

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



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*FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT*



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#### ON THE COVER:

PLA Tank crew wearing Type 07 camouflage participate in the Tank Biathlon 2018 in Russia.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TankBiathlon2018-74.jpg>, CC BY 4.0

# OEWATCH

## Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

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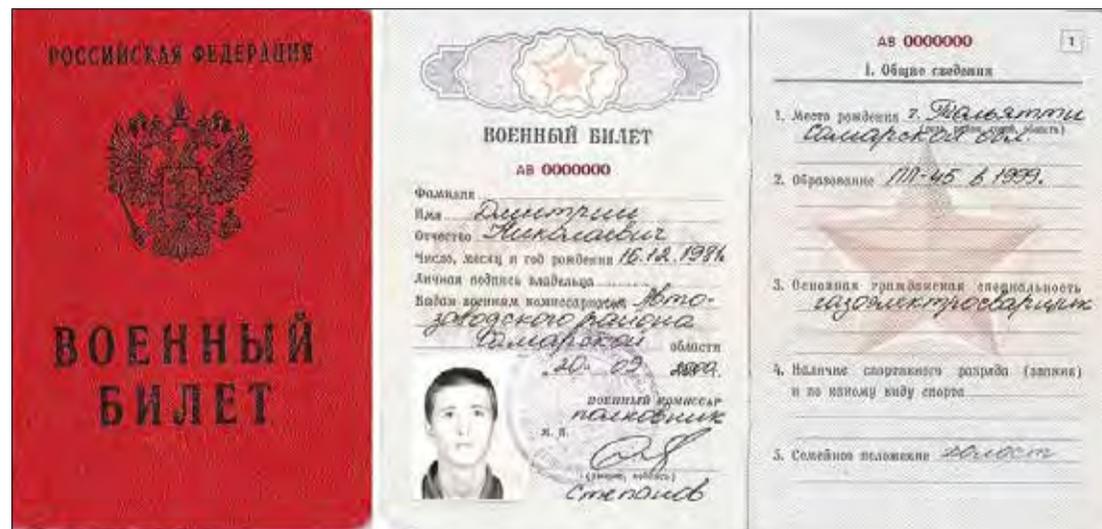


## COVID-19 and the Russian Spring Draft

**OE Watch Commentary:** Given the uncertain situation with the coronavirus pandemic, there had been considerable speculation whether Russia's Ministry of Defense (MoD) would still go forward with the Spring 2020 conscription campaign. However, as the first excerpt from the pro-government *Izvestia* points out, "on 30 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on conscription from 1 April to 15 July," whereby 135,000 new recruits will be conscripted into military service for one year.

The article quotes an expert who justifies the decision by asserting that "in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions." He also goes on to point out that delaying the draft would force "the entire military training system... to be redrawn," presumably by either extending current draftees or allowing units to become undermanned. To protect against the spread of this virus, this expert supports the decision for a "two-week quarantine for conscripts before being sent to the troops," thus postponing the actual movement of new recruits to their units until 20 May, as well as the introduction of "special security measures... during the transportation of draftees to duty stations."

The coronavirus also caused additional downstream effects for those draft-age Russian males who will graduate from high school this spring. The virus has forced the delay of the Unified State Exam, which serves as the key document for graduating high school students to obtain admission to university education (and a deferment from conscript duty). The second excerpt from the liberal radio station, *Echo Moscow*, reports that "the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov," has directed "15 thousand students will be given the opportunity to pass the exam for admission to universities." Provided the student does well on the exam, he will begin university studies in the fall instead of entering the draft pool. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



*Military document proving conscript service of the Russian army* Source: CPI-RUS.  
Source: CPI-RUS via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Military\\_ticket\\_Russian\\_army.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Military_ticket_Russian_army.jpeg), Public Domain

***“The draft cannot be canceled, because in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions.”***

**Source:** “Эксперт оценил решение оставить весенний призыв – 2020 (An expert considers the decision to hold the spring draft – 2020),” *Izvestia*, 1 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/994384/2020-04-01/ekspert-otcenil-reshenie-ostavit-vesennii-prizyv-2020>

*Director of the Bureau of Military-Political Analysis, Alexander Mikhailov, called the decision proper not to cancel the spring conscription. Earlier, on 30 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on conscription from 1 April to 15 July.*

*According to Mikhailov, the draft cannot be canceled, because in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions.*

*“Secondly, 135 thousand new recruits should not drop out of the training system for young recruits, otherwise the entire military training system will have to be redrawn,” he said.*

*The main difference between the spring 2020 draft is increased measures for the prevention of viral diseases and two-week quarantine for conscripts before being sent to the troops, Mikhailov noted. Special security measures will be applied during the transportation of draftees to duty stations.*

*For this reason, the youngest replenishment will enter the troops only by 20 May, which in the current conditions is absolutely justified, the expert said....*

**Source:** “Выпускников школ, которым уже есть 18 лет, не будут призывать в армию этой весной (Graduates of schools that are already 18 years old will not be drafted into the army this spring),” *Echo Moscow*, 9 April 2020. <https://echo.msk.ru/news/2622019-echo.html>

*Graduates of schools that are already 18 years old will not be drafted into the army this spring. This was reported by the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. According to him, 15 thousand students will be given the opportunity to pass the exam for admission to universities, Interfax reports. At the same time, because of the coronavirus, the main wave of unified state examinations was moved from the end of May to June.*



## No Dock for the Kuznetsov?

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to Kremlin plans, by the end of this year, 70% of the Russian military will be equipped with “modern” weaponry. While there is little doubt that the Ministry of Defense will announce that they have reached (or exceeded) this target, the Russian navy remains unable to project combat power via its sole aircraft carrier (Admiral Kuznetsov). The brief excerpt from the moderate *Svobodnaya Pressa* describes the latest travails in trying to construct the necessary infrastructure needed to repair this Soviet-era vessel.



*Admiral Kuznetsov in the floating dock PD-50 in 2006.*

Source: Mikhail Rogov No machine-readable author provided. Serguei S. Dukachev assumed via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aircraft\\_carrier\\_Admiral\\_Kuznetsov\\_\(in\\_dock\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aircraft_carrier_Admiral_Kuznetsov_(in_dock).jpg), CCA-SA 2.5 Generic

After returning from its voyage to support air operations in Syria in early 2017, the Kuznetsov was slated to undergo a major overhaul near Murmansk and return to service this year (2020). However, as the article points out, the ship’s overhaul was abruptly stopped when the country’s largest floating dock (PD-50)

where the Kuznetsov was parked, sank in October 2018, further damaging the deck of the carrier. Problems continued in December 2019, when a fire broke out on the Kuznetsov while repair work was underway, resulting in yet more damage.

Since recovering the floating dock was deemed unfeasible, the article describes the plan to merge two dry docks, by digging out a space large enough between the docks to accommodate the Kuznetsov. However, as the article points out, even though funding was appropriated toward this project, “experts in the shipbuilding industry unanimously argued that the terms for the reconstruction of the docks were completely unrealistic.”

According to the article, construction of the new dock began in late 2019, although “it has now become clear that the reconstruction of two parallel docks at the 35th shipyard in Murmansk has actually been discontinued... and the prospects are absolutely vague.” The article suggests that given the delays in constructing a new dock to accommodate the Kuznetsov, where necessary repairs can be made, “the aircraft carrier may be ready in 2023,” or may not “return to duty until the middle of the decade,” if then. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“The only Russian aircraft carrier will remain idle for repair for many more years...”***

**Source:** Vladimir Tuchkov, “Адмирал Кузнецов» будет атаковать корабли НАТО прямо с берега (The Admiral Kuznetsov will attack NATO ships directly from the shore),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 7 April 2020. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/261747/>

*The only Russian aircraft carrier will remain idle for repair for many more years...*

*...Everything rests in the absence of a dock, in which the aircraft carrier could accommodate for repair work.... The fire that arose last December [2019] during welding operations claimed the lives of two sailors. Moreover, the losses, which were finally calculated at the end of this week, amounted to half a billion rubles....*

*...It has now become clear that the reconstruction of two parallel docks at the 35th shipyard in Murmansk has actually been discontinued. This is where the long-suffering aircraft carrier should be located.... Last year, it was announced that the dock under the Admiral Kuznetsov would be ready in 2021, and repairs would be completed in 2022. The opinion of independent experts is different. In the best case, if the reconstruction of the docks immediately resumes, the aircraft carrier may be ready in 2023. At worst ...*

*...Now the work has come to a standstill, and the prospects are absolutely vague.... Back in the summer of last year, when a contract was signed between USC and IIS, experts in the shipbuilding industry unanimously argued that the terms for the reconstruction of the docks were completely unrealistic. As for the repair of an aircraft carrier, it can end at best in 2023.*

*...Consequently, the “Admiral Kuznetsov” may return to duty in the middle of the decade.*

*This sad story has another “author”. It began with the fact that in the fall of 2018, an accident occurred during the stay of Admiral Kuznetsov in the floating dock PD-50 on the territory of the 82nd Shipyard. As a result of difficult weather conditions, the supply of electricity from the shore to the dock was cut off.... As a result, the largest floating dock operated in Russia sank.*



## Strengthening Russian Influence in Crimea

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past six years, the Russian military has continued to strengthen the overall infrastructure and its combat capabilities within the annexed Crimean Peninsula. For instance, alongside auto and truck transport, rail service along the new Kerch Strait Bridge began last December. Militarily, as the first excerpt from the official news agency *TASS* points out, Russia continues to fortify its “aviation and air defense in Crimea.” The article describes a recent military exercise which combined “Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and air defense, aviation and air defense of the Southern Military District, S-400 missile air defense crews” to thwart “a massive missile strike of the mock enemy.”

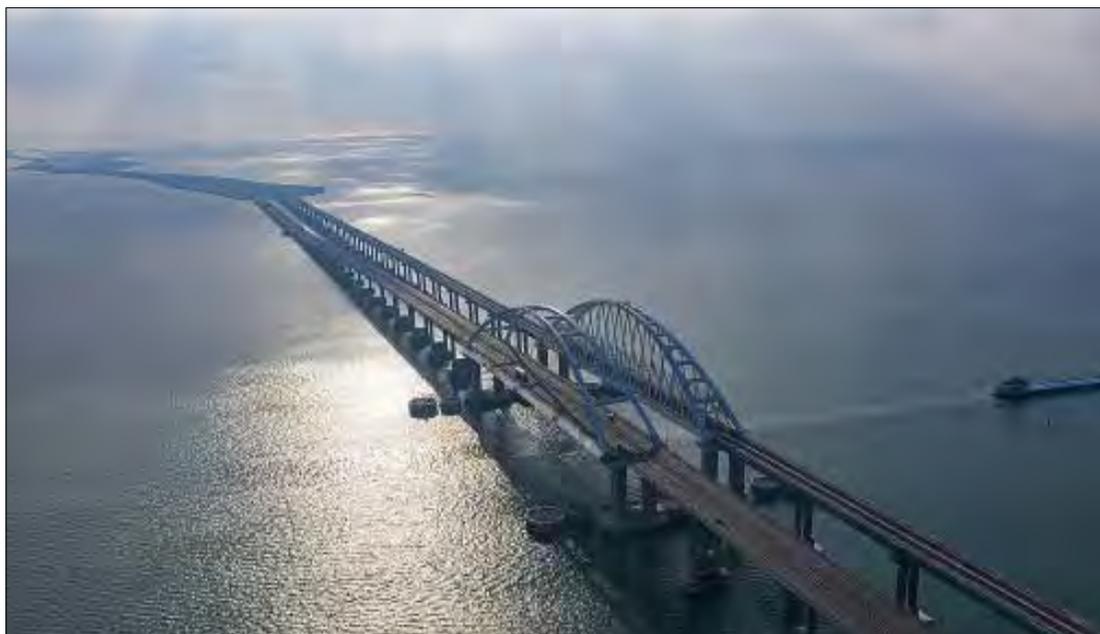


Photo of Kerch Strait Bridge, December 2019.

Source: Rosavtodor.ru, <https://bit.ly/2xcxbey>, CCA 4.0 Intl

While there is no question that Russia has greatly improved its access to Crimea and ability to defend this peninsula, it has also transplanted some less favorable characteristics. The second excerpt from the pro-business daily, *Kommersant*, describes a recent military court case in Crimea where contract soldiers paid bribes, from 3-15 thousand rubles (\$40-\$200) to “receive positive marks for passing the standards for physical fitness.” Contract soldiers receive an additional bonus based on their physical fitness test results. The article goes on to point out that “the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.” Perhaps in an attempt not to tarnish the Russian military’s “polite soldier” image, the article asserts that “several of... [the contract soldiers] served in Ukrainian Navy units until 2014.”

While acts of minor bribery within the Russian military are nothing new, it is curious that this incident was not covered by any of the media organs within the Ministry of Defense (e.g. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, *Zvezda TV*, etc...). From the Kremlin’s perspective, Russia now “owns” Crimea and they have continued to integrate this peninsula into all aspects, both good and ill, of their political, legal, economic, information and military infrastructure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“In total, the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.”***

**Source:** “Авиация, ПВО С-400 проводят учения по масштабному отражению ракетной атаки в Крыму (Aviation, S-400 air defense conduct drills on massive missile attack deflection in Crimea),” *TASS*, 3 April 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1139669>

*Planes and S-400 air defense systems deflected a massive missile strike of the mock enemy during the bilateral military exercise of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District aviation and air defense in Crimea, Fleet press service announced Friday.*

*“According to the drill scenario, aviation and missile defenses, deployed in Crimea, provide the peninsula’s air defense, while the Southern Military District aviation, based on the mainland, conducts the air offensive,” the Fleet disclosed.*

*The attacking party seeks to secure the air supremacy by destroying targets at the Opuk proving ground. At the same time, the defense planes cover the S-400 crews and deflect the enemy’s massive missile strike....*

*The drills involve the Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and air defense, aviation and air defense of the Southern Military District, S-400 missile air defense crews, located on the Crimean Peninsula, and more than 20 military planes.*

**Source:** Vadim Nikiforov “У матросов есть заносы (Sailors have drifts),” *Kommersant*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4310112>

*As Kommersant learned, the Crimean Garrison Military Court examined more than ten criminal cases of petty bribery. The defendants in the case are military men serving on contracts in the coastal defense forces of the Black Sea Fleet. All of them paid 3-15 thousand rubles to an unknown official through an intermediary. In return, they received positive marks for passing the standards for physical fitness....*

*...For a fictitious assessment of physical certification on October 14, he gave a bribe through an intermediary of 15 thousand rubles. And Nikolai Pavlov, who serves in the army under contract since October 2018, according to court documents paid a bribe of 10 thousand rubles for the mark “excellent” on passing the standards for physical training.*

*In total, the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.*



# Constructing Multifunctional Medical Centers to Combat COVID-19

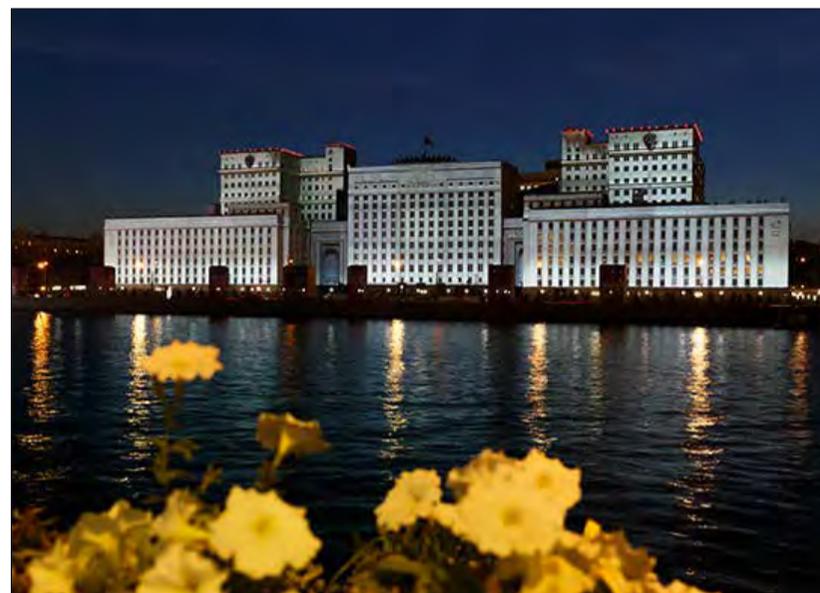
**OE Watch Commentary:** As this commentary is being written, like the rest of the world, Russia is in the midst of fighting the coronavirus. Initially, Russian government officials claimed that they had the situation well under control, but it now appears that the spread of this virus will test the country's medical system. The accompanying excerpt from the military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, discusses various roles the Russian military is playing in the fight against COVID-19.

The article begins by describing the plans for the recently reconfigured Military Construction Company (VSK) to construct "16 multifunctional medical centers in 15 regions of the country." As the article points out, this organization "was created in the structure of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation by decree of President Vladimir Putin" in October 2019. The VSK is comprised of "about 11 different organizations," and according to the article, "work is ongoing from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka around the clock, in three shifts" to build and equip these medical centers.

The article points out "engineering and railway troops" have been enlisted to help in the construction, stressing, "coordination and control are also carried out around the clock, including through the National Defense Management Center of the Russian Federation." The article asserts that these centers will be equipped with the latest medical technology and that staffing and medical training for these new centers is handled by "the Military Medical Academy." The article claims that "the first multifunctional medical center in Nizhny Novgorod will be commissioned on 20 April," with the others being completed shortly thereafter. These facilities will "provide the necessary medical assistance to both military personnel and the civilian population" to combat the coronavirus. The article concludes by reminding readers of the epidemiological support that the Russian military provided to Italy and Serbia, where "specialists of the radiation chemical and biological defense troops" helped to disinfect various housing areas and medical institutions.

It's too early to predict how effective the Russian medical system and these additional military measures will prove in combatting the spread of the coronavirus. Until now, strengthening the country's healthcare infrastructure (both civilian and military) has not been the Kremlin's highest priority. This virus may change that. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“Work is ongoing from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka around the clock, in three shifts...”***



*National Defense Management Center of the Russian Federation.*  
Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National\\_Defense\\_Management\\_Center.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_Defense_Management_Center.jpg), CCA 4.0

**Source:** Oleg Falichev, "Военные возводят защиту от вируса (The military is building protection against the virus)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 7 April 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56324>

*On the site in Odintsovo, under the supervision of Deputy Minister of Defense Timur Ivanov, the construction of a medical center is being completed. The RF Ministry of Defense also exercises tight control over other such complexes that are being built on the territory of the Russian Federation.... There is no doubt that they will be delivered on time. The teams have strict discipline, well-established technology and accurate logistics of material delivery....*

*...On October 18, 2019, the Military Construction Company (VSK) was created in the structure of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation by decree of President Vladimir Putin. The goal is construction in the interests of the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces.... Deputy Minister Timur Ivanov identified the structures that became part of the VSK. These are about 11 different organizations, in particular, the 20th and 31st design institutes of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, the Main Directorate for the Arrangement of Troops, five construction enterprises (one in each military district and the Northern Fleet) and three specialized in the creation of airfields, hydraulic structures, and nuclear facilities spheres....*

*As you can see, VSK is a serious organization, and who else but she can contribute to the fight against coronavirus. In just one day, the number of workers employed at the construction sites of 16 multifunctional medical centers in 15 regions of the country increased by a thousand and, as of 1 April, amounted to more than five thousand people. Work is ongoing from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka around the clock, in three shifts. The foundation was poured at all objects, now the installation of buildings is being carried out. Over 800 units of construction and special equipment are involved. The work is carried out on behalf of the Supreme Commander with the involvement of engineering and railway troops, the use of modern technology. Coordination and control are also carried out around the clock, including through the National Defense Management Center of the Russian Federation.*

*We add to the above that each medical center will be equipped with... anesthesiology equipment, endoscopy, extracorporeal membrane oxygenation. The appropriate staff of medical personnel who have already completed or is completing training and advanced training at the Military Medical Academy of the Russian Defense Ministry.*

*The first multifunctional medical center in Nizhny Novgorod will be commissioned on 20 April. From 10-15 April, the first eight centers will receive the necessary equipment and medical equipment. According to Timur Ivanov, the completion of the events will provide the necessary medical assistance to both military personnel and the civilian population.*

*As for the actions of military epidemiologist and virologists in the Italian Bergamo... Russian medical and nursing teams have been involved in the treatment of patients in 65 boarding houses that are adapted by the local authorities to isolate and treat Italian citizens infected with coronavirus. In particular, a team of doctors of epidemiologists and specialists of the radiation chemical and biological defense troops of the Ministry of Defense of Russia, together with Italian military specialists, carried out a complete sanitary disinfection of the boarding house and several medical institutions. In total, more than 5,000 square meters of interior and access roads have been disinfected.... Russia has also provided similar assistance to Serbia.*



## Less Transparency on Military Topics?

**OE Watch Commentary:** There's no question that the readiness, morale and combat capabilities of the Russian military have considerably improved since Sergei Shoigu became Minister of Defense back in 2012. While the statistics in each of these categories are notable, even more impressive has been the actual combat performance of Russian military units during complex operations, whether in Ukraine or Syria. During a recent presentation before the Federation Council, Defense Minister Shoigu highlighted his many accomplishments over the past eight years (see link below for complete speech). As the brief excerpt from the pro-business daily *Kommersant* points out, Shoigu also touched upon what he referred to as “weaknesses in Russia’s media legislation,” which allows pro-Western media outlets to publish material which could harm the country’s national security.

According to the excerpt, Shoigu claimed that “over the past three years,” the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has repelled “more than 25 thousand hacker attacks from abroad...[and] each year their number is growing by 12%.” He goes on to assert that these foreign hackers “have helpers in Russia,” where “under the guise of media laws... these pro-Western journalists... are trying to infiltrate military facilities, searching for relatives and witnesses.” Shoigu is likely referring to those rare investigations by Russian journalists who have uncovered material which reflect poorly on the MoD (e.g. casualties, abuses, corruption). The article lists a number of these investigative reports from the past several years which have alleged Russian military involvement and personnel losses in Ukraine and Syria.

The article concludes on a cautionary note, quoting a Russian media expert who “fears that Sergei Shoigu’s proposal to tighten media legislation will be implemented,” pointing out that it is already “extremely difficult for Russian journalists to work with military topics.” While there’s no question that the Russian military has become stronger under Defense Minister Shoigu, this article suggests that some of this improvement may stem from a greater effort to suppress bad news and negative reporting. (For Shoigu’s full speech, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsYNpPhbIKY&feature=youtu.be&t=320>) **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Official portrait of Sergei Shoigu with awards. June 2014.

Source: <http://structure.mil.ru/management/minister/photo/port.htm> CCA 4.0 Intl

**“... According to him [Shoigu], the laws on mass media cover up a “pro-Western opposition division,” trying to penetrate military facilities and post materials on the Internet.”**

**Source:** Elena Rozhkova, Maria Litvinova, Natalia Glukhova, “Минобороны обнаружило журналистский дивизион; Сергей Шойгу призвал ужесточить законодательство о СМИ (Defense Ministry discovered journalism division; Sergei Shoigu urges tightening of media legislation),” *Kommersant*, 26 March 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4301552>

*Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu spoke on Wednesday at a meeting of the Federation Council as part of a government hour. In addition to assessing the country’s combat potential and the social side of army life, the minister touched upon the problem of the weaknesses of Russian media legislation. According to him, the laws on mass media cover up a “pro-Western opposition division,” trying to penetrate military facilities and post materials on the Internet. Mr. Shoigu did not cite specific examples...*

*Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu labeled the information space as a “theater of operations,” during his remarks to the Federation Council on March 25th. According to the Minister of Defense, over the past three years, more than 25 thousand hacker attacks from abroad have assaulted the information infrastructure of the RF Armed Forces, and each year their number is growing by 12%. Although Russia, according to Mr. Shoigu, is ready to fight them, he is upset that foreign hackers “have helpers in Russia.” According to him, there is a “pro-Western opposition division,” whose “activists”, “under the guise of media laws, are trying to infiltrate military facilities, searching for relatives and witnesses.” “They climb into the hospitals where our wounded are, in cemeteries, in commemorations, in the families of our dead children. They expose the entrances and exits from our closed facilities and put them on the Internet,” the minister complained.*

*...In recent years, a number of investigations and reports of Russian journalists have been released, which provoked a negative reaction from the military department. Among them are the material of *Kommersant*’s special correspondent Ilya Barabanov on military operations near Debaltseve, an interview with *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Yelena Kostyuchenko and a contract tanker who received severe burn wounds during battles in eastern Ukraine, a series of reports by Pavel Novaya *Gazeta* special correspondent Pavel Kanygin about the events in the Donbass. Mr. Shoigu could have in mind the publication of Leo Schlosberg in his newspaper “The Pskov Province” about contract servicemen who died under obscure circumstances, who allegedly took part in hostilities in Ukraine, as well as other journalistic and human rights investigations regarding the presence of the Russian military in Syria and Libya....*

*...Igor Yasin, co-chair of the independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers, fears that Sergei Shoigu’s proposal to tighten media legislation will be implemented, although it is extremely difficult for Russian journalists to work with military topics.*



## Coastal Defense Missiles Will Be at Victory Parade

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* discusses Russian plans to display the 3K60 Bal [3K60 «Бал»] (NATO: SSC-6 Sennight) coastal defense missile system at the May 9th ‘Victory Day’ Parade commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. The Bal can launch eight Kh-35 [X-35] (NATO: AS-20 Kayak) missiles with approximately a 130km range (260km with the new Kh-35U missile). A typical Bal complex (battalion) consists of two command vehicles, four TELs, four transport-loader vehicles, two Monolit-B coastal and air reconnaissance radars, and one support vehicle. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Bal-E coastal missile system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2015/i-Bmxx6QC, CCA-NC-ND-4.0>



Bal-E coastal missile system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2015/i-ffM5cBC/A, CCA-NC-ND 4.0>

**“On May 9, as part of a mechanized convoy on Red Square, the ‘Bal’ will be represented by self-propelled launchers, transport and reloading vehicles, and command control and communication centers - a total of six vehicles...”**

**Source:** Oleg Falichev, “«Бал» без маскарада: Один залп и нет авианосца (‘Bal’ Without a Masquerade: One Salvo and No Aircraft Carrier),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 24 March 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56045>

### **‘Bal’ Without a Masquerade: One Salvo and No Aircraft Carrier**

...On May 9, as part of a mechanized convoy on Red Square, the “Bal” will be represented by self-propelled launchers, transport and reloading vehicles, and command control and communication centers - a total of six vehicles...Recall that the “Bal” (GRAU 3K60, NATO classification SSC-6 Sennight) was adopted by the Russian Armed Forces since 2008. And the state tests were completed in 2004.

At present, according to some reports, Russia has 50 coastal defense units (as of 2019):

- 11th Coastal Missile-Artillery Brigade (Utash settlement) - 4 launchers;
- 15th Coastal Missile-Artillery Brigade (Sevastopol) - 4 launchers;
- 72nd Coastal Missile Brigade (Smolyaninovo) - 4 launchers;
- 72nd Coastal Missile Brigade (Kunashir Island) - 4 launchers;
- 25th Coastal Missile Brigade (Donskoye village) - n / a;
- 520th Coastal Missile-Artillery Brigade (Anglichanka, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky) - 4 launchers;
- 847th Separate Coastal Missile Brigade (Kaspiysk) - 4 launchers.

Speaking at the final military department collegium of 2019, Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu said that another Bal coastal missile system will enter the Navy in 2020. Over the past six years, 17 “Bal” and “Bastion” coastal defense systems have entered the army, allowing for the rearmament of 17 battalions.

In addition to Russia, the complex is in service with Vietnam and Venezuela (2 complexes, 8 SPU Bal-E)...



## The Russian Army's Domestic Support for Civil Authorities

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted articles discuss the Russian Army's support for Russian civil authorities due to the COVID-19 crisis. The article from *Kommersant* discusses how the Russian military will create four task forces for the purpose. Apparently, these units will be built around existing Radiation, Chemical, and Biological (RKhB) Defense units, with substantial engineering and logistic support. Of particular interest, the article mentions the size of Russian RKhB defense brigades, approximately 1000 personnel. The article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses Russian plans to mobilize reservists, if necessary, to man mobile field hospitals. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



ARS-14KM decontamination and degassing station.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/i-hr2nqDd>, CCA NC-ND 4.0

***“...The mobile reserve of the General Staff in this case means organizations involved in medical support for the troops. These are depots for special medical equipment, decontamination vehicles, and so on. These are so-called temporarily mothballed military hospitals, medical laboratories, and other subunits designed to conduct anti-epidemiological measures...”***

**Source:** Oleg Mukhin, “Коронавирус остановят броней (Stopping Coronavirus with Armor),” *Kommersant Online*, 26 March 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4302151>

### ***Stopping Coronavirus with Armor***

Two of the four Russian Defense Ministry task forces for countering the spread of “viral infections” will be stationed in Black Earth regions. Their creation was announced on Wednesday (25 March) evening. Their nucleus could be the 27th Separate Radiation, Chemical, and Biological (RKhB) Defense Brigade from Kursk, and they will also include medical and engineering subunits, supply and logistics resources, and military police.

For the time being, subunits are concentrating at training grounds as part of a readiness inspection, but the command room at the military district HQ headquarters will be analyzing “a simulated epidemiological situation” around the clock...The creation of the first task forces “for the purpose of containing emergency situations” was announced on Wednesday evening (25 March) by the Western Military District press service. So far, it is the only district to announce the formation of such bodies; the decision to do so was made by the district’s commanding officer, Colonel General Aleksandr Zhuravlev.

At the district, they stress that the task forces are being created solely “as part of an inspection of readiness for containing emergency situations arising from the threat of mass contamination and spread by viral infections.”...The events should take place “solely at training grounds” of the armed forces, without civilian services being involved. Also to be inspected will be the military’s transport resources for moving required forces and assets by air and rail to assist the sick and carry out quarantine and treatment measures.

Judging from the stated purpose and list of equipment being brought out by the military, the nucleus of the two Black Earth task forces could be the 27th Separate RKhB Defense Brigade in Kursk — one of the largest entities of its kind (about 1,000 personnel). Its purpose is to work in the focal points of radioactive, chemical, and biological contamination; analyze the level of contamination; treat localities or sites; and lay smokescreens.

The brigade is regularly on exercise and has new equipment — mobile chemical protection complexes, degassing stations, ARS-14KM spray stations, TMS-65U special heat treatment machines (including for disinfecting equipment and places), KLP-10 field laboratories (for situation analysis), and special treatment stations. And it is this equipment, according to the Defense Ministry, that will gather at the training grounds in the first instance.

The remaining part of the Black Earth task forces, to judge from the district’s news roundups, could be drawn mostly from subunits of the 20th Guards Combined-Arms Army (headquartered in Voronezh). According to a report by the district, apart from RKhB defense troops the task forces will consist of medical and engineering subunits, supply and logistics resources, and military police. The 20th Army in Voronezhskaya Oblast — in Voronezh and Boguchar — has subunits of this type...



# Continued: The Russian Army's Domestic Support for Civil Authorities

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “На борьбу с COVID-19 армия бросит мобильные резервы Генштаба (General Staff Mobilizes Reserve to Combat COVID-19),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 26 March 2020. [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-03-26/1\\_7828\\_army.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-03-26/1_7828_army.html)

## General Staff Mobilizes Reserve to Combat COVID-19

...The Defense Ministry is preparing not only to safeguard its personnel, but also if necessary to give help to the civilian population, as Russian military specialists are doing in Italy. The Russian Federation Defense Minister said the Defense Ministry plans by mid-May to complete the construction of 16 modular infection centers in various regions of the country...

The construction of all the modular infection centers, which is being carried out around the clock by railroad troops and engineering troops (4,000 people and 750 items of equipment are involved), is due to be completed by 15 May. This is the period when experts predict the spread of COVID-19 will peak...

Judging by comments in social networks and the media, many people did not really understand the phrase “mobile reserve of the General Staff.” As a former senior officer in the Defense Ministry recounted, on condition that he remained anonymous, “the mobile reserve of the General Staff in this case means organizations involved in medical support for the troops. These are depots for special medical equipment, decontamination vehicles, and so on. These are so-called temporarily mothballed military hospitals, medical laboratories, and other subunits designed to conduct anti-epidemiological measures and to provide protection against weapons of mass destruction.”

They can play a dual role — protecting the troops and protecting the population. The main question here is finding military specialists capable of putting the reserve into operation. “If two or three mobile field hospitals are deployed, there will be enough officer specialists. But if the mobile reserve of the General Staff has to be deployed in order to protect cities with a population of more than 1 million against this particularly dangerous infection, it will be necessary to call up specialists from the reserve, in other words, reservists,” the expert noted.

As *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was told by Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev, he remembers how, in order to resolve medical, anti-epidemic, and other tasks in the interests of the country, reservists were called up in large numbers in Soviet times, when the Chernobyl tragedy occurred in April 1986. “At that time, the military commissariats called up several thousand specialist servicemen liable for callup, as reservists are now customarily called, from which several civil defense regiments were formed. They were subordinate to the USSR Defense Ministry and carried out the main functions in the cleanup after the tragedy,” the expert stressed. In the event of an unfavorable scenario with the spread of COVID-19, something similar might happen in Russia, he reckons...



Decontamination of armored vehicles with ARS-14KM decontamination and degassing station.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/i-ktVVTPZ>, CCA NC-ND 4.0



Field hospital.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ISSE-2009/i-fvtvDgf/A>, CCA NC-ND 4.0



TMS-65U decontamination vehicle.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/i-9bRZxc8/A>, CCA NC-ND 4.0



## Russian View of Foreign Dependence on Space Capabilities

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted interview of Colonel Sergey Suchkov, Chief of the Aerospace Forces' (VKS) Main Center for Space Situation Reconnaissance in *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses his views on the importance of space as both an enabler for conducting terrestrial warfare, and now as a domain in its own right. Of particular interest, Suchkov points out a perceived dependency of foreign states (US/NATO) on space for a myriad of capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“It is no secret that the main means of command and control of troops, weapons, reconnaissance, communications, navigation, and meteorology of foreign states are concentrated in outer space today...”***

***-Colonel Sergey Suchkov, Chief of the VKS Main Center for Space Situation Reconnaissance***

**Source:** Yuliya Kozak, Наблюдать за звёздами и гарантировать безопасность страны (Observing the Stars Guarantees State Security),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 27 March 2020. <http://redstar.ru/nablyudat-za-zvyozdami-i-garantirovat-bezopasnost-strany/>

### ***Observing the Stars Guarantees State Security***

*Peering into the starry sky, filled with satellites and orbital stations invisible to the naked eye, one would hardly think that all the aforementioned, as well as everything that goes on outside the Earth's atmosphere, is being constantly watched -- not just to idly admire, but to ensure the security of Russia's military space activity. And this continuous monitoring is being conducted at the Aerospace Forces' (VKS) Main Center for Space Situation Reconnaissance (RKO). Here, in a literal sense, by call of duty, they know everything about the near-Earth space that must be known, in order to fend off the threats, which space may pose for our country. As to what those threats exactly are -- we discussed with Colonel Sergey Suchkov, the chief of the VKS Main Center for Space Situation Reconnaissance.*

***You talked about the threats, and how to counter them? What is the national space monitoring system? What is its role in ensuring our country's national security? And how can the information of the Main RKO Center impact the increase of the Russian Federation Armed Forces capabilities?***

*The Russian National Space Monitoring System is a large information network, uniting the capabilities of all the Defense Ministry's and civilian departments' resources. It is intended for continuous, permanent, and global observation of space and for evaluating the space situation both in peacetime and in wartime.*

*Its role in implementing the country's national security lies in its information support for the accomplishment of such tasks as: foiling the threats emanating from space and in space, the unimpeded deployment and functioning of a domestic spacecraft grouping, and assessment of other hazards associated with man-made space debris.*

*It is no secret that the main means of command and control of troops, weapons, reconnaissance, communications, navigation, and meteorology of foreign states are concentrated in outer space today, while space itself is gradually turning into a sphere of armed struggle, along with the sea, land and air. Incidentally, military operations of recent decades were conducted through space.*

*As for the enhancement of the capabilities of our armed forces, it is achieved through the timely receipt of reliable information on the space situation. Thanks to this, a forecast of the nature of the foreign states' operations in space -- and, as a consequence, on Earth -- can be made.*



## Russian Topographic Maps and Cloud-Based Technology

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to provide greater access of geospatial information by means of cloud-based technology. According to *Izvestia*, currently only the staffs of military districts, armies, and divisions have access to such information, but in the future this information will be directly accessible by lower level formations, including forward deployed reconnaissance units. Of particular interest, the article mentions the use of the Apsheronsk-2015 [Апшеронска-2015] system that is capable of producing 3D maps that ‘will be especially useful in the development and conduct of large-scale combat operations’. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Commander personal tablet PC.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2013/i-bVdcKHb/A, CCA NC-ND 4.0>

***“The Defense Ministry is currently engaged in the creation of an online topographic repository. It will store maps of all scales, as well as 3D terrain models. The staffs of military districts, armies, and divisions now have immediate access to such information. But in the near future, soldiers of reconnaissance groups in enemy rear will also have access to it...”***

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Облачные атласы: в армии создается топографическое онлайн-хранилище (Cloud Atlases: Russian Army Creates Online Topographic Repository),” *Izvestia* Online, 7 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/994729/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/oblachnye-atlasy-v-armii-sozdaetsia-topograficheskoe-onlain-khranilishche>

### **Cloud Atlases: Russian Army Creates Online Topographic Repository**

The Russian servicemen will have “cloud atlases” at their disposal. The Defense Ministry is currently engaged in the creation of an online topographic repository. It will store maps of all scales, as well as 3D terrain models. The staffs of military districts, armies, and divisions now have immediate access to such information. But in the near future, soldiers of reconnaissance groups in enemy rear will also have access to it...

Per Viktor Murakhovskiy, the chief editor of the *Arsenal Otechestva* magazine, in modern conditions, it is impossible to conduct troops command and control, as well as to plan operations without relevant maps. “A map is a commander’s main working tool,” the expert believes. “Establishing precise areas and boundaries that the troops must occupy can only be done with a map. When planning actions, determining one’s deployment location is the first thing an officer or a general should perform. All further steps originate from this. A verbal description of the terrain will not suffice here, as the probability of an error that may lead to the loss of control is very high. New technologies will help the commanders to acquire maps almost immediately, significantly improving troops controllability.

With the advent of electronic repositories, it will no longer be necessary to print out maps for all occasions, store them in warehouses, and deliver them in truckloads to the troops when needed, the military expert Oleg Zheltonozko believes. “Now, having arrived at a new location, the commander will immediately receive a map in electronic form and determine his positioning on terrain,” the specialist explained. “If necessary, it will be possible to print the maps in needed number of copies even in field conditions -- such possibility is now available. The army has received compact equipment, allowing to do this fast when needed...

In order for the troops to be able to use the most up-to-date topographic information in field conditions, the Apsheronsk-2015 [Апшеронска-2015] automated system of ultra-precise electronic maps and 3D models of the terrain was deployed...Optical, infrared, laser, and radar sensor data is used in creating and updating electronic maps and 3D models. As a rule, these sensors are installed on reconnaissance satellites, combat aircraft, UAVs, and ships.

Thanks to their operations, an officer can see a detailed and accurate digital map on the screen of a special tablet or laptop. The 3D models provide an opportunity to assess the terrain topography and take its peculiarities into consideration when conducting combat operations. In particular, they help determine the most convenient directions of advance or possible threat directions, and where to expect an enemy strike. It also makes it possible to home in artillery and aviation to targets.

The main advantage of the Apsheronsk-2015 is the rapid creation of a modern reliable, accurate, and readable digital information. In order to organize the coordination of interbranch troop groupings and the successful work of staffs, this system can generate 3D layouts of terrain -- they will be especially useful in the development and conduct of large-scale combat operations.

Geospatial information systems are also being used today in the preparation of military operations. They make it possible to provide staffs and commanders with relevant, constantly updated digital maps.



## Russia Continues to Upgrade its Northern Fleet

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the accompanying passage discusses, Russia recently demonstrated its two newest ships conducting joint logistics training in rough-seas, during a Beaufort Force 7 moderate gale in Arctic waters. The purpose-built Russian oil tanker “Akademik Pashin” is an ice-class vessel designed for these conditions. Still, transferring fuel and cargo in rough seas while moving at just under 14 miles-per-hour seems a bit of a challenge. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The Russian Navy’s two newest ships ...showed off their capabilities in the Barents Sea. Oil tanker “Akademik Pashin” and “Admiral Kasatonov” set out from the Kola Peninsula for joint training in harsh weather. In high waves and winds up to 15 meters-per-second, several tons of liquid and solid materials were transferred from the tanker to the frigate.”***

**Source:** Atle Staalesen, “Two brand new naval vessels training in Arctic waters,” *The Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 10 March 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/03/two-brand-new-naval-vessels-training-arctic-waters>

### ***Two brand new naval vessels training in Arctic waters***

*The Russian Navy’s two newest ships ...showed off their capabilities in the Barents Sea. Oil tanker “Akademik Pashin” and “Admiral Kasatonov” set out from the Kola Peninsula for joint training in harsh weather. In high waves and winds up to 15 meters-per-second, several tons of liquid and solid materials were transferred from the tanker to the frigate. The two vessels maintained a speed of 12 knots during the operation and the materials were transferred by beam line, according to news agency Sudostroenie .*

*On 25 December, the Nevsky Naval Yard transferred the 130-meter-long tanker to the Northern Fleet. The «Akademik Pashin» is the first tanker in several decades built exclusively for the Russian Navy. It has a deadweight of 9,000 tons and is ice class Arc4, which enables it to operate in the icy waters of the north. The ship can simultaneously provide three vessels with fuel and other material while underway in an open sea.*

*The “Admiral Kasatonov” was built at the Severnaya Yard in St. Petersburg. It is the second ship of new Russian frigate class Project 22350, a multipurpose fighter ship that is capable of combating enemy underwater and surface ships, aviation, as well as coastal targets at distances of more than 1.5 kilometers. The ship is currently undergoing testing in the Barents Sea. In late February, sister ship “Admiral Gorshkov” conducted the first ship-launched firing of the new hypersonic missile Tsirkon. Several more missile tests will reportedly be conducted from the frigate during 2020.*

## 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>



# The Russian Army's Smoke Screen Production And Training

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying article from *Izvestia* and the excerpt from *Krasny Zvezda* discuss smoke screen production and training. The Soviet and Russian armies were/are great believers in the use of smoke in combat and operations. In Soviet days, approximately 30% of the known artillery ammunition stockpiles were smoke rounds. Most Russian vehicles and vessels are able to produce their own immediate smoke screens. Russians have not invested in top-attack armor to the same degree as the West, trusting in the efficacy of particulate smoke. Now the Russians are testing an automated command and control system to bring critical areas under a smoke screen and electronic curtain and maintain them. Evidently the system surveys the area's meteorological condition and electronic spectrum and develops an aerosol visual and electronic veil. There appears to be an active component to this effort by interfacing with air defense forces to engage aerial targets from UAVs to cruise missiles. The value of smoke in tactical actions has been emphasized by the experience of urban combat in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The force is rehearsing new tactics to camouflage important facilities and equipment concentrations. The troops will be concealed by an impenetrable veil.”***

**Source:** Aleksei Ramm and Bogdan Steopovoi, “The Russian Army will form within an aerosol cloud away from spies,” *Izvestia*, 10 March 2020. <https://iz.ru/976360/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/dym-v-otechestvo-armiui-spriachut-ot-shpionov-v-aerozolnykh-oblakakh>

## ***The Russian Army will form within an aerosol cloud away from spies***

*The force is rehearsing new tactics to camouflage important facilities and equipment concentrations. The troops will be concealed by an impenetrable veil. The army tested a new automated command and control system (ASU). According to the Defense Ministry, its mission is to conceal airfields, staffs, and unit concentration areas using smoke screens. Electronic warfare assets, as well as specialized vehicles that produce the veil, are combined in the ASU. The system determines how enemy reconnaissance is tracking the force with the aid of aircraft, drones, or satellites. Afterwards, it issues the command to implement a specific regime. Experts note that conducting combat operations these days without such a veil is unthinkable.*

*Initial exercises of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical defense (RKhBZ) subunits camouflaging a large troop formation with the aid of the new equipment were conducted in Buryatia. They rehearsed the procedure for the employment of smoke and aerosol screens. They make it possible to provide effective cover for troops from ground, aerial, and space reconnaissance, and also from all types of precision and even laser weapons, the military department earlier reported. Right now this element of combat training in the troops is being treated with utmost attention.*

*Military expert Oleg Zheltonozhko believes that the civil war in Syria proved that the need for camouflaging troops with smoke screens has increased. “Such cover makes it possible to hide troops or their movement from reconnaissance, and also to counter high-precision weapons... In Syria, Israeli aviation conducted most of their attacks from maximum distances to avoid air defense retaliatory fire. In most cases, a precision-guided weapon was used, which, as a rule, has a laser homing warhead. Smoke defocuses the guidance beam and does not allow the munition to find the target of attack. As a result, high-precision bombs and missiles miss or self-destruct.” He noted that videos from the Syrian Arab Republic show how the tanks are concealed. They move to the attack position, fire and then launch smoke bombs and leave the line of fire. This protects armored vehicles not only from conventional grenade launchers but also from antitank guided missiles with laser homing warheads. “In this aspect, the Russian Armed Forces have an advantage over the majority of the NATO countries’ armies,” Our RKhBZ troops have subunits that can cover entire areas with smoke and aerosol screens. First and foremost, this is how the staffs, army and frontline aviation airfields, troop concentration areas, as well as depots and bases are protected. Special attention is paid to the transport infrastructure: tunnels, crossings, bridges, and important railroad stations, which serve to supply troop groupings.”*

## ***The Buryat maneuvers***

*Defense of an entire area was rehearsed at the Eastern Military District maneuvers in Buryatia. In the course of the exercises, NBC systems identified enemy reconnaissance assets observing the force. As the NBC subunits entered the area, they determined the type of smoke clouds, as well as aerosols, which effectively covered the territory of the troops’ concentration from the enemy.*

*In modern conflicts, combined screens are the most effective, since any high-tech army uses a range of reconnaissance assets, including spy satellites. Only competently selected camouflage can block this unwanted attention. NBC subunit officers, who receive all the necessary information from the ASU, are tasked with selecting the methods of installing smoke screens and special charges, as well as for their detonation. They take into account the wind speed and direction, air humidity, and other important weather parameters, when choosing the right type of aerosol and smoke screen.*

*Special vehicles and the RPZ-8KhM external detonation electronic control system are employed to set up the screen. This equipment makes it possible to activate the aerosol countermeasure devices at a distance of up to 10 kilometers in any weather conditions.*

*Depending on the situation, the veil set up systems make it possible to cover a specific area with the desired type of smoke. An ordinary smoke screen can disrupt the visual reconnaissance of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In the event that enemy radar are also observing the territory, metal particulates are added to it, so as to reflect radar signals. As a result, the enemy sees “snow” on the radar station displays, instead of helicopter and tank silhouettes.*

*NBC troops can use special chemical fillers, which hide soldiers and equipment from enemy thermal imaging devices. Aerosols used together with the smoke, impedes the effective use of most modern weapons, including cruise missiles with laser guided warheads.*

*The war in Syria has had a serious impact on army tactics. Air defense assets need to be able to destroy attacking aircraft, helicopters, and UAVs while on the move. Such skills will prove useful if the force is suddenly attacked by kamikaze drones or if the drones precede a cruise missile strike. Equipment on the march is particularly vulnerable. As a result, the Pantsir and Tor anti-aircraft systems crews are developing changes to their combat training program, providing drills to destroy cruise missiles, aircraft, and UAVs while on the move. Among the air defense troops, this method is called “firing from horseback.”*



## Continued: The Russian Army's Smoke Screen Production And Training

**Source:** "Russia: Under Cover of Flamethrowers, Smoke Screen," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11 March 2020. <http://redstar.ru/pod-prikrytiem-ognemyotov-i-dymovoj-zavesy>

### ***Russia: Under Cover of Flamethrowers, Smoke Screen***

The following excerpt is from an article on the successful training of the 1st Mobile Chemical Defense Brigade at the 4,000 hectare Shinkany range:

*Facility camouflaging is carried out using modern TDA-3 smoke generating vehicles. "Their main component is an aviation engine, which transforms the smoke mixture into a dense aerosol cloud. In comparison with other models, the capability of using a powder composition to camouflage objects not only in the visible spectrum, but also in the infrared one, is the distinctive feature of this vehicle," Major Andrey Ukhlichev, commander of the aerosol countermeasures battalion stated.*

*Indeed, not even a couple of minutes went by, as all the facilities that were in front of us, disappeared in a dense impenetrable smoke. The total area of the veil was about 2.5 square kilometers.*

Over the years, FMSO has studied and written about foreign perspectives on pandemics. One example is below. For more information on previous FMSO work on pandemics including Ebola, search OE Watch issues:

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

## Death Unguarded: Unsecured Virulent Pathogens in African Medical Facilities

By Robert Feldman

While affluent countries can afford secure, state-of-the-art bio labs to house deadly pathogens for research, many countries do not have the financial and/or technical resources to provide such facilities. Antiquated equipment, minimal security, and other problems have plagued these labs in less developed countries, increasing the risk for theft of lethal microbes by terrorists as well as dangerous accidents. This article discusses these issues and the concerns regarding the ability of some countries to provide ongoing and adequate security of these facilities.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/195089>



## New Arctic T-80BVM Tanks Get Workout

**OE Watch Commentary:** The T-80BVM has a gas-turbine engine that makes it optimum for starting at -40°. It is faster than other Russian tanks, has excellent cross-country capability but it is expensive, high-maintenance and hardly fuel efficient. It does not perform well in mountainous dusty terrain, but is the premier tank for Arctic conditions. It made its official Northern Fleet debut in the 7 November 2019 Military Parade in Murmansk. As the accompanying article discusses, the tank is now in the hands of troops conducting company-level training. Will it be involved in amphibious landings during this year's summer training? **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The drills assessed the troops’ readiness to accomplish gunnery, tactical, engineering and special training exercises within the required time limits, and also the tactical skills of commanders in a battle.”***

**Source:** Unattributed, “Russian Northern Fleet motor rifle troops employ upgraded T-80BVM tanks in drills,” *Tass*, 6 April 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1140825>

### ***Russian Northern Fleet motor rifle troops employ upgraded T-80BVM tanks in drills***

*The Northern Fleet’s motorized rifle brigade held company-level tactical drills during troops’ qualification checks after the winter training period, involving over 100 weapons systems, including the upgraded T-80BVM tanks...*

*“Company-level tactical drills were held in the Pechengsky district of the Murmansk Region. Aside from the personnel of motorized infantry units, the drills involved more than 100 items of combat hardware: MTLB multi-purpose light-armored prime movers and T-80BVM tanks,” according to a press office statement. During the drills, the motorized rifle troops practiced going on high alert and conducted a march to the designated areas, repelling attacks by enemy subversive groups and overcoming notionally contaminated terrain...*

*“At the training ground, the troops practiced small arms, combat vehicle, artillery, mortars and grenade launcher fires against targets that simulated the enemy’s armored vehicles at distances of 100 to 3,000 meters and conducted fire against low-flying air targets.” The drills assessed the troops’ readiness to accomplish gunnery, tactical, engineering and special training exercises within the required time limits, and also the tactical skills of commanders in a battle. Special attention was paid to troops’ cohesion in defense and a counter-attack, camouflaging and terrain reconnaissance...*

*The T-80BVM is the Russian upgraded version of the T-80BV tank. The upgraded tanks arrived at the Northern Fleet’s motor rifle brigade in 2019. The T-80BVM tank features a multi-channel gunner sight, a 125mm 2A46M1 gun, a 12.7mm NSVT anti-aircraft and a 7.62mm PKT coaxial machine-gun. The ammunition load includes the 9K119 Refleks missile system. The tank is equipped with a weapon stabilizer and a vision device for the mechanic/driver. The T-80BVM is outfitted with an upgraded GTD-1250TF gas turbine engine with a 1,250 horsepower capacity. The tank can develop a maximum speed of 70 km/h and has a fuel capacity for 500 kilometers. T-80BVM tanks feature improved maneuverability and mobility and are outfitted with new devices that enhance their combat efficiency, the level of protection and reliability in extreme conditions. The new engine improves the tank’s performance characteristics, especially in harsh Arctic conditions.*



## The Utility of Russian-Serbian Relations to Moscow

**OE Watch Commentary:** A recent visit by Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu to Serbia revealed not only the continuation of longstanding ties between Moscow and Belgrade, but the contemporary efficacy of this relationship, within several disparate frameworks, for Moscow. As noted in the revealing title of the second accompanying source, Serbian foreign policy seems to portray a need for satisfying several external influences – complicated further by the intricacies of resolving the question of Kosovo – which may also reflect the dynamics between the ruling Serbian coalition and those in the (Serbian Radical Party – led) opposition. Notwithstanding its ostensible multipronged international engagement, Belgrade’s underlying relationship with Russia is significant – and manifests itself in a myriad of forms, to include military cooperation, societal views of history, and regional politics.



Russian President Vladimir Putin with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, JAN 2019.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/59690>, CC BY 4.0

Regarding military armaments, Serbia has acquired (at times, free of charge) Russian-built equipment. Noticeably missing in the first accompanying article’s listing of weapon systems, however, is any allusion to the more sensitive (and potentially destabilizing) first shipment of Pantsir-S1 air defense systems, which arrived within a week of Shoigu’s visit. Serbia’s purchase of this advanced system, announced in fall 2019, took place despite possible US sanctions.

Apropos societal views on history, the image of Shoigu visiting Serbia soon after the 20-year anniversary of NATO operations was clearly symbolic; the first accompanying article recalls Shoigu’s leadership of Russia’s humanitarian aid operation as then-Russian Minister for Emergency Situations. Not surprisingly, his visit included a formal call at a Serbian exhibition, dedicated to this aforementioned anniversary. Moreover, in a not subtle linkage to another common view, the first reference notes Shoigu’s visit to a WW II memorial, honoring a monument to Soviet soldiers who liberated Belgrade. (The continued presence and diplomatic emphasis on the WW II / Soviet memorial in Serbia is in stark contrast to, for example, the ongoing diplomatic drama occurring between Czechia and Russia over a Czech decision to take down the statue of Soviet Marshal Konev – the liberator of Czechoslovakia.)

Politically, Serbia’s warmer relations with NATO, as alluded to in the second accompanying reference, likely do not inspire great trepidation in Moscow; Serbian President Vučić, as noted in the first reference, does not intend for Serbia to join the Alliance. Of greater import and utility to Russia is Serbia’s vocal aspirations to join the European Union (EU). As the EU still maintains sanctions against Russia (extended through mid-September 2020) for the destabilization of Ukraine, Moscow will continue to leverage both individual political relationships – as well as the general European dependence on Russian natural gas and oil – in order to chip away at Brussels’ ability to concretely impose any form of punitive measures. In Belgrade, Moscow enjoys both of these factors. Finally, as referenced in the second accompanying article, the lack of a final resolution to Kosovo continues to impart to Moscow regional leverage broadly as an influential international arbiter in the process, and narrowly as the protector of (as yet unfulfilled) Serbian interests, strengthening even further Belgrade’s political dependence on Russia.

The still-serving Serbian Foreign Minister’s blunt 2019 opinion regarding Russian President Putin and NATO military operations in 1999, noted in the third accompanying reference (and revealingly quoted in the margins of the second accompanying reference), offers an instructive view of the general Serbian societal opinion of Russia – now and in 1999. That is to say, it was within the 1999 context of a chaotic, reeling, post-Soviet Russia that NATO (and the West) was able to perpetrate what most Serbs consider to be a historical wrong. This opinion, shared by both Moscow and many ordinary Russians, may ultimately be the most important aspect of the strong bilateral relationship. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sarafian)**

***“Within the framework of Russian military cooperation with international partners, Serbia occupies a special place.”***

***“[Serbian] President Vučić has repeatedly stated that Serbia will not join NATO while he is in office.”***



## Continued: The Utility of Russian-Serbian Relations to Moscow

**Source:** “Сергей Шойгу в Белграде напомнил о том, что объединяет наши страны (Sergei Shoigu in Belgrade reminded [us] what unites our countries),” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 17 February 2020. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/02/17/sergey-shoigu-v-belgrade-napomnil-o-tom-chto-obedinyaet-nashi-strany.html>

*“Within the framework of Russian military cooperation with international partners, Serbia occupies a special place.”*

*... the Armed Forces of Serbia received six MiG-29s from Russia, as well as 30 BRDM-2MS [an upgraded BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance vehicle] and 30 T-72MS tanks...*

*“In 1999, Sergey Shoigu visited Belgrade multiple times and [as then-Russian Minister for Emergency Situations] led the Russian humanitarian aid operation [in response to NATO military operations against Serbia and Montenegro].”*

*“[Serbian] President Vučić has repeatedly stated that Serbia will not join NATO while he is in office.”*

*“During a brief visit to Belgrade, Sergei Shoigu took the time to take part in the ceremony ... at the Liberators of Belgrade [during WWII] memorial... [and] laid flowers at the monument to Soviet soldiers.”*

**Source:** “На трех стульях: как Сербия лавирует между Россией, США и ЕС (Straddling three chairs: how Serbia maneuvers among Russia, the USA and the EU),” *Izvestia*, 1 March 2020. <https://iz.ru/981367/kseniia-loginova/na-trekh-stuliakh-kak-serbiia-laviruet-mezhdu-rossiei-ssha-i-es>

*“At the same time [as the March 2020 visit of Serbian President Vučić to the U.S.], an active rapprochement between Belgrade and NATO is occurring...”*

*“The White House has repeatedly expressed concern about Serbia’s acquisition of Russian arms, including the Pantsir-S1 air defense system.”*

*“It is unfavorable for Russia to support a final settlement of the Kosovo issue...”*

**Source:** ““Если бы Путин тогда был президентом, нас бы не посмели бомбить” Глава МИД Сербии Ивица Дачич — о давлении Запада и обмене территориями с Косово (If Putin had been president [during that period], they would have not dared to bomb us” Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić- on Western pressure and the exchange of territories with Kosovo),” *Izvestia*, 19 April 2019. <https://iz.ru/869415/aleksei-zabrodin/esli-putin-togda-by-l-prezidentom-nas-ne-posmeli-bombit>

*[Portion of Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić’s reply to a question, regarding Serbia’s relations with western partners]*

*“We are grateful to the Russian Federation for the help that it provided at that time in [1999], but if Putin had been president [during that period], they would have not dared to bomb us. Russia, I think, would have taken a different position.”*



**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>



## Armenia to Acquire Radar System from India

**OE Watch Commentary:** The armed forces of Armenia maintain various Russian radar systems (among an inventory of largely Russian weapons and equipment), but as the accompanying excerpted article reports, a recent agreement with the government of India will introduce a new radar system into the Armenian military. The article from *News.am* reports that the Indian government “reached an agreement worth \$40 million to provide radar systems to Armenia” and that it “was reported by Indian media with sources in the government.” The article included a link back to the original article from *India Today* and it appears that a number of other Armenian sources which reported on the acquisition got it from there and not from an announcement from the Armenian government.

The article mentions that the agreement is for “four Swathi radar systems” and notes how the system can “simultaneously manage several projectiles from different types of weapons in different places” and that it is currently in service “on the line of contact in Kashmir.” The article also points out how “Armenia tested Russian and Polish systems, but chose the Indian system.” The Indian bid on the contract reportedly came in lower than the Russian one, even though the Armenian

armed forces are often able to purchase weapons and equipment from the Russian defense industry at the same prices the Russian armed forces pay. While it does not mention which Russian system took part in the bid to offer a comparison of capabilities with Swathi, the purchase is taking place alongside other notable acquisitions and reforms in the Armenian armed forces (see: “Russia’s Security Assistance Balancing Act in the Caucasus,” *OE Watch*, February 2020). **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



*Weapon Locating Radar (Swathi) passes through the Rajpath during the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade-2018, in New Delhi on January 23, 2018.*

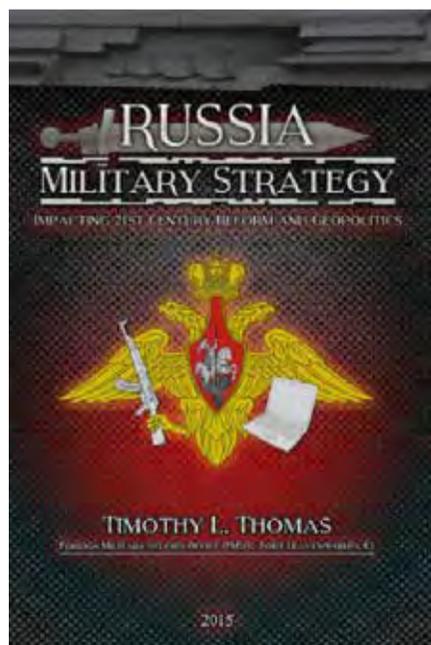
Source: Government Open Data License - India (GODL), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weapon\\_Locating\\_Radar\\_\(Swathi\)\\_passes\\_through\\_the\\_Rajpath\\_during\\_the\\_full\\_dress\\_rehearsal\\_for\\_the\\_Republic\\_Day\\_Parade-2018\\_in\\_New\\_Delhi\\_on\\_January\\_23,\\_2018.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weapon_Locating_Radar_(Swathi)_passes_through_the_Rajpath_during_the_full_dress_rehearsal_for_the_Republic_Day_Parade-2018_in_New_Delhi_on_January_23,_2018.jpg)

**“Armenia tested Russian and Polish systems, but chose the Indian system.”**

**Source:** “СМИ: Индия будет поставлять Армении радары на \$40 миллионов (Media: India will provide Armenia \$40 million worth of radar systems),” *News.am*, 2 March 2020. <https://news.am/rus/news/563320.html>

*India reached an agreement worth \$40 million to provide radar systems to Armenia. This was reported by Indian media with sources in the government.*

*The contract states the provision of four Swathi radar systems...The radar can simultaneously manage several projectiles from different types of weapons in different places. It is noted that the Indian army uses this system on the line of contact in Kashmir...It was reported the Armenia tested Russian and Polish systems, but chose the Indian system.*



### 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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## Uzbekistan and Tajikistan Continue Security Cooperation

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the governments of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have improved their relationship over the past few years, security cooperation became one way to measure how far they've come. The accompanying excerpted articles report on a few developments between the armed forces of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that demonstrate this progress.

The first article from *Asia-Plus*, a Russian-language news website based in Tajikistan, reports on a recent joint military exercise carried out by Uzbek and Tajik units at a facility in Tajikistan. The article notes it was a "joint special-tactical anti-terrorist exercise," involving a scenario of "an incursion across the border by an armed group." The article reports on a few aspects of the exercise, including how Uzbeks "conducted an air strike" on the enemy after carrying out aerial surveillance. It is worth remembering that during clashes with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999, the Uzbek government unilaterally carried out airstrikes against the group in Tajikistan's territory. The Uzbek government at the time believed that the Tajiks had not been doing enough to deal with the militant group, and it stressed an already frail relationship.

The second article, also from *Asia-Plus*, reports that the Uzbek and Tajik defense ministries are set to sign "a memorandum of cooperation on military intelligence" that will allow "for the organization and carrying out of joint exercises, the exchange of experience and information in the field of military intelligence." It is unclear how the part of the memorandum on joint exercises is different from existing agreements, but the exchange of information in military intelligence marks another step in closer cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“According to the plan of the exercise, in order to repel an incursion across the border by an armed group, the Uzbek soldiers carried out aerial surveillance and after finding the enemy, conducted an air strike.”***

**Source:** “Минобороны Узбекистана: учения с армией Таджикистана превзошли все ожидания (The Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan: the exercise with the army of Tajikistan surpassed all expectations),” *Asia-Plus*, 17 March 2020. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20200317/minoboroni-uzbekistana-ucheniya-s-armiei-tadzhikistana-prevzoshli-vse-ozhidaniya>

*The joint exercise of the armed forces of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, “Commonwealth 2020,” was held at a high level, according to the ministry of defense. The joint special-tactical anti-terrorist exercise with units from the ministries of defense of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took place March 11-14 at the Tajik “Fakhrabad” training facility...*

*According to the plan of the exercise, in order to repel an incursion across the border by an armed group, the Uzbek soldiers carried out aerial surveillance and after finding the enemy, conducted an air strike. Units of the armed forces and border guards of Tajikistan took part in repelling the attack on the border...*

*A scenario during the course of the exercise also worked through a situation of the armed group occupying an airport...according to the plan at this stage of the exercise, Uzbek soldiers, descending by rope from Mi-8 helicopters, supported three assault groups of the Tajik army...*

**Source:** Avaz Yuldashev, “Таджикистан и Узбекистан подпишут меморандум о сотрудничестве в сфере военной разведки (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will sign a memorandum on cooperation on military intelligence),” *Asia-Plus*, 14 February 2020. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20200214/tadzhikistan-i-uzbekistan-podpishut-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-v-sfere-voennoi-razvedki>

*The Ministries of Defense of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will soon sign a memorandum of cooperation on military intelligence...The document provides for the organization and carrying out of joint exercises, the exchange of experience and information in the field of military intelligence.*

*Cooperation between the neighboring states in military-technical cooperation started to develop after the state visit by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Dushanbe in March 2018...It was then that an agreement was signed by the two governments on cooperation in areas of the transit of military or special cargo, and cooperation in civil defense...an agreement was also signed between the defense ministries of the two states on military cooperation...*

*...on April 23-26, 2019 at the Fakhrabad training facility, a joint training took place for military intelligence units of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan...*



# China: Building Leadership Skills in NCOs for the Future Battlefield

**OE Watch Commentary:** One of the biggest issues that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has had to confront is its lack of leadership skills in what has been referred to as the “Five Cannots (五个不会),” of commanding officers and the “Two Inabilities (两个能力不够).” These have been identified as issues and referenced in a number of Chinese military reports over at least the past five years and are defined and broken down in the first and second articles, both published in *Jiefangjun Bao* as:

Five Cannots:

- (Officers/leaders) cannot judge/analyze the situation
- (Officers/leaders) cannot understand the intention of higher authorities
- (Officers/leaders) cannot make operational decisions
- (Officers/leaders) cannot deploy troops
- (Officers/leaders) cannot deal with unexpected situations

Two Inabilities (often translated as Insufficient Abilities):

- “Our military’s ability to fight a modern war is insufficient”
- “Our cadres’, at all levels, abilities to command modern war is insufficient”

In a world with rapidly evolving technology and the changing dynamics and function of China’s military, the PLA is now pushing to professionalize and develop the leadership skills of its non-commissioned officers (NCO). The third article extract, also published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, describes how a brigade in the Tibet Military District is working to improve the comprehensive command abilities of its infantry squad leaders through what can be seen as a trial by fire.

During drills and exercises, infantry squad leaders are being assigned to specialized squads of various other branches to give them an opportunity to master the operation of different specialized weapons and equipment from other branches. This also affords them the opportunity to see how command works within these different branches. To further build their decision-making ability Infantry squad leaders are incorporated into major battle groups during combat scenarios, where they are encouraged to share their views and recommendations with the more senior leadership in key areas, such as in the use of force and firepower attack. Also, combat training scenarios are not scripted and infantry squad leaders are placed in unfamiliar scenarios.

Infantry squad leaders are viewed as the “end-point” commanders on the battlefield. Battalion and company commanders will delegate command to them. They are expected to accomplish combat tasks independently, are expected to develop their capability in “joint thinking,” and have a good grasp on available supporting forces. Therefore, we might expect to see an increasing stringency in their training as time goes on. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“Infantry squad leaders are the end-point commanders on the battlefield, so they must also have joint thinking, and they must consider supporting forces.”***

**Source:** “西藏军区某旅着力提升“末端指挥员”综合指挥能力:步兵班长独立指挥支援火力 (A Brigade of Tibet Military District Exerts Efforts to Improve the Comprehensive Command Abilities of ‘Commanders at the End Points’: Infantry Squad Leaders Command Supporting Firepower on Their Own),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 30 March 2020. [http://www.81.cn/bzzj/2020-03/30/content\\_9779985.htm](http://www.81.cn/bzzj/2020-03/30/content_9779985.htm)

***A Brigade of Tibet Military District Exerts Efforts on Improving the Comprehensive Command Abilities of ‘Commanders at the End Points’: Infantry Squad Leaders Command Supporting Firepower on Their Own***

*“Infantry squad leaders are the end-point commanders on the battlefield, so they must also have joint thinking, and they must consider supporting forces.” A leader from the brigade told a reporter that to improve the overall command abilities of infantry squad leaders, the brigade is following the path of overlapping squad leader posts within the scope of brigade and battalion. It puts infantry squad leaders into specialized squads of various other branches so that they can master the operation of the specialized weapons and equipment of several branches and learn how command is exercised there. When organizing training exercises in combat actions and the operations which groups of military officers do in them, the brigade incorporates infantry squad leaders into major battle groups, and it encourages them to give their views and recommendations in those teams regarding the use of forces and firepower attack, so as to play the role of brain trust for scientific decision making by battalion and company commanders.*

*... In unfamiliar conditions, and with no set advance plan for the combat operations and no script to follow, battalion and company commanders delegate command to infantry squad leaders for accomplishing tasks...*



## Continued: China: Building Leadership Skills in NCOs for the Future Battlefield

**Source:** Li Chunli, “着力破解“两个能力不够”问题 (Focus on Breaking Down the Problem of the Two Insufficient Abilities),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 30 December 2014, <[http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2014-12/30/content\\_97805.htm](http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2014-12/30/content_97805.htm)>

### *Focus on Breaking Down the Problem of the Two Insufficient Abilities*

*President Xi profoundly pointed out that our army’s ability to fight modern wars is insufficient, and cadres at all levels are not capable of commanding modern wars.*

*... it is necessary to stand on the cusp of the storm and examine the importance and urgency of resolving the “Two Insufficient Abilities.”*

**Source:** “西藏军区某旅着力提升“末端指挥员”综合指挥能力:步兵班长独立指挥支援火力 (A Brigade of Tibet Military District Exerts Efforts to Improve the Comprehensive Command Abilities of ‘Commanders at the End Points’: Infantry Squad Leaders Command Supporting Firepower on Their Own),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 30 March 2020. [http://www.81.cn/bzzj/2020-03/30/content\\_9779985.htm](http://www.81.cn/bzzj/2020-03/30/content_9779985.htm)

### *A Brigade of Tibet Military District Exerts Efforts on Improving the Comprehensive Command Abilities of ‘Commanders at the End Points’: Infantry Squad Leaders Command Supporting Firepower on Their Own*

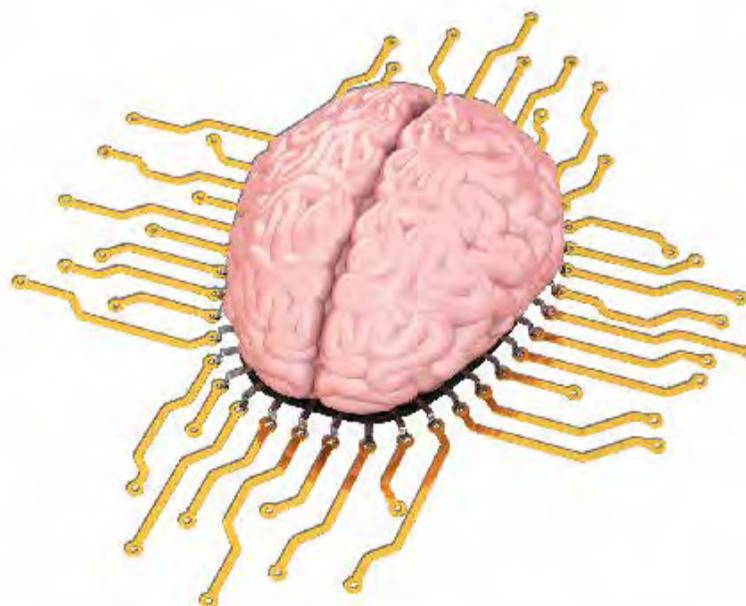
*“Infantry squad leaders are the end-point commanders on the battlefield, so they must also have joint thinking, and they must consider supporting forces.” A leader from the brigade told a reporter that to improve the overall command abilities of infantry squad leaders, the brigade is following the path of overlapping squad leader posts within the scope of brigade and battalion. It puts infantry squad leaders into specialized squads of various other branches so that they can master the operation of the specialized weapons and equipment of several branches and learn how command is exercised there. When organizing training exercises in combat actions and the operations which groups of military officers do in them, the brigade incorporates infantry squad leaders into major battle groups, and it encourages them to give their views and recommendations in those teams regarding the use of forces and firepower attack, so as to play the role of brain trust for scientific decision making by battalion and company commanders.*

*... In unfamiliar conditions, and with no set advance plan for the combat operations and no script to follow, battalion and company commanders delegate command to infantry squad leaders for accomplishing tasks...*

## THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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Mad Scientist Laboratory engages global innovators to report on the Operational Environment (OE), emergent disruptive technologies and their convergent impacts, and the changing character of warfare.





## China: The Changing Dynamics of Mobilization Under Informatized Warfare

**OE Watch Commentary:** “Mobilization is born for war and executed toward war.” That is how the accompanying Chinese article, published recently in *Jiefangjun Bao*, begins. The article is part six of a series of articles on the concepts and roles of informatized warfare in various military functions, in this case mobilization.

China’s National Defense Mobilization Law went into effect in July 2010. According to the law, the National People’s Congress Standing Committee has the power to place the national economy and civilians in China, to include foreign assets, in a war-time footing if state sovereignty, unification, territorial integrity, or security is threatened. In 2010, theorists and military scholars were still researching the concept of informatized warfare as new technologies were coming online. Ten years later, with the future battlefield becoming so complex, the face of mobilization is changing as well.

The PLA has embraced the concept of science and technology, bringing the military and the mobilization effort to new heights. The authors of the article explain that the rapidly changing revolution in informatized warfare will change the form and methods of mobilization. They look at the strategic functions of national defense mobilization in the new age and ask the question of how China might “seize future commanding heights and establish a powerful, new-type mobilization support setup” that can fully support an actual combat.

The authors explain that the future of informatized warfare extends beyond the concept of military strength. It also comprises “comprehensive national power.” In this era of informatized warfare, the side that is able to set up/mobilize the fastest will be at an advantage over the other.

In the era of informatized warfare, the entire inner dynamics of the future battlefield has evolved. For example, support is no longer needed predominantly for a ground battlefield, but rather it has expanded to a multi-dimensional space in land, sea, air, electromagnetics, and cyber. It has gone from a campaign level to a strategic level. A mobilization system, according to the authors, needs to consider the construction of the entire support model.

Because of technology, joint operations are becoming increasingly precise under the conditions of informatized warfare (precision strike, precision support). Because of the growing complexity of warfare (joint operations involve multiple armed services... technology, increasingly rapid decision making), the traditional mobilization method, which had once been used during the age of mechanized warfare, will no longer suffice. It needs to be much more precise and calculated. The authors refer to “precision mobilization support,” saying it needs to be turned into a powerful “lever” for the enhancement of combat strength.

The authors anticipate that the ongoing competition for superiority in science and technology will only intensify, and whoever masters advanced science and technology and can form deterrence and combat strength through rapid mobilization and agglomeration, will become a ‘disruptor’ of conventional superiority and a ‘dominator’ in future rivalries and military struggles among great powers.

They also paint a picture of a “hybrid war” in which lines are blurred between military and civilian participation (civil-military integration), between the front and rear, and between strategic, campaign, and tactical operations. Because of these increasingly blurred lines, intelligent technology becomes more critical and therefore intelligent mobilization is stepping up the tempo and becoming increasingly important at all levels. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“...Whoever masters advanced science and technology and is capable of forming deterrence and combat strength through rapid mobilization and agglomeration will become a ‘disruptor’ of conventional superiority and a ‘dominator’ in future rivalries and military struggles among great powers.”***

**Source:** Yu Yunxian and Yuan Zongyi, “信息化战争应有怎样的动员观 (What Kind of Mobilization Concept Should Informatized Warfare Have?),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 2 April 2020. [http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-04/02/content\\_258063.htm](http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-04/02/content_258063.htm)

*Mobilization is born for war and executed toward war. With the rapid development of the S&T revolution, a number of new-type combat forces with extremely high operational effectiveness have taken the stage of war and helped bring about essential changes to the form and operational mode of informatized warfare, and consequently, fundamental transformations will definitely be made to the ideas, demands, methods and so forth of national defense mobilization as well...*

*Given that joint operations involve multiple combat-engaging armed services, vast battlefields, and intensive use of technology, and, at the same time, come with high intensity, a quick tempo, and massive consumption of goods and materials, the task of mobilization support is extremely heavy and arduous.*

*We can anticipate that the contest for S&T supremacy in the future military sphere will be more intensified. All major powers in the world today, who are vigorously adapting to new changes and pushing ahead with transformation, are studying how to convert intangible quality S&T potential into tangible war capabilities, thereby seizing the strategic new heights in military S&T innovation. Hence, whoever masters advanced science and technology and is capable of forming deterrence and combat strength through rapid mobilization and agglomeration will become a “disruptor” of conventional superiority and a “dominator” in future rivalries and military struggles among great powers. Thus we are required to firmly establish the idea of science and technology being the core mobilization power...*

*...The age of intelligent mobilization has quietly come and is moving up-tempo to the forefront of war and becoming an important component, and by taking part in the entire process of joint operations with all elements involved at all times, it has evolved into a key factor in informatized warfare and a “linchpin” vital to the outcome of war.*

*...This is not only an attempt to actively adapt to and design the rules of future warfare, but also the key to gaining an early start and winning the initiative in future informatized joint operations.*

*In the age of globalization, international, regional, and business-to-business cooperation is getting closer and closer, and the allocation and turnover of such important resources as goods and materials, technology, talent, and equipment is getting more handy and smooth region-wide or even worldwide. This is an inevitable trend of economic and social development, and also provides an even broader platform for national defense mobilization.*



## PLA Adopts New Digital Camouflage for All Services

**OE Watch Commentary:** The PLA is beginning to transition to a new type of camouflage, an updated digital pattern that will be used across all services and arms.

China began development of camouflage in the 1980s, releasing the Type 81, a mottled camouflage roughly similar to the “Frog Skin” or “Duck Hunter” patterns. Improvements came with the high contrast Type 87 with rounded leaf pattern similar to US woodland, that with some improvements, was still used as late as 2007 across most of the PLA.

In the late 2000s, the PLA adopted the digital Type 07 pattern which has since become the standard across the PLA. Type 07 also had a multitude of service and climate-specific types including a basic pattern, Navy and Army Special Forces pattern, and terrain-specific patterns for the People’s Armed Police and Rocket Force. According to the accompanying article, it suffered several deficiencies, such as the use of impractical blue for Marine and Navy forces, which only had limited utility during amphibious operations and in normal times made it harder to spot personnel that had fallen in the water. The design used for the PLAAF Airborne Corps similarly only helped reduce signature while parachuting but had high contrast in almost all environments once troops were on the ground.



PLA Tank crew wearing Type 07 camouflage participate in the Tank Biathlon 2018 in Russia.  
Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TankBiathlon2018-74.jpg>, CC BY 4.0

Perhaps representing an attempted solution to these problems, the PLA appears to have tried a more general pattern several years ago. At the military parade in 2017 held in Zhurihe, Inner Mongolia, PLA units were shown wearing “Type 15,” a pattern similar to Multicam. It first adopted low-visibility patches and name tapes, which has been carried over to the latest version. However, it does not appear to have been used widely.

The first indication that China was rolling out yet another new type of camouflage was in September 2019 when Chinese Central Military Commission member and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe wore the camouflage during his visit to Russia and observation of the Tsentre-2019 exercise. On October 1st 2019, the PLA displayed the camouflage at the National Day parade. As noted by the article, commanders and commissars of the five joint Theater Commands and formations of troops in the parade wore the different patterns. The camouflage was jointly developed by the Institute of Military Equipment [军需装备研究所] in Beijing, a subordinate organization of the Logistic Support Department of the Central Military Commission, and SunTexGroup [中天科技], an Anhui province-based textile manufacturer.

The “starry sky” pattern, which will likely be called Type 19 [19式], does away with the service-specific patterns in favor of a single digital pattern. In comparison to the Type 07 camo, “starry sky” uses a smaller ‘pixel-size’ and has a more dispersed pattern. While this adopts a single digital pattern, unlike the U.S. Universal Camouflage Pattern (UCP) adopted in 2004 it has color variants for different environments and missions. The article notes that in addition to offering superior concealment, the universal adoption will also reduce logistics requirements.

Notably, the adoption of new camouflage appears to be part of a broader effort that will affect other parts of the PLA. The PLAAF, for example, rolled out new regulations on paint schemes for aircraft in March, adopting a low-visibility style low observable coatings and markings which will incorporate radar signature reducing materials. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

***“The new “Starry Sky Camouflage” combat uniforms have improved color and style, abandoning the previous model of dividing the camouflage type according to military service. The new type uses five types: woodland, jungle, desert, wasteland and urban, making them more in line with actual camouflage and the requirements of a realistic combat environment.”***



## Continued: PLA Adopts New Digital Camouflage for All Services

**Source:** “‘星空迷彩’扰敌 新戎装重实战 (‘Starry Sky Camouflage’ to Confuse Enemies, New Equipment for Real Combat,” *Takungpao* [大公报]) 2 December 2019. <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2019/1202/384299.html>

*Beginning this year the People’s Liberation Army will replace its uniforms. The new “Starry Sky Camouflage” combat uniforms have improved color and patterns, abandoning the previous model of dividing camouflage type according to military service. The new camo uses five types: woodland, jungle, desert, wasteland and urban, bringing them more in line with the requirements of a realistic combat environment. The uniform is part of an integrated individual combat system that includes gloves, bulletproof clothing, helmets, etc., placing equal emphasis on incorporating cutting edge technology and combat effectiveness to meet the needs of all services and arms carrying out joint operations in all types of terrain.*

...

*The “Starry Sky” pattern is divided into five types: woodland, jungle, desert, wasteland and urban. Woodland camouflage is used in temperate regions, and jungle camouflage is used in tropical regions. While the pattern is the same, darker or lighter shades of green are used to adapt to different types of vegetation. Desert camouflage is also similar to wasteland camouflage. While the former is a lighter tint to mimic a sand dune environment, the latter is darker to mimic the shade of the rock and brush vegetation environment of the Gobi desert. The urban camouflage pattern uses a mixture of light gray and blue pixels.*

### *Leaders of Five Theater Commands Act as “Models”*

*During the October military parade, the formation carrying the PLA flag was led by five generals, the commanders and commissars of the five major theater commands, each wearing a type of camouflage. General Liu Yuejun [刘粤军], the commander of the Eastern Theater, Lieutenant General Wang Jianwu [王建武], Commissar of the Southern Theater, General Zhao Zongqi [赵宗岐], commander of the Western Theater, Lieutenant General Li Qiaoming [李桥铭] commander of the Northern Theater, and Zhu Shengling [朱生岭], Commissar of the Northern Theater were dressed in the new woodland, jungle, desert, wasteland, and urban camouflage. The ongoing military reorganization is breaking the barriers between arms and services and promoting joint operations—“Starry Sky camouflage” is also the result of this trend.*

*The PLA’s current Type 07 camouflage distinguishes military units by color, such as Army woodland and desert camouflage, Navy marine camouflage, Air Force urban camouflage, Rocket Force jungle camouflage, etc, which would have significant shortcomings in combat. For example, the blue and white camouflage of the Marine Corps and the light blue camouflage of the Air Force paratroopers only have a camouflage effect during a brief part of amphibious landings or landing by parachute, and their color contrasts significantly with their environment. Additionally, conspicuous armbands and logos impair soldiers’ ability to avoid detection.*

### *Helping Soldiers Remain Concealed*

*“Starry sky camouflage” marks a shift from “service camouflage uniforms” to “universal camouflage uniforms”, which are common to all military services and are used according to terrain, environment, and missions. This is the first time that the People’s Liberation Army replaced military camouflage with general-use camouflage. The fact that military service cannot be determined by camouflage is also tactical. For example, during the parade, the Air Force Airborne Force and the Army Special Operations Forces are all dressed in desert camouflage. In the future, officers and men of the Marine Corps at the Djibouti base will wear desert camouflage, which is more in line with the local geographical conditions. Additionally, universal camouflage is also more in line with the joint logistics support model to ensure three-dimensional offensive and defensive operations in border areas [疆域立体攻防作战].*

...

*The pixel block of the Type 07 camouflage used large pixels, and while the “starry sky camouflage” retains the use of a digital camouflage design, the pixel color blocks are much smaller and use more dispersed patterns to enhance the degree of realism and ability to blend into the background. It also produces different effects according to lighting and distance and has enhanced camouflage effects in low-light and near-infrared.*



## Why the PLA Adopted the Type 95 Light Support Weapon

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpt details the PLA's experience with the Type 88 general-purpose machine gun, which has since been abandoned in favor of the Type 95 light support weapon (QBB-95), a variant of the Type 95 assault rifle. In laying out the key points of this evolution it highlights the current direction of PLA infantry tactics and development.



"Machine gun Type95," National War College.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Machine\\_gun\\_Type95.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Machine_gun_Type95.jpg), Public Domain

In the late 1970s, the PLA held a series of tests to determine the appropriate caliber for a planned set of infantry weapons, which concluded that a small caliber would best be suited for China's needs. The resulting 5.8x42mm cartridge is used by PLA rifles, designated marksman rifles and machine guns use a common, though a "heavy" variant with stronger casing and heavier grain bullet is used for some applications.

As the article highlights, at the time the global trend was toward the use of lighter-caliber machine guns for use with squads. The Type 88 was designed in the mid-90s to fill this role and was issued to units beginning in 1997.

A two-man crew operated the weapon, providing a rate of fire of 1,000 rounds per minute, with an effective range is 1,000 meters. The belt-fed machine gun used 100-round belts in the light machine gun configuration and 200 rounds when used with a tripod.

However, a sea change in views on the appropriate caliber for use in squads, in part due to the PLA's observations of US success in the first Gulf War and Somalia, led them to question the utility of the system. Heavier 12.7mm machine gun teams were integrated at the company and battalion level putting the Type 88 in an awkward position in which its requirement for two-man teams, the additional awkward weight of the tripod, which added an additional 4.2kg (9.25lbs), combined with Type 88's reliance on the heavier 5.8mm ammunition was a contributed to its abandonment in favor of the Type 95 light support weapon in 2016.

The Type 95 support weapon does not require additional crew and can provide effective or suppressing fires at 600 and 800 meters. Equipped with a longer and heavier barrel than the standard Type 95 assault rifle and a bipod for stability, it has a firing rate of upwards of 650 rounds per minute. While it uses 80-round drums instead of 100- or 200-round belts, Automatic Riflemen in the PLA Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC), for example, carry at least four of the 80-round drums in chest pouches.

For now, the Type 95 assault rifle remains standard, though members of the People's Armed Police and coastal defense units are equipped with the Type 03 rifle. A new rifle, the QBZ191 rifle, was first displayed at the National Day parade in 2019, and a designated marksman variant appears to be in testing. However, it is unclear if all forces will eventually be equipped with it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

***“Since 2015, our military’s new mechanized infantry squad has undergone great changes. The Type 88 machine gun has been replaced, and each squad is equipped with two Type 95 machine guns, eliminating the assistant gunner position. As a result, six personnel are assigned to an infantry fighting vehicle, and a squad will have two machine gunners, giving them significantly more firepower.”***



## Continued: Why the PLA Adopted the Type 95 Light Support Weapon

**Source:** “中国造出世界最轻通用机枪为何又弃用 有两个缺陷 (Two flaws: Why the World’s lightest General-Purpose machine gun was abandoned by China),” Sina, 《出鞘》 Drawn Sword Blog, 7 May 2019. <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2019-05-07/doc-ihvhiews0315150.shtml>

*The Chinese Type 88 general-purpose machine gun (also referred to as the QJY88) 5.8-mm general-purpose machine gun first appeared in 1999. Known as the world’s lightest in that category, with a total weight under 7.6kg (16.8lbs), However, it was only in service for roughly ten years, and finally was discontinued in 2016, due to unclear advantages, insufficient power, and mediocre performance.*

*As a new general-purpose machine gun, the Type 88 general-purpose machine gun was not well received. Data indicates that while its design was finalized in 1996 and troops began receiving it in 1997, its total production rate over 20 years is very low, not surpassing 20,000 units. This might lead some to believe that it had “made a quick exit.” By contrast, the first-generation general-purpose machine gun developed by our army, the Type 67 machine gun, produced more than 30,000 in the 1970s alone. At present, the Type 88 general-purpose machine gun is still serving in the army, although it has not “quickly withdrawn from the stage of history.”*

*The Type 88 is designed to act as a light machine gun when using a tripod, and it becomes a medium machine gun when placed on a tripod. Compared with the Type 95 machine gun, it had a superior weight of fire and suppression effects, leading to optimism about its tactical utility.*

*Beginning in 2005, the PLA operational units began to implement a new infantry squad weapon system for mechanized infantry. The tripod for the Type 88 was replaced with a bipod and infantry squads were equipped with it in a two-man light machine gun configuration, giving squads firepower approaching that of U.S. military squads.*

*However, this optimism was short-lived. After the Gulf War, the U.S. military questioned the combat capability of the small caliber 5.56 mm M249 machine gun. In 1993, after heavy losses in Mogadishu it concluded that while the 5.56 mm light machine gun is both light and flexible, it offered inferior suppression capability compared to 7.62 mm general-purpose guns.*

*For the Type 88, even when using the heavier variant of 5.8mm, its power and range cannot be compared with medium-caliber general-purpose machine guns. While a key driver of the development of the Type 88’s development was the then-popular idea that medium-caliber machine guns were ‘useless,’ experience on the battlefield had definitively disproved that theory.*

*Given the new observations of battlefield performance, Chinese planners worried that if equipped at the company- or battalion- level, the Type 88 would clearly be deficient. Currently, fire support sections [火力排] in motorized companies in the PLA are equipped with two (Type 89) 12.7mm heavy machine gun squads, and a large number also equipped at the battalion level. The Type 88’s capabilities pale in comparison to the Type 89’s in terms of range, weight of fire and suppression.*

*This placed the Type 88 general-purpose machine gun in an awkward situation. On the surface it may seem suitable for deployment with squads, but in fact, it fails in a number of ways, such as its requirement for using the heavier variant of 5.8mm ammunition, which complicates logistics.*

*At the same time, due to its weight, it requires flotation devices when fording rivers or wading across a beach. It is not convenient to use and can slow down a combat team’s assault operations, limiting its roles. Given these reasons, it is not surprising that the Type 88 was eventually abandoned.*

*Since 2015, our military’s new mechanized infantry squad has undergone great changes. The Type 88 machine gun has been replaced, and each squad is equipped with two Type 95 machine guns, eliminating the assistant gunner position. As a result, six personnel are assigned to an infantry fighting vehicle, and a squad will have two machine gunners, giving them significantly more firepower.*



# China Launches Test-bed For High-Bandwidth Communications Satellites

**OE Watch Commentary:** In January, China launched a test-bed satellite that it hopes will become the first of a new generation of powerful communications satellites. The new satellite, SJ-20 [实践二十号], or “Shijian” for test or verification, is the first launch of the new Dongfanghong-5 series communication satellite.

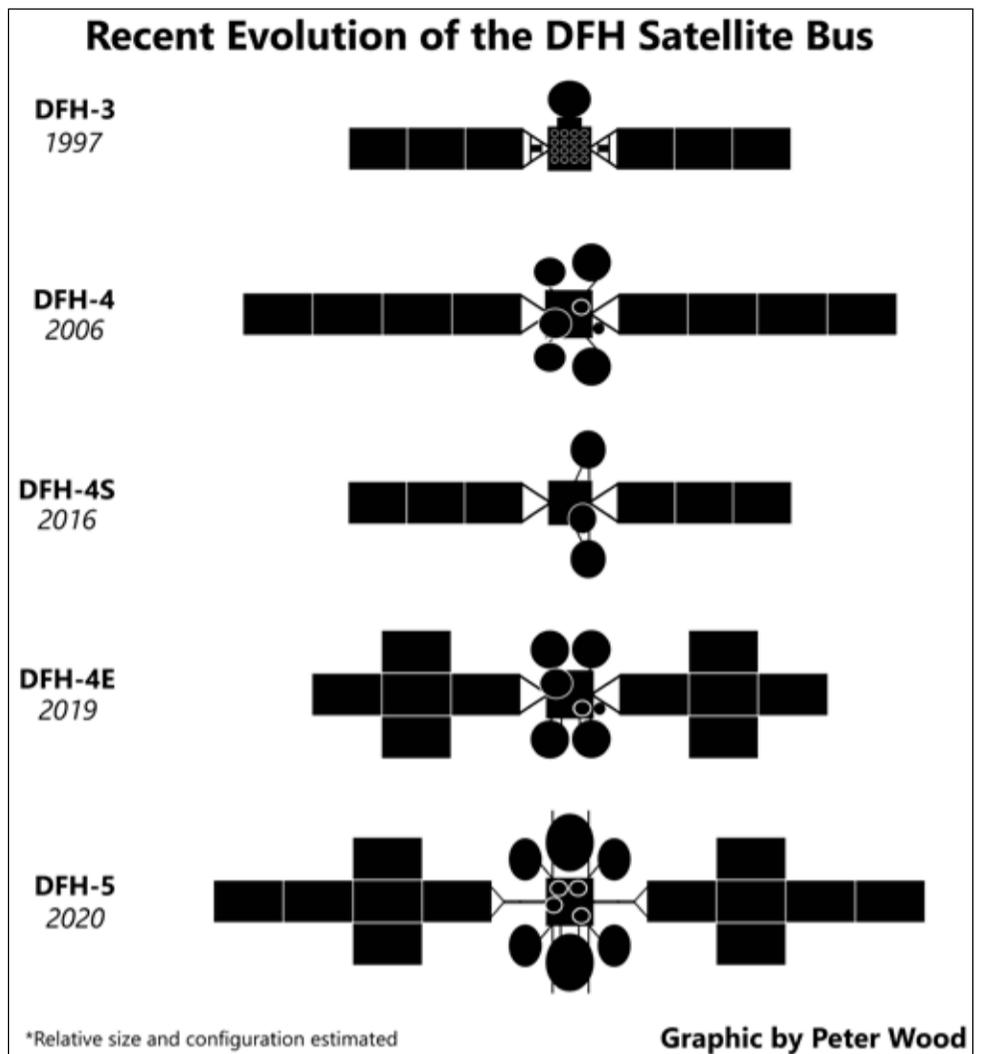
While most internet and other data applications use fiber optic cables, satellites are now challenging long-held assumptions that satellites can only act as a compliment or extension of ground networks. Companies like OneWeb in the UK and Amazon’s Project Kuiper and SpaceX’s Starlink program plan to use massive constellations of smaller communications satellites in lower orbits (with 648, 3,000 and 42,000 satellites respectively) to offer high-speed internet.

By contrast, China appears to be opting for a smaller number of high-throughput satellites (HTS), which can transmit massive volumes of data. The Shijian, China’s heaviest satellite to date, is capable of broadband internet in the Ka (26.5–40) and Extremely High-Frequency Q/V bands (33-75 GHz). Chinese scientists are particularly excited about the ability to transmit in the higher bands, as it allows the satellites to use Ka-band bandwidth for other connections, resulting in lowered costs. In the article, Li Feng [李峰], chief designer of the SJ-20, noted that the ability to transmit in Q/V increases transmission bandwidth by “4-5 times.”

To provide the required power, the article notes that the Dongfanghong-5 bus has a huge array of solar panels. With the 12 panels fully extended, the satellite is 40 meters end-to-end. The core module is also significantly larger than previous generations (see graphic), 2.5 tons heavier and features more antennae clusters.

For China, these satellites are even more important and are “keystones” in their broader ambitions for space. China envisions a network connecting several constellations of satellites with airborne ISR sensors, ground stations, and end-users, the “Space-Earth Integration Network Project” [国家天地一体化信息网络工程]. The ambitious project spans civilian and military organizations and will connect government agencies with SOEs and private companies to accomplish their goals.

The commercial aspect of these constellations is also key, and the development of the Dongfanghong-5 series is in anticipation of demand in the near future. Chinese planners see the satellite industry as an economic bonanza that will provide space-based communication and television services across Asia and Europe to complement its infrastructure and investment projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. The article also notes that the satellites are part of “Broadband China” [宽带中国], a plan launched in August 2013 by the Chinese government for a phased rollout of improved mobile and broadband internet coverage for the country, slated for completion by 2020. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



***“Industry predictions indicate that by 2022, high-throughput satellites will account for 50% of the total global satellite bandwidth; in the same timeframe demand for China’s satellite broadband will also reach more than 1TB.”***



## Continued: China Launches Test-bed For High-Bandwidth Communications Satellites

**Source:** “未来20年通信卫星就靠它 (The Next 20 Years of Communications Satellites Will Depend on It),” *Economic Daily* [经济日报], 4 January 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/04/c\\_1125420981.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/04/c_1125420981.htm)

*Recently, China successfully launched the Shijian-20 satellite via a Long March 5 carrier rocket from the Wenchang space launch center. This satellite is the first flight test satellite of a new generation of large-scale geostationary satellite platform independently developed by China. The Dongfanghong-5 satellite bus, will continue maturing of new technologies, promote the application of new technologies, and is of great significance to the development of China’s aerospace technology.*

*The Shijian-20 satellite was developed by the Fifth Institute of the Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation and weighs eight tons. It is both the heaviest satellite currently most technologically advanced satellite developed by China. The primary task of the satellite is to verify the technical stability of the Dongfanghong-5 hub, as well as test more than 10 world-leading technologies.*

*Develop the satellite platform first*

*Communication satellites act as ‘neural networks’ for today’s information society. They offer the advantages of long-distance, large coverage area, a large number of high-quality communication channels. It is widely used in international and domestic or regional communications, maritime communications, television broadcasting, and other fields.*

*Satellite application performance is often achieved by loading different functional loads on a common platform. Currently, many countries have adopted the design method of a satellite “bus” that, with very little modification can handle different payloads, shortening the satellite development cycle, saving development funds, and improving satellite reliability.*

*..With the development of China’s economy and continuous acceleration of national defense modernization, it is becoming more and more important that China’s communication satellites make significant leaps in performance. Academician Zhou Zhicheng [周志成] (chief designer and project head of the Shijian-20 and Dongfanghong-5 programs) noted that the “original reason for developing the Dongfanghong-5 was because China needs high-throughput communication satellites.” The Dongfanghong-5’s characteristics of “high loads, high power, and high-accuracy control,” are an international benchmark, and which can meet China’s demands for high-throughput communication satellites for the next 20 years.*

*Through the use of modular design and digital development, the Dongfanghong-5 hub can greatly shorten the satellite development cycle and improve production efficiency. For mature general-purpose loads, the satellite development cycle does not exceed 36 months. At the same time, the localization rate of the Dongfanghong-5 hub has reached 100%, further driving the development of China’s domestic aerospace equipment.*

*As China’s common platform for large-scale satellites in geosynchronous orbit, the Dongfanghong-5 hub is highly adaptive and can be widely used in high-orbit communications, microwave remote sensing, optical remote sensing, space scientific exploration, scientific experiments, orbit services, etc.*

*The successful launch of the Shijian-20 satellite, therefore, represents an important step forward in the Dongfanghong-5 program and lays a solid foundation for its use in other applications. With the development of commercial satellite live broadcasting, emergency communications, mobile communications, Internet of Things and other business applications, as well as the steady development of conventional GEO-orbit satellite communications, the satellite communications industry represents a major market.*

*Industry predictions indicate that by 2022, high-throughput satellites will account for 50% of the total global satellite bandwidth; in the same timeframe demand for China’s satellite broadband will also reach more than 1TB. Facing broad demand and in the interest of furthering the national “Belt and Road” and “Broadband China” strategies, China will rely on the Dongfanghong-5 as a platform to develop several communication satellites capable of transmitting between 100GB and 1TB, which will provide service to countries along the “Belt and Road” and surrounding areas.*



## China: 'Business as Usual' as COVID-19 Diverts the World's Attention?

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying three article excerpts suggest that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has not distracted China from its international exploits and military plans. On the contrary, they suggest that the pandemic has created an opportunity for China to advance its agenda in contested areas like the South China Sea, while the rest of the world is distracted. Despite China's global aid and diplomacy efforts, the articles demonstrate a continued distrust in the country's intentions and a perception that it is "business as usual for China and its military," given what it is doing in the public eye as well as behind the scenes.

In the first article, published in the *Taipei Times*, Chang Yan-tin, an adjunct professor at Taiwan's National Defense University, points out that J-11 fighters, H-6 bombers, and KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft flown by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force had "intruded into Taiwan's outer airspace... during their first long-distance nighttime exercise." Chang points out that this was the first time Chinese warplanes operated over the Taiwan Strait during nighttime exercises. The fact that the maneuvers took place while the world was busy fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Chang, "implies that there are political motives behind the action." The author explains that China is using a "compound strategy – with military activity, public opinion, and psychological propaganda warfare – to gradually change the Strait's status quo."

The next two articles, published in Philippine media outlets *Philstar.com* and *Inquirer*, are reporting the Chinese Academy of Sciences' establishment of two research stations on the heavily contested Subi and Fiery Cross Reefs. This is taking place as Beijing makes a big show of donating 100,000 COVID-19 test kits to Manila. According to *Philstar.com*, "the 'research' constitutes further incursion in waters within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone plus 150-mile extended continental shelf. The article also points out that recently, Beijing had also delivered a million respirators and 250,000 test kits to the Czech Republic, with huge quantities of other supplies to follow. The donation came despite the fact that, in December 2018, the "Czech cyber-security agency became the first in Europe to ban Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE for spyware in 5G technologies."

As the *Inquirer* notes, it is "still business as usual" for China and its military, even as "the world is turning topsy turvy over the novel coronavirus 2019 pandemic that started in China." The article goes on to quote maritime security expert Collin Koh as saying, "the launching of two new research centers by China at this time is a significant development. Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints. Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA is touted to remain ready despite the coronavirus." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints... Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA is touted to remain combat ready despite the coronavirus.”***

**Source:** Chang Yan-ting, "Prepare for War to Keep Peace with Rowdy PLA," *Taipei Times Online*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2020/03/30/2003733631>

### ***Prepare for War to Keep Peace with Rowdy PLA***

*In the past, Chinese warplanes only operated over the Taiwan Strait during the daytime. That the first nighttime exercise took place as the world is busy fighting the COVID-19 pandemic implies that there are political motives behind the action.*

*The PLA Air Force is being transformed from a purely defensive force to a regional expeditionary one. The reason for these frequent operations in the Strait airspace in recent years is that China wants to use a compound strategy — with military activity, public opinion and propaganda warfare — to gradually change the Strait's "status quo." It has also launched a psychological warfare campaign that is increasing tension in the region.*

*Today's around-the-clock surveillance and reconnaissance is advanced, and it is no longer possible for the CCP to wage a quick attack to force a speedy result...*

*As the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the China-US trade dispute is turning into global economic warfare, the Chinese economy has apparently deteriorated due to its huge deficits. Due to Beijing's overarching disease prevention framework with closed control and lockdowns, the serious economic crisis could turn into a major political event.*



## Continued: China: 'Business as Usual' as COVID-19 Diverts the World's Attention?

**Source:** Jarius Bondoc, "Beijing Surveys Philippines Reefs While Donating Virus Tests," *PhilStar*, 27 March 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2020/03/27/2003675/beijing-surveys-philippines-reefs-while-donating-virus-tests>

### *Beijing Surveys Philippines Reefs While Donating Virus Tests*

*One simply can't trust China's communist rulers. As Beijing gave Manila Covid-19 test kits it bolstered control of two of seven Philippine reefs it illegally is occupying. Civilian ruses were used, no different from deploying fisheries militia to Philippine maritime jurisdictions.*

*China's Academy of Science "established two research stations" on Subi and Fiery Cross Reefs, the official Xinhua News Agency announced last weekend. "Scientists [will] live and conduct field research on ecology, geology, and environment."*

*The "research" constitutes further incursion in waters within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone plus 150-mile extended continental shelf.*

*Twenty and 55 miles respectively from Philippine Pagasa island municipality, Subi and Fiery Cross are in fisheries-rich Spratlys. The archipelago is said to also contain oil, gas, and other minerals...*

*Last Saturday in Manila the Chinese embassy made a big show of donating 100,000 Covid-19 test kits to the Dept. of Foreign Affairs. It was the second dole; 2,000 kits came five days ahead. The Philippines direly needs testing and other medical supplies to contain the pandemic that sprang from Wuhan in Dec...*

*Also last weekend in the Czech Republic, Beijing delivered a million respirators for potential severe Covid-19 patients. Earlier Prague received 250,000 test kits. Three more planeloads were expected Sunday with more respirators, two million face masks, personal protection equipment, and other medical supplies. In Dec. 2018 the Czech cyber-security agency became the first in Europe to ban Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE for spyware in 5G technologies. Last Dec. 2019 the prime minister suddenly sacked the three-year-long agency chief allegedly for inexperience. Before heading cyber-security the latter was for ten years with the Czech national security department.*

**Source:** Frances Mangosing, "China Launches New Facilities in West PH Sea Just as World's Eyes Fixed on COVID-19," *Inquirer*, 30 March 2020. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/186253/china-launches-new-facilities-in-west-ph-sea-just-as-worlds-eyes-fixed-on-covid-19>

### *China Launches New Facilities in West PH Sea Just as World's Eyes Fixed on COVID-19*

*While the world is turning topsy turvy over the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that started in China, it's still business as usual for the Asian giant in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea).*

*Maritime security expert Collin Koh said the launching of two new research centers by China at this time is a significant development.*

*"Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints," Koh told INQUIRER.net.*

*"Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA (People's Liberation Army) is touted to remain combat ready despite the coronavirus," he said.*



## Chinese Military Hosts Video Conferences to Help Allies Combat COVID-19

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 6 April, military health experts from the People's Liberation Army hosted a video conference call with Pakistan's military, where 20 health experts with experience in disease outbreak prevention and control discussed strategies for dealing with COVID-19. According to the accompanying article published by the Chinese state-run *Ministry of Defense Network*, the Chinese experts called in from Beijing and Wuhan, while the Pakistani experts participated from the city of Rawalpindi to discuss issues such as monitoring and detection of COVID-19, emergency command coordination, and clinical treatment options. The article notes that the video conference was the first of several organized by the Chinese military "to share experience in the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia outbreaks with foreign troops." It also states that the next step for the Chinese military will be to "build a community of human destiny, strengthen international cooperation in the fight against epidemics with the military of the countries concerned, work together to combat the epidemic situation, maintain international health security, and make new contributions to improving human health and build a more healthy community."



*The Flag of The People's Liberation Army.*

Source: PhilIP via Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_People%27s\\_Liberation\\_Army.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_People%27s_Liberation_Army.svg), Public domain

On 8 April, a second video conference call was held, this time with the Singaporean military, to share knowledge regarding the prevention and containment of COVID-19. According to the *Ministry of Defense Network*, 17 experts from the health departments of both armies with experience in disease testing and prevention first introduced "the overall situation and experience of their respective military forces participating in the national epidemic prevention and control." The experts then discussed topics including COVID-19 testing and diagnosis, clinical treatment methods, epidemic trends (including imported cases), and "psychological intervention."

On 9 April, the Chinese military hosted a third video conference, this time to discuss COVID-19 with the Russian military. The *Ministry of Defense Network* reported that over 30 experts from the health departments of the Chinese and Russian militaries with experience dealing with disease outbreak and containment experience held discussions. China shared the same expertise with Russia that it previously provided to Pakistan and Singapore, but this time also discussed conducting epidemiological investigations and rehabilitative blood plasma therapy for patients with critical cases of COVID-19. The article claimed that Russia "spoke highly of the tremendous efforts made by the Chinese military to participate in epidemic prevention and control and the important achievements China has achieved in fighting the new coronary pneumonia epidemic," saying "We sincerely thank the Chinese military for its high-quality, frank and in-depth academic exchanges and experience sharing, which we believe fully reflect the new era of China and Russia." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hartnett)**

***“During the next step, the Chinese military will uphold the concept of serving to build a community of human destiny, strengthen international cooperation in the fight against epidemics with the military of the countries concerned, work together to combat the epidemic situation, maintain international health security, and make new contributions to improving human health and build a more healthy community.”***



## Continued: Chinese Military Hosts Video Conferences to Help Allies Combat COVID-19

**Source:** Qiao Nannan, “Chinese and Pakistani armies hold a video conference on the sharing of experience in the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia,” *Ministry of Defense Network*, 7 April 2020. [www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/07/content\\_4863295.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/07/content_4863295.htm)

*On the afternoon of April 6, about 20 people from the military health departments of China and Pakistan and experts in clinical, detection, prevention and control related fields held video sharing sessions on the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia in Beijing, Wuhan and Rawalpindi.*

*Subsequently, the two parties focused on the exchange of emergency command coordination, epidemic prevention and control, monitoring and detection, clinical treatment and other topics.*

*This is the first video conference organized by the Chinese military to share experience in the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia outbreaks with foreign troops. During the next step, the Chinese military will uphold the concept of serving to build a community of human destiny, strengthen international cooperation in the fight against epidemics with the military of the countries concerned, work together to combat the epidemic situation, maintain international health security, and make new contributions to improving human health and build a more healthy community.*

**Source:** Qiao Nannan, “Chinese and Singaporean troops hold a video conference on sharing experience in the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia,” *Ministry of Defense Network*, 9 April 2020. [www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/09/content\\_4863460.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/09/content_4863460.htm)

*On the afternoon of April 8th, the Chinese and Singaporean military held a video conference on the experience sharing of the prevention and control of the new coronary pneumonia epidemic. A total of 17 experts from the health departments of the two armies and related fields in clinical, testing, prevention and control participated in Beijing, Wuhan and Singapore. The two sides introduced the overall situation and experience of their respective military forces participating in the national epidemic prevention and control. The experts focused on the topics of epidemic prevention and control, diagnostic testing, clinical treatment and epidemic trends, and combined with case analysis to discuss the treatment of critical patients and in-hospital control, psychological intervention and prevention and control of imported cases.*

**Source:** Qiao Nannan, “Chinese and Russian troops hold a video conference on sharing experience in the prevention and control of new coronary pneumonia,” *Ministry of Defense Network*, 10 April 2020. [www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/10/content\\_4863462.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/diplomacy/2020-04/10/content_4863462.htm)

*On the afternoon of April 9th, the Chinese and Russian armed forces held a video conference on the experience sharing of prevention and control of the new coronary pneumonia epidemic. More than 30 experts from the health departments of the two armies and clinical, detection, prevention and control related fields participated in Beijing, Wuhan and St. Petersburg. The Chinese side introduced the overall situation and experience of the Chinese army’s epidemic prevention and control work. Experts from both sides focused on topics such as epidemic prevention and control, diagnostic testing, and clinical treatment, and combined with case studies to discuss and communicate epidemiological investigations, critical patient treatment, and rehabilitation plasma therapy and other strategies.*

*The Russian side spoke highly of the tremendous efforts made by the Chinese military to participate in epidemic prevention and control and the important achievements China has achieved in fighting the new coronary pneumonia epidemic. We sincerely thank the Chinese military for its high-quality, frank and in-depth academic exchanges and experience sharing, which we believe fully reflect the new era of China and Russia.*



# China's Deepening Diplomatic and Economic Engagement in Afghanistan

by Syed Fazl-e Haider

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-deepening-diplomatic-and-economic-engagement-in-afghanistan/>

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 29 February, US and Taliban representatives signed the “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” in Doha, Qatar, which laid out a framework for ending the 18-year old conflict in Afghanistan. As the US plans to draw down its forces in Afghanistan, China is set to further deepen its involvement. Beijing wishes to achieve at least two key objectives. First, it wants to block any contact between the Taliban and ethnic Uighur Muslim militants seeking independence from China. Second, the PRC wants long-term stability in Afghanistan in order to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—the flagship project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—to the country. Beijing sees Afghanistan as a primary link between the Central Asian republics and the CPEC. To achieve its objectives, Beijing has pursued positive engagement with the Taliban. These ties have increased over the past couple of years: for example, in 2019 Taliban representatives paid at least two visits to Beijing (in June and September) for talks with PRC officials.

With multi-billion dollar investments in different development projects, China is the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan. China has adopted a two-step process over the past twelve years to increase its stake in Afghanistan: first investments, followed by political engagement. The PRC first entered Afghanistan as a major investor and developer in 2007, when it won a \$3.5 billion contract to operate the Ayanak copper-gold mine in the country’s eastern Logar Province. Then, it also invested in oil and gas exploration projects and railway infrastructure development in the war-torn country. On the political front, Beijing made contacts with both the Afghan government and Taliban to promote a political settlement of the conflict—particularly after the US President cancelled peace talks with the Taliban last September.

China’s economic interests in Afghanistan coincide with its wider plans: to develop western China, increase regional trade links, build energy pipelines, and expand its economic influence in the region. The PRC is likely to deepen its strategic partnership with Pakistan and Afghanistan to form a “Pamir Group” in order to establish a new Silk Road linking the Caucasus to western China. Historically, the Pamir Mountains were considered a strategic trade route between Kashgar in China, and Kokand in Uzbekistan on the Northern Silk Road.

Both geographically and geopolitically, China enjoys a favorable environment to increase its stakes in Afghanistan. It shares a small border with Afghanistan through the Wakhan Corridor, and the regional powers surrounding Afghanistan generally have good relations with the PRC, favoring China’s increased involvement in Afghanistan. Pakistan is China’s closest strategic ally, and host to the massive CPEC program; Iran is seeking to deepen its strategic ties with China amid rising tensions with the United States; and Tajikistan is among the states that first joined the BRI, and also hosts a de facto PRC military base in the far eastern part of the country.

The PRC has now emerged as a key political player in Afghanistan—and after the withdrawal of US troops, China may be expected to play an even more active role. Presently, China is committed to hosting a meeting between the Afghan government and Taliban—a key US demand that has been rejected by the Taliban, which derides the Afghan government as a US puppet. If this were to occur, it would mean that, after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the actual political settlement process would be initiated and led by Beijing.

In the diplomatic arena, Pakistan is China’s major trump card for enhancing its political profile in Afghanistan. Pakistan is believed to have played a major behind-the-scenes role in brokering China-Taliban peace consultations. In October 2018, the late Maulana Sami ul Haq, a stalwart Afghan Taliban supporter, called on China to play a greater role in the Afghan peace negotiations. Popularly known as “Father of the Taliban,” Maulana invited Beijing to play the role of arbitrator to the Afghan conflict. He advocated increased Chinese engagement because of China’s stakes in the region, and stated that China should not leave Afghanistan-related matters solely to the United States. Thanks to leveraging such contacts through its closest ally Pakistan, the PRC developed backdoor communication links with the Taliban.

Afghanistan was not initially included in the map of China’s BRI program when it was launched in 2013. BRI plans instead focused on Pakistan and Central Asia. In recent years, however, Beijing has increased its stakes in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s potential role in the BRI has been discussed in a report by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), a Kabul-based think tank. The report highlights potential roles for Afghanistan that fits well into the BRI: It provides the shortest route between Central Asia and South Asia, and between China and the Middle East; it can also serve as a gateway to the Arabian Sea. The \$60 billion CPEC program contains transportation infrastructure projects that can be extended to Afghanistan, thereby further integrating it into the BRI.

(Continued)



## Continued: China's Deepening Diplomatic and Economic Engagement in Afghanistan

Serious discussions are ongoing to incorporate Afghanistan into the CPEC. In 2017, China convened a trilateral dialogue with Pakistan and Afghanistan intended to discuss CPEC expansion into Afghanistan. In a trilateral foreign ministers' meeting hosted by Islamabad in September, representatives from the three sides observed that the Peshawar-Kabul Motorway may provide the foundation for Afghanistan's formal joining of the CPEC, as Peshawar—Pakistan's largest northwestern city—is already linked to the route. The sides decided to pursue the motorway under a "China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Plus Cooperation" (CAPPC) program.

For China, the conflict-ridden but strategically located country of Afghanistan could either prove to be a unique opportunity, or a formidable security challenge. Through its increased presence in Afghanistan, the PRC has worked over the past 12 years to convert the security problems emanating from volatile Afghanistan into a strategic and economic opportunity to expand its influence to South and Central Asia—and even further afield to the Middle East and Europe. Afghanistan will likely be formally included in China's BRI map in the future, as Beijing gradually attains greater economic stakes and diplomatic influence in the war-ravaged country. The PRC may be expected to leverage CPEC to provide a springboard for the extension of its BRI into Afghanistan and Iran, and onwards into the energy-rich Gulf region. Following the withdrawal of US troops, China—with the help of its close ally Pakistan—is set to become a major player in Afghanistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Haider)**

Over the years, FMSO has studied and written about foreign perspectives on pandemics. One example is below. For more information on previous FMSO work on pandemics including Ebola, search OE Watch issues:

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

### Avian Influenza: Potential Impact on Sub-Saharan Military Populations with High Rates of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

By Robert Feldman and Kent Nickell

Before COVID-19 grabbed all of the headlines, health officials were also looking at several other diseases that could potentially reach pandemic level. One of these was H5N1, commonly known as avian influenza or bird flu. This article, which originally appeared in *Military Medicine*, discusses the possibility that in people infected with both H5N1 and HIV, the AIDS from HIV might suppress the immune reaction to allow further mutation of H5N1 to occur, with a possible disease outbreak from the new strain to follow.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/200034>



## Japanese Self-Defense Forces: Integration, Does it Hurt? (*Ittaika Itai ka*)

**OE Watch Commentary:** Japan was disarmed at the end of World War II, and adopted a constitution in 1947. War-renouncing article nine of the constitution says, among other things, Japan will never maintain an army, navy, air force or other war potential. This was problematic in 1950 when, a few weeks after the Korean War started, Japan, still under occupation, was directed by the Supreme Commander, Allied Powers (SCAP), General MacArthur, to rearm. Not that the SCAP used the term rearm: instead he directed the Japanese to form, initially, a 75,000-man National Police Reserve (NPR). The fact that the NPR wore retooled American fatigues, were trained by American army officers and NCOs and were equipped with rifles, machine guns, mortars and field artillery, left no doubt: this was a new Japanese army. But the key was, it was not called an army. In 1954 what had been the NPR was renamed the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF). The GSDF joined the renamed maritime and newly established air components to form the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). But the importance of terminology and euphemism remained and remains a powerful norm to this day.

After their defeat, the Japanese developed a strong aversion to war, and a national commitment to never experience war again. This quickly became a norm that political scientist Andrew Oros aptly describes as domestic anti-militarism. A large segment of the population can be counted on to react negatively to almost any change in JSDF policies, equipment, or missions, fearful that any change could potentially lead towards a slippery slope which ends in military dictatorship and unending war with suffering and privation for ordinary people. Avoiding certain trigger words and broad use of euphemisms are two ways Japanese administrations cope with the domestic anti-militarism norm.

Thus, JSDF units are not deployed (*hahei*) but dispatched (*hakken*). Soldier (*gunjin*) is not used, but unit member (*tainin*) is. The term is ‘domestic anti-militarism’ because Japan has been willing to allow the American military to use bases in Japan and a majority of the Japanese people support an alliance with the US. It is not pacifism, as is so often claimed in the West; US armed forces in Japan are armed, and the Japanese do not object to this (for the most part). But the Japanese like to believe the ‘polite social fiction’ (*tatema*) that their own well-armed troops are not military forces, but self-defense forces (*jieitai*) that do not participate in war. Keeping up that social fiction has been difficult under Prime Minister Abe, whose policies have stretched what the JSDF is allowed to do, to include increasing JSDF support to US forces. As a result, another trigger word has become prominent: *ittaika*, which literally means becoming one body, and in the triggering context refers to integrating the JSDF under US military command.

On 19 March, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) commissioned its latest Aegis cruiser, the *Maya*. The first accompanying article notes this is the first Japanese Aegis cruiser with Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) – that is, its defensive missiles can respond to an enemy track from a different Aegis ship. The article observes this newest cruiser comes with many new capabilities, but notes, “On one hand, air defense is strengthened, but (having) the CEC means integration with US forces, which already has the capability, will be accelerated.” The article also quotes Japan Defense Minister Kono Taro in his commissioning speech using the term ‘coordinated missile defense’ (*sougo misairu bouei*) and thus avoiding the use of *ittaika*.

Prime Minister Abe had taken a different tack the month before, when answering questions in Japan’s legislature, the Diet. An opposition representative and former foreign minister, Okuda Katsuya, had asked him whether American and Japanese vessels would cooperatively deal with a situation where an unidentified vessel appeared while an MSDF vessel was escorting an American vessel. In this case the opposition member avoided the offending word, but as the second accompanying passage notes, Abe answered, “Since there will not be direct communications with a foreign fleet, including American military vessels, and the Americans will, practically speaking, respond to peculiar situations with their own judgment, this cannot be thought of as integration.” The PM was aware that opposition figures often use euphemisms themselves to ask questions, then, if the questioned official agrees to the purposely innocuous query, pounce, declaring “This constitutes integration,” or whatever the anathema word or concept is. When officials do fall for such ploys, the result is potentially inflammatory. So the PM preemptively declared there was no integration.

Not all Japanese deplore *ittaika*. As the third accompanying passage shows, *Nikkei*, a news service with a right-of-center editorial bent, for instance, in 2017, lauded ‘unified action’ (*ittai unyou*) between US forces and the JSDF, declaring it simply included mutual operations, missions and training of the two members of the alliance; that the JSDF’s capabilities were strengthened thereby; and that this increased capability, as well as the ‘sense or feeling of unity’ (*ittaikan*) this portrayed to Japan’s enemies strengthened deterrence. Even the favorably minded *Nikkei* however, rather than the term itself, used two different synonyms for *ittaika*, but with the same *ittai* prefix and thus similar enough to send a message of support.

A blogger in Okinawa, on the other hand, indicates the fear that drives the domestic anti-militarism norms, including the tendency to make certain terms and concepts odious. Published in January 2019, the blogger discusses the ongoing training of newly instituted amphibious-operations-capable GSDF troops by the US Marines, and the plan to station more GSDF troops in the Ryukyu islands that constitute Okinawa prefecture. As the final passage notes, the blogger concludes this is not just an issue of adding to Okinawa’s already heavy military basing burden, but whether or not this integration of US forces and the JSDF would draw Okinawa into an American war and make Okinawa, again, a battlefield. He calls on Okinawa’s governor to call for halting USF and JSDF *ittaika* and steadfastly opposing stationing more JSDF troops in the prefecture. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hunter-Chester)**



## Continued: Japanese Self-Defense Forces: Integration, Does it Hurt? (*Ittaika Itai ka*)

*“The integration of U.S. Forces and the Self Defense Forces is [an invitation] to enter a dangerous stage where an assumed war increasingly becomes actual war.”*

**Source:** “海自・米軍、一体化加速 情報共有、防空力強化 「共同交戦能力」艦が就役 (MSDF--USF, Accelerating Integration, Sharing Intelligence, Strengthening Air Defense [Cooperative Engagement Capability] Ship Commissioned),” *Mainichi Shimbun*, 20 March 2020. [https://mainichi.jp/articles/20200320/ddm/012/010/113000c?cx\\_fm=mailasa&cx\\_ml=feature](https://mainichi.jp/articles/20200320/ddm/012/010/113000c?cx_fm=mailasa&cx_ml=feature)

*“As well as being the first MSDF ship with the capability to precisely target an enemy missile and share that targeting with an ally [Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC)], it has numerous other functions and constitutes the newest, cutting-edge ship.”*

**Source:** “中東派遣、米軍と一体化ない 夫婦別姓やじ、同調せず—安倍首相・衆院予算委 (Middle East Dispatch, Not USF Integration --Then a Marriage where both Spouses Keep Their Surnames (Some) Jeered -- (I) Disagree: Prime Minister Abe at the Upper House Budget Committee),” *Jiji Press*, 4 February 2020. <https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2020020400176&g=pol>

*“Since there will not be direct communications with a foreign fleet, including American military vessels, and the Americans will, practically speaking, respond to peculiar situations with their own judgment, this cannot be thought of as integration.” ....*

*“The prime minister emphasized a Maritime Self-Defense Force ship ... dispatched to the Middle East furnishing intelligence does not constitute integration with American use of force.”*

**Source:** “自衛隊と米軍の一体運用 抑止力高める狙い (SDF and USF Unified Action Aims to Raise Deterrence Strength),” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei) Digital Edition*, 14 September 2019. [https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASFS13H4B\\_T10C17A9EA2000/](https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASFS13H4B_T10C17A9EA2000/)

*“Under the Japan-U.S. Alliance, unified action by JSDF and USF means the JSDF and USF together conduct operations, missions and training.”*

**Source:** “沖縄「米軍・自衛隊一体化」とのたたかい正念場 (Okinawa: USF—SDF Integration and a Highly Critical Moment),” Ari no Hitokoto (*An Acceptable Comment*) blog by Kihara Satoru, 5 January 2019. <https://blog.goo.ne.jp/satoru-kihara/e/76810c246e01bf9e2ff12d1ed462139>

*“The integration of U.S. Forces and the Self Defense Forces is (an invitation) to enter a dangerous stage where an assumed war increasingly becomes actual war.”*



JS Maya.

Source: Night1011204 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSX\\_20180730\\_221114.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSX_20180730_221114.jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0



## Vietnam Asserts Historical Claims in Maritime Dispute with China

**OE Watch Commentary:** China has occupied the Paracel Islands ever since the 1974 naval confrontation between Chinese and then-South Vietnamese forces. However, Vietnam still claims sovereignty over them. According to the excerpted Vietnamese article, on 3 April, Chinese vessels sank a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Paracel Islands. The Chinese navy further seized eight Vietnamese fishermen before eventually releasing them back to Vietnamese authorities.

While the return of the fisherman quelled tensions, if not the broader diplomatic dispute, Vietnamese officials were adamant in justifying their claim to the islands. The article, for example, notes that the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that Vietnam had both historical and legal grounds to assert sovereignty over the Paracel Islands. Besides this, Vietnam asserted that China unnecessarily jeopardized the lives of the Vietnamese fishermen and violated mutual understandings between the leaders of China and Vietnam.



*Heritage and Freedom Flag in the Memorial for Battle of the Paracel Islands.*

Source: Huyme via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heritage\\_and\\_Freedom\\_Flag\\_in\\_the\\_Memorial\\_for\\_Battle\\_of\\_the\\_Paracel\\_Islands.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heritage_and_Freedom_Flag_in_the_Memorial_for_Battle_of_the_Paracel_Islands.JPG), CC by 2.0

According to the article, Vietnam submitted these complaints to the Chinese Embassy in Vietnam. In addition, Vietnam requested that China agree not to pursue such actions in the future and to compensate the fishermen for the damage to their boat. Based on the article, it appears that this dispute has been mostly resolved diplomatically but the underlying historical tensions over the islands remain. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“As has been repeatedly affirmed, Vietnam has sufficient historical evidence and legal grounds to assert Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in accordance with international law.”***

**Source:** “Việt Nam yêu cầu Trung Quốc xử nghiêm, bồi thường vụ đâm chìm tàu cá ở Hoàng Sa (Vietnam requests China strictly punish and compensate it for sinking fishing vessels in the Paracel Islands).” *Tuoitre.vn*, 3 April 2020. <https://tuoitre.vn/viet-nam-yeu-cau-trung-quoc-xu-nghiem-boi-thuong-vu-dam-chim-tau-ca-o-hoang-sa-20200403230645957.htm>

*Vietnam handed over an complainnt asking the Chinese to investigate and react swiftly to the Chinese civil servants and police who sank the Quang Ngai fishing boat in Hoang Sa. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam provided a response to the information about the fishing vessel and 8 Vietnamese fishermen in trouble in Phu Lam island area, Hoang Sa, Vietnam. The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang said: “As has been repeatedly affirmed, Vietnam has sufficient historical evidence and legal grounds to assert Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in accordance with international law. The action of an official Chinese official ship violated Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, causing damage to property, threatening the safety and lives and the legitimate interests of Vietnamese fishermen, and went against the unified common perception of the leaders of the two countries on the humane treatment of fishermen from the Agreement on Basic Principles Guiding the Settlement of Sea-related Issues. The actions complicate the situation and are not conducive to bilateral relations as well as to the maintenance of peace, stability, and cooperation in the South China Sea.”*

*According to Thu Hang, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated with the representative of the Chinese Embassy and presented the protest note, requesting the Chinese side to investigate and clarify the situation of civil servants and ships.*



## Insurgents Exploit Thailand's Efforts against COVID-19

**OE Watch Commentary:** As COVID-19 spreads in Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, military forces are being tasked with disinfecting areas where people congregate. In southern Thailand, the military has disinfected places of worship to prevent a spread. However, according to the excerpted *Bangkok Post* article, insurgents in southern Thailand carried out a bombing targeting Thai soldiers after they disinfected a mosque. This led to injuries of two soldiers in a group of eight who were returning to their base from the mosque.

The article notes that a police investigation determined that the insurgents were responsible for the bombing, conducted with a homemade bomb, and planted on the route from the mosque to the military base. The article further notes that one week before this bombing occurred, there were two other bombings at the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre in nearby Yala in southern Thailand. Those bombings targeted a COVID-19 prevention meeting. This means that within one week, there were three separate attacks connected to the Thai government's efforts to address the spread of COVID-19 in the country's restive south, where Muslim Malay insurgents have waged an insurgency for several decades.

Even if the insurgents are not exploiting the government's and military's exposure during COVID-19 meetings and disinfecting activities to attack government and military targets, the insecurity resulting from these attacks will hamper efforts to prevent the spread of the virus. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Phukhao Thong, Sukhirin District, Narathiwat 96190, Thailand.

Source: Kitti Lekakul via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phukhao\\_Thong,\\_Sukhirin\\_District,\\_Narathiwat\\_96190,\\_Thailand\\_-\\_panoramio\\_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phukhao_Thong,_Sukhirin_District,_Narathiwat_96190,_Thailand_-_panoramio_(2).jpg), CC by 3.0

***“A police investigation found that the ranger team had been helping with a cleaning activity at Ban Lamai mosque on Friday.”***

**Source:** “Rangers hurt in blast after mosque cleaning,” *Bangkok Post*, 21 March 2020. [https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1883520#cxrecs\\_s](https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1883520#cxrecs_s)

*Two rangers were hurt in a bomb blast as their team returned from taking part in a cleanup at a mosque to combat the spread of the coronavirus in Rangae district on Friday evening. Eight rangers were returning to their base—four on a pickup truck and two on a motorcycle—when a roadside bomb went off. The force of the blast wounded two—Penphet Yammali, 30, and Witthaya Tengrang, 30—who were sitting in the back of the pickup truck.*

*A police investigation found that the ranger team had been helping with a cleaning activity at Ban Lamai mosque on Friday. The home-made bomb, planted near a power pole, was detonated when their pickup passed the spot. Authorities believed the bomb, weighing 25kg, was the work of insurgents seeking to target security forces. Just last week, 25 people were injured when two bombs were set off outside the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre in Yala, where a meeting on Covid-19 prevention was taking place.*



## Indonesia's Maritime Border Security Challenges

**OE Watch Commentary:** The first accompanying passage from an Indonesian source discusses the country's counter-piracy priorities. In particular, the article discusses the efforts of Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (referred to as "Bakamla"), in conducting surveillance between the maritime borders of Indonesia and the Philippines, where, among other security threats, Abu Sayyaf has kidnapped Indonesian fishermen (see: "Abu Sayyaf Kidnapping Indonesians at Sea," *OE Watch*, March 2020). According to the article, special operations will be conducted in North Sulawesi because it is the Indonesian province that is closest to the Philippines' maritime borders.

The article features an interview with the Director of Bakamla, Leonidas Braksan, who states that the porousness of the borders make Indonesia vulnerable to piracy. Braksan notes that defending Indonesia's borders requires the navy, police headquarters, and Indonesian National Narcotics Agency to cooperate. This suggests that in addition to terrorism and piracy, Indonesia is also dealing with drug trafficking occurring between smugglers in the Philippines and Indonesia. In fact, terrorist groups like Abu Sayyaf have been known to engage in narcotics trafficking so these threats are not mutually exclusive.

Further, Braksan asserts that Bakamla always needs to take preemptive measures and anticipate new security crises in Indonesia's maritime border areas. This is relevant because besides the Philippines, there have also been increasing instances of piracy in the maritime borders between Singapore and Indonesia. As the second passage from Singapore's *Straits Times* reports, for example, on 16 March, the two countries' navies intercepted a vessel attempting a robbery in the strait between Singapore and Indonesia. This was the eighth time in a three-month period that a piracy attempt was reported in the strait, which represents an uptick from the previous year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Logo of the Maritime Security Agency of the Republic of Indonesia.

Source: Badan Keamanan Laut via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo\\_of\\_the\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Agency\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Indonesia.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_of_the_Maritime_Security_Agency_of_the_Republic_of_Indonesia.png), CC by 4.0

***“Specifically for North Sulawesi, which directly borders the Philippines, there are special operations being conducted by [the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency].”***

**Source:** “Bakamla Zona Maritim Tengah Fokus Jaga Perbatasan Indonesia (Bakamla’s Maritime Zone Has a Focus on Guarding Indonesia’s Borders),” *kumparan.com*, 5 March 2020, <https://kumparan.com/manadobacirita/bakamla-zona-maritim-tengah-fokus-jaga-perbatasan-indonesia-1syhFE0e7OA>

*Dr. Leonidas Braksan of the Republic of Indonesia’s Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) Central Maritime Zone continues to conduct surveillance in the border area between Indonesia and the Philippines. Specifically, for North Sulawesi, which directly borders the Philippines, there are special operations being conducted by Bakamla. Leonidas Braksan said that monitoring border areas is indeed a priority program in Bakamla. In fact, according to Leonidas, not only Bakamla, but all government institutions, also make the surveillance of border areas one of their most important tasks. “It is not just Bakamla. BNN, and the Navy, and then Police Headquarters also focus on it (the border area), because the border is quite vulnerable,” said Leonidas.*

*Concerning the latest information about the border, Leonidas revealed that his side always has initial information that is kept internally, as that is necessary for doing operations. “We need to be alert so we can anticipate if needed,” he said.*

**Source:** “Sea robbery attempt in Singapore Strait foiled by Singapore and Indonesian navies,” *Straits Times*, 16 March 2020. [straitstimes.com/singapore/sea-robbery-attempt-in-singapore-strait-foiled-by-singapore-and-indonesian-navies](https://straitstimes.com/singapore/sea-robbery-attempt-in-singapore-strait-foiled-by-singapore-and-indonesian-navies)

*A daring robbery attempt by three pirates in the Singapore Strait on Monday (March 16) morning was foiled by the close cooperation between the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the Indonesian navy (TNI-AL).*

...

*Eight piracy attempts in the Singapore Strait have been reported this year as of February.*

*There was a marked uptick last year in the number of such incidents in the Singapore Strait, with 31 attempts reported.*



## Bypassing the “Make in India” Initiative

**OE Watch Commentary:** The government of India’s deal to manufacture the AK-203 rifle in India through a licensing agreement with Kalashnikov Concern has been delayed due to a requirement as part of the “Make in India” initiative (see: “An Update on India-Russia Security Cooperation,” *OE Watch*, April 2020). In order to fulfill the army’s urgent need for rifles, it appears that the Indian Ministry of Defense is bypassing the initiative and acquiring a number of light machine guns from Israel. The accompanying excerpted article discusses this deal.



An IWI Negev Light Machine Gun of the Special Action Force (SAF).

Source: Rhk111 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IWI\\_Negev\\_Machine\\_Gun\\_@\\_SAF\\_36th\\_Anniversary\\_Exhibit.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IWI_Negev_Machine_Gun_@_SAF_36th_Anniversary_Exhibit.jpg), CC BY SA 4.0

The article from *Force*, a news website with a focus on military and security issues in India, reports how the Indian defense

ministry signed an agreement “with an Israeli firm called Israel Weapons Industries for procurement of 16,479 Light Machine Guns under the Fast Track Procedure (FTP) in a bid to modernize Infantry.” A statement from the defense ministry notes that the light machine gun is the “Negev 7.62X51 mm” (the Negev NG-7) and that the acquisition is “operationally urgent.” The article also notes that this is not the first time in the past year that the defense ministry (under the previous minister Nirmala Sitharaman) fast tracked acquisition of a weapon. It mentions how “Indian Army has already inducted its newly acquired American SiG 716” and the army reportedly put these into service with units in the Northern Command. The article does not say where exactly the newly acquired Negevns will be put into service, but that they “will boost the confidence of the frontline troops.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“On 19 March... the Ministry of Defence (MoD) acquisition wing signed a... contract with an Israeli firm called Israel Weapons Industries [to procure] 16,479 Light Machine Guns, under the Fast Track Procedure (FTP) in a bid to modernize Infantry.”***

**Source:** “India to Procure 16,479 Light Machine Guns From Israel,” *Force*, 20 March 2020. <http://forceindia.net/india-procure-16479-light-machine-guns-israel/>

*...The Ministry of Defence (MoD) acquisition wing on 19 March 2020 signed a Rs880 crore contract with an Israeli firm called Israel Weapons Industries for procurement of 16,479 Light Machine Guns under the Fast Track Procedure (FTP) in a bid to modernise Infantry.*

*“The contracted Negev 7.62X51 mm LMG is a combat proven weapon and currently used by several countries around the globe...The provisioning of this operationally urgent and very critically needed weapon will boost the confidence of the frontline troops and provide much needed combat power to the Armed Forces,” MoD announced in a statement.*

*...This move comes after the 2019’s approval by the then defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman to procure the Sig Sauer rifles. The Indian Army has already inducted its newly acquired American SiG 716.*

*An expected contract to induct more than 7 lakh AK-203 assault rifles which are going to be produced in the joint venture between India and Russia is also due.*



## Pakistan Moving into Sales of JF-17 Fighters

**OE Watch Commentary:** The JF-17 is a multi-role combat aircraft developed jointly by the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex and China's Chengdu Aircraft Corporation. Its development and introduction provided Pakistan's air force with a multi-role fighter and an upgrade to its inventory. While sales of the JF-17 were not an initial goal, the accompanying excerpted article reports that the Nigerian Air Force is taking delivery of three JF-17 fighters from Pakistan later this year, and there are a few things worth noting.

The article from *Quwa*, an English-language website reporting on defense issues in Pakistan, reports that the Nigerian Air Force “will receive its three JF-17 Thunder multi-role fighters in November 2020.” The article mentions that the Nigerian government began saving money for the JF-17s a few years ago and how “Pakistan was waiting for payments before starting the production of the fighters.” The author of the article believes that the Nigerian government “will follow-up this contract with a follow-on order to fully replace its legacy F-7Ni and FT-7Ni fighters,” though he also notes how the Nigerian government “seems to be ordering aircraft once it has sufficient cash funds for an order on-hand (i.e., not through a line of credit or loan)” so it is unknown when another order would take place or how many fighters it would include.



*JF-17 Thunder with the 8,126 m-high Nanga Parbat in the background.*

Source: Asuspine via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan\\_Air\\_Force\\_JF-17\\_Thunder\\_files\\_in\\_front\\_of\\_the\\_26,660\\_ft\\_high\\_Nanga\\_Parbat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_Air_Force_JF-17_Thunder_files_in_front_of_the_26,660_ft_high_Nanga_Parbat.jpg), GFDL 1.2

The author also points out that while the JF-17 is an upgrade to Nigeria's current inventory of fighters, the three JF-17s set to be delivered “are from the tail-end of the Block-II's production run” and that if there is an additional purchase of JF-17s, it “would likely involve one of the newer JF-17 variants,” either the JF-17Bs or JF-17 Block-IIIs. As Pakistan continues production of the JF-17B and Block-III variants, it will be worth watching if any sales come out of it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

**“By 2021, Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) will be rolling-out JF-17Bs and JF-17 Block-IIIs.”**

**Source:** Bilal Khan, “Nigeria Will Take Delivery of JF-17 Fighters in November 2020,” *Quwa*, 1 March 2020. <https://quwa.org/2020/03/01/nigeria-will-take-delivery-of-jf-17-fighters-in-november-2020/>

*The Nigerian Air Force's (NAF) Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Air Marshal Sadiq Abubakar announced that the NAF will receive its three JF-17 Thunder multi-role fighters in November 2020...*

*Nigeria started budgeting funds for its JF-17 order in 2016...The three-year gap between the time Nigeria started budgeting funds and the ECC's approval suggests that Pakistan was waiting for payments before starting the production of the fighters.*

*It is likely that the NAF will follow-up this contract with a follow-on order to fully replace its legacy F-7Ni and FT-7Ni fighters. Nigeria seems to be ordering aircraft once it has sufficient cash funds for an order on-hand (i.e., not through a line of credit or loan).*

*However, these three initial JF-17s are from the tail-end of the Block-II's production run. By 2021, Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) will be rolling-out JF-17Bs and JF-17 Block-IIIs. Thus, any follow-on purchase by the NAF would likely involve one of the newer JF-17 variants.*

*That said, the JF-17 Block-II represents a major capability jump for the NAF. In addition to beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles (BVRAAM), the Block-II is configured for precision-strike through satellite-guided and laser-guided bombs, the C-802 anti-ship missile, and the stand-off range Range Extension Kit (REK).*

*Through the JF-17, Nigeria possesses one of Sub-Saharan Africa's most well-equipped fighters (second only to, arguably, the South African Air Force's JAS-39C/D Gripen). Even a full squadron of 16-18 aircraft would amount to a significant force capability in the region, especially if it includes the Block-III...*



## Chinese-Arab Cooperation in the Time of COVID-19

**OE Watch Commentary:** There is consensus in Arabic-language media that the coronavirus pandemic and its aftermath will change the structure of international relations and alliances. In the Middle East and North Africa, China's early response to the pandemic's spread has been interpreted as a harbinger of deeper Sino-Arab cooperation to come.

China's reach was on display in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, perhaps most notably in the North African Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). As those countries' historical allies across the Mediterranean were forced to deal with the domestic consequences of the epidemic, China provided early and well publicized assistance to all three. A former Tunisian foreign minister, cited in the excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, argues that the pandemic may help bring about greater North African integration, a longtime political aspiration that has never been realized. The one thing that is clear amidst all the moving pieces, he adds, is that "China's position will become stronger after the coronavirus."

Chinese aid to Algeria, meanwhile, invited controversy after a commentator on French state-owned media (*France24*) questioned whether it was genuinely intended or mere "diplomatic propaganda." The accompanying passage from the website of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), a quasi-official Chinese entity that promotes cooperation with members of the Arab League, highlights the ensuing Franco-Algerian diplomatic spat and explains: "Because the facts cannot be discredited, local media in Algeria have reported widely about Chinese help at these critical moments. Furthermore, China's aid has continued flowing."

In Algeria and other countries, Chinese aid has been presented as an exercise in solidarity to repay Arab support in the early stages of the epidemic. In the excerpt from *Baghdad Today*, for instance, China's ambassador to Iraq emphasizes that "the aid that Iraq sent to China when the coronavirus appeared was substantial, and the Iraqi government and people were supportive of us, so now is our turn to help Iraq in order to overcome and contain this virus." Similar sentiments are expressed by the diplomat in charge of CASCF affairs at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in an op-ed published by the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, where he explains how Chinese assistance will "contribute to a Chinese-Arab victory in this battle." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



China-Arab States Cooperation Forum Logo.  
Source: CASCF website, [http://www.chinaarabcf.org/ara/images/bg\\_A\\_1.png](http://www.chinaarabcf.org/ara/images/bg_A_1.png), no copyright (logo)

***“China’s speed and capabilities will contribute to a Chinese-Arab victory in this battle...”***

Source: هل تعيد تونس ترتيب علاقاتها الدولية بعد كورونا؟  
“Will Tunisia Restructure its Foreign Relations Post-Coronavirus?” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 10 April 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/ty7mptd>

*Most diplomats agree that international relations will change after the Coronavirus crisis. New alliance will be built, while other relationships lose their luster. In the midst of these developments, Tunisia, like other countries, may be forced to restructure its international relations and review its foreign policies, as the crisis has demonstrated the degree of solidarity from some countries and the absence of it from others. China is among the countries that have supported Tunisia in the face of the Coronavirus. China announced medical assistance and a donation of medical equipment and equipment, which recently arrived in Tunisia. More assistance is planned... Former Foreign Minister Ahmed Wanis said in a statement to Al-Araby Al-Jadeed: “After the Corona crisis, a new distribution of relations and responsibilities will emerge at the global level... There will be an opportunity to restore the unity of the greater Maghreb, as this crisis may force countries to reach a settlement, especially in Morocco’s relationship with Algeria... North African integration may be the solution... International relations will change according to the new arrangement of countries and the extent to which they can revitalize their economies and develop their relations. It is clear that China’s position will become stronger after the Coronavirus.”*



## Continued: Chinese-Arab Cooperation in the Time of COVID-19

**Source:** الجزائر تتهم وسائل الإعلام الفرنسية بتشويه المساعدة الصينية  
 “Algeria Accuses French Media of Misrepresenting Chinese Aid,” *China-Arab States Cooperation Forum*, 7 April 2020. <http://www.chinaarabcf.org/ara/zagx/rwjl/t1766751.htm>

*During the critical period of epidemic prevention and control in China, Algeria continued to provide assistance to China. When Algeria needs it, China has also emerged at the right time, and this is a vivid example of international cooperation in fighting the epidemic. But France24 has deliberately tarnished China... This expert criticized Tunisia and Algeria for not being effective in combating the epidemic, and then began attacking Chinese aid. He said that the medical supplies were not Chinese aid to Algeria but rather special assistance to a local military hospital by a local Chinese company that made a lot of money. He claimed that this aid is only part of China’s diplomatic propaganda... The Chinese embassy in Algeria issued a statement the same day, noting that the French analyst not only ignored the efforts of Chinese assistance to combat the novel coronavirus epidemic in Algeria, but also made false, obnoxious and defamatory comments on the subject. China expressed its condemnation and opposition. Because the facts cannot be discredited, local media in Algeria have reported widely about Chinese help at these critical moments. Furthermore, China’s aid has continued flowing.*

**Source:** السفير الصيني: العراق ارسل لنا مساعدات كبيرة بداية ظهور كورونا... جاء الوقت لرد الجميل  
 “Chinese Ambassador: Iraq Sent Substantial Assistance When Corona First Appeared... It Is Time for Repayment,” *Baghdad Today*, 6 April 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/sdllsc3>

*Chinese ambassador, Zhang Tao, said on Monday that the government of Iraq has fully supported his country since the beginning of the coronavirus, indicating that the time has come to repay that help and help Iraq be rid of the coronavirus... “the aid that Iraq sent to China when the coronavirus appeared was substantial, and the Iraqi government and people were supportive of us, so now is our turn to help Iraq in order to overcome and contain this virus.”*

**Source:** مكافحة الوباء وبناء مجتمع المستقبل المشترك للبشرية  
 Li Chengwen, “Fighting the Epidemic and Building a Shared Future for Humanity,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 14 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/usrgh26>

*China is closely tied to Arab countries in the midst of this battle against the epidemic... The Chinese people will not forget... the assistance of Arab countries and the solidarity of Arab friends in social media... China’s speed and capabilities will contribute to a Chinese-Arab victory in this battle... You know your true friends in times of trouble. We are confident that this ordeal will add strength to the China-Arab friendship, and the ties of China-Arab cooperation will be further strengthened... The cooperation between China and the Arab countries in combating the epidemic will show the world once again the strength of developing countries in solidarity, and foresee broader prospects for cooperation in building a common future society.*



**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>



## China's COVID-19 Diplomacy in the Middle East

**OE Watch Commentary:** China appears to be conducting an intense propaganda campaign to pre-empt being held accountable for the role it played in the spread of COVID-19 across the world. It has been conducting what some have called “coronavirus diplomacy” in Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, sending supplies and medical assistance to countries hit hard by the pandemic. The accompanying passages discuss China’s provision of masks, experts and medical equipment to the Middle East, including Algeria, Tunisia, the Palestinian National Authority and Iran. As the final passage warns, this assistance could eventually translate into leverage for China in terms of access to natural resources, investments and increased influence in the region.

The first passage from *Middle East Eye* discusses China’s assistance to Algeria, including medical expertise, respirators and equipment. As the passage notes, the supplies were donated by the state-owned China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC). China will also reportedly build a small hospital in Algeria to provide preventive care for roughly 5,000 Algerians and 4,000 Chinese employed by CSCEC working in Algeria. The second and third passages point out similar support to Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority, to include test kits, masks, protective gear and medical expertise.

The fourth passage looks at China’s support to Iran, including a batch of anti-epidemic supplies and a team of voluntary health experts. The Chinese President notes that China “will continue to provide as much assistance as it can for Iran” in its fight against the COVID-19 outbreak and stresses that “China and Iran are comprehensive strategic partners.” The final passage notes that Beijing has donated over 250,000 masks donated to Iran, calling this Beijing’s ‘mask diplomacy.’

As the final passage points out, China’s support to governments across the Middle East “could be a prelude to a policy that extends beyond the protection of China’s economic and energy interests.” In the long-term, this could lead to a “shift in the regional balance of power, with China playing a bigger role.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



3M N95 Particulate Respirator Mask.

Source: Banej via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3M\\_N95\\_Partuculate\\_Respirator.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3M_N95_Partuculate_Respirator.JPG), CC BY-SA 3.0

***“From a geopolitical perspective, it is not inconceivable that [the pandemic] will lead to a shift in the regional balance of power, with China playing a bigger role.”***

**Source:** “Coronavirus: Algeria gets help against pandemic from trade partner China,” *Middle East Eye*, 4 April 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-algeria-gets-help-against-pandemic-trade-partner-china>

*Algeria [has] found a helping hand in China, the top exporter to Africa’s biggest nation.*

*An Air Algerie plane arrived in the capital Algiers from Beijing in late March carrying a 13-member Chinese medical team and equipment, including respirators... The supplies were donated by the state-owned China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) on behalf of Beijing to help Algeria battle its Covid-19 outbreak.*

*With 1,251 officially declared cases, including 130 deaths, Algeria is worse hit than its North African neighbours Tunisia and Morocco, and its health sector is in dire need of improvement.*

...

*China, where the novel coronavirus first emerged in December, has been helping other countries fight the disease, offering masks, experts and equipment.*

*Algeria, with a population of more than 40 million, has placed orders with China for 100 million face masks and 30,000 testing kits, as well as protective medical clothing and other equipment.*

*China is also expected to build a small hospital in the North African country to provide preventive care for roughly 5,000 Algerians and 4,000 Chinese employed by CSCEC, official Chinese media reported, without providing further details.*

...

*Beyond health care, China has invested in oil refineries across Algeria and has built roads and railways.*



## Continued: China's COVID-19 Diplomacy in the Middle East

**Source:** “China donates medical aid to Tunisia,” *Xinhuanet.com*, 17 April 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/17/c\\_138983311.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/17/c_138983311.htm)

*China donated a batch of medical aid to Tunisia’s Ministry of National Defense... The medical aid includes N95 masks, test kits and medical protective glasses.*

**Source:** “China delivers 10,000 coronavirus kits to Palestine,” *Middle East Monitor*, 31 March 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200331-china-delivers-10000-coronavirus-kits-to-palestine/>

*The Palestinian Authority Health Ministry has had 10,000 coronavirus test kits and ventilators delivered from China... In addition, the Chinese ambassador to Palestine... stated that his country was exploring the possibility of dispatching a medical team to Palestine to help Palestinian medics address the coronavirus pandemic.*

**Source:** “Xi says China ready to provide further assistance for Iran against COVID-19 epidemic,” *Xinhuanet.com*, 14 March 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/14/c\\_138877556.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/14/c_138877556.htm)

*To help Iran beat the coronavirus outbreak, China has offered Iran a batch of anti-epidemic supplies and sent a team of voluntary health experts, said the Chinese president.*

*Chinese President Xi Jinping said China will continue to provide as much assistance as it can for Iran in the latter’s fight against the COVID-19 outbreak.*

*Stressing that China and Iran are comprehensive strategic partners and their people enjoy a traditional friendship, Xi noted that the Iranian government and people have provided sincere and friendly support and help for China’s fight against the epidemic.*

**Source:** Valeria Talbot, “Covid-19 in MENA: Toward a Shift in the Regional Balance of Power,” *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 9 April 2020. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/covid-19-mena-toward-shift-regional-balance-power-25677>

*While it is hard to predict what the pandemic’s political, economic and social consequences will be, from a geopolitical perspective it is not inconceivable that it will lead to a shift in the regional balance of power, with China playing a bigger role. Beijing has been particularly proactive in lending support to governments across the region – from Algeria to Tunisia, and from the Palestinian National Authority to Iran – by supplying medical equipment and sharing medical expertise. Beijing’s so-called ‘mask diplomacy’ – with over 250,000 masks donated to Iran – could be the prelude to a policy that extends beyond the protection of China’s economic and energy interests.*

### Fangs of the Lone Wolf

**Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars 1994-2009**

Dodge Billingsley  
with Lester Grau

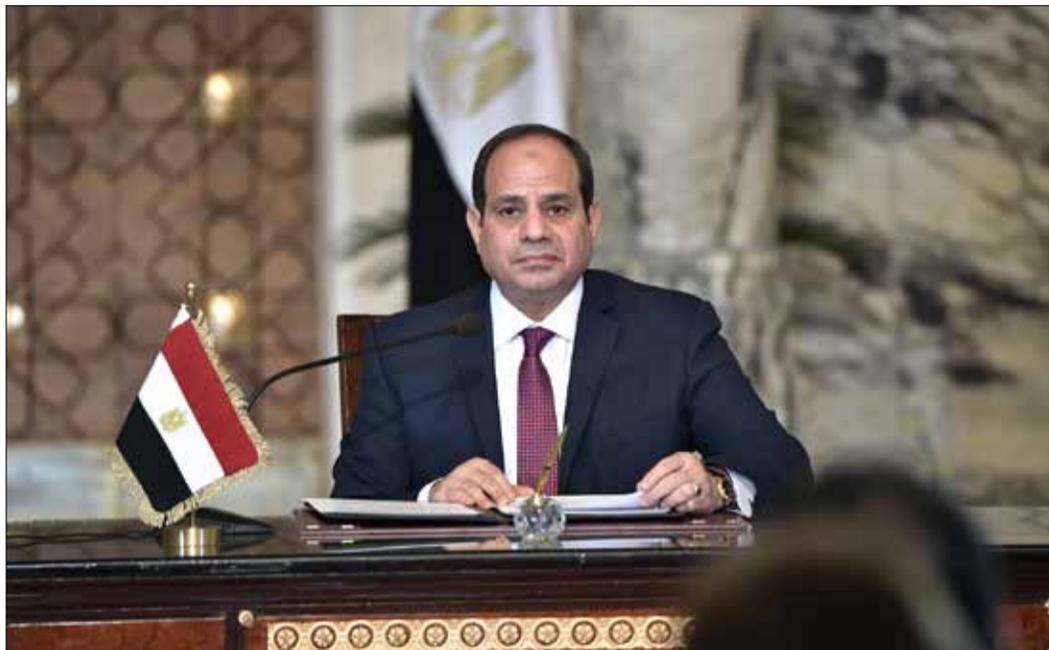
Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination 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>



## COVID-19 and the Egyptian Military

**OE Watch Commentary:** From the perspective of its supporters in the media, the Egyptian government's initial response to the coronavirus pandemic has been exemplary. The first accompanying article, authored by a retired military officer who serves as deputy director at the *Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies*, a think tank, argues that “the Egyptian state offers a positive model for how to deal with the coronavirus crisis in the economic, health and social fields.” The author lists 13 points that others can use to learn from the Egyptian state’s “serious, responsible and positive” approach to the outbreak, including the importance of having “a strong army” with “the financial capabilities to assist the state in peacetime, help the civil sector achieve self-sufficiency as much as possible, and provide all the necessary requirements, especially in times of crisis.”



President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi at a state visit in Russia in 2017.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/trips/56360/photos/51705>, CC BY 4.0

The Egyptian Army’s Chemical Warfare Division has been the public face of the Egyptian military’s response to coronavirus. Prior to the pandemic, it was unknown on social media beyond some gentle mocking for apparently doing little more than manufacturing inexpensive consumer goods, such as liquid hand soap and sanitizer, under the brand name “King.”

In mid-March, it entered the spotlight by engaging in extensive though marginally effective campaigns to spray disinfectants on public spaces across Egypt. In further and likely more effective measures, the Egyptian military’s manufacturing plants have been mobilized to produce masks, medical necessities, sanitizers and other products viewed as essential to containing the virus’s spread. In a display of its regional ambitions, the Egyptian military even sent medical aid to Italy.

Enforced physical distancing has not been part of the Egyptian government’s early efforts to prevent the epidemic from spreading. Countries with comparable socio-political structures, including Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, were much quicker to deploy military vehicles to enforce strict physical distancing measures and/or mitigate the effects thereof, usually working alongside police and security forces. For a variety of reasons, Egyptian measures have been more permissive and mostly enforced by police forces, though as noted in the accompanying excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, more restrictive measures “would definitely require the army to more actively participate in the curfew implementation.”

In March, two high-ranking Egyptian military officers died of COVID-19. The official account claimed they died in the line of disinfection duty, but the final accompanying passage suggests at least one of them contracted the virus in late February, after a meeting with international investors to discuss projects in Egypt’s New Administrative Capital (NAC). The NAC has been a centerpiece of the grand infrastructure projects that constitute a key pillar of the Sisi government’s military-led economic growth strategy. The Egyptian government’s main international partner in the NAC project is the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC). Initial government functions were to be transferred to the NAC in the summer of 2020, but this has now been pushed back to 2021, after workers at the site were found to be infected with COVID-19. **End**

**OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“The implementation of these measures would definitely require the army to more actively participate in the curfew implementation...”***

**Source:**

Mohammed Ibrahim al-Duiri. “The Egyptian State’s Positive Role in the Coronavirus Crisis,” *Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies*, 10 April 2020. <https://www.ecsstudies.com/opinions/8732/>

الدور الإيجابي للدولة المصرية تجاه أزمة كورونا

*There is no doubt that the Egyptian state offers a positive model for how to deal with the Coronavirus crisis in the economic, health and social fields... In this article, I will try to address thirteen major points that I view as lessons learned and drawn from the serious, responsible and positive way the state has dealt with the Coronavirus crisis, as well as what could be useful to support the pillars of the state in the post-epidemic phase... The fifth point: The importance of a strong army that can defend the state against any potential threats while also having the financial capabilities to assist the state in peacetime, help the civil sector achieve self-sufficiency as much as possible, and provide all the necessary requirements, especially in times of crisis.*



## Continued: COVID-19 and the Egyptian Military

**Source:** “Egypt’s Armed Forces engage in tangential battles,” *Ahram Online*, 2 April 2020. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/366359.aspx>

... The army is contributing with the production of disinfectants and hygienic substances and products in Nasr Company, military production factories and the Arab Manufacturing Organisation, and by means of the countrywide sanitisation and disinfection campaigns in major thoroughfares, government buildings, schools and universities, Al-Azhar buildings, the Coptic Cathedral and other vital public institutions.

**Source:** سياسات غير فعّالة نتيجة ضعف الإمكانيات : “Coronavirus in Egypt: Ineffective Policies due to Limited Capabilities,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 30 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/w8r9ghh>

Sources in the cabinet revealed to *al-Araby al-Jadid* that there are several proposals already in place to deal with the pandemic in its third stage, including completely stopping trains and subways, isolating some areas inside Greater Cairo and preventing exit and entry from them, then isolating those provinces with the most cases. The sources noted that the implementation of these measures would definitely require the army to more actively participate in the curfew implementation, alongside the police which has thus far taken charge of implementing these policies in cities.

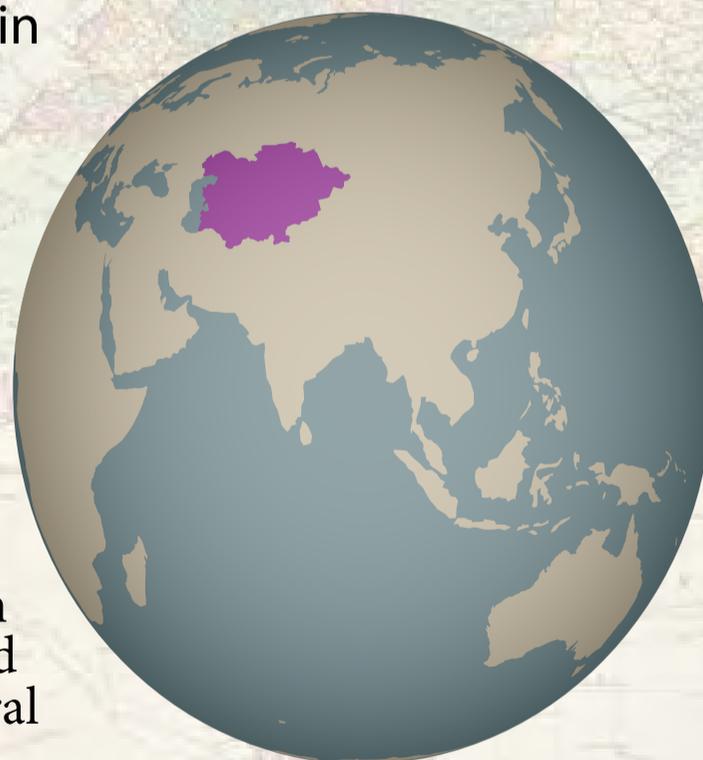
**Source:** كورونا يضرب الجيش المصري: تدابير لمنع التفشي بالمعسكرات : “Coronavirus Strikes the Egyptian Military: Preparations to Avoid an Outbreak in Military Camps,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 24 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/r6r4ooe>

Contrary to the Egyptian Army Spokesman Col. Tamer Al-Rifai’s announcement that [Major General Shafie Abdel Halim] Dawoud and [Major General Khaled] Shaltout had died during the army’s chemical warfare disinfection campaigns of government installations, roads and public squares over the past days, a well-informed sources told *al-Jadeed al-Jadid* that Dawoud was the first senior officer diagnosed with coronavirus. This happened approximately two weeks ago, after he held a meeting with a number of foreign investors and contractors who came to Egypt at the end of February, to work on project linked to the New Administrative Capital.

## 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>



## Russia Sees Opportunity in COVID-19 to Isolate Iranian Forces in Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** The COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread occurrence in Iran may have created an opportunity for Russia in Syria. Citing threats to the health and safety of Syrian Arab Army soldiers from the pro-Iranian forces that travel back and forth to Iran, Russia has imposed a rule to temporarily “isolate” the pro-Iranian forces from the Syrian Army, with a view to eventually “make this isolation permanent.” The accompanying passages discuss this situation, in light of Russia and Iran’s conflicting long-term goals and competition for influence in Syria.

As the first passage from an interview with a Turkish expert notes, Russia’s long-term goal in Syria is to “establish territorial integrity under the Syrian Baath regime-- its close ally since Cold War years and its satellite.” The expert points out “Moscow’s interests and vision, in this framework, is also in conflict with Tehran and the Quds Force, who want to make Syria into a second Lebanon, and various militias into a second Lebanese Hezbollah (or a Syrian Hezbollah).” According to the expert, in the Kremlin’s future vision of Syria, the only armed forces there are the Syrian Arab Armed Forces. He points out the long-standing ties between Russia and Syria, even noting that the Syrian Army was at one time called “an Arabic-Speaking Red Army.”

However, currently, there are pro-Iranian forces fighting on the side of the Syrian Arab Army. As the second passage notes, “Russian commanders in Syria decided to turn the situation related to the coronavirus epidemic in Iran to their benefit by starting to filter out pro-Iranian forces fighting on the side of the Syrian Arab Army.” According to the passage, “the Russian command ...imposed a rule requiring deployment of Syrian army formations loyal to Russia separately from pro-Iranian forces. These precautions were introduced in order to prevent infection among the soldiers that, in some way or another, come into contact with the Iranian “Shiite international forces” and local militias affiliated with Tehran.” The author notes that the pandemic may allow those opposing Iranian influence in Moscow and within the Syrian government to take “temporary” measures to protect the Syrian forces by isolating the Iranian ones, with a long-term view of making this isolation permanent. However, the author claims that these steps will “hardly be able to alter Tehran’s general infiltration into the Syrian army and security apparatus and even less able to drive Iranian militias out of the eastern regions.”

The difficulty in driving Iran out of Syria is explained in the final passage, which points out that Iran is working to entrench and bolster its influence in Syria, by rebuilding Shiite-dominated neighborhoods in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Latakia and Tartus. The author notes “this includes not only returning Shiites who fled their homes during the civil conflict, but also bringing in others from Lebanon and Iraq, all part of an alleged demographic engineering scheme to entrench the Islamic Republic’s influence.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

***“The pandemic will officially allow those opposing Iranian influence in Moscow... to take “temporary” measures to isolate Iranian forces and gradually make this isolation permanent.”***

**Source:** Taha Akyol, “Esad’ın İdlib’deki ordularını Rusya kurdu “(Russia Established Assad’s Armies in Idlib),” *Karar.com*, 2 March 2020. <https://www.karar.com/esadin-idlibdeki-ordularini-rusya-kurdu-1547116>

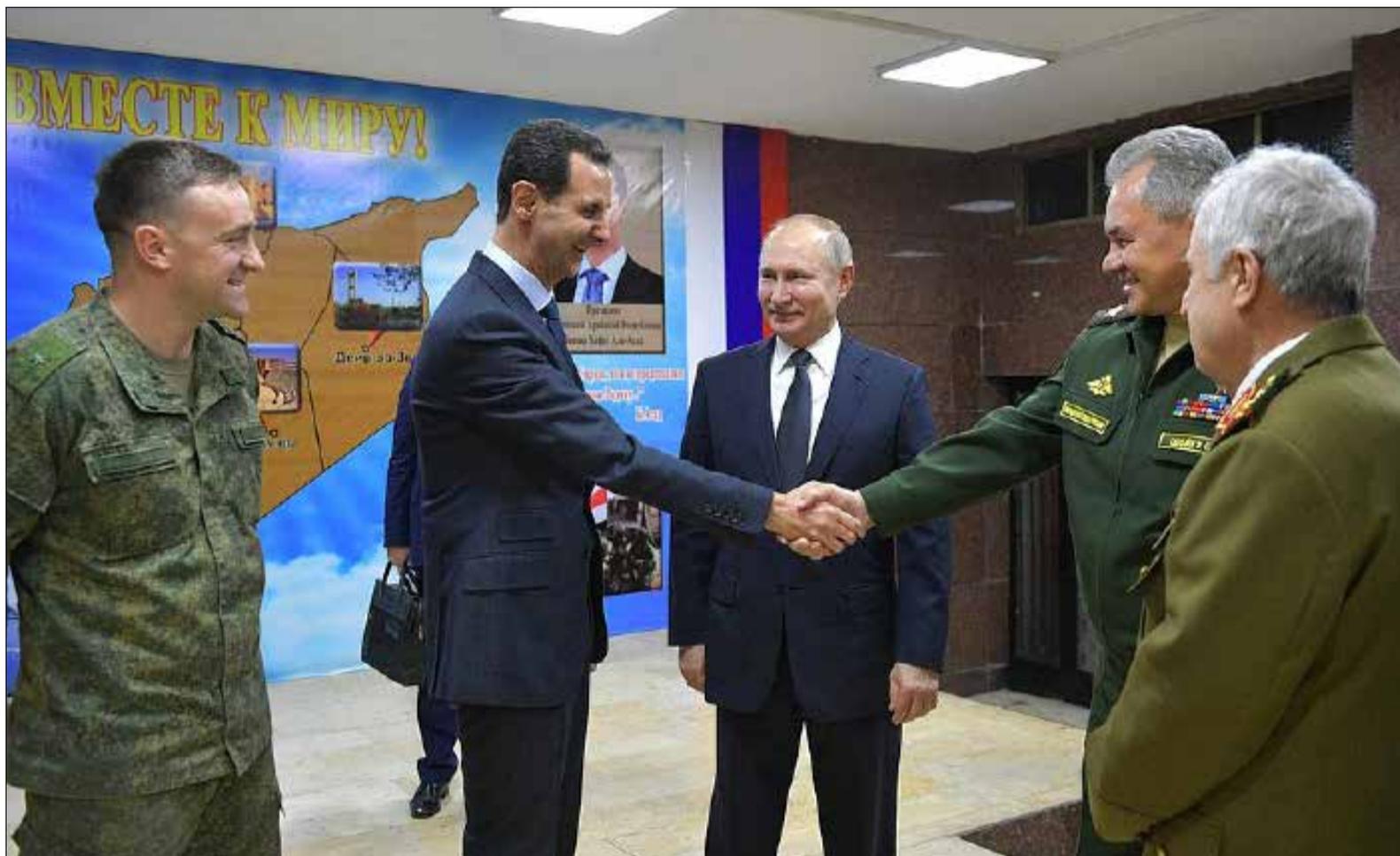
*The Russian Federation’s ultimate goal in Syria [is to] establish territorial integrity under the Baas regime-- its close ally since Cold War years and its satellite. Moscow’s interests and vision, in this framework, is also in conflict with Tehran and the IRGC Quds Force, who want to make Syria into a second Lebanon, and various militias into a second Lebanese Hezbollah (or a Syrian Hezbollah). In the Kremlin’s future vision of Syria, the only armed forces there are the Syrian Arab Armed Forces...*

### ***‘An Arabic-Speaking Red Army’***

*Relations between the Russian Federation Armed Forces and the Syrian Arab Armed Forces are not based on a contextual security cooperation; on the contrary, they are based on deep, cultural and doctrinal ties that go all the way back to the Arap-Israel wars during the Cold War. During this period, the armed forces of the Baas regime could be called “An Arabic-Speaking Red Army.” Today, the two main units conducting the Idlib operation-- the 25th Division and 5th Army Corps-- were established by the Russians during the civil war. The Commander of the 25th Division Gen. Suheyl el-Hassan, was awarded multiple awards by Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, and praised during Putin’s visit to the Khameimen base.*



## Continued: Russia Sees Opportunity in COVID-19 to Isolate Iranian Forces in Syria



Vladimir Putin visited the command post of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria. With President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bashar al-Assad (left) and Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. 7 January 2020.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62545>, CC BY 4.0

**Source:** Antan Mardasov, "Is COVID-19 changing Astana allies' dynamics in Syria?" *Al Monitor*, 31 March 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/russia-iran-syria-turkey-coronavirus-subversion.html#ixzz6JQrb6jSL>

*Al Modon, a Lebanese periodical, has reported that Russian commanders in Syria decided to turn the situation related to the coronavirus epidemic in Iran to their benefit by starting to filter out pro-Iranian forces fighting on the side of the Syrian Arab Army. The Russian command allegedly imposed a rule requiring deployment of Syrian army formations loyal to Russia separately from pro-Iranian forces. These precautions were introduced in order to prevent infection among the soldiers that, in some way or another, come into contact with the Iranian "Shiite international forces" and local militias affiliated with Tehran.*

...

*"It is only natural that groups of military advisers and special forces personnel would face a security issue during the pandemic, considering the threats in central and eastern Syria created by [air connections] with Iran and Shiite pilgrims traveling back and forth," [a] Russian military source said.*

...

*It is rather likely that the pandemic will officially allow those opposing Iranian influence in Moscow and within the Syrian government to take "temporary" measures to isolate Iranian forces and gradually make this isolation permanent. However, these steps will hardly be able to alter Tehran's general infiltration into the Syrian army and security apparatus and even less able to drive Iranian militias out of the eastern regions.*

**Source:** Amberin Zaman, "Is Syria unable, or unwilling, to fend off Iran coronavirus contagion?" *Al Monitor*, 25 March 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/syria-iran-coronavirus-stop-spread.html#ixzz6JQspoveg>

*Rebuilding Shiite-dominated neighborhoods in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Latakia and Tartus is a key element of Iran's strategy of bolstering its influence in Syria. This includes not only returning Shiites who fled their homes during the civil conflict, but also bringing in others from Lebanon and Iraq, all part of an alleged demographic engineering scheme to entrench the Islamic Republic's influence.*



## Syria's Idlib Continues to Challenge Turkish-Russian Relations

**OE Watch Commentary:** The situation in Syria's Idlib province and the question of how to deal with radical elements continue to be a contentious issue between Turkey and Russia. The ceasefire that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin reached on 5 March de-escalated the situation temporarily. Since then Turkey stepped up measures to strengthen its position by deploying more military personnel and equipment and by setting up more outposts. As part of the ceasefire, Turkey and Russia started joint patrols around the M4 highway. While Turkey faces challenges in keeping extremist groups in Idlib under control, Russia seems to be facing challenges keeping the Syrian regime and Iran backed militias in compliance with the ceasefire. The first accompanying article analyzes the challenges Turkey faces dealing with extremist groups in Idlib while the second article discusses the threat these radical groups pose to joint Turkish-Russian patrols along the M4 highway.

Turkey needs to deal with the extremist groups in Idlib for several reasons. As the first article from *Al-Monitor* states, these groups challenge Turkey to “achieve its immediate goals” of establishing safe zones in Idlib province for “the millions of Syrian refugees it hosts.” Estimated at over 3.5 million, Syrian refugees in Turkey have “become a heavy burden” at a time when Turkey faces a possibility of financial collapse and the COVID-19 crisis. Second, the presence of extremist groups, notably Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), tests Turkish-Russian relations. Russia has repeatedly called on Turkey to clear them from Idlib since 2017. However, Turkey has not shown a clear desire to take on HTS and other extremist groups. The author states that “[h]aving failed to take on HTS and similar groups in any significant manner to date, the question remains as to whether Ankara has the will to carry out this task today” despite these groups obstructing recent Turkish-Russian joint patrol on the M4 highway.

The second article notes that while the cease-fire reached on 5 March has been opposed by HTS, which continues its operations along the M4 highway and poses a threat to joint Turkish-Russian patrols. The author states that two “missions were conducted on 15 March and 23 March... but both... had to be cut short due to provocative moves by these groups.” The third mission was postponed due to security reasons. As the second passage notes, this situation “constitute[s] very good reasoning for the Russian and Syrian armies to break the ceasefire in the region,” which doesn't bode well for the cease-fire holding up in the long-term. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“The jihadi groups that Ankara has maintained some degree of contact with in the region remain Turkey's Achilles' heel in its dealings with Russia over Idlib.”***

**Source:** Semih Idiz, “Does Turkey have the will to take on jihadis in Idlib?” *Al-monitor*, 24 March 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/turkey-syria-russia-will-ankara-take-on-jihadis-in-idlib.html>

*The situation in the northwestern Syrian province continues to be volatile, despite the fragile cease-fire reached between Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin in Moscow on March 5.*

*The jihadi groups that Ankara has maintained some degree of contact with in the region remain Turkey's Achilles' heel in its dealings with Russia over Idlib.*

*These groups also pose an obstacle to Ankara as it tries to achieve its immediate goals in the province. Turkey's principal aim is to establish safe zones there to house the millions of Syrian refugees it hosts.*

*Russia's position has not changed. It insists that jihadi groups in Idlib have to be eliminated before military operations can be finally terminated... The main group in Russia's crosshairs is Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), which Moscow continues to refer to by its original name, Jabhat al-Nusra. The Moscow Summit on March 5 once again tasked Ankara with removing HTS and related groups from Idlib...*

*Having failed to take on HTS and similar groups in any significant manner to date, the question remains as to whether Ankara has the will to carry out this task today.*

...

*The question of jihadi fighters in Idlib has taken on an added significance now following last week's killing of two Turkish soldiers in the region by “radical groups,” as stated by Turkey's Ministry of Defense.*

...

*HTS has refused to comply with the cease-fire reached at the Moscow summit. Russia says HTS was also the organizer of the recent protests that obstructed the joint Turkish-Russian patrol on the strategic M4 highway.*

**Source:** Serkan Demirtaş, “Radical groups block Turkish-Russian patrol in Idlib ria” *Hurriyet Daily News*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/radical-groups-block-turkish-russian-patrol-in-idlib-153458>

*The ceasefire seems to hold in general terms, but the joint patrolling missions cannot be carried out properly due to the continued activities of the radical groups along the M4. The first and second missions were conducted on March 15 and March 23 respectively but both operations had to be cut short due to provocative moves by these groups.*

*Under normal conditions, the third mission had to take place last weekend. Ankara blames the bad weather conditions, but it seems it's more than that. Citing security reasons, the Russian side is not very much willing to hold the joint mission with calls on the Turkish government to take measures against the disruptive activities of the radical groups.*

...

*The radical groups remaining near the highway will likely continue to interfere with the joint patrolling mission and it would constitute very good reasoning for the Russian and Syrian armies to break the ceasefire in the region.*



## Syrian Conflict Increasingly Shaped by Expansive Use of UAVs

**OE Watch Commentary:** Recent developments in Syria have served to highlight the ways in which unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are being exploited by both conventional militaries and insurgent groups. Wael Fatha, a writer for the Lebanese newspaper *al-Watan al-Arabi*, echoed the belief among some Russians that the skies of Syria were the scene of the so-called drone wars. This past February, Turkish forces launched a uniquely punishing series of drone strikes against Syrian army positions and formations in Idlib province in order to blunt the Syrian army's Russian-backed advance deeper into the province. The Israeli-based *Jerusalem Post* commentator Seth Frantzman argued that the drone strikes, "reveal the degree to which Turkey has created a groundbreaking armed force of drones over the last several years." While the Russian no-fly zone in northwestern Syria has prevented Turkish manned jets from conducting airstrikes within the region, these most recent strikes demonstrate an ability for Turkish UAVs to successfully operate in denied airspace. While Turkey has employed its UAVs in targeted strikes against Kurdish insurgent forces in northeastern Syria and northern Iraq, it has never before launched such a large quantity of attacks in such a short span of time against primarily conventional targets.

Likewise, insurgent groups in Syria have dramatically increased their use of imported and improvised UAVs to conduct both intelligence gathering and attacks against Syrian regime and other targets. Wael Fatha cites Russian military claims of more than 60 attempted UAV attacks against its base in Humaymim in northeastern Syria, and an additional 58 attacks against its base in Latakia since the start of 2019. As a result, Russian forces have recently deployed new anti-air assets in Humaymim intended to defeat the surge in drone attacks. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir Khalil, a journalist writing in the Saudi-owned and London-based *al-Majalla*, adds that while many of the UAVs acquired or manufactured by insurgent and terrorist groups are unrefined or crudely fashioned, their low-cost and ease of use has made them attractive to such groups. In some respects UAVs are leveling the playing field for insurgent groups facing off against more technologically advanced militaries such as Russia, Turkey, and the United States. Khalil asserts that, contrary to Russia's deployment of anti-air systems, the most promising defense against drones will be found through developments in electronic warfare and jamming techniques. **End OE Watch Commentary (Dennis)**

***“Major General Konashenkov noted that opposition fighters were continually improving their UAVs, with some new UAVs able to travel upwards of 250 km and operate at altitudes up to four kilometers. He added that such capabilities make it increasingly harder to track the UAVs.”***

***“The Syrian conflict has seen a drastic expansion of drone warfare as regional powers and terrorist groups have resorted to UAVs after this new technology has flooded into conflict zones around the world. Since every side has been subject to drone attacks, every side is now attempting to employ them.”***



## Continued: Syrian Conflict Increasingly Shaped by Expansive Use of UAVs

**Source:** Wael Fatha, “هل تشعل الصراع في الشرق الأوسط؟” (Drone Wars... Will They Inflamm Tensions in the Middle East?)” *al-Watan al-Arabi*, 10 December 2019. <https://alwatanalarabi.com/-/143268مستقبل-صراعات-الشرق-الأوسط-بعد-استخدام>

“The Russian Army claimed that since the beginning of 2019 it has destroyed more than 60 UAVs that were heading towards its base in Humaymim, Syria. The base is close to areas still occupied by jihadists and opposition fighters. Major General Igor Konashenkov said that Russian forces also intercepted another 58 UAVs and 27 missiles targeting its base in the Latakia province--a stronghold for Bashar al-Assad’s regime in northwest Syria.

Konashenkov insisted to journalists that Russian forces thwarted all of the attempted attacks.

During a press conference organized by the Russian military, Konashenkov also asserted that the UAVs used in the attempted attacks, while rudimentary in nature, were capable of releasing rockets from an altitude of more than two kilometers. Most of the UAVs had appeared to originate from Khan Shaykhun and Lataminah--two small towns that were captured by the Syrian Army in August of 2019. However, other UAVs were launched from various areas in Idlib province as well. Idlib remains one of the last bastions of jihadists and opposition fighters in Syria and it has become the source of tensions between Moscow and Ankara due to efforts to prevent a wide-scale offensive by the Syrian regime in the province.

In Humaymim, Russia has deployed two air defense systems aimed to thwart UAV attacks: the Pantsir-S1 and the Tor-M2. These are in addition to its well-known S-400 air defense system, which is deployed at Humaymim. It has also deployed an S-300 anti-air system at its naval base in Tartus, located in southern Latakia province.”

**Source:** Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qadr Khalil, “حرب الدرونز: أسلحة الإرهابيين على ساحة الشرق الأوسط” (Drone Warfare: Terrorists’ Weapon of Choice on Battlefields Across the Middle East),” *al-Majalla*, 14 October 2019. <https://arb.majalla.com/node/77186/«حرب-الدرونز»>

“Terrorist groups have resorted to the use of UAVs due to the relative ease of smuggling, purchasing, or manufacturing them. The costs of acquiring a drone can range anywhere from \$300 to \$3000. While capabilities in range and payload size can differ, the low cost of such drones, combined with their ability to achieve effects similar to missiles costing millions of dollars, has led many to call them, “low cost, high impact terrorist weapons.”

...

The past few years have seen an abrupt change in terrorist groups’ willingness to manufacture and employ drones in terrorist operations as drones have become more accessible and available. Parts can be easily procured over the internet, and drones are capable of carrying explosives and being used in attacks against vital government and civilian institutions that can result in property damage or loss of human life.

...

Ibrahim al-Marashi, an associate professor of history at the California State University in America, says, “Terrorist groups have demonstrated a willingness to adopt certain aspects of modernity to include UAVs. They have been able to easily acquire UAVs and are even able to control them via their smartphones.”

...

al-Marashi pointed out that the best defense against these “terrorist aircraft” is through electronic warfare capabilities that can jam and disrupt the aircraft’s navigational equipment. There are other ways to defeat drones as well, and many of them have been developed since the so-called “drone wars” broke out above Syria.”

**Source:** Seth Frantzman, “Turkish Drones Revolutionize Idlib Conflict - Analysis,” *Jerusalem Post*, 2 March 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkish-drones-revolutionize-Idlib-conflict-analysis-619510>

“In Idlib, Turkish armed and surveillance drones have come into their own. According to accounts Turkey has devastated some Syrian regime units, damaging or destroying up to 100 tanks, 72 artillery pieces and several air defense systems. In the fog of the Syrian war, which has dragged on nine years, it is never clear if the various accounts are accurate, but videos from drone feeds don’t lie.

Turkey has shown that the drone can be used in an area where air defenses may deny the ability to fly larger jets, such as Turkey’s F-16s, but where smaller drones can operate with impunity. It has shown they can be effective tactically and score many successes, transforming the battlefield. Turkey’s widespread use of drones in Idlib, if the accounts are accurate, may be one of the largest concentrations of drones used in this manner before.”



## Russia's Presence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean

**OE Watch Commentary:** Historically Russia has always wanted to gain access to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Its centuries long successive battles with the Ottoman Empire were fought mostly to achieve this objective. While Russia gained its first access point to the Mediterranean by establishing a naval base in Syria in the 1970s, it was not until the Syrian civil war that it became a major player in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. The accompanying article from Turkey's state-run news agency, *Anadolu Ajansı* provides insights into increased Russian activities in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

According to the article, Russia's national security strategy and military doctrine require Russia to be a major player in the Middle East for various reasons. First, the activities of terrorist groups and the risk of them getting their hands on nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction is a major concern for Russia. Second, Russia wants to block European countries' search for a natural gas supplier who would be an alternative to Russia; as its position as a formidable supplier of natural gas provides it with leverage over the energy security of major European countries. As such, Russia has been closely following the hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean in addition to working to curb the possibility of natural gas flowing from the Persian Gulf to Europe.

Russia's policy towards Iran is also part of its power play for greater influence in the Middle East. Through maintaining good relations with Iran, Russia extends its influence to the Persian Gulf to balance and leverage the United States' influence in the greater Middle East. Iran's Shia proxy groups in Iraq and Syria support Russia's policies in those countries. Russia and Iran also collaborate in controlling the price and output of petroleum. While Russia sees an ally in Iran, it does not want a stronger Iran which does not rely on Russia.

Russia's national security strategy and military doctrine call for an active role in the Eastern Mediterranean balance of power, for three reasons. First, this allows Russia to have a rapid response in the Middle East and protect Russian interests by fortifying its naval and air bases in Syria's Tartus and Khmeimim respectively. A naval base in Syria enables Russian naval ships and submarines sailing in the Mediterranean at all times. To this end, Russia is trying to establish more naval bases in the region including in Egypt and Libya. Second, Russia wants to keep an eye on hydrocarbon exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Libya because natural resources in these regions could potentially compete with its supply in European markets. Russia also intends to prevent any efforts of constructing pipelines transmitting natural gas from the Persian Gulf to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“The current Russian national security strategy and military doctrine also aims to be effective in [the Middle East]...”***



Vladimir Putin in Khmeimim Air Base in Syria.

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir\\_Putin\\_in\\_Khmeimim\\_Air\\_Base\\_in\\_Syria\\_\(2017-12-11\)\\_24.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_(2017-12-11)_24.jpg), CC-BY-4.0

**Source:** “Rusya Orta Doğu’da ne yapmak istiyor? (What does Russia want to do in the Middle East?),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 18 March 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/rusya-orta-dogu-da-ne-yapmak-istiyor/1770192>

*Moscow's interest in the Middle East is not new. The Russians aimed to be active in this vast geography including mainly in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and North Africa during the Tsarist and Soviet periods. The current Russian national security strategy and military doctrine also aims to be effective in this region...*

*In its concept of national foreign policy, the Russian Federation declares that it sees the Middle East as a priority area in terms of global security problems. The possibility of the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction and the activities of terrorist organizations in this region are considered among the primary threats. Russia, one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), sees itself as one of the parties to the Middle East problems as a member of the Middle East Quartet.*

*However, Russia does not declare its intention of preventing being “bypassed” by the West within the scope of Europe's energy security policies. Since the 2005 Russia-Ukraine gas crisis, Western countries have been making efforts to provide alternatives to energy from Moscow and to establish energy transmission lines that will “bypass” Russia. The control of the Eastern Mediterranean coasts is gaining importance [due to] plans to direct the natural gas deposits in the Persian Gulf to Europe...*

*The Russian Federation considers the Mediterranean an important area of interest, as explained in its National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine. It wishes to make the Russian navy effective in green (open seas) and blue (ocean) waters and to keep it in constant navigation... Russia wants to patrol near the crisis regions and continue its existence. In addition, in order to be able to use its nuclear warhead missiles when necessary, Russia aims to keep its submarines and ships carrying them in the Mediterranean. According to Russia, the Tartus port in Syria alone is not enough. For this reason, Russia's search for a base on the North African coast continues. In this context, it continues its dialogue with Egypt or Libya.*

*Libya interests Russia due to its geopolitical importance of having Africa's largest hydrocarbon resources and its proximity to Europe. In Libya, as in Syria, directing energy resources to Europe may lead to Russia being left out of the energy equation...*

*Iran is the third important policy area of Russia in the Middle East. Iran stands out as a support factor for Russia both in the use of airspace and in policies against the USA. Iran's influence in Iraq is also important in this respect. Russia also uses Iran in balancing the US and its allies in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. Iran's Shia militias have also supported Russia's policies in Syria and Iraq for a long time... Iran is also an actor that Russia wants to see [as an ally to control] oil prices and supply.*



## Turkey's Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Weapon

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey's defense industry continues to unveil new products to improve Turkey's warfighting capabilities, particularly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). While some Turkish defense manufacturers have focused their efforts on developing and improving the capabilities of UAVs, others have focused on disrupting UAV attacks. Most recently, Turkey's electromagnetic anti-drone systems producer Harp Arge (R&D) has produced an anti-UAV gun to disrupt UAV attacks. The accompanying articles provide insights into Turkey's first anti-drone gun.

According to the first article from the manufacturer Harp Arge, the ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun weighs 5.5-pounds and its indigenous antenna technology allows for its reduced size and weight. The weapon has the capability to disrupt drone communication via control and command centers by causing a malfunction using high-speed electromagnetic interference. It can combat UAVs within nearly a two mile-range. As the article states, this Anti-Drone Gun has capability to function silently in three seconds to disrupt drone systems "without negative consequences to human health, public safety and the environment." This gun "provides the most effective solution to combatting drones." With its foldable and adjustable butt, it is easy to operate in challenging field environment.

The second article states that over 70 percent of the Anti-Drone Gun was produced by indigenous capabilities. The manufacturer notes that the firm has been working on the design and a prototype of an anti-drone weapon for a long time. Finally, the investment of Ekba Holding enabled its production and now, the firm "will start mass production of the ES-60 after establishing its assembly line." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



TAI ANKA-S.

Source: N13s013 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TAI\\_ANKA-S.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TAI_ANKA-S.jpg), CC-BY-SA-4.0

***“Harp ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun offers mobile solutions to field troops with its 2.5 kg weight and 3 km effective range...”***

**Source:** “ES-60 Elektromanyetik Drone Savar Silahı (ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun)” [harparge.com](http://www.harparge.com), Undated. <http://www.harparge.com/drone-savar>

*Drones have been widely used recently due to their high availability and low costs...*

*Especially in rallies, concerts, stadiums and similar public events, stopping drones with firearms comes with serious drawbacks. The Anti-Drone gun applies high-speed electronic warfare technology to the drone.*

*Drones exposed to electromagnetic attack are disabled by losing connection with command and control. The ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun offers an effective solution in the fight against the drones since it does not harm human health and environmental safety and produces a silent and fast result.*

*Harp ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun offers mobile solutions to field troops with its 2.5 kg weight and 3 km effective range. With its local and national special antenna design, the ES-60 Electromagnetic Anti-Drone Gun provides operational convenience to the user with its ergonomic structure. Our guns are 100% compatible with your own binoculars and gun apparatus with the 22mm picatinny rail system. Our drone gun, which is presented with a foldable and adjustable butt stock option, is designed for difficult field conditions.*

*Our ES-60 Electromagnetic Drone repellent electromagnetic weapon systems pacify drones with its super focused antennas and high power output. With fast scanning, continuous mixing is applied to drone command and Gps / Glonass frequencies. Using the anti-drone weapon for 3 seconds is sufficient to blind the drone systems.*

**Source:** Göksel Yıldırım, “Milli drone savar 3 kilometreden drone uçurmayacak (National drone repellent will not let drones fly within 3 kilometers),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 15 March 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/bilim-teknoloji/milli-drone-savar-3-kilometreden-drone-ucurmayacak/1766630>

*More than 70 percent of its content is locally sourced and the anti-drone gun was on display for security personnel...*

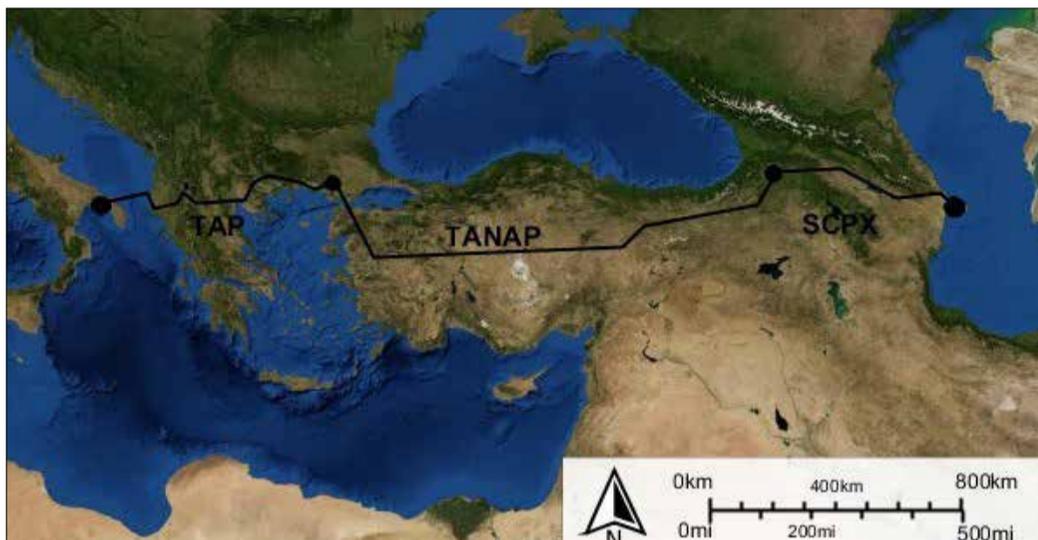
*Harp Arge said they had been working on the design and prototyping of an anti-drone gun for a long time but that its production was made possible only after it was acquired by Ekba Holding recently. The company has now been included in the Cemd Defense Corporation group that operates as part of the Ekba Holding and will start mass production of the ES-60 after establishing its assembly line.*



## Turkey's Energy Security and Dependency

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey's dependence on foreign energy poses a threat to Turkey's energy security specifically and national security in general. The accompanying article from *Sigma Turkey* analyzes Turkey's energy efficiency, reliance on import, and diversification of its energy resources by investing in renewable energy resources.

According to the article, Turkey's energy consumption can be reduced by increasing its energy efficiency. The author cites reports from Turkish Chamber of Mechanical Engineers stating Turkey's "potential for energy savings is 50% for buildings, 20% for industrial use and 15% for transportation." However, the article does not make any suggestion as to how Turkey could be more energy efficient, but it states that efficient usage of energy could reduce dependency on importing energy especially from Russia.



Southern Gas Corridor.

Source: Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern\\_Gas\\_Corridor.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_Gas_Corridor.jpg), CC-BY-SA-4.0

Turkey heavily relies on Russia for energy. The author states that for a NATO country to depend so heavily on Russian oil, natural gas, and coal resources is a security risk. While Turkey has reduced its dependency on Russian natural gas to 48 percent thanks to the TANAP pipeline, this is still considered a high enough percentage to pose a threat to energy security. Turkey is also dependent on Russian crude oil and petroleum products totaling slightly over 46 percent as of November 2019. Additionally, Turkey imports about 40 percent of its coal from Russia. Besides above the energy resources, Russia is also building Turkey's first nuclear power plant (Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant) and Russia will have control over its operation and uranium and nuclear waste management processes.

Turkey could take several measures to address this situation. It could unleash its renewable energy potential. The author provides a diagram from Turkey's Chamber of Mechanical Engineers report visualizing Turkey's renewable energy resource potential in Hydro-electric, wind, geothermal, solar and biomass. According to Orhan Aytaç, Member of the Energy Policies Working Group of the Chamber of Mechanical Engineers if Turkey "could operate the existing power plants in full capacity, [it] could increase Turkey's generating capacity between 95 – 145 billion kWh." The author also notes that Turkey's idle renewable energy capacity for electricity generation could further increase the energy "generation capacity by 610 billion kWh which is more than twice the current electricity consumption." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“The risk in [Turkey’s] energy dependency debacle is the Russian Federation’s overwhelming share in it.”***

**Source:** A. Necdet Pamir “Turkey’s Energy Outlook – A Snapshot,” *Sigma Turkey*, 30 March 2020. <https://www.sigmatrueky.com/turkeys-energy-outlook-a-snapshot/>

...Turkey is almost totally import-dependent for natural gas, oil and hard coal... Increasing Turkey's energy efficiency will lead to a significant drop in our primary energy consumption... According to reports by the Chamber of Mechanical Engineers, our potential for energy savings is 50% for buildings, 20% for industrial use and 15% for transportation. Focusing on reduction of energy efficiency, next to energy savings, also means additional employment potential.

...  
Despite these pessimistic figures, on the full part of the bottle, there exists a very significant potential of renewables in the country while those sources are almost fully under-utilised. The claims that Turkey does not have adequate natural energy resources are unfounded. To the contrary, the country has more than enough solar and wind renewable energy potential as well as significant potential of geothermal energy.

...  
Another risk in our energy dependency debacle is the Russian Federation's overwhelming share in it. Depending on a single or a group of countries for any country's energy needs is a security risk in itself, but Turkey's situation is slightly more perilous since it is a NATO country while in dire need of Russian oil, gas and coal resources. Our dependency for Russia in natural gas has somewhat come down to 48% in recent years thanks to TANAP (via Azerbaijan)...

Our dependency on Russia does not end there. Russia's share in our coal imports is at a commanding 40%. But the real danger will be the Akkuyu NPP, if it ever comes to be, where Russia will have absolute control over its construction, operation, uranium and nuclear waste management processes.

...  
If we could operate the existing power plants in full capacity, we could increase Turkey's generating capacity between 95 – 145 billion kWh (Orhan Aytaç, Member of the Energy Policies Working Group of the Chamber of Mechanical Engineers).

If Turkey could use its idle renewables capacity for electricity generation, this would further increase the generation capacity approximately by 610 billion kWh which is more than twice the current electricity consumption. Increasing energy efficiency in all sectors will further contribute a 25% to these figures.



## The Impact of COVID-19 on SDF Operations and ISIS

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) continues to be a threat throughout the region despite its territorial defeat. The question of what happens to imprisoned ISIS members still lingers. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which played a key role in defeating ISIS in Syria hold thousands of transnational ISIS members in their mostly makeshift prisons. They have continuously called on other countries to repatriate their nationals because of the challenges of detaining them for a number of years. However, with few exceptions, no country has been willing to take their nationals back. The idea of establishing an international tribunal to put those detained ISIS members on trial was never solidified. Now with the threat of a global COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more challenging for the Kurds to safeguard these ISIS members as they have revolted to try to escape. While the first accompanying article provides insights into the prison revolt by ISIS members, the second article analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on operations against ISIS and ISIS attacks in Syria.



Baghuz ISIL Families.

Source: Voice of America via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baghuz\\_ISIL\\_Families.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baghuz_ISIL_Families.png), CC-PD-Mark/PD-VOA

The first article from *Rudaw*, a news network broadcasting from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, describes the prison revolt that took place in al-Sinaa Prison in Syria's al-Hasakah province. The fear of COVID-19 seems to have been the major trigger of the revolt and attempted escape. The prison holds about five thousand ISIS members. The majority of them were captured during the SDF's fight to take control of the last ISIS-held territories in Deir ez-Zor, Syria. The intention of the revolt seems to have been to overpower the guards and find ways to escape. However, SDF spokesperson Kîno Gabriel stated that no members of ISIS were able to escape. Mr. Gabriel stated that even though this incident confirms SDF's ability to secure imprisoned ISIS members, it also proves the need for the international community to provide support to SDF and the Kurds to ensure these imprisoned members of ISIS and their families that are kept in camps are guarded securely. The need to provide assistance to the Kurds seems to be more pressing now due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the second article from the *Rojava Information Center*, a local news outlet based in northeast Syria points out, overall ISIS attacks have decreased due to COVID-19. Similarly, SDF's raids and arrests on ISIS sleeper cells have decreased as well. While the widespread assassinations by ISIS has declined, ISIS continues to target the "individuals connected to the Autonomous Administration or SDF." The article states that ISIS distributed flyers in Deir ez-Zor warning citizens not to associate themselves with the Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northeast Syria.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“The incident confirms their ability to secure ISIS terrorists, pointing to the need for more support from the international community...”***

**Source:** “HSDê li ser revîna girtiyên DAIŞê daxuyanî da (The SDF has issued a statement on the escape of ISIS prisoners),” *Rudaw.net*, 30 March 2020. <https://www.rudaw.net/kurmanji/kurdistan/300320209>

*Spokesperson for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Kîno Gabriel, said in a statement that on Sunday ISIS detainees were able to sabotage and remove the internal doors of the cells, create holes in the walls and take control of the ground floor of the prison...*

*Kîno Gabriel ... the SDF's Anti-Terrorism Forces intervened and were able to take the prison under their control and secure the [prison] and all the detainees inside it.*

*“We confirm that there are no escapees..., and that the situation in the detention center is under full control.”*

*Gabriel also said that “the incident confirms their ability to secure ISIS terrorists, pointing to the need for more support from the international community and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in order to provide maximum protection for detentions and camps that include ISIS members and their families...”*

**Source:** “Report: anti-ISIS arrests and raids drop as tensions over COVID-19 rise,” *Rojava Information Center*, 07 April 2020. <https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/04/report-anti-isis-arrests-and-raids-drop-as-tensions-over-covid-19-rise/>

- March saw decreases across the board – in terms of attacks, raids, deaths and arrests – suggesting COVID-19 has distracted SDF and ISIS alike
- Though last month, February, we saw a spike in arrests by the SDF, Asayish and Coalition, arrests fell 97% to just 3 in March
- With 48 attacks, there is a small decrease of 9% compared to the month before. As always the majority occurred in Deir-ez-Zor, with a significant amount in Heseke as well
- Kurdish-majority cities along the border, such as Derik, Qamishlo, Amude and others, have once again remained untouched by sleeper-cells

*... Though assassinations did decline in March, ISIS continued their campaign of targeting individuals connected to the Autonomous Administration or SDF. As of 4 April, ISIS continued distributing fliers throughout Deir-ez-Zor, threatening all who continue their association with AANES and SDF...*

*In March, the RIC only managed to confirm 3 arrests of sleeper-cells which is a huge decline from February (96 documented arrests).*



## Hezbollah's Standing in Lebanon Tarnished by Coronavirus Response

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the spread of coronavirus impacts countries throughout the Middle East, it is exacerbating political, economic, and military tensions in Lebanon, especially among its Shia citizens. Longtime Lebanese journalist and political analyst Hanin Ghaddar, writing in the Beirut-based *al-Majalla*, observes that Hezbollah's reputation amongst its own supporters has been marred by its negligent and opaque response to the coronavirus crisis--a response many see as driven by undue deference to Iran. Even before the virus began to spread throughout the country, Lebanon was suffering from sustained political and economic hardship. On 7 March, the Hezbollah-backed government of Hassan Diab announced it was defaulting on Lebanon's sovereign debt amidst a financial crisis that was forcing private businesses to close and lay off workers. And, as Ghaddar points out, Lebanon's medical system pre-coronavirus already faced a shortage of critical medical supplies and workers.

However, as the coronavirus began to appear in Lebanon, Hezbollah stayed silent and continued to maintain its close links with Tehran. Even as it became apparent that Iran was in the throes of a massive outbreak, Hezbollah ignored pressure to stop inbound flights from Iran. Hanin Ghaddar points out it was Hezbollah's Shia supporters who expressed the most concern and anger about the party's decision, in part because they were the community likely to be exposed to people traveling from Iran.

There is a perception that Hezbollah and Iran's negligent response to the coronavirus pandemic is driven by a desire to project strength and a preoccupation with continuing operations against American forces in Iraq and in the broader Middle East. Indeed, Ghaddar highlights the fact that Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, spent much of early March--a critical period for the spread of the coronavirus--in Tehran meeting with senior Iranian officials about Iran's efforts against the American presence in Iraq. Nasrallah didn't comment on the growing pandemic in Lebanon until a sermon on 13 March. Hanin Ghaddar argues that such actions have led many of Hezbollah's own supporters to question whether Hezbollah cares more about appeasing its Iranian benefactors than alleviating the growing suffering of the Lebanese people who it purports to serve. **End OE Watch Commentary (Dennis)**

***“Even once the coronavirus pandemic is behind us, Iran will forever be linked by people in the region to the virus that took many of their loved ones’ lives. In Lebanon, Hezbollah will pay the price for that link.”***

**Source:** لبنان- و«حزب-الله»- في- زمن- «كورونا» (Lebanon and Hezbollah in the time of Coronavirus), *al-Majalla*, 27 March 2020. <https://arb.majalla.com/node/83626/«ان-وروك»-ن-جز-ي-ف-«هلل-ابرح»-و-ن-ان-يل>

*“The flights from Iran have caused dissatisfaction with Hezbollah amongst Shia residents more than any other group, as Lebanon's Shia community are the ones most directly exposed to the virus from those coming from Iran. Hezbollah's inability to form a functioning government, to combat corruption, or to implement meaningful reform is bad enough. But now they are literally injuring Lebanese citizens by allowing the virus spread from Iran.*

*Just a week before the coronavirus began to spread, Lebanon had defaulted on paying its sovereign debt. Lebanon does not have the money it has pledged to combat coronavirus. It's no secret that most of Lebanon's hospitals were already suffering from a lack of medical supplies, which includes a lack of spare parts for the ventilator machines which are in high demand today.*

*Lebanon is anxious about increased unemployment and the loss of jobs, as many never returned to work after the financial crisis hit. The Lebanese government has yet to begin negotiations with its creditors and debtors nor has it developed a plan to deal with it. Worse, it has no idea at all about how to defeat the coronavirus. Asides from forcing people to stay in their homes, the government has provided no medical, economic, or social support to attempt to decrease the Lebanese people's suffering.*

*It wasn't until March 13th that Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, commented on the coronavirus situation. In fact, it's been reported that he had been busy visiting Tehran to discuss responses to the American presence in Iraq. The Iranian regime and Hezbollah neglected their response to coronavirus and, even as the situation deteriorated, they continued to prioritize military operations over protecting the Iranian and Lebanese public.*

*Many Lebanese were critical of the Iranian flights coming to Lebanon, foremost among them Shia themselves. However, despite the criticism, Hassan Nasrallah said nothing. In his Friday sermon, he asked people to stay at home and practice social distancing but avoided mention of the Iranian flights. Many Lebanese believe that the flights aren't just bringing home Lebanese from Iran, but instead are also bringing in Iranians stricken with the virus so that they can receive care in private Hezbollah hospitals. This belief was strengthened by Hezbollah's decision to ban the media from entering Beirut's Airport when the Iranian Air flights arrived at the airport as if Hezbollah was trying to hide someone or something.”*



## COVID-19 Prompts Israel and Hamas to Explore Prisoner Swap

**OE Watch Commentary:** In early April, Hamas and Israel signaled their willingness to explore indirect negotiations over a potential prisoner swap. The move came amid an outbreak of COVID-19 in both Israel and the Gaza Strip. The accompanying passages from local sources discuss this prospect as well as the humanitarian needs of the Gaza Strip in light of the outbreak, which could be part of the potential negotiations.

The first passage from *The Jerusalem Post* discusses that Hamas has shown a willingness to negotiate with Israel over the return of the bodies of Israeli soldiers Hadar Goldin and Shail Oron who were killed in the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict as well as two Israeli civilians, Avera Mengistu and Hisham as-Sayyid currently held by Hamas. The leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar stated, “We are ready to make partial concessions on our prisoners issue in exchange for Israel’s release of elderly prisoners, patients, and prisoners as a humanitarian gesture in light of the coronavirus crisis.” The Israeli Prime Minister’s Office called for immediate negotiations with Hamas through intermediaries to return the bodies and captive civilians held by Hamas.



*IDF facilitated the transfer of approximately 100 tons of medical supplies and goods into Gaza through Kerem Shalom Crossing, July 19, 2014.*

Source: Israel Defense Forces via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transferring\\_Goods\\_and\\_Medical\\_Supplies\\_into\\_Gaza\\_\(14716916773\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transferring_Goods_and_Medical_Supplies_into_Gaza_(14716916773).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

Israel Defense Minister Naftali Bennett mentioned linking humanitarian aid the Gaza Strip needs to fight COVID-19 to the recovery of Israelis held in the Gaza Strip. “There is talk of the humanitarian world in Gaza... Israel also has humanitarian needs, which are mainly the recovery of the fallen,” Bennett stated, “and I think that we need to enter a broad dialogue about Gaza’s and our humanitarian needs. It would not be right to disconnect these things.” According to the second article by Avi Issacharoff from *The Times of Israel*, Israel is having Egyptian mediators ask Hamas leadership for greater detail about the group’s negotiation position. Moreover, Israel told Egyptian mediators the Israeli Government is willing to exchange food, medical equipment, and a limited number of elderly and female Palestinian prisoners for the release of Israelis held in the Gaza Strip.

The last passage from *Al-Monitor* outlines the threat COVID-19 poses to the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinians traveling from Pakistan and Cairo into the Gaza Strip have already introduced the virus into the densely populated territory. In the event the virus does spread rapidly in the Gaza Strip, the article outlines how the Gazan health system does not have the capacity to handle a large outbreak of COVID-19, which only has 70 intensive care unit beds and 65 ventilators for a population of 2 million people. The World Health Organization has provided disinfectant, protective gear, and 1,000 test kits for Gazans through the Israeli office of the Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA), which is the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) unit responsible for coordinating movement from Israel into the Gaza Strip. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fesen)**

***“I think that we need to enter a broad dialogue about Gaza’s and our humanitarian needs. It would not be right to disconnect these things.”***



## Continued: COVID-19 Prompts Israel and Hamas to Explore Prisoner Swap

**Source:** Lahav Harkov, “Netanyahu: I’m willing to negotiate captives’ release with Hamas,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 April 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/netanyahu-im-willing-to-negotiate-captives-release-with-hamas-623910>

*“The coordinator for captives and missing people, Yaron Bloom...with the National Security Council...are prepared to act constructively with a goal to return the bodies and missing people and end this matter, and call for an immediate discussion through intermediaries,” the Prime Minister’s Office statement read.*

*Hamas has held the bodies of IDF soldiers Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin since Operation Protective Edge in 2014 and has civilians Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed in captivity.*

*Sinwar said... “ready to make partial concessions on our prisoners issue in exchange for Israel’s release of elderly prisoners, patients and female prisoners as a humanitarian gesture in light of the coronavirus crisis...”*

*Defense Minister Naftali Bennett said...“there is talk of the humanitarian world in Gaza... Israel also has humanitarian needs, which are mainly the recovery of the fallen” – meaning Goldin and Shaul – “and I think that we need to enter a broad dialogue about Gaza’s and our humanitarian needs. It would not be right to disconnect these things.”*

**Source:** Avi Issacharoff, “Progress said made in talks for return of prisoners held in Gaza amid virus fears,” *The Times of Israel*, 5 April 2020. [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/progress-said-made-in-talks-for-return-of-prisoners-held-in-gaza-amid-virus-fears/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/progress-said-made-in-talks-for-return-of-prisoners-held-in-gaza-amid-virus-fears/)

*...Israel had asked Egyptian mediators to talk to the Hamas leadership and clarify Sinwar’s statements.*

*Israel consulted with Egypt on the possibility of resuming negotiations for the exchange of prisoners and in return will allow food and medical equipment into the Gaza Strip and the release of a number of elderly men and women incarcerated in Israel.*

**Source:** Shlomi Eldar, “As coronavirus spreads to Gaza, Israel can offer little,” *Al-Monitor*, 27 March 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/israel-physician-for-human-rights-gaza-strip-palestinians.html>

*One Israeli source involved in what has been happening in Gaza describes how the virus-carriers got infected. It all started about two weeks ago, when two Palestinians arrived in Gaza after spending time in Pakistan and Cairo. They arrived at the border crossing with Egypt by bus, together with many other Gazans, and when they crossed over into the Gaza Strip...*

*on March 25, only 144 tests were conducted on a population of approximately 2 million, squeezed into a densely populated area with extremely poor conditions to maintain hygiene. The continued spread of the virus will definitely result in the collapse of the already impoverished health system in Gaza, where the total number of intensive care beds is just 70, and there are only 65 ventilators, some of them already in use.*

*The Israeli office of the Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA) for Gaza announced that 1,000 test kits, protective equipment and disinfectant were provided to Gaza... “This undertaking by the World Health Organization...*



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>



## The Houthi Movement Says COVID-19 is US Biological Weapon

**OE Watch Commentary:** In a March 2020 speech, Houthi Movement leader Abd al-Malek al-Houthi explained to his audience that “experts in biological warfare” have noted “that for years the Americans have worked to take advantage of the coronavirus and spread it within certain societies.” The targeted societies, he added, are China, certain Muslim countries, and the Islamic community as a whole. With no documented COVID-19 cases in Yemen at the time of the speech, al-Houthi confidently asserted that the pandemic reaching Yemen “would be due to an American-supervised action, via its Saudi and Emirati tools,” in which the ruse of “humanitarian assistance in the form of medical tools or foodstuffs” would be used to distribute materials contaminated with the virus.



Veterinarian Hasan Alkaf, takes samples from a camel during the first reported Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) case in Haramout, Yemen in April 2014.

Source: CDC Global Flickr Account, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cdcglobal/17053986812>, CC BY 2.0

Some days after this speech, unidentified aircraft apparently dropped supplies of protective masks in several parts of Yemen. The Houthi-controlled government put out a statement urging residents to not touch the masks, saying they had been dropped by the Saudi coalition and were infected with the coronavirus. A Yemeni newspaper investigated but was unable to verify the claim, which it considered “a clear

and explicit Houthi plan to hold the coalition responsible for any cases that may appear in the future.” Houthi sources also claimed that the virus was being spread from Saudi officers to their Yemeni partners in the National Army, most notably on coastal fronts near the Saudi-Yemeni border.

The accompanying passage from the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* highlights how Yemeni social media activists ridiculed al-Houthi’s statements. However absurd the claims might be, the Houthis have now established a clear narrative for their followers to understand the pandemic. Consistent, targeted and effective messaging campaigns have been a centerpiece of Houthi success at the domestic level. Yemen’s ongoing conflict is to them a conspiracy to expand US-Israeli power, one in which Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and international institutions are mere tools. Coronavirus is but the latest weapon in their adversaries’ arsenal: “Americans and Israelis and their proxies do not refrain from oppressing mankind, whether through viruses, bombs and deadly weapons or by corrupting people’s lives.”

For now, the coronavirus-as-US-bioweapon narrative is limited to the fringes of Arabic-language government and media discourse. Yet as they are forced to deal with the pandemic’s fallout, governments across the region may be forced to conjure a plausible scapegoat in order to deflect popular anger. In this respect, the Houthis are well ahead of the curve. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“If the virus did come to Yemen it would be due to an American-supervised action...”***

**Source:**

“Leader of the Revolution: If Coronavirus Comes to Yemen it Will be by American-Supervised Action,” *Saba*, 21 March 2020. <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3091591.htm>

قائد الثورة: أي وصول لكورونا إلى اليمن سيكون بفعل وإشراف أمريكي

*The leader of the revolution [Abd al-Malik Badr al-Din al-Houthi] pointed out that by the grace of God, the coronavirus epidemic did not reach Yemen... and if the virus did come to Yemen it would be due to an American-supervised action, via its Saudi and Emirati tools, and that it would be dealt with as a hostile action... He explained that some societies have been targeted with using what is portrayed as humanitarian assistance in the form of medical tools or foodstuffs that are contaminated with viruses that transmit deadly epidemics. There are military means for targeting societies with these germs and viruses, so-called biological warfare. “Some experts in biological warfare talk say that for years the Americans have worked to take advantage of the coronavirus and spread it within certain societies,” he said. He noted that America is expected to target China by virtue of its being an economic and cultural competitor. They also focus on societies within our Islamic community and on the community as a whole... He said, “Americans and Israelis and their proxies do not refrain from oppressing mankind, whether through viruses, bombs and deadly weapons or by corrupting people’s lives. It is important to be aware of the negative role nature of the forces of evil, in order to go against them and confront their sabotage.”*



## Continued: The Houthi Movement Says COVID-19 is US Biological Weapon

**Source:** عاجل فتحذير فتحقيق.. هل أنزل التحالف صناديق كمادات ملوثة أم أن الحوثيين يدبرون لأمر جلل؟  
 “Breaking: Warning and Investigation... Did the Coalition Drop Boxes of Contaminated Masks or Are the Houthis Preparing Something Big?” *al-Masdar Online*, 1 April 2020. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/179892>

*Regardless of whether or not the coalition dropped boxes of masks or not, many saw in the Houthi allegations of “dropping boxes contaminated with the coronavirus,” a clear and explicit Houthi plan to hold the coalition responsible for any cases that may appear in the future or if there are already existing cases that are being kept secret, as is widely reported in Sanaa, and they are looking for a specific way to announce this and hold the coalition responsible for its spread.*

**Source:** جماعة الحوثي : ضباط سعوديون أدخلوا فيروس كورونا إلى هذه المدينة اليمنية !  
 “Houthi Movement: Saudi Officials Brought Coronavirus to this Yemeni City!” *Yemen Press*, 2 April 2020. <https://yemen-press.com/news114225.html>

*The Houthi news agency, Saba, reported that Saudi officers had spread the coronavirus among government forces soldiers in the city of Midi. According to the agency, intelligence indicated an outbreak of the coronavirus among what it described as the aggression’s mercenaries (the National Army) in the Midi front. It said the number of confirmed infections totaled 36 as of March 26 and included the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Brigade, the 10th Brigade, the Cavalry Brigade, and the Special Forces Brigade.*

**Source:** سخريه يمنية من زعيم الحوثيين بعد ادعائه أن كورونا سلاح أميركي  
 “Yemenis Mock Houthi Leader After Claims Coronavirus is an American Weapon,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 22 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/rmx8a5m>

*A new speech by Houthi militia leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, broadcast by his group’s al-Masirah channel yesterday (Saturday), has drawn widespread ridicule from Yemeni activists on social media, after he claimed that the novel coronavirus is an American weapon and that his brother Hussein al-Houthi established the group based on “divine directives.”*

Over the years, FMSO has studied and written about foreign perspectives on pandemics. One example is below. For more information on previous FMSO work on pandemics including Ebola, search OE Watch issues:

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

## Avian Influenza: Potential Impact on Sub-Saharan Military Populations with High Rates of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

By Robert Feldman and Kent Nickell

Before COVID-19 grabbed all of the headlines, health officials were also looking at several other diseases that could potentially reach pandemic level. One of these was H5N1, commonly known as avian influenza or bird flu. This article, which originally appeared in *Military Medicine*, discusses the possibility that in people infected with both H5N1 and HIV, the AIDS from HIV might suppress the immune reaction to allow further mutation of H5N1 to occur, with a possible disease outbreak from the new strain to follow.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/200034>



## Iran Announces Mass Production of COVID-19 Test Kits

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 19 February, Iran reported two coronavirus deaths, hours after confirming their first case. As of the end of March, Iran had confirmed 41,495 confirmed cases and 2757 deaths. The latest models by the University of New South Wales predict that by late June, Iran could reach 48 million cases—half their population—if serious interventions are not taken.

While COVID-19 cases continue to grow at a staggering rate, Iranian media has reportedly been overflowing with mixed information surrounding the virus. As fake remedies made their way across social media, Iranian media reported nearly 300 people have been killed and more than a thousand have been sickened by ingesting methanol under the guise that it can cure or prevent coronavirus. As the passage from *Sputnik* notes, while Iranian hospitals are fighting to treat their coronavirus patients, they are further pressed to handle the influx of patients with methanol poisoning—and its side effects, which include permanent blindness.

Other Iranian media outlets have resorted to rhetoric—pointing out that US-led sanctions have crippled Iran’s ability to import the necessary drugs and protective gear to combat the virus properly. Despite US claims that medicines and medical equipment are not under sanctions, Iranian Foreign Ministry retorted that the US has practically blocked the transfer of Iran’s financial resources in other countries into the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA).

Nevertheless, Iran touts its technological superiority, announcing their achievements in producing a COVID-19 test kit that can provide results in three hours, with 98% accuracy. As the first accompanying passage from Iranian news outlet *Khabar* discusses, during an official ceremony held by Brigadier General Farhad Amiri, head of the Ministry of Defense’s Institute of Education and Research, and General Azizi Delshad, representative to the General Staff of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Defense’s Institute of Education and Research declared that these kits are highly accurate and have been verified by relevant authorities. Furthermore, the tests are reported to be entirely produced domestically, and are now being mass-produced in order to fulfill the needs of the Iranian armed forces and medical fields. Iran has even offered to export this kit to other countries, if required.

Pishtaz Teb Zaman Diagnostics is one of the companies responsible for supplying Iranian labs with 80,000 kits per week. According to the second passage from *Tasnim News Agency*, Vahid Younesi, a business development manager at Pishtaz Teb Zaman Diagnostics highlighted that his company was prepared to deliver 400,000 kits within the by late May. While listing key features of their kits, he stated, “It will take two hours for test results to come out”—an hour faster than reported by most Iranian media outlets. Without further details, Younesi pointed out that around 20 countries have already placed an order to purchase Iran’s kits. **End OE Watch Commentary (Plude)**

***“We are proud to present one of the most important defense achievements made by the scientists and experts of the Ministry of Defense.... This [COVID-19 test] kit can test for the virus with superior precision within 3 hours and can operate on all genomes in the world...Today, it is ready to be mass produced and provided to medical centers...”***

**Source:** “Kithaye Tashkhise Corona Sakhte Vezahrates Defa’ Che Vizhegihayeh Darad? (What are the Features of the Ministry of Defense’s Coronavirus Diagnosis Kits?),” *Khabaronline.ir*, 30 March 2020. <https://khabaronline.ir/news/1370785>

*What are the Features of the Ministry of Defense’s Coronavirus Test Kits?*

*A ceremony unveiling the mass-production of COVID-19 detection kits was held at the General Staff of the Armed Forces with Brigadier General Farhad Amiri, head of the Ministry of Defense’s Institute of Education and Research, and General Azizi Delshad, representative to the General Staff of the Armed Forces in attendance.*

*After extending holiday greetings for Eid, Amiri announced, “We are proud to present one of the most important defense achievements made by the scientists and experts of the Ministry of Defense, along with the support of Iran’s Armed Forces.”*

*General Azizi Delshad, head of the Industrial Research Department for the General Staff of the Armed Forces also said during the ceremony, “This kit can test for the virus with superior precision within 3 hours and can operate on all genomes in the world...Today, it is ready to be mass produced and provided to medical centers... “There is nothing else in the world similar to this kit that can also be exported.”*



## Continued: Iran Announces Mass Production of COVID-19 Test Kits

**Source:** “Iranian Coronavirus Diagnostic Test Kits Ready to Hit Global Market,” *Tasnim News Agency*, 25 March 2020. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2020/03/25/2230472/iranian-coronavirus-diagnostic-test-kits-ready-to-hit-global-market>

*Vahid Younesi, the business development manager at Pishtaz Teb Zaman Diagnostics, said the research and development team at his company began its work on the production of indigenous laboratory test kits for the new coronavirus, after the first cases were confirmed in Iran last month.*

*The Iranian coronavirus test kit “is exactly on par with the foreign-made ones as regards precision, functionality and time of diagnosis ... It will take two hours for test results to come out,” he said.*

*Younesi went on to say that his company will start exporting the Iranian coronavirus test kits once domestic needs are met, emphasizing that some 20 countries have placed orders to purchase the kits.*

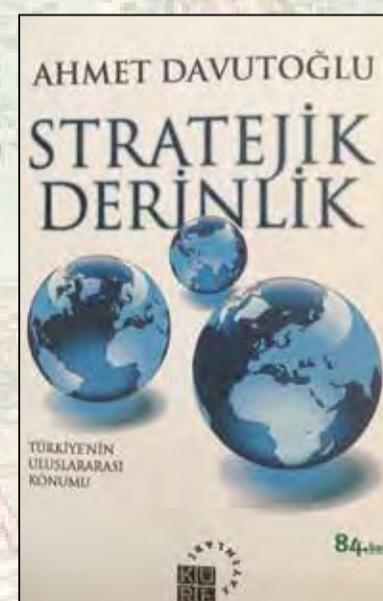
**Source:** “Suicide by Methanol Alcohol in Iran Over Coronavirus Fears!,” *Sputnik News*, 28 March 2020. <https://ir.sputniknews.com/iran/202003286153451-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%DA%A9%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-/>

*There is only one problem in other countries, the coronavirus epidemic, but now we are simultaneously fighting on two fronts: Coronavirus and Methanol Poisoning.*

## Book Review: A Look Back and Forward at Turkey’s “Strategic Depth” Foreign Policy Doctrine

Karen Kaya  
February 2020

“Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)” is a Turkish book published in 2001. This was a time when international relations theorists were describing new frameworks of world order and security modalities following the end of the Cold War and bi-polar world. Works such as Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” and Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” were icons of this intellectual period. It was in this context of a changing international system that Turkish International Relations Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu (who later served as Foreign Minister between 2009-2014 and Prime Minister between 2014-2016) attempted to define Turkey’s position in his book “Strategic Depth.” From around 2002 to 2012, the foreign policy that Davutoğlu outlined in his book was considered the doctrine and roadmap for Turkish foreign policy.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/309386>



## Iran: Khamenei on Power and Patience

**OE Watch Commentary:** Each year, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other top Iranian officials mark several anniversaries and holidays with major speeches: The anniversary of the Islamic Republic, Qods (Jerusalem) Day on the last Friday of the Islamic month of Ramadan, the anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the US Embassy, and Nowruz (Persian New Year).

Khamenei's Nowruz speech this year, excerpted here, focused largely on demonizing and chastising the United States. He noted, "Today, our enemy and the enemy of the Islamic Republic is the United States... American officials are liars, treacherous, shameless, greedy and charlatans." He continued to argue that it is the duty of the Iranian nation to confront the United States. Khamenei then discussed patience as a reason why the Islamic Republic remained strong and was destined for victory. Part of Khamenei's concept of patience was strategic—Iran can outlast its enemies—but



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivering his traditional Persian New Year address.

Source: Khamenei.ir, <http://english.khamenei.ir/d/2020/03/22/3/22071.jpg>

part is also steadfast embrace of ideology. Those who remain true to the Islamic Republic's principles are destined for victory; whole those within the system—the so-called reformists—who seek compromise with the West are impatient and inevitably fail.

Khamenei's speech also touched upon demography—an increasingly prevalent theme (see: "Khamenei Speaks on Demography," *OE Watch*, December 2013)—as the Iranian leadership begins to worry about the effect of declining fertility on Iran's future power. Khamenei bluntly stated that the birth rate is too low and that, if it remains so, Iranian power will decline.

He then addressed how another element of future Iranian power must be domination of cyberspace. Like demography, this is a repeating interest for Khamenei who, in 2012, created the Supreme Leader's Cyberspace Council to help set policy and coordinate among Iran's numerous cyber-specific organizations.

He then concluded by addressing the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on Iran. While he raised the conspiracy that COVID-19 is an American invention, he also said he did not know the truth. This is sufficient to signal to the Iranian media that they can continue to "investigate" the links between COVID-19 and the US government in order to keep the conspiracy theory alive while eschewing regime responsibility for having done so. Khamenei defended the National Anti-Corona Headquarters' decision to close shrines and mosques and said that, simply put, the Islamic Republic "had no other choice." Here, he rebuked those who continued to defy social distancing restrictions in order to visit shrines and, in some cases, lick the interior tombs. That said, he argued that the Islamic Republic's religiosity would be its strength as it gives Iranians a higher morale caliber than those in the West who are too eager to betray for selfish immoral purposes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

*“We should increase our power as much as we can.”*



## Continued: Iran: Khamenei on Power and Patience

**Source:** “Sokhanrani Nowruz Rahbar-e Enghalab Khatib beh Mellat-e Iran (The Nowruz Address by the Leader of the Revolution to the Nation of Iran),” *Khamenei.ir*, 22 March 2020. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=45227>

### *Khamenei’s Nowruz Speech*

“Patience” does not mean sitting idle and waiting to see how events pan out, rather patience means resisting, showing steadfastness and refusing to change one’s calculations as a result of the enemy’s deceptions. Patience means pursuing the goals that we have set for ourselves....

The people have been completely patient. The past 40 years have proved this in a tangible manner. Some of our so-called intellectuals have unfortunately shown impatience and some of them went as far as to cooperate and to speak in harmony with the enemy because of their impatience. Of course, only some of them were like this.

The opposite point to such individuals is the youth who are thankfully very large in number, and who will continue to grow in number on a daily basis, God willing. They are active in the arena of culture, science, technology, politics and international understanding – in other words, they correctly understand international issues. Such youth are in contrast with those individuals and as I said, they are thankfully increasing every day. So, showing patience means not giving up, not becoming weak and not having doubts, and stopping the enemy with courage and wisdom and subjugating him....

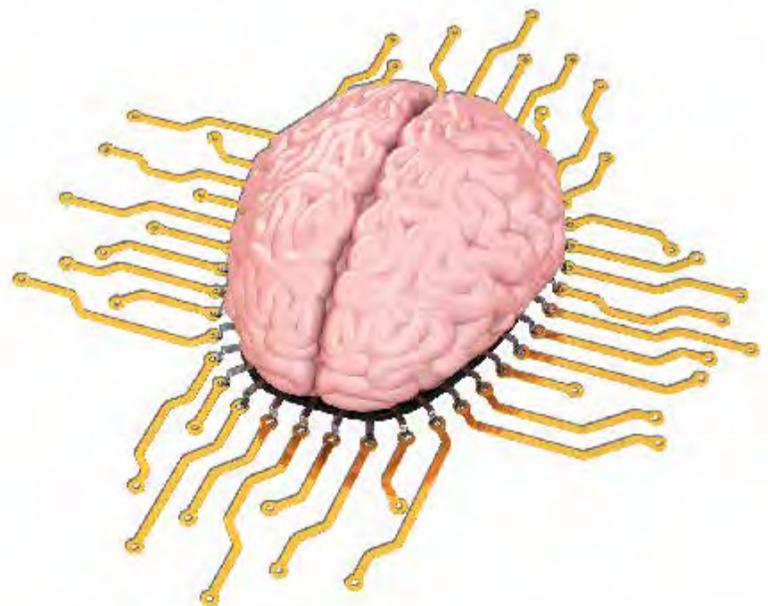
I have said in my recent speeches that the country should become strong. Strengthening the country is one of our goals. This is one of the main guidelines of bethat [commencement of Muhammad’s prophethood]. This concept has been taken from bethat and from the Holy Quran. The Quran says, “Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war.” [Qur., 8:60]. It means that we should increase our power as much as we can....

Preserving the young population of the country is one of the means of power. That is the reason why I stress the issue of increasing the birth-rate so much. In the present time, our country is a young country. If the birth-rate is not at a sufficient level – which is the case in the present time – then in a few years’ time, the young population of the country will decrease. Then, a country that has few youths will make little progress. So, this is one of the means of preserving the young population of society. Another means of power is cyberspace, which is vital today. Today, cyberspace dominates the lives of individuals throughout the world. There are some people who do everything they need to do through cyberspace. Power in this area is vital.

## THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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## Iran Unveils Ghadir Submarine Upgrades

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Iranian military regularly trumpets the supposed successes of its indigenous military industries, and claims through state media that its domestically-produced military platforms achieve the same technological prowess as Western-produced products purchased by Arab rivals across the Persian Gulf.

In the excerpted article from the official *Islamic Republic News Agency*, Abbas Fazelnia, the head of Iran's naval factories, bragged that overhaul of the navy's Ghadir-class submarine enabled Iran to operate in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman with stealth and with "high capability in diving." This likely is an exaggeration, at least for Persian Gulf operation, given that the Gulf's maximum depth is less than 300 feet. Likewise, there is no indication that the Iranian military has mastered the technology used by the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force to maximize acoustic properties in order to elude passive sonar.



The refitted Ghadir submarine in Bandar Abbas, 8 April 2020.

Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <https://img9.irna.ir/d/r2/2020/04/08/4/157064527.jpg>

Still, any upgrade—especially should it incorporate Chinese, Korean, or Russian technology—could increase the Iranian submarine fleet's nuisance factor within Fifth Fleet operational environment. Fazelnia told the Iranian media that the Ghadir class submarine could fire torpedoes from two tubes, release minesweepers, launch missiles, and transport commandoes. Given recent Iranian attacks on international shipping in the Sea of Oman and Emirati waters, any upgraded capability for stealthily inserting commandoes should be of concern. That the Iranian navy seeks this capability also suggests that the Islamic Republic will not cease its efforts to support insurgencies across the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“The strength of the Ghadir class is its small size, which cannot be tracked or detected.”***

**Source:** “Zirdaryaye Ghadir Ghabul Kesef va Rangiri Nist (The Ghadir Submarine cannot be Detected or Intercepted),” *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 8 April 2020. <https://www.irna.ir/news/83743884>

### ***The Ghadir Submarine cannot be Detected or Intercepted***

According to the public relation's office of the Navy, Rear Admiral Abbas Fazelnia, with reference to the addition of the overhauled Ghadir-class submarine to the navy's patrol group, said, “Worldwide, there are three classes of light, semi-heavy and heavy submarines, and the Ghadir is in the light class.” He added, “For the past several years, we have been producing the Ghadir-class submarine, and we are among the countries that are able to build all submarine classes.” The Commander of Naval Factories said that building a submarine is one of the most advanced sciences in the world and on the cutting edge of technology, and he said, “If a country can build a submarine, it means it has access to all the sophisticated technology. Admrial Fazilnia clarified, “At the direction of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, we have taken good measures to improve the combat capability, especially in the area of submarines...” He said, “Today, we are witnesses the addition of the Ghadir-class submarine whose systems are indigenous and are built in the naval factories belonging to the Ministry of Defense.” He continued, “The strength of the Ghadir class is its small size, which cannot be tracked or detected. On the contrary, it can pose a great threat to the enemy by carrying smart torpedoes. It has a higher ability to destroy the enemy.”



## Al-Shabaab's Infighting Over Funds



*"Usually al-Shabaab is fighting with AMISOM soldiers, such as the one pictured here, but lately its leaders have been fighting among themselves over funds"*

Source: AMISOM/Wikimedia/Flickr, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Advance\\_contingent\\_of\\_AMISOM\\_troops\\_deployed\\_in\\_Baidoa\\_09\\_\(7213740332\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Advance_contingent_of_AMISOM_troops_deployed_in_Baidoa_09_(7213740332).jpg).

**OE Watch Commentary:** Al-Shabaab's top leaders are fighting, only this time instead of the battle being with government soldiers or AMISOM troops, it is with each other, and it is over money. As the accompanying excerpted article from the Kenyan news site *The Nation* reports, in February of this year the terrorist group's leader Ahmed Diriye, aka Abu Ubeyda, tried to expel Mahad Karate, who is head of finance and intelligence operations, and Bashir Qorgab, then head of external operations. It appears that Karate and Qorgab survived the attempted purge through support of their respective clans, though shortly afterwards Qorgab and his wife were killed by a drone attack.

Much of the money Diriye and Karate are fighting over is raised from forced taxation of farmers, herders, and businessmen both in Mogadishu and al-Shabaab controlled areas. Diriye accuses Karate of hoarding it, while Karate argues that his clan, the Hawiye, constitute the majority of those who contribute the funds and therefore should receive a greater share.

Diriye's strategy of trying to wrestle control from Karate has not worked well due to the Hawiye loyalty to Karate. Now, to try to counter Karate, Diriye has reached out to several small clans in the hope of forming, as the article describes, "a conglomeration against the Hawiyes," though no successes with this attempt were reported.

This fight for control of the funds is playing out against a backdrop of precise drone strikes periodically taking out key leaders, leading to accusations and counteraccusations of espionage that make attempts to forge alliances and resolve the issue even more difficult. Meanwhile, al-Shabaab fighters deployed to the Kenyan border find themselves without food due to the infighting between Diriye and Karate over the group's money. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***"Infighting among the top leadership of Somali-based militia Al-Shabaab over finances is threatening to split the group, an intelligence report seen by the Nation shows."***

**Source:** Allan Olingo, "Shabaab leaders split over funds control," *The Nation (Kenya)*, 27 March 2020. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Shabaab-leaders-split-over-funds-control/1056-5505532-9a3qfh/index.html>

*Infighting among the top leadership of Somali-based militia Al-Shabaab over finances is threatening to split the group, an intelligence report seen by the Nation shows.*

*Last week soldiers raided an Al-Shabaab hideout in Holawajir, on the border with Lamu County, and shot dead 12 militants, among them a local commander who had been providing intelligence and logistical support to terrorists hiding in the forest.*

*To deflect attention, Al-Shabaab has deployed fighters along the Kenyan border, albeit without food due to the financial wrangles...As a result, militants deployed along the border have been looting shops. On March 14, on the border of Somalia and Garissa County, Al-Shabaab militants vandalised two shops, stealing food.*



## Arms Spending in East Africa

**OE Watch Commentary:** Based on the recently released SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, spending on weapons last year by African countries varied widely. With African nations frequently criticized for overspending on military equipment at the expense of money for development, it is a topic of interest to several African news sites. That includes *The East African*, which examined arms spending by five East African countries, and as the excerpted accompanying article reports, with \$71 million in arms purchases Ethiopia led the pack. A significant portion of that money was used to purchase 100 57E6 SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) from Russia that will be used with its Pantsyr-S1 platforms.

At \$32 million, Kenya was second in the amount it spent on arms, much of which went to upgrading its air power. The country made a range of purchases, as well as receiving several aircraft from Italy and Poland that it had ordered in earlier years. In spending so much, the country jumped from 95th in the world in 2018 with regards to arms expenditures all the way up to 62nd in 2019. Traditionally its arms suppliers have been Serbia, Russia, China, and Israel, but last year Italy and the US made inroads.

While Ethiopia and Kenya bumped up their military spending last year, Uganda decreased its outlay from 2018, when it spent \$9 million on arms, to only \$1 million last year. As for the other two countries profiled in the article, Rwanda and Tanzania, they did not spend on arms at all in 2019.

Though there are multiple countries that export arms to Africa, Russia is by far the largest, accounting for 49% of arms exports to the continent, significantly dwarfing all others. Meanwhile, as numerous factors, especially economic and political, come into play with regards to arms purchases over a year, how the unusual events of 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, influence the quantity as well as source of African imports won't be known until the data is crunched and released next March. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*"To beef up its air defense system, Ethiopia has purchased 100 57E6 SAMs from Russia for use with its Pantsyr-S1s, an example of which is pictured here,"*

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS\\_Airshow\\_2013\\_\(Ramenskoye\\_Airport,\\_Russia\)\\_\(521-05\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS_Airshow_2013_(Ramenskoye_Airport,_Russia)_(521-05).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

***“Eastern African countries spent \$104 million on arms last year as Ethiopia and Kenya raced to modernize their defense systems, even as Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda reduced their military spending in the same period.”***

**Source:** Allan Olingo, “Ethiopia, Kenya raise military spend as East Africa arms budget hits \$104 million,” *The East African*, 4 April 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/East-African-countries-splurge-usd-104m-on-new-arms/4552908-5513938-wofs23/index.html>

*Eastern African countries spent \$104 million on arms last year as Ethiopia and Kenya raced to modernize their defense systems, even as Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda reduced their military spending in the same period.*

*The Sipri arms transfer data shows that Russia accounted for 49 per cent of arms exports to Africa, followed by the US at 14 per cent and China at 13 per cent.*

*The data also showed that Russia accounted for 36 per cent of arms imports by African States, China 19 per cent and France 7.6 per cent. The five largest arms importers in sub-Saharan Africa were Angola, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal and Zambia.*

*African countries have over the years been criticized for perceived over-spending on weapons at the expense of their development budgets.*



## South Sudan's Obstacles to Peace

**OE Watch Commentary:** South Sudan's government of unity lacks a long term strategy for peace and was only formed to ease external sanctions. Those are the claims made in the accompanying excerpted article from the South African website *The Conversation*. The lack of optimism that this time the politicians have the correct formula is based not only on history – since civil war broke out in 2013 the country has had numerous past peace agreements fail – but also several factors related to the present peace agreement.

One of the biggest obstacles to peace has been the inability to come to a lasting agreement as to how the oil present in part of the country should be shared among the different parties. However, President Salva Kiir having agreed to revert to pre-war state boundaries might at least partially solve this problem, though the battle over control of this valuable resource has been long and some are skeptical that it will end.

Another criticism of the present agreement, which has been dubbed “the revitalized agreement” because it essentially recycles some parts of the failed August 2015 agreement, is that much of it caters to the country's elites and does not go far enough in addressing long-term problems. Additionally, the agreement lacks sufficient accountability mechanisms, does not reform the government, and does not adequately provide for the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups. Essentially the agreement's main focus is on power sharing with insufficient attention paid to many of the underlying causes, such as government corruption and ethnic divisions, which fuel the country's conflict.

To be sure there has been some progress. Last year the different sides aligned with President Kiir and the leader of his main opposition, Riek Machar, were supposed to form a new unity government. Twice they were forced to delay it, but finally in February 2020 the unity government was formed. However, full unity still has not come to the armed forces. The plan was to integrate the rebels and government forces into one national force, but as the article states, that has been “a difficult task considering all sides had spent years killing each other.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*“Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan is also Commander-in-Chief of South Sudan's army which is struggling to integrate former opposition forces into its ranks.”*

Source: Stein Ove Korneliusen/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salva\\_Kiir-3,\\_by\\_Stein\\_Ove\\_Korneliusen.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salva_Kiir-3,_by_Stein_Ove_Korneliusen.jpg), CC BY 2.0

“a difficult task considering all sides had spent years killing each other.”

***“Also, rebels and government forces were to be integrated into a national army: a difficult task considering all sides had spent years killing each other.”***

**Source:** Andrew Edward Yaw Tchie, “South Sudan: root causes of ongoing conflict remain untouched,” *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 22 March 2020. <https://theconversation.com/south-sudan-root-causes-of-ongoing-conflict-remain-untouched-133542>

*One sign of trouble with the agreement is that the security forces are not yet united. Another is that it's not based on ideas about how to govern or resolve the existing dispute. In essence, the agreement is all about individual elites taking up positions to get access to resources and power.*

*The two sides were supposed to form an interim government of national unity last year, but were twice forced to delay it. This was mostly due to the issue of the first vice-president's personal security. Also, rebels and government forces were to be integrated into a national army: a difficult task considering all sides had spent years killing each other.*

*Citizens have had scant experience of good governance, constitutionalism, the rule of law, human rights and gender equity. Ethnic divisions endure and social norms and values have been eroded. People have not had time to reconcile. And their economic opportunities still rely heavily on oil.*

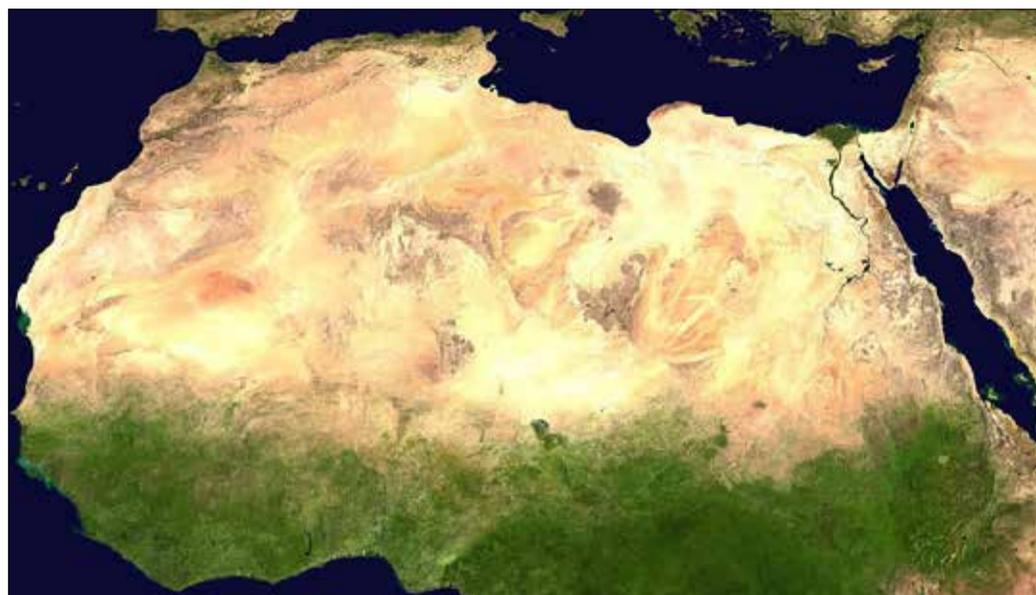
*Over the past few years, all sides of the conflict recruited fighters on a large scale and there is no comprehensive policy for peaceful disarmament. Since the 1970s, when violence began, troops have never been fully reintegrated into civilian life.*



# Terrorism and Conflict Interfere with Great Green Wall Progress

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Great Green Wall project, an initiative to plant billions of trees across a swath 15 kilometers wide and 7,775 kilometers long, is falling far behind its initial schedule. As the accompanying excerpted article from *Deutsche Welle* notes, besides corruption and a lack of funding, terrorism and insecurity are also hindering the Wall's progress. These factors are interrelated, as foreign countries are unwilling to invest funds in insecure environments.

With global warming as well as other factors leading to the Sahara encroaching on the greener lands to its south, two of the major benefits the Wall is postulated to provide are a decrease in both desertification and the loss of fertile soil. There are numerous add-on benefits to these. For example, with less desertification and soil loss, additional land becomes available for farming. Already in Nigeria where five million hectares of land has been restored, 20,000 green jobs have been created.



The Great Green Wall project, which is attempting to prevent the expansion of the Sahara, the sand colored portion of this satellite picture, by planting millions of trees is struggling in part because of interference from terrorism and conflict.

Source: NASA/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahara\\_satellite\\_hires.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahara_satellite_hires.jpg), Public DomainKorneliusen.jpg, CC BY 2.0

The terrorism and insecurity hindering the Great Green Wall project is spread across several countries. In places such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the aid organizations tasked with implementing the project, along with the indigenous populations who will be doing much of the work, are paralyzed by the local conditions. As a result an adverse cycle is created. With the people unable to safely plant trees that help mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration, increased global warming occurs, causing less land to be available for farming, resulting in increased unemployment and some people turning to crime or terrorism, which makes the area unsafe for tree planting, and thus the cycle repeats itself.

To break that cycle, as the article notes, will take several initiatives, including the elimination of terrorism. However, with several of the nations along the path of the Great Green Wall being fragile states that suffer from government corruption and poor infrastructure, combating terrorism to allow the Wall to proceed forward is proving quite difficult. Potential international donors after looking at the operational environment are sometimes dissuaded from making what they perceive to be a risky investment, while investing in only nations which are free of terrorism and conflict will have the undesired effect of creating an even wider gulf between the stable and unstable countries. Thus, work will continue on the Wall, with some nations making more progress than others, but overall it will remain at a level significantly less than originally envisioned. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“This progress cannot be said for many countries in Central Africa... “Terrorism is very strong here and paralyzes human efforts and aid organizations. Corruption also plays a role with money rather going into politicians’ pockets than into project development.””***

**Source:** Silja Fröhlich, “Africa: What Happened to Africa’s Ambitious Green Belt Project?” *AllAfrica.com/Deutsche Welle*, 6 April 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-happened-to-africas-ambitious-green-belt-project/a-53004690>

*The Great Green Wall is more than just an environmental project that is intended to restore 100 million hectares of fertile lands in the Sahel, and in the process cut 250 million tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It aims to create 10 million so-called green jobs.*

*This progress cannot be said for many countries in Central Africa, according to Fell. “Terrorism is very strong here and paralyzes human efforts and aid organizations. Corruption also plays a role with money rather going into politicians’ pockets than into project development.”*

*But lack of funding is a particularly big problem for conflict-torn countries such as Burkina Faso. The cross-border Great Green Wall Initiative is currently not investing in the country due to its high insecurity.*

*Janani Vivekananda thinks this is a mistake: “The project would be a good way to create peace. But if investments are only made in stable states, then it will harm the weakest who, without investments, are exposed to further conflicts and climate change. Ultimately, this increases the inequality between stable and fragile states.”*



## Obstacles to African Union Involvement in Libya

**OE Watch Commentary:** Following a meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council earlier this year, the AU is insisting in having a larger role in the Libya's peace process, but as the accompanying excerpted article from the *South African Institute for Security Studies* notes, there are several challenges to such AU involvement. To understand these obstacles, it is first necessary to look at the Libyan conflict, which the article describes as a quagmire involving a multitude of local and international actors who sometimes have diametrically opposed interests, leading to protracted instability. On the Libyan domestic side there are two well known players, the UN-recognized government of national accord (GNA) and Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). There are also two additional domestic entities that get far less media attention: militias and Islamists. As for non-African nations involved in Libya, the divide is often over who supports the GNA or LNA, though some offer varying support to both.

Into this fray the AU is trying to exert itself, however, as previously noted, despite Libya being a member of the organization, it is encountering numerous obstacles attempting to do so. The first is that the AU failed to become strongly involved with the already ongoing UN peace process. Thus, the AU is finding it difficult to convince the belligerents involved in the conflict to turn to it for solutions.

The second challenge facing the AU is the issue of neutrality. While the AU itself may appear to be neutral, several of the AU member nations are looked at by some Libyans as having sympathies to the loyalists of former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Along these same lines, there are reports that several African nations have made deals with different Libyan factions.

The AU's third challenge is a lack of agreement among the African nations as to how to approach the Libyan conflict. One example of this is their failure to decide whether or not to deploy a joint AU-UN peace support mission to the country. Related to this lack of agreement as to the proper approach is the AU's final challenge, the significant number of AU committees and other entities tasked with trying to resolve the Libyan crisis. This inability to coordinate and speak with a single voice is hindering their progress with Libya, which also has multiple entities that so far are unable to unite. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*The African Union, its headquarters pictured here, is encountering obstacles as it tries to engage in the Libyan peace process.*

Source: NASA/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahara\\_satellite\\_hires.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahara_satellite_hires.jpg), Public Domain/Korneliusen.jpg, CC BY 2.0 Andrew Moore/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African\\_Union\\_Conference\\_Centre\\_\(18167970401\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_Union_Conference_Centre_(18167970401).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

***“The AU has been asserting, with increasing vigor, that it must be included in attempts at brokering peace in and bringing stability back to Libya, one of its member states.”***

**Source:** “Africa’s Place in resolving Libya’s Quagmire,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 19 February 2020. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/africas-place-in-resolving-libyas-quagmire>

*The AU has been asserting, with increasing vigor, that it must be included in attempts at brokering peace in and bringing stability back to Libya, one of its member states.*

*The AU is yet to convince Libyan belligerents to turn to the continent for a solution, especially with the strong presence of non-African actors in both the peace process and the hostilities in the country. Convincing Libyans to make space for a potential African or African-led process also requires bringing non-African actors to the same negotiation table*

*In the same vein, some high-level AU officials who are political appointees and are involved in the Libyan peace process are nationals of neighboring countries and thus may not be perceived to be neutral by some Libyan stakeholders. There are perceptions that they represent the interests of their capitals rather than those of the AU as a collective entity, irrespective of what their personal commitments may be to the peace process.*

*The latest summit has added another entity to this list by creating the contact group for Libya, without dissolving the larger High-Level Ad-hoc Committee. The difference in mandates between the two has not been clarified, nor how the contact group will be operationalized and whether the committee will continue to be the main interlocutor in the mediation process in the meantime.*



## Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, Neglecting the Neglected Tropical Diseases

**OE Watch Commentary:** With much of the world's attention focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, previously neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) risk becoming even more neglected. These NTDs, as the excerpted accompanying article from *African Arguments* points out, affect more than 1.5 billion people worldwide and each year kill approximately 170,000 of them. For those who survive, depending on the disease, there can be disfigurement, chronic pain, and other ailments that greatly reduce a person's quality of life.

Numerous diseases qualify as NTDs, but this article described just three: lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis (aka bilharzia) and trachoma. Briefly, lymphatic filariasis, a mosquito-borne disease caused by parasitic worms, can result in extensive swelling and tissue thickening of the limbs. Schistosomiasis is a water-borne disease caused by parasitic flatworms that may infect the urinary tract or intestines. Trachoma, the last disease mentioned, is a bacterial infection that can lead to blindness.

Of particular note is that many NTDs disproportionately affect females. Several factors account for this, including that women and girls are often the ones who collect water, thus exposing themselves to water-borne diseases such as schistosomiasis. Additionally, even if the female is not sick, it is usually a woman who assumes much of the burden as the primary caregiver in the family, with girls likely to drop out of school to fulfill that role.

There is still much to be done from a public health standpoint in Africa to combat the NTDs. However, while Africa has 40% of the global NTDs burden, a mere 0.6% of global health funding is dedicated to their elimination. The toll of these diseases, especially on women and girls is immense, and while this article does not mention it, others also point to the impact the NTDs have on African militaries, from a reduced pool of healthy recruits to the diversion of soldiers for necessary public health activities. Thus, while there is great fear that COVID-19 could lead to an untold number of deaths, Africa is already suffering from several other devastating diseases that will likely continue to plague the continent even if COVID-19 is eventually eliminated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Checking for trachoma, an eye infection that can lead to blindness and which is one of several neglected tropical diseases in Africa.

Source: USAID/Yonas Getachew/RTI International/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usaidafrika/49465078742/in/photolist-2in4szd-26tioR3-GT499v-26tioBq-25rpGej-JMxg7K-dLN7vF-dLN6vv-dLN67F-dLTCsq-dLN6Jv-dLTCSS-dLTCao-dLTCGLG-dLTBWS-dLN59F-dLN5JP-deLCrt-deLCgE-dLN5PT-dLN6Dk-dLN7hF-2in4szo-25apw1a-25apxTD-GT47cp-26tieG1-26tinbQ-2in3iZo-dLTD7C-dLTERd-dLTF2u-dLN79z-dLTDuG-dLTE93-GT4h48-dLN6ST-26tidcN-25aptQZ-25rpG6d-JpkizL-GT49pa-26wQob4-deLCxV-Lyg9Sw-MhNjWm-MmY1qo-MmX8mQ-LsP8Kk-LYfYK7>, Public Domain

***“Among the poor communities affected by Neglected Tropical Diseases, one group suffers disproportionately: women and girls.”***

**Source:** Ciku Kimeria, “These diseases that affect 1.5 billion people affect one group the most,” *African Arguments*, 23 March 2020. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/03/23/ntds-affect-1-5-billion-people-women-girls/>

*Among the poor communities affected by Neglected Tropical Diseases, one group suffers disproportionately: women and girls.*

*NTDs primarily affect the world's most impoverished communities. But within this, one group is even more likely to suffer disproportionately: women and girls.*

*While there have been positive changes in the fight against NTDs in the past decade, much more is required if the continent is to completely eliminate them. Thanks to the work of organizations – such as The Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN), a World Health Organization project founded in 2016; Speak Up Africa, an African policy and advocacy action tank that focuses on NTDs; and the No to NTDs movement – some progress is being made.*

*There have been successes recorded. In 2017, Togo eliminated lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem. In 2018, Ghana did the same with trachoma.*



## Mali Air Force Super Tucano Goes Down Over Sévare

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 7 April, a Malian A-29B Super Tucano crashed while in approach to Base Aérienne 102 near the town of Sévare in the Mopti region. A number of journalists reported the crash and there is even cell phone video of the plane plummeting to the ground making the rounds on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/DonKlericuzio/status/1247568375208800256>). Both pilots were killed in the crash.

Military officials were quick to acknowledge the incident. An official communiqué on 9 April, excerpted here, claimed that the two pilots had just returned from a combat mission in the Timbuktu area where they “repeatedly attacked and destroyed the enemy, saving their brothers under fire in Mondoro, Dialloubé, and Boulkessi.” Other reporting on the incident claim that the two pilots were on a routine training mission. An international aviation press outlet stated the aircraft was returning from an exercise, as part of an anti-terrorist operation against armed groups. If the sortie was an actual combat mission it would be significant for Mali and the government’s fight against jihadist forces in the Sahel because of the speed in which the Malian Air Force has gone from delivery, to training, to actual combat air operations.

Neighboring Burkina Faso was the first African nation to order the Super Tucano, receiving its first three aircraft in 2011. Yet Burkinabe pilots did not fly their first combat missions until 2018. It took seven years to get pilots ready and maintenance infrastructure in place. Only months ago the Burkino Faso armed forces acknowledged for the first time that Burkinabé crewed Tucanos conducted joint combat missions with French forces. French Mirage fighters acting as command and control platforms guided the much nimbler Tucanos onto enemy targets.

It took Burkino Faso 11 years to conduct its first combat sortie. Other African nations have adopted the Tucano. Mauritania received two of four A-29s in 2012 and is still getting up to speed. Officially there has been no indication they have been engaged in air combat operations. Senegal has three A-29s on order while Ghana has five on the way. Nigeria has twelve A-29s on order and is expected to get their A-29s operational quickly due to the experience of its air force.

Mali is the 14th nation to acquire the aircraft, ordering six in June 2015. The Super Tucano is heralded as a low cost system to conduct low intensity missions—perfect for the type of fight Mali and the rest of the nations of the Sahel are engaged in. Mali took delivery of the first four Tucanos in 2018. Since then the Mali Air Force, with multi-nation assistance, has been training its small pilot corps for the Super Tucanos in counter-insurgency and close air support role.

In addition to training operations with the Mali Air Force, official military statements and local press coverage of the incident noted that one pilot received training in Czech Republic while the other was trained in Brazil.

The loss of these pilots and the aircraft represented a twenty-five percent reduction of Mali’s Super Tucano combat capability. Days after President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta paid tribute to the fallen airmen, head of the Air Force Brigadier General Souleymane Doucouré also recognized the deceased pilots. He also demonstrated his belief in the Super Tucano by taking one for a short flight. The gesture was likely intended to reinforce Mali’s commitment to the aircraft itself and its intention of establishing an independent military aviation capability.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

***“Captain Moussa Maïga and second lieutenant Mamadou Boubacar Traoré have repeatedly attacked and destroyed the enemy saving their brothers under fire in Mondoro, Dialloubé, and Boulkessi, among others. A journey that has earned them the trust of their fellow service members.”***



## Continued: Mali Air Force Super Tucano Goes Down Over Sévare



*Air-to-air with Afghan Air Force Embraer A-29 Super Tucano.*

Source: US Air Force from USA Capt. Eydie Sakura via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air-to-air\\_with\\_Afghan\\_Air\\_Force\\_Embraer\\_A-29\\_Super\\_Tucano.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air-to-air_with_Afghan_Air_Force_Embraer_A-29_Super_Tucano.jpg), Public Domain

**Source:** “Deux héros finissent leur partition (Two Heroes Finish Their Mission),” *Armed Forces of Mali*, 9 April 2020 <http://pastel.fama.ml/deux-heros-deux-excellents-pilotent-finissent-leur-partition/>

*The Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, wanted to acknowledge the two pilots who died on Tuesday, April 7, 2020, following their crash in Sévare. Marked by the pain of the loss of these pilots and other fallen fighters of the week, he could not stay far. Deeply moved by these tragic events, he presented his wholehearted compassion to the Malian army and the bereaved families of these brave sons, on Thursday April 9, 2020 at Air Base 100 in Bamako.*

*Captain Moussa Maïga and Second Lieutenant Mamadou Boubacar Traoré, two volunteers for the homeland, were back from a commanded mission in the Timbuktu area. Led to perfection, they returned to Sévare where they met their fate. Their mission, to restore morale to ground troops and local population. They were congratulated by their superiors after each mission. These pilots were also responsible for government reprisals following the jihadist attack on the post at Dinangourou on February 6, 2020. Captain Moussa Maïga and second lieutenant Mamadou Boubacar Traoré have repeatedly attacked and destroyed the enemy saving their brothers under fire in Mondoro, Dialloubé, and Boulkessi, among others. A journey that has earned them the trust of their fellow service members.*

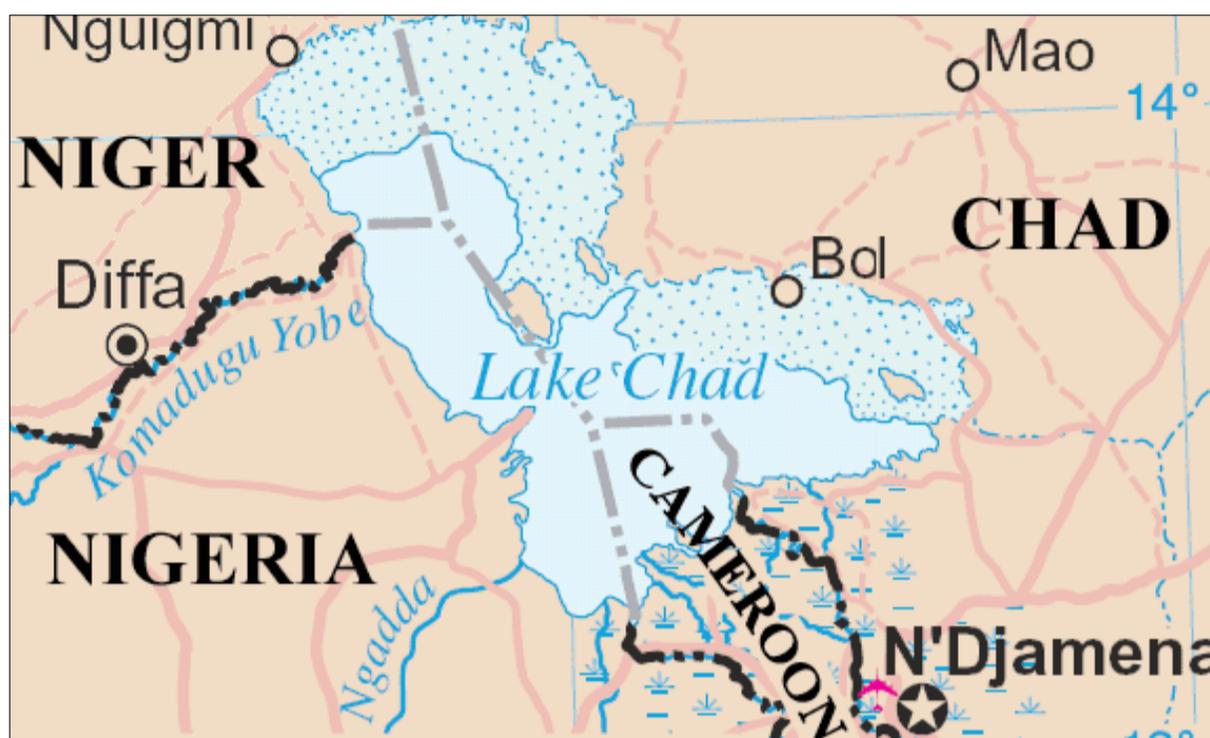


## Chad's President to Lead Military Operations against Boko Haram

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 23 March, a Boko Haram faction operating around Lake Chad carried out an unprecedentedly large-scale attack on a Chadian base, killing 92 soldiers. According to the excerpted article from a pro-government Chadian website, the Chadian president, Idriss Déby, responded by promising to personally lead military operations against Boko Haram. Déby, who came to power three decades ago in a military coup, traveled from Chad's capital N'Djamena to the base, to follow through on his promise.

The article notes that Déby also promised an overwhelming response and praised the heroism of the 92 fallen soldiers in the surprise attack, which left the military camp in ruins. According to the article, Déby surveyed the damage before meeting with military leaders in the Lake Chad area, who determined that any offensive against Boko Haram would require speedboats because Boko Haram's camps were based on small islands.

The image of Déby that emerges from the article is of a leader sacrificing regular presidential duties to carry out a revenge mission against Boko Haram. The article also includes several quotes from Déby about refusing to accept defeat and chasing Boko Haram down in the same way the group had chased down the Chadian soldiers. The article portrays the 67-year old leader as one who is not willing to back down from a fight. While this tone may be expected from a Chadian publication sympathetic to its government and leader, Déby's actions are unique in a regional context. Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon, for example, have also seen major Boko Haram attacks on their territories. However, rarely have their leaders marched to the frontlines, or taken part in planning operations against Boko Haram. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Lake Chad map.

Source: United Nations via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lakechad\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lakechad_map.png), CC BY SA 2.0

***“I refuse this defeat and the response must be overwhelming.”***

**Source:** “Déby décide de rester au Lac pour diriger des opérations militaires (Déby decides to stay at the Lake to lead military operations),” *Alwihdainfo.com*, 24 March 2020. [https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-Deby-decide-de-rester-au-Lac-pour-diriger-des-operations-militaires\\_a84604.html](https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-Deby-decide-de-rester-au-Lac-pour-diriger-des-operations-militaires_a84604.html)

*The President of the Republic Idriss Déby will stay in Lac province to personally lead military operations against Boko Haram. He “refuses to remain in his office in N'Djamena” after traveling... to Boma, Lac Province, where the army suffered a deadly attack yesterday from Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau faction. According to the Presidency, [he] has decided to settle in Baga Sola for a time to personally coordinate and direct operations. “I refuse this defeat and the response must be overwhelming,” said Idriss Déby. The President of the Republic took about 30 minutes to assess the extent of the damage before holding a war meeting with military leaders in the operational area. Among the military commands and instructions, Idriss Déby ordered that the army be equipped with speedboats. ... The first assessment is of 92 dead and 47 wounded on the side of the army, while Boko Haram managed to carry away its dozen dead fighters.*



## Mozambican Jihadists Escalate Violence



Quissanga District in Mozambique 2018.

Source: NordNordWest via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quissanga\\_District\\_in\\_Mozambique\\_2018.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quissanga_District_in_Mozambique_2018.svg), CC by 2.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** Northern Mozambique is emerging as the newest hotspot of insurgent activity in Africa. The excerpted Portuguese-language article in *Diario Mozambique* elaborates on the security crisis in the country's north, through an interview with Mozambican social anthropologist Paulo Granjo. Granjo argues that the violence is entering a new phase, as evidenced by the latest jihadist attack in Mocímboa da Praia on 23 March. He claims the attack demonstrates the jihadists have accumulated numerous weapons, and were reinforced from abroad, specifically by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to which the Mozambican jihadists are loyal.

The article also discusses the evolution of the jihadists from 2017 to present, pointing out significant changes. Whereas three years ago they were living on subsistence food and attacking isolated and defenseless positions, now they are able to openly confront police and military forces and control some territory. According to the article, for example, it was in Quissanga and Mocímboa da Praia, which are separated by around 100 kilometers, that the jihadists released photographs on social media of their territorial conquests with fighters holding the ISIS black flag. The article further notes they attempted to rob banks, cut the communication lines off between those two towns and the rest of the country, and attack police stations, but they were generally lenient towards civilians and encouraged them to attend mosques.

The anthropologist does not view these events as indicating that Mozambique is becoming a failed state. Nevertheless, he points out that the jihadists' tactics resemble those that the guerillas used successfully for centuries, suggesting that there will be no quick resolution to the conflict that has been growing in Mozambique since 2017. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“Guerrilla behavior is effective and that is precisely why it has been used for centuries.”***

**Source:** “Grupo Armado Que Ataca Cabo Delgado Recebeu Reforço De Meios E De Pessoal Em Moçambique (Armed Group Attacking Cabo Delgado Received Reinforcement of Methods and Personnel in Mozambique),” *diariomz.com*, 29 March 2020. <https://diariomz.com/grupo-armado-que-ataca-cabo-delgado-recebeu-reforco-de-meios-e-de-pessoal-em-mocambique/?fbclid=IwAR3mkTZqWHhK7O5ywnfTn5H0gQYIRYLuyN8ItMtT848cDoKn57iVdaMaVNQ>

*The researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences Paulo Granjo regards the attacks in northern Mozambique as entering a new phase involving reinforcing of the methods and personnel of this armed group. “With the attack on Mocímboa da Praia on Monday, we entered a new phase because everything indicates that, at this moment, in addition to having accumulated large amounts of weapons in attacks, there is some kind of reinforcement of means from abroad.” In an interview with Lusa about this week’s attacks in Mocímboa da Praia and Quissanga, the social anthropologist who has studied Mozambique for decades considered that “there is a complete change from what was happening” since 2017. Until last week, these armed men “were living on subsistence food, with attacks on isolated and defenseless populations, but this third phase strongly indicates that they obtained reinforcements of means and personnel no longer from Mozambique, but from abroad, and they are already in a position to demonstrate their military power to confront the police and armed forces and claim some control over the territory,” asserted the researcher.*

*The armed fighters, who shared photographs with the Islamic State flag, sent people either to mosques or to the beach “and there was a direct attack on the police barracks and an attempt to blow up the coffers of bank branches and cut off the optical fiber connections with the rest of the country”. Asked whether the lack of control by police forces indicates a ‘failed state,’ the investigator considered it not to be so, arguing that guerrilla behavior is effective and that is precisely why it has been used for centuries.*



## Key Boko Haram Leader Killed in Joint Operation on Lake Chad Islands



Nigerien Army patrol in Diffa 2016.

Source: Nicolas Pinault via Voice Of America, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerien\\_Army\\_patrol\\_in\\_Diffa\\_2016.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerien_Army_patrol_in_Diffa_2016.jpg) CC x 2.0

operations of the MNJTF, was “designed and planned by elements of the Nigerien and Nigerian armies.”

The article further notes that eliminating Ibrahim Fakoura was not the only recent counter-terrorism success against Boko Haram. Fifty Boko Haram fighters were also eliminated in another recent battle in Toumour, Niger. At the same time, the article clarifies that the security situation remains dire. It states that there are still 120,000 refugees from Nigeria in Diffa, Niger and that the crowdedness is so extensive that several dozen refugees were killed in a stampede while collecting food and stipends in February.

Lastly, the article notes that the operation was supported by a strategic partner. While it doesn't specify which country this is, the article notes that the United States and France have bases in Niger. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“Elements of the Nigerien armed forces deployed in Diffa region carried out an operation on Nigerien islands of Lake Chad from March 10 to 16, which eliminated Ibrahim Fakoura, one of the factional leaders of Boko Haram.”***

**Source:** “Le Niger annonce avoir tué Ibrahim Fakoura, ‘figure de proue’ de Boko Haram (Niger announces the killing of Ibrahim Fakoura, ‘figurehead’ of Boko Haram),” *Le Monde*, 20 March 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/03/20/le-niger-annonce-avoir-tue-ibrahim-fakoura-figure-de-proue-de-boko-haram\\_6033778\\_3212.html?utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Twitter#Echobox=1584694243](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/03/20/le-niger-annonce-avoir-tue-ibrahim-fakoura-figure-de-proue-de-boko-haram_6033778_3212.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1584694243)

*The Nigerien ministry of defense announced it has killed a “figurehead” of the jihadist group Boko Haram, Ibrahim Fakoura, during an operation in the islands of Lake Chad. “Elements of the Nigerien armed forces deployed in the Diffa region carried out an operation on Nigerien islands of Lake Chad from March 10 to 16, which eliminated Ibrahim Fakoura, one of the factional leaders of Boko Haram, and several of his companions,” according to a statement from the ministry of defense read on public television. The operation, which “was part of the operations of the Multinational Joint Force” (Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon), was “designed and planned by elements of the Nigerien and Nigerian armies and supported by a strategic partner.” The United States and France have bases in Niger.*

*Niamey authorities stated that they had “neutralized” 50 Boko Haram fighters after an Islamist attack on an army position in Toumour, also in the southeast. According to the UN, Diffa region is home to 120,000 Nigerian refugees and thousands of displaced people fleeing Boko Haram’s abuses. In mid-February, around 20 people died and several were injured in a stampede during the distribution of food and money to refugees and displaced persons in Diffa.*



## Venezuela Loses its Only Telecommunications Satellite

**OE Watch Commentary:** Venezuela's only telecommunications satellite, Venesat-1 (also known as Simón Bolívar) has been out of service since 13 March 2020, causing disruptions to internet services as well as radio and television broadcasts all over the country. In a brief statement on 25 March, the Ministry of Science and Technology announced that due to a failure, the Simón Bolívar satellite will no longer provide telecommunications services. Without further explanation, the Nicolás Maduro regime recognized that the 400 million dollar investment, built and launched in China in October 2008, was out of orbit with no possibility of recovery. The loss comes a full three years, seven months before the end of the satellite's expected service life of 15 years.

Acquired by the Chávez government after a cooperation agreement between Venezuela and China was signed in November 2005, Venesat-1 was one of three satellites owned by Venezuela and operated by Venezuela's Bolivarian Agency for Space Activities (ABAE), an agency of the Ministry of Science and Technology. Technicians and engineers charged with maintenance and monitoring of Venesat-1 were trained in China.

According to Luis Zambrano, a telecommunications engineer and former official of ABAE, the failure of the satellite could have been caused by internal damage, such as a short circuit, which would push false information into the data system. Alternatively, it may be due to human error; either due to an oversight, or because preventative measures were not taken.

Several US companies noticed Venesat-1's failure as it was happening. ExoAnalytic Solutions, based in California, which operates a network of space tracking and satellite tracking telescopes, detected a significant change in Venesat-1's orbit on 13 March. Ten days later, AGI, a Pennsylvania-based specialty company, confirmed that Venesat-1 had moved 30 degrees from its original orbital position, and would be out of Venezuela's line of sight if it deviated another 40 degrees, which would complicate any effort to restore control, unless Venezuela turned to ground stations in other countries. As none of Venezuela's allies (including China and Russia) were poised to offer assistance in such a task, Venesat-1 operators lost contact with the satellite while trying to move it to a graveyard orbit.

According to oppositionist publication, *Runrun.es*, a Venezuelan news, opinion, and analysis website founded by Venezuelan investigative journalist Nelson Bocaranda, Venezuela depended on Venesat-1 to provide internet and telephony services to underdeveloped regions of the country, which was heavily laden with Maduro regime propaganda. Due to the unexpected failure, the regime has had to request assistance from US company, Intelsat, to restore services. Nearly all television and radio services transmitted via Venesat-1 were transferred to the American satellite Intelsat-14, on 24 March. The articles speculate as to whether or not the assistance provided by Intelsat will fall subject to sanctions imposed on Venezuela by the Trump administration, or whether Washington will react negatively, as it has done with other companies aiding the Maduro regime.

In January 2019, the Maduro regime announced negotiations with China were underway for development of a replacement satellite which would be launched into orbit before the end of Venesat-1's expected lifespan. It remains to be seen whether those plans will be expedited. **End OE Watch Commentary (Lundell)**

***“The expected lifespan of Simón Bolívar was 15 years, so its sudden failure for reasons still unknown, has forced the Maduro regime to ask for help from a US provider...”***

**Source:** “Asesinado el satélite Simón Bolívar (Simón Bolívar Satellite Assassinated),” *Runrun.es*, 25 March, 2020.  
<https://runrun.es/noticias/402156/asesinado-el-satelite-simon-bolivar/>

*“That day the regime reported that “due to technical difficulties, we are unable to transmit open radio and television broadcasts to the interior of the country ... We have redoubled efforts to guarantee the restoration of services within the next few hours.” But the problem was not identified, nor was the type of signal specified, whether analog or digital. Instead, the regime took the unusual tactic of advising users to ‘continue enjoying different signals through cable television systems and other existing subscription services in the country, as well as through digital or web platforms.’ A TDA [open digital television] user in Venezuela would hardly sign up for a private provider, which does not even have replacement set-top boxes for their own subscribers, for only a few hours, although they might like to.”*

*In the hands of the imperial eagle. Venezuela does not have ground stations in other countries, nor does it have close friends, ideological or political, who can take on the urgency of such a task. Not even the Chinese or the Russians, neither as providers nor as financiers, are in a position to take action. In order not to prevent the total collapse of its propaganda platform upheld by Venesat 1, the [Maduro]regime was forced to turn to the oldest of the space industry corporations, the imperialist Intelsat. Based on figures from 2018, the United States dominates the global satellite market with a 47% revenue share.*

*Observations from AGI and ExoAnalytic suggest that VeneSat-1 operators lost contact with the satellite while trying to move it to a “suitable, non-elliptical graveyard orbit,” which is an unused location where damaged or unusable satellites go, a kind of morgue of space debris, so far away that it makes it impossible for the useless debris to interfere with the functionalities of other space objects.*



# Continued: Venezuela Loses its Only Telecommunications Satellite

**Source:** “Venezuela pierde su satélite de telecomunicaciones, «joya de la corona» chavista” (Venezuela loses its telecommunications satellite, Chavista “crown jewel”),” *Albertonews.com*, 06 April 2020. <https://albertonews.com/principales/venezuela-pierde-su-satelite-de-telecomunicaciones-joya-de-la-corona-chavista/>

*“When it was launched into orbit, the Chavista government guaranteed the satellite would benefit 12 million people, and it is also an open secret that [the satellite] served to oxygenate [the Chavista government’s] propaganda platform. The expected lifespan of Simón Bolívar was 15 years, so it’s sudden failure for reasons still unknown, has forced the Maduro regime to ask for help from a US provider...”*

**New satellite.** *In January last year, the Maduro government announced that it was negotiating the development of a new satellite to replace Venesat-1, which would be launched before the expiration of Simón Bolívar’s expected lifespan. Chavismo’s proposal to China, specifically to the China Great Wall Industry Corporation, the manufacturer of the three original Venezuelan satellites (Venesat-1, Vrss-1, and Vrss-2), “was to launch Venesat-2 (Guaicaipuro) a year earlier (2022) than Simón Bolívar stopped being operational, and they would coexist for a time, but I suppose that now they will have to move up the timeline,” said Zambrano.*

*Venezuela still has the other two satellites, also launched with China’s assistance. The second to be launched into orbit was the Francisco de Miranda observation satellite (Vrss-1), in September 2012, with the goal of promoting resource research, environmental protection, monitoring and disaster management, and urban planning. And the third is the remote sensing Antonio José de Sucre (Vrss-2), launched in October 2017 with the goal of reinforcing the work of Vrss-1.*

*Last October, Maduro celebrated the 11th anniversary of the satellite. “Eleven years ago our country’s first satellite was launched into space: the Simón Bolívar. It succeeded in consolidating and expanding telecommunications throughout the country. Venezuela has the capacity to achieve definitive technological independence. Let’s go for more!” But five months later they would be discarding the Venesat-1, almost in a discreet funeral act, leaving behind any possibility of technological “independence”, let alone, going for more.*

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## The Venezuelan Navy Loses a Coastguard Ship

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 30 March, a Portuguese-flagged cruise ship, the RCGS Resolute (apparently doing maintenance and without passengers) reported being shot at and struck by a coastguard ship belonging to the Bolivarian Navy (as the Navy of Venezuela is officially called), the Naiguatá. The Bolivarian Captain called for the Resolute to follow the Naiguatá to a Venezuelan port on island of Margarita, the Resolute having violated Venezuelan territory according to the Bolivarians. As evidenced by the third accompanying reference, the Bolivarians have their version of events, which, at the time of this writing, does not seem credible. More believable is the version coming from the cruise ship spokespersons: While the captain of the Resolute was seeking advice about what to do from company headquarters, the Bolivarian captain decided on ramming the Resolute with his Naiguatá. The Bolivarians later claimed that the Resolute was the aggressor. Too soon it was too late for the captain of the Resolute to reconsider his pugnacious impropriety. The valiant Naiguatá broke, took on water and later sank. Other units of the Bolivarian navy rescued the Naiguatá's crew. Latin America has not seen such a definitive use of ramming as a technique of engagement since the Battle of Iquique in 1879. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“While the RCGS Resolute suffered minor damage... the naval vessel suffered severe damage on contact with the bulbous reinforced icebreaker prow of the expedition cruiser of the RCGS Resolute ice breaker class, and began to take on water.”***

**Source:** Computista, RCGS Resolute de Portugal: La armada venezolana nos atropelló y disparó en aguas internacionales (RCGS Resolute of Portugal: The Venezuelan Navy ran into us and fired at us in international waters),” *Noticiero Digital*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.noticierodigital.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=150809#p1688649>

*“While the RCGS Resolute suffered minor damage...the naval vessel suffered severe damage on contact with the bulbous reinforced icebreaker prow of the expedition cruiser of the RCGS Resolute ice breaker class, and began to take on water.*

*Ready to help at any time, the RCGS Resolute stayed near the scene during more than an hour and contacted the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC\_ in Curacao. That is the international organization that supervises whatever maritime emergency. All efforts to contact those on board the naval vessel remained without response.”*

**Source:** Jhoan Meléndez, “Se hundió el guardacostas «Naiguatá» tras chocar contra barco portugués (The coastguard ship “Naiguatá” sank upon crashing against a Portuguese ship),” *Noticiero Digital*, 3 April 2020. <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/03/se-hundio-buque-naiguata-de-la-fanb-tras-chocar-contra-barco-portugues/>

*[Official Bolivarian Armed Forces spokesperson]: “the action of the ship ‘Resolute’ is considered cowardly and criminal, extremely so in that it didn’t help in the rescue of the crew, failing to meet international norms that regulate lifesaving assistance on the sea.”*

**Source:** Andrea Guidugli, “El Resolute se resistió al registro del BVLNaiguatá y no asistió al buque tras el impacto (The Resolute resisted inspection from the BVL [Littoral Vigilance Ship] Naiguatá and did not assist the ship after impact),” *Infodefensa.com*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2020/04/01/noticia-resolute-resistio-registro-naiguata-asistio-buque-impacto.html>

*“The information, to which this outlet had access, indicates that the Resolute, of Portuguese flagging, not only refused to stop, but also increased velocity. For this reason, the Venezuelan coastguard vessel was obliged to conduct an interdiction maneuver and position itself in front of the boat in order to impede its progress...”*



## Venezuela and Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying references are representative of reportage coming out of Venezuela to the effect that the challenge of the coronavirus is one among many sufferings, that it is compounded and perhaps eclipsed by other severe conditions, and that we are in any case unlikely to ever know the actual extent of the virus or its contribution to suffering and death in that country. That world oil prices are at rock-bottom levels is one of curious coincidences of the global moment. The effect of lower oil prices on Venezuela's rentier economy has long been predictable, but the shrinking of the society's capacity to deal with a crisis like a pandemic is on this occasion worsened by what might seem an incongruous factor – the disappearance of gasoline inside the oil rich country. The first accompanying reference is brief reportage from *El Impulso*, a legacy (1904) newspaper from Barquisimeto of an ostensibly anti-Maduro politician blaming the Bolivarian regime and calling for a government that could solve the country's problems. The second accompanying reference is a more substantive, 2500-word investigative report from *El Pitazo*, a much newer (2014) but evidently well-funded and more media-savvy outlet. *El Pitazo* places fuel demand at 135,000 barrels per day and domestic production at 55,000, or 4% of installed refining capacity. The reasons for the severe gasoline shortage are multiple, all stemming from government decisions or failures. Equipment deterioration of refineries has put most of them out of operation, the price of crude has made it less economically feasible to pump, the Cubans get a large measure, experienced oil workers have left the country, etc. The article does say that the US sanctions on the Venezuelan oil company PVDSA have also had a negative effect on supply. Interestingly, the total number of automobiles on the road in Venezuela has, according to the article, gone down from 4.1 million in 2012 to 3.4 million today. The third accompanying article is about a more valuable liquid, potable water, which is also in short supply. The fourth accompanying article is typical of common, recurring reports of widespread electrical blackouts. The fifth reference is about shortages of beds and equipment at hospitals, a condition that predates the pandemic. According to reportage, most Venezuelan hospitals do not have dependable electricity, or water supplies, or beds. Ventilator shortages in hospitals without electricity? PPE shortages in hospitals without soap and water? Something reduced what had been one of the most prosperous countries in South America to being perhaps the worst prepared to meet a pandemic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

### “...The country is without gasoline...”

**Source:** José Escalona, “Guanipa: 9 de cada 10 venezolanos hoy no pueden surtir de combustible (Guanipa [José Guanipa, a vice president of the national legislature]: 9 out of every 10 Venezuelans now cannot get gasoline),” *El Impulso*, 6 April 2020. <https://www.elimpulso.com/2020/04/06/guanipa-9-de-cada-10-venezolanos-hoy-no-pueden-surtir-de-combustible-6abr/>

*“It is because of them that the country is without gasoline and in the worst crisis in our history. It is urgent that we have a national emergency government that dislodges the power of Maduro and his accomplices and really set the foundation for addressing the problems of Venezuelans in the middle of this pandemic...”*

**Source:** Patzzy Salazar y Daniel Benítez, “Escasa producción e importación de gasolina dejan a Venezuela sin combustible (Low production and import of gasoline leaves Venezuela without fuel),” *El Pitazo*, 4 April 2020. <https://elpitazo.net/investigacion/escasa-produccion-e-importacion-de-gasolina-dejan-a-venezuela-sin-combustible/>

*“...In recent weeks, the clamor has made itself felt in several key sectors of the country, those that require gasoline to receive medical treatment, buy food, or distribute food to the large consumer centers...”*

*The demand for gasoline is at about 135,000 barrels of gasoline per day; nevertheless, the current production capacity of the country's refineries allows a production between 55,000 barrels daily, according to Rafael Quiroz, economist expert in petroleum matters...*

*According to an investigation published by El Pitazo...the average [of oil sent to Cuba] rose between 2006 and 2016, with the delivery of 95, 755 barrels daily...*

*The experts coincide in that the supply of gasoline is principally due to the fall in national petroleum production, the low installed refining capacity and the difficulty of importing chemical additives ...*

*The panorama for improvement in the distribution of fuel is not promising. According to the experts, the sanctions are not going to allow Venezuela to be able to acquire the components needed to produce sufficient gasoline...”*

**Source:** José Escalona, “75% de los hogares venezolanos no recibe agua de manera regular (75% of Venezuelan homes do not receive water on a regular basis),” *El Impulso*, 6 April 2020. <https://www.elimpulso.com/2020/04/06/75-de-los-hogares-venezolanos-no-recibe-agua-de-manera-regular-6mar/>

*“On his Twitter account, Marco Bozo revealed that 75% of Venezuelan homes do not receive the vita liquid on a regular basis. The legislator indicated that the popular zones of the country can wait as much as three weeks for even a drop of water...”*

**Source:** María Rodríguez, “Al menos 10 municipios del Zulia sin electricidad por explosión en subestación (At least 10 counties in Zulia without electricity due to explosion at substation),” *El Nacional*, 7 April 2020. <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/al-menos-10-municipios-del-zulia-sin-electricidad-por-explosion-en-subestacion/>

*“From its twitter account, Corpoelec [national electric power company] indicated that the west side of Zulia state was affected. It did not specify the substation where the explosion occurred [Cuatricenario, west of Maracaibo], which it indicated in a tweet three hours later...”*

*Newswoman María Rodríguez detailed that at least Maracaibo, San Francisco, La Cañada, Machiques, Jesús Enrique Lossada, Mara, Almirante Padilla, Guajira, Catatumbo y Rosario de Perijá were affected...”*

**Source:** Mariel Lozada, “Venezuela se enfrenta sin camas ni insumos suficientes al coronavirus (Venezuela confronts the coronavirus without beds nor supplies),” *Efecto Cocuyo*, 4 April 2020. <https://efectococuyo.com/salud/venezuela-se-enfrenta-sin-camas-ni-insumos-suficientes-al-coronavirus/>

*“According to the Global Health Security Index 2019, Venezuela is one of the three countries of the region with the fewest hospital beds: only 80 per 100,000...”*

*In the area of intensive care, 53% of the hospitals do not have protective gloves, and 55% do not have masks...”*



## Colombia and Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** The first accompanying reference is an interview of a Colombian economist and the second reference is a Colombian news media review of the strategy announced by the Colombian national government to confront the coronavirus pandemic. The Colombian economist interviewed in the first reference exemplifies one side of what seems to be an increasingly binomial set of perspectives. His is that the Colombian economy cannot be sacrificed by draconian social distancing measures (such as that promoted by the Mayor of Bogota), or the society will not have the wherewithal to do much of anything to confront this or other challenges. The political left in Colombia, of which the mayor of Bogota is a participant, favors extreme social control measures. As indicated by the second reference, the strategy, or at least the intended strategy of President Iván Duque's administration is to mobilize what can be mobilized from the central government but to try to get the economy reignited as soon as possible. Colombia has a more nationalized medical support system than does the United States, but still has some private hospitals. The second reference includes nine general lines of effort that the Colombian government is pursuing or planning to pursue. While it reads as similar to plans announced by other governments, emphasis logically shifts to particular local conditions, for instance, the especially difficult rural transportation challenge. A general quarantine was put in place on 23 March, and was to expire on 13 April, a "medida de aislamiento preventivo obligatorio" (obligatory preventative isolation measure) was put in place on 5 April, along with intentions to close the border with Venezuela. Although social distancing has been officially engaged and encouraged, announcements of the national strategy do not make it the central feature. The isolation measures have a number of exceptions, and border-closing inclinations, while not un-serious, are subject to the porosity of Colombia's long land border with its many smuggling routes. Colombia's society is in a far better position, however, for confronting a national emergency such as this pandemic than is that of neighboring Venezuela. Correspondingly, Colombia's economy is that much more vulnerable to recession, depending on the approach taken by political leaders. The pandemic, in other words, could become or be made into a leveler of overall geopolitical strength between two competing, regional ideological and political identities, the Bolivarians and the not-Bolivarians. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“...That woman [Bogota mayor Claudia López] hasn't a clue of what she is talking about...”***

**Source:** Miguel Ángel Camacho (interview of Kavier Garay), “Economía colombiana en tiempos de Covid-19: entre recesión y depresión (Colombian economy in the time of Covid-19: between recession and depression),” *Panam Post*, 23 April 2020. <https://es.panampost.com/miguel-camacho/2020/04/02/economia-colombiana-covid-19/>

*“Panam Post interviewed Javier Garay, Doctor in Political Science, professor and researcher at Externado University [Colombia], visiting scholar at the Anderson School of Management at UCLA and fellow of the Political Science Institute...*

*Duque understands clearly that the management he gives to the pandemic depends on economic and social stability in Colombia...*

*Q: Are can confirm that Colombia runs the risk of entering into a recession due to the pandemic we confront?*

*A: This won't just be a recession, but we could really be talking about a depression and not only in Colombia...*

*It is an absolutely inviable proposal...*

*I think we are at a point of making a cost-benefit calculation. Again, there is no evidence that there aren't alternatives to a quarantine from the technical, medical points of view, from the epidemiological point of view. If there are no alternatives, then we need to make a calculated decision, because we cannot turn off the economy. That woman [Bogota mayor Claudia López] hasn't a clue of what she is talking about.*

*What they can do is keep people from going to work, keep business from functioning. That they can do. They can't oblige the companies to continue to maintain the workers if they are not producing, because the companies disappear...”*

**Source:** Guiovanni Alarcón, “El gobierno presenta Plan de contingencia para covid-19 en Colombia (The administration presents contingency plan for COVID-19 in Colombia),” *Radio Santafé*, 4 April 2020. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2020/04/04/gobierno-presenta-plan-de-contingencia-para-covid-19-en-colombia/>

*“This plan...has nine principle components...*

*1. Management of population screening and diagnostics...*

*2. Amplification of medical infrastructure...*

*3. Territorial program to assure supply sufficiency (all government agencies to address health services)...*

*4. Additional basic benefits package (financial aid) to COVID-19 patients...*

*5. Assuring that EMS services are working in networks to coordinate territorial responses...*

*6. Transportation assistance (especially for rural areas)...*

*7. Telemedicine...*

*8. Reduction of non-essential surgeries and trauma...*

*9. Seek assistance from foreign embassies (especially for equipment such as ventilators)...”*



## What Happened to Daniel Ortega?

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the first reference, from an anti-Bolivarian outlet, Daniel Ortega, Marxist dictator and head of Bolivarian regime in Managua, Nicaragua, decided to take a more-or-less hands-off approach to the coronavirus pandemic, more in line with Mexico, Sweden or Brazil. Ortega's inaction was perhaps due in part to the regime's relative incapacity to do much of anything except order a public quarantine, a measure he also did not take. The article notes that access to clean water is a widespread problem. The second accompanying article raises a more interesting political question. Where has Ortega himself gone? Part of the hands-off approach might be due to his personal condition; at the time of this writing he hadn't been seen or heard from in a month. His wife, the vice president, has been covering for him. If he is incapacitated, the legislature is supposed to swear her in as president. The conspiracy theory animating the second accompanying article is of an attempt by the regime to use the pandemic to get more international aid, but just how hiding Ortega or stalling the transition works to that end is not made clear.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

*“Absences of the president...oblige the National Assembly to swear in the vice-president-in this case his wife...”*

**Source:** Emmanuel Alejandro Rondón, “El régimen de Ortega deja a los nicaragüenses a merced del Covid – 19 (The Ortega regime leaves Nicaraguans at the mercy of Covid-19),” *Panam Post*, 25 March 2020. <https://es.panampost.com/emmanuel-rondon/2020/03/25/regimen-de-ortega-condena-a-los-nicaraguenses-y-los-deja-a-merced-del-covid-19/>

*“Another enormous problem that confronts Nicaragua is the scarcity of water. In the Nicaraguan portal 100% Noticias [https://100noticias.com.ni/], a revealing report explains that ‘potable water only arrives at 70% of the urban population and 35% of the rural. A Good part of the citizenry can’t even wash their hands...”*

**Source:** Elizabeth Fuentes, “El plan macabro tras la desaparición de Daniel Ortega (the macabre plan behind the disappearance of Daniel Ortega),” *El Cooperante*, 6 April 2020. <https://elcooperante.com/el-plan-macabro-tras-la-desaparicion-de-daniel-ortega/>

*“It is already 25 days without the Nicaraguans having seen the face or heard the voice of Daniel Ortega. Yesterday, his wife Rosario Murillo sent a telephonic message to the citizens in which she sent greetings on the part of Ortega...”*

*According to the law, in Nicaragua it is provided that absences of the president, including his death, total incapacity or resignation, would oblige the National Assembly to swear in the vice-president-in this case his wife Rosario Murillo-and name another vice-president...”*



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## China's Image in LATAM Suffering?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Judging from a number of Spanish language analyses and opinion pieces, of which the accompanying references are exemplary, it appears that one of the victims of the coronavirus is China's public stature in the Spanish-speaking world. The first of the accompanying references makes the common argument that the pandemic is somehow being used to advantage by China in its quest for world domination. The second reference is measured, but addresses that same argument about Chinese advantage-taking by noting how demand for Chinese goods has suffered badly from the pandemic. The third reference is evidence that Chinese official reportage is not being readily accepted. Interestingly, and admitting that the outlets referenced herein are from a relatively conservative range within the LATAM media universe, the writers tend to specify the Chinese Communist Party as the villain, rather than just China. Furthermore, many writers like Jorge Ospina (fourth reference) have not just doubted the responsibility of the Chinese government in regard to the pandemic, they have noticed the congruence of the pronouncements of the World Health Organization with the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“The Communist Party put its totalitarian apparatus to the service of hiding information...”***

**Source:** Emmanuel Rincón, “Coronavirus: la estrategia de China para impulsar un nuevo orden mundial (Coronavirus: China's strategy to impel a new world order),” *PanamPost*, 6 April 2020. <https://es.panampost.com/emmanuel-rincon/2020/04/06/coronavirus-china-orden-mundial/>

*“China has used the coronavirus strategically like a Trojan Horse to push its agenda of economic and cultural domination and position itself in international organizations...”*

*Many theories have been brandished regarding the coronavirus, nevertheless, it is not possible to confirm in an empirical manner that this pandemic was created in some lab in Wuhan, but what we can affirm is that the Communist Party put its totalitarian apparatus to the service of hiding information about this pandemic...”*

**Source:** Beatriz de Majo, “¿Existe un plan chino de dominación? (Is there a Chinese plan of domination),” *El Nacional*, Caracas, 7 April 2020. <https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/existe-un-plan-chino-de-dominacion/>

*“China has used the coronavirus strategically like a Trojan Horse to push its agenda of economic and cultural domination and position itself in international organizations...”*

*Many theories have been brandished regarding the coronavirus, n “...Might it interest the gurus of the Communist Party that their counterparts in this interactive and globalized world – with 80% of the world population outside their borders – forming a concert of nations asphyxiated and impoverished with a [level of economic] demand completely decimated? It is enough to cite only one statistic: Chinese exportations during the first two months of this year went down 16%, and that happened before the rest of the planet felt, in turn, the battering of the pandemic crisis...” nevertheless, it is not possible to confirm in an empirical manner that this pandemic was created in some lab in Wuhan, but what we can affirm is that the Communist Party put its totalitarian apparatus to the service of hiding information about this pandemic...”*

**Source:** Jesús Centeno, “Nadie en Wuhan cree la cifra oficial muertos por Covid-19 (Nobody in Wuhan believes the official death figures for COVID-19),” *La Razon* and *EFE*, Madrid, 1 April 2020. <https://www.larazon.es/internacional/20200401/wkkbna3langebgitdkiru4v3ya.html>

*“A Chinese public outlet published that in just one day, 5000 burial urns were delivered to a single crematorium...”*

*The news portal assures that in one day they came to deliver 5,000 urns, double the deaths that the authorities admit, and that the total number of deaths could be greater than 40,000...*

*The news has caused an uproar in the social networks like Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter...”*

**Source:** Jorge Ospina Sardi, “La OMS es cómplice en la tragedia del coronavirus (The WHO is complicit in the coronavirus tragedy),” *La Nota*, Bogotá, 20 March 2020. <https://lanota.com/index.php/CONFIDENCIAS/la-oms-es-complice-en-la-tragedia-del-coronavirus.html>

*“...At two months from its appearance, the Communist Party of China informed the WHO that one of the most contagious diseases that has been known to man was not contagious. How is it possible that that organization welcomed without evidence such a falsehood?...”*

*...the WHO, which is allegedly supposed to be on top of and expert in these matters, became the pimp of these lying Chinese rulers...”*



## Ecuador Worst Hit by COVID-19?

**OE Watch Commentary:** It appears, judging from reportage, that Ecuador has suffered greatly from the pandemic. Why is not yet clear, although the elevated level of Chinese presence in the Ecuadoran economy has been the subject of past *OE Watch* reporting. The first accompanying reference is local Ecuadoran reporting from early in the spread of the epidemic. The second accompanying reference is from a widely read Peruvian sports reporting outlet which has taken to extensively report on the pandemic in Ecuador. That outlet has been keeping an ongoing timeline of events there. It appears to be relatively neutral politically. The third reference is a commentary regarding the situation in Ecuador from Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro. He has been attacking the President of Ecuador, Lenin Moreno, since last year when Moreno pulled Ecuador away from the Bolivarian bloc and failed to support Maduro as Juan Guaidó was being recognized as the legitimate interim president there. Maduro is showing world-class chutzpah on *YouTube* by hyping the coronavirus situation in Ecuador and offering to be larger than their difference to provide Venezuelan scientific, technical and medical assistance to the people of Ecuador. Whatever the relative truth about Ecuador's pandemic suffering, its government is clearly in the gunsights of Bolivarian propaganda. Maduro's play is enough to warn analysts to wait before judging the course of the virus or the performance of the government in Ecuador relative to other countries of the region, and to watch for other efforts, especially by the Bolivarian left, to use the crisis to oust the President Moreno. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“This day [5 April], the Ecuadoran territory ends with 3,646 case of COVID-19, as well as 180 total deaths.”***

**Source:** Victoria de Sousa, “Ecuador: Catorce muertos y casi 800 contagiados por Covid-19 (Ecuador: Fourteen deaths and almost 800 contracted by COVID-19),” *Venepress*, Caracas, 23 March 2020. <https://venepress.com/article/Catorce-muertos-y-casi-800-contagiados-por-Covid19-en-Ecuad1584906145139>

*“The numbers represent a doubling of deaths in relation to the reporting this Saturday. As well as 200 new positives. According to official data, 1347 persons are in the epidemiological containment, 872 cases negative and three have recovered...”*

**Source:** Editors, “Coronavirus en Ecuador, resumen del domingo 5 de abril: últimos reportes y cifras oficiales del COVID-19 (Coronavirus in Ecuador, summary of Sunday, 5 April: latest reports and official numbers of COVID-19),” *Depor*, 5 April 2020. <https://depor.com/off-side/coronavirus-ecuador-vivo-hoy-sabado-4-de-abril-casos-confirmados-covid-19-muertos-cifras-oficiales-y-minuto-a-minuto-en-guayaquil-quito-y-otras-ciudades-del-pais-tiempo-real-noticia/?ref=depr>

*“The country of the north [Ecuador] is one of those that has suffered the most from this pandemic, which has caused the collapse of mortuary systems*

*And sewn terror in the population. This day, the Ecuadoran territory ends with 3,646 case of COVID-19, as well as 180 total deaths. Coronavirus in Ecuador with all of the incidences and the minute by minute for this Sunday, 5 April. The country has turned into a veritable nightmare, especially in Guayaquil.”*

**Source:** Nicolas Maduro, “Nicolas Maduro presidente de Venezuela habla sobre Lenin Moreno y el Coronavirus (Nicolas Maduro president of Venezuela talks about Lenin Moreno),” *Youtube*, 5 April 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-WJSFVvInE>

*“...hundreds of corpses in the houses, decomposing, rotting in the home...*

*We offer them support – scientific, technical, medical to the people of Ecuador...*

*Lenin Moreno, we have tremendous differences, ideological, political, personal even, but we will put them aside...”*



## Gulf Cartel Distributes Food and Supplies to Residents of Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas

**OE Watch Commentary:** Residents of Tamaulipas took to social media to post photos of supplies allegedly provided by the Gulf Cartel. According to *Economía Hoy* and *La Hoguera*, two Mexican based news outlets, the supplies were distributed in the capitol city of Ciudad Victoria to assist low-income residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photos on social media show white boxes with “Gulf Cartel in support of Ciudad Victoria, Mr. 46, Vaquero” on the side. The report notes that each box contained pantry items like oil, rice, cornmeal, cans of tuna, crackers, cereal, sugar, coffee, soups, and condensed milk.

*MTP Noticias*, another Mexico news outlet, reports that some residents who received the boxes stated that members of the Gulf Cartel who delivered the supplies wanted the people to know that it was from the cartel and not the government. This is not the first time the Gulf Cartel supplied aid to residents. In 2013, the cartel provided aid after Hurricane Ingrid, and again in September 2017 following a massive earthquake in the state of Guerrero.

The COVID-19 pandemic is now seeing delivery of ‘public goods’ competition taking place both between the cartels and the state in Mexico and between the cartels themselves, with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel (indirectly linked via the ‘El Chapo’ 701 line) in addition to the Gulf Cartel now giving out aid. The providing of such aid represents a challenge to state authority as well as reinforcing the social banditry narratives promoted by the cartels, which seek to place them in a protector role vis-à-vis the local communities in which they operate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**



Supplies allegedly provided by the Gulf Cartel.

Source: *La Hoguera*, <https://lahoguera.mx/cartel-del-golfo-reparte-despensas-en-tamaulipas-por-covid-19/>. Reposting of Gulf Cartel social media.

***“According to sources, during delivery of more than 100 boxes, the criminal group told residents that the supplies are from the ‘Gulf Cartel’ so that they knew where the items came from, and not think that it came from the government or company.”***

**Source:** Fernando Eslava, “Cártel del Golfo reparte despensas en Tamaulipas por Covid-19 (Gulf Cartel distributes supplies in Tamaulipas for Covid-19),” *La Hoguera*, 6 April 2020. <https://lahoguera.mx/cartel-del-golfo-reparte-despensas-en-tamaulipas-por-covid-19/>

*During this health emergency due to Covid-19, Tamaulipas was allegedly supported by members of the Gulf Cartel, who delivered pantry items to low-income families in the capitol city of Ciudad Victoria.*

**Source:** “Cartel del Golfo reparte despensas a familias de escasos recursos ante la contingencia de Coronavirus (Gulf Cartel distributes pantry items to low-income families facing the coronavirus pandemic),” *MTP Noticias*, 6 April 2020. <https://mtpnoticias.com/viral/virales/cartel-del-golfo-reparte-despensas-a-familias-de-escasos-recursos-ante-la-contingencia-de-coronavirus/>

*Some of those who received the boxes said that the same gunmen who delivered the items made it a point to tell them that it was support from the cartel and not the government.*



## Mexico: Another Car Bomb Explosion Near National Guard in Celaya, Guanajuato

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 6 April, a car bomb exploded in Celaya, Guanajuato, around 2100. According to the accompanying Mexico-based news outlet *Heraldo Mexico*, a Honda CRV filled with explosives was abandoned near the La Laja community, towards Apasea el Grande. This is the second car bomb to be reported in the municipality this year, the previous one being on 8 March (see: “Car Bomb Explodes Outside National Guard Headquarters in Celaya, Guanajuato” *OE Watch*, April 2020). According to another news source *La Verdad*, witnesses reported seeing two subjects arriving at the site and abandoning the Honda CRV. The vehicle exploded minutes later, according to the eyewitnesses. A second explosion occurred as the flames reached the fuel tank.

*Heraldo Mexico* also reported on another incident that occurred earlier in the afternoon. Around 1400, there was a shootout in Jerécuaro between unidentified armed men and the National Guard. According to Mexico-based news *Noticieros en Linea*, the National Guard was attacked by a group of men in a white car with Guanajuato license plates. A total of five attackers were killed – four men and one woman.

This new car bombing—essentially a small IED detonation within a car boosted by a secondary fuel tank explosion—was within the vicinity of the National Guard Headquarters as was the previous one that took place on 8 March. As in the earlier bombing, it appears to be a messaging activity meant to warn off the National Guard from its operations focused on one of the local organized crime groupings—either the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (CSRL) or the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) who are battling each other for control of the region. This incident should be considered another irregular warfare event within Guanajuato related to escalating car bomb employment potentials related to anti-personnel—as opposed to anti-infrastructure—targeting of National Guard forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**



Mexican National Guard Shield.

Source: Guardia Nacional - Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana del Gobierno de México via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guardia\\_Nacional\\_Mexicana.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guardia_Nacional_Mexicana.png), Public domain

***“[This] is the second car bomb that exploded against that military corporation within the same municipality [so far this year].”***

**Source:** “Explota coche bomba en Celaya; no hay lesionados: VIDEO (Car bomb explodes in Celaya; no injuries: VIDEO),” *Heraldo Mexico*, 7 April 2020. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/estados/exposion-coche-bomba-incendio-celaya-guanajuato-inseguridad/>

*The incident occurred on Monday night when members of the General Directorate of Traffic and Road Police were patrolling Constitution Avenue and located an abandoned vehicle, which was reported as stolen and involved in a robbery.*

...

*In the afternoon in a confrontation in Jerécuaro between hired killers and elements of the National Guard, left five people dead.*

*The event was recorded shortly after 2 in the afternoon on Monday when a shooting was reported on the Jerécuaro-Apasea el Alto highway, at the height of the Rancho de Guadalupe community.*

*Preliminary data indicates that shortly before 2:00 in the afternoon, armed men aboard at least two trucks collided head-on with elements of the National Guard.*

**Source:** “Otro “coche bomba” explota cerca de cuartel de la Guardia Nacional en Celaya (Another ‘car bomb’ explodes near the National Guard headquarters in Celaya),” *La Verdad*, 7 April 2020. <https://laverdadnoticias.com/crimen/Otro-coche-bomba-explota-cerca-de-cuartel-de-la-Guardia-Nacional-en-Celaya-20200407-0144.html>

*So far this year, it is the second car bomb that exploded against that military corporation within the same municipality.*

*Some witnesses reported seeing two subjects arriving at the site aboard a Honda CR-V truck, which they later left at the site. All this happened just a few meters from the aforementioned National Guard checkpoint. Minutes later, the vehicle exploded.*

**Source:** “Otro “coche bomba” explota cerca de cuartel de la Guardia Nacional en Celaya (Another ‘car bomb’ explodes near the National Guard headquarters in Celaya),” *La Verdad*, 7 April 2020. <https://laverdadnoticias.com/crimen/Otro-coche-bomba-explota-cerca-de-cuartel-de-la-Guardia-Nacional-en-Celaya-20200407-0144.html>

*So far this year, it is the second car bomb that exploded against that military corporation within the same municipality.*

*Some witnesses reported seeing two subjects arriving at the site aboard a Honda CR-V truck, which they later left at the site. All this happened just a few meters from the aforementioned National Guard checkpoint. Minutes later, the vehicle exploded.*