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RUSSIA'S AMBITIONS



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- 3 *Russia Looks to Expand Its Influence in Africa*
- 4 *Russian Influence in the Levant Basin*
- 5 *Escalation in Syria?*
- 6 *Iran: Supreme Leader Advisor Lauds Russian Strategic Ties*
- 7 *The Growth of Russia-Thailand Relations: What's Next?*
- 9 *A Chinese Perspective on Pakistan-Russian Cooperation in Afghanistan*
- 10 *Covert Supply Lines*
- 11 *A Militarized Silicon Valley in Russia?*
- 13 *Russia Forms Two New Divisions in the Southern Military District*

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 14 *"Holy Defense:" Hezbollah's New First-Person Shooter Video Game*
- 15 *War in Syria Turned Hezbollah into a Powerful Army*
- 16 *The Tiger Forces in Damascus*
- 18 *Syria: Who are the Loyalist Forces on the Eastern Banks of the Euphrates?*
- 19 *A Turkish View of the Wagner Group in Syria*
- 20 *Turkey's Balancing Act with Armed Rebels in Northern Syria*
- 21 *Turkey and Power Play in Syria*
- 22 *Iran: Muslims Supported by US, UK are Illegitimate*
- 23 *Iran Unveils New Anti-Armor Missile*
- 24 *Police Chief Demands Death for Sufi Protestors*
- 25 *Iranian Environmentalists Arrested as Spies*
- 26 *Iran: Israel's Missile Defense Can Be Overwhelmed*
- 27 *13 Million Users of Domestic Messaging Apps in Iran*
- 27 *Arresting Iranian Cyber Criminals*

AFRICA

- 28 *Nigeria's Environmental Devastation Drives Conflict*
- 29 *Boko Haram Repeats Chibok Kidnapping, Now in Dapchi*
- 30 *Who are the Anglophone Secessionists in Cameroon?*
- 31 *Protests Against Foreign Militaries in Niger*
- 32 *South Sudan's President Scapegoats US for Failed Peace Talks*
- 33 *South Sudan: Buying Peace Does Not Work*
- 34 *Local Debate on AMISOM: Should It Stay or Should It Go?*
- 35 *Is China Practicing "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" in Africa?*

LATIN AMERICA

- 36 *Brazil Has a Border Problem*
- 37 *Security Issues in Ecuador*
- 38 *Impact of Odebrecht Scandal on Peruvian Economy*
- 39 *Elections in El Salvador*
- 39 *Elections in Cuba*
- 40 *Elections in Colombia*
- 41 *Cristina Fernández's Legal Jeopardy*
- 42 *Colombian Forces Fight the ELN*
- 42 *Cracks in Bolivarian Military Morale*
- 43 *Stabilizing Venezuela: Strategic Objective for Bolivarians*
- 44 *Continuing Violence in Mexico Fuels Armored Car Business*
- 45 *Bombs Detonated on Ferry and Tourist Vessel in Mexico*

ASIA-PACIFIC

- 46 *China's Focus on the Development of "High-Quality Weapons and Equipment" for the Navy*
- 47 *Fact or Psychological Warfare? China's Development of the World's Strongest Individual Firepower System*

- 49 *China Commits to Building Global Satellite Communication Network by 2023*
- 50 *Xi Jinping Promotes Civil-Military Integration, Technological Innovation*
- 51 *Reopened Chinese-Built Railways Link Coastal Angola with the Interior of Africa*
- 52 *Beyond Bitcoin: Could China Embrace Blockchain for Defense and Security Applications?*
- 54 *China Seeks Extradition of Detained Uyghurs in Malaysia*
- 55 *Vietnam's Military Modernization*

CAUCASUS, CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA

- 56 *Concern in Kazakhstan over Returning Foreign Fighters from Syria*
- 57 *Uzbekistan Reopens Border Checkpoints with Tajikistan*
- 58 *Azerbaijan and Georgia Increase Bilateral Security Cooperation*
- 59 *Pakistan's Training Mission to Saudi Arabia*

RUSSIA, UKRAINE

- 60 *A Russian Approach to Interagency Cooperation*
- 61 *New Russian Officer Code of Conduct*
- 62 *Russian Operational Reserve Will Enhance Active Component Readiness*
- 64 *The Drel Gliding Gravity Bomb with Independently Targetable Submunitions*
- 66 *The Kinzhal Air Launched Missile is a Modified Iskander SRBM*
- 67 *Stock up on Baking Soda Before the Acid Fog Descends*
- 68 *Russian Arctic Oil Vital to Russian Economy*
- 69 *The New Chinese Silk Road May Run Through the Arctic*
- 70 *Interview with Russian Navy Commander Admiral Korolev*

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ON THE COVER:

At the Luzhsky training ground during the main stage of the Zapad-2017 joint Russian-Belarusian strategic exercises.

Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55644>, CC 4.0.

OEWATCH

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Russia Looks to Expand Its Influence in Africa

OE Watch Commentary: Russian influence in Africa is not a new phenomenon. Back in the days of the Cold War the Soviet Union had deep ties to the continent, providing arms, training, and ideological support to African independence movements. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia partly turned away from its African relationships. Now, as the accompanying article from the *Institute for Security Studies* relates, Russia is renewing old ties and forging new ones on the continent.

According to the accompanying article, Russia's involvement in the continent is often most welcome. From an African perspective, having yet another player in the areas of trade and politics helps to level the playing field. Additionally, Russia does not place the preconditions on trade such as respecting human rights that the West frequently insists upon. The result has been significant growth in trade between Russia and Africa, with one report stating it grew 185 percent between 2005 and 2015.

Some of that trade can be ascribed to arms sales. Indeed, Russia has a long history of being a major supplier of weapons to Africa. One need only look at the flag of Mozambique, emboldened with the image of an AK-47, to know how important and longstanding Russian-supplied weapons are to the continent. That history continues as Russian weapons are often the ones that appear in countries with arms embargoes.

Russian military influence is not limited to arms sales. Large numbers of Russian soldiers serve as peacekeepers and trainers in Africa. Additionally, numerous African countries attend Russian-hosted military exercises, either as participants or observers, with those countries that are major trading partners with Russia more likely to attend. Nor should it be overlooked that many of Russia's investments in Africa are related to energy – oil, gas, and nuclear – through its state-owned firms that often have military ties.

Russia's Africa connections have not been without controversy. The country has been accused of exacerbating conflicts through its ignoring of arms embargoes and undermining governance through lack of transparency in economic deals. Still, despite these problems and competition with the bigger Chinese player, Russia is gradually increasing its influence in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Through energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa.”



Vladimir Putin and the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé.

Source: Kremlin/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Alpha_Condé_\(2017-09-28\)_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Alpha_Condé_(2017-09-28)_1.jpg), CC BY 4.0.

Source: Ronak Gopaldas, “Russia and Africa Meet Again,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 13 March 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/russia-and-africa-meet-again>

Through energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa.

Indeed, as Stephanie Wolters of the Institute for Security Studies notes, ‘Russia’s position hasn’t really changed much in the past few years – i.e. bargaining for African support in multilateral institutions in return for UN Security Council vetoes.’

However, through strategic energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa on an incremental, rather than an exponential, level.

Russia’s push to level the playing field and create a more equitable power balance in international relations is likely to appeal to Africa’s leaders.

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>



Russian Influence in the Levant Basin

OE Watch Commentary: The Eastern Mediterranean's "Levant Basin," home to massive untapped offshore natural gas deposits, is on track to becoming a key flashpoint in the region's tangle of crises and conflicts. The Levant Basin's gas deposits represent an economic challenge for Russia, which is currently the top exporter of natural gas in the world. According to the accompanying passage from the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, "Russia is ready to wage a world war in order to maintain its influence and safeguard its interests in this vital region."

As the region's countries scramble to claim and exploit resources within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), Syria's EEZ remains untouched save for a 2013 agreement with Russia to explore parts of these waters. While Russia and its allies in Syria remain preoccupied by operations to regain territory from rebel forces, the importance of littoral projection has not escaped their planning and military thought. Several articles in recent issues of the Syrian Ministry of Defense's quarterly journal *Military Thought (al-Fikr al-Askari)* are dedicated to coastal defense. Russia's 49-year renewable lease on the Tartous Naval Facility is now in effect, and the facility will be expanded manifold, to eventually hold 11 warships. In August 2017, Russia added two submarines to its permanent Mediterranean naval presence.

Russia has also helped the Egyptian government protect and exploit resources within its own EEZ, including by purchasing a 30 percent share in the Egyptian "Zohr" Field and by outfitting Egyptian ships, most notably the two French-built Mistral-class helicopter carriers that were originally intended for the Russian Navy. Russian companies have also negotiated with the Italian company Eni for rights to explore and develop Lebanon's offshore gas resources, some of which are along a contested maritime boundary with Israel. The shifting web of enmity and alliances in the Middle East is compounded in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Turkish-Greek conflict. The second accompanying passage, from the Egyptian semi-official *al-Ahram*, argues that Russia is "the new rising star in the Middle East" and has now joined the United States as a "party that can mediate between Ankara and Nicosia." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

سيطرة روسيا على غاز المتوسط

Adnan Karima, "Russian Control of Mediterranean Gas," *al-Hayat*, 13 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/wGWJg7>

The Mediterranean Basin has among the world's richest natural gas deposits and he who controls Syria controls the Middle East, the gateway to Asia, the keys to Russia (according to Catherine II) and the first Silk Road (according to Chinese strategy). He who controls Syria can control the world economic system. Thus, we can understand the true reasons for Russian commitment to its presence in Syria, which may last for over 100 years according to the agreement signed with the Bashar al-Assad regime. Russia is ready to wage a world war in order to maintain its influence and safeguard its interests in this vital region...

Source:

أطماع تركيا تشعل الصراع.. روسيا النجم الساطع الجديد في الشرق الأوسط

"Turkish Ambitions Spark Conflict... Russia the New Rising Star in the Middle East," *al-Ahram*, 22 February 2018. <http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/News/132870.aspx>

Analysts conclude that compared to 2017, more incidents will occur in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the party that can mediate between Ankara and Nicosia is not only Washington but also Russia, the new rising star in the Middle East.

"...the party that can mediate between Ankara and Nicosia is not only Washington but also Russia, the new rising star in the Middle East..."



"Permanent Russian naval group in the Mediterranean provides air defence over Syria."

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/photo/gallery.htm?id=27388&cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.



Escalation in Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: The official, Kremlin-supported media had little to say regarding the 7-8 February losses incurred by the Wagner Private Military Company (PMC) near Dayr az Zawr, Syria. The Kremlin's reticence stemmed not only from the unwillingness to admit the losses of Russian mercenaries, but that Russian PMCs still don't officially exist. As discussed in last month's *OE Watch* ("Pros and Cons of Legalizing Private Military Companies") Russian legislators have yet to pass legislation authorizing the development of PMCs. While denying the existence of Russian PMCs presents no grave challenges for the Kremlin, covering up the deaths and injuries of Wagner personnel, particularly given the spread of digital technology and alternate channels for information in Russia, has proven more difficult.

The accompanying excerpt from the semi-independent news source, *Rosbalt*, describes how even without official Kremlin recognition of the Wagner PMC losses, Russian defense officials are preparing to escalate to avoid further personnel and reputation losses. The article begins by suggesting that "the current standoff between Russia and the West... could make the Cuban missile crisis and other critical moments of the Cold War... seem like child's play." It reminds readers of the US strike against "the Syrian Government forces' Shayrat airbase" in April 2017 and the February 2018 attack which "destroyed a column of the Wagner private military company... near Dayr az Zawr." The source alleges that Russian military personnel did not intervene during these two attacks, "but now everything could change." Having recently declared Russia's superpower pretensions, "the Kremlin needs to make at least some attempt to restore its reputation."

The author supports this assertion by quoting the recent statement of General Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian Army General Staff, who stated on 13 March that, "in the event of a threat arising to our servicemen's lives, the Russian Federation Armed Forces will take retaliatory measures, both against the missiles and against their delivery vehicles." The author queries a number of Russian military experts to gauge their assessment on the likelihood of escalation, with the responses ranging from not very likely to the possibility of direct conflict. One expert summed it up by saying "we are moving in a dangerous direction."

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

"The situation in Syria is such that 'uncontrollable escalation is always possible if hostilities suddenly begin locally, because no one is prepared to lose. And that could lead to anything'."

Source: Aleksandr Zhelenin, "Неконтролируемая эскалация возможна," (Uncontrollable Escalation Possible) *Rosbalt*, 14 March 2018. <https://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2018/03/14/1688403.html>

Journalists love shocking headlines and preambles that excite the imagination, but today it will probably be no exaggeration to say that never since World War II has the world come closer to the brink of the abyss. Recent statements by official representatives of the United States and the Russian Federation could make the Cuban missile crisis and other critical moments of the Cold War -- to which people like to compare the current standoff between Russia and the West -- seem like child's play....

...Let us recall that recently the Americans, after a similar warning, destroyed a column of the Wagner private military company, which shortly before this had been firing at the headquarters of the Kurdish armed opposition near Dayr az Zawr.

In both cases no response or attempts at counteraction were observed on the part of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. But now everything could change. First, because the rout of the Wagner private military company was received extremely painfully by the Russian public, and second, because the Russian presidential election is literally upon us and the Kremlin needs to make at least some attempt to restore its reputation, which has been shaken by these American strikes....

...The very next day after Haley's statement at the UN, Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian Army General Staff, stated that, in the event of "a threat arising to our servicemen's lives, the Russian Federation Armed Forces will take retaliatory measures, both against the missiles and against their delivery vehicles."

...The expert's [Mikhail Magid] explanation for Gerasimov's statement is that "the Russian Federation would like to ensure the safety of its troops in Syria. They have already suffered major losses: the rout of the column containing representatives of the Wagner private military company, the plane with dozens of servicemen that crashed near the Humaymim airbase. Fresh losses would be extremely disadvantageous to the Kremlin just before the election. Nevertheless, for the exact same reason the Russian Air Defense Forces will most likely not fire at the Americans: No one wants another rout."

...Novaya Gazeta military observer Pavel Felgengauer assesses the danger of a direct Russian-American military conflict in Syria as close to zero. The mutual threats currently being heard from both the Russian and the American sides, according to him, are "not so terrifying." But we are moving in a dangerous direction," he commented, even so.

Aleksandr Khramchikhin, deputy director of the Institute of Political and Military Analysis, holds the directly opposite opinion. According to him, "there is a certain 'red line,' beyond which it will be necessary to join battle, because it will be impossible not to do so." ...The situation in Syria is such that "uncontrollable escalation is always possible if hostilities suddenly begin locally, because no one is prepared to lose. And that could lead to anything."



Iran: Supreme Leader Advisor Lauds Russian Strategic Ties

OE Watch Commentary: Over the course of the last decade, Iran-Russia relations have undergone an unprecedented rapprochement. For much of Iranian history, after all, Iranians have viewed Russia with distrust if not disdain. Prior to the nineteenth century, successive shahs and dynasties looked down upon Russia as backward and uncouth. As the Russian Empire became a growing military power in the nineteenth century, resentment brewed, especially after the Russian army seized what is now Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia from Iranian control and later encroached upon Iranian claims in what is now Turkmenistan. In 1907, Russia and Great Britain formally divided Iran into spheres of influence and as Iranians struggled for some semblance of constitutional democracy, it was the tsar in St. Petersburg who sought to stymie their efforts.

So far as most Iranians were concerned, the Soviet Union was not much better. Soviet policies were just as exploitative as Tsarist Russian policies before them, and Soviet imperial interests manifested in support for Kurdish and Azerbaijani separatism further imperiled Iranian sovereignty

and independence. In the first months of the Islamic Revolution, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini railed against both the United States and the Soviet Union and promised a foreign policy independent from both Cold War rivals.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, has actively courted Iran. After the nuclear accident at Chernobyl and the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian nuclear industry had difficulty competing against industry giants in the United States and Europe and so began to pursue business in places like Iran, which Western companies by law or decision chose to avoid. Russia's atomic energy company took over work to construct Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant and, at various times, has promised to build several new reactors. As Russo-Iranian relations tightened, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei swept previous animosity toward Moscow under the rug in order to better counter the West and its regional proxies despite residual animosity toward Russia on the part of ordinary Iranians (see "Iran-Russia Relations," *OE Watch*, July 2016).

It is in this context that the excerpted interview with the conservative *Mehr News Agency* by Ali Akbar Velayati, post-revolutionary Iran's longest serving foreign minister (1981-1997) and the current chief foreign affairs advisor to Khamenei, is of interest. Velayati hails the "growing and strategic ties" with Russia. The interview comes after Russia vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution, sponsored by the United States and the United Kingdom, which sought to sanction Iranian violations of an arms embargo placed upon Houthi insurgents in Yemen. While Velayati's comments touched on a broader array of foreign relationships, his praise for Iran's growing ties with Russia seem designed to counter those who say that such ties risk too much. Rather, he implies that Russia's willingness to defend Iran at the United Nations justifies Khamenei's strategy. The danger moving forward would be if an assumption or reality of Russian protection leads the Islamic Republic to believe itself immune to the consequences of its support for insurgency across the Middle East. In such a case, Iranian weapons transfers and sponsorship of insurgency could quickly get worse. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Ali Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's Advisor on Foreign Affairs.

Source: Khamenei.ir, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=29319>, CC 4.0.

“What Russia has shown...is the growing strategic relationship between the two countries.”

Source: “Veto-ye Qata’nameh ‘Aliyeh Iran Namayanegar Ravabat-e Rahbaradi Iran va Rusiyeh Ast” (“The veto of the resolution against Iran represents the strategic relationship between Iran and Russia”), *Mehr News Agency*, 28 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/9sEg1b>

The international affairs advisor to the Supreme Leader said that by vetoing this resolution, Russia has shown the growing relations and strategic ties. According to the Mehr correspondent, Ali Akbar Velayati, international affairs advisor to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a meeting with Syria’s Minister of Religious Endowments Muhammad Abdul-Sattar, reportedly said, “We had a very good and important meeting with Syrian religious scholars and it was very good and important and we both believed that the nation and state of Syria and Iran had strategic relations which allowed them to survive against the common enemy of the Americans and Zionists, and this victory could not have been achieved but for the struggle of the warriors of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and every place where the Muslims would be free....”

And, in response to a question regarding the British government’s efforts in the Security Council against Iran and Yemen, he stated: British policy has a negative impact on the Iranian people, and it [British actions] were not contrary to our expectations. What Russia has shown in the veto of this resolution is the growing strategic relationship between the two countries.



The Growth of Russia-Thailand Relations: What's Next?

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has set its eyes on Thailand and is clearly striving to gain more influence in the region. According to the excerpted article from *The Nation*, Russia is pursuing a strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast Asian nations, particularly Thailand. Some of the areas in which both countries are hoping to strengthen ties include transport, logistics, energy, biotech, robotics, information technology, cyber security, terrorism, and military. The article cites Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Alexei Gruzdev, as calling Thailand a possible “hub in ASEAN” and “a key trading bloc and an important member of the international community.” Additionally, Gruzdev expressed a willingness to “take part in infrastructure development (within Thailand), including for a high-speed railway, port development, and air traffic control system for U-Tapao airport.” The excerpted article published in the *Bangkok Post* discusses recent commitments to cooperate in combatting international terrorism and transnational crimes and there are clear indications that Russia could be preparing to play a bigger role in the region. For example, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha expressed hopes Russia will participate in meetings and dialogues initiated by Thailand, once Bangkok assumes the ASEAN chairmanship next year.

According to the excerpted articles from *The Diplomat* and *RIA Novosti*, Russia and Thailand have been cooperating in the military and defense industries as well. In May 2016, Prayut visited Russia in what was said to be the first formal visit by a Thai premier in more than a decade. During the visit, both sides signed an agreement on military cooperation. Following the visit, reports emerged claiming Thailand planned on buying Russian helicopters and tanks and a “jointly run production and maintenance facility in Thailand (was planned) to support the Mi-17V5 helicopters and other Russian systems in Thailand.” The article from *RIA Novosti* mentions Russia-Thai cooperation in security and that the two sides are developing military ties to strengthen regional security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Overall, Russia offers Thailand an alternative to China and the United States for support, while for Russia, firming up relations with Thailand is a strategic move to increased trade and influence in the ASEAN region. Thailand also is strategically located by the entrance to the heavily traveled Strait of Malacca. Additionally, there has been ongoing talk of trying to build the Kra Isthmus canal, which would cut through Thailand, and be a huge benefit to Russian trade. Finally, Russia's growing presence in Southeast Asia could counterbalance that of the United States and China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Wang Weidong, Asina Pornwasin, “Thailand Moves up in Russia's Sights,” *The Nation*, 22 February 2018. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/Economy/30339403>

Russia sees Thailand as a key focus for the country in Asia as part of its strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast nations, said Alexei Gruzdev, Deputy Minister of Economic Development.

“... Thailand may be considered a hub in Asean. There are a lot of fields to explore and that's why we were here,” said Gruzdev, who led a trade mission to Thailand.

In regards to the country's Eastern Economic Corridor, Gruzdev said that Russia was ready to take part in infrastructure development, including for a high speed railway, port development and air traffic control system for U-Tapao airport.

“All these fields that mention transport, logistic, energy, biotech, pharmaceutical, medical equipment, financing, robotic, IT, and Internet technology, we are interested in.

“We think that we need to explore new areas like in petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, robotics, IT and cyber security. Russia is a s leading country in term of cybersecurity, technology and software,” Gruzdev said.

Gruzdev said that Asean is a key trading bloc and an important member of the international community.

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “Thailand, Russia Unite to Fight Terror,” *Bangkok Post*, 1 March 2018. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1420067/thailand-russia-unite-to-fight-terror>

Thailand and Russia confirmed yesterday a joint commitment to strengthen security cooperation in combatting international terrorism and transnational crimes, and enhancing cyber security.

Source: Prashanth Parameswaran, “What's Next for Russia-Thailand Military Ties?” *The Diplomat*, 20 January 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/whats-next-for-russia-thailand-military-ties>

But cooperation between Moscow and Bangkok has been on the uptick in recent years. Thailand has been looking to boost relations with several other nations following a coup in May 2014, which complicated its ties with the United States and other Western nations. Meanwhile, Russia under Vladimir Putin – ambitious abroad and increasingly isolated from the West – has been looking to boost its presence in the Asia-Pacific, including in Southeast Asia.

In a key step towards boosting ties, in May 2016, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha made a trip to Russia in May 2016, the first formal visit by a Thai premier in more than a decade. Though Prayut had downplayed the defense component of the relationship, his visit last year came amid reports that Thailand planned on buying Russian helicopters and tanks, and an agreement on military cooperation was one of six pacts inked by the two sides during his trip

Interestingly, one of the topics discussed was the setting up of a jointly run production and maintenance facility in Thailand. The facility, according to unnamed sources who spoke to IHS Jane's, would reportedly support the Mi-17V5 helicopters and other Russian systems in Thailand but also potentially look to provide maintenance support to other Mi-17V5 operators in Southeast Asia.

(continued)



Continued: The Growth of Russia-Thailand Relations: What's Next?

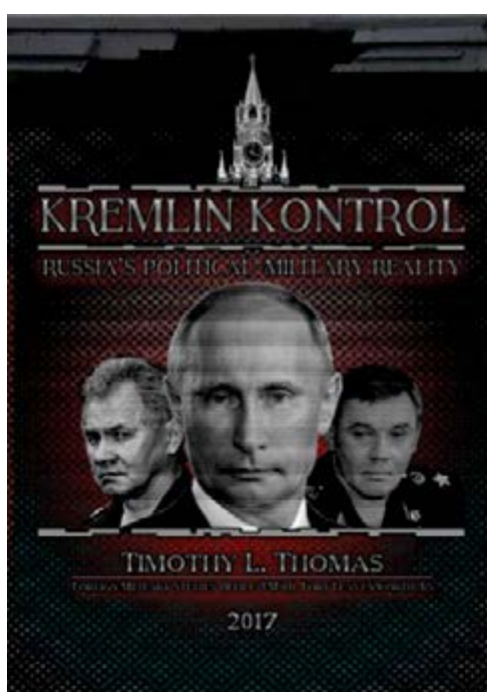
“Russia sees Thailand as a key focus for the country in Asia as part of its strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast nations...”

Source: Yevgeny Belenky, “Военное сотрудничество РФ и Таиланда становится фактором стабильности в АТР (Military Cooperation between Russia and Thailand is becoming a Factor in the Stability of the Asia-Pacific Region),” *RIA Novosti*, 20 March 2017. https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170320/1490368903.html

Russia-Thai cooperation in security, developing military ties, military-technical cooperation is an important element in bilateral relations and factors in to strengthening regional security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2016, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Thailand, General Prawit Wongsuwan, visited Russia twice. In 2015 and 2016, detachments of military ships from the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet, visited Thailand, the ambassador recalled.

... it was a question of exporting and importing modern weapons and military equipment, cooperation in locating production, assembling Russian weapons in Thailand, serving Russian military equipment – primarily aviation – having dual use-military and civilian purposes.



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>



A Chinese Perspective on Pakistan-Russian Cooperation in Afghanistan

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 February the Pakistani publication, *The News International*, published an article about statements that a Chinese expert on international affairs made to *China Global Television Network*. According to the article, the Chinese expert is supportive of Russian and Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan because they both have security interests in the country. The expert also expected that since Russia and Pakistan are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), they could utilize the SCO to increase dialogue with both the Afghan government and the Taliban. In addition, the Chinese expert argued that the US decision to suspend security funding to Pakistan “has driven Pakistan and Russian relations even closer,” especially on issues related to security and stability in Afghanistan.

The Chinese expert also hinted at economic implications of the warming Russian-Pakistani relations. He said that the two countries agreed to build a pipeline from Russia to Pakistan to provide natural gas to Pakistan and that this is also driving their greater security cooperation. This pipeline could overlap with the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline, or TAPI, which is set to be completed in 2019. It would therefore inevitably have to pass through Afghanistan as well as other Central Asian countries that are SCO members. Turkmenistan is an exception, however, in that it has attended SCO fora but because of its official policy of neutrality in foreign affairs, it is the only Central Asian country to not have joined the SCO.

The Chinese expert made one final point—the long-standing “all-weather friendship” between China and Pakistan would not be affected by Pakistan’s relations with either Russia or the US. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“He said that Pakistan was now a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), hence both Russia and Pakistan could use this new channel to step up their dialogue concerning Afghanistan and try to bring the Taliban back to the negotiating table.”

Source: “Pakistan, Russia have shared interests to see peace, stability in Afghanistan: Chinese expert,” *The News International*, 21 February 2018. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/283921-pakistan-russia-have-shared-interests-to-see-peace-stability-in-afghanistan-chinese-expert>

While commenting on closer relations between Pakistan and Russia, a Chinese expert on international affairs said that both countries could play a constructive role to bring peace and stability to the region including Afghanistan. He opined that the two countries could also use multilateral channels to enhance their dialogue as Russia, China and Pakistan had a trilateral dialogue concerning Afghanistan. He said that Pakistan was now a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), hence both Russia and Pakistan could use this new channel to step up their dialogue concerning Afghanistan and try to bring the Taliban back to the negotiating table.

He also said “Russia and Pakistan have warmed up relations for several years but certainly the latest U.S. move concerning Pakistan has driven Pakistan and Russian relations even closer.” He said that both the countries had not only agreed to enhance their political consultations but also to increase their cooperation in economic, trade and investment areas. To yet another question, he remarked that Pakistan and China enjoyed an all-weather friendship regardless of Pakistan’s relations with other countries, adding that “China welcomes friendship between Pakistan and Russia.”



Valley in Samangan Province in northern Afghanistan.

Source: US Army, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86#/media/File:Samangan_Province.jpg, (CC BY 2.0).



Covert Supply Lines

OE Watch Commentary: The title of a recent article from the pro-government Russian daily *Izvestiya* says it all: “Ministry of Defense to Offer Private Carriers Stealth Contracts: Transport Companies will Ship Military Cargoes Expeditiously and Under Conditions of Secrecy.” Where in the past, these military transportation contracts had to go through a competitive bidding process and were not classified, under the new regulation, they “will be drawn up in an expedited manner following a simplified procedure and the documents will be totally classified.” While the experts quoted in the article claim that this new procedure “will allow the delivery of military materials within compressed schedules and without excessive bureaucratic delays,” it says nothing about the lack of oversight and an almost certain increase in corruption.

Oddly, the article asserts that this new covert procedure “will also be used for supplying Russian troops participating in peace-keeping operations beyond the country’s borders” and that Russia’s new National Guard “will acquire the right to purchase transport services under the simplified procedure.” The article quotes a military expert who suggests that defense officials need to resort to clandestine methods because “transportation of army cargoes is constantly being analyzed by foreign intelligence services,” but doesn’t explain why domestic transport services should also be secret. This new regulation will make tracking Russian military shipments more difficult for both foreign observers and Russians with an interest in what their government is doing. **End OE**

Watch Commentary (Finch)



Map of the Donbass region.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Donbass.png; CCA-SA 3.0.

“Izvestiya was told by the Ministry of Defense that the ministry intends to accelerate and classify outsourcing transportation of military cargoes.”

Source: A. Kruglov, N. Surkov and B. Stepovoy, “Минобороны предложит частным перевозчикам ‘стелс-контракты’: Транспортные компании перевезут военные грузы оперативно и в условиях секретности (Ministry of Defense to Offer Private Carriers ‘Stealth Contracts’: Transport Companies will Ship Military Cargoes Expeditiously and Under Conditions of Secrecy),” *Izvestiya*, 27 February 2018.
<https://iz.ru/708891/aleksandr-kruglov-nikolai-surkov-bogdan-stepovoi/minoborony-predlozhit-chastnym-perevozchikam-stels-kontrakty>

In the event of war or foreign army operations transport companies will ship Russian military cargoes under “stealth contracts.” For this purpose the Ministry of Defense has developed a new regulation for working with private carriers. Contracts with them will be drawn up in an expedited manner following a simplified procedure and the documents will be totally classified. In the opinion of experts this will allow the delivery of military materials within compressed schedules and without excessive bureaucratic delays.

Izvestiya was told by the Ministry of Defense that the ministry intends to accelerate and classify outsourcing transportation of military cargoes.... The new regulation for purchasing transport services should ensure the necessary expeditiousness of military shipments under special circumstances. The time for signing the state contracts under such conditions will be significantly shortened. It will not be necessary to wait for the ten days specified under [current] law.

This plan will be put into effect in the event of threats to Russia’s military security. It will also be used for supplying Russian troops participating in peace-keeping operations beyond the country’s borders. The minister of defense and the director of the Federal Service of National Guard Troops will acquire the right to purchase transport services under the simplified procedure.

The issue of secrecy is given special attention in the new regulation. The carrier must have a license to conduct work using information containing state secrets. All of the enterprises, institutions and organizations familiar with the military plans will be obligated to not divulge this information.

It is being affirmed in the Ministry of Defense that the new process will not require additional expenditures from the federal budget. The cost of the “stealth contracts” should not exceed the costs of similar contracts executed under the standard procedure.

Viktor Murakhovskiy, chief editor of the magazine “Arsenal Otechestva” told Izvestiya that the new regulation will allow military shipments to be significantly accelerated. Today a state customer calling for the purchase of services must go through a lengthy competitive procedure. “The Russian Army has long used the services of civilian carriers. During large exercises a great amount of transportation for the deployment or regrouping of troops is engaged under outsourcing contracts,” reported Viktor Murakhovskiy....

...In the opinion of the expert the ensuring of secrecy is extremely important for covert transportation of troops and logistics items. “The transportation of army cargoes is constantly being analyzed by foreign intelligence services,” said Viktor Murakhovskiy. “The military know this and therefore they systematically take measures to protect this information. Even in peacetime the corresponding documentation is maintained under classified access....”



A Militarized Silicon Valley in Russia?

OE Watch Commentary: Perceived technological backwardness has been a recurrent theme throughout much of Russian history. Some suggest that the country's political and economic systems have contributed to this seeming lag in technology. The Kremlin leadership has often directed considerable resources to compensate for this technological lag, particularly in the realm of defense armaments. In a recent interview from Russia's main military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Deputy Defense Minister General Pavel Popov described the plans for a new "technopark" which will allegedly "provide for the search, development, and pioneering of advanced ideas and developments and breakthrough technology in the defense sphere."

Ever since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, there has been much discussion within Russian defense circles about developing and harnessing all of the country's technological assets (military, civilian, academic) to restore and modernize Russia's defense capabilities. According to the excerpt, this new "Technopark-Era" will apparently encompass "foremost scientific employees, promising young scientists, and the best specialists of scientific companies of the Armed Forces." Moreover, the facility will be co-located with representatives of Russia's top arms manufacturers which will "facilitate the growth of the efficiency of interaction among educational, industrial, and research organizations." By bringing together the best and brightest in the field of "breakthrough technology," the Russian leadership hopes to see "development in such fields as nanotechnology and biotech, information and telecommunications technology, and data protection."

The new technopark will reportedly be constructed near the city of Anapa (Krasnodar Region) on the northern coast of the Black Sea. The more favorable climate and resort reputation of the region will likely be an added incentive for employees and military personnel. The new facility will not be operational until 2020 (at the earliest). As the excerpt points out, this new technopark "will be a base for the development and pioneering of a model of the interaction of scientific, educational, and industrial organizations," which will "ensure a synergetic impact in the field of an enhancement of the quality of the training of personnel, primarily for catering for the requirements of military science and enterprises of the defense industrial complex." It will be interesting to see if the enthusiastic rhetoric surrounding this new research and development project achieves its lofty objectives. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Dmitriy Semenov, "Эра заряжена на прорыв в будущее (Era Is Primed for a Breakthrough into the Future)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 28 February 2018. <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/36313-era-zaryazhena-na-proryv-v-budushchee>

One of the principal objectives of the Defense Ministry of Russia when it comes to state support for innovation activity for 2018 is the building of the Era Military Innovation Techopark....

...The project is essentially to shape an innovation infrastructure which provides for the search, development, and pioneering of advanced ideas and developments and breakthrough technology in the defense sphere. Execution of this initiative, the Defense Ministry of Russia notes, will make it possible to enhance the efficiency of applied scientific research, create a base of new technology, and provide for the pro-active development of military systems. Foremost scientific employees, promising young scientists, and the best specialists of scientific companies of the Armed Forces will work in the technopark.... How the idea of the building of the Era Military Innovation Technopark is being embodied in practice was described for your Krasnaya Zvezda correspondent by General of the Army Pavel Popov, deputy RF defense minister.

[Semenov] Pavel Anatolyevich, the project which the Defense Ministry of Russia is currently bringing to fruition is undoubtedly a requirement of the times. What is the main goal, the arterial line, of the building of the military technopark?

[Popov] I will say for a start that this concept is fully in keeping with the priorities of policy in the sphere of state support and development of innovation activity.... The format of the technopark itself will make it possible to shorten the time from the inception of innovative scientific projects to their materialization in the form of the building of specific models of arms and military and special equipment. This project, which is being executed on the initiative of the Defense Ministry of Russia, is designed to further the development of applied science and upgrade the scientific and production base of enterprises of the defense industrial complex and other enterprises and organizations, including medium-sized and small business engaged in the field of military and dual-purpose technology. The development of the Era project is also to facilitate the growth of the efficiency of interaction among educational, industrial, and research organizations and to create the conditions for productive interdepartmental and interbranch cooperation....

[Semenov] Pavel Anatolyevich, what main types of activity are scheduled for exercise in the technopark?

[Popov] The key areas, like I say, involve the search, development, and implementation of advanced ideas and developments and breakthrough technology corresponding to the interests of consolidation of the country's defense capability. We are talking about scientific research and development in such fields as nanotechnology and biotech, information and telecommunications technology, and data protection....

As a whole, Era will be a base for the development and pioneering of a model of the interaction of scientific, educational, and industrial organizations such as will afford an opportunity for use of the resources and results obtained in various fields. I would note also that the building of a production, scientific and educational, and social infrastructure and the pooling of production and scientific and educational resources will make it possible to ensure a synergetic impact in the field of an enhancement of the quality of the training of personnel, primarily for catering for the requirements of military science and enterprises of the defense industrial complex....

(continued)



Continued: A Militarized Silicon Valley in Russia?

“The format of the technopark itself will make it possible to shorten the time from the inception of innovative scientific projects to their materialization in the form of the building of specific models of arms and military and special equipment.”



President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu being briefed on Technopark-Era, Kremlin, 23 Feb 2018.

Source: Russian Presidency, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56923>, CC BY 4.0.



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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Russia Forms Two New Divisions in the Southern Military District

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya*, the 19th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade, in the 58th Combined Arms Army (Chief of the General Staff, General Valeri Gerasimov's former command), will be converted back into divisions. These units were converted from divisions to brigades during the 2008 'New Look' reforms. The general consensus of Russian opinion on the reason for this conversion is that antiterrorist operations are now less of a concern (for which the brigade is better suited), while the possibilities of peer-to-peer conflict are on the rise (for which the division is better suited).

The location of where these new Russian divisions are, or are not, is of particular interest. All of these new divisions are in the Southern Military District and the southern half of the Western Military District. These dispositions should be expected, as the Southern Military District is adjacent to, or contains, hotspots and/or territorially disputed areas such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia (two breakaway regions of Georgian territory occupied by Russia since the end of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War), conflict areas in Eastern Ukraine, and the Crimea. Although a few divisions have been formed in the Western Military District, near the Ukrainian and Belarussian border, curiously no divisions have been formed near the Baltics, despite Russian claims these divisions are intended to combat NATO. The Russians have been adamant that they have no desire for territorial expansion in the Baltics and the decision not to place divisions near this area may be a way of messaging this intent.

The exact structure of these divisions has yet to be announced, but it is likely these units will not be fully manned. The typical structure of a motorized rifle division consists of three motorized rifle regiments, one tank regiment, one artillery regiment, one air defense regiment, and a few separate battalions, companies, and platoons. (Tank divisions have a similar structure, but one motorized rifle regiment, and three tank regiments.) In current practice, most divisions are missing one or more motorized rifle or tank regiments. There is a high likelihood that these "missing" regiments are intended to be fleshed out with reservists in the event of large-scale mobilization, similar to the cadre system the Russians maintained before the 2008 New Look reforms. This may appear to be rolling back the 2008 reforms, but this is not the case. Prior to 2008, most divisions had a very low level of combat readiness and had difficulty even fielding a single battalion tactical group for operations in Chechnya and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Today, all brigades and divisions are considered "permanently ready," usually having manning levels of over 80 percent, with each maneuver brigade and regiment (supposedly) capable of forming at least one battalion tactical group.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)

"...two new motorized rifle divisions will be activated in the 58th Combined-Arms Army at the end of 2018. They will be established on the basis of the currently existing 19th and 136th separate motorized rifle brigades by including additional battalions and regiments."

Source: Nikolay Surkov, Aleksey Ramm, Yevgeniy Andreyev, "Северный Кавказ укрепили дивизиями (The North Caucasus Has Been Strengthened with Divisions)," *Izvestiya*, 16 February 2018. <https://iz.ru/705714/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/severnyi-kavkaz-ukrepili-diviziiami>

The Defense Ministry has begun an unprecedented reorganization of 58th Army, the main striking force in southern Russia. It will be strengthened considerably through the activation of two new motorized rifle divisions equipped with BMP-3s and the newest T-72B3 tanks. Existing military posts will be took out of mothballs and new ones created in Mozdok and Vladikavkaz. A portion of 58th Army will be redeployed to Stavropol and Krasnodar regions. Experts note that in this way Russia is forming general-purpose forces that will deter the threat from NATO.

...two new motorized rifle divisions will be activated in the 58th Combined-Arms Army at the end of 2018. They will be established on the basis of the currently existing 19th and 136th separate motorized rifle brigades by including additional battalions and regiments. It is proposed to arm them with BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles and T-72B3 tanks.

Viktor Murakhovskiy, editor-in-chief of the journal Arsenal Otechestva, told Izvestiya that the reinforcement of 58th Army is a portion of the measures for creating the nucleus of combined-arms armies based on division structures in the Southern and Western districts. According to him, it is necessary to activate general-purpose forces that will deter the threat from NATO on a guaranteed basis.

"The experience of combat operations and exercises has shown that the division is a more self-sufficient formation [соединение] than the brigade. The latter usually requires reinforcement by combat and logistic support assets and weapon assets," the expert noted. "The division is more adapted to the physical geographic features of the European part of Russia, where there are large expanses and a considerable length of lines of contact and of fronts."...

“Holy Defense:” Hezbollah’s New First-Person Shooter Video Game

OE Watch Commentary: First-person combat video games have emerged as a cheap way for militaries and armed groups across the globe to recruit, train and indoctrinate. Recently, Lebanese Hezbollah’s “Electronic Media Division” released a first-person shooter game set in contemporary Syria and called “Holy Defense: Protecting the Nation and Holy Sites.” The game’s character, named Ahmed, moves through increasingly difficult levels by completing missions based on actual events in Syria. The game begins at the Sayyida Zaynab shrine, the defense of which has become a rallying cry for Iranian-backed militias in Syria. After fending off ISIS attackers and neutralizing their mortar fire in the Damascus suburbs, Ahmed goes to Qusayr, the site of Hezbollah’s first overt action in the Syrian conflict, where he and his comrades are tasked with rescuing hostages and then taking full control of the town. The game’s final two levels consist of hunting down an ISIS suspect and expelling jihadist groups from the Syrian-Lebanese border.

The game was released at a ceremony held in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Speaking at the ceremony, Lebanese Minister of Youth and Sports Mohammed Fneish, a Hezbollah party member, noted the “soft power” value of the enterprise, which employs “electronic media and entertainment” to spread the culture of “The Resistance” (al-Muqawama), as Hezbollah often refers to itself. Fneish emphasized “the importance of innovative methods,” with video games held up as a prime example.

“Holy Defense” is not the first game to be released by Hezbollah’s media center, though it is the first in which Israelis are not the enemy. Nor is it the first video game set in the Syrian conflict: Slightly over a year ago, a Russian video game company released a “Real-Time Tactics” game (in which players control squads or units rather than an individual) titled “Syrian Warfare.” Video games have insinuated themselves into the conflict in other ways too: ISIS propaganda videos are said to echo the aesthetics of the first-person shooter game “Call of Duty,” and in 2014 ISIS supporters created a user-modified version of the popular first-person shooter video game Arma 3. This is the same game, incidentally, from which Russian military officials used a snippet to allege evidence of US support for ISIS. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...to illuminate facts using these means of entertainment in order to spread a culture...”

Source: تقرير موقع العهد حول لعبة الدفاع المقدس
“Report from the Al-Ahed Website on the ‘Holy Defense’ Game (Video),” *Holy Defense Video Game Official Website*, 1 March 2018. <http://www.holydefense.com/article.php?id=20&cid=13&catidval=0v>

“Why did the Resistance (Hezbollah) intervene in Syria? What was the Resistance’s cause in Syria? We need to rewrite the course of events. When did the Resistance intervene? How did the Resistance intervene? Where did the Resistance intervene? And what was the impact of this intervention?... This is not an imaginary game, it constitutes the employment of electronic media and entertainment to shed light on facts that took place in Syria, to illuminate facts using these means of entertainment in order to spread a culture.”

Source: فنيش خلال اطلاق لعبة الدفاع المقدس
“Fneish at the Release of Holy Defense Video Game,” *National News Agency (Lebanon)*, 28 February 2018. <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/330939/>

Speaking at the ceremony, Fneish noted “the importance of innovative methods and using them for soft power, as our people have no other choice other than the Resistance if they wish to have freedom of decision and protect their holy sites ... The name ‘holy defense’ comes from the fact that we are truly in a defensive position and the sacredness of our defense comes from the sacredness of the values we hold.”





War in Syria Turned Hezbollah into a Powerful Army

OE Watch Commentary: While Lebanese Hezbollah has long sought to depict itself as a Lebanese nationalist organization seeking to defend Lebanon and ‘resist’ Israeli aggression, the civil war in Syria has belied this notion. It has been noted that Hezbollah’s deployment into Syria alongside Iranian advisors to defend Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against the Syrian opposition had nothing to do with Lebanese sovereignty and everything to do with acting upon Iranian commands to preserve the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah axis.

While Hezbollah has lost hundreds (if not thousands) of fighters in Syria, the accompanying excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency* reports how former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Yahya Safavi assessed that the experience has augmented Hezbollah’s military capabilities. After all, Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 ended the active phase of Hezbollah combat. The Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 was less a ground fight than an aerial campaign, with Hezbollah seeking to survive Israeli bombardment. This meant that between 2000 and the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, a new generation of Hezbollah fighters effectively had no real combat experience. Syria, however, has become both a trial by fire for Hezbollah recruits, where only the strong and competent survive, as well as a laboratory to test tactics and weaponry against a potent enemy.

Safavi’s comments suggesting that Hezbollah is the vanguard of “a powerful united Islamic army” raises the prospect that Iran might use Hezbollah as a mercenary force to be used elsewhere (possibly in Yemen or Iraq) as a proxy to undermine adversaries and advance Iranian interests while maintaining the fiction of Iran’s own non-intervention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Hezbollah flag flying over an abandoned artillery piece on the grounds of the former SLA prison in Khiam.

Source: Paul Keller - Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulk/354323204/>, CC 2.0.

Source: “Jang Suriya Hezbollah ra beh yek Artesh Qodratmand Tabdil Karad” (“The War turned Hezbollah into a Powerful Army”), *Mehr News Agency*, 17 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/8e1d84>

[Former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Yahya] Safavi stated, “Lebanese Hezbollah was both a guerrilla organization and a movement. And as a result of the Syrian war, it has transformed into a powerful regular army that stands up to the Zionists alongside the Lebanese Army to defend the people and the land of Lebanon. It is true that the Syrian war has lasted 83 months and has produced a number of martyrs, but Hezbollah has become an army, much like before the eight-year [Iran-Iraq] War the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps wasn’t a military organization but as a result of the war, we became a powerful army. Now Hezbollah is a powerful military arm... A powerful united Islamic army has arisen in Syria.

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EGYPT AND ISRAEL TUNNEL NEUTRALIZATION EFFORTS IN GAZA

by LUCAS WINTER, FMSO



The Tiger Forces in Damascus

OE Watch Commentary: Syrian Army Brigadier General Suheil al-Hassan recently took command of the loyalist campaign to retake the rebel-held enclave of Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of Damascus. Al-Hassan (aka “The Tiger”), a former paramilitary commander in the regime’s Air Force Intelligence, has risen to become the loyalist camp’s most effective military commander. He leads the so-called “Tiger Forces,” the regime’s most capable strike force which is credited with key battlefield victories in Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, the Syrian Desert and Deir Ezzor. Al-Hassan has also emerged as Russia’s favored Syrian commander. When President Vladimir Putin and Russian military leadership visited the Hmeimim Airbase in Syria in December 2017, al-Hassan was the only Syrian at the table besides President Bashar al-Assad.

Al-Hassan’s appointment to lead the Ghouta offensive, according to the first accompanying article, came at Russia’s behest. The article, published in the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, cites an exchange on Facebook in which Alexander Ivanov, the spokesman for the Russian forces in Syria, calls al-Hassan’s appointment “necessary given his abilities to lead battles that many others have been unable to.” The statement came in response to a comment from a supporter of Colonel Ghayath Dallah, from the Syrian Army’s 4th Armored Division, whom the comment’s author insinuated was “as capable if not more so than Suheil al-Hassan” and that if the Russians “[provided] Colonel Ghayath Dallah with half of what you gave al-Hassan” they would be able to see it for themselves.

The deployment of the Tiger Forces to Damascus will have an impact on Syrian military politics. The Republican Guard and the 4th Armored Division, which are considered the Syrian Army’s elite units, traditionally guard the capital’s various entry points, increasingly with help from allied and dependent militias. In early January, rebels took terrain from Republican Guard forces in Harasta, a strategically located Damascus countryside suburb that had been under an informal truce for some time. According to the second accompanying passage, from the pro-opposition Lebanese news site *al-Modon*, the losses in Harasta meant that “legions of militias came to the city and its surroundings to regain what the Republican Guard had lost.” Harasta became a “site to display victories, earn the trust of leaders and marginalize others.” The field commander for the Tiger Forces’ deployment to Damascus, the article notes, is a collaborator of Suheil al-Hassan’s from Harasta.

The Ghouta Front is considered among the most complicated and treacherous from within, given the multitude of competing interests and goals within both the loyalist and opposition camps. Al-Hassan and his forces are to operate in tandem with elite Syrian Army formations, Shi’i militias, local militias (of uncertain loyalties), private militias and regime paramilitary forces, all of whom seek to curry favor with their backers and hope to control the spoils and terrain that would result from loyalist advances. Russia has placed its bet on al-Hassan succeeding in this complex environment, which is why he is now being shadowed by a Russian personal security detail, as the third passage from the pro-opposition news network *Orient News* describes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

موسكو تدعم النمر لاقتحام الغوطة

“Moscow Supports ‘The Tiger’ to Storm the Ghouta,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/5QZYGa>

In a message posted on the [Hmeimim] Center’s Facebook and Telegram account, a member of the “Ghayath Forces” led by Colonel Ghayath Dallah... alleges that “There are officers that are as capable if not more so than Suheil al-Hassan, but unfortunately you marginalized our campaign and halted the attack when the rebels were on the brink of defeat... [you should provide] Colonel Ghayath Dallah with half of what you gave al-Hassan”... The Hmeimim Center’s Spokesman Alexander Ivanov responded that “The land forces mentioned in the message were given sufficient opportunity to end the presence of extremists, and they were excluded following the end of a predetermined period for doing so.” Ivanov praised “the appointment of Syrian officer Suheil al-Hassan as commander of the operations to destroy the terrorist Nusra Front in Eastern Ghouta [which] was necessary given his abilities to lead battles that many others lack”...

Source:

مليشيات النظام إلى حرستا الخلاف على زعامة الحشدر

“Regime Militias to Harasta: Disputes on Leading the ‘Insectarium,’” *al-Modon*, 4 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/PTR2jq>

Areas around Harasta, in Damascus’s Eastern Ghouta, saw hundreds from loyalist militias head to the area over the past several days, with names that do not suggest belonging to a national military, but rather resemble small groups, each with their own leader... For loyalist militias, Harasta became a site to display victories, earn the trust of leaders and marginalize others... The Republican Guard, through its 104th and 105th Brigades, has been considered the true military force in charge of Harasta for some time, but the blows that it received during the second stage of the “They Were Wronged” battle, and its loss of sensitive positions, made the regime leadership lose trust in it... Legions of militias came to the city and its surroundings to regain what the Republican Guard had lost. The first of these militias was the “Qalamoun Shield”... [but many of its] fighters defected [to the opposition], fought the Republican Guard, and handed areas over to the opposition. The “Qalamoun Shield” was unable to absorb opposition attacks and a campaign by loyalist and backers of the 4th Division began against the “Qalamoun Shield” and those who had entered truces with the government... As soon as the [4th Division’s “Ghayath Forces” arrived] the disagreements with the Republican Guard began, and they recurred in every battle that joined the two, regarding deployment and movement as well as leadership over the battle. The “Ghayath Forces” took over the area of “al-Balaa” in Qaboun... [and] began their shelling independently of other formations and without coordinating with them, which increased tensions between the groups amidst constant recriminations against the Republican Guard and assertions that their positions should be handed over to the 4th Armored Division...

The Harasta highway has in the past few days become an arena to flex one’s muscles. A group linked to Suheil al-Hassan’s “Tiger Forces” arrived in the area, led by Abu Arab Shuhaymi, a regime loyalist from Harasta and former confidant of Dhu al-Hima Shalish who has worked with Suheil al-Hassan for years. Having always been associated with fronts in the north and the east of the country, the Tiger Forces sought to make their presence felt in rural Damascus, to have a seat reserved in Damascus.

(continued)



Continued: The Tiger Forces in Damascus

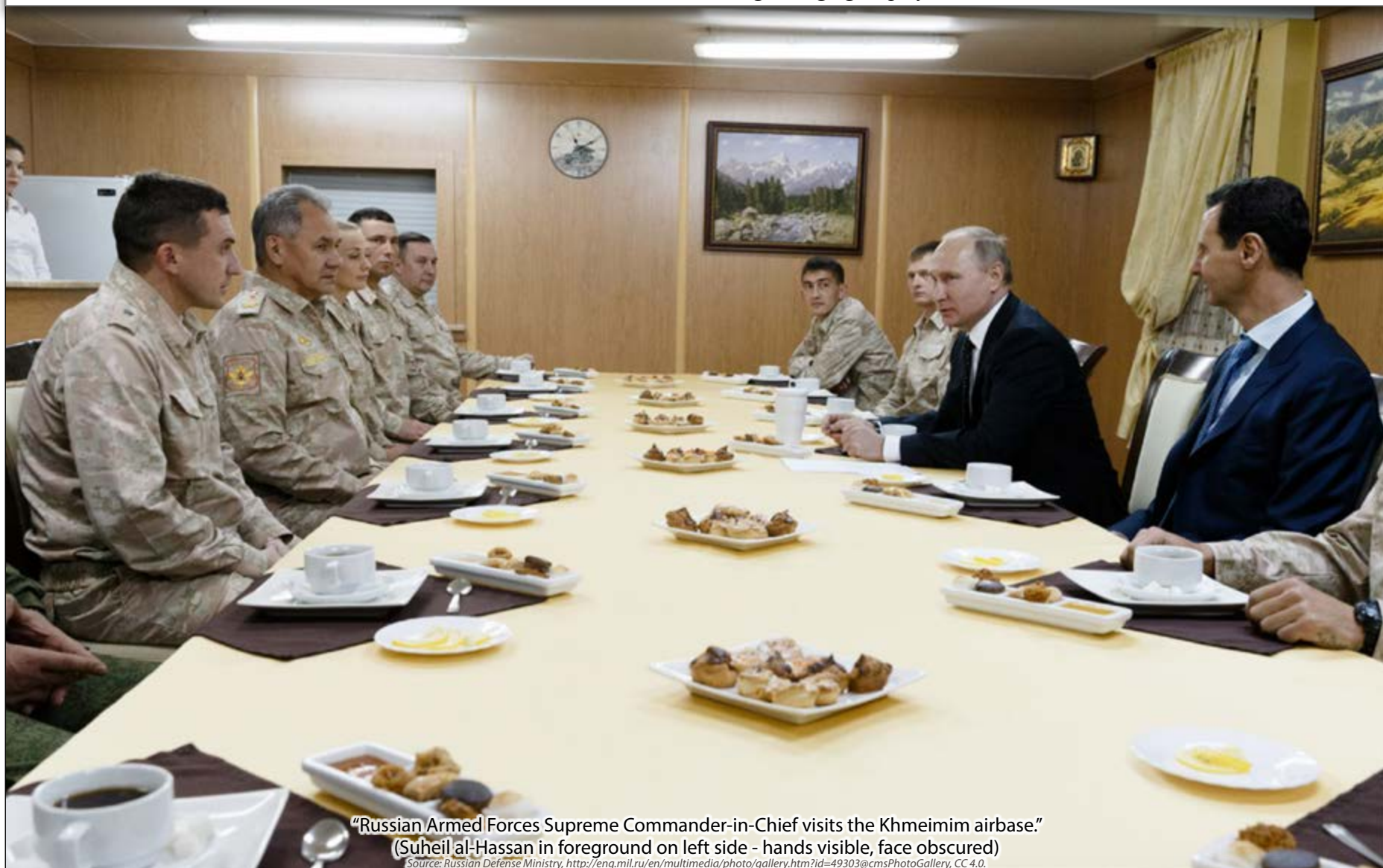
“...Legions of militias came to the city and its surroundings to regain what the Republican Guard had lost...”

Source:

“Special Russian Protection for Suheil al-Hassan,” *Orient News*, 4 March 2018. <https://goo.gl/3W8FTu>

حماية روسية خاصة لسهيل الحسن

Pages loyal to Suheil al-Hassan, nicknamed “the Tiger,” posted images of him on the Eastern Ghouta front accompanied by a Russian bodyguard alongside a regime bodyguard... This is not the first time that al-Hassan appears accompanied by Russian protection, as he also did so in a recent video which shows him near the Eastern Ghouta, addressing a large group of his militia members...



“Russian Armed Forces Supreme Commander-in-Chief visits the Khmeimim airbase.”

(Suheil al-Hassan in foreground on left side - hands visible, face obscured)

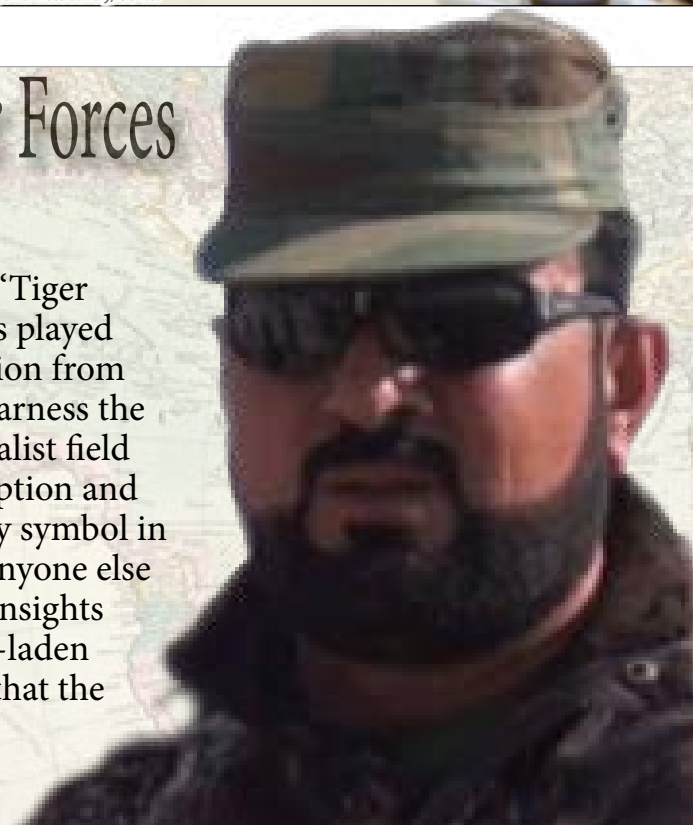
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=49303@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

Suheil al-Hassan and the Syrian Army's Tiger Forces

By Lucas Winter

This paper looks at the genesis, evolution and growth of the Syrian Army's “Tiger Forces” and their leader Suheil al-Hassan. The paper shows how Hassan has played an important role since conflict began in 2011. It attributes his transformation from special forces commander to leader of military campaigns to an ability to harness the Syrian Army's full infantry, artillery and airpower better than any other loyalist field commander. Given the Syrian Army's manpower shortages, rampant corruption and rivalry-laden bureaucracy, this is no small feat. Al-Hassan has become a key symbol in the Syrian loyalist camp, able to project more combined arms power than anyone else in Syria. His success on the battlefield comes less from tactical or strategic insights than from his ability to thrive within the loyalist camp's opaque and rivalry-laden bureaucracy. For this he has become a symbol to regime supporters, proof that the war can be won by working within the system. (July 2016)

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194882>





Syria: Who are the Loyalist Forces on the Eastern Banks of the Euphrates?

OE Watch Commentary: The small strip of territory on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, directly across from the Syrian city of Deir Ezzor, is currently controlled by an estimated 3,000 soldiers, militiamen and mercenaries variously linked to Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government. This toehold is linked to Deir Ezzor on the western banks of the Euphrates via a metal bridge laid down last year by Russian military engineers. It is the only pocket on the eastern bank of the Euphrates that the Syrian government and its allies were able to control following the collapse of ISIS. According to the accompanying excerpted article, published in March 2018 on the Syrian opposition news website *Ayn al-Madina*, Iranian-backed militias make up the majority of the force in this pocket (1,200-1,500), while Russian military and private contractors are the best-equipped. Each unit has its turf, though they collaborate to secure al-Salihiyya at the edge of the territory under their control. The article describes how the armed groups contract “middlemen and influencers” to recruit volunteer fighters by offering truces to the displaced population. The article describes the truces, which have been successfully implemented by the loyalist camp in other parts of Syria, as “basically consist[ing] of the refugees turning themselves in and providing one family member to join up with the militia, in exchange for the cancelling of their prosecution order.” In good capitalist fashion, the author adds: “The middlemen compete with one another to bring in the largest number of recruits to the militia for which they work.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...The middlemen compete with one another to bring in the largest number of recruits to the militia for which they work...”

Source:

جيب علي بابا في يسار الفرات (3) آلاف لص وقاطع طريق، من جنود النظام وأتباع إيران والروس

“Ali Baba Pocket in Euphrates Right Bank: 3,000 Thieves, Killers and Road-Blockers from the Regime Soldiers and Followers of Iran and Russia,” *Ayn al-Madina*, 10 March 2018. <https://goo.gl/Xu3G9E>

There are three main types of forces deployed in the pocket nominally held by the regime on the right bank of the Euphrates River, which were identified to Ayn al-Madina by confidential sources, as follows:

1. *Russian-linked forces. This includes units from the regular army and a large number of mercenaries. They all work under the command of an officer called “General Moul.” Their numbers are estimated to be 500 soldiers and fighters. These forces are well armed, with heavy weaponry including artillery, tanks and rocket launchers, in addition to APCs, mine-clearing equipment, armored vehicles and military engineering equipment.*

2. *Iranian-linked forces. These include Shi’i militias from the village of Hatlah led by Yassin al-Mayyuf and another led by Hassan Ali Moussa al-Moullah Ayad, who enjoys close relations with Lebanese Hizbullah and whose militia flies their banner. There is also the al-Baqir militia headed by “Hajj” Khaled al-Marai and Nawaf al-Bashir via his son Asaad. Each of them has a group they directly lead in these militias. Recently there has been a gradual turn by Nawaf al-Bashir from Iran’s Revolutionary Guard to the regime’s Republican Guard, although it has not yet reached the level of a defection from the Iranians. All of these forces operate under the command of a small Revolutionary Guard unit, estimated to number 100. The total number of Iranian-linked militias is estimated at 1200-1500, making them the most numerous as compared to their Russian and regime counterparts.*

3. *Regime-linked forces. This includes a group from the Syrian Army that belongs primarily to the so-called “5th Assault Corps,” supported exclusively by the Russians, in addition to smaller groups from the Republican Guard, Military Intelligence, and Air Force Intelligence, which seems to follow Brigadier General Suheil al-Hassan. This in addition to groups from the soon-to-be-formed “Self-Defense Forces,” currently known as “Popular Committees,” led by Azzam al-Tair (Secretary of the Second Rural Branch of the Baath Party). In total there are estimated to be 1,000 fighters, with 300-400 of them reserve forces. They are commanded by two officers known by their first name, Brigadier General Jamal and Colonel Ibrahim.*

Within the area nominally controlled by the regime on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, there is distinct presence and influence depending on the forces in the area. The regime is relatively strong via the Russian-backed 5th Corps in the village of al-Hassiniyah. Shi’i militias control Hatla and Marat. Russian deployment is focused on the villages of Khusham and al-Tayiba, in addition to a small presence in the village of al-Salihiyya, as they opened a base and a coordination office there. Russian helicopters are used to secure logistical supplies to these forces from bases in the Military Airbase east of Deir Ezzor. Nearly all of them work together to control al-Salihiyya.

There is a similar distinction in terms of the roadblocks and main checkpoints. The Russians and the regime control the Halibiyya Roundabout checkpoint and control the main checkpoint in al-Salihiyya in conjunction with Iranian-backed militias, after which the SDF-controlled area begins. The regime and Iranian-backed militias together manage another checkpoint in al-Salihiyya, while Iranian-backed militias run 5 checkpoints in Hatla.

Immediately after crossing the Euphrates last September, regime and militia forces executed tens of civilians that they captured. Some of the victims’ rotting corpses are still strewn in the open til this day. There was widespread looting, to the extent that doors, windows, and copper electrical wiring were taken from the walls of houses. Members of the “Tribal Army” militia, which came from Raqqa as one of the militias linked to Air Force Intelligence and crossed the river before retreating, left vulgar messages on the walls of homes. These days, local middlemen and influencers linked to regime intelligence services and Iranian-backed militias work alongside military commanders. A middleman backed by the al-Bustan Foundation, owned by Bashar al-Assad’s cousin Rami Makhlouf, also has appeared alongside them. The middlemen in essence encourage refugees to return under a so-called “truce,” which basically consist of the refugees turning themselves in and providing one family member to join up with the militia, in exchange for the cancelling of their prosecution order. The middlemen compete with one another to bring in the largest number of recruits to the militia for which they work.



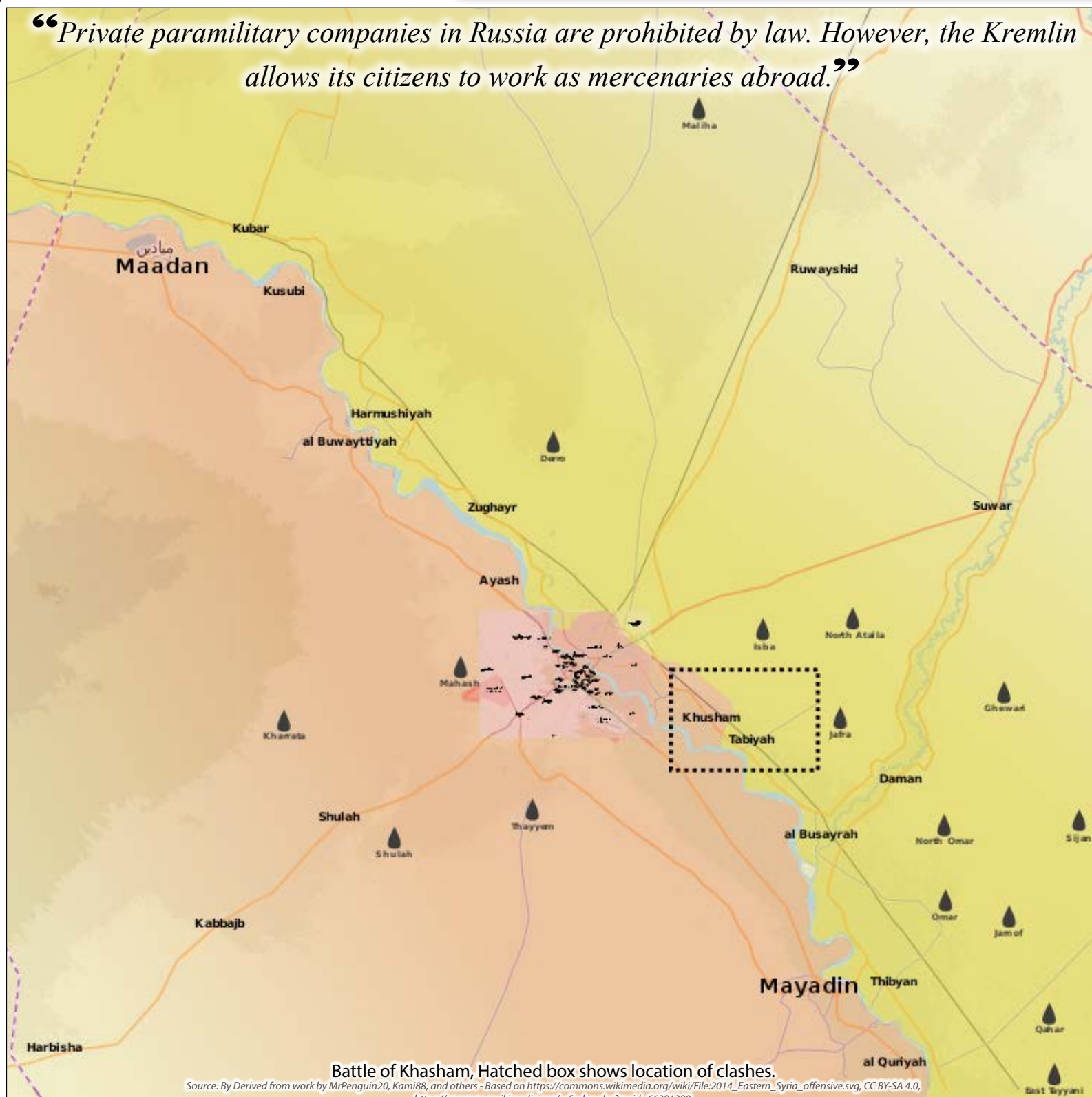
A Turkish View of the Wagner Group in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The Wagner Group is a Russian private military company that has played a role in Russian operations in Syria. While the Russian Government has not yet officially acknowledged the existence of this paramilitary group, it gained attention on 7 February when personnel from the company carried out an attack on Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Deir Ezzor. The accompanying excerpted article from the Turkish newspaper *Haberturk* reports on the Wagner Group and it provides some insight into the Turkish perspective of its activities in Syria. The article notes several things about the group, but it only provides information that has been published in a number of other media outlets around the world. Despite actively engaging in the Syrian civil war, the Turkish government has not made any comments on the presence of the Russian mercenaries in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: “Rusya uzmanları Putin’in paralı askerleri olan Wagner Grubu’nu anlattı (Russian experts talked about Putin’s mercenaries of Wagner Group),” *Haberturk*, 26 February 2018. <http://www.haberturk.com/wagner-grubu-nedir-rusya-uzmanlari-putinin-parali-askerleri-olan-wagner-grubu-nu-anlatti-1853055>

The Russian media refers to the group as a paramilitary unit equipped with heavy weapons and armored vehicles, but without officially acknowledging it. However, it is believed that it operates under the directives of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Then why doesn’t this paramilitary unit officially exist? Professor at Moscow State University Kerim Has provided Nalan Koçak from the Habertürk newspaper with answers: “Private paramilitary companies in Russia are prohibited by law. However, the Kremlin allows its citizens to work as mercenaries abroad. Knowingly they [the Kremlin] create legal loopholes. However, these mercenaries are not allowed to work inside the country. These mercenaries first appeared in Ukraine as Slavic paramilitary units. Later, around 2015 these paramilitary units formed the Wagner Group. I want to point out that this information has not been officially confirmed by [Russian Government].”

“Private paramilitary companies in Russia are prohibited by law. However, the Kremlin allows its citizens to work as mercenaries abroad.”



Battle of Khasham, Hatched box shows location of clashes.

Source: By Derived from work by MrPenguin20, Kami88, and others - Based on https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014_Eastern_Syria_offensive.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=66281280>.



Turkey's Balancing Act with Armed Rebels in Northern Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey's incursion into the Syrian city of Afrin (Operation Olive Branch) has sparked a fight between various Syrian rebel groups in a local power struggle. Clashes have broken out between Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian Liberation Front (SLF) which consists of Ahrar al-Sham and the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement. Fighting started in the Aleppo Governorate and spread to the Idlib Governorate, which is a stronghold of HTS. HTS was formed by merger of five Salafist groups, including Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) in 2017. The accompanying excerpted article, written by a Turkish journalist and researcher and published in *Gazete Duvar*, sheds light on how this power struggle might play out.

The article states that when Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch, it coordinated with HTS in Idlib in the outskirts of Afrin. This was a tactical alliance made by both groups against the common Kurdish enemy. The tactical alliance's end was inevitable, because HTS was at the same time fighting for dominance of Idlib with Syrian rebel groups that were closer allies of Turkey, in particular Ahrar al-Sham. The Turkish military's sudden presence on the outskirts of Idlib threatened HTS, and the plan which Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran reached during negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan to create de-escalation zones also included eliminating HTS.

Turkey has positioned its soldiers in various areas of Idlib with the help of HTS, giving the group assurances that it will not be attacked. According to the author, Turkey's challenge will be what to do when HTS is attacked by Turkey's proxies and allies in Syria. Assessing the situation, HTS issued a statement claiming Turkey is going to encourage other Free Syrian Army groups from Afrin to fight against them. As such, Turkey's tactical alliance with HTS will likely break soon.

The author argues that although the leader of Al-Qaeda, Aymen al-Zawahiri, is not in a position to give orders to HTS, his latest warning to those in Idlib is very important. Zawahiri called on "the mujahideen" to spread across the region and prepare for guerrilla warfare, which may last for a number of years. The author concludes that in light of all this, the future for HTS looks dark. Russian fighter jets, Iranian militias, and the Syrian Army will likely try to root them out of Syria. Also, while the SLF will continue clearing them from cities, towns, and villages, the possibility of HTS and Ankara's confrontation is likely. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

"Ahrar al-Sham and some other groups saw this as Al-Qaeda's attempt to swallow them."



Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) fighters gathered before deployment.

Source: By Takinginterest01 (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HTS_fighters.png, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: Umit Kivanc, "Cihatçılar arası savaşta da taraf olmaya doğru (Towards picking a side in war between jihadists)," *gazeteduvar.com*, 24 February 2018. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2018/02/24/cihatcilar-arasi-savasta-da-taraf-olmaya-dogru/>

The relationship between Ankara and HTS is not one of friendship, their alliance is tactical and is based on mutual interest. Let's remember who HTS is.

In July 2016, Al-Nusra announced that it had severed ties with Al-Qaeda central and formed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham with other small groups...

However, at the beginning of 2017, Al-Nusra took one more step, further expanding the coalition of organizations and this time renamed itself as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham [HTS]. It affirmed delinking itself from Al-Qaeda...

As a matter of fact, HTS, shortly after announcing its establishment, called upon all other armed opposition groups including Ahrar al-Sham to unite. Ahrar al-Sham and some other groups saw this as Al-Qaeda's attempt to swallow them. In fact, Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, one of the important organizations that participated in the establishment of the HTS announced that they left the alliance. Thus, HTS started its attacks on the small groups in Idlib.

By this means HTS became dominant in Idlib. When it did, it faced an unwanted guest: Turkish military. Why didn't it want [this guest]? Because Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara reached an agreement in Astana and projected to establish de-escalation zones in Idlib. This included getting rid of HTS.



Turkey and Power Play in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey's Operation Olive Branch to enter the Syrian city of Afrin raises the risk of direct military confrontation between Turkey and the Syrian regime. An article from the Turkish daily *Hurriyet* states that on 20 February Turkey launched rocket attacks on al-Assad forces en route to Afrin to help the People's Protection Units (YPG) to defend Afrin. Any military confrontation could result in a shift of power dynamics in Syria between Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

As the accompanying article suggests, Iran could use its military proxies in an engagement between Damascus and Ankara. Therefore, Turkish gains in Syria will threaten its objectives. By the same token, if Turkey and the Syrian regime engage in a direct military confrontation, Russia might not just stand by. As it did after Turkey shot down its fighter jets in 2015, Russia may close Syrian airspace to Turkish fighter jets in support of the al-Assad regime. The article states that this will derail Russian plans in Syria as it is the biggest supporter of the Syrian Regime; however, there is a strong possibility that Russia will use its influence over Turkey and prevent a possible military engagement.

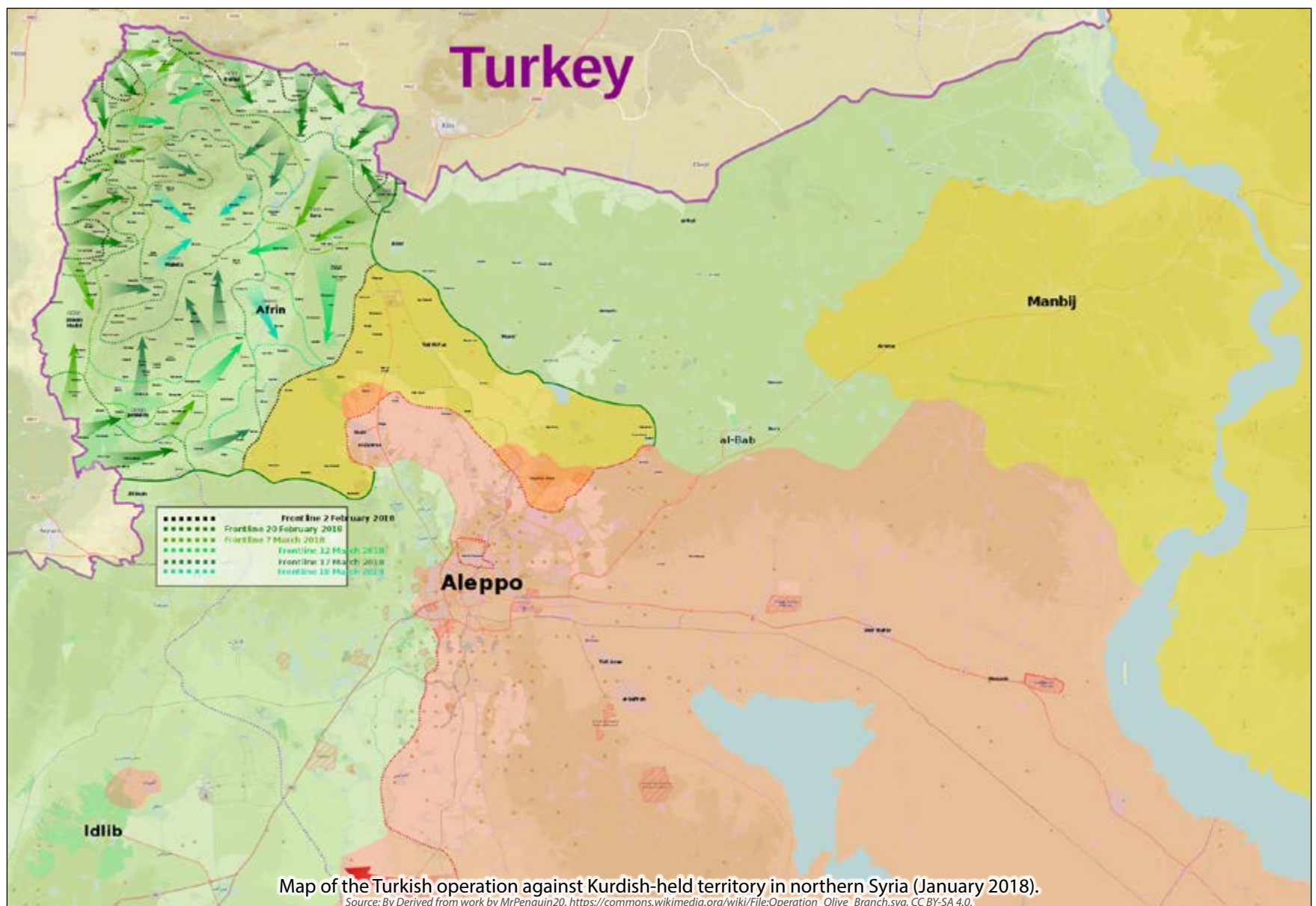
The article notes that military confrontation is the worst-case scenario. Despite all the disagreements between Iran, Russia, and Turkey, the good relations they established without interruptions during the Astana process, a series of negotiations between parties involved in the conflict in Syria which took place in the city of Astana, Kazakhstan. This provides assurances. However, the article cautions against unanticipated possibilities of things getting out of control because of the presence of different armed groups that are waging proxy wars. For example, there is the possibility of friction between Shia elements in areas under the control of the Syrian government in southern Afrin and Turkish forces. The author cites a recent report from the Turkish think-tank EDAM, stating that Shia militias supported by Iran might be bothered by the Turkish supported Sunni Free Syrian Army. In essence, Turkey might face some difficult choices in Syria with Moscow and Tehran. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: Sedat Ergin, "Afrin'de her ihtimale hazırlıklı olmak (To be ready for every possibility in Afrin)," *Hurriyet*, 9 March 2018. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/afrinde-her-ihtimale-hazirlikli-olmak-40766053>

One of the consequences of confrontation between the Assad regime and Turkey will be Russian and Turkish relations coming under serious pressure. A development in this direction will overturn the entire game plan of Russia, a number one supporter of al-Assad regime in Syria.

If such a possibility emerges, al-Assad regime's another supporter, Iran will not be a spectator on the scene, and it will enable its proxies in Syria.

“One of the consequences of confrontation between the Assad regime and Turkey will be Russian and Turkish relations coming under serious pressure.”



Iran: Muslims Supported by US, UK are Illegitimate

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran has, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, positioned itself as defender of Shi'ites worldwide. The concept of guardianship of the jurists (velayat-e faqih) imposed upon Iran by the late revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, however, imposed a minority interpretation of the role of clergy in the state that placed the Islamic Republic at odds with the majority of Shi'ites worldwide. Many of the most influential Shi'ite theologians oppose velayat-e faqih and thereby challenge the legitimacy of Iran's Supreme Leader itself.

It is in this context that the accompanying excerpts of a recent speech by the current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, which appeared on his website, are interesting. As Western countries focus on listening to if not empowering voices in the theological debate long overshadowed by extremists, Khamenei's dismissal of the legitimacy of any Shi'ite leader maintaining an office in London is a shot across the bow of

mainstream practitioners of Shi'ism, most of whom embrace traditional Quietism which eschews any clerical role on everyday governance. After all, while Qom, in Iran, and Najaf in Iraq remain the major centers of Shi'ite scholarly studies, many Shi'ite leaders have established offices in London in order both to take advantage of the freedoms inherent in British society and to remain outside the reach of Iranian intelligence and security services, which control discourse inside Iran and have influence in Iraq. By raising the issue of and dismissing the legitimacy of independent Shi'ites, Khamenei conversely shows that Shi'ite leaders who do not subordinate themselves to his views are an increasing concern to the Iranian leadership and are effectively challenging Khamenei's own legitimacy.

That said, Khamenei's accusations that Shi'ites speaking from or meeting in London are under foreign influence, or that moderate Muslims engaging with the United States or Israel are likewise compromised, signals the future of Iranian influence operations. Talk of Sunnis on whose behalf "Israel advocates" is also a broad swipe at Saudi Arabia, which is undergoing an unprecedented rapprochement with Israel.

The rest of Khamenei's speech was boilerplate: Beseeching the "liberation" of Jerusalem and the destruction of Israel, accusing the United States and Israel of being behind the Islamic State, and praising Iran's own record of "extending the resistance front" from Tehran to Damascus and Lebanon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Supreme Leader Khamenei greets Mohammed Abdul-Sattar al-Sayed, Syrian Minister of Religious Endowments.
Source: Khamenei.ir, http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/39077/C/13961210_0939077.jpg, CC 4.0.

“The Shi'ites that London supports? We don't accept those Shi'ites.”

Source: “Biyarat dar Didar Vazir-e 'Awqaf va Jame'ah az Ulama-ye Suriya” (“Statement in a Meeting with the Minister of Religious Endowments and a group of Syrian Religious Scholars”), *Khamenei.ir*, 1 March 2018. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=39080>

The Shi'ites that London supports? We don't accept those Shi'ites. Those Sunnis for which the United States and Israel advocates? We don't see those Sunnis as Muslim. Islam opposes disbelief and oppression and arrogance. We subscribe to ourselves. Our common thoughts are tawhid [the oneness of God]. Our common thoughts are the Ka'bah [in Mecca]. Our common thoughts are the Holy Prophets. And we share in common our affection for the Ahl al-Bayt [the family of the Prophet Muhammad]....

We have entered the fortieth years of the Islamic Revolution. From the very first day, all the world's leading powers spoke against us: The United States and the Soviet Union, NATO, and Arab and regional states, and yet we did not go away and instead grew. What does this mean? First, what the great powers want does not necessarily come true, that is, everyone decided we should go away but we would not be lost. The survival of Iran's Islamic Revolution proved that whatever America, Europe, and the world's atomic powers want does not necessarily come true. And if all of us and the Resistance Front's elements are decisive in the region, then enemies cannot do a damn thing.”



Iran Unveils New Anti-Armor Missile

OE Watch Commentary: Iran continues to invest heavily in its domestic military industry. Announcements with regard to new products and development occur on a monthly basis. While Iranian leaders often exaggerate the capabilities of their products, the announcements nonetheless give insight into future challenges in the operational environment. It is against this backdrop that *Tasnim*, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-affiliated outlet, reports on the unveiling announcement of a new missile.

The Azarakhsh (Lightning) missile is designed for short-range tactical missions. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, who attended its unveiling, reportedly spoke of how the new missile will complement Iran's growing reliance on drone and helicopter technologies and noted the growing importance of helicopter and drone operations in both air raids and reconnaissance. While the article speaks of the missile being mounted on a Cobra helicopter, it most likely refers to the Toufan, an Iranian knock-off based on the AH-1J SeaCobra.

The manufacture of rockets for air-to-ground use and Iran's proliferation of drones to proxies in Lebanon and Syria, as well as the Syrian Army's use of helicopters, suggests that the Azarakhsh could soon be deployed against both Israel and Syrian opposition targets. It might also pose a threat to Turkish forces, especially as Turkey uses armor in its operation in Afrin, an operation which the Assad regime in Syria denounced. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The Azarakhsh missile which can be mounted on the Cobra helicopter was unveiled.”

Source: “Jadidtarin Moshak-e Zadzareh Irani ba Nam Azarakhsh Ravanmay’e Shod” (“The newest anti-armor missile, ‘Azarakhsh,’ was unveiled”), *Tasnim News*, 28 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/Jx8fPR>

At the ceremony, the Azarakhsh missile which can be mounted on the Cobra helicopter was unveiled. This missile weighs 70 kilograms, has a 127 millimeter diameter, has a 10 kilometer range, and has a six kilometer lock-on feature. The missile also has a thermal search for air-to-ground mission and can reach a maximum speed of 550 meters per second. Another achievement named in this ceremony was equipping the 17th IRGC Ground Forces with night vision capability.



photo : Hossein Zohrevand

IRGC Chief Mohammad Jafari unveils Iran's new Azarakhsh anti-armor missile.
Source: Tasnim News, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1396/12/09/1396120915030369113478064.jpg>, CC 4.0.



Police Chief Demands Death for Sufi Protestors

OE Watch Commentary: On the evening of 25 February 2018, a Sufi protest against religious repression in Iran and the detention of some of their members in a local police station turned violent when police moved in and clashed with the Gonabadi (Sufi) dervishes. During the ensuing fighting, a bus allegedly driven by a member of the Sufi order and, separately, a car plowed through the assembled police killing three members of the Law Enforcement Forces and two members of the paramilitary Basij. Some reports suggested that one of the officers killed had also been stabbed. The violence injured an additional 30 members of the law enforcement community.

In the excerpted article from *Fars News Agency*, a hardline government news outlet, the head of the Law Enforcement Forces for greater Tehran announces his expectation that the judiciary will expedite the execution of those allegedly responsible for running over police and Basij with vehicles. The entire episode is revealing on a number of levels. Firstly, despite the Iranian government's rhetoric of social justice and democracy, it shows lack of judicial independence. Secondly, while political divisions within Iranian society are often depicted as between hardliners and reformers and religious divisions are portrayed as sectarian—Sunni vs Shi'ite Muslims, for example—it is also important to recognize the growing influence and power of Sufism inside Iran (and, for that matter, inside Saudi Arabia where a Sufi underground exists in the Hijaz). That Sufis not only rallied in the heart of Tehran but also fought back violently against the Law Enforcement Forces and the Basij shows that anger percolates not far below the surface of the Islamic Republic. That the video of the bus running down police went viral in Tehran suggests popular curiosity about dissent and could spark copy-cat acts of violence.

The arrests of more than 300 Gonabadis may backfire, as could the execution of the bus and car drivers accused of running over police and Basij, since they could create more grievance and provide martyrs around which to rally. Based on Rahimi's comments in the article, it does not appear that the Iranian government is prepared to address Gonabadi grievances. His decision to blame external actors fits the conspiratorial template often used by the Iranian government, but does little to address the root causes of discord. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The events of 25 February originated overseas and on counter-revolutionary [internet] sites.”

Source: “Majazat ‘Amal Shehadat Mamoran Naja dar Khiaban Pasdaran qabl az payan sal” (“Punishment before the end of the year for those who Martyred the Agents of the Law Enforcement Forces in Pasdaran Street”), *Fars News Agency*, 28 February 2018. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13961209002058>

General Hossein Rahimi, in a conversation with the correspondent from Fars News Agency, said the punishment for the martyrdom of the Law Enforcement Forces should be announced before the Eid. The head of the capital's police said, “With the coordination of the Judiciary, and for the healing of the families of the martyrs of the incident on Pasdaran Street, the person who killed three of the officers of the Tehran Police Commander's Assistant Unit should be hanged before the Eid.” It is necessary to mention that General Rahimi announced at the funeral of the Pasdaran martyrs that the events of 25 February originated overseas and on counter-revolutionary [internet] sites, and said, “For our dear martyrs, we demand punishment for the driver of the bus and Samand car.”



The Aftermath of Rioting on Pasdaran Street on the evening of 19-20 February 2018.

Source: Fararu.com, fararu.com/fa/news/349636/ هت ش د گ ب ش - یری گ رد ز ا د ع ب ن ا ر ا د س ا پ ن ا ب ا ی خ و ا ص ت



Iranian Environmentalists Arrested as Spies

OE Watch Commentary: On 24 January 2018, Iranian authorities arrested Iranian-Canadian environmentalist Kavous Seyed Emami. On 9 February 2018, Iranian authorities alerted his wife that he had committed suicide in prison, a charge his family fiercely denies. The episode, however, placed Iran's growing environmentalist movement in the spotlight. The Islamic Republic's environmental record is poor. Greater Tehran, with its approximately 14 million people, can rival Beijing and New Delhi in terms of pollution. Government opacity and the involvement of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps means that ordinary Iranians often have little recourse to hold polluters accountable. Just as with the Gezi Movement in Turkey, the Iranian government has cracked down quickly and forcefully on environmental organizing, presumably because environmentalism has the potential to organize a broad array of citizenry across traditional sectarian and political divisions.

It is against this backdrop that the excerpted article from the hardline *Mehr News Agency* is relevant. Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, the second most powerful judiciary official in Iran and the ministry's spokesman, announced that security forces had rounded up 70 individuals accused of espionage under the cover of environmentalism. Tehran Public Prosecutor Abbas Ja'fari-Dowlatabadi explained, "These individuals have been collecting classified information about the country's strategic areas under the guise of carrying out scientific and environmental projects." While Mohseni-Ejei has announced that no foreigner was among those in the most recent rounds of arrests in the Persian Gulf littoral Hormozgan province, his quip that foreign influence permeates environmentalism suggests segues with the judiciary's espionage conspiracy and reflects Iran's efforts to taint all grassroots activism with accusations of foreign control. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: "Fard-e Kharaji dar Pervandeh Jasusa-e Fa'al Mahit-e Zisti Dastgir Nashodeh Ast" ("No foreigners have been arrested in case involving environmentalist spies"), *Mehr News Agency*, 25 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/zSt7Xj>

A spokesman for the judiciary said: With regard to the spy case in the guise of environmental activity, three people in Hormozgan have recently been arrested, but no foreigner has been arrested in the case. According to the Mehr correspondent, in the 125th [weekly] press conference, Hojjat al-Islam Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei in answer to the question "Was any foreigner arrested in the case of the environmental activists?" said, "Three people were recently arrested in Hormozgan [province], but no foreigner was arrested in this case...."

He said, "[Foreign] influence is a serious issue, and at the head of it are the United States and Israel, and we must pay attention to it.

"[Foreign] influence is a serious issue, and at the head of it are the United States and Israel."





Iran: Israel's Missile Defense Can Be Overwhelmed

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's growing missile arsenal has become the focal point of international diplomacy in the wake of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and corollary UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Lebanese Hezbollah's acquisition of more than 120,000 rockets and missiles despite UN Security Council resolutions demanding the group's disarmament and a UN monitoring force in Lebanon, as well as sporadic Iranian and Hezbollah UAV penetration of Israeli air space, have also increased regional tension.

On 18 February 2018, while speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed a portion of an Iranian UAV which he said Israel had downed as it tried to penetrate Israeli airspace. In the excerpted article from *Javan Online*, General Hossein Salami, deputy Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander, suggests that while Israel has developed anti-missile defenses, Iran's strategy is simply to overwhelm Israel's system with the sheer number of rockets.

Salami's comments hint at Iran's development of an asymmetric doctrine similar to the Iranian Navy's utilization of speed boat swarming attacks in the Persian Gulf after Operation Praying Mantis in 1988. Iran appears to be embracing a corollary swarming attack with mass-produced UAVs and missiles, a tactic it could use to try to overwhelm the Saudi and Israeli anti-missile defenses or those of U.S. forces in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“What will they do if hundreds of missiles rain down on them?”

Source: “Vakanesh Janshin Farmandeh Sepah beh Namayesh Netanyahu dar Munich” (“Deputy IRGC Commander Responds to Netanyahu in Munich”), *Javan Online*, 20 February 2018. <http://www.javanonline.ir/fa/news/896199>

“Today, we are witnessing that the US and Israel have turned into ridiculous artists, by showing the body of a rocket at the White House and the wing of an aircraft [in Munich] and introducing them as an Iranian missile and drone. This action means their position has declined. Faced with the [Islamic] revolution, their situation has become more complex.” He [Gen. Hossein Salami] continued, “The Israelis claimed that the UAVs which penetrated the skies of the occupied territories was Iranian, but whether this allegation is true or false, we should say this this isn't the first and won't be the last UAV of the resistance front, and the Israeli [F-16] fighter jet was shot down in response to the downing of the drone....”

“What were the THAAD and Patriot missile systems doing to counter that missile? Why couldn't they intercept the missile?” He added: “If they cannot strike a missile, what will they do if hundreds of missiles rain down on them?”





13 Million Users of Domestic Messaging Apps in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: Even before Iran's December 2017 unrest, Iranian officials sought to control and constrain the internet. For years, Iranian officials have debated creating a broad firewall around Iran and instead, construct a national intranet. The role of social media in catalyzing the spread of protests, however, has given new urgency to Iranian efforts to control online activity. The accompanying excerpted article from *Mehr News Agency* reports that earlier this year Iran's Supreme Cyberspace Council announced government loans and subsidized bandwidth tariffs for five local apps, including Soroush, Wispi, Gap, iGap and BisPhone. Abolhasan Firuzabadi, the secretary of the Supreme Cyberspace Council, now claims that at least 12 million Iranians use a domestically-produced and operated messenger service, which is presumably meant to undercut the popularity of Western social media channels. This shows that the Iranian strategy has gained some traction, at least in some quarters; however, with 74 million cell phone subscribers inside Iran (roughly 91 out of 100 Iranians) and with more than 36 million internet users, even 12 million domestic messaging app users suggests the majority of Iranians still utilize non-domestic messaging apps. Telegram, for example, which the Iranian government has struggled to shut down inside Iran, reportedly has 40 million users in the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“There are currently 12 to 13 million users of the domestic mobile messengers.”

Source: “Takhir Qaveh Qasa’iyeh va Vizarat-e Ershad dar Ajrayi Mosubeh Hamayat az Peyam Rasanha” (“Delay of the Judiciary and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the Implementation of the Bill for Developing Messaging Apps”), *Mehr News Agency*, 26 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/kHd6wt>

[Abdolhasan] Firuzabadi added, “Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting has been cooperating well with the implementation of this goal, and they have done what they were supposed to do.”

The secretary of the Supreme Cyberspace Council, noting that the Ministry of Communications had loaned five billion tomans to domestic messengers, said, “This ministry said there is no problem to achieve this, and they’re in the final stages of this field.” Firoozabadi added: “There are currently 12 to 13 million users of the domestic mobile messengers.”

Arresting Iranian Cyber Criminals

OE Watch Commentary: In the wake of the December 2017-January 2018 unrest, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and cyber police have gone on the offensive to counter those utilizing the Internet to conduct what security forces consider counter-revolutionary activities. In the excerpted article from the semi-official *Islamic Student News Agency (ISNA)*, Tehran Police Chief Hossein Rahimi announced that security forces have included those using the internet to incite in their round-up of “thugs.”

While some of the internet activity may have been political, the *ISNA* also reported that the “thugs” had used social media and Instagram to threaten and perhaps even blackmail other citizens. If this is accurate, then the range of internet crimes which Iranian security forces seek to counter has expanded from politics and pornography to blackmail and extortion as some Iranians post photographs of others in embarrassing situations. Such incidents, even if few and far between, will provide Iranian authorities with an excuse to further their monitoring of all online activity and Iranian government efforts to create a ‘Halal’ intranet strictly controlled by the Iranian government. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Police have begun to deal with offenders in cyberspace.”

Source: “Dastgiri Arazil Faza’i Mojazi” (“Arresting Cyber Criminals”), *Islamic Student News Agency*, 2 March 2018. <https://goo.gl/SuPYUF>

General Hossein Rahimi, in a conversation with ISNA, with reference to the plan to deal with the thugs in Tehran that resulted in the arrest of 241 in different parts of Tehran on Wednesday, said the police plan to deal with the thugs and intruders in the neighborhoods with the assistance of the citizens themselves as well as the observation of my colleagues in specialized police units in different parts of Tehran. A report on the final stage of the operation was also released. When asked whether the “Instagram” thugs were also among those arrested among the mobs, the police chief of Tehran noted, “Three of the arrested individuals are thugs who used to bully, trash talk, and carry out offensive actions in cyberspace. They were identified and arrested.”

According to the ISNA report, for some time, thugs have created webpages to threaten people and create a sense of insecurity for citizens, and police have begun to deal with offenders in cyberspace.



Nigeria's Environmental Devastation Drives Conflict

OE Watch Commentary: While much of the news coming out of Nigeria about violence and bloodshed is related to Boko Haram terrorizing the local populace, the ongoing conflict between the country's nomadic herders and indigenous farmers rarely makes the headlines. As the accompanying article from the South African news website *The Conversation* explains, the herders are mainly Muslims from the Fulani ethnic group, whereas the farmers are predominantly Christians and often not Fulani, with the result that the conflict is fueled by both ethnic and religious differences. However, frequently overlooked in this narrative the article describes as "ethnic war" is the factor that is bringing these two disparate groups into violent contact with each other, namely environmental devastation.

A brief geography lesson is necessary in order to understand the situation. On the north-south axis Nigeria spans about 1,000 kilometers, with the far south possessing a tropical rainforest climate, making it lush with vegetation. The far north is marked by the fringes of the Sahara and in between the two are grasslands often turned into farms. Unfortunately, the Sahara is moving southward at a rate of approximately 600 meters per year, while at the same time Lake Chad, located in the northeastern section of the country, is drying up. This combination of increased desertification and lack of water has pushed the Fulani pastoralists further south in search of pastures and water for their herds. The further south they venture, the more they encounter non-Fulani farmers who are angered by the Fulani's animals eating their crops.

There has long been tension between the pastoralists and farmers, and the Fulani have a history of strategically annexing territories, but in the past those problems have largely been confined to the northern part of the country. Now, because of extensive environmental degradation there has been large scale migration of Fulanis into the south, and these are not just Fulanis from northern Nigeria, but rather from across a wide swath of West Africa. The results from the conflict have been devastating, with over two thousand killed, tens of thousands displaced, and billions of dollars in lost revenue.

As the article describes, the government response to this problem has been mostly silence. Some elites and political leaders suspect President Muhammadu Buhari, who is Fulani, of being complicit in the attacks by herders, but they have not gone so far as to directly accuse him. However, while there is no proof that Buhari has done anything to fan the flames of the conflict, Nigeria's hierarchical society gives the word of elites a great deal of weight.

One suggested solution the government did put forth was the creation of cattle "colonies" where land is taken from indigenous farmers and given to the herders. Farmers from the Yoruba ethnic group have been particularly vocal in their opposition to such a plan, slamming it as nothing more than an "ethnic land grab." While such a proposition appears to be a non-starter, the author suggests a difficult but multipronged approach to reducing the underlying environmental issues that have led to tensions between the herders and farmers: recharging Lake Chad, emplacing sustainable water management, embarking on large-scale reforestation, engaging neighboring countries, and reaching out to international donors for assistance. Should such a massive undertaking be successful, the herders would no longer need to descend south as often or as far, decreasing their interaction with the farmers, and thus in turn decreasing the likelihood of conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Fulani herders, such as the ones pictured here, have migrated further south into Nigeria because of environmental degradation in their northern pastures.

Source: Rita Willaert/Flickr, <https://goo.gl/b1CuUw>, CC BY-NC 2.0

“But environmental explanations are largely ignored in favor of talk of ethnic or religious conflict. Such talk quickly becomes highly emotive, preventing a full analysis of all the driving forces behind the conflict.”

Source: Olalekan Adekola, “Nigeria’s conflict is a result of environmental devastation across West Africa,” *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 22 February 2018. <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-conflict-is-a-result-of-environmental-devastation-across-west-africa-91694>

This is because environmental devastation has necessitated widespread migration of Fulanis from all over West Africa to the south of Nigeria, which has been unable to prevent nomads from other countries from coming in along its long borders. The influx of new people has disrupted the existing dynamics and relationship between predominantly farming local communities and nomadic herders.

But environmental explanations are largely ignored in favor of talk of ethnic or religious conflict. Such talk quickly becomes highly emotive, preventing a full analysis of all the driving forces behind the conflict. The dominance of the “ethnic war” narrative therefore makes it harder to develop holistic and sustainable solutions and, in a country that is a mix of cultures and religions, puts national unity and peace-building at risk.

In 2016, the conflict led to the death of 2,500 people, displaced 62,000 others and led to loss of US\$13.7 billion in revenue. In January 2018 alone, the conflict claimed the lives of 168 people.



Boko Haram Repeats Chibok Kidnapping, Now in Dapchi

OE Watch Commentary: In 2014 Boko Haram infamously kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria. Not until October 2016 and May 2017 did the group exchange over 20 and 80 of the girls, respectively, for a ransom of around three million Euros. Since 57 girls immediately escaped after the kidnapping, three escaped in the months afterwards, and several died in the bush, slightly over 100 girls remain captive. Boko Haram claims the remaining girls in captivity do not want to return home and has released videos of them saying they want to stay with Boko Haram, although such videos were likely coerced.

Less than a year after the May 2017 exchange, according to the excerpted article in Nigeria's Vanguard, Boko Haram again conducted a mass kidnapping of schoolgirls, this time around 110 girls in the town of Dapchi in Yobe State on 18 February. The attack, according to the article, was not only a human tragedy, but an example of more "incompetence and carelessness" from the government. The article describes how, like in the Chibok kidnapping, the government at first denied a kidnapping took place and then claimed to have rescued all the girls, only to admit days later that neither claim was true.

After the kidnapping, a new social media campaign to call for the release of the Dapchi girls began and was called #DapchiGirls on Twitter. It also linked up with the #Bringbackourgirls campaign that has called for the government to win the freedom of the Chibok girls. The article says the #DapchiGirls campaign will bring claims of legal, criminal negligence against the Nigerian government, although it has not explained how it will do so. The pressure on the government from the #DapchiGirls campaign, among other sources, apparently was successful in contributing to pushing the government to negotiate a short-term ceasefire with Boko Haram whereby the group returned all of the kidnapped Dapchi girls on 21 March, except five girls who suffocated in a vehicle during the kidnapping and one Christian girl who refused to convert to Islam.

The reason for Boko Haram returning almost all of the girls was that the leadership of the Islamic State-loyal faction of Boko Haram to which the kidnappers belonged does not believe in kidnapping Muslim girls as a legitimate form of warfare. The leadership therefore disapproved of the operation carried out by the kidnappers in Dapchi, who did so without approval. While Nigeria saw a best-case scenario unfold after the Dapchi kidnapping, there is no guarantee that this faction, or the other more ruthless faction that holds the remaining Chibok girls, will not continue other attacks and possibly kidnappings of Christians girls. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Politische Karte Nigerias (Bundesstaat Yobe hervorgehoben).

Source: By Domenico-de-ga (Own Work), zenn <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ANigeria-karte-politisch-yobe.png>, CC-BY-SA-3.0.

“The abduction of 110 Secondary school girls of Government Girls Science and Technical Secondary School, Dapchi in Yobe State on February 19, 2018 is the worst form of a deja vu that our movement could have ever imagined.”

Source: “Bring Back Our Girls’ blames Govt failures for Dapchi kidnap,” Vanguard, 13 March 2018. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/03/bring-back-girls-blames-govt-failures-dapchi-kidnap/>

The Bring Back Our Girls group accused the Nigerian government of “incompetence and carelessness” for the seizure of 110 girls by Boko Haram from their hostel in the restive northeast. “How terribly embarrassing it is that within four years since the abduction of 276 Chibok girls in April 2014 our country is again in the news for tragic reasons,” the group said in a statement. “The abduction of 110 Secondary school girls of Government Girls Science and Technical Secondary School, Dapchi in Yobe State on February 19, 2018 is the worst form of a deja vu that our movement could have ever imagined at this time in our nearly four-year-old advocacy.” Blaming the kidnap on the “incompetence and carelessness of our government,” the group urged the authorities to do everything possible to free the girls.



Who are the Anglophone Secessionists in Cameroon?

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article from the website of the French-Language *Journal du Cameroun* on 20 February discusses the main Anglophone secessionist groups in the ongoing crisis in Cameroon. Cameroon is a country where about 20 percent of the population of 23 million speaks English as the official language and most of them are located in the two regions bordering Nigeria. However, the rest of the country, including the federal government, speaks French as an official language. Since 2016 a growing number of Anglophones have protested against, among other issues, the appointment of Francophones in the education sector in Anglophone areas.

According to the article there are two currents that characterize the Anglophone secessionists: the traditional groups, which have existed since the 1990s, and more recent groups, which have come together only since 2016. The traditional groups include Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (Socadef), which is an armed wing of the Southern Cameroon Youth League. Socadef was formed in 1995 to seek secession for the Anglophones in the region of Ambazonia. The article also states that the group has carried out several attacks with home-made bombs against the Cameroon Defense Forces and has 300 members.

The more recent groups include one called the Vipers whose tactics involve the burning down of public buildings, including colleges, in protest of Francophone influence in the education sphere. Other groups, such as the Tigers of Ambazonia, have assassinated Cameroonian gendarmeries in the Anglophone regions and circulated leaflets in cities or on social networks to spread their message.

The article shows that the resistance to Francophone influence in the Anglophone parts of Cameroon is multi-generational; however, at the same time, the Anglophone rebels do not appear to be particularly well-armed or militarily sophisticated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The brewing Anglophone crisis [in Cameroon] has transformed the North West and South West regions into a vast battleground for various secessionist faction.”



Southern Cameroon Map.

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

Source: “Crise anglophone: plusieurs factions sécessionnistes armées actives sur le terrain (Anglophone crisis: several armed secessionist factions active in the field),” *Journal du Cameroun*, 20 February 2018. <https://www.journalducameroun.com/crise-anglophone-plusieurs-factions-secessionnistes-actives-terrain/>

The escalation of violence in the English-speaking areas has brought to light many groups leading the armed struggle. The brewing Anglophone crisis has transformed the North West and South West regions into a vast battleground for various secessionist factions. Two currents characterize the different factions fighting in the conflict between secessionists and Cameroonian defense forces. On the one hand, there are the traditional groups created in the wake of the demands of the 1990s, and the more recent groups which came together in the wake of the October 2016 crisis.

In the first current, Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (Socadef), an armed wing of Ebenezer Akwanga’s Southern Cameroon Youth League (Scyl), is a pioneer. This radical secessionist organization was created in March 1995. The second trend of secessionist factions is made up of groups whose birth dates back to the beginning of the Anglophone crisis in October 2016. Here we find the Vipers. The actions of the Vipers consist mainly in preventing the resumption of classes in English-speaking regions by setting fire to public buildings.



Protests Against Foreign Militaries in Niger

OE Watch Commentary: On 25 February the French language website *slateafrique.com* reported on protests in Niger that have seen protesters carrying messages opposing the foreign military presence in Niger, among other issues. According to the article, a new finance law in the country has been criticized because it will lead to higher prices for goods and services. The article, however, does not explain the specific details about the finance law, but instead focuses on the chants that emerged from the protests against the finance law.

The article says that the protests quickly saw chants not only against the finance law, but also against foreign bases in the country. However, the article does not indicate that the protesters viewed the foreign bases as an excessively costly expenditure or related to the finance law in any way. Rather, political opposition parties that joined the protests began raising the issue of the French, US and German militaries that have bases and conduct operations in Niger. The protesters called for these foreign armies to “go away.”

From the article it appears, therefore, that the protests are not about any maltreatment by the foreign militaries in Niger, but that the issue is being used as a wedge issue to rally protesters to the side of opposition parties. The article notes that, in response, a coalition of the ruling parties was planning counter-demonstrations. While foreign militaries have not been blamed for any particular incident to warrant protests, their presence in Niger is a new political issue which deserves continued attention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Niger: manifestation contre la loi de finances et les bases militaires étrangères (Niger: protest against the budget law and foreign military bases),” *slateafrique.com*, 25 February 2018. <http://www.slateafrique.com/827674/niger-manifestation-contre-la-loi-de-finances-et-les-bases-militaires-etrangeres>

Several thousand people demonstrated Sunday in Niamey and the major cities of Niger to demand the abrogation of the 2018 finance law and the departure of foreign forces based in the country. “Down with the ruthless finance law!”, “Down with the unjust finance law!”, “Foreign forces down!”, “French, American and German armies, go away!”, chanted protesters in Niamey, responding to the call of a coalition of civil society organizations.

For the first time, the political opposition and three trade unions (out of the ten in the country), had called their militants to take part in the demonstrations. One of the main leaders of the protests described the military bases, in particular of America and France, as occupation forces that are present in Niger as part of the fight against the jihadists.

To respond to these waves of protest, the coalition of ruling parties is planning a counter-demonstration.

“[He] described the military bases, in particular of America and France, as occupation forces that are present in Niger as part of the fight against the jihadists.”



Af Ner 125 - Fort de Madama.

Source: Thomas Goisque, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Af_Ner_125_-_Fort_de_Madama.jpg, (CC BY-SA 3.0).



South Sudan's President Scapegoats US for Failed Peace Talks

OE Watch Commentary: With the latest South Sudan peace talks collapsing, the country's president, Salva Kiir, found a scapegoat for their failure...the United States arms embargo. The two weeks of negotiations that took place in Ethiopia between the Sudanese government and several rebel groups resulted in almost no agreements on key issues. As the accompanying article from the newspaper *The East African* explains, Kiir claims the US decision to not sell his country weapons emboldened the opposition groups who are now hoping and waiting for the government to collapse.

Kiir apparently failed to mention that despite the embargo, arms are still flowing into his country. Last year the UN declared the trafficking was often coordinated through South Sudan's neighboring countries. Nor is the US alone in viewing an arms embargo as a way to pressure the warring factions to pursue peace, with Britain, France, and several other countries also viewing it favorably. Even the UN is presently contemplating an arms embargo, though an attempt in 2016 by the US to have the world body adopt one was thwarted and it is possible it will meet the same fate this time. However, despite the US not being alone in supporting, or at least considering a stronger arms embargo, Kiir's ire is squarely addressed against the US, with his claiming America is "bullying" South Sudan and wants to "take its resources."

Kiir also did not mention the strong support the US provided South Sudan in its bid for independence or the significant aid the US has provided the country since then. Unfortunately, despite that aid, as well as assistance from other countries, South Sudan has become engulfed in an ethnically based civil war. As the accompanying article details, over one million people have fled the country, another two million are displaced, and the dead number in the tens of thousands.

The arms embargo Kiir rails against was emplaced not just to put pressure on the opposing sides to end the war; it is also because of the gross human rights violations both sides have committed. As often happens in ethnic conflicts, cruel and barbaric acts occur, with Kiir's government forces, despite international pressure, not immune to performing some particularly heinous ones.

Following the collapse of the peace talks, Kiir has indicated a willingness to resume them, though it is unclear what demands, if any, either side would change in the next round. As for this latest delay in peace negotiations, the war, now in its fifth year, finds the government opposition splintering into multiple factions, a development that makes additional talks that much more difficult. Meanwhile, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), at 12,500 personnel, has been unable to quell the ethnic violence, and has suffered losses. Also with regards to the UN, Kiir may blame the US for some of South Sudan's woes, but at one point the war and its casualties led UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who rarely criticizes leaders, to call out South Sudan's political elites as having little interest in their own people.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“[President Kiir] accused the US of ‘bullying’ and [imposing the arms embargo] to cow South Sudan and take its resources’.”



Salva Kiir, President of South Sudan, claims the US arms embargo caused his peace talks with rebels to collapse.

Source: South African Government, <https://goo.gl/SUUrw7>, CC BY-ND 2.0.

Source: Dicta Asiimwe, "South Sudan's Kiir blames US for peace talks collapse," *The East African*, 23 February 2018. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/South-Sudan-Kiir-blames-US-for-peace-talks-collapse/2558-4316892-ajls0yz/index.html>

South Sudanese President Salva Kiir blames the United States for the collapse of the latest peace talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

He accused the US of "bullying" and "taking the action [imposing the arms embargo] to cow South Sudan and take its resources".

Juba appears confident that the regional states are likely not to enforce the arms embargo.

South Sudan plunged into war in December 2013 after a dispute between President Kiir and his then deputy Riek Machar.



South Sudan: Buying Peace Does Not Work

OE Watch Commentary: On the surface it sounds like a fairly reasonable way to reduce conflict: provide warring elites with high-level political positions and/or large sums of money to prevent them and their followers from fighting. However, as the accompanying article from *African Arguments* relates, this “buying peace” policy, as it is sometimes called, is fraught with problems, the main one being that it does not treat the underlying causes of a conflict, leading to any cessation of hostilities often being only temporary.

The article’s author points to South Sudan as an example where mediators attempted this strategy of buying peace. In this case, the deal was between President Silva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar. Machar had been vice-president in July 2011, when South Sudan became independent, and stayed in the position until 2013 when internal government tensions erupted into civil war. The 2015 peace agreement returned Machar to the vice-presidency, but any thoughts of this action buying long-term peace were relatively short-lived as the following year Kiir dismissed Machar and fighting resumed. Some view the attempt to buy peace by having Machar join the government as a failure. Since 2016 more rebel groups have joined the opposition, causing the conflict to spread with UN estimates placing the number killed at tens of thousands, around two million displaced, and seven million in need of humanitarian assistance.

Interestingly, despite this disaster, mediators are once again trying to stop the bloodshed by bringing the warring parties to the table with appeasements and rewards, or in other words, a repeat attempt to buy peace. The author points out that this is not likely to be successful for the same reason previous efforts to buy peace did not work, specifically a failure to address root causes of the problem. As an example of this the article points to a different, although related, conflict in South Sudan between the Shilluk community and President Kiir. Many Shilluk joined the South Sudan Democratic Movement to fight Kiir’s fledgling government over disputed land in the country’s Upper Nile region. The militia’s leader, Johnson Olony, agreed in 2013 to end hostilities, and in return, he and some of his men were awarded positions in the military and government. However, the basic disagreements over land that led to the fighting in the first place were not addressed. Meanwhile, relationships became frayed between Olony and other parties in the government, with the tensions eventually compelling him to return to the rebel fold where, as a leader once again, he helped rally supporters to resume the fight over their grievances.

The accompanying article points out additional problems with the policy of buying peace. One of these is that in the process of rewarding the elites, accountability and justice for the less powerful is often ignored. Thus, a history of violence against the masses might simply be dismissed. Yet another problem with trying to buy peace is that there is a strong chance it only lasts as long as there are resources to pay for it and that when the money runs out, the fighting could resume.

A better approach than a buying-the-peace policy would, to summarize the article, be twofold. The first approach involves shifting the emphasis away from rewarding the elites and more towards addressing the underlying grassroots grievances driving the conflict. The second approach is ending the rewards for waging war by finding the funding and then cutting it off through measures such as arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans. By providing disincentives to conflict as opposed to the failed policy of buying-the-peace incentives not to fight, South Sudan might finally emerge from the violence that has engulfed it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The strategy of buying peace has not and cannot work. It is only when the financial resources and benefits of fighting dry up that we might finally move a step closer towards building a meaningful and sustainable peace.”



A South Sudanese man in a remote village with what appears to be a well-worn version of the Heckler & Koch G3 Assault rifle.

Source: Steve Evans/Flickr, <https://goo.gl/NVviQD>, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Source: Daniel Akech Thiong, “South Sudan: Buying off elites to stop fighting won’t work. Here’s what might,” *African Arguments*, 12 March 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/03/12/south-sudan-buying-off-elites-to-stop-fighting-wont-work-heres-what-might/>

In a bid to end this bloodshed, mediators are once again trying to bring warring parties to the table. They are largely relying on similar tactics of trying to appease military leaders and offer them rewards to cease hostilities. Recent experience, however, should have exposed to them the unsustainability of trying to “buy peace”.

Ultimately, buying peace by offering rewards to warring elites is doomed to fail. It is anathema to democracy and allows dictatorship. It benefits only those at the top and, unless every power-broker is satisfied, which is impossible, it only encourages factions to split to demand what they believe they are due.

As things stand, there is little prospect of a meaningful peace treaty being signed. But if different and concerted forms of pressure were exerted on those benefiting from conflict and obstructing negotiations, the warring parties’ calculations could finally change. The strategy of buying peace has not and cannot work. It is only when the financial resources and benefits of fighting dry up that we might finally move a step closer towards building a meaningful and sustainable peace.



Local Debate on AMISOM: Should It Stay or Should It Go?

OE Watch Commentary: Is it really time for the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to begin withdrawing from the war-torn Horn of Africa nation? As the accompanying article from the newspaper *The East African* relates, the UN and the Western countries that fund AMISOM are saying yes to the idea of a systematic withdrawal, citing progress made in rebuilding and training the Somali National Army (SNA), which now numbers 12,000 soldiers. Opposing the withdrawal are the governments of Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, who supply the 22,000 soldiers constituting AMISOM. The reason given for their recalcitrance in removing the soldiers is the perception that the SNA is still not ready to accept full responsibility for defending the country, and that gains made in securing territory would be at risk if AMISOM troop numbers and/or funding were reduced. Interestingly two pieces of information were left out of the article. First, many of the governments supplying soldiers, as often happens in foreign-funded peacekeeping operations, find it profitable to do so. Second, there is no mention as to the possibility that the desire among these countries to continue in AMISOM may not be equal. As an example, it is unknown if Uganda, which does not border Somalia, or Ethiopia, which does and also has a long and often antagonistic relationship with that country, both have the same degree of commitment towards continuing the mission.

Until recently, the SNA supported keeping AMISOM in Somalia for an extended period of time; however, that changed after the Ugandan army killed three SNA soldiers in a friendly fire incident. Blame was traded by both sides. Uganda claimed Somali soldiers opened fire on the convoy of their AMISOM contingent head, Brigadier Paul Lokec, as it was heading to its base and that they returned fire in self-defense. Somalia on the other hand, claimed the convoy tried to forcibly pass a security checkpoint, leading to the exchange of gunfire. Whatever the cause, the end result has been anger towards AMISOM and a change of heart by some Somalia authorities regarding their intent to having these foreign soldiers on their soil for much longer. However, there are those both within and outside Somalia who question the SNA's ability to fully carry the burden of defending against al-Shabaab, a terrorist group whose recent large-scale bombings have shown that while it has been hurt by AMISOM and SNA operations, it is far from defeated.

Soon after the AMISOM-SNA shootout, the commanders of each of the contributing nations' forces stated that the number of soldiers in AMISOM should not be reduced, a position echoed by their respective ministers of defense and foreign affairs. However, that stand may be ignored, as last year the UN Security Council (AMISOM is operated by the African Union with UN approval) adopted a resolution to reduce AMISOM troop levels and transition security responsibilities to the SNA. Thus, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, appealed for increased aid to assist with the transition. He noted the recent political gains made by the country as one of the factors important in helping to fulfill AMISOM's exit strategy. He also pointed out (as have many other regional analysts) that further progress on the security front cannot be made without further progress on the political front. Indeed, progress on both fronts has been arduous, and depending on who is arguing, having AMISOM withdraw will either lead to further stability or a reversal of gains. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Tough choices as troop contributing countries seek to increase boots on the ground, but funders push for a reduction.”



A Ugandan soldier, serving with AMISOM on the northern city limit of Mogadishu.

Source: Stuart Price/UN Photo, <https://goo.gl/YAx99>, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Source: Dicta Asiimwe and Julius Barigaba, “Troop contributing countries disagree with UN, donors on Amisom withdrawal,” *The East African*, 3 March 2018. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Amisom-withdrawal-region-differs-with-UN-and-donors-/2558-4327446-3fn59t/index.html>

Tough choices as troop contributing countries seek to increase boots on the ground, but funders push for a reduction...The change of heart by the Somali authorities on the withdrawal of Amisom gained momentum last week after the Ugandan army shot dead three SNA soldiers in a friendly fire incident, prompting a flurry of accusations and counteraccusations between Ugandan and the SNA over who started the shooting...Uganda's Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Kutesa added the mission was also in need of force enablers and multipliers, which are crucial in carrying out effective operations.

“Going forward, it is essential therefore that the international community look at the bigger picture in Somalia, so that the gains made in recent years through enormous efforts and great sacrifice of Amisom and the SNA are not in vain,” Mr Kutesa said.



Is China Practicing “Debt-Trap Diplomacy” in Africa?

OE Watch Commentary: There are some who might view Chinese investment in African nations as simply providing assistance for infrastructure development. As the accompanying article from the *Institute for Security Studies* (an organization based in South Africa) explains, the problem is Africa might be selling its future to China in what has been described as “debt-trap diplomacy.” One need only look at Sri Lanka to see what can happen when China offers easy – some might say addictive – money that comes without the same, or what might be seen as strict, conditions of Western lenders. Post civil-war Sri Lanka turned to what it believed was its benevolent friend, China, to help finance its reconstruction. The money flowed in, but the country developed economic problems causing the debt burden to become untenable. In lieu of repayment, Sri Lanka relinquished majority control over its strategic port of Hambantota. Outrage ensued across Sri Lanka with accusations that such debt-trap diplomacy poses a threat to the sovereignty of developing, but vulnerable nations. Now, many wonder if Africa is falling into the same trap.

In Africa, as happened in Sri Lanka, loans are collateralized with long-term high value assets, such as ports or mineral resources. In return for financing and sometimes even building the infrastructure these countries need to exploit their own natural resources, China frequently requires favorable access to those very same resources. This arrangement, sometimes described as “tied-aid,” not only benefits Chinese companies, but also provides China with economic penetration and strategic leverage in the host country.

Perhaps nowhere on the African continent is China’s strategy so pronounced as in Djibouti. So far, Chinese financing has helped this tiny, coastal, cash-strapped nation with several large infrastructure projects, including a new port, two new airports, and the Djibouti-Ethiopia railroad. This influx of Chinese money and the growing debt Djibouti owes has some in that African nation concerned, with one deputy from the National Assembly declaring that China is going to take the port, just as it did in Sri Lanka. Djibouti, by no coincidence, is also where China has established its first military base overseas. This base, as the article’s author notes, is the first pearl in China’s “String of Pearls,” a geopolitical theory describing Chinese ambitions to have a secure sea route in the Indian Ocean connecting China to the Middle East.

Although China’s financing is described as predatory, the article points out how African political leaders are often complicit in these deals. While not excusing their actions, it should however be noted that often these countries with their low credit ratings, narrow revenue bases, and undiversified economies find it difficult to obtain financing through Western sources. Still, it is those very same economic problems that make it likely a country will default on its loan, allowing China to acquire the resources it had agreed to as collateral.

Some argue that many African leaders could be savvier in their negotiations with the Chinese, or even possibly use their relationship with China to encourage Western powers to be more willing to finance riskier infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, there is growing concern that African nations will suffer a similar fate as Sri Lanka, trapping themselves in a never-ending debt servitude and perhaps losing a piece of their sovereignty in the process. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Given Africa’s huge reliance on China as a source of funding, there is concern that African states will suffer a similar fate to Sri Lanka – and unwittingly become pawns in China’s global strategic agenda.”



Concerns are growing that Chinese financed megaprojects in Africa, such as the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway pictured here, are causing some African nations to become “debt-trapped” to China

Source: Mwangi Kirubi, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mwangee/34181402040/>, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Source: Ronak Gopaldas, “Lessons from Sri Lanka on China’s debt-trap diplomacy,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 21 February 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-from-sri-lanka-on-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>

Given Africa’s huge reliance on China as a source of funding, there is concern that African states will suffer a similar fate to Sri Lanka – and unwittingly become pawns in China’s global strategic agenda.

With the West in retreat and focusing on internal issues, China is asserting a more muscular approach across Africa. As Africa’s main trading partner since 2008, China is securing a long-term ‘foothold’, where it can do business and also ensure the security of its citizens and companies.

Many states would have to resort to payments ‘in kind’ – which effectively amounts to a country handing the asset back to China a la Sri Lanka. This has led to Beijing’s role in Africa being criticized by Western governments and some Africans as neo-colonial.

However while there is a tendency to paint China’s financing as predatory, African political elites are also complicit, argues China-Africa expert Dr Lucy Corkin. Blaming China provides a convenient scapegoat but doesn’t absolve governments from brokering shoddy deals that don’t benefit their people.



Brazil Has a Border Problem

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 March the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* published the following statistic-filled article detailing the increased amount of contraband seized and criminals apprehended along Brazil's long and relatively open border frontier. At first glance the numbers are dramatic and sobering. However, while the amount of illicit goods, including drugs and military grade weapons, crossing the border might be rising, it is difficult to assess to what degree. The revelation is Brazil's growing effort to control its borders in recent years, and hence a better understanding of what they are seizing and what they might be missing. Realizing the country is awash in illegal and often very dangerous contraband, the federal government has rolled out a number of border security initiatives in the past decade, but the task is herculean for multiple reasons.

First, the Brazilian armed forces are still haunted by the years of military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). Significant segments of the population still recall military rule and fear a resurgent military as a result. Laws have been enacted and politicians have been reticent to use the military in what might be considered standard law enforcement roles, including the government's recent decision to have the military take over security in crime-ridden Rio de Janeiro. This is understandable but frustrating to many in the security side of the government who believe there are currently no other options to maintain security and control along the country's vast border—and in its major cities.

The second difficulty is the actual border zone itself. Brazil has one of the longest and most lightly defended land borders in the world, in part because a good portion of it is located in the Amazon. Roads are non-existent. Rivers are highways and are navigable depending on the season. The face of the Brazilian state on the Amazon frontier are nearly 40 Special Border Platoons. Take the case of São Gabriel da Cachoeira in Brazil's far northwest, a region typically known as “the Dog's Head” for its distinct geographic border resembling a barking dog. It is the home of the 2nd Jungle Brigade. The entire brigade supports seven Special Border Platoons strung out from Maturacá near the Venezuelan border to Bela Vista on the border with Columbia. The platoons are resupplied by boat and occasionally small plane when the weather is cooperative. However, the platoon in Cucuí is cut off from its airstrip and so all supply and support takes place on the Rio Negro in a six to ten hour boat ride, depending on the season.

While the federal government can deploy all branches of law enforcement for any given operation, there are only a handful of permanently located Federal Police in São Gabriel. While they conduct their own investigations, they are totally dependent on the army for logistics and to carry out law enforcement operations—a task that the army only recently has been granted within a 90-kilometer deep border zone. Moreover, the Special Border Platoons were created to secure a variety of government agencies on the frontier. In reality, only the army has shown up, and as the article states, 30,000 soldiers have been deployed for the entire national frontier. Many in Brazil believe that this is not enough. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“The products with the greatest increase in seizures were medicines (381.47%), footwear (340.02%), videogames (174.00%) and non-recorded media (123.48%).”



Major Pontes at 2nd Jungle Brigade HQ discusses an operation to seal the border and provide humanitarian assistance to the local indigenous population (for Brazil 2).

Source: Author's own photographs. Permission Granted by Author.

Source: Camporez, Patrik. “Prisões e apreensões batem recorde nas fronteiras brasileiras (Arrests and illegal goods seized on Brazil's Border hits all-time record),” *O Globo*, 5 March 2018. <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/prisoos-apreensoes-batem-recorde-nas-fronteiras-brasileiras-22455470>

Although there are still vast stretches of unprotected border, the institutions responsible for its enforcement have undertaken reinforcements to reduce vulnerability. In the first half of 2017, the Federal Revenue Office established the General Coordination to Combat Contraband and Descaminho (Corep), which carried out, by the end of last year, 3,181 surveillance and repression operations, in which it imposed fines of R \$281 millions. The amount was 223.5% higher than in 2016, when the penalties reached R \$86.8 million. The products with the greatest increase in seizures were medicines (381.47%), footwear (340.02%), videogames (174.00%) and non-recorded media (123.48%). Altogether, 221 million packets of smuggled cigarettes were seized, which represented an increase of 11.16% compared to 2016.



Brazilian soldiers of the 4th Special Border Platoon en route to Maturacá near Venezuela border (for Brazil).

Source: Author's own photographs. Permission Granted by Author.



Security Issues in Ecuador

OE Watch Commentary: Drug cartel presence, paramilitary incursions from Colombia, and illegal fishing are just a few of the security issues Ecuador is currently facing. In late 2017, it was reported that Mexican drug cartels were operating in Ecuador (as well as in 50 other countries and five continents) as cited in the excerpted article from *Infobae*. While Ecuadorean authorities denied the claim, it became difficult to refute after the Ecuadorean Navy seized 1.3 tons of cocaine off the country's Pacific Coast in December 2017 as discussed in the excerpted article from *El Universo*. This same source also discussed that in recent years authorities seized seven narco-submarines in Ecuadorean territory, including two semi-submersibles in Isla Puna and five submersibles in Esmeraldas. Other items seized included towed torpedoes and buoys with geo-location capabilities for moving drugs. These items allow drug traffickers to simply cut drugs from underneath a transport vessel if discovered and with geo-coordinates, they are able to return and find the shipment at high sea once authorities are gone.

Geographically speaking, Ecuador sits in a vulnerable position between the world's two largest cocaine producers, Colombia and Peru. Its location is also complicated by the fact that it is situated along the Pacific coast, making its territorial waters a key transit zone for drug traffickers and other illicit maritime flows to North America and Asia. Analysts also worry that improvements to the Trans-Amazonian Highway connecting Peru and Colombia through Ecuador, part of the nation's notably good investment in road infrastructure, may exacerbate contraband flows through the country via overland routes as well.

Apart from drug trafficking, Ecuador is plagued by Colombian nationals fleeing violence from paramilitary groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC in Spanish). The country also serves as a safe haven for paramilitary groups looking to escape persecution in Colombia as discussed in the excerpted article from *El Comercio*. Areas of particular concern for this type of activity were cited as Sucumbíos, Carachi, and Esmeraldas. The article from *El Comercio* also notes the formation of new guerilla groups in Ecuador and, in fact, residents from Sucumbíos have warned the government about this activity for some time.

Beyond drug trafficking, security in Ecuador is challenged by a range of other criminal activity, one of which is illegal fishing as discussed in another excerpted article from *El Comercio*. Although this problem is a constant concern, it reached a critical point in August 2017 when Ecuador's authorities seized a Chinese fishing vessel in the Galapagos Marine Reserve with 300 tons of fish and 6,600 hammerhead sharks, which are considered a protected species. Security in and around the Galapagos Islands is a priority for Ecuador, but the area is difficult to protect given it is located 620 miles off the coast, making it an issue for the country's Navy and Coast Guard to maintain a constant presence.

Finally, since Ecuador adopted the US dollar as its official currency in 2000, it has become an attractive center for money laundering as discussed in the excerpted article from *Extra*. The country is taking steps to thwart this activity by creating new laws regarding the transportation and movement of US dollars and the government created a financial task force dedicated to mitigating money laundering. In response to the multiple security challenges mentioned in this commentary, Ecuador is fighting the issues head on with capable and professional police and military forces. Nonetheless, continued vigilance is necessary to keep security concerns in the country to a minimum. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "Cuáles son los cuatro cárteles mexicanos que operan en Ecuador (Which Mexican Drug Cartels are Operating in Mexico?)," *Infobae*, 17 December 2017. <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2017/12/06/cuales-son-los-cuatro-carteles-mexicanos-que-operan-en-ecuador/>

Mexican drug cartels are active in at least 51 countries to include Ecuador according to a Mexican government official. Specifically, the Sinaloa Cartel, La Familia Michoacana and the Gulf Cartel currently have the most influence in this country. The country and its maritime waters are also used as a key transit zone to move cocaine from Peru and Colombia.

Source: "Ecuador cierra el 2017 decomisando más de 98 toneladas de droga (Ecuador Ends 2017 Confiscating More Than 98 Tons of Drugs)," *El Universo*, 31 December 2017. <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/12/31/nota/6545833/ecuador-cierra-2017-decomisando-mas-98-toneladas-droga>

Pablo Aguirre, Ecuador's National Anti-Narcotics Director, reported the seizure of more than 1.3 metric tons of cocaine in December 2017. He also highlighted that during 2017, authorities dismantled more than 97 criminal structures associated with drug trafficking and seized more than 98 metric tons of drugs.

Source: "Ciudadanos extranjeros están detrás de ataques en Sucumbíos (Foreign Citizens Behind Attacks in Sucumbíos)," *El Comercio*, 9 August 2017. <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/extranjeros-criminales-guerrilla-ataques-sucumbios.html>

Victor M. is a 66 year old Ecuadorean national has lived along the banks of the San Miguel River since 1980. During this time, he indicated that Colombian paramilitary groups freely crossed from Colombian into Ecuador without repercussion. He also discussed during a recent news interview that Ecuadorean guerilla groups are forming and have been for years as they have watched activity from Colombia.

Source: "Ecuador presenta protesta a China por pesca ilegal de especies protegidas (Ecuador Presents Formal Protest to China for Illegal Fishing Activities)," *El Comercio*, 17 August 2017. <http://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/ecuador-protesta-china-flotapesquera-especiesprotegidas.html>

The Chinese Ambassador to Ecuador was called to the Chancellery where he was presented with a formal protest regarding Chinese vessels fishing in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone. This protest was made after authorities detained a Chinese fishing vessel with more than 300 tons of fish including protected species from the Galapagos Islands.

Source: "Ecuador figura en la lista negra de lavado de dinero (Ecuador Blacklisted for Money Laundering)," *Extra*, 2 March, 2017. <http://www.extra.ec/actualidad/dinero-listanegra-ecuador-estadosunidos-politica-CJ1128352>

Ecuador has made recent strides to crack down on dirty money, passing a law last year that issues new compliance requirements regarding the transportation of cash and valuables through the mail. Also under that law, the UAF, which previously resided under the purview of the Attorney General's office, has now been established as an autonomous body within Ecuador's Coordinating Ministry of Economic Policy.



Impact of Odebrecht Scandal on Peruvian Economy

OE Watch Commentary: The title of this commentary is named as such as it exemplifies how Brazilian construction company Odebrecht has adversely affected the Peruvian economy following the fallout of the company's international construction scandal. Although Brazil is bearing the largest brunt of its own misconduct, Peru's economy is also feeling the effects. This is because construction projects with contracts worth billions of dollars have been halted in the wake of the investigation, and in the meantime, Peru grapples with how to respond to a scandal engulfing the highest ranks of its political class.

Because of the gravity of this case, experts assert that Peru could potentially serve as a case study to how corruption of this nature can affect a developing nation. "The entire country has come to a halt, leaving Peru's construction sector paralyzed" said Hugo Alache, the spokesperson for the Association of Odebrecht construction, in the excerpted article from *La Republica*. In the article, Alache also states that at least 147 companies went bankrupt due to the scandal. The excerpted article from *El País* discusses how the scandal also affected the Gasoduto del Sur (Southern Gas Pipeline), a 620-mile long gas pipeline and the largest infrastructure project ever built in Peru.

Odebrecht admitted to paying \$29 million in bribes to public officials in Peru between 2005 and 2014 in exchange for \$12.5 billion in contracts as discussed in the excerpted article from *El Comercio*. However, it has denied that all of its Peruvian projects were tainted by corruption. Economists estimate that halted projects and null contracts shaved as much as 1.5 percentage points off Peru's GDP last year. Economists estimate the investigations will cost Peru at least another half point to a point this year. Thanks in large part to strong mineral prices, Peru's economy is still poised for growth in 2018, but because of the Odebrecht affair, it is not expected to approach the 5 percent annual GDP hike that economists say is needed to reduce poverty in the country. At the same time, because of the Odebrecht-related investigations, roughly 150,000 jobs have been lost over the past 12 months and dozens of companies are on the brink of bankruptcy. The excerpted article from *La Región* notes how even Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski declared that the "Odebrecht scandal put a brake on economic growth." Since the after effects of this scandal are slowing coming to light, only time will tell how the Odebrecht affair will affect Peru's economy in the long term. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

"Hugo Alache Correa, the spokesperson for the Association of Odebrecht construction materials, reported that at least 147 Peruvian companies have gone bankrupt due to failure of the Brazilian company to pay for materials purchased to build multiple construction projects in the country."

Source: "Odebrecht provocó la quiebra de 147 empresas peruanas (Odebrecht Causes Financial Ruin of 147 Companies in Peru)," *La Republica*, 27 October 2017. <http://larepublica.pe/politica/1136486-odebrecht-provoco-la-quiebra-de-147-empresas-peruanas>

Hugo Alache Correa, the spokesperson for the Association of Odebrecht construction materials, reported that at least 147 Peruvian companies have gone bankrupt due to failure of the Brazilian company to pay for materials purchased to build multiple construction projects in the country. Furthermore, more than 247 additional construction material providers are in debt because of the scandal.

Source: "El caso Odebrecht paraliza la construcción del mayor gasoduto de Perú (Odebrecht Investigations Halts the Construction of the Biggest Gas Pipeline in Peru)," *El País*, 02 February, 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/02/01/america/1485903956_914476.html

Peru canceled its contract with Odebrecht to build the Gasoducto del Sur. This pipeline was of particular significance as it represented the countries' largest ever infrastructure project and was slated to cost seven billion dollars. Because Odebrecht could not finish the pipeline, the company was forced to pay Peru a multi-million dollar fine for non-compliance.

Source: "Juez devolvió pedido de extradición contra Toledo a la fiscalía (Judge Returns Toledo Extradition Request to Fiscalía)," *El Comercio*, 02 February 2018. <https://elcomercio.pe/politica/alejandro-toledo-juez-devolvio-pedido-extradicion-fiscalia-noticia-495022>

Odebrecht admitted to paying 29 million dollars in bribes for construction contracts between 2005 and 2014. During these periods, the following Presidents were allegedly involved in this corruption scandal: Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), Alan García (2006 - 2011) y Ollanta Humala (2011 - 2006).

Source: "El caso Odebrecht afecta la economía peruana (Odebrecht Affair Affects the Peruvian Economy)," *La Región*, 14 March 2017. <http://diariolaregion.com/web/el-caso-odebrecht-afecta-la-economia-peruana/>

Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski declared a few days ago that "the Odebrecht affair has put a brake on the Peruvian economy". The after effects of this scandal could cost Peru anywhere from 0.5 to 1 point in GDP growth this year. Kuczynski further indicated to open source channels that the government "is implementing an anti-corruption war on public construction projects despite the difficulty in implementing something of this nature."



Elections in El Salvador

OE Watch Commentary: Legislative and municipal (county level) elections were held in El Salvador on 4 March. The system of vote counting and confirmation is elongated in El Salvador as compared to, say, Colombia or Cuba. As such, the final counts indicated in the first accompanying reference may be off by a seat or two. In broad ideological terms, however, the overall results likely to be certified this election cycle appear similar to those in Colombia. The right did better than the left. This disfavors current President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, whose governing party is the leftist Frente Farabundo Martí (National Liberation Front, FMLN). The results are also a setback for the region’s Bolivarian alliance, as President Cerén and the FMLN are supporters of that strategic block. The second accompanying reference is an opinion/analysis/call-to-action from the secretariat of the relatively obscure Central American Socialist Party, PSOCA (see <https://elsoca.org/>). It points out that the farther left organizations in El Salvador, already disillusioned with the FMLN, called for blank voting. Indeed, the non-participation rate, according to the PSOCA, was over 50 percent. Leaders of the PSOCA are calling for a new, radical umbrella organization outside the FMLN. Notably, the FMLN has been the only openly recognized member of the Forum of Sao Paulo, the hemisphere’s top leftist consortium and political style guide. We might look to see if a new Salvadoran organization appears within that grouping. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Carlos Palomo, “Infografía: Así quedaría la Asamblea Legislativa 2018-2021, según tendencias del TSE (Infograph: This is how the Legislative Assembly would end up),” *elsalvador.com*, 5 March 2018. <http://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/457306/infografia-asi-quedara-la-asamblea-legislativa-2018-2021-segun-tendencias-del-tse/>

ARENA:	37 reps
FMLN :	23 reps
PCN:	8 reps
GAN:	11 reps
PDC:	3 reps
CD:	1 rep
Non partisan:	1 rep

Source: “Balance de las Elecciones 2018: ¿Qué significa la derrota del FMLN? (2018 Electoral Results: What does the FMLN’s defeat mean?),” *El Socialista Centroamericano*, 6 March 2018. <https://elsoca.org/index.php/americacentral/declaraciones-del-psoca/4627-el-salvador>

“The electoral defeat puts the exhausted FMLN against the ropes in that in its last presidential year it will lose the capacity to negotiate in the Legislative Assembly. ARENA, with ten more representatives, has in its favor the rules of the game that will allow them to get the Administration back in 2019...from the Centralamerican Socialist Party we call on all the political organizations, labor, campesino, student, indigenous, popular, etc, to form a new umbrella organization with a view toward making a Revolutionary Pole...”

Elections in Cuba

OE Watch Commentary: Cubans went to the polls on 11 March to elect delegates to the provincial legislatures and to the National Assembly of Popular Power. The traditionally high turnout might have been a little lower than the previous election, but at any rate will have been around 90 percent of the suffrage, which begins at age 16. The new National Assembly will then elect the President of the Council of State, who is also the Chief of State and Government. Expectations are that current Vice-president, Miguel Díaz–Canel will be elected as the new President. Raul Castro, now 86 years old, has announced his pending retirement and apparently will not accept the position. He will, however, remain at the head of the Communist Party (PCC). **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: “Este domingo Cuba elige diputados a la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular (This Sunday Cuba elects deputies to the National Assembly of Popular Power),” *Panorama.com*, 11 March 2018. <http://www.panorama.com.ve/mundo/Este-domingo-Cuba-elige-diputados-a-la-Asamblea-Nacional-del-Poder-Popular-20180310-0012.html>

“This Sunday more than eight million Cubans meet to exercise their right to vote...Those who may participate in the elections, in accordance with article 5 of Electoral Law Number 72, include ‘all Cubans man and woman including members of the armed institutions, who will have reached 16 years of age...”

Source: “¡Un Ejemplo para El Mundo! Dictadura cubana destacó “la pureza y transparencia” de las elecciones (An Example for the World! Cuban dictatorship exhibits ‘the purity and transparency of the elections),” *DolarToday*, 12 March 2018. <https://dolartoday.com/un-ejemplo-para-el-mundo-dictadura-cubana-destaco-la-pureza-y-transparencia-de-las-elecciones/> <https://elcooperante.com/cubanos-eligen-al-parlamento-como-primer-paso-para-sustituir-a-raul-castro-en-la-presidencia/>

“For his part, the First Vice-president of the Councils of State and of Ministers, Miguel Díaz – Canel highlighted that ‘the act of voting, in this occasion, entails a lofty concept of duty and a commitment to the revolution and to socialism, it is a recognition of the purity and transparency of the Cuban process, very different than that of other nations.”

“...Cubans meet to exercise their right to vote...”



Elections in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: Legislative elections were held in Colombia on 10 March and as the accompanying excerpted articles show, the right did better than the left. The legislative elections precede the presidential elections and constitute a final, definitive survey of national opinion regarding the array of political parties. It is considered definitive in the sense that the numbers of seats in the Senate and Congress are set. Because the incoming president will have to form a legislative coalition to get anything passed, voters now have an idea of which presidential candidates have a real hope of forming such a coalition. Many individual voters will still vote their first preferences; however, some will select a candidate who they consider close enough to their way of thinking but who can actually effect the necessary alliances. Iván Duque, who will be the rightist coalition's candidate in the first presidential round, earned more votes (43 percent of the total) in the parliamentary elections than did the whole leftist coalition. Marta Lucía Ramírez, who came in second to Duque on the right, herself won a million and a half votes. Those two will form a single ticket for the presidential contest. Given the recent results, a President Duque would appear to have the easiest path to creating a workable legislative block. Of course, things can change between now and the first round on 27 May, but at this point it seems likely that the Duque/Ramírez ticket will win over fifty percent of the vote in the first round, ending the race early (there will be a second round only if no candidate wins an absolute majority).

This prognostic seems also to be what the left sees, given that in his speech after the results came in, leftist leader Gustavo Petro asserted that the numbers were there to take things to the second round, which seems to mean he wishes the numbers were there. Right now they are not. The FARC, for the first time running candidates as a legal political party, got less than one percent of the vote, not enough to earn a legislative seat. This reflects a continued aversion in Colombia for the brand. (Note, however, that because of the FARC-government power sharing agreement, the FARC still gets five seats in the house and five in the Senate, as many as a minor party that earned ten times as many votes). Nevertheless, candidate Gustavo Petro, who for practical purposes may be as leftist as any of the official FARC candidates, won 30 percent of the vote. Candidate Iván Duque sounded far more confident afterwards, however, appealing in his speech to those dissatisfied with the FARC-government agreement by deriding the impunity extended to FARC leaders and the clientelism of which the current president has been accused. What does all this mean for the future of Colombia's internal political warfare? It is too early to make a confident guess, but a less-than-confident guess sees a coming Duque-led administration making few additional concessions to the Bolivarians. That would mean, for instance, that the ELN will not likely get a power-sharing deal like the FARC did, and neither Cuba nor Venezuela will see much diplomatic support coming out of Bogotá. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the right doubled the left...”



Source: “Así quedó el Congreso: conozca a los senadores más votados del país (This is how Congress ended up: know which were the most voted-for senators in the country),” *El Tiempo*, 12 March 2018. <http://www.eltiempo.com/elecciones-colombia-2018/congreso/el-centro-democratico-es-el-mas-votado-para-el-senado-2018-192752>

“The abstention rate fell with respect to 2014. In the Senate it went from 56% to 53%. There were 2,901,939 more votes. In the House it went from 56% to 52.4%. An additional 3,040,996 persons voted. ...In an unprecedented day of voting, the right doubled the left.”...

<i>Great Consultation through Colombia</i>	<i>Social Inclusion for Peace</i>
<i>[right coalition]</i>	<i>[left coalition]</i>
<i>Iván Duque--4,038,101</i>	<i>Gustavo Petro--2,849,331</i>
<i>Marta Lucia Ramirez--1,537,790</i>	<i>Carlos Caicedo--514,978</i>
<i>Alejandro Ordoñez--384,721</i>	

Source: Jorge Galindo, “La mayor encuesta de Colombia (The most important Colombian poll),” *El País*, 11 March 2018. https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/03/11/colombia/1520729654_650810.html

“...the [congressional] elections are an inflexión point that fixes expectations that exist about each party, about each regional leader, but also about each [presidential] candidate, the the extent that they can give a turn to the results. ...In no small measure this happens because the legislative elections serve as the definitive poll.”

Source: Editors, “Los mensajes de Duque y Petro tras ganar las consultas (The messages of Duque and Petro on winning the consultations),” *El Tiempo*, 12 March 2018. <http://www.eltiempo.com/elecciones-colombia-2018/presidenciales/declaraciones-de-ivan-duque-y-gustavo-petro-tras-ganar-en-consultas-192748>

Duque:“...the presidential candidate [Duque] made it clear that among his principle propositions was avoiding ‘that to our country come the temptations of popular authoritarianism that ruined Venezuela.’... He added that the moment had arrived to ‘turn the page on impunity, clientelism and tax strangulation...”

Petro: “The numbers are there to move on to the second round.”



Cristina Fernández's Legal Jeopardy

OE Watch Commentary: Former Argentinean President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is facing what appear to be multiple uphill battles in the Argentinean justice system. The most serious, as noted in the first accompanying reference, is a charge of having conspired to cover up the culpability of Iranians implicated in the 1994 terrorist car bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. The cover-up was allegedly organized within the scope of an agreement with the Iranian government. The second accompanying reference is of a separate charge of government corruption. It mentions a third investigation on yet another corruption accusation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...Justice entered a case against ex-president Cristina Fernández for presumed illegal concealment...”

“...Justice...resolved today that opposition senator and ex-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) be tried...”



Remains of the AMIA after the AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

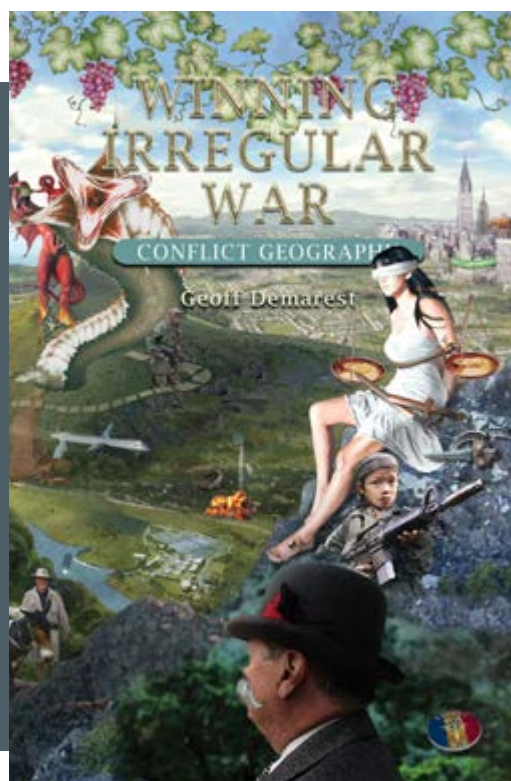
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Atentado_AMIA.jpg, Fair Use.

Source: “Tres años después: Cristina Fernández irá a juicio por presunto encubrimiento de terroristas (Three years later: Cristina Fernández will face justice for presumed cover-up of terrorists),” *El Cooperante*, 5 March 2018. <https://elcooperante.com/tres-anos-despues-cristina-fernandez-ira-a-juicio-por-presunto-encubrimiento-de-terroristas/>

“The Justice [Department] resolved today that opposition senator and ex-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) be tried for the crimes of fraud and illicit association...According to the accusation, the ex-chief executive and the rest of the accused participated in an association...purposed to commit crimes in order to illegally and deliberately take funds that had been assigned to public transportation works...”

Source: DPA, “Elevan a juicio oral causa contra Cristina Fernández (Hearing for cause brought against Cristina Fernández),” *La Jornada*, 2 March 2018. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2018/03/02/elevan-a-juicio-oral-causa-contra-cristina-fernandez-1756.html>

“The Justice [Department] entered a case against ex-president Cristina Fernández for presumed illegal concealment, by way of an agreement with Iran, of those implicated in the attack against the Jewish Community Center AMIA of Buenos Aires...”



Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. 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/m/fmso-books/195392/download>



Colombian Forces Fight the ELN

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying references are recent among numerous reports showing that the Colombian Army has been taking offensive initiative against the People's Liberation Army (ELN) in the last few months. The action reported in the first reference took place in North Santander, a department bordering on Venezuela and which is home to a great deal of hydrocarbon infrastructure, including hundreds of miles of vulnerable pipeline. The ELN has long experience at hydrocarbon predation. Shutting down the loci of their processing operations will set the ELN back a bit, but unless they are chased to sanctuary and neutralized, they are likely to continue. According to the second accompanying source, government forces apparently caught up with one of the ELN units in Antioquia, in northeastern Colombia, at the base of a large sanctuary area known as the Paramillo. The report suggests that the pre-stated goal of the operation was to wipe the ELN unit out, and that seems to have been the result. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...seven illegal complexes were located and destroyed...”

Source: Radio Santafé, “El Ejército dismantló siete cambuches de robo de gasolina del Eln (The Army dismantles seven ELN gasoline theft structures),” *Radio Santafé*, Bogotá, 8 March 2018. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2018/03/08/ejercito-desmantelo-siete-complejos-ilegales-del-eln-para-robar-y-procesar-hidrocarburos-en-norte-de-santander/>

“In joint operations of the Second Division [Colombian Army], the Air Assault Division with its Counter-Narcotics Trafficking Brigade, the National Police, seven illegal complexes were located and destroyed, [these complexes] being used for the extraction and processing of hydrocarbons in North Santander Department.”

Source: Colprensa, “10 guerrilleros muertos por bombardeo al Eln (10 guerrillas dead from bombing the ELN),” *Vanguardia.com*, 7 March 2018. <http://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/426615-10-guerrilleros-muertos-por-bombardeo-al-eln>

“Operation Red Lighting, that is advancing against the ELN, [effected] by the Armed Forces in conjunction with the National Police and the Colombian Air Force, left 10 persons dead and three captured, as well as seizing war materiel...This is considered to be the complete column of the ELN in Lower Cauca [lower Cauca River area in northern Antioquia Departments] that has caused displacements in Cáceres y Tarazá [counties] and the attacks against electric towers in the interconnection toward Córdoba.”

Cracks in Bolivarian Military Morale

OE Watch Commentary: In March 2017, counterintelligence personnel arrested a number of officers in the Bolivarian National Army (Venezuela). According to the first accompanying source, those officers were convicted this month of treason and sent to prison. The second accompanying reference is exemplary of many reports of a new set of arrests just made this March. The men arrested this time were also mostly lieutenant colonels, the apparent leader being a highly accomplished commander. Given that Hugo Chávez' political career was launched by a coup attempt that got him arrested when he was a lieutenant colonel, it is no wonder Nicolas Maduro would have a heightened concern, especially about young commanders in charge of considerable weaponry. It would be valuable to remember, nevertheless, who is who. Chávez left prison to later run as a candidate in actual elections. Presidential elections are coming in Venezuela, perhaps this May. Few people, if anyone, thinks they are going to be open or fair. They will more than likely reaffirm choices made by party leadership in the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV) and the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Cuban Communist Party, PCC). Those nuclei might decide that it is time to retire and replace Maduro, and it may be that the military rumblings will have had an influence on such a decision.

In any case, our analyses of the possibilities of a military coup in Venezuela cannot reasonably be drawn without consideration of other milestones noted in this month's *OE Watch*, in particular the elections in Cuba. Elections there reaffirmed party control and commitment to the revolution, but still presented a change in public personalities at the top. As such, it could give color to the notion of peaceful systematic change of leadership in Venezuela as well. Considering how much power the Bolivarian National Army already has within the Venezuelan government and society, it seems unlikely that we will see an actual military coup, even while the elections might herald more public leadership by uniformed men. Still, many in Venezuela see things are getting worse and more curious all the time. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the accused ...were detained last March...”

Source: “Tribunal dictó privativa de libertad a nueve militares del Ejército por ‘traición a la patria’ (Tribunal sentenced nine military officers to prison for ‘treason’),” *Aporrea*, 10 March 2018. <https://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/n322073.html>

“The tribunal charged them with the crime of treason, instigating rebellion and actions unbecoming of an officer. The accused are six lieutenant colonels, two sergeants and a first lieutenant, who were detained last March.”

Source: Javier Mayorca, “Crímenes sin Castigo: Descontento en el Ejército (Crimes without punishment: Discontent in the Army),” *Rurrun.es*, 8 March 2018. <http://runrun.es/opinion/341149/crimenes-sin-castigo-descontento-en-el-ejercito.html>; “¡EL RÍO SUENA! Un nuevo movimiento nace en el corazón del ejército (The River is Noisy [from a common saying that when the river makes noise, it carries stones] A new movement is born in the heart of the army),” *DolarToday*, 10 March 2018. <https://dolartoday.com/el-rio-suena-un-nuevo-movimiento-nace-en-el-corazon-del-ejercito/>

“A new movement that supposedly intended to remove Maduro from power was detected in the country's principal military force. Officers that had been in command of units with a high degree of firepower are now carried to the tribunals....At the time this note is being written, the presentation of Marín [Igbert José Marín Chaparro, accused as mutiny leader] and other officials [apparently 19 in all] to the military control tribunals in Caracas...This is the second anti-President dissident movement detected in the ranks in only a year.”

Stabilizing Venezuela: Strategic Objective for Bolivarians

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 March, on the fifth anniversary of the death of Hugo Chavez, Latin American leaders were scheduled to meet in Caracas, Venezuela to set the objectives for the continuation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro originally founded the group in 2004 as a regional union to resist perceived United States imperialism via the Monroe Doctrine and to encourage other nations to adopt Bolivarian styles of leftist authoritarian government.

As noted in the first excerpted article from *Granma Online*, the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, Bolivarians fear that “the American continent faces an important challenge amid Washington’s hostility and aggressiveness.” After the US government revealed that it would prefer that Peru encourage Venezuelan officials not to attend the 15th annual Summit of the Americas, Bolivarians argued that “destroying the Bolivarian Revolution and overthrowing Maduro is an imperialist priority.” With the US developing assistance programs for Latin American states, like Peru, to reduce their dependence on Venezuelan oil, some Latin American states are indecisive on whether to side with the US or the Bolivarians. Considering this new political and economic divide, the Bolivarians in Cuba and Venezuela fear that the US is “in favor of a military coup in Venezuela.”

The second excerpted article from *Granma Online* describes how Cuban president, Raúl Castro called upon the leaders at the Summit on 5 March, saying leaders “have a strategic and urgent task [to defend] the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.” According to the excerpt, President Castro blames US actions to “destabilize the region” for the current instability in Venezuela. The article suggests that the Bolivarians view instability as a strategic threat to Latin American stability, but also to the image of Bolivarian economic systems. In other words, Venezuelan economic collapse could indicate to other Latin American states that the Bolivarian model (state-owned industry and authoritarian government) could be unsustainable, but this remains to be seen. With the two original ALBA founders now deceased, the future of the Bolivarian movement will likely continue to resist US policy initiatives in Latin America, but its survival will depend on stabilizing Venezuela. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kelsay)**

“We proclaim the unwavering support for the civic-military union led by President Nicolás Maduro.”



Raul Castro and Nicolas Maduro, November 2016.

Source: <https://www.voanoticias.com/a/depredadores-prensa-rsf-maduro-castro-zetas/3576110.html>, Public Domain.

Source: “After the Eagle’s Flight, Will the Condor Return? (Tras vuelo del águila ¿el regreso del Cóndor?),” *Granma Online*, 15 February 2018. <http://www.granma.cu/mundo/2018-02-14/tras-vuelo-del-aguila-el-regreso-del-condor-14-02-2018-23-02-10>

The American continent, which has been declared a peace zone, faces an important challenge amid Washington’s hostility and aggressiveness... Sierra said that “Interestingly, the OAS secretary general remained in complicit silence regarding the statements made just a few days ago by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in which he supported a military coup in Venezuela and in which he also defended the validity of the Monroe Doctrine...” Destroying the Bolivarian Revolution and overthrowing Maduro is an imperialist priority, when seeking pretexts to raise popularity rates in the White House.

Source: “Raúl: la defensa de Venezuela es una tarea estratégica del Alba (Raúl: the defense of Venezuela is a strategic task of the ALBA),” *Granma Online*, 5 March, 2018. <http://www.granma.cu/mundo/2018-03-05/raul-la-defensa-de-venezuela-es-una-tarea-estrategica-del-alba-05-03-2018-16-03-21>

The president of the Councils of State and Ministers, Army General Raul Castro Ruz, said Monday that the Alba has as a “strategic and urgent task” the defense of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Cuban leader intervened in the XV Summit of the integration mechanism that coincides with the fifth anniversary of the physical departure of Commander Hugo Chávez, founder with Fidel of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples Trade Treaty (ALBA) -TCP.

Raúl referred to the military threat, the hostility and the aggression of imperialism against Venezuela, as well as a neoliberal attack to reverse the social gains achieved since the triumph of Chávez at the end of the last century.

He added that at the present time interventionist policies against the sovereignty of the nations of the region are being carried out, especially against the progressive governments, and attempts are being made to dismantle the integration processes forged in the last decades.

These actions, he said, “destabilize the region and pose dangers to regional peace and security.”



Continuing Violence in Mexico Fuels Armored Car Business

OE Watch Commentary: In the earliest years of Mexico's raging drug war, relocation to less violent regions of the country resulted in mass internal migration or movement abroad. Today, families are still relocating because of violence, armed robbery and kidnapping threats, but a trend of purchasing armored vehicles for personal safety, which first appeared two years ago, is now exploding in popularity. When this trend was first reported in 2015, buyers were predominantly drug traffickers, affluent families and politicians. However, Ballistics Group CEO Fernando Echeverri indicates in the excerpted article from *El País* that this is no longer the case and that today's market is more diversified given that independent professionals and entrepreneurs in all sectors are looking for protection from violence. Echeverri further indicated that cars produced by his company are indeed effective, as the work done by his company has thwarted attempted murders and kidnappings on multiple occasions, though actual statistics are not reported. In terms of demand, the highest overall sales of armored vehicles are reported in Monterrey (Mexico's industrial epicenter) and the Federal District, where common street cars can be retrofitted into certifiable armored vehicles for \$25,000-\$55,000.

Apart from news articles simply reporting that the sale of armored vehicles are on the rise, the excerpted article from *Motorpasion* provides statistics to support this idea. For example, the sale of bulletproof vehicles in Mexico rose 10 percent between 2015 and 2016, with a growing demand from the private sector. Demand also is based on the type of protection one may need as indicated in the excerpted article from *La Jornada*. Mauricio Garibaldi Sanchez of Blindajes Alemanes, a private sector armored vehicle company, indicated that vehicles are generally built to protect against three different weapon types, including .44 Magnum revolvers, AK-47s, and AR-15s. However, this does not mean that vehicles are not available to protect against higher caliber weapons.

Garibaldi Sanchez further indicated that consumer demand in Mexico City is for armor that can withstand .44 caliber bullets as these are the weapons most commonly used in car robberies. In closing, Garibaldi Sanchez commented that in 2017, 23 percent of his sales came from new customers. He clarified this comment by stating that before, these customers were not concerned with purchasing armored vehicles and tied this necessity to insecurity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“As reported by Motorpasion, the sale of bulletproof vehicles in Mexico rose 10% between 2015 and 2016, with a growing demand from the private sector. Sales grew by another 9% in 2017.”

Source: “El negocio de detener las balas crece en México (The Business of Stopping Bullets Grows in Mexico),” *El País*, 18 February 2016. https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/02/18/actualidad/1455818852_628648.html

[According to Ballistics Group CEO Fernando Echeverri], “75% of our sales last year were to private individuals. Wealthy businessmen and moneyed families are being joined by medium-sized businesses and employees that spend all day in the street and are scared of their windows being smashed.”

Source: “La venta de autos blindado en México crece de manera exponencial (Sale of Armored Vehicles in Mexico Grows Exponentially),” *Motorpasion*, 19 November 2017. <https://www.motorpasion.com.mx/industria/la-venta-de-autos-blindado-en-mexico-crece-de-manera-exponencial>

As reported by Motorpasion, the sale of bulletproof vehicles in Mexico rose 10% between 2015 and 2016, with a growing demand from the private sector. Sales grew by another 9% in 2017.

Source: “Aumento de la delincuencia y la violencia impulsan mercado del blindaje en México (Increases in Violence and Crime Fuel Armored Vehicle Industry in Mexico),” *La Jornada*, 12 December 2017. <https://www.jornada.unam.mx/2017/12/17/mundo/019n1eco>

Mauricio Garibaldi Sanchez, head of Blindajes Alemanes in Queretaro, Mexico stated that his firm produces armored vehicles capable of providing three different levels of protection: one capable of protecting occupants from a weapon such as the Magnum 44 revolver, a second which is able to withstand attack from an AK-47 rifle, and a third capable of stopping rounds fired by AR-15 automatic rifles.



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Bombs Detonated on Ferry and Tourist Vessel in Mexico

OE Watch Commentary: An explosion on a tourist ferry in Playa del Carmen in February 2018 and the discovery of a bomb on a tourist vessel in early March 2018 have some authorities in Mexico claiming that these may not be coincidental accidents, but instead, terrorist attacks of some type as discussed in the excerpted article from *El Universal*. However, the article also notes that not everyone drew the same conclusion, particularly Alberto Elias Beltran, the Deputy Attorney General for International Affairs in Mexico. Expounding on this statement, Elias Beltran indicated that it is not in the interest of criminal organizations (drug cartels) to conduct terrorist attacks of any kind as these types of actions would certainly lead to increased levels of security and increased scrutiny by authorities.

On 21 February 2018, five explosive devices were detonated on a ferry known as the Caribe 3 (owned by Barcos Caribe) while docked at Playa del Carmen, a popular tourist destination in Mexico. The excerpted article from *Milenio* provides details regarding these devices, but indicated they were not professional grade. A total of 24 people were injured as a result of the explosions. On 1 March 2018 two separate explosive devices were discovered on another vessel owned by Barcos Caribe after it was searched at the Port of Cozumel. Representatives from the company reported that the explosive devices found had been in place for 10 months, but that they represented no harm to travelers.

Foreign governments are taking these incidents very seriously and the US State Department issued a travel warning on 7 March for ferry travel to Playa del Carmen. The excerpted article from *Noticaribe* shows that Mexico is taking these incidents seriously and authorities are actively looking to discard and/or corroborate information regarding these incidents. They are also looking to identify, arrest, and bring to justice the probable perpetrators of these acts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“According to Alberto Elias Beltran, whoever caused the explosion did not intend to injure individuals on the boat because the devices themselves had very limited capacity.”

Source: “Explosion en ferry fue intencional: PGR (Explosion on Ferry was Intentional: PGR),” *El Universal*, 10 March 2018. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/seguridad/bomba-casera-explosion-en-ferry-fue-intencional>

The Attorney General’s Office (PGR) assured that the explosion in February on a ferry boat owned by Barcos Caribe Company, the family of the former governor of Quintana Roo, Roberto Borge, was the act of a terrorist or organized crime group. However, Alberto Elias Beltran, the Deputy Attorney General for International Affairs, argued that it was not a terrorist attack because no claim was made by any organization nor do conditions exist to motivate an incident of this type.

Source: “Explosion y bombas en barcos caribes...Que se sabe del caso (Explosions and Bombs on Caribbean Ships in Mexico and What is Known about the Cases),” *Milenio*, 03 March 2018. http://www.milenio.com/estados/explosion-barcos-caribe-bomba-playa-carmen-cozumel-alerta-embajada-noticias_0_1135086681.html

According to Alberto Elias Beltran, whoever caused the explosion did not intend to injure individuals on the boat because the devices themselves had very limited capacity. In total, five explosive charges were used to target the vessel docked at Playa del Carmen. Among the material collected at the scene by Expert Services personnel, items recovered included pieces of cardboard in cylindrical form, fragments of copper wire with yellow insulating coating and two aluminum sheets that were part of the boat structure.

Source: “Alerta en Cozumel: presuntas bombas en embarcación de Barcos Caribe; la Semar ya investiga (Alert in Cozumel: Alleged Bombs Found on Barcos Caribe; Semar Investigates Incident),” *Noticaribe*, 01 March 2018. <http://noticaribe.com.mx/2018/03/01/preliminar-alerta-cozumel-reportan-dos-presuntas-bombas-en-embarcacion-de-barcos-caribe-fondeado-frente-a-la-isla-la-semar-ya-investiga/>

Alberto Elias Beltran reported that extensive investigations are being conducted by the PGR, the National Security Commission (CNS) and the Secretariat of the Navy (Semar). He further reiterated that to date, the Attorney General’s Office has interviewed witnesses, reviewed videos from security cameras, and carried out work such as inspection of the scene with experts in chemistry, criminalistics, photography, fire, and explosives. Finally, the general commissioner of the Federal Police, Manelich Castilla, announced that 900 military personnel from seven divisions, as well as 195 canine units, were deployed in Cancun to reinforce surveillance to the highway network and in the three airports that the state has, which are in Cozumel, Cancun, and Chetumal.



China's Focus on the Development of "High-Quality Weapons and Equipment" for the Navy

OE Watch Commentary: China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) is aiming to build the country's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier by 2025, according to the recent accompanying excerpted article by the *South China Morning Post*. Currently, China already possesses two conventional powered carriers and is nearing completion of a third. Developing a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, as the article points out, will allow the Chinese navy to "go on long missions on the high seas." It will also "be key to firing up an advanced electromagnetic aircraft launch system, in contrast to the ski-jump launches now in use." Other possible advantages not mentioned in the article include: greater flexibility without the hassle of refueling, energy independence, more storage capacity for weapons and aircraft fuel, and an environmentally clean source of (nuclear) energy. Other notable projects being undertaken by CSIC, according to the article, include a "new type of nuclear submarine (China already has several nuclear submarines in its fleet), submarine artificial intelligence combat systems, and a "comprehensive electronic information system" for maritime battles." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"[China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation] must... provide high-quality weapons and equipment for the navy's strategic transformation towards a blue-water force in 2025..."

Source: Liu Zhen, "China Aims for Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier by 2025," *South China Morning Post*, 1 March 2018. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2135151/china-aims-nuclear-powered-aircraft-carrier-2025>

CSIC (China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation) also said it was working on a new type of nuclear submarine, submarine artificial intelligence combat systems and a "comprehensive electronic information system" for maritime battles.

The South China Morning Post reported earlier that China was installing AI systems on its nuclear submarines as part of computer upgrades to aid decision-making.

"We must ... provide high-quality weapons and equipment for the navy's strategic transformation towards a blue-water force in 2025," CSIC said.

Nevertheless, China will need to go down the nuclear power route if its aircraft carriers are to be able to go on long missions on the high seas. Nuclear power will also be key to firing up an advanced electromagnetic aircraft launch system, in contrast to the ski-jump launches now in use.



China's first domestically built aircraft carrier, the Type 001A, in Dalian, China.

Source: GG001213, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3A%E5%81%9C%E6%B3%8A%E4%BA%BE%E5%A4%A7%E8%BF%9E%E6%B8%AF%E7%9A%84001A.jpg>, Public Domain (CC0 1.0).



Fact or Psychological Warfare? China's Development of the World's Strongest Individual Firepower System

OE Watch Commentary: Foreign press reports are claiming that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been equipping some of its ground forces with the QTS-11 infantry integrated combat system, which is designed to "adapt to future informatized warfare."

Echoing the claims from a CCTV program, reports are calling the gear the "strongest individual firepower in the world."

According to the excerpted articles from *Asia Times* and *Global Times*, China developed the QTS-11 system in response to a need to "catch up in the race to arm soldiers" and took a decade of dedicated effort to accomplish it. The gear consists of a 5.8 millimeter-caliber rifle, integrated with a 20 millimeter grenade launcher, capable of destroying antipersonnel targets within a radius of 200 meters. The system is fully digitalized and can include other wearable gear such as thermal imagers, laser rangefinders, wearable computer and positioning, communication and situational awareness helmets. The whole intent is to improve combat strength by arming individual soldiers with a complete unit rather than as a segment of a larger force in urban warfare and dismounted infantry actions.

The QTS-11 system is described as a possible game-changer. According to *Asia Times*, a military hospital in China's East Theater Command claims to be developing "an Ironman-like, weight-bearing suit mocked as a 'wearable skeleton' to carry heavier gear" as the PLA seeks to increase the number of "gadgets and devices on each of its infantrymen." The article also notes how the gear has reportedly been "deployed to about 50,000 infantrymen and other troops for special duties, air assault, and paratrooper brigades of 13 field armies."

The article from the *Global Times* points out that the United States was the first to develop an integrated combat system, but "they dropped the research of Objective Individual Combat Weaponry system due to weight problems." The article also reports how the QTS-11 system has also been used for training by a branch of PLA Special Operations Forces, known as Sky Wolf Commandos in China's Western Theater command, which has reportedly caught India's attention.

The article from *The Economic Times* questions China's motives in announcing the deployment of the system. According to the article, China's Western Theater Command is responsible for security along the 3,488 kilometer Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. Media reports announcing the deployment of the QTS-11 system along the border of India are perceived as possible psychological warfare being used by the PLA because the news followed within a few days of Chinese reports announcing it was upgrading its air defenses along the LAC. The article cites another example of Chinese psychological warfare being used against India during last year's 73-day Doklam standoff. The article states that during the standoff, the "Chinese military carried out a media blitzkrieg," which highlighted the deployment of new battle tanks as well as massive military exercises on the Tibetan plateau. Whether China's announcements are solid fact or psychological warfare, it is a potential development worth tracking. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: "PLA Infantrymen Now Have Powerful Rifles, but Still Lag US," *Asia Times*, 22 January 2018. <http://www.atimes.com/article/pla-infantrymen-now-powerful-rifles-still-lag-us>

The big gun, part of the PLA's QTS-11 system, is the result of a decade of painstaking efforts to catch up in the race to arm soldiers... Together with other wearable gear such as thermal imagers, laser rangefinders, wearable computer and positioning, communication and situational awareness helmets, the whole QTS-11 kit costs a grand total of 1 million yuan a pop. It has already been deployed to about 50,000 infantrymen and other troops for special duties, air assault and paratroopers brigades of 13 field armies, Hong Kong-based Ming Pao newspaper reports.

...the QTS-11 system could be a game changer, and it has also been reported that a military hospital of the East Theater Command is now developing an Ironman-like, weight-bearing suit mocked as a "wearable skeleton" to carry heavier gear as Beijing aims to put more gadgets and devices on each of its infantrymen.

Source: Liu Caiyu, "PLA Arms Ground Force Unit with Integrated Warfare System," *Global Times*, 22 February 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1090258.shtml>

A branch of the People's Liberation Army Ground Force has been equipped with an integrated individual soldier combat system to "adapt to future informatized warfare," which has been hailed as the strongest individual firepower in the world, media reported on Thursday.

The Sky Wolf Commandos, a branch of PLA Special Operations Forces from the Western Theater Command, have been equipped with the QTS-11 system in their training, Weihutang, a column affiliated with China Central Television (CCTV), reported on Thursday.

The system,...is capable of destroying antipersonnel targets. Each soldier equipped with the system is armed with a thermal imager and optoelectronic and positioning systems, Science and Technology Daily reported.

Source: "PLA Equips Ground Unit along Indian Border with US Army-Style Combat Gear: Report," *The Economic Times*, 23 February 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pla-equips-ground-unit-along-indian-border-with-us-army-style-combat-gear-report/articleshow/63042343.cms>

The announcement by the official media of the deployment of new system along the border with India followed a report few days ago of the upgrading the air defences along the LAC was seen by military observers here as a psychological warfare being resorted to by the PLA.

The Global Times earlier quoted an expert as saying the upgradation of the air defence with deployment of fighter jets like J-10 and J-11 is aimed at confronting any threat from India in the light of India acquiring new fighter aircraft, an apparent reference to Rafale aircraft

The Chinese military carried out a media blitzkrieg during the height of last year's 73-day Doklam standoff highlighting deployment of new battle tank as well as massive military exercises on the Tibetan plateau.



Continued: Fact or Psychological Warfare? China's Development of the World's Strongest Individual Firepower System

“...the QTS-11 system could be a game changer, and it has also been reported that a military hospital of the East Theater Command is now developing an Ironman-like, weight-bearing suit mocked as a ‘wearable skeleton’ to carry heavier gear as Beijing aims to put more gadgets and devices on each of its infantrymen.”



Soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army 1st Amphibious Mechanized Infantry Division.

Source: By Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Flickr: 110712-N-TT977-077), https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Soldiers_of_the_Chinese_People%27s_Liberation_Army%2011.jpg, CC BY 2.0.

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China Commits to Building Global Satellite Communication Network by 2023

OE Watch Commentary: China has announced that it will begin construction of a low-earth orbit (LEO) communication satellite constellation with the goal of building a global communication network. The constellation, dubbed Hongyan (鸿雁) or Wild Geese, will eventually provide global cell phone coverage, even in remote areas. The system will also include automatic identification systems (AIS), allowing more precise monitoring of ships and aircraft and improving safety. China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC; 中国航天科技集团) plans to complete the system by 2023. CASC affiliates have also partnered with international clients such as Thailand's Kasetsart University to help develop the technology. China's pursuit of a lower-cost, network of LEO satellites follows its success in building geostationary communications for a number of countries, including Pakistan, Nigeria, Venezuela, and Bolivia.

The accompanying transcribed excerpt from CCTV, a Chinese government broadcaster, included an interview with Zhang Hongtai, Director of the China Academy of Space Technology, the research arm of CASC. Hongtai argued that the satellite system has a number of advantages over current ground-based internet connections. In particular, they are able to more effectively reach remote areas and do not require as much physical infrastructure, including base stations in remote areas. This is even more important in the context of creating redundant networks that work in parallel with existing internet connections. Currently, 99 percent of internet traffic is transmitted over fiber optic cables, which can be disrupted by natural disasters (especially earthquakes, which have been known to damage cables on the ocean floor) or in times of conflict.

However, CASC's system will be joining an already-crowded field; many similar systems already exist or are planned. The Iridium satellite constellation, for example, has been active since the late 1990s. Planned systems include SpaceX's 12,000-satellite constellation, slated for completion in the mid-2020s. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Source: “鸿雁星座系统今年发射首颗星 未来手机上网信号无死角 (Hongyan Satellite System Will Launch First Satellite This Year - In the Future Cellphones Will Not Lose Internet Signal),” CCTV, 10 March 2018. <http://m.news.cctv.com/2018/03/10/ARTIX4psuzAaIt3USfXBQdMQ180310.shtml>

Zhang Hongtai, Director of the China Academy of Space Technology: “By 2020 we want to build a network of six linked satellites to prove the system works, and then by 2023 increase the system to 54 satellites to have global data coverage. After the system reaches 270 satellites, we will have global broadband capability, with applications in six fields including voice telecommunication.”



Xi Jinping Promotes Civil-Military Integration, Technological Innovation

OE Watch Commentary: China recently held its annual National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing over two weeks in March. This year Xi Jinping took on special significance due to important changes to China's governmental structure. An important theme promoted by senior leaders, including Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, has been "Civil-Military Integration (军民融合)." As noted in the accompanying excerpted article from *Xinhua*, Xi spoke to military delegates at the NPC in March and made a case for continuing military reforms and improving China's ability to innovate in military technology fields. To do so, Xi argued, China's defense industries and the monopolies they represent must reform, promote the exchange of ideas and receive greater input from the civilian sector.

China's Communist Party (CCP), and by extension the People's Liberation Army, have military and political traditions that emphasize strong connections between the civil and military domains. China's Defense White Papers, its biennial announcement of official military policy, frequently highlight civil-military integration. The 2008 Defense White Paper for example, stated that "China makes it a point to take into consideration the needs of economic and social development and insists on having military and civilian purposes compatible with and beneficial to each other, so as to achieve more social benefits in the use of national defense resources in peacetime."

Xi's speech in March, following his work report at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, mirrors the pattern of remarks he made, first at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 (where he was appointed General Secretary of the CCP) and then at the NPC that March. As noted in the accompanying excerpted speech from March 2013, Xi called on the Chinese government and civilian industry "to achieve in-depth integration of the use of infrastructure and other key facilities based on demands and led by the government."

Chinese civil-military cooperation is multi-level and spans a wide range of industries, research programs, and infrastructures. Chinese military aircraft practice deploying to, and operating from, designated dual-use airports. Infrastructure projects, particularly in China's less well-developed west, are built with military considerations and long distance deployments are practiced using all available roads and rail to move troops from one side of the country to another. Civilian advances in quantum technology are being used to create encrypted communications for the military. As Xi put it in speech this year, "Civil-Military Integration is beneficial to strengthening China's hidden war potential and national defense strength." Given the recent modification to China's constitution that will allow Xi to extend his tenure beyond 2023, the pattern of military reforms and promotion of civil-military integration can be expected to continue to accelerate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



"We must pay close attention to the direction of development of military science and technology and weaponry in the world, highlight the coordinated innovation of military-civilian science and technology in key areas."

- Xi Jinping

Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping prior to a meeting in Beijing, China, Sept. 19, 2012.
Source: DoD photo by Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AXi_Jinping_Sept_19%2C_2012.jpg, Public Domain

Source: "习近平：扎扎实实推进军民融合深度发展 为实现中国梦强军梦提供强大动力和战略支撑 (Xi Jinping: Resolutely Promote the Deep Development of Military-Civil Integration to Provide Strong Momentum and Strategic Support for Realizing the China Dream and the Strong Military Dream)," *Xinhua*, 12 March 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/12/c_1122526642.htm

Xi Jinping: "We must pay close attention to the direction of development of military science and technology and weaponry in the world, highlight the coordinated innovation of military-civilian science and technology in key areas... We must strengthen the sharing of ideas, break monopolies, improve the efficient allocation of resources for technological innovation, uncover hidden capacity for innovation in society, and promote lively competition in national defense science and technological innovation."

Source: Xi Jinping, "Build People's Armed Forces That Follow the Party's Commands, Are Able to Win Battles and Have Fine Conduct" (2013) *The Governance of China*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press 2014), p. 243.

"We should coordinate the development of our economy and defense capabilities, and combine efforts to make the country prosperous and the military strong. We should further the great integration of military and civilian development, and work to achieve in-depth integration of the use of infrastructure and other key facilities based on demands and led by the government."



Reopened Chinese-Built Railways Link Coastal Angola with the Interior of Africa

OE Watch Commentary: A newly reopened railway is now transporting goods from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) across Angola to the port of Lobito. The 1,344 km Benguela railway, built by the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), China's largest rail company, cost \$1.8 billion. The accompanying excerpted article from *The People's Daily Online* provides some details on this project. The project began in 2007 and saw its first trial run in 2015. According to CRCC statistics, the project employed roughly 100,000 local workers. The fastest rail in Angola's history, the project will quickly move passengers and cargo across the breadth of Angola and the railway is likely to be a major boon to the Angolan and DRC economies. UN trade data indicates that over 80 percent of DRC exports consist of minerals and metals and because of the railway, DRC copper and manganese now have a more efficient route to the Atlantic. Angola, while far wealthier than its neighbor to the east, is even more reliant on mineral wealth, with over 90 percent of its exports coming from oil.

China and Angola enjoy a close trade relationship, and in 2016, Angola for the first time beat out Russia to become China's top source of oil imports. CRCC is heavily invested in Angola, and in addition to the railway has built an airport in Angola's Cabinda Province, an exclave separated from Angola proper by part of the DRC.

Chinese firms are making major inroads in Africa through construction projects. While the details of many deals are murky and reports of spying devices planted in a new, Chinese-built African Union building have raised concerns, many infrastructure projects appear to have real traction with local governments. In east Africa, for example, a railway corridor linking the port city of Djibouti with Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa and Nairobi, Kenya is opening up whole new avenues of trade. There are plans to link the Benguela Railway with other projects, such as the trans-Tanzania-Zambian TAZARA Railway, linking both coasts of the African continent. China's efforts to link these underdeveloped, but geographically important axes of trade will likely change patterns of trade in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The Benguela Railway is an important route for DRC and Zambian copper, manganese, and other mineral resources.”

Source: “中企承建铁路助力安哥拉重启铁路国际贸易 (Chinese Enterprises Contracted to Help Reopen Railways, Resume International Trade),” *People's Daily Online*, 8 March 2018. <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0308/c1002-29856853.html>

The Benguela Railway is an important route for DRC and Zambian copper, manganese, and other mineral resources, but due to the Angolan Civil War transportation totally prevented, forcing exports to Europe to be transported through South Africa or Tanzania, resulting in a sharp increase in costs.





Beyond Bitcoin: Could China Embrace Blockchain for Defense and Security Applications?

by Wilson VornDick

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/beyond-bitcoin-china-embrace-blockchain-defense-security-applications/>

OE Watch Commentary: Since January 2016, bitcoin has skyrocketed from less than \$1,000 and nearly peaking at \$20,000 in December—a 2,100 percent increase. Despite its volatility, euphoria over bitcoin along with other cryptocurrencies has spread across the globe and nowhere has this been more evident than China. However, despite official concern about cryptocurrency, the technology that underpins bitcoin, known as distributed ledger technology or blockchain, is being evaluated for application by other Chinese industries and sectors. Specifically, it has piqued the interest of a small group of cyber security experts and media in China that view blockchain as holding great promise for application across China's broad national security interests and apparatus.

Even though China has quickly become a global leader in cryptocurrencies, fear of the currency's potential use in illicit purchases on the dark web, money laundering, and offshoring of badly needed currency have left Chinese authorities unnerved. As a result, the government began cracking down in the last quarter of 2017. In September, a notice was issued to shutter cryptocurrency exchanges, restrict any new ICOs, and ban the trading of digital cryptocurrency under the pretext of reducing financial risks.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is charging ahead with new and innovative ways to leverage the blockchain. Indeed, many of these uses are interchangeable with defense and security priorities. One groundbreaking proposal in National Defense Science and Technology (NDST) in 2016 and a concentrated release of associated articles on June 2, 2017 asserts that China should consider blockchain in military and security operations. While these articles are in no way an official indication of China's current or future use of blockchain, the articles do offer a glimpse of the novel ways in which this technology could be leveraged. Moreover, it would seem that the technology would align with the civil-military application goals tied to the broad "informatization" campaign enshrined in China's 2015 Military Strategy and 13th Five-Year Plan for Informatization (2016-2020) among others.

Of the three researchers that contributed to the NDST (2016) article, each of whom holds a PhD and is focused on cyber security, one in particular stands out: Zhu Qichao. Dr. Zhu Qichao is not only the director of the Center for National Security and Strategic Studies at the National University of Defense Technology in Beijing, but also a colonel in the PLA and a thought leader in China's artificial intelligence efforts. In the article, three main areas of military and security employment were outlined: intelligence operations, weapons life cycle and personnel management, and military logistics. This foundational approach may very well frame future Chinese security-related blockchain endeavors and perceptions.

For intelligence operations, the ability to discretely "pay intelligence professionals and informants" is critical. Blockchain allows participants to apply for one or more accounts, regardless of "national and geographical restrictions," with no direct correlation between different accounts. Touting the weapons life cycle and personnel management advantages, blockchain would allow Chinese military and security-related commercial and industrial partners as well as leadership to maintain secure information transfers and communications to include sensitive studies, combat readiness statuses, and production timelines.

Finally, as military logistics becomes more "smart" or "intelligent", blockchain can improve the entire logistics enterprise by making it more robust, dynamic, and resilient by creating small, interconnected networks. As a result, this new enterprise is less risky and more survivable since it avoids a "centralized management strategy" that is over-reliant on a few critical information centers or other key geographical sites. The NDST's recommendation was reprised a year later in a slimmed down, summation in Liberation Army Daily by Zhang Min. This article gained significant traction as it was widely circulated and republished in a variety of Chinese media outlets to include *Xinhua* (*Xinhua*, *China Military Online*, *China News*; June 2, 2017).

Despite these benefits, blockchain is not a panacea for China's security challenges. First, the issue of confidentiality for the large amount of classified military information and where those "densities" of information would be stored on the blockchain needs to be addressed. Second, constructing these various blockchain would require a substantial amount of resources (power, programmers, processing power, etc.) and dedicated nodes. Third, because blockchain architecture is decentralized, its communications would bypass a centralized server, thereby raising regulatory and control issues. Finally, the authors allude to the fact that the "liberalism" at the heart of blockchain architecture may be irreconcilable with the degree of control with which Party and military leadership would likely seek to exercise, even though it is not specifically stated in such terms.

Blockchain has yet to prove its military and security bona fides in China. However, as the technology becomes more mainstream, regulated, and slowly sheds its illicit reputation, it is very likely that its use will proliferate across the public and private sectors in China. Even if China continues its crackdown on cryptocurrencies in the future, the technology behind it has been recognized as having intrinsic value and utility for Chinese defense issues. **End OE Watch Commentary (VornDick)**

(continued)



Continued: Beyond Bitcoin: Could China Embrace Blockchain for Defense and Security Applications?

“With stronger policy support, China will work to establish uniform military and civilian standards for infrastructure, key technological areas and major industries, explore the ways and means for training military personnel in civilian educational institutions, developing weaponry and equipment by national defense industries, and outsourcing logistics support to civilian support systems.”

Source: “Full text: China’s Military Strategy,” Xinhua, 26 May 2015. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628_5.htm

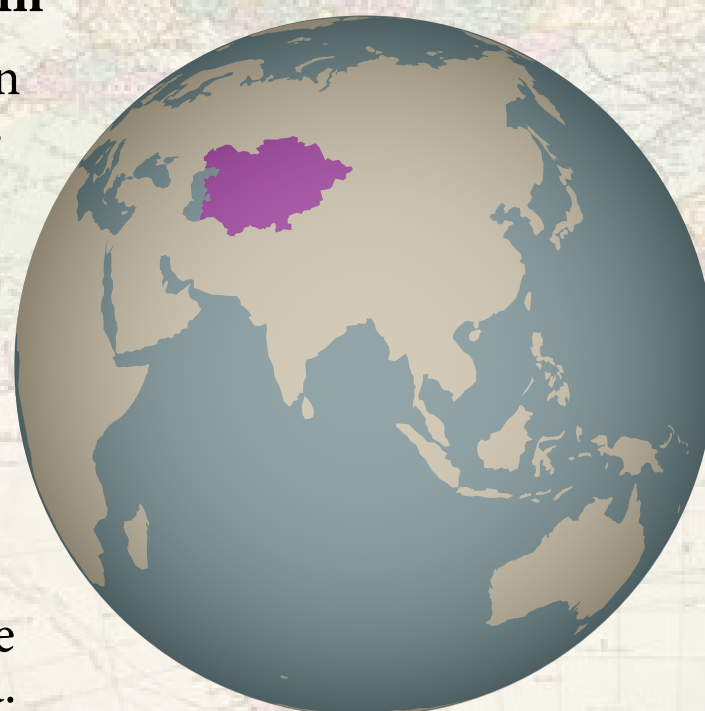
...China’s armed forces will deepen logistics reform in relevant policies, institutions and support forces, and optimize strategic logistics deployment. They will innovate the modes of support, develop new support means, augment war reserves, integrate logistics information systems, improve rules and standards, and meticulously organize supply and support, so as to build a logistics system that can provide support for fighting and winning modern wars, serve the modernization of the armed forces, and transform towards informationization...

...With stronger policy support, China will work to establish uniform military and civilian standards for infrastructure, key technological areas and major industries, explore the ways and means for training military personnel in civilian educational institutions, developing weaponry and equipment by national defense industries, and outsourcing logistics support to civilian support systems...China will devote more efforts to science and technology in national defense mobilization, be more readily prepared for the requisition of information resources, and build specialized support forces...

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194880>



China Seeks Extradition of Detained Uyghurs in Malaysia

OE Watch Commentary: The Chinese government has requested the extradition of 11 Uyghur detainees in Malaysia in accordance with a strengthened extradition agreement signed in 2016 between the two governments. The detainees were captured during an illegal border crossing from Thailand into Malaysia. Chinese sources allege that the detainees are linked to terrorist activities, while Malaysian authorities and officials have agreed to investigate the matter.

As the first source from the pro-Chinese *Global Times* points out, following the detention of the 11 ethnic Uyghur Chinese nationals in Malaysia, the Chinese government formally requested the extradition of the detainees to China for “possible links to terror activities.” Zhu Yongbio, assistant director of the Institute of Central Asia Studies at Lanzhou University, quoted in the source, expressed confidence that the detainees would receive a “fair trial” upon their return to China and that “Western countries should not apply a double standard to China in its dealings with suspected terrorists” and added “that China is making a contribution to international anti-terrorism efforts by strengthening domestic anti-terrorism.”

China has faced increased scrutiny internationally for attempting to utilize the extradition process to renationalize foreign Uyghur scholars, migrants, and asylum seekers, with 612 “red notices” issued last year alone. Red notices are akin to an international arrest warrant and are among one of eight types of notices circulated through Interpol. Controversy surrounds the legitimacy of the claims that those sought for renationalization are linked to criminal or terrorist activity.

The Malaysian government responded to the request, as the second excerpt from the semi-independent news source, *The Star*, indicates, with Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Zahid promising an investigation, consideration, and cooperation with the Chinese request. This is not the first request of late; as recently as early 2017, the Malaysian government returned 29 other Uyghurs under similar circumstances. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**



Deputy Malaysian Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.
Source: Prachatai, <https://goo.gl/Zx8pWH>, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

“China’s request to extradite from Malaysia 11 Uyghurs detainees, who illegally crossed the border and are being investigated for possible links to terror activities.”

Source: “China wants Uyghurs from Malaysia: Report,” *Global Times*, 11 February 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1089256.shtml>

...“China’s request to extradite from Malaysia 11 Uyghurs detainees, who illegally crossed the border and are being investigated for possible links to terror activities... Malaysia approved a document to strengthen law enforcement cooperation with China in April 2016, in which the two sides agreed to offer wide assistance to each other on criminal procedures...”

...“It is legitimate for China to request the extradition of the Uyghurs, who are Chinese nationals. Once extradited to China, the Uyghurs would be given a fair trial in accordance with China’s laws,” Zhu Yongbiao, assistant director of the Institute of Central Asia Studies at Lanzhou University, told the *Global Times*....“Western countries should not apply a double standard to China in its dealings with suspected terrorists as they would ask suspected terrorists involved with IS to be extradited,” Zhu said, adding that China is making a contribution to international anti-terrorism efforts by strengthening domestic anti-terrorism.

Source: Shah, M. F. and Kili, M. A. “Zahid: China has requested extradition of detained Uighurs,” *The Star (Online)*, 10 February 2018. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/02/10/zahid-uighur-extradiction-request/>

...Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Malaysia would honor the Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) thorough Interpol and the extradition agreement it signed with China...“Prior to this, we have extradited Malaysians from China who were involved in falsifying credit cards and other criminal activities. As such we will consider Beijing’s request,” he said....

...Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Malaysia’s Deputy Prime Minister, told local media last year that biometric information provided by Chinese authorities had enabled the arrests of 29 Uighur militants since 2011, all of whom were deported to China. That includes six Uighurs sent back to China in 2012, despite their pending refugee status determinations....

55



Concern in Kazakhstan over Returning Foreign Fighters from Syria

OE Watch Commentary: A Russian-language article on 6 March from the Kazakhstan-focused Russian-language news website *Tengri News* presented new statistics on the number of foreign fighters from Kazakhstan who have returned to the country from Syria. According to the new statistics, 125 Kazakhs have returned from Syria and 57 of them have been convicted on terrorism charges. The deputy chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan was quoted in the article as saying that since the defeat of international terrorist organizations in Syria, presumably referring to the al-Qaeda-loyal groups and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), there has been an exodus of fighters to other regions, including Central Asia.

One of the concerns expressed by the deputy chairman is that most of the returnees still adhered to their radical views. Kazakhstan is therefore developing rehabilitation programs for the returnees who have not been convicted. Without these programs, the article notes that the returnees may otherwise contribute to the broader radicalization of Kazakh society. The deputy chairman believes that Kazakhstan needs to improve its national programming to counter terrorism and religious extremism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“International terrorist organizations were defeated in Syria and Iraq and as a result there have been outflows of militants and their families to other regions.”

Source: “57 вернувшихся из Сирии казахстанцев осуждены – КНБ (57 Kazakhstani returnees from Syria sentenced – KNB),” *Tengri News*, 6 March 2018. https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/57-vernuvshih-sya-iz-sirii-kazahstantsev-osujdenyi-knb-339290/

125 citizens returned from Kazakhstan to Syria, 57 of whom were convicted. This was reported by the deputy chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan Nurgali Bilisbekov. “As you know, international terrorist organizations were defeated in Syria and Iraq and as a result there have been outflows of militants and their families to other regions.” According to him, the returnees mostly continue to adhere to radical views. These and other factors emphasize the need to further improve the national program for countering terrorism and religious extremism,” he added.



Manjali mosque atyrau.

Source: By Redtryfan77 (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manjali_mosque_atyrau.JPG, (CC-by-2.0).



Uzbekistan Reopens Border Checkpoints with Tajikistan

OE Watch Commentary: The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has made improving relations with neighboring states a priority since taking office in December 2016. The accompanying excerpts from Uzbek and Tajik sources report on the government of Uzbekistan's recent decision to reopen several checkpoints on the Uzbek-Tajik border after years of remaining closed under former President Islam Karimov. This could be the most significant of Mirziyoyev's efforts to improve relations in the region, as Uzbekistan's relationship with Tajikistan under Karimov stood as the worst compared to relationships with other regional governments.

The article from *Anhor*, a Russian language news website in Uzbekistan, reports on the recent decision and that "a new checkpoint will be set up in the Samarkand Oblast, located in the village of Jartepa, Urgut District." The article also notes that there were regular disagreements between the Tajik and Uzbek governments on the demarcation of the border, though it does not mention that the two sides stated they would work on resolving undemarcated sections of the border in the near future.

The article from *Asia-Plus*, a Russian-language news website in Tajikistan, lists all of the border checkpoints that are now open, including the "railway crossing 'Amuzang,' connecting the Surkhandarya Oblast of Uzbekistan with the Tajik rail station 'Khoshadi' in the Khatlon Oblast." The article from *Avesta*, a Russian-language news website, also reports on the reopening of the rail line and how "in November 2011 Uzbekistan suspended all rail traffic" and in 2012, the government reportedly "removed some of the rail line." The suspension of traffic on this rail line stood as one of a number of measures Karimov took against Tajikistan over the years as the relationship between the two sides remained strained, but none of the articles mention the minefields along sections of the Uzbek-Tajik border.

The government of Uzbekistan placed land mines on sections of the Uzbek-Tajik border in the early 2000s in response to incursions carried out by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. The Uzbek government removed some of the mines in the years since then, but it is unknown what sections of the Uzbek-Tajik border remain mined or how Mirziyoyev might deal with it. In any case, Mirziyoyev's decision to reopen a number of checkpoints on the Uzbek-Tajik border is significant and it will be worth watching how Uzbek-Tajik relations develop. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Over the past eight years only two border checkpoints operated between the two countries – Tursunzade-Sariosiyo and Fotekhobod-Oybek.”

Source: “Ўзбекистан обустраивает старые и открывает новые КПП (Uzbekistan is equipping old and opening new border checkpoints),” *Anhor*, 24 February 2018. <https://anhor.uz/news/uzbekistan-obustraivaet-starie-i-otkrivaet-novie-kpp>

The government of Uzbekistan reached a decision on the resumption of activities of some border checkpoints on the Uzbek-Tajik border...Another important announcement is that a new checkpoint will be set up in the Samarkand Oblast, located in the village of Jartepa, Urgut District...a number of different disagreements regularly took place between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, including the demarcation of the border. However, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, after coming to power, engaged in a “reset” of relations with neighboring states, in particular Tajikistan...

Source: Yuldashev, Avaz. “На таджикско-узбекской границе сегодня начнут функционировать десять ранее закрытых КПП (Nine previously closed border checkpoints have started operating today on the Tajik-Uzbek border),” *Asia-Plus*, 1 March 2018. <http://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/politics/20180301/na-tadzhiksko-uzbekskoi-granitse-segodnya-nachnut-funktsionirovat-desyat-ranee-zakritih-kpp>

...Today (these border checkpoints) began to operate:

- “Jartepa,” connecting (Tajik) Penjikent and Uzbek (Samarkand)
- “Kushkent” and “Uchturgan,” connecting (Tajik) Ganchi and Zafarabad and (Uzbek) Jizzak
- “Khavastabad” and “Bekabad,” connecting the Tajik District of Spitamen with the (Uzbek) Syrdarya and Tashkent Oblasts
- “Pap,” connecting the Asht District of the Sughd Oblast with the Namangan Oblast of Uzbekistan
- “Ravat,” connecting the city of Kanibadam with the Fergana Oblast
- “Gulbahor,” connecting the Shakhritus District, Khatlon Oblast with the Surkhandarya Oblast
- The railway crossing “Amuzang,” connecting the Surkhandarya Oblast of Uzbekistan with the Tajik rail station “Khoshadi” in the Khatlon Oblast

...Over the past eight years only two border checkpoints operated between the two countries – Tursunzade-Sariosiyo and Fotekhobod-Oybek. Two other checkpoints closed under the (former) President Islam Karimov resumed operations at the beginning of the year, “Andarkhon-Patar” and “Kushtigermon”...

Source: “Первый поезд из таджикского Хатлона проследует через узбекский Амузанг 7 марта (The first train from Tajikistan's Khatlon will travel through Uzbekistan's Amuzang on 7 March),” *Avesta*, 1 March 2018. <http://avesta.tj/2018/03/01/pervyj-poezd-iz-tadzhikskogo-hatlona-prosleduet-cherez-uzbekskij-amuzang-7-marta/>

The first passenger train on the “Kulyab-Moscow” route is expected to travel through the railway checkpoint “Khoshadi” (Amuzang) on 7 March. Remember that in November 2011 Uzbekistan suspended all rail traffic on the Galaba-Amuzang line (connecting to Khatlon Oblast, Tajikistan). In the spring of 2012 Uzbekistan removed some of the rail line...



Azerbaijan and Georgia Increase Bilateral Security Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: Georgia's security cooperation with Azerbaijan has been increasing over the past few years through a trilateral relationship that includes Turkey, but as the accompanying excerpted article reports, it appears that bilateral military ties between Georgia and Azerbaijan are increasing as well. The article comes from *Haqqin*, a Russian-language news source in Azerbaijan with ties to the government, and it reports on a recent meeting between the Azerbaijani and Georgian defense ministers.

Outside of any agreements made at the meeting, a statement by Defense Minister of Azerbaijan, Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov, where he "expressed gratitude to the Georgian people for the support of Azerbaijan in international organizations and recognition of its territorial integrity, and stressed, that Azerbaijan also recognizes and supports the territorial integrity of Georgia," shows how the partnership continues to take shape. The government of Azerbaijan's support of the territorial integrity of Georgia is worth noting, but the Georgian government's support for Azerbaijan in recognizing its territorial integrity is more important, particularly as it relates to Armenia. Armenia and Azerbaijan remain locked in a conflict over the territory of Nagorny-Karabakh.

The Georgian government has maintained a fairly good relationship with the Armenian government over the years, but statements of support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and increased security cooperation with Azerbaijan's armed forces could have a significant impact on Georgian-Armenian relations. There are several areas that the article mentions as prospects for military cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan and it will be important to watch how these develop in the next few years and the impact it could have on Georgian-Armenian relations and security in the Caucasus region.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)

"The (Azerbaijani) Minister again expressed gratitude to the Georgian people for the support of Azerbaijan in international organizations and recognition of its territorial integrity, and stressed, that Azerbaijan also recognizes and supports the territorial integrity of Georgia."

Source: "Азербайджан и Грузия договорились о военном сотрудничестве (Azerbaijan and Georgia reached an agreement on military cooperation)," *Haqqin*, 9 March 2018. <https://haqqin.az/news/124327>

The Defense Minister of Azerbaijan, Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov, met with the delegation led by the Defense Minister of Georgia, Levan Izoria...Hasanov emphasized that the Azerbaijani-Georgian strategic partnership is at a high level...military cooperation of the two countries is carried out by providing regional economic projects as well as in the format of the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia military structure...

The (Azerbaijani) Minister again expressed gratitude to the Georgian people for the support of Azerbaijan in international organizations and recognition of its territorial integrity, and stressed, that Azerbaijan also recognizes and supports the territorial integrity of Georgia...

...The two sides also exchanged views on the prospects for cooperation in military, military-technical, military-education, military-medical spheres, joint military exercises, and (other) issues of mutual interest.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a plan of bilateral cooperation for 2018 was signed by the ministries of defense of Azerbaijan and Georgia.



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>



Pakistan's Training Mission to Saudi Arabia

OE Watch Commentary: When the head of the Pakistani Army, General Qamar Bajwa, announced on 15 February that 1000 soldiers will deploy to Saudi Arabia as part of a training mission, it caused a controversy in Pakistan's parliament and generated a number of questions from the media. The accompanying excerpted articles from Pakistan report on the recent decision to deploy additional forces to Saudi Arabia and provide insight into the impact of the deployment.

The article from *Dawn*, a widely-read English-language news source in Pakistan, reports on the announcement and how Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi "green-lighted the deployment" without the knowledge of Pakistan's parliament. The article brings up how one of the government's main concerns with the deployment is that Pakistan "not become party to any war in the Middle East or any Arab state." It is noted that the deployment will consist of 1000 soldiers "on a training mission" in addition to the 1600 soldiers "already stationed in Saudi Arabia." The article also mentions how "military cooperation between Pakistan and KSA dates back nearly five decades," but the Pakistani government has not discussed any specifics of the new training mission, which led to concerns that the soldiers could get involved in Saudi Arabia's operations in Yemen. The size of the deployment, which adds a significant number of soldiers to the overall Pakistani contingent in Saudi Arabia, also contributed to speculation about the mission.

The article from *The Express Tribune*, an English-language newspaper in Pakistan, discusses the deployment and provides insight into concerns of Pakistanis. The article notes how the deployment "comes at a time when Saudi forces are undertaking a military campaign to quell the Houthi rebels in Yemen" and that "Riyadh has been pushing Islamabad to commit troops for its campaign in Yemen for quite some time now." The author questions why the government of Pakistan decided to rethink its decision to deploy forces after a few years of deliberations and notes how Saudi Arabia "was one of the few countries which came to Pakistan's rescue during times of crisis." Outside of any pressure the Pakistani government felt to support Saudi Arabia, the author also brings up how the government consulted with the governments of Iran and Qatar before moving forward. Lastly, the author's statement that "Pakistan is walking a tightrope and any misstep can have grave consequences" sums up the situation that some in Pakistan now believe the deployment has created. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"Dastagir said a total of 1,000 Pakistani troops are being sent to the Kingdom on a training mission. He said 1,600 Pakistani soldiers are already stationed in Saudi Arabia."

Source: Guramani, Nadir. "Govt refuses to divulge 'operational details' of Pakistani troops' deployment to Saudi Arabia," *Dawn*, 19 February 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390403>

Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani on Monday threatened Defence Minister Dastagir with 'contempt of parliament' proceedings after the minister outright refused to provide details of the 'unilateral decision' to send Pakistani troops to Saudi Arabia for deployment..."Why don't we proceed against you and the prime minister over contempt of parliament?" Rabbani asked Dastagir after the minister revealed that it was Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi who green-lighted the deployment..."The parliament found out [about the deployment] through a press release," Rabbani said...

But the defence minister argued that despite the decision, Pakistan remains "neutral" — in line with a unanimous resolution passed by a joint sitting of parliament in 2015 stating that Pakistan will not become party to any war in the Middle East or any Arab state.

Disclosing the size of the deployment for the first time since the decision was announced, Dastagir said a total of 1,000 Pakistani troops are being sent to the Kingdom on a training mission. He said 1,600 Pakistani soldiers are already stationed in Saudi Arabia...

Military cooperation between Pakistan and KSA dates back nearly five decades, the minister recalled, adding that Pakistani troops' training of Saudi forces is governed by the '1982 bilateral Pak-Saudi Protocol on the Deputation of Pakistan Armed Forces Personnel and Military Training'..."The assistance being rendered to Saudi Arabia is a continuation of the ongoing support and is within the confines of joint parliamentary resolution of April 2015 [that called for neutrality]."

Source: Yousaf, Kamran. "Pakistani boots on foreign soil," *The Express Tribune*, 19 February 2018. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1638546/6-pakistani-boots-foreign-soil/>

...Given the sensitivities attached to the move, the military's media wing in its terse statement clarified a few crucial points.

Firstly, troops are being sent as part of the longstanding bilateral security cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia...troops who are already stationed in the Kingdom and fresh contingent would not be deployed outside Saudi Arabia. The deployment is only meant for 'training and advise mission,' says the army...

But the fresh deployment has raised eyebrows because it comes at a time when Saudi forces are undertaking a military campaign to quell the Houthi rebels in Yemen, reportedly backed by Iran. Riyadh has been pushing Islamabad to commit troops for its campaign in Yemen for quite some time now. In 2015, the government took the Saudi request to parliament, which passed a unanimous resolution outlining guidelines for Pakistan's engagement with Saudi Arabia. Parliament while supporting Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, set certain red lines. And those include staying away from the conflict in Yemen...

So, in this backdrop what has really prompted Pakistan to rethink that policy?... Islamabad has longstanding strategic and defence ties with Riyadh. The oil-rich Kingdom was one of the few countries which came to Pakistan's rescue during times of crisis. After Pakistan conducted nuclear explosions in May 1998, Saudi Arabia bailed out Pakistan to avoid its economic meltdown because of the West's crippling economic sanctions...

...The good news though is that Pakistan has taken Iran on board before making the latest move. Qatar is another country that must be concerned and closely watching the Pakistani decision. But before the formal announcement, the army chief paid a secret visit to Doha to assure the Qatari leadership that Pakistan's troops would not become part of any military adventure outside Saudi Arabia. All this demonstrates that Pakistan is walking a tightrope and any misstep can have grave consequences.



A Russian Approach to Interagency Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: A good example of Russia's military-scientific approach to problem solving was on display in the December 2017 edition of Russia's military theory journal, *Military Thought*. On the subject of identifying key problems with collective information-sharing tasks between Russian government entities, Y.G. Anisimov, V.G. Anisimov, and E.V. Solohov lay out an extensive argument for interagency cooperation that is significantly based on mathematical modeling and quantitative analysis. For Russian professional readers, this would be an entirely normal article and an understandable approach to the argument. The fact that the authors are all general officers and two have doctoral degrees is also par for the course. The article does not highlight specific current event-based issues, rather, it is an appeal for a general acceptance of a scientific-based approach to conducting information sharing among "federal executive bodies" on security and defense issues.

The purpose of this commentary is not a review of the math involved, rather just to highlight an example this discussion framework. From a standpoint of research and development, the authors explain that developing predictive methods and making decisions based on mathematically predictive outputs would find an immediate and agree-able audience among Russian federal bodies. They also indicate that this approach would provide enhanced feasibility with a choice of and use of multiple predictive models and the ability to coordinate decision-making from local to global levels.

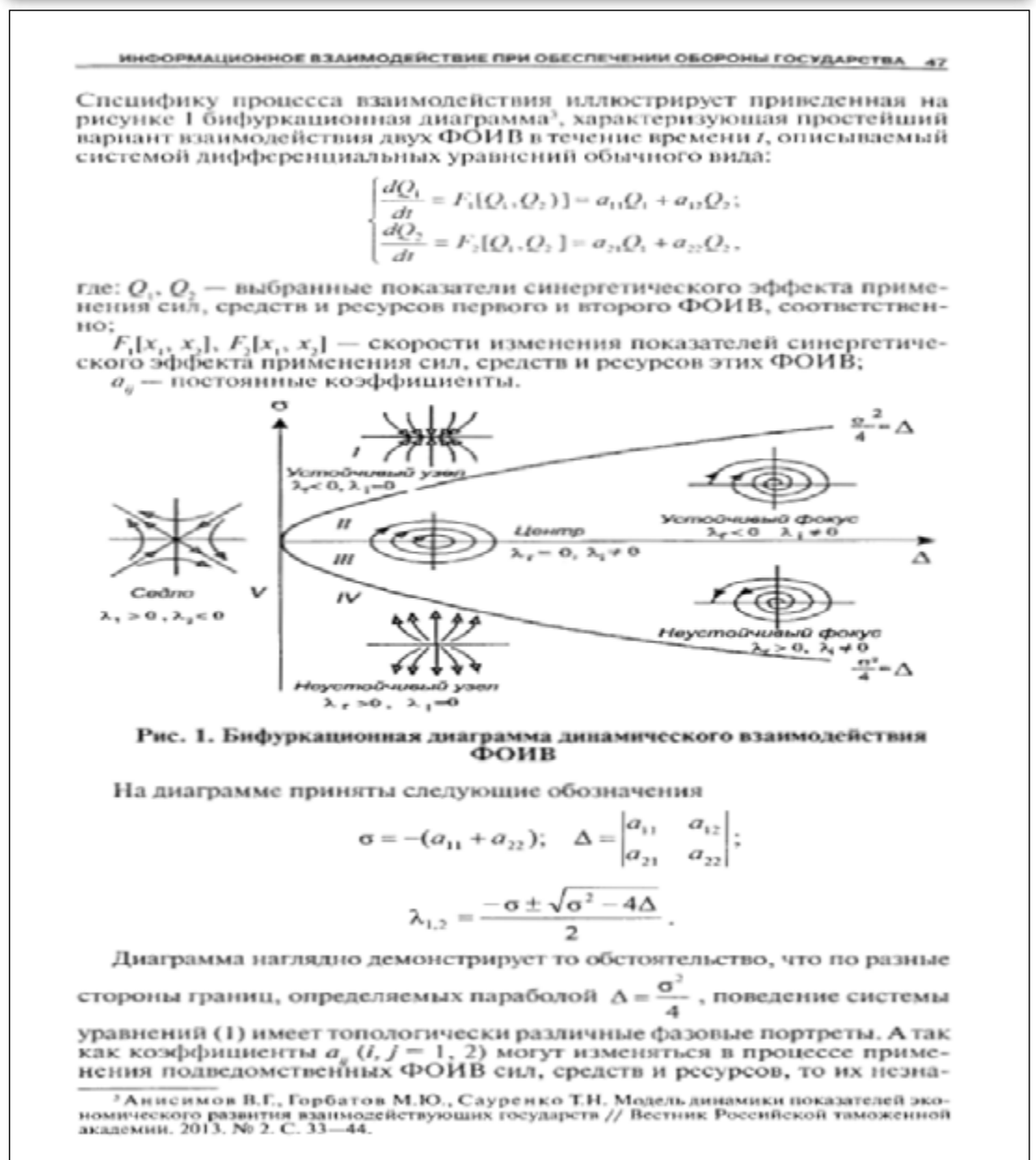
The models presented in the article show "possible synergy effects of two [generic] interacting agencies" and the application of generic "capabilities and resources." The authors' statement, "Experience tells us that these types of interactions are not always effective," surely evokes a knowing nod from anyone working with large bureaucracies.

With the advent of Russia's National Defense Management Center and its emphasis on consolidation of defense and security information, new bureaucratic procedures and even a bureaucratic culture would be expected to emerge. A scientific approach, inherent in Russian military science education and practice, is a natural Russian response. Serious discussions by leading strategic researchers and policy-makers are likely to proceed from this approach. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Vainer)**

“Effective security measures can only be applied by simultaneous, coordinated deployment of all the country's available capabilities and resources. They synergetic effect of these deployments is synonymous with accomplishing the Russian Federation's security and defense mission.”

Source: Е.Г.Анисимов, В.Г. Анисимов, и И.В.Солохов, Проблемы Научно-методического обеспечения межведомственного информационного взаимодействия, *Военная Мысль*, No.12, Декабрь 2017, стр. 45-51. (Y.G. Anisimov, V.G. Anisimov, and E.V. Solohov, "The Issue of Providing for Scientific Methodological Interagency Information Cooperation," *Military Thought*, No.12, December 2017, pp.45-51.)

...The stated interaction objective is to maximize the synergy effect by applying capabilities and resources from various agencies. Thus, the most effective form of interaction is symbiosis. If this is not to be achieved for whatever reason, then the acceptable ways of interaction maybe commensalism or neutralism...



A Russian Approach to Interagency Cooperation.

Source: Анисимов В.Г., Горбатов М.Ю., Сауренко Т.Н. Модель динамики показателей экономического развития взаимодействующих государств, Вестник Российской Таможенной Академии, 2013. No. 2, С. 33-44. (Y.G. Anisimov, M.U. Gorbato, and T.N. Saiurenko, "Model of dynamic demonstration of economic development in cooperative government," *Journal of Russian Customs Academy*, 2013, No. 2, pp. 33-44.)

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Е.Г.Анисимов, В.Г. Анисимов, и И.В.Солохов, Проблемы Научно-методического обеспечения межведомственного информационного взаимодействия, *Военная Мысль*, No.12, Декабрь 2017, стр. 4. (Y.G. Anisimov, V.G. Anisimov, and E.V. Solohov, "The Issue of Providing for Scientific Methodological Interagency Information Cooperation," *Military Thought*, No.12, December 2017, p 47.)

New Russian Officer Code of Conduct

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past several years, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has implemented policies to improve operational security. Many of these new restrictions stem from advances in digital technology, particularly those associated with social media. Ever since Russia's intervention in Ukraine, there have been numerous incidents where Russian military personnel have posted information on social media sites which flatly contradicted the official Kremlin version of events. The brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news source, *Izvestiya Online*, describes a new code of conduct for officers and general officers on the General Staff, which not only covers proper officer behavior, but places considerable emphasis upon information and operational security.

The article begins by pointing out that the new code of conduct “describes all aspects of a commander’s performance, from his external appearance and manner of talking to the organization of subunit operations,” suggesting that today’s General Staff officers should model themselves after their tsarist and Soviet predecessors. As a leader, the code advises the officer “to be patient and well disposed toward his subordinates,” and that he/she “must not transfer the responsibility for making the final decision onto a subordinate’s shoulders.” The “officer must always maintain a smart external appearance and look like a leader in any situation,” avoiding the use of “street jargon or undesirable language.” Moreover, today’s officer should keep his workplace well organized, and he is “insistently encouraged to place portraits of the Russian Federation President and the Defense Minister in his office.”

A major portion of the code focuses upon computer and digital security. Today’s officer must be computer literate, ensuring that he maintains a strict line between personal and military digital systems. The code warns about the dangers of cellphone use, pointing out that a cellphone is “the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.” According to the new code “social networks are categorically banned,” and are regarded as “taboo for you and your subordinates.”

The timing for the release of this new officer code of conduct is curious. There’s no question, that over the past several years, the Russian Ministry of Defense has become much more alarmed with information and operational security, and that concern is reflected in the new code. However, ever since the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the popular meme for those in the military has been the “polite Russian soldier,” where the brave Russian defender unselfishly protects the motherland. This new code of conduct suggests that this meme may no longer be accurate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The cellphone is called ‘the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.’”



Soldiers without insignia guard buildings in the Crimean capital, Simferopol, March 2, 2014.
Source: Elizabeth Arrott (VOA), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VOA-Crimea-unmarked-soldiers.jpg>, Public Domain.

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov, Nikolay Surkov, and Aleksey Ramm, “Табу на соцсети включили в кодекс (Social Network Taboos Incorporated into a Code),” *Izvestiya Online*, 28 February 2018. <https://iz.ru/714220/aleksandr-kruglov-nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/tabu-na-sotcseti-vkliuchili-v-kodeks>

The Defense Ministry has drawn up a code of conduct for officers and general officers on the General Staff, the High Command, and the military district commands. The document describes all aspects of a commander’s performance, from his external appearance and manner of talking to the organization of subunit operations and setting of tasks for subordinates. A special section is devoted to information technologies and the need to observe secrecy in using them. Mobile telephones are to be monitored particularly, and social networks are declared “taboo.” The experts say that in both the tsarist and the Soviet armies a General Staff officer was a model of professionalism and good manners....

In the section about work organization the authors have tried to answer the question: What personal qualities must a leader demonstrate first and foremost? The officer is advised to be patient and well disposed toward his subordinates -- with the emphasis on the fact that they are under the leader’s protection. The chief must not transfer the responsibility for making the final decision onto a subordinate’s shoulders....

...It is written into the code that an officer must always maintain a smart external appearance and look like a leader in any situation.... Particular attention is paid to standards of speech. An officer may not use street jargon or undesirable language, lest he become the object of mockery and lose authority in the eyes of those around him....

...A competent leader must be able to use a PC and office equipment. There are many hidden rocks in these waters, however. The use of personal computers, external hard disks, or other information storage devices for work needs to be prohibited.... The rules for using mobile phones are stipulated separately. The cellphone is called “the ideal instrument for spying on its owner and obtaining confidential information and statistical data for analysis.” ...Social networks are categorically banned. According to the code they are “taboo for you and your subordinates.”

The officer’s workplace is not ignored. He is insistently encouraged to place portraits of the Russian Federation President and the Defense Minister in his office. ...



Russian Operational Reserve Will Enhance Active Component Readiness

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses the Russian Ministry of Defense's latest attempt to implement an operational reserve system. This iteration of the reserve system is notable for several reasons. The first is that there is no mention of "territorial defense units," a concept where reservists man units that provide rear area security throughout the strategic depth. Although not mentioned, it is likely that Russia's newly formed National Guard, Rosgvardiya, will assume these units, as it is primarily concerned with internal defense. Perhaps of most interest is the description of how Russian reservists will complement the active force. In the Russian personnel system, positions that are vacant are termed "current under manning" (TNK, from the Russian текущий некомплект, "THK"), while positions that are filled with personnel that are not available (due to medical issues, leave, in training, etc.) are termed "temporary under manning" (VNK, from the Russian временный некомплект, "BHK"). The Russian Ministry of Defense will not only use reservists to staff designated reserve units (similar to the US System), but reservists will also fill TNK and VNK shortages in active duty units (something that is not done in the US system) to boost active duty readiness. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“There are those concepts – current under manning (TNK) [текущий некомплект (THK)] and temporary under manning (VNK) [временный некомплект (BHK)].”

- Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin

Source: Bogdan Stepovoy, Aleksey Ramm, and Yevgeniy Andreyev, “В резерв по контракту (In the Reserve, on Contract),” *Izvestiya*, 13 February 2018. <https://iz.ru/706732/bogdan-stepovoi-aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/v-rezerv-po-kontraktu>

The Russian Army has begun the full-scale formation of a mobilization reserve. Reserve soldiers and officers, who have concluded a contract with the Ministry of Defense, must attend special classes every month and undergo military training annually. In exchange, the state guarantees them monthly payments and a series of compensations. In the event of the declaration of a call to service, reservists will bring existing units up to strength, and they will also be used to form new units. Military experts think that the reform will strengthen the country's defense capability...

*The military commissariats are responsible for the formation of the reserve. Not all of them have yet begun the corresponding work. However, by way of illustration, the recruitment of volunteers is already occurring in Rostov Oblast – a reserve servicemen can conclude a contract for service in the reserve at the Novoshakhtinsk City Military Commissariat... “To do this, you need to appear at the military commissariat, while having your passport and military identification card on your person,” a Novoshakhtinsk Military Commissariat spokesman told *Izvestiya*. “A reserve serviceman must train for 2-3 days per month and undergo annual training with a duration of from 20-30 days”... They can call up that man for service at any moment: during the declaration of a special or threatening period, in the event of major exercises, emergency situations, or simply a critical shortage of military specialists in the units.*

*“The issue on the creation of an organizational mobilization reserve was raised a long time ago,” Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy told *Izvestiya*. “The new system will permit the training and maintenance of highly-skilled cadres at combat readiness and guarantee the rapid deployment of personnel to the theaters of military operations, where new formations need to be deployed, but the local mobilization reserve is inadequate”... In particular, in his words, the new cadre recruitment system will increase the combat capability of the Far East. There is equipment in the units of this region but a cadre shortage exists.*

Salary and Money for Billeting

The reserve soldiers and officers who are arriving in the reserve sign a contract for three, five, or more years. During the conclusion of a new agreement, a Russian receives a lump sum payment: for a three-year period – in the amount of the salary, and for five or more years – one and a half times more.

A reservist's pay will be composed of the position salary, the pay for rank, and the regional coefficient. For example, a platoon leader in the rank of a senior lieutenant in central Russia totals R27,500 [≈\$481 based upon March 2018 exchange rate]. A squad leader in the rank of a sergeant in Kemerovo Oblast (regional premium – 30 percent) – R25,300 [≈\$443 based upon March 2018 exchange rate]. Indeed, this money is paid in the full amount only during training. The reservists will be paid 12 percent of the pay in the remaining period, 11 months per year. A senior lieutenant from central Russia will receive R3,300 [≈\$58 based upon March 2018 exchange rate] per month and a sergeant from Kemerovo Oblast – R3,036 [≈\$53 based upon March 2018 exchange rate] ...

(continued)



Continued: Russian Operational Reserve Will Enhance Active Component Readiness

How This Works

They will attach the reservist to a specific military unit or to a Mobilization Deployment Support Center (TsOMP) [Центр Обеспечения Мобилизационного Развертывания (ЦОМР)], where he will undergo training...

“There are those concepts – current under manning (TNK) [текущий некомплект (ТНК)] and temporary under manning (VNK) [временный некомплект (ВНК)],” Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin told Izvestiya. “For instance, a serviceman has transferred to a different duty location, and his vacant position has not yet been filled, this is temporary under manning. If a man has become ill and already will be unable to accomplish his duties – this is current under manning. TNK and VNK seriously impact a military unit’s combat capability. By way of illustration, there can be a shortage of one company commander and several riflemen-machine-gunners and driver-mechanics. Their absence has a serious impact on the battalion’s capability to accomplish the combat mission. There are also positions, which are introduced only in the event of war. For example, assistant machine-gunner or mortar loader. They are not needed in peacetime but they become critically important in an engagement”...

The mobilization reservists, who have concluded a contract with a military unit, will fill TNK and VNK positions. The replenishment of losses in wartime will become their other mission.

New Centers for Reservists

They will both store equipment and train reservists at the Mobilization Deployment Support Centers (TsOMPs)...If necessary, they will transform the centers into “full-fledged” military units and formations. They will build a new state-of-the-art infrastructure for the Mobilization Deployment Support Centers. In 2016, the Ministry of Defense concluded a contract for the design of the new Military Equipment Storage and Repair Base on Sakhalin. The design illustrates what the Mobilization Deployment Support Center could look like.

They plan to build a military garrison in the Village of Dachnoye. A parking lot with an area of 700,000 square meters and a barracks for the accommodation of 521 soldiers and sergeants, headquarters and training buildings, depots for equipment and missile-artillery weapons, and a heated storage facility for 1,200 vehicle parking spaces will appear there. They will equip the equipment storage and repair areas. That infrastructure will permit the accommodation of a battalion of reservists at the base in the event of training assemblies and to conduct exercises and routine maintenance of the equipment using their own manpower...



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The Drel Gliding Gravity Bomb with Independently Targetable Submunitions

OE Watch Commentary: The Standardized Gliding Cluster Bomb (PBK) with Self-Aiming Antitank Submunition-Combined (SPBE-K), or Drel PBK-500U, will be Russia's first guided bomb with self-targeting submunitions. The Drel is reportedly 310 cm long, has a 45 cm diameter, weighs 540 kg, and has 15 self-targeting submunitions that are designed to destroy armored vehicles, radar reconnaissance system radars, command-and-control facilities, and particularly SAM systems. The air dropped PBK-500U can glide up to 30 km from its target, well outside the range of many short-range air defense systems. The accompanying excerpted article from *Gazeta.ru* discusses the features of the PBK-500U, and specifically mentions the cost savings of using the PBK-500U versus using an expensive cruise missile.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Svobodnaya Pressa* also mentions the bomb's features and points out that the PBK-500U will by no means replace conventional gravity bombs, as they are far cheaper. Of particular interest in the article is the mention of how Russians describe the tactical, operational, and strategic depths. Based upon this information, and descriptions seen in other sources, the approximate depth values are: tactical depth (0-120 km), operational-tactical depth (120 km-500 km), operational depth (500-1,500 km), operational-strategic depth (1,500-5,500 km), and strategic depth (5,500+ km). The PBK-500U is considered to be an operational-tactical level weapon system, likely used on operational-tactical fighters such as the Su-24M and Su-34. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Why do we need air-delivered weapons such as the Drel?... it is all a matter of price. A gliding munition with guidance based on data of the global positioning system is tens or even thousands of times less expensive than an air-to-surface guided missile. It ensures high accuracy of engagement (3-5 meters) with a long flight range. But the most important thing is that the price of this air-delivered weapon permits using it en masse.”

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok, “Новое оружие России: «Дрелью» по танкам (New Russian Weapon: Drel Against Tanks),” *Gazeta.ru*, 20 February 2018. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2018/02/20/11656981.shtml>

During a scientific-technical conference held at facilities of Basalt Scientific Production Association (NPO), Vladimir Lepin, general director of the Tekhmash Concern, announced that Drel, the newest aerial bomb that became known for the first time during the Army-2016 forum, will enter the inventory in 2018.

“State tests of the new basic model of a 500-kilogram gliding cluster bomb armed with self-aiming submunitions began in 2016. The state tests are being conducted in accordance with the program of the client (Russian Defense Ministry), and after their successful conclusion in 2018 it is planned to make this article operational,” Lepin stated.

It is reported that the standardized gliding cluster bomb, PBK-500U SPBE-K (Drel) has the capability of all-weather, around-the-clock use. It is presumed that the munition will be released without the platform aircraft entering the kill zone of SAM systems and complexes. The PBK-500U SPBE-K gliding cluster bomb is designed to engage the probable enemy's armored vehicles, radar reconnaissance system radars, command-and-control facilities, and SAM complexes and systems.

After separation from the platform aircraft, Drel can fly up to 30 kilometers and deliver up to the 15 self-aiming submunitions to the target area, which will be guided to specific targets using the GLONASS global positioning system.

The newest PBK-500U SPBE-K aerial bomb weighs around 540 kilograms and the munition is three meters long. It is presumed that Drel will be released from high altitudes and from the stratosphere (in particular, the principal altitude for combat employment of the new munition is given as 14 kilometers). It is reported that the cluster bomb itself and the self-aiming submunitions have a small radar cross-section, which will reduce substantially the possibility of Drel being hit by enemy air defense missile-gun complexes and small-caliber air defense artillery.

*It is presumed that the Drel aerial bomb will enter the arsenal of all Russian aircraft. It will be possible to accommodate this air-delivered weapon in their internal bomb bays and on their underwing pylons...” The meaning of developing such munitions that glide and are guided based on data of the global positioning system is as follows,” Andrey Frolov, editor-in-chief of the Arms Export journal, explained to *Gazeta.Ru*. “It would appear that we have air-to-surface guided missiles with a substantially greater flight range and warhead yield.*

“Why do we need air-delivered weapons such as the Drel?” According to the expert, it is all a matter of price. A gliding munition with guidance based on data of the global positioning system is tens or even thousands of times less expensive than an air-to-surface guided missile. It ensures high accuracy of engagement (3-5 meters) with a long flight range. But the most important thing is that the price of this air-delivered weapon permits using it en masse. In fact it is rather stupid to try to hit a jeep costing \$15,000 and mounting a heavy-caliber machinegun with a guided missile costing \$500,000. This is absurd. And no economy will withstand the employment of missiles at that price en masse. But Frolov emphasizes that a gliding munition with GPS guidance is the ideal munition for low and even high intensity conflicts.

Therefore the Drel is an extremely promising gliding cluster bomb. And the expert believes its acceptance into the inventory will sharply increase Russian Army combat capabilities.

(continued)



Continued: The Drel Gliding Gravity Bomb with Independently Targetable Submunitions

Source: Sergey Aksenov and Viktor Murakhovskiy, “ВКС России никак не возьмут в руки «Дрель» (There Is No Way The Russian Federation Aerospace Forces Will Get Their Hands on The Drel),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 8 January 2018. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/190045/>

The Russian military will receive the newest PBK-500U Drel precision aerial bomb in the inventory in 2018. Tekhmash Concern General Director Vladimir Lepin told Interfax about this in an interview...In 2016, RF Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov promised to equip our operational-tactical aviation aircraft with Drel soon. According to him, the munition is designed to engage enemy armored vehicles, fortifications, field ammunition dumps, industrial facilities, and lines of communication...

In the opinion of Anatoliy Tsyganok, head of the Center for Military Forecasting of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis, state-of-the-art munitions of this nature will become the primary weapon for all the world's high-tech armies in 10-15 years. We are ahead for now, although not everything is going smoothly. “PBK-500U Drel is an antitank system. It is designed to engage particular armored vehicles,” military expert and MilitaryRussia website editor Dmitriy Kornev explained. “This is a rather recent decision for Russia, because up to now we have not had a single series-produced device with self-aiming submunitions in the inventory. There are of course simple cluster munitions on tactical missiles, including Iskander.”

[Svobodnaya Pressa] But in fact there is an international convention prohibiting cluster munitions?

[Kornev] Most likely the new aerial bomb is not among those prohibited by this convention, since the ban extends only to antipersonnel cluster munitions (submunitions weighing up to 20 kilograms -- Auth.). Not only do we have, but the West also has more powerful cluster bombs.

[Svobodnaya Pressa] On what kind of delivery vehicles can the new aerial bombs be mounted?

[Kornev] First of all, there is the Su-24M. Secondly, the Su-34 is an aircraft that will operate in the operational depth of the enemy defense. The Tu-22M also can employ the new bomb theoretically, but it hardly will. This is a little way from their specialization.

[Svobodnaya Pressa] How should we assess the fact that the Drel bomb can glide up to 30 kilometers? Is this a revolution or nothing special? Will the platform aircraft really remain unattainable for enemy air defense?

[Kornev] If we are talking about engaging tank formations, their own air defense has a kill radius of less than 30 kilometers against offensive air weapons. In the Russian troops these are the Osa and Tor complexes. That is, bombing is possible without entering the immediate air defense zone of a tank formation. It is understandable that if we are talking about permanent positions of armored systems prepared in advance and covered from the air, then of course there will be more serious air defense systems there. But in any case, the kill probability against the platform aircraft declines as the munition's range capability increases.

And it simply is great to employ such a munition with respect to an enemy who is on the march, because there is a much lesser radius of action for mobile air defense complexes in troop columns. The only thing is that it will be necessary to ensure the coordination of bombers as part of a reconnaissance-strike complex. This is when reconnaissance reports target coordinates in real time and incoming aviation executes a maneuver and employs munitions against a target for which there has been prestrike reconnaissance. As a matter of fact, the majority of modern operations should be carried out specifically in that way...

In the opinion of Colonel (Reserve) Viktor Murakhovskiy, editor-in-chief of the Journal Arsenal Otechestva [Homeland Arsenal], acceptance of the new aerial bomb into the inventory will not affect the strategic balance of forces in the world in any way.

[Murakhovskiy] You have to understand that in the case of a new aerial bomb we are talking about the operational-tactical and not the strategic level. These are entirely different concepts. It is like comparing apples to oranges. For example, range is the main characteristic of a strategic weapon. The Chief of General Staff recently publicly designated the range of operational-tactical arms as up to 500 kilometers. The next level is up to 1,500 kilometers. But strategic weapons have a reach from 5,500 kilometers and more. And their warhead can be both nuclear and conventional, as for cruise missiles.

[Svobodnaya Pressa] That is, it is a question of a simple improvement of operational-tactical munitions and no more than that?

[Murakhovskiy] Just so. There are two directions here. The first is an improvement in the delivery vehicle. In this case aircraft are equipped with a computer subsystem that supports employment of conventional unguided munitions with an accuracy similar to that of a precision munition. There are such systems on the Su-24M, Tu-22M3, Su-33, Su-35, and so on.

And the second direction is creation of the precision-guided munitions themselves, but you have to understand that this is expensive. A conventional 500-kilogram aerial bomb costs less than 300,000 rubles (≈ \$5211 based upon the March 2018 exchange rate.) but a smart bomb of that caliber with a laser homing head costs around 8,500,000 rubles. (≈ \$147,635 based upon the March 2018 exchange rate.) Therefore you have to have both of them in the arsenal and employ them depending on the specific mission and the enemy force.



The Kinzhal Air Launched Missile is a Modified Iskander SRBM

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses features of Russia's newly announced Kinzhal air-to-surface missile. The Kinzhal is intended to be fired from a MiG-31, as the aircraft reportedly functions as a first stage booster for the missile. The MiG-31 also launches Russian anti-satellite missiles. Russia has saved substantial costs and research and development time by basing the Kinzhal on the existing Iskander SRBM surface-to-surface missile, instead of developing a new missile from scratch. The adoption of existing technologies, and repurposing (if feasible), is standard practice in the Russian Armed Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm, “Кинжалный удар «Искандера» (The Iskander's Kinzhal Strike),” *Izvestiya*, 2 March 2018. <https://iz.ru/715127/aleksei-ramm/kinzhalnyi-udar-iskandera>

The Russian Armed Forces have received the Kinzhal aviation missile system, Vladimir Putin stated in a message to the Federal Assembly. The “heart” of the new system is a hypersonic missile capable of performing complex maneuvers. It strikes targets with high precision within a radius of more than 2,000 kilometers. On 1 December last year, the latest aviation missile systems commenced trial combat duty in the Southern Military District. According to experts, video during the President's speech showed the aviation version of the ground-based Iskander operational-tactical missile system. It is modified for high-altitude supersonic launch. Meanwhile, the Kinzhal is categorized as defensive weaponry.

“The video clearly shows a modified Iskander system series 9M723 aeroballistic missile suspended under the fuselage of a MiG-31,” Dmitriy Kornev, editor-in-chief of the Internet project Military Russia, noted. “The missile cone is streamlined with several tapers. It can also be observed that the engine compartment has a characteristic barrel shape. In contrast to the ground-based version of the Iskander, the Kinzhal missile has a remodeled tail section and smaller vanes. Also, in the tail of the missile there is a special cap. Apparently, it protects the engine nozzle when flying at supersonic speed. The cap separates after the missile launch from onboard the MiG-31.”...

“Accelerated to supersonic speed, the MiG-31 acts as a ‘first stage’ which increases by several times the flight range and speed of the 9M723. After launch, due to the increase in altitude and dive, the missile gains hypersonic speed as well as the necessary energy for maneuvering,” Dmitriy Kornev noted. “Although the 9M723 is considered to be aeroballistic, its trajectory in the terminal phase is quite complex. Due to the energy obtained, the rocket can perform complex maneuvers.”

According to the expert, this product has special units to overcome antimissile defenses — decoy targets and jamming generators. The 9M723 can be equipped with optical or radar homing heads. The first detects the target, combining what the camera sees with a picture stored in its memory. It is best suited for striking stationary objects. The second looks for targets in reflected radar signals. It serves to destroy mobile targets, in particular ships.

“The 9M723 is a fully developed and tested system. It has a homing head, a system to overcome antimissile defenses, and maneuvering capability,” military historian Dmitriy Boltenkov noted. “It would take at least 7-10 years to create an aviation missile with similar capabilities from scratch. A further two-three years would have been spent on testing. In the case of the Kinzhal, the developers and military managed with just eight years. It is also quite understandable why the MiG-31 was chosen as the carrier. The Mig-31 has a high load capacity and powerful engines. It is the only one capable of accelerating to supersonic speed and also launching the five-ton 9M723 missile.

“The video clearly shows a modified Iskander system series 9M723 aeroballistic missile suspended under the fuselage of a MiG-31.”



MiG-31.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin Blog, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/790th-Fighter-Regiment/i-wSTNGqR/A>, CC 4.0.



Stock up on Baking Soda Before the Acid Fog Descends

OE Watch Commentary: Two of Russia's most polluted centers are in the Arctic. One is in the city of Norilsk, east of the Yenisei River, and the other is Monchegorsk on the Kola Peninsula, 145 kilometers south of Murmansk. Both are major producers of nickel, cobalt and copper. Heavy metals and sulfides pollute the air, forests and waterways at both locations. Wages are high and their products are an important part of the Russian economy. Additionally, the Russians have long maintained a military airbase at Monchegorsk. The government has made progress in cleaning up the environs, but anytime authorities advise wiping down one's floors with baking soda, it makes the ecological cleanup look at bit tardy.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“The authorities in Monchegorsk, in the northwestern Arctic Russian region of Murmansk, have warned residents to stay at home after the town was engulfed in a dense fog of hydrogen sulfide, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported on its website on 9 March.”

Source: “Arctic Russian Town in Lockdown Over ‘Toxic’ Fog,” Caversham, *BBC Monitoring*, 9 March 2018.

The newspaper said the local administration had not officially said where the toxic fumes were coming from, but it recalled that sulfates are being processed in Monchegorsk by the Severonickel Kola Mining-Metallurgical Company, which is part of Nornickel - Russia's leading metals and mining enterprise. According to Novaya Gazeta, the town has been covered in hydrogen sulfide since 5 March.

The paper quoted the mayor's office as “saying diplomatically” that the maximum permissible concentration of the substance in the air had been exceeded “more than a factor of two”. Nornickel has also announced that it is stopping production “until weather conditions improve”. The fog is so thick that it is causing traffic accidents, according to the newspaper.

This is not the first time that Monchegorsk has been covered in a yellow mist... The incidents have always been associated with emissions from the Nornickel plant during windless weather...

Murmansk Governor Marina Kovtun has tweeted that the authorities are dealing with the situation. But Novaya Gazeta quoted residents as saying they are angry that the regional administration is not doing enough. The Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) said on its website on 8 March that the maximum permissible concentration of hydrogen sulfide has not been exceeded in Monchegorsk. However, it advised residents to wipe their floors with baking soda, tightly close doors and windows, refrain from going outside and drink plenty of liquids.



Monchegorsk-railway and factories.

Source: By kallerna (Own work), https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/Monchegorsk-railway_and_factories.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Russian Arctic Oil Vital to Russian Economy

OE Watch Commentary: Arctic oil and gas extraction is paying off for Gazprom and Gazprom's majority stock holder, the Russian government, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The Independent Barents Sea Observer* reports. The Gazprom CEO, Alexey Miller, reported the good news directly to President Putin. In a time of Western economic sanctions, this can only be good news from the Russian perspective. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“As Gazprom, celebrates its 25-year anniversary, it can also record a historical high in natural gas exports. In a meeting with President Putin last week, company CEO Aleksey Miller confirmed that exports in 2017 amounted to 194.4 billion cubic meters, the company's biggest annual volume ever. According to Miller, the 2017 result is 90 percent higher than the result in 1993, the year when Gazprom was privatised. The biggest part of the export growth - as much as 30 percent – was during the last three years.”

Source: “Gazprom's Export from Arctic Goes Record High,” *The Independent Barents Sea Observer*, February 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2018/02/gazproms-exports-arctic-goes-record-high>

Russian natural gas now accounts for as much as 34.7% of the European market, its biggest share ever. And volumes are likely to continue to grow... With new export pipelines North Stream-2 and the TurkStream, more natural gas can be sold to European consumers. The Arctic constitutes an increasingly important priority for Gazprom. In 2017, the company's flagship project in the region, the Bovanenkovo field in the Yamal Peninsula, produced as much as 82.8 billion cubic meters of gas. And more is to come. By year 2020, the company intends to produce an annual of 115 billion cubic meters from the field.

According to Aleksey Miller, the ... Yamal Center is becoming its most important priority.... Huge additional reserves have been added to its resource portfolio. Further, the regional Tambey fields hold an estimated 7.7 trillion cubic meters...

Gazprom previously estimated its potential natural gas exports from Yamal to up to 360 billion cubic meters. In 2017, the company's total production amounted to 471 billion cubic meters. Gazprom was originally established in 1989. It originated from the Soviet Ministry of Gas Industry, and became the Soviet Union's first state run corporate enterprise. On 17 February 1993, Gazprom became a joint stock company. It is majority owned by the Russian government.



Gazprom Headquarters in Moscow (2010).

Source: By Ghirla (Own work), <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ab/Gazprom.JPG>, [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>)], via Wikimedia Commons.



The New Chinese Silk Road May Run Through the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The extension of the Finnish railroad system into Norway to the town and port of Kirkenes, as the accompanying excerpted article from China's *Xinhua* reports, would provide a trade route for Chinese goods to the Baltic Sea and into Central and Eastern Europe. This would allow the Chinese to use the Northeast Passage running north of the Russian coast and save 40 percent of the current travel distance and 20 percent of energy costs. It would also bypass the major ports of Marseilles, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg and create a new trade hub in the Baltic Sea and, ultimately, it would promote China's major interest and influence in the Arctic region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Envisioning a new port on the Barents Sea coast and a railway that goes all the way southward to the Baltic Sea, Norway’s Arctic town of Kirkenes sets its sight on a major European hub on a Polar Silk Road with a link to China. Finland and Norway announced on ... 9 March their plans to explore building an Arctic railway between Finland’s northern city of Rovaniemi and Norway’s ice-free port of Kirkenes. This agreement came after Norway announced plans to develop a new harbor and terminal areas near Kirkenes, a town in the Sor-Varanger municipality in Norway’s northeastern county of Finnmark.”

Source: Liang Youchang and Zhang Shuhui, “Norway’s Arctic town envisions Gateway on the Polar Silk Road with link To China,” *Xinhua*, 10 March 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/10/c_137029993.htm

Rune Rafaelsen, mayor of the Sor-Varanger municipality, told Xinhua that “This project with a railway connected to the Belt and Road Initiative through the Northern Sea Route and the Arctic strategy of China fits very well into all the plan for the huge ‘Barents Harbor’. Regarding future logistic transport in the Arctic, you are dependent on having a good railroad that could reach Europe fast and Kirkenes is the first (Western) port when you come from China.”

According to a study by the Finnish and Norwegian governments, the 520-km railway between Rovaniemi and Kirkenes would cost about 2.9 billion euros (3.6 billion U.S. dollars) and open in 2030. It will form part of the proposed Arctic Corridor, which envisions that cargo from Asia would be offloaded in Kirkenes and sent southward by railway to Finland, the Baltic states and the rest of Europe. Local planners in Kirkenes have been lobbying for the Norwegian town of Barents, 15 kilometers west of the border with Russia, as the perfect site for a major hub linking the Arctic shipping route and the Arctic Corridor.

“The vision for the Arctic Railway is to be able to offer an environment-friendly and faster transport alternative for goods between Northeast Asia and Northern Europe via Finland by utilization of the Northern Sea Route and development of Kirkenes as a hub port,” according to a Norwegian report published in January. The report titled ‘An Arctic Railway Vision’ was the result of work between the development company Sor-Varanger Utvikling, the Kirkenes Business Park and the Finnmark County Council. The voyage could be reduced by 40 percent using the Northern Sea Route, also known as the Northeast Passage, when compared to the current route through the Suez Canal between Northern Europe and Northeast Asia.... It would result in a 20 percent reduction in fuel consumption....



Kirkenes Harbour, 2010.

Source: By Mathis Heibert, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Kirkenes_Harbour.jpg, CC BY 2.0.



Interview with Russian Navy Commander Admiral Korolev

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's recent military developments have included significant efforts to improve the Russian Navy, so far with mixed results. In February 2018 a journalist from Russia's major military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), interviewed the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Korolev, who provided a glowing report on the navy's status and plans for the year ahead.

In the interview, Admiral Korolev pointed out how the Russian Navy gained "practical experience" in Syria, firing 100 cruise missiles on ISIS forces and destroying "more than 1,250 targets of illegal armed force elements" from operations in the Mediterranean. The Admiral also mentioned the Gulf of Aden and the African Horn as areas of recent naval success, where Russia worked to decrease terrorism and increase safety. He went on to comment on Russian advances in the Arctic, securing the region for the country's economic development.

When asked about the strong history of the Russian Navy and its relevance to present operations, Admiral Korolev, who has served in his current position for two years, discussed the annual navy leadership operations conference. This year's conference will include, in part, a scientific-historical conference to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Russia's nuclear submarine fleet. Rather than focusing on current operations, "(at) the operational conference...we also will remember the centennial of the day the RKKA [Workers' and Peasants' Red Army] and the RKKF [Workers' and Peasants' Red Navy] were established" by the Soviet government.

The Admiral paints a radiant picture of the Russian Navy's continued development. As he explains, the increased financial and innovative focus recently placed on the navy are proved by the fact that "in just the last five years the figure for time spent underway in Navy combined formations doubled and the average time of missions performed by crews of submarines and ships at sea grew almost by a third. In short, the condition of the Navy always is checked fundamentally by its actions at sea." Admiral Korolev cites the last five to six years as a time of immense naval improvement, including in naval aviation, submarine development, equipping 96 percent of coastal defense troops with cutting edge missiles, personnel training, rescue equipment, and other developments. Coincidentally, these years of development were overseen by Russian President Vladimir Putin and *Krasnaya Zvezda* published the interview a month before the 18 March election, which Putin won by a considerable margin. **End OE Watch Commentary (Johnson)**

Source: Andrey Gavrilenko, "Военно-морской флот – на стремнине развития (The Navy Is on the Swift Current of Development)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 15 February 2018. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/36166-voenno-morskoj-flot-na-stremnine-razvitiya>

[KZ] Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the Navy has entered a new training year, which for the navy men will be another stage of development and improvement of combat proficiency. What kind of "deck" is beneath your subordinates' feet now and on what does the traditional confidence of sailors in the successful performance of all missions assigned to them rest today?

[Korolev] You mentioned our naval confidence correctly. The Navy began 2018 with significant achievements behind it in all directions and components which feed this confidence, and I would even say this conviction. Our Navy gained inestimable practical experience of combat operations against terrorist groupings on Syrian Arab Republic territory, having brought down 100 cruise missiles on the head of the IGIL, and having carried out more than 400 combat sorties with the destruction of more than 1,250 targets of illegal armed force elements during the carrier group's operations in the Mediterranean. Today this is a Navy which succeeded in operating effectively to lower the threat of maritime piracy in the vicinity of the Gulf of Aden and African Horn and which continues to be present in these areas regularly for guaranteed safety of world shipping. Well, and of course this is a Navy that is successfully developing the Arctic and which has been and remains a guarantor of security of Russia's maritime economic activity in the ocean....

[KZ] It is common knowledge that navy men are capable of performing missions of any difficulty, relying among other things on their own unique historical traditions. What kind of pages of the combat annals will be of help for sailors in 2018?

[Korolev] The Navy leadership operations conference held annually in the N.G. Kuznetsov Naval Academy is in part devoted to these pages... A scientific-historical conference devoted to the 60th anniversary of Russia's nuclear submarine fleet, which we will celebrate this year, will be held as part of this conference. At the operational conference we also will remember the centennial of the day the RKKA [Workers' and Peasants' Red Army] and RKKF [Workers' and Peasants' Red Navy] were established.

[KZ] How is the Navy's oceangoing status confirmed today?

[Korolev] I would say there no longer is a need to confirm the oceangoing status of the Russian Navy. Even stubborn skeptics realize and know that the zone of operations of our Navy's forces has not been enclosed for a long time just by the boundaries of inland seas.... The last five-year plan in which the foundation for Navy development in all directions was laid down speaks best and most graphically of all about the results of this work. In just the last five years, 64 combatant ships and craft, including 3 strategic missile submarine cruisers, 7 multirole submarines, 14 surface combatants, and 39 small combatants were built for the Navy....

...It was thanks to the attentive attitude toward Navy problems on the part of the Supreme Commander, defense minister, and the not indifferent heads of Russian Federation components and cities that we are worthily overcoming all difficulties in short time periods. There are many proofs. I will cite one of the most indicative ones. In just the last five years the figure for time spent underway in Navy combined formations doubled and the average time of missions performed by crews of submarines and ships at sea grew almost by a third. In short, the condition of the Navy always is checked fundamentally by its actions at sea....

[KZ] The Navy includes coastal defense troops. How do things stand with reequipping the Navy's coastal component?

[Korolev] In the last few years the reequipping of the Navy coastal defense troops with Bal and Bastion missile complexes allowed us to take the level of outfitting with state-of-the-art equipment to 96 percent....