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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Foreground:

Iranian micro UAV, unidentified model, at an Armed Forces presentation (9/2018).

Source: Mehr News Agency [CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian_micro_UAV.jpg.

Background:

Iranian Flag over Archaeological Site - Bishapur - Southwestern Iran.

Source: Adam Jones Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/adam_jones/7424861282/, CC 2.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>.

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Military District Reform Rumored

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Svobodnaya Pressa* discusses recent rumors that the Russian Federation is considering creating more military districts. The original intent of combining military districts after the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the 2008 New Look reforms was to reduce the size of the Russian military bureaucracy. Any creation of new military districts would obviously require a large staff increase. Russia's most recent addition to the military district system was the creation of the Northern Joint Strategic Command (OSK) in 2014. Even in this case, Russia did not choose to set up a fully manned military district headquarters to provide command and control, but instead simply chose to augment the Northern Fleet for this purpose. If new military districts are added in the future, the borders of these new districts would likely align with the borders of the eight National Guard regions, as currently the National Guard and military district borders do not overlap. These spatial relationships are almost certainly maintained to facilitate command and control during times of crisis; National Guard formations and units would be subordinated to the Ministry of Defense during large-scale warfare, while Ministry of Defense formations and units would be subordinated to the National Guard during domestic insurgencies (like the Chechen conflict). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Military districts of Russia since 2016.

Source: By AlexWelens - Министерство обороны Российской Федерации Военные округа, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50166964>.

“Rumors have circulated throughout the country about the latest change of the model of the military-administrative division of Russia’s territory...”

Source: Sergey Ishchenko, “Тень Сердюкова: Хождение по военному округу (Serdyukov’s Shadow: Wandering Through a Military District),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 9 February 2019. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/224083/>

Rumors have circulated throughout the country about the latest change of the model of the military-administrative division of Russia’s territory...As far as one can judge from the information, which has already been made public by the mass media, the marked aggravation of the military-political situation along the entire perimeter of our borders simply compels Moscow to return to the already Soviet military district structure...It was thought that no serious invasion whatsoever threatens precisely Russia from any strategic axis in the foreseeable future. We, even if we were not embracing NATO and the US by that time, but we had still found a common language on the main global security issues. Exercises, if they were conducted, then under the guise of armed combat only with international terrorists. And isn’t it true that the fronts, into which the military districts had to be restructured with the initiation of a war, are not needed to repel terrorists?

But Shoygu will not resolve the matter with the simple signing of the latest directive. Because now simply mind-boggling expenditures are required for the recreation of at least some of the long since destroyed military districts. Really each new military administrative unit of the Armed Forces of that type requires not only a headquarters with hundreds of experienced and trained officers-managers. From where do we also need to take dozens of additional formations and military units of a military district set – engineer, signals, command and control, radiological, chemical, and biological defense, missile, air defense missile, and others. And therefore – much will have to be reformed from the ground up and some will have to be redeployed hundreds and thousands of versts from other cities and villages...

Already this year, they claim that a “retrograde” reorganization awaits three of the four military districts that have remained in Russia. They will obviously once again divide Western Military District into Leningrad and Moscow military districts. They will exclude nearly everything, which is located beyond the Urals, from the composition of Central Military District – and precisely – from Omsk Oblast to Baykal. It has not yet been determined what they will call what is being formed in the enormous space in this variant. But, logically, - “the ill-forgotten” Siberian Military District that was disbanded under Serdyukov.

If that is so, only Southern Military District, the most combat capable today, which stands against furious Ukraine and the NATO Bloc, which is emerging behind its back, will greet 2020 intact...



Private Security and the Russian National Guard

OE Watch Commentary: When Russia's National Guard force was created three years ago, one of its assigned missions was to oversee the country's massive private security market, which provides domestic security functions for private Russian business (e.g. access control, bodyguard protection, physical security of facilities, escort services, etc...). This industry blossomed during the 1990s as Russia transformed its economy and remains a robust market today, where many Russian businesses rely upon these companies for various aspects of security. However, as the accompanying excerpt from the pro-business daily, *Kommersant* points out, it now appears that the National Guard is trying to expand its market share within the realm of private security, particularly within the energy industry.

The article begins by claiming that Russian "oil companies fear monopolization of the market by the security services of the Russian National Guard, which has acquired authority for revocation of the licenses of private security companies at facilities of the fuel and energy complex." It is important to note that the National Guard, even though it is a state body, possesses its own commercial security service. Since the National Guard controls the licensing procedure for private security companies, energy executives fear the National Guard will "effectually deprive them of the right to choose their security." Given the proximity of the Kremlin to major Russian energy companies, it was not surprising that these "companies have declined official comment." Nevertheless, *Kommersant* sources "explain that the Russian National Guard wants to expand its influence in the field of protection of the fuel and energy complex."

The article concludes with an observation from a legal expert who points out that because the National Guard "is simultaneously both an inspection entity and a business... a conflict of interests cannot be ruled out." Three years ago, when the National Guard was formed, there were concerns that this new force would be employed to guarantee and solidify the current Kremlin administration's political control. Having fully accomplished that mission, the National Guard now appears to be branching into the economic sector. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"Oil companies fear monopolization of the market by the security services of the Russian National Guard..."



Commander of the Russian National Guard, Viktor Zolotov.
Source: kremlin.ru [CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Viktor_Zolotov.jpg.

Source: Dmitriy Kozlov, "Добыча полезных охраняемых. ЧОПам нефтяных компаний мешает Росгвардия (The booty from guarding the spoils. The Russian National Guard Is Hampering Oil Companies' Private Security Companies)," *Kommersant*, 18 January 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3855859>

Oil companies fear monopolization of the market by the security services of the Russian National Guard, which has acquired authority for revocation of the licenses of private security companies at facilities of the fuel and energy complex.... The leaders of Lukoil, Gazprom Neft, the petrochemical Sibur, and Tatneft -- Vagit Alekperov, Aleksandr Dyukov, Dmitriy Konov, and Nail Maganov -- complain about the growth of the number of Russian National Guard orders addressed to the private security companies protecting facilities of the fuel and energy complex. The Russian National Guard, the oilmen write, are effectually depriving them of the right to choose their security.

The Russian National Guard, which is led by Viktor Zolotov, ex-director of the RF president's security service (a subdivision of the Federal Protective Service), acquired the moment it was formed in 2016 MVD authority for control over private security activity and also FGUP [Federal State Unitary Enterprise] Okhrana (2017 earnings, according to RSBU [Russian Accounting Standards], R20.7 billion, profit, R1.7 billion). In 2018 the Russian National Guard planned to check on 2,800 facilities of the fuel and energy complex (2,500 in 2017). The FGUP website pointed out that Gazprom and Lukoil are its clients also.

The companies have declined official comment. But Kommersant sources among the oilmen and in the uniformed agencies explain that the Russian National Guard wants to expand its influence in the field of protection of the fuel and energy complex.... "The risks are quite obvious -- monopolization of the protection services and corresponding price rises," a Kommersant source in a major oil company says.

The companies are speaking of a legal conflict: the federal law on the security of facilities of the fuel and energy complex permits the enlistment for their security of private security companies, but clause 21 of Appendix 1 to Government Decree 587 prohibits this....

The biggest state-owned companies -- Rosneft, Gazprom, Rosatom, Transneft, and others -- also have their own security. The earnings of FGUP Atom-Okhrana in the past year were over R5 billion, profit, almost R181 million. The struggle for the security services market between the companies and government entities in the fuel and energy complex took a turn for the worse back in 2013. The MVD-owned FGUP Okhrana and FGUP Vedomstvennaya Okhrana of the Energy Ministry wanted to acquire the authority for the protection of all facilities of the high- and medium-hazard category, but such amendments did not carry.

Lawyers do not consider the legal conflict unduly complicated.... The lawyer believes that the oilmen's current problems with the Russian National Guard look to be a consequence of "incompetence or malfeasance". A conflict of interests cannot be ruled out either, he adds, since the service is simultaneously both an inspection entity and a business....



Bolstering the Russian Ground Forces, the Cossack Way

OE Watch Commentary: Since the Russian Federation has always been a continental power, almost all of its wars and conflicts have been primarily fought on the ground. Therefore, the Russian Ground Forces have long been considered the most important branch of the Armed Forces, though proponents of the strategic nuclear forces and aerospace defense may differ with this assessment. The accompanying excerpted article from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* lays out the case for augmenting the Russian Ground Forces with Cossack formations. According to the article, the Russian Ground Forces currently have approximately 280,000 personnel, but in the event of an armed conflict, 200,000 to 350,000 servicemen would be required in each military district adjacent to the front. Although Russia does possess other militarized forces, such as the National Guard and FSB Border Troops, these forces are an insufficient number to support a major conflict. Russia is tinkering with an operational reserve system, but it appears at this time that it has little functionality at best. Since greatly increasing the size of the Russian Ground Forces seems unlikely, the author proffers the solution of augmenting the Ground Forces with Cossack formations, much as the Cossacks augmented the imperial army in Tsarist times. These forces would provide an economical alternative to a large standing army and would also be valuable for securing the rear, an important point considering the General Staff's view that war does not occur just at the front, but throughout the breadth of the defense. Due to the changing character of war, Cossack bands may be called upon to defeat enemy special operations forces operating behind enemy lines, or to suppress domestic dissent fomented by enemy propaganda and social media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Rumors have circulated throughout the country about the latest change of the model of the military-administrative division of Russia’s territory...”

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(continued)



Continued: Bolstering the Russian Ground Forces, the Cossack Way

Source: Konstantin Sivkov, “Нагайка в помощь «Армате» (A Whip to Help the Armata),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 5 February 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/48094>

Through Defense Ministry efforts the impression has formed that our Ground Forces conform to all requirements; however, a comparison of their current composition with figures of previous periods forces a person to ponder...Thus, our Ground Forces had 670,000 to 780,000 persons during 1994-1995, while according to Internet data, they have 280,000 today. At that time there were around 70 divisions; today there are 8 plus 27 tank and motorized rifle brigades, which corresponds approximately to 25 estimated divisions...

In Russia's Military Doctrine and the list of missions facing the Armed Forces, we will single out those in which a key role is set aside for the Ground Forces. Hence it follows that for defense of the country, the Ground Forces above all must be capable of supporting RF Armed Forces strategic deployment, territorial defense, and a crushing defeat of the enemy in likely wars and armed conflicts.

In these conflicts and wars the Ground Forces' proportion of the overall numerical strength of the grouping involved can be from 40-50 to 70-80 percent depending on the area of outbreak and nature of the enemy. Accordingly, our Ground Forces must field a grouping that is from regimental to divisional in scale in 1-5 days for resolving border incidents. In the course of a week or two they must send a corps- or army-level grouping to the armed conflict area. In 1-3 months they must form a grouping equivalent to one or two Great Patriotic War fronts...it turns out that the numerical strength of our Ground Forces should be 450,000-550,000. These very rough estimates give an idea of the order of magnitude.

The Rear as the Front

The primary territorial defense missions are to combat sabotage teams, destroy terrorist groupings and bandit forces, and secure and defend facilities of great political, economic, and spiritual importance to the state. The district zone of responsibility may have several thousand very important facilities (from 1,500-2,000 to 3,000-3,500)...the necessary personnel for resolving territorial defense missions will average from 200,000 to 350,000 servicemen, and this is within just one district adjacent to the front...

Naturally, other security structures will be involved in territorial defense missions, but only Rosgvardiya, The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and Federal Security Service (FSB) do not have the requisite armed force elements. According to open-source data, Rosgvardiya has around 340,000 persons. There are no valid data as to strictly how much of a military component there is -- operational units and formations (particularly a special-purpose division and brigades), special rapid-response detachments (SOBRs), and special-purpose militia detachments (OMONs).

By analogy with the Ground Forces and excluding militarized security, it can be assumed that their overall strength is a maximum of 150,000-200,000 and the forces are distributed to eight districts. Each district accounts for an average of 20,000-25,000 servicemen. The Rosgvardiya grouping will be built up through maneuver in the region adjacent to the front, but all the same it is a matter of doubling these forces at the maximum -- no one will relieve Rosgvardiya of the performance of missions in other areas of the country.

With the outbreak of a border or armed conflict, the RF Armed Forces Ground Forces together with Rosgvardiya in the zone adjacent to the front still can create the necessary grouping for territorial defense, and this is on condition of performing partial mobilization as a minimum. But even in this case capabilities for missions in the interior of the country no longer will remain. But in a local war in the border zone, even with full mobilization, all the main forces of the Armed Forces Ground Forces will be used in the zone of combat operations, the Rosgvardiya personnel and servicemen of rear-service units of the Armed Forces are insufficient for territorial defense.

From Farmsteads to Military Settlements

There are only two solutions: either increase the RF Armed Forces Ground Forces by approximately 70-80 percent or establish territorial military-industrial settlements. Their composition and structure have been substantiated... I will note only that from an administrative aspect the territorial military-industrial settlements (TVPPs) will have to be subordinate to the heads of rayons and towns, and from an operational aspect to local territorial defense command and control entities, and be under the control of FSB military counterintelligence.

It can be figured that up to 30 percent of settlement personnel will join formation in full mobilization, i.e., a little more than a half-million persons must live in such settlements within one district to form a grouping of 150,000-200,000. Settlement personnel themselves will maintain the authorized arms and combat equipment through tax and other benefits. In combination with high morale and proficiency of personnel who mastered military affairs from an early age, this appears to be a sufficiently powerful and effective tool for ensuring national security in a territory. We essentially are talking about revival of the Cossacks, but on a new basis...in order to solve the problem of defense of such an enormous territory as ours, the reestablishment of the Cossacks on a new conceptual and technological basis probably is the only solution.



Russian Anti-Satellite Technologies as a Response to the US Ballistic Missile Defense System

OE Watch Commentary: The US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) in 2001, recent withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), and release of the Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR) have aroused Russian fears about the US developing capabilities to eventually overcome Russia's nuclear deterrent. A key fear, as described in the accompanying excerpted article from *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, is that the US will eventually field a directed energy (laser) weapon capable of targeting a ballistic missile. Although the Russians believe there is little they can do to prevent the fielding of such a system, they are intending to do the next best thing, blind or destroy the space-based sensors required to attain the targeting data necessary to hit an intercontinental ballistic missile. These space-based sensors and their associated communications are deemed to be the weak link in any ballistic missile defense system. The accompanying excerpted article from *Svobodnaya Pressa* discusses the testing of a missile of Russia's forthcoming A-235 Nudol ballistic missile defense system for the protection of Moscow and surrounding areas. Although the A-235 is primarily designed to destroy incoming ballistic missiles, the characteristics required to do so also provide the A-235 an offensive capability to target satellites. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“It has been branded a killer not only of satellites but of intercontinental missiles.”

Source: Sergey Valchenko, “Ракета-«убийца спутников» станет ответом на американскую ППО (A ‘Satellite-Killer’ Missile Will Be the Response to American Missile Defenses),” *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 3 February 2019. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2019/02/03/raketaubiyca-sputnikov-stanet-otvetom-na-amerikanskuyu-pro.html>

On 2 February President Vladimir Putin articulated a number of military-technical actions which are to be a fitting response to Washington's torpedoing the INF Treaty and also plans to put combat systems into space...The threat from space is perfectly real. The Pentagon recently announced the possibility of the deployment of strike arms in space in its 108-page Ballistic Missile Defense Review. Specifically, it notes that the American military will estimate the timeframe and cost of the potential building of a satellite fleet for the destruction of missiles in their launch phase.

The danger of the deployment of combat satellites in space is clear. The United States hopes with these to destroy Russian strategic retaliatory-strike or launch-on-warning missiles. Having acquired a “space sword” of laser or particle-beam weapons, the United States could come to believe in impunity. In this case it could be tempted to deliver a first strike with nuclear missiles or defend itself against our retaliatory strike. This would lessen the role of the nuclear-deterrence factor.

Of course, such preparations cannot be ignored...



Russian Transport and reloading vehicle on the chassis of the MAZ-547A for long-range intercept missiles 51T6 as part of the Amur A-135 anti-missile defense complex.

Source: By Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=66165418>.

Source: Viktor Sokirko, “Разведка доложила поздно: США «засекли» убийцу своих спутников спустя 3 года (Late Intelligence: US ‘Pinpoints’ Killer of Its Satellites Three Years After the Event),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 20 January 2019. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/222182/>

Information has been disclosed...on the development by Russia of a variety of directed-energy and ground-based antisatellite technologies...Russia is conducting experimental launches of satellites that perform complex operations in orbit to enhance their antisatellite potential... This most likely relates to the Nudol missile defense system, which is intended to repulse a nuclear strike at the distant approaches and is being deployed not only on the ground but also in space. It has been branded a killer not only of satellites but of intercontinental missiles... Its testing is close to completion, and it will be incorporated in Moscow's air and missile defense system in the foreseeable future, and subsequently also in the air and missile defense of other strategic objectives on Russian territory. A system which “lay dormant” for a considerable length of time has acquired a real profile and will be ready for use very soon.

The A-235 system has a predecessor -- the A-135 Amur missile defense system which even now forms part of Moscow's “air shield” and is designed to repulse a limited nuclear strike on the Russian capital and the central industrial region. Despite its capabilities it is to some extent outdated, and it is partially backed up by the S-300 surface-to-air missile system -- and now the S-400 SAM system, too -- so upgrading of the missile defense system has long been overdue...the A-325 system covered a distance of 3,500 kilometers in 17 minutes and reached its target. The tests, that is to say, can be considered successful. It is not known for certain exactly what missile this was, but in terms of specifications and performance characteristics in all probability it surpasses the 53T6 interceptor missile of the Amur system, which is capable of intercepting ballistic missiles and their warheads traveling at up to 6-7 kilometers per second at altitudes ranging from 5 kilometers to the borders of near space...



Importance of Space-Based Intelligence, Reconnaissance, and Surveillance

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the Russian Ministry of Defense states Russian Defense Minister, General Sergey Shoygu's comments about the growing importance of space-based Intelligence, Reconnaissance, and Surveillance (ISR) for Russian military operations. This same theme is also encountered in the accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, which discusses how the new State Eye satellite that was put into orbit in December is capable of not only monitoring ground targets, but also objects (satellites) in space, and it can be used to support the targeting of these objects. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Syrian experience shows that for the effective employment of precision weapons detailed reconnaissance and cartographic information is essential. Such data may be obtained only with modern satellites capable of the high-resolution filming of the Earth’s surface.”

Source: “Министр обороны провел селекторное совещание с руководством Вооруженных Сил, (Russian Defense Minister Holds Conference Call with Ranking Personnel of Armed Forces),” *Russian Ministry of Defense*, 5 February 2019. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12209596@egNews

A conference call with ranking personnel of the Armed Forces was held today in the Russian Federation National Defense Management Center under the direction of General of the Army Sergey Shoygu, head of the defense department...

The listed part of the call began with a discussion of the building of spacecraft.

The defense minister said that satellite reconnaissance and navigation systems have been performing an ever bigger role in the field of the country's military security as of late.

The Syrian experience shows that for the effective employment of precision weapons detailed reconnaissance and cartographic information is essential. Such data may be obtained only with modern satellites capable of the high-resolution filming of the Earth's surface.

The Defense Ministry is vigorously pursuing the technological re-equipment of the orbital fleet of military spacecraft, therefore...

Source: Andrey Riskin, ““Государево око” для ракеты Нудоль (The “State Eye” For Nudol Missiles),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 January 2019. http://www.ng.ru/armies/2019-01-19/100_190119nudol.html

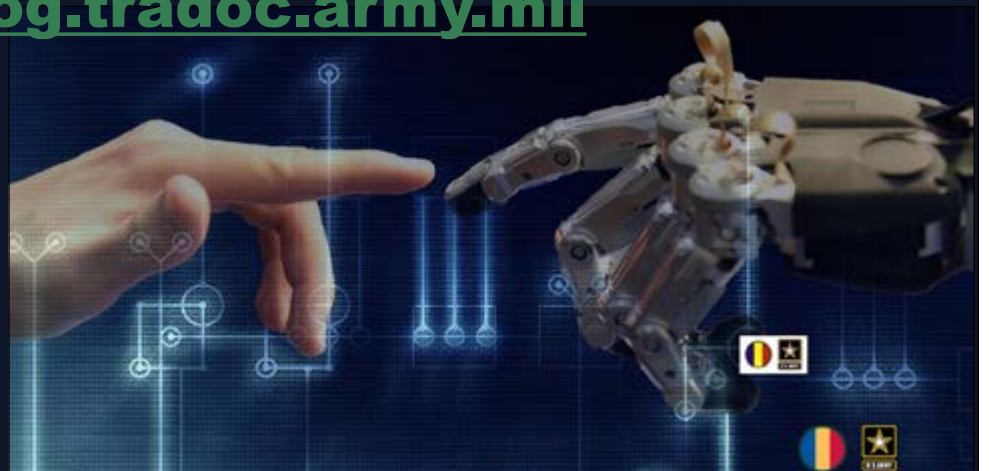
As reported by RIA Novosti...is affirming that on 23 December 2018 Russia successfully tested a new anti-satellite system. The report concerns the PL-19 Nudol system. This was the seventh test of the anti-satellite system...Interestingly, yesterday Dmitriy Rogozin, head of Roskosmos, introduced a new project, the State Eye. “After a successful launch from the Vostochnyy Space Center in December we have strengthened the group of Earth remote sensing satellites,” Rogozin noted. “We are introducing a project which is called ‘State Eye’. We will be able to observe the dynamics of change of any of the processes on Earth.” It is affirmed this system can be used by employees of the Emergence Services Ministry (MChS), agricultural workers, petroleum and gas company employees, and others. And, of course, if it is taken into account that all space developments can have a dual (that is, not only a civilian) use, this would include military uses as well. It cannot be excluded that ‘State Eye’ will be used to not only monitor military facilities of the United States and other NATO countries, but to track space satellites of a probable adversary as well...

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

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Mad Scientist is a TRADOC initiative and community of action that continually explores the future through collaborative partnerships and continuous dialogue with academia and industry.





Revelations of a Russian Mercenary in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: While still officially illegal, over the past several years there have been credible reports that Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs) have been active in Ukraine, Syria, Africa, and possibly South America. In the accompanying excerpt, the moderate news source, *Sobesednik*, interviews a former member of a Russian PMC who had been deployed to Syria. Some of his remarks are revealing.

The article begins by explaining that the interview was conducted anonymously by phone since the Russian “Criminal Code article ‘On Mercenaries’ has not been revoked,” and that the ex-officer “could even be arrested.” Since PMCs are not legal on Russian territory, the interviewee points out that his contract stated that the PMC who hired him was “registered in the Virgin Islands.” A former artillery officer in the Russian military, the interviewee had military contacts who encouraged him to join the PMC. Since he was prior service, he did not have to go through training and was soon deployed for “the next six months in the middle of Syria, north of Palmyra.”

The ex-mercenary describes the relatively high pay—“200,000 rubles [about \$3,000] a month,” pointing out that this “unrealistically huge amount,” allowed him to pay off his mortgage, “which is why I [he] went to Syria.” For spending money while in Syria, the “main currency there was ammunition. Sell 10 to 15 cartridges to a middleman, get several packs of cigarettes, alcohol, or some gear.” He paints a grim picture of logistic support, claiming that the “food was the most dangerous factor of the entire deployment. It is impossible to survive more than six months on it.” He claims that the “equipment is usually your own, brought from Russia.” Soldiers are prohibited from owning phones, and if a soldier posted something on social media, he “could easily get sent home without being paid a single ruble.”

The interview concludes on a dark note, with the ex-mercenary claiming that even though he has been asked to return to Syria, he “will not go,” describing the situation there as “anarchy and lawlessness,” where Syria “after the war is even worse than it was during the war.” Within the state-sponsored media, Russia’s military operation in Syria has been portrayed as an overwhelming success, where Russian forces have helped their Syrian comrades defeat terrorism and restore order. This interview, albeit from a member of a Russian PMC, provides an alternative assessment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...*The country after the war is even worse than it was during the war....*”

Source: Rimma Akhmirova, ““Бумажки не так важны, как доверие”. Бывший боец ЧВК – о войне в Сирии (“Papers Are Not as Important as Trust,” Former PMC Fighter on War in Syria),” *Sobesednik*, 23 January 2019. <https://sobesednik.ru/obshchestvo/20190122-ya-voeval-v-sirii>

Sobesednik is launching a new section: “Confession of an Anonym.” Its heroes will tell us about things they cannot make public under their real names. The truth may cost them money, reputation, freedom, or even their lives. Our first interlocutor is Aleksander, a private military company (PMC) fighter who recently returned from deployment in Syria...

...Alexander never elaborates on his Syrian trip publicly; he can discuss the details only among former military men like himself. The details may shock people who aren’t prepared and cause condemnation, and if the current policy changes, Aleksander could even be arrested -- the Criminal Code article “On Mercenaries” has not been revoked.

“I am a former officer, an artilleryman; I have a lot of acquaintances in military and near-military circles. One of these ‘acquaintances of my acquaintances,’ as it turned out, served in a PMC and just returned from deployment. He answered my questions succinctly: ‘It is okay to go.’ Both of us had combat experience, served in hot spots, and would not have taken a complete gamble. The acquaintance got paid and said that I could survive there if I thought about what I am doing. And I took the chance....”

“You sign a contract, but everyone understands that it is a worthless piece of paper. Mine did not even have a seal, just signatures. An LLC something or other -- a name I do not even remember because it is impossible to find if anything happens -- is registered in the Virgin Islands.... I flew out in March and spent the next six months in the middle of Syria, north of Palmyra, practically in the desert.”

“My pay rate was R200,000 [about \$3,000] a month. Maybe in Moscow people get this kind of money working in offices, but for the majority of those who go to ‘make war’ this is an unrealistically huge amount. Our main currency there was ammunition. Sell 10 to 15 cartridges to a middleman, get several packs of cigarettes, alcohol, or some gear richer....”

“There is no fierce fighting in Syria anymore. Officially, the military operation is over. But skirmishes and shootouts are a common thing.... Food -- canned food, rice, and pasta. They would drop off a few bags for a group for a month and we gradually ate through them. Fighters laughed that this food was the most dangerous factor of the entire deployment. It is impossible to survive more than six months on it....”

“Equipment is usually your own, brought from Russia. There are no mobile phones. You can, of course, get a phone locally, but after several scandals with fighters taking pictures at secret locations and posting them on social media, control became stricter, for disclosing information also. You could easily get sent home without being paid a single ruble.”

“I fulfilled my personal task -- I returned alive. I did not participate in the obvious dirt that follows you in nightmares for the rest of your life. I paid off the mortgage, which is why I went to Syria and remained in good standing with the commanders. They are calling me back. But I will not go. I had enough; it is anarchy and lawlessness there. The country after the war is even worse than it was during the war.”



Controlling the Kremlin's Narrative

OE Watch Commentary: Directing the country's information narrative remains a top Kremlin priority. Having seized the controlling heights of the information realm (primarily TV), the Kremlin leadership can ensure that its perspective is disseminated throughout Russian society. As the first accompanying excerpt from the pro-business daily, *Kommersant* points out, television remains the primary "source of information for the Russians." According to the article, while the internet has "overtaken the radio and newspapers...television continues to be the most popular means of obtaining information."

There are growing concerns, however, that many Russians, particularly the young, are turning to the internet for information. Over the past several years, the Kremlin has been implementing measures to better regulate internet traffic. The second excerpt, also from *Kommersant*, describes proposed legislation which calls for "protective measures to be introduced 'to ensure the long-term and stable operation' of the internet in Russia." While the article fails to describe the exact details of this proposed legislation, it does refer to Russia's desire to obtain "internet sovereignty," which would allegedly "make the Russian internet 'stable in the face of external threats.'"

As an apt example as to how the Kremlin directs the country's information narrative, the third excerpt, from the official news agency TASS, describes how Russian officials plan to introduce "the Pobeda [Victory] TV channel" later this spring, which will be dedicated to broadcasting movies and other programs dealing with the Great Patriotic War (WW II). The Soviet victory over Nazi Germany has become the centerpiece of the current Kremlin ideology. Though it has been nearly 75 years since the end of the Great Patriotic War, this costly achievement serves as the martial prism through which the Kremlin information machine often portrays the West. Just as in 1941, fascists tried to destroy the USSR, so today, according to much of the Kremlin-directed media, dangerous forces in the West (e.g. Ukraine, NATO, US) are again preparing to attack. To defend the motherland against these "threats," the Kremlin will direct and use all the information tools in its arsenal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...Television still occupies top position as a source of information for the Russians..."



Meeting with heads of Russian print media and news agencies.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56639/photos/52069>, CC 4.0.

Source: Yekaterina Grobman, "Россияне поверили в интернет и неформальные медиа: Но телевидение пока остается главным каналом информации (Russians Have Placed Faith in Internet and Informal Media. But Television Remains Main Channel of Information at Present)," *Kommersant*, 24 January 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3861488>

Television still occupies top position as a source of information for the Russians.... At the same time, the internet as a main source of information has taken second place, overtaking the radio and newspapers.... Television continues to be the most popular means of obtaining information: Three-fourths (76%) of respondents watch television broadcasts.

Source: Dmitriy Shestoporov, Natalya Korchenkova, "Суверенный рунет набирает скорость Sovereign Russian Internet is Gathering Speed)," *Kommersant*, 18 January 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3855920>

The Ministry of Communications and Mass Media is proposing not postponing the draft law on a "sovereign Russian internet," which has been criticized by market participants, the Expert Council under the government, and ANO Tsifrovaya Ekonomika. The reform may be costly for the state, business representatives think...

...As Kommersant has reported earlier, the authors of the draft law, which was submitted on 14 December, are insisting on the need for protective measures to be introduced "to ensure the long-term and stable operation" of the internet in Russia....

Denis Davydov, a board member at the Safe Internet League, stated that the opponents of the draft law "are actually implementing" points in the US cyber-strategy, which state Washington's intention to prevent other countries from acquiring internet sovereignty....

Source: "Новый телеканал "Победа" запустят в России весной 2019 года (New "Victory" channel will launch in Russia in the spring of 2019)," TASS, 29 January 2019. <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/6053961>

Created for the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, which will be celebrated in 2020, the Pobeda TV channel will appear on Russian air in the spring of 2019.

"...In modern Russian society, the memory of the Great Patriotic War and the celebration of Victory Day remain the most important factor uniting people..."



Reassessment Needed of Soviet-Afghan War

OE Watch Commentary: Russia commemorated the 30th Anniversary of the end of the Afghan War (1979-1989) this past month and the country's media provided a number of retrospective assessments of this conflict. The military weekly, *Voenno-Promyshlenniy Kyrier*, published a detailed, sobering analysis which reveals how Russian society (and some within the military) now regard this conflict.

The article begins with describing when, in 1989, the country's leadership "gave a negative assessment of the participation of the Soviet Union in the Afghan war," and how "the 'undeclared' war in Afghanistan became the forerunner of the collapse of the Soviet Union." Soviet military losses were significant: over 15,000 KIA and more than 50,000 with serious injuries. The article asserts that those who fought in Afghanistan and the family members of those who were killed "did not receive substantial social and material support from the state." According to the article, many are still waiting for assistance.

The article goes on to describe the major factors which hampered the Soviet war effort in Afghanistan. According to the author, the first and "most important strategic mistake of our leadership," was the failure to realize that "Soviet troops were embroiled in a civil war." "The second mistake was an attempt to hide from the people, whose sons were fighting, the very fact of what was happening" in Afghanistan. And the third mistake stemmed from the first, in that "the political and military leadership clearly did not calculate the amount of forces and means necessary to carry out the operation."

The article describes the traumatic toll this conflict left "in the public consciousness and the fate of several generations," pointing out that 620,000 Soviet soldiers fought in Afghanistan and "a significant part of them experienced the so-called Afghan syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorders." Unfortunately, psychological help was often lacking for these veterans. Returning vets were scarcely acknowledged, and as the article points out, for those who were killed, in an attempt to hide the cost of the war, "until 1987, it was forbidden to make corresponding inscriptions on tombstones."

The article includes some of the challenges which Russian veterans of the Afghan war face today, pointing out that over 19,000 Afghan vets are still waiting for housing, and that the "material condition of medical institutions for these war veterans is extremely unsatisfactory." The article attributes some of this neglect to an incorrect understanding of this conflict, and as the title of the article suggests, "there is a need to give the events of the Afghan war a new political assessment." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...Afghanistan has left an ambiguous, traumatic trail in the public consciousness and the fate of several generations..."

Source: Oleg Falichev, "Афганский излом: В обществе назрела необходимость дать событиям афганской войны новую политическую оценку (Afghan Fracture: In society, there is a need to give the events of the Afghan war a new political assessment)," *Voenno-Promyshlenniy Kyrier*, 22 January 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/47777>

"I did not send you to Afghanistan." Many people remember how cynically this phrase sounded from the mouth of the officials responsible for the social security of the internationalist soldiers in the 90s. It struck point-blank like automatic fire, not just humiliating, but destroying people in uniform. Mikhail Gorbachev and the 1989 Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR gave a negative assessment of the participation of the Soviet Union in the Afghan war. The warriors who returned and the families of the victims did not receive substantial social and material support from the state. Alas, the situation has not improved much. What is the reason and how should we evaluate those events today, 30 years after the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan?

...The whole country then received the deepest moral trauma, and the "undeclared" war in Afghanistan became the forerunner of the collapse of the Soviet Union. For the period from December 25, 1979 to February 15, 1989, KIA losses of the Armed Forces, border and internal troops amounted to 15,051 people..., WIA-53,753...

...Soviet troops were embroiled in an internecine war, which was the first and most important strategic mistake of our leadership... The second mistake was an attempt to hide from the people, whose sons were taken to the war, the very fact of what was happening.... The third error follows from the first. The political and military leadership clearly did not calculate the amount of forces and means necessary to carry out the operation... In the end, it became obvious to the Soviet leadership that it was impossible to solve the intra-Afghan problem by military means...

We repeat: Afghanistan has left an ambiguous, traumatic trail in the public consciousness and the fate of several generations. The cost of the war exorbitant burden lay on the economy. The USSR lost prestige in the international arena, and social tensions arose within the country. 620 thousand military personnel passed through Afghanistan...If not all, then a significant part of them experienced the so-called Afghan syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorders. After the return home, 35-40 percent of combatants were in dire need of professional psychologists' help and treatment. But even the dead (as instructed from above) were buried without the slightest publicity. Until 1987, it was forbidden to make corresponding inscriptions on tombstones.

According to Natalya Antipina, State Secretary and Deputy Minister of Construction and Housing of the Russian Federation, the total number of "Afghans" who are not provided with housing (registered before January 1, 2005) is 19,245.... Things are no better in health care. According to the chief medical officer of the Novosibirsk Regional Hospital "Novosibirsk Regional Hospital No. 2 of War Veterans," Lyudmila Kanunnikova, the material condition of medical institutions for war veterans is extremely unsatisfactory.



Arctic Tank Modernization Continues

OE Watch Commentary: The 200th Separate Coastal Defense Motorized Rifle Brigade and elements of the 80th Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade have been turning in their old T-72s and replacing them with the new T-80BVM tank, which has been upgraded for Arctic conditions as the accompanying excerpted article reports. Each brigade has a tank battalion with 31 tanks. Both brigades are located on the Kola Peninsula and have a variety of firing ranges on which the tankers can master their new equipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Russian military considers the T-80BVM the tank best suited for operations in the high north.”

Source: Atle Staalsen, “New more powerful tank rolls into Northern Fleet garrisons,” *The Barents Observer*, 8 February 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/02/new-more-powerful-tank-rolls-northern-fleet-garrisons>

...The Russian military considers the T-80BVM the tank best suited for operations in the high north. It has a 125 mm smoothbore gun with a range of up to 3,000 meters. Secondary armament consists of a coaxial 7.62 mm machine gun and roof-mounted 12.7 mm machine gun.

The T-80BVM is an upgraded version of the T-80BV main battle tank. It was first publicly displayed in 2017...



Servicemen of Northern Fleet learn to operate new T-80BVM tanks.
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12179688@egNews, CC 4.0.



Have Power, Will Travel

OE Watch Commentary: Powering remote sites can be an expensive proposition, particularly in the Arctic. Russia has more northern cities and villages in the Arctic than any other country. Russia has designed and built a floating nuclear energy power plant which will begin supplying electrical energy to the remote Russian town of Pevek this summer and there are now plans to design and build floating liquefied natural gas (LNG)-fueled power plants. It is a natural extension based on the remarkable growth and success of the Russian LNG industry on the Arctic Yamal Peninsula. It will fit in well with Russian LNG ice-class tankers transiting the Northern Sea Route and has definite applications for non-Russian LNG customers. The Wärtsilä firm mentioned in the accompanying excerpted article is the Finnish corporation, Wärtsilä Oyj Abp, which manufactures and maintains power plants and other equipment for the maritime and energy markets. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Russia launches call for tender for floating LNG power plant,” *The Barents Observer*, 6 February 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/02/russia-launches-tender-floating-lng-power-plant>

While the Akademik Lomonosov is scheduled to be towed to the remote Arctic town of Pevek this summer, [subsequent floating nuclear power stations] could face cheaper competition from floating LNG power plants. According to the tender, a potential builder would have to include both construction costs and long-term maintenance costs. The tender stipulates a 45 million ruble price for the feasibility study, preliminary design and possible deployment of such floating power plant, fueled with LNG...

Russia is not the first to build such floating power plant. Wärtsilä has already delivered one such plant on a barge to the Dominican Republic. Placed on a barge, the power plant can easily be relocated and is therefore an ideal solution for power production on an interim basis. It can either provide power to a remote mining or petroleum field like on the north coast of Siberia, or it can be connected to a local electricity grid as the Akademik Lomonosov will be in Pevek on Russia’s Far Eastern northern coast.

With Yamal LNG, the coming Arctic LNG, and the reloading terminal on the Kola Peninsula, Russia has several sources to provide fuel to such plants in northern waters. Russia has large-scale plans for industrial development of the Arctic region, including along the Northern Sea Route and the northern rivers of Ob, Yenisei and Lena.

“The tender stipulates a 45 million ruble price for the feasibility study, preliminary design and possible deployment of such floating power plant, fueled with LNG.”



View of Pevek from the south.

Source: Btibtets [Public domain], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:View_of_Pevok_from_the_south.jpg.



A New Turn in Armenian-Russian Relations?

OE Watch Commentary: The Armenian government's relationship with Russia has appeared at times to be strained since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan assumed office in May 2018, but as the accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate, this relationship took a new step when a reported 83 Armenian soldiers deployed to Syria in response to a request from the Russian government. The article from *News.am* reports some information on the deployment, including how the contingent of Armenians "arrived on 8 February in the Syrian city of Aleppo" and that their mission is to provide "humanitarian and medical assistance" in addition to "carrying out demining work." The article also includes a statement from Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, who stated that Armenia was the "first who responded to our call to provide help to the Syrian people."

The article from *First Armenian News* provides another perspective of the deployment, including how the Russian government had "regularly proposed" bringing in contingents of Armenian soldiers, but that the previous administration of "Serzh Sargsyan was not inclined to it." The article notes how "Yerevan is officially part of the Russian campaign in Syria," and as such, is relying on Russian logistical support during the deployment. Ultimately, it was thought that Pashinyan's administration would not have as good of relations with Russia as Sargsyan had, but the deployment shows how the relationship is taking shape. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"They will provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the population of Syria outside combat zones, as well as carrying out demining work."



The Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan (2019)

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Besuch_des_Ministerpr%C3%A4sidenten_von_Armenien,_Nikol_Pashinyan,_im_K%C3%B6nig_Rathaus-2162.jpg, CC 4.0.

Source: "ВШОйгу поблагодарил Армению за гуманитарную помощь Сирии (Shoigu thanked Armenia for the humanitarian aid to Syria)," *News.am*, 8 February 2019. <https://news.am/rus/news/495299.html>

Defense Minister of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Sergey Shoigu thanked the head of the Armenian Defense Ministry, David Tonoyan, for taking part in providing humanitarian aid to Syria... "You were the first who responded to our call to provide help to the Syrian people," said Shoigu...

It was previously reported that a group of 83 Armenian specialists arrived on 8 February in the Syrian city of Aleppo. They will provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the population of Syria outside combat zones, as well as carrying out demining work...

Source: Sargis Artsruni, "Сирийский блеф правительства Армении, или лесть Путину за счет армянского флага? (The Armenian government's Syria bluff or flattery to Putin at the expense of the Armenian flag?)," *First Armenian News*, 9 February 2019. <https://ru.1in.am/1252242.html>

...Moscow regularly proposed such a program even to the previous Armenian government, but the team of Serzh Sargsyan was not inclined to it.

There are no rational arguments from the political point of view in support of dispatching the humanitarian group to Syria. First, Yerevan is officially part of the Russian campaign in Syria, which will definitely cause certain problems in the West...The weakest argument in support of dispatching the humanitarian mission to Syria is that we are going there to defend our [Armenian] community. However, it is unclear, how de-mining specialists and doctors are going to defend the Armenian community.

Second, the motives of the Syria campaign are unclear, particularly as this step by Nikol Pashinyan seems to be pursuing the objective of pleasing Putin...

However, it is most alarming that the status of the Armenian mission is unclear...And in general, did the government have the right to dispatch such a mission without parliament's consent?...Previously, Serzh Sargsyan "passed by" this demand by Moscow, saying that Armenia could participate in the Syria campaign only in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) format...



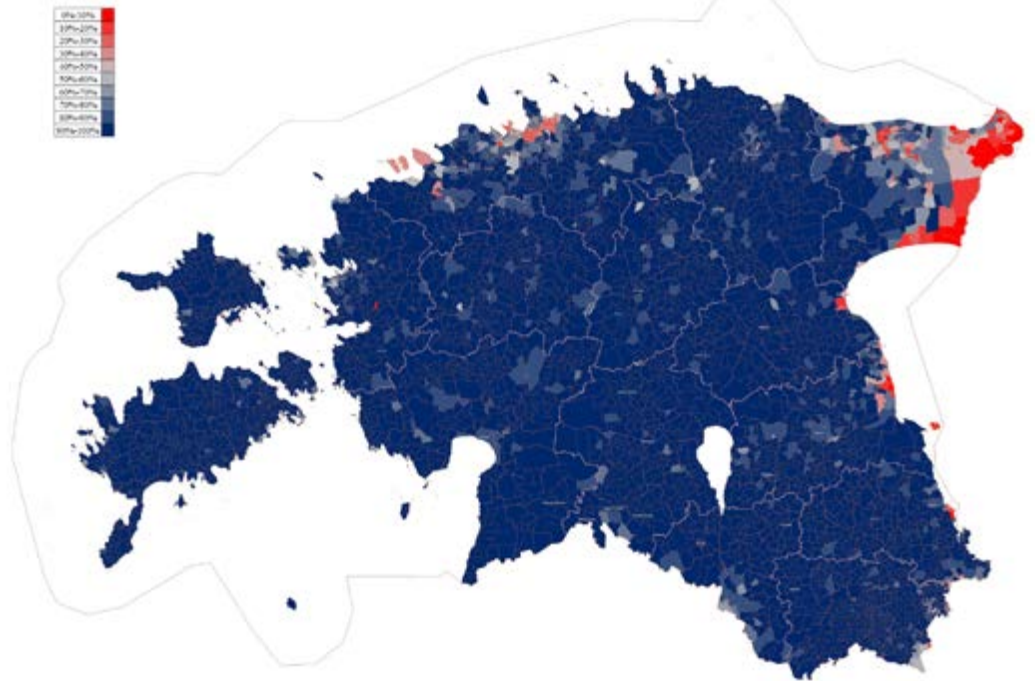
Campaign Sparks Division Between Ethnic Russians and Estonians

OE Watch Commentary: As the parliamentary elections in Estonia draw near, a campaign ad for a new party has drawn attention and criticism for its reference to the division between ethnic Russians and Estonians. The poster appeared at a tram station in Tallinn and featured two sides, one which said in Estonian “Only Estonians here” and another in Russian that read “Only Russians here.” Underneath these statements, a phone number was given with the invitation to call if there were any questions. The accompanying excerpted article from *Komsomolskaya Pravda* gives the perspective of the head of the party (Estonia 200) responsible for the poster, who explains why they decided to stoke the already tense relationship between Estonians and Russians, the latter of which make up approximately 25 percent of the population.



Logo for Estonia 200 reading “Estonia 200 Long Plan for Estonia”
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Eesti_200_logo.png

Share of Estonians in Estonia by locality, 2011 (2014 for Tallinn)



Share of ethnic Estonians by every populated place.

Source: H2ppyne [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Share_of_Estonians.png.

“...In our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian ‘rooms’ and this starts in kindergarten....”

Source: Maria Berk, “В Эстонии появились провокационные плакаты, разделяющие русских и эстонцев на остановке,” [In Estonia there appeared provocative posters differentiating Russians and Estonians at a tram stop] *Комсомольская Правда*, 8 January 2019. <https://www.perm.kp.ru/daily/26927.3/3976850/>

“What is the point in a poster showing us the divisions in society? Estonian residents have put a mirror up to society... Let’s once and for all stop living in parallel worlds in a society with different opportunities. We will create one kindergarten and school for all children in Estonia,” stated the leader of the party Kistina Kallas. In her words, the provocative billboard was needed to bring attention to the problem of differences in opportunity between Russians and Estonians....

“In our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian “rooms” and this starts in kindergarten,” explained Kallas.

Now social media users have spread new posters, hung around the city for the Estonia 200 party. On them is written the following: “Estonians and Russians together in one school,” “Estonians and Russians together in one party.” This party is trying to urge the government to create a single system of education.

“We have seen that this subject (the subject of integration and relations between Russia and Estonians) is hard. Painful roots of this problem run very deep,” explained the head of the party Kristina Kallas. Russians feel this problem every day. Of course these posters were hurtful to them. I sincerely apologize to those whom we have caused harm yesterday. But it is important because all of society flinched and thought: what is really our most serious problem.”

The article quotes Kristina Kallas, the chairwoman of Estonia 200, saying “what is the point in a poster showing us the divisions in society? Estonian residents have put a mirror up to society... Let’s once and for all stop living in parallel worlds in a society with different opportunities.” Kallas explains that the goal of the ad campaign was to point out that the differences between Estonian and Estonian-Russian societies are still very prominent, adding that “in our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian ‘rooms’ and this starts in kindergarten.” The separation in schools by language creates and maintains a divide between Estonians and Russians, a weakness that has been exploited by Russia to incite protests and violence in the past through fake news campaigns. Because of the persistent issues in Estonia fueled by this separation, one of Estonia 200’s primary goals is to close the gap between these two societies by working toward more integrated schools.

The posters did not go over very well with Russians or Estonians and the party received a good deal of backlash over the incident. Kallas addressed the outrage by stating, “we have seen that this subject (the subject of integration and relations between Russians and Estonians) is hard. Painful roots of this problem run very deep. Russians feel this problem every day. Of course these posters were hurtful to them.” Since then, new posters have appeared with a message intended to better promote unity, saying “Estonians and Russian together in one school, Estonians and Russians together in one party.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**



Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Kyrgyzstan

OE Watch Commentary: The group Kyrk Choro (Forty Knights, sometimes called the Kyrgyz Choroloru, or Kyrgyz Knights) made headlines in Kyrgyzstan in December 2014 when its members conducted a raid on a nightclub in Bishkek and briefly detained several Chinese nationals for allegedly soliciting prostitutes. While it initially appeared to be an act of vigilantism, the raid turned out to have been sanctioned by Kyrgyz authorities, who previously signed a memorandum of understanding with the group to provide support to law enforcement. The government charged a few members of Kyrk Choro for conducting the raid beyond the limit of the memorandum, but the group continued to carry out similar raids targeting companies with foreign employees (mostly Chinese) in what it stated was in protection of the country. While the group has stayed out of the headlines over the past few years, the accompanying excerpted article from *Vecherniy Bishkek* reports on recent Kyrk Choro activities.

The article mentions how the group has recently “visited companies in Chuy Region” alongside the Kyrgyz State Migration Service and the Interior Ministry (MVD) and lists some of the companies they visited. While the article does not mention it, these companies are reportedly Chinese owned and employ an unknown number of Chinese nationals. The article also notes how Kyrk Choro was “in charge of the recent rally held in protest against ‘Chinese expansion,’ which nearly grew into riots outside the White House.” The article includes comments by a Kyrgyz economist and a member of parliament, who both warn of the consequences for foreign investment in the country and how China might react. Kyrgyz security forces broke up the recent protest in Bishkek and arrested several of its organizers, though it was not clear if those arrested were members of Kyrk Choro. While the Chinese ambassador in Kyrgyzstan and media in China commented on the recent incidents, the Chinese government has not taken any action in response. In any case, Kyrk Choro appears to be working alongside the government in the same capacity it did before and this will be important to watch if anti-Chinese sentiment in Kyrgyzstan continues to foment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“It is noteworthy that Kyrgyz Choroloru, which the government departments have chosen to monitor investment facilities, is known for its sharp anti-Chinese remarks.”

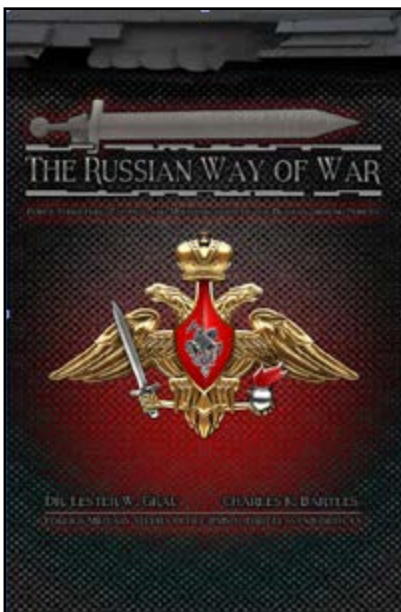
Source: Karypbai kyzy Tolgonai, ““Кырк чоро”, Госслужба миграции и МВД “кошмарят” инвесторов? (Are “Kyrk Choro,” the Federal Migration Service and the MVD “causing nightmares” for investors?),” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 29 January 2019. https://www.vb.kg/doc/376327_kyrk_choro_gosslyjba_migracii_i_mvd_koshmariat_investorov.html

The Kyrgyz State Migration Service, jointly with the Interior Ministry and the NGO Kyrgyz Choroloru have visited companies in Chuy Region... “They first visited the Tokmak oil refinery and then the LLP Kant Pipe and Roofing Slate Company. Earlier they made a similar tour to the Zhongda oil refinery. The aim of the visits is to check whether (foreign) workers stay legally in Kyrgyzstan,” the Migration Service said.

It is noteworthy that Kyrgyz Choroloru, which the government departments have chosen to monitor investment facilities, is known for its sharp anti-Chinese remarks... The organization was also in charge of the recent rally held in protest against “Chinese expansion”, which nearly grew into riots outside the White House. Now they have had access to foreign workers’ personal data as part of the inspection by the State Migration Service and the Interior Ministry...

“Domestic economists are sounding the alarm, as any checks on businesses are a bad signal, even if they are conducted by state bodies, not to speak of activists,” economist Azamat Akeneyev has told Vecherniy Bishkek... The economist recalled that a struggle for investors was increasing across the world. “However, except for China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey which are our main partners, businesses from no foreign countries are hurrying to come to Kyrgyzstan. On top of this, there are checks involving the openly anti-Chinese Kyrk Choro. By doing similar things we are showing that laws in our country do not work and that one should not rely on any government guarantees...”

MP Kojobek Ryspayev is also outraged by the presence of Kyrk Choro at investors’ business facilities. He said that it was inadmissible for NGOs to interfere in the work of businessmen... “This will impact on our country’s relations with China, which is Kyrgyzstan’s main creditor and trade partner, sooner or later...” MP Kojobek Ryspayev told Vecherniy Bishkek.



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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Chinese Views on How Artificial Intelligence Will Change Ways to Win Wars

OE Watch Commentary: Since Chinese President Xi Jinping took office, the country has been in a race for supremacy in artificial intelligence (AI). In July 2017, China released its first national artificial intelligence development plan, titled the “New-General AI Development Plan,” and elevated AI development to the national strategic level. Today, Chinese officials and researchers within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) reflect a belief that AI will one day be critical to military power and will fundamentally change the characteristics of warfare. One such individual is Li Minghai, from China’s National Defense University. According to Li in the accompanying excerpted article from *Jiefangjun Bao*, AI will “bring about some striking changes to the battle-winning mechanisms.”

Li makes other salient points in the article, including how “algorithm superiority” is a key component to determining “one’s dominance in AI-centric warfare.” Algorithms are described as the “centerpiece of war efficiency enhancement” and they are a “series of clear commands for solving issues, representing the explicit steps for solving various types of issues according to certain rules.” Li goes on to explain that “in future warfare, the force that enjoys algorithm superiority will be able to rapidly and accurately predict the development of the battlefield situation, thus coming up with the best combat-fighting methods.” Algorithm superiority will lead to “cognition superiority,” “speed superiority,” and “decision-making superiority.”

Li also argues in the article that operational elements are shifting “information dominance” to “machine-led operations.” He sees AI technology permeating every element and process surrounding war-fighting. He points out that the Internet of Things, the Internet of Intelligence, and the Internet of Brains will make up the foundation of warfighting. He also talks about how battlefield decision-making, which is now conducted by humans, will one day be conducted by machines and/or a combination of man and machine. The human brain is creative, flexible, and takes the initiative, making it ideal for high-level decision making. The strengths of machines lie in rapid speed, high precision, and endurance.

Li addresses future extreme operations that will be highly disruptive in nature. He envisions an extreme expansion of the operational spaces and domains. “Future AI warfare will be multi-dimensional, all-domain operations, with the space of war-fighting being extremely extended from the traditional domains to the polar, deep sea, and outer space domains.” The boundaries of various operational domains will be blurred and will permeate the cognitive and information domains. Operational progress will become accelerated and actions and decision making will be so rapid that it will allow for preemptive deployments and attacks.

According to Li, Xi Jinping said, “If the battle-winning mechanisms in contemporary warfare cannot be clearly understood, then one may never be able to grasp the key link as if one is watching thaumatrope images.” While Li offers insight into his vision of a successful outcome to artificial intelligence on future battlefields, there is no indication that the PLA is following the steps and methods outlined by him. However, the content of the article, as well as myriad other academic papers that have been published, clearly point to the depth at which Chinese researchers are digging to understand AI and how it will be used on future battlefields. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Future AI warfare will be multi-dimensional, all-domain operations, with the space of war-fighting being extremely extended from the traditional domains to the polar, deep sea, and outer space domains.”

Source: Li Minghai, “智能化战争的制胜机理变在哪里 (Where Exists the War-Winning Mechanisms of AI Warfare),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 15 January 2019. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2019-01/15/content_225335.htm

...artificial intelligence [AI] warfare in the future will bring about some striking changes to the battle-winning mechanisms.

In future warfare, the force that enjoys algorithm superiority will be able to rapidly and accurately predict the development of the battlefield situation, thus coming up with the best combat-fighting methods, and achieving the war objective of “prevailing before battle starts”.

Algorithms are the key link that determines one’s dominance in AI warfare. First, algorithm superiority leads to and determines cognition superiority... Second, algorithm superiority leads to and determines speed superiority... Third, algorithm superiority leads to and determines decision-making superiority.

The Internet of Things, the Internet of Intelligence, and the Internet of Brains will become the foundation of war-fighting.

Thanks to the AI decision-making support technology and the appearance of “cloud brains”, “digital staff members”, “virtual warehouses”, decision-making in war develops from purely human decision-making to man-machine combined decision-making, cloud brain AI decision-making, and neural network decision-making.

Man-machine combined decision-making... The strengths of human brains lie in creativity, flexibility, and initiative. The strengths of machines lie in fast speed, high precision, and great anti-fatigue endurance.

Future AI warfare will be multi-dimensional, all-domain operations, with the space of war-fighting being extremely extended from the traditional domains to the polar, deep sea, and outer space domains. In particular, it will permeate into the cognition domain, the information domain, and other domains, and will further blur the boundaries of various operational domains.



PLA Stratagems for Establishing Wartime Electromagnetic Dominance: An Analysis of “The Winning Mechanisms of Electronic Countermeasures”

by Zi Yang

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OE Watch Commentary: As Chinese companies assume an ever-more prominent international profile, recent controversies surrounding Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei have rekindled discussions over information security. However, while public debates have mostly focused on peacetime communications security and alleged incidents of espionage, it is also necessary to explore the designs and stratagems of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) for dominating the information sphere in a time of war. This article provides analysis of the PLA’s latest treatise for dominating the electromagnetic spectrum (电磁频谱), or EMS, a critical realm that serves as the main carrier of information for modern military forces.

A number of titles exploring “winning mechanisms for informationized warfare” (信息化战争制胜机理) have been published since PLA Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping first proclaimed a personal interest in the subject. The Winning Mechanisms of Electronic Countermeasures (电子对抗制胜机理) is one of the more prominent texts that have emerged during this rush to satisfy Xi’s concerns.

Most significantly, Winning Mechanisms is the only monograph since the initiation of the 2016 PLA reforms that systematically breaks down thinking among PLA strategists in regards to achieving a superior position in the EMS. Whoever controls the EMS, and has the ability to deny enemies from effectively utilizing this channel, will retain enormous advantages in securing victory. According to the text, “the winning mechanism” of EMS contests is described as “the inherent basis and path to realizing electromagnetic dominance through electronic offense and defense by way of electromagnetic energy, directed energy, sound energy, and other technical means.”

The PLA’s game plan is divided into four principles and stages: 1) “gather one’s strengths and advantages to achieve a superior starting position” (聚优谋势); 2) pursue “multi-level integration” (多元集成); 3) employ “precise release of energy” (精确释能); and 4) demonstrate “effects in multiple areas” (多域显效). The fourth and final stage is the most important one in securing victory, and it is the focus for the majority of EMS stratagems.

Per Winning Mechanisms, careful preparation is needed before launching any attacks, and pre-war preparations allow one to achieve an advantageous starting position. Bringing forward qualitatively and quantitatively superior forces is a must in any war preparations. While quantity can make-up for inferior quality in some cases, the text underlines the importance of quality—not only in terms of hardware, but also in terms of military personnel and their experience, training, and ability to quickly react to ever-changing battlefield conditions. After identifying the forces needed, meticulous operational planning and force arrangement is needed to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses. Moreover, having accurate intelligence and a comprehensive understanding of enemy capabilities ahead of battle will enable prompt assessment and decision-making. Such diligent planning will ensure that the PLA will always be ahead of the enemy in conducting sustained offensive operations, and in keeping the enemy off-balance.

The multi-level integration stage focuses on supplying friendly forces with timely intelligence data. Platforms (平台), systems (系统), and “systems of systems” (体系) must be integrated to make sure that friendly forces can effectively move and fight as one. Information and intelligence tie these levels together, guiding the decisions of commanders and operators through the reconnaissance–target guidance–strike–assessment loop. In this stage, battlefield intelligence is collected from platforms in land, sea, air, and space through satellites, radars, electro-optical sensors, and electronic intelligence equipment. Besides integrating friendly forces with intelligence, information support systems encompassing reconnaissance, surveillance, communications, navigation, positioning, guidance, and control need to be strengthened in order to protect them from enemy electronic attacks.

The third principle involves the precise release of energy, which is important for both tactical and political reasons. The authors of Winning Mechanisms note that precise attacks avoid collateral damage against civilian electronic infrastructure, which could have negative legal and public opinion ramifications. Instead of imprecise attacks, friendly forces must identify and strike at “critical nodes” (中枢节点) in the enemy’s network, to be conducted at opportune moments prior to the launching of an all-out offensive. According to the authors’ calculations, destruction of ten percent of critical nodes will collapse the enemy’s information network. In contrast, the network would still remain intact even after 40 percent of “ordinary nodes” (普通节点) are destroyed. Strikes must be therefore be performed in a systematic fashion, and assessments are necessary in improving upcoming attacks. The attack methods employed—whether they be anti-radiation, directed energy, or electromagnetic pulse weapons—must correspond to the target’s characteristics in order to achieve the most desired effects. Winning Mechanisms divides the types of targets into five general categories: reconnaissance and early warning, wireless communication, guidance and fire control, navigation and positioning, and friend-or-foe identification. (*continued*)

(continued)



Continued: PLA Stratagems for Establishing Wartime Electromagnetic Dominance: An Analysis of “The Winning Mechanisms of Electronic Countermeasures”

Winning Mechanisms lays out three broad areas—electromagnetic deterrence, deception, and destruction—as the main areas in which the PLA must confront the enemy. Notably, PLA strategists view winning with minimum use of force as the ideal scenario, and the first two categories (EM deterrence and deception) both incorporate a strong psychological component. The text indicates that, given modern armies’ heavy reliance on electronic equipment, EM deterrence will play a crucial role in forcing the enemy to submit or withdraw. By demonstrating the PLA’s sophisticated electromagnetic strike capability and willingness to employ such means without hesitation, EM deterrence will exploit the enemy’s fear of losing expensive, critical electronic assets.

Per the text, increasing news reports and propaganda on PLA war games is one way of giving adversaries the impression that the PLA is adroit in EW. Intentionally leaking snippets of information regarding the PLA’s advanced “assassin’s mace” (杀手锏) electromagnetic weaponry will also intimidate adversaries. Furthermore, publishing works on EW theories and doctrine could show PLA know-how in striking vulnerable nodes in the enemy information network—thus compelling the enemy to think twice about an EMS face-off with China.

Winning Mechanisms recommends employing suppressive jamming and firepower simultaneously in order to increase damage to critical nodes in the early warning, communications, and “latent-potential warfare system” (战争潜力系统). Yet the argument here appears to run counter to the aforementioned notion of not striking civilian infrastructure—instead, it suggests that civilian infrastructure must also be a target. The text recommends striking telecommunications systems in order to disrupt communications between enemy government and citizenry, foster popular discontent through disrupting the electric power system, and degrade transportation systems that support enemy troop mobilization and deployment.

The authors specifically point out the differences between “deterrence” (威慑), “deception” (欺骗), “threats” (威胁), and “shock and awe” (震慑) tactics. Deterrence shows genuine military capability, and the resolve to use it. Deception presents fake information to the enemy with an intention to mislead; deception may be employed both against enemy personnel and against “smart” weapons. Threats force the enemy into courses of action that they never desired. Shock and awe employs one, or a small number, of precise strikes on high valued targets in order to demonstrate PLA capabilities and stun the enemy into submission.

As explicated in Winning Mechanisms, deception has been used by armies throughout history, and remains an integral component of today’s wars. Military deception can be further divided into two types: “confusion deception” (迷惑型欺骗) and “misleading deception” (误导型欺骗). In the first instance, the target could become confused when confronted with a mixture of real and false information—such as the use of decoys to create the illusion of a large incoming force on enemy radars—that will lead to “vacillating decisions or a dispersion of forces” (举棋不定或是处处分兵).

Leading PLA EW theorists advocate seizing the offensive initiative with careful planning, intelligence-led force integration, and the use of precision weapons, as well as deterrence and deception tactics to intimidate or confuse the enemy. This text, from an authoritative source, serves as a window into the thinking of PLA EW experts on how a post-reform PLA could achieve victory in the EMS. While having its share of flaws, Winning Mechanisms nevertheless offers the PLA and China-watching community a reference on how one of the world’s leading militaries plans to conduct itself during a future EMS conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Yang)**



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>



China Accelerates Chip Design to Overcome Strategic Vulnerability

OE Watch Commentary: In the accompanying excerpted article, Hu Xiao, an associate researcher at the National University of Defense Technology (directly subordinate to the Central Military Commission, China's highest military body), notes the difficulty facing China in replacing its reliance on foreign microchips. According to Hu, microchips are a strategic commodity, and Chinese demand makes up 33 percent of the global market. Particularly as China attempts to move its industries up the value-chain, dominate in AI, and introduce Internet+ (internet of things) technologies, demand will only rise. However, reliance on imports of foreign chips introduces strategic vulnerabilities, and Hu is explicit in stating the dangers of lacking domestic chip-building capability.

China's goals are to first reduce their reliance on imported chips, and then eventually become an exporter, upon whom the rest of the world is itself reliant. A combination of licensing deals with chip-making giants, domestic innovation and outright copying are helping China slowly move toward these goals. Progress has been made allowing China to replace foreign-made chips in sensitive applications such as Beidou navigation system terminals and supercomputers.

However, Chinese scientists acknowledge that chip architecture design is very difficult, and the manufacturing itself has to be very precise. China's progress has been the result of a national effort. A series of state-directed economic and scientific development plans have made domestic chip design and manufacture a leading priority for China. Innovation is being encouraged through sponsoring of research and competitions. The ongoing trade war has led to tighter restrictions on technological transfers to China. Ironically, emerging Chinese dominance of IT sectors such 5G technology has lead other countries to seek alternatives. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Chips for use in China's indigenously-developed Beidou navigation system have already achieved large scale use.”



Tianhe-2 in National Supercomputer Center in Guangzhou.
Source: By O01326 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45399546>.

Source: “国防科技大学专家为您讲述：芯片研发究竟有多难 (National Defense Science University Expert Explains: How Hard is Microchip R&D,” *China Military Online*, 21 December 2018. http://www.81.cn/jskj/2018-12/21/content_9384631.htm

Currently the global high-end chip market is almost occupied by advanced companies such as the United States and Europe. However, accelerating the research and development of domestically produced independent chips has always been the key development direction of the government, enterprises and research institutes. In recent years, China has made great progress in the field of integrated circuits, and percentage of chips that are domestically produced has risen continuously. The situation in which access to high-end chips are subject to others' control is gradually being broken.

Chips for use in China's indigenously -developed Beidou navigation system have already achieved large scale use. In the field of supercomputers, the world's number one “Shenwei Taihu Light” [神威太湖之光] and “Tianhe No. 2” [天河二号] have all adopted domestic high-performance processors. Consumer electronics such as domestic mobile phones, Bluetooth speakers, and satellite receiver boxes have also begun to use a large number of domestic chips.

On November 9th, the “2018 China Integrated Circuit Industry Promotion Conference” was held in Chongqing. 102 enterprises participated, displaying 154 products. The “Feiteng 2000+ High Performance General Purpose Microprocessor” and other 24 products were chosen as outstanding “China Microchip” [中国芯] (domestically produced chip). Awarded products included digital switch chips, analog RF circuits, artificial intelligence chips, fingerprint sensors, industrial controls and consumer electronics.

This progress is the result of national support and investments. In 2006, the State Council issued the “National Medium- and Long-Term Science and Technology Development Plan (2006-2020)”. And in June 2014, the State Council approved the implementation of the “National Integrated Circuit Industry Development Promotion Outline”, all of which included requirements for the development of this field.

With the support of the country and the breakthrough of a series of key core technologies, “China Microchip” is gradually reducing the distance with developed countries. “Made in China” [中国创造] (national initiative) will eventually occupy the commanding heights of information system technology and China will truly take the lead in competition and development.



Russia May Begin Purchase of Chinese-made Drones, Engines

OE Watch Commentary: There are reports that Russia may soon begin to purchase a wider range of equipment from China. Since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s, China has largely been the recipient of Soviet, and later Russian technical aid and arms sales. Most of China's early aircraft and tanks were transferred from the Soviet Union during the Chinese Civil War and then the Korean War. Many industries were essentially built from the ground up by Soviet technical advisors. The breakup of the Soviet Union however, meant that many important production lines were located in independent countries.

Rebuilding the engineering expertise or relocating these lines (like the Ilyushin aircraft production line in Uzbekistan) back to Russia took its toll on the Russian military industry. The outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea meant that the Ukrainian government was unwilling to sell a large number of engines and parts needed to maintain Russian equipment. The accompanying excerpted article suggests that China may be stepping in to fill some of these gaps. However, China purchases large numbers of engines (especially marine diesels) from Ukraine, which may give the Ukrainians some leverage to limit the sale. Another area where it might make sense for Russia to purchase from China rather than develop its own capability is UAVs.

The article highlights the successes China has had in dominating some niches of the global arms market that would have otherwise likely been dominated by Russia. Chinese companies have offered a range of tactical reconnaissance, attack, and long-endurance drones. Free from sales restrictions that have prevented many customers from purchasing more advanced drones from the US, Chinese UAVs have been popular among countries in the Middle East and Africa. Russia may begin purchases of these drones, though the authors suggest that just as Russia has used various techniques to prevent China from reverse-engineering fighter jets and SAMs, China itself may find it necessary to incorporate such techniques for drones it sells to Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The diesel engines purchased from China have been installed in some light surface ships of the Russian Navy.”

Source: “俄售华苏35做手脚 现想买中国无人机也被技术封锁 (Russia sells China ‘rigged’ Su-35s, Now Wants to Purchase Chinese Drones to Break Technological Blockade),” *Sina Military*, 22 January 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2018-01-22/doc-ifyquptv8621003.shtml>

A long time ago, China began exporting optical glass to Russia. After polishing by Russian companies, this optical glass was installed in various Russian military equipment. [This is due to the fact that] after the breakup of the Soviet Union the optical industry acquired from Germany after the end of World War II has along since declined.

Now that Russia is importing more Chinese-made weapons and components, Hong Kong media has published an article saying that Western and Ukrainian sanctions and arms embargo against Russia forced Russia to turn to China for aircraft and missile parts, even though in Russia there are doubts about the quality of alternatives made in China.

The article said that Russia may lack other means to purchase weapons and components, especially connectors, pumps and diesel engines. These parts were mainly imported from Ukraine and European countries, but now due to sanctions, Russia has to switch to China. Russian media has reported that these parts are technically backward and there is neither the ability nor the need to invest large amounts of money to produce these parts within Russia.

The diesel engines purchased from China have been installed in some light surface ships of the Russian Navy. Russia's surface warships and wheeled armored vehicles are heavily dependent on imports. Foreign media believe that if Russia intends to restart abandoned or canceled equipment plans, will import marine gas turbines and automotive diesel engines from China. However, imports of Chinese-made marine gas turbines is likely to be obstructed by the Ukrainian side. Chinese marine gas turbines have a deep relationship with Ukraine.

In addition, there are reports that Russia may import Chinese-made drones. Chinese-made drones have been used in many countries and regions, and China has even exported production lines. While their performance is considered to be inferior to U.S. products, compared to Russian drones, Chinese drones are significantly more capable. ...Furthermore, exporting drones not only involves the aircraft and a simple control system, but also a complex set of technological systems. If Russia imports Chinese drones, observers believe that, there will be differences between export and foreign trade variants like the S-400 and Su-35, and technical measures will be taken to avoid being copied. Russia adopted this measure on the Su-35 to prevent propriety secrets of its engine and avionics being cracked.

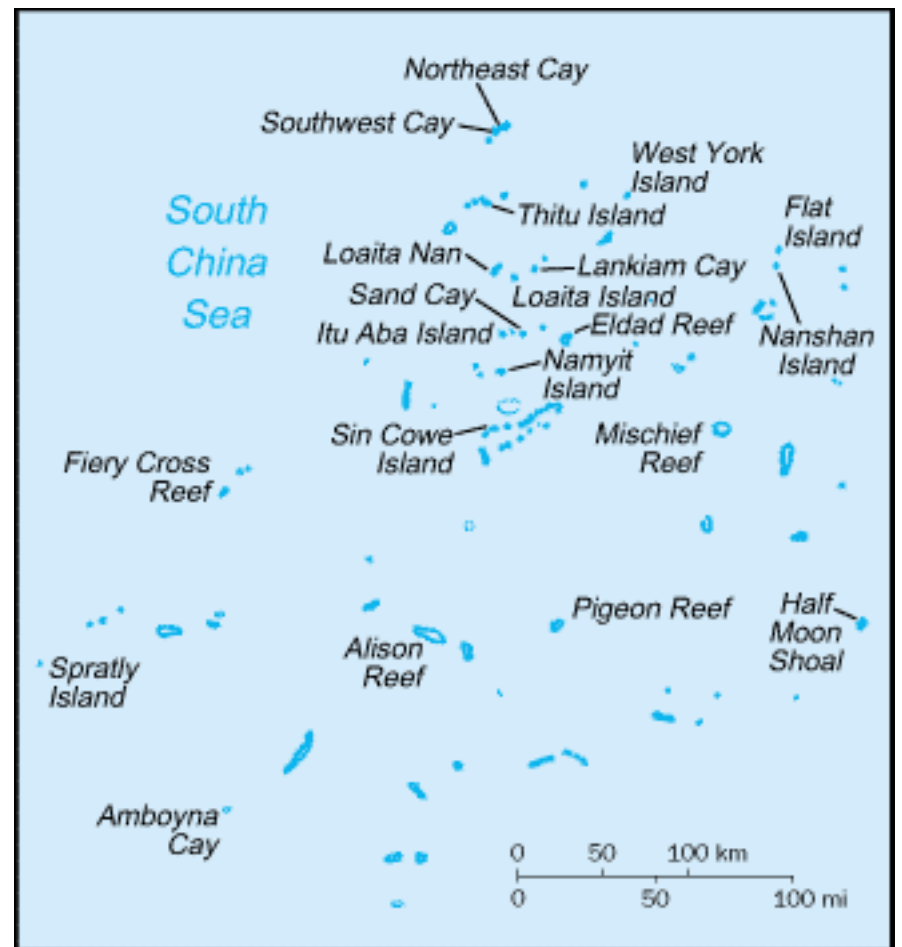


China Reacts to South China Sea Report

OE Watch Commentary: On 16 January, the accompanying excerpted article from the Chinese language website *sina.com* provided a Chinese perspective on a report by a South China Sea-focused American think tank called the Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) about Chinese interference in the territorial waters of the Philippines. According to the article, the Philippines is acting in moderation regarding the issues mentioned in the report. The article also calls the report's claims speculation and refers to previous statements by the President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, at the ASEAN Summit in which he stated that the US should recognize that China already has a presence in the South China Sea and should not do anything to cause friction.

In particular, the article objected to the report's claims that China was deploying fishing boats as a militia in the waters of the Philippines to perform patrols, surveil, and resupply the People's Liberation Army Navy presence in the Spratly Islands. Since these fishing boats seemed not to have commercial utility, the AMTI report concluded that their purpose was military in nature. The article in response to this report, however, did not provide evidence to refute or otherwise counter the report's claims. Rather, the article relied on the statements of officials in the Philippines to demonstrate that because they are not concerned about these Chinese fishing boats, the think tank must be overhyping the threat or stirring tensions unnecessarily.

There were also three policies noted in the article that attempts to demonstrate that the Philippines need not be concerned about these fishing boats: first, China and the Philippines have agreed that their relationships transcends the South China Sea and will not revolve around naval disputes; second, the two countries agreed to handle any disputes in a peaceful manner; and third, the two countries agreed to work with ASEAN, which includes the Philippines, to resolve matters in the South China Sea. China still considers the activities the report describes to not be unlawful or threatening to the Philippines. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Spratly Islands.

Source: Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=552620>.

“The South China Sea is already in the hands of China, so why do you want to create friction?”

Source: “美智库称大量中国民兵现身南沙 菲律宾回应:纯属猜测 (A U.S. think tank reports that a large number of Chinese soldiers appeared in the Spratly Islands and the Philippines responded: it is only speculation),” *sina.com*, 16 January 2019. <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/china/2019-01-16/doc-ihqhqcis6557560.shtml>

There were 76 incidents of piracy and armed robbery reported in Asia waters last year, the lowest in more than a decade. The number of significant incidents - which usually involved armed perpetrators, leading to violence against ships' crew in some cases - was 10 last year, the lowest in 12 years. In the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, there was a slight decrease in armed robbery cases from nine in 2017 to eight last year. The results were shared at the 10th Nautical Forum, which is ReCAAP's annual dialogue with maritime, diplomatic and shipping communities, attended by more than 150 representatives. “While the results do not tell us if the same patterns will continue in the future, what happened in the past can be quite useful for the shipping industry - when they go to certain locations, what kind of measures they have to take,” [Masafumi Kuruki] said.



PLA Army Air Defense Brigades Now Able to Share Information with Air Force

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese reporters visiting a PLA Army Air Defense brigade under the Central Theater Command have announced a significant breakthrough in the unit's ability to share information with the PLA Air Force. The PLA has faced problems with both inter-branch (e.g. Army Air Defense and Armor) and inter-service communication. Previous reporting in 2018 discussed OPFOR exercises meant to challenge PLA air defense brigades and improve inter-service communication. Army air defenses have undergone significant modernization from their days as mostly division-size units of Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA).

Images published in the accompanying excerpted articles give a sense of their current equipment, which includes what appear to be Type 99 35-mm twin-barreled anti-aircraft guns, and HQ-16 Medium range air defense systems. Other typical equipment of Army Air Defense units include the HQ-7 SAM (borrowed from the French Croatal system), an upgraded HQ-12 medium-range SAM system, the HQ-17 SAM, and Type 95 SPAA, as well as various short-ranged Qianwei (Vanguard) MANPADs.

The articles note that the air defense brigade practices interception of enemy aircraft performing ultra-low-altitude penetration and using electromagnetic jamming. Army air defense units play an important role in China's layered air defense, with particular attention to the aforementioned roles. While these equipment upgrades are important on their own, articles like the two excerpted here are indicative of the PLA's recognition that organization and training issues themselves have a major impact on combat effectiveness.

The Army Air Defense brigade credits the creation of a the Joint Theater Command system with helping streamline inter-service communications and get access to PLA Air Force data. Previously, the units had set up two ad hoc systems with temporary cables laid between the two units. The PLA Air Force operates an extensive network of static and mobile radars. While the unit sharing the data is not specified, it is likely that the units have more powerful radar units or permanent early warning radar stations. The introduction of information sharing between services, which in addition to the tactical radars and strategic SAMs of its radar and air defense branches, is a potent force multiplier. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: “陆空信息壁垒被打破了 (The Army-Air Force Information Barrier Has Been Broken),” *Chinese Military Online*, 24 January 2019. http://www.81.cn/2018xczjyzzw/2019-01/24/content_9412631.htm

This reporter has interviewed Army Air Defense units many times, but for the first time, he saw real-time air situation data from the (PLA) Air Force on display in the Operations Duty Office of the Army Air Defense Brigade.

Brigade officers had a lot of opinions about being able to share information with the Air Force.”

“We have been looking forward to this [air situation data sharing] for many years,” said Zhang Feng [张峰], the brigades’ chief of staff. Zhang has worked in the brigade for more than ten years. He told reporters that they have conducted joint training with their neighboring military units on several occasions. Both units typically apply for approval in advance, and although they receive approval from their superiors, it has been difficult to completely overcome the institutional barriers between services.

In the past, due to institutional mechanisms and the requirements of confidentiality, information fusion channels were not smooth enough. They had to lay temporary communication lines between each other. Alerts could only be communicated by telephone, and data could not be shared directly.

Now, the duty staff can view the real-time position and distance of the airborne objects in a certain range with just a click of the mouse.

Guo Hui [郭 徽], a member of the brigades’ training staff, told reporters that before the (2015) military reforms, when the brigade requested an information sharing system to connect them with neighboring Air Force units, they were informed that it was technically feasible, but difficult to implement.

After the new round of national defense and military reforms, the establishment of the joint theater commands changed this situation.

Source: “陆空联合防空 – 确认过眼神，是并肩作战的人 (Army-Air Force Joint Air Defense: Fighting Side by Side),” *Ministry of Defense Online*, 20 January 2019. http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-01/20/content_4834911.htm

In the past few years, during joint training with other military units, the air situation data [空情信息] was transmitted by phone or physical documents. This not only limited the total data, but also introduced a time lag. On the battlefield, reducing this time can improve combat effectiveness.

Air defense combat is fast-paced, and the Air Force radar has a long detection range. Using the air situation data provided by the Air Force can greatly reduce the time needed to identify targets, giving units more time to prepare. The sharing of this data is not difficult to achieve technically, so institutional barriers are the main issue. In the past each unit performed its own reconnaissance and intelligence was difficult to share. Now under the joint theater commands [战区], everything starts from actual combat needs, and the links of the intelligence sharing of various arms and services become more and more smooth. Battlefields that were been opaque in the past have become multidimensional and transparent, and officers and enlisted are more comfortable with sharing intelligence...The most prepared side will always be victor of a battle.

“Now under the joint theater commands [战区], everything starts from actual combat needs, and the links of the intelligence sharing of various arms and services become more and more smooth.”



Report Indicates China Moving Toward Sixth-Generation Fighter

OE Watch Commentary: Recent Chinese press reports have been highlighting China's push to build a world-class air force over the next three decades. Part of that effort appears to be the possible development of a sixth-generation fighter jet. In November 2018, according to the accompanying excerpted article published in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, Xu Anxiang, Deputy Commander of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), announced that China was implementing a three-stage plan that would transform his branch into a world-class air force. The article notes that the first step is to "cross the basic threshold for a strategic air force by 2020" by setting up a PLAAF forces system, command system, battle system, and support system with fourth-generation equipment as a backbone, and third-generation equipment as the main body. Step two is to establish basic strategic capabilities and have a more "complete, scientific, and rational" force system by 2035. Step three will see a PLAAF capable of supporting "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people and realize the Chinese Dream and Strong Military Dream" by 2050.

According to the same article, Xu introduced a flight demonstration for the J-20, China's fifth-generation stealth fighter, during the 12th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition in Zhuhai. The J-20 is capable of carrying new model mid- and long-range missiles and short-range air-to-air missiles.

A more recent article, published by China's *Global Times*, announced that China was determined to keep up in the global race toward sixth-generation fighter jets, which it expects to have no later than 2035. According to the article, a sixth-generation fighter jet is expected to include the "ability to command drones, artificial intelligence and even higher stealth capability through aerodynamic design" and it could possess new technologies like "laser, adaptive engines, hypersonic weapons and swarm warfare" capabilities. The article hints that China could already have started in its research and development phase toward the next generation fighter as "China's tradition is to have one generation in service, a new one in development, and a next-generation under study," an expert was quoted as saying. "Now that the J-20 is already in service, the development for a new aircraft is also underway," he surmised. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"A generation gap means the sixth-generation warplanes would easily top fifth-generation ones including the US' F-22 and China's J-20..."

Source: "歼-20战机已具备初步作战能力 (New J-20 Fighter Jet on Display at Zhuhai Airshow)," *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 13 November 2018. <http://mil.huanqiu.com/world/2018-11/13532521.html>

Xu Anxiang (PLAAF Deputy Commander) pointed out that this J-20 fighter demonstration had two primary features: First, the J-20 fighter was displayed in formation at the exhibition, showing that the J-20 already possesses initial operating capabilities. Second, the J-20 opened its weapons bay and conducted its display while circling the sky above the airport, demonstrating that it is capable of carrying new model mid- and long-range missiles, as well as short-distance air-to-air missiles.

While answering questions of reporters, Xu Anxiang expressed that the Air Force will progressively realize its goal of building a world-class air force according to the "three steps to take" plan. The first step is to cross the basic threshold for a strategic air force by 2020, and to set up a PLAAF forces system, command system, battle system, and support system with 4th-generation equipment as the backbone, and 3rd-generation equipment forming the main body. The second step, from 2020 to 2035, is for the PLAAF to establish basic strategic air force capabilities, and for the force system to be more complete, scientific, and rational. The third step, from 2035 to the mid-century, is for the general objectives of the PLAAF to be the same as the country and national defense armed forces, to build a first-rate strategic air force, and thereby support the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people and realize the Chinese Dream and Strong Military Dream.

Source: "China Eyes Building Next Generation Fighter Jets by 2035," *Global Times*, 11 February 2019. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1138454.shtml>

China will not fall behind in the global race toward sixth-generation fighter jets and is expected to build its own next-generation fighter jets by 2035, said a leading Chinese fighter jet specialist.

Some new features of a sixth-generation fighter jet include the ability to command drones, artificial intelligence and even higher stealth capability through aerodynamic design, the periodical reported.

New technologies, such as laser, adaptive engines, hypersonic weapons and swarm warfare, might also be part on the new aircraft, Wang said, noting that China will choose some of these features and add others that best suit China's needs.

A generation gap means the sixth-generation warplanes would easily top fifth-generation ones including the US' F-22 and China's J-20, analysts said.

"China's tradition is to have one generation in service, a new one in development and a next-generation under study. Now that the J-20 is already in service, the development for a new aircraft is also underway," the expert forecast.



Dedicated OPFOR Unit Helps PLAAF Improve Skills

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article profiles the PLA Air Forces' (PLAAF) dedicated "Blue Force" air brigade. In the Chinese military, the colors are the opposite of NATO countries, with the "red team" being representing the PLA, and "blue" a notional opponent. The PLAAF takes great pride in this unit as representative of its transformation from an inward focused force, to one that is able to effectively learn from and emulate enemy tactics to become more effective. This air brigade was only made public in 2015 during the annual "Firepower" [火力] exercise. While the PLA ground force also have a brigade size dedicated "blue team," its profile is much higher and it appears in media more frequently. Other services have smaller teams that are even more camera-shy.

Based at the Flight Test and Training Center [飞行试验训练基地] in Cangzhou, Hebei province, the PLAAF blue team falls under the Central Theater Command. The article notes that the OPFOR team is equipped with China's most advanced fighter aircraft. While unspecified, this likely includes the advanced variants of the J-10 interceptor, the J-20 stealth fighter aircraft, the Su-30 and its Chinese-produced copy the J-16, as well as newly purchased Su-35 aircraft. In addition to training with air units cycled through Cangzhou and helping test new aircrafts capabilities, the OPFOR unit also participates in annual large-scale OPFOR exercises with other branches and services. This includes both the "Red Sword" [红剑] and "Blue Shield" [蓝盾] exercises. "Red Sword" is a comprehensive test of the PLAAF's ability to conduct a campaign. "Blue Shield" tests the PLAAF's Air Defense brigades' ability to successfully defend objectives.

The brigade also brings in outside experts on various topics to enhance the realism of their training. In one instance, when working to simulate an "enemy air to air missile" the unit sought the input of the "chief designer of a certain aircraft." From context, this is very likely Yang Wei, lead designer of the J-20.

Over the course of the past three years Chinese media has been granted much greater access to PLA OPFOR units across the PLA Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy and Rocket Force than in previous years. At the same time, the tempo of confrontation exercises and their attention to realistic scenarios has been increasing. Instructed by senior Chinese Communist Party officials to rapidly improve the capabilities of the PLA, these moves indicate a military-wide embrace of opposition force training as a way of enhancing the PLA's readiness. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: "飞行蓝军的思考 | 从研究队友到研究对手的转变 (Reflections on the PLAAF Blue Force — Transforming from Learning from Your Team to Learning From the Enemy)," *PLA Daily*, 8 January 2019. http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2019-01/08/content_9398616.htm

In the spring of 2018, after several years of training, the Blue Army traveled west to Yangguan [阳关] (a remote desert area in western China), and began a confrontation exercise with an unidentified Air Force brigade.

The significance of this exercise is extraordinary. In the past, they participated in opposition training as part of a larger group of different units. This exercise marked the first time that the brigade individually held an exercise with another PLAAF unit...

Transforming the past view of victory and defeat and achievement is the hurdle that must be overcome when the new path of red vs blue confrontation exercises is taken.

"We need to need to focus on improving combat effectiveness as our only goal" said Wang Long [王龙], the unit commissar. Before departing, he made two demands of pilots participating in the exercise. "First, you must teach you colleagues in the brigade everything you learn from the exercise without holding anything back; Second, we must make it clear that our purpose is not to demonstrate our skill to other units, but to give them the full sense of fighting a real enemy."

Facts have proved that both sides of the exercise benefited a lot from this attitude.



J-20 fighter.

Source: by emperornie, CC BY-SA 2.0, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-20#/media/File:J-20_fighter_\(44040541250\).cropped.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-20#/media/File:J-20_fighter_(44040541250).cropped.jpg).

“Transforming the past view of victory and defeat and achievement is the hurdle that must be overcome when the new path of red vs blue confrontation exercises is taken.”



India's Ongoing Problems with Fighter Aircraft

OE Watch Commentary: As the government of India continues to deal with issues in revamping its inventory of fighter aircraft, a recent crash of an Indian Air Force Mirage 2000 fighter highlighted problems with the upgrades to current fighters and it comes at a time when the Rafale controversy shows no signs of dissipating. The accompanying excerpted article from *Firstpost* reports on the crash, which resulted in the death of both pilots, despite the fact that they ejected from the aircraft. The article focuses on the problems with the ejection system and notes how “the Mirage in question had just been upgraded in an ongoing programme to improve the performance envelope of what is now a 30 year old aircraft.”

The article does not mention what other upgrades took place within the program, but states that it is “necessary to ask Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) if this exercise to complete the upgrade in record time, with the kits obtained from Dassault, in France was an attempt by the public sector aircraft manufacturer to offset the scathing criticism by Air Chief Marshal Dhanoa that the aviation company was miles behind in its schedules for assembling not just the Mirage 2000 but also the Jaguars.” Additionally, the article states that another “48 aircrafts (are) being fitted with similar upgrades.”

While it will take some time for the investigation into the crash to unfold, the article from *The Print* shows how it comes at a time when the Rafale controversy continues to be a problem. While the article rehashes some of the same points that have come up in the past year, it notes how “two more (fighter) squadrons are due to be phased out by March, bringing the strength down to just 29 as against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons” and how the Indian Air Force believes it “will need at least 45 squadrons to fight a possible two-front war.” In reference to the pending deal to acquire new fighters the article notes that “while there is no fixed time table that needs to be adhered to, it was hoped that the process would be rushed through.” Regardless of the next steps that the Indian government takes to deal with its issues with fighter aircraft, it appears that there is increased pressure to resolve it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“This becomes a point of concern because the Mirage in question had just been upgraded in an ongoing programme to improve the performance envelope of what is now a 30 year old aircraft.”

Source: Bikram Vohra, “Mirage 2000 crash puts HAL’s credibility under cloud; further upgrades to ageing fleet pointless before thorough probe,” *Firstpost*, 3 February 2019. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/mirage-2000-crash-puts-hals-credibility-under-cloud-further-upgrades-to-ageing-fleet-pointless-before-thorough-probe-6017131.html>

It is too early to tell why the pilots died after ejecting from an aborted Mirage 2000 in Bengaluru on Friday and were unable to do so safely as the ejection system should have ensured. But certain questions are raised because of this malfunction...

The Indian Mirage 2000s are fitted with the Martin Baker Mk 10 ejection system which is highly reliable and has saved over 7,500 lives globally as of February 2018...The fact is that the ejection system which comprises several aspects has to work perfectly and experts say the slightest error or even a small non-working part can cause the system to fail in its activation.

This becomes a point of concern because the Mirage in question had just been upgraded in an ongoing programme to improve the performance envelope of what is now a 30 year old aircraft...Whether these relatively old jets have the capability for an upgrade and to what extent the refurbishing and upgrading of the plane had an impact on the efficiency of the ejection system and the overall capability of the jet.

...It is also necessary to ask Hindustan Aeronautical Limited if this exercise to complete the upgrade in record time, with the kits obtained from Dassault, in France was an attempt by the public sector aircraft manufacturer to offset the scathing criticism by Air Chief Marshal Dhanoa that the aviation company was miles behind in its schedules for assembling not just the Mirage 2000 but also the Jaguars.

Just two months ago, Dhanoa had said, “In the Sukhoi delivery HAL is three years behind, in the Jaguar we are six years behind, even the Mirage is two years behind.”

...It is a valid contention and till an independent investigation confirms exactly what went down in Bengaluru be it upgrade or maintenance there should be a total scrutiny of the other 48 aircrafts being fitted with similar upgrades...

Source: Snehash Alex Philip, “Despite Modi’s promise, one more year passes without IAF getting its fighter jets,” *The Print*, 31 December 2018. <https://theprint.in/governance/rafale-row-slows-down-purchase-of-114-fighter-jets-iaf-badly-needs/170270/>

...The Rafale controversy has apparently slowed down the Indian Air Force’s plan to procure 114 fighter jets, with the process of acquiring them yet to get the necessary ‘Acceptance of Necessity’ from the defence ministry.

The IAF has been waiting for new fighter jets since 2000 and its hopes were raised after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in April that India had rolled out the process to procure them, with a ‘Request for Information’ issued. He had promised to speed up the process and not “waste time like the UPA”.

However, eight months on, there has been little movement on the critical purchase...The government, thankfully, went in for an emergency purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jets, but this will not meet the urgent need of the IAF...

The IAF has seen a steady decline in its fighter squadrons and at least two more squadrons are due to be phased out by March, bringing the strength down to just 29 as against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons...The last time IAF had 42 squadrons was back in 2002. The IAF’s calculations say it will need at least 45 squadrons to fight a possible two-front war...

Seven fighter aircraft are in contention for the mega deal, valued to be worth over \$20 billion. While there is no fixed time table that needs to be adhered to, it was hoped that the process would be rushed through...



Indonesia and the Philippines Investigate Jolo Cathedral Bombing

OE Watch Commentary: On 27 January a major explosion ripped through a Roman Catholic Cathedral in the city of Jolo (Sulu Province) in Mindanao, the Philippines. Around 20 people were killed and over 100 others were injured. Although under usual circumstances the investigation of the attack could involve only authorities from the Philippines, the accompanying excerpted article from the Indonesian-language *Tribunnews.com* reveals that Indonesia has also been asked to investigate. The reason for this is that, according to the police in the Philippines, the bombers may have been two Indonesians.

Although the article recognizes that there is still a lack of confirmation on the identity of the bombers, authorities in the Philippines suspect at least one bomber, but possibly both bombers, were Indonesian women whose purpose for committing the suicide bombing was to urge Abu Sayyaf members to do the same. It was a form of shaming, insofar as men would see women being more brave than them and then seek to carry out suicide bombings themselves. There has historically been much less precedent for suicide bombing in the Philippines than in Indonesia, and in 2018 an Indonesian family even committed a suicide bombing when parents who had been in Syria detonated explosives at a church in Surabaya. This may be why Indonesians were selected to carry out the bombings in Jolo. At the same time, the article notes the authorities in the Philippines still suspect Abu Sayyaf members guided the Indonesian women to the specific target—the cathedral. This indicated Filipinos were closely involved in the operation.

According to the article, the authorities in both countries intend to continue to collect evidence and confirm the suspects. Nevertheless, if Indonesian women were involved in the suicide bombings in Jolo as the article mentions, it would represent the possible start of a new trend in Mindanao where suicide bombings, foreign fighters, and women will more commonly be part of attacks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Kepolisian Filipina Masih Cek Kewarganegaraan Pelaku Pengeboman Jolo,” *tribunnews.com*, 2 February 2019, <http://www.tribunnews.com/internasional/2019/02/02/kemlu-ri-kepolisian-filipina-masih-cek-kewarganegaraan-pelaku-pengeboman-jolo>

The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Philippine police were still searching for the truth of the identity and citizenship of the bombers in Jolo, the Philippines. The Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Armanantha Nasir, said in a statement that Indonesia had not been able to confirm the news about the possibility of involvement of two Indonesian citizens in a terrorist bombing in Jolo, Southern Philippines. Philippine Interior Minister Eduardo Año said the two perpetrators of suicide bomb attacks behind the attack of the Catholic church on Jolo Island came from Indonesia. The attack killed 22 people and injured 100 people, including civilians and soldiers. “The group responsible (in this attack) was the Indonesian suicide bomber. But the Abu Sayyaf group which guided them, studied the target, conducted secret monitoring and brought the couple to church,” Año said. “The aim of the Indonesian couple was to set an example and influence Philippine terrorists to carry out suicide bombings,” he added.

“The aim of the Indonesian couple was to set an example and influence Philippine terrorists to carry out suicide bombings.”



Aftermath of the Jolo Cathedral bombings.

Source: ALBERT ALCAIN/PRESIDENTIAL PHOTO (Public domain), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aftermath_of_the_Jolo_Cathedral_bombings.jpg



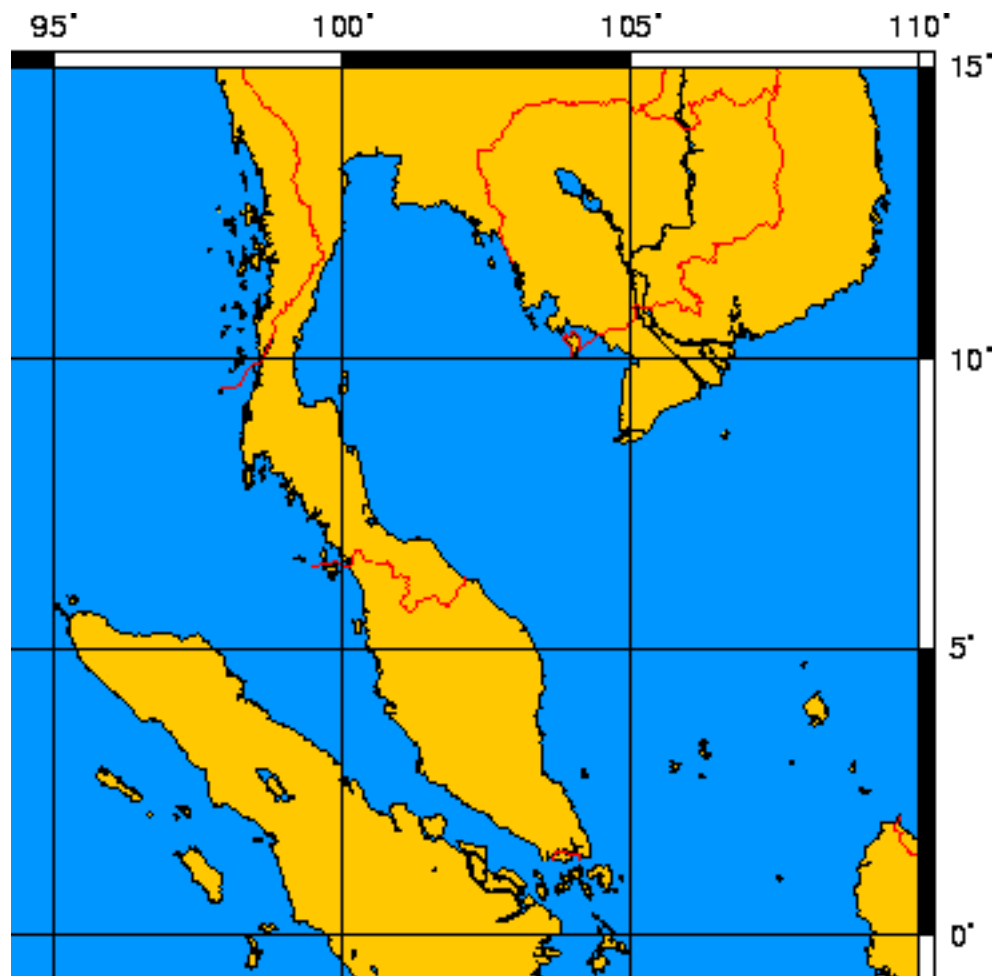
Singapore Reports Positively on Counter-Piracy

OE Watch Commentary: While Southeast Asia witnessed several terrorist attacks in 2018, including in Marawi, the Philippines and in Surabaya, Indonesia, in addition to other violent conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar and southern Thailand, one area where security has improved in the region is in counter-piracy in the region's waters. According to the accompanying excerpted article from Singapore's *The Straits Times*, the 76 incidents of piracy and armed robbery reported in Asian waters in 2018 was the lowest in more than decade. Moreover, only 10 of those incidents involved violence against the crew of a ship. The article noted that what was notable for Singapore is that the 76 incidents in Asian waters included only eight instances of armed robbery in the Straits of Malacca, which is one of the world's most important waterways. Therefore, the vigilance and cooperation that has allowed for the provision of this security is commended in the article.

The biggest concern in the article was that there were three abductions of crews in Asian waters in 2018. However, despite the article's pessimism about that statistic, it was still four fewer abductions than in 2017. The information the article came from the 10th annual meeting of member states in the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) agreement. It has been keeping these statistics since 2007 and therefore can now observe trends over the last 12 years.

One of the key takeaways from the meeting was that looking back on past data cannot predict future trends, but it certainly can help people in the shipping industry know which locations may require a heightened sense of vigilance or what kind of measures are most suitable to deter and prevent piracy. For example, 80 percent of incidents occur between 1900 and 0600. Therefore, it obviously makes sense for ships to heighten their guard at night compared to day time. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“While the results do not tell us if the same patterns will continue in the future, what happened in the past can be quite useful for the shipping industry.”



Straits of Malacca.

Source: CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1675464>.

Source: “Lowest number of piracy and armed robbery cases in Asia waters in more than a decade),” *The Straits Times*, 15 January 2019. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/lowest-number-of-piracy-and-armed-robbery-cases-in-asia-waters-in-more-than-a-decade>

There were 76 incidents of piracy and armed robbery reported in Asia waters last year, the lowest in more than a decade. The number of significant incidents - which usually involved armed perpetrators, leading to violence against ships' crew in some cases - was 10 last year, the lowest in 12 years. In the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, there was a slight decrease in armed robbery cases from nine in 2017 to eight last year. The results were shared at the 10th Nautical Forum, which is ReCAAP's annual dialogue with maritime, diplomatic and shipping communities, attended by more than 150 representatives. “While the results do not tell us if the same patterns will continue in the future, what happened in the past can be quite useful for the shipping industry - when they go to certain locations, what kind of measures they have to take,” [Masafumi Kuruki] said.



Iranian Army Shifts from Defensive to Offensive Posture

OE Watch Commentary: The Iranian military has gone through various strategic phases over its existence. The 1979 Islamic Revolution was, of course, a watershed event. Revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini distrusted both Iran's air force because of the high proportion of royalists who populated its top ranks, as well as flag officers who had risen to power in other military branches under the shah. Only Iraq's 1980 invasion of Iran suspended the wholesale purges of top brass.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) coalesced and became predominant. Through sheer attrition and a quantitative military edge, Iran was able to stalemate Iraqi forces, achieve naval victory over Iraq, and capture the strategic peninsula, all bolstering the confidence of Iranian leaders.

Their decision to confront US forces directly in April 1988 and the Iranian defeat in Operation Praying Mantis, however, convinced Iranian leaders to embrace a more asymmetric approach to confront the US and other military powers. In the Persian Gulf, this meant an embrace of speed boat swarming tactics against US shipping, while elsewhere, asymmetric tactics meant an embrace of insurgency and terrorism. *Fararu.com* is a website close to the IRGC. The accompanying excerpt of senior leader speeches on the occasion of the Strength-97 military exercises, however, hints that, more than 30 years after Operation Praying Mantis, a new change may be underway in Iranian strategic doctrine.

If the embrace of asymmetry was the result of relative weakness, the Army Ground Forces' embrace of more offensive doctrines and their commanders' explicit comments highlight a belief that Iran is now strong enough to confront enemies more directly. That Admiral Sayyari, who until last year was commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy, also embraced such sentiment suggests a broader consensus. Driving this consensus may be recent Iranian successes in Syria—where President Bashar al-Assad increasingly appears to have won the civil war—and in Iraq, where many Iraqis and Iranians assign disproportionate credit to Iranian rather than US assistance in victories against the Islamic State.

Unclear, however, is what an offensive strategy may mean in the operational environment. While Iran has recently developed tanks (see: "Iran: New Karrar Tank to be Unveiled Soon," *OE Watch*, February 2017), it is unlikely that they could be used to launch a ground invasion of any neighboring states. Rather, Heydari and Sayyari's comments may reflect a greater willingness to supplement IRGC deployments abroad with more a formal Iranian Army Ground Forces deployment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

"...we have turned the Ground Forces into a mobile offensive force...."



Army Ground Forces Commander Kiomars Heydari.
Source: *Fararu.com*, https://fararu.com/files/fa/news/1397/11/7/467846_264.jpg

Source: "Farmandeh-e Niru-ye Zamini Artesh: Ruyekard Tahajami dar Dastur Qarar Gereftah Ast (Commander of the Army Ground Forces: An Offensive Approach is in Place)," *Fararu.com*, 27 January 2019. <https://fararu.com/fa/news/388236>

The commander of the Army Ground Forces said that today nothing threatens us and emphasized, "Today, we have turned the Army Ground Forces into a mobile offensive force, but we must not in the future become starry-eyed about our capabilities. We need to upgrade our power to account for the science of the day in order to maintain the accountability of our operations." According to the Tasnim [News Agency], Admiral Habibullah Sayarri, the Coordinating Deputy of Islamic Republic of Iran Army, and Kioumars Heydari, commander of the Army Ground Forces, participated in a special news conference to discuss the achievements of the Strength-97 military exercises, and the latest steps to improve the military's defensive capabilities. At the beginning of the program, Gen. Heydari, commander of the Army Ground Forces, said the Strength-97 military exercises were tangibly different from previous iterations. In this exercise, we unveiled two important approaches. The first approach was the unveiling of structural changes ordered by the Army Ground Forces commander-in-chief, and the second was the general strategy communicated to the entire armed forces, which was an aggressive and proactive approach to the armed forces...

Heydari said that using asymmetric tactics are not a strategy but rather tactics, and we have crossed this point today. We have reached a level of deterrence that requires no unpleasant tactics and we can defend the country with a good offense.



Iran Builds Up Syrian Proxies on the Western Banks of the Euphrates

OE Watch Commentary: According to local media reports, Iranian forces have over the past year carried out a relatively effective proxy-building campaign in areas between the towns of al-Mayadin and Abu Kamal, on the western banks of the Euphrates River in the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor (see: “Iran: Winning Hearts and Minds in Deir Ezzor,” *OE Watch*, March 2018 and “Shia Symbolism: Iran-Backed Militias Resurgent in Syria,” *OE Watch*, October 2016). These former ISIS Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV) strongholds, located near and along the border with Iraq’s Anbar Province, are home to a conservative and predominantly Sunni population that is traditionally considered skeptical, if not hostile, toward Iranian intentions. However, years of conflict have transformed parts of Deir ez-Zor into an inhospitable mix of fear, destruction, indigence and resentment, and in the absence of alternatives, the security provided by Iranian-backed factions may be gaining appeal with a growing number of local residents.

Iranian efforts, as described in the three accompanying passages, are multi-faceted. In the Russian-controlled city of Deir ez-Zor, the Iranian cultural center offers a variety of free activities and services, from seminars and lectures on religion and politics to Farsi classes, humanitarian work, and pay-per-view soccer games beamed on large screens in the center’s grounds. Near the town of al-Mayadin, a shrine has been built to draw Shi’i tourism from Iraq and Iran, while local residents report an uptick on public “Shi’i practices” such as the way the call to prayer is done. Iranian-sponsored facilities distribute food, clothing and other necessities to refugees and indigent families, while relatives of Iranian-backed foreign fighters have, according to one of the reports, recently been relocated to al-Mayadin and moved into homes previously occupied by ISIS fighters. Over 1,000 Syrian men have been recruited into Iranian-backed militias, presumably as the kernel of an envisioned “local army” which, according to one of the excerpts, would include 40,000 fighters and control the Syria-Iraq border. The primary lure for joining the pro-Iran militias is reportedly the promise of a steady income, with family perks and protection from the harassment of Syrian government agents an added bonus.

According to the second accompanying passage, Russia is Iran’s main competitor for control over the western banks of the Euphrates in Deir ez-Zor. According to the article, Russia and its allies control key facilities in the provincial capital (Deir ez-Zor), while Iranian influence is strongest further downstream. The article discusses how in January 2019, Iranian proxies expelled Syrian fighters in the Russian-affiliated 5th Legion from the towns of al-Mayadin and Abu Kamal, south of Deir ez-Zor along the border with Iraq. On the outskirts of al-Mayadin, the third source claims, is a base with “military forces who prevent the entry or exit of anyone that is not Iranian, whether civilian or fighter, amidst the presence of strong security and the constant flight of drones overhead.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...the continuation of Iranian forces’ recruitment and their warming relations with local residents...”



Qalaat Rahbah on the outskirts of al-Mayadin.

Source: By Zoepkoe / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38810366>.

(continued)



Continued: Iran Builds Up Syrian Proxies on the Western Banks of the Euphrates

Source:

فيلات البلدية .. معقل «فاغر» و «فاطميون» والحرس الثوري في دير الزور
 “Villat al-Baladiya... Wagner, Fatimiyoun and IRGC strongholds in Deir ez-Zor,” *Ayn al-Madina*, 1 January 2019. <https://goo.gl/ofjyyk>

Behind the al-Fateh mosque, in the “Villat” neighborhood, the Iranian cultural center operates since opening last March. It hosts a variety of events, including informational lectures on topics including Ashura and the “Corrective Movement,” Farsi language classes, humanitarian work such as distributing food items to the families of killed and injured regime fighters, and entertainment such as setting up large TV screens for the youth to watch pay-per-view soccer games for a symbolic cost.

Source:

ما أسباب الصراع الإيراني الروسي “الخفي” في دير الزور؟
 Musab al-Majbal. “What’s behind the “hidden” Iranian-Russian conflict in Deir ez-Zor,” *Orient News*, 13 February 2019, <https://goo.gl/5B4zAk>

Al-Nayif added that in early October 2018, Iranian militias pulled out of the city of al-Mayadin and the village of Mahkan and redeployed to Abu Kamal, taking the place of Russian occupation forces. This created an internal conflict about influence. In early January 2019, Iranian militias expelled a group from the 5th Legion from Abu Kamal on the border with Iraq and al-Mayadin in rural Deir ez-Zor, which are considered key strongholds for Iranian militias.

The Russian forces did not object to the expulsion of the 5th Legion militias under their control, but rather in order to save face in some way they deployed the 5th Legion militias to a remote area in the eastern desert of al-Mayadin, Deir ez-Zor Province, far from the Iranian militias.

According to local sources, Iranian militias are present in al-Mayadin, Abu Kamal, their surrounding areas, al-Sakria, and al-Hamdan, where Iran seeks to establish a “local army” of around 40,000 fighters with the goal of controlling the border triangle with Iraq and preventing any other militias from competing with them in the region, in particular the 5th Legion which includes fighters from the Free Syrian Army who entered into a truce and whom do not follow the vision of the Iranian militias...

The eastern parts of Deir ez-Zor, particularly al-Mayadin and Abu Kamal on the border with Iraq, are thought to be under the control of Iranian militias, while the Russians control the city of Deir ez-Zor, the surrounding countryside, the entries to the city, its military airport, and its key government institutions.

Source:

روسيا وإيران.. حليفان والنظام والمتحالفان مع عدوه يتصارعان على النفوذ في سوريا
 “Russia and Iran... Regime partners in alliance with its adversaries compete for influence in Syria,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, 28 January 2019. <http://www.syriahr.com/?p=305431>

The SOHR monitored the continuation of Iranian forces’ recruitment and their warming relations with local residents, their carrying out of “Shi’ization” activities and bringing more residents into the Shi’i fold by paying money, providing assistance or helping resolve their problems. The SOHR recently confirmed an increase in the number of Iranian forces and militia members to around 1,200 Syrian men of different ages in the western Euphrates banks of rural Deir ez-Zor... Residents and volunteers are enticed with salaries that depend on whether one goes to the fronts or remains in the training center in the western Euphrates banks, as well as immunity from being arrested by regime forces...

They also distribute food, clothes, blankets, housing necessities and school materials (with books in Farsi). Iranian forces also expand by curbing the excesses of regime forces and giving residents what they are owed, with people turning to the Iranian forces to reclaim their possessions seized by fighters from Iranian militias, in order to win over residents and get them to join their ranks...

The SOHR had previously monitored Iranian concentrations in the al-Mayadin area, located west of Abu Kamal. This includes an Afghan charity restaurant in which Iranian-supported Afghan militias prepare and distribute food to residents and refugees, as well as the transformation of the secondary (Shari’a) school in al-Mayadin into a recruitment center for Iranian and Shi’i militias. It also includes lectures and talks about Shi’ism. Iranian and Asian Shi’i forces are also concentrated in the Hawi area of al-Mayadin. Iranians have also built a Hosseiniyya and shrine in Nabaa ‘Ain Ali, located between al-Mayadin and Mahkan, where the SOHR monitored the arrival of Iranian passenger buses carrying “Shi’i tourists” from Iran, Syria and Iraq, who chanted sectarian chants in the region. There is also a strong Iranian forces presence in the area between the Sheep Market and the Rahbah Castle (Qalaat Rahbah) in al-Mayadin. There are military forces who prevent the entry or exit of anyone that is not Iranian, whether civilian or fighter, amidst the presence of strong security and the constant flight of drones overhead...

In recent weeks the SOHR also published on Iranian forces doing the call to prayer in eastern rural Deir ez-Zor in accordance with Shi’i practice... Around 50 Iranian and Afghan families arrived to al-Mayadin, located on the west of the Euphrates. They are the families of fighters in the Iranian and Afghan militias.



Moscow Disapproves of Erdogan's Plans in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in Moscow on 23 January 2019 to discuss a post-US Syria and the establishing of a security zone in northern Syria with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The meeting revealed more differences in priorities in Syria than cooperation between the countries. While the first accompanying excerpted article from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from the Middle East, highlights the differences that emerged at the Moscow meeting, the second article from Turkish daily *Hurriyet* analyzes President Erdoğan's meeting in two points.

The first article by Semih Idiz, a well-respected Turkish journalist, states that Erdoğan hoped to achieve two objectives in Moscow. First, the Turkish president aimed to “get a green light for a cross-border Turkish operation east of the Euphrates against” the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish armed group that Turkey considers a terrorist organization. The second objective was to “seek support for a Turkish security zone in the region.” However, Moscow showed no sign of support for either a Turkish military operation into Syria nor the security zone. Putin's priority was the situation in Idlib. Furthermore, the article quotes Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Hamdi Aksoy, who called the deployment of Syrian forces to the outskirts of Manbij a “provocation.” Idiz notes that deployment of Syrian forces was done with the approval of Moscow as Russian forces were photographed near Manbij “conducting a joint patrol with YPG.” The article states this development has frustrated Turkish officials as it was indicated by spokesman Aksoy's statement and writings of pro-government commentators. Overall, the Moscow meeting showed the Russian “disapproval of Turkey's plan for northern Syria.”

As the second passage states, the results of the Moscow meeting can be analyzed in two points, including the situation of Idlib and establishing a security zone in northern Syria. First, the situation in Idlib has rapidly deteriorated as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaida linked terrorist group in Syria, has seized control of almost all of Idlib, challenging the Sochi agreement signed between Russia and Turkey to establish a de-escalation zone in the northwest Idlib region. In September 2018, Turkey promised Russia to clear Idlib from HTS to avert a Russian backed Syrian regime's military operation against Idlib. However, Turkey has yet to deliver on this promise. Both Erdoğan and Putin acknowledged the strong presence of HTS in Idlib and signaled a joint Russian-Turkish operation in Idlib to implement the Sochi agreement. Second, when it comes to establishing a security zone in northern Syria, while Turkey insists upon it (especially in the areas controlled by Kurds), President Putin did not bring up the possibility of establishing a security zone. The Russian president also stated that there is no United Nations Security Council Resolution on establishing security in Syria. Putin further complicated the situation for Erdoğan by suggesting a dialogue between the al-Assad regime and the Kurds in northern Syria, which is likely to prevent Turkish cross-border military operation. Putin also called on Turkey to collaborate with the al-Assad regime, referencing the Adana Agreement of 1998 as a framework for cooperation between Turkey and Syria against terrorism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: Semih Idiz, “Erdoğan-Putin summit highlights differences over Syria,” *Al-Monitor*, 25 January 2019.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/01/turkey-russia-syria-moscow-summit-highlights-differences.html>

...President Recep Tayyip Erdogan returned empty-handed from his summit in Moscow this week with President Vladimir Putin...

Erdogan hoped to not only get a green light for a cross-border Turkish operation east of the Euphrates against the US-backed People's Protection Units (YPG) — which Ankara considers a terrorist organization — but to also seek support for a Turkish security zone in the region...

It was clear from the start... volatile situation in Idlib... would be Putin's priority...

Ankara also faces opposition from Moscow. The Erdogan-Putin talks did not provide any indication that Moscow would support a Turkish military incursion into northern Syria.

Complicating matters further for the Turkish side is the fact that Russia is working to secure an agreement between the Kurds in northern Syria and Damascus, in order to prevent a Turkish operation...

“This region is currently in the hands of the Kurds,” Putin said. “Damascus must talk to the representatives of the Kurds...”

This is not music to Ankara's ears... The remarks also indicate that Moscow is seeking to accommodate the Kurds...

A small indication of this was the recent deployment of Syrian forces on the outskirts of Manbij, just west of the Euphrates River, which Turkey wants full control of after US forces leave.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamdi Aksoy expressed Ankara's annoyance over this development last week. He accused the regime of “provocation in Manbij,”...

Some prominent pro-government commentators have also started to acknowledge that Ankara's problem in Syria is not just with Washington, but also with Moscow.

(continued)



Continued: Moscow Disapproves of Erdogan's Plans in Syria

“The Erdogan-Putin talks did not provide any indication that Moscow would support a Turkish military incursion into northern Syria.”

Source: Sedat Ergin, “İki başlıkta Erdoğan’ın Moskova gezisinin dökümü (Analysis of Erdoğan’s Moscow visit in two points),” *Hurriyet*, 25 January 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/iki-baslikta-erdoganin-moskova-gezisinin-dokumu-41093889>

We can evaluate the results of the Moscow meeting between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian Leader Vladimir Putin under two headlines: Idlib and an East of Euphrates-Safe Zone.

...The crisis in Idlib is particularly urgent. The reason is the implementation of the Sochi agreement in which Erdoğan and Putin decided to establish a “de-escalation zone” in Idlib last September [2018]. All plans were turned upside down. Al-Qaida linked Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) expanded its dominance in the region by defeating the groups supported by Turkey...

When it comes to the safe-zone headline, there is no exact overlap in the statements of the two sides as in the Idlib heading.

The Russian leader wants to solve the issue of the east of the Euphrates primarily through a dialogue between Damascus and Kurdish representatives; thus, [he] recognizes the main actors of this region as the Assad regime and Kurdish representatives. Putin also said specifically regarding the “safe zone”... the “UN Security Council has no decision on this.”

Putin also emphasized the need to implement the “Adana Agreement that was signed between Turkey and Syria for cooperation to fight against terrorism...”



Vladimir Putin, Hassan Rouhani and Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave a joint news conference (2/19).

Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59830>, CC 4.0.



Iran's Strategic Shift to China and Russia

OE Watch Commentary: While many in the United States perceive Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution as fundamentally anti-American in character, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's ideology was equally antagonistic toward the Soviet Union. "Neither East nor West but Islamic Republic," became a popular slogan as Iranian crowds thumbed their noses at both the Soviet Union and the United States.

With the end of the Cold War, however, and a heightened US presence in the region—especially after the 1991 Operation Desert Storm and the 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom—the Iranian leadership has increasingly sought greater strategic alignment with Russia (see: "Iran-Russia Relations," *OE Watch*, July 2016) and, in recent months, has questioned whether it is time to revise the Khomeini-era slogan (see: "Will Iran Pivot to the East?" *OE Watch*, September 2018).

The 28 January 2019 remarks by Major General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, a former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and today Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's top military advisor, appears to put any debate to rest. In a speech excerpted here from coverage in the semi-official *Iranian Students' News Agency*, he identifies the United States and Israel as the chief enemies of the Islamic Republic and suggests that Iran must respond by aligning itself more closely with Russia and China, which he identifies as the United States' top competitors.

While the Iranian public remains suspicious of Russia given Russia's own imperial history in the region, Rahim-Safavi's remarks appear to mark the end of any debate about a shift into Russia's orbit. Rahim-Safavi speaks not as an individual, but as a member of the Supreme Leader's inner circle. As for China, Iran's outreach is likely motivated as much by the economy as geostrategy. Iran remains a rentier state heavily dependent on oil sales, and China is thirsty for energy supplies. Whether China is willing to put all its eggs in the Iranian basket as Rahim-Safavi hopes, though, is unclear as Beijing's traditional approach is to maintain cordial relations with all energy suppliers, including Iran's rival Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, so long as Tehran feels itself backed by major powers, it is unlikely to make concession or fear retaliation in case it engages militarily in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Yahya Rahim-Safavi, advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei and former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Source: ISNA, <https://cdn.isna.ir/d/2018/03/15/3/57654376.jpg>.

“The model of the Iran is to support the resistance axis, and the strategic development of strategic relations with America’s global rivals like Russia and China, and these can be considered as the main strategies of the defense architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Source: “Dar Aghaz Penjmin Daheh Enghalab, Yek Janh Tarkibi ‘Aleyeh-e Rahandazi Shodeh Ast (At the beginning of the fifth decade of the revolution, there is a hybrid war against Iran),” *Iranian Students' News Agency*, 28 January 2019. <https://www.isna.ir/news/97110804066>

The secretary of the first national conference on the defense architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, presented strategic proposals for the security architecture of the Islamic system, and said, “Promotion of dignity and geopolitical and geostrategic weight and the great cultural power of the Islamic Republic of Iran is how to defeat the U.S. strategy in the region, including its Greater Middle East Plan, toppling the Syrian government. The model of the Iran is to support the resistance axis, and the strategic development of strategic relations with America’s global rivals like Russia and China, and these can be considered as the main strategies of the defense architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Houthi “Re-Engineering” of Yemeni Society

OE Watch Commentary: According to recent local reports, Yemen’s Ansarallah Movement (“the Houthis”) is transforming areas under its control in ways that are likely to have an enduring impact on Yemeni politics, culture and society. While the movement’s focus on changing attitudes and perspectives is not surprising, given its origins as a youth training and education camp, the speed and extent to which its leaders have been able to transform key socio-political structures, symbols and institutions, has caught many by surprise.

The accompanying passage from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid* provides a detailed overview of how the Houthis have “[taken] advantage of war, chaos and the absence of a central authority” to “enact fundamental changes in state institutions.” According to the article, these changes extend to religious affairs, where the Houthis have placed their own preachers in mosques; real estate, where they have redistributed property for political reasons; public education, where they have changed the school curriculum; and, civics, where they have pushed to replace national symbols with their own slogan and banner. The article highlights changes to the military and security institutions, whose “fighting doctrine” has been transformed through “educational sessions” taught by “religious scholars trained in various countries, particularly Iran.” Perhaps most importantly, the Houthis have upended various centers of power to their advantage, most notably relations within and among the tribes. The article concludes by warning that by “re-engineering” Yemeni society, the Houthis have ensured that their influence will outlast the war and live on, even if the group is defeated politically and/or militarily.

An example of the Houthis’ gradual, deliberate and legalistic approach to transforming government institutions can be found in the excerpted articles from *al-Jazeera* and *al-Mashhad al-Yemeni*. The articles describe changes at the University of Sana’a, where after seizing control of the capital in September 2014, the Houthis began installing allies and supporters in key administrative positions. In September 2016, 66 faculty members were dismissed, followed by a December 2018 purge of 117 more. Many of those let go claim they were dismissed for criticizing the movement in public, though the Houthi-controlled university leadership claims that they were let go for not showing up to work. In a sign of shifting academic priorities, in early February the faculty syndicate launched a weekly discussion series that will analyze the lectures of Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi. Attendance is not obligatory, though presumably highly encouraged. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



“...taking advantage of war, chaos and the absence of a central authority...”

A man holds up an image of Abd al-Malik al-Houthi during protests against the Saudi-led coalition.
Source: Henry Ridgwell (VOA) [Public domain] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houthis_protest_against_airstrikes_3.png

Source:

الحوثيون يعيدون هندسة اليمن اجتماعياً وثقافياً وتاريخياً وقبلياً واقتصادياً

Asaad Sliman. “Houthi Social, Cultural, Historical, Tribal and Economic Re-Engineering of Yemen,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 30 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/hqnWDM>

The Houthis are taking steps to deepen their rule over areas under their control in north and west Yemen, by establishing what they call “Our New Yemen,” whose contours are defined by their political, cultural, social and sectarian project. They have done so by taking advantage of war, chaos and the absence of a central authority... The Houthis have been able to enact fundamental changes in state institutions, led by the security and military institutions. They have enacted changes in their fighting doctrine, by forcing many in the security and military institutions they took over following the coup to attend intensive training sessions, which they call educational sessions and are taught by religious scholars trained in various countries, particularly Iran... The Houthis target students to implant their ideology and recruit them into the ranks of Ansarallah, whether as fighters on the front or as loyalist. Teachers are forced to undergo educational sessions... Many consider that the Houthis are betting on the war to drag on and will frustrate or delay political solutions, as the war gives them a chance to enact the greatest number of changes possible to Yemen’s socio-cultural foundations. This ensures their remaining in power in the future, even if they lose military or politically, or are forced to accept a political solution. The changes the Houthis are making to the tribal foundations are probably the most sensitive of all...

Source:

الحوثيون يفصلون 117 أكاديمياً من جامعة صنعاء

“The Houthis let go of 117 faculty members from Sana’a University,” *al-Jazeera*, 12 December 2018. <https://goo.gl/ivDxRT>

Sources in the teacher’s syndicate of Sana’a University confirmed that university president Ahmed Daghar, who was appointed by the Houthis, had let 117 professors and academics go, all at once... According to academics at the university who spoke to aljazeera.net by telephone, this is not the first time that members of teacher’s syndicate are let go, as 66 of them have suffered this fate in the recent past.

Source:

شاهد بالصورة إلى أين وصل التغلغل الحوثي في جامعة صنعاء

“See in pictures the degree to which the Houthis have penetrated Sana’a University,” 6 February 2019, *al-Mashhad al-Yemeni*, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/126717>

Student sources at the university published an invitation from the Higher Studies and Scientific Research Syndicate calling on students to attend weekly lectures hosted by the syndicate to analyze the speeches of Houthi militia leader Abdel Malik al-Houthi... the Houthis previously forced some classes to attend militia gatherings and listen to lectures by the group’s previous leader, Hussayn Badr al-Din al-Houthi. The Houthis also replaced tens of academics and lecturers at the university with those professing full support to the militia and its ideology.



Turkey's Position on Venezuela

OE Watch Commentary: The Venezuelan crisis has sparked a huge debate in Turkey. The Turkish press and TV shows have devoted a disproportionate amount of time and attention to the issue, giving it expansive coverage. This may seem odd, considering Turkey's distance from Latin America. Turkey's unique interest in the issue can be attributed to both their recent history and their long history of coups, which entailed elected governments being overthrown. As such, it is no surprise that the discussion on Venezuela has mainly focused on the crisis as "an attempted coup against democracy and an elected government by an external power" and thus, unacceptable. Turkish officials have expressed their support for Nicolas Maduro. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss Turkey's position on the issue.

The first passage discusses a tweet by the Turkish Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Advisor Ibrahim Kalin. The tweet reads: "Our President has called the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and expressed Turkey's support, telling him, 'Stand tall, we are with you.' With our President Erdoğan's leadership, Turkey will preserve its principled stand against all coup attempts." The tweet ended with the hashtag "#WeAreMADURO."

The second passage discusses comments by the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, who expresses his opposition to the European Parliament's decision to recognize Juan Guaido as Venezuela's temporary President. Çavuşoğlu notes that "Maduro was elected. Nobody should disrespect the will of the Venezuelan people." Çavuşoğlu also says that "external interventions" like these are "unhealthy."

The third passage, by Sami Kohen, a veteran foreign policy columnist known for his balanced and neutral analyses, offers a more nuanced approach. He claims that the argument that "the national will should be respected" is not quite accurate, given that the elections in Venezuela were not held under free and fair conditions. He points out that the turnout was very low, given the opposition's boycott of the election; and the fact that many of the opposition were prohibited from voting or arrested. On the other hand, he notes that the current situation is also unacceptable. He says that the developments were a "political coup" which took place with the "manipulation of the United States." He also claims that "the United States is doing everything it can to overthrow its challenger Maduro, in Venezuela which it considers 'its backyard.'" **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“#WeAreMADURO”

Source: "Erdoğan'dan Maduro'ya: Dik dur kardeşim, yanındayız (From Erdoğan to Maduro: Stand tall my brother, we are with you)," *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 24 January 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogandan-maduroya-dik-dur-kardesim-yanindayiz-41092658>

Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın shared a tweet regarding Venezuela's National Assembly Leader Juan Guaido's declaration of himself as "temporary president":

"Our President has called the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and expressed Turkey's support, telling him, 'Stand tall, we are with you.' With our President Erdogan's leadership, Turkey will preserve its principled stand against all coup attempts. #WeAreMADURO

Source: "Son dakika... Çavuşoğlu'ndan Venezuela tepkisi! (Breaking news... Çavuşoğlu's reponse to Venezuela!)," *Milliyet.com.tr*, 1 February 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/son-dakika-cavusoglu-ndan-dunya-2820851/>

Foreign Minister [Secretary of State] Mevlut Çavuşoğlu reacted to the European Parliament's decision to recognize opposition leader Juan Guaido, who declared himself "temporary president" in Venezuela. He said, "External interventions like this are unhealthy .. They deepen the problem. They may even lead to a civil war in Venezuela... Maduro was elected. So nobody should disrespect the will of the Venezuelan people."

Source: Sami Kohen, "Venezuela krizinin iki yüzü (The two faces of the Venezuela crisis)," *Milliyet.com.tr*, 29 January 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/venezuela-krizinin-iki-yuzu-2818915/>

At first glance, the situation in Venezuela may look like an attempt to overthrow an elected president, with the manipulation of external powers. Taken from this angle, the National Assembly Leader Juan Guaido's declaration of himself as the President may be evaluated as an attempted coup against the regime and against democracy. ...The issue is not as simple as it looks and has two sides to it. So, it would be beneficial to analyze it from a broader perspective.

Yes, Maduro had won controversial elections in Venezuela last year, and earned the right to his second 6 year term, starting his term with a ceremony at the beginning of January.

The first harbinger of the crisis was the fact that the opposition and the United States declared his presidency illegitimate and asked for his resignation. Not long after that, with the manipulation of the United States, a political coup was staged, and the Assembly Leader Guaido appeared, and attempted to overthrow the socialist leader and the regime.

It is impossible to accept such a forced move. It is clear that Washington is behind this, and that since the beginning, Washington has taken a stance against Maduro. The US is doing everything it can to overthrow its challenger Maduro, in Venezuela which it considers "its backyard."

Those who are opposed to the developments in Venezuela are basing their arguments on the "national will" and "national sovereignty."

On the other hand, the "results from the ballot box" are controversial in Venezuela. Of course it is imperative to respect the ballot box. But it is just as necessary for the elections to be held under free and fair conditions. In Venezuela, the elections had been boycotted by the opposition, and therefore, had a very low turnout. Most of the opposition leaders were prohibited, and some were arrested. The judiciary has not been functioning independently..."



The UAV Threat to Turkish Security

OE Watch Commentary: Non-state armed actors increasingly use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or commercial off-the-shelf drones as they become easier to build or acquire. The usage of UAVs by non-state actors poses a challenge to the air superiority of conventional armies, particularly their monopoly over airspace. The accompanying excerpted article from *The Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM)*, an independent Turkish think tank, provides insights into the threats the usage of UAVs by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) pose to the national security of Turkey.

According to the article, the Syrian Civil War provided opportunities for terrorist organizations to test new technologies, including UAVs, and new concepts to wage warfare. As such, non-state actors employing new technologies and concepts have transformed the traditional concept of war and are challenging conventional armies. The article states that the PKK is one of these terrorist organizations that has employed the use of UAVs as a tactic. This poses a critical threat to Turkish national security. The report further focuses on the types of the UAVs used by the PKK - quadcopter and fixed wing - and provides examples of incidents reported by the Turkish press. Compared to remotely controlled drones, the PKK has used the drones that are deployed using GPS coordinates, which make it challenging to intercept with jammers. The PKK staged coordinated attacks on 10 November 2018 on ceremonies commemorating the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, in multiple areas to increase impact.

The report aims to inform policy makers about this threat so that they work towards minimizing the damage through the development of preventive measures. Finally, it concludes with anti-drone technology. It shares its findings and makes recommendations for policy makers. Some recommendations are as follows: first, to protect critical areas, facilities and military units, a multi-faceted defense should be established; second, the usage of UAVs by the terrorist groups must be dismantled before it poses a greater danger to Turkish national security; third, a surprise factor of drone attacks should be minimized through conducting exercises. Finally, the article says that it is critical for states to not only counter the usage of drone technology by terrorist groups at the tactical level, but also to target the supply chains allowing terrorist groups to obtain drone-making hardware.

End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)

“...the changes in the usage of drones by the PKK terrorist organization points at the existence of a critical threat to Turkish national security.”

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoğlu and Barış Kırdemir, “Terör Tehdidinde Yeni Boyut: Drone Saldırıları ve Türkiye nin Milli Güvenliğine İlişkin Gelişmeler (A New dimension in Terrorism Threat: Drone Attacks and Developments Regarding Turkey’s National Security,” *EDAM*, 3 February 2019. http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EDAM_Drone-Sald%C4%B1r%C4%B1lar%C4%B1-ve-T%C3%BCrkiyenin-Milli-G%C3%BCvenli%C4%9Fi.pdf

The Syrian Civil War has given many states the chance to test their new weapon systems in war and has also provided this same opportunity to terrorist organizations as they learn new [warfighting] technologies, concepts and tactics. The current hybrid warfare environment threatens the classical advantage of conventional armed forces... Undoubtedly, one of the most important [above] mentioned skills is the usage of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by terrorist groups.

Recently, the changes in the usage of drones by the PKK terrorist organization points at the existence of a critical threat to Turkish national security. This study evaluates the issue for the relevant decision makers and brings together modern approaches within the scope of war studies and security sciences.

The report begins with analyzing the evolution of the PKK’s drone threats against Turkey. Then they present three case studies to show the situations in which the issue can evolve into. Also, [to learn how to minimize the strategic surprise factor... Subsequently, existing anti-drone technologies and strategies in the world are analyzed. Finally, findings and policy recommendations are listed.



Bayraktar TB2 UAVs (cropped).

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



The Latest “Houthi Drone”

OE Watch Commentary: Yemen’s Ansarallah Movement (“the Houthis”) recently unveiled its latest UAV, an anti-personnel “suicide drone” called the “Qasef-2K.” The Qasef platform, based on the Iranian Ababil-T drone, was introduced over a year ago and has become a key component of the Houthis’ growing drone arsenal (see: “Yemen: Increased UAV Employment by Houthi-Led Coalition,” *OE Watch*, August 2018 and “Yemen: Houthis Claim Increased UAV Use,” *OE Watch*, November 2018). The Qasef-2K was first deployed in mid-January 2019, when it was used to target top leaders of the Saudi-backed Yemeni military who were at the time gathered for a ceremony in the sprawling al-Anad military base, north of Aden. Footage from the event shows a small drone exploding overhead, spraying the ground with munitions that injured several high-ranking officers and ultimately killed the head of military intelligence and the military’s deputy chief of staff, along with a number of soldiers. In response, aircraft from the Saudi-led coalition targeted sites in Yemen allegedly used for the storage, launching and command of UAVs.

“...[Colonel Turki al-Maliki] indicated that the [Houthi] militias are in possession of Shahed-129 drones...”

Source:

الإنتحار المسير .. سلاح الحوثيين الاستراتيجي
“Remote-Controlled Suicide... Houthi Strategic Weapons,” *Abaad Studies & Research Center*, January 2019. <http://www.abaadstudies.org/pdf-24.html>

Unmanned weapons... have become strategic weapons for the Houthis, who may develop them to become a greater threat to regional and international security...

... this technology may be used in the future for political assassinations...

... the Houthis will seek to establish other sectarian organizations in the region and provide them with unmanned weapons to achieve a quick balance of power with the regimes that they challenge. It is expected that experts in Shi'i groups in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could obtain this type of technology.

Source:

التحالف: الحوثيون يحاولون توسيع استخدام الدرون في اليمن
“Coalition: The Houthis Seek to Expand their Use of Drones in Yemen,” *al-Arabiya*, 20 January 2019. <https://goo.gl/CNf5CK>

[Colonel Turki al-Maliki] indicated that the [Houthi] militias are in possession of Shahed-129 drones.

Houthi UAV capabilities remain modest but have been steadily increasing and are likely to continue doing so, according to the accompanying excerpted report published in January 2019 by the *Abaad Studies Center*, a Yemeni think tank. Focused on Houthi use of unmanned aerial and naval weapons, the report envisions a future in which the means of domestically manufacturing UAVs are readily available to a large number of state and non-state actors, including “Shi'i groups in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.” Drones like the Qasef-2K, the article surmises, “may be used in the future for political assassinations.”

Discussions of growing Houthi UAV capabilities were punctuated slightly over a week after the attack, when Colonel Turki al-Maliki, the spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, claimed that the Houthis are in possession of Iranian Shahed-129 drones. If true, this would represent a qualitative leap in Houthi UAV capabilities. Regardless, the Houthis will likely continue accumulating expertise and seeking access to more advanced UAV components, thus allowing the group to cobble together increasingly lethal and effective drones. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Qasef-1 recovered from Yemen.
Source: DoD photo by EJ Hersom (Public domain), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qasef-1.jpg>



Ukraine to Buy Combat Drones from Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-January, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced over a tweet that his government had signed a deal to purchase a dozen Turkish combat drones (the Bayraktar TB2- a medium altitude and long-range tactical UAV system) for \$69 million. The drones are expected to be delivered within a year, and will come with ground control stations and equipment. Given Ukraine's problems with Russia, and Turkey's status as the second largest army in NATO, the deal is significant in many ways. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss its significance.

The first accompanying passage is by Burak Çalışkan, an expert on the Black Sea region. Çalışkan discusses how with this deal, Ukraine becomes the second country (after Qatar) to procure the Turkish combat drones. The deal signals growing bilateral defense cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine, and comes after a previous purchase for Turkish communication systems for the Ukrainian Army and National Police. The passage also notes that the deal brings the Ukrainian military closer to NATO standards in its drone technology. The passage discusses that Turkey-Ukraine military cooperation took off after 2014, when the two countries agreed to cooperate on warplanes, missile systems, UAVs, radar production, armored tanks, and research in space. Since then, cooperation in these areas has developed and culminated in the July 2018 meeting of "Turkey-Ukraine Defense Industry Cooperation" during which a number of important deals were signed. This is the background upon which the current drone deal is taking place.

The passage also highlights that the deal is a result of both countries' problems with Russia. It notes that Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis as of 2015 led to problems in the Turkey-Russia relationship. The author suggests that while the two countries are now working together to bring a resolution to the Syrian crisis, "the fact remains that the two countries have disagreements and conflicts of interest in the Caucasus, Middle East and the Black Sea. In this framework, considering that Turkey and Ukraine are the south and north corners of the Black Sea, the geopolitical importance of the Ankara-Kiev relationship becomes more clear." The author points out that Russia now has influence and presence in Turkey's southern border (due to its presence in Syria) and that this poses a threat to Turkey. He argues that Turkey's defense cooperation with Ukraine has the potential to balance this threat and reduce Russia's ability to maneuver in the region.

The second and third passages discuss some of the technical aspects of the drone system. They point out that the Bayraktar TB2 UAV operates as a platform for aerial intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition, with the ability to simultaneously deliver information to operation centers. The second passage, which is from the producer's own website, notes that the Bayraktar TB2 has a flight control system that allows autonomous taxi, take-off, navigation, landing and parking operations without assistance from any external sensor, or reliance on GPS systems. This is a particularly useful feature given the ongoing advances in technologies that can jam GPS signals, such as Russian Electronic Warfare (EW) systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: Burak Çalışkan, "Türkiye ve Ukrayna İlişkilerinde Savunma Sanayii İşbirliği (Defense Industry Cooperation in Turkey-Ukraine Relations)," *Dunyabulteni.net*, 15 January 2019. <https://www.dunyabulteni.net/analiz/turkiye-ve-ukrayna-iliskilerinde-savunma-sanayii-isbirligi-burak-h436332.html>

The rapidly developing relations between Ankara and Kiev in the last few years, has become apparent in the defense industry too. In fact, in the last few days, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko declared over social media that Ukraine has signed a deal with Turkey to procure the Bayraktar TB2 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), produced by Baykar.

Per the agreement, Baykar will produce 6 Bayraktar TB2 UAVs within a year, and deliver them to the Ukrainian Army. In addition, they will deliver three ground control station systems to Ukraine. It is being reported that Ukraine has made this decision over a 3-year period, becoming the second country (after Qatar), to prefer the Bayraktar TB2. Ukrainian delegations that attended the test flights for Bayraktar TB2, say they were impressed with its combat success and flight performance.

It is also noteworthy that Poroshenko noted that he came to the agreement with Turkish President Erdogan, and that it is part of an effort to equip the Ukrainian military with NATO-standard modern equipment and weapons. Following the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea, Ukraine had stepped up efforts to strengthen its military against its strong neighbor. At this point, Turkey-- with the second largest army in NATO and as a littoral state to the Black Sea-- had come up as an important actor.

Ankara and Kiev had agreed in 2014 to pursue a number of joint projects in the defense industry. They signed agreements to co-produce warplanes, missile systems, UAVs, radars, armored tanks, and work together in navigation and space projects...

In July 2018, Turkey and Ukraine conducted the First Turkey-Ukraine Defense Industry Cooperation meeting, to accelerate defense cooperation. This resulted in a cooperation agreement between Ukrainian Ukrobonoprom and Turkish Aselsan, whereby Aselsan would provide the Ukrainian army with high tech wireless communication systems...

It can be said that the development of Turkey-Ukraine relations are a product of both countries' problems with Russia. In particular, Russia's engagement into the Syrian crisis in 2015 and its initiatives which concern Turkey, had been a problem for Turkey for a long time...

Despite the fact that Turkey and Russia are now in a normalization phase and are working together in Syria, the fact remains that the two countries have disagreements and conflicts of interest in the Caucasus, Middle East and the Black Sea. In this framework, considering that Turkey and Ukraine are the south and north corners of the Black Sea, the geopolitical importance of the Ankara-Kiev relationship becomes more clear. Regardless of how much Turkey and Russia have to cooperate within certain areas in Syria, Russia's influence in southern Turkey (via its presence in Syria) can become a threat to Turkey for many years to come. As such, a strategic partnership that Turkey will develop with Ukraine, has the potential to break the threat that Russia poses for Turkey (via its influence on Damascus) and reduce Russia's ability to maneuver in the region.

(continued)



Continued: Ukraine to Buy Combat Drones from Turkey

“...Turkey-Ukraine relations are a product of both countries’ problems with Russia. Despite the fact that Turkey and Russia are now... working together in Syria, the fact remains that the two countries have disagreements and conflicts of interest in the Caucasus, Middle East and the Black Sea. In this framework, considering that Turkey and Ukraine are the south and north corners of the Black Sea, the geopolitical importance of the Ankara-Kiev relationship becomes more clear.”

Source: “Bayraktar Tactical UAS,” Bayraktarmakina.com, Undated. <http://baykarmakina.com/en/sistemler-2/bayraktar-taktik-ihha/#1458637130929-195f09d3-ff5a>

Bayraktar Tactical UAS is a Medium Altitude Long Endurance class system developed for tactical reconnaissance and surveillance missions. Prototype Development Phase started within 2007 based on a competition model. Bayraktar Tactical UAS, with its critical all subsystems including Flight Control, INS-GPS, Automatic Take Off-Landing systems [was] developed in house [and] demonstrated fully automatic taxi, take off, landing and parking phases in 2009...

Source: ““Son dakika: Anlaşma imzalandı! Ukrayna, Türkiye’den İHA alacak (Breaking news: Deal signed! Ukraine will buy UAVs from Turkey),” Hurriyet.com.tr, 12 January 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/son-dakika-anlasma-imzalandi-turkiye-ukraynaya-ihha-satacak-41081039>

The Bayraktar TB2 UAV system attracts attention as the world’s most advanced UAV system in its class, with its electronic, software, aerodynamic, design and systems. The Bayraktar TB2 can conduct aerial intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and intelligence flights, with the ability to simultaneously deliver information to operation centers. It also has the capability to attack targets with its own equipment. The Bayraktar TB2 UAV system can also conduct laser targeting for friendly war planes.



Bayraktar TB2 Runway.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_Runway.jpg, by Bayhaluk [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Iranian Forces Test Night Vision Cameras

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian officials take great pride in the Islamic Republic's military industries. In the accompanying excerpted article from *Mashregh News*, an outlet affiliated with the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, Army Air Force Commander Yusuf Ghorbani announces that the Army Air Force successfully tested night vision cameras and scopes on helicopters. If true, this expands Iranian nighttime operational capabilities, though there have been noted discrepancies between the relatively sterile and controlled scenarios undertaken during Iranian military exercises and real-life operational environments.

While Ghorbani does not mention the process of developing night vision technology, such technologies have long been on Iranian wish-lists presented to the international community and partners seeking to engage in counter-narcotics operations along Iran's borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. This raises the possibility of leakage of transferred technologies.

Night vision technology may be standard for many militaries around the globe, but if Iran has pressed such technology into service for its helicopters, it raises the possibility that Iranian military behavior may soon change in theaters like Syria. Whereas once many Iranian operations were daylight only, the technology might allow other operations to become 24-hour affairs. An even greater problem might be the potential proliferation of such technologies to groups like Hezbollah or Hamas. Additionally, night vision cameras could enhance Iranian surveillance capabilities, especially if cameras now mounted on helicopters are transposed onto Iran's growing unmanned aerial vehicle fleet.

End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)

“The night vision cameras were successful.”

Source: “Jangandeh-haye NEZAJA beh Komak NEZAJA Amand (Army Ground Force [NEZAJA] fighters come to the aid of NEZAJA fighters),” *Mashregh News*, 26 January 2019. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/931654/>

Air Force Commander Yusuf Ghorbani, with reference to the missions of the [13]97 Army Ground Force “Strength” Exercises, said, “One of the special missions, which is the first time helicopters are being used in this military exercise, is a reconnaissance operation at night. The attack, transport, and reconnaissance helicopters are equipped with night vision equipment to be able to carry out operations, and the night vision cameras were successful.” Referring to the fact that many of the missions are in line with the threats of the day, he said, “The Army [Air Force] helicopters used new tactics to identify targets at night as well as conducted successful night combat operations, and we were able to identify the enemy’s positions and hit fixed and mobile targets using optimized missiles and artillery.” He added: “In this military exercise, all fire support operations, logistical support, and reconnaissance support were carried out successfully by army air force helicopters, and the Army Air Force personnel showed their readiness to face various threats on the various battlefields.”



Iranian Army Ground Force military exercises.
Source: *Mashregh News*, <https://cdn.mashreghnews.ir/d/2019/01/26/4/2438752.jpg>.

IRGC Air Force Unveils New Ballistic Missile

OE Watch Commentary: On 7 February 2019, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Air Force held a ceremony to unveil their new surface-to-surface ballistic missile. According to *Tasnim News Agency*, an Iranian-based news outlet, IRGC Commander, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari stated at the unveiling that this new production is a message to the West in response to “threats and sanctions.” Jafari continued that Iran’s defensive capabilities act not only as a deterrent, but also in the best interest of the country’s national security. According to the article, the missile is named “Dezful,” after the city where the ceremony took place, which is located in Iran’s Khuzestan Province. The report states that the missile has a range of 1000 kilometers, which is 300 kilometers more than its predecessor, the “Zolfaghar” missile.

According to *Mashreg News*, another Iranian-based news outlet, Jafari stated at the ceremony that this is only one of many new technologies as Iran will continue to upgrade existing missiles. Jafari continued that the IRGC Air Force will focus its attention towards producing missiles that are lightweight and faster. According to the report, the IRGC’s Air Force research division will continue to develop “technologically advanced missiles,” which will include “intelligent” missiles, for the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

“Iran will focus on lightweight, speed, and mass production of missiles, according to Jafari, and creating ‘intelligent’ missiles for the future.”

Source: “Namayesh karkhane zeerzameene toleed mooshakhaye ballistic Sepah/roonemaye az mooshak ballistic hoshmand zameen be zameen ‘Dezful’ (Unveiling of IRGC ballistic missile/display of surface-to-surface ballistic missile ‘Dezful’),” *Tasnim News Agency*, 7 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/QUm1fi>

IRGC Air Force Commander, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said at the ceremony: ‘Despite the conspiracies and threats of the enemy of the Islamic Republic’s, it is only natural that we continue to move forward. The resistance of the people of Khuzestan, especially the heroic and resilient people of Dezful, unveiled the Dezful surface-to-surface missile, the latest achievement and product of the IRGC Aerospace Force.’”

Source: “Namayesh karkhane zeerzameene toleed mooshak haye Sepah baraye avaleen bar/roonemaye az mooshak hosmand ‘Dezful’ ba bord 1000 kilometre + ax (Unveiling of IRGC missile for the first time/display of ‘Dezful’ missile with range of 1000 kilometers + photos),” *Mashreg News*, 7 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/FQNFSn>

“Jafari stated at the ceremony: ‘Today, Europeans want to limit our defensive capabilities with sanctions, while they use their offensive capabilities to attack innocent people all around the world.’”

“Iran will focus on lightweight, speed, and mass production of missiles, according to Jafari, and creating ‘intelligent’ missiles for the future.”



New IRGC ballistic missile.

Source: Tasnim News, <https://goo.gl/QUm1fi>, CC 4.0.



Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Threatens Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: Some Eastern Mediterranean countries, including Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Italy, and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian Authority recently reached a deal to create the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum to cut infrastructure costs, create a regional market and lower prices. Turkey perceived this deal as a threat to its national interests and the interests of Turkish Cypriots. The accompanying excerpted articles, one from *The New Turkey*, a non-profit digital platform launched by the pro-government think tank Seta Foundation, and the other from state owned *Anadolu Ajansı*, argue that excluding other coastal countries of the Eastern Mediterranean (Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the latter of which is only recognized by Turkey as a sovereign entity) from the deal will make this new forum irrelevant.

The article from *The New Turkey* argues that one of the objectives of the forum is “to exclude Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean energy structure.” The actions of Egypt provide clues regarding this objective as the Egyptian government has actively sought an alliance with the littoral states of Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and Israel to curb Turkish ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean to extract natural gas and oil. Turkey is trying to find ways to decrease its energy dependence to other countries. As a result, Turkey deployed its survey drilling ship accompanied by Turkish Naval warships to start oil and gas exploration in the north of Cyprus in October 2018 and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) started drilling in November 2018 (see: “Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean over Natural Gas,” *OE Watch*, December 2018). The article states that the exclusion of Turkey and other coastal countries will pose a challenge to the success of this forum, because Turkey will continue to be a major player in the region and it will continue to explore and extract natural gas or oil in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The second article states that, with this forum, a power struggle over hydrocarbon reserves has officially started in the Eastern Mediterranean. This article focuses on the reasons why Turkey was excluded from this forum. The first reason is to preclude the possibility of a gas pipeline going through Turkey to Europe. Instead, the natural gas will flow to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas Pipeline. This pipeline will be built between a partnership of Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Israel and it will carry Israeli natural gas to Europe. Second, Israel and Greece’s attitude towards Turkey played a role in excluding it. As the article states, this attitude towards Turkey indicates that the Eastern Mediterranean issue is not only economic, but also political. Third, the tension between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus and Egypt has led the latter two countries to sign an agreement to build a natural gas pipeline. Also, the disagreement over declaring exclusive economic zones has added another layer of complexity to existing power dynamics. The article believes that no matter what, Turkey will be among the strongest power players in the Eastern Mediterranean and it has its place among the countries who have claims over natural gas reserves. While this remains to be seen, the article reflects how the Turkish government continues to deal with the situation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“...despite efforts to exclude Turkey from regional initiatives, Ankara will continue to be a major actor in the geo-strategic competition in the Eastern Mediterranean.”

Source: İsmail Numan Telci, “Egypt’s Energy Activism as a Threat to Security in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *The New Turkey*, 18 January 2019. <https://thenewturkey.org/egypts-energy-activism-as-a-threat-to-security-in-the-eastern-mediterranean>

The Egyptian government has initiated the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum...

It was announced that the main aim of the forum was to increase cooperation and coordination among Eastern Mediterranean countries...

It can be argued that apart from the officially stated goals, one of the main motivations of this forum is to exclude Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean energy structure...

In early 2018, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced that Ankara would not allow other regional actors to exclude Turkey in Eastern Mediterranean affairs, particularly in regards to energy reserves. An important step taken by Turkey in this context has been the introduction of natural gas exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean...

...Turkey will continue its activities in the Eastern Mediterranean despite all efforts by other regional actors, particularly Egypt, Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot administration of South Cyprus ...

...despite efforts to exclude Turkey from regional initiatives, Ankara will continue to be a major actor in the geo-strategic competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. As Turkey heavily depends on external actors in terms of its energy needs, it is of great importance for the country to explore and extract natural gas or oil in every possible field. Therefore, the Turkish government will continue its efforts to explore oil and gas in its territorial waters. For this reason, any initiative to exclude Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean will lack solid foundations. This would also damage the friendly relations among regional actors and further threaten the security environment in the region.



Continued: Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Threatens Turkey

Source: İsmail Kavaz, “Doğu Akdeniz’de Türkiye’siz bir mutabakat mümkün mü? (Is it possible to reconcile without Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean?),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 17 January 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/dogu-akdeniz-de-turkiye-siz-bir-mutabakat-mumkun-mu/1367182>

...the struggles and collaborations over sharing hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean are becoming more evident...

Turkey, in terms of its geostrategic position is situated in the center of the world’s supply and demand... the issue of transferring energy resources to global markets brings Turkey and some other regional states up against each other.

The regions’ resources [can be carried] to the European continent via two routes... the first one is to flow natural gas to Turkey then to Europe. The second is to transfer natural gas to global markets with the Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas Pipeline project through Israel, GKRY [Republic of Cyprus], Greece and Italy. This results in leaving Turkey out [of the forum]...

The attitude of Israel and Greece towards Turkey makes the issue in the Eastern Mediterranean more political than economic...

...Ankara closely follows the developments between Egypt and the GKRY. Finally, the natural gas pipeline agreement signed between Egypt and the GKRY damages already strained bilateral relations [between Turkey and these countries]. Also, the disagreement over the exclusive economic zones causes a face-off between parties...

Oil and natural gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean Region



Source: US Energy Information Administration [Public domain], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Levant_Basin.png.



Privatization of Turkish Military Factory Draws Different Reactions

OE Watch Commentary: On 13 January 2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the privatization of Turkey's Tank and Pallet Factory to increase the operational efficiency of the factory and to boost the national defense industry. Some welcomed this decision to hand over a military-run factory to a privately-owned company and argued the Turkish defense industry is "aiming high." However, some former military personnel, Turk Harb-Is (the labor union of the factory workers) and opposition parties voiced their concerns over privatization and handing the plant over to BMC, an armored vehicles manufacturer partially owned by Qatar. While the accompanying excerpted article from Turkey's English-language daily *Hurriyet Daily News* analyzes the overall success of the Turkish defense industry, the article from left-leaning *Cumhuriyet* criticizes the government's decision to privatize the Tank and Pallet Factory.

The article entitled "Turkish defense industry aims high" argues that the Turkish defense industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in Turkey thanks to "President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign and security policy understanding." The article quotes President Erdoğan saying "Turkey will be a global power, a leading country in the new term. Our fundamental focus is on our Defense Industry to achieve this aim." Turkey's foreign dependence in defense has decreased from 80 percent to 35 percent since 2002 and the president closely monitors major defense projects. Turkey projects to reach 100 percent independence in the defense industry by 2053 "with an export capacity of \$50 billion." İsmail Demir, the head of the Presidency of Defense Industries stated that they are currently managing 610 projects. The article notes that 2019 will be significant for the defense industry as it plans to deliver a TCG Kınalıada, MILGEM corvette to the Turkish Navy, the TCG Anadolu, multipurpose amphibious assault ship will sail into the sea in February, and "Turkey's first new generation submarine, Piri Reis, is also expected to hit the seas in 2019."

The Tank and Pallet Factory was established in 1975 and operated by the Land Forces Command as a military unit. It manufactured indigenous equipment, including howitzers, ammunition carriers, day and night vision binoculars and tracks for tanks, among other things. As the article from *Cumhuriyet* points out, the land and some existing structures of the factory were given to BMC free of charge months before the privatization decision was announced. Giving the factory to BMC, a company headed by Ethem Sancak, known to have close ties to Erdoğan, drew strong criticism from opposition political parties. Qatar's ties to BMC is another point of contention. Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar visited the factory on 4 January 2019 to assuage the criticism and reaffirmed that the government will not back down from privatizing the factory. This factory will be under the management of BMC for 25 years. It will manufacture Altay main battle tanks (see: "Turkey to Mass Produce Altay Tank" *OE Watch*, December 2018), military and commercial vehicles, and engines of various platforms and the factory is expected to be fully operational by 2023. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

"[Erdoğan] said Turkey decreased foreign dependence in its defense sector from 80 percent in 2002 to 35 percent since coming to power in 2002."

Source: Serkan Demirtaş, "Turkish defense industry aims high," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 14 January 2019. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/turkish-defense-industry-aims-high-140473>

The last decade and a half under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have surely singled out the defense industry as the most steadfastly growing sector in Turkey... This is no coincidence but a reflection of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign and security policy understanding.

"Turkey will be a global power, a leading country in the new term. Our fundamental focus is on our Defense Industry to achieve this aim..."

In December 2017, the Presidency of Defense Industries was tied to the Presidency from the Defense Ministry in order to highlight the importance attached to this agency by President Erdoğan. He chairs each and every executive-committee of the presidency and closely follows all major projects.

In an address on the occasion of a groundbreaking ceremony for one of the biggest defense industry investments in recent years by BMC, one of the largest commercial and defense vehicle producers, with the partnership of Qatar, Erdoğan explained his devotion to the national and independent defense industry...

[Erdoğan] said Turkey decreased foreign dependence in its defense sector from 80 percent in 2002 to 35 percent since coming to power in 2002...

By 2053, the Turkish defense industry aims to be 100 percent independent with an export capacity of \$50 billion, Demir said...

İsmail Demir informed that his presidency is currently running more than 610 projects with more than \$6 billion in endorsements, describing this achievement as a big revolution in only 15 years.

Yet 2019 will be important in terms of Turkey's defense industry objectives.

TCG Kınalıada, another MILGEM corvette, will be given to the service of the Naval Forces while TCG Anadolu, Turkey's first indigenously built multipurpose amphibious assault ship which can also be configured as a light aircraft carrier, will hit the seas in February. Turkey's first new generation submarine, Piri Reis, is also expected to hit the seas in 2019.

(continued)

Continued: Privatization of Turkish Military Factory Draws Different Reactions

Source: Hüseyin Hayatsever, “Bakanlık: Bence BMC (Ministry: I think BMC),” *Cumhuriyet*, 7 January 2019. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/1193132/Bakanlik_Bence_BMC.html

With the signature of President Tayyip Erdoğan, a decision was made to privatize the Tank and Pallet Factory belonging to the Ministry of National Defense in Sakarya. It was reported that many months ago, the land and existing structures were allocated to BMC, a company owned by Ethem Sancak in partnership with Qatar, free of charge... a visit by the National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar to the factory last week, did not dispel concerns about privatization. In the meantime, the Türk Harb-İş Union [that the factory workers belong to] decided to continue to resist privatization.

...The Tank and Pallet Factory, established in 1975 manufactured completely indigenous equipment such as howitzers, ammunition carriers, day-and-night binoculars and tracks for tanks and other military carriers. The factory was also modernizing Leopard 1 and 2 and other tanks.



BMC trucks at Eurosatory 2012.

Source: Copyleft [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2012_Eurosatory_BMC_trucks.JPG.



Russia Makes Strategic Inroads into Africa

OE Watch Commentary: While a great deal of attention has been devoted to China's increasing influence in Africa, generally underreported has also been Russia's inroads into the continent. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African news site *The Conversation* points out, back in the days of the Soviet Union, there was strong diplomatic and/or military support from Moscow for several African countries. When the Soviet Union collapsed, so did that support. However, more than 25 years later, and in line with Vladimir Putin's aspirations of great-power status for his country, Russia is reestablishing itself in Africa.

To an extent, Russia is following the same playbook China uses in its dealings with Africa. Like China, Russian investments and trade on the continent come with none of the prescriptions or conditions institutions such as the IMF and World Bank frequently impose. Also, like China, Russia is investing heavily in Africa's energy and minerals sectors.



Vladimir Putin met with President of the Central African Republic Faustin Archange Touadera.
Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57534>, CC 4.0.

Trade and investment between Russia and Africa grew by 185 percent from 2005 to 2015. On the energy side, Russia has been investing heavily in Africa's oil, gas, and nuclear power sectors, with Russian companies such as Gazprom, Lukoil, Rostec, and Rosatom being quite active on the continent. These companies, the article points out, are mostly state-run, and their investments are often linked to both Russian military and diplomatic interests.

As for Russia's interest in African minerals, it is especially evident in several countries, including Zimbabwe, where it is developing that country's large deposits of platinum group metals, and in Angola, where it mines diamonds. Then there is the resource rich Central African Republic (CAR), where in 2017, Russian military instructors and what has been described as "170 civilian advisors," were sent to train that country's army and presidential guard. The next year, three Russian journalists in CAR, investigating what other articles have referred to as a private military company with Kremlin links, were found murdered in a remote area.

Besides minerals and energy, Russia has another revenue stream from Africa as a major supplier of weapons to several nations. These military ties, as the article notes, are frequently linked to bilateral military agreements. Russia has also been active in providing troops for UN peacekeeping operations. However, while Russia is anxious to play a key role in Africa's future, its own economy has experienced only modest growth, limiting its ability to do so. This is in contrast to China, whose strong economy has allowed it to make massive investments in Africa. Still, while Russia's domestic economy may limit what it can do in Africa, it has, under Putin, returned to a prominent role there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Russia is gradually increasing its influence in Africa through strategic investment in energy and minerals. It's also using military muscle and soft power.”

Source: Theo Neethling, “How Russia is growing its strategic influence in Africa,” *The Conversation*, 6 February 2019. <https://theconversation.com/how-russia-is-growing-its-strategic-influence-in-africa-110930>

Much has been made about China's role and profile in Africa and the factors underlying its activities on the continent. Less debated is the spread and depth of Russia's contemporary presence and profile in Africa.

Russia is gradually increasing its influence in Africa through strategic investment in energy and minerals. It's also using military muscle and soft power.

For African leaders, the key word is agency and the question is how to play the renewed Russian attention to their countries' advantage, and not to fall victim to the contemporary “geopolitical chess” game played by the major powers on the continent.



With Russian Help, A Fragile Peace Agreement in the Central African Republic

OE Watch Commentary: Since 2012, seven peace treaties have been signed by the warring parties in the Central African Republic and all seven failed to deliver peace between the country’s Christians and Muslims. Now, as the accompanying excerpted article from the South African website *CAJ News* reports, an eighth treaty is attempting to succeed where the others have not. The negotiations leading to this agreement were held in Sudan with mediation from both the African Union and UN. Interestingly, while this article gave credit to Russia for brokering a meeting last year between the mainly Christian anti-Balaka alliance (led by Maxime Mokom) and Seleka, an alliance of Muslim rebel groups (led by Nouredine Adam), many other news sites did not mention Russia’s role in the peace process.



Members of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on patrol. Violence between Christians and Muslims has necessitated a military presence to try and keep the peace.

Source: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe, <https://goo.gl/YttqQJ>, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Although this agreement between the government and 14 rebel groups is being praised, like its predecessors, it faces formidable obstacles. There is, however, some cautious optimism for success, as described in the accompanying excerpted article from *Deutsche Welle*, based on the long negotiations that culminated in the agreement, including many that attempted to tackle the numerous grievances of the various groups as well as to understand the socioeconomic pressures behind them. Still, there are concerns the treaty could unravel in this thinly populated country that is often at or near the bottom of human development indices.

One of the largest concerns is whether or not the Seleka rebels, who control large parts of the country, including some that are mineral rich, will give up power. Along these same lines, one attempt to provide the rebels with some power in the government is to have the prime minister appointed from within their ranks. However, the rebels are not fully unified, and there is a rivalry among several of the groups, so it could be difficult choosing one person who is acceptable to all factions. Additionally, it is unclear how much power the Muslim prime minister will actually wield in this country that has a Christian majority.

Although the government rejected the idea of a blanket amnesty, the treaty does call for the establishment of a Truth, Reconciliation and Compensation Commission. It also establishes a goal of integrating the rebels into the armed forces. It is hoped that these and other key components of the treaty will be enough to end a war that has resulted in thousands dead and over one million fleeing their homes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“A prime minister from the ranks of the rebels and no general amnesty — these are the cornerstones of the peace treaty that has been signed by the government of the Central African Republic and several rebel groups.”

Source: Raji Bashir, “Russia plays momentous truce to usher peace in CAR,” *CAJ*, 4 February 2019. <http://cajnewsafrica.com/2019/02/04/russia-plays-momentous-truce-to-usher-peace-in-car/>

However, Russia played a prominent role in laying the foundation for the peace talks between Touadera’s administration and the 14 armed groups that control most of the country. CAR has been in crisis since 2013 when Muslim rebels seized power.

Source: Silja Fröhlich, “New Hope for the Central African Republic,” *Deutsche Welle*, 5 February 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/new-hope-for-the-central-african-republic/a-47373650>

A prime minister from the ranks of the rebels and no general amnesty — these are the cornerstones of the peace treaty that has been signed by the government of the Central African Republic and several rebel groups.

The agreement covers various aspects, including the implementation of a government of national unity bringing together all political and social forces of the country.

“These groups don’t respect international humanitarian law. They don’t delineate between civilians and combatants. So to treat these groups as equal partners at the table to give them some autonomy, if that does emerge, is very worrying.”



Is Boko Haram “in Charge” of Baga, Borno State?

OE Watch Commentary: At the end of December 2018, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-loyal faction of Boko Haram attacked the town of Baga in northern Nigeria’s Borno State and took control of it for at least several hours. The group released a video of the operation, making clear they inflicted casualties on Nigerian soldiers. According to the accompanying excerpted article from Nigeria’s *Premium Times*, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are challenging government claims about Baga having been retaken by the military. They say that the ISIS flags are still in the town and that the ISIS-loyal militants are even inspecting civilians as they enter or exit the town.

Consistent with the messaging of this faction of Boko Haram, which promises to focus on targeting the Nigerian government and “Christian” NGOs, the civilians report they have generally not been maltreated. The article notes that they claim that if they want to leave Baga and take refuge in other cities like Monguno or Maiduguri, then the militants allow them to do so after determining they are not a threat. At the same time, civilians reported that when an identity card of an anti-Boko Haram vigilante member was found on a man, then he was taken away and later assumed to have been killed. In contrast, when a civilian who had a voter’s card on his person was noticed by the militants they told him to leave the town and vote elsewhere but not in Baga. It therefore seems voting itself is not an offense for which the militants serve the death penalty.

The article demonstrates that even though many civilians do not want to live under the rule of the militants, the militants are not necessarily administering the areas under their control in as a brutal a way as they did in the past, such as when they conquered Baga in 2014 and killed dozens of people before losing it again to the Nigerian security forces. At the same time, the claims of the civilians interviewed by *Premium Times* and the military absolutely do not match up. The military asserts it is in control of Baga, but if civilians find such assertions to not represent reality it could further undermine the legitimacy of the military in the eyes of the local people. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Boko Haram in charge, issues movement permit in Baga – Fleeing residents,” *Premium Times*, 5 February 2019, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/310341-boko-haram-in-charge-issues-movement-permit-in-baga-fleeing-residents.html>

Displaced residents of Baga, a border community in Borno State recently taken over by Boko Haram insurgents, said the Nigerian government is lying in the claims that the town has been reclaimed by government troops. According to multiple civilian sources, the insurgents are not only flying their flags in the commercial border town but are also controlling the movement of civilians in an out of the town. But the military has described the report as another propaganda of Boko Haram. It insisted that its troops are currently in charge of Baga. But weeks after celebrating the military’s reported liberation of Baga, residents just returning from the community said the insurgents had not moved an inch since they took over the town. Most of them said the insurgents were not only in control of the town but also allow civilians to return and pick up their belongings without harming them.

“Most of them said the insurgents were not only in control of the town but also allow civilians to return and pick up their belongings without harming them.”



Lake Chad (Baga site) borno state.

Source: Sani Ahmad Usman [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lake_Chad_\(Baga_site\)_borna_state.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lake_Chad_(Baga_site)_borna_state.jpg)



Kenya's Homegrown Terrorists

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 September 2013, Somali-born members of al-Shabaab launched a devastating assault on Nairobi's Westgate Mall. In contrast, as the accompanying excerpted article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* points out, the 2015 attack on Garissa University and the 15 January 2019 attack on Nairobi's DusitD2 Hotel, which often has foreign guests, were perpetrated mostly by Kenyan-born al-Shabaab members. There have been other Kenyan-born al-Shabaab terrorists who have launched attacks within Kenya, but those were mainly near the Somali border. However, with the DusitD2 Hotel attack in the country's capital, as the article states, Kenya finds itself increasingly worried about homegrown terrorists and terrorism.



Police provide cover as civilians run to safety during the DusitD2 Hotel attack in Nairobi. Several of the al-Shabaab terrorists involved in the assault were Kenyan-born, raising fears of homegrown terrorism.

Source: Shadychiri/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Civilians_Scamper_to_safety_as_plain_clothe_police_provide_cover_at_dusit_d2_nairobi.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

According to a statement released by al-Shabaab, the Saleh an-Nabhan battalion, named in honor of Kenyan national and former al-Shabaab leader Saleh Nabhan, carried out the DusitD2 Hotel attack in accordance with the guidelines of al-Qaeda supreme leader Sheikh Ayman Adh-Dhawahir. The statement also gives a reason for the attack... the US moving its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Besides the Saleh an-Nabhan battalion (also sometimes referred to as a brigade), there is another group, Jaysh al-Ayman, that is also mainly comprised of Kenyans. Both of these are reportedly active in Kenya's Boni Forest, an area near the Somali border.

This was not Saleh an-Nabhan's first high profile operation. It was responsible for the 2010 Kampala, Uganda bombings and in January 2016, attacked the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) base in El Adde, Somalia, killing over 100 Kenyan soldiers. It is unknown whether Saleh an-Nabhan deliberately chose 15 January to attack the DusitD2 for the date's symbolism, but it fell on the three year anniversary of the El Adde attack. It was also the day after a Nairobi court declared that suspects from the Westgate Mall attack, based on evidence pieced together over the past five years, would stand trial.

While the assault on the DusitD2 Hotel brought attention to al-Shabaab's ability to launch a major operation in Kenya's capital, it also increased the Kenyan government's resolve not to withdraw its forces from Somalia until stability and security are established there. However, as the article points out, such a position clashes with the UN stance that foreign troops should start withdrawing from Somalia. Additionally, Kenya wanting to stay in Somalia also encourages further attacks by al-Shabaab on Kenyan soil, including by its own homegrown Kenyan terrorists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“This means al-Shabaab's influence and cells may have penetrated many parts of Kenya.”

Source: Duncan E. Omondi Gumba and Mohamed Daghar, “Home-Grown Terror a Worsening Threat for Kenya,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 29 January 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/home-grown-terror-a-worsening-threat-for-kenya>

The DusitD2 attack was also a litmus test of Kenya's ability to deal with terrorism. The response by security forces suggested that counter-terrorism measures like the establishment of a joint operations centre, were working. These were adopted after the Westgate attack in which 67 people died.

The six attackers and 12 suspects in court for the 15 January terror attack on Nairobi's DusitD2 hotel complex are mostly Kenyans.

The latest attack – claimed by extremist group al-Shabaab – shows that not only is the terror threat far from over, but it is increasingly a local problem, with logistical support from Somalia. Most of the 18 who appeared in court were from counties like Isiolo, Nyeri, Kiambu, Mombasa and Machakos – hundreds of kilometres from the Somali border. This means al-Shabaab's influence and cells may have penetrated many parts of Kenya.



Operation Targets Purported “Katiba Serma” in Mali

OE Watch Commentary: Among the jihadist groups in Mali are the well-known al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its Malian offshoot, Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and JNIM’s Burkina Faso-oriented offshoot, Ansroul Islam. Also active in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-loyal Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Yet around the town of Serma in northern Mali, there is also a local jihadist group that is allied with JNIM, but does not have its own formal name. It is now being referred to, however, as Katiba Serma (Serma Brigade) as reported in the accompanying excerpted article from the French-language *RFI Afrique*.

The article discusses an operation in early January in a town called Boni near Serma where the French-led Operation Barkhane, in coordination with Malian Armed Forces, carried out air strikes on Katiba Serma. According to the article, up to 20 jihadists in Katiba Serma were killed and five of the jihadists were captured and then evacuated out of the area by helicopter. Presumably, they could provide valuable intelligence information to the Operation Barkhane forces. In addition to this, a training base and weapons storage depot was discovered around the town. According to the article, most of Katiba Serma’s members, including those who were arrested, are Fulani.

What is notable about this article is that it now formally refers to Katiba Serma by that name even though no group has previously gone by that moniker. This could indicate that Katiba Serma has certain unique attributes in terms of its area of operations around Serma, its style of attack, such as using IEDs and conducting ambushes, and its ideology, which is similar to the other al-Qaeda groups, that the media now brands it as Katiba Serma. For the time being Katiba Serma is still localized, but because it is part of broader network in Mali and the Sahel, and it is thus one component of a larger jihadist insurgency. Although the successful operation described in the article may limit Katiba Serma’s capabilities in the short-term, the media is bringing new attention on its militancy. It remains to be seen whether it will ever formally announce itself as Katiba Serma and gain increased attention or whether it will be a name only used in the media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Katiba Serma is recruiting in the Fulani community of central Mali and could be involved in major terrorist operations in neighboring countries, particularly in Burkina Faso.”

Source: “Bilan de l’opération contre la katiba Serma au Mali (Review of the operation against katiba Serma in Mali),” *RFI Afrique*, 10 January 2019. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190110-bilan-operation-contre-katiba-serma-mali>

After several days of operations in the region of Boni, Mali, the headquarters of the armies in Paris said that the operation targeted Katiba Serma. A military maneuver that occurred in two stages between January 4 and 9 permitted the capture or killing of about twenty jihadists. The mission was conducted in coordination with the Malian Armed Forces and involved Mountain Commandos and French Parachute Commandos. Katiba Serma is recruiting in the Fulani community of central Mali and could be involved in major terrorist operations in neighboring countries, particularly in Burkina Faso.



French and Malian military northeast of Gao, 2017.

Source: France 3 Grand Est [CC BY 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BarkhaneGao2017\(8\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BarkhaneGao2017(8).jpg).



Mali Releases Militant Reintegration Policy

OE Watch Commentary: Although there has been a civil war and other more localized conflicts in Mali since 2012, the country has never been forthcoming about its policies towards demobilizing, disarming and reintegrating ex-combatants. However, on 25 January, *maliweb.net* published the accompanying excerpted French-language article, which for the first time revealed details on those programs. According to the article, which references a Malian decree about the programs, eligibility to be demobilized, disarmed and reintegrated is limited to Malian nationals who are mentally and physically fit and have not been involved in major human rights abuses or received a maximum sentence. In addition, those who have colluded with terrorist groups are excluded, which would bar virtually anyone involved with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or its Malian affiliate, but not members of local vigilante or militia groups. Nevertheless, there is sometimes only a fine line between AQIM's Malian affiliate and ethnic-based Fulani militias, which could make it difficult to discern whether or not a detained militant was in AQIM or not.

Among those who are eligible to be reintegrated into the Malian army the main requirement is to be above the age of 18 but below the age of 40. However, any position of a higher rank requires also the ability to read and write in Arabic or French. Further trainings, which result in the receipt of a diploma, allow those who are reintegrated to eventually be promoted. Notably, a number of positions are available for specialists not in military duties, such as drivers, carpenters, and plumbers.

The generally wide opportunities for ex-combatants to be demobilized, disarmed and reintegrated suggests that after several years of war Mali recognizes it cannot hold on to the ex-combatants forever. The publication of the criteria for demobilizing, disarming and reintegrating the ex-combatants is considered a sign in the right direction in terms of transparency and could encourage more combatants to take advantage of the program. However, details on some specifics of the program, such as how it will be determined whether the ex-combatants are physically or mentally fit or whether or not they were in AQIM, are still unclear.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

“This decree sets the criteria for the integration of the ex-combatants... including into the armed forces and security forces.”

Source: “Démobilisation, désarmement et réinsertion des ex-combattants: Les critères rendus publics (Demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants: Criteria made public),” *maliweb.net*, 25 January 2019. <https://www.maliweb.net/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/demobilisation-desarmement-et-reinsertion-des-ex-combattants-les-criteres-rendus-publics-2798933.html>

With regard to Decree No. 2015-0894 / P-RM of 31 December 2015 establishing, organizing and operating procedures of the National Commission for Disarmament -Demobilization and Reinsertion (CNDDR);

Article 1: This decree sets the criteria for the integration of the ex-combatants of signatory movements into the bodies of the State, including into the armed forces and security forces.

Article 2: The ex-combatants of the signatory movements of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers process, wishing to integrate into the Constituent Corps of the State, including in the Armed and Security Forces, will be subject to the following integration criteria:

- *Be of Malian nationality;*
- *not to be prosecuted for violation of human rights;*
- *Not to be in collusion with terrorists and organized crime groups;*
- *have not been the subject of a final sentence to an afflictive or infamous punishment;*
- *To be physically fit and to enjoy all his faculties.*

Exceptionally, ex-combatant specialists (secretaries, drivers, carpenters, plumbers etc.), can also be integrated on the basis of their professional qualification.



Al-Qaida rejoint par ses militants du Maghreb au Mali.

Source: Magharebia [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Qaida_rejoint_par_ses_militants_du_Maghreb_au_Mali_\(8142141394\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Qaida_rejoint_par_ses_militants_du_Maghreb_au_Mali_(8142141394).jpg).



South Africa Looks to Increase UAV Exports

OE Watch Commentary: Back in the 1960's, amidst a period of growing international isolation and sanctions because of its policy of apartheid, South Africa encouraged the further development of its own arms-related companies. Over the next few decades the country would develop a significant military-industrial base. With the end of apartheid in the 1990's, South Africa was able to greatly increase the number of countries to which it could export its domestically manufactured weapons, from small arms to fighter jets. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African website *DefenceWeb* notes, now the country is also involved in meeting the global demand for military unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The three examples of UAVs mentioned in the article were all from Milkor, a South African company that manufactures several military-related items but is most well known for its grenade launchers, which have been exported to over 60 countries. Its UAVs will also launch explosives, only in this case the company's weapon is a small diameter bomb that is laser guided. Milkor's 12 meter wingspan MA380 will be capable of carrying two of these. Its MA80, which is smaller, might carry one laser-guided bomb. Its third UAV, the hand-launched MA18, is unarmed and built for tactical surveillance. It should be noted that while the article does not mention it, Milkor is not the country's only manufacturer of UAVs.

The *DefenceWeb* article also discusses Denel, a South African state-owned conglomerate that is one of South Africa's largest military equipment manufacturers. The company, which sells a large amount of products to Saudi Arabia and its allies, has had several setbacks in recent years, and according to the accompanying excerpted article from *eNews Channel Africa*, Riyadh offered to partner with Denel, but that proposal eventually fell through. The *DefenceWeb* article raises the idea of a future alliance between Milkor and Denel, with the former helping the latter regain its international reputation. Thus, *DefenceWeb*, which should be noted listed partner content in its article, is looking at South Africa's push into the global UAV market as being particularly promising, and one that could possibly lead to a significant increase in the country's export of hi-tech military equipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“[The South African company] Milkor is now part of a handful of elite companies around the world producing armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).”

Source: “South Africa – an emerging player in the global unmanned military vehicle market,” *DefenceWeb*, 11 February 2019. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/industry/industry-industry/south-africa-an-emerging-player-in-the-global-unmanned-military-vehicle-market/>

Milkor is now part of a handful of elite companies around the world producing armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Its first UAV weapon is a small diameter laser-guided bomb. The 12-metre wingspan MA380 will carry two of these weapons.

Apart from weapons, mission equipment on the larger UAVs includes electro-optical/infrared sensors, synthetic aperture radar (SAR) and communications/signals/electronic intelligence payloads.

These projects are purely South African initiatives, using the majority of locally-sourced components. Milkor sees this as helping develop the local defense industry, boosting the economy and benefiting the South African National Defense Force (SANDF).

Source: “There is no Saudi proposal on Denel under consideration: Gordhan,” *eNews Channel Africa*, 22 January 2019. <https://www.enca.com/news/there-no-saudi-proposal-denel-under-consideration-gordhan>

The South African government is not considering any proposal from Saudi Arabia on taking a stake in struggling state arms company Denel, Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan said, after the Gulf country offered to partner with Denel last year.



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As Economy Sinks, Military Discontent Rises in Zimbabwe

OE Watch Commentary: With a rising cost of living, low wages, poor working conditions, and numerous other grievances, members of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces are extremely disgruntled. As the accompanying excerpted article from the *Zimbabwe Independent* reveals, their morale is the lowest it has been in decades. Although the problems leading up to this discontent have been brewing for a while, around October of last year the process began to accelerate. A 150 percent hike in the cost of fuel, which sparked protests, brought things to a head in mid-January 2019.

Complicating the situation have been accusations that the military used unnecessary force in cracking down on the protests. At least 12 civilians were shot and several females, including young girls, were raped, purportedly by members of the armed forces. President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the country's senior military leaders have had, as the article notes, difficulty explaining the soldiers' actions. In order to deal with the rising discontent among his populace and also to launch a probe into how the security forces dealt with the protesters, the president canceled his trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Mnangagwa owes his position to the military, for in 2017 the army ousted former president Robert Mugabe, enabling Mnangagwa to eventually assume the presidency. During the coup – Operation Restore Legacy – numerous verbal promises were made to soldiers, including having their salaries paid in foreign currency and better working conditions. As one army source reported, these were intended to boost their morale. However, with regards to their compensation, Zimbabwe's struggling economy led the government to declare it was unable to pay the soldiers in hard cash. This and other broken promises have fueled the growing discontent sweeping the armed forces today.

There are signs that the low morale has resulted in a general mistrust and sense of suspicion within the government, including the military. Soldiers have also taken certain actions, causing the president to tweet that “chaos and insubordination would not be tolerated.” At one point, some officers described as “rogue soldiers” were detained, accused of propping up protesters.

Zimbabwe Defense Forces spokesperson Overson Mugwisi has denied that the military is suffering from low morale. However, despite Mugwisi's insistence that there is no discord, his military's own Directorate of Signals has purportedly been receiving numerous reports saying otherwise. Meanwhile, military leaders, according to the article, are warning of grave consequences if the soldiers' discontent continues. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Military bosses, sources said, were edgy, amid fears that if the grievances raised by the restive soldiers were not urgently addressed, the situation could have grave consequences.”

Source: “Army morale lowest as economy implodes,” *Zimbabwe Independent*, 25 January 2019. <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2019/01/25/army-morale-lowest-as-economy-implodes>

Morale within the Zimbabwe Defence Forces has reportedly hit rock bottom, the lowest ever since the country's Independence in 1980, amid reports that the troops are disgruntled over the rising cost of living, poor salaries and working conditions, among several other grievances, the Zimbabwe Independent can report.

Military bosses, sources said, were edgy, amid fears that if the grievances raised by the restive soldiers were not urgently addressed, the situation could have grave consequences.

Conditions within the barracks, military sources said, have deteriorated, as Zimbabwe reels from the devastating impact of a multi-faceted economic crisis.

“Chaos and insubordination will not be tolerated. Misconduct will be investigated. If required, heads will roll,” Mnangagwa said on his Twitter handle this week.



The morale of the Zimbabwean military was high during this Solidarity March in 2017 telling President Mugabe to go, but with poor working conditions and low pay, has since tumbled to extremely low levels.

Source: Zimbabwean-eyes Flickr, <https://goo.gl/LKdRLw>, Public Domain.



Kidnapping in Nigeria: An Underreported, Multifaceted, Criminal Enterprise

OE Watch Commentary: Kidnapping by locals in the oil-producing Niger Delta in the early 2000's, as described by the accompanying excerpted article from the *ENACT* website, has morphed significantly over the years. Back then, the perpetrators would abduct foreign oil workers and use them as bargaining chips to draw international attention to the environmental destruction and underdevelopment in their region. However, what started as an attempt by a group of people who felt victimized to bring notice to their plight, over time evolved into a monetized operation that is, as the article describes, a multifaceted criminal enterprise operating across land and at sea, and driven by different motivations, including financial, political, ideological, and sociocultural.

The Niger Delta is still the epicenter of kidnapping, although now it is for money, as the militants learned the oil executives would pay hefty amounts to have their workers released. It did not take long before they began targeting others who would draw large ransoms, including politicians and wealthy businesspeople. Even offshore from the Niger Delta is not immune from kidnappings, a problem that has raised the Gulf of Guinea's insecurity level. To be sure, there are also numerous abductions in areas outside the Niger Delta region, with perhaps the most infamous occurring in the town of Chibok, where 276 girls were taken by the terrorist group Boko Haram. As for the country's roads, they present a particular hazard, where kidnapping by criminal gangs frequently takes place.

Some Nigerian analysts believe the most common reason for kidnapping is not financial or political, but rather ritual. There is an entrenched myth in parts of the country, as the article notes, that claims certain body parts, when used for magic, bring wealth, power, and protection.

It is difficult to give precise numbers as to how many people are kidnapped each year in Nigeria. Between May 2016 and May 2017, the Nigerian Police Force reported 886. However, as many people fear or do not trust the police, it is estimated that the actual number of kidnappings is significantly higher. Attempts to bring down the kidnapping rate by methods such as deploying large numbers of officers along troublesome roads has had mixed results. Thus, kidnapping remains a serious problem as the country searches for more effective means to combat it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: William Assanvo and Don Okereke, "Nigeria's Kidnapping Crisis," *ENACT*, 1 February 2019. <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/nigerias-kidnapping-crisis>

If more proactive and effective responses are not developed to address the socio-political economy underpinning it, the situation could further deteriorate with the proliferation of criminal syndicates across the country, and beyond.

Kidnapping carried out at sea is also increasingly common, specifically offshore from the Niger Delta states where it contributes to increasing insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Criminal groups pursuing financial gain are responsible for these abductions.

High-net-worth individuals are the main targets: businessmen, politicians, traditional leaders and their family members, including schoolchildren, religious leaders and public servants. Random citizens are also kidnapped, particularly on the street.

Suspected kidnappers are frequently arrested and gangs dismantled, but security services remain mainly reactive. The crime continues apace and the search for more effective measures continues.

"If more proactive and effective responses are not developed to address the socio-political economy underpinning [kidnapping], the situation could further deteriorate with the proliferation of criminal syndicates across the country, and beyond."



Destruction following the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping.

Source: Yaroh Dauda/VOA/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chibok_kidnapping_destruction_VOA.jpg, Public Domain.



Convoy of Armed CJNG Survey Neighborhoods in Zacatecas

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article by *NarcoViolencia*, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) has increasingly been expanding throughout Mexican territories. In a video published in the accompanying article, CJNG gunmen can be seen armed with .50 caliber machine guns and assault rifles as they drive through Zacatecas neighborhoods in what appear to be newer-model vehicles. The report notes that the CJNG similarly drive through streets in the municipalities of Apulco, Nochistlán, and Tlachichila in Zacatecas.

According to the accompanying excerpted article by *La Net Noticias*, civilians who witnessed the cartel’s vehicles were shocked by CJNG’s arrival, as this would represent more violence in the area and more armed clashes in their streets. Since there are no municipal police, residents have requested the intervention of the Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR) and the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) to help push the cartel out of their towns. As the report indicates, CJNG is expanding their patrol across Mexican territories and publicly displaying their military grade weaponry to send a message of financial superiority and strength. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

“CJNG sicarios survey the area at all hours and even put up road blocks.”

Source: “Video: En un gran convoy sicarios del CJNG armados con barrets y ametralladoras caliber 50 circulen Zacatecas (Video: In a large convoy, CJNG gunmen are armed with barretts and .50 caliber machine guns as they circulate Zacatecas),” *NarcoViolencia*, 29 January 2019. <https://www.narcoviolencia.mx/2019/01/video-en-un-gran-convoy-sicarios-del.html?m=1>

“As shown in the video, CJNG sicarios were in a large convoy in recent model trucks across towns in Zacatecas. They are seen carrying assault rifles, some with barretts and machine guns, and appear to be conducting surveillance.”

Source: “Convoy del CJNG alarma a pobladores en municipios de Zacatecas [Video] (Convoy of CJNG alarms residents in municipalities of Zacatecas [Video]),” *La Net Noticias*, 24 January 2019. <https://www.lanetnoticias.com/estados/372216/convoy-del-cjng-alarma-a-pobladores-de-municipios-de-zacatecas-video>

“After seeing the presence of CJNG members, the citizens of the towns of Apulco, Nochistlán, Tlachichila in Zacatecas requested the intervention of the Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR) and the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) to remove the criminals from the streets.”

“CJNG sicarios survey the area at all hours and even put up road blocks.”

The Gulf Cartel’s Armored Vehicles

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 January 2019, at least two members of the Scorpions of the Gulf Cartel were killed by officers from the National Defense Secretariat (SEDENA) and the State Police of Tamaulipas in Mexico. The Scorpions are the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel. According to the accompanying excerpted article by *La Net Noticias*, a Mexico-based news outlet, police reported the confrontation first in Monterreal. The Scorpions were traveling in an armored Hummer and firing at authorities from a turret that was attached to the vehicle. The report explains that the fighting in the area is due to rival factions of the Gulf Cartel continuing to battle for control over Reynosa.

According to the accompanying excerpted article by *NarcoViolencia*, another Mexico-based news source, the Hummer had logos that identified the occupants as Scorpions of the Gulf Cartel of Matamoros. This is not the first instance Mexican authorities had been involved in a public shootout with the Gulf Cartel in armored vehicles. According to the report, on 31 December 2018, another group of Scorpions were traveling in similar armored trucks with the same logos. The report notes that, while the military managed to stop the turret-equipped armored vehicle, some of the Scorpions managed to escape in nearby armored trucks, in which a search by SEDENA and SEMAR (Secretariat of the Navy) forces is still pending. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

“They were traveling in a Hummer truck armored and equipped with a turret, from which they fired shots.”

Source: “Monstruos blindados: las imágenes del enfrentamiento contra sicarios del CDG (Armored Monsters: the images of the confrontation against gunmen of the CDG),” *La Net Noticias*, 4 January 2019. <https://www.lanetnoticias.com/viral/362147/monstruos-blindados-las-imagenes-del-enfrentamiento-contra-sicarios-del-cdg>

“They were traveling in a Hummer truck armored and equipped with a turret, from which they fired shots, as well as with assault rifles.”

Source: “El Cártel del Golfo traía Hummer blindada acondicionado como vehículo military táctico equipado con torreta para dispara military táctico equipado con torreta para disparar en Tamaulipas (The Gulf Cartel brought an armored Hummer fit to be a tactical military vehicle equipped with a turret in a shoot in Tamaulipas),” *NarcoViolencia*, 3 January 2019. <https://www.narcoviolencia.mx/2019/01/el-cartel-del-golfo-traia-hummer.html#>

“The truck had logos that identified the members as Scorpions of the Gulf Cartel of Matamoros. On December 31, 2018, another group of sicarios were traveling in another armored truck with the same logos.”

“From 2010 to date, Tamaulipas confiscates the largest number of these armored vehicles, which have been used in clashes with authorities and rival groups. All types of trucks are modified with thick steel plates and have been manufactured in workshops by both the Gulf Cartel and its rival, Los Zetas.”



Salvadorans Elect Nayib Bukele

OE Watch Commentary: On 3 January, thirty-seven year old Nayib Bukele won the presidential elections held in El Salvador as the excerpted article from *ABC* reports. He is to be sworn in on 1 June. The election was novel for a number of reasons, one of which is the evident rejection of the traditional parties (ARENA and the FMLN). As the excerpt from *BBC Mundo* notes, Bukele's election seems to announce the electorate's departure from the country's bi-party tradition. The article suggests that as a result, he may have some difficulty gaining the necessary votes for some of his initiatives. He had been a member of the Marxist FMLN until just two years ago. Unable to register a new party in time for these elections, he ran as the candidate of a smaller rightist party, the Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANU). The other excerpt from *ABC* notes that the results have to be counted as a loss for El Salvador's far left (the FMLN garnered under 15 percent of the vote), in part a reaction to the failure of the Maduro regime in Venezuela, as well as to a lackluster management performance by the leftist incumbent President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, who in any case has been a staunch supporter of the Maduro regime. The results are yet another setback for the region's Bolivarian alliance. President-elect Bukele has already hinted, as the *BBC Mundo* excerpt reports, that he will not be giving further support to the Maduro regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...unpopularity of the Maduro regime in all of Latin America...”



Outgoing president Salvador Sánchez Cerén (L) with the president-elect Nayib Bukele (R), 2015.

Source: Presidencia El Salvador [CC0], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reuni%C3%B3n_del_presidente_S%C3%A1nchez_Cer%C3%A9n_con_el_alcalde_de_San_Salvador.jpg.

Source: Adrián Espallargas, “Bukele gana en El Salvador con su lucha contra la corrupción (Bukele wins in El Salvador with his fight against corruption),” *ABC*, 5 February 2019. <https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-bukele-gana-salvador-lucha-contracorrupcion-201902050300-noticia.html>

“Nayib Bukele ...was proclaimed president for the period 2019-2024 with 53% of the votes...”

With the victory of the GANA candidate, the Central American country puts an end to more than 25 years of administrations from the rightist party... Carlos Calleja (Arena) collected 31.77% of the votes, while que Hugo Martínez (FMLN) gained 14.41% of the votes and Josué Alvarado (Vamos) 0.78%...

Businessman of Palestinian origin and only 37 years old, Bukele is a relatively recent arrival to the political system in El Salvador...”

Source: Marcos González Díaz, “Elecciones en El Salvador: quién es Nayib Bukele, el joven empresario que será el próximo presidente del país centroamericano tras arrasar frente a los partidos tradicionales (Elections in El Salvador: who is Nayib Bukele, the Young businessman who will be the next president of the Central American country after sweeping the traditional parties),” *BBC Mundo*, 4 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47112057>

“With an image characterized by a leather jacket and sunglasses, Bukele awakened the attention of youth and ‘millennials’ thanks to a campaign centered on social media...”

Roberto Cañas, analyst and ex-commander of the FMLN... ‘...the label left or right does no suffice to define what is happening.’ ‘...Bukele is not associated with that political past in El Salvador in which one said that they were of ARENA or the FMLN...

Bukele already marked a difference regarding the stance he is thinking of holding with countries like Venezuela or Nicaragua, publicly supported by the outgoing [President] Sánchez Cerén. ‘A dictator is a dictator. Of left or right, he [Bukele] asserted [on Twitter].’

Source: Emili J. Blasco, “La cercanía a Maduro y la mala gestión económica castigan al FMLN en El Salvador (Closeness to Maduro and poor economic management punishes the FMLN in El Salvador),” *ABC*, 6 February 2019. <https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-cercania-maduro-y-mala-gestion-economica-castigan-fmln-salvador-201902061658-noticia.html>

“The growing unpopularity of the Maduro regime in all of Latin America and the unviability of the same Chavista prescriptions during the last ten years in El Salvador by the old guerrilla of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) explains to a great extent the presidential election results this Sunday.”



Focus on Cuba

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying reference by Carlos Sánchez Berzain in *Infobae* about the political situation in northern South America and the Caribbean is relevant and insightful. It is also representative of an increasing number of articles focusing on the role of Cubans. Mr. Sánchez is an accomplished lawyer, bureaucrat and scholar. Moreover, he is a political exile from Bolivia, a condition which informs his opinion both in terms of direct experience and in terms of emotional impetus. His take is that the Cubans are in charge, have a great deal to lose if their power in Venezuela were greatly reduced, and will do everything to delay that eventuality while they look for ways to stay in control. Mr. Sánchez opines that Maduro is obedient to his Cuban masters, but that the Cubans will ultimately sacrifice him. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Carlos Sánchez Berzain, “La dictadura cubana inmolará al dictador Maduro en Venezuela (The Cuban dictator will sacrifice dictator Maduro),” *Infobae*, 3 February 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/americas/opinion/2019/02/03/la-dictadura-cubana-inmolara-al-dictador-maduro-en-venezuela/>

“In the Castroist analysis, a negotiated withdrawal by dictator Maduro would grant a rapid and relatively easy victory to the United States and to his declared enemies of the Group of Lima and the European Parliament, aggravating and accelerating the crisis that is already underway in the dictatorships of Nicaragua, Bolivia and in Cuba itself where signs of growing citizen reaction are being seen. Accordingly, delaying and resisting in Venezuela at all cost is their strategy. ...

The more the forced term of dictator Maduro is drawn out, the more Castroism has hope in the possibilities that its accomplices (because to protect the crime is complicity) can achieve an opening for ‘dialog’, or manipulate some ‘elections’ or promote a ‘humanitarian action’ keeping Maduro, or anything in order to ‘ease up’ and later go back to misleading. Gaining time is the objective and the means are simply all, including threats and destabilization of the democratic governments that support Guaidó....

Maduro responds to the interests of the Castroist dictatorship of Cuba to which he owes power and by which he has always been controlled and directed. The extreme continuation of dictatorship in Venezuela is determined by a foreign power, called Cuba.”

1986

2019



FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES OFFICE:
OVER 30 YEARS OF FOREIGN PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



Germans in Bolivia

OE Watch Commentary: Last December, the German government announced some diplomatic efforts in Bolivia aimed toward gaining participation in lithium exploitation there. As the reference from *Mineria en Línea* indicates, doing big business in Bolivia means doing business with the government and the Bolivian government says it is interested in geopolitical partnership as much as it is in business partnership. The article notes that Germany is making a competitive play that possibly challenges interests of the Chinese, who have been making their own investments in Bolivia. The article does not mention current events involving the Maduro regime in Venezuela, but Bolivia’s government is decidedly Bolivarian and so far an unwavering supporter of the Cuban and Venezuelan Bolivarians. The excerpted article from *Gestión* reports of a choice recently made by the Bolivians in favor of the Chinese. That choice does not mean the Germans have been cut out, as there is some potential for geographic sorting as to where different operations might occur, as the article indicates. Still, one cannot help but wonder if the timing of the announcement is not related to the “geopolitics” mentioned by the Bolivian Bolivarians, especially given that so much current geopolitics in the Western Hemisphere revolves around the Venezuela question. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Editors, “En el nuevo “Gran Juego” del litio, Alemania adelanta a China en Bolivia (In the new ‘Great Game’ Germany gets a step on China in Bolivia),” *Mineria en Línea*, 28 January 2019. <https://mineriaenlinea.com/2019/01/en-el-nuevo-gran-juego-del-litio-alemania-adelanta-a-china-en-bolivia/>

the environment, emphasizing the commitment of Germany in social and environmental issues...

German diplomats in La Paz also emphasized the high-level German government support for the project...

The ACI [German company] victory signifies that Germany now has a beachhead in the last frontier called the Lithium Triangle of South America: the Bolivian Uyuni salt lake, one of the largest unexploited deposits in the world...

Some risks...

While Uyuni has at least 21 million tons of lithium, the nationalization of natural resources has been a key policy of Morales...

ACI stated that the automobile manufacturers with which it had spoken could not confirm anything publicly until final agreement had been reached...

Juan Carlos Montenegro, head of YLB, said that geopolitics is important for Bolivia when deciding with what companies to associate itself...

Source: “Bolivia elige firma china para invertir US\$ 2,300 millones en proyectos de litio (Bolivia chooses a Chinese Company to invest \$2.3 billion in lithium projects),” *Gestión*, 6 February 2019. <https://gestion.pe/mundo/bolivia-elige-firma-china-invertir-us-2-300-millones-proyectos-litio-257968>

“Bolivia chose the Chinese Company Xinjiang Tbea Group as ‘strategic partner’ to implement various projects of industrialization of lithium...

The investment calculated for ‘potential projects’ that will be carried out in the Coipasa salt flats in Oruro, and in Pastos Grandes, in Potosí, is for some \$2.3 billion dollars....

The indicated capital expenditures ‘are subject to confirmation’ once the results of feasibility studies of the projects is known...

The salt flats of Coipasa and Pastos Grandes are close to Uyuni...”

“... geopolitics is important for Bolivia...”



Mountains and reflections surrounding the Uyuni salt flat during sunrise, Daniel Campos Province, Potosí Department, southwestern Bolivia.
Source: By Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47617647>.



Brazil's Migrant Problem

OE Watch Commentary: Last month the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado* published the accompanying excerpted article regarding Brazil's official exit from the United Nation's Global Compact for Migration. In December, Jair Bolsonaro had indicated he would withdraw Brazil from the Compact, signed only weeks earlier on 19 December 2018 by president Michel Temer as reported by the accompanying excerpted article from *Istoé*. True to its word, the Bolsonaro government announced on 8 January 2019 it would leave the compact.

The *O Estado* article focus was three fold. First, Brazil's withdrawal and the possible repercussions to the UN would be negative. The article implied that leaving the Compact despite the fact that according to the Compact itself, it is non-binding under international law and it does not effect a state's national sovereignty, Brazil is demonstrating it may be willing to remove itself from other multilateral agreements. The article includes a quote from a

diplomat that "the message that Brazil sends is that, to the developing countries, the UN may not be so relevant in the future and this is of great gravity." It is easy to see why the UN might feel this way considering that last year Brazil withdrew from hosting world climate talks in 2019.

Second, the UN hopes, as it does with its many other compacts and non-binding affirmations, that the Compact will stand as a set of guidelines for nation states around the world dealing with immigration issues. UN officials and local Brazilian NGOs including the Brazil-based Conectas suggest as per the article, that the Compact could be damaging to Brazilian immigrants, stating that there are approximately three million Brazilians living abroad.

Third, is the fact that despite its seemingly endemic corruption, and financial ups and downs, Brazil has become the economic powerhouse of South America, and in the past couple decades tens of thousands of migrants have entered the country in hopes of a better life. Bolivians, Haitians, most recently Venezuelans, and others from neighboring countries, have flocked to Brazil to take advantage of Brazil's open border policy.

While migrants are able to enter the country all along its 10,000 mile land border, once they arrive there is little to no government infrastructure to assimilate migrants into the Brazilian socio-economic system. This strains government ability to manage the inflows of migrants. Once, back when Brazil was considered just another poor country in South America it may have been possible to have an open border, but today it is proving to be more difficult.

On any given day at the Peace Mission (Missão Paz), a charity run by the Catholic Church in central São Paulo, hundreds of Haitians and Bolivians stand outside or sit on bleachers underneath a huge canvas top to escape the heat. Inside, there are basic Portuguese language classes, assistance to get the necessary documentation needed to integrate into Brazilian society, and vocational training. However, even with the correct paperwork in hand, migrants do not find it easy in Brazil and the number of migrants entering Brazil is far more than organizations like the Peace Mission can process.

Consider Haitian migration into Brazil. After the earthquake in Haiti and in conjunction with a number of other factors, nearly 100,000 Haitians entered Brazil. One of the primary migration points is the border between Peru and the state of Acre. There is a Brazilian Army Special Border Platoon at the border crossing point and after cursory checks, the army pointed migrants toward the capital of Rio Branco. In Rio Branco migrants were more fully processed, with the expectation they would continue further into to greater Brazil. However, many did not leave the state of Acre, or went only as far as the neighboring state of Rondonia and its capitol Porto Velho. Eventually there were many more Haitians than the border states could support and the governments of both Acre and Rondonia chartered buses and civilian jet airliners to send Haitians on a one way journey to São Paulo. The flights led to a war of words between the regional leaders and the leadership of São Paulo that was closely followed by the press until it faded from the headlines.

Some Brazilians believe that the outcome of it all is that the country, with its open border policy, is sorely lacking an effective policy to manage migration. Most of the migrants that cross the borders by land end up squeezing into ever expanding favelas in Brazil's mega cities like Rio de Janero and São Paulo. It should not be completely unexpected that an international compact on migration, even though non-binding, might be perceived as infringing on sovereignty. In fact, it is likely that because Brazil has serious migration issues to contend with that the Compact may have been jettisoned. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Army checkpoint near Iguazu Falls.

Source: Dodge Billingsley.

(continued)



Continued: Brazil’s Migrant Problem

“Brazil will seek a regulatory framework compatible with the national reality and with the well-being of Brazilians and foreigners”

Source: “Bolsonaro retira Brasil de Pacto de Migração e ONU teme reviravolta (Bolsonaro withdraws Brazil from Migration Pact and UN fears turnaround),” *O Estado de S.Paulo*, 8 January 2019. <https://internacional.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,brasil-deixa-pacto-global-pela-imigracao-da-onu,70002671958>

The first announcement of the departure of the new government was made in December by Twitter by Chancellor Ernesto Araújo, on the same day that the Itamaraty approved the agreement, at a UN meeting in Morocco... “Brazil will seek a regulatory framework compatible with the national reality and with the well-being of Brazilians and foreigners. In the case of Venezuelans fleeing the Maduro regime, we will continue to welcome them,” he said... “The message that Brazil sends is that, to the developing countries, the UN may not be so relevant in the future and this is of great gravity,” commented an experienced ambassador, on condition of anonymity.”

Source: “Futuro chanceler diz que Brasil vai deixar Pacto Global de Migração (Future chancellor says Brazil will leave Global Migration Compact),” *Istoé*, 10 December 2018. <https://istoe.com.br/futuro-chanceler-diz-que-brasil-vai-deixar-pacto-global-de-migracao/>

The ambassador [Ernesto Araújo] also added that immigrants are welcome in Brazil and will not be discriminated against. However, he defended a definition of criteria to guarantee safety to all. He did not elaborate on those criteria. “Immigration is welcome, but it should not be indiscriminate. There must be criteria to ensure the safety of both migrants and citizens in the destination country. Immigration must be at the service of the individual interests and cohesion of each society. “



Traffic crosses the open border between Paraguay and Brazil 24 hours a day via the Friendship Bridge.
Source: Dodge Billingsley.



Paraguay Announces Plan to Reinforce Security along its Border with Brazil

OE Watch Commentary: In 2017, Lincoln Gakiya, a São Paulo-based prosecutor and one of the greatest authorities on organized crime in Brazil, stated that “Organized crime grows stronger where the state is absent” in reference to the First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital or PCC). The accompanying excerpted article from *Istoé* reports on Gakiya’s statement and as of 2019, his assertions have come true as the PCC is now Brazil’s largest criminal organization with a significant presence in the country. Regionally, the PCC controls drug trafficking routes between Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Colombia. The PCC’s drug shipments along the routes through these countries are sent abroad, making it a transnational criminal organization. Although the PCC has been of concern for some time now, Paraguay in particular is taking measures to reinforce security along its shared border with Brazil because according to the excerpted article from *Telefuturo*, the Paraguayan People’s Army (EEP), a communist insurgent group, has aligned itself with the PCC to provide the Brazilian group protection in Paraguay in exchange for weapons.

In early January 2019, the Paraguayan National Police announced an increase in security measures in the city of Pedro Juan Caballero, which sits along the border with Brazil, as part of a strategy to eradicate criminal groups operating in the area, including the PCC. Other measures Paraguay is prepared to take in order to reinforce security are highlighted in the excerpted article from *Ultima Hora*. This article also discusses the significance of the security efforts in the city of Pedro Juan Caballero. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“The Paraguayan National Police is asking for citizen collaboration in reporting suspicious individuals or vehicles entering from Pedro Juan Caballero.”

Source: “O avanço do PCC (PCC Spreads),” *Istoé*, 13 July 2017. <https://istoe.com.br/o-avanco-do-pcc/>

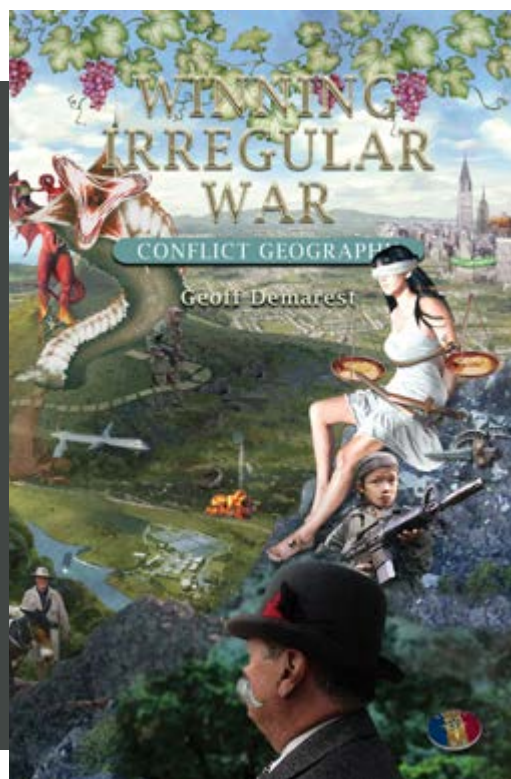
Back in 2017, Brazilian Prosecutor and Security Expert Lincoln Gakiya warned that, “Organized crime grows stronger where the state is absent.” This statement was made in reference to the exponential growth of the PCC within Brazil, regionally (Paraguay, Bolivia and Colombia) and transnationally as the end goal of this group is to distribute internationally where it can sell cocaine at a higher cost.

Source: “Confirman alianza del EPP con el PCC (Alliance between EPP and PCC Confirmed),” *Telefuturo*, 4 January 2019. <https://telefuturo.com.py/noticia/26728-Confirman-alianza-del-EPP-con-el-PCC->

The Paraguayan People’s Army (EEP) has aligned itself with the PCC to provide the Brazilian group protection in Paraguay in exchange for weapons. This information was confirmed during a meeting between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil where all three countries’ agreed to work together to fight transnational organized crime during 2019.

Source: “Policía anuncia aumento de seguridad en Pedro Juan Caballero (Police Announce Increased Security Measures along Brazilian City of Pedro Juan Caballero),” *Ultima Hora*, 22 January 2019. <https://www.ultimahora.com/policia-anuncia-aumento-seguridad-pedro-juan-caballero-n2793106.html>

The Paraguayan National Police is asking for citizen collaboration in reporting suspicious individuals or vehicles entering from Pedro Juan Caballero, Brazil into Paraguay as the Brazilian city is considered as one of the most violent in the region. As a result of this request, citizen reports and security checkpoints aided Paraguayan authorities in arresting two PCC operatives at in Pedro Juan Caballero in late January. After searching the vehicle of the PCC operatives, authorities seized several large caliber rifles, pistols and ammunition. In addition to citizen support and border security checkpoints, Paraguayan Police are also asking for Brazil and Argentina to help support its efforts as the PCC is active in all three countries and is continuously looking for areas to grow both regionally and abroad.



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>



Changing Brazilian-Chinese Trade Relations?

OE Watch Commentary: The Brazilian economy (the largest in South America) has become somewhat dependent on exports to China. As the brief excerpt from the centrist Brazilian newspaper, *O Globo* points out, “the level of production and employment in 11 [Brazilian] states depend on the behavior of the Chinese economy.” While China has become the leading destination of Brazilian exports over the past decade, Chinese investments within Brazil have declined over the past two years. As the excerpt indicates, last year alone, China’s investments in Brazil dropped by 75 percent, going from \$11.3 billion in 2017 to \$2.8 billion in 2018.

The excerpt criticizes the government’s lack of a trade strategy toward China, its largest partner. It points out that the recently elected Bolsonaro administration is not focusing on the country’s objective interests and is instead fixed in an impractical mindset where China remains “an enigma in the Brazilian foreign policy.” The article advocates “evaluating the alternatives with China...in foreign policy that leads to the development of long-term strategies, with positive results in the production chains and the country’s level of employment.” As one of the founding members of BRICS, the new Brazilian government may end up taking a more pragmatic approach regarding its trade with China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wedman)**

Source: “Brazil Has Yet to Formulate a Strategy Toward China, Its Main Partner.” *O Globo*, 15 January 2019. <https://oglobo.globo.com/opiniao/brasil-permanece-sem-estrategia-para-china-seu-maior-parceiro-23371621>

China has become the main destination of Brazilian exports in this decade. It buys more exports than the United States, the European Union, and Latin America. Overall, the level of production and employment in 11 states depends on the behavior of the Chinese economy. Recently, China reduced investments in Brazil. The investments amounted to \$2.8 billion last year, a 75 percent drop from \$11.3 billion in 2017. Even without considering the atypical flow in 2017, there was a significant reduction last year: 47 percent less than in 2016, when the investments amounted to \$5.3 billion.

Beijing defined a trading policy early in the millennium. It has advanced in the construction of a network of agreements, free trade, with the objective of guaranteeing the energy and food security of its 1.3 billion inhabitants. In Chinese pragmatism these agreements mean not only business but also a projection of political and economic power... On the other hand, Brazil has long defined priorities and the trend of the relationship with the United States, a historical ally and fundamental partner. China, however, remains an enigma in the Brazilian foreign policy.

According to O Globo, the signs issued by the current government suggest that China will remain a perennial foreign policy enigma. Jair Bolsonaro, President of Brazil, stressed his automatic alignment with Washington in the trade war with Beijing during his election campaign....



“China has become the main destination of Brazilian exports in this decade.”

Brazilian Soybean Exports, 2008.

Source: Roosevelt Pinheiro, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soja_exportacao.jpg, CC-BY-3.0.



Will Haiti Break Ties with Taiwan in 2019 and Opt for China?

OE Watch Commentary: Haiti's weak economy, lack of jobs and inability to attract foreign investors are just a few reasons that the country has looked at all potential financial opportunities offered to them in the past two years. While the Haitian government has continuously asserted that its intentions are to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan, it has not ruled out that if the deal is right, it is open to working with other countries that may be more financially advantageous (many assert China) according to the accompanying excerpted article from *Diario Libre*. This is of interest as over the last decade, China has successfully poached many of Taiwan's diplomatic partners in the Caribbean, Central and South America; the most recent being the Dominican Republic and Panama in 2018. However, throughout 2018, Haiti has kept its word to Taiwan in maintaining diplomatic ties and accepting foreign aid from them.

One example of fidelity is Haitian President Jovenel Moïse's visit to Taiwan along with parliamentarians, business owners and other members of his administration in mid-2018. However, despite this trip, Moïse's (now former) chief of staff, Wilson Laleau, noted that Haiti is not closing the door to other potential partnerships, including China, as indicated by the excerpted article from *PV Latam*.

The *PV Latam* article also discusses how Taiwan offered the Haitian government a loan of \$150 million to provide electricity to all of Haiti during negotiations that began in May 2018. There are questions that the loan will materialize, and if so, whether Taiwan can keep its promise to provide Haiti with continued electricity. At the same time, the Taiwanese offer pales against the \$4.7 billion which China offered Haiti in the summer months of 2017 to completely overhaul Port-au-Prince's crumbling infrastructure, from roads and bridges to electrical grids and water systems as discussed in the excerpted article from *Haiti Libre*. Despite the amount of cash offered by China in 2017 and the subsequent smaller amount offered by Taiwan in 2018, this article simply provides an overview of past events and is a topic that is of interest in the region given the large number of former diplomatic partners China has poached from Taiwan in recent years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“The initial infrastructure investment is estimated at \$ 4.711 billion, whose terms and conditions of financing are still unknown.”

Source: “Haiti mantiene su fidelidad con Taiwán pese a ofertas de China (Haiti Remains Faithful to Taiwan Despite Offers from China,)” *Diario Libre*, 2 May 2018. <https://www.diariolibre.com/actualidad/internacional/haiti-mantiene-su-fidelidad-con-taiwan-pese-a-ofertas-de-china-LL9782508>

With all external financial offers presented to Haiti by both Taiwan and China, the country has opted to choose carefully. According to an unnamed Haitian official, Haiti sees Chinese money as money for tomorrow whereas they see Taiwanese money that would potentially be available more expeditiously which would help Haiti find some relief so that they can govern. At this time, Haiti appears more willing to deny China's most recent offer, but there is an intent to shift and accept Chinese aid.

Source: “Haiti recibirá un préstamo de \$ 150 millones de Taiwán (Taiwan Grants Haiti US\$150 Million Loan to Build Electricity Grid),” *PV Latam*, 6 June 2018. <https://www.pv-magazine-latam.com/2018/06/01/haiti-recibira-un-prestamo-de-150-millones-de-taiwan/>

Taiwan offered to lend Haiti \$150 million for infrastructure development aimed at developing rural power grids in the impoverished Caribbean nation that is still recovering from a devastating 2010 earthquake. The same offer allegedly serves as an attempt in a bid to shore up relations amid a renewed diplomatic onslaught by rival China that has stripped it of two foreign allies in the past month. According to the Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrew Lee, a deal of this nature with Taiwan “provides a win-win situation to help a diplomatic ally with a major infrastructure development project and also creates overseas business opportunities for Taiwanese companies.”

Source: “Chinese interested in the renovation of Port-au-Prince,” *Haiti Libre*, 12 August 2017. <https://www.haitilibre.com/en/news-21936-haiti-reconstruction-chinese-interested-in-the-renovation-of-port-au-prince.html>

...This very general draft contains proposals for water and drainage works, road improvements, environmental protection, drainage and sanitation, a communication network and the reconstruction of the old town of Port-au-Prince; The initial infrastructure investment is estimated at \$ 4.711 billion, whose terms and conditions of financing are still unknown, as this proposal has not yet officially reached the gates of the Central Government or borrowed the official channels of bilateral cooperation...



Police Dismantle Largest Cocaine Processing Laboratories Ever Discovered in Spain

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 January 2019, a joint operation run by Spanish, Portuguese and Colombian police resulted in the seizure of one of the largest cocaine processing labs to ever be discovered in Spain, and even in Europe. According to Spanish police, as reported in the accompanying excerpted articles from *Europa Press* and *Las Provincias*, 11 individuals were arrested as part of the operation and identified as being from multiple countries, including two from Colombia, one each from Spain and Morocco, and five from Albania, while no further information was reported on the remaining two individuals arrested. These same individuals allegedly worked together in areas throughout Spain to pick up chemical precursors and concealed narcotics from ports located along the Spanish coast. The cocaine processing lab in question was located in an isolated chalet in the village of El Puig, near the city of Valencia. As the article from *Las Provincias* reports, authorities were initially alerted to this lab based on multiple visits to Spain by two Colombian chemists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“The agents were aware of the presence in our country of a couple of Colombians who had been sent up to three times by the organization providing the palm kernel flour mixed with cocaine.”

Source: “Detenidas 11 personas y desarticulado uno de los mayores laboratorios de cocaína de Europa en El Puig, Valencia (Eleven Individuals Detained in Mega-Cocaine Lab in Spain),” *Europa Press*, 21 January 2019. <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-detenidas-11-personas-desarticulado-mayores-laboratorios-cocaina-europa-puig-valencia-20190121094538.html>

...The organization was composed of citizens of Spanish, Colombian and Albanian nationality dedicated to the introduction of sacks of a thousand kilograms each with the purpose of extracting the base paste of the palm kernel flour (residue that remains after the extraction of the seed oil of the palm that is cultivated in tropical zones) and, once separated, proceed to the transformation of it into cocaine hydrochloride...

Source: “Desmantelan en Albalat dels Tarongers uno de los laboratorios de cocaína más importantes de Europa (Authorities Dismantle One of the Most Significant Cocaine Processing Labs in Europe),” *Las Provincias*, 21 January 2019. <https://www.lasprovincias.es/sucesos/desmantelan-chalet-puig-20190121094336-nt.html>

The agents made ten records in real estate, several of them in El Puig, and seized some 8,500 liters of various controlled chemical substances that were difficult to acquire and that were to be used for the preparation of cocaine hydrochloride

As a result of the police investigations, the agents were aware of the presence in our country of a couple of Colombians who had been sent up to three times by the organization providing the palm kernel flour mixed with cocaine...

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>

