

Foreign Military Studies Office

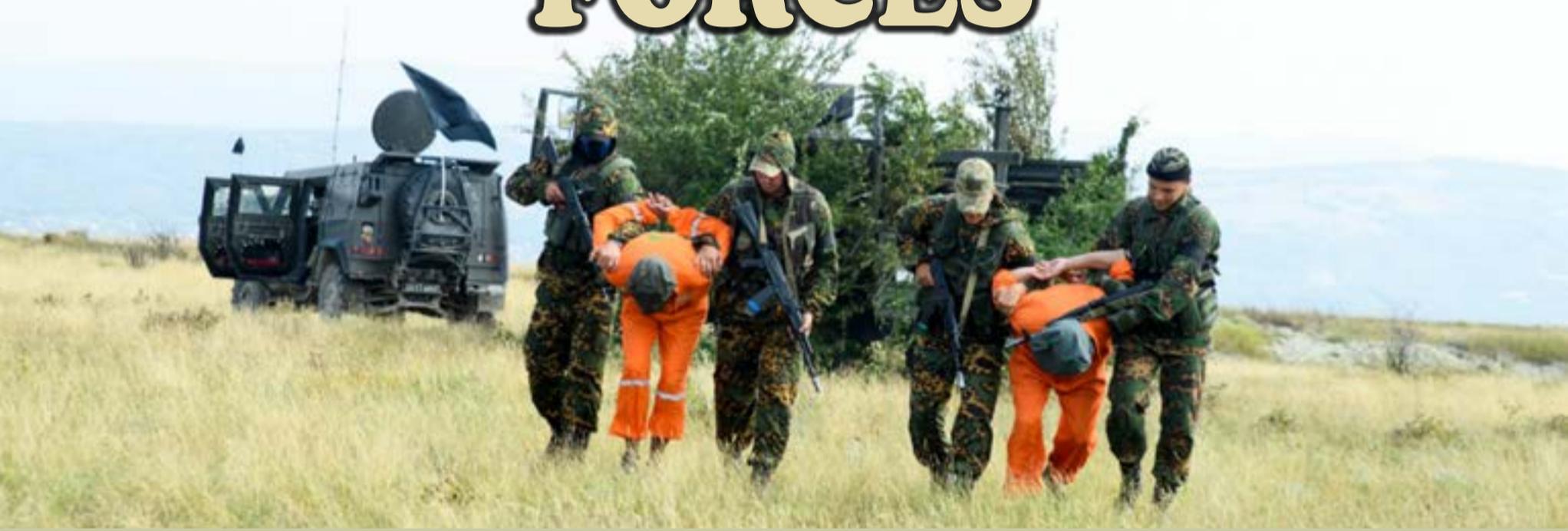


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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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ON THE COVER:

Belarusian special units eliminate mock terrorists' base during 2nd stage of Slavic Botherhood 2018 tactical drills (Rayevsky training ground, Krasnodarsky Krai).

Image Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=58405@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

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The Russian Perspective of “Friction” and “Wear” in Hybrid War

OE Watch Commentary: In their writings about hybrid war, the Russians never claim to be practitioners, only the victims of it. Instead, they describe their actions as “counter-hybrid” operations. In the article “‘Friction’ and ‘Wear’ of Hybrid Wars” by A. A. Bartosh, published in Russia’s military theory journal *Военная Мысль* (Military Thought), there are some insights into the Russian view of hybrid war and also an opportunity to view the doctrinal practice of Russian military science.

In his article, it is noteworthy that Bartosh defers to the definition of hybrid warfare attributed to the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies: “the use of military and non-military means in an integrated campaign aimed at creating a surprise effect, capturing initiative, and gaining psychological advantages to be used for diplomatic purposes; large scale and rapid informational, electronic, and cyber operations; covert and clandestine military and intelligence activities combined with economic pressure.” While accepting this definition, Bartosh also warns that this descriptor cannot be used officially, as it requires more scientific proof.

Bartosh breaks down the “friction” of hybrid war into five “peculiarities” that he claims augment Clausewitz’s “seven sources of general friction” in warfare. The first is that hybrid warfare “makes the adversary deal with several phases all at once.” The second is the difference in the military and political command structures with regard to how they would handle “the subject and objects of hybrid war” (This is key phraseology used in Russian military science to focus deliberate attention to emerging doctrinal concepts). The third is that an “altered balance of military and non-military means of warfare...creates a new form of transnational conflict.” Terrorism gets its own special category due to its complexity and unpredictability. Given that Russian military science strives to build thought structures to make things quantitatively predictable, terrorism is a kind of antithesis to such structure and a special kind of friction. The fifth characteristic is migration. Given Russia’s economic and demographic challenges, the issue of non-Russians migrating into the state, according to Bartosh, is of special strategic concern. The author is sweeping (and resonant in Russia) in his description of migrants as “poorly educated young men...under the influence of pseudo religious sects and criminal gangs,” who have combat experience, inferring that they are pre-disposed to being an armed threat to the state.

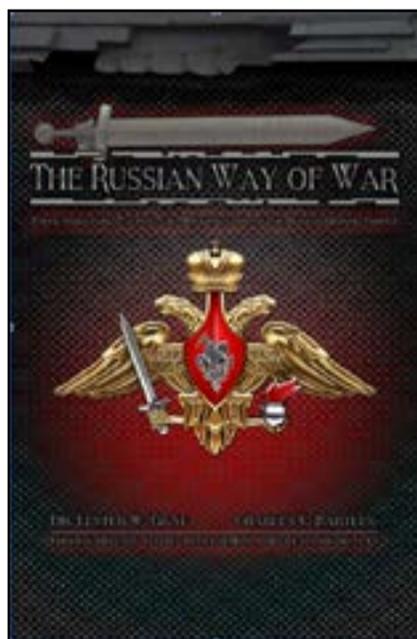
There are three factors of “wear” that Bartosh describes. The first is “technical” wear of things like weapons. The second is mental fatigue of combatants and civilians in war zones. The third is economic wear or a loss of resources through lost opportunity costs applied elsewhere in society. As presented, all these factors are described in a way for other Russian analysts to quantify in the Russian correlation of forces discipline and develop in a systems engineering approach.

The practice of Russian military science is structured and deliberate. So, this article suggests that the Russians have not yet fully settled on the needed unifying concept of hybrid war in their own military science practice. In this light, their practice of it can be thought of as concept experimentation: gradually becoming more developed, more structured, more deliberate. The chief inhibitor to an immediate resolution of this concept in Russian military minds is the “unpredictability stemming from unsustainable states and non-government agents...that require solutions beyond international norms and rules.” As Bartosh warns: “The state is losing monopoly over use of force.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm and Vainer)**

“The state is losing monopoly over use of force.”

Source: “Трение и Износ гибридной войны (Friction and Wear of Hybrid Wars),” *Военная Мысль* (Military Thought), No. 1 2018, pp. 5-12.

“The Russian model of countering hybrid warfare should be constructed taking into account the nonlinear forms and methods of the attacking forces and should reflect the following key objectives of national defense. One, ability to quickly and definitively respond.... two is to enable the country to promptly concentrate....efforts and resources...three is conduct continuous intelligence and [interagency coordination] and minimize friction and wear factors on the implementation of the chosen strategy...four is educating, training, and selecting high-quality personnel....”



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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Russian Combined Arms Armies Are Implementing Automated C2 System

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has long been interested in developing an Automated Command and Control System (ASU) and has fielded several such tactical systems. Automated command and control is a particularly good option for Russian commanders in tactical situations due to the somewhat ‘commander-centric’ Russian military decision making process, that functions not by the commander’s staff developing courses of action, but by the commander himself simply choosing the course of action early in the decision making process, and then making adjustments as necessary. ASUs facilitate this process by reducing the Russian decision making cycle, so that the Russian observe, orient, decide, and act (OODA) loop would be faster than potential adversaries, such as the US. According to Russian military expert Viktor Murakhovskiy, well implemented ASUs can reduce the decision making cycle by up to 2.5 times. ACUs are seen as essential elements of reconnaissance-strike loops, as they facilitate rapid reconnaissance, planning, and most importantly, action.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses the capabilities of the *Akatsiya-M* ASU, a new system that will be fielded in Russia’s operational-level Ground Forces’ commands (12 Combined Arms Armies and 4 Army Corps). The system will not only provide C2 and situational awareness for the operational commander regarding his own directly subordinate units, but will also allow for liaising with, or command and control of, attached subordinate units of the Navy, Aerospace Forces, and Airborne Troops. In addition, the *Akatsiya-M* will be integrated with the Russian National Defense Control Center. Although not mentioned in the article, the fielding of the *Akatsiya-M* is likely closely tied to a variety of new communications systems (satellite, tropospheric/HF, fiber optic) that have been or are being fielded in the Combined Arms Armies or Army Corps, as the *Akatsiya-M* likely requires a resilient communications backbone to operate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Commanders will receive data on the combat situation and be able to give orders in real time. The Ministry of Defense is implementing the Akatsiya-M automated command and control system, which will be in each combined-arms army by the end of 2019.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Aleksandr Kruglov, “Минобороны развернет «Акацию» за 21 млрд: Общеармейские армии перейдут под автоматизированное управление в режиме реального времени (The Defense Ministry Will Deploy Akatsiya for 21 Billion: Combined-Arms Armies Will Transfer to Automated Command and Control in Real Time),” *Izvestiya*, 5 July 2018. <https://iz.ru/761052/aleksei-ramm-aleksandr-kruglov/minoborony-razvernet-akatciuu-za-21-mlrd>

Commanders will receive data on the combat situation and be able to give orders in real time. The Ministry of Defense is implementing the Akatsiya-M automated command and control system, which will be in each combined-arms army by the end of 2019. The Defense Ministry has already allocated more than 21 billion rubles for their purchase. The system provides the army commander and his staff with online information about the combat situation, including the status of our own troops and actions by the enemy. Based on these data, the commander will be able to give orders directly via Akatsiya to subordinate troops. According to experts, the new system will significantly outpace an enemy in decision-making and implementation on the battlefield.

Izvestiya was told by the Ministry of Defense that the Akatsiya-M technically consists of staff cars with special equipment based on KamAZ all-terrain four-axle trucks. This provides the system with high mobility. It can be deployed in minutes in any direction. Manufacture of the Akatsiya-M will begin this year and will go on until 2019. The Akatsiya-M will be in each combined-arms army and army corps. In total, more than 21 billion rubles have already been allocated for the creation of the system...The Akatsiya system was already deployed in the field in 2011. It supports the daily life of the military in peacetime. For example, through this system, the rear services keep records of stocks and the issuance of food, fuel and lubricants, and clothing.

But the Akatsiya-M is a combat system. It is designed for combat, peacekeeping and special operations. The automated command and control system uses closed radio and satellite communication channels to create a single information field that ensures continuous exchange of information between command posts and headquarters. The automated command and control system also has integrated reconnaissance devices, including satellites and UAVs.

The Akatsiya-M continuously receives and analyzes data on the ongoing situation in real time: information on enemy actions and the aerial, ground, interference, radiation, chemical, and bacteriological environment. Also, data is disseminated on the combat readiness of our own troops’ equipment, the availability of ammunition, fuel and lubricants, and even information about the moral and psychological state of personnel...The processed data is displayed in real time on an electronic chart. In that way, the commander can assess the situation in real time and make a decision in a few minutes. If there is a need, the commander can even give orders to a detachment of soldiers.

The Akatsiya-M interacts with automated command and control systems of other military arms and branches. Thanks to this, the commander and army headquarters will be able to easily manage groups of troops which include Navy units and formations, Aerospace Forces, and Airborne Troops. The Akatsiya-M also exchanges information with the National Defense Control Center in real time...



Syria and the Russian General Staff Academy

OE Watch Commentary: While many in the West regard the Syrian conflict as an ongoing nightmare, Russians tend to hold a more sanguine view. The Russian media has portrayed the past three years of their military involvement as a success. Their reports stress that besides helping to defeat terrorists, Russian military personnel have helped the Assad government regain control over 60 percent of Syrian territory. Russian military losses have been minor and their involvement has allowed them to both test various weapon systems and gain valuable combat experience. Most importantly, the military's accomplishments in Syria have helped to raise Russia's status within the region and globally.

In the accompanying brief excerpt from the country's primary military news source, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the deputy head of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Military Academy, Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim, discusses how the Syrian operation has affected both the class composition and the curriculum. He points out that "more than half of the students who enrolled this year gained combat experience in Syria," and that "many officers and generals of the academy successfully performed assignments in Syria as military advisers." General Kim asserts that academy personnel were not merely observing operations in Syria, but "made a unique contribution to the creation and organization of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria." He stresses that "learning without practice is dead," explaining that their experience in helping "to eliminate international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic," has been incorporated into the "latest approaches to teaching and research."

Not surprisingly, General Kim never once uses the term "Ukraine" in the interview, only obliquely commenting that the Academy uses "the experience of the performance of assignments in 'special regions.'" Such an indirect reference may be code language for the Russian military's ongoing involvement in Ukraine. Regardless, while the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine appear far from over, the Russians believe their armed forces have performed well and are incorporating the lessons-learned into current curriculum. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim (left) with cadets during Open Door ceremony at the General Staff Academy.
Source: http://mil.ru/conference_of_pro/news/more.htm?id=12111781@egNews CC BY 4.0.

Source: Dmitriy Semenov, "В приоритете – сирийский опыт (Priority Given to Syrian Experience)," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 6 July 2018. <http://redstar.ru/v-prioritete-sirijskij-opyt/>

Interview with Professor Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim, candidate of military sciences and deputy head of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Military Academy.

...Despite its impressive age and distinguished status, this higher educational institution is not resting on its laurels. The latest approaches to teaching and research are being actively implemented here; for instance, broad use is being made of the experience of the performance of assignments in "special regions" -- above all as part of the effort to eliminate international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The academy has now completed work to select students in 2018.... Our current students are commanders of formations, their deputies, and also representatives of military management organs at various levels, specialists from military higher educational institutions and scientific research organizations. More than half of the students who enrolled this year gained combat experience in Syria, and many have been awarded major state honors. All in all, it's a strong cohort.

...Many officers and generals of the academy successfully performed assignments in Syria as military advisers, worked on research and other tasks. Our academy made a unique contribution to the creation and organization of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria. Assignments as part of this structure were performed by department heads and their deputies, and by a number of teachers. The Center conducted several significant humanitarian operations, in particular it secured the withdrawal of militants from areas of Aleppo, Homs, Eastern Ghouta, and others. Similar work continues to this day.

Certainly, the experience of the Syrian events is currently being used everywhere, not only in our academy. As for representatives of the General Staff Military Academy who have returned from the Middle East, they are actively passing on their experience to students and using it in research work.... The experience acquired by our teachers while performing assignments as part of the Reconciliation Center for Syria is fully included in the teaching process and transposed into educational activity. It is well known that learning without practice is dead, so the fact that representatives of the General Staff Military Academy obtain practical skills at the frontline is invaluable in every respect.



New Russian Armor Tactics from the Syrian Experience

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles from *Sputnik* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* discuss new armor tactics that have been developed or refined due to Russia's experience in the Syrian campaign. The new tactics include such interesting names as the "Tank Carousel" (rotating tanks through firing positions so continuous fire is maintained for an extended duration) and "Tank Trousers" (rapidly alternating fire between two trenches). In addition to new tactics, Russian technological advancements are allowing old tactics to be refined. For instance, Russian tankers have long practiced using tanks to deliver indirect fire (like a howitzer or a mortar), but new sensors for environmental conditions and new ballistics computers (such as the Sosna-U) reportedly now allow indirect fire to be delivered at a range of up to 8 kilometers, with shells hitting within 15-20 meters of their target. As can be seen in both articles, these tactics, developed and honed in Syria, are now being brought home and implemented throughout the rest of the force. Although these articles only discuss how Russian armor tactics are being developed, it is almost certain that many other new tactics and procedures are also being adopted throughout the Russian Armed Forces based upon the Syrian campaign. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Syrian combat experience is being introduced through training, exercises and hands-on sessions during tactical and fire events.”

Source: “‘Armored Carousels’ & ‘Tank Trousers’: Look Inside Russia’s Modern Tank Tactics,” *Sputnik*, 4 July 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/military/201807041066049372-russian-armor-tactics/>

In an era of localized conflicts without clear front lines, jihad-mobiles equipped with anti-tank guns and IEDs, the idea of large tank armies facing off along vast fronts has become a thing of the past...

“This maneuver is called the ‘tank carousel’, “ tank company commander Captain Roman Schegolev told the journalist amid the tanks’ movements. “It allows us to fire over an unlimited time period. There can be three, six, nine or more machines. They move uninterrupted in a circular motion, one pummeling the enemy, the other moving to the rear and reloading, the third preparing to enter firing position, and so on. Non-stop shooting; just make sure to feed the shells,” the officer explained...

“The carousel could be compared to the rotating drum of a revolver,” Stanavov explained. “Only instead of cartridges there are tanks, and instead of bullets – powerful 125-mm shells. The scheme is used when it is unknown what kind of armament the enemy has at his disposal – tanks, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) or grenade launchers.”...“Imagine tanks shooting for ten, twenty, thirty minutes at a time without a break,” the officer said. “On the other side they will break down and open return fire, revealing their armament. Then our disguised sniper tanks with specially trained crews step into action. They quickly and efficiently strike the identified targets.”..

Localized conflicts, including the war in Syria, demonstrate that the classical tank warfare idea of positional defense and offensives are irrelevant in conditions of irregular warfare, Stanavov noted. “In Syria, militants don’t bother with planning strategic offensives and drawing arrows on operational maps, but rather adhere to the mobile tactics of guerrilla warfare – guessing the strength of government positions, rushing in on high-speed jihad-mobiles, making precise strikes and quickly disappearing.”...In Syria, the journalist explained, the tank carousel has been a particularly effective tactic during the Syrian Army’s operations in the country’s geographic conditions of earthen and sand parapets. Here, tanks can move along the parapet and, when they reach an opening, shoot, quickly concealing themselves back behind the embankment. So long as they remain in constant motion, it becomes almost impossible to aim at or hit them. Furthermore, to deceive the enemy, the commander can choose which opening to fire from at random, giving the impression there are more tanks deployed than in reality. Openings can be created using engineering equipment, and if necessary, by the crew itself...

Another tactic explained by Schegolev is the idea of ‘tank trousers’, which involves tanks alternating fire between two trenches, without staying in one position for more than a few seconds. The tank enters the trench, fires, kicks into reverse and moves to the next. Enemy anti-tank weapons don’t have time to react...Along with the carousel, tanks can operate in pairs, crosswise, or according to seemingly completely random patterns. “These operations are rather complicated, and require a high level of crew training, Senior Lieutenant Vladislav Seliverstov said. “We are constantly training, with at least two shooting drills and one driving one each week.”...

In addition to move and shoot maneuvers, the 20th Guards Combined Arms Army trains to hone their skills in firing from a closed firing position – a tactic invented during the Great Patriotic War. “With the advent of new long-range tank guns and stable in-flight ammunition, this tactic has acquired particular urgency,” Stanavov explained. It allows for plunging fire by tanks, effectively turning them into a sort of howitzer.

“Our shells are very stable in flight, so this technique allows us to inflict maximum damage on the enemy at a very long range,” Senior Lieutenant Seliverstov explained. “The enemy does not actually see the tanks, which means he cannot suppress them with traditional means – recoilless guns, ATGMS and grenade launchers. Only long-range artillery and aviation, which need time to deploy, will do any good. But time is not something the enemy will get; the tanks come in, shoot and leave.”

Russian tankmen have honed the skill of their plunging fire considerably; at a distance of 8 kilometers, high explosive shells hit within 15-20 meters of their target. Accuracy is further improved by modern equipment present on the T-72B3s, including the Sosna-U sight, digital ballistics computer, sensors for wind and temperature conditions and an automatic target tracking system which takes account of the movement of the target and the tank itself. At night, guidance devices operate using the main sight’s thermal imaging system.

(continued)



Continued: New Russian Armor Tactics from the Syrian Experience

Source: Yuriy Belousov, “Готовы к будущим учебным сражениям: Войска Центрального военного округа нацелены на дальнейшее усиление своего боевого потенциала (Ready for Future Mock Engagements: Troops of the Central Military District Are Eyeing the Continued Reinforcement of Their Potential),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30 May 2018. <http://redstar.ru/gotovy-k-budushhim-uchebnym-srazheniyam/>

At the end of the winter period of instruction Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Lapin, commander of the Central Military District, observed: “The current environment is forcing us to focus our main efforts on raising and maintaining the troops’ permanent readiness and the reliability of the command and control of units and subunits, perfecting their composition and structure, and on re-equipment with modern specimens of arms and military equipment.”...

Even under the increased workloads specialists of the Central MD continue to aggressively master the new modes of the conduct of combat operations with regard to the Syrian experience. Led by the advocates of the process – the servicemen of the Central MD who in the period of the fight against international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic acquired, without exaggeration, invaluable combat experience. Today the experience they have gained is with their participation in the subunits being passed on to the personnel. Originating with them, more than a dozen procedural recommendations and aids have been introduced in the plan-based instructional process.

The Syrian combat experience is being introduced through training, exercises and hands-on sessions during tactical and fire events. A demonstration training session with ranking personnel of the Central MD, at which the topic “Creation of a Reconnaissance-Strike (Fire) Loop in a Combined Unit, Formation, and Subunit. Procedure of its Employment” was examined and ways of combating “jihad-mobiles” were shown in practice, was conducted in December 2017 at the Chebarkul’ range under the direction of the commander of the military district. A series of demonstration force-on-force battalion tactical exercises, at which combat against unmanned aerial vehicles of the adversary and the employment of attached tank elements in the role of mobile artillery were demonstrated and episodes of the employment of reconnaissance-fire loops and “tank carousels” were rehearsed, was held at formation and subunit level.

As an example, in respect to the latter, a session at the Totskiy range, where during a battalion tactical exercise the officer commanding the tank battalion made the decision to take out the adversary with the mastered “tank carousel” method, merits attention. Specifically, in the course of the simulated combat company commanding officers were able with a barrage of fire from the weaponry of two tank pairs a whole series of exposed targets. How? Based on the Syrian method, when tanks leaving for the rear to restore the spent ammo load, are immediately replaced by the next pair of combat vehicles, maintaining the intensity of fire effect on the adversary...



“Results of Operation in Syria.”

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.mil.ru/images/upload/2017/SAVX2207.jpg>, CC 4.0.



Slavic Brotherhood 2018: Applying the Syrian and Donbas Experience to the Balkans?

by Sergey Sukhankin

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OE Watch Commentary: During June 18–28, Russia’s southern city of Novorossiysk (Krasnodar Krai) hosted the trilateral joint tactical military exercise Slavic Brotherhood 2018, at the Raevsky training center. These drills were the largest international maneuvers of the Russian Airborne Troops so far this year, involving 700 soldiers from the Russian side as well as 250 members of the Belarusian special operations forces and 50 Serbian special forces personnel. The exercises were designed to rehearse joint actions of a combined task force carrying out peace-making and counter-terrorism operations.

The legend of the exercise envisaged a group of terrorists simultaneously attacking a city and a column of coalition forces. The joint tactical groups, comprised of Russian, Belarusian and Serbian forces, were to eliminate the adversaries. Interestingly, these drills for the first time trained the “principle of sledge and hammer”: Russian forces were supposed to block the adversary forces and deny them freedom of movement within the theater, with Belarusian (and apparently Serbian forces) delivering the final blow.

The exercises featured 10 aircraft (from the Southern Military District) and 150 pieces of hardware and military equipment. Some of this hardware was used for the first time within the scope of a military exercise, including BMD-4M airborne combat vehicles, BTR-MDM Rakushka armored personnel carriers, Rys armored automobiles and T-72B tanks. The Slavic Brotherhood 2018 exercise once again demonstrated Moscow’s special emphasis on developing and deploying Electronic Warfare capabilities. For example, aside from the multifunctional Infauna intelligence complex (which facilitates communications counter-measures and jams the receivers of enemy radio-controlled explosive devices), an Aistyonok counter-battery radar system was used in these drills.

The Aistyonok can reportedly detect the position of fire weapons, calculate the trajectory of incoming shells, as well as control unmanned aerial vehicles. This equipment was used along with Orlan-10 UAVs (previously tested by Russia in both Syria and Ukraine) to collect information about the simulated enemy’s whereabouts. Additionally, within the scope of these drills, Serbian special forces utilized the Russian future infantry combat system Ratnik, comprised of modernized body armor, a helmet with a special eye monitor, advanced communication systems, and special headphones. Currently, Russia is conducting work on the Ratnik-3.

Slavic Brotherhood 2018 takes on a much broader military-strategic significance when looked at against the background of Russia’s involvement in various foreign conflicts in its larger neighborhood, especially Syria. In recent years, many of Russia’s top military strategists have increasingly called for the Russian Armed Forces to capitalize on their “Syrian experience” in order to better prepare for future conflicts and improve their methods of training. Indeed, the necessity to use Syrian lessons in future training and the implementation of the state armament program was repeatedly highlighted by Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu as well as President Vladimir Putin.

Aside from the Syrian war, one should keep in mind Russia’s experience gained in various regional conflicts across Europe’s East and the former Soviet space. Of particular note has been the role of Russia’s Airborne Troops (which were also involved in Slavic Brotherhood 2018) in various localized wars in Transnistria, the South Caucasus and, especially, the Balkans. The, so-called “Pristina march” by the Airborne Troops in June 1999, is still widely viewed in Moscow as proof of Russian high morale and military superiority in comparison with the West.

These ideas were recently emphasized by prominent Russian military expert Lieutenant General Yuri Netkachev, who presumed that the tactics being tested during Slavic Brotherhood 2018 could well be used “in the Donbas region and in the Balkans, namely in Kosovo, which must be seen as an integral part of Serbia.” The general, however, underscored that “this will happen later. For now, the situation remains under NATO’s. Given the training range landscape, composition of forces involved, and the operational art being practiced last month, Slavic Brotherhood 2018 should be seen as more applicable to potential operations in the Balkans, and to a lesser extent with Syria and Donbas. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**

“...Communication with the Serbs was carried out through an interpreter...’ said the commander of the coalition tactical group, Andrey Kondrashkin.”

Source: Kseniya Nikolayeva, “Пулеметные очереди и рев вертолетов: в Новороссийске завершились учения «Славянское братство» (Machine gun rounds and the roar of the helicopters: the exercise ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ finishes up in Novorossiysk),” *TV Zvezda*, 28 June 2018. https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201806280912-amro.htm

...In the international exercise, “Slavic Brotherhood,” the principal of “the hammer and the anvil” was worked out for the first time. Russian forces clamped the enemy in a vice and the Belarusian airborne forces carried out suppressing fire.

“Our exercise is not called “Slavic Brotherhood” in vain – we all understood perfectly well. Yesterday, action was coordinated in preparation for hostile actions. Communication with the Serbs was carried out through an interpreter...” said the commander of the coalition tactical group, Andrey Kondrashkin...



CIS Members Reject Russian Request for Assistance in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: In June 2017 the Russian government made a request to members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to provide a unit for a Russia-led mission in Syria, emphasizing peacekeeping. The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, both CSTO members and close partners of Russia, had been specifically mentioned in the request and each declined to provide peacekeepers unless they would be part of an official UN peacekeeping mission. The accompanying excerpted article from Azerbaijan reports on another request from the Russian government, this time for members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to get involved in reconstruction efforts in Syria. The article provides insight into how much cooperation members of organizations led by Russia are willing to provide.

The article comes from the online version of *Baki Xabar*, an Azerbaijani-language newspaper with ties to the government, and it reports on the request made by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at a recent meeting of the CIS Council of Defense Ministers. At the meeting, Shoigu again appealed to CIS members, this time to become involved in the reconstruction process, including “the demining of areas, joint patrols in de-escalation zones, the provision of humanitarian assistance, and the restoration of infrastructure.” While Shoigu avoided calling it a peacekeeping mission, most of the tasks he mentions came up at the time of the CSTO request last year. The CSTO grew out of the framework of the CIS, but the latter organization’s Council of Defense Ministers includes all CSTO members (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) plus Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

The article marks the only official public response to the request from a CIS member and while the response came from a deputy in Azerbaijan’s National Assembly, and not from the president or defense ministry, it is still notable considering the newspaper’s ties with the government. The response from the deputy mentions a couple of reasons why Azerbaijan rejected involvement in Syria. The deputy’s statement that “Azerbaijan should promote its own position rather than that of the CIS or any other party” and that officials there believe they “have not so far felt any serious support from the CIS on a number of global problems that we have faced” could have come from other CIS members, based on their past experiences with the organization and security issues.

The deputy notes that the government of Azerbaijan recognizes authorities in Syria and wants “a quicker end to the civil war,” but that it is opposed to “Syria’s position because it has supported the separatist regimes rebelling on Georgia’s sovereign territory.” The Syrian government officially recognized the independence of Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in May 2018. The deputy also mentions how the Azerbaijani government supports “Georgia’s position on this matter” and that “Azerbaijan itself as a country has been suffering from separatism.” The other CIS members have also stated they want an end to the war in Syria and though they do not have as good of relations with Georgia as Azerbaijan does, none have recognized the independence of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Ultimately, while the other governments of CIS member states remained silent in response to the request, the response from Azerbaijan is an example of what one CIS member is willing to do with the organization. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Mahammadali Garibli, “Rusiyanın MDB ölkələrinə “Suriyanın bərpasına qatılın” çağırışı – məsələnin Azərbaycan üçün maraqlı nüansları... (Russia’s call to CIS Countries ‘To Join the Reconstruction of Syria’: the nuances of the issues for Azerbaijan),” *Baki Xabar*, 7 June 2018. <http://www.baki-xeber.com/siyaset/78538.html>

...Army General Sergey Shoigu, the Russian Defense Minister, has called on CIS member states to participate in the restoration of peaceful life in Syria. The Russian minister made this statement at the CIS Council of Defense Ministers’ meeting held in the town of Kyzyl, Republic of Tuva. “Today a large part of Syrian territory has been liberated from terrorists... All conditions have been created to settle the conflict by political means, and to revive Syria as a unified and indivisible state.” – said Shoigu...

In this vein, the Russian Defense Minister proposed that CIS member states participate in the reconstruction of Syria... “There is a wide spectrum of opportunities for our collaboration with regard to Syria. This includes the demining of areas, joint patrols in de-escalation zones, the provision of humanitarian assistance, and the restoration of infrastructure. We hope for your support to demonstrate our unity in the fight against international terrorism and in the provision of general security...”

...Azerbaijan is also a member of the CIS. However, we, as a country have not so far felt any serious support from the CIS on a number of global problems that we have faced. Besides, Syria has recognized the “independence” of Georgia’s separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia... Georgia is Azerbaijan’s close neighbor and strategic partner. If we take into account all these factors, how should Azerbaijan respond to Russia’s proposal on Syria?

...Aydin Mirzazade, a National Assembly deputy, said in an interview with our newspaper that Azerbaijan is taking a balanced approach to these kinds of matters... “I think Azerbaijan can participate in these kinds of projects based only on bilateral agreements... Azerbaijan should promote its own position rather than that of the CIS or any other party... Azerbaijan does not intend to intervene in any other matters related to the civil war. Our country’s position on Syria is clear. We recognize the official authorities there, and wish for a quicker end to the civil war. As far as Georgia is concerned, we cannot share Syria’s position because it has supported the separatist regimes rebelling on Georgia’s sovereign territory. Since Azerbaijan itself as a country has been suffering from separatism, we support Georgia’s position on this matter.” (said Mirzazade)

“Azerbaijan should promote its own position rather than that of the CIS or any other party.”



International Political Pressure Mounts against Russian Troop Presence in Moldova

OE Watch Commentary: The past two months have seen an increase in international pressure for Russia to withdraw its troops from Moldova. On 22 June, the UN General Assembly adopted its first-ever, non-binding resolution for Russia to immediately remove its military personnel and armaments from Moldova’s breakaway, pro-Russian Transnistria region. The topic is now scheduled in the Assembly’s agenda for further debate. On 11 July, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly passed a declaration reaffirming the need for Russia to withdraw its troops from Moldova, and recommended a transformation of the country’s Russia-dominated peacekeeping operation to a civil mission under an international mandate. That same day, at its summit in Brussels, NATO called on Russia to withdraw its forces stationed in countries without their consent, including those in Moldova.

Transnistria, a mostly Russian-speaking region, broke away from Moldova in 1992 largely out of fear that Moldova would re-unite with Romania. Local elements of Russia’s 14th Army, remaining in Transnistria since the fall of Soviet Union, defensively fought against Moldovan troops, ultimately to the advantage of the separatists. Russia then negotiated a ceasefire to a war that ended with 1,000 casualties, 51,000 internally displaced persons, and at least 80,000 refugees. Since then, Transnistria has acted as a de-facto separate state supported by Russia, which, in addition to roughly 400 peacekeepers, continues to station approximately 1,200 troops there despite its commitment to remove them in the 1999 Istanbul Summit. Russia and its Transnistrian supporters claim that Russian troops stopped further bloodshed over the breakaway territory and are currently the guarantor of peace and stability there. The current Moldovan government argues that Russia encouraged, rather than prevented, the fighting in the 1992 conflict and that they threaten the country’s stability.

The accompanying excerpted articles from sources in the region reflect two prevailing perspectives. One is a largely pro-European integrationist view that supports minimizing Russia’s influence in Moldova. The other view claims Russia’s presence and engagement in Moldova makes sense from a security, economic and historical standpoint. The excerpt from Moldova’s pro-Russian *Moldavskiye Vedomosti* argues that the recent calls for Russia’s troop withdrawal are simply distractors intended to divert attention away from the Moldovan government’s plan to sabotage Transnistria’s settlement process. The excerpt from Moldova’s pro-European *IPN* news agency emphasizes that the UN, OSCE, and NATO declarations are valuable even if Russia does not withdraw its troops in the near-term, because they build a stronger, legal case that the Moldovan government can increasingly exploit. The excerpt from Russia’s *TASS* news agency quotes Moldova’s pro-Russian President Dodon, who believes that the demands for the Russian troop withdrawal are nothing more than political posturing ahead of Moldova’s next parliamentary elections. The elections will be held by the end of November 2018 and are expected to be highly contested between supporters of the current government and those who back President Dodon’s pro-Russian vision for Moldova’s future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kuruz)**

“Even if the resolutions do not have an immediate action, they represent a legal instrument.”



Russian Peace Keepers at border crossing between Transnistria and Moldova. Source: By Clay Gilliland [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Peace_Keepers_at_border_crossing_between_Transnistria_and_Moldova_\(16348984171\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Peace_Keepers_at_border_crossing_between_Transnistria_and_Moldova_(16348984171).jpg).

Source: “МИД ПМР назвал ‘негативным сигналом’ революции НАТО и ОБСЕ (MFA PMR Called ‘Negative Signal’ of NATO and OSCE Resolution),” *Moldavskiye Vedomosti*, 13 July 2018. <http://www.vedomosti.md/news/mid-pmr-nazval-negativnym-signalom-rezolyucii-nato-i-obse>

...The initiative of the Republic of Moldova to add a paragraph on the so-called “transformation” of the peacekeeping operation . . . reveals the real goals of Chisinau, which is trying to mask the policy of scrapping the peacekeeping mechanism with public rhetoric about the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Source: “Rezolutia ONU va fi un Instrument Juridic Pentru Moldova, MAEIE (UN Resolution will be a Legal Instrument for Moldova),” *IPN*, 11 July 2018. <http://www.ipn.md/ro/dosar-transnistrian/92298>

The objective was not only to bring the subject on the international agenda, but to . . . specify that the military troops stay in the Republic of Moldova against its will and this is a violation of the international law. . . Even if the resolutions do not have an immediate action, they represent a legal instrument.

Source: “Moldova’s President Criticizes UN Resolution on Russian Troops’ Pullout from Transnistria,” *TASS Russian News Agency*, 15 July 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1013208>

The resolution on withdrawal of the Russian military mission from Transnistria, which had been drafted by Moldova’s pro-European government and was later passed by the UN General Assembly, is counterproductive . . . I noticed their absolutely politicized nature . . . and are nothing but an intra-political fight and positioning in the context of the coming parliamentary election in Moldova.



China Praises Cooperation with Belarus and Its Special Forces

OE Watch Commentary: On 6 July the Chinese-language website *sohu.com* published the accompanying excerpted article on a special unit of honor guards of the Chinese Army that visited Belarus. They were sent there to participate in the Belarus National Day celebration. The article notes that Belarusian soldiers similarly have been sent to China in recent years to participate in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) military exercises. The article emphasizes that part of the importance of these exchanges is that they are a form of solidarity between Belarus and China, which are both subject to various forms of pressures or sanctions from Western countries.

The article also praises Belarusian special forces, noting that they stand on par with Russian special forces. It also praises Belarusian military management concepts and tactical ideas. This is why the article says that even though the West refers to Belarus as a dictatorship, no country dares to attack it. Lastly, the article suggests that it is a strategic interest for China to expand the relationship because Belarus represents the westernmost European country that cooperates militarily with China.

Belarus, according to this article's perspective, is aligned with China because they have common strategic competitors. While China's military is certainly larger than Belarus' military, the article also states that in certain areas the Chinese military still can learn from Belarus, such as special forces and management. The SCO is certainly one forum where this knowledge and learning transfer may take place. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Some experts say that China and Belarus can strengthen the deep military cooperation between the two countries.”

Source: “时隔3年！我军一支特殊部队再次出征欧洲，专家：此举意义非凡 (After 3 years! A special unit of our army again went to Europe, Experts: the significance of this move is extraordinary),” *sohu.com*, 6 July 2018. http://www.sohu.com/a/239591247_619988

The Chinese armed forces' honor guards were invited to participate in the Belarusian National Day military parade. This is the 70th anniversary of Belarusia's commemoration of the Great Patriotic War. The important purpose is to strengthen military cooperation with the country. However, military cooperation between China and Belarus has been very frequent. Belarus has repeatedly sent military representatives to observe the many military exercises of the SCO.

China and Belarus have long been subject to Western blockades and sanctions. Since independence in 1991, [Belarus] has trained elite soldiers. The total strength of the Belarusian army is 80,000, of which the Air Force and the Army Special Forces are the sharpest swords. Some experts say that China and Belarus can strengthen the deep military cooperation between the two countries. Participating in military exercises can allow China to learn from Belarus' advanced military management concepts and tactical ideas, and can also expand China into Eastern Europe through military cooperation.



Chinese military honor guard.

Source: Linda D. Kozaryn, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_military_honor_guard.jpg, CC-BY-2.0.



Chechnya's Special Forces University to Offer Mountain Tourism

OE Watch Commentary: Twenty years ago, devastated by a brutal war and subsequent lawlessness, the region of Chechnya was largely considered a violent wasteland. Over the subsequent two decades, Russian authorities implemented a successful counter-insurgency strategy, which (though costly in terms of resources and political control) has brought stability and a measure of prosperity to this once war-torn region. To illustrate just how far Chechnya has progressed, the brief accompanying excerpt from the official Russian news source TASS, announced that a new “Russian Special Forces University in Gudermes plans to host the first tourists in August 2018.”

As reported in a previous *OE Watch* entry (“New Special Forces Training Center in Chechnya,” May 2017) the official mandate of this new training center is not altogether clear. While initially described as providing special forces training to those wearing Russian uniforms, the latest report suggests that individual, private “tourists” will also be able to enroll. As described in the excerpt, a portion of the Russian Special Forces University will be used as an incubator for tourism, charged with developing “mountain tourism in the region.”

Besides attracting visitors for mountain adventures, the new Special Forces University offers an impressive array of training programs for military personnel: “weapons training and practical shooting, tactical special training, airborne and flight training, diving training and diving, security and bodyguard training, mountain training and mountaineering, tactical medicine and first aid, training of military journalists, official dog breeding, information and technical training and physical training.” Alongside their promotional photos, the university’s website (see: <https://ruspetsnaz.ru/about/>) includes basic information and planned future activities. Chechnya has indeed come a long way over the past two decades. From a lawless and heavily damaged region, the opening of this unique university suggests that Chechnya could soon become a destination for both tourists and military professionals. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The Russian Special Forces University in Gudermes plans to host the first tourists in August 2018...”



Logo for the Russian Special Forces University in Chechnya. Source: <https://ruspetsnaz.ru>. CCA BY 3.0.

Source: “Российский университет спецназа в Чечне примет первых туристов в августе 2018 года (Russian Special Forces University in Chechnya will host the first tourists in August 2018),” TASS, 25 May 2018. <http://tass.ru/pmef-2018/articles/5235399>

The Russian Special Forces University in Gudermes plans to host the first tourists in August 2018 - after the initial stage of the construction of the center was completed, the chairman of the government’s tourism committee, Muslim Baytaziev, told TASS...

“Part of the infrastructure of the Russian Special Forces University will be put into operation in August of this year, thus it will be marked that the center is ready to receive tourists. In addition to a wide range of services on the basis of the center, the university develops the directions for the development of mountain tourism in the region, they conducted expeditions to study mountain peaks and trails for building tourist routes...” Baytaziev said, adding that the full launch of the facility is planned for 2019.

The Russian Special Forces University (RUS) is built on the territory of more than 450 hectares in the city of Gudermes and is a multifunctional complex of 95 buildings and structures equipped with the latest specialized information and technical solutions. RUS will cover such areas as fire training and practical shooting, tactical special training, airborne and flight training, diving training and diving, security and bodyguard training, mountain training and mountaineering, tactical medicine and first aid, training of military journalists, automatic training, official dog breeding, information and technical training and physical training. Almost all these areas of the center will be accessible to tourists and residents of Chechnya....

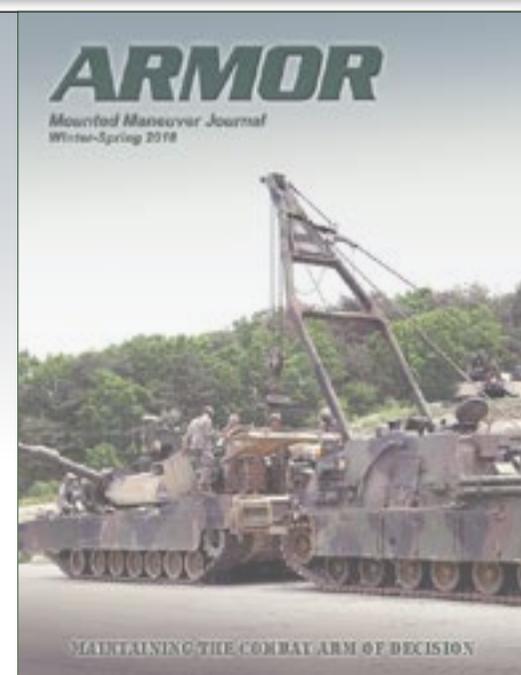
Reconnaissance-in-Force Russian Style

By Lester W. Grau

“Integrated fires, rapid detect-destroy systems and the controlled, merciless onslaught of smaller robot tanks and assault vehicles may rip through robust defenses to determine the true nature of the defense and prepare the main attack to totally dismantle it. To the Russian way of thinking, the reconnaissance-in-force remains a viable method of tactical intelligence. Learning how to employ it optimally is the current challenge.”

This paper was originally published in *Armor* journal’s Winter-Spring 2018 edition.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/230764>





Another Russian Base in Kyrgyzstan?

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past few years there have been discussions in Kyrgyzstan of the Russian government establishing another military base in the country. While these discussions have not resulted in any action being taken, the accompanying excerpted article reports how it is closer to becoming a reality. The article comes from the online version of *Vecherniy Bishkek*, a Russian-language newspaper supportive of the government, and it reports on a recent inter-parliamentary meeting between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Russia over the establishment of another Russian military facility in Kyrgyzstan.

The Russian representative at the meeting, a deputy of the State Duma Defense Committee, stated, “Russia is interested in expanding the airbase in Kant and the inclusion of the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan.” Many of the previous discussions on the establishment of another

Russian base in Kyrgyzstan mentioned placing it in a southern province, most likely in Osh or Batken. This meeting brought up the expansion of the Kant airbase and utilizing it to provide operational coverage for the southern provinces, not necessarily establishing a new facility in the south. In addition, the article notes how both governments are considering another base as a response to what they see as regional threats. While here has been nothing mentioned about what additional aircraft or other units the Russian government would deploy to Kyrgyzstan, it could be a significant increase in the overall Russian presence if these discussions are any indication.

Lastly, the article brings up how the Kant airbase is not the only Russian military facility in Kyrgyzstan. Outside of Kant, other facilities include “the naval base at Issyk-Kul, the seismological station in the town of Mailuu-Suu and the communications relay in the village of Chaldovar.” While only a small number of Russian personnel are reported to be at each of these other facilities, the article mentions how “in exchange of rent for the land occupied by these bases, Russia provides weapons and equipment.” Regardless, if the Russian government adds another base or strengthens its military presence at Kant, the security assistance it provides to the Kyrgyz government will be worth watching for a likely increase. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“...the following Russian military bases are located in the republic: the Kant airbase, the naval base at Issyk-Kul, the seismological station in the town of Mailuu-Suu and the communications relay in the village of Chaldovar.”

Source: Marina Osipova, “Российское военное присутствие в Кыргызстане должно усилиться? (Should the Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan be strengthened?),” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 9 July 2018. https://www.vb.kg/doc/371995_rossiyskoe_voennoe_prisytstvie_v_kyrgyzstane_doljno_ysilitsia.html

The issues of strengthening Kyrgyz-Russian military cooperation, including the prospect of establishing another Russian military base in the south of Kyrgyzstan, have been actively discussed for more than a year since the then president, Almazbek Atambayev, mentioned the idea after a visit to Moscow...in the framework of the inter-parliamentary meeting of the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic and the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Victor Zavarzin, deputy chair of the State Duma Defense Committee, stated that Russia is interested in expanding the airbase in Kant and the inclusion of the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan...

“(The base in Kant) exists for ensuring security in the region. Within the CSTO framework and bilateral Kyrgyz-Russian cooperation, it fulfills strategic goals. We want to strengthen and expand the components of this base that will cover the south,” said the deputy...

The situation is such that Russia cannot put forth an initiative of the expansion of the military contingent of an independent state – it must come from the authorities of the republic...said political analyst Kubatbek Asanov...There are two perspectives on the role of Russia ensuring security in Central Asia. According to the first, Russia exaggerates the danger of ISIS to the region in order to keep it under control. I support the second perspective, according to which Moscow warns about the real threat and the need to fight it jointly. In my opinion, the problem is even more serious than the Russian authorities warn, said independent expert Taalatbek Masadykov...According to Alikbek Jekshenkulov, former Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, the opening of a Russian military base in the south of Kyrgyzstan will be one of the key components of the countermeasures of the growing threats...

As of today, the main document regulating Kyrgyz-Russian military cooperation is the agreement on the status of Russian military bases in Kyrgyzstan from September 20, 2012. From it, the following Russian military bases are located in the republic: the Kant airbase, the naval base at Issyk-Kul, the seismological station in the town of Mailuu-Suu and the communications relay in the village of Chaldovar. In exchange of rent for the land occupied by these bases, Russia provides weapons and equipment...



Russian President Vladimir Putin and former Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev at the inauguration of the Russian airbase near the city of Kant, Kyrgyzstan (2003).

Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/29600>, CC 4.0.



Putting Science Companies to Work

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to develop and expand the “science company program” for college graduates who need to complete their mandatory, one-year term of military service. As the accompanying excerpt from the popular daily, *MK Online*, points out, under this program, select university graduates complete their “compulsory service” by contributing “important research and scientific and technical developments.” In this case, select graduates of the “Severodvinsk Shipbuilding and Machine-Building Technical College” have been “mobilized to build nuclear submarines.” The MoD maintains that these young scientists will contribute to both the military’s research and development, and that upon completion, a portion of these students will put their talents to use within military industry, either as military officers or full-time defense employees. The excerpt describes some of the specific jobs assigned to these new recruits: “turner, ship’s fitter, assembler of hulls of metal vessels, and milling machine operator,” claiming that such labor “will make it possible to preserve work skills.” While these soldiers may spend a portion of their time with research and development, the excerpt states that “the main aim is to provide defense industry complex enterprises with young workers and specialists to fulfill the state defense order.”

The second excerpt, from the main government source, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, describes additional details about these new science companies. A large contingent (160 recruits) will be “assigned for service to Anapa, where the building of the Era military innovation technopolis is being completed...” The new center is scheduled to begin “operations on 1 September and [will] have in its structure four new science companies.” Another contingent of “20 smart boys from Tula, with engineer diplomas included... will be based and perform military training three days a week in the local 106th Airborne Division. The rest of the time they will work at Tula defense enterprises, including those manufacturing the modern Pantsir-S missile/gun systems and Grad, Uragan, and Smerch multiple-launch rocket systems.” The article concludes with some overall statistics about this program, noting that since its inception in 2013, “approximately 2,000 persons have performed this service.” Of these, about 20 percent have elected to remain on active duty as officers, while about the same amount “are now working in defense industry as civilian specialists.”

The Russian leadership continues to experiment with programs which allow bright young men to fulfill their military obligation while actually contributing to the country’s defense needs. Not too long ago, Russian recruits were sometimes forced to help build dachas for senior officers; today they are helping to construct submarines and other advanced weapon systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Sergey Valchenko, “Минобороны сформировало научно-производственную роту судостроителей (Defense Ministry Forms Science and Production Company of Shipbuilders),” *MK Online*, 3 July 2018. <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2018/07/03/minoborony-sformirovalo-nauchnoproizvodstvennyu-rotu-sudostroiteley.html>

Arkhangel’skaya Oblast Military Commissariat has formed the first science and production company from new recruits of the spring draft. They will perform compulsory service in Sevmash shops. The press service of the shipbuilding enterprise told MK that the new recruits will be mobilized to build nuclear submarines....

...In the course of their compulsory service gifted young men replenish military science with important research and scientific and technical developments. The science and production companies have a different task – to ensure that young people who have come to work in the most important defense enterprises do not leave them for a year for the sake of compulsory military service.

The Educational Center for Training Junior Specialists of the Navy’s Joint Training Center has assisted Sevmash in organizing the science and production company. Fifty new recruits who have had secondary vocational education will do their compulsory service here. This is the main requirement for candidates for service in the “production” subunit. All 50 draftees completed Severodvinsk Shipbuilding and Machine-Building Technical College. In addition, they received good vocational training and production experience in Sevmash shops during their studies....

Service in such a company requires such work specialties as turner, ship’s fitter, assembler of hulls of metal vessels, and milling machine operator. Service in a science and production company will make it possible to preserve work skills.... The main aim is to provide defense industry complex enterprises with young workers and specialists to fulfill the state defense order.

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, “Хоть ученый, но все же солдат. В Российской армии создали еще четыре научные роты (Perhaps a Scientist, but Still a Soldier. Four More Science Companies Have Been Formed in the Russian Army),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 5 July 2018. <https://rg.ru/2018/07/05/v-armii-sozdali-eshche-chetyre-nauchnye-rotы.html>

More than 400 soldier volunteers, who had earlier been selected for science companies, have left for military service from the induction stations of 48 components of the Russian Federation....

Some 160 of the recruits of specialized subunits have been assigned for service to Anapa, where the building of the Era military innovation technopolis is being completed at this time. Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu says that it is to begin full-fledged operations on 1 September and have in its structure four new science companies....

...20 smart boys from Tula, with engineer diplomas included, have acquired a unique opportunity to perform their constitutional duty without time off from work, so to speak. They will be based and perform military training three days a week in the local 106th Airborne Division. The rest of the time they will work at Tula defense enterprises, including those manufacturing the modern Pantsir-S missile/gun systems and Grad, Uragan, and Smerch multiple-launch rocket systems....

To speak as a whole, though, as of 2013, when the first science company appeared in the Russian army, approximately 2,000 persons have performed this service. One out of every five has preferred, following conscript service, to remain on parade, but with officer status now. Roughly the same number of former scientist soldiers are now working in defense industry as civilian specialists.

(continued)



Continued: Putting Science Companies to Work

“The main aim is to provide defense industry complex enterprises with young workers and specialists to fulfill the state defense order.”



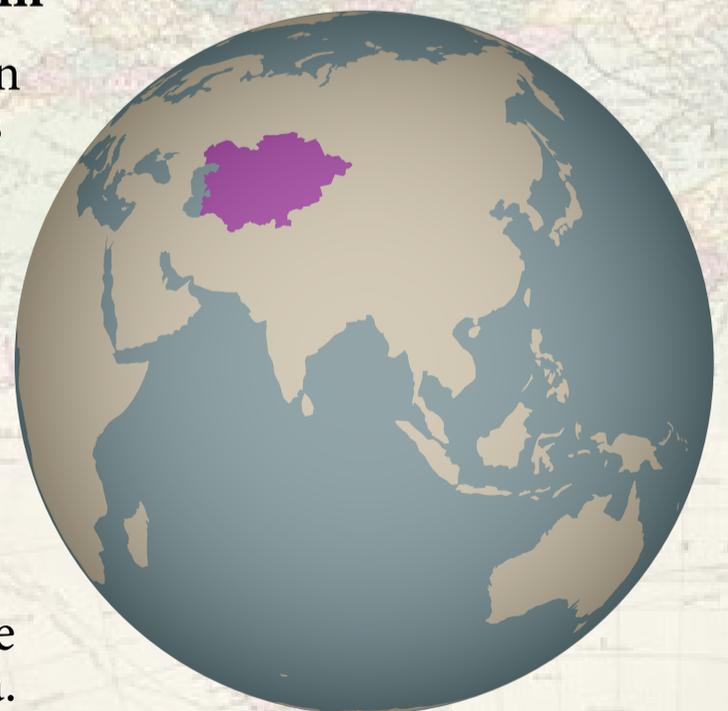
President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu being briefed on the Technopolis Era project, February 2018.

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

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>



Russia is Shortening Officer Training and Adjusting Conscription Standards

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the 22 June 2018 edition of *Izvestiya* discusses a new Russian initiative to decrease the length of training programs for most new Ground Forces' lieutenants from approximately five to four years. As stated, the number of academic hours spent studying military and civilian courses will not be affected, instead training time at the academies will be cut from lengthy practical application training that embeds cadets in units.

In conjunction, the accompanying excerpted article from the 9 June 2018 edition of *Izvestiya* discusses a major change to the way conscripts are assessed for military service. In the past, Russian youth were categorized medically as 'fit for service', 'unfit for service', or 'fit for service with limitations'. These youth were then assessed into the military, deemed unfit, or placed into an inactive reserve, respectively. According to new legislation, youth assessed into the third category (fit for service with limitations) are now being given an opportunity to voluntarily have their medical statuses reassessed for military service. Apparently, this category can also bar youth from enrolling in military academies and hinder the ability to find work in the state security services. This tweaking of medical assessments and shortening of officer training are likely intended to slightly increase the available manpower pool. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov and Bogdan Stepovoy, "Лейтенантские погоны положат под новогоднюю елку: Военные училища подготовят в три раза больше офицеров-танкистов и пехотинцев (Lieutenants' Epaulets to Be Left Under the New Year's Tree: Military Colleges to Train Three Times More Tank Officers and Infantrymen)," *Izvestiya*, 22 June 2018. <https://iz.ru/757228/aleksandr-kruglov-bogdan-stepovoi/leitenantskie-pogony-polozhat-pod-novogodniuiu-elku>

The Ministry of Defense is introducing a new timetable for training lieutenants. Higher military educational establishments plan to have two graduating classes of students in 2018. The first graduating class received its lieutenant's epaulets in March, the second will receive them in December. In 2019 students will graduate not in summer, as usual, but in October. The new timetable for sending lieutenants to the troops reflects the transition by higher military educational establishments from a five-year to a four-year training program and a shortage of officers in the troops. This year approximately 2,000 lieutenants will be sent to the troops -- three times more than a year ago. Experts believe that the accelerated pace of graduation will have no impact on the quality of officer training...

The four-year program experiment for the training of lieutenants was concluded in 2018. It was deemed to be a success, consequently, all combined-arms commanders will train for a year less. In military colleges with complex technical specializations the training period will remain as before -- five years...

Students who have to leave educational establishments during the transitional period will have received a full-fledged education. Specialized accelerated learning methods have been developed for them by the Ministry of Defense. There will be no reduction in the number of academic hours allocated to the main subjects. But in the last few months before graduation students will have to apply themselves to their studies. The academic timetable will become even busier because of the increased number of classes.

*Currently colleges training lieutenants for the Ground Troops are recruiting students to be trained under the new program. The Moscow Higher Combined-Arms Command School told *Izvestiya* that the 2018 intake would receive their lieutenants' epaulets in four years' time. The Kazan' Red Banner Higher Tank Command School confirmed to *Izvestiya* that this year's intake of students will also be training for four years. The training period will be reduced to four years at the Novosibirsk and Far East Higher Combined Arms Command Schools. These higher educational establishments train all lieutenants for the Ground Troops' motorized and tank formations...*

In the Soviet Union, there was a four-year system of higher vocational military education. The time allocated for this training was sufficient for colleges to produce skilled officers. The Ground Troops' higher educational establishments switched to a five-year training system in 1995. Early graduations of lieutenants were held for the last time in 1999 and 2000. Back then the Army needed officers to carry out counterterrorist operations in Chechnya...

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov and Bogdan Stepovoy, "«Дембель» наступит быстрее: Минобороны меняет правила призыва на срочную службу (Discharges Will Arrive Sooner: The Defense Ministry Is Changing Conscription Rules)," *Izvestiya*, 9 June 2018. <https://iz.ru/753553/aleksandr-kruglov-bogdan-stepovoi/dembel-nastupit-bystrye>

The Defense Ministry is preparing to change the conscription rules. As early as this fall, the young people who have been declared fit for conscription with limitations will be able to voluntarily undergo a second examination by a medical commission. This is particularly important for the citizens who want to make a career in the security agencies, as well as for those applying for admission to the military higher education institutions. The rules for calculating the duration of service in the Armed Forces will also be clarified...

*Approximately 30 percent of conscripts are granted exemption from military service annually due to the state of health, Sergey Krivenko told *Izvestiya*. The option of a second examination is particularly important for those applying to the military higher education institutions. They are often disqualified by the medical commissions established by the enlistment offices. Also, a significant number of young people want to serve in the Army, so that they can subsequently join the civilian public service, the police, or other security agencies. This is especially common in the regions. In these cases too, the possibility of having a diagnosis reevaluated will be useful...*

The amendments make it possible for any conscript aged between 18 and 27 to undergo a second examination by a medical commission. The draft government decree includes a detailed description of the relevant procedure. A young man will need to submit an application to the enlistment office. The chief enlistment officer will then direct him for a second examination in a municipal or a state medical institution. A detailed examination can be conducted as an outpatient or an inpatient procedure...



Assessing Russia's Ten-Year Military Spending Plan

OE Watch Commentary: A key component of the current Kremlin ideology posits that Russia's sovereignty relies upon strong and combat-ready military forces. Even though this military focus might entail belt-tightening in other budget areas (e.g. pensions, healthcare, education, etc.), providing for a robust defense remains a top priority. Kremlin pundits frequently repeat Napoleon's admonition that "Народ, который не хочет кормить свою армию, будет кормить чужую," (The people who don't want to feed their army, will end up feeding another). These sentiments are expressed in the accompanying excerpted article from the popular Russian daily, *MK Online*, where the well-regarded military analyst, Ruslan Pukhov, Director of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, is interviewed regarding the new State Armaments Program (GPV) for 2018-2027.

“Russia's primary threats and the main national missions, which face the country, lie on the continent. Therefore, we also need to make the emphasis on the priority development of the Ground Troops and VDV.”

In the interview, Pukhov insists that Russia “is one of a few countries in the world that are really and not formally sovereign states,” suggesting that countries which rely upon others for their defense are not truly independent. He points out that the new State Armaments Program (GPV), which budgets 19 trillion rubles (\$316 billion) toward defense, is actually less than the previous ten-year program when “taking inflation into account.” He goes on to suggest that military expenditures is money well spent, asserting that “approximately half of the military budget goes to [domestic] purchases,” and that therefore, these budget funds are “returned to the economy and stimulates its innovative development.”

According to Pukhov, in the previous GPV, there was an “excessive bias toward expenditures for the Navy,” where they directed funds toward “the construction of the most expensive large surface combatants.” Pukhov applauds the more balanced apportionment of funds among the military branches in the new GPV, claiming that “the main national missions, which face the country, lie on the continent,” and that therefore, the country's leadership ought “to make the emphasis on the priority development of the Ground Troops and VDV.” Specifically, he recommends greater spending on “command and control, reconnaissance and communications systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and new armored platforms.”

Using rhetoric that is normally confined to more extremist sources, Pukhov posits that this focus on rearming “the ground troops and airborne troops” will help to “resolve the issue with the Kyiv Junta or the Baltic Nazis, if necessary...” The article concludes with Pukhov listing many of the new weapon systems which Russia hopes to add to its arsenal over the next 5-10 years, asserting that by 2028, the “Russian Armed Forces will have a totally new appearance in a technical regard and will obtain significantly higher combat capabilities.” Despite economic challenges, military modernization remains a top priority for the Kremlin. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Tor-M2DT short-range anti-aircraft missile system displayed at 2018 Victory Day parade, Moscow.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2018_Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade_54.jpg CCA BY 4.0.

(continued)



Continued: Assessing Russia's Ten-Year Military Spending Plan

Source: Olga Bozhyeva, “Эксперт рассказал, какой будет Российская армия через десять лет (The Expert Said What the Russian Army Will be Like in 10 Years),” *MK Online*, 1 July 2018. www.mk.ru/politics/2018/07/01/ekspert-rasskazal-kakoy-budet-rossiyskaya-armiya-cherez-desyat-let.html

The new State Armaments Program (GPV) for 2018-2027 has been approved. R19 trillion will be sent for the purchase of weapons and their modernization and another R1 trillion for the construction of new infrastructure. Isn't that a lot? Some people advise, for example, to build not tanks but roads. What in general are the new GPV's priorities? Will the country be able to fulfill it? Will it not be bankrupt? Moskovskiy Komsomolets asked Ruslan Pukhov, a member of the Public Council under the RF Ministry of Defense and the Director of the Center for the Analysis of Strategic and Technologies (TsAST), to respond to these and other questions.

[Bozhyeva] So, the main question – is about money. Enormous resources for defense – R20 trillion. Is there no way without this?

[Pukhov] The assessment of whether Russia is spending a lot or a little on defense – is a question of world view. Our country – is one of a few countries in the world that are really and not formally sovereign states. But you need to pay for sovereignty and sovereignty is expensive. The readiness to pay for sovereignty – this is not a question of the presence or absence of the needed resources, but the question of an ideological choice. There are very poor countries, for example, Cuba and the DPRK, among the sovereign countries. But there are very rich states – for example, Germany or Japan - among the states, which don't possess sovereignty....

...What is more, the expenditures for the purchase of weapons are de facto being reduced.... But, while taking inflation into account, the real amount of expenditures for the new weapons program will be reduced approximately twofold as compared to GPV-2020. If you will recall, when the GPV that is in force was adopted, a dollar cost approximately R30, today – this is R60...

[Bozhyeva] But the country requires a technological revolution. Would additional trillions for these purposes really hinder that?

[Pukhov] Expenditures for the purchase of weapons – this is not simply the irrecoverable expenditure of resources but actually investments in the country's economy. Thanks to them, highly skilled jobs are being created and innovative development and the progress of science and technologies are being stimulated.... Approximately half of the military budget goes to purchases, in other words, is returned to the economy and stimulates its innovative development...

[Bozhyeva] Some experts note the new program's better balance as compared to GPV-2020. That one allocated approximately R4.7 trillion for the development of the Navy and R2.6 trillion for the Ground Troops and VDV [Airborne Troops]....

[Pukhov] Russia's primary threats and the main national missions, which face the country, lie on the continent. Therefore, we also need to make the emphasis on the priority development of the Ground Troops and VDV. Judging by everything, the excessive bias toward expenditures for the Navy has been eliminated and the construction of the most expensive large surface combatants has been sensibly shifted to the future in the new GPV...

...We need to invest the resources, which have been freed up as a result of the rejection of naval gigantomania and the harebrained schemes, in command and control, reconnaissance and communications systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and new armored platforms. Incidentally, it is precisely the ground troops and airborne troops that will have resolve the issue with the Kyiv Junta or the Baltic Nazis, if necessary, if they, who have been counting on NATO, will want to test our defense....

[Bozhyeva] On the development and purchase of which weapon systems do they plan to place the primary emphasis?

[Pukhov] The new GPV is betting on the initiation of the reequipping the troops with actually new generation models. First of all, this concerns the Ground Troops. After 2021, one can expect the initiation of deliveries of new-generation advanced ground-based platforms – Armata heavy (with the new T-14 Tank in the lead), Kurganets-25 medium tracked and Bumerang medium wheeled, Koalitsiya-SV 152-mm self-propelled artillery systems, light armored vehicles and motor vehicles of new types, new missile systems, unmanned ground systems and, obviously, new models of small arms based upon the Ratnik theme. There will be deliveries of new automated command and control netcentric systems, reconnaissance, command and control, and communication complexes, and new electronic warfare systems....

...On the whole, in the event of the complete realization of the new GPV, I think that the Russian Armed Forces will have a totally new appearance in a technical regard and will obtain significantly higher combat capabilities after a decade, by 2028....

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/fms0/m/fms0-monographs/195094>



Improving Medical Care in the Russian Military

OE Watch Commentary: As Russia continues to move toward creating a more professional military, where the majority of manpower is staffed by officers and contract personnel, there has been a corresponding increase in social and material benefits for those in uniform. For instance, pay for military personnel is largely competitive with the civilian sector and the overall housing situation has improved. As the three accompanying excerpts from the pro-government source, *Izvestiya*, point out, providing medical care for military personnel, particularly in combat conditions, also continues to develop and become more responsive.

The first excerpt describes the new Vodnik armored tactical ambulance, which “being equipped with a set of diagnostic and intensive-care apparatus,” will allow for rapid treatment for injured personnel. The vehicle was first tested during the conflict in Chechnya back in 2001, but has since been modernized with “apparatus for artificial lung ventilation, stimulation of cardiac activity, and other intensive-care treatments” which allow for treating injured soldiers en route to a medical facility. The second excerpt describes a new specially outfitted Mi-8 helicopter, which carries “sophisticated medical equipment” within an on-board medical module that provides for “artificial ventilation, stimulation of cardiac activity and other resuscitative manipulations,” permitting “complex surgical operations even in flight.” The medical helicopter is also equipped with the Vitebsk air defense system, which will provide for reliable cover “from the enemy’s anti-aircraft weapons.” According to the article, four of these specially equipped air ambulances will be fielded this year.

The third excerpt describes the introduction of special medical modules to remote military locations designed for advanced telemedicine. According to the article, “this year, the Armed Forces will receive 16 hardware-software complexes for remote diagnostics,” providing for “qualified assistance to servicemen in remote garrisons, on ships, as well as in emergency situations and during humanitarian operations.” These telemedicine modules can be equipped with sophisticated diagnostic equipment and will be connected to professional personnel at the top military hospitals. As Russia moves toward creating a more professional military, it continues to strengthen the necessary medical care to keep this force healthy-in peace and at war. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The treatment and diagnostic apparatus of the medical Vodnik makes it possible to perform the requisite medical treatments en route...”

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov, “Спасение на Воднике (Vodnik Rescue),” *Izvestiya*, 29 June 2018. <https://iz.ru/760128/aleksandr-kruglov/spasenie-na-vodnike>

The Russian army is testing armored tactical ambulances for the evacuation of wounded from the battlefield. The special vehicle has been built on a foundation of the GAZ-39371 Vodnik wheeled armored all-terrain vehicle. Its strong points are high cross-country capability and mobility.... The medical compartment is equipped with a set of diagnostic and intensive-care apparatus, which makes it possible to stabilize the condition of the wounded until arrival at the hospital...

Izvestiya was told in the Defense Ministry that the Vodnik medical-evacuation vehicles with special medical apparatus went to the field this year. They are undergoing testing. The vehicles are being developed as part of an extensive program of the modernization and retooling of the medical service of the Armed Forces.... In 2001 some 12 vehicles of an experimental-industrial batch underwent field tests under combat conditions in Chechnya as escort vehicles. The tests were deemed a success.

After he is found, the wounded individual will immediately be rendered emergency medical and anesthetic and intensive-care assistance and taken under doctors’ care to a military hospital. The treatment and diagnostic apparatus of the medical Vodnik makes it possible to perform the requisite medical treatments en route.... The all-terrain “ambulance” has everything necessary for the transportation of casualties. The equipment is composed of apparatus for artificial lung ventilation, stimulation of cardiac activity, and other intensive-care treatments...

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov, Aleksei Ramm, “Военные получили летающую ‘скорую помощь’ (The military has received a flying ambulance),” *Izvestiya*, 28 June 2018. <https://iz.ru/737353/aleksandr-kruglov-aleksei-ramm/voennye-poluchili-letaiushchuiu-skoriuiu-pomoshch>

This year, the Defense Ministry will receive the first “flying operating table.” These are Mi-8AMTSh helicopters, equipped with container modules with a set of sophisticated medical equipment. Now doctors will be able to carry out resuscitation and complex surgical operations even in flight. The complex of on-board self-defense “Vitebsk” will reliably cover the helicopters from the enemy’s anti-aircraft weapons. Under such cover, the “air hospital” will have the opportunity to evacuate the wounded directly from the battlefield.

As Izvestia was informed at the VKS headquarters, before the end of this year four MI-8AMTSH with medical modules should enter the troops. This system is being adopted as part of a large-scale program for the modernization and technical re-equipment of the medical service of the Armed Forces. ...After first aid, the helicopter will take the wounded to the military hospital. The medical module has everything necessary to transport two victims who are in serious or extremely serious condition. These are devices for artificial ventilation, stimulation of cardiac activity and other resuscitative manipulations.

(continued)



Continued: Improving Medical Care in the Russian Military

Source: Alexander Kruglov, Bogdan Stepova, “Военная медицина уходит в Сеть; Минобороны осваивает технологии телемедицины (Military medicine goes online; The Ministry of Defense is mastering the technologies of telemedicine),” *Izvestiya*, 10 July 2018. <https://iz.ru/762755/aleksandr-kruglov-bogdan-stepovoi/voennaia-meditcina-ukhodit-v-set>

The technology of telemedicine is being introduced into the Russian military. This year, the Armed Forces will receive 16 hardware-software complexes for remote diagnostics. With their help, doctors on the ground will be able to contact the consultative centers of the country's leading military hospitals. Advice and help from experienced professionals will be indispensable in setting the right diagnosis and performing complex surgical operations. The first complexes will be directed to the parts located on the Kuril Islands. According to experts, telemedicine will provide an opportunity to provide qualified assistance to servicemen in remote garrisons, on ships, as well as in emergency situations and during humanitarian operations....

...The first stationary centers for remote consultations will be opened in the Military Medical Academy, as well as in the Main Military Clinical Hospital named after N.N. Burdenko and in the 3rd Central Military Clinical Hospital. A.A. Vishnevsky. Further the system will be consistently implemented in the hospitals of military districts. ...Depending on the configuration, mobile complexes can be equipped with a medical module, which includes various portable equipment. For example, an electrocardiograph, an ultrasound scanner, a tonometer, a glucometer or a spiograph. It is possible to connect additional devices. All data from them will be broadcast in real time to the doctor-consultant.

...Such equipment is indispensable in the conduct of rescue and humanitarian operations to provide military assistance - as, for example, in Syria. The introduction of telemedicine technologies will significantly increase the level of military medicine, told military expert Alexei Leonkov to Izvestia....



Vodnik Ground Ambulance.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net> CCA BY 4.0.

© Vitaly V. Kuzmin



Military Support for Pension Reform?

OE Watch Commentary: Faint murmurs of protest could be heard beneath the excitement and success of Russia's hosting of the 2018 World Cup competition. Just as the games were getting underway, Kremlin authorities released a proposal which would raise the retirement age for men to age 65 (currently 60) and to 63 for women (currently 55) over the next 10-15 years. The proposal is predicated on both improved life expectancy for Russians and economic strains within the current pension system. The brief accompanying excerpt from the pro-government source, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, describes how those in uniform regard changes to the pension system and past proposals to alter retirement benefits for those serving in the military.

The author begins by quoting a high-level government official who suggests that the authorities are "assessing the question of adjusting the period of service which military officers are required to complete in order to be entitled to retirement." Whereas Russia males today working in the civilian sector must work until 60 before retiring, the official points out that "the military often become pensioners at the age of 40, having served 20 years." The article then reviews previous discussions which would extend the term of service (25 years) or possibly the "abolishment of military pensions and their replacement with one-time exit payments." The author points out that such discussions did not have "a positive impact on the morale of the officers in the Army and the Navy, as well as in other security agencies."

The article concludes by suggesting that the government is unlikely to alter the military's retirement system until they have resolved the country's overall pension program. Indeed, the article quotes an expert who posits that should the above pension reform for civilians be implemented, the authorities will need the support of those in uniform "to establish constitutional order in the country if unsanctioned rallies, demonstrations, and other violations occur." While seemingly minor, the Kremlin's plan to overhaul the country's pension system could have a profound impact on all Russian citizens, including those in uniform. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The media have written about possible social protests in the country over the raising of the retirement age for large groups of the population. If the same were to apply to the military at the same time, the government would face additional problems....”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, "Власти не рискнут проводить пенсионную реформу еще и для силовиков (The Authorities Will Not Risk Implementing Pension Reform for Security Agencies Too)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 June 2018. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2018-06-18/1_7246_pensia.html

The large-scale pension reform which is being implemented in the country has so far bypassed the security agencies. However, judging by the statements by Anton Siluanov, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the government is also assessing the question of adjusting the period of service which military officers are required to complete in order to be entitled to retirement. "We have made these assessments together with the Defense Ministry and it will be one of the elements of our proposals," Siluanov said a few days ago.

...It is worth remembering that Anton Siluanov spoke about it as early as 2015 when he served as finance minister in the previous government. "I believe that the military's length of service required for retirement can also be extended. Look, we have a million healthy men working as guards, let alone the significant number of employees in the security agencies. There is a security officer standing at every boom gate and guarding it. The military often become pensioners at the age of 40, having served 20 years."

It became known a bit later that the Scientific-Research Institute of Finance, which is subordinated to the Finance Ministry, had even prepared arguments in favor of the abolishment of military pensions and their replacement with one-time exit payments.... It is quite clear that it has not had a positive impact on the morale of the officers in the Army and the Navy, as well as in other security agencies.

Last year, both the public and the Army also actively discussed a draft law -- which had allegedly been prepared by the government and the security agencies and had leaked into the media -- on the raising of the bottom limit of the servicemen's length of service entitling them to military pension from 20 to 25 years. In order to make it possible for the servicemen to adapt to the new conditions, the draft law provided for a transitional period until 2023.... It remains unknown what the final version of the draft law on the raising of the military's pre-retirement length of service to 25 years to be presented by the government to the State Duma will look like.

"...A large-scale pension reform is about to begin in the country. Apparently, the number of years which the servicemen are required to service before they can get a pension will also be adjusted for the security agencies. However, the matter requires delicate approach. The government is doing the right thing by avoiding haste...." Aleksandr Kanshin, deputy chairman of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry's Public Council, told Nezavisimaya Gazeta.

"The media have written about possible social protests in the country over the raising of the retirement age for large groups of the population. If the same were to apply to the military at the same time, the government would face additional problems. The country's leadership does not need such scenario, so I believe that they will implement the pension reform in the Army, the Internal Affairs Ministry, Rosgvardiya, and other security agencies gradually, keeping in mind the need to provide the factors of social protection for the military servicemen and the employees of security agencies. They have enough work as it is now. They also need to be prepared to establish constitutional order in the country if unsanctioned rallies, demonstrations, and other violations occur," Lieutenant-General Yuriy Netkachev, who is also a military expert, noted.



Successful Russian IO Campaign

OE Watch Commentary: The downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH-17 over Southeast Ukraine in July 2014 was one of the deepest watersheds in the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. While the Western narrative claims that separatist forces in the Donbas region (perhaps aided by regular Russian forces) were responsible for this tragedy, the Kremlin and its pliant media juggernaut have developed numerous scenarios which ‘prove’ that the separatists and their Russian sponsors are blameless. The accompanying brief excerpt from the pro-government source, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, reflects both the general belief that Russia is innocent and the Kremlin’s strategy of deflecting any blame for this crime.

The author (a senior military analyst) begins his article by claiming that despite detailed international reports which point to Russian involvement in the destruction of this airliner, “it is still wholly unclear here who downed it.” He then reviews a couple of the earlier Kremlin explanations which placed the blame on the Ukrainians, pointing out that even though these versions were easily debunked, “the theory that the Boeing was downed by a Ukrainian Su-25 attack aircraft is still very popular in Russia.” Given the distorted coverage of the Kremlin-sponsored media, such an assertion is understandable.

The gist of the article focuses on attempting to discredit the recent Dutch and Australian-lead commission of inquiry which provided specific evidence of Russian culpability. The author suggests that the commission released its findings in late May “clearly to coincide with the 2018 World Cup.” Such a suggestion supports the Kremlin’s narrative that the West will do anything to weaken Russia’s global image. The commission’s attempt to use video graphics to illustrate its findings is dismissed by the author as a “cartoon film” which can “hardly be considered even indirect evidence of Russian guilt and absolutely certainly have nothing to do with direct evidence.” The author asserts that the “Dutch-Australian call on Russia ‘to repent’ and ‘admit blame’ is a kind of request for help,” but that since no one in Russia or the Donbas region has come forward to admit their involvement, there is “no evidence of Russia’s guilt.”

The author concludes by stating that “the loss of the Boeing will remain a subject of political speculation, but simply will not be solved.” Such a statement accurately reflects the strength and success of the Kremlin-sponsored media campaign on its own population. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“It is four years since the moment of the loss of the Malaysian Boeing 777 airliner over the Donets Basin (Donbas), and however odd, it is still wholly unclear here who downed it.”



Route map of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MH17_map-en.svg CCA-SA 3.0.

Source: Aleksandr Khranchikhin, Deputy Director of the Institute of Political and Military Analysis, “Кто же сбил «Боинг» над Донбассом? (Who Downed the Boeing Over the Donbas?),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 13 July 2018. http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2018-07-13/1_1004_boeing.html

It is four years since the moment of the loss of the Malaysian Boeing 777 airliner over the Donets Basin (Donbas), and however odd, it is still wholly unclear here who downed it. The parties to the conflict placed the responsibility, as expected, on each other, “corroborating” the charges with a variety of nonsense.

The theory that the Boeing was downed by a Ukrainian Su-25 attack aircraft is still very popular in Russia. However surprising, this theory has been articulated even by some officials....

...This entire sum of astonishing theories could have induced sad contemplation were it not for the West with its commission of inquiry, which was dominated by the Dutch (the Boeing had departed from Amsterdam) and Australians (the majority of stricken passengers were from this country). This commission gave a reminder of its presence at the end of May of this year, clearly to coincide with the 2018 World Cup....

Your author is far from an expert in jurisprudence, but it is surmised that the cartoon films on the drive of a self-propelled transport-erector launcher and radar (TELAR) of the Buk-M1 air defense missile system (SAM) from the Russian Federation Armed Forces 53d Air Defense Missile Brigade (zrbr) stationed in Kursk by Russian and Ukrainian roads shown by the commission of inquiry may hardly be considered even indirect evidence of Russian guilt and absolutely certainly have nothing to do with direct evidence....

In actual fact, the May Dutch-Australian call on Russia “to repent” and “admit blame” is a kind of request for help. Or a recruitment approach. It follows from it that the commission has no real evidence but suddenly in Russia or the Donbas self-proclaimed republics there will be a traitor who will provide this evidence? No traitor was found: possibly, simply because there is nothing to provide, there is no evidence of Russian guilt nor was there ever in view of the absence of the guilt itself. Malaysia, who owned the Boeing, is not tied to Western mutual assistance, this is why it stated plainly that it has no evidence of Russia’s guilt....

...Ultimately, however surprising in our time, the loss of the Boeing will remain a subject of political speculation, but simply will not be solved....



Anchors Away in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Sea Fleet's 13-25 June exercise was Russia's largest naval maneuver in a decade. It tested the fleet's capabilities and readiness in anti-submarine warfare, on-board live-fire missile and anti-aircraft firing, amphibious landing, submarine convoy attack, coastal defense artillery and missile firing, fleet tactics, minesweeping, under-way repairs and logistics, live-fire torpedo and cruise missile firings and at-sea UAV reconnaissance flights. There was extensive coverage of the event as the two accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Missions to destroy the notional adversary's amphibious assault detachment and fleet were conducted; massive enemy air strikes were repulsed. The submarines deployed to designated areas to counter both an underwater and a surface adversary.”

Source: Olesya Frantsishevich: “To Defend the Arctic,” *Na Strazhe Zapolyarya* (On Guard in the Polar Region, a weekly newspaper of the Northern Fleet), 29 June 2018.

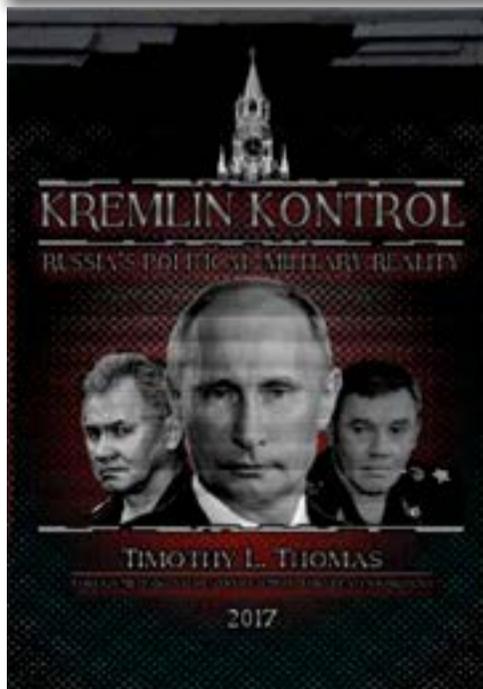
The Northern Fleet rendezvous-and-cruise that took place in the Barents Sea in June was the most extensive in the last 10 years. Thirty-six combatant ships were assigned to it, including the guided missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, the large antisubmarine warfare [ASW] ship Severomorsk, the destroyer Admiral Ushakov, nuclear and diesel-electric submarines, the large amphibious warfare ships Kondopoga, Georgiy Pobedonosets, and Aleksandr Strakovskiy, support craft, around 20 aircraft, and more than 150 pieces of military and specialized equipment belonging to coastal defense missile and artillery troops and ground troops, naval infantry, and air defense troops...

On the 10th day of the rendezvous and cruise, Northern Fleet Commander Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov arrived aboard the guided missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov in the Barents Sea area where the fleet's strike force grouping was exercising. The ship was taking part in an exercise for the first time following a refit. To cite the words of Captain 2nd Rank Vladimir Kuzmin, the missile cruiser's commander, following its modernization the ship has shown itself to be in very good shape. Factoring in the modernized digital technologies based on electronic equipment, the weaponry that has been tried-and-tested over a number of years is performing all the tasks. There are no issues with the equipment. A field staff was deployed aboard the cruiser Marshal Ustinov whose work -- along with the organization of command and control of the forces at sea -- was inspected personally by Northern Fleet Commander Adm. Nikolay Yevmenov. He evaluated the professionalism of the crews during their performance of the concluding combat drills staged by the Northern Fleet ships' rendezvous-and-cruise -- a naval artillery battle and neutralization of a notional adversary's fortified onshore positions.

Once the bulk of the planned combat drills had been completed, artillery and missile fire was delivered against air, water-surface, and coastal targets in the Barents Sea. The combat drills designated “artillery action against a notional adversary's surface ships and the engagement of fortified onshore objectives” were performed by the crews of the Admiral Ushakov and Marshal Ustinov using universal-caliber artillery -- AK-130 coaxial artillery mounts. Aboard the destroyer Admiral Ushakov, which wields the greatest artillery firepower of the existing ships, fire was delivered against the targets by both batteries -- bow and stern.

The engagement of a naval target involved firing at a naval panel target towed behind an auxiliary fleet tug. The onshore targets were set up on a firing range located on Poluostrov Rybachiy. Both ships conducted the artillery exercises successfully by hitting the naval and onshore targets with the specified accuracy.

All the planned firing and other combat drills have been completed successfully. The weaponry, equipment, and facilities of the combatant ships, support craft, aircraft, and air defense and the armaments and equipment of the naval infantry and the ground and coastal defense troops have reliably withstood the tests posed by the combat exercises. Ammunition consumption has not exceeded the planned norms.



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>

(continued)



Continued: Anchors Away in the Arctic

Source: Olga Vorobyova, “A Large-Scale Test by Sea” – Interview with Admiral Nikolay Anatolyevich Yevmenov, the Northern Fleet commander,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 July 2018. www.redstar.ru/masshtabnaya-proverka-morem/

[OV] Why was it necessary to stage such a large-scale event?

[NY] The Northern Fleet is a combined strategic formation which protects Russia’s national interests in the Arctic. Guaranteeing the security of the state’s maritime policy implementation and of its normal economic activity in the Arctic regions and in areas of the Northern Sea Route zone is our service’s priority mission. The voyage’s main objective was to test the actual readiness of ships’ crews, coastal troop subunits, and aviation for executing the tasks assigned to them. The large-scale maneuvers were of an exclusively defensive nature....

[OV] What safety measures were taken for the period of the exercise in the Barents Sea?

[NY] For safety purposes, all the combat-exercise performance areas were closed to civilian shipping and to aircraft flights for the duration. Navigators had been forewarned of this. The free passage of ships, including foreign ones, was permitted daily from 23:00 to 08:00 hours, when suspension of firing was guaranteed.

[OV] How long did the exercise last? What exercises did the Northern Fleet sailors perform over that period?

[NY] The large-scale maneuvers took place in the Barents Sea from 13 through 25 June. Over that period, the ships and auxiliary vessels covered more than 10,000 nautical miles [18,520 kilometers]. During the tactical missions, the crews of the ships, submarines, planes, and helicopters performed more than 70 combat exercises. Of these, 19 included live fire on marine, aerial, and coastal targets....

[OV] Were any new types of naval weapons being tested on this occasion?

[NY] Yes, tests were conducted, with good results. All the planned firing and other combat exercises were executed successfully. The combatant ships’, auxiliary ships’, aviation, and air defense weapons and technical equipment, and the naval infantry’s and ground and coastal troops’ arms and equipment were creditably tested by the combat exercise, and the expenditure of ammunition did not exceed the planned norms.

[OV] What tasks were successfully accomplished in the exercise’s various stages?

[NY] During the exercise, operations for seeking and neutralizing a notional adversary’s submarines were conducted successfully, as were mine-detection and minelaying missions and redeploying troops by to take control of operationally important defense areas. Missions to destroy the notional adversary’s amphibious assault detachment and fleet were conducted; massive enemy air strikes were repulsed. The submarines deployed to designated areas to counter both an underwater and a surface adversary.

[OV] Which of the exercise’s episodes have been judged as the most important?

[NY] The training voyage consisted of various scenarios, each of which is important as a test of the Northern Fleet sailors’ skill and professionalism. It is important that our fighting men successfully rehearsed the full range of the forces’ ... defensive operations within the Northern Fleet’s zone of responsibility....

The missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov and the destroyer Admiral Ushakov effectively destroyed aerial targets with surface-to-air missiles.... All the missile targets that were launched by the small missile ships Rassvet and Aysberg were destroyed. The Admiral Ushakov also “destroyed” the notional adversary’s ship by launching a Moskit [“mosquito” SS-N-22 supersonic ramjet] anti-ship cruise missile against the target at its maximum range.

[OV] Were there any ... circumstances that made you change the course of the exercise?

[NY] Fortunately, it all worked out without that. But unforeseen events did occur. Right at the ... concluding stage, the crew of the inshore minesweeper Yelnya rescued a person in the Barents Sea. This occurred as the minesweeper was ... closing off the area where the fleet’s strike-ship grouping was to conduct combat exercises. Two miles to the north of Cape Teriberskiy, the Yelnya’s crew discovered a kayaker who was being carried out to sea. The sailors lifted the debilitated rower aboard and administered first aid, fed him, and warmed him up. Once the tasks at sea had been completed, the minesweeper Yelnya returned to its home base ... Polyarnyy. There the rescued kayaker went ashore. The extreme-sports enthusiast had come to Murmansk Oblast from Moscow to paddle on the Voronya River, which flows into the Barents Sea. Thanks to our ships’ presence there, a tragedy was averted.

[OV] Comrade Commander, what conclusions have been made from the exercise results?

[NY] The Northern Fleet ships’ training voyage has shown a high standard of interaction among the fleet forces on the open-sea. The crews’ nautical skills improved and the smoothness of their teamwork and coordination in performing missions increased. All the scheduled training was accomplished successfully and the exercise’s objectives were achieved...



China Adding Nuclear-powered Icebreakers in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: China conducted a successful campaign to gain observer status in the Arctic Council and has been involved in a variety of Arctic programs, including exploration, navigation, undersea mapping, scientific research, and the acquisition of liquefied natural gas from the Yamal Peninsula area. Chinese Arctic contacts are not exclusive to Russia. China is involved in the Finnish-Norwegian railroad extension to the Arctic coast that would shorten transit time and open up Central and Eastern European markets for Chinese goods transiting the Northeast Passage along Russia's borders. Now China will add a nuclear-powered icebreaker support ship to its expanding Arctic icebreaker effort as reported by the accompanying excerpt from *The Barents Observer*. China intends to be a player in the Arctic, and evidently not just a bit player. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“China’s only current ocean-going icebreaker, the ‘Xue Long’ (Snow Dragon) is an icebreaking research vessel. Last summer, the ship sailed the entire Arctic rim with several stops.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “China Opens Bids For First Nuclear Powered Icebreaker,” *The Barents Observer*, 27 June 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2018/06/china-opens-bids-first-nuclear-powered-icebreaker>

The ship will be an “icebreaker support ship” indicating a multi-purpose vessel that does more than simply breaking the ice for other vessels in convoy. China’s only current ocean-going icebreaker, the “Xue Long” (Snow Dragon) is an icebreaking research vessel. Last summer, the ship sailed the entire Arctic rim with several stops... where the on-board scientists worked on different ice and climate-related research projects.

Today, Russia is the only country in the world that operates a fleet of civilian nuclear-powered vessels; four icebreakers and one container ship, all with Murmansk as their homeport. Three new, even more powerful, nuclear-powered icebreakers are under construction.

China has experience in naval nuclear propulsion from their in-service fleet of six military submarines of three different classes.

Song Zhongping, a military expert, stated that the new icebreaker’s reactor can be applied to a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier once updated. Also, nuclear-power could also be applied to other military vessels, allowing them to sail longer distances on the world oceans.

China’s interest in the Arctic is growing and in January the country issued its first white paper on its Arctic policy. China is already actively investing in Russian petroleum development and several huge-scale infrastructure projects including railway and deep-sea port in Arkhangelsk.

The white paper states that China aims to participate “in the exploration for and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources”.... and stresses the importance of working together with other Arctic states.

Join the Army and See the Snow

OE Watch Commentary: So, you are an eighteen year-old able-bodied Russian lad from the City of Arkhangelsk, located just south of the Arctic Circle. It gets cold and stays cold during the long winter. Your government is calling you up for a year of mandatory military service. It is going to be a tough year, but you hope that at least it will provide a change of scenery- perhaps in the sunny south...But your orders come and you are going north to the island archipelago of Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic Ocean-the farthest north point in Europe. As the accompanying excerpted article from *The Barents Observer* reports, 170 young men were conscripted “from the Arkhangelsk region” and “were told prepare for transfer to Novaya Zemlya” in the Arctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Earlier this year, the Commander of the Northern Fleet, also in charge of Russia’s Arctic Brigades, said Novaya Zemlya is a top priority for 2018.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “170 Recruits Sent To Novaya Zemlya,” *The Barents Observer*, 6 July 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2018/07/170-recruits-sent-novaya-zemlya>

During the first week of July, 170 young men from the Arkhangelsk region, called up for mandatory military service, were told prepare for transfer to Novaya Zemlya.... They should be ready for severe tests in the Arctic with winter temperatures down to minus 40 degrees Celsius [also -40° Fahrenheit] and Polar Night for most of the winter.

The 170 conscripts were among the 1,500 young men from Arkhangelsk region called to do military service. The others went to serve in the navy, army, air force and Rosgvardia – the Russian government’s internal military force reporting directly to the President.

Conscription is a mandatory 12-month draft for all male Russian citizens ages 18 to 27. The service was ... reduced from 24 months to 18 months in 1993 and to 12 months in 2008...

At Novaya Zemlya, the main military settlement is Belushya Bay on the southern of the two islands. Nearby is the newly renovated and upgraded Rogachevo air base. Earlier this year, the Commander of the Northern Fleet, also in charge of Russia’s Arctic Brigades, said Novaya Zemlya is a top priority for 2018



More Energy for Europe

OE Watch Commentary: The Yamal Peninsula, site of a major liquefied natural gas production and distribution effort, continues to expand with energy from the area going to customers in Europe and China. The Russian government is a major stock holder in Gazprom and sees the developments in the company as positive for the economy and Arctic development, as the accompanying excerpted article reports.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

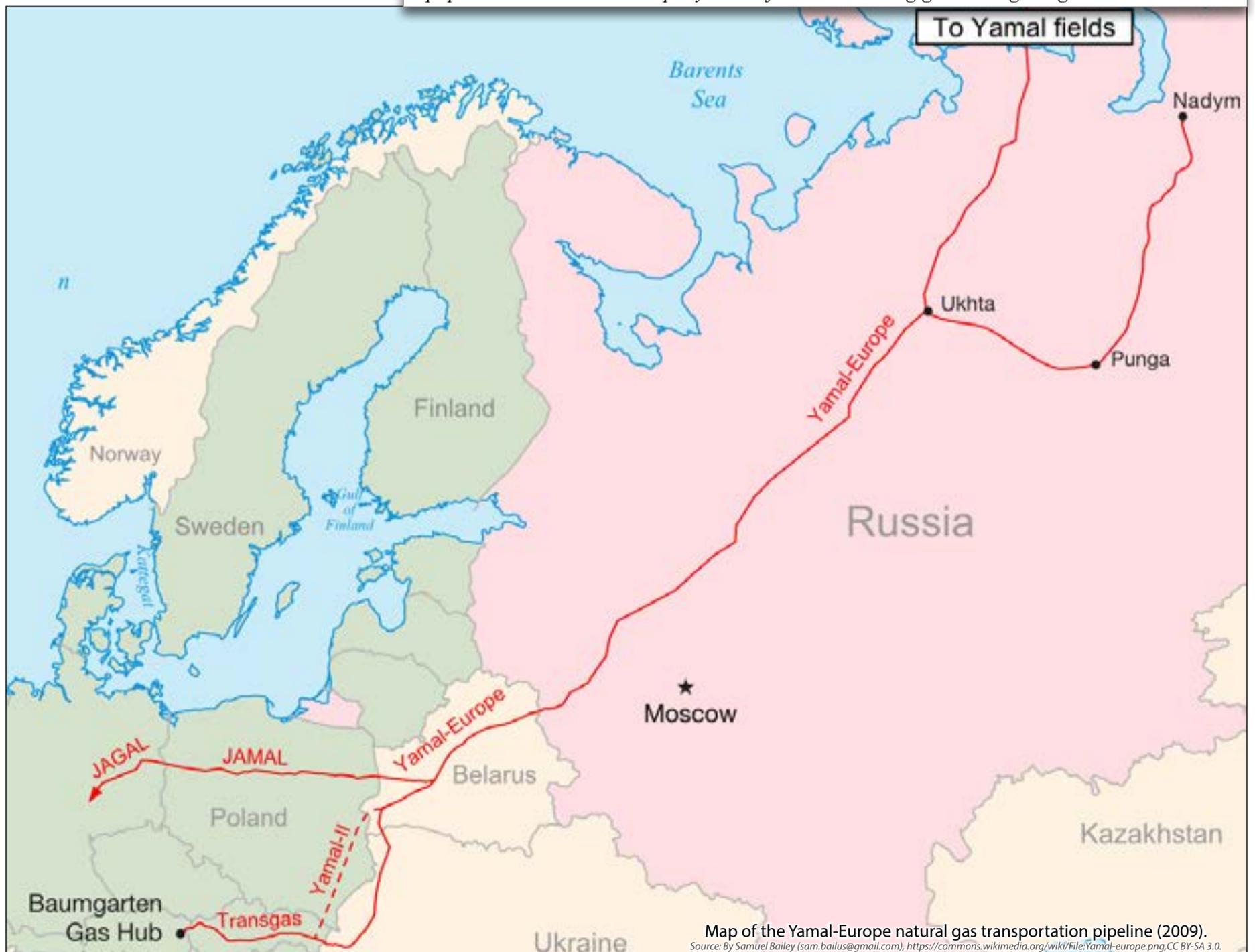
“When both the Bovanenko and Kharasavey fields are in operation after 2023, Gazprom’s accumulated natural gas production in the Yamal Peninsula will reach almost 150 billion cubic meters per year.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Gazprom Moves On With another Grand Project on Yamal Tundra,” *The Barents Observer*, 13 July 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2018/07/gazprom-moves-another-grand-project-yamal-tundra>

The decision to start development of the field was made during Gazprom CEO Aleksey Miller’s visit to the Yamal-Nenets region this week...Preparations are underway and housing quarters for the project workers are already on site in Bovanenkovo...A total of 1.5 million tons of construction material will be shipped to the site, in summertime through a sea port facility on the Kara Sea coast. In winter time, the goods will be transported by railway to Bovanenkovo, and from there on trucks.

The development of the Kharasavey comes as Gazprom launches its third production effort at the nearby Bovanenko field site. When both the Bovanenko and Kharasavey fields are in operation after 2023, Gazprom’s accumulated natural gas production in the Yamal Peninsula will reach almost 150 billion cubic meters per year. Everything will be sent out through the company’s westbound Bovanenkovo-Ukhta pipeline, and most of it subsequently exported through the trans-Baltic Nord Stream pipeline...

The Yamal Peninsula is Russia’s biggest development area for natural gas and both Gazprom and Novatek are investing big sums in new infrastructure and fields. The peninsula is flat as a pancake and is surrounded by the shallow waters of the Kara Sea and the Gulf of Ob. It is all tundra land and the installations built are resting on permafrost. According to Gazprom, measures are taken in order to prevent possible damage from permafrost melting. That includes equipment which lets the company know if the surrounding ground is getting unstable.





Spain and Catalonia

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 June Pedro Sánchez (of the Spanish socialist workers' Party, PSOE) became Prime Minister of Spain and president of government after a no-confidence vote removed Mariano Rajoy. The failure of confidence was primarily driven by discontent over the handling of the independence actions in Catalonia. On 14 May Joaquim "Quim" Torra was elected as the 131st President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, succeeding Carles Puigdemont, who remains in exile. Torra is a leftist and avowed *independentista* who openly calls for the separation of Catalonia from Spain. For the author of the accompanying excerpted reference from *Libertad Digital*, having the two, Sánchez and Torra, in these executive positions at the same time bodes poorly for the continuation of Spain as a territorial entity in its current form.

The author of the accompanying excerpted reference from *ABC.es* strikes a similar note, suggesting that what is likely to happen was expressed by Torra in a book he published in 2016. In that reference, recently reconfirmed by Torra, the plan involves writing a Catalan constitution that will expressly revoke the Spanish one. There is some political irony here in that a key reason why leftist Pedro Sánchez gained power in Spain was the increased influence of the *Podemos* political party, a party initiated with funding impetus from deceased Latin American leftist, Hugo Chávez. While geopolitical fortunes in Latin America seem to be trending against the left in Latin America, recent prospects have greatly improved for the left in Iberia, and on the back of Latin American leftist energies. The other accompanying excerpted reference from *ABC.es* (dated 11 July) adds fuel to the specter of impending rebellious activity in Catalonia. All of the independence leaders who had been jailed by the Spanish government are now back in Catalan jails. The suggestion is that they might not remain there for long. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The first [Torra] maintains that self-determination is in march, the second [Sánchez]...that self-determination does not fit in the Constitution, but that everything is possible.”



Joaquim "Quim" Torra, Catalan Generalitat President.
Source: Josep Rendias (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joaquim_Torra_11.jpg), CC-BY.

Source: Pablo Planas, “El socialista Sánchez y el racista Torra se reparten España (Socialist Sánchez and racist Torra divvy up Spain),” *Libertad Digital*, 9 July 2018. <https://www.libertaddigital.com/espana/2018-07-09/el-socialista-sanchez-y-el-racista-torra-se-reparten-espana-1276621799/>

“The encounter has been an exit without exceptions, according to the versions of Sánchez and Torra...Two and a half very satisfactory hours as the two parties tell it...According to Moncloa [Spanish equivalent of saying ‘according to the White House’], the result could not be more positive...There is room for ‘dialog’...The first [Torra] maintains that self-determination is in march, the second [Sánchez]...that self-determination does not fit in the Constitution, but that everything is possible...”

Source: Daniel Tercero, “La hoja de ruta real del «president» (The actual roadmap of the ‘president’),” *ABC.es*, 9 July 2018. https://www.abc.es/espana/catalunya/abci-hoja-ruta-real-president-201807090248_noticia.html#ns_campaign=mod-outbrain&ns_mchannel=abc.es&ns_source=organico&ns_linkname=desktop-tablet&ns_fee=AR23_1fila

“...I wrote a book [Els Últims 100 Metres: el Full de Ruta per Guanyar la República Catalana [2016, Angle Editorial; ISBN 8416139997, 9788416139996, in Catalan]...that treats the last hundred meters of the (independence) process...I think it continues to be valid...’ Those are the words of Quim Torra...this 5 July...‘It is about, simply, approving a Catalan Constitution that abrogates the Spanish. And done.’ (page 49)...”

Source: Editors, “Todos los independentistas presos ya están en Cataluña (All of the independentista prisoners are now back in Catalonia),” *ABC.es*, 11 July 2018. https://www.abc.es/espana/catalunya/politica/abci-todos-independentistas-presos-estan-cataluna-201807111215_noticia.html

“Ex-counselors Jordi Turull, Joaquim Forn and Josep Rull have already arrived in Catalonia and this afternoon will enter Lledoners prison...With this step, all nine of the independentista politicians in prison for rebellion are as of today already regrouped in Catalonia...”



The PLA Army Tests Its Special Forces Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: The PLA Army has conducted its first comprehensive assessment of its special forces capabilities. The exercise “Ingenious Special Operations Soldier-2018” [“特战奇兵—2018”], reported on in the accompanying excerpted article from *Xinhua*, tested all levels of command, including brigade, battalion, company, element and squad levels. While media coverage of the exercise emphasized tests of special forces skills, such as fast-roping from helicopters, night operations and sniper attacks, the underlying point of the exercise is likely to be the test of command capabilities.

As the PLA has undergone major reorganization since 2015, the upper echelon in charge of the PLA Army Special Forces (ground forces; 陆军) appears to have shifted as well. An interview in 2011 during a China-Pakistan joint counter-terror training exercise featured Senior Colonel Sun Congjun [孙从军], whose position was listed as head of the Special Forces Bureau [特种作战局] under the General Staff Department’s Operations Department [参谋部作战部]. This organization, which previously used the PLA Army structure as the basis for the rest of the PLA, was restructured in 2015 to make it a joint command. At the time of writing it is unclear if the Special Forces Bureau has been shifted to the new joint structure. However, the comprehensive operations and command assessment appears to be a test of a new system.

China’s first army special forces units were first set up in the 1990s. Additional units have continued to be stood up, with the other services of the PLA establishing SOF units with specialized skills sets throughout the 2000s.

Each of China’s PLA Group Armies [集团军]—the largest formation below the five Theater Commands—appear to have an associated SOF brigade or regiment. Increasing realism in training, and particularly the creation of PLA Aviation Brigades that provide SOF brigades with organic vertical lift, are important steps in creating an operationally useful force. As assessments of the exercise “Ingenious Special Operations Soldier-2018” are published or future iterations of the exercise take place, the PLA’s progress in implementing the new command structure should become more clear. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



People’s Liberation Army Special Forces Insignia.
Source: By Peter Wood.

“The assessment and competition emphasized real combat training, included all active special forces brigades, all battalion and company commanders, and all operational elements [分队].”

Source: “陆军首次组织特种作战部队考核比武 (PLA Army conducts first assessment of its special operations forces), *Xinhua*, 16 July, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-07/16/c_129914444.htm

The contest focused on testing the commanding headquarters’ ability to plan and use special operations forces effectively, SOF elements [分队] commanders’ ability to command special operations, SOF squads’ ability to conduct operations, and individuals’ stamina, skills, and intelligence.

Organized by the PLA Army, the test is the first of its kind for the PLA Army’s special operations forces since the PLA’s reorganization in 2015. The assessment is meant to select and train the best SOF soldiers and discover problems with China’s Special Forces during its development.

The Emergence of the PLA Navy's "Jiaolong" Commando Unit

OE Watch Commentary: As the PLA Navy has become more active globally, it has needed to participate in a much greater range of missions, as reported by the accompanying excerpted article from the *PLA Daily*. In 2008 the PLA Navy made public the existence of its "Water Dragon" or "Jiaolong" Commando Unit [蛟龙突击队] during its anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. Although only founded in 2002, the unit has already participated in a number of high-profile operations.

In 2015, Jiaolong commandos participated in the evacuation of 571 Chinese citizens and over 200 other foreign nationals from Yemen after a Saudi-led coalition began airstrikes against the Houthi rebel group. In April 2017 a Tuvalan-registered cargo ship "OS35" was hijacked by Somali pirates in the waters of the Gulf of Aden. At the time, the PLA Navy's *Yulin* [玉林], a Type 054 Destroyer in China's South Sea Fleet was participating in anti-piracy patrols. Gong Kaifeng [龚凯峰], a special forces platoon-leader, led a group of 16 Navy SOF aboard the "OS35", rescuing the crew.

Although the unit has provided ample fodder for Chinese Navy recruitment videos and propaganda, it should not detract from the fact that naval special forces have important roles to play in how China could conduct wars across a range of theaters. Video of Jiaolong unit training show them operating in a wide range of environments, from desert to frozen mountains and conducting airborne, surface and underwater infiltration missions. In a 2015 interview (in Chinese, see: http://www.81.cn/syjdt/2015-08/03/content_6611441.htm), Captain Li Yerui [李烨睿], a Jiaolong company commander, explained that his training included 52 hours of continuous mock capture and resistance training, as well as regular exposure to tear gas training. According to Li, the course boasts an 88.8 percent washout rate.

China's first anti-piracy patrol in December 2008 marked its first major mission outside home waters in its modern history. Since the beginning, patrols have since been used to train shipborne aviation and accompanying submarine units. Comments from members of these branches highlight the value of such long-distance training in complex environments and with real-world issues. Conspicuous inclusion of the Jiaolong commando units since that first mission should highlight the progress in training and professionalism that is also being made by China's maritime special forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The Jiaolong commando's appearance on the world's stage indicates that the Chinese military is becoming more confident and more open.”



People's Liberation Army Navy Special Forces.

Source: By U.S. Department of Defense Current Photos, July 2016.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/140716-G-HN254-571_%2814714332244%29.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: “蛟龙突击队的世界亮相 (Jiaolong Commando Unit Worldwide Debut),” *PLA Daily*, 26 February 2018. http://navy.81.cn/content/2018-02/26/content_7952015.htm

According to Sun Hao [孙浩], a PLA Navy Marine Commander the birth and growth of the Xiaolong commando team can be described happening at “Just the right time to maximize its potential”. This “time” is the creation of the Jiaolong commando unit as the result of China's military transformation. This “potential” is the growth of the Jiaolong unit that reflects the steady increase in pace of the Chinese military becoming stronger. The Jiaolong commando's appearance on the world's stage indicates that the Chinese military is becoming more confident and more open. “This is the mission and opportunity offered to the Jiaolong unit by the new era,” says Sun. To Sun, making the Jiaolong unit public is a part of a process of constant learning and improvement. “The gap between us and the foreign special forces is still very large. Whether it is army building, personnel selection training, or actual combat experience, we are all elementary school students,” he said.



The PLA Air Force's "Thunder Gods" Airborne Commando Unit

OE Watch Commentary: In the Chinese military, the airborne forces—with the exception of parachute-trained members of special forces units from other services—belong to the PLA Air Force (PLAAF). China's Airborne Corps, formerly the 15th Airborne Corps, has been reorganized to adopt new missions, equipment and improve command and control. One area that has seen significant expansion is its special forces component. PLAAF Special Forces are tasked with carrying out penetration operations, killing key enemy figures and destroying enemy command and control facilities. Initially only a regiment, this has been upgraded to a brigade. In September 2011, the "Leishen" (thunder god) Commando Unit [雷神突击队] was founded as an elite force within China's Airborne Corps; its development over the past several years is noted in the accompanying excerpted articles.

Tasked with "reaching all regions, taking advantage of all opportunities, overcoming all difficulties, and defeating all opponents", the Leishen unit, as elite parachutists, have acted as a test bed for innovations in the airborne corps. They train jumping from different aircraft and using various parachute configurations and maneuvers. Members of Leishen have attended Venezuela's "Hunter School" to learn jungle warfare and participated in several international special forces competitions.

As a "special force within the special forces," the Leishen commandos have strict physical standards and expect soldiers attempting to join the unit to already have advanced skills. In addition to requirements common to all special forces—and differentiating them from regular members of the Airborne Corps—candidates to join the Leishen unit must have participated in multiple major drills and be able to jump under the "three 'no'" conditions that emphasize realism in training: no ground command, no target guidance and no support personnel. They must also be proficient in using four different types of parachutes. After acceptance, the recruits into the unit face intense training commando training that has a roughly 50 percent washout rate.

China has traditionally lacked the transport aircraft needed to perform a major airborne operation. With the Y-20 heavy lift transport entering mass production and upgrades to smaller aircraft being rolled out, that situation is changing. Although still in its early stages, PLAAF special forces units like the Leishen commandos have laid an important foundation for building a strong strategic deterrent and power projection capability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The program organized drills, focusing on more than 20 high-difficulty subjects such as helicopter parachute jumps, penetration operations from high-altitude using wing-type parachutes, low-altitude parachute assault, and ground long-distance penetration.”

Source: “雷神’ 突击，天降奇兵，” (“Thunder Gods’ Surprise Attack”), *People’s Daily*, 2 December 2013. http://kj.81.cn/content/2013-12/02/content_5672125.htm

Shi Jianchang [史建强], commander of the Leishen Commando unit: “The advantages of precision parachute and helicopter landing are important features differentiating airborne special forces from other special forces.”

...According to Major General Li Fengbiao [李凤彪], commander of the Airborne Forces, over the past two years, the commando team has focused on the joint operational requirements under the conditions of informationization, fearlessly changed the traditional training methods, determined the tasks according to the operational tasks, and creating an environment that better reflects operational requirements. The program organized drills, focusing on more than 20 high-difficulty subjects such as helicopter parachute jumps, penetration operations from high-altitude using wing-type parachutes, low-altitude parachute assault, and ground long-distance penetration.

Source: “In-depth: A close look at Chinese airborne troops,” *China Military*, 30 August 2017. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2017-08/30/content_7736996.htm

The special operations regiment that was directly affiliated to the corps were expanded into a special operations brigade. While increasing the number of special forces in the airborne troops, this also indicated one of the future directions of the airborne troops - special operations...

As the new airborne troops are reorganized into brigades, the brigades will be more professional and modular in the future, and each, assisted by the support unit, will be an independent unit that is able to undertake a battle-size airborne combat.

“In this way, the airborne troops will have better maneuvering capability and can reach the destination in every theater.” According to Zhao Jinjun, deputy chief of staff of the airborne troops, this makes the input of troops more flexible and mobile either for independent combat or the combined combat of several theaters.



Chinese special forces units including the "Leishen" commandos practice infiltration using Harbin Y-12 aircraft like the one pictured here.
Source: "Harbin Y-12e" By Mike-tango, CC-BY-SA-3.0 7 November, 2008. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/Y12e.jpg>.



China: Achieving Strength through Big Data and “New Quality Combat Forces”

OE Watch Commentary: China has been developing what it refers to as “new quality combat forces” (新质作战力量) and focusing on using cutting-edge technologies to try to gain asymmetric advantages. Articles on the subject, such as the two accompanying excerpted articles have been popping up in various media sources over the past months, indicating the growing importance.

In the article published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the daily newspaper of the Central Military Commission of the PLA, the authors write about offsetting technological differences through offensive measures that use new cutting-edge technologies. They add that since China’s use of force is either equal to or inferior to its adversaries or competitors, the strategy is to “gain greater weight for asymmetric winning.” One way to gain greater weight is through the use of “new-type weaponry” that is based on providing support to data link technology, with information systems at the core. This new equipment is based on support of data link technology.

“Steal the firewood from under the pot,” is a parable included in the 36 strategies of ancient China. This parable can be explained by, when facing an enemy too powerful to engage directly, first weaken him by undermining his foundation and attacking his source of power. The authors of the first article explain that it is important to actively implement the tactic of attacking the opponent’s weaknesses by playing up your own strengths. In doing so, the goal is to beef up their own forces equipped with new cutting-edge technologies through informatized defensive operations in air defense, missile defense, counter precision strike, counter-special assault, and counter-biological raid operations in an effort to ensure combat power in ground operations remain intact.

The article published by *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* offers more details and examples of how the PLA Army can apply “big data” to hone its “new quality combat forces.” This term, “new quality combat forces,” seems to have come about only in the past two or three years. The article includes a section that describes how to use these forces as the “iron fist” to win battles. It describes the future battlefield as consisting of new-quality combat forces for special operations, cyber operations, and long-range operations that have a high degree of technological elements, special operational mechanisms, and unique operational effects, significantly more so than today. This new type army force system will be of an “appropriate size and structure.” It will be merged into joint operations and be versatile in staging three-dimensional operations and great efforts will be placed in developing special operations forces and the aviation forces to strengthen efforts in reconnaissance and early warning efforts. These new type forces will play a leading role in the main battle force. They will be the “cream of the elite forces for ground operations” and will be able to overpower opponents “in one stroke on the battlefield.” All of these technologies being put into place may seem somewhat obscure, but it is clear that China is pursuing an approach that differs from the traditional building up of forces that might be seen in a Clausewitz-style of warfare.

China has long lagged behind in technological capability. Some in the country believe they are now poised to pave the way to new technological development in information and other systems in hopes of creating an asymmetric advantage that will allow it to defeat any adversary that might otherwise equal them in strength. At the center of its efforts will be a serious push to use big data as a means to boost combat power. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: “Hui Yong and Sun Qianggen, “善用“奇器”谋取非对称优势 (Making Good Use of ‘Cutting Edge Technology’ for Asymmetric Advantage),” *Xinhua*, 14 June 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2018-06/14/c_129894397.htm

The Army’s asymmetric operations in the age of information, through the innovative development and combined implementation of new cutting-edge technologies, may deliver fatal overloaded destruction to the enemy’s operational system, and may also effectively protect one’s own operational system, thus producing operational effects that go beyond conventional expectations and achieving a superb result of asymmetrical winning.

... it is essential to actively implement the tactic of “attacking the opponent’s weaknesses by giving playing to one’s strengths”, and beef up the high-effectiveness protection capabilities of the forces equipped with new cutting-edge technologies through carrying out informatized defensive operations in the forms of air defense, missile defense, counter-precision strike, counter-special assault, counter-biochemical raid operations, thus guaranteeing that one’s combat power can be effectively maintained in ground operations. It is essential to step up the informatized technological upgrading and transformation of the existing defensive weapon systems and platforms for ground operations, step up the input and use of the cutting-edge defensive technological forces...

Source: Li Dayong, “这是新型陆军建设发展史上一个标志性事件 (A Landmark Event in the Annals of the New-Type Army’s Building and Development),” *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 31 May 2018. http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2018-05/31/nw.D110000zgqnb_20180531_1-12.htm

“The new-quality combat forces plays a leading role in the main battle force as a sharp dagger and an iron fist. They are the cream of the elite forces for ground operations, and are able to overpower opponents in one stroke on the battlefield!”...

According to what these authors learned, since the founding of the Army’s leading organ, they have focused on the building of a modernized new-type Army force system featuring an appropriate quantity size and an appropriate organizational structure, being effectively merged into joint operations, and being versatile in staging three-dimensional operations throughout the whole territory, with great efforts being made to develop the special operations forces and the aviation forces, to optimize and strengthen the reconnaissance, early warn, and information support forces, to modernize and reorganize the assault, long-range precision strike, air defense and missile defense forces, to actively foster the forces for unmanned operations and for cyber offensive and defense, thus pushing the building of digitalized, three-dimensional, special operations, unmanned, modularized Army forces up to a higher new level.



Building More Capable Overseas Chinese Security Forces: The Next Priority?

OE Watch Commentary: China seems to be facing an uphill battle in providing security for its Belt and Road initiative. The two accompanying excerpted articles from the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* explain the situation. The first article describes overseas Chinese security teams as “doorkeepers.” China reportedly has more than 5,000 private security companies. Of these, only six are certified to operate overseas, and most of those six focus on escorting Chinese commercial ships. The article notes how more than 80 percent of these Chinese forces have only “a basic education... and are directly led by people who are just military enthusiasts and love playing war games.” While many are military veterans, they “lack the combat training and experience” seen in their international counterparts.

Because of the inability for Chinese security firms to meet security demands, in the past, Chinese companies overseas were turning to local and multinational sources to provide security services. However, this has been costly. According to the second article, some Chinese firms have leaned toward hiring special forces from India and Pakistan, because they could speak English, Arabic, and even French. Some Chinese security firms have also hired “veterans of the Chinese navy’s anti-piracy squad, Snow Leopard counterterrorism commandos, and other former Chinese special forces personnel.” However, they are at a disadvantage due to a lack of experience and low wages. Receiving roughly 10 times less than their foreign counterparts, they rarely stay long.

Language barriers have hampered the expansion of Chinese security companies overseas, because it impedes networking opportunities. As the second article explains, language skills can prove to be more beneficial than weapons selection because it allows the Chinese security companies to “have good relations with the local police, warlords, or even gangsters and terrorists.” With the massive Belt and Road initiative, there is an increased urgency to build up China’s security capabilities and, according to the first article, Beijing is currently looking at options to “establish a security agency to coordinate security for Chinese enterprises abroad.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Minnie Chan, “Into the Danger Zone: Why a Private US Military Firm is of Value to China’s Belt and Road Mission,” *South China Morning Post*, 15 July 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2155353/danger-zone-why-private-us-military-firm-value-chinas>

“Unlike the Chinese security teams who ... are like doorkeepers, the multinational and multilingual Blackwater guards were well trained and provided personnel and cargo protection services...”

“More than 80 per cent of Chinese security personnel have just a basic education ... and are directly led by people who are just military enthusiasts and love playing war games.”

Like the Blackwater guards, most Chinese security personnel are military veterans but they lack the combat training and experience of their international counterparts.

The need to close that yawning gap in expertise is becoming ever-more urgent as Chinese companies fan out along revived trade routes as part of Beijing’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, a massive infrastructure-driven plan to link economies into a China-centred trading network.

So much so that Beijing is exploring the possibility of establishing a security agency to coordinate security for Chinese enterprises abroad.

Huang Rihan, executive director of the Belt and Road Institute at the Centre for China and Globalisation, said just six of China’s 5,000-plus private security companies are certified to operate overseas.

Source: Minnie Chan, “The Soft Powers China Needs to Be a Global Force in High-Risk Private Security,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 July 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2155354/soft-powers-china-needs-be-global-force-high-risk>

“In terms of what I have witnessed, the foreign competitors of Chinese security companies have good relations with local police, warlords, or even gangsters and terrorists. Otherwise it’s impossible for them to survive in those high-risk areas,” [Fred] Wang, [senior manager from a Chinese state-owned hydropower engineering company investing in the Middle East and Africa] said.

Beijing-based military expert Zhou Cheming said some Chinese security firms preferred hiring special forces veterans from India and Pakistan because they could speak English, Arabic and even French, common languages in the Middle East and Africa.

“...most Chinese security personnel are military veterans but they lack the combat training and experience of their international counterparts.”



The Lessons China Taught Itself: Why the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Matters

by Abigail Grace

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-lessons-china-taught-itself-why-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-matters/>

OE Watch Commentary: China’s changing political landscape and the recent accession of India to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) marks the beginning of a new chapter for one of China’s first self-founded multilateral groupings. First established in June 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s initial activities were primarily focused on security, namely combating the “three evils”—terrorism, separatism, and extremism. This year’s leader-level summit marks the first instance in which Indian Prime Minister Modi will join the grouping as a full member, introducing a democratic counterweight into an organization historically dominated by China, and to a lesser degree, Russia.

Largely absent from previous outcome-focused Western analyses is a close look at the lessons that China itself has learned on advancing its geostrategic interests through multilateral organizations. A review of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s activities reveals that China perceives the organization as a blank canvas to hone its own approaches to leading on the international stage. Moreover, official releases from the SCO itself acknowledge the need for the group to continue refining coordination and organization mechanisms. Thus, the current value of the SCO is as a forum for China to define and articulate its interests, shape the focus of international institutions based on its own domestic priorities, lobby its neighbors to adopt its approach, and codify those views within an internationally legitimate multilateral process.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was preceded by the Shanghai Five, which was created in April 1996 by all SCO founding member states, excluding Uzbekistan. The Shanghai Five’s initial mandate was limited in scope and focused on the demilitarization and clear delineation borders within the region. China’s initial step into this multilateral grouping was driven by a strategic necessity stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the need for clear territorial boundaries, rather than a broader plan to imbue Eurasia with multilateralism. As time passed, and China’s grip on the security situation in Xinjiang tightened, Chinese officials advocated the expansion of the SCO’s mandate.

In 2004, official SCO documents began to increasingly emphasize the “further development and deepening of the SCO cooperation on trade, economic, investment.” These preliminary discussions served as a precursor to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. By 2006, the SCO was highlighting the role of information and communications technology (ICT) in its forward planning documents, and openly acknowledging that ICT could cause “serious damage to the security...and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.” The SCO’s work on ICT is particularly noteworthy, as it both presaged and proceeded in concert with an evolution of Chinese rhetoric on ICT standards into a robust defense of “cyber sovereignty.” The complementary nature of China’s work in the SCO with its work in other multinational fora is underscored by its repeated efforts to use the United Nations as a means to legitimize and extend China’s illiberal ICT governance norms across new domains.

The Chinese Communist Party’s 18th Party Congress marked the beginning of Secretary General Xi Jinping’s tenure and a sharp shift in how China perceived itself within the existing international order. Chief among Xi’s initiatives is to “unremittingly strive” for the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” by 2049. As China has realized success with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in its bilateral dealings with SCO member states, China’s Foreign Ministry is increasingly linking BRI to the upcoming work of the SCO itself. Indeed, a key deliverable for the 2018 SCO Summit was the “strengthening of ties” between the SCO countries and the Belt and Road Initiative, which, “have been closely related...from the very beginning.”

Although China has succeeded in gaining Russian support for the Belt and Road Initiative over the past five years, India’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization introduces another actor, one that is keen to check China’s ambitions for regional hegemony. At the 2018 meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Foreign Ministers, India refused to endorse the Belt and Road Initiative, highlighting a fissure between the members. Despite this public split, both China and India have used the 2018 SCO Qingdao Summit to highlight regional cooperation rather than competition. However, on controversial issues such as ICT standards, India could constraint the SCO’s ability to forcefully advocate for Beijing and Moscow’s preferred positions at the United Nations. In contrast to the SCO’s 2017 Astana Declaration, the 2018 Qingdao Declaration notably declined to endorse the SCO’s 2015 ICT standards submission to the United Nations.

Altogether, the 2018 Qingdao Declaration totals two thousand more words than the SCO’s 2017 Astana Declaration and includes references to issues as diverse as infectious diseases, e-trade, Afghanistan’s peace process, the Syrian Civil War, international trade barriers, peace on the Korean Peninsula, disarmament and nonproliferation, state sovereignty, counterterrorism, drug-trafficking, anti-corruption efforts, and a host of other topics.

That China’s Foreign Ministry was able to lead multilateral negotiations on such an array of issues demonstrates their bureaucrats’ attention to detail, diplomatic deftness, and desire to influence policy outcomes on a broad range of matters, many of which may not produce tangible impacts for years to come. By building multilateral support for emerging issue sets that remain under discussed within developing countries, China is benefitting from a “first mover” approach to international relations, where it is able to set the parameters and define success on matters that will be of critical importance to future generations.

In the years to come, it remains to be seen if China itself will adhere to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s pledge to advance this “new type of international relations” defined by equality among all states and domestic political non-interference, or if China’s own “great rejuvenation” will impinge upon those in its periphery. What is certain is that China’s engagement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has taught Beijing valuable lessons on how to form, shape, and engage “new models” of international organizations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grace)**

(continued)



Continued: The Lessons China Taught Itself: Why the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Matters

“Trade volume between China and countries along the Belt and Road has exceeded five trillion U.S. dollars.”

Source: “Economic Watch: SCO in closer ties with Belt and Road Initiative,” *Xinhua*, 9 June 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/09/c_137241789.htm

...Initiated in 2015, the Qingdao freight trains have travelled from China to Central Asia over 3,000 times, making the coastal city a node on the economic corridor linking China, Central Asia and Europe.

Qingdao, which hosts the 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit this weekend, is one of the witnesses of the enhanced connectivity between China and other SCO members thanks to the development of the Belt and Road Initiative...Trade volume between China and countries along the Belt and Road has exceeded five trillion U.S. dollars...



Aerial view of the Civic District, Singapore River and Central Business District, Singapore.

Source: By kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=59759702>.



Davao City: An Innocent Tourist Attraction or a Stop Toward Further Militarization

OE Watch Commentary: Stopovers by the Chinese military in the Philippines have been drawing attention and raising concern over the past month. On 16 July, according to the accompanying excerpted article published in the Philippine news source *Inquirer*, a Chinese research vessel reportedly docked to replenish in Davao City, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s hometown. The stop was said to be routine, in which China had obtained diplomatic clearance from higher authority.

The visit drew added attention because, according to the *Inquirer* article, earlier in the month, six opposition senators expressed their concern by filing two resolutions calling for an inquiry into earlier “technical stops” of Chinese cargo planes in Davao City. Critics were quick to point out that the Philippines does not hold a Visiting Forces Agreement with China.

The accompanying excerpted article, published by the *Manilla Bulletin*, confirmed the visit, calling it routine. The article went on to describe other visits. For example, from 30 April to 3 May this year, “three Chinese vessels were in the country for a goodwill visit,” docking at Sasa Wharf in Davao City. In June, A Chinese aircraft landed and refueled in Davao. More recently, a Chinese People’s Liberation Army Air Force Ilyushin IL-76 refueled at Davao International Airport. The IL-76 is a heavy-transport plane capable of carrying tanks and other military equipment.

The port calls could very well be routine, or it could be connected to China’s militarization of the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea disputed areas. Either way, it is interesting to note, however, that all the visits have taken place in Davao. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“...opposition senators have taken interest on the presence of Chinese military transport planes in Davao City.”

Source: “Chinese Research Vessel Docks in Davao,” *Inquirer*, 16 July 2018. <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/168461/breaking-chinese-research-vessel-docks-davao>

A Chinese research vessel docked at President Rodrigo Duterte’s hometown in Davao City on Monday night.

Philippine Navy spokesperson Cdr. Jonathan Zata said Yuan Wang 3 arrived at 8:14 p.m. in Davao City for replenishment purposes.

He said the visit obtained a diplomatic clearance from higher authorities and there was “nothing unusual” about it.

The visit comes as opposition senators have taken interest on the presence of Chinese military transport planes in Davao City

Source: Francis Wakefield, “PN Confirms Arrival of Chinese Survey Ship in Davao City,” *Manila Bulletin*, 17 July 2018. <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/17/pn-confirms-arrival-of-chinese-survey-ship-in-davao-city>

“It’s completely routine, nothing unusual about the visit. We had Chinese warships calling on our ports in the past the same as with any other warships from other countries,” [Navy spokesman Commodor Jonathan Zata] added.

It was recalled that three Chinese Navy vessels were in the country for a goodwill visit from April 30 to May 3, 2018.

The vessels— Chang Chun (DDG 150), a guided missile destroyer; Kin Zhou (FFG 532), a guided missile frigate; and Chao Hu (890), a replenishment ship — also docked at Sasa Wharf in Davao City.

The flotilla was headed by Rear Adm. Shen Hao, deputy commander of the East Sea Fleet of the People Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and the concurrent commander-in-chief of the PLA Navy Task Group 150.

In June, government also allowed a Chinese aircraft to land and refuel in President Rodrigo Duterte’s hometown of Davao City.

A Chinese People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) Ilyushin Il-76 made another refueling stopover at the Davao International Airport on Saturday noon.

The IL-76 is a known heavy-transport plane designed to carry tanks, guns and other military equipment. It has a wingspan of about 50 meters and has a payload of at least 40 tons.



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The Indian Government's Response to Chinese Maritime Activities

OE Watch Commentary: As the government of China continues to develop the capabilities of its naval forces and expands its maritime economic reach (such as the agreement with the government of Sri Lanka for a majority control of the Hambantota Port), there has been a harsh reaction from the government of India and Indian defense and security analysts (the latter are equally critical of China and of the Indian government for not acting quickly enough to counter Chinese activities). The accompanying excerpted articles from Indian news sources report on the forces under the Andaman and Nicobar Command (the island chain in between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, east of India) and a recent agreement between the governments of India and Seychelles over the development of a naval base on Seychelles' Assumption Island. The articles provide a look at a couple of things that the Indian government is doing in response to Chinese maritime activities.

The article from the online version of *Force*, an English-language monthly magazine that focuses on defense issues in India, features an interview with Vice Admiral Bimal Verma about his role as Commander in Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command and the capabilities of the Indian forces on the island. Admiral Vera discusses the "Long Term Perspective Plan" for the naval contingent on the island, including "more and larger amphibious ships, more weapon carrying platforms, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capable and missile carrying platforms" and that this would complement the current units there, which are "suited for surveillance." He also notes the army's contingent as having "two infantry battalions and one Territorial Army battalion" and that there is a plan for another army battalion (presumably infantry). Admiral Verma also talks about "mission-based deployment in the Straits of Malacca," which appears to be centered on maintaining an active presence in the straits, as well as a recent exercise focused on a scenario of defending the island, which the interviewer notes, "got a bit of a traction in the Chinese press." There have been previous reports that the Indian government has not put enough of a priority on funding for the Andaman and Nicobar Command, but this could be changing.

The article from *The Wire*, an English-language news website in India, reports on the agreement between the governments of India and Seychelles "on a project to develop a naval base at Assumption Island." The two sides initially reached an agreement for the base earlier this year, only for it to be rejected in the parliament of Seychelles amid a protest from the country's political opposition and public. For now, it appears that this agreement will go through and it represents another step, alongside the continuing development of the forces in the Andaman and Nicobar Command, which the Indian government is taking in response to Chinese maritime activities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: "Interview | Commander in Chief Andaman and Nicobar Command, Vice Admiral Bimal Verma AVSM, ADC," *Force*, 12 June 2018. <http://forceindia.net/interview/commander-chief-andaman-nicobar-command-vice-admiral-bimal-verma-avsm-adc/>

(Force): Given the tasks this command has — from defence of the Andaman and Nicobar island chain to keeping a watch on what moves around in this area — what assets would you ideally want, in terms of amphibious vessels, surveillance systems etc?

(Vice Admiral Bimal Verma): When the Andaman and Nicobar Command was created in 2001, it was planned to induct a range of assets into the (Order of Battle) of the newly raised Command. However, the build-up of force levels is still work in progress...There is a blueprint under consideration, it has gone through several iterations and the planned assets could be expected to materialise over the next two Plan periods.

(Force): What are these assets?

(Verma): You would be aware of the Long Term Perspective Plan (LTPP) of the services...as far as the surface component of navy is concerned, more and larger amphibious ships, more weapon carrying platforms, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capable and missile carrying platforms are planned. Currently, the assets that we have are suited for surveillance. Recently, some more platforms including a weapon platform have been added.

As far as the army is concerned, right now we have two infantry battalions and one Territorial Army battalion...The induction of a third army battalion is part of the long term plan. Also, in due course, 108 Mountain Brigade at ANC (Andaman and Nicobar Command) will become comprehensively independent; which will result in certain additional assets such as integral air defence...

(Force): The CNS (Chief of Naval Staff) has been speaking about the mission-based deployments...What assets have been deployed for that?

(Verma): The mission-based deployment in the Straits of Malacca is steered by ANC. We, at ANC and the Eastern Naval Command, jointly deploy assets to maintain a constant presence there. The assets with long sea legs, helicopter carrying capability and good sensors are being deployed in the mouth of Malacca straits...

(Force): What were the lessons learnt in Defence of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Exercise (DANX) conducted last year which also got a bit of a traction in the Chinese press?

(Verma): All services conduct annual major exercises, be it TROPEX by the Navy or Gagan Shakti of the IAF. While each service participates in some form or the other in these exercises, including forces from ANC; these exercises are conceived by the respective service headquarters. What sets DANX apart is that the exercise was conceived by us at ANC for the defence of A&N islands. Besides all our assets, we got certain force accretion from the three services in the mainland which included the Special Forces too...

(Force): Today you have amphibious capability for about two battalions. What is it that ideally you should be looking for in your area of responsibility?

(Verma): The ANC has a defensive role and I think for that the brigade-level is adequate for the time being.

Force: Is there anything else you would like to share?

(Verma): This is the only joint operational command in the country...I have all the operational assets of the armed forces directly under me and we operate seamlessly...I am a naval officer, but here I don the camouflage uniform of our sister service. I would say that the last two-three years have been quite productive for us...While the army has given some of its assets from its existing kitty (inventory); the IAF has increased the number of Mi-17 helicopters in the islands. And the navy has provided weapon carrying platforms...

(continued)



Continued: The Indian Government's Response to Chinese Maritime Activities

“The assets with long sea legs, helicopter carrying capability and good sensors are being deployed in the mouth of Malacca straits.”

Source: “India, Seychelles Agree to Work on Assumption Island Project,” *The Wire*, 25 June 2018. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-seychelles-assumption-island-project>

India and Seychelles today agreed to work together on a project to develop a naval base at the Assumption Island keeping each other's concerns in mind after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Danny Faure...

The visit comes just days after Faure said that a joint project with New Delhi to develop a naval base at Assumption Island in his country would not move forward...India also announced a \$100-million credit to Seychelles for augmenting its defence capabilities...

On the project to develop a naval facility at the island, which would give India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean Region, Modi said, “We have agreed to work together on the Assumption Island project based on each other's rights.”...



Indian Navy Ships.

Source: Michael Scalet (Flickr), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vran/441968765>, CC 2.0.



Sea Trials for China's Second Aircraft Carrier Point to Accelerating Growth in Capability

OE Watch Commentary: The rate of China's accelerating progress in its aircraft carrier program is an indication of the country's commitment to rapidly building a stronger, more capable navy. As described in the two accompanying excerpted articles, published in *New Delhi's Television (NDTV)* and the *South China Morning Post* respectively, China's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, known as the Type 001A, was preparing for its second sea trial in early July. The first sea trial took place from 13-18 May.

The Type 001A is China's second aircraft carrier. The first carrier, the Liaoning, was a refitted Soviet-era Admiral Kuznetsov-class vessel. While the Liaoning is an older platform, analysts view it as an ideal platform from which to learn. Song Zhongping, a military expert and TV commentator who was cited in both articles, explained that the Liaoning had taken nearly six years to become fully combat-ready after it entered service in 2012. Having gained experience in testing a large warship, Song expects the process to be accelerated for the Type 001A, with the ship expected to become operational and delivered to the People's Liberation Army Navy within the next two years. First, however, it must successfully undergoes tests in different waters and under different ocean conditions.



The Type 001A aircraft carrier after launch at Dalian (2017).

Source: GG001213, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%81%9C%E6%B3%8A%E4%BA%8E%E5%A4%A7%E8%BF%9E%E6%B8%AF%E7%9A%84001A.jpg>, CCO.

Developing and constructing the Type 001A reportedly took 532 Chinese enterprises, including private firms, to complete and some 3,000 workers from across China worked on it daily. The vessel is said to contain more than 12,000 pieces of equipment and more than 3,600 cabins. The propulsion system design, copied from the Liaoning's Soviet TB-12 engines, uses eight steam turbines.

The PLA has long lacked air supremacy in the South China Sea and on the high seas. Chinese observers are hopeful that the country's aircraft carrier program could help it to overcome these shortcomings. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“It took nearly six years for the Liaoning to become fully combat-ready after it entered service in 2012. But...the experience gained (will) allow the new vessel to become combat-ready within about two years.”

Source: “China's First Home Built Aircraft Carrier to Embark on Second Sea Trial,” *NDTV*, 6 July 2018. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/chinas-first-home-built-aircraft-carrier-set-to-embark-on-second-sea-trial-1878997>

The carrier's first sea trial was from May 13 to 18, and the success of the first trial proves that the process could be accelerated, a military expert said.

“The carrier can be delivered to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy as soon as possible,” Song [Zhongping, a military expert and TV commentator] told state-run Global Times.

China already has one aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, in service, ...”The Liaoning helps China gain experience in testing a huge warship like an aircraft carrier, so it can accelerate the progress for the next one, but progress has to be made step by step.”

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) used to lack air supremacy in the South China Sea and on the high seas, Song said, adding that the aircraft carrier could help overcome that shortcoming.

Boasting more than 12,000 pieces of equipment, the carrier has been made by 532 Chinese enterprises including many private firms.

The vessel has more than 3,600 cabins. About 3,000 workers from across China worked on the ship on a daily basis.

Source: Catherine Wong and Minnie Chan, “China's First Home-Grown Type 001A Aircraft Carrier Begins Maiden Sea Trial,” *South China Morning Post*, 23 April 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2142989/chinas-first-home-grown-aircraft-carrier-begins-maiden>

The sea trial of the Type 001A carrier, which coincides with the PLA Navy's 69th anniversary, is expected to be limited in scope and duration but analysts said it had a symbolic importance as China sought to highlight the advances it had made as a nautical power.

The Type 001A's propulsion system uses eight steam turbines – a design copied from the Soviet TB-12 engines used by its sister ship, the Liaoning.

Zhou said the new carrier would be tested for between six and 12 months in different waters and different ocean conditions before it was handed over to the navy.

One expert predicted the vessel could be combat-ready within two years.

It took nearly six years for the Liaoning to become fully combat-ready after it entered service in 2012. But Song said that the experience gained would allow the new vessel to become combat-ready within about two years.



Singapore's Cyber-Security Strategy

OE Watch Commentary: On 17 June Singapore's *The Straits Times* published the accompanying excerpted article discussing the terrorism and cyber threats that the Singapore Armed Forces is facing, as well as the ways Singapore is contributing to countering these threats domestically and internationally. According to the article, Singapore is one of the most "connected" countries in the world in terms of citizen's personal and professional lives. This makes the cyber threat particularly important in the country.

To address cyber threats, the country has developed a Cyber Defense Test and Evaluation Centre where soldiers can test how to handle simulation cyberattacks. In 2017 the Singapore Armed Forces also engaged in an internal reorganization to address cyber threats with the creation of the C4 Command, which stands for command, control, communications and computers and is staffed by full-time national servicemen with expertise on cyber security. In addition, the Singapore Armed Forces, according to the article, trains 18,000 soldiers more generally in counterterrorism.

While addressing problems such as cyber security domestically, the article also shows how Singapore seeks to extend its skills and expertise abroad as a form of soft power. The Singapore Armed Forces Counter-Terrorism Training Unit, for example, also partnered with and trained Iraqi security forces in combat tactics and improvised explosive devices to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). According to the article, as a small state, Singapore is aware that it requires strong defense ties with other countries and regular joint military exercises with them in order to deal with challenges it faces. This is likely one of the reasons for Singapore's overseas support to the counter-ISIS campaign. In its own region, the article notes, Singapore has also enhanced military cooperation with Brunei and Thailand in recent years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Singapore is highly connected, which makes us more susceptible to cyber threats.”

Source: “Terrorism and cyber threats among pressing security issues SAF has to deal with: DPM Tharman,” *The Straits Times*, 17 June 2018. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/terrorism-and-cyber-threats-among-pressing-security-issues-saf-has-to-deal-with-dpm>

Terrorism and cyber threats are pressing security issues which Singapore has to deal with and the changing role of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) reflects this. The SAF has evolved over the years into a fighting force capable of a wide range of operations, such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief operations, peace support operations and maritime security deployments. The SAF has made “significant strides” in addressing cyber threats as well and “Singapore is highly connected, which makes us more susceptible to cyber threats,” said Deputy Prime Minister Tharman. Dealing with the challenges require strong defence ties with other countries, maintained through regular exercises together. Tharman was the reviewing officer at the commissioning parade where a total of 348 officer cadets, including those from the Royal Brunei Armed Forces and the Royal Thai Army, graduated after 38 weeks of training.



Aerial view of the Civic District, Singapore River and Central Business District, Singapore.
Source: Jxcacs, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aerial_view_of_the_Civic_District_Singapore_River_and_Central_Business_District_Singapore_-_20080518.jpg, (CC BY 2.0).



Japan Develops Islands in Indonesia's Natuna Sea

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the Indonesian language news website *Nusantara News*, reports on Indonesia's most recent cooperation with Japan over islands in the Natuna Sea. The sea is officially part of Indonesia's Riau Islands Province, but is claimed by China in the demarcation of its territory in the South China Sea. According to the article, Japan will help develop six of the outer islands in the Natuna Sea. In particular, this assistance will include fishery technology, fishing markets and capacity building in fishing techniques, which was agreed upon in September 2017 during the sixth bilateral strategic dialogue between Japan and Indonesia. That dialogue revolves around politics, security, economy, trade and investment, people to people contact, and exploration of opportunities for strategic cooperation between the two countries, according to the article.

Japan's strategic cooperation with Indonesia in the Natuna Sea is certain to have implications for China. Just as China has developed disputed islands in the South China Sea that it controls, Indonesia appears to be doing the same. From the Indonesian perspective, the more developed the islands in the Natuna Sea become, the more difficult it will be for China to legitimate its claim on them. Japan has an interest in making it more difficult for China to claim all the territory in the South China Sea that it claims, particularly as it relates to Japanese-Chinese maritime disputes. This is likely why, according to the article, Japan has made a significant investment in those six islands in the Natuna Sea, amounting to six billion yen (\$53 million). This case also shows that for Japan, which is Indonesia's second largest investor, economic, security and development interests in Southeast Asia are often complementary. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Six outer islands will become a Japan-Indonesia project.”



Map of South China Sea showing Natuna.

Source: By Hobe / Holger Behr [Public domain], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karta_CN_SouthChinaSea.PNG.

Source: “Enam Pulau Terluar Yang Akan Menjadi Proyek Maritim Jepang-Indonesia (Six Outlying Islands Which Will Become Japan-Indonesia Maritime Project),” *Nusantara News*, 26 June 2018. <https://nusantaranews.co/enam-pulau-terluar-yang-akan-menjadi-proyek-maritim-jepang-indonesia/>

Six outer islands will become a Japan-Indonesia project. Following the maritime cooperation plan that was initiated in September last year, Japan and Indonesia signed the Exchanges of Notes on the Integrated Marine and Fisheries Centers and Fish Market. The funding of the six islands' development reached six billion yen. The form of assistance will be fishery technology, fishing markets and capacity building in the fisheries sector. Both ministers agree on the importance of increasing cooperation in the field of investment, particularly in infrastructure. As is known, at present, Japan is the second largest investor in Indonesia with an investment value of US \$5 billion in 2017.



China's cyber policy appears to have three vectors —peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner— that 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>



Differing Narratives Explain Myanmar Violence

OE Watch Commentary: For the past several years the violence and displacement in Myanmar's Rakhine State has been increasing and during this time various narratives have emerged about who is responsible for what has taken place. The accompanying excerpted article from *The Straits Times* discusses some of those narratives. According to the article, Myanmar's national security adviser does not deny that a humanitarian crisis exists, but views the situation as terrorism-driven. In particular, he points to the jihadist group, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), as responsible for causing tensions between ethnic groups through its attacks mostly on Buddhists. Referring to an Amnesty International report that highlighted some ARSA attacks, the national security adviser says ARSA has targeted village heads and civilians, while also engaging in a propaganda campaign to make the military look bad.

On the other hand, the article points to a British journalist who has been reporting on the Rohingya situation. The journalist suggests Myanmar's national security adviser makes a false equivalence where he compared Buddhist and Muslim suffering. The journalist argues that international organizations have documented arson, rape and murder disproportionately against Rohingya civilians, which is the reason why the vast majority of Rohingya civilians have fled their villages.

For reasons of maintaining neutrality, the article notes that the president of the International Red Cross has not weighed in on which narrative he considers to be correct. However, he did confirm that the vast majority of displaced Rohingya people were not ready to return to Myanmar due to their lack of trust in security forces in the country as well as other economic reasons, such as the lack of markets in their former villages, which have been destroyed.

The article also cited another perspective from the Thai ambassador to Vietnam, who argued that the root cause of the conflict was the socio-economic conditions of Rakhine State in which the Rohingyas have generally been left poorer than their Buddhist counterparts. Finally, one of the more alarming concerns about the crisis, according to the article, came from the European Union Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs, who said that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) could find fertile ground for the terrorist recruitment among displaced Rohingyas. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“European Union Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs Jean-Christophe Belliard added that leaving the crisis to fester could foment terrorism.”

Source: “Myanmar national security adviser says terrorism at the root of conflict in Rakhine state,” *The Straits Times*, 2 June 2018. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/myanmar-national-security-adviser-says-terrorism-at-the-root-of-conflict-in-rakhine-state>

Myanmar national security adviser Thaung Tun has called on the international community to view the humanitarian crisis in the Rakhine state “more objectively”, saying that naming and shaming would only inflame inter-communal violence. “Myanmar does not deny that what is unfolding in northern Rakhine is a humanitarian crisis, but it is a crisis that affects more than one community,” said Mr Thaung Tun. He said that, for instance, the premeditated and brutal killings of village heads and civilians by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militant group - detailed by Amnesty International in a report - caused ethnic groups to flee the area.

Critics include British journalist Mr Richard Lloyd Parry from The Times. Mr Parry said tales of arson, rape and murder are overwhelmingly of Rohingya civilians, leading to their flight into Bangladesh. International Red Cross president Peter Maurer warned that the vast majority of displaced people were not yet ready to return. Outgoing Thai ambassador to Vietnam, Manopchai Vongphakdi, said, “We believe the root cause of the problem is related to the socioeconomic conditions of Rakhine state. The distribution of equitable and inclusive growth should be addressed urgently.” European Union Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs Jean-Christophe Belliard added that leaving the crisis to fester could foment terrorism.



Burnt down house in northern Rakhine State (Moe Zaw-VOA).

Source: Moe Zaw, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burnt_down_house_in_northern_Rakhine_State_\(Moe_Zaw-VOA\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burnt_down_house_in_northern_Rakhine_State_(Moe_Zaw-VOA).jpg), (CC-by-2.0).



The Role of Turkish Special Forces in Operation Olive Branch

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish Special Forces Command (OKK), which is also known as the Maroon Berets, includes officers of various class and rank, non-commissioned officers and expert sergeants. They are trained to operate in all types of terrain and climate while encountering internal and external threats to Turkey's national security. In addition to the Maroon Berets, in recent years the Police Special Forces (POH) and Gendarmerie Special Forces (JOH) have carried out several operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) youth affiliate Civil Protection Units (YPS previously YDG-H), especially in heavily urbanized areas. The accompanying excerpted articles provide information about the role Maroon Berets, the POH and JOH played during Turkish military operation in the Syrian city of Afrin.

The accompanying article from Turkish State-run *Anadolu Agency* focuses on the role of POH and JOH forces in Operation Olive Branch and why they were chosen to take part. According to the article, the two special forces units have the capability to organize coordinated attacks in both urban and rural terrain. They gained urban warfare experience jointly combating the YPS in the Turkey's Kurdish cities Sur, Silopi, Cizre, Idil, Yuksekova, Nusaybin and Sirnak in 2016. A video accompanying the article shows these special forces in their full gear conducting searches in an unspecified residential area near Afrin. The video also shows that the POH and JOH carried MPT-76 infantry rifles that were made in Turkey. This rifle has effective firing range of 600 meters and has been equipped with night vision scopes.

The second accompanying passage, from the pro-government newspaper *Sabah*, states that the Maroon Berets were the critical units in Operation Olive Branch as the rest of units were selected and positioned according to the intelligence provided by these forces. Some of the Maroon Berets' duties include surveillance on enemy positions and structures, infiltration into enemy territory, and carrying out counterterrorism operations. They operate under the OKK, which reports to the General Staff. According to the article, the type of the military hardware that was used in the operation was decided in accordance with the information by the Maroon Berets. For example, they requested Leopard tanks instead of MA63 tanks. The plan for Operation Olive Branch was prepared based on the information provided by the Maroon Berets. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“JOH and POH have gained significant urban warfare experience in 2016 in Sur, Silopi, Cizre, Idil, Yuksekova, Nusaybin ve Sirnak. They have operational capability in all kinds of terrain.”



Turkish female special forces police (PÖH), 2016.

Source: http://m.haberturk.com/2016/09/17/1297688_e1b8b9d1146244266c681ffac5cc0ee_640x640.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_female_special_forces_police_\(P%C3%96H\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_female_special_forces_police_(P%C3%96H).jpg).

Source: Soner Kılınc, “JÖH ve PÖH’ler Afrin görevinde (JOHs and POHs are in duty in Afrin Duty),” *Anadolu Agency*, 1 March 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/joh-ve-pohler-afrin-gorevinde-/1076904>

Within the scope of Operation Olive Branch that [was] carried out by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), the Gendarmerie Special Forces (JOH) and Police Special Forces (POH), units that came from all over Turkey have been supporting the operation in the Afrin countryside.

...JOH and POH with joint operation capability have been deployed to the bases that have established. They are conducting explosive destruction and home search activities, especially in residential areas when needed.

The specially trained JOH and POH teams, who search the villages cleared of terrorists one by one, are vigilant against any terrorist infiltrations at night.

With the capability to work in rural terrain, JOH and POH perform their duties continuously over 24 hours with their weapons reinforced with night vision...

...JOH and POH will carry out important duties in operations in Afrin city center. JOH and POH have gained significant urban warfare experience in 2016 in Sur, Silopi, Cizre, Idil, Yuksekova, Nusaybin ve Sirnak. They have operational capability in all kinds of terrain.

Source: Ahmet Topal, “Afrin’in anahtarı Özel Kuvvetler’de (Afrin’s key is with Special Forces),” *Sabah*, 18 January 2018. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/01/18/afrinin-anahtari-ozel-kuvvetlerde>

The most critical unit of the Afrin operation will be the Special Forces. They will do the first infiltration. The other units in the field will take positions according to them and they will proceed with the instructions of the Maroon Berets.

...The Special Forces Command, operating directly under the Chief of the General Staff, also completed its long-standing preparations. The information gathered by Special Forces personnel from Afrin was effective in preparing the plans of the operation.

...Preparations were made according to the needs of the special forces. It was learned that Maroon Berets demanded Leopard tanks instead of MA63 tanks...It was stated that the commandos that were sent to the area were chosen from the experienced personnel who will adapt to the Maroon Berets.



Egypt's Thunderbolt Forces: Image and Reality

OE Watch Commentary: The Thunderbolt Forces (Quwwat al-Sa'iqā) are the Egyptian military's most prominent and best-known special forces units. They are consistently exalted by Egyptian media and are highly capable at self-promotion and image control. Historically, they are considered among the region's most competent special operations units. For example, a "ranking" of Arab Special Forces published on the Arabic-language version of *Sputnik* last year considers the Thunderbolt Forces the region's most capable (The "rankings" are based on a video posted to YouTube from an account focused on Arab military affairs). Not surprisingly, this view is particularly prevalent in Egyptian media. The accompanying excerpt from *el-Mogaz*, for instance, cites the former head of the Thunderbolt Forces, who confides that these forces are the "top-ranked globally" and are "doing a much better job in fighting terrorism than the US Marines did."

The accompanying excerpt from *Egypt Defence Review*, written in the summer of 2017 by a local commentator of Egyptian military affairs, presents a dissenting view on the Thunderbolt Forces. The article asserts that "only chauvinistic Egyptians can claim that they're the best in the Arab world with a straight face. When the reality is the progress made by the Iraqi Golden Division, Jordanian JSOC, UAE SOF, and Tunisians means Egypt shouldn't even be in the conversation anymore." The Thunderbolt Forces, he claims, "have not moved in line with the world wide SOF community. Instead they still train and plan for a conflict with a conventional enemy." This, he continues, is because the Egyptian Armed Forces are "stuck in 1973" and consequently "unable to strategically plan for current and emerging threats." While the Thunderbolt training program may be producing soldiers "who are physically robust, motivated, and have a unique ethos" they are nonetheless "poorly skilled for what should be elite Special Operations Forces soldiers in the 21st Century."

There has been recent evidence that graduates from the Thunderbolt Forces academy, located in the Nile Delta northeast of Cairo, are capable of taking on a conventional adversary; unfortunately for Egypt, that conventional adversary happens to be the Egyptian Army. Egypt's most notorious jihadist rebel is a man by the name of Hisham Ashmawy. His elusive network has carried out several successful ambushes and assassinations. Ashmawy graduated from the Thunderbolt Forces academy but was subsequently tossed out of the army for fears that he was becoming radicalized. One of Ashmawy's key associates was killed by an Egyptian airstrike in October 2017. Named Emad al-Din Abd al-Hamid, he was also a Thunderbolt Forces graduate who had been expelled from the military for suspected religious radicalism. Earlier that month, Abd al-Hamid orchestrated an ambush that killed many Egyptian police and military personnel in the country's Western Desert, near the border with Libya. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"... the progress made by the Iraqi Golden Division, Jordanian JSOC, UAE SOF, and Tunisians means Egypt shouldn't even be in the conversation any more..."

Source: أفضل 5 قوات خاصة عربية
"5 Top Arab Special Forces," *Sputnik*, 1 April 2017. <https://goo.gl/EopZjZ>

#1: Egyptian Special Forces

...In order to join the Thunderbolt Forces one must be extremely physically fit and submit to a special medical examination. The units under the command of the Thunderbolt Forces are initially submitted to the highest levels of training at the Thunderbolt command in Inshas. Those who the school selects for commission are placed in the Thunderbolt units and Egyptian Naval Special Units. The training of the group takes 34 weeks without pause, in addition to the medical examinations.

Source: خبير عسكري يكشف ترتيب قوات الصاعقة المصرية على مستوى العالم
"Military Expert Reveals Global Ranking of Egyptian Special Forces," *el-Mogaz*, 16 August 2017. <http://www.elmogaz.com/node/407188>

The former head of the Thunderbolt Forces, General Mustafa Kamel, said that these forces are the best in the world. Despite their relatively recent formation (1957) these forces are the top-ranked globally... The Americans have gained great experience from Egyptian forces during joint exercises, especially in terms of fighting in the desert... He noted that the forces are performing excellently in the Sinai, doing a much better job in fighting terrorism than the US Marines did...

Source: "Egyptian Special Operations Forces: A Thunderbolt Introduction," *Egypt Defence Review*, 4 July 2017. <https://egyptdefreview.wordpress.com/2017/07/04/egyptian-special-operations-forces-a-thunderbolt-introduction/>

Initial Training follows the same syllabus as the rest of the Army with recruits being drilled to instill discipline and taught basic skill at arms, section tactics, and field craft. The duration of basic for Conscripts is little over a month and a half. As a result of the short training time and a syllabus that hasn't had any major changes in decades, those who pass have a very basic grasp of small unit tactics, combat marksmanship, and in general being a SOF soldier. So, it would not be a leap to say that Egyptian Conscripts in general across the majority of the Army are poorly trained riflemen...

In the end the School produces Conscripts who are physically robust, motivated, and have a unique ethos but are poorly skilled for what should be elite Special Operations Forces soldiers in the 21st Century...

This inexperience (among other factors) has lead the Thunderbolt to a position of increasing irrelevance. Whereas other nations innovated and improved the Thunderbolt has been the same for decades, it's indicative of a country and an Armed Forces that seems to be eternally stuck in 1973 and is thus unable to strategically plan for current and emerging threats...

The performance of the Thunderbolt (and the Army at large) in the Sinai proves they were and still are utterly unprepared for counter insurgency operations, they have not moved in line with the world wide SOF community. Instead they still train and plan for a conflict with a conventional enemy.

It has come to a point now where only chauvinistic Egyptians can claim that they're the best in the Arab world with a straight face. When the reality is the progress made by the Iraqi Golden Division, Jordanian JSOC, UAE SOF, and Tunisians means Egypt shouldn't even be in the conversation any more.



Visit of Chinese Military Delegation to Iran

“The biggest threat to humanity is the United States.”

OE Watch Commentary: While China has traditionally taken a hands-off approach in the Middle East, its growing energy reliance on Middle East oil and desire to compete globally, instead of just regionally, against the United States and its allies have contributed to warming ties with Iran. The accompanying excerpted article from *Tasnim News Agency*, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), documents the visit of a 16-member Chinese military delegation. With regard to Special Forces, China and Iran are not equals: China has much more to contribute to Iran in terms of equipment, training, and tactics than the reverse.



Ground Force Commander Brig. Gen. Kiyumars Heydari meets visiting Chinese delegation.
Source: Tasnim, goo.gl/ZSR7Nm, CC 4.0.

While a single visit in and of itself does not signify a change in relations, growing Sino-Iranian military ties suggest that Tehran and Beijing are serious about augmenting their ties (for more information, see “Iran Navy Enters Pacific,” *OE Watch*, April 2013; “Iran-China Air Force Cooperation on Horizon?” *OE Watch*, December 2015). Outreach to China would also conform to a traditional Iranian pattern of seeking to bolster strategic and military partnerships with countries deemed in Tehran to be otherwise uninterested in internal Iranian affairs. When Great Britain and Russia competed for influence inside Persia (as Iran was then known) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Iranian authorities turned first to Austria and then to Belgium before seeking a greater partnership with the United States. While Russo-Iranian ties have had an unprecedented rapprochement, many Iranians remain distrustful of Russia and skeptical of Moscow’s ultimate intentions (See “Special Essay: Iran-Russia Relations,” *OE Watch*, July 2016). Therefore, outreach to China makes strategic sense. Simply put, it is Tehran’s way of not putting all its eggs in one basket.

Should China and Iran cooperate on special operations, the second-order impact could be significant. The IRGC remains the chief patron not only of Hezbollah and the Houthis, but also equally dangerous militias in Iraq. Tactics learned by the IRGC from Chinese Special Forces might therefore migrate quickly into the strategic environment in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Didar-e ‘Uza-ye Hayat-e Nezam-e Chin ba Farmandeh Niru-ye Zamini Artesh (Chinese Military Delegation Meeting with Ground Forces Commander),” *Tasnim News Agency*, 3 July 2018. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/04/12/1767123/>

According to Tasnim, this delegation consisted of 16 military men from the Chinese Air Force and Navy with experience in the field of Special Operations. Tomorrow, the Chinese military delegation will also tomorrow see General Ghadir Nezami, Armed Forces General Staff deputy for International Affairs and will also visit the 65th Special Forces Airborne Brigade of the Navy. Gen. Heydari, in this meeting, welcomed the Chinese military delegation and said the two countries have a long historical record, and noted, “Iran and China are two great countries, effective in the region and the world, and both countries face common threats around the region and the world. “The biggest threat to humanity is the United States,” said the commander of the Army’s ground forces.



Iran to Launch New Satellite by Year's End

OE Watch Commentary: In a wide-ranging interview with *Mashregh News*, an outlet close to Iran's intelligence and security services, Manuchehr Manteqi, managing director of the Iran Aviation Industries Organization, discussed a number of aviation and space projects. Two portions of the interview, in the accompanying excerpted article, are illuminating. First, was his discussion of the new Sharif-Sat, an indigenous satellite developed by the Sharif University of Tehran. While the Iranian press had originally announced a February 2015 launch date, that date came and went without a launch and mention of the Sharif-Sat eventually faded from public discourse. While Manteqi's words suggest Iran is prepared again to launch the Sharif-Sat into orbit, his emphasis on budgetary caution and his suggestion that the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) has put the brakes on satellite launches are notable; indeed, he suggests that the SNSC has become the logjam in Iran's broader satellite program.

While the Islamic Republic remains deeply interested in a space program, his complaints may reflect tension between those more interested in the science behind and enabled by the satellites and the SNSC's greater interest in launch systems which have dual use ballistic missile potential. At the same time, Manteqi's mention that the designers of Sharif-Sat are producing a new satellite highlights the importance of Iranian universities in Iran's space program. Additionally, Manteqi's comments with regard to construction of a 150-seat aircraft raises questions about Iran's efforts to purchase aircraft internationally to upgrade its commercial fleet. While Iran's initial proposal included planes with a seating capacity three-times greater than the volume flown by Iranian aircraft, the excess planes may not only have been destined for the Iranian military, but also to reverse engineer for Iran's own domestic production. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The Sharif-Sat is among the important satellites that should be launched into space.”

Source: “Pertab-e Sharif Sat Montazar Tayid-e Showra-ye ‘Ali-ye Amniyat-e Melli (Launch of the Sharif Sat waiting for Approval by the Supreme National Security Council),” *Mashregh News*, 23 June 2018. <https://goo.gl/ryJfX9>

According to a Mashregh report, Iranian successes in the air and space areas in the region and the world are clear. Construction of a 150-seat aircraft is one program, and it will be built in the near future if funding becomes available. Iran's self-sufficiency in the construction and design of helicopters and airplanes was a long-standing dream which has been realized in the country today. And to get to know more about Iran's aerospace successes, we sat down with Manuchehr Manteqi, head of the National Space Center and managing director of the Iran Aviation Industries Organization, for a detailed discussion....

“Sharif Sat is set to launch this year”

Mashregh: The Supreme Leader has emphasized the aero-space field, and the Sharif-Sat is among the important satellites that should be launched into space. Can you say precisely when will this satellite finally be launched into space? Is it on the agenda, or has it been forgotten?

Manteqi: The group that designed Sharif-Sat are designing another satellite. Basically, the process of designing and building satellites in Iran has never been slow. The Sharif-Sat can be launched this year, but the exact time of launching is not my decision; the launch procedure has its own process. The satellites which are built, delivered, and integrated, and sent to the launch station, and they must get the permissions to launch from the Supreme National Security Council, or we can say the Sharif-Sat is able to be launched because everything is ready, and that the satellite will be launched when the Supreme National Security Council's approval is issued. But we're not able to follow up from the Supreme National Security Council when exactly the satellite will be launched because the Council makes its determination and issues its final decision based on both internal and external factors, and so I want to say that this is not a topic on which we can make a decision judging by the very complicated process of launching the satellite.

Mashregh: How many satellites will be launched this year?

Manteqi: Every year, there is the ability to launch satellites, and in 2017, the Simorgh was launched, and this year, God willing, the Sharif-Sat will be launched if licenses are granted.



Sharif University of Technology (SUT) Tehran.

Source: By Masoud Ki (Flickr/Sharif University of Technology), CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sharif_University_of_Technology.jpg



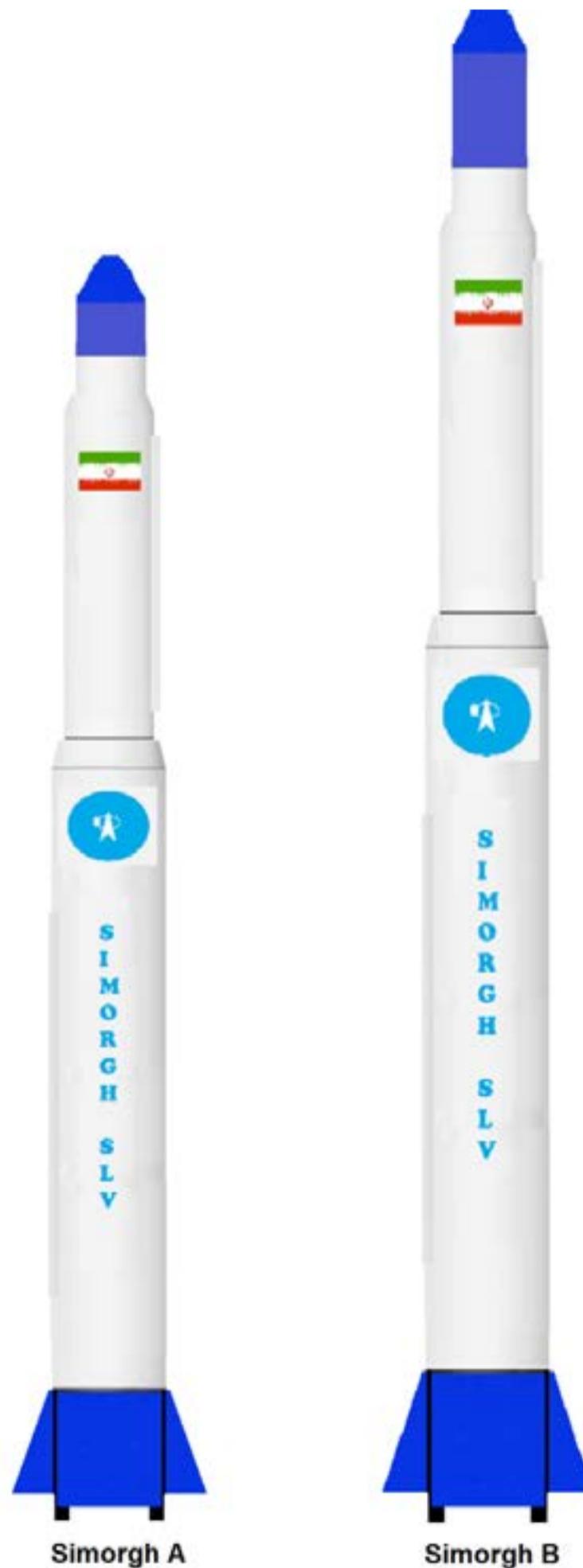
Iran's Simorgh Satellite Ready for Launch

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian authorities are signaling that they will soon be undertaking a number of satellite launches. Manuchehr Manteqi, managing director of the Iran Aviation Industries Organization, has commented that his organization is only awaiting a permit from the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) before launching the long-delayed Sharif-Sat. In this accompanying excerpt from the *Mizan News Agency*, Hossein Bolandi, director of the satellite program at the Tehran-based University of Science and Technology, reported that the “Simorgh” (Phoenix) satellite is also ready for launch. Previously, the Simorgh referred only to a satellite launch vehicle which had its first successful launch in July 2017 (after a failed attempt the previous year). Bolandi’s comments, however, draw a sharp distinction with regard to the Simorgh satellite, which is meant to bolster Iran’s telecommunication systems.

In early October 2017 Mohsen Bahrami, head of Iranian Space Agency, listed five satellites ready for launch: Doosti, Amir Kabir, Nahid 1, Zafar and Pars 1. That Bahrami mentioned neither the Simorgh nor the Sharif-Sat suggests a number of possibilities. First, it is unclear whether the Simorgh and the Sharif-Sat are truly new or are simply a rebranding of previous projects. Alternately, it is possible that those discussing the readiness of the Simorgh and Sharif-Sat are exaggerating; that Iranian satellite work is speeding up or that satellite work is dispersed and uncoordinated across Iranian entities. This latter possibility, however, seems the least plausible given the tight control the IRGC and the SNSC hold over Iran’s space program. No matter what, the increasing discussion of satellite development and readiness for launch provide an excuse for, if not directly signals, greater investment in launch vehicles, the technology for which has dual use potential in Iran’s ballistic missile program.

Bolandi’s statement concerning the job potential of Iran’s space program have all the hallmarks of advocacy for a greater budget in a time of declining resources. While his comments regarding Iran becoming a “space power” may be exaggerated, they do reflect a desire for prestige and a nationalist pride which ordinary Iranians will embrace, even if they do not support the clerical regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“We have become one of the world’s space powers.”



Simorgh SLV (2012).

Source: Vahid alpha at English Wikipedia [CC BY 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simorgh_SLV.png.

Source: “Mahvareh Simorgh Amaeh Purtab beh Faza Ast (Simorgh Satellite is Ready for Launch into Space),” *Mizan Online*, 1 July 2018. <http://www.mizanonline.com/fa/news/432211/>

According to an economic correspondent for the Mizan News Agency, Hossein Bolandi...said, “The space debate in the country dates back to the mid-1980s, when it was introduced due to the leadership of the Supreme Leader. The director of the satellite project at the University of Science and Technology said that Amir Kabir’s satellite is now ready, and added, “The Simorgh satellite, with a weight of 440-550 pounds, is also ready to be orbited 310 miles above earth.”

He said, “With its internal capabilities, all the telecommunications needs of the space division can be achieved.” Bolandi expressed that 17,000 jobs by 2025 could be on the horizon and noted, “We have made great progress in the space industry in less than 20 years, and have become one of the world’s space powers.”



Iran Preparing to Host Nanotechnology Festival

OE Watch Commentary: Three years ago, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made nanotechnology a priority for Iranian science and industry (See: “Khamenei Speaks on Nanotechnology, *OE Watch*, March 2015). With the help of Chinese partners (See: “Development of Iranian Nanotechnology Companies in China, *OE Watch*, May 2017”), Iranian nanotechnology appears to be advancing. By once again hosting a nanotechnology exhibition at Tehran’s most prominent fairgrounds and convention center, as the notice of the 11th Nanotechnology Festival and an article from *Fars News Agency* excerpted here announce, the Islamic Republic seems not only both to wrap itself in an image as a technological innovator and nanotechnology leader, but it also seeks to further promote nanotechnology and its applications among Iranian universities and companies.

While the Iranian government in some publications will refer to its nanotechnology festival as “international,” it is not clear how international it really is beyond, of course, the developing Sino-Iranian relationship in the field. As such, the announcement of a second permanent Iranian nanotechnology office in China appears to signal concrete, rather than merely aspirational developments. While the Iranian announcements focus on civilian applications, potential military nanotechnology applications include more effective body armor, more effective motion, thermal, and biochemical detection and a weight reduction of aircraft and other vehicles.

That Saeed Sarkar, secretary-general of the Iran Nanotech China Center (INCC) and an officiator at the inauguration of Iran’s second INCC office, developed his expertise as a physics graduate student at the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom may also highlight continuing debates about Iranian students on student visas who study potentially sensitive subjects in Western universities.

End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)

“The new office aims to facilitate mutual cooperation between Iran and China in the field of nanotechnology.”

Source: “Yazdehmin Joshnvareh va Nameshgah Fanavari Nano (11th Festival and Exhibition of Nanotechnology),” *Iran Nano Festival*, 8 July 2018. <http://festival.nano.ir/>

The 11th Festival and Exhibition of Nanotechnology will be held between 13 and 16 October this year at the International Permanent Fairground [in Tehran]. In this festival, there will be three active categories:

- *Institutions promoting Nanotech including a student club, a specialized book store, academic societies; and educational companies.*
- *Scientific centers and laboratories, universities and research institutes, and [industrial] parks and incubators*
- *Industrial companies in 12 sectors such as automobiles, water and environment, sanitation and health, construction, agriculture and packaging, nanomaterials, textiles, oil and related industries; commerce, consulting companies—brokers for international and technical services—will alongside the exhibition hold specialized workshops and celebrations of the products with nanotechnology certification.*

Source: “Iran Nanotech China Center (INCC) Inaugurates 2nd Office in Guangzhou,” *Fars News Agency*, 8 July 2018. <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13970417000936>

The 2nd office of the INCC inaugurated on Saturday in China’s Guangzhou, the first being in Suzhou. The new office aims to facilitate mutual cooperation between Iran and China in the field of nanotechnology and also boost interactions among companies of the two countries, the official website of Iran’s Nanotechnology Initiative Council (INIC) reported. The inauguration ceremony was held with the consul general of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Guangzhou Khalil Shirgholami, secretary general of INIC Saeed Sarkar and representatives of Chinese organizations and companies in attendance.... Iran’s first nanotechnology center was opened in 2015 in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. In a relevant development in December, an Iranian company managed to set up five nanofiber industrial production lines by electrospinning method in China. The five nanofiber industrial production lines were launched in China in the wake of agreements between an Iranian and a Chinese company.



The banner for Iran’s upcoming 11th Nanotechnology Exhibition.

Source: festival.nano.ir, goo.gl/eyJpiu.



Central Asia: Next Stop for Syria's Foreign Jihadists?

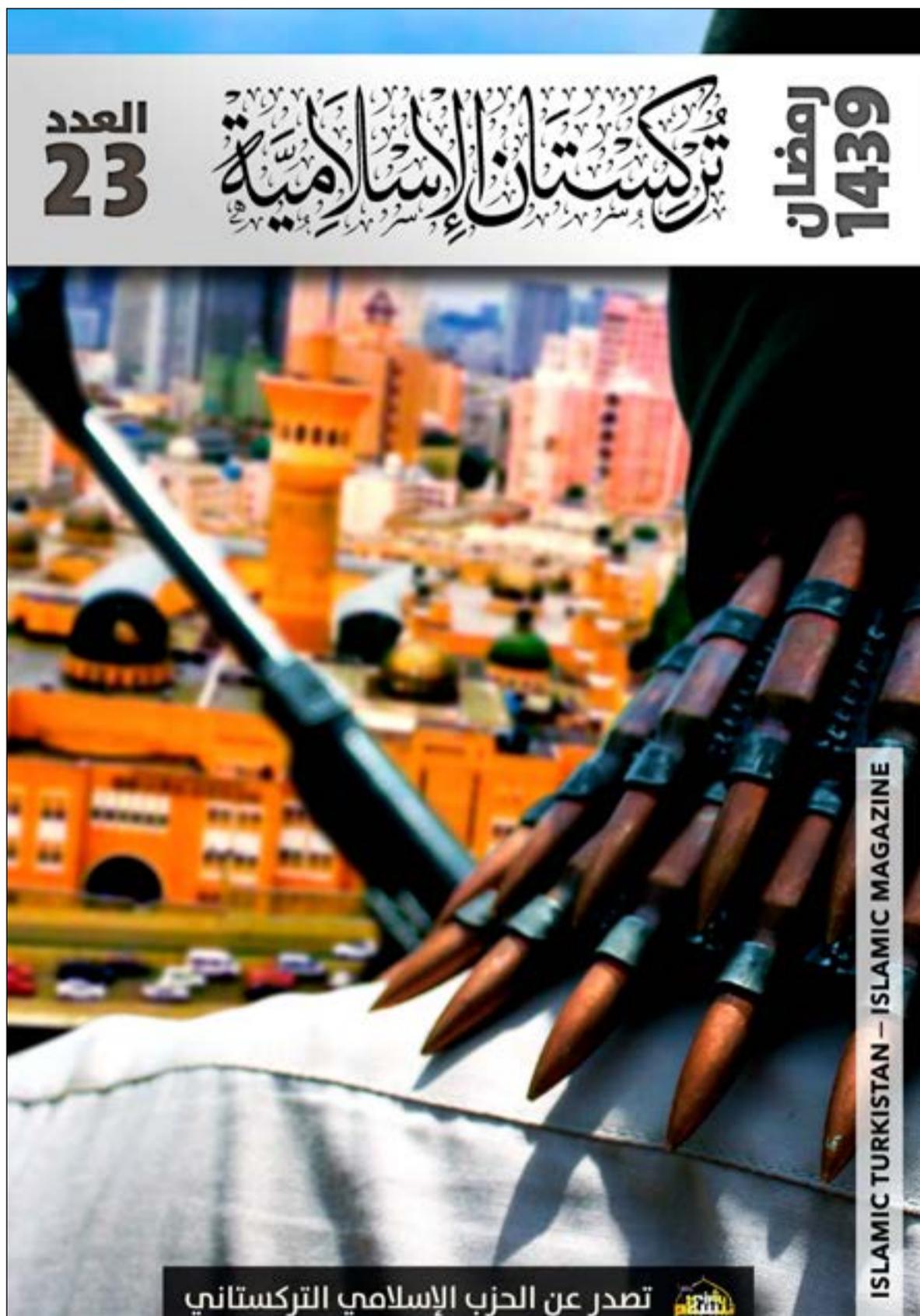
OE Watch Commentary: The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), a jihadist group made up primarily of ethnic Uyghurs, has emerged as one of the Syrian conflict's most resilient factions. With the majority of rebel groups having either collapsed, contracted, dissolved into other formations, or surrendered to government forces, the TIP has remained relatively strong and intact in its mountainous bases near the Turkish border. With the fulcrum of activity for global jihadists shifting away from Syria, though, TIP leadership may be torn between the divergent goals of consolidating gains in Syria or moving to more hospitable environments closer to their main targets in China's Xinjiang Province. The two accompanying excerpts, from prominent Arabic-language media sources, provide some context to this important question.

The first article, from Lebanon's *al-Akhbar*, relies on open source information and anonymous jihadist informants to argue that at least some Syria-based TIP members are shifting their focus toward Central Asia. The article mentions an influential Rohingya jihadist ideologue, the former spokesman for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, who recently called for TIP fighters "to include China in your targets... and support your brothers in Turkistan and elsewhere, and carry out commando attacks inside China..." The article also mentions a high-ranking al-Qaeda envoy from Afghanistan who recently visited TIP bases in Syria, purportedly to discuss the establishment of a "High Coordinating Council for Jihad against Buddhists." This entity's main role, according to the article, will be to "coordinate between the Turkistani, Uzbek and other Central Asian jihadists, with the aim of targeting Buddhists everywhere."

The second article, from the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, looks at how foreign jihadists have become "the biggest obstacle to resolving the dilemma in Idlib, Northern Syria." It points to efforts by various parties, including local rebels, to uproot the jihadists from the area. The plan, according to a local analyst cited in the article, is to "gradually" expel them from Syria." The article's author does not speculate on where they would be sent to, merely noting that "the same recruitment networks that were used to bring them into Syria have smuggling routes to get them out."

If the Syrian government and local rebels strike a truce deal in Idlib Province and its surroundings, foreign jihadists will face increasing pressure to move on, as their presence will complicate the success of any government-rebel reconciliation program. Foreign jihadists, particularly those from Central Asia, may well decide to retrace their steps out of Syria sooner rather than later. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...include China in your targets... and support your brothers in Turkistan and elsewhere, and carry out commando attacks inside China...”



Cover from Turkistan Islamic Party's Electronic Magazine (latest issue).
Source: Jihadology Website (Aaron Y. Zelin and Jihadology.net), <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/turkistacc84n-al-islacc84micc84yyah-magazine-23.pdf>, <https://jihadology.net/about/legal-notice/>.



Continued: Central Asia: Next Stop for Syria's Foreign Jihadists?

Source: التركستاني يستعدّ نحو الجهاد ضد البوذيين؟
 “The TIP Prepares... for Jihad Against Buddhists?” *al-Akhbar*, 20 June 2018. <https://goo.gl/8qhgcB>

Source: المتطرفون الأجانب... عقدة الحل في الشمال السوري
 “Foreign Extremists... Obstacle to a Solution in Northern Syria,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 11 June 2018. <https://goo.gl/u74XMG>

Far from the spotlight, the Turkistan Jihadist Movement continues to rearrange its cards in preparation for playing a role beyond Syria... to divide the TIP into two main factions, the first of them ready to depart the Syrian scene in preparation for what comes next, the second committed to continuing the “Syrian mission” until its end...

Foreign fighters affiliated with al-Qaeda represent the biggest obstacle to resolving the dilemma in Idlib, Northern Syria. For this reason efforts are required to expel them from the region. These began about two months ago, and the number of foreigners has decreased, including fighters from the Turkistan Islamic Party, which is considered the largest and fiercest force according to analysts.

Recent changes have created disorder within the TIP and divisions... among those who call for the need to continue the “Syrian jihad” and encourage migration to Syria and those asserting the need to fight against “the near enemy” (meaning China)...

The presence of foreign fighters is on the agenda for resolving the situation in the north, where extremist fighters were pushed into by the Syrian regime and Russia, transported from areas in the north and center of Syria, as well as the Damascus surroundings, and their presence has become an “essential” issue amidst news of a solution to “gradually” expel them from Syria, given the difficulty of reaching truces with them given their links to al-Qaeda.

Some days ago, Abu Dhir Azzam entered the TIP jihad fray openly. The well-known jihadist issued an audio recording... [where] he called on them... to “include China in your targets... and support your brothers in Turkistan and elsewhere, and carry out commando attacks inside China...”

Experts following events in northern Syria say the extremists in Idlib are currently divided into two groups. The first is made up of Syrian Nusra Front members. Most of them have a “domestic agenda. There are also in Idlib Syrian leaders of al-Qaeda with a foreign agenda, and other foreign leaders who were targeted over the past 18 months in two big campaigns, the first in early 2017 with an airstrike that killed more than 150 fighters, and the other a few months ago. This in addition to the wave of assassinations that killed some of them....

...“TIP leaders in Syria in the past three months hosted a jihadist envoy coming from Afghanistan in two visits that were separated from one another by five weeks.” The envoy was a Pakistani national who... “held three meetings, two with leaders from the Nusra Front and the third with a group of field commanders from the TIP, a meeting which lasted around five hours,” according to the source...

According to al-Hajj, they “represent a basic obstacle to any truce and hence they must be expelled and neutralized in the ongoing operations in Idlib,” which aim to change the status of Nusra members and de-radicalize the group so their existence can appropriate for the next stage...

“TIP leaders in Idlib had not welcomed an envoy of this rank except for once, about three years ago.” The timing of this trip, according to the source, came less than two weeks after the rough contours were sketched for forming the “High Council for Jihad Against Buddhists” in Afghanistan. It is believed that this council will be called the “Islamic Movement for Jihad Against Buddhists.”

... the same recruitment networks that were used to bring them into Syria have smuggling routes to get them out, even if it is a “complex, slow and expensive operation”...

The source also pointed to the key role played by the known jihadist Abu Dhir Azzam, who is of the Rohingya ethnicity, in the formation of this council. Some years ago, he was the spokesman for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. He came to Syria in 2014 and joined ISIS, but he left the group and secretly fled in the second half of 2016, after which he renounced the group. The sources added that Abu Dhir “received direct assistance from Taliban commanders and leaders of al-Qaeda for forming this new council, which will aim to coordinate between Turkistani, Uzbek and other Asian jihadists, with the aim of laying out plans for jihad against Buddhists everywhere.”

Experts estimate the number of foreign fighters in Idlib commanded by al-Qaeda to be more than 2,000 fighters. The TIP fighters in Syria are estimated to number 1,200...

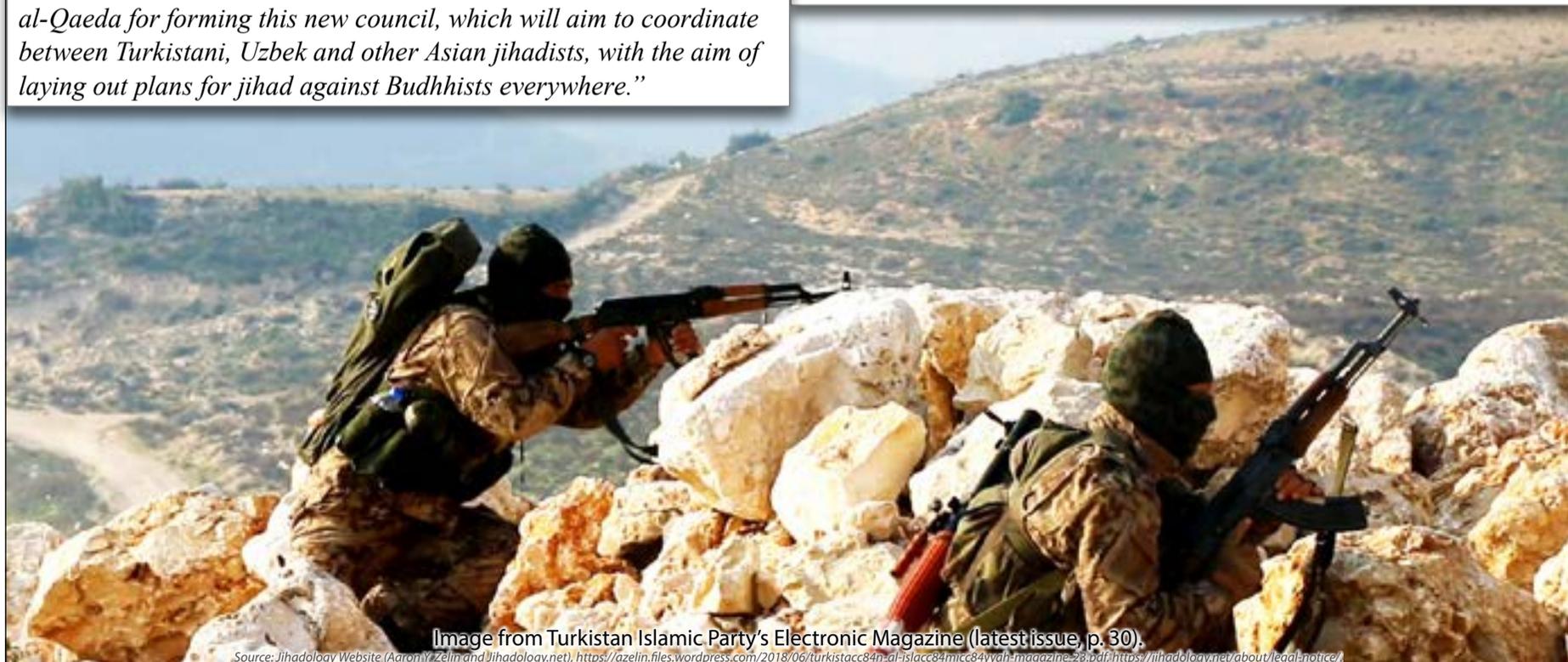


Image from Turkistan Islamic Party's Electronic Magazine (latest issue, p.30).

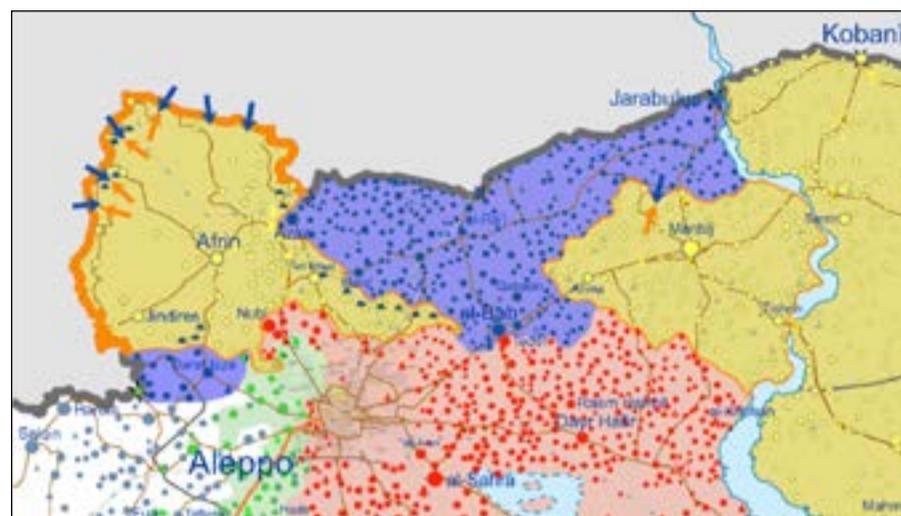
Source: Jihadology Website (Aaron Y. Zelin and Jihadology.net), <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/turkistacc84n-afislacc84micc84yyah-magazine-26.pdf>; <https://jihadology.net/about/legal-notice/>



Turkish Concern over its Southern Border Security

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey faces several challenges on its southern border and while its concerns are not new because of the decades-long conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Syrian Civil War added another dimension. The accompanying passage from Turkish daily *Hürriyet* assesses the Turkish efforts to secure its southern border and the author focuses on the Turkish operations into Syria and Iraq against Kurdish armed groups.

According to the article, Turkey's main security concern on its southern border with Syria are the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing People's Protection Units (YPG). Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch into Syria intended to curb the Kurdish expansion in Syria on its border. Turkey has long argued that the PYD and the YPG are linked to the PKK, even though both have denied their links to the PKK. The author argues that Operation Euphrates Shield prevented the PYD and YPG from taking control of the entire Turkish-Syrian border, reaching all the way to the Mediterranean. Operation Olive Branch curbed the possibility of the Kurdish insurgency infiltrating into Turkey through the mountainous region of Afrin.



Territorial Control: Turkey-Syria border near Aleppo (Blue - Turkish Allies, Red - Syrian Army, Yellow - SDF, Green FSA).

Source: By Sivizius [CC BY-SA 4.0], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_attack_on_Afrin.svg.

The author states that Turkey cannot secure its southern border solely through resolving the situation in Syria. From a Turkish perspective, Ankara has to consider Syria and Iraq as a whole in terms of its southern border security strategy and fighting the PKK. The author further argues that the presence of the PYD and YPG in Syria spilling over into Iraq increases the likelihood of the Sinjar region becoming another sanctuary for the PKK. Turkey recently launched a military operation in the Qandil Mountains where the PKK has its camps and its leadership cadres. Despite the geography on the Turkish and Iraqi sides of the border posing a challenge, Turkey's new strategy is determined to block the PKK's routes within Iraq's territory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“The success of the new strategy implemented in Iraq (military operations), like the recent efforts against the PKK in Syria requires jointly utilizing Turkey's military and diplomatic powers.”

Source: Oğuz Çelikkol, “Türkiye'nin güney sınırının güvenliği (Turkey's Southern Border Security),” *Hürriyet*, 7 June 2018. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/oguz-celikkol/turkiyenin-guney-sinirinin-guvenligi-40860104>

Turkey has long demanded that the PYD/YPG not extend its reach west of the Euphrates River. Behind Turkey's demand was the concern that the PYD/YPG would expand its control towards the Mediterranean and establishing a state in northern Syria. Turkey seems to be making significant progress towards achieving its goals by using its military and diplomatic power...

Turkey had to conduct two big military operations in order to curb the PYD/YPG's expansion and control in Syria. The first of these military operations (Operation Euphrates Shield) prevented PYD/YPG from seizing control of Jarablus and Al-Bab (west of the Euphrates River up to Afrin on the border with Turkey's Hatay) and expanding through to Hatay which would have allowed them to control almost all of the Turkish-Syrian border...

Turkey's second military operation in Syria, [Operation Olive Branch]... was carried out in the Afrin region. [Afrin] region was cleared of PYD/YPG... and it is under control of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Supported by Turkey, FSA began to control...all of the Turkish-Syrian border in the west of the Euphrates....

The Afrin operation...has increased Turkish-Syrian border security. Also, it contributed to the efforts to prevent the incursion of PKK terrorists from Afrin...into Turkey (Hatay province)...

From Turkey's perspective the security of the southern border is not an issue that can be resolved only in the context of Syria. Ankara has to look at Syria and Iraq as a whole in terms of fighting the PKK and the security of the southern border. The presence of the PYD/YPG in Syria spillovers to Iraq. The Sinjar region [of Iraq] has the possibility of becoming a new Qandil which worries Turkey.

The PKK settling in northern Iraq... because of the topographical structure of the Turkish-Iraqi border is a problem that poses difficulty in solving it. The PKK (in Northern Iraq) has several camps on the Iraqi side of Turkish-Iraqi border... the presence of the PKK's senior leadership cadres...in the Qandil Mountains continue to be a problem for Ankara.

[The PKK] being on the border of Iraq and Iran... is a problem that Ankara needs to solve. The announcement by Turkish officials of a military operation in the Qandil Mountains shows that Ankara is determined to completely resolve this issue.

Turkey has also change the strategy in the fight against the PKK in Iraq...it seems the PKK's infiltration routes into Turkey will be closed within Iraq. The ongoing military operation south of Hakkari (on the border of Turkey and Iraq)... in the Hakurt region shows this [new strategy]. The military land operations on Sinjar and Qandil will be an important part of this new strategy.

The success of the new strategy implemented in Iraq (military operations), like the recent efforts against the PKK in Syria requires jointly utilizing Turkey's military and diplomatic powers.



Turkish Dams Cause Water Conflict in the Middle East

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey's neighbors have historically accused the country of restricting water flow to their territories because of the several dams the Turkish government has built on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers since the 1960s. The completion of the Ilisu Dam rekindled the decades old water dispute between Turkey and Iraq. The excerpted accompanying 20-page assessment on water security, written by a Turkish professor for the Turkish think tank *Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies*, sheds light on the water conflict between Turkey and its neighbors with a focus on Turkish and Iraqi relations.

The accompanying passage analyzes the historical background of the issue and makes an assessment on how it could be resolved. According to the author, the water conflict between Turkey and Iraq dates to 1965 when Turkey built its first dam, Keban, on the Euphrates. Iraq initially insisted that Turkey allow 350 cubic meters per second of water flow while the dam fills up. The financiers of the dam, including the World Bank, pressured Turkey to provide guarantees insisted upon by Iraq. Therefore, in 1966 Turkey guaranteed Iraq 350 cubic meters per second of water flow, even though having third parties interfere in this dispute infuriated Turkey. The author argues that Iraq blames its neighbors, especially Turkey, for its water shortages because of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project. According to the author, Iraq's internal conflicts and crumbling water infrastructure have caused its water shortages.

The accompanying passage also touches upon Iran's role in this dispute between Turkey and Iraq. Even though at first glance the issue seems to be affecting Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian relations, Iran has contributed to the water shortages in Iraq as well. Iran has built dams on sources feeding the Tigris and significantly decreased the amount of water flow to Iraq. However, Iran has historically blamed Turkey for water shortages. The latest example was in 2017, when Iran's President Hassan Rouhani accused Turkish dams on the Tigris and Euphrates of causing water shortages. The author states Iran's aim is to create a perception in the international arena that Turkey causes water shortages in the region.

In the last chapter, the author states that Turkey's stance on water security has been the same for decades. Turkey has always been against third-party interference in this issue. However, Iraq has influenced public opinion internationally in many ways since the building of the Ilisu Dam, even though the dam was built to generate power, not to provide water to Turkish farmers. The author argues that Turkey should point out that its water usage is in compliance with the international law. Despite the concerns of Turkey's neighbors over water security, the author believes water should be a tool for regional cooperation and Turkey should play an active role in providing technical assistance to its neighbors to solve this water conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“Iraq sees its neighbors especially Turkey as the root cause of its water scarcity.”

Source: Dr. Seyfi Kılıç, “Türkiye-Irak İlişkilerinde Su Meselesi ve Geleceğe Dönük Öneriler (Water Issue in Turkey-Iraq Relations and Future Recommendations),” *Orsam.org.tr*, 5 June 2018. <http://orsam.org.tr/files/Degerlendirmeler/72/72TR.pdf>

International developments played a significant role in the transboundary water issue between Iraq and Turkey ... In this study, ...the evolution of transboundary waters issue will be evaluated and recommendations will be made for the future...

In general, it has been stated that the emergence of water issues between Turkey and its neighbors [(Syria and Iraq)] started with the construction of the Keban Dam in 1965.

The Keban Dam regulates the Euphrates River and has had a positive impact on water storage infrastructure of Syria and Iraq. However, Iraq has insisted that during the filling up of the Keban Dam, Turkey must guarantee 350 cubic meters per second of water continue to flow. The institutions that provided the funding [for the dam] pressured Turkey to comply and Turkey, signed an agreement in 1966, stating that it would take all the measures to release 350 cubic meters per second of water...

Turkey's...experience has caused Turkey to have a negative attitude towards third party interference in this issue...

Iraq sees its neighbors especially Turkey as the root cause of its water scarcity. Iraq claims that because of the Turkey's multi-faceted development project, the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), there has been a decrease in the water level of the Tigris and Euphrates that causes water scarcity in Iraq. This claim is far from reality. Especially on Tigris, Iraq's main water source, no project that would consume water has been implemented...

The Tigris river has become a tool for continuous political turmoil in Iraq...

Because of the Dams Iran has built on branches [of the Tigris River] from time to time, it has caused serious water shortages...yet in 2017 [Iran] blamed the Turkish Dams...[in] 2017 Iran's President [Hassan] Rouhani targeted Turkey and stated that the dams Turkey has built negatively affect the water levels of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers...



The remnants of the old Hasankeyf Bridge alongside the new bridge (2004).
Source: By No machine-readable author provided. Bertilvidet--commonswiki assumed (based on copyright claims), CC-BY-SA-3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hasankeyf.JPG>.



Khamenei on Strategic Patience

OE Watch Commentary: Against the backdrop of widening anti-government protests and a general strike in the Tehran bazaar, on 30 June, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave a graduation address to students at Imam Hossein University, a university run by and for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). While the broad theme of Khamenei's address was to dismiss the belief that it is possible to peel the people away from the regime as a notion rooted in "stupidity," the accompanying excerpted piece from *Khamenei.ir* is important in its illumination of Khamenei's strategic thinking.

At the heart of debates about both diplomacy with the Islamic Republic and its military ambitions, are questions about the sincerity of the regime: Does Iran approach diplomacy as a means to resolve conflict or does it see diplomacy as an asymmetric warfare strategy to delay and distract opponents? And does Iran view ceasefires and temporary deals as steps toward more comprehensive agreements or the desired end result of engagement?

Khamenei's discussion of strategic patience suggests that he sees some compromise as tactical, rather than an end goal. He views conflicts and struggle as a decades- if not centuries-long struggle and urges the IRGC never to exit "the arena" but rather to continue resistance as a multi-generational struggle. Indeed, he places this "struggle" and "resistance" at the heart of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic over which he presides.

The implications of his speech to the IRGC are important for the region. In Lebanon, Iran's proxy group Hezbollah has achieved unprecedented power with a stranglehold on the cabinet and, increasingly parliament. It has an ally in Lebanon's presidency and has expanded its sphere of operation from southern Lebanon and the southern neighborhoods of Beirut into the east and increasingly north of the country as well. At the same time, the Iranian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria has in recent months regained territory held for years by the Syrian opposition. When Khamenei tells the IRGC that they can never be "content," he is effectively ordering them to continue their march into other areas, perhaps including a more direct confrontation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, or Bahrain. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei walks to the ceremony at Imam Hossein University.

Source: *Khamenei.ir*, http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/40051/C/13970409_0840051.jpg, CC 4.0.

“If we show patience, the distant horizons will be ours.”

Source: “Biyarat bar Morasim-e Daneshamukhtegi Daneshjuyani Daneshgah Imam Hossein (‘Alihu as-Salam) (Statement at the Graduation Ceremony of the Students of Imam Hossein (Peace be Upon Him) University),” *Khamenei.ir*, 30 June 2018. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=40055>

What does patience mean? Patience means staying in the arena, not getting out of it. Some individuals flee from the arena. Some individuals do not flee from it, but they leave it gradually. This is against patience. Patience means endurance, staying in the arena and resisting. Patience means keeping our eyes on distant goals and distant horizons. It means looking at distant goals. Sometimes, we become pleased, happy and proud with a certain achievement. The dangerous thing is to become contented. This is dangerous because it prevents us from staying in the arena. This should not be the case.

You should look at the distant goal and at the peak. You should see what the real message of the Revolution and the Islamic government is and to which place this message wants to take the Iranian nation, the Islamic Ummah and finally the human community. You should look at that particular destination. The movement of the Islamic Revolution requires such patience.

You should take a look at the early Islamic era. In the early decades when there were many difficulties – particularly during the time of the Holy Prophet – Muslims showed patience and resistance and the result was that despite great disorder which had been caused against the true edict of Islam, the peak of human civilization belonged to Muslim nations and countries during the third and fourth centuries of the Hijri calendar. The issue is like this.

If we show patience, the distant horizons will be ours. If you stand firm today, future generations will reach the peak. It is they who will reach it, but this will be your art and your achievement. Of course, I hope that by Allah's favor, you who are today's youth and today's generation will witness that day as well. And you will witness it, God willing. The Revolution is deep-rooted with a bright future ahead of it and it requires steadfastness. This was about patience.



Yemen: Increased UAV Employment by Houthi-Led Coalition

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2017, Yemen's Sana'a-based government unveiled four small drones it claimed to have developed (for more see: "Yemen: Sana'a Government Claims Domestic UAV Production," *OE Watch*, April 2017). Not much more was heard on the topic until April 2018, when the Houthi-led government in Sana'a announced that it had used two of its "Qasif" attack drones to target an oil facility and an airport across the border in Saudi Arabia. Both drones were reportedly shot down, and Saudi forces displayed the remains of one of them at a press conference. As cited in the first accompanying excerpt, the Saudi coalition's spokesman described them as "suicide UAVs" like the ones used by ISIS in Iraq and based on the Iranian "Ababil" design.

Since then, Houthi-led forces have increased their use of these drones, particularly in the fight to control the Yemeni Red Sea port of Hudaydah, where three drones were shot down within a two-week period. For the first time, the Sana'a-based Yemeni military's "War Media" posted footage from a "Rasid" surveillance drone operating in this area. The footage also showed a "Qasif" drone dropping several munitions below before returning to its base, in a slightly scaled-up version of a tactic employed by ISIS and rebel groups in Syria since 2016 (for more see: "Mini-UAV Proliferation in Syria," *OE Watch*, October 2016).

Although small and fairly rudimentary, the drones are causing concern among members of the Saudi-backed coalition. The second accompanying article, posted on the Ansar Allah website (the official name for the Houthi Movement), lists a series of potential Saudi targets within reach of these drones; they include airports near the border, a key water desalinization plant, and naval targets in the Red Sea.

The final accompanying article, from the Arabic-language website for *Sputnik*, illustrates the heightened concerns created by these drones. In July 2018, a drone was shot down over Aden. According to the article, a few days later an unidentified object flew above the presidential palace in Aden; it was only after unleashing several anti-aircraft rounds in its direction that guards protecting the residence of Saudi-backed president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi realized they were shooting at a plastic bag sent airborne by a sandstorm earlier that day. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...Among potential targets for the Yemeni ‘Qasif’ drone are eight important and vital facilities...”

Source: تحالف دعم الشرعية في اليمن يكشف عن الطائرة بدون طيار التي أسقطت في مطار أبها
“Coalition Supporting Legitimacy in Yemen Unveils the UAV that was Downed in Abha Airport,” *al-Riyadh*, 16 April 2018. <http://www.alriyadh.com/1675596>

Al-Malik clarified that the type of UAVs that were downed in the Abha airport and Jizan had previously been used by ISIS in Iraq... He added that these UAVs use the same style as Iranian anti-ship suicide drones, noting that the remains that were collected resemble the Iranian Ababil UAV system, and which the Huthis refer to as “Qasif.”

Source: الطائرات اليمنية المسيرة الرعب القادم من الجنوب
“Yemeni UAVs: The Fear to Come from the South,” *ansarollah.com*, 19 April 2018. <http://www.ansarollah.com/archives/154934>

Among potential targets for the Yemeni “Qasif” drone are eight important and vital facilities. If they were targeted by these planes, the western areas and in particular the vital southwestern Saudi facilities would be paralyzed.

al-Shaqiq Water Desalinization Plant

This is one of the vital facilities, as it secures water for the greatest part of southwestern Saudi Arabia. If there were to be any explosions in this facility or the destruction of its reservoir tanks and water transport facilities, a large area of southwestern Saudi Arabia would experience a real crisis.

King Khalid Airbase

It is located in Khamis Mushait. It is expansive, and could be turned into an easy target for Yemeni ballistic missiles. As of now, though, it will become a target for precise attacks thanks to these UAVs. In addition to this base, the Qasif UAV can reach three Saudi airports in the country's southwest: Najran, Jizan and Abha airports.

Naval Targets

The precise Qasif attacks will not be limited to the surface of the earth, but surely will also target Saudi enemy naval ships. There will be parallel strikes from suicide boats, which have become a new threat and challenge to the enemy's naval forces. The presence of a warhead on the UAVs means that he who controls the aircraft can hit his target in a suicide attack, relying on the cameras present on these drones, and thus destroy the target and inflict major losses on the adversary. We also do not forget how are heroes used this technology in other ways, when they carried out a major operation targeting the Saudi Navy ship “al-Madina” using a suicide boat. This attack seriously damaged the ship, particularly the helicopter it was carrying aboard.

Source: اليمن... إطلاق نار كثيف يستهدف كيسا بلاستيكا فوق القصر الرئاسي بـعدن
“Yemen... Intense Firing on a Plastic Bag Above Aden's Presidential Palace,” *Sputnik*, 10 July 2018. https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/201807101033676299-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%86/

A source in the local Aden government told Sputnik that forces of the presidential guard tasked with protecting the Maashiq Palace, where President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi lives, became suspicious of an unidentified object flying above on the morning of 10 July. They thought it was a UAV and targeted with ground fire. The source added, “The guard forces realized that the unidentified object was merely a plastic bag carried up by the wind, following a sandstorm in Aden earlier.”

(continued)



Continued: Yemen: Increased UAV Employment by Houthi-Led Coalition



"Rasid" Surveillance Drone Footage (TOP), "Qasif" Drone Dropping Munitions (BOTTOM).
Source: Yemeni "War Media" (YouTube Screenshot), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg2Gut7FtXQ>, Fair Use.



Iran to Re-Launch “Helicopter Carrier”

OE Watch Commentary: The Iranian navy has had a tough couple of years. In November 2016 the Iranian frigate *Alvand* and the supply ship *Bushehr* became stranded in the South African port of Durban on the Indian Ocean, curtailing a high-profile mission to sail into the Atlantic Ocean. Not only did the mission fail, but the Iranian navy had to rely on the generosity of the South African government to feed its crews while the ships underwent multi-month repairs. More recently, the Iranian destroyer *Damavand* sank after striking a jetty in the Caspian port of Bandar Anzali. After the Iranian navy denied the incident, bloggers subsequently released video footage of the *Damavand* sinking (See: “Iran: Warship Sinks after Mishap,” *OE Watch*, March 2018).

Source: “Nav-e Balgardabir ‘Kharg’ beh Darya Bazgosht (Kharg [Helicopter] Carrier Returned to the Sea),” *Fars News Agency*, 20 June 2018. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13970330000921>

Kharg a helicopter carrier of the Islamic Republic of Iran, after major overhauls taking four years, has been deployed as the largest Western Asian vessel on the maritime mission. According to the *Fars News Agency*, the *Kharg* helicopter carrier along with the *Sabalan* destroyer have deployed as the 54th marine flotilla to the Gulf of Aden, northern Indian Ocean, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

The accompanying excerpted article seeks to reset the Iranian navy’s image: It describes the return to service of the Iranian “helicopter carrier” *Kharg* and the destroyer *Sabalan*. What the article glosses over, however, are the capabilities of the ships. The *Sabalan* was a Vosper frigate built in 1969 by the British. The *Kharg*, meanwhile, is more than 40 years old and is a large tanker and supply ship which the Iranian navy named a helicopter carrier after stationing three helicopters on it. That Iran conducted a four-year retrofit and repair of the *Kharg*, however, does show a growing maintenance capability, one born of necessity given the age of Iran’s fleet.

That said, the fact that Iran has now sent its largest ship to the Bab al-Mandab and Gulf of Aden, however, shows the degree to which Iran wants to show its flag in and around Yemen, especially as its proxy war with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continues. Should the *Kharg* be damaged in those crowded waters or fail at sea as the 2016 flotilla to Atlantic Ocean did, the loss of face to the navy within Iran would be significant. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Kharg, after major overhauls taking four years, has been deployed.”



The *Kharg* helicopter carrier.

Source: *Fars News Agency*, https://media.farsnews.com/media/Uploaded/Files/Images/1392/07/19/13920719000178_PhotoA.jpg, CC 4.0.



The IRGC Wins Multibillion Dollar Economic Projects

OE Watch Commentary: Khatam al-Anbiya, the economic and engineering wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was founded in 1979, but emerged as an economic power a decade later. Loathe to lose its privileged position in society at the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC directed Khatam al-Anbiya to invest and compete in civilian enterprises. In the accompanying excerpted article from *Tasnim News Agency*, an agency associated with the IRGC, the head of the Khatam al-Anbiya's construction wing promises to completed about 40 large projects with \$28 billion worth of investment by the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on 1 February 2019. That more than 80 percent of those projects by value involve the oil and gas industries (and, specifically, the South Pars field), illustrates how oil continues to skew Iranian industry despite years of official rhetoric about economic diversification. The scale of the water projects described also illustrate the reach of Khatam al-Anbiya, especially in dam construction. More importantly, however, the official figures announced by General Abdollahi represent a figure more than four times the official budget of the IRGC, and more than double Iran's official defense budget. This, in turn, illustrates first, the degree to which the IRGC distorts the Iranian economy and, second, how the IRGC has become independent of the official budget as passed by Iran's parliament. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: "Behrebardari Abr-e Piruzhi Abi Gharb-e Kehavarz bar Hamat Sepah ta Payan-e Sal (Executing Large Water Projects in the West of the Country with the effort of the IRGC by the end of the year)," *Tasnim News Agency*, 12 June 2018. <https://goo.gl/FCRmDC>

The commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters, announced, "The largest water project of the country, entitled 'Waters of the West,' will be operational by the end of this year. According to Tasnim, General Ebadollah Abdollahi, on the sidelines of a meeting with the resistance economy chiefs, said, "The project has been implemented over 1460 km and includes 17 dams, 150 km tunnels and 700 km out of a total of 2400 km of transmission lines, which will be operational by the end of the year.

He said, "In the area of supplying water to the central and eastern plains of the country, Khatam al-Anbiya's headquarters has submitted its proposals to the Ministry of Energy, and among the projects are desalinization from the Sea of Oman and its transfer, and the implementation of these projects requires approval from the country, and the Ministry of Energy is considered the main custodian of water in the country. Abdollahi added, "Khatam al-Anbiya's headquarters has already completed major water supply projects...."

This year, by year's end, 40 projects will be implemented in different fields of oil, gas, water and rail, road and port infrastructure with an investment of \$28 billion from Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters.

"By year's end, 40 projects will be implemented...with an investment of \$28 billion."

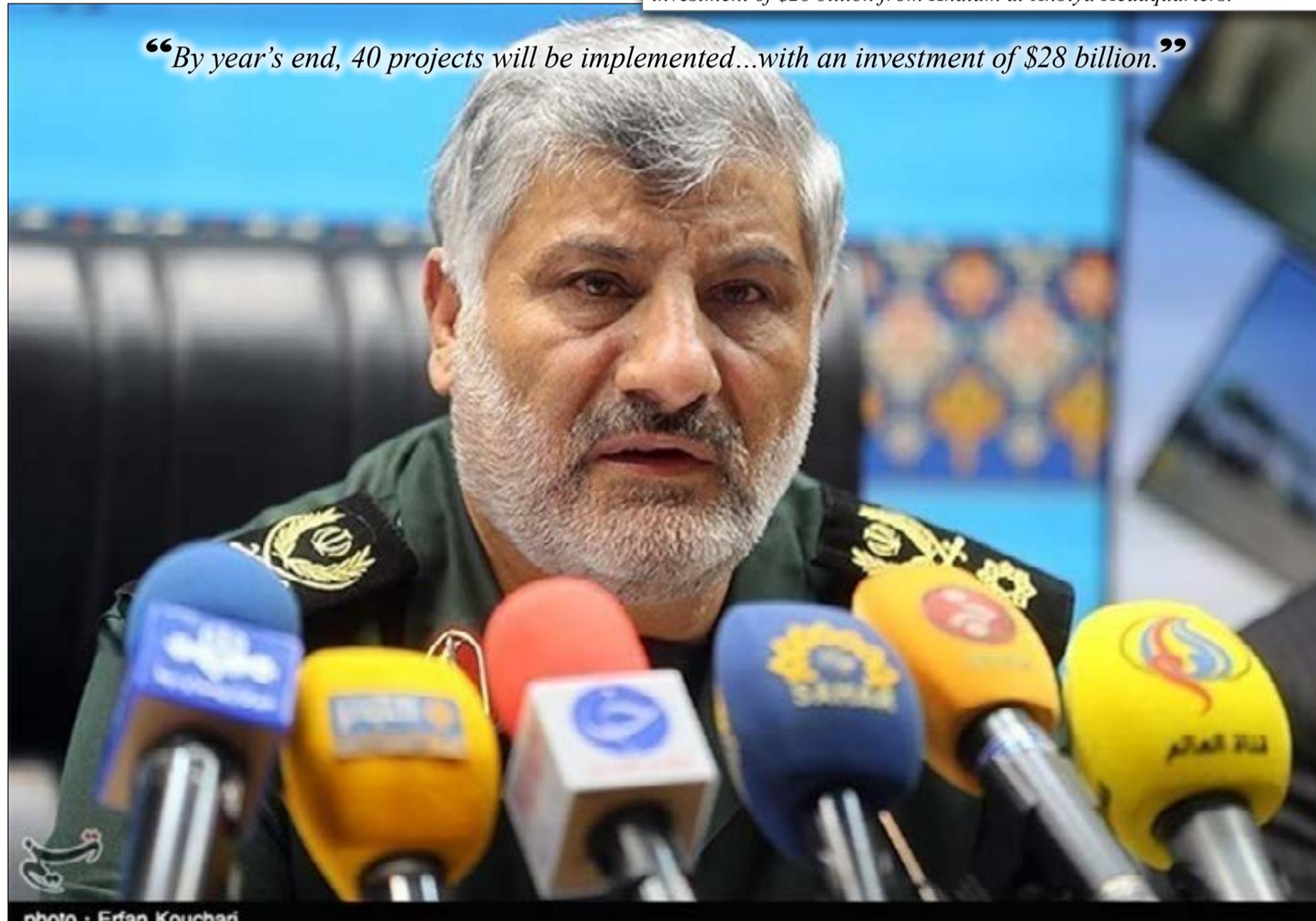


photo : Erfan Kouchari

Khatam al-Anbiya Commander Ebadollah Abdollahi.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, goo.gl/ofS8c8, CC 4.0.



Turkish Armed Forces Continue to Professionalize

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey continues to increase the number of its professional military personnel as it adapts to emerging technologies and new threats. As of now, about 50 percent of the Turkish Armed Forces are professional soldiers and the rest consist of conscripts, as mandatory military service remains in place for men over the age of 18. The accompanying excerpted article from Turkish State-run *Anadolu Agency* sheds light on how the transition to a professional army affects who the state uses to fight against terrorism.

According to the article, the units that directly participate in the active fight against terrorism are all comprised of professional personnel. Additional professional units and commands were created in the regions where there was a need. As a result of this, the conscripts have been placed in non-combatant services. Turkey has also shortened the duration of compulsory military service from 18 months to 12 months for males without a college degree, from 15 months to 12 months for college educated men who wish to serve as an officer, and from eight months to six months for those who serve as a sergeant or private.



Two Turkish soldiers salute.

Source: By NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan/MC2 (SW) Christopher Hall/NPASE East/NTM-A [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_Turkish_soldiers_salute_\(4699895014\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_Turkish_soldiers_salute_(4699895014).jpg), Public domain.

The article states that the Turkish Ministry of Defense “hired 45,273 enlisted sergeants and contracted privates” in the last two years. It is also worth noting that 7,567 of the enlisted sergeants have completed their training and were deployed to their duty locations and the training of 8,382 of enlisted sergeants still continues. Interviews, health screenings, and background investigations of 16,690 enlisted sergeants are pending. While 9,116 contracted privates have finished their training and have been deployed to their posts, the training of 964 of them is ongoing. The hiring process for 2,554 of the contracted privates continues. Turkish Land Forces hired the largest number while the Special Forces Command hired the least number of soldiers. The air force was the second largest, while the navy was third largest employer.

There are several reasons for the recent hires. The first reason is to continue professionalizing the military. Second, it is being carried out to replace staff who were dismissed or arrested in purges following failed attempted coup d'état of July 2016. Third, the belief of professional soldiers will receive more adequate training to effectively fight terrorism. Fourth, technologically advanced military hardware reduces the need for more personnel, and it requires specialized personnel to operate the equipment. The former head of Turkish National Defense Commission, Faruk Özlü, stated the nature of warfare has changed, because a tank now has advanced communication systems and technologically advanced warfare equipment, so it needs to be operated by the trained professional soldiers. As of 2016, Turkey is projected to complete its transition to the professional military by 2023. Whether Turkey will be able to complete this transition remains to be seen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“In the last two years 45,273 enlisted sergeants and contracted private personnel were hired as professional units have been employed in the active fight against terrorism.”

Source: Sarp Özer and Sinan Uslu, “TSK’da profesyonel orduya geçişte köklü dönüşüm (In TAF radical transformation in the transition to professional army),” *Anadolu Agency*, 20 June 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/tskda-profesyonel-orduya-geciste-koklu-donusum/1179627#>

In Turkish Armed Forces the efforts to transition to a professional army have begun to yield results. In the last two years 45,273 enlisted sergeants and contracted private personnel were hired as professional units and have been employed in the active fight against terrorism.

...restructuring in the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) towards transitioning to a professional army have been ongoing for a while in accordance with the emerging technologies and threats.

In this context, TAF also modernized not only its conventional defense and war techniques it also transitioned to a defense concept based on technology, information and deterrence.

...after efforts aiming to professionalize combat units, primarily Commando units, there are no conscripts in the operational regions or...that have direct participation in the conflicts...In the regions where there was a need additional professional units and commands were created.

...those who were doing their duties as conscripted soldiers were utilized in the non-combatant services...

Accordingly, the Ministry of Defense hired 45,273 enlisted sergeants and contracted privates...

7,567 enlisted sergeants finished their training and were deployed... 8,382 continue their training...16,690 personnel...pending interviews, health screenings and background investigations.

In hiring contracted privates... 9,116 individuals finished the training...training of 964 continues...hiring process for 2,554 candidates continues. Special Forces Command hired 243 enlisted sergeants...

Land Forces Command hired 30,161 enlisted sergeants [and] 9,585 contracted privates...Navy hired 741 enlisted sergeants [and] 1,896 contracted privates...Airforce hired 1,494 enlisted sergeants [and] 1,153 contracted privates...



Questions on Shortfalls in Electricity Generation in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian authorities have long justified their nuclear program in the need to meet domestic energy needs. On its face, this explanation does not make sense. While Iran mines natural uranium, this cannot provide more than 15 years' fuel for the eight nuclear reactors Iranian authorities have said they hope to build. In comparison, the cost of upgrading Iran's existing refinery and pipeline network could be accomplished at a fraction of the cost and enable enough electricity generation to power the country for more than a century. Either way, the accompanying excerpt from *Mardom Salari*, a newspaper affiliated with the Islamic Republic's reformist movement, suggests that the Iranian government is falling well behind its needs in generation. For all the billions of dollars Tehran has spent in its ostensibly civilian nuclear industry, its nuclear reactors account for less than 1.5 percent of Iran's power portfolio.

Politically, the excerpt spells trouble for the country. Iran is theoretically oil-rich; its population can rightly ask why with so much potential energy, their government has failed to generate sufficient electricity, especially in comparison to rival, oil-rich Arab states across the Persian Gulf. This, in turn, raises basic questions among ordinary Iranians about the competence of government authorities. As the article explains, at issue is a loss of production in industry, food spoilage due to lack of refrigeration, and "an overall decrease in the welfare of citizens." That the Energy Ministry, according to the article, seeks to regulate consumption rather than increase capacity to meet increasing demand, promises growing popular frustration, especially during the summer months.

In sporadic demonstrations, the Iranian public has been increasingly voicing frustration at regime spending choices—for example, its provision of aid to Hezbollah or militant Palestinian factions—at the expense of investment in the Iranian public and infrastructure. That Iran appears to be utilizing a portion of its already insufficient generating capacity to supply and create influence in Iraq and Afghanistan may also not rest well with the Iranian people as their deprivations increase. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“After ten years, again, Iranian citizens have such blackouts.”



Shazand thermal power plant in Iran's Markazi province.

Source: Mohsan Dabiri-e Vaziri, Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic, <https://goo.gl/iHxWkt>.

Source: “Mosaraf-e Barq Cheqader az Tawlid Bishtar Shodeh Ast? (How Much is Electricity Production Greater than Consumption?),” *Mardom Salari*, 4 July 2018. <https://goo.gl/dZoLbi>

In recent days, cities such as Tehran, Karaj, Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, Semnan, Ahvaz, Hamedan, Kermanshah, and Kerman have suffered sporadic and irregular electricity outages. These outages have been as a result of insufficient electricity generation in the country as well as damage suffered by some equipment during the peak of usage. According to Mardom Salari Online, in the past they said it was a good spring for rain, but this good thing did not last long into the summer, and a 60 percent shortage of electricity generated hydroelectrically has led to dispersed blackouts in a number of provinces. In today's civilization, electricity has become an integral part of our day-to-day life; without electricity, there is neither productive industry nor the mechanisms of comfort. In the meantime, the lack of electricity has always been one of the most fundamental issues in Iran. In the summer of 2008, there were extensive outages along the borders of Iran and now, after ten years, again, Iranian citizens have such blackouts....

Although the nominal capacity of hydroelectric power plants is 11,000 megawatts, with the reduction in water supplies behind dams, only about 5,000 megawatts of electricity are being produced. The thermal power plants, with a nominal capacity of 63,000 megawatts, have produced only 44,000 megawatts of electricity. The dispersed and renewable sectors are also about 1,400 megawatts, the nuclear sector is also about 1,000 megawatts, and small diesel power plants generate about 400 megawatts of electricity....

Meanwhile, the Energy Ministry, which has not increased the country's electricity production capacity in relation with consumption (about 5 percent per year) and has not stored sufficient amount of electricity, sees the only solution as being management of electricity consumption by consumers through methods such as reducing their consumption in peak hours, changing working hours in offices, and increasing electricity tariffs.



Achieving Gasoline Self-Sufficiency in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: While Iran has long been an oil exporter, it has become dependent over the decades on imports of gasoline in order to meet its domestic needs. At the beginning of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2005, imports accounted for 40 percent of Iran's domestic needs. Through both rationing and production schemes, Ahmadinejad managed to get imported gasoline dependency down to 20 percent, before interest groups seeking rationing exemptions and increased demands again increased the proportion of gasoline imported to previous levels. Of course, gasoline imports are not simply about driving cars and trucks: Iran uses gasoline to generate electricity and, because of their declining condition, Iranian engineers often inject gasoline into wells in order to increase the volume of oil extracted.

It is against this backdrop, that Mohammad Reza Ne'matzadeh, Minister of Industries, Mines and Commerce during President Hassan Rouhani's first term (2013-2017), contributed an essay to Iran, in the accompanying excerpt, which argues that building a new refinery to make Iran self-sufficient in gasoline should be a key national security priority. While Ne'matzadeh is correct that achieving production rates of more than 26 million gallons of gasoline per day would reduce pressure on the Iranian economy, his article avoids a basic question many have been asking: if Iran were truly capable of building such a refinery by itself, why would it have sought the participation of foreign firms to build the refinery in the first place? Those solicitations suggest that Iranian technological know-how and/or its ability to produce precision equipment remain deficient. Also important is the underlying assumption of the article, that despite diplomatic rhetoric to the contrary, Iranian authorities fear the pressure upon the economy which a renewal of sanctions will bring. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: "Palayashgah-ye baraye 'Abor az Tahrimha (A refinery to overcome sanctions)," *Iran*, 29 June 2018. <http://iran-newspaper.com/newspaper/item/472213>

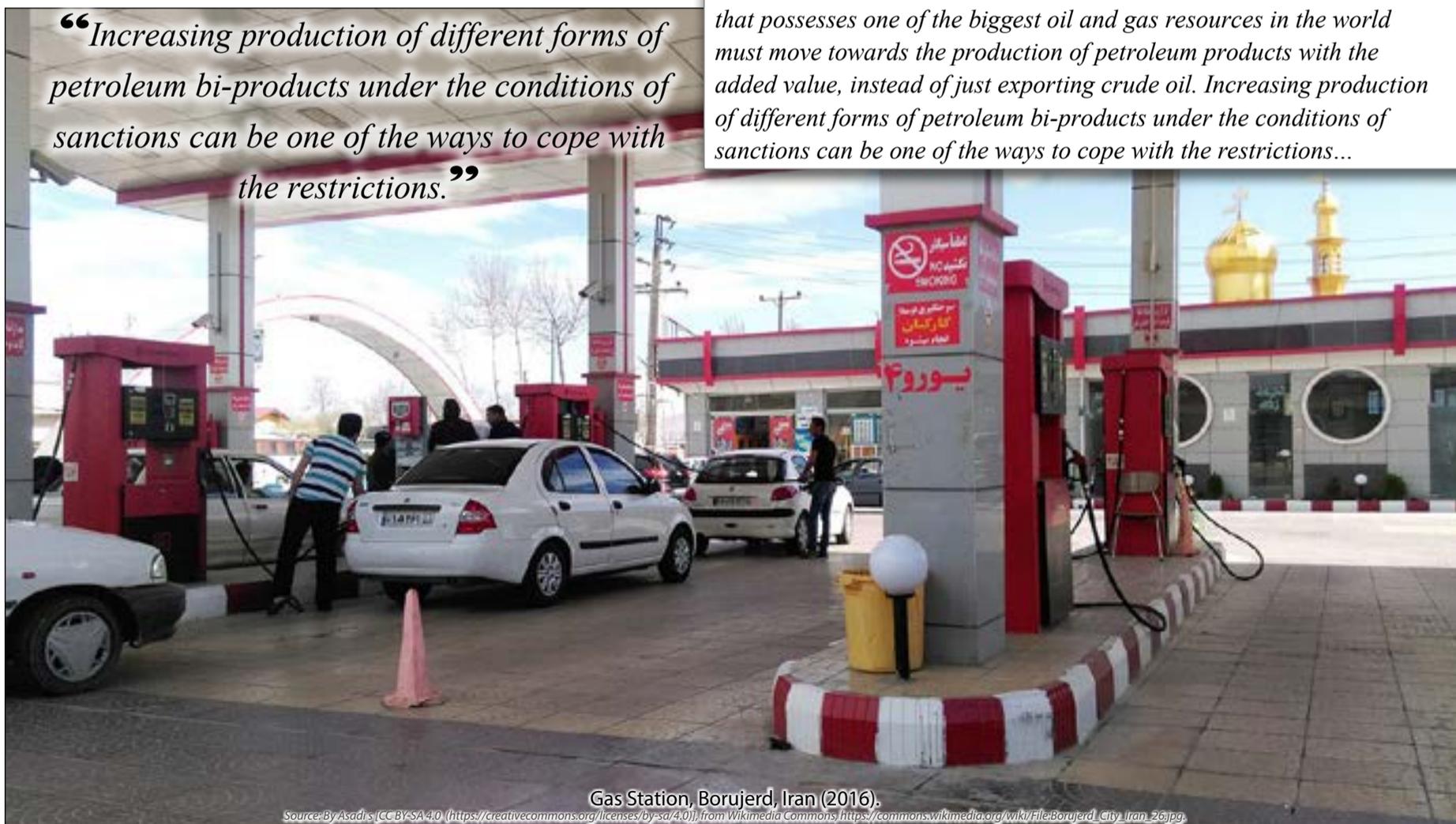
While America is threatening the buyers of Iranian oil to cut off their imports from Iran, on Thursday last week, the president opened the second phase of the Star of the Persian Gulf refinery. This is another step towards self-sufficiency and the export of [refined] petroleum. The Star of the Persian Gulf Refinery, as the biggest natural gas condensate refinery in the world, will be completed in three phases, and each phase will have a daily production capacity of 3.17 million gallons of petroleum with the Euro-5 standards.

So far, two phases of the refinery with the production of 6.34 million gallons of petroleum per day with the Euro-5 standards have been completed. According to the plans that had been prepared in advance, the third phase of the project will be completed before March 20, 2019, the end of the Iranian year. At that time, the total amount of petroleum produced would reach 9.51 million gallons of petroleum per day and the total amount of petroleum produced by the country would reach 26.41 million gallons per day. With the completion of the third phase, alongside providing for all the domestic needs of the country, Iran can also join the club of the countries that export petroleum.

At a time when with its unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and re-imposing oil sanctions, the American government is trying to increase pressure on our country, the completion of a major refinery most of whose equipment and investment have been supplied from inside the country will convey a clear message to the world. At the start of the planning of that refinery, foreign investors entered Iran in order to implement that project but later on, as the result of the sanctions they were forced to stop their work....

Whether under normal circumstances, or under sanctions, an Iran that possesses one of the biggest oil and gas resources in the world must move towards the production of petroleum products with the added value, instead of just exporting crude oil. Increasing production of different forms of petroleum bi-products under the conditions of sanctions can be one of the ways to cope with the restrictions...

“Increasing production of different forms of petroleum bi-products under the conditions of sanctions can be one of the ways to cope with the restrictions.”



Gas Station, Borujerd, Iran (2016).

Source: By Asadi's, [CC BY-SA 4.0] (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>), from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gas_station_in_Borujerd_City_Iran_26.jpg).



Accepting FATF is Absolutely Forbidden

OE Watch Commentary: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was founded by the G-7 in 1989 as an intergovernmental organization to combat money laundering. In 2001 its mission was expanded to include combating financing for terrorism. The basis of the FATF is peer review, which usually requires banking transparency. In 2008 FATF put the Islamic Republic of Iran on its blacklist as being of money laundering and terrorism financing concern. While this does not involve formal sanctions, it does disincentive foreign investment in Iran. It is against this backdrop that the Islamic Republic has begun negotiations to get off the FATF blacklist. But to rectify its concerns, the FATF is demanding Tehran be more transparent about its banking and financial sectors. The accompanying excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency* covers an important speech about the FATF by Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem-Shirazi, who is among the Islamic Republic's most hardline and anti-Western religious clerics. He has blessed child marriage, called the Holocaust a "superstition," and declared women's entrance into stadium events to be religiously forbidden. While no longer a member of the Assembly of Experts, a clerical body which can appoint a new supreme leader after the death or removal of the previous one, he remains an important voice in Iranian politics.

He opposes any cooperation with the FATF, arguing the cost of transparency would not be worth the reputational relief. He implies that Western powers might use the FATF as a "colonial" tool and utilize the information provided to act against Hezbollah and other groups which many Western governments designate as terrorists, but which Makarem-Shirazi sees as valuable and noble allies. Within the Iranian political and social context, the colonial charge has weight and can poison political discussion by stigmatizing debate opponents as pawns of conspiracy.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, himself a hardliner, has sought to navigate the pragmatic need to shed Iran's money laundering and terrorism financing reputation with the concerns voiced by Makarem-Shirazi, and has proposed that the Iranian parliament incorporate "positive points" derived from FATF and other international conventions, without formally signing or ratifying complete treaties. This strategy, of course, seen also with Iran's promise to abide by the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty without actually ratifying it, will not likely assuage the FATF and those governments concerned by more nefarious goals which motivate Iran's financial opacity. Certainly, Makarem-Shirazi's opposition and Khamenei's compromise both suggest that Iranian authorities remain committed to financing Hezbollah and other US-designated terrorist groups in the face of growing financial pressure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The provisions of the convention are quite colonial and leads to domination.”



Naser Makarem Shirazi.

Source: By Mostafameraji [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, <https://goo.gl/fy4pFc>.

Source: “Pezeresh Sanad-e FATF Siyaha Motaleq Ast (Accepting the Document of the FATF is Absolutely Forbidden),” *Fars News Agency*, 3 July 2018. <https://goo.gl/onxPwT>

According to Fars News Agency from Qom, this afternoon in a meeting with families of martyrs, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem-Shirazi told the families of the martyrs, the defenders of the shrines, elite knowledgeable ladies, and the cultural elite of Qom with reference to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) that some issues should be clarified with regard to joining the counter-terror commission: “Some issues regarding joining the FATF need to be identified such as the definition of terrorism and the nature of groups, and who determines this. With reference to whether the West wants to consider the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hezbollah, and similar groups as terrorists under the basis of this convention. According to Western criteria, any group that wants to defend its country and its people is a terrorist, and based on this criteria, the evil of Islamic State terrorists in Iraq and Syria has been reduced while they are also placed in the collection of terrorist groups... Another point is what scope of bank accounts should be available to the western side to determine terrorism? And another point is what accounts should be addressed? And will all accounts [be revealed] or only suspicious accounts?” He added, “The Western side is looking for this in the FATF, and all information about bank account holders.”

Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi, stating that the issues in the convention are one-sided, noted, “The provisions of the convention are quite colonial and leads to domination, and nothing new will happen if we do not join the convention and sanctions remain in place. By accepting the convention, however, we are completely at the hands of the West. Therefore, joining the FATF is both logically and religiously forbidden.



Turkish Foreign Security Policy Under an Executive Presidency

OE Watch Commentary: With the 24 June elections, Turkey's governing system shifted to an executive presidency. Many analysts are considering what Turkish foreign security policy will look like under the new system as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remains in power after winning the elections. According to the accompanying excerpted article from the pro-government *Daily Sabah*, the president's office will be able to make more efficient decisions as "the struggle against terrorism will be the top priority agenda item with regards to Turkey's foreign policy and security matters in the coming months."

The article states that Turkey will focus on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Democratic Union Party (PYD) and "the Gülenist Terror Group (FETO)" in its fight against terrorism. The author argues that the ongoing cross-border operation against the PKK will continue while Turkey will try to "strengthen its ties with friendly local partners by forming new alliances to deal with conflicts at their source." These alliances include getting Iran's support in its operation against the PKK in the Qandil Mountains, where the PKK's leadership has set up camp. Turkey will also work on improving its collaboration with Iraq "to deter the threat of various terrorist groups." According to the author, fighting against FETO will be another important security issue for Turkey as it will try to curb the international activities of this organization by putting "diplomatic pressure on countries," especially NATO allies.

According to the article, Turkey will continue its involvement in Syria to pursue two intertwined goals: combating terrorist groups, in order to later establish safe zones. The Astana process that Turkey, Russia and Iran started will "be the primary framework to stabilize Syria" while the parties work towards creating "a common frame for a realistic political road map." Turkey seeks to establish safe zones in Syria so that refugees currently located in Turkey may be resettled within them. The government aims to stop the growth of resentment against the 3.5 million refugees, especially in cities bordering Syria. The author states that Turkey sees the Syrian Civil War as its own domestic issue and it will continue pursuing a sustainable peace as one of its top priorities. While the author states that there will be "a new game" in Ankara under the executive presidency regarding foreign and security policy, the priorities concerning foreign policy and national security will remain the same. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: Talha Köse, "Turkey's foreign security policy after the June 24 elections," *Daily Sabah*, 28 June 2018. <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2018/06/29/turkeys-foreign-security-policy-after-the-june-24-elections>

The June 24 parliamentary and presidential elections are one of the most critical elections in the political history of the Turkish Republic... Turkey's governing system and structure are transforming into an executive presidency where the popularly elected president will have command of almost all aspects of critical policy areas including foreign policy and national security...

The president's office will be able to make more efficient decisions and avoid bureaucratic obstacles and procedures....

Turkey's struggle against terrorism will be the top priority agenda item in Turkey's foreign policy and security matters in the coming months. The PKK/Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) will be the focus of Turkey's fight against terrorism. The cross-border operations against the PKK will continue and even expand in Iraq and Syria. Turkey will try to collaborate with local partners in the struggle against the PKK/PYD and will strengthen its ties with friendly local partners by forming new alliances to deal with conflicts at their source. Joint efforts with Iran are critical for fighting PKK targets in the terrorist organization's camps and training grounds in the Qandil mountains. Ankara will also try to improve its collaborative efforts with the Iraqi central government to deter the threat of various terrorist groups. Stabilization of the Turkish-Iraqi border is also essential for the strengthening of economic ties, trade and investment opportunities between the two neighbors. Another critical issue for Turkey in the fight against terrorism will be the struggle against FETÖ.

Especially FETÖ leaders that try to maintain their [international] activities will be the primary focus of Turkey's effort against this organization. Turkey will increase its diplomatic pressure on countries, especially Turkey's NATO allies, to deal with the FETÖ threat internationally.

The Astana process between Turkey, Russia and Iran will continue to be the primary framework to stabilize Syria. The parties will continue to work together to find a common frame for a realistic political road map. There are still hurdles for the stabilization of Syria, as Assad feels more confident as he tries to expand his campaign over the opposition-controlled areas, killing more civilians. The critical balance between the U.S., Russia and the local, regional partners is the critical, crucial component of Turkey's efforts to struggle against terrorism. A key incentive for Turkey in dealing with terrorist organizations in Syria is to create safe zones for civilians so that the Syrian refugees in Turkey may safely return to their country. The presence of more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey creates problems and puts pressure on the Turkish government, especially on the local cities and provincial administrations bordering Syria. Erdoğan will increasingly feel domestic political [pressure] to deal with the problem of Syrian refugees in Turkey...

In the short and medium terms Turkey's priorities concerning foreign policy and national security will stay the same but how these priority issues are handled may have long-lasting consequences.

“In the short and medium terms Turkey's priorities concerning foreign policy and national security will stay the same but how these priority issues are handled may have long-lasting consequences.”



With Learning Chinese, a Dose of Indoctrination

OE Watch Commentary: English has an increasingly strong rival on the African continent for the new language many want to learn...Chinese. As the accompanying excerpted article from the website *African Arguments* explains, an increasing number of Africans, especially those who have or want to have business with Chinese companies, are lining up for Mandarin lessons. With trade between Africa and China growing rapidly, as well as large numbers of Chinese manufacturers setting-up shop in Africa, many Africans feel that learning Chinese will open up new opportunities for them.

Catering to much of this burgeoning quest for language lessons are schools affiliated with the Confucius Institute, which is overseen by what is known as Hanban, an arm of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Both Australia and the US have accused some of these Chinese language schools of spying, propaganda, and censorship, but that has not stopped Africa from allowing and even embracing them. Presently, there are nearly 50 Confucius Institutes – schools that are part of the Confucius Institute, a trademarked name – on the continent, with that number likely to significantly increase in the coming years.

While language training is ostensibly the goal of the institute, a certain amount of indoctrination in Chinese thinking is inevitable. This appears to be quite acceptable to many Africans, as reflected by a pedagogically questionable, but culturally revealing comment from an official with Tanzania's Ministry of Education, who, in urging Tanzanians to learn Mandarin, stated they would also “acquire the technological knowledge and skills of the Chinese who are very successful in this area.” That push to learn Chinese was just one of many from the Tanzanian government, as it actively fosters increased bilateral cooperation with China.

There is another route for Africans eager to learn Chinese besides studying at a Confucius Institute in Africa...attend school in China. Interestingly, more English-speaking African students now choose to study in China than in English-speaking countries such as the US or England. Scholarships and generally low tuition costs have helped such students choose China over the other locations. The Confucius Institute, as a form of soft power, has made considerable inroads in Africa in the last few years. It has not needed to push its way in; instead, many Africans, including their governments, are pulling it into their nations. They recognize the increasing importance the Chinese government, Chinese businesspeople, and the Chinese language will play on the continent. Unfortunately, however, the article did not answer one question...To what extent will this be at the expense of learning English? **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Chinese are coming here to do business and they don't speak English.”



Confucius Institute Logo.

Source: By Source, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5011232>.



Confucius Institute at Seneca College in Canada.

Source: By Raysonho @ Open Grid Scheduler / Grid Engine [CC0], from Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SenecaConfuciusInstitute2.jpg>.

Source: Claire van Den Heever, “It started as hype: Chinese spreads fast in Africa as language of success,” *African Arguments*, 25 June 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/06/25/started-hype-chinese-spreads-fast-africa-language-success/>

“I read that, by 2050, China will be number one in the world,” he says. “The Chinese are coming here to do business and they don't speak English.”

Speaking at the launch of a pilot programme in Dar es Salaam in February 2016, a Tanzanian Education Ministry official urged citizens to learn Mandarin. “If you learn Chinese language and culture well, you will also acquire the technological knowledge and skills of the Chinese who are very successful in this area,” he said.

“More people speak Chinese than any other language; if I can speak to the majority of the world's people, I can support or disagree neatly with more people,” says one student.

“Considering Zimbabwe is now trading immensely with China, knowing their language will break down communication barriers when conducting business,” adds another.



If Somaliland and Puntland Go to War, the Winner Could Be Al-Shabaab

OE Watch Commentary: Two regions in northern Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland, have been fighting intermittently over contested territory for more than a decade. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* news website states, the fighting has intensified in the last few months and risks becoming an all out war. Should that occur, the winner could be al-Shabaab, the terrorist group entrenched in Somalia. While having suffered territorial losses at the hands of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) troops, al-Shabaab is still a formidable entity and could potentially take advantage of the chaos a Somaliland-Puntland war would entail and acquire new territory.

The fighting could perhaps be described as a civil war, with that “perhaps” dependent on whether one defines Somaliland’s status as being a sovereign nation or part of Somalia. That is because Somaliland, in the northwestern part of Somalia, declared its independence from Somalia in 1991, but despite having a functioning government and being significantly more peaceful than much of the rest of Somalia, no country recognizes Somaliland’s sovereignty claim. As for Puntland, it too has its own government, but unlike Somaliland has not declared itself independent, choosing instead to remain part of Somalia, though as an autonomous state. The territory the two are battling over stretches from the Gulf of Aden in the north to the Ethiopian border in the south and includes the Sool and Sanaag regions. According to some geological surveys, the area might contain vast amounts of oil, a key factor driving Somaliland’s and Puntland’s efforts to control it.

Both sides have massed soldiers on the edges of the contested area. There is particular concern that as they approach the town of Tukaraq, even greater fighting will erupt. Should the two actually go to war, it could be devastating for both of them. While both have enjoyed relative prosperity compared to the rest of Somalia, in large measure because they were generally not embroiled in the decades-long conflict the country found itself in following the fall of the Siad Barre government, neither is wealthy. A war could severely drain the resources, human and financial, of both countries, leaving a space for al-Shabaab to plant their flag. Additionally, as the article explains, it is not just al-Shabaab that might take advantage of the situation. ISIS has a small branch in Puntland that would gladly see its foes weakened.

Some are claiming war is not inevitable, although preventing one will take work. Steps include brokering a ceasefire, having both sides withdraw from contested area, reducing inflammatory talk, and initiating discussions between the parties. It is unclear if such measures will succeed, but many will be watching to see what happens, especially al-Shabaab and ISIS. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

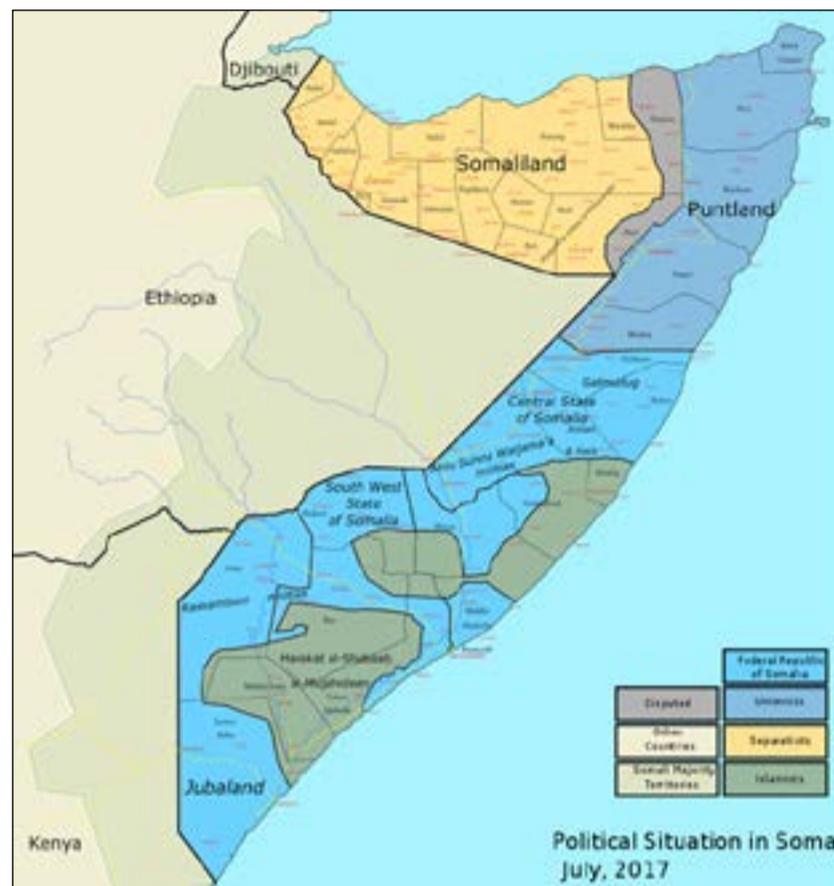
“Somaliland and Puntland’s dispute over land stretching from the Gulf of Aden to the Ethiopian border risks escalating into open war.”

Source: Kennedy Senelwa, “Are Somaliland, Puntland ready for war over land?” *The East African*, 16 July 2018. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Somaliland-Puntland-land-dispute/4552908-4666094-q4134q/index.html>

Somaliland and Puntland’s dispute over land stretching from the Gulf of Aden to the Ethiopian border risks escalating into open war.

“War is still avoidable, but to forestall it both sides need to take a step back, dial down their rhetoric and allow for mediation led by the UN,” said the think tank in a briefing titled “Averting War in Northern Somalia.”

The ICG, which researches conflict, said the dispute risks creating space for Al Shabaab insurgents and an Islamic State branch in Puntland.



Somaliland and Puntland have been fighting over the disputed grey area in the map above.

Source: Nicolay Sidorov/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Somalia_map_states_regions_districts.svg, Public Domain.



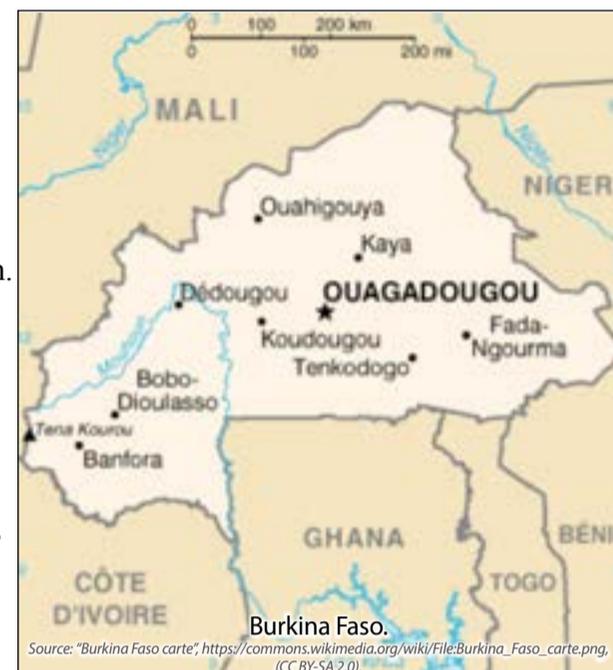
Crossfire Creates Displacement from Burkina Faso to Mali

OE Watch Commentary: Since 2017 al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-allied militants have increasingly shifted operations to and recruited in northern Burkina Faso. One of the results of this is that an increasing number of civilians have been uprooted and displaced from their homes. According to the accompanying excerpted French-language article from *Radio France Internationale*, since January 2018 there have been 2,000 refugees from Burkina Faso who fled into Timbuktu and Gao, Mali. This is despite that Mali itself has been in conflict during this time. Moreover, each month since January 2018, the number of Burkinabe refugees has increased. The article cites UNHCR numbers that in total 7,000 Burkinabes (people from Burkina Faso) have fled into Mali.

One of the more disconcerting revelations of the article was that many of the refugees were, in fact, fleeing from the Burkina Faso authorities. Refugees who were interviewed said that authorities beat them and imprisoned them, presumably on suspicion of involvement in terrorism. Some of them claimed their family members never returned after being detained. The refugees recognize that the Burkina Faso authorities struggle to distinguish between civilians and combatants, specifically, that when in doubt, authorities assume a civilian is a combatant.

The article finally refers to the High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, who commented on the situation of the Burkinabe refugees in Mali. Grandi noted that military actions were necessary to counter AQIM in Mali, but this could also lead to negative side effects on the civilians living in the affected border region. If, according to Grandi, the civilians feel threatened, then they will be less likely to cooperate with Burkinabe authorities and could even join the insurgents themselves. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“We were afraid of the Burkina authorities. They beat people up and put them in jail.”



Source: “Burkina Faso carte”, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burkina_Faso_carte.png, (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Source: “Des réfugiés Burkinabè de plus en plus nombreux dans le Nord (Terrorism in the North Mali: AQIM seeks to hide the death of one of its leaders),” *Radio France Internationale*, 23 June 2018. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180624-mali-refugies-burkinabe-nord-hcr-filippo-grandi>

More and more Burkinabe refugees are coming to the region of Timbuktu and Gao in northern Mali. According to preliminary estimates by the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, there were 2,000 in January 2018. Since then, the number has been increasing every month.

Ehya arrived near Gao seven months ago. He fled his home country with his wife and six children. “We were afraid of the Burkina authorities. They beat people up and put them in jail. Members of our family have been arrested and today we have no news of them, they are missing. Authorities do not differentiate between bandits or us, between good and bad. So they take everyone.”



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Africa's Deadliest Group: Militant Herders

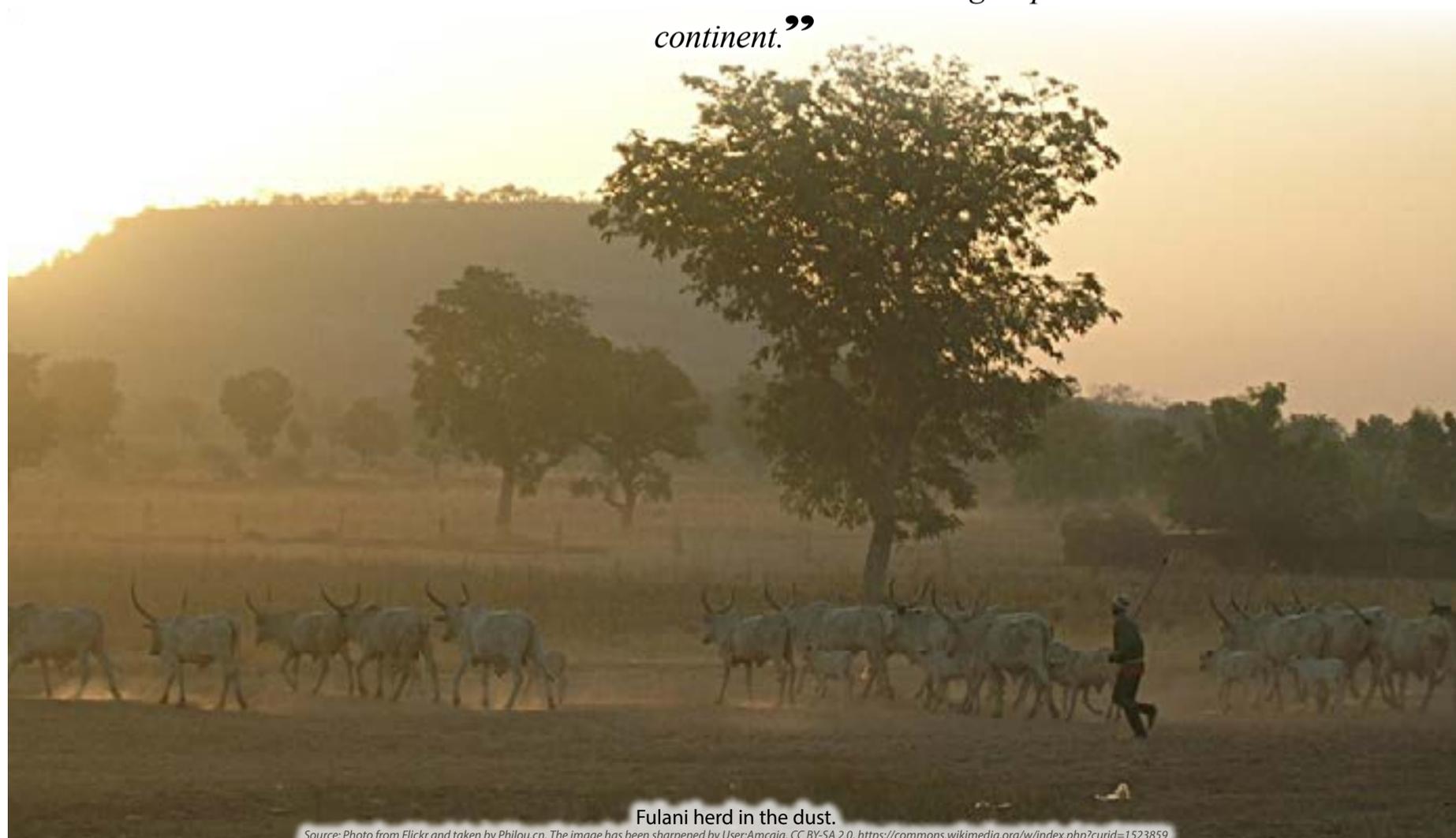
OE Watch Commentary: It is a title with no honor...deadliest group in Africa. For years it was Boko Haram, the jihadist organization founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in Nigeria, but later also active in parts of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Now, however, according to the accompanying excerpted article from the *Cajnews Africa* website, despite Boko Haram's brutal attacks, including the use of children as suicide bombers, another group can claim that title. It is the herders, or more specifically, armed militant herders. Their individual attacks generally kill only a few people at a time, thus leading them to be underreported in the press which tends to focus more on the massive raids often launched by Boko Haram, but those few deaths add up to many when all of the herders' attacks are tallied.

Although the herders are a menace in many parts of Africa, this article mainly focused on the devastation they have wrought in Nigeria. In the center of the country, the number of attacks against civilians has been reported as 48 percent higher than attacks by Boko Haram in its northeastern Nigeria stronghold. All told this year, clashes between the herders and farmers have resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people and the displacement of about 300,000. Just this past June, over 38,000 people in centrally located Plateau State were displaced.

Many of the herders are Fulani, who traditionally have been nomadic pastoralists, tending cattle, sheep, and/or goats. There has also been a long tradition of skirmishes with farmers when stray animals from Fulani herders find their way into planted fields. Two factors, however, have made the situation worse. The first is increasing desertification. As the Sahara widens, it forces the herders further south where many farms are located. The second is the proliferation of weapons, with the Fulani especially notorious for using machine guns to attack villages and farmers. Because of these attacks, in 2014 the Global Terrorism Index ranked the armed herders, who are mostly Fulani, as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world.

Although this article does not mention it, other articles have cited the farmers being increasingly armed, who when asked, say it is to defend themselves against the herders. The herders, in turn, say they have been attacked by farmers. The violence accompanying this arms race has left parts of Nigeria devastated. The government has been called upon to do more to stop the bloodshed, and many are critical of its response. At the same time, while Boko Haram has been damaged by military operations, it was not defeated, and Nigeria now finds itself with an even deadlier group that it also must confront if the country is ever to find peace. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Armed nomadic herdsman have overtaken the Boko Haram terror group as the deadliest sect in the continent.”



Fulani herd in the dust.

Source: Photo from Flickr and taken by Philou.cn. The image has been sharpened by User:Amcaja. CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1523859>

Source: Emeka Okonkwo, “Militant herdsman now Africa’s worst killer sect,” *Cajnews Africa*, 13 July 2018. <http://cajnewsafrica.com/2018/07/13/militant-herdsman-now-africas-worst-killer-sect/>

Armed nomadic herdsman have overtaken the Boko Haram terror group as the deadliest sect in the continent.

Conflicts between farmers and herders in the Nigerian Middle Belt region have strongly escalated this year.

In 2014, the Global Terrorism Index rated the armed herdsman, mostly of the Fulani tribe, as the fourth deadliest terrorist group globally.



MINUSMA Investigates Abuses in Mali

OE Watch Commentary: On 26 June the French-language website of the French-led UN Mission for the Stabilisation of Mali (MINUSMA) released the accompanying excerpted statement about a Malian battalion that has been accused of abuses in Mali. According to the statement, the incident in question occurred on 19 May in the town of Boulkessy where the battalion, which is part of the G5 Sahel, killed civilians in retaliation for a soldier in the unit who was killed by an unidentified individual. MINUSMA's investigation has concluded that the battalion's retaliatory action led to the killing of 12 civilians at a cattle market in Boulkessy.

The MINUSMA statement was also very frank. It highlighted that the incident takes place alongside other allegations of Malian troops engaging in extrajudicial summary executions, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, and destroying property. Now that it has been determined that the abuses have taken place in Boulkessy, MINUSMA has called upon Malian authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice and provide a report on the incident. The article does not indicate, however, whether Mali will end up prosecuting the troops who are alleged to have committed the violations in Boulkessy.

The MINUSMA statement highlights an ever-growing concern about the conduct of the counter-insurgency in Mali. Moreover, as Malian troops fight against both jihadist insurgents as well as other ethnic and local militias, all of whom do wear uniforms, it has become difficult to distinguish who is the enemy and who is not. The incident in Boulkessy will only further alienate the population from the Malian troops. Some believe that one way to mitigate and deter similar retaliatory incidents in the future is holding to account the troops involved the killings. MINUSMA, therefore, according to the article, will observe whether Mali's Military Prosecutor follows through on opening of a judicial inquiry into the incident in Boulkessy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The MINUSMA investigation concluded that on 19 May elements of the Malian battalion of the G5 Sahel Joint Force summarily and / or arbitrarily executed 12 civilians at the Boulkessy cattle market.”



Map of the conflict in Northern Mali (2013).
Source: By Northern Mali conflict.svg; Orionist derivative work: Rowanwindwhistler [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern_Mali_conflict-es.svg.

Source: “La Minusma Conclut Son Enquête Sur Les Incidents De Boulkessy Du 19 Mai 2018 (Minusma Concludes Its Investigation On The Incidents Of Boulkessy),” *Minusma.unmissions.org*, 26 June 2018. <https://minusma.unmissions.org/la-minusma-conclut-son-enqu%C3%AAt-sur-les-incidents-de-boulkessy-du-19-mai-2018>

MINUSMA remains concerned about the serious violations and abuses of human rights in the country's central regions that have resulted in the deaths of civilians in recent months. Following recurrent allegations of extrajudicial summary executions, enforced disappearances, kidnappings and the destruction and burning of property, coupled with deadly intercommunal violence, MINUSMA deployed investigative teams and issued two press releases on the seriousness of this situation. MINUSMA also highlighted its efforts to support the Malian authorities in the conduct of its investigations in the regions of Mopti and Ségou.

On 19 May, at the weekly Boulkessy fair, in retaliation for the death of one of their own who was shot dead by an unidentified element, soldiers from the Malian battalion of the G5 Sahel Joint Force reportedly killed civilians at the scene. The MINUSMA investigation concluded that on 19 May elements of the Malian battalion of the G5 Sahel Joint Force summarily and / or arbitrarily executed 12 civilians at the Boulkessy cattle market. The report was sent to the Government of Mali.



South Sudan: With Few Details, a Palatable Peace Deal

OE Watch Commentary: South Sudan's long running civil war, fueled by interethnic rivalries, has left the world's newest nation devastated. With South Sudanese officials facing UN imposed sanctions if a peace agreement was not reached by 30 June, and under additional pressure from the presidents of Uganda and Sudan, President Salva Kiir of South Sudan and his former Vice President but now opposition leader, Riek Machar, signed a peace agreement on 27 June in Khartoum. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from *African Arguments* notes, it is a deal with few details, which is why the warring parties may have actually agreed to sign it. In other words, they were able to avoid sanctions with very little cost to their positions.

It is perhaps not surprising that so little details were ensconced in the agreement. Discussions of concrete steps towards power sharing, which served as an obstacle in previous attempts to broker a peace deal, were largely absent. As a result, terms agreed upon were rather nebulous. For example, the deal includes the creation of a "national army," but that means different things to the different politicians involved, and with few, if any, specifics provided, it is uncertain what form a "national army" would actually take.

"All-inclusive security organs" is yet another clause that has few details. It is uncertain whether this means every community and/or ethnic group will be included or only the two main belligerents that signed the agreement. Still another clause calls for all civilians to be disarmed, a scary proposition for those who depend on their weapons to protect themselves in this war-torn nation. Interestingly, one section of the agreement where there is a bit more detail deals with rehabilitating the oil fields. It covers oilfield security and includes a role for Sudanese forces, providing the Sudanese military with their first opportunity for direct involvement in South Sudan since it gained independence from Sudan. Although the article relates it could be one of the reasons Sudan's president pushed for this treaty, another reason is likely Sudan's desire to increase the flow of landlocked South Sudan's oil through Sudanese pipes and to a Sudanese port.

The agreement includes a provision allowing the parties to develop self-monitoring mechanisms. This is a significant departure from past agreements, which required external monitoring to ensure compliance. However, as the article states, the UN wants to show something for its efforts and is willing to accept just about anything that shows progress. Meanwhile, other articles are already citing rebels rejecting the peace deal. Given so many strikes against it, the ability for this peace agreement to hold remains far from certain, and will depend a great deal on what post-agreement details the parties finally agree upon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

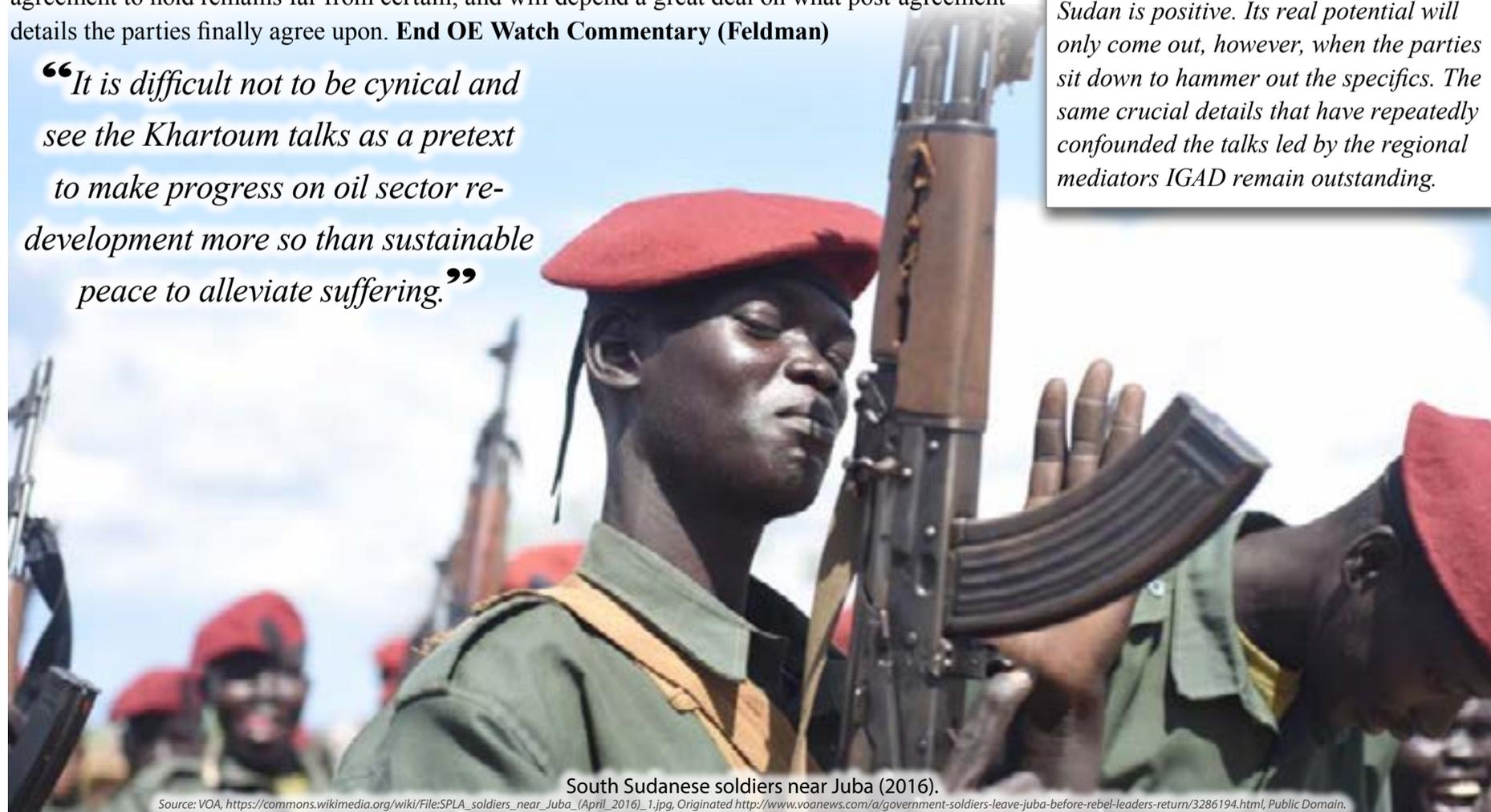
"It is difficult not to be cynical and see the Khartoum talks as a pretext to make progress on oil sector re-development more so than sustainable peace to alleviate suffering."

Source: Matthew Lerichie, "South Sudan's New Peace Deal Is Missing Something: Details," *African Arguments*, 29 June 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/06/29/south-sudan-peace-deal-missing-something-details-khartoum/>

So why did the leaders agree to this deal? To begin with, coming to this resolution will likely mean that UN sanctions are avoided. Additionally, it is notable that the deal contains a new provision that states: "the parties shall agree on self-monitoring mechanisms". This is a departure from external monitoring that is meant to compel parties to abide by the peace terms and hold violators accountable.

The deal promises the creation of a "national army", but this has long been agreed on in principle and adds nothing about what it means in practice. Building a national army means something different to Kiir, Machar, and the other political leaders.

It is difficult not to be cynical and see the Khartoum talks as a pretext to make progress on oil sector re-development more so than sustainable peace to alleviate suffering. But after continued failures, perhaps any kind of agreement between the main belligerents in South Sudan is positive. Its real potential will only come out, however, when the parties sit down to hammer out the specifics. The same crucial details that have repeatedly confounded the talks led by the regional mediators IGAD remain outstanding.



South Sudanese soldiers near Juba (2016).

Source: VOA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SPLA_soldiers_near_Juba_\(April_2016\)_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SPLA_soldiers_near_Juba_(April_2016)_1.jpg), Originated <http://www.voanews.com/a/government-soldiers-leave-juba-before-rebel-leaders-return/3286194.html>, Public Domain.



Africa's Four Types of Organized Crime

OE Watch Commentary: Broadly speaking, as the accompanying excerpted article from the *Institute for Security Studies* explains, there are four types of organized crime in Africa. While there is some overlap between them, each is evolving in a different way based in large measure on the characteristics of the society in which they are found.

Mafia-style organizations represent the first typology with its defining feature being violence. Cape Town, South Africa, with its gangs, criminal networks, and connections with corrupt police is provided as an example. Murder, extortion, and trafficking illicit substances are the types of activities these criminals are involved in, often with some protection because of their connections to the state, resulting in the article's author drawing parallels to the Mafia. The article characterizes Nigeria as fitting this first typology, although the criminals often have greater global reach and less control domestically than those in South Africa. The substantial presence of Nigerian criminal groups in Italy is presented as the example of their international connections.



Rhino mother and young killed for their horns in South Africa.
Source: Hein Waschefort/Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rhino_poaching.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.

In the second category of organized crime, the criminal organizations do not resemble the traditional organized crime groups but instead function as networks that link outsiders and insiders together to facilitate the movement of illicit products or resources. As an example, drug trafficking on the continent's east and west coasts is done not so much by Mafia-style groups as it is by loose networks of criminal entrepreneurs, often with strong political connections. One can see this in Guinea Bissau, frequently described as a narco state, with its set of interlocking criminal networks who protect their illicit goods as they transit the country.

A strong crossover between militias or other armed groups and trafficking or smuggling operations constitutes the third category. These groups often arise in weak states and/or zones of conflict, and might even provide some form of governance. Countries such as Mali determine which groups are active through the process of providing or withholding political protection to them.

The final category is one Americans increasingly hear about...cybercrime. It is no longer just the faux Nigerian prince requesting a thousand dollar deposit in order to release a million dollars. With growing internet connectivity and the improving skills of cybercriminals, the methods these individuals are using have grown increasingly more sophisticated.

As the article states, how these four typologies evolve or dissolve will depend on changes in global drug trafficking patterns, the demand for environmental products, and other factors. With many African nations already having dismal records with regards to combating organized crime, the ability of law enforcement agencies to adapt as criminal organizations change their tactics is uncertain at best. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The degree to which organized crime is connected to both grand and local level corruption must also be seen as a defining feature of harm. The overlap between ostensibly legitimate business actors and organized criminal ones is one of the most serious concerns.”

Source: Mark Shaw, “Where in Africa is organized crime most serious,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 11 July 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/where-in-africa-is-organised-crime-most-serious>

While the focus is on armed groups and conflict, the role of the state is also important in this category of organized crime. For example, the Malian state and the Kenyan military have proven to be as central to the development of cross-border trafficking economies as criminal groups.

Having outlined these four categories, it is easier to analyze where the greatest harm is being done. Each causes harm in its own way, although how harm is measured or assessed is often determined by external influences (notably the impact elsewhere globally), rather than internally (local deaths or suffering, or degradation of the environment).

The degree to which organized crime is connected to both grand and local level corruption must also be seen as a defining feature of harm. The overlap between ostensibly legitimate business actors and organized criminal ones is one of the most serious concerns.



Can Justice Systems Counter Terrorism?

OE Watch Commentary: In 2001 the UN agreed that terrorist acts should be classified as serious criminal offenses and as such, should be dealt with through court systems. This was essentially reiterated in 2006 when the UN's Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy prioritized the rule of law and respecting human rights while responding to terrorism. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from South Africa's *Institute for Security Studies* explains, the reality on the ground in West Africa is quite different from what the UN wants, as terrorism is often dealt with not by justice systems, but rather by militaries or other state security agencies.

To be fair, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed a counter-terrorism strategy that focuses on the rule of law and protection of human rights. Additionally, ECOWAS states are working among themselves to strengthen criminal sector cooperation when responding to terrorism. Finally, the ones most affected by terrorism – Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger – have not only ratified international conventions on terrorism, they have also instituted various criminal justice measures, including establishing specialized judicial procedures for terrorism-related offenses.



Bomb blast aftermath in Jos, Nigeria (May 2014).

Source: Diariocritico de Venezuela/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/diariocriticove/14237725034/>, CC BY 2.0.

However, despite these well-meaning attempts to emphasize a judicial approach to terrorist activities, most West African responses still tend to be in the military or other state security apparatus realm. There are several interrelated reasons for this lag in the implementation of a policy based on the court systems. To begin with, the post-9/11 funding from external donors emphasized military interventions, not judicial processes. Additionally, there was an urgency to stabilize areas that were overwhelmed by violence, an action that some felt would not be amenable to the often slow-workings of courts. Even the expression “war on terror” connotes military operations, not a judicial process.

The emphasis on using the military or other state security apparatus, instead of the judicial system, is not without costs. When extraordinary powers are granted to security agencies, extraordinary abuses can occur, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture. Those accused of terrorism often find their rights to due process absent, while those who violate such rights often do so with impunity. Recent research, as the article notes, has shown that aggressive counter-terrorism responses in communities where problems such as injury or arrest of loved ones occurs, especially when perceived as unjust, can drive people to side with the terrorists. Thus, the author of the article believes that while difficult to implement, dealing with terrorism-related offenses through a country's justice system when practical, is preferable to dealing with them through security forces. To not do so could be counterproductive, creating even more terrorists than eliminated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“While sometimes necessary to contain genuine national emergencies, security based counter-terrorism operations create significant risks in the long term, because they exacerbate cycles of grievance and violence that drive extremism.”

Source: Romi Sigsworth, “Easier said than done: using the justice system to counter terrorism,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 13 July 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/easier-said-than-done-using-the-justice-system-to-counter-terrorism>

While sometimes necessary to contain genuine national emergencies, security based counter-terrorism operations create significant risks in the long term, because they exacerbate cycles of grievance and violence that drive extremism. Recent research confirms that aggressive counter-terrorism responses resulting in the death, injury or unlawful arrest of loved ones are key ‘tipping points’ for extremist recruitment in Africa.

There are many barriers to using justice approaches to counter terrorism in West Africa. The security context is complex, with disastrous implications for human security. The range of actors involved in the conflict and in trying to restore peace makes consensus and coordination difficult. Weak criminal justice systems struggle to investigate and prosecute terrorist acts, and there are systemic problems of limited resources and capacity, corruption, impunity and political interference.

Criminal justice system reform programmes in West Africa – which are vital to sustainable peace and development – must be adapted to absorb the added pressures and complexities of terror crimes. This includes equipping ‘ordinary’ police, prosecutors and courts to handle terrorism cases within rule of law and human rights frameworks.



Brazil in Final Phase of Constructing Country's First Cruise Missile

OE Watch Commentary: For the past two decades, Brazil has led the way in developing an indigenous defense industry that aims to create equipment for itself and for export. At first, Brazil began developing its own weapons and equipment to address security concerns in the region, but more importantly, to cut down on costs of importing equipment as discussed in the accompanying excerpted article from *La Vanguardia*. In its quest to produce its own military equipment, Brazil has proven itself to be adept in producing high quality equipment at lower costs. This has caught the attention of countries to include Angola, Burkina Faso, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mauritania and Senegal, all of which have purchased equipment from the South American giant.

At present, Brazil produces a wide variety of products, such as the A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft and the Engesa EE-11 Urutu, a six-wheeled armored personnel carrier that can be outfitted for peacekeeping, civil disturbance, and combat roles and is particularly popular in tropical nations because of its capabilities to operate in multiple types of terrain.

As Brazil continues to evolve as a military equipment producer, other reports indicate that the country is in the final phase of completing test flights for a new cruise missile known as the MTC-300, as noted by the accompanying excerpt from *Defensa*. The production of this missile is significant as it is the first cruise missile to be built domestically. According to the *Defensa* article, this new missile has a 300 km range and accuracy in the 50-meter scale. The article further indicated that it will enter its final phase of development this year and should be ready for use by 2020. Apart from being Brazil's first domestically produced missile, the accompanying excerpted article from *Dialogo* points out that another important component of the missile is that it expands the country's deterrent capacity and gives the army long-range fire support with high precision and lethality, but with minimal collateral damage. Ultimately, Brazil continues to lead the way in military production in the region and does not appear to be stopping any time soon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“With [projected 2018] defense expenditures totaling \$65.3 billion, as well as many established public, private, and public-private defense manufacturers, Brazil’s export of defense technology is set to increase.”

Source: “Brasil reafirma apuesta por industria bélica y ofrece financiación a países (Brazil Reaffirms its Dedication to Military Industry and Offers Financing to Other Countries),” *La Vanguardia*, 5 April 2017. <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20170405/421456640547/brasil-reafirma-apuesta-porindustria-belica-y-ofrece-financiacion-a-paises.html>

While most Latin American nations possess an indigenous military production sector, none is as substantial as Brazil’s. With [projected 2018] defense expenditures totaling \$65.3 billion, as well as many established public, private, and public-private defense manufacturers, Brazil’s export of defense technology is set to increase. Brazil’s National Defense Strategy also aims to continue this production with the hopes of ruling out the need to purchase imported defense services or equipment.

Source: “El misil de crucero brasileno AV-TM MTC-300 en su etapa final (Brazilian Cruise Missile AV-TM MTC-300 in Final Stages of Development),” *Defensa*, 4 May 2018. <https://www.defensa.com/brasil/misil-crucero-brasileno-av-tm-mtc-300-etapa-final>

The first Brazilian cruise missile, the MTC-300, with a 300 km range and accuracy in the 50-meter scale, will enter the final phase of development this year, with the resumption of test flights. The first deliveries to the Army are planned for 2020 with an initial order of 100 units.

Source: “Programa ASTROS 2020 refuerza artillería del Ejército Brasileño (ASTROS 2020 Program Strengthens Brazilian Army’s Artillery),” *Dialogo*, 16 May 2018. <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/astros-2020-program-strengthens-brazilian-armys-artillery>

The missile expands the country’s deterrent capacity and gives the Army long-range fire support with high precision and lethality, but with minimal collateral damage,” said an Army officer linked to the venture. It is a resource used for infrastructure destruction missions, such as a power plant or industrial complex. The warhead of 200 kg of explosives is significant.

Weaponized Drones Target Baja California Secretary of Public Security's Residence

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 July 2018 two drones equipped with grenades were discovered in the Tecate municipality in Baja California. According to the accompanying excerpted article by a Mexico-state based news outlet, *Jalisco Político*, one of the drones fell in the home of Gerardo Sosa Olachea, leader of the State Secretary of Public Security. Although the grenades did not go off, the State Prevention Police followed emergency protocols and isolated the area. The drones were confiscated, according to the report, and will be analyzed by the Cybernetic Police of the Secretary of Security.

Another state news outlet, *Excelsior*, reported in the accompanying excerpt that Gerardo Sosa released a statement about the incident and described it as “regrettable.” He furthered that these actions are in response to the recent months of major drug and weapons seizures as well as the capturing of criminals. The report notes that the officers who seized the drones stated that one of the drones found in the courtyard of the house was equipped with an audio and video system.

It should be noted that this is the second weaponized drone incident to now have taken place in Mexico. An earlier incident took place in Guanajuato state in October 2017, in which a drone with a “potato bomb” (so called because it is often the size of a potato) improvised IED—consistent with past Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) use of these devices—was recovered from a vehicle during a police pursuit. This latest incident is important to note given the proximity of Tecate to the US-Mexico border (east of the Tijuana-San Diego metropolitan region) and that it is the first known use of weaponized drones to have taken place in Mexico by a cartel group. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

“...it was around 7:00 am on Tuesday when elements of the State Prevention Police assigned to Sosa Olachea’s protection detail reported having seen two drones flying over the property...”

Source: “Envían drones con granadas al secretario de Seguridad Pública de Baja California (Drones with Grenades were Sent to the Secretary of Public Security of Baja California),” *Jalisco Político*, 10 July 2018. <http://jaliscopolitico.com/nacional/justicia/envian-drones-con-granadas-al-secretario-de-seguridad-publica-de-baja-california>

...Gerardo Sosa released a statement stating that they are the product of the strategy against crime. He also said that all three levels of government will work to punish those that violate the law...

Source: “Dron con granadas cae en casa del secretario de Seguridad Pública de Baja California (A Drone with Grenades Falls in the Secretary of Public Security of Baja California’s House),” *Excelsior*, 10 July 2018. <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/dron-con-granadas-cae-en-casa-del-secretario-de-seguridad-publica-de-baja-california>

...According to the information, it was around 7:00 am on Tuesday when elements of the State Prevention Police assigned to Sosa Olachea’s protection detail reported having seen two drones flying over the property, located in the Los Laureles municipality of Tecate...



Weaponized drone that targeted Baja California Secretary of Public Security's Residence.

Source: SSPE (Mexican Secretariat of Public Security) via Telemundo, <https://www.telemundo47.com/noticias/mexico/Un-dron-con-granadas-aterizo-en-propiedad-del-jefe-de-policia-de-Baja-California-487930411.html>.



Chinese Interest in Bolivia

OE Watch Commentary: On 19 June 2018 Chinese President Xi Jinping and visiting Bolivian President Juan Evo Morales Ayma agreed that the two countries would establish a strategic partnership to promote greater development of bilateral relations, as reported in the accompanying excerpted article from *La Razon*. Increased engagement between China and Bolivia is not surprising as the Asian giant initially created diplomatic relations with the country over 30 years ago, but what is notable is that in the past 5 years, China began investing heavily in the country. In the coming years, China is proposing multiple agreements between the two countries, to include increased exportation of agricultural products from Bolivia, development strategies in what is known as the Belt and Road initiative, and expansion of hydroelectric facilities with the end goal of making Bolivia the “energy center” of South America. The accompanying excerpted articles discuss China’s growing need for agricultural products from the region and its interest in making Bolivia the energy center of South America.

China has looked to multiple countries in Latin America for agricultural products to include Brazil and Argentina, both of which are actively working with China to support its increasing need for food commodities. Take for example Brazil. Here, Chinese interest in soybeans is so prevalent that it is investing heavily to upgrade Brazil’s infrastructure to move soybeans from the landlocked Mato Grosso, since half of the country’s soybeans are produced here. To date, an estimated \$20 billion in funds from China are already being used to renovate the railways and roads to bring Brazilian soybeans to port at a lower cost as discussed in the excerpt from *La Prensa*. In Bolivia, the demand for soybeans and quinoa is not as high as in the aforementioned countries, but new agreements stipulate that Bolivia will be expected to increase the export of these products in coming years.

In addition to expressing its desire for agricultural products, China also expressed its willingness to contribute to Bolivia becoming the “energy center” of South America by constructing two hydroelectric plants; the first of which became operational earlier this year as discussed in the excerpt from *Energia Limpia Para Todos*. Two Chinese firms were contracted to construct the \$139 million project. Once both plants are up and running, Bolivia expects to produce 3,000 megawatts of additional energy and hopes to export at least 1,000 megawatts by 2020. President Morales said that with the inauguration of first hydroelectric plant known as San Jose I, 55 megawatts have been added to the 2,100 megawatts generated up to now by the Andean country. The excerpted article further discusses energy currently used by Bolivia and how the second San Jose project will contribute to additional energy production for possible export. While some speculate that China is interested in energy exports, other sources claim financial support to the country is more strategic and is related to the Chinese Belt Road Initiative as discussed in excerpted article from *HKTDC*. Regardless of China’s reasons, large investments and a focused interest in a particular region are something to consider.

End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)

Source: “Bolivia y China fortalecen relaciones bilaterales tras encuentro presidencial (Bolivia and China Presidents Meet to Strengthen Bilateral Relations),” *La Razon*, 19 June 2018. http://www.la-razon.com/nacional/Bolivia-China-relaciones-acuerdos-comercio-presidentes_0_2949905027.html

Chinese contracts awarded by Bolivia in recent years include exploration for lithium and mineral salts, the construction of facilities to extract and refine potassium chloride and cast zinc, the construction of a plant for tin ore processing, and significant exportation of both soybeans and quinoa. In terms of electricity, China has expressed its willingness to aid Bolivia in becoming the “energy center” of South America and plans to do so by building hydroelectric plants (one of which is already operational).

Source: “Apetito de China impulsa precios de la soya brasileña (Chinese Appetite for Brazilian Soy Comes with a Cost),” *La Prensa*, 5 April 2018. https://impresa.prensa.com/economia/Apetito-China-impulsa-precios-brasilena_0_5000499969.html

Exporting soybeans from Brazil to China is not a cheap endeavor, but with more than \$20 million in investments, things are finally changing, but the exportation process is still not cheap. Traditionally, exportation has been expensive because for the past 5 decades, Mato Grosso (state which produces largest quantity of soybeans in the country) antiquated railways and roads were used to transverse the 1,300 mile route to get to export sites.

Source: “Bolivia con gigantesca planta de energía solar fotovoltaica e hidroeléctrica (Bolivia Now has Gigantic Solar Energy and Hydroelectric Plant),” *Energia Limpia Para Todos*, 13 April 2018. <https://energialimpiaparatodos.com/2018/04/13/lider-bolivia-con-gigantes-planta-de-energia-solar-fotovoltaica-e-hidroelectrica/>

Bolivia consumes 1,500 megawatts, which means “600 megawatts of reserves,” so the country could export between 200 and 300 megawatts if it so desired. The San Jose project consists of two plants, this one with 55 megawatts, and the second with the capacity to generate another 69, to contribute a total of 124 megawatts to the National Interconnected System (SIN).

Source: “The Belt and Road Initiative,” *HKTDC*, 3 May 2018. <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative/The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative/obor/en/1/1X000000/1X0A36B7.htm>

“China will continue to help Bolivia in implementing its strategy of becoming the ‘energy center in South America’. We will strengthen cooperation in various fields under the Belt and Road Initiative, and push for deeper bilateral relations,” Liang added. Initiated in 2013, the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative seeks to strengthen connectivity among Asia and other regions in infrastructure investment.

“China will continue to help Bolivia in implementing its strategy of becoming the ‘energy center in South America’.”



Cubazuelaruso Oil

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted references note that the Venezuelan government oil enterprise PDVSA is struggling to deliver crude oil because of production and legal problems. They also suggest that delivery of crude oil to Cuba is a high priority. The references from *La Patilla* (dated 25 and 26 June) report that a tanker, unable to deliver oil to a refinery in Curacao due to legal difficulties, delivered it to another ship at sea, off the Cayman Islands. The other report from *La Patilla* is of the movement of a laden tanker to a refinery in Cuba. Although not assured in the series of reports, *La Patilla* suggests, based on the timing, locations and sizes of the tankers, that the reports cover the same delivery. Of special interest is their implication that the crude oil on board is probably of Russian origin. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“A tanker that for a month was unable to deliver Russian crude to the Venezuelan PDVSA...was able to unload it in the Caribbean and a second shipment is also likely to do so soon.”

Source: “Petróleo ruso comprado por Pdvsa para Cuba descarga en el Caribe (Russian oil bought by PDVSA [Venezuelan oil Company] unloads in the Caribbean),” *La Patilla* and *Reuters*, 25 June 2018. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2018/06/25/petroleo-ruso-comprado-por-pdvsa-para-cuba-descarga-en-el-caribe/>

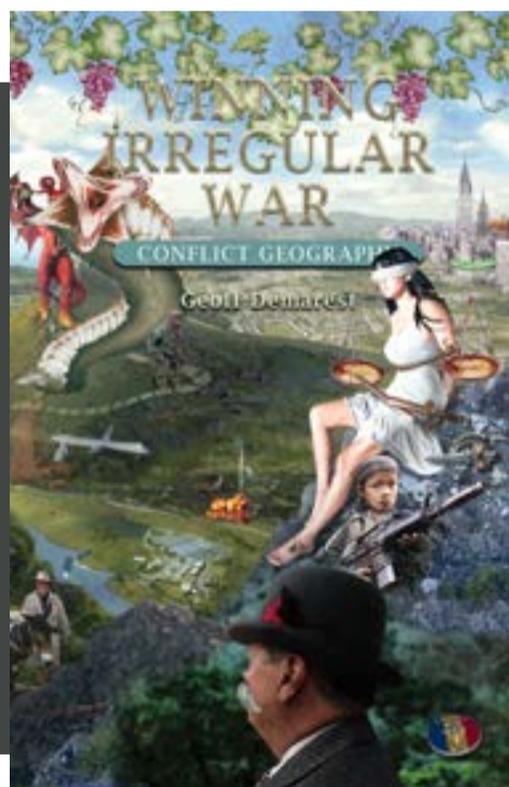
“...A tanker that for a month was unable to deliver Russian crude to the Venezuelan PDVSA...was able to unload it in the Caribbean and a second shipment is also likely to do so soon, according to Reuters and a source with knowledge of the sale...It was not immediately clear what Company finally received the shipment...Secondary sources cited in the monthly report of the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) estimated that Venezuelan production decreased to 1,392 million bpd last month, the least since the 1950s...”

Source: “Como Piratas del Caribe, Pdvsa transfiere cargas barco a barco en mar abierto (Like Pirates of the Caribbean, PDVSA transfers cargo ship-to-ship on the open sea),” *La Patilla*, 26 June 2018. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2018/06/26/como-piratas-del-caribe-pdvsa-transfiere-cargas-barco-a-barco-en-mar-abierto/>

“The tanker Advante [sic] Atom, an Aframax type, that was originally supposed to deliver Russian Urals Crude to PDVSA’s Bullenbay terminal in Curacao, from where it was to be exported to Cuba, was apparently affected by the Conoco-PDVSA dispute and was temporarily deviated to Venezuelan waters to avoid being detained...On 21 June, the tanker discharged to another unidentified tanker by way of a ship-to-ship transfer facing the Cayman Islands according to ship tracking data from Reuters...”

Source: “Venezuela envía a Cuba buque con 500.000 barriles de petróleo (Venezuela sends an oil tanker to Cuba with 500,000 barrels of oil),” *La Patilla*, 8 July 2018. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2018/07/08/venezuela-envia-a-cuba-buque-con-500-000-barriles-de-petroleo/>

“The Liberian flagged Panamax type oil tanker Impros...left the docks of Guaraguao [northern coast of Cuba]...on its way to Matanzas [northwest coast of Cuba]...The delivery is made in the midst of enormous difficulties that PDVSA has in fulfilling its commercial commitments in quantity and quality of crude, because of a pronounced fall in its production...”



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>



Living Conditions in Venezuela Are Not Improving

OE Watch Commentary: At this point, use of the word “crisis” in reference to Venezuela would be ambiguous and ineffective. Both the start and the end of the tragedy are hard to pinpoint. If for some Venezuelans conditions are critical now (meaning they face reasonable doubt concerning their immediate personal survival), then almost certainly we will see conditions become still more critical for more Venezuelans. This is because, as the accompanying references attest, the trend has been in one direction and accelerating. Infrastructure and institutions are falling apart, but no apparent, appreciable changes are being made in the regime’s approach to governance and management. The authors of the accompanying references, harshly critical of the government, give some context, and both plea for outside help. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



“...He will continue breaking records...”

Venezuelan eating from the trash due to shortages in 2017.

Source: VOA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venezuela_shortages_-_Eating_garbage_2.png, Public Domain.

Source: Editors, “¡Destroyer! Antonio de la Cruz: Nicolas Maduro: el hombre record (Destroyer! Antonio de la Cruz: Nicolas Maduro: record-setter),” *DolarToday*, 4 July 2018. <https://dolartoday.com/destroyer-antonio-de-la-cruz-nicolas-maduro-el-hombre-record/>

“The annual inflation rate is at 41,956 percent...Likewise, he managed to hit for the lowest record for oil production in the last fifty years...In health, the record of the regime impacts the Continent, taking apart several decades of effort of the region’s governments and the Pan-American Health Organization...The strategy of the regime to maintain power at all cost has contributed to the records Maduro has reached. He will continue breaking records, even if the serve to eliminate the country and its people.”

Source: Sabrina Martín, “The UN Exposes the Atrocities of Nicolás Maduro in a Devastating Report,” *Panam Post*, 25 June 2018. <https://panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2018/06/25/the-un-exposes-the-atrocities-of-nicolas-maduro-in-a-devastating-report/>

“A new UN report exposes grave abuses of human rights in Venezuela...Violations of the freedom of peaceful assembly... Impunity...Extrajudicial executions...Arbitrary arrests and torture...Inadequate food and healthcare...Recently elected Colombian President Ivan Duque has been one of the strongest voices in condemning the Maduro regime.”

1986

2016

**FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES OFFICE:
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The Coming Death of UNASUR?

OE Watch Commentary: The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is principally an invention of the deceased Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chávez. His intention was to displace the Organization of American States (OAS) as the premier regional international organization, excluding the United States in order to diminish US influence in the region and increase that of the region's leftist, and especially Bolivarian, political parties. It appears from the accompanying excerpted articles that UNASUR is hemorrhaging money and members, and that Colombian President-elect Ivan Duque may be planning to give it an unceremonial coup de grâce on the way to restoring the prestige of the OAS. According to the accompanying reference from *Runrun.es*, the government of Ecuador is even trying to gain ownership of the organization's headquarters building outside Quito, which had been a gift to the organization from Rafael Correa, Ecuador's last president. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Headquarters of UNASUR in Mitad del Cielo, Ecuador (2015).
Source: Montserrat Boix, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UNASUR_\(Ecuador\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UNASUR_(Ecuador).jpg), CC 4.0.

“...Argentina, Brasil, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay and Perú left UNASUR...”

Source: Andrés Felipe Gama, “Iván Duque sugiere a países abandonar la Unasur por ser cómplice de la dictadura venezolana (Ivan Duque suggests that other countries abandon UNASUR for being an accomplice of the Venezuelan dictatorship),” *Radio Santafé*, 30 June 2018. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2018/06/30/ivan-duque-sugiere-a-paises-abandonar-la-unasur-por-ser-complíce-de-la-dictadura-venezolana/>

“Part of strengthening the inter-American system is exercising this withdrawal [from UNASUR] and strengthening our participation in that organization [the OAS] and strengthening the Democratic Charter...’...It is fitting to mention that Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay y Perú left UNASUR because of disagreements about its functioning. That organization is formed by 12 nations of South America and its creation was impelled, among others, by the deceased Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.”

Source: Edgar C. Otálvora, “Informe Otálvora: Unasur se queda sin sede, presupuesto y miembros, (Otálvora Report: Unasur ned s up without a headquarters, budget and members),” *Runrun.es*, 15 July 2018. <http://runrun.es/opinion/354969/informe-otalvora-unasur-se-queda-sin-sede-presupuesto-y-miembros.html>

...Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno announced his decision to request member governments to return the building that his predecessor and former political ally Rafael Correa donated to Unasur...

Bolivarian Military Solidarity with Ortega

OE Watch Commentary: If the accompanying excerpted sources are correct, the Bolivarian leaders in Cuba and Venezuela are supporting Nicaraguan strongman Daniel Ortega with more than just words. They are apparently sending weaponry in the midst of ongoing, violent civil unrest that has some Nicaraguans wondering if they are on a Venezuela-like path. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Editors, “Continúa su viaje a Nicaragua buque venezolano con armas cubanas (Venezuelan ship with Cuban weapons continues its voyage to Nicaragua),” *La Patilla*, 2 July 2018. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2018/07/02/continua-su-viaje-a-nicaragua-buque-venezolano-con-armas-cubanas/>

“...The ‘naval logistics’ type ship ‘Los Frailes’ (IMO 9611852) continued its voyage yesterday toward the port of El Ramas in Nicaragua...The boat carries up to 2000 Cuban AKM 7.62 caliber rifles (62x39) with 6000 magazines and 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition of the same caliber...The boat is also carrying...four anti-riot vehicles of the Bolivarian National Guard.”

“The boat carries up to 2000 Cuban AKM 7.62 caliber rifles (62x39) with 6000 magazines and 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition.”



Los Frailes Naval Logistics Ship (Damen Stan Lander 5612 type) of the Bolivarian Navy of Venezuela (late 2012).
Source: Carlos E. Perez S.L., https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:T-91_Los_Frailes.JPG, CC 4.0.

Source: EEFE, “Managua, la capital nicaragüense en el ojo del huracán (Managua, the Nicaraguan capital, in the eye of the hurricane),” *Infobae*, 4 July 2018. <https://www.infobae.com/america/portadas/2018/07/10/el-nuevo-diario-nicaragua-martes-10-de-julio-de-2018/>

“...To land in Managua these days seems most like doing so in the very eye of a hurricane... In most cases, they appear more prepared for war than for security. They do not transmit confidence...The response of the government to the demonstrations has carried the country into a spiral of violence in that the eye of the hurricane is narrow and the storm that approaches is implacable.”



Mexico-Cuba Nexus?

OE Watch Commentary: On 1 July Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly abbreviated in references as AMLO, won the Mexican presidential elections with a little over 53 percent of the vote. He will be inaugurated on 1 December this year. Until becoming President-elect, AMLO was president of the *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* or *Morena* (National Regeneration Movement), a political party formed around AMLO in 2013. After the election, he was replaced as head of the party by Yeidckol Polevnsky Gurwitz, the latter having previously been in the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD).

It is early to assert what President López Obrador's foreign policy preferences will be, but the writers of the accompanying excerpted references alert to evidence that he may align Mexican foreign policies more closely with those of Cuba, which means Cuba's ruling Cuban Communist Party, PCC. As election strategy, AMLO formed the electoral coalition *Juntos Haremos Historia* (Together We Will Make History). One of the party members of that coalition, the *Partido de Trabajo* (Labor Party) has strong ties to the Forum of Sao Paulo. Recent Wikipedia pages titled, "*Foro de São Paulo*" and "*Movimiento Regeneración Nacional*" list the latter as a member of the former. The PRD, the other main party in the Morena coalition, is also listed. The Forum of Sao Paulo is a composition of many of the hemisphere's far left and anti-US Government parties aligned with the PCC and the Bolivarian movement.

The Spanish author of the accompanying reference from *14ymedio* opines that AMLO is fundamentally inspired by the Cuban revolution, claiming even that AMLO's foreign visits since he became 50 years of age have been only to Cuba. It is clear from the publicly available references that the Mexican press has long been aware of Fidel Castro's admiration for AMLO and vice-versa. That mutual admiration, however, is probably not as significant a clue regarding any impending adjustment in Mexican foreign policy as are the close party relationships within the Forum of Sao Paulo. Those party ties suggest a tilt in favor of the Cuban Communist Party. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Mexican President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador Associating with the Morena political party in 2018.
Source: Eneas De Troya from Mexico City, México, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMLO_se_afilia_a_MORENA_en_el_Zócalo_\(8361522287\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMLO_se_afilia_a_MORENA_en_el_Zócalo_(8361522287).jpg), CC 2.0.

“...It is impossible to separate Cuba from the political essence of...AMLO...”

<p>Source: Rubén Cortés, “La raíz cubana de López Obrador (López Obrador’s Cuban Base),” <i>14ymedio</i>, 2 July 2018. http://americanuestra.com/la-raiz-cubana-de-lopez-obrador</p>	<p>Source: Carina García, “AMLO es la persona con más autoridad moral: Castro (AMLO is the person with the greatest moral authority: Castro),” <i>El Universal</i>, 28 November 2016. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/politica/2016/11/28/amlo-es-la-persona-con-mas-autoridad-moral-castro</p>
<p><i>“It is impossible to separate Cuba from the political essence of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO. Since he was 50 years old he has only left Mexico two times, and the two were to Cuba. On the death of the Cuban dictator, AMLO said, ‘Comandante Fidel is a political and social warrior of great measure’.”</i></p>	<p><i>“For the deceased ex-governor of Cuba, Fidel Castro, Andrés Manuel López Obrador ‘will be the person of greatest political and moral authority when the system collapses and, with it, the empire’...The Cuban considered that the book [Obrador’s 2010 book, <i>The Mafia That Has Taken over Mexico...2012</i>] as the sharpest description of how the United States devoured Mexican wealth to the last bite...”</i></p>



Is Ecuador Realigning?

OE Watch Commentary: Ecuador's government has (or perhaps had) been a core ally within the Bolivarian block of countries that includes the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and of a few smaller, island nations. Judging from the accompanying excerpted references, part of the reason may relate to internal political competition mixed with international criminal matters. As the accompanying reference from *Infobae* details, the administration of President Lenin Moreno is pursuing ex-President Rafael Correa (who was a strong supporter of Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian parties) for the false arrest and imprisonment of an Ecuadoran citizen, Fernando Baldas. Baldas was able to gain an international order for Correa's arrest.

The total destruction of Venezuelan material well-being by the Bolivarian regime is probably a greater factor in Moreno's thinking, however. Also in the decision mix, given that Ecuador has traditionally aligned with Colombia, President Moreno probably has taken note of the fact that the Colombians just elected a president who is promising to oppose the Bolivarians. Many in the region believe that the US posture is always a factor as well. The ideological tone of PAIS Alianza, the political party of Lenin Moreno, will be of some interest. It has been a member of the leftist coalition Forum of Sao Paulo, and its participation and influence in that organization is worth watching. PAIS apparently booted Rafael Correa from its ranks this year, and seems to have steered from the Bolivarian "20th Century Socialism" toward a less toxic social democracy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Diego Puente, "Ecuador se aleja del bloque bolivariano (Ecuador distances itself from the Bolivarian block)," *El Comercio*, 6 July 2018. <http://www.juiciocrudo.com/articulo/ecuador-se-aleja-del-bloque-bolivariano/9866>

"The Government of Ecuador changed its position as to the regimes of the self-denominated progressives. Foreign relations with Venezuela and Bolivia are at the moment the lowest in the last 11 years. The ambassadors assigned to those countries were called home for consultations Monday, 4 July of 2018...For Esteban Santos, dean of Political Sciences at the UDLA [University of the Americas in Quito], currently there is evidence of a distancing from the regimes that promote the Socialism of the XXI Century..."

Source: Sabrina Martín, "Ecuador and Venezuela are Heading Towards a Diplomatic Crisis," *PanAmPost*, 9 July 2018. <https://panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2018/07/09/ecuador-and-venezuela-are-heading-towards-a-diplomatic-crisis/?cn-reloaded=1>

"Lenin Moreno appears to be turning on Ecuador's former ally Venezuela, as the economic and political crisis there grows increasingly dire...The president of Ecuador, Lenin Moreno, is about to change his foreign policy in relation to Venezuela after warning Nicolas Maduro "not to provoke him."

Source: Editors, "Rafael Correa habló tras la orden de detención en su contra: 'No voy a volver a Ecuador, sería casi un suicidio' (Rafael Correa spoke after the arrest order against him: 'I am not going back to Ecuador, it would almost be a suicide')," *Infobae* and *AFP*, 4 July 2018. <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2018/07/04/rafael-correa-sobre-la-orden-de-detencion-en-su-contra-no-voy-a-volver-a-ecuador-seria-casi-un-suicidio/>

"... 'There is a whole complot', said Correa in Brussels, for whom the 'government' of Lenin Moreno is 'without a doubt' behind. 'He is behind everything...'... 'If I were single I would' [go back to Ecuador to face charges], the ex-president noted, reminding that when he left his position he had promised his family several years stay in Belgium, where his wife is from..."

"...The Government of Ecuador changed its position..."

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Bolivarian Influence in the Caribbean Softening

OE Watch Commentary: While Hugo Chávez was in power in Venezuela, the parties of the Forum of Sao Paulo, and especially the parties aligned with the Bolivarian movement led by the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), increased their influence over a number of smaller Caribbean governments. This was in part enabled by oil subsidies extended by the Bolivarian government in Venezuela to the benefit of several Caribbean governments. In part, the Bolivarian regime in Venezuela sought to weaken support that Caribbean governments might lend to neighboring Guyana in relation to a longstanding territorial sovereignty dispute. Hugo Chávez famously added an eighth star to the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a symbol of his government’s claim to what amounts to two-thirds of Guyanese territory. From the accompanying excerpted references, it now looks like the Bolivarian hope of softening Caribbean support for Guyana has turned into a softening of support for the Bolivarians generally. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...The heads of government reiterated their...support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana...”

<p>Source: Editors, “Los 15 países del Caricom reiteran su apoyo a Guyana en el reclamo territorial de Venezuela (The 15 countries of CARICOM reiterated their support for Guyana in the case of Venezuela’s territorial claims),” <i>La Patilla</i>, 8 July 2018. https://www.lapatilla.com/2018/07/08/los-15-paises-del-caricom-reiteran-su-apoyo-a-guyana-en-el-reclamo-territorial-de-venezuela/</p>	<p>Source: Editors, “Los países que cambiaron opinión en la OEA y le dieron la espalda a Maduro y su régimen (The countries that changed opinion in the OAS and turned their backs on Maduro and his regime),” <i>Maduradas</i>, 6 Jun 2018. https://maduradas.com/le-mostramos-los-paises-que-cambiaron-opinion-en-la-oea-y-le-dieron-la-espalda-a-maduro-y-su-regimen-lista/</p>
<p><i>“The disputed region, currently under Georgetown’s sovereignty, covers an area of some 160,000 square kilometers, which means three quarters of the territory of Guyana....The heads of government reiterated their firm and unbreakable support for the maintenance and the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.”</i></p>	<p><i>“This Tuesday a resolution was approved to open the door for suspension of Venezuela as a member country of the Organization of American States (OAS). The resolution was supported by 19 countries, with 11 abstentions and four votes against, including Venezuela itself...Bolivia, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines y Venezuela.”</i></p>



Territorial Map of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Showing the Territory Disputed by the Government of Venezuela. Source: The Photographer, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venezuela_Division_Politica_Territorial.svg, CC3.0



Drug Routes between Venezuela and the Dominican Republic

OE Watch Commentary: On 31 December 2017 the Dominican Republic National Drug Control Police (DNCD) seized 1,500 bricks of cocaine, but the seizure itself is not what stood out. Instead, it was the crew of 12 traffickers, the majority of which were Venezuelan as noted in the accompanying excerpted article from *El Nacional*. The nationality of the crew members is significant, because as a number of reports point out, cocaine trafficking between the two countries has steadily increased since 2013 and is believed to be related to economic and political instability in Venezuela. As the excerpted article from *Hoy Digital* discusses, Venezuelans began trickling into the Dominican Republics after President Nicolás Maduro took office and the country plunged into an economic crisis. This idea is further reiterated by the fact that prior to 2013, an estimated 3,400 Venezuelans resided in the Dominican Republic. However, by 2016, the article notes how the arrival of Venezuelans entering into Dominican airports had jumped by 40 percent when compared to numbers reported in 2015 (142,540) and they keep coming just as cocaine arrests from Venezuelans continue to increase on the island.

Despite the fact that Mexico controls much of the cocaine moving out of South America, Venezuela is still a significant regional export hub and much of its shipments are sent directly to the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic offers some of the Caribbean's largest container ports (six in total) and a plethora of routes for go-fast vessels given the country's vast coast. The Dominican Republic is also the most populous country in the Caribbean with 10.5 million inhabitants and boasts the most robust economy in the region. Furthermore, it has a booming property market, the largest economy and GDP in the Caribbean, and banking sector willing and able to launder money as discussed in the excerpted article from *Insight Crime*. This same source also discusses that for Venezuelans, the Dominican Republic is immensely attractive as a new place to resettle and avoid the rampant hyperinflation and government expropriation. Hence, multiple factors starting back in 2013 and leading up to present have contributed to the new and growing link between cocaine trafficking activity between Venezuela and the Dominican Republic.

End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)

“This idea is represented by the fact that more and more Venezuelan nationals are living in the country and being arrested in conjunction with large-scale cocaine seizures.”

Source: “Detuvieron a varios venezolanos en Dominicana por tráfico de drogas (Venezuelans Arrested for Drug Trafficking in Dominican Republic),” *El Nacional*, 2 January, 2018. http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/sucesos/detuvieron-varios-venezolanos-dominicana-por-trafico-drogas_217420

Authorities in the Dominican Republic are reporting that Venezuelan trafficking organizations are operating with increased frequency in the country. This idea is represented by the fact that more and more Venezuelan nationals are living in the country and being arrested in conjunction with large-scale cocaine seizures.

Source: “Migración venezolana ocupa segundo puesto en República Dominicana (Venezuelans Represent Second Largest Group of Immigrants in the Dominican Republic),” *Hoy Digital*, 16 April 2018. <http://hoy.com.do/migracion-venezolana-ocupa-segundo-puesto-en-republica-dominicana/>

However, that dynamic changed after President Nicolás Maduro took office and the country was plunged into an economic crisis in 2013. The first to arrive in the Dominican Republic were upper- and middle-class Venezuelans fleeing the uncertainty. They generally established medium-sized service companies and got jobs as professionals. But lately, the stream has turned into a flood. Prior to 2013, an estimated 3,400 Venezuelans resided in the DR. However, by 2016, the arrival of Venezuelans through Dominican airports had jumped by 40 percent when compared to numbers reported in 2015 for a total of 142,540 people, although there is no clear data on how many went for tourism purposes and how many stayed.

Source: “República Dominicana y Venezuela: Tráfico de cocaína por el Caribe (Dominican Republic and Venezuela: Cocaine Trafficking through the Caribbean),” *Insight Crime*, 24 May 2018. <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/republica-dominicana-y-venezuela-trafico-de-cocaina-por-el-caribe/>

The Dominican Republic (DR) sits in the heart of the Caribbean. It is the region's most populous nation with 10.5 million inhabitants and has its strongest economy. Up to five million tourists enter the country through the international airports and the dozens of cruise liners that pull up to its ports every year. From a trade point of view, the Dominican Republic's six ports make it a regional hub for container shipping. Some of these ports can handle the “neo-Panamax” ships, the largest size able to negotiate the Panama Canal making it a drug trafficking paradise. As for Venezuelans that have moved to the country, it is also an attractive option as those with money are able to stash it beyond the reach of hyperinflation and government expropriation. The culture on this Caribbean island is a lot like that in Venezuela, so they feel right at home.



Guatemalan Authorities Find First Ever Coca Field in Country

OE Watch Commentary: Certain climates or locations are better than others for growing crops, but key factors needed to grow specific crops can be mimicked to make an area previously deemed as unfavorable more favorable. The accompanying excerpted articles from Latin American sources discuss engineer-enhanced cocaine production that was first seen in Honduras in 2017 and then again in Guatemala in 2018.

As the excerpt from *El Heraldo* discusses, in late April 2017, authorities discovered the first ever coca plantation in the Olancho Department of Honduras. From this location, drug traffickers were growing more than 10,000 cocaine plants and 1,200 seedlings. More surprising still were indications that the plantation had likely been operational since 2014. The excerpted article from *La Prensa* points out that initial findings by authorities revealed that the land used to create the plantation was scouted out by Colombian crop engineers around that time. Once successful with coca plants, the Colombians then proceeded to start growing additional plants. As the excerpted article from *Estrategia y Negocios* notes, Colombian drug cartels will likely try to continue to produce in Honduras because they can lower costs and further enhance their operational structures. The piece also points out that this change “should put countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador on alert because route changes may occur due to new production schemes.” Ironically, their assumption turned out to be true as discussed in the excerpted article from *Prensa Libre*.

On 26 May 2018 Guatemala’s National Civil Police (Policía Nacional Civil de Guatemala – PNC) reported the discovery of a coca field in Cobán (located in the Alta Verapaz Department). The coca field had been sown between coffee plants. In total, almost one hectare of coca was found and subsequently destroyed according to the *Prensa Libre* article. The difference between this case and the Honduran case is that at this point, it is not known if Colombian crop engineers were responsible for scouting the location and growing the plants.

Indigenous cocaine is prevalent in the jungle region of the Andean ridge in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. This is because cocaine plants require hot, damp, and humid climates as well as iron-rich clay soil to thrive, all of which is readily offered by the rainforest environment unique to the Andean jungle. The Andean jungle is also perfect to dry out leaves as the geography in and around where cocaine grows provides an ideal setting to lay mature leaves along the hillside until they are ready to be carefully packed into sacks and taken to a lab where they are further cultivated into coca paste. These factors make the Andean Ridge the premier location in the world to grow and cultivate cocaine. However, even though this region is ideal for production, it is not logistically ideal for producers whose primary consumers live in the United States or Europe. This is why cartels are looking to produce in areas such as Honduras and Guatemala.

End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)

“Information released by authorities revealed that two Colombian crop engineers entered Honduras and selected different land areas to conduct trial runs to see if coca plants could thrive in any of the selected regions.”

Source: “Honduras: Incautan plantación clandestina de coca en Esquipulas del Norte (Clandestine Coca Plantation Seized in Esquipulas del Norte, Honduras),” *El Heraldo*, 27 April 2017. <http://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1067087-466/honduras-incautan-plantaci%C3%B3n-clandestina-de-coca-en-esquipulas-del-norte>

Three months of surveillance and intelligence collection aided Honduran authorities in discovering the countries’ first ever coca plantation on April 27, 2017. The plantation itself was located on top of a mountain in the Palos Blancos village of Olancho. From this location, drug traffickers were growing more than 10,000 cocaine plants and 1,200 seedlings.

Source: “Hallazgo de plantas de coca pone a Honduras en nueva fase del narco (Discovery of Cocaine Plants Marks New Phase of Drug Trafficking in Honduras),” *La Prensa*, 10 June 2017. <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1079056-410/plantas-coca-narcotraficomarihuana-coca%C3%ADna>

Information released by authorities revealed that two Colombian crop engineers entered Honduras and selected different land areas to conduct trial runs to see if coca plants could thrive in any of the selected regions. As part of their assessment, the engineers tested soil and evaluated the effects that elevation and climate would have on the plants. Given the experiment was successful in Olancho, they stayed in the country and started a full-grown coca plantation there.

Source: “Honduras descubre plantación de coca (Cocaine Plantation Discovered in Honduras),” *Estrategia y Negocios*, 7 June 2017. <http://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/centroamericaymundo/1078918-330/honduras-descubre-plantaci%C3%B3n-de-coca>

Army intelligence agents believe that the discovery of the first cocaine plantation in Honduras shows that drug cartels are looking for new areas to develop. It also shows how they are re-thinking their operational schemes and innovating to reduce transportation costs. Analysts also indicated that this change should put countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador on alert because route changes may occur due to new production schemes.

Source: “Localizan por primera vez plantación de coca y laboratorio para procesarla (Authorities Found First Ever Coca Plantation and Processing Lab),” *Prensa Libre*, 26 May 2018. <http://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/alta-verapaz/pnc-localiza-por-primera-vez-plantacion-de-coca-y-laboratorio-para-procesarla>

The crops were found in a mountainous region six hours by foot from the central city of Cobán, which is the capital of the department of Alta Verapaz. The finding in and of itself is significant because it represents the first ever coca field to be discovered in Guatemala. A small laboratory was also found near the coca farm. It contained materials commonly used for turning coca leaves into cocaine base, such as gasoline, cement and acid.



Operation Jaque Ten Years On

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 July 2008 the Colombian Army carried out a spectacular operation to rescue presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three American contractors who had been taken hostage by the FARC over five years earlier (The history can be read in English in the 2009 book *Out of Captivity*). In the operation, the Colombian Army also freed about a dozen government police and military personnel that the FARC had been holding hostage even longer for the purpose of strategic extortion. The operation was an historic victory for the Colombian armed forces and especially for Colombian military intelligence. In the operation, two FARC guerrillas were captured, and, as the accompanying excerpted reference from *RCN Radio* notes, the fates of the two have been quite different. One of the FARC prisoners, who was transferred to the US justice system, is said to be still in jail. The whereabouts of the other is unknown, after having been given amnesty under the recent FARC-government accords.

The anniversary of the rescue comes at an influential moment, given that President-elect Ivan Duque takes a less positive position toward the accords than does the current President Juan Manuel Santos. The rescue operation carries a considerable amount of public emotion and is emblematic of a feeling within much of the population that the government of President Santos forfeited the expected outcome of successful military efforts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...Ten Years Ago the Country Rejoiced...”



Source: Juan David Escobar Valencia, “La traición al espíritu de la Operación Jaque (Betrayal of the Spirit of Operation Jaque),” *El Colombiano*, 2 July 2018. <http://www.elcolombiano.com/opinion/columnistas/la-traicion-al-espíritu-de-la-operacion-jaque-CL8940334>

“Ten years ago today the country rejoiced at the results of one of the most important military operations in its history: Operation Jaque. Colombians did not believe in the myth propagated by the guerrilla’s academic minions who assured that defeating them was impossible and that we should resign ourselves to living together with them.”

Source: Rafael Pérez, “¿Qué pasó con los dos guerrilleros capturados en la Operación Jaque? (What happened with the two guerrillas captured in Operation Jaque?).” *RCN Radio*, 2 July 2018. <https://www.rcnradio.com/judicial/que-paso-con-los-dos-guerrilleros-capturados-en-la-operacion-jaque>

“Alias ‘Cesar’ was the chief of the jailors of that group of hostages...alias ‘Enrique Gafas’, was the other FARC jailer trapped by Operation Jaque... ‘Gafas’ was paying his sentence for his crimes in Colombia. However, on 2 June 2017...he was freed...for security reasons, the whereabouts of ‘Gafas’ is a complete mystery at this time...”

Source: Ricardo Puentes Melo, “La Operación Jaque y la Cruz Roja. 10 años después (Operation Jaque, 10 years later),” *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 7 July, 2018. <https://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/la-operacion-jaque-y-la-cruz-roja-10-anos-despues.html>

“While the terrorists have been awarded their liberty, money and seats in Congress, the soldiers who risked their lives to liberate the hostages in Operation Jaque have been pursued, vilified, threatened and dishonored.”