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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

A Senegalese special forces soldier and his spotter prepare to fire an M240 machine gun as part of interoperability training during with U.S. special forces soldiers during Exercise Flintlock 2019, near Po, Burkina Faso, Feb. 21, 2019. Flintlock 2019 builds the capacity of participating nations to support regional cooperation, security and interoperability. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mary S. Katzenberger).

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5127396/flintlock-2019-po-burkina-faso>, Public Domain.

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Military-Industrial Journalistic Countermeasures

OE Watch Commentary: In November 2018, the liberal Russian daily, *Novaya Gazeta* published an investigation regarding fraud within one of Russia's most important weapons manufacturers, Корпорации Тактическое Ракетное Вооружение (KTRV, or Tactical Missile Weaponry Corporation). The article described how state defense expenditure funds were siphoned off via various schemes to enrich family members of the corporation's director. The article went on to receive much wider publicity when opposition and anti-corruption activist, Alexei Navalny produced a video which highlighted the findings in the article. (see: "Russian Defense Industry-Improved Financial Accountability?," *OE Watch*, January 2019).

One might have presumed that following this article there would have been organizational changes at KTRV. Instead, two months later, as if the *Novaya Gazeta* article and subsequent video had never been produced, the pro-Kremlin, military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer-VPK (Military-Industrial Courier)* published a long, detailed interview with the KTRV director, where he claims to "calculate the Corporation's economic status as sound and sufficiently stable." While the director does admit that "there are problem issues in the Corporation," he's confident that "all of them, in our view, are being resolved." The *VPK* article goes on to thoroughly describe all of the many contributions which the KTRV corporation is making to the Russian defense sector (e.g. hypersonic and cruise missiles, torpedoes, counter-torpedo protection, anti-ship missiles, mines, etc.). While the director also talks about developments in the realm of "information countermeasures," he makes no mention of the earlier investigation and allegations of financial malfeasance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"As a whole, we calculate the Corporation's economic status as sound and sufficiently stable."



Hypersonic Avangard Rocket produced by KTRV.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hypersonic_rocket_complex_Avangard.jpg, CC 4.0.

Source: Oleg Falichev, "От дозвука до гиперзвука," [From Subsonic to Hypersonic], *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 29 January 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/47947>

The domestic OPK [defense-industrial complex] is continuing to summarize the results for 2018. General Director Boris Obnosov talked to "Voyennoye-promyshlennyy Kuryer" about what they were, and the tasks for 2019 on the eve of the 17th anniversary of the Korporatsii "Takticheskoye raketnoye vooruzheniye" (KTRV) [Tactical Missile Weaponry Corporation].

[Falichev] – Boris Viktorovich, how was 2018 for the Corporation?

[Obnosov] – The final results of our work this year will be set out later, closer to March. That includes at the level of the Defense Ministry and the government.... In the annual rating of the world's largest arms producers, the KTRV rose by 12 places.

As a whole, we calculate the Corporation's economic status as sound and sufficiently stable. There are problem issues in the Corporation, as with any living organism, but all of them, in our view, are being resolved....

...We succeeded either in completing our signature programs, or confirming those characteristics of the VVT [arms and military equipment] products, which are included in them.

There were successful launches of the Kh-101 cruise missile and the "Avangard" hypersonic glide vehicle, about which assuredly even the deaf heard of the launches in the Far East...

[Falichev] – KTRV includes sufficiently independent enterprises and associations with powerful background, producing a wide catalog of products – from torpedoes to supersonic missiles.

[Obnosov] – We have several OKR [experimental-design projects] on aviation and naval weaponry. These are various designation products: "air-to-air," "air-to-surface," and "air-to-ship." Roughly a third of them are connected with coastal systems and underwater naval weaponry.

...In 2019, we must complete more than 10 OKR, among which, as I already said, have both aviation and naval components. In this connection we have become, generally speaking, omnivores....

...In the field of naval weaponry, nearly all classes of underwater equipment, including anti-submarine torpedoes and missiles, mine, and mine countermeasures systems, information countermeasures systems, and counter-torpedo protection, as well as sea- and coastal-based anti-ship missile systems are being developed....



Russia's Mobile and Cost-Efficient Satellite Launch Service

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian plans to field a low-cost rocket that can launch small (up to 15kg) satellites into a very Low Earth Orbit (LEO) of 250-300 kilometers. This rocket is based upon the MN-300 meteorological rocket that has been modified to include a second stage booster. This system is very mobile, and can reportedly be moved by truck, air, or rail. The article focuses on the financial benefits of such a system, including the ability to rapidly put a satellite into orbit, without having to “piggy-back” on another (larger) rocket, which is the customary way small satellites are put into orbit. But this system also has military uses. Small reconnaissance and communications satellites may have shorter life spans due their small sizes and close orbits, but the ability to rapidly field small satellites on demand could be extremely valuable in crisis situations when surge capabilities are required. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Scientists of the Russian Science and Production Association ‘Tayfun’ have found a way to ensure the rapid delivery of satellites into space. They have proposed to create a super-light space launch vehicle based on the MN-300 meteorological rocket.”

Source: Aleksandr Bulanov, “Естественный носитель: в России создают ракету для оперативных запусков Она сможет отправлять на орбиту спутники весом до 15 кг за три часа (A Natural Carrier: A Rocket for Expedited Launches is Being Created in Russia; It Can Send Satellites Into Orbit Weighing up to 15 Kilograms in Three Hours),” *Izvestiya*, 20 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/843088/aleksandr-bulanov/estestvennyi-nositel-v-rossii-sozdaiut-raketu-dlia-operativnykh-zapuskov>

Scientists of the Russian Science and Production Association “Tayfun” have found a way to ensure the rapid delivery of satellites into space. They have proposed to create a super-light space launch vehicle based on the MN-300 meteorological rocket. It is used to send scientific equipment into the upper layers of the atmosphere along a ballistics trajectory. “We plan to replace the scientific equipment located in the payload section of the rocket with a second-stage engine. This will give the carrier the ability to inject a payload weighing up to 15 kilograms into a low, near-earth orbit at an altitude of 250-300 kilometers,” noted Anatoliy Pozin, the manager of NPO “Tayfun’s” Geophysical and Ecological Laboratory for Missile and Space Research. “And the launch platform of the MN-300 rocket and the first stage will remain unchanged, which minimizes expenditures for modernization.”...

*The new version of the rocket will fully retain the positive qualities of the MN-300. Preparation for launch will take a total of about three hours and its transportation can be accomplished in a container installed on an ordinary truck or railroad platform. Water or aircraft transportation versions are also available, *Izvestiya* was told by Yuliya Chikacheva, an engineer on the developers’ staff...*

“Besides the elimination of the economic losses associated with the additional logistics and the lengthy waiting periods for a launch, its high responsiveness will open new possibilities for rapid exchanges of small satellites in the event that they become suddenly disabled,” noted the engineer.

The Cost of the Flight

The main shortcoming of the new rocket is the high cost of delivering 1 kilogram of payload into orbit. It is approximately \$60,000. However, this cost can be offset by individual conditions of the launch. “The cost of inserting a satellite into orbit may fluctuate significantly depending on its characteristics, but most likely it will be about \$20,000 to \$30,000 a kilogram, which is at least half that of the costs cited by the NPO ‘Tayfun’ specialists,” noted Andrey Potapov, Deputy Director of the Space Center of the Skolkovskiy Institute of Science and Technology. “Moreover, the high cost of a new rocket is fully justified by the capability of selecting the altitude of the orbit and the launch time for the goals of the specific space mission.”...

The Scientific Side

*It is assumed that the main payload for the new rocket will be scientific nano- and micro-satellites. The number of their launches has significantly grown in recent years. In the opinion of Anatoliy Kopik, director of marketing for the “Sputniks” Company, small scientific devices (weighing 1-2 kilograms) may be launched to a 300-kilometer low orbit for study of the earth’s lower thermosphere. At the present time this field remains little studied since the use of meteorological rockets can rarely be used there. And it is preferred not to use large and expensive satellites to resolve such tasks, the expert related. refused to comment to *Izvestiya* about NPO “Tayfun’s” new development. The project to create the new rocket may be completed over the course of 3-4 years.*



Russia Hedges Bets on Satellite Navigation

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian plans to field a new terrestrial navigation system, the *Sprut-NI* (Спрут-Н1). The *Sprut-NI* is primarily for use by larger platforms (naval vessels, strategic air defense systems, aircraft, etc.), and is seen as a way of improving and diversifying navigation capabilities. This diversification of navigation capabilities is important for the Russian military, as they believe the satellite navigation provided by systems such as GPS and GLONASS could be unavailable or severely degraded in the event of a peer-level conflict. The diversification of navigation capabilities is also occurring elsewhere in the Russian Armed Forces, such as even with relatively small UAVs that are using terrain recognition technologies for this purpose. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Alternative backup channels are vital to the military because, as has become clear, modern satellite navigation systems are vulnerable to electronic warfare devices.”

Source: Aleksey Kozachenko and Aleksey Ramm: “Когда спутник подавлен: флот получит наземную ГЛОНАСС (When Satellite Is Jammed: Navy to Get Ground-Based GLONASS),” *Izvestiya*, 19 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/843437/aleksei-kozachenko-aleksei-ramm/kogda-sputnik-podavlen-flot-poluchit-nazemnuu-qlonass>

A new-generation high-precision radio navigation system (RNS) -- Sprut-NI [Спрут-Н1]-- has been created for the Navy. It will make it possible to determine an object's geographical position, speed, and altitude with a degree of accuracy that significantly exceeds that of data from GLONASS or GPS. The determination of coordinates is carried out by ground-based RNS stations, which pass an encrypted signal to ships and planes. The main advantage of the new system over satellite navigation is that the high-tech RNS signal cannot be jammed.

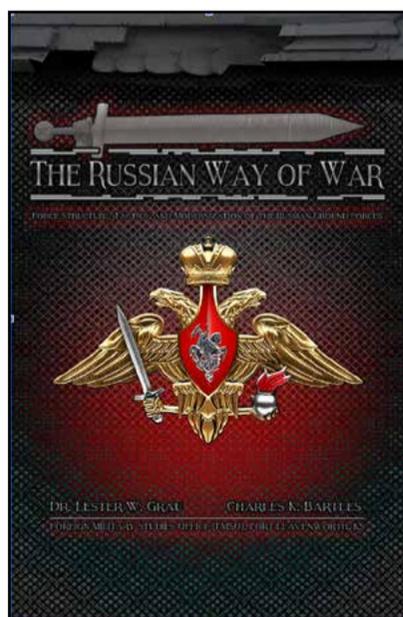
This year equipment for the Sprut-NI navigation system will start to be trialed on ships of one of the Navy's fleets, Izvestiya was told by the Defense Ministry. In the first phase, the RNS will operate over the territory of Russia and its coastal waters. Two ground-based stations will be deployed.

At present the Sprut-NI is the only Russian broadband RNS with ground-based stations, and in terms of accuracy it surpasses foreign analogues. The system comprises a series of ground-based stations for tracking and transmitting orders to a ship or plane, a receiver, and a computer center. It is known that the system has excellent functional capabilities in terms of data transmission speed and the security of the signal -- the precise technical parameters of the new system are being kept secret...

Alternative backup channels are vital to the military because, as has become clear, modern satellite navigation systems are vulnerable to electronic warfare devices. At the same time, the ground-based Sprut-NI RNS will continue operating autonomously even if an enemy manages to jam the satellite signal in a certain area. The idea is that broadband RNS stations will become an essential means of navigational support to ships and other vessels when an enemy is actively engaged in EW.

A modern warship sorely needs a navigation system that cannot be jammed, Izvestiya was told by Captain First Rank Sergey Batalin, former commander of a Pacific Fleet submarine.

“Knowing your precise location in real time is very important -- it makes it possible to assume an attacking course in timely fashion or to evade enemy strikes,” the expert reckons. “There are loads of methods of determining your location, but the most precise and quickest are special navigational systems that automatically plot a route. It is also important that navigational data are relied on by many of the ship's command and control systems, including the aiming and guidance of high-precision weapons.”



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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MiG-31 to Provide Coverage of Pacific and Arctic Region

OE Watch Commentary: The MiG-31BM is the modernized version of the MiG-31 (NATO designation “Foxhound”). It is a long-range interceptor aircraft with anti-air, anti-ship and anti-ground capability, plus it can launch anti-satellite missiles and the Kinzhal cruise missile. It has flown 8,000 kilometers in just over 7 hours using aerial refueling. The regiment mentioned in the accompanying excerpted article will probably be assigned to the Naval Aviation of the Pacific Ocean Fleet. The additional assignment of MiG-31 BM aircraft to Murmansk will provide coverage of the Northern Sea Route and vicinity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Aleksey Kozachenko, “Сядут на Камчатке: на Дальнем Востоке развернут авиаполк МиГ-31 сверхзвуковые перехватчики берут под контроль Арктику и Тихоокеанский регион (They Will Land in Kamchatka: MiG-31 Aviation Regiment to be deployed in Far East. Supersonic Interceptors to Monitor Arctic and Pacific Region),” *Izvestia*, 21 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/847654/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko/siadut-na-kamchatke-na-dalnem-vostoke-razvernut-aviapolk-mig-31>

The Defense Ministry has decided in principle to deploy a new MiG-31 regiment to the Yelizovo airfield in Kamchatskiy Krai xxx. MiG-31s have been well tested in the North. In 2018, a series of tactical air exercises patrolling the Arctic zone with MiG-31BMs were conducted. The planes were also used during the Vostok-2018 maneuvers. Following the exercises, the Ministry of Defense decide to conduct permanent patrolling of the Arctic with these fighters and to form aviation units for this purpose.

The new formation will be given the number of a famous unit -- the 865th Fighter Regiment.... According to military expert Dmitriy Boltentkov, “this aviation unit was traditionally stationed in the east of the country and performed missions to cover the North and the Pacific region. In 2010 the regiment was disbanded. One of its MiG-31 squadrons became part of the 317th Separate Mixed Aviation Regiment, and all the aviation unit’s regalia were transferred there. This squadron will now provide the foundation of the revived regiment.” The 865th Regiment holds the Order of the Red Banner of Labor -- it is the only combat aviation unit ever to have been awarded a civilian order. The award was given for its part in dealing with the aftermath of flooding in the Blagoveshchensk area...

MiG-31s have traditionally been deployed in the North and in Kamchatka. Yelizovo airfield has already been home to a regiment armed with this plane, according to military expert Anton Lavrov. “The advantage of the MiG-31BM is that it can monitor a vast area thanks to its high speed, powerful radar, and long-range missiles. This makes it possible to fully cover the eastern coast and the border with the United States. The fighter performs the role of an effective interceptor in a remote area of the country -- in this respect it is better than ordinary fighters. Moreover, a large number of planes of this type are in storage, and it will be possible to increase the number of aviation units, if necessary.”

“The regiment could be assigned missions to escort Russian strategic bombers,” Dmitriy Boltentkov noted. “In addition, they will be able to perform missions to cover the Kamchatka group of the submarine fleet. It will also be possible to use them as a powerful strike force in the Pacific.”

The MiG-31BM has been chosen as the carrier of a unique Russian weapon -- the high-precision Kinzhal hypersonic aviation missile. Work on modernizing the plane was conducted in parallel with the development of this system. With the emergence of the Kinzhal, the interceptor acquired a new role as a strike plane. The MiG-31 takes missiles to a height of up to 25 km and a speed of 3,000 kph, then the missiles begin their own autonomous flight. Using the Kinzhal, nuclear and conventional warheads can be delivered to a target up to 2,000 km away. In this way the plane is able to strike enemy forces without entering the zone protected by the enemy’s air defense and missile defense system.

This year the Defense Ministry will also create a unit at the Monchegorsk airfield in Murmanskaya Oblast, where two squadrons of MiG-31 interceptors will be deployed. There are subsequent plans to expand them into a full aviation regiment.



“The advantage of the MiG-31BM is that it can monitor a vast area thanks to its high speed, powerful radar, and long-range missiles.”

Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-31BM.

Source: Alex Beltyukov - RuSpotters Team [CC BY-SA 3.0 GFDL 1.2], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mikoyan-Gurevich_MiG-31BM,_Russia_-_Air_Force_AN2221622.jpg



VDV Reorganization to Include Organic Aviation

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* and *Izvestiya* discuss the subordination of the Russian Aerospace Forces' assets to the Airborne (VDV). Typically, Russian VDV formations (brigades and divisions) are supported by attached army aviation brigades belonging to the Russian Aerospace Forces (the Russian Ground Forces VDV, and Naval Infantry currently have no manned aviation assets). In current practice, this means that request for aviation support for the VDV are routed through the Military District/Joint Strategic Command. As mentioned in the *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* article, the Vostok-2018 exercise included an experiment involving the direct assignment of an aviation brigade to a VDV maneuver brigade. Apparently this experiment was deemed a success, as the Russians are planning to permanently assign an army aviation brigade to the VDV around 2020-2021. Not only will the army aviation brigade be assigned to the VDV, but this unit will be somewhat modified. The brigade (48-50 helicopters) will reportedly have four helicopter squadrons: one squadron of Mi-35M (HIND-E) strike helicopters, one squadron of heavy lift Mi-26T2 (HALO) helicopters, and two squadrons of Mi-8AMTSh-V (HIP) combat-transport helicopters. If this command and control relationship proves beneficial, other army aviation brigades could be subordinated in a similar manner. The other accompanying excerpt, is an interview of Airborne Troops Commander, Colonel General Andrey Serdyukov, in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. It mentions some other possible changes in the VDV, including the possibility that some VDV brigades may be upsized into divisions in the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Airborne Troops Commander Colonel General Andrey Serdyukov.
Source: By Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70308848>.

“Measures to reconstitute brigades into divisions are regarded as just one stage in the prospective evolution and building of the Airborne Troops.”

Source: Pavel Ivanov, “«Крылатая пехота» становится мобильнее Реформа: ВДВ России сделает их глобальной силой (Winged Infantry is Becoming More Mobile: Reform of Russia's Airborne Troops Will Make Them a Global Force),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 19 February 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/48469>

...Even before the start of the exercises, Airborne Troops commander Andrey Serdyukov stated that Vostok would be a validation of the new organizational structure of Airborne Troops units and subunits. So, what was the colonel general talking about?

*According to the *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, the experiment to create a new organizational structure for the Airborne Troops began in 2017. And it was done on the basis of the 31st Airborne Brigade. The main task was to radically improve the maneuverability of the brigade, in particular, on the battlefield. To do this, it was planned to use helicopter units.*

Therefore, the brigade formed two airmobile battalions. Compared to conventional airborne assault brigades they were provided with a somewhat lighter organizational structure. Also, the mortar and antitank units were equipped with vehicles—Rys and UAZ trucks.

The brigade command quickly took charge of helicopter squadrons, one combat and three military transport squadrons based on Mi-8AMTSh and Mi-26 helicopters. Units are transferred from the Aerospace Forces structure. Helicopter pilots were not just attached to the brigade command. During the experiment, they became regular units of the 31st Airborne Brigade. This made it possible to build cooperation between personnel and pilots, as well as to teach the command to plan and manage the joint combat work of the new airmobile battalions and helicopter squadrons...

As officially reported by the Defense Ministry, during the Vostok-2018 exercises a landing was performed by tactical assault troops as part of the airmobile battalion of the 31st Airborne Brigade. This involved more than 40 Mi-8AMTSh helicopters, two Mi-26 heavy multirole transport helicopters, and more than 10 Mi-24 fire support helicopters.

Trucks were delivered to the specified area on the external pylons of Mi-8 helicopters. Using the landing method, Mi-26 helicopters landed eight all-terrain vehicles and four Rys armored vehicles equipped with Kornet antitank guided missiles, and Kord heavy machine guns.

The reform gives a new vector of development to the Airborne Troops. They are becoming more modern and responsive to current military and political objectives. But the effectiveness of the reform is a matter of time.

(continued)



Continued: VDV Reorganization to Include Organic Aviation

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Aleksey Kozachenko, Bogdan Stepovoy, and Konstantin Valentinov: “ВДВ окрыляют: десантники получают собственную авиацию (Airborne Troops Acquire Wings: Airborne Troopers Will Get Their Own Aviation),” *Izvestiya*, 19 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/847090/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi-konstantin-valentinov/vdv-okryliaiut-desantniki-poluchat-sobstvennuu-aviatciiu>

...Several sources in the military department have told *Izvestiya* that the proposal to form one army aviation brigade in the Airborne Troops has, on the whole, been approved. But the unit will not be created before 2020-2021: New helicopters have to be ordered for it. According to *Izvestiya*'s sources, the aviation brigade will be directly subordinate to the Airborne Troops Commander.

The aviation unit will be based in either Ryazan', Voronezh, or Orenburg. It will incorporate four helicopter squadrons. One will be equipped with Mi-35M strike helicopters, and this model has not been chosen by chance: As distinct from the Mi-28N and Ka-52 main strike helicopters, the Suprekrokodil can transport up to seven airborne troopers. Another two squadrons will be armed with Mi-8AMTSh-V combat transport helicopters, and the fourth with superheavy Mi-26T2 helicopters.

The creation of an army helicopter brigade in the Airborne Troops will enable airborne subunits to operate far more efficiently and diversely, Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, head of the Executive Committee of the Russian Airborne Troopers Union, told *Izvestiya*. “Use of the Airborne Troops is currently being expanded substantially,” Valeriy Yuryev told *Izvestiya*. “Airborne troopers can be used to reinforce ground forces and also to carry out reconnaissance and sabotage activity. In addition, under conditions of powerful air defense, it becomes the most effective thing to transfer troops in helicopters that are practically inconspicuous at superlow altitudes. It also should not be forgotten that for airborne troopers a helicopter means not only transfer but also fire support.”

Some 48-50 helicopters capable of tackling combat tasks by day or by night will be gathered together in the Airborne Troops Army Aviation Brigade. In the Army the Mi-8 and its modifications, including the AMTSh-V, are dubbed the Kalashnikov assault rifle among helicopters – reliable, trouble-free, hardy, and tenacious. The Mi-8 AMTSh-V has modern ceramic armor, more powerful VK-2500 engines, and new avionics and is fitted with flaps for loading and unloading hardware instead of a hinged ramp. This modification is particularly good for work under desert and high-mountain conditions.

Mi-26T2 heavy transport helicopters will be used to transfer armored vehicles armed with antitank guided missile systems and large-caliber machine guns. The machine has a flight range of 800 km, or 1,905 km with extra fuel tanks. The Mi-26T can carry approximately 80 airborne troopers at a time.

Fire support will be provided by Mi-35M Superkrokodil helicopters. The brigade can, if necessary, be promptly transferred over thousands of kilometers by military transport aviation. All the helicopters, except the Mi-26T, are conveyed within the most massive transport aircraft – the Il-76. The machines can be assembled and prepared for combat application over one to two days...

Source: Alexander Tikhonov, “Десант наращивает мобильность и мощь (Airborne Building up Mobility and Power),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 February 2019. <http://redstar.ru/desant-narashivaet-mobilnost-i-moshh/>

...The airborne troops' mobility and capacity to regroup in short order is among their main distinguishing factors. Andrey Nikolayevich, what measures are scheduled for the coming years to continue increasing the VDV's mobility?

The Airborne Troops' have always been a high-mobility combat arm capable of very swiftly relocating subunits over great distances, regrouping, and deploying in any strategic sector.

In 2018 the Airborne Troops conducted an experiment to employ a “new type” air assault formation directly with army aviation. The formation's participation in the Vostok-2018 strategic maneuvers constituted the culminating stage of the experiment. Fundamentally new combat and maneuver capabilities on the part of air assault subunits operating from helicopters were demonstrated during the performance of combat training missions...

In an interview you gave to *Krasnaya Zvezda* last year you stated that the total authorized strength of VDV personnel had increased by 48 percent since 2012. Are there plans to continue increasing the authorized strength of the “winged guard”? Is there a possibility that brigades will be reconstituted as divisions?

The increase in the strength level last year has been just one stage in the evolution and building of the Airborne Troops. With the active support of the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces it is planned to implement some further measures that will be aimed at the troops' considerable reinforcement in the quantitative and qualitative respects. The VDV command's action plan stipulates the creation within the troops of a brigade with a “new type” organizational and manning structure, which will acquire qualitatively different capabilities in the performance of combat and specialized missions via its own mobile component and increased combat potential. Measures to reconstitute brigades into divisions are regarded as just one stage in the prospective evolution and building of the Airborne Troops.



Mandatory Patriotic Training?

OE Watch Commentary: The Kremlin leadership continues to place considerable emphasis upon strengthening the country's military awareness and sense of patriotism, particularly among Russia's younger generation. One of the more recent vehicles for youth patriotic instruction is the Young Army movement, created by Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu in mid-2016 (see: "Young Army for all Schools," *OE Watch*, December 2018). The movement, which began as a voluntary, scouting-type organization for children (8-18 years old), now appears to be transforming into something more mandatory. As the accompanying excerpt from the pro-business daily *Kommersant* points out, participation in the movement may soon be required of children of both active duty military officers and employees in Russia's military-industrial complex.

The article begins by quoting a proposal which was sent to the leadership of the military industry complex (MIC) with the goal of "developing the Young Army movement" within their enterprises. The article does not describe what type of training would be involved for the children associated with the MIC. The excerpt also refers to an earlier article which describes a "letter of the acting deputy commander of the Eastern Military District with a request to take into Young Army movement 100% of the children of officers aged between 8 and 18 years old."

The latest directive to enlist children into the movement may be prompted by a desire to please higher headquarters. The excerpt includes a quote from a *Kommersant* source who claims that Defense Minister Shoygu "pays great attention" to the development of this movement and that for company directors by "supporting this initiative means supporting him personally." The article goes on to point out that according to the plans of the Ministry of Defense, "by 2020 there should be about a million people" enrolled in the Young Army movement. There are currently some 350,000 Russian youth enrolled.

According to its original mandate, one of the objectives of the Young Army movement is to instill a greater sense of healthy patriotism among Russia's younger generation. The article quotes a representative of the "Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committees of Russia," who questions how such a directive to enlist the children of MIC employees will be implemented, suggesting that "the intervention of the military in children's structures causes concern." If this is any indication, the requirement that children of military officers and employees of Russia's MIC join the movement does not necessarily guarantee that this goal will be met. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"According to a Kommersant source, 'Sergey Shoygu pays great attention to the development of the movement, supporting this initiative means supporting him personally.'"



Young Army cadets in Severomorsk.

Source: http://eng.mil.ru/images/upload/2015/2016-08-03_yunarmy_severomorsk-900_22.jpg, CC 4.0.

Source: Ksenia Mironova and Ivan Sinergiey, "Военным заводам заказали Юнармию: Минобороны просит создать отделения движения на всех предприятиях ОПК (Military Plants ordered Young Army: The Ministry of Defense asks all defense enterprises to create a branch of the movement)," *Kommersant*, 12 March 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3908185>

As it became known to Kommersant, detachments of the military-patriotic movement Young Army may appear at the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex. The corresponding proposal was sent to the leadership of the defense industry complex with the goal of "developing the Young Army movement", the number of which, according to the plans of the military, by 2020 there should be about a million people. Earlier, Kommersant reported about the letter of the acting deputy commander of the Eastern Military District with a request to take into Young Army movement 100% of the children of officers aged between 8 and 18 years old....

...On the plans to expand the activities of the military patriotic Young Army movement at the enterprises of the military-industrial complex, several sources involved in the implementation of the state defense order told Kommersant.... According to a Kommersant source, "Sergey Shoygu pays great attention to the development of the movement, supporting this initiative means supporting him personally."

Valentina Grebenik, executive secretary of the Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committees of Russia, believes that in this way the military is trying to substantiate the activities of the main military and political directorate... "I do not understand how this should be implemented.... And in general, the intervention of the military in children's structures causes concern," notes Mrs Grebenik.

In the future, the number should increase significantly: for example, on February 26, the first deputy chief of the main military-political directorate, General Alexei Tsygankov, said that by 9 May, the ministry predicts an increase in the number Young Army members to reach 500,000. To this end, the Ministry of Defense proposes to create an Young Army squad in each school, open the houses of Young Army in each region and launch a year-round network of Young Army camps based on the branches of Patriot Park. By the 75th anniversary of the Victory in 2020, it is planned to increase the number of Young Army to 1 million members...



Complexities and Challenges of Russia's Avangard Hypersonic Glide Reentry Vehicle

by Maxim Starchak

Republished and edited for *OE Watch* in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 16, Issue 30, dated 5 March 2019. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/complexities-and-challenges-of-russias-avangard-hypersonic-glide-reentry-vehicle/>

OE Watch Commentary: Late last year, President Vladimir Putin referred to the Avangard hypersonic glide reentry vehicle (RV) as a “gift” to Russia for 2019. Clearly, the Avangard was designed, in part, to demonstrate the military-industrial power of Russia. But its development has faced serious problems, and its future remains questionable. The Avangard, developed by MIC NPO Mashinostroyenia, is based on the company’s 1980s-era Albatross project, which was supposed to counter the comprehensive ABM system being created by the US as part of the Strategic Defense Initiative (popularly known as “Star Wars”). The possibility of creating a hypersonic reentry vehicle was likely discussed during Putin’s visit to this plant in December 2002.

A Russian prototype hypersonic vehicle apparently performed a test flight as part of the Security 2004 military exercise, on February 18, 2004. This was stated by both the then–first deputy chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Yuri Baluevsky, and President Putin. Speaking at a press conference, the Kremlin leader claimed these missiles systems are capable of striking ground targets across intercontinental distances with hypersonic speed and high accuracy. The gliders are also capable of sharp, high-speed horizontal and vertical evasive maneuvers in flight.

The first explicit mention of the Avangard (Project 4202) hypersonic RV dates back to 2007, and is referenced in “Publication No. 16” of the Special Bureau for Design and Technology, responsible for the development of missile silos. However, the first mention of “Project 4202” in NPO Mashinostroyenia corporate documentation does not appear until 2009. That year, then-president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev visited the plant, apparently jump-starting the development of the Avangard.

The Soviet-era project to develop a hypersonic glide vehicle (Albatross) was only given four years. Therefore, the 3–5 years of silence between Putin’s call for a hypersonic glide vehicle in 2002 and the initiation of the Avangard development program in 2007 or 2009 is quite striking, and likely related to several factors. First, since Washington’s withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Moscow continued for several years to try to reach a new agreement to replace the Cold War–era arms control regime. The final decision on going forward with the Avangard, apparently, was made only after Russian-US negotiations on ABM hit a wall in October 2007. Second, the Russian Ministry of Defense repeatedly added new requirements for the hypersonic reentry vehicle.

The aforementioned documents produced by the Special Bureau for Design and Technology in 2007 suggest that a decision was made to utilize the R-36M Voevoda missile system for the new hypersonic reentry vehicle. In the development of the missile system, it was necessary to solve problems of stealth, guidance, maneuvering and radio waves passing through the plasma generated by the glide RV. The main problems were the high temperature (up to 2,000 degrees Celsius) during reentry and the associated problem of controllability. It was also important to achieve a speed of Mach 17–22. Russian arms manufacturers were unable to solve these problems between 2009 and 2015.

To date, at least ten tests of the hypersonic RV have been carried out. The first tests (in 2013–2015) either did not achieve the necessary performance data or were unsuccessful. As a result, in 2014 there was concern that the project would be canceled. The main issues were solved only in 2016, and newly successful tests were carried out. A year later, in 2017, before the completion of the official test program, the government decided to start serial production. As such, the Avangard’s development process echoed that of the Bulava ballistic missile, whose serial production began in 2008, before testing could be completed. The Bulava did not officially enter service until ten years later.

The Avangard reportedly has a length of 5.4 meters and is a multiple RV, with three independently targetable warheads, each equal to more than two megatons of TNT. The vehicle is equipped with a thermal control system developed by NPO Nauka. It travels along a low trajectory, at a height of 60 to 100 kilometers above the Earth, separating from the carrier and performing height and direction maneuvers up to 1,000 kilometers; it can fly several thousand kilometers to its target. According to Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov, the latest test, carried out in December 2018, confirmed the controllability of the vehicle at speeds of Mach 27.

According to the State Armament Program, two regiments in the Orenburg Region will be equipped with the Avangard system by 2027—that equals 12 missile systems. According to the plans of the Ministry of Defense, the first regiment armed with Avangards will assume combat duty in 2019. However, due to persistent serial production backlogs in the Russian defense-industrial sector (over the past few years, no defense ministry plan for strategic missile systems deliveries has been entirely fulfilled, and NPO Mashinostroyenia failed to complete the State Defense Order in 2010–2011), probably only one or two battalions will be equipped with the Avangard (2–4 missile systems).

Additionally, the start of serial production and equipping of the first Strategic Missile Forces regiment with the Avangard, does not mean this hypersonic system is actually ready. It still must undergo a series of tests atop UR-100N and Sarmat ballistic missiles. The inventory of UR-100Ns is limited, production having stopped in 1985; some of these missiles have already been retired, while a part is relegated for testing. The long-term carrier of the Avangard will be the Sarmat, the development and production of which has also been delayed. Thus, the Russia’s much-advertised hypersonic weapon is unlikely to reach strategic missile units for some time to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Starchak)**

Source: “«Отличный подарок к Новому году»: Путин оценил новое российское оружие (An “excellent New Year’s gift: Putin appreciated the new Russian weapons),” *NTV*, 26 December 2018. <https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/2128800/>

...The rocket launched from the Dombrovsky range near Orenburg and quickly gained altitude...In space, the unit separated from the carrier and rushed at the intended target, the Kura range on Kamchatka, at a speed of more than 20,000 km/hour...For Russia, “Avangard” is a deterrence weapon...



'Special Outsider': Russia Joins the Race for Global Leadership in Artificial Intelligence

by Sergey Sukhankin

Republished and edited for *OE Watch* in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 16, Issue 35, dated 13 March 2019. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/special-outsider-russia-joins-the-race-for-global-leadership-in-artificial-intelligence/>

OE Watch Commentary: On February 26, the industrial director of the Rostec State Corporation, Sergey Abramov, declared that work on the fourth generation of the Ratnik future infantry combat system is underway. The system is said to include, among other advanced elements, a soldier's exoskeleton as well as software link ups with micro-Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and other systems utilizing artificial intelligence (AI). The authorities claim that such military-industrial contractors as JSC Kalashnikov, High Precision Systems and Techmash have become Russia's "locomotives," driving the development and production of AI systems. Abramov concluded that "our [Russian] weaponry has always been, currently is and will remain the best in the world—without any unnecessary meekness and illusions regarding our competitors."

Last year, the editor-in-chief of the military magazine *Arsenal Otechestva*, Victor Murakhovsky, provided a fascinating assessment of the new upgrades to the AI-supported Ratnik system. According to Murakhovsky, its strong points include:

- Increased maneuverability, which will play a particularly crucial role within the scope of para(military) operations carried out under challenging conditions such as "forests, mountains, the Arctic zone, and urban warfare." Specifically, the *Arsenal Otechestva* editor argues that the employment of exoskeletons "will increase the current maneuverability of a soldier by two or three times" and will allow the Russian Armed Forces to avoid the "predicaments they [Soviet forces] had to face in Afghanistan."
- Increased precision of firepower, which will be achieved through a wide range of optical sensors (such as thermographic cameras, laser designators, rangefinders and optic-location complexes) integrated into the new system.
- Increased level of protection, which, thanks to the exoskeleton, "will increase the level of protection by several times."

Murakhovsky, however, points to some notable problems that might not allow the Ratnik to be used to its full potential for at least some time. Namely, he mentions the issue of its internal battery, which can only work continuously for up to 2–3 hours without recharging. He stated that, to be truly effective, the system needs to be able to function for at least 24 hours (ideally, 48 hours, given the difficulties of accessing a power source in field conditions) without additional charging.

More recently, the Russian side has announced that work on PTM-5 "smart mines" equipped with AI will be launched sometime in 2019. These mines will reportedly be capable of distinguishing between civilians and military forces rather than automatically exploding in either case, which is meant to considerably decrease civilian casualties in conflict zones. At the same time, AI will enable the mines to "choose targets in an independent mode".

At the moment, however, it would be premature to share Abramov's optimism and rush into referring to Russia's reported achievements in the realm of AI as a "scientific breakthrough." Yet, two aspects nevertheless seem quite clear. First, artificial intelligence, which Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly referred to as a "key for achieving global leadership" has entered Russia's "priority list." As a result, "scientific breakthroughs" (real or imagined) are bound to occur going forward. Second, the Russian military seems to have assumed the leading position in the country when it comes to developing AI (both for civilian and military needs). This stems from the growing role of the Military Innovative Technopolis ERA (MIT ERA) in the domestic defense-industrial sector. Constructed on the coast of the Black Sea (Anapa), and expected to be fully operating by 2020, the MIT ERA industrial park prioritizes eight main research fields for its resident firms:

1. IT systems, automated-control systems, and AI;
2. robotic systems;
3. computer science, computer technology;
4. technical vision, pattern recognition;
5. information security;
6. nanotechnology and nanomaterials;
7. energy, technologies and life-support machines; and
8. bioengineering, biosynthetic and biosensor technologies.

Another important detail pertaining to the MIT ERA is premised on two important relationships:

- A strong link between academia and the Armed Forces. The MIT ERA is to become a highly sophisticated combination of laboratories, engineering centers, and "open spaces" equipped with the most up-to-date equipment specifically designed for promising military scholars and members of academia.
- A strong link between theory and practice, meant to include all stages of the product generation cycle, from idea generation to practical limited-scale testing.

Yet, this optimism is not shared by all experts in the field. For instance, in a paper published last autumn by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Sergey Karelov (the founder of Witology and the head of the League of Independent IT Experts) argues that "all countries, with the exception of the [United States] and China, are outsiders in the rush for AI technologies... [E]ven such technologically developed states as France, Germany, India and South Korea, whose technological development is incomparable with countries of the third world, are looking into becoming AI-colonies." In contrast, Karelov's report pointedly names Russia a "special outsider," which has the potential to join the rush for global leadership as long as Russia's industrial base is able to combine "the principle of asymmetry with still-present intellectual traditions of the Soviet science." **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**

Source: "Ростех ведет работу над экипировкой "Ратник" четвертого и последующих поколений (Rostec is carrying out work on equipping "Ratnik" of the fourth and future generations)," *TASS*, 25 February 2019. <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/6157867>

...*"Work on future generations of equipment is being carried out, we have enough scientific and technical background for this..."*, said Abramov...*At present, TsNIITOCHMASH (a division of Rostec) has completed research work on Ratnik-3 and submitted its results to the Ministry of Defense in order to receive recommendations and an order to conduct design work...*



Get on the Boat, Get off the Boat

OE Watch Commentary: The *Aleksandr Otrkovskiy* is one of three Ropucha-class large landing ships built in Poland that are in service with the Northern Fleet. They can be loaded from fore and aft ramps and can carry 450 tons and up to 25 standard armored personnel carriers. The training reported on in the accompanying excerpted article apparently included the different types of vehicles that the 66th Naval Infantry Brigade would use, but it was not a full-up combat load since tanks and artillery were not involved. It takes a good deal of crew and driver skill and training to embark and disembark vehicles quickly and efficiently. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“In the course of the training, the BDK Aleksandr Otrakovskiy’s crew practiced ship maneuvering and ballasting elements while receiving and disembarking the seaborne assault force, while the driver-mechanics improved their skills in getting on the landing ship’s twin-deck and getting off onto the shore.”

Source: “Large Landing Ship Aleksandr Otrakovskiy Practices Amphibious Training Tasks,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 2 March 2019. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12219776@egNews

The exercise was held in the Pechenga bay on the Kola Peninsula shore near the Liinakhamari settlement. It involved 16 BTR-80 and BTR-82 AM armored personnel carriers, 12 all-wheel drive KamAZ and Ural military trucks, [tracked articulated chassis all-terrain] vehicles and engineering equipment belonging to the Northern Fleet naval infantry, as well as some 150 naval infantry.

In the course of the training, the BDK Aleksandr Otrakovskiy’s crew practiced ship maneuvering and ballasting elements while receiving and disembarking the seaborne assault force, while the driver-mechanics improved their skills in getting on the landing ship’s twin-deck and getting off onto the shore.

Amphibious training is one of the core elements of the naval infantrymen’s combat training that in full measure allows to practice teamwork and the tactics of amphibious landing on an open beach. Practicing loading military equipment aboard a landing ship from the shore is a basic element.

After rehearsing the tasks with the naval infantry, the large landing ship Aleksandr Otrakovskiy sailed to the Northern Fleet main base – Severomorsk.

Freedom of Navigation to be Tested in Arctic?

OE Watch Commentary: A French Navy supply vessel, the *FS Rhone*, sailed the Northern Sea Route from Norway to the Aleutian Islands last summer, using the Russian Northern Fleet and Pacific Fleet radio beacons to navigate the waters. The *FS Rhone* is not an ice-class vessel and Russian rescue services reportedly were on standby (see: *French Naval Vessel Sails Northern Sea Route*,” *OE Watch*, November 2018). Whatever coordination and permissions the French obtained before the voyage is not readily available, but was apparently minimal; however, as the accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax* reports, the Russian government would like to establish rules for using the Northern Sea Route by “foreign military ships.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“In case of emergency or complicated ice conditions, the captains must send a report to the nearest Russian port or military base.”

Source: “Foreign military ships to be compelled to notify Russia about plans to travel along Northern Sea Route,” *Interfax*, 6 March 2019. <https://www.interfax.com>

According to the newspaper Izvestia on 6 March, Russia has pledged to protect the Northern Sea Route, and the government has elaborated rules of its use by foreign military ships...The ships will also be compelled to prevent environmental pollution. In case of emergency or complicated ice conditions, the captains must send a report to the nearest Russian port or military base.

The newspaper noted that U.S. representatives had repeatedly called for making the Northern Sea Route a transport corridor open to all. The latest statement of the kind was made by U.S. Coast Guard Commander Adm. Paul Zukunft in 2018.

According to Izvestia, the United States is challenging the right of any littoral country, not just Russia, to establish the rules of navigation in the Arctic waters. They do not recognize the right of Canada to control Arctic routes either. The U.S.’ claims regarding the Northern Sea Route date back to the Cold War. In 1964, Washington and Moscow exchanged protests after U.S. ships tried to travel along the coast without authorization.



States Continue to Invest in Russian Energy

OE Watch Commentary: The Arctic LNG 2 project is located on the eastern side of the Gulf of Ob—an extension of the Arctic Kara Sea. It is opposite Novatek’s original Arctic LNG project designed to exploit the vast LNG fields of the Yamal (Gydan) Peninsula as the accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax* reports. Total is a major energy giant based in France, while Mitsubishi of Japan, Kogas of South Korea, Nuovo of Italy and Saudi Arabia have also been in talks with Novatek. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Under the terms of the deal, Total buys 10% in Arctic LNG 2 and has an option to increase its stake to 15% if Novatek reduces its participation interest below 60%.”

Source: “Novatek closes sale of 10% stake in Arctic LNG 2 to Total,” *Interfax*, 7 March 2019. <https://www.interfax.com>

The Arctic LNG 2 project involves building three LNG trains at 6.6 million tons per annum each, using gravity-based structure (GBS) platforms. [An “LNG train” is a liquefied natural gas plant’s liquefaction and purification facility. In order to transport LNG from one country to another, its volume has to be dramatically reduced. To do this, the gas must be liquefied by refrigeration to less than -161 °C. This refrigeration process is conducted in multiple units arranged sequentially-like a train.] The project is based on the hydrocarbon resources of the Utrennoye field on the Gydan Peninsula.

The final investment decision on the project is expected to be made in the second half of 2019, and production at the first train of the plant is scheduled to start in 2023. Under the terms of the deal, Total buys 10% in Arctic LNG 2 and has an option to increase its stake to 15% if Novatek reduces its participation interest below 60%. “Literally: if we go below 60%, then [Total will additionally receive] 50% of our reduction, but not more than 5%,” Novatek CEO Leonid Mikhelson said. Taking into account its 19.4% stake in Novatek itself and Novatek’s plans to retain a 60% interest in Arctic LNG 2, Total’s overall stake in the project will be about 21.6%.

Prior to the deal, Novatek owned 60% of Arctic LNG 2 directly and 40% through Ekropromstroy. The company plans to sell 40% of the project to foreign investors, which include companies from China, Japan, Thailand and Saudi Arabia.

Big Ship for a Big Job

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military expansion in the Arctic has kept the *Sevmorput* container ship busy in the Arctic waters. Now, as the accompanying excerpted articles from *The Barents Observer* report, it is hauling construction material for the LNG fields off the Kara Sea. Sailing up the Dvina River to Arkhangelsk’s port of Ekonomaya made the record books for the largest ship to make the trip. The *Sevmorput* has a capacity for 30,000 tons of cargo. The half-capacity load may be a reflection of the rather shallow draft of the Dvina. What’s next after all the construction slows down? Frozen fish is a good bet. The Russian Arctic fishing industry has been steadily expanding and other (nonnuclear) container ships are kept busy moving the frozen fish to market. This time of year, icebreakers are essential. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Rosatomflot is an active participant in the large-scale Arctic hydrocarbon projects.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Nuclear container ship *Sevmorput* sets course for new Arctic gas field,” *The Barents Observer*, 6 March 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-industry-and-energy/2019/03/nuclear-container-ship-sevmorput-sets-course-new-arctic-gas-field>

...It is all destined to the development of the Utrenneye natural gas field and adjacent seaport on Gydan Peninsula, ship owner Rosatomflot informs. A second shipment to Gydan is scheduled later this year.

“Rosatomflot is an active participant in the large-scale Arctic hydrocarbon projects,” Atomflot General Director Mustafa Kashka says. “The usage of nuclear-powered container ship «Sevmorput» in the development of the Arctic LNG 2 shows that our successful work experiences from the Arctic is much needed”...

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Biggest ship ever makes its way up the river to Arkhangelsk,” *The Barents Observer*, 12 March 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-industry-and-energy/2019/03/biggest-ship-ever-makes-it-way-river-arkhangelsk>

... The «Sevmorput» is the world’s only nuclear-powered container ship...

The ship was built in the period 1984-1988. In 1992-2006 she was used for transportation to ports along the Northern Sea Route. Later she was docked at the Atomflot base in Murmansk for years without assignments, and Rosatom was preparing to turn the ship into scrap metal.

In 2013 it was announced that “Sevmorput” would be renovated and put into service again...



Sino-Soviet Conflict Remembered with Concern

OE Watch Commentary: While relations today between Moscow and Beijing are strong, 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of what is often referred to as the Sino-Soviet border conflict. During a seven-month period in 1969, Soviet and Chinese forces skirmished over ownership of a number of islands in the rivers which separated China from the USSR. The border has since been delineated and relations restored, but as the accompanying excerpt from the centrist-daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* points out, today there are increased Russian concerns over China's growing military prowess.

The article begins by comparing defense budgets, asserting that in 2019, China's military expenditures will be "almost four times bigger than the amount that Russia spends on defense." The author traces the increase in Chinese defense spending, pointing out that since 2000 "it had grown almost 18-fold," where today it amounts to \$177.6 billion. And while "the Chinese defense industry stills lags behind Russia in... aviation and rocket engines, submarines, and new kinds of weapons," the article asserts "that the lag is shrinking rapidly." Moreover, it appears that China has become more of a danger to Russian arms sales, indicating that "in global arms trade, especially in the post-Soviet space, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, they [Russia and China] act as competitors."



Russian ship sprays water cannon on Chinese fisherman on the Wasuli River (1969).
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sino-Soviet_border_conflict_May_1969.jpg, CC 3.0.

The article concludes on a sobering note, suggesting "that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future." When referring to threats from the west, Russian military analysts insist that capabilities are more important than intentions. Even though relations between China and Russia are good today, this article suggests that Russian analysts have already started paying greater attention to Chinese military capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“It can be assumed that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future.”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Китай на свою оборону тратит в четыре раза больше, чем Россия Пекин к 2035 году планирует создать на флоте шесть авианосных групп (China Spends Four Times More Than Russia on Defense: Beijing Plans to Create Six Fleet-Based Aircraft Carrier Groups by 2035),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 March 2019. http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-03-05/6_7524_oborona.html

As seen from China's 2019 draft budget, its defense expenditures in the current year will increase by 7.5 percent and amount to \$177.6 billion when expressed in dollars. This is the second-largest defense budget in the world after the United States. And it is almost four times bigger than the amount that Russia spends on defense. China has the most numerous (more than 2 million military servicemen) military in the world. And in combat power, this military is second only to those of the US and Russian armed forces.

The Chinese leadership does not consider the increase in military expenditures a sign of excessive militarization. The growth rate of military expenditures in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in contemporary history is impressive; 20 years ago the PRC's defense budget amounted to about \$10 billion. In other words, by 2019 it had grown almost 18-fold compared to the start of the century...

...According to expert estimates, the Chinese defense industry stills lags behind Russia's in some other areas as well: aviation and rocket engines, submarines, and new kinds of weapons. But it is emphasized that the "lag is shrinking rapidly." And if Beijing and Moscow act as strategic partners on the world stage, then in global arms trade, especially in the post-Soviet space, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, they act as competitors...

“Chinese nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (with electromagnetic catapults) are expected to join the fleet by 2035, increasing the overall number of aircraft carriers to at least six, though only four of them will be engaged on the front lines,” the newspaper quotes Wan Yunfei, an expert on the PRC's naval forces and former PLA destroyer officer, as saying. He is confident that Beijing will not be slashing the budget for aircraft carriers despite the slowdown in economic growth and trade disagreements with the United States. It can be assumed that with such ambitious plans and large-scale financing, China might also overtake Russia in military strength in the future.



Small Steps in Uzbekistan's Military Reform

OE Watch Commentary: President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has implemented a number of significant reforms since he took power a couple of years ago and as the accompanying excerpted article from *Fergana Agency* reports, one of the latest involves the establishment of a course of military journalism. The article reports how the course is a joint effort between the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Defense and how prospective students for the new program will undergo “four years of study” for a degree as well as “four month retraining courses.” The article also notes how in addition to regular entrance requirements, students will take part in an interview with “journalists and officers” and that the program will include “physical training as part of a military university program.” Additionally, the article mentions how the four-month refresher courses “will be taught by specialists of the press services of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Interior Ministry and other departments.” Overall, the establishment of a military journalism course with a civilian university is a relatively small reform, particularly compared to the appointment of a new defense minister last month. However, it does follow along with Mirziyoyev’s previous incremental changes and could eventually allow for more information on the Uzbek Armed Forces to become available. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The university and the Ministry of Defense signed a memorandum of cooperation, including joint educational work.”

Source: “В Узбекистане начнут воспитывать военных журналистов (The education of military journalists will start in Uzbekistan),” *Fergana Agency*, 12 March 2019. <https://fergana.agency/news/105833/>

Starting with the 2019/20 academic year, a new course will be in the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan – military journalism. The university and the Ministry of Defense signed a memorandum of cooperation, including joint educational work...

Training in the specialty of “military journalism” will take place in two steps: a bachelor’s degree, including four years of study, and four month retraining courses. The university will accept 20 students in the first year... Upon admission, in addition to standard tests, applicants will go through an interview, which will be conducted by journalists and officers, as well as physical training as part of a military university program...

The program has days scheduled for military training. Lectures for refresher courses will be taught by specialists of the press services of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Interior Ministry and other departments... The University of Journalism and Mass Communications was established by resolution from President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on 24 May 2018...



Visit of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation in Uzbekistan (2018).

Source: Mil.ru [CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visit_of_the_Minister_of_Defense_of_the_Russian_Federation_06.jpg.



Improved Officer Selection/Tracking System

OE Watch Commentary: As prestige toward military service has improved over the past several years, Russian defense officials have become more selective in choosing the best cadets for officer training. As the accompanying excerpt from the pro-Kremlin daily *Izvestiya* points out, “as well as passing the YeGE (the Russian equivalent to the ACT/SAT), future cadets will have to undergo special professional selection tests in real time.” As the article explains, even if they have high marks in the YeGE, prospective cadets will not be admitted if they do not pass the special professional selection tests.

“The new professional selection system will make the management of human resources in the Armed Forces a great deal more effective...”

These special military tests are also designed to determine “a candidate’s aptitude for particular classes of military specialism,” which are divided into three categories: “those suited to serving in subunits directly involved in military action -- the VDV (airborne), spetsnaz, and so forth; the second category means having administrative abilities: Such candidates may in time occupy important command posts. Those in the third category can serve in all positions except those envisaged by the first two. In other words as technical specialists, engineers, or staff or rear services officers.”

The article quotes a military expert who suggests this “new professional selection system will make the management of human resources in the Armed Forces a great deal more effective.” This expert goes on to point out that “back in the nineties there was practically no selection, and people sometimes became officers who were unsuited to military service,” which “did not reflect well on the situation in the Armed Forces.” Another expert who supports tracking officers according to their strengths, remarks that “the Armed Forces people have always quietly divided their fellow service personnel into officers ‘for war’ and officers ‘for peacetime,’” and that since “officer training costs the state a great deal,” it makes sense “to use people as effectively as possible.” Ultimately, the article shows how the Russian military continues to develop policies and procedures to strengthen its personnel system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Roman Kretsup, Aleksey Ramm, and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Каждому по боеготовности: Минобороны перепроверит ЕГЭ абитуриентов (To Each According to His Abilities. Defense Ministry To Re-Test Applicants With Single State Examination Pass),” *Izvestiya*, 8 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/842706/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/kazhdomu-po-boesposobnosti-minoborony-pereproverit-ege-abiturientov>

The Defense Ministry is to increase the requirements for entering military vuzes [higher educational establishments] to a major extent. As well as passing the YeGE [Single State Examination] future cadets will have to undergo special professional selection tests in real time...

...Sources in the military department have told Izvestiya that the Defense Ministry has introduced a new system of tests for the professional selection of service personnel: It will start to operate this year. The tests have been developed by specialists at the General Staff Military Academy. The criteria will be used to test not only military vuz applicants: In the future they will also be applied to select candidates for contract service. A candidate who fails to pass professional selection will not be admitted to a military vuz even if he achieves pass marks in the YeGE and in physical training.

There are already tests for military vuz applicants. But they are mainly focused on determining a candidate’s aptitude for particular classes of military specialism: Now there will be three rather than seven. The first category will encompass those suited to serving in subunits directly involved in military action -- the VDV [Airborne Troops], the spetsnaz, and so forth. Suitability for the second category means having administrative abilities: Such candidates may in time occupy important command posts. Those in the third category can serve in all positions except those envisaged by the first two. In other words as technical specialists, engineers, or staff or rear services officers....

The new professional selection system will make the management of human resources in the Armed Forces a great deal more effective, Aleksandr Perendzhiyev, a member of the Officers of Russia expert council and senior lecturer at the REU [Russian Economics University] named for Plekhanov, told Izvestiya. This should help to minimize situations in which the state spends a lot of time and money on training an officer who proves unable to serve in his specialized field because of his psychological attributes.

“There are people who are not good at paperwork, dealing with documents or analyzing information,” Aleksandr Perendzhiyev said. “It is better for them to work with the personnel. And there are those whose psychological type does not enable them to lead. When they are appointed to command, both the men and the discipline suffer as a result....”

...Back in the nineties there was practically no selection, and people sometimes became officers who were unsuited to military service, the expert recalls. And that did not reflect well on the situation in the Armed Forces.

“It is important to use people as effectively as possible, so any sensible system for improving the quality of the selection of future officers is only to be welcomed,” military expert Vladislav Shurygin told Izvestiya. “Using tests to separate future officers into those capable of showing their qualities either in combat or in command positions makes good sense. In the Armed Forces people have always quietly divided their fellow service personnel into officers ‘for war’ and officers ‘for peacetime.’ It could not be said that any of them were bad. It was simply that not everyone could show composure or take the initiative under extreme conditions. At the same time, away from frontline conditions many such officers became, for example, excellent teachers. Officer training costs the state a great deal, so discarding such personnel is at the very least senseless and wasteful.”



Bilingual School Highlights Estonian Language Politics

OE Watch Commentary: Many of the cities in North-Eastern Estonia have a high percentage of ethnic Russians. Kohtla-Järve is among these cities where the majority of its inhabitants speak Russian on a daily basis and its secondary schools reflect this reality. There is significant concern in the Estonian government that this system disadvantages students as future Estonian citizens. In order to work in Estonia, it is necessary to possess a certificate proving proficiency in the Estonian language and many students who are educated in Russian or bilingual schools do not possess this proficiency. For this reason, there has been increasing pressure for schools to provide education entirely in Estonian.

The accompanying excerpted article refers to the Estonian Education Minister, Maili Reps of Estonia's Centre Party, who has made the controversial decision to keep the local secondary school partially bilingual. The incoming tenth grade class will be taught entirely in Estonian but the upper two grades will continue to be taught in both Estonian and Russian. Even though Reps has concerns about making the transition to Estonian-only education, she recognizes the need for this change to happen eventually. Reps specifies that "resolute steps have to be taken, starting at the kindergarten level, to bring all students up to standard from a young age." The administration has hesitated to make the switch too quickly, concerned it will have a negative impact on students because, "many students coming to the school will have to take on additional Estonian 'cramming' lessons to bring them up to speed, on top of their already full curriculum."



Map of Estonia showing Kohtla-Järve location.
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Estonia_-_Location_Map_\(2013\)_-_EST_-_UNOCHA.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Estonia_-_Location_Map_(2013)_-_EST_-_UNOCHA.svg), CC 3.0.

This view has not been popular among members of other parties in Estonia, such as the Reform and Isamaa parties, who have voiced support for Estonian-only education. The article also points out that the Centre party has been criticized by others such as Erik Kalda, the editor-in-chief of *Põhjarannik*, a local daily newspaper. Kalda says that, "Centre party machinations and interests are causing Russian youth to suffer... as they miss out on another academic year of all-Estonian education." As a talking point during the recent Parliamentary campaign, the results of the election on 3 March are telling of the way Estonians think about this issue. The Reform party overwhelmingly won the elections with the Conservative People's Party (EKRE) and Isamaa taking the next two spots above the Centre Party. Language education in Estonia will continue to be a contentious issue. **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**

"Ms Reps has already said resolute steps have to be taken, starting at the kindergarten level, to bring all students up to standard from a young age."

Source: Andrew Whyte, "Opinion: Kohtla-Järve school case should be cause for national concern," *ERR News*, 18 February 2019. <https://news.err.ee/911396/opinion-kohtla-jarve-school-case-should-be-cause-for-national-concern>

Since many students coming to the school will have to take on additional Estonian "cramming" lessons to bring them up to speed, on top of their already full curriculum, many will opt to go to the Russian-language upper secondary school in nearby Jõhvi instead.

Language in education is a key topic in party politics ahead of the general election on 3 March, with the Reform and Isamaa parties favoring Estonian-only, and Centre, the Social Democratic Party (SDE) and the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) erring more towards bilingual education for the time being.

Ms Reps has already said resolute steps have to be taken, starting at the kindergarten level, to bring all students up to standard from a young age.

The Postimees opinion piece, which appeared on Sunday, entitled "why aren't we making a noise?" questions why there is hesitation on the issue and why Ms Reps has not met with the local Estonian-speaking population to poll their opinion on the matter.

The piece in turn cites an article by Erik Kalda, editor-in-chief of local daily Põhjarannik, who points to the bigger picture and why Centre is taking the stance that it is.

There are some 27,000 people in Ida Viru County whose first language is Estonian; the fact that they should feel excluded from decision making processes on language in education, with protracted meetings and communication via official letters, should sound alarm bells, Mr Kalda argued.

Centre party machinations and interests are causing Russian youth to suffer too, he says, as they miss out on another academic year of all-Estonian education.



Former Donbas Hero

OE Watch Commentary: As the armed conflict between Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine's Donbas region drags on into its fifth year, there are few signs of resolution. Some Russian analysts now refer to the situation as a "suitcase without handles," suggesting that determining the region's future political status appears intractable, and that progress toward resolving the conflict will be difficult. The pro-Kremlin, major Russian media continue to enflame tensions by portraying the authorities in Kiev as the sole aggressor. Nevertheless, as the brief excerpt from the liberal daily, *Novaya Gazeta* indicates, the incessant Russian propaganda to support the separatists in the Donbas region may be losing its appeal.

The article describes how an early Russian "hero" from this conflict (Igor Strelkov née Girkin) has decided to "put up for sale a medal that he was awarded for annexing Crimea to Russia." Strelkov gained notoriety back in early 2014 as one of the Russian ringleaders in both Crimea's annexation and in sparking the armed separatist movement in the Donbas region, where he went on to serve as "Defense Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)." After returning to Moscow in late summer 2014, Strelkov helped to coordinate volunteers and donations for the pro-Russian forces in Donbas. However, as the article points out, Strelkov is now "out of cash and out of favor with the Kremlin, leading him to sell a gold medal he was awarded in 2014 for his role in the occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula."

Overall, the article suggests how this one time "hero" of Russia's armed intervention against Ukraine should now be reduced to selling his awards to make ends meet serves as an apt metaphor. The Kremlin and its pliant media encouraged people like Strelkov to volunteer their efforts to defend Russian interests in Ukraine. Having helped to create an intractable situation in the Donbas region, the Kremlin now appears to ignore true believers like Strelkov. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Igor Girkin (Strelkov).
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Igor_Ivanovich_Strelkov_Yekaterinburg3.JPG, CC 4.0.

“The Russian former commander of militants in eastern Ukraine is out of cash and out of favor with the Kremlin, leading him to sell a gold medal he was awarded in 2014 for his role in the occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.”

Source: “Игорь Стрелков решил продать медаль за присоединение Крыма к России за 1 миллион рублей из-за ‘материальных проблем’ (Igor Strelkov decided to sell his medal for the annexation of Crimea to Russia for 1 million rubles due to ‘material problems’),” *Novaya Gazeta*, 9 March 2019. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2019/03/09/149853-glava-dvizheniya-novorossiya-igor-strelkov-reshil-prodat-medal-za-prisoedinenie-kryma-k-rossii>

Former Defense Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), head of the Novorossia public movement Igor Strelkov (Girkin) put up for sale a medal that he was awarded for annexing Crimea to Russia.... The starting price of the medal is 1 million rubles, the auction will be held on April 13.

...The Russian former commander of militants in eastern Ukraine is out of cash and out of favor with the Kremlin, leading him to sell a gold medal he was awarded in 2014 for his role in the occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

...Igor Girkin, a 48-year-old self-described Russian nationalist who goes by the nom de guerre Strelkov, says he is selling the medal because he needs the money and has no respect for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is depicted on the medal triumphantly wearing a laurel wreath.

For additional background on Strelkov, see:

“RUSSIA’S MAN IN NEW TYPE WAR-IGOR GIRKIN.”

BY RAY FINCH

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/216622>



Armenia's "Offensive" Strategy?

OE Watch Commentary: While the Armenian government's recent announcement of its acquisition of Russian Su-30SM fighters (with an estimated delivery of 2020) provided some insight into the direction of Armenia's armed forces, recent statements in the accompanying excerpted article by Minister of Defense David Tonoyan, offer more information on how the government plans to continue in this area. The article, from the Armenian news website *lin.am*, reports on a statement from Tonoyan during a radio interview that the country's armed forces "were not going to remain on the defensive position." Tonoyan also referred to the government's acquisition of the Su-30SMs as making "it possible to neutralise the ambitions of the adversary."

The article also discusses how the acquisition "symbolises changes in the defence system" of Armenia, specifically that it is moving from a Soviet strategy to a "Western model, which assigns an important role to air forces." A Russian military analyst interviewed for the article states that "four units of fighters are only sufficient to defend oneself" in reference to the reported number of Su-30SMs that Armenia will be acquiring. He goes on to suggest that an Armenian squadron of 12 fighters "will definitely have dominance in the air over Azerbaijan" and this highlights the lack of clarity regarding the acquisition. The initial reports on it mentioned that the Armenian government would acquire four Su-30SMs, but there have also been reports that this number could be as high as 12 and the article notes another statement from Tonoyan that the Armenian government "wanted to buy a squadron of multirole fighter planes." While it could be some time until the exact number of Su-30SMs Armenia will acquire is known, the government appears to be planning to have a full squadron of fighters.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)

"Tonoyan confirmed that this implied fighter aircraft Su-30SM."



Sukhoi Su-30SM in flight.

Source: Alex Belyukov [CC BY-SA 3.0 GFDL 1.2], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sukhoi_Su-30SM_in_flight_2014.jpg.

While it could be some time until the exact number of Su-30SMs Armenia will acquire is known, the government appears to be planning to have a full squadron of fighters.

Source: Aram Sargsyan, "Армения переходит к наступательной стратегии: единственный выход – разгром противника (Armenia is switching to an offensive strategy: the only exit – the destruction of the enemy)," *lin.am*, 1 March 2019. <https://ru.lin.am/1253606.html>

Serious conceptual changes are taking place in Armenia's general defence policy in view of global trends, the situation in the region, and the conflict with Azerbaijan. Our Armed Forces are switching from defence strategy to offensive strategy. Armenian Defence Minister David Tonoyan said on the air of the Armenian Public Broadcaster that our Armed Forces were not going to remain on the defensive position and if the situation led to renewed combat operations against Azerbaijan, we would not hesitate. Asked whether we would launch an attack or not, David Tonoyan replied: "Why not?"

...The defence minister spoke about strategic changes...He said that Armenia's demographic and economic potentials made it impossible to compete with the adversary in quantitative terms. This is precisely why we focus serious attention on quality issues and maintaining a quality balance. Even now, the army is being supplemented with the weapons and military hardware, which will make it possible to neutralise the ambitions of the adversary. Tonoyan confirmed that this implied fighter aircraft Su-30SM.

...He emphasised that the life of every soldier of the Armed Forces, be it those [serving] on a regular or contract basis, is more precious than any weapon, and that if two pilots in a Su-30 fighter could carry out a combat mission hundreds of kilometres away from the front line instead of a thousand military men, there can be no talk about the "costliness" of Su-30s...

Perhaps, it is not by chance that the defence minister is speaking about strategic changes, using the example of modern multirole fighters. The purchase of Su-30 fighters effectively symbolises changes in the defence system of our country...many experts believe that it is time to renounce the strategy of Soviet times, which is aimed to strengthen ground forces and the air defence system, and switch to the Western model, which assigns an important role to air forces, including fighter aviation, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), robotics, and the development of modern technologies...

The deputy director of the Moscow-based Centre for Political and Military Analysis Alexander Khranchikhin, considers these changes to Armenia's military policy as unambiguously natural, given the same factors, which the Armenian defence minister highlighted, i.e. limitations in Armenia's economic, financial, and human resources...According to Khranchikhin, four units of fighters are only sufficient to defend oneself. In the presence of one squadron (12 units), Armenia will definitely have dominance in the air over Azerbaijan. However, this is not going to seriously increase Armenia's offensive potential...

For reference, last week, the Armenian defence minister told the Russian RIA Novosti news agency that the Defence Ministry of the Republic of Armenia wanted to buy a squadron of multirole fighter planes.



Anti-Bribery Training

OE Watch Commentary: A key component of the Kremlin's current narrative revolves around the assertion that the country has overcome the criminality and lawlessness of the 1990s. Under President Putin's firm leadership, the Kremlin has been able to gain the upper hand over unscrupulous businessmen and bureaucrats, restoring order and discipline, allowing the country to focus on more serious foreign threats. Even though the pro-Kremlin media continues to repeat this assertion, according to the accompanying excerpt from a local Krasnodar source, *Yugopolis*, citing recent poll data, Russians still label bribery and corruption as the country's third most pressing problem (behind rising prices and poverty).

As a military will often reflect the values of the country it purports to defend, it is not surprising that the Russian military also continues to struggle with criminality in its ranks, to include among high-level officers. Indeed, the excerpt from a recent article in the pro-business daily *Kommersant*, describes how Lieutenant-General "Sergey Chvarkov, the former head of the Russian Center for the Reconciliation of the Warring Parties in Syria," and now "deputy head of the General Staff's Military Academy, [was] accused of having stolen six million rubles over three years during the implementation of a 400-million-rouble state contract with a commercial firm."

In response to these corruption challenges within the military, the excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source, *Izvestiya*, points out that, "the Defense Ministry has devised a special guide on how to avoid taking bribes." The article asserts that the anti-bribery "booklet's development was no accident," pointing out that the number of crimes linked to bribe-taking [within the Ministry of Defense] has "increased since 2016." It quotes an expert who asserts that "the level of general legal culture in both society and the Army in our country is low," worrying that perhaps this booklet will be "just another boilerplate response in the context of the fight against corruption." While today's Kremlin narrative remains filled with dark warnings about external threats, the articles show how Russia's greatest challenges may reside closer to home. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: "Россияне назвали самые острые проблемы страны (Russians named the most acute problems of the country)," *Yugopolis*, 27 February 2019. <http://www.yugopolis.ru/news/rossiyane-nazvali-samye-ostrye-problemy-strany-118490>

Economic problems remain the most significant for the majority of the population. This is evidenced by a survey conducted by the Levada Center on February 15–20, 2019... Thus, 62% of respondents are most concerned about rising prices, 44% - impoverishment of the population, 41% - corruption, bribery, 36% - rising unemployment, 34% - sharp stratification into rich and poor, inequitable distribution of income...

Source: Oleg Rubnikovich and Ivan Safronov, "Примирителя Сирии обвинили «по ощущениям» Генералу Минобороны вменяют мошенничество как лицу Академии Генштаба (Syrian Peacemaker Charged 'On Feelings': Defense Ministry General Blamed for Fraud as Face of General Staff's Academy)," *Kommersant*, 21 November 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3805715>

Kommersant has learnt that one of the defendants in a criminal case for fraud is Sergey Chvarkov, the former head of the Russian Center for the Reconciliation of the Warring Parties in Syria. The Lieutenant-General, who currently holds the post of deputy head of the General Staff's Military Academy, is accused of having stolen six million rubles over three years during the implementation of a 400-million-rouble state contract with a commercial firm.

...According to Kommersant's information, investigators have evidence from several witnesses who have stated that they handed over envelopes to the General, in which "money could be felt."

Source: Aleksey Kozachenko and Bogdan Stepovoy, "За жесты под солнцем: Минобороны описало способы получения и виды взяток (For Gestures in the Sunshine: The Defense Ministry Has Described Methods of Taking Bribes and Forms of Bribery)," *Izvestiya*, 5 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/841725/aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi/za-zhesty-pod-solntcem-minoborony-opisalo-sposoby-polucheniia-i-vidy-vzjatok>

The Defense Ministry has devised a special guide on how to avoid taking bribes. The practical recommendations are presented in the form of a methods guide booklet, but they will be consolidated by a departmental [Ministry] order. The military have taken a detailed approach to compiling the booklet: It contains a whole section devoted to dealing safely with a potential briber....

*...The booklet is an attempt by the Defense Ministry to mobilize the fight against corruption. How effective it will be is another matter, Oleg Zherdev, the chairman of the Gvardiya security departments' association of lawyers, told *Izvestiya*.*

"It will do no harm to remind military personnel one more time about their rights and obligations," the expert reflects. "The level of general legal culture in both society and the Army in our country is low. The main thing is that these recommendations should not turn into just another boilerplate response in the context of the fight against corruption."

The booklet's development was no accident. The Defense Ministry reports that the level of corruption-based criminality was successfully reduced by 12 percent in 2017-2018. However, the number of crimes linked to bribe-taking has increased since 2016. Within the overall number of corruption-based violations, this kind of crime constitutes 48.5 percent.

“The Defense Ministry has devised a special guide on how to avoid taking bribes.”



China's View of Hypersonic Weapons: Changing the Dynamics of Warfare

OE Watch Commentary: China (like Russia) has been pursuing hypersonic weapons. The country reportedly conducted seven test-flights of the DF-ZF, a hypersonic missile delivery vehicle, which is expected to be operational by 2020. Such missiles have clear advantages and, as the accompanying excerpted article from *Jiefangjun Bao* explains, “will open up a new arena and a new form of military struggle.” The article discusses how hypersonic missiles change the concept of time and space as the speed of these weapons will allow little time for an opponent to react. The article goes on to explain that it will be possible to launch hypersonic missiles from many platforms on land, at sea, in the air, and in space. They combine the superiorities of ballistic missiles and aircraft technology, giving them speed and flexible maneuverability. As a result, the article states that their employment “will completely overturn the equilibrium of current opposing offensive and defensive systems,” and the side that possesses them will have the strategic advantage.
End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)

Source: Niu Yujun, “高超声速武器如何影响战争 (How Hypersonic Weapons Affect Warfare),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 14 February 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2019-02/14/c_1210059534.htm

The development and use of hypersonic weapons will open up a new arena and a new form of military struggle. Their unique combat superiority will overturn the forms of future warfare and the shape of combat operations.

Profound change in the concept of time and space in future warfare.
Hypersonic weapons fly so fast ... That speed greatly shortens an opponent's reaction time and the combat operations process. It upsets the opponent's operational tempo... They can execute fast and accurate attacks against global targets from many platforms on land, at sea, in the air, and in space... The boundary between air and space is completely erased. The distance between areas is shortened. The battlefield space concept of forward and deep deployment is blurred. “The distant horizon is right in front of your face” is truly achieved. Battlefield distance is no longer barriers and buffers which the enemy and friendly sides can use for support, and trading space for time will be difficult to achieve.

Overturning of the current strategic balance in opposing systems. ...
hypersonic weapons will combine the superiorities of ballistic missile and aircraft technology. That is, they will have the combat characteristics of fast speed and long range of ballistic missiles in flight, along with the technical features of aircraft, namely their flexibility of maneuver and unpredictable course. That will completely overturn the equilibrium of current opposing offensive and defensive systems. The side with hypersonic weapons will create a new, asymmetric, absolute superiority in the attack, rendering current, traditional air defense and anti-missile defense systems ineffective...

“The side with hypersonic weapons will create a new, asymmetric, absolute superiority in the attack, rendering current, traditional air defense and anti-missile defense systems ineffective.”

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China's Rocket Forces Conduct Readiness Training

OE Watch Commentary: China is testing its Rocket Forces' combat readiness through opposition force (OPFOR) exercises involving special forces. This February an unidentified Rocket Force OPFOR team conducted drills in a snow-covered mountainous part of China where temperatures reached -20 °C.

While this accompanying excerpted article is written in an approved style meant to focus on the contributions of individuals rather than the unit training itself, it provides some useful details. First, it further emphasizes the importance of OPFOR training across all Chinese services, including the Rocket Force. While the 2nd Artillery, and its reorganized form the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), maintained an OPFOR training base in northeastern China, it appears that more units are being exposed to the training and the testing itself has become stricter. The article also suggests that this special forces team travels around China conducting exercises with various units, in addition to less frequent set piece training where a unit travels to a designated training area or live fire range.

The focus on special forces is also noteworthy. Chinese media previously revealed the existence of the PLARF's "Sharp Sword" [利刃] unit, though others likely exist. There appears to have been an increase in special forces' participation in OPFOR training. Special forces are considered to be a fundamental part of Rocket Force operations both as a defense against enemy special forces operating within Chinese territory and operating in some capacity within enemy territory, helping to call in and evaluate strikes.

Interestingly, the special forces team appears to draw heavily on soldiers who have served in conventional missile launch units elsewhere in the Rocket Force, perhaps with the mindset that the blue force (OPFOR in China) should fully understand normal Rocket Force doctrine. The PLA Rocket Force is an integral part of most PLA offensive campaigns. Adding realism to exercises and increasing the tempo the drills—especially an OPFOR component to help launch units better prepare for threats, will undoubtedly contribute to their operational effectiveness. **End OE**

Watch Commentary (Wood)

“Only when I joined the blue force did I understand that being skilled at fighting arts isn't enough, especially if a war breaks out, you have to use your head, and use technology.”



Graphic by Peter Wood
 Recreated from CCTV13 video footage
 "PLA Rocket Force OPFOR 'Blue Force'"

Source: “火箭军某蓝军部队严寒条件下进行特战训练 (Rocket Force OPFOR Carries Out Special Forces Drills in Extreme Cold),” *Xinhua*, 4 February 2019. http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-02/04/content_4835817.htm

This is the account of a reporter accompanying a special operations OPFOR element and participated in a confrontation drill in extreme cold conditions.

Zhang Tan [张坦], commander of the special forces element said “Rocket Force red vs blue confrontation exercises are non-contact, as is the special forces’ sabotage operation. For this exercise, if the defending ‘red team,’ discovers the ‘blue’ special forces team they will be counted as killed. In order to complete the sabotage mission, the team members must develop a strong skill and extraordinary will.”

This young commander originally served with an (unidentified) “new type” missile brigade in the Rocket Force. He was a missile launch battalion [弹发射连] commander and served in training roles and as a staff officer in a combat support unit. In 2016, he and his missile brigade came [to the training area] to participate in a confrontation exercise. As a member of the “red force,” he advised the group and made a good account of himself.

Now he is confident in his skills and leads the “blue force” special forces team visiting guided missile units across China to help sharpen their skills.

Sun Jintao [孙晋涛] is a squad leader in the unit. He joined the PLA from a military school in 2013, and is both of high character and a skilled mixed martial artist. While skillfully operating the special combat equipment he carried with him, he said: “Only when I joined the blue force did I understand that being skilled at fighting arts isn't enough, especially if a war breaks out, you have to use your head, and use technology.”

As soon as he finished speaking, he and his teammates exchanged a few hand signals. In an instant, he grabbed his heavy rucksack and quickly jumped over a hillside and moved to the front to hide.

Under a few big trees, Rong Chenglin [荣成林], dressed in a white snowsuit, was lying motionless in the snow, blending in with the surrounding environment. Through the special reconnaissance equipment he carried, he observed and judged the surrounding situation and slowly approached the target accompanied the other team members.

Rong came from the “1st Conventional Missile Brigade” [常规导弹第一旅] (China's first such unit established in the early 1990s). He has traveled to the Gobi Plateau with the missile troops (for live fire exercises) and into the jungles of the South, and has directed command post defense operations during previous exercises.

He has totally switched roles from defense to offense like today's sabotage attack, becoming special forces squad leader, and writing up a series of targeted reconnaissance tactics that have been adopted by special forces elements...

Last year, during the Rocket Forces' confrontation exercise, these blue team officers and soldiers who were special in the special skills, cleverly used the night-time conditions to quietly approach the “enemy force” and carry out precision harassment and planting traps, inflicting losses and hindering the enemy missile brigade.



The Role of China's Theater Commands

OE Watch Commentary: At the end of 2015, China kicked off a massive military transformation. Under the new plan, expected to be complete by 2020, power was consolidated under the Central Military Commission, China's Communist Party body with President Xi Jinping as its "core." Along with rebalancing and restructuring the armed forces, the seven military districts were consolidated into five theater commands, going from an admin-intensive ground operations format to a joint operations format.

The accompanying excerpted article, published in *Xinhua*, offers some insight into the roles and responsibilities of the new theater commands. Each theater command is responsible for building the command system, giving guidance to force building and management, and facilitating well-coordinated parallel development of military operations command and force building. They each are the central point of the operation command chain and play a key role in linking the forces under their command to the higher authorities. In the new system within China's military transformation, everything is done for the purpose of fighting and the theater commands are expected to boost combat readiness with the goal of being able to fight and win. The theater commands play a key role in directing the building of the joint operations command system. They also spearhead the allocation of the different military forces, evaluate various units' combat and support capabilities, and organize and plan joint operations and joint training.

These are just some of the roles and responsibilities of the theater commands, as described in the article. In their transition from administration to operations, the theater commands shape theater strategy, force deployments, capability standards and action arrangements. Their operational requirements are linked with the country's national strategy and overall military strategy. As these strategies continue to evolve to maintain the pace with global trends, their roles will likely evolve. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The core in the design of the theater command system lies in giving prominence to ‘combat operations.’ Everything is done for the purpose of fighting...”

Source: Liu Zhengyuan and Xu Haiwei, “Effectively Grasp Requirement for the Theater Commands That Are in Charge of Military Operations Under the New System,” *Xinhua*, 26 February 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2019-02/26/c_1210067723.htm

Establishing a theater command system that “integrates peacetime and wartime functions, operates in a normalized fashion, performs specialized functions, runs as a streamlined and efficient entity” is the pivotal part in the reform of our military’s joint operations command system. Being a joint operations command organ consisting of all military services’ command elements, a theater command stands at the central point of the operation command chain, and plays a key role in linking the forces under their command to the higher authorities....

The core in the design of the theater command system lies in giving prominence to “combat operations”. Everything is done for the purpose of fighting...

... The theater commands perform the crucial function and the primary duty of organizing joint operations in their respective strategic directions. In particular, they play an irreplaceable role in directing the building of the joint operations command system, planning the allocation of military forces, examining and evaluating various units’ combat and support capabilities, organizing and planning joint operations and joint training...

...A theater command’s operational requirements are upwardly linked with the national strategy and the overall military strategy, comprised of the requirements of various services in the theater, laterally related to force building in various services, thus situated at a pivotal point in the generation of military requirements...

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China Launches First “Intelligent” Cargo Ship

OE Watch Commentary: In November of 2018, China Ship News announced, in the accompanying excerpted article, that a Chinese company had completed and tested the world’s first “intelligent” cargo ship. The ship, called Pacific Vision [明远], is a Very Large Ore Carrier, with a maximum cargo of 400,000 metric tons. The ship is over 362 meters long and 65 meters wide. For comparison, the *Vale Sohar* (pictured) is a similar 400,000-ton ore carrier.

The economic efficiency involved in bigger ships have driven cargo ships toward ever-larger sizes, with the main restrictions being those of important transit areas like the Suez and Panama canals. Despite their size, modern container ships already have a small crew complement compared to 50 years ago, with weather forecasting, automation and satellite navigation systems helping reduce the need for various crew positions. “Intelligent” ship technology aims to harness sensors and satellite navigation systems to improve safety through continuous monitoring. However, this amount of data requires deliberately-designed architectures to properly process it.

In 2017, China operated over 1000 bulk carriers—double that number if Hong Kong-registered ships are included. Remote controlled ships have been tried before, but insufficiently smart navigation and high operating costs compared to human crews meant that projects were abandoned. The new system should help improve safety and efficiency.

The article notes that the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology established a special program to develop “smart” ships, with the goal to “seize the commanding heights of ship technology development, and enhance its (Chinese ship manufacturers’) international competitiveness.” The *Pacific Vision’s* successful 10-day trial is another step toward that goal and while its “intelligent” systems are only an incremental step, paired with more accurate and redundant navigation systems such as China’s expanding Beidou-3 navigation satellite constellation, “intelligent” ships’ automatic ship-to-ship communication, collision avoidance systems and sensor data fusion point toward a future where a large portion of sailing jobs such as bulk carriers, oil tankers, cargo ships are fully automated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“...the study of intelligent ship technology is one of the important ways for China’s shipbuilding industry to adjust its industrial structure, seize the commanding heights of ship technology development, and enhance its international competitiveness...”



Vale Sohar in Nantong, China (2012).

Source: Dmitry Lakhtikov [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vale_Sohar_in_Nantong.jpg.

(continued)



Continued: China Launches First “Intelligent” Cargo Ship

Source: He Baoxin and Qian Ping, “全球首艘智能VLOC成功试航—中国智能船舶1.0新时代来临 (World’s first Smart VLOC Successfully Completes Trial Voyage—The Era of Chinese AI Ships is Getting Closer),” *China Ship News*, 26 November 2018. <http://chinashipnews.com.cn/show.php?contentid=14332>

On 14 November 2018, the world’s first 400,000-ton ‘intelligent’ Very Large Ore Carrier (VLOC) built by China State Shipbuilding Corporation’s [中国船舶工业集团有限公司]Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co. [上海外高桥造船有限公司], successfully completed its first test voyage. Under the careful supervision of Waigaoqiao staff, the A.I. ship project team successfully overcame poor sea conditions, complicated navigation tests. After 10 days of sea trials, the ship completed its project goals. The results of the navigation test indicates that all functions of the intelligent systems met requirements. The test results were confirmed by the ship-owners, China Classification Society (CCS) and DNV GL (an international standards, registration and classification society).

As China’s first intelligent ship 1.0 R&D developmental model, the ship network platform and information platforms to achieve five modular A.I. functions including auxiliary autonomous navigation, efficient energy management, equipment operation and maintenance, ship-to-shore integrated communication, dry cargo, and liquid cargo monitoring...

In 2016, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology set up a “Smart Ship 1.0 Special project”, bringing together the ship industry’s top institutions [院所], AI developers, shipbuilding groups, institutions of higher learning, and so on, work together to carry out intelligent ship research. CSSC is the project’s lead organizer...

In the course of the implementation of the Intelligent Ship Project, Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding design department saw success in designing an integrated intelligent system with the ship, optimized the layout according to requirements, and completed more than 500 schematics. In response to the mismatch between domestic and foreign communication equipment, Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding design Department has organized a number of live ship and laboratory tests, focusing on the coordination of intelligent system mooring and navigation outline finishing and intelligent equipment installation etc. Because of the asymmetry of conceptual and cognitive information between the R&D personnel of intelligent system and the construction personnel of real ships, how to compile the outline suitable for the verification of real ships has become a severe test for Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding and various research units. After several rounds of research, Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Design department finally led the implementation of the test outline that can guide production, for the actual ship intermodulation and verification of the overall promotion of the creation of good conditions...

The smart ship achieved six major breakthroughs: First, the ship demonstrated the “platform + application” concept, with a network information platform aggregating, processing and analyzing the ship’s sensor information in an integrated, uniform way. This reduces redundancy and inconsistency between systems. Secondly, for the first time, the ship was able to assist with collision avoidance in the open sea and helping to solve navigational issues. The third breakthrough was in streamlined ship-to-ship communication, which paves the way for automatic collision avoidance programs. The fourth innovation involved intelligent monitoring of mineral cargoes’ liquefaction (when a solid begins to act more like a liquid due to vibration). Actively monitoring the state of cargos helps resolve stability issues that may result from the ship shaking and improves the safety of navigation. The ships’ fifth innovation was improvement in data transmission effectiveness through better compression of ship-to-shore transmissions. The sixth and final breakthrough for the ship was the (aforementioned) recognition by international standards organizations CSS and DNV GL.

Industry experts say that the study of intelligent ship technology is one of the important ways for China’s shipbuilding industry to adjust its industrial structure, seize the commanding heights of ship technology development, and enhance its international competitiveness. “Intelligent Ship 1.0 Special” Development, will be the system to enhance China’s intelligent ship design, construction, operation, maintenance, management and other aspects of the ability, as well as the core products of the independent, safe and controllable capabilities. At the same time, taking bulk carriers and oil tankers as application carriers, the research on related intelligent function modules and systems will lead to the coordinated development of the whole industrial chain and enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of China’s shipbuilding industry.



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>



Beidou Navigation System Expansion Announced

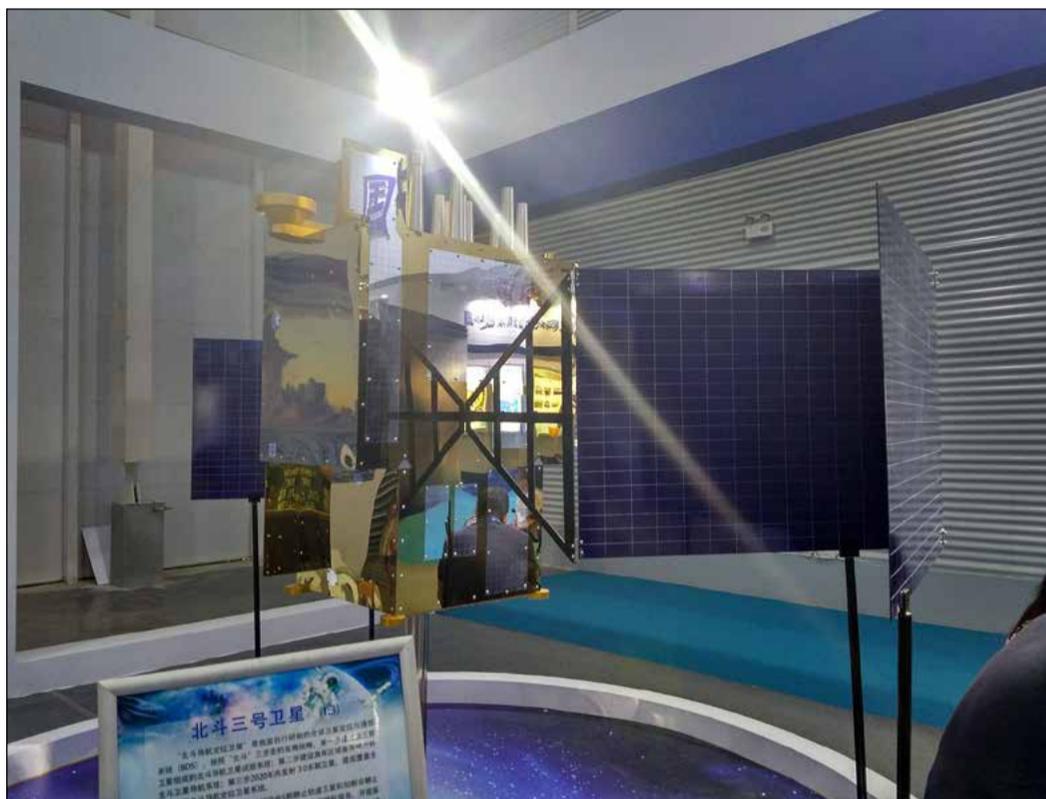
OE Watch Commentary: China is continuing to expand its Beidou Navigation Satellite System, with 8-10 new satellites expected to be added to the existing constellation of 19 “Beidou-3” and 18 “Beidou-2.” The new satellites are being placed in Medium Earth Orbits between 20,000 and 24,000 km, similar to those commonly used by other navigation satellite systems including GPS, Galileo and Glonass. Five Beidou-2 satellites are in the much higher Geostationary orbits.

Chinese officials view the use of domestically produced microchips in Beidou satellites and receiver systems as a major milestone in the country’s push for technological self-reliance.

The accompanying excerpted article from *China Military Online* notes that Beidou has been widely adopted as an alternative to GPS and Galileo, particularly for industrial applications. Current users have access to position data accurate within 10 meters globally and within 5 meters in the Asia-Pacific region, though the Chinese military has access to a significantly more accurate encrypted signal from the system.

China hopes to leverage the system not only for military applications and foreign sales but also to help drive its own quest to develop advanced technologies such as internet of things, automation, and AI. An expanded system encompassing positioning, navigation and timing functions, planned for completion by 2035, will have direct application to these new technologies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“China plans to complete the construction of the BDS-3 global system and start to provide special services by 2020.”



北斗三号卫星 (Beidou 3rd Generation).

Source: Spr98 [CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:北斗三号卫星 (1: 3) .jpg.

Source: “China to launch 8 to 10 Beidou navigation satellites this year,” *China Military Online*, 5 March 2019. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-03/05/content_4837262.htm

According to the China Satellite Navigation Office, Beidou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) will continue high-density global deployment, launching 8 to 10 Beidou navigation satellites and complete all Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) satellites launch this year, in order to further improve the constellation layout across the world, and to comprehensively enhance the service performance of BDS and improve user experience.

Since the BDS-3 project completed the basic system and began to provide global services at the end of last year, the BDS has been operating steadily. Through global testing and evaluation, its global positioning accuracy is better than 10 meters and in the Asia-Pacific region, it is 5 meters, which both meet the index requirements.

After years of development, BDS has formed a complete industrial chain and achieved large-scale applications in China’s transportation, agriculture, public security, surveying and mapping industries, and other fields. This year, China will gradually increase the in-depth innovation and integration of BDS with emerging technologies such as the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence (AI), with a view to promoting new integration application models and formats of the “Beidou +”.

According to statistics, the sales of basic products such as domestically-made Beidou navigation chip modules have exceed 700 million, and the sales of domestically-made high-precision board and antenna have accounted for 30% and 90% of the domestic market respectively as of the end of 2018...

At present, the BDS has been widely applied to various fields such as the confirmation of land rights in Indonesia, construction in Kuwait, land surveying and mapping in Uganda, precision agriculture in Myanmar, offshore drilling in Maldives, drones in Cambodia, warehousing and logistics in Thailand, airport timing services in Pakistan, and power inspection in Russia. The high-precision products of the BDS have been exported to more than 90 countries and regions, and the ground-based technology and product system of the BDS are also exported overseas...

China plans to complete the construction of the BDS-3 global system and start to provide special services by 2020. China will build a PNT (positioning navigation and timing) system, featuring wider application, greater integration, and higher intelligence with the BDS as the core by 2035. With stronger functions and better performance, the BDS will serve the world and benefit mankind



Shanghai Embraces 5G Technology, Accelerates Infrastructure Plans

OE Watch Commentary: Shanghai is rushing to embrace 5G technology, the high-speed wireless communication standard that is expected to power a new generation of data-intensive applications from robotics to mobile devices. On 6 March, China Mobile Shanghai unveiled a plan to build 5,000 ground stations as part of a scale test of 5G technology by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Chinese media have previously reported that China had 772 million internet users in 2017—55.8 percent of the total population. Nationwide, demand for faster internet and better coverage is rising. 5G has much higher bandwidth and lower latency compared to previous generations and is predicted to help usher in a new digital ecosystem of connected devices and content. China has made domestic adoption of this technology a priority. It is also envisioned as an important part of China's industrial plans, with 5G tech connecting highly autonomous factories with various parts of the manufacturing process connected as part of the "internet of things."

Shanghai has a population of 26.3 million, and the initial rollout to Hongkou District [虹口区], in north-central Shanghai, provides a solid base to test the technology before expanding the service to other areas. China Mobile, a state-owned enterprise and the world's largest mobile phone provider, is the main provider of this service, but 5G is not just for mobile phones. As highlighted by China Mobile Shanghai's Chen Li in the accompanying excerpted article, the goal is to partner with other major industries such as transportation and manufacturing to begin developing applications for the technology.

The Chinese government has set ambitious targets for the percentage of 5G components produced in China, and eventually for Chinese domination of the market. By 2020, 75 percent of 5G mobile telecommunication systems and mobile terminals should be built in China. Chinese tech giant Huawei is investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the technology. While this article does not evaluate China's progress toward that goal, the urgency, high-level support, and massive scope of what Chen is calling for fits into this overall plan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“From the perspective of national strategy, the ubiquitous, flexible and intelligent 5G network will provide solid support for the deep integration of cross-domain, all-round and multi-level industries.”

Source: “中移动上海公司董事长：9月底上海将建成不少于5000个5G基站 (China Mobile Shanghai Chairman: Shanghai Will Build No Less than 5000 5G Stations by the End of September),” *First Financial*, 6 March 2019. <https://www.yicai.com/news/100132354.html>

By the end of September, Shanghai will have at least 5,000 fifth-generation wireless network technology base stations, providing Gigabit broadband to 5.6 million home users and 3,000 buildings, setting a world-class information infrastructure benchmark.

Chen Li [陈力], National People's Congress representative and Party Secretary of the China Mobile Shanghai's Party Committee, announced that China Mobile will complete the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's scale R&D test of 5G. The end-to-end function and network performance verification will promote the contiguous 5G coverage of the main urban areas, suburban business hotspot area and vertical industry application area, and plan to jointly build the first "double gigabit" demonstration area with Hongkou District [虹口区] before the end of March.

5G can provide at least ten times the peak rate of 4G, the transmission delay of milliseconds and the connection capacity of hundreds of billions. It is a new ecological capability that drives the innovation of the whole society and an important breakthrough for releasing the potential of digital economy.

From the perspective of national strategy, the ubiquitous, flexible and intelligent 5G network will provide solid support for the deep integration of cross-domain, all-round and multi-level industries. As a key infrastructure to promote the digital transformation of the economy and society, 5G is also an important foundation for accelerating industrial upgrading and structural transformation.

Chen said China Mobile Shanghai, with the "Yangtze River Delta 5G innovation and development alliance" as a platform, working together with the Shanghai rail bureau, other government agencies and telecom industry leaders, speed up 5G inter-industry vertical integration and actively develop 5G applications.

Chen also suggested that plans for 5G and vertical industry integration should be accelerated to begin work on direct applications such as connected transportation, medical and health, and industry.



Taiwan Announces 2019 Armed Forces Training Plan

OE Watch Commentary: In February Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) announced the outline of military training in 2019 as reported in the accompanying excerpted article. Some exercises are being expanded due to recent actions by the People's Republic of China. In January, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping announced that reunification is an inevitable requirement for the historical rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and that the Chinese government does not promise to renounce the use of force.

According to Major General Yeh Kuo-hui, chief of the MND's Operations and Planning Division, this year's Han Kuang [漢光] exercise (Taiwan's largest military exercise focused on repelling an attack by mainland China) will be held over the course of April and May. A command post computer simulation is planned for the first phase on 22-26 April and is meant to help improve the operational decision-making skills for commanders at all levels. A live-fire joint anti-landing operation is planned for 27-31 May.

The latest defense white paper and quadrennial defense review, both published in 2017, emphasize China's improvements in ballistic missile strike and integrated air operations. If effective, the People's Liberation Army could deal Taiwanese air bases and command centers a crushing blow, and pave the way for an amphibious landing. Likely as a result of these concerns, this year's exercise will also include combat landing and replenishment on improvised runways by Taiwan's Air Force.

Six sections of highway are designated for emergency runway operations along the Sun Yat-sen National Freeway and Pingtung provincial highway. Both highways run North-South and have straight and level intervals 2,400m long for use in wartime. Training for runway repair teams and engineers near the sections are planned to improve the units' ability to support the Taiwanese air force in combat.

According to the article, asymmetric warfare is the key combat force for future Taiwan defensive operations, and that one of the exercises will test mine-laying, sniper combat, cyber warfare, and electronic warfare to its advantage against a larger force. Taiwan's small size and limited live-fire ranges restricts its military's ability to carry out realistic training. Observers of the exercise frequently note that the exercises are overly scripted or use unrealistic tactics meant more for show than effectiveness. However, it appears that the Taiwanese government is looking to retain its defensive advantage through the renewed emphasis on joint training and asymmetry, if it can be accompanied with realism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The annual exercise will demonstrate the ‘all-out’ defense concept [整體防衛構想] and concretely enhance the joint strength of Taiwan’s three services.”

Source: “國防部「漢光35號演習」陸空實兵課目對外開放 (Ministry of National Defense “Han Kuang No. 35 Exercise” Air and Ground),” *MND Military News Agency* [國防部軍事新聞通訊社], 27 February 2018. <https://mna.gpwb.gov.tw/post.php?id=8&message=93230>

At a press conference on February 27, Major General Ye Guohui [葉國輝] of the MND's Operations and Planning Division stated that this year's “Hanguang 35” exercise will include the National Highway No. 1 Changhua Huatan Road for “Wartime and Runway Takeoff and Landing” drills and live fire “Counter-Amphibious Landing” exercises at the Pingtung Manfeng firing range. The annual exercise will demonstrate the “all-out” defense concept [整體防衛構想] and concretely enhance the joint strength of Taiwan’s three services.

Ye said that this year's “Han Kuang No. 35” exercise includes plans for a “command post computer simulation exercise” in April and “live-fire exercise” in May. The command post simulation will be held between April 22-26. During the exercise, army will hold a 24-hour computer-assisted command post exercise in accordance with the overall defense concept of “conserve combat power, [achieve] victory on the coastline, annihilate the enemy [at the shore]” to strengthen the operational decision-making of commanders at all levels.

Ye announced the live fire component will be held from May 27-31. The Army, Navy and Air Force will adopt a joint combat model, and the defense forces will follow the overall defense concept and carry out 5 days and 4 nights of joint offensive and defensive OPFOR exercises in island defense areas so that the officers and men understand the combat mission and are familiarized with the battlefield environment.

A “combat runway takeoff and landing” military exercise will be carried out on May 28 from 0615 to 0735, at the National Road No. 1 Changhua Huatan Road section; the “Joint Anti-landing Operation” live-fire exercise will be held in May. It is planned for the 30th from 0830 to 0920 hours at the Pingtung Manfeng Shooting Range.

Ye pointed out that the national warfare preparations took off and landed last time in September of the Republic of China in the implementation of the war preparations for the people. The Ministry of National Defense, in addition to asking the air force brigade near the war preparation road to conduct inspections every month, will also cooperate with senior engineers at regular intervals. The runway repair and implementation of the warfare take-off and landing drill, the purpose is to maintain several runways in the wartime can be used, mainly in combat and inter-departmental cooperation...

Ye emphasized that in order to implement the full-scale readiness of the Taiwan defensive operations, the national army will be pragmatic and continue to strengthen the combat training of the troops based on the development of the enemy's military strength, tactics, and possible threats to Taiwan, reviewing combat plans and researching countermeasures against the enemy in order to enhance the overall defense force of the national army and ensure homeland security.



New Chinese Two-Seat Carrier-based Fighter Enters Next Phase of Testing

OE Watch Commentary: Reporting in official Chinese media indicates that a new variant of China’s J-15 carrier-based fighter jet is likely undergoing testing with the PLA Navy. The new aircraft has been variously called the J-15D and J-15S. Similar variants are typically designated S for “shuang” [双], two-seat.

Beyond the additional seat, the new variant incorporates a number of other noteworthy features. Commenters note that the new fighter uses two indigenously-produced WS-10A engines. Early versions of the J-15 relied on imported Russian engines. While some two-seat aircraft are used for training, other details point toward the likely mission set for the new aircraft. Most variants of the J-15 have rails on the wingtips for weapons, but images of the new two-seater appear to include electronic countermeasures pods similar to the Russian-designed “Khibiny” series. China has also deployed Su-35s, Su-30s, and J-16s (a copy of the Su-30) with similar modules. In the accompanying excerpted article, Wei Dongxu, a frequent media commentator on military issues, suggested that the second seat position could be for a dedicated specialty. This might include a role such as a weapon systems officer or electronic warfare officer, though there is insufficient information to be certain.

The creation of a dedicated role would fit with observable trends. Chinese military writings emphasize the importance of electronic warfare to improving the survivability and effectiveness of aircraft, and new jamming pods have been shown on JH-7A fighter bombers, H-6 bombers, and even UAVs in recent years.

The J-15 itself has faced several hurdles, including two high-profile crashes due to technical problems, and insufficiently powerful engines. This has led to speculation that an entirely new aircraft would be developed (possibly based on the J-31 stealth fighter). Regardless of the J-15’s final fate, creation of a dedicated carrier-based electronic warfare variant and attendant pilot specialties will help the PLA Navy move toward a more modern and effective carrier aviation force. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: “Two-seat J-15 fighter jet boosts carrier capability: experts,” *China Military Online*, 13 December 2018. http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-12/13/content_9377182.htm

A modified two-seat variant of the J-15 fighter jet was spotted at a Chinese aircraft carrier training base in a recent TV program, suggesting the carrier-based warplane is already being tested and expected to greatly expand the carrier’s combat capability with electronic warfare equipment that one pilot cannot manage.

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy only operates the single-seat J-15 fighter jet on the Liaoning aircraft carrier at the moment, but military analysts predict the two-seat variant of the warplane would be able to join the ranks within two years.

The new fighter jet, which resembles the J-15 but with a larger cockpit, was seen parked in a hangar at an unspecified Chinese carrier-based aircraft training base in a Sunday China Central Television (CCTV) program.

CCTV’s website, cctv.com, published a separate report on Tuesday titled “China’s most mysterious carrier-based fighter jet quietly appears, greatly accelerating the pace of aircraft carrier’s combat capability,” saying the aircraft in the program is a modified two-seat version of the J-15.

The variant might already be undergoing tests with the PLA Navy, the cctv.com report said.

It is painted with military camouflage instead of the flight test color, which further supports the speculation, military experts said.

Modifying the single-seat J-15 into a two-seat version can greatly increase the combat capability of the fighter jet and the aircraft carrier, cctv.com reported.

The new aircraft can also conduct electronic jamming missions, the report said.

In April, photos of the variant equipped with wingtip electronic warfare pods surfaced online, but their authenticity could not be verified.

A single pilot cannot manage to fly the jet and engage in complicated electronic battles at the same time, Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military expert, told the Global Times on Wednesday.



J-15 03.

Source: By Garudtejas7, [CC BY-SA 4.0], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-15_03.jpg.



The Development of Pakistan's JF-17 Fighter

OE Watch Commentary: While the majority of attention from media in India and Pakistan over the past several weeks reported on the recent clash between the two countries, particularly the Indian Air Force's strike on Balakot on 26 February and the downing of an Indian aircraft by Pakistan a day later, the accompanying excerpted articles report on a recent missile test by Pakistan's Air Force and the continuing development of the JF-17 fighter and they provide some insight into the status of the air forces of both countries outside of the recent clash.

The article from *The News International*, an English-language newspaper in Pakistan, reports on the missile test and how it was "developed, integrated and qualified solely through indigenous efforts of Pakistani scientists and engineers." The article also discusses how work on the latest variant of the JF-17, the "Block 3" (Pakistan's current inventory of JF-17s are the Block 1 and 2 variants) is "underway" and that a Chinese source is claiming it will include a "whole combat system" that will allow it to better communicate with other platforms.

The article from *Zee News*, an English-language news website in India, also reports on the ongoing development of the JF-17 and while it was published before the recent clash, it notes how "the Pakistani Air Force is in the process of adding 62 JF-17 jets before India gets the 36 Rafale jets." The article reports on the potential timeline for additional JF-17 Block 2, "by 2019," and JF-17 Block 3, "by 2020," and that the Indian government "will only be getting 36 Rafale jets by 2020." It is worth remembering that while the Rafale controversy in India has resulted in a significant delay in the government's efforts to acquire a multirole fighter, the deal signed with France will result in the delivery of 36 fighters. Ultimately, the government of Pakistan appears to be making more strides than India in the development of its inventory of fighters and with support from China, this could likely continue. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The development and production of JF-17 Block 3 are underway aimed at enhancing its informatised warfare capability and weapons, Chief Designer of the China-Pakistan co-developed fighter jet, Yang Wei said.”

Source: Mariana Baabar and Muhammad Anis, "New lethal missile tested," *The News International*, 13 March 2019. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/443168-new-lethal-missile-tested>

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and scientists achieved another milestone on Wednesday with successful test-firing of an indigenously-built extended range smart weapon from JF-17 multi-role fighter aircraft.

The successful trial has provided JF-17 Thunder with a very potent and assured day and night capability to engage a variety of targets with pinpoint accuracy, the PAF announced... the weapon has been developed, integrated and qualified solely through indigenous efforts of Pakistani scientists and engineers...

The development and production of JF-17 Block 3 are underway aimed at enhancing its informatised warfare capability and weapons, Chief Designer of the China-Pakistan co-developed fighter jet, Yang Wei said.

...Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military analyst told Global Times that the JF-17 Block 3 is likely to be fitted with an active electronically scanned array radar, which can gather more information in combat, enabling the fighter jet to engage from a farther range and attack multiple targets at the same time...

Pakistan, the main user of the JF-17, could further share information between the fighter and other platforms taking advantage of the whole combat system to effectively defend against strong opponents...JF-17, or the FC-1, is a single-engine multi-role light fighter jet jointly developed by China and Pakistan for export.

Source: Manish Shukla, "Pakistan eyes 62 JF-17 jets from China as Rafale dogfight continues in India," *Zee News*, 7 January 2019. <https://zeenews.india.com/world/pakistan-eyes-62-jf-17-jets-from-china-as-rafale-dogfight-continues-in-india-2168320.html>

While the opposition is targeting the NDA government on the Rafal fighter plane deal, neighbouring Pakistan is engaged in taking full advantage of the opportunity. The Pakistani government has approached China to make the JF-17 (Block 3) Jet fighter plane available for the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) as soon as possible.

According to the Indian Air Force (IAF) intelligence report accessed by Zee News, the Pakistani Air Force is in the process of adding 62 JF-17 jets before India gets the 36 Rafale jets...The Pakistani government is keen to induct most advanced version of JF-17 series -- the new JF-17 Block-3 -- to make its air force match its Indian counterpart.

According to the report, Pakistan has asked Chengdu Aircraft Corporation of China to deliver 13 JF-17 (Block 2) to Pakistani Air Force by July 2019. They have also asked the Chinese firm to deliver the more advanced two seater- JF-17 Block-2 jets by 2020...

According to intelligence reports, Pakistan and China are also jointly developing JF-17 (Block-3) jets which is a fourth generation fighter jet. Pakistani Air Force is expecting the new variants of JF-17 (Block-3) to be delivered from 2020 which will be more powerful than the already existing JF-17 series...

While the Indian Air Force requires a total of 126 new Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) plane, it will only be getting 36 Rafale jets by 2020. With Pakistan upping its efforts in getting the 62 new jets for its air force, the Indian Air Force seems to be looking at a tough challenge ahead...



Malaysia Arrests ISIS Militants

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 March Malaysia's *Tribunnews.com* published the accompanying excerpted article about the arrests of seven foreign terrorism suspects in Klang Valley and Sarawak, six of which were Egyptians and one was Tunisian. In addition, two Malaysians were arrested for facilitating their travel into the country. The article claims the one Tunisian was a member of the al-Qaeda-affiliated group Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia, but that group has become defunct. This means the suspect must have been a former member and changed his loyalty to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), because the article indicates he had also pledged loyalty to ISIS. The Egyptians, in contrast, were reported in the article to be members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to Malaysian security officials, the way some of these foreigners entered Malaysia was through using false Syrian passports. That was a vulnerability, because they succeeded in entering the country. Other vulnerabilities that Malaysian officials have noted is that terrorists have sought to marry sympathetic Malaysians, which allows them to enter the country easily. Yet others have applied for a student visa and then overstayed in order to plot terrorist activities.

According to the article, the foreign fighters in this case were trying to use Malaysia as a transit point from which they would target a third country; this probably refers to the Philippines which has seen an increase in attacks and propaganda by ISIS-loyal militants since 2017. Malaysian officials mentioned in the article, therefore, indicate they have been closely working with foreign intelligence agencies to continue to monitor terrorists attempting to use the country's territory as a transit hub or logistics base. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Malaysia wants to continue to anticipate the entry of ISIS fighters who use Malaysia as a shelter, transit, and base for plotting attacks in third countries.”

Source: “Tingkatkan Kewaspadaan Masuknya Pejuang ISIS, Polisi Malaysia Tangkap 9 Teroris (Increased Vigilance of ISIS Fighters, Malaysian Police Capture 9 Terrorists),” *Tribunnews.com*, 10 March 2019. <http://www.tribunnews.com/internasional/2019/03/10/tingkatkan-kewaspadaan-masuknya-pejuang-isis-polisi-malaysia-tangkap-9-teroris>

Malaysian police have raised awareness about the entry of terrorist fighters from abroad to the country. Nine terrorists have been named including six Egyptians and one Tunisian who were arrested in the Klang Valley and Sarawak between 2-9 February. Among two of the 22-year-olds, an Egyptian and Tunisian, the latter who is known to have been in Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia and entered Malaysia using false Syrian travel documents. The other five Egyptians who were arrested by the counter-terrorist police were members of the Muslim Brotherhood and relied on facilitators to secure accommodation, logistics and jobs, including purchasing airplane tickets for members. Two of them are still students of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Also arrested were two Malaysians who were charged with violations as terrorism facilitators for foreign terrorists. Therefore, Malaysia wants to continue to anticipate the entry of ISIS fighters who use Malaysia as a shelter, transit, and base for plotting attacks in third countries.

Southern Thai Insurgents Increase Attacks

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 March the accompanying excerpted publication from Thailand, *Khaosod English*, reported on Thai reactions to an increase in bombings by insurgents in the decades-old conflict in the country's southern three provinces. In those provinces ethnic Malay Muslim Thais have sought independence or autonomy for decades. According to the article, the government captured a suspect who was part of a contingent of the separatists that had been responsible for the uptick in bombings. A total of 17 have struck the region in recent weeks. In addition, the recent bombings reached Phatthalung and Satun, which is the farthest north that the insurgency has reached in the past 15 years. A Thai officer indicated this was a response to the weaker defenses in those two provinces as the insurgents come under pressure elsewhere.

The article also noted the historical grievances of the insurgents. On the 110th anniversary of the pact between Thailand (then Siam) and the British, which led to the Pattani sultanate being split between Malaysia and Thailand, the insurgents put up banners denouncing the pact. Other roads were similarly defaced with graffiti marking the occasion. The deputy of the Thai junta who returned from a visit to the southern provinces, according to the article, dismissed that the uptick in violence was related to elections scheduled in Thailand on 24 March. At the same time, he claimed it was too early to tell if the recent violence was indicative of a new trend of escalation or whether the status quo would prevail. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“...the 17 bombings – which struck Phatthalung and Satun provinces – were the work of separatists operating in the neighboring border region.”

Source: “Southern Separatists Blamed for 17 Bomb Attacks,” *Khaosod English*, 11 March 2019. <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/crimecourtscalamity/2019/03/11/southern-separatists-blamed-for-17-bomb-attacks/>

Deputy junta chairman Prawit Wongsuwan said Monday a suspect has been taken into custody in connection with yesterday's bombing spree in the southern region. Gen. Prawit did not identify the suspect, but said the 17 bombings – which struck Phatthalung and Satun provinces – were the work of separatists operating in the neighboring border region. No one was killed or injured in the attacks.

If Prawit's claim is true, it marks an escalation by secessionist militants to bring their attacks northward toward Phatthalung and Satun, which had been mostly unaffected during the 15 years of violence. Police also reported that banners were hung in Yala and Narathiwat denouncing the Thai state over a 1909 treaty that partitioned the Patani sultanate between Siam and British Malaya. Sunday marked the 110th anniversary of the pact ending the Muslim kingdom's independence. Some roads were likewise defaced with graffiti reading “Patani 110.”

Speaking to reporters at Don Mueang Airport just after returning from meetings in the two provinces, Prawit insisted the attacks had nothing to do with any political factions. “It's not related to politics,” the general said. Thailand is gearing up for an election on March 24.



Indonesian Women Involved in Terrorism

OE Watch Commentary: Indonesian women have increasingly been deployed as suicide bombers in recent years. This trend is recognized in the accompanying excerpted Indonesian language article from *merdeka.com*. The article began with a discussion of a 12 March raid by the counter-terrorism force, Detachment 88, of a suspected terrorist in Sumatra. What was surprising was that the intended suspect surrendered, but his wife did not and blew herself up along with their two children. The husband later admitted his wife had been more exposed than him to the doctrines of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which explains her actions.

According to the article, Indonesian terrorism experts believe it has been three years since Indonesian women have moved to the forefront of radicalism in the country and that hundreds of women in the country have adopted the idea that jihad is obligatory and are willing to become suicide bombers. One of the causes of radicalism, according to the article, is that when there are mass arrests of extremists, who are usually men, it serves to radicalize their wives. One solution to deal with this trend, therefore, which is under consideration, is to extend police monitoring to the family members of terrorism suspects when the suspect is in custody. Furthermore, the article notes another consideration is to provide stipends to family members of terrorism suspects because what often happens is that other extremists take care of the imprisoned member's relatives while he is in custody or the relatives resort to robbery to compensate for the lost income for the family.

In addition, the article suggests that the government continue de-radicalization programs and argues that a holistic approach to terrorism would take into account religious ideology and the need to challenge the religious interpretations of the extremist groups and their family members.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)



Gedung Densus 88, Polda Metrojaya.
Source: Nur Cholis [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gedung_Densus_88_Polda_Metrojaya_-_panoramio.jpg.

“If in the past they were in the back line, now women are on the front lines in carrying out acts of terror.”

Source: “Dulu Perempuan di Belakang, Kini di Garis Depan Lakukan Aksi Terorisme (In the past women were behind, but now at the forefront of carrying out acts of terrorism)” *merdeka.com*, 14 March 2019. <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/pengamat-dulu-perempuan-di-belakang-kini-di-garis-depan-lakukan-aksi-terorisme.html>

Suspected terrorist Husain alias Abu Hamzah in North Sumatra was arrested alive by the Detachment 88 at a raid on Tuesday. Surprisingly, in an attempt to search his home, his wife did not want to surrender. In fact, together with his two children she decided to blow themselves up. Abu Hamzah admitted his wife was more exposed to ISIS radicalism. So she did not want to give up and chose to blow herself up with his two children at home before the police managed to arrest him.

A terrorism expert from UIN Jakarta, Zaki Mubarok, sees that the radical ideology of women was not new. Even in Indonesia, it has often been found that a woman is eager to commit acts of terror. He explained in the past 3 years many women were involved in the jihadist movement. So indeed, according to him, there has been a process of radicalization targeting women. “If in the past they were in the back line, now women are on the front lines in carrying out acts of terror. Abu Hamzah’s wife is just one example, there are still many others,” Zaki said.



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Debating a Safe Zone for Syria: The View from Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: After eight years of fighting in Syria, it appears that the conflict has now moved to a political platform. The actors on the ground are trying to protect their interests and secure a say in the future of Syria through diplomatic negotiations. One of the items debated in these negotiations is the idea of a safe or buffer zone, stretching about 20 miles from the Turkish border into Kurdish-controlled Syrian territory. However, there are major differences between the safe zone that Turkey-- as a neighboring country-- envisions, and the safe zone that non-neighboring countries to Syria envision. Respected Turkish journalist Hediye Levent has been examining the issue from various angles in a series of articles in her column for Turkish daily *Evrensel*, known for its non-biased reporting.

It should be noted that there are still many questions to be answered regarding the safe (or buffer) zone: Will the zone include a no-fly zone on the Turkey-Syria border? Who would administer the no-fly zone? Will the zone be established for a limited time, or will it be longer-term? Who will it protect, and against whom?

As Levent notes in the first excerpt, Turkey envisions the zone as an area that it would control directly, and from which it can manage Syrian Kurdish groups. She notes that “Turkey wants to establish the buffer or safe zone against the Kurds; whereas the U.S. wants it to protect the Kurds and U.S. allies.” Levent notes that basically “Turkey wants part of Syria’s control to be given to it.” The accompanying excerpted article from *Bursa TV* features a quote by Turkish President Erdoğan, which explains this view: “If there’s going to be a safe zone at our border, it should be in our control. Because this is my border.”

In the third accompanying passage, Levent discusses the legal challenges surrounding Turkey’s claims to a safe zone. She notes that the presence that Turkey envisions having in Syria does not have a legal basis. Once the conflict is over, she notes that “Turkey will be a neighboring country who deployed military force into Syrian territory.” This is not consistent with all the binding statements that Turkey has made (via the Sochi and Astana Agreements), that call for protecting Syrian territorial integrity, as the first passage notes.

On the other hand, Turkey does have a legitimate concern about foreign terrorist fighters and the scary prospect of an “al-Qaeda emirate, right next door,” as she discusses in the fourth passage. In a discussion about Idlib, which is estimated to have almost 20,000 jihadi militants, Levent points out non-neighboring countries to Syria (such as Germany and France) are worried about waves of refugees and the dispersion of jihadis. In contrast, she notes, “the city in question is on the Turkish border.” Turkey fears the spillover effects of this jihadi, terrorist activity near its border, including becoming a transit point for these fighters. Not only is this a huge security risk, but it also entails potentially devastating effects on the Turkish tourism industry, which represents around 10 percent of the economy, and decreased prospects for attracting foreign investment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“If there’s going to be a safe zone at our border, it should be in our control. Because this is my border.”

- Turkish President Erdoğan

Source: Hediye Levent. “Kime göre, neye göre tampon bölge? (Buffer zone according to who and what?),” *Evrensel.net*, 28 February 2019. <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/83434/kime-gore-neye-gore-tampon-bolge>

Also according to reports from Turkey, the zone that Turkey wants to establish will be closed to the Syrian army; Turkey will be the only country with a say in it on everything from construction to education, without giving up the Free Syrian Army; and it will be a zone from which Turkey can manage the Syrian Kurds without the risk of a large-scale military operation. Based on declarations from government officials and their vision for a safe zone, it can briefly be said that Turkey wants part of Syria’s control to be given to it.

Declarations coming from the U.S. about the safe or buffer zone are even more confusing. According to these, the zone that the U.S. wants to establish is different from what Turkey has in mind. The issue of the Syrian Kurds is one issue where the two sides are on completely different pages. Turkey wants to establish the buffer or safe zone against the Kurds; whereas the U.S. wants it to protect the Kurds and U.S. allies...

What will happen to the issue of “protecting Syrian territorial integrity” which Turkey has signed multiple times via the Astana and Sochi agreements?

Source: “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Güvenli bölge kontrolümüzde olmalı (President Erdoğan: The safe zone should be in our control),” *Bursatv.com.tr*, 23 February 2019. <https://www.bursatv.com.tr/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-guvenli-bolge-kontrolumuzde-olmali-h334908.html>

President Erdoğan said, “If there’s going to be a safe zone at our border, it should be in our control. Because this is my border. We don’t want Europe—who is afraid of migrants-- to have a presence in Syria.”

Source: Hediye Levent, “Adana Mutabakatı çıkış yolu olabilir (The Adana Agreement can be a way out),” *Evrensel.net*, 31 January 2019. <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/83239/adana-mutabakati-cikis-yolu-olabilir>

Turkey’s presence in Syria does not have a legal basis. Once the Free Syrian Army (FSA) factor is gone, this would mean Turkey’s basis for being in Syria is removed. Basically, once the FSA factor is removed, Turkey will be a neighboring country who deployed military force into Syrian territory. It should be reminded that the fighting is over, which means that the conditions allowing Turkey to intervene into the conditions on the ground are over. It is clear that Turkey’s argument of “Kurdish entities and their PKK links,” which Turkey is using to intervene in Syria, will become heightened and questioned.

(continued)



Continued: Debating a Safe Zone for Syria: The View from Turkey

Source: Hediye Levent, “Vekalet savaşında ‘İdlib’e ne olacak?’ eşiği (The turning point of ‘What will happen in Idlib’ in the proxy war),” *Evrensel.com.tr*, 1 November 2018. <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/82579/vekalet-savasinda-idlibe-ne-olacak-esigi>

On the other hand, one can't help but ask: On the issue of Idlib, one can understand the concerns of Germany and France who are worried about waves of refugees and the dispersion of jihadis. But the city in question is on the Turkish border. Let's just assume that Russia was convinced that the situation in Idlib will be permanent, and those jihadis and militants were allowed to stay there. What will Turkey do with a structure that could be called an al-Qaeda emirate, right next door?

Actually, regardless of whether there's an operation against Idlib or not, the jihadis and armed groups there will continue to be Turkey's problem, particularly with regards to security. But what is Turkey's long-term plan? Are they planning the gradual disposition of radical elements in Idlib? Even in this case (i.e. without an armed operation), the jihadis will likely gradually spread to various countries including Turkey.

For historical background on Turkey and the Syrian conflict, see:

“THE SYRIAN CRISIS FROM A NEIGHBOR’S PERSPECTIVE: THE VIEW FROM TURKEY.”

BY KAREN KAYA

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/202242>

(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN MILITARY REVIEW, MARCH-APRIL 2014)

A New Operational Security Issue in Turkey: PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds

OE Watch Commentary: Since its launch in late 2017, the online multiplayer game PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds (PUBG) has quickly become one of the most popular mobile games in the world. The game allows a player to add other players as “friends” and establish verbal and written contact with them via chatrooms. Popular among Turkish military members, the online game has become a security vulnerability. As the accompanying passages discuss, the Turkish Armed Forces recently issued a warning notice to its personnel, noting that members of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) were using the game to obtain logistical information and intelligence about Turkish positions from soldiers.

“PKK militants, by entering chat rooms, establish contact with Turkish soldiers — first to play and chat, and later on to collect intelligence data such as their locations, their units, personal information and their possible operational plans.”

According to the first passage by Turkish security analyst Metin Gürcan, the directive was primarily for the Turkish Armed Forces and Gendarmerie Command units tasked with combating terrorism in the field. It said the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey and the People’s Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria have been communicating via the game. In addition, the directive also instructs units to ban the game as a counterintelligence measure, given that the players’ positions are identified in the game’s locations/region section. Gürcan explains that, “PKK militants, by entering chat rooms, establish contact with Turkish soldiers — first to play and chat, and later on to collect intelligence data such as their locations, their units, personal information and their possible operational plans.”

The second accompanying passage from a Turkish newspaper also discusses that a report was sent to all Turkish Gendarmerie Commands on 20 February 2019. The report noted that PKK members were using the app to obtain location intelligence from the soldiers, through contact established in chat-rooms after they would “friend” the soldiers. The PKK would then use this information to plan or avoid operations. They would also use the game to communicate with other PKK members without being detected.

The issue relates to the use of smartphones while on duty, an issue that many other militaries are grappling with. Gürcan notes that in October, the Russian army introduced restrictions on smartphone use and banned soldiers from sharing content on the internet — including selfies. Gürcan notes that the Turkish army is also considering a smartphone ban for active-duty soldiers. Currently, he notes that Turkish conscripts are not allowed to use smartphones. They are only allowed to use simple phones in their barracks, and only at specified times. However, he notes that there are no restrictions on smartphone use for contract sergeants, noncommissioned officers and officers while on duty.

As Gürcan discusses, the issue also relates to a debate on how to balance information security, counterintelligence measures without depleting troop morale due to loss of contact with families and loved ones. He notes that, “In today’s combat conditions, when soldiers’ contacts with their families and loved ones are broken as a counterintelligence measure, morale and motivation can rapidly decline.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

(continued)



Continued: A New Operational Security Issue in Turkey: PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds

Source: Metin Gürcan, "Cyberization means it's not your daddy's war anymore," *Al-Monitor.com*, 8 March 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/turkey-syria-cyber-war-between-kurdish-militants-soldiers.html#ixzz5iDzIJXEJ>

The directive was primarily for the Turkish Armed Forces and Gendarmerie Command units tasked with combating terror in the field. It said the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey and the PKK-affiliated People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria have been communicating via the game Playerunknown's Battlegrounds.

The Turkish notice pointed out that in PUBG's locations/region section, players' positions are identified. PKK militants, by entering chat rooms, establish contact with Turkish soldiers — first to play and chat, and later on to collect intelligence data such as their locations, their units, personal information and their possible operational plans.

The directive also instructs units to ban these games as a counterintelligence measure.

...To prevent intelligence leaks, TSK conscripts are not allowed to use smartphones. They are only allowed to use simple phones in their barracks, at specified times. These simple phones can hold only seven military cell numbers, keeping conscript communications under control.

There are no restrictions on smartphone use for contract sergeants, noncommissioned officers and officers while on duty. It's prohibited to use smartphones in critical posts and during operations, yet this rule is not strictly applied.

So, obviously, Turkish soldiers serving at critical bases in Turkey or northern Syria spend their free time playing with their smartphones when there is internet access.

...Players can organize tournaments in which they can establish voice contacts. This is the point where PKK/YPG militants jump into the equation. They frequently participate in these PUBG tournaments organized by Turkish soldiers.

...We know that in October, the Russian army introduced restrictions on smartphone use and banned soldiers from sharing content on the internet — including selfies.

...Senior sources told Al-Monitor the Turkish army is also considering a smartphone ban for active-duty soldiers. Sources said the army is trying to find a way to balance information security, counterintelligence measures and ways of boosting combat troops' morale. In today's combat conditions, when soldiers' contacts with their families and loved ones are broken as a counterintelligence measure, morale and motivation can rapidly decline.

In the era of cyberization of armed conflicts, the TSK, like all other armies, has to work hard to strike this sensitive equilibrium in its fight against terror.

Source: "PKK'lilerin "PUBG" oyunu (The PKK's 'PUBG' game)," *Haberturk.com.tr*, 1 March 2019. <https://www.haberturk.com/pkk-lilarin-pugb-oyunu-2389570>

The Gendarmerie has identified that PKK members send directives to group members via a popular internet war game called "PUBG mobile" to avoid getting caught. The new report regarding the PKK's new communication system was sent to the local gendarmerie commands.

...The Kilis Town Gendarmerie Command deciphered the group's tactic. The report deciphering the PKK's new communication method was sent to all Gendarmerie Commands on 20 February 2019.

...The Hakkari Town Gendarmerie Command wrote, "It has been determined that the terror organizations PKK/PYD/YPG have been utilizing ... PUBG...[a] mobile game app that has 400 million users worldwide to communicate among each other and to avoid detection and operations against them. It has been determined that the group members give and receive directives from within the mobile game, and that within the location-region selection part of the game, they identify locations [of Turkish soldiers]. It has been reported that within the regions that the terror group is active, they establish contact with security personnel on duty in those regions; and then within the chatrooms part of the game, they try to gather intelligence information about their personnel information, what institution they work for and any intelligence about their agency. It was recommended to keep this in mind in counter-intelligence efforts.



Scenes from PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds.

Source: Whelsko via Flickr.com, www.flickr.com/photos/whelsko/, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/whelsko/28914015537/>, Public Domain.



Is Russia Getting Entangled in Southwest Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: After retaking Daraa Province last summer, the Syrian government and its Russian backers hoped that former rebels and other military-age males would help kickstart stabilization efforts by joining a regional branch of the “5th Corps,” a Russian-led formation through which “reconciled” armed rebels are brought under the command of the Syrian Armed Forces. A string of assassinations that began in early 2019 and has mostly targeted reconciled commanders from Daraa, however, hints that the province is becoming a semi-anarchic site of competition between and among Syrian security agencies, Iranian-backed militias, and recalcitrant rebels. The accompanying excerpted articles describe these dynamics and the challenges they pose for Russia.

The first two accompanying excerpts, one from *al-Araby al-Jadid* and the other from *al-Modon*, claim there is a growing presence of Iranian-backed forces in Syria’s southwest. These forces, according to the articles, are under “strict orders” to conceal their identities and avoid mixing with local residents; they fly Syrian flags over their checkpoints and facilities, dress in Syrian military fatigues and even carry Syrian military ID cards. The deception is purportedly aimed in part at Russian forces, given Moscow’s pledge to prevent Iranian forces from digging in near the border with Israel.

The clandestine presence of Iranian-backed forces is hardly Russia’s only problem in Syria’s southwest. According to the third accompanying excerpt, also from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, the government’s return to Daraa has unleashed a turf war between various security agencies, with local media reporting widespread instances of arbitrary detentions and the prevention of IDPs from returning home. Living conditions are, for many, worse than they were under rebel control, leading some local residents to openly resist the reconciliations. A group calling itself the “Popular Resistance” has taken credit for various hit-and-run attacks, including the one on the alleged Hezbollah position mentioned above. In a rebellious neighborhood of the provincial capital Daraa, where the only formal government security presence consists of occasional patrols by Russian military police, anti-government protests broke out in early March.

As the third excerpt notes, many residents in reconciled communities see Russia as the only party that can resolve their problems, even though Russia does not have the capacity to do so. According to the article, Russian officers are routinely manipulated by Syrian government agents, who feed their Russian counterparts “false information” and make promises that go unfulfilled. They do so with an awareness of “the Russians’ inability to follow up on every single detail” and their lack of experience “in dealing with local issues.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“Most of the time Russian officers are manipulated by regime officers...”

Source:

تواجد جديد لـ“حزب الله” بالسويداء وتوسع في جنوب سورية
Rayan Mohammed. “New Hezbollah Presence in Suweida and Expansion in Southern Syria,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 28 January 2019. <https://goo.gl/RmiJpD>

It appears that Hezbollah and Iranian groups are redeploying in southern Syria, first of all with the goal of having a presence near the Syrian occupied Golan Heights and second to avoid the danger of Israeli strikes. They are especially doing so in Suweida Province and its environs, which is majority Druze.

The movements of these militias in southern Syria, from Suweida to Daraa to Quneitra, is taking place despite all the talk about a Russian-Israeli international agreement to clear the area adjacent to the occupied Syrian Golan of any Iranian or Lebanese Hezbollah presence at a depth of 80 to 100 kilometers...

“Hezbollah and Iranian militias are present in Daraa and Quneitra. They are not visible as in Damascus, for example, since they do not raise flags or chant slogans that identify their sect...”

... the reason Hezbollah and Iranian militias cannot be noticed in southern Syria is the strong orders they were given to conceal their identities. They wear military uniforms like those of the regular military and they have even been provided with military ID cards. They are forbidden from mixing with and speaking to people, so no one finds out they are not Syrian.

Source:

درعا: المقاومة الشعبية تستهدف مقرّاً لحزب الله
“Daraa: Popular Resistance Targets Hezbollah Base,” *al-Modon*, 6 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/mcUIdj>

The video shows a checkpoint with the Syrian flag flying above, in order to conceal the Hezbollah facility. This is a new strategy being used by Iran and its militias in the south, in order to prevent being targeted or disclosing their location. Russia has tried to prevent the presence of Iranian militias near the border with the occupied Golan, and Russia previously sent its military police to Tel Hara to strengthen its presence there, after a visit by leaders of Iranian-backed militias in October 2018. Several checkpoints in the villages of Nahta, Dael and Mahja have been recently targeted with light and medium weapons, without any casualties. Activists believe these attacks are a new Russian message to Iranian militias seeking to further expand in the region and recruit local residents. They do not discount the possibility of “reconciliation factions” backed by Russia carrying out the attacks with tacit agreement from Russia, in order to combat the danger of Iranian militias and hold up their pledge to protect the security of Israel and Jordan...

Amidst a Russian-Iranian disagreement on dividing the gains and extending their influence in the region, a disagreement which may develop into a long-term conflict in the near future, and amidst calls by local residents to continue the revolution until its goals are met, the one thing that remains firm is the chaos and instability in Daraa and its negative effects on the lives of people, which warns of more attacks and assassinations.

(continued)



Continued: Is Russia Getting Entangled in Southwest Syria?

Source:

Adnan Ahmed. "The 6th Corps: Russian Containment of Daraa's Residents or of Iran and its Militias?" *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 1 March 2019.

<https://goo.gl/drGBTk>

الفيلق السادس: احتواء روسي لأهالي درعا أم لإيران ومليشياتها؟

Last February 19, the spokesman for the Russian Reconciliation Center, Colonel Igor Federov, said that the people of Daraa are resorting to Russians to solve many of their affairs, which they cannot address themselves, including knowing the whereabouts of their relatives and problems relating to residency, housing and real-estate. Naturally, even if Russia has authority over the regime, it does not have the experience that the regime and the Iranians have in dealing with local issues. It also does not have sufficient staffing to deal with such tasks. Most of the time Russian officers are manipulated by regime officers who present them with false information or put off things they promise to do, relying on the Russians' inability to follow up on every single detail. In the meantime, the regime's security agencies compete to regain their former influence in any way possible, including assassinations which often target members of prominent families and for which they accuse members of other prominent families, with the goal of stirring up tribal and familial disputes in the province and making that particular security service the one to resolve the dispute, in order to increase their influence in the province.

Iran Diverting Money from Development to Military

OE Watch Commentary: President Hassan Rouhani, whose administration is now approaching its sixth anniversary, has repeatedly increased the Iranian military budget. According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Tasnim News*, an outlet close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian government may soon increase its military budget by raiding the National Development Fund. The article suggests that the Iranian parliament has agreed to withdrawal around \$2.7 billion from the fund and will direct \$1.7 billion of it to the Iranian military. If Iranian budget statistics are taken at face value, this would represent more than a ten percent supplement to the current budget. The parliament would allocate the remaining billion dollars for a variety of sectors. Beyond that excerpted in the accompanying translation, the article provides additional funding for Iranian state television and film, water (potable and for irrigation) and various academic programming.

The justification for the diversion from the National Development Fund lies in the government's desire to fulfill the sixth development plan, which itself was approved by the Supreme Leader. Article 106 of the development plan demanded the strengthening of national defense.

The notion of a national development fund, much like other regional states' sovereign wealth fund, is to invest in the future and expand and diversify a government's wealth. That the Iranian government now withdraws money from its fund suggests that international sanctions are impacting the Iranian economy and that the Iranian government is increasingly looking for new ways to fund its current operations. Given the reality of power inside Iran and the influence of both the Supreme Leader and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, utilizing the National Development Fund to supplement the budget seems more realistic in the short-term than taxing properties linked to Iran's most influential power centers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“...1.5 billion euros to strengthen the defense base.”



The Iranian government appears prepared to increase spending on the military. Pictured is one of Iran's Fateh-class submarines.

Source: Defa News, http://www.defanews.ir/sites/default/files/NAME-A-971128-1030_6.jpg.

Source: "Majles 1.5 Milliard Euro baraye Taghvit Beneyeh Defa'-ye Etesas Dad (The Majlis allocated 1.5 billion euros)," *Tasnim News*, 24 February 2019. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/12/05/1954812>

According to the parliamentary correspondent of the Tasnim News Agency, at the public meeting of the Islamic Consultative Assembly on Sunday evening [24 February], the legislature passed two supplementary notes and four budget bills that authorized the government to withdrawal 2.375 billion euro [\$2.674 billion] from the 2019-2020 development fund in the form of foreign exchange and with the government's guarantee, and it is determined that these resources will be expended subject to the following decisions:

- Up to 150 million euros for pressurized water and modern irrigation schemes
- Up to 150 million euros for watershed and aquaculture
- Up to 100 million to counteract the destruction effect of pollutants and their impact on powergrids.
- Up to 1.5 billion euros to strengthen the defense base in fulfillment of Article 106 of the 6th Development Plan.
- Up to 40 million euros for laboratory and workshop equipment for the universities of the ministry of science...



ISIS Continues to Infiltrate into Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey remains as a transit country for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) members en route to Europe. How many of those ISIS members who manage to sneak into Turkey make their journey to European countries is unknown. However, one thing is certain: ISIS is about to surrender its last stronghold, Baghouz in eastern Syria, to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Despite increasing its border security in some areas by building hundreds of miles of border wall, ISIS militants manage to infiltrate into Turkey with the help of smugglers. The accompanying excerpted passage from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from the Middle East, provides insight into the infiltration of ISIS members into Turkey.

The article, written by a well-respected Turkish journalist closely monitoring developments in Syria, states that while the Turkish government claims “no country can match Turkey’s efforts to combat” ISIS militants, the fact is ISIS militants continue to sneak into Turkey. Turkish officials have been more lenient towards ISIS suspects as a significant number of detainees are released without conducting thorough investigations. At times, Turkey has allowed ISIS suspects to walk free without bringing charges against them. The author states that between 2012 and 2015, Turkey had a “free passage policy” on its border. However, it has recently increased security operations, especially against suspected ISIS members. While the numbers of ISIS suspects who have been apprehended by Turkish officials in recent months have significantly increased, as noted by the article, many question the seriousness and adequacy of these anti-ISIS operations. Moreover, Turkish officials’ efforts to cluster all groups that it classifies as terrorist organizations, such as the Gulen Movement, Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Syrian Democratic Union (PYD) and its armed wing the People’s Protection Unit (YPG), together show the weight Ankara has given to the threat ISIS poses.

The article further notes that many ISIS networks and cells remain active in Turkey (see: “Radicalization and “ISIS Networks” in Turkey,” *OE Watch*, October 2018). Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu has previously stated that tens of thousands of individuals from a number of countries had been banned from entering Turkey and that several thousand people had been extradited for involvement with terrorist groups. According to the *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)*, at least 85 families linked to ISIS “have sneaked into Turkey” going first through the Kurdish and Turkish controlled areas in Syria “in the past two months, paying smugglers large sums of [money] between \$10,000 and \$50,000.” As the author points out, Turkey seems to be the first destination for ISIS foreign fighters who manage to escape from Syria. There is evidence that some ISIS fighters have undergone surgery in Turkey to change their appearance so as not to be detected as they make their way to European countries. While ISIS is about to lose its territorial control in the Middle East, several indicators suggest it will remain as a threat and likely engage in acts of violence, especially in European countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“Turkey stands out as a major crossroad in the accounts of IS members captured in various countries.”

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “IS militants continue to sneak into Turkey despite measures,” *Al-Monitor*, 1 March 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/turkey-syria-isis-militants-try-to-infiltrate-turkish-border.html#ixzz5hvDnOGq4>

Besieged in its last holdout in Baghouz, eastern Syria, the Islamic State (IS) has reached the end of the road in terms of territorial control, with Turkey standing out as an escape route for fleeing militants. Despite measures the authorities take, the militants sustain their efforts to sneak into Turkey and head to other countries after staying for a while...

Turkey has long been under fire for turning a blind eye to IS at its borders, failing to enforce enough measures and failing to properly prosecute IS members, letting many suspects walk free. Turkish officials respond angrily to such criticism. According to the government, no country can match Turkey’s efforts to combat the radical group.

After the 2012-2015 period, when Turkish borders were highly porous due to what amounted to a “free passage” policy, security operations targeting IS have notably increased in Turkey in recent years...

Many observers, however, see Turkey’s efforts against IS as inadequate and not serious, given how Ankara waters the issue down by jumbling it together with other groups it considers to be terrorist organizations...

Most of the questioning stems from a widespread impression that IS suspects are easily released. It is a widely held conviction that IS members enjoy lenient treatment in Turkey, not to be found anywhere else in the world...

The number of IS-related detentions in Turkey is no doubt impressive, but many detainees are subsequently released due to shallow investigations...

IS’ logistical networks and cells remain active despite the hundreds-kilometer-long border walls that Turkey erected in recent years against illegal crossings from Syria. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reports that at least 85 IS-linked families have sneaked into Turkey in the past two months, paying smugglers large sums of between \$10,000 and \$50,000. According to SOHR, the smugglers take the escapees through territory held by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) first and then through the Turkish-controlled Operation Euphrates Shield region.

Turkey stands out as a major crossroad in the accounts of IS members captured in various countries, from Tunisia to Britain. Interviews with 18 IS captives held by the YPG, conducted by the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, indicate that Turkey has been central to the organization’s activities.



Perceptions of Russian Strength in Middle East

OE Watch Commentary: Arabic-language media continues to be bullish in its appraisal of Russian influence in the Middle East. The prevalent view is highlighted in the first accompanying article, written by a former member of the Palestinian National Authority who served as its information minister and ambassador to Russia and Egypt. Writing in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, a Saudi daily with wide distribution throughout the region, he notes that Russia has made itself an essential player in the region by maintaining cordial relations with and providing weapons systems to any interested country in the region, while at the same time establishing itself as the main powerbroker in Syria. As a result, he believes that Russia will soon become involved in negotiations between Israel and its Syrian and Palestinian neighbors, though the specifics of that involvement are not yet clear.

Arabic-language media stories have of recent also touted Russia's purported ability to resolve the Yemen and Libya conflicts. The second accompanying excerpt originates from the Yemeni news site *Akhbar al-Yom*. It claims that "Yemeni political circles" believe that Iran and Oman intend to help Russia "establish a foothold" to end the war in Yemen. The third excerpt, from Egypt's semi-official *al-Ahram*, quotes Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, son of the former Libyan dictator, as believing that Russia holds the key to solving the Libyan conflict, given its neutrality and good relations with all parties. The original source for the article is an interview with a political advisor to Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, published in the Arabic-language website of Russia's *RT* and subsequently picked up by several media sources from the region, including *al-Ahram*.

If one is to believe the fourth accompanying excerpt, Russia's regional strength has led three Arab countries (Libya, Sudan, Egypt) to request hosting Russian military bases in their territory. The claim, which was carried by a handful of Arabic-language media sources, including the Qatari daily *al-Sharq* and the Arabic-language website for Turkey's *Anadolu Agency*, originates from a Russian-language website and was first published in Arabic by *Sputnik*, Russia's other main Arabic-language media outlet.

These articles demonstrate how the perception of Russia as the Middle East's new powerbroker remains prevalent in mainstream Arabic-language media. Although not dependent on it, this narrative is reinforced by Russia's Arabic-language media outlets. The Arabic-language operations of *Sputnik* and *RT* have emerged as fundamental tools for the Russian government to continually and cheaply bolster the perception of itself as the new dominant player in regional affairs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“Russia can be relied upon to resolve the Libyan crisis by virtue of its neutrality...”

Source: الروس يقتربون
Nabil Amr. "The Russians are Approaching," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 March 2019. <https://goo.gl/uYzWmo>

Russia's intelligent diplomacy succeeded in making it natural and necessary for all Middle Eastern countries to have relationships with it. Its trade expanded with all the countries of the region, even its adversaries, and it liberated its arms from the constraints of ideology and the demands of the Cold War, finding its way to most armies without barriers or conditions. The most important achievement has been in terms of the influence it has achieved in Syria...

It is too early to conclude the extent of the Russian role and its specific impact in this area [Israel-Palestine], but it can be said that the Russians are coming.

Source: إيران وعمان يهدان لتدخل روسيا في اليمن نتيجة عدم الحسم
"Iran and Oman Pave the Way for Russian Intervention in Yemen," *Akhbar al-Yom*, 19 February 2019. http://akhbaralyom-ye.net/news_details.php?sid=109213

Yemeni political circles considered the bilateral talks between the Sultanate of Oman and Russia to be part of the Iranian-Omani plans through which the three countries seek to establish a foothold for Russia in Yemen.

The political circles said that for more than a year and a half, Oman, Iran and Russia have been looking at this seriously, especially since the war in Yemen has dragged on and in light of the coalition's difficulty to end the coup and help government forces decisively end the conflict.

Source: سيف الإسلام القذافي: نراهن على روسيا لحل الأزمة الليبية
"Saif al-Islam Gaddafi: We are Counting on Russia to Resolve the Libyan Crisis," *al-Ahram*, 15 February 2019. <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/696224.aspx>

Saif al-Islam, the son of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, stressed that Russia can be relied upon to resolve the Libyan crisis by virtue of its neutrality. "What we want from Russia and others is to help the Libyans get out of their crisis, stabilize the country and unify their institutions," he said.

Source: سبع دول تعلن استعدادها لنشر قواعد روسية على أراضيها...منها دول عربية
"Seven Countries Announce their Readiness to Host Russian Bases, Including Arab Countries," *Sputnik*, 5 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/sywQNX>

State governments from across the world, from South-East Asia to South America, have confirmed that they are ready to host Russian naval and land bases on their territory.

According to the Tsar Grad website, some suggested that Russia use all of the infrastructure for its flights.



Iran: Hovercraft successfully fires cruise missiles

OE Watch Commentary: The Persian Gulf is both shallow—less than 300 feet at its deepest point—and narrow. Its various islands—Farsi, Abu Musa, the Tonbs, and others—each exert territorial waters, narrowing international sea lanes even more.

Iran has utilized various strategies to operate in such restricted waters. In 1987 and 1988, for example, it utilized both land-based anti-ship missiles and mines. Iranian attacks on and interference with international shipping led the Reagan administration to reflag tankers and the US Navy to engage in escort operations. After the Iranian navy tried to confront the US during Operation Praying Mantis in 1988, a move which proved disastrous for both the Iranian navy and air force, Iranian tactics shifted toward the asymmetrical: the Iranian navy switched to speed boats which would swarm an adversaries' much larger and more advanced ships and, in theory, cause enough damage to cause opponents' home audiences to question the value of their deployment.

Over the last several years, however, the Iranian navy has increasingly embraced hovercraft (see: "Iran Unveils New Hovercraft," *OE Watch*, March 2015). The accompanying excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency*, a media outlet close to the military, reports that during Iran's annual military exercises, its hovercraft successfully fired cruise missiles. Previously, the Iranian press has reported that hovercraft have successfully supported helicopter operations. While such reports suggest that the Iranian military considers hovercraft a platform for a variety of missions, the article suggests its main function remains the rapid delivery of troops. In all likelihood, Iran will utilize its hovercraft not only in the Persian Gulf to rotate troops between various islands, but also Iran's northern Indian Ocean coast, where terrain makes road transport difficult between its two major Indian Ocean ports, Jask and Chahbahar. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The hovercraft...launched a surface-to-surface cruise missile.”

Source: “Shelik Mushak-e Kruz Sateh beh Sateh az Havehnav dar Razmayesh ‘Velayat-97’ (Shooting Surface-to-Surface Cruise Missiles from a Hovercraft during the Velayat-97 Military Exercises),” *Fars News Agency*, 23 February 2019. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13971204000658/>

According to the Fars News Agency defense correspondent, who was quoting the public relations unit of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, on the second day of the third phase of the Velayat-97 exercises, the hovercraft of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy Aviation unit, in addition to performing the intrinsic mission of fast delivering forces in various operational areas, launched a surface-to-surface cruise missile. The missile successfully hit a distant target. In recent years, hovercraft units have been equipped with missile systems that can play an important role in opposing the enemy.

Forcing Iranian Military Businesses to Pay Tax

OE Watch Commentary: Within the Islamic Republic of Iran, as in China, Thailand, and Egypt, the military has outsized influence on the economy. Historically, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) entered the civilian economy after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 in order to maintain an independent financial base; it has since grown its share in the economy to between 25 and 40 percent. In addition, many revolutionary foundations (*bonyads*) connected to Iran's senior religious leadership are reported to have amassed hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Aftab-e Yazd*, a newspaper affiliated with the Islamic Republic's reformist faction, reports that the Iranian government is prepared to tax private NGOs and other institutions which are controlled by both the military and the Supreme Leader. While this seems unlikely to come to pass, the budget figure proposed represents twice Iran's current budget. That authorities in Tehran could double Iran's budget by taxing such properties highlights how expansive the clerical leadership and military's business holdings have become and bureaucratic frustration at the presence of so much non-taxable property. The proposal also highlights the competitive disadvantage suffered by many other Iranian businesses who must pay significant tax while their competitors remain exempt. Over time, this has diminished the importance of the private sector in favor of the semi-governmental sector. The budgetary problems compound when businesses connected to the military and religious authorities purchase private sector competitors and then remove their properties and profits from the tax base. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“...corporations under the Armed Forces...are required to pay their tax.”

Source: “Mu'assasat-e Ghayr Dawlati Mokalaf beh Perdakht Maliyat (NGOs are Required to Pay Taxes),” *Aftab-e Yazd*, 23 February 2019. <http://aftabeyazd.ir/?newsid=130801>

The government predicted a total budget of 407 trillion tomans [\$97 billion] in the next year's budget, with part of this coming from revenues that consist of taxes and other income. In fact, this figure is expected to be 208 trillion tomans and, of this, 153 trillion tomans are from revenues. This prediction is in the budget bill that many of the institutions and NGOs which have an important role in the Iranian economy but were exempt from tax. But, yesterday, the parliament finally came to the aid of the government after a lot of criticism from experts and, as approved by the law, the Imam Reza Shrine and certain subsidiary institutes and corporations under the Armed Forces and the Executive Headquarters of Imam's Directive...are required to pay their tax to the treasury.



Turkey Conducts Naval Drill in Surrounding Seas

OE Watch Commentary: On 27 February 2019 the Turkish military launched its largest ever naval exercise named “The Blue Homeland” as tensions have escalated in the Eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Seas, all of which surround Turkey. The exercise will simultaneously take place in the aforementioned seas over an area of 300,000 square miles with the participation of 103 warships, naval patrol planes, helicopters and thousands of military personnel. The accompanying excerpted articles argue the aim of the exercise is to showcase the warfighting capabilities and strength of Turkey’s military and naval power.

The article from *Anadolu Ajansı* states The Blue Homeland is not just an exercise, but a geopolitical concept that is an expression of control over its territorial waters and the Turkish Navy’s power capabilities with new and domestically made ships, unmanned aerial vehicles (including the ANKA and Bayraktar TB-2) and other weapon systems. The article makes three points. First, the exercise will project Turkish military and naval power as tensions increase over territorial waters. Second, the Turkish Navy will likely adopt a more active role in “energy geopolitic[al] competition.” Third, the sustainability of the demonstration of naval power depends on the success of Turkey’s domestic defense industry. The article provides more detailed accounts of the closely related first and third points. The article highlights that the Turkish Navy has transformed into a more powerful force with its domestically made warships. This includes the construction of a multipurpose amphibious assault ship, the *TCG Anadolu*, which will reportedly be configured as a mini-aircraft carrier. Also, Turkey’s Ada-class, MILGEM project has delivered domestic corvettes with the capabilities of surface combatants. This project is likely to deliver additional ships with anti-submarine warfare and high-seas patrol capabilities. As the article notes, “Turkey is heavily investing in its naval capabilities,” and The Blue Homeland exercises will provide an opportunity to see the Turkish Navy’s strength and the ability to coordinate “joint operations capacity with other branches” of its military.

The second article is an interview conducted with retired Admiral Cem Gürdeniz. Admiral Gürdeniz states that this exercise affirms Turkey as a maritime power and how the eastern Mediterranean is the “center of gravity of the drill,” since this area poses “the biggest geopolitical challenges.” While the retired Admiral does not consider this drill as a message to Turkey’s enemies, he notes that Turkey is demonstrating its stance in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially against those countries Turkey perceives as posing threats to its interests.

The third article, from Turkish daily *Milliyet*, is written as a response to criticism that The Blue Homeland sends a threatening message to Turkey’s neighboring countries. It states that it intends to bring stability to the region and it has been conducted in accordance with NATO’s mission. Turkey and Greece have a mutual understanding about this drill, with the Turkish government informing its Greek counterparts about the drill to build trust between both countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“The Blue Homeland is not merely an exercise codename; it is a geopolitical concept that manifests Ankara’s political-military agenda [for] the coming decade.”

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoglu, “‘The Blue Homeland’: Turkey’s largest naval drill,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 27 February 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/-the-blue-homeland-turkey-s-largest-naval-drill/1404267>

The Turkish Navy is set to conduct massive drills called “Mavi Vatan” – “the Blue Homeland” -- between Feb. 27 and March 8. For the first time in the Republic’s history, Turkey’s military will test its warfighting capabilities in the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and Mediterranean at the same time. The Blue Homeland is not merely an exercise codename; it is also a geopolitical concept that manifests Ankara’s political-military agenda [for] the coming decade.

The Blue Homeland is centered on a trilateral basis. First, the concept has a pronounced power projection aspect... Second, this understanding adopts a more active role for the Turkish Navy in energy geopolitics competition, coercive efforts, and naval diplomacy. Third and finally, the sustainability of the concept depends on maintaining the uptrend in Turkey’s domestic defense industry.

Overall, Turkey is heavily investing in its naval capabilities not only for defending its territorial waters, but also for protecting the country’s sea lines of communication (SLoC) and building power projection capacity. Therefore, The Blue Homeland exercises offer a good opportunity to monitor the Turkish Navy’s improving outlook, as well as its joint operations capacity with other branches.

Source: Barçın Yinanç, “Blue Homeland ‘shows Turkey has become a maritime power,’” *Hurriyet Daily News*, 4 March 2019. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/blue-homeland-shows-turkey-has-become-a-maritime-power-141624>

‘The Blue Homeland naval drill shows Turkey has become a maritime power,’ says a retired admiral... Cem Gürdeniz, who is the father of the name ‘Blue Homeland.’

‘We have our own domestic defense industry satisfying most of our defense needs,’...

The center of gravity of the drill is the eastern Mediterranean, as it harbors the biggest geopolitical challenges...

Source: “Mavi Vatan-2019 Taktik Tatbikatı bir tehdit değil (Blue Homeland-2019 Tactical Exercises is not a threat)” *Milliyet*, 28 February 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/mavi-vatan-2019-taktik-tatbikati-gundem-2835116/>

The Blue Homeland-2019 tactical exercise is, contrary to what has been reported in some foreign media, not an activity that aims to threaten neighboring countries. The exercise aims to contribute to the security and stability of Turkey in the region and to NATO’s common goals. Within the scope of a confidence-building measure, the drill also was announced with mutual declarations between Turkey and Greece.



Understanding Turkey's Energy Policy

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years Turkey has worked towards increasing and diversifying its energy supplies. While doing that, it has tried to decrease its energy dependence on other countries, especially Russia. The accompanying excerpted article from the pro-government think tank *Seta Foundation* analyzes Turkey's energy policy in a series of questions.

The article starts with the scope of Turkey's energy and mining policy. As the article states, the foundation of Turkey's national energy and mining policy relies on three strategies, including producing energy domestically, ensuring the security of energy supply, and the "formation of a foreseeable energy market." Turkey strives to ensure all energy sources and equipment is domestic.

The second, third and fourth questions address the issues of renewable energy, domestic energy production and increasing the usage of domestic resources respectively. The author refers to renewables such as wind, solar and geothermal as domestic energy sources. Turkey has realized the potential of renewable energy in possibly helping to expand its economy. In 2018, nearly half of the energy production was sourced domestically. The author states that Turkey aims to reduce its dependence on foreign energy sources by focusing on domestic energy production and that one way to increase this is to focus on renewable energy production. Despite having rich renewable energy resources and the climate to facilitate them, Turkey lacks sufficient technical infrastructure to adequately harness renewable energy production. As the article points out, if Turkey's goal is to increase renewable energy production and reduce its energy dependence, it has to address how it is going to produce adequate equipment such as solar panels and wind turbines domestically. Also, it has to find ways to provide technical training to create a workforce to work in renewable energy production. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

“Turkey has rich potential in renewable energy sources, which are often referred to as domestic and national energy resources.”

Source: Ismail Kavaz, “5 Soru: Türkiye'nin Milli Energy Serüveni (5 Questions: Turkey's National Energy Adventure),” *Seta Foundation*, 6 February 2019. <https://www.setav.org/5-soru-turkiyenin-milli-enerji-seruveni/>

1. What is the scope of Turkey's National Energy and Mining Policy?

The National Energy and Mining Policy is built around three foundational strategies. The first of these is domestication, the second is ensuring the security of energy supply and the third is the formation of a foreseeable energy market...

2. What is the usage ratio of domestic energy sources in Turkey's energy production?

Turkey has rich potential in renewable energy sources, which are often referred to as domestic and national energy resources. Recently an important level of acceleration has been achieved to realize this potential and make the production and use of renewable energy a significant part of the economy. Wind, solar, and geothermal energy are among the foremost domestic and national energy resources for Turkey.

3. Why is domestic energy production important?

...To reduce this foreign dependency, the search for alternative energy resources has intensified in recent years. Accordingly, the shift towards domestic and renewable energy resources in Turkey continues to grow...

4. What is being done to increase the use of domestic resources?

While Turkey is a rich country with respect to its potential for renewable energy sources, it currently falls short of adequately reflecting this fact in its energy production. One of the main obstacles in this field is technological insufficiency...

Tensions Build between China and Turkey over Uighurs

OE Watch Commentary: Once a champion of the rights of Uighurs, a Turkic ethnic group primarily living in the Xinjiang region of China, the Turkish government has refrained from issuing any statements regarding their recent treatment by the Chinese government. However, on 9 February 2019, a spokesperson of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Hami Aksoy, broke the Turkish government's silence on this issue. The accompanying excerpted statement from the MFA and two articles written by Turkish columnists shed light on why Ankara broke its silence and how this might impact Turkish-Chinese relations.

The MFA statement called upon Chinese authorities “to respect the fundamental human rights of Uighur Turks and to close the internment camps.” The statement went on saying China's systematic assimilationist policy towards the Uighur Turks and reintroduction of internment camps are a “great shame for humanity.” It continued by stating “we expect this legitimate response to be taken into account by the Chinese authorities.” The statement also called upon the UN secretary-general to take action to end this tragedy. This unexpected statement came after reports circulated on social media announcing the death of Uighur folk musician Abdurehim Heyit in a Chinese prison.

The article from the Turkish daily *Milliyet* analyzes the MFA statement. While the statement was welcomed by politicians and civil society organizations, it created a divide in previously positive Turkish-Chinese bilateral relations. The reason for the statement seems to be domestic politics. Maintaining good relations and cooperation with China is one of the policy priorities for Turkish diplomacy, and Turkish diplomats will face challenges as they work to fix bilateral relations in the coming days. *(continued)*

“The reintroduction of internment camps... and the policy of systematic assimilation against Uighur Turks carried out by the authorities of China is a great shame for humanity.”

(continued)



Continued: Tensions Build between China and Turkey over Uighurs

The final accompanying article is written by respected Turkish journalist Semih Idiz for *al-Monitor*. The author states that Turkey's statement condemning Chinese treatment of Uighur minority in China surprised many. Turkey has remained silent in the past several years over China's treatment of Uighurs because it wants to maintain good relations with China as its relations with the West deteriorate. The Chinese Embassy in Ankara responded to the MFA's statement two days later, calling Mr. "Heyit's death and the treatment of Uighurs 'groundless and distorted'" by releasing a video of Mr. Heyit showing he is still alive. The article states that Turkish columnist Murat Bardakci called the MFA statement a "major diplomatic gaffe" and a failure on Turkish officials to verify the death of Mr. Heyit before issuing an official statement. Bardakci continued saying such statements that are not based on verifiable facts raise questions regarding the seriousness of the Turkish government. Turkish government spokesperson Omer Celik tried to reel in the statement by saying that Ankara respects China's territorial integrity and understands China's concerns over its security.

Idiz states that the reason behind the MFA's statement was the government's effort to appeal to nationalist voters on the eve of elections in Turkey on 31 March 2019. The author further states that despite the recent friction between Turkey and China, the expectations are that relations will go back to normal. However, China's decision to close its consulate in Izmir, supposedly a gateway of China's One Belt One Road Initiative to Europe, seems to concern Turkish officials. China also issued a travel warning for its citizens traveling to Turkey and recently arrested four Turkish businessmen on charges of tax evasion. While the situation continues to play out, the articles show how this is one area where the governments of Turkey and China diverge. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: "Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü Hami Aksoy'un Uygur Türklerine Yönelik Ağır İnsan Hakları İhlalleri ve Halk Ozanı Abdurrehim Heyit'in Vefatı Hakkındaki Soruya Cevabı (The response of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a question regarding gross human rights violation perpetrated against Uighur Turks and the death of folk poet Abdurrehim Heyit)," [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-06_-uygur-turklerine-yonelik-agir-insan-haklari-ihlalleri-ve-abdurrehim-heyit-in-vefati-hk.tr.mfa), 9 February 2019. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-06_-uygur-turklerine-yonelik-agir-insan-haklari-ihlalleri-ve-abdurrehim-heyit-in-vefati-hk.tr.mfa

The reintroduction of internment camps in the 21st century and the policy of systematic assimilation against the Uighur Turks carried out by the authorities of China is a great shame for humanity.

We expressed our views on the tragedy in the Xinjiang region to the Chinese authorities at all levels... We expect this legitimate response to be taken into account by the Chinese authorities.

On this occasion, we invite the Chinese authorities to respect the fundamental human rights of Uighur Turks and to close the internment camps

Source: Sami Kohen, "Çin ile sorun (Problem with China)," *Milliyet*, 12 February 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/cin-ile-sorun-2826201/>

A statement by the Turkish Foreign Ministry last Saturday revealed an unexpected discrepancy with China...

Ankara's outburst regarding Abdurrehim Heyit's fate... has created a problem in Turkish-Chinese relations that had been going very well.

...It is clear that this is related to domestic politics as well as to the principle stance.

Source: Semih Idiz, "Will Uighurs upend Turkey-China relations?" *Al-Monitor*, 22 February 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/turkey-unexpected-outburst-against-china-uighurs.html>

Turkey's scorching condemnation of China on Feb. 9 over the treatment of the Turkic Uighur minority in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region caught many... by surprise...

...questions have been raised about the timing of Ankara's harsh statement and the true reasons behind it...

Beijing responded immediately by uploading a video of Heyit showing him to be alive...

The Chinese Embassy in Ankara responded officially to Aksoy on Feb. 11 with a statement calling the allegations regarding Heyit's death and the treatment of Uighurs "groundless and distorted."...

...the video represents an embarrassment for Ankara, which appears now to have jumped the gun, as noted by Murat Bardakci... Bardakci called Aksoy's statement on Heyit's alleged death a "major diplomatic gaffe, made hastily on the basis of hearsay over social media, and without any effort to verify the facts."

...government spokesman Omer Celik chose his words carefully to avoid escalating the situation.

Celik also asserted "Ankara's respect for China's territorial integrity" and for "Beijing's need to provide for its security."...

The shared concern is that this latest and unexpected outburst against China may turn out to be a "one-shot affair" because it has more to do with Turkey's local elections in March than the plight of the Uighurs...

Erdogan needs a strong turnout for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the March elections to further consolidate his hold on power. Many see Ankara's latest attack on China as an attempt to please the AKP's religious and nationalist bases.

Despite the recent heated exchanges between Ankara and Beijing, the general expectation is that ties will return to the status quo in light of broader interests that neither side can afford to endanger.



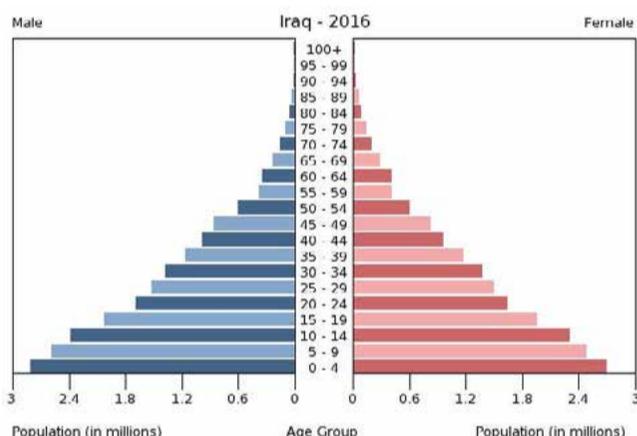
Demographic Challenges in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq

OE Watch Commentary: Despite a regional decline in growth rates over the past five years, growing populations continue to be a major challenge in several Arab countries. In Egypt, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has been warning about it for over a year, and has begun describing it as one of Egypt's two main challenges of the moment (terrorism is the other). The latest Egyptian government estimates, released in March 2019 and noted in the accompanying excerpt from *al-Youm al-Sabaa*, foresee the country's population rising to approximately 120 million in 2030, nearly double what it was in the early 1990s. Because the vast majority of the population (around 95 percent) is concentrated along the narrow Nile River valley and its delta, continued high growth rates carry additional challenges with regard to water and land management. The Egyptian government is now embarking on a campaign to convince prospective parents dreaming of large families that "Two is Enough." The highest fertility rates are in rural and semi-rural areas, where large-family traditions and religious conservatism make family planning a difficult sell.

“...the population of Egypt will reach 119.753 million by 2030...”

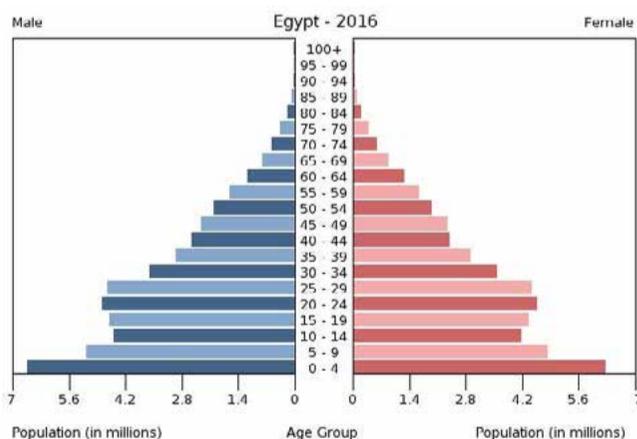
In Jordan, home to one of the region's best-educated populations, government-led family planning campaigns have met with similar resistance, as the accompanying excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadid* notes. Nonetheless, Jordan's fertility rate has dropped from 3.5 to 2.7 over the past five years. This leveling, though, has been offset by a massive influx of Syrian refugees, estimated to be around 1.3 million. Jordan's population is now thought to be slightly over 10 million, nearly double what it was in 2000. Fertility rates are higher among Syrian refugees than the rest of the population, and the article lists several projections of Syrian refugee numbers in the future. The highest estimate, which assumes that the refugees do not return home, forecasts their numbers rising to 2.7 million by 2040.

Iraq, as the third accompanying excerpt notes, has one of the world's highest population growth rates. The median Iraqi is 20 years old (by comparison the median age in the United States is 38) and the average Iraqi mother bears 4.2 children, highest in the Arab world. According to the article, starting in 2023 "Iraq will annually release one million unqualified graduates into the overcrowded labor market." Examining the country's 2019 budget, the article's author, an Iraqi intellectual, paints a dire picture: "Iraq is practically draining its financial capabilities and reserves with the debt system amid population growth, pressure on services, security threats, a widening corruption network and inflation." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Iraq Population Pyramid.

Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>, Public Domain.



Egypt Population Pyramid.

Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>, Public Domain.

Source:

الإحصاء: توقعات بوصول سكان مصر لـ 119.7 مليون نسمة عام 2030

Heba Hossam. "CAPMAS: Egyptian Population Expected to reach 119.7 million in 2030," *al-Youm al-Sabaa*, 5 March 2019. <https://goo.gl/m8TqYB>

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) predicted that the population of Egypt will reach 119.753 million by 2030, according to the mid-range projection based on the population of mid-2017 totaling 95.455 million. It expects that the population will grow to 153.688 million by 2052.

Source:

حلم تنظيم الأسرة في الأردن

Anwar al-Zaydat. "The Dream of Family Planning in Jordan," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 24 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/4zLXPD>

Jordan's population grew by 256,000 in 2018, with a population growth rate of 5.3 per cent, according to the Statistical Yearbook 2018 issued by the Department of Statistics, bringing the total population (estimated) to 10 million and 309,000.

Since the establishment of the Higher Population Council in Jordan in 2002, successive governments have been seeking to disseminate plans and ideas of family planning, in light of the population growth that is not compatible with economic growth, in parallel with the focus on family health issues. However, these efforts collided with the ideas of some rejectionist groups...

According to the Population and Family Health Survey of 2017-2018, the total fertility rate in the 15-49 age group declined from 3.5 children per woman in 2012 to 2.7 children in 2017 - 2018... There is a clear impact of refugees on the population in terms of numbers and fertility, as the fertility rate of Syrian refugees is of 4 children... The High Population Council expects that the number of Syrian refugees in the country to reach 2.7 million by 2040 if the population growth rate of the Syrians stabilizes at 2.9% in the next 22 years and if the refugees do not return. This is one of 6 projections made by the council in a document issued regarding refugees.

Source:

اقتصاد العراق 2019: موارد مستنزفة لمستقبل غامض

Safa Khalaf. "Iraqi Economy in 2019: Resource Depletion for an Unclear Future!" *al-Safir*, 18 February 2019. <https://goo.gl/CbyNZM>

Under the weight of indebtedness and the decline in growth and the dependence on a single source of national income (oil), Iraq is practically draining its financial capabilities and reserves with the debt system amid population growth, pressure on services, security threats, a widening corruption network and inflation... Iraq's population growth is almost the highest in the world today with one million births a year. Starting in 2023, Iraq will annually release one million unqualified graduates into the overcrowded labor market...



Burundi Opposes Reductions of Its AMISOM Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past eleven years, despite having deployed nearly 22,000 troops from five countries, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) still has not fully subdued al Shabaab. While true that the terrorist group has lost ground and has been pushed out of Mogadishu, it still controls significant amounts of territory and has conducted attacks in the capital (often involving suicide bombers), which attest to its ability to still conduct operations. Against this backdrop of AMISOM struggling to defeat al Shabaab, or at least attempting to prepare the Somali National Army to continue the fight, the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* discusses the politics and potential perils of AMISOM's withdrawal from Somalia.

Approximately one quarter of AMISOM's strength is provided by the Burundi contingent, whose 5,400 soldiers are exceeded only by Uganda's 6,200. Last December, the African Union Peace Support Operations Division decided that the February 2019 round of cuts, consisting of 1,000 soldiers, would come solely from the Burundian forces, causing Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza to complain that his country was being unfairly targeted, and that any drawdown should be spread proportionately across all troop-contributing countries. The article mentions many believe President Nkurunziza's opposition to the substantial cuts his forces would bear is because his impoverished country presently makes \$72 million a year for contributing soldiers.

Two reasons are given for the force reduction being solely from the Burundian contingent, although it is possible there are other explanations Burundi was targeted. First is that AMISOM is struggling in part because it does not have enough equipment, and because the Burundi contingent had relatively low levels of equipment, it was the most vulnerable to be cut. The second reason for the cut is the EU, which funds a large part of AMISOM, was getting back at Burundi for its poor human rights record.

Whatever the reason for this drawdown being only from Burundi, the larger picture is that many are worried a decrease in boots on the ground from any AMISOM contingent, with al Shabaab not defeated, could have catastrophic consequences for Somalia. With questions regarding the ability of present day Somali forces to completely take over the defense of their own country, many are encouraging AMISOM to rethink its withdrawal timetable. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“A hasty withdrawal is, however, fraught with risk for what has been achieved so far because Al Shabaab is in hibernation; it is not dead.”

Source: “Don't cut and run; Al Shabaab isn't dead,” *The East African*, 2 March 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/oped/editorial/Amisom-withdrawal-Al-Shabaab-not-dead/434752-5006550-i7ssub/index.html>

One of the reasons Amisom has given for its failure to rout Al Shabaab is that the peacekeepers have been short of “force multipliers” – military parlance for equipment such as attack helicopters and other offensive weapons that would enhance their ability to take the fight to the enemy. This is because the EU and other donors have been unwilling to take on the additional cost.

A hasty withdrawal is, however, fraught with risk for what has been achieved so far because Al Shabaab is in hibernation; it is not dead.

Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza has not hidden his feeling that the European Union, a key sponsor of Amisom, was unfairly targeting his country.



Burundian soldiers marching during an awards ceremony at the former Somali Military Academy in Mogadishu. Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza opposes AMISOM's intended reduction of 1,000 soldiers from the Burundi contingent.

Source: AMISOM/FLICKR/Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2016_28_Burundi_Rotation-4_\(27274040756\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2016_28_Burundi_Rotation-4_(27274040756).jpg), Public Domain



Uganda Threatens to Quit AMISOM over Potential Force Reductions

OE Watch Commentary: First to threaten a pullout of his country's troops from the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) over decreased funding was President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi. Now, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* notes, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda is sounding a similar alarm... no Ugandan troops if it is forced to scale down from the over 6,000 it presently has in Somalia.

While the article does not mention it, AMISOM receives money from several sources, including the UN and EU. However, that funding has been both irregular and declining, and in 2017 the UN Security Council, in Resolution 2372, proposed a phased drawdown of the peacekeepers, with the final ones leaving by 2020.

Museveni, whose country supplies the largest number of troops to AMISOM, has claimed he will withdraw all of them if even just one Ugandan soldier is cut from the rolls. He also claims that the UN Security Council's move was a "total lack of seriousness" with regards to flushing out al Shabaab, and indeed, Uganda and other troop-contributing countries have called for an increase in peacekeepers, not a decrease.

With al Shabaab frequently taking over territory vacated by AMISOM troops, and with a great deal of uncertainty as to whether the Somali National Army will be ready to assume complete or near complete responsibility for their country's defense by 2020, the question has arisen as to whether or not AMISOM will have a change of heart regarding its proposed troop reductions, or at least the timetable to do so. For now, however, AMISOM plans to continue with its drawdown, and as the article notes, should Uganda and Burundi pull out even earlier than 2020, it would serve as an added advantage for al Shabaab to rebuild, recruit and restructure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“President Yoweri Museveni (of Uganda) has threatened to withdraw his country's forces from the peacekeeping mission in Somalia if the United Nations insists on reducing the number of troops on the mission...”



Uganda Contingent Commander Brig. Sam Kavuma greets Ugandan soldiers during a 2015 ceremony to receive new troops as they rotate into Somalia. Presently Uganda has the largest contingent of soldiers in AMISOM.

Source: AMISOM/FLICKR/Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015_06_17_AMISOM_UPDF_Rotation-9_\(18268451464\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015_06_17_AMISOM_UPDF_Rotation-9_(18268451464).jpg), Public Domain.

Source: Jonathan Kamoga, "Uganda joins chorus to quit Amisom over cuts," *The East African*, 10 March 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Uganda-joins-chorus-to-quit-Amisom-over-cuts/4552908-5016974-1qyn4sz/index.html>

President Yoweri Museveni has threatened to withdraw his country's forces from the peacekeeping mission in Somalia if the United Nations insists on reducing the number of troops on the mission.

“Because the numbers are small, we are only in urban centres and streets while Al Shabaab is taking over the countryside,” he said.

Burundi's threat was triggered by an announcement by the AU that it would cut 1,000 troops by February 28, 2019, in line with the new Amisom operations blueprint known as the Concept of Operations (ConOps). Under ConOps, some operating bases are to be reconfigured and others closed as troop numbers fall.

Mr Museveni, while addressing a high-level meeting of ministers in charge of refugees in the Great Lakes Region in Kampala on Thursday, said the Security Council's move was a “total lack of seriousness” to the task of flushing Al Shabaab out.



Malian Militant's Proof-of-Life Video Overturns French Claims

OE Watch Commentary: On 12 March, the French language publication *Jeune Afrique* published the accompanying excerpted article confirming claims from France and Mali that one of the most prominent jihadist leaders in Mali, Amadou Kufa, is, in fact, not dead despite previous reports. According to the article, France had originally declared him dead after a night raid in November 2018. It was considered significant because 30 fighters were reportedly with him and he was second to only Tuareg jihadist leader, Iyad ag Ghaly; both of them are loyal to al-Qaeda. Thus, it was expected that his death would weaken the group militarily and demoralize his fighters.

However, according to the article, Kufa looked perfectly healthy in a new propaganda video, undermining claims that he was even injured. The article noted that France assessed the video and determined it was “likely” Kufa in the video. This admission came also after assurances by a Malian General that Kufa died of his injuries.

Despite the setback for France and Mali that Kufa is still alive and apparently well, the article also notes that Yahya Abu al-Hammam, another major al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader, was killed in Mali in February. A Tunisian al-Qaeda leader, Abu Iyad al-Tunisi, was killed at around the same time and around the same city, Timbuktu, as Yahya Abu al-Hammam. Therefore, there appears to be an increase in intelligence gathering about jihadist hideouts in Mali, allowing for successful counter-terrorism operations. This article nevertheless demonstrates that Kufa remains elusive and both France and Mali consider it important to ensure that he is captured or killed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“It is likely that the radical Fulani preacher Amadou Kufa, an important jihadist leader is still alive...”

Source: “Mali : ‘vraisemblable’ que le chef jihadiste Amadou Kufa soit encore en vie, selon l’état-major français (Mali: ‘probable’ that jihadist leader Amadou Kufa is still alive, according to French staff),” *Jeune Afrique*, 12 March 2019. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/747881/politique/mali-vraisemblable-que-le-chef-jihadiste-koufa-soit-encore-en-vie-selon-letat-major-francais/>

It is likely that the radical Fulani preacher Amadou Kufa, an important jihadist leader, is still alive, while Bamako and Paris said he was dead since late November, according to French staff. On November 23, France and Mali announced the death in a French military operation of Amadou Kufa and about thirty members of his group, which belongs to the jihadist alliance “Group of support to Islam and to Muslims” (JNIM), led by the Malian Touareg Iyad Ag Ghaly. But a man presented as Amadou Kufa recently appeared in a video about which the Malian and French authorities examined its authenticity. According to the conclusions of Paris, “it is likely that it is him” and so he is still alive, said the spokesman of the French General Staff, Colonel Patrik Steiger.

Multinational Joint Task Force Gains Ground against Boko Haram

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 March, the accompanying excerpted French-language article on *koaci.com* highlighted the sites of the latest Boko Haram battles in the Lake Chad region. The most significant detail in the article was that the Multinational Joint Force (known by the acronym “FMM” in French and “MNJTF” in English) killed more than 40 Boko Haram members in a roughly three-day period before the article was published. Less than three months earlier, the MNJTF base in Baga, Borno was overrun by Boko Haram, so this appears to represent a turnaround for the MNJTF. An obvious boost to the war effort against Boko Haram was also the entrance of around 500 Chadian troops into Boko Haram’s area of operations in Borno State, Nigeria to combat the group.

As the article mentions, not all of the ongoing fighting is in Nigeria, as 27 of the Boko Haram members killed were in Gueskerou, southeastern Niger, where they attacked a military base of Niger and were repelled by the MNJTF. The article also mentions 23 Boko Haram members being killed and one being captured in Abadam, Nigeria, which straddles the border with Niger.

The article acknowledges Boko Haram has been weakened by the MNJTF, whose troops hail from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, but the group continues to carry out attacks in Nigeria and Niger on a regular basis. Amid recent reports of infighting and internal dissent among the leaders of Boko Haram, the current phase of the counter-insurgency may nevertheless create an opportunity to further cause the group to weaken from without and within. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Though weakened by a multinational force that includes troops from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin, the Islamists in Boko Haram still continue to carry out deadly attacks in northeastern Nigeria and Niger on a regular basis.”

Source: “Lac Tchad, 40 Boko Haram abattus par la force multinationale (Lake Chad, 40 Boko Haram shot by multinational force),” *koaci.com*, 11 March 2019. <http://koaci.com/niger-tchad-boko-haram-abattus-force-multinationale-128692.html>

40 members of Boko Haram have been neutralized by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting the Nigerian Islamist sect in the Lake Chad Basin since Friday. Multinational force positions were targeted by Islamists from Boko Haram in Gueskerou, Niger, resulting in clashes. In a statement, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) announced that it had killed at least 27 terrorists. New fighting took place around Abadam, Nigeria where 23 Islamists were shot dead. A jihadist was captured. Though Weakened by a multinational force that includes troops from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin, the Islamists in Boko Haram still continue to carry out deadly attacks in northeastern Nigeria and Niger on a regular basis.



Factors Giving Rise to Militant Extremism in the Sahel

OE Watch Commentary: In looking at West Africa, two regions may both suffer from underdevelopment, marginalization, and inequality, but whereas one may see the rise of militant extremists, the other may not. Examining this seeming paradox, the accompanying excerpted article from the *IRIN* news agency, itself a synthesis based on 19 other articles, reveals several additional factors that must be considered when not only trying to determine whether or not there will be militant extremism, but also, should that militancy come to be, what methods are most effective at countering it.

While militancy may arise among the poorly educated members of a community who are economically disenfranchised, it can also occur among the literate, wealthy individuals of a society. Thus, as the article describes, there are multiple paths to militant extremism, with an individual's decision to join fundamentally an emotional one, albeit frequently within a context of limited options. Peer pressure, community identity, and the impact of personal trauma and humiliation – such as may occur at the hands of security forces – all play significant roles in influencing that choice.

Interestingly, although women are often depicted as coerced, and indeed an unknown number are, there are also those who serve as active members of violent militant groups. As the article notes, not all women are “just wives or cannon fodder.”

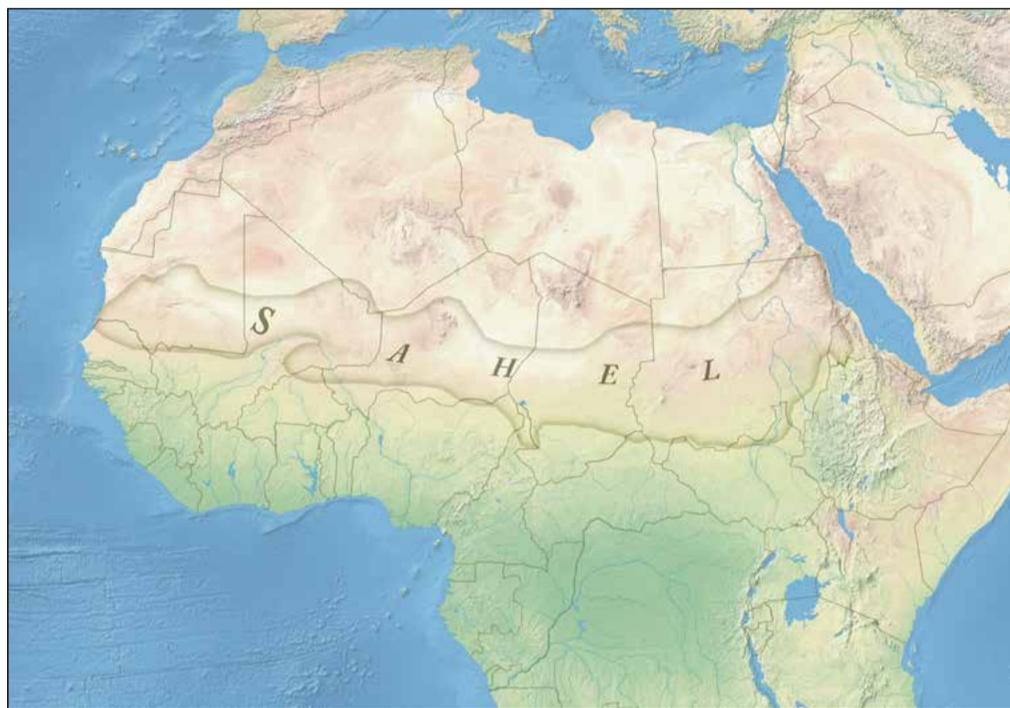
The article also states that there is a tendency to minimize the role of ideology in favor of more rational explanations such as poverty and underdevelopment. However, that is a mistake, for the power of faith is quite significant. Martyrdom, even though many jihadists only have a relatively limited knowledge of their religion, still exerts a strong pull. It should also be remembered that certain areas, such as rural northeastern Nigeria where Boko Haram has been centered, are very conservative, and the idea that Westernization, with its liberal ways, is evil can readily take root.

To counter this militancy, government forces often adopt tactics that are counterproductive, using blunt force and collective punishment against villagers. The result is that these frequently fuel, rather than stop, the rise of militant extremism. Other interventions, such as attempting to reintegrate former rebel fighters back into society, often suffer from poor implementation, such as not providing the community enough notice and support to allow the program to be successful.

Perhaps the article's most striking finding is that there is little evidence that providing aid reduces either the likelihood of terrorism or of people joining extremist causes. Thus, until more research is done, the path forward with regards to using aid to reduce terrorism is uncertain.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“There is little to suggest that providing aid reduces the incidence of terrorism or the likelihood of people joining jihadist causes.”



Map illustrating the Sahel region of Africa.

Source: Munion [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Sahel.png.

Source: Obo Anyadike, “Countering Militancy in the Sahel,” *IRIN*, March 2019. <https://www.irinnews.org/in-depth/countering-militancy-sahel>

Violent jihadism continues to gain ground in West Africa, ramping up humanitarian needs in a region where 18.5 million people already require aid.

There is no consensus on what violent extremism is, much less how to combat it. Those working in the countering/preventing violent extremism industry, also known as P/CVE, believe it is distinct from the “hard” militarized approach of counter-terrorism – and some aid agencies have been happy to take P/CVE money as part of their “human development” programming.

Evidence is scarce that P/CVE approaches have successfully reduced extremism. There is little to suggest that providing aid reduces the incidence of terrorism or the likelihood of people joining jihadist causes.

And there is also a gender dimension that is rarely explored. We seem to automatically regard female jihadists as somehow coerced. But women are also active members of insurgent movements, not just wives or cannon fodder.



Benin Worries Terrorism May Be Imported from Its Neighbors

OE Watch Commentary: Because of its neighbors, the small West African nation of Benin is potentially facing big problems. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* explains, three of the four countries it abuts - Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso - harbor violent extremists. With porous borders as well as endemic poverty, it is feared that Benin could also become home to terrorist groups.

Cross-border ethnic and family ties, as the article describes, result in many communities viewing the border in their region not as a barrier but instead a territorial continuum, to be readily and easily crossed to see relatives and friends as well as conduct trade. Such a situation makes it difficult for Benin to draw “hard” borders and enforce them. Additionally, based on observations of other countries, it is known that violent extremists tend to settle in areas like this. With many of Benin’s border areas being both relatively ungoverned and poor, it is feared these could serve as a welcome invitation to terrorist groups.

Compounding the situation even further is the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex Benin shares with Burkina Faso and Niger. Extremist groups have used parts of this large forest and wildlife preserve as fallback bases as well as a place to earn money through poaching.

Benin’s armed forces have been preparing for the potential threat of terrorist groups entering their country. In December 2018, in the northern town of Ségbana, 1,050 members of the army, air force, and navy conducted an anti-terrorism operation called Ma Kon-Hin. It ended with the military building latrines and providing health care for the local populace. Additionally, in January of this year, the country hosted a meeting with several other West African nations to discuss their common security challenges.

The presence of risk factors – porous borders, ungoverned spaces, poverty, and marginalized people – do not, as the article relates, definitely mean extremist groups in neighboring countries will gain a foothold in Benin. However, because there is concern they may try, Benin is looking for ways to be less inviting as well as to respond forcibly should it need to do so. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Surrounded by countries grappling with violent extremism, Benin needs to reduce its vulnerabilities at community level.”



Beninese soldiers, such as the ones pictured here training, are being called upon to help prevent terrorist groups from neighboring countries establish themselves in Benin.

Source: Jad Sleiman, U.S. Marine Corps/Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin_Armed_Forces#/media/File:Beninese_Army_soldiers_taking_part_in_live_fire_exercise_at_Bemb%C3%A8r%C3%A8k%C3%A8_2009-06-16.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: Michael Matongbada, “Can Benin Protect Itself from terrorism in the Region,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 8 Mar 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-benin-protect-itself-from-terrorism-in-the-region>

Surrounded by countries grappling with violent extremism, Benin needs to reduce its vulnerabilities at community level.

In January this year, Benin hosted the fourth meeting of the Accra Initiative in Cotonou. The initiative enables participating countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo – to discuss common security challenges and responses. Under the theme ‘sharing information as a weapon’, the meeting was attended by ministers and security and intelligence officials from these countries, as well as Mali and Niger.

Actions to prevent extremist threats in Benin should consider these kinds of local conflicts, particularly those related to the management of land resources and national parks. Mediation or support to people who feel victimized should be offered, and community consultations carried out.



Boko Haram Convoy Attack Undermines Election

OE Watch Commentary: On 23 February Nigeria held presidential elections that were considered successful, notwithstanding a one-week postponement, and some allegations of misconduct in the administering of the elections. While Muhammadu Buhari won the election, his party's governor in Borno State, Kashim Shettima, was embroiled in controversy after the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-loyal faction of Boko Haram attacked his convoy near Maiduguri in the week before the election. According to the accompanying excerpted article from Nigeria's *The Guardian*, the attack brought to light significant flaws in the management of security in the region.

Based on interviews with survivors, the article found the convoy included around 100 vehicles, but only the latter half of the convoy was targeted; the governor himself was in the front half of the convoy so he was not directly affected by the attack. Those attacked, however, included security officers, politicians and their family members, the press and some civilians. One of the problems the convoy faced, according to the article, was that the road was not smooth, which prevented the vehicles from a quick escape. Moreover, sand dunes surrounded the road, which made it difficult to drive away once the convoy came under attack. There were also some issues with permissions because the convoy generally would not travel that late at night, but under pressure from the governor the military fatefully let it pass checkpoints.

The article also indicates that casualties were greater than the government initially admitted. Several civilian vigilantes and district heads, for example, were killed while dozens of other members of the convoy are suspected of having been kidnapped. A number of vehicles were also stolen and destroyed. Survivors had to walk a long distance to a nearby military base for safety until they could return to Maiduguri. The attack therefore, clearly put a stain on an otherwise imperfect but passable election season and demonstrated that key roads in northeastern Nigeria remain under threat from the militants.

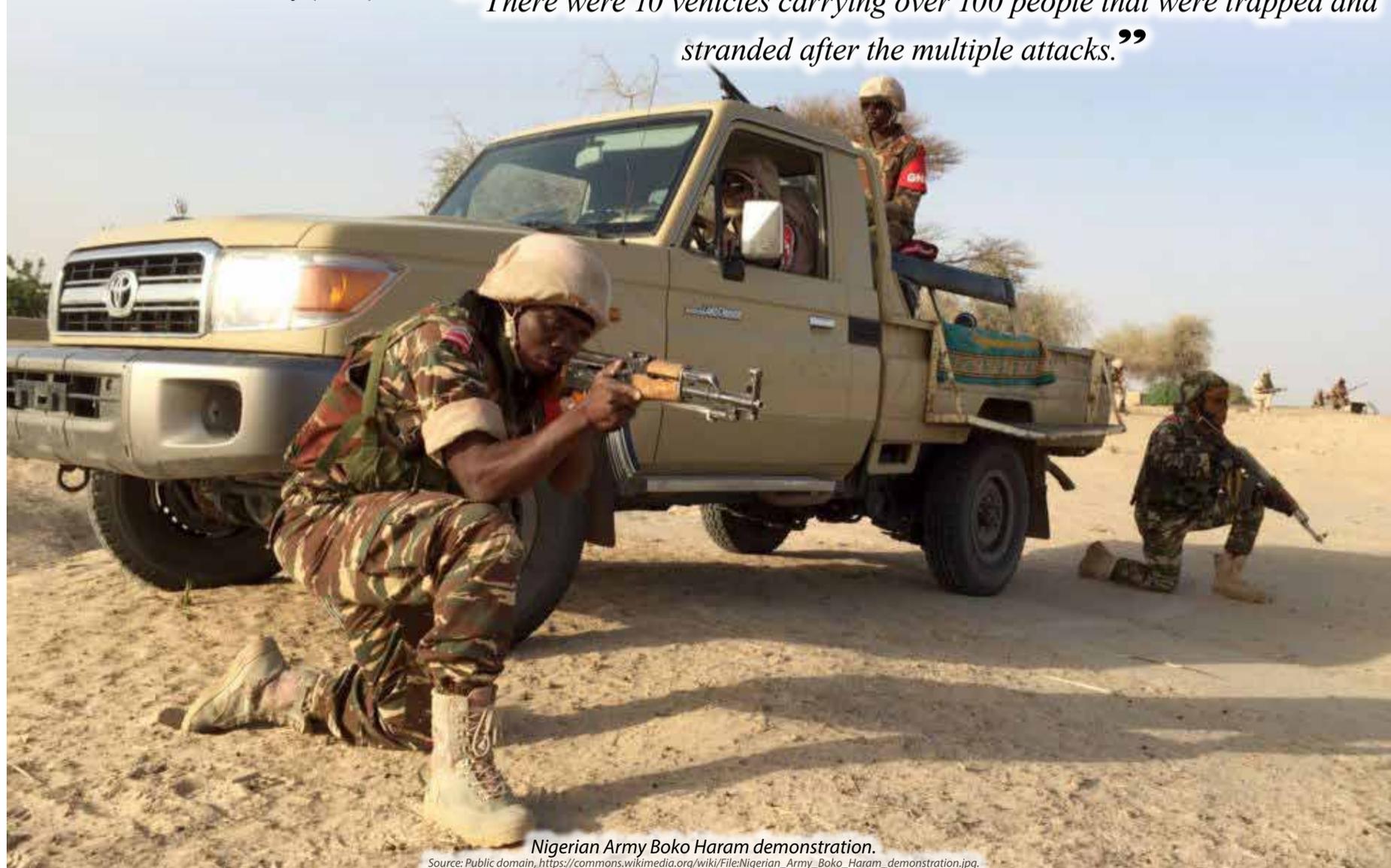
End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

“There were 10 vehicles carrying over 100 people that were trapped and stranded after the multiple attacks.”

Source: “Survivors narrate ordeal after Boko Haram attacked Shettima’s convoy,” *The Guardian*, 15 February 2019. <https://guardian.ng/news/survivors-narrate-ordeal-after-boko-haram-attacked-shettimas-convoy/>

Boko Haram terrorists attacked the convoy of Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State, killing four persons and abducting dozens of people along Dikwa-Ngala road at about 6:35p.m. The governor was in the convoy of about 100 vehicles, when the insurgents attacked the second half of vehicles heading to Gambouru-Ngala for a campaign rally. The second batch, numbering over 50, were conveying security personnel, politicians, women and top government officials, before insurgents struck at Logoma village. As the travelers scamped for safety, eight vehicles were also seized by the insurgents, along with the abduction of over three dozens into the bush.

Muhammadu Abubakar, another survivor, told The Guardian that a Civilian JTF member was shot in the head, including a soldier and three civilians. A Gajibo military source also said, “There were 10 vehicles carrying over 100 people that were trapped and stranded after the multiple attacks,” adding that the security situation was brought under control up to the time the governor returned to Maiduguri.



Nigerian Army Boko Haram demonstration.

Source: Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerian_Army_Boko_Haram_demonstration.jpg.



Somalia and Egypt Agree to Cooperate on Security

OE Watch Commentary: With concerns over shared threats, Egypt and Somalia, as the accompanying excerpted article from the Somalia news site *Shabelle Media* relates, signed a memorandum of understanding on 1 March to help strengthen security cooperation between them; their main goal being to weaken terrorist groups that threaten both nations. Besides the two countries exchanging intelligence information, Egypt will also share its counterterrorism expertise with Somalia as well as help train Somali security personnel. Additionally, as part of Egypt's overall strategy for the region, it will increase its economic cooperation with Somalia to increase the latter's stability.

A driving force behind this cooperation is concern, particularly on Egypt's part, that unrest in the Horn of Africa could threaten ships wishing to navigate through the Gulf of Aden and into or from the Red Sea. This in turn would adversely impact the Suez Canal. As Egypt depends on the canal for a significant amount of revenue, any potential to disrupt shipping through it is a major worry for Cairo.

Egypt already has a naval presence near the Bab el Mandeb Strait, which is the narrow passageway between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula, and Djibouti and Eritrea, both situated in the Horn of Africa. Additionally, it has agreed with Sudan, whose long coast forms a significant portion of the Red Sea's western bank, to increase maritime cooperation. Thus, the memorandum of understanding with Somalia, which borders the Gulf of Aden, is a continuation of Egypt's intent to protect Red Sea shipping. Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry went so far as to say "Somalia's security is an essential part of Egypt's national security."

Both countries are presently battling terrorists. Somalia is struggling with al Shabaab, while Egypt is fighting the Islamic State and al-Qaeda- aligned groups. There is an additional concern that terrorists fleeing Syria could find their way to Africa, compounding counterterrorism efforts. Egypt presently holds the rotating presidency of the African Union, and is pledging to lead the continent to greater stability. Its memorandum of understanding with Somalia appears to be one step in helping it to meet that pledge. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Somalia's security is an essential part of Egypt's national security.”

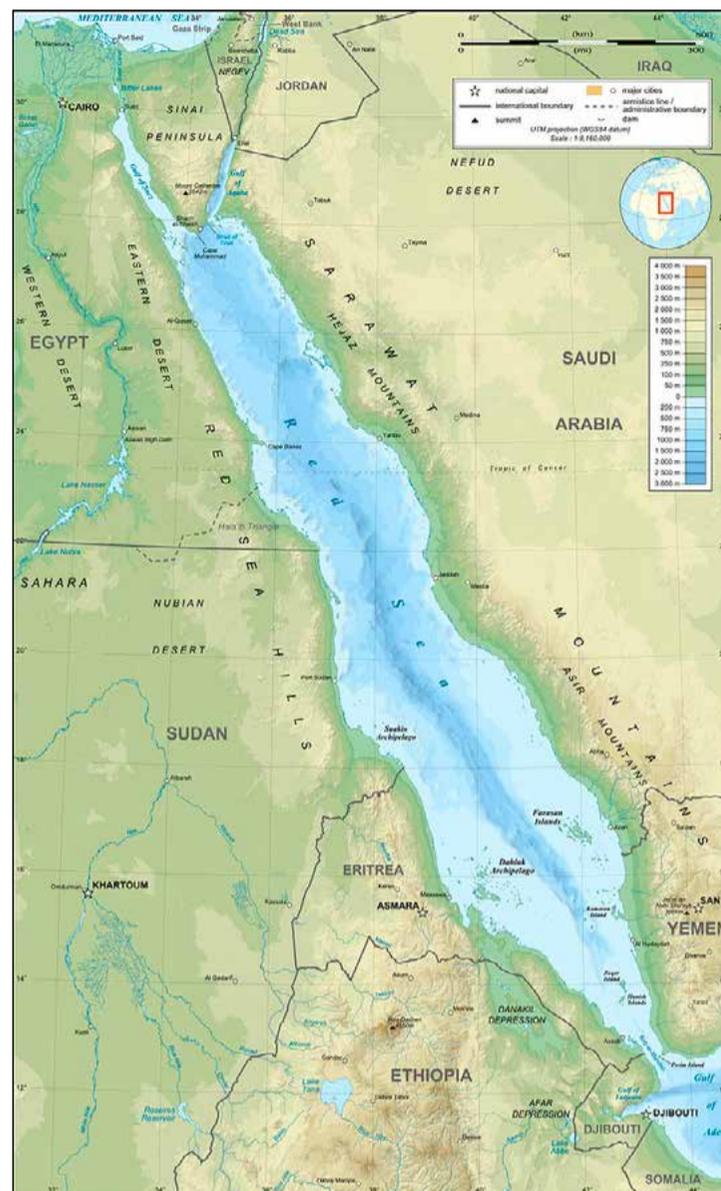
Source: “Egypt, Somalia bolster security coordination amid Suez Canal fears,” *Shabelle Media Network*, 10 March 2019. <https://radioshabelle.com/egypt-somalia-bolster-security-coordination-amid-suez-canal-fears/>

Egypt, Shoukry said, would continue to back the Somali economy and push development in the Horn of Africa country. “Somalia's security is an essential part of Egypt's national security,” he said.

There is concern that unrest in the Horn of Africa could threaten navigation in the southern entrance of the Red Sea, possibly affecting access to Egypt's Suez Canal.

Egypt's concern, security analysts say, is that terrorist groups in other African countries, including Somalia and Nigeria, will join militants in North Africa, particularly Libya, in a broad strategy to foment unrest in Africa.

“Al-Shabab has already started staging attacks in Somalia's neighboring countries,” Okasha said. “Egyptian authorities are closely monitoring these developments.”



Trouble off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden, could adversely impact Suez Canal traffic.

Source: Eric Gaba/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red_Sea_topographic_map-en.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Conflict and Oil Intertwined in Somalia

OE Watch Commentary: Amidst the many difficulties plaguing Somalia, including a government struggling to maintain national unity and terrorist attacks carried out by al Shabaab, comes a finding that could either be an opportunity for the country to lift itself up from where it is mired or yet one more problem that will further complicate the nation's plight. As the accompanying excerpted article from South Africa's *Institute for Security Studies* points out, that finding is oil, or in the words of the Norwegian seismic company Spectrum Geo exploring off the coast, "the scent of oil."

It appears there are significant gas deposits off the East African coast, and indeed Mozambique and Tanzania are searching for markets for their extensive reserves. Somalia also has large gas deposits, but particularly notable for the geologists is the likelihood that it also has oil. Should the geologists be right, and the oil fields developed, the revenue could fund schools, hospitals, road construction, and other projects that could help lift large numbers of Somalis out of poverty. However, there is also the "resource curse," known to so many other resource-rich African nations, where corrupt government officials and elites squander the money for themselves. With Somalia noted for its corruption and lack of transparency, it is feared a sudden influx of petro funds could further undermine the country's fragile democracy as well as aggravate problems with neighboring countries.

Already there are tensions with Somalia's southern neighbor, Kenya, which accuses Somalia of attempting to sell four offshore oil blocks whose ownership is contested. Somalia claims it was simply a marketing exercise, and that it is awaiting a decision from the International Court of Justice on whether the territory falls within Somali or Kenyan borders. While the competing claims may be settled on whether the court follows Article 15 of the 1982 Convention of the Law of the Sea, which, briefly, sets the maritime boundaries as being perpendicular from the point where the landward boundary of adjacent countries meets the coast, the issue is complicated by arguments over the colonial-era boundaries between the two.

There is yet another complication... Kenya is supplying troops to AMISOM to combat al Shabaab. While some Somalis accuse Kenya of being in Somalia for its own interests, including economic ones, Kenya has suffered heavy casualties since it invaded Somalia in 2011 in response to al Shabaab killing tourists at a Kenyan beach resort on the Somali border. Thus, Kenya and Somalia have security and economic relationships, albeit sometimes quite fraught. In the long run, oil may yet help Somalia. However, it has yet to be extracted from the ground and already there are arguments over it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

"Somalia has enough problems as it is. Now the resource curse, so fatal to many other African countries, appears to be raising its ugly head."



A Kenyan soldier with AMISOM examines a car destroyed by a Kenyan Air Force missile strike during an operation to dislodge al Shabaab from Kismayo, Somalia. While Kenyan soldiers serve in Somalia, the two countries are arguing over potential oil discoveries off the East African coast. Source: MISOM/Wikimedia Commons/Flickr, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_Kismayo_Advance_25_\(8049966250\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_Kismayo_Advance_25_(8049966250).jpg), Public Domain.

Source: Peter Fabricius, "Is the Scent of Oil a Solution for Somalia," *Institute for Security Studies*, 1 March 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-the-scent-of-oil-a-solution-for-somalia>

Kenya recalled its ambassador and expelled Somalia's. Kenya's foreign affairs cabinet secretary Monica Juma told journalists that Somalia was 'deliberately misleading' prospective investors by offering to sell four offshore oil blocks in an area of the sea that was subject to court proceedings to resolve an ownership dispute between the two countries.

Kenya seems keener on settling the dispute bilaterally than through the ICJ.

Somalia has enough problems as it is. Now the resource curse, so fatal to many other African countries, appears to be raising its ugly head. On the military front, Mogadishu isn't winning the war against al-Shabaab. And now the African Union (AU) has reluctantly decided to downsize the AU Mission in Somalia, its force that has prevented al-Shabaab from overrunning the country.



What Role for Brazil's Armed Forces?

OE Watch Commentary: The Brazilian armed forces have been scrutinized in the press lately. It is well known that President Bolsonaro, a former junior officer in the army, is fully supportive of a strong military and has made numerous statements throughout his history as a politician, including a recent speech he gave to navy personnel at their base in Rio where he stated that “democracy and freedom, only exist when their respective Armed Forces so wants or affirms,” as recounted in the accompanying excerpted article from *O Globo*.

The reaction of indignation in various Brazilian media to Bolsonaro's statement is partially a residue effect of the former military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964-1985. There are few Brazilians that recall this period with fondness. It was a time of great stress on Brazil, democratic norms were under siege and human rights violated—people simply disappeared and many were tortured including then political activist, and former Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff. Numerous congressmen disparaged Bolsonaro's statement and some called for denunciation and clarification as the *O Globo* article also notes.

Today, the armed forces are not the same institutions they were in 1964, nor is Brazil the same country. Many in the military are keenly aware of the armed forces' negative historical legacy and if anything, many in Brazil believe that the army would restrict itself to barracks, rather than get deeply involved again in politics. In another *O Globo* article the same day, military general Otávio Rêgo Barros, now working in the new government, defended the role of the military in Brazil's civil society recalling the teachings of political scientist Samuel Huntington.

This battle over the military's place in the new government has been brewing. In late November 2018 the Brazilian newspaper *Correio Braziliense* featured a lengthy and instructive interview with former career soldier and then future Defense Minister, General Fernando Azevedo e Silva, outlining what the relationship between the military and the new government would be. The interview may have been a response to an interview published only days earlier by Chief of the Army, General Eduardo Villas Bôas, where he claimed that Bolsonaro “does not represent the return of the military to politics, but there is a risk of politicization of the barracks.”

Whatever the future, the role of the military in modern Brazil is not likely to be independent of the current security situation. The country is dealing with chronic organized crime, corruption at the highest levels, a porous border and smuggling of every kind from non-state actors, like narco-traffickers on the frontier and organized crime syndicates that permeate all the major cities across Brazil. It is hard to say whether it is a majority or minority, but there are many in Brazil that feel like the military has to be part of the solution. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“Commander of the Army, Eduardo Villas Bôas, said that [President] Bolsonaro does not represent the return of the military to politics, but there is a risk of politicization of the barracks.”

Source: “Congressistas criticam declaração de Bolsonaro sobre papel das Forças Armadas (Members of Congress criticize Bolsonaro's statement on the role of the Armed Forces),” *O Globo*, 7 March 2019. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/congressistas-criticam-declaracao-de-bolsonaro-sobre-papel-das-forcas-armadas-23505834>

...“The mission will be fulfilled alongside the good people of our Brazil, those who love the homeland, those who respect the family, those who want to engage with countries that have an ideology similar to ours, those who love democracy. And that, democracy and freedom, only exist when their respective Armed Forces so wants or affirms.”...

...the role of the Armed Forces is very well defined in the Federal Constitution, and the Armed Forces have recently shown commitment to democracy, unlike the President of the Republic, who has always shown a deep contempt for democracy. This threat that he seeks to make with this speech, that democracy and freedom can be usurped by the Brazilian people, does not correspond to what the Armed Forces thinks or what the people think...

Source: “Ao lado de generais, Bolsonaro defende fala sobre militares e democracia (Bolsonaro and generals defend statement about military and democracy),” *O Globo*, 7 March 2019. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/ao-lado-de-generais-bolsonaro-defende-fala-sobre-militares-democracia-23506293>

“Objective civilian control, advocated by Samuel Huntington, advocates that the Armed Forces should be the strength of this civilian control. Naturally, the Brazilian Armed Forces already do so, because they strongly defend democracy.”

Source: “A política não está e não vai entrar nos quartéis”, afirma futuro ministro (The policy is not and will not enter the barracks”, says future minister),” *Correio Braziliense*, 25 November 2018. https://www.correio braziliense.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2018/11/25/interna_politica,721383/a-politica-nao-esta-e-nao-vai-entrar-nos-quarteis-afirma.shtml

...(Defense Minister) Azevedo e Silva says he believes that the protagonism of the military in the Bolsonaro administration does not present any risk of attrition for the Armed Forces. “Those in the active component will continue with the same missions, those who will serve in the government will act as [public] servants. There are no risks...” Earlier this month, in an interview with Folha de S.Paulo, Commander of the Army, Eduardo Villas Bôas, said that [President] Bolsonaro does not represent the return of the military to politics, but there is a risk of politicization of the barracks. “I do not see that risk. We have long been focused on our end-activity. The policy is not and will not enter the barracks,” said Azevedo e Silva...

...“From 2004, our primary regulations were laid out in the National Defense Policy, the National Defense Strategy and the Defense White Paper. This has given a normative sense in the armed forces what each should do, how each should carry out its mandate, and what is the priority of each institution. Otherwise, the portfolios, programs and projects of each branch of the armed forces are determined according to the needs of the country. Any country that wants to be strong must have a strong and adequate Armed Force.”...



Cubans Defend Their Regime

OE Watch Commentary: Whereas not very long ago the central role of the Cuban dictatorship in Venezuela was a whispered topic, it is now more and more openly discussed in the region. In the accompanying excerpted reference from *La Linterna Azul*, the author opines that the situation should not be compared to the take-downs of dictators in the past in other countries and that getting rid of Maduro will not solve the problem. The reference from *Venezuela al Día* is a fairly long article that offers a number of data points concerning the Cuban military presence in Venezuela. It references a 2017 article from *Foresightcuba* to note that the reportage is recent. It then goes on to mention some calculations, including a suggestion that the Cuban presence may far exceed the approximately 20,000 that seems a popular figure. The reference from the *YouTube* channel of *Testigo Directo* is a somewhat sensational presentation in which news correspondent Karla Salcedo interviews analyst Sebastiana Barráez, who asserts that Cuban intelligence infiltrated the Venezuelan opposition in order to break it up (keep it from unifying). She opines that it worked, too, suggesting that the arrests of 123 military members for conspiracy and related crimes were a product of the infiltration of Cuban agents into opposition parties. Salcedo also interviewed former Defense Minister Enrique Ochoa Antich, who highlighted the indoctrination of Venezuelan militia members in Cuba. The Salcedo report was aired before international efforts to have humanitarian aid enter Venezuela on 23 February, but it correctly anticipated the application of violence by the regime to stop it, including use of irregular formations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Santiago de Cuba - José Martí Mausoleum, Changing of the Guard.
 Source: PRA [CC BY 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santiago_de_Cuba_-_Garde_a_Mausol%C3%A9_Jos%C3%A9_Mart%C3%AD].JPG.

“...we are dealing with the removal of three (3) armies of occupation...”

Source: Gerdailor Alvarado “No es la salida de un dictador (This is not the departure of a dictator),” *La Linterna Azul*, 25 February 2019. <http://www.lalinternaazul.info/2019/02/25/no-es-la-salida-de-un-dictador/>

“Here we are dealing with the removal of three (3) armies of occupation. Remember that in Venezuela there are 22,000 Cubans who came to control the country with Chavist consent...Remember that in the countryside there are possibly 20,000 members of the Colombian FARC and ELN that have no place to go...”

Remember that in Margarita and the East of the country there is a large although unknown number of Hezbollah that also do not have an immediate way of leaving safely...This is the removal of a dictator mixed with the removal of a concealed invasion by the government of the country itself for 20 years...”

Source: Josephina Blanco and Duamig, “Pruebas de la presencia militar cubana en las Fuerzas Armadas venezolanas (Proof of Cuban military presence in Venezuela’s armed forces),” *Venezuela al Día*, 21 February 2019. <http://www.venezuelaaldia.com/2019/02/21/pruebas-la-presencia-militar-cubana-las-fuerzas-armadas-venezolanas1456/>

“An unofficial piece of information published in *Foresightcuba* [<http://foresightcuba.com/ejercito-cubano-en-venezuela/>] – that is dedicated to presenting statistics about the island-, counts the military presence in Cuba as follows: 4,500 infantry men organized in eight battalions of 500 troops each, plus a battalion in Fuerte Tiuna [pentagon equivalent]; two brigadier generals...4 colonels...8 lieutenant colonels...6 naval captains... and 25 junior officer....

The CEOFANB [Strategic Operational Command of the Armed Force] informed [September 2018] of the presence in the country of the Black Wasps, the premier elite force in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba (FAR). The objective was military exercises on the Colombian border.”

Source: Karla Salcedo Flores, “Inteligencia cubana estaría dominando a Venezuela: investigación - Testigo Directo HD, (Cuban Intelligence is dominating Venezuela: Investigation – ‘Direct Witness’),” *Testigo Directo/YouTube*, 15 February 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiPDF3Sh7gM>

“Did they really copy the Cuban model in Venezuela? Let’s look at it. The student [Hugo Chávez] learned from Fidel Castro. What many people don’t know is that Nicolas Maduro was ideologically educated in Cuba....The owners of Venezuela [have been] Fidel Castro and Raul Castro by way of the Cuban G2, who are those directing the military in Venezuela.”



Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel Use GoPro in Attack Against CJNG

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 February, the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (CSRL) launched an attack against rival cartel, Jalisco Nueva Generación Cártel (CJNG). According to the accompanying excerpted article from Mexico-based news *Vanguardia*, CSRL members killed five alleged CJNG members in 90 seconds. The attack occurred in the municipality of Valle de Santiago, in the state of Guanajuato. The article states that the group of assailants were sent by José Antonio Yepes (aka “El Marro”), the leader of CSRL.

In another excerpted article by *RadioFórmula*, the attack happened at an auto body shop over disputed oil territory between the two rival cartels. A CSRL member recorded the attack on a GoPro camera attached to his body. The 1:32 minute-long video shows the assailants shooting the alleged CJNG members while they assault the building and ramming into wooden wall/locked doors with a pick-up truck to gain additional entry into it. The recording shows two trucks arriving at the auto body shop with men wearing tactical vests and using military grade assault rifles. The article cites journalist Humberto Padgett as stating that one of the assailants appears to be using a “next generation Heckler and Koch sub-machine gun.” The video was posted on CSRL social media, which was then picked up by Mexico-based news outlets. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

“While the leader is opening fire, he is also coordinating the operation in the field with great control over the details.”



CSRL attack GoPro footage.
Source: CSRL social media via Radio Formula.

Source: “Cártel Santa Rosa de Lima defunde video de sangrienta ejecución a miembros del Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (The Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel posted a video executing members of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel),” *Vanguardia*, 26 February 2019. <https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cartel-santa-rosa-de-lima-difunde-video-de-sangrienta-ejecucion-miembros-del-cartel-jalisco>

“Led by a man with presumed military training, he tells one of his men to cover him. While the leader is opening fire, he is also coordinating the operation in the field with great control over the details.”

Source: “Cártel del ‘Marro’ difunde VIDEO de sangrienta ejecución a miembros del CJNG (‘Marro’s Cartel posted a video executing members of CJNG),” *RadioFórmula*, 26 February 2019. <https://www.radioformula.com.mx/noticias/mexico/20190226/cartel-del-marro-difunde-video-de-sangrienta-ejecucion-a-miembros-del-cjng/>

“In the recording, trucks arrive at the business with a number of men in black caps and tactical vests, military grade assault rifles, and next-generation ‘Heckler and Koch’ submachine gun, according to journalist Humberto Padgett.”



The Hezbollah Presence in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles discuss Hezbollah’s growing presence not only in Latin America, but particularly in Colombia. The article from *L’indro* examines Hezbollah’s principal objectives in Colombia, some of which include drug trafficking, the sale and export of stolen vehicles, money laundering and training grounds for new recruits. The article also notes how Hezbollah sends a portion of its earnings to Beirut, via European banks, and invests the rest in Colombia. The article from *Red Mas* also reports on Hezbollah in Colombia and notes other aspects of how the group operates in the country, including additional criminal schemes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

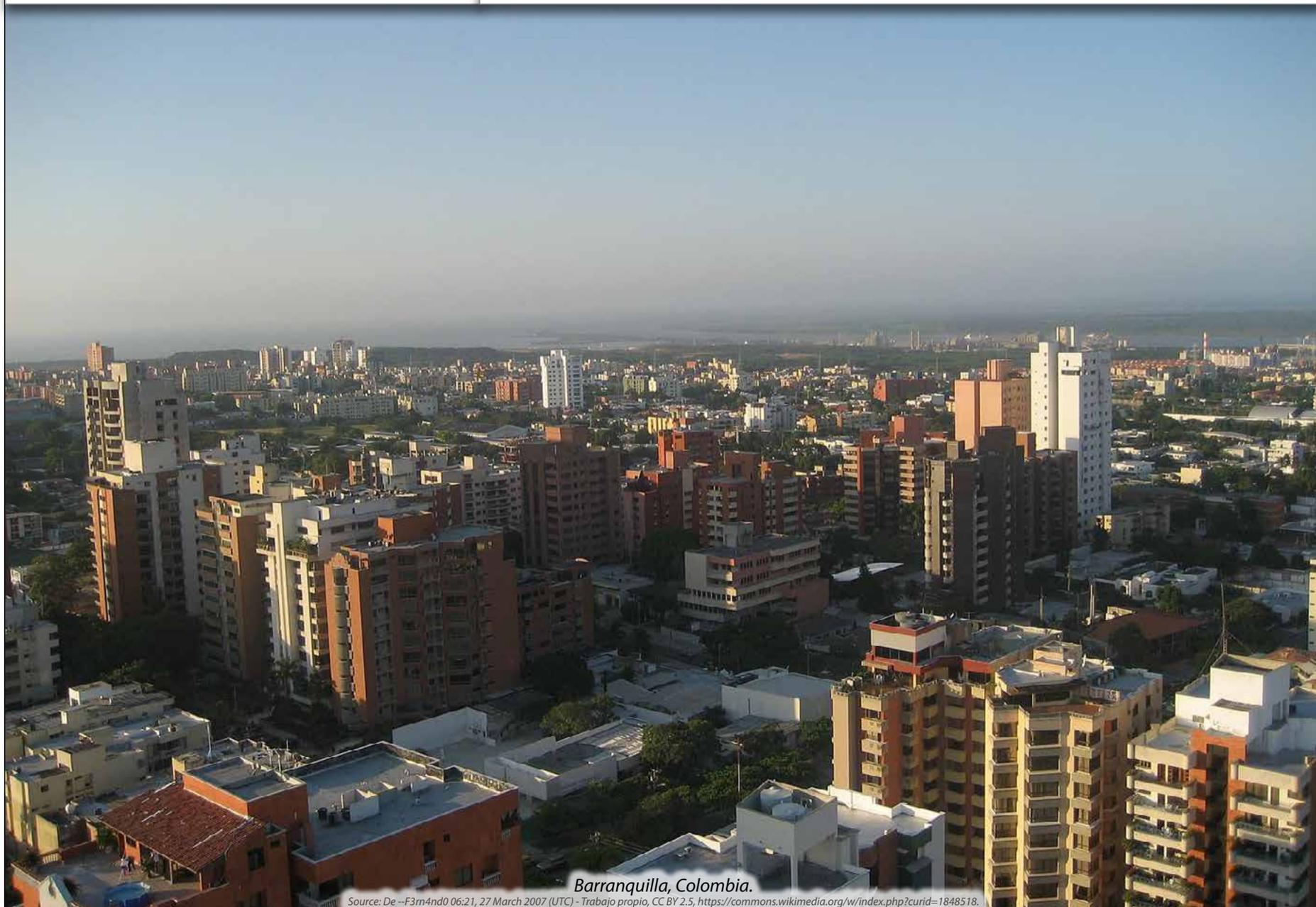
“Hezbollah is utilizing social media to recruit new members in Colombia.”

Source: “Hezbollah in America Latina: l’infiltrazione perfetta (Hezbollah and its Perfect Infiltration in Latin America),” *L’indro*, 21 November 2018. <https://www.lindro.it/hezbollah-in-america-latina-linfiltrazione-perfetta/>

...As for the recruitment process, it has been facilitated in Colombia where 40,000 Muslims currently reside and conversion to Islam has increased by 40% over the last 15 years. Colombia is also home to five mosques and 10 Islamic cultural centers. As for illicit earnings generated by Hezbollah in Colombia, 80% of funds are channeled through European banks and back to Beirut. The remaining 20% is re-invested in Colombia...

Source: “Hezbollah tendría estructura clandestina en Colombia (Hezbollah Maintains Clandestine Structure in Colombia),” *Red Mas*, 9 April 2018. <http://www.redmas.com.co/internacional/hezbollah-estructura-clandestina-colombia/>

Hezbollah is carrying out illegal activities in Colombia under a clandestine structure they call the External Security Organization (ESO). Within the country, Hezbollah generates illicit funds by orchestrating scams involving banks and their clients and creating autonomous societies (better known as an LLCs in the United States) to export contraband clothing to Panama and coal to Lebanon. This information was uncovered during an investigation carried out by Colombian national police over the course of three years. This investigation further confirmed Hezbollah presence in Colombia and aided authorities in identifying that the group maintains key operational bases in Barranquilla, Cartagena and Maico. ESO members are brought into Colombia utilizing false documentation provided by Venezuela or the FARC. As for recruitment, Hezbollah is utilizing social media to recruit new members in Colombia. On these sites, they target individuals who are sympathetic to Hezbollah ideology. After sympathizers are identified, Hezbollah tracks potential recruits and attempts to indoctrinate and convert them to Islam.



Barranquilla, Colombia.

Source: De--F3m4nd0 06:21, 27 March 2007 (UTC) - Trabajo propio, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1848518>.



Argentina Aims to Unify Defense Policy and Diplomacy

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Infobae* discusses how Argentina is working on implementing a plan that President Mauricio Macri and his team have aimed for since his inauguration: to unify defense policies and diplomacy. In doing so, Macri has changed both personnel and the names associated with their jobs. One example of this is the removal of Horacio Chighizola as the Minister of Defense and replacing him with Paola Di Chiaro as the Secretary of Military Strategy. In short, the change will also allow for a new power structure under which the president will play a more critical role in controlling how the Argentinian Armed Forces will work with the Foreign Ministry to make strategic decisions that will protect the country.

As outlined in the article, there are three principal realms that aim to unify the armed forces and foreign policy: the South Atlantic, Argentina's northern border, and cyber-space. In the South Atlantic, the country will work with multiple countries to explore Antarctica and secure strategic resources. Along the northern border, Argentina will join forces with other countries that have already formulated plans to fight drug trafficking and terrorist activities. And in cyber-space, Argentina will follow the lead of the United States and Brazil, as both currently adhere to cyber-space guidelines in which the military works to thwart attacks carried out by other military organizations and state intelligence agencies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Argentina's Ministry of Defense.

Source: Aleksandr Timofejev, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ministerio_de_la_defensa_-_panoramio.jpg, CC 3.0.

“In modernizing the Armed Forces and maximizing security along the northern border, Argentina is looking to provide added logistics support to the military so that they can fight against drug trafficking and terrorism.”

Source: “A partir de los últimos cambios, el Gobierno busca unificar las tareas de Defensa con la Cancillería (Recent Changes Indicate that the Government is Looking to Unify Defense Policy and Diplomacy),” *Infobae*, 27 February 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2019/02/27/a-partir-de-los-ultimos-cambios-el-gobierno-busca-unificar-las-tareas-de-defensa-con-la-cancilleria/>

President Mauricio Macri of Argentina has appointed new personnel (Horacio Chighizola removed with Paola Di Chiaro as his replacement) to strategic defense positions in an attempt to forge defense policy and diplomacy. To make this happen, Di Chiaro is already working on putting together a team involving academics, diplomats and experts in military affairs. These individuals will be responsible for carrying out Macri's plan which he initially presented in June 2018 as part of his new National Defense Policy Directive. Regions/sectors in which Macri will begin to forge defense policy and diplomacy are outlined below:

South Atlantic: *Argentina's 2019 plan for the South Atlantic is to strengthen military patrols while simultaneously placing a greater emphasis on scientific work in Antarctica. In doing these things, Argentina will work closely with countries to include the United States, Brazil, Russia and England. In Antarctica specifically, the South American nation will increase cooperation with England to increase scientific work and on new ways to protect the environment. A government official stated the following regarding Brazil, “There was also a diplomatic exchange with Brazil to advance common defense issues which resulted in the creation of new training courses and joint patrols”. This is because the South Atlantic is a strategic exploration zone for Argentina to secure resources for the future and for its future positioning in Antarctica so that the country can further coordinate scientific work with other countries.*

Northern Border: *In modernizing the Armed Forces and maximizing security along the northern border, Argentina is looking to provide added logistics support to the military so that they can fight against drug trafficking and terrorism. In terms of diplomacy, Argentina realizes they cannot carry out this fight alone and is looking to coordinate with the United States, Brazil and Israel to prosecute individuals conducting illegal activities; especially in the tri-border region where drug trafficking and Hezbollah activity run rampant.*

Cyber-Space: *The plan to modernize the military in cyber-space started last year when Argentina purchased software designed to combat this phenomenon. In developing its strategy, Argentina has divided its protection plan into two areas; cyber-defense and cyber-security. However, the South American nation has also thought of unifying roles as Brazil and the United States have done. This is because key leaders realize that cyber-space attacks are conducted by outside military organizations and state intelligence agencies and that military involvement is imperative to thwart both cyber defense and security issues.*