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ON THE COVER:

"Active phase of Vostok 2018 maneuvers."

Image Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=60528@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

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Reasoning for the Vostok-2018 Strategic Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: Russia conducted the Vostok-2018 strategic exercises 11-17 September 2018 and according to Defense Minister General Sergey Shoygu, approximately 300,000 servicemen (approximately one-third of the Ministry of Defense's uniformed personnel); 36,000 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other combat vehicles; more than 1,000 helicopters, aircraft, and drones; and ships and auxiliary vessels of the Northern and Pacific Fleets took part in the maneuvers. In addition, approximately 3,000 military personnel from the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and several units from Mongolia also participated.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Svobodnaya Pressa*, lays out some reasoning behind the exercise. The article points out that these annual major exercises shift on a yearly basis from military district to military district, and discusses parallels between Vostok-2018 and Vostok-1981. One commonality, from the author's perspective, is that both exercises were conducted during particularly contentious relations with the West and were intended to deter (through their sheer size), but not provoke (due to them not being near a current hot-spot).

The accompanying excerpted article from *Vzglyad*, lays out varying opinions regarding whether the Vostok-2018 exercise is Syria related. Prominent journalist and military expert Pavel Felgengauer is somewhat cynical of this view, pointing out: "It is difficult to use what was employed in Syria in the large-scale operations, which are being tested at the maneuvers." The article from *Gazeta.ru* is perhaps the most interesting of the articles as it sheds some light on Russian terminology differences. In particular, strategic command-staff exercises [стратегические командно-штабные учения] are considered to be front-level operations occurring at the operational-strategic level of military activity, since they primarily involve just a single military district/joint strategic command, but maneuvers [маневры] are larger (strategic) in nature and involve multiple military districts and fleets in the context of a continental Theater of Military Operations (TVD) [театр военных действий (ТВД)]. Due to the scale of the Vostok-2018 exercise, it would be considered a 'maneuver' by this definition. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“It is unlikely that 300,000 soldiers and commanders, off-shore ships, and Long Range Aviation will be involved to combat strictly terrorists, even international terrorists.”



Vostok-2018 Strategic Exercise.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=60539@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

(continued)



Continued: Reasoning for the Vostok-2018 Strategic Exercise

Source: Sergey Ishchenko, “Восток-2018: Россия начинает репетицию Третьей мировой (Vostok-2018: Russia Is Beginning Dress Rehearsals for World War III),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 8 September 2018. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/210128/>

...In a word, what has already begun in Siberia, the Far East, and Arctic and Pacific waters is making an unprecedented impression on the whole world. For there has not been this scale of movement of troops in our country's Armed Forces for almost four decades. Since the time of the Soviet Zapad-1981 exercises...the main narrative of the Zapad-1981 exercises was the start of a big war on the continent. What are we now about to rehearse at Vostok-2018?

Both with us and in the West the majority of specialists are certain that today also we are, in actual fact, preparing for exactly the same thing. There was recently, for example, an article on the upcoming exercises in the German business newspaper Handelsblatt. The authors of the publication express the opinion that the North Atlantic alliance will in this way be shown impressive military power. And since the scale of the exercises is comparable to the biggest operations of World War II, they are hereby “embodying Washington's fears.” The fears are absolutely real, what is more, for the participation of the Chinese military in Vostok-2018 graphically demonstrates to the world the indications of the shaping of a new anti-American military alliance, whose aggregate power is appreciably greater than is today at the disposal of the United States.

Yes, but why, then, are the exercises being held at Russia's eastern, not western, borders? After all, several thousand Chinese men and officers could easily have been airlifted to somewhere near Bryansk or Voronezh.

There are likely two reasons. The first is that strategic command-staff exercises of district scale, at a minimum, have recently been held in Russia annually. But their zones are chosen strictly in turn. The Tsentr-2015 maneuvers were staged in 2015. Exactly a year later, Kavkaz-2016. Another year passed – Zapad-2017. It is thus now the turn of the East.

But a simple listing of Russian military activity in the past month is persuasive that we are learning synchronously at exactly this time to fight not only in the Far East, Pacific, and Siberia. Judge for yourself...

But the formalization of the date and location of the maneuvers are not the main thing, of course. It is politically far more important for Moscow today to mass these heaps of weapons and host of personnel as far away from the line of contact, which is heating up right before our eyes, with the alliance. In order to avoid additional charges of a provocation. We remember how last year's Zapad-2017 exercises caused real hysteria in Europe and the United States. The calendar approved in the General Staff long since has now simply happily come to hand at just the right moment for us, therefore.



Vostok-2018 Strategic Exercise.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=60538@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

(continued)



Continued: Reasoning for the Vostok-2018 Strategic Exercise

Source: Oleg Moskvina and Mikhail Moshkin, “Крупнейшие маневры на Дальнем Востоке напрямую связаны с Сирией (The Largest Maneuvers in the Far East Are Directly Linked with Syria),” *Vzglyad*, 11 September 2018. <https://vz.ru/politics/2018/9/11/941197.html>

Vostok-2018's active phase will occur in two stages. “The Main operations will unfold on five combined-arms ranges, four Air Force and PVO ranges, and in the water areas of the Sea of Okhotsk and Bering Sea and Avachinsk and Kronotskiy bays”, General Staff Chief Valeriy Gerasimov warned last week.

...The exercises will last four days, until 15 September. Incidentally, the Zapad-1981 large-scale exercises, with which Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu himself compared Vostok-2018, lasted a bit longer – from 4 through 12 September 1981. Military experts recall that the troops were redeployed from Central Russia already long before the official start of the exercises, in other words, preparations had already occurred for no less than one month.

“Obviously, it was decided to demonstrate the capabilities of our armed forces to redeploy substantial men and equipment great distances in a short period of time, in other words, to mobilize substantial forces on one of the axes,” Academy of Military Sciences Corresponding Member Aleksandr Bartosh said.

He assumes that it was decided to conduct Vostok-2018 with that scope in order to disseminate the experience of the Syrian war to the maximum extent in the Army so that the officers, who had managed to serve as instructors in the Syrian Government Troops, would share their knowledge with the maximum number of officers who have not yet been under fire.

“I think that those results, which our military personnel obtained during the course of the Syrian conflict, will be used to the maximum extent in these exercises”, the expert told Vzglyad Newspaper.

Bartosh recalled: since the very beginning, our General Staff has been carefully studying the experience, which has accumulated in Syria. So, less than six months after the initiation of the operation, in March 2016, General Staff Chief Valeriy Gerasimov published the article “Based upon Syria’s Experience” in VPK Magazine, where he analyzed the nature of the engagements in the Arab Republic.

“Not only instructors were in Syria, all of the military district commanders were there along with their staffs”, Independent Military Expert Pavel Felgengauer told Vzglyad Newspaper. “In this regard, yes, they will share the experience at the maneuvers because all of the army command authorities were there”. However, in his opinion, the theoretical developments come in handy in the Far East only in an abridged form: “It is difficult to use what was employed in Syria in the large-scale operations, which are being tested at the maneuvers”...

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok, “Маневры «Восток-2018»: чего так испугались на Западе (The Vostok-2018 Maneuvers: What Has So Frightened the West),” *Gazeta.Ru*, 3 September 2018. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2018/09/03/11942911.shtml?updated>

“The first thing, from which we need to begin, is with terminology and to clarify – are “Vostok-2018” maneuvers [маневры] or strategic command-staff exercises [стратегические командно-штабные учения]? They are called different things in various sources. But maneuvers and exercises – are not at all one and the same thing. Maneuvers – are the highest form of troop operational training”, Konstantin Makiyenko, the Deputy Director of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, told Gazeta.Ru...

The publication’s interlocutor points out that they sometimes call “Vostok-2018” the most large-scale troop maneuvers in the post-Soviet years and practically immediately add: the impending exercise – is one of the main events of 2018 in the RF Armed Forces. In other words, we need to unambiguously put the matter to rest – they are either maneuvers or exercises, Makiyenko thinks.

In Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu’s words, “Vostok-2018” – is the largest event since the times of the “Zapad-81” maneuvers for the training of the Armed Forces, which has acquired the status of international exercises, has unprecedented scales, both based upon spatial sweep and based upon the strength of the military command and control agencies, troops, and forces that are involved.

In Makiyenko’s words, the first question, which we need to formulate in this case is – precisely what do we intend to refine at these maneuvers. If the men and equipment of two military districts and of two fleets are involved in these events, then, based upon the scale, this is already clearly not the rehearsal of a frontal operation. This is already as a minimum strategic operations in a continental theater of military operations with the involvement of the fleets’ forces on the maritime axes, Makiyenko thinks.

“It is unlikely that 300,000 soldiers and commanders, off-shore ships, and Long Range Aviation will be involved to combat strictly terrorists, even international terrorists”, Makiyenko pointed out. In his words, it now remains to clarify – are the operations of the troops (forces) during the course of the maneuvers of an offensive or defensive nature and what kind of military-political situation has been created at the exercises...

Gazeta.Ru’s interlocutor thinks that there are all of the grounds to assume that the planned strategic operations in the continental theater of military operations will be purely defensive in nature, in other words, varied defensive operations – from frontal (or operations of operational-strategic combined formations) to corps operations - will be rehearsed during the course of “Vostok-2018”...

...in peacetime, one cannot inspect many issues of strategic regroupings, the work of the operational and strategic rear services, the conduct at full scale of the troops’ advance into operational areas and weapons training on all periods, otherwise one would have to paralyze all activity of the country’s economic complex and the daily lives of the population in the exercise conduct areas, however, it is entirely possible with the needed degree of realism to designate the work of the troops and, in so doing, obtain the needed experience, Makiyenko believes.



Vostok-2018 in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Fleet played a significant role on the flank of the major Vostok-2018 exercises as noted by the accompanying excerpted articles from Russian sources. The Northern Fleet initially moved 5,000 nautical miles into the Eastern Military District territory to guard the eastern approach to the Northern Sea route. The 80th Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and 61st Naval Infantry Brigade conducted yet another summer amphibious landing, this time of the northern side of the Chukotka Peninsula—the entrance to the Northern Sea Route. This repositioning of this large naval and ground force to an isolated region will probably become a matter of lore to the 200-some local inhabitants of the village of Vankarem. After finding and destroying notional enemy sabotage personnel, the motorized rifle brigade conducted a cross-country vehicle march across the peninsula from the Arctic to the Pacific Ocean. The naval component conducted simulated search and rescue missions and a detachment of vessels sailed south around the Kamchatka Peninsula to conduct an anti-submarine hunt in the Sea of Okhotsk. The exercise concluded on 17 September. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Russian Federation Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu announced that approximately 300,000 servicemen (approximately one-third of the personnel of the RF Armed Forces), 36,000 tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other combat vehicles, more than 1,000 helicopters, aircraft, and drones, and ships and auxiliary vessels of the Northern and Pacific fleets will be taking part in the maneuvers over a vast territory.”

Source: Sergey Ishchenko, “Восток-2018: Россия начинает репетицию Третьей мировой (Vostok-2018: Russia is Beginning a Dress Rehearsal for WWII),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 8 September 2018. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/210128/>

A detachment of warships of the Northern Fleet, escorted by the nuclear-powered icebreaker 50 Let Pobedy and her diesel-electric colleague Ilya Muromets is at this time for the first time in history completing an adverse ice crossing of the Northern Sea Route from the Barents Sea to the Chukchi Sea. The detachment, which left Severomorsk on 8 August, is composed of the large ASW ship Vice-Admiral Kulakov, the large landing ships Aleksandr Otrakovskiy and Kondopoga with naval infantry on board, the sea-going minesweeper Vladimir Gumanenko, the tanker Sergey Osipov, the salvage tug Pamir, and the crane ship KIL-143. All these ships and support vessels are without reinforced ice strakes [longitudinal metal hull reinforcement]. Navigation in these areas for these vessels is clearly very risky. Even at the start of fall, the ice in the Arctic is at least one-meter thick.



Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12194983@egNews, CC 4.0.



Continued: Vostok-2018 in the Arctic

Source: “Арктическая группировка Северного флота провела высадку морского десанта на Чукотке (The Northern Fleet’s Arctic Grouping Has Conducted an Amphibious Assault Landing on Chukotka),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 11 September 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12195023@egNews

“Vostok-2018” troop maneuver began as subunits of the Northern Fleet Naval Infantry and Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted a tactical landing of an amphibious assault force on an undeveloped beachhead on the Chukotka Sea in the area of Cape Vankarem. The amphibious assault operation of the Northern Fleet on Chukotka was conducted for the first time in contemporary history. The exercise occurred in several phases. The actions of the ships’ crews and the assault force were well-coordinated and rehearsed beforehand.

In the first phase, with the fire support of Large Antisubmarine Warfare Ship Vice-Admiral Kulakov, naval infantrymen seized a beachhead for landing the assault force and supported the approach of the Large Landing Ships Kondopoga and Aleksandr Otrakovskiy with the main force. In phase two, the landing ships beached directly on the coastline and the armored vehicles disembarked onto the shore. Ka-27 shipborne helicopters, from the Vice-Admiral Kulakov, conducted fire support for the amphibious assault force landing.

The Northern Fleet group that is led by ...the Vice-Admiral Kulakov is participating in the “Vostok-2018” maneuvers on the Northeastern Axis. The Northern Fleet forces are training in tactical combat in the Arctic Zone in the Chukotka area, both on the continental coast, and also in the seas of the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. Northern Fleet ships and vessels conducted a transit from the main basing facility on the Kola Peninsula to the exercise conduct area along the Northern Maritime Route to participate in the Vostok-2018 maneuvers. The detachment’s cruise began on 8 August. During this time, the ships and vessels covered more than 4,000 nautical miles and conducted several tactical exercises in the Arctic.

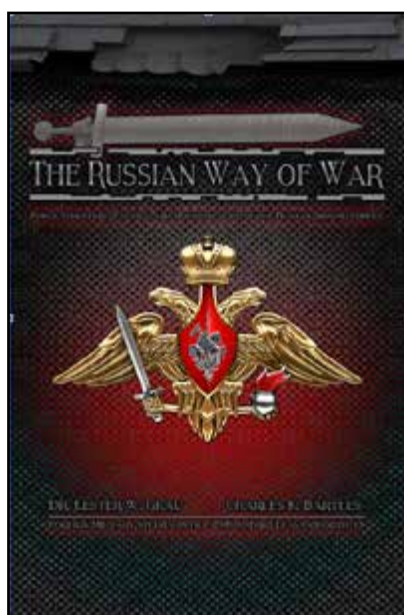
Source: “На Чукотке арктические мотострелки Северного флота учились уничтожать Диверсантов (On Chukotka, Arctic Motorized Infantry of the Northern Fleet Train in the Elimination of Saboteurs),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 12 September 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12195143@egNews

On Chukotka, subunits of a Northern Fleet Arctic motorized infantry brigade took part in the Vostok 2018 maneuvers. The conducted raids to hunt down and destroy reconnaissance and sabotage groups of a notional adversary. The training was conducted in the Cape Vankarem area, where ... motorized infantry and naval infantry landed the previous day.

Hypothetical saboteurs were detected using state-of-the-art reconnaissance equipment and unmanned air vehicles. Following the receipt of information from reconnaissance scouts, subunits of the Arctic motorized infantry brigade moved to the target area on army utility all-terrain vehicles and snow- and swamp-crossing vehicles armed with heavy machine guns. The motorized infantrymen conducted the pursuit and encirclement of a notional adversary. During a live-fire stage, the hypothetical saboteurs were eliminated by fire from small arms and heavy machine guns against prepared target positions.

Source: “Арктические мотострелки Северного флота пересекли Чукотский полуостров на штатной технике (Northern Fleet Arctic Motorized Riflemen Crossed Chukotskiy Poluostrov in Organic Vehicles),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 14 September 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12195525@egNews

Subunits of the Northern Fleet Arctic Motorized Rifle ... made a march across the Chukotka Peninsula from the shore of the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific coast in TO&E vehicles designed for the Far North. The road march across trackless terrain went from Cape Vankarem to Egvekinot settlement (a distance of more than 270 kilometers) in DT-10P articulated snow and swamp-capable vehicles in the course of two days. During the march, the soldiers conducted raids to find and destroy simulated enemy commando teams. Live fire with small arms and heavy-caliber machineguns ... was conducted during the march....



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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(continued)



Continued: Vostok-2018 in the Arctic

Source: “Northern Fleet warships, support vessels hold rescue drill as part of Vostok 2018 exercise,” Interfax, 14 September 2018.

A group of warships and support vessels of the Russian Northern Fleet conducted a search-and-rescue drill in the Bering Sea. The drill involved crews of the ASW Vice-Admiral Kulakov, landing ships Alexander Otrakovsky and Kondopoga, tugboat Pamir, and diesel-electric icebreaker Ilya Muromets. The crews were tasked with helping a ship in distress on the Northern Sea Route. A search-and-rescue Ka-27 helicopter took off from the Vice-Admiral Kulakov to verify the coordinates of the ship in distress. The helicopter evacuated distressed people from the sea surface as did the crew of the Vice-Admiral Kulakov. Crews of the tugboat Pamir and the diesel-electric icebreaker Ilya Muromets conducted a firefighting exercise.

Source: “Отряд боевых кораблей и судов обеспечения Северного флота провел противолодочное учение в Охотском море (Detachment of Northern Fleet Combatant Ships and Support Vessels conducts Antisubmarine Warfare Exercise in Sea of Okhotsk),” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 15 September 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12195594@egNews

A detachment of Northern Fleet combatant ships and support vessels taking part in the Vostok-2018 troop (force) maneuvers conducted an antisubmarine warfare [ASW] exercise in the Sea of Okhotsk. In the course of the exercise the crew of one of the detachment's ships, the large ASW ship Vice-Admiral Kulakov, rehearsed a range of measures to hunt for submarines with the aid of onboard sonar armament as well as employing a Ka-27 PL ASW helicopter. During their sortie the crew of the helicopter conducted search operations using a dipping sonar station.

During the exercise, combat crews of the ship's mine and torpedo department conducted training drills involving a simulated submarine being forced to surface and the simulated employment of the entire array of ASW armament. The crew of the large ASW ship also conducted measures to protect the ship against attack by a hypothetical submarine using evasive antisubmarine maneuvering....

They cooperated with a tactical strike force of Pacific Fleet vessels including the Guards missile cruiser Varyag and large ASW ships Admiral Vinogradov and Admiral Panteleyev which conducted a joint coordination exercise with two ship hunter-killer groups of small ASW ships in maritime areas of the Sea of Okhotsk...The ships jointly rehearsed maneuver and changing formation, and air defense of a grouping at sea....A total of up to 20 combatant ships of various types took part in the missions. Their actions were supported by deck-based ASW aviation.



Vostok-2018.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=60575@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.



Increasing Multi-Domain Capabilities: The Iskander Engages the Sea

OE Watch Commentary: The Iskander missile system fills an important niche in Russian force projection. In general, Russia believes that the US/NATO will maintain air superiority and has thus invested heavily in missile technologies. Iskander missile systems are found in missile brigades operated by the Russian Ground Forces' Missile and Artillery Troops. These brigades are usually part of an Army Group (Combined Arms Army or Tank Army) or Army Corps. In terms of capabilities, the Iskander missile system is a significant improvement over its predecessors like the OTR-21 *Tochka* (SS-21 Scarab) and OTR-23 *Oka* (SS-23 Spider) and has little in common with them. The system is capable of not only transporting and launching two missiles, but also firing two different types of missiles. The Iskander, which Russia classifies as a tactical-operational missile system, can fire two SRBMs or two ground-launched cruise missiles GLCMs, referred to as the R-500 or Iskander-K in Russian. These missiles can carry a variety of payloads weighing 480-700 kilograms, including cluster warheads (anti-personnel/anti-material), fragmentation submunitions, area denial submunitions, high explosive, thermobaric, high explosive earth penetrators for bunker busting, electromagnetic pulse, decoy, and nuclear warheads.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses new developments regarding the Iskander, namely the use of electro-optical and radar targeting capabilities that can target naval vessels. The Russian Federation already possesses a variety of coastal defense missiles including the *Granit* (SS-N-19 Shipwreck), *Onyx* (SS-N-26 *Strobile*), and *Kh-35* (AS-20 Kayak/SS-N-25 Switchblade/SSC-6 Sennight). These additional capabilities could also be of great benefit for the Army Group commander in terms of the disruption of enemy Reception, Staging, Onward movement, and Integration and sustainment activities at a Sea Port of Debarkation (SPOD). Previously, if the Army Group commander had to use an organic asset to target a SPOD, he probably would use the Iskander to target key pieces of critical infrastructure (fuel depots, gantry cranes, etc.). Now, the Iskander can destroy or damage ships in their berthing areas or in the immediate vicinity of the SPODs, actions that would significantly hinder port operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“As part of the scheduled reoutfitting of military district troops, high-power self-propelled artillery battalions in artillery brigades are being rearmed and are beginning scheduled combat training.”



© Vitaly V. Kuzmin

9P78-1 TEL of 9K720 Iskander-M SRBM.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2018-Demonstration-part-2/I-15MHQGr>, CC 4.0.

(continued)



Continued: Increasing Multi-Domain Capabilities: The Iskander Engages the Sea

Source: Roman Kretsul and Aleksey Ramm, “«Искандер» стал морским убийцей (The Iskander Has Become a Navy Killer),” *Izvestiya*, 21 August 2018. <https://iz.ru/775092/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/iskander-stal-morskim-ubiitcei>

The servicemen of the missile formations have begun training on the destruction of surface ships. The first exercises occurred in Southern Military District. To date, the Iskander-M missile complexes have not been capable of effectively destroying moving targets...The missile formations' capability to destroy naval surface targets will make the Russian coasts impregnable...

The maneuvers that occurred – are the Russian military personnel's first experience on combating naval surface targets. Prior to this, it was thought that the Iskander-M missile complex can effectively destroy only fixed targets. The fact is that the missile was guided not to a specific target but to a point on the terrain and flew based upon the designated coordinates. That warhead can be guaranteed to destroy headquarters, munitions dumps, or a missile silo. However, the system was not effective against ships and other moving targets.

The successful launches against naval surface targets, which were conducted in Russia's south, could indicate the fact that homing systems are arriving in the missile troops, Military Expert Dmitriy Kornev pointed out. From all appearances, we are talking about electro-optical and radar systems. First of all, a visual representation of the target, the photograph of a ship, for example, is loaded into the software component. During the approach, the missile literally sees the target and compares it with the loaded picture, while independently adjusting its course. The radar system compares the terrain relief with the specified image. While exposed above the water surface, the target with definite dimensions is a unique feature for the missile, which it compares with the data, which reconnaissance received earlier.

“The Iskander's accuracy is such that it can destroy a specific portion of an aircraft carrier, the width of which is 50 meters,” Dmitriy Kornev said. “The ballistic missile's high-explosive warhead can punch through the main deck or even pass through the ship. One missile can guarantee the sinking of a corvette or a frigate. And it can put a major ship out of commission. The ammunition of one missile brigade is sufficient in order to counter an entire squadron”.

The Iskander-M operational-tactical missile complex can employ both ballistic [SS-26 Stone] and also cruise missiles [SSC-7]... The most effective employment of the Iskanders – is in the composition of reconnaissance-strike complexes. A reconnaissance aircraft locates the target and transmits the information to the missile formation's command post, after which the target is destroyed. The entire process from the moment of detection to the moment of destruction takes several minutes...

To date, the main weapon to counter surface ships has been the Bastion coastal missile complex. The new Onyx [SS-N-26 Strobile] supersonic anti-ship missiles, against which any state-of-the-art air defense systems are powerless, are entering the basic load of ammunition of these coastal missile complexes. The Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicles and the target designation helicopters, which permit the detection and “illumination” of targets at the remote approaches, are expanding the capabilities of these systems.

“The country's capabilities to combat carrier strike groups and amphibious groups will dramatically increase,” Naval Expert Dmitriy Boltenkov explained. “In the event of a military conflict, many more missiles will fly to the enemy, which will travel along different trajectories.”



9M723K-E missile for Iskander-E system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Engineering-Technologies-2014/r-4zqzKzN/A>, CC 4.0.



Establishing the Gauntlet

OE Watch Commentary: The K-300P *Bastion-P* (NATO name SS-C-5 Stooze) is a mobile anti-ship and surface-to-surface missile system that is usually truck or ship-mounted. It has a reported 350-450 kilometer range and can carry a 250 kilogram warhead and has been used effectively in Syria against ground targets. Typically, a battery will have a command and control vehicle, a support vehicle and four firing vehicles. As the accompanying article on the deployment of the system reports, the New Siberian Islands are a choke point on the Northern Sea Route and a logical place for an anti-ship missile system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: “Russia planning to deploy Bastion missile systems in Arctic,” *Interfax*, 12 September 2018.

A battery of Bastion coastal defense missile systems will be deployed on the Kotelnny island by the end of the year. The Bastion will replace the outdated Rubezh systems. According to the report “With such reinforcement the Northern Fleet’s tactical group on the New Siberian islands will be able to provide effective control and defense for the Northern Sea Route. The battery is not the first Bastion-armed unit under the Arctic command, the system is already deployed with a coastal defense missile and artillery brigade in the Murmansk region.”

“With such reinforcement the Northern Fleet’s tactical group on the New Siberian islands will be able to provide effective control and defense for the Northern Sea Route.”



© Vitaly V. Kuzmin

K-340P TEL of K-300P Bastion-P coastal defence missile system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin Blog, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/NAVY-Day-2018-Saint-Petersburg/i-frcnjRf/A>, CC 4.0.

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

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

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

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



The Automation of Forward Air Control

OE Watch Commentary: Forward Air Controllers (FACs), individuals on the ground that assist pilots in dropping munitions on the enemy, have long been key personnel in the Russian Armed Forces. During the Soviet-Afghan War, FACs were so valued that the Afghans put bounties on them to be killed or captured. FACs have also been an important part of Russia's Syrian campaign. Forward Air Controller, Senior Lieutenant Aleksandr Prokhorenko, died 24 March, 2016 after he became surrounded by ISIS fighters and reportedly called an air strike on his own position to avoid capture. The accompanying excerpted articles from *Armeyskiy Sbornik* and *Izvestiya*, describe the nature of a FAC's duties and how Russia is quite interested in using robotics and artificial intelligence to designate targets and guide munitions, thereby reducing the need for human FACs, such as Senior Lieutenant Prokhorenko, to be placed in danger. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Source: V. Lukyanchik, O. Bunin, and D. Koryakin: "Авианаводчик с искусственным интеллектом (A Forward Air Controller with Artificial Intelligence)," *Armeyskiy Sbornik*, July 2018, pp. 26-33.

From the experience strategic exercises Tsentr-2015, Kavkaz-2016, and Zapad-2017 and combat operations of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Aerospace Forces (VKS) in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), it follows that the employment of aviation and UAVs permits general-purpose forces to execute combat missions effectively. The engagement of targets and destruction of objectives and personnel by army and ground attack aviation (henceforth, aviation) with a 85-95% probability, however, is impossible without the accurate availability of target coordinates and corresponding target designation and guidance. At the present time a forward air controller (FAC) -- a specialist who, on the forward edge of combat operations (.5-2 km) and sometimes next to the enemy, provides a target designation to an aerial vehicle -- coordinates the actions of aviation in the area of operations of the Ground Troops (ground forces) and "vectors" aviation (aerial vehicles) to the target. On the one hand this threatens the life of the FAC both from the enemy as well as from possible friendly fire, and on the other hand such factors as stress, fatigue, fear, malaise, and others are inherent to a person. In addition, the FAC is sent into the attack position (combat mission area) in advance to perform his combat mission and is present there regardless of weather conditions and time of day. Using a robot in place of a person helps preclude the aforementioned factors and significantly reduces the factor of risk to a person's life and health...

"UAVs and forward air-controller robots are indispensable in the modern Armed Forces."

Source: Bogdan Stepovoy and Aleksey Ramm, "Робот наведет авиацию с высокой точностью: Офицеров-авианаводчиков хотят заменить искусственным интеллектом (A Robot Will Guide Aircraft with High Precision: Forward Air Controllers are to be Replaced by Artificial Intelligence)," *Izvestiya*, 10 August 2018. <https://iz.ru/773334/bogdan-stepovoi-aleksei-ramm/robot-navedet-aviatciuu-s-vysokoi-tochnosti>

The profession of forward air controller will cease to be the most dangerous one in the Armed Forces... The Defense Ministry has informed Izvestiya that the concept of a robotic forward air controller is being developed by the Aerospace Forces (VKS). The controller will have two components -- ground-based and airborne. To operate in the ground troops' first echelon, the robot's special electronic equipment will be mounted on a tracked platform. The complex will also get airborne carriers -- UAVs (BPLA). The Aerospace Forces are currently deciding exactly which of the homeland UAVs is best suited to that role.

During battle, the air controller-robots will operate independently -- more exactly, with minimal intervention by operators. It will be required only when difficult irregular situations arise... Airborne and ground robots will get reconnaissance and guidance equipment. The standard apparatus will be able to detect a target, define its parameters, and relay the coordinates to a command post or to Aerospace Forces airplanes. The equipment will include a laser rangefinder, a high-resolution video camera, a thermal imager, and a navigation system.

The robot will determine what kind of target is in front of it -- a tank, a machinegun weapon position, an artillery system, or a surface-to-air missile complex. The artificial intelligence will select the type of weapon with which it is best to destroy the adversary's equipment and personnel, and will also distinguish our own personnel from theirs. For target destruction, conventional free-falling bombs or ammunition adjusted via satellite or a laser beam can be used, as well as weapons with a TV guidance system.

The automated forward air controller's job will not end there. In those cases where laser-guided missiles and bombs are being used, the robot will "illuminate" the target with the laser. For destroying an adversary's stationary objects with guided aerial bombs or cruise missiles, there will be sufficient coordinates indicated...

But the main thing is that ground subunits' stability in defense and rapid forward movement during a raid or an attack greatly depend on the forward air controllers' work. They are responsible for ensuring that a bomb strike does not hit our own men, Lieutenant General Valeriy Gorbenko, the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army's former commander, said.

"UAVs and forward air-controller robots are indispensable in the modern Armed Forces," he noted. "It is important that the equipment will make it possible to transmit data about targets not only to a command post, but also directly to an airplane. This will help inflict a strike on the adversary without delay, which greatly increases the effectiveness of airstrikes."



Current Lessons-Learned From the Battle of Kursk

OE Watch Commentary: Each issue of *Armeski Sbornik* features a special section of “Abstracts” designed to allow officers at the Russian tactical level (division and below) to use the material to conduct their own professional development events and impart current key themes to the armed forces. A core part of Russian military science and education is the study of World War II battles. In the accompanying excerpted article, authors Samosvat and Kurshev provide a succinct history of the battle of Kursk. The subject of innovation is noted as something extended from higher commands within the framework of formal planning: “In the realm of strategy, the Soviet Supreme Command showed a creative approach to the planning....an out-of-the-box idea was that the side that had strength in numbers deliberately handed the initiative to the other side and assumed a defensive posture in the initial stage of the campaign. Later on, as part of the unified process, the plan was to launch resolute counter-attacks and all-out offensive operations.” Also, the advantage of mobility in defensive operations was emphasized in this journal-bound staff ride: “the Kursk battle enriched the domestic military art with experience of creating deep, multi-layered, active, and stable defense, conducting flexible and decisive maneuvers using capabilities in defensive and offensive actions” and also the operational art displayed at Kursk “solved the issue of establishing predetermined, positioned, impenetrable, and active defense...” Some of the other lessons-learned that conformed to contemporary General Staff messaging included “Guerrilla war also contributed to the success at Kursk” and “Today, some Western historians are shamelessly trying to rewrite history by diminishing the significance of the Red Army’s victory near Kursk.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Vainer)**

Source: D. Samosvat and A. Kurshev, “Курская Битва. Её роль и значение в ходе войны (The Battle of Kursk. Its Role and Meaning in the Way of War),” *Armeski Sbornik*, June 2018, pp. 67-76.

In the realm of strategy, Soviet Supreme Command showed a creative approach to the planning of 1943 Summer-Fall campaign. An out-of-the-box idea was that the side that had strength in numbers deliberately handed the initiative to the other side and assumed defensive posture in the initial stage of the campaign. Later on, as part of the unified process, the plan was to launch resolute counter-attacks and all-out offensive action. Also successful was the creation of impenetrable defense in the operational and strategic sense. It was supported by a large number of mobile units. It began with artillery shelling from two fronts, large-scale maneuvering by strategic reinforcements, massive bombings of enemy main forces and reinforcements.

Soviet Supreme Command was quite inventive in generating ideas of counter-offensives in each direction, determining the targets for major strikes and ways to defeat enemy forces. A fine example of this was the Orel operation where Soviet troops delivered concentric strikes in the same general direction with subsequent dissection of enemy forces, destroying them in separate parts. In Belgorod-Kharkov operation, the main attack came from adjacent front flanks, which allowed quick penetration of deeply fortified enemy lines of defense, splitting up their forces in two groups and going in behind enemy defensive positions around Kharkov.

“The Kursk battle enriched the domestic military art.”



Monument near Prokhorovka, site of the Battle of Prokhorovka during the Battle of Kursk of the Second World War.

Source: By Alexander Persona Grata (Flickr: IMG_5191.jpg) [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prokhorovka_tank_monument.jpg.



Constructing Military Ideology... and a Military Church

OE Watch Commentary: Even though the Russian constitution states that “no ideology may be established as state or obligatory,” the Kremlin continues to search for a unifying set of beliefs. The accompanying excerpt from the country’s primary military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, suggests that the current Kremlin leadership may be leaning toward the former tsarist ideology “За веру, царя и Отечество (for the faith, tsar and fatherland).” The article quotes Colonel General Kartapolov, who was recently appointed as Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate. According to the article, “Kartapolov is convinced that the modern Russian serviceman cannot be shaped without shaping lofty spirituality in him,” and that this ideology “will be based on knowledge of the history of our Motherland and people and on historical and cultural traditions.”



Artist image of the main cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces.

Source: <http://eng.hram.mil.ru/> CCA-4.0.

To help with shaping this “lofty spirituality,” General Kartapolov described plans for the construction of the “Main Church of the Armed Forces, whose construction will commence in the very near future in the Patriot Park near Moscow.” He pointed out that this “new church will be one more example of the people’s unity around the idea of patriotism, love, and devotion to our Motherland.”

The accompanying excerpt from the centrist daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, provides some additional details about this new military church. If all goes according to plan, this military house of worship (which will hold 6,000 people and stand 95 meters tall) will hopefully be completed by 9 May 2020, which is the “75th anniversary of the Victory” in the Great Patriotic War. The article points out that the façade of the church will be in the same color as “Russian missile systems and armored vehicles... [and] creates the illusion of the church’s similarity with a giant rocket complex.” (For a fuller picture, see the church’s website: <http://hram.mil.ru/>) The inside of the church will be “decorated with paintings with battle scenes from military history and texts from the Holy Scriptures.” The article also points out that this new religious complex will be used as “a center for the training of military clergy.”

During the Soviet period, communism served as the ideological basis for the armed forces. Having been largely discredited, the Russian political and military leadership now appear to be drawing on more traditional beliefs in constructing a new ideology for the country’s armed forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Andrey Kartapolov is convinced that the modern Russian serviceman cannot be shaped without shaping lofty spirituality in him.”

Source: Mariya Tomilenko, “Крепить дух воинства (To Strengthen the Army’s Spirit),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 7 September 2018. redstar.ru/krepit-duh-voinstva/

In a meeting with journalists on 5 September Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov, Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate, spoke about the tasks, structure, stages of formation, and work principles of military-political organs...

The need for information protection of the Armed Forces’ personnel and the need to shape in them the steadfast conviction of the importance of serving the Fatherland on the traditional principles of Russian society is one of the main reasons why this decision to create military-political organs was adopted...

...During the conversation the talk also turned to the distinguishing qualities of the soldier of the future. Andrey Kartapolov is convinced that the modern Russian serviceman cannot be shaped without shaping lofty spirituality in him. Speaking about ideology, the deputy head of the military department pointed out that this will be based on knowledge of the history of our Motherland and people and on historical and cultural traditions.

Another topic of frank discussion was the role of the military clergy in the present Russian Army. Andrey Kartapolov reported that the Military Clergy Training Center will function under the Main Church of the Armed Forces, whose construction will commence in the very near future in the Patriot Park near Moscow. ...He pointed out that the new church will be one more example of the people’s unity around the idea of patriotism, love, and devotion to our Motherland.

Source: Arthur Priymak, “Главный храм Минобороны замаскирован от небес (The main church of the Ministry of Defense is disguised from heaven),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 September 2018. http://www.ng.ru/faith/2018-09-05/2_7304_armyhram.html

By 9 May 2020, the 75th anniversary of the Victory, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will have its main church, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said. The place for the church is located 63 km from Moscow, not far from Kubinka, and the military patriotic park...

The main church of the Russian Armed Forces is already labeled the “khaki church” on the Internet.... the walls of the military church are really made in the color of the standard Russian missile system and armored vehicle... From the inside, the walls are decorated with paintings with battle scenes from military history and texts from the Holy Scriptures. The projected height is 95m and is designed for 6 thousand people... is 95 m. The style of the future church is the eclectic of the so-called Russian style with Byzantine. The architecture creates the illusion of the church’s similarity with a giant rocket complex.” ...The church complex will be the center for the training of military clergy.



Connecting Slavic Brotherhood and the Russian Army

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the principal, professional journal for Russian tactical-level officers, *Armeski Sbornik*, typifies recent historical interpretation inculcated into Russian military education. The author Horeshko broadly demonizes the West and specifically takes aim at the US and NATO. While not unexpected in the current environment, the article develops a shared persecution culture presented at the recent All-Slavonic Congress and from a hundred years ago. The author makes a compelling comparison between the 1800s poetry of Czech Jan Kollar (“Unite we all without exception: Serbs, Russians, Czechs, Bulgarians, Poles...”) and Russian F.I. Tyutchev (“the crusaders angry regiments want to get rid of the Slavic race”) with current speeches at the Moscow event, which included “The West against the Slavs” and “NATO is the main threat to the Slavic world.” The author laments that “ineradicable Russophobia... comes from time immemorial” and in multiple pages outlines the argument “that the Yankees are obsessed with the idea of a global dictate,” Western immorality, and the situation of current Slavic nations becoming “vassals to the West.” His argument is vitriolic but not shrill. He states “You can polemicize for a long time, who takes away whom from whom. Anti-Russian rhetoric tries to minimize the role and importance of Russia in European history.” The author’s interpretation assesses that Russia saved the Western world three times in modern history (Napoleonic period, WWI, and WWII). Connecting this history to the cultural concept of Slavic brotherhood resonates with the current Russian military identity as the military of an historic global power not just one born at the end of the Cold War, or since Putin became president. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Vainer)**



Source: B. Horeshko, “Арреппор – НАТО, а велят все на Русского Солдата (The aggressor – NATO, and they bring it all down on the Russian soldier),” *Armeski Sbornik*, June 2018, pp. 32-39.

CALLING ON ALL BROTHER-SLAVS

Outstanding poet of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Jan Kollar (1793-1852), in dozens of enormously persuasive sonnets expressed the idea of Slavic reciprocity:

“Slavs, dear brothers

Slavs! You love bloody disputes and battle - tell me:

what kind of barbarity is that? ..

Unite we all without an exception: Serbs,

Russians, Czechs, Bulgarians, Poles, one

to another we throw ourselves into embraces -

under one banner, under one flag;

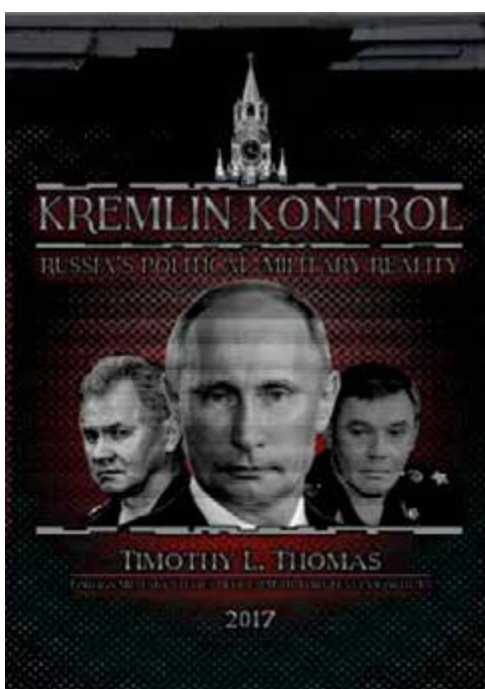
forget all that was, let us be brothers

- and we will shake the opposing enemy!”

The fact that the Yankees are obsessed with the idea of a global dictate is undeniably true. Hardly anyone would like to be a nation-pawn, at the behest of the United States obediently moving around the board of geopolitics. This is a problem of those who have reconciled themselves to the necessity of forgetting about such obsolete concepts as sovereignty, humanism, morality, etc.

...The West idealizes itself and purposefully demonizes Russia. Europe is held together by a shaky alliance on the anti-Russian platform; there is no other way to end the crisis, and they simply do not see it.

“What they succeed in is the rhetoric of obscuring eternal truths. Playing the game of bridging modern Russia with the past, they say that it is a barbaric country possessed by demons of an endless expansion of its borders inherited from Russian royal rulers.”



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>



Revisiting Russia's Seizure of Kosovo Airport

OE Watch Commentary: While largely forgotten in the West, the Russian military's attempt to seize a major airport in Kosovo at the tail end of the 1999 conflict between Serbia and NATO forces has become a watershed event in the Kremlin's current narrative. In their account, Russian forces, though vastly outnumbered, were willing to make a daring attempt to seize this critical airport, both to assist their Serbian Orthodox brothers and to demonstrate that Russia was willing to use force to maintain influence in the region. The accompanying excerpt from a Russian regional news source, *Amurskaya Pravda*, describes how Russian and Serbian film producers have teamed together to create a movie titled "Balkan Frontier," which describes "the secret operation of the Russian special forces group that took control of the Slatina airport in Kosovo in the summer of 1999, which was of crucial strategic importance."

According to the author, this incident was "the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, [that] Russia loudly declared its interests in the international arena." While the film is purportedly based on "real events, recreated with great, almost documentary authenticity," the creators did have to "add a few bright and dramatic episodes" to make the story "more spectacular." The film includes all sorts of military equipment and "many pyrotechnic effects," and although production mostly took place in Serbia, much of the weaponry and funding were provided by the Russian Defense Ministry.

The film will be released in Russian next year and according to the article, "negotiations are already under way to show 'Balkan Frontier' in other countries." The article quotes the film's director, who asserts that "participation in this film is part of my love for Russia, a tribute to her significant role in the fate of my Motherland." If the film's trailer is any indication, (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZUcdtp_w4g) it is clear that the 1999 events in Serbia and Kosovo have been revised to align with the Kremlin's narrative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia loudly declared its interests in the international arena."



American and Russian soldiers pass out flyers to the citizens of Kamenica, Kosovo, on July 15, 1999.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_News_Photo_990715-A-6207H-008.jpg Public Domain.

Source: Valeriya Khvashevskaya, "Балканский рубеж: Гоша Куценко и Эмир Кустурица снимаются в фильме о войне в Югославии (Balkan frontier: Gosha Kutsenko and Emir Kusturica in the film about the war in Yugoslavia)," *Amurskaya Pravda*, 13 August 2018. <https://www.ampravda.ru/2018/08/10/083635.html>

In Serbia, the film "Balkan Frontier" with Gosha Kutsenko and Milos Bikovich is in full swing. In the international project dedicated to the war in Yugoslavia, Russian and Serbian actors are involved...

...The dramatic motion picture is based on the real events of the war in Yugoslavia in the late 90s. It tells about the secret operation of the Russian special forces group that took control of the Slatina airport in Kosovo in the summer of 1999, which was of crucial strategic importance. In the center of the plot are the members of the special squad that captured the airport and secured it until peacekeepers arrive. This operation was preceded by an unexpected "march-spurt" of our peacekeeping battalion from Bosnia in Kosovo. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia loudly declared its interests in the international arena. Representatives of all the parties involved in the conflict were perplexed: no one could understand under whose control the strategically important bridgehead for NATO had passed....

...Filming began last year in Serbia. Work on the film goes both in Belgrade and in areas remote from the capital... Part of the filming takes place in Moscow and in unique scenery in the Moscow region. Although the film is shot as a drama, at the core - real events, are recreated with great, almost documentary authenticity, the creators of the project explained.

...In order for the film to be more spectacular, we added a few bright and dramatic episodes in the story, but on the whole this story is based on real events of that secret operation that was conducted in Kosovo.

...Since the "Balkan Frontier" is a military movie, there are many pyrotechnic effects and stunt tricks on the set. "We were very much helped by the Russian Defense Ministry," says the executive producer. "There was an unprecedented amount of military equipment on the set: all sorts of cars, a whole column of armored personnel carriers, helicopters, and much more."

...Kusturica himself admitted that these shootings are of special importance for him. "For me, participation in the "Balkan Frontier" project is part of my love for Russia, a tribute to her significant role in the fate of my Motherland," says the famous director. "We are brothers, and this picture is just about that!" It is planned that the film will be released in Russian next year. In addition, negotiations are already under way to demonstrate "Balkan Frontier" in other countries of the world.



Russian Pipeline Troops: Sustaining the Fight Across the Land and From the Sea

OE Watch Commentary: The Pipeline Troops are a special branch of the Russian Armed Forces' Material Technical Support Troops. They are intended to deploy and maintain fuel pipelines for the Ground Forces, Navy, and Aerospace Troops during combat activities. Field pipelines can be constructed easily and quickly (in good conditions), and moved when needed. In addition, they can transport fuel and water at much lower cost than other means of transportation in field environments or support fuel distribution from national stores to military district fuel depots and airfields.

Interest in military pipelines and bulk fuel distribution stemmed from the motorization and mechanization of the Soviet Armed Forces that began in the 1930s. The Soviets also successfully used military pipelines to support several operations during the Great Patriotic War (WWII). The domestic and foreign use of military pipelines was studied extensively, leading to new pipeline performance and design specifications. These new requirements led to the development of new (larger) Portable Trunk Pipelines (PMP). From the onset, the pipeline units were intended to integrate with the civilian pipeline infrastructure, as one of the battalion's first tasks was to conduct trials with Soviet Ministry of Oil Industry to test connection feasibility for joining military and civilian pipelines.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, new second-generation PMPs were fielded and used pressurized, steel pipes, which could be deployed faster with fewer personnel than previous systems. With modern pipe laying machines, assembly of the pipeline is fully automated. Pipelines were essential during the Soviet-Afghan War. Two pipeline systems, totaling over 1,200km, were built, one in the east (Hairatan-Bagram), and the other in the west (Turagundi-Shindand) that connected thirteen fuel depots and nine intermediate reservoirs. The 40th Army received 5.4 million tons via three pipelines, accounting for 80 percent of its fuel supply throughout the campaign.

By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Red Army had 24 pipeline brigades, six separate pipeline battalions, three separate pipeline companies, and eight separate pipeline platoons, totaling over 5,000 personnel. The Russian Federation has disbanded or downsized the pipeline brigades, and now uses separate pipeline battalions as the primary means of military pipeline support. (In terms of command and control, these separate pipeline battalions are part of the MTO brigades found in Army Groups.) The pipeline battalion consists of several pipeline companies, and can lay pipe at a rate of 60-80 km a day. A pipeline company can install and operate pumping stations, and for the operation and defense of their segment of the pipeline, to include patrolling, emergency services and maintenance. The company can lay the pipeline in the event that the automated pipe laying is not possible. When pipeline operations are no longer needed, the company's personnel dismantle the pipeline, and uninstall pumping stations.

Aside from military operations, the Pipeline Troops may also provide pipe laying and support of: strategic industries, operations in extreme climates, and operations to support natural and man-made disaster relief. The Pipeline Troops laid more than 240km of pipeline to support firefighting efforts to quell peat fires in the summer of 2010 that occurred in the Nizhny Novgorod, Vladimir, and Moscow regions. Perhaps the most recent and high-profile activities of the Pipeline Troops occurred after Russia's annexation of Crimea. After Ukraine cut water supplies, a pipeline battalion was deployed to Crimea and laid 52 separate pipelines, totaling 497km, to provide water for the civilian population.

The Pipeline Troops currently use first and second generation PMPs to support operations, and have begun to develop third generation PMPs. Current development efforts are focused upon increasing reliability to levels similar to stationary pipelines, resilience, and life-expectancy of equipment. The accompanying excerpted press releases from the *Russian Ministry of Defense*, discuss how Russia is employing tactical pipelines to support maneuver. Typically, these tactical pipelines would connect existing civilian pipe infrastructure to field distribution units, but the 6 September 2018 press release explains how tactical pipelines could be connected to tankers at sea to support ground operations. The Pipeline Troops will continue to be an essential Russian sustainment asset that can also support civil authorities in times of crisis. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**





Continued: Russian Pipeline Troops: Sustaining the Fight Across the Land and From the Sea

“The main purpose of this exercise was for servicemen to rehearse the practical skills of deploying and pumping fuel through a PMTP-100 pipeline under complex terrain conditions.”

Source: “Трубопроводный батальон ЮВО в рамках учения обеспечил подачу топлива войскам через реку в Волгоградской области (Southern Military District Pipeline Battalion Ensures Fuel Supply to Troops Across River in Volgograd Oblast During Exercise),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 21 August 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12191866@egNews

The Southern Military District’s Separate Pipeline Battalion provided troops with fuel over a floating bridge across the Karpovka River within the framework of a tactical special exercise on the Prudboy Range in Volgograd Oblast. According to the plan of the exercise, the pipeline battalion delivered fuels and lubricants to motorized rifle subunits more than 5 km distant from the refueling points...

The main purpose of this exercise was for servicemen to rehearse the practical skills of deploying and pumping fuel through a PMTP-100 pipeline under complex terrain conditions. This pipeline makes it possible to deliver more than 1,200 tons of fuel a day so as to refuel up to 10 ATs-5.5 troop refueling units an hour. In all, approximately 150 servicemen are involved in the exercise, and more than 50 items of military and special hardware have been mobilized, including a PSG-160 mobile fuel station and a PNU mobile pumping plant.

Source: “Около 30 новейших бронетранспортеров Каспийской флотилии в ходе планового учения впервые обеспечили высадку морского десанта (About 30 Brand-New Armored Personnel Carriers of the Caspian Flotilla for First Time Support Amphibious Assault Landing During Routine Exercise),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 6 September 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12194422@egNews

About 30 brand-new BTR-82A armored personnel carriers of a Caspian Flotilla naval infantry subunit supported an amphibious assault landing during a routine bilateral company-level exercise.

Six Serna and Dyugon amphibious assault craft of the Caspian Flotilla delivered a company tactical group of naval infantry to capture a sector of coastline...

Within a very short time places for amassing, storing, and issuing supplies were established on the shore. A fuel depot deployed by the water’s edge organized the intake of fuel from a tanker via a flexible pipeline 400 meters long. The tanker ship VTN-57 provided the fuel and logistics support for the amphibious assault force, feeding fuel to the onshore depot via special sleeves. The fuel supplied amounted to more than 400 tons...

Taking part in the joint bilateral tactical exercise of the Caspian Flotilla and a motorized rifle brigade of the Southern Military District 58th Combined-Arms Army were more than 1,000 troops and about 400 items of military and specialized hardware were involved. The brand-new BTR-82A modification armored personnel carriers entered service with the Caspian Flotilla in 2018.



Russian Pipeline Troops.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://mil.ru/images/military/military/photo/0605%281%29.jpg>, CC 4.0.



Time Management and Re-Enlistment

OE Watch Commentary: Even with better pay and benefits, the Russian military continues to struggle in attracting enough young men to serve as contract soldiers. Unless there is a radical change in the near future, plans to reach 500,000 contract soldiers by 2020 will likely not be met. Low re-enlistment rates may be a key factor as to why the Russian military has had such problems in expanding the number of contract soldiers. While the Ministry of Defense (MoD) apparently regards re-enlistment figures as classified, the accompanying excerpt from the centrist news source, *Kommersant*, suggests that harsh and arbitrary working conditions among the rank and file may be a primary reason as to why contract soldiers are reluctant to extend their military service.

The article focuses upon a recent directive issued by the Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov, whereby he mandates that commanders maintain a realistic duty schedule – particularly with regard to their subordinates. According to the article, “commanders are prohibited from holding work conferences in the night hours and on days off and holidays, and they have been ordered to end the practice of keeping servicemen on duty ‘until the leadership departs.’” To ensure that this directive is followed, “the National Defense Management Center has been tasked to conduct daily monitoring of adherence to the plan of the day in the Army.”

The article suggests that instead of streamlining command and control, new technologies may actually be partially responsible for this poor time management. It points out that “in a number of military command and control agencies, the holding of conferences two or three times a day has become the norm,” forcing commanders “to spend a large part of their working time day in front of web cameras,” causing these leaders to delay making decisions, which then results in longer hours for subordinates. This “breach of working-time regulations” combined with a chronic shortage of housing for contract soldiers, “is the main factor influencing servicemen’s motivation to continue serving in the Armed Forces’ ranks.”

The current Kremlin leadership has made military readiness a top priority, and coupled with the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, the Russian military operating-tempo remains intense. As this article illustrates, without better time-management, maintaining such a high-level of readiness will likely stymie Russian plans to build a more professionally-staffed military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57480> CC-BY 4.0.

“The Armed Forces General Staff chief notes that, ‘in combination with problems of providing service and permanent housing in a number of regions,’ breach of working-time regulations is ‘the main factor influencing servicemen’s motivation to continue serving in the Armed Forces’ ranks.’”

Source: Ivan Safronov, “Валерий Герасимов взялся за расписание (Valeriy Gerasimov Has Taken Charge of the Schedule),” *Kommersant*, 3 September 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3731077>

Kommersant has learned that Valeriy Gerasimov, the Russian Federation [RF] Armed Forces General Staff chief, has ordered the commanders of districts, commanders of combat arms, and commanders in chief of branches of service to end the practice of breaching the working-time regulations in the troops. Henceforth, commanders are prohibited from holding work conferences in the night hours and on days off and holidays, and they have been ordered to end the practice of keeping servicemen on duty “until the leadership departs,” and also to exclude their continued presence at their workplaces during off-duty periods without necessity. The National Defense Management Center has been tasked to conduct daily monitoring of adherence to the plan of the day in the Army....

“An inspection has revealed that, in a number of military command and control agencies, the holding of conferences two or three times a day has become the norm,” the RF Armed Forces General Staff chief writes. “A tendency to abuse the conduct of conferences in videoconference mode is being observed. As a result, individual commanders are compelled to spend a large part of their working time day in front of web cameras and to begin work with the personnel in the afternoons, and, as a rule, beginning with another conference.” The general notes that the practice is continuing in the Army of setting tasks with a stipulation of the shortest deadline for executing them (“immediately,” “by tomorrow morning,” “by Monday”), which results in a breach of the servicemen’s working-time regulations and in getting them to work at night and on days off and holidays.

...Therefore, [Col.] Gen. Gerasimov notes, personnel suffer a buildup of tiredness and their ability to work is reduced, which negatively impacts their emotional and psychological state, increases the social tension in military collectives, and, in his opinion, even becomes a cause of family breakdown. The Armed Forces General Staff chief notes that, “in combination with problems of providing service and permanent housing in a number of regions,” breach of working-time regulations is “the main factor influencing servicemen’s motivation to continue serving in the Armed Forces’ ranks.”

...The majority of complaints were connected with the non-standardized work schedule and the difficulties involved in getting their allotted days off....



Prime Training Time in Tiksi Bay

OE Watch Commentary: The summer is prime training time in the Arctic and the 80th Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade got a good workout. Tiksi Bay is adjacent to the delta of the mighty north-flowing Lena River. The Northern Fleet has shown particular interest in Arctic rivers, having conducted two previous riverine exercises up the north-flowing Yenisei River and now working near the Lena outlets. Northern Fleet personnel are becoming quite adept in movement and combat in Arctic river and ocean waters. Incidentally, as noted by the accompanying excerpted article, this was a training event en route to the main event. The Northern Fleet is providing vessels and ground power to the large Vostok-2018 Exercise which begins on 11 September. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gru)**

“On 28 August, Arctic motorized rifle brigade and Northern Fleet infantry subunits, in BTR-80 armored personnel carriers and Vityaz all-terrain vehicles, conducted a landing from the large amphibious warfare ships Kondopoga and Aleksandr Otrakovskiy, with fire support from the large antisubmarine warfare ship Vice Admiral Kulakov, onto an undeveloped beach in Tiksi Bay.”

Source: Yekaterina Tomilenko, “Морской десант высадился на побережье Якутии (A Marine Amphibious Landing Force Has Debarked on the Yakutiya Coast),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 29 August 2018. <http://redstar.ru/morskoj-desant-vysadilsya-na-poberezhe-yakutii>

The exercise’s main objective was to train in interaction during an amphibious landing on an undeveloped beach, to capture and defend a beachhead, and also to conduct raids in areas of the Far North and the Arctic. The exercise took place in several stages. With fire support from the large antisubmarine warfare ship Vice Admiral Kulakov and two Ka-27 helicopters, an amphibious landing craft and two high-speed launches approached the shore with the naval infantrymen aboard, who conducted the amphibious landing and supported the Kondopoga’s approach with the main naval infantry forces in APCs.

Following the capture of the coastal beachhead by the naval infantrymen and airborne assault personnel, who had conducted a landing from helicopters ..., the Aleksandr Otrakovskiy approached the shore with the Arctic motorized rifle brigade subunits’ personnel and equipment.

In articulated all-terrain vehicles, the Arctic motorized rifle troops ... disembarked, and then conducted raids and seek and destroy missions against a notional enemy’s reconnaissance and sabotage groups in coastal areas.

During the exercise, small arms and heavy machine gun fire was conducted against coastal targets.... In all, more than 40 vehicles and 700 personnel landed.

Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov noted that landing operations had repeatedly been rehearsed on Novaya Zemlya and Severnaya Zemlya, on Taymyr, Cape Chelyuskin, and on the New Siberian Islands. Such an exercise has now been conducted in the Tiksi area in Yakutiya for the first time.

Last year, Northern Fleet sailors performed four marine amphibious landing operations on an undeveloped beach. The landing on the Yenisey [River] bank in the Dudinka area simultaneously involved three AWSs -- Georgiy Pobedonosets, Aleksandr Otrakovskiy, and Kondopoga. The Northern Fleet sailors also accomplished, for the first time, a debarkation of heavy equipment onto Cape Chelyuskin -- the Eurasian continent’s northernmost point...

During a trip to the Tiksi garrison, the Northern Fleet commander took part in a ceremony installing the first piling for a modern block-modular base facility for servicemen of the fleet’s air force and air defense formations. The new military camp’s construction is scheduled for completion within six months. It will consist of 11 facilities, in particular, a dormitory for military personnel, an administrative building, a diesel power-generating plant, water and fuel storage reservoirs, a mess hall, and a garage. All the facilities will be interconnected by covered passages, which... is especially important in the Far North and Arctic regions.



Arctic motorized rifle units of the Northern Fleet landed on the Golomyanny Island (2017).

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12143846@egNews, CC 4.0.



Consolidating Naval Training at Kronshtadt?

OE Watch Commentary: In what was labeled as a cost-saving measure, former Russian Minister of Defense, Anatoly Serdyukov announced plans to transfer naval training facilities in St. Petersburg and consolidate them in nearby Kronshtadt. However, due to objections from within the military and the projected price of the proposed move, these plans were later scrapped. A decade later, as the accompanying excerpt from the largely independent news source *Versiya* describes, these plans are being reconsidered.

After examining the background of the previous plan, the author reviews the current disposition of naval education institutes in St. Petersburg. He points out that “according to the military, the spread of naval universities in the northern capital today not only hinders the educational process at the proper level, but constantly requires large costs for the maintenance of real estate.” While on paper, it might make sense to transfer these naval institutes and consolidate them in Kronshtadt, the author quotes other experts who argue that such a move will actually be more expensive in the long run. He points out that the military is using the previous cost estimate to move the training facilities (100 billion rubles or approximately \$145 million) and that this amount will likely be insufficient today. He also claims that such a move “may significantly diminish the quality of the sailors’ education,” pointing out that this occurred with pilot training when the Zhukovskiy and Gagarin Air Force Academy was moved from Moscow to Voronezh. The author goes on to explain that there is currently inadequate housing and other infrastructure (e.g. “heating and water supply”) to accommodate moving the naval training facilities and personnel to Kronshtadt.

The author concludes by suggesting that the driving factor behind this proposed move, despite the serious obstacles, is simply economic: “It looks like money, as usual.” Vacating the naval schools in the “prestigious areas of Saint Petersburg and their sale will bring huge profits, which could “open up great opportunities for corruption.” For those who know their Russian history (e.g. the Kronshtadt rebellion in 1921) consolidating Russian naval training within Kronshtadt - without adequate infrastructure - proved to be highly problematic in the past. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“All naval schools are located in prestigious areas of Saint Petersburg and their sale will bring huge profits.”



Map of Kronshtadt.

Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datel:Map_of_Kronstadt_bay.png CC-BY 2.0.

Source: Aleksandr Stepanov, “Переезд на сто миллиардов: Сергей Шойгу встал на путь Анатолия Сердюкова? (Move Costing 100 Billion; Has Sergey Shoygu Taken the Path of Anatoliy Serdyukov?),” *Versiya*, 27 August 2018. <https://versia.ru/sergej-shoigu-vstal-na-put-anatoliya-serdyukova>

At the end of July, the Defense Ministry decided to create a super-modern military town in Kronshtadt to which all of Saint Petersburg’s naval educational institutions will be transferred. Such an initiative was made previously by Anatoly Serdyukov, but because of the cost of the project, estimated at more than 100 billion rubles, the scheme was abandoned. And now the Defense Ministry has remembered the old plan.

What is behind it, the desire to create a training base for sailors or a wish to assimilate budget monies and get their hands on expensive real estate in the center of Saint Petersburg?

...According to the military, the spread of naval universities in the northern capital today not only hinders the educational process at the proper level, but constantly requires large costs for the maintenance of real estate....

...In addition, according to experts, no savings will emerge in the end. On the contrary, the resettlement operation will lead to the budget losing several billion. After all, a lot of money will be needed to create and equip the base for a new university. By the way, 100 billion rubles is still the previous cost of the project. We must assume that in 10 years that could multiply. But most importantly, as a result of the relocation of the universities, the quality of the sailors’ education may significantly diminish. Unfortunately, this is not even an assumption – there are already examples of this.

Schemes for the relocation of the military schools from the prestigious real estate of the capital cities were first worked out directly under Anatoly Serdyukov. The very first was the controversial transfer from Moscow to Voronezh of the Air Force Academy imeni Zhukovskiy and Gagarin. Then there was also talk about savings and improving the quality of pilot training. However, it turned out differently; most of the senior lecturers did not want to move to the periphery, where there were no conditions for normal service or housing. As a result, almost no one moved from the decades-old faculty in Moscow to the new place of service and work....

...Apparently, that history will now repeat itself. It is still unclear where the families of lecturers facing resettlement from Saint Petersburg will be placed. Military officials believe that Kronshtadt can comfortably accommodate more than 30,000 students and teaching staff with families. However, almost half of the housing stock on the island consists of communal apartments.... The conditions there are unacceptable - rotten floors and falling ceilings, problems with heating and water supply. It is hardly to be expected that many lecturers will agree to such a move....

...So what is the matter then? It looks like the money, as usual. After the sailors move, there will remain the empty buildings of military schools in Saint Petersburg.... All naval schools are located in prestigious areas of Saint Petersburg and their sale will bring huge profits. The cost of all the buildings in which the Saint Petersburg naval universities are located, according to the most approximate estimates, is several billion rubles. At the same time, the concept of ‘market price’ is so elastic that it opens up great opportunities for corruption.



No Pirates in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: Commercial Arctic shipping along the Russian Northeast Passage continues to grow, not as rapidly as Russia desires, but it is growing as the accompanying excerpt from *The Barents Observer* reports. Up to this point, much of the goods in transit were bulk shipments of metals, oil and natural gas. However, cargo ships, and now a container ship have made successful transits. Although there has been no piracy reported in Arctic shipping lanes, the Northern Fleet has conducted several exercises to retake ships from terrorists and saboteurs. As the article from *Xinhua* notes, the Chinese consider the lack of piracy in the Arctic as a real plus. The article believes that the Suez and Malaccan Straits need to clean up their neighborhoods or they are going to lose transit fees.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“In 2016, only 19 ships with 214,500 tons of cargo made the transit from the Bering Strait to the Barents Sea. That was more than in 2015 when goods volumes shipped along the route was only 40,000 tons.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “First Container Ship successfully breaks through the Ice,” *The Barents Observer*, 12 September 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2018/09/container-ship-makes-it-east-west-russias-arctic-route>

The Venta Maersk is a brand-new container ship designed for voyages in icy conditions. It set sail in late from Busan, South Korea, and was accompanied by the nuclear icebreaker 50 let Pobedy through the East Siberian Sea and Laptev Sea beginning on 8 September. It is ... the first regular container ship that has crossed the Russian Arctic route. The icebreaker escort was finished once the ships sailed into the Laptev Sea on 11 September...Ice data from the Russian Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute show that there is still more than one-meter of thick ice in major parts of the East Siberian Sea, while the whole Kara Sea and practically all of the Laptev Sea are ice-free.

Rosatom Chief of Maritime Operations, Vladimir Artyunyan stated, “The convoy successfully proceeded through the Sannikova Strait, which is the shortest route, with an average speed of 11 knots. There have been no complaints from the ship captain or the shipping company.”

The «Venta Maersk» is now continuing its voyage towards its destination of Bremerhaven. It will proceed through the Laptev Sea, and subsequently the Kara Sea and Barents Sea before it enters Norwegian waters. The Danish-registered container ship was built in 2018 and can carry up to 3,600 containers. Several more companies are considering test voyages with container ships across the Northern Sea Route. Among them is the Korean company Hyundai Merchant Marine.

Source: “‘Tian En,’ Chinese Ship on Maiden Arctic Voyage, Docks in Dutch Port,” *Xinhua*, 9 September 2018. www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/09/c_137456629.htm

The Chinese cargo ship Tian En docked in the Dutch port of Eemshaven on 8 September on its maiden voyage across the Arctic region to deliver wind power equipment to France, the Netherlands and Sweden. “The Netherlands is famous for, among other things, the use of clean energy, especially wind power,” Captain Chen Xiangwu said. “We are more than pleased to deliver wind power equipment to this beautiful country via the ‘Polar Silk Road’....The route passing through the Arctic is much shorter than the traditional one passing through the Suez Canal. Besides, the crew doesn’t have to worry about pirates in the Arctic.”

In a white paper on its Arctic policy early this year, China said it would intensify cooperation with other countries to jointly build the Polar Silk Road. The Polar Silk Road via the Arctic is regarded as the third arch of the Belt and Road Initiative, adding another sea route in addition to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, the South Pacific and Oceania.

The Tian En, which is owned by COSCO Shipping Specialized Carriers Company, crossed the Bering Strait on Aug. 17 and arrived in the French city of Rouen, about 140 kilometers northwest of Paris, on 5 September, to a warm welcome from the local authorities. It is expected to arrive in Sweden on Sept. 15.



Container ship CSCL Arctic Ocean, Calandkanaal, Rotterdam (2016).

Source: By kees torn (CSCL ARCTIC OCEAN) [CC BY-SA 2.0] (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>), via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CSCL_Arctic_Ocean_\(ship,_2015\)_002.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CSCL_Arctic_Ocean_(ship,_2015)_002.jpg)



China Builds Icebreaker at Home

OE Watch Commentary: The *Xuelong 2* (Snow Dragon 2) apparently will be classified as another research icebreaker as the accompanying excerpted article reports, but it raises the issue of the commercial icebreaker monopoly that *Rosatomflot* currently has on the Northeast Passage (see: “If you build it, will they come?” *OE Watch*, September 2018). Perhaps China wants the *Xuelong 2* to break ice for its own ships in the Northeast Passage. China has a polar research institute in Shanghai and a 550-foot long research icebreaker, the *Xuelong 1*, in operation in Arctic waters (see: “Potential Chinese Foothold in the Arctic,” *OE Watch*, April 2014), though the *Xuelong 2* is much bigger than its predecessor. Additionally, China is taking bidders for a nuclear-powered icebreaker support ship for its expanding Arctic icebreaker effort (see: “China going nuclear in Arctic,” *OE Watch*, August 2018). The Arctic waters are warming up commercially and politically.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: “China Launches First Domestically Built Icebreaker,” *Global Times Online*, 10 September 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119098.shtml>

China launched ... its first domestically built polar icebreaker, the Xuelong 2, a ship that has strong icebreaking capability and is expected to reach thick ice-covered Polar Regions including the North Pole.... According to Zhang Xia, director of the Polar Strategy Center at the Polar Research Institute of China, the launch of the Xuelong 2 means that the ship's overall structure, power system and other main equipment are completed. After it finishes further interior building and sea trials, the ship will be delivered for use within the next year.... It has two-direction ice breaking capabilities at both its bow and stern...The Xuelong 2 is considered a medium-sized icebreaker with a strong icebreaking capability comparable to the US icebreaker Healy, and can reach most places in the Arctic and the Antarctic including the North Pole despite thick ice there... With the launch of the Xuelong 2, China has gained the know-how on building an icebreaker and will not be dependent on foreign technologies in the future.”

Dong Yue, a research fellow at the Polar Research Institute of the Ocean University of China, stated that “It is expected to participate in China's 10th Arctic expedition and 35th Antarctic expedition in 2019. It is equipped with intelligent sensors and covered with wireless data connection. The ship has six state-of-the-art laboratories to be used to gather data and manage samples...Polar regions are closely related to the entire world in fields like global climate studies and environmental protection. It is China's responsibility to take part in polar affairs and create a community with a shared future. Expeditions into the polar regions can not only boost China's science and technology capability, but also bring China commercial opportunities access to natural resources and tourism.”

“China's first domestically built icebreaker, the Xuelong 2, was launched from the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai on 10 September. The vessel is 122.5 meters long and 22.3 meters wide, with a displacement of 13,990 tons and a navigation capability of 20,000 nautical miles.”



Xuelong 1, departing from the inner harbour of the Port of Fremantle, Western Australia (2016).

Source: By Bahnfreund [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xue_Long_Fremantle_2016_\(4\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xue_Long_Fremantle_2016_(4).jpg).



Rising Russian-Ukrainian Tensions in the Sea of Azov

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* explains some of the background of simmering tensions between Russia and Ukraine regarding the Sea of Azov. Obviously, these tensions primarily stem from Russia's annexation of the Crimea, specifically in regard to concerns over Russia's construction of the \$3.7 billion Crimean Bridge project that spans the Kerch Strait and the ongoing detention of vessels by both sides. The accompanying excerpted articles from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discuss the increasing militarization of the Sea of Azov, and the possibility that a conflict could be sparked by militants of the unrecognized Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). Of particular note, all three articles mention potential escalation and belief that the U.S./NATO could be drawn into a potential conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Azov Sea has become the new arena for confrontation between Ukraine and Russia.”

Source: Anton Lavrov, “«Соболя» против «Гюрзы»: Военный эксперт Антон Лавров — о борьбе за контроль над Азовским морем (‘Sobol’ Versus ‘Gurza’: Military Expert Anton Lavrov on the Fight for Control of the Azov Sea),” *Izvestiya*, 29 June 2018. <https://iz.ru/758636/anton-lavrov/sobolia-protiv-giurzy>

The Azov Sea has become the new arena for confrontation between Ukraine and Russia. In March, Ukrainian border guards detained the Russian trawler ‘Nord’ there. In May, the most abhorrent politicians and public figures in Kyiv reacted to the opening of the Crimean Bridge with their latest threats of sabotage...Russia and Ukraine exchanged ostentatious border service and air force exercises with live fire. On this pretext, Ukraine has closed the use of large stretches of the coastal waters in its border zone until the autumn. The “temperature” in this shallow inland sea belonging to the two states has perceptibly risen. It seems that it is about to turn into the hottest spot on the border between Russia and Ukraine.

Of course, the likelihood of a direct confrontation between fleets there is not great. Ukraine simply does not have one there. But any impediments to civilian shipping may be painful for Russia. The overwhelming majority of vessels entering the Azov Sea are heading for Russian ports. Just a few years ago, a very important international maritime trade route off the coast of Somalia was jeopardized by local residents in ordinary fishing boats. And it proved to be difficult to defend oneself against such a threat, even with the involvement of the world's leading navies. If it so wishes, the Ukrainian state is capable of causing even more trouble...after the construction of the Crimean bridge started, the Azov Sea definitively turned into a field on which there are only two players. It is possible, in theory, to imagine active or passive support for Ukraine from NATO somewhere near Odesa. But no third party will be able to interfere in what is happening in the Azov Sea any longer...

The buildup of Russian forces in the Azov Sea and the demonstrative tightening of the inspection regime for vessels coming from Ukrainian ports has already had an effect. The provocation on Ukraine's part has stopped. The detention of the Russian ship was clearly an isolated incident, carried out in the traditional Ukrainian way, without an evaluation of the long-term consequences of their step. Having realized that it has no chances in a confrontation in the Azov Sea, Ukraine is now trying to somehow play down the incident. This is a positive sign, indicating that things are unlikely to go as far as a real conflict.

However, the fundamental conflicts here are going nowhere. The need to protect shipping, and the dispute over the state borders and the fishing stocks in the Azov Sea, will remain for the long term and they will be sore point in relations between the countries for a long time to come. So, it should not be expected that Russia will now return to its initial position. Ukraine's ill-considered provocation has led to the fact that the Russian military presence here will only increase.

Source: Andrey Riskin, “На Украине предложили усилить военное присутствие Киева в Азовском море (Is Ukraine Prepared to Fight in the Sea of Azov?),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 3 September 2018. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2018/09/03/11986597.shtml>

Maksym Burbak, leader of the People's Front faction in the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, has declared, RIA Novosti reports, the need to boost the country's military presence in the Sea of Azov. The point is that the Ukrainians believe that Russia is allegedly barring the way to vessels traveling to Ukrainian ports, which is resulting in losses since the vessels are standing idle. “A buildup of our military presence and a stiffening of economic sanctions should be the response to the country's maritime blockade,” Burbak said...

The grounds for reinforcing positions in the Sea of Azov are simple, Kyiv claims that Russia is impeding shipping, inspecting each vessel making for Ukrainian ports. The Ukrainians, which is not surprising, were immediately supported here by the US State Department, which demanded that Russia stop being a “nightmare” for international shipping in the Sea of Azov. The department also added that Russia “has detained hundreds of commercial vessels,” which were attempting to reach Ukrainian ports. The State Department believes that these actions are an example of the “Russian campaign to destabilize Ukraine.”

Kyiv's authorities are for the time being only proposing insane scenarios of a solution of the problem. They will propose to escort all Ukrainian vessels by warships, not, it is true, indicating where to get them from. Then they will recall the “wolfpack” tactics, which will allegedly prevent “Russian aggression” in the region. Then they will propose to mine the Sea of Azov.

Even thoughts about it being necessary to simply sit down at the negotiating table with Moscow and to end the provocations involving the seizure of Russian vessels do not arise among Ukrainian politicians, apparently. There is only hope placed in America. And of what this hope consists is clear....the US State Department Ukraine representative, said recently in a Guardian interview that “we can talk with Ukraine, as we would with any other country, about what it needs (to strengthen the army – NG). I believe it could be a question of the Navy.... I think we would also need to consider the question of air defense as well.”

And it is not, of course, a question of Ukraine not having a fleet, it is only one of the navy being on its last legs. It is simply that everything will be as it always is: America allocates the money, someone in Kyiv happily siphons it off, and this is the end of it. And, as always, Moscow is to blame for everything.

(continued)



Continued: Rising Russian-Ukrainian Tensions in the Sea of Azov

Source: Mikhail Sergeyev, “Холодная война в Азовском море превращается в горячую (The Cold War in the Sea of Azov Is Becoming a Hot One),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 September 2018. http://www.ng.ru/economics/2018-09-09/1_7306_azov.html

The escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation in the Sea of Azov is leading with US participation to the threat of a military clash. Kyiv spoke of the redeployment to Azov “for protection of its ports” of armored gunboats, which have already been spotted in the port of Berdians’k. The authorities of the unrecognized Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) are warning of a likely penetration of Ukrainian forces into the area of the port of Mariupol’. American experts are calling for the commitment of US forces to “unblock” the Kerch Strait. Russian cargo traffic via the Sea of Azov would also suffer were a conflict to begin.

Russia and Ukraine have thus far avoided armed clashes in the Sea of Azov, which is a highly sensitive zone of opposition both for Kyiv and for Moscow. But the situation could change following the reinforcement of the Ukrainian Navy in the Sea of Azov with the clear diplomatic support of the United States. At the end of last week the Gyurza-M, the first Ukrainian armored patrol boat, which was delivered to the sea on a vehicular trailer, was offloaded in the port of the Ukrainian Berdians’k.

The General Staff and the Command of the Ukrainian Navy, which the Ukrainian Military Portal cites, says that three small artillery boats will very shortly be delivered to Azov. Before the end of 2018 the Ukrainian forces are planning to build a full-fledged Ukrainian naval base and also to deploy a division of patrol boats. The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine has made the decision to reinforce the military presence in the Sea of Azov and to provide elements of coastal defense with the latest precision missile weapons, RIA Novosti points out.

The 2003 treaty on the legal status of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, which declares them inland waters of Russia and Ukraine, is in effect between Moscow and Kyiv at this time. Now, though, Kyiv wants to renounce this treaty, draw a border, and liquidate the status of Azov as inland waters...

Today the waters of the Sea of Azov could become part of a military theater in the event of Kyiv’s conflict with the unrecognized Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR)...

Meanwhile, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the Sea of Azov could become grounds for direct American intervention...American experts are proposing that US Navy forces be committed to the Sea of Azov...





Prelude to Religious Conflict in Ukraine?

OE Watch Commentary: The conflict between pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas region and Ukrainian forces continues to fester, and as the accompanying excerpt from the official Russian news agency *TASS* suggests, it could soon expand into a more complex, violent, religious struggle. A significant portion of the Ukrainian population adheres to the Orthodox faith. Due to historical circumstances, however, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been divided, broadly speaking, between those who pay allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate and those who favor greater autonomy. As relations between Moscow and Kiev have deteriorated over the past four years, movement toward creating a fully independent (autocephalous) Ukrainian Orthodox Church has grown.

To become independent, Ukrainian authorities have appealed to the Ecumenical Church of Constantinople, and as the article points out, it appears that this body appears ready to “grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.” Understandably, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), “which has about 12,000 parishes and 200 monasteries on the territory of the country” is adamantly opposed to such a move. Citing a chief ROC cleric, the article warns “that steps to authorize autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church may have catastrophic consequences, including violence and seizure of churches belonging to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, reporting to Moscow Patriarchate.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



President Putin meets with members of Holy Synod of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, (2013).

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/18960> CC BY 4.0.

“The chief of Moscow Patriarchate’s department for relations between the Church and society, Vladimir Legoida, warned that steps to authorize autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church may have catastrophic consequences....”

Source: “Ukrainian autocephaly to have ‘catastrophic’ consequences — Russian Orthodox Church,” *TASS*, 12 September 2018. <http://tass.com/society/1021115>

The chief of Moscow Patriarchate’s department for relations between the Church and society, Vladimir Legoida, warned that steps to authorize autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church may have catastrophic consequences, including violence and seizure of churches belonging to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, reporting to Moscow Patriarchate.

“I think that parishes of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church will not recognize the authority of the Kiev Patriarchate on their own free will, and this may provoke violence on behalf of the schismatics,” Legoida said. He added that “more than 40 churches” belonging to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church have already been seized by the Kiev Patriarchate.

“Developments of this kind will have truly dramatic or even catastrophic consequences, because our Ukrainian brothers have already found themselves in a difficult situation,” he said, adding that if autocephaly will be granted to the Kiev Patriarchate, the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be subjected to “more pressure on the part of the nationalists and on the part of the state.”

...At present, Ukraine is part of the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, recognized by the global community of Eastern Orthodox Christian Churches, reports to Moscow Patriarchate. It is a self-governing religious organization with broad administrative powers, which has about 12,000 parishes and 200 monasteries on the territory of the country.

Simultaneously, Ukraine has another two organizations referring to themselves as Orthodox Churches - the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reporting to the so-called Kiev patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church that draws on the ideology and practices of a religious movement that reformist nationalistic Ukrainian priest set up in the first half of the 20th century.

...In April 2018, President Pyotr Poroshenko sent a petition to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, asking him to authorize the emergence of an independent united Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Officials of the two schismatic Churches hailed his motion while the canonical Church reporting to Moscow Patriarchate did not make any requests on its part.

The secretariat of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Church of Constantinople published a communique last Friday, September 7, reporting the appointment of Bishop Daniel of Pamphilon and Bishop Ilarion of Edmonton as exarchs of the Ecumenical Patriarch to Ukraine as a step towards preparations for granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Holy Synod of the Russian Church issued a protest on Saturday saying Constantinople’s decision was driving relations between the two Patriarchates into an impasse.



Georgia Seeks to Build a Reserve—Again

OE Watch Commentary: While the breakaway region of Abkhazia last month celebrated the anniversary of its separatist war with Georgia, which began in August 1992, Georgian media recalled the more recent war with Russia in August 2008. That war is understood by many Georgians to have formalized the loss of the two separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and put Georgia under constant threat of “Russian military aggression.” In the wake of such a sober assessment, it was recently announced that Georgia would again try to create a viable reserve force as the accompanying excerpted articles from *Kviris Palitra* report.

This will be Georgia’s third attempt. The first took place prior to the 2008 war with Russia. The 2008 war was a reality slap in the face for many Georgians, as Russian forces penetrated south all the way to Gori and then turned east on the main highway towards Tbilisi. The panic was justified as Russian troops were less than an hour’s drive from the capital and there was very little Georgians could do to stop them. A second attempt to establish a reserve force was undertaken during the tenure of Irakli Alasania, Georgian Defense Minister from 2012-2014. The initiative failed, though some wonder if perhaps this third attempt will succeed. The pilot program is already underway and will run through November.

Training bases in the cities of Batumi and Telavi will house training brigades for the reserve force. Under current law, reservists will be protected from employers who might want to eliminate their civilian jobs in case a deployment longer than the 45 days a year spreads over 12 months. Currently Georgia relies on compulsory service of all males 18-27 to augment its smaller professional soldier force, many of which are on-going international peacekeeping missions abroad. When Russia entered Georgia in 2008, the Georgian contingent deployed to Iraq was flown home. A working reserve would help alleviate those numerical pressures.

The reserve would be available to assist in natural disasters and other emergencies, but its primary mission would be in defense of the nation. The article suggests that the two areas of primary concern for Georgia are in the cyber realm and general IT. Although unsaid, it is implied that while a reserve service would expedite mobilization in case of war and natural disaster and provide relief on a national level, it will not be a panacea for Georgia’s security problems. In reality, Georgia today is defended by a professional class and compulsory service. Georgian media often notes that conscripts are generally disinterested in military service.

The new government vision is a force that is 30 percent contract or professional soldier and 70 percent reserve, with an additional draw of only 1-3 percent of draftees or those under compulsory service. As the articles imply, a tiny nation like Georgia needs a reserve force and the author looks to the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) as an example of what could be. It is not inconsequential that he chooses the Baltic countries, three other small countries living in Russia’s shadow. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Georgian soldiers on the attack during Combined Resolve II (2014).

Source: By 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command from Grafenwoehr, Germany [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian_soldiers_on_the_attack_during_Combined_Resolve_II_\(14304988195\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian_soldiers_on_the_attack_during_Combined_Resolve_II_(14304988195).jpg).

“The Georgian Defense Budget can not provide for a large regular army staffed on the basis of contract... These functions should be taken on by the Reserve Service, this third attempt has to be successful—there is no other way.”

Source: “რეზერვის შექმნის მესამე ცდა (The Third Attempt to Create A Reserve),” *Kviris Palitra*, August 27, 2018. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/45945-rezervis-sheqmnis-mesame-cda.html>

...We lost two occupied territories and live under permanent threat of renewed Russian military aggression. Unfortunately, neither Georgia or the international community can take real steps to end the Russian occupation and restore the country’s territorial integrity...

Source: “ათი წელი აგვისტოს ომიდან (Ten Years After the August War),” *Kviris Palitra*, August 8, 2018. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/45377-athi-tseli-agvistos-omidan.html>

...The primary point is that the reserve service should become universal and be the largest part of society. This will provide a nationwide total defense model that is really a relief for a small country like us...



The CSTO Factor in Armenian-Russian Relations

OE Watch Commentary: When Armenian authorities arrested former president Robert Kocharian and Colonel-General Yuri Khachaturov in July and charged them “overthrowing the constitutional order of Armenia” (in connection with the March 2008 protest against election results that turned violent), it sparked a harsh reaction in Russia due to Kocharian’s relationship with President Vladimir Putin and the fact that General Khachaturov is the Secretary General of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). As the accompanying excerpted articles from Armenian and Azerbaijani sources report, the arrests have had an impact on Armenian-Russian relations and sparked discussions in Azerbaijan over the possibility of the country becoming an observer, or even member, of the CSTO.

The article from *Inews.az*, a pro-government news website in Azerbaijan, discusses the possibility of Azerbaijan joining the CSTO and notes how Ali Guseynli, the head of the “legal and state construction committee” of Azerbaijan’s Parliament, talked about it “in an interview with local media.” Guseynli’s statement

started the discussions that took place in Azerbaijani media and caused a reaction in Armenia. The article also includes an interview with a political analyst, who mentions how Azerbaijan was “already in the CSTO, and seeing that it indulges Armenian aggression, we left its ranks.” The Azerbaijani government does have good bilateral relations with CSTO members (outside of Armenia), so it is possible that it would have some support in obtaining observer status; however, it ultimately left the organization because of the situation with Armenia over Nagorny Karabakh, which has yet to be resolved.

The article from *News.am*, an Armenian news website, notes Pashinyan’s reaction to discussions of Azerbaijan’s potential participation with the CSTO. It demonstrates that the Armenian government is taking the discussions somewhat seriously and how it intends to reject Azerbaijan’s participation in the organization, if it comes to that. Lastly, the article from the Russian-language version of *Lragir*, an independent news website, discusses the recent visit of Nikol Pashinyan, the Armenian Prime Minister, to Moscow and how Russian officials are concerned with “former President Kocharian and other high-ranking (Armenian) officials being held to account.” While the concern for Kocharian is important to note, the arrest of General Khachaturov has an impact on the CSTO, an organization the Russian government considers important for regional security and to maintain partnerships with member states. Russian government officials and media in Russia consider the arrests a shift in Armenian policy away from Russia and toward the West and while General Khachaturov has been released on bail, the CSTO’s leadership remains up in the air. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Flag of Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

Source: By UnknownUnknown author (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO_Flag.png) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization.png.

Source: S. Agayeva. “Мы и ОДКБ: О том, почему тема возможного вступления в организацию вызвала шквал обсуждений (The CSTO and Us: Why the topic of membership in the organization caused a storm of discussion),” *Inews.az*, 28 August 2018. <http://www.1news.az/news/politolog-o-polemike-razvernuvsheysya-v-obschestve-vokrug-voprosa-o-vstuplenii-azerbaydzhana-v-odkb>

There has been a recent, heated discussion in Azerbaijan of the possible entry of the country into the CSTO. Ali Guseynli, the chairman of the legal and state construction committee of Milli Mejlis (parliament) of Azerbaijan, expressed his opinion of the expediency of Azerbaijan’s possible entry into the Collective Security Treaty Organization in an interview with local media...

In continuation of the theme, Inews.az decided to turn to political analyst Tofik Abbasov and learn his reaction to this controversy in society...

(Abbasov): ...With regard to our possible contact with the CSTO, or adopting observer status in it, I note that the organization is now undergoing a reorganization and new legal requirements are being made for observer status...I am not saying “Yes, I am for the CSTO,” I am saying that it is possible (to join). On the other side, I am certain that where our enemies are present, especially our sworn enemy – Armenia, we must be present, at least in the status of observer...I want to remind you that, having joined a collective organization and facing some unexpected situations, Azerbaijan can leave it at any time. We were already in the CSTO, and seeing that it indulges Armenian aggression, we left its ranks...

(continued)



Continued: The CSTO Factor in Armenian-Russian Relations

“The possibility of Azerbaijan getting observer status in the CSTO and new prospects for military-technical cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan are not coming out of the blue. Azerbaijan is clearly waiting for a reversal of the political situation in the region.”

Source: “Пашинян: Без согласия Армении Азербайджан не может стать наблюдателем в ЕАЭС и ОДКБ (Pashinyan: Without the consent of Armenia, Azerbaijan cannot become an observer in the EAEU or the CSTO),” *News.am*, 10 September 2018. <https://news.am/rus/news/470194.html>

It is likely understood by everyone that without the agreement of Armenia, these kinds of decisions cannot be made. This was stated by Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, in an interview with the newspaper Kommersant, answering a question about the position of Armenia if Azerbaijan becomes an observer country in the Eurasian Economic Union and in the CSTO...

Source: Sarkisyan, Manvel. “Новая фаза в армяно-российских отношениях и Азербайджан (A new phase in Armenian-Russian relations and Azerbaijan),” *Lragir*, 8 September 2018. <https://www.lragir.am/ru/2018/09/08/133271/>

On the eve of the visit to Moscow by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, passion burned in both Russia and in Armenia...The blunt statements of officials and political scientists over Moscow's concerns of the internal policies of the new Armenian government and about the expectations of the leadership of Russia even became humorous.

The concerns of Russian officials are about the involvement of former President Kocharian and other high-ranking (Armenian) officials being held to account...Moscow does not have any mechanism for influencing Armenian policy – this mechanism was eliminated along with the vassal power of Serge Sargsyan...Pashinyan's visit has one unique aspect – it takes place after the meeting between the presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan...A lot is expected in Azerbaijan of the Pashinyan-Putin meeting. The possibility of Azerbaijan getting observer status in the CSTO and new prospects for military-technical cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan are not coming out of the blue. Azerbaijan is clearly waiting for a reversal of the political situation in the region...

...there were hopes in Azerbaijan the “velvet revolution” in Armenia would stimulate Russia's aggressiveness towards the new authorities. For some reason there was a naïve idea to provide Russia with services for “punishing” Armenia...

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>





EU Holds 3rd Annual “Three Seas Initiative” Summit in Bucharest

OE Watch Commentary: The European Union’s (EU) annual “Three Seas Initiative” summit, held in Bucharest, Romania on 17-18 September, has drawn a wide range of political reaction from European press. The Initiative aims to unify presidential-level support to 12 EU countries between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas for interconnection projects involving energy, transport, and digitalization. Poland led Croatia in launching the first two summits in Dubrovnik (2016) and Warsaw (2017). September press statements about this year’s summit reflect three primary positions across Europe: 1) the Initiative is principally an effort by Poland to become a more central, regional power; 2) the Initiative is divisive and can inherently weaken the EU; and 3) the projects will strengthen political, economic, and geographic connections between eastern and western EU states, and decrease dependencies on Russia.

The Initiative’s projects are largely infrastructure-focused, and will be financed with a 100 billion Euro investment fund started by the Polish National Development Bank. Key proposals include “Via Carpathia,” a project intended to build a motorway linking Lithuania’s port of Klaipeda to Thessaloniki, with passage through Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Another key project addresses the transportation of liquefied natural gas from Poland to Croatia, with distribution pipelines linking member countries. In the field of digitalization, the Initiative includes the development of digital platforms that would monitor regional river basins for pollution, improve regional logistical capabilities related to trade, and facilitate development of a sustainable energy sector together with energy storage.

The accompanying excerpted articles from sources in the region reflect only but a few of the numerous European perspectives on either the projects themselves or Poland’s leadership of the Initiative. The first article is from the EU policy-focused *Euractiv* media site and implies that the Three Seas Initiative is simply a manifestation of Poland’s international agenda. It compares Poland’s leadership of the Initiative to its failed, post-World War I effort to establish the Intermarium -- a proposed Central and Eastern European federation perceived by many as Warsaw’s attempt to emulate the 16th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This negative perception of Poland is concurrent with a broader rift between the EU leadership and Warsaw over the latter’s questionable adherence to democratic checks and balances.

The second article, from Russia’s *Sputnik*, likewise compares Poland’s leadership of the Initiative to the Intermarium, but also suggests that its true intent may be to thwart both Russian and German influence in the region. The article’s portrayal of the Initiative as a tool to weaken European unity is consistent with a growing concern over Russian media efforts to create and exacerbate divisions within the EU.

The third article, from Slovakia’s *Bratislava TASR*, shares a positive outlook regarding the Initiative’s projects, as they will help that country reduce its reliance on Russia for energy. Many EU states hold this perspective, as it relates to an extensive political and economic endeavor to diversify and integrate alternative energy sources throughout Europe. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kurz)**

“Our goal is to build a gas supply system that won’t enable blackmail against us.”

Source: Georgi Gotev and Alexandra Brzozowski, “The Brief – Three Seas, Two Leaders,” *Euractiv.com*, 17 September 2018. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/the-brief-three-seas-two-leaders/>

“... Let’s not beat about the bush. The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) is a Poland-promoted anti-Russian and pro-US project. And it kicks off today... TSI is quite similar to another Polish project, meant to build a Polish bloc in Central and Eastern Europe after World War I, a sort of power centre between Germany and Russia.”

Source: Andrew Korybko, “The Three Seas Initiative: Has Poland’s Moment Finally Arrived?” *Sputnik*, 15 September 2018. https://sputniknews.com/radio_trendstorm/201809151067999865-the-three-seas-initiative-has-polands-moment-finally-arrived/

“... the Three Seas Initiative that Poland launched together with Croatia in 2016 is thought by some to be its resurrected 21st century manifestation [of the Intermarium] because it includes many of the same countries... and the same geopolitical goal... [including]... countering Russian interests in the region. It’s not just Russia, though, but also Germany that the Three Seas might be trying to thwart too... Many of the countries within this region recently voted for EuroRealist governments that are loudly advocating for national sovereignty and traditional values, both of which challenge the EuroLiberal model that Berlin has been trying to force upon the rest of the EU.”

Source: “Kiska: Objective is To Become Less Dependent on Russian Gas,” *Bratislava TASR*, 18 September 2018. <http://newsnow.tasr.sk/economy/kiska-objective-is-to-become-less-dependent-on-russian-gas/>

“... Slovak President Andrej Kiska, who took part in the summit, stated after the negotiations that the objective is to create such a diversification of natural gas so that Slovakia isn’t dependent on Russia in this area. ‘Our goal is to build a gas supply system that won’t enable blackmail against us. We know that when it comes to Russia’s strategic interests, Russia doesn’t observe its own agreements, and letting Slovakia be blackmailed with energy is the worst thing that can happen to us...’”



Russian Influence Operations Target Swedish Elections

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years, the Kremlin has attempted to interfere in democratic elections in the West, particularly in countries that it perceives as potential adversaries. As the accompanying excerpt from the Swedish source, *Svenska Dagbladet* indicates, Moscow's latest target may be Sweden, which represents a concern to Russia considering its close ties to NATO and membership in the European Union. The article discusses how the Riksdag (parliamentary) elections, which were held on 9 September, could be an important target for Russian influence operations.

The article quotes an Estonian defense official who asserts that "a massive wave of disinformation is engulfing Sweden, which is now in the crosshairs of Russian meddling before the Riksdag election." This same official warns that it would be a mistake to "underestimate Moscow's ability to establish networks that influence the political debate in the long term." For instance, the article discusses the rise of the far-right Sweden Democrats party and questions whether its increased popularity might be the result of its exploitation of the migrant crisis and an increased crime rate, but also Kremlin meddling. According to another Swedish expert quoted in the article, since NATO membership for Sweden is a "red-line" for the Kremlin, they would be willing to support the anti-NATO and anti-EU sentiment found in the Sweden Democrat party.

In the time approaching the election, Swedish officials began to take more notice of the tide of disinformation circulating around the country. As the excerpt points out, fake news stories promoted the ideas that Sweden was on the brink of collapse due to migrants and that it was being overrun by Muslim influence. As another expert points out, while "the Swedish security services know quite well what is going on and who is doing what... the question is how to put a stop to the whole thing." Since the results of the election have already been tabulated, Swedish officials are examining the factors which caused a shift in voter choices. This article suggests that the Kremlin leadership will continue to exploit information and disinformation in pursuit of its geopolitical goals. **End OE**

Watch Commentary (Dimmick)



Hybrid flag of Sweden and Russia.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Sweden_and_Russia.png CCA Public Domain.

“‘Moscow is playing the long game’ and its intent is to divide and weaken the West in order to strengthen its grip on power at home.”

Source: Thomas Lundin, "Varningen: Så försöker Ryssland påverka valet (Warning: So, Russia is trying to influence the election)," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 8 August 2018. <https://www.svd.se/varningen-sa-forsoker-ryssland-paverka-valet>

A massive wave of disinformation is engulfing Sweden, which is now in the crosshairs of Russian meddling before the Riksdag election a month from now. Estonia's intelligence chief now warns against underestimating Moscow's ability to establish networks that influence the political debate in the long term.

There is a massive wave of disinformation, half-truths, and distorted descriptions engulfing Sweden. "Swedish children forced to pray to Allah in school;" "Sweden hiding positive doping tests;" "Sweden considering sending its army to Donetsk;" "Migrants fighting a war in Sweden;" or "Sweden near collapse -- 55 death zones." "We will see more and more of this," says the head of the Estonian intelligence service, Mikk Marran....

At a meeting of experts in Riga, arranged by the NATO strategic communications center StratCom, his message is that "Moscow is playing the long game" and that its intent is to divide and weaken the West in order to strengthen its grip on power at home.... "The core of Moscow's influence strategy is to influence parliamentary elections long before they take place," says Marran.

[Lundin] How resistant is Sweden? "Sweden has woken up at the last second and today is one of the more resistant nations in Europe," believes Janis Sarts, head of StratCom in Riga, which is studying the Russian influence attempts.

[Lundin] What methods is Moscow working with against Sweden?

[Sarts] They are investing in networks that take years to build up.

[Lundin] Are the Sweden Democrats part of these networks?

[Sarts] I will only say that the Sweden Democrats definitely fit into the pattern.

... "The NATO issue is extremely important to Russia," Lieutenant Commander Patrik Thome, head of the [Swedish] Armed Forces' psychological operations unit, also confirms.

Erik Lagersten, former communications director of the Armed Forces and now one of the military's advisers at StratCom, says that Swedish NATO membership is completely out of the question for Moscow. That is where the red line goes. "In that connection it's obvious that the Sweden Democrats serve Russian interests," he says. He does not want to comment on whether it takes place deliberately and actively or unintentionally.

Jonas Survila of King's College in London is a communications expert and has been an adviser to several election campaigns. He is convinced that Russia monitors Sweden intensely. "The Swedish security services know quite well what is going on and who is doing what. But the question is how to put a stop to the whole thing," he says....



Tajik-Uzbek Border Guards Conduct Joint Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: Reconciliation efforts between the Uzbek and Tajik governments since Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president of Uzbekistan almost two years ago have been significant and as the accompanying excerpted article reports, the two sides recently took another step in improving relations by carrying out a joint exercise with their respective border guards. The article from *Asia-Plus*, an independent news website in Tajikistan, reports on what took place during the exercise, including a scenario of an armed group “operating with fire support from the adjacent territory.” Previous joint exercises of Central Asian militaries or security forces have rarely included an enemy with fire support capabilities, though it is worth noting that an incident on the Tajik-Afghan border a week after the exercise took place reportedly involved mortar fire from Afghanistan. In addition to the exercise, the article mentions how the heads of the Tajik and Uzbek border guards met in Dushanbe and “discussed the prospects for further cooperation on improving the functionality of border checkpoints” as well as approving “a plan of joint action for localized conflict situations on the border.” In the past, cooperation between the Uzbek and Tajik governments during incidents on their borders has been notably poor and it will be worth watching if both governments follow through with this in the event of a future incident. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The two heads of the border guards decided to approve a plan of joint action for localized conflict situations on the border.”

Source: Yuldashev, Avaz. “Таджикские и узбекские пограничники «отразили прорыв бандформирований на границе» (Tajik and Uzbek border guards “repulsed the breakthrough of a group of bandits on the border”),” *Asia-Plus*, 17 August 2018. <http://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20180817/tadzhikskie-i-uzbekskie-pogranichniki-otrazili-proriv-bandformirovanii-na-granitse>

...For the first time in history, the security forces of the two states held a joint exercise...At the junction of the border of three countries – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, in the Shahrtuz District (Tajikistan), the border guards of the two countries held the tactical joint military “Jaihun 2018.” This was reported by the Press Secretary of the GNKB of Tajikistan, Muhammad Ulughojayeve...

In the exercise, cooperation and coordination was worked out by the border guards units to neutralize the border security threats – large amounts of illegal drug trafficking, and the incursion of armed groups of bandits operating with fire support from the adjacent territory. Units and reservists of the Border Guards and State Security Committee of Tajikistan and the Border Guards of the SNB of Uzbekistan, several armored vehicles, transport aircraft, and border patrol boats were involved...

At the same time, at a meeting in Dushanbe, the commander of the Border Guards of the GKNB, Rajabali Rahmonali and his Uzbek colleague, Ruslan Mirzayev, discussed the prospects for further cooperation on improving the functionality of border checkpoints...The two heads of the border guards decided to approve a plan of joint action for localized conflict situations on the border...



Presidential Palace (Palace of Nations) – Rudaki Ave, Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2012).

Source: By Rjruiziii [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palace_of_Nations_and_the_Flagpole,_Dushanbe,_Tajikistan.JPG.



Risky Business: A Case Study of PRC Investment in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

by Danny Anderson

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/risky-business-a-case-study-of-prc-investment-in-tajikistan-and-kyrgyzstan/>

OE Watch Commentary: China’s “New Silk Road” or “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) has reached Central Asia in resounding fashion. As a result, the republics of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have seen large increases in Chinese presence and investment. Although both countries have overlapping needs, the degree and character of PRC involvement in each has differed. Development experts classify both countries as “high-risk” for debt distress given public debt projections. However, despite the risk of such an outcome, both countries appear inclined to welcome PRC investment with open arms, as a way of funding needed investment like power generation and logistical links with the outside world.

Tajikistan

China is currently the country’s largest external creditor, with over \$1 billion owed to China’s Export-Import Bank as of 2016. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are Tajikistan’s two largest creditors behind China, with \$318 million and \$217 million in debt ownership, respectively, with the (most recent assessment) total external debt coming in at \$2.9 billion.

While a large share of the approximately \$1 billion in loans from China Export-Import bank to Tajikistan has gone to road projects, including a major highway between the two countries, most funding has gone to tackling Tajikistan’s energy crisis. Heavy PRC investment into the energy sector—primarily coal power plants—significantly improved Tajikistan’s power production picture. The 400 megawatt (MW) Dushanbe–2 plant, which was opened in 2012 and reached full generation capacity in 2016, helps keep the lights on in the capital. The plant’s construction was funded through \$331 million in Chinese loans, paired with \$17 million in funding from Tajikistan. TBEA, the Chinese company that built the plant, received the rights to and profits from multiple gold mines in the north of the country to offset the cost of Dushanbe–2.

Another noteworthy aspect of China’s likely future involvement in Tajikistan’s power sector: supplying coal. Right now Tajikistan imports its coal from other Central Asian countries, like neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In 2016 alone Tajikistan imported 1.6 million tons of coal from those two countries, but their new projects will require around 500 million tons of coal. While the country has three coal mines that can help pitch in, Tajikistan will likely have to purchase Chinese coal meet the new demand.

PRC investment is pushing into Russia’s near abroad, offsetting some of the financial load Russia used to shoulder. Russia’s financial role in Tajikistan has shrunk while its political involvement has grown. As recently as 2004, Russia wrote off \$300 million in loans to Tajikistan for a military base south of Dushanbe (that has since been extended until the year 2042).

Kyrgyzstan

BRI investment in Kyrgyzstan resembles that of Tajikistan in important ways. Lending from China has climbed sharply, to the point where \$1.7 billion of Kyrgyzstan’s \$3.8 billion in external debt is owed to China. Like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan’s debt to China is substantial; unlike Tajikistan, it is seeking to use PRC lending to invest in technological and transportation infrastructure.

Kyrgyzstan’s “Taza Koom” or “Smart Nation” program seeks to launch the Kyrgyz Republic into twenty-first century relevance with modern technological infrastructure, from faster internet connections to increased surveillance and security systems. As part of Kyrgyzstan’s ambitions to become a “digital hub” for China’s New Silk Road, PRC firms such as Huawei and China Telecom have partnered with the Taza Koom project. Huawei has stated its intention to help convert two of Kyrgyzstan’s largest cities into so-called “smart cities”: the capital of Bishkek and Osh to the south. Smart cities allow municipal authorities to better monitor and manage their cities’ resources, and may improve traffic flow and emergency response times. However, they also bring with them the potential to enable more effective state surveillance, and to provide PRC intelligence services with electronic backdoors into target countries’ systems.

Where energy projects seemed to take precedence in Tajikistan, transportation projects have taken precedence in Kyrgyzstan, with a large sum of that going to the proposed railroad via Bishkek to Samarkand, Uzbekistan and beyond, as part of China’s planned New Silk Road rail corridor. Kyrgyzstan will likely cede access to some of its natural resources to China to offset some of the railway’s proposed \$2 billion construction costs.

As in Tajikistan, Russia’s involvement looks increasingly narrow when compared with that of the PRC. In Kyrgyzstan, it is largely focused on countering other regional powers. Kyrgyzstan only owes Russia \$240 million, a payment plan for which was ratified in the Russian parliament earlier this year. The Russian military has a base in the country, and is exploring the possibility of to add another.

Even though Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are heavily in debt to China and will remain so for many years, both seem inclined to welcome the Belt and Road Initiative as a way to bolster their regional standing and fund needed infrastructure investment in a number of sectors. With Russia constrained in its ability to match the PRC’s financial firepower, the close attention paid both these republics by China’s signature foreign policy initiative may help cement PRC influence in this corner of Eurasia for years to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Anderson)**

Source: “TBEA can get license for further mining deposit if profit from the gold deposits doesn’t cover the cost of CHP plant,” *Asia-Plus*, 1 May 2018. <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20180501/tbea-can-get-license-for-further-mining-deposit-if-profit-from-the-gold-deposits-doesnt-cover-the-cost-of-chp-plant>

...He noted that the Tajik government had agreed to give TBEA the rights to further mining deposits (the location was not identified) if the profit made from the gold deposits doesn’t cover the cost of building the Dushanbe-2 CHP plant.

...TBEA in 2013 received necessary licenses from the Government of Tajikistan to conduct exploration operations at both these deposits until 2017. The company was also exempted from customs duties and value added tax on import of equipment...



China Stands by Re-education Camps in Xinjiang

OE Watch Commentary: In recent months there has been a growing level of scrutiny and condemnation in the West of the re-education camps that China has established in its westernmost Xinjiang region. China claims they are a way to de-radicalize potentially extremist Muslim Uyghurs and, in doing so, to prevent terrorism. On 3 September the Chinese website *dwnews.com* published the accompanying excerpted Chinese-language article defending the country's policies in Xinjiang in the face of pressure from Western countries to close them down.

The article first notes that the criticism of China is part of a wave of critiques in the West to superficially display concern about human rights. The article then argues that the violent conflict between the Chinese government and those who commit terrorism—presumably referring to Uyghur terrorists or terrorist groups in Xinjiang—the latter is the one responsible for provoking the violence. The article then explains that the re-education camps and the previous terrorist attacks exist in a dialectic that the Western critiques fail to acknowledge. The article suggests the Western critiques make it seem as if the re-education camps exist in a vacuum and for no reason. According to the article, if there were no re-education camps the government would be forced into a passive and defensive state simply waiting for the next attack.

The purpose of the camps, according to the article, is to transform the mind and not to inflict bodily harm on anyone. Although the article does not discuss the content of the re-education at the camps, it claims they will eliminate the spiritual violence carried out by the extremists and make them more rational. The article also suggests that it is appropriate to re-educate the entire Uyghur or Muslim population of Xinjiang, even though only a few people have been terrorists because it is impossible to anticipate which ones among the masses will become terrorists. The article also does not deny that it will be unfair to many people and cause them non-physical harm, such as being unable to attend work during their time in re-education. However, the article suggests that this is compatible with international law because China is doing the minimum required to deal with a security threat to the survival of the state.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

“The focus of the ideological reform is to eliminate the spiritual violence carried out by extremists.”



“Khotan-mezquita-d04.”

Source: Colegota, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khotan-mezquita-d04.jpg>, (CC BY 2.5).

Source: “为中国新疆改造营辩护 (Defending China's Xinjiang Re-education Camps),” *dwnews.com*, 3 September 2018. <http://blog.dwnews.com/post-1052758.html>

Recently, ideological reform camps in Xinjiang, China have again raised a wave of Western public concern. The US Congress frequently holds hearings to show that there are “very serious” human rights issues.

Legally and ethically in treating a violent conflict, it is the responsibility of the party that provokes the incident on its own initiative that must be considered, because provoking violence means being the cause of the incident. The counter is often a passive “response” of a defensive nature. The Chinese government's implementation of a large-scale re-education camp began in 2014, and before that, there were numerous cases of violent terror in Xinjiang, and more and more terrorist acts have caught the government and the military police in a state of dormancy. Although counter-terrorism was effective, the local people in Xinjiang still lived in a state of horror and uneasiness. In such a place where terrorism has been destructive for a long time, the local government must of course control the situation, fulfill its responsibility of protecting the residents, and also prevent regional ethnic factionalization and extremist forces.



China Building a Military Facility in the Wakhan Corridor: Fact or Fiction?

OE Watch Commentary: The *South China Morning Post* recently released the accompanying excerpted report, based on “sources close to the Chinese military,” claiming that China is assisting Afghanistan in setting up a mountain brigade in the Wakhan Corridor. According to the report, on 22 August the Afghan embassy in Beijing said China was assisting Afghanistan to set up the brigade to “boost counterterrorism efforts.” Now, however, both sides are denying the claim, saying that there will be “no Chinese military personnel of any kind on Afghan soil at any time,” and, as seen in the accompanying excerpted article, published in the Chinese state-sponsored *Global Times*, China “will not build a military base in Afghanistan.”

Despite these denials, with China having a history of downplaying plans and projects, the report is noteworthy. The Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of land, consisting of mountainous and rugged terrain that is difficult to access, in the far northeastern part of Afghanistan. The territory is of important historical and strategic significance. Following the Durand Line agreement of 1893, the Wakhan Corridor was formed to create a boundary, serving as a buffer, between the Russian Empire (Russian Turkestan) and the British Empire (British India). At the eastern most part of the corridor, Afghanistan shares a 47-mile-long border with China’s Xinjiang province. The excerpted article from *Inkstone* explains that Beijing views the Wakhan Corridor as a large geographical loophole for potential separatists and terrorists to try to come across its borders and into Xinjiang and militant Uyghurs have been blamed for violent attacks in Xinjiang.

As noted, Afghanistan is important to China’s own security. It could also be important to Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative. China has already opened up its first overseas military base in Djibouti and there is talk of it opening another base in Gwadar, Pakistan. As the country moves forward with its Belt and Road Initiative, it has become aggressive in its plans to provide security for the project, which is expected to cost upward of \$8 trillion. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The war-torn Central Asian country (Afghanistan) has become increasingly important for China’s own security, as well as President Xi Jinping’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative...’”

Source: Minnie Chan, “China is Helping Afghanistan Set Up Mountain Brigade to Fight Terrorism,” *South China Morning Post*, 28 August 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2161745/china-building-training-camp-afghanistan-fight>

Sources close to the Chinese military earlier told the Post that China had funded and started building a training camp for Afghan troops in Afghanistan’s isolated Wakhan Corridor – a narrow strip of inhospitable and barely accessible land extending about 350km from the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan to China’s Muslim region of Xinjiang.

One of the sources said that once the camp was completed, the People’s Liberation Army was likely to send troops there, but the embassy denied the claim, saying no Chinese military personnel would be stationed in Afghanistan.

The war-torn Central Asian country has become increasingly important for China’s own security, as well as President Xi Jinping’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, a huge trade and infrastructure plan.

“Construction of the base has started, and China will send at least one battalion of troops, along with weapons and equipment, to be stationed there and provide training to their Afghan counterparts,” one of the sources said.

Source: China Not Building Military Base in Afghanistan: Defense, Foreign Ministries,” *Global Times*, 30 August 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1117727.shtml>

The report was “inconsistent with facts,” defense ministry spokesman Wu Qian said at a briefing on Thursday.

The report was also denied by foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying at a daily briefing on Wednesday, without elaboration.

China will likely provide counter-terrorism training to Afghan counter-terrorism forces and police, but only within the Chinese border, Li Wei, a counter-terrorism expert at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, told the Global Times on Thursday.

“China will not build a military base in Afghanistan,” he said.

Source: Kinling Lo, “Why is China Funding a Military Outpost in Afghanistan?,” *Inkstone*, 29 August 2018. <https://www.msn.com/en-sg/news/other/why-is-china-funding-a-military-outpost-in-afghanistan/ar-BBMDly5>

Who exactly will be in this camp?

Minnie (Chan): *An Afghan diplomatic official in Beijing has denied the involvement of any Chinese military personnel in this project. But according to my sources, China will need to send more than 500 personnel to the camp.*

Not everyone there will be training troops or will be combat-ready soldiers. Within the group, there will be people who are engineers doing construction work for the camp.

Why is Afghanistan going along with this?

Minnie: *Afghanistan is poor. All of their weapons were purchased from overseas, and they do not have a domestic weapons construction industry. They need weapons, and they need people to train them. China is fully funding the project, so for Afghanistan, it is like military aid.*



India to Use New Drones at Border with China

OE Watch Commentary: For the past several decades there have been tensions between India and China in their mutual Himalayan borderland. These tensions have recently escalated because of reports that China will extend its railway in Tibet through Nepal up to the Indian border. There are concerns China may edge up to, or even enter, India's territory. In this context, the accompanying excerpted Chinese-language article for the military news section of *sina.com* on 7 September has drawn attention to Indian efforts to purchase drones from Israel to monitor the border with China.

According to the article, India plans to purchase a Heron TP armed drone from Israel and will submit a formal tender in 2019. A version of this drone was reportedly used in some major Israeli operations in Gaza and on a Gaza-bound weapons shipment in Sudan in 2009. The article notes how the drone would provide India with the capability to carry out cross-border missile attacks in China and to monitor the Sino-Indian border more effectively than the smaller drones that India has previously used. In addition, the new drones would allow India to fly at altitudes of 5,500 meters above sea level, which is conducive for the high Himalayas.

Although the article does not mention what China's response will be to this drone acquisition, and does not hint that India will actually outfit these new drones with weapons, news of the acquisition shows that China is certainly paying close attention. Nevertheless, in other recent cases along the Sino-Indian border in which India has used drones to monitor the border, such as in Sikkim, China has lodged diplomatic protests. Presumably, any future incidents will also be handled diplomatically as well, unless this higher quality system represents too significant a change of the status quo for China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“There have been rumors that India will purchase the ‘Heron’ TP armed drone from Israel, which can carry out cross-border missile attacks.”

Source: “印度将购以色列无人机监控中印边境军事活动” (India will buy Israeli drones to monitor military activities on the Sino-Indian border), *mil.news.sina.com*, 7 September 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/china/2018-09-07/doc-ihitesuz6689475.shtml>

On September 7 Hong Kong media quoted the Russian satellite news agency reporting that India hopes to purchase a remote-controlled aircraft system that can work at altitudes above 5,500 meters above sea level. The report said the reason was that India wanted to explore carrying out military activities along its northern border with China. According to reports, there have been rumors that India will purchase the “Heron” TP armed drone from Israel, which can carry out cross-border missile attacks. It is reported that the Indian Army will submit a formal tender by April 2019, and manufacturers should be ready to deliver the system by 2020. The report said that the Indian Army has been using small drones for a long time, but these more advanced drones will strengthen India's ability to monitor the Sino-Indian border.



Source: Calips, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DRONE_HERON_01.jpg, (CC-by-3.0).



India's Appointment of the 14th Corps Commander

OE Watch Commentary: The government of India has been carrying out diplomatic efforts to avoid another incident on its border with China following the standoff in Doklam from June to August last year, while at the same time strengthening its forces along the border (see: “The India Government’s Efforts to Avoid Another Doklam Standoff,” *OE Watch*, June 2018). The accompanying excerpted article reports on another step the Indian government is taking to improve the capabilities of its forces along the border with the appointment of Lieutenant General Yogesh Kumar Joshi as commander of the 14th Corps of the Army.

The article, from *The Print*, focuses on General Joshi’s background and notes how he is well respected for his service in the 1999 Kargil War and more specifically, for how he “is an expert on India’s eastern neighbour.” The article mentions General Joshi’s previous commands of “a brigade and a division in the (14th Corps) area,” his time as “Defence Attache to China (2005-2008)” as well as other efforts and positions in the army related to China. It is worth noting that the 14th Corps is under the Indian Army’s Northern Command, not the Eastern Command where the Doklam standoff took place.

The article also notes “a recent joint patrol by Chinese and Pakistani armies in the vicinity of the Khunjerab Pass” (on the China-Pakistan border, north of the 14th Corps headquarters) and that a source quoted in the article believes General Joshi’s appointment is a way to deal with the “complexities of China-Pak relations.” Indian military leadership has stated in the past year that it sees China as much of a threat as Pakistan. Lastly, the article mentions how General Joshi’s time in command might be short, as he could be in consideration as the next army chief “after General Bipin Rawat’s scheduled tenure ends in December 2019.” While there are political considerations for this to ultimately take place, the appointment of General Joshi as commander of the 14th Corps demonstrates what measures the Indian government continues to take to strengthen its northern border. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The uniqueness that Joshi brings to his office is not only his knowledge of the Chinese language. He also commanded a brigade and a division in the (14th Corps) area.”

Source: Sujan Dutta, “Why Modi govt & Army picked this general to protect borders with China & Pakistan,” *The Print*, 3 September 2018. <https://theprint.in/security/new-appointee-lt-gen-joshi-is-the-perfect-man-to-lead-armys-fire-and-fury-corps/110370/>

Soldier-diplomat Lt Gen. Yogesh Kumar Joshi assumed charge of a crucial Army corps covering borders with both China and Pakistan over the weekend – a selection that indicates the importance the Modi government attaches to the sensitive region less than a year before general elections.

All choices for corps commanders are carefully studied before the appointments are made.

Yet, in choosing Joshi to command the 14 Corps, Army Headquarters and the government have selected an officer of outstanding merit who was not only a hero in the 1999 Kargil war but who also went on to deal with China in subsequent tenures, and is an expert on India’s eastern neighbour...

The uniqueness that Joshi brings to his office is not only his knowledge of the Chinese language. He also commanded a brigade and a division in the (14th Corps) area...Joshi was Defence Attache to China (2005-2008) and negotiated the technicalities of the first India-China joint exercise “Hand-in-Hand” in Kunming in 2007...He handled two sensitive positions on the China desk at the Directorate-General of Military Operations subsequently, cutting through patrolling disputes in Chumar and Demchok and Daulat Beg Oldi in Eastern Ladakh, and then giving inputs to resolve last year’s 72-day Doklam stand-off...

*“Be assured that General Joshi is being specially appointed keeping the complexities of China-Pak relations in Ladakh and his experience and success with both of them,” a source in the defence ministry told *ThePrint*. One of these complexities is a recent joint patrol by Chinese and Pakistani armies in the vicinity of the Khunjerab Pass; the other is that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that overrides Indian interests passing through territories claimed by New Delhi, is now getting into an intensive phase with more Chinese deployments in territories under Pakistani control...*

Joshi could be in the reckoning as the Army chief after General Bipin Rawat’s scheduled tenure ends in December 2019. But, as Rawat’s appointment has shown, the Centre does not go by seniority or by mere convention in choosing service heads. The Modi government executes its political prerogative to make senior appointments.

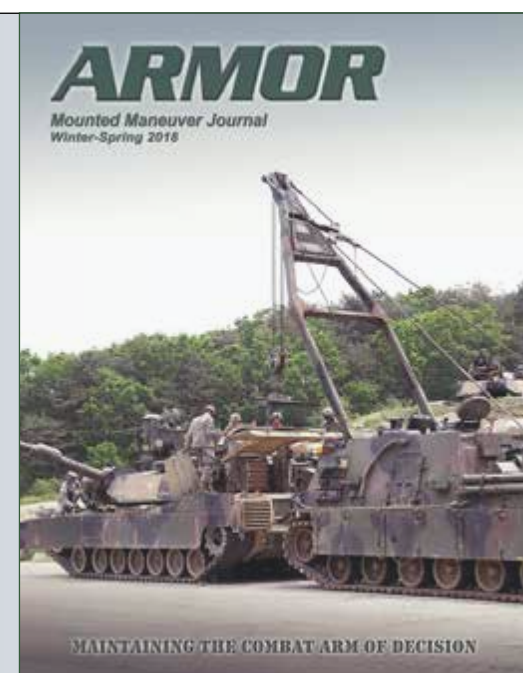
Reconnaissance-in-Force Russian Style

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>





“New Type” PLA Units Emphasize Mobility, Joint Operations

OE Watch Commentary: Globally, ground forces have seen their role diminished as air and naval forces’ strike and power projection capabilities become more prominent. This is particularly true within the PLA, which is attempting to rebalance its resources to better suit its strategic environment, in which threats (and targets) are expected to be in the air or across the ocean, rather than from land borders as in previous decades. The accompanying excerpted article is part of a special feature in the June issue of the PLA’s official newspaper *PLA Daily* and in an editor’s note explaining the future of Ground Forces development, Hou Yongbo challenged readers to be creative in imagining new ways to employ ground forces and join in a debate.

The author(s) given for this piece, Yuan Yunshan and Dai Yue, likely a pseudonym or pseudonyms for multiple people, argue that China’s military must re-examine the most basic components of combat and develop a new theory of ground forces combat, focusing on dispersion and greater combat capability through the use of networking. The author analyzes trends in future warfare and attempts to build a survivable, more powerful model starting with the smallest combat unit: the individual soldier. The goal of this proposed “single-soldier intelligentized integrated ground-air combat system [单兵智能化地空一体作战系统]” is to maximize the individual combat capability of each soldier, while increasing their survivability given the realities of modern precision weaponry.

The PLA ground forces are reinventing themselves and making important investments in combat equipment to be much more effective than what was considered the poorly-equipped soldier lacking effective command and control that featured in many of China’s previous wars. This discussion, while a first step, is part of what is already happening on a larger scale, as the PLA is already moving in this direction through its emphasis on “informatization” [信息化] and “System of Systems” [体系], which seek to create significant gains in combat capability through networking command, sensors and strike platforms. It also matches discussions of swarm warfare, where networked individuals are distributed in way that increases their individual survivability, prior to coalescing and striking together in groups from multiple vectors. If successful in making these upgrades to the PLA’s combat-capability, combined with more realistic training, it could make the PLA’s ground forces a more potent force. **End OE Watch Commentary**

(Wood)

“As long as we keep up with the pace of scientific and technological development, and develop combat methods in response to these developments, the future ground force will play the main role in winning future wars.”

Source: “隐形陆军可成为未来发展方向—对建设现代化新型陆军的探索思考 (Stealthy Ground Forces Could Be the Future Direction of Development—Reflections on building a modernized New Type Ground Forces),” *PLA Daily*, 12 June 2018. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/1/2018-06/12/07/2018061207_pdf.pdf

The author believes that the development of “single-soldier intelligentized integrated ground-air combat system” [单兵智能化地空一体作战系统] is the core method of creating a “stealth army” [隐形陆军]. In the battlefield environment, (from the enemies’ point of view) the individual soldier is the most basic “target” unit when “dispersed” [散]. As the individual soldier is also the most important combat unit, its combat ability is very important. The goal of the “single-soldier intelligentized integrated ground-air combat system” is to make full use of modern scientific and technological means, fundamentally altering the traditional soldier’s way of warfighting, making a qualitative change to their combat capabilities. The “single-soldier” is no longer an individual in the traditional sense, but is now equipped with weapons that are “networked,” “informationized,” and “intelligentized.” Not only do they have a high individual combat capability, but also has constant situational awareness, network data communications and the ability to command intelligent unmanned combat platform. Imagine, then that the intelligent individual’s “fist, eyes and ears” are being extended, allowing the single soldier to detect the enemy at beyond-visual range, and conduct air attacks, so that its ability to conduct combat are extended from the traditional two-dimensions to three-dimensions, and even extended to four-dimensional cyberspace, making a qualitative change to their combat capabilities. The main technical means of “fusing” these scattered battlefield elements—such as intelligentized single-soldiers, unmanned combat platforms, command and control nodes, logistic support bases, etc.—are network, informationized, and intelligent technologies, which optimize the proportion of firepower strike ability according to changes in the battlefield environment to achieve fast and efficient aggregation, maximizing the impact.



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>



Can China Produce Micro Precision Strike Weapons?

OE Watch Commentary: China has been making important strides in future technologies, such as artificial intelligence and quantum communications, endeavoring to be a world leader in these and other areas. The accompanying excerpted article from *Jiefangjun Bao* stresses that these and other advanced technologies will support future trends of micro-military operations, which represents yet another new direction. For example, intelligent micro-perception systems under micro-combat conditions could provide battlefield intelligence and information that is otherwise difficult to obtain with traditional sensing equipment. Micro-bionic technology can be used to develop new materials, new equipment, and new methods of warfare.

The article goes on to describe how micro-operations will influence military operations in the future, arguing that rather than the scale of wars expanding, they will be reduced through disruptive technologies. For example, mechanical equipment will be replaced by “state-of-the-art information technology,” which is minimally sized and lighter, uses minimal energy, is extremely high in speed offensively and defensively, and is extremely effective in operational performance. Micro-operations could also be disruptive to the organizational structure of military forces and the number of combat personnel could be reduced. Lastly, the article highlights examples of research and development of various military-based micro-systems being conducted in other countries and goes on to urge China to push forward, leaning on initiatives, such as civil-military integration, to become the leader in micro-operations technologies. This could shape up to be another race to achieve the leading edge. **End OE Watch**

Commentary (Hurst)



An etched silicon wafer.

Source: NASA, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Etchedwafer.jpg>.

“We should fully understand the importance of micro operations, lead the developmental trend of micro operations, and seize the dominance of micro operations.”

Source: Pei Fei, Zhang Dapeng, Li Jinggang, “微作战—异军突起的战争新锐 (Micro Operations Emerge as a New Cutting-Edge Type of Warfare),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 30 August 2018. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2018-08/30/content_214671.htm

The appearance and use of miniature operational equipment and mini-sized combat forces has increasingly changed our cognition of military operations in the future. Maybe, a mosquito in the future will be turned into a weapon for precision strikes.

...We should fully understand the importance of micro-operations, lead the developmental trend of micro operations, and seize the dominance of micro-operations...

The requirements of intelligent warfare in the future drive the development of micro-operations. The development of intelligent capabilities in military operations has disrupted conventional wisdom. The intelligent capabilities of battlefield sensing, automatic decision-making, and smart attacks will undoubtedly become the key to winning victories in war. Micro-operations precisely come into line with the development of such intelligent capabilities in military operations, and represent a new direction in the high-speed development driven by the requirements of intelligent warfare. Intelligent warfare requires intelligent means of sensing and perception. Intelligent micro-perception systems under micro-combat conditions can provide battlefield intelligence and information that is difficult to obtain with traditional sensing equipment.

The technologies of micro-systems, micro-bionics, and micro-unmanned equipment support the development of micro-operations.

...Micro-warfare with the implementation of nanotechnology and miniature equipment as its basic characteristics will make a disruptive impact on conventional operations.

Today, with military development going on swiftly, we should fully realize the importance of micro-operations, step up its research before such operations actually take place, drive deployment and planning through major technological innovation and self-reliant innovation, act as a lead runner in the race of micro-operations.



PLA Army Aviation Brigades' Training Now Includes Urban Operations

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese Army Aviation brigades are beginning to incorporate elements of urban area training. In January 2018 China introduced a new *Outline of Military Training and Evaluation* [军事训练大纲] and at the unit level, more specific instructions have been issued, emphasizing new skills that command views as necessary to improve combat capability as the accompanying excerpted article from the *PLA Daily* reports. While China's attack helicopter forces were first developed in the 1970s to help counter tanks in an anticipated Soviet invasion from the north, with the shifting of strategic priorities—and growth of China's cities—knowledge of urban environments are now more important than the deserts and steppe terrain previously emphasized.

Helicopters are also valued for their mobility and utility as scouts and transports. However, pilots acknowledge the difficulties that come from both the more confined airspace (especially when landing or taking off) and from the complicated electromagnetic environment (such as cluttered radar returns). The unit discussed in the article, an unnamed Army Aviation brigade under the 79th Group Army, is based in Liaoning Province in northeastern China and is part of the Northern Theater Command [北部战区]. Notably, Liaoning is more densely populated than much of China's northeast, and units could be expected to operate in the urban sprawl connecting Dandong on the border with North Korea to the Liaodong peninsula (home to the major port city of Dalian) and curving around the coast of the Bohai Gulf toward Tianjin. The new emphasis on training in urban environments is a major step forward in increasing realism in training and matching training for what the PLA sees as likely scenarios. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Cities have low visibility and maneuverability—the point of changing the ‘battlefield’ [training area] is to meet the requirements of future urban operations and raise our units’ ability to carry out operations in all domains.”

Source: “Hai Yang and Hao Hailong, “‘战场’由荒原到城区, 城市作战难在哪? (Switching the ‘Battlefield’ from Wastelands to Urban Areas - Why are Urban Operations Difficult?),” *PLA Daily*, 25 February 2018. http://army.81.cn/content/2018-02/25/content_7951357.htm

During the wintertime, in a certain part of southern Liaoning [province], an unidentified army aviation brigade of the 79th Group Army (Northern Theater Command) quietly began an airborne assault exercise. For the exercise, the force commander selected not a remote forest, but an urban area.

The Unit's commander explained the new Outline of Military Training [新大纲] added urban operations training content including landing and taking off from the roofs of buildings, landing in very narrow areas and electronic warfare. When conducting training according to the new Outline of Military Training and Evaluation (OMTE) the unit's Party committee recognized that there are many buildings in urban areas and more that they are not evenly distributed. Both the electromagnetic environment and terrain make deep assaults [纵深突击] difficult, and serve to better temper the units' actual combat capability. During the training, a two-helicopter formation [编队] was carrying out reconnaissance. Just as Wang Xian [王显] one of the pilots, was about to transmit information, his screens suddenly showed interference and an uneven signal, eventually losing contact with the command post. “Urban operations are ‘doing something hard while doing something hard’—first, you are already carrying out reconnaissance which is itself difficult (but now are doing so in a more complicated environment).” Li Zhicheng [李志成], a battalion commander in the brigade acknowledged, “The electromagnetic environment in urban areas is complicated. It is very easy for battlefield awareness to be reduced with just a little interference—and it is very difficult to gather and transmit battlefield intelligence!”

“Aircraft XXXX, transmit your data to the command post!” After losing contact with the command post, the aircraft was ordered to were ordered to act as an information transfer point to retransmit information from other units.” Because of all of the tall buildings in cities and the complicated terrain, and limited space for operations, you can only use formations of 2-3 aircraft.” Brigade Training Section [作训科] Chief Xu Liang [徐亮] explained that the OMTE significantly raised the requirements for how often equipment needed to be used in complex airspace environments, so the brigade adopted a small “networked” group with high mobility and ability to quickly reorganize to better test air communications, electronic warfare, precision attacks and other tactical capabilities.

This reporter has learned that during training the brigade alters its routes through different districts according to the terrain and changes its unit composition according to tactical requirements, cooperates in researching combined tactical issues, and strengthens training in electromagnetic spectrum management according to natural and man-made environmental factors. They also strengthened their ability to innovate tactics under the new system, and implemented courses in low-altitude navigation, search and rescue, etc.

“Find the target and begin jamming!” Following the commander's order, the “Unit” began using airborne jamming equipment to cast a wide net. Immediately, the opposing force's command network were paralyzed. At the same time, ground forces, using infrared spotting attacked the enemy positions. According to reports, this exercise generated a massive amount of database, representing an effective exploration of five operational methods to use in cities methods of conducting urban operations in all of the five tiers of Chinese cities.



History of China's Type 99 Main Battle Tank

OE Watch Commentary: While details of China's armament development programs can be opaque, retrospectives about the development of the Type 99 Main Battle Tank—including interviews with its chief designer, Zhu Yusheng—provide some useful insights into their thought processes and the progress of the industry since the 1980s and are noted in the accompanying excerpted article from the *PLA Daily*.

In the 1970s, China had mostly Type 59 tanks (a first generation tank, by their counting) and no plans for a second generation tank. With the opening of China in the late 1970s and a reprioritization toward conventional military modernization, in the early 1980s Chinese leaders focused on building the PLA's core military capabilities, including recognizing the need for a new main battle tank (MBT), to be designated the Type 99.

The Type 99 represented a change from previous practice where COSTIND [国防科工委] and the General Staff Department [总参谋部] jointly made decisions. In the case of the new MBT, the Central Military Commission—China's top military body, and the State Council, the civilian government—directly issued orders to “independently build and develop [自行研制] a tank up to ‘2000-level’ [2000水平] (i.e. that would remain capable through the new millennium).”

Primary research responsibility fell to the 201 Research Institute of China Ordnance Industries Group [中国兵器工业集团], better known in the west as NORINCO.

In 1984, Zhu Yusheng, a one-armed 66-year-old PLA veteran was pulled out of retirement in the early 1980s to be the lead designer [总设计] of the new tank. Though up to the task, Zhu recalled the challenge designing the new tank represented, noting that China would have to jump from first generation tanks to third generation, despite essentially no progress having been made for 20 years. “Its not like [other nations] were asleep” (and not developing new technology during these years) he said in an interview later posted through *CCTV*.

Due to the requirement of building the tank using as much-self developed technology as possible, the engineers needed to design their own main gun, engine and overcome other similar problems. According to a documentary about the development of the tank, NORINCO engineers only needed 16 years to develop the Type 99, comparable to the 14 years needed for the German Leopard 2.

Since the completion of the Type 99, China has continued to upgrade the design. In 2000s, NORINCO began work on a new variant, the 99A, which incorporated even more modern features.

Mao Ming, the lead designer of the Type 99A—is a senior expert at NORINCO who has been researching tanks and armored vehicle design for more than 30 years. He has received first class National Science and Technology Progress [国家科技进步一等奖] awards twice and a special distinction of making “Major Contribution to High Tech Weapons Development [高技术武器装备发展建设工程重大贡献奖]” from the Chinese Communist Party, the Central Military Commission and the State Council. Mao also worked in a laboratory that developed a new generation of amphibious fighting vehicles in the 1990s and helped develop a new armor penetrating round for the Type 99's main gun, capable of defeating even the most advanced types of armor. The new tanks include advanced countermeasures, optics and other sensors. As noted in the accompanying excerpt from *The Observer Online*, Mao has stated that the Type 99A “is China's first ‘informationized tank’.”

While the Type 99 and its modernized follow-on variants proved expensive and are supplemented by larger numbers of lighter Type 96 tanks, the Type 99's development represented a watershed for the Chinese armament industry, promoting widespread modernization of design techniques and adoption of modern technology and demonstrating that it could produce advanced weaponry. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**





Continued: History of China’s Type 99 Main Battle Tank

Source: “99A主战坦克总设计师: 让国产坦克插上信息化 ‘翅膀’ (99A MBT Chief Designer: Informationize Our Tanks),” *PLA Daily*, 16 March 2018. <http://www.chinanews.com/mil/2018/03-16/8469092.shtml>

As one of the key components of the Army’s equipment, for modern armies, the MBT plays a major role in determining the combat effectiveness of units. As a large country with a long land border, the performance of China’s MBTs is very important for national defense.

Despite much speculation from foreign observers, the Type 99 was not developed with a specific enemy in mind or following a particular model for its development. The primary goal was to become the main equipment for China’s armored units, and be viable after 2000. However, it should be said that, given the state of Chinese industry and technology at the time, this was a very high bar...

In the mid-1980s, many of the basic technologies of China’s weapons industry were not as good as those of developed countries such as the United States. There were huge gaps in design capabilities and technical equipment. There were only a handful of computers in design institutes and factories, and CNC machine tools and CNC machining centers. Moreover, due to the influence of the international political and military situation, the weapon industry system has been plagued by losses for more than a decade since the mid-1980s, and scientific research work also lagged. On this basis, it is difficult to imagine the main battle tanks in which all aspects of performance can be comparable to those of the West or the former Soviet Union. This put Zhu under tremendous pressure.

At that time, there was a public opinion that Western tank design style represented by the United States should be adopted. But Zhu always believed that this kind of East-West style should not be used in the new tanks. He believed China should design its own main battle tanks according to the determined general requirements of the development goals. It should not matter whether a design element came from the East and the West, as long as it helps us succeed. Moreover, it is necessary to take the road of self-reliance, independent research and development, reflecting Chinese characteristics, and taking into account the actual needs of the war.

Source: “金戈铁马 99式主战坦克研发纪实 (‘Golden Halberds and Iron Horses’, Record of the Type 99 Main Battle Tank’s Research and Development),” *CCTV, Memories of the Military Industry*, Episode 7. 2014. http://list.youku.com/albumlist/show/id_22498728.html

Source: “99式坦克之父祝榆生逝世 享年96岁 (Zhu Yusheng, Father of the Type 99 MBT Passes Away at 96),” *The Observer Online*, 31 October 2014. https://www.guancha.cn/military-affairs/2014_10_31_281645.shtml

...“Its not like [other nations] were asleep” — Zhu Yusheng

...“It is China’s first ‘informationized tank’,” — Mao Ming, the lead designer of the Type 99A

“The primary goal was to become the main equipment for China’s armored units, and be viable after 2000.”



“ZTZ-99A Main Battle Tank.”

Source: By Tyg728 [CC BY-SA 4], https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/27/ZTZ-99A_MBT_20170716.jpg.



Mianyang: The Bellwether in China's Civil-Military Integration Initiative

OE Watch Commentary: Mianyang is not a city name that is well known outside of China; however, the city has become significant for the research and development and production of some technologies critical to China's national security. Often dubbed the "Western Silicon Valley of China," Mianyang, located in the southwest province of Sichuan, is the birthplace of China's atomic and hydrogen bombs and, as the accompanying excerpted article, published in *China Military Online*, explains, is now striving to "become a bellwether" in China's civil-military integration (CMI) program. Mianyang now reportedly has the country's first CMI dual-use technology trading center and is planning to establish 10 industrial parks that will feature military-civilian integration.

One of Chinese President Xi Jinping's top initiatives is to improve the country's capacity for innovation in military technology. One way to accomplish this is through the integration of civilian and military resources. The *China Military Online* article states that in Mianyang there are 18 state-level research institutes, 14 colleges and universities, nine national key laboratories, 28 academicians from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and 230,000 professional workers and technicians. Over the past two years, 10,000 patent applications came out of Mianyang annually and in 2017, CMI enterprises in Mianyang accounted for more than 50 percent of the city's total industrial output value at \$22 billion.

Since Xi Jinping took over as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012, CMI has become a national strategy and a priority. The accompanying article published in a March issue of *China Daily* explains that CMI generally refers to the military and defense industries transferring technologies to civilian sectors, including private companies, on the military's suppliers list. Currently, state-owned defense contractors dominate the research, development, and production of weapons and equipment for the People's Liberation Army. However, according to the article published in *Global Times*, private firms are now catching up with their state counterparts in realizing China's goal of CMI. The article describes one of the overwhelming advantages of private companies as being their ability to stay abreast of the latest scientific developments in the world and having the ability to cooperate with foreign companies and learn from them, which accelerates China's research. The *China Daily* article goes on to conclude that civil-military strategy is key to fostering the sustainable growth of defense sectors, upgrading China's military hardware, and injecting new momentum into the country's private sector. If Mianyang does indeed reach a point of being the bellwether in China's CMI, then it is worth paying attention to what is taking place there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"...the (civil-military integration) strategy is key to fostering the sustainable growth of defense sectors, to upgrading the Chinese military's hardware and to injecting new momentum into the country's private sector."

Source: "Civil-Military Integration Speeds Up in Mianyang," *China Military Online*, 10 September 2018. http://www.china.org.cn/china/2018-09/09/content_63189301.htm

It has set up the country's first CMI dual-use technology trading center, first large-scale platform for sharing of CMI scientific instrument and is planning to establish 10 industrial parks featuring military-civilian integration.

(Mianyang) is home to 18 State-level research institutes, 14 colleges and universities, nine national key laboratories, 28 academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, as well as more than 230,000 professional workers and technicians.

In 2017, there were 321 CMI enterprises based in Mianyang Science and Technology City, with the annual output value of 150 billion yuan, accounting for more than 50 percent of total industrial output value.

In statistical terms, in Mianyang last year, the patents granted for every 10,000 of its population reached 9.45. A total of 1,997 patent-based projects were implemented, with an output value of 21.82 billion yuan (US\$ 3.19 billion).

Source: Zhao Lei, "Civil-Military Integration Will Deepen," *China Daily*, 3 March 2018. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201803/03/WS5a99d67ca3106e7dcc13f437.html>

Such integration generally refers to the military and defense industries transferring technologies to civilian sectors and including private companies on the military's suppliers list. So far, State-owned defense contractors still dominate the research, development and production of weapons and equipment for the People's Liberation Army.

Observers said the strategy is key to fostering the sustainable growth of defense sectors, to upgrading the Chinese military's hardware and to injecting new momentum into the country's private sector.

Source: Ma Jun, "Private Firms Catching up with State Counterparts in Realizing China's Civil-Military Agenda: Experts," *Global Times*, 11 September 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119159.shtml>

Civil-military integration (CMI) has been a national strategy and a priority within China's leadership agenda since 2012.

China's private firms are now participating more in the R&D of the defense and military industry, and the achievements of civil-military integration (CMI) were on vivid display during the 6th China (Mianyang) Science & Technology City International High-Tech Expo.

The CMI-themed event was held in Mianyang, Southwest China's Sichuan Province - the birthplace of Chinese atomic and hydrogen bombs as well as artificial satellites - from Thursday to Sunday.

CMI generally refers to including private producers on a Chinese military supplier's list and exchanging technologies in the military and defense industries with the civilian sector.

Private firms have an overwhelming edge in high-tech sectors because they are well-informed of the latest breakthroughs in the world and could also cooperate with foreign companies and learn from them to accelerate research, according to Wang.



Indonesia Counters Street Gangs Before Asian Games

OE Watch Commentary: On 20 August the Indonesian-language news website, *Tagar News* published the accompanying excerpted article discussing the Asian Games that began several days earlier. The article expressed concern about the way the Indonesian security forces engaged in excesses in its efforts to provide security before the Asian Games took place. Citing Amnesty International, the article notes that the police shot dead around 70 people who were engaged in conventional street crimes, such as pickpocketing and even begging, in the weeks before the games.

The police chief had given orders to police officers to not hesitate to shoot any perpetrator who resisted arrest. There were, according to the article, in total 200,000 officers who received this order. In addition to the high death toll, the police also arrested nearly 2,000 people. One of the concerns Amnesty International has raised, according to the article, is that there has been a low level of accountability for officers involved in shooting or detaining people. Amnesty International therefore called on the National Human Rights Commission and the National Police Commission to immediately conduct thorough investigations of shootings or detentions.

According to the article, a major spike in shootings occurred in Jakarta and Palembang when the security forces engaged in operations to clear the streets of crime one month before the games. The article therefore suggests there was a correlation between an increased police presence and shootings and that without proper accountability or investigations, there are questions about whether the use of force exceeded the limits of human rights and rule of law.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)



Source: “Di Balik Kemeriahan Asian Games 2018, Polisi Tembak Mati Puluhan Orang (Behind the Excitement of the 2018 Asian Games, Police Shoot Dead Dozens of People),” *Tagar News*, 20 August 2018. <https://www.tagar.id/di-balik-kemeriahan-asian-games-2018-polisi-tembak-mati-puluhan-orang>

Apparently, according to Amnesty International Indonesia, the police shot dead more than 70 people in operations to eradicate street crime in various cities throughout Indonesia ahead of the 2018 Asian Games. For the sake of security and the smooth running of the Asian Games, National Police Chief Tito Karnavian ordered police officers not to hesitate to shoot at perpetrators who resisted when officers were arrested. To secure the 2018 Asian Games, as many as 200,000 personnel were deployed by the police. The police arrested nearly 2,000 people and detained 700 of them for street crime.

Although the intention of the police was to secure the 2018 Asian Games, a number of criticisms still are levied on the police.



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Thailand Acquires Chinese Submarines

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 September the excerpted article under military news for the Chinese language website *sina.com* discussed a new deal between China and Thailand for China to manufacture a S26T submarine. It will be built by the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) in Wuhan and is expected to be delivered by 2023. The article noted that although Thailand has traditionally been “a traditional ally of the United States,” this deal is another example of growing ties between China and Thailand that have accelerated since 2014.

The article contextualized Thailand’s purchase in terms of geopolitics. It notes, for example, that Vietnam has acquired Kilo-class submarines from Russia and that Singapore and Malaysia also have submarines. The article considers Vietnam to be a rival of Thailand and suggested that the Vietnamese view China as assisting Thailand to build its “second South China Sea fleet” that can undermine Vietnamese regional interests. The only small submarines that Thailand had acquired prior to the deal with China were part of World War II compensation from Japan, but they have since been retired.

The article acknowledges how Thailand’s new government in 2014 first considered purchasing submarines from Germany, but only after that did not work out did the government consider purchasing them from China. Indeed, what made China’s bid attractive to Thailand is that the price is more reasonable than submarines from other countries, while the quality of Chinese submarines is also improving.

The article also recognizes that this deal cannot be divorced from other trends. With Thailand as a new client, and Pakistan as a long-time client of China when it comes to submarines, China is becoming one of the major exporters of submarines in the region. However, the article indicates that the export to Pakistan of the S20P submarine has been delayed, or even called off, according to Western media. Nevertheless, the article indicates such reports are only the product of speculation and encourages readers to continue to pay close attention to the deal with Pakistan. Indeed, according to the article, that deal would warrant as much excitement as the current deal with Thailand. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Although Thailand has always been a traditional ally of the United States, it has been strengthening cooperation with China in all areas since 2014.”



“Naval Ensign of Thailand flown at RTNHQ.”

Source: Xiangyod, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naval_Ensign_of_Thailand_flown_at_RTNHQ.jpg, CC-BY-3.0.

Source: “中国出口泰国S26T潜艇开工 (China’s export of the S26T submarine to Thailand has begun),” *sina.com.cn*, 11 September 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2018-09-11/doc-ihicyfw8568153.shtml>

On September 4, a Chinese S26T submarine that was sold to Thailand was officially celebrated in Wuhan. The Thai Navy Commander went to the scene to launch the project and give a speech. Although Thailand has always been a traditional ally of the United States, it has been strengthening cooperation with China in all areas since 2014. Vietnamese media has since claimed that China is helping Thailand to build a “Second South China Sea Fleet.”

In 2014, the Thai military government came into office and finally launched an international bid. In July 2016, the Thai Defense Minister announced that he would purchase three submarines. On May 5, 2017, [China] officially signed the agreement.

In 2017, the chief designer of China’s conventional submarine said in an interview that China’s latest conventional submarine has surpassed the Russian “kilo-class” submarine, and its tactical indicators rank among the best in the world.

It makes sense that now that the work on the S26T for Thailand has started, there is no reason why the S20P for Pakistan should not start. Is there a problem? Previously, Western media claimed that the deal between China and Pakistan was called off. However, this should be considered speculation.

If the work starts on the S20P for Pakistan, it will require a grand opening ceremony like when the work on the S26T for Thailand started.... One can only wait for more news!



South Korea Launches New Submarine

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles from South Korean newspapers have reported the launching of a new submarine by South Korea. This submarine is a first for the South Korean navy as it is capable of launching ballistic missiles and it marked the first time a submarine was designed and built locally without foreign assistance, except for certain component parts. The submarine is being launched against the backdrop of the ongoing talks with North Korea as South Korean President Moon Jae-in spoke at the launching ceremony days before his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. President Moon used the address to state his policy of “peace through power,” but in one news article the writer questions the president’s judgment on being present at the launching of a weapon, which North Korea could take as a threat against it, days before the summit. Economic factors were given as President Moon’s main reason for attendance at the ceremony. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stedry)**

Source: “Korea launches 3,000-ton homegrown submarine,” *The Korea Herald*, 14 September 2018. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180914000687>

“This is a national strategic weapons system capable of responding to all threats, and it will help strengthen the Navy’s defense capabilities.”

The new 83.3-meter-long, 9.6-meter-wide submarine capable of carrying 50 crewmembers is equipped with six vertical launching tubes capable of firing submarine-to-ground ballistic missiles and can operate underwater for 20 days without surfacing, officials explained.

Source: Ahn Byung-Yong, “문재인 대통령 “힘을 통한 평화는 우리의 흔들림 없는 안보전략 (President Moon Jae-in “Peace through power is our unwavering security strategy),” *Hankook Ilbo*, 14 September 2018. <http://daily.hankooki.com/lpage/politics/201809/dh20180914161009137450.htm>

“We will not stop our path to peace if we have a strong military and defense force together,” Moon said at the opening ceremony of the “Doosan Changhongham” at the Daewoo Shipbuilding Marine Okpo Shipyard in Gyeongnam Province on the same day.

“But peace is never given by itself,” Moon said. “We must build and protect ourselves.”
President Moon said, “In April, the government designated seven regions including Geoje and Tongyou as industrial crises and employment crisis areas and urgently organized a 1.2 trillion won additional budget to support regional economic revitalization and replacement / complementary industries.

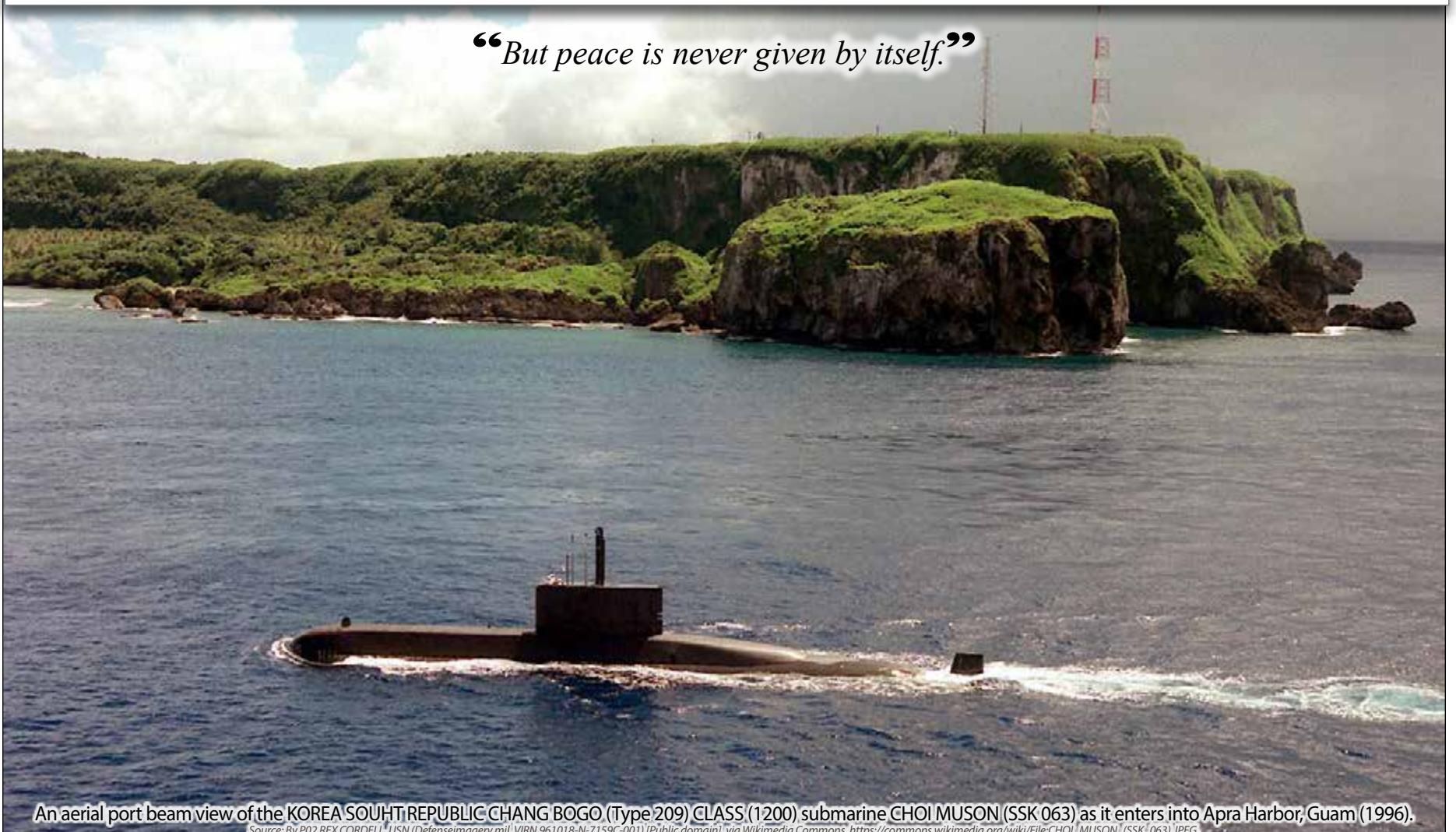
Source: ““北 치명적 전략무기’ 진수식에 文대통령 왜 갔나? (Why did President Moon attend the launching ceremony of a strategic weapon deadly to the North?),” *Donga Ilbo*, 14 September 2018. <http://news.donga.com/BestClick/3/all/20180914/92005138/1>

It is quite unusual that President Moon attended the submarine launching ceremony, which could be called a national strategic weapon in North Korea, ahead of next week’s inter-Korean summit.

It was reported that there was some controversy inside the presidential office due to the situation. It is because North Korea may accept it sensitively ahead of Pyongyang summit.

Finally, considering the recent economic situation, President Moon’s took the difficult step before the summit.

“But peace is never given by itself.”



An aerial port beam view of the KOREA SOUTH REPUBLIC CHANG BOGO (Type 209) CLASS (1200) submarine CHOI MUSON (SSK 063) as it enters Apra Harbor, Guam (1996).
Source: By P02 REX CORDELL, USN (Defenseimagery.mil, VIRN 961018-N-7159C-001) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CHOI_MUSON_\(SSK_063\).JPEG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CHOI_MUSON_(SSK_063).JPEG)



The Future of Korea's Military

OE Watch Commentary: Kim Myong-sik, a former editorial writer for *The Korea Herald*, published the accompanying excerpted opinion piece for his former employer on his concern for the future state of the armed forces of South Korea. In it he laid out his reasons for his concern, which fall into two main areas: the reducing of standards, including the service time, for recruits, and the failure of the senior military leadership to properly look after the affairs of the military. Mr. Kim expressed concern that new recruits would not be trained to deal with hardships as he was while serving in the 1960s. He also expressed concern for the planned reduction in the service time for recruits combined with the planned reduction in the overall size of the South Korean military. Mr. Kim criticized the senior leadership for their failure to care for the soldiers leading to outside interference in the military, for arguing with each other during a live broadcast at the National Assembly, for being subservient to political power, and for failing to speak against the shortening of the length of service for recruits. He also called for the elimination of exemption from active duty service for men who win at international competitions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stedry)**

Source: Kim Myong-sik, "Deepening worries over future of armed services," *The Korea Herald*, 12 September 2018. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180911000855>

"Sweat in peacetime saves blood in war," drill sergeants shouted to us young recruits many years ago. Maybe they still use those same words, but compulsory military service in the 1960s really meant a lot of sweat, from both physical and mental hardships.

... soldiers spend a much shorter time in the military service now. Recruits joining the Army in June 2020 will be discharged in December 2021, as the mandatory service period will be cut back to just 18 months... Moreover, the existing defense reform plan envisions reducing the total troop strength of the three armed services to 520,000 by 2022 from the present 640,000.

Song Young-moo, the 20th defense chief since the democratic reform of 1987, was replaced after 13 months in office, during which he did little to increase public trust in the military at a time of a highly volatile security situation or establish firm discipline in the officers community.

Deplorable disarray in the command environment was dramatically shown to the public when Minister Song and senior officers of the MSC labeled each other liars during a hearing on the martial law controversy at a National Assembly standing committee broadcast live.

However, it is regrettable that the military's own negligence in the protection of soldiers' human rights invited interference by an outside activist...

The undeniable facts are that our soldiers' individual combat capabilities are declining while high-ranking officers are subservient to political power rather than resolutely maintaining independence from it with professionalism.

We are deeply sorry there is no voice of opposition from our generals against the absurd government plan to shorten the compulsory service period despite the foreseen decline in the youth population, while they know too well the damage it will do to our defense posture.

Our defenders nowadays save a lot of sweat in their service life. My drill sergeants were right in their warning against an easy military life. Our government and military authorities, please do everything to ensure that not much youthful blood is shed in a time of real fighting.

"Our defenders nowadays save a lot of sweat in their service life."



South Korean soldier in DMZ (2012).

Source: By Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, D. Myles Cullen (originally posted to Flickr as: [1]) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_Korean_soldier_in_DMZ.jpg.



South Korean Special Forces in the UAE

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the South Korean newspaper, *The Korea Herald*, reported that an opposition lawmaker is taking issue with the presence of a South Korean Special Forces unit in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The lawmaker, Rep. Kim Jong-dae, expressed his concern that the unit could be drawn into the conflict in Yemen as the UAE is fighting alongside Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels. He compared the presence of South Korean forces in the UAE as being the same as US forces in South Korea, where those forces can automatically be drawn into a conflict due to their presence. Rep. Kim is calling for the immediate withdrawal of the unit, which is providing training to the UAE forces and made his comments in the context of the 550 Yemeni asylum seekers that have requested entry into South Korea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stedry)**

“People in the UAE understand that the Akh unit assumes a similar role to those played by US forces stationed in South Korea during the Cold War.”

Source: Yeo Jun-suk, “S. Korean Special Forces in UAE a ‘trip wire’ in Yemeni civil war: lawmaker,” *The Korea Herald*, 6 September 2018. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180906000816>

A South Korean Special Forces unit dispatched to the United Arab Emirates has become a “trip wire” in the ongoing Yemeni civil war, an opposition lawmaker said, calling for the unit’s immediate withdrawal from the region.

....Rep. Kim Jong-dae of the minor Justice Party said that the 150-member Akh Unit could automatically be drawn into the UAE’s fight against rebel forces in Yemen.

“Special Forces dispatched to the UAE will become automatically involved in the conflicts,” said Kim. “People in the UAE understand that the Akh unit assumes a similar role to those played by US forces stationed in South Korea during the Cold War.”

United States Forces Korea has deployed army units close to the border region with North Korea as a show of its commitment to the defense of South Korea.

Given that these forward-deployed units are likely to be the first target of North Korea’s military attacks, their presence has assured South Korea that the US will honor its pledge to come to the country’s aid in the event of a war.

The lawmaker said he would oppose a motion to extend the dispatch of the Akh unit. The government has submitted the motion to the National Assembly, and most lawmakers support the measure. The motion is likely to be put to a vote within the year.



Korean and American Soldiers serving together as members of the Coalition in Afghanistan (2004).

Source: By Sgt. 1st Class Sandra Watkins-Keough [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korean_and_American_Soldiers_serving_together_as_members_of_the_Coalition_in_Afghanistan.jpg.



Saudis Seek Pathway to the Arabian Sea

OE Watch Commentary: Yemen's easternmost province of al-Mahrah is vast, arid and sparsely inhabited. Believed to be rich in untapped energy and mineral resources, the province is one of the few areas of Yemen that has prospered during the current conflict (largely as an entry point for goods from neighboring Oman). According to the accompanying excerpted passages from Arabic-language news sources, recent actions by Saudi Arabia suggest that gaining a foothold in al-Mahrah may now be one of the kingdom's priorities in Yemen.

Al-Mahrah and the neighboring Yemeni province of Hadhramout have long been of strategic interest to Saudi Arabia, given their potential role as conduits for Saudi oil exports to bypass the Straits of Hormuz. The first accompanying passage comes from an April 2018 study published by the *Abaad Studies and Research Center*, a Yemeni think tank. It notes that while Saudi (and UAE) leaders have long coveted al-Mahrah's ports, conditions for the Saudis to enter have only recently become favorable. Ironically, this is partly due to local concerns that the UAE, Saudi Arabia's key partner in the Arab Coalition fighting in Yemen, would seek to control the province as it has done with other parts of Yemen.

As noted in the second passage, from the news website *Rai al-Yaum*, Saudi Arabia sought to "create a land corridor" to reach al-Mahrah's ports in the 1980s but was rebuffed by the socialist government of South Yemen. It tried again following Yemeni unification in 1990, but was turned down by Ali Abdullah Saleh. Finally, the government of Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, which is nominally in control of the province, has given Saudi Arabia "tacit approval" to deploy forces in al-Mahrah. Yet the impact of Hadi's "tacit approval" only goes as far as his writ, which in al-Mahrah is mostly limited.

Al-Mahrah is run by local councils and tribal leaders, many of whom are distrustful of Saudi presence in their communities. In mid-August 2018, contractors began setting up Saudi military outposts on the coast of al-Mahrah. Local residents forced the work to stop at four of them, according to the excerpted article from Qatar's *al-Sharq*. A journalist from al-Mahrah posted photographs of one of these sites, which "was on private land belonging to one of the residents." At another location, "residents complain that a military site prevented them from grazing their camels around the site and fishermen cannot fish on that side of the sea because it is a prohibited military zone."

Seeking to win over the local population, Saudi Arabia has unveiled various "reconstruction" projects in the province, despite the fact that al-Mahrah "has not been hit by a single shell during the war," as the accompanying article from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid* notes. Gaining a foothold in al-Mahrah, the author hypothesizes, may now in fact be of greater importance to Saudi Arabia than defeating the Ansar Allah Movement (the Houthis). Even more, he surmises, the Houthis may have suddenly become useful to Saudi Arabia, as "their presence may provide cover for the Saudi desire to redraw the Yemeni map to achieve the hidden strategic objectives of the war." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

هل يريد الخليج الانتصار على إيران أم لديه أطماع في اليمن؟
 "Does the Gulf Seek Victory Over Iran or Does it Have Ambitions in Yemen?" *Abaad Center*, 14 April 2018. <http://www.abaadstudies.org/news-59778.html>

In its third year of military operations in Yemen, Abu Dhabi does not appear to be interested in the Houthis, especially since their fight was - since the beginning - an excuse to establish a military presence in southern Yemen. The only interest of the United Arab Emirates is to control 2,000 km of the Yemeni coast, the central pillar of Abu Dhabi's plan to become an energy superpower, pursuing this goal relentlessly, instead of negotiating over joint use of ports and investments in the country's energy infrastructure.

Saudi Arabia, for its part, sent special military forces - not related to the Arab Coalition - to al-Mahrah, benefiting from concerns by the neighboring state of Oman and allied tribes from al-Mahrah of UAE forces entering the province and concerns of armed clashes between Oman and the Emirates, which are historical enemies. Preliminary information says that there is a Saudi campaign of nationalization among the people of al-Mahrah, similar to the UAE nationalization program in Socotra, and a previous nationalization program in al-Mahrah by Oman.

Riyadh is seeking to build an oil port in Mahrah, on the Arabian Sea coast. This is the dream of Saudi Arabia, allowing it to breathe south onto the Indian Ocean, without worry about Iran's threats to the Strait of Hormuz. Five years after the transformation of Kharkhir province in Najran, southern Saudi Arabia, into a store of crude oil and the evacuation of all its inhabitants, it is possible to extend an oil pipeline and establish a port in al-Mahrah faster and cheaper than to do so in the port of Mukalla, which was part of Saudi Arabia's old strategy. A presence on the Arabian Sea would also help Riyadh stop the flow of smuggled weapons into its territory via Yemen. The negatives of this oil project would be continued Iranian threats, as the pipeline will pass near the border with Iranian-ally Oman, whereas if the port were in Mukalla the pipeline would go through the territory of Yemeni tribes which are loyal to Saudi Arabia.

Source:

المهرة خبر خير... تلاحم قبلي ومقاومة جديدة للنفوذ السعودي
 Mona Safwan. "Al-Mahrah: Good News... Tribal Cohesion and New Resistance to Saudi Influence," *Rai al-Yaum*, 8 September 2018. <https://goo.gl/ALNGhi>

Not only is language preserved by tribes of al-Mahrah, but also the Arab traditions that appear to be a stumbling block in the face of attempts at foreign domination by the Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sought to counter the popular rejection with official cover...

This Saudi project in al-Mahrah is very old. Since the 1980s, the kingdom has tried to create this land corridor since the days of southern socialist rule, and following unification during the era of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and today after the war under President Hadi... South Yemen rejected this before unification, as well as Yemen after unification during Saleh's reign. Unfortunately, the Hadi government has given it tacit approval.

With the alliance between the authority of President Hadi and Saudi Arabia, there appears to be a preliminary official approval but a popular rejection... what is the political and military justification for the Saudi military presence or the [Arab] coalition to restore legitimacy?

In al-Maharah there are no rebellious tribes, no militias, no extremist groups, no Houthis, not even al-Qaeda, which differentiates it from all other Yemeni provinces to the north and south.

(continued)



Continued: Saudis Seek Pathway to the Arabian Sea

“...The larger question regards whether the continuation of war and the accumulated chaos in the north and south is a situation that does not displease the Saudi...”

Source: السعودية تنشي 15 موقعا عسكريا في المهرة

“Saudi Arabia Establishes 15 Military Sites in al-Mahrah,” *al-Sharq*, 25 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/rkRzcr>

Local sources in the Yemeni province of Al-Mahrah confirmed that the Saudi forces operating within the Arab alliance in Yemen have established 15 military sites along the border with the Sultanate of Oman, while angry residents of the province have thus far stopped four of them from being built, according to the website Al-Mahrah Post.

A Yemeni journalist revealed the military sites being built by Saudi Arabia in the province of Al-Mahra in eastern Yemen. He also highlighted local reactions opposed to Saudi intervention in the province, which they described as an occupation. The Yemeni journalist Yahya al-Sawari published a picture of one of the areas in the Directorate of Masilah, in the province of Al-Mahrah.

He said: “This is a military site, being set up by a contractor on behalf of the Saudi forces, before local residents stopped the construction, as it was on private land belonging to one of the residents. It is considered a grazing area, and is also close to houses... About 15 military sites have been established by the Saudi forces. These sites are spread over the coastal districts of the province... In the district of Sayhut, the coastal area of Dhurfat, the residents complain that a military site prevented them from grazing their camels around the site and fishermen cannot fish on that side of the sea because it is a prohibited military zone.”



Source:

أنبوب النفط وميناء المهرة صفقة قرن سعودية

“Oil Pipelines and al-Mahrah Port: Saudi’s ‘Deal of a Century’,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 22 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/LJ9gqs>

From Shabwa to Hadramout and even to al-Mahrah, these Yemeni areas, more than half the size of this country, have long been an old and renewed “Saudi dream area” to create a sea port for the Kingdom through Oman or Yemen. This would give it an alternate route for exporting oil in light of the crisis with Iran. During the war it has led since 2015, Saudi Arabia has sought to divert attention from the east of Yemen, particularly al-Mahrah, and it has taken very cautious steps there. However, events in this province bordering the Sultanate of Oman have once again raised the question of what Riyadh wants in Yemen, and why when war is going on north and south reconstruction projects are launched in al-Mahrah, which has not been hit by a single shell during the war. The larger question regards whether the continuation of war and the accumulated chaos in the north and south is a situation that does not displease the Saudis...

The development has been accompanied by an intense crisis over al-Mahrah following Saudi Arabia’s entrance with its full military and political weight, through a series of steps by extending bridges of influence to local communities in the province and sending Saudi forces to al-Mahrah’s vital areas, including border crossings and the airport, despite local rejection since the first moment at the highest level of local authority...

The province is Muscat’s strategic depth, at a time when the Saudi military presence at least seems to be a provocation to the tranquility of the province, which did not know the existence of the militants of Ansar Allah (the Huthis), as well as to the Omani neighbor which is historically concerned with Saudi moves on its border with Yemen. This reinforces the restrictions taken regarding imports via the border crossing with Oman (Shihen and Sayfat) and the prohibition of several items from entering, all the way to a 100 per cent tax hike on imports...

“The main idea is to open a sea channel from the Arabian Sea, along the Omani and Yemeni borders, and extending into the Kingdom through the Empty Quarter, the second largest desert in the world, which occupies the south-eastern third of the Arabian Peninsula”...

In light of the various data that confirm the existence of Saudi economic and strategic objectives in the east of Yemen, questions arise about why Riyadh is working on these goals in the absence of a strong Yemeni state and without support from or coordination with the Yemeni side, if this were to benefit both parties... and [questions about] whether the Houthis are a military threat requiring all of these years of war, or if in fact their presence may provide cover for the Saudi desire to redraw the Yemeni map to achieve the hidden strategic objectives of the war, given all the information mentioned above.

Iranian Private Sector to Assist in Rebuilding Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: More than seven years of civil war have largely destroyed Syria. As the Syrian Army and its outside supporters reconsolidate control over Syria—or at least those portions of the country not held by Syrian Kurds who have not targeted Assad directly—discussion has begun to turn toward reconstruction. The UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia has estimated that it will take \$388 billion to rebuild the country. While it is unrealistic that the international community will offer that degree of support, there is an active debate in many Western governments about whether contributing to reconstruction rewards Bashar al-Assad’s regime for the damages it caused or whether corruption in the Syrian government will enable Bashar’s regime to siphon off aid or channel away from towns and cities in which the opposition was active.

In the accompanying excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency*, Defense Minister Amir Hatami suggests that the Islamic Republic “is ready to assist” with reconstruction in Syria. That the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is already so involved in construction explains the irony of the Defense Minister promising the support of the private sector. Hatami’s signaling of Iranian involvement in Syria’s reconstruction also suggests that the Islamic Republic plans to double down on its involvement in Syria if the civil war ends with Assad victorious. That he does so against the backdrop of continuing demonstrations in Iran with regard to the state of the Iranian economy highlights the importance that Syria holds for the Islamic Republic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“We have stood alongside the Syrian people and government to fight the terrorism.”

Source: “Bakhsh-e Khasusi Iran baraye Bazsazi Suriya Amadegi Darad (The Iranian Private Sector is Ready to Rebuild Syria),” *Fars News Agency*, 26 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/W6X58J>

General [Amir] Hatami, at a press conference in Tehran, said the Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to sustainable security and the preservation of the territorial integrity of the countries of the region and stated, “For 40 years, the Islamic Republic has had good relations with Syria in all fields, and this country [Syria] stood alongside Iran in the imposed [Iran-Iraq] war, and we have stood alongside the Syrian people and government to fight the terrorism, and we will continue in this way.”

He stated that these successes and victories, in the framework of the bilateral ties between the two countries and at an important political level, in cooperation with the forces of the resistance and the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic, overcame a major regional plot and conspiracy, and he said, “Congratulations to the Syrian Defense Minister and the leaders of the two countries, and to both the governments and nations of Iran and Syria.”

The Minister of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Iran said the people of Syria are a single entity regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds.... Amir Hatami stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its high capabilities, is ready to assist the Syrian people and the Syrian government in the field of reconstruction, said: “The Islamic Republic also has a high level of defensive capabilities and can help Syria to expand its military and equipment.”



More than seven years of fighting have destroyed much of Syria's civilian infrastructure. Here, a street scene in Aleppo.

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Flickr) [OGL (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/1/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syria-two_years_of_tragedy_\(8642756918\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syria-two_years_of_tragedy_(8642756918).jpg).



Deepening Russian Cultural Influence in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted passages detail how Russia is using education as a “soft power” tool to deepen its influence in Syria. The first two, from the Arabic-language website of *RT*, report on a group of eight Syrian boys who have begun studying at the Institute of Railway Forces and Military Communications, part of the Khroulyv Military Academy of Logistics and Transportation (KMALT) in St. Petersburg. The program was established under a “permanent agreement” signed by Russia and Syria, whereby “a new batch of Syrian students will be enrolled at the beginning of each new academic year.” According to Olga Kovitidi, a Crimean representative in the Russian parliament who sits on the Committee on Defense and Security, within ten to fifteen years the Syrian army will have a core of Russian-trained officers “who have undergone the same military education as their Russian counterparts.” These officers, she predicts, “will become the future elite of the Syrian Arab Army.”

The bilateral agreement allows Syrians to study in Russian military academies free of charge “provided they have a good level of Russian,” which a growing number of Syrians do. The third passage, from *al-Jazeera*, notes that the demand for learning Russian continues to grow in Syria. Russian fluency has become a highly marketable skill, and many Syrians are embracing Russia’s “cultural invasion” given the associated employment and educational opportunities it brings. The first-ever Russian-curriculum school in the Middle East is set to open in Damascus this year (though classes will be taught in Arabic).

Russia’s deepening influence in Syria is often in competition with Iranian efforts to gain leverage (see: “Iran and Russia Compete for Influence in Syria,” *OE Watch*, May 2018; “Russia and Iran Compete for Syria’s Phosphates,” *OE Watch*, June 2018). As noted in the fourth accompanying passage, published in the Syrian opposition news site *Sada al-Sham* and translated into English by *The Syrian Observer*, friction between the Syrian government’s two allies “sometimes manifests as a military clash or an assassination or the securing of an economic investment from the Assad regime.” Far from the headlines, though, “There is an attempt by each party to penetrate Syrian society religiously or culturally.” How this competition plays out will have important consequences for Syria and the region as a whole. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...They will become the future elite of the Syrian Arab Army...”

Source:

التحاق أول دفعة من التلاميذ السوريين بالمدارس العسكرية الروسية

“First Batch of Syrian Students Joins Russian Military Institutes,” *RT*, 16 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/H7aRN4>

Eight Syrian students arrived in the Russian city of St. Petersburg and began preparing to enroll in various Russian military schools. A Syrian government source confirmed the news, pointing out that there is a permanent agreement, under which a new batch of Syrian students will be enrolled at the beginning of each new academic year. “The development of highly professional military officers in Russia is a good investment for the future and security of Syria,” said Olga Kovitidi, a member of the Federation Council and chair of the International Military Technical Subcommittee. “They will become the future elite of the Syrian Arab Army.” The senator also expects the Syrian border, within 10 to 15 years, to be protected by highly trained and prepared Syrian officers who have undergone the same military education as their Russian counterparts. Syrian students are expected to start their first lessons in Russia at the beginning of September, as part of a recent agreement between Syria and Russia, allowing Syrian children to study free of charge in military schools, provided they have a good level of Russian.

Source:

أول دفعة من الأطفال السوريين تلتحق بالأكاديمية العسكرية في سان بطرسبورغ

“First Batch of Syrian Youths Join Military Academy in Saint Petersburg,” *RT*, 1 September August 2018. <https://goo.gl/4KTMwa>

The first group of Syrian children began the new school year at the Institute of Railway Forces and Military Communications of the Military Academy of Logistics and Transportation in St. Petersburg.

Deputy Defense Minister Dmitry Bulgakov said during his visit to the Institute today that this is the first experiment of its kind and is the implementation of the decision of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to start teaching Syrian students in all Russian military educational institutions, including those that specialize in the preparation of officers.

Source:

القوة الناعمة للحليف الأول... سوريا تتحدث الروسية

Sulafa Jabbour. “Soft Power for the Top Ally... Syria Speaks Russian,” *al-Jazeera*, 18 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/Ci5vuk>

An option to study Russian was established in the literature department of Damascus University four years ago, which was neither the first nor the last chapter of the Russian “cultural invasion” of Syria. Not only did Russia intervene militarily on behalf of the Syrian regime three years ago, but it has also directed its attention toward that which might give it a more long-lasting influence in Syrian society...

According to statements by ministry officials to Syrian media, there are 170 schools offering Russian, distributed across most Syrian cities, using about 100 teachers from Syria who have mastered the language. The number is expected to rise in the coming school year, which begins at the start of September...

Ahmed Meftah, 45, who teaches Russian at a private academy in Damascus... does not think that Russia has intervened directly to impose its language in Syria, but that Syrians generally have started to love the language of their country’s ally, and have independently decided to learn it, especially with the growing opportunities and university scholarships in Russia.

Source:

مرصد الإفتاء في دراسة جديدة الضربات والملاحقة الأمنية تدفع التنظيمات التكفيرية إلى اللجوء إلى الإرهاب العائلي كتنكيك للتجنيد والانتشار

“The Cultural Frontlines for Russia and Iran in Syria,” *Sada al Sham* via *The Syrian Observer*, 9 August 2018. http://syrianobserver.com/EN/Features/34604/The_Cultural_Frontlines_Russia_Iran_Syria

Some believe there is a struggle for influence between Iran and Russia, which sometimes manifests as a military clash or an assassination or the securing of an economic investment from the Assad regime. However, another feature of this competition has become clear. There is an attempt by each party to penetrate Syrian society religiously or culturally. This has been illustrated by the opening of schools connected with Husseinayahs or a church or a French or Russian language institute.



Normalization of Turkey and KRG Relations

OE Watch Commentary: The regional dynamics and Turkey's relations with the Iraqi government play a role in relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Turkey's relations with the KRG were at their lowest point preceding the Kurdistan Independence referendum on 25 September 2017, because of Turkey's objection to Kurdish independence. The accompanying excerpted article, from the pro-government think tank *Seta Foundation*, provides insights into the evolution of Turkey-KRG relations since the referendum.

According to the article, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani's attendance at Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's inauguration signaled that Turkey and the KRG are likely to reevaluate their relations. It seems the results of elections in Iraq have played a role in the normalization of Turkish and KRG relations. According to the author, Kurdish political parties, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), will likely play a central role in forming the next Iraqi government. Therefore, inviting Prime Minister Barzani to the inauguration and trying to normalize relations with the KRG might have been Turkey's plan to have influence in the formation of the government through these Kurdish parties. It remains to be seen if good relations with the KRG will give Turkey an upper hand in its relations with the Federal Government of Iraq. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: "Emrah Kekili, "Turkiye-IKBY İlişkilerinin Geleceği: Geçmişin Gölgesinde Geleceği İnşa Etmek (The Future of Turkey-KRG Relations: To Build Future in the Shadow of the Past)," *setav.org*, August 2018. https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2018/08/209_Turkiye_IKBY.pdf

The KRG [Kurdistan Regional Government] wants to normalize its relations with Turkey. While Turkey closely follow the changing dynamics in the region and Iraq, [it] will also reevaluate [its] relations with Erbil...

While Ankara clearly objected to the [Kurdish Independence] referendum, it also sided with Baghdad and Tehran against the administration in Erbil. After the referendum, Turkey did not recognize any other authority in Iraq besides Baghdad... It severed its relations with Erbil. However, inviting the KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to the President's inauguration put the future of Erbil-Ankara relations on the agenda...

The KDP's position in the process of forming a government in Iraq will be an important parameter in the future of Iraqi politics. As a result, all sides in Baghdad will try to get the KDP-PUK alliance on their sides... in this case, the nature of Ankara's relations with Erbil will be more important for Iraqi politics...

As Ankara rebuilds its relations for short and long terms with Erbil, it will take Baghdad's sensitivities into consideration. As it was mentioned, since the Kurdish political parties have turned into important actors, Baghdad will also take Erbil's attitude into consideration. Ankara building good relations with Erbil will provide Turkey with a better hand to play.

“While Turkey closely follows the changing dynamics in the region and Iraq, [it] will also reevaluate [its] relations with Erbil.”



Pre-referendum, pro-Kurdistan, pro-independence rally in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (2017).

Source: By Levi Clancy [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pre-referendum,_pro-Kurdistan,_pro-independence_rally_in_Erbil,_Kurdistan_Region_of_Iraq_10.jpg.

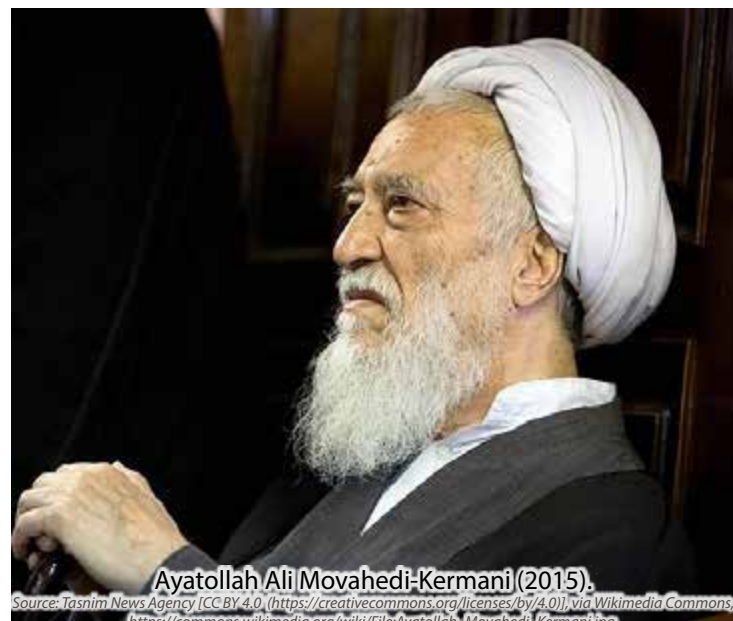


The Range of Iranian Missiles

OE Watch Commentary: When the Iranian government negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which became United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, it sought to draw a line between Iran's nuclear program and its ballistic missile program. While critics of the JCPOA identify the lack of constraints on ballistic missiles as a flaw, Iranian diplomats have sought to assuage that it exists only for defensive purposes and that Iran would self-limit ballistic missile productions to those with a range under 1,200 miles.

For years, Iran's clerics have preached sermons undercutting these diplomatic assurances, as illustrated in a recent article from *Defa Press*. By delivering his remarks at the weekly Friday sermon in Tehran, in which capacity he was speaking on behalf of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Movahedi-Kermani suggested that Iranian missiles are geared predominantly to target both American interests in the region and Israel. That Movahedi-Kermani spoke about American bases but did not differentiate between Israeli military targets and cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa suggests that, to the Iranian regime, all Israeli targets are legitimate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Your enemies have weapons and bases but, because they do not have God, they will fail.”



Source: “Niru-haye va Tajhizat-e Amrika-ye dar Tiras-e Mushakha-ye Irani Hastand (American forces and equipment are within range of Iranian missiles),” *Defa Press*, 24 August 2018. <https://goo.gl/ELrFe5>

Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Movahedi Kermani, in the Tehran Friday prayer sermon that was held in the Mausoleum of Imam Khomeini this week, regarding the necessity of believers to maintain their piety, said, piety and good virtue solves the problems in human life, and whomever has piety, God makes his bad deeds good and increases his rewards.... The Friday Prayer leader said that, according to the Imam [Khomeini], peace be upon him, America could never do anything right, and added, “Your enemies have weapons and bases but, because they do not have God, they will fail.” He continued, “The leader of the revolution has made many statements in this regard, that America cannot attack us. These statements were factual because the leader wanted those who fear America to understand that they will never be able to engage with us, and there will never be a war.”

Ayatollah Movahedi Kermani reiterated, “Trump is angry at the useless expenditures made in the region, and it is one of their policies that they want to receive the price of security.” He argued the Americans will not dare to attack Iran because they know what would come next and said, “There are thousands of forces in Syria and Lebanon alongside missiles which can fly over Israel and destroy Tel Aviv or Haifa.”

The Tehran Friday Prayer leader said, “Today, Iran is at the helm of Israel and even the tiniest sting by Israel or the United States will lead to very bad consequences for them... The same missiles worry them and they don't have a comfortable sleep... because today tens of thousands of American forces the Persian Gulf and Persian countries are within range of Iran's missiles.”





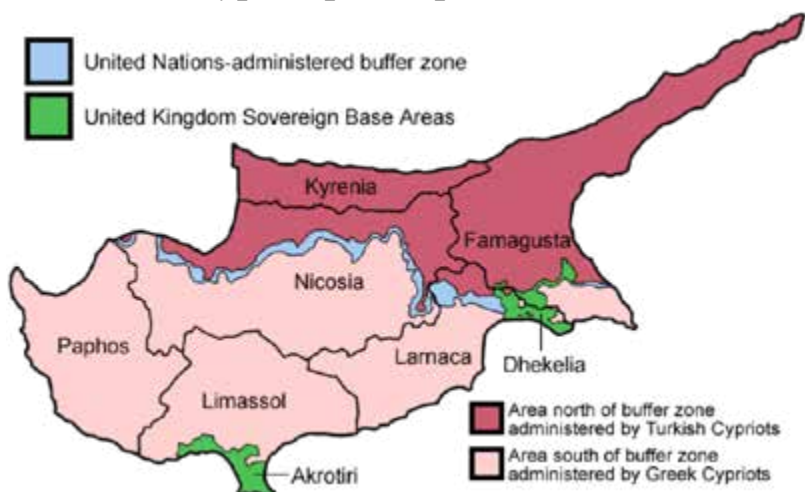
Turkey to Establish Naval Base in Cyprus

OE Watch Commentary: The Mediterranean Sea continues to be on Turkey's radar, especially after the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves and an increased presence and attention of other countries as a result of the Syrian crisis. The Turkish Naval Forces Command submitted a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommending the urgent establishment of a permanent naval base in Cyprus. The accompanying excerpted article, from the pro-government Turkish daily *Yenisafak*, supports the decision of urgently establishing a permanent base in Cyprus.

According to the passage, there are several reasons why Turkey plans to establish a naval base. First, "western powers" including the United States, Britain, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Canada, Portugal, Greece, and Denmark have increased their military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean using the Syrian war as pretext. Second, the Greek administration of the Republic of Cyprus has been trying to establish control over the Eastern Mediterranean energy fields by cutting deals with other countries to curb Turkey's ambitions over energy resources. Third, the vast energy reserves, worth billions of dollars, have the potential to reduce Turkey's energy dependence. Finally, the Eastern Mediterranean "is a key route in world trade and energy traffic" including Middle Eastern and Central Asian oil transportation routes.

As the article states, Turkey's objectives of establishing this base are to safeguard its interests as well as those of "Northern Cyprus" and to ensure the sovereign rights of the latter. The base will enable Turkey to take military measures against hydrocarbon explorations that the Greek administration grants to other countries without the consent of Turkey and "Northern Cyprus" (whose sovereignty is only recognized by Turkey). Turkey also hopes that the base will give it an upper hand in the Cyprus peace process talks. Finally, the base will reduce the response time of any military or humanitarian actions Turkey may take in the region and deter other actors from posing a danger to the stability of the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

"The base will enable the protection of Northern Cyprus' sovereignty as well as facilitate and fortify Turkey's rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, preventing the occupation of sea energy fields, and strengthening Turkey's hand in the Cyprus peace process talks."



Map of the districts of Cyprus, named in English.

Source: By Golbez [CC-BY-SA 2.5 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>), GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons.

Source: Kiymet Sezer, "Adaya'ya acil deniz üssü (The island urgently needs a naval base)," *Yenisafak*, 28 August 2018. <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/adaya-acil-deniz-ussu-3392187>

The Eastern Mediterranean is one of the most critical regions of the world in terms of both energy and military security. Almost all the nations are here. The most vital security threats to Turkey intensifies in the region. Turkey urgently needs to establish a comprehensive naval base in the TRNC [Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus].

Turkey has engaged in preparations to protect its sovereignty as various countries boost military deployments in the Mediterranean using the Syrian war as an excuse, as the Greek administration of the Republic of Cyprus splits energy reserves. In this context, the Turkish Naval Forces Command submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that Turkey should establish a naval base in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

...The base will enable the protection of Northern Cyprus' sovereignty as well as facilitate and fortify Turkey's rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, preventing the occupation of sea energy fields, and strengthening Turkey's hand in the Cyprus peace process talks...

The Greek administration of the Republic of Cyprus is working to establish control over the Eastern Mediterranean energy fields.

It is cutting deals with all countries except Turkey, namely Israel, in order to limit Ankara's naval authority...

Actors have already started to take sides in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is of critical importance because of its energy reserves worth billions of dollars. The area is also significant because it is a key route in world trade and energy traffic.

Turkey has continued to voice a strong stance against violations in the Eastern Mediterranean on various platforms and has prepared a precautionary plan.

...The island of Cyprus is at the center of oil and trade routes as it stands out with its presence on the energy basin in the Eastern Mediterranean. The island controls access to the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean.

Cyprus... controls the transportation routes of Middle Eastern and Central Asian oil, which constitutes more than half of the world's petroleum.

As a result, Turkey has prepared precautionary measures to implement in the face of any issues that may arise regarding this strategic location in the following years.

...A Turkish naval base in the area will ensure the safety of the people of Northern Cyprus and show once more that Ankara stands by the island. The naval base will allow Turkey to protect its rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The base will contribute greatly to military precautions taken against the maritime jurisdiction declared by the Greek administration of the Republic of Cyprus, the deals it is dishing out, and the hydrocarbon exploration grants it is allowing by ignoring Turkey and Northern Cyprus.

...A Turkish base in the region would reduce the response time for military and humanitarian action...it would quell efforts by other actors to stir unrest.



Commander of Iranian Armed Forces: Khamenei is the Ultimate Authority

OE Watch Commentary: That Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, is also the commander-in-chief of the Iranian armed forces is nothing new. As Mohammed Bagheri, chief of the Armed Forces General Staff states in the accompanying excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency*, Article 110 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic makes clear that the Supreme Leader has that role and that he can hire and fire military commanders from both the regular army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). What is interesting, however, is that it seems Bagheri felt the need to remind the Iranian military that they must follow the orders of the Supreme Leader - apparently new public rhetoric.

Regardless, as the Islamic Republic nears a transition in leadership—Khamenei is 79 years old and has had prostate cancer—the fear that the IRGC could defy the religious leadership, if not stage an outright coup, is growing among ordinary Iranians. Elsewhere in his speech, Bagheri offered advice to commanders and personnel to ensure that they act as a “soldier of *velayat* [Islamic guardianship as enshrined by the supreme leader],” act in a revolution manner, demonstrate piety, reject the temptation of wealth, and be “merciless” as they confront enemies foreign and domestic.

This illuminates the subject of what motivates the IRGC as an entity and individuals choosing to join it. While Iranians and outside analysts regularly describe factions within Iranian politics, seldom is factionalism among the IRGC as recognized, even though it is clear that it is not ideologically homogenous. Anecdotally, some IRGC members are true believers in the Islamic Republic’s revolutionary ideology, while others join the IRGC for the privileges. Bagheri is reminding them of the proper motivation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Sardar Mohammad Bagheri in Great Prophet Wargame (2016).

Source: Tasnim News Agency [CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sardar_Mohammad_Bagheri_in_Great_Prophet_Wargame_in_April_2016_by_tasnimnews_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sardar_Mohammad_Bagheri_in_Great_Prophet_Wargame_in_April_2016_by_tasnimnews_(cropped).jpg).

“The Armed Forces...are under the command and control of the Supreme Leader.”

Source: “Niru-haye Mosleh Tabegh Ghanun-e Asasi taht Farmandahi Rahbari Nizam Qarar Darad (The Armed Forces Act according to the Basic Law under the Command of the Supreme Leader),” *Fars News Agency*, 25 August 2018. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13970603000274>

Gen. Mohammed Bagheri, chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, said that according to a recent decree by the Supreme Commander of Armed Forces about managing the Armed Forces vis-à-vis the Leadership; that is, how the Leadership manages the Armed Forces, a statement on “the Status of the Armed Forces” has been address to commanders, officials, managers and staff of the armed forces.

The text of this statement is as follows:

...The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran...while recognizing the separation of powers, states that the Armed Forces, in accordance with Article 110, are under the command and control of the Supreme Leader, and that during the 40 years of the Islamic Revolution, there have been numerous sacrifices on the part of the army, law enforcement, and Basij, but the military has always occupied a special place for the leadership...



Radicalization and “ISIS Networks” in Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: Some in Turkey believe that if only harsh security measures are implemented without examining factors which lead to radicalization, preventing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or ISIS-like radical organizations emerging in the future is highly unlikely. The accompanying excerpted article from the Turkish and Kurdish news agency *Mezopotamyaajansi* is an interview with Turkish journalist Doğu Eroğlu, who just published a book entitled *ISIS Networks: Radicalization, Organization, and Logistics* in Turkey. In the interview, Eroğlu reveals the structure of ISIS in Turkey and how it organizes and recruits in different localities in the country.

Eroğlu's book is based on open sources, Turkish court records on ISIS members who were put on trial, and interviews with ISIS recruits, family members, and some other individuals from the cities where ISIS has the most organizational structure and those who have witnessed increased radicalization in their cities. The findings pose a greater concern for Turkey, because of the increasing trend of radicalization. It seems the Salafi and Jihadi networks have roots all over Turkey, though in some cities more than others. Turkish cities, including Gaziantep (which borders Syria), Konya, Adana, and especially Istanbul and Ankara are the stronghold of what the author calls “Turkish ISIS.” These cities have continuously sent recruits to Iraq and Syria and in many cases, ISIS members have gone back and forth between Turkey and Iraq or Syria. Eroğlu states that among the networks in Turkey, the network in Gaziantep has carried out attacks in Turkey.

When it comes to ISIS networks and recruitment strategies, the article states that ISIS members first established their networks through familial relations then expanded from their immediate environment. For example, when a family member is recruited, then that individual recruits other relatives and friends. Currently, it seems all Salafi or other radical elements are experiencing an ominous silent period in Turkey. The author provides suggestions to decision makers and citizens of what to do when faced with another wave of this. As Eroğlu suggests, they might be planning their next move, whether it be a wave of attacks in Europe, Turkey or in the Middle East. One thing seems to be certain: the radicalization and recruitment process seems to continue without any break, despite ISIS losing successive battles in Iraq and Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“Until the next move is determined, these [Salafi] communities will try to continue their existence through organizing their social networks without staying under the radar of security forces.”

Source: Metin Yoksu, “DAİŞ’i inceleyen Eroğlu: Selefi grupları hiç olmadığı kadar genişledi ne yapacaklarını bekliyorlar (Eroğlu who researched ISIS: Salafi groups has expanded as ever, and they are waiting for what to do next),” *Mezopotamyaajansi*, 18 August 2018. <http://mezopotamyaajansi12.com/tum-haberler/content/view/32222>

Doğu Eroğlu who researched and wrote a book on ISIS’ organization structure in Turkey drew attention to the ever growing expansion of the base of the Salafi groups with the participation of those who have returned from Syrian war. “What those Salafi groups will do has turned into a big question mark. These [ISIS] communities will continue to organize until the next destination is clear,” he said.

Journalist Doğu Eroğlu has published a book named ISIS Networks published by İletisims Publishing on how ISIS is organized in Turkey... He obtained information for his book by talking to the families of ISIS members. Eroğlu investigates how ISIS has organized in Turkey and whether ISIS has completed organizing in Turkey. Eroğlu pointed out that the end of ISIS in Syria and Iraq did not [automatically] eliminated Salafis and he has told the Mezopotamia Agency which unit [of ISIS] carries out the organization’s actions...

For the organization’s presence in Turkey Eroğlu chose the term “Turkish ISIS.” Among the domestic networks, only the Gaziantep structure staged attacks on Turkey and ... individuals from Adiyaman tied to the Gaziantep cell. From the moment it was founded, [the Gaziantep structure] acted with an objective of staging attacks inside Turkey... and commenced its attacks in May 2015...therefore, I was not able to contact individuals from this network. I was only able to speak with them as they were in preparation for the actions within Turkey that commenced in May 2015, after this action I did not get a chance to contact them because the structure was made up of specialized people working towards a specific goal.

There was not any evidence showing ISIS military training camp inside Turkey...

While ISIS is not maintaining its presence as it did at the height of Syrian Civil War, the elements that formed this organization continue independently [in Turkey]...they still continue as Salafi communities...

During the Syrian Civil War [ISIS] acted more independently in Turkey...

Family connections seems to be the number one method of choice for organizing and [recruiting]... In Turkey, in the past, global jihadi movements were connected through [some] civil society organizations... However, over the course of the Syrian Civil war, it did not organize its structure through any formal organization... rather it used social spaces such as informal praying spaces it created in shops, shared spaces in the neighborhoods, tea houses, and in the vicinity of [certain] bookstores...

With those who returned from the [Syrian Civil] War, these [Salafi] communities] have continued to expand as ever even as the chances of Islamic State being successful have declined...

However, where the global jihadi movement’s next stop will be depends on whether the movement’s future representatives would be able to establish control over land or not; that’s being able to provide a hope of a new lifestyle to its followers. This will determine the future of Salafi communities. Until the next move is determined, these [Salafi] communities will try to continue their existence through organizing their social networks while staying under the radar of security forces



Turkish President Announced 48 Defense Projects

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after his inauguration to be Turkey's first President under the executive presidency that he designed, announced a 100 Day Action Program. The program has several projects, of which the most significant is to be carried out by the defense industry. The accompanying excerpted article from *millisavunma.com* (or *nationaldefence.com*), a non-governmental website dedicated to publishing news on the Turkish defense industry, highlights some of the projects that the Turkish President announced.

The passage quotes President Erdogan stating 48 projects out of 400 will be related to defense and carried out by the Turkish defense industry. The projects vary in scope, from unmanned aerial vehicles to mass production of the Turkish ALTAY tank. This focus on the defense industry has been on the Turkish agenda for some time now. A day does not pass without news about a new project or a new product that the industry is launching. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“... in the past 5 years every incident we experienced showed the importance of defense industry projects.”

Source: “Savunma Sanayii Başkanlığı’nin Yürüttüğü Projeler (Projects being carried out by Undersecretariat for Defense Industry),” *millisavunma.com*, 3 August 2018. <http://www.millisavunma.com/news/savunma-sanayii-baskanliginin-yurutugu-projeler/>

Under the auspicious of Presidential vision, a list of national products and plans, some of which were announced by President Erdogan, was published. These plans will shape the future of the National Defense Industry and will be implemented by the Undersecretariat for Defense Industry.

President Erdogan announced that “in the past 5 years every incident we experienced showed the importance of defense industry projects. I give importance to defense industry projects. In our program 48 out of 400 projects belong to defense industry. I closely follow every one of them. These projects consist of laser weapons, satellite and satellite launch projects, developing unmanned aerial vehicles, rockets and missiles, helicopter engines and fighter jets. We are establishing Turkey’s space agency. We are expecting the delivery of defense industry projects such as missiles and a precision guidance kit that TAF [Turkish Armed Forces] needs. We are opening a space technologies optic systems research center.”



Bayraktar TB2 UAVs (2015).

Source: By Bayhaluk [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_UAVs.jpg.



Morocco Grows Military, Reinstates Obligatory Service

OE Watch Commentary: The Moroccan cabinet recently passed a bill reinstating military service in the country, 12 years after it was abolished by a government decree. Once the bill is approved by the nation's parliament in October, the law will require one year of service from both men and women aged 19 to 25 (with the usual exemptions for medical issues and educational pursuits). The reinstatement of military service is generally tied to ongoing problems of youth unemployment, criminality and political protests in Morocco's north. The first accompanying excerpt, from *The Arab Weekly*, cites a Royal Palace statement linking service to the improvement of younger adults' "integration into the professional and social life." The article cites a Moroccan academic who endorses the change, arguing that military service "will convey citizenship, civil values and social cohesion, which the youth massively lack."

The new policy may also have regional implications. The second passage, from the Arabic-language website of the popular Moroccan news source *Hespress*, highlights reactions from the Polisario Front, an Algeria-backed movement which has sought Western Saharan independence from Morocco for several decades. Tensions between Morocco and Polisario leaders has been on the rise since May 2018, when Morocco accused Iran of supporting Polisario. According to an anonymous Polisario official cited in the article, Morocco's reinstatement of military service is "a form of covert escalation" that "undermines the efforts made by Horst Kohler, the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy" and "is a clear indication that Rabat is not serious about a peaceful settlement to the issue of the [Western] Sahara."

Spanish media also reported on the change in Moroccan law. The third passage, from the conservative Spanish daily *ABC*, contextualizes the reinstatement of military service within a broader program of military modernization. The article highlights increased Moroccan military expenditures and details the weapons systems being acquired, while attributing this expansion to "the arms race with its neighbor Algeria, which has nearly tripled its military budget in ten years." The article cites a Spanish military analyst who considers Morocco and Algeria - where obligatory military service is already in place - to be locked in a "struggle for regional leadership," despite their overlap in various security and defense organizations. While there is nothing new to Moroccan-Algerian competition, their ongoing military upgrades and the injection of Iran into their strategic perspectives are noteworthy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"...The strengthening of the Moroccan armed forces responds in large measure to the arms race with its neighbor Algeria."

Source: Saad Gerraoui. "Morocco brings back compulsory military service but details are scarce," *The Arab Weekly*, 2 September 2018. <https://the arabweekly.com/morocco-brings-back-compulsory-military-service-details-are-scarce>

Morocco abolished compulsory military service in 2006. The revival of the policy is aimed at improving younger adults' "integration into the professional and social life," a statement from the Royal Palace said... Sociologist Soumaya Naamane Guessous said she favoured reinstating military service because it would allow the mixing of social classes as well as rural and urban citizens... "The military service will convey citizenship, civil values and social cohesion, which the youth massively lack."... Another sociologist, Abdelkrim Belhaj, said requiring military service was part of an effort by the state to mobilise the youth to be more involved in the country's life. The decision to reinstate the military service came at a time violence and school dropouts among the young people are high. Every day, Moroccans post videos and photos of theft and other crimes, depicting sense of insecurity in the streets.

Source: تجنيد شباب المغرب يثير قلق البوليساريو .. والجزائر تفضل الصمت
"Conscription of Young Moroccan Males Worries Polisario... While Algeria Remains Silent," *Hespress*, 21 August 2018. <https://www.hespress.com/orbites/402809.html>

With extreme apprehension, the Polisario Front has been monitoring the Moroccan government's decision to reinstate compulsory military service... "The Moroccan decision is a form of covert escalation 28 years after the signing of a ceasefire"... "The Moroccan step undermines the efforts made by Horst Kohler, the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy, who has called on the Polisario and Morocco, as well as observers, to attend a round of negotiations next October"... "Injecting unemployed youth into battle will undoubtedly have disastrous consequences to regional stability and security. Morocco's announcement of obligatory military service is a clear indication that Rabat is not serious about a peaceful settlement to the issue of the [Western] Sahara."

Source: Manuel Trillo. "Marruecos refuerza su poderío militar con alta tecnología (Morocco reinforces its military strength with advanced technology)," *ABC*, 2 September 2018. https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-marruecos-refuerza-poderio-militar-alta-tecnologia-201809020239_noticia.html

Morocco is reinforcing its military on land, sea and air. In the past ten years, its defense expenditures have increased by 50% and are expected to continue growing until 2022. This will allow it to purchase a large number of combat vehicle, F-16s and frigates. It even intends to acquire a submarine. Add to this the launch of its first spy satellite and, some weeks ago, the reinstatement, after twelve years, of obligatory military service.

The strengthening of the Moroccan armed forces responds in large measure to the arms race with its neighbor Algeria, which has nearly tripled its military budget in ten years. According to Juan A. Mora Tebas, a specialist at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (IEEE), "The modernization of its security and defense inventory is part of the struggle for regional leadership with Algeria, without forgetting that both countries are members in joint security and defense organizations." Linked to this rivalry is the always-tense issue of the Sahara, where Algerians are traditional supporters of the Polisario Front... The IEEE expert prefers to speak of "modernization" or "renovation" rather than "rearmament," given that most of the new purchases will substitute obsolete equipment.



Defense or Domination? Building Algerian Power With Russian Arms

by Andrew McGregor

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/defense-or-domination-building-algerian-power-with-russian-arms/>

OE Watch Commentary: Algeria is undertaking a major arms acquisition program designed to enhance its regional standing and make it difficult for terrorists or insurgent forces to operate on Algerian territory. To this end, it has become a major purchaser of Russian arms that are often battle-proven in Syria. When it was initially formed in 1962 from anti-colonial guerrilla units, the Algerian People's National Armed Forces (Armée Nationale Populaire—ANP) possessed only captured or abandoned French arms as well as some Chinese and Egyptian equipment. Within a year, the Soviet Union began offering weapons on credit at favorable terms. By the time of the Soviet collapse, some 90 percent of the ANP arsenal was Soviet in origin. With the military gear came thousands of Soviet advisors.

To reestablish Russia's role as Algeria's main arms supplier, President Vladimir Putin canceled a Soviet-era Algerian military debt of \$4.7 billion dollars in 2006, in return for an Algerian commitment to buy \$7.5 billion worth of Russian weaponry. Aided by an upsurge in energy prices that helped fund the purchases, Algeria became Russia's third largest customer for military goods. A quick look at some of Algeria's most recent Russian arms purchases illustrates how this North African state is building a modern and capable army:

- Two hundred modernized Russian T-90SA main battle tanks were delivered to Algeria in 2016. This year, Algeria is taking delivery of roughly 300 BMPT Terminator II armored fighting vehicles.
- In May, Algeria became the fifth known purchaser of Russia's TOS-1A Blazing Sun multi-barrel mobile rocket launcher.
- Earlier this year, Russia began delivery of four regiments of the Iskander-E (SS-26 Stone) short-range mobile ballistic-missile system. Each regiment consists of 12 launchers and about 30 support vehicles.
- In a sign of the enhanced defense cooperation between Russia and Algeria, the latter field-tested the new Russian Pantsir-SM mobile anti-aircraft system in June. The Pantsir-SM is a greatly improved version of the Pantsir-S1 system, using phased-array radars for target acquisition and tracking. Algeria is expected to be a major purchaser.

Precision targeting of Algerian weapons will be much improved thanks to the ten-year agreement Algeria signed in June, allowing its military to use the Russian Global Navigation Satellite System (Globalnaya Navigatsionnaya Sputnikovaya Sistema—GLONASS). Heretofore, India has been the only other state granted use of the system.

This summer, Algeria is receiving the last of its 42 previously purchased Russian Mi-28NE Night Hunters, an all-weather, two-seat attack helicopter designed to target armor but also useful for reconnaissance and operations against ground forces. Moreover, the ANP is taking delivery of 39 upgraded Mi-171Sh SuperHip military transport helicopters, refurbished in Russia with the addition of an optronic ball, the Shturm-V precision-guided-missile system and Ataka supersonic missiles.

In September, Algiers will take delivery of its first Russian-made Project 22160 patrol vessel. Three more of the 1,300-ton ships will be built in Algeria. Other naval acquisitions include four Russian-made Project 636 Varshavyanka Kilo-class submarines, with one already delivered and another undergoing sea trials. These new submarines are an improvement on the two Project 636M Kilo-class submarines already in Algerian service and are largely intended for coastal defense.

Moscow hopes that arms sales and military cooperation agreements will bolster Russia's position in Algeria, but its goal of establishing a naval base at the port of Mers al-Kabir still appears distant. Algeria continues to try to establish some balance in its international arms purchases, but has let it be known that it is increasingly interested in technology-transfer agreements to permit the development of its own arms industry.

Algeria maintains its constitutional prohibition on military deployment outside the country and a strict policy of regional non-interference. While some of the Russian equipment is useful for counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism work, the rest seems better suited for defensive use against Moroccan, Libyan or European opponents. With Russian assistance, the ANP is now the second-most powerful military in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (McGregor)**

Source: "Algeria orders Project 22160 patrol vessels from Russia," *Defence Web*, 29 May 2018. http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51857:algeria-orders-project-22160-patrol-vessels-from-russia&catid=51:Sea&Itemid=106

Algeria has agreed to acquire one new Project 22160 patrol vessel from Russia and build another three locally...Russian defence minister Sergey Shoigu said one of the reasons for Algeria acquiring the Project 22160 was its performance off the Syrian coast...

Algeria is receiving two new Project 636 Kilo class submarines from Russia, with the first about to be delivered and the second nearing sea trials. Algeria has apparently also ordered two additional Kilo 877EKM vessels, for delivery in 2020-2022.



The African Union Diminishes Its Role in the Western Sahara Crisis

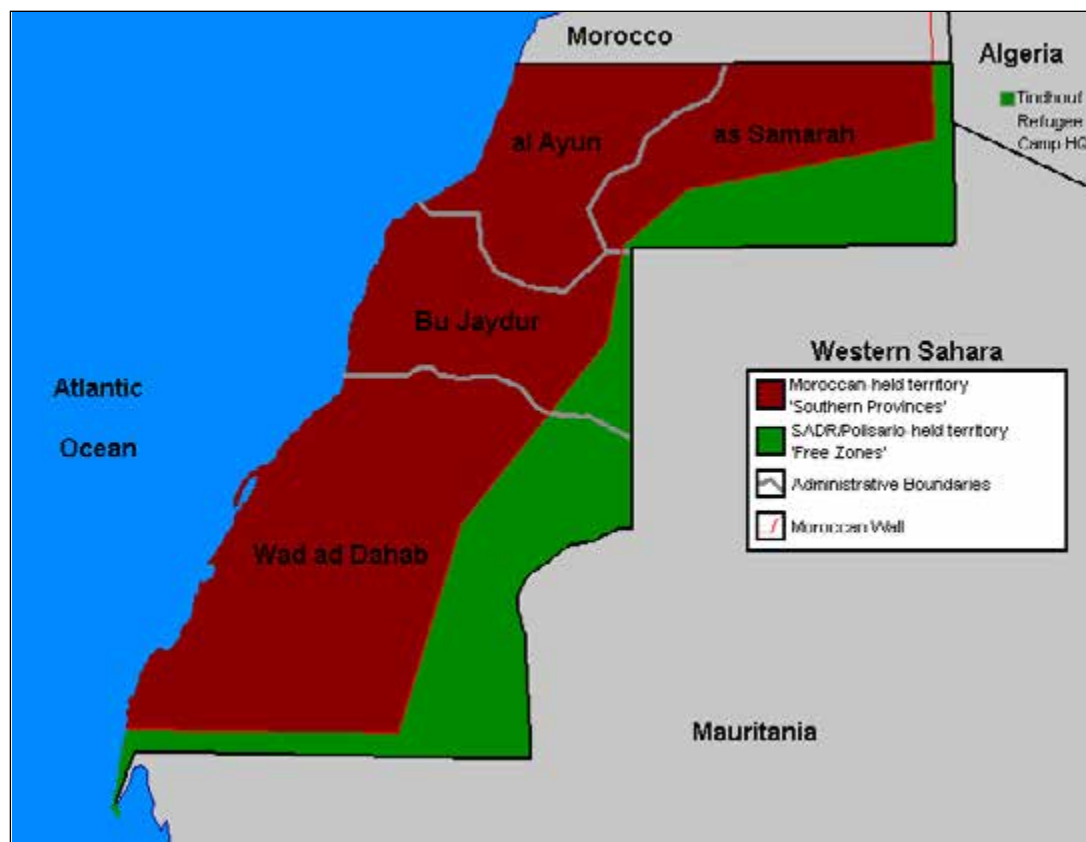
OE Watch Commentary: After many years of the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) attempting to play a major role in ending the crisis in Western Sahara, an area claimed by Morocco as well as the Polisario Front (which represents the indigenous Sahrawi people), the AU has decided to limit its efforts and instead shift its support to the UN peace process in the region. As described in the accompanying excerpted article published by the South African *Institute for Security Studies*, this is a big win for Morocco, which just returned to the AU in 2017 and has long viewed the AU-led efforts as biased, based in large measure on the AU accepting the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a member state.

Never before has the AU's PSC, which is comprised of fifteen countries, formally decided to limit its involvement in an African crisis. Indeed, since its formation in 2004, it has considered itself a major player in every major security issue on the continent regardless of whether or not there were other intergovernmental organizations or the UN trying to broker peace agreements. There is concern that with this action, the AU is setting a dangerous precedence that will cause it to back away from possible future intervention because a member state is complaining.

It could be, as the article states, that the AU's actions were to decrease the tensions between Morocco and its allies on one hand, and staunch supporters of Western Sahara, such as Algeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Angola on the other. It should be noted, though, that while SADR has such supporters, overall, less than half of AU member states formally recognize SADR's sovereignty.

It was January of this year that the AU called for joint AU and UN talks that would eventually lead to a referendum for the people of Western Sahara to decide their own fate. Less than one year later, they are calling

instead for a troika of AU officials to support the UN process, a significant downgrading of the AU's original role. The AU's decision to support the UN's efforts with regards to Western Sahara instead of taking the lead, according to the article, favors Morocco's position, which so far has been not to concede any territory. Left unanswered is whether the AU will reassert itself or continue to defer to the UN and other organizations when AU member states complain of bias as the new normal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Map of the Western Sahara.

Source: Orthuberra/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ملف:ساحرا_الغربية#/media/File:W_Sahara_Map.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

Source: Ndubuisi Christian Ani and Liesl Louw-Vaudran, "AU limits its role in Western Sahara crisis," *Institute for Security Studies* (South Africa), 11 September 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/au-limits-its-role-in-western-sahara-crisis>

The AU's decision to limit the PSC's role in Western Sahara to heads of state could negatively impact the council's work. PSC summits of heads of state take place only once or twice a year and usually discuss a burning crisis.

The UN oversaw a truce between the two sides in the early 1990s but the issue has never been resolved and tensions flare up periodically in the border regions. The AU has also asserted its role in resolving the crisis since the dispute erupted in the 1970s.

This is the first time the AU has taken a formal decision to limit PSC involvement in an African crisis. The move is a big win for Morocco, which believes the AU-led efforts are biased. The danger is that it could set a precedent for other AU member states that disapprove of AU interventions.

“This is the first time the AU has taken a formal decision to limit PSC involvement in an African crisis. The move is a big win for Morocco, which believes the AU-led efforts are biased. The danger is that it could set a precedent for other AU member states that disapprove of AU interventions.”



Mysterious Kidnappings in Lake Chad Region

OE Watch Commentary: The Lake Chad region, which includes Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon, has been host to several jihadist movements in recent years, including Boko Haram and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). As the accompanying excerpted French-language article from *RFI* notes, these two groups have been responsible for banditry, kidnapping and of course, other terrorist attacks. Yet, the article mentions that in Diffa, Niger there has been an increase in abductions by armed groups on motorcycles, who call the relatives of the abductees and usually return them for a ransom. These armed groups appear to have no relationship to AQIM or Boko Haram.

The article points to one case where an elderly lady and her daughter were kidnapped not far outside of Diffa. Evidently, the kidnappers knew exactly who they were targeting: the two hostages were, in fact, the mother and sister of the deputy of Diffa. Although the kidnapping was not resolved at the time of the article, the kidnappers had apparently requested a large ransom for the release of the two hostages.

This new kidnapping phenomenon has been especially aimed at deputies and their families and, according to the article, created a form of psychosis among local communities. They are already embattled by jihadists, but this more mysterious threat is having a psychological impact. Moreover, the article notes that such kidnappings have spread to Maradi in central Niger and even to Zamfara in western Nigeria. Although the kidnappers appear not to be linked in any way to jihadist groups and are seeking only ransoms, the inability of regional governments to curtail this threat will place growing strains on the confidence of the people in their governments to provide security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Niger: multiplication des enlèvements dans les régions du lac Tchad et de Maradi (Niger: increased kidnappings in Lake Chad and Maradi regions),” *RFI*, 7 September 2018. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180907-niger-multiplication-enlevements-lac-tchad-maradi>

This phenomenon of kidnappings of civilians for the payment of ransom has grown in alarming proportions since several weeks ago throughout the Diffa region. People armed with motorcycles run into houses or surround a village and kidnap victims. Once the bandits are away, the relatives of those captured are called by phone for the payment of the ransom. The latest case is that of an old lady and her daughter in the village of Gueskerou 35 kilometers from Diffa. The target was well chosen. The elderly lady is the mother of a deputy of the region. The search to find the two abductees has not arrived at any result yet. This new form of banditry has created psychosis among border populations in Lake Chad.

“This new form of banditry has created psychosis among border populations in Lake Chad.”



“Traders traversing the Sahel-Saharan region are feeling the impact of recent AQIM activity.”

Source: Jemal Oumar, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_conflit_avec_al-Qaïdaentra%C3%A9ne_la_hausse_des_prix_alimentaires_en_Mauritanie_\(6049012103\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_conflit_avec_al-Qaïdaentra%C3%A9ne_la_hausse_des_prix_alimentaires_en_Mauritanie_(6049012103).jpg), (CC BY-SA 2.0).



Violence in Africa: Trends and Drivers

OE Watch Commentary: Conflict in Africa today has changed since the end of the Cold War, when most of the continent's fighting was between states. Now, as described in the accompanying excerpted article published on the website of the South African *Institute for Security Studies*, conflict is generally within the states themselves. Additionally, there are a number of non-state actors, such as Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army, responsible for regional conflict. Still, since 2015 armed conflict has steadily declined, with the violence associated with militant Islamist groups, and the responses of various states to that violence, offering the strongest resistance to that downward trend.

Fatalities from armed conflict mainly occur in only a handful of African countries. From 2001-2017 those countries were Sudan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Libya. There was a spike in fatalities in 2002 from the conflict in the DRC known as the Second Congo War or the Great War of Africa, with that spike receding as the conflict wound down in mid-2003. Another spike occurred in 2013-2015, with this one driven by Boko Haram along with, but to a lesser extent, the Nigerian military's attempt to combat Islamic extremism.

Countries with large populations – Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the DRC – generally have a higher total number of fatalities from armed conflict. However, a look at the ratio of fatalities to a country's population shows that there are several countries, including CAR, Somalia, and Libya, with small populations that have an extremely high casualty burden as a result of Islamic extremism.

The article notes seven structural drivers of violence in Africa: poverty, degree of democratization, regime type, population age structure, repeat violence, the bad-neighbor effect, and poor governance. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and while all are drivers, some, such as poverty, may be a deeper but less direct driver of violence than others, such as governance. Finally, although the collective impact of some or all of these can result in a propensity towards violence, often a single event, such as Mohamed Bouazizi's decision to self-immolate on 18 December 2010, leading to the Arab Spring, is required to trigger the actual violent event.

Although there has been progress in reducing violence, much more needs to be done. Recommendations include improving governance, rapid economic development, prioritizing education, better civilian oversight of militaries, and other steps. However, as the article points out, Africa's "silence the guns by 2020" initiative may take considerably longer. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: Jakkie Cilliers, "Violence in Africa: trends, drivers and prospects to 2023," *Institute for Security Studies*, 30 August 2018. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ar-12-v1.pdf>

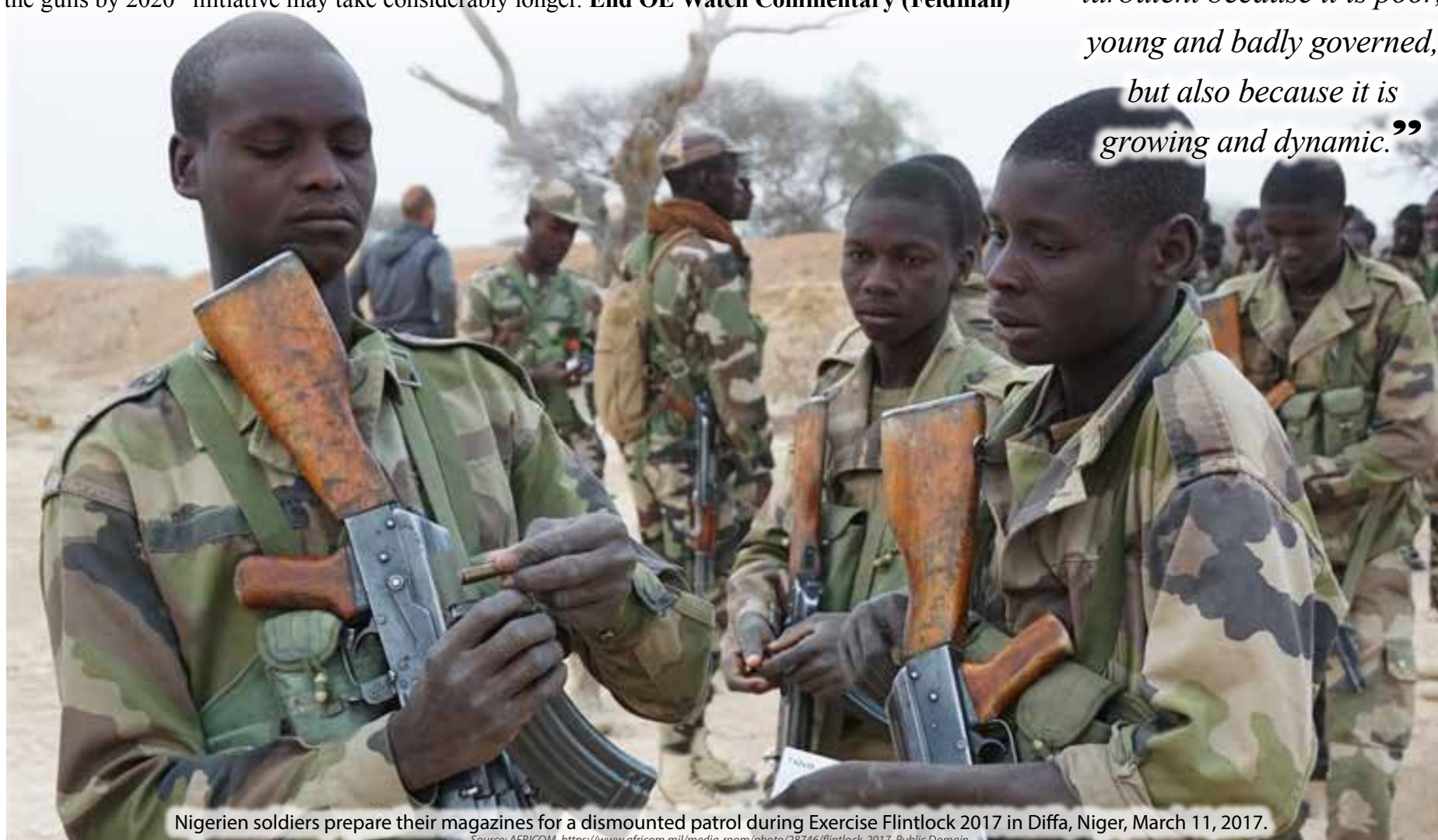
Africa will remain turbulent because it is poor, young and badly governed, but also because it is growing and dynamic.

Effective responses to violent Islamist extremism in key countries would rapidly reduce armed conflict in Africa.

Violence is changing in Africa. The ballot, not the gun, is becoming the main source of political contestation, accompanied by a shift to urban rather than rural violence.

The United Nations system needs to step up its commitment to peacekeeping in Africa as the most important, cost-effective and proven means through which to respond to conflict.

“Africa will remain turbulent because it is poor, young and badly governed, but also because it is growing and dynamic.”



Nigerien soldiers prepare their magazines for a dismounted patrol during Exercise Flintlock 2017 in Diffa, Niger, March 11, 2017.

Source: AFRICOM, <https://www.africom.mil/media-room/photo/28746/flintlock-2017>, Public Domain.



The ISIS-affiliated Boko Haram Faction Reclaims Territory

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 September the Nigerian media outlet *Sahara Reporters*, which is often critical of the government, published the accompanying excerpted article about the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-affiliated Boko Haram faction's re-conquest of the town of Gudumbali, which is located north of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri. According to the article's sources, thousands of civilians were forced to flee to other towns in Borno State after the attack in Gudumbali. This attack has therefore placed a strain on nearby towns that are receiving an influx of displaced persons.

According to the article, there are several factors that made this attack especially difficult for the Nigerian military to bear. First, the military lost several dozen soldiers in the attack and it came only weeks after more than 20 soldiers were reportedly killed in another Boko Haram raid on a military barracks in Mobbar, Borno State. Second, Gudumbali had a special symbolic significance. Earlier this year the Nigerian army erected a cenotaph in Gudumbali to honor 144 fallen soldiers who lost their lives in a battle with Boko Haram in 2015. To see the town fall back into Boko Haram's hands, even if temporarily, thus represents a hit to the army's morale. Fortunately for the military, the cenotaph was not destroyed during the recent attack.

Third, the attack in Gudumbali questions the army's ability to return displaced persons back to their hometowns. Part of the army's plan to restore stability to Borno State is to encourage people to return to their homes even though the international community questions the safety of their hometowns. The article, for example, notes that the army had recently returned hundreds of displaced civilians from the prior battle in Gudumbali in 2015 back to their towns only to see them have to flee again in this recent attack. It is evident that the town was not secure enough to receive displaced persons back to their homes yet. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



"Soldiers at war."

Source: Johnexx, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soldiers_at_war.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

“Hundreds of displaced residents who had only returned to the town a few weeks ago were fleeing their homes in Gudumbali when the terrorists attacked troops.”

Source: “Civilians, Soldiers Take Refuge In Gubio As Boko Haram Recaptures Gudumbali,” *Sahara Reporters*, 8 September 2018. <http://saharareporters.com/2018/09/08/breaking-civilians-soldiers-take-refuge-gubio-boko-haram-recaptures-gudumbali>

Boko Haram insurgents dislodged troops and recaptured Gudumbali town, the headquarters of Guzamala Local Government Area in the northern part of Borno State. Hundreds of displaced residents who had only returned to the town a few weeks ago were fleeing their homes in Gudumbali when the terrorists attacked troops. A source in Borno told SaharaReporters that many civilians and soldiers took refuge in Gubio while the insurgents raided the town.

Gudumbali is the same town where, in July, Tukur Buratai, Chief of Army Staff, unveiled a cenotaph in remembrance of the 144 officers and soldiers who fell to Boko Haram in a single swoop in November 2015.



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

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

<https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/operational-environment-publications/red-diamond-newsletter>



Nigerian Navy's Rapid Growth Includes Addition of More Fast Patrol Boats

OE Watch Commentary: A great deal of military-related news coming out of Nigeria is about the Nigerian Army, perhaps not unexpected as it is the principle force engaged in combating the terrorist organization Boko Haram. Garnering far less attention is the Nigerian Navy, which, with several thousand members, including those of the Coast Guard, constitutes one of Africa's largest navies and is responsible for maritime security along the country's Gulf of Guinea coast. As the accompanying excerpted article published on the South African website *DefenceWeb* notes, that navy is about to get even bigger with the commissioning of 16 new vessels.

Commissioned on 3 September 2018, the new additions include ten small boats and six patrol vessels. The latter include two FPB (fast patrol boat) 110's. Each FPB 110 is 35 meters long and is outfitted with two 12.7mm and one 20mm cannon. Four FPB 72's, which are about 11 meters shorter than the FPB 100's, were also commissioned. The article states it does not know what types of small boats were commissioned, but based on recent purchases deems it likely they are 9.5 meter Guardian fast patrol boats.

These latest acquisitions represent over 200 vessels of various sizes procured by the Nigerian Navy just in the past two years, including approximately 60 boats (8.2 meters in length) produced in country by Epenal. Now the navy is eyeing more fast patrol vessels for littoral waters up to the country's exclusive economic zone. The navy would also like to acquire a hydrographic vessel and landing ship to enhance its regional maritime dominance.

The maritime threats the Nigerian Navy may be called upon include piracy and attacks on strategic oil installations. That last one is incredibly important, for oil and gas constitute much of the lifeblood of the country's economy. Besides the threats emanating from domestic criminal groups against maritime oil infrastructure, there are also transnational threats, including from terrorist organizations. However, despite the commissioning of these 16 new vessels, and the fact that the navy is quite large, especially in comparison to those of some neighboring countries, there is still concern, as the article states, that a considerable deficit persists in the number of vessels necessary to meet the navy's many requirements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: "Nigerian navy commissions new vessels," *Defenceweb*, 5 September 2018. http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53011:nigerian-navy-commissions-new-vessels&catid=51:Sea&Itemid=106

The Nigerian Navy has commissioned into service 16 new vessels, including ten small boats and six patrol vessels, which will be used to enhance maritime security and protect the country's oil and gas assets. It has also revealed that more vessels are on the way.

"I must however be quick to observe that despite this commendable stride, we have barely scratched the outstanding deficit in the navy fleet," the Chief of Naval Staff added.

"For a littoral state with huge dependence on her offshore resources, maritime security is vital to the nation's well-being. Against this background of threats the entire nation would invariably be at risky situation if we do not insist on a motivated and virile navy like ours."

"For a littoral state with huge dependence on her offshore resources, maritime security is vital to the nation's well-being. Against this background of threats the entire nation would invariably be at risky situation if we do not insist on a motivated and virile navy like ours."

- Nigerian Minister of Defense, Brigadier General Mansur Dan-Ali



"24-meter multipurpose Fast Patrol Boats, are designed to carry out all typical Coast Guards."

Source: OCEA/Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:OCEA_FPB_72_MKII.jpg, CC BY 4.0.



South Africa's New Chief of Police: Concern of a "War Zone"

OE Watch Commentary: South Africa's new police chief, after looking at the latest report of crime statistics, described the country as being close to a "war zone." The murder rate, as the accompanying excerpted article from the South African website *The Conversation* reveals, is 36 per 100,000, reflecting the biggest annual per capita increase in that number since 1994. The breakdown reveals an increase of 11 percent of women murdered since last year, 10 percent for the number of girls, and 20 percent for the number of boys.

The report, which according to the article the South African authorities tried to obfuscate in an attempt to downplay crime rate increases and embellish crime decreases, had several other statistics of note. Firearms were used in 41 percent of murders, followed by knives at 31 percent and other sharp instruments at 11 percent. Some murders though were committed with items whose names are relatively unfamiliar to many Americans, including the *panga*, which is a machete, and the *sjambok*, a heavy leather whip, used respectively in 0.6 and 0.5 percent of the murders. Bottles and bottle heads were also listed as murder weapons, used 1 percent of the time.

The two main motives behind the country's high murder rate were given as gang-related and mob justice. The third highest is listed as taxi-related, reflecting in part the turf battles among taxi operators that sometimes turn deadly. Sexual assault increased on average across the country by 8.2 percent, the largest increase among the contact crimes reported. One South African province, Limpopo, even reported a 26 percent increase in this crime. Looking at the number of assaults against women as well as cases of domestic abuse reveals a particularly disturbing trend of violence against women.

The article argues that income inequality is the main driving force behind many of these crimes, citing research that it makes property crime more profitable as well as more attractive, undermines trust of social and institutional structures, and leads to feelings of frustration, hostility, and hopelessness among those who are impoverished. Thus, despite the difficulties in doing so, if the country wants to decrease its crime rate, as the article states, it must somehow find a way to reduce the tremendous inequality, one of the highest in the world, which presently exists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: "Anine Kriegler, "South Africa won't become less violent until it's more equal," *The Conversation*, 12 September 2018. <https://theconversation.com/south-africa-wont-become-less-violent-until-its-more-equal-103116>

Even the new minister of police Bheki Cele expressed shock at the numbers, describing South Africa as being close to a "war zone". He admitted that the country's police force "dropped the ball".

And, secondly, the country's leaders must address inequality. South Africa is a highly unequal society. It has one of the highest gini-co-efficients (a measure of inequality) in the world. Research shows that inequality and crime go hand in hand.

Police leaders reported that their staff numbers have gone down by 10,000 since 2010. They argued that they had 62,000 fewer police than were needed.

"Even the new minister of police Bheki Cele expressed shock at the [latest crime statistics], describing South Africa as being close to a 'war zone.'"



"On 17 May 2010 the SAPS demonstrated along with Emergency Services how efficient they will be during the 2010 World Cup. Thousands of spectators joined the parade through the streets of Sandton."

Source: ER24 EMS(Pty) Ltd/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_african_police_may_2010.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Eritrea: Why Peace with Ethiopia May Not Translate into Domestic Reforms

OE Watch Commentary: It has been dubbed “The North Korea of Africa” for its repression of the press, lack of human rights, and intentional isolation from most other countries. Eritrea, however, appears to be coming out of its shell, but as the accompanying excerpted article from *African Arguments* posits, its pursuit of peace with Ethiopia, with which it had a long running and sometimes violent border dispute, does not necessarily translate into improvements in human rights and press freedom at home. Indeed, it is possible that the end of its self-imposed international isolation may actually strengthen Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki’s repressive hand at home.

Before explaining why Eritrea embracing peace with Ethiopia and improving relations with other nations in the region may actually be counterproductive for the human rights of Eritreans, first a brief history lesson must be provided. After its 1998-2000 border war with Ethiopia, to maintain his power, Afwerki cut deals with nations that would support his repressive regime, with Qatar becoming particularly crucial during this time period. However, that relationship started to fray, and he instead developed alliances with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, signing a security pact with the latter to allow for a base to be constructed in Assab to support the Emirates’ war in Yemen.

Eritrea’s close relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE are one of the reasons the article’s author claims Eritrea may not undergo internal reform following its rapprochement with Ethiopia. Saudi Arabia and the UAE do not want to see internal instability in Eritrea, as could occur with political reforms. They are basing their interactions, as the article relates, not on principle but on self-interest, and while Eritrea having a better relationship with Ethiopia may serve their interests, a democratic Eritrea does not. With Saudi Arabia and UAE economic and political backing, along with the monetary benefits that will arise from making peace with Ethiopia, Eritrea does not have to succumb to Western pressure to reform.

The article mentions another reason why Eritrea may not undergo reform following its peace with Ethiopia...Afwerki, who has no interest in reforms and has the experience and means to crack down on internal dissent. After over two decades ruling the country, he does not appear to be making any moves towards relinquishing power. There have been articles suggesting that with Eritrea and Ethiopia finally finding peace that Eritrea would start to see some internal reforms. The reasoning behind this was that much of Afwerki’s repressive actions were explained to Eritreans as being necessary to fend off Ethiopia. However, with Ethiopia no longer an enemy, the rationale for the repression was supposed to go away, and thus the repression itself would disappear. It has not and as this article states, it is not looking likely that it will.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“In this way, Eritrea and Ethiopia’s peace can be seen as part of wider Red Sea dynamics, rivalries and interests being projected onto the Horn, which are more likely to raise tensions in an already volatile region than encourage democratization.”



Eritrean president Isaias Afewerki in joint press briefing in Asmara (2002)
Source: Helene C. Stikkel/Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaias_Afwerki#/media/File:Isaias_Afwerki_in_2002.jpg, Public Domain

Source: Salih Noor, “Eritrea: Why change abroad doesn’t mean change at home,” *African Arguments*, 12 September 2018. <https://africanarguments.org/2018/09/12/eritrea-why-change-abroad-change-home/>

Meanwhile, Afwerki has used Ethiopian hostility as a pretext for widespread prohibitions on freedoms, the banning of the free press, and the imposition of indefinite military service at home.

These patrons, however, have little interest in Eritrea undergoing reforms, which might risk its internal instability.

In this way, Eritrea and Ethiopia’s peace can be seen as part of wider Red Sea dynamics, rivalries and interests being projected onto the Horn, which are more likely to raise tensions in an already volatile region than encourage democratization.

Secondly, the reality is that as long as Afwerki remains at the helm, it is difficult to see genuine reforms happening. For a whole generation, the president has suspended Eritrea’s democratisation and cracked down on any dissenters in order to maintain his rule.



Somalia: A Fractured Nation Might Fracture Further

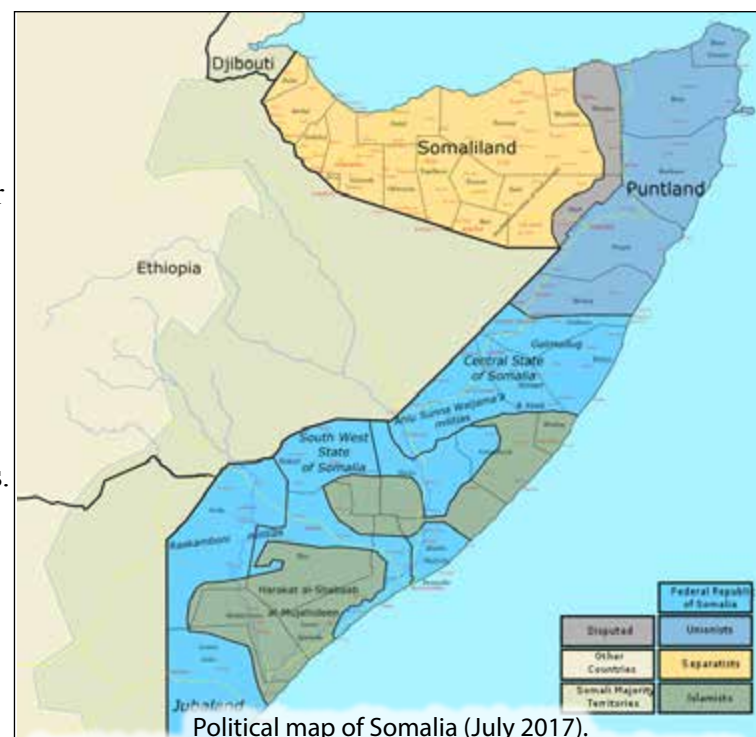
OE Watch Commentary: Somalia's government, mired in war with the terrorist group al-Shabaab while trying to fight corruption, develop the economy, and provide basic services to its populace is facing yet another challenge. As discussed in the accompanying excerpted article published in *The East African*, five regional states have announced they will no longer cooperate with the central government until their grievances – insecurity, sharing of natural resources, and interference by the federal government – are heard. Should their threat come to fruition, the country could be split into six regions comprised of Mogadishu and the five regional states. Such an action could embolden al-Shabaab to launch attacks against a splintered country.

The fracturing, as the article describes, could also possibly negate the gains made by the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). This would be for two reasons. First, there is a potential loss of territory to al-Shabaab that AMISOM fought to control. As for the second reason, AMISOM's role includes helping to stand up the Somali National Army (SNA) so that as AMISOM downsizes, which it has already begun to do, the SNA can provide security for the country. However, divisions in the country could potentially harm the SNA, especially since many of its soldiers have strong clan loyalties, making AMISOM's job of training a cohesive force that much more difficult.

Abdullahi Abdi Mohamed, chairman of a pro-government think tank, takes issue with the five regional states, stating that the central government has gone out of its way to engage them. He notes that the leaders of those five are former warlords who are finding it difficult to survive with transparent and democratic institutions. If they actually do splinter off, Mr. Mohamed feels it is because those former warlords want to maintain the status quo of a Somalia that is clan-centric.

The international community has responded to the threat of fracturing with disappointment. The World Bank has been particularly vocal, releasing a report that states political disputes and fragmentation put the country's debt relief prospects in jeopardy. There is at least one meeting scheduled to address the issues the five states want discussed, although, as the article states, it is unsure the five will attend. Thus, it remains to be seen if Somalia, already fractured by Somaliland's declaration of independence and areas controlled by al-Shabaab, can retain some semblance of unity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Somalia could be split into six regions after five regional federal states announced that they would no longer co-operate with Mogadishu until their grievances...are addressed.”



Political map of Somalia (July 2017).
Source: Nicolay Sodorov/Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia#/media/File:Somalia_map_states_regions_districts.svg, Public Domain.

Source: Abdulkadir Khalif, “Somalia in a crisis as regions pull away from Mogadishu,” *The East African*, 15 September 2018. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Somalia-in-a-crisis-as-regions-pull-away-from-Mogadishu/4552908-4761244-nx0f2r/index.html>

The five regions have not been keen on contributing troops to form a strong national army as part of the National Security Architecture that is being funded by donors.

On insecurity, political instability and last year's drought, Somalia recorded a 2.3 per cent economic growth while livestock export to the Middle East, which forms the backbone of the Somalia economy declined by 75 per cent.

Somalia could be split into six regions after five regional federal states announced that they would no longer co-operate with Mogadishu until their grievances about insecurity, sharing of natural resources and the interference by the central government in their affairs are addressed.



Mogadishu Somalia (2015).

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



Huge New Study of the Colombian War

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted reference, the Colombian military recently delivered a massive written history to the country's Truth Commission (Commission for Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition), which was established under the terms of the FARC-Government accords to look into the historic details of the country's multi-decade war. Reportedly done in fifty volumes, the document, titled *Génesis*, is an interdisciplinary study done cooperatively by the Office of the Attorney General and the Army to document the criminal activities of the FARC over time. The project has evidently been ongoing for some years. Its revelation at this time seems to be a product of the change of administration and the attendant change in administration attitude toward the FARC agreement. An additional study is also promised, according to the reportage, this one focused on the history of the ELN. For historians of the war in Colombia, this huge set of official government assertions and documentation will be of immense interest. Not stated in the reporting was when the studies will be released to the public or if there will be official translations into other languages. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) insurgents.

Source: By Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS.) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revolutionary_Armed_Forces_of_Colombia_\(FARC\)_insurgents.GIF](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revolutionary_Armed_Forces_of_Colombia_(FARC)_insurgents.GIF).

“...fifty volumes that contextualize and document the origin and evolution of the FARC.”

Source: Ariel Cabrera, “Génesis,” *Radio Santafé*, 28 August 2018. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2018/08/28/genesis-sobre-la-guerra-y-las-atrocidades-cometidas-por-las-farc-en-50-anos-entregan-ff-mm-a-comision-de-la-verdad/>

“We are talking about a report compiled in fifty volumes that contextualize and document the origin and evolution of the FARC, that is the result of an interdisciplinary study carried out by the Office of the Attorney General and the National Army of Colombia, wherein is documented perpetrations, among which are included acts of war and of grave human rights violations carried out by that guerrilla group...it details the manner in which each block [of the FARC] conducted criminal activities such as forced recruitment and abortions, among others – also identifying down to the individual leaders those responsible for the atrocities.”



Flag of the FARC-EP.

Source: by MrPenguin20, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_FARC-EP.svg, CC 3.0.

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Armed Drones in Mexico

OE Watch Commentary: Drug cartels and criminal organizations change trends to move drugs with frequency, but there are always methods that will survive despite the fact the authorities across the region are aware of their existence. For example, narco tunnels have flourished along the US-Mexico border since the early 1990s with the newest models showing the highest levels of sophistication ever seen. From South America northward, maritime trafficking of cocaine has evolved in terms of vessels used, but the method itself has existed for decades and is unlikely to disappear. The accompanying excerpted articles show how over the past few years, drug traffickers have been turning to cheaper and less risky alternatives in the form of drones.

The article from *El Universal* reports how Mexican cartels have been using drones to move small drug shipments across the border since 2010 as well as to conduct surveillance and reconnaissance. The articles from *La Prensa* and *Correio do Estado* report how authorities in Colombia and Brazil were actually surprised in late 2016 and early 2018 to see drug cartels in their own countries mimicking drones for the same purpose.

More recently, Mexican cartels are once again changing the rules of drug trafficking by armoring their drones to conduct criminal attacks. The article from *Zeta Tijuana* reports an incident that took place in July 2018 and if anything regarding drone use and its expansion in the past has come true, it is likely that other cartels in Mexico and other regions will see the value of armoring drones to conduct attacks against rival criminal groups, politicians or authorities without the risk of being arrested. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“In July of this year, an armed drone was used to attack the house of Baja California State Public Safety Secretary Gerardo Sosa Olachea in the city of Tecate.”

Source: “Narco envía droga a EU...en drones (Drug Traffickers Use Drones to Ship Drugs to the United States),” *El Universal*, 17 August 2014. <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2014/carteles-fabrican-narcodrones-trasiego-eu-1022274.html>

Mexican cartels have utilized drones since 2010. By 2012, this tactic proved to be well established as authorities along the SW border seized more than 150 drones carrying an estimated two metric tons of drugs; primarily marijuana, cocaine, and heroin.

Source: “Narcotraficantes envían cocaína a Panamá con drones: Policía de Colombia (Colombian Drug Traffickers Send Cocaine to Panama with Drones),” *La Prensa*, 17 November 2016. http://www.prensa.com/mundo/Narcotraficantes-enviando-Panama-Policia-Colombia_0_4622537754.html

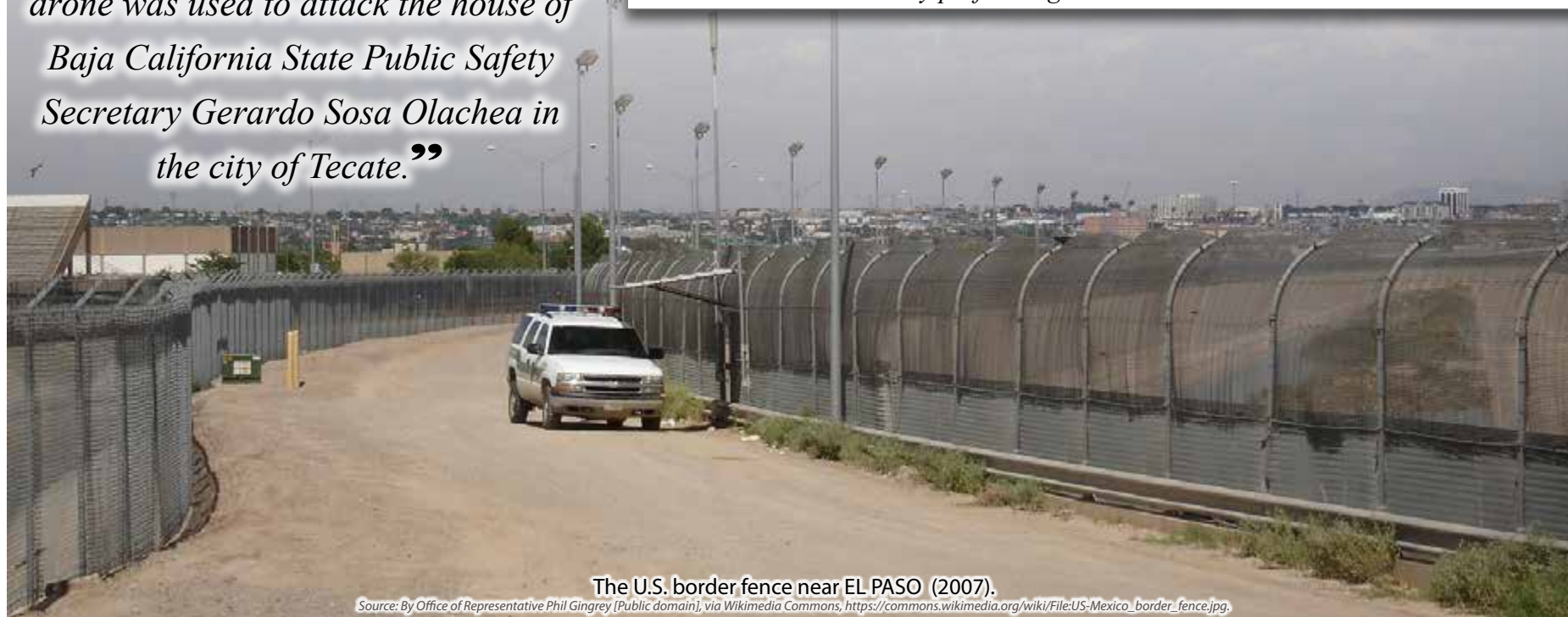
In mid-November of 2016, Colombian Police seized a drone used by drug traffickers to send a small cocaine shipment from the Colombian jungle to Panama. This represents the first case in which authorities have detected this trafficking method in Colombia.

Source: “Drone abatido pela PM próximo a presídio custa em torno de R\$ 20 mil (Drone Shot Down by Police Outside Prison in Brazil),” *Correio do Estado*, 14 January 2018. <https://www.correiodoestado.com.br/cidades/dourados/drone-abatido-pela-pm-proximo-a-presidio-custa-em-torno-de-r-20-mil/319489/>

On 14 January, 2018, Military Police shot down a drone attempting to deliver an unquantified amount of drugs to the Campo Grande prison in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Police further reported that guards noticed the drone maneuvering across the prison’s walls and decide to shoot it down but the people who were guiding the drone from a car outside the prison were able to escape. The drone was taken to the police station for an investigation and so far no one has been arrested. However, police did indicate that this method is gaining popularity in the country.

Source: “Con drones envían granadas a casa de Sosa Olachea (Armored Drones Used to Attack Residence of Sosa Olachea),” *Zeta Tijuana*, 10 July 2018. <http://zetatijuana.com/2018/07/con-drones-envian-granadas-a-casa-de-sosa-olachea/>

In July of this year, an armed drone was used to attack the house of Baja California State Public Safety Secretary Gerardo Sosa Olachea in the city of Tecate along the US-Mexico border. At least two drones were allegedly used in the strike. The first was armed with audio and video equipment and two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that did not explode after falling into the official’s yard. A second drone was seen above the house likely performing surveillance.



The U.S. border fence near EL PASO (2007).

Source: By Office of Representative Phil Gingrey [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US-Mexico_border_fence.jpg.



Jalisco New Generation Cartel Announces Arrival in Salamanca

OE Watch Commentary: A new video by the Jalisco New Generation cartel (CJNG) circulated on social media on 28 August 2018, announcing the cartel's arrival in Salamanca, a city in the Mexican state of Guanajuato. According to the accompanying excerpted article from the Mexican state news outlet, *El Sol de Salamanca*, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes—also known as 'El Mencho'—leader of Jalisco New Generation cartel issued a statement addressing the conflict between CJNG and the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel over territory in Guanajuato. He warned the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel's leader, José Antonio Yépez Ortiz—also known as 'El Marro'—that he and his cartel will be eliminated from the area. The article explains that the fight between the two cartels is over the so-called "Guanajuato Corridor," which consists of Celaya, Salamanca, Irapuato, and Leon, and extends to Los Apaseos, which borders Querétaro.

According to the excerpted article from *Vanguardia*, another Mexican state news outlet, the video is meant to not only announce CJNG's arrival in Salamanca, but also state the cartel's alleged intention of providing security to the people of the city. The video is slightly over two minutes long, in which the camera pans out for a view of a number of armed, hooded men while a narrator explains the cartel's plan to liberate Salamanca of "thieves and traitors." The video concludes with the narrator stating, "we are looking for peace and tranquility in Salamanca." **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

"In the video, he warns that the Jalisco cartel will not leave the municipality and anyone that 'works, helps or protects El Marro, will be banished not only from Salamanca, but from all of Guanajuato'..."

Source: "El Mencho asegura en video que CJNG peleará plaza de Guanajuato (In a video, El Mencho says that CJNG will fight for Guanajuato plaza)," *El Sol de Salamanca*, 28 August 2018. <https://www.elsoldesalamanca.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/el-mencho-cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-llega-guanajuato-peleara-plaza-amenaza-video-el-marro-cartel-santa-rosa-de-lima-1950705.html>

Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, El Mencho, leader of the Jalisco New Generation cartel, announced a fight for Guanajuato against the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel and warned its leader, José Antonio Yépez Ortiz, also known as El Marro, that they will be exterminated...

In the video, he warns that the Jalisco cartel will not leave the municipality and anyone that 'works, helps or protects El Marro, will be banished not only from Salamanca, but from all of Guanajuato'...

Source: "Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación anuncia con video llegada a Salamanca (The Jalisco New Generation cartel announced their arrival in Salamanca in a video)," *Vanguardia*, 28 August 2018. <https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cartel-de-jalisco-nueva-generacion-anuncia-con-video-llegada-salamanca>

A new video by Jalisco New Generation cartel circulated social media announcing their arrival to the municipality of Salamanca, Guanajuato to supposedly bring security to the population and exterminate the criminal cell led by El Marro...

'We are looking for peace and tranquility in Salamanca,' the narrator concludes; afterwards, five narco banners were placed at different points of the Guanajuato municipality, all signed by the cartel, led by 'El Mencho'.



CJNG Video.

Source: YouTube, 28 August 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NXBIFX3tt4&app=desktop>, Fair Use.



El Salvador Breaks Diplomatic Ties with Taiwan

OE Watch Commentary: On 27 August 2018, El Salvador officially severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan, opting instead to establish new ties with the People's Republic of China. This severing of ties is concerning to Taiwan for two reasons. First, it leaves the Taiwanese government with only 12 remaining diplomatic partners in the region and second, President Ing-wen claims that China is attempting to use “dollar diplomacy” in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to convince these countries to sever ties with the island nation in exchange for economic compensation as noted in the accompanying excerpted article from the *BBC*. Her statements do not seem to be far off base, as both Panama and the Dominican Republic cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in June of 2017 and May of 2018, respectively. While Taiwan maintains diplomatic ties with Paraguay and Brazil, the concern is that other countries in the region will follow suit, causing it to lose the remaining few diplomatic allies it has in Latin America and the Caribbean. At present, Taiwan's only other remaining allies in Central America are Belize, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras.

While China's actions in Latin America are being seen by governments around the world as less than favorable, Japan is particularly concerned and has not hesitated to state that El Salvador's actions could influence Japan's ties with China. According to the excerpted article from *La Prensa*, Kazuyoshi Higuchi, the Japanese Ambassador to El Salvador, believes China's break in diplomatic ties with Taiwan could be related to the impending approval of a concession for the Port of La Union and of a draft bill to create a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the eastern region of El Salvador. Although it has not yet happened, Japan has alluded to the idea that El Salvador's decision could lead to the suspension or elimination of international cooperation that Japan offers to the country. The reasons for possible suspension of existing agreements are further highlighted in the article, but in short, Japan fears that China could be looking to use the port for military purposes. Finally, the Japanese ambassador expressed concern about the possibility of a “shift in power” if China continues to establish diplomatic relations with other countries in Central America and the world, leading Taiwan to lose even more allies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Taiwan accused Beijing of pursuing ‘dollar diplomacy’ to lure away its ally.”



La Union Port Under Construction (2008).

Source: By CEPA (<http://www.puertolaunion.gob.sv/>) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puerto_La_Uni%C3%B3n.jpg.

Source: “¿Diplomacia de chequera? Por qué quedan países en Centroamérica que no rompen relaciones con Taiwán a favor de China (Dollar Diplomacy? Why are there Still Countries in Central America that have not Broken Diplomatic Ties with Taiwan in Favor of China?),” *BBC*, 22 Aug 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40264113>

Taiwan accused Beijing of pursuing “dollar diplomacy” to lure away its ally, saying El Salvador had maintained ties with Taipei for 85 years. It also said mainland China's repeated attempts to poach the island's allies were no longer just between Taipei and Beijing, but had become an issue for the whole region. Taiwanese President Ing-wen China further indicated that China is trying to use increased suppression against Taiwan to showcase its influence and strength in the region (both Asia and other regions of the world where it can exert power).

Source: “Panamá rompe con Taiwán y establece lazos diplomáticos con China (Panama Breaks Diplomatic Ties with Taiwan and Establishes them with China),” *El Pais*, 20 June 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/06/13/actualidad/1497329309_106971.html

“The government of the republic of Panama recognizes that there is but one China in the world, that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory,” the statement read. “The government of the Republic of Panama severs ‘diplomatic relations’ with Taiwan as of this day and undertakes not to have any more official relations or official exchanges with Taiwan.”

Source: “Japón condiciona cooperación (Japan puts conditions on cooperation),” *La Prensa*, 27 August 2018. <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Japon-condiciona-cooperacion-20180826-0067.html>

The La Union port concession is the issue that most concerns the ambassador since the Japanese Government helped finance its construction. He expressed that the port was intended to promote El Salvador's development and international trade. It should avoid being used for military purposes, the ambassador said... “We can't discard that possibility [of the port being used militarily],” the ambassador told La Prensa Grafica... He also warned that the port should be open to all, and the concession and licensing process should be transparent... given the option of a Chinese state company using the port exclusively to move its own goods, without accepting ships from other countries.



China's Growing Influence on the Latin American Economy

OE Watch Commentary: The People's Republic of China continues to expand its economic influence throughout Central America. The accompanying excerpted article from the centrist, *Panama Today*, quotes economic expert Rolando Gordón, who claims that China will be the “foremost commercial power” by 2030. As the article points out, China's growing economic power has induced a number of the countries in the region to break “relations with Taiwan,” and instead “seal economic ties with China.” For instance, El Salvador recently signed a diplomatic agreement with China, hoping that they would develop projects to generate significant income for the Central American country. Similarly, the article states that Panama has already signed about thirty agreements with China, some related to the usage of the Canal, as well as China's cooperation with Costa Rica, where it has helped with infrastructure and technology. The article goes on to suggest that since China “has geopolitical and commercial plans for the next 40, 50, 100 years,” it is able to take advantage of the lack of strategic planning among countries in Central America. While the deals which China makes with individual countries in the region may bring some short-term economic benefit to these Central American countries, in the long run, these projects will end up serving Chinese strategic interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wedman)**

“By 2030 it is considered that the foremost commercial power will be China, and nobody can stop that.”

Source: “Giovanna Ferullo, “Central America without a clear vision to take advantage of the growing alliance with China,” *Panama Today*, 21 August 2018. <https://www.panamatoday.com/international/central-america-without-clear-vision-take-advantage-growing-alliance-china-7643>

...China “is clear” regarding what it wants in Central America: it sees Panama as a platform to distribute its products, thanks to its ports and the facilities of a bullet train that the Asian giant plans to build in the country. “By 2030 it is considered that the foremost commercial power will be China, and nobody can stop that”, added the president of the Faculty of Economics of the State University of Panama (UP), Rolando Gordon.

El Salvador announced on Monday that it broke relations with Taiwan, considered a rebel province by Beijing, and sealed diplomatic ties with China, a decision that Salvadoran President Salvador Sanchez called a “step in the right direction.”

A little more than a year ago Panama did the same and has already signed about thirty agreements with China, which for years has had a preponderant role in the local economy, being the second most important user of the Canal, second only to the United States, and the first supplier of the Colon Free Zone (ZLC), the largest in the continent.

Costa Rica was the first country in the region to establish ties with China in 2007, and both signed a joint 2016-2020 action framework last year that identifies infrastructure, technology, and financial cooperation as priority areas.



“Official photograph of 2014 Summit of Leaders of China and of countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Source: Chilean Government, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gobiernodechile/14661316116/>, CC-BY-2.0.



How Nicaragua's Political Instability is Affecting Costa Rica

OE Watch Commentary: In 1948, Costa Rica officially abolished its military and is the only country in the region without one. The country does have security forces, including a Coast Guard to patrol its maritime space and other entities to provide internal and border security, but it is far from equipped to deal with the influx of Nicaraguan refugees currently attempting to flee that country's ongoing political crisis as the accompanying excerpted articles report. Immigration of Nicaraguan nationals into Costa Rica is nothing new, but in April 2018, what started out as protests regarding pension reform quickly unraveled into official unrest in Nicaragua.

A number of sources in the region have noted how the pension reform was quickly forgotten as President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, in an attempt to regain control internally, are using violence against citizens who speak out against the government and its policies. Nicaraguan citizens are attempting to fight back and have even pushed for early elections as indicated in the article from *La Nacion*. In response, Ortega indicated that his resignation would only cause more chaos, which further enraged citizens who face food shortages and unwarranted arrests.

Given the current political situation in Nicaragua that has no end in sight, many Nicaraguans have chosen to flee into neighboring Costa Rica. The article from *Diario Extra* discusses the situation of Nicaraguan refugees, including how more than 23,000 have looked to Costa Rica for refuge since April 2018. The article also mentions the statement from Costa Rican First Vice President and Foreign Minister Epsy Campbell, who said that the current immigration situation is worsening and that while it cannot be quite be classified as a crisis, it may escalate into one without intervention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

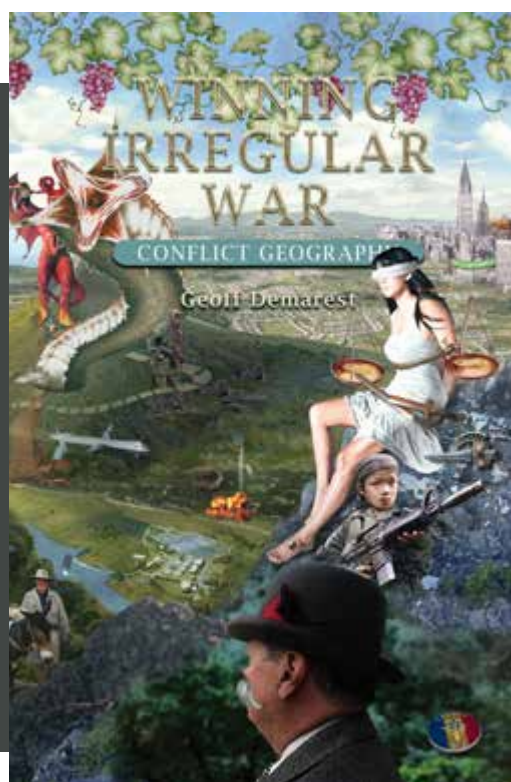
“Protesters have demanded Ortega’s resignation and early elections, but the embattled president has said he will not bring polls scheduled for 2021 forward.”

Source: “Daniel Ortega rechazó adelantar las elecciones en Nicaragua por las protestas: “Sería un factor de inestabilidad e inseguridad (Daniel Ortega Rejected Proposal to Move Up Election Dates Amid Protests in Nicaragua),” *La Nacion*, 24 June 2018. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2155828-crisis-nicaragua-protestas-violencia-muerte-daniel-ortega-entrevista>

Protesters have demanded Ortega’s resignation and early elections, but the embattled president has said he will not bring polls scheduled for 2021 forward. “The opposition told me that on 19 April that that I have to leave now”. He further stated that leaving office and holding early elections would represent a very serious precedent for the good of the country in the sense that it would open the door to anarchy in the country. A broken Nicaragua would be taken over by drug trafficking,” he added.

Source: “Gobierno desconoce cuántos nicas entran ilegalmente Campbell (Gobierno Lacks Exact Statistics Regarding the Number of Nicaraguans Entering the Country Illegally),” *Diario Extra*, 22 August 2018. <https://www.diarioextra.com/Noticia/detalle/367992/gobierno-desconoce-cuantos-nicas-entran-ilegalmente>

Costa Rican Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs Epsy Campbell announced Thursday that the government does not have exact statistics regarding the number of Nicaraguans entering the country illegally, but some reports indicate that more than 23,000 have entered since April 2018. In an attempt to provide these individuals some type of respite, Costa Rica has built two shelters to house Nicaraguan migrants fleeing the country’s violent political crisis. “What’s happening in Nicaragua is unacceptable, and it’s having direct consequences on our country. The world has to focus on Nicaragua before this situation turns into a crisis,” Campbell said.



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>



New FARC War Structure

OE Watch Commentary: The author of the accompanying excerpted blog entry, likely writing under a pseudonym, points out that the FARC-government power sharing agreement greatly restricts government options for repressing or reducing the cultivation of illicit drugs. The editorial, with what appears to be accurate information about the agreement, points out that the results are evident: a tremendous increase in illicit drug cultivation (cultivations that the Colombian government is apparently no longer to call illicit). It also notes that this new norm logically translates to better financing and greater overall power for the FARC. The excerpted reference from *La Silla* alludes to recent news that a number of senior FARC leaders, including several who had helped craft the power-sharing agreement and were poised to exercise larger political profiles, seemed to have gone into hiding. The article’s journalists did some interesting investigative work, determining who was present and absent during recent major FARC party meetings, and what regions the absentees represented within the organization. They claim to have found that most of the absent FARC leaders were from areas where the FARC military structure remained the strongest and where there was the greatest dissidence, that is, non-participation in the accords. A number of news reports have noted the significance of the FARC-controlled places for maintaining control of internal and cross-border drug smuggling routes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Ivan Marquez, a FARC Leader Gone Missing (photo circa 2016).
Source: By Sortu, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan-Marquez-GoraHerria.jpg>, CC 4.0.

“...Many more absentees are from zones where the guerrilla is strongest...”

Source: Rafael Uribe-Uribe, “Sobre la nueva estructura de guerra de las Farc (About the FARC’s new war structure),” *La Crónica*, 12 September 2018. <http://rafaeluribe.blogspot.com/2018/09/cronica-731.html>

“The Achilles tendon [of the FARC-government power sharing accord] is the part that addresses the solution of the problem of illicit cultivations, the part most intelligently negotiated by the guerrilla and the worst by the government. The FARC obtained three key concessions: prohibition of the use of Glyphosate and aerial fumigation; obligation on the part of the government to negotiate voluntary crop substitution and manual eradication with local [usually FARC-controlled] communities; classification of the crops as of ‘illicit use’ instead of illicit (which is an elemental distractor), and the kicker, that drug trafficking be declared as a ‘lesser included’ infraction in order to dissipate whatever penalties.”

Source: Juanita Vélez and Adelaida Ávila Cabrera, “La mayoría de ausentes de la Farc vienen de las zonas de disidencias (The majority of the absent FARC [leaders] come from [where there were FARC] dissidents),” *La Silla Vacía*, 10 September 2018. <https://lasillavacia.com/la-mayoria-de-ausentes-de-la-farc-vienen-de-las-zonas-de-disidencias-67865/>

“More absentees [from] where there are more dissident [FARC] units: In the epicenter of the largest dissidence, which is that of Gentil Duarte, spanning Meta and Caquetá, there is no news of nine party leaders, counting Márquez, El Paisa and Romaña. We do not know if the two things are connected or in what way. Many more absentees are from zones where the guerrilla is strongest. The majority of the absentees come from the Southern Block, which makes its presence in Caquetá and Putumayo (9absentees) and has activities in Meta, Vichada and Guaviare (7 absentees).”



Spanish-Colombian Relations and Catalonia?

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted reference from *Libertad Digital* is representative of a Spanish ‘rightist’ viewpoint regarding the recently elected administration of President Pedro Sánchez. President Sánchez is a leftist political leader. This fact by itself would logically suggest that the new Spanish government might find less common ground with the new Colombian administration of Iván Duque, which most observers categorize as less amenable to the politics of Marxist-styled political organizations than was former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. However, both the reportage and emotive content of the opinion piece hint to a potentially more consequential rift in Spanish-Colombian relations on the horizon. Two personalities, a lawyer named Enrique Santiago, and a political party leader named Pablo Iglesias, stand out in this story. Enrique Santiago is known in Colombia because he represented the FARC in the FARC-Colombian government negotiations held in Havana, and was apparently the central FARC negotiator and author of the results. He is, according to some sources, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Spain. Pablo Iglesias is known in Colombia because he is the Secretary General of another far-left Spanish political party, Podemos. Podemos, launched with money from deceased Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chávez, was instrumental in the election of Pedro Sánchez to the Spanish presidency. Enrique Santiago, Pablo Iglesias and their political apparatuses also have been closely aligned with and involved in the Catalan independence movement.

According to the accompanying excerpted reference from *El Diario*, written from a perspective much more favorable to Messrs. Iglesias and Santiago, the two are the victims of unfair, vituperative Twitter attack from former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe. As part of the Twitter attack, former President Uribe republished a recent opinion article written by Eduardo Mackenzie titled, “The secret war of Pablo Iglesias against Colombia” in which Mackenzie reports and opines on the activities of the Spanish leftists against Former President Uribe. Eduardo Mackenzie is a renowned journalist and historian. While this latest Mackenzie article may have been impassioned, it appears that he duly reported what amounts to a concerted Spanish Civil War-style left-right confrontation generated by the Spanish far left in order to support the Bolivarian parties in Latin America (The PSUV in Venezuela and the PCC in Cuba). Álvaro Uribe has been the single most important political mentor and sponsor of just-elected Iván Duque, and so it is that attacks against Uribe are reasonably interpreted as attacks against the new Colombian administration. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the communist Podemos, is ‘co-governing’ from the Parliament...”



Pablo Iglesias (photo circa 2017).

Source: By Marc Lozano, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pablo_Iglesias_2016_\(cropped_3x4\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pablo_Iglesias_2016_(cropped_3x4).jpg), CC 2.0.



Enrique Santiago, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Spain (photo circa 2010).

Source: By Izquierda Unida, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EnriqueSantiago.jpg>, CC 2.0.

Source: Federico Jiménez Losantos, El sanchismo-leninismo, con el golpismo catalán (Sanchism-leninism, with catalonian coupism),” *Libertad Digital*, 9 September 2018. <https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/federico-jimenez-losantos/el-sanchismo-leninismo-con-el-golpismo-catalan-85972/>

“What is happening now in Spain reminds us of the dumbest thing that has happened in all of the countries that have fallen under communist dictatorships: the ‘it can’t happen here’. And it happens. This week, the communist Pablo Iglesias, for many years a paid flatterer of the Venezuelan narcoterrorist regime and who is being paid by the Iranian theocracy...has proclaimed that his party, that is, the communist Podemos, is ‘co-governing’ from the Parliament....Of course, Spain is far from that situation. We are in the EU. And what good does it do us facing the worst thing that can happen to a country, that it perpetrate, with outside help, a coup d’état to liquidate the country [referring to the separation of Catalonia]?”

Source: Jesús Travieso, “Álvaro Uribe carga contra Pablo Iglesias dando difusión a un artículo plagado de bulos (Álvaro Uribe charges against Pablo Iglesias giving publicity to an article plagued with rumors),” *El Diario*, 14 September 2018. https://www.eldiario.es/rastreador/Alvaro-Uribe-Pablo-Iglesias-difusion_6_814428556.html

“The ex-president of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe, is a regular to political polemics. The latest, which he himself initiated, has smeared two Spanish politicians: the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, and the Secretary General of the PCE, Enrique Santiago. Uribe has wanted to demonstrate his rejection of both by way of an article by Eduardo Mackenzie that he has shared via Twitter, a text plagued by insults against Santiago and Iglesias. And it is filled with rumors about the family of the secretary general of Podemos.”