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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Russian Airborne Troops

Source: <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Airborne-troops-day-2010/i-LWQHtcD>, CC BY 4.0

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Implications of the Northern Fleet Assuming Military District Status

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Joint Strategic Command (OSK-North) is an experimental inter-service combined strategic formation headquartered in Severomorsk. The command was formed on 1 December 2014 to defend Russia's national interests in the Arctic. The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russia's plans to upgrade the status of OSK-North, so that it is also considered a Military District.

OSK-North was carved out of the Western OSK, consisting of the Komi Republic, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Arkhangelsk Oblast, and Murmansk Oblast. In terms of military assets, OSK-North became responsible for most Ministry of Defense assets on these territories; and a few additional units were transferred to the command from the Central and Eastern OSKs. In regard to military assets, the command's assets can generally be described in terms of sea, land, air and components. The sea component consists of the North Sea Fleet, the Belomorsk Naval Base, and Flotilla. The land component is in the newly formed (2017) 14th Army Corps, which controls the 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Alakurtti) and 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Pechenga), the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, and supporting units. The Air component is in the 45th Air and Air Defense Army, which consists of the 1st and 3rd Air Defense Divisions, and the 98th Composite Aviation Regiment, and supporting units.

When OSK-North was formed Russia chose not to duplicate the same command and control structures that was found in the other OSKs. Instead of creating a brand new staff element (joint headquarters) to provide command and control, Russia has chosen to simply augment the Northern Fleet. Another difference is that although the OSK-North was considered a 'Joint Strategic Command', it is not considered a Military District (MD) as the other four OSKs. According to the accompanying article from *Izvestiya*, this situation may change as Russia is now planning to upgrade the status of OSK-North, so it is also considered a Military District. Apparently, according to the article, Russia's experimentation with not basing an OSK on joint headquarters has been deemed a success, as it is seen as reducing the overhead associated with (large) joint headquarters, but having sufficient capabilities to command and control a OSK/MD. Although OSK-North is the only OSK/MD in this situation, there has been discussion of forming new Russian OSKs/MDs due to the current commands being too large to effectively control, especially if engaged in front-level operations. (There has been recent speculation that OSKs will be responsible for front-level command and control during large-scale combat operations.) If Russia decides to form any new OSKs/MDs, they could be based upon the OSK-North model.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)



Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Евменов,_Николай_Анатольевич#/media/File:Nikolaj_Evmenov,_2016.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“The experience of the experimental combined formation was deemed a success ... [and] resulted in the Defense Ministry deciding to elevate its status.” -Military expert Anton Lavrov

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Alexey Kozachenko, Bogdan Stepovoy, “Северный флот получит статус отдельного военного округа (Northern Fleet to Assume Military District Status),” *Izvestiya* Online, 19 April 2019. <https://iz.ru/869512/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi/poliarnoe-vliianie-severnoy-flot-poluchit-status-voennogo-okruga>

The Defense Ministry is prepared to alter the status of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command (OSK-North), as of December it will be an independent military-administrative entity equal in importance to a military district. Izvestiya Defense Ministry sources say that Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov will continue to command the fleet.

Izvestiya sources in the Northern Fleet command say that the OSK-North was until recently essentially an experimental combined formation: it was studied whether it could accomplish assignments involving defense of Russian interests in the Arctic region. Large-scale two-month exercises, at which interaction of the navy, aviation, and ground troops was rehearsed, were conducted in the Northern Fleet in 2016. Ships, submarines, strategic and long-range bombers, fighters, and S-300, S-400, and Pantsir air defense systems and also motorized riflemen and naval infantry were employed in the maneuvers...The experience of the experimental combined formation was deemed a success, which it was that resulted in the Defense Ministry deciding to elevate its status, Izvestiya sources report.

Military expert Anton Lavrov believes that the decision was brought about by a search for the optimum staffing structure of the Northern Fleet. “The Defense Ministry’s decision underscores yet again that the Arctic is for us a priority military sector,” Anton Lavrov told Izvestiya.

The northern territories are deemed particularly important for Russia’s defense, military expert Viktor Murakhovskiy confirmed. “The new status reflects the special role of the navy in the Arctic,” the expert emphasized.

For defense of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) the government recently drafted special rules of watercraft’s passage. Foreign warships and vessels will now have to give Russia 45 days’ notice of their plans and compulsorily take Russian pilots on board. Passage may even be denied, and in the event of unsanctioned NSR traffic, experts believe, Russia could take extraordinary action, up to and including detention or destruction of the vessel.



Russia Integrates Tank Battalions into the Airborne Troops

OE Watch Commentary: In Soviet times, the Russian Airborne (VDV) was envisioned as an exploitation force that would jump in behind enemy lines to seize key points. In order to fulfill this mission, almost the entire division or brigade would be on jump status and regularly practice airborne insertion techniques. Since the VDV was not intended to fight against heavy conventional forces and given the aforementioned mission requirements, the Russian VDV only used light armored vehicles that were capable of being transported and/or parachute dropped by the Il-76 cargo plane. Due to this situation, the Airborne possessed no main battle tanks, and instead used light tanks such as the PT-76 (now retired) and the Sprut-SD. Although main battle tanks were never part of the VDV's MTO&E in Soviet times, they were routinely operationally controlled by VDV units when necessary. The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses how the Russian VDV is integrating tanks into its ranks.



Russian Airborne Troops.

Source: <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Airborne-troops-day-2010/i-LWQHtCd>, CC BY 4.0

In 2015, the VDV decided to add organic tank battalions to VDV regiments and brigades. This development was due to a change in how the General Staff believed the VDV would be utilized. Large-scale rear insertions against peer-level adversaries are now extremely difficult given the proliferation of modern air defense systems. Russian VDV units are no longer focused on this one mission. Instead they are now focused on specific missions regarding the areas where they are located, for example the 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division in Novorossiysk has been designated a 'mountain division.' (This designation has required slight MTO&E and training changes.) In addition, the role of the VDV as a rapid reaction force has also impacted MTO&E requirements. Since the General Staff envisages the VDV as part of the initial rapid reaction element that would fend off any NATO incursion, an armor capability is seen as essential for this mission. Although the VDV is adding a non-airmobile friendly piece of equipment to its ranks, the deployability of the VDV will in reality change very little. The Russian VDV, as the conventional force, primarily relies upon rail for the mass movement of units and most combat vehicles. Regimental-level drops can be conducted, but with a great straining of resources, so the addition of tanks units will have negligible impact on a force which is already relying on rail for the mass movement of brigades and divisions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The airborne assault forces are growing their tank muscle.”

Source: Vladimir Sosnitskiy, “Десантные тельняшки танкистам впору (Tank Troops in the Striped T-Shirts of the Airborne Troops),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 25 March 2019. <http://redstar.ru/desantnye-telnyashki-tankistam-vporu/>

Rayevskiy training ground, Krasnodarskiy Kray -- The armor in Airborne Troops units just got much tougher and more reliable...The dynamics of a company-level tactical exercise at a recently formed tank battalion of the 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division largely mirrored real warfare. The first two companies of this subunit, which are manned by contract soldiers, have already undergone a similar appraisal of their combat proficiency. Now is the turn of the third company, in which most of the crews are conscripts. They only recently arrived from training subunits in Kovrov, Chelyabinsk, and Sertolovo. They chose to serve in the Airborne Troops of their own volition. Many say it was something they did not dare dream of, but it turns out that the airborne assault forces “are growing their tank muscle.” The young tank troops have already been issued their blue-and-white striped T-shirts, of which they are particularly proud. True, the commander of the conscript company says that this badge of distinction is, so to speak, a down payment and they will have to sweat to earn it. Indeed they will: Even before this exercise the mechanic-drivers were tested for their driving skills and tank commanders and gunners examined in the theory of shooting and the nuts and bolts of tank weaponry.

Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Khokhlov starts counting down the seconds on his electronic stopwatch as the company obeys the order to assemble, and then he dispassionately notes the crews' agility at the fighting vehicle depot and as the subunit heads to the training ground, how they obey commands while on the march, take on ammunition at the staging area, and transition from travel to combat mode. “As the practice of the first months shows, instructing the soldiers in the separate procedures and individual drills turned out much simpler than getting them to act cohesively as part of a crew, platoon, or company,” Lt Col Khokhlov admits. “And this is where we rely on the experience and abilities of the tank commanders, who are contract soldiers. It is they who have to forge the individual soldiers' characters and skills into a team spirit. The youthful energy of the platoon commanders comes into play as well -- they are all recent graduates of the Kazan' and Omsk tank schools.”

The formation's staff officers play an active role in the division's new battalion, which is helping it to rapidly find its feet. The guards division's deputy commander, Colonel Andrey Kondrashkin, keeps a close eye on the tank officers' tactical training, maintaining their focus on ways of jointly operating with airborne assault subunits and on careful study of Airborne Troops subunits' tactics in battle. The guards formation's training chief, Major Yevgeniy Solovyev, and the officers in his section help the battalion staff to use the exact format preferred in the division for organizing exercises. And the armor and tank service specialists take care so that the battalion's “iron” does not encounter any operating issues...

By the way, in the preceding exercise for the professional companies their commander decided to lengthen the range of fire from the T-72B3 tank's 125-mm gun and shorten the target display time. The rate of fire accelerated. Obviously, this required more intensive and better coordinated work by the crews. But it is fair to demand that of professionals. The airborne assault tank troops speak very highly of their T-72B3 machine, believing that its simplicity of operation, survivability, all-terrain capabilities, weaponry, and a recent upgrade make it the best tank in the world. The company-level tactical exercise stage for the newly formed airborne assault tank battalion has shown that these are promising innovations and that the subunit itself is on the right track in its evolution.

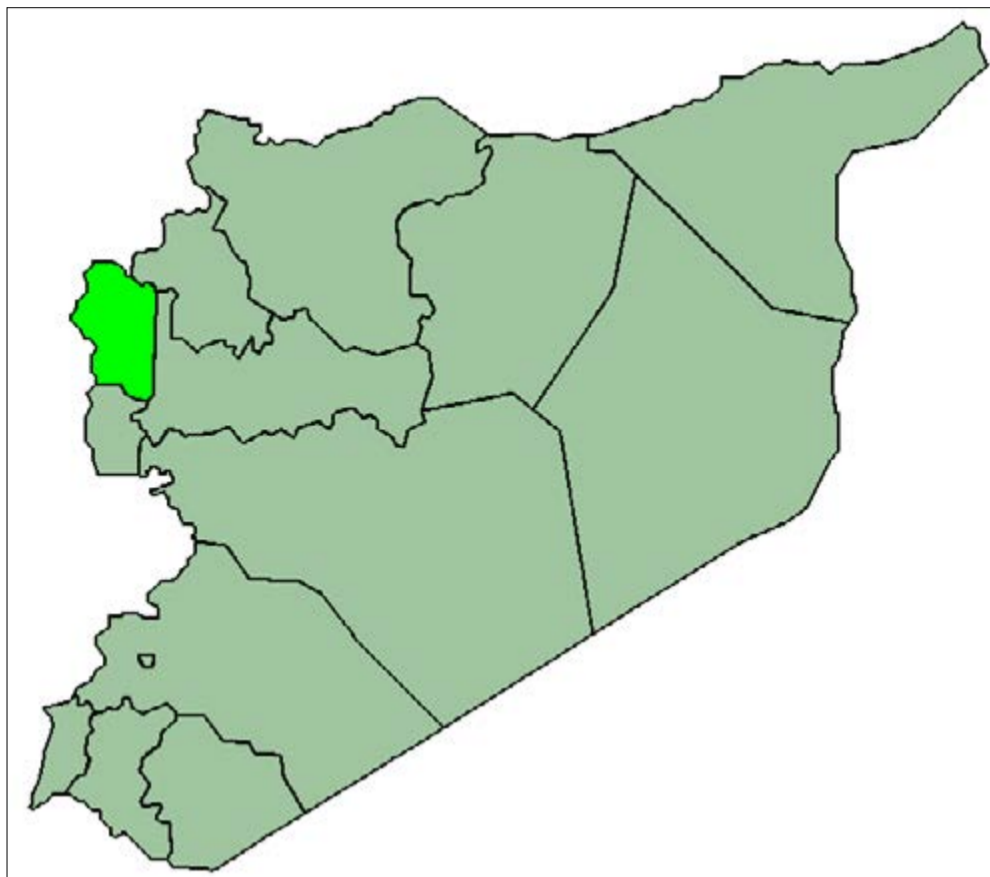


Mongolian Aid to Syria; Russia Partners with Military Airlift

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's Syrian-based Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Sides reported the delivery of humanitarian aid from Mongolia to the village of Zama in the mountainous region of Latakia and noted Russia's assistance with use of military airlift. The village had been particularly hard hit. The aid package included canned meat, rice, flour, sugar, tea, blankets, mattresses, and school supplies.

Russia's use of its military airlift capacity to facilitate this donation on behalf of its much poorer neighbor reflects national strategies beyond the Middle East. Mongolia shares over 2000 miles of border with Russia. Its national security strategy includes deliberate pursuit of constructive relations with its two giant neighbors as well as "Third Neighbors," which can balance foreign policy interests and raise Mongolia's sovereignty profile. Third Neighbors can be any other country or even international organizations and activities. Mongolia's participation in peacekeeping and stability operations since 2002 worked as a successful strategy for them; humanitarian assistance is an extension of this. Providing humanitarian aid to Syria is quite a feat given Mongolia's very limited economic capacity and even more challenging logistics but it reinforces the national security objectives; facilitating such assistance helps Russia's interests, too.

End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)



Syria, Latakia.

Source: KureCewlik81 via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SyriaLatakia.PNG>, Public Domain.

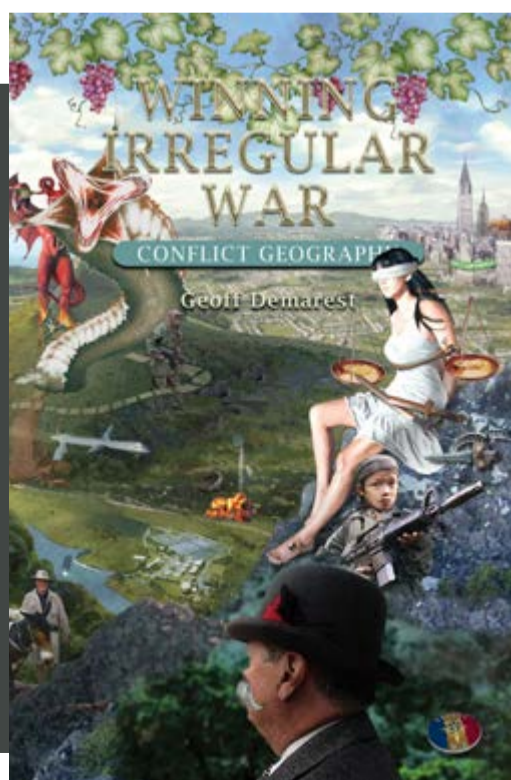
“Earlier reports said the distribution of humanitarian assistance from Mongolia, which had been delivered by a Russian Aerospace Defense Forces’ plane, had begun in the warstricken Syrian areas.”

Source: “Russian military delivers Mongolian aid to Syria’s Latakia,” *Tass* (in English), 16 May 2019. tass.com/defense/1058528

The Russian military has delivered Mongolia’s humanitarian aid to the most affected areas of Syria’s Latakia province, a spokesman for the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Sides Vladimir Ladeinov told reporters.

...

The village of Zama is located in a hard-to-reach area of mountainous Latakia. It is home to 8,000 citizens, but all men went off to war and 250 of them died or went missing and more than 300 others were wounded.



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>



Artillery Training in Preparation for Tsentr 2019

OE Watch Commentary: The Totskoye training center has a long and remarkable history. On 14 September 1954, the Soviets dropped a 40 kiloton RDS-4 atomic bomb there as part of a training exercise involving 45,000 troops and massive amounts of aircraft and equipment. In September 1994, 250 Russian and 250 American soldiers participated in “Peacekeeper ‘94”-the first joint Russian-US training exercise held in Russia. Now, the Totskoye training center is home to preparations for what will become another front page headline: Exercise *Tsentr* will be held in September 2019. The accompanying passage from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses preparation exercises for *Tsentr* 2019, which will be held in the Central Military District. The Central Military District occupies the center of Russia [Volga, Ural and Siberian regions] and borders the Arctic Ocean to the North and Kazakhstan and Mongolia to the South.



Central Military District Headquarters.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Military_District_headquarters,_Yekaterinburg.jpg, CC BY 4.0

Although the preparation exercise simulated the launches of Iskander ballistic and cruise missiles, there was no scrimping on ammunition expenditure. A six-gun-battery of 152mm howitzers may fire a 300 meter standing barrage (50 meters per gun). The standing barrage is planned to insert a wall of artillery fire to stop the advancing enemy in his tracks. The standing barrage is continually fired to deny the enemy further advance. This exercise fired a 2,400 meter standing barrage. That is a 1.49 mile wall of continuously exploding rounds and shrapnel! It takes eight batteries of 152mm artillery to fire that standing barrage. 18 batteries were available, so the barrage was sustained by switching batteries to keep the barrels cool enough. The “Fire Vise” is another ammunition-intensive planned fire event that uses multiple battalions to fire simultaneous moving barrages designed to force the enemy inward to a concentration area where they can be finished by area fire. The concept was developed in Afghanistan and refined in Chechnya.

Also discussed in the article was the use of various mortars and gun/mortars, as well as antitank systems, during the exercise. This exercise completed the winter training period. Contract soldiers are placed in those positions requiring the most training and they will still be trained and available in September for Exercise *Tsentr*. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“As the conclusion of a month-long training encampment, artillery subunits of an artillery brigade, a multiple rocket launcher brigade and motorized rifle brigade artillery conducted a live-fire tactical exercise which included simulated missile launches by a missile brigade.”

Source: “Missile Troops and Artillerymen of Central Military District’s 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army Have Successfully Mastered New Tactical Devices To Combat Illegal Armed Elements,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17 April 2019. <http://redstar.ru>

This was conducted at the Totskoye combined-arms training range under the direction of Guards Colonel Vasiliy Solovyev, Acting Chief of Staff of the Central Military District’s 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army, and Guards Col. Andrey Shabanov, Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery of the combined formation. Under the command of these combined-arms officers, the missile troops and artillerymen accomplished missions involved in the command and control of missile strikes and artillery fire, and rehearsed different ways of eliminating illegal armed elements.

In the exercise, missile brigade battalions, armed with Iskander-M missile systems, delivered individual and group missile strikes against particularly important and hardened targets. ... Guards Lieutenant Colonel Ruslan Bakirov, Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of the 2nd Guards Combined-Arms Army’s Missile Troops and Artillery, and the men under Col. Andrey Surkov conducted nine simulated strikes using conventionally armed cruise and ballistic missiles, and -- according to objective monitoring data -- successfully “destroyed” four command and control posts, two communications centers, and two bridges and a dam. These “strikes” thwarted an approach by the operational reserve of the hypothetical illegal armed force.

Over 2,000 men and some 500 systems were assigned to the final evaluation exercise of the winter period of instruction for artillerymen and missile troops. Battalions and batteries of cannon and rocket artillery performed a variety of fire missions on the range’s tactical area between the Lysaya and Kalanchovaya mountains. For the first time a wall of fixed barrage fire extending for some 2,400 meters erupted from the bursts of howitzer shells. On the order of Guards Col. Andrey Shabanov, Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery of the combined formation, this fire mission was conducted in a well-coordinated manner by three battalions of 2S19 Msta-S 152-mm self-propelled guns, two battalions of the Separate Guards Artillery Brigade under Guards Col. Sergey Yurchenko and a battalion of D-30 122-mm towed howitzers. In this way the artillerymen prevented subunits of the hypothetical illegal armed forces from breaking out of their blockaded area.

For the first time at the Totskiy range, the Samara army’s “gods of war” also employed the “fire vise” against the hypothetical militants. Using several three- line moving barrages, heavy and medium howitzer battalions forced the notional adversary back into a 64 hectare [158 acre] artillery concentration area. There, they delivered overlapping volleys of rocket-propelled high explosive powerful warheads, each containing 1,000 preformed fragments. Two MLRS rocket artillery battalions from the artillery of two guards motorized infantry brigades undertook this mission. Guards LTC Rustam Fakhрутdinov commanded the battalion of Grad 122-mm multiple-launch rocket systems and Guards Major Eduard Usov commanded his battalion, which was recently rearmed with the Tornado-G systems.

According to Guards Lt. Col. Bakirov, the best results were posted by the rocket artillery battalions of Guards Lt. Col. Fakhрутdinov and Guards Maj. Usov. He also singled out the self-propelled howitzer battalion under Guards Captain Aleksey Obutkin from the Guards Artillery Brigade. His men are specialists in counterbattery fire and successfully completed seven fire missions to suppress artillery batteries and mortar platoons belonging to the hypothetical illegal armed elements....



Black Sea Fleet Commander takes over Northern Fleet

OE Watch Commentary: Vice Admiral Aleksandr Aleksanderevich Moiseev has been a fast-burner in the Russian submarine service and has spent much of that time beneath Arctic ice. He is no stranger to the Northern Fleet. Aside from the expected achievements of an up-and-coming submariner, in 1998, his submarine launched two German commercial satellites into orbit while submerged. It was the first commercial space launch for the Russian Navy and the first commercial payload launched from a submarine. His involvement in the November 2018 Kerch Strait incident has done nothing to slow down his meteoric career. As the accompanying passage from the *Barents Sea Independent Observer* discusses, he is replacing Nikolay Yevmenov, who is promoted to command the Russian Navy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Aleksandr Moiseev served 29 years onboard nuclear submarines. Now, he is the new commander in charge of Russia’s most powerful fleet.”



Map of Russian Northern Fleet bases.

Source: Kallemax at English Wikipedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Northern_Fleet_bases.png, Public domain

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Putin appoints new leader of Northern Fleet,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 8 May 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/05/putin-appoints-new-leader-northern-fleet>

Putin appoints new leader of Northern Fleet

The decree from President Vladimir Putin was signed on the 3rd of May. But the news was made public by the Armed Forces only six days later as thousands of Navy officers were marching in the streets on Victory Day May 9th.

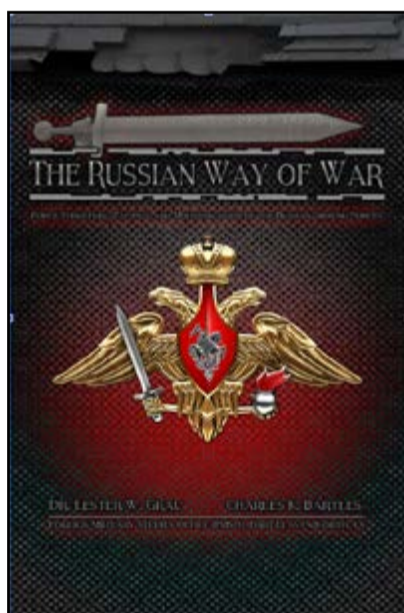
The person who has headed the Northern Fleet for the past three years, Nikolay Yevmenov, is promoted to command the Russian Navy. He takes over the leadership of one of most powerful military forces in the world. Yevmenov replaces Vladimir Korolev, who has been in charge of the Russian Navy since 2016.

Aleksandr Moiseev comes from the post as commander of the Black Sea Fleet where he has served since May 2018. He has long experiences in the North. For more than two decades, he served on board submarines that have crisscrossed the Arctic. He started in 1988 as engineer on a sub and ended up as captain onboard one of the world’s most powerful nuclear submarines.

In 1994, he served on board the K-18 Karelia, a Delta-IV submarine, and was decorated for his participation in the planting of a Russian flag at the North Pole.

From 1998 he headed the nuclear powered K-407 Novomoskovsk, another Delta IV sub. He later became head of the Northern Fleet’s 31st division, the powerful unit based in Zapadnaya Litsa on the Barents Sea coast. In 2008, he was in charge of the nuclear-powered submarine K-44 when it made a transfer from the Northern to the Pacific Fleet while submerged under the polar ice.

He is a man well-liked by the President himself. In 2011, he was awarded the medal for Hero of the Russian Federation, and subsequently became the deputy commander of the Northern Fleet and then the leader of the submarine unit of that same fleet.



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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Cruising in a Stretch-Submarine

OE Watch Commentary: The Poseidon intercontinental-range, nuclear autonomous torpedo is reportedly capable of moving fast, far, quiet and deep while avoiding the various interception systems designed to destroy intercontinental nuclear missiles, cruise missiles and the like. As the accompanying passage from *Barents Sea Independent Observer* discusses, the Belgorod, “one of Russia’s most secret weapons carriers, a 184-meter long nuclear-powered submarine” is destined for the Northern Sea Fleet, where one of its missions will be a Poseidon launch vessel.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“Built for special missions, Belgorod can carry deep-sea equipment like nuclear reactors to the Arctic seabed, as well as deploying the Poseidon second strike, nuclear delivery [underwater] drone.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Here Comes a nuclear submarine longer than the world has ever seen” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 23 April 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/04/worlds-longest-here-comes-submarine-world-has-never-seen>

Here Comes a nuclear submarine longer than the world has ever seen

April 23 was a very special day at the Sevmash yard in Severodvinsk. One of Russia’s most secret weapons carriers, a 184-meter long nuclear-powered submarine with the project-name 09852 was launched....

The Belgorod (KS-139) is believed to have four to six tubes designed for the Poseidon nuclear-powered, nuclear armed underwater drone, a weapon that came as a surprise when it first was confirmed in President Putin’s annual State of the Federation speech in March last year....

Belgorod is built on a elongated hull of what was originally meant to be an Oscar-II class multi-purpose submarine, a sister vessel to the ill-fated “Kursk” submarine that sank in the Barents Sea during a naval exercise in August 2000. The hull of the submarine was laid down in 1992, but it was first twenty years later, in 2012, that the Defense Ministry decided to use the hull to construct this giant special purpose vessel.

The extra space in the prolonged hull has room to carry equipment for deep-sea operations, like small-sized nuclear-reactors aimed to provide power to secret military installations on the Arctic Sea bed.

Expert on Russian nuclear submarines, H. I. Sutton, suggests in a blog post on the portal *Covert Shores* that one of the secret missions for Belgorod will be the covert placement of large underwater systems, like the new multi-sensor submarine detection network named “Harmony”. Similar to NATO’s SOSUS cable system, the Russian network with sensors is aimed to detect enemy submarines. “Harmony” will be powered by nuclear reactors that will be placed on the Arctic shelf by Belgorod.

The submarine will also be able to carry other special purpose mini-submarines, like those based in Olenya Bay on the Kola Peninsula where Russia’s Main Directorate for Deep Sea Research [Главное управление глубоководных исследований Минобороны (ГУГИ)] nicknamed GUGI, is located. Although the crew on the Directorate’s submarines are from the Northern Fleet, these special submarines are operated directly by the General Staff of the Armed Forces.

Belgorod is 11 meters longer than the giant 173-meters Typhoon submarines of the Cold War and 29 meters longer than the Oscar-II class subs.

As reported by the Barents Observer in March when Russia’s Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu visited the yard in Severodvinsk, Belgorod will be the first full-time carrier of the Poseidon underwater drone. The 24-meters long torpedo-looking drone is powered by a small nuclear reactor and is designed as a second nuclear strike weapon. If an enemy targets Russia with nuclear weapons, the Poseidon will guarantee retaliation. Launched from “Belgorod” the drone is tipped with a multi-megatons nuclear warhead that can cross oceans like the North Atlantic at a depth and with a silence making it impossible to stop....Poseidon will be a game changer for global nuclear deterrence when it becomes operative...

“Belgorod” now will make mooring tests, launch its two reactors, and start sea trials in 2020, after which it will be delivered for operations by the end of that year....

Another Major Oil Deposit Discovered in Russian Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: Russian Arctic energy exploration continues to pay dividends. The Yamal Peninsula has two major gas and oil fields producing in the Murmask/White Sea region. This latest find on the Tamir Peninsula is well located to take advantage of the nearby Dudinka river port on the mighty Yenesei River flowing north into the Arctic Ocean. Dudinka has long been a vital link for shipping the extracted and smelted nickel, copper, cobalt and palladium produced in Norilsk as well as coal. The new fields are about midpoint of the Russian Arctic and certainly upgrade the already vital status of the region to the Russian economy. Russia has been concerned with the defense of this river route and has conducted two large riverine exercises there during the last four years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Russia’s state mineral extraction agency Rosnedra now confirms that the resource estimates of the Paykha fields amount to as much as 1.2 billion tons....That is one of the biggest estimates ever made for a Russian oil field.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Arctic oil field could be Russia’s biggest discovery in 30 years”, *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 8 May 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/05/artic-oil-field-could-be-russias-biggest-discovery-30-years>

Arctic oil field could be Russia’s biggest discovery in 30 years

It is good news for company Neftegazholding and its leader Eduard Khudaynatov, who for years have been seeking ways to develop the Payakha area. Khudaynatov had previously estimated the field resources far lower, at about 600 million tons...

Some experts reacted with skepticism to the sudden major upgrade of the Payakha. Reportedly, only few exploration wells have been drilled in the area and seismic studies and data assessments remain sparse. No new oil samples have been presented by the company....The Payakha fields are located along the eastern banks of the Yenisei, about 130 km north of the port town of Dudinka.

The sudden upgrade of the fields comes as the Russian government is hectically struggling to add shipment volumes to the Northern Sea Route. President Vladimir Putin has requested a boost in Arctic shipping to an annual 80 million tons by the year 2024 and new infrastructure and industry is planned and being built to meet the ambitious target. The Payakha fields could become a key part of the picture.

Previously, it was believed that the field could provide up to five million tons to the Northern Sea Route by 2024. That estimate might now be increased. Furthermore, the Payakha resources could become a crucial component in the new Arctic oil pipeline planned by Rosneft. The state oil company says it intends to build a 600 km long pipeline from the Vankor fields in western Siberia to the coast of the Taymyr Peninsula. It will have the capacity to carry 25 million tons per year and could potentially include also the Payakha resources....



Fighting for Military Death Benefits

OE Watch Commentary: The Kremlin leadership has worked diligently over the past decade to restore the honor and prestige of military service, and the official rhetoric reflects their admiration for those who defend the Russian state. While not extravagant, Russian authorities assert that they are prepared to compensate service members and their families for losses incurred while on active duty. The first brief excerpt from the government news source *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* describes a recent directive which spells out the payments which service members or surviving family receive in the event of serious injury or death (KIA-2 million rubles or \$33K; WIA-from 1.5 million-500,000 rubles or \$25K-\$8.5K depending on the injury).

However, as the second excerpt from the moderately liberal source *Novaya Izvestiya* points out, actually receiving these payments is another story. The article describes the “semi-annual marathon in the courts” that the wife of an officer killed in Syria had to pass through in order to receive these benefits. The problem stemmed from the fact that her late husband had not received the status of “veteran of combat action” while still alive, and once he was killed, the military said he was no longer eligible for this status. She was forced to take her case to court, where she claimed that “the military enlistment office fought with us, as if we were its enemies” during repeated hearings over several months.

After travelling from Volgograd to Moscow and meeting with representatives of the “main military-political department of the Ministry of Defense,” the wife was ultimately successful in obtaining the death benefit, thanks to the personal involvement of the Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. She “hopes that her case will make life easier for other widows or parents of other dead soldiers,” pointing out that “not all of them, who survived this grief, would have the strength to knock down the thresholds of military registration and enlistment offices and courts for months.” She notes that “Shoigu simply will not be able to intervene in every case unless amendments are made at the legislative level.” This was not an isolated case, as many surviving family members have had to initiate legal proceedings to receive death benefits from the military.

Strengthening Russia’s military prowess remains a key objective of the current Kremlin leadership. In their calculus, this improved military status will help to restore the country’s great power status. The above article would suggest, however, that Russia’s actual legislation on the matter is not consistent with these super-power aspirations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Official portrait of Sergei Shoigu.

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

“... the military enlistment office fought with us, as if we were its enemies...”

Source: “Индексация задним числом. Военным и отставникам увеличили отдельные выплаты (Indexation in Retrospect. Individual Payments Increased for Serving and Retired Military Personnel),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 22 April 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/04/22/>

The Russian Federation Government has published Directive No. 435, according to which former and current service personnel and their close relatives as well as militarized department officers including police and their families and citizens on military musters will have the insurances, individual payments, and one-time allowances granted to them under the law index-linked....

...Point 2 of Article 5 of that document says that, if a soldier is killed or dies from serious injury, wounds, trauma, contusions, or sickness contracted in service, his close relatives are paid R2 million in insurance in equal shares. For those invalided while in service the law also provides insurance compensation: R1.5 million for Class 1, R1 million for Class 2, and R500,000 for Class 3.

Source: “Вдова погибшего в Сирии офицера: Шойгу не сможет помочь всем (The widow of an officer who died in Syria: Shoigu will not be able to help everyone),” *Novaya Izvestiya*, 10 April 2019. <https://newizv.ru/news/society/10-04-2019/vdova-pogibshego-v-sirii-ofitsera-shoigu-ne-smozhet-pomoch-vsem>

The widow of Captain Sergei Petin, who died in Syria, commented on the words of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu about preventing red tape when paying allowances to participants in hostilities and to the families of the dead soldiers. Previously, the woman had to obtain justice through the court with the military registration office because of gaps in the legislation.

Yesterday, the Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu sharply criticized his subordinates for their heartlessness and red tape on the social benefits of servicemen and their families. This happened after an embarrassing story regarding Captain Sergey Petin who died in Syria, whose widow with two children lives in the city of Volzhsky near Volgograd. Difficulties arose since Sergei Petin was not granted the status of a veteran of combat action when he was alive, and it’s not clear what to do if the soldier has already died and didn’t get a certificate.

“My lawyer and I had to go through a semi-annual marathon in the courts,” Elena Petina told the publication Novosti-volgograda.ru It turns out that the military enlistment office fought with us, as if we were its enemies.

Elena Petina hopes that her case will make life easier for other widows or parents of the dead soldiers. After all, not all of them, who survived the grief, have the strength to knock down the thresholds of military registration and enlistment offices and courts for months.... “I voiced these thoughts during a trip to Moscow to the main military-political department of the Ministry of Defense. Probably, the reaction of Sergei Shoigu occurred after this problem was brought to his attention. For me personally, this is very valuable, but if you look to the future, and such cases, I think, unfortunately, such occurrences will reoccur, since Shoigu simply physically, will not be able to intervene in every case unless amendments are made at the legislative level.”



Russian Pension Payment for Donbas

OE Watch Commentary: Even with the recent change of presidential administrations in Kiev, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine over the separatist regions in the Donbas shows little sign of resolution. Indeed, as the first excerpt from Russian official news agency TASS points out, in late April (just after the presidential election in Ukraine), “Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree which eases Russian citizenship rules for residents of certain regions of southeastern Ukraine.” The article goes on to specify that “individuals permanently residing in certain areas of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Lugansk regions have the right to apply for Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure... in order to protect human rights and freedoms.” Presumably, once the majority of residents within these separatist regions possess Russian passports, the Kremlin will have a greater legal pretense to employ military force to protect their “human rights and freedoms.”

Since the Kremlin’s offer of Russian citizenship for residents in the separatist regions, there have been economic concerns over the costs in providing pensions to potentially 2-3 million new Russian passport holders. However, as the brief second excerpt (also from TASS) indicates, Russian officials claim that the expense of providing pensions to these new Donbas citizens “will not overload the PFR (Pension Fund of Russia) system.”



Map showing separatist regions in Ukraine.

Source: <http://www.mil.gov.ua/> CCA 4.0

Such an assertion might be surprising to at least one Russian military pensioner. The third excerpt, from the moderate source *Novaya Izvestiya*, describes how Mikhail Zaikin, a military pensioner from Russia, had his Russian military pension revoked when authorities learned that he had volunteered to serve in the military of the separatist Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR). Zaikin resorted to social media to complain about his situation, and then pressed charges against the “Volgograd military registration and enlistment office.” In a somewhat convoluted ruling, “the court still sided with Zaikin, finding that “since the DPR is not recognized by the UN member states, it does not exist legally, and therefore serving in the ranks of local forces does not fall under the provisions of the Russian law on military retirees.” (For additional background on this story, see: “Negative Military Reporting” in the December 2018 issue of *OE Watch*.)

Despite their consistent denials, five years ago, the Kremlin began to provide military assistance to the separatist regions in SE Ukraine. At the time, many of the locals assumed that this military support would ultimately result in a Crimea-like annexation by Russia. While the Kremlin has yet to make this claim, by issuing passports to the residents of separatists in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, Russian authorities appear to be preparing for such a seizure—whether they can afford it or not. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...Payment of pensions to residents of certain areas of the proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk people’s republics after they receive Russian passports will not be a big burden on the pension system of the Russian Federation...”

Source: “Kremlin: Russian passports to provide freedom of movement to Donbass residents,” TASS, 30 April 2019. <http://tass.com/politics/1056533>

...On April 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree, which eases Russian citizenship rules for residents of certain regions of southeastern Ukraine. “Individuals permanently residing in certain areas of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Lugansk regions have the right to apply for Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure,” the decree reads. According to the document, the decision has been made “in order to protect human rights and freedoms” based on generally accepted international laws.

Source: “Топилин: пенсии жителям Донбасса по получении паспортов России не перегрузят систему ПФР (Topilin: pensions to residents of Donbass upon receipt of passports of Russia will not overload the PFR (Pension Fund of Russia) system),” TASS, 26 April 2019. <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/6380707>

Payment of pensions to residents of certain areas of the proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk people’s republics after they receive Russian passports will not be a big burden on the pension system of the Russian Federation, Minister of Labor and Social Protection of Russia Maxim Topilin told reporters. “I don’t think it will be a big burden,” he said, answering the relevant question.



Continued: Russian Pension Payment for Donbas

Source: “Ополченец из ДНР добился выплаты российской пенсии (Militiaman from the DNR was paid his Russian pension),” *Novaya Izvestiya*, 18 April 2019. <https://newizv.ru/news/society/18-04-2019/opolchenets-dnr-dobilysya-vyplaty-rossiyskoy-pensii>

...Mikhail Zaikin also had to plead with the Volgograd military registration and enlistment office. From the documents submitted to the Central Court of Volgograd, it follows that he is a pensioner of the Ministry of Defense after years of service since 2003. For more than ten years, even before the armed conflict in the Donbass, he regularly received his military pension. But a few months ago, its payment was discontinued, since it became known that Zaikin went to Donetsk and joined the ranks of the so-called people's militia - in the military unit 08805 (5th separate motorized rifle brigade “Oplot”).

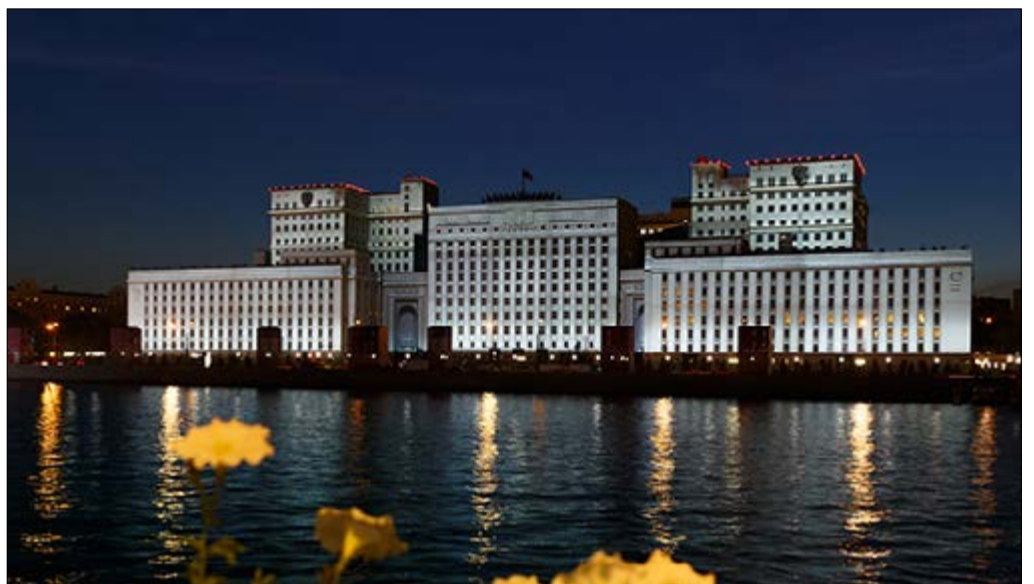
...The regional military registration and enlistment office insisted on the termination of pension payments referring to the law - according to its provisions, military pensioners when they return...

...But the court still sided with Zaikin, finding that since the DPR is not recognized by the UN member states, it does not exist legally, and therefore serving in the ranks of local forces does not fall under the provisions of the Russian law on military retirees....

Russia to Deploy Full Radar Satellite Constellation in 2020

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from *Izvestiya* discusses Russia's plan to completely fill the “Liana” Radar Reconnaissance System constellation. The Liana is a four-satellite constellation currently consisting of two Lotos-S satellites launched in 2009 and 2018, and which will eventually be completed by the addition of two Pion-NKS satellites planned for launch in 2020. The system is intended to do both maritime and ground-based reconnaissance, thereby replacing several legacy systems. These high-resolution radar satellites provide a day/night and all-weather capability to surveil planes, tanks, armored personnel carriers, ships. This information will be transmitted to the Russian National Defense Management Center for analysis and action. The deployment of the constellation had been delayed due to import sanctions and the withdrawal of the Ukrainian defense industry, but these obstacles appear to have been overcome. If Russia does field these additional satellites, it will have significantly increased her space-based ISR capability.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)



Russia's National Defense Management Center.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Defense_Management_Center.jpg, CC BY 3.0

“The difference between civilian and military satellites is being erased.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Roman Kretsul, “«Лиана» опутает Землю: система радиолокационных спутников заработает к новому году (‘Liana’ is Ensnaring the Earth: The Radar Satellite System Will Begin to Operate in the New Year),” *Izvestiya Online*, 8 May 2019. <https://iz.ru/868589/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/liana-oputaet-zemliu-sistema-radiolokatcionnykh-sputnikov-zarabotaet-k-novomu-godu>

The formation of the unique “Liana” Radar Reconnaissance System (RLR) in low-earth orbit, which will cover the entire planet, will be completed over the course of this year. A Ministry of Defense spokesman reported to *Izvestiya* that the launches of two satellites are planned by 1 January 2020, after which the system will begin to operate at full performance. Putting “Liana” into operation will permit the Russian General Staff to observe even small objects in the world.

The “Liana” Radar Reconnaissance System will consist of four satellites – two “Lotos-S” and two “Pion-NKS”...The Lotos-S, the first satellite of the “Liana” System, was launched into orbit in 2009, and the second – in 2018. It remained to put two “Pion-NKS” satellites into operation to complete the system's formation, which they plan to do this year. The satellites, which are part of the “Liana” System, are already at 100-kilometer altitude. In the process, their onboard equipment permits them to detect an object with a size from an automobile and, if necessary, to guide a precision-guided weapon system to it. All of the System's remaining characteristics and its elements are classified. Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu officially announced its existence for the first time at the beginning of 2017. During the fall of last year, the Military Department Head reported that he had personally approved the coordinated schedule of the manufacture and testing of a “Pion-NKS” satellite. “The difference between civilian and military satellites is being erased in recent years, by way of illustration, an ordinary satellite can support Army communicates via encrypted channels”, Ivan Moiseyev, the scientific director of the Space Policy Institute, told *Izvestiya*. “But signals intelligence satellites – this is such a specific sphere that only a military spacecraft can handle this mission. These technologies have begun to be developed in the civilian sector – in particular, to monitor traffic on roads”...



Profiting off Patriot Park

OE Watch Commentary: Officially opened in 2016 as a showplace to highlight Russia's military accomplishments and equipment, Patriot Park continues to expand its offerings. Located some 40 miles west of Moscow, the complex serves not only as a venue for the Russian military to showcase its latest weapons, but also as a training ground, a conference location and a place to host special events. As the first brief excerpt from the pro-business daily *RBK* points out, Patriot Park will soon be offering a variety of other attractions in order "to increase the attendance of the park to 100 thousand people per day."

The article describes that even though the exact details regarding the funding for these new facilities have yet to be worked out, among other additions, the plan calls for the construction of "a ski center, a children's amusement park, a Ferris wheel, an aquarium..., a water park, territory for paintball, laser-tag,... hotel, and a multi-disciplinary clinic for the treatment of military personnel, their families and military retirees" within the Patriot Park complex. To accommodate the increased traffic and visitors, the Ministry of Defense plans to improve the transport infrastructure surrounding the park.

Besides highlighting the country's accomplishments, large projects in Russia have often served as corruption conduits for those involved in their construction (e.g. 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics). As the second brief excerpt from the opposition source *The Insider* points out, the expansion and developments within Patriot Park appear to be no exception. As the title of this long, investigative article suggests, some of those close to the Kremlin leadership have figured out ways to "pilfer funds through Patriot Park." The article describes, for instance, how one individual connected to the construction of the new cathedral at Patriot Park, "bought himself a Mercedes-Maybach, worth around 10 million rubles (\$167,000), one month after the consecration of the foundation stone." The article goes on to review the quasi-criminal backgrounds (e.g. embezzlement, fraud) of other individuals involved in constructing projects at Patriot Park, or what they refer to as the "military Disneyland." While the Kremlin continues to construct an ideology built upon patriotism and military readiness, these articles suggest that some Russians hope to exploit this ideology for personal profit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"... And it is Putin's friends and the Ministry of Defense leadership that are making money on this "military Disneyland..."



President Putin studying a model of the Armed Forces Cathedral at Patriot Park, September 2018.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58595>, CC BY 4.0.

Source: Inna Sidorkova, Nadezhda Fedorova, Maxim Solopov, "Частно-государственный «Патриот» Что ведомство Сергея Шойгу решило построить в крупнейшем военном парке (Private-state 'Patriot' What the ministry of Sergey Shoigu decided to build in the largest military park)," *RBK*, 24 April 2019. <https://www.rbc.ru/society/24/04/2019/5cbf04d99a7947c2d506dbce>

The Ministry of Defense plans to build 900 thousand square meters in the Patriot Park with new buildings and structures for civilian use. It is planned to attract investors to the implementation of projects with the prospect of commercial payback.... The goal of the project is to increase the attendance of the park to 100 thousand people per day.

To improve the transport accessibility of the park, the Ministry of Defense counts on building a new junction at the 59th kilometer of the Minsk highway during its reconstruction and the railway line with a stylized armored train between Kubinka-1 station, Patriot air base and Kubinka air base.

...Among the entertainment facilities to be built are a ski center, a children's amusement park, a Ferris wheel, an aquarium of 3.5 thousand square meters, a water park, a territory for games, paintball, laser-tag... a fishing village with a sauna complex,... and hotel complex.

...In addition, the Ministry of Defense is planning to build a medical center (6 thousand square meters) in the Patriot Park - a multi-disciplinary clinic for the treatment of military personnel, their families and military retirees.

Source: Sergey Yezhov, "Парк жуликов и воров. Как пилят на парке «Патриот» и при чем тут повар Путина, дочь Шойгу и сын Ротенберга (Park of Crooks and Thieves. How They Pilfer Funds Through Patriot Park and What Putin's Chef, Shoygu's Daughter, and Rotenberg's Son Have to Do With That)," *The Insider*, 24 April 2019. <https://theins.ru/korruptsiya/152511>

Patriot Park near Moscow has already cost the Russians more than 20 billion rubles, and today it emerged that a further 1.7 billion rubles of taxpayers' money will be allocated for it. In addition, the park takes voluntary and compulsory donations from people for a giant khaki-colored cathedral (thousands of people have already chipped in). And it is Putin's friends and the Ministry of Defense leadership that are making money on this "military Disneyland..."

...The cathedral is due to be completed in a year's time, but already now some of the individuals involved in the project can boast about their gains. For example, the head of the Resurrection foundation [Aleksandr Kanshin] bought himself a Mercedes-Maybach, worth around 10 million rubles, one month after the consecration of the foundation stone (the ceremony was attended by Putin and Vladimir Gundyayev [Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church]). The Insider found out that Kanshin paid a deposit for his car in October 2018, two months after the patriotic foundation was registered. This is despite the official salaries of the fund's management and other expenses (website, communications) totaling approximately 300,000 rubles a month....



The Transformation of Colonel Kvachkov

OE Watch Commentary: One of Russia's more notorious military prisoners, Colonel (retired) Vladimir Kvachkov, was released from prison earlier this year. Kvachkov gained notoriety in 2005 when accused of trying to assassinate Anatoliy Chubais, a prominent Russian official who had been partially responsible for Russia's painful, and often corrupt, privatization program. While ultimately acquitted of this crime, Kvachkov was subsequently arrested in 2010 for plotting an armed mutiny and given an eight-year sentence. While still in prison, he released an incendiary, nationalist video, and was charged with inciting hatred, and given two additional years in prison. As a former GRU (Military Intelligence) officer, Kvachkov gained notoriety for saying (and acting upon) what some in uniform were thinking, becoming a hero for many Russian nationalists. In the accompanying excerpt from a long interview in the popular, military weekly *Military-Industrial Courier* (VPK), Kvachkov shares some of his observations.

While spending more than a decade behind bars, Kvachkov discovered the Orthodox faith, and asserts that he is "no longer the colonel who knew how to fight and conduct special operations. Now I feel like a soldier of Christ...". He goes on to claim that the primary reason behind the Soviet Union's demise stemmed primarily from "the Soviet people's loss of an understanding of the meaning of their life on Earth," stressing that "the collapse of the USSR showed that without a religious faith it is impossible to build a fair state." As a firm Orthodox believer, Kvachkov maintains not only that "the military cannot live without ideology," but that "the state system of Russia should be an autocratic Orthodox monarchy."



Colonel (ret) Vladimir Kvachkov, September 2018.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Kvachkov.jpg, CC-BY-SA-3.0

Regarding the situation in Ukraine, Kvachkov argues that "we need to recognize the Donbas and Lugansk republics as part of Russia," but that if Russia wants to further expand, it must first focus on developing "an attractive economic model of our internal development, with religious and spiritual components." He goes on to point out that in Russia today, "the gap between the poor and the rich is huge," noting that him and his grandson, who is employed by the Russian National Guard may find themselves "on different sides of the barricades."

Kvachkov has expressed admiration for certain aspects of the current Kremlin leadership (e.g. the return of Crimea), but has spoken out strongly against a number of their actions and policies. For instance, he maintains that the country's current economic system "is rolling into the abyss of liberal capitalism." While certainly not an accurate barometer of military thinking, the fact that *VPK* provided a forum for this controversial officer to express his thoughts suggests that he still has followers in the ranks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...I understood that the army cannot live without ideology.... The state system of Russia should be an autocratic Orthodox monarchy..."

Source: Oleg Falichev, "Духовные университеты полковника Квачкова (The Spiritual Universities of Col. Kvachkov)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer VPK* [Military-Industrial Courier], 9 April 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/49517>

The release of the man accused of attempting to assassinate Anatoly Chubais in 2005, and then, in 2010, an attempt at armed rebellion, ...Retired colonel, Vladimir Kvachkov, formerly an employee of the General Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, spoke to Military-Industrial Courier.

-How long did you spend in prison?

11 years, four months, 15 days.

...All these years there was a process of my internal conversion. And now, in front of you, there is no longer the colonel who knew how to fight and conduct special operations. Now I feel like a soldier of Christ, a man, I hope, having overcome my pride. ...Your will must be a continuation of the will of God. This is the duty of the Russian Orthodox officer to understand and fulfill what is ordained to you from above....

...No one believed in communism. I am convinced: the Soviet Union died, first of all, for a spiritual and moral reason - because of the loss by the Soviet people of the understanding of the meaning of their life on Earth....The collapse of the USSR showed that without a religious faith it is impossible to build a fair state.

...As a military man, besides having the first philological education, I understood that the army cannot live without ideology.... The state system of Russia should be an autocratic Orthodox monarchy.

- You have not seen the country for many years. Has it changed?

It seems to me for the worse. It has become less Russian, less Christian, and is rolling into the abyss of liberal capitalism....

Of course, the return of the Crimea from the geopolitical point of view is the most important event, here I am completely on the side of Vladimir Putin.... But having raised the Russian spirit in the Crimea, we immediately extinguished it in Donetsk and Lugansk....

...When we ourselves live according to the truth, then we say: brothers, we in Great Russia restored state property, the law of God in schools, introduced the teaching of the foundations of Orthodox culture, restored the best methods of the Soviet education system and truly free health care. Russia must become an attractive country in all respects. Then reach out to us... Of course, we need to recognize the Donbass and Lugansk republics as part of Russia. Moreover, to restore them in the boundaries in which they existed before the current events. The question, I repeat, is different: what will we offer to the Donbas? New oligarchs, our flawed education and health? There should be an attractive economic model of our internal development, with religious and spiritual components....

...Today, information war is in full swing. It is necessary to understand: without state ideology there can be no effective counteraction....

...My grandson was called up to the special division of operational assignment of the Rosguard [National Guard]. A situation may arise that we will find ourselves on different sides of the barricades. Why does he have to shoot at his grandfather - for the good life of collective Chubais?...The gap between the poor and the rich is huge...



Divine Military Sanction

OE Watch Commentary: According to its constitution, Russia has no official state ideology. Over the past several years, however, the traditions of organized religion, particularly those associated with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), have played a prominent role in shaping the outline of a new ideology. As the two accompanying excerpts suggest, the role of Orthodoxy has grown particularly prominent among the Russian military.

The first excerpt from the military media source *Zvezda TV*, describes the arrival of a special icon to the “Vladimir Cathedral Church in Sevastopol.” As the article points out, this icon “was consecrated by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill at Easter services on 28 April.” The icon was then transported to Crimea, “where Prince Vladimir was baptized,” and will go on to spend the next year travelling among Russian military bases throughout the country, ending up “in Moscow in the Armed Forces Main Cathedral on the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory” (9 May 2020). General Andrey Kartapolov, chief of Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate, commented that “the sacred object will cover more than 57,000 kilometers by air, water, and land. It will be in more than 120 cities, over 150 cathedrals, and more than 300 formations and military units.” The article also explains that “President of Russia Vladimir Putin donated funds for creating the Icon.”



The icon of the Main Church of the Armed Forces of Russia was delivered to the Black Sea Fleet, 30 April 2019.
Source: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12228808@egNews_CCA
4.0

The second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source *Svobodnaya Pressa*, describes some of the religious background to the conflict in SE Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces. In the author’s assessment, the “dominant factor behind this conflict was still the Orthodox component.” He claims that Orthodox icons were “already noticeable on the barricades in Donetsk and Lugansk in March and April 2014,” and that according to one of his fellow separatists, who “considered himself a warrior of Christ, ... Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary, he argued, the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands...” He goes on to argue that “the unified Orthodox faith... remains one of the few brackets that unites them [Ukrainians] with the Orthodox residents of Russia.” The creation of a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church will presumably exacerbate tensions.

On the surface, the notion that the Russian Ministry of Defense would expend the time, effort and resources to transport and display a religious icon throughout the country might appear irrational. However, the symbols of the Russian Orthodox faith have long played a prominent role in providing military personnel with assurances of divine sanction, and will likely remain a complicating factor in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“... Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary ... the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands...”

Source: Pavel Nastin, Igor Baldin, “Образ Спаса Нерукотворного для главного храма ВС России привезли в Севастополь (The image of the Savior, not made by hands, for the main church of the Russian Armed Forces, was brought to Sevastopol),” *TV Zvezda*, 30 April 2019. <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20194301245-HhQ2f.html>

“...Today we solemnly transfer the Main Icon of the Holy Mandylion of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Cathedral to the Southern Military District command and the Crimean clergy,” said Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov, chief of Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate, at the solemn ceremony for transferring the Icon in the Vladimir Cathedral Church in Sevastopol.

...He pointed out that the Icon will be taken through military units and cathedrals throughout the country. “During the year it will be taken through many formations and military units of the Russian Army and through cathedrals of the Russian Orthodox Church so that not only thousands of servicemen, but also the Orthodox faithful in various corners of our Motherland can bow to the sacred object. The sacred object will cover more than 57,000 kilometers by air, water, and land. It will be in more than 120 cities, over 150 cathedrals, and more than 300 formations and military units,” Kartapolov emphasized.

He noted that the Icon is beginning its path in the City-Hero of Sevastopol, “on the land of Chersonesos,” where Prince Vladimir was baptized, and will end it in Moscow in the Armed Forces Main Cathedral on the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory....”

...President of Russia Vladimir Putin donated funds for creating the Icon. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill consecrated the Icon at Easter services on 28 April....

Source: Alexei Polubota, “С Богом в душе и с «калашом» в руках (With God in the soul and “Kalash” in your hands),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 28 April 2019. <https://svpressa.ru/society/article/231540/>

...The theme of defending Orthodoxy in connection with the events in Novorossiia is weakly marked in the public consciousness. Yes, in 2014, people of various convictions traveled from Russia to the Donbass. Supporters of the left, nationalist ideas... But the dominant, in my opinion, was still the Orthodox component. This was already noticeable on the barricades in Donetsk and Lugansk in March and April 2014, where Orthodox icons could be seen next to the patriotic posters. Later, at almost all the checkpoints there were also icons. In the days of the fiercest battles in the summer of 2014, a banner with the face of Jesus Christ was raised in the half-encircled Luhansk city by punishers of Lugansk....

My comrade, “Black Sea” considered himself a warrior of Christ. He insisted that Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary, he argued, the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands, and not be in a hurry to expose their cheeks to their enemies....

...In such conditions, it is the unified Orthodox faith that remains one of the few brackets that unites them with the Orthodox residents of Russia. If we take it broader, then Orthodoxy is perhaps the main thing in the near historical perspective, which allows us to speak of the unity of Great Russians and Little Russians, as constituent parts of the Russian super-ethnos.



Armenia's Interest in Remote Sensing

OE Watch Commentary: The Armenian government often gets attention for its acquisitions of weapons and equipment that improve a specific capability of its armed forces in opposition to Azerbaijan, like the recent purchase of Su-30SM fighters. The accompanying excerpted articles from *Lragir*, an independent news website from Armenia, report on a recent development that allows the Armenian government to utilize Russian satellites for remote sensing and discuss how the country's defense expenditures have increased.

The first article discusses the “cooperation agreement in the field of remote sensing signed between Russian Space Systems (a Roscosmos structure) and the Armenian company Geocosmos” and that the Russian and Armenian governments are considering “the creation of a joint enterprise capable of constructing remote sensing satellites as well as software and data processing services for imagery.” The article does not mention how Armenia will use the data provided by the satellites, but does note that the Armenian company Geocosmos, which “closely collaborates with the defense structures of Armenia,” reportedly “secured a contract with the Ministry of Defense,” and that the ministry has been “interested in conducting operational intelligence through satellite imagery.”



Artistic illustration of Russian satellite Canopus-B on terrestrial orbit.
Source: José Furtado via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Canopus-B.jpg>, CC 4.0/wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uzbekistan_Armed_Forces_Patch_(digital_camouflage).jpg, Public domain

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The second article reports the increase in Armenia's defense expenditures from 2017 to 2018, which was “an increase of 33 percent.” While the article does not offer a breakdown of Armenia's defense spending in that timeframe or a projection of expenditures for 2019, the agreement between Russian Space Systems and Geocosmos shows an area where the Armenian government is looking to add a capability and could have some funding for it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The ministry was interested in conducting operational intelligence through satellite imagery.”

Source: “Армения сможет воспользоваться данными российских спутников (Armenia can use data from Russian satellites),” *Lragir*, 30 April 2019. <https://www.lragir.am/ru/2019/04/30/147564/>

Armenia can now utilize data received by Russian orbital groups, as reported by (Nezavisimaya Gazeta's) Voennoe Obozrenie...the opportunity is provided for through an cooperation agreement in the field of remote sensing signed between Russian Space Systems (a Roscosmos structure) and the Armenian company Geocosmos...

Moscow and Yerevan have considered the creation of a joint enterprise capable of constructing remote sensing satellites as well as software and data processing services for imagery.

“Geocosmos” closely collaborates with the defense structures of Armenia. It was reported in 2017 that the company secured a contract with the Ministry of Defense. The ministry was interested in conducting operational intelligence through satellite imagery...

Source: “Военные расходы Армении в 2018 году составили \$609 миллионов (Armenia's military expenditures in 2018 consisted of \$609 million),” *Lragir*, 29 April 2019. <https://www.lragir.am/ru/2019/04/29/147436/>

Armenia's military expenditures in 2018 consisted of \$609 million, an increase of 33 percent from 2017. This comes from data presented by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)...



Uzbekistan's Choice of Partners for Joint Exercises

OE Watch Commentary: The Armed Forces of Uzbekistan have rarely taken part in joint military exercises in the years since the country became independent, though this has changed under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. When Uzbek units did participate with a foreign partner (or a security organization), it provided some insight into how the Uzbek government viewed threats and what it sought from a security cooperation partnership. The accompanying excerpted articles report on a two recent joint military exercises that Uzbek units took part in and shed light on what the Uzbek government might seek as it increases participation in security cooperation.

The article from *Kun.uz* reports on an exercise Uzbek units carried out with Tajiks at the “Fakhrabad training facility in Tajikistan” and how both “worked on their skills and shared knowledge of mountain training, engineering, first aid in the field and other skills.” The article also mentions the first ever Uzbek-Tajik joint exercise that took place last year. While the exercise appeared to focus more on building cooperation than conducting a joint operation, the fact that a second exercise took place within a year does demonstrate that the Uzbek government is putting some priority on a partnership with Tajikistan.

The article from *Gazeta.uz* reports on a joint exercise Uzbekistan hosted with units from Pakistan and Turkey around the same time as the other exercise. The exercise, titled “Commonwealth Shield 2019,” involved participants “blocking and eliminating illegally armed groups in mountainous terrain.” This scenario appears to be based on an incident in 2000, when Uzbek forces clashed with members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who had conducted an incursion into the country, and suggests that the incident had an impact on shaping the Uzbek view of threats.

It is difficult to determine what, if any, security cooperation partnership emerges from this exercise. Pakistan and Uzbekistan are already members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. A number of analysts in the region have predicted that the Uzbek government under Mirziyoyev will choose to increase security cooperation with either Russia or the US (or possibly China), but if these exercises are any indication, the government is looking at developing multiple partnerships. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Units of the joint operational force carried out reconnaissance of the area, blocking and eliminating illegally armed groups in mountainous terrain with the help of helicopters.”

Source: “Военные разведчики Узбекистана и Таджикистана закрепили сотрудничество на практике (Military scouts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan strengthened cooperation in practice),” *Kun.uz*, 28 April 2019. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2019/04/28/voyennyye-razvedchiki-uzbekistana-i-tadjikistana-zakrepili-sotrudnichestvo-na-praktike>

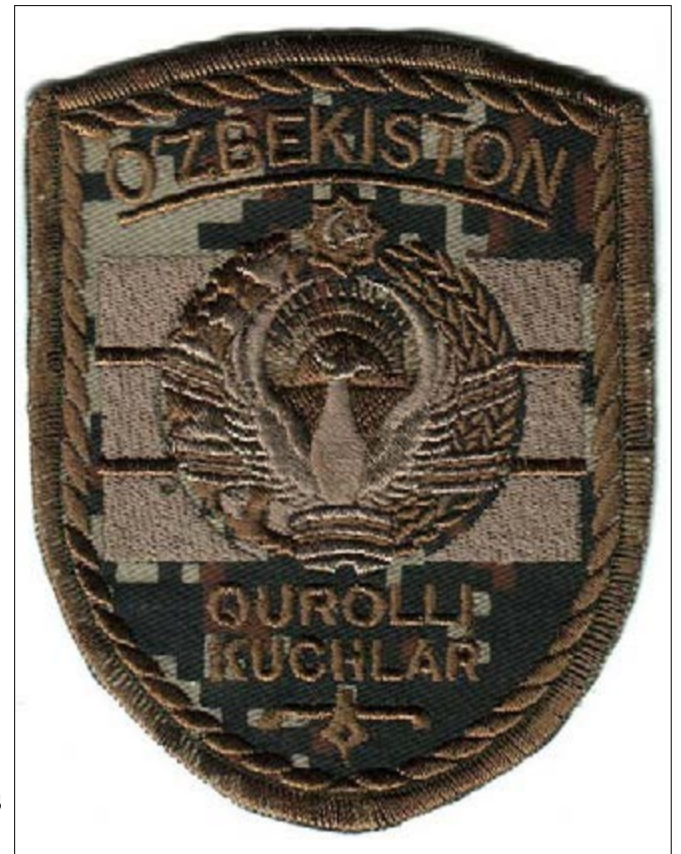
From 23-26 April, a joint training of reconnaissance personnel from units of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan took place at the Fakhrabad training facility in Tajikistan...

The officers and NCOs of the two countries jointly worked on their skills and shared knowledge of mountain training, engineering, first aid in the field, and other skills...in September 2018, in Tajikistan, a joint military exercise of special purpose units of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan took place for the first time under the title “Combat Commonwealth-2018”

Source: “Учения военных Узбекистана, Пакистана и Турции завершились (The military exercise of Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Turkey has ended),” *Gazeta.uz*, 27 April 2019. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/04/27/training/>

The joint exercise of the soldiers of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Turkey has ended...the main phase of the trilateral exercise “Commonwealth Shield 2019” took place at the Forish range...

Units of the joint operational force carried out reconnaissance of the area, blocking and eliminating illegally armed groups in mountainous terrain with the help of helicopters. Two Mi-24 helicopters of the armed forces of Uzbekistan were involved...



Uzbekistan Armed Forces Patch.

Source: Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uzbekistan_Armed_Forces_Patch_\(digital_camouflage\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uzbekistan_Armed_Forces_Patch_(digital_camouflage).jpg), Public domain



Chinese Shipbuilder Launches Amphibious Unmanned Surface Vehicle

OE Watch Commentary: A Chinese shipping industry source recently announced that the Wuchuan Shipbuilding Group and Qingdao Wujiang Technology Co., Ltd have successfully produced a high-speed amphibious unmanned surface vehicle (USV) called the “Sea Iguana.” The Sea Iguana recently passed multiple navigation tests at its facilities on the Yangtze. Wuchuan touts the unmanned amphibious system as a unique offering and a major milestone for Chinese defense companies in the marine defense sector.

Wuchuan, a subsidiary of China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) [武昌船舶], is located in Wuhan, Hunan province far up the Yangtze River in China’s interior. Wuchuan is one of China’s major shipbuilders, also producing Type 039A/B (Yuan) submarines and Type 072 (Yukan) landing ships among others.

Qingdao Wujiang Technology [青岛无疆技术有限公司], the private company partner in the research and development of the Sea Iguana, is located in Qingdao in Shandong province on China’s eastern coast. Qingdao Wujiang describes itself as an innovative enterprise focused on the research of core unmanned technology including deep learning algorithm, their sensors and control systems. It also produces unmanned boats called the Black Fish [黑鱼] and Hunting Shark [猎鲨] and an unmanned minesweeper codenamed Hound [猎犬].

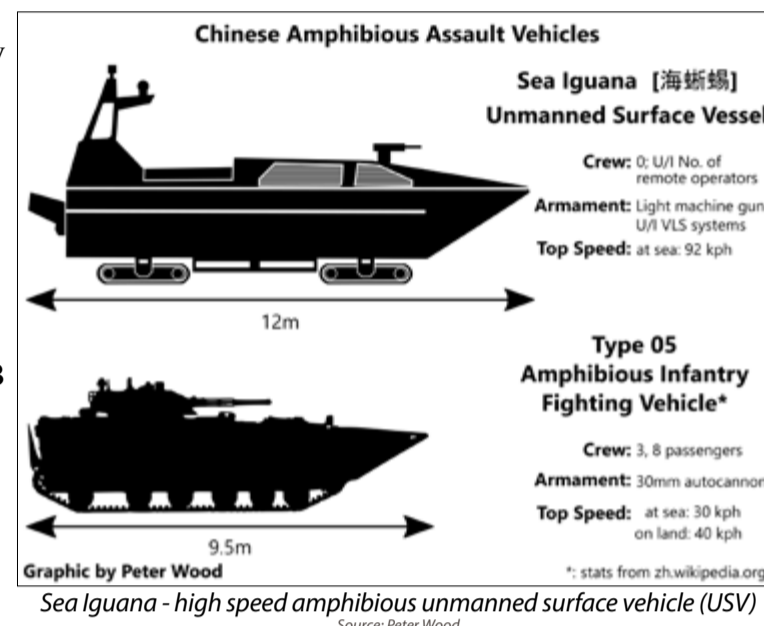
China Shipbuilding & Offshore International Company (CSOC), CSIC’s export arm, previously offered an armed unmanned vessel, the 15-meter JARI at the Zhuhai Airshow in 2018.

The system has low-profile retractable treads, likely to reduce drag in the water. While images from the factory were blurred, it is clear that the Sea Iguana uses two pump jets for propulsion in the water. To navigate, the USV uses the Beidou satellite navigation system. Artist depictions of the Sea Iguana show it firing machine guns and missiles from vertical launch cells built into its body.

Concepts of operations for the system displayed in 2018 depict several USVs variously joining a PLA amphibious assault or operating on their own, all linked to a broader battlefield network via a loitering aerial drone. Company materials indicate that the system has an operational range of between 600 and 1200 kilometers, but can only be controlled by systems 40-50 kilometers away, making the UAV intermediary control node necessary. As the accompanying article states, the system is also envisioned as conducting raids on its own or being used to carry commandos.

It is unclear whether the system will be adopted by the Chinese Navy itself or is primarily for export. Regardless, given the broad requirement for amphibious systems in China’s expanded Navy and Marine Corps, the associated technologies represent an important new capability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The “Sea Iguana” has excellent high-speed navigation and stealth characteristics. It can stealthily travel at a maximum speed of 50 knots at sea, and perform infiltration, intelligent patrol, fast assault, and amphibious landing, or deliver special operations forces depending on operational requirements.”



Source: “武船交付全球首款水陆两栖智能无人防务快艇 (Wuchuan delivers the world’s first amphibious intelligent unmanned defense fast boat),” *eWorldship* [国际船舶网], 12 April 2019. http://www.eworldship.com/html/2019/NewShipUnderConstruction_0412/148414.html

On April 8th, the world’s first amphibious intelligent unmanned defense speedboat “Sea Iguana,” built by Wuchuan Shipbuilding Group, successfully passed the factory acceptance at Wuchuan’s facility in Wuhan’s Shuangliu district and was officially delivered to Qingdao Wujiang Technology Co., Ltd.

The “Sea Iguana” is a model of military-civilian fusion

The “Sea Iguana” is jointly built by an unidentified subsidiary of Wuchuan Shipbuilding Group and Qingdao Wujiang Technology Co., Ltd., and has outstanding overall performance. It exemplifies deep military-civilian fusion and is a masterpiece of the defense sector representing the advanced, intelligent equipment China is developing for the marine defense market and international customer requirements. Defense equipment, marking the scientific research level of China’s intelligent marine defense equipment has entered the world’s advanced level....

The “Sea Iguana” power propulsion system is mainly composed of electromechanical liquid system equipment including the main engine, pump jet, and retractable tread system.

The “Sea Iguana” is 12 meters long, 4.14 meters wide, 1.65 meters tall, and has a draft of 0.55 meters. The entire body is made of an aluminum alloy material. The bottom uses a unique trimaran streamline structure and pump-jet propulsion technology. The bottom is equipped with a retractable tread mechanism, and a variety of weapons are installed in the main compartment.

Powerful information technology capabilities:

The “Sea Iguana” is equipped with advanced navigation, target acquisition and fire control systems including a Beidou navigation system, various radars, and computer information processing terminals. The speedboat may be controlled using a remote control system installed on combat platforms such as large ships. It is integrated with space-based navigation and positioning systems, land-based theater command system, and sea-based combat system platforms.

Advanced performance:

The “Sea Iguana” has excellent high-speed navigation and stealth characteristics. It can stealthily travel at a maximum speed of 50 knots at sea, and perform infiltration, intelligent patrol, fast assault, and amphibious landing, or deliver special operations forces depending on operational requirements. It is capable of carrying out coastal defense tasks including acting as a coastal sentry, and island/reef airport protection duties



Chinese Media Spotlight on PLA Marine Corps Jiaolong Commando Training

OE Watch Commentary: The China Global Television Network (CGTN) was recently given special access to the Jiaolong Commando [蛟龙突击队] training base in Sanya, Hainan province. Sanya is an important naval base for the PLA, its largest in the South China Sea and home to several large formations of submarines and destroyers.

The Jiaolong Commandos were founded in 2002 and have participated in anti-piracy missions and the evacuation of civilians from Yemen in 2015. The combination of these—and a clear desire by the central government to highlight its expanding military power has pushed the unit more into the spotlight.

The news article highlights various aspects of training and selection, noting that the unit includes a graduate of Tsinghua University (widely regarded as China's MIT). A regular comment regarding training of such units is the need to attract skilled soldiers with life experience from different backgrounds and higher education. Additional details about training from similar reporting indicate that there is a roughly 50 percent washout rate and recruits train in a full combat loadout weighing 15 kilograms (33 pounds). The unit's mission set reportedly includes conducting infiltration and reconnaissance missions defending and seizing islands in the South China Sea.

China's navy has expanded rapidly. Additional comprehensive amphibious ships (Type 071; Yuzhao class) that have PLA Navy Marine complements have been commissioned, increasing the need for specialized security and special mission troops. At the same time, the Marine Corps itself has been expanded from two brigades to six, with a total of seven planned by 2020. While depictions of the unit in Chinese popular media likely serve more as a recruitment tool than deterrent to neighboring countries, China is attempting to quickly improve its amphibious assault capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Jiaolong Commando Patch
Source: Peter Wood

“The corps was formed in the 1950s for amphibious assaults. Today, the goal is an expeditionary force for missions far beyond territorial waters.”

Source: “The Jiaolong Commandos,” CGTN, 15 April 2019. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e784d444d34457a6333566d54/index.html>

“Our special operations force is the vanguard in joint operations. We should be the point of the sword in joint operations, to strike terror into the enemy,” says Gong Kaifeng [龚凯峰], squadron officer of the Jiaolong Commandos.

26-year-old Gong has been a commando for seven years. He has participated in the 25th escort mission in the Gulf of Aden and joint international operations. For him, the biggest transformation is the Marine Corps is now combat-oriented and more international.

The corps was formed in the 1950s for amphibious assaults. Today, the goal is an expeditionary force for missions far beyond territorial waters.

According to a Defense Ministry statement, the Marine Corps was established to strengthen the structure of the Navy but later became its own branch. With more amphibious capabilities planned, expansion and reorganization are on the table, with equipment and training upgrades.

In contrast to its U.S. counterpart, the Chinese army does not have a unified Special Operations Force Command and the numbers of the PLA Marine Corps have never been officially disclosed.

As the Navy's emphasis on amphibious capabilities grows, the Jialong Commandos will be further integrated with other divisions in joint combat operations. The Navy will continue to prioritize the Marine Corps to make it one of the strongest in the world.

China: New Stealth Material Could Improve Infrared Concealment

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese researchers at the Suzhou Institute of Nano-Tech and Nano-Bionics [苏州纳米所] under the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Suzhou, Zhejiang Province have made a breakthrough in material science that allows them to better reduce an object's infrared signature. The results of this discovery, if capitalized by China's defense industry, could be integrated into a whole range of aircraft, ships and ground vehicles; as ground forces and naval vessels are increasingly vulnerable to detection by satellites and airborne sensors. The discovery can also support China's efforts in next-generation aircraft with low observability across the entire electromagnetic spectrum. While there are a multitude of applications, the new material could, for example, help improve aircrafts' survivability against air-to-air missiles with infrared guidance systems such as the AIM-9 (Sidewinder).



AIM 9L Sidewinder

Source: David Monniaux modified by FOX 52,

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/AIM_9L_Sidewinder_%28modified%29_copy.jpg, CC BY-SA 4

Reducing an object's observability to different wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum can range from radar-absorbent paints, to simply choosing a color that is less visible in certain levels of light. Reducing infrared signature is a difficult problem for material science because typically absorbing the heat or dispersing it is insufficient to significantly reduce signature or involves other trade-offs such as weight and greater rigidity. The breakthrough revolves around "Kevlar nanofiber aerogel (KNA)." The new material has additional utility due to its apparent flexibility. According to the article, layers of the material act as an insulator and absorb heat, only releasing it slowly in a way that is easy to mask with the ambient background temperature.

Early generations of these missiles were limited to tracking the strongest infrared (heat) signature on an enemy aircraft—the exhaust from the engine. With the development of more sophisticated sensors, they are now capable of attacking from other aspects including the front, detecting friction from the air heating the wings or other parts. Flexibility in a material then becomes even more important as it is necessary for proper shaping or application to movable parts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The new material is rugged, lightweight, and foldable, and it can escape detection by the “eyes” of infrared sensors without the need for additional energy.”

Source: “中国学者发现新型红外隐身材料 (Chinese Scientists Discover New Infrared Stealth Material),” *Science Net [科学网]*, 19 April 2019. <http://news.sciencenet.cn/htmlpaper/2019/4/201941613524158649883.shtml>

This reporter has learned from the Suzhou Institute of Nanotechnology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences [中科院苏州纳米所] that a research team led by Zhang Xuetong [张学同] recently discovered an infrared stealth material. The new material is rugged, lightweight, and foldable, and it can escape detection by the “eyes” of infrared sensors without the need for additional energy.

Everything in nature radiates infrared light. The ability of an object to radiate infrared light is directly related to its surface temperature. Therefore, no matter day or night, infrared detectors can measure the difference between the target and the background to obtain infrared images of different objects. Current infrared stealth technology operates on the principle of changing the target's heat emission characteristics, but most of these stealth materials have the disadvantages of continuous energy consumption, narrow application range and slow response.

In this study, technicians wanted to invent an infrared stealth material that could adapt to changing temperatures without the need for additional energy. They first created a strong but soft nanofiber aerogel film that has excellent thermal insulation properties. The film is immersed in a phase change material-polyethylene glycol (PEG) and subjected to water repellent treatment to obtain a composite material which is light, strong, strong, and has excellent infrared stealth performance.

Since the nanofiber aerogel film itself is a good heat insulating material, the polyethylene glycol stores heat and softens when heated, and re-hardens when heat is released during solidification, and the composite film covering the target under simulated sunlight. It can absorb heat from the sun to achieve the purpose of suppressing temperature rise, just like the surrounding environment, making the target object “invisible” to the infrared detector. When night comes, the film slowly releases heat to match the surrounding environment. Additionally, the use of a suitable thickness of aerogel film between the heating target and the phase change composite film can also make the hot object “stealth”.

“The new materials can be used not only for infrared stealth but also for electronic insulation materials, battery separator materials, etc. We predict that there will be very broad applications [for the material].” Said Zhang Xuetong.”



BeiDou – an Imminent Global Constellation

OE Watch Commentary: China has reportedly exported high-precision BeiDou (a Chinese satellite navigation system) products to more than 90 countries and regions and is on track to achieve its goal of having a global navigational system. A recent article published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, highlighted some of the accomplishments of the Navigation and Space-Time Technology Research Center of the National University of Defense Technology, stating that it was one of the driving forces behind the BeiDou system. Having started out with a small group of three young scientists and after suffering a number of major setbacks over the past 24 years, the research group has since grown into “an indispensable national team” for the construction of the navigation system.

Along with the BeiDou satellite systems, the team also developed a number of key systems including satellite receivers, navigation chips, service signal receiving and transmitting subsystems, and measurement and communications systems. These have given the BeiDou satellite navigation systems “superior performance capabilities, such as high-precision measurement and strong jamming countermeasures.

As the third accompanying passage from *Japan Times* discusses, China has spent at least \$9 billion on this celestial navigation system, which would cut its dependence on and rival the United States’ GPS system. The BeiDou navigational satellite system has come a long way since Chinese scientists first began to develop it. By the end of 2000, the first satellite system (BDS-1) was providing services to the entire country. By the end of 2012, the second system (BDS-2) was extending coverage to the Asia-Pacific region. According to the BeiDou website, during 27 December 2018 news conference at the state Council Information Office, Ran Chengqi, Director General of China Satellite Navigation Office and spokesperson of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, announced the completion of the BDS-3 Primary system. Four months later, on 20 April 2019, China successfully launched its 44th BDS satellite on 20 April, 2019. The satellite marks the beginning of an intensive campaign to deploy the BDS constellation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“This [the 44th BDS satellite launch] is the first BDS satellite launch in 2019, which marks the beginning of the intensive campaign of the BDS constellation deployment.”



Coverage polygon of BeiDou-1

Source: en: China-Japan-South_Korea__trilateral_meeting.png; Myouzskederivative work: Kriplozoik (talk)derivative work: Lux.r.ck via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beidou-coverage.png>, Public domain



Coverage polygon of BeiDou-2 in 2012

Source: Derivative work by Daveduv via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beidou_Navigation_Satellite_System_2012.png, CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)

Source: Wang Wowen and Hu Haowei, “点亮“北斗”，中国星座闪耀 (Light up the BeiDou, the Chinese Constellation Shines Globally),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 8 May 2019. <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/n1/2019/0503/c1011-31062066.html>

Light up the BeiDou, the Chinese Constellation Shines Globally

According to data from the China Satellite Navigation Office, high-precision BeiDou products have been exported to more than 90 countries and regions, and ground-based BeiDou technologies and product systems have been exported overseas. As one of the driving forces behind the BeiDou system, for more than 20 years, the Navigation and Space-Time Technology Research Center of the National University of Defense Technology has successively overcome [researched] nearly a hundred key satellite navigation core technologies, making the Chinese constellation shine globally.

They have successfully developed a number of core equipment such as satellite receivers, navigation [processing] chips, service signal receiving and transmitting subsystems, and measurement and communications systems. These have equipped China’s BeiDou satellite navigation system with superior performance capabilities, such as high-precision measurement and strong jamming countermeasures.

The research group with only three people at the beginning has now grown into an indispensable “national team” for the construction of China’s BeiDou satellite navigation system. During the independent innovation process to master key core technologies, a group of satellite navigation experts and top-notch innovative talents has emerged from the team. The team has trained more than 180 doctorate-holders and masters-holders, and won one special prize and one second prize for the State Science and Technology Progress Award. They have also produced 78 national invention patents, achieving a double harvest of both talented personnel and scientific research results.



Continued: BeiDou – an Imminent Global Constellation

Source: BaiDou website, accessed 13 May 2019. <http://en.beidou.gov.cn/>

The 44th BDS satellite was successfully launched onboard a Long March 3B rocket from Xichang Satellite Launch Center at 22:41 on April 20th, 2019. This is the first BDS satellite launch in 2019, which marks the beginning of the intensive campaign of the BDS constellation deployment.

Source: “China Building \$9 Billion BeiDou Rival to U.S.-Run GPS, Looks to Go Global,” *Japan Times*, 19 November 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/11/26/asia-pacific/china-building-9-billion-beidou-rival-u-s-run-gps-looks-go-global/>

China Building \$9 Billion BeiDou Rival to U.S.-Run GPS, Looks to Go Global

China is taking its rivalry with the U.S. to the heavens, spending at least \$9 billion to build a celestial navigation system and cut its dependence on the American-owned GPS amid heightening tensions between the two countries.

China Continues to Boost its Peacekeeping Role

OE Watch Commentary: China has been involved in United Nations peacekeeping missions for nearly three decades. Since 1990, China has dedicated over 30,000 peacekeepers to various missions around the world. While China was initially slow and antagonistic toward peacekeeping, over time the country began changing its stance and increasing its contribution, coinciding with the evolving international situation and to further its foreign policy agenda.

Most recently, according to the accompanying article extract, China’s envoy to the UN gave his commitment to continue contributing, and even boosting the role of Chinese peacekeepers. Not only has China now established a standby peacekeeping force of over 8,000 troops and two standby peacekeeping police contingents, which it can put into operation at any time, it is now actively helping other “Troop Contributing Countries” to build their own capacity of peacekeepers.



A Chinese peacekeeper attends a medal parade ceremony in Bukavu, South Kivu
Source: en:User: MONUSCO Photos via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Chinese_peacekeeper_attends_a_medal_parade_ceremony_in_Bukavu,_South_Kivu_\(10761340676\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Chinese_peacekeeper_attends_a_medal_parade_ceremony_in_Bukavu,_South_Kivu_(10761340676).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

Most of China’s aid has been, and continues to be within the African Union. According to the article, China will continue to provide Africa with \$100 million worth of military assistance and an additional \$80 million to “help Africa advance its standby force and rapid reaction force and support Africa in its efforts to enhance its own peacekeeping capacity.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Hong Xiao, “China Boosts Its Peacekeeping Role,” *China Daily Online*, 8 May 2019. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-05/09/content_9498765.htm

China Boosts Its Peacekeeping Role

...Ma Zhaoxu said that China, as a permanent member of the Security Council, was a major Troop Contributing Country (TCC) and financial contributor to Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs).

At present, over 2,500 Chinese peacekeepers are implementing mandates in eight task areas, working in such fields as land-mine removal, medical services, engineering, transportation and security.

Ma noted that a standby peacekeeping force of over 8,000 troops and two standby peacekeeping police contingents have been established and all have passed UN inspection.

China will continue to work actively on providing the African Union (AU) with military assistance worth \$100 million and an additional \$80 million to help “Africa advance its Africa standby force and rapid reaction force and support Africa in its efforts to enhance its own peacekeeping capacity,” he said.



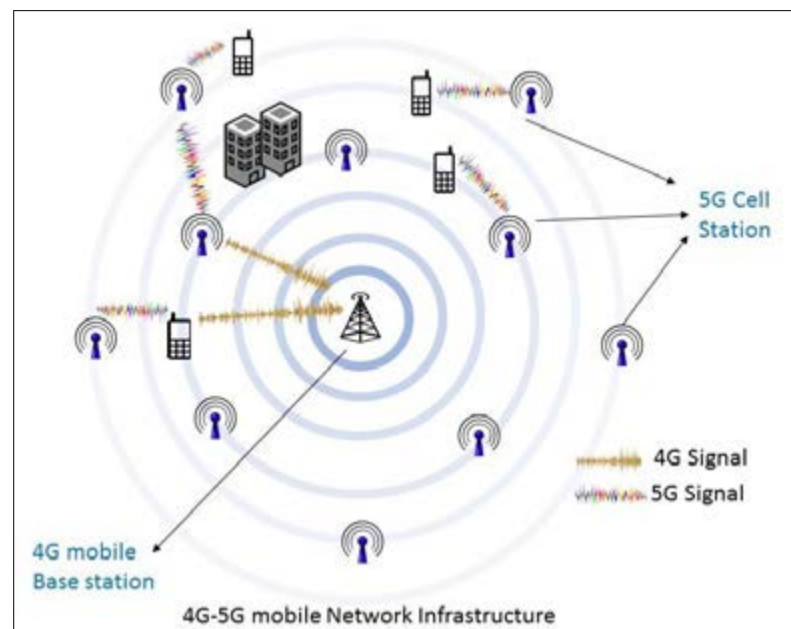
Chinese Border Patrol Using 5G Networks to Identify and Capture Smugglers at the Border

OE Watch Commentary: In April, the *South China Morning Post* reported that authorities planned to establish the country's first 5G checkpoint in Tonghua, in Jilin Province. According to the article, the border patrol unit there signed an agreement with China Mobile, the largest wireless network operator in the country, to build China's first 5G checkpoint network. In May, *Daily NK* reported that Chinese authorities had established a 5G network near Dandong, in Liaoning Province, to help crack down on smuggling and defection at the border.

5G technology, which still has yet to be fully rolled out, has been highly anticipated due to its low latency and high precision capacity. According to the *Daily NK*, 5G is now believed to be responsible for the arrest of Chinese smugglers. Because the previous 4G network often took too long to conduct facial recognition and analyze images, there was a lag in communication, which often allowed criminals enough time to escape before authorities realized who they were. Under a 5G network, smugglers have far less time because the recognition and transmission is almost instantaneous. According to *Daily NK*, border patrol units use virtual reality fluoroscopes, drones, and 4K-quality real-time video to monitor the region. China is also reportedly running test 5G network in 16 areas of the country. Not all these locations are announced.

The article in *South China Morning Post* concluded that China is competing with the United States to develop 5G technology, with its military applications still at an early stage. Using them to crack down on illegal activities at the border area is just the start. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“There is a possibility that Chinese authorities have given military units, including those in the border region, priority access to 5G technology to use for security purposes.”



5G mobile network diagram

Source: en: User:Goodtiming8871 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:5G_mobile_network_diagram.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: “Minnie Chan, “China to use 5G Technology to Tackle Flow of Refugees, Smuggled Goods Over North Korean Border,” *South China Morning Post*, 8 April 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3005285/china-use-5g-technology-tackle-flow-refugees-smuggled-goods>

A Chinese border patrol unit plans to use 5G technology to help stem the flow of refugees from North Korea and smuggled goods between the two countries, according to mainland Chinese media. The unit in Tonghua, Jilin province, signed an agreement with China Mobile – the largest wireless network operator – on March 23 to build the country's first 5G checkpoint at Unbong, or Yunfeng Reservoir in Chinese, Legal Daily reported.

... the new technologies would help to resolve the problem of blind spots as a result of the complex geography and challenging terrain in the area.

China and the US are competing for leadership on 5G technology but its military applications are still at an early stage. Antony Wong Dong, a military expert based in Macau, said the two countries were testing its use through trial applications. “The 5G [technology] is costly and there are many security problems that need to be resolved before it can be used for military purposes,” Wong said.

Source: “Mun Dong Hui, “Chinese Authorities Expand 5G Technology on Border with North Korea,” *Daily NK*, 13 May 2019. <https://www.dailynk.com/english/chinese-authorities-expand-5g-technology-on-border-with-north-korea/>

Chinese Authorities Expand 5G Technology on Border with North Korea

Dandong is the latest city slated to house a checkpoint employing 5G technology to crack down on smuggling and defections along the Sino-North Korea border, regional sources report.

“The previous 4G network took a long time to recognize people's faces and analyze the images, and there were many cases where the smugglers got away before the authorities showed up [...] However, the authorities are using a 5G network now and the smugglers have less time to escape.”

Border patrol units are known to employ virtual reality fluoroscopes, drones, and 4K-quality real-time video to monitor the border region in a significantly more hi-tech and comprehensive manner than before.

There is a possibility that Chinese authorities have given military units, including those in the border region, priority access to 5G technology to use for security purposes.



China's Reaction to the Terror Attacks in Sri Lanka

OE Watch Commentary: Although Sri Lanka has historically come under India's sphere of influence, China has increased its economic stake and investments in Sri Lanka in recent years. As a result, the country's security increasingly matters to China. Thus, the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka have attracted China's attention. The accompanying passage from the Chinese-language website *huanqiu.com* provides a Chinese perspective of the attacks.

The article describes the Sri Lanka attacks as “one of the most serious terrorist attacks on humanity since the September 11 event in the United States.” It discusses that Sri Lanka probably could have prevented the attacks on its soil given that it had prior notice of some terrorist cells in the country with plans for attacks. At the same time, it also acknowledges that the local cell that carried out the attack was neither well-known nor had a history of terrorism, making it easy to overlook. It claims that the key feature of the attacks were that they represented a true linkage between the international network or influence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) and the local cell in Sri Lanka that launched the massive series of bombings.



Southern Sri Lanka

Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_Sri_Lanka.png, Public Domain.

Turning to Chinese concerns, the article states that one Chinese citizen was killed; five citizens were missing or dead; and five others were injured. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, China will seek to work with Sri Lanka or any other country in joint counterterrorism training and cooperation. Despite the fact that the two countries do not share a border, China's call to Sri Lanka signals China's willingness for increased security cooperation between the two countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“A little-known local extremist organization, with the help of an international terrorist organization, launched a deadly attack.”

Source: “从新西兰到斯里兰卡 惨痛教训警示着恐怖主义对全世界的危害 (From New Zealand to Sri Lanka a painful lesson warning about the harms of terrorism to the world),” *huanqiu.com*, 24 April 2019. <http://world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2019-04/14778745>.

The series of bombings in the South Asian island nation of Sri Lanka shocked the international community. The number of victims has risen to more than 320, including dozens of foreign citizens, and more than 500 others were injured. This is one of the most serious terrorist attacks on humanity since the September 11 event in the United States.

From New Zealand to Sri Lanka, the bitter bloody incident has also warned the world of the dangers of extremism and terrorism. A little-known local extremist organization, with the help of an international terrorist organization, launched a deadly attack.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yan Shuang said at a press conference that according to the current status, one Chinese citizen was killed in the incident and five Chinese citizens have lost contact. In addition, five injured Chinese citizens were being treated in local hospitals, two of whom were seriously injured. Yan Shuang also said, “I would like to stress once again that we are willing to work with the international community including Sri Lanka to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and jointly safeguard regional and world peace and stability.”



Italy Joins the Belt and Road Initiative: Context, Interests, and Drivers

by Dario Cristiani

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/italy-joins-the-belt-and-road-initiative-context-interests-and-drivers/>

OE Watch Commentary: In March 2019, following several months of accelerated diplomatic movements between Italy and the People's Republic of China (PRC), the two countries signed a broad and comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Italy to join the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This makes Italy the first major European country, and the first Group of Seven (G7) member, to formalize its participation in the BRI project. As such, this development is particularly remarkable. In addition, many believe that this economic cooperation will inevitably turn into a greater geopolitical understanding between the two countries—thus reinforcing Beijing's influence in Europe and the Mediterranean region.

The MoU does not represent an international agreement, has no binding effect between the parties, and remains mostly generic in its contents and wording. The collaboration will focus primarily, but not exclusively, in the sectors of transport, logistics and infrastructure. Italy is not the first European country that China has reached out to under the framework of the BRI. The PRC's initial focus was primarily on Eastern and Central European countries, and several countries still waiting to become members of the EU. At the end of 2018, China first raised the bar by signing BRI agreements with Greece and Portugal. However, Italy's entry into this project changed the terms of the debate, given Italy's status as a European heavyweight: Rome is a founding state of the EU, a member of the G7, a long-standing NATO member, and remains among the top five European countries in terms of economic size, population, and political clout. Thus, Italy entering into a BRI agreement, even a non-binding one, is significant.

Economic considerations, geopolitical needs, and specific political conditions were at the core of Italian motivations in signing this MoU. The economic rationale is particularly significant, as Italy considers the BRI a vital opportunity to boost Italian exports to China. Italy has suffered from serious financial problems in recent years, and the recent deterioration of the global economic outlook is set to have an immediate impact on Rome, threatening to trigger a new economic recession. As such, Italian policymakers, whatever their political stripe, are always very focused on finding opportunities for Italian companies abroad as long as the Italian domestic market remains stagnant. Thus, Italians have focused mostly on the economic impact of the MoU: for Rome, the ten trade agreements on the table are worth about \$22.45 billion, and they are expected to provide a significant stimulus to the Italian economy as a whole. The Chinese consumer market is perceived as a terrific opportunity, particularly in light of the rising Chinese interest in Italian products.

In addition, Italy is eyeing Chinese investments in the infrastructure sector. The PRC is particularly interested in the port of Genoa—and above all in the port of Trieste, the historical Mediterranean gateway to trade and business with Danubian Europe. In an interview with the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, Wang Huiyao, the founder of the Center for China and Globalization (a Chinese think tank close to the government), said that “the Italian economy is going nowhere and joining the Belt and Road earlier than others is a great opportunity... Italy has many economic problems, Europe is in crisis and the BRI is the only major global investment plan.”

Another critical reason motivating the Italian approach is the shifting geopolitical reality of the Mediterranean. A number of external powers are trying to deepen their presence in this space. China is one of the foremost of these powers, and it is increasingly active in the Maghreb, in the Mashreq (primarily in Egypt), and in a number of European Mediterranean countries (for example, Greece, Serbia, and Croatia). Fear of American disengagement from the Mediterranean is raising concerns in Rome about future Italian security. Inevitably, this will lead Italy to interact with all those global powers who are becoming more involved in the Mediterranean.

Lastly, the Italian position towards China has been influenced by the peculiar political and ideological features of the current Italian government. The current governing “yellow-green coalition” is formed by the 5 Stars Movement (5S) and the League (previously the Northern League)—two parties that are both relatively new to power (although the League has shared government responsibilities in earlier cabinets led by Berlusconi). The less clearly defined historical legacies, institutions, and political cultures of these parties allow room for specific political personalities to drive the government's agenda, and shape its stance on global affairs. Luigi Di Maio, the Minister for Economic Development and leader of the 5S, was the major institutional actor in crafting this agreement—together with one of his undersecretaries, Michele Geracci, whose role in promoting the deepening of Italo-Chinese relations can be hardly underestimated. Geracci lived in China for years, has an unusually broad network of contacts in the country, and his role in government has been characterized since the very beginning by an intense focus on deepening ties with China.

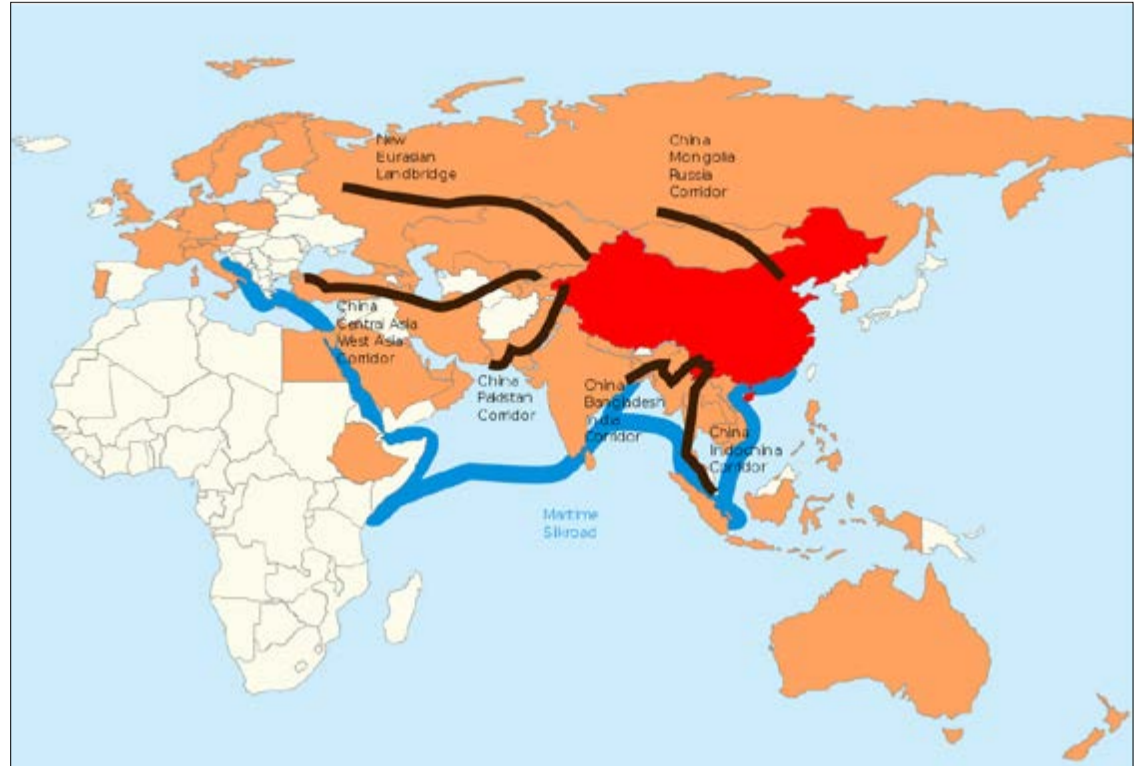
Italy is the first European heavyweight that formalized its participation in the BRI project. While the MoU is non-binding and somewhat generic, this latter element might be used in the future to further deepen relations in several strategic sectors. Economic and geopolitical considerations drive Italy's approach to the BRI. However, this evolution was also favored by the presence of elements in the current government particularly sympathetic with Chinese interests. Although the latter might change in the future if the government changes (or if less pro-China elements within the 5S movement emerge), economic and geopolitical considerations are set to remain significant in the coming years. Given the geopolitical significance of the BRI, the evolution of Italian relations with China will be particularly significant—not only from an economic standpoint, but also for the future of the European and Mediterranean geopolitical equations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Cristiani)**



China's Reach into the Mediterranean: One Belt One Road Initiative (Belt and Road Initiative)

OE Watch Commentary: China's reach into the Mediterranean through its One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR) is a cause for concern among some European countries. [OBOR is also called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).] OBOR was announced in 2013 by China to encompass the historic Silk Road trade route which would run across Eurasia and extend through sixty countries including Turkey and some European countries. The accompanying articles from the Turkish press discuss Turkey's role in this initiative and the implications of OBOR for European countries.

The first article from October 2018 in the pro-government *Daily Sabah* quotes a Chinese expert as saying that Turkey will play an essential role in China's OBOR project due to its geostrategic location. The article notes that Xing Guangcheng from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated that some have voiced concerns over this project only serving China, due to Chinese originated loans which may pave the way to dependence on China the region. However, he claims that China intends to design the project to benefit other countries as well. China has signed multilateral trade agreements with many countries including Turkey.



One Belt One Road
Source: Lommes via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:One-belt-one-road.svg#/media/File:One-belt-one-road.svg>, CC BY-SA 4.0

in

Six months later, as noted in the second article from state funded *Anadolu Ajansı*, China's activities in the Mediterranean as part of the OBOR project are analyzed as strengthening the European leg of OBOR. Chinese firms are already heavily invested in a marina in Greece and have signed an agreement with Italy to ensure trade privileges. Thus, it appears that China is extending its influence to Europe especially from the Adriatic to Mediterranean Seas, and working on trade routes to Israel, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. The article states that these activities are not merely limited to China's trade ambitions. In fact, these Chinese activities show that China is turning the Eastern Mediterranean into the South China Sea in terms of logistics and supply routes security. China's ambitions and some EU member countries' willingness to open their doors to China's activities have caused tension among EU members. Despite China's claims that this project will contribute to improving relations with the EU, there is concern that it will lead to increased Chinese dominance in Europe. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“[These developments] will secure Chinese commercial activities in the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of logistics and supply security as if China is conducting these activities in the South China Sea.”

Source: Mustafa Kırıkçıoğlu, “Chinese experts point to Turkey’s central role in Belt and Road Initiative,” *Daily Sabah*, 24 October 2018. <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2018/10/25/chinese-experts-point-to-turkeys-central-role-in-belt-and-road-initiative>

Turkey, given its central location, will play a pivotal role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese experts have said.

They also rejected claims that Beijing would use the funds and loans for the project to expand its influence over the recipient countries.

Speaking at an event in Ankara, the director general of the Institute for Borderland Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Xing Guangcheng said that because of Turkey's geographical location, the country holds a significant position in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR), another name for BRI, project...

“Some experts are presenting OBOR as a project that only serves China's interest. However, China wants to establish a common initiative with other countries. This is a win-win project,” he said.

Source: Selim Han Yeniçun, “Çin'in Akdeniz'deki ticari hamleleri AB'yi kaygılandırıyor (China's commercial moves in the Mediterranean concern the EU),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 4 April 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/cinin-akdeniz-deki-ticari-hamleleri-abyi-kaygilandiriyor/1456722>

The Chinese companies, which will operate the port of Piraeus in Greece, and with Italy's participation in the “Belt and Road” project, have gotten an advantage over improving the transportation routes starting from the Trieste Port to Adriatic Sea and central Europe. In terms of commerce, these developments will make the EU a Chinese neighbor. At the same time, they will secure the Chinese commercial activities in the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of logistics and supply security as if China is conducting these activities in the South China Sea.

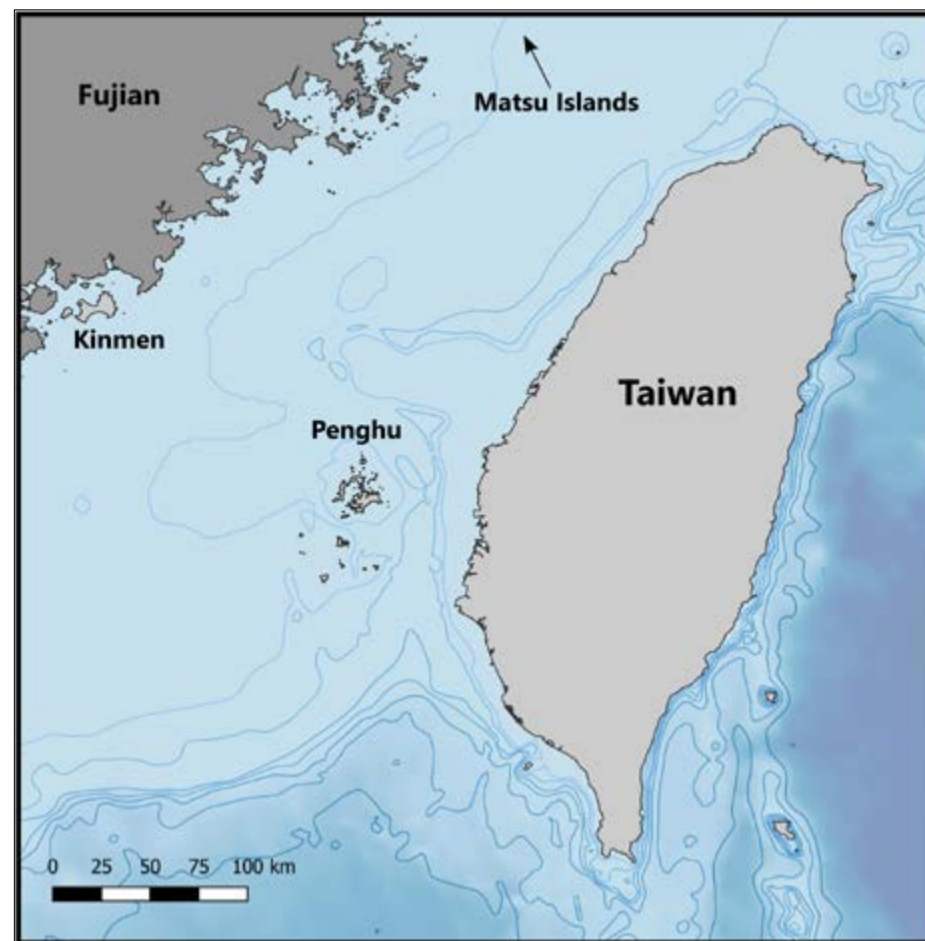
China is not only constructing a trade highway in Italy but also it is through Israel, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Although China considers its investments as within scope of “peaceful development,” it has caused reaction from France and Germany which are politically and economically dominant [in the region].



Taiwan Plans Additional Forward Operations Bases for Special Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Taiwan's Ministry of National Security is apparently planning to build additional bases on the Kinmen and Penghu island groups for its 101st Recon Battalion, also known as the Sea Dragon Frogmen. Kinmen lies less than 2 kilometers from Xiamen, a major city in Fujian province. Fujian's coastline is dotted with numerous small islands and islets, of which the Kinmen, Wuqiu and Matsu Islands (see map) are controlled by Taiwan. The Penghu Island Group lies roughly midway in the Taiwan Strait between Fujian Province and Taiwan proper. In the 1950s Kinmen was subjected to heavy bombardment by the PLA, and it and Penghu are likely to be the focal point of any future conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan's 2017 Quadrennial Defense Review emphasizes "multi-domain deterrence" and asymmetric responses to China's military buildup. The Defense White Paper issued the same year describes ROC forces as "tak[ing] advantage of favorable timing and space to strike the enemy's center of gravity and critical weakness to disrupt their battle tempo and paralyze their capabilities for achieving partial advantage with the aim of "small taking on large, weak striking strong." The 101st Recon Battalion has historically conducted reconnaissance and infiltration operations, and would likely be a major part of operations meant to blunt an attack by the PLA. As the accompanying article describes, these forward operating bases would help speed up their ability to deploy in a crisis.



Kinmen and Penghu.
Source: Graphic by Peter Wood.

Mainland China for its part has dramatically increased the size of its amphibious forces, planning to bring the Marine Corps up from two brigades to seven by 2020. Special Forces units within the PLA Ground Forces, Navy and Air Force have all been given a much higher profile over the last five years, including the "frogmen" of the PLA Navy's Jiaolong Commandos (see "Chinese Media Spotlight on PLA Marine Corps Jiaolong Commando Training" in this issue of *OE Watch*). Chinese media sources note that in addition to conventional forces, coastal militia units in Fujian are also trained to act as sentries against enemy infiltration. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The upgraded facilities and increased mobility of the Army’s frogmen units will increase Taiwan’s capabilities in waging asymmetric warfare in the event of a Chinese invasion.”

Source: “Taiwan plans new forward bases for Army Frogmen on Kinmen and Penghu,” *Taiwan News*, 21 April 2019. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3685045refugees-smuggled-goods>

The Taiwanese military has reportedly begun accepting bids from contractors for the development of two forward operating bases and equipment upgrades for the Taiwan Army's 101st Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB-101st), better known as the "Sea Dragon Frogmen" [海龍蛙兵] special forces. The Ministry of National Defense (MND) has drafted plans to upgrade special port facilities on the outlying islands of Kinmen [金門], and Penghu [澎湖], to assist in the rapid deployment of Frogman units in the Taiwan Strait.

The MND is prepared to invest over NT\$400 million (US\$12.9 million) into the project, with NT\$260 million going to the base in Kinmen, and NT\$165 million for the facilities in Penghu. With China's increasingly threatening actions around Taiwan and in the South China Sea, the MND views rapid response capabilities around Taiwan's outlying islands a top priority for national defense. UDN reports that the new forward bases planned for the ARB-101st are the result of strategic consultations with U.S. military officials.

The upgraded facilities and increased mobility of the Army's frogmen units will increase Taiwan's capabilities in waging asymmetric warfare in the event of a Chinese invasion.

In addition to potential invasion scenarios, the ARB-101st may also be employed to occasionally survey the numerous minor islands in the Taiwan Strait, which might serve as outposts for illegal activity or potential threats to national security if they are not secured.

Currently, most of the speedboats and other equipment for maritime operations for the ARB-101st are stored on inland military bases and must be towed to the seashore. After the forward seaside facilities are upgraded, the frogmen will be able to deploy much faster to better safeguard Taiwan's territory against potential threats.



Indonesia: Still Vulnerable to ISIS Ideology

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 April, the Indonesian language website *tempo.com* published the excerpted article providing the perspective of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to Indonesia. According to this council (Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body comprised of many Indonesian Muslim groups), the ideology of the Caliphate that ISIS instilled in its followers has spread to various countries, including Indonesia. Therefore, the military destruction of the 'Caliphate' and its demise in the Middle East is no reason to let down vigilance about the group's influence in Indonesia.

The Deputy Secretary of the MUI notes that new information technologies helped ISIS in disseminating its ideology, which has particularly affected students. He also blames the proscribed Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) for espousing a similar ideology to ISIS about establishing a Caliphate. While HTI is different than ISIS in many other ways, including its general avoidance of using violence, HTI's praise of the Caliphate made it easier for ISIS to find fertile ground for its message. The end result was that several hundred Indonesians joined ISIS and some have even returned back home to launch attacks.

One solution to the problem of ISIS's ideological influence, according to another university lecturer cited in the article, is to continue the ban on HTI and related groups. As long as youths are exposed to HTI's ideas, future iterations of terrorist groups like ISIS will continue to attract followers. The university lecturer also acknowledges that it is not only students but also some police, military and even government officials who believe in the Caliphate ideology. Therefore, although religious leaders and leading intellectuals are willing to combat the ideology, it will be a long way before they feel confident that the Indonesian citizenry is immune to the ideology, which they refer to as a "virus." **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Indonesian Ulema Council Logo

Source: Indonesian Ulema Council via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_Majelis_Ulama_Indonesia_\(مجلس_علماء_إندونيسيا\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_Majelis_Ulama_Indonesia_(مجلس_علماء_إندونيسيا).svg), Public Domain.

“The idea of the Caliphate still dominates their thoughts.”

Source: “Meski ISIS Keok, Khilafah Tetap Harus Diwaspadai (Even though ISIS is in Trouble, the Caliphate Must Be Monitored),” *tempo.com*, 2 April 2019. <https://dunia.tempo.co/read/1200617/pemimpin-isis-baghdadi-muncul-di-video-puji-teror-sri-lanka>

The Deputy Secretary of the MUI Study and Research Commission Ali M Abdillah said the Caliphate ideology and violence still had to be monitored even though ISIS had been destroyed on the military front. “The ideology has spread widely in various countries, including Indonesia,” Ali said in Jakarta. Exploiting sympathizers and information technology carrying the Caliphate ideology and violence thus far has spread the “virus” massively, including targeting students as well as those in offices and institutional environments. In addition to ISIS sympathizers, the Caliphate ideology was also carried by activists from Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which the government has banned institutionally.

“The idea and idea of the Caliphate still dominates their thoughts,” said the lecturer at the University of Indonesia (Unusia) University. Therefore, the community still has to be “warded off” so that it is not affected by that ideology. According to him there must be decisive action against people or parties who are proven to carry the Caliphate ideology in Indonesia.



Changes for Indian Forces after Pulwama

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 February 2019, a terrorist attack on India's Central Reserve Police Force in the Pulwama District killed over 40 and led to India carrying out retaliatory airstrikes on militant targets inside Pakistan. Since then, the government of India has sought to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces along the line of control (LOC). The accompanying excerpted articles discuss some of these efforts, which entail a change to the Indian military's procurement procedures, and the construction of ammunition storage facilities.

The article from *The Times of India* reports on a recent change to the process of how the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force are able to procure weapons and equipment, specifically "to enhance their operational preparedness along the border with Pakistan." The article notes that the changes include "allowing the three services to procure required weapons and equipment from a single vendor" and that "the threshold granted to the three forces (a) couple of weeks ago for each proposal is around Rs 300 crore (around \$43 million)." While the article does not mention it, the change reportedly took place to help fast track purchases of ammunition.

The article from *The Tribune* discusses the Indian Army's planned construction of four ammunition storage facilities with the help of the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC). The article mentions how the storage facilities will be at "key locations facing China and Pakistan" and will hold a "range of ammunition used by the Army — bullets, rockets, anti-tank, surface-to-air missiles, etc." The government claims that the storage facilities will be "protected against strikes like those seen during the aerial engagement on 27 February when Pakistan air force jets targeted the army installations along the Line of Control" and that they will have a storage capacity of 200 metric tonnes. The article also notes how the Indian Army had previously "approached the NHPC" last year, but only recently finalized the deal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Source: Central Intelligence Agency via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Line_of_Control#/media/File:Kashmir_map.jpg, Public domain

“The government also relaxed certain rules to cut delays in military purchase like allowing the three services to procure required weapons and equipment from a single vendor.”

Source: “Post Pulwama, Centre grants more financial powers to 3 services to buy weapons,” *The Times of India*, 16 April 2019.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/post-pulwama-centre-grants-more-financial-powers-to-3-services-to-buy-weapons/>

In the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, the government has granted emergency powers to the three services to procure weapons and military hardware to enhance their operational preparedness along the border with Pakistan, official sources said.

The government also relaxed certain rules to cut delays in military purchase like allowing the three services to procure required weapons and equipment from a single vendor...

Now, the government has granted more powers to the Army, Navy and the Indian Air Force to go for buying of critical weapons and equipment to help them effectively deal with any hostilities along the border with Pakistan....Sources said the threshold granted to the three forces (a) couple of weeks ago for each proposal is around Rs 300 crore...

Source: “Army to store ammo in caves under Himalayas,” *The Tribune*, 26 April 2019.

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/army-to-store-ammo-in-caves-under-himalayas/763821.html>

The Army has joined hands with the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) to construct underground caverns for storage of ammunition at four locations in the Himalayas.

The services of the NHPC have been sought since it has a huge experience in making dams with underground tunnels in the mountains. The Army's size of ammunition storage caverns is almost the same strength as what tunnels are made for dams by the NHPC.

These ammunition storage caverns (large caves) will come up at key locations facing China and Pakistan. A range of ammunition used by the Army — bullets, rockets, anti-tank, surface-to-air missiles, etc., can be stored in the caverns.

...it's protected against strikes like those seen during the aerial engagement on February 27 when Pakistan air force jets targeted the army installations along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir...Each of these will have storage capacity of 200 metric tonnes.

The Army had earlier tried to make these caverns on its own in Sikkim and Tawang. However, seepage, dampness and other geological challenges hampered the plans. In November last year, the Army approached the NHPC.



Russian-Iranian Competition in Aleppo

OE Watch Commentary: A news story published by Turkey's state-run *Anadolu Agency* on 19 April claimed that clashes had occurred between Iranian-backed forces and Russian-backed forces near Aleppo International Airport (in addition to separate clashes in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor). Despite an official denial by the Syrian military, the clashes were also reported by other pro-opposition media outlets, including *al-Araby al-Jadid*, which added that they subsided only after Russian military aircraft hovered overhead. Aleppo's airport and the adjacent military airbase are thought to be under the direct control of Iran's Quds Force and are a key node for supplying Iran's military presence in Aleppo Province.

Iranian influence in Aleppo city and province is substantial. At the local level, Iran exerts influence through a complex web of local partnerships that are subsumed under the umbrella of the Local Defense Forces (LDF). According to the accompanying excerpt from the Lebanese news website *al-Modon*, Russia has invested in training, arming and growing its own local partners in Aleppo and has even provided them with Russian Military Police uniforms. Still, according to the article, Russia's key partner is "a weak competitor to the Iranian militias in Aleppo" and Russia has "few military posts and bases in Aleppo compared to those of the Revolutionary Guards."

According to the *Anadolu Agency* article, which is based on an anonymous source, the clashes took place after pro-Iran forces refused a Russian order to vacate the airport. Russia apparently seeks to reopen the airport to civilian and commercial traffic, in order to help revive the moribund Syrian economy. Curbing Iranian strength in the province may also be a motivation, which is problematic according to the fourth accompanying excerpt, written by Abd al-Bari Atwan, a London-based Palestinian who is among the region's most prominent political commentators. In his view, Russian policy ought to "respect the particularities of the Syrian-Iranian relationship and the reasons behind the existence of Iranian bases in Syria, rather than looking at this presence from the Israeli angle only."

The frequency of fighting between Russian and Iranian proxies has been on the uptick in several parts of Syria over the past year. Clashes in Aleppo, though, are of particular significance due not only to Iran's substantial military presence in the area but also to Turkey's influence and interests there. Recent Israeli attacks on Iranian facilities in the province and the proximity of jihadist-controlled territory in Idlib Province are additional elements feeding the multi-polar power dynamics evolving in Aleppo. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“... *Russia has few military posts and bases in Aleppo compared to those of the Revolutionary Guards* ...”

Source: سوريا.. قتلى وجرحى باشتباكات بين قوات روسية وأخرى إيرانية
“Syria... Dead and Wounded in Clashes Between Russian and Iranian Forces,” *Anadolu Agency*, 19 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y6n42kl5>

In Aleppo, clashes between the two sides took place in the international airport to the east of the city. It is unknown whether they resulted in casualties. The source did clarify that the Aleppo clashes came after requests by Russian forces for the IRGC and Iranian-backed terrorist groups to leave the airport.

Source: مطار حلب الدولي: روسيا تريد إخلاء المليشيات الإيرانية؟
“Aleppo International Airport: Does Russia Seek to Clear Iranian Militias?” *al-Modon*, 20 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yyokqgpy>

These developments are part of a Russian attempt to pressure the Iranian militias out of Aleppo International Airport, under the pretext of reopening it for civil transportation and commercial freight after a pause of more than 7 years. Russia says the reopening of the airport is a vital demand for the industrial and commercial sectors in Aleppo, in addition to its importance for domestic passenger transport, given the poor road conditions between Aleppo and the rest of the provinces...

Iran recognizes the importance of the Aleppo airports in terms of its continued influence and superiority at the expense of the Russian presence, and therefore refuses to hand them over. They are considered the fastest and safest supply route for their militias in north Syria, without which their other military bases in Aleppo would lose their safe supply line...

Russia has few military posts and bases in Aleppo compared to those of the Revolutionary Guards...

Russia succeeded in attracting the “Jerusalem Brigade” (Liwa al-Quds) militia. Since the beginning of 2019, it has increased the number of its members more than three-fold, to nearly 5,000. It has increased its armament and training to be a strong competitor. Hundreds of its members have been deployed in Handarat, al-Malah and al-Zahra. Russia has, however, failed to attract tribal and local militias. Despite the arming, training and support of the “Jerusalem Brigade,” it remains a weak competitor to the Iranian militias in Aleppo and lost many of its members in its first confrontation with Iranian militias in March.

Source: صراع روسي إيراني للسيطرة على حلب
Adnan Ahmed. “Russian-Iranian Struggle for Control over Aleppo,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 21 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y58htuox>

According to local sources, the clashes occurred in the vicinity of Aleppo International Airport and stopped only after a Russian aircraft flew over the area...

At the beginning of April, friction broke out between the two sides in Aleppo when the Russian military police arrested a number of elements of the “resistance movement” militia backed by Iran in the city center. This came after a group of the Revolutionary Guards intercepted a Russian military police patrol in Jabal Azan south of the city of Aleppo, and prevented it from passing towards the base of “Sayyida Rukaya.” Iranian officers asked the Russian military police to leave because they entered an Iranian military zone...

Russia deployed hundreds of members of the new “Jerusalem Brigade” in the Al Zahraa neighborhood and the northern outskirts of the new Aleppo district. They established a major concentration inside the artillery battalion near the Russian observation post at the Zahraa Association, wearing uniforms of the Russian military police and using modern and sophisticated logistics techniques. Military experts said that Moscow was seeking to rely on the “Jerusalem Brigade” to be a military arm of Russia in the face of the Iranian-sponsored militias, so as not to force the Russian military police directly into such confrontations.

Source: ما هي قصة الاشتباكات الروسية الإيرانية في دير الزور وحلب؟
Abd al-Bari Atwan. “What’s the Story of the Russian-Iranian Clashes in Deir Ezzor and Aleppo?” *Rai al-Youm*, 21 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y2tb64ja>

Just as other Russian leaders demand understanding and respect of their interests, they must respect the interests and feelings of their allies at the same time and put an end to this Israeli arrogance, stop giving Netanyahu free gifts, and respect the particularities of the Syrian-Iranian relationship and the reasons behind the existence of Iranian bases in Syria, rather than looking at this presence from the Israeli angle only.

Stroytransgaz: “A Complement to Russian Security and Military Influence”

OE Watch Commentary: In late April 2019, following a visit to Damascus by Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov, Russian and Syrian news outlets reported on an agreement for a Russian entity to “lease” the container terminal in the Syrian port of Tartous. The terminal is adjacent to a naval base which is already under lease to the Russian Navy (for 49 years and with the option to renew). The first accompanying excerpt from the pro-government Syrian newspaper *al-Watan*, provides some details on the recent agreement, which has yet to be ratified by the Syrian parliament. Citing Syria’s minister of transport, it notes that the deal does not call for the commercial port to be handed over to Russian entities, but rather establishes “a partnership in administering, expanding and operating the Tartous port.” At a cost of over half a billion dollars, the major upgrades will require many years to turn a profit, which the minister argues is the reason the contract length was set at 49 years. He expects the port capacity to increase from 20,000 to 2 million containers received annually, and explains that “the presence of a global company invested in the port will create a positive atmosphere” that will encourage global shipping companies to use it.

The “global company” that is to implement the project is Stroytransgaz (STG Group), a Russian construction holding company that has been active in Syria since prior to the current conflict. In 2014, the US Treasury Department placed sanctions on Stroytransgaz and several of its divisions and subsidiaries, as well as on the investment group that controls the company (Volga Group) and the owner of that investment group (Gennady Timchenko). Somewhat ironically, the Syrian government expects the presence of Stroytransgaz to help it skirt sanctions of its own, or in the words of Syria’s minister of transport, it will “reduce the effects of the oppressive blockade imposed on Syria and help deliver needs and necessities to the Syrian people.”

Stroytransgaz has emerged as one of Russia’s key private sector vehicles for exploiting and controlling Syria’s strategic resources. The second accompanying article, from the Lebanese news website *al-Modon*, describes it as “a speeding train devouring all Syrian contracts.” The Tartous Port agreement came on the heels of a finalized contract for Stroytransgaz to upgrade and administer Syria’s large fertilizer factories in Homs Province. Last year, the company outmaneuvered Iranian firms to gain control over Syria’s main phosphate deposits, giving it a virtual monopoly on phosphate fertilizer production in Syria (see “Russia and Iran Compete for Syria’s Phosphates,” in the June 2018 issue of *OE Watch*). Stroytransgaz and its affiliates have also obtained contracts to build irrigation systems, a gas processing plant in Homs Province, and even a large tourist facility on the Syrian coast, near Tartous. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Gennady Timchenko during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin (2018).
Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gennady_Timchenko,_2018.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“...Stroytransgaz is like a speeding train devouring all Syrian contracts...”

Source:

Mohammed Rakan Moustafa. “Al-Watan Publishes Details on the Syria-Russian Agreement for Tartous Port,” *al-Watan*, 25 April 2019. <http://alwatan.sy/archives/195867> (translation via: <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/features/50046/details-emerge-of-syrian-russian-agreement-over-the-tartous-port.html>)

الوطن» تنشر تفاصيل الاتفاق السوري الروسي لميناء طرطوس

Transport Minister Ali Hammoud, denied reports on social media that Tartous port was being rented or bartered away with the Russians, saying that the investment contract was for a partnership in administering, expanding and operating the Tartous port, according to the regulations used for partnerships between the public and private sector in Syria, and that it would be signed by the private Russian Stroytransgaz company. Hammoud told *Al-Watan* that the contract period had been set at 49 years because according to the economic feasibility study the project needed this long to achieve the necessary profits for both sides...

The Minister for Transport said that this investment would help break the blockade and reduce the oppressive sanctions, and said: “The presence of a global company invested in the port will create a positive atmosphere for global shipping and encourage them to use the harbor, which will reduce the effects of the oppressive blockade imposed on Syria and help deliver needs and necessities to the Syrian people”...

The current depth is between four and 13 meters and after the expansion it will see two million containers annually. He noted that the port now receives about 20,000 containers annually, which means an increase tens of times over.

Source:

Mohanad al-Hajj Ali. “The Man who is Buying Syria,” *al-Modon*, 26 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5geymwn>

الرجل الذي يشتري سوريا

The same is true for the rest of the contracts, such as the South Middle Area Gas Plant (producing 7 million cubic meters of gas per day) and the Tuweinan gas plant (producing about 1.4 million cubic meters of gas per day). The contract signed between the General Organization of Chemical Industries and the Russian company Stroytransgaz goes into effect on March 17, to invest in fertilizer factories in Homs. The investment period will be 40 years with a value of not less than 200 million Dollars. 50 years is also the length of the contract between the General Organization of Geology and Mineral Resources of Syria and Stroytransgaz to invest and extract phosphate from the al-Sharqiya mines (2.2 million tons annually). The People’s Assembly ratified this resolution last year.

In other words, the Timchenko-owned Stroytransgaz is like a speeding train devouring all Syrian contracts. It is the state’s partner in its resources, and also a complement to Russian security and military influence.



The Syrian Army's Interest in Tunnel Warfare

OE Watch Commentary: An article in the latest issue of the Syrian military's bimonthly magazine *Jaysh al-Shaab* ("The People's Army"), points to their interest in subterranean warfare. Titled "Tunnel Wars," the article provides a largely detail-free overview of subterranean warfare in the Syrian conflict and effectively conveys the Syrian military's continued interest in the topic. The author emphasizes the effectiveness and asymmetry of subterranean operations, noting that the "ideal use of land and tunnels, whether defensively or offensively," will enable army units to "maintain the element of surprise and the initiative and to complete their missions in the most efficient and least costly manner." Acquiring subterranean combat capabilities is of utmost importance in his estimation, but it requires "high-level training for fighting units." Such training, he notes elsewhere in the article, has already been set in motion, as the Syrian Army adapted to rebel tunneling by "reorienting forces and training to confront this complicated and difficult form of urban warfare."



Syrian military media correspondent reporting from a seized underground bunker.

Source: Syria Military Media YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSznmM4N_Ow, Public Domain

Jaysh al-Shaab is published by the Syrian Army's "Political Department". The department was created by Hafez al-Assad in 1971, as one of his first initiatives after successfully consolidating power as Syria's Baathist president. The department has extensive writ, including conscript training and morale maintenance, as well as oversight of the various branches of the military media. Its efforts over the past eight years are arguably a key reason for the Syrian Army's institutional survival.

Insurgent use of tunnels has been of great interest to the Political Department since the early days of the Syrian rebellion. Throughout the conflict, its "military media" channel has produced video reports from inside tunnels that were purportedly seized from rebels. As with other military media reports, these dispatches are for the most part paeans to the Syrian Army's patriotism and combat capabilities. At the same time, they may serve to inform viewers of what the Syrian Army considers an important battlefield challenge. Thus, while these official reports inevitably convey an exaggerated image of competence and preparedness, propagandistic excesses need not obscure their informational value--that the Syrian Army places importance on rudimentary subterranean structures. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"... reorienting forces and training to confront this complicated and difficult form of urban warfare..."

Source:

LTC Ayad Harba. "Tunnel Wars," *Jaysh al-Shaab*, No. 2111-2112 - March/April 2019, <http://mod.gov.sy/SD08/msf/media/jeshalsha3b-magazine/0.pdf> (page 50-52)

حروب الأنفاق

... reorienting forces and training to confront this complicated and difficult form of urban warfare. Syrian soldiers were able to gain these advantages quickly and in response to their needs... The above indicates the utmost importance of high-level training for fighting units to allow them to engage in all types of complex combat and maintain the element of surprise and the initiative and to complete their missions in the most efficient and least costly manner. This can be achieved through the ideal use of land and tunnels, whether defensively or offensively.



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>

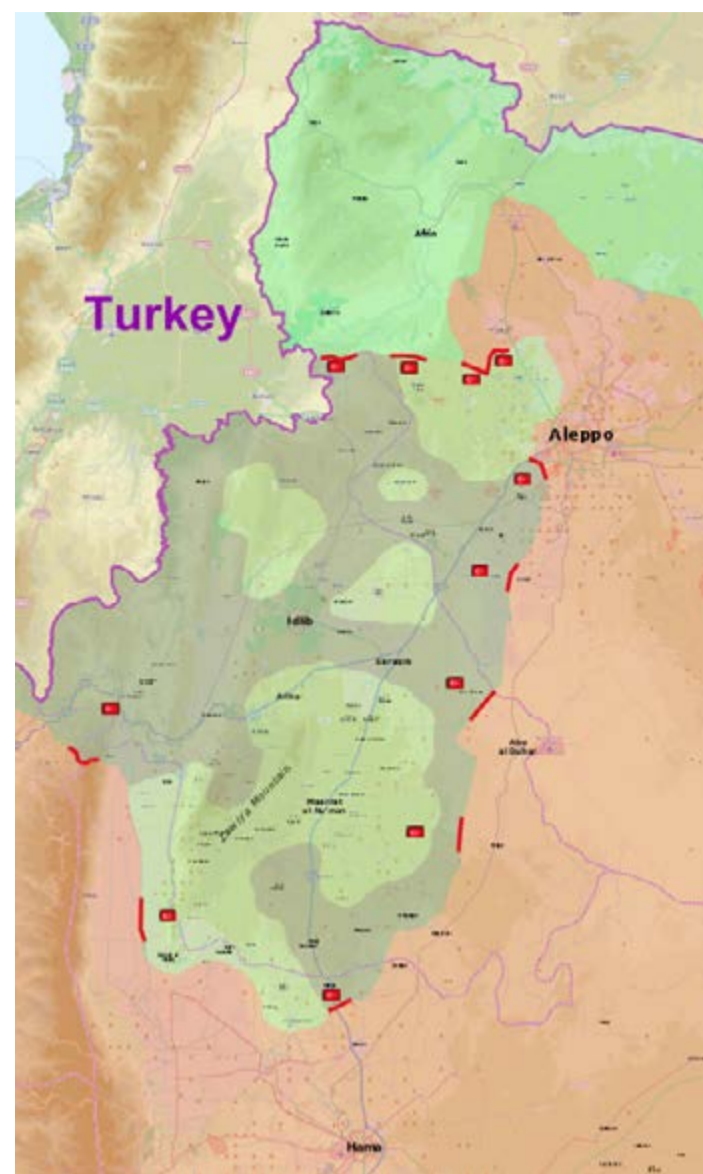


Turkish Concerns Regarding Idlib

OE Watch Commentary: The northeast Syrian province of Idlib continues to pose a challenge to Turkey and its relations with Russia and Iran. Despite being on opposing sides of the Syrian conflict, Ankara and Moscow have generally managed to maintain a working relationship. In September 2018, the Turkish President had brokered an agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin, promising to dismantle extremist groups in Idlib and prevent a military operation by the Syrian regime, but failed to deliver on this. In fact, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) with close ties to al-Qaeda, has almost completely taken over Idlib. As such, Turkish officials are concerned about a Syrian regime operation on Idlib (backed by Russia and Iran). The accompanying articles from Turkish daily *Hürriyet* shed light on Turkish concerns regarding the impact of such an operation on Turkey, including refugees, danger to Turkish troops and a potential influx of militants.

Russia and Turkey recently launched joint patrols to monitor the situation in Idlib. According to the first article, the developments in Idlib are at a tipping point because the Syrian regime has escalated its attacks with the support of Russian air strikes. The article points out statements made by Russian officials regarding the situation in Idlib. On 26 April, Alexander Lavrentiev, Russia's special envoy to Syria, stated that Turkey's failed efforts to neutralize HTS has disappointed Russia. As the author points out, this statement was not welcomed in Ankara. Two days later, President Putin stated that in response to terrorist attacks from Idlib, Russia always coordinates with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and provides air support. On 29 April, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the activities of terrorists in Idlib and other areas could not be allowed to continue indefinitely and reaffirmed Russian support of the Syrian regime. On 30 April, the Turkish and Russian Presidents spoke on the phone and announced that they are working in coordination towards a solution in Idlib. The article points out that as of 1 May, with Russian air support, the Assad regime had launched a military operation on Idlib.

The second article is a follow up to the first article by the same journalist who is very familiar with the situation in Idlib. The author discusses that Turkey has established 12 military observation posts around Idlib and conducted military patrols as recently as 5 May. In a likely scenario where HTS weapons turn against Turkey, Turkish soldiers in those posts will be in a very dangerous situation. In addition, if the current Syrian regime's military operation in Idlib escalates, it is highly likely that this would cause an influx of refugees to Turkey. The author also raises the important question of "What will happen to the HTS militants in Idlib whose numbers are estimated to be at least 15,000 to 20,000? Where will all these jihadists who have adopted al-Qaeda ideology go?" While this question remains unanswered, it is almost inevitable that some will cross into Turkey (to transit or to stay), threatening Turkish national security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Turkish Observation Posts in Idlib.

Source: Derived from work by MrPenguin20 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_Observation_Points_in_Idlib.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0

“The developments in Idlib have entered an extremely dangerous course... with the escalation of the military operation carried out by the Assad regime with the support of Russia.”

Source: Sedat Ergin, “İdlib’de tehlike çanları çalıyor (Bells of danger ring in Idlib),” *Hürriyet*, 3 May 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/idlibde-tehlike-canlari-caliyor-41201752>

...The developments in Idlib have entered an extremely dangerous course concerning the entire international community, with the escalation of the military operation carried out by the Assad regime with the support of Russia.

Alexander Lavrentiev, Putin’s special envoy to Syria... “Our Turkish friends and moderate opposition have failed to carry out their efforts to destroy the remaining terrorists...”

Now let’s go to a more important explanation... Russian leader Putin...

“We always coordinate our actions with President al-Assad before we make any attempts. In fact, it is he who performs these initiatives, not us. All we do is to provide support mostly air support...”

Russian Foreign Minister Serge Lavrov in a statement made in Moscow... “We cannot tolerate a situation where terrorists are held safe as in a natural conservation zone... In Idlib and some other regions, the situation in which terrorists are somehow active cannot continue forever...”

After all these statements, a telephone call was made between Putin and Erdogan on Tuesday, April 30th. In the third paragraph of the read-out of this [phone call] put on the website of the Russian Presidency...:

“The two leaders emphasized the importance of Russia and Turkey maintaining close coordination in their efforts to stabilize the situation in Idlib and the need for effective measures to suppress terrorist groups.”



Continued: Turkish Concerns Regarding Idlib

Source: Sedat Ergin, “İdlib konusunda bir muhasebe (An evaluation regarding Idlib),” *Hürriyet*, 4 May 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/idlib-konusunda-bir-muhasebe-41202918>

Idlib has a vital importance for Turkey. Idlib, with nearly half of its western border neighboring Hatay [and] an important part of its northern border is adjacent to Afrin under the control of TAF [Turkish Armed Forces], looks at Turkey from two fronts. Thus, even a small development there will affect Turkey....

The international community does not want a hot conflict in Idlib to lead to a humanitarian catastrophe by triggering a massive wave of migration. It would be a most likely prediction to say such a migration wave would be headed towards Turkey....

Even if there is a final political solution to the Syrian crisis one day, what will happen to the HTS militants in Idlib whose numbers are estimated to be at least 15,000 to 20,000? Where will all these jihadists who have adopted al-Qaeda ideology go?

These are the questions we have before us and we have to start thinking about their responses.

Huawei Expands its Network

OE Watch Commentary: A lot has been written about the risk to Western security if the United Kingdom moves forward with a decision to use the Chinese technology company Huawei for its 5G telecommunication network infrastructure. Just as important, but less reported, has been Huawei’s activities in Turkey. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press point to important collaboration between Huawei and Turkey’s technology sector.

The first passage discusses Huawei’s activities in Turkey, noting that its Research & Development Center in Istanbul is now the company’s “second largest R&D center outside of China.” The article discusses that Huawei has been working with Turkish regulators, operators and other stakeholders to establish the 5G ecosystem in Turkey. It also notes that Huawei is supporting the country’s transformation to a 5G network and “sharing its expertise” with 33 Turkish technology companies.

The second passage discusses important collaboration between Huawei and Turkey’s “Information Technology Valley” (or “IT Valley,” inspired by Silicon Valley both in name and concept) -- a new initiative to advance technological innovation in Turkey. The passage discusses that Huawei and “IT Valley” have signed a cooperation protocol to establish a “Smart Cities Research Center.” The protocol was signed during a ceremony attended by both Turkey’s Industry and Technology Minister, and the General Manager of Huawei Turkey. In their speeches, both men alluded to joint research and development efforts, particularly in the fields of artificial intelligence, cloud, big data, block chain and other future technologies. Huawei Turkey’s General Manager noted that their cooperation with the Turkish public sector since 2002 has enabled Huawei to become Turkey’s largest provider of information technologies.

The final passage is from the website of Turkey’s “New Center for Innovation and Technology-Based Growth,” referred to simply as “IT Valley.” It is described as a platform where “science turns into technology, and technology turns into product.” The Valley is located in Istanbul, where an area has been dedicated to this innovation-hub, described as “an ecosystem” for entrepreneurs-- a place where they can acquire financial support and access to investors. The goal is to encourage the innovation of new technologies to advance Turkey’s position on the global stage. This is the context in which collaboration with Huawei is taking place. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“The R&D Center that Huawei opened in its Istanbul office in 2009... [is] the second largest R&D center among its centers outside of China.”

Source: “İstanbul, Huawei’nin teknoloji üssü oldu (Istanbul has become Huawei’s technology base),” *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 8 March 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/teknoloji/istanbul-huaweinin-teknoloji-ussu-oldu-41142476>

Huawei, one of the world’s leaders in software and equipment producers, is producing technologies in the internet of things, artificial intelligence, cloud and smart/safe cities, with Turkish engineers, who make up the majority of its team.

Huawei is supporting Turkey’s 2023 goals, the country’s transformation to a 5G [network] via its support to the Openlab program, and in collaboration with 33 Turkish technology companies. ...

The R&D Center that Huawei opened in its Istanbul office in 2009, with an investment exceeding 120 million dollars, has become the second largest R&D center among its centers outside of China. ...

The company, which has purchased 1 billion dollars worth of goods Turkey, also employs over 1300 people.

...

Huawei Turkey is ready for Turkey’s transition to 5G. In order to establish the 5G ecosystem in Turkey in a healthy way, the company is sharing its expertise with Turkish regulators, operators and other relevant stakeholders.



Huawei P10 phone

Source: en: Petar Milošević via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Huawei_P10_front.jpg, CC BY-SA



Continued: Huawei Expands its Network

Source: “Huawei ve Bilişim Vadisi’nden önemli işbirliği (Important Collaboration between Huawei and IT Valley),” *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 1 April 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/teknoloji/huawei-ve-bilisim-vadisinden-onemli-isbirligi-41168601>

Huawei and Information Technology Valley have signed a Cooperation Protocol regarding [establishing a] Smart Cities Research Center, at a ceremony attended by Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank. With this agreement, Huawei will be active in “Smart Cities” and develop joint solutions with its R&D team and Information Technology Valley.

...Huawei and Information Technology Valley will conduct joint R&D efforts in the fields of artificial intelligence, big data, the internet of things, blockchain and other future technologies.

The Minister of Industry and Technology Mustafa Varank said the following at the ceremony:

“...We want to make Turkey a communication hub and an industrial and technological leader.... The protocol that we signed today is an important step in making our country a technological hub. Information Technology Valley, Tubitak and Huawei will work together and produce many important projects. The results of these projects will add value to our country. We want to use technological resources as best as possible and open new horizons in the field of smart cities...”

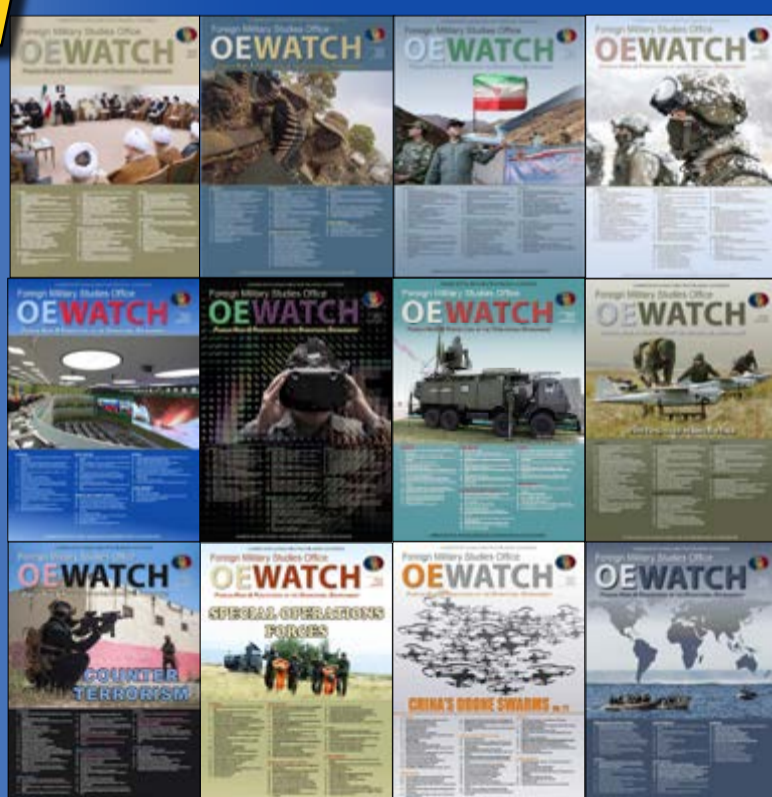
Huawei’s General Manager for Turkey Cem Zhao said the following: “Huawei is promising access to digital for every person, family and organization for a connected and smart world. Huawei started its activities in Turkey in 2002. Thanks to the Turkish economy’s rapid growth, and [our] cooperation with the Turkish public sector... Huawei has become Turkey’s most extensive information technology provider in Turkey. We are determined to create a leading communication infrastructure for Turkey, and encourage a healthy development of the information sector in Turkey. We are ready to work with our customers and partners to create a healthy ecosystem [in Turkey].”

Source: “Hakkimizda (About Us),” *Bilisimvadisi.co*, Undated. <https://bilisimvadisi.co/kurumsalrefugees-smuggled-goods>

We are forming “Turkey’s New Center for Innovation and Technology-Based Growth” in collaboration with productive and creative members of our society who will form the spirit of Information Technology Valley, especially bright and successful students, productive scientists, entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, advisor-mentors, technicians and other professionals. ...

Information Technology Valley is a platform where science turns into technology, and technology turns into product. It is here that an idea will turn into a marketable project and commercialized. Our goal is, in accordance with [Turkey’s] 2023 Vision, to produce high value-added new technologies and products that will add more strength to Turkey’s strength. Thus, Information Technology Valley will be established as an ecosystem for the innovator, where they can acquire financial support and an investor network.

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The Dynamics of Trilateral Relations between Turkey, Russia, and Iran

OE Watch Commentary: On 17 April 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Turkey after having meetings in Damascus with Syrian regime officials. This visit came ahead of a scheduled meeting of Russia, Iran and Turkey in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nursultan (formerly Astana). Even though Zarif's visits were announced as efforts to solve the Syrian conflict, it seems they might have had other intentions as well. On one hand, Iranian efforts aim to facilitate a dialogue between the government of Bashar Al-Assad and the Turkish government to prevent Turkey from launching military operations further into Syrian territory. On the other hand, Iran aims to bring Syria's eastern and northeastern regions under the control of the Syrian regime so that it can undermine American influence in the region and balance Russian ambitions in Syria. The accompanying article from pro-Kurdish news agency *Mezopotamya Ajansi* and an interview from independent Turkish news portal *Medyascope* discuss dynamics of trilateral relations among these three countries.



Vladimir Putin, Hassan Rouhani, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin,_Hassan_Rouhani,_Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan_02.jpg, CC BY 4.0

The article from *Mezopotamya Ajansi* provides a Kurdish perspective on relations between Turkey, Russia and Iran. According to the article, while Russia tries to continue its strategic relationship with Turkey to weaken NATO, it does not want Turkey to sever its ties with NATO. Russia rather prefers Turkey remain a NATO member who continues to have problems with its NATO allies. As such, Russia intends to weaken NATO through a member that constantly troubles the alliance. The article also discusses deteriorating relations between Russia and Iran due to conflicting objectives in Syria. Russia has signaled its objection to Iran's presence in Syria. Meanwhile, Iran intends to strengthen its military presence and remain in Syria. At times, friction between the two countries has led to military confrontations. Competition for control over Aleppo has been a significant point of contention. This rivalry will ultimately have a significant affect in the future of Syria and the Syrian conflict.

The interview from *Medyascope* with Middle East expert Erhan Keleşoğlu states that Turkey's alliance with Iran and Russia is a tactical one due to developments in Syria and a desire to counterbalance American power and involvement in the region. Turkey cannot maintain its presence in Syria without the consent of Russia and Iran. While Turkey supports the opposition in the Syrian conflict, Russia and Iran have been ardent supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. However, these countries have converging interests in other areas. Iran and Turkey have converging interests regarding Kurdish groups in their respective countries. Turkey also relies on Iran for natural gas and Iran expects support or neutrality from Turkey in its strategy to undermine the alliance spearheaded by Saudi Arabia to isolate Iran in the region. The author states that Iran has the ability to navigate between Turkey and Russia. There is growing interdependence between Russia and Turkey as both countries have signed agreements to cooperate in several areas from defense to energy. Turkey needs Russian natural gas and Russia needs a market to export its natural energy resources. Overall, Russia seems to be accommodating Turkey on many fronts. The developments in Syria will shape the future of this trilateral relationship. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The alliance of Russia, Iran and Turkey was formed as a tactical alliance against the United States’ involvement in Syria...”

Source: “Suriye’de dengeler oturmadı: Türkiye ve İran çıkmazda (Unsettled balance in Syria: Turkey and Iran Impasse),” *Mezopotamyaajansi.com*, 3 May 2019. <https://mezopotamyaajansi.com/ANALIZ/content/view/56302>

Russia gives Turkey some economic concessions to keep Turkey on its side to gain leverage against NATO. Again it is trying to extend the agreements and relations going as much as possible over Idlib and Afrin. While Russia seeks to avoid taking a tough stance towards Turkey until July-August, it also supports Turkey as it develops relations with the [Syrian] regime behind the scenes... Russia prefers a Turkey that remains with NATO rather than a Turkey that severs ties with NATO so that it can trouble the United States politically...

It is said that there is conflict between Russia and Iran, another actor within the Syrian conflict. Russian and Iranian relations has strained due to Russia's stance that Iran and Turkey must leave Syrian soil. This tension [between Russia and Iran] has spread to the areas [that they are] militarily dominant... The main area of contention between Russia and Iran is Aleppo.

Source: Işın Eliçin, “İran-Rusya-Türkiye ittifakı: Erhan Keleşoğlu ile söyleşi (Iran-Russia-Turkey alliance: an interview with Erhan Keleşoğlu),” *Medyascope.tv*, 18 April 2019. <https://medyascope.tv/2019/04/18/iran-rusya-turkiye-ittifaki-erhan-kelesoglu-ile-soylesi/>

Alliance of Russia, Iran and Turkey was formed as a tactical alliance against the United States’ involvement in Syria... The alliance desires to counterbalance the United States. These countries are disturbed by America’s Middles East policy...

[Iran and Turkey] have a Kurdish issue in the region and we can say [Iran and Turkey] have a general security alliance to manage their Kurdish issue...

In terms of solving the [Syrian Conflict] Iran is a significant actor [and] able to maintain relations with all sides on the ground such as Syria, Russia, Turkey [and] in some ways the European Union, all with the exception of United States...

Iran works on a strategy to undermine the alliance formed against it in the region under the leadership of Saudi Arabia. Turkey holds a critical position in this strategy. Iran expects support or at least neutrality from Turkey. Iran wants to keep Turkey on its side to break political and economic isolation against it in the region...

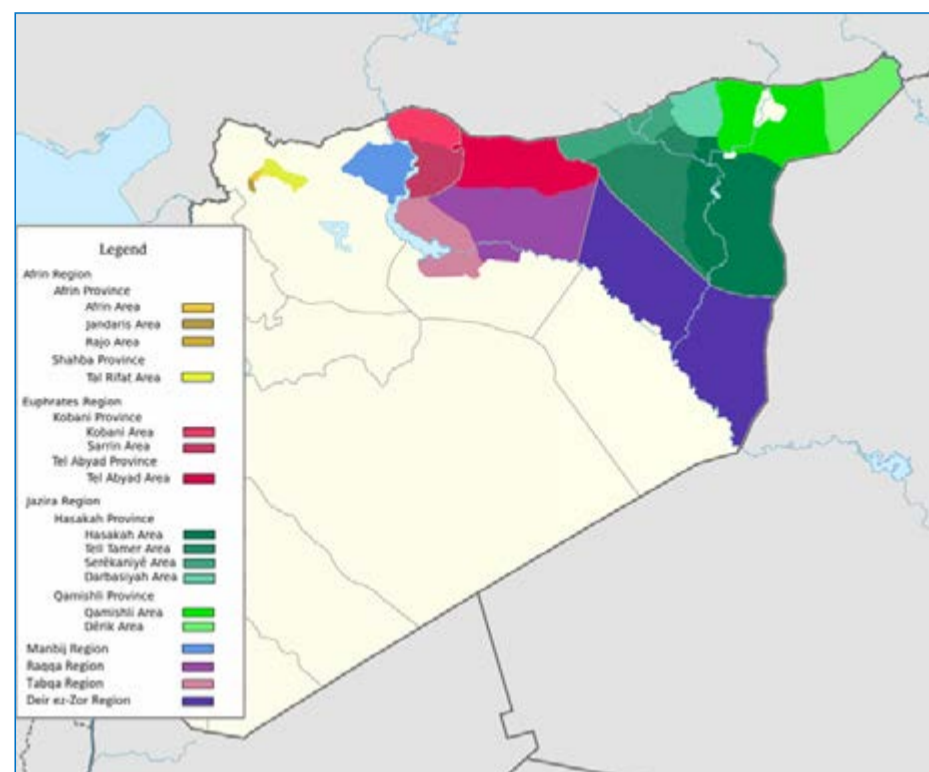
[Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan has stated that an operation on East of Euphrates is still on the table... but he needs the support of Russia and Iran for such an operation.



Turkish-Russian Negotiations in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Following their joint military patrol in Idlib, sources suggest that Turkey and Russia might have reached a deal to allow Turkey to launch an operation on Tel Rifaat, a Syrian town controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). In exchange Russia will reportedly launch attacks on Jisr ash-Shugur, a town near Idlib. On 5 May, Turkey's Vice President Fuat Oktay confirmed ongoing talks between Turkey and Russia regarding Turkey potentially deploying forces to Tel Rifaat without providing much details. The accompanying articles from Kurdish and Turkish sources provide insight into this possibility.

The first article from Kurdish *Hawar News Agency*, an agency that closely monitors developments regarding Syrian Kurds, points out that Turkey and Russia conducted a meeting in the northern region of Syria in early May 2019 to discuss Tel Rifaat. The attacks by the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) on Maranaz and Al-Malikiyah, two small villages near Tel Rifaat in Northern Syria, came days after this meeting and coincided with the Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar's visit to the Turkish-Syrian border. While Kurdish sources stated that the attacks on Maranaz and Al-Malikiyah were repelled by the YPG, Arab sources reported that the attacks were stopped due to ongoing negotiations between Russian and Turkish officials.



De facto cantons of Rojava.

Source: Editor abcdef via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:De_facto_cantons_of_Rojava.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

The second article, written by a well-respected Turkish journalist closely monitoring developments in Syria, claims that Russia might have given Turkey a green light to attack Tel Rifaat. The author notes that while Russia wants to take full control of Idlib, Turkey is looking for a face-saving move by deploying troops to Tel Rifaat. Turkish troops already conducted patrols in Tel Rifaat in coordination with Russia.

The author also states that Russia's plans to continue collaborating with Turkey and give concessions to Turkey in Tel Rifaat bothers the Iranian and Syrian regimes. As the article points out, the control of Tel Rifaat and surrounding areas is significant for different reasons for Turkey, Kurdish forces, and the Syrian regime. Iran and the Syrian regime are concerned that Turkey and the opposition forces it supports will control Tel Rifaat, posing a threat to Aleppo from the north. For Turkey, controlling Tel Rifaat means connecting the areas of Operations Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch. For Kurdish forces, Tel Rifaat is an important point from which to launch an operation on Turkish controlled Afrin. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“[The Syrian regime] and Iran are bothered by Russia's concession to Turkey in Tel Rifaat to keep [Turkey] collaborating.”

Source: Nûrhat Hesên, “Merenazê planên Rûsya û Tirkiyê têk birin (Russia and Turkey's plans were nullified),” *hawarnews.com*, 5 May 2019. <https://www.hawarnews.com/kr/haber/merenaz-plann-rsya-tirkiy-tk-birin-h16548.html>

A few days ago, a meeting between Russia and Turkey took place in the northwest of Syria...

According to information obtained, as a result of negotiations held between Russia and Turkey, Russia will launch intense attacks on Jisr ash-Shugur... Turkey will attack Tel Rifaat.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar's visit to Hatay, [on] the Syrian border, at the time of the attacks by the Turkish Army and its gangs on Maranaz and Al-Malikiyah, indicate the attacks were planned...

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “Büyük düşün küçük kırıntıları: Tel Rıfat hesapları (Little crumbs of big thought: Tel Rifaat plans),” *Gazete Duvar*, 6 May 2019. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/05/06/buyuk-dusun-kucuk-kirintilari-tel-rifat-hesaplari/>

Alliance of Russia, Iran and Turkey was formed as a tactical alliance against the United States' involvement in Syria... The alliance desires to counterbalance the United States. These countries are disturbed by America's Middles East policy...

...

[Iran and Turkey] have a Kurdish issue in the region and we can say [Iran and Turkey] have a general security alliance to manage their Kurdish issue...

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Iran works on a strategy to undermine the alliance formed against it in the region under the leadership of Saudi Arabia. Turkey holds a critical position in this strategy. Iran expects support or at least neutrality from Turkey. Iran wants to keep Turkey on its side to break political and economic isolation against it in the region.

...

[Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan has stated that an operation on East of Euphrates is still on the table... but he needs the support of Russia and Iran for such an operation.



Sudan, Algeria and the “Second Arab Spring” Debate

OE Watch Commentary: The Arab Spring that started in 2010 with street protests in several Arab countries, led to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, while paving the way for some reforms towards democratization in others. But Algeria and Sudan had not been part of this process. Now, in 2019, street protests in these two countries have overthrown their long-time rulers-- ending Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s 20 year rule in Algeria and Omar al-Bashir’s 30 year rule in Sudan. This has raised the question of whether we are witnessing a second “Arab Spring.” The accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss the issue, noting that the critical thing to watch will be whether the military in both countries will voluntarily relinquish power to a civilian government.

The first three passages are from a series of articles by Sami Kohen- a respected international relations columnist for the mass daily *Milliyet*. In the first passage, Kohen focuses on Algeria, pointing out the peaceful aspect of the demonstrations, and the fact that the military or police did not interfere. He credits the military for siding with the people in producing the outcome, highlighting that it will be critical to watch how the military will act at this point.

The second passage features Kohen’s views on Sudan. He notes that the first round of the “revolution” has taken place and the al-Bashir regime has been toppled, cautioning that “it is not clear how the second round of civilian control and democratization will play out.” He also points out that regional and global actors alike have been watching Sudan closely, not so much for their interest in seeing the country democratize, but more because they want to make sure that the outcome will help their own interests. He claims that regional countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt have no interest in seeing a democratic Sudan, which he claims will likely become a “sphere of competition” for outside powers.

In the third accompanying passage, Kohen compares and contrasts the current events with the previous Arab Spring. He points out that the military sided with the people in both Algeria and Sudan. Kohen writes that “this represents a much different, much more hopeful experience than those painful experiences that took place in the previous Arab Spring countries.”

The fourth accompanying passage is from an interview with Ömer Taşpınar, another respected Middle East expert. Taşpınar notes the common aspects of the developments in Sudan and Algeria: “economic problems...and the fact that the military, which is strong in both countries, have convinced the leaders, or the dictators to leave power.” He is more pessimistic about the idea that the military will relinquish control in both countries, saying that he doesn’t see any kind of “spring” or “democratization” coming out of these countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Source: Unknown and Vikoula5 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abdelaziz_Bouteflika.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

“In both countries, the military sided with the people. ...[T]his represents a much different, much more hopeful experience than those painful experiences that took place in the countries of the previous Arab Spring. In both countries, the question being asked now is: Will they be able to establish a civilian and democratic regime?”

Source: Sami Kohen, “Cezayir Bahari (Algeria Spring),” *Milliyet.com.tr*, 5 April 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/cezayir-bahari-2853607/>

The people’s movement in Algeria took place within a “spring spirit.” ... The military or police did not interfere, nobody’s nose bled.

This demonstrated that the people of Algeria are capable of showing their will peacefully, and without resorting to violence. The outcome can be considered the victory of “the people on the street.” But it is clear that the military siding with the people and placed its weight behind democracy has played an important role in this outcome. ...

In this process, how the military will act, and whether it will intervene or not is critical. It is also not clear whether the people will be able to continue its united and conscientious stance.

In contrast to the painful experiences of the “Arab Spring” in Northern Africa and the Middle East, the course that the ‘Algerian Spring’ will take is worth watching closely.



Continued: Sudan, Algeria and the “Second Arab Spring” Debate

Source: Sami Kohen, “Sudan Neden Önemli (Why is Sudan Important?),” *Milliyet.com.tr*, 30 April 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/sudan-neden-onemli--2866170/>

For weeks, the entire world has been watching the developments in Sudan.

The reason for this special attention is that, Sudan, which is an Arab country but also part of Africa, has witnessed the public’s uprising against Omar al-Bashir’s authoritarian regime and overthrown him through widespread street demonstrations. This development has led to a hope that Sudan may be able to transition to a civil and democratic regime. But at this stage, it is not yet clear whether the military, which is still critical, and other public institutions, will allow for this. The public is determined to continue its resistance until there is radical regime change and the old guard is completely eliminated.

So even though the first round of the “revolution” in Sudan has taken place and the al-Bashir regime has been toppled, it is not clear how the second round of civilian control and democratization will play out.

Of course this is part of the reason why regional and global actors are closely following the developments in Sudan, and wondering whether this ‘Arab Spring’ experience will be successful. But in reality, the external world’s interest in Sudan has more to do with their own interests than their passion for “democratic values.”

In principle, most countries hope to see a transition to a civilian and democratic regime in accordance with the public’s will; but in practice the real thing that those countries want is to ensure that the new circumstances that will arise in Sudan will help their interests.

The fact is that the Westerners can pay lip service to democracy all they want, but their goal is to keep Sudan in their sphere of influence. Sudan’s nearby neighbors like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt have no interest in seeing a democratic regime in Sudan. Russia and China want to develop bilateral relations with Sudan. The type of regime in Khartoum doesn’t concern them.

It is not yet clear how the process in Sudan will develop, but it is very likely that the country will become a sphere of competition for external actors. ...

Source: Sami Kohen “Sivil darbe (Civilian Coup),” *Milliyet.com.tr*, 19 April 2019. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/sivil-darbe-2860847/>

In both countries, the military sided with the people. Except for Tunisia, this represents a much different, much more hopeful experience than those painful experiences that took place in the previous Arab Spring countries. In both countries, the question being asked at this point is: Will they be able to establish a civilian and democratic regime?

Source: Ömer Taşpınar, “Transatlantik (Transatlantic),” *Medyascope.tv*, 27 April 2019. <https://medyascope.tv/2019/04/27/omer-taspinar-sudan-ve-cezayirden-yeni-bir-arap-baharinin-cikmasi-kolay-degil/>

“The common denominator between the developments in Sudan and Algeria are economic problems... And the fact that the public in both countries have taken to the streets due to these economic problems. A second common denominator is that the military, which is strong in both countries, have convinced the leaders, or the dictators to leave power. (Bouteflika in Algeria, and Bashir in Sudan).

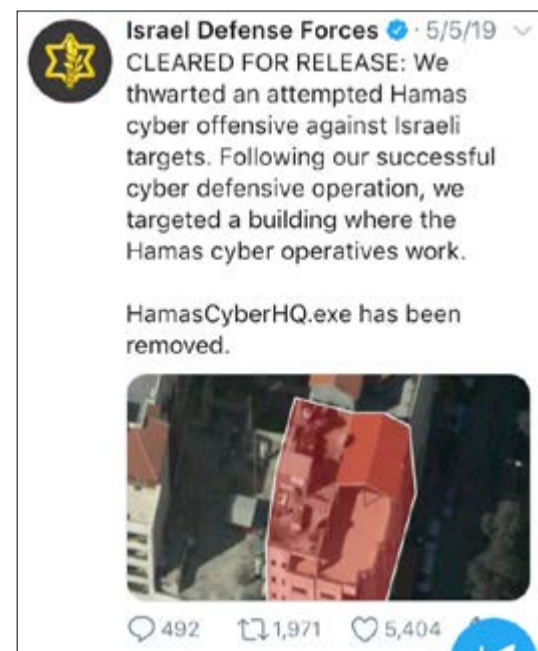
The military - the power behind the regimes in both countries- took center stage and took initiative. What’s happening in Sudan is a desire by the military to form temporary government, following an internal revolution ... and the suspicion of whether the military will relinquish power to a civilian government ... Of course the most important external actor who wants the military to stay in power is Egypt, Sudan’s northern neighbor. Sisi, who also came to power via a military coup, is currently the head of the African Union. Sisi asked for 3 billion dollars from Saudi Arabia and the UAE to help the military regime in Sudan.... These are status quo regimes, not regimes that will lead to a democracy or elections. So I don’t see any kind of “spring” or “democratization” coming out of these countries.”



Israel's Military Force against Cyber Threat: A New Precedent?

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 May, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) tweeted “We have thwarted an attempted Hamas cyber offensive against Israeli targets. Following our successful cyber defensive operation, we targeted a building where the Hamas cyber operatives work.” This represents an important turning point in warfare, as it is the first reported incident of an immediate, real-time military force being used by a nation-state against a cyber threat or attack. The accompanying passages from Israeli sources discuss the incident.

The first passage is the IDF tweet, which announces the cyber defensive operation, and ends with “HamasCyberHQ.exe has been removed.” The second passage, from *The Times of Israel* discusses that the attack came during a weekend of intense fighting between the IDF and terror groups in the Gaza Strip. The article notes that IDF fighter jets “destroyed the building housing the headquarters of [Hamas]’s cyber unit” after neutralizing “the digital threat.” The article quotes commander of the IDF’s Cyber Division, Brig. Gen. “Dalet,” as saying that the cyber-attack was aimed at “harming the quality of life of Israeli citizens.” According to the Brig. Gen. “Dalet,” this was also one of the first incidents in which Israeli soldiers had to fend off a cyber-attack while also fighting a physical battle. In an era of growing cyber threats and unclear international norms on how to respond to them, the case could represent a precedent for immediate military action against a potential or actual cyber-attack. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Source: IDF Twitter Feed, Public Domain

“HamasCyberHQ.exe has been removed.”

Source: Israeli Defense Forces Twitter Feed, 5 May 2019. <https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1125066395010699264>

CLEARED FOR RELEASE: “We have thwarted an attempted Hamas cyber offensive against Israeli targets. Following our successful operation, we targeted a building where the Hamas cyber operatives work.

HamasCyberHQ.exe has been removed.”

Source: “IDF says it thwarted a Hamas cyber attack during weekend battle,” *The Times of Israel*, 5 May 2019. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-thwarted-a-hamas-cyber-attack-during-weekend-battle/>

The Israeli military said its soldiers thwarted a cyber attack by the Hamas terror group over the weekend, without elaborating on the nature or target of the offensive.

The Israel Defense Forces said once the digital threat was neutralized, fighter jets destroyed the building housing the headquarters of the terror group’s cyber unit.

“Hamas no longer has cyber capabilities after our strike,” IDF spokesperson Ronen Manelis told reporters.

The attack came amid a weekend of intense fighting between the IDF and terror groups in the Gaza Strip. Since Saturday, Palestinian terrorists launched upwards of 600 rockets and mortar shells at Israel, killing two people, and fired an anti-tank guided missile at a car north of the Gaza Strip, killing the driver.

In response, the IDF conducted hundreds of airstrikes on targets linked to terror groups throughout the Gaza Strip, killing at least 14 Palestinians, nearly all of them members of rocket-launching cells.

...

The commander of the IDF’s Cyber Division, who can only be identified by his rank and first Hebrew letter of his name, Brig. Gen. “Dalet,” would only say that the cyber attack occurred Saturday and was aimed at “harming the quality of life of Israeli citizens.”

The military said much of the information about the attempted attack cannot be published as it might reveal to Hamas details about Israel’s cyber capabilities.

...

“Israel’s ability to defend itself and thwart cyber attacks means the Hamas terror group’s efforts to carry out attacks in the cyber realm fail time and time again,” a Shin Bet official said.

According to Dalet, this was one of the first incidents in which Israeli soldiers had to fend off a cyber attack while also fighting a physical battle.

“What’s special here is that we thwarted this threat under fire,” Dalet told reporters.



Iranian Army Ground Forces Unveil New Drones and Tech

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying reports from Iranian media discuss, Iran's Army Ground Force (Artesh) recently unveiled six new devices including a smart multi-rotor bomber, an atomic plasma spectrometer, a laser warning system, as well as new hand-launched drones, communication devices, large weapons, and military vehicles.

According to the reports, the smart multi-rotor bomb can fly 5 kilometers for 30 minutes and carries a payload of 8 kilograms. One of the drones -the Torparan- is affixed with a net gun that can capture lightweight drones of up to 2 kilograms. The atomic plasma spectrometer and laser warning system can either be carried by troops or attached to weapons or drones like a quadcopter. The laser warning system can apparently identify an incoming threat from up to 15 kilometers away. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**



Devices unveiled at ceremony.

Source: Tasnim News, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/01/31/1993287/6>, CC BY SA 4.0.

“During the ceremony, the ground force unveiled 6 new devices, which included communications packs, vehicles, and 2 new squadrons of drones like the Farpod.”

Source:

دستاورد-جدید-نیروی-زمینی-ارتش-روغمایی-شد-تصاویر

“6 daštavar jaded neeroo-e zameenee artesh roonemay-e shod + tasaveer (Iranian Army Ground Force Unveiled 6 New Achievements + Pictures),” *Tasnim News Agency*, 20 April 2019. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/01/31/1993287/6>

“During the ceremony, the ground force unveiled 6 new devices, which included communications packs, vehicles, and 2 new squadrons of drones like the Farpod.”

Source:

-مشخصات دستاوردهای-جدید-نیروی-زمینی-ارتش-روغمایی-شد

“6 daštavar jaded neeroo-e zameenee artesh roonemay-e shod + tasaveer (Iranian Army Ground Force Unveiled 6 New Achievements + Pictures),” *Fars News*, 20 April 2019. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13980131000148/>

“The Torparan drone has a net gun that can capture light drones that weigh up to 2 kilograms.”

“Another drone is able to identify people at up to 15 meters away and vehicles at up to 50 meters away...and it can be affixed with the atomic plasma spectrometer.”

Ex-General Claims IRGC Presence in Bosnia and Support to Al-Qaeda



Saeed Ghasemi.

Source: Mostafameraji via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saeed_Ghasemi_27.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 April 2019, Iranian internet channel *Aparat* featured a two-hour long interview with former IRGC general Saeed Ghasemi, during which Ghasemi stated that the IRGC was active in Bosnia in the 1990s under the guise of aid workers. As the accompanying excerpts from the interview discuss, he explained that the IRGC was in Bosnia as members of the Red Crescent, but were really there to train Bosnian Muslims. He continued that mujahedeen from around the world came to Bosnia to help, including al-Qaeda. Ghasemi claims that al-Qaida fighters were given headbands, uniforms, badges and flags made to look like they were affiliated with the IRGC.

Ghasemi says that IRGC's involvement in Bosnia started when Hossein Allahkaram (the Ansar e-Hezbollah leader) visited him at his home and asked for photos and identification to go into Bosnia under diplomatic cover. Ghasemi ends his discussion on Bosnia by expressing that it was the Iranian government's responsibility to provide financial and materiel support, which included weapons and training to all fighters active in Bosnia. Qassemi blames CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, who is of Iranian descent, for “giving [them] away.” Both the IRGC and the Iranian Red Crescent have dismissed Ghasemi's claims. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**

“...Sepah gave al-Qaeda headbands, uniforms, flags made to look like they were Sepah, and they all wore badges.”

Source: “Rudarru-21 Saeed Ghasemi, az huzoor dar bosni-e ta zelzeleh Kermanshah (Rudarru-21 Saeed Ghasemi, from presence in Bosnia to the earthquake in Kermanshah),” *Aparat*, 14 April 2019. <https://www.aparat.com/v/I1hOS>

“We were there as members of the Red Crescent, but really there to train Bosnian Muslims...Around the time we were there, al-Qaeda came in too to help. Sepah gave al-Qaeda headbands, uniforms, flags made to look like they were Sepah, and they all wore badges.”

“It was CNN's spy, this fellow compatriot of ours, who all of our politicians, including Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, love to give her interviews, this dishonorable spy of CNN gave us away.”



Sudan's Junta Clings to Power

OE Watch Commentary: The coup d'état against Sudan's long-serving president, Omar al-Bashir, driven in large part by popular uprisings against his authoritarian ways, human rights abuses, and mishandling of the economy, brought jubilant people to the streets. Now those people are returning to the streets in protests against what they perceive may be the military relinquishing power too slowly. As the excerpted two accompanying articles from the *Radio Dabanga* website relate, those protests are getting bolder as the military junta demands wider powers for itself.

According to the first excerpted article, the junta, known as Sudan's Transitional Military Council (TMC), has stressed that its leadership council (Sovereign Council) needs the powers to "impose a State of Emergency, declare war, take command of regular forces, and appoint governors of the provinces and ambassadors." Additionally, the council emphasized its large role in defining the two year transition period.

A TMC spokesman also spoke of the presence of a "deep state." The article did not go into significant detail explaining exactly what the "deep state" is, other than to say that it causes long delays in mail delivery, and flour and fuel might not arrive at all. Reportedly the TMC says it might take five years to dismantle this deep state.

While the junta is dictating its requirements, as the second excerpted article notes, there have been protests that remnants of the old regime remain in power, and that the military is dragging its feet when it comes towards moving to full democracy. Some of those protests have reportedly been put down with force, including severe beatings.

There is great concern that Sudan might enter a spiraling cycle of violence and counter-violence between the government's security forces and the protesters who worry that one bad regime has just been exchanged for another bad regime. Thus, whether or not there can be a peaceful transition to democracy, and if so, when it will occur, hinges in the coming weeks on what positions the military firmly decides to adhere to.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“Sudan's Transitional Military Council (TMC) has stressed the need to grant the leadership council (Sovereign Council) powers to impose a State of Emergency, declare war, take command of regular forces, and appoint governors of the provinces and ambassadors.”

Source: “Sudan's junta demands wider powers,” *Radio Dabanga*, 9 May 2019. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-s-junta-demands-wider-powers>

Sudan's Transitional Military Council (TMC) has stressed the need to grant the leadership council (Sovereign Council) powers to impose a State of Emergency, declare war, take command of regular forces, and appoint governors of the provinces and ambassadors.

Similarly, Lt Gen Yasir El Ata, another member of the TMC said “We will continue to liquidate the corrupt regime and the deep state,” he said, adding that it could take five years. He said the cell, seized in the past two days with weapons and explosives, belongs to the Popular Security militia. The entire Popular Security system is being dismantled.

He said that the deposed President Omar Al Bashir, the figures of the former regime, and a number of people accused of corruption are now in Kober prison, some of whom are subject to investigation.

Source: “Injuries as army, militia clash with Khartoum protestors,” *Radio Dabanga*, 9 May 2019. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/injuries-as-army-militia-clash-with-khartoum-protestors>

The Alliance for Freedom and Change (AFC) condemned the ongoing attacks on the protesters in Nyala and Khartoum and considered them dangerous actions aimed at dragging the protesters to counter-violence, stressing the commitment of the protesters to the peaceful approach.

Paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces reportedly launched an attack on the demonstrators at the sit-in front of the general command of the Sudanese army in Khartoum.

The TMC rejected the proposals of the opposition forces defining the powers and attribution of the transitional period institutions because it gives the Sovereignty Council symbolic functions while it reserved the full power to the government.



Sudanese protests over fears that the military that overthrew President al-Bashir won't step down in a timely fashion.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/04/21/1993961/sudan-protesters-to-name-civilian-council-pressure-military>, CC BY 4.0



Can South Sudan Maintain Its Fragile Peace Without al-Bashir?

OE Watch Commentary: While there has been a lot of attention on Sudan following the coup that removed Omar al-Bashir from office, much less attention has been paid to what the impact of that transition will be on South Sudan, where al-Bashir was overseeing that country's fragile peace deal. The excerpted accompanying article from *African Arguments* tries to provide just such a perspective based on careful analysis of historical trends.

Al-Bashir was intimately tied to the peace deal. When many in the international community were losing hope of finding a peaceful end to the conflict between the government forces, led by President Salva Kiir, and opposition forces, led by Riek Machar, he was able to broker a peace deal between the two, using his influence along with Russian, Chinese, and Saudi Arabian support. Although that September 2018 agreement has resulted in relative stability in the country, there is widespread concern that certain flaws and difficulties in implementation could lead to renewed fighting. There is precedence for that concern, as previously brokered peace deals have failed. Now, with al-Bashir gone, it is unclear whether the military government has the ability or desire to help South Sudan's warring parties keep the deal.



South Sudanese troops.

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

At first glance one might think Sudan would be strongly committed to peace in South Sudan as the two countries' economies are largely interdependent on oil, with vast amounts of oil present in landlocked South Sudan and the necessary infrastructure and port to ship it to the rest of the world in Sudan. However, as the article states, regional politics defy this conventional logic. Instead, localized politics, interethnic competition, complex patronage networks, and individual ambitions often drive decisions. Additionally, there are still some in Sudan who resent the 2005 peace deal, brokered by al-Bashir, with the southern rebels that eventually led to South Sudan seceding from the north. There is concern that they may reassert themselves following al-Bashir's removal.

Changes are also occurring in South Sudan. For one, Machar, who received support from al-Bashir during Sudan's Second Civil War, is now asking for a six month extension to the deadline for forming a transitional government. Furthermore, there is concern that there may be several individuals within South Sudan's opposition who are lobbying with Khartoum's new leaders, potentially further complicating an already complicated situation.

Thus, while many are particularly happy al-Bashir is gone from power, his absence leaves a void in the peacemaking process for South Sudan. Presently that void is being filled with uncertainty. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Sudan's former president was central to South Sudan's latest peace process. Elites in both countries may sense opportunity in his absence.”

Source: Matthew Lerichie, “What al-Bashir's removal means for South Sudan's fragile peace,” *African Arguments*, 30 April 2019. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/04/30/what-al-bashir-removal-south-sudan-fragile-peace-deal/>

Sudan's former president was central to South Sudan's latest peace process. Elites in both countries may sense opportunity in his absence.

At the same time, Sudan's internal turmoil is still very much ongoing. As long as this uncertainty remains unresolved, its leaders may be unable to turn their attention to issues beyond the country's borders. Given that Western states and international organization have already largely backed away, this would leave South Sudan with little external direction or support.

In February and March, as the protests escalated in Khartoum, President Kiir expressed his support for al-Bashir. After al-Bashir's removal, however, the South Sudanese government quickly changed tack and congratulated the new military rulers. As Sudan's leadership continues to take shape, Kiir's government is likely to continue offering its backing to whoever is apparently in charge.

...figures in Sudan may turn inwards as the uncertainty continues, resulting in less pressure and resources for South Sudan. This could, in turn, allow more room for elites in South Sudan to maneuver, leading to more complications. The resulting confusion will cause further delays in the implementation of the peace deal and, in the absence of any Sudanese or other international intervention, its possible collapse.



Russia Helping to Strengthen CAR Military

OE Watch Commentary: A year after Russia was instrumental in having the UN partially lift its arms embargo on the Central African Republic (CAR), Russia is now helping the CAR strengthen its military. As the accompanying article from the South African website *CAJNews* reports, Russia sent five military and 170 civilian instructors. A “batch” of small arms and ammunition was also sent, although what a “batch” consists of was not defined.

Russian involvement in CAR started in 2017 when it supported the government of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. The following year Russia helped broker a peace deal among the country’s armed groups. While other countries also played a role in trying to bring peace to the war-torn CAR by sending peacekeeping troops, Russia’s involvement (including Russian military contractors) has been particularly noticeable.



Putin meeting with CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

Source: Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57534>, CC BY 4.0

Presently, the Russian instructors have established a training center in the city of Berengo. There, the CAR defense forces are being trained in methods of combat, including how to handle weapons. To implement the training, the Russians have created a tactical field as well as another site with an observation tower and other features which prepare for combat. So far 1,900 individuals have been trained, including machine gunners, rifle experts, police, and gendarmes.

Furthermore, President Putin signed a decree to send 30 Russian troops to the CAR as part of the UN peacekeeping mission there, MINUSCA. While these are welcome additions to MINUSCA, other articles have expressed concern over Russia’s role in the CAR, and have been particularly critical of some of the opaque aspects of it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Russia, which played a crucial role in peace-building efforts in the Central African Republic (CAR), is strengthening the country’s defense forces.”

Source: Oman Mbiko, “Russia trains CAR defense forces,” *CAJNews* (South Africa), 30 April 2019. <http://cajnewsafrika.com/2019/04/30/exclusive-russia-trains-car-defence-forces/>

Russia, which played a crucial role in peace-building efforts in the Central African Republic (CAR), is strengthening the country’s defense forces.

In addition to educational facilities in Berengo, there are household facilities.

It accommodates more than 300 cadets.

As of March, seven sets of cadets have been groomed at the training centre. Some 1 900 individuals have been trained, including 128 officers.



Angola and Russia Seek to Increase Ties

OE Watch Commentary: Currently only a few Russian companies are operating in Angola, with their involvement mostly limited to extracting diamonds, constructing hydroelectric dams, and activities related to the financial sector. However, as the excerpted accompanying article from the *Pambazuka News* website explains, the two countries are looking to expand their economic ties further, with Angolan President João Lourenço reportedly very interested in fostering more Russian private investment in his country. The Angolan president stated he wants public-private partnerships or the creation of Angolan-Russian companies with a focus on manufacturing, agro-industry, fishing, energy, tourism, mining, and other sectors.



Angolan Army soldiers instruct their fellow mortarmen on coordinates as a part of their training in Russia.
Source: Russian Ministry of Defense via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angolan_soldiers_training_in_Russia.png, CC BY-4.0

Putin and João Lourenço met in early April for talks, where they discussed not only trade and economics, but also regional and international matters. Draft agreements are now in the works on commercial shipping, mutual protection of classified information, and in a sign of Russia's growing military interest in Africa, simplified access to Angola's ports for Russian warships.

João Lourenço is no stranger to Moscow, having completed his military education in the Soviet Union in 1982. He offered Putin congratulations on how the city has progressed since then, and gave Putin an award in appreciation of Putin's long support of Angola. The admiration was not one-sided, with Putin describing Angola as "an old and reliable partner." On a more objective assessment, Russia's Ambassador to Angola from 2007 to 2012, Sergei Nenashev, described Angola as a priority for Russia's cooperation in Africa, mentioning that country's huge economic potential. Indeed Angola has vast natural resources, including diamonds, oil, gold and others. However, the article fails to mention that China is Angola's largest trading partner, not Russia, and that a significant amount of Angola's oil is exported to the United States.

Cooperation between Angola and Russia dates back before either nation was in its present form, with what was then the Soviet Union supporting the Angolan independence movement. In 1976 Angola and the USSR signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation. By 2016 annual trade between the two reached an estimated \$500 million annually. Now Putin and João Lourenço are looking to increase those ties even more. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Strengthening cooperation in trade, economy and culture, as well as current international and regional matters were top issues in talks between President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President João Lourenço of Angola at the Kremlin on 4 April.”

Source: Kester Kenn Klomegah, “Russia and Angola stuck between diplomatic rhetoric and business reality,” *Pambazuka News*, 27 April 2019. <https://www.pambazuka.org/economics/russia-and-angola-stuck-between-diplomatic-rhetoric-and-business-reality-0>

“Angola is a reliable and old partner. We need to consider what we need to do, without delay, to stimulate our trade and economic ties. There are interesting fields of activity, such as the diamond industry, fisheries and space exploration. There are also cultural spheres, such as education and the training of personnel,” Putin told the Angolan President.

But, professors Vladimir Shubin and Alexandra Archangelskaya from the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for African Studies, have argued that “both Russia and Angola still need to be more strategic in aligning their interests, and more proactive in carving out efficient bilateral instruments and mechanisms in order to promote economic exchanges and reap the benefits of a fully-fledged partnership.”

Strengthening cooperation in trade, economy and culture, as well as current international and regional matters were top issues in talks between President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President João Lourenço of Angola at the Kremlin on 4 April.



The AU Opposes Coups, but What if Popular Protests Back Them?

OE Watch Commentary: It is called the Lome Declaration. Its principle, that unconstitutional changes of government should be rejected, was basically adopted by the African Union (AU). As the excerpted accompanying article from the South African news site *The Conversation* explains, this stance against actions like coups is proving to be a challenge: The recent overthrow of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir by the Sudanese military was backed by the masses.

While the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which is the AU's policy that essentially formalized the Lome Declaration's rules, clearly opposes coups, the organization in the past has wavered in its response to them. One of the first incidents where this occurred was in Egypt in 2012 when President Morsi was overthrown. This AU labeled the event a coup, condemned the Egyptian military, and suspended Egypt from AU membership. Then, in 2014, in clear contradiction of AU rules that coup leaders should not hold political positions, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who led the coup, ran for president and won. The AU, as the accompanying article describes, eventually "blinked." In 2015 the AU reinstated Egypt's membership, and in a demonstration of how much the AU is ignoring its own mandates, in 2019 Sisi became the organization's rotational head.



Egyptians protest President Morsi before his overthrow.

Source: J Weeks/VOA via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tahrir_Square_in_Cairo_as_night_falls_-_27-Nov-2012.jpg, Public Domain

Zimbabwe is another example of the AU wavering with regards to its anti-coup dictum. In 2017, President Robert Mugabe, after decades in power, was placed under house arrest by the military. Despite this action, AU membership was never revoked, and the general who led the intervention subsequently became the country's vice-president.

With the overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, the AU is once again confronted with the same dilemma: whether or not enforce its own rules with regards to unconstitutional changes in a despotic government whose overthrow was backed by popular uprisings. Not enforcing the rules risks legitimizing the use of force in political situations, whereas enforcing them could result in oppressive governments being protected by the AU. To deal with this problem, the article suggests having an agreement regarding when the military should transition to a civilian government following a coup, and deciding whether tail end military involvement of sustained popular protests is justified. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The events in Egypt and the subsequent AU response underscored the unique dilemma that a combination of popular protests and military intervention pose for the continental body’s policy against coups.”

Source: Adem K. Abebe, “Popular protests pose a conundrum for the AU’s opposition to coups,” *The Conversation* (South Africa), 5 May 2019. <https://theconversation.com/popular-protests-pose-a-conundrum-for-the-aus-opposition-to-coups-116315>

In addition, the AU standards speak about the removal of “democratically elected governments”. In practice, it never asks whether the removed government was democratic, and does not have mechanisms to make a proper determination on the issue.

But the tail-end involvement of the military after intensive and popular protests raises questions about how this should be applied. While there have been some hiccups and inconsistencies, the rule has allowed the AU to reject coups d’état and suspend governments from its membership. But the recent round of popular protests that finally led to the toppling of authoritarian presidents is a reminder of the conundrum the AU faces.

The events in Egypt and the subsequent AU response underscored the unique dilemma that a combination of popular protests and military intervention pose for the continental body’s policy against coups.



Changing Constitutions to Enshrine Authoritarianism

OE Watch Commentary: Despite the African Union's (AU) African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which essentially calls for sanctions when a government illegally amends its national constitution in order to stay in power, numerous African nations appear to have either done, or are in the process of doing, exactly that. As the excerpted accompanying article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* describes, the threat of AU sanctions does not appear to be enough to stop certain countries from enshrining authoritarianism.

The most recent occurrence of this was in the Comoros. There, President Azali Assoumani, following controversial changes to the constitution last year, was elected for another term. He could potentially remain in office until 2029. That is just one year shy of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who could continue to serve until 2030, if certain amendments are passed by the country's parliament and validated by a referendum.

As the article describes, Egypt and the Comoros follow a wave of earlier changes to presidential mandates in Rwanda, Chad, Burundi, and the Republic of Congo. These were marked by controversial referendums in which incumbents were accused of manipulating the outcomes.

Part of the problem is the lack of a consensus within the AU as to when amendments constitute a legitimate versus illegitimate change of a nation's constitution. There are efforts to clarify the issue, but meanwhile amendments that enable presidents to continue to serve are present in the constitutions of many African nations. These amendments may entail disqualifying political opponents, extending the tenure of the incumbent, or other changes that lead to a less robust democratic process.

Attempting to pass such amendments can lead to instability, insecurity, and/or violent clashes, as happened in Burkina Faso, the DRC, Burundi, Togo, and the Sudan. Violent protests also occur when the people are unable to see the end of a regime, as occurred during the Arab Spring and most recently in Sudan, with the overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir with assistance from the army.

Thus, incumbents circumventing the democratic process can lead to authoritarianism, violence, or both. As the article notes, the AU's response has often been reactive as opposed to proactive in these matters. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Changes to constitutions have enabled Presidents such as Azali Assoumani of the Comoros, pictured here, to stay in power for long periods, placing the democratic process at risk.
Source: Balde Nouhou via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azali_Assoumani_2018.jpg, CC BY 3.0

“Africa is again witnessing an increased number of constitutional amendments that allow incumbents to extend their terms and centralize political power.”

Source: “Tampering with national constitutions is a threat to stability in Africa,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 30 April 2019. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/tampering-with-national-constitutions-is-a-threat-to-stability-in-africa>

Africa is again witnessing an increased number of constitutional amendments that allow incumbents to extend their terms and centralize political power.

Yet, in many AU member states, such amendments continue and ultimately infringe on democratic principles, leading to instability and authoritarianism. In order to prevent this, the PSC should ensure member states adopt and domesticate its legal frameworks, and adhere to democratic standards when amending their constitutions.

The gap in the articulation of AU legal frameworks means that any attempt by citizens to remove incumbent leaders without using means articulated in their national constitutions, can be categorised as ‘unconstitutional’. At the same time, the actions of many governments evade the AU's attention.

Most constitutional amendments in favour of incumbents have followed similar seemingly democratic processes that appear to garner national consensus, mostly through referendums, but that work in favour of particular leaders and their parties.



Church Attack in Burkina Faso Suggests Tactical Change

OE Watch Commentary: On 29 April, the French daily *Le Parisien* published the excerpted article discussing a recent attack by jihadists in Burkina Faso. While these groups have conducted many attacks in recent months, the article indicates that this particular attack was unique because it was the first attack on a church in Burkina Faso since 2015. The attack killed five worshippers, including the pastor. The article suggests that this may indicate the renewal of a past strategy, leading to a potentially more dangerous phase of the insurgency for civilians, especially worshippers at churches.

The article notes that pastors have often been targets for assassination since 2015, but not inside their churches. Most of those assassinations were in the north of Burkina Faso, like this one. However, the article reports that other attacks have extended to central Burkina Faso near the capital, Ouagadougou, and to the east of the country in recent months. The three jihadist groups suspected of being behind this latest church attack are (the primarily Mali-based) Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), its Burkina Faso-based offshoot, Ansourul Islam, and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS)-loyal group, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The attack may even have been the result of a collaboration between those three groups.



Burkina Faso carte.

Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burkina_Faso_carte.png, Public Domain.

Pastors have not been the only religious leaders targeted by jihadists. The article highlights that Muslim clerics have also been killed for not being “radical enough.” Foreign missionaries have also been killed in Burkina Faso in the past. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Although Christian and Muslim clerics have been targeted by jihadists in the past, this is the first attack on a church since 2015.”

Source: “Burkina Faso: au moins cinq personnes tuées, dont le pasteur, dans l’attaque d’une église (Burkina Faso: At least five people killed, including the pastor, in the attack on a church),” *leparisien.fr*, 29 April 2019. <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/burkina-faso-au-moins-cinq-personnes-tuees-dont-le-pasteur-dans-l-attaque-d-une-eglise-29-04-2019-8062521.php>

A church attack in Burkina Faso, a poor country facing recurring jihadist attacks, killed five people on Sunday in Silgadji in northern Burkina Faso. Although Christian and Muslim clerics have been targeted by jihadists in the past, this is the first attack on a church since 2015.

Burkina Faso has been confronted for the past four years by increasingly frequent and lethal attacks attributed to jihadist groups, including Ansarul Islam, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Initially concentrated in the north of the country, these attacks have targeted the capital and other regions, including the east, and since 2015 some 350 people have died.

Attacks regularly target religious leaders, mainly in the north of the country. In mid-March, Father Joel Yougbaré, priest of Djibo, was kidnapped by armed individuals. His corpse was found near Djibo, according to residents of the city. Several imams were also murdered by jihadists in the north. According to security sources, they were “considered not radical enough” by jihadists or “accused of collaborating with the authorities.”

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Gold Mining Connections to Killings in Zamfara, Nigeria

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from Nigeria's *Pulse.ng* discusses the increased violence in the northwestern Nigerian state of Zamfara. The article pins the violence on the disorganized gold mining industry in the state, whereby gold is smuggled out of Zamfara to markets in nearby Togo, Benin and Niger and then further abroad, enriching the traffickers but not the people of Zamfara. The argument goes that the killings in Zamfara occur because the illicit gold smuggling industry attracts traffickers linked with armed bandits and criminals in the state. These armed bandits raid villages to steal livestock or kidnap women, children and village leaders to ransom them back to their families. If the ransoms are not paid, the hostages will be harmed or killed.

The article also highlights second-order effects of this violence. Because farmers are afraid to work alone in their fields in affected areas, they have not tended to their land. This has led to a decrease in agricultural production, which, in turn, has led to an increase in the scarcity of food in Zamfara.



Zamfara State Nigeria.

Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zamfara_State_Nigeria.png, CC BY SA 3.0.

Although the violence in Zamfara had attracted significant attention on social media, according to the article, it was not until Zamfara indigenes in the Nigerian capital of Abuja protested in front of the presidential villa that President Muhammadu Buhari took strong action. He ordered the suspension of the licenses of anyone caught gold mining in Zamfara because of the acknowledged nexus between gold mining and armed bandits. He further directed the security forces and intelligence services to flush out the smugglers and armed bandits. The air force has even destroyed some of the logistics bases of the bandits. The article concludes by noting that even though the security forces are overstretched, especially as a result of combatting Boko Haram in the northeast, they are hoping to deliver a decisive blow to all of this criminal activity in Zamfara. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Intelligence reports say there is a nexus between the illicit gold mining industry and the killings in Zamfara.”

Source: “Here’s all you need to know about Zamfara killings,” *Pulse.ng*, 8 April 2019. <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/zamfara-killings-all-you-need-to-know/mbflqrf>

Gold from Zamfara is routinely smuggled out of the state to ready markets in neighboring Togo, Benin and Niger. From here, the gold finds its way to other markets across the world, with Nigeria benefiting next to nothing from the sale; and Zamfara maintaining its status as one of the poorest states in the country. Intelligence reports say there is a nexus between the illicit gold mining industry and the killings in Zamfara. How many people have been killed by the bandits in Zamfara so far? It is difficult to put a figure to the killings. However, for a crisis that has spanned all of two years, the death toll is better imagined. Hundreds have been killed in Zamfara since 2016 and hundreds have been buried in mass graves.

The modus operandi of the bandits goes like this: they raid villages, tear down doors, drag the heads of homes from houses and hurl them into forests. In the forests, they establish contact with the families and demand a ransom. Once this ransom doesn’t arrive on time, they proceed to killing their victims.

After indigenes of Zamfara State who reside in Abuja stormed the presidential villa to register how displeased they are with the federal government over the killings, President Muhammadu Buhari issued a directive suspending all mining activities in Zamfara. Buhari said he is “constantly in touch with the security chiefs, and receives regular briefings on the situation in Zamfara and across the country.”



Has Benin Suffered its First Terrorist Attack?

OE Watch Commentary: Benin is a country in coastal West Africa that neighbors other countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria that have been facing serious threats from terrorist groups. However, Benin did not experience any terrorist attacks on its territory until one that appears to have occurred on 4 May. According to the accompanying passage from French-language *rfi.fr*, a Beninese tour guide and two French citizens went missing in the north of the country at the Pendjari National Park on 4 May. The park is located along the border with Burkina Faso, which has suffered dozens of terrorist attacks, including kidnappings of foreigners in recent months.

While the article indicates that both French and Burkinabe authorities are still investigating the incident, there is reason to be pessimistic: terrorist groups aligned with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) most likely abducted them. One key clue in this assessment, according to the article, is that someone was found dead in the park near where the three were traveling. This was probably the Beninese tour guide. The two French tourists were not found, however, meaning they must have been taken captive. Until the two of them are located, or perhaps seen in a proof-of-life video released by a terrorist group, the French and Beninese authorities are urging caution and refusing to make any conclusions about the case.

According to the article, one reason why terrorist groups may have just recently moved into Benin is that the Burkinabe security forces have engaged in an offensive against terrorist groups in the east of the country since March. Therefore, the terrorist groups may have withdrawn across the border into Benin. Benin was prepared for this eventuality. The article notes that Burkina Faso had warned of possible terrorist infiltration as a result of the offensive. Considering these details, it may only be a matter of time before it is confirmed that the two French tourists are in the hands of a terrorist group. If somehow this is not the case and they are alive and safe, Benin can breathe a sigh of relief, but the threat will not go away easily. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“We are faced with something we do not understand.”



Map of Africa showing Benin.

Source: TUBS via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benin_in_Africa_\(mini_map_rivers\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benin_in_Africa_(mini_map_rivers).svg), CC BY-SA 3.0

Source: “Bénin: un Béninois et deux Français toujours portés disparus (Benin: A Beninese and two Frenchmen are still missing),” *rfi.fr*, 5 May 2019. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190504-benin-guide-beninois-deux-francais-disparus-parc-pendjari>

In Benin, a Beninese tourist guide and two French nationals have been missing in the north of the country. The group was due to return to their hotel Wednesday night after an excursion to the Pendjari National Park, located on the border with Burkina Faso. According to the French authorities, the investigation is still ongoing. The search is continuing in northern Benin.

There is very little information on the precise circumstances of this disappearance. From certain sources, a body in a state of decomposition, who was impossible to identify, was discovered in the park. The information has been confirmed by the Beninese authorities, but for Cotonou, this major discovery does not allow, at this stage, the drawing of conclusions about the fate of the three missing people.

Pendjari National Park is precisely on the border with Burkina Faso. The country launched in mid-March a wide-reaching counter-terrorism operation in the eastern part of its territory and, on that occasion, it informed bordering countries about the risk of having suspected jihadists retreat to their territories.



Brazil Addresses Illegal Cigarette Traffic

OE Watch Commentary: According to regional news service *O Paraná*, Brazil is in the midst of implementing yet another frontier security project on the state of Paraná bordering Paraguay. It is well known that the Brazilian border is considered porous. Both federal and local security services have struggled to keep up with cross-border smuggling operations by organized crime groups with operatives on both sides of the border.

According to the article, the new, joint initiative of National Forces (a combination of local and federal law enforcement agencies), will continue to focus on the inflow of drugs and firearms entering Brazil from Paraguay by establishing a working group and building up a more robust security infrastructure in the state of Paraná. However, the primary target is the illegal cigarette trade flowing in from Paraguay. A key consideration appears to be a realization of lost tax revenue due to Brazilians smoking smuggled cigarettes rather than Brazilian made ones.

It is estimated that illegal cigarettes flowing into Brazil deny federal coffers billions of Reals in unearned tax revenue. According to a federal study detailed in the article, there is as much as 11 billion Reals (\$2.7 billion) in lost tax revenue every year.

Cigarettes in Brazil are taxed at 80% as opposed to a 13% tax on cigarettes in neighboring Paraguay. The article rightly points out this taxation discrepancy and implies that part of the solution to address the problem entails evaluating “the reduction of taxation on cigarettes manufactured in the country,” in an effort to reduce consumption of illegal cigarettes. This could be a significant step as protectionism of industries like cigarettes in Brazil is part of the cause of smuggling in general, as prices are simply much lower in neighboring countries. There is just too much temptation to smuggle cigarettes and other goods like electronics and other staples.

While the border between the state of Parana and Paraguay is not as dense and restricted as the Amazon border between Columbia or Venezuela, the Paraná River and Itaipu Dam just to the north of Iguacu Falls presents a variety of challenges. Brazilian naval units that patrol the river have had to step up the armor on their patrol boats because it is not uncommon to come under fire when pursuing illicit watercraft, or from the Paraguayan shoreline.

As the second article demonstrates, Brazilian forces were fired upon while pursuing and intercepting a boat in-bound from Paraguay that turned out to be carrying over 1300 pounds of marijuana. While the war on the border will continue to fight the inflow of contraband including cigarettes, a multi-pronged approach that would narrow the gap between the cost of cigarettes in Brazil and Paraguay, might help or at least slow down the flow. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“At the end of last year a survey conducted by Ibope, commissioned by ETCO (Brazilian Institute of Competitive Ethics) revealed that 54% of the cigarettes consumed in Brazil are of illicit origin. The survey also revealed that last year alone, 106.2 billion cigarettes were consumed in Brazil, with 57.5 billion of them coming from the illegal market.”

Source: “Seguranca e economia querem “fechar” a fronteira (Homeland Security seeks to “close” or tighten the border to restrict the flow of illegal cigarettes entering Brazil),” *O Paraná*, 27 March 2019. <https://oparana.com.br/noticia/seguranca-e-economia-querem-fechar-a-fronteira/?fbclid=IwAR2lQu9QyNiQeul0coIA2lU9oP5WVl0Zk7iyKJU6jydeFlil54IW1T8Q5Es>

As part of the process of confronting border crime, an important front will be focused on the creation of a working group with the mission to evaluate the reduction of taxation on cigarettes manufactured in the country. The intention is to “reduce consumption” of foreign low quality” cigarettes. The initiative results from the understanding that organized crime is financed by high-volume tobacco smuggling in Brazil.

Source: “Polícia Federal e Força Nacional são alvos de tiros no Lago de Itaipu (Federal Police and National Force come under fire on Itaipu Lake),” *O Paraná*, 8 May 2019. <https://oparana.com.br/noticia/policia-federal-e-forca-nacional-sao-a-tiros-alvos-de-tiros-no-lago-de-itaipu/>

The boat, a steel plate vessel measuring approximately 7 meters in length and equipped with a 90 hp outboard motor, contained 658 kg of marijuana.



Brazilian Navy up-armored boat patrolling the Paraná River near Iguacu Falls on the border with Paraguay.

Source: Dodge Billingsley



Receita Federal Agents at a Checkpoint in the Brazilian state of Paraná.

Source: Dodge Billingsley



Military Refugees in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying reference is a 2,800 word investigative article about a unique geopolitical conundrum that the Colombian government and nation is currently facing as a collateral result of the situation and events in neighboring Venezuela. This is a rare, curious matter. An increasing population of military personnel from one country is taking refuge in another. Many of the Venezuelan military refugees have aspirations of returning to Venezuela, including as a military force to fight in opposition to the regime of the PSUV [United Socialist Party of Venezuela] ostensibly led by Nicolás Maduro. Some of the refugees are demanding that they be sustained by the Colombian government, and some are apparently agents of the PSUV regime or perhaps Cuban intelligence. In any case, there have been numerous challenging events, including what appears to have been a falsified murder scare within the military refugee population. How to sort that population to determine loyalties, and what to do about unwelcome agents are difficult problems for the Colombian government. The author of the article suggests that the Chavistas [PSUV or Cubans] hold the initiative, have great influence over events and are going to use the situation to their advantage. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...No solutions appear close...”

Source: Carola Briceño Peña, “Militares refugiados se han convertido en bomba de tiempo para Duque y Guaidó (Military refugees have become a time bomb for Duque and Guaidó),” *Panam Post*, 5 May 2019. <https://es.panamapost.com/carola-briceno/2019/05/05/militares-venezolanos-refugiados-cucuta-bomba-tiempo/>

“The centers for Venezuelan military and police refugees that arrived in Colombia last February in the scheme of trying to send humanitarian aid to Venezuela have turned into a veritable time bomb that nobody knows how to deactivate....

The majority took the step motivated by a firm desire to be on the right side, so as to not lend themselves to the macabre game of blocking medicines that so many Venezuelans need...

Nevertheless, others came over with different motives. ‘Some of the compañeros here came thinking they would be given a house, cars, money. ...

‘One has to be very careful, especially in this zone [refugee area] because here people supporting the Chavistas [PSUV regime in Venezuela] come here easily.’ ...

Moreover, the soldiers continue their refuge in hotels and every day there are new issues in those centers, which the majority want to leave immediately. No solutions appear close and it seems that everything is going to continue the same until the Chavistas cause the problem, to which they are ably increasing pressure, to blow up.”



Venezuelan armed forces.

Source: Cancillería del Ecuador via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venezuelan_armed_forces.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0



Panamanians Elect Laurentino Cortizo

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 May, 66 year old Laurentino “Nito” Cortizo won the presidential elections in Panama. He is to be sworn in on 1 July. President-elect Cortizo is US-educated (Norwich University and the University of Texas). As indicated in the first accompanying report, as Panama’s agricultural minister, Cortizo resigned “over disagreements with the Free Trade Agreement” with the United States. Cortizo is leader of Panama’s Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). Founded by General Omar Torrijos in 1979, the PRD is a member of the Socialist International (as is Voluntad Popular, the Venezuelan party to which Juan Guaidó belongs). Although the PRD is also a member of the leftist Forum of Sao Paulo, which is generally supportive of the Cuban Communist Party and the Venezuelan United Socialist Party PSUV, it is not yet clear what stance President-elect Cortizo will take regarding the Venezuela situation when he is president. As the second accompanying article reports, he had said during the campaign that Juan Guaidó was the President-in-Charge in Venezuela. He apparently also opined, however, that the Venezuelan opposition should negotiate with the Maduro administration. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...‘Nito’ Cortizo...was declared winner...”

Source: Editors, “Elecciones en Panamá: quién es ‘Nito’ Cortizo, al que declaran ganador de la votación presidencial con sólo un 2% de ventaja (Elections in Panama: who is ‘Nito’ Cortizo, who was declared winner of the presidential voting with only a 2% advantage),” *InfocifrasOnline.com* and *BBC Mundo*, 6 May 2019. <https://infocifrasonline.com/2019/05/06/elecciones-en-panama-quien-es-nito-cortizo-al-que-declaran-ganador-de-la-votacion-presidencial-con-solo-un-2-de-ventaja/>

“...the future Panamanian President resigned his post [as agricultural minister in 2001] over disagreements with the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Panama....

These were the first elections since the leaking of the Panama Papers that swept the country three years ago and that were later affected by other huge financial scandals. For this reason the fight against corruption was one of the principal themes of discussion during the campaign....”

Source: Editors, “Nuevo presidente de Panamá: Venezuela tiene en este momento un presidente encargado y se llama Juan Guaidó (New Panamanian President: Venezuela has at this moment a president in charge and his name is Juan Guaidó),” *lapatilla.com*, 6 May 2019. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2019/05/06/nuevo-presidente-de-panama-venezuela-tiene-en-este-momento-un-presidente-encargado-y-se-llama-juan-guaido/>

“The political leader belonging to the Revolutionary Democratic Party, center left, assured during an interview this past February 25th, that ‘Venezuela has at this moment a president in charge and his name is Juan Guaidó.’ He hopes that the transition in Venezuela will happen via negotiated settlement and that they don’t close the ports.”



Laurentino “Nito” Cortizo, 2019.

Source: Alavergne25 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laurentino%22Nito%22_Cortizo_candidato_presidencial_2019.jpg, CC



Iberia Culture War

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying reference puts into stark relief a central political confrontation alive on the Iberian Peninsula. Not only has the migration of Muslims into Spain become a central, if not *the* central electoral political issue, but Barcelona has evidently become its geographic center of gravity. According to the reportage, the city government in Barcelona, which is leftist-controlled, has been increasingly welcoming of and deferential to Islamic expression and to Muslim immigration, while it has at the same time suppressed traditional Catholic expression. The article highlights the platform and candidate campaign promises of the newly formed (circa 2013) political party, Vox. According to the report, Vox is promising to remove radical Salafist clerics and shut down illegal immigration, especially Muslim. While the Vox party is not rightist in the classical Spanish sense (it is pro-Israel, for instance), it is clearly anti-left. It promotes elements of traditional Spanish culture and Spanish national sovereignty. This translates to not being in favor of Catalanian independence and not in favor of Muslim immigration into Iberia. The election featured in the article is for the mayoralty of Barcelona, and the issue of how the city might deal with the clash of cultures could not be expressed to the electorate more plainly. It is not exactly a new issue for the city, either. The Franks kicked the Moors out of Barcelona at the beginning of the 9th Century. The struggle then, as now, is unlikely to be violence-free. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...The Vox proposal is that Barcelona cease to be a ‘sanctuary city’...”

Source: Carlos Cuesta, “Vox promete cerrar las 15 mezquitas salafistas radicales de Barcelona (Vox promises to close Barcelona’s 15 radical Salafist mosques),” *Ok Diario Madrid*, 5 May 2019. https://okdiario.com/espana/vox-promete-cerrar-15-mezquitas-salafistas-radicales-barcelona-4070972?utm_source=onesignal&utm_medium=notificacion

“This is about one of the campaign promises that the Vox [recently formed political party] congressman and candidate Ignacio Garriga will take up....

Facing the decision of the city council to promote and publicize Ramadan, Vox wants to denounce the waste of public funds along with the fact that ‘irresponsibly promotes immigration that has nothing to do with Catalanian or Spanish culture.’...

The Vox proposal is that Barcelona cease to be a ‘sanctuary city’ for illegal immigration and for the jihadist influx....”

ELN Rising

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying references are representative of an increasing number of reports that the Colombian guerrilla Army of National Liberation (ELN) is gaining strength, has increased presence and impunity within Venezuelan territory, and enjoys improving relations with both the FARC and the formal armed services controlled by the Marxist regime in Venezuela. Any potential dialog between the ELN and the Colombian government seems to have ended when the ELN was found responsible for the January bombing of a police school in Bogotá. The ELN, according to reportage, is marshaling strength in the Venezuela-Colombia border region, evidently in support of the defense of the Marxist regime in Venezuela. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...Dialogs [with the ELN] are at a point of death ...”

Source: Editors, “El comandante de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia denunció que casi la mitad del grupo terrorista ELN está en Venezuela (‘The Commander of the Colombian Military Forces denounces that almost half of the ELN terrorist group is in Venezuela),” *Infobae*, 9 May 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/05/09/el-comandante-de-las-fuerzas-militares-de-colombia-denuncio-que-casi-la-mitad-del-grupo-terrorista-eln-esta-en-venezuela/>

“According to calculations, especially of the fronts that commit crimes in the Colombia-Venezuela border zone, that is where those structures and their leaders stay, and we can be talking about some 1000 to 1100 men....Dialogs [with the ELN] are at a point of death since the car bomb attack committed by the ELN this past January 17 against the Police Officers School in Bogota that left 22 dead and 66 wounded.”

Source: Matthew Bristow, “Soldados venezolanos enseñaron cómo lanzar misiles antiaéreos a rebeldes del ELN (Venezuelan soldiers show rebels of the ELN how to launch anti-air missiles),” *Infobae*, 6 May 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/05/06/soldados-venezolanos-ensenaron-como-lanzar-misiles-antiaereos-a-rebeldes-del-eln/>

“Fighters of the Army of National Liberation received instructions on the use of the IGLA ground to air missile system manufactured in Russia, according to Luis Navarro, commander of the Colombian military forces. The Marxist force known as the ELN has used Venezuelan territory as a refuge for a long time, and has a close ideological affinity with the socialist Maduro administration...”

In an interview at an air base in Bogotá, he commented, ‘It is materiel of the Venezuelan armed forces’.

Source: Editors, “El informe de inteligencia que menciona a ‘El Paisa’ tras alianza ELN-FARC para las elecciones de Octubre 2019 (the intelligence report that mentions ‘El Paisa’ in a FARC-ELN alliance for the October 2019 elections),” *El Nodo*, 5 May 2019. <http://elnodo.co/ELECCIONES19>

“Fighters of the Army of National Liberation received instructions on the use of the IGLA ground to air missile system manufactured in Russia, according to Luis Navarro, commander of the Colombian military forces. The Marxist force known as the ELN has used Venezuelan territory as a refuge for a long time, and has a close ideological affinity with the socialist Maduro administration...”

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Russia Steps Deeper Into the Venezuelan Battleground

by Pavel Felgenhauer

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-steps-deeper-into-the-venezuelan-battleground/>

OE Watch Commentary: In the early morning of April 30, opposition leader, speaker of the National Assembly and the self-proclaimed interim president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, declared that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had abandoned the socialist autocratic president Nicolás Maduro. Yet, Guaidó's pronouncement was only supported by a relatively small group of armed Venezuelan personnel who had defected to the opposition.

The acute standoff between the opposition-controlled National Assembly and the Maduro regime has continued since January 2019. On one hand, Guaidó has been recognized as interim president by the United States, most Latin American countries, the European Union and a large portion of the Venezuelan populace. On the other, Maduro is supported by Russia, China, Cuba, Turkey, Iran, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Mexico, and by left-wing *Chavista* activists in Venezuela (supporters of the left-wing political ideology of *Chavism*, based on the ideas, programs and governing style of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez). The severe political, economic and social crisis in Venezuela has greatly diminished the popular appeal of *Chavism*, but the military and security forces have remained loyal to the Maduro regime. The attempt to remove Maduro on April 30 failed as rebel military personnel did not attract much active support within the ranks. Clashes between pro-Guaidó protesters and security forces ensued, and at least one protester was killed in the streets of Caracas. Nevertheless, the regime survived, and Maduro boasted about crushing the attempted coup. The pro-Kremlin media in Moscow also cheered the outcome.

The story of the apparently futile anti-Maduro uprising is complicated. Allegedly, the uprising's top *Chavista* military and regime figures were in communication with Guaidó on organizing an orderly transfer of power, on flying Maduro into exile to Cuba and Guaidó taking power for a brief period before calling new elections. But on April 30, something apparently went wrong, and the top brass *Chavista* conspirators refused to help remove the embattled sitting president. Russia was accused of persuading Maduro to stay and cling to power instead of fleeing to Cuba. Russian officials have denied any accusations of involvement, with sources in Moscow implying that Guaidó acted prematurely, and the plan of regime change fell apart.

The Venezuelan opposition and its supporters have been hoping to persuade Moscow and Beijing to stop resisting regime change in Caracas. They suggest that the best way for Russia and China to secure their considerable investments in Venezuela—primarily in oil production—is to help organize an orderly transition of power that dismantles the bankrupt, incompetent, corrupt and unpopular leftist autocratic regime.

At the end of March 2019, Moscow deployed a force of some 100 military personnel to Venezuela. This force is led by the chief of staff of the Russian Land Forces (*Sukhoputnye Voyska*), Colonel General Vasily Tonkoshkurov, a veteran of the 1980s intervention in Afghanistan and the Chechen wars. Until May 2018, Tonkoshkurov was the deputy chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. The Russian embassy in Venezuela announced, “[O]ur military personnel are in no way involved in the clashes in Caracas.” Moscow insists the Russian military contingent in Venezuela is not a fighting force, but rather a group of advisors and technical specialists helping refurbish the Venezuelan military. The Russian contingent is also assisting in implementing the military hardware Russia had previously sold the *Chavismo* regime (over \$11 billion worth in all) that has been collecting dust during the Venezuelan economic, political and social crisis.

To date, Russia has provided Venezuela with modern Su-30MK2V fighters, T-72 tanks, heavy guns, and a variety of missile and anti-aircraft systems, including S-300VM (Antey-2500) long-range interceptors, shorter-range BuK-M2 and S-125 Pechora-2M anti-aircraft missiles, as well as Smerch long-range missiles. Moscow has also provided Caracas with modern shoulder-launched Igla-S anti-aircraft missiles.

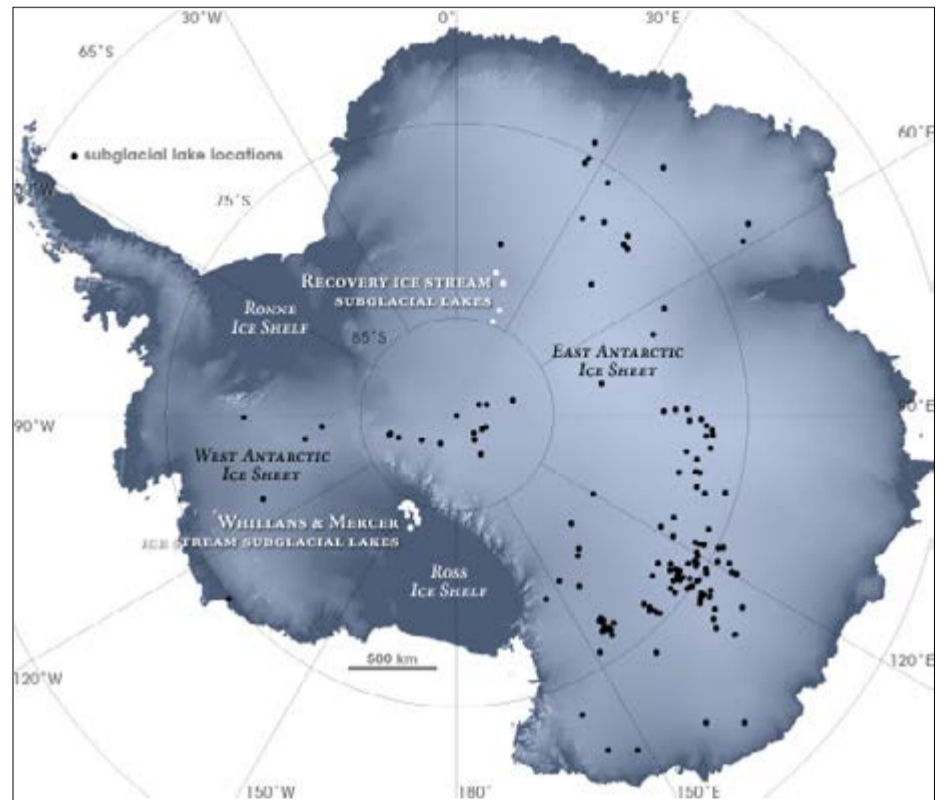
Russian military analysts believe that with that hardware, Russian advisors and specialists can build a well-organized multi-layer anti-aircraft and missile-defense system in Venezuela that could inflict serious damage on any US-led forces if they “dare to invade to change the regime.” Colonel General Tonkoshkurov and his group were apparently sent to Venezuela specifically to organize, build up and lead a comprehensive multi-service defense force ready to inflict heavy casualties and repel the Americans. This may explain why such a high-level, combat-experienced general was sent to lead the mission in Venezuela. Moscow seems ready to take on the US and any possible allies in Venezuela, seeing it as part of a global “geopolitical” standoff with Washington. Russia wants to show it is ready to stand up to the challenge and possibly engage the US military in a direct military confrontation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Felgenhauer)**



The Antarctic Institute of Argentina and New Scientific Discoveries

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-January, a team of 50 scientists, investigators, mountaineers and drillers from Argentina and the United States discovered living organisms in the deepest lake to ever be found in the Antarctic. After this discovery, the lake was named Lake Mercer; a body of water that does not freeze even though its average temperature is zero degrees. The hope with Lake Mercer's discovery is that it will lead to additional discoveries in Antarctica with consent and help from Argentina. The accompanying passages discuss this discovery and the Antarctic Institute of Argentina, which promotes exploration such as this latest one.

The first accompanying passage from Argentinian Via Pais reports on the new discovery, noting that the scientist discovered bacterial cells, remains of crustaceans, plants, mushrooms and other unnamed species in Lake Mercer. The second accompanying passage from the Antarctic Institute of Argentina discusses Argentina's mission, vision and values in Antarctica. As the passage discusses, the Antarctic Institute of Argentina (IAA) is a scientific/technological organization that is overseen by the Argentinian government. The IAA is also an active member of the National Science and Technology Agency of Argentina. Finally, the IAA is seen as an international pioneer in development and studies in Antarctica. The IAA is recognized as a highly respected scientific/technological organization in the Antarctic at both the national and international level. This is because Argentina played a leading role in creating the Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959. In 1951, the IAA was recognized as the first international scientific institute exclusively dedicated to studying the Antarctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Antarctica Subglacial Lakes Map.

Source: NASA Earth Observatory via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antarctica_Subglacial_Lakes_Map.png, Public Domain.

“The expedition that led to the discovery of Lake Mercer was planned over many years. The hope of scientists participating in the expedition was to find single cell microbes. However, scientists were met with a spectacular surprise when they found bacterial cells, remains of crustaceans, plants, mushrooms and other unnamed species.”

Source: “Histórico: encontraron vida en un lago inexplorado de la Antártida (Historic: Scientists Find Never-Explored Lake in the Antarctic with Living Plants and Creatures),” *Via Pais*, 19 January 2019. <https://viapais.com.ar/argentina/814451-historico-encontraron-vida-en-un-lago-inexplorado-de-la-antartida/>

The expedition that led to the discovery of Lake Mercer was planned over many years. The hope of scientists participating in the expedition was to find single cell microbes. However, scientists were met with a spectacular surprise when they found bacterial cells, remains of crustaceans, plants, mushrooms and other unnamed species.

Source: “Instituto Antártico de Argentina (Antarctic Institute of Argentina),” *Dirección Nacional del Antártico*, Updated 19 March 2019. <http://www.dna.gob.ar/instituto-ant%C3%A1rtico-argentino>

Mission: In concordance with what has been set forth by the state, the role of the IAA is to define, develop, direct, control, coordinate and release scientific and technological activities conducted in the Antarctic to countries' that are part of the Antarctic Treaty signed in 1959. Release of findings is positive as it promotes communication with both national and international scientific communities.

Vision: The work of the IAA is valued for its unyielding compromise to international scientific cooperation, their protection of the environment and the continued work conducted by the government to ensure peace in the country; all of which are Antarctic Treaty pillars.

Institutional Values of the IAA: The IAA stands out as an international scientific/technological organization for some of the reasons highlighted below:

- Dedication, experience, and creativity in the development and promotion of science in the Antarctic
- Flexibility and resilience in facing conditions which at times impede scientific and technological work in the Antarctic
- A profound sense of confraternity, respect and shared work conducted with other countries' in the Antarctic.
- Respect for the principals and norms as laid out in the Antarctic Treaty

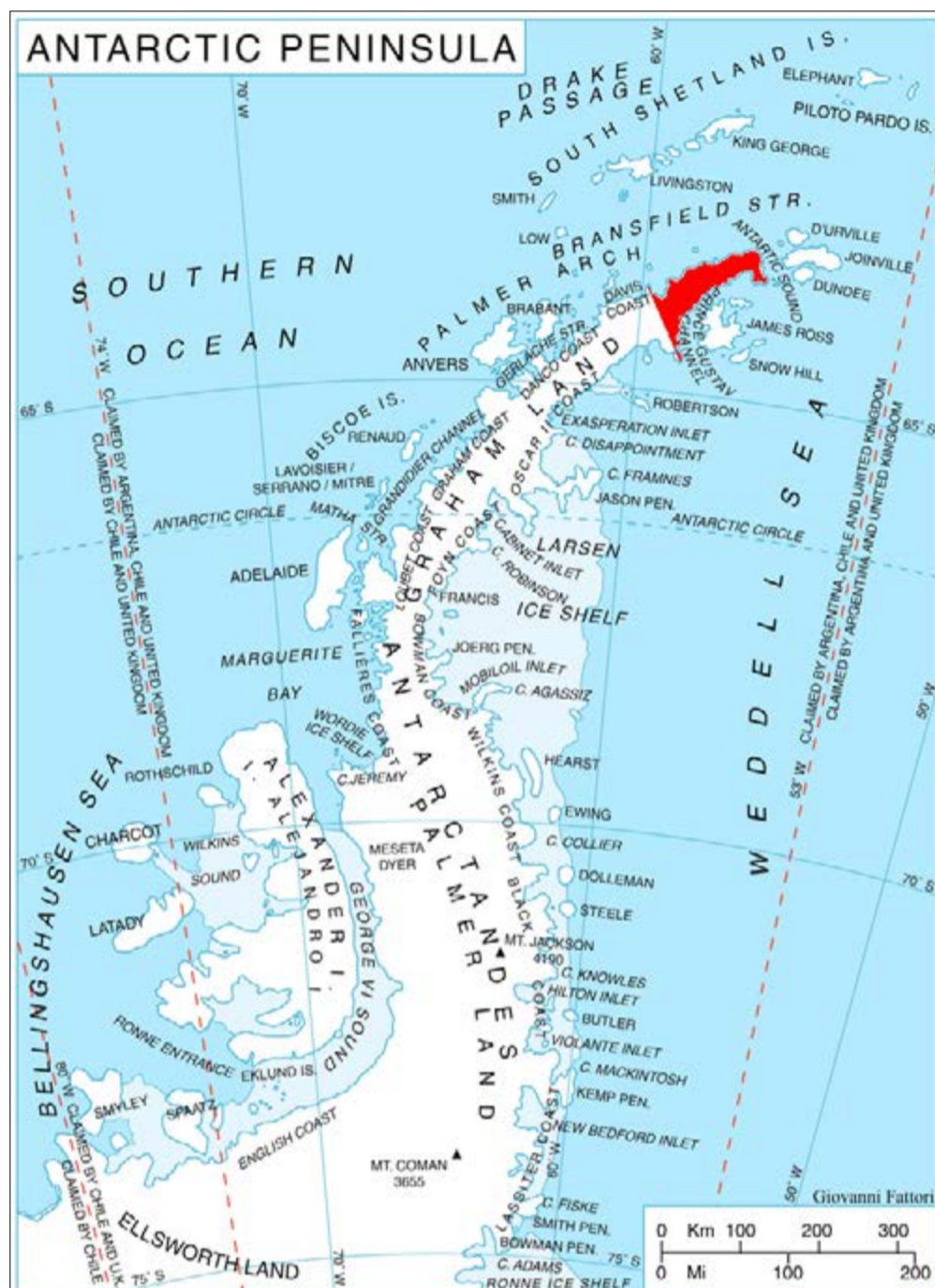


Chile Makes Advances in Antarctic Exploration

OE Watch Commentary: The following excerpts discuss Chile's activities in Antarctic exploration. They highlight the role of the Chilean military, recent successes by Chile in Antarctica, and how Chile and Argentina are looking for ways to improve bilateral cooperation to protect their common interests in the southern continent.

The first accompanying passage from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs discusses “Dirantartica,” a Directorate responsible for planning and executing Antarctic affairs; along with its diplomatic, legal and political roles. Dirantartica works in conjunction with national and international organizations to safeguard Chile's interests in the conservation and preservation of Antarctica. The passage credits the Chilean Armed Forces for making it possible for scientists to conduct research in Antarctica through the innovative work of a group known as the O'Higgins Exploration and Rescue Section.

The O'Higgins Exploration and Rescue Section (SERO) is part of the Chilean Army and works to develop the planning and execution phases of exploration efforts, particularly to set up safe passage for scientists interested in studying never seen areas and areas that are difficult to access. As the second accompanying passage from a paper written by the Brazilian Navy discusses, SERO soldiers tasked to exploration missions are highly trained to operate in harsh environments. As part of a recently concluded mission that started in 2008 and ended in 2018, SERO was able to set up a base camp in Plateau Laclavere, north of the Antarctic Peninsula. The passage highlights the challenges related to accessing this area (aerial routes proved to be too dangerous due to rapid meteorological changes), and notes that despite these challenges, SERO found a way to access the area by land. Now, thanks to the diligent work of the SERO soldiers, national and international scientists have access to the new and vast area of Plateau Laclavere.



Plateau Laclavere, Antarctica.

Source: Apcbg via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ant-pen-map-Trinity-Peninsula.PNG>, CC BY-SA 3.0

Chile and Argentina both realize for the need to enhance bilateral cooperation on the Antarctic Peninsula. As such, they began forming interdisciplinary teams capable of conducting joint inspections of foreign bases as part of the Antarctic Treaty in 2016. The most recent inspections were conducted at the end of February 2019 and focused on bases operated by four separate countries. The joint inspections suggest the two countries' willingness to abide by the Antarctic Treaty and their desire to protect Antarctica. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Plateau Laclavere is 1,000 meters above sea level and is known for its flat terrain. These two factors present access problems as wind speed can increase up to 25 knots in a short time period which is generally accompanied with cloudiness which reduces visibility to a few meters. This means that Plateau Laclavere is hard to access by land but nearly impossible by air because of wind and visibility issues. It is also the reason SERO needed to build an efficient land route to this area.”



Continued: Chile Makes Advances in Antarctic Exploration

Source: “Antártica (Antarctica)”, Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 February 2019. <https://minrel.gob.cl/minrel/site/edic/base/port/antartica.html>

Dirantartica places ample focus on all aspects that pertain to the Antarctic Treaty and its signatories. In doing this, Dirantartica fully complies with its international obligations as laid out by the Treaty to include following international guidelines and consultative norms regarding Antarctica. Additionally, Dirantartica strictly adheres to its own Antarctic Strategic Plan (2015-2019) and collaborates with other public entities competent in positioning Chile the Region of Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic as the gateway to the Antarctic. Apart from the workload Dirantartica conducts, the organization also develops yearly principal objectives; some of which are listed below:

- *Applying the National Antarctic Policy of 2017, the Antarctic Strategic Plan (2015-2019) and the coordination and execution of the National Antarctic Program. These tasks are accomplished with the participation of the other organizations who play a role in Antarctic matters and with the help of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some of these organizations include: the Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH), the Directorate of Borders and State Limits (DIFROL); the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of the Environment, the Undersecretary of Tourism, the Undersecretary of Fisheries, and the XII Region of Magallanes, just to name a few.*
- *Prepares and coordinates with the national Antarctic delegation for their participation in international forums regarding the Antarctic Treaty. Additionally, Dirantartica helps organizations prepare for consultative meetings with experts in addition to implementing the decisions adopted in such instances.*
- *Coordinates everything related to the Commission for the Conservation of Living Antarctic Marine Resources (CCRUMA).*
- *Plays an active role in the Environmental Impact Operational Committee Assessment. This organization provides up-to-date assessments on condition in Antarctica to the Ministry of the Environment.*
- *Acts as the Executive Advisor to the Antarctic Policy Council and its Permanent Working Committees to include General Affairs and the Antarctica Financial team.*
- *Drafts and prepares legal regulations on issues that concern Dirantartica's areas of expertise.*
- *Conducts specific reports at the request of national authorities and solicits queries from public and private organizations related to issues relevant to their role in Antarctica.*
- *Disseminates work completed by the Chilean government to members of the Antarctic Treaty via the use of the thematic compendia, seminars, talks and courses.*
- *Coordinates and prepares documents that are entered in the annual Antarctic National archives.*

Source: “Plateau Laclavere, nueva ruta para la exploración y la ciencia (Plateau Laclavere: New Route for Exploration and Science),” *Marinha.mil.br*, 6 July 2018. <https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/sites/www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/files/publicacoes/rapal/documentos/di/DI-57%20-%20PlateauLaclavere%2C%20nueva%20ruta%20para%20la%20exploraci%C3%B3n%20y%20la%20ciencia.pdf>

The O'Higgins Exploration and Rescue Section (SERO) has improved over time in terms of techniques, procedures that must be followed to mitigate loss of personnel and equipment needed to operate in Antarctica and pave routes or move heavy ice blocks. In establishing new terms and procedures, SERO has come up with three principal objectives in the field. The first is to support scientific research on land and at sea while ensuring the safe movement of glaciers or islands located along the coast. Second, SERO is responsible for providing logistical support to scientists and ensuring their survival. And third, SERO aims to create safe land routes to locations in Antarctica where scientists are interested in exploring such as Plateau Laclavere.

The area known as Plateau Laclavere is located north of the Antarctic Peninsula. It measures 40 square kilometers and contains a mass of glacial ice that measures approximately 350 meters from top to bottom. This area does not differ greatly from general characteristics presented in other areas of Antarctica except for two distinct geographical characteristics. Plateau Laclavere is 1,000 meters above sea level and is known for its flat terrain. These two factors present access problems as wind speed can increase up to 25 knots in a short time period which is generally accompanied with cloudiness which reduces visibility to a few meters. This means that Plateau Laclavere is hard to access by land but nearly impossible by air because of wind and visibility issues. It is also the reason SERO needed to build an efficient land route to this area.

Source: “Chile y Argentina concluyen tercera inspección conjunta de bases extranjeras en la Antártica (Chile and Argentina Conclude Third Joint Inspection of Foreign Bases in Antarctica),” *Chilean Antarctic Institute*, 7 March 2019. <http://www.inach.cl/inach/?p=25869>

Joint inspections of foreign bases in Antarctica conducted by Chile and Argentina aim to prepare each country to face new regulations that will likely be included in the next iteration of the Antarctic Treaty. It also helps foreign countries operating in Antarctica to review its Protocol on Environmental Protection. The joint procedure conducted by Chile and Argentina allows optimization of resources to be able to exercise their central power rights granted to them through the Antarctic Treaty. Joint inspections also help to verify compliance with obligations assumed by Consultative Parties, particularly those related to the protection of the Antarctic environment. Finally, the inspections serve as a measure to help Chile and Argentina improve bilateral relations regarding work in Antarctica.



Ecuador's Response to Increasing Narco Flights

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles discuss the challenge posed by clandestine airstrips, specifically ones used for drug smuggling with aircraft because they make detection of narco-flights difficult. As the passages note, Ecuador's government is trying to thwart this activity through a number of initiatives.

As the first passage discusses, Mauricio Campuzano, the Commanding General for the Ecuadorian Airforce (FAE) recently said that there are currently over 2,000 airstrips in the country. While some of these are legal, others are not, and authorities have no control over the latter. This comment came following the discovery of a clandestine landing strip in its early construction stages and the crash of a narco flight. In this same passage, Campuzano discusses why detecting narco flights are difficult and what the government's plan is to thwart or at least lessen this activity. These include installing a new radar in Manabí, conducting ongoing studies regarding ingress and egress routes of illicit aircraft, and the use of new helicopters to better monitor areas of remote access.

The second passage, from the Ecuador Ministry of Interior discusses an operation named "Plan Conquistador," launched on 15 January 2019. According to the passage, the main objective of this operation was to dismantle a cell of Ecuadorians and Mexicans who utilize aerial routes to move drugs from Ecuador to Mexico. The results are also highlighted, and include multiple arrests and drug seizures.

Ecuadorian news source *El Comercio* discusses why narco-traffickers prefer Cessna planes. It notes that Cessnas are "infrequently detected by radars or police monitoring for illicit aircraft as they can fly as low as 500 meters, turn off their navigational lights and transponders and land on airstrips that measure 300-500 meters." Apparently, these airstrips can be constructed in Ecuador in less than a day if necessary. The passage also points out that once the aircraft lands in Ecuador, "it is loaded with approximately 700kgs of cocaine within 7-15 minutes at which time it departs to Mexico." Once in Mexico, the Cessna will land on an airstrip if there is one in place. If not, "cocaine packages are thrown off the aircraft in areas pre-coordinated with Mexican narcos." **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

"It is not easy to detect clandestine airstrips as landing strips do not require any more than 500-600 meters to land if not less."

Source: "En Ecuador hay más de 2.000 pistas aéreas no controladas (More than 2,000 Uncontrolled Landing Strips Located in Ecuador)," *El Universo*, 6 April 2019. <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2019/04/05/nota/7270838/ecuador-hay-mas-2000-pistas-aereas-no-controladas>

Mauricio Campuzano, the Commanding General for the Ecuadorian Airforce (FAE) reported that there are currently more than 2,000 airstrips which authorities have no control over. He further stated that it is "not easy to detect clandestine airstrips as landing strips do not require any more than 500-600 meters to land if not less. Furthermore, the landing strips may be paved roads or prepared or unprepared landing strips. The pilots responsible for landing aircraft in these difficult conditions face complicated and risky landings".

This statement was made following the recent discovery of an illicit airstrip under construction in El Aromo, Ecuador and shortly after, the crash of a narco aircraft in Manabí. In response to Campuzano's statements, Oswaldo Jarrin, Ecuador's Defense Minister asserted the necessity to better monitor areas where illicit aircraft enter the country. Steps mentioned by Jarrin include installing a new radar in Manabí (principal entrance point of illicit flights), a change in mentality from "action-reaction" that needs to be replaced with a permanent and consistent study that will yield answers for the future. As for the FAE, they are replacing their Dhruv helicopters with 3 new helicopters to include an AW 119, an MK2 and an AW 119 simple. Ecuador will also continue using the P3 it already has.

Source: "Desmontan red narcotraficante que operaba entre Ecuador y México (Police Dismantle Drug Trafficking Ring that Operated between Ecuador and Mexico)," *Ecuadorian Ministry of Interior*, 15 January 2019. <https://www.ministeriointerior.gob.ec/desmontan-red-narcotraficante-que-operaba-entre-ecuador-y-mexico/>

The Ecuadorian government launched "Plan Conquistador" on January 15, 2019 in provinces to include Guayas y Santa Elena. The reason for this operation? To dismantle a cell of Ecuadorians and Mexicans who utilize aerial routes to move drugs from Ecuador to Mexico. Reported results were reported as follows:

- Arrest of 11 individuals (9 Ecuadorians and 2 Mexican nationals)
- Seizure of 373.37kgs of cocaine

Intelligence work conducted by the National Police and Anti-Narcotics Directorate 3 months before the operation verified the following information:

- That aerial flights were occurring between Ecuador and Mexico
- The location of seven criminal cell members in Guayaquil
- The locations of homes utilized by Ecuadorians and Mexicans for meetings and to store drugs.
- Vehicles used to move drugs

Source: "Entre el 2003 y el 2018, se han confiscado 17 naves con droga (Between 2003 and 2018, Authorities Confiscate 17 Aircraft Carrying Drugs)," *El Comercio*, 12 March 2018. <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/avionetas-narcotrafico-confiscado-policia-inteligencia.html>

Aircraft generally used to traffic drugs are Cessnas for multiple reasons. First, they are infrequently detected by radars or police monitoring for illicit aircraft as they can fly as low as 500 meters, turn off their navigational lights and transponders and land on airstrips that measure 300-500 meters. These same airstrips can be constructed in Ecuador in less than a day if necessary. Once an aircraft lands in Ecuador, it is loaded with approximately 700kgs of cocaine within 7-15 minutes at which time it departs to Mexico. Once in Mexican territory, the Cessna will land on an airstrip if there is one in place. If not, cocaine packages are thrown off the aircraft in areas pre-coordinated with Mexican narcos.