

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



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*FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT*



## EURASIA

- 3 Russia's Anti-Trojan Horse Strategy
- 4 Russian Operational Art, Military Science, and Leadership Signaled From Syria
- 5 The Rising Profile of Russia's Military Police
- 7 Turning Back the Clock: Will Russia Revert from Brigades to Divisions?
- 8 Chief of Manpower Sees No End to Conscription in the Near Future
- 9 Blades to the Brigades: Northern Fleet Ground Forces Receive Arctic Bulldozers
- 10 How Much and What is to be Shipped on the Northern Sea Route?
- 11 Maneuver Defense Training in Preparation for Tsentr 2019
- 12 Maritime Requirements for Northern Sea Route
- 13 Year-round Transport of Arctic Liquid Natural Gas (LNG)
- 14 A Russian View of NATO: Organized Criminal Group
- 15 Achilles Heel of Russian Defense?
- 16 Defending Soviet Memory
- 17 The Impact of Azerbaijan's Statements
- 18 Russia's Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan
- 19 Estonian Officials Express Security Concern
- 20 NATO's Latest Drill Shows Changing Threats

## INDO-PACIFIC

- 22 Philippine Officials Allege Communist Insurgents Use NGO Fronts
- 23 Indonesian Muslim Organization Responds to New Zealand Attack
- 24 China's Expectations Grow for its Non-Commissioned Staff

## Officers

- 25 China Pushes Military Education Throughout Academia
- 26 China Claims Lead in Blockchain Projects
- 28 India's Improvements in Artillery
- 29 Military Delegates to China's "Two Meetings" Discuss Enhancing Joint Training, Interoperability
- 31 Learning Without Fighting: New Developments in PLA Artificial Intelligence War-Gaming
- 32 CETC Offers Unmanned Maritime Sensor System for South China Sea
- 33 China Launches New Communications Relay Satellite
- 34 New Chinese Remote-Controlled Minesweeper on Display in Abu Dhabi Defense Expo

## MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 35 Iran: Khamenei Threatens to Use Precision Missiles
- 36 Iran Conducts its Largest UAV Exercise
- 37 Supreme Leader: Do Not Let the Enemy Dominate Cyberspace
- 38 Iran Cements its Presence in Syria
- 40 Aspiring Social Media Influencers in Damascus
- 41 What to do with ISIS Detainees and Returnees?
- 43 The SDF's Role in Syria's Future
- 44 Disagreements Between Moscow, Damascus and Tehran
- 45 Perceived Kurdish YPG Threat May Lead to Turkey, Syria and Iran Alliance
- 46 Russia's Game Plan and Turkish-Russian Joint Patrols in Idlib
- 47 Turkish Perspectives on the S-400 Purchase from Russia
- 48 Are Yemeni Southerners Seeking to Revive Soviet-Era Ties?

## AFRICA

- 50 Why Moscow Backed Sudan's Embattled President
- 51 South Sudan: Does Humanitarian Aid Fuel the Conflict?
- 52 Africa's Crushing Debt to China
- 53 Somalia: Worries Over Withdrawal of Kenyan Military
- 54 Concern after French Military Doctor's Death in Mali
- 55 Malian Interethnic Massacre: Did Army Focus Too Much on Islamists?
- 56 DRC's Army and Police: Still Not Ready for Primetime
- 57 Muhammadu Buhari Comments on Boko Haram in Nigeria

## LATIN AMERICA

- 58 Brazil's Guarani Infantry Fighting Vehicle Gets Another Upgrade
- 59 Authorities Transfer Key Leaders of the First Capital Command in Brazil
- 60 Bolivia Next?
- 61 Me-too Colombia
- 62 Colombia Roadblock Tactic
- 63 FARC Peace Accords: A 2019 Snapshot
- 65 How Colombia's President is Dealing with Internal Security Issues
- 66 Maritime Disarray in Venezuela
- 67 Route 32: Costa Rica's Gateway to the Silk Road Economic Belt
- 68 China's Aid to Ecuador Through OBOR: Strategic Cooperation or Strategic Trap?
- 70 CJNG Members Arrested in Veracruz

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#### ON THE COVER:

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei meets with Iran's Assembly of Experts  
Source: Gerdab.ir, [https://gerdab.ir/files/fa/news/1397/12/25/41546\\_312.jpg](https://gerdab.ir/files/fa/news/1397/12/25/41546_312.jpg).

# OEWATCH

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### Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

#### Eurasia

Chuck Bartles  
Geoff Demarest  
Matti Dimmick  
Ray Finch  
Les Grau  
Matthew Stein  
Tom Wilhelm

#### Indo-Pacific

Cindy Hurst  
Elsa Kania  
Matthew Stein  
Peter Wood  
Jacob Zenn

#### Middle East, North Africa

Ihsan Gündüz  
Karen Kaya  
Michael Rubin  
Lucas Winter

#### Africa

Robert Feldman  
Jacob Zenn

#### Latin America

Dodge Billingsley  
Robert Bunker  
Geoff Demarest  
Brenda Fiegel  
Alma Keshavarz  
Catalina Wedman

#### Editor-in-Chief

Editor

Design Editor

**Tom Wilhelm**

Karen Kaya

Thomas Tolare





# Russia's Anti-Trojan Horse Strategy

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Kremlin's strategy of restoring Russia's superpower status is predicated largely on reforming and modernizing the country's armed forces and related security services. According to their calculus, robust military forces will ultimately translate into greater global influence, which in turn will result in a more prosperous and stronger Russia. From the Kremlin's perspective, the West (particularly the US) remains the chief obstacle in realizing this strategy. In the brief accompanying excerpt from Russia's main military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Russia's top general, at a meeting at the Academy of Military Sciences, "gave a report about the main directions of development of military strategy and about tasks of military science." Some of his comments merit closer attention.

After making an obligatory nod to the importance of military science, Gerasimov asserts that "the United States and its allies determined the aggressive vector of their foreign policy." He suggests that the US strategy is built around a combination of "military actions of an offensive nature such as global strike," combined with the "technologies of color revolutions and soft power." The US strategy which "has been dubbed the 'Trojan horse,'" according to Gerasimov "is the elimination of statehood of undesirable countries, the undermining of sovereignty, and a change of legally elected state authorities." This presumably includes Russia.



General V. Gerasimov

Source: Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valery\\_Gerasimov\\_\(2015-05-12\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valery_Gerasimov_(2015-05-12).jpg), CCA-SA 3.0

Gerasimov claims that "the Russian Federation is ready to counter any of these strategies," suggesting that the essence of the Russian response "is the 'strategy of active defense,' which... envisages a set of measures for preemptive neutralization of threats to national security," and which will allow the Russian military to "be a step ahead." The backbone of Russia's defense strategy, according to Gerasimov, is the "substantiation and upgrading of nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence measures," which include "state-of-the-art models of arms, including fundamentally new kinds of weapons." He then goes on to list some of these modern weapons: "Avangard, Sarmat, and the newest Peresvet and Kinzhal weapons have shown their high effectiveness, and the Poseydon and Burevestnik complexes are going through successful tests. Scheduled work is proceeding on creation of the Tsirkon hypersonic sea-launched missile." However, unlike the USSR, which invested heavily into defense (and which hastened its demise), Gerasimov points out that "the creation of new weapon models will not draw Russia into a new arms race." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"Any potential aggressor has to understand that any form of pressure on Russia and its allies is pointless."***

**Source:** General Valeriy Gerasimov, "Векторы развития военной стратегии (Vectors of Development of Military Strategy)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 4 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/?attempt=1>

*General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov, chief of RF [Russian Federation] Armed Forces General Staff, spoke at a general assembly of the Academy of Military Sciences....*

*This year we are examining questions of the development of military strategy under today's conditions.... Meanwhile, Russia's geopolitical rivals do not conceal that they plan to achieve political goals not just in the course of local conflicts. They are preparing to wage wars against a "high-tech enemy" using precision-guided munitions (PGM) from the air, sea, and space, with active conduct of information warfare.... Therefore, a search for rational strategies of waging war against a varying enemy acquires priority importance for developing the theory and practice of military strategy.*

*...The United States and its allies determined the aggressive vector of their foreign policy. They are studying military actions of an offensive nature such as "global strike" and "multi-sphere battle," and they use technologies of "color revolutions" and "soft power." Their goal is the elimination of statehood of undesirable countries, the undermining of sovereignty, and a change of legally elected state authorities. That was the case in Iraq, in Libya, and in Ukraine. Similar actions are seen in Venezuela at the present time.*

*...The Pentagon began developing a fundamentally new strategy of military operations that already has been dubbed the "Trojan horse." Its essence is active use of the "protest potential of a fifth column" in the interests of destabilizing a situation with simultaneous delivery of PGM strikes against the most important targets.*

**Source:** General Valeriy Gerasimov, "Векторы развития военной стратегии (Vectors of Development of Military Strategy)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 4 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/?attempt=1>

*...I would like to note that the Russian Federation is ready to counter any of these strategies. In recent years military scientists together with the General Staff have developed conceptual approaches for neutralizing the aggressive actions of probable enemies. The basis of "our response" is the "strategy of active defense," which, with consideration of the defensive nature of Russian Military Doctrine, envisages a set of measures for preemptive neutralization of threats to national security.*

*...It is the substantiation of measures being developed that must comprise the scientific activity of military scientists. This is one of the priority directions for ensuring national security. We must preempt the enemy in the development of military strategy and be "a step ahead."*

*...Because of this, the substantiation and upgrading of nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence measures are an urgent task for development of military strategy. Any potential aggressor has to understand that any form of pressure on Russia and its allies is pointless. Our response will not be long in coming. State-of-the-art models of arms, including fundamentally new kinds of weapons, are being made operational and are being deployed for this.*

*Series production of new models of armaments and outfitting of the Armed Forces with them have begun. Avangard, Sarmat, and the newest Peresvet and Kinzhal weapons have shown their high effectiveness, and the Poseydon and Burevestnik complexes are going through successful tests. Scheduled work is proceeding on creation of the Tsirkon hypersonic sea-launched missile.*

*...The creation of new weapon models will not draw Russia into a new arms race.*



# Russian Operational Art, Military Science, and Leadership Signaled From Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russian media recently reported that Colonel-General (3-Star) Sergei Surovikin is relinquishing command of Russian forces in Syria to Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov. The first accompanying article notes that Surovikin has held the command in Syria longer than any of his predecessors, and is returning to command the Aerospace Forces. The Aerospace Forces is the newest branch of the Russian Armed Forces, and it has a special expectation in evolving Russian military art: leading efforts in exercising the deployment of capabilities that Chief of the Russian General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov has described as “self-sufficient groups of... highly mobile troops.” Surovikin in this position is the first combined-arms general who has commanded the Aerospace Forces.

Meanwhile in Syria, Serdyukov, according to *Kommersant*, is tasked with “speeding up the Russian-Turkish agreements on organizing joint patrols in areas of the Idlib de-escalation zone.” This is seen by the Russians as pursuing a standing initiative delayed since fall of 2018. In Russian operational art, the concept of joint patrols may or may not include integrated activity between cooperating sides, rather just coordinated or de-conflicted actions. Humanitarian convoys, in Russian military art, are distinct from patrols but seem to bridge the line between military and non-military actions in General Staff thinking.

The joint patrols are an example of Russia’s “strategy of limited actions” which Gerasimov discusses in the second accompanying passage. The passage features segments of a speech that Gerasimov gave during a meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences. He discusses Russia’s “strategy of limited actions” including “humanitarian operations,” which Russian military police have prominently been leading in Syria (like convoys to removing civilians from battles zones), as “new methods.” This is key because the term “methods” signals doctrinal prominence and establishment in Russian military science practice. He also notes that the Syrian experience has had an important role in the development of the “new methods”. Thus, it is not surprising that the out-going commander Surovikin will lead the Aerospace Forces after his time in Syria, to further Russian military art. It is worth also noting, in this regard, that he had previously been one of the key officers in the establishment of the modern Russian Military Police Forces. (See: “Russia’s Game Plan and Turkish-Russian Joint Patrols in Idlib,” in this issue of *OE Watch*, p. 47) **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**



Sergey Surovikin in 2018.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=68214425>, CC BY 4.0.

***“We got a rationale for new methods of action of the troops during the operation. The role of the military strategy was to plan and coordinate joint military and non-military actions of the Russian group of troops (forces) and formations of the armed forces of the interested states, militarized structures of the countries participating in the conflict.”***

**Source:** “Командующего ВДВ десантировали в Сирию Газета “Коммерсантъ (Airborne Troops Commander “Air-dropped” into Syria),” *Kommersant*, Issue No. 65, 12 April 2019. <https://kommersant.ru/daily/118094>

Starting from March 17, their routes were extended in areas west of Aleppo, north of Hama and mountainous Latakia. As of yesterday, “*Kommersant*” sources say, coordinated patrol of joint convoys of Russian and Turkish soldiers should have commenced along the front line between the opposing sides in the area between the Turkish checkpoints of Barkum and Surman. If these maneuvers are recognized as successful then after April 20 the military personnel of the two countries will start joint patrols of the north-eastern part of the de-escalation zone. “We assume the fact that in May we will be able to start coordinated patrols consisting of joint convoys inside the demilitarized zone,” a military source told “*Kommersant*.”

**Source:** “Векторы развития военной стратегии Анастасия Свиридова Выбор редакции, Фактор силы (Vectors of Military Strategy Development Anastasia Sviridov Editor’s Choice, Power Factor),” *Redstar.ru*, 3 April 2019. <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/>

## **“The strategy of limited action” outside Russia**

The Syrian experience has an important role in the development of the strategy. Its development and implementation allowed us to identify a new practical area- the fulfillment of tasks for the protection and promotion of national interests outside the territory of Russia, within the framework of the “strategy of limited actions.”

The basis for the implementation of this strategy is the creation of a self-sufficient group of troops (forces) based on the formations of one of the branches of the Armed Forces, which has high mobility and is able to make the greatest contribution to the solution of the tasks. In Syria, this role is assigned to the formations of the Aerospace Forces.

We got a rationale for new methods of action of the troops during the operation. The role of the military strategy was to plan and coordinate joint military and non-military actions of the Russian group of troops (forces) and formations of the armed forces of the interested states, militarized structures of the countries participating in the conflict.





# The Rising Profile of Russia's Military Police

**OE Watch Commentary:** As an institution, the Russian military police is a relatively new addition to the Russian Armed Forces, founded in late 2011. As the accompanying excerpted interview of Lieutenant General Vladimir Ivanovskiy, the Chief of the Russian Federation's Military Police Main Directorate, in *Krasnaya Zvezda* indicates, Russia's military police perform a wide range of tasks, similar to US military police. These include route security and traffic enforcement; facility and personnel security; law enforcement activities; promoting good order and discipline in the ranks; and expeditionary security. Russian military police units can now be found in each regiment and brigade of the military districts, the Northern Fleet, and Airborne Troops, as well as a few stand-alone units in the North Caucasus that were apparently created for the primary purpose of supporting the Syrian campaign.

The accompanying excerpted articles from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Interfax* point out that Russian military police are a key component of Russian security forces in Syria, especially with regard to "humanitarian and peacekeeping issues." According to *Interfax*, about 60% of Russia's military police personnel have served in Syria. These articles make it clear that the military police are a growing and significant component in Russian's deployable military capacity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“The military police battalion is, at a minimum, three companies (up to 100 servicemen each) plus operational and logistic-support elements.”***

**Source:** Aleksandr Tikhonov, “Уверенная поступь военной полиции (Military Police's Confident Advance),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 18 February 2019, <http://redstar.ru/uverennaya-postup-voennoj-politsii/>

*Vladimir Sergeyevich, the Southern Military District's military police subunit recently returned to its permanent deployment center from Syria after carrying out difficult missions there. In their homeland -- Dagestan -- the military police officers received a heroes' welcome. And I would like to begin our conversation with that subject. What kind of an account did the Russian Federation Defense Ministry military police officers give of themselves and what account are they giving in the Syrian Arab Republic? What tasks are they resolving there?*

*...Military police troop subunits -- battalions -- and also territorial subunits -- the Humaymim, Tartus, and Damascus commandant's headquarters -- are serving in the Syrian Arab Republic. As of today everything relating to safeguarding humanitarian and peacekeeping issues and a post-conflict settlement has been assigned to our guys -- to the military police. Military police subunits are serving at checkpoints and observation posts, monitoring the cease-fire regime. They are providing security for citizens' passage to the de-escalation and de-confliction zones and are patrolling territory in the region of Manbij city, rendering aid to the local population and to the posts set up on the Syrian Arab Republic side.*

*One of the military police subunits' main tasks is to provide backup for humanitarian operations, including security for UN humanitarian convoys. Thus the military police recently escorted a convoy of this kind to the region of Al-Tanf, where the Rukban refugee camp is situated. The military police have been assigned the protection of medical brigades and mobile hospitals of the Russian Federation when they are rendering medical assistance to the population. They provide security for the work of the sapper subunits when they are mine clearing. The remit of the servicemen of the military commandants' offices includes controlling access to the territory of Russian bases and maintaining law and order and military discipline at the necessary level among the personnel of our contingent of troops in Syria.*

*The Military Motor Vehicle Inspection Administration (VAI) personnel in the Syrian Arab Republic monitor Russian servicemen's observance of traffic regulations and the rules for drivers' operation of Russian Federation Armed Forces transport facilities. The VAI's duties include state registration and record keeping of the Russian Federation Armed Forces transport facilities and the issue of registration documents and state license plates for transport facilities. In addition the VAI servicemen carry out the technical inspection of the Russian Federation Armed Forces transport, including with the use of diagnostic equipment. Finally, the VAI forces ensure the safety of traffic when military transport convoys carrying defense freight are on the move....*



*Russian Military Police in Khmeimim Air Base in Syria 2017.*  
Source: Wikimedia Commons, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/563511/photo>, CC-4.0



## Continued: The Rising Profile of Russia's Military Police

**“At the present time, about 60% of military police officers have performed special duties in Syria.”**

**Source:** Aleksandr Tikhonov, “Уверенная поступь военной полиции (Military Police’s Confident Advance),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 18 February 2019, <http://redstar.ru/uverennaya-postup-voennoj-politsii/>

*It is clear that it was this experience that led to an understanding of the need to improve the military police’s organizational structure.*

...As of last year we embarked on the creation of a new branch of the military police -- troop subunits. The first experiment was the creation of two battalions which are currently carrying out special missions beyond the Russian Federation. And now there is a military police subunit in each regiment and brigade of the military districts, Northern Fleet, and Airborne Troops. To coordinate the activity of the territorial organs (the commandant’s officer, the VAI, the disciplinary battalions) and the military police troop subunits, as of 1 March 2019 the post of military district deputy chief of staff for the military police and chief of the regional military police administration is being introduced. He will be the point of contact for military police territorial and troop subunits.

The military police troop subunit within a regiment will naturally be subordinate to that regiment’s commander. The military district deputy chief of staff for the military police will obey the Defense Ministry military police main directorate chief when it comes to special issues and on all other issues the district commander and chief of staff...

**On the basis of Syrian experience, have any additional decisions been made on equipping the military police officers with new models of weapons, military vehicles, and kit?**

First, the military police need to have vehicles with off-road capability. In this connection over the course of 2017-2018 over 250 UAZ Patriot and UAZ-3962 patrol vehicles were supplied to the military police subunits. The military police have started to buy quad bikes for service at training grounds. We are examining the issue of buggy deliveries.

Second, we need armored vehicles. Considering their fulfillment of special missions beyond the Russian Federation, the military police subunits are being provided with Tigr and Tayfun armored vehicles. In 2018 they began to buy UAZ-394511-03 Yesaul armored vehicles and work is under way to acquire other armored vehicles like the Patrul and Tayfun 4x4.

In addition the military police subunits are being equipped with UAVs, long-distance mobile communications systems, night vision devices, and modern thermal imaging devices. In connection with the formation of naval military police sections BL-680 ships are being bought to patrol water areas at navy basing centers under the control of the Defense Ministry...As for UAVs, they are mainly used in the VAI to monitor the observance of road traffic regulations...

**You mentioned road traffic accidents. Can you dwell on this important topic in more detail? What contribution do VAI inspectors make to reducing the accident rate? Is the number of road traffic accidents involving servicemen declining?**

Over the past five years we have observed a stable trend toward a reduction in the number of road traffic accidents involving military drivers. As a result of preventive measures aimed at owners of personally owned vehicles, in comparison with 2017 the number of road traffic accidents for which this category is to blame has declined by 7 percent. The number of road traffic accidents involving servicemen as passengers and pedestrians has dropped by 5 percent...

This year we will start implementing the departmental targeted program beginning with accident avoidance training for our drivers.

**Source:** “60% of Russian military police officers have Syria service record,” *Interfax*, 18 February 2019.

Russian Defense Ministry military police officers have been performing their duties in Syria since the moment the Russian forces been deployed there, Lieut. Gen. Vladimir Ivanovsky, the chief of the military police main directorate, told journalists.

“At the present time, about 60% of military police officers have performed special duties in Syria,” Ivanovsky said...

“The military police officers have acquired priceless combat experience in Syria, which has now been included in the training program for both territorial military police bodies and military units that have been set up since December 1, 2018,” Ivanovsky said.

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “Вашингтон препятствует переговорам Дамаска, (Moscow Is Beefing Up the Military Police Contingent in Syria),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 13 January 2019. [http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-01-13/2\\_7480\\_syria.html](http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-01-13/2_7480_syria.html)

While the United States is planning to leave Syria, Russia is building up its military presence in the country. This is happening through a reinforcement of elements of the Russian Federation Armed Forces’ military police. Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, leader of Ingushetia, has announced that servicemen of the military police battalion of the 19th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Southern Military District are once again headed to Syria. This is now their fourth Syria assignment.

The military police battalion is, at a minimum, three companies (up to 100 servicemen each) plus operational and logistic-support elements. The Russian Syria contingent will thus be increased in the very near future by roughly 500 men and officers...

Lieutenant-General Sergey Solomatin, director of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria, announced on Saturday that on 11 January representatives of the Russian military police “organized patrolling along the rear boundary of the five-kilometer security zone in the area of Manbij on two routes in a total length of 17 km.” The starting and end point in both cases is the Ajami residential area. A minimum of two or three military police platoons (approximately 50-60 servicemen) is required for the organization of around-the-clock patrolling in this sector. And considering leave, the planning of countermeasures to possible provocations, and the retention of a reserve, almost an entire military police battalion is needed. This is considerable...

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “Вашингтон препятствует переговорам Дамаска, (Moscow Is Beefing Up the Military Police Contingent in Syria),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 13 January 2019. [http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-01-13/2\\_7480\\_syria.html](http://www.ng.ru/world/2019-01-13/2_7480_syria.html)

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## Turning Back the Clock: Will Russia Revert from Brigades to Divisions?

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpt from the on-line Russian newspaper *Vzglyad* discusses efforts to undo aspects of the 2008 ‘New Look’ reforms by reverting to a divisional structure. Although Russia has converted several brigades back into divisions, with plans for a few more, it appears unlikely that all or even most brigades will become divisions. In practice, the conversion of a brigade into a division usually entails combining multiple brigades into one division, resulting in little net change of manpower. Aside from this robbing Peter to pay Paul approach, the actual structure of these divisions appear to be different than their structure before the 2008 reforms. Typically, fully formed Soviet/Russian divisions had between 13,000-15,000 personnel. Most estimates about personnel strength in current divisions usually range around 8,000-10,000. Further complicating the matter, many current Russian divisions are missing a maneuver regiment. (It is presumed that these ‘missing’ regiments would be reconstituted with conscripts and recalled servicemen from the strategic reserve in the event of hostilities.) Although Russia may reform some divisions, given the current Russian Ministry of Defense manpower level of 850,000 personnel, level of funding, and focus on modernization instead of size, it is not clear how that could be a significant net increase of manpower required for the implementation of Army-wide conversion to divisions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“The trend toward reorganizing and redesignating brigades, particularly motorized infantry and tank brigades, has not been removed from the General Staff’s agenda -- there will be more divisions.”***

**Source:** “Как и зачем меняется структура российской армии (How and Why the Structure of the Russian Army Is Changing),” *Vzglyad* Online, 19 March 2019. <https://vz.ru/society/2019/3/19/968900.html>

*The United States is strengthening its military presence in Europe, but the Russian army is also actively changing. Divisions -- the “crackers” of an adversary’s defense, which themselves are also capable of effectively withstanding the onslaught of attacking forces -- are being revived...Plans to increase the number of military districts are being hatched in the bowels of the Ministry of Defense. What do all these changes mean?*

*A division differs from a brigade not only in numbers of personnel. Although size does matter here. At wartime strength a land division constitutes 13,000-15,000 “grunts,” six regiments (three motorized rifle regiments, tank regiment, artillery regiment, surface-to-air missile regiment, plus separate units -- antitank battalion, reconnaissance battalion, signals battalions, combat engineer, logistic support, medical, and repair and restoration battalions, separate companies of chemical troops (radiological, chemical, biological defense), unmanned air vehicles (UAV), “listeners” (electronic warfare), and of course the headquarters security companies. And their own artillery supply dumps and food dumps.*

*A division is a miniature army capable of operating independently even in isolation from the main body. The presence of formations such as these (as distinct from the more compact and mobile brigades) attests to the readiness to employ them in serious operations.*

*Let us visualize the situation whereby an attack is launched from the Donets Basin with a subsequent heading toward Rostov-na-Donu and the North Caucasus. Its path will be blocked by the 152nd Motorized Rifle Division, whose combat power is capable of halting an offensive and winning time pending the approach of Southern Military District forces. In exactly the same way that the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division stationed in the city of Valuyki is to halt an offensive on Voronezh pending the approach of Western Military District reinforcements. A brigade, with its noticeably lower potential, will have difficulty handling that sort of mission. The trend toward reorganizing and redesignating brigades, particularly motorized infantry and tank brigades, has not been removed from the General Staff’s agenda -- there will be more divisions.*

*It is proposed utilizing the unselected reserve below the Armed Forces threshold of 1 million men to address the problem of manning the new formations -- a further 80,000 men may be enlisted (including men serving on a contract)...*



## Chief of Manpower Sees No End to Conscription in the Near Future

**OE Watch Commentary:** Many Russian media reports and pronouncements have claimed that contract service will eventually completely replace conscription in the Russian Armed Forces. However, as the accompanying excerpted interview from *Krasnaya Zvezda* shows, Lieutenant General Yevgeniy Burdinskiy, Chief of the Main Organization and Mobilization Directorate of the Russian General Staff, takes a much different view. Currently, the Russian Ministry of Defense has about 850,000 uniformed soldiers. (This number does not include uniformed servicemen in the National Guard, Border Troops, and other security services.) According to Lieutenant Burdinskiy, “In 2018, more than 350,000 people are performing military service on a contract in warrant officer, NCO, and soldier positions, with a 1.7:1 ratio of contractors to draftees.” If this number is accurate, Russia is well short of its stated goal of 405,000 contract personnel. Further complicating matters, some Russian conscripts are offered the option of two-year contracts instead of the one-year conscription period.

The number of these ‘2-and-done’ contractors has not been made public. Given these numbers, Lieutenant Burdinskiy’s statement that “the complete abandonment of the civilian draft is not deemed advisable in the near or longer-term perspectives,” provides insight into the future of Russian conscription. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



The Russian Federation Ground Forces (Sukhoputnyye voyska Rossijskoj Federatsii) medium emblem  
Source: Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Ground\\_Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Ground_Forces)

***“At the same time, both in light of the need to accumulate a militarily trained manpower mobilization resource, and proceeding from the state’s financial and economic capabilities, the complete abandonment of the civilian draft is not deemed advisable in the near or longer-term perspectives....”***

**Source:** Yuliya Kozak, “На стремнине модернизации (Riding the Rapids of Modernization),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 6 March 2019.  
<http://redstar.ru/na-stremnine-modernizatsii>

***Is there a possibility in the near future that drafting civilians for military service will be abandoned in favor of a move to a contract army?***

*The number of people performing military service on a contract has risen considerably in recent years, which has enabled us to make a proportionate reduction in the number of draftees.*

*In 2018, more than 350,000 people are performing military service on a contract in warrant officer, NCO, and soldier positions, with a 1.7:1 ratio of contractors to draftees.*

*At the same time, both in light of the need to accumulate a militarily trained manpower mobilization resource, and proceeding from the state’s financial and economic capabilities, the complete abandonment of the civilian draft is not deemed advisable in the near or longer-term perspectives...*





## Blades to the Brigades: Northern Fleet Ground Forces Receive Arctic Bulldozers

**OE Watch Commentary:** A bulldozer is a must for construction and soldiering in the Arctic. Snow drifts and ice blocks need to be moved out of the way. But the Arctic is more than ice and snow. There is peaty soil and permafrost under all that snow. Permafrost is a mixture of rocks, soil and ice that remains frozen in a layer year-round. Permafrost forms when winter freezing exceeds summer thawing and can extend 2,000 feet below the ground surface. Permafrost is tough to move, peaty soil --not so much. In the summer, a thaw sets in and sections of the far north turn into massive bogs on top of the permafrost. The bogs and marshy ground can readily swallow heavy equipment. As the accompanying passage discusses, the BM10M2S armored bulldozer is specially designed to operate in this Arctic environment. It is tracked, the tracks are wide and the bulldozer's weight is carefully distributed. Other Russian tracked engineer and combat vehicles are already equipped with blades to move snow and soil, but when it comes to heavy digging and pushing, the bulldozer leads the way. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Source: Vitali Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalikuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2017-Static-p3/i-HLW8FHP>, CC BY SA 4.0

***“Arctic brigades have received special bulldozers. They are fully armored and can withstand grenades, small arms fire, and even hits by antitank missiles. The special bulldozer has been designed not only for road construction work but also to evacuate equipment under fire and to destroy enemy fortifications. The vehicle is fully autonomous and is well adapted for work in the North. Its engine starts up at temperatures down to -60° Celsius [-76° Fahrenheit].”***

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy: “With Armor on Ice: Troops in Arctic Get Special Bulldozers. Vehicles Are Designed To Destroy Enemy Fortifications and To Build Roads”, *Izvestia*, 26 March 2019. <https://iz.ru/845814/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/bronei-poldu-voiska-v-arktike-poluchili-spetsbuldozery>

### ***With Armor on Ice: Troops in Arctic Get Special Bulldozers. Vehicles Are Designed To Destroy Enemy Fortifications and To Build Roads***

According to the Ministry of Defense, the Arctic brigades have received special armored bulldozers. Syrian experience showed that field formations need such simple and inexpensive specialized equipment. This bulldozer ...has an armored capsule for the driver's cab and a protected engine cowling. The vehicle weighs more than 20 tons and has a speed of 10 km/hour. The bulldozer has been specially adapted to operate in the Arctic. It is capable of moving large amounts of earth throughout a wide range of temperatures from 45° to -60° Celsius [113° to -76° Fahrenheit]. Armored plates up to 20 mm thick protect the driver against bullets, shell fragments or aviation ordnance as well as antitank missiles. The bulldozer's cabin and side doors are equipped with armored glass to provide the driver with the view that he needs to work. In the future the vehicle may be fitted with special stand-off grill screening to protect it against shaped charges and antitank rocket launchers. As the Syrian experience showed, this combination armor makes it possible to reduce personnel losses substantially while performing combat missions.

The Arctic bulldozer is designed to construct roads, evacuate equipment under fire, and destroy enemy fortifications....Bulldozers are required primarily for the rapid construction of defensive positions, dismantling obstacles and the construction of simple engineer barriers such as earth banks or berms. These machines are also needed to move large amounts of soil, backfill trenches and ditches, dismantle obstacles and barricades, and repair roads during combat. In peacetime the bulldozers can be used during emergencies to assist the population. The additional armor will not have a major impact on the vehicle's main characteristics. On the contrary, the armor will be able to protect the vehicle's operator against falling trees or pieces of buildings and structures.

Military expert Colonel (retired) Sergei Suvorov stated that “The practice of employing this machinery is widespread in the Near East. Of course, there are no barricades in the Arctic, but this machine will prove handy in clearing drifts and blocks of ice and in building roads.” Many armies of the world have armored bulldozers. The United States has used such machines widely ever since the war in Vietnam, where bulldozers would clear the jungle... While preparing for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the American Army and Marine Corps bought 12 armored bulldozers in Israel and used them for engineering work. In Israel, American bulldozers are being modernized for the armed forces. They have armor and bullet-proof glass. In addition, these bulldozers can be fitted with additional attachments (a smokescreen system, machine gun, or grenade launcher) that can be controlled directly from the cabin. The crew of the Israeli bulldozer consists of two people – the bulldozer driver and a rifleman. Soldiers call these vehicles, despite their formidable appearance, teddy bears



# How Much and What is to be Shipped on the Northern Sea Route?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia's hopes for economic and political gain through the expansion of the Northern Sea Route are soaring. As the accompanying passage from the *Barents Sea Independent Observer* discusses, Aleksei Likhachev, the leader of the Rosatom nuclear power consortium, has increased Putin's growth of tonnage shipped projection by over 12 million tons. Russia is spending its rubles on infrastructure development to meet these rosy projections. Energy and metals will make up much of the tonnage, but projections of exported Russian manufactured goods is also up. These tonnage projections are all for shipments of Russian resources and goods. What they do not include are foreign shipments. There has been a modest upturn in foreign shipments on the Northern Sea Route including a Danish container vessel. Should the Norwegian/Finnish Rail Baltica project be realized and extend the Norwegian/Finnish rail lines to the Arctic Ocean, China would be very interested in this fast commerce route to the Baltic States and the heart of Europe. The Chinese ships would be using the Northern Sea Route to get there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

**“Shipping on the Northern Sea Route will amount to 92.6 million tons in year 2024. That is an increase of more than 450 percent in six years.”**

**Source:** Atle Staalesen, “Russian Arctic developer present a new dazzling target for Northern Sea Route” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 10 April 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-industry-and-energy/2019/04/russian-arctic-developers-present-new-dazzling-target-northern>

## **Russian Arctic developer present a new dazzling target for Northern Sea Route**

Aleksei Likhachev, the leader of the Rosatom nuclear power consortium, made the number of 92.6 million clear as he took the floor at the Arctic Forum in St. Petersburg. And it will be done by year 2024, in line with President Putin's so-called May decrees. The May Decrees are the 5-year plan presented by Putin after his re-election to the presidency in 2018. It includes 80 million tons of shipments on the Northern Sea Route per year by 2024. Rosatom, however, believes it can do even better and intends to over-fulfil the President's target by more than 12 million tons. These may appear as fantasy figures, however, with Russia's major current stress on Arctic developments, hardly anybody dares to rule out the possibility. In 2018, shipping on the route amounted to 20 million tons.

...

Included in the updated plan from the nuclear power company is 41 million tons of liquified natural gas from Novatek's Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2. The latter field will provide 22 million tons. Included is 17.5 million tons of oil, five of them from the Vankor area, another five from the Payakha field and 7,1 million from Novy Port. Coal will constitute a substantial part of the picture with a total of 23 million tons, 19 million from the Taybass basin in Taymyr Peninsula and four million from the Syrdasayskoye field. Also included is eight million tons of goods to be delivered through the Northern Latitudinal Passage, the projected railway line that will be connected to Sabetta, the new sea port in Yamal. These goods will be produced in other places in Russia, and then exported through Arctic waters.

...

In addition are the nickel ores shipped by company Nor Nickel, as well as the goods annually delivered to settlements located along the Russian Arctic coast, the so-called Severny Zavoz [Northern Delivery]. The list also includes one million tons of transit shipments along the route between Asia and Europe. However, as highlighted by Russian Deputy Minister Maksim Akimov, major uncertainties remain linked with these shipments. “This is a very complicated and technologically difficult task,” and he stressed that the Southeast Asian region is a highly competitive region and that freight companies will need favorable prices and that shipment time limits need to be met.

...

Rosatom has the prime responsibility for the development of the Russian Arctic route. A new law adopted in December 2018 gives the state company key responsibility for state policy on the Arctic, as well as development of regional sea ports and infrastructure. A new Northern Sea Route Directorate was established by the company last year. The directorate includes the Atomflot base and the icebreakers, as well as the state Hydrographical Company. At its disposal will be a rapidly growing number of nuclear-powered icebreakers. By 2024, the company expects to have three new LK-60 icebreakers ready, the Artika, Sibr and Ural. Six years later, the fleet of icebreakers will grow with another two new LK-60 vessels, as well as one new Lider, the super-powerful 120 KW vessel. Then, in 2035, another two Liders will be on the water...

The new figures presented by Likhachev and Rosatom are significantly higher than estimates recently presented by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Ministry believes shipping on the Arctic route could total 77 million tons by 2024. Those figures do not however foresee the building of the Northern Latitudinal Passage railroad and subsequent possibility to ship out goods produced elsewhere in the country.

...

Judging from Likhachev, this should be the start of what will ultimately become a much bigger route. According to Likhachev, by 2030, the goods volume on the Northern Sea Route could total up to 120 million tons, and that only in the east-bound direction. Those estimates are backed up by Leonid Mikhelson, who in the same conference session made it clear that his company Novatek now increases its production estimates for the region. Up to 70 million tons of liquified natural gas will be produced in the area of the Yamal and Gydan Peninsulas by 2030.





# Maneuver Defense Training in Preparation for Tsentr 2019

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying passage from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses the 74th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade's recent force-on-force and a live-fire exercise at its training center near their garrison town of Yurga. The brigade has two motorized rifle battalion tactical groups fully manned with contract soldiers that conducted the exercise. Maneuver defense is a well-planned action and requires pre-selection of fighting positions and advance preparation of the ground and positions. In the accompanying article, the use of well-rehearsed battle drills is emphasized as well as the use of artillery and combat engineers to shape the fight. The brigade is not equipped with all the latest equipment, the battalions are fully manned and UAVs are clearly being integrated within the force. The commanders are younger than their Western counterparts. This brigade will certainly be part of the major exercise Tsentr this year and two of its battalions are fully trained for it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The Yurginskiy contract soldiers are tirelessly improving their field combat proficiency during scheduled classes and tactical exercises. This two-sided BTU [battalion tactical exercise] has been the main event in the brigade’s combat training as part of its preparations for the Tsentr-2019 strategic command staff training exercise.”***

**Source:** Taras Rudyk, “В ходе батальонного тактического учения в Западной Сибири его участники успешно решили более 15 тактических и огневых задач (Tested by Maneuver Defense: During Battalion Tactical Exercise in West Siberia Participants Successfully Accomplished Over 15 Tactical and Fire Missions),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 20 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/ispytanie-manyovrennoj-oboronoj>

## ***Tested by Maneuver Defense: During Battalion Tactical Exercise in West Siberia Participants Successfully Accomplished Over 15 Tactical and Fire Missions***

*Yurginskiy Combined-Arms Range -- A demonstration force-on-force and live-fire battalion tactical exercise involving subunits of the Orders of Kutuzov and Suvorov Separate Zvenigorodsko-Berlinskaya Guards Motorized Infantry Brigade took place at the Yurginskiy combined-arms range located within the administrative boundaries of Kemerovskaya Oblast.... The exercise lasted six days, with two battalion tactical groups taking part in it. Tank, artillery, surface-to-air missile, surface-to-air missile/artillery, engineer, RKhB [radiological, chemical, and biological] defense, and electronic warfare (EW) subunits were added to their strength for reinforcement and support purposes, along with the crews of unmanned aerial vehicles [UAVs]... Today, UAVs are widely employed during tactical exercises by Central Military District troops. An entire air group of unmanned air systems -- Orlan-10, Zastava, Eleron, and the Leyer EW and EW support measures system -- were utilized in this exercise to examine the terrain and collect reconnaissance data, and to guide aircraft and artillery onto targets. The UAV crews also notified the battalion tactical group commanders of the effects of their target engagements.*

*The troops' ground operations were given air support by aircraft of army aviation -- Mi-8AMTSh-V Terminator assault transport helicopters from a helicopter regiment stationed at the Tolmachevo military airfield outside Novosibirsk. A total of some 2,000 servicemen (all the assigned subunits are fully manned with men serving under contract) took part in the exercise and around 400 military and specialized hardware and armaments systems were employed. These included BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, T-72B3 tanks, 2S3 Akatsiya 152-mm self-propelled howitzers, BM-21 Grad multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS), 9P149 Shturm-S antitank guided missile (ATGM) systems, 9A35 Strela-10 surface-to-air missile systems, Shilka self-propelled aircraft guns (ZSU-23-4), BTR-80 armored personnel carriers [APC], BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance vehicles, lightly armored multipurpose prime movers (MT-LB), 2S12 Sani 120-mm mortars, and 9K38 Igla man-portable surface-to-air missile systems (MANPADS).*

...

*In line with the exercise scenario the 1st Battalion Tactical group under the command of Major Sergey Gutsakov conducted a maneuver defense against superior enemy forces; the 2nd Battalion Tactical group headed by Captain Irek Magasumov demonstrated offensive combat operations. On this occasion the attention of the command of the brigade and the combined formation was focused on a live-fire stage during the conduct of a maneuver defense. Accordingly, this was taken into account when planning the exercise and elaborating a scenario for the conduct of mock combat episodes in light of the troops' operations in local wars and armed conflicts.*

*According to the Defense Ministry's inspector for Kemerovskaya Oblast, Maj. Gen. (Reserve) Vladimir Ashitok: “The experience of conducting combat operations in local military conflicts has shown that combat missions have mainly been conducted by company tactical groups. It is necessary to continue instructing officers -- primarily the commanders of battalion tactical groups -- in the conduct of combat, in the command and control of subunits in a complex and rapidly changing situation, which is what a maneuver defense involves.... According to Major General Yakov Rezantsev, “one of the main goals of the exercise was to formulate uniform rules governing their preparation and staging. For this reason we involved the commanders of formations and military units in them, so as once again to decide on uniform approaches in the application of new forms and modes of instruction for the troops.”*



## Continued: Maneuver Defense Training in Preparation for Tsentr 2019

**Source:** Taras Rudyk, “ В ходе батальонного тактического учения в Западной Сибири его участники успешно решили более 15 тактических и огневых задач (Tested by Maneuver Defense: During Battalion Tactical Exercise in West Siberia Participants Successfully Accomplished Over 15 Tactical and Fire Missions),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 20 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/ispytanie-manyovrennoj-oboronoj>

*Several goals were set during the battalion tactical exercise: to inspect the combat readiness of the brigade's subunits; to enable their commanders to execute their functional duties when organizing movement into an area of combat employment; to improve subunits' teamwork and coordination when organizing defensive and offensive engagements, and the skills of battalion commanders during the command and control of subordinate and attached subunits and when organizing collaboration between them in a complex battle situation. Despite the fact that at each exercise the military administrative agencies and staffs model the corresponding tactical situation and the troops operate in line with a previously devised "scenario," at company, battalion, and brigade live-fire tactical exercises commanders are frequently presented with various unforeseen tactical and fire mission problems not stipulated in the "scenarios." This is dictated by the necessity to instruct the troops not on the basis of a template, which has long been the practice not just in this combined formation but generally among the troops of the Central Military District. And when in the course of exercises company, battalion, or brigade commanders are presented with these tactical problems, this demands from them not only tactical knowledge but also bold and unconventional decisions, and from the personnel -- the ability to execute them. So the present battalion tactical exercise was also set the goal of cultivating in the men high combat qualities and a high morale during their operations to accomplish the tactical problems introduced.*

...

*"This exercise is the culmination of a battalion's training. In the given instance, this is a battalion tactical group which takes part in such an exercise during each training period. The troops have rehearsed more than 15 tactical and fire missions, eight of which were dependent on the prevailing situation and the decisions taken by the exercise director. UAVs were utilized as part of reconnaissance-fire systems for the purpose of the appropriate training of the battalion commander. It is too early yet to talk about a final evaluation, this will be presented following inspection of the target range along the lines -- and this involves more than 1,300 different targets. But even now it can be said that the tasks that were assigned to the men under instruction have been accomplished. So the troops' tactical operations merit a solid 'good' rating."*

...

*"The Yurginskiy contract soldiers are tirelessly improving their field combat proficiency during scheduled classes and tactical exercises. This two-sided BTU [battalion tactical exercise] has been the main event in the brigade's combat training as part of its preparations for the Tsentr-2019 strategic command staff training exercise."*

## Maritime Requirements for Northern Sea Route

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Northern Fleet reportedly has some 39 warships and 42 submarines. There is an increasing amount of transport vessels moving oil, gas and ores to market. As the accompanying passage discusses, the Arctic Ocean is about to get even more crowded. The increased traffic on the Northern Sea Route will require more a large fleet of icebreakers, search and rescue vessels, supply ships, repair and maintenance vessels and other vessels to handle the expected increase of the Arctic Passage. Of interest is the inclusion of on-board UAVs to aid in managing the route. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“Earlier reports stated that Russia needs more than 100 new vessels to support cargo shipping along the NSR, which is projected to grow to 80 million tons per year by 2024.”***

**Source:** “Northern Sea Route fleet requirements put at 150 vessels”, *Interfax*, 10 April 2019. <https://www.interfax.com>

### ***Northern Sea Route fleet requirements put at 150 vessels***

*Speaking at the International Arctic Forum, Deputy Transport Minister Yuri Tsvetkov stated that a fleet of about 150 vessels will be needed to support annual cargo traffic of 80 million tons along the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Tsvetkov also heads Russia's Federal Maritime and River Transport Agency. “For full implementation [of the federal Northern Sea Route program], the icebreaker fleet, nuclear-powered fleet, auxiliary fleet is estimated at somewhere around 150 vessels, of which 50 are existing vessels that will be chartered from the market, and about another 100 vessels have to be built in addition.” Speaking about the construction of a new fleet, he said that his agency is starting construction of buoy tenders and survey vessels this year. “We’re starting to build two of each [type of] vessel this year. Under the comprehensive plan to develop backbone infrastructure, we’re supposed to build about 13 buoy tenders by 2024 and 16 emergency rescue vessels,” Tsvetkov said, adding that all vessels will be outfitted with drones.*





## Year-round Transport of Arctic Liquid Natural Gas (LNG)

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia is making steady progress in the effective exploitation of the LNG fields of the Arctic Yamal Peninsula. As the accompanying passage discusses, the first Russian-manufactured ice-class tanker is being built in the Zvezda shipyards by the city of Bolshoi Kamen in the Russian Far East close to North Korea. The shipyard used to be part of the Soviet Navy and constructed and repaired nuclear submarines. The South Korean shipbuilding company, Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering has a contract to construct 15 icebreaking LNG carriers for the Yamal LNG project. LNG sales are expected to become a major part of the Russian economy. The tankers should be able to sail from the Yamal Peninsula to Europe year-around but may require icebreaker assistance on parts of the Eastern route to the Pacific Ocean. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The ship will be able to handle ice up to 2.1 meters thick. It will have a 45-MW propulsion unit, for power comparable to that of an atomic icebreaker. Its primary fuel source will be LNG.”***

**Source:** “Zvezda to deliver pilot LNG tanker for Arctic LNG 2 in Q1 2023,” *Interfax*, 10 April 2019. <https://www.interfax.com>

### ***Zvezda to deliver pilot LNG tanker for Arctic LNG 2 in First Quarter 2023***

*The Zvezda Shipbuilding Complex and Public Joint Stock Company Sovcomflot have signed a contract for the construction of a pilot [Russian-built] LNG tanker for the Arctic LNG 2 project....Prior to the signing of the contract, Zvezda worked to receive certification. Audits of Gaztransport & Technigaz (GTT), PJSC Novatek (MOEX: NVTk), and shipowners were carried out, and Zvezda’s capacity to build membrane-type LNG cargo containment systems was verified. About 100 Zvezda employees underwent training in South Korea and France and mastered the large-block method of constructing ships. The pilot tanker will meet the technical requirements for the Christophe de Margerie-class ships ordered in South Korea in 2013 to service Novatek’s Yamal LNG project and facilitate year-round LNG transportation in difficult ice conditions in the Kara Sea and the Gulf of Ob. “The tanker built by Zvezda will meet all the Russian legal requirements that allow a ship to be recognized as Russian” according to a Rosneft spokesman. The Zvezda Shipbuilding Complex is being built on the base of the Far Eastern Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Center by a consortium headed by Rosneft. The complex will build large vessels, elements of offshore platforms, ice-class vessels, specialized vessels, and other marine equipment.*

## Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

**By Matthew Stein**

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

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





## A Russian View of NATO: Organized Criminal Group

**OE Watch Commentary:** As expected, there was little celebration within the Kremlin or the Russian media over NATO's recent 70th anniversary, where the alliance is still regarded as one of the country's primary threats. As the first brief excerpt from a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs points out, from the Kremlin's perspective, the NATO "alliance is not going to stop building up its military and political confrontation with Russia." The statement makes frequent references to NATO's desire to "strengthen its coalition capability and to improve its military infrastructure stationed on the Russian border," which is interpreted by the Kremlin as "an attempt to apply military pressure."

One might presume that such a one-sided, negative portrayal of NATO might be counter-balanced by those senior Russian officials who have personal experience of working with the alliance. As the second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (VPK) suggests, nothing could be further from the truth. In this brief article, former Representative of the Russian Federation to the High Command Allied Powers in Europe, General (ret) Leontiy Shevtsov, who spent two years acting as the liaison between Russia and NATO in the 1990s, now refers to the alliance as an "organized criminal group" (OCG).

Shevtsov repeats many of the charges made by the current Kremlin leadership: e.g. NATO is merely a front organization "for a monopolar world order under US hegemony," that any country which joins the alliance "loses its independence," and must follow "commands from Washington." Shevtsov further claims that NATO "cultivates fascism and supports nationalist regimes," asserting that the US has been "drawing them into and obligating them to become members of an organized criminal group." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"...In connection with the 70th anniversary of NATO, the members of the bloc need not triumph, but repent."***

**Source:** "Comment by the Information and Press Department on the 70th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 4 April 2019. [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3601456](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3601456)

*The North Atlantic Treaty, which led to the establishment of NATO, was signed on April 4 seventy years ago.... The agenda of the meeting and the decisions taken at it by the North Atlantic Council show that the alliance is not going to stop building up its military and political confrontation with Russia. The bloc's key goal - to rally its allies for containing "the threat from the East" - has not changed since its establishment in 1949.*

*Although NATO has officially declared its readiness for dialogue with Russia, no practical steps towards this goal have been made. The bloc continues to rely on ultimatums and is not ready to seriously talk about the key European security topics within the framework of result-oriented discussions.... The alliance continues to strengthen its coalition capability and to improve its military infrastructure stationed on the Russian border for expediting the eastward deployment of its troops and equipment.... We see all of this as yet another step towards destabilization and an attempt to apply military pressure....*

**Source:** Leontiy Shevtsov, "Североатлантическая ОПГ: Приказ из Вашингтона не освобождает от ответственности (North Atlantic OPG: Order from Washington is not an excuse)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer-VPK* (Military-Industrial Courier), 2 April 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/49365>

*NATO celebrates its 70th anniversary. Does the alliance have something to be proud of? Perhaps the wars started by the US, which it has long made into a business?*

*Each new member of NATO must be ready for aggression, bombing, murder and cruelty against any state, following a command from Washington - these are the rules of conduct established by the bloc. With entry into the organization, the country loses its independence and does what is demanded of a member of the organized criminal group. A good example is the aggression against Yugoslavia. The leaders of NATO and the states that participated in the bombings must be brought to trial, like Nuremberg, on charges of genocide against the Serbs, which included children. The destruction of industrial and transport infrastructure is estimated at about one hundred billion dollars. NATO must pay these damages.*

*Currently, there is no difference between the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. They advocate a united front for a monopolar world order under US hegemony. Worse, they cultivate fascism and support nationalist regimes, whose representatives are already organizing torchlight processions in imitation of Hitler. It is obvious that some leaders of NATO countries that participated in the bombing of Yugoslavia have not realized, even 20 years later, that the United States was drawing them into and obligating them to become members of an organized criminal group....*

*...In connection with the 70th anniversary of NATO, the members of the bloc need not triumph, but repent.*





## Achilles Heel of Russian Defense?

**OE Watch Commentary:** For the past several years the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has been following the Kremlin's lead, and working on a strategy to defend against what has often been referred to as a "color revolution," or how foreign powers (meaning the US) might exploit digital information to disrupt Russia's political system. The MoD's latest rendition has been dubbed the "Trojan Horse strategy," whereby the US would use a combination of precision weapons and targeted information to weaken Russia. In the brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer (VPK)*, the authors examine some of the country's vulnerable points where the enemy might be able to spark "a provocation of insurrection aimed at destabilizing the situation and changing power in Russia."

The authors begin by pointing out that "the difficult socio-economic situation caused by the inability of the authorities to achieve sustainable growth and raise the standard of living of the population... increases the risk of destabilization." They suggest that the country's depressed economic situation, whereby 40% of the population "can only afford essential goods - food and clothing... is extremely negative for defense capability." The authors criticize what they consider to be wasteful spending on prestige projects, claiming that "programs to strengthen the unity of the Russian nation cost 230 times less than the Sochi Olympics." The authors then move on to look at Russia's demographic data, positing that "in the next 10–15 years [the demographic factor] will have a negative impact on the state of the Russian army and society." These poor demographics are exacerbated by the growing urbanization of Russia, whereby "large cities expand from the influx of labor, while villages and small cities shrink."

While the authors describe a number of other weak points within Russian society (e.g. crime, corruption, unemployment, poor infrastructure) they suggest that the danger of ethnic separatism, particularly in the North Caucasus, remains the greatest vulnerability. They assert "that without improving the socio-economic situation in the regions that have the potential to incite separatism and play the national card, it is not possible to neutralize the dangers and threats of a hybrid nature." The article concludes with a recommendation that the government reassert control over key sectors of the economy, positing that "privatization inevitably spurs interethnic contradictions," and that "national ownership is the economic basis and condition for the inviolability of the state."

A key component of Russia's current defense strategy is predicated upon improving the country's domestic situation to prevent the enemy from exploiting problems. This article suggests that there is still much room for improvement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"...According to Rosstat for 2018, 37 percent of Russians live on less than \$ 10 a day. According to surveys, more than 40 percent can only afford essential goods - food and clothing."***

**Source:** Grigory Nikonorov, Igor Rodionov, "Молодецкая убыль: В России все меньше годных к строевой службе и просто трудоспособных (Youth decline: In Russia, less and less fit for combat service or even labor)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer-VPK (Military-Industrial Courier)*, 25 March 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/49211>

*The essence of the "Trojan Horse" strategy, which is being worked out in the USA, is a combination of a preemptive strike at control centers with a provocation of insurrection aimed at destabilizing the situation and changing power in Russia. A special role in this scenario is assigned to the national factor.*

*...Everything is complicated by the difficult socio-economic situation caused by the inability of the executive to achieve sustainable growth and raise the standard of living of the population, which increases the risk of destabilization....*

*...According to Rosstat for 2018, 37 percent of Russians live on less than \$ 10 a day. According to surveys, more than 40 percent can only afford essential goods - food and clothing.... From the point of view of supporting government policies and preserving the moral and psychological state of the army and the country's population (much of which is regarded as a mobilization resource), this situation is extremely negative for defense capability.*

*...Programs to strengthen the unity of the Russian nation cost 230 times less than the Sochi Olympics"*

*...The demographic situation is getting worse.... The demographic factor in the next 10–15 years will have a negative impact on the state of the Russian army and society. If you do not change the situation, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will be reduced by themselves, talking about guaranteed protection of sovereignty will be problematic.*

*...Extremely negative is the dynamic of the distribution of labor resources. Large cities expand from the influx of labor, and villages and small cities shrink.... This inevitably leads to an increase in the criminal element, which is increasingly structured along national lines. I*

*...The most problematic region that can be used by a geostrategic adversary in a hybrid war is the multinational North Caucasus....It should be recognized that without improving the socio-economic situation in the regions that have the potential to incite separatism and play the national card, it is not possible to neutralize the dangers and threats of a hybrid nature.*

*...One of the most important lessons is that the multinational state is not insured against disintegration or absorption by others until the danger of bureaucratization and corruption of the ruling elite and the entire state and public life is overcome.... National ownership is the economic basis and condition for the inviolability of the state. Its privatization inevitably spurs interethnic contradictions. As a result, in a multinational state, the national-state structure is crumbling. Under these conditions, it is impossible to ensure the country's defense and sovereignty.*



## Defending Soviet Memory

**OE Watch Commentary:** The recent decision by a Lithuanian court, which found Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov guilty of crimes against humanity stemming from the January 1991 armed clash in Vilnius, struck a raw nerve among many Russians. In the brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer (VPK)*, political gadfly, Nikolai Starikov warns that such insubordination will not be tolerated, and that Russia should respond “as tough as possible.” He goes on to argue that if the Kremlin allows “such countries as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia to wipe their feet on Russia... then respect for our country in the world will quickly evaporate.”



Nikolai Starikov

Source: Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nikolay\\_Starikov\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nikolay_Starikov_02.jpg), CCA-SA 4.0

Ten years ago, Starikov was a virtually unknown author, most famous for developing elaborate conspiracy theories which blamed the US for nearly all of Russia’s problems, particularly

for engineering the collapse of the USSR. While his theories have barely changed, Starikov has moved from the fringe to become a much more popular pundit within the pro-Kremlin Russian media today. This *VPK* article contains a typical example of Starikov’s conspiratorial thinking, where he refers to “the premiere of the technology called ‘Unknown Snipers.’” Just as in Vilnius in 1991, or in Kiev in February 2014, there were “Unknown Snipers” which sparked the conflict, so in Starikov’s cosmology, the US is the nefarious power using this type of scheme to weaken Russia, or in the past, the USSR.

There is zero possibility that the current Kremlin leadership will extradite the 94-year old Yazov to serve his sentence in Lithuania, and Starikov suggests that the Russian leadership retaliate using “economic levers,” perhaps even demanding economic compensation from Lithuania for the investments made in their country during the Soviet period. Nostalgia for the Soviet Union continues to grow in Russia, inspired by pundits like Starikov, who assert that Russians must defend the memory of this former superpower. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“The question arises: how should Russia respond to such judgments? In my opinion, as tough as possible.”***

**Source:** Nikolai Starikov, “У Вильно короткая память: В антироссийском раже прибалтийские страны могут лишиться территории (Vilno has a short memory: In their anti-Russian rage, the Baltic countries may lose territory),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer-VPK (Military-Industrial Courier)*, 2 April 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/49364>

*In Vilnius, a sentence was announced in the case of the events of January 1991, when 14 people were killed during the anti-Soviet riots. Marshal Yazov, the court sentenced to 10 years in prison, despite the fact that the prosecutor’s office demanded a life sentence....*

*Before our eyes, the Baltic States commit acts for which sooner or later they will be ashamed. The 94-year-old leader of the Soviet army is sentenced to prison for performing his official duties. Soviet officers are judged for execution of orders... And the order, which was carried out by the military, cannot be called inhuman or violating any international norms.... The order to kill, shoot, crush was not given. And the military did not. Therefore, the accusations made at the Lithuanian court are not supported by any facts.*

*...In 1991, in Vilnius, the premiere of the technology called “Unknown Snipers” took place. Now everyone knows about it. Some people from the roofs of houses were killing people gathered near the Vilnius television center. Our soldiers simply did not have live ammunition, and any ballistic examination would instantly refute the accusations brought against the military...*

*What happened? Betrayal. Gorbachev gave the order, and then pretended that the Alpha group, on its own initiative, got into a plane and arrived in Vilnius.*

*The question arises: how should Russia respond to such judgments? In my opinion, as tough as possible. If Russia will allow such countries as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia to wipe their feet on our country... then respect for our country in the world will quickly evaporate. Surely there are a number of economic levers, about which our military-political leadership knows much better than we, ordinary citizens. An officer who honestly fulfilled his duty must also be protected by our state at the end of his military service.*

*... Maybe it’s time to create an official commission that will calculate how much the Soviet Union has invested in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia....*





# The Impact of Azerbaijan's Statements

**OE Watch Commentary:** The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan often make statements that highlight the capabilities of their respective armed forces and periodically threaten each other with consequences if fighting over Karabakh were to resume. The accompanying excerpted articles are examples of these types of statements, but there is a notable difference that shows how the conflict has changed. The article from *Baki Xabar*, a pro-government Azerbaijani newspaper, includes a statement from Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on how Azerbaijan's army "took under its control part of occupied territories during the April 2016 clashes as well as the wider area it liberated on the Nakhchivan front following successful operations in May 2018." The excerpt from *Interfax* includes another statement from Aliyev a few weeks later, where he states that Azerbaijan's military "freed a part of the occupied lands in the Agdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil districts" in reference to the April 2016 clash.



Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh\\_conflict#/media/File:Nagorno-Karabakh\\_Map2.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh_conflict#/media/File:Nagorno-Karabakh_Map2.png), CC 4.0

The excerpt from *AzTv* is an interview with Azerbaijan's Defense Minister, Zakir Hasanov, and he makes the same reference on how Azerbaijani forces took territory in April 2016, though his statement comes as an apparent response to the Armenian defense minister's recent comment of a "new war in exchange for new territories." He goes on to claim that only a fraction of the Azerbaijani army "defeated the Armenian army within three or four days" and noted the patriotism "Azerbaijani army officers and civilians demonstrated during the April fighting." The statements from Azerbaijani officials come on the three year anniversary of the April clashes and while they are similar to past claims of capabilities, the clashes in April 2016 and May 2018 are notable for territory exchanging hands for the first time since the 1990s. If steps taken by the Armenian government for the development of its armed forces over the past couple of years are any indication (see: "Armenia's "Offensive" Strategy?," *OE Watch*, April 2019; and "Gauging Armenian and Azerbaijani Military Exercises," *OE Watch*, November 2018), statements like these are being listened to and could have an impact. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***"The April fighting was a highly successful operation from the military point of view, considering that crucial, strategic heights were taken over."***

**Source:** Tahir Taghiyev, "Status-kvonu bundan artıq saxlamaq cəhdi – Ermənistan hər an müharibəni tətikləyir... (An Attempt To Further Extend Status Quo -- Armenia Will Trigger War at Any Moment...)," *Baki Xabar*, 19 March 2019. <http://www.baki-xeber.com/siyaset/89402.html>

...President Ilham Aliyev has said on many occasions that the Azerbaijani Army has worthily responded to the enemy and it will continue to do so like it did when it took part of the occupied territories under its control during the April 2016 clashes as well as the wider area it liberated on the Nakhchivan front following successful operations in May 2018...

**Source:** "Aliyev describes April war in Karabakh as one of Azerbaijan's most successful military operations," *Interfax*, 2 April 2019. <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=895427>

..."The Azerbaijani army accomplished a highly successful operation aimed at stopping Armenia's provocations and freed a part of the occupied lands in the Agdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil districts," Aliyev said. "The April fighting was a highly successful operation from the military point of view, considering that crucial, strategic heights were taken over," he said.

**Source:** "EKSKLÜZİV MÜSAHİBƏ: Müdafiə naziri Zakir Həsənov "Günün nəbzi" proqramının qonağı oldu - 03.04.2019 (EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov was the guest of the "Pulse of the Day" program - 03.04.2019)," *AzTv*, 3 April 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6qT8LtutVE>

...Asked to comment on the phrase "new war in exchange for new territories", uttered by Armenia's defence minister regarding the Karabakh territorial conflict between the two countries, Hasanov said the remark was only meant for domestic consumption in Armenia...Hasanov commented on the April 2016 fighting, in which Azerbaijan reclaimed some of its land held by ethnic Armenian troops...He said the results for the Armenians were "catastrophic" as "20 per cent of the Azerbaijani army" defeated the Armenian army within three or four days. He also praised the patriotism that he said Azerbaijani army officers and civilians demonstrated during the April fighting...



## Russia's Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan

**OE Watch Commentary:** There have been a number of reports over the past several years that the Russian government would establish another military base in Kyrgyzstan, in addition to the Kant Airbase (as well as a few other small, special purpose facilities), but no agreement emerged from any of the bilateral meetings that took place during this time frame. The topic came up again a few months before President Putin's visit to Kyrgyzstan at the end of March. While the two sides only modified the existing agreement on the Kant Airbase, the accompanying excerpted articles contain a few important items worth noting.

The article from *Kaktus*, an independent Russian-language news website in Kyrgyzstan, reports that the Russian government “will increase the area of land it rents by almost 60 hectares” and that it will increase the annual payment “by \$291,500.” The article also notes that the agreement appears to allow for the deployment of unmanned systems. The article



“российская авиационная база Кант в Республике Киргизия (The Russian air base Kant in the Kyrgyz Republic)”  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant\\_\(air\\_base\)\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant_(air_base)_01.jpg), CC 4.0

from *Kommersant*, a Russian newspaper, mentions how Russian unmanned aerial vehicles have been used during joint military exercises in the region, including the “Forpost, Orlan, and Takhion,” and that the agreement allows for the discussion of the “permanent deployment of such UAVs at the Kant base.” Overall, the recent agreement between the Kyrgyz and Russian governments did not result in another base as has been speculated over the years; however, the articles show that the agreement entails an increase in Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan along with a possible permanent deployment of Russian UAVs at the Kant base. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

**“Russia will increase the area of land it rents by almost 60 hectares, and as a result of this, the rent of the base will increase by \$291,500 (for a total of \$4.8 million).”**

**Source:** “Военную базу России в Кыргызстане расширят (The Russian base in Kyrgyzstan is expanding),” *Kaktus*, 28 March 2019. [https://kaktus.media/doc/389002\\_voennuyu\\_bazy\\_rossii\\_v\\_kyrgyzstane\\_rasshiriat.html](https://kaktus.media/doc/389002_voennuyu_bazy_rossii_v_kyrgyzstane_rasshiriat.html)

*Changes and additions have been made to the 2012 agreement on the status of the Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan as part of the state visit by President Vladimir Putin...Russia will increase the area of land it rents by almost 60 hectares, and as a result of this, the rent of the base will increase by \$291,500 (for a total of \$4.8 million). Also written in the agreement were the concepts of “unmanned aerial vehicle” and “unmanned aviation system.”...*

**Source:** Kirill Krivosheev, Aleksandra Dzhorzhevich, and Kabay Karabekov, “Киргизия не свернула с курса на Россию (Kyrgyzstan did not go off course on Russia),” *Kommersant*, 29 March 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3925427>

*...It should be noted that Russian UAVs arrived in the region in 2018 too: A unified group of forces made up of the units from the Russian and Kyrgyz armed forces used them during the CIS antiterrorist drills. According to Colonel Aleksandr Lapin, commander of the Central Military District's forces, these included UAVs Forpost, Orlan, and Takhion. “A group of unmanned aerial vehicles was established and we used it according to the experience acquired in Syria,” Mr Lapin said. Permanent deployment of such UAVs at the Kant base could apparently be discussed now...*





## Estonian Officials Express Security Concern

**OE Watch Commentary:** Estonian leaders have recently been concerned about their country's state of readiness in the event of a crisis. While some have been focused on the military threat from Russia for years, the accompanying excerpt from the centrist Estonian daily *Postimees* features comments by National Security and Defense Director Indrek Sirp who says that there are more pressing security matters than Russia. Sirp highlights that Estonia faces threats from a variety of sources including natural and technical disasters and notes that these concerns are compounded by a lack of proper funding and communication capacities in need of improvement.

Sirp directly addresses the issue of communication in state defense saying, "Communication is one of the most pressing issues. One of the reasons is that we have certain fragmentation: different ministries, IT buildings. We have not been able to organize them under a single roof." He further specifies that the problem with this fragmentation is that the expectations for how they will work together in a crisis situation is not fully realized. This could lead to slower reaction times and prevent agencies from taking appropriate, coordinated action. The article claims that the issues persist due to a lack of consistent funding, despite the government's desire to improve things.

The article also sheds light on Sirp's plans for the future: "We have a solid base for future decisions. For example, how the state should build shelters. The government decided that instead of building shelters, we can use existing infrastructure for public shelters. Mostly in bigger cities, where threats are more likely to happen." Nevertheless, even with a clear idea of how to implement improvements, the government is aware of the country's limitations. This is evident in Sirp's questioning, "Can we manage an accident with hundreds of casualties on our own, without asking for help from neighboring countries - that I am not sure of. I am not sure Estonia can even develop this ideal capability one day. We must rely on allies." **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**

***"Communication is one of the most pressing issues. One of the reasons is that we have certain fragmentation: different ministries, IT buildings. We have not been able to gather them. There is a working group looking into this issue. They have understood that we need visible progress - we cannot continue the same way."***

**Source:** "Sõda pole tõenäolisim kriis (War is not the most likely crisis)," *Postimees*, 25 March 2019. <https://www.postimees.ee/6552841/soda-pole-toenaolisim-kriis>

[Kund] Your predecessor Kristjan Prikk graded Estonian state defense as "satisfactory" in 2014 and in 2016 he gave a C+. How would you grade it now?

[Sirp] If we continue the same way it is possible to calculate when we reach A. I would not give a grade. I think we are in a good position currently; we know our strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, I would say that our broad-based defense is doing well.

[Kund] So our President Kersti Kaljulaid was mistaken, when she said that broad-based defense only exists on paper?

[Sirp] I think the president meant that she wants to see further steps. First state defense blueprint in 2013 consisted of two separate documents - military and non-military. Now we have a single document which includes capability planning and operational planning. We have finished our "first lap" and are starting the second one. There has been visible progress in civil defense. We have a solid base for future decisions. For example, how the state should build shelters. The government decided that instead of building special shelters, we can use existing infrastructure for public shelters. Mostly in bigger cities, where threats are more likely to happen. These places need to be chosen and labelled, so people would know where to find them. It would be ideal to occasionally rehearse how to take shelter. The Interior Ministry needs to start planning this, find people and additional funding....Can we manage an accident with hundreds of casualties on our own, without asking for help from neighboring countries - that I am not sure of. I am not sure Estonia can even develop this ideal capability one day. We must rely on allies.

[Kund] For six years now people have been saying that communication is the biggest deficiency in broad-based defense. Currently it is still so. Blueprints have been created, funds have been issued - why is this problem not solved?

[Sirp] Communication is one of the most pressing issues. One of the reasons is that we have certain fragmentation: different ministries, IT buildings. We have not been able to gather them. There is a working group looking into this issue. They have understood that we need visible progress - we cannot continue the same way. We need to verbalize our expectations to private firms that offer us communication services. We presume that they will continue working in crisis situation, but if there is no electricity, then how exactly? Do they have extra capacity, a generator under a mast or something? The other important aspect is how we ensure communication outside of Estonia. When we do not have cables under the sea or they stop working, then what is our solution for communicating with the outside world. The mechanisms and processes have been agreed on. We will see the results in some time.



# NATO's Latest Drill Shows Changing Threats

**OE Watch Commentary:** The international cyber defense exercise “Locked Shields 2019” organized by NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE) was held in Tallinn, Estonia from 8-12 April 2019. As the accompanying European news sources discuss, the exercise took on the issue of a national election being disrupted by cyber threats, and addressed the protection of vital services and critical infrastructure. In addition to the cyber challenges, the teams had to efficiently execute strategic decisions and solve forensic, legal and media challenges.

The first passage discusses that this was the world’s largest live-fire cyber exercise (meaning that the actions of the teams would have immediate effects in the game-like environment) and was held as a competition among teams. The drill featured a scenario where a fictional island nation was holding national elections when it was subject to coordinated cyber-attacks that targeted water purification systems, electric power grids, and 4G public safety networks. The passage explains that the event used a game-based approach, enabling participants to take on roles in fictional response teams whose goal is to assess a crisis situation and defend networks that have fallen victim to cyber-attacks.

The second passage, from the website of the CCDCOE, features comments by Lauri Luht, Head of Cyber Exercises at NATO CCDCOE. Luht notes that the exercise involved 4000 virtualized systems that had to endure over 2500 attacks and says, “In addition to maintaining more than 150 complex IT systems per team, the Blue Teams had to be efficient in reporting incidents, executing strategic decisions and solving forensic, legal and media challenges.” The second passage also notes how the exercise highlighted the need to enhance communication between technical, civil and military experts and decision-makers. The exercise enabled participant nations to practice the entire chain of command in the event of a cyber threat involving both civil and military units.

NATO’s efforts to adapt to changing warfare and security threats is not new. At a June 2016 NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Brussels, cyber was categorized as an operational domain (similar to sea, air and land) and the ministers decided that a cyber-attack can invoke NATO’s Article 5 on collective defense. During that meeting NATO member states also agreed to deploy new battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland against Russia. Article 5 says that an armed attack against one shall be considered an attack against all; so the decision to include cyber in this scope signaled the changing definition of armed attack.

It is also worth noting the location of the exercise. Estonia has become a leading cyber security force within NATO after a series of cyber-attacks against the country’s financial and communication sectors took place in 2007 (which officials blamed on the Russian government). Since then, the country has led such exercises and competitions such as this one. This year’s winners? France, followed by the Czech Republic and Sweden. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

***“The participants are taking part in a simulation where a fictional island nation is holding national elections and is subject to coordinated cyber attacks that target water purification systems, electric power grids, and 4G public safety networks.”***



November 30, 2016. NATO and partner nations civilians, military work together and closely collaborate during a NATO exercise Cyber Coalition 16 in Tallinn, Estonia.

Source: Edouard Bocquet, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shapenato/31210770062>, Public Domain

**Source:** Elena Pavlovskaya, “NATO takes part in world’s largest cyber security drill,” *Neweurope.eu*, 9 April 2019. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/nato-takes-part-in-worlds-largest-cybersecurity-drill/>

*A team of 40 cyber security experts led by the NATO Communications and Information Agency are competing in Locked Shields 2019, the world’s largest live-fire cyber exercise, an event that includes more than 1,000 participants.*

*Organized by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Estonia, the event uses a game-based approach, enabling participants to take on roles in fictional response teams whose goal is to assess a crisis situation and defend networks that have fallen victim to cyber-attacks.*

*The participants are taking part in a simulation where a fictional island nation is holding national elections and is subject to coordinated cyber attacks that target water purification systems, electric power grids, and 4G public safety networks. The job of the NATO team is to help contain the damage and protect other networks from further attacks.*

*These types of cyber drills are seen as a valuable tool for NATO cyber experts and national security services to learn how to protect their IT systems and critical infrastructure while forging closer ties between civilian and military experts, both of whom would be needed to counter cyber threats.*

*The CCDCOE... organized the 2019 drills with the Estonian Defense Forces, the Finnish Defense Forces, the US European Command, the National Security Research Institute of the Republic of Korea, and Tallinn’s University of Technology.*





## Continued: NATO's Latest Drill Shows Changing Threats

**Source:** "France Wins Cyber Defense Exercise Locked Shields 2019," Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence, [ccdcoe.org](https://ccdcoe.org/news/2019/france-wins-cyber-defence-exercise-locked-shields-2019/), Undated, <https://ccdcoe.org/news/2019/france-wins-cyber-defence-exercise-locked-shields-2019/>

*The team from France wins the largest and most complex international live-fire cyber defense exercise Locked Shields 2019. Czech and Swedish team take second and third place respectively.*

*"The winning team excelled in availability, usability and providing services for the customer," said Lauri Luht, Head of Cyber Exercises at NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE).*

*"Every single participating team deserves credit for tackling the complex cyber challenges of Locked Shields exercise. This year the exercise evolved around 4000 virtualized systems that had to take more than 2500 attacks. In addition to maintaining more than 150 complex IT systems per team, the Blue Teams had to be efficient in reporting incidents, executing strategic decisions and solving forensic, legal and media challenges. Protection of critical infrastructure is essential to ensure the efficient operation of both military and civilian organizations, it is the foundation of our modern digital lifestyle," added Luht.*

*In 2019 the exercise highlighted the growing need to enhance dialogue between technical experts, civil and military participants and decision-making levels. The CCDCOE integrates the technical and strategic game, enabling participating nations to practice the entire chain of command in the event of a severe cyber incident involving both civilian and military players. Reflecting real world cyber threats, the exercise addressed first and foremost the protection of vital services and critical infrastructure.*

## THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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

The Mad Scientist Laboratory blog is a marketplace of ideas about the future of our society, work, and conflict.

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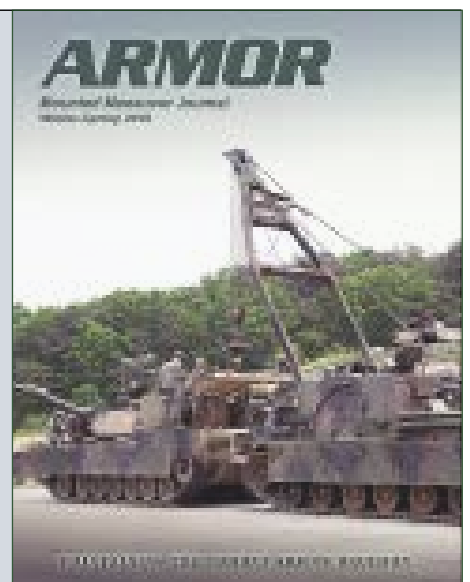
## Reconnaissance-in-Force Russian Style

By Lester W. Grau

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

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

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



## 22





# Indonesian Muslim Organization Responds to New Zealand Attack

**OE Watch Commentary:** After an Australian citizen carried out a mass killing of 49 worshippers at a mosque in New Zealand, the Banyuwangi branch of Indonesia’s multi-million member Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, issued a statement seeking to deter Indonesians from responding with vengeance and violence. Indonesia’s proximity to Australia and New Zealand, the history of Indonesian jihadists attacking tourist spots where Australians are present, such as in Bali in 2002 and 2005, and Indonesia’s position as the world’s most populous Muslim country made this an important response (Banyuwangi is also the town on Indonesia’s most populous island of Java nearest to the island of Bali).

According to the accompanying passage from a recent article in the Indonesian *antaranews.com*, Nahdlatul Ulama condemned the terrorist attack in New Zealand while also urging Indonesians to remain calm and not be provoked. It further stated that it was not the duty of Indonesians themselves to take revenge or respond but rather all religious people. Six Indonesians were reported to have been in the mosque that was attacked in New Zealand, including at least one who was killed. Nahdlatul Ulama further urged the Indonesian government to assist those victims and for ordinary citizens to pray for them. Nahdlatul Ulama also encouraged Indonesians to avoid spreading calls for violence on social media.

The overall tenor of Nahdlatul Ulama, therefore, was to support action by the Indonesian government but for Indonesian citizens to express their concerns through prayer and not any violent actions. In this regard, Nahdlatul Ulama’s efforts helped to defuse tensions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama – panoramio

Source: Akhmad Fauzi via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pengurus\\_Besar\\_Nahdlatul\\_Ulama\\_-\\_panoramio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pengurus_Besar_Nahdlatul_Ulama_-_panoramio.jpg), CC BY 3.0

**“We also urge all parties to calm down and not be provoked by those who take revenge because it does not need to be done by Indonesian citizens.”**

**Source:** “Terorisme di Selandia Baru dikutuk Lembaga Dakwah NU [Terrorism in New Zealand condemned by the NU Da’wah Institute], *antaranews.com*, 16 March 2019. <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/810987/terorisme-di-selandia-baru-dikutuk-lembaga-dakwah-nu>

“We strongly condemn all forms of extremism and terrorism wherever they are such as in New Zealand,” said Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Citizens Advocacy Team Moh. Kholili. According to him, the brutal killings occurred when worshipers were shot on Friday prayers in a broadcast done by live-streaming. He said extremism and terrorism were the enemies of all humanity, and invited all religious people to condemn the cruel and inhumane acts. He also encouraged the Indonesian government to urge the New Zealand government to crack down on the perpetrator and reveal the terrorist network so that the case could be investigated thoroughly. He hoped that the Indonesian government would strengthen assistance to Indonesian citizens who were victims and their families and invited all citizens to pray for victims of violence in two mosques in New Zealand. “We also urge all parties to stay calm and not be provoked by those who take revenge because it does not need to be carried out by Indonesian citizens, so stop spreading violent videos through social media,” he said.



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

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

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



# China's Expectations Grow for its Non-Commissioned Staff Officers

**OE Watch Commentary:** For decades, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has struggled under an obsolete command and obsolete technical systems. Meanwhile, the PLA, realizing that warfare under informatized conditions requires more highly-skilled non-commissioned officers at the tactical grassroots level, has been making a concerted effort to recruit more highly qualified and educated personnel.

The following article extracts from *China National Radio Online*, gives a balanced assessment on some of the weaknesses and goals set aside for non-commissioned staff officers in China's 79th Group Army. According to the article, they are now expected to conduct the duties of a staff officer. However, this endeavor is not progressing without challenges. Some of the weaknesses observed include an inability to understand the battlefield situation making it difficult to make battle decisions; an inability to calculate support data and understand supplies parameters; and an inability to make sense of combat consumption, which would affect the entire course of combat. While there has been a push to recruit more highly-skilled and educated non-commissioned officers, the article indicates that soldiers are still coming up short in education and training.

Perhaps most interesting in the article is the mentioning of a *Detailed Regulations on the Cultivation and Building of Non-Commissioned Staff Officer Troops*. According to the article, the detailed regulations call for non-commissioned staff officer troops to be able to "keep up with" evaluation standards for commissioned staff officers. Their capabilities are expected to be at the same level as those of commissioned staff officers. They are expected to be fully versed in reading, writing, calculating, transmitting, etc... and mostly, they are expected to improve on their capabilities to carry out their posts. In short, as Deputy Brigade Commander Liu Quan summarized, non-commissioned staff officers' knowledge might currently be uneven. However, once they possess the same command, planning, and other capabilities as commissioned officers, they will be an important link between command organs and frontline combat units on the future battlefield. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“Only once they truly possess the same command, planning, and other capabilities as commissioned officers can they fully perform their function of “forming a connecting link” between command organs and frontline combat units on the future battlefield.”***

**Source:** “Non-Commissioned Staff Officers Have Arrived! See How Elite Brigade in North Improves Capabilities, Quality of Non-Commissioned Officers,” *China National Radio Online*, 16 March 2019. [http://k.sina.com.cn/article\\_2280198017\\_87e90f8102700h4x5.html?from=ml](http://k.sina.com.cn/article_2280198017_87e90f8102700h4x5.html?from=ml)

## ***Non-Commissioned Staff Officers Have Arrived! See How Elite Brigade in North Improves Capabilities, Quality of Non-Commissioned Officers***

*Zheng Xueyi, a reconnaissance section non-commissioned staff officer, could not understand the battlefield situation and could not make battle decisions; Shi Zhengxuan, a financial affairs section non-commissioned assistant, was unable to calculate support data and could not understand supplies parameters; Bi Yiduan, a motorized infantry 4th battalion non-commissioned staff officer, could not make sense of combat consumption, thereby influencing the entire course of combat.*

*Not long after, the brigade's Detailed Regulations on the Cultivation and Building of Non-Commissioned Staff Officer Troops came “fresh out of the oven.” The detailed regulations provided a detailed list of non-commissioned staff officer powers and duties. It also gave clear regulations for the cultivation and usage, capability requirements, training standards and elimination through evaluation of non-commissioned staff officers.*

*According to the stipulations of the detailed regulations, non-commissioned staff officer troops must “keep up with” evaluation standards for commissioned staff officers. Their foundational work capabilities, specialized command capabilities, planning, regulation and control capabilities, and capabilities to carry out their posts must reach the same level as those of commissioned staff officers. Not only must they be thoroughly versed in and grasp basic techniques, such as “reading, remembering, calculating, writing, sending, transmitting, etc.” and related knowledge, it is even more vital that they improve their specialized command capabilities, planning, regulation and control capabilities, and capabilities to carry out their posts.*

*“Commissioned and non-commissioned officers train and test together, training troops and preparing for combat with the same frequency and vigor.”*

*... Deputy brigade commander Liu Quan said that: “Non-commissioned staff officers are an important marker for the new unit systems and mechanisms following reform and adjustment. Although they possess plentiful experience, their knowledge is uneven. Only once they truly possess the same command, planning, and other capabilities as commissioned officers can they fully perform their function of “forming a connecting link” between command organs and frontline combat units on the future battlefield.*





# China Pushes Military Education Throughout Academia

**OE Watch Commentary:** Many countries operate some form of conscription, requiring young adults to devote one or more years of military service to their country. China is not one of them. However, it does require a certain amount of military training to be incorporated into the academic year of its students. The following two articles, published in *Xinhua* and *South China Morning Post*, offer some insight into China's system of required military education and how it has evolved throughout the years.

The *South China Morning Post* explains that military education for all students in China was first written into legislation in 1984 as part of the country's Military Service Law, which stated that "it is the sacred duty of every citizen of the People's Republic of China to defend the motherland and resist aggression." In 1994, the country released a new set of military education rules, which stated that the training must include theoretical, as well as practical combat education. Hence, it became mandatory for students in higher education institutes to go through basic military training. Most Chinese universities today require first-year students to complete a two-week program at the beginning of the academic year. The students are exposed to basic formations, combat skills, and occasionally learning to shoot weapons.

In 2006, according to *Xinhua*, China rolled out a new syllabus for military courses. That syllabus was recently updated, with the Ministry of Education and the National Defense Mobilization Department, under the Central Military Commission, in a new document, requesting that certain military courses be included in college curriculum. The new courses added to an already existing syllabus are meant to raise "college students' awareness of national defense and (improve) their all-round quality." Some of the newly added courses include defense skills and protection training in wartime, replacing outdated training projects. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“The new syllabus adds courses on defense skills and protection training in wartime in addition to previous courses, such as military technologies and war information.”***

**Source:** “China Releases New Syllabus for Military Courses in Universities,” *Xinhua*, 12 April 2019.  
[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/12/c\\_137972483.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/12/c_137972483.htm)

## ***China Releases New Syllabus for Military Courses in Universities***

*The document, which was jointly released by the MOE and the national defense mobilization department under the Central Military Commission, asked colleges to add military courses into their training and teaching programs, set specific credit for such courses, and record performance results into students' archives.*

*The new syllabus adds courses on defense skills and protection training in wartime in addition to previous courses, such as military technologies and war information.*

*The revision was made to remove out-dated training projects and improve the training quality monitoring system amid the country's deepened education reform, said an official with the MOE.*

*The establishment of such courses is helpful for raising college students' awareness of national defense and improving their all-round quality, the official said.*

**Source:** Phoebe Zhang, “Why Chinese Students Have to Start the Academic Year with a Short Spell of Military Service,” *South China Morning Post*, 23 September 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2165265/why-chinese-students-have-start-academic-year-short-spell>

## ***Why Chinese Students Have to Start the Academic Year with a Short Spell of Military Service***

*Most Chinese universities require first-year students to go complete a programme – usually for two weeks – at the start of the academic year.*

*The students study basic formations, combat skills and sometimes even learn to shoot. Training is also mandatory for high school pupils, while some middle schools make teenagers take part in exercises.*

*Military education was first written into legislation in 1984, as part of China's Military Service Law, which declares “it is the sacred duty of every citizen of the People's Republic of China to defend the motherland and resist aggression”.*

*In 1994, a new set of military education rules said the training must include theoretical as well as practical combat elements, a requirement repeated in the 2001 Law of National Defence Education.*

*The law makes it mandatory for students in higher education institutes to go through this basic military training.*



# China Claims Lead in Blockchain Projects

**OE Watch Commentary:** China claims to be leading the way in blockchain technology, which could one day have significant economic, social, and military implications. Blockchain replaces the need for third-party financial institutions and is a (potentially disruptive) technology that underpins cryptocurrencies. It is a system in which a record of transactions made by cryptocurrencies are maintained across multiple computers, linked in a peer-to-peer network. With its potential to counter fake documents and provide real-time tracking, it is a useful tool to supervise financial and similar sectors. From another standpoint, as some experts argue, blockchain could one day be weaponized for “gray zone” warfare. According to an article published in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, “The potential for applications of blockchain technology in the military arena are extremely broad.” These may include the comprehensive management of weapons and equipment, along with various applications in logistical support.

China has proudly stepped up to announce that it is now leading the world in new blockchain projects. As described in the first excerpted article, published in *China Daily*, as of November 2018, China has 263 blockchain projects in progress. 25 percent of these are said to be global projects. There are now about 615 blockchain companies in China. Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent, known collectively as “BAT” have also launched their own blockchain initiatives.

Since February, the Chinese government has been implementing “Regulations on the Management of Blockchain Information Services.” Providers are expected to file their information on the listing system within 10 days of launching their service. (Note: The Cyberspace Administration of China had reportedly approved the first 197 blockchain firms, among which BAT were included, in late March 2019, according to their website: [http://www.cac.gov.cn/2019-03/30/c\\_1124305122.htm](http://www.cac.gov.cn/2019-03/30/c_1124305122.htm)).

*China Daily* explains that the country is using the technology in a number of industries, the most predominant being in financial services. Other industries include public services, healthcare, supply chains, smart manufacturing, logistics, green energy and smart government. Nearly 50 percent of respondents in China, according to a Deloitte survey, claimed the technology was already in use within their organizations, compared with 14 percent in the United States.

*China Daily* reports that there is really not a big difference in the development of blockchain between China and the United States. However, it concludes that once the technology is mature enough to unlock the consumer market, “blockchain development in China will be much faster than in the US, thanks to the country’s fast-growing internet industry and large user base.

Blockchain is still in its infancy and its potential has yet to be realized. China is clearly intent on leading the charge. While China’s progress, as seen through *China Daily* seems fairly innocuous, *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* hones in on the military aspect. “Blockchain technology is still an “untapped goldmine... By seizing the opportunity brought by cutting-edge science and technology, by striving to seize the initiative in military competition, and seizing the high ground in world military affairs we will win the informatized wars of the future.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“Once blockchain technology is successfully applied to areas such as military network security management or full life cycle management of weapons in the future, it will inevitably surpass traditional military management systems and bring about revolutionary changes in the building of the armed forces and their operational methods.”***

**Source:** “Nation Leads World in Blockchain Projects,” *China Daily*, 2 April 2019. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/02/WS5ca2b016a3104842260b3ce7.html>

## ***Nation Leads World in Blockchain Projects***

*As of November, China led the world in new blockchain projects, with 263 in progress.*

*The figure accounted for about 25 percent of such projects globally, according to data service provider Blockdata in Beijing.*

*Blockchain refers to the technology that underpins cryptocurrencies, but its real value goes far beyond that...*

*The technology is used widely across a range of industries in China, like financial services, public services, healthcare, supply chains, smart manufacturing and logistics.*

*“The main strength of blockchain is in decentralized data management,” said Zhang Feixue, chief editor at Blockdata. “It can serve the real economy in terms of circulation and distribution. In the field of industrial economy, blockchain allows various assets to flow in the digital world, so it is*

*In Deloitte’s 2018 global blockchain survey, nearly 50 percent of respondents in China said the technology was already being used in their organization, compared with only 14 percent in the United States.*

*Qulian is just one of 615 blockchain companies in China, with 82 percent of them founded between 2016 and last year, according to a report in December by Beijing think tank EO Intelligence. Half of the companies are working on the adoption of blockchain technology in the financial industry.*

*Internet giants Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent - collectively known as BAT in the industry - have launched their own blockchain initiatives.*





## Continued: China Claims Lead in Blockchain Projects

**Source:** Si Jia, “It is Worth Taking Note of the Applications for Blockchain Technology in the Military Domain,” *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 26 July 2018. <https://www.chainnews.com/articles/244843179553.htm>

### *It is Worth Taking Note of the Applications for Blockchain Technology in the Military Domain*

*The potential for applications of blockchain technology in the military arena are extremely broad. It can be used in full life cycle management of weapons and equipment. The current weapons and equipment recordkeeping methods are generally paper-based or recorded in electronic media...*

*Blockchain technology also has applications in logistical support because it effectively resolves difficult problems that intelligentized military logistics face such as networked communications, data preservation, and systems upkeep...*

*...Cutting-edge science and technology such as blockchains comprehensively permeate the military domain and before long with changes in the shape of warfare, even determining success or failure. Although the use of blockchain technology in the military arena is still in the initial stage and projects have yet to get going, the development of any science and technology must undergo a process of accumulation of gradual changes. Once blockchain technology is successfully applied to areas such as military network security management or full life cycle management of weapons in the future, it will inevitably surpass traditional military management systems and bring about revolutionary changes in the building of the armed forces and their operational methods.*

*Blockchain technology is still an “untapped goldmine.” The major military powers of the world of which the United States is representative have already caught the scent of this wave of advanced science and technology. One by one they are seeking applications for blockchain technology in the military arena, seeking a favorable position in the new round of the revolution in military affairs. At a time when a new round of innovation and development in current science and technology is germinating and growing, we both need to undergo independent innovation to actively develop disruptive military science and technology and we need to closely follow the big wave of the new world military technological revolution. By seizing the opportunity brought by cutting-edge science and technology, by striving to seize the initiative in military competition, and seizing the high ground in world military affairs we will win the informatized wars of the future.*



**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>



# India's Improvements in Artillery

**OE Watch Commentary:** Artillery has long played an important role along the Line of Control (LOC) between India and Pakistan and as the accompanying excerpted article reports, the Indian Armed Forces are taking steps to improve its capabilities in this area. The article comes from *The Print*, an English-language news website in India, and it discusses the recent induction of the Dhanush howitzer into the Indian Army and how it is an improvement on existing artillery along the LOC. The article first mentions that for a number of years “the Indian Army’s Artillery Corps has been working towards becoming a ‘major combat arm’, instead of being a mere ‘support arm’ for infantry or armour.” The author notes several features of the new howitzer, including its “maximum range of 38.4 kilometers” and that this “makes outranged Pakistani artillery units more vulnerable to Indian counter-battery fire.” While these are important to note, the article mentions how “114 Dhanush units are on order with 18 expected to be delivered before the end of 2019” and that it will be a couple of years until they can be produced in sufficient numbers to have an impact along the LOC. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“Indeed, the Dhanush [howitzer] makes outranged Pakistani artillery units more vulnerable to Indian counter-battery fire, while itself staying out of reach.”***

**Source:** Saurav Jha, “With Dhanush howitzer, Artillery Corps lends a major combat arm to Indian Army at LoC,” *The Print*, 26 March 2019. <https://theprint.in/opinion/with-dhanush-howitzer-artillery-corps-lends-a-major-combat-arm-to-indian-army-at-loc/212161/>

*Since the 1999 Kargil War, the Indian Army’s Artillery Corps has been working towards becoming a ‘major combat arm’, instead of being a mere ‘support arm’ for infantry or armour.*

*While recent imports such as the K-9 Vajra-T self-propelled howitzer (SPH) and the M-777 ultra lightweight howitzer (ULH) have been in the spotlight, it is the indigenous 155 mm/45 calibre Dhanush howitzer — scheduled to be formally inducted on March 26 — that will provide the Indian Army with an advantage, especially along the mountainous terrain of the Line of Control (the LoC).*

*Although derived from the baseline FH-77B, the Ordnance Factory Board’s (OFB’s) Dhanush is a major step-up in terms of capability over the former.*

*Moreover, with a high-level of indigenous content (IC), the Dhanush howitzer will be much easier to maintain than the 155 mm/39 caliber Bofors FH-77B howitzer...In fact, Dhanush’s production will make indigenous spares available for improving the serviceability of the FH-77B as well.*

*For instance, the longer barrel length of the Dhanush, along with the use of a ‘Zone-6’ bi-modular charge system, allows it to fire an extended range full-bore base bleed (ERFB-BB) shell to a maximum range of 38.4 kilometers (km) as opposed to just 24 km for the FH-77B... Importantly, it also outranges any towed gun or howitzer in the Pakistan Army’s arsenal by a significant margin.*

*The Dhanush howitzer also has superior fire control and accuracy when compared to the FH-77B due to the incorporation of an automatic gun alignment and positioning system (AGAPS), which uses an enhanced tactical computer (ETC) for on-board ballistic computations...Each Dhanush unit is also provided with a STAR-V radio, which along with the ETC and a gun display unit make it compatible with the Indian Army’s Shakti Artillery Combat Command & Control System (ACCCS) that automates artillery operations in a network-centric environment.*

*The use of AGAPS along with electro-hydraulics suited for auto gun laying enables the Dhanush to be aimed at a target much faster than the FH-77B, once targeting data is available. This means that the Dhanush can better utilize enemy gun location data provided by the Swathi Weapon Locating Radar (WLR) and drones used by search and target acquisition (SATA) units of the Artillery Corps.*

*Indeed, the Dhanush makes outranged Pakistani artillery units more vulnerable to Indian counter-battery fire, while itself staying out of reach. Dhanush’s longer range and high rate of fire will also make it useful in defeating localized Pakistan Army’s offensives in sectors of the LoC where the terrain favors the Pakistani side...The destruction of heavily fortified Pakistani posts along the LoC requires interlocking artillery fire from different directions.*

*This is more easily accomplished if a standard artillery regiment consisting of 18 guns can be disaggregated and divided into groups...out of the 18 guns in a regiment, two could be sited closer to a target in different locations and used in what is called a ‘direct-in-direct fire’ (DIDF) mode, a concept that emerged during the Kargil War and was found to be rather efficacious.*

*Meanwhile, the remaining guns — themselves sub-divided into firing units and kept further back — could engage the target from different directions, thereby maximizing the probability of destroying the target...*

*At the moment, 114 Dhanush units are on order with 18 expected to be delivered before the end of 2019. A requirement for a further 300 units of this type is being projected by the Indian Army with annual production expected to reach 60 units in a couple of years...*





# Military Delegates to China's "Two Meetings" Discuss Enhancing Joint Training, Interoperability

**OE Watch Commentary:** Joint operations and training make regular appearance in Chinese national policy. Some recent appearances were President Xi Jinping's 19th Communist Party Work Report in last October, and Premier Li Keqiang's Work Report at the National People's Congress in March. The accompanying passages from the *PLA Daily* provide insight into recent developments regarding Chinese joint operations and training.

*PLA Daily* Reporters Liu Jianwei 刘建伟 and Zhou Yuan 周远 spoke with military representatives to the "Two Meetings" 两会 in Beijing this March. The "Two Meetings" are the annual convocations of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—two State (distinct from Communist Party) representative bodies. A cross section of Chinese society, including the military, is invited to participate. The representatives gave their views regarding improvements in joint and combined training.

The Chinese Military's sweeping reorganization plan, which begun on 31 December 2015, has already undergone two major phases: "Neck and Above," 脖子以上 reorganization of the Central Military Commission, and "Below the Neck" 脖子以下 changes to operational units. The two components have put major stress on the PLA as it has to reconfigure its system of regulations and inter-organizational communication top to bottom.

Additionally, a major theme that is not said outright but clearly behind a lot of rhetoric included in the article is the adoption of an entirely new mindset. While it may seem intuitive that the PLA's primary responsibility is preparing for conflict, the Chinese military has struggled with the widespread prevalence of a "garrison mindset." Jinping and the Central Military Commission have therefore made adoption of "preparation for warfare" and realism in training top priorities. (See "Learning Without Fighting: New Developments in PLA Artificial Intelligence War-Gaming," in this issue of *OE Watch*.) The opinions expressed by the representatives provide insight into ongoing progress.

Regarding equipment, one PLA Air Force Officer noted that as the PLAAF takes on more responsibility for transporting equipment from other services, it made communication with those services regarding equipment specifications more important. PLA Rocket Force Representative Ding Guolin 丁国林 highlighted the necessity of improving defense industry's ability to take future joint operations into account and develop relevant equipment.

A major focus is improving understanding of other branches' jobs. As mentioned by a representative from the Western Theater Command 西部战区, staff officers from different branches are undergoing cross training to enhance understanding and communication. Special research exercises have been organized to "stress-test" the system and improve regulations.

These representatives, representing a swath of senior and lower-level military leaders across China's military, are clearly focused on enhancing the role of officers in leading joint training throughout their respective services and branches. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

***"Everyone is exploring a new model for joint training with other branches and forces."***

**Source:** "解放军和武警部队代表委员热议提升联合作战指挥能力(Representatives of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Force discuss improving joint operational command capability)," *PLA Daily*, 10 March 2019. [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-03/10/content\\_4837503.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-03/10/content_4837503.htm)

*"A group of staff members will go to the National Defense University to receive joint operations command training."*

*"Everyone is exploring a new model for joint training with friendly arms."*

*Over the past few days, the [National People's Congress] government work report was reviewed and discussed. The sections regarding improving the level of actual military training has made Northern Theater Command Representative Zang Jihui 臧继辉 very proud. During a break in the discussion, he frequently shared observations about improvements in joint training, and the question of how to improve realism in training is the question he thinks about the most.*

...

*In inspecting the Joint Operations Command Center of the Central Military Commission, President Xi stressed that leading cadres at all levels, especially senior cadres, should be prepared to fight. A representative from the Central Military Commission agreed, emphasizing that commander's role as leading cadres of the army is preparing for war and that to fulfill this duty they must help plant joint operational concepts in their organizations.*

*The representative told reporters that in the face of new requirements, they took the lead in breaking the thinking concept that was not compatible with joint operations, and formulated a set of scientific and standardized joint operational command procedures, and clearly required: joint training assessment, first test commander; On the duty of combat, the key is to look at the leading cadres... A series of solid measures have enabled the leading cadres of the theater to firmly establish the concept of joint operations and improve their command capabilities.*



## Continued: Military Delegates to China's "Two Meetings" Discuss Enhancing Joint Training, Interoperability

**Source:** “解放军和武警部队代表委员热议提升联合作战指挥能力(Representatives of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Force discuss improving joint operational command capability),” *PLA Daily*, 10 March 2019. [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-03/10/content\\_4837503.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-03/10/content_4837503.htm)

*Central Theater Command 中部战区 Deputy Commander and Central Theater Command Ground Forces Commander Fan Chengcai 范承才 said that on March 5, when he heard the government work report mention “improving the level of realistic combat military training and resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests,” at the Great Hall of the People [China's national legislative building] he felt uplifted. He excitedly explained that as a leading cadre, we must strengthen our mission, reinforce our responsibilities, focus on joint training and update our thinking, act as leaders in preparing conflict, and improve our ability to perform our missions.*

....

*A representative from the Western Theater Command 西部战区 said that on the basis of major training, border control, disaster relief and other tasks, the theater command regularly organized the rotation of the commanders, staff officers and support personnel at the same level, and led the command of the armed forces. They also conduct research-oriented command drills to improve all-round joint operational command capabilities at all levels.*

...

*Jointness will be decisive on future battlefields, and is therefore inseparable from peacetime training and exchanges between the services, branches and forces. Central Theater Command representative Tan Min 谭民 told reporters that the commander must play a key role in providing necessary support for the joint training of the troops, and lead the troops to expand on the basis of task-based training based on the ability-based training.*

*Nowadays, the frequency of joint training is getting higher and higher, the joint combat skills mastered by officers and men improving, and familiarity with other military branches and services is increasing.... Representative Ding Guolin from the PLA Rocket Force said that in recent years, joint training has been limited, but that one after another, obstacles to joint operations are being eliminated.*

*Ding said that “For the ability to enhance joint operations, the officers and men of the army have more expectations: the various arms and services can often communicate in depth, and the equipment manufacturers should consider the requirements of joint operations when developing weapons and equipment...” Listening to the representatives of the PLA and the armed police forces, the reporter seems to see that leading cadres at all levels are leading the officers and men, unswervingly moving toward unity and toward being able to achieve victory...*



Central Military Commission  
Joint Staff Department  
Graphic by Peter Wood





# Learning Without Fighting: New Developments in PLA Artificial Intelligence War-Gaming

by Elsa Kania

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/learning-without-fighting-new-developments-in-pla-artificial-intelligence-war-gaming/>

**OE Watch Commentary:** A lack of recent experience in combat is often characterized as a major liability and potential disadvantage for the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in any future conflict scenario. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has not been at war since its 1979 conflict with Vietnam—and there are intense concerns today about the perils of “peace disease.” Today, the PLA's contemporary experiences in military operations other than war (MOOTW), including counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations, offer only limited experience of direct relevance to potential high-end conflict scenarios.

How is the PLA attempting to overcome this challenge? The PLA is seeking to enhance the realism and sophistication of “actual combat” (*shizhan*, 实战) training, while expanding its activities in war-gaming with new training techniques, including using virtual reality to enhance realism and enable psychological conditioning.

During his work report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping urged the PLA to accelerate the development of military intelligentization [*junshi zhinenghua*, 军事智能化] and improve joint and all-domain operational capabilities based on network information systems.

This view seems to elevate “intelligentization,” which involves leveraging AI technologies to enable and enhance a range of future military capabilities, as a guiding concept for future Chinese military modernization. Clearly, China recognizes AI as integral to future national competitiveness, with the potential to change the global balance of power. Activities like China's 2017 AI and Wargaming Forum which featured competitions between AI systems and human teams expanding across Chinese military and civilian institutions, with plans to evolve from simpler scenarios of land warfare to the complexities of naval, aerial, air-sea, and cyber battlefields.

The application of AI to war-gaming could provide an invaluable instrument as the PLA seeks to train for and explore the dynamics of future warfare. The introduction of AI to war-gaming activities can provide not only training, but also a means of studying and even seeking to “design” future intelligentized warfare. Furthermore, the expansion of war-gaming within the PLA can contribute to training future commanders who may develop greater skills in strategic thinking and command decision-making, which is a current weakness for the PLA.

Going forward, the PLA's evident interest in the application of AI to war-gaming constitutes a notable direction of development. The PLA appears to be undertaking these activities with the hope of ‘designing’ the shape of future warfare. In the absence of opportunities to “learn from fighting” (*zai zhanzheng zhong xuexi zhanzheng*, 在战争中学习战争), innovations in AI in war-gaming could prove to be leading factors influencing future conceptual innovations by the PLA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kania)**

***“Clearly, China recognizes AI as integral to future national competitiveness, with the potential to change the global balance of power.***

***...The expansion of war-gaming within the PLA can contribute to training future commanders who may develop greater skills in strategic thinking and command decision-making, which is a current weakness for the PLA.”***

**Source:** “东部战区陆军某师引进虚拟现实技术构建心理训练环境——“VR战场”锤炼血性虎气 (A certain division of the Army in the Eastern Theater introduced virtual reality technology to build a psychological training environment - “VR battlefield” hammering bloody tiger spirit),” *Xinhua.com*, 17 January 2017. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190408191242/http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-01/17/c\\_129450795.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20190408191242/http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-01/17/c_129450795.htm)

**Source:** 习近平在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告 (Xi Jinping's report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China),” *Xinhua.com*, 27 October 2017. [http://www.china.com.cn/19da/2017-10/27/content\\_41805113\\_3.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/19da/2017-10/27/content_41805113_3.htm)



# CETC Offers Unmanned Maritime Sensor System for South China Sea

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to an article posted on China's official portal for military news, China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) has revealed a new unmanned ocean observation system at this year's Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition in Malaysia. CETC is a major provider of advanced electronic systems to the Chinese military, including airborne and land-based radars, and a comprehensive suite of maritime sensors including shipborne radars, sonars and Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs).

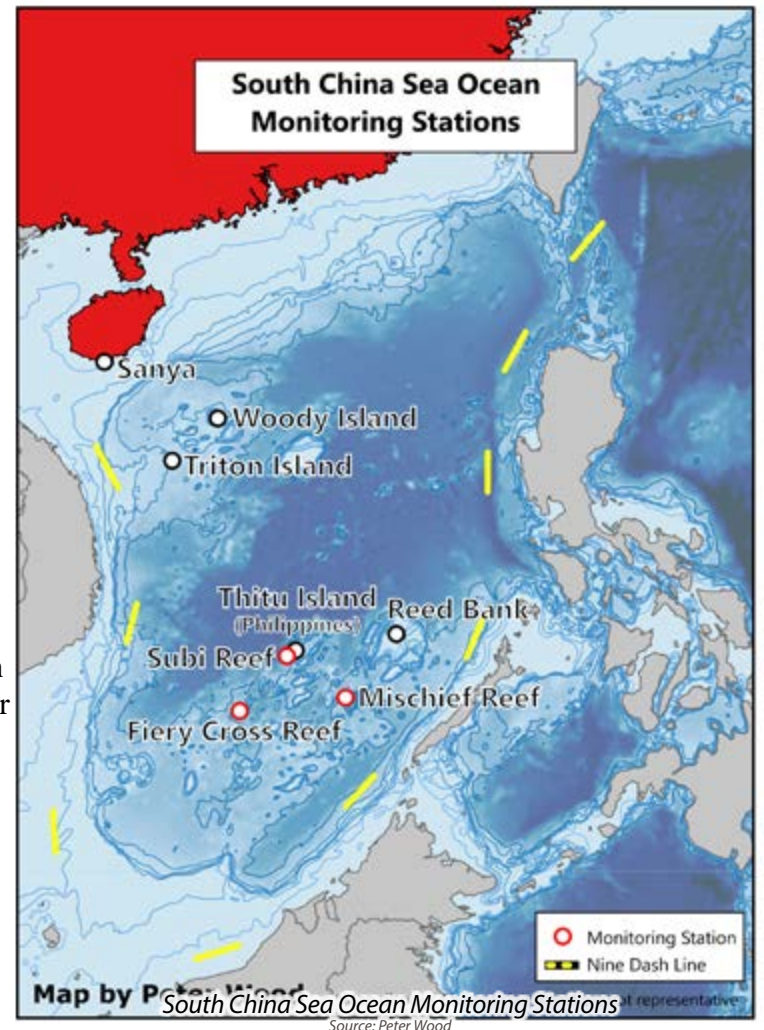
CETC's Maritime Information Technology Institute, the producer of the system, participated in its first military expo in November 2018 at China's Zhuhai Air Expo. The subsidiary was established in September 2013 in response to China's national strategic focus on maritime issues. The Maritime Information Technology Institute has also created a "Bionic Underwater Robot-Fishbot" UUV which it also advertises as part of its maritime ISR systems.

Three variants of the system are available, including an integrated floating information platform [综合信息浮台] (IIFP) and a reef-based integrated information system (IRBIS), and a ship-based system. According to specifications posted on Chinese social media, the IIFP's over-the-horizon radar has a range of 100 km. It can also detect automatic identification system (AIS) signals (used in ship navigation) over 30 km, provide 4G (LTE) service for 15 kilometers, and transmit shortwave radio 300 km. Earlier CETC reporting on the system described it as part of a "Blue Ocean Information Network" [蓝海], which CETC offers as a comprehensive network of sensors.

Over 1,300 hectares (3,200 acres) of islands and reefs in the South China Sea have been reclaimed or expanded, with many now boasting permanent garrisons, radars, and harbors. China is currently building an extensive set of overlapping civilian and military sensors across the Paracel [西沙] and Spratley [南沙] archipelagos. In 2015 for example, the Sansha Municipality [三沙市] which administers all of the islands set up a "Paracel Archipelago Military/Law Enforcement/Militia Joint Coordination Center" 西沙群岛军警民联防协调中心.

In October 2018, China's Ministry of Natural Resources opened an Ocean Observation Center responsible for the Spratley Islands, with permanent observation posts on Fiery Cross Reef 永暑礁, Subi Reef 渚碧礁, and Mischief Reef 美济礁.

These outposts are regarded as "hardship" postings for Chinese naval personnel, so the deployment of unmanned systems built by CETC will allow for enhanced monitoring while potentially reducing manning costs. As the article makes clear, these systems will serve dual purposes, enhancing civilian weather conditions monitoring and natural disaster early warning capabilities, while also strengthening military domain awareness capability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



**“.. platform systems can play an important role in the construction on China's [Spratley] and [Paracel] Islands, defending the islands and reefs, and continuous monitoring of targeted waters.”**

**Source:** China launches new system to defend islands and reefs in South China Sea,” *China Military Online*, 1 April 2019. [english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content\\_9464939.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content_9464939.htm)

*China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) launched a new type of offshore platform at the 2019 Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA). The unattended all-weather information network node system, integrating multidimensional situational awareness and integrated information services, is important for island reef construction and protection, maritime research, and maritime public services.*

*The system has two variants: a floating integrated information platform (IIFP) and a more powerful island reef-based integrated information system (IRBIS). It is reported that the relatively “lightweight” IIFP can be deployed in all sea conditions. IIFP uses solar power to sustain itself and has good adaptability. It can be deployed to appropriate sea area by tugboat and other vessels and be operated remotely without on-duty personnel. It can perform various functional tasks as required, for example, as a 4G or shortwave communication base station, a marine environmental monitoring platform, a tsunami early warning facility, an auxiliary navigation service system or continuous surveillance of offshore target.*

*The Island Reef-Based Information System (IRBIS) is a more complex, all-weather, fixed and unattended system, consisting of shallow water platform and electronic mission system that can be equipped with a variety of sensors, which make it more powerful. No matter which kind of variant it is, or whether it is military or civilian, there must be broad application prospects. And for the areas that we're more focused on, the platform systems can play an important role in the construction on China's [Spratley] and [Paracel] Islands, defending the islands and reefs, and continuous monitoring of targeted waters. In addition to being applied to homeland security and marine scientific research, they are also important platforms for providing public service products, including disaster reduction and rescue, and maritime positioning and navigation.*





# China Launches New Communications Relay Satellite

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 31 March, China launched the “Tianlian” [天链, lit. “sky chain”] 2-01 relay satellite on a Long March 3B rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan. As the accompanying passage from *Xinhuanet* discusses, the Tianlian 2-01 represents an important link in China’s progress toward its goals for space.

Relay satellites occupy geosynchronous orbits with an average altitude of over 35,000 km. Their greater altitude relative to the surface of the earth and stable orbit allows them to communicate with ground stations more effectively and with satellites in a wider range of orbits.

The Tianlian-2-01 marks the first of a new generation of relay satellites that is meant to replace—or more likely, add redundancy to—its satellite communications network, communicate with spacecraft, and transfer data from imagery satellites. Previous launches stationed Tianlian satellites along the equator over the Indian Ocean and Central Pacific.

The first generation of Tianlian satellites was launched beginning in 2008, making China the second nation to build a satellite relay system (after the U.S. Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System [TDRSS]). The Tianlian 2 is based on the Dongfanghong-4 东方红-4 communications satellite platform developed by the China Academy of Space Technology (CAST). The new generation of Tianlian satellites is expected to have a longer life and additional antennas, doubling the allowed transmission rate. Additionally, according to the article, the system computers have been substantially upgraded, improving mission management and allowing the satellite to send and receive from multiple sources simultaneously.

In addition to stations scattered across China, the PRC currently maintains space tracking and communications ground stations in several parts of the globe, including Dongara, Australia, Kiruna, Sweden and outside Neuquén Argentina. China has also previously launched the Queqiao 鹊桥 relay satellite that enabled communications with the Yutu lander mission to the far side of the moon in January this year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



The Launch of Long March 3B Rocket

Source: AAXanderr via Wikimedia, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/The\\_Launch\\_of\\_Long\\_March\\_3B\\_Rocket.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/The_Launch_of_Long_March_3B_Rocket.jpg), Public Domain.

***“..the Tianlian II-01 will provide data relay, measurement and control, transmission services for manned spacecraft, satellites, carrier rockets and other non-spacecraft users.”***

**Source:** “China launches new data relay satellite,” *Xinhuanet*, 1 April 2019. [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content\\_9464485.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content_9464485.htm)

*China sent a new data relay satellite into orbit from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwest China’s Sichuan Province late Sunday night. The Tianlian II-01 satellite was launched at 11:51 p.m. Beijing Time by a Long March-3B carrier rocket.*

*As the first satellite to constitute China’s second-generation data relay satellite network, the Tianlian II-01 will provide data relay, measurement and control, transmission services for manned spacecraft, satellites, carrier rockets and other non-spacecraft users.*

*The Tianlian II network will be markedly more advanced in mission planning, system management and operations than the first-generation network composed of Tianlian I satellites.*

*The new network, with faster data transfer and higher multi-objective service capability, will play an important role in improving the transmission promptness, in-orbit security and mission flexibility for medium- and low-Earth orbiting satellites and manned spacecraft.*

*The satellite is developed by the China Academy of Space Technology under the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. The launch marks the 301st mission of the Long March carrier rocket series.*



# New Chinese Remote-Controlled Minesweeper on Display in Abu Dhabi Defense Expo

**OE Watch Commentary:** On February 17-21, 2019, Guizhou Jonyang Kinetics Co., Ltd 瞻阳重工, displayed its ATV and wireless remote-controlled mine-clearance vehicles at the Abu Dhabi Defense Exhibition in Abu Dhabi (more commonly known as IDEX), United Arab Emirates. The new YL905-S system is meant to speed mine clearing and reduce casualties through remote operations. Specifications on display indicated that the vehicle was able to perform minesweeping operations at upwards of 1.3km/hr. The new minesweeper system also has a longer range (5km) compared to previous remote controlled systems.

China has conducted extensive minesweeping operations along its border with Vietnam. According to Chinese estimates, some 1.3 million mines were buried in Yunnan Province during the 1979 war with Vietnam and over a decade of low level conflict. An unknown number of mines scattered across 1.5 million square meters have been cleared from the Sino-Vietnamese border in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The last mine was cleared from the Guangxi border area in October 2018. Du Fuguo, a PLA minesweeper, was severely injured during minesweeping operations in Malipo County 麻栗坡县 Yunnan in November 2018.



Chinese Type 72 landmine found by US Marines in Iraq  
Source: Jjccc101 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jason%27s\\_camera\\_127.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jason%27s_camera_127.JPG), Public Domain

PLA units have previously been shown using a less advanced remote-controlled sweeper. Chinese peacekeeping troops stationed in Africa had previously used a smaller version with essentially a large metal detector and tracked vehicle, making the Joyang system a substantial improvement in capabilities.

According to displayed signage, the mine-clearance vehicle is produced in partnership with China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation's 716 Institute 中船重工第七一六研究所, a national research unit focused on civil-military fusion and development of control systems and automatic control devices. Joyang equipment is also used by the People's Armed Police--China's internal security forces directly controlled by the Central Military Commission. Jonyang also produces the JY816-RF tracked amphibious troop carrier and JYL913 assault bridge system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

**“Guizhou Jonyang Kinetics Co., Ltd, displayed its.. wireless remote-controlled mine-sweeping vehicles at the Abu Dhabi Defense Exhibition in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.”**

**Source:** “詹阳重工亮相阿布扎比防务展 (Zhan Yang Heavy Industry Debuts at Abu Dhabi Defense Exhibition),” Jonyang 瞻阳重工, 18 February 2019. <http://www.jonyang.com/news/596510.htm>

*On February 17-21, 2019, Guizhou Jonyang Kinetics Co., Ltd, displayed its all terrain vehicle and wireless remote-controlled mine-sweeping vehicles at the Abu Dhabi Defense Exhibition in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.*

*The biennial defense exhibition in Abu Dhabi is regarded as the most important event in the world's military industry, bringing together the world's leading defense groups, defense experts and military generals responsible for purchasing equipment, and is the largest military in the Middle East Equipment exhibition. The exhibition is Joyang's response to [Guizhou] provincial secretary Sun Zhigang's 孙志刚 requirement to deepen military-civil fusion that he made during the of the company through greater international engagement. This exhibition marks Joyang's first time participating in a major international defense expo.*

*During the exhibition, top defense equipment from all over the world competed in Abu Dhabi and took the lead. The Jonyang all terrain vehicles and minesweepers have attracted much attention for their excellent product quality, original product design and excellent performance. Military personnel from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Ukraine, Myanmar, Pakistan, India inspected the equipment, as did the captain and staff of the PLA Navy vessel Kunlunshan 昆仑山 (a Type 071 amphibious transport dock), part of the visiting Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy patrol. The Chinese military attaché to the United Arab Emirates visited the booth to learn more about Jonyang.*

*With the help of the Abu Dhabi Defense Exhibition, Jonyang's efforts in defense have been affirmed by many parties, and established a good brand image at home and abroad, laying a solid foundation for exploring the international market. Under the guidance of the national military-civilian fusion development strategy, Guizhou Jonyang Kinetics Co., Ltd will continue to forge ahead, work hard, give full play to the leading role of military-civilian integration enterprises and emergency industry leaders, accelerate the pace of enterprise transformation and upgrading, further strengthen and improve enterprises, and strive To build a world-class “fine, special, excellent, special” high-end engineering equipment “intelligence” manufacturing enterprises.*





## Iran: Khamenei Threatens to Use Precision Missiles

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 21 March, the Iranian New Year, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave an address to pilgrims at the Imam Reza Shrine, the holiest Shi'ite shrine in Iran. Portions of his speech made headlines abroad, particularly those suggesting that European states, in practice, have also “left” the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA], the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal. Just as significant were his comments excerpted here, which bragged about the enhanced precision of Iranian missiles. This is a theme to which Iranian authorities have repeatedly turned in recent months (See: “Equipping the IRGC with New Ballistic Milles,” *OE Watch*, December 2018 and “Iran Claims Enhanced Missile Precision,” *OE Watch*, May 2017). Khamenei’s comments represent the first time he has made the explicit claim.

Khamenei coupled the claim of enhanced missile precision with the specific threat that Iran is capable of hitting “all enemies – at least the ones in the region or the ones who have forces in the region” and specified that this was the basis of Iranian deterrence.

More broadly, the speech provides insight into Khamenei’s military philosophy. Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he explains, the shah purchased advanced weaponry from the United States but could not manufacture or maintain this equipment independently.

While the shah had purchased F-14s, for example, Washington suspended delivery after the shah fell and many Iranian pilots training in the United States sought asylum. Initially, he argues, this left Iran at a disadvantage, especially as Iraqi forces bombarded Iranian cities during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. While Gulf Cooperation Council states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continue to purchase top line equipment, Khamenei suggests their lack of significant domestic military industry puts them at a strategic disadvantage which he will never again accept Iran suffering. Indeed, he calls sanctions historically a blessing in disguise because it forced the Islamic Republic to develop its own capabilities.

Khamenei’s beliefs that accurate ballistic missiles form the basis of Iranian deterrence and that indigenous military production is key to Iranian security suggest that diplomatic conflicts over Iranian missiles will continue for the near future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Khamenei speaks in Mashhad on 21 March 2019, the Iranian New Year.

Source: Khamenei.ir, [http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/42057/B/13980101\\_1142057.jpg](http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/42057/B/13980101_1142057.jpg), CC by SA 4.0.

**“The Islamic Republic can confront and strike every enemy in the region.”**

**Source:** “Biyanat-e dar Ejitema’e Ziyaran va Mojavarani Harem Motahar-e Razavi (Statement to the community of pilgrims and neighbors at the Holy Imam Reza Shrine),” *Khamenei.ir*, 21 March 2019. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=42061>

### Statement to the Community of Pilgrims

...Today by divine grace, our condition in the area of defense resources is better than almost all countries in the region. Our enemies too admit this. They acknowledge this in order to use it as a tool to exert pressure. Of course, it will not be a tool to exert pressure. Despite their foolish desires, we will continue to strengthen our defense capabilities. At the time of the Holy Defense [Iran-Iraq War], if they had sold us weapons, if they had given us tanks, missiles and ammunitions, we would not have thought of producing them on our own.

Well, if we had had them, we would have continued to be dependent and our need for others would not have been removed, similar to many other countries in our region which you are familiar with. Their countries have become weapons depots, but these weapons belong to others and their use is contingent on the willpower of others. They themselves have neither power nor the scientific and practical capability to use them correctly. We would have become like them.

...One day we sat and enemy planes bombed our cities while we did not have means of defense.... But we have developed our defense capabilities. Today, our enemies – at least the ones in the region or the ones who have forces in the region – know that the Islamic Republic can confront and strike every enemy in the region with its precision and active missiles. They have realized this. This is deterrence! This means that the enemies who are sometimes tempted to launch a military attack should realize that it is not possible, that the Islamic Republic has a mighty fist and a strong hand which can retaliate. This is deterrence. We should reach this point in the area of economic matters. So, this is an opportunity which is available to us because of the sanctions imposed by the enemies. Today, we can work on this. This was the first matter.



## Iran Conducts its Largest UAV Exercise

**OE Watch Commentary:** Iranian defense officials have long paid lip service to the increasing importance of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in their defense. This is not simply part of the Iranian political or military leadership's frequent rhetorical bombast. The Iranian military first used rudimentary drones in 1986 to conduct surveillance over Iraqi trenches during the Iran-Iraq War. Over the past 15 years, there has been a rapid expansion of UAV models in the Iranian arsenal. Range has also increased substantially after Iranian authorities reportedly incorporated GPS navigation into the platforms (See: "Iran Joins Satellite-Guided Armed UAV Club," *OE Watch*, May 2016).

The accompanying passage from *Mashregh News*, a news service close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), discusses Iran's largest UAV exercise to date. According to the report, there were 50 offensive UAVs in simultaneous combat operations operating over 600 miles from their controllers, which successfully hit and destroyed their targets. If the report is accurate, then the IRGC has demonstrated the ability to coordinate multiple UAVs launched from disparate locations in Khuzestan, Bushehr, Fars and Hormozgan provinces toward Bani Farour Island, 100 miles west of the Strait of Hormuz.

Also of note is the inclusion of drones modeled after the Lockheed Martin RQ-170 which Iran captured after one landed in Iranian territory on 5 December 2011. While Iranian authorities regularly claim to have reverse-engineered the "Sentinel," there is no indication that the resulting Iranian drone has any of the capabilities of the RQ-170.

Finally, the exercise name "To Jerusalem-1" may signal more than diplomatic hostility to Israel. Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy based in Lebanon, has previously utilized drones in both Lebanon and Syria and has claimed responsibility for sporadic UAV infiltration of Israel over the last several years. Iran's demonstration of the ability to utilize drone swarms launched from various locations to attack simultaneously reflects an increase in capability which could change the operational environment in the Eastern Mediterranean. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



A UAV Iran reports to be its equivalent of an RQ-170 launches a missile over the Persian Gulf during March exercises.

Source: Mashregh News, <https://cdn.mashreghnews.ir/d/2019/03/16/4/2474377.jpg>

***“The sheer number of UAVs in simultaneous combat operations occurred for the first time in our country.”***

**Source:** "Hamleh Hamzaman 50 Faravand Pehpad-e Irani beh Ahdaf (Simultaneous Attack by 50 UAVs upon Targets)," *Mashregh News*, 14 March 2019. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/944205>

### ***Simultaneous Attack by 50 UAVs***

*According to a report by Mashregh, a large-scale UAV exercise conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] Aerospace Force called "To Jerusalem-1" occurred in the general area of the Persian Gulf.*

*In this exercise, in the presence of Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, commander of the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters, IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Hossein Salami; Brigadier General Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC aerospace force, and other senior commanders in the armed forces [who operate] in the general area of the Persian Gulf, and for the first time, there were 50 offensive UAVs including from the Iranian RQ-170 which participated along with other assault and combat drone units.*

*The sheer number of UAVs in simultaneous combat operations occurred for the first time in our country, let alone other countries, and they operated more than 600 miles from their controllers and at the specified time they hit and destroyed their targets....*

*Commander Salami said all the UAVs participating in this exercise precisely destroyed their targets. These UAVs are an emerging phenomenon in the field of defense and our country's military industry....*





## Supreme Leader: Do Not Let the Enemy Dominate Cyberspace

**OE Watch Commentary:** Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei considers the 1979 Islamic Revolution not only a political revolution but also a cultural one. In the accompanying excerpt, the Iranian cyber issue news portal *Gerdab.ir* provides coverage of Khamenei's remarks delivered before the Assembly of Experts, a clerical body whose main job is to select a new supreme leader upon the incapacitation or death of the sitting leader.

Khamenei began his remarks expressing condolences on the deaths of the late Expediency Council Chairman Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi and Guardian Council member Ayatollah Mohammad Danesh Zadeh Qomi (Momen) within the previous three months, a move which highlights the aging of the clerical generation who led Iran's Islamic Revolution. His public meeting with the Assembly of Experts likewise focuses attention--probably purposely--on the 79-year-old Khamenei's own mortality and his hopes for a smooth transition following his death.

In his remarks, Khamenei uses rhetoric that parallels past Sunni extremists like Abdullah 'Azzam (Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden's mentor), and argues that Western culture is an element of 'soft warfare' which must be defended against with the same ferocity as more traditional military strategies. Here, he singles out cyberspace as a main field of battle. While he does not address Iran's own cyber warfare capabilities, he does argue that the Islamic Republic must strictly control the cyber domain to prevent its use by Western powers to reach Iranian youth. Indeed, he argues that not only does Iran face a challenge from the United States and "the Zionists," but also by Europeans and the West more broadly. Such hostility toward Europe suggests that Iranian diplomatic efforts to divide the United States and Europe are tactical and that Iranian diplomatic outreach to European states is limited to business but insincere regarding political reform.

Nationalist sentiment remains high in Iran, even among those who are not particularly sympathetic to clerical rule. Khamenei's suggestion that Western powers have laid cultural siege to Iran likely seeks to tap into this sentiment. However, 40 years of frustration with clerical authorities and widespread sentiment among ordinary Iranians that Iranian and Western liberalism are not mutually exclusive, will limit the resonance of his message. Still, the notion of besiegement and the need to wage a cultural battle provides a useful insight into Khamenei's mentality.

Khamenei intersperses his speech with quotations from the Quran. Of those included with the excerpt, the first—*Sura* [chapter] 60—is nicknamed "Mumtahanah" ["Examining Her"] and warns Muslims not to make enemies with God and discusses the story of Abraham. The second, *Sura* 20, is nicknamed "*Ta Ha*" after its first two letters in Arabic and discusses the story of Moses. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei meets with Iran's Assembly of Experts on 14 March 2019.  
Source: *Gerdab.ir*, [https://gerdab.ir/files/fa/news/1397/12/25/41546\\_312.jpg](https://gerdab.ir/files/fa/news/1397/12/25/41546_312.jpg)

***“The enemy’s maximum attack requires maximum mobilization on our part.”***

**Source:** “Nagazarid Doshman bar Fazai’ye Mojazi va Farhangi Kahvar Mosalet Shavad (Do not let the enemy dominate the cyberspace and culture of the country),” *Gerdab.ir*, 16 March 2019. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/28369>

### ***Do Not Let the Enemy Dominate Cyberspace***

*...Well, let's speak again of another issue: Delineating the enemy to protect against a soft invasion. It is one of the most important things necessary to do... When the border is not clear, the enemy can penetrate, cripple, manipulate, can dominate cyberspace. If the border is clear to the enemy, his domination of cyberspace will not be easy in such a cultural environment. This is also an issue which the verse [Qur. 60:1] points out: “O you who have believed, do not take My enemies and your enemies as allies, extending to them affection while they have disbelieved in what came to you of the truth.” God Almighty forbids that we deal with the enemy in this way. This is also a point....*

*I'll end with two points: First, the enemy's maximum attack requires maximum mobilization on our part. Today, the invasion of the enemy is maximized, that is, they use all their facilities and capabilities. First of all, the Americans and on the margins below, the Zionists, that is, the Zionist regime and, alongside them, are the Westerners and all of the Europeans.... Americans have repeatedly said that the sanctions we imposed against Iran are the most severe sanctions in history. They are right. At one point, I have also said that the failure the United States will face in this case will be the hardest failure for the United States, God-willing. If we are, God-willing, correct and we move correctly, we will move forward. So, one point is that before a maximum offensive, it is necessary to have a maximum mobilization.*

*The second point is that the basis of work is the divine citation: “Do not slacken in My remembrance.” [Qur. 20:42].*



## Iran Cements its Presence in Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russian-Iranian competition for influence and resources in Syria has been reported extensively in Arabic-language media (see: “Russia and Iran Compete for Syria’s Phosphates” *OE Watch*, June 2018 and “Is Russia Getting Entangled in Southwest Syria?” *OE Watch*, April 2019). The emerging consensus is that while Russia has won the scramble for Syrian resources, Iran continues to expand its influence in ways that often irritate Russian authorities. The latest such example is a purported concession granting Iran administrative control over Syria’s largest commercial port, located in the city of Lattakia. According to the first accompanying excerpt, this move has angered Moscow due to the port’s proximity to Russian military assets in the Syrian coastal provinces of Lattakia and Tartous, in particular Moscow’s main airbase which is located about 30 kilometers south of the port. Although the agreement is purely for commercial activities, the article’s author claims that once Iranian entities are “in control of the premises, nothing prevents them from transforming it into a military facility.”

According to the author, in late 2018 Iranian leaders began “exerting pressure on Damascus over its slow execution of strategic agreements, which was caused by internal reservations and Russian objections.” The resulting compromise, he claims, is for Damascus to grant Iran profitable concessions of limited political and military value. Strategic value, however, usually lurks beneath the economic surface of these concessions. A case in point, detailed in the two excerpted articles from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, is a contract for Iranian companies to build 200,000 housing units in Damascus, including at least 30,000 in the suburb of Darayya.

Darayya is considered a new focal point for Iranian influence in the capital. A key rebel bastion, it was under siege for much of the Syrian war; by the time the government recaptured it in late 2016, a small fraction of its more than 250,000 residents remained. Much of Darayya is destroyed and numerous obstacles are being placed on returnees. A recent property law aimed at facilitating reconstruction (Decree 66) opens up the possibility for the expropriation (and subsequent doling out) of land in Darayya. As a result, news outlets opposed to the Syrian government have intimated that Iran aims to replicate in Darayya what it helped establish in the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut (al-Dhahiya al-Janoubiya). One of the excerpted passages claims that the building plan includes housing for Iranian officers and a security sector. Areas of Iranian influence in Damascus, including the Sayyida Zaynab neighborhood and the Mezzeh Military Airbase, are located nearby, with the latter a stone’s throw away. A shrine that will likely draw Shi’i “religious tourism” to the neighborhood has nearly been completed, giving fighters who are in Syria to “protect the shrines” a good excuse to settle in Darayya. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

**“...Since late 2018, Iran has been exerting pressure on Damascus over its slow execution of strategic agreements...”**

### Source:

Ibrahim Hamidi. “Russia ‘Angry’ with Iran’s Arrival Next Door on the Mediterranean Coast,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 3 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yxavnok5> (translated via The Syrian Observer: <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/49557/irans-presence-on-syrian-coast-angers-russia.html>)

روسيا «غاضبة» من وصول إيران إلى جوارها في مياه المتوسط

*Russia has expressed its anger over Damascus’ granting of Iran the right to operate the western Latakia port on the Mediterranean. This marks the first time that Tehran is given a foothold on the Mediterranean near Russia’s bases in Tartous and Lattakia...*

*Since late 2018, Iran has been exerting pressure on Damascus over its slow execution of strategic agreements, which was caused by internal reservations and Russian objections...*

*Iran gave the Syrians a line of credit totaling \$6.6 billion since 2011, and that was topped up with an additional \$1 billion in 2017. However, over the past three months, relations between the two countries have become even warmer, especially after President Bashar al-Assad landed in Tehran in February to meet with President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.*

*The two governments agreed to establish a joint chamber of commerce, a joint bank, and a power station in Latakia. Iranian developers were also given the rights to construct a 200,000-apartment housing development near the Syrian capital...*

*The Latakia port agreement gives the Islamic Republic the right to use a Syrian harbor with 23 warehouses for economic purposes only, but once in control of the premises, nothing prevents them from transforming it into a military facility.*





## Continued: Iran Cements its Presence in Syria

### Source:

إيران تبني ضاحية جنوبية في دمشق تشمل 200 ألف وحدة سكنية  
Ammar Halabi. "Iran Builds 200,000-Housing Unit Southern Suburbs in Damascus," al-Araby al-Jadid. 25 February 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y4ko23gc>

*Iran has obtained a contract from the Syrian regime to build 200,000 housing units in Syria, according to an Iranian official. Observers warned that the new project aims to build a southern suburb in Damascus similar to the suburb of Beirut, as Tehran hopes to build popular loyalty in Syria just as it did in Iraq...*

*"The Iranians did not get any strategic or important contracts in light of Russia's presence, as Russia controlled most vital reconstruction sectors. Therefore, they turned toward housing units," said [Syrian economic expert Younis] Karim. He pointed to Iran's failure to obtain sovereign contracts because of Russian dominance, which has turned Iran's domestic population against the Syrian regime, given the magnitude of Iranian sacrifices for the sake of the regime and the lack of gratitude for them, which has become evident in Iranian media.*

*He added that due to Russian strength and Iran's unwillingness to clash with it, Iran has shifted its strategy from one of obtaining sovereign contracts towards obtaining non-sovereign privileges. He pointed out that the regime benefited in terms of securing housing units, which is currently hard for Syrians to obtain given elevated prices.*

*According to Karim, this project clearly shows that the Assad regime has taken a decision to completely exclude Iran from the sovereign files, because today there are two options, either falling, which is currently ruled out, or a coup against the Iranians and their expulsion and a change in their presence from political and military to economic, only granting them simple projects without any sovereign dimension, such as the establishment of residential units.*

### Source:

داريا الممنوعة على أهلها... ساحة لإيران ومليشياتها  
Adnan Ahmed. "Darayya, Forbidden to its People... The Domain of Iran and its Militias," al-Araby al-Jadid, 3 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yyjdtajm>

*In the face of these restrictions on the people and conditions placed on their return, as well as the scarcity of available services, the city of Darayya has experienced active movement by Iran and its followers in the city, with an abundance of capabilities and equipment. A source following this issue said that Darayya falls within the sphere of Iranian influence. Iranian officials signed a contract with the regime to build 30,000 housing units, including housing for Iranian officers in the security square of Darayya, given its proximity to key sites of Iranian influence. Darayya is less than 5 kilometers south of the Iranian embassy; it is also a few hundred meters from the Mezzeh Military Airport. Tehran attributes its interest in the city to the presence of the shrine of Sayyida Sakina. Darayya is also close to sensitive command centers of the 4th Division led by Maher al-Assad, the brother of Syrian regime president, and Air Force Intelligence, both of which have strong ties with the Iranians. According to the "Sawt al-Asima" website, the 4th Division is deployed at the city entrances and in its interior; residents are forbidden from leaving the populated areas, which represent no more than 8% of the city. Entrance to Darayya's other neighborhoods are forbidden even to owners of homes located there. The authorities were also close finishing the restoration of the Sayyida Sakina shrine, which is being sponsored by Iran.*



## Aspiring Social Media Influencers in Damascus

**OE Watch Commentary:** With armed conflict largely contained in Damascus and its surroundings, a new generation of aspiring social media influencers have recently descended on the Syrian capital. Despite explicitly and emphatically stating their apolitical agendas, these video-bloggers (“vloggers”) have been criticized by Syrian opposition media for doing “soft propaganda” on the government’s behalf. In this context, the accompanying excerpted Arabic-language media reports illustrate the continued importance of new media in the Syrian conflict.

The first accompanying excerpted article, from the English-language version of the Syrian opposition news website *Enab Baladi*, summarizes some recent “vlog” dispatches from Damascus. The second article, from the pro-opposition Lebanese news website *al-Modon*, focuses on one of the videos and objects to how “the camera obscures a large part of daily life in Damascus, from the remaining security barriers, poverty, homelessness, displacement and even the water and electricity crises.” The article’s author characterizes the video as “soft propaganda” since it “does not convey raw and direct information, but rather merely reflects a general atmosphere that is in favor of the regime.”

In late March, Syrian media outlets reported on the visit of a female Chinese reporter-turned-social media influencer, who passed through Damascus and Aleppo as part of a grand drive across Asia, Europe and Africa. In an interview with Syrian state TV, she “spoke of the support of economic entities for her trip and of Chinese plans for investment.” In contrast to the independent vloggers, whose business model relies primarily on revenue tied to viewership numbers, she is functioning as an industrial ambassador of sorts, “traveling around the world in a Chinese car to deliver a message on the quality of Chinese industry.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

**“... She said she is traveling around the world in a Chinese car to deliver a message on the quality of Chinese industry ...”**

**Source:** “Youtubers visiting Syria: Sympathy with the regime or glimmer of hope for Syrians?” *Enab Baladi*, 7 March 2019. <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/03/youtubers-visiting-syria-sympathy-with-the-regime-or-glimmer-of-hope-for-syrians/>

*Many other YouTubers sought to divulge this “other face” of the city during their journeys in Damascus’s narrow alleyways and at its various restaurants, asking people about their situation and avoiding as much as possible the facets of the “first face” of this conflict. They tried to infer the message that politics are not involved in the content of videos they post on their YouTube channels...*

*Abu Rob has indicated that he suffered from a major attack by the Syrian public from both conflicting sides and that Syria TV, the opposition’s TV channel, has interfered in the content and distorted the meaning of the videos in a “bad way”. He noted that his intention was to capture the situation of Damascus and represent it to the Jordanian audience in a neutral way...*

*The videos posted by both Youtubers have generated contradictory views among Syrians, between those who considered it as a way to promote the regime’s narrative and disgrace the Syrian people’s grievances, and those who saw no harm in these videos and welcomed the fact that it presented a relief of the burden of war which the Syrians have endured throughout the years of conflict without leaving the country...*

*“The biggest mistake I have made is the belief that I can tackle a subject like the Syrian issue and separate the things that are impossible to separate. Separating politics from daily life is almost impossible, especially as regard to the Syrian issue.”...*

**Source:** “Chinese Traveler in Syria: ‘Safety’ Reigns Across the Country,” *al-Modon*, 26 March 2019. <http://tinyurl.com/y5exytn9>

*The visits of bloggers and social media stars to Syria to circulate the regime’s propaganda about the end of the country’s war, reconstruction and victory over the “conspiracy,” have become routine over the past few months. After a group of Arab travelers passed through, Chinese blogger Wu Shan went to Damascus and Aleppo, on a visit that was celebrated by the official media as evidence of “the lies of Western media.”... According to the statements, Shan wants to convey a message “regarding stability, the daily life of Syrians and their regular work routine.” In an interview with the official news channel “al-Ikhbariya,” she spoke of the support of economic entities for her trip and of Chinese plans for investment. She said she is traveling around the world in a Chinese car to deliver a message on the quality of Chinese industry...*

**Source:** “Social Media Star Andrawos Bassous: Fake Journey to Syria,” *al-Modon*, 4 March 2019. <http://tinyurl.com/yxa9gdo9>

*As can be expected from any propaganda video, the quick visit to Damascus does not hint at anything “abnormal” happening. The filming takes place in luxury hotels and the images are centered around the types of food in Damascus’s old restaurants. There are no refugees or displaced, while the camera obscures a large part of daily life in Damascus, from the remaining security barriers, poverty, homelessness, displacement and even the water and electricity crises. It portrays Syria as consisting of the capital Damascus alone, and hence the video ceases to be a documentary and rather bolsters the official propaganda promoting regime legitimacy.*

*The “tourist” does not have natural conversations with the exhausted people in the streets, but rather uses some of them to repeat the clichés of brotherhood between Christians and Muslims when he reveals his name and the tattoo of a huge cross on his hand. Some of the English-language subtitles accompanying the Arabic dialogue are also falsified, whether when speaking of Jews in a racist or anti-Semitic way, or when discussing the old neighborhoods of Damascus and the Christian presence in the East...*

*Although there is no direct talk of politics, all the praising of security in Damascus is accompanied by an image of the Syrian regime flag, whether in the background or in the hands of Bassous himself...*

*At first sight, the Syrian regime appears creative in relying on prominent social media figures to convey its ideas with greater dynamism than official media, which has lost credibility... Thus, this “soft propaganda” does not convey raw and direct information, but rather merely reflects a general atmosphere that is in favor of the regime, without official endorsement, with the aim of repeating it only with greater credibility. The system will certainly not find anything better than paid social media stars to take on this task, as they are more popular on social networks than are traditional media, actors and celebrities. They also have a high profile in the international media, which find “individual initiatives” impressive, as shown by the media engagement with Bassuos from the media in Germany and Sweden.*





## What to do with ISIS Detainees and Returnees?

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria. This has prompted a global debate about what to do with the people who voluntarily went to these countries to fight alongside ISIS. This debate includes questions such as what will happen to these people if they go back to their home countries, if the governments will take them back and if they do, whether they will be tried for various crimes, as well as if the former ISIS members constitute a threat and how they might be reintegrated back into society. The accompanying passages highlight some important aspects of the issue.

The first accompanying passage discusses the views of Rusen Cakir, a Turkish expert on the matter. Cakir notes that most Western countries, and some Muslim countries, do not want their citizens back, due to security concerns that may arise from returning fighters merging with sleeper cells in their countries. Cakir points out that the case of those who went to fight in Iraq is slightly easier because there is a state structure in Iraq, with courts and a justice system. This means that those who joined ISIS in Iraq and were caught in Iraq can be tried there.

However, he notes that most of those caught in Syria are people who were caught by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF does not have the status of a state, which complicates the matter. Thus, the status of the ISIS members and their families being held in the SDF's detainment facilities (which are more makeshift prisons than detainment facilities) are subject to serious debate. In addition, the security situation in those regions is still precarious and the SDF does not have the resources to keep these people in their facilities indefinitely. Recent reports estimate that the SDF holds about 12,000 foreign women and children, in addition to over 8000 fighters, including 1000 foreign fighters in their prisons.

The second accompanying passage from a Kurdish news source discusses recent reports that 30 ISIS fighters had recently fled an SDF prison. While the report denies the escape, it does point out that local officials have called on nations to take back their imprisoned foreign fighters, warning the prisoners could flee. The report quotes Abdulkarim Omer, a local leader in northeast Syria: "Our region is unstable; any chaos may enable ISIS fighters to flee." The local administration has also called for an international court to try the ISIS fighters in Syria.

The third accompanying passage discusses a recent incident in February, when Turkish security forces stopped a timed bomb-laden truck in Hatay, a Turkish city on the Syrian border. According to the report, the truck- driven by an ISIS terrorist- was caught before an attack happened. However, the planned attack aimed to force the release of 100 ISIS members held in SDF prisons. This suggests that ISIS is willing to conduct attacks to force the release of its members. Given this reality, plus the SDF's limited resources, it would appear that leaving these foreign fighters and their families in the hands of the SDF or even the Iraqi judicial system is not a sustainable solution. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

***“Local officials have called on nations to take back their imprisoned foreign fighters, warning the prisoners could flee.”***

**Source:** Rusen Cakir, “Dünya IŞİD sonrası tartışıyor. Ya Türkiye? (The World is Debating the post-ISIS era. What about Turkey?),” *Medyascope.tv.com*, 22 February 2019. <http://rusencakir.com/Dunya-ISID-sonrasini-tartisiyor-Ya-Turkiye/6928>

*...Most of those caught in Syria are people who were caught by the YPG-led SDF. And because the SDF doesn't have the status of a state, the people they are holding and their families are subject to serious debate. And every country has a different opinion. But we can say the general approach is as follows: They don't want them back; they want them to stay put where they currently are. But the conditions aren't ripe for them to stay there, or the SDF wants to make this a serious bargaining point. ...*

*Many Western countries, but also some Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Algeria and Uzbekistan, don't know what to do with these people if they are extradited back to their home countries. They are facing this question. Of course the most important factor is security. Western countries are worried that these people may plan threats against their countries. Another factor is: Every western country is worried that they have undiscovered jihadist cells in their countries. And they are worried about what might happen when these undiscovered cells are met with these returning fighters. And so they don't want to see these people in their territories.*

## Continued: What to do with ISIS Detainees and Returnees?

**Source:** Vladimir van Wilgenburg, “Deir al-Zor Military Council-aligned media denies reports ISIS prisoners escaped Shadaddi prison,” *Kurdistan24.net*, 4 April 2019. <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/b74bab4f-297b-456d-a4dc-63971fb6a545>

*The semi-official page of the Deir al-Zor media center aligned with the Deir al-Zor Military Council (DMC) ... denied reports that 30 Islamic State members escaped prison in Shaddadi in the Deir al-Zor governorate.... “We, as the center of Deir al-Zor media, are denying this news and we confirm that our forces are offering the full protection for prisons in which ISIS members are being incarcerated,” it added.*

*The SDF continues to hold thousands of prisoners, including at least 1,000 foreigners from 50 countries. Local officials have called on nations to take back their imprisoned foreign fighters, warning the prisoners could flee.*

*“Our region is unstable; any chaos may enable ISIS fighters to flee,” Abdulkarim Omer, the co-head of foreign relations for the local administration in northeast Syria, warned last year.*

*“Some of those fighters are dangerous and may pose serious threats [to] Europe and the international community.”*

*Western countries have largely refused to take back their detained citizens, fearing they could pose a security risk or would be released after short sentences.*

*As a result, the local administration has called for the establishment of an international court to try the Islamic State fighters in Syria.*

*“We call on the international community to establish a special international tribunal in northeast Syria to prosecute terrorists,” the administration said last week.*

**Source:** Menekşe Tokyay, “Suriye ve Irak’ta köşeye sıkışan IŞİD’in uyuyan hücreleri Türkiye için tehdit (The sleeper cells of ISIS, which is squeezed into a corner in Syria and Iraq, are a threat for Turkey),” *Euronews in Turkish*, 16 February 2019. <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/02/16/isid-ve-pyd-teror-saldirilarinda-isbirligine-gidebilir>

*Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said last week that Turkish security forces had stopped a timed bomb-laden truck in Hatay.*

*The truck, which was driven by an ISIS terrorist, was caught before it conducted a terrorist attack, in exchange for the release of the 100 ISIS members that are held by Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).*



Foreign Fighters in Syria (Antifascist from 0161 Antifa Manchester Crew in the International Freedom Battalion (IFB) in Rojava.

Source: Unknown IFB member via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IFB\\_Antifa\\_Manchester.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IFB_Antifa_Manchester.png), CC BY 4.0.





## The SDF's Role in Syria's Future

**OE Watch Commentary:** After eight years of bloody fighting, the Syrian conflict appears to be moving into the diplomatic negotiations phase. Each party involved in the conflict is looking to come to the negotiating table with hopes of maximizing their gains and furthering their interests. One of these parties is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which emerged from the conflict as a group that successfully managed to push back the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on the ground. Many are watching to see whether the (predominantly Kurdish) SDF will try to leverage this success in negotiations with the Syrian regime, to push for legal recognition of their autonomous Kurdish regions in northern Syria, thus planting the seeds for what their brethren in next door Iraq have achieved: the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government, formally recognized as such within the Iraqi Constitution. The accompanying passages feature interviews with SDF leaders about their demands and red lines within the future of Syria.

While the SDF is predominantly Kurdish, it has fought against ISIS in areas that exceed the boundaries of the Kurdish parts of Syria. Currently, the SDF controls about a third of Syrian territory where it holds thousands of former ISIS members, whom most countries do not want back (see article, “What to do with ISIS Detainees and Returnees?” in this issue of *OE Watch*). These factors are strong bargaining chips for the SDF when they come to the negotiating table.

The first accompanying passage is an exclusive interview with the Commander in Chief of the SDF, Mazlum Kobane, by Turkish journalist Amberin Zaman. As the *Al-Monitor* article discusses, Kobane points out that they “do not wish to separate from Syria.” However, he notes two principal demands from the Syrian regime: One is that their autonomous administrations in Syria be preserved and accorded legal status; the second is that the SDF should be preserved. Kobane notes these as their “red lines” and says that they would be willing to engage in “all kinds of negotiations with the regime on this basis.” While the preservation of the SDF is a key condition, he also says that before there can be any military changes, there needs to be a political settlement. Once there is a political deal, he says, “some changes can be effected on the ground.”

The second accompanying passage may shed light on what these “changes on the ground” may be. The passage features comments by the spokesperson for the SDF, Redur Khalil. Khalil says that the SDF could be integrated into the Syrian Army once a political agreement is established with the regime. Taking the comments of the two SDF leaders into account, it appears that the SDF will push for the preservation of their autonomous administrations, and may possibly consider integrating into the Syrian Army in exchange; however, this would have to entail an arrangement that preserves the SDF or recognizes them as the leading authority in their regions.

The Kurds view the regions they live in as “Kurdistan,” and they see Kurdistan as a four-part region: eastern Kurdistan (Iran), western Kurdistan (Syria), southern Kurdistan (Iraq), and northern Kurdistan (Turkey). In Iraq, an autonomous Kurdish region has already been established with all the traits of an independent state, including its own constitution, parliament flag, army, border and border patrol, national anthem, international airports and education system. It appears that the Syrian Kurds are working to follow their lead. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

***“We have two principal demands [from the Syrian regime]: One is that our autonomous administrations here be preserved and accorded legal status. The second is that the SDF should be preserved.”*** - Mazlum Kobane, Commander in Chief of the SDF

**Source:** “Turkish intervention could trigger Syria’s ‘second great war’,” *Al-Monitor.com*, 20 March 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/syria-kurdish-mazlum-kobane-damascus-talks-assad-russia.html>

*With Islamic State cells continuing to operate to deadly effect in Syria and neighboring Iraq, it’s too early to say “mission accomplished,” cautioned Mazlum Kobane, the commander in chief of the SDF, in an exclusive interview with Al-Monitor....*

*“We are ultimately part of Syria. We do not wish to separate from Syria. If there is to be a lasting solution for this region it needs to be with Damascus. Negotiations with the regime are inevitable...”*

*“....before [there can be] any military changes in this area, there needs to be a political settlement first. We are telling [the Russians and Damascus] that once we have a political deal in place, then some changes can be effected on the ground.”*

*“Rojava [Syrian Kurdistan] is a part of Syria. But our work here as part of the SDF forces is being carried out in an area that exceeds the boundaries of Rojava. We have Arab allies. A third of Syrian territory is under our control...”*

*“We have two principal demands [from the Syrian regime]: One is that our autonomous administrations here be preserved and accorded legal status. The second is that the SDF should be preserved. The security of the territory east of the Euphrates River should be left to the SDF. These are our red lines. We are willing to engage in all kinds of negotiations with the regime on this basis.”*

**Source:** “Kurdish forces could be integrated in Syrian Army: SDF official,” *Almasdarnews.com*, 7 January 2019. <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/kurdish-forces-could-be-integrated-in-syrian-army-sdf-official/>

*Speaking to the AFP News Agency, the spokesperson for the SDF, Redur Khalil, said that the Syrian Democratic Forces could be integrated into the Syrian Arab Army once an agreement is established between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and Damascus.*

*Khalil told the AFP that a deal between Damascus and the Syrian Democratic Council is ‘inevitable, adding that “reaching a solution between the autonomous administration and the Syrian government is inevitable because our areas are part of Syria.”*



## Disagreements Between Moscow, Damascus and Tehran

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 18 March 2019 the military chiefs of Syria, Iran, and Iraq held a trilateral military summit in Damascus, the Syrian capital. While the official aim of the summit was announced as coordinating joint efforts to fight terrorism, the announcement made after the summit suggested otherwise. The Iranian and Syrian military chiefs demanded the withdrawal of American forces from Syria and threatened Kurdish forces in Syria to accept the authority of Damascus. The trilateral summit and subsequent moves by Russia shed light on each of these countries' interests in Syria. The accompanying passages, one from *Rudaw*, a news outlet supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq and the other from a Turkish news outlet *Haberturk* analyze this trilateral summit and what it revealed.

The *Rudaw* article claims that this is the first meeting among Syria, Iran and Iraq since the Syrian Civil War started in 2011. The article provides briefing excerpts from three military chiefs. First, Syrian Military Chief and Minister of Defense Ali Abdullah Ayyoub calls on forces who are present in Syria without the consent of the regime to leave Syria and notes that the regime has the means to drive all occupying forces out. Mr. Ayyoub also notes the Syrian regime's objective to take back control of areas under Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) either through negotiations or by military means. Second, Iranian Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri states that Iranian forces are in Syria with the consent of Damascus and says that they will remain in Syria as long as the Syrian regime allows. Finally, Iraq's Chief of Staff speaks about the re-opening of the border between Iraq and Syria.

According to the article from *Haberturk*, the absence of Russia at the trilateral meeting in Damascus indicates the existence of disagreements between Russia, Syria and Iran. The article highlights that the Russian Minister of Defense was in Syria the next day, meeting with the Syrian President. The author cites London based *al-Arab* newspaper saying that the Russian President has warned Damascus regarding Iranian attempts to form regional alliances. The article also notes that there are indications the Iranian and Syrian regimes are bothered by Russian accommodations of Turkey in Northern Syria including in Idlib. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

**“... Iran and the government in Damascus are bothered by Russia’s attitude towards Turkey in northern Syria...”**

**Source:** “İran, Irak ve Suriye arasında askeri zirve (A military summit between Iran, Iraq and Syria),” *Rudaw*, 19 March 2019. <http://www.rudaw.net/turkish/middleeast/19032019>

*Ayyoub stressed that [Syrian territories] with no exception including Idlib will definitely and completely return to Syria’s control and domination.*

*Ayyoub... the Syrian army has the power and the means to remove US forces. Ayoub said “we will remove the US and all forces of the other states from Syria. We will either deal with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) through reconciliation or by rescuing the territories through military action.”*

*Iran’s Military Chief of Staff Bagheri pointed out that Syrian sovereignty and independence must be respected [and] Iranian forces are here with the permission and authorization of the Syrian state.*

*[Iranian] forces will remain in Syria as long as Syria wishes...*

**Source:** Mehmet Akil Ersoy, “Moskova-Şam-Tahran hattında neler oluyor? (What is happening between Moscow-Damascus-Tehran?),” *Haberturk*, 27 March 2019. <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/mehmet-akif-ersoy-2548/2415838-moskova-sam-tahran-hattinda-neler-oluyor>

*...Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu went to Damascus to have a meeting on March 19 with Bashar al-Assad immediately after the meeting [between Iran, Iraq and Syria’s military chiefs].*

*... the fact that the trilateral meeting took place without the participation of Moscow and then Shoygu’s meeting with al-Assad are seen as signs of disagreements ... between Moscow-Damascus-Tehran.*

*...in the London based al-Arab newspaper the news regarding Shoygu’s visit to Damascus was run as Putin’s message to al-Assad [being] “warning regarding Iran”... Al-Arab claimed Iran’s military alliances in the region threaten not only the US, but also the interests of Russia. Moscow, who was afraid of this, wanted to warn the government in Damascus not to take any action east of the Euphrates and Idlib. Because the trilateral summit in Damascus focused not only on the region east of the Euphrates, but also on Idlib... Iran and the government in Damascus are bothered by Russia’s attitude towards Turkey in northern Syria...*





## Perceived Kurdish YPG Threat May Lead to Turkey, Syria and Iran Alliance

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey has been threatening to launch a cross border military operation against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, which it considers to be a terrorist organization. The accompanying article from *Al-Monitor*, a Middle East news website, sheds lights on what actions Turkey might take against the threat it perceives from the YPG.

As the article points out, Turkish officials believe that keeping the possibility of an operation alive helps curb the political aspirations of the Kurds since the events "in northern Syria have been developing to the disadvantage of the YPG" after the United States announced its intention to withdraw troops from Syria. This turn of events has led "the Syrian Kurdish groups to seek

a negotiated settlement with Damascus from a much weaker position." Negotiations between the Syrian regime and Syrian Kurds concerns Turkey because it could lead to cooperation between them against Turkey.

The author states that Turkey's concerns are informed by Damascus' past support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, the Syrian regime's recent stance "against any form of self-administration by the Syrian Kurds" may assuage Turkey's concerns. The author also notes that Turkey's threats against the Kurds has given Syrian President Bashar al-Assad the upper hand in a possible settlement with the Kurds. He points to a recent interview in which Mazlum Kobane, the commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (which is predominantly led by the YPG) said that the Kurds have two non-negotiable demands: "preservation and recognition of the autonomous Kurdish administration and preservation of the SDF..." The article highlights the response of Syrian Defense Minister Gen. Ali Abdullah Ayoub, in which he says that the SDF will be dealt with either through "national reconciliation or .... through force." Iran, who backs the Syrian regime, opposes the SDF and "any Kurdish autonomy in Syria." The author points out that "there is an emerging convergence of interests on the Kurdish question between Ankara, Tehran and Damascus." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



SDF infantry in northern Raqqa countryside.

Source: VOA via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SDF\\_infantry\\_in\\_northern\\_Raqqa\\_countryside\\_\(December\\_2016\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SDF_infantry_in_northern_Raqqa_countryside_(December_2016).png), Public Domain

***“...there is an emerging convergence of interests on the Kurdish question between Ankara, Tehran and Damascus.”***

**Source:** Semih Idiz, "Turkey relying on events to turn tide against Kurdish YPG," *Al-Monitor*, 27 March 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/turkey-syria-usa-ankara-believes-tide-to-turn-against-ypg.html>

*...the situation in northern Syria has been developing to the disadvantage of the YPG...*

...

*This has forced the Syrian Kurdish groups to seek a negotiated settlement with Damascus from a much weaker position.*

...

*Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in January that Turkey would not like to see the Assad regime move into areas evacuated by US forces because Damascus could go on to cooperate with the YPG against Turkey.*

*Ankara may be moderating its position, given the hard-line opposition Damascus is taking against any form of self-administration by the Syrian Kurds.*

*In his interview with Al-Monitor's Amberin Zaman, Mazlum Kobane, the commander of the YPG-led and American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), listed two non-negotiable demands.*

*"One is that our autonomous administration here be preserved and accorded legal status. The second is that the SDF be preserved. The security of the territory east of the Euphrates River should be left to the SDF. These are our red lines," Kobane said.*

*Syrian Defense Minister Gen. Ali Abdullah Ayoub... the SDF would be dealt with in one of two ways...*

*..."national reconciliation or the liberation of the areas that they control through force."*

...

*This signals greater cooperation between Ankara and Tehran against Kurdish aspirations in the near future. Iran is also cool to the idea of any Kurdish autonomy in Syria and opposes the SDF.*

*Put another way, there is an emerging convergence of interests on the Kurdish question between Ankara, Tehran and Damascus.*



## Russia's Game Plan and Turkish-Russian Joint Patrols in Idlib

**OE Watch Commentary:** Despite supporting opposite sides of the protracted Syrian conflict, Russia and Turkey have managed to maintain their working relationship. However, as the Syrian regime assumes more control over Syrian territories with Russian help, it becomes harder for Turkey to maintain the delicate balance between Russia and the opposition groups it support in Syria, and to maintain the status quo in Idlib. The accompanying articles discuss the challenges Turkey is facing in Syria, especially in Idlib, and how these challenges impact its relations with Russia.

The first article, written by a well-respected Turkish journalist closely monitoring developments in Syria, states that Russian actions have shown a lack of confidence in Turkey to fulfill its commitments regarding Idlib. Except for removing some heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone, Turkey has not delivered on its promises in Idlib. However, as the article notes, despite this, Russia has maintained its alliance with Turkey. The author attributes this to the Russian view that a joint structure would make it easier to minimize attacks from Idlib on Russian and Syrian regime units. In addition, Turkey has engaged in efforts to consolidate the opposition groups in Idlib, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, under one umbrella (although these efforts have not yielded results). It is highly unlikely that Turkey will be able to unify the opposition groups in Idlib and maintain the cease-fire because the Turkey-backed groups attacked regime forces as recently as 9 March 2019.

As the second article from the left-leaning Turkish daily *Gazete Duvar* reports, a new Russian and Turkish agreement paved the way for joint Russian-Turkish patrols starting on 8 March 2019 in Idlib. According to the agreement, Russian forces would patrol outside the city limits of Idlib while the Turkish Armed Forces would patrol the demilitarized zone. While Turkey and Russia have different scenarios for the future of Idlib, the first article states that the future of Russian-Turkish relations depends on preserving the status quo in Idlib. (See: "Russian Military Art and Science and Leadership Signaled from Syria" in this issue of *OE Watch*, p. 4) **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

**“Preservation of the status quo at Idlib seems essential to the future of Russian-Turkish relations.”**

**Source:** Fehim Tastekin, "Russia seeks to hold reluctant Turkey accountable in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, 20 March 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/turkey-syria-russia-is-ankara-giving-up-on-idlib.html>

*Turkey, which is badly pressed to fulfill the commitments it made to Russia during the Sochi negotiations on Syria, ... is now trying to find a way to extricate itself from being stuck between Russia and the Syrian rebels.*

*When Turkey's campaign to create a buffer zone east of the Euphrates River did not work out, Russia succeeded in dragging Turkey back to the Idlib agenda. On March 3-4, Russia and Turkey signed a new accord to follow up on the issues discussed during the Iran, Russia and Turkey summit Feb. 14 in Sochi.*

*The new text introduced some interesting points. On March 8, Russian forces patrolled on one side of the buffer boundary as Turkish troops patrolled the other.*

...

*The steps Russia has taken so far show that Turkey probably will not be able to avoid fulfilling its commitments, but the situation also raises the question of whether Turkey is actually subscribing to the Russian operational plan that will put Idlib under the control of the Syrian regime army.*

...

*Although Turkey managed to get some heavy weapons removed from the demilitarized zone to save face, other conditions weren't implemented... Russia kept up some pressure with facile statements that "Turkey is working on it, but the accord has not been fully implemented." Nevertheless, Russia opted not to disrupt its ties with Ankara for a variety of reasons.*

*... with a joint structure it would be easier to minimize attacks from Idlib on Russian and Syrian regime units, and enable Turkey to boast that terror organizations had been eliminated and so the cease-fire should be preserved...*

...

*Preservation of the status quo at Idlib seems essential to the future of Russian-Turkish relations.*

*Although unwillingly adhering to Russia's operations plan, Turkey still hopes HTS will be freed from the terrorist label, so a new "terror-free" structure can take over control of Idlib and preserve the status quo until a political solution is reached. Russia still hopes Turkey will contribute to the Syrian regime's takeover of the region. Russia is paying much attention to keeping Turkey on its side while trying to sort out the Idlib mess.*

**Source:** "Akar: İdlib'de ortak devriye bugün başlıyor (Akar: Joint patrols start today in Idlib)," *Gazete Duvar*, 8 March 2019. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/03/08/idlibde-ortak-devriye-basliyor/>

*Idlib is one of the important fields we are currently working on. We provide the necessary coordination with both Russia and Iran. This 17 September [2018] accord played an important role. There is a demilitarized zone here. Within the framework of our meetings on 14 February [2019], today on the border zone outside of Idlib Russia's and in the demilitarized zone Turkish Armed Forces' patrol will begin. In terms of the continuation of the ceasefire in the region, we see this as an important step.*





## Turkish Perspectives on the S-400 Purchase from Russia

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on 8 April 2019 amid mounting pressure from Turkey's NATO allies against purchasing the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile defense system. During the visit, the Turkish President reiterated Turkey's determination to purchase the S-400s. The controversial issue has drawn attention from both Turkish and international media. The accompanying articles from the Turkish media discuss some Turkish perspectives on the issue.

The first passage from Turkish daily *Ahval* is an interview with Faruk Loğoğlu, a former Turkish Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador Loğoğlu states that engaging in a policy that tries to pursue a balancing act between its western allies and Russia will be damaging to Turkey. He argues that Turkey should immediately abandon this policy and adopt a balanced foreign policy. He claims that Turkey should clarify which side its on. He claims that "trusting Russia and seeing Russia as a strategic partner would be an incorrect perception. S-400 takes us to a point of dependence [on Russia] in planning for defense."

The second passage from Turkish daily *Ahval* features an interview with Dr. Kerim Has, a respected expert on the issue. He claims that the delivery of the S-400s will be in July. He also notes that 100 Turkish military officers will go to the Kapustin Yar base in Russia in May. They will then start official training in September or October at the military base in Saint Petersburg, for five to six months... He claims that "the delivery of all of the parts to Turkey and Turkish military taking the full control of S-400s will take one to two years."

The final passage from Turkish left leaning daily *Gazete Duvar* highlights Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's response to mounting pressure over the acquisition of S-400s. Çavuşoğlu states that Turkey may purchase a second battery of S-400s or another air defense system if the United States does not sell the Patriot missile defense system to Turkey. He also states that if Turkey does not receive F-35 jets, it may turn to other countries to purchase fighter jets. Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Sergeyevich Peskov responded to Çavuşoğlu's statements by highlighting Russia's technical capacity to expand Russian-Turkish military and technical cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

**Source:** Gülten Sarı, "Faruk Loğoğlu: ABD ile ilişkilerde tehdit, şantaj, manipulasyon devrede, Rusya'dan stratejik ortak olmaz (Faruk Loğoğlu: threat, blackmailing and manipulation is on stage in the relationship with the US [and] Russia cannot be a strategic partner)," *Ahval*, 6 April 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/guncel/faruk-logoglu-abd-ile-iliskilerde-tehdit-santaj-manipulasyon-devrede-rusyadan-stratejik>

*The thesis [of S-400s] is that they will not pose a threat to NATO while Turkey's purchase of S-400s is not acceptable or believable to NATO and the USA...*

*Turkey pursues a policy of balance sometimes with the West [and] sometimes with Russia. Turkey should abandon this balancing policy immediately. In between two super powers while trying to establish a balance Turkey will lose.*

*What Turkey needs to do is to keep its foreign policy in balance... it should present a policy that makes its standing clear. The S-400s are one of [these policies].*

*...Trusting Russia and seeing Russia as a strategic partner would be an incorrect perception. S-400 takes us to a point of dependence [on Russia] in planning for defense.*

**Source:** "Rusya uzmanı Dr. Kerim Has anlatıyor: Putin'e eli zayıf giden Erdoğan, neyle döndü? (Russia Expert Dr. Kerim Has says: Erdoğan who went to Putin with a weak hand has returned with what?)," *Ahval*, 9 April 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/rusya-turkiye/rusya-uzmani-dr-kerim-has-anlatiyor-putine-eli-zayif-giden-erdogan-neyle-dondu>

*When looking at the relations with Russia, the outstanding issue is S-400s. The process of buying the S-400s seems to continue... and Putin expressed in a briefing that the delivery of S-400s to Turkey must be completed... Also, a new generation of Russian weapons are on the agenda for delivery...*

*It was said the delivery [of S-400s] will be in July. In May 100 [Turkish] military officers will go to the Kapustin Yar base in Russia for training. But actual training will begin in September or October at the military base in Saint Petersburg Russia and continue for five to six months... The delivery of all of the parts to Turkey and Turkish military taking the full control of S-400s will take one to two years.*

**“...Trusting Russia and seeing Russia as a strategic partner would be an incorrect perception. S-400 takes us to a point of dependence [on Russia] in planning for defense.”**

**Source:** "Kremlin'den Çavuşoğlu'nun 'İkinci S-400 alabiliriz' açıklamasına 'olumlu' yanıt (An affirmative response from the Kremlin to Çavuşoğlu's announcement of 'we may buy a second [battery of] S-400s')," *Gazete Duvar*, 10 April 2019. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/dunya/2019/04/10/kremlinden-cavusoglundun-ikinci-s-400-alabiliriz-aciklamasina-olumlu-yanit/>

*Kremlin Press Secretary Peskov: We have necessary technical resources to expand military-technical cooperation with Turkey.*

...

*Peskov gave the following response to a question about Çavuşoğlu's announcement stating "in case of the United States does not sell Patriot air defense systems, Turkey may purchase a second S-400 air defense system:" Military-technical cooperation is an important dimension of Russia's cooperation with many foreign countries... This is also true in the case of Turkey he emphasized.*



## Are Yemeni Southerners Seeking to Revive Soviet-Era Ties?

**OE Watch Commentary:** In mid-March, a delegation from Yemen's Southern Transitional Council (STC) led by its president, Aidarous al-Zubaidi, visited London and Moscow. The visit to Moscow was especially noteworthy given the Cold War-era ties between the Soviet Union and the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), or South Yemen. The STC favors the re-establishment of an independent South Yemen, with Aden as its capital; its supporters in the media sought to portray al-Zubaidi's trip as a prelude to deeper Russian involvement in Yemen through an alliance with the STC.

According to the first accompanying article, from the pro-STC news website *tahdeeth.net*, the ties established between the PDRY and the Soviet Union remain relevant. The article highlights the "tens of thousands" of Yemeni students who trained in the Soviet Union and the similar number of Russians who were "present in the southern cities as military experts." At present, the author argues, the STC needs "an international ally with... the military power and international and regional influence to turn the southern dream into reality." The fact that South Yemen "is swimming on huge lakes of oil and gas, in addition to [its] mineral wealth" implies, according to the author, that supporting southern independence could yield significant strategic and material benefits for Russia.

Former South Yemen is in theory controlled by the Saudi-backed, internationally recognized government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Yet according to the 2019 final report by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, security forces allied with the STC are "the primary instruments of authority throughout the southern areas of Yemen." During al-Zubaidi's visit to Moscow, Russia's ambassador traveled to Aden to meet with representatives of the Hadi government. As the second accompanying excerpt notes, the ambassador downplayed the rumors of Moscow's support for the STC, stating that Russia opposes partition and remains committed to Yemeni unity and to the Hadi government's legitimacy. While in Aden, the Russian ambassador did also, however, meet with STC leaders.

The third accompanying excerpt, republished from a Yemeni writer's Facebook post on the news website *almawqea.net*, downplays Russia's interest in allying with the STC, at least for the time being. Al-Zubaidi's invitation to Moscow, the author argues, was "nothing more than a political formality" that illustrates Russia's policy of "opening its doors to any politician from any country and listening to them." In the author's opinion, "Russia's game makes sense, but al-Zubaidi's belief that by accepting to listen to him Russia is indicating a readiness to stand fully behind him makes no sense." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

**"... Russia does not have any practical agendas for Yemen and does not want to be engaged in a power struggle over Yemen, at least not at this stage ..."**

**Source:** علي ع مديق بج اوب "بدل" ري كذت .. وكسوم ال يدي بزل ا قرايز "Al-Zubaidi's Trip to Moscow... Reminding 'The Bear' of an Old Duty for Russia," *Tahdeeth*, 18 March 2019. <http://tahdeeth.net/news/80302>

*STC President General Aidarous al-Zubaidi's visit to Russia marks an important political and diplomatic gain for the southern issue, which needs an ally and an international figure such as Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council...*

*The relationship between the two countries for over two decades was a unique model in the region, during which the two peoples formed a strong relationship. Tens of thousands of southern civilian and military students studied in Moscow, and tens of thousands of Russians have been present in the southern cities as military experts...*

*According to international reports, the south is swimming on huge lakes of oil and gas, in addition to mineral wealth. The South will not benefit from all that wealth unless it finds an international ally with modern exploration capabilities and the military power and international and regional influence to turn the southern dream into reality.*

*Sources close to President al-Zubaidi revealed to tahdeeth.net that he is seeking a strategic alliance with Moscow in a way that guarantees independence to the south by raising the issue in the UN Security Council. The South should build a special relationship with Moscow that gives it priority in the economic and military realms and even in arms deals, once the southern state has been established.*

**Source:** ميسق تب بحرت ال وكسوم نأ ندع نم دكؤي يسورل ري فسل "Russian Ambassador Confirms from Aden that Moscow Opposes Yemeni Partition," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 March 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5jzzwrq>

*STC President General Aidarous al-Zubaidi's visit to Russia marks an important political and diplomatic gain for the southern issue, which needs an ally and an international figure such as Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council...*

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*According to international reports, the south is swimming on huge lakes of oil and gas, in addition to mineral wealth. The South will not benefit from all that wealth unless it finds an international ally with modern exploration capabilities and the military power and international and regional influence to turn the southern dream into reality.*

*Sources close to President al-Zubaidi revealed to tahdeeth.net that he is seeking a strategic alliance with Moscow in a way that guarantees independence to the south by raising the issue in the UN Security Council. The South should build a special relationship with Moscow that gives it priority in the economic and military realms and even in arms deals, once the southern state has been established.*



**Source:** <https://almawqea.net/wall/3427>.. Mohammed al-Miahi. “Chat with Aidarous al-Zubaidi,” *al-Mawqea*, 20 March 2019.

*Russia is not able to turn the tables in [the STC's] favor, nor will the UAE help it achieve its dream, so long as [the STC] lacks a true project that convinces the people and proves it has the authority to take charge of the southern issue... In fact, what Russia is doing is opening its doors to any politician from any country and listening to them. It is nothing more than a political formality that Russia has done with many others, especially recently, as part of its own attempts to restore some kind of effectiveness and political presence in the region...Russia does not have any practical agendas for Yemen and does not want to be engaged in a power struggle over Yemen, at least not at this stage, and the statements made by the Russian Foreign Ministry after the meeting confirms the matter more...*

*In sum, Russia's game makes sense, but al-Zubaidi's belief that by accepting to listen to him Russia is indicating a readiness to stand fully behind him makes no sense. Al-Zubaidi is an inconsistent politician; like other southern leaders, he lives in a great illusion. In the end, his illusions will end, they will evaporate and he will awaken to a mirage that will be clear to people, without illusions and without an issue.*

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49



## Why Moscow Backed Sudan's Embattled President

**OE Watch Commentary:** The protests against Sudanese President Hassan Omar al-Bashir, who served for nearly 30 years, had been increasing these past few months. While many countries tried to distance themselves from the embattled ruler, one in particular, Russia, worked hard to keep him in power. The degree of that support is perhaps best exemplified by Moscow allegedly sending men from the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, to advise Sudanese security forces on how to quell the protests. While al-Bashir is finally out of office, the excerpted accompanying article from *The East African* news site, which was written shortly before he was overthrown by the Sudanese military, offers valuable insights as to why Russia was so intent in assisting his regime.



Presidents Putin and al-Bashir, pictured here in November 2017. While Moscow sent men from the Wagner Group to assist Sudan with putting down protests, it was not enough to prevent the overthrow of the Sudanese president.

Source: Пресс-служба Президента России/www.kremlin.ru/Wikimedia Commons:[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir\\_Putin\\_and\\_Omar\\_al-Bashir\\_\(2017-11-23\)\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Omar_al-Bashir_(2017-11-23)_01.jpg), CC BY 3.0

Moscow certainly has financial interests in Sudan and is intent on expanding those ties as well as in other regions to help absorb the blows to its own economy from Western sanctions. However, it would be a mistake to couch Moscow's assistance in propping up the Sudanese president in strictly economic terms. Indeed, besides the economic reasons, Moscow had multiple political interests for seeing the al-Bashir regime continue. To begin with, it furthered Russia's message that it is a stalwart ally no matter how appalling a country's human rights record may be, and al-Bashir's is so bad he was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide and crimes against humanity. Actually, the ICC involvement in Sudan possibly strengthened Putin's and al-Bashir's relationship as both disdain the international organization.

There are other reasons for Russia's backing of al-Bashir. Russia was a rather latecomer in the scramble for great power influence in the Horn of Africa, and thus found itself unable to secure a base on Djibouti's coast the way the US and China have. Locked out, Russia turned to Sudan, where al-Bashir invited it to establish a naval base, providing Moscow with important geostrategic access to the Red Sea.

As the article notes, the strong bilateral relationship between Russia and Sudan is based on several factors, including Sudanese resource extraction in exchange for Russian armaments, Russian contractors training Sudanese forces, and Sudan providing Putin with a way to restrain US and Chinese hegemony. However, despite those deep ties, unlike in Syria where Russian backing of an embattled strongman left that person in power even as the state collapsed around him...this time Moscow's close friend fell to a military coup. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“More broadly, the deployment of Wagner personnel on the streets of Khartoum fits in with a long-term Russian foreign policy goal — to promote a multi-polar international order designed to restrain US and Chinese hegemony.”***

**Source:** Will Johnston, “More than just oil and gold informing Russia decision to back Bashir,” *The East African*, 12 March 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/oped/comment/Why-Russia-is-backing-Sudan-Omar-Bashir/434750-5021178-ga4fsxz/index.html>

*More broadly, the deployment of Wagner personnel on the streets of Khartoum fits in with a long-term Russian foreign policy goal — to promote a multi-polar international order designed to restrain US and Chinese hegemony.*

*Strategic access to the Red Sea could also enable Russia to consolidate its growing sphere of influence in the region, with Sudan acting as bridge for a security architecture extending from Syria to the Central African Republic.*

*While these theories of grand strategy regarding a military base on the Red Sea are compelling, whether Russia could afford such an investment remains to be seen. Regardless, these complex networks of extraction, security co-operation and geo-strategic interest could explain why Russia would want to maintain the status quo in Sudan or at least limit the fallout of a popular uprising.*

*Syria and Ukraine, regions where Wagner have been active, faced similar existential questions about the type of society or governance model that would take each respective country forward and in both cases Wagner were not on the pro-democracy side.*





## South Sudan: Does Humanitarian Aid Fuel the Conflict?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Embroiled in a civil war since 2013, when President Kiir accused his former vice president, Riek Machar, of plotting a coup d'état, South Sudan has been the recipient of enormous amounts of relief supplies provided by humanitarian aid organizations. However, as the excerpted accompanying article from *African Arguments* relates, while the intentions of these aid organizations have been good, unfortunately the supplies help fuel the conflict, creating even more misery among the populace that was depending on the donated food, medicine, and other goods to relieve their suffering.

This twisted outcome comes about in large part because militant groups often find ways to seize the relief supplies for their own use, often through infiltrating distribution centers and having appointed supporters steal food. They also divert supplies from their intended recipients in a more straightforward way...using force to steal it. Both the South Sudanese national army and rebel groups have been accused by the UN of stealing food aid as well as vehicles from humanitarian organizations.

Efforts by aid groups to create camps for refugees have also provided unintended benefits to the rebels. They enter the camp and recruit new fighters, sometimes by force. The camp might have little ability to stop such actions.

Yet another way humanitarian aid is misused is when the warring factions create the impression that the food and other supplies are coming from them. As an example, President Kiir branded rice that had come from Chinese food assistance as being his gift to the hungry populace.

Kiir's government has also become adept at using the country's crises as a way to encourage foreign donors to provide even more assistance. In what has been described as "playing the fragile state card," the government portrays the country on the brink of collapse. This existential threat can manipulate foreign parties who are anxious for South Sudan to survive.

Fees imposed by rebel groups and the government also help swell the coffers of both groups. There might be charges such as sitting fees and airport fees, as well as NGO registration fees. If aid agencies want to deliver their goods, they often find themselves caving in to these extortionary practices.

The article states more transparency, new ways of operating, and additional regulations are needed with regards to delivering aid. Otherwise, both the government and rebel groups will continue to manipulate it to their own advantage, and help perpetuate the conflict rather than ameliorate suffering. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



"With members of the South Sudanese national army, such as those pictured here, and rebel groups accused by the UN of stealing food aid, there is concern that humanitarian aid is helping to fuel the conflict," VOA.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/a/government-soldiers-leave-juba-before-rebel-leaders-return/3286194.html>, Public Domain

**Source:** Daniel Akech Thiong, "South Sudan: How warring parties play international donors," *African Arguments*, 20 March 2019. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/03/20/south-sudan-aid-warring-parties-play-international-donors/>

*There are no easy solutions of course. But until the international community and humanitarian organisations acknowledge how their approaches are exploited and played by warring parties, they will continue to play their now clearly-defined roles in South Sudan's repeating cycles of violence.*

*Mediators must recognise the weaknesses of this approach and acknowledge how it has contributed to ongoing cycles of violence. At the same time, however, humanitarian actors must confront their own role in this complex system too. They must examine the many ways in which their presence may provide support for warring parties and help prolong the conflict. It has reached the point at which militants are not only skilled at exploiting weakness in the system opportunistically, but actively seek to mobilize humanitarian interventions as a strategy of war.*

*Finally, the nature of the humanitarian response must also be debated. The kind of emergency relief typically deployed in South Sudan is both more susceptible to manipulation and less effective in long-term than support that would build resilience and self-sustainability.*

***"It has reached the point at which militants are not only skilled at exploiting weakness in the system opportunistically, but actively seek to mobilize humanitarian interventions as a strategy of war."***



## Africa's Crushing Debt to China

**OE Watch Commentary:** Africa has generally welcomed Chinese investments, especially because the Chinese don't make the same demands, including with respect to human rights, as the Europeans and Americans insist on. However, as the excerpted accompanying article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* notes, these investments are not without costs, with the biggest one being the tremendous amount of debt many African countries now find themselves owing to China. Presently, 20% of Africa's external debt is owed to China, making that country Africa's largest single creditor.

While China has long had economic interests in Africa, these became particularly pronounced in the early 2000's. Searching for energy and mineral resources to meet its rapidly growing manufacturing base, China invested heavily in extractive industries in the continent. Although still heavily involved in mining and related activities, China more recently has begun to branch out into non-resource based ones. Its ambitious Road and Belt Initiative is a prime example of this, with such large scale projects as the completed 485km Mombasa-Nairobi railroad line showcasing China's investment in African infrastructure.

The collateral requirements in loans for many of these projects are the main problems for several African nations. Basically, a single loan can be considered a barter system, where in return for investment capital, an African country might offer China certain resource concessions. Alternatively, the African country may allow China to have a stake in an infrastructure project such as a port, or, particularly risky, secure the loan using its natural resources and/or assets as collateral. That last one has resulted in numerous countries – including Zambia, Angola, the DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti, and several others – handing over some of their assets or resources to China. As an example, in 2016, with 82% of Djibouti's external debt owed to China, Djibouti turned control of its port over to its lender. Eventually, China might come away with a 70% stake and a 99 year lease on the port.

As the article states, China has made inroads in countries with weak governance, poor accountability, and lack of transparency, but as the article also states, there is nothing inherently wrong with Africa and China engaging in economic activity. There is great concern, though, that some African leaders are allowing the continent to be plundered of its assets and resources, and that such leaders are failing their own people. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*"There is concern that Chinese lending for megaprojects, such as the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway pictured here, is causing severe indebtedness among several African nations," Mwangi Kirubi.*

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

**Source:** Stellah Kwasi, "High Cost of Having China as Africa's Partner of Choice," *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 13 March 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/high-cost-of-having-china-as-africas-partner-of-choice>

*Owing to the 'no conditionality' policy, many African countries have turned to China as the partner of choice. However the relationship is increasingly showing some characteristics evident during colonialism, raising questions about the true cost of the benefits Africa is getting from China. Only as recently as 2015 did China start visibly focusing on the commercial and viability aspects of their investments.*

*The loans are big and the terms leave sub-Saharan Africa with little revenue of their own from commodity production while increasing their debt levels. Multilateral organizations like the African Development Bank, the World Bank and last-resort lenders like the IMF generally give loans at lower-than-market rates.*

*Most of the projects undertaken by China are capital-intensive ventures like ports, railway lines, roads and even airports. Rarely does it invest in more basic amenities like sanitation programs. China then reclaims and runs the assets for profit when countries default.*

***"Owing to the 'no conditionality' policy, many African countries have turned to China as the partner of choice. However the relationship is increasingly showing some characteristics evident during colonialism, raising questions about the true cost of the benefits Africa is getting from China."***





## Somalia: Worries Over Withdrawal of Kenyan Military

**OE Watch Commentary:** After several delays, the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) are withdrawing from Somalia. As the excerpted accompanying article from the Kenyan news site *The Daily Nation* relates, Somali's leaders fear that in locations where the soldiers move out, the terrorist group al Shabaab will move in. One of the recent KDF pullouts was from their command center in Busar, a town in northern Jubaland that was liberated during the first 100 days of Kenya's entry into Somalia. Reportedly, the Kenyan troops destroyed the Busar base before leaving.

The KDF have abandoned other bases in Somalia, including in El Adde and Bardera. When they withdrew from the latter in 2017, al Shabaab took over the base within just five days.

The African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) oversees the KDF's and other countries' military contingents in Somalia. At a February meeting in Mogadishu of top AMISOM commanders, agreement was reached on how to execute the mission's new Concept of Operations (CONOPS), essentially a framework for the African Union's force withdrawal.



"Somali leaders are worried that the withdrawal of Kenyan soldiers serving with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), such as the ones pictured here, could leave large parts of Somalia at risk of being taken over by al Shabaab," AMISOM/Wikimedia Commons  
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM-Kismayo-Advance%2005-180499647691.jpg> Public Domain

Overall the transition plan for Somalia incorporates several components: phased and conditions-based AMISOM troop withdrawal, degrading al Shabaab, and supporting the Somali government security forces taking charge of the country's security. As of now, at least some AMISOM force withdrawal is underway, al Shabaab has been degraded but far from defeated, and there is great concern that Somalia's government forces are not up to the task of handling the entire nation's security.

Several other reasons have been put forward as to why the Kenyan troops are leaving, besides AMISOM possibly believing objectives are being met. One is that due to a significant drop in AMISOM funding, it was becoming increasingly difficult to move troops and supplies into certain areas. Another theory claims that the withdrawal is related to a political fight between Somalia and Kenya over oil blocks in a disputed area. Whatever the reason or reasons for the withdrawal – funding, political spat, a determination that Somalia will soon be able to provide its own security, or something else entirely – many Somalis are nervous that the territorial gains by AMISOM will be lost when it departs the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“Leaders in Somalia are questioning the recent abandonment of a military base in the country by Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) soldiers, saying the move will expose the country to Al-Shabaab threats.”***

**Source:** Nyambega Gisesa, “Somali leaders jittery over KDF’s military base pullout,” *Daily Nation (Kenya)*, 20 March 2019. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/KDF-pullout-sends-Somali-leaders-into-panic/1056-5033066-158201gz/index.html>

*Leaders in Somalia are questioning the recent abandonment of a military base in the country by Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) soldiers, saying the move will expose the country to Al-Shabaab threats.*

*“The decision for the drawdown in terms of Amisom troop numbers was supposed to be in 2017, but the Somali government has been asking for extensions due to fears that it might not be able to hold back the militants. The funding for the operations has also been dwindling,” Mr Edward Wanyonyi, a graduate of war studies from King’s College, London, said.*

*“By Kenya withdrawing from their positions, Al Shabaab could fill up the void and in turn upset Somalia as a way of getting back at them,” said Mr John Kariuki, a geopolitics expert.*



## Concern after French Military Doctor's Death in Mali

**OE Watch Commentary:** In March, the French military launched an operation in the Gourma area of central Mali. According to the accompanying passage in the French news source *rfi.fr*, just as the operation began, a French military doctor was killed when his vehicle struck an IED, and some in the vehicle were injured. This immediately led to a response by French President Emmanuel Macron, who promised continued French support for the mission in Mali.

According to the article, the doctor was traveling in a vehicle that did not have Red Cross insignia to identify its passengers as members of a medical team. It was also unclear, according to the article, whether the IED was planted by militants with knowledge the vehicle was entering that area or not. If there had been a Red Cross insignia on the vehicle and that was known to the militant, then that would be a flagrant violation of the laws of war, although the jihadist militants in Mali do not regularly follow those laws.



Mauritanian troops-Mali-Mauritania border-2010

Source: Magharebia via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mauritanian\\_troops-Mali-Mauritania\\_border-2010.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mauritanian_troops-Mali-Mauritania_border-2010.jpg), CC BY 2.0

The article further discusses the type of terrain in which the French forces operate in the Gourma area of central Mali. The area is forested with thickets of thorns and low visibility. This makes operations difficult and favorable to the militants. The roads are also described as pathways that snake through the forest. As a result, IEDs planted on those pathways, according to the article, have become a weapon of choice for the militants and are the number one risk to the lives of French and Malian forces operating in the area. Although the article notes that French soldiers have increased their security measures, they still have not been able to counteract the IEDs. Moreover, according to social media statements observed by the author, the area is widely believed to be a safe haven for the militants. Already off to a difficult start, the French operation in Gourma will be challenging. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“This time it was a landmine that was the killer. It is today the number one risk in Mali.”***

**Source:** “Un médecin militaire français tué au Mali” (“A French military doctor killed in Mali”), *rfi.fr*, 2 April 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190402-medecin-militaire-francais-tue-mali>

*A French military doctor was killed in Mali following the triggering of an improvised explosive device when his armored vehicle passed during a battle operation against terrorist armed. The head of state Emmanuel Macron announced in a statement that did not specify the location of the operation his “very great sadness” and reaffirmed “the full support of France to Mali and the support of the United Nations for the implementation for the peace agreement of 2015.*

*For a year and a half, the French army has been conducting a series of military operations in Liptako, in the north-east of Mali, with the Barkhane force, and is now extending its action across the Niger River into the adjacent area of Gourma. On the social networks several generally well-informed contributors talk about the Foulsaré forest area, a safe haven for terrorist groups, and a well-known area of the French army since it has deployed there with the Malian and Burkina Faso forces in the spring of 2017. A French soldier of the 6th Engineer Regiment died at the time because of short-range automatic weapon fire. Probably in the same region, this time it was a landmine that was the killer. It is today the number one risk in Mali.*

*According to the staff, the vehicle that was destroyed did not have a red cross to identify a medical team. It is unclear whether the explosive device used by the terrorists was planted in anticipation of the passage of French forces, or if it had been there for longer.*





# Malian Interethnic Massacre: Did Army Focus Too Much on Islamists?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Following the deaths of 23 Malian soldiers at the hands of an al Qaeda-affiliated group, members of the Dan Nan Ambassagou militia, which is comprised of hunters from the Dogon community and is associated with the Malian military, apparently decided a reprisal was in order. As the excerpted accompanying article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* website explains, on 23 March the militia attacked the village of Ogossagou, killing 157 Fulani. While the Fulani, who are mostly Muslim nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, and the Dogon, who are mostly farmers and embrace a traditional African religion, have clashed before, the latest rounds of violence in Central Mali have risen to unprecedented levels.

As the excerpted accompanying article from *African Arguments* explains, the growing conflict is based on a competition over grazing corridors and water. Climate change, land degradation, and population growth have led to fewer natural resources being available for more people, with the result that traditional methods of defusing conflict among various ethnic groups are no longer working. Meanwhile governments and their affiliated security forces often view the Fulani with suspicion because of the ethnic group's high mobility.

Islamist groups benefit from the interethnic friction by presenting themselves as the protectors of the Muslim Fulani. However, while only a small percentage of Fulani support these groups, the Islamist propaganda has caused all of the Fulani to be associated with them, causing increased suspicion to be cast on the Fulani. With increased suspicion comes increased violence, and with increased violence comes more opportunities for Islamist groups to present themselves as guardians of the Fulani, thus creating a cycle that fuels conflict.

As the excerpted article from *African Arguments* notes, the Malian military as well as the international militaries led by France prior to this most recent outbreak of violence have concentrated almost exclusively on the threat posed by Islamist groups, basically ignoring the complex interethnic dynamics brewing in central Mali. Now, especially that Islamist groups are part of the interethnic conflict equation, some attention is being paid to the problems of the Fulani, Dogon, and other ethnic groups. Indeed, after the attack, the Malian government dissolved the Dan Nan Ambassagou group and fired the military's chief of staff and other officers "who had tolerated and promoted coordination and cooperation between security forces and militias."

It should be remembered that the government's own counterterrorism efforts, including arbitrary arrests and other human rights violations of the Fulani, have made it part of the problem. Additionally, the government's absence in certain areas, a void sometimes filled by Islamists, has also aggravated the situation. Now, belatedly, it is trying to stop the spiraling interethnic violence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

**Source:** Boukary Sangare, "Next Steps as Violence Surges in Central Mali," *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 2 April 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/next-steps-as-violence-surges-in-central-mali>

*Mali's centre has seen a rise in violent attacks against civilians and security forces – the Malian Armed Forces in particular – since the beginning of 2019. On 1 January, nearly 40 people were killed in an attack on the village of Koulogon-Fulani. Twenty-three people died in another attack on a military base in Dioura on 17 March. The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), created in March 2017 as the main 'jihadist' coalition including the Katiba Macina, claimed responsibility.*

*Violent extremist groups thrive in areas where the state is absent or contested. They also flourish when demographic changes and socio-economic fragilities cause inter-communal tensions around access to land and pastoral resources, for example. Extremists promise protection and socio-economic wellbeing. For instance, since 2015 Katiba Macina has focused on resolving old conflicts arising from access to agricultural and pastoral lands in several areas of the Central Niger Delta.*

**Source:** "Insiders Insight: Explaining the Mali Massacre," *African Arguments*, 26 March 2019. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/03/26/insiders-insight-explaining-the-mali-massacre/>

*The Malian president has already fired the military's chief of staff and the chief of land forces, as well as other officers, who had tolerated and promoted coordination and cooperation between security forces and militias like Dan Nan Ambassagou. Of course President Keita, who has led a rather anaemic administration, will have to ask himself some hard questions as well about his own performance in the face of escalating violence.*

*Large parts of the Sahel region are experiencing a worsening security environment and escalating violence between security forces, ethnic militias and radical Islamists, with civilians increasingly becoming the favourite punching bag of all these groups. The presence of international forces is substantial and second in capability and scale only to that in Afghanistan. But the obsession of the international community with combating religious terrorism at the expense of addressing fundamental societal and economic problems have arguably made international forces part of the problem, rather than the solution.*

***“But the obsession of the international community with combating religious terrorism at the expense of addressing fundamental societal and economic problems have arguably made international forces part of the problem, rather than the solution.”***



## DRC's Army and Police: Still Not Ready for Primetime

**OE Watch Commentary:** Following a contentious and controversial presidential election in December 2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo's new leader, Felix Tshisekedi, inherited an army that the excerpted accompanying article from the South African *The Conversation* describes as weak, incoherent, and, to some extent, dysfunctional. The police force fared even worse, with the article claiming they are in a more dire state than the army.

Complicating matters for President Tshisekedi is that the United Nations wants to scale back its stabilization force, known as MONUSCO, presently serving in the troubled country. MONUSCO troops help protect DRC civilians from both armed groups and exploitative government forces, so their withdrawal is raising fears among DRC civilians. One of MONUSCO's goals was to train the country's troops – including to respect civilians – in order to fill the gap when the UN forces leave, but that task remains incomplete.



*"Security Sector Reform has struggled in the DRC, with corruption and human rights abuses of civilians still significant problems in the army"*

Source: MONUSCO/Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aveba\\_district\\_de\\_l'Ituri\\_Province\\_Orientale\\_DR\\_Congo\\_-\\_Des\\_militaires\\_FARDC\\_en\\_patrouille\\_\(16643921095\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aveba_district_de_l'Ituri_Province_Orientale_DR_Congo_-_Des_militaires_FARDC_en_patrouille_(16643921095).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

A security sector reform program was initiated over 15 years ago. However, as the article notes, an inability to integrate the country's non-state actors into professionally operating national security institutions has resulted in the program's failure. In other words, compromises such as fast tracking the integration of rebel forces, and appointing insurgent leaders to senior positions for which they weren't qualified, may have resulted in short term stability, but as a result, within the army there are not only individuals but entire units accused of war crimes. Additionally, corruption and illegal activities are widespread. The situation is so bad that soldiers undertaking offensive operations sometimes do so without the proper equipment or even ammunition.

The nation's police are described to be in an even worse state of affairs. They receive less funding and attention than the army. They supplement their income through activities such as demanding bribes from motorists and traders...some of the very people they are supposed to be protecting.

There have been some successes in improving the security forces. Military schools and colleges have been established, the army has implemented a biometric payment system, legal frameworks for both the police and army have passed parliament, and other programs, often utilizing donor money, have been implemented. Some of these initiatives have paid off, as the army has pockets of well-functioning units.

There are several suggestions for security sector reform, such as implementing firm civilian oversight and better use of donor resources. As the article notes, however, the reform program has to get back on track, and the DRC government needs to take ownership of the process.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***"In the DRC priority was given to the need for stability and reducing risk, rather than to long term reforms of the security sector. This is partly why the country's security forces just aren't up to the task of properly protecting citizens."***

**Source:** Thomas Mandrup, "Why the DRC's army and police aren't yet ready to protect citizens," *The Conversation* (South Africa), 8 April 2019. <https://theconversation.com/why-the-drcs-army-and-police-arent-yet-ready-to-protect-citizens-114326>

*There have been significant improvements in terms of operational capacity, but the police, army and other security forces are still widely perceived as unprofessional.*

*There is an urgent need to improve the training of both the army and the police, and to secure the needed equipment for forces to undertake operations and for logistical support. These are urgent and long overdue issues that need to be addressed.*

*Donors, too, can make or break reform programmes. This is mainly through a focus on their national political agenda and self-interest, bad programming and the imposition of 'off-the-shelf' initiatives on the country in question. My research illustrates that donor staff tend to use standardised tools while SSR programmes needs to be tailored to the local needs.*

*In the DRC priority was given to the need for stability and reducing risk, rather than to long term reforms of the security sector. This is partly why the country's security forces just aren't up to the task of properly protecting citizens.*





## Muhammadu Buhari Comments on Boko Haram in Nigeria

**OE Watch Commentary:** Ever since Boko Haram launched its self-declared jihad in 2010, the Nigerian government has downplayed the group's violence and promised a quick end to the fighting. As the fighting persisted, this approach undermined the government's credibility. As the accompanying passage from *Sahara Reporters* discusses, in his recent speech at the World Economic Forum, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari claimed that Boko Haram held no territory in Nigeria, repeating a longstanding Nigerian government claim. Considering that Boko Haram is still carrying out attacks and that it holds hundreds of hostages and abductees in its camps, this claim is subject to questioning.



(English) Hey! Gentlemen! We'll be going one after the other.

Boko Haram Execution Video.

Source: VOA via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boko\\_Haram\\_Execution\\_Video\\_VOA.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boko_Haram_Execution_Video_VOA.PNG), Public Domain.

At the same time, the transcript of Buhari's speech, which the article includes, indicates that Buhari has tempered the overconfidence of prior administrations. He noted, for example, that it will take decades to repair the damage carried out by Boko Haram on infrastructure, let alone harm to social cohesion. Buhari attributed the root causes of the emergence of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in the region to a lack of social and economic inclusion. He also acknowledged that Nigeria was expected to be the world's third most populous country by 2050 and that it would have to meet the demands of such a large population.

Another challenge he mentioned was social media making physical boundaries less relevant and being filled with divisive and predatory material (especially online forums). This includes the types of propaganda Boko Haram puts out. In addition, Buhari indicated that cooperation between nations was essential to overcome the transnational nature of conflicts in the modern era. This may suggest that in his second term as president, Buhari will pursue a counter-Boko Haram strategy in line with other international partners. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“We have been hosts to some of the deadliest conflicts in recent history.”***

**Source:** “It Will Take Decades To Repair The Destruction And Damage Caused By Boko Haram,” *SaharaReporters*, 6 April 2019, <http://saharareporters.com/2019/04/06/buhari-it-will-take-decades-repair-destruction-and-damage-caused-boko-haram>

*It will take decades to reverse the deaths, destruction and damage caused by Boko Haram in the last 10 years. The President said this while delivering a speech at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa currently going on in Jordan. “We have been hosts to some of the deadliest conflicts in recent history,” Buhari said of the regions under focus.*

*Buhari identified “lack of social and economic inclusion” as the “root cause of many challenges” being experienced by the region. He urged the forum to come together to solve the problem. In this digital age where physical borders no longer exist to protect even the most secured nations, the only way to overcome predatory and divisionary forces is for all well-meaning nations to work together for the greater good of mankind. Simply put, cooperation amongst sovereign nations is no longer a choice. Today, we are living in a new world. In this new world without borders, my personal view is stability and sustainability can only be achieved through inclusive economic growth, and enhanced cooperation amongst nations.*



# Brazil's Guarani Infantry Fighting Vehicle Gets Another Upgrade

**OE Watch Commentary:** Brazil recently wrapped up LAAD 2019, the largest defense tradeshow in South America, during which Brazilian military officials made numerous announcements related to military technology plans and upgrades. The accompanying passages from Brazilian sources focus on a variety of procurement programs related to the Guarani infantry fighting vehicle. The VBTP-MR 6 x 6 Guarani is the centerpiece around which the Brazilian army has sought to modernize its land forces with a focus on mobility.

The first accompanying passage from *Technologia & Defesa* notes that the 6 x 6 Guarani would receive both engineering and de-mining upgrades, with the purpose of fully integrating a combat engineering company into the Brazilian mechanized infantry brigades. Earlier in the month another article revealed that the Brazilian army had ordered an additional 20 HEMTT M984 trucks to support the 6 x 6 Guarani fleet. Most recently the defense magazine revealed a new 120mm mortar platform for the Guarani.

These announcements make sense. According to the publication, the vehicle concept was approved in 1999 and again reviewed and accepted in 2007. Since then the army has continued to incorporate additional Guarani infantry fighting vehicles into its land forces.

The engineering upgrades or add-ons to the current Guarani fleet will take place in two phases. The first phase will provide the vehicle with engineering capability and the second phase will provide demining capability and equipment for road clearing. Further details are pending regarding the mortar platform.

According to the author of the second article, the continued commitment to the Guarani is part and parcel of Brazil's commitment to modernizing its land forces including restructuring existing units into mechanized combat brigades. Within the combat brigade structure, the ability to include engineering force to accompany combat infantry is seen as complimentary if not critical.

And while Brazil currently has no nation state enemies on its long border, its military is heavily involved in its own nation building as well as international peacekeeping operations around the world—endeavors in which the engineering enhancements to the Guarani will prove valuable. Military construction and engineering units regularly participate in infrastructure projects like the current construction of a 13 kilometer stretch of BR-432 between Manaus and Boa Vista due to be completed in 2020.

With the exception of the Amazon, where rivers rather than roads dictate the operational environment, the Guarani and its wheeled chassis gives the army much more flexibility and speed than earlier model infantry fighting vehicles. The newly announced upgrades will also ensure the mechanized brigades can do their own de-mining, route clearing and fire support. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

***“The ultimate goal of the Brazilian Army is to equip all Mechanized Combat Engineering Companies with these vehicles, which in addition to providing a substantial increase in the operational capacity of the force, will provide a tool of great efficiency and great mobility that can be used by the civil defense in cases natural disasters.”***

**Source:** “Morteiros pesados de 120 mm para blindados na LAAD 2019 (120 mm heavy armored mortars in LAAD 2019),” *Technologia & Defesa*, 14 April 2019.

<http://tecnodefesa.com.br/morteiros-pesados-de-120-mm-para-blindados-na-laad-2019/>

*Installed in a 6 × 6 Guarani, the 120 mm mortar is an extremely lethal weapon due to its high mobility, depth and density of shot (multiple impacts of different directions) and ability to support armored and mechanized troops during its displacement, covering the flanks and the front line... Faced with more complex platforms and larger and heavier (longer range) guns, the semi-automatic 120 mm mortars mounted on 6 × 6 armored vehicles offer the additional advantage of extremely lower acquisition, maintenance and purchase cost of ammunition, and “ready for KC390” airborne capability without the need to disassemble parts or components.*

**Source:** “Brasil adquire mais 20 caminhões Hemtt 8×8 para apoiar os VBTP-MR 6×6 Guarani (Brazil acquires another 20 Hemtt 8 × 8 trucks to support the VBTP-MR 6 × 6 Guarani),” *Technologia & Defesa*, 7 March 2019. <http://tecnodefesa.com.br/brasil-adquire-mais-20-caminhoes-hemtt-8x8-para-apoiar-os-vbtp-mr-6x6-guarani/>

*The ultimate goal of the Brazilian Army is to equip all Mechanized Combat Engineering Companies with these vehicles, which in addition to providing a substantial increase in the operational capacity of the force, will provide a tool of great efficiency and great mobility that can be used by the civil defense in cases natural disasters.*

**Source:** “Está nascendo um novo veículo da família Guarani, a Viatura Blindada de Combate Engenharia (A new vehicle from the Guarani family, the Combined Armored Engineering Vehicle, is being born),” *Technologia & Defesa*, 31 March 2019. <http://tecnodefesa.com.br/esta-nascendo-um-novo-veiculo-da-familia-guarani-a-viatura-blindada-de-combate-engenharia/>

*In regards to the Brazilian Army, [Guarani modernization] shows that with intelligence and pragmatism it is possible to face the challenges that arise, maintaining a modern and efficient force.*







# Authorities Transfer Key Leaders of the First Capital Command in Brazil

**OE Watch Commentary:** “Without State intervention, organized crime thrives.” This comment was made by Prosecutor Lincoln Gakiya of the Special Action Group Against Organized Crime (GAECO) in São Paulo during a press conference held in 2017 regarding the criminal group “First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital or PCC).” As the first accompanying article from a Brazilian source discusses, Mr. Gakiya was referring to strategic moves made by the PCC to maintain operations in prisons, and to consolidate control over organized crime and drug trafficking in São Paulo (its principal operational base) and other areas throughout Brazil.

Fast forward to 2019 and Prosecutor Gakiya has made some progress in separating key PCC leaders by transferring them to different prisons across the country. This is important because, as the second accompanying passage from *BBC Brazil* notes, despite the fact that key leaders are imprisoned, they are still able to run their criminal activities from within the prisons. The passage also points out that the transfer of 22 key leaders could cause chaos within the group and lead to the appointment of new leaders, but Gaika also believes the transfers may help authorities in gaining more control over the group while giving them insight on the PCC financial structure.

One important transfer in February was that of Marcos Willians Camacho, a key leader within the PCC. As the third article from Bolivian *Los Tiempos* notes, authorities believe his arrest may disrupt communications, at least on a temporary basis. This is because Marcola’s departure from his comfort zone in Sao Paulo will make it difficult for him to communicate orders to the 30,000 PCC leaders operating in areas throughout Brazil.

The PCC originated as a prison gang in 1992 as a self-protection group, but today, it is Brazil’s largest and most powerful criminal organization. The group is also said to have members working in at least two-thirds of the country. The PCC is also considered to be a transnational criminal organization because it controls drug trafficking routes between Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Colombia for shipment outside South America. This same organization is known to launder money and traffic weapons in South America and abroad.

In terms of strategy, the PCC is actively looking to increase cocaine exports to foreign markets while maintaining its operational base in Brazil. Until this point, Brazilian authorities have been unable to thwart the rapid growth of this group. The fourth article points from Spain’s *El Confidencial* points out that one of the main reasons for this is that Brazilian police lack intelligence when it comes to fighting organized crime. Instead, the most commonly used method by police is to imprison members without investigating the leaders behind this large criminal organization. Time will tell if prison transfers of key leaders will affect operations or if the group will simply look to replace new leaders from within. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**“The transfer of key PCC leader Marcos Willians Camacho to a federal prison in Porto Velho may disrupt communications at least on a temporary basis with his key leadership base of 30,000 individuals in Sao Paulo.”**

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

*According to Prosecutor Lincoln Gakiya of the Special Action Group Against Organized Crime (GAECO) in São Paulo, “Without State intervention, organized crime thrives”. This comment was made after the PCC orchestrated brutal prison attacks against rival gang members in 2017. Although the heinous violence shocked Brazil, both authorities and citizens alike were horrified when PCC leader Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho, alias Marcola (currently serving time in a maximum-security prison) indicated that the PCC now maintains widespread operations in Sao Paulo and in other areas throughout Brazil.*

**Source:** “PCC pode ter guerra interna e nova liderança após transferência de chefes, diz promotor ameaçado pela facção (PCC May Erupt in Internal War and Generate New Leadership After Transfer of Key Leader),” *BBC Brazil*, 20 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-47300472>

*Prosecutor Lincoln Gaika, the lead investigator behind the PCC, stated that the group could experience internal strife and look for new leadership following the transfer of 22 key leaders to different federal prisons in mid-February 2019. Gaika was responsible for asking the court to transfer the 22 members of the Sao Paulo based organization to federal prisons in Brasília, Porto Velho and Mossoró. One of the prisoners transferred was identified as Marcos Willians Camacho, aka Marcola, a key leader within the group.*

**Source:** “Brasil aprieta el cerco al PCC, el grupo criminal más poderoso del país (Brazil Cracks Down on the PCC, the Most Powerful Criminal Organization in the Country),” *Los Tiempos*, 16 February 2019. <http://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/mundo/20190216/brasil-aprieta-cerco-al-pcc-grupo-criminal-mas-poderoso-del-pais>

*The transfer of Marcos Willians Camacho, a key leader within the PCC may disrupt communications at least on a temporary basis. Why? Because the leader of the PCC was transferred from a prison in Sao Paulo, the organization’s stronghold, to a federal prison in Porto Velho (Rondonia state located in northern Brazil). At this prison, rules for visits and contact with other prisoners are much more rigid. Furthermore, Marcola’s departure from his comfort zone in Sao Paulo will make it difficult to communicate orders to PCC leadership, a group that has around 30,000 members.*

**Source:** “El grupo más temido de Brasil ya aspira a controlar el narcotráfico de América Latina (The Most Feared Group in Brazil Aims to Control Drug Trafficking in Latin America),” *El Confidencial*, 3 March 2019 (Updated from 12 May 2018). [https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2019-03-08/el-grupo-mas-temido-de-brasil-ya-aspira-a-controlar-el-narcotrafico-de-america-latina\\_1560493/](https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2019-03-08/el-grupo-mas-temido-de-brasil-ya-aspira-a-controlar-el-narcotrafico-de-america-latina_1560493/)

*Experts agree that Brazilian police lack intelligence when it comes to fighting organized crime. A consequence of this is that the PCC has managed to gain control of criminal operations in multiple Brazilian states and continues to expand at a rapid pace even outside of Brazil. At present time, the fight against the PCC has focused on imprisoning members who work in favelas without investigating the actual leaders who operate a thriving transnational drug trafficking organization. Also, little is known about the PCC structure, how the group launders money, or where their drug routes are located.*

## 60





## Me-too Colombia

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying references reflect a growing issue in Colombia. An existential danger presents itself to FARC advantages that the guerrilla group had gained within the power-sharing agreement it reached with the former Colombian government administration of Juan Manuel Santos. Among the accusations surfaced and formalized against the guerrilla group is that of sexual abuse. It seems that from among their many accusers and the many opponents of the agreement (politicians, military officers, policemen) the FARC leaders least expected that the most dangerous and effective would be the victims of sexual abuse. The accusations as presented in the reportage are not generalized. They involve specific accusers naming individual FARC leaders (including some who were granted Colombian legislative seats as part of the deal) of forced recruitments and rapes of minor children, and forced abortions. According to the reporting, the FARC and its legislative supporters have tried to silence the accusers, but efforts to organize the victims now appear increasingly successful and their voices are being heard. The suggestion in the reportage is that a group of sexual abuse victims may accomplish what appeared beyond reach by other means, to wit, the dismantling of FARC leaders' efforts to gain legitimated power, and the denial of their impunity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

**Source:** Editors, “La Reacción” llega su novena edición y lo hace defendiendo a las niñas de “La Rosa Blanca (“La Reaccion” ninth edition arrives and it does so defending the girls of “The White Rose”),” *La Linterna Azul*, 27 March 2019. <http://Www.Lalinternaazul.Info/2019/03/27/La-Reaccion-Llega-Su-Novena-Edicion-Y-Lo-Hace-Defendiendo-A-Las-Ninas-De-La-Rosa-Blanca/>

“...when their ninth edition came, they [a start-up video newscast] dedicated it to what happened in the Senate Peace Commission, when the girls of the White Rose Corporation reminded FARC guerrillas (converted into senators of the Republic by a magic trick) to their faces, of the crimes of rape committed by some of them in their encampments, with girls and boys and youths of both sexes, whom they subjected to the most painful and shameful abuses...”

**“This country is only going to be saved by victims like those of the White Rose Corporation, who have the courage to confront the devil with a reality that they do not like because it is incontrovertible.”**

**Source:** Fernando Londoño Hoyos interview of Maria Fernanda Cabal, “LA HORA DE LA VERDAD MARIA FERNANDA CABAL,” *La Hora de La Verdad* and YouTube, 14 February 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mczgATMMRag>

“The congresswoman said, ‘This country is only going to be saved by victims like those of the White Rose Corporation, who have the courage to confront the devil with a reality that they do not like because it is incontrovertible.’”

# 1986



# 2019



**FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES OFFICE:**  
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## Colombia Roadblock Tactic

**OE Watch Commentary:** Costly demonstrations have been going on in the southwestern department of Cauca in Colombia. They are of a particular flavor, with its own name, *minga*. The word derives from a past set of marches made by tribal identities to protest a variety of perceived grievances, but the term is now applied to a tactic used by activists, with a heavy indigenous or tribal participatory content, that features blocking roadways, not just marching on them. The first accompanying reference, written by a foremost historian of the FARC and anti-totalitarian editorialist, discusses the use of the term in its political context. The author explains the *minga* as a cynical aggressive political action, but his article is more focused on explaining the significance of the word as a piece of competitive newspeak. In its current manifestation, the *minga* is blocking main commercial arteries, including the PanAmerican highway. The author of the second accompanying reference, editorializing for a Cali newspaper, also asserts that the *minga* is less a cultural grievance of tribal peoples and more an indirect effort at pure party politics being guided by the far left. The author of the third reference goes farther, maybe to the heart of the matter. He lists a number of regional events having to do with the movement and positioning of forces in the geopolitical regional context related to the struggle to control Venezuela. He asks if the *minga* isn't just part of one big combination of all means of struggle and another piece in the region's geostrategic drama. His suggestion is that indeed it is. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

**“...Iván Márquez calls for a national minga...”**



Iván Duque Márquez, 20 November 2017.

Source: Centro Democrático via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iv%C3%A1n\\_Duque\\_M%C3%A1rquez.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iv%C3%A1n_Duque_M%C3%A1rquez.png), CC BY-SA 2.0

**Source:** Eduardo Mackenzie, “La minga y el novlangue mamerto (The Minga and Communist newspeak),” *Periódico Debate*, 25 March 2019. <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/22391-la-minga-y-el-novlangue-mamerto/>

*“In light of everything that has happened all these years in Colombia, minga is a synonym of resonance for riot, a violent act executed by a small group of indigenous persons; it is an offensive and deliberate act, against the authorities and or civilians. But the established press takes it as a synonym for a peaceful and defensive cultural action, or familial, of indigenous peoples in the south of Colombia...”*

*...One day there will be in Colombia a serious study that follows the example of what German philosopher Victor Klemperer did back in 1933 regarding the newspeak of the Nazi. But before that we could begin with an elementary glossary that uncovers the problem and launches the debate and the various intellectual initiatives...”*

**Source:** Natalia Bedoya, “Minga: protesta o extorsión (Minga: protest or extortion),” *Diario Occidente*, Cali, 28 March 2019. <https://occidente.co/opinion/columnistas/protesta-o-extorsion/>

*“President Duque is right in not sitting down to dialog during an ongoing political action [the Spanish term used was “vías de hecho.” That term, directly translatable perhaps as “ways of fact or act” has meaning in legal parlance, but is now popularly applied to something akin to “propaganda of the deed,” or perhaps closer to “leverage through the use of an action.”]...”*

*Prior consultation is a right of the indigenous and tribal peoples that should be recognized, but that should not be converted into an excuse to impede economic development. The minga, infiltrated by political operatives and FARC dissidents, is attempting to extort, by the use of political actions, to impose on us some petitions that, more than a cultural purpose, have a political purpose, or better said, a partisanship purpose...”*

**Source:** John Marulanda, “¿Minga geoestratégica? (geostrategic minga),” *Periódico Debate*, 28 March 2019. <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/22402-minga-geoestrategica/>

*“On this strategic game board, that gets more entangled by the day, it is valid to ask oneself if the indigenous organizations of Cauca, which have territory, justice, security, economy and their own coastline, who share chavist [referring to the ideology of Hugo Chávez] politics and narco-FARC activity, are an incidental or a structural part of the above-noted regional scenario, given that the narco-terrorist Iván Márquez (alias) calls from Venezuela for a national minga.”*





## FARC Peace Accords: A 2019 Snapshot

**OE Watch Commentary:** It has been three years since the signing of the peace according by the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016. The accompanying excerpts from Colombian news sources provide insight into perspectives of demobilized FARC members and of the government on how the accords have fared in their eyes.

The first passage, from the Spanish-language website of the French news source *France 24* points out that many former FARC combatants feel that the government has failed them completely. Take for example the Cauca department where many citizens claim that peace never even arrived. Why? Because although the FARC may not be there anymore, new groups have simply moved in to take over the drug routes formerly operated by the FARC. Furthermore, the passage points out that the local economy continues to thrive on drug production even though there are farmers who want to do the right thing and grow legal products. However, earnings generated from growing corn or any other agricultural product for that matter is simply not enough to make a living; particularly in Cauca, a Department with a large indigenous population that has little to no education. These same individuals are not comfortable with the idea of abandoning their homes to move to urban areas where they could possibly find work.

Furthermore, as the second passage from Colombian *El Espectador* discusses, at the end of 2018, forced/voluntary recruitment of children by the FARC and other paramilitary groups had never been higher when compared to levels from 2015-2017. The passage highlights regions that currently possess the most significant recruitment rates and claims that they are seduced by FARC members promising them a better life.

Iván Márquez, FARC's former second-in-command recently criticized the government in an online video for their failure to abide to the peace agreements signed in 2016. As the third passage from the Colombian news source *Infobae* discusses, Emilio Archila, a Post-Conflict Advisor for the Colombian government was quick to respond to these criticisms. He highlighted that 9 out of every 10 former FARC combatants receive a monthly payment and that 98% are enrolled in healthcare programs. However, as the fourth passage from *El Tiempo* discusses, this answer does not provide a complete picture of possible government success in controlling the growth of FARC dissidents as they have grown from 400 to 1,700 from late 2016 to December 2018. Another issue that does not make sense is the increased recruitment of children as discussed in the second passage. Despite the government's claims, it cannot be denied that guerilla groups are regrouping and gaining strength as numbers do not lie. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** "La Colombia rural, retrato de un país sin una paz completa (Rural Colombia: An Overview of a Country without Complete Peace)", *France 24*, 4 January 2019.

<https://www.france24.com/es/20190104-colombia-campo-paz-farc-conflicto>

*According to an unidentified farmer from Cauca, "The government has failed us. We were promised homes, stores, productive projects and much more. As of today, we have seen nothing. Without help or even a socio-economic infrastructure to support legal activities, it is nearly impossible for us to move forward and turn the page from our old lives" (referring to when they worked with the FARC). This same farmer indicated that the earnings generated from growing any legal agricultural product is simply not enough to make a living; particularly in Cauca, a region with a large indigenous population which possesses little to no education.*

**Source:** "En Colombia la niñez sí va a la guerra: Organizaciones entregan informe a la JEP (According to JEP, Children in Colombia are Still Facing the War)", *El Espectador*, 12 February 2019. <https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/jep/en-colombia-la-ninez-si-va-la-guerra-organizaciones-entregan-informe-la-jep>

*During 2018 alone, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) reported 66 cases of children who had either sought refuge in the group or were directly recruited by them. In comparison, only 17 did the same thing in 2017. More surprising still is that many of the 66 new recruits were seduced by FARC members promising them a better life. Regions where recruitment is highest are those that are being disputed by FARC dissidents and rival criminal factions. Currently, those areas with the highest incidence of recruitment include Chocó, Buenaventura (both rural and urban areas), the Pacific Coast of Cauca and Norte de Santander.*

**Source:** "El Gobierno colombiano rechazó las críticas del ex líder de las FARC Iván Márquez sobre el acuerdo de paz: "No dice la verdad (Colombian Government Rejects Criticism from Former FARC Leader Iván Márquez and Peace Agreements)", *Infobae*, 19 January 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2019/01/13/el-gobierno-colombiano-rechazo-las-criticas-del-ex-lider-de-las-farc-ivan-marquez-sobre-el-acuerdo-de-paz-no-dice-la-verdad/>

*Emilio Archila, a Post-Conflict Advisor for the Colombian government, reported that in 2018 alone, 20 projects worth \$4.7 million were created to benefit more than 1,311 former FARC combatants. He further stated that the government has fast-tracked the reintegration process with the help of the Reincorporation and Normalization Agency (ARN) and that as of today, there are more than 13,031 ex-combatants registered in the program.*

***"During 2018 alone, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) reported 66 cases of children who had either sought refuge in the group or were directly recruited by them. In comparison, only 17 did the same thing in 2017."***



## Continued: FARC Peace Accords: A 2019 Snapshot

**Source:** “Los ejércitos ilegales que enfrentará la nueva cúpula militar (Paramilitary Groups Will Face New Military Strategy)”, *El Tiempo*, 21 December 2018. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/los-ejercitos-ilegales-que-enfrentara-la-nueva-cupula-militar-305714>

*Ministry of Defense Guillermo Botero stated the following when questioned about the alarming growth of FARC dissidents from 400 to 1,700: “There are various factors. First, there were FARC combatants that first decided to adhere to the peace accords, but later changed their minds. Second, it is possible that previously reported numbers were wrong. Now, we (the government) are managing those numbers. The possibility also exists that reported FARC growth is erroneous, but there is also a chance that the group has indeed grown since the peace accords”.*



**Colombian President Santos Signs a Peace Accord With FARC Leader Jiménez.**

Source: U.S. Department of State from United States via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colombian\\_President\\_Santos\\_Signs\\_a\\_Peace\\_Accord\\_With\\_FARC\\_Leader\\_Jim%C3%A9nez\\_\(29330649883\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colombian_President_Santos_Signs_a_Peace_Accord_With_FARC_Leader_Jim%C3%A9nez_(29330649883).jpg), Public Domain.





# How Colombia's President is Dealing with Internal Security Issues

**OE Watch Commentary:** President Iván Duque Márquez was sworn in as the President of Colombia in August 2018. By the end of the year, he had taken definitive steps to thwart the growth of new criminal groups currently proliferating in the country. To achieve his objective, Duque utilized the military to conduct an operation called “Plan Diamante.” This was President Duque’s first internal military operation, and appears to have yielded some positive results. The accompanying articles discuss the problem and the operation to address it.

Colombian news source *El Tiempo* gained access to a recent Ministry of Defense report released to Congress that discussed internal security concerns in Colombia caused by both criminal and paramilitary groups. As the first accompanying article notes, the report pointed out that there are currently an estimated 7,260 members of illegal organizations operating in more than 90% of the country. The report also named those groups deemed as the most threatening to internal security. Some of those groups were named as dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Clan del Golfo, Los Pelusos, Los Puntillos and other unnamed groups.

President Duque realized criminal statistics and criminal groups operating in the country were on the rise after he took office (and surely before) despite the FARC peace accords signed in 2016. Based on this information, the government took steps to target criminal organizations in the country as part of an operation named “Plan Diamante”. When questioned about the success of this plan, *El Tiempo* received the following answer from Ministry of Defense Guillermo Botero: “Plan Diamante has already passed its first 100 days and we have hit these organizations hard. What remains is complete illegality and we have not given up, but instead, have continued to attack with force. We (the Colombian Military) has achieved excellent results, but there are always ways to improve”.

Indeed, work carried out by the Colombian Army’s 4th Division as part of Plan Diamante in South Eastern Departments to include Meta, Guaviare and Vaupés yielded excellent results. This is why the Colombian government is continuing with Plan Horus which has already been in effect for a year. Given that Plan Diamante was conducted in areas throughout the country for approximately 100 days, the list of successes highlighted by Colombian news source *Extra* in the second accompanying passage provide a good overview of how joint interoperability between the National Army, the Air Force, National Police and Attorney Generals’ offices were key to making President Duque’s first internal military operation a success. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** “Los ejércitos ilegales que enfrentará la nueva cúpula militar (Paramilitary Groups Will Face New Military Strategy)”, *El Tiempo*, 21 December 2018. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/los-ejercitos-ilegales-que-enfrentara-la-nueva-cupula-militar-305714>

*Currently an estimated 7,260 members of illegal organizations are operating in 26 of Colombia’s 32 Departments. This number is particularly alarming as it represents more than half of the former FARC combatants that disarmed in 2016. These criminal organizations are also causing increasing in internal crime. For example, between January and October 2017, Colombia reported 9,957 crimes. During the same time frame in 2018, 10,579 crimes were reported.*

## **Can a Military Operation Destroy these Criminal Organizations?**

*Ministry of Defense Guillermo Botero stated the following when asked if military intervention could work to fight new and growing criminal organizations: “Of course. Plan Diamante has already passed its first 100 days and we have hit these organizations hard. What remains is complete illegality and we have not given up, but instead, have continued to attack with force. We (the Colombian Military) has achieved excellent results, but there are always ways to improve”.*

**Source:** “El Ejército Nacional y el positivo Plan Diamante en el suroriente colombiano (National Army and Positive Results of Plan Diamante in South Eastern Colombia)”, *Extra.com.co*, 19 November 2018. <http://extra.com.co/noticias/judicial/el-ejercito-nacional-y-el-positivo-plan-diamante-en-el-suror-481458>

*Listed in this excerpt is a list of successes cited in South Eastern Colombia as part of Plan Diamante:*

- 54 arrests of individuals working at the service of the Clan del Golfo and Los Puntilleros
- 41 weapons seized to include handguns and unidentified rifle types
- The destruction of 38 illegal clandestine hiding places
- The neutralization of 9,292 explosive devices
- The seizure of 10,606 rounds of ammunition
- The destruction of 7,512,000 cocaine plants
- The destruction of 4,858 kilograms of cocaine leaf
- The eradication of 1,112,70 hectares of land utilized to grow cocaine
- The destruction of 5 cocaine chlorohydrate laboratories
- The destruction of 28 coca paste processing labs

**“Open source media channel *El Tiempo* gained access to a Ministry of Defense report released to Congress that discussed internal security concerns in Colombia caused by both criminal and paramilitary groups. This report pointed out that there are currently an estimated 7,260 members of illegal organizations operating in more than 90% of the country.”**



## Maritime Disarray in Venezuela

**OE Watch Commentary:** The attached references, complete with amateur videos and twitter comments, report a particularly curious and potentially worrisome occurrence. Two or three huge transport barges washed up onto the shore of a small island off the coast of Venezuela, evidently after drifting away from docks at a petroleum products facility some kilometers distant. From the videos, the barges appear to be mostly empty. The writer of the short text in the first accompanying reference passes along rumors about their use, but also suggests more reasonably that for so many barges of that size to just float away might point to an act of sabotage. The second reference (dated a few days earlier) includes more information about the origin of the barges and a danger they may present. The barges had perhaps belonged to a non-Venezuelan company and had been recently expropriated by the Maduro regime. Twitter comments with that reportage suggest the barges were to be used, or were being used, by a Venezuelan company to store toxic waste. Whether an act of sabotage or gross negligence, we are reduced to amateur social media reportage (or benefited by it) of a potentially significant event. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

**Source:** Por Mi Madre, “Gabarras quedan varadas en Puerto Píritu, ¿qué transportarán?,” *Tal Cual*, 1 March 2019. <http://talcualdigital.com/index.php/2019/03/01/gabarras-quedan-varadas-en-puerto-piritu-que-transportaran/>

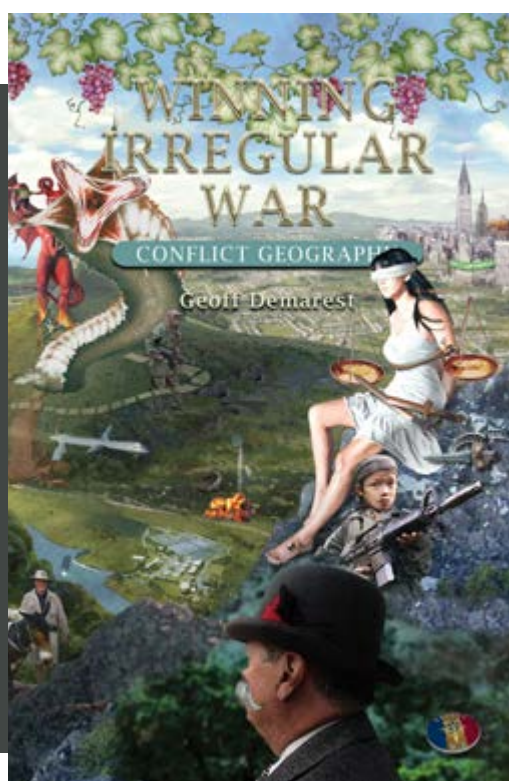
“...Some barges got loose, or were let loose, at the Cryogenic of Jose, in Anzoátegui state, specifically at the Petrocedeño docks. No one at Puerto Píritu [where they beached] was sure that [contraband] was what the craft were being used for, but everyone was surprised that ships of that size could “slip away” from a port...”

**Source:** “¡MÍRELAS! Las gabarras expropiadas a Pdvsa que encallaron en costas de Puerto Píritu y alarmaron a la comunidad (+Fotos y Videos) (Look at them! The barges expropriated from PDVSA that ran aground on the coast of Puerto Píritu and alarmed the community [photos and video]),” *Maduradas.com*, 26 February 2019, <https://maduradas.com/mirelas-las-gabarras-expropiadas-pdvsa-encallaron-costas-puerto-piritu-alarmaron-la-comunidad-fotos-videos/>

“...The craft did not have crews, but were supposedly loaded with toxic content that implies a great ecological danger, according to the opinions of some tweeters...”

The Venezuelan crude oil refiners... generated coke and sulfur in great quantities, these barges were acquired to ‘store in place’ all that toxic waste...”

“...Some barges got loose, or were let loose...”



Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: "I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious."

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195392/download>





## Route 32: Costa Rica's Gateway to the Silk Road Economic Belt

**OE Watch Commentary:** In 2007, Costa Rica became the first Central American country to establish diplomatic relations with China. The ties continue to develop, with China investing in a number of Costa Rican infrastructure projects. As the brief excerpt from the Argentinian conservative daily *La Nacion* points out, China has recently begun work “on the expansion of Route 32 between the crossing to Rio Frio and the center of Limon.” Route 32 is a key highway, as more than 80% of Costa Rica's imports and exports enter the country through this route.

In 2015, former Costa Rican president Luis Guillermo Solís and China's president Xi Jinping signed an agreement to develop a “Special Economic Zone” (SEZ) within Costa Rica. The goal was to stimulate the region's economy through development models that had proven successful in China. Later in 2017, China requested the expansion of several Costa Rican highways as a necessary condition to start the SEZ project. To comply with China's requirements, Costa Rica began the expansion of Route 32, through a Chinese contractor. Costa Rica's National Road Council hopes that the route expansion will enable containers to travel from Moin Port to Nicaragua in less than 4 hours.

As the article points out, the project recently entailed “the recruitment of more than 200 workers... to speed up the work, which is over three months behind the schedule.” While the term of the project was initially set at 34 months, the company has already consumed almost half of that period, and as the article indicates, “the progress achieved is less than 10 percent.” The article points out the problem of unemployment in Costa Rica and notes that 600 people would be hired to work on the project as a measure to deal with unemployment in the province. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wedman)**

**Source:** Patricia Recio, “Chinese Company Seeks 221 Laborers in Limon,” *La Nacion*, 25 March 2019. <https://www.nacion.com/el-pais/trabajo/empresa-china-a-cargo-de-ruta-32-busca-20/KQFATLKFNNFLZOR2J6UNIWQUB4/story/>

*...The China Harbor Engineering Company started the recruitment of more than 200 workers to work on the expansion of Route 32 between the crossing to Rio Frio and the center of Limon. The construction company requires hiring truck drivers, excavators, compactors, bulldozers, tractors, and mixers, as well as welders, heavy equipment mechanics, flagmen, bricklayers, carpenters, human resources assistants, and bilingual drivers with a C2 license. The projection is that between March and June 221 people will be hired, of the 600 who announced that they would hire as national labor, in addition to those that are already part of the project.*

*The company announced that it would increase the number of workers at the construction site in order to speed up the work, which has is more than three months behind the schedule....*

*These posts were also announced by the Government as a measure to deal with unemployment in the province. The term of the project is 34 months. However, the company has already consumed almost half of that period and the progress achieved is less than 10 percent, as confirmed by the National Road Council last February.*

**“...The China Harbor Engineering Company started the recruitment of more than 200 workers to work on the expansion of Route 32 between the crossing to Rio Frio and the center of Limon.”**



Costa Rica Regions map.

Source: Peter Fitzgerald, French translation by Joelf via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Costa\\_Rica\\_regions\\_map\\_\(fr\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Costa_Rica_regions_map_(fr).png), CC BY-SA 3.0



## China's Aid to Ecuador Through OBOR: Strategic Cooperation or Strategic Trap?

**OE Watch Commentary:** The China One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR), also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, has become an important economic tool contributing to diplomacy and soft power. Some observers fear that OBOR is a push for Chinese dominance in global affairs. In pursuit of that aim, China has been accused of setting up “debt traps,” one of the best-known cases being in Sri Lanka. Unable to repay its debt for mass infrastructure financed by China, Sri Lanka gave the Asian giant a controlling equity stake and a 99-year lease over Hambantota port, strategically located on Sri Lanka’s southern shore. Working to counter these accusations, the Chinese government touts OBOR as a bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future.

China’s trade route extends as far as Latin America. China and Ecuador, for example have recently been pushing to strengthen bilateral ties in a seemingly mutual win-win scenario. Ecuador, according to the World Bank, has been struggling since 2014 to balance and adapt its economy, which has been negatively impacted by low oil prices (Ecuador’s primary revenues are derived through its oil exports), a depreciation of the dollar (Ecuador has been using US currency since its own currency collapsed in 2000), and increasing external financial costs.



Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela map.

Source: Ecuador\_Colombia\_Venezuela\_map.png; F3m4nd0derivative work: r@ge via Wikimedia, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6e/Ecuador\\_Colombia\\_Venezuela\\_map.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6e/Ecuador_Colombia_Venezuela_map.svg), CC BY-SA 3.0

Ecuador suffered further setbacks in April 2016, when it was struck by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake. Along with killing some 676 people and injuring another 16,600, the earthquake caused extensive damage, which was widespread across Manabi Province. Now, the Chinese government has set out to “assist” its Latin American friend with the Chinese consortium China Road and Bridge Corporation-China National Electronics Import & Export Corporation (CRBC-CEIEC) funding much needed large-scale infrastructure projects in Ecuador’s northern provinces of Manabi and Esmeraldas. While this move has raised some eyebrows by those who remain leery of China’s intentions, both Chinese and Ecuadorean press, such as the three following reports from China’s *Xinhua* and Ecuador’s *El Comercio* and *El Telégrafo*, have been painting an overall positive image of the shared plans and contracts.

According to the first article, published in *Xinhua*, China’s official state-run press agency, Adriano Zambrano, administrator of the airport is calling China a “strategic partner.” He goes on to explain that Manta, the second most populous city in Manabi Province, could become a South American gateway for all of the Asia-Pacific, including Australia, for people and goods. This, according to Zambrano, will “energize tourism, business and trade with Singapore, China, Japan, and others.”

According to *El Telégrafo*, Chinese Ambassador to Ecuador Wang Yulin, Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno and Chinese President Xi Jinping recently signed 10 cooperation agreements, among which included a memorandum for joint Chinese and Ecuadorean participation in building OBOR “to implement the development strategy for which mutual investment will be encouraged.”

China has also granted Ecuador a \$900 million loan at a 6.5 percent interest rate “without the need to commit future oil production,” according to *El Comercio*. In previous years, China has extended financing to Ecuador in exchange for advance contracts to supply China with Ecuadorean oil. There is no information explaining possible repercussions should Ecuador not be able to repay that and other loans. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

**“Ecuador was granted a 900m US dollar loan from China, at a 6.5 per cent interest rate “without the need to commit future oil production.”**





## Continued: China's Aid to Ecuador Through OBOR: Strategic Cooperation or Strategic Trap?

**Source:** "China's BRI Provides Development Opportunity for Ecuador," *Xinhua*, 9 April 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/09/c\\_137962477.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/09/c_137962477.htm)

### *China's BRI Provides Development Opportunity for Ecuador*

*Chinese companies are currently working on projects along the country's northern Pacific coast, an area hard hit by a powerful earthquake on April 16, 2016.*

*Financial support from the Chinese government, along with the participation of Chinese consortium China Road and Bridge Corporation-China National Electronics Import & Export Corporation (CRBC-CEIEC), have helped launch large-scale infrastructure projects in the northern provinces of Manabi and Esmeraldas.*

*The projects include the reconstruction of the Eloy Alfaro International Airport in Manta, Manabi's second-largest city, and two bridges in the province. A fourth project centers on the Quinde-Las Golondrinas Highway that connects Esmeraldas with neighboring Imbabura province.*

*Ecuador's government sees the new airport as an axis of development and a gateway for thousands of business opportunities that will help spur the local economy and contribute to national progress.*

*"China is a strategic partner," said Zambrano. "Although we are a small economy, being in a strategic location in the westernmost part of South America and aligned with the Equator allows us to develop all connectivity."*

**Source:** "Gobierno Informa que Logró en China un Crédito por USD 900 Millones, a una Tasa de Interés de 6,5% (The Government Announced It Obtained a \$900 Million Loan from China at a 6.5 Percent Interest Rate), *El Comercio*, 12 December 2018. <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/china-prestamo-ecuador-lenin-moreno.html>

### *The Government Announced It Obtained a \$900 Million Loan from China at a 6.5 Percent Interest Rate*

*"Ecuador was granted a 900m US dollar loan from China, at a 6.5 per cent interest rate 'without the need to commit future oil production.'"*

*"The transparent and disciplined handling of public finances generated trust in international markets, which allowed Ecuador to subscribe a new credit agreement under better conditions with the Chinese Development Bank, with a 6.5 per cent interest rate, with a 6 year deadline and a two-year grace period".*

**Source:** Wang Yulin, "China busca tratado comercial con Ecuador (China Seeks Trade Treaty with Ecuador)" *El Telégrafo*, 22 January 2019. <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/economia/4/wangyulin-china-tratado-comercial-ecuador>

*[Wang Yulin - Chinese Ambassador to Ecuador,] The visit had positive results. The two Presidents agreed to strengthen the overall strategic association already in existence. They signed 10 cooperation agreements, notable among which is the memorandum for joint Chinese and Ecuadorian participation in building the Belt and Road to implement the development strategy for which mutual investment will be encouraged.*

*Also notable is the agreement by which the China Development Bank is offering Ecuador \$900 million to support economic and social development projects. The interest rate will be the lowest of any previous disbursement, which is to say 6.5 percent over six years, plus two grace years. I am fully confident in the future development of bilateral relations.*

*[Wang] We had \$4.6 billion in trade exchange between January and October 2018. Apart from petroleum products, China imports agricultural products from Ecuador such as bananas, shrimp, roses, and in the future avocado and pitahaya as well. China is a big market because it has a population of 1.4 billion. In the last visit, Ecuador promoted itself the right way to the Chinese business sector.*



## CJNG Members Arrested in Veracruz

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 7 February 2019, Mexican authorities conducted a successful operation as part of the “United for the Construction of Peace in Veracruz” program, which is led by a team of secretariats of the National Defense (SEDENA), Mexican Navy (SEMAR) and Public Security (SSP), as well as the federal police. The accompanying passages discuss the outcome of the operation.

As the passages discuss, the authorities arrested two alleged Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) members in the city of Tierra Blanca in the state of Veracruz. The accompanying excerpt from the Veracruz Governor’s office states that 22-year old Alejandro from Tres Valles told authorities that he was employed by “El Tío” and “El 20.” The other alleged member, named Cornelio, from the town of José María Morelos stated that he worked for “El Muñeco” and was in part responsible for securing weapons and tactical equipment for the group. The Governor’s statement continued that authorities seized a white Honda CRV-type vehicle and discovered five R-15 long weapons, three AK-47s, a 22-mm caliber hunting rifle, a 16-mm shotgun, as well as a large amount of ammunition. Seized tactical equipment included 32 ballistic plates, 22 tactical vests, a variety of camouflaged uniforms with CJNG initials, Kevlar helmets, portable radios and radio frequency modules, and a credential holder of the Attorney General’s Office of Veracruz. According to another excerpted article by Mexico based news outlet, *Costa Veracruz*, authorities also seized 134 bags of what appeared to be crystal meth and 75 bags of marijuana. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**

**Source:** “Detienen a dos presuntos integrantes del CJNG, en Tierra Blanca (Two alleged CJNG members arrested in Tierra Blanca),” *Veracruz Gobierno del Estado*, 7 February 2019. <http://www.veracruz.gob.mx/2019/02/07/detienen-a-dos-presuntos-integrantes-del-cjng-en-tierra-blanca/>

*“Two alleged CJNG members were arrested in the city of Tierra Blanca in the state of Veracruz. Authorities seized armaments, tactical equipment, harmful substances, and a van.”*

**Source:** “Detienen a narcos con todo un arsenal en Tierra Blanca (Drug traffickers arrested with an arsenal in Tierra Blanca),” *Costa Veracruz*, 7 February 2019. <https://costaveracruz.net/2019/02/07/detienen-a-narcos-con-todo-un-arsenal-en-tierra-blanca/>

*“Authorities searched a white Honda CRV-type vehicle and found five R-15 long weapons, 3 AK-47s, a 22-mm caliber hunting rifle and a 16-mm shotgun.”*

*“Authorities seized 134 bags of what appeared to be crystal meth and 75 bags of what appeared to be marijuana.”*

**“Two alleged CJNG members were arrested in the city of Tierra Blanca in the state of Veracruz. Authorities seized armaments, tactical equipment, harmful substances, and a van.”**



## OEWATCH

Check out [back issues](#) of FMSO’s Operational Environment Watch dating back to 2011. They provide translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>