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EURASIA

- 3 Strengthening Russian Army Ground Mobility
- 4 New Russian MANPADS Supports Integrated Air Defense
- 5 Russia Upgrades Close-Range Air Defense Capabilities
- 6 Russia Fielding Two New Self-Propelled Mortar Systems
- 7 Russia's Modernization of Battlefield Command and Control
- 9 Purpose of Burevestnik Nuclear Powered Cruise Missile Contemplated
- 10 Ka-65 Naval Assault Helicopter Undergoing Arctic Modifications
- 11 Russia Looking at Longer-Range, Small Submarines
- 12 Short-Range Arctic Gun-Mortar
- 13 Grain Deliveries from Arctic Waters
- 14 Putting Sputnik back in the Arctic
- 15 Update on Technopolis-ERA
- 16 Increase in Pay and Benefits for Contract Soldiers
- 17 Dagestan 1999: Turning Point for Russia and Putin
- 18 Russia/China and the Dollar/Euro
- 19 A Russian View: Removing Business from the Chinese Military
- 20 Uzbekistan Faces Mounting Economic Costs From Staying out of Russian-Led Eurasian Union
- 21 A New Source for Armenian Weapons and Equipment?
- 22 China's Priorities for Joint Exercises in Central Asia

INDO-PACIFIC

- 23 China: Type-15 MBT Export Variant Shows Off Enhanced

Protection and Mobility

- 25 China: J-20 Fighter Intended to Strike at Early Warning, Aerial Refueling Platforms
- 27 Chinese LCAC Development
- 29 Chinese Investors Interested in Strategic Philippine Islands
- 31 Xi Jinping's Summer Foreign Policy Tour Displays "Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics"
- 33 China, Laos, Burma and Thailand Continue Mekong River Patrols
- 34 A Vietnamese View on Spratly Islands Confrontation with China
- 35 Japan to Acquire UAVs For Maritime Domain Awareness
- 36 Indonesia Closes in on Poso Terrorist Cell
- 37 India and Pakistan: Deal or No Deal for Russian Rifles

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 38 What's in a Name? S-400 Parts Start Arriving at "Mürted" Air Base
- 40 Turkey's Military Bases Abroad
- 42 Turkish Military Preparing for Another Operation in Syria
- 44 The Katerji Group: A New Key Player in the Syrian Loyalist Universe
- 45 Israel: "Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?"
- 47 Qatar, the UAE and China Advance Artificial Intelligence in the Arabian Peninsula
- 48 China's UAE Rapprochement: A Turkish Perspective
- 49 China's Cooperation with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

- 51 Iran's Negotiations with Domestic Kurdish Opposition Groups
- 52 Iran: Mohajer-6 UAV Strikes Targets in Iraq
- 53 Iran Warns of Phone and Text Scams
- 54 Iranian Navy Chief Visits Russian Naval Forces
- 55 Is There a Crack in the Houthi Movement?

AFRICA

- 57 To Counter Piracy, West Africa Must Look East
- 58 Ghana Expands its Navy to Fight Petro-Piracy
- 59 Burkina Faso Civil Society Responds to Humanitarian Emergency
- 60 Mali Diaspora Seeks Larger Role in Mali Peace Process
- 61 Borno Emir Returns Home Despite Boko Haram Threat
- 62 UAE to Establish Military Base in Niger
- 63 DRC: Links Between the ADF and ISIS
- 64 The Growing Role of Women in Al-Shabaab
- 65 Somaliland Emerging as Geopolitical Battleground
- 66 South African Military Enters Cape Flats to Quell Violence

LATIN AMERICA

- 67 Forum of Sao Paulo in the Dumps
- 69 ELN Emerging as Bolivarian Strike Force
- 70 Simon and Snowy
- 71 Update on the FARC
- 72 Costa Rica: Cartels' Coca Plantation Experiment Confirmed
- 73 Colombian Cartels Steal Fuel to Produce Cocaine
- 74 Cocaine Production Trends in Peru

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ON THE COVER:

T-72B3 Tank

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:T-72B3.jpg>, Public Domain.

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Strengthening Russian Army Ground Mobility

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military continues to enhance its overall mobility. The accompanying excerpt from *Vzglyad* discusses the reactivation of pontoon-bridge equipment to engineer regiments at the army level as well as separate repair and restoration battalions. It focuses on the restoration of operational bridging capability of higher-level forces and performing more maintenance and repair tasks within the tactical and operational units. Russian maneuver brigades already have a pontoon bridge company, so the concern is for operational level crossing capability.



A portion of the PP-91 pontoon bridge.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/2MSul3P>, CCO-1.0 Public Domain

The article points out that a “engineer [bridge] regiment appeared in the army, equipped with the new model pontoon PP-91, which allows deploying a 250-meter bridge over the river in one hour.” The article does not divulge the total number of these new pontoon-bridge equipped regiments to be activated, but given the large number of rivers throughout Russia (more than 100,000), there will likely be at least one pontoon set per army size formation.

The article also addresses the reintroduction of organic repair units for maneuver units, pointing out that the reforms under the previous defense minister to outsource this function “did not justify itself.” According to the current defense minister, it became clear that “the tasks of providing repair services to troops in combat conditions had not been solved. In particular, the equipment was not repaired, and fuels and lubricants were not delivered to the field areas.” Similarly, the article does not specify how many of these separate repair and restoration battalions will be activated. Restoring these units throughout the army will be a massive undertaking, and an expert quoted in the article posits that “it may take from a year to two years to retrofit the engineer troops.”

The same expert indicates that these changes to enhance mobility were based on “more and more maneuvers,” where “in recent years, the number of military exercises has increased significantly compared to the nineties.” He goes on to state that the focus of the Russian military today “is connected with the concepts of mobilization readiness and logistics” and that “tanks do not need roads, tanks need directions.” The article concludes on a somewhat ominous note, quoting another expert who recalls that back in the late 1980s, “the liquidation of the pontoon regiments was a political measure. We were no longer going to force the rivers of Europe.” However, the expert continues, if today’s “Russian military strategy focuses again on tank forces, then the rivers will have to be crossed.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...tanks do not need roads, tanks need directions.”

Source: Alexander Kolpakov, Ivan Abakumov, “Российская армия готовится форсировать реки Европы (The Russian army is preparing to cross the rivers of Europe),” *Vzglyad*, 30 July 2019. <https://vz.ru/society/2019/7/30/989911.html>

The Ministry of Defense plans to recreate the pontoon-bridge regiments and individual repair and restoration battalions, which were disbanded under Gorbachev and Serdyukov. Earlier, third-party private companies engaged in the repair of armored vehicles under a contract, but in the spring Shoigu expressed his disappointment with their work. As for the pontoon regiments, their dissolution under Gorbachev was a clear gesture of friendliness towards NATO.

On Monday, it became known about the decision of the Ministry of Defense to revive the types of formations eliminated over the past 30 years. This was announced on Monday by the commander of the 2nd Guards Combined Arms Army, Major General Andrei Kolotovkin.

“This year, the army formed its own repair battalion, which will undoubtedly increase the technical capabilities of the association when performing combat training missions in the field. In a combat situation, it is very important to have units at hand, capable of, for example, quickly putting into operation a tank that lost a track on a mine,” Kolotovkin told Red Star.

According to him, recently an army regiment appeared in the army, equipped with a new model pontoon PP-91, which allows deploying a 250-meter bridge over the river in one hour. In general, repair and restoration battalions were disbanded in 2008 by order of the Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov, most of the pontoon-bridge formations ceased to exist in the late 80s, during the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev.

...It might seem that the revival of the pontoon-bridge regiments and repair and restoration battalions was required because of the frequent breakdowns of armored vehicles, because the army is undergoing more and more maneuvers, noted the editor of the magazine Arsenal of the Fatherland Alexei Leonkov. “In fact, this is connected with the concepts of mobilization readiness and logistics. Tanks do not need roads, tanks need directions...” he told the VZGLYAD newspaper. “Indeed, in recent years, the number of military exercises has increased significantly compared to the nineties....” Leonkov said. Now it may take from a year to two years to retrofit the engineer troops, the source said.

Serdyukov’s decision regarding repair battalions was made as part of the general transfer of many army functions to outsourcing, recalls military expert Alexander Golts. He believes that in many aspects, outsourcing has paid off....

...Recall that in March the head of the Ministry of Defense Sergey Shoigu said that the outsourcing system that had developed in the army by 2012 did not justify itself. According to him, the tasks of providing troops in combat conditions were not solved. In particular, the equipment was not repaired, and fuels and lubricants were not delivered to the field exit areas....

...“But for Gorbachev, the liquidation of the pontoon regiments was a political measure. We were no longer going to force the rivers of Europe,” Goltz explained.... “In general, pontoons are needed exclusively for forcing rivers. If the Russian military strategy focuses again on tank forces, then the rivers will have to be crossed.”



New Russian MANPADS Supports Integrated Air Defense

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russia's newest MANPADS system, the 9K333 *Verba*, which is replacing the 9K38 *Igla*. As the passage discusses, the *Verba* will be significantly different from its predecessors. Aside from better flight characteristics and tracking capabilities and unlike earlier MANPADS, the *Verba* is designed to be capable of functioning in an integrated air defense system, and as a stand-alone system. This integration can be accomplished through simply using portable radar systems such as the 1L122 *Garmon* to conduct tipping and cueing, or more advanced ways such as in conjunction with multiple sensors, a layered defense and a formal mobile headquarters. In addition, the article discusses that the *Verba* is equipped with a "unique aiming system with elements of augmented reality," enabling it to "shoot down aircraft and helicopters, even if the targets have not yet entered the Air Defense missile complex operator's field of view."

The Soviet Union fielded its first Man-Portable Air-Defense System (MANPADS), the 9K32 *Strela-2* in 1968. Egypt's use of a *Strela-2* to shoot down an Israeli A-4 Skyhawk on 19 August 1969, was the first successful employment of a man portable air defense system in combat conditions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The “Verba” portable air defense missile complex has obtained a unique aiming system with elements of augmented reality...”

Source: Roman Kretsul, Bogdan Stepovoy, and Aleksey Ramm, “Жизненная цель: ПЗРК оснащают элементами дополненной реальности (A Vital Target: They Will Equip MANPADSs with Elements of Augmented Reality),” *Izvestiya Online*, 1 August 2019. <https://iz.ru/904852/roman-kretcul-bogdan-stepovoi-aleksei-ramm/zhiznennaya-tsel-pzrk-osnashchaiut-elementami-dopolnennoi-realnosti>

They Will Equip “Verba” MANPADSs with Elements of Augmented Reality

“Virtual” Air Defense (PVO) systems will defend Russian troops from air strikes. The “Verba” portable air defense missile complex has obtained a unique aiming system with elements of augmented reality, sources in the Ministry of Defense reported to Izvestiya. Now the Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS) can shoot down aircraft and helicopters, even if the targets have not yet entered the Air Defense missile complex operator’s field of view. This also provides the capability to merge all of the air defense complex’s crews into a single combat network, which is commanded and controlled in real time. The first lots of the MANPADSs with the new aiming systems have already been shipped to the troops. Deliveries of a brigade set of the upgraded “Verba” complexes, which will replace the “Igla” family of complexes, will be completed this summer, the people in the Military Department that Izvestiya spoke to explained...

In the process, the air defense missile complex operator can even not see the target itself, thanks to the new aiming system. Information arrives from the portable radar station, which has become part of the MANPADS battery’s composition. The “Garmon” mobile system is capable of locating airborne targets at a distance of 40 kilometers. Furthermore, a battery of soldiers with the MANPADSs can be connected to the network of more powerful PVO complexes and obtain data from their detection systems...

The commander of an air defense missile-gun battalion told Izvestiya that the advantage of the portable systems is not only their maneuverability but also the fact that it is very difficult for electronic systems to detect a soldier with a MANPADS. And this provides greater tactical capabilities – for example, for the organization of an ambush in the enemy rear.

In contrast to the complexes of previous generations, the “Verba” MANPADS was developed and tested already in the post-Soviet time and was officially accepted into the inventory in 2015. Its primary characteristic – is the unique tri-spectral seeker head, which sees targets in the ultraviolet and near and middle infrared bands...the new system is 1-2 times more effective than the “Igla” MANPADS. In the process, its capabilities have not been fully revealed.

The new command and control system merges all of the subunit’s “Verba” MANPADSs into a single loop. Each soldier can see the target’s location and its parameters on the screen. The platoon leader or battery commander is capable of assigning targets among the crews and of creating massive or concentrated fire from his workstation and can also place “air defense decoys” in real time. To do this, the officer has a portable command and control module, which is accommodated in a special backpack, and can be set up into a full-fledged workstation, if necessary...Furthermore, the subunits, which are equipped with the “Verba”, have begun to receive the platoon leader command and control vehicle and an armored vehicle for a squad of air defense missile complex operators. The latter is capable of conducting target reconnaissance and of firing homing missiles.



Russia Upgrades Close-Range Air Defense Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles from *Armeyskiy Standart* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discuss the replacement for the Strela-10 (SA-13 Gopher), a close-range surface-to-air missile system with four missiles mounted on a multipurpose tracked light armored (MT-LB) chassis. The *Sosna* (SA-24) close-range surface-to-air missile system can be based upon a MT-LB, BTR, or BMP-3 chassis and consists of 12 *Sosna* 9M337 missiles with a maximum range of 10 km and altitude of 5 km. The system can reportedly detect aircraft at 16-30 km, helicopters at 10-14 km, cruise missiles at 8-12 km, and armored ground targets at 8 km. The *Sosna* is intended for defending supported units from air strikes and cruise missiles, and is capable of operating as part of an integrated air defense system, under the control of various (older, current, and expected) types of mobile command posts. The *Sosna* is one of the last lines of air defense for a supported unit against air threats in the Russian integrated air defense system. Before encountering the *Sosna*, air threats would have to evade the long-range S-300s, S-350s, S-400s, and S-500s of the Aerospace Defense Forces, and the medium-range *Buk-M3s* (SA-17 Grizzly) and short-range *Tor-M2s* (SA-15 Gauntlet) of the Ground Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The complex can operate in two modes: automatic (without operator involvement) and semiautomatic (the operator controls the system, but many processes are automated). The ‘fire and forget’ principle is used.”

Source: Dmitry Popov, “Авиация противника врежется в «Сосну»: Минобороны берет на вооружение новый зенитный ракетный комплекс (Enemy Aircraft Will Crash Into the *Sosna*: Defense Ministry Will Take New SAM Complex Into the Inventory),” *Armeyskiy Standart* [Army Standard] Online, 10 July 2019. <https://armystandard.ru/news/t/20196281032-pme9i.html>

Enemy Aircraft Will Crash Into the *Sosna*: Defense Ministry Will Take New SAM Complex Into the Inventory

*They began developing the *Sosna* in 2005. The main idea was to lighten the design of existing air defense systems of a similar type and introduce an electro-optical control system with laser guidance. By 2013 the *Sosna* air defense system received a new multichannel automatic all-weather and around-the-clock jam-protected electro-optical weapon control system, the 9M340 *Sosna-R* precision SAM (the missile control system is teleoriented on a laser beam) and automatic and semiautomatic guidance modes. High effectiveness of the missile also was achieved due to a short flight time to the target, high guidance accuracy, and use of a laser contact-proximity fuze...The complex successfully completed state tests in April 2019.*

The most interesting thing in the complex is its combat module. The module design supports all-round weapon guidance -- there are means of acquisition and identification as well as launchers for missiles on a flat rotating platform. In the front part of the combat module is a light armored housing necessary for protecting the electro-optical equipment unit. Two Surface-To-Air Missile (SAM) launchers standing at the sides of the rotating platform are equipped with drives responsible for displacement in the vertical plane, which is necessary for preliminary guidance.

*Radar acquisition equipment in the *Sosna* air defense system was rejected -- air situation monitoring is done only using electro-optical systems. The electro-optical equipment unit includes a daylight camera and thermal imager. The separate thermal imaging device is for tracking a flying missile. Three laser devices are mounted on the unit: two are used as rangefinders and the third as a missile control system. Data from the electro-optical systems are input to the screen of the operator panel and the operator can find the targets and pick them up for tracking.*

The complex can operate in two modes: automatic (without operator involvement) and semiautomatic (the operator controls the system, but many processes are automated). The “fire and forget” principle is used. The operator is responsible for the missile launch, but subsequent processes are carried out automatically without human involvement...

*In addition, the *Sosna* air defense system has hardly any emission during the search for and tracking of a target, which means it is more difficult to detect...In addition, the complex also is capable of destroying lightly armored ground equipment.*

Source: Anton Valagin, “Новейший зенитный комплекс “Сосна” показали на видео (Latest *Sosna* Air Defense Complex Shown on Video),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 17 June 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/06/17/novejshij-zenitnyj-kompleks-sosna-pokazali-na-video.html>

Latest *Sosna* Air Defense Complex Shown on Video

*...A special feature of the air defense missile complex is its standardization. The combat module with the missiles and the guidance system is mounted on the standard turret ring race of a infantry fighting vehicle (BMP), armored personnel carrier (BTR), multipurpose light armored vehicle (MT-LB), or ship or fixed mount. The BMP-3 is the preferred platform. The fast armored vehicle with variable clearance allows the *Sosna* to easily follow combat formations of armored vehicles, covering them from the air.*

*But the main advantage of the new air defense system is its missile, the highly accurate 9M340 with a three-channel (laser, television and thermal) guidance system. The automated guidance system provides the *Sosna* with all-weather, around-the-clock capabilities. Neither heat nor interference (atmospheric or electronic) will keep the 42-kilogram missile from striking its target. The rapidly operating guidance system and the flight speed of the missile are such that the *Sosna* can effectively strike fast-moving helicopters and drones.*

*Tests have demonstrated the high effectiveness of the complex in combating various targets. The advantages of the *Sosna* also include: the capability to fire on the move, excellent survivability, and the low cost of both the entire complex as well as its munitions. In April 2019 the air defense missile system successfully passed state testing...*



Russia Fielding Two New Self-Propelled Mortar Systems

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discusses Russian plans to field two new self-propelled mortar systems that are intended to support motorized rifle, airborne, and alpine infantry battalions. The 2S42 Lotos self-propelled mortar consists of a 2A60 120mm turret-mounted mortar mounted on a BMD-4M airborne fighting vehicle chassis. The 2S41 Drok self-propelled mortar consists of 82mm turret-mounted mortar mounted on a Tayfun armored personnel carrier chassis. Russia already has self-propelled mortar systems in the inventory, including the 2S4 Tyulpan 240mm self-propelled mortar and the 2S23 Nona-SVK 120-mm battalion self-propelled gun, which functions as a hybrid mortar, gun, and howitzer. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Russian Missile Troops and Artillery Emblem.

Source: Russian government, via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Medium_emblem_of_the_Russian_Missile_Troops_and_Artillery.svg, Public domain

“New self-propelled mortars designed for the Russian army -- the 2S42 Lotos self-propelled artillery gun and the 2S41 Drok wheeled self-propelled piece... are destined for the inventories of motorized rifle, air assault, and alpine infantry battalions.”

Source: Aleksey Petrov and Yegor Badyanov, “Выстрелил и скрылся: зачем нужны новые самоходки “Лотос” и “Дрок” (Fire and Take Cover: Why the Need for the New Self-Propelled ‘Lotos’ and ‘Drok’),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 22 July 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/07/22/vystrelil-i-skrylsia-zachem-nuzhny-novye-samohodki-lotos-i-drok.html>

Fire and Take Cover: Why the Need for the New Self-Propelled Lotos and Drok

As we know, mortars are utilized as the basic means of delivering suppressive fire against enemy manpower, destroying an adversary’s concealed artillery positions, and hitting his military hardware. The effectiveness of fire suppression is tied directly to the large amount of explosive, which is greater in a mortar round than in an artillery shell of comparable caliber. That said, artillery shells are more accurate than mortar munitions. Mortars constitute the main means of fire support in the inventory of subunits in many armies around the world...

Combat experience in local wars has shown, however, that mortar crews perish relatively quickly from the fragmentation effect of the more accurate artillery systems. The emergence on the arms market of mobile (self-propelled) mortar systems mounted on infantry fighting vehicle (BMP) or armored personnel carrier (BTR) chassis, which were initially greeted with skepticism, therefore proved to be a justified and proven solution in combat conditions...

Adjustments to the type of military hardware in question have been brought about by contemporary local wars and the emergence of precision weaponry. BTRs and BMPs equipped with special hatches have been replaced by turret-mounted mortars which have not only provided additional protection for the combat crew but also enabled an increased engagement range (by virtue of barrel length and a wider range of vertical guidance angles) and an expanded, 360-degree suppressive fire sector... A substantial drawback of turret-mounted mortars is the complexity of design and the high cost compared to the mortar systems obtained by installing standard mortars inside armored vehicles. Despite this, both types of self-propelled mortars are encountered in mechanized subunits in service with the world’s leading armies...

New self-propelled mortars designed for the Russian army -- the 2S42 Lotos self-propelled artillery gun and the 2S41 Drok wheeled self-propelled piece -- were on display at the *Armiya-2019* forum. Both fighting vehicles are destined for the inventories of motorized rifle, air assault, and alpine infantry battalions.

Like the Nona-SVK, the Lotos turret-mounted mortar is fitted with the 2A60 120-mm artillery system mounted on a BMD-4M airborne fighting vehicle chassis. The Lotos is to replace the air-droppable 2S9 Nona-S self-propelled artillery piece inasmuch as it possesses a number of substantial advantages over it. First, it has double the ammunition carried capacity. Second, the Lotos has a modern fire control system that enables precision target engagement and is integrated with the tactical echelon’s communications facilities.

The 2S41 Drok self-propelled turret-mounted mortar is mounted on a Tayfun-VDV armored vehicle fitted with an 82-mm smoothbore mortar facility standardized with the Podnos mortar (the 2B14 Podnos forms part of the Drok as an additional option that enhances the system’s combat power). On top of that, the Drok is acquiring an additional automated combat module fitted with a 7.62-mm PKTM modernized Kalashnikov tank machine gun and an optoelectronic defense system to counter modern precision antitank guided missile systems.

The 2S42 Lotos and 2S41 Drok self-propelled mortars are due to enter service with the Russian Army sometime after 2020, on the completion of state trials and experimental operation in the field. Many of these vehicles’ characteristics are classified at the moment, but one can be sure that the latest models of self-propelled mortars will in no way be inferior to the known foreign counterparts.



Russia's Modernization of Battlefield Command and Control

OE Watch Commentary: Modernizing command and control by developing an automated command and control system has been a long-term goal for the Russian Federation. The intent of this reform is to assist the commander in choosing his given course of action, and then rapidly generating and disseminating orders throughout the command. The first accompanying passage from a recent *Izvestiya* article discusses the Russian Airborne (VDV) and their recent exploits in the use of automated command and control to facilitate ground-air operations during a large-scale airborne troops exercise in Crimea. The second accompanying passage from *Izvestiya* discusses the 'backbone' over which the automated command and control rides. This "military internet," a highly secure local wireless network, reportedly has 1,500 mobile communications and encryption complexes stretched over 2,000 km that is capable of transfer rates of up to 300 megabits per second. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The use of automated control systems is especially important for the Airborne Troops, as paratroopers operate at great distances from base and their combat is characterized by high speed...This is why paratroopers need accurate coordination with the Aerospace Forces’ strike systems and the long-range fire systems of the Ground Troops’ Missile Troops and Artillery...It is no coincidence that the paratroopers were among the first to adopt such a system...” -- Viktor Murakhovskiy, the editor-in-chief of the Arsenal Otechestva magazine

Source: Aleksey Kozachenko, “Десант на автомате: в Крыму испытали умную систему управления огнем (Automatically Controlled Assault Landing: Smart Fire Control System Tested in Crimea),” *Izvestiya* Online, 23 July 2019. <https://iz.ru/900825/aleksei-kozachenko/desant-na-avtomate-v-krymu-ispytali-umnuiu-sistemu-upravleniia-ognem>

Automatically Controlled Assault Landing: Smart Fire Control System Tested in Crimea

A fundamentally new command and control system has been tested during a large-scale airborne troops exercise in Crimea, where almost 2,500 servicemen were airdropped in one landing operation. An Il-76 battle formation was controlled at the same time by the crew of an A-50U “airborne radar.” Information was transmitted in real time via an Il-22 airborne relay aircraft to a military transport aviation command post and a command post at a test range in Crimea. This was the first time that a single combat information loop was tested in the field, Izvestiya was told at the Ministry of Defense. The loop was made up of several automated control systems, including the automated command and control systems of the Airborne Troops, the Air Defense Troops, and the Air Forces.

The operations by reconnaissance troops, paratroopers, aviation, and land-based weapons were controlled in real time by a command post deployed on an A-50U airborne early warning and control aircraft. The single combat loop included not only airborne troops, but also about 50 transport, fighter, and attack aircraft. Thanks to the synchronization of the automatic command and control systems, a single command post was able to control an air battle, airstrikes on ground targets, as well as landing and ground operations – several dozens of transport Il-76s, Su-25 attack aircraft, Su-27 fighters, and 2,500 paratroopers in all.

During the exercise, every radar, airplane, helicopter, and effectively every participant in the exercise served as a source of information. They transmitted their coordinates, direction of movement, and information about the enemy, and exchanged information about the operations and position of the enemy’s aircraft, radars, and antiaircraft weapons. This provided the commanders with the most accurate picture of what was happening in the theater.

All the information flowing to the airborne command post was analyzed with the help of an automated control system. Based on the results of the analysis, the electronics provided the commanders with recommendations on the choice of weapons necessary for the destruction of a particular target... At the same time, the information was transmitted to the National Defense Management Center. Not only did the center receive in real time information about everything happening in the air and on the ground, but it was also able to make corrections to the course of the exercise.

The use of automated control systems is especially important for the Airborne Troops, as paratroopers operate at great distances from base and their combat is characterized by high speed, Viktor Murakhovskiy, the editor-in-chief of the Arsenal Otechestva magazine, told Izvestia. “This is why paratroopers need accurate coordination with the Aerospace Forces’ strike systems and the long-range fire systems of the Ground Troops’ Missile Troops and Artillery,” the expert said. “It is no coincidence that the paratroopers were among the first to adopt such a system. Its elements have been used in exercises before. The system has now received its final form and can be considered as the technical basis for the command and control of the Airborne Troops...”



Continued: Russia's Modernization of Battlefield Command and Control

Source: Aleksey Kozachenko and Aleksey Ramm, “Гиги по небу: Минобороны тестирует дальнобойный «военный интернет» (Gigabytes Through the Sky: The Ministry of Defense Is Testing the Long-Range ‘Military Internet’),” *Izvestiya Online*, 1 August 2019. <https://iz.ru/905053/aleksei-kozachenko-aleksei-ramm/gigi-po-nebu-minoborony-testiruet-dalnoboinyi-voennyi-internet>

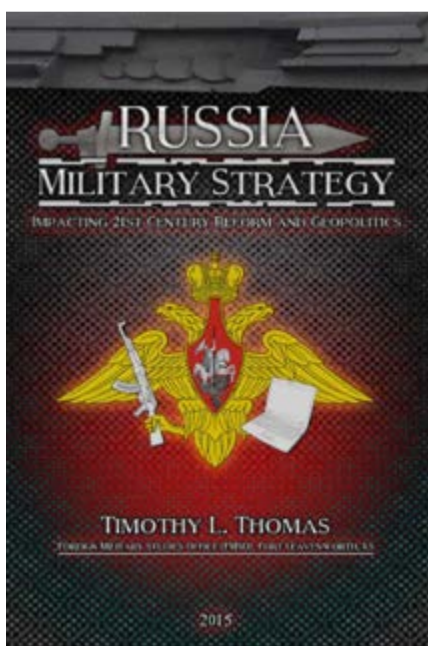
Gigabytes Through the Sky: The Ministry of Defense Is Testing the Long-Range ‘Military Internet’

The unique exercises were conducted in Central Military District, a Ministry of Defense spokesman told Izvestiya. The special radio communications channels, through which the digital information was transmitted, were created during the course of the exercises. A highly secure local wireless network, which permitted the transmission of large-volume files, including audio and video conference files, supported the exchange. The data was transmitted to a distance of over 2,000 kilometers. More than 4,500 servicemen were involved in the exercises and more than 1,500 state-of-the-art communications systems were used to create the wireless network...The created network is totally autonomous and doesn't have internet exchange points, which connect it to the “outside” internet. All important information was transmitted via Ministry of Defense hardware with the employment of encryption. This permitted them to avoid possible leaks. In the future, these communications lines will permit the organization of the high-speed transmission of practically any volume of information throughout the country's entire territory, a Military Department spokesman clarified...

Today the majority of the automated combat command and control automated systems, which military personnel use, need stable and secure communications channels, “Arsenal of the Fatherland” Magazine Editor-in-Chief Viktor Murakhovskiy thinks. “Stable communications lines support the stable operation of the automated command and control systems (ASU)”, the expert told Izvestiya. “All communications channels are used to create those lines. As before, Radio-relay communications are considered to be reliable and high-performance. Tropospheric, satellite and other types of long-range communications are also used to create those communications channels. In contrast to the internet, these are totally secure channels. The primary advantage of military communications networks is that they are absolutely autonomous and resistant to outside impact – outside consumers even theoretically cannot obtain access to them”.

Major flows of encrypted information are transmitted during the course of video conferences at the National Command Center. During them, video communications are organized with all of the main commands and types of troops, the military districts, the fleets, and even with separate units. The signal must be super-stable and encrypted to do this. But the signal – is only the visible portion. The main mission of those communications channels is data transmission and processing for the automated combat command and control systems. A state-of-the-art automated troop command and control system permits the headquarters to obtain exhaustive information directly from the battlefield, for example, to see fuel and ammunition reserves of a specific tank or Infantry Fighting Vehicle (BMP) in real time...

This year, the RF Armed Forces have begun to create a sovereign internet. The secure system for the exchange of digital information has already received a name – the multiservice backhaul network (MTSS) [мультисервисная транспортная сеть связи (MTCC)]. The first phase of the work will be completed by the end of 2019 and it will be completely ready in two years. Its own search engine will appear for MTSS and military personnel will lay a fiber-optic cable across the Arctic for its independent functioning. The MTSS must provide the country's electronic security on a par with the secure Russian segment of the Worldwide web, the project for the development of which is being discussed right now.



RUSSIA MILITARY STRATEGY: IMPACTING 21ST CENTURY REFORM AND GEOPOLITICS by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

Russian military's main tasks are to maintain the combat readiness of the Armed Forces and to ensure the Russian Federation's defensive capability. Russia's military heritage will assist this process tremendously. Combat readiness includes updated strategic thought, new equipment revelations, and future-war projections. Defensive capability includes not just protecting Russia's territory, but also the security of the nation's national interests and conduct of geopolitics. Capturing the essence of these developments is the goal of this book. In the process a few templates for understanding Russian military thought and actions are offered for further consideration and use.

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Purpose of Burevestnik Nuclear Powered Cruise Missile Contemplated

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has been experimenting with a new nuclear cruise missile, the 9M730 Burevestnik (SSC-X-9 Skyfall). The most interesting feature of the Burevestnik is its means of propulsion. The system reportedly has a solid-fuel booster engine and a nuclear-powered sustainer engine. The accompanying excerpted article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online discusses the purpose of this nuclear-powered cruise missile. The author posits that the Burevestnik is intended to be a “weapon of vengeance, a weapon which would be used after the warheads of intercontinental ballistic missiles ‘work over’ the territory of the aggressor.” A strike by a Burevestnik would be intended to eliminate the remainder of enemy resistance after strategic nuclear weapons were used. As the article notes, the Burevestniks would thus “complete the destruction of all of the aggressor country’s military and civilian infrastructure facilities, leaving them no chance for survival,” intending to negate some concerns about a relatively slow moving and radiation spewing platform. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Burevestnik is a weapon of vengeance, a weapon which would be used after the warheads of intercontinental ballistic missiles ‘work over’ the territory of the aggressor...”

Source: Aleksey Leonkov, Ядерный “Буревестник”: новая крылатая ракета станет “оружием возмездия (The Nuclear Burevestnik: The New Cruise Missile Will Become a ‘Weapon of Vengeance’),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 18 July 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/07/18/iadernyj-burevestnik-novaia-krylataia-raketa-stanet-oruzhiem-vozmezdiia.html>

The Nuclear Burevestnik: The New Cruise Missile Will Become a ‘Weapon of Vengeance’

Among the latest weapons presented to the Federal Assembly by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin on 1 March 2018 was a strategic intercontinental cruise missile, later named the Burevestnik... Since that time the controversies surrounding this missile have not abated. For the most part they relate to the multitude of technical parameters and the integral parts of the missile which have become known to the general public: the aerial nuclear engine, the subsonic speed, the inversion trail (the radioactive exhaust), etc... So yes, the Burevestnik has a nuclear aviation engine with a compact nuclear reactor, created thanks to modern Russian technologies which allow a cruise missile to fly an unlimited time at subsonic speed to any distance.

The Burevestnik is often criticized for its subsonic speed. They say any air defense missile complex can handle it, since the work of the nuclear aviation engine leaves a noticeable “radioactive exhaust.” Undoubtedly, the critics are correct in the case of the use of the Burevestnik in a retaliatory strike under attack. Air defenses and the ballistic missile defense systems of a probable adversary have not yet been destroyed and, naturally, they could detect the missile. But the truth of the matter is quite different.

Like the Poseidon unmanned submarine, the Burevestnik is a weapon of vengeance, a weapon which would be used after the warheads of intercontinental ballistic missiles “work over” the territory of the aggressor. Understandably, after a retaliatory strike under attack by our Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN) something would remain of the aggressor country’s military and civilian infrastructure (reserve command centers, protected military bases, factories, electric power stations, etc.). Such residuals will allow the aggressor country to continue to wage war against Russia. This is the exact moment when a “weapon of vengeance” is required.

The Poseidons strike coastal sites, and the Burevestniks strike all sites in the depths of the aggressor country’s territory. In so doing it is not a given that the surviving individual air and ballistic missile defense complexes will be able to provide a fully capable defense (there will be many gaps in this defense), and the systems for monitoring the air situation in an ionized atmosphere would be unlikely to see the “radioactive exhaust” of our cruise missile. Moreover, the Burevestnik will maneuver, bypassing detected surviving air defense zones.

In this manner the Burevestniks will complete the destruction of all of the aggressor country’s military and civilian infrastructure facilities, leaving them no chance for survival. How many Burevestniks will be needed for this, I will leave for “behind the scenes” discussions.

Meanwhile, states nurturing aggressive plans against Russia and its allies must know that the flight of the Burevestniks does not only mean the end to all of their hopes for victory, it also means the end to their existence as a state. It is precisely the Burevestniks, and not the Tomahawks, that will bomb the aggressor countries back to the Stone Age, and no other outcome is possible...



Ka-65 Naval Assault Helicopter Undergoing Arctic Modifications

OE Watch Commentary: The Ka-65 naval assault helicopter is not in production yet, but as the accompanying passage discusses, the Kamov design bureau is already adapting it for Arctic conditions. It apparently mounts two four-missile pods and a chain gun. It is a multipurpose aircraft which might also be adopted to support Arctic ground force units. It will be years before the Ka-65 is a resident in the Arctic, but Russia is looking to the future, and the Arctic is important to that future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Frozen ‘Minoga’: They are modernizing the Ka-65 for operation in the Arctic. The combat helicopter will be prepared to accomplish missions under extremely low temperatures....”

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “«Миного» мороженная: Ка-65 модернизируют для работы в Арктике (The Frozen ‘Minoga’: They Are Modernizing the Ka-65 for operation in the Arctic. The Combat Helicopter Will Be Prepared To accomplish Missions under Extremely low temperatures),” *Izvestiya*, 23 July 2019. <https://iz.ru/897278/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/minoga-morozhenaia-ka-65-moderniziruut-dlia-raboty-v-arktike>

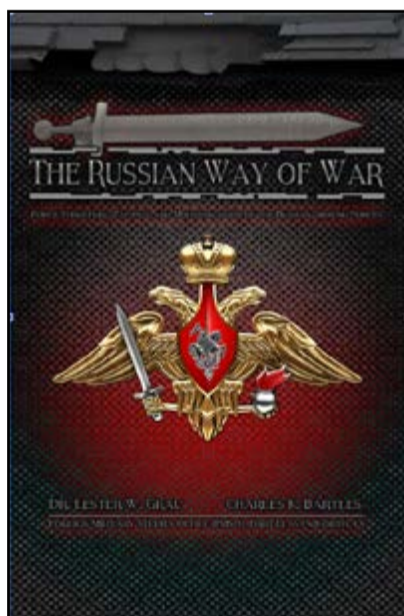
The arctic upgrade will install an additional power plant to start the main engine during very cold temperatures, and rescue and heating systems for the crews, which will also allow them to survive in the harsh polar conditions in the event of a catastrophe. The helicopter will operate at any time of day in adverse weather conditions. The navigation system, which permits it to determine its coordinates without using satellite communications, will also ... increase the aircraft’s effectiveness.

Since the 1980s, the Ka-27 family of medium aircraft has been considered to be the Russian Navy’s main helicopters. They rightfully deserved the reputation of reliable aircraft but a replacement is needed for them in the future....

The Ka-65 will be manufactured in antisubmarine, transport, and assault versions....The “Minoga” will be used as an antisubmarine or assault-transport aircraft on the Navy’s combat ships. In the Arctic, it will first of all be in demand as an “insulated” transport or assault helicopter, which will be able to maintain communications between such northern bases as the Arctic three-winged [trefoil] building on Franz-Josef Land, and also between remote garrisons, Navy and PVO [Air Defense] posts and border outposts.

If necessary, the “Minoga” will be able to operate as a reconnaissance aircraft, target indicator, or antisubmarine helicopter, which operates from onboard a ship or from coastal airfields....State-of-the-art Russian frigates and corvettes, which will operate in the extreme northern latitudes and, in the future – helicopter carriers and aircraft carriers need reliable and tried and tested aircraft, Military Expert Anton Lavrov thinks. “The ‘Minoga’ will get the coaxial scheme that is traditional for all Kamov aircraft. At one time, they stopped at it during the development of shipborne helicopters, because that technical solution permits the development of a more compact fuselage – without the aft antitorque rotor on the long pylon. For Navy helicopters, that requirement – is one of the primary ones. They must fit into the hangars and elevators, where each square meter is worth its weight in gold. Furthermore, an aircraft with a coaxial scheme needs a smaller takeoff and landing pad that is smaller...

The Ka-65 “Minoga” [Lamprey Eel] helicopter will include an arctic version. The Ministry of Defense has stipulated the performance specifications for it... The model is designed for operations from onboard combat ships and from airfields of the Far North, and also from remote naval bases of the Arctic three-winged [trefoil] building structures. The... aircraft is being upgraded for operation at extremely low temperatures. The helicopter will also receive a unique navigation system, which will determine the coordinates with high accuracy even without using GPS/GLONASS.



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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Russia Looking at Longer-Range, Small Submarines

OE Watch Commentary: Air-independent propulsion (AIP) is a maritime technology that would allow a nonnuclear submarine to operate without access to atmospheric oxygen, thus negating the requirement to surface or snorkel. This could result in quieter underwater running than in nuclear or diesel submarines. The Russian Navy is primarily a green-water navy and AIP technology would fit well with coastal defensive operations. The accompanying passage discusses proposals by two Russian design bureaus for such a submarine. The United States and the Soviet Union have a history in AIP research. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Navy needs nonatomic submarines that combine the advantages of smaller dimensions and greater stealth.”

Source: “Рубину брошен вызов Подводную лодку с анаэробной установкой предлагают сразу два конструкторских бюро (Challenge Issued to Rubin. Submarine with Anaerobic Propulsion Proposed by Two Design Bureaus Simultaneously),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 23 July 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/07/23/v-podlodkah-na-smenu-iadernomu-reaktoru-pridut-anaerobnye-ustanovki.html>

Challenge Issued to Rubin. Submarine with Anaerobic Propulsion proposed by Two Design Bureaus Simultaneously

The Malakhit maritime mechanical engineering bureau in Saint Petersburg announced its vessel's specifications: 1,200 miles nonstop range under water, maximum diving depth 300 meters, cruise length up to 30 days, crew of 18-20 plus a team of 16 commando frogmen. The specifications are based on the condition that the submarine has an air-independent (otherwise known as anaerobic) propulsion unit, based on an innovative closed-cycle gas turbine engine. That is, one that can operate without the direct feed of atmospheric air essential for the diesel engines that have long been used in submarine construction.

A nuclear reactor is also an air-independent propulsion unit that has been with the Navy for more than 50 years... It took quite a while to get the “atomic boiler” to work in a totally enclosed space and to work reliably without endangering the crew. But they managed to do it. However to this day a nuclear power plant, even in its modular version for a submarine or icebreaker, remains fairly bulky, expensive, and challenging to operate. And it is not cost-effective for all submersibles....

The Malakhit boat proposal has relatively modest external parameters: length 65.5 meters, beam 7, draft 5.2, and a hull of steel. Yet it has a total range of 4,300 miles. According to Malakhit spokesmen, submarines like this are designed mainly for special missions in littoral waters. They can be used as a strike force or, for example, to transport and covertly land and recover commando frogmen. They can also reliably protect and guard maritime borders by way of covert patrols and minelaying. And they are highly effective at electronic intelligence gathering where required...Malakhit designers will equip it with a single power plant for underwater and surface propulsion, which significantly -- by 5-6 times -- increases the nonstop underwater range compared against the firm's earlier Piranha-T and Piranha-T.1 midget submarine projects.

Defense Ministry representatives ... have long wanted to have ...new types of nonatomic submarine that combine the advantages of atomic boats with smaller dimensions and acoustic footprints. The Rubin Central Maritime Technology Design Bureau has reportedly been working for some years on a project for just such a submarine with air-independent propulsion.

New confirmation of this was the recent publication of the annual accounts of United Shipbuilding Corporation, of which both Rubin and Malakhit are part. The report mentions a project called Perspektiva N with a timeline for implementation by 2025 and in which Rubin is involved. ... “Work was done to build an example of a ship's air-independent propulsion unit and a special floating rig for testing the AIP unit jointly with a lithium-ion storage battery.”...

According to open source reports, Russia's approach to creating air-independent propulsion units differs fundamentally from methods used abroad to obtain hydrogen. It is generated in the required quantity on board the submarine by reforming diesel fuel, which means there is no need for the boat to carry reserves of highly pure hydrogen.

Senior figures in the Russian Navy had announced that they expect to receive a ready anaerobic unit from Rubin in 2021-2022. But now, commenting on Malakhit's “premiere” at the maritime expo in Saint Petersburg, Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov, recently appointed Commander in Chief, has been saying that the selection of an air-independent propulsion unit for submarines might take place after comparative tests of the offers from Rubin and Malakhit.



Short-Range Arctic Gun-Mortar

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage discusses several characteristics of the latest Russian “Magnolia” two-section self-propelled artillery piece, which was revealed at the Armiya-2019 Fifth International Military Technical Forum. As the passage notes, this self-propelled system will be used in “hard-to-transit and swampy areas and regions of the Extreme North.”

The 2S31 Vena has a BMP-3 chassis that is amphibious and can get past a variety of rugged terrain. The marshy tundra of the Arctic is a challenge for most vehicles and the DT10-PM articulated vehicle is usually best in that type of terrain. Apparently the 2S31 turret is mounted in the rear section of the articulated DT10-PM while the crew rides in the forward section. The 2A80 rifled gun-mortar is the product of several generations of this unique artillery piece. The turret should incorporate automated fire control, a navigation system and a target acquisition system. The DT10-PM is a frequent participant in amphibious landings by the Northern Fleet. *OE Watch* has been following the DT10-PM since July 2015 when the vehicle made its debut as “The All-Terrain Arctic Field Kitchen.” The original delivery date was supposed to be in 2017, but it showed up before that and has served as infantry personnel carriers, ambulances, amphibious landing vehicles, transport vehicles, recovery vehicles and now as an artillery platform. This vehicle is a Vityaz manufacturing company success story. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



The 2S31 Vena.

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2S31_Vena_-_Oboronexpo2014part3-02.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0



DT-10P Bronnitsy250.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DT-10P_-_Bronnitsy250.jpg, CC by SA 4.0

“At the beginning of May of this year, photographs of an unknown self-propelled artillery piece appeared on the internet. The weapon was mounted on the chassis of a tracked DT-10MP armored transporter of the Vityaz family. The turret of the combat vehicle with its weaponry was shielded from casual observers by a tarpaulin. However, even then military experts suggested that this development used the combat module of the well-known 120-mm 2S31 Vena self-propelled gun. And they were proven to be correct.”

Source: “Характеристики таинственной двухзвенной самоходки раскрыли на “Армии” (Characteristics of Secret articulated self-propelled gun Revealed at ‘Armiya-2019’),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 1 July 2019. <https://rg.ru/2019/07/01/harakteristiki-tainstvennoj-dvuhzvennoj-samohodki-raskryli-na-armii.html>

Characteristics of Secret Two-Element Self-Propelled Gun Revealed at Armiya-2019

At the Armiya-2019 Fifth International Military Technical Forum, several characteristics of the latest Russian Magnoliya two-section [articulated], self-propelled artillery piece became known. Information concerning this development can be found in “Uralvagonzavod” Corporation materials. As stated in its data sheet the “Magnolia” was created by the Burevestnik Central Scientific Research Institute Joint Stock Company in Nizhegorodskaya [Oblast], and was designed to conduct fire missions against various targets, ranging from elements of precision weapon systems, to field fortifications, and enemy personnel and armored vehicles. This self-propelled system will be used in hard-to-transit and swampy areas and regions of the Extreme North.

The firing range of the HE-FRAG artillery rounds can reach 8.5 kilometers, guided munitions can reach 10 kilometers, and HE-FRAG mortar rounds can reach 7 kilometers. The rate of fire is up to 10 rounds per minute. The vertical aiming angle is from 5 to 80 degrees, the horizontal angle is 360 degrees. The munitions load is at least 80 rounds. It has a 4-man crew.

As is well-known, fully equipped the two-section DT-10PM tracked transporter weighs 23.5 tons and it has a cargo capacity of 10 tons. The V-45-5S, 710-horsepower engine allows a maximum speed of 44 kilometers per hour on land and up to 5 kilometers an hour swimming. It has a cruising range of 700 kilometers. It is manufactured in the city of Ishimbay at the “Vityaz” AO “Machine Building Company.

At the beginning of May of this year, photographs of an unknown self-propelled artillery piece appeared on the internet. The weapon was mounted on the chassis of a tracked DT-10MP armored transporter of the Vityaz family. The turret of the combat vehicle with its weaponry was shielded from casual observers by a tarpaulin. However, even then military experts suggested that this development used the combat module of the well-known 120-mm 2S31 Vena self-propelled gun. And they were proven to be correct.



Grain Deliveries from Arctic Waters

OE Watch Commentary: Many of the mighty north-south Russian rivers flow north into the Arctic Ocean. Regular bulk shipments of coal and metals from Norilsk flow north on the Yenisei River to the Arctic and then west to the port of Murmansk where they are loaded onto railcars to make the trip south into the interior of Russia. But this is the exception and most of these Russian north-flowing waters have not had the economic impact of south-flowing waters such as the Missouri and Mississippi. With the opening of the Northern Sea Route, this may change. Long-distance barge and vessel shipping may prove competitive with long-distance rail rates for bulk shipping and provide an impetus for trade and river-town development. The accompanying passage discusses a plan to send the first 50,000 tons of grain by ship down the river of Irtysh. According to the passage, “the ship will reload its shipment in Sabetta, the new Arctic port in the Gulf of Ob, and from there sail eastwards along the Northern Sea Route all the way to Japan.” This shipment may prove the start of an economic boom for Russian agriculture and shipping. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The region of Omsk in 2018 produced a total of 1.9 million tons of grain, of which 30 percent was exported to a value of \$49 million. Today, the exports from the land-locked region are fully dependent on railway transportation, but that might ultimately change.”



Russian Rivers.

Source: Kmusser via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_rivers.png, CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Ships to sail down great Siberian river, deliver grain to Japan via Arctic route,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 31 July 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2019/07/ships-sail-down-great-siberian-river-deliver-shipments-grain-japan-arctic->

Ships to sail down great Siberian river, deliver grain to Japan via Arctic route

In a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Aleksey Gordeev, regional Omsk Governor Aleksandr Burkov announced that the first 50,000 tons of grain will be sent this year by ship down the river of Irtysh. The ship will reload its shipment in Sabetta, the new Arctic port in the Gulf of Ob, and from there sail eastwards along the Northern Sea Route all the way to Japan.... The region today spends 11,800 rubles on the delivery of a shipment of third class grain to Japan. The route via the Irtysh and Northern Sea Route will cost only 7,000 rubles. It is now necessary to establish a certified access point in Sabetta, Burkov argued. Sanitary controls of the shipments must be conducted on site. Deputy Prime Minister Aleksey Gordeev promised to deal with the issue and follow up with the Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance. According to Governor Burkov, the Northern Fleet will assist with the shipments from Sabetta to Japan.

It is not the first time that shipments were made on the Irtysh to Sabetta and from there further to Asian buyers. In 2016, two 600 ton heavy chemical reactors were sent from South Korea to Sabetta and from there up on the Irtysh to the Pavlodar oil refinery in Kazakhstan. In summer of 2017, several more shipments were made on the same route. This time, the destination was the south Ural city of Tobolsk and a new refinery built by company Sibur. In Sabetta, the goods were placed on big barges that subsequently were towed more than 2,000 km up the river.



Putting Sputnik back in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: Maintaining satellite communications over the Polar Regions is tricky. During the Soviet era, Arctic communications were maintained by the Molniya [lightning] satellite system of high elliptical orbits with an apogee over Russia. Maintaining the orbits was a problem and the satellites had to be replaced frequently- about every year and a half. According to the accompanying passage from *Izvestiya*, the Russian Ministry of Defense is restoring a reliable satellite communications capability for the Northern Sea Route and surrounding areas. The military Meridian satellite system is a replacement for the Molniya. The article also mentions the Russian Blagovest [Church bell chimes] military satellite which operates from a geostationary orbit. Evidently the Meridian and Blagovest satellites will be able to interface and pass information rapidly. It is not clear whether this improved communications capability will be shared with commercial Arctic industry and shipping. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Ministry of Defense will provide a satellite “umbrella” for the Northern Sea Route: by the end of the year the entire Russian group in the Arctic will receive access to high definition data transmission channels. High Arctic communication channels will become operational when “Meridian-M” satellites are launched into orbit.”

Source: Aleksei Ramm, Roman Kretsul, Bogdan Stepovoy, Andrei Fedorov, “Northern Sea Route: Communications in the Arctic Will Be Provided by Military Satellites,” *Izvestiya*, 4 June 2019. <https://iz.ru/884961/aleksei-ramm-roman-kretcul-bogdan-stepovoi/vse-sevmorputem-sviaz-v-arktike-obespechat-voennye-sputniki>

Northern Sea Route: Communication in the Arctic Will Be Provided by Military Satellites

A source from the Ministry of Defense told “*Izvestiya*” that new satellites will provide a greater throughput capability of the satellite’s communication system and expand its access zone to the entire duration of the Northern Sea Route. Experts told “*Izvestiya*” that providing communication in the High Arctic is a very ambitious engineering challenge. The majority of modern satellite systems are not able to function north of the 70th parallel. A major part of the Northern Sea Route lies in this geographic area. A group of satellites will provide global coverage and guaranteed access for the Russian military to proprietary high speed data transfer, telephone, and other types of communication. It will also decrease the amount of resources leased by the operators in the general use networks. On May 31, the Minister of Defense, Sergey Shoygu, reported that the orbital group of Russian communication satellites was greatly reinforced. “By the end of this year, two upgraded ‘Meridian-M’ communication satellites will be launched.”

Moreover, by the end of the year, the orbital group of military communication, “Blagovest,” will be fully set up. It will consist of four satellites. According to the Minister of Defense, it will expand satellite communication access area on Russian territory and beyond, including the Arctic zone. Sergey Shoygu said that in total, since 2013, the armed forces received more than 115 thousand individual satellite communication messages.

Communication Difficulties

Providing communication in the Arctic region is a serious engineering challenge. Modern satellite systems have operational limits of approximately 70 degrees northern latitude. However, the Northern Sea Route is located much farther to the north. Only one system operates in the Arctic, which is American Iridium, but it only provides voice communication, and it is not always reliable. Systems such as Globalstar and Inmarsat also have northern operational limits of approximately 70 degrees northern latitude.

“Geostationary satellites are not able to reach the Arctic regions,” explained Ivan Moiseev, a scientific director at the Moscow Space Club. During Soviet years, communication was provided there by utilizing elliptical orbits such as “Molniya.” Telecommunications satellites with the same name operated on these orbits. “Those who were in charge of providing communication believed that it was not necessary for that region because, until recently, there were only a few border control stations. There are very few commercial customers in the Arctic. Therefore, commercial satellite operators were not interested in the Arctic. Until recently, there was an opinion that communication between a few customers there could be provided without satellites. Radio-wire or point-to-point direct tropospheric communication systems, which were installed some time ago by the Soviet Union, were used. It was later abandoned due to the absence of customers.”

Hero of Russia, former submariner, Rear Admiral Vsevolod Khmyrov stated that “The satellite system must be expanded. The Navy and Army need communication. It is essential for the efficient operation of the Army and combat ships: both surface combat vessels and submarines. Their combat readiness will be seriously dependent on the new modern satellites, which usually perform several tasks, including measurement and signals intelligence, and hydro-meteorological surveys.”

...The Ministry of Defense is planning to deploy a group of four “Blagovest” satellites by 2020. They are intended to provide high-performance data exchange, telephone, and video teleconferencing. The first satellite was launched on August 17, 2017, on a “Proton-M” launch vehicle from Baikonur. It received a sequence ID number “Kosmos-2520.” Last year, “Kosmos-2526” and “Kosmos-2533” were deployed into orbit. The last satellite from this group is expected to be launched this summer. We [*Izvestia*] also know that from 2006 to 2014, seven “Meridian” satellites were launched, but not all of them became operational....



Update on Technopolis-ERA

OE Watch Commentary: Although construction remains ongoing, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to expand, develop, and publicize projects at its military innovation technopolis-ERA, located in Anapa (Krasnodar Region) on the Black Sea coast. This complex revolves around the concept of merging talented, young military scientists with their counterparts from academia and industry. By providing them with top-notch research facilities, the goal is to harness their intellectual prowess and creativity to develop cutting-edge technologies to strengthen the country's defense and high-tech potential.



A classroom at Technopolis ERA.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2GXnUIK> CCA-SA 4.0

The brief excerpt from Russia's primary military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* describes the recent establishment of a military science company, made up of well-educated recruits

from the Tula region, into the ERA technopolis. Within Russia, the city of Tula is renowned for its long history with arms production, and today remains home to a number of important weapon manufacturers. As the article points out, "the idea of creating a Tula [based] scientific company...was due to the growing importance of training and professional growth of highly qualified personnel in the military-industrial complex." It is hoped that the knowledge and experience that these young technicians gain while working at ERA will be applied when they "return to their native land [Tula] and continue to build their careers there."

The article quotes a defense official who emphasizes "the principle of triangular benefit" of the ERA complex, whereby (military conscript) students, defense enterprises, and the military, while engaged in "scientific activity," work together to reach a "technological breakthrough" to strengthen the country's defense. Some Russian pundits have suggested that ERA is an acronym for the "Elite of the Russian Army," and while it may be too early to measure its overall effectiveness, this new complex could result in important defense innovations. (Also see: "A Militarized Silicon Valley?" in the April 2018 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"The military innovation technopolis ERA is more confidently mastering a new model of interaction between scientific, educational and industrial organizations."

Source: Vladimir Sosnitsky, "ЭРА пополняется новобранцами из Тулы (ERA replenished with recruits from Tula)," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5 August 2019. <http://redstar.ru/era-popolnyaetsya-novobrantsami-iz-tuly/>

The military innovation technopolis ERA is more confidently mastering a new model of interaction between scientific, educational and industrial organizations. In joint laboratories, on this basis, advanced research is carried out in close cooperation of scientific company operators with defense industry specialists and industrial partners. As part of the spring draft, together with the government of the Tula region, a Tula scientific company was formed to work at ERA which, in the interests of defense projects, will directly work with high-tech enterprises in the region....

...The idea of creating a Tula scientific company, among other things, is due to the growing importance of training and professional growth of highly qualified personnel in the military-industrial complex. Thanks to the Tula research and production company, positive experience in preserving young talented specialists will receive a new impetus for development with the formation of a scientific unit based on the military technopolis ERA....

...Many Tula enterprises from the defense industry complex, which are distinguished by high-tech design and production activities, have already expressed their intention to interact with fellow operators of a new scientific company. As a result of agreements already reached with the government of the Tula region, areas of scientific and practical research that are promising for cooperation will soon be included in the ERA technopolis plan....

"Now we are comprehensively testing the regional model of the formation of a scientific company using the example of the Tula region," Colonel Nikolai Baranchuk, deputy chief of the military technopolis for military-political work, told the Red Star. - It is planned that after graduation, after serving in the army in close cooperation with regional enterprises of the military-industrial complex, they should return to their native land and continue to build their careers there.

As Colonel Baranchuk explained, the principle of triangular benefit is laid here. For a young man, this is an opportunity to prove himself in work, scientific activity and receive a job offer at the enterprise without spending time on an internship and a probationary period. For the enterprise, it is necessary to form a high-quality personnel reserve and, with its help, make a technological breakthrough and receive a state order from the Ministry of Defense. For the military department, the benefit is seen in the final results of the operation of such a system....



Increase in Pay and Benefits for Contract Soldiers

OE Watch Commentary: Three years ago, Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials celebrated the milestone of having enlisted more contract soldiers (approximately 300,000) than conscripts (276,000) into the ranks. At the time, some observers suggested that the Russian military was well on its way to reaching its target of approximately 450,000 contract soldiers by 2020, and possibly moving toward a totally professionally staffed military. Retention problems, however, have so far stymied efforts to reach the 450,000 goal. In the brief excerpt from the mostly pro-Kremlin daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, military journalist Victor Baranets describes a recent pay increase (effective 1 September 2019) and expansion of other benefits for contract soldiers which might help the MoD to reach this objective.

Citing data from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Baranets reports that “the average monthly pay for an ordinary soldier and sergeant who undergo contract military service will increase from the current base salary of 20–40 thousand rubles [\$312–\$625] to 30–50 thousand rubles [\$469–\$781] or more,” depending on years of service, assignment and specialty allowances. He goes on to point out that housing allowances for contract soldiers will also increase “from the current 3,900 rubles [\$61] to 12,800 rubles [\$200] (depending on the locality).” Baranets also predicts that the MoD will soon enact legislation “which will provide for the provision of the right to travel free of charge to the place of vacation and back for contract military personnel” and to possibly expand “the categories of citizens who are eligible to choose a two-year contract military service in lieu of one-year conscript duty.”

Some of the reader comments to this article reflect both positive and negative reactions toward placing greater emphasis on using contract soldiers. One reader suggested that Russians living in depressed regions look at contract military service “not only for a decent salary and benefits, ...but as a social ladder to improve their prospects.” Conversely, another reader disparaged the notion of a contract service, remarking that “the contract soldier is not a professional.... A professional is a military man with many years of specialized education and service experience. The contract soldier is someone who has not found himself in life, has no education, and is not capable of anything.”

Over the past decade, the Kremlin has devoted considerable resources toward improving military readiness and modernization. A key component of this increased military focus has been on developing well-trained, professional soldiers. While the mandatory one-year period of conscription for Russian men (ages 18-27) will likely remain a requirement for the foreseeable future, it appears that the Kremlin leadership is continuing to construct the necessary incentives to attract more professional soldiers into the ranks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...they are joining the army not only for a decent salary and benefits, which are unavailable in depressed regions, but as a social ladder to improve their prospects....”

Source: Victor Baranets, “Сколько будут платить контрактникам (How much will contract soldiers be paid),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2 August 2019. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27010.1/4072488/>

...The average amount of money allowance for an ordinary soldier and sergeant who undergo military service under the contract will increase from the current 20–40 thousand rubles to 30–50 thousand rubles or more, reports Krasnaya Zvezda. And this will bring the social guarantees of this category of military personnel closer to those of officers and warrant officers.

This will be especially noticeable after a significant increase in the average amount of compensation payments for housing rental from the current 3.9 thousand rubles to 12.8 thousand rubles (depending on the locality).

But that is not all. The military department intends to amend the Federal Law “On the status of military personnel”, which will provide for the provision of right to travel free of charge to the place of vacation and back for military personnel undergoing military service under the contract in the ranks of non-commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers, as well as military cadets educational organizations regardless of the place of military service.

...In addition, the issue of amending the Federal Law of 1998 No. 53-FZ “On Military Duty and Military Service” is being worked out in terms of expanding the categories of citizens who are presented with the right of alternative choice - to perform military service under the contract for two years instead of service by call. Today, this norm, recall, applies only to citizens with higher and secondary vocational education.

Reader Comments:

Sdelka

...they are joining the army not only for a decent salary and benefits, which are unavailable in depressed regions, but as a social ladder to improve their prospects....

Pavel

The contract soldier is not a professional.... A professional is a military man with many years of specialized education and service experience. The contract soldier is someone who has not found himself in life, has no education, and is not capable of anything....



Dagestan 1999: Turning Point for Russia and Putin

OE Watch Commentary: Though it has taken 20 years, in August, the Kremlin leadership enacted legislation which grants veteran status to those local Dagestani militia personnel who helped to defend the region against terrorist incursions back in 1999. As the first brief excerpt from the official news agency TASS points out, “in August and September 1999, armed gangs invaded Dagestan from Chechnya... then the Russian troops in the fight against the militants were helped by local militias.” The article goes on to explain that this new law “gives Dagestan militias the status of war veterans, providing for a monthly cash payment and the provision of a number of benefits for housing and communal services,” as well as other assistance.

Recall that this conflict helped to propel the relatively unknown Prime Minister Putin into national prominence and solidified his selection as Kremlin leader. In addition to addressing the recent legislation providing Dagestani militias with veteran status, the second excerpt, from the popular daily *Argumenty i Fakty* (AiF) places this conflict within the larger Kremlin narrative. The article quotes an expert who asserts that “what happened 20 years ago in Dagestan was actually the first attempt to create what we now call ISIS,” which included “all the relevant elements: radical Wahhabi ideology, the invasion of armed groups and foreign support.”

Having prevented this incursion into Dagestan, Russian forces would go on to eliminate “terrorists on the territory of Chechnya during the counter-terrorist operation.” The article goes on to recall Putin’s harsh promise at that time, where he asserted that no matter where the terrorists were hiding (“in the toilet”), Russian forces would “waste them.” The author suggests that the people “liked this behavior and this determination,” since it demonstrated that Putin understood “that the capture of Dagestan by terrorists from Chechnya would be the actual beginning of the collapse of Russia.”



Republic of Dagestan.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1503923>, Public Domain

From the Russian perspective, while problems remain, compared to 20 years ago, the situation today in the North Caucasus region, particularly in Dagestan and Chechnya, has become much more prosperous and stable. As the second excerpt concludes, the move to crush the terrorist incursion into Dagestan in August 1999 was “the moment when Russia embarked on the path to regaining its sovereignty, its independence, and stable development.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“This event - the liberation of Dagestan and the further destruction of terrorists on the territory of Chechnya during the counter-terrorist operation - became a cardinal moment in the history of Russia.”

Source: “Путин подписал закон о статусе ветерана боевых действий для ополченцев Дагестана (Putin signed a law on the status of a war veteran for militiamen of Dagestan),” TASS, 2 August 2019. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6729418>

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law granting the status of a war veteran to militiamen from Dagestan who fought against militants in 1999. A document published on the official portal of legal information gives them the right to receive monthly payments and material benefits.

The law gives Dagestan militias the status of war veterans, providing for a monthly cash payment and the provision of a number of benefits for housing and communal services....

...In August and September 1999, armed gangs invaded from Chechnya, first in the Tsumadinsky and Botlikh districts of Dagestan, then in the Novolaksky district. Then the Russian troops in the fight against the militants were helped by local militias.

Source: Ekaterina Barova, “Уроки 1999-го. Что помешало создать террористическое государство в России (The lessons of 1999. What prevented the creation of a terrorist state in Russia),” *Argumenty i Fakty*, 8 August 2019. https://aif.ru/society/history/uroki_99-go_chno_pomeshalo_sozdat_terroristicheskoe_gosudarstvo_v_rossii

20 years ago, on August 7, 1999, the detachments of the fighters Basayev and Khattab invaded Dagestan... The liberation of Dagestan came with a high price. According to official figures, 279 soldiers and officers were killed during the operation, and more than 800 were injured. In addition, 37 local militia were killed and over 720 were injured. Losses of militants, according to the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, amounted to about 2,500.

The other day, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law granting militiamen from Dagestan who fought against Chechen fighters in 1999 the status of war veterans, the right to monthly payments and material benefits.

Why is this date so important for all of Russia? The director of the Foundation for the Study of Democracy, Maxim Grigoriev, explained: “What happened 20 years ago in Dagestan was actually the first attempt to create what we now call ISIS... which included all relevant elements: radical Wahhabi ideology, the invasion of armed groups and foreign support...”

This event - the liberation of Dagestan and the further destruction of terrorists on the territory of Chechnya during the counter-terrorist operation - became a cardinal moment in the history of Russia. At the same time, it began precisely with Dagestan, and here the direct role of the then head of the Russian government, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, was great.

His figurative harsh words are well known: “If we catch the terrorists in the toilet, then we will waste them in the toilet.” Moreover, all this required from Putin, in my opinion, political will and confidence in his actions. And in fact, people liked this behavior and this determination. He acted here not as a politician, but as, first of all, a statesman who understands that the capture of Dagestan by terrorists from Chechnya would be the actual beginning of the collapse of Russia. It seems to me that this was a key point for Putin’s support and for the people of Russia to believe in him as president....

...Therefore, this date - August 7, 1999, is one of the key points in the development of Russia. I believe that from this moment it is worth counting after 1991, the moment when Russia embarked on the path to gaining again its sovereignty, its independence, and stable development.



Russia/China and the Dollar/Euro

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade or so, one of the Kremlin's favorite talking points has been the assertion that the US exploits its advantage of controlling the dollar as the global reserve currency. They argue that Washington uses its economic prowess to punish countries that do not subscribe to American leadership with economic sanctions. They also point out that this "exorbitant privilege" of controlling the global money supply allows the US to spend more on its military than it can rightfully afford. Consequently, the Kremlin has been at the forefront in calling for alternatives to the US dollar as the global reserve currency.

To circumvent sanctions and weaken the dollar's role as global reserve currency, the Kremlin leadership has encouraged bilateral trade using local currencies and has employed this strategy in its closer relationship with China. The first brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier (Military-Industrial Courier)*, points out that the Chinese yuan, which currently "plays the role of a regional currency... in about five years... can become the world leader," suggesting that the Chinese yuan will replace the US dollar as the global reserve currency. To support this claim, the author asserts that China "has been systematically ridding itself of US government bonds and increasing purchases of gold and other precious and rare earth metals" in an attempt to strengthen the Chinese yuan. He goes on to suggest that "the Chinese strategic geo-economic project 'One Belt-One Road' is actually a clever mechanism for countries to "switch to the yuan or to mutual settlements in national currencies."

The second excerpt from *RBK*, one of Russia's leading business news sources, places the above claims in better perspective. The article does support the assertion that the use of the dollar in foreign trade between Russia and China has decreased. More importantly, however, instead of relying on local currencies to bypass the dollar, the article describes how Chinese and Russian companies are increasingly using the Euro, pointing out that "the share of the European currency grew tenfold over the year - from 0.7% in the first quarter of 2018 to 37.6% in the first quarter of 2019." The article quotes an expert who suggests that the tendency for China "to replace the dollar with the Euro will continue," and that it remains "unlikely that the replacement will be in the direction of the ruble or the Chinese yuan." While the Kremlin remains determined to weaken American economic power, it may inadvertently strengthen the European currency. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...Now the Chinese yuan plays the role of a regional currency, but in a fairly short time - in about five years - it can become the world leader..."

Source: Maxim Kazanin, "Юань вместо доллара: Китайская финансовая разведка готовится к валютным войнам (Yuan instead of dollar: Chinese financial intelligence is preparing for currency wars)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier*, 30 July 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/51708>

Changes in the international financial system and the currency market have been brewing for a long time. The Chinese are gradually preparing the emergence of the so-called golden yuan....

A number of steps have already been taken - the yuan in the basket of reserve currencies, some countries, including the states of the Persian Gulf, fully switched to the yuan, the Central Asian republics, in particular Kazakhstan - the largest of them, are connected to the Chinese payment system China UnionPay. Now the Chinese yuan plays the role of a regional currency, but in a fairly short time - in about five years - it can become the world leader.

...In China, the natural basket of reserves is growing, since the last three months, Beijing has been systematically ridding itself of US government bonds and increasing purchases of gold and other precious and rare earth metals. So it is likely that in the foreseeable future, the yuan may become golden. It is precisely to this power of the Middle Kingdom that they are constantly striving....

...Gradually, more and more states that in one way or another agreed to participate in the Chinese strategic geo-economic project "One Belt - One Way" will switch to the yuan or to mutual settlements in national currencies. ...

Source: Ksenia Nazarova, Ivan Tkachev, "Доля доллара в оплате экспорта из России в Китай впервые упала ниже 50% (The share of the dollar in the payment of exports from Russia to China for the first time fell below 50%)," *RosBuisnessKonsulting-RBK*, 26 July 2019. <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/26/07/2019/5d39ad439a79477f145b23b0>

...The share of the dollar in China's calculations for the supply of goods and services from Russia for the first time fell below 50%, amounting to 45.7%, follows from the statistics of the Central Bank for the first quarter of 2019....

...The dedollarization in the payment of Russian exports did not favor national currencies, but the Euro. The share of the European currency grew tenfold over the year - from 0.7% in the first quarter of 2018 to 37.6% in the first quarter of 2019....

...On the whole, in the foreign trade of Russia and China (export and import of goods and services), the share of the dollar in the first quarter, although it decreased dramatically, still covered more than half of payments - 55.7%... Russia still mainly pays for Chinese imports in dollars (66.5%)....

...The growth in the share of the Euro in turnover with China is due to several reasons. The transition to settlements in national currencies (yuan / ruble) is still difficult for exporters due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure...

...Alexander Knobel, Director of the Institute of International Economics and Finance of the All-Russian Aviation Institute, does not exclude the possibility that with China the tendency to replace the dollar with the Euro will continue, since these currencies are similar in terms of convenience and liquidity, it is not difficult to replace one with the other. It is unlikely that the replacement will be in the direction of the ruble or yuan, he believes, for up to 75% of exports are raw materials, and there the calculations will be carried out mainly in reserve currencies.



A Russian View: Removing Business from the Chinese Military

OE Watch Commentary: The 1990s was a tough decade for the Chinese military. As their country's economic systems transformed from something centrally controlled to one with capitalist principles, state structures like the military saw their funding drastically reduced. To compensate for this lost funding, military personnel often adopted novel (sometimes corrupt) measures to get by. This focus on generating revenues, however, detracted from their war fighting capability. Over the past decade, the Chinese leadership has enacted reforms and legislation designed to eliminate corrupt business practices in the military. The accompanying excerpt from one of Russia's more independent news sources, Kommersant, provides a Russian perspective on how business interests and corruption have been reduced within the Chinese military, emphasizing that "the Chinese army has finally stopped doing business."

Providing some context, the article explains that "Army business helped the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) survive in the 1980s and 1990s, when, for the sake of accelerated economic development, the country tried to minimize the defense budget." Not surprisingly, "corruption flourished in the army, and military training faded into the background - the main concern of the command was making money." The article asserts that in 2015, the Chinese leadership adopted a "course towards a complete and final separation of the army and business," though it also points out that "in 2017 in Beijing military hospitals up to 90% of patients were civilian: army medicine is highly valued by the population, and people willingly used its paid services." Presumably, business practices and corruption have not been completely eradicated from the Chinese military.

Quoting a Chinese source, the article points out that "the army should prepare for battles... if the army deviates from this task, innumerable disasters await us." The Chinese military continues to modernize and improve its combat readiness. Along with increased funding to accomplish these tasks, measures have been enacted to reduce business opportunities and corruption within the PLA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"... Army business helped the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) survive in the 1980s and 1990s, when, for the sake of accelerated economic development, the country tried to minimize the defense budget...."

Source: Mikhail Korostikov, "Китайская армия сбросила оковы капитализма (The Chinese army has thrown off the shackles of capitalism)," *Kommersant*, 11 July 2019. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4027355>

The Chinese army finally stopped doing business, the Xinhua news agency reported July 11. The process of depriving the armed forces of this uncharacteristic function began in 1998, and the final decision to abandon it was made in 2015. Army business helped the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) survive in the 1980s and 1990s, when, for the sake of accelerated economic development, the country tried to minimize the defense budget. But the price was too high: corruption flourished in the army, and military training faded into the background - the main concern of the command was making money....

...However, many loopholes remained: there were schools, hospitals, cinemas and other socially significant objects in the garrisons, which were allowed to accept civilians.... For example, according to the Beijing Shibao newspaper, in 2017 in Beijing military hospitals up to 90% of patients were civilian: army medicine is highly valued by the population, and people willingly used its paid services.

...In 2016, announcing the imminent closure of the army business, the official press organ of the PLA newspaper "Tszefantzyun bao" reported that "the army should prepare for battles. The basic task of the army is to fight; if the army deviates from this task, innumerable disasters await us," the authors warned....



Uzbekistan Faces Mounting Economic Costs From Staying out of Russian-Led Eurasian Union

by Fozil Mashrab

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-faces-mounting-economic-costs-from-staying-out-of-russian-led-eurasian-union/>

OE Watch Commentary: During his address to the 20th Plenary Session of Uzbekistan's Senate, on 21 June, President Shavkat Mirziyayev expressed fears that the country's manufacturers could face increasing difficulties accessing their traditional export markets. His suggested solution, to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Russian-dominated regional trade bloc, may have caught many by surprise, however. Mirziyayev noted that, whether one likes it or not, Russia and the other EEU member countries—Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia—account for 70 percent of Uzbekistan's external trade. He fretted that, soon after the Eurasian Union adopts common product marking standards, goods from Uzbekistan might face discrimination and additional restrictions.

President Mirziyayev's position on the possibility of Uzbekistan one day joining the EEU is an important departure from Tashkent's previous policy of staying out of Moscow-dominated integrationist groups. His predecessor, late president Islam Karimov, was deeply suspicious of Russia and refused to join any regionalist organizations led by Moscow, all of which, he claimed, reminded him of the former Soviet Union.

Mirziyayev's comments before the Senate indicate that the costs of remaining outside the EEU, which already incorporates two of Uzbekistan's five immediate neighbors, would be detrimental to the domestic economy. This is despite the fact that, in the last three years, Uzbekistan removed many barriers to developing trade ties with key EEU member states like Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. In particular, cooperation with Russia has been expanding rapidly in new areas such as nuclear power plant construction and the purchase of military equipment.

In April 2017, during President Mirziyayev's first visit to Moscow, he announced that Uzbekistan would abolish customs duties for many types of products manufactured in Russia. In turn, Russia granted so-called green corridors (simplified customs regimes) to Uzbekistan's agricultural exports. Later, similar green corridors were extended to Uzbekistan's textile exports to Russia. So far, Russia and other EEU countries have been willing to open their markets to Uzbekistani products only on the basis of reciprocity. As Russian President Putin put it, "The trucks bringing Uzbek fruits and vegetables to Russia should be loaded with Russian goods on the way back."

Despite growing ties with the EEU, Uzbekistan faces increasing restrictions while it remains outside the bloc. As such, Tashkent's current policy of avoiding EEU membership and relying solely on bilateral arrangements looks increasingly unreliable and disadvantageous—especially when one also factors in the current legal and financial difficulties faced by the 2.5 million Uzbekistani migrant laborers in Russia who sent home \$4.2 billion in remittances in 2018 alone. Tens of thousands of these migrant workers choose to apply for Russian citizenship every year to ease their access to the Russian labor market.

And although the Uzbekistani authorities under President Mirziyayev have recently given some indications that they may be considering joining the Eurasian Union, certain parallel developments suggest the opposite may actually be true. Instead, the government could be moving toward more protectionist policies following the brief period of liberalization and relaxation of foreign trade regulations that occurred after Mirziyayev's ascension to power. Specifically, under pressure from local manufacturers, the authorities are planning to introduce new regulations that will increase the average duties levied on all imported goods (including from EEU member countries) and reduce the number of goods exempt from duty collection. All of these measures, instead of bringing Uzbekistan closer to EEU standards, would widen the gaps and erect new barriers between them.

Beyond trade, one must take into account potential political risks associated with membership in the EEU, such as the frequently cited "risk of becoming hostage to Russia's unpredictable and often dangerous foreign policy, with limited options of defending its own national interests." Even if looked at purely through the prism of trade and economic calculations, however, Uzbekistani authorities will still face tough choices in the future while domestic manufacturers continue to clamor for restricted imports and greater protection from the government. **End OE Watch Commentary (Mashrab)**



A New Source for Armenian Weapons and Equipment?



Artak Davtyan.

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

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Armenia's acquisitions of the Russian Iskander missile system and the Su-30 fighter received a lot of attention from regional media over the past few years. As the accompanying excerpted articles report, acquisitions of other weapons and equipment could play an important part in Armenia's security cooperation partnerships going forward. The article from Armenian *News.am* reports on how defense companies from Armenia and Russia "have signed contracts at the International Military-Technical Forum "Army-2019"." The article quotes the head of Armenia's military industry as saying that the forum is "the best way to develop military-technical cooperation not only with Russia, but also with countries that participate in [it]."

The article from *Panorama.am*, another Armenian news source, features an interview with Armenia's Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Artak Davtyan, who comments on military acquisitions. He notes that the "process

of replenishing military equipment represents a number of steps, which will be regularly improved upon" and points out "both this and next year, the import of a large volume of weapons and equipment has started and will continue on the basis of previous agreements." The article does not mention specific items, but there have been reports that the defense ministry is looking to replenish basic equipment and they are not referring to a high-profile or expensive acquisition. The articles also come at a time when the Armenian Defense Ministry has mentioned acquisitions of weapons or equipment from the West and not long after the delivery of the Russian S-400 missile system to the Turkish government, which continues to have poor relations with the Armenian government. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"We consider the "Army" forum as the best way to develop military-technical cooperation not only with Russia, but also with countries that participate in this forum."

Source: "Россия и Армения заключили ряд контрактов на форуме «Армия-2019»: намечены новые контракты (Russia and Armenia finalized a number of contracts at the "Army-2019" forum: the details of the new contracts)," *News.am*, 27 June 2019.
<https://news.am/rus/news/520806.html>

Companies of the military industry of Armenia and Russia have signed contracts at the International Military-Technical Forum "Army-2019"...Technical cooperation is developing very well now, and we have signed and are planning to sign new contracts for the supply of military items...

(Chairman of the military industry of Armenia) Avetik Kerobyan stressed that Armenia emphasized that Armenia views the forum as an effective base where it is possible to reach agreements with different countries. "We consider the "Army" forum as the best way to develop military-technical cooperation not only with Russia, but also with countries that participate in this forum..."

Source: "Начальник Генштаба ВС Армении прокомментировал закупку новых видов вооружения (The Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia commented on the purchase of new types of weapons)," *Panorama.am*, 3 August 2019.
<https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2019/08/03/Начальник-генерального-штаба-ВС-Армении/2149545>

The process of replenishing military equipment represents a number of steps, which will be regularly improved upon. This was said today in an interview with the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia, Lieutenant-General Artak Davtyan...As for the purchase of new weapons, Davtyan noted that both this and next year, the import of a large volume of weapons and equipment has started and will continue on the basis of previous agreements. "This is related to air defense and missile systems, long-range weapons, and increasing the fire power of reconnaissance units..."



China's Priorities for Joint Exercises in Central Asia



Border Fence- China-Tajikistan.

Source: Raki_man via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Border_Fence_-_China-Tajikistan_-_panoramio.jpg, CC BY 3.0

Kabar notes how “the Mountain Eagles of the Xinjiang detachment of the People’s Armed Police and the Black Panthers of the National Guard of Kyrgyzstan are participating in the exercise” and that the exercise involved “antiterrorism training and a joint operation.” Around the same time, the article from *Asia-Plus* reports how the exercise in GBAO includes “a battalion of soldiers and officers of the paratroopers of Tajikistan and the one company of the People’s Liberation Army of China” and that it involved “a joint operation in the event of a threat of terrorists from Afghanistan crossing Tajikistan into China.” The article also mentions how a “similar exercise of the two militaries took place in GBAO in October 2016.”

It is worth remembering that while the Chinese government has carried out bilateral joint exercises with units from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the majority of the exercises over the past several years with Central Asian forces have taken place with those from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Joint exercises between Chinese and Central Asian forces do not take place annually like Russian and Central Asian exercises; however, these exercises have featured Chinese forces defending the border of Xinjiang, similar to the scenario of the latest exercise in Gorno-Badakhshan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“This is the first time the unit (Mountain Eagles) is participating in a military exchange between China and foreign special forces...”

Source: “В Синьцзяне стартовали китайско-кыргызские совместные антитеррористические учения (A joint Chinese-Kyrgyz antiterrorism exercise started in Xinjian),” *Kabar*, 7 August 2019.

<http://kabar.kg/news/v-sin-tcziane-startovali-kitaisko-kyrgyzskie-sovmestnye-antiterroristicheskie-ucheniia/>

A joint Chinese-Kyrgyz antiterrorism exercise, Cooperation-2019, started on Tuesday at a facility outside Urumqi...The exercise is working [on] strengthening relations, expanding cooperation and increasing the combat effectiveness of the special forces of the two states against terrorism, but not directed against third parties or regions.

The Mountain Eagles of the Xinjiang detachment of the People’s Armed Police and the Black Panthers of the National Guard of Kyrgyzstan are participating in the exercise. About 150 personnel from both sides will carry out antiterrorism training and a joint operation...This is the first time the unit (Mountain Eagles) is participating in a military exchange between China and foreign special forces...

Source: “В Ишкашиме стартуют таджикско-китайские антитеррористические учения (The Tajik-Chinese antiterrorism exercise is starting in Ishkashim),” *Asia-Plus*, 8 August 2019. <https://www.news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20190808/spetsialnaya-rota-armii-kitaya-pribila-v-ishkashim>

...A Chinese company will participate in the Tajik-Chinese antiterrorism exercises, which will take place from 8-14 August in the Ishkashim District of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast of Tajikistan...The exercises will involve a battalion of soldiers and officers of the paratroopers of Tajikistan and the one company of the People’s Liberation Army of China.

The Tajik and Chinese forces will work through a joint operation in the event of a threat of terrorists from Afghanistan crossing Tajikistan into China...A similar exercise of the two militaries took place in GBAO in October 2016.



China: Type-15 MBT Export Variant Shows Off Enhanced Protection and Mobility

OE Watch Commentary: A Chinese TV program aired in August showed off the VT-5, a “lightweight” Main Battle Tank (MBT), an export variant of the Type 15. The program entitled “Lightweight Main Battle Tank VT-5 - Evolution of the King” [《轻量化主战坦克VT-5 - 王着的进化》], followed presenter Wu Jie [吴杰] as he interviewed technicians working on the tank and showing off its capabilities.

The program was filmed at Chinese arms producer Norinco’s Inner Mongolia First Machinery Group Corporation, also known as the Baotou Tank Factory. The area is also home to the Tank & Armored Vehicle Experimental Center [坦克装甲车辆实验中心], where all Chinese tanks conduct mobility and firing tests.

For China, which has fought wars with India along the Tibetan plateau, and along its border with Vietnam, the 30-36 ton VT-5 could fill a capabilities gap for geographic areas where larger MBTs (which typically weigh upwards of 50 tons), would be unable to travel. As noted by one Norinco technician, heavier tanks all struggle in high plateaus, rice paddies, and riverbanks—terrain that covers much of China and particularly the southwest and eastern parts of the country.

Throughout the program, technicians interviewed by Wu Jie emphasized the tank’s agility. As one technician noted, the VT-5 has a power-to-weight ratio of 18–19.6 (horsepower/tons), depending on the configuration. The tank’s driver’s position was designed to more closely resemble civilian cars has a steering wheel to make learning to drive it easier. Other important features are a modular engine that is meant to be easy to pull out and repair or replace.

Despite the lighter weight and mobility, the tank is heavily armed. The VT-5’s primary armament is a rifled 105mm autoloading cannon. While smaller than the 120-125mm cannon that have become standard for larger MBTs, the program claims the 105mm is capable of providing accurate fires against all but the most heavily armored targets. The latter part of the program showed the tank firing its main gun at distances of 1000, 1200 and 1500 meters at 4X6meter targets. Firing from a second position 1200 meters away and using the automatic firing computer, the tank hit the center of a 4 x 6 meter target. Other sensors include a windspeed indicator that feeds data directly to the targeting computer.

The tank commander and gunner sit in the turret on either side of the gun/autoloader system and each has their own hatch. The 105mm shells are loaded into the autoloader system via a hatch on the back of the turret.

In addition the main gun, the VT-5 has a remote weapons station combining what appears to be a 35mm automatic grenade launcher and 12.7mm machine gun located behind the commander’s entry hatch.

The tank incorporates both active and passive defenses. The sides of the tank are lined with a thick belt of modular reactive armor plates, which are easily bolted on and replaced. These plates are meant to guard against high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) rounds by exploding outward when struck. The VT-5 also makes use of lightweight slat armor that is effective against rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) to protect the tank treads and the rear of the turret.

Active protection systems include a laser “dazzler” or “soft-kill active protection system” installed on the right-hand side of the turret. This emits infrared beams to blind incoming anti-tank missiles. Another active system, which fires explosive rounds to intercept incoming missiles, can apparently also be installed.

While it is unclear if the VT-5’s domestic variant—the Type 15—will be broadly adopted by the PLA itself, the tank represents a significant modernization compared to China’s other light tanks and a recognition that mobility will be vital in future battlefields. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

VT-5 Lightweight MBT

Crew: 3

Speed: 70 kph*

Weight: 33-36 tons

Power-to-Weight Ratio: 18 -19.6 hp/ton

Armament: Primary - Autoloading 105mm cannon
Secondary - RWS with 35mm automatic grenade launcher and 12.7mm machine gun

*:All stats via 《军武零距离》

“VT-5 Lightweight MBT” by Peter Wood

“Whether from the perspective of speed or the ability to transit areas [not easily accessible] the VT-5 is superior to regular main battle tanks.”



Continued: China: Type-15 MBT Export Variant Shows Off Enhanced Protection and Mobility

Source: “CCTV 7 “轻量化主战坦克VT-5 - 王着的进化 (Light/weight Main Battle Tank V-T5 - Evolution of the King,” *Military Equipment Close Up* 《军武零距离》 [TV program on CCTV7], August 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YR-Q5QParg>

[The following is a partial transcript of the TV program]

Narration begins:

In 1916 a weapon called a tank first appeared on the battlefield. With firepower, protection, and mobility, tanks rule the battlefield but face tough challenges. Today, after 103 years, the king of the battlefield is still being shaped by new technologies.

Wu Jie: “This is NORINCO’s Inner Mongolia First Machinery Group Corporation Tank & Armored Vehicle Experimental Center. Next to me is our country’s new generation self-developed lightweight main battle tank VT-5. Why call it a lightweight main battle tank? Because its weight is between 33-36 tons. What is the reasoning behind this? Our Type 96B MBT has participated twice in the Russian tank biathlon. Its combat weight is about 45 tons, while Germany’s Leopard IIA7 MBT’s full combat weight can reach 67 tons, and the United States M1A2 MBT, its latest model, can exceed 71 tons—about twice that of our VT-5.”

“So how do our little VT-5s stand in the heavyweight-dominated world main station tank family? Under the weight limit, what level of offensive capability, maneuverability, and protection can it achieve? In today’s episode of “Military Close Up”, we take a closer look.”

“The Inner Mongolia First Machinery Group Corporation Tank & Armored Vehicle Experimental Center. This is China’s largest tank and armored vehicle mobility verification laboratory. All domestic tank armored vehicles have to go through a rigorous examination here before they go into service. The model testing and verification of the VT-5 tank are also being carried out here.”

“Testing the tank’s maneuverability and the reliability is the most important work here. For this show, aerial drones are one of our most important methods of shooting. But today’s high-performance drone is facing a considerable challenge. The drone, which weighs just over a kilogram, was left behind by a tank weighing more than 30 tons. After the VT-5 tank fully accelerates we are left far behind. This picture gives us a real experience of being ‘left in the dust.’ The VT-5 has a maximum speed of 70 km per hour and can accelerate very quickly.”

[speaking to a Norinco staff member identified only as Chief Li]

Wu Jie: “Chief Li, why did your team develop a light MBT?”

Chief Li: “Lightweight tanks are mainly used for special areas such as jungles, deserts, shorelines, rice paddies high plateaus that are not easily accessible to main battle tanks. In these areas, [lightweight MBTs] act in place of the main battle tank to perform destruction of enemy armored targets because it is lighter and relatively smaller in volume. In this way, it can reach areas that normal MBTs cannot reach because they are too heavy. Whether from the perspective of speed or the ability to transit these areas the VT-5 is superior to regular MBTs.”

[Speaking with an unidentified Norinco technician] [VT-5坦克制人员]

Technician: “The engine is equipped with an integrated automatic transmission. It is hoisted in one piece. It is all one integral unit and can be removed and replaced within two hours.”

Wu Jie: “What about the propulsion of the tank?”

Technician: “The tank weighs between 33 and 36 tons, so the power-to-weight ratio is between 18 and 19.6 horsepower per ton, which means it has a lot of horsepower.”

Wu Jie: “Why is this indicator so important?”

Technician: “Power-to-weight ratio is the embodiment of a tank’s overall agility, and its maximum speed including its acceleration is reflected in this ratio.”

[later, inspecting the VT-5’s armor]

Wu Jie: “This armor hanging on the outside of the VT-5 is also a very important means for enhancing the VT-5’s battlefield’s survivability.”

[motioning to technicians installing reactive armor panels]

“Here we see the crew hanging this additional armor on either side of the VT-5 main battle tank body. Let’s look at this armor. It’s all modular pieces that can be mounted to a frame of the body. When anti-tank weapons strike, explosives inside react instantly, creating a shock wave that destroys the incoming warhead and diverts it away from the tank. Of course, it’s not enough to survive in brutal modern battlefield conditions.”

Wu Jie: “On the side of the turret we saw a very special device that looked a bit like a small mushroom head with lots of little windows on it. It’s actually a very special and important sensor. It can sense whether enemy laser detection equipment is illuminating our tanks on the battlefield. If so, it will warn the tank’s occupants, giving them time to take evasive action. For example, it can use the launchers around us to fire smoke bombs to block the enemy’s view. At the same time, our VT-5 tank’s powerful agility can be used to quickly get out of the danger zone.”

[Narration]

To protect yourself on the battlefield you must rely not only on your armor but also on intelligence. There is also a more amazing secretive future technology [黑科技; or “black technology”] that the VT-5 can rely on the golden bell hooded iron shirt. In 2017 China showed off for the first time its domestically-developed active protection system undergoing testing.

[Footage of a countermeasures system being tested plays]

From footage captured by a high-speed camera taking 15,000 frames per second, we can see that on the left side is an incoming anti-tank (HEAT) projectile. The targeted tank suddenly fires two active defense projectiles from the tank a few meters away from the launch of the rocket. They explode, diverting force away from the tank itself. The protective system can be mounted on the VT-5 and the whole system is very small and lightweight.”



China: J-20 Fighter Intended to Strike at Early Warning, Aerial Refueling Platforms

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2019, J-20 stealth fighters joined an air brigade under China's Eastern Theater Command Air Force for the first time. First shown off publicly at the 2016 Zhuhai airshow, the J-20 has been a centerpiece of Chinese pride in technological development. The accompanying excerpt from an article in China's *Shipborne Weapons* magazine describes the J-20's likely combat roles and tactics.

Chief among these roles would be targeting the aerial early warning and aerial refueling aircraft that have underpinned US air superiority by allowing forces to fly further, stay on station longer and have a more complete picture of the aerial situation.

Advances in avionics and the J-20's large wing surface and internal fuel stores combine to make it a platform capable of long-range interceptions beyond China's coasts. As noted in the article, the J-20 also has comparatively large internal weapons stores, allowing it to carry a complement of four long-range air-to-air missiles such as the PL-12. Images in Chinese media indicate that even larger missiles are under development, but would likely be restricted to use in external stores that would increase the J-20's radar cross-section, reducing its stealthiness.

The article notes that the J-20s capabilities can have a real impact in terms of making enemy commanders reluctant to put early warning and aerial refueling assets close to the line of combat, further reducing supporting aircraft's range. This further helps Chinese maritime operations, which would typically be vulnerable to aerial attack. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



J-20 fighter.

Source: Emperornie via Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/J-20_fighter_%28cropped%29.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0

“Because these targets operate at ranges relatively close to the effective detection ranges of the J-20, and it is difficult to deploy air cover force without gaps for these assets, once they are attacked by the J-20's air-to-air missiles, it is unlikely that they will be able to be rescued.”



Continued: China: J-20 Fighter Intended to Strike at Early Warning, Aerial Refueling Platforms

Source: “歼-20与隐身战机时代空中作战的发展变化 (Development of Air Battle Pattern in the Age of J-20 Stealth Fighter),” *Shipborne Weapons* 《舰载武器》 May 2019. pp. 36–41.

At the beginning of 2019, the first group of four domestic J-20 fighters was delivered to the Eastern Theater Command Air Force combat unit, indicating that the most advanced domestic aviation combat equipment is being delivered at an unusual capacity and speed. At the same time, it also reflects the main mission set of the aircraft and China's defensive focus. The main mission direction of this type of fighter and the current defense focus of China's national defense forces. Following the U.S. F-22 and F-35, China's J-20 and Russia's Su-57 have also entered service in recent years, and confrontation of stealth fighters vs stealth fighters will become a reality. Along with a large number of UAVs, cruise missiles and air-launched flying decoys, the battlefield environment is unprecedentedly complex, so modern aviation's combat style and even combat missions must adapt to this new change. As the equipment with the strongest concealment, mobility and activity space and scope in the whole combat system, Stealth Combat Aircraft will play an irreplaceable role in the future battlefield. ...

The J-20 represents the latest generation of domestically-developed single-seat, double-engine, heavy-duty multi-role fighters with high stealth, high maneuverability and high situational awareness. While a gap remains in some respects between the J-20 and the F-22 and F-35, each has their pros and cons. For example, the J-20, due to the limitations of engine performance, maybe inferior to F-22 in terms of supersonic cruise capability and super maneuverability, but its significantly larger body size, giving it greater fuel capacity and endurance. It has a larger combat radius and mission set without needing to conduct aerial refueling. Based on photos released domestically, the J-20's weapons bay has a width of 2 to 2.2 meters, a length of 4.5 to 4.7 meters, and a depth of 0.66 to 0.8 meters. At the same time, thanks to the rapid advancement of microelectronics and information technology since the 21st century, the capabilities of the airborne equipment, theater situational awareness and the collection, integration, and distribution of battlefield information are more advanced than those of the F-22 10 years ago, and similar to the more modern F-35.

Compared with the F-35, whose internal weapons stores are small and which does not have supersonic cruise capability and super maneuverability, the J-20 has an internal weapons bay and a greater mobility advantage. So not only are there no generational differences with the F-22 and F-35, but the J-20 also has certain advantages. They have the ability to go out into the offshore airspace during the war and perform the tasks of competing with the foreign fourth-generation aircraft such as F-22, F-35, etc. to compete for air superiority and to attack enemy air, sea and land targets.*

As a relatively strong stealth air platform, the important targets of forward-operating J-20s include enemy early warning aircraft and aerial refueling aircraft—important targets with limited mobility that nevertheless pose a significant threat. Because these targets operate at ranges relatively close to the effective detection ranges of the J-20, and it is difficult to deploy air cover force without gaps for these assets, once they are attacked by the J-20's air-to-air missiles, it is unlikely that they will be able to be rescued. Whether it is an airborne early warning aircraft or an aerial tanker, the loss of one of these assets will have a very serious effect on the enemy's entire combat system. Therefore, the J-20's presence in a near seas combat zone will have a significant deterrent impact on enemy air early warning aerial refueling operations.

If the enemy cowers in the face of the J-20 and puts the early warning aircraft and the aerial refueling aircraft in the safe rear airspace, it will weaken the support ability for the frontline forces like the F-22 and F-35 fighters, decrease mission capability and even force the front line to be pulled back. This also means that having the J-20 operate in forward near-seas airspace can create a favorable situation, restricting the F-22 and F-35's range of activities and imposing limits on enemy maritime activity due to the lack of sufficient air support, greatly reducing pressure on our maritime and offshore defense operations.

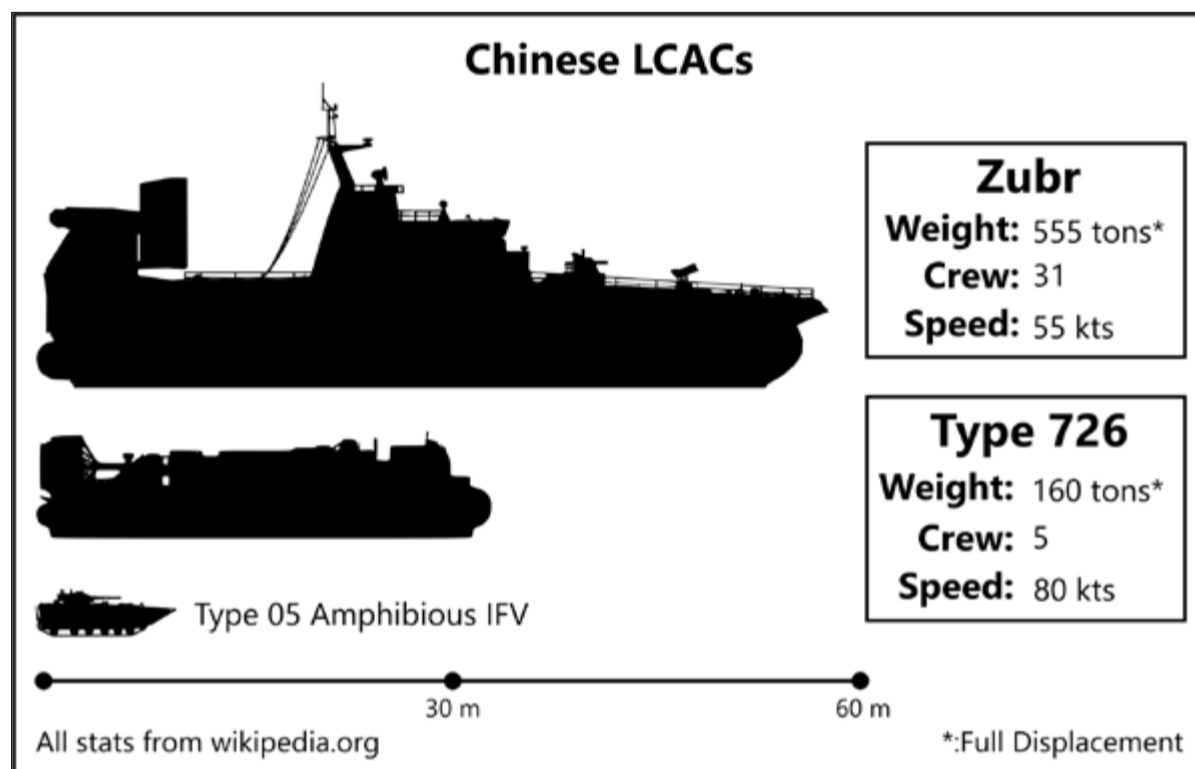
*Note: China uses a different system for counting aircraft generations than western countries



Chinese LCAC Development

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from an article in China’s *Shipborne Weapons* magazine provides an overview of China’s long path toward developing Landing Craft Air Cushions (LCAC)—military hovercraft.

With the PLA Navy Marine Corps undergoing rapid expansion, there is a need for commiserate number of ship-to-shore connectors. Hovercraft or Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) type ships allow rapid movement of tanks and equipment from ships at sea to beaches and even further inland. Importantly, their design allows them to navigate environments where other amphibious ships (like landing tank ships) or amphibious tanks are unable to approach. However, as explained in the article, China’s experience in developing successful hovercraft has been anything but easy.



“Chinese LCACs” by Peter Wood

Work began on small passenger hovercraft in the 1960s with the first trials in 1971. These first hovercraft were limited to river journeys on the Yangtze River. Development of an ocean capable craft, the 50-70 ton Type 722 began in the late 70s, with long-distance tests in the Bohai Gulf in 1980. Difficulties with power plants and other aspects of the technology, however, limited the capabilities of these hovercraft. Purchases and license-production deals have been more successful. The Type 726 (Yuyi class) LCACs have been purchased from Ukraine (the primary shipyard responsible for them at Feodosia in Crimea is now under Russian control). China has continued to attempt to indigenize the design, manufacturing more at its own shipyards and adopting engine domestic engine technology for later variants. China also has purchased two of the 550+ton Ukrainian Zubr LCAC and produced two more under license. More appear to be under construction.

China has built seven Type 071 (Yuzhao) amphibious assault ships—each of which can accommodate four Type 726 LCACs. The 250-meter-long Type 075 LHD currently under construction in Shanghai is likely capable of transporting at least two of the Type 726 LCACs. Open source analysts observing building programs at China’s major shipyards via commercial satellite imagery have noted more Type 726As under construction.

China is rapidly expanding its amphibious and expeditionary power projection capabilities. Given defense priorities such as contested islands in the South and East China Seas and Taiwan, developing fast ship-to-shore connectors to move troops and material into a beachhead will remain a major construction priority for Chinese shipbuilders for the foreseeable future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Type 726 hovercraft have a displacement of between 150–160 tons, are approximately 30 meters long, and 16 meters wide. They have a maximum load of about 50 tons, a maximum speed of more than 60 knots at sea, and a range of 320 nautical miles. They can carry a single Type 99 or Type 96 main battle tank or 4 armored vehicles.”



Continued: Chinese LCAC Development

Source: “国产气垫船的创新发展 (Innovation and Development of Homemade Hovercraft),” *Shipborne Weapons* 《舰载武器》, May 2019 pp. 42- 48.

The Type 726 hovercraft used by the Chinese navy currently has six vessels: the prototype, No. 3320, Nos. 3321 and 3322 from the first production group, and Nos. 3330, 3331, and 3332 from the second production group. The 726 hovercraft is a supporting project of the Type 071 comprehensive landing ship, but due to the difficulty of the involved technology, the overall progress lagged behind the Type 071. The first 726 hovercraft, later renamed No. 3320, conducted a test in the Pearl River (near Hong Kong) in 2009 and was further improved in 2010 to carry out escort missions with the Type 071 “Kunlunshan” [昆仑山] and participate in the testing. It was not until 2011 that the No. 3320 hovercraft officially entered service after publicly participating in an amphibious landing exercise.

Type 726 hovercraft have a displacement of between 150–160 tons, are approximately 30 meters long, and 16 meters wide. They have a maximum load of about 50 tons, a maximum speed of more than 60 knots at sea, and a range of 320 nautical miles. They can carry a single Type 99 or Type 96 main battle tank or 4 armored vehicles.

The Type 071 comprehensive landing dock can accommodate four Type 726s. Large and medium-sized hovercraft, although not as amazing, its technical threshold has forced countries to look at the aviation industry slightly associated with the high-precision, high-cost ship species, and the most core of which is its gas turbine engine is generally the core aircraft of aviation engines. The 726 also faced the weakest heart problem at the beginning of its development. In 2005, Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) modified the core design of the WS-10 engine (used in fighter jets) and modified it for use in LCACs as the QC-70 gas turbine.

It was not until 2013, three years after the first boat was made, that the second 3321 entered service after further development. The 726 has experienced “growing pains,” but it has been doggedly developing, and beginning with the No. 3321 hovercraft, which entered service in 2013, the design has matured. In 2016, the Type 726 hovercraft began to enter mass production.

The total number of type 071 integrated landing ships and Type 726s is increasing in the new round of naval plans. Practice shows that our country based on self-reliance and hard work, and finally developed a focus on mission, with Chinese characteristics of dual-use hovercraft, and achieved better military and economic benefits.

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Chinese Investors Interested in Strategic Philippine Islands

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese investors are investing in three Philippine islands. As the accompanying passage from a Philippine news source explains, the moves are concerning due to the strategic implications of the islands.

Fuga Island, north of the main island of Luzon, is part of the Batanes Group, an archipelago that stretches north toward Taiwan. The area is a strategic east-west bottleneck between the South China Sea and Pacific. It also has been a transit point between Taiwan and the Philippines. One leg of the Imperial Japanese Army's invasion of the Philippines during WWII, for example, transited the area as forces were moved from Formosa (Taiwan).

One Philippine military official interviewed for the article suggested “We could become an accessory to China’s attempt to take over Taiwan. The current threat to Taiwan is currently from the west. If China establishes its footprint in Fuga, the threat would also be from the south.”

The other two islands at the center of the investment controversy are Grande Island and its much smaller islet Chiquita, which sit in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, formerly a major US naval base. The island’s location is also of concern due to its proximity to disputed areas in the West Philippine Sea and Scarborough Shoal claimed by China (see map).

While the companies that have expressed interest in investing in these islands have stated they are for agricultural and tourist purposes, Philippine observers are wary. The article notes that Chinese investment in Cambodia, ostensibly for economic purposes, has increasingly drawn skepticism, particularly given 3,400-meter runway and deep-water port under construction—features not typical to tourist destinations.

Chinese investment has been welcomed by the current Philippine administration, and multi-billion dollar assistance and development packages are key to reaching election pledges related to poverty reduction. However, the article notes that recent surveys have shown that trust for China has decreased in the face of ongoing tensions in the South China Sea—including the sinking of a Philippine fishing boat. The Philippines had also protested Chinese maritime survey activity conducted in the Benham Rise, an area of elevated undersea features to the east of Luzon.

While the power of Chinese investment has given China significant sway in the Philippines, strategic concerns about their long-term implications for national security are rising. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



“Areas of interest to China within the Philippines” by Peter Wood

“For the Philippine Navy, Fuga and all other features in the Batanes Group of Islands are considered “strategic features” because “they can potentially control access to Luzon Strait.”



Continued: Chinese Investors Interested in Strategic Philippine Islands

Source: “Frances Mangosing, “Chinese investors eye 3 PH isles,” *Inquirer.net [Philippines]*, 5 August 2019. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/178612/chinese-investors-eye-3-ph-isles>

Chinese investors are targeting three strategic islands in the northern Philippines for transformation into economic and tourism zones.

The islands — Fuga in Cagayan province, and adjacent Grande and Chiquita in Subic Bay, Zambales province — play significant roles in the country’s national security, according to military officials.

Fuga Island, part of the country’s second northernmost island group, provides access to the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, while Subic Bay is just 260 kilometers from Panatag Shoal that China seized from the Philippines in 2012.

The Philippines secured \$12.16 billion worth of investments as part of the 19 business deals signed between Filipino and Chinese companies on the sidelines of President Rodrigo Duterte’s visit to Beijing in April for the Belt and Road Initiative forum. ...

One agreement is for a proposed \$2-billion “Smart City” to be built by Xiamen-based Fong Zhi Enterprise Corp. on Fuga Island.

The Chinese company hopes to build an agriculture breeding center and soil improvement project, medical schools and a high-tech industrial park, according to the Cagayan Economic Zone Authority (Ceza), which supervises the development of the island. ...

Aside from the \$2-billion Fuga project, Ceza has obtained \$1.9 billion worth of committed projects in other parts of Cagayan, which is strategically located at the country’s northeastern tip.

The 10,000-hectare Fuga Island is a quiet, coastal town in Babuyan archipelago, the second northernmost island group in the Philippines. Its location provides access to both sides of the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. ...

For the Philippine Navy, Fuga and all other features in the Batanes Group of Islands are considered “strategic features” because “it can potentially control access to Luzon Strait.”

“It is one of the rationales for establishing a presence on Mavulis Island at the border with Taiwan,” said the Navy spokesperson, Capt. Jonathan Zata, referring to the naval detachment launched in the northernmost part of the Philippines this year.

Fuga Island is also considered “unique” by the Navy for its private airfield on one of the adjacent islets and lies astride a telecommunications submarine cable connecting the country with mainland Asia.

In the country’s northwestern side, GFTG Property Holdings and Sanya CEDF Sino-Philippine Investment Corp. forged an agreement for a \$298-million project to develop the adjacent Grande and Chiquita islands under the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority. It was also one of the deals signed in April.

Subic Bay, a former US military base until it closed in 1992, is about 260 kilometers from the Chinese-controlled Panatag Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the country’s exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

Both Grande and Chiquita served as key defenses of Spain and the United States during their colonization of the Philippines.

Grande Island sits at the mouth of Subic Bay and served as an important naval fortification for the United States during World War II.

On the western side of the Philippines, Beijing has been flexing its military muscle to have effective control of the South China Sea, one of the biggest potential flashpoints in the region. ...

A Chinese presence on the island would allow unrestricted access to both the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea and could drag the Philippines in a possible China-Taiwan conflict, he said. ...

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said his office had not been consulted by the business sector on the security implications of the Chinese investments. “I’ll have the intel make an assessment,” he said.



Xi Jinping's Summer Foreign Policy Tour Displays "Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics"

by John Dotson

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/xi-jinpings-summer-foreign-policy-tour-displays-great-power-diplomacy-with-chinese-characteristics/>

OE Watch Commentary: In the month of June, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping kept up an ambitious international travel schedule, spending nearly half the month abroad on four major trips: to Russia, Central Asia, North Korea, and the G20 Summit in Japan. Although diplomatic travel is a normal part of the duties of any national leader, Xi's travel itinerary for June 2019 was unusually heavy. Furthermore, it was accompanied by a propaganda campaign in the People's Republic of China (PRC) media apparatus that, even by the standards of CCP discourse, was intensive. As described in state media (CCTV) on 29 June, "Through June, Chairman Xi Jinping made four successive foreign trips, creating a new record in the foreign relations history of New China [that] once more raised up China's international influence, once more perfected the totality of [China's] diplomatic position, and once again expanded space for [China's] strategic plans."

Throughout Xi's diplomatic tour, five narrative propaganda themes were particularly prominent: Promotion of a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Russia; touting the BRI as a "win-win" proposition for both China and participating countries, and as a model for international economic development; the promotion of "multilateralism," even while placing China at the center of world affairs; the depiction of China as a model of successful governance, and as a bedrock of stability amidst a chaotic global environment caused by the United States; and promotion of Xi's own cult of personality, depicting Xi as a brilliant foreign policy thinker and inspiration to leaders in the developing world.

Xi's travels commenced with a trip to Russia in the first week of June, where he first conducted meetings in Moscow with President Vladimir Putin, and then with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The leading theme stressed in PRC propaganda was that Xi and Russian leaders were working together, in the midst of a world that "is becoming increasingly uncertain and unstable," to forge a "comprehensive strategic partnership" that would contribute to a cooperative multilateral world. As the accompanying passage from Chinese state-owned *Xinhua* demonstrates, the unnamed but clearly identified villain responsible for this global instability is the United States, accused of "blatantly violat[ing] the international law and the basic norms of international relations, [and] bull[ying] others with sanctions recklessly..."

Xi's next stop was a mid-month trip to Central Asia. On 12 June, Xi traveled to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where he held meetings with Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov and Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. PRC press coverage of these meetings stressed similar themes: China's positive role in promoting stability and security in Central Asia; the opportunities offered by the BRI; and that regional governments firmly supported the PRC's measures aimed at "safeguarding peace and stability in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and cracking down on extremism." This coverage also depicted regional leaders as eagerly looking to Xi for guidance. On 13 June, Xi also held his first face-to-face meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The centerpiece of Xi's visit was an address on 14 June at the 19th annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the quasi-alliance of China, Russia, and Central Asian states (and later, India and Pakistan) first formed in 2001.

On 15-16 June, Xi was in Dushanbe, Tajikistan for meetings with other national leaders, and for the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a parallel diplomatic forum to the SCO that includes membership by 27 Asian and Middle Eastern states. At the CICA conference, Xi presented a speech titled "Working Together for a New Progress of Security and Development in Asia," which once more stressed the themes of building a "community of common destiny," and a "new model of international relations" (focused on multilateral cooperation. Within this construct, the "platform of Belt and Road cooperation" would be a central means "to secure a sustained driver for our common development."

On the heels of the trip to Central Asia, Xi Jinping then conducted a visit to North Korea on 20-21 June. This trip was focused more on closed door meetings rather than on public speeches or events. PRC propaganda themes surrounding the visit were more subdued, and largely focused on bland statements such as the "need to continue to stick to peace talks so as to make even greater contributions to peace, stability and prosperity in the region."

The capstone of Xi's June travels was the G-20 Summit in Osaka, Japan on 28-29 June. Xi conducted a meeting of leaders from the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa); and a side meeting with French President Macron to urge greater international "multilateralism." In his G20 speech, Xi once again touted the BRI. As depicted in PRC media, however, the centerpiece of Xi's trip was a side meeting with US President Donald Trump. As the second accompanying passage from *Xinhua* shows, the meeting was reported to have brought about a deal "to restart economic and trade consultations between the [two] countries on the basis of equality and mutual respect, injecting much-needed confidence into the global economy and markets." PRC media was effusive in its praise, with *China Daily* proclaiming that Xi "achiev[ed] diplomatic success in... upholding multilateralism, partnerships, mutually beneficial cooperation and providing directions for global growth and governance."



Continued: Xi Jinping's Summer Foreign Policy Tour Displays "Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics"

As the third accompanying passage shows, domestically-oriented Chinese-language media's coverage of the G-20 summit ramped up Xi's personality cult to a new level. In an official commentary under the name of PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅), Wang stated that the G20 meeting was held "at a historical juncture interwoven with a chaotic international situation," during which "Xi displayed the foresight and sagacity of Chinese leaders."

Xi Jinping's June 2019 summer foreign policy tour represented an unusual level of foreign travel for a paramount Chinese leader. All four trips allowed Xi to bolster a domestic image as a lynchpin world leader—with the PRC's state-controlled press providing effusive praise of Xi's accomplishments as an international statesman, and his status as a model for leaders of developing countries. It also represented one of the clearest displays yet seen during Xi's tenure of "great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics"—characterized by unabashed assertion of international leadership, wrapped in the language of benevolence and international cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Dotson)**



CICA Meeting Photo.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60756>, CC BY SA 4.0

Source: "Stronger China-Russia partnership key to global peace, stability: Xi," *Xinhua*, 6 June 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-06/06/c_138122568.htm

[S]ome individual country, regardless of the consequence, has blatantly violated the international law and the basic norms of international relations, [and] bullied others with sanctions recklessly... which has hindered global economic growth and impaired the growth of global trade.

Source: "Xinhua Headlines: Xi, Trump agree to restart trade consultations, set tone for China-U.S. ties," *Xinhua*, 29 June 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-06/29/c_138185032.htm

[The two leaders] ... clinched a deal to restart economic and trade consultations between their countries on the basis of equality and mutual respect, injecting much-needed confidence into the global economy and markets.

Source: "不畏浮云遮望眼——国务委员兼外交部长王毅谈习近平主席出席二十国集团领导人大阪峰会 (Not afraid of floating clouds and obscurity - State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi talks with President Xi Jinping at the G20 Leaders Osaka Summit)," *CCTV*, 29 June 2019. <http://news.cctv.com/2019/06/29/ARTIfsxdelQEKWMO8yAFfrgu190629.shtml>

Chairman Xi Jinping stood amidst these historical tides, not allowing clouds to cover his eyes, and from a new model of international relations and from the heights of a community of common destiny for mankind, and with clear direction for the world economy and global governance... displayed the foresight and sagacity of Chinese leaders, assuming and bringing into play the functions of a responsible great power... The present chaotic world situation still persists, and various unstable and uncertain factors are still spreading; we should take Xi Jinping foreign relations thought as our guide... and do our utmost to initiate the new achievements of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.



China, Laos, Burma and Thailand Continue Mekong River Patrols

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 October 2011, suspected drug smugglers attacked two cargo ships in the “Golden Triangle” of the Mekong River (where the borders of Thailand, Burma and Laos meet) and killed all 13 of their Chinese crew members. In response, China urged the Thai and Burmese governments to do more to protect Chinese shipping and suspended all shipping on the Mekong. Despite little press reporting on the incident outside of China, there was a domestic outcry for the government to step up its actions. The suspension of its shipping operations came to an end on 10 December 2011, when China joined forces with Laos, Burma, and Thailand to launch the first of many joint security operations along the Mekong River.



Mekong River.

Source: 松岡明芳 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mekong_River_Luang_Phabang-Laos_%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%A1%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%99%E0%B9%89%E0%B8%B3%E0%B9%82%E0%B8%82%E0%B8%87_%E3%83%A1%E3%82%B3%E3%83%B3%E5%B7%9D_DSCF7487.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

As the accompanying article discusses, nearly eight years after the first security forces took to the water, the Asian countries launched their 84th joint patrol. The joint efforts have reportedly created a major deterrent in a region that has been heavily laden with crime and drug production.

The Mekong River is an important resource for millions of people in Asia. It runs through China, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. It is used for a variety of activities including irrigation, water supplies, transportation, fisheries, and power generation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“A total of 13,300 officers and 702 vessels have participated in the past 83 missions that have ‘imposed a powerful deterrent and dealt a hefty blow’...”

Source: “84th Mekong River Joint Patrol Begins,” *Xinhua Net*, 23 July 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/23/c_138251208.htm

Seven vessels participated in the patrol, which will involve inspections, a crackdown on drug crime and an anti-drug publicity campaign, according to the provincial public security department.

The joint patrols started in December 2011 after a gang hijacked two cargo ships and killed 13 Chinese sailors in Thai waters on October 5 that year. A total of 13,300 officers and 702 vessels have participated in the past 83 missions that have “imposed a powerful deterrent and dealt a hefty blow” to crime on the river, the department said.



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>

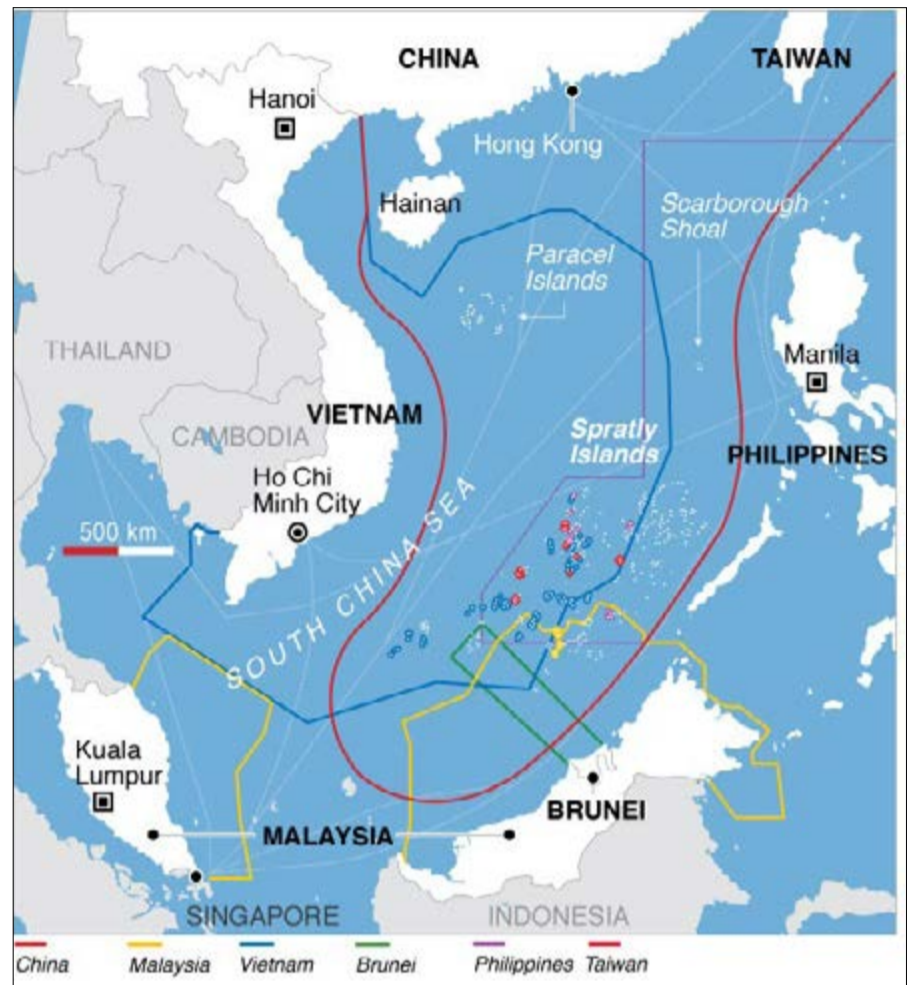


A Vietnamese View on Spratly Islands Confrontation with China

OE Watch Commentary: In the first week of July, a Chinese ship carrying out seismic surveys entered waters surrounding the Spratly Islands claimed by Vietnam. This prompted four Vietnamese naval ships to confront the Chinese ship and two Chinese naval ships to patrol the area as well. This incident rekindled passions in Vietnam similar to those in 2014 when Chinese drilling near the Spratly Islands in Vietnamese waters led to anti-Chinese protests in Vietnam. One example of a vehement Vietnamese reaction to this recent incident can be found in the accompanying passage from a Vietnamese-language news source.

The article argues that China's purpose in sending the ship into Vietnamese waters was to establish a precedent and gradually move deeper into Vietnamese waters each time it conducts such an operation. The author claims the Vietnamese naval ships were too passive in these engagements, but defers to the navy to adopt the most appropriate strategy to deal with Chinese incursions. In addition, the author understands the challenge of dealing with irregular warfare, noting that in the past, "Russia, China and even Vietnam used unorthodox fighting styles in non-transparent wars," suggesting a similar case with the Chinese ship that entered the Spratly Islands.

What irks the author in particular is Vietnam's general silence about the matter and refusal to condemn China publicly. Noting that "the US, EU, Japan, India, Australia and Canada" all oppose China's posture in the South China Sea, the author finds it to be humiliating that Vietnam does not make China aware of the illegality of its actions and generate more international opprobrium towards China. Rather, the author states that Vietnamese media was silent on the issue to prevent Vietnamese citizens from knowing how their navy is responding to incursions. The author therefore concludes that Vietnam has been hit by China but Vietnamese leaders do not acknowledge the pain and still continue to visit China to speak with Chinese officials. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



South China Sea Claims map.

Source: Voice of America via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_China_Sea_claims_map.jpg, Public domain

“Vietnam has been excessively silent for a long time about the South China Sea dispute.”

Source: “Bị đánh đau không dám rên cũng là nỗi nhục lớn (Suffering from grief and not complaining is also a great humiliation),” Viettin, 16 July 2019. <http://www.viettin.de/node/1113>

The Haiyang Dizhi 8 ship of China violated Vietnam's economic sovereignty zone in Tu Chinh beach area. China has done so many times, partly to frustrate Vietnam, and in part to create precedents to add new milestones deep into Vietnam's waters. The presence of the Vietnamese police ship preventing it, though not at an intense level, is not new. Without being a soldier, I dare not criticize the passive defenses of the Vietnamese maritime police and navy during the past decades of violations of territorial waters, shootings, beatings of fishermen and dancing.

In the past, countries such as Russia, China and even Vietnam used unorthodox fighting styles in non-transparent wars. China is armed with fishermen, using fishing vessels instead of a navy to suppress foreign fishing vessels in waters. But the most frustrating thing, especially in today's complicated world situation, is the attitude of Vietnamese media. The press was also silent, even refusing to mention the fact that the Hai Duong 8 was in Tu Chinh. Vietnam has been excessively silent for a long time about the South China Sea dispute.

China is increasingly isolated in all areas: economy, military, diplomacy. The US, EU, Japan, India, Australia and Canada all conduct diplomatic and military actions on the East China Sea to warn China. An alliance against the technology thieves is forming. Hong Kong and Taiwan are also coming out against Chinese conspiracies. The strange thing is that such a big confrontation, which lasted for a few days, was the only source of the South China Morning Post, BBC, AFP, VOA and Vietnamese Facebook. Now I feel that being hit without pain is a great humiliation.



Japan to Acquire UAVs For Maritime Domain Awareness

OE Watch Commentary: According to an article in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the Japanese Ministry of Defense is planning to acquire more unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to improve maritime domain awareness. Japanese territory includes more than 6,852 islands and the country is dependent on maritime trade. At the same time, it has territorial disputes with China, Russia and South Korea; and Japanese Aerial Self Defense Forces aircraft frequently intercept aircraft or monitor naval vessels near disputed areas.

According to the article, the most likely candidate is the MQ-8C Fire Scout, an unmanned helicopter capable of flying at a height of 5,000 meters. While short-legged compared to fixed-wing drones, these helicopters are capable of being operated off the decks of destroyers or Izumo-class multi-purpose destroyers. The Izuomo-class are 248 meters long and equipped with a flat deck intended to support multiple helicopters. The ships are to be reconfigured to be capable of conducting F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) fighter operations.



MQ-8C Fire Scout flying over Webster Field Annex.

Source: US Navy via Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/85/MQ-8C_Fire_Scout_flying_over_Webster_Field_Annex.jpg, Public Domain

In 2018 Japan purchased three RQ-4 Global Hawk drones. These “High Altitude Long Endurance” (HALE) drones operate at altitudes upward of 15,000 meters (60,000 feet) for more than 20 hours.

Use of drones could help reduce tensions with Japan’s neighbors, particularly China. In 2013 it was reported that a Chinese naval vessel illuminated a Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF) ship with a fire control radar--a hostile act. Another unconfirmed report from 2019 stated that a South Korean destroyer similarly targeted a JMSDF patrol aircraft. Use of drones could prevent a further escalation or at least prevent loss of life when used to patrol sensitive areas. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“With Chinese government ships regularly sailing around the Senkaku Islands and the Chinese military becoming more active in places such as the East China Sea and Pacific Ocean, figuring out how to operate with limited personnel and equipment has become an issue.”

Source: “MSDF to acquire 20 unmanned helicopters,” *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Japan), 28 July 2019. <https://the-japan-news.com/new/article/0005902898>

The government plans to introduce about 20 large, unmanned helicopters to Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers and other ships, several government sources said.

In response to China’s maritime expansion, the government wants to strengthen its early warning and surveillance activities around the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture. The helicopter model is expected to be selected in fiscal 2022, with the procurement starting in fiscal 2023, the sources said.

Early warning and surveillance activities in the East China Sea are currently conducted using MSDF vessels, surveillance helicopters, P-3C surveillance planes and other equipment. With Chinese government ships regularly sailing around the Senkaku Islands and the Chinese military becoming more active in places such as the East China Sea and Pacific Ocean, figuring out how to operate with limited personnel and equipment has become an issue. Ship-based unmanned aircraft can monitor faraway foreign vessels and other objects that cannot be captured by shipboard radar, which would expand the area over which a single MSDF vessel is able to cover in its surveillance.

Unmanned aircraft can also fly at night and in bad weather, giving them a broader range of operation than manned aircraft.

Learning from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant of Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., the government is considering equipping the drones with radiation sensors. The Defense Ministry wants drones to take over duties that are risky for manned aircraft.

The unmanned helicopters would likely be deployed to Izumo- and Hyuga-class destroyers, as well as to a new destroyer with minesweeping capabilities.

The MQ-8C Fire Scout is considered the leading candidate. Made by Northrop Grumman Corp. of the United States, the 12.6-meter-long, 2.7-meter-wide unmanned helicopter can detect the movements of ships and other objects from an altitude of about 5,000 meters. The U.S. Navy’s MQ-8B version is said to be capable of flying continuously for more than eight hours, or of operating for five hours over an area 200 kilometers from its base ship.

In December last year, the Cabinet decided to introduce three unmanned helicopters as part of the five-year Medium Term Defense Program for fiscal 2019 to 2023. The government wants to create a force of 20 such helicopters over the next decade or so. Under the current legal framework, operating unmanned aircraft must be monitored by direct eyesight from manned aircraft or other locations. So the government will need to study and affect a change to the law to allow unmanned helicopters to operate independently.

Indonesia Closes in on Poso Terrorist Cell

OE Watch Commentary: In recent weeks Indonesia has made progress on eliminating any remaining al-Qaeda-loyal Jemaa Islamiya (JI) cells in the country. The accompanying passage from a recent article in the Indonesian-language publication *Tempo* discusses Indonesian police now going after another group, the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), considered the deadliest terrorist cell in Poso, Sulawesi. The article states the cell is led by Ali Kalora, who took over its leadership after the Indonesian police killed the group's former leader, Santoso, in 2016. Santoso had made a name for himself for terrorizing the area around Poso and pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), although ISIS never recognized MIT as one of its affiliates.

According to the article, the police now believe MIT is down to only nine members in Poso and has only three firearms. Moreover, the police reportedly have intelligence on the location of the group's hideout. However, due to its remoteness, the police are yet to be able to reach it and stage an operation. The article mentions that this remaining MIT cell has been too busy on the run to launch attacks, having killed only one person in the last year.



Monument of Poso Regency, January 2017.

Source: Bagas Chrisara via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monument_of_Poso_Regency,_January_2017.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

According to the article, the police have extended their operation for capturing or killing Ali Kalora and his cell members by three months. Once the mission is completed, Poso will be free from MIT's violence. Moreover, with JI increasingly marginalized, counter-terrorism in Indonesia appears to be more effective now than any time in recent history. Nevertheless, the ideology of the terrorists still permeates groups that remain above ground and participate in various mass demonstration movements in Indonesia. This mode of operation (staying just below the threshold of violence but organizing and preparing for it) appears to have become the default as a result of the difficulty in taking arms against the state. (Also see: "Indonesia Breaks Up Al-Qaeda-Loyal Jemaa Islamiyah Cell" in the August issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“According to the police, the number of members of the MIT group is shrinking and now it only has nine members.”

Source: “Belum Berhasil Ringkus Ali Kalora, Operasi Tinombala Diperpanjang (Not yet Succeeding in Capturing Ali Kalora, Operation Tinombala is Extended),” *Tempo (Indonesia)*, 11 July 2019. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1223610/belum-berhasil-ringkus-ali-kalora-operasi-tinombala-diperpanjang/full&view=ok>

The National Police extended the operation period of the Tinombala Task Force for the next three months, starting from July 2019. The Tinombala Task Force was initially formed to destroy and capture the East Indonesia Mujahidin terrorist network (MIT) led by Santos. On July 18, 2016, Santoso was killed after a shootout with the Tinombala task force. After Santoso's death, Ali Kalora rose to take the reins of leadership.

According to the police, the number of members of the MIT group is shrinking and now it only has nine members. They are equipped with three firearms. The Tinombala Task Force already knows the hiding location, but it takes a long time to reach the place.

The Kalora group has also been accused of being the mastermind behind crimes in Poso. One of them was a murder that was believed to have occurred on last June 26, 2019.



India and Pakistan: Deal or No Deal for Russian Rifles

OE Watch Commentary: Since the Russian government began security cooperation with the government of Pakistan several years ago, there have been questions and concerns in India about how close the cooperation might develop and what it would mean for Indian-Russian relations (see: “The Impact of Pakistan-Russia Security Cooperation on India,” in the December 2018 issue of *OE Watch*). The accompanying excerpted articles report on a recent deal between the governments of Russia and India to manufacture a Kalashnikov variant in India. In addition, they discuss the Russian government’s rejection of an agreement with Pakistan for the purchase of an unknown variant of Kalashnikovs.



AK-103 Assault Rifle.

Source: Burnyburnout via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AK-103_Assault_Rifle.JPG, CC BY-SA 3.0

The article from India’s *Economic Times* reports on a recent agreement between India’s Ordnance Factory Board and Russia’s Rosoboronexport and that the joint venture was the “fastest ever” created and that it had “firm political will” from the highest levels on both sides.” The article also notes that the venture “will produce the AK 203 assault rifles (a variant of the AK-103) that are to be the mainstay of the Indian Army in the years to come” and that these “will replace the INSAS assault rifles currently in service.”

The article from *The Print*, another Indian source, looks at the deal that the government of Pakistan tried to make with the Russian government “to buy new generation Kalashnikov rifles” and how Russian officials assured “India that there will not be any military deal with Islamabad.” The article points out previous examples of security cooperation between Russia and Pakistan, including the delivery of Russian Mi-35 helicopters. Neither article mentions it, but units from the armed forces of Russia and Pakistan are set to take part in the fourth of a series of joint military exercises in October 2019. Overall, the articles provide an update on how Russian security cooperation with India and Pakistan is playing out in the region. While the Russian government maintains a relationship with Pakistan, it appears to have put a priority on its relations with the government of India. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“They also added that the Russian top leadership has assured India of no such military cooperation with Pakistan – an assurance which came after India raised its concerns with Moscow this year.”

Source: Manu Pubby, “Joint venture for AK 203 rifles factory at Amethi was the ‘fastest ever’ created with Russia,” *Economic Times*, 9 July 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/joint-venture-for-ak-203-rifles-factory-at-amethi-was-the-fastest-ever-created-with-russia/articleshow/70144865.cms>

The joint venture to produce Kalashnikov rifles at a factory in Amethi was the ‘fastest ever’ created by Russia for an Indian venture and had ‘firm political will’ from the highest levels on both sides...The Amethi factory, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March this year, weeks before the election, will produce the AK 203 assault rifles that are to be the mainstay of the Indian Army in the years to come.

While the factory is getting functional with the supply of equipment needed to manufacture the rifles, the Army is yet to place an order for the AK 203 with Russian officials saying that technical and commercial proposals are likely to be submitted by the end of this month.

...Sources told ET that 6.7 lakh rifles are to be made at the Amethi factory in the first phase, which is likely to be expanded significantly over the next few years...These rifles will replace the INSAS assault rifles currently in service with the Army and are likely to be supplied to paramilitary forces in the future also.

The Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited joint venture for production of Kalashnikov assault is between India’s Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) and Russia’s Rosoboronexport and Kalashnikov Group parented by Rostec.

Source: Snehesh Alex Philip, “Russia rejects Pakistan request for 50,000 AK rifles, assures India of no deals in future,” *The Print*, 17 July 2019. <https://theprint.in/defence/russia-rejects-pakistan-request-for-50000-ak-rifles-assures-india-of-no-deals-in-future/264004/>

The Russian government has rejected Pakistan’s request to buy new generation Kalashnikov rifles...assuring India that there will not be any military deal with Islamabad.

Top sources in the defence and security establishment told ThePrint that India was informed about the rejection earlier this year.

...Pakistan had sent in a proposal to buy a consignment of 50,000 AK series of assault rifles in an attempt to deepen military ties with Russia. The sources, however, did not mention the particular model sought by the neighbouring country.

Pakistan’s proposal had surprised many in the Indian establishment since the nation’s army uses the AK 56 – manufactured by China...

AK 56 is the Chinese version of the AK 47, but lighter. A number of AK 56s have been seized from the terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast...

They also added that the Russian top leadership has assured India of no such military cooperation with Pakistan – an assurance which came after India raised its concerns with Moscow this year.

Indian intelligence agencies have been keeping a close watch on the activities of Pakistani army and their attempts to build ties with Russia...Russia and Pakistan had in 2015 signed a deal for four Mi-35M attack helicopters, which have already been delivered. The following year, in 2016, Russia and Pakistan also carried out their first joint military exercise...



What's in a Name? S-400 Parts Start Arriving at "Mürted" Air Base

OE Watch Commentary: After much controversy, the first set of S-400 components was delivered to Turkey in Russian cargo planes in mid-July. With the arrival of the initial parts, the debate about the S-400s turned from whether or when they will arrive, to where they will be deployed. While no official decision has been announced, the parts' delivery to the Mürted Air Base outside Ankara has led many to speculate that this base is a leading contender. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources shed light on this debate, highlighting the symbolic meaning of the word "Mürted."

As the passages note, this base was previously called the "Akıncı Air Base," but its name was changed to "Mürted" after it served as the headquarters of the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016. Much has been written in the Turkish press about the meaning of the word "Mürted." Its literal definition, according to the passages, is someone who left Islam and became an apostate. However, it has a slightly different meaning in the context of Turkish/Ottoman history. As the second passage discusses, the name "Mürted" originally comes from the 1402 Ankara War between the Ottoman and Timurid Empires. During this war, some Tatars and Anatolian principalities from the Ottoman side defected and switched over to the other side. As a result, the Ottoman military lost the war and its sultan was taken hostage. As the third passage discusses, this was the "greatest blow against the Ottoman Empire during its founding and rise," and the name "Mürted" was given to this area to describe the act of betrayal against the Ottoman sultan that took place here. (In 1995, the name was changed to Akıncı; making the recent change a restoration of the area's original name.)



Mürted Air Base.

Source: Ex13 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ak%C4%B1nc%C4%B1_Air_Base_2016.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

As the fourth passage notes, President Erdoğan invoked this history in a recent event entitled "Evening to Commemorate the Martyrs of 15 July 2016," drawing a parallel between 1402 and the perpetrators of the failed coup attempt, saying, "This name ["Mürted"] was given to those who betray their own country, their own military and those who went to fight on Timur's [Khan] side: Traitors. And now again, traitors."

The final passage also points out, this was the base from which "the F-16s that bombed the Turkish Grand National Assembly [Parliament] ... had taken off..." during the failed coup. After this incident, the base was initially closed. Later, a suggestion was made to re-name it "Mürted," given that a similar incident had taken place here 614 years earlier. The author points out that it "is tradition in Turkey to change the names of places that witnessed bad events." He also claims that the selection of "Mürted" as the place of delivery for the system is one of several "important symbolisms that could help us understand the reasons and threat perceptions that led to [the S-400s'] acquisition." Presumably, the name change to Mürted symbolizes the message to never forget the failed coup attempt; the S-400 arrival to Mürted symbolizes the warning to never attempt anything like it again. (Also see: "Turkish Commentators See Connection between Failed Coup and S-400 Purchase" in the August issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“This name was given to those who betray their own country, their own military...”
-Turkish President Erdoğan

Source: “İşte S-400’lerin konuşlanacağı yerler (Here are the places where the S-400s will be deployed),” *Haberturk.com*, 14 July 2019 (updated 22 July 2019). <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-haberi-iste-s-400-lerin-konuslanacagi-yerler-2504111>

Based on threat and risk analyses that are being done, one of the S-400 batteries will be deployed at one of the border towns of Şanlıurfa to counter any threats from Syria. The second battery will be deployed in a part of the Amanos [Mountains] to counter any threats from the Eastern Mediterranean. Let's not give any more details.... The main radar system will be at the Mürted Air Base in Ankara.



Continued: What's in a Name? S-400 Parts Start Arriving at "Mürted" Air Base

Source: "Mürted Hava Üssü nerede? Mürted ne demek? (Where is the Mürted Air Base? What does Mürted mean?)," *Sozcu.com.tr*, 12 July 2019. <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/gundem/murted-hava-ussu-nerede-murted-ne-demek-5227127/>

The Mürted Air Base (formerly the Akıncı Air Base) is a Turkish Air Force base located 35 km northwest of Ankara, near Ankara's town of Kahramankazan. This air base, which is under the 1st Tactical Air Force Command, contains the 4th Air Wing.

What does Mürted Mean? Mürted means someone who left Islam, who turned from [their] religion, and who rejected religion. [It means] a Muslim who became an apostate.

Where does the area of Mürted get its name? The area gets its name from the 1402 Ankara War, between the Ottoman and Timur [Timur Khan of the Timurid Empire] militaries. During the war, some of the Black Tatars and some Anatolian principalities ["beyliks"] from the Ottoman side defected and switched over to the Timur side. The Ottoman military lost this war and Sultan Yıldırım Beyazid was taken hostage.

Source: "Mürted ne demektir, anlamı nedir? Mürted Hava Üssü nerede? (What does Mürted mean? Where is the Mürted Air Base?)," *Aksam.com.tr*, 15 July 2019. <https://www.aksam.com.tr/ekonomi/murted-ne-demek-anlami-nedir-murted-hava-ussu-nerededir/haber-988999>

This [the 1402 Ankara War between Ottoman Beyazid and Timur Khan's forces] was the greatest blow against the Ottoman Empire during its founding and rise. Beyazid, who lost the war, was taken hostage by Timur [forces].... Following this war, the area was named Mürted. The word Mürted means some who left Islam to join another religion. The word was also used to describe some of the Ottoman principalities' act of betrayal against Beyazid.

Later, the Akıncı Base was established here. The fact that this base was the coordination center for the 15 July coup attempt, led to discussions of closing the base. The Prime Minister at the time, Binali Yıldırım, suggested the base be named Mürted, given that a similar incident had taken place here 614 years earlier.

The base, which had been named Mürted Air Base until the 1990s, was re-named the Akıncılar Air Base after the mid-1990s.

Source: "Mürted ne demek? Mürted Hava Üssü nerede? Mürted ile ilgili detaylar (What does Mürted mean? Where is the Mürted Air Base? [Here are] the details about Mürted)," *Haberturk.com.tr*, 12 July 2019. <https://www.haberturk.com/murted-ne-demek-murted-hava-ussu-nerede-2503812>

During an event entitled, "An Evening to Commemorate the Martyrs of 15 July," President Erdoğan brought up the similarity between Mürted and the Akıncı Base. Erdoğan said in his speech, "One of our pashas [high ranking military officers] suggested: "Let's call the Akıncı Base 'Mürted'." It was named Mürted before it was called Akıncı anyway. This name was given to those who betray their own country, their own military and those who went to fight on Timur's [Khan] side: Traitors. And now again, traitors."

Source: "Kadri Gürsel, "15 Temmuz darbe girişimi Türkiye'ye S-400 aldırdı (The 15 July coup attempt made Turkey purchase S-400s)," *Al Monitor.com*, 10 August 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2019/08/turkey-united-states-russia-coup-attempt-led-s400-deal.html>

The transfer of the first units of the strategic air defense system of S-400's which Turkey bought from Russia, and which started on 12 July, contained important symbolisms that could help us understand the reasons and threat perceptions that led to their acquisition.

...

The most important [symbolism] was the selection of the Mürted Air Base as the location for the arrival of the Russian planes carrying the units of a weapons system developed to down NATO war planes. ... Mürted, formerly "Akıncı" [Air Base] was the "headquarters" of the 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt organized to overthrow the Erdoğan government. The F-16s that bombed the Turkish Grand National Assembly [Parliament] and the Gölbaşı Police Special Operations Center near Ankara, had taken off from this base. Back then; it was called "Akıncı."

It is tradition in Turkey to change the names of places that witnessed bad events. This instance was the same; two months after the coup attempt, the Air Force erased the name "Akıncı" and returned the base to its previous name of "Mürted," which was the name used until 1995.

The coup-plotter pilots had flown the F-16's which were supposed to attack their targets in Ankara from the "Akıncı" Base exactly three years ago; and now, three years later, Russian planes carrying the S-400 system, [land]ed at this base...



Turkey's Military Bases Abroad

OE Watch Commentary: In the past decade, Turkey has built a robust military presence abroad, stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Horn of Africa to exert its influence and promote regional security. While the Turkish military has been actively engaged in Syria, it also maintains a presence in Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan as well as peacekeeping troops in the Balkans. The Turkish navy patrols the Black Sea, Aegean and Mediterranean seas to protect its territorial interests in surrounding waters and energy resources. The accompanying articles discuss the importance of these bases.

The first accompanying article lists the military bases Turkey established in the Middle East and Africa in recent years including in neighboring Iraq and Syria, the Persian Gulf, Red Sea (see: “A Turkish Military Base in the Red Sea,” in the February 2019 issue of *OE Watch*), Horn of Africa, and a new one they are considering in the Eastern Mediterranean. The article provides a number of reasons why Turkey established and deployed military to these overseas bases. First, these bases enable Turkey to “deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals” especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Second, they function as protectorates of Turkey’s interests and claims to natural resources. Third, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s “increasing perception of threat is an important factor for establishing bases” especially in Qatar and Somalia. Fourth, establishing bases in those regions where Turkey perceives threats, projects Turkey’s hard power to deter threats to its national security and interests. The article notes that maintaining some of these military bases could face challenges if Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE close Red Sea and Persian Gulf access to Turkey.

The second article from Turkish think tank *Turksam* provides insights into naval and air bases that Turkey is considering establishing in Cyprus. The article states that Turkey has recently been proactive in protecting its rights and preventing threats to its national interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. As the article argues that, to remain relevant in the region, Turkey must establish naval and air bases in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an entity only recognized by Turkey. This would enable Turkey to respond more rapidly to threats to its drilling ships engaged in natural gas discovery and drilling off the coast of Cyprus. Turkey is specifically looking at establishing an air base in Geçitkale and a naval base in Iskele, areas controlled by Turkish Cypriots. The Eastern Mediterranean has been a contentious region among littoral and other countries conducting natural gas exploration. (Also see: “Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean over Natural Gas,” in the December 2018 issue of *OE Watch* and “Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Threatens Turkey,” in the March 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“...Overseas military bases in both the Middle East and Africa... [enable] Ankara to deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals...”

Source: Paul Iddon, “The significance of Turkey’s overseas military bases,” *ahvalnews.com*, 13 July 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkish-military/significance-turkeys-overseas-military-bases>

Turkey has established several overseas military bases in both the Middle East and Africa in recent years. This enables Ankara to deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals – primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – in several key areas....

Turkey... has troops in neighboring Iraq and Syria as well as in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. In most of the countries where it currently stations forces Ankara has done so under agreements with the host governments.

Levent Özgül, a Turkish defense analyst, noted that Turkey has “formal expeditionary bases” in Qatar, Somalia, northern Cyprus and Sudan along with “informal activities in Tripoli, Libya” where Turkey supports and arms the Government of National Accord (GNA) against the UAE-backed Libyan National Army (LNA).

“The Qatar, Somalia and Sudan deployments and Libyan efforts are all against Saudi Arabia and the UAE,” Özgül told Ahval.

...

Özgül said Cyprus was “the hottest spot” where Turkey has military forces. Turkey’s drilling of recently discovered natural gas off the coast of the southern Republic of Cyprus is opposed by the European Union, other regional countries...

...

“Erdoğan’s increasing perception of threat is an important factor for establishing bases in Qatar and Somalia; but, beyond Erdoğan, Turkish military bases in Iraq and Syria is an outcome of deeper, long-term state policy against Kurdish nationalism,” Gürbüz told Ahval.

...

“Turkey’s regional ambitions and the geo-strategic rivalry in the Red Sea is a key driver for the Erdoğan regime in shaping threat perception,” Gürbüz said.

“Turkey’s overseas naval and maritime installations are an essential part of Turkey’s efforts to expand its soft power influence as well as its hard power projection...”



Continued: Turkey's Military Bases Abroad

Source: Gökhan Güler, “KKTC’ye Hava ve Deniz Üssü (Air and Sea Base in TRNC),” *turksam.org*, 21 June 2019. <http://turksam.org/kktcye-hava-ve-deniz-ussu>

The Turkish side has recently pursued a proactive policy to protect its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean... Recently... experts in the subject emphasized the necessity of urgently establishing a sea and air base in the TRNC.

The fact that the Turkish side has been proactively advocating for its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean for some time seems to have seriously disturbed some countries.

...

Accordingly, it has been considered that the air base can be built in Geçitkale and the naval base can be built in İskele area. The establishment of a naval and air bases in the TRNC will not only eliminate supply problems, but will also enable [Turkey] to intervene immediately in case of any situation.



Topographic map in English of the Red Sea.

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



Turkish Military Preparing for Another Operation in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Since last year, the Turkish government has discussed the possibility of a military operation to the east of the Euphrates River in Syria. The first accompanying article discusses the Turkish military's preparations for such an operation. The second article provides insight into a proposal from the Kurdish-led group known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) regarding such an operation.

As the first article, written by a former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs discusses, one of the main goals of such an operation would be to “interrupt the continuity of the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria,” specifically, to ensure that the SDF does not achieve territorial continuity along Turkey's southern border. Such an operation is not an easy one since it calls for consent from major players involved in the Syrian conflict. In addition, Turkey would need Russian approval to carry out a military operation of such magnitude. Furthermore, as the article notes, “Syria is strongly opposed to the creation of a safe zone controlled by the Turkish military.” Despite these, Turkey has deployed and stationed its military on the Turkish Syrian border in preparation for an imminent operation. As the passage notes, the deployment covers nearly 45 miles of border starting from Turkish town of Suruc across from the Kurdish controlled Syrian city of Kobane to the Turkish border town Akçakale. The deployment “includes two armored brigades, two mechanized infantry brigades and two commando brigades.”

Negotiations have been on-going regarding the extent and depth of such an operation, with several actors working to ensure that it would be limited. It is in this context that the second accompanying article is important. Speaking to an *Al Monitor* correspondent, Mazloum Kobane, the commander-in-chief of the SDF, provides details of an offer they made to Turkey. It lays out what would be acceptable to them, and some of the compromises they would be open to making in return for certain concessions. Kobane states that the SDF sought a dialogue with Turkey to propose a working solution, after “Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened an imminent incursion east of the Euphrates” in December 2018. The Kurdish Commander states that Kurds proposed several things to Turkey. First, they said that a safe zone of slightly over three miles would be acceptable unlike the over 18 miles demanded by Turkey. Second, they proposed a locally-recruited force to replace the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) – a group Turkey considers a terrorist group - in the region allocated as a safe zone. Third, the YPG would withdraw all long-range weaponry to a safe distance from Turkey and “in return, Turkey will commit to non-aggression.” Fourth, unlike Turkey's plans to control the zone, an international monitoring force should be deployed to monitor the zone. The commander stated that if Turkey chooses to attack them rather than meeting this proposal, his forces will fight back stretching the war to the entire border. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The region east of the River Euphrates in northern Syria has always been on Turkey's agenda... Turkey is amassing large numbers of troops along the border...”

Source: Yaşar Yakış, “Fırat'ın doğusu hala Türkiye'nin gündeminde,” *ahvalnews.com*, 1 August 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/suriye/firatin-dogusu-hala-turkiyenin-gundeminde>

The region east of the River Euphrates in northern Syria has always been on Turkey's agenda, but because of more pressing domestic and foreign policy issues, it has not been at the forefront of public debate for several months...

Turkey is massing large numbers of troops along the border, especially between the Turkish town of Suruç, across from the Syrian town of [Kobane]... and Akçakale (facing the Syrian town of Tel Abyad). The distance between the two Turkish towns is around 70 km. If Turkey does eventually carry out the cross-border military operation that it has talked about for more than two years, it will probably take place in this area. It would aim to drive a wedge between the areas east and west of Kobane and interrupt the continuity of the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria.

The concentration of Turkish troops is almost an army-corps size and includes two armored brigades, two mechanized infantry brigades and two commando brigades. On the Syrian side of the border there is nothing that can militarily match such a big concentration of troops...

Syria is strongly opposed to the creation of a safe zone controlled by the Turkish military and the consolidation of the Kurdish presence in the northern Syria...

Syria's stance will probably be supported by Russia and Iran with whom Turkey cooperates in the Astana/Sochi process. If Russia's aim of involving Germany and France in the Astana process materializes, Turkey may be further isolated.

Therefore, Ankara has to find a channel of communication to initiate cooperation with Damascus. Otherwise it will be harming its own long-term interests in Syria.



Continued: Turkish Military Preparing for Another Operation in Syria

Source: Fehim Taştekin, “Can Syrian Kurds’ offer unlock door to compromise with Turkey,” *al-monitor.com*, 31 July 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/turkey-syria-united-states-kurds-have-offer-for-safe-zone.html>

Kobane said that in December, after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened an imminent incursion east of the Euphrates, the Kurds sought contacts with the Turkish side via the Americans and, in a bid at a compromise, made their own offer for a safe zone. The proposal rests on the following basis, as explained by Kobane:

- *A safe zone with a depth of some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles), as demanded by Turkey, is not acceptable, but one with a depth of 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) could be possible.*
- *The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), which dominate the SDF, would pull out from the zone and forces representing a “local military council” would be deployed.*
- *The YPG is prepared to withdraw heavy weaponry from the zone. Other weapons with ranges reaching Turkey could be removed as well, including even those with ranges of up to 20 kilometers (12.4 miles).*
- *In return, Turkey would commit to non-aggression.*
- *An international monitoring force could be deployed in the area.*
- *Turkey cannot be part of the monitoring mission, which has to be neutral.*
- *Turkey could join the international force only on the following conditions: locals displaced from Afrin must return home, while civilians and militias brought in after the city’s seizure by Turkey must leave and seized properties must be returned. The process should proceed under the control of the Afrin Civil Council, coupled with international guarantees. Provided that progress is achieved, Turkish troops could take part in patrols in the safe zone.*
- *The zone would be off-limits to the militias favored by Turkey (the groups that have backed Turkey in the Euphrates Shield campaign), but civilians displaced from the area would be free to return.*

...

Kobane warned that a Turkish intervention would trigger a sprawling war, implying that Turkey’s seizure of Afrin last year was relatively easy because of a “strategic decision” the Kurds made at the time. “We did not want the war to expand. We wanted to keep it limited to Afrin,” he said. “The eastern Euphrates, however, will not be the same. Any attack by the Turkish army will turn into a big war. If they attack Gire Spi [Tell Abyad], for instance, the front will extend all the way from Derik to Manbij.”



Map of Turkey-Syria border showing Euphrates River.

Source: Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sy-map.png#/media/File:Sy-map.png>, Public Domain.



The Katerji Group: A New Key Player in the Syrian Loyalist Universe

OE Watch Commentary: The Katerji (Qaterji, Qatarji, Qatirji) Group is a Syrian business consortium led by Hossam al-Katerji, a member of the Syrian parliament, and his older brother Muhammad. The accompanying passages from local sources discuss this group, which has emerged as a key economic and military actor among Syrian loyalists.

The Katerjis come from a modest background, according to a detailed biographical sketch published last February in the Syrian opposition news website *Jisr Press*. Their father was a tailor from the Aleppo countryside who moved to Raqqa in the 1950s and became modestly successful, eventually bequeathing his sons a four-story home on Raqqa's al-Naim Roundabout (later made famous as an ISIS execution stage). Although technically outsiders, the family became connected to local tribal leaders and adopted their traditions. Following the senior Katerji's death in the 2000s, his three sons moved to Aleppo, where they became involved in the lucrative real estate market of Aleppo's old city with help from an unidentified military officer with direct links to the presidential palace. They subsequently set up a "general trade" office in Damascus, where they worked as fixers and middlemen, providing services and connections mostly to tribal leaders from Raqqa who were on business in the capital.

While well-connected, the Katerjis remained outside of the inner circle. In 2013, however, they were called upon to help with the vital task of keeping oil and grain flowing to "useful Syria" from areas east of the Euphrates, after the latter fell out of government hands in the spring of that year. Their years working as brokers between Damascus and the east paid off, and since then their business empire has sprawled into a variety of sectors. Although apparently scorned by the urban business elite as uneducated, rural war profiteers, they appear to have become entrenched in the top ranks of Syrian loyalist businessmen. Their business interests continue to expand, and their wealth is estimated at anywhere between \$50 million and \$1 billion dollars, according to the biographical sketch.

The Katerjis have recruited fighters to protect their business interests since 2013. Militias linked to the Katerji Group are now present throughout Syria. The excerpted news report from *alsouria.net*, the Syrian opposition news site, claims that they are now establishing a militia on the Euphrates Valley border with Iraq, in cooperation with Syria's military intelligence branch. According to the report, the militia is being stood up "not for a military aim or to support Assad's forces" but rather to "protect [Katerji] investments there and the oil convoys which are going from SDF areas to regime areas."

Syrian opposition media often describes the Katerjis as an important pillar in the Syrian loyalist camp's pro-Iran faction. In that vein, the excerpted passage from the Lebanese news website *al-Modon* wonders whether a recent attack against Katerji militiamen in Aleppo was instigated by "businessmen loyal to Russian militias." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"...Qaterji's aim is to form forces in Deir ez-Zor to 'protect his investments there and the oil convoys which are going from SDF areas to regime areas, not for a military aim or to support Assad's forces'..."

Source: القاطرجي كيف صار أولاد الخياط حيتانا؟
"Katerji: How did the Sons of a Tailor Become Whales?" (Part One), *Jisr Press*, 1 February 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5gqy2hm>

Their names top the list of "whales of Syrian money" with a wealth of 300 billion Syrian pounds. They own and manage a wide variety of companies, operating in different fields and linked to one another only by the family name. They own dozens of buildings and real estate in the heart of Damascus and historic Aleppo, and buy oil and wheat from both ISIS and the SDF. They import goods from Turkey, and their convoys cross through the lines of conflict with ease. Their followers include an army of tribal leaders. They spend money on militias or run them themselves in most areas of conflict in Syria...

Source: القاطرجي أحد أبرز رجال أعمال نظام الأسد يؤسس ميليشيا شرق ديرالزور.. كيف بنى إمبراطوريته الاقتصادية؟
"One of Assad's Most Prominent Businessmen Founds Militia in East Deir ez-Zor," *alsouria.net*, 12 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y4ove96y> (translation via: <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/51804/one-of-assads-most-prominent-businessmen-founds-militia-in-east-deir-ez-zor.html>)

The Ayn al-Furat Network reported that Hussam Qaterji, one of the most prominent businessmen to have appeared over the last few years in Syria, has begun to form militias in the Albu Kamal countryside east of Deir ez-Zor to facilitate his smuggling work. Hussam Qaterji is one of the most famous intermediaries for transporting oil from SDF to regime areas.

The local network said that Qaterji has begun to form a militia in the "al-Abbas village in the Albu Kamal countryside," adding that the "his militia is under the supervision of the Military Intelligence branch of the Syrian security services."

Local sources told Alsouria Net that Qaterji's aim is to form forces in Deir ez-Zor to "protect his investments there and the oil convoys which are going from SDF areas to regime areas, not for a military aim or to support Assad's forces."

Source: حلب: هل استهدف موالون لروسيا "مجموعة قاطرجي"؟
"Aleppo: Did Russia Loyalists Attack the Qaterji Group?" *al-Modon*, 23 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5kh5jj4> (translation via: <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/51883/aleppo-did-russia-loyalists-attack-the-qaterji-group.html>)

Sources told Al-Modon that the blast resulted from a high-impact explosive device, which hit an office of the Qaterji Group in Aleppo. The operation killed Saad Qaterji, head of the protection militia of the Qaterji Group in northern Syria... The sources said that it was likely the blast was a measure by businessmen loyal to Russian militias, with the attack part of the Iranian-Russian competition in Aleppo through proxies who are manufacturers and traders loyal to each side.

The Qaterji Group controls a large part of commercial and industrial work in Aleppo, with its projects expanding greatly over the last two years, given its proximity with the Iranian regime's militias. Qaterji has naturally expanded at the expense of traditional businessmen and manufacturers in Aleppo, who see his group as a threat to their interests. For the most part they are loyal to the chamber of commerce headed by Fares al-Shihabi, who is close to Russian militias.



Israel: “Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?”

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from local sources discuss Israel’s view that Russia has proved ineffective at curtailing Iranian involvement and military activity in Syria, despite a previous promise to do so. This is due to Hezbollah’s growing presence near Israel’s northern border.

As the first passage from Israeli *Haaretz* discusses, Russia had promised Israel a year ago “to keep an Iranian presence away from the [Israeli] border in return for Israel not interfering in the operation by the Assad regime to retake control of southern Syria.” Specifically, Russia would ensure the “demilitarization of 70 or 80 kilometers between Iranian forces and the border with Israel.” Now, based on developments on the ground and Hezbollah’s increasing presence in southwestern Syria, the passage notes how “ridiculous it was to rely on Russia’s promise.” It also points out that when Israel voiced its concerns to Russia about Hezbollah’s presence on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, they were told, “the promises concerned only the Iranians themselves, and not their agents.” Meanwhile, the passage notes, “Hezbollah operations in the villages on the Golan have intensified.”



Golan Heights.

Source: Masterpjz9 at en.wikipedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golan_heights_border.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.5

The second passage discusses Israeli views of Russia’s strategy in Syria, and more broadly in the Middle East. It is a report referencing a panel during the recently held Herzliya Conference in Israel, entitled, “Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?” According to the passage, Ehud Evental, a reserve colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces said during the panel, “The Russians give us some room to maneuver to attack Iranian targets in Syria, but they also give the Iranians freedom of action to bring weapons into Syria.” The colonel explains, “Moscow gives each side limited room to maneuver and then each side is obliged to turn to Moscow for relief from the other.” The passage quotes another expert as saying that Russia’s strategy is “tremendously sophisticated,” because it creates leverage by “help[ing] to create a problem and then offer[ing] yourself as part of the solution.”

Reports confirm that Hezbollah’s presence in southwestern Syria, near the Israeli border has grown dramatically. As the third passage from the Middle Eastern news source *The Algemeiner* discusses, Hezbollah “settlers” are essentially replacing the native Syrian population in the area as part of a conscious plan to change the country’s demographics. The passage argues that Hezbollah’s goals in the Syria war are not limited to just military action and propping up the Assad regime. Its goals have to do with “an Iranian settlement project whose implementation began several years ago. The aim [of this project] is changing the demography [of Syria] by settling [it with members of] Iran-backed [Shi’ite] militias from Afghanistan, Lebanon, and other countries in the region.” This is concerning for Israel, particularly given that Hezbollah has gained urban warfare experience from the Syrian civil war, as well as tactical planning knowledge from working with the Russians and Iranians, in addition to its arsenal of ballistic missiles, guided missiles, and armed drones. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“[It was] ridiculous to rely on Russia’s promise, about a year ago, to keep an Iranian presence away from the border...”

Source: Amos Harel, “Analysis: Hezbollah Turning Syria Villages on Israel Border Into Fortresses,” *Haaretz*, 3 August 2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-hezbollah-turning-syria-villages-on-israel-border-into-fortresses-1.7614571>

... The Iranians are trying to translate their regional arc of influence into a real land corridor – along with the arms smuggling network they are operating, alongside their air and sea efforts, on the Tehran-Baghdad-Damascus-Beirut line on the ground.

In addition, it seems Tehran is making an effort to deploy some of its longer-range missiles in western Iraq with the help of the Shi’ite militias there, with the goal of distancing them from Israeli capabilities to attack them, which have been demonstrated in the past in northern and eastern Syria.

At the same time, Israel has continued to fight its holding action near the border on the Golan Heights. A series of attacks attributed to the IDF there illustrates again how ridiculous it was to rely on Russia’s promise, about a year ago, to keep an Iranian presence away from the border in return for Israel not interfering in the operation by the Assad regime to retake control of southern Syria.

At the time, the Russians spoke about demilitarization of 70 or 80 kilometers between Iranian forces and the border with Israel – and Netanyahu supporters boasted about his “unprecedented diplomatic achievement.” In reality, it was revealed very quickly that Hezbollah was actually more active in the region and the organization was reestablishing its terror networks in southern Syria.

...When Israel came to complain to the Russians about the Hezbollah presence on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, they were told that the promises concerned only the Iranians themselves, and not their agents. Given these circumstances, it seems Moscow has made peace with Israel’s limited military actions against the Iranians and Hezbollah in Syria, as long as it does not endanger the stability of the regime in Damascus.

... But Hezbollah operations in the villages on the Golan have intensified.



Continued: Israel: “Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?”

Source: Laurie Mylorie, “Israeli experts skeptical about Russia,” *Kurdistan 24*, 5 July 2019. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/analysis/482a183a-7d41-41b9-8d43-6a01717820a9>

Ehud Evental, a reserve colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces [said] “The Russians “give us some room to maneuver” to attack Iranian targets in Syria, but they also “give the Iranians freedom of action” to bring weapons into Syria.”

Dr. Dmitry Adamsky, a professor at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy, and Strategy in Herzliya, spoke in similar terms. He described Russian policy as “tremendously sophisticated,” particularly compared to Moscow’s policy during the Cold War....

Students of the Middle East are well-familiar with that tactic—more informally, described as playing arsonist and fireman: you help create a problem and then offer yourself as part of the solution to that problem. That creates leverage....

Indeed, as Evental explained, Moscow gives each side limited “room to maneuver,” and then each side is obliged to turn to Moscow for relief from the other.

Source: Benjamin Kerstein, “Hezbollah ‘Settlers’ Changing Syria’s Demography Under Iranian Direction,” *The Algemeiner*, 3 May 2018. <https://www.algemeiner.com/2018/05/03/hezbollah-settlers-changing-syrias-demography-under-iranian-direction/>

Hezbollah “settlers” are reportedly replacing the native Syrian population as part of a conscious plan to change the country’s demographics.

Under Iranian direction, the Lebanese Shi’ite terrorist group has been fighting on behalf of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s regime since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. It also dominates southern Lebanon, where it has established a massive terrorist infrastructure in order to threaten Israel.

Hezbollah’s “involvement in the Syria war is not confined to military action aimed at propping up the Syrian regime. [Its goals] extend much further than that, and have to do with an Iranian settlement project whose implementation began several years ago. The aim [of this project] is changing the demography [of Syria] by settling [it with members of] Iran-backed [Shi’ite] militias from Afghanistan, Lebanon, and other countries in the region.”

Ayyash accused the world of “ignoring the ongoing plan of demographic cleansing, as part of which tens of thousands of Syrians were transferred from their homes in Ghouta to northern Syria several days ago, and thousands of others left eastern Al-Qalamun, near Damascus, [as part of a move] ‘brokered by Russia...’”

“One of the most disturbing aspects of the Iranian plan in Syria,” he added, “was reported by our colleague, [Lebanese journalist] Randa Taqi Al-Din, in the daily Al-Hayat. She cited French sources, who assessed that Hezbollah will transform from the ‘Lebanese Hezbollah’ into the ‘Syrian Hezbollah,’ because its members are currently settling in Syria along with the Iranians.”

Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars
1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley
with Lester Grau

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>



Qatar, the UAE and China Advance Artificial Intelligence in the Arabian Peninsula



Bing Xu, co-founder of SenseTime at the Goldman Sachs Private Innovative Company Conference (PICC) in Las Vegas.
Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jurvetson/31033047177/>, CC BY 2.0

OE Watch Commentary: An arms race to effectively “weaponize data” through artificial intelligence may be unfolding on the western shores of the Arabian Gulf. Central to this tussle is the competitive rivalry between the well-administered and deep-pocketed micro-states of Qatar and the UAE, both of which are vying to become the regional pioneer in the deployment of new technology, including 5G connectivity and artificial intelligence.

Last year, the Qatari government established the Qatar Center for Artificial Intelligence (QCAI). According to the organization’s website, the 5 June 2017 blockade against Qatar was “catalyzed by a ‘data attack’ on Qatar’s information infrastructure.” As a result of events such as this one, the website notes, “societies are grappling to understand the ‘weaponization’ of data.” In early 2019, the QCAI issued a blueprint for a “National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Qatar.” The blueprint’s underlying “vision” is “to have AI so pervasive in all aspects of life, business and governance in Qatar that everyone looks up to Qatar as a role model for AI+X nation.” “AI+X,” according to the document, is shorthand for places where AI is “embedded in all aspects of human activity.”

The UAE government published its own “Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031” in 2017 and according to the accompanying excerpt from *Gulf News*, is now beginning to implement it. The July 2019 UAE-China Economic Forum in Beijing, where an agreement to establish “The AI Centre of Excellence in Abu Dhabi” was signed, was a step forward. The center will be the “regional research and development headquarters” for SenseTime, a Chinese Artificial Intelligence startup company best known for its facial recognition algorithms. Founded in Hong Kong in 2014, the company is a “unicorn” (valued at over \$1 billion) with global reach.

Although the UAE-China relationship is geared toward the future, the rhetoric used by their leaders is laden with historical references, as illustrated by the final accompanying passage. While lofty historical allusions are a standard element of political grandstanding, the emphasis on past links may also reveal a perception that close relations between the near and far east are a re-emerging historical norm. The UAE’s plan to expand Chinese language education and talks of a “100-year ‘road map’” also hint at a multi-generational view of the relationship. (Also see: “5G Launches in the Arabian Peninsula,” in the August 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...Modern AI is powered by data and societies are grappling to understand the ‘weaponization’ of data...”

Source: “Our Story,” Qatar Center for Artificial Intelligence Website, undated. <https://qcai.qcri.org/index.php/about-us/>

Modern AI is powered by data and societies are grappling to understand the “weaponization” of data. In fact the blockade of June 5th 2017 was catalyzed by a “data attack” on Qatar’s information infrastructure... It is imperative that Qatar not only be a consumer of AI but take steps to influence the evolution of AI technology.

Source: “Cabinet clears 10-year artificial intelligence strategy,” *Gulf News*, 21 April 2019. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/cabinet-clears-10-year-artificial-intelligence-strategy-1.63470566>

The UAE yesterday launched a national strategy for artificial intelligence (AI) to improve customer services, assess government performance and increase living standards as well as to harness AI technology in the transport, tourism, health and education sectors... The National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031 aims at positioning the UAE as a global leader in artificial intelligence by 2031, and aims to develop an integrated system that employs artificial intelligence in vital areas in the UAE.

Source: “China AI giant SenseTime to set up regional R&D headquarters in Abu Dhabi,” *The National*, 23 July 2019. <https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/china-ai-giant-sensetime-to-set-up-regional-r-d-headquarters-in-abu-dhabi-1.889975>

Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO) signed a deal with artificial intelligence firm SenseTime to base its regional research and development headquarters in the emirate, solidifying Abu Dhabi’s position as an emerging hub of technology research in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region.

The AI Centre of Excellence by SenseTime, the technology start-up valued at \$4.5 billion (Dh16.5bn) when it raised \$620 million in Series C+ funding in May, is expected to create 600 highly skilled direct technology jobs over the next five years, Elham Al Qasim, chief executive of ADIO, told *The National*, speaking from Beijing on Tuesday.

Source: “Sheikh Mohamed: UAE and China creating 100-year ‘road map’ to boost alliance,” *The National*, 23 July 2019. <https://amp.thenational.ae/uae/government/sheikh-mohamed-uae-and-china-creating-100-year-road-map-to-boost-alliance-1.889755>

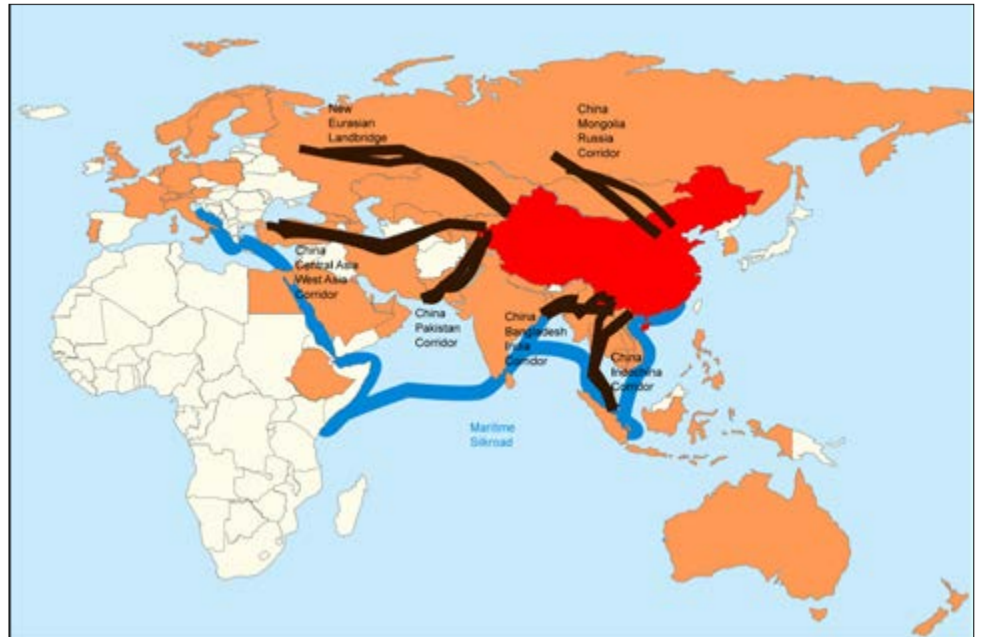
“The truth is that our relations didn’t begin 35 years ago only, but they started with our Arab ancestors. Our history extends back thousands of years... the two sides are laying pillars of a road map for the next 100 years, beginning with steps to teach the Chinese language in more than 200 schools in the UAE”...



China's UAE Rapprochement: A Turkish Perspective

OE Watch Commentary: China is increasing its influence in the Middle East through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its strategic partnerships with certain Middle Eastern countries. One of these countries is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which hosts the largest Chinese population in the region, and is playing a major role in China's BRI in the Middle East. The accompanying article from Turkish state run *Anadolu Ajansı* provides a Turkish perspective on the UAE-China relationship and its implications for Turkey.

The article takes a critical tone towards the UAE as a regional rival to Turkey. It claims that UAE policies and actions are geared towards curtailing Turkey in the region along with its strategic regional and global plans. The article is written under the assumption that the UAE's endeavor to strengthen its relations with China is part of its global plan to have the upper hand in countering Turkey as a regional power.



One Belt One Road (Belt and Road Initiative).

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

The article also discusses the history of UAE-China relations, the role the UAE might play in China's BRI, and Chinese investments in the UAE. It notes that approximately 200,000 Chinese citizens live in the UAE, executing China's investment projects.

In July 2018, Chinese leader Xi Jinping made an official visit to the UAE and on 20 July 2019 the UAE crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan reciprocated and visited China. He was greeted with an official ceremony at the airport. During the visit, China and the UAE signed "a series of strategic agreements covering the energy, technology, defense, environmental and education sectors." The article points out that the Persian Gulf has strategic importance in China's global and regional ambitions, making the UAE an important partner for China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“[Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's] visit to China will further deepen the strategic cooperation between the UAE and China...”

Source: Mehmet Rakipoğlu, “BAE-Çin ilişkileri derinleşiyor (UAE-China relations deepening),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 31 July 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/bae-cin-iliskileri-derinlesiyor/1546033>

The United Arab Emirates [UAE], has been trying to increase its influence in the region with its most aggressive foreign policy strategy in recent years...From restraining Turkey in Syria by supporting al-Assad's regime and the YPG [People's Protection Units] to creating loyal actors in the Horn of Africa... the UAE has many global and regional plans and projects.

One of these [plans] is to adapt to the rhythm in the transformation of global politics. In this context, the UAE's interest in rising [powers] China and Russia is gradually increasing...

MbZ [Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan] went to the People's Republic of China on July 20 for an official visit. MbZ was greeted with an official ceremony at the airport and he met with many senior Chinese officials during his three-day visit. As a result of the visit, a series of strategic agreements covering the energy, technology, defense, environmental and education sectors were signed....

In July 2018, Xi Jinping paid an official visit to the UAE. This was the first visit from China to the UAE in 29 years. The visit had positive results for the two countries. Within the framework of the visit, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the two countries and by signing the agreement bilateral relations were elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership...

China's most ambitious breakthrough on a global scale, the One Belt One Road project, launched in 2013, has the potential to influence global trade and UAE-China relations...

While China's [Persian] Gulf expansion plays an important role in the course of its global and regional policy, the UAE has a different position with China than other Gulf countries. As a matter of fact, nearly 200,000 Chinese people live in the UAE, mostly in Dubai...

...

As a result, MbZ's visit to China will further deepen the strategic cooperation between the UAE and China...



China's Cooperation with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region



Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Source: Fars News Agency via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nechirvan_Barzani_meets_with_Ali_Sharmkhani,_Tehran_21_January_2018_\(29915\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nechirvan_Barzani_meets_with_Ali_Sharmkhani,_Tehran_21_January_2018_(29915).jpg), CC BY 4.0

consulate headquarters in Erbil, which sources claim will be one of the largest consulate general buildings in Erbil. The passage notes that this will be built on a plot of land that is 30 thousand square meters (~7.5 acres) allocated by the IKR government. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from local sources discuss China's growing diplomatic and economic relationship with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). As the passages discuss, this is taking place amid China's plans to significantly upgrade its diplomatic presence in Erbil, the IKR capital.

As the first passage from Chinese *Xinhua* notes, in late July, China's Consul General in Erbil, Ni Ruchi met with the IKR President Nechirvan Barzani in Erbil to discuss deepening cooperation in the fields of energy and infrastructure, "within the framework of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative." The passage also notes that the two sides discussed the political situation and efforts to rebuild areas that were destroyed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as well as cooperation between their respective private sectors. This meeting followed a previous meeting in April, when then-Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani received an invitation to China.

The second passage from a Kurdish source discusses a proposal by the region's private sector to the Chinese representatives in Erbil. According to the passage, the Vice President of the local Union of Importers and Exporters suggested that China open a trade center in the region to use as a central hub from which to market and sell its technological products in the region. The Chinese Consul General is reported to have supported the idea. In addition, the Chinese private sector is encouraged to develop economic and trade cooperation with the IKR. Specifically, as the final passage discusses, China has been supporting companies like Huawei, Sinoma-Suzhou, and China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) to invest in the region for several years.

This is all taking place amid China's initiative to upgrade its diplomatic presence in Erbil. China had opened a consulate general in Erbil in late 2014. As the final passage from the website of IKR Foreign Relations announces, China is planning to build a new

"...We support companies like Huawei, Sinoma-Suzhou, and CMEC to invest in [the] Kurdistan Region..." - Former Consul-General of the People's Republic of China to Erbil

Source: "China vows to boost cooperation with Iraqi Kurdistan," *Xinhua*, 1 August 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/01/c_138273433.htm

China's Consul General in Erbil Ni Ruchi has confirmed China's desire to strengthen cooperation with Iraq's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan... Ni held a meeting on Tuesday in Erbil with President of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani, during which the Chinese diplomat hailed the longstanding friendship between the Chinese and the Kurds, as well as the connection between the two cultures...

Ni said that China is willing to take this opportunity to deepen its cooperation with the Kurdistan region in the fields of energy and infrastructure, within the framework of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

For his part, Barzani reaffirmed Kurdistan's willingness to enhance cooperation with China in the fields of economy, trade, industry, culture and education, said a statement by the Kurdish presidency's office.

The two sides discussed the political situation in the region and the efforts of rebuilding the areas devastated in the fight against the Islamic State, as well as the cooperation between the private sectors of both sides...



Continued: China's Cooperation with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

Source: "Çin'den Kürdistan Bölgesi hamlesi (China's Kurdistan Region Move)," *Kurdistan24.net*, 20 June 2019. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/tr/video/67deef7-9122-4dfc-93ac-58f5c78ab333>

Xelîl Goran, the Vice President of the Union of Importers and Exporters, speaking to K24, said that they had requested that China open a trade center in the Kurdistan Region, in order to develop economic relations with China. Goran noted that the trade center could be used to market and sell Chinese products to Iraq's other cities and other countries in the region. Goran, who said that they had met with China's Consul General in Erbil, noted that he had supported the idea of a trade center with Chinese goods, and would work to further this idea.

Source: "Chinese Consul-General: relations with KRG expanding," *Kurdistan 24*, 16 February 2016. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/28d5fe44-71f6-4069-9f02-f9ff5e379691/Chinese-Consul-General--relations-with-KRG-expanding>

[Former Consul-General of the People's Republic of China to Erbil, Tan Banglin] said "For economic cooperation, we support companies like Huawei, Sinoma-Suzhou, and CMEC to invest in Kurdistan Region... Sinoma-Suzhou has invested \$13.4 million dollars in Kurdistan Region to construct a steel structure factory, which has already been put into operation. The cement factory construction project by CMEC is in full swing," Banglin continued.

Source: "China is preparing for the construction of a new building for the General Consulate headquarters in Erbil," *Kurdistan Democratic Party Foreign Relations*, 9 May 2018. <http://fr.kdp.info/a/d.aspx?l=12&a=37747>

The General Consulate of the People Republic of China in the Kurdistan Region works with the relevant authorities in the Kurdistan Regional Government to prepare for the construction of a new building for the consulate headquarters in Erbil. ...

The Chinese Consul ... pointed out that his country intends to strengthen relations with the Kurdistan Region, and the Consulate General of China in contact with the relevant authorities in Kurdistan to build a new building for the Consulate General of his country in Erbil on a plot of land (30) thousand square meters allocated by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

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>



Iran's Negotiations with Domestic Kurdish Opposition Groups

OE Watch Commentary: It has recently been reported that the government of Iran has started another round of negotiations with its Kurdish opposition groups to find a peaceful resolution to its Kurdish issue, following several failed attempts. The accompanying articles provide insight into the possible motivations behind these latest round of negotiations.

As the first passage discusses, Iran invited four Kurdish groups (the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and two factions of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan) to Oslo for a third round of negotiations in August. These parties comprise the “Cooperation Center of Iranian Kurdistan’s Political Parties” formed in 2018, in an effort to unify Kurdish opposition against the Iranian regime. The article argues that the latest negotiations are an attempt by Iran to prevent Iranian Kurdish groups from collaborating with the United States against the Iranian regime “should the [US] take military action against Iran.”

The article suggests that the Iranian delegation took a threatening approach, noting “[T]he Iranian delegation, led by Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, a veteran Iranian diplomat ... ‘threatened’ the Kurdish side with ‘unpleasant consequences’ if they failed to heed Tehran’s advice.” Furthermore, while negotiations were on-going, Iran launched attacks on armed Iranian Kurdish opposition groups, casting doubt on the sincerity of the government’s intentions regarding the negotiations.

The second article from the Kurdish website *nûpel.net* argues that these negotiations might be a mere delaying tactic on the part of the Iranian regime. The article points out that Iran engages in diplomacy as a tactic of war since it has used negotiations in the past to kill influential Kurdish leaders such as Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in Vienna in 1989. According to the article, the two main factors that led Iran to seek negotiations are the potential for Kurdish opposition parties uniting internally and waging war against the Iranian regime, and external pressure. Iran is concerned about external pressure from the United States and the threat from Kurdish parties in Iraq and Syria to its forces in those countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Their aim is to thwart any cooperation between us and the United States.”
-Kurdish opposition member

Source: Amberin Zaman, “Tehran courts Kurds as Washington amps up rhetoric against Iran,” *al-monitor.com*, 16 July 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/iran-court-kurdish-opposition-groups-talks-washington.html>

Iranian Kurdish opposition groups will meet with Iranian government officials in Oslo for a third round of talks in August, Al-Monitor has learned. The meetings, to be mediated by a Norwegian organization devoted to conflict resolution, mark the first time the Iranian regime has sat at the same table with multiple Kurdish groups since 1979...

“I don’t believe for a second that the Iranian regime is sincere.” The official echoed sentiments aired by other Iranian Kurdish opposition sources...

The prevailing consensus among the Iranian Kurdish groups is that Tehran’s cooperation with NOREF is aimed at dissuading the armed Iranian Kurdish opposition from collaborating with the United States, should the latter take military action against Iran....

A Kurdish opposition member confirmed that the Iranian delegation, led by Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, a veteran Iranian diplomat who currently advises Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, had “threatened” the Kurdish side with “unpleasant consequences” if they failed to heed Tehran’s advice....

“Their aim is to thwart any cooperation between us and the United States,” the Kurdish opposition member said. “We agreed to take part because we want to show good will, to prove that we want a political solution to the Kurdish problem, so we don’t end up getting labeled the bad guys.”

Source: “İran’ın Kürt açılımı derde deva olmayabilir (Iran’s Kurdish opening may not be a panacea),” *nupel.net*, 22 July 2019. <https://nupel.net/iranin-kurt-acilimi-derde-deva-olmayabilir-35970h.html>

Iran has started negotiations with some Kurdish parties in Oslo. The available data suggest that Tehran follows distraction tactics rather than solutions...

When looking at the Iranian-Kurdish conflict, it can be seen that these dialogs and negotiations are [used] as weapons of assassination and methods of liquidation against the Kurds. ...

Diplomacy for Iran is not the continuation or less intense form of war, but one of the basic tactics of war.

Iran’s main policy is not to recognize the Kurds, so what factors [pushed] Iran to initiate such a process... The first is the struggle of Kurdish parties and movements, the second is the international factors and the combined pressure of these two...



Fighters of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI or KDPI) in 2013.
 Source: Kurdishstruggle via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PDKI_fighters.jpg#/media/File:PDKI_fighters.jpg, CC BY 2.0



Iran: Mohajer-6 UAV Strikes Targets in Iraq

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's indigenous military industry is a source of pride for the Islamic Republic, but frequent announcements about new platforms and capabilities are often exaggerated. As sanctions and international isolation continue to constrain Iran's economy, the Islamic Republic has prioritized its drone fleet as a relatively cheap means to project power regionally and shown that many of the advances announced for its drone fleet have substance.

The Mohajer ("migrant"), manufactured by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Qods Aeronautics Industries, was Iran's first operational drone series, launched in 1985 in order to conduct surveillance over Iraqi lines during the Iran-Iraq War. It was the subject of a mass-market movie by the same name in 1990, which was produced and released under the sponsorship of future president Mohammad Khatami who, at the time, was minister of culture and Islamic Guidance.

Iran provided the Mohajer-2, developed in the early 1990s, both to the late President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and to Lebanese Hezbollah.

The Mohajer-3 never made it into production, and was quickly supplanted by the Mohajer-4, which was unveiled in September 2014. At the time, Iran's Deputy Defense Minister bragged that it could shoot down helicopters, fighter jets, and cruise missiles. The Mohajer-4 reportedly has a ten-horsepower engine capable of a 6,500-foot flight ceiling at maximum 75 miles per hour, and has become a mainstay of the regular army's ground forces. There was a surge in Iranian drone activity over Iraq following the Islamic State capture of Mosul in June 2014 and, in early January 2015, the Islamic State distributed photographs of a downed Mohajer-4 in Jalawla near Kirkuk. In January 2015, an Iranian Mohajer-4B crashed in Deir az-Zour, Syria.

The excerpted article from a news agency closely affiliated with the IRGC announces that the IRGC Ground Forces deployed the Mohajer-6, first unveiled in April 2017, to attack Kurdish insurgents in the mountainous terrain on the Iraqi side of the Iran-Iraq border. The use of the drones to strike at insurgents not in an active combat zone show the increasing centrality of Iran's drones in the Islamic Republic's defense doctrine.

The higher flight ceiling of 18,000 feet and the Mohajer-6's 12-hour flight time represent a significant operational advance. The IRGC reports that the Mohajer-6 can carry guided "vertical" bombs affixed under each wing. Such vertical bombs allow guidance on the yaw axis—making adjustments to the left and right—as the bomb falls; there is no indication that the Iranian operators can control pitch or rate of fall. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Iran unveils "Mohajer-6" drone.

Source: Tasnimnews, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1396/11/16/1396111616075383213237564.jpg>

“What is notable in this operation was the IRGC Ground Forces’ use of UAVs to target the positions of terrorists.”

Source: “Avalin ‘Amaliyat Barunmarzi Mohajer-6 ba Bombha-ye Gha’im (The First Overseas Operation of the Mohajer-6 with ‘Vertical’ Bombs),” *Tasnim News*, 12 July 2019. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/04/21/2052437>

The First Overseas Operation of the Mohajer-6

According to the Tasnim News Agency’s defense correspondent, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ [IRGC] Ground Forces said in a statement that, in response to recent acts of terror in the west and northwest of the country, the IRGC attacked these terrorist groups’ positions on the Iraqi Kurdish border with artillery, missiles, UAVs and ground forces.

What is notable in this operation was the IRGC Ground Forces’ use of UAVs to target the positions of terrorists. The IRGC Ground Forces’ UAV unit is one of the newly established units, which has been able to perform well in the short time since its formation....

The Mohajer-6 UAV is the newest member of the Mohajer UAV family. It is a combat-reconnaissance UAV with a range of 2,000 kilometers [1,242 miles] that provides the capability to perform reconnaissance, surveillance, and combat missions with a large operational radius, long flight time, and with appropriate reliability. The UAV uses precision munitions, is equipped with optical and thermal cameras, and can carry two vertical bombs under its wings. The UAV is also capable of flying at night and day and in adverse weather conditions using advanced optical systems....



Iran Warns of Phone and Text Scams

OE Watch Commentary: Most international discussion about Iranian cyber issues revolves around the Passive Defense Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' efforts to hack critical infrastructure, or the efforts of Iran's various security services to control social media. Meanwhile, Iran's cyber police force occasionally releases statistics about other cyber violations in which they have become involved, such as the distribution of pornography. The excerpted article from the cyber-focused Iranian website *Gerdab.ir* is of interest because it reports a growing problem of Iranian scam artists seeking to trick Iranians into providing confidential information such as ATM passwords and banking information. In effect, the same sort of phishing scams which plagued the United States and other Western countries until public sophistication about online issues grew, now plagues a less experienced Iranian society.

Financial sanctions have largely insulated the Iranian economy from the outside world. The Islamic Republic developed its own electronic network in 2002 to create an intranet for Iranian banks and most Iranian banks were connected to the system by 2010. This has allowed Iranian banks to issue ATM cards both to allow Iranians to access Iranian rials and conduct other banking functions such as electronically paying bills and taxes. Despite this network, broad distrust of Iranian banks and suspicion about government has hampered the Iranian government's efforts to make society less cash dependent. That such scams are occurring with increasing frequency and now merit a special warning and a hotline likely will reinforce ordinary Iranians' preference to conduct cash transactions rather than rely on electronic banking. This in turn will both limit Iranian government insight into many financial transactions and breathe new life into a currency black market which thrives on differences between official and street rates." **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



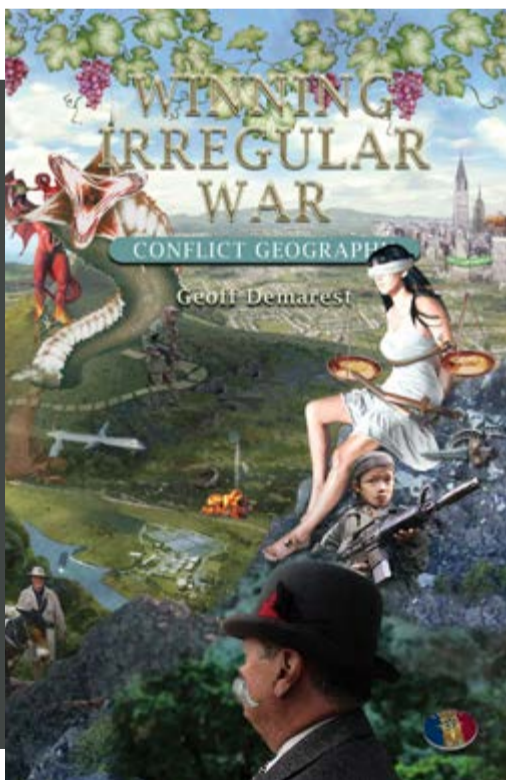
An ATM in Imam Khomeini Airport City.
Source: Imam Khomeini Airport City, https://www.ikac.ir/Portals/_default/Skins/dng-theme/images/ATM.jpg

“Scammers have been abusing citizens.”

Source: “Moraghab Kalahabardari az Tarigh Tomas-e Telefon va Peyamakha-ye Ja’li Bashid (Beware of fraudulent phone calls and fake texts),” *Gerdab.ir*, 30 July 2019. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/28743>

Beware of fraudulent phone calls and fake texts

According to a *Gerdab* report, The Tehran division of the Telecommunications Company of Iran warned about the sending of fake SMS messages about winning prizes, donations or instructing citizens to reveal their ATM code. The Tehran division of the Telecommunications Company of Iran declared, “Scammers have been abusing citizens under the pretext of goodwill, offering cash and non-cash prizes, and requesting bank passwords.” Accordingly, Tehran Telecommunications demands its customers and citizens to contact Telecommunications Public Relations Unit with number 2021 before taking any action.



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>

Iranian Navy Chief Visits Russian Naval Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Hossein Khanzadi assumed command of the regular Iranian navy in November 2017. Since then, he has slowly been seeking to leave his mark on a branch of the military which is both increasingly central to Iranian force projection and has experienced major equipment problems in recent years. Increasingly, it appears that naval cooperation between Tehran and Moscow is becoming an important component of already burgeoning Russia-Iran ties. While Russia and Iran have long had maritime relations in the Caspian Sea, Khanzadi's prominent appearance at Russian Navy Day festivities in St. Petersburg on 28 July—a report of which is excerpted in Iran's conservative *Fars News Agency*—suggests both that Iran and Russia value their military cooperation.



Admiral Khanzadi attending Russian Navy Day festivities in St. Petersburg, 28 July 2019.

Source: Fars News Agency, https://media.farsnews.com/Uploaded/Files/Images/1398/05/07/13980507000677_Test_NewPhotoFree.jpg

Russian support for the Iranian Navy could take many forms: Iran's indigenous ships have proven unreliable and could benefit from Russian equipment or upgrades. Russia might provide resupply and other logistical support. In 2016, for example, an Iranian flotilla failed to make it into the Atlantic Ocean, ran out of supplies, and was forced into port in Durban, South Africa, for emergency repairs. While the Sisi regime in Egypt has prevented Iranian naval vessels from transiting the Suez Canal, Russia could send supply ships based at Tartus in Syria into the Red Sea to extend the Iranian ships' deployment durations. The Russian Navy might also cooperate with Iran in updating the Islamic Republic's aging submarine fleet. Of special interest to analysts should be any reports of Russian weapons sales to Iran generally and the Iranian navy specifically, not only because of the weaponry itself, but also because the Iranian military quite openly brags about its desire and capability to reverse-engineer weaponry and military platforms. (Also see: "Iran's Navy Expands Operational Range," in the January 2013 issue of *OE Watch*, "Iran-Russia Relations," in the July 2016 issue of *OE Watch* and "Iran: Warship Sinks After Mishap," in the March 2018 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Khanzadi attended the Russian Navy Day celebration in St. Petersburg.”

Source: “Bazdid Daryadar Khanzadi az Nawgan Niru-ye Darya-ye Russiya” (Admiral Khanzadi Visits Russian Naval Forces), *Fars News Agency*, 29 July 2019. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13980507000787>

Iranian Navy Chief Visits Russian Naval Forces

The Chief of Naval Forces of the regular military of the Islamic Republic of Iran was standing on the sidelines of a ceremony for the Russian Federation Naval Forces.

Admiral Hossein Khanzadi, the Commander of the Naval Forces of regular military for the Islamic Republic of Iran traveled to Russia to participate in the ceremony and saw the country's naval forces. Khanzadi, who led the military delegation, attended the Russian Navy Day celebration in St. Petersburg. More than 20 countries were present. He spoke with their commanders during a visit to the Russian destroyers.

Is There a Crack in the Houthi Movement?

OE Watch Commentary: A power struggle is brewing at the highest levels of leadership in Yemen's Houthi Movement, according to media sources from the Gulf. The first accompanying excerpt, from the UAE-based *SkyNews Arabia*, frames the conflict as pitting the Supreme Political Council and close confidants to the movement's leader, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, against a coalition aligned with some of the movement's most successful leaders on the ground, including Mohammed Ali al-Houthi (Abd al-Malik's cousin and head of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee) and Abu Ali al-Hakim (the most prominent Houthi military field commander). The conflict is alternatively framed as pitting Abd al-Malik and the party's ideological core (the "Saada Wing") against the more diffuse network of Houthi political and military allies, particularly but not exclusively in the Sana'a area (the "Tribal Wing").

The reports warrant some skepticism, given that media sources opposed to the Houthis are not usually objective in their reporting and have been predicting the movement's collapse for years. Still, potential cracks in the foundations of the Houthi edifice are consequential, and there are reasons to believe change is afoot within the movement. One hint comes in the form of a crackdown carried out by Houthi "Preventive Security" forces (al-Amn al-Waq'i) against allies in the "Tribal Wing" suspected of mixed loyalties. Houthi Preventive Security forces first gained notoriety after being blamed for the death of longtime Yemeni president and erstwhile Houthi ally Ali Abdullah Saleh, in late 2017. The accompanying excerpted news report from Saudi Arabia's *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, published shortly after Saleh's death, claims that he was closely monitored and eventually assassinated by Preventive Security operatives. The article describes Preventive Security as a 3,000-man strong "secret multi-tasking security force" that includes experts in technology and communications, a special operations military unit, a recruitment and advocacy branch, and a propaganda wing. Preventive Security reports directly to Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, according to the article, and is the "Saada Wing's" main counterintelligence entity, monitoring "all movements of militia leaders" and providing Abd al-Malik with daily reports.

The seriousness of the brewing power struggle, according to the excerpt from the UAE's *al-Bayan*, has led the "Saada Wing" to further empower Yahya al-Shami, a veteran Saleh-era Yemeni military commander described as the Houthi Movement's "actual military leader." According to the article, al-Shami recently replaced Mohammed Ali al-Houthi on the Supreme Political Council, the first step in a plan that would eventually see al-Shami taking over the council's presidency from Mashat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Ansarullah Leader Abdel Malek Alhouthi.

Source: RuneAgerhus via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansarullah_Leader_Abdel_Malek_Alhouthi_\(01\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansarullah_Leader_Abdel_Malek_Alhouthi_(01).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

"...The conflict between top-ranking Houthi leaders for money, influence and power is between two conflicting wings..."

Source: صراع المشاط والحوثي يندر بحرب في شوارع صنعاء
"Mashat-al-Houthi Conflict Portends War on the Streets of Sana'a," *SkyNews Arabia*, 31 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y6dzgcow>

The conflict between top-ranking Houthi leaders for money, influence and power involves two conflicting wings. The first is represented by Mahdi Al-Mashat and the director of his office, Ahmed Hamed, along with Yahya Badr al-Din al-Houthi, Minister of Education, and Interior Minister Abdulkarim al-Houthi. The second wing is led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, along with intelligence chief Abu Ali al-Hakim, as well as a wide range of military and political leaderships in Sana'a and provinces under the control of Iranian followers. Sources close to the Houthi group said that the differences moved to the top ranks and have begun to escalate between the current Revolutionary Committee and the Supreme Political Council.

Source: (الأمن الوقائي)... سلاح الحوثي الخفي
"Preventive Security'... The Hidden Houthi Weapon," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 December 2017. <https://tinyurl.com/yyvhvoqn>

Al-Sharq al-Awsat learned from security sources in Sana'a that the Houthis used Preventive Security, a secret multi-tasking security force which receives its orders directly from the group's leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi, to eliminate its former ally President Ali Abdullah Saleh...

The size of the force is estimated at 3,000 people, including experts in information technology and engineers specialized in communications, monitoring and analysis. It also includes a military unit trained for special operations, including raids, assassinations and explosives manufacturing. There is another unit tasked with recruitment, while another does advocacy work (cultural security) and functions, which according to the sources include the dissemination of the ideas of the group and its founder Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, as well as infiltrating the media and organizing courses, seminars and workshops, whether in Yemen, Beirut or Iran...

The sources explained that this multi-tasking security force represents the intelligence arm of the leader of the group. Its functions go beyond focusing on the group's adversaries to also include elements of the group itself, where it monitors all movements of militia leaders and provides daily reports to the leader of the group, including all the details of the performance of the militia...



Continued: Is There a Crack in the Houthi Movement?

Source:

عودة الصراعات إلى داخل «البيت الانقلابي» في اليمن

“The Return of Internal Conflict to Yemen’s ‘Putschist Camp’,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 18 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5kw957b>

While disputes between the Houthi leaderships in Sana’a are expected to widen and spread to other militia-controlled areas, the conflict within the movement, particularly between the so-called “Saada” and “Tribal” wings, remains the actual frontrunner...

The province of Amran was not immune to this conflict. The day before yesterday, local sources in the province found the body of a tribal elder, a pro-militia leader called al-Waruri who previously worked to help the group in the invasion of Amran and Sana’a with money and fighters, on a road in the al-Qafla directorate, Amran Province. Tribal sources described the incident as “indicative of a mysterious assassination campaign led by Houthi leaders in the province.” Local residents accused the Preventive Security forces of involvement in the assassination of al-Waruri, especially after news of a dispute between him and Houthi leaders...

In the meantime, informed sources in Sana’a said that since the beginning of this month, the Preventive Security forces began to carry out large-scale arrests of a number of Houthi leaders and supervisors, accusing them of treason. Local media quoted sources close to the militias as saying that Preventive Security arrested more than 75 leaders in a month, including supervisors and Houthi officers in the capital and the provinces of Sana’a, Dhamar, Ibb, Hajjah and Amran, after storming their homes. They were put in a special prison belonging to Preventive Security.

Source:

يحيى الشامي.. مهندس الانقلاب الحوثي يتقدم إلى الواجهة

“Yahya al-Shami... The Houthi Coup Engineer Comes to the Fore,” *al-Bayan*, 2 August 2019. <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2019-08-02-1.3618582>

After failing to contain the conflict among its factions, the Houthi militia has pushed Major General Yahya al-Shami, the actual military commander of the militia who has been running things from behind for years, to the fore. At the same time, they reassigned the head of the so-called Revolutionary Committee, Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, to the Shura Council.

After chairing the so-called High Committee for Crises, which has managed clashes since the militia overthrew the government, al-Shami was appointed as a member of the so-called Supreme Political Council, which nominally administers areas under the militia’s control. This is in preparation for his taking over the council presidency, which is currently headed by Mahdi al-Mashat, the former chief of staff of the movement’s leader. At the same time, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi was removed from the council and appointed as a member of the Shura Council...

Before the invasion, according to military sources, al-Shami played a key role in planning the storming of Sana’a and the division of the city into security and military quadrants, as well as the distribution of armed cells in its neighborhoods in preparation for any possible confrontation. He supervised the command and mobilization of military operations, and led confrontations with forces supporting the late president in Sana’a in late 2017. Al-Shami brought in about 20,000 armed men and distributed them to the southern neighborhoods of the city. Al-Shami, who has emerged as a militia commander for decades, is credited with pursuing army officers he knew by virtue of his position, and establishing lines of communication with commanders of units in and around the capital to reassure them and dismantle these units by deploying staff and emptying them of their stockpiles and cadres.



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-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>



To Counter Piracy, West Africa Must Look East

OE Watch Commentary: While piracy off Africa's east coast has markedly decreased, it continues to be a significant problem off the continent's west coast. Numbers help tell the story. As the excerpted passage from an article in South Africa's *Institute for Security Studies* reports, from 2011 to 2017, pirate attacks off Somalia's coast went from 237 to nine. Last year there were only three. In contrast, the Gulf of Guinea was declared "the world's most dangerous for piracy" by the International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre this year, with 73% of all maritime kidnappings and 92% of hostage takings occurring in those waters.

The article discusses multiple reasons for this disparity between the two coasts, beginning with the Western Indian Ocean sea routes commanding significant international attention as ships heading to and from the Suez Canal link the enormous European, Indian, and East Asian markets. Additionally, those ships are from a large number of nations. Contrast this with the Gulf of Guinea, where most of the attacks occur in territorial waters against localized shipping among West African nations. Thus, the article notes, piracy off Somalia's coast generated a significant international effort, with several powerful navies - including American, Russian, Chinese, Indian, and French - coordinating their efforts, while the Gulf of Guinea response has relied on local navies which lack the capabilities of the non-African ones patrolling off the east coast.

Additionally, while there is a center in Yaoundé, Cameroon, tasked with implementing an interregional approach to issues such as piracy, many West African governments have not prioritized maritime security, making coordination among the countries difficult. The article notes that this has resulted in such problems as pirates shifting among maritime jurisdictions when one country applies pressure and the others do not.

Another example of poor coordination among the West African nations is the insistence by Nigeria that shipping companies within its territorial waters use Nigerian sailors onboard their ships. According to the article, this creates a problem when that ship needs to cross into the territorial waters of another country.

With piracy at record lows off Africa's east coast, the author warns against complacency. At the same time, he suggests the west coast nations increase regional coordination, perhaps with international assistance incorporating lessons learned from the other side of the continent. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“A few years ago piracy off the east coast of Africa, focusing on Somalia, was a major crisis, attracting extensive international attention. Now it has plummeted. Meanwhile across the continent in the Gulf of Guinea, the piracy problem, which never attracted quite the same attention, has persisted at much the same high levels.”

Source: Peter Fabricius, “Gulf of Guinea must look east to solve its pirate problem,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 1 August 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/gulf-of-guinea-must-look-east-to-solve-its-pirate-problem>

A few years ago piracy off the east coast of Africa, focusing on Somalia, was a major crisis, attracting extensive international attention. Now it has plummeted. Meanwhile across the continent in the Gulf of Guinea, the piracy problem, which never attracted quite the same attention, has persisted at much the same high levels...

Pirate attacks off Somalia's coast have dropped dramatically over the past eight years – from 237 incidents in 2011 to nine in 2017 and just three attempted attacks in 2018...

By contrast, on 8 July this year the International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB-PRC) said the seas around West Africa remained ‘the world's most dangerous for piracy.’ Of the 75 seafarers taken hostage on board or kidnapped for ransom worldwide so far this year, 62 were captured in the Gulf of Guinea – off the coasts of Nigeria, Guinea, Togo, Benin and Cameroon. ...

Walker [Senior Researcher and specialist in maritime issues at the Institute for Security Studies] notes that the many West African nations with shores on the Gulf of Guinea could better fight piracy through pooling their capacity and strengthening their law enforcement institutions. Such cooperation between and within the economic communities of West African States and Central African States is improving maritime security to a degree.

One manifestation of the need for coordination is that while private security guards on ships have been an effective, albeit controversial, means to combat pirates off Somalia, this hasn't worked in the Gulf of Guinea. Countries such as Nigeria insist on shipping companies manning their vessels with Nigerian naval teams in their national waters.

Another downside of the many different national jurisdictions fighting piracy in the west is that pirates can shift to different national maritime jurisdictions when one country steps up the pressure against them. This displacement of piracy could be a major factor in maintaining high overall piracy rates, Walker suggests.

He also notes that those fighting Somali piracy have been able to institutionalise their efforts more effectively than their Gulf of Guinea counterparts. However the institutions in the west are working as well as their member states empower them to, he says.

Reva notes that companies sailing off Somalia have together developed effective safety guidelines for ships travelling through a well-defined High Risk Area. For example, ships navigating through the region are urged to increase their speed and install protective systems on board. They are also asked to follow the protected Maritime Security Transit Corridor, making it harder for pirates to attack. These guidelines were key to bringing down piracy off Somalia's coast, Reva said.



Pirates off the Somali coast hijacking the MV Faina in 2008. While piracy has greatly decreased off east Africa's coast since then, it remains stubbornly persistent in the Gulf of Guinea.

Source: US Navy via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MV_Faina_-_pirates.jpg, Public Domain



Ghana Expands its Navy to Fight Petro-Piracy

OE Watch Commentary: With its vast amounts of offshore hydrocarbon deposits, Ghana suffers from maritime criminals who steal cargo that contains refined petroleum products, known as “petro-piracy.” This interferes with the important trade that Ghana conducts by sea, which is critical to its economy. In an effort to address this situation and improve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, Ghana signed a contract to construct a forward operating base (FOB) at Edzinlibo, a port in the country’s Western Region. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African site *DefenceWeb* notes, the new FOB should decrease the response time to petro-piracy.

The new base is only part of the Ghanaian navy’s upgrade. Six additional patrol boats will be added to the fleet, in addition to the two offshore patrol vessels that have been procured, with the capability to stay at sea for prolonged periods. As the article states, these can patrol the country’s “exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles and extended continental shelf of 350 nautical miles.”

While these new boats are welcome recent additions, Ghana’s navy has actually been growing over the past decade. Besides several fast attack and patrol boats it ordered from South Korea, Germany, and the US, it commissioned four patrol boats donated by China in 2017. Also, in 2011, the country commissioned two 46 meter patrol boats it bought from Poly Technologies, a Chinese company.

The petro-pirates that the navy is seeking to combat are reportedly part of a heavily armed criminal enterprise, which besides stealing petroleum products also kidnaps, shoots, and tortures crewmen. Ghana is not alone among West African nations dealing with these maritime criminals. Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and the DRC all have to combat illegal interference with the important trade they conduct by sea. The situation is apparently getting worse, with the International Maritime Bureau reporting that since 2018, attacks against ships and crews around West Africa have increased markedly. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



While Ghana’s naval fleet still has several older boats, such as those pictured here, it is adding newer ones to enhance its ability to combat maritime crime.

Source: Master Sergeant Steve Faulisi, USAF via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghanaian_Navy_035.jpg, Public Domain



Gulf of Guinea Nations.

Source: PresidentistVB via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gulf_of_Guinea_Nations.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

“As we all know the sea is the super highway for global trade and Africa’s quest for a continental free trade area cannot be successful without a secured maritime domain.”

Source: “New base and vessels for Ghana’s Navy,” *DefenceWeb (South Africa)*, 1 August 2019. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/new-base-and-vessels-for-ghanas-navy/>

The defence minister stated that the maritime sector was the backbone of the Ghanaian economy due to ports and harbours serving as the gateway for more than 80 per cent of the country’s international trade.

Over the past two years Ghana has experienced around ten actual and reported pirate attacks. With incidents of theft, kidnapping for ransom, illegal fishing and drug trafficking being common across West African oceans, Nitiwul states, “As we all know the sea is the super high way for global trade and Africa’s quest for a continental free trade area cannot be successful without a secured maritime domain.”

He said swift action is needed to deal with illegal and unregulated fishing, maritime pollution, sea robbery, illegal bunkering and other maritime crimes, and that technology can help overcome these challenges, along with information sharing and collaboration with other navies. He added that efforts are underway to achieve maritime domain awareness through satellite imagery and other maritime solutions while the Ghana Air Force was complementing the Navy with aircraft to protect the country’s maritime domain.



Burkinabe Civil Society Responds to Humanitarian Emergency

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from the French-language publication *Infowakat* discusses a civil society campaign to address the humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso resulting from a jihadist insurgency and government counter-measures. According to the article, there have been 250,000 displaced people in 100 villages, which in turn has meant farms and cattle have been left unattended. In some cases, the article notes the insurgents themselves have occupied or stolen from those properties.

To respond to this humanitarian emergency, civil society organizations have launched a campaign called “make a gesture” and alleviate the suffering of victims of the conflict. This is in recognition of the inability of the government to respond to their needs. To coordinate support, the participating organizations have been requesting other organizations to join and have been using mobile phones and the Internet to coordinate

donations. Part of the campaign has been an appeal to emotion with participating organizations explaining how several years ago no one could have ever expected that life in Burkina Faso would involve people fleeing their villages with only buckets and luggage being carried over the heads. Further, the appeal notes how parents have tragically lost their children when leaving their villages.

The article reflects how civil society in Burkina Faso is mobilizing its resources in areas where the government’s resources and response has been inadequate. In addition, this case demonstrates how social media is increasingly being used for humanitarian emergencies in developing countries such as Burkina Faso. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Road Traffic in the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou.

Source: Walter Hochauer via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Strasse_ouaga002_2007-02.JPG, CC BY-SA 3.0

“In the Sahel, North Central, North Central, and Eastern regions the humanitarian situation is ‘alarming’.”

Source: “Burkina: ‘Faisons un geste’ pour les déplacés (‘Let’s make a gesture’ for the displaced),” *Infowakat*, 1 August 2019. https://infowakat.net/burkina-faisons-un-geste-pour-les-deplaces/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=lettre_dinformation_de_infowakatnet_du_2019_08_02&utm_term=2019-08-02

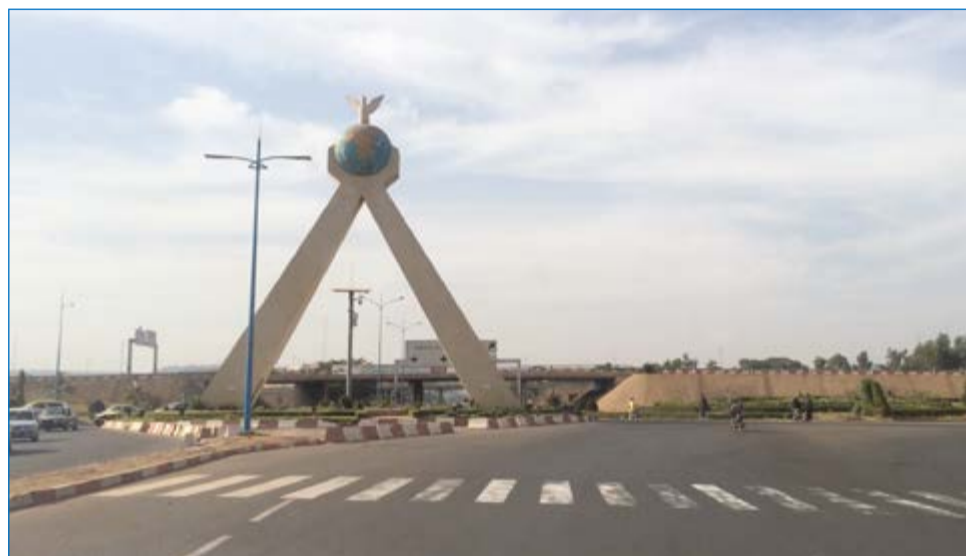
250 thousand people have become internally displaced because of the terrorist threat. These people have abandoned their fields, their cattle, their houses, and more. This has become the property of their executioners. To help them, “make a gesture” national solidarity campaign was launched on August 1, 2019. In the Sahel, North Central, North Central, and Eastern regions the humanitarian situation is “alarming”.

A “hundred villages are emptied of their inhabitants (...) and emergency public services have not planned for this massive influx of internally displaced persons and therefore people find themselves without receiving an appropriate response. Due to lack of organized relief, more than 95% of IDPs are hosted in host communities such as Barsalgho, Arbinda, Kaya, Ouagadougou, Boromo, Manga...” Some have lost their children on the road of exodus, and the lucky ones were greeted by goodwill, but unfortunately they sleep under the stars at the mercy of bad weather.



Mali Diaspora Seeks Larger Role in Mali Peace Process

OE Watch Commentary: For years and even decades, Malians abroad have played an outsized role in the economics of the country. A strong remittance economy is one of the pillars of relative economic stability in Mali. Families who have members living outside the country call on their relatives to help in times of drought and famine. The diaspora has built schools and health clinics across the country. Now, the Malian diaspora is seeking a larger role in the peace process in Mali to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict consuming the central and northern regions of the country. The accompanying article from *Actu Global*, a website run by the Institut National de Prévoyance Sociale (National Social Insurance Institute- INPS), discusses this effort.



Monument de la Paix in the administrative district of Bamako.

Source: Photo by Dodge Billingsley

Elements within the diaspora, specifically the High Council of the Malian Diaspora (CSDM) based in France, are getting involved

in the task of reconciliation and path to peace. In its quest, CSDM is enlisting another powerful, yet geographically diverse ally within Mali; the traditional village and tribal leaders including village and area chiefs and Qadis (judges or magistrates on local Sharia courts). Together, the CSDM and the local leaders hope to advance the country's peace process.

The first meeting including the CSDM and local power brokers recently took place in the city of Askia, and according to public statements from the current director of the CSDM, Chérif Mohamed Haïdara, it was a good first step. Haïdara said Mali's situation was dire but not any more dire than the recent past in Ivory Coast, or Burkina Faso, where "social problems are managed by the Mauro-Naba, who is above all." He touts both Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso as political successes brought about through local traditional governance.

It is difficult to say if this recent meeting of representatives from the diaspora and the traditional local leaders in Askia will have any lasting impact or lead to other meetings across the central and northern regions of the country where the conflict is acute. However, the power of the diaspora, and the power of the local traditional leadership is generally not disputed. In fact, historically, the federal government has been considered by some to be an artificial layer created or imposed from a colonial past. While Malians recognize the government, there is a tacit understanding that the day-to-day stability and rule of law, at the local level, is a function of traditional leaders. During every election cycle, candidates make the rounds among the traditional leadership to get their support. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“It is important for each of us to embrace the question of those who represent us in a constant, cultural way, to help our customary chiefs, our cantons, our imams, our scholars, because they are the first officials. So we in the diaspora are with you, we support your approach to peace and national reconciliation and we will pass, inshalla, the message ... because we know that without you, we will never have a united Mali, indivisible and in peace. It's impossible!” -- CSDM President Chérif Mohamed Haïdara

Source: “Le Président Du CSDM, Chérif Mohamed Haïdara, Aux Legitimités Traditionnelles De Gao: ‘Sans Vous, On N’aura Jamais Un Mali Uni, Indivisible Et En Paix’ (The President of the CSDM, Cherry Mohamed Haidara, to the Traditional Legitimacies of Gao: ‘Without You, One Will Never Have a United Mali, Indivisible and in peace’),” *Actu Globe, Institut National de Prévoyance Sociale*, 2 August 2019. <http://actu-globe.com/2019/08/02/le-president-du-csdm-cherif-mohamed-haidara-aux-legitimites-traditionnelles-de-gao-sans-vous-on-naura-jamais-un-mali-uni-indivisible-et-en-paix/>

Visibly seduced by the success of this first meeting, CSDM President Chérif Mohamed Haïdara is now advocating for the rehabilitation of traditional leaders in Mali. “In Burkina-Faso, social problems are managed by the Mauro-Naba who is above all,” says President Haidara at the microphone of our colleagues Africable television. Before continuing: “With a fratricidal war, Côte d’Ivoire, which was torn, almost disappeared from the map. But it has been reconstituted today and has almost become the economic heart of West Africa. This is because the Ivorian government relied on traditional leaders to convey the messages of peace and reconciliation.

CSDM President Chérif Mohamed Haïdara: “It is important for each of us to embrace the question of those who represent us in a constant, cultural way, to help our customary chiefs, our cantons, our imams, our scholars, because they are the first officials. So we in the diaspora are with you, we support your approach to peace and national reconciliation and we will pass, inshalla, the message ... because we know that without you, we will never have a united Mali, indivisible and in peace. It's impossible!”

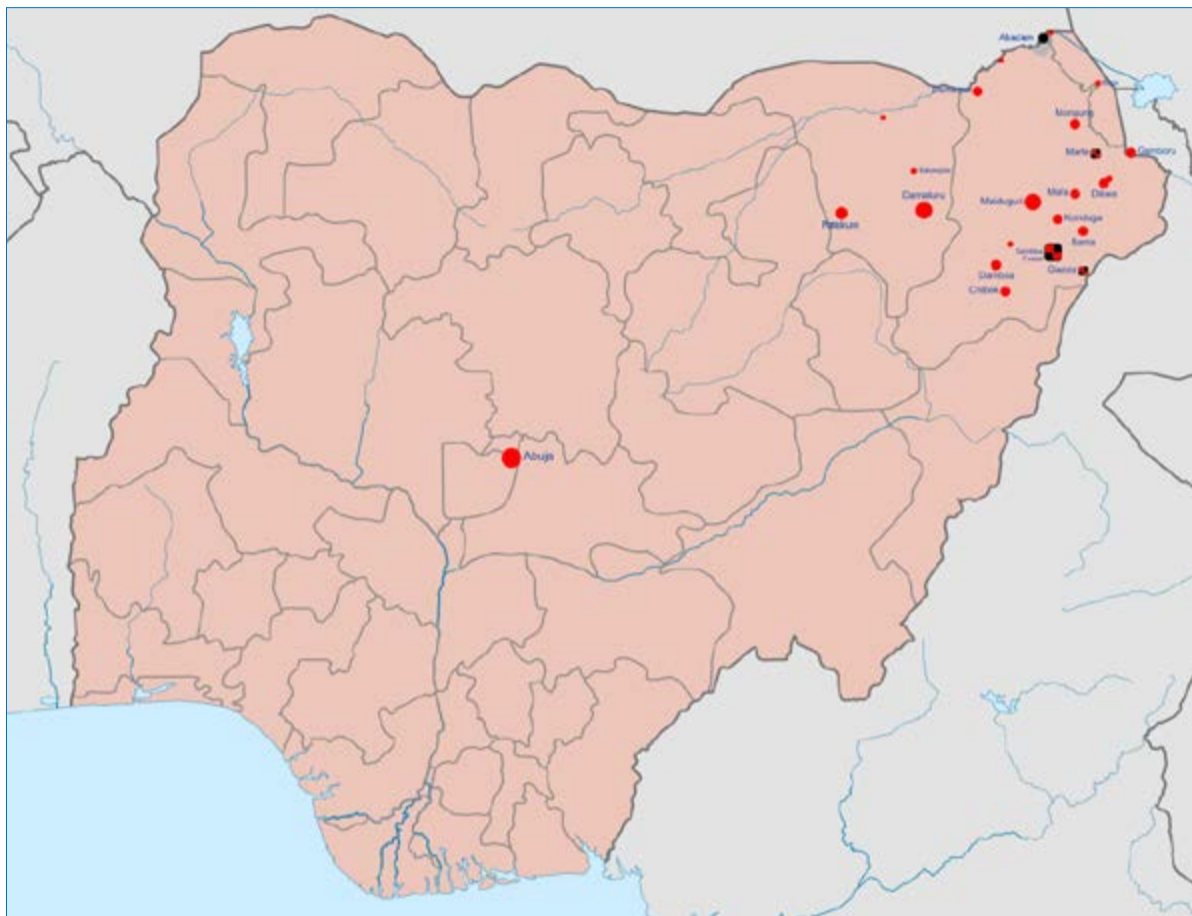


Borno Emir Returns Home Despite Boko Haram Threat

OE Watch Commentary: When Boko Haram conquered large swathes of Borno, Nigeria in 2014 it always targeted traditional rulers (emirs) by killing them or occupying their palaces if they fled their home villages. The town of Gwoza was unique among Boko Haram's conquests because it was from there that the group leader, Abubakar Shekau declared an "Islamic state" months before pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The accompanying passage from the Nigerian publication *ThisDay* discusses the Gwoza emir's return home for the first time after being displaced by Boko Haram in 2014.

According to the article, the emir's return was facilitated by the relative peace in the town. Despite his five-year absence, he appeared not to have lost popular support and received a rousing welcome from the town's inhabitants. Whereas five years ago Boko Haram controlled the town, now the emir and other politicians were also able to tour the town, participate in the celebration of the emir's return, and meet with commoners.

The new Borno governor's representative also declared that it was important to preserve local institutions, which are the same ones Boko Haram wanted to overturn in order to create its own governance structures.



Boko Haram insurgency map.

Source: Ali Zifan via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boko_Haram_insurgency_map.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0

At the same time, the article makes clear how vulnerable Gwoza remains. The governor's representative, for example, was reported to have promised the townspeople to repair the hospital, water sources, and other public utilities, which were destroyed during Boko Haram's occupation of the town. Only through these confidence-building measures will the governor be able to encourage people from Gwoza who fled Boko Haram to return to their hometown. As evidence that a return to normalcy is still not at hand, the article notes the governor's representative was unable to promise a return of the mobile phone network to Gwoza and called upon the military to launch continued campaigns against Boko Haram in mountains near Gwoza. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Addressing the people, Governor Babagana Umara said the return of the monarch signified the return of civic authority in the local institution.”

Source: “Borno Monarch Returns Home Five Years after Displacement by Boko Haram” *ThisDay*, 16 July 2019, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/07/16/orno-monarch-returns-home-five-years-after-displacement-by-boko-haram/>

The Emir of Gwoza in Borno State, Alhaji Mohammed Shehu-Timta, has returned home following relative peace and security five years after displacement from the kingdom by Boko Haram insurgents. Shehu-Timta who was accompanied by the Deputy Governor of the state, Mr. Usman Kadafur; Senator Ali Ndume (APC-Borno South), members of the state House of Assembly and village heads, among others, was received in a colourful celebration showcased with a martial display of Gwoza culture at the emir's palace. Addressing the people, Governor Babagana Umara said the return of the monarch signified the return of civic authority in the local institution. Represented by his deputy, Kadafur, the governor said his administration accords high respect and commitment to the traditional institution, describing it as a “symbol and pride of every society”. “We are going to accelerate the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Gwoza General Hospital, water sources and other public utility buildings, among others.”

Shehu-Timta recalled when the insurgents sacked the town in 2014, killings dozens of people, declaring the town as their spiritual caliphate. He also urged the military to intensify its operations on the Mandara Mountains to clear the remnants of the insurgents and to enable residents of the area return.



UAE to Establish Military Base in Niger

OE Watch Commentary: Niger has been sandwiched between unstable regions for nearly a decade, with the Boko Haram conflict in northeastern Nigeria and the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-led insurgency in northern Mali. Moreover, as a result of the ongoing Libyan civil war and competition between Gulf States in supporting various armed forces in that country, Niger is also being drawn into North African conflicts. In addition to Nigeria, Mali, and Libya, Niger also shares borders with Chad, Benin, and Burkina Faso, all of which have also experienced jihadist activity in recent years.

The accompanying article from the French-language Lebanese pro-Hezbollah publication *almanar.com.lb* discusses a plan in which the “Emirati army will install a military base on the northern border of Niger adjacent to Algeria and Libya.” By allowing this, the author claims

that Niger is involving itself in the Libyan quagmire and risking the security situation in Niger. The UAE is supporting the Khalifa Haftar-led Libyan National Army (LNA) in Libya, who, as the article explains, is backed by the alliance including Saudi Arabia and Egypt and that is opposed by Turkey and Qatar. The article suggests that Niger will face a risk from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is still active in Libya, especially in the south, near Niger’s border. ISIS could benefit from instability and power vacuums created by LNA attacks on militias backed by Turkey and Qatar.

The article alleges Niger received funding and diplomatic pressure from the UAE and help from the UAE’s ally, Saudi Arabia, to ensure the UAE could establish the base on Niger’s territory. While the article’s bias is no doubt against the UAE and therefore opposed to Niger’s relationship with the UAE, it also illuminates the growing impact of Gulf region rivalries on the geopolitics of somewhat distant and less wealthy countries such as Niger. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



C-17 UAE Air Force.

Source: Curimedia via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C-17_UAE_Air_Force_\(5988164451\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C-17_UAE_Air_Force_(5988164451).jpg), CC BY 2.0

“For Niger, the arrival of an Emirati military base is a high-risk operation.”

Source: “Une base militaire émiratie au Niger jouxtant la Libye et l’Algérie!” (An Emirati military base in Niger bordering Libya and Algeria!), *french.almanar.com.lb*, 16 June 2019. <http://french.almanar.com.lb/1394043>

Discussions between the Emiratis and Nigeriens have been long and difficult, but they are now on the verge of success. In the coming months the Emirati army will install a military base on the northern border of Niger adjacent to Algeria and Libya. This is a high-risk operation for President Issoufou who is thus putting a foot in the Libyan quagmire. This alliance with the “godfather” Haftar’s offensive against the Libyan National Unity could weaken the security situation in Niger, which is already not excellent.

Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou initially expressed his hesitation to any agreement with the UAE, arguing that his country had recently refused the installation of an Italian military base. Rome wanted to set up a military base in northern Niger under the pretext of combating illegal immigration to Europe. If [the UAE] joined the quest for installing a military base long after Italy, the Emiratis seem to have found the more decisive argument: the checkbook and diplomatic pressure, including the help of their Saudi allies who are very influential in Niger.

The agreement between Niger and the Emiratis is testimony to the extent to which Haftar’s decision to try to seize power by force in Libya could set the region on fire. The fighting around Tripoli had a first consequence of a certain resurgence of Daesh’s strength, with the awakening of many dormant cells.

The installation of an Emirati base in Niger prolongs the rivalry between, on the one hand, the United Arab Emirates and their Saudi and Egyptian allies, who declared support for the Libyan National Army and, on the other side, Turkey and Qatar, who are sponsors of the national unity government of armed militias defending Tripoli.

For Niger, the arrival of an Emirati military base is a high-risk operation. Indeed, several Nigerien nationals are already trapped by the war in Libya. They could pay for their country’s lack of neutrality in the clashes between Haftar and al-Sarraj. With the arrival of the Emirati army, Niger will therefore have four foreign forces on its soil not necessarily making it safe from terrorist attacks.



DRC: Links Between the ADF and ISIS

OE Watch Commentary: The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel group in the northeastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), carried out an attack on an army base on 16 April 2019. Shortly thereafter, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed responsibility. As the accompanying excerpted article from *African Arguments* points out, evidence that the two groups had links first emerged in 2018, but the April 2019 army base attack marked the first time that ISIS publicly acknowledged this relationship. Additional proof emerged two weeks after the attack when a video showed ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi receiving reports on global franchises, including the “Central Africa Province.” ISIS recognizing the ADF as one of its provinces would suggest relations between the Congolese rebels and international Islamist networks, though not much is known about them. The passage discusses some of these relations.



Government soldiers of the DRC on their way back from fighting Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in March 2014. In more recent years, the ADF has developed significant links with the Islamic State.

Source: MONUSCO/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/monusco/13246914484/>, CC BY-SA 2.0

Late last year, ISIS was found to have transferred money to the ADF. However, that discovery did little to clear up the mystery regarding the ties between them, as it was uncertain how much money was transferred, how it was moved, what it was ultimately used for, and if additional funds would be forthcoming.

As the article notes, the ADF has always been a highly fluid organization. Originally formed from several rebel groups, one of their main objectives was to overthrow Uganda’s government, and eventually they came to use neighboring DRC as a base from which to launch attacks. Although initially embracing a religious ideology, this weakened over time. However, in the late 2000’s, as they suffered marked losses at the hands of the Congolese army and the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), the ADF embraced more radical Islamist origins to help fill the decimated ranks. The article suggests that this might have been when they reached out to international Islamist networks. As an overture, they began to use a flag similar to the one used by ISIS and Boko Haram.

Unlike the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Islamic State West Africa Province, ADF’s leadership has not made a public pledge of allegiance following the recognition of the ADF as an ISIS affiliate. This makes it difficult to know if the affiliation extends throughout ADF or only a sub-faction of it. Either way, the affiliation appears to be paying off for ADF, especially since it adopted some ISIS propaganda strategies, as new recruits, including militants from neighboring countries, are helping to replenish its ranks. For its part, ISIS has also benefited from the relationship. As the passage notes, “since the implosion of its “caliphate” in Syria and Iraq, IS has been at pains to stay relevant.” The establishment of new franchises in Africa and Asia has become critical to keeping the organization’s “remain and expand” narrative alive. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Since the implosion of its “caliphate” in Syria and Iraq, IS has been at pains to stay relevant. The establishment of new franchises in Africa and Asia has become critical to keeping the organization’s “remain and expand” narrative alive.”

Source: David Bruckmeier, “The eastern DRC’s most active rebel group just got a bit more dangerous,” *African Arguments*, 31 July 2019. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/07/31/eastern-drc-most-active-rebel-group-just-got-a-little-more-dangerous-adf/>

The ADF was not eliminated in 2014 largely due to the lack of a sustained commitment from the Congolese government and its deterioration of relations with MONUSCO. Newly-elected President Felix Tshisekedi has urged swift, internationally-backed action against the growing terrorist threat posed by the ADF. Whether he has the power to turn his words into deeds is uncertain, though, given former president Joseph Kabila’s continued control of the DRC’s security forces. As increasing numbers of foreign soldiers join the ADF’s ranks, it may only be a matter of time until they take the insurgency to their home countries.

As religious indoctrination increased so did the intensity of the group’s violence. Between 2014 and 2018, nearly 2,000 people were killed in attacks attributed to the ADF. This surge in violence coincides with its possible establishment of ties with Islamist groups, but its increased recruitment from neighbouring countries, looting of weapons in raids on army installations, and the restoration of local support networks were likely more important factors in its resurgence. If IS’s other African affiliates are any indication, there may well be limited exchange of funds and fighters. The ADF’s fortunes have been and will continue to be primarily shaped by local dynamics.

Since the implosion of its “caliphate” in Syria and Iraq, IS has been at pains to stay relevant. The establishment of new franchises in Africa and Asia has become critical to keeping the organization’s “remain and expand” narrative alive.



The Growing Role of Women in Al-Shabaab

OE Watch Commentary: The first time a female al-Shabaab suicide bomber carried out a mission was in June 2011, when Somalia's interior minister, Abdishakur Sheikh Hassan, was killed. The bomber was his niece. Since then, the number of females who don suicide vests, as well as serve in prominent roles such as carrying out intelligence operations, has increased. The excerpted accompanying article from *The East African* discusses this trend.

As the passage notes, one reason for the uptick in the recruitment of women is the belief that they generally attract less suspicion than men. That might have been the case on 24 July 2019, when a female suicide bomber walked into the office of Mogadishu mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman where a security meeting was being held. The blast killed seven and injured several others. Al-Shabaab claimed the intended target was the UN envoy to Somalia, James Swan, who had just left the building when the attack occurred. The mayor was critically injured and later died from his wounds.

It appears that Somali women are not the only ones being trained for deployment as facilitators, logisticians, and attackers; the article points out that the jihadist organization purportedly has recruited Kenyan women. This has caused Kenyan security agencies to be on high alert. As Kenya's Inspector General of Police, Hillary Mutyambai noted, it was initially thought that al-Shabaab mainly recruited women to serve as jihadi brides, with their tasks mostly centering on cooking and cleaning in the militants' camps. Now, some of the women are assuming different roles, including more senior ones that were traditionally reserved for men.

One role for women is spy. A Kenyan security report discussed in the article notes how they have been deployed to befriend government officials. Al-Shabaab's intent is for them to identify security loopholes that the terrorist organization can then exploit. In January 2019, there was a deadly attack in Kenya at the DusitD2 hotel complex, with at least two women playing instrumental roles in the operation. Kenyan security agencies are worried another attack could be in the works, and that women trained by al-Shabaab could play key roles in that one as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Al-Shabaab has increased the number of women in its organization, not just for suicide attacks such as the one that recently killed Mogadishu's Mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman, pictured here, but also to serve as logisticians and other key roles.
Source: UNSOM/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unsom/27154513118>, Public Domain

“Not only are they [regional security agencies] concerned by the high rate at which the Al-Qaeda-affiliated group is recruiting young well-educated women, but [they] are also wary about the high profile positions it is giving them in the insurgency movement.”

Source: “Terrorists turn to female suicide bombers in new trend,” *The East African*, 4 August 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Terrorists-turn-to-female-suicide-bombers-in-new-trend/4552908-5222336-6kytw6z/index.html>

Security analyst George Musamali notes that among the things that drive women to join Islamists groups is the “romantic notion of the lives of extremists, honour and accolades as well as the idea of being a mujahidin's spouse, widow or mother.”

The new trend of Al-Shabaab recruiting an alarmingly high number of women into their rank and file is mainly because women are less [likely] to raise suspicion when undertaking terror activities.

This was the fourth known time Al-Shabaab has used a woman in a suicide attack. Now the frequency at which it is deploying women in their attack missions is alarming regional security agencies.

Not only are they concerned by the high rate at which the Al-Qaeda-affiliated group is recruiting young well-educated women, but are also wary about the high profile positions it is giving them in the insurgency movement.

Previously it was thought widely that women were primarily recruited by Al-Shabaab as brides for fighters and were meant to cook and clean in the militants' camps.

However more women are now assuming greater roles in active combat, intelligence gathering, planning, coordination, and execution of attacks, according to the intelligence report.

On Saturday, Inspector General (IG) of Police Hillary Mutyambai said security agencies were on high alert.

“We are aware that Al-Shabaab is changing tack and increasingly using women as facilitators and spies, not just brides for the fighters. More women are being trained to take up more senior roles that were reserved for men,” he said.

The IG said this should be “a wake-up call to the security agencies and members of the public to be on the lookout”.

The Kenyan security report adds that some of the women are to be deployed to befriend government officials and identify loopholes in security and report to Al-Shabaab for planning of the attacks.

The most recent high-profile case involved Violet Kemunto who was the wife of Ali Salim Gichunge, aka Farouk, the mastermind of the DusitD2 hotel complex attack in January this year....

Another female accomplice, Miriam Abdi, whom is believed to have played a central role in the delivery of the deadly weapons used in the attack is still on the run.

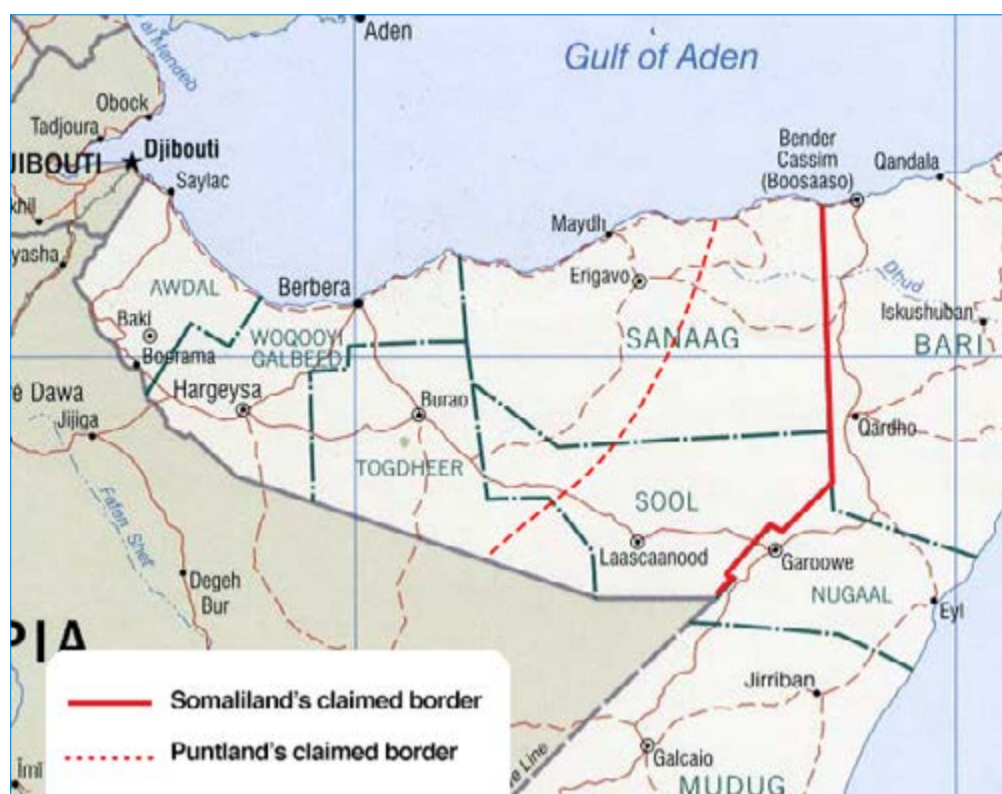
The new trend of Al-Shabaab recruiting an alarmingly high number of women into their rank and file is mainly because women are less likely to raise suspicion when undertaking terror activities.



Somaliland Emerging as Geopolitical Battleground

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from a recent article in Kenya's *The East African* discusses Kenya's relationship with Somaliland in the context of regional geopolitics. The article discusses a controversy, which commenced after Kenya's Principal Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted that he met Somaliland's "foreign minister" to discuss strengthened cooperation between Kenya and Somaliland. Somalia then protested to Kenya about this because it does not recognize Somaliland, noting the tweet denigrated Somali sovereignty, disrespected Somalia's "One Somalia" policy, and negatively impacted relations with Kenya.

The article also explains how Somalia broke diplomatic ties with Guinea because Somaliland's "president" met Guinea's president during his visit to Guinea's capital, Conakry. Somaliland, in turn, claimed Somalia and Western countries, particularly Italy, are working to stymie Somaliland's quest for independence. In addition, the article suggests Kenya's tightening relations with Somaliland are meant "as leverage over the maritime dispute with Nairobi that comes up for hearing at the International Court of Justice on September 9."



Map of Somaliland border claims.

Source: Drieakko via wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_somaliland_border_claims.jpg, Public Domain.

Besides Kenya's and Guinea's relations with Somaliland angering Somalia, the article also states that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has not only made a deal with Somaliland to expand its Berbera port but also has maintained relations with Puntland, having trained and funded its security forces. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have also both been involved in the reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea and in the political transition in Sudan. While countries in Africa and the Gulf region are both jockeying for power in East Africa, Somalia, which has been busy fighting al-Shabaab, appears left out and unable to assert power to prevent what it considers growing rebelliousness from Puntland and Somaliland. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“We consider this tweet an affront to Somali sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, as well as harmful to the relationship between Somalia and Kenya.”

Source: “Scramble for Horn of Africa by Gulf, Orient, Western and African interests,” *The East African*, 14 July 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/africa/Scramble-for-Horn-of-Africa/4552902-5195356-whjo0h/index.html>

What started as a tweet by Kenya's Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary Macharia Kamau on May 27 has brought to the surface a covert competition for political and economic influence in the Horn. Mr Kamau's tweet that he had met Somaliland Foreign Minister Yasin Hagi Mohamed and discussed issues of mutual interest and ways of strengthening co-operation between the two countries infuriated Mogadishu, which has refused to recognise Somaliland's secession since 1991. Mogadishu responded by issuing a protest letter to Nairobi for hosting officials of the breakaway Somaliland. A week later, Somalia broke diplomatic ties with Guinea for affording the protocol of a head of state to Somaliland president Musa Bihi during his one week visit to Conakry.

There are concerns in Mogadishu that Kenya is trying to forge closer ties with Somaliland as a leverage over the maritime dispute with Nairobi that comes up for hearing at the International Court of Justice on September 9. Now, the United Arab Emirates — an ally of Saudi Arabia in their competition with the Qatar/Turkey axis for political and economic influence in the Horn — is emerging as a critical player. In the past year, the UAE has been on the wrong side of Mogadishu by maintaining bilateral relations with Puntland state, where it is training and funding security forces.



South African Military Enters Cape Flats to Quell Violence

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-July, troops from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) entered Cape Flats, an impoverished area of Cape Town, evoking memories of apartheid. But this time they were not sent by a white government to quell rebellion against racist laws. As the excerpted accompanying article from the South African site *DefenceWeb* explains, the troops were there to help stem the community's staggering gang violence. The deployment came just a few days after a bloody weekend in early July.

The article explains that the troops are there to serve as force multipliers, allowing the police, who are usually too few in number to effectively maintain law and order, to operate in areas that were previously a no-go for them. This could potentially lead to the arrest of gang bosses and ultimately create a secure enough environment to allow social interventions to prevent youths—many of whom are unemployed—from turning to crime. The police are also supposed to take this time to modernize, increase their effectiveness, and improve their legitimacy; by tackling corruption and collusion with gang members that has occurred within police ranks.

A total of 1,302 troops are involved in this operation. SANDF has some experience with helping to mitigate violence in civilian areas based on peacekeeping operations in places such as the DRC. Armed with R4's, they will operate roadblocks, conduct patrols, and perform other tasks in support of the local police.

As the article notes, while expectations were high that the troops would have an immediate positive impact on the crime rate, the initial results have been disappointing, and resentment is starting to set in, with one individual describing the operation as “inflated expectations.” The article claims that the troops' effectiveness may be hindered by strict rules of engagement as well as the requirement that they follow the police's lead.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)



Many South African troops, such as these attached to MONUSCO, have served as peacekeepers. Now they are being asked to apply that peacekeeping experience to one of their own urban areas that has become riddled with gang violence.

Source: MONUSCO/Flickr, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_African_Army#/media/File:South_African_troops_MONUSCO.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0

“What the deployment can do is temporarily stem gang related violence and give the politicians and police time to come up with a longer-term plan.”

Source: Jonathan Katzenellenbogen, “SANDF deployment in Western Cape giving space for politicians and police,” *DefenceWeb* (South Africa), 30 July 2019. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/sandf-deployment-in-western-cape-giving-space-for-politicians-and-police/>

At best, the deployment offers a temporary, partial, and far from ideal solution. Ideally the police would be in control. What the deployment can do is temporarily stem gang related violence and give the politicians and police time to come up with a longer-term plan.

The shortage of police in the province and the intense nature of the gang violence raises the matter of whether Ramaphosa will extend the deployment, beyond the initial three month period, which ends on 16 September. This is at a time when there could be more calls for military support for the police to help quell attacks on trucks on the N3 in Kwa-Zulu Natal, contain gang violence in Port Elizabeth, and help to control potential outbreaks of violence fuelled by low economic growth.

President Cyril Ramaphosa ordered the deployment just days after a bloody weekend in early July when 13 people were killed in Philippi East on the Cape Flights. Yet coming after years of not responding to calls for soldiers to be deployed, it is also a sign of what Cameron Dugmore, the ANC Leader in the Western Cape Legislature, has called the “new dawn” in the Province's politics.



Forum of Sao Paulo in the Dumps

OE Watch Commentary: The Forum of Sao Paulo (FSP) held its 25th plenary in Caracas this July 25 through 28. As noted in the first accompanying reference, pro-forum *Telesur* reported the meeting's ostensible purposes to include advancing resistance to American imperialism, a favorite staple. Additionally and significantly, *Telesur* noted that one of the centerpiece themes would be support of the "Norway Dialog," which is a negotiation between the Bolivarian regime in Caracas and a slice of opposition parties ostensibly led by Juan Guaidó.

The FSP, an umbrella organization of socialist, communist and workers' political parties formed in the early 1990, has had great success in the past couple of decades in helping member parties take the reins of local and national governments. The forum apparently did not enjoy the kind of attendance this year in Caracas to which it is accustomed and for which its organizers had hoped.

As noted in the second accompanying reference, a number of influential leftist parties, long-term members of the FSP, did not attend or kept their participation hidden. These included the leftist parties from Chile, probably out of support for Michelle Bachelet, with whom the Bolivarians suffered some recent diplomatic unpleasantness. Even Bolivian President Evo Morales, a stalwart within the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) group, made some waffling communications about Bolivian attendance, announcing that Bolivia would not attend 'as government,' in view of upcoming elections in that country.

One of the controversies associated with the meeting involved participation in Caracas by amnestied FARC leaders, who supposedly had to seek permission to leave Colombia. They not only attended, but at least one was given the stage. Moreover, a FARC spokesperson, as recorded in the third accompanying reference, boasted about its long affiliation with the forum, saying that the FARC was one of the "founding members of the Forum of Sao Paulo." The FARC's condition as a legal political party under the FARC-Santos accords makes its open participation in the forum more publicly acceptable, but noteworthy is the openness with which the FARC leadership now talks about their past participation. That openness seems to have marked the forum meeting generally.

The revolutionary goals and methods are no longer being expressed sub rosa, or, for that matter, the forum's alliance with the Venezuelan uniformed group known as the Cartel of the Suns, which is led by Diosdado Cabello. The Cartel, which is heavily involved in transnational criminal activity, was given prominence at the forum meeting. The new radical candor, along with the poor humanitarian record in Venezuela, might be part of what made some leaders of leftist parties in other countries uncomfortable. It appears that although the Cuban Communist Party and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela were hoping that the conference would improve the image and regional support for their (Maduro) administration in Caracas, the opposite happened, as member parties from several countries found it too disadvantageous politically to be seen in support of the Bolivarian regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“Journalists and observers in Caracas consider that it is the weakest FSP meeting in many years, given that in reality the number of delegates and international guests did not reach 150, far from the 800 announced by Diosdado Cabello.”

“We were founding members of the Forum of Sao Paulo.” - FARC Spokesperson

Source: Editors, “Inicia en Venezuela el XXV Encuentro del Foro de Sao Paulo (XXV Meeting of the Forum of Sao Paulo in Venezuela Begins),” *Telesur*, 25 July 2019. <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/venezuela-sede-encuentro-foro-sao-paulo-20190725-0007.html>

“According to the event organizers, for this edition of debate and reflection is foreseen about the advance of neoliberalism and imperialism in the world and the region...The objectives of the meeting in the Venezuelan capital will center on the struggle for peace in Colombia, for peace in Venezuela and for support of the Norway Dialogs, among other themes of regional interest... Attendance is expected from more than 125 leftist movements and political parties of the world...”



Continued: Forum of Sao Paulo in the Dumps

Source: Editors, “No asistió al Foro de Sao Paulo: Izquierda democrática marca distancia del régimen de Maduro (Democratic left distances itself from the Maduro regime),” *Venezuela Red Informativa*, 27 July 2019. <http://venezuelaredinformativa.com>

“The meeting of the Forum of Sao Paulo (FSP) that is happening in Caracas through this Saturday has several drops in attendance of the political parties that form it... The greatest evidence of this fracture is demonstrated by the attitude of the government of Bolivia, which publicly transmitted that it would NOT attend ‘as government’, a decision that is interpreted as a tactical move due to presidential elections that will be carried out in October... Journalists and observers in Caracas consider that it is the weakest FSP meeting in many years, given that in reality the number of delegates and international guests did not reach 150, far from the 800 announced by Diosdado Cabello.”

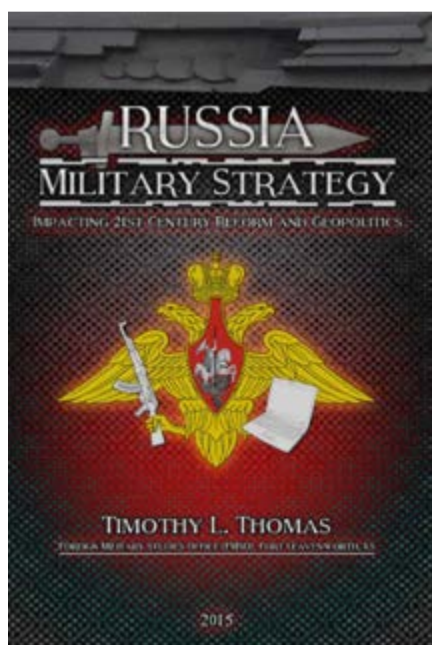
Source: Editors, “‘El Foro de Sao Paulo no tiene ningún vínculo con Santrich’: Rodrigo Granda (The Forum of Sao Paulo has no ties with Santrich: Rodrigo Granda),” *Semana*, 12 July 2019. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-foro-de-sao-paulo-no-tiene-ninguna-vinculacion-con-santrich-rodrico-granda/623226>

“... [Question to an official spokesperson of the FARC, Rodrigo Granda while in Colombia]: ‘You [the FARC] were able to participate in the forum as a guerrilla movement?’

[Answer]: ‘Yes, as an armed movement. That caused a very big debate around whether or not a guerrilla could be included. We were founding members of the Forum of Sao Paulo and we participated during the most critical period of repression in this country. Definitely, we had to be careful...’

Source: Richard Mathews, “El Foro de Sao Paulo hace una alianza estratégica con el Cartel de los Soles (The Forum of Sao Paulo makes a strategic alliance with the Cartel of the Suns),” *Diario Las Américas*, 14 June 2019. <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/americas-latina/el-foro-sao-paulo-hace-una-alianza-estrategica-el-cartel-los-soles-n4179267>

“Havana, in sum, is putting its strategy and intelligence resources in the service of the recuperation of progressivism and to defend the stability of the Maduro regime, while the Cartel of the Suns loosens resources and assumes real power in Venezuela, while they find a transition that will preserve their domination... According to authoritative sources, the immediate objectives are summarized as ‘take advantage of the incoherence of the opposition to keep Nicolás Maduro in power; back the government of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua; endorse the illegal candidacy of Evo Morales in Bolivia; underwrite the success of the President López Obrador’s agenda in Mexico; politically and financially support the candidacies of Cristina Kirchner in Argentina and of Gustavo Petro in Colombia; fight together for the liberation of Lula da Silva in Brazil; and strengthen relationships with Islamic fundamentalism, among other projects’.”



RUSSIA MILITARY STRATEGY: IMPACTING 21ST CENTURY REFORM AND GEOPOLITICS by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

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ELN Emerging as Bolivarian Strike Force

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying references are representative of multiple reports indicating that the Army of National Liberation (ELN) may now be the central fighting force of the Bolivarians, and that the current Colombian administration of Ivan Duque is not keen on giving it the same deference that previous President Santos gave the FARC.

The first accompanying reference, from Lima-based *El Comercio* reports a first-hand visit to an ELN unit in the western Colombian state of Chocó. The non-critical article includes some interesting data and assertions, but is especially significant because of the obvious displacement by the ELN of the FARC, which had been the more dominant guerrilla in that region in the past. The ELN has increased both its presence and impunity within Venezuelan territory as well, and enjoys improving relations there with both the FARC and the formal armed services controlled by the Bolivarian hierarchy.



FARC Flag.

Source: MrPenguin20 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_FARC-EP.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0

The second accompanying article, from Argentina-based *Infobae*, is an involved and fascinating piece exposing the dog-eat-dog nature of outlaw competition (along the Venezuelan border) that has become a lawless scramble in which the ELN is but the leading brand of thuggery. Any potential dialog between the ELN and the Colombian government apparently ended when the ELN was found responsible for the January bombing of a police school in Bogotá.

The third accompanying reference, also from *Infobae*, reports a decision of the Colombian government not to dialog with the ELN, but to arrest its leaders instead. The article is also noteworthy for analysts in that it lists the ELN leadership and outlines the counties composing the ‘Catatumbo’ region, among other things. (Also see “ELN Rising” in the June 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“Before, they disputed territorial control with the FARC, but after the disarmament of the ‘compas’ – as they call them –, the ELN was left confronting the Army, the dissidents of the first group [FARC] and armed drug trafficking bands...”

Source: “En la selva con el ELN, la última guerrilla de América (In the jungle with the ELN, the last guerrilla in America),” *El Comercio* and *AFP*, 19 June 2019. <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/eln-colombia-choco-guerrilla-bombardeos.html>

“Fifty-five years have past since its rising up in arms, the 4th of July, 1964, and the Army of National Liberation is still there: without winning nor conceding defeat. Its adversary is stronger than before, but the new generation of leaders defends and asserts the ‘open war against the State’... Decimated in past epochs, the ELN now has a foot strength of 2,300 combatants as opposed to the 1800 that official intelligence counted in 2017... In Chocó they unleash a guerrilla war under special conditions... in that dense jungle where they traffic in wood, cocaine, gold, and platinum, they move on foot or in outboard motor launches.... Before, they disputed territorial control with the FARC, but after the disarmament of the ‘compas’ – as they call them --, the ELN was left confronting the Army, the dissidents of the first group [FARC] and armed drug trafficking bands...”

Source: Sebastiana Barráez, “Tensión en la frontera: paramilitares colombianos amenazaron a la Policía venezolana por amparar a la guerrilla (Tension on the border: Colombian paramilitaries threaten the Venezuelan police for helping the guerrilla),” *Infobae*, 9 July 2019. <http://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/07/09/arde-la-frontera-paramilitares-colombianos-amenazaron-a-la-policia-venezolana-por-amparar-a-la-guerrilla/>

“A few days ago, three ‘colectivos’, as the armed civilians are called, were ‘charging for vaccinations’ (obliging people to give them money for their causes [extortion racket] on the trocha [smuggling path across border] Grullo de Ureña, Táchira, when they were captured by paramilitaries of the Grupo La Línea, led by alias “El Paisa”, who carried them away and quartered them [chopped them up]. They made some pamphlets threatening the CICPC and GAES or CONAS [police units of the Bolivarian state apparatus] for ‘offering guerrilla groups and colectivos an environment where they could camp out and sow their politics in our county’.”

Source: Editors, “La Fiscalía de Colombia ordenó la captura de diez líderes del ELN, incluidos los cinco miembros de su cúpula (The Colombian Justice Ministry ordered the capture of ten ELN leaders, including the five members of its central command),” *Infobae*, 2 August 2019. <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2019/08/02/la-fiscalia-de-colombia-ordeno-la-captura-de-diez-lideres-del-eln-incluidos-los-cinco-miembros-de-su-cupula/>

“...Issued by way of these documents are arrest warrants against Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista, alias ‘Gabino’, y Eliecer Herlinto Chamorro, alias ‘Antonio García’... Additionally, the highest level of leadership of the guerrilla is made up by Israel Ramírez Pineda, alias ‘Pablo Beltrán’; Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias ‘Pablito’, y Rafael Sierra Granados, alias ‘Ramiro Vargas’... The Catatumbo, one of the regions in Colombia with the most coca cultivation, is formed by the counties of Convención, El Carmen, El Tarra, Hacarí, La Playa, San Calixto, Sardinata, Teorama and Tibú... In Quito, in February, 2017, The ELN initiated peace negotiations with the former Colombian administration, which were moved to Havana in May 2018 where in August the last round of dialogs ended without progress...”



Simon and Snowy

OE Watch Commentary: On occasion of commemorating Simon Bolívar's victory at the Battle of Boyacá Bridge (7 August 1819) and the 200th birthday of the Colombian Army, Medellín journalist Juan Escobar added a worthy detail. Framing his eulogy as a note about the animals beloved of the Liberator, the subject of Mr. Escobar's article is not the common fare about Bolívar's horses, but is instead about a puppy the General came across after the Battle of Niquitao (2 July 1813). The puppy was a cross between mastiff and shepherd (called a Mucuchí, now a breed known in English as the Venezuelan Sheepdog). Because the puppy had dark fur with a streak of white along its back and tail, the General named him Nevado (Snowy Peak or Snowy), a name that could hardly be more appropriate to the Andean geographies of the Spanish American War of Liberation. Snowy was friendly, but also very protective and prone to fierce attacks against the enemies of his friends, a habit which Mr. Escobar informs us caused the Liberator anguish. Snowy campaigned for years alongside Bolívar when, after the battle of Carabobo (24 June 1821), news came to the General that his friend had been mortally wounded.

Mr. Escobar's poignant narrative has a receptive audience in Colombia. In recent years, thousands of canines have served in the Colombia police and military, especially as drug and mine detectors. Many have given their lives. As landmine sniffers, dogs became priority targets of FARC and ELN snipers. Well aware, Mr. Escobar moves from the 19th century to the 21st by noting the life and heroism of a dog named Sasha, who, like Snowy, was killed in combat after years of courageous service. Just short of retirement, Sasha died from a FARC grenade during Operation Sodoma that dispatched FARC chief Mono Jojoy (23 September 2010). In Colombia, the four-pawed heroes do not go unappreciated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Statue of Nevado and the Indian Tinjaca, the two companions of Simón Bolívar, in Plaza Bolívar de Mucuchíes, Mérida.

Source: adri021 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nevado_%26_Tinjaca_Simon_Bolivar%27s_companions.jpg, CC BY 2.0

“We honor all our heroes! Even those with four paws.”

Source: Juan David Escobar Valencia, “Los amigos cuadrúpedos de Simón Bolívar (The four-legged friends of Simon Bolivar),” *El Colombiano*, 5 August 2019. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/opinion/columnistas/los-amigos-cuadrupedos-de-simon-bolivar-GG11358482>

In battles, Nevado was fierce and attacked the enemy, something that anguished Bolivar...The 24th of June, 1821 at the Battle of Carabobo that would seal the definitive independence of Venezuela, when he was celebrating the victory, The Liberator received the terrible news that Nevado had died...Nevado was found pierced by a lance, his beautiful fur bathed in blood. To the man who had seen so many battles and been witness to the death of so many brave men, it was impossible to hold back his tears... Our 'Nevado' heroes did not disappear that day. We remember Sasha, the Labrador of the Colombian Army, who in more than 100 mine detection operations kept hundreds of soldiers and Colombian children from being blown to bits, short only four months to retirement, died from a grenade during Operation Sodoma in 2010... We honor all our heroes! Even those with four paws.



Update on the FARC

OE Watch Commentary: In the first reference, Editor in Chief of the *Panam Post*, Vanessa Vallejo makes a compelling argument to the effect that there was never a peace agreement in Colombia and that the FARC is now much stronger than it was when Alvaro Uribe left office in 2010. Vallejo points out that what many like to call dissidents of the FARC are not dissidents, but simply FARC. She makes her argument on the basis of the actions and words of what was the previous and now is the present leadership of the FARC, and on the size, geography and activities of the units comprising the ‘dissidence.’ Political power correlates to finances, and finances can correlate to the control of lines of communication for trade, in this context smuggling routes.

As reported in the second reference, Colombia remains the world’s largest producer of coca. Though slightly reduced in total acreage, the coca growing areas have become more productive, including in border areas. Smuggling routes go from something of potential black market value toward that market, and it appears that many of the best routes from Colombia are still controlled by the FARC. While many are used for clandestine coca transport, the routes are used to transport other goods as well, such as illegally mined gold. The third accompanying reference gives us some insight into the nature of human rights violation accusations in Colombia. It is reported that many of the ex-combatants of the FARC are being assassinated, along with ‘social leaders.’ The reference indicates that, if we are to believe the Colombian Ministry of Justice, most of the murders are being committed by criminal organizations, especially including FARC units that did not submit to conditions of the agreement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The ‘new’ FARC is much, much stronger than it was when ex-president Álvaro Uribe Vélez left power...”

Source: Vanessa Vallejo, “Las ‘nuevas’ FARC: el legado del acuerdo de La Habana (The New FARC: legacy of the Havana accords),” *Panam Post*, 23 January 2019. <https://es.panampost.com/vanessa-araujo/2019/07/23/nuevas-farc-acuerdo-habana/>

Dissidents of the FARC do not exist. The guerrilla planned from the start to get to Congress without giving up its arms or the marketing of drugs. To continue supporting the Santos-FARC accords is to be complicit in a tragedy... According to the Colombian Observatory of Organized Crime, there are around 2,500 ‘dissidents’ of the FARC in arms. They are distributed in 37 structures and present in 18 Departments and 120 counties, zones where the guerrilla has historically always been...With a couple of exceptions the top leaders of the FARC also make up part of what many are calling ‘dissidents’... The ‘new’ FARC is much, much stronger than it was when ex-president Álvaro Uribe Vélez left power, indeed Santos received a defeated guerrilla group.

Source: Iván Briceño, “ONU: Colombia es el mayor cultivador de hoja de coca (UN: Colombia is the largest grower of coca leaf),” *Radio Santafe*, 3 August 2019. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2019/08/03/colombia-se-mantiene-como-mayor-cultivador-de-hoja-de-coca-pese-a-leve-baja-en-2018/>

“Colombia continues to be the principal grower of coca leaf in the world, in spite of a mild reduction of 1.2% in 2018...The representative in Colombia of the United Nations Office against drugs and crime (ONUDD) Pierre Lapauque, said ‘At the end of last year, the area seeded with coca had a slight reduction, passing 171,000 hectares (in 2017) to 169,000 hectares.’ Lapauque noted that there was a ‘compensatory effect’ that explained ... the shrinkage was not as significant: while the crops were reduced in nine departments, there were increases in regions such as Bolívar (north), Cauca (southwest) y Norte de Santander (border con Venezuela). The diplomat asserted that ‘the coca crops are continuously more concentrated.’”

Source: Editors, “Las ‘disidencias’ de las Farc son las que más asesinan a sus excombatientes (‘Dissident’ Elements of the FARC are who most is killing its ex-combatants),” *El Nuevo Siglo*, 4 August 2019. <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/articulos/08-2019-disidencias-de-las-farc-son-las-que-mas-asesinan-sus-excombatientes>

“...The majority of the crimes against ex-combatants of the FARC have been committed by its dissidents and [other] organized armed groups, the Justice Ministry informed yesterday... According to the official report, of the universe of identified murders, 190 victims, 26 have been committed by FARC dissidents – denominated Residual Organized Armed Groups (GOAR); 10 by private citizens, eight by Clan del Golfo and eight by the ELN. Likewise, Type 3 organizations (whose operations are limited to barrios or sectors) are responsible for eight homicides, Los Pelusos (dissidents of the EPL) are authors of five and two were committed by Public Forces [government]... This past 19 July, the Verification Mission of the United Nations revealed in front of the Security Council of that organization that it had verified the death of 123 ex-combatants of the extinct FARC guerrilla. The organism asked the state to guarantee the security of these persons.”



Costa Rica: Cartels' Coca Plantation Experiment Confirmed

OE Watch Commentary: Are certain climates or locations better than others to grow coca plants? Perhaps, but certain key factors needed to grow coca plants can be mimicked to make an area previously deemed as unfavorable more favorable. In July 2018, authorities had discovered the first ever coca plantation in Costa Rica, which represented a completely new and possibly experimental method being employed by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). As the accompanying passage from Costa Rican news source *La Nacion* discusses, this was some kind of experiment, specifically an “attempt by DTOs to develop biologic studies aimed at making cocaine plants more resistant to climate variations.” In June 2019, according to the accompanying article, “a laboratory analysis carried out by forensic scientists has confirmed that the plantation located last year was coca leaf or *Erythroxylum coca*.” The article points out that the July 2018 discovery was “the first and only discovery of those shrubs in Costa Rica.”



Coca plantation on a hillside near Caranavi, western Bolivia.
Source: International Center for Tropical Agriculture via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caranavi_field5_lo_\(4387016012\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caranavi_field5_lo_(4387016012).jpg), CC by SA 2.0

Traditional cocaine production countries are located in the Andean ridge of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. This is because cocaine plants require hot, damp, and humid climates as well as iron-rich clay soil to thrive; all of which are present in rainforest environments unique to the Andean jungle. However, similar environments are available in select areas of Costa Rica.

The coca plantation discovered in July 2018 was in the Perez Zeledon region of Costa Rica. Michael Soto, Costa Rica's Minister of Security suggests that this plantation may have been experimental to see if the plants would grow. Guillermo Araya, Director of the Costa Rican Drug Institute (ICD), asserts that the initial attempts by DTOs to grow cocaine plants on Costa Rican soil were not successful and that “after evaluating the results, it appears that the producers did not obtain the objectives they had hoped for.” However, he points out that traffickers will always evolve and find new ways to achieve their objectives, which include “reducing shipping costs to the US by bringing production closer to the border and to increase harvest periods from the traditional two that occur in South America to multiple [periods].” **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Growing coca plants in Costa Rica represents an attempt by DTOs to develop biologic studies aimed at making cocaine plants more resistant to climate variations.”

Source: “Grupos narcos ensayaron siembra de coca en montanas de Pelez Zeledon (Narco groups tested coca planting in Perez Zeledon mountains),” *La Nacion*, 16 June 2019. <https://www.nacion.com/sucesos/narcotrafico/grupos-narcos-ensayaron-siembra-de-coca-en/BW4MEAEHQBC77E45DZCA7B2K5I/story/>

*A laboratory analysis carried out by the forensic scientists of the OIJ confirmed it: a plantation located last year in a mountainous terrain of the Daniel Flores district in Pérez Zeledón was coca leaf or *Erythroxylum coca*....*

That seizure, made on July 20, 2018, was the first and only discovery of those shrubs in Costa Rica, since the traditional zone is the countries of South America such as Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador.

“I believe that these coca plants were grown as some type of test. After evaluating the results, it appears that the producers did not obtain the objectives they had hoped for,” according to Michael Soto, Costa Rica's Minister of Security. For Soto, growing coca plants in Costa Rica represents an attempt by DTOs to develop biologic studies aimed at making cocaine plants more resistant to climate variations. He also asserts that it is an attempt for DTOs to harvest coca plantations more than two times a year.

According to Soto, these groups are looking for specific environmental conditions necessary to grow cocaine to include humidity, ground acidity, wind, and other variables that the coca plant requires to thrive. Soto also states that he does not rule out that DTOs will continue their attempts to grow cocaine in Costa Rica by adapting the coca plant to the environment. However, Soto stated that “At this time, we have no indications that DTOs have been successful at a national level in any specific area.”

For Guillermo Araya, Director of the Costa Rican Drug Institute (ICD), the fact that authorities discovered the first ever coca plants in the country in July 2018 makes it clear that organized crime is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. He also indicated that drug trafficking organizations are obviously interested in cultivating coca plants in Central American countries for multiple reasons to include reducing shipping costs to the US by bringing production closer to the border and to increase harvest periods from the traditional two that occur in South America to multiple [periods].



Colombian Cartels Steal Fuel to Produce Cocaine

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts from Latin American sources discuss how Colombian cartels and criminal organizations are stealing gasoline, diesel and petroleum to produce cocaine. They also discuss some measures that have been taken to address this problem.

As reported by Mexican news source *El Sol de Mexico*, this activity is highly prevalent in Tibú (Norte de Santander Department) which is located along the Colombian/Venezuelan border. After the gasoline is extracted, it goes through a distillation process to produce a product known as “pate grillo.” Pate grillo and/or refined gasoline are important components needed to produce coca base. These products are mixed with coca leaves and a sprinkling of cement for approximately 40 minutes during which time coca paste is formed. In addition to gasoline, the other components necessary to create refined cocaine include sulfuric acid, caustic soda, water, ammonia and sodium bicarbonate.

As the second accompanying passage from *El Expres* discusses, Colombian authorities have known about fuel theft utilized to produce coca base since 2002 and have attempted different strategies to thwart fuel theft without success. Colombia’s most recent attempt to inhibit fuel theft occurred in 2016 with the creation of a Special Operations Hydrocarbon Group (GOESH). Apart from GOESH, Ecopetrol is also taking significant steps to stop the theft of fuel from their ducts. *El Expres* asserts that work done by GOESH and Ecopetrol (the largest petroleum company in Colombia) has reduced fuel theft in Colombia by an estimated 95% over the last two years. However, this does not necessarily translate to the same reduction in coca base production, as there are other products that cartels may be using to produce coca base. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Ecopetro's Center of Operations is a Pioneer in Improving, Extracting, Processing and Storing Crude Oil (El Centro de Ecopetrol, es un corregimiento Pionero en la explotación, extracción, procesamiento y almacenamiento de crudo).
Source: Kioscovicivigital via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Resultados-ecopetrol-1.jpg#/media/File:Resultados-ecopetrol-1.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0

“Criminal organizations in Colombia to include the National Liberation Army (ELN) ... are stealing gasoline, diesel and even petroleum from Colombia’s national gas company Ecopetrol. These products are used to produce something known as pate grillo which is a substance with limited consistency that is utilized in the cocaine production process.”

Source: “En Colombia también hay huachicoleo, usan combustibles para elaborar cocaína (Gasoline Used to Produce Cocaine in Colombia),” *El Sol de Mexico*, 17 January 2019. <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/justicia/huachicol-gasolina-ecopetrol-colombia-cocaina-mexico-robo-combustibles-2933692.html>

Criminal organizations in Colombia to include the National Liberation Army (ELN) and other criminal groups are stealing gasoline, diesel and even petroleum from Colombia’s national gas company Ecopetrol. These products are used to produce something known as pate grillo which is a substance with limited consistency that is utilized in the cocaine production process.

Source: “Así puso fin Colombia al robo de combustibles (How Colombia is Combatting Fuel Theft),” *El Expres*, 16 January 2019. http://www.elexpres.com/2015/nota.php?story_id=187930

By creating a Special Operations Hydrocarbon Group (GOESH), Colombia has reduced fuel theft by an estimated 95% over the last 2 years. GOESH is responsible for conducting continuous patrols of oil ducts that cartels and/or criminal groups commonly steal from. GOESH strategy was planned by Colombian authorities and represents a specialized police group that is trained in applying technology to conduct searches at fuel refineries, a surveillance system, and special checks and controls along ducts that transport gasoline. They also carry out special patrols along the most vulnerable fuel duct lines and search gas transport trucks and fuel barges to ensure that those transporting gasoline products are doing it legitimately.

Ecopetrol is also working to detect illicit fuel extraction by utilizing fiber optic technology along their principal oil ducts to quickly identify theft in real time. The company has also added chemical markers on gasoline shipment trucks with the end goal of locating where gasoline has been stolen from and what stations remaining fuel is being delivered to gather more information regarding exactly which gas stations are supplying gasoline directly to criminal groups.



Cocaine Production Trends in Peru

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles from Spanish-language news sources shed light on cocaine production trends in Peru. The first passage from Spain's *El Pais* discusses new consumer nations within South America, new growth sites within Peru, and emerging markets where Peruvian cocaine is being sent. The second passage from Peruvian news source *Efe* attempts to provide an estimate as to how much cocaine is actually being produced in Peru.

According to *El Pais*, cocaine growth within Peru has increased in recent years to support increased consumption in Chile and Mercosur countries (specifically Argentina and Brazil). The passage claims that Peru is now a primary production country for Asia and other international destinations. And while the Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (VRAEM) region of Peru continues to serve as the countries' primary growth and production region, the need for increased production has also resulted in new production sites within Peru. According to the passage, these include "the lower Amazonian region, Caballococha (a triple border shared by Peru, Brazil and Colombia), the Puno region along Peru's border with Bolivia and the Madre de Dios region which lies along Peru's shared border with Brazil and Bolivia."



Madre de Dios, Peru.

Source: Roosevelt Garcia via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rio_Madre_de_Dios,_Peru.JPG, Public Domain

The addition of new production sites is directly correlated to increased cocaine production within the South American nation, according to Peruvian news source *Efe*. The passage cites a 14% production increase of coca cultivation sites between 2016 and 2017.

In an attempt to stop increasing coca production, Devida (Peru's National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs) has looked into alternative agricultural endeavors for coca farmers to include offering incentives to grow cacao, coffee and other products. Devida has also resorted to hand picking coca plants in certain regions of Peru but also realizes that this type of activity poses risks to those individuals attempting to destroy valuable coca crops. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Specifically speaking, we realize cocaine production is on the rise in the lower Amazonian region, Caballococha (a triple border shared by Peru, Brazil and Colombia), in the Puno region along Peru's border with Bolivia and in the Madre de Dios region which lies along Peru's shared border with Brazil and Bolivia.”

Source: “El cultivo de coca en Perú se desplaza a las fronteras con Brasil y Bolivia (Cocaine Production in Peru Shifts towards Border Regions of Brazil and Bolivia),” *El Pais*, 27 November 2018. https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/11/27/america/1543344243_444001.html

Rubén Vargas, the Peruvian Director of Devida, started reporting in late 2018 that cocaine production has specifically spiked in border regions that Peru shares with Brazil and Bolivia. However, he further indicated that Peru has no recent studies indicating exactly how much Peruvian produced cocaine stays in Mercosur's two largest countries; Brazil and Argentina or in Chile. He also stated that it is unknown how much stays Peruvian cocaine stays in the aforementioned countries or even how much is exported to emerging markets in Asia, South Africa and Australia.

Regarding areas of increased cocaine production within Peru, Vargas confirmed that, “production is on the rise in the lower Amazonian region, Caballococha (a triple border shared by Peru, Brazil and Colombia), in the Puno region along Peru's border with Bolivia and in the Madre de Dios region which lies along Peru's shared border with Brazil and Bolivia.”

Source: “Los cultivos de coca crecen 14 % en Perú hasta llegar a casi 50.000 hectáreas (Cocaine Cultivations Increase by 14% to Nearly 50,000 Hectares),” *Efe*, 14 March 2019. <https://www.efc.com/efe/america/portada/los-cultivos-de-coca-crecen-14-en-peru-hasta-llegar-a-casi-50-000-hectareas/20000064-3924924>

Land utilized to grow coca plants increased to 49,900 hectares in Peru in 2017. This represents a 14% increase in the amount of land utilized to grow coca plants from 2016. This information was released by the United Nations Office of Drug Control at the end of 2018. The UNODC report that provided this information was released at the end of 2018, but does not actually provide a fixed number regarding how much cocaine is actually produced in Peru due to a lack of consensus in calculating this number. However, the report estimates that Peru produces around 411 metric tons of cocaine per year.