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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Talks between Vladimir Putin and President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during a working visit to Russia, April 8, 2019

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60244>, CC BY SA 4.0

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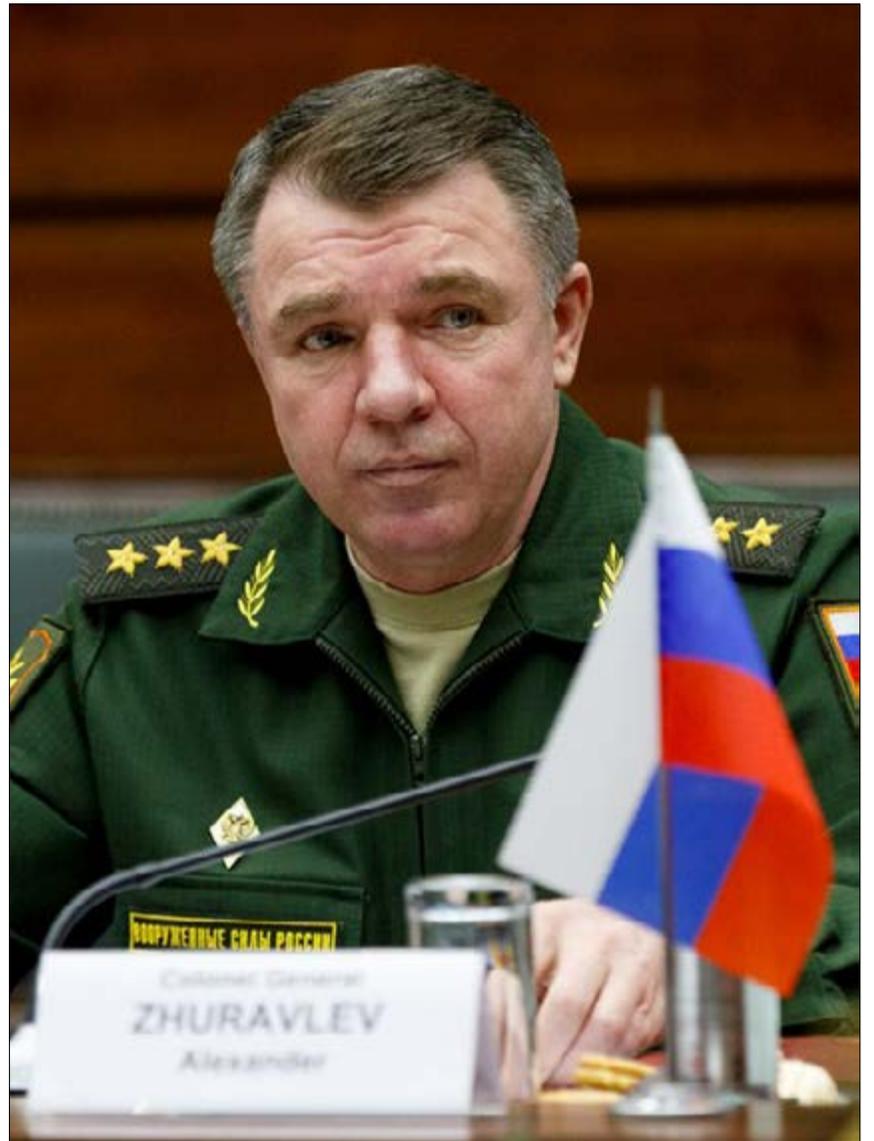


Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted interview of the commander of the Western Military District, Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, in *Krasnaya Zvezda* sheds light on the impact that Russia's involvement in Syria is having on the training and development of the Russian Armed Forces. Colonel General Zhuravlev explains the importance of effective command and control, use of unmanned vehicles, military deception, and the increasing need to plan for urban and underground warfare in combat operations.

The second accompanying excerpt, which is from an interview of the commander of the 41st Combined-Arms Army, Major General Yakov Reztantsev, also in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, is in many respects quite similar to Colonel General Zhuravlev's account of the importance of Russia's Syrian experience. Major General Reztantsev makes an interesting observation about how Russia sees the nature of current and future warfare: "We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere." This mention of 'inverted front' is likely the view that current and future conflicts will be fought through the depth of defense instead of on well-defined fronts, as was usually the case in the 1st and 2nd World Wars. Conflict, in this sense, could manifest in terms of heavy armored formations on the country's borders, but also through precision rear area strikes, special operations forces, and hostile information operations (exploitative media and social media) used to rile up disaffected elements of the population and unnerve the population as a whole.

This thinking is in tune with the Russian General Staff's public views on the nature of current and future warfare, and is in line with recent reforms that have focused on controlling media and social media narratives, and increasing rear area security capabilities. This is likely the impetus for current discussions about creating smaller military districts that would function as front-level commands in the event of large-scale warfare. (Discussions of front-level activities had fallen out of favor after the Cold War.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District.
Source: Mil.ru, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Zhuravlyov_\(2017-02-28\)_-1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Zhuravlyov_(2017-02-28)_-1.jpg), CC BY 4.0

“Modern combat -- and this has been confirmed by the Syrian experience -- requires commanders at all levels to display military keen-wittedness and to seek out opportunities to mislead the enemy and force him to act in a way that is advantageous to us.” -Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District

“It is hard to overestimate the significance of the experience acquired in Syria. The skills and abilities obtained there are being systematically developed into special methodological guides.” -Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District

“We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere. This concept for the conduct of combat operations continues to be studied by military specialists taking account of the emergence of new means of armed combat and the effective monitoring of modern reconnaissance systems and instruments.” -Major General Yakov Reztantsev, Commander of the 41st Combined Arms Army



Continued: Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

Source: Oleg Pochinok, “С учётом сирийского опыта (Taking Account of Syrian Experience),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 27 May 2019. <http://redstar.ru/s-uchyotom-sirijskogo-opyta-2>

Saint Petersburg -- The Western Military District winter training period, which has now ended, showed that considerable attention is being devoted within the troops to implementing the experience acquired while performing missions in the Syrian Arab Republic. This experience, as practice shows, plays an important role in enhancing the proficiency both of individual servicemen and of units and subunits. Hero of Russia Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, commander of the Western Military District, talked to Krasnaya Zvezda about the work being done in this area.

Alexander Alexanderovich, the concept of “Syrian experience” is rather generalized. What does it entail, first and foremost?

Above all, this is not a separate area of intensive combat training, but an organic component of it.

During practical performance of combat training assignments we strive to make as much use as possible of the experience of conducting hostilities in modern armed conflicts, including in the Syrian Arab Republic. When conducting tactical, special tactical, and command-staff exercises, we devote particular attention to unorthodox thinking, departing from established stereotypes, and using nonstandard methods when assignments are being tackled by generals and officers. To this end, they make active use of procedures such as turning movements, envelopment, infiltration, and covertly moving to the attack transition line. Modern combat -- and this has been confirmed by Syrian experience -- requires commanders at all levels to display military keen-wittedness and to seek out opportunities to mislead the enemy and force him to act in a way that is advantageous to us. Heightened attention is therefore paid to the utmost readiness of command and control and comprehensive support systems, and also to the covert deployment of the necessary forces.

Is account taken of the particularities of hostilities conducted by terrorist forces? How well studied are they?

A particular feature of the Middle East conflict is that the main hostilities are conducted in population centers. Moreover, the terrorists do not only strive to maintain their positions but also make attempts to expand the territory under their control. They use simple and on the whole effective tactics and methods of combat. In particular, they use the civilian population as a living shield, thereby depriving the pro-government forces of their superiority in firepower. In addition, in the Middle East conflict the terrorists for the first time began using state-of-the-art means of armed combat -- strike UAVs and means of electronic reconnaissance and electronic warfare...When holding a seized population center, the terrorists generally organize a system of fragmented defense [очаговая оборона]. Its stability derives from a robust system of firepower, high density of firepower, and also the ability to rapidly concentrate forces in the necessary place. For this purpose, buildings are linked by tunnels and underground communication passages, making it possible to covertly regroup and transfer reserves to the most threatened areas. Approaches to positions and tank danger areas are mined. The lower stories of buildings in key areas are turned into long-term fire positions. Armor and artillery are placed in residential districts close to socially significant assets (hospitals, schools, mosques) in order to avoid being destroyed by airstrikes. At crossroads, barricades are erected and permanent emplacements constructed, linked by communication passages for covert maneuvers.

In other words, the importance of skillful organization of urban warfare is increasing?

Definitely. Cities, as natural fortified areas, are centers of resistance and constitute a goal of armed combat. In particular, fierce fighting was conducted for Palmyra and Aleppo in Syria, and also for Fallujah and Mosul in Iraq. Moreover, the cities of Aleppo and Mosul are, in fact, megalopolises with a population of more than 2 million. Incidentally, it can also be said that in Syria a new way of using Armed Forces formations was developed and tested in practice for the first time -- the humanitarian operation. Thus, in Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta, at the same time as performing combat assignments to rout the terrorists, it was necessary within a short space of time to plan and conduct measures to evacuate the civilian population from the conflict zone...Practice shows that the establishment of control over urbanized areas will, in the medium term, become one of the key conditions for achieving success in military operations. When conducting hostilities in a city (or population center), a number of particular features can be identified. These are the lack of a clear line of contact with the enemy and the extent of the line of contact both vertically (from underground passages to the upper stories of buildings) and in terms of depth. Another characteristic is the difficulty of maneuvering forces, and also of using armor because of the considerable number of obstacles. There is also the factor of the defending side's superior knowledge of the locality...

Do the gunmen's tactics and the various objective conditions for countering them require an appropriate adjustment to the organization of everyday combat training?

It is hard to overestimate the significance of the experience acquired in Syria. The skills and abilities obtained there are being systematically developed into special methodological guides. At training grounds, commanders of subunits are practicing constructing and overcoming “Syrian ramparts,” conducting “tunnel warfare” and “countertunnel measures,” and combatting “jihad-mobiles” and combat drones, including with the use of electronic warfare. During combat training, work is done on assignments as part of integrated reconnaissance and fire and reconnaissance and strike systems, with the use of various types of maneuver. Tactical exercises by motorized rifle and tank subunits are conducted in collaboration with aviation and the use of UAVs.



Continued: Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

Source: Taras Rudyk, “Боевые приоритеты сибирских бригад (The Combat Priorities of the Siberian Brigades),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 15 May 2019. <http://redstar.ru/boevye-prioritety-sibirskih-brigad>

You have served in various regions and taken part in troop operations -- not least in Syria. Given that fact, have you made any changes or introduced any innovations into the tactical and weapons training of Siberian formations and units or into the professional career-area training of officers?

Virtually all formation and unit commanders -- as well as the bulk of Army command-and-control officers -- have performed missions in the Syrian Arab Republic or another armed conflict areas. We are, of course, introducing the combat experience they acquired there into the process of training the personnel in tactical field training, at gunnery ranges, and at troop firing ranges. This is the priority requirement from the Commander of the Central Military District, the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, and the Russian Federation Defense Minister.

As regards the combat experience acquired in Syria both by our specialists and on the whole by the grouping of Russian troops in the Syrian Arab Republic, we have already repeatedly applied it and are applying it in practice in the course of tactical live firing exercises, and we are also demonstrating it for training purposes at methodological training camps with commanders at various levels. Thus, in the course of defensive exercises, engineer fortifications for defensive positions were produced covertly and in good time by utilizing bulldozers with cover provided by combat engineer and reconnaissance sections. When it came to preparing the “Syrian berm” [protective earthworks for maneuver in which a tank fires in motion], defense was conducted on a platoon-by-platoon basis. Each section appointed observers to monitor the aerial situation with a view to detecting enemy unmanned aerial vehicles -- quadcopters and drones. In order to combat “jihad mobiles” composite groups armed with heavy machine guns, antitank rocket launchers, and antitank guided missiles were set up. Snipers practiced elements of countersniper warfare and camouflage skills in both wooded, mountain, and desert terrain...

You said that during the winter period there were two two-sided battalion tactical exercises with live firing. In February one of those battalion tactical exercises was held with subunits of the 74th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade at the Yurga Combined-Arms Test Range -- a battalion tactical group with reinforcing and support subunits operated mobile defense. To what extent is that subject currently a topical one when training troops in this region? What are the features of combat training under Siberian conditions?

It cannot be said that we are entirely abandoning the classic static defense. It is defined by the field manual when troops are concentrated across a broad front and they have time to prepare for combat. But the questions of conducting maneuver defense are topical today, since they are dictated by the combat experience acquired in the armed conflict areas -- including Syria -- that I have mentioned. We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere. This concept for the conduct of combat operations continues to be studied by military specialists taking account of the emergence of new means of armed combat and the effective monitoring of modern reconnaissance systems and instruments. We are training subunits to conduct mobile operations under enemy fire, because the troops must be prepared to repel an attack from any direction at any time...

Given the modern development of weaponry and unmanned aerial vehicles -- including unmanned combat aerial vehicles -- we must rule out the static performance of missions and operate in a creative fashion. When planning combat operations and accomplishing missions, commanders must think about how to protect the lives and well-being of their subordinates. That is why we are training the troops at test ranges to be able to change their location as quickly as possible once their combat training missions have been accomplished. That was the case with the two-sided live-fire battalion tactical exercise in the 74th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, during which the troops successfully rehearsed more than 15 firing and tactical missions, and the commanders acquired skills relating to the command and control of subunits and organizing collaboration between them in a complex and rapidly changing environment.



Corruption and Delays in Russian Long-Range UAV Development

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade, Russian military officials have repeatedly discussed developing, testing and fielding a heavy, long-range UAV. The need for such a weapon system became fully evident after the Kremlin's decision in September 2015 to support the Assad government in Syria. Thereafter, every six months or so, defense officials have announced that the development and testing were almost completed, and that fielding would begin in the near future. To date, however, the Russian military still lacks a long-range UAV. The accompanying brief excerpt from the independent news source *Sobesednik* provides some insight into the causes of this delay.



Altair heavy UAV in construction.

Source: SteSus85 - собственная работа [own work], <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=62882300>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The article begins by pointing out that “Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu will inspect Tatarstan [Kazan] for the second time this year,” apparently to figure out “why the State Defense Order had been disrupted for production of the Altair heavy UAV, acutely needed by our Armed Forces performing combat missions in Syria.” The article then goes on to describe how one of the key firms involved in developing the heavy UAV (the M.P. Simonov Experimental Design Bureau) was a victim of a “hostile acquisition... with support of Kazan law enforcement officials.” The remainder of the article attempts to explain the complex, convoluted scheme which allowed certain business and state officials to divert defense funding for the heavy UAV into their own pockets. In anticipation of Putin's visit, the article alleges that the staff of Tatarstan leadership “were able to destroy practically all documents that could bear evidence” of criminal activity at the local level.

While not necessarily representative of the wider Russian defense industry, this article highlights a key obstacle to the country's continued plans for military modernization: deep seated, bureaucratic irregularities, even corruption. Even with all the rhetoric about the strength of Russian patriotism, this article suggests that certain senior government, business and security officials continue to develop schemes for personal enrichment at the expense of the country's defense. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...A multitude of questions have built up for local VPK [military industrial complex] enterprises: one of the main ones is why the State Defense Order had been disrupted for production of the Altair heavy UAV acutely needed by our Armed Forces performing combat missions in Syria...”

Source: Maksim Rogozin, “Совещание в Казани: какие документы сотрудники президента Татарстана могли уничтожить перед визитом Путина (Conference in Kazan: Which Documents Associates of the President of Tatarstan Could Destroy Prior to Putin's Visit),” *Sobesednik Online*, 13 May 2019. <https://sobesednik.ru/politika/20190513-soveshanie-v-kazani-kakie-dokumenty-sotrudniki-prezidenta-tatarstana-mogli-unichtozhit-pered-vizitom-putina>

Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu will inspect Tatarstan for the second time this year. A multitude of questions have built up for local VPK [military industrial complex] enterprises: one of the main ones is why the State Defense Order had been disrupted for production of the Altair heavy UAV acutely needed by our Armed Forces performing combat missions in Syria...

...Complaints can be lodged at the same time with Republic head Rustam Minnikhanov, whose former adviser, Cypriot citizen Rustem Magdeyev, participated in the hostile acquisition of the M.P. Simonov Experimental Design Bureau with support of Kazan' law enforcement officials. At least that is what both the heads and rank-and-file personnel of the Bureau assert.

...Magdeyev is an influential person in the Republic. According to mass media information, he is a confidant of Radik Yusupov, leader of the so-called Sevastopol' organized crime group and known by the nickname “Dragon.”

...It was learned from our sources close to the Republic leadership that on the threshold of the visit by the president of Russia, associates of Minnikhanov's staff were able to destroy practically all documents that could bear evidence of his ties with Magdeyev.

Just what position will Tatarstan Republic President Minnikhanov take now? Will he defend the interests of his associate Magdeyev or will he finally tell the truth about why the State Defense Order was disrupted?



The Path Already Taken: A Return to Cadre Formations?

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted editorial by renowned military journalist and academic Alexander Golts in *Ekho Moskvy* discusses the reasoning behind proposed changes to the provisions in Russian law on medical exemptions for conscription. In short, the changes will require that disqualifying medical conditions be documented only by institutions approved by the Ministry of Defense (MoD), instead of the current practice of allowing private physicians to do this task. This reform is intended to decrease the number of medical waivers for military service, as it will presumably be far more difficult to bribe personnel at the MoD approved institutions, than a private physician.

Golts presents an interesting question about why the Russian Federation is still very concerned about draft dodging, while it has been bragging about the popularity of contract service. The author posits that Russia has fallen far short of the previously stated goal of having 425,000 servicemen under contract by 2019 (the actual number probably being around 350,000 servicemen). Golts also points out that although the Russian MoD has experienced some modest growth in terms of personnel in the last few years, the total number of personnel is still fewer than 900,000. Golts states that Russia has added 25 large units since 2014, but despite this significant increase in the number of units, the number of personnel has only increased by 30,000 in this time period (enough personnel for 3-4 large units). In addition, Russia plans on creating 11 more divisions and brigades by the end of 2019. The author speculates that these large increases in unit numbers, but modest increase in personnel, means that Russia is pondering a return to the cadre system, that used partially manned units, and that was abolished during the 2008 ‘New Look’ reforms. Golts believes that if Russia is considering a return to the cadre system, it will need to maintain a large reserve of personnel who have received military training during compulsory service. Although a complete return to cadre system of military manning is highly unlikely, Russia may be contemplating a partial return to this system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“...the General Staff strategists have only one way out. It is to return to the Soviet mass mobilized army concept.” -Alexander Golts

Source: “Alexander Golts, Александр Гольц: Зачем власти ужесточают правила призыва в армию (Alexander Golts: Why the Authorities Have Tightened Conscription Regulations in the Army),” *Ekho Moskvy Online*, 31 May 2019. <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/openmedia/2436425-echo>

All sorts of new initiatives, which are directed at toughening draft regulations, are pelting down from the commanding heights. We just learned that the Ministry of Defense has submitted a draft of new amendments to the Law “On Military Obligation and Military Service”...The capability will appear for the draft boards to double-check the health of conscripts, who had previously received a deferment, semiannually. To do this, they will regularly send them for a reexamination to special entrusted medical institutions, which are on a special Defense Ministry list. So, they presume to fight this through the use of mercenary doctors, who receive compensation to assign diagnoses to those young men, who are released from service. At the same time, the Government Commission on Draft Law Activity has supported the draft law on increasing the fines on military registration...

The new Defense Ministry initiatives indicate to what extent the official reports differ from the actual state of affairs. So, the Military Department contends that compulsory service soldiers are gradually being supplanted by contract servicemen. However, even the official figures do not confirm that. Actually, the number of conscripts has continuously declined over the course of several years. In 2018, it even set a peculiarly abysmal record – more than 260,000 men were drafted.

But, at the same time, over the course of several years (since 2016), the official strength of contract servicemen has not increased at all, one and the same figure has been cited in the reports – 385,000. In the process, even it appeared to be inflated. In a Krasnaya Zvezda interview in March, Yevgeniy Burdinskiy, the chief of the General Staff Main Organizational-Mobilization Directorate, acknowledged that there are “more than 350,000” contract servicemen. But literally several days later, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu confided that there are 395,000 contract servicemen in the Armed Forces... In any case, this is lower than planned. According to the Ministry of Defense Action Plan for 2013-2020, there should be 425,000 contract servicemen in 2019.

The question arises; just what strength of contract servicemen should correspond to the allegedly gradually declining number of conscripts? All the more so that they propose to send 7,000 more to the Army this spring than last year. Do we need to arrive at the conclusion in this case that the number of contract servicemen has not increased but, on the contrary, has decreased?

In reality, they are suppressing two factors in the Russian General Staff. First of all, the fact that Russia is declining right now and will fall into a demographic hole in the next few years. By 2030, the number of young men, who will annually reach the age of 18, will not exceed 650,000...Demography is affecting the fact that the number of contract servicemen is also not increasing – really their ranks to a great extent are being augmented only by those people, who have completed compulsory service. So, the base for extended service is being reduced due to demographics.

In the process, it is obvious that contract servicemen are leaving the Armed Forces en masse, contrary to the victorious reports. Since officially the problems do not exist, one can only guess about the contract servicemen’s real misfortunes...The fact that Russia has entered into a new Cold War is another problem. The Ministry of Defense regularly reports about the development of increasingly new formations: three armies, four army corps, and 25 formations have been created in the Armed Forces since 2014. But, in so doing, the Army’s strength has increased by a total of 30,000 servicemen. This is enough for a total of 3-4 formations, but in no way for 25. And they plan to create 11 more divisions and brigades in 2019.

As a result, the General Staff strategists have only one way out. It is to return to the Soviet mass mobilized army concept. This is when 80 percent of the units and formations – are not fully-manned. It is assumed that millions of reservists will be sent to these formations on the eve of a war or after its initiation. But in order to conduct that planning, you need to have at your disposal a so-called “mobilization resource”, those people, who received military training during compulsory service. This is precisely why the authorities want to rake up the maximum number of recruits into the Army during the conversations about a contract army.



Formation of a Warrior-Statist

OE Watch Commentary: July marks the one-year anniversary of the re-introduction of the Main Military-Political Directorate within the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. This organization is charged with organizing political-military instruction, as well as helping maintain morale and discipline within the ranks. To commemorate the event, the chief of the Directorate, Colonel-General Andrei V. Kartapolov, provided Russia's main military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* with a long and detailed article describing the organization's mission, why it was established, and some of its achievements to date.

Not surprisingly, given that his article was published less than a week after the Victory Day celebrations, Kartapolov begins by invoking the "unparalleled feat of the Soviet people during the Great Patriotic War" (World War II) claiming that this triumph represents "the spiritual bond of our society" today. While Kartapolov does not identify the guilty parties, he alleges that "our opponents denigrate, pervert the most precious thing for the people of Russia - the memory of the Great Patriotic War," and "they" are trying to corrupt Russian youth with "extremist ideologies." The Main Military-Political Directorate has been established to combat these negative trends and to inculcate within military personnel the "fundamental spiritual values that form the framework of the military service of modern Russia."

He summarizes that "the main goal of creating military-political bodies is to form a warrior-statist - a reliable and loyal defender of the Fatherland, a carrier of traditional spiritual and moral values of Russian society." Kartapolov asserts that after the collapse of the USSR, "depolicitization [of the military] was an erroneous step," arguing that "the Armed Forces are not only a military force, but also a political institution," in that they are charged to "ensure the protection of the constitutional system and order, which allows preserving the stability and sustainable development of the entire political system of society."

During the Soviet period, the Main Political Administration was created to ensure that the Soviet military remain dedicated to the Communist Party ideals and leadership. When these ideals were discredited, the Soviet leadership soon collapsed. Today's Main Military-Political Directorate within the Russian Armed Forces appears to be aligning itself dangerously close with the current Kremlin leadership. Should Russian society grow weary of the status quo, this proximity and the willingness to defend a specific political system could have troubling consequences for the Russian military in the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...The main goal of creating military-political bodies is to form a warrior-statist - a reliable and loyal defender of the Fatherland, a carrier of traditional spiritual and moral values of Russian society."



Colonel-General Andrei V. Kartapolov.
Source: https://structure.mil.ru/management/info.htm?id=11960036@SD_Employee, CCA-4.0

Source: Colonel-General Andrei V. Kartapolov, "Наша цель – формирование воина-государственника (Our goal is the formation of a warrior-statist)," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 May 2019. <http://redstar.ru/nasha-tsel-formirovanie-voina-gosudarstvennika/>

...Its name changed several times, but the main purpose remained unchanged - to organize in the army and in the navy [and] work to maintain high morale of the troops, political and military education of personnel....

...The unparalleled feat of the Soviet people during the Great Patriotic War is today the spiritual bond of our society.... For modern commanders and their deputies in military-political work, the historical memory of the highest selflessness and perseverance of Soviet soldiers, officers and generals who have defended our Motherland in fierce battles is very important. At the same time, our opponents denigrate, pervert the most precious thing for the people of Russia - the memory of the Great Patriotic War, they are trying to prove that the feat of the older generations - the winners of fascism - is exaggerated by history. The priority target audience is youth - the future of Russia.

Extremist ideology based on the ideas of neo-Nazism and radical Islam is spreading on the Internet. The result of such a link is that the forms and methods of implementation of right-wing and left-wing extremist groups of actions often become indistinguishable from terrorist acts carried out by radical Islamists....

...The conclusion from what has been said is obvious: it is necessary to systematically proceed to the formation of political consciousness, high moral and volitional qualities, immunity to ideological and cultural values alien to our society from the personnel of the Armed Forces (and indeed from the whole of Russian society as a whole).

...Awareness of the urgent need to strengthen the protection of traditional values of Russian society, the importance of its spiritual unity in the difficult conditions of global instability led the military-political leadership of the country to a decision on a radical restructuring of the system of work with personnel of the Armed Forces....

...The post-Soviet period was characterized by active de-partyization, de-ideologization and de-communization of all spheres of public life, and first of all the system of work with the personnel of the army and navy. It must be admitted that this was a compromise solution caused by the conditions of the transition period.

...Now, many years later, it became clear that depolicitization was an erroneous step. After all, the Armed Forces are not only a military force, but also a political institution. It is another matter that in a legal and democratic society they should support not one or another party, but the legitimately elected power of the people, ensure the protection of the constitutional system and order, which allows preserving the stability and sustainable development of the entire political system of society... The main goal of creating military-political bodies is to form a warrior-statist - a reliable and loyal defender of the Fatherland, a carrier of traditional spiritual and moral values of Russian society.

...I want to highlight the fundamental spiritual values that form the framework of the military service of modern Russia, the basis of the political consciousness of the Armed Forces personnel...



Russia's Strategic Culture



Russian soldiers marching in Victory Day Parade, May 2017.
Source: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54467> CCA 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: Some Russian military theorists have adopted the notion of a “Strategic Culture” (SC), suggesting that individual countries view the concepts of strategy, defense, and war differently. In the brief excerpt from the somewhat independent military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (VPK), the prolific author, Alexander Bartosh describes the main characteristics of the Russian SC in light of the challenges facing the country today. He borrows a definition from Russian military expert, Andrei Kokoshin, who defines SC as the “special behavior of the armed forces inherent in a given country and its people, in the methods of using military force.” He elaborates by describing SC as “a set of stereotypes of consistent behavior... in the use of military force to attain political objectives...” Bartosh claims that SC is not an attribute only of the Armed Forces... but of the whole nation...[and] which often persists almost unchanged with a change in the

leadership of a country or even the political system.”

Bartosh asserts that many of Russia’s current problems stem from the mistaken attempt in the 1990s when “the ruling elites attempted to transfer elements of US strategic culture onto Russian soil without the necessary critical rethinking.” According to Bartosh, this was a serious blunder, and “as a result, the national security of our state was threatened, the Armed Forces were significantly weakened, entire industries and strategic defense enterprises were destroyed, and the cultural and ideological sphere was seriously damaged.”

Bartosh goes on to describe what he considers five “unique components” of Russian SC: “defensive in nature, a focus on the unconditional end of war in victory, a willingness to sacrifice for success, collectivism, and a desire for a balanced use of force.” While Bartosh claims that “the only legal basis for the use of military force is the decision of the UN Security Council,” he explains Russia’s use of armed force in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere over the past decade, by insisting that “Russia may conduct military actions without appropriate sanction in the exercise of the right to individual or collective self-defense in the event of an armed attack on her or her allies.”

Bartosh bemoans the fact that many Russians today do not subscribe to this SC recipe and quotes fellow pundit, retired general Leonid Ivashov who claims that “Russia today has gotten lost in the darkness of wild capitalism... First it tried squeezing into the immoral and vile western system..., then rushes into the arms of China. The current power ‘elite’ does not have a course for Russia, or rather, it is pursuing a course to nowhere.” While Russia may indeed possess a unique Strategic Culture, the model proposed by Bartosh does not necessarily reflect the mundane reality. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...We emphasize the unique components of the Russian Strategic Culture: defensive in nature, focus on the unconditional end of the war victory, willingness to sacrifice for the sake of it, collectivism, the desire for a balanced use of force...”

Source: Alexander Bartosh, “Народ-победитель нуждается в поддержке (The Victorious People need Support),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* VPK [Military-Industrial Courier], 21 May 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/50309>

Today the world is opposed to the final vector of interaction of forces, on the one hand, contributing to stability and order, on the other - provoking anarchy, chaos. The balance between them determines the nature of the era. You can stand and win in global competition based on a body of knowledge that covers a wide range of strategies and technologies, both traditional and innovative. The strategic culture (SC) has a significant but still not sufficiently demanded potential as a tool for military-political analysis, developing a general line for other states, searching for mutually acceptable solutions when communicating with representatives of other civilizations. SC includes financial, economic, administrative, political, cultural and ideological spheres. This makes it pivotal.

Strategic culture, as defined by Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Andrei Kokoshin, is expressed in the special behavior of the armed forces inherent in a given country and its people, in the methods of using military force. The SC is a set of stereotypes of the sustainable behavior of the relevant subject in the use of force on a large scale in its political objectives and military objectives, including in the preparation, adoption and implementation of strategic decisions.

SC - an attribute not only of the Armed Forces or even the state machine, but of the whole nation. This is a long-term, highly inertial sociopsychological phenomenon, which often persists almost unchanged with a change in the leadership of a country or even a political system....

Our SC was severely tested during the breakdown of the Soviet socio-political formation in the early 90s. At that time, the ruling elites attempted to transfer elements of US strategic culture onto Russian soil without the necessary critical rethinking, inviting advisers and consultants from the State Department and the CIA to do this. As a result, the national security of our state was threatened, the Armed Forces were significantly weakened, entire industries and strategic defense enterprises were destroyed, and the cultural and ideological sphere was seriously damaged....

“Russia today,” according to Leonid Ivashov, “has gotten lost in the darkness of wild capitalism, is trying to find its own way, its place in the system of the modern world order. First it tried squeezing into the immoral and vile western system...then rushes into the arms of China. The current power “elite” does not have a course for Russia, or rather, it is pursuing a course of nowhere.”

...We emphasize the unique components of the Russian Strategic Culture: defensive in nature, focus on the unconditional end of the war victory, willingness to sacrifice for the sake of it, collectivism, the desire for a balanced use of force... All these were most clearly manifested in the years of the Great Patriotic War.



China-Russia Relations: “Harmonious but not Identical”

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade, much has been written about the growing alignment of Russian and Chinese strategy. One of the binding elements of this alignment has been their mutual desire to challenge what they regard as a US-led global security order. In the brief excerpt from the popular daily *MK Online*, Russian academic Yuriy Tavrovskiy describes some of the details behind the notion that these two countries are “united by the rejection of US geopolitical expansion.”

Tavrovskiy begins by describing how Chinese authorities are using propaganda to both prepare the country “for possible difficulties and hardships,” and to stoke anti-American sentiments, by reminding the population that “casualties of the ‘Chinese People’s Volunteers’ approached a million” during the Korean War. This is necessary because, as he asserts, “the Cold War against China is developing according to the patterns of the one that has been waged against Russia for many years,” whereby the US is trying to contain China with “trade and financial sanctions, restrictions on access to technology, and being surrounded with military bases.”



Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu meets with Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenhe at the Moscow Conference on International Security, April 2019.

Source: http://mil.ru/mcis/news/more.htm?id=12227799@egNews&_print=true, CCA 3.0

The author argues that “the US position is complicated by the need to confront two nuclear powers with global interests at once,” and that an attempt to constrain Russia and China “may create... advantages for Moscow and Beijing, if they can properly assess it and quickly coordinate their plans and actions.” While their mutual relations “have seen good and not so good times,” Tarkovskiy suggests that they should strengthen military ties with “even more frequent exercises on the ground, ... sea, ... space, [and through] exercises to counter cyber warfare, the creation of regional centers for flexible response, and joint development of new weapons systems.”

Tarkovskiy ends his article on a realistic note, pointing out that the “new challenges and common threats are unlikely to lead to the creation of a Russian-Chinese military-political alliance in the foreseeable future.” He suggests, however, that even though the two countries remain “together, but separate,” such a situation will force “the United States [to] fight on two fronts at once.” (Also see: “China Upgrades Relations with Russia,” in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...The ‘Cold War’ against China is developing according to the patterns of the one that has been waged against Russia for many years.”

Source: Yuriy Tavrovskiy, “Второй фронт американской холодной войны: Россия только выиграет (The Second Front of US Cold War: Russia Will Only Benefit),” *MK Online*, 4 June 2019. <https://www.mk.ru/economics/2019/06/04/vtoroy-front-amerikanskoj-kholodnoy-voyny-rossiya-tolko-vyigraet.html>

Russia and China were united by the rejection of US geopolitical expansion.

The US offensive against China on the trade and financial fronts, pushing China out of the global high-tech markets, and the rise of military tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea make it possible to draw the conclusion that the overt phase of the “Cold War” is approaching.

Intensification of anti-Chinese actions gives rise to an adequate response from the Chinese authorities defending national interests. Public resentment and patriotic sentiment in the media and blogosphere are growing. Regarding internal propaganda, a campaign began to prepare the population for possible difficulties and hardships in the spirit of the Long March (1934-1936)... On TV, the traditions of selfless struggle against US forces during the Korean War (1950-1953) were glorified when the casualties of the “Chinese People’s Volunteers” approached a million!...

...The ‘Cold War’ against China is developing according to the patterns of the one that has been waged against Russia for many years. Trade and financial sanctions, restrictions on access to technology, and being surrounded with military bases have become regular facts of life of Russian society...

...But on the other hand, the US position is complicated by the need to confront two nuclear powers with global interests at once. The new situation may create additional advantages for Moscow and Beijing, if they can properly assess it and quickly coordinate their plans and actions.

The relations between Moscow and Beijing for the 70 years that have passed since the founding of the PRC (People’s Republic of China) and the establishment of diplomatic relations have seen good and not so good times....

...Given the emerging reality, the already achieved high level of mutual understanding and interaction between the commanding staff of the military departments and security agencies can be increased. A response to new challenges should include even more frequent exercises on the ground and in the sea and in the near and deep space, exercises to counter cyber warfare, the creation of regional centers for flexible response, and joint development of new weapons systems.

Let us be realistic. Even new challenges and common threats are unlikely to lead to the creation of a Russian-Chinese military political alliance in the foreseeable future. At the start of the “cold war” that has been imposed on us, we will be “together, but separate” according to the Chinese proverb “he er bu tong” [“harmonious but not identical”]. The United States will fight on two fronts at once. Our cause is right!



New Fueling Capability Will Enhance Russian Maneuver

OE Watch Commentary: The history of the Fuel Service dates from 1936, when the Red Army's Fuel Supply Directorate was created on 17 February of that year, concurrently with the creation of the military districts' fuel service sections. This day marked the birth of the Fuel Service of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, and then of Russia. The Fuel Service is one of Russia's most important logistical assets, usually working closely with the Pipeline Troops by supplying ground vehicle, aviation, and missile fuels, oil and lubricants throughout the country. Fuel Service personnel are responsible for receiving, storing and dispensing fuel; along with servicing fuel depots and refueling points. They are trained in the "Use of Fuel and Missile Fuel" and "Organization of Supply of Fuel and Missile Fuel" departments of the Volsk Military Logistics Institute, with a dedicated five-year curriculum for Fuel Service officers. The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses new Fuel Service vehicles that will enhance Russian maneuver.



Fuel tanker based on KamAZ-63501 chassis with a capacity of 12000 litres and 10 dispensers.
Source: Boevaya mashina via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ATZ-12-10-63501.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0

The article discusses new Fuel Service vehicles based on the 8x8 KamAZ-63501 chassis, in the 'Mustang' line of KamAZ vehicles, which are capable of 1.75m ford depth and overcoming obstacles of up to .6m in height. The ATZ-12-10-63501 [AT3-12-10-63501] fuel truck is designed for the transportation, short-term storage, and mass refueling of combat vehicles. The system has a capacity of 12,000 liters, and it is capable of simultaneously refueling 10 vehicles. The ATZ-12-10 has a self-sealing polymer coating that prevents fuel leakage in the event of a 7.62-mm bullet impact. The ATs-14-63501 [AIQ-14-63501] fuel truck is designed for the transportation, short-term storage (12,000 liters) and distribution of aviation fuel. The ATs-14 is designed for all-weather operations, functioning in conditions of up to +/-50 degrees Celsius and 98% humidity.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)

“For military hardware, fuel is what air and sustenance are for a living organism. In the absence of the troops' provision with POL there will be no victory.” -Colonel Konstantin Yandola, Chief of the Central Military District Fuel Service

Source: Taras Rudyk, “Новые автотопливозаправщики повысили манёвренные возможности войск (New Fuel Servicing Trucks Have Increased Troops' Maneuver Capabilities),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 5 June 2019. <http://redstar.ru/novye-avtotoplivozapravshhiki-povyssili-manyovrennye-vozmozhnosti-vojsk/>

...A column of infantry fighting vehicles of a motorized rifle company emerged from a birch grove and raced toward the ATZ-12-10-63501 fuel truck. Behind it stood an ATs-14-63501 fuel truck. At this time, somewhere in the firing positions, the combat crews of Strela-10 surface-to-air missile systems and Igla man-portable anti-aircraft missile systems stepped up surveillance of the air situation. Nor were the crews of the Tunguska self-propelled surface-to-air missile/gun systems caught napping. Because for an adversary the troops' field refueling stations are always desirable targets. For this reason the air defense assets provide cover for the field refueling stations, and primarily along the columns' routes of departure and passage.

Several minutes later all the infantry fighting vehicles had been refueled, the drivers resumed their seats and started the engines, and the column of BMP-2s tore off along the field track leaving clouds of dust in its wake...

“The delivery of the ATZ-12-10-63501 fuel servicing trucks to the Russian Federation's armed forces has been dictated by the times themselves when, with the evolution of the means of armed warfare and the change in the tactics of the opposing sides' operations, what is demanded of the troops is heightened mobility, operational efficiency, and swiftness in the execution of the designated missions. Comparing the technical capabilities of this vehicle with its predecessors, the equipment refueling process is now conducted twice as fast as with the former models,” Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Gubin, Chief of the Equipment and Facilities Section of the Rocket Fuel and POL Service of the Central Military District's Resource Provision Directorate, picked up our conversation with Col. Yandola.

For his part, Lt. Col. Maksim Sobolev, Chief of the 41st Combined-Arms Army's POL Services, explained the design capabilities of the ATZ-12-10-63501 that have enabled it to halve the time taken for its deployment, the preparation of an area for vehicle refueling, and the actual refueling process itself:

“The ATZ-12-10-63501 enables vehicles to be refueled immediately on its arrival. Previously, with the old hardware, the ATMZ-5.5-4510, various trailers -- the PZP-10, PZP-14 -- were used for refueling tracked and wheeled vehicles in field conditions. That is to say, the old vehicle traveled with one of these single-axle trailers in tow. The trailer carried a drum with a flexible coiled fuel hose attached. Some time was needed to deploy and stow it, and this operation was performed manually, requiring the physical efforts of two men. And what do we have now? The ATZ-12-10-63501 facilitates both rapid arrival at a refueling site and the fuel servicing truck's mobile deployment. It can be stowed automatically with the aid of an electric motor -- the fuel hoses retract and the vehicle rapidly exits the refueling area.”

“For military hardware, fuel is what air and sustenance are for a living organism. In the absence of the troops' provision with POL there will be no victory,” Col. Yandola said firmly, and at my request he articulated the aims of the present training assembly.



Official Records and MH17

OE Watch Commentary: This month marks the fifth anniversary of the downing of Malaysian Airline flight MH17 over SE Ukraine. This unintended tragedy hardened the positions of Ukrainian and Russian-supported separatists in the Donbas region and further aggravated tensions between Russia and the West. While the Kremlin and its separatist proxies in Donbas continue to deny any culpability, a recent article in the independent *Novaya Gazeta Online* suggests otherwise. As the brief accompanying excerpt points out, “according to the conclusions of the international [Joint] Investigative Team engaged in the investigation of the tragedy, the Boeing was attacked by a Buk complex in the possession of pro-Russian separatists.” The remainder of the article reviews some recently revealed administrative data from the Russian military which may corroborate this claim.



Dutch and Australian police officers investigate crash site of MH-17.
Source: Dutch Ministry of Defense via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Investigation_of_the_crash_site_of_MH-17.jpg, CC0 1.0

While the author does not explain how the information was obtained, he discusses how unclassified documents “have appeared in the possession of *Novaya Gazeta* that concern safety measures taken on the general purpose roads during the redeployment of Russian troops in June 2014. Also available are excerpts from orders concerning [meal] allowances and the allocation of combat rations provided to air defense servicemen.” These documents appear to support the claim that regular Russian military units were involved in providing the equipment and expertise used in downing MH17. While there is no evidence of who specifically launched the missile, the investigative report claims that “the launcher itself came into their hands... from the territory of Russia and had belonged to the 53rd Air Defense Brigade (Military Unit 32406) quartered near Kursk.”

The author of the article traveled to Kursk to see if anyone would speak to him from the 53rd Brigade and answer the question: “Who gave them the orders?” Not surprisingly, he was met with silence, disavowal of any knowledge, or with assertions such as “I cannot tell you anything. I do not have the right to talk about the actions [of the Homeland].”

Since this tragedy occurred, the Russian Ministry of Defense, as well as other government agencies, have proposed numerous alternate theories as to who was responsible for the destruction of MH17. Since much of the evidence incriminating the Russian military was derived from social media, it is worth noting the total blanket restriction of social media use for military personnel since the disaster. Nevertheless, this article suggests that clues can still be found in official records. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“What were Russian air defense troops doing along the Ukrainian border on the day of the crash of the Malaysian Boeing?”

Source: Pavel Kanygin, “О действиях родины говорить не имею права (I Do Not Have the Right to Speak of Actions of the Homeland),” *Novaya Gazeta Online*, 5 June 2019. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/06/05/80785-o-deystviyah-rodiny-govorit-ne-imeyu-prava>

What were Russian air defense troops doing along the Ukrainian border on the day of the crash of the Malaysian Boeing?

Documents not stamped “Secret” have appeared in the possession of Novaya Gazeta that concern safety measures taken on the general purpose roads during the redeployment of Russian troops in June 2014. Also available are excerpts from orders concerning [meal] allowances and the allocation of combat rations provided to air defense servicemen.

From the papers it is evident that more than 170 servicemen from subunits of the PVO RF [Russian Federation Air Defense Forces] were located along the border in Rostov Oblast on the day [Malaysian Airline] flight MH17 was attacked by a Buk ZRK [surface-to-air missile complex] launcher. And on 15 July, two days before the Boeing tragedy, they received combat rations for five days....

...We recall that the tragedy occurred on 17 July 2014 in the skies over the Donbass, 35 kilometers from the border of the Russian Federation. It took the lives of 298 passengers, including 80 children. The civilian airliner was following the route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur and, while flying over Donetskaya Oblast at an altitude of 10,000 meters, it was struck by a “surface-to-air” missile from a Buk launcher.

...According to the conclusions of the international [Joint] Investigative Team (JIT) engaged in the investigation of the tragedy, the Boeing was attacked by a Buk complex in the possession of pro-Russian separatists. The launcher itself came into their hands, according to the conclusion of the investigators, from the territory of Russia and had belonged to the 53rd Air Defense Brigade (Military Unit 32406) quartered near Kursk. The JIT experts studied witness reports and amateur photograph images for the period of 23-25 June 2014, particularly photographs and videos of the movements of columns of Russian military equipment on the general purpose roads along the western borders....

...Russian authorities, primarily the Ministry of Defense, called that JIT report unsubstantiated and the video and photographic materials falsifications.

...However, the JIT’s conclusions concerning the route of movement of Kursk Buk 332, as we shall see, can be confirmed by documents of the military themselves, which are in the possession of Novaya Gazeta....

...The fact that the servicemen from the Kursk unit had arrived in the Millerovo border area beginning on the date of 15 July deepens suspicions and substantiates the issues raised by JIT investigators the previous year. For example, who performed the transport of the combat vehicles there and back and who was in the crew?... Who gave them the orders?

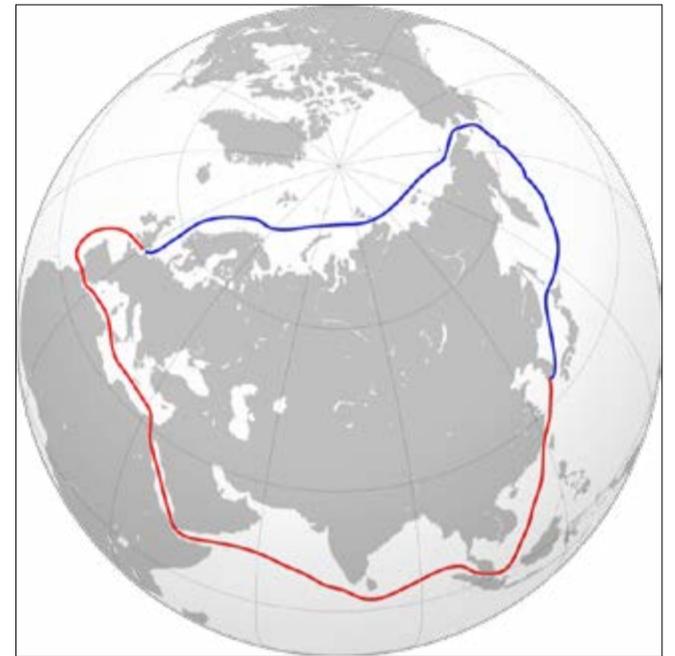
...The editorial staff of Novaya [Gazeta] decided to speak with former and current servicemen of the 53rd Brigade without intermediaries.

...At the end of the short visit the major pronounced the sentence: “I cannot tell you anything. I do not have the right to talk about the actions [of the Homeland].”



Developing the Economic Viability of the Northern Sea Route

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles discuss the initiatives of Russia's leading developers of Arctic logistics to team up with DP World (a global port operator comprised of Dubai Ports Authority and Dubai Ports International) in an effort to increase shipping on the Northern Sea Route and make the Arctic shipping route more profitable. Chinese and Danish container ships have already proven the viability of the Northern Sea Route and Russia is looking to make Murmansk a major container shipping port. China has been in negotiations with Finland and Sweden about extending their railroad to the North Sea. This railroad extension would save China from shipping its goods all the way west to Rotterdam only to then send them east again into the European market. The extension could provide a different route for commerce and faster access to customers. However, Sweden and Finland have not yet agreed to the extension. Murmansk already has a viable railroad and an Arctic container port would facilitate export and import trade and could readjust economic relations in the region. DP World seems to be the logical partner in this effort that could make it all work. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Northern Sea Route (blue) vs. Southern Sea Route (red).

Source: Collin Knopp-Schwyn and Turkish Flame via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Northern_Sea_Route_vs_Southern_Sea_Route.svg, CC BY 4.0

“The developers of the Northern Sea Route team up with DP World, the global port operator based in the Arab gulf state. Container shipping is among the priorities.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Russian Arctic shipping boost with support from Dubai,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 6 June 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/06/russian-arctic-shipping-boost-support-dubai>

Two of Russia's leading developers of Arctic logistics on Thursday teamed up with the DP World in a joint effort to increase shipping on the Northern Sea Route. The agreement, a non-legal document, aims at joint efforts in making the Arctic shipping route more profitable...

Rosatom, the state nuclear power company is one of the stakeholders in the deal that was signed during the St. Petersburg Economic Forum. Nornickel, the Russian mining and metallurgy company, is also part of the agreement. In addition Russia's Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) joined the agreement. The document was signed by Vladimir Potanin, President of Nornickel, Alexey Likhachev, CEO of Rosatom, Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of RDIF, and Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Group Chairman and CEO of DP World. Among the priorities in the deal is to identify ways to increase transit shipments on the route, including container shipping.

The deal comes as port developers in Murmansk announced that they are in the process of planning a major container port in Arctic region. The port will be able to handle up to five million containers per year and is planned to be ready for operations in 2024. Three locations are being studied, the Ural Bay, the Kildin Strait and Teriberka. According to Rossiiskaya Gazeta, the investment cost will amount to 60 billion rubles.

DP World has a portfolio of more than 70 operating marine and inland terminals in 40 countries across six continents. The company business also includes industrial parks, logistics and economic zones, maritime services and marinas.

Source: Stephanie Roker, “DP World to operate ports along Russia's Northern Sea Route,” *Dry Bulk*, 10 June 2019. <https://www.drybulkmagazine.com/ports-terminals/10062019/dp-world-to-operate-ports-along-russias-northern-sea-route/>

.... For the first stage, the parties to the agreement will have to develop a strategy to increase the efficiency of the use of the NSR and to determine ways of developing transit traffic. The focus will be on linear transportation of containers and other bulk cargo along the Northern Sea Route.

The project partners are all world-renowned experts in their field of competence. The Russian Direct Investment Fund has many significant opportunities to attract foreign capital in the largest investment projects in the Russian Federation. ROSATOM is the authorized infrastructure operator of the Northern Sea Route and the owner of the world's only nuclear icebreaking fleet. Norilsk Nickel, whose production facilities are located in the Far North, have many years of experience and knowledge in the field of logistics passing through the NSR.

The company provides cargo transportation not only for its own needs, but is a key participant in the 'northern delivery' in the Arctic region of the country. DP World is one of the world's largest and recognized global port operators and a leader in global digital supply chain solutions that specializes in freight logistics, terminal services and freight services.

His Excellency, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem said: “DP World is uniquely positioned to help drive the development of the NSR. We are excited about the possibilities and the benefits this will bring not only to the Russian economy, but also to customers in Asia and Europe. Our expertise in developing new Ports, infrastructure and innovative new supply chain solutions, are key factors in our successes over the last few decades. We see enormous potential in NSR and look forward to creating new successes with our partners.”

The parties agreed to establish a joint working group to conduct an analysis and prepare a feasibility study for the project within six months. Subject to this work being completed a next stage decision will be made on the further development of the project....



Major Investment in Arctic Logistics

OE Watch Commentary: Murmansk has benefitted significantly from Russian military expansion in the Arctic. As the accompanying article discusses, in a move to spread the development a bit further in the region, the Russian Navy is building a 346-acre military logistics center near Arkhangelsk and the Dvina River. It is a significant step in the long-term sustainability of the Russian military in the Arctic. This facility may require a step-up in dredging activity on the Dvina. Earlier this year, the *Sevmorskpyt*, the world's largest ship and only nuclear-powered container ship, picked up a half-capacity load of construction materials for the Yamal 2 LNG Project from Arkhangelsk. (See "Big Job for a Big Ship" in the April 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Map of Russia, Arkhangelsk Oblast.

Source: Stasyan117 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Russia_-_Arkhangelsk_Oblast.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0

“A string of military units have been deployed in new and upgraded bases along the Russian Arctic coast. They have a growing need of supplies. Now, the country is building a new logistics center ... to help its Northern Fleet handle the complex and expensive transport operations in icy waters. It is constructed on a plot along the Northern Dvina River, near the City of Arkhangelsk.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Navy is building a new major depot for Arctic operations,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 2 May 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/05/here-comes-russias-new-military-logistics-base-arctic>

Navy is building a new major depot for Arctic operations: A military logistics center in Arkhangelsk will handle millions of tons of goods destined for troops and bases across the Arctic.

The facility will become a crucial hub for reloading and storage of supplies for military activities in the region. Included will be indoor storage capacity of 31,500 square meters and outdoor space of 300,000 square meters... According to the developers, the center will be able to handle more than one million tons of goods per year. At any time, up to 27 thousand tons of solid goods can be stored on site along with 78 thousand tons of fuels and lubricants and 260 vehicles and pieces of machinery.

Construction is in the process and the whole facility is scheduled to be ready for operations in year 2021. It is built on a 140-hectare plot outside the city center, in an area near the sea port of Ekonomia. Construction is managed by a company affiliated with the national nuclear research center's Kurchatov Institute. Investments are estimated at 15 billion rubles (€205 million)...

A miniature model of the center was on display during the recent Arctic Forum in St. Petersburg. It showed a large facility with plenty of space for containers and goods. Several major buildings are nearby and a port complex with cranes is connected with roads and railway.

Not only military equipment and goods will be channeled through the center. According to the project developers, up to 80 percent of capacity will at times be used by non-military commercial companies.

The Arkhangelsk logistics center is the first of four facilities of its kind to be built all over Russia. Next in the line are centers in Kaliningrad, Vladivostok and Sevastopol, to serve respectively the Baltic, Pacific and Black Sea Fleets.

Russia's growing need for new military infrastructure and transport capacities in the Arctic has resulted in the building of a number of new naval vessels and capacities. That includes a new fleet of military transportation ships. Two ships of the Zvezdochka-class have been put on the water and another three are under construction. The latest of the ships, the Akademik Kovalyov, is reportedly built to transport a wide range of weaponry, including the Bulava missiles.

It is believed that Oboronlogistika, the company established and owned by the Ministry of Defense, is a key stakeholder behind the new center in Arkhangelsk. In only a few years, the company has secured itself a significant role in northern waters. In 2016, it officially became the so-called joint logistics operator for the Arctic, which means that it will provide supplies to the expanding military facilities, bases and ships in the region.



Third Major LNG project for Yamal Arctic Peninsula

OE Watch Commentary: Russia continues to push expansion of energy extraction and export from the Arctic. The two Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects on the Yamal Peninsula are already a major investment. As the accompanying article discusses, Novatek- Russia's second largest natural gas producer- recently announced that it is building a third LNG project in the Arctic, to be developed exclusively with Russian technology. The LNG trains mentioned in the article refer to a liquefied natural gas plant's liquefaction and purification facility. In order to transport LNG from one country to another, its volume has to be dramatically reduced. To do this, the gas must be liquefied by refrigeration to less than -161 °C. This refrigeration process is conducted in multiple units arranged sequentially- like a train. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“As if in a great rush to develop its Arctic resources, Russian natural gas company Novatek this week made clear that it is starting the development of a third LNG project in the Yamal region.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Novatek announces 3rd LNG project in Arctic: The Ob LNG will be developed exclusively with Russian technology,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 23 May 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/05/novatek-announces-3rd-lng-project-arctic>

Novatek announces 3rd LNG project in Arctic: The Ob LNG will be developed exclusively with Russian technology

The Ob LNG will be based on the resources of the Verkhnetiuteyskoye and Zapadno-Seyakhinskoye fields, two structures located in the central part of the Yamal Peninsula. The fields hold a total of 157 billion cubic meters of natural gas and the projected new plant will produce up to 4.8 million tons of LNG per year. The plant and adjacent infrastructure will cost \$5 billion and is to come in operation in year 2023...

The development of the Ob LNG will run parallel to the Arctic LNG 2, the company's far bigger project currently under development on the nearby Gydan Peninsula. The Arctic LNG 2 will produce up to 19.8 million tons, and the first of its projected three trains is to be ready by year 2023.

The announcement of the Ob LNG project comes at the same time that Novatek signs a major contract with UK-based TechnipFMC for engineering and construction of the Arctic LNG 2.

Novatek's first Arctic project, the Yamal LNG, is already operating at full speed, which means an annual production of up to 16.5 million tons.

Unlike the two other projects, the Ob LNG will be built exclusively with Russian-made technology. This will be up twice as cheap as with foreign technology...

The new plant will be built in Sabetta, near the installations serving the Yamal LNG. A pipeline will connect the plant with the two gas fields, and the Sabetta sea terminal will provide a route for exports.



Putin Visits Yamal LNG Plant in Dec 2017.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56337>, CC BY-SA 4.0



Radio-Electronic Combat Capabilities Extend to the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The Murmansk-BN and Karsukha systems are normally employed in the Ground Forces EW Brigades. These brigades can provide cellular communications jamming, GPS location spoofing, reconnaissance and communication satellite jamming, and disrupting AWACS aircraft. In areas where there is a fleet, the EW assets are combined into an EW Center. In this instance, apparently the EW Center is assigned to the Northern Fleet Headquarters rather than the fleet's 14th Army Corps. In addition to ground and naval EW systems, the three Arctic maneuver brigades each have an electronic warfare company for tactical jamming and detection. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“New systems for radio-electronic warfare installed along the country’s Arctic coast are able to jam foreign ships and aircraft several thousand kilometers away.”



Sleeve Insignia of the Russian Northern Fleet.
Source: Thommy via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sleeve_Insignia_of_the_Russian_Northern_Fleet.svg, Public domain

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Russia says its radio-electronic shield now covers the Arctic,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 21 May 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/22/russian-radio-electronic-shield-now-covers-arctic-officials-say-a65680>

Russia says its radio-electronic shield now covers the Arctic:

According to Izvestiya, the Northern Fleet has completed its new Center for Radio-Electronic Warfare. The center includes two Murmansk-BN systems, as well as the Krasukha and Divnomorye systems. The powerful Murmansk-BN system has been deployed in Severomorsk, Kola Peninsula, and in Kamchatka, and is capable of covering the whole area of the Northern Sea Route. The range of the Murmansk-BN is 5,000 kilometers and up to 8,000 kilometers in good weather conditions. Testing of the Murmansk-BN has been on-going for the past two-three years. The system automatically maps ongoing activities in its operational area and defines measures needed to neutralize threats.

In addition,...the Krasukha-2 and Krasukha-4 systems that have been deployed in new military bases in Novaya Zemlya, Severnaya Zemlya, the New Siberian Islands and in Chukotka. The Krasukha-4 is reportedly able to jam satellite communications, GPS signals and drone communication. When subjected to the jamming, the enemy reportedly finds himself blind, deaf and without speech.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, the new systems for radio-electronic warfare were extensively tested in an exercise in the Russian Far East in April this year. More than 1,000 servicemen and 100 items of equipment were involved. “The relevance of this kind of training is dictated by the need to apply new tactical approaches that are based on experiences from modern-day military conflicts”.

The Murmansk-BN system has been developed by KRET, a subsidiary unit of state technology company Rostec. According to the company, the technology makes Russia capable of “disorganizing any system of shortwave communication.” According to Vladimir Mikheev, adviser to the general director of KRET, “it can block the whole information fields of the enemy’s military management. The efficiency level of containment of an enemy is comparable with the most modern attack weapons”.

The Murmansk-BN is transported by several heavy trucks and it is believed that it takes several days for the more than 30-meter high telescoping masts to be positioned and the system calibrated and activated.

Recent testing of the new radio electronic systems has affected civilian communication systems. Over the last two years, aircraft and non-military industries in Scandinavia have repeatedly reported the loss of GPS signals...In November 2018, a Norwegian Defense Ministry spokesperson told the Barents Observer that the jamming has come “from Russian forces on Kola.” Earlier that same year, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry brought up the question with Moscow and requested that Russia halt the jamming. “We recognize Russia’s right to exercise and train its capacities [but] it is not acceptable that this kind of activity affects security in Norwegian air space”...



Developing Arctic Connectivity

OE Watch Commentary: Given their long border, and at times, painful history with their large eastern neighbor, leaders in Finland have adopted a wary, yet pragmatic approach in their relations with Russia. As a member of the European Union (EU), Finland has joined in the economic sanctions against Russia stemming from their armed aggression against Ukraine, yet it continues to develop economic and cultural ties where practicable. The accompanying excerpts from Finnish and Russian sources describe the details of a new project to construct an underwater data cable which will stretch from Helsinki to Tokyo along the Arctic Ocean.

The first excerpt from the Finnish news site *Helsingin Sanomat* points out that the deal between “Russian mobile phone operator Megafon and Finnish network company Cinia” to construct this cable was signed during the recent International Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg. The article posits that “the project could bring Finland billions of euros and thousands of jobs.” It stresses the point that this underwater high-speed cable would not be able to “be built without Russia participating in the project because a long stretch of the cable would run on Russian territorial waters.” While there are still other obstacles to be cleared, the article claims that the “cable could be built by 2022,” and will stretch “10,800 kilometers.”



Arctic Connect Cable.
 Source: Insider (derivative work); CarolSpears (map-substrate) via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Optical_Trans-Arctic_Submarine_Cable_System.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0

The second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin site *Lenta.ru* provides additional details, asserting that “the new cable will go along the most direct route from Europe to Asia, and in applying the most advanced technological solutions in construction.” It quotes a Finnish businessman who claims that “the laying of the transarctic cable is part of the work to stimulate the socio-economic development of the Arctic region,” stressing that this cable will “link together three continents, where about 85 percent of the world’s population lives.” The article ends on a positive note, pointing out that underwater “cable networks account for over 95 percent of global data transfer, with an expected increase in transit of international IP traffic between the Asian and European continents in the next 5 years to exceed 200 percent.”

Over the past decade, Russia has invested heavily in Arctic-related projects. While many of these projects have been designed to primarily strengthen the Kremlin’s claim to Arctic resources, this joint project with their Finnish (and other) partners suggests that some in Russia see the need for greater global cooperation “to stimulate the socio-economic development of the Arctic region.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The laying of the transarctic cable is part of the work to stimulate the socio-economic development of the Arctic region...”

Source: Laura Halminen, “Suomen valtionyhtiölle sopimus venäläisen firman kanssa: Arktinen merikaapeli voi tuoda tuhansia työpaikkoja (Finnish State-Owned Company Contracts With a Russian Company: The Arctic Sea Cable Could Create Thousands of Jobs),” *Helsingin Sanomat Online*, 6 June 2019. <https://www.hs.fi/teknologia/art-2000006133390.html>

The international data cable project at the Arctic Region has found a Russian business partner. The project could bring Finland billions of euros and thousands of jobs.

The so-called northeast cable [for the Arctic Connect cable] cannot be built without Russia participating in the project because a long stretch of the cable would run on Russian... waters.

The agreement was signed today... at the International Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg.... The parties are Russian mobile phone operator Megafon and Finnish network company Cinia....

...The northeast cable could be built by 2022. It has been estimated to reduce latency, or time delay, between Europe and Asia from the current 250 milliseconds to 150 milliseconds. If the cable is built, it would be altogether 10,800 kilometers long.

...The primary route of the northeast cable would run from the Barents Sea through the Bering Strait to the Sea of Japan. In Norway, the cable would run to the Gulf of Kirkkonieni, and in Russia, to the Murmansk region. At the other end of Russia, the cable would reach the Vladivostok region and the west coast of Japan....

Source: “МегаФон и Cinia через Арктику соединят оптиволокном Европу и Азию (MegaFon and Cinia will connect Europe and Asia with optical fiber through the Arctic),” *Lenta.ru*, 6 June 2019. <https://lenta.ru/news/2019/06/06/megafon/>

MegaFon and Finnish infrastructure operator Cinia Oy signed an agreement in St. Petersburg to establish an international consortium to build a new underwater high-speed optical line that will connect Helsinki and Tokyo. ...This is laid both in the architecture of the route - the new cable will go along the most direct route from Europe to Asia, and in applying the most advanced technological solutions in construction....

“The laying of the transarctic cable is part of the work to stimulate the socio-economic development of the Arctic region. The new communication line is an example of a high-tech solution for the development of the global economy, combined with the use of the highest environmental standards in construction. Today we are announcing a project that links together three continents, where about 85 percent of the world’s population lives.” said Cinia CEO Ari-Jussi Knaapila....

International submarine cable networks account for over 95 percent of global data transfer, with an expected increase in transit of international IP traffic between the Asian and European continents in the next 5 years to exceed 200 percent. The main drivers of increasing traffic will be the growing connectivity of data centers around the world, data transmission in next-generation networks, the development of IoT and the digitalization of the industrial Internet. Currently, there is no submarine fiber-optic communication line in the international backbone networks, which would directly connect Europe, coastal regions of Russia, Japan and North America....



Moscow Plans to Expand Canal System Between Caspian and Azov Seas

by Paul Goble

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-plans-to-expand-canal-system-between-caspian-and-azov-seas/>

OE Watch Commentary: Russia surprised many last year when it used its internal canal system to shift military vessels from the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Azov to ramp up pressure on Ukraine. In fact, river and canal traffic has always played an enormous role in Russian history and Moscow's plans. Now, the Russian government has announced a new project to expand its internal transit links between these two bodies of water, both for security reasons and to expand east–west trade in a way that will compete with the rail systems of China and the West.

Building a new, larger canal system across the North Caucasus has been on Moscow's agenda on and off since at least 1932; but its security interests, budgetary stringencies and geo-economic goals make it more likely to be carried out now. Moscow has shifted its main Caspian Flotilla naval base away from Astrakhan in the north, down to Kaspisk, on the outskirts of the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala, where it is in a position to more readily project power around the Caspian. The prospect of a new canal between the Caspian and the Sea of Azov is real enough that it has sparked competition between Dagestan and Kalmykia over its proposed route.



Caspian Sea and the Sea of Azov.

Source: Texas University via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspian_sea_oil_gas-2001.jpg, Public domain, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Currently, water connections between the two seas are limited to the Lenin Volga–Don Shipping Canal, opened in 1952. Part of what Moscow calls the Unified Deep-Water System of European Russia, this canal is too shallow and has too many locks to be useful for large-scale trade or the shifting of larger military vessels. To compensate for that, the Soviet government began construction of a deeper canal alongside it in the 1980s, but that project died with the Soviet Union. However, in the early 2000s, Moscow again brought up the idea of a canal, albeit in a different location and far deeper and with fewer locks, in order to project power and to compete with alternative east–west projects being promoted by China, Europe and the United States.

This project was christened the Eurasia Canal. If built, it would be 700 kilometers long, four times the length of the Suez Canal and eight times that of the Panama Canal. It would be 6.5 meters deep, have few locks, and would be capable of carrying over 75 million tons of cargo yearly. If completed, this would transform the geo-economics and thus geopolitics of the region.

For years now, many had assumed that it was going nowhere fast given its potentially enormous price tag (various figures have been suggested and all have been rising), the absence of outside investors given Western sanctions, and competing transportation projects through Azerbaijan and Georgia. But a year and a half ago, Moscow adopted a new “Strategy for the Development of Russian Ports in the Caspian Basin,” which called for the building of new port facilities on the Caspian, developing rail and road links to them, and also building a canal to the Sea of Azov via the route Moscow had been talking about three decades before.

That development appears to reflect the convergence of three things: First, China has indicated that it is interested in investing in such ports and a canal. Second, Moscow's experience last year with moving naval vessels from the Caspian to the Azov Sea has brought the Russian defense ministry in on the side of such construction, transforming it from an economic project to one with national security implications. And third, Moscow is concerned that progress in the development of east–west rail, highway and pipeline projects passing from the Caspian through Azerbaijan and Georgia—and potentially across Armenia, given the recent shift in government there—could undercut its influence in the region, something Russia is not prepared to tolerate.

Such behind-the-scenes calculations have now surfaced largely because officials in Dagestan and Kalmykia are in open competition for the location of the new commercial port on the Caspian and hence on the route of a canal westward. Dagestan appears to have the inside track: it already has a large commercial port (Makhachkala) and a rapidly expanding military one (Kaspisk) as well. Consequently, building a new commercial port and linking it to a new canal system would seem to be the most advantageous choice. But the situation is not nearly as clear-cut; and Kalmyk officials are now arguing that they should be given the port and the money it would bring because Moscow is already subsidizing Dagestan via the development of the naval port there. Given the security risks, they say, Kalmykia is a better choice.

Competition between the two North Caucasus republics may in fact slow the canal project down, even if China comes in with the money to finance this gigantic enterprise. But it is worth watching because of how these competing arguments shed light on Moscow's thinking about the ports and the canal as well as about its intentions in the region and more broadly. **End OE Watch Commentary (Goble)**



Russian Commentary On The New Ukrainian Chief of the General Staff

OE Watch Commentary: Perhaps signaling a change in approach to the conflict in Ukraine, newly elected President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has replaced a number of key officials within the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense. The accompanying excerpt from the Russian military weekly, *Military-Industrial Courier* (VPK) examines the background and recent statements of the newly appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Ruslan Homchak.

According to the article, General Homchak has a solid reputation. As a cadet, he graduated from the USSR's most prestigious military school (Moscow Higher Military Command School named after the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR) and then went on to serve in a number of important command positions, while continuing to advance his military education. As the article points out, prior to his appointment as Chief of the General Staff, Homchak "served as the chief inspector of the Ministry of Defense," where he gained a thorough knowledge "in almost every part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine."

This Russian article portrays General Homchak as "known for the failure of the operation, which ended with the 'Ilovaisky cauldron'" in August 2014, when Russian forces encircled Ukrainian troops, resulting in "400 killed and more than 400 wounded, about 160 missing and 300 captured." The article claims that "blame for the Ilovayskaya tragedy rests entirely on the ex-president Petro Poroshenko and the former chief of the General Staff," but it also casts doubt on General Homchak since "he was one of those who successfully escaped the encirclement." It goes on to parse some of General Homchak's recent statements regarding the conflict in SE Ukraine, suggesting that he will take a more measured approach toward Russia and the separatist regions. For instance, instead of promoting the "hysteria fanned by Zelenskiy's hawkish opponents," and recently remarked, "there will be no direct invasion [by Russia] tomorrow." Similarly, instead of exacerbating the situation surrounding the detained Ukrainian sailors, Homchak said, "I cannot evaluate the Kerch operation... It's too bad that they are in captivity, but it's good that they are alive... I am sure they will be released from captivity."

The article concludes with the obligatory Kremlin assertion that the US is the main culprit behind this conflict, claiming that General Homchak "meets with representatives of the United States almost daily, tirelessly thanking them for the consistent support of Ukraine and for 'resisting aggression from the Russian Federation.'" **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Lieutenant General Ruslan Homchak, Chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruslan_Khomchak,_2019_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruslan_Khomchak,_2019_(cropped).jpg)
CCA 4.0

“...Homchak is a real combat general who does not bend. He would rather put a bullet in his head, than surrender to the enemy...”

Source: "Valery Gromak, "Укротитель боевых петухов (Tamer of Battle Roosters)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* VPK [Military-Industrial Courier], 11 June 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/50766>

One of his first decrees of the sixth president of Ukraine was to fire General Viktor Muzhenko, Chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and appoint Lieutenant General Ruslan Homchak to this position....What is his track record?

From February 2017, Homchak served as the chief inspector of the Ministry of Defense. In this position, he inspected almost every part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine...The new Chief of General Staff has a solid education. In the Soviet Union, he graduated from the Moscow Higher Military Command School named after the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, whose graduates are informally called Kremlin cadets.... As one of the best, Khomchak was sent to serve in the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSVG). Next in the record is the Belarusian Red Banner Military District. Then in independent Ukraine, Khomchak graduated from the National Academy of Defense. He commanded the 300th Independent Mechanized Regiment, the 72nd Independent Mechanized Brigade, the 6th Army Corps...

"Homchak is a real combat general who does not bend. He would rather put a bullet in his head, than surrender to the enemy," said Gennady Korban... Most of all, Ruslan Homchak is known for the failure of the operation, which ended with the "Ilovaisky cauldron", where, according to official data, the losses of the Ukrainian Armed Forces amounted to 400 killed and more than 400 wounded, about 160 missing and 300 who were captured.... Those who survived the meat grinder, believe that the blame for the Ilovayskaya tragedy rests entirely on the ex-president Petro Poroshenko and already former chief of the General Staff Viktor Muzhenko. There are many questions to Ruslan Homchak - he is one of those who successfully left the encirclement....

Since the appointment, Ruslan Homchak has already been noted by a number of statements that are intended to appease the hysteria fanned by Zelenskiy's hawkish opponents... "I think that there will be no direct invasion tomorrow..." "I cannot evaluate the Kerch operation ... Of course, there was no need to put the sailors at risk. It's too bad that they are in captivity, but it's good that they are alive, considering that they have opened fire on them and they could die. I am sure: they will be released from captivity ...

The new chief of the General Staff was noted and that he meets with representatives of the United States almost daily, tirelessly thanks them for the consistent support of Ukraine and for "resisting aggression from the Russian Federation."



Politics and Poison in Abkhazia

OE Watch Commentary: Political intrigue has been on full display in Abkhazia since the possible poisoning of the leading opposition presidential candidate Aslan Bzhaniya, who fell deathly ill in mid April. The timing of his sudden illness led to mass demonstrations in the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi and calls to postpone the election until late the fall to give Bzhaniya time to recover. At first, current president Raul Khajimba refused to move the elections from their scheduled July date. However, days later, after negotiations with the opposition, and a vote by parliament to make it so, it was decided that elections would be delayed and take place in August, but not in November, as the opposition initially requested.

While Bzhaniya's illness and the state of politics in Abkhazia were well covered across various Abkhaz news sources, and received mention in the Russian press, a recent commentary in *Abkhazinform.com* has put forward some interesting observations.

Since Abkhazia's independence from Georgia in 1993, it was easy for Abkhazians to see Georgia's hand in all of its domestic and political troubles. (At the same time Georgians commonly accused Russia of political intrigue in Abkhazia.) According to *Abkhazinform.com*, those past perceptions have largely changed thanks to the 2008 Russian military invasion into Georgia, which has resulted in Abkhazians feeling more secure about their place vis a vis Georgia. In addition, the original war for separation in 1992-1993 is a distant memory for many and a matter of national history for many younger Abkhaz who never experienced the war or knew life as part of the Georgian Republic.

It is against this backdrop that the current intrigue over the possible poisoning of the lead opposition candidate demonstrates that Abkhazia is its own wild wild west when it comes to domestic politics. Bzhaniya's illness or poisoning, the demonstrations, and the delayed election, are seen, at least by *Abkhazinform.com*, as a true domestic political crisis—no outside bogey-man required. Aslan Bzhaniya is seen as a real political threat to current president Khajimba. It will be interesting to see if Khajimba is found complicit in Bzhaniya falling ill.

The article also points out that Abkhazia is still searching for an identity other than being "someone's "health resort and breadbasket" and territory with an "advantageous geographical position." The article makes the point that while a Georgian military attempt to retake Abkhazia is really not even considered anymore, Abkhazia is still searching for its own independent identity outside of being a Russian beach resort or a nation on the brink of a new war with Georgia. The article also makes the point that in the past, every government in Abkhazia has been accused by the opposition of willingly conceding to Moscow, but that when the opposition has come to power it makes the same concessions to Russia as the previous administration, fueling another round of opposition. There is no doubt that Abkhazia is politically and militarily tied to Russia but it doesn't mean that the tiny nation doesn't have aspirations of its own, and the direction of the country is considered at stake.



Aslan Bzhaniya.

Source: Leonid via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aslan_Bzhaniya.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

It is also worth remembering that the Abkhaz are a Muslim people, albeit a very Soviet Muslim society, and that Russia's most wanted in Chechnya for over a decade before he was killed was Shamil Basaev. Prior to that Basaev was also awarded the Hero of Abkhazia medal and was given much credit—by the Abkhaz—for winning the war against Georgia. Basaev also took an Abkhaz wife. Two years later when Russia and Chechnya went to war it was prudent for Abkhazia to revise its history, writing out the contributions that Basaev and other Chechens made to Abkhaz independence. It is too easy to think of Abkhazia as a puppet state controlled by Moscow but as the article points out, the reality on-the-ground in Abkhazia is different, and the drama around the pending presidential elections reflects that. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“Mass protests, after which a compromise was reached on the date of the postponed election, promoted the idea that the current government benefits from the situation, pushing the theory of the “Georgian trace” aside”

Source: “«ДИАЛЕКТИКА ПО-СУХУМСКИ». КТО СТАНЕТ НОВЫМ ПРЕЗИДЕНТОМ АБХАЗИИ? (Analyzing Sukhumi” Who Will Become President of Abkhazia?),” *Abkhazinform.com*, 10 June 2019. <http://abkhazinform.com/tochka-zreniya/item/8923-dialektika-po-sukhumi-kto-stanet-novym-prezidentom-abkhazii>

Entering into a confrontation with Georgia in the early 1990s, the Abkhaz elite tried to defend the right to their own state. One can argue about whether it is prosperous, prospective, independent or dependent on Russia, its military-political guarantees and socio-economic support. But even 25 and 10 years ago, an application was made for the formation of a new Abkhazia, and not just someone's "health resort and breadbasket" and territory with an "advantageous geographical position". Years have passed, but even today there are many signs that the transition to a post-conflict agenda, filled with content that is fundamentally different from the first years of the struggle for independence, has not been completed. The question of the quality of management of "our state", that is, for what, in fact, the Abkhaz society struggled, remains unresolved.



Georgia, Ossetia, Russia and Abkhazia.

Source: Ssolbergj & creator of source map via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia,_Ossetia,_Russia_and_Abkhazia_\(en\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia,_Ossetia,_Russia_and_Abkhazia_(en).svg), CC BY-SA 3.0



Gauging Azerbaijan's Exercises

OE Watch Commentary: Following the April 2016 clashes in Nagorno Karabakh, some sources in the Caucasus reported on how they resulted in the armed forces of Azerbaijan gaining territory. Interestingly, the May 2018 clashes in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (an exclave of Azerbaijan) did not receive much attention, despite larger gains of territory by Azerbaijani forces. The accompanying excerpted articles report on two recent military exercises by Azerbaijan's armed forces near Nagorno Karabakh and in Nakhchivan and there are a few things worth noting.

The first article reports on a joint exercise carried out by Azerbaijani and Turkish units in Nakhchivan and it notes how the exercise took place as part of a "bilateral military agreement." While there is a strategic partnership agreement between the two sides, the Turkish government did not get involved in either the 2016 or 2018 clashes. The scenario of the exercise with Turkey is not mentioned and while the exercise is called "Unbreakable Brotherhood-2019," there has been no precedent for Turkey to fight alongside Azerbaijani forces. The second article reports on the other exercise, which took place a week prior, and it mentions how scenario of the exercise focused on training for "an enemy attack at night by delivering counterattacks in multiple directions, with a transition to the offensive" and that it involved a large number of soldiers and equipment.

Ultimately, the fact that the Azerbaijani government held the exercises in quick succession in areas in which it had taken territory over the past three years provides some insight into how they are preparing for conflict in Nagorno Karabakh and in Nakhchivan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“On the basis of the bilateral military agreement, Azerbaijan and Turkey will carry out a joint tactical exercise with live firing on the territory of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.”



The breakaway republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh within the Caucasus region, after the South Ossetia war in August 2008.

Source: Andrei nacu at English Wikipedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caucasus_breakaway_regions_2008.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0

Source: “Азербайджан и Турция проведут совместные военные учения в Нахичевани (Azerbaijan and Turkey will carry out a joint military exercise in Nakhchivan),” *EurAsia Daily*, 31 May 2019. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/05/31/azerbaydzhani-turciya-provedut-sovmestnye-voennye-ucheniya-v-nahichevani>

On the basis of the bilateral military agreement, Azerbaijan and Turkey will carry out a joint tactical exercise with live firing on the territory of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The maneuvers are called “Unbreakable Brotherhood-2019” and will take place from 7 to 11 June...

Source: “В Азербайджане стартовали широкомасштабные военные учения (A large-scale military exercise has started in Azerbaijan),” *EurAsia Daily*, 20 May 2019. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/05/20/v-azerbaydzhane-startovali-shirokomasshtabnye-voennye-ucheniya>

...It is planned that during the course of the maneuvers that an action to “repulse an enemy attack at night by delivering counterattacks in multiple directions, with a transition to the offensive” will be worked out...Up to 10 thousand soldiers, 150 tanks and armored vehicles, up to 200 rocket and artillery systems, and up to 35 aircraft will be involved...The exercise will run until May 24...



Chinese Security Assistance to Kyrgyzstan



Zhao Kezhi.

Source: 美国驻华大使馆 (PAS China via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zhao_Kezhi_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zhao_Kezhi_(cropped).jpg), Public Domain.

OE Watch Commentary: The majority of security assistance provided to Kyrgyzstan’s armed forces or security services comes from Russia, particularly when it comes to weapons or equipment. The accompanying excerpted article reports on the Chinese government’s recent delivery of \$4 million worth of vehicles to the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry and while this is small compared to Russian assistance, it is worth noting as the Chinese government engages in the region.

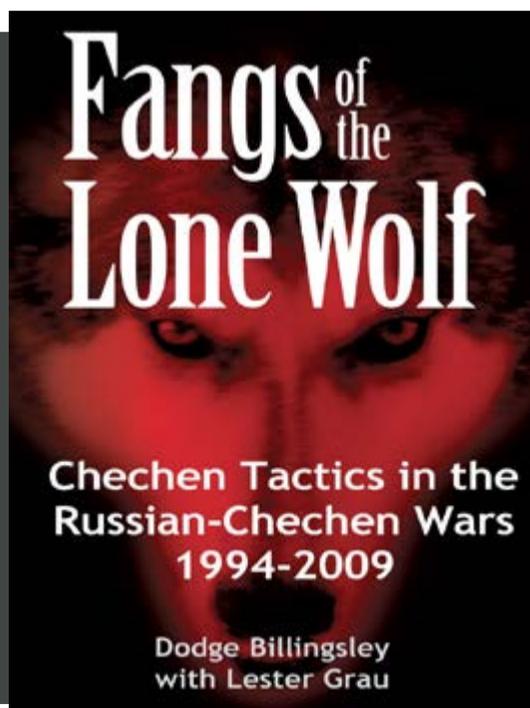
As the article from the independent Russian-language news website *Kaktus* reports, in May 2019, “a protocol was signed by the two ministries” for the delivery of the vehicles and that the “buses, minivans, SUVs, and armored police vehicles” arrived in Kyrgyzstan on 3 June. The article also notes how the Kyrgyz Interior Minister, Kashkar Junushaliyev, mentioned that the equipment would be used “during the summit of the heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” in Bishkek on 14 June. It is possible the Chinese government simply provided the vehicles in order to bolster security for the summit, but the assistance is worth noting alongside previous Chinese security cooperation in the region, including the construction of several outposts for the Tajik border guards and the Kazakh government’s purchase of two Chinese Wing Loong unmanned aerial vehicles. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Yesterday, on 3 June, Minister Junushaliyev inspected vehicles – buses, minivans, SUVs, and armored vehicles, which had arrived from China.”

Source: “Броневики, автобусы и внедорожники. Китай предоставил МВД Кыргызстана помощь на \$4 млн (Armored vehicles, buses and SUVs. China provided \$4 million of assistance to the MVD of Kyrgyzstan),” *Kaktus*, 4 June 2019. https://kaktus.media/doc/392479-broneviki_avtobusy_i_vnedorozhniki_kitay_predostavil_mvd_kyrgyzstana_pomosh_na_4 mln.html

...In May 2019 Kashkar Junushaliyev, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, and Zhao Kezhi, Minister of Public Security of China, discussed issues of bilateral cooperation and the potential for its further development. After discussions, a protocol was signed by the two ministries on “providing free material-technical support to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan (police equipment) for the amount of 30 million yuan.”

Yesterday, on 3 June, Minister Junushaliyev inspected vehicles – buses, minivans, SUVs, and armored police vehicles, which had arrived from China... The minister noted that the donated equipment will have a significant role in raising the level of the ministry’s fight against crime and ensuring public security, including during the summit of the heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization...



Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>



Azerbaijan and China Sign \$800 Million Economic Package: The Geo-Economic Implications

by Orkhan Baghirov

Republished and edited for OE Watch in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 16, Issue 78, dated 29 May 2019. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-china-sign-800-million-economic-package-the-geo-economic-implications/>

OE Watch Commentary: Azerbaijan's participation in the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which took place in Beijing on 25–28 April, proved successful for Baku, having resulted in a number of important new, non-oil-sector investment projects in the South Caucasus country. Specifically, during the Forum, Azerbaijani representatives signed 10 agreements, cumulatively worth \$821 million, with Chinese companies.

Based on these agreements, China National Electric Engineering Company (CNEEC) will invest \$300 million in a tire factory in the Sumgayit chemical-industrial park (about 25 kilometers northwest of Baku). The investment promises to create 800 new factory jobs there and boost the plant's production potential to 3.3 million tires per year. CNEEC will acquire a 90 percent share in the project, while the Azerbaijan Investment Company will own the remaining 10 percent.

The signed business deals also include the building of a 300-hectare greenhouse complex in the Kurdamir region of Azerbaijan, the construction of agrological industrial parks in the Guba, Goychay and Khachmaz regions, an agreement on export of Azerbaijani wine to China, and the creation of the Azerbaijan Trade House in Chengdu, China. Moreover, an Asian-European telecommunication corridor will be established within the framework of the "Azerbaijan Digital Hub" initiative in order to better coordinate the annual transit of 2,5000 containers across the territory of Azerbaijan, traveling along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

Sino-Azerbaijani economic cooperation truly picked up in 2015, when President Ilham Aliyev made an official visit to China. During that trip, the two governments signed several important documents, including a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Joint Encouragement of the Establishment of the "Silk Road Economic Belt," which promised to Increase Azerbaijan's geostrategic role within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the following years, Azerbaijan implemented several important infrastructure projects that attracted Chinese interest as potentially beneficial for the BRI. Notably, in May 2018, Azerbaijan inaugurated the Baku International Sea Trade Port on the Caspian Sea, which has an annual capacity of 15 million tons of cargo. Another important event was the inauguration of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) Railroad in 2017, which has been mostly financed by Azerbaijan. This railway is a key link in the trans-continental, overland transit of goods from China to Europe, and vice versa.

The development of economic relations after 2015 also significantly affected bilateral trade volumes. Since then, trade turnover between China and Azerbaijan more than doubled, reaching \$1.3 billion in 2018. And China has become one of Azerbaijan's four top trade partners (it ranked ninth in 2015).

Despite active cooperation on strategic projects and the increasing levels of trade turnover with China (43 percent of China's trade with the South Caucasus region is now with Azerbaijan), until now Azerbaijan had largely not been willing to open its doors to private Chinese companies. Most of the investment agreements had heretofore been with Chinese state-owned enterprises. Therefore, the package of agreements signed at the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing can be considered an important turning point in Sino-Azerbaijani economic relations as it substantially increases the involvement of Chinese companies in Azerbaijan. That the value of these 10 agreements surpasses the total value of all investments made by Chinese firms until then (\$800 million) underscores the willingness of both sides to expand their economic cooperation.

The increased importance of the non-oil sector in bilateral economic relations is another significant factor in these developments. The oil crisis of 2014 had encouraged Azerbaijan to attract outside investment in its non-oil enterprises as well as to seek out new export markets. And Baku assessed China to be the best option for both. Although petroleum-based products, including fuel and plastics, continue to dominate Azerbaijani exports to China, the Chinese market should provide great opportunities for Azerbaijan's non-oil products in the long-term.

However, tightening relations between Azerbaijan and China come with some critical political implications. Taking into account the fact that Russia and Turkey are presently Azerbaijan's main trade partners in the country's non-oil sector, growing Chinese involvement there is likely to create friction with the most important players in the region. It bears reiterating that, although Russia does not want to create problems in its relations with China, it does consider the South Caucasus to fall within its "sphere of privileged interests" and jealously guards the access of third countries to this region. Baku certainly understands this dynamic and is thus prudently cautious in its approach to Moscow, knowing that the latter remains a key player in any prospective resolution to the Karabakh conflict—reaching which has never stopped being a priority of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Risks related to sudden drops in oil prices, on the one hand, and China's large investment projects in neighboring countries, on the other, are omnipresent. Together, they encourage Azerbaijan to maintain a balanced policy both toward China and other regional players while taking into account its national economic and political interests. To achieve this, Azerbaijan seeks to participate in BRI without assuming Chinese loans—thus avoiding China's "debt-trap diplomacy." Furthermore, it prefers to deal mainly with state-owned companies on investment projects in order to decrease the scope for economic pressure. Due to their success to date, these tactics will certainly remain the main components of Azerbaijani policy toward China going forward. **End OE Watch Commentary (Baghirov)**



China Mulls Rare Earth Export Controls, Issues Threat

OE Watch Commentary: In June, China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC; 国家发展改革委员会) convened a meeting of top rare-earth mining and refining enterprises to get feedback and suggestions for new regulation. The NDRC is a powerful interagency coordination body within the State Council, the top non-Party governmental body in China. While the NDRC's remit has fluctuated in recent years, it is widely understood as having significant authority to direct policy within the other ministries. As the accompanying passage from a notice on the NDRC's own website suggests, the Commission is currently considering another round of regulation of the rare earth industries. Additional articles suggest this may be in response to China's ongoing trade war with the United States.

The seventeen rare earth elements are not themselves that uncommon in nature (despite the name). Their application in many high tech sectors including metallurgy and electronics have made them an essential part of the global supply chains for these products. Concentrated deposits and government promotion of mining have made China a world leader in their mining.

Data from the China Rare Earth Industry Association [中国稀土行业协会] paints a picture of China's overall production (see graphic). Rare earths can be divided into two main categories: "light" and "heavy" according to their atomic weight. Light rare-earth production and reserves appear to be overwhelmingly (85%) concentrated in Inner Mongolia, and mostly come from the enormous Bayan Obo [白云鄂博] mine. The mine complex consists primarily of two large strip mines each more than half a mile across. The remainder of production comes mostly from Shandong and Sichuan provinces. Production of the far rarer "heavy" rare earths are concentrated in a roughly triangular area in southeast China, composed of southern Jiangxi, eastern Guangdong and western Fujian provinces.

Particularly since 2009, China has repeatedly reduced its exports, consolidating the industry, cracking down on smuggling and setting production caps. The NDRC notice suggests that more strict regulation of the industry is in the pipeline. Low-quality production capacity will be forced out, and consolidation, combined with new technology, will help China achieve better economies of scale. However, the emphasis on smuggling appears to indicate that leakage into the global supply through unregulated channels remains an issue. For Chinese policymakers, China's advantage in rare-earth production is clearly as strategic an issue as it is an economic one. Further examples of how rare earths could be used in international relations can be seen in articles in official media.

On 29 May, the *People's Daily* (the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) published a threatening editorial about China's control of the rare earth global market. The author, the pseudonymous "May Lotus" [五月荷] went so far as to reference language used "you have been warned" [勿谓言之不预] that historically has been part of official warnings on the eve of escalations with China's neighbors including India (1962), the Soviet Union (1969) and Vietnam (1978). As the accompanying passage demonstrates, the article contends that in response to US tariffs, China has several measures at its disposal, including the ability to control rare earth exports. The timing of the article, in context with the NDRC's deliberations, could indicate further tightening of rare earth exports. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“We advise the U.S. side not to underestimate the Chinese side's ability to safeguard its development rights and interests. Don't say we didn't warn you!... United States, don't underestimate China's ability to strike back.”

Source: “国家发展改革委召开稀土企业座谈会 (National Development and Reform Commission Held a Symposium With Rare-earth Industry),” *NDRC Website*, 6 June 2019. http://www.ndrc.gov.cn/gzdt/201906/t20190605_938277.html

On June 5, the relevant departments of the National Development and Reform Commission held a symposium with members of the rare-earth industry to hear the opinions and suggestions of key enterprises on how to adjust the structure of the rare earth industry, accelerate transformation and upgrading, and achieve high-quality development.

Participating enterprises said that the formation of the rare-earth enterprise group in China has made significant progress. Led by the initial formation of large enterprise groups, the industries are being scaled up. The scale of direct-application application industries continues to expand, and product quality has been greatly improved. Key preparation technologies for ultra-high purity rare-earth metals and compounds, high-performance rare earth alloys and have seen breakthroughs. Deep processing of minerals, which had formerly lagged behind, has gradually improved. But at the same time, there are still outstanding problems in the production and operation order of the industry such as private mining, over-production, illegal recycling and other illegal industries. The risk of [China's] advantages in mining and smelting separation technology diffusing is increasing, and indigenous innovation in high-end applications is still weak.

Participating enterprises recommended a stronger crackdown on illegal mining, strengthening export control of rare earth products, and consolidation of the industry's business order to protect precious resources. They also advocated for strengthening of intellectual property rights protection, and strict prohibition of export of technologies.

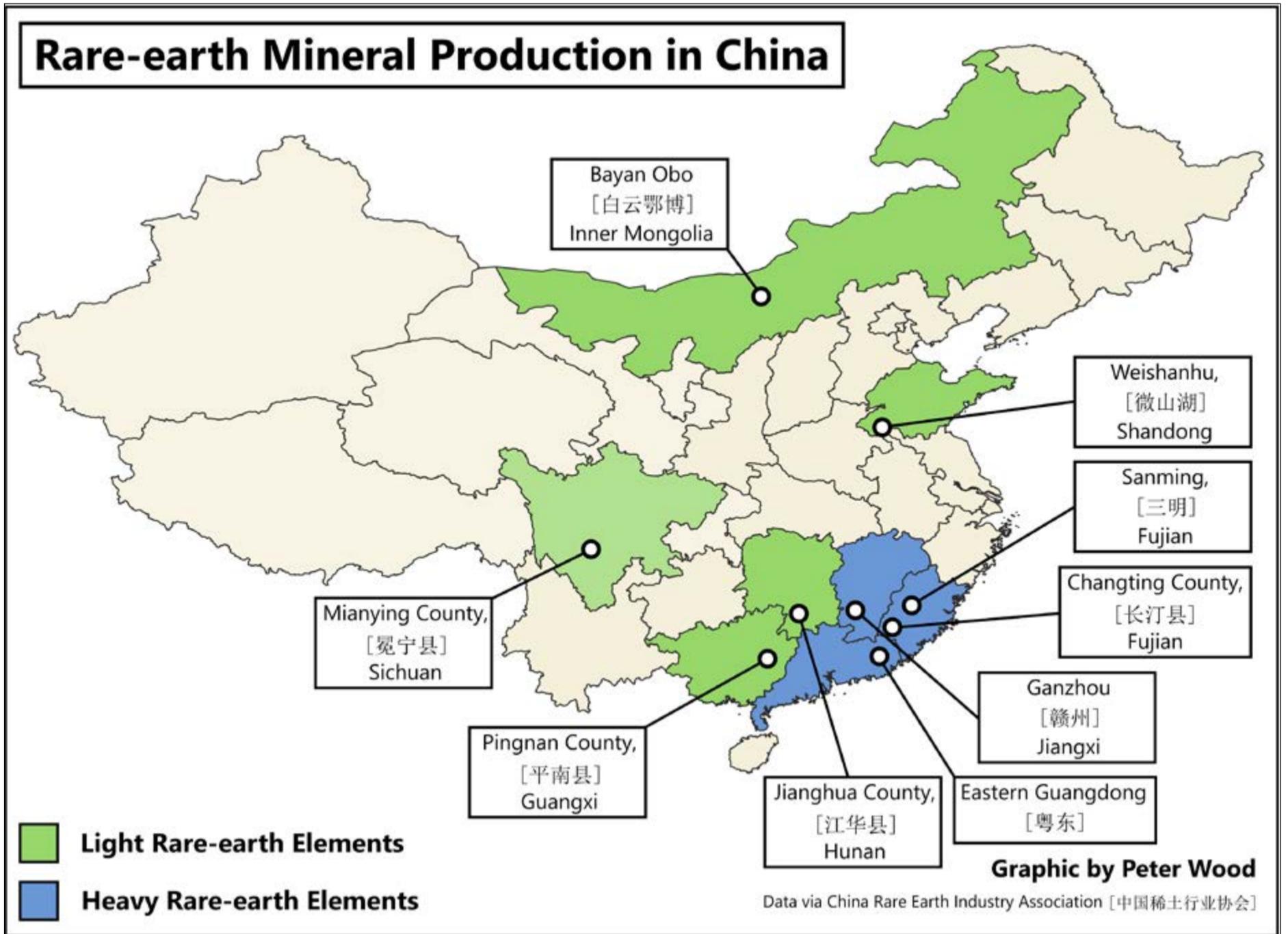
Members of relevant departments at the National Development and Reform Commission said that they will seriously study and absorb the opinions and suggestions put forward by the participating enterprises. They committed to work with other departments to study and formulate relevant policies and measures, improve regulatory mechanisms, standardize the industry development order, strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights, support the research and development of new technologies, and encourage coordination among upstream and downstream industries to make proper use of this strategic resource. At the same time, relevant rare earth enterprises are required to effectively promote real integration and industrial optimization, strengthen internal control and make full use of large-scale effects. Self-discipline within the industry must improve, and the total volume control plan must be strictly followed, as must the new limits on smelting and separation capacity. Low-quality and inefficient production should be decreased. Investment efforts should be increased, and research and development of green mining, smelting and separation technology must be accelerated, with the goal of achieving breakthroughs in a number key core technologies to enhance the competitiveness of the entire industry.



Continued: China Mulls Rare Earth Export Controls, Issues Threat

Source: “美方不要低估中方反制能力 (America Should Not Underestimate China’s Ability to Retaliate),” *People’s Daily*, 29 May 2019.
http://www.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2019-05/29/c_1124554682.htm

“We advise the U.S. side not to underestimate the Chinese side’s ability to safeguard its development rights and interests. Don’t say we didn’t warn you!... United States, don’t underestimate China’s ability to strike back.”



Rare-earth Mineral Production in China.
 Source: Graphic by Peter Wood

“At the same time, relevant rare earth enterprises are required to effectively promote real integration and industrial optimization, strengthen internal control and make full use of large-scale effects. Self-discipline within the industry must improve, and the total volume control plan must be strictly followed, as must the new limits on smelting and separation capacity.”



China Upgrades Relations with Russia

OE Watch Commentary: Speaking at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in June, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping announced that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin had upgraded their diplomatic relationship. The announcement came at an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and deliberately drew on the imagery of Mao Zedong’s 1949 visit to Moscow and meetings with Stalin at the Bolshoi. China’s official state-run news agency *Xinhua* published the full-text of Jinping’s speech, which merits analysis.

The shift from “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership” [全面战略合作伙伴关系] to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era” [新时代中俄全面战略合作伙伴关系] is significant. While this

language may appear to be an artifact of an older style of communist diplomacy, the Chinese foreign ministry currently employs an entire rubric of similar terminology to describe its relations with other countries. Pakistan, long considered China’s closest ally, is described as an “All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership” [全天候战略合作伙伴关系]. For context, the next “highest” level, “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership” [全面战略合作伙伴关系] includes at least 10 countries. In upgrading relations with Russia in this way, both partners are indicating a real positive shift in relations.

China-Russia bilateral trade topped \$100 billion in 2018, a record. Scientific and industrial cooperation—particularly in aerospace—continue to be strong. In recent years Putin has promoted Chinese-language study. In remarks to *Xinhua*, Russian Minister of Science and Higher Education Mikhail Kotyukov said about 30,000 Chinese students study in Russian universities, while about 20,000 Russian students study in Chinese universities.

Also of note is Xi’s mention of the Community of Common Destiny of Humanity (CCD) [人类命运共同体]. The concept has been a repeated theme in speeches on international relations in 2013 to the Moscow Institute of International Relations and the UN General Assembly in 2015. Articles in the Chinese Communist Party’s theoretical journal *Seeking Truth* [求实] have argued that the concept is an indication of China’s desire for peaceful development and acceptance of more international responsibility as a rising power. As such, China intends to take a more active role in global development. (For a breakdown of China’s foreign relations rubric by country in 2016 see “China’s Foreign Relations,” <https://www.p-wood.co/2016/09/18/chinas-foreign-relations/>). **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Chinese and Russian Flags.
Source: Graphic by Peter Wood

“Just now, President Putin and I signed and issued a joint statement announcing the development of a “China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era,” the upgrading of bilateral relations and the opening of a new era of higher level and greater development of China-Russia relations.”



Continued: China Upgrades Relations with Russia

Source: “习近平在中俄建交70周年纪念大会上的讲话 (全文) (Speech by Xi Jinping at the Commemorative Meeting of the 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Russia (Full Text)),” *Xinhua*, 6 June 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-06/06/c_1124589505.htm

Dear President Putin,

Ladies, gentlemen, friends:

It is a pleasure to join President Putin in the historic and world-famous Bolshoi Theatre. Seventy years ago, Chairman Mao Zedong visited the Soviet Union for the first time and the leaders of the two countries met here and began the historical prologue of Sino-Soviet friendship. Today, we are once again gathered at the Bolshoi Theatre to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries and jointly usher in another historic moment in Sino-Russian relations.

We will not forget that during the arduous Great Patriotic War and the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Chinese and Soviet soldiers and civilians fought side-by-side against fascist aggression, and forged in blood an unbreakable bond. On the second day of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union recognized and established diplomatic relations with New China. In the years when new China was being built, a large number of Soviet experts helped China, and through wisdom and sweat not only helped the new China lay the foundation for industrialization but also told a beautiful tale of friendship between the two peoples.

After experiencing the ups and downs of Sino-Soviet relations, the two sides refocused on the trends of the times and the fundamental interests of their two peoples, promoted normalization of Sino-Soviet relations, and pioneered the establishment of a new type of relationship that was “non-aligned, non-confrontational and not targeting any third party.” It laid a solid foundation for the long-term development of bilateral relations.

Facing changes to the international system, at the beginning of the 21st century, the two sides signed the landmark Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation 《中俄睦邻友好合作条约》, which established the concept of “friends for generations, never an enemy,” in law.

The two countries have since upgraded relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership [全面战略协作伙伴关系], with both sides firmly regarding each other as a priority for their own diplomacy, establishing a comprehensive mechanism for exchanges in various fields, deepening political trust, resulting in fruitful practical cooperation, vigorous development of people-to-people exchanges, close and effective international cooperation, and promoting the construction of a new type of international relations. Through these efforts, we are setting an example of how to build a community of common destiny for mankind [人类命运共同体].

Ladies, gentlemen, friends:

After 70 years of change, China-Russia relations have become more mature, stable and tough and now stand at a new historical starting point, facing new historical opportunities. Just now, President Putin and I signed and issued a joint statement announcing the development of a China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era [新时代全面战略协作伙伴关系], the upgrading of bilateral relations and the opening of a new era of higher level and greater development of China-Russia relations.

New Era China-Russia relations should always be based on mutual trust and reinforce each other's strategic support. Solid political mutual trust is the most important feature of China-Russia relations, and firm mutual support is the core value of bilateral relations. We should cherish and care for the valuable mutual trust that the two sides have built. We should make full use of the mechanism of exchanges at all levels and a complete platform for cooperation, conduct frank and in-depth exchanges on major issues such as their respective policies, internal and external policies and development strategies, increase mutual support on issues involving each other's core interests, firmly grasp the strategic direction of the development of China-Russia relations, and not be disturbed or undermined by anyone.

...



China's Advances in Responding to UAV Threats

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years, China has grown increasingly concerned about the threat of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to its security. The two excerpted articles discuss some of China's advances in this area.

The first article, originally published by *Jiefangjun Bao*, and later posted on the State Commission for National Defense Mobilization website, discusses a civil air defense system developed in Shanghai. The article states that China perceives a need to protect citizens and "major objects" from being attacked by UAVs. During a recent exercise, a civil air defense team out of the Minhang District, a suburban district of Shanghai, which is seen as one of China's innovation centers, used a "low-altitude magic shield" UAV defense and control system. The system was reportedly a success. Using radio and radar detection systems and optical and electronic tracking, they managed to suppress radio (transmissions) and used "satellite navigation deception" to cut off communication links between the group of UAVs and their ground operators. This forced the UAVs to land and allowed the participants to capture them. The "very precise" system is capable of locating, tracking, and identifying aerial objects at all altitudes, including smaller ones flying at low altitude.



A Chinese Type 95 SPAAG vehicle on display at the "Our troops towards the sky" exhibition at the Beijing Military Museum.
Source: Max Smith, via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_95_SPAAG#/media/File:Type_95_SPAAG_-_Beijing_Museum_1.jpg, Public domain

Another measure or weapon reported to "eliminate drones" (as well as cruise missiles) is a new self-propelled anti-aircraft gun. According to the *Global Times* report, the anti-aircraft gun is based on an eight-wheeled armored vehicle, and is more mobile (and faster) than the current systems, which are mounted on tracks (which is most suitable for off-road operations). It is believed to use an electro-optical aiming system. The technology behind the system, which reportedly features a single 35-millimeter cannon has reportedly advanced, and the article notes "the weapon might have already been commissioned into the Chinese military." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Through searching and detecting air objects with high precision across multiple frequency bands at all altitudes, the (anti-aircraft) system can effectively identify and continuously track slow and small flying objects at low altitude, and then achieve the purpose of expelling hostile targets or forcing them to land.”

Source: Wang Na et al, “把先行优势转化为铸盾胜势 (Turn the Advantages of Being the Lead Runner into the Triumphant Shield-Building Superiority),” *State Commission for National Defense Mobilization* website, 4 June 2019, <http://www.gfdy.gov.cn/battle/2019-06/04/>

Turn the Advantages of Being the Lead Runner into the Triumphant Shield-Building Superiority

Shanghai Municipality is an economic, trading, and technological innovation center of our country. It is hailed as a “bellwether of reform and opening up” and a “forerunner of innovation-driven development”. In recent years, the civil air defense system in the municipality made full use of the local advantages and strengths as a lead runner in socioeconomic development, stepped up the modernization of the air defense equipment and the innovation of combat methods in combination with forging and enhancing the capability of the specialized teams, laid a solid foundation for casting an impregnable civil air defense shield to protect the security of the local people.

New Equipment Plays a Lead Role on the Exercise Grounds

In recent years, protecting major objects from being attacked by UAVs was one of the new issues the anti-air-raid struggle faced. During the exercise, the civil air defense team of Minhang District used the “Low-altitude Magic Shield” UAV defense and control system to successfully resolve this issue. They adopted means of radio suppression and satellite navigation deception to cut off the communications linkage between the “enemy” UAV group and its ground operators, then captured the invading UAVs after their forced landing.

According to the explanation given by the personnel at the civil air defense office of Minhang District, the UAV defense and control system has the functions of radio detection, radar detection, optical and electronic tracking. Through searching and detecting air objects with high precision across multiple frequency bands at all altitudes, the system can effectively identify and continuously track slow and small flying objects at low altitude, and then achieve the purpose of expelling hostile targets or forcing them to land.

Source: Liu Xuanzun, “China’s Mobile Anti-Aircraft Gun Capable of Eliminating Drones, Cruise Missiles: Experts,” *Global Times*, 27 May 2019. http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1151817.shtml#content_9527433.htm

China’s Mobile Anti-Aircraft Gun Capable of Eliminating Drones, Cruise Missiles: Experts

China revealed a new self-propelled anti-aircraft gun on Sunday... The anti-aircraft gun seems to be based on an eight-wheeled armored vehicle, featuring a single 35 millimeter cannon as its main means of attack, Chinese military analysts said on Monday, citing a photo released by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Daily on its Sina Weibo account on Sunday evening.

Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military analyst, told the Global Times on Monday that the appearance of the weapon in a PLA Daily report indicates the technology has now matured and the weapon might have already been commissioned into the Chinese military.

One of the highlights of the weapon are its wheels, which enable the new self-propelled anti-aircraft gun to have higher mobility compared to those that are already in the PLA service and use tracks, and are more suitable for off-road operations, Wei said.



China Unveils its First Indigenous High-Precision Sniper Rifle

OE Watch Commentary: China recently unveiled some of the details about its first indigenous high-precision sniper rifle. According to the following article from *Global Times*, it will replace the outdated QBU-88, which has been in use by the People’s Liberation Army for over 20 years but no longer meets the requirements of modern warfare. The new high-precision sniper rifle, which was not given a designation, fires 7.63-millimeter rifle rounds and has a range of 800 meters (half a mile). The technology of the rifle is such that it can be operated at night.



Rifle Type 88.

Source: National Defense University via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QBU-88#/media/File:Rifle_Type88.jpg, Public Domain.

The article also mentions another fairly new type of advanced sniper rifle, the high-caliber QBU-10, which, according to other sources, has been adopted by Chinese army and navy special forces. According to the article, both of these sniper rifles

“can complete different missions and form an all-

round combination.” It is not clear what the precise mission of the newly unveiled high-precision sniper rifle is, but the QBU-10 is capable of destroying armored targets 1,500 meters away (approximately a mile). **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The gun is China’s first ever high-precision sniper rifle, marking a significant breakthrough in the country’s sniper development....”

Source: Liu Xuanzun, PLA Gets New Lethal High-Precision Sniper Rifle: Report,” *Global Times*, 19 May 2019. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1150580.shtml>

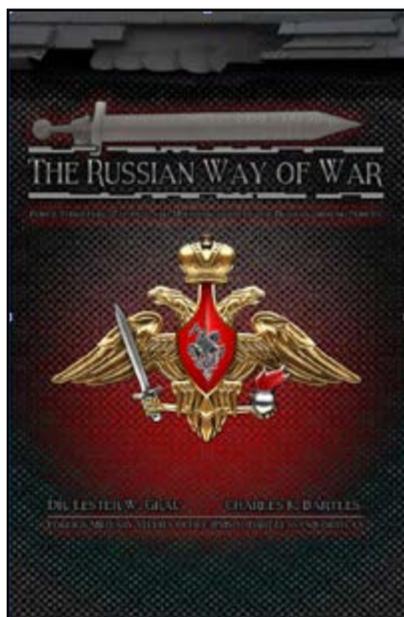
China unveiled on Sunday details of its first homemade high-precision sniper rifle, a weapon that could replace the old rifle that has served the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) for more than 20 years.

Capable of firing 7.62 millimeter rifle rounds with an effective range of 800 meters, the weapon has a full length of 1,150 millimeters and weighs 6.5 kilograms, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Sunday, without announcing the gun’s designation.

The gun is China’s first ever high-precision sniper rifle, marking a significant breakthrough in the country’s sniper development, the report said, noting that the term “high-precision” refers to the rifle’s ability to accurately hit a target as small as a coin from a hundred meters.

A low light level image intensifier can be added to the sniper’s scope so it can be operated at night.

The two types of sniper rifles can complete different missions and form an all-round combination, the expert said, noting that the high-precision rifle can make lethal attacks on infantry targets, while the high-caliber rifle can blow up light armored vehicles or enemies behind cover.



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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New Class of Amphibious Assault Ship Will Expand PLA Navy Operational Capability

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese news sources, backed up by commercial satellite imagery, are reporting that work on a new class of ship—the Type 075 amphibious assault ship [075型两栖攻击舰]—is already underway at Hudong Shipyard [沪东造船厂] in Shanghai. When complete, the ship will join the expanding number of the more capable Type 071 (Yuzhao) class amphibious transport docks built since 2007. An article in *Shipborne Weapons*, a popular magazine published by China State Shipbuilding Corporation, speculates that when complete, it will fill an important niche for the PLA Navy.

The article notes that while China has successively improved its earlier amphibious ships, such as the Type 072A landing ship, they remain ineffective due to their inability to support large scale aerial operations. While the Type 072A (Yuting II) has a landing deck—and the PLA has even practiced flying attack helicopters off the back of one—it lacks a hanger bay or support facilities. Additionally, this type is limited by its small size. By comparison, the Type 071 amphibious transport dock has a displacement more than five times larger, with a spacious deck and hanger. However, the article goes on to note that while significantly more capable, limitations of range and firepower mean that, even in conjunction with land-based aircraft, the Type 071s are still not fully capable of supporting PLA amphibious assault operations beyond China's near seas [近海].

Descriptions of Chinese campaigns published by the National Defense University in Beijing emphasize using multiple modes of transport to “accelerate the speed of first wave units” landing; including fast landing craft, hovercraft, and helicopters executing vertical assaults as part of three-dimensional landing operations [立体登陆作战].

The article goes on to suggest that the Chinese Navy must either double down on developing carrier battle groups or build large helicopter-carrying amphibious assault ships on par with US landing helicopter docks (LHD). For the moment China lacks shipborne aircraft capable of vertical or short takeoff and landing, limiting the new class of ships to carrying a large complement of transport and attack helicopters. If expanded to include additional Type 075s, China's ambitious ongoing carrier building program may suggest that it has chosen both paths. (Also see: “The Future of the PLA Navy's Shipborne Helicopter Force” in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“China's Navy must completely resolve the question by following one of two courses: Develop their own aircraft carrier battle groups, or develop their own amphibious assault ships.”

Source: “中国海军队两栖攻击舰的需求 (Requirements for the PLA Navy's Amphibious Assault Ship),” *Shipborne Weapons* [舰载武器] No. 307. February 2019. pp. 16-18.

As early as 2010, there was news that the Chinese navy was building an amphibious assault ship. This was roughly three years after China's first 20,000-ton Type 071 assault ship had been delivered. These high-tonnage amphibious ships with large deck-wells and helicopter decks represent a major leap for Chinese naval ship development. Previous Chinese naval development followed traditional mechanized amphibious ships. Even the best of those types at the time, the Type 072A (Yuting II) Tank Landing ship only had a gross tonnage of less than 5000 tons and under normal circumstances could only carry less than 400 tons (250 personnel and 10 light tanks). Although in theory, it can carry 1500 tons, in realistic operations there is not enough room for more than 1000 tons of materials. Although the first equipped with a landing deck for helicopters, the ship did not have necessary support equipment, giving it limited ability to operate helicopters. As a result, the Type 072A is a very traditional conventional landing ship.

The 20,000-ton Type 071 dock landing ship has a larger vehicle storage area (and can carry up to 40 vehicles of all kinds) crew compartment (up to 800 marines). The ship itself has improved capabilities including aviation support facilities and the world's largest well deck. Aviation facilities including a 70m helicopter landing deck and a hanger that can hold 4 Z-8J [large transport helicopters]. The well deck can carry four Type 726 (Yuyi class) LCACs or 18 Type 05 high-speed amphibious fighting vehicles....

The Type 071 amphibious transport dock gives the Chinese navy a basic capability for carrying out three-dimensional landing operations within near seas areas (this is based on the limitations of land-based aviation units' combat radii or land-based army aviation helicopter's operational range). But increasing the number of Type 071s does not resolve the issue that some regions are beyond the range of land-based aircraft's ability to cover or for the (Type 071s) shipborne helicopters ability to successfully support three-dimensional landing operations. China's Navy must completely resolve the question by following one of two courses: Develop their own aircraft carrier battle groups, or develop their own amphibious assault ships....

According to domestic speculation, China is currently building a 30,000-ton class large amphibious assault ship. The overall design resembles the U.S. “Wasp” class (LHD), and the vehicle storage area and well deck are not large, with more space used for the hanger bay and various aviation support equipment. Due to the fact that China does not currently have shipborne vertical or short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft like the AV-8B or F-35B, it will first equip helicopters. The standard for 30,000-ton class amphibious assault ships is roughly 20 aircraft, and 30 tons under full load.

Due to the insufficient numbers of aircraft carriers and shipborne fixed-wing aircraft, a Chinese assault ship could carry slightly more shipborne armed helicopters than their U.S. equivalents (estimated no less than 1/3 of the total compliment). Under full load, the ship could boast a very impressive 20 10-ton transport helicopters at the same time. If used as part of a formation [编队] with two Type 071 amphibious transport docks, the entire amphibious assault operational formation would have 28 transport helicopters (including four aboard each of the Type 071s) and roughly 10 armed helicopters to send into battle.

This way, during Chinese navy's three-dimensional amphibious operations, the air component and surface transport components are balanced, improving operational equipment and material transport capability or reducing the time to move ashore (decreasing the amount of time spent within range of the enemy), all with great significance.



The Future of the PLA Navy's Shipborne Helicopter Force



PLAAF Changhe WZ-10.

Source: 3GO*CHN-405/mjordan_6 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PLAAF_Changhe_WZ-10_-_Jordan.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

OE Watch Commentary: China's *Shipborne Weapons* journal recently featured a multi-part series discussing China's ongoing program to develop a dedicated helicopter carrier, the Type 075. The first part of the series featured an analysis of the various pros and cons of other amphibious assault ships. The accompanying passage is from a subsequent part of the same discussion and hones in on the question of which indigenously produced attack and transport helicopters are best suited for the Chinese navy's needs.

Currently, China's helicopters aboard its transports and surface combatants are limited in niche anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and transport roles. China's navy needs a dedicated shipborne helicopter force to provide direct fires and transport capabilities in support of amphibious operations. Building several Type 075 helicopter carriers similar to US landing helicopter docks (LHD) would allow a full complement of helicopters in both attack and transport roles.

China's geography naturally lends itself to helicopters, but technological bottlenecks in engine design, composite materials for lightweight airframes had slowed China's ability to produce capable rotor-wing aircraft indigenously. The Chinese military has seen a marked increase in its use of helicopters of all types. While they were previously mostly concentrated in the Army, the Navy and Air Force have gradually adopted more helicopters including attack variants.

Over the past decade, the number of Army aviation regiments were expanded and later enlarged to a brigade. Each Group Army now boasts an Army Aviation brigade. The PLA Navy's complement of shipborne helicopters has also expanded as more decks became available for them to operate off of. The PLA Navy has also experimented with arming Z-9Cs, a small transport helicopter, with light torpedoes and anti-ship cruise missiles.

Lacking dedicated ground attack aircraft, the PLA as a whole has a requirement for direct fire support. As a result, China has produced two dedicated attack helicopters—the Z-10 and Z-19. While the former can carry a larger loadout, the latter is likely confined to armed scouting roles. Both helicopters have Z-10s and are now regularly shown carrying additional fuel for long-distance operations in support of amphibious assaults.

The PLA relies mostly on a mix of Z-9, Z-9, and Mi-17 transport helicopters. The Z-9 and Z-8 are indigenized copies of French designs. The former is a light helicopter and the latter a heavier design. Modernized versions of the Z-8 including a navalized "G" variant and a wide body version are both discussed in the article for their potential suitability for PLA Navy amphibious ships.

The article concludes that for the new Type 075, a complement of 10 Z-10s and 20 wide-body variant Z-8s provide the best mix of offense and transport capabilities for the Chinese Navy. (Also see: "New Class of Amphibious Assault Ship Will Expand PLA Navy Operational Capability" in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Judging from the progress of China's amphibious assault ships and development of relevant helicopters, the seven-ton Z-10, and 15-ton Z-8 wide-body class helicopters should be chosen to best meet operational requirements.”

Source: “中国海军两栖攻击舰载机的选型 (Selection of the PLA Navy's Amphibious Assault Ship Shipborne Aircraft),” *Shipborne Weapons* [舰载武器] No. 307. February 2019. pp. 19-34.

...China can currently mass produce two advanced armed helicopters, namely the six-ton class Z-10 (Thunderbolt) and the four-ton Z-19 (Black Whirlwind). Together they are the main force of Chinese Army Aviation.

Between the Z-10 and Z-19, which is more in line with the operational requirements of amphibious assault ships? Obviously, the future amphibious assault ship cannot equip two helicopter types with similar capabilities, so which should it choose?...

From the perspective of firepower, advanced technology, operational capability and potential for improvement, between the two attack helicopters, the Z-10 is overall the most reasonable to develop into a shipborne variant. Helicopters on long-term deployment aboard amphibious assault ships and carrier aircraft both face additional challenges. (Facing conditions at sea, the airframes require anti-corrosion, -humidity, and -salt measures...)....

The number and capability of transport helicopters carried by amphibious assault ships are even more important than gunships. After all, these helicopters are responsible for vertical landing capability air transport capability during amphibious operations....

Judging from the progress of China's amphibious assault ships and development of relevant helicopters, the seven-ton Z-10 and 15-ton Z-8 wide-body class helicopters should be chosen to best meet operational requirements. This provides the most practical balance of time, technology, performance and cost. Of course, subject to operational needs the ship could also carry a small number of Z-18 early warning helicopters or antisubmarine warfare helicopters.

If the Chinese Navy's 30,000-ton amphibious assault ship has enough room for 10 Z-10s and 20 Z-8 wide-body helicopters, then its airborne fire support and material transport capacity will be very considerable. The transport capacity, for example, would be on par with U.S. Wasp-class LHD's MV-22 and CH-53K 50 percent and could satisfy the requirements of three-dimensional landing operations [立体登陆作战].



Amnesty Proposal for Southern Thailand

OE Watch Commentary: One of the most overlooked but enduring conflicts in Southeast Asia is in southern Thailand, where Muslim Malay militants have been combatting the Thai government to secede from the country. According to the accompanying passage from *Bangkok Post*, a new initiative to stem the tide of the insurgency is in the works. It involves amending Thailand’s 2008 National Security Act to facilitate insurgent defections.

According to the proposal, insurgents wishing to surrender would be able to do so by registering with the Internal Security Operations Command. They would then engage in a six-month training course at a military camp and be required to provide information about other insurgents to the authorities. After this, they would be provided with occupational training and sent back home while being monitoring by the Thai military. This would lead to a two-year probationary period and then a final evaluation. If the authorities were satisfied that an individual had stayed away from any insurgent activities and had reformed, then any criminal charges would be dropped and the individual would be allowed to return to society and live a normal life.



City of Songkhla

Source: Tarik Abdel Monem via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City_of_Songkhla.jpg, CC BY 2.0

Meanwhile, the conflict shows no sign of abating. The Thai cabinet has decided to extend the state of emergency in most parts of the country’s three southernmost provinces for an additional three months into September 2019. It should be also be noted that the plan for insurgent defections is neither approved nor is it certain that it will attract a significant number of insurgents. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“After providing useful information to authorities, they would receive occupational training before being sent back home.”

Source: “Law change would encourage insurgents to surrender,” *bangkokpost.com*, 29 May 2019. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1685836/National-Security-Act-amendment-would-encourage-insurgents-to-surrender>

Security authorities will propose that the Cabinet amend the National Security Act to pave the way for southern insurgents to surrender and turn over a new leaf. During the meeting, the committee agreed in principle to amend the 2008 National Security Act to facilitate the surrender of southern insurgents facing arrest warrants. The proposed amendments would cut red tape and enable the army to work more efficiently, said a source at the meeting.

Under the proposed amendments, those wanting to surrender would register before being handed to the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) Region 4 Forward Command, which would send them to undergo training at a military camp for six months. After providing useful information to authorities, they would receive occupational training before being sent back home. Soldiers would monitor their activities. If they behaved well and steered clear of the unrest, the authorities would propose that the Office of the Attorney-General drop criminal cases against them within two years, allowing them to lead a normal life.



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>



Faulty Ammunition in India

OE Watch Commentary: At a time when Indian officials have been examining the readiness of the country’s armed forces in several areas with increased scrutiny, the accompanying excerpted article reports on how faulty ammunition has caused accidents in the Indian Army. The article, from *The Times of India*, reports on a “high number of accidents taking place in the field due to the poor and defective quality of ammunition being supplied for tanks, artillery, air defense and other guns by the state-owned Ordnance Factory Board (OFB).” The article mentions how the Indian Army has brought up the issue with the defense ministry and lists the systems that have been involved in an accident because of faulty ammunition, including “105mm Indian field guns, 105mm light field guns, 130mm MA1 medium guns, 40mm L-70 air defense guns as well as the main guns of the T-72, T-90 and Arjun main-battle tanks, with some ‘isolated cases’ also being reported from the 155mm Bofors guns.”



An Arjun MBT being test driven on the bump track at the Central Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CBRDE) at Avadi, Chennai.

Source: Ajai Shukla via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arjun_MBT_bump_track_test.JPG, CC BY 2.5

A representative from the OFB responded to the issue, stating that ammunition is delivered “only after stringent inspection by the factory’s quality control department” and believes that the Indian Army could be “equally responsible for defects/accidents.” A source in the article notes how the accidents have been taking place over the past few years, but does not mention if the accidents took place during training or with an operational unit while it was engaged in any skirmishes, like what happened between India and Pakistan following the attack in Pulwama. As Indian officials continue to scrutinize the readiness of the armed forces, the accidents with faulty ammunition are an important issue to watch. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Regular accidents” are occurring with 105mm Indian field guns, 105mm light field guns, 130mm MA1 medium guns, 40mm L-70 air defense guns as well as the main guns of the T-72, T-90 and Arjun main-battle tanks, with some “isolated cases” also being reported from the 155mm Bofors guns, due to defective ammunition.”

Source: Rajat Pandit, “Army raises alarm over rising accidents due to faulty ammunition,” *The Times of India*, 14 May 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/army-raises-alarm-over-rising-accidents-due-to-faulty-ammunition/articleshow/69315854.cms>

The Army has sounded the alarm over the unacceptably high number of accidents taking place in the field due to the poor and defective quality of ammunition being supplied for tanks, artillery, air defense and other guns by the state-owned Ordnance Factory Board (OFB).

The Army has told the defense ministry (MoD) that the spike in ammunition-related accidents is causing “fatalities, injuries and damage to equipment” at an alarming rate...MoD sources said the Army has raised with Secretary (Defense Production), Ajay Kumar, the “serious concerns” about the lack of requisite “quality control and quality assurance” by OFB, which with 41 factories and an annual turnover of about Rs 19,000 crore is the main source of supply of arms and ammunition to the over 12-lakh strong force...

...“Regular accidents” are occurring with 105mm Indian field guns, 105mm light field guns, 130mm MA1 medium guns, 40mm L-70 air defense guns as well as the main guns of the T-72, T-90 and Arjun main-battle tanks, with some “isolated cases” also being reported from the 155mm Bofors guns, due to defective ammunition.

“With the OFB’s piecemeal and poor approach in problem-solving, the Army has stopped firing some types of long-range ammunition, while also refraining from not testing some others to their maximum ranges. There have been, for instance, over 40 accidents of the 125mm high explosive ammunition fired by tanks in the last five years,” said a source.

...The OFB, on being contacted by TOI, said ammunition is supplied to Army only after stringent inspection by the factory’s quality control department as well as the DGQA (director general of quality assurance)...Some defects or accidents, however, do sometimes occur during “bulk exploitation” of the ammunition by the Army...“The OFB is not aware of the storage/handling/maintenance conditions at the Army’s end, which are equally responsible for defects/accidents.” The OFB has implemented recommendations of seven committees but “the drills and condition of weapons were never investigated”...



Transnational Terror Cells in Malaysia

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from the Malaysian website *Malaysiakini* discusses Malaysian authorities' recent successes in breaking up two transnational terror cells in the country. One of the cells, comprised of two Malaysians and an Indonesian, was reportedly planning to launch attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia before its members were detained in Kedah and Selangor, Malaysia. Authorities discovered another cell in Terengganu and Klang Valley, which included two Rohingyas from Myanmar among its four members.

According to the investigation, a suspect detained in Kedah had participated in bomb-making training in Jogjakarta, Indonesia with Jemaah Ansharut Daulah, an Indonesian extremist religious group. As for the cell involving the two Rohingyas, it was reported that their targets were churches, Hindu and Buddhist places of worship, and entertainment centers; and their intended tactic was suicide bombings. According to the Inspector-General of Police, they supported the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and were exposed to its ideology, although there is no mention of them having trained in Iraq or Syria.

These arrests indicate that Malaysia has successfully broken up terrorist cells on its territory. The country is increasingly being used as a transit hub by jihadists in the region, but what made these cases unique is that Malaysia itself was the intended target of attacks. Moreover, the involvement of two Rohingyas in one of the cells could indicate that some members of that ethnic group, having been victimized in Myanmar, could be vulnerable to recruitment by regional jihadist groups. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Royal Malaysian Police

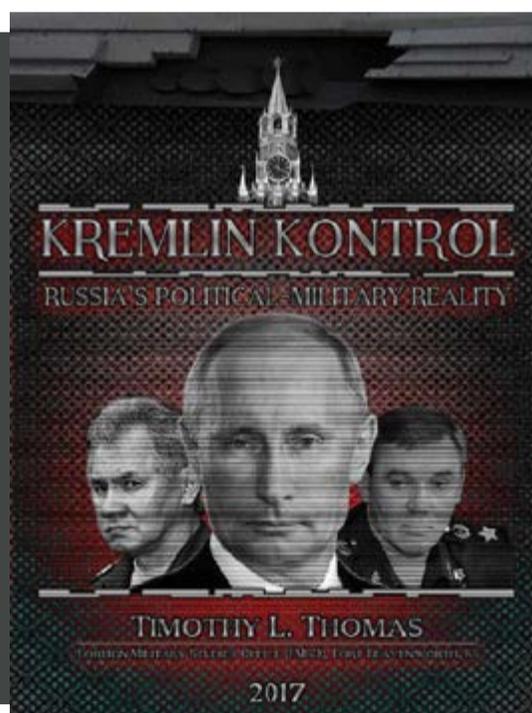
Source: Original by Fadzil Shah Extracted into SVG format by khalidrizuan91 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Malaysian_Police.svg, Public Domain, CC BY-SA 4

“They are suspected of being involved in supporting ISIS and planning to launch attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia.”

Source: “Polis tangkap 3 lagi suspek penganas IS (Police arrest 3 more suspected IS terrorists),” *malaysiakini.com*, 16 May 2019. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/476420>

Police arrested three more ISIS terrorists who planned to launch attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Inspector-General of Police Abdul Hamid Bador reported the three suspects comprised two Malaysians and an Indonesian who were detained in Kedah and Selangor on May 14. “They are suspected of being involved in supporting ISIS and planning to launch attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia,” he said in a statement.

The arrest was after an operation that arrested four other suspects, including two Rohingyas in Terengganu and in the Klang Valley between May 5 and 7. Both suspects and the Malaysians arrested on November 22 had undergone bomb-making exercises in Jogjakarta, Indonesia in 2018 under the terrorist group Jemaah Ansharut Daulah Indonesia. While there they learned the methods to produce triacetone triperoxide (a type of chemical), which is used to produce large-scale blasts and vehicle bombs. In addition, a suspect was apparently planning to launch an attack on non-Muslim houses of worship in Malaysia using suicide bombings.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-q2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>



Suspected Sri Lanka Attacker Arrested in Myanmar

OE Watch Commentary: In the aftermath of the Easter terror attacks in Sri Lanka, perpetrated by a group loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the manhunt for living members of the group is apace. This manhunt has evidently reached Myanmar, where a Sri Lankan suspect was arrested. According to the accompanying passage from the Southeast Asian news source *Irrawaddy.com*, the 39-year old arrived in Myanmar on a tourist visa, but did not register at any hotel, which apparently created suspicions about him. The suspect’s visit to a visa office in Yangon created further suspicions and ultimately led to his arrest.

Importantly, the article does not indicate that the suspect is guilty. Indeed, it might be unlikely that a suspect in one of the world’s largest-ever terrorist attacks would voluntarily visit a visa office and not remain in deep hiding. The article states that it is unclear whether Sri Lanka tipped off the Myanmar authorities about the suspect; and indicates that Sri Lanka believes it has arrested or killed all the remaining Easter attack plotters.



Myanmar police in Bahan Township

Source: Aung Naing Soe (VOA) via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Myanmar_police_in_Bahan_Township_\(Aung_Naing_Soe-VOA\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Myanmar_police_in_Bahan_Township_(Aung_Naing_Soe-VOA).jpg), Public Domain, CC BY-SA 4

Myanmar’s vigilance may have as much to do with its concern for Sri Lankan security as its own security. According to the article, Myanmar has received warnings from other countries in the region about potential attacks on the country by ISIS-loyalist cells, in response to its treatment of Rohingyas. In recent years, tens of thousands of Rohingyas have fled the country for Bangladesh or other countries to escape a large military crackdown on Rohingya villages throughout Rakhine State. Moreover, as the article notes, some Rohingyas have also been arrested in other countries in Southeast Asia for their ties to, and plotting with, ISIS. Meanwhile, one Malaysian was arrested before attempting to travel to Myanmar to fight alongside the Rohingyas. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Myanmar has long been warned about terror attacks by foreign supporters of Islamic State (IS) recruited from Southeast Asian networks in support of the persecuted Muslim Rohingya.”

Source: “Sri Lankan with Suspected Easter Bombing Ties Arrested in Yangon,” <http://irrawaddy.com>, 23 May 2019. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/sri-lankan-suspected-easter-bombing-ties-arrested-yangon.html>

A Sri Lankan man, believed to have connections with those involved in the Easter bombings that killed at least 250 people, was arrested in Myanmar. Abdul Salam Irshad Mohmood, 39, was detained by police when he appeared at an immigration office in downtown Yangon to renew his visa.

In the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings, Sri Lankan authorities have said all suspected plotters and those directly linked to the attacks have either been arrested or are dead. Myanmar has long been warned about terror attacks by foreign supporters of Islamic State (ISIS) recruited from Southeast Asian networks in support of the persecuted Muslim Rohingya. In 2017, Malaysia’s counter terrorism force detained a suspected ISIS follower planning to head to Myanmar to perform jihad, to fight against the Myanmar government on behalf of the Rohingya in Rakhine State. Earlier this month, Malaysia arrested four men for plotting assassinations and large-scale terror attacks in the Klang Valley. One of the suspects, a 20-year old Rohingya man, admitted to supporting the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).



Pro-Russian Officer Appointed as Syrian Military's New Chief of Staff

OE Watch Commentary: In April 2019, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad appointed Major General Salim Harba as the Syrian Armed Forces' new chief of staff. Harba is close to Moscow, and his appointment has been interpreted as a further step in Russia's increasing influence over forces loyal to the government of Bashar al-Assad.

According to Harba's excerpted biographical sketch, he hails from a village near the presidential family's hometown of Qardaha, in Latakia Province. Early in the Syrian conflict, he served as an eloquent and loquacious defender of the Syrian government's suppression of rebels. Presented as a civilian military analyst, he appeared on a variety of Arabic-language satellite TV news channels. According to the accompanying excerpt from the Syrian opposition news platform *al-Jumhuriya*, "the Iranians were looking at Harba as an officer working on behalf of Moscow, which explains his sidelining from the leadership of the military forces that were mobilized to fight and suppress the Syrian revolution in its early years."

Following Russia's September 2015 military intervention, Harba receded from the airwaves and resurfaced as a top-level commander in Syria's military. In December 2015 he was put in charge of Russian-led operations in northern Latakia Province, and was eventually tasked with overseeing Suhail al-Hassan's Tiger Forces, the most effective loyalist unit. During operations to retake the city of Aleppo in 2016, he was appointed military commander of Syria's northern sector. He was a key member of the Syrian delegation to the Astana talks, while continuing to supervise operations in vital areas surrounding Aleppo. In April 2018 he was appointed deputy chief of staff of Syria's armed forces, and in September of that year he led his country's delegation to Baghdad for meetings with the top military leaders of Iran, Iraq and Russia. In December 2018 he was named the Syrian Army's commander for Aleppo Province.

According to the accompanying biographical sketch, Harba has a doctorate in military strategy from a Russian university. When the Syrian conflict broke out in 2011, he was the head of Syria's war college in Damascus. The passage claims that "Russian intervention allowed Harba to return to positions of leadership," suggesting that Harba may be a key part of Russian designs for the Syrian military. It should be noted that Syrian Defense Minister Ali Ayyoub and his four predecessors all served as chief of staff before being promoted to head the ministry of defense.

End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)

"...The conflict over the chiefs of staff could be described as the tip of the iceberg of the Russian-Iranian conflict over vital positions in the regime's army..."

Source:

(Salim Harba Biographical Sketch), *blacklist.pro-justice.org*, undated. <https://blacklist.pro-justice.org/ar/criminal/%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7/>

سليم حربا

Salim Harba comes from the Qardaaha region of Latakia Province. He obtained a doctorate in military science from Russia, and has appeared as a strategic analyst on satellite channels, newspapers and news sites since 2012. Before that Harba worked as the head of the War College, one of the schools of the High Military Academy, with the rank of Brigadier General. After that he was instructed to appear as a civilian in order to defend the regime on media channels during the period between 2012 and 2015. He maintained his military rank during this period and was promoted to the rank of Major General in 2015.

Source:

Arwa Khalifa. "Who Controls the Syrian Regime Army?" *al-Jumhuriya*, 23 April 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y3eg9qqb>

من يمسك بجيش النظام السوري؟

A source familiar with the recent moves in the regime's army says: "The Iranians were looking at Harba as an officer working on behalf of Moscow, which explains his sidelining from the leadership of the military forces that were mobilized to fight and suppress the Syrian revolution in its early years." However, Russian intervention allowed Harba to return to positions of leadership; after this intervention he oversaw the work of the Desert Hawks, a militia close to Moscow. He also oversaw the forces of Suhail al-Hassan, and was appointed last year as deputy chief of staff and chairman of the security Committee in Aleppo, with the support of Moscow. The conflict over the chiefs of staff could be described as the tip of the iceberg of the Russian-Iranian conflict over vital positions in the regime's army. The removal of the head of the military intelligence division, Major General Mohamed Mahal, nearly a month ago was one of the chapters of this conflict. Mahal is a figure close to Moscow, and several media reports have indicated his recent involvement in the establishment of a military faction that brings together opposition forces that have entered into settlements with the Syrian regime in the south, with the aim of confronting Iranian influence. His dismissal came shortly after Bashar al-Assad met with Iranian leader Ali Khamenei in Tehran, which could easily be linked to Iranian demands from the regime, in return for Tehran's help in the face of his successive economic crises.



Courting Syria's Sunni Arab Tribes

OE Watch Commentary: Nearly all parties involved in the Syrian conflict are courting the Sunni Arab tribes of Syria's northeast, according to recent Arabic-language media reports. The tribes are largely concentrated around the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV) and surrounding areas. Many of their communities are purportedly still within the reach of remnants and sleeper cells of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), given that they were under ISIS control less than two years ago. Most of this territory is now controlled by the Kurdish-led, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The first accompanying article, from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, argues that three main camps are competing to recruit the tribes of eastern Syria: the Syrian government, Turkey, and the SDF. The author explains how each of these camps has recently convened gatherings to establish overt partnerships with local tribal leaders. Despite the Syrian government's long-time undermining of tribal structures, the author notes, "many have returned to the pre-national structures, that is, to the culture of the tribe and clan." Consequently, all parties to the Syrian conflict are now seeking to exploit tribal identities, creating a virtuous cycle of sorts for clan politics. The party best positioned to understand this complex dynamic, according to the accompanying excerpt from the Syrian opposition news website *Enab Baladi*, is the Syrian government, which "is perfectly aware that the role of the clan is symbolic in east Syria" but is nonetheless using tribal identities as a "popular incubator... that can be exploited to condemn the US presence in the region to push it out and regain control over the area."

Whether or not the ongoing protests against SDF rule in Deir Ezzor are being orchestrated by the regime, the pressure on the SDF is real. The third accompanying excerpt, from the pro-Syrian government Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar*, argues that Saudi Arabia has intensified discussions with tribal leaders in the Euphrates Valley as part of a purported US-Saudi plan that "includes a reduction of the presence of Kurdish elements within the SDF in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor." These efforts, the author adds, are intended to "[compete] with Turkey's notable effort in the same field."

Confrontation looms in eastern Syria, but its contours remain vague. Turkish efforts to "form a military body representing the 'clans of the eastern region' that can be used to confront the Kurdish 'People's Protection Units'" (the dominant group within the SDF) have yielded results, and rumors of a Turkish offensive against the SDF have swirled for months. The fourth accompanying excerpt, from Turkey's *Anadolu Agency*, instead hypes up a purported offensive by the SDF and its allies against Iranian influence in the Euphrates Valley. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"...The loyalty of the elders and heads of these clans divide into three camps..."

Source: Amin al-Asi. "Syria: Three-Way Competition for Tribal Loyalty East of the Euphrates," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 5 May 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y28txgpp> سورية: سباق ثلاثي على ولاء عشائر شرقي الفرات

The loyalty of the elders and heads of these clans divide into three camps. A number of them are still loyal to the regime, while some went to cooperate with the "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF) after it expelled ISIS from the region, and yet others chose to coordinate with the Turkish side, where the Supreme Council of Syrian Tribes recently was established to include Syrian Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish tribes ...

In an interview with al-Araby al-Jadid, the writer and political researcher Manaf al-Hamad said, "in the light of the fragmentation and disruption of the Syrian social fabric, many have returned to the pre-national structures, that is, to the culture of the tribe and clan, given the total absence of political party and civil societies. Bashar al-Assad's regime has shattered the original values of the tribe in Syria and has exploited them in an ugly way by linking them to the security apparatus," he said, adding: "But the fact that a large number of tribesmen have obtained advanced degrees and have left to work abroad, especially in the Gulf countries, has led to a qualitative leap in consciousness in terms of relationship with the tribe, the regime and the homeland, due to their experiencing the great cultural gap between Syria and these countries..."



Engineers attached to Operation Inherent Resolve's Special Operations Joint Task Force erected a bridge over the Euphrates River in Syria, 27 December 2017.

Source: DoD photo by Army Staff Sgt. Richard Lutz, <https://www.defense.gov/observe/photo-gallery/igphoto/2001862855/>, Public Domain.



Continued: Courting Syria's Sunni Arab Tribes

Source: “Through clans card: Tripartite marathon towards eastern Syria,” *Enabbaladi* (English), 17 May 2019. <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/05/through-clans-card-tripartite-marathon-towards-eastern-syria/> (Arabic original: <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/300213>)

As for the regime, “it is perfectly aware that the role of the clan is symbolic in east Syria, but it is trying to deal with them as a popular incubator, which protests against the practices of SDF, that can be exploited to condemn the US presence in the region to push it out and regain control over the area.”

However, the recent conference of tribes in Ayn Issa provoked the regime. Al-Alou attributed this to the conference seeking to “ease the popular protests against the presence of SDF, while the regime relies on popular action that may trigger a revolution against SDF, causing the tribal areas to be destabilized; thereby, pushing the US to withdraw from the region, and allowing the regime to regain control.”

Meanwhile, “Turkey is seeking to enter tribal areas in the east of the Euphrates, and get closer to the people through tribal sheikhs to create a popular incubator welcoming the Turkish presence,” said al-Alou...

Source: استثمار في «الكباش» مع إيران: خطط أميركية – سعودية لعشائر شرق الفرات
 “Investing in the ‘Arm-Wrestle’ with Iran: American-Saudi Plan for the Tribes East of the Euphrates,” *al-Akhbar*, 18 May 2019. <https://al-akhbar.com/Syria/270671>

The foregoing intersects with information about Gulf activity, especially by Saudi Arabia, to ease tensions between tribes and “the coalition” and also to try to build new bridges that allow them to take advantage of residents of the Euphrates Valley in the conflict, both at the Syrian and the regional levels. According to tribal sources, Riyadh, which communicates with a number of tribal elders, summoned the leader of the “Maghawir al-Thawra” faction, Muhannad al-Talaa, to visit the kingdom and discuss plans including a possible military role for tribesmen, aimed primarily at “the Iranian presence in the Syrian Badiya (West Bank of the Euphrates)”...

The Saudi-American plan, according to the same tribal sources, includes a reduction of the presence of Kurdish elements within the SDF in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, to be replaced by members of the “Deir Ezzor Military Council” and the “Syrian Elite Forces” and Arab volunteers within the Asayish, in return for the guarantee of a “fair” mechanism to benefit from the oil and gas fields in the region ...

It is no secret that the Saudi involvement in tribal affairs competes with Turkey’s notable effort in the same field, to form a military body representing the “clans of the eastern region” that can be used to confront the Kurdish “People’s Protection Units” along the border areas.

Source: عملية محتملة لـ“بي ب ك” والتحالف ضد مجموعات إيران شرقي سوريا
 “Expected YPG and Coalition Operation Against Iranian Groups in Eastern Syria,” *Anadolu Agency*, 17 May 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yyc4bejc>

With the support of the international coalition, the terrorist YPG/PKK organization is preparing to launch a possible military operation against the sites of terrorist groups affiliated with Iran in eastern Syria, a local source told Anadolu’s correspondent. According to the sources, YPG/PKK elements were trained by coalition forces preparing to launch a military operation in western Deir Ezzor province, after the organization tightened control of the eastern Province.

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Voices from a Refugee Camp in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: After the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) lost the territories they controlled in Iraq and Syria, thousands of wives and children of suspected ISIS members were left behind. Many eventually surrendered to Iraqi security or Kurdish forces in their regions. The questions of what to do with the children who were either born in former ISIS territories or brought to Syria or Iraq by their parents; and what to do with ISIS wives remain unanswered. Many countries have shown no desire to take back their citizens who joined ISIS. The recent repatriation of over 180 Turkish children of suspected ISIS members to Turkey reignited the debate. The accompanying articles from Kurdish sources provide the perspectives of two children and a female ISIS member still in Syria.



Civilians at an SDF screening center, 8 March 2019. Most of the evacuees were families of Islamic State fighters.
Source: Voice of America via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baghuz_ISIL_Families.png, Public domain.

The first article from Kurdish news agency *Hawar* features an interview with two children of ISIS members in the al-Hawl refugee camp in Al Hasakah, Syria. One child identifies herself as being from the Maghreb region of Africa and says that she was brought to Syria against her will by her father in 2014 and lived in ISIS-controlled Raqqa. Her father has since been killed, and she now wants to go back. She calls on her government (she does not specify which country she's from) to help her and her sister return home. The other interviewee is from Uzbekistan and was brought to Syria by her father as well. She states that they spent some time in Turkey during which they were arrested by the Turkish intelligence service. They were eventually released, and crossed into Syria to join ISIS with the help of a smuggler.

The second article from Kurdish news outlet *Rudaw* features an interview with a female Danish ISIS member who is also being held at the al-Hawl refugee camp. She says that she does not want to live in a democracy, nor does she want to return to Denmark; instead she wants to live under ISIS. Currently the al-Hawl refugee camp holds 72,000 suspected ISIS members and their relatives from various countries. The section of the camp that hosts suspected ISIS members is tightly secured by the Kurdish forces. How many of these suspected ISIS members still firmly hold onto their hope of living under ISIS rule is unknown. While some countries are concerned over the possibility that potential returnees will quickly become radicalized, others have focused on either establishing rehabilitation programs or providing support to prevent any future radicalization. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The children of ISIS members call on the governments of their countries to take them back.”

Source: Nesrîn Elî, Zarokên li kampa Holê dixwazin vegerin welatê xwe (Children at al-Hawl camp want to return to their countries), *ANHA*, 27 May 2019. <https://hawarnews.com/kr/haber/zarokn-li-kampa-hol-dixwazin-vegerin-welat-xwe-h17390.html>

The children of ISIS members call on the governments of their countries to take them back. One child says she, her sister and her brother are victims of her father's wrong ideas. My hope is to return to my country and continue my education...

N.E. (13) and her sister who are from Maghrib have been in Syria for 5 years and their father was killed... N.E. said ... when they arrived in Turkey, a few days later they were arrested by Turkish intelligence. [Turkish officials] did not allow us to go to Gaziantep, [a Turkish city on the Syrian border] until a smuggler took us to Aleppo [a Syrian city].

After that NE and her family settled in al-Raqqa in 2014...

A 13 year old girl named E. A. from Uzbekistan [stated]... After the Syrian Civil War started, they went to Turkey and stayed there... after a while Turkish intelligence arrested them. She stated that “they did not know why they were arrested”... because of pressure from Turkey, they crossed into Syria and her father joined ISIS.

Source: Danimarkalı IŞİD’ci kadın: Demokrasi istemiyorum (A Danish female ISIS member: I do not want democracy), *Rudaw*, 4 June 2019. <http://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/0406201912>

A female ISIS member who is a Danish national currently in al-Hawl Camp in Hasakah, Rojava, stated that she did not want to return to her country because she did not want to live under the roof of a democracy and said, “I want to live in the Islamic State.”

...

There are 13 Danish national women and children who were ISIS members at al-Hawl Camp.

...

There are 72,000 relatives of ISIS members at al-Hawl Camp.



The S-400 Deal: A “Strategic Victory” for Russia?

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2017, when Turkish officials initially announced plans to buy the S-400 (long-range missile defense) system from Russia, many assumed that they would eventually “come to their senses” and back out of the deal, as they had previously walked away from a similar deal with China. However, this time Turkey has not backed out, and the missiles are being delivered in July. This is happening despite repeated warnings about the various problems it would cause for the country (being excluded from the F-35 program and sanctions, among others). Given that NATO is generally considered the final anchor that still binds Turkey to the West, this development has significant geopolitical implications. The accompanying passage sheds light on a Turkish perspective on the issue. The author, a respected expert and a former Turkish diplomat who is critical of the deal, laments that it will “separate [Turkey] from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years.” He also sees it as a Russian strategic victory.

The author goes through the technical, military, political, economic, and geopolitical losses that Turkey will incur from the deal. After laying out all of these losses, he suggests that the purchase has no reasonable explanation other than Russian manipulation and strategic moves (mostly in Syria) which painted Turkey into the corner in which it currently finds itself. He writes that “the S-400 purchase is not something that can be explained by logic, strategy, technology or diplomacy.” He explains it as a “veiled Russian coup,” adding that Putin is probably “laughing quietly in the Kremlin.” He claims that with this sale, Putin has won the “first victory in his... war against the West,” by pitting Turkey against NATO. He ends on a sarcastic note, questioning whether Turkey will find “eternal peace and happiness in Eurasian deserts.”

From a technical and military standpoint, he points out that the F-16s, “which are the backbone of our air force” will become impossible to fly, due to sanctions. In addition, he notes, Turkey’s NATO-integrated air defense and early warning system will become unusable. He also points out that Turkey’s air and naval forces will become more vulnerable, which will have to be addressed by ordering SU-57 planes and more S-400’s from Russia. He warns that this will make Turkey even more dependent on Russia, given the need for maintenance, equipment and training for these systems.

Economically, he points out that the CAATSA [Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] sanctions will quickly bring Turkey’s precarious economy to the brink of collapse. Ironically, he notes, it will be the International Monetary Fund “which is based in Washington” that Turkey would have to turn to, if its economy does collapse. He also points out that being excluded from the F-35 supply chain will cost the Turkish defense industry approximately \$15 billion and will push some Turkish defense contractors into bankruptcy. This does not even include the costs from the loss of technical know-how.

He claims that the questions being raised about Turkey’s NATO membership, “will shake the core structure of the Turkish Armed Forces.” Most notably, he laments that the S-400 purchase will force Turkey to shift axes and be interpreted as “the end of Turkey’s unhappy marriage with the West” due to irreconcilable differences. (Also see: “Turkish-Russian Military Cooperation” in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“The S-400 purchase will force the Republic of Turkey to shift axes. It will separate this country from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years.”

“Let’s call it what it is: The S-400 purchase is a veiled Russian coup. You can be sure that... Putin is laughing quietly in the Kremlin.”

Source: Aydin Selcen, “Altın vuruş olarak S-400 alımı (The S-400 purchase as a golden trigger),” *Gazeteduvar.com.tr*, 16 June 2019. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/06/16/altin-vurus-olarak-s-400-alimi/>

From a technical standpoint, what will happen if we buy the S-400? The F-16’s, which are the backbone of our air force, will become impossible to fly. Our NATO-integrated air defense and early warning system will become unusable. The CAATSA [Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] sanctions will quickly bring our already-vulnerable economy to the brink of collapse. In particular, the vulnerability that will emerge in our air and naval forces-- which is certain and quickly accelerating-- will have to be addressed by ordering SU-57 planes and more S-400’s from Russia. We will become dependent on Russia for the maintenance, equipment and training of these systems.

Politically, all of these will have brought Putin- originally a professional intelligence agent- his first victory in the “hybrid war” that Russia launched against the West around 2007 with a single motion, by pushing the two S-400 batteries on NATO-member and a NATO flank country Turkey. Islamists, leftists, nationalists have all taken the same side, and are thinking that Turkey is stepping into being ‘non-aligned,’ and while the S-400 purchase has been marketed to the public this way, in fact Ankara will be pulling the ‘golden trigger’ on this [Putin’s hybrid war].

The S-400 purchase will force the Republic of Turkey to shift axes. It will separate this country from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years. Meanwhile, we still don’t know why the S-400 is so imperative, and what threat it will protect us and from whom....

What may be the cost of walking away from the S-400 purchase in this final period leading up to 31 July? From a military point of view, the first point would be Idlib [Syria]. In fact, even while the purchasing process was going on, a Turkish Armed Forces observation point was targeted by 35 mortar shells. The Syrian army’s operations are on-going as well. There is talk of another two million Syrian civilians being swept towards our borders. ...

Economically, we are approaching collapse... Which would be a heavier cost- the US burden [sanctions] or Russian acts? The correct answer is that of the US. In fact, when our economy does collapse, the place we would go to is the IMF and the IMF is in Washington. There’s also the cost of being excluded from the F-35 supply chain, and the approximate 15 billion dollar loss that some of our defense contractors will incur, potentially pushing them into bankruptcy. I’m not even counting the potential loss of technical know-how throughout the process.

Diplomatically-- remember that thing called diplomacy-- we should not have painted ourselves into a corner by being faced with these alternatives. We should not have been in a position to choose between the US and Russia, between the F-35 and the S-400. We should have avoided the current situation before we got to this point. Have we heard about any diplomacy traffic between our Moscow or Washington Ambassadors, any initiatives, meetings, or behind-the-scenes negotiations? No.

Let’s call it what it is: The S-400 purchase is a veiled Russian coup. You can be sure that the Russian President Putin is laughing quietly in the Kremlin.... The S-400 purchase has no explanation to do with logic, strategy, technology or diplomacy. Buying the S-400s will just make our current position even more difficult. And the S-400 batteries will contribute nothing to our country’s defense....

The questions being raised about our NATO membership will shake the core structure of the Turkish Armed Forces. And our unhappy marriage with the West will end due to irreconcilable differences.... And of course since everyone in the country is anti-American, ... we’ll throw ourselves into Eurasian deserts and achieve eternal peace and happiness there.

China and Russia Offer Alternatives to Turkey for F-35s

OE Watch Commentary: In light of news that F-35s may not be available to Turkey based on their acquisition of the S-400 system from Russia, Turkish commentators are noting that Russia and China have rapidly offered a solution to fill the void. As the accompanying articles suggest, both countries have raised the possibility of fulfilling Turkey's need for a fifth-generation stealth fighter jet, with either the Chinese J-31 or the Russian Su-57. As the first passage notes, the Chinese J-31 has similar capabilities, and is a fifth generation twin-engine and multi-purpose stealth jet fighter, as is the Russian Su-57. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Following Russia, China has also raised the possibility of cooperating with Turkey on the fighter jet issue.”

Source: “Türkiye F-35 yerine J-31 ve Su-57 alabilir (Turkey can buy the J-31 or the Su-57 instead of the F-35),” *Aksam.com.tr*, 13 June 2019. <https://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/turkiye-f35-yerine-j31-ve-su57-alabilir/haber-980065>

The Chinese media announced that Turkey was considering buying Russian Su-57 or Chinese J-31 (FC-31) jets in the event that the F-35 program was cancelled. Chinese expert Guangyu (Senior Advisor to China's Weapons Control and Nonproliferation Foundation), who analyzed the issue, said that countries like Turkey need many stealth fighter jets and that they could buy these two alternatives instead.

As the US continues to threaten Turkey regarding the F-35's if it buys the S-400s [from Russia], other countries with jet fighters similar to the F-35, are flashing the green light to Turkey.

Russian officials, who expressed their respect to Turkey regarding its determination for national security on the issue of the S-400s, had already announced that they were ready to negotiate with Turkey on the fighter jet issue, in light of the US's threat regarding [removing Turkey from] the F-35 program.

Following Russia, China has also raised the possibility of cooperating with Turkey on the fighter jet issue... Experts are saying that the J-31 have similar capabilities as the F-35 and may be a good option for Turkey. ...

The J-31, which is being developed by the China Aerospace Industry Institute and the Shenyang Aircraft company, is a fifth generation twin-engine and multi-purpose stealth jet fighter, with goals for export.

The J-31 made its first flight at Airshow China in 2014, at Zhuhai in South China's Guangdong Province. After that, very few details were heard about the plane. Analysts say that it is being developed and that it could also serve as the jet fighter for China's next generation aircraft carrier.



The Russian SU-57 stealth jet fighter.

Source: Maxim Maksimov via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sukhoi_T-50_Maksimov.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0



The Chinese J-31 stealth jet fighter.

Source: 天劍2 via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-31-2.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: “F-35’ler için alternatifler hazır (Alternatives for the F-35s are ready),” *Yenisafak.com.tr*, 6 March 2019. <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/abd-f-35leri-vermedi-diye-havlu-atmayiz-3344926>

Defense Analyst Turan Oğuz said that in the event that the F-35s are not given to Turkey, Turkey may turn to Russia or China for fifth generation fighter planes. “Russians have the SU-57 planes, which are fifth-generation.... Similarly, China has the J-31 planes and those are also fifth-generation... So, we can say that on the issue of Turkey purchasing fifth generation planes, the US is not the only alternative; it's only a matter of time and a certain number of different technical aspects,” he said.



Turkish-Russian Military Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: Historically, Turkey and Russia have been rivals on many fronts and been on opposing sides of different alliances. However, the Syrian Civil War has changed this. With Russia's involvement in Syria in 2015, Turkey quickly realized that it could not remain relevant in Syria without Russian consent. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss this relationship, how it has changed due to Syria, and how it has been asymmetric in favor of Russia since 2015.

The first article, from Turkey's Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), an independent Turkish think tank, analyzes Turkish-Russian defense cooperation in detail. The article starts by discussing Russian arms exports and efforts to diversify its market, attributing its defense cooperation with Turkey to this diversification effort. It discusses that for Russia, entering Turkey's "weapons market would provide Russia with strong political leverage over" Turkey's western allies. According to the author, selling the S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system to Turkey is much more than just another arms sale for Russia. As the article points out, purchasing S-400s will "irreparably damage" relations between Turkey and its western allies which seems to be Moscow's objective. The acquisition of S-400s will have serious political ramifications for Turkey, as they will certainly "compromise NATO's military secrets." Overall, the article provides a fair assessment of Turkish-Russian political and military cooperation and its ramifications on Turkey's alliance with NATO.

The second article argues that the Turkish-Russian relationship is growing increasingly asymmetrical, with Turkey unable to refuse Russian demands. This has become especially true after Turkey paid a heavy price for shooting down Russian Su-24 fighter jets in 2015, and realized that it would not be able to remain at the table in Syria without a green light from Russia. Russia has exploited this relationship in many transactions. The article highlights five areas pointing to asymmetric relations between the two countries.

First, the relationship tips in favor of Russia during times when Turkey perceives threats to its national security from radical and violent groups domestically and on its borders. Second, Turkey's weakened relations both with its western allies and neighbors have given Russia an upper hand as perceived by Turkish observers. A Turkey with strained relations with NATO and the European Union gives Russia an opportunity to solicit more concessions from Turkey such as in the TurkStream natural gas project or establishing the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. The third area pointing to an asymmetric relationship is the S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system purchase, which will make Turkey dependent on Russia for weapons systems in addition to Turkey already relying on Russia for over 50 percent of its natural gas. Fourth, Russia's presence in Syria and its annexation of Crimea have provided Russia with advantages in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea respectively which further contributes to an asymmetrical power balance with Turkey as Russia gained leverage in two of the seas surrounding Turkey. Finally, an authoritarian Turkey with weakened institutions has become more susceptible to Russia as both countries resemble each other in terms of their regime. (Also see: "The S-400 Deal: A 'Strategic Victory' for Russia?" in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“A NATO member will be purchasing a defensive strategic weapon system from the organization's main rival and the risk of the system to compromise NATO's military secrets is nearly certain.”

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkish-Russian Defense Cooperation: Political-Military Scope, Prospects and Limits," *EDAM*, 13 May 2019. <http://edam.org.tr/en/turkish-russian-defense-cooperation-political-military-scope-prospects-and-limits/>

This study aims to assess the political-military scope, limits, and prospects of the advancing Turkish – Russian defense partnership. In doing so, it will first present a tour d'horizon of the Russian arms exports, and then explain why Russian weaponry is 'attractive' to many nations. The second part will analyze the Turkish defense sector and weapons market in detail. The third part will evaluate the S-400 deal. The fourth section will focus on the prospects and future trajectory of the Turkish – Russian defense cooperation. Finally, the study will conclude with its findings....

[Turkish] authorities must realize that the S-400 deal comes at a price. Defense acquisitions, especially strategic weapon systems packages, cannot be properly assessed without reference to the context in which they take place or without reference to the general strategic environment in contemporary international affairs. Furthermore, in this specific case, a NATO member will be purchasing a defensive strategic weapon system from the organization's main rival and the risk of the system to compromise NATO's military secrets is nearly certain.

Source: Kerim Has, "Türkiye-Rusya ilişkilerinde derinleşen asimetrik model (An asymmetric model deepening in Turkey-Russia relations)," *karar.com* 31 May 2019. <https://www.karar.com/gorusler/turkiye-rusya-iliskilerinde-derinlesen-asimetrik-model-1227679#>

In the first decade of the 21st century Turkish-Russian relations were carried out through a delicate balance. From the end of the plane crisis that broke out in November 2015 through today an asymmetric relationship model emerged in Turkish-Russian relations....

When looking more closely at the characteristics that distinguish the current asymmetric model with relations from previous periods, it is necessary to emphasize the following few issues. First, ... asymmetry deepens when direct threats against Turkey's national security arise domestically and on its borders...

The second component that deepens the asymmetry in its relations with Russia is the fact that Ankara is at odds both with its Western allies and many of its neighbors and partners in the East.

[Adding the military-geopolitical dimension to the relationship makes the asymmetric model [of relations] long term...



Turkey and Russia to Cooperate on Domestic Security

OE Watch Commentary: Victor Zolotov, the head of the Rosgvardia (the Russian National Guard) paid a five-day visit to Turkey in mid-May. Established in 2016, the Rosgvardia directly reports to Russian President Vladimir Putin and is mainly responsible for internal security. A long-time close friend of Putin, Zolotov is an influential figure in implementing Russia's internal security policies. During his visit to Turkey, he was accompanied by the Turkish Gendarmerie Forces Commander, Arif Çetin. The visit resulted in an important Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which signals that Turkish and Russian cooperation is expanding into the field of domestic security. The accompanying passage from Middle Eastern news website *Al-Monitor* discusses the significance of the visit and MoU.



National Guard of Russia.

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Guard_of_Russia_\(2017-03-27\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Guard_of_Russia_(2017-03-27)_02.jpg), CC BY 3.0.

The article discusses a number of reasons for the visit, including “information sharing between the Russian National Guard and Turkish gendarmerie forces;” and the fact that “Russians wanted to learn the general structure of the Turkish Gendarmerie Command and its operations.” Furthermore, it discusses that both sides want to establish cooperation between interior security units at an institutional level. As the article discusses, the MoU between the Turkish Gendarmerie Command and the Rosgvardia covers “cooperation in public order, public security, protection of state facilities, combating extremism and sharing intelligence about cross-border organized crime.” The memorandum also includes “organizing joint exercises, trainings for the military and civilian personnel of the Rosgvardia and the Turkish Gendarmerie Forces.”

The author states that cooperating along these lines may lead to the Rosgvardia offering to guard the TurkStream Natural Gas Pipeline and Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant “which is being constructed by Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corp[oration].” Under the auspices of providing security to Turkish-Russian joint ventures, the Rosgvardia could potentially gain access to the Turkish private security sector. Also, the Rosgvardia “could engage in training and exercises with its Turkish partner to ensure public order” without any restrictions. As the author notes, cooperation at this level will pave the way for “sharing intelligence on terror organizations and organized crime” as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The cooperation framework also foresees organizing joint exercises, trainings for the military and civilian personnel of the Rosgvardia and Turkish gendarmerie forces.”

Source: Metin Gürçan, “Why ‘Putin’s personal army’ chief visited Turkey,” *Al-Monitor.com*, 22 May 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/05/turkey-russia-chief-of-putins-personal-army-visited-ankara.html>

Viktor Zolotov, the head of the Russian National Guard, Rosgvardiya, a security unit that oversees anti-riot police and SWAT teams, paid a surprise visit to the capital, Ankara, from May 13-18 with a “heavily loaded” agenda... Although his Russian delegation’s carefully crafted schedule didn’t include any direct contact with the Turkish army, NATO’s second largest, the visit heralds further military cooperation between Russia and Turkey...

Zolotov, whose special force of 200,000 provides policing and military capabilities, is an influential name when it comes to Russia’s security policies...

The Turkish news media said the goal of the visit was information sharing between the Russian National Guard and Turkish gendarmerie forces. Accordingly, Russians wanted to learn the general structure of the Turkish Gendarmerie Command and its operations and to work toward beneficial sharing of information between the two states...

Turkey’s pro-Russian newspaper Aydinlik reported that Zolotov’s visit wasn’t limited to information sharing and that concrete steps were taken during the visit for institutional cooperation between Russian and Turkish interior security units.

Zolotov was accompanied by Turkey’s Gendarmerie Commander Arif Cetin throughout his visit. The two also signed a memorandum of understanding that covers cooperation in public order, public security, protection of state facilities, combating extremism and sharing intelligence about cross-border organized crime. The cooperation framework also foresees organizing joint exercises, trainings for the military and civilian personnel of the Rosgvardia and Turkish gendarmerie forces.

...it could offer security services for the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, which is being constructed by Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corp., and the Turkstream natural gas pipeline; the Rosgvardiya also could engage in training and exercises with its Turkish partner to ensure public order... It could be the trainer, coordinator and even partner of private security firms in Turkey. Of course cooperation to this extent would include sharing intelligence on terror organizations and organized crime.



Challenges in Turkey-Iraq Relations

OE Watch Commentary: Speaking to reporters after meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan raised the prospect of a security and military cooperation accord with Iraq to fight terrorism. This is not the first time the two countries have announced a security cooperation agreement; a similar deal was signed in 2008 but did not yield results. The accompanying article written by a respected Turkish Middle East expert discusses the challenges to a potential security agreement between Turkey and Iraq.

The article notes that both presidents stressed the importance of bilateral cooperation against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), based in northern Iraq. The Turkish President said, "We've decided that an agreement on military cooperation and trust between Turkey and Iraq will be an appropriate step," adding that the respective foreign and defense ministers and intelligence chiefs would meet to discuss details.

However, there are a number of challenges. As the article discusses, Turkey had planned to open another border crossing with Iraq to increase bilateral trade, bypass the Kurdish Regional Government and end the monopoly of the Habur border crossing, creating a safe zone to "cut off PKK's connections to Sinjar in Iraq and Rojava in Syria." However, Baghdad seems unwilling to agree to this, as it does not want to anger the Kurdish Regional Government. The other tension point stems from Turkey's cross-border operation into Iraq against the PKK and Turkish military posts in northern Iraq. Baghdad has long viewed these operations as violating its territorial integrity. Finally, the influence of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries on Iraq poses another challenge. Therefore, the author concludes, even though Turkish and Iraqi relations seem to improve, the possibility of signing a working military or security cooperation agreement is still far off. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Habur border crossing, Turkey & Iraq.

Source: Mahmut Bozarslan via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Habur_border_crossing_\(Turkey_%26_Iraq\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Habur_border_crossing_(Turkey_%26_Iraq).jpg), Public Domain.

“Despite the optimistic outlook... Turkish-Iraqi ties are fraught with long-standing problems...”

Source: Fehim Tastekin, "How viable is Turkey's bid for military partnership with Iraq?," *Al-Monitor*, 22 May 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/05/turkey-iraq-how-viable-military-partnership.html>

During Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's recent visit to Ankara, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan raised the prospect of a security and military cooperation accord between the two neighbors... Turkey and Iraq signed a security deal in 2008, but it has had little effect on the ground. And the stumbling blocks in bilateral ties remain tough, calling for more tempered expectations.

Speaking after his May 15 meeting with Abdul Mahdi, Erdoğan stressed the importance of cooperation against the Islamic State (IS) and other groups, including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which takes refuge in the mountains of northern Iraq... Erdoğan... added that Turkey's foreign and defense ministers and the intelligence chief would hold a meeting soon with their Iraqi counterparts to discuss details of the deal.

Despite the optimistic outlook... Turkish-Iraqi ties are fraught with long-standing problems...

Turkey has sought to open a second border crossing with Iraq as an alternative to the existing one, which is on the border with the Kurdistan region. The planned new crossing — at Ovakoy, where the borders of Turkey, Iraq and Syria meet — is designed to serve multiple aims: increase bilateral trade, bypass the Kurdistan region and end the monopoly of the existing crossing at Habur, create a safe zone along the Syrian border and all the way to Mosul and thus cutting off the PKK's connection to Sinjar in Iraq and Rojava in Syria. Despite its pledges of cooperation, Baghdad has dragged its feet on the project, which would shift the balance on a route that is outside its control. Baghdad is likely refraining from angering the Kurds at a time when it is trying to normalize ties with them...

Other tensions in the bilateral relationship stem from Turkey's cross-border operations against the PKK and from Turkey's military bases in northern Iraq, including the one at Bashiqa near Mosul. Although the two sides share sensibilities on territorial integrity and security in rhetoric, their perspectives remain disparate...

Efforts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to win over Iraq are posing an additional hardship for Turkey, on top of the influence of Iran.



Dispute Over Natural Gas Exploration in the Mediterranean

OE Watch Commentary: The discovery of natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean continues to cause tension in the region. This tension impacts power dynamics among littoral states but also among other countries and companies. In January 2019, several countries including the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt formed the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum to foster cooperation on natural gas and oil reserves in the region. Turkey perceived this forum as a threat because it excluded Turkey and northern Cyprus (which Turkey considers the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’). The accompanying article from state-funded *Anadolu Ajansı* discusses Turkey’s perspectives on the issue.

According to the article, the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves could have contributed to the resolution of the Cyprus issue, but the attitudes of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece towards Turkish Cypriots and Turkey make this outcome unlikely; in fact, it escalates the situation further. The Republic of Cyprus’s recent announcement of an agreement with France allowing the French to establish a naval base on Cyprus adds another layer of complexity: France may stop Turkey from disrupting French petroleum company Total’s hydrocarbon exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. The article argues that Greece and the Republic of Cyprus purposefully involved other European Union member countries to gain the leverage to limit Turkey’s access to areas to drill for hydrocarbon reserves. Therefore, the author argues that tensions will continue to escalate in the region.

Second, from the Turkish perspective the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) declared by the Republic of Cyprus violate international law under the London and Zurich Agreements of 1959 that created the constitution of Cyprus and the rights of Turkey and Cypriot Turks over natural gas reserves. Also, the Republic of Cyprus signed EEZ delimitation agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel without consulting with the Turkish side. Turkey opposes these unilateral actions of the Republic of Cyprus and will prevent any natural gas drilling attempts in EEZ areas that overlap with areas that Turkey lays claim to. The Turkish Navy has previously interrupted drilling activities of ships commissioned by the Republic of Cyprus. The other issue that falls under international law is the violation of Turkey’s right over its continental shelf. Turkey considers the methods by which Greece and the Republic of Cyprus determined the EEZ, to be in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982.

Finally, the author highlights Turkey’s concern over energy security. Currently, Turkey imports nearly 99 percent of its natural gas and 89 percent of its petroleum needs. The energy reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean could reduce Turkey’s energy dependence on countries such as Russia and create a secure energy supply for its citizens. As such, other countries engaging in energy discovery and drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean pose a threat to Turkey’s energy security. The author notes that regional states should shift to a more collaborative approach to help regional energy and security stability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The potential of approximately 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 122 trillion cubic feet of gas... has made the region a new area of struggle and crisis.”



Eastern Mediterranean basins including Levant basin and oil and gas fields.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (eia) via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eastern_Mediterranean_basins_including_Levant_basin_and_oil_and_gas_fields.png, Public Domain.

Source: İlhan Sağsen, “Yeni bir kriz ve mücadele alanı: Doğu Akdeniz (A new area of crisis and struggle: Eastern Mediterranean),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 22 May 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/yeni-bir-kriz-ve-mucadele-alani-dogu-akdeniz/1484415#>

According to the US Geological Survey, the Eastern Mediterranean has the potential of producing approximately 1.7 billion barrels of oil and 122 trillion cubic feet of gas. This has begun to attract the attention of the world’s leading energy companies and regional countries that have high demand for energy as well as the other countries in the region. This situation has made the region a new area of struggle and crisis...

Within this framework, the issue can be handled in three dimensions for the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean: the Cyprus problem, international law and energy security. One of the major actors of the region, Turkey is developing its policies through these three dimensions.

When the approaches of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Cyprus (GCAC) are evaluated, it is seen that, unfortunately, it adds another dimension to the Cyprus problem and a new non-solution.

One of the most important security problems in the region is the fact that the Republic of Cyprus, Israel and Greece have acted in violation of the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)...

Looking at the issue in terms of international law, Turkey argues that Turkey and the TRNC have rights over the Exclusive Economic Zone that the GCAC has declared without consulting the TRNC... Turkey and Northern Cypriot Turks have rights under the London and Zurich Agreements...

The third major dimension of Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics is energy security. This issue closely interests Turkey because of its need for energy security as well as its position within the energy trade... For actors who need energy as do the EU and Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean energy reserves is a critical resource to have access to.

Qatar, the UAE and Houthi Weapons Sources

OE Watch Commentary: Weapons smuggling routes to Sana'a inevitably go through areas of Yemen controlled by purported adversaries of the Houthis. If one is to believe the recent Arabic-language media reports excerpted alongside this commentary, the UAE, Qatar and even Saudi Arabia are complicit – via their Yemeni allies – in allowing weapons to reach the Houthis.

Qatari-Emirati finger pointing is part of a broader war of words between the two Gulf states, one that has become increasingly pronounced in Yemen. For several years now, influential Qatari-affiliated media outlets such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Araby al-Jadid*, have reported on the darker side of UAE policy in Yemen, most recently its undercutting of Yemen's internationally recognized government. UAE-friendly media outlets, for their part, regularly denounce Qatar for its purported support of the Houthis.

The first accompanying excerpted article, originally posted by a Yemeni news agency allied with the family of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, describes rampant weapons smuggling in Taiz Province. According to the author, “militias allied to political forces that are sponsored and supported by Qatar” facilitate weapons smuggling to their Houthi adversaries. The smuggling, according to the author, is “not a casual process by smugglers to earn money, but an inevitable result of the implementation of the Qatari policy in support of the Houthis in Taiz.”

The second excerpted article accuses the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council of involvement in weapons smuggling. “There may be no evidence to condemn the UAE directly for smuggling operations,” the author notes, but “the UAE-backed Transitional Council facilitates arms smuggling to the Houthis via the southern ports of Mukallah, Shabwah and Aden.” Such activities, he claims, would be “impossible for the transitional authorities to conduct...without knowledge or consent from the UAE.”

The author of the third accompanying excerpt points his finger at Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and his cronies in Yemen's internationally recognized government, which is backed by Saudi Arabia. Mohsen, a longtime ally of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, currently holds the title of vice-president in the internationally recognized government. According to the author, Mohsen “hides beneath the cover of legitimacy” to make unbelievable profits as part of a “smuggling mafia.” Mohsen's activities, the author concludes, “raise many questions on the role of the government, which may benefit from maintaining the status quo in its current complex form, without proving its sincerity to resolve the crisis.” Whether or not this is true, there is no doubt that many are profiting significantly from Yemen's war economy, and that contraband in weapons and ammunition has become a vital sector in this new economic structure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“This magnitude and continuity of weapons smuggling to the Houthis is not a casual process by smugglers to earn money, but an inevitable result of the implementation of the Qatari policy in support of the Houthis in Taiz.”



A cache of weapons is assembled on the deck of the guided-missile destroyer USS Gravelly (DDG 107).

Source: Official U.S. Navy Page from United States of America, U.S. Navy photo/U.S. Navy via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_cache_of_weapons_is_assembled_on_the_deck_of_USS_Gravelly_\(26142029092\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_cache_of_weapons_is_assembled_on_the_deck_of_USS_Gravelly_(26142029092).jpg), Public Domain.

Source:

“Taiz: Widespread Weapons Smuggling to the Houthis via al-Arqud Frontlines,” *al-Khabar* via *al-Methaq News*, 18 April 2019. <https://almethaqnews.com/news21724.html>

تعز..عمليات تهريب واسعة للأسلحة إلى الحوثيين عبر مناطق التماس في الاقروض

Local sources have disclosed large-scale arms smuggling to the Houthis across the front lines in Taiz separating Houthi militias from militias allied to political forces that are sponsored and supported by Qatar. The sources confirmed to the Khabar news agency that 14 weapons cargoes were discovered across the al-Aqrud front in al-Misrakh district, in coordination with the de facto authority and prominent leaders within the district and in Taiz Province...

The sources considered these moves as falling within a greater project that begins with plotting to collapse the al-Aqrud front in favor of the largest gang of weapons smugglers to the Houthis in al-Misrakh district. The sources confirmed that this magnitude and continuity of weapons smuggling to the Houthis is not a casual process by smugglers to earn money, but an inevitable result of the implementation of the Qatari policy in support of the Houthis in Taiz.

Source:

Ziyad al-Lahji. “UAE Role in Smuggling Weapons to the Houthis,” *theyemen.net*, 5 March 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yydmtv8>

دور الإمارات في تهريب الأسلحة للحوثيين

Prior to the killing of former president Saleh, the coalition accused the northern forces stationed in the First Sector, near Saleh, of smuggling weapons to the Houthis via the southern ports of Mukallah and Shabwah, which prompted the UAE forces' insistence to expel these northern forces and hand over the ports to the Security Belt and Elite forces, which are directly affiliated with the UAE forces. Even so, smuggling continued at its strongest through these ports, meaning there is a direct relationship between smuggling and those forces. In my estimation, these forces would not dare to commit such crimes unless they were in advance coordination with the Emirati forces and complete satisfaction from the UAE itself. There may be no evidence to condemn the UAE directly for smuggling operations. What the UAE can certainly not deny, however, is that the relationship between the UAE-backed Transitional Council and the Houthis is very tight and occurs at the highest levels, under the direct supervision of Tehran and Hezbollah, and in full view of the Emirati forces. It is also undeniable that the UAE-backed Transitional Council facilitates arms smuggling to the Houthis via the southern ports of Mukallah, Shabwah and Aden. It is impossible for the transitional authorities to conduct such activities operations without knowledge or consent from the UAE, an indication of a hidden Emirati role in smuggling operations.



Continued: Qatar, the UAE and Houthi Weapons Sources

Source:

بيع أسلحة في حرب وهمية.. صفقة شيطانية بين الحوثيين والإصلاح

“Weapons Sales in an Imaginary War... Satanic Pact between the Houthis and Islah,” *al-Mashhad al-Araby*, 29 May 2019. <https://www.almashhadalaraby.com/news/94866>

The recent period has seen a Houthi-Brotherhood expansion in the smuggling of weapons, ammunition and raw materials for the manufacture of explosives through areas of government influence, specifically in Taiz, towards the areas where the coup militias [Houthis] are present...

The Houthi-Brotherhood alliance cannot be seen as a secret relationship, for they often act in ways that expose this terrorist alliance. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the lull along the Brotherhood-led fronts in Marib and Taiz, as well as an Nihm front in Sanaa. The Brotherhood leader Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar is considered the “head of the Snake” who has made unbelievable profits through arms smuggling. The general [al-Ahmar] hides beneath the cover of legitimacy while also being involved in many arms smuggling operations to the Houthi militias that are supposed to be his adversaries given his role as the right-hand man of Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi... Ali Mohsen also formed an alliance with Hashim al-Ahmar, commander of the 6th Military Region and Amin al-Ukaimi, governor and commander of Al-Jawf, as part of the “smuggling mafia” areas under the control of the al-Houthi militia, which generates huge financial gains. The smuggled shipments included drone parts, weapons-manufacturing materials, and high-grade chemical explosive materials. The crimes of Islah, especially through its influential leaders in the internationally recognized government, raise many questions on the role of the government, which may benefit from maintaining the status quo in its current complex form, without proving its sincerity to resolve the crisis.

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

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



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



Brexit and the Middle East

OE Watch Commentary: The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (EU)- Brexit- will have implications for the Middle East. The UK will no longer be bound by previous agreements that the EU had signed with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League of Arab States or the Organization for Islamic Cooperation. While the Brexit process still bears a number of unknown factors, the questions raised in the accompanying passages from Middle Eastern sources shed light on regional considerations.

The *Saudi Daily Arab News* reports that the UK has approached the UAE and other Gulf countries on a possible trade deal following Brexit, given that the EU agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will no longer apply to the UK. The GCC includes the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. The passage notes that the UK wants trade with the GCC to increase to 25 billion pounds (\$31,5 billion) by 2020.

Along similar lines, Turkey has published a long statement on the website of its Trade Ministry, explaining how Brexit may impact Turkey-UK trade relations. The critical point for Turkey is that it has a Customs Union agreement with the EU, which will not apply to the UK after Brexit, translating into tariffs on goods to and from the UK. Experts claim this may cost Turkey around \$2.4 billion unless it signs a separate deal with the UK.

Israel also has had to revise its trade relations with the UK. Previously, trade relations between Israel and the UK were government by an agreement with the EU, but in February 2019, Israel and the UK signed a trade deal of their own. The accompanying passage from the *Jerusalem Post* discusses the deal and the potential boost it may bring to Israel-UK tech ties. The passage notes that Britain is Israel's leading export destination within the EU, with bilateral trade "repeatedly breaking records in recent years, reaching \$7.2 billion in 2016, \$9.1 billion in 2017 and approximately \$11 billion in 2018."

In the final accompanying passage from Iran's *Tehran Times*, the commentator associates the UK's unilateral decision about Brexit with supporting US policies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Britain has approached the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries on a possible trade pact after Britain leaves the European Union...”

Source: “Brexit Süreci Kapsamında Türkiye-Birleşik Krallık Ticari İlişkileri (Turkey-UK Trade Relations in the Brexit Process),” *The Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Turkey*, 15 May 2019. <https://www.ticaret.gov.tr/blog/ekonomi-haberleri/brexit-sureci-kapsaminda-turkiye-birlesik-krallik-ticari-iliskileri>

A notice issued by the UK on 21 February 2019, provides information about the fate of trade deals in the event that the UK leaves the EU without an agreement, and considers our country among a list of countries with close ties to the EU, saying that our Customs Union agreement will not be valid post-Brexit.

Source: “UK approaches Gulf countries on post-Brexit trade pact — UAE minister,” *Saudi Daily Arab News*, 11 February 2019. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1450626/business-economy>

Dubai: Britain has approached the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries on a possible trade pact after Britain leaves the European Union...

Britain is due to leave the EU on March 29, but it has yet to find an agreement acceptable to both Brussels and UK lawmakers, raising the prospect of a disorderly exit that could damage the world's fifth-largest economy.

The UK was “looking forward” to a free-trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Liam Fox, the UK state secretary for international trade, said during a visit to Dubai for the summit...

The GCC comprises the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. In 2017, trade between the UAE and UK totaled 17.5 billion British pounds (\$22.7 billion), up 12.3 percent from 2016, according to official figures. By 2020, the UK government wants that number to increase to about 25 billion pounds.

Source: Israel, Britain Sign Post-Brexit Trade Continuity Deal,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 February 2019. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Israel-Britain-sign-post-Brexit-trade-continuity-deal-581037>

[Israel's] Economy Minister Eli Cohen and British Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox put pen to paper on a bilateral trade continuity agreement in Tel Aviv on Monday [18 February 2019]. ...

“We think there is enormous potential in the relationship to be synergistic in what we do in terms of the tech sector,” he [British Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox] said. “Of course, we have a huge tech sector in the UK. We had more venture capital and tech come to London in the past year than the whole of France, Germany and Sweden put together. So clearly, with the sort of innovation that comes out of Israel, there's enormous potential for us to work together for our mutual benefit.”

Britain is Israel's leading export destination within the EU, with bilateral trade repeatedly breaking records in recent years, reaching \$7.2 billion in 2016, \$9.1b. in 2017 and approximately \$11b. in 2018.

Source: “London's costly mistake in following U.S. foreign policy,” *Tehran Times*, 16 June 2019. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/437026/London-s-costly-mistake-in-following-U-S-foreign-policy>

...Undoubtedly, the U.K. government is trying to falsely accuse Iran of the attacks [on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman], to help the Trump administration in spreading anti-Iran propaganda. It seems that London is blindly following Trump's high-risk strategies in the Middle East, but 10 Downing Street (headquarters of U.K. government) has already paid a big price for following U.S. games. Taking part in Yemen War and starting Brexit, majorly supported by Trump, are only a small part of these costs.



Symbol of Brexit.

Source: Rlevente via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brexit.png>, CC BY-SA 4.0



Supreme Leader Discusses “Cyber Agents of Insecurity”

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran is a paradox: On the one hand, it is one of the most connected countries in the world in terms of internet usage and penetration, on the other hand, its government remains repressive and paranoid about the possibility that unregulated networking could pose a threat to regime survival. The excerpted article from an Iranian cyber news website discusses Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s recent remarks to law enforcement forces with regard to the internet, which address a broader range of concerns than past ones on the topic. For example, while he acknowledges the benefits of e-commerce and information on people’s lives, he publicly warns that the internet might bolster the black market and erode the state’s ability to command the economy. Indeed, while the Islamic Republic is often thought about in terms of its religious philosophy, the Islamic Revolution also ushered in an embrace of command economies. Clerical rhetoric is infused with an embrace of social justice, however ill-defined that concept might be, and ministries, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and religious foundations dominate a constrained economy.



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei meeting with police commanders and chiefs.

Source: Tasnimnews.com, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2019/04/28/1999578/leader-urges-serious-police-action-against-smuggling-cyber-insecurity-in-iran>, CC BY 4.0.

While Khamenei alludes to pornography and political opposition, he appears most worried about the ability of Iranians to purchase or trade weaponry online. Even though weapons ownership is largely illegal in the Islamic Republic, the regime lost track of many weapons after the end of the Iran-Iraq War and remains concerned about their potential impact on regime security. Khamenei makes this point while juxtaposing Iran with gun ownership in the United States, exemplifying his frequent obsession with depicting Iranian society as healthier and more moral than American culture and society. However, his acknowledgment of ongoing violent crime suggests that the frequent statements by Iranian officials of the Islamic Republic’s superiority mask a darker reality, where crime and gun violence remain serious problems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Cyberspace today...has huge dangers.”

Source: “Ba ‘Avamal Na Aman Konandeh Fazaye Mojazi Barkhorad Jedy Konid (Deal Seriously with Cyber Space Agents of Insecurity),” *Gerdab.ir*, 29 April 2019. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/28481>

Deal Seriously with Cyber Agents of Insecurity

...He [Ayatollah Khamenei] knew that the advancements in the law enforcement forces in the last few years have been a valuable asset and added: “Of course this doesn’t mean that law enforcement is at the optimal level of the Islamic system, but [we] must strive with continuous effort to achieve the optimal level, and confront everyone who questions law enforcement. Even an unfit officer in a police station must be corrected.”

The leader of the Islamic Revolution said that security was necessary for economic mobility and prosperity and said: One of the specific obstacles [to] prosperity and development is black market contraband smuggling that today is a two-way street. In addition to illegal imports, goods and agriculture needed by the people leave the country.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized: Behind the scenes, some of these items are not merely profitable but ideas, images and malevolent goals exist in these spaces and law enforcement needs to fully and assiduously confront this.

Khamenei also discussed securing cyberspace and said that “Cyberspace today has largely expanded into the lives of people but it has huge dangers, in the same way that it has many benefits and carries opportunity.”

He knew that the internet causes loss and harm to people and emphasized the role of law enforcement in securing cyberspace.

Ayatollah Khamenei noted “preventing the sale and purchase of weapons” as one of the important responsibilities of law enforcement. He said: “In many countries, like the United States, purchasing and selling weapons due to the interests of mafia-like weapons producing companies, is legal. This creates problems for people, but in our country where there are no similar issues and buying and selling weapons is illegal, we must have preventative measures.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the need to prevent buying and selling weapons online and said: “The murderer Rouhani Hamadani shared a photo of himself on Instagram yesterday with four different kinds of weapons and it is the duty of law enforcement to deal with such cases.”



Iran: Preparing for Zafar III Satellite Launch

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted news article suggests that the Islamic Republic is almost ready to launch the Zafar III satellite- described as a surveillance satellite with public benefits for Iran’s transportation, natural disaster and agriculture sectors. As the article notes, the article will launch in September, after three months of quality control.

The article makes much of the indigenous nature of the satellite, claiming that 90 percent of the parts were manufactured in Iran. This is likely true—Iran has invested greatly in its indigenous military industries and manufacturing as a strategy to mitigate vulnerability to sanctions. Unclear is the origin of the other ten percent or specific nature of foreign components.

The satellite was manufactured at Iran’s University of Science and Technology, suggesting the close links between Iranian universities and the military. Even if the satellite does not have a military purpose, for a university to access the funds and material needed to build a satellite would likely require the approval of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In addition, the Iranian government would also have to coordinate with the university with regard to the satellite’s launch.



Department of Computer Engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology.

Source: Doozandeh via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ComputerDepartment.JPG>, CC BY-SA 3.0

Such satellite launches, even if conducted under the guise of peaceful research, are likely to increase diplomatic tension between Iran and those countries concerned about its nuclear ambitions given the fact that the technology needed to launch a satellite into space is largely identical to that which could be used to deliver a nuclear missile. (For background, see: “Iran’s Simorgh Satellite Ready for Launch,” in the August 2018 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Iran...has the intellectual capital to build satellites.”

Source: “Pertab Mahavareh ‘Zafar’ dar Shahrivar Mah (Launch of the Zafar Satellite in September),” *Mashregh News*, 22 May 2019. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/961132>

Launch of Zafar Satellite

The president of the University of Science and Technology in Iran said: “The Zafar III satellite will be launched in September after three more months of quality control.” Jabar Ali Zakeri, the president of the Iran University of Science and Technology, said in conversation with a reporter from a science and academic group of Fars News that the Zafar is nearly finalized. He said: “This University’s third satellite, Zafar, is ready. It is completely designed and built by Iranian scientists. After quality control, the satellite will launch in September.”

Iran is a country that has the intellectual capital to build satellites. Zakeri added: “Ninety percent of the equipment for Zafar was manufactured in Iran and was produced domestically. In the last ten years, the Iran University of Science and Technology became one of the three universities that has made advancements in the fields of space and satellite technology.”

Zakeri emphasized that this satellite has public benefits. He continued on to say that: “Zafar’s dimensions are 70 [centimeters] by 70 and it sends its data and information to Earth. In this way, we could say that it has scientific functions, especially in agriculture, where it can find the most fertile areas to cultivate different crops.” In another part of his speech, Zakeri pointed out that the construction of the third satellite of the University is nearing its end, and noted the satellite’s functionality in the transportation, natural disaster and agriculture sectors.



IRGC: Social Media to be Shut in Case of War

OE Watch Commentary: The Passive Defense Organization is the division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) responsible for cyber policy, including both hacking against foreign targets and cyber security at home. The excerpted article highlights a speech by Gholamreza Jalali, the head of the Passive Defense Organization, which confirms the degree to which the IRGC has integrated cyber concerns into its broader defense strategies.

Jalali first argues that the threats Iran faces today mirror those of 37 years ago, largely because of what he depicts as growing US and regional hostility as well as the looming end of the Iranian nuclear deal. He acknowledges that the US's "maximum pressure" campaign has negatively impacted the Iranian economy, and chides the European states for subordinating European commercial interests to US political pressure. He alleges that part of the US political strategy has been to sow discord among Iranians via the internet broadly and, more specifically, via social networks. Such comments might be veiled criticisms toward Telegram, which hosts approximately 500,000 Farsi language channels and, as of 2018, accounted for 40 percent of Iranian internet bandwidth.



Head of the Passive Defense Organization, Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali.
Source: Iran Front Page News, <https://ifpnews.com/wired/iraq-syria-lebanon-defence-train-iran/>, CC BY 4.0

Jalali may exaggerate by suggesting the Passive Defense Organization has a "kill switch" to shut social networks in Iran, but it certainly has the ambition to achieve such control. During the periodic protests which Iran experiences, the Iranian government shuts down its cell phone network and tries to interrupt texting and other communications. The IRGC has also previously sought to require all social networks which Iranians utilize to station their servers inside Iran. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“If war breaks out, social networks will be shut down.”

Source: “Sardar Jalali: Agar Jangi Rokh Dahad, Shabkeh-haye Ejtema’i Besteh Khavahand Shod (General Jalali: If War Occurs, Social Networks will Close),” *Aftab News*, 26 May 2019. <https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/591955>

“If War Occurs, Social Networks will Close”

The head of Iran’s Passive Defense Organization said: “Today we are facing conditions like those of the May 24 [liberation of Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq War]. Americans are readying themselves for war in different arenas, whether online, cyberspace, the economy or politics. Americans in politics agreed that the Nuclear Agreement was good, provided that Iran adheres to its conditions, but we are not tied to the Agreement. In order for Iran to stay in the agreement and remain engaged, the Europeans entered the [case] and then they themselves left the agreement in order to free their hands to impose new sanctions. Because officials at the European Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been careless, they have not given us a year’s income. If we accept that we are wasting their [European’s] time, it’s as if the Europeans’ goal is to put us within America’s economic shooting range. Ayatollah Khamenei’s wise plan to change our path in adopting the demands of the agreement, which over time, will reduce Iran’s commitment and after Iran’s demands are not met, will be a stepping stone in Iran’s withdrawal from the agreement.

Jalali warned: “We are in the midst of an American political strategy whose outcome is a complete economic invasion. The tools of this strategy are imposing economic pressures on our country, monetary, financial and banking sanctions, eviscerating our oil exports and those of some strategic goods.... The Americans are infiltrating our social networks to influence people and public opinion and perform a variety of psychological tricks on Iranians. Of course, these possibilities for Americans were created out of our past mistakes. We weren’t able to have economic diplomacy with solid foundations and without sanctions or disturbances, nor were we able to create our own social networks. These were some of our mistakes, and the enemy has used them as tools to put pressure on our country. Americans have used social media to influence public opinion and people’s thoughts and ruined our economy right in front of us, and have readied themselves for war.

This Ershad [Islamic guidance] military commander showed that our country was in danger: “Despite the two components of power used by our enemy, we can say that the possibility of war is very slight, so a military attack and these two elements of power in front of each other exist, so if war breaks out, social networks will be shut down for safety reasons and economic pressures will lessen. The American strategy focuses on war. Those who emphasize the possibility of war are on the side of the enemy. These are people who like the fact that Iran is under sanctions while the enemy has added another pressure onto Iran—the fear of war....”

He added: “During the Gulf War, we showed the world we were leaders and if there ever is another war in the Persian Gulf, Iran would win. The reason for this is that we have specific powers like the IRGC Navy and in the event of a conflict in the Gulf of Oman or elsewhere, we have a strategic power, the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have trained and equipped them. The training and arming of the powers in the Persian Gulf and in the Arabian Sea did not happen today or yesterday. Over the course of the last 30 years, agents of the Passive Defense Organization have put these strategic measures on the agenda. Countries of this region must be aware of these points. Our strategy and equipment are not in conflict with any country and all of our military know-how is based on the doctrine of self-defense.



Iran: Progress on National Intranet



Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, minister of Information and Communications Technology.
Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammad-Javad_Azari_Jahromi.jpg, CC BY 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: In 1993, Iran became only the second country in the Middle East (after Israel) to connect to the internet. President Mohammed Khatami's administration invested in connecting cities with fiber-optic cables and by 2005, Iranian internet usage had surged to over six million users. Internet cafes proliferated, especially in the second half of the decade. But with the tremendous growth in internet usage came a decline in the Iranian leadership's ability to control the information and news available to the public.

The 1999 student protests- followed two years later by mass protests sparked by a diaspora television report suggesting the Iranian government had ordered their national team to throw a World Cup qualifier - convinced Iranian authorities that they needed to better control the internet. The government licensed all internet service providers and reduced speed to give itself more time to react to rumors or news it simply disliked. After the 2009 post-election unrest, government censorship increased, leading Iranians to turn to virtual private networks (VPN). Between July 2010 and July 2011, for example, Freedom House reported one VPN provider reported a ten-fold increase in their use within Iran, as Iranians sought to circumvent government restrictions on social media sites like Facebook. A 2014 report by the Islamic Republic's Ministry of Youth and Sports found more than two-thirds of Iranian youth used VPNs.

As Iranian authorities repeatedly failed to control internet use, Iranian politicians and security experts increasingly began to discuss a national intranet. According to the excerpted article from *Donya-e Eqtesad*, Iran's chief financial newspaper, Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, Iran's minister of Information and Communications Technology (who, at age 37, is also the Islamic Republic's youngest minister), gives a progress report on the creation of the national intranet. As the article notes, "80 percent of the Ministry of Communication's responsibility is [to] create a

national infrastructure of networks." In practice, this also means internal manufacturing of all components necessary for indigenous broadband. This, in turn, suggests that Iranian efforts to create an intranet which is physically distinct from the internet are well in progress. Such an intranet will rely less on software and firewalls to keep outside influences out, and more on physical separation.

This may not be satisfying to Iran's younger population seeking connectivity to the outside world, but the ministry answers more to the demands of the Supreme Leader than the wishes of the broader populace. Still, an intranet without content will likely be poorly used. The *Donya-e Eqtesad* article suggests that this component of Iranian strategy remains unresolved. The article quotes Reza Amali, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution as saying: "The Ministry of Communications says that now that they have prepared the infrastructure, [but] who will provide the content and services? This is the missing piece." Broadly speaking, there appears little discussion among regime power centers as to how to force Iranians to embrace ideological content in which they have little or no interest. (For background, see: "Comprehensive Legal System for the Country's Internet and Cyberspace," in the October 2017 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

"We were able to achieve 70 percent self-sufficiency in the development of broadband equipment."

Source: "Maarafi Chehar Peruzheh dar Roz Jihani Ertibatat (Introducing Four Projects on Global Communications Day)," *Donya-e Eqtesad*, 20 May 2019. <https://donya-e-eqtesad.com/4612>

Progress on National Intranet

The Minister of Information and Communications Technology, at the ceremony for the celebration of Global Communications Day, mentioned that the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology ushered in a boom of production of digital services this year. He said: "The boom in production and the expansion of digital services is of extreme importance to our society, because the expansion of the digital economy is laid out in the plan for the country's development." He continued on to say: "With our coworkers at the telecommunications syndicate and with the use of a computer program that was built two and a half years ago, we were able to achieve 70 percent self-sufficiency in the development of broadband equipment. Much of the Iran-made equipment was presented at the exhibition yesterday. Now we are able to supply Iranian-made broadband equipment to four provinces. The tremendous growth in the inter-provincial network transmission, which for many years had halted, has developed as a result of Iranian skills and knowledge.

The Minister of Information and Communications Technology specified that: "Now up to 30 percent of equipment related to mobile broadband is Iran-made. In other words, we are able to produce 30 percent of the equipment related to mobile broadband. This growth indicator is noteworthy but not satisfactory. Of course, networks have recently grown. Our fixed bandwidth is a huge leap in progress and gives us great hope. According to the "ICT" Technology Resource report, our colleagues within the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology should work harder to grow these percentages and witness the growth of production of communications....

At this ceremony, Reza Amali, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution said: "80 percent of the Ministry of Communication's responsibility is in creating a national infrastructure of networks. Services and content are still missing and no one has yet spearheaded those projects.... "Communications are an important pillar in the National Information Network. With the skills of the Ministry of Communications, this network fortunately has progressed by over 80 percent. Its budget was 12.5 trillion tomans [\$3.75 billion] and received 8.5 trillion tomans from the private sector. Amali noted the significant contribution of the private sector to the National Information Network and said, "We have a group on this network that showed us that we did not look at the network with integrated knowledge. The Ministry of Communications says that now that they have prepared the infrastructure, who will provide the content and services? This is the missing piece.



Iran: Nationwide Curriculum for Computer Programming

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian authorities often point to increasing educational standards for both men and women as one of the primary successes of the Islamic Republic. While it is true that literacy and other educational measures have increased, they have simply continued trends that predated the revolution. That said, there is truth to the notion that the Islamic Republic has advanced study and student achievement in engineering and technology. Part of the reason for this is cultural: Iranian society (and broader Middle Eastern society) honors engineering. Engineers in Iran and elsewhere often receive special salutations, much as doctors or ambassadors do in Western societies. Another important part is simply self-defense against the backdrop of dictatorship. Engineering, math, and science are all fields in which there is a right and a wrong, and so school marks are more objective than they are for more malleable subjects like literature, political science, or even economics. The Islamic Republic's emphasis on indigenous industry and autonomy also increase the likelihood of gainful employment for engineers and technical experts.



Students at a Shahid Beheshti University computer lab, Tehran, Iran.
Source: Shahid Beheshti University, <http://en.sbu.ac.ir/Faculties/ComputerEngineering/slides/slide3.jpg>

It is against this backdrop that the excerpted article from *Gerdab.ir*, an Iranian website specializing in news about computer and cyberspace, is of interest. It outlines secondary school curriculum reforms to add mandatory computer programming courses for freshmen and sophomores. In other countries, such an ambitious coding curriculum might be undercut by a lack of qualified teachers, but the long Iranian embrace of technology—even after the Islamic Revolution—means that finding qualified coding instructors for every high school may be less of a challenge than in other countries. The article claims that one of the main objectives of the reform is to foster “a culture that makes effective use of cyberspace,” though it is unclear how such a curriculum would address cyber security from a regime perspective. A broader emphasis on coding in high schools, however, may have benefit for the regime as they can identify, cultivate, and perhaps even co-opt talent prior to the university admission process and/or military conscription. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“This plan...improves the quality of technology education.”

Source: “Tarh-e Towse’ah Barnameh Nevisi Baraye Daneshamuzan Sarasar Keshevar Ejra Mishavad (A Programming Development Curriculum is being Implemented for Students Across the Country),” *Gerdab.ir*, 3 June 2019. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/28572>

A Programming Development Curriculum is being Implemented

The three-part plan entitled “Plan for the development of entrepreneurship and computer programming in the field of information technology for students around the country” is aimed at realizing the objectives of the Iranian Islamic model for progress.... This plan establishes a “a creative system and innovation in education in order to provide material and guidance to managers, educators and entrepreneurs.” It improves the quality of technology education and provides for better infrastructure to foster the development of businesses. Among the main objectives of the plan are: fostering a culture that makes effective use of cyberspace, training and providing support for students’ innovative tech ideas that apply modern technology to the development of the economy.

Some of the other objectives of this plan are...to provide for the advancement of entrepreneurship..., develop information technology, foster creativity alongside coding skills. The practical steps in the plan are to host entrepreneurship events that showcase information technology for students across the country, provide entrepreneurship training, and teach coding to first- and second-year secondary students during the 2019-2020 academic year.



Iran: Admiral Fadavi Selected as Revolutionary Guards Deputy

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 April 2019, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei announced the appointment of Major General Hossein Salami to be the new commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), replacing Mohammad Ali Jafari who had held the position for 12 years. The 59-year-old Salami was a long-time head of the staff college, operations deputy for the joint staff, and a former head of the IRGC Air Force. While Salami has held many portfolios, his past positions have largely been more theoretical and bureaucratic than operational. He is best known in Iran and the West for his fiery and often threatening rhetoric.

According to the excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency*, an outlet close to the IRGC and which often covers military matters, Khamenei has appointed Ali Fadavi to fill Salami's critical deputy position. This can be very important to the operational environment, largely because Fadavi was the head of the IRGC-Navy until recently, and his decade at this position saw a marked increase in confrontation toward the United States and other Western powers. It was Fadavi, for example, who oversaw the detention of American sailors off Farsi Island in January 2016. Fadavi has repeatedly spoken about probing American weaknesses and has also overseen the development of suicide drone boats. His threats and statements tend to be more understated than Salami's but also more substantive. If Fadavi is now Salami's deputy, it suggests that the IRGC may take a far more aggressive posture toward the United States and its allies, on both land and sea. As Fadavi is still relatively young by Islamic Republic standards at age 58, his appointment to be IRGC deputy could signal Khamenei considering him for the top IRGC spot in the near future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Admiral Sardar Ali Fadavi.

Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sardar_Ali_Fadavi_by_Mbazri_02.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“We needed somebody...who could surprise the enemy.”

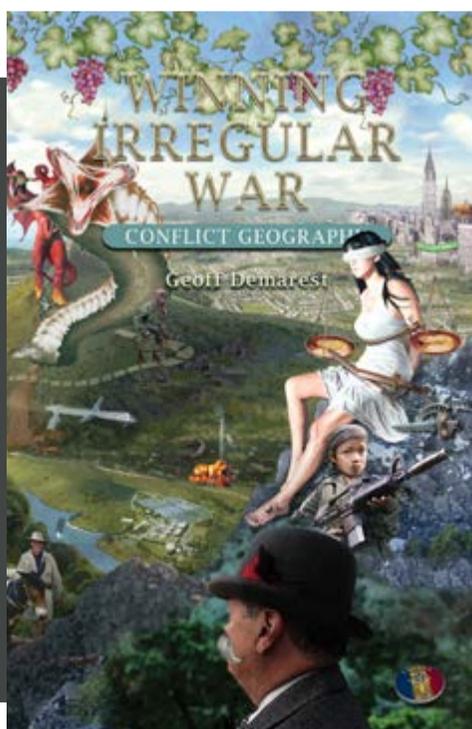
Source: “Sardar Shirazi: Sardar Fadavi ba Tawjeh beh Savabegh ‘Amiliyati Ziad dar Niru-ye Daryaye baraye Janshini Sepah Entekhab Shod (General Shirazi: Admiral Fadavi, Because of His High Operational Record in the [IRGC] Navy, is Selected as Successor),” *Fars News Agency*, 19 May 2019. <https://www.farsnews.com/printnews/13980229000200>

Admiral Fadavi Selected as Revolutionary Guards Deputy

On a farewell occasion and at the introduction of the new deputy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC], Brigadier General Mohammad Shirazi, head of the Supreme Leader's military office, noted: “The work and mission of the IRGC is jihadi and revolutionary, and so under the commander of all of IRGC, we needed somebody hardworking and operational. Commander Fadavi was our choice because of his record in the navy.

He continued: “The progressive development of the IRGC's powerful missions... is happening as our enemy is in decline. We needed someone to take command who could surprise the enemy, and so the new commander appointment will hurt the enemy.

General Shirazi said: “For the IRGC to be able to fulfill its duty, it needs to have strong headquarters....”



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>



Chinese Tech in Africa: Big Role for Huawei

OE Watch Commentary: China continues to encourage African governments and businesses to utilize Huawei for their future telecom needs, despite accusations that data from the computer system that Chinese tech giant Huawei installed in the African Union (AU) headquarters was sending data back to Beijing. As the excerpted accompanying article from the *East African* website notes, both the AU and the Chinese have denied the spying allegations. Meanwhile, Huawei continues to make inroads into Africa despite additional concerns that its 5G networks could potentially lead to intrusions and bugging. For example, Beijing recently signed a \$175 million public-private partnership with Kenya for Huawei to construct the Data Center and Smart City Facilities project, which includes the National Cloud Data Center, Smart ICT Network, and the Government Cloud and Enterprise Service. Huawei's platform also runs a popular mobile money system in East Africa.

China has already made significant non-cyber investments in Africa, including in areas such as transportation infrastructure and extractive industries. Now, as the article explains, China wants to use infrastructure, science and technology to further expand its influence and become a cyber-superpower. Beijing's goals can be seen, at least in part, by its latest initiative, which entails linking together two of its largest foreign policy programs that both list technology and science as their core aims: The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Peter Kagwanja, CEO of the Nairobi-based Africa Policy Institute, observed that civilizations since the Romans have used technology to spread their influence in Africa, but unlike the West, which did not share their expensive technology with the continent, the Chinese are willing to do so. Whether or not this is a fair historical assessment remains to be seen. However, it is worth noting that last year, President Xi Jinping pledged to invest a further \$60 billion in African nations. The money will be channeled through grants, interest-free loans and credit lines, with Chinese firms such as Huawei having leading roles in its use. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



African Union Conference Center in Addis Ababa, built by the Chinese government.
Source: Andrew Moore via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_Union_Conference_Centre_\(18167970401\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_Union_Conference_Centre_(18167970401).jpg), CCBY-SA 2.0

“Now Huawei, China’s biggest global tech firm, may continue to play a central role in Sino-Africa relations, where China wants to use infrastructure, science and technology to expand its influence and become a cyber-superpower.”

Source: Aggrey Mutambo, “Despite controversy, China still bets on technology in Africa,” *The East African*, 15 May 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Despite-controversy-china-still-bets-on-technology-in-africa-/2560-5116150-1t10yf/index.html>

Now Huawei, China’s biggest global tech firm, may continue to play a central role in Sino-Africa relations, where China wants to use infrastructure, science and technology to expand its influence and become a cyber-superpower.

“There have been a growing number of countries expressing an unbiased attitude toward Chinese tech companies’ participation in 5G network projects,” Mr Lu Kang, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said.

“This again proves that most countries can make independent policy decisions that serve their interests based on objective facts, and that they remain committed to fostering and safeguarding a fair, just and non-discriminatory market environment.”

Mr Pang said Huawei will be working with governments, private enterprises and industry partners to build “a better all-connected Africa” and make the digital economy a bridge connecting China and Africa.



Sudan: Fraught Relations Between Military and Opposition after “Bloody Massacre”



Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, Sudan's de facto Head of State in 2019.
Source: Akshay888777 via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P077j70q.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: Following the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir, Sudan has been witnessing growing protests against the military's grip on power. As the accompanying passage from the *AllAfrica* website notes, the junta described the camp in the nation's capital where a group of protesters gathered, as a security threat. A spokesman for the transitional military council stated legal action would be taken against “unruly elements.” What followed on 3 June though was not legal action. Security forces shooting their weapons and burning down tents overran the camp. At the end of the assault, reportedly at least 60 civilians lay dead.

An alliance of the various protest groups soon called off the talks they had been holding with the military. Those talks, as the second accompanying article from *Radio France Internationale* explain, were

about whether to have a civilian or military transitional government before elections are held. There has been international pressure for the military to relinquish power, but so far it has retained its grip on the country. The attack on the protest camp, which was located outside the defense ministry, has reinforced the message that it does not plan to readily turn the country over to civilian rule, at least for now.

The military actually declared that it did not disperse the protesters by force. Armed forces spokesman Shamseddine Kabbashi stated that the tents are still at the protest site and that the youth are moving freely. However, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, who documented the protests and attacks, and are asking for assistance to help deal with the large number of wounded, has contradicted Kabbashi's comments. British Ambassador Irfan Siddiq said that not all was as peaceful as the military had described, stating he could hear gunfire from his Khartoum residence.

There have been calls for total civil disobedience in order to remove the Transitional Military Council (TMC) from power following what one organization has described as a “bloody massacre.” Thus, the military, which until relatively recently was being praised by many in Sudan for launching a coup against the hated al-Bashir, now finds itself as the target of ire. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Sudanese activist group that had been negotiating with military rulers has called off talks after at least 13 sit-in protesters were killed outside Khartoum's army headquarters on Monday.”

Source: “Sudan: Military Council Says Protest Site is ‘Unsafe’, Boots Out Al Jazeera,” *AllAfrica.com*, 31 May 2019. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201905310003.html>

“The protest site has become unsafe and represents a danger to the revolution and the revolutionaries and threatens the coherence of the state and its national security,” said General Bahar Ahmed Bahar, head of the central region in Khartoum.

The protest follows a two-day strike organized by demonstrators and opposition groups frustrated by a deadlock in talks on a transition to democracy.

Source: “Sudan: Activists End Negotiations With Military After Protesters Killed,” *Radio France Internationale*, 3 June 2019. <http://en.rfi.fr/africa/20190603-sudan-activists-end-negotiations-military-after-sit-protesters-killed>

The Sudanese activist group that had been negotiating with military rulers has called off talks after at least 13 sit-in protesters were killed outside Khartoum's army headquarters on Monday.

The Alliance for Freedom and Change, the umbrella group of the protest movement, has encouraged protesters to put up barricades in and around the capital, which civilians reportedly have been doing.



Sudan's Islamist Parties Demand Sharia

OE Watch Commentary: Islamist parties were relatively quiescent during the months-long protests against then-president Omar al-Bashir. Now that Bashir has been overthrown by the military, they are voicing their wishes, or in some cases, their demands, regarding what they want in a future government. As the excerpted article from the *East African* website explains, the Islamists want sharia, and they will not consider any political roadmap that excludes it.

Bashir rose to power in 1989 after an Islamist-backed coup, and Islamic law was further cemented into the country's governance by subsequent legislative actions. Since Bashir himself fell victim to a coup in April, Islamist parties have been pressuring the ruling junta to keep sharia in place. This is in contrast to the protest leaders who pushed for Bashir's overthrow, and whose present priority is installing a civilian government rather than maintaining Islamic law.

Additionally, the Islamist parties want the sovereign council, which is slated to rule for a three-year transition period, to be headed by the armed forces. This is in line with the military's position but once again differs from the protest leaders, who are pushing for civilian rule. Presently it is unclear what the final composition of the sovereign council will be or if it is open to change once instituted.

The Islamists' close ties to Bashir have made it difficult for them to form alliances with the protesters who helped force him out (as one Sudanese journalist noted, the Islamists were with the regime until its fall). Thus, at least three entities can be considered to be part of the political dynamics in Sudan: the military government, the protesters who forced Bashir out and want a civilian government, and the Islamists who demand sharia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“With talks suspended between protest leaders and Sudan's military over a transfer of power to civilian rule, Islamist movements are backing the army in the hope it will keep sharia law in place.”

Source: “Sudan Islamists back army in push to preserve sharia,” *The East African*/AFP, 27 May 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/africa/Sudan-Islamists-sharia-law/4552902-5132868-spqbl0z/index.html>

With talks suspended between protest leaders and Sudan's military over a transfer of power to civilian rule, Islamist movements are backing the army in the hope it will keep sharia law in place.

[Islamist parties] have since not joined the protest alliance at loggerheads with the generals over the makeup of a new governing body, which would rule the country for a three-year transitional period.

Tayeb Mustafa, who heads a coalition of conservative parties, said Islamists were opposed to the transition plan because it “ignored the application of Islamic law”.

The protest alliance “stole the revolution in broad daylight”, said Mustafa, whose 2020 coalition brings together Islamist groups, including the Popular Congress Party, a long-time ally of Bashir.



Large-scale protests, such as the one pictured here, were an important part of the Sudanese revolution that led to the overthrow of President al-Bashir. Now, the military junta that leads the country, is under pressure from Islamist parties to ensure sharia is included in the country's future political roadmap.

Source: Hind Mekki/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hmekki/46875803524/in/photolist-2eqfkg3-RKQczp-RKQd2X-2fwfkt4-4FSWFZ-ngRRkj-NRhSCn-PUx21Z-Q5MFxV-Q2q3rm-NReHor-PRJCE1-PUwmUP-PUyr96-Q5M3J4-Q5LXop-NNndtA-PRNMks-NNqThG-NRg3wz-Q2nmfJ-QoFPTA-NNqJAU-Q5KmqZ-NNnM6u-NRg9pg-PRLVgo-PvPMY9-NRhd2p-Q5Lvo8-Q2rxe9-PUyRRx-PUTzR6-NRe1DK-PRM4Uq-nh9VT5-nhQrub-ng5rFT-RBFhAb-QoG6PJ-6mq4Ma-nhaJjx-ngBY1o-ngTpp7-5FruAN-eeeyBc-QoHEky-PvUQub-PRQEWA-ngP2nD>, CC BY 2.0



Parallels between the Revolutions in Egypt and Sudan

OE Watch Commentary: For the Egyptian author of the accompanying passage from *African Arguments*, the recent overthrow of long-serving Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, as well as the events preceding and following the coup, have numerous parallels to the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Both revolutions started with massive demonstrations by a disgruntled civilian populace. Both resulted in outcomes that at least initially appeared to have popular support.

Unfortunately, they both soon turned violent, as the militaries maintained power. Peaceful demonstrations in Khartoum against the junta were met with soldiers wielding weapons...at last count 60 civilians were killed. The event is eerily reminiscent of the Rabaa massacre in 2013, where Egyptian security forces, raiding protest camps and attacking opposition demonstrations, killed over 800 in a single day.



Part of the Sudanese protestors near the Army Headquarters in Khartoum in 2019.
Source: M. Saleh via Wikimedia, https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Sudanese_protestors_chanting.jpg, CC BY SA 4.0

Egyptian military leaders said they were guardians of the revolution and had no desire for long-term power. The Egyptian general at the time of the revolution, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has repeated this statement on multiple occasions. Sudanese military leaders echo a similar claim regarding their intentions. However, despite el-Sisi's insistence that he wants to return the Egyptian government to civilian rule, he has changed the constitution to allow himself to stay in power until 2030. Notably, the Sudanese junta, though it has not changed the constitution to rule for an extended period, has been discrediting the opposition while tightening its grip on power.

The two revolutions are also similar with regards to foreign relations. Saudi Arabia and the UAE gave Egypt \$40 billion to face down both the opposition and Muslim Brotherhood. Now, it has been revealed that members of Sudan's military council have visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The author ends with advice for the Sudanese people based on his experiences with the Egyptian revolution: do not trust the Sudanese military, no matter what its leaders may say. He writes, "Our advice from Egypt is to be warned. Whatever they might say, these military leaders have no intention of allowing civilians to govern Sudan." **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“After Egypt’s 2011 revolution, the military soon acted to retake power. Today, Sudan’s military is behaving and talking in the exact same way.”

Source: Osama Gaweesh, "This is how our revolution in Egypt failed. Sudan, please be warned," *African Arguments*, 5 June 2019. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/06/05/egypt-failed-sudan-revolution-please-be-warned/>

After Egypt’s 2011 revolution, the military soon acted to retake power. Today, Sudan’s military is behaving and talking in the exact same way.

These exact same arguments are being made by Sudan’s military leaders now. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the TMC, and his deputy Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (aka “Hemedti”), have similarly talked of themselves as protectors of the revolution and insisted that they want to eventually see a civilian state.

When you hear this, our advice from Egypt is to be warned. Whatever they might say, these military leaders have no intention of allowing civilians to govern Sudan. They are planning to take full power soon and, just like in Egypt, proceed to repress every single type of opposition.

Sudan’s military council today are giving the same ridiculous speeches almost verbatim in an attempt to discredit their opponents. “The demonstrations threaten our state”; “the leaders of the demonstration are agents of foreign intelligence”; “enough is enough, we have to remove this demonstration camp from the streets for the sake of other people”. These quotes could as easily be from Egyptian as Sudanese military leaders.



Conflict and Ignorance Fuel DRC Ebola Epidemic

OE Watch Commentary: The number of Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has risen to over 2,000 since the August 2018 outbreak in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. Approximately 1,300 have died from the viral disease, also known as Ebola hemorrhagic fever. According to the accompanying excerpted article from the South African news site *CAJ News*, two factors have allowed it to spread: conflict and ignorance.

With regards to conflict, attacks by rebel groups, who are fighting over the region's mineral wealth, have prevented aid groups from treating infected individuals and implementing public health measures to help curb the spread of the disease. Some organizations, including OXFAM, have suspended operations. When they will resume is unknown.

Ignorance is also fueling the epidemic; with some individuals not believing the disease is real. Additionally, many people are avoiding treatment, resulting in those cases going unnoticed by health care workers who might have been able to help prevent them from infecting others.



In the DRC, a South African battalion of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) provides a security escort for civilians attending an Ebola Awareness Campaign.

Source: MONUSCO, [Recently, yet another worrisome development occurred. According to the excerpted accompanying article from the *Daily Monitor*, Uganda recorded its first case of the disease since the epidemic started: a five year old Congolese boy who crossed the border with his family and sought medical care at a Ugandan clinic. Uganda has been on high alert for Ebola since the outbreak in the DRC, intending to avoid the death toll of its neighbor. Unfortunately, the young boy has since died, and despite Uganda's efforts, additional cases of the disease have been found in the country. **End OE Watch Commentary \(Feldman\)**](https://www.flickr.com/photos/monusco/40889087753/in/photolist-29sYQgg-282VtPW-2aHpmqd-HjsQon-24K7D7a-29pkUdP-29pkTQe-2aMJ2LM-2edbFHI-29Gix2w-29pqFT8-M2QK5c-29prfMK-2aHpsb1-2aHpnXb-282VA4Q-282RxdC-29Gn6cY-2aHpZtG-282W3b-NEb55h-29GIFRA-2cKuxBc-UGMJQS-NZis8V-2cF45xC-2cKroat-2cKuu4F-2cEZQTE-29preQK-2bDrD3W-2cF3KT3-2bmnEwZ-2cF43ju-2bmkLx2-2fcwL1W-QBJ3xq-TxPYJm-25SiegeB-29r7kzr-2bAPoHs-29GipwS-2gbQBL2, CC BY-SA 2.0</small></p>
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“No matter how effective treatment is, if people don't trust or understand it, they will not use it.”

Source: Jean Kassongo, “DRC Ebola Cases Escalate to Above 2,000,” *CAJ News (South Africa)*, 11 June 2019. <http://cajnewsafrica.com/2019/06/06/drc-ebola-cases-escalate-to-2-000/>

“No matter how effective treatment is, if people don't trust or understand it, they will not use it,” N'Daw [Oxfam country director in Congo] said.

The current outbreak is the second worst in global history behind the crisis that claimed some 11,000 people in West Africa between 2013 and 2016.

Source: “One Case of Ebola Confirmed in Congo,” *Daily Monitor (Uganda)*, 11 June 2019. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/One-case-of-Ebola-confirmed-in-Uganda/688334-5153810-m29w0v/index.html>

Uganda has been on high alert since the outbreak in the eastern DRC, where more than 2,000 cases of the highly contagious virus have been recorded, two-thirds of which have been fatal.

A five-year-old boy is being treated for Ebola in Uganda, the first case since an outbreak in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo 10 months ago, Health Minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng has said.



Burkina Faso: Terrorist Attacks Target Christian Minority

OE Watch Commentary: Burkina Faso has been witnessing a string of assaults on its Christian minority, including one on a Catholic Church in May that left four people dead. According to the accompanying passage from South African news source *The Conversation*, this is being driven by the weakening of the state over the past decade.

The author points to a timeline of instability, beginning with the 2011 clashes between police and students, as well as a military mutiny that occurred the same year. Then-president Blaise Compaoré managed, with some difficulty, to regain control. However, hostilities flared again when he proposed to change the constitution so that he could run in 2015, and in 2014 he was overthrown by a popular uprising. The transitional government then suffered a military coup in 2015. Later that year, an election was held, and Roch Marc Christian Kaboré became the country's new president. However, all of this turmoil has reportedly weakened both the civilian government and the army.



Burkina Faso Soldiers practice react to contact battle drills, March 1, 2017 at Camp Zagre, Burkina Faso.
Source: Spc. Britany Slessman via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flintlock_2017_small_unit_tactics_training_in_Burkina_Faso_170301-A-ZF167-075.jpg, Public Domain.

Domestic instability is not Burkina Faso's only problem; the entire region is experiencing insecurity. Al-Qaeda, located in neighboring Mali, has conducted attacks. Burkina Faso has been unable to respond forcefully to these attacks or even to adequately police its borders. As a result, in areas void of effective government, the jihadists can "emerge and thrive." These groups often claim to be affiliated with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, but are usually homegrown, and rely on longstanding interethnic issues to expand and further their cause.

One group the jihadists have been attacking is the Christian populace, who at 20 to 25% of the country's population, are a minority. Catholics in particular have been targeted, ostensibly because they have had a strong relationship with the state, including producing many of the nation's leaders. As the author notes, "By targeting Catholics, these attacks are targeting one of the main pillars of Burkinabe society." Additionally, attacking Catholics is a way to generate international publicity. However, despite the attacks, many Catholics are determined to maintain the delicate balance between religious communities, though it is uncertain if this will be enough to overcome the threats that a weakened Burkina Faso presents. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“By targeting Catholics, these attacks are targeting one of the main pillars of Burkinabe society.”

Source: Ismaila Kane, "Burkina Faso: a weakened state is paving the way for terrorism," *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 9 June 2011. <https://theconversation.com/burkina-faso-a-weakened-state-is-paving-the-way-for-terrorism-118211>

These events are part of a violent trend that is mostly affecting the country's northern and eastern regions. Terrorist attacks and inter-communal conflict – like the massacre of Fulani in Yirgou (north) in early 2019 – have many concerned for the West African nation.

The Catholic Church has a huge influence on society and has acted as a moderator in the country's times of crisis. By targeting Catholics, these attacks are targeting one of the main pillars of Burkinabe society.

But since his election, the government has had resistance from some groups who believe it is incapable of confronting the country's multiple challenges.

The central powers in Burkina Faso, and the army in particular, have been substantially weakened by these crises.

Attacks targeting Christians are a kind of publicity stunt. They are designed to provoke reactions from various groups including potential recruits, competing terrorist groups, the general public, and western embassies.



Protests Against Foreign Military Bases in Niger

OE Watch Commentary: Niger is a country situated in the middle of violent conflicts in West Africa, that often suffers from the spillover effects of insurgencies tied to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso. Boko Harm's operations in northeastern Nigeria also frequently spread into Niger. As the accompanying article from the French-language *Jeuneafrique* discusses, Niger has allowed the United States and France to have military bases in the country, for support. However, recent protests by a reported 1,000 people in Niger oppose a US or French military presence in the country.

As the article discusses, the protests were against foreign military bases as well as Boko Haram and other jihadists. The protesters were high school students responding to a call to protest by the Nigerien Student Union. They were opposed to what they viewed as an infringement on their country's sovereignty. The article highlights one of the placards which read, "We do not see any added value of the presence of foreign military bases." The student leader, however, whose interview was quoted in the article, did not object to foreign military support in principle.



USARAF C-IED support Lake Chad Basin (LCB) partner nations by saving lives.
 Source: EOD via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USARAF_C-IED_support_Lake_Chad_Basin_\(LCB\)_partner_nations_by_saving_lives_170123-A-ZZ999-001.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USARAF_C-IED_support_Lake_Chad_Basin_(LCB)_partner_nations_by_saving_lives_170123-A-ZZ999-001.jpg), Public Domain, CC BY 4.0

The article also provided the context behind the recent protests. On 17 May, a group loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), operating along Niger's borders with Mali and Burkina Faso ambushed and killed 28 Niger soldiers. In an effort to explore ways to prevent jihadi groups from operating on its territory, the government of Niger allowed the US greater freedom to carry out drone operations and to expand a base in Agadez in northern Niger. Germany also has a logistics base in Niger while France is the power behind the anti-jihadist Operation Barkhane.

Until the threat from these jihadist groups is quelled, it can be expected that the government, student union, civil society, and other groups will continue to deliberate over the most effective ways to counter security threats to the country while maintaining sovereignty. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“No to the outsourcing of our national sovereignty.”

Source: “Manifestation Contre la Présence de Bases militaires étrangères à Niamey (Demonstration Against the Presence of Foreign Military Bases in Niamey),” *leparisien.fr*, 25 May 2019. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/779936/politique/niger-manifestation-contre-la-presence-de-bases-militaires-etrangeres-a-niamey/>

A thousand people demonstrated in Niamey against the presence in Niger of French and American military bases. To the rhythm of local music dedicated to the Nigerien army, protesters meandered the streets shouting “Long live Niger, long live the Nigerien army” before holding a rally in front of the parliament. On placards one could also read: “No to the outsourcing of our national sovereignty”, “Our territory has been independent since August 3, 1960”. “We do not see any added value of the presence of foreign military bases,” said USN leader Idder Algabid. These attacks could be avoided if, however, there was “open collaboration and outside support” with foreign armies.

On May 17, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack in the west, killing 28 soldiers, and an unsuccessful assault on a high-security prison near the capital, where many jihadists are held. As part of Operation Barkhane, French forces also have a base at Madama in the North. Niger has also allowed the construction of a large US base of drones in Agadez (north), whose cost is estimated at one-hundred million dollars, and gives the United States a leading observation platform. Niger recently allowed the Americans to arm their drones. Germany has a logistics base in Niamey to supply troops to neighboring Mali.



A New Insurgency Front in Benin?

OE Watch Commentary: On 1 May, two French citizens and their Beninese tour guide were kidnapped at Pendjari National Park in Benin. The tour guide was later found dead. In a separate kidnapping, an American and South Korean citizen were also taken, but the circumstances of their kidnapping have not been disclosed. All of the hostages were rescued on 9 May from the same location in Mali, as a result of an elaborate operation by French special forces. The accompanying passage from the French-language *nordsudjournal.com* discusses the operation.



Oswald Homéky, Beninese minister of tourism at Pendjari Park after the disappearance of the two French tourists.
Source: Yai.isac via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oswald_Hom%C3%A9ky,_ministre_b%C3%A9ninois_du_tourisme_au_parc_Pendjari_apr%C3%A8s_la_disparition_des_deux_touristes_fran%C3%A7ais_MTCS.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

According to the article, the hostages were tracked down thanks to a geo-locatable watch that one of the hostages had on. The article notes that the kidnappers took great care to conceal their movements; so if it weren't for the

watch, the hostages may not have been found. Nevertheless, once they were tracked down, the surveillance drones were able to follow them and intelligence agencies were able to identify the lead kidnapper as a 40-year old Beninese man named Jom Kekel. Ultimately, French special forces conducted the raid to rescue the hostages in a part of Mali near the borders of Benin and Burkina Faso. Although the hostages were freed and seven of the kidnappers killed, two special forces members were also reportedly killed.

The article also indicates the relative sophistication of the kidnappers. For example, in order to rescue the hostages, the special forces had to first engage a sentinel who was guarding the perimeter of the location where the hostages were held. Moreover, the kidnappers were evidently expert at maneuvering the border region, having brought the hostages across national borders and through various forested regions. The article further implied there was collaboration between local criminals who actually took captive the two French citizens and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-loyal group in the Sahel that then received the hostages from the local criminals and held the hostages in Mali. The hostages were then, according to the article, going to be transferred to northern Mali before the rescue operation took place.

Also important to recall is that this was the first time jihadist-connected cells have been reported to operate on Beninese territory. Therefore, the prospect of a new front for insurgency in that country cannot be discounted. (For background, see: "Has Benin Suffered its First Terrorist Attack?" in the June 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Very quickly, the French forces mounted an operation to rescue the hostages because there was information stating that the hostages were about to be sent to the far north of Mali.”

Source: “Retour sur l’Opération qui a Permis de Libérer les Otages Enlevés au Benin (Returning to the Operation that Freed Hostages Kidnapped in Benin),” <http://nordsudjournal.com>, 17 May 2019. <https://www.nordsudjournal.com/mali-burkina-faso-retour-sur-loperation-qui-a-permis-de-liberer-les-otages-enlevés-au-benin/>

Since the kidnapping of two French tourists on May 1 at Pendjari National Park in Benin, investigations have accelerated and US intelligence services were working with their French counterparts to find the hostages. The kidnappers were quickly identified. They were armed men led by a 40-year-old Beninese named Jom Kekel, affiliated with the Sahel branch of the Islamic State organization. “One of the hostages, the American, had on him a geo-locatable watch,” says a well-informed source. Very quickly, the French forces mounted an operation to rescue the hostages because there was “information stating that the hostages were about to be sent to the far north of Mali,” says another security source.

At the entrance of the camp, the special forces passed three hundred meters from the first jihadist who was the sentinel. The combat helicopter that was providing air cover located the sentry and opened fire and shot at him. He died on the spot. While the jihadists were facing the soldiers coming from the southeast, another group of French soldiers discreetly arrived from the north-east to extract the hostages who were hidden in a hut.



UK Offers Nigeria Support to Counter Boko Haram

OE Watch Commentary: As Nigeria struggles to contain the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in its northeast, there have been reports in Nigerian media of a potential boost in support from the UK. The accompanying article from the Nigerian *Vanguard* is one such example. The article discusses an offer of support from the UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, to help the country in its counter-insurgency efforts.

Hunt claims that the violence in the country is being fuelled by a growing rift between the Nigerian army and the local population. Hunt himself visited Maiduguri, which is the largest city in the epicenter of the insurgents' area of operations in Borno State. He learned that there were two million displaced people living in makeshift villages akin to refugee camps there. During his visit, Hunt pointed out the support that the UK had given to the World Food Program to help those displaced people. He also left open the possibility of further support to the Nigerian military, pending Nigeria expressing interest in this more explicitly.



Nigeria Army Cantonment at Ikeja.

Source: Kaizen Photography, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigeria_Army_Cantonment_1.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

Based on Hunt's comments, UK support might also be conditioned on Nigeria changing its counter-insurgency strategy. Hunt states that Nigeria has been moving locals out of towns into so-called secure areas and then assuming that civilians who are not in the secure areas are Boko Haram supporters. According to Hunt, this is understandable but counter-productive, because it deprives civilians of their livelihoods and results in distrust between them and the military. Hunt therefore suggests the UK could provide both military and developmental support, the latter potentially contributing to building trust with, and improving the livelihoods of, civilians. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Lack of trust between the authorities and local people is one of the things that is fuelling the problem at the moment.”

Source: “Ask Us for Support and You’ll get [it], UK Tells Nigeria,” *vanguardngr.com*, 2 May 2019. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/boko-haram-ask-us-for-support-and-youll-get-uk-tells-nigeria/>

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has said Nigeria should ask for support in the fight against Boko Haram and that Britain would be ready to give. Mr. Hunt said a perceived rift between the Nigerian Army and the local populace in the North-east is fueling violence in the region. He said “intelligence information reaching him” reveals that lack of trust between the authorities and indigenes is one of the reasons that fuels attacks in the region. He also said the British government would be willing to support the military fight insurgency only “if the authorities ask for help.”

The British envoy also accused the military of moving the locals into towns “and assuming the ones that are not in a secure area are members of Boko Haram.” He said while the approach is understandable, “the effect means depriving the indigenes of their livelihood and homes.”

The official said his government is considering providing both military and non-military support to Nigeria.



Colombia: Freedom to Develop the Personality

OE Watch Commentary: A major sea change happened this month in the drug war against cocaine and heroin trafficking. The Colombian Supreme Court legalized the personal use of psychoactive drugs in public places. Some plaintiffs sought a *tutela* (which, in Colombian legal parlance is a constitutional mechanism for immediate protection of a fundamental right that is currently being violated, probably as an enforcement result of a government law or regulation) against a part of the police code that made drinking alcohol or using drugs in public places illegal. The decision reverses longstanding practice. Although the court has at least some public support on this, the accompanying commentaries reflect Colombian opinion opposed to the court's decision. The tone of the commentaries is one of angry, stunned incredulity. The central reasoning of the justices was that the fundamental right being violated (the justification for the *tutela*) was that of the free development of the personality. The commenters suggest that the court is oblivious to the facts not only that the continued use of drugs does not have a positive effect on personality, but also that users have to get the drugs from someone.



The Supreme Court of Justice, Colombia.

Source: Torax via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Supreme_Court_of_Justice_-_Colombia.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

For some time, there has been an active political current in Colombia for making drug use and production legal, a current which has evidently strengthened some since the implementation of the FARC-Santos power sharing agreement. This *tutela* by the court appears to be a step toward the total legalization goal. For the war on drugs that many in the US military and other agencies have been waging for decades, often along with Colombian partners, this court decision may at some point turn out to have been a major milestone toward making law enforcement efforts against the production of cocaine and heroin in Colombia illegal. Colombia may see a bump in tourism, though. Foreigners can go there to develop their personalities as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“With these decisions, the Court contributes to the creation of a Narco-State...”

Source: Alfonso Monsalve Solórzano, “¿Cuál libre desarrollo de la personalidad? (Which free development of the personality?), *El Mundo*, 8 June 2019. <https://www.elmundo.com/noticia/-Cual-libre-desarrollo-de-la-personalidad-/376789>

“...The Supreme Court, in a decision regarding a request for a protective order against a prohibition in the Police Code on the consumption of alcohol and psychoactive substances in parks and streets, that is to say, in public places, declared such proscriptions as unconstitutional, with the argument that they amounted to a general prohibition that affected the free development of the personality of Colombians and that it diminished, for example, the consumption of those substances during family reunions in such places...”

Source: José Ignacio Penagos Hincapié, “Colombia y su ‘justicia injusta (Colombia and its unjust justice),” *IMF Noticias*, 8 June 2019. <https://ifmnoticias.com/colombia-y-su-justicia-injusta/>

With these decisions, the Court contributes to the creation of a Narco-State, sponsored by its magistrates, converting themselves into accomplices of delinquency and lending reason to international critics who insist in calling out the country as a banana republic prostrated to the narcos. The Court is creating exactly that, a perfect Paradise for narco-tourism, irresponsible consumption, sick consumers, murderous drug dealers and bands of delinquents dedicated to providing the supposed personal doses, who will kill for control of neighborhoods, territories and parks, drawing invisible territories.



Some Bolivarian Order of Battle

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from a leading Argentina-based news site outlines a handful of armed organizations that give the Venezuelan regime some of its coercive capacity. The article highlights the Colectivos (hybrid motorcycle gang/strike units), GNB (Bolivarian National Guard), PNB (Bolivarian National Police), Sebin (Bolivarian Intelligence Service), the FAES (Bolivarian National Police Special Action Force), and the Military Intelligence Counterintelligence General Directorate (DGCIM).

The article notes the presence of ELN (National Liberation Army) and FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) remnants operating in Venezuela's vast, mostly unpopulated rural areas. The authors do not suggest these organizations are part of the Bolivarian apparatus proper, but imply their impunity. The article also does not mention any Cuban organizations, and more notably, does not mention the regular units of the Bolivarian Armed Forces. (For a discussion on impunity as a strategic concept, see Dr. Geoff Demarest, [Winning Irregular War](#), p33.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...today, Cuban envoys are present in every Venezuelan state apparatus.”

Source: Editors, “Colectivos, GNB, PNB, Sebin o FAES: quiénes son y cómo actúan las temibles fuerzas represivas del régimen de Maduro (Colectivos, GNB, PNB, Sebin or FAES: who they are and how the fearsome repressive forces of the Maduro regime operate),” *Infobae*, 11 June 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/06/11/colectivos-gnb-pnb-sebin-o-faes-quienes-son-y-como-actuan-las-temibles-fuerzas-represivas-del-regimen-de-maduro/>

“Colectivos...

The colectivos are the guardians of Chavista ideology. These paramilitary groups, in fact, are considered the ‘armed defense of the Bolivarian Revolution’ and it is calculated that there are around 100,000 [members]...

The Bolivarian National Guard and the Bolivarian National Police...

In 2017, it is estimated that [the National Guard has 70,000 enlisted members...]

The PNB [Bolivarian National Police], for its part, is estimated to have had [in 2017] about 26,000 officers...in June of this year, Nicolás Maduro said he wanted to add 20,000 more to the ranks of the GNB and the PNB...

The FAES (Bolivarian National Police Special Action Force)...

It [the FAES] is the most feared police squad in Venezuela...those agents are called out as the authors of the majority of (political) murders... They were created 14 July, 2017...

The Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN)...

Regarding its role, the SEBIN is most comparable to the North American FBI since its original mission was to protect the territorial national security, but, nevertheless, Hugo Chávez twisted its purpose and today it is known for domestic surveillance...Although the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship dates back decades...today, Cuban envoys are present in every Venezuelan state apparatus...

The Military Intelligence Counterintelligence General Directorate (DGCIM)...

Although the Venezuelan Army has had an intelligence unit since 1957, since 2001 it is dedicated itself to counterintelligence. Since then, it investigates the armed forces themselves and their officers....”



Bolivarian National Police Special Action Force (FAES).

Source: Catia Tve via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fuerzas_de_Acciones_Especiales_\(FAES\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fuerzas_de_Acciones_Especiales_(FAES).png), CC BY 3.0



ELN Positions in Catatumbo

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying reference is a report of ELN (National Liberation Army, a guerilla group) units expelling landowners from parcels in Venezuela near the Colombian border in the region known as the Catatumbo. This presence may be ominous, but is neither unprecedented nor unpredictable.

The Colombian ‘Catatumbo’ is an informal region of ten to fifteen counties, named after the Catatumbo River, which flows from Andean slopes inside Colombia to Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela. In Venezuela, there is a municipio (county) named Catatumbo, but the Catatumbo River itself only forms a short portion of that Venezuelan county’s northern border. The Zulia River, after which the relevant Venezuelan Department (state) is named, is a tributary of the Catatumbo and flows through the middle of Catatumbo County. The ELN presence noted in the references is about where Venezuelan Highway 6 crosses the Zulia River and has a junction with another paved road that leads downriver toward Lake Maracaibo to the north. The location, as indicated in the references and obvious from the physical geography, is valuable for facilitating and controlling smuggling flow. Highway six, meanwhile, runs more or less parallel to the Colombian border across the entire Catatumbo region. Therein lies the geostrategic significance of the report. ELN can move quickly laterally, entering and escaping Colombian territory at any of numerous points along the border.

The reportage indicates clashes have happened between the ELN and official Venezuelan armed units. The tone of the first reference, however, is that the Venezuelan armed forces do not want to involve themselves in what is described as a clash between drug trafficking bands. However, there is a Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) outpost and checkpoint at the highway junction near the bridge. It appears that whether under higher-level instructions or simple incapacity, the GNB is not getting in the ELN’s way. The ELN, for its part, is simply displacing ‘civilian’ population by force.

It is perhaps instructive militarily that the body of a local farm owner who defied the ELN was found in Colombian territory. The reportage about this one place in Catatumbo is worrisome in that it affirms a larger military hypothesis -- that the ELN is positioning, marshaling and securing its lines of communication in order to raid into Colombian territory on a greater scale. That escalation could be helpful to the health of the ELN’s illicit commercial enterprise, but it would also be collaborative with, if not obedient to, geostrategically-purposed instructions coming from Havana. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Colombia-Venezuela border map.

Source: Shadowfox via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mapa_de_la_frontera_Colombia-Venezuela.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0

“In this struggle for territorial control between guerrilla and paramilitaries, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces do not appear to want to involve themselves...”

Source: Sebastiana Barráez, “El ELN colombiano se apoderó de 15 fincas en territorio de Venezuela (Colombian ELN takes 15 farms in Venezuelan territory),” *Infobae*, 12 June 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/06/11/el-grupo-terrorista-colombiano-ejercito-de-liberacion-nacional-se-apodero-de-15-fincas-venezolanas-en-el-municipio-catatumbo/>

“This is very attractive ground because of the pathways that exist between Colombia and Venezuela that permit the smuggling of gasoline, foodstuffs, medicines, and that has become a route for narcotics traffic and human trafficking... You know, two months ago, the guerrilla arrived at the farm of [palm oil] producer Gonzalo Garza Carreño, who they told to abandon. He said he wasn’t going because it was his property and nobody was going to kick him of it. Days later he was killed and his body showed up in Colombian territory... In this struggle for territorial control between guerrilla and paramilitaries, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces do not appear to want to involve themselves...”



Guaidó Leadership in Decline?

OE Watch Commentary: After the failed attempt at an uprising in late April, Venezuelan popular support for interim President Juan Guaidó has been flagging, perhaps badly, as evidenced by the accompanying references. Interim President Guaidó attempted a round of dialogs with the Maduro regime. That decision and activity ended without any formal or explicit result, but apparently confused many among the opposition and disappointed more. The decision to attempt negotiations in Norway after previously insisting that talking with the Bolivarian regime was pointless, has come across to many as desperate and weak, judging from Venezuelan commentary.

Guaidó at this point seems no longer to be able to draw a crowd or instigate a demonstration (few showed up for the demonstration that he called for 4 May), and emigration seems to have up-ticked sharply. It is all potential evidence of disillusion toward the Guaidó-centered leadership. If nothing else, this turn of events bodes poorly for the Popular Will Party (Voluntad Popular), which is the party of Guaidó and also of Leopoldo López, who has been a central figure among the opposition parties represented in the National Assembly. The Popular Will party is also a member of the Socialist International, and perhaps for that reason enjoyed some support among its ideological similars in Europe. Now it appears that the historic moment for Voluntad Popular may have passed. We wait to see what group ascends to re-mobilize popular opposition to the Bolivarian regime, if that is now possible. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Juan Guaido in Caracas, 2 February 2019, by Venezuelan photographer AlexCocoPro.
 Source: Alexcocopro via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caracas_02_febrero_2019_Juan_Guaido_Presidente_Interino_Venezuela_Por_fot%C3%B3grafo_Venezolano_AlexCocoPro.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

“...[Guaidó] has not been able to maintain the power of convocation after the failed attempt to provoke a rupture in the military establishment...the so-called Operation Liberty, the roadmap to achieve change, is now but a slogan...”

Source: Francesco Manetto, “El plan de Guaidó para el cambio en Venezuela se estanca (The Guaidó plan for change in Venezuela stalls),” *El Pais* and *Twitter*, 6 May 2019. https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/05/06/america/1557094072_726582.html

“...The opposition faces the threat of demobilization and the challenge of maintaining internal cohesion... [Guaidó] has not been able to maintain the power of convocation after the failed attempt to provoke a rupture in the military establishment...the so-called Operation Liberty, the roadmap to achieve change, is now but a slogan...”

Source: “Ya das arrechera”: la patilla entrevistó en exclusiva a guaidó y opositores le caen encima (Now You’re ‘Off-Putting’ People),” *La Iguana TV*, 12 June 2019. <https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/498637-guaido-entrevista-exclusiva-criticar/>

“...Reactions from [within] the opposition was not long in coming. For many, it was not only evidence of fatigue in the militant opposition and disillusion as to the leadership of Guaidó, but now at this point accusations of being ‘purchased’ and of being corrupt...”

Source: Editors, “Sin Anestesia ¿Qué pasó Juan? (Without anesthetic, What happened, Juan?),” *Verdadesrumores.com*, 10 June 2019. <http://verdadesrumores.com/sin-anestesia-que-paso-juan/>

“...People are asking why Juan Guaidó has not named a cabinet with ministers and other functionaries that allow him to from a legitimate leadership group with which to produce a definitive break from the Maduro government...”