

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



Volume 10  
Issue #8  
August 2020

## FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

### EURASIA

- 3 Russia's Development of Robotic Combat Vehicles
- 5 Russian Army Starts Receiving Kamaz Trucks with Armored Compartments
- 7 MLRS is Becoming a Precision Weapon
- 8 Updated Ka-29 Helicopters to Make Arctic Debut
- 10 Pacific Fleet to Conduct Arctic Amphibious Assault Exercise
- 11 Second Borei Class Strategic Nuclear Submarine Joins Northern Fleet
- 12 Soviet Era Frigate Update Includes Pantsir Air Defense System
- 13 Russia Forms Mobile Air Defense Reserve of Pantsir-S
- 14 Russia's Energy Strategy 2035: A Breakthrough or Another Impasse?
- 16 The Kremlin's Critique of Western Values
- 18 Let the Army Expo and Games Go On
- 19 A Russian Military Look at the Personnel Factor in Chinese Information Warfare Development
- 21 Russia's Balance Between India and China
- 23 Russian Allies: Examining Russia's Relations with CSTO Members
- 25 Debating the Pros and Cons of Russia's Syria Campaign
- 27 Russian Patriotism and Values
- 28 Bond Between Russian Religion and Military
- 30 Russia's Increasing Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan
- 31 Armenia's Defense and Strategy Reforms
- 32 Georgia Announces Plans to Produce Su-25 Aircraft

### INDO-PACIFIC

- 33 Communist Party of China Claims Strong Party Leads to Strong Military
- 34 Building China's Militia: An Integral Part of China's Armed Forces
- 35 China Reforms Military Reserve System
- 37 China Completes Global Deployment of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System
- 38 PLA Ground Force Adopts 155mm Mobile Artillery System
- 40 Fighting the Battle for the Pandemic Narrative: The PRC White Paper on Its COVID-19 Response
- 42 Huawei and 5G: Update on the Tech Cold War
- 44 China and Iran Announce \$400 Billion Trade Deal
- 46 Philippines Army Recruiting Tausug to Help Fight Abu Sayyaf
- 47 Myanmar's Dilemma: Cooperate with Kachin Rebels on COVID-19 or Not?
- 48 Indonesia Banned from Blocking Internet During Protests
- 49 Emergency Spending for the Indian Armed Forces

### MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 50 Preparing for the Post-COVID-19 World: A Turkish Perspective
- 52 Russian Information Operations to Leverage Competition in the Eastern Med
- 53 UAE's Information War against Turkey
- 54 UAE Looks to China in Post-COVID Economic Future
- 56 Turkey and China Renew Currency Swap Agreement
- 57 Turkey Launches New Round of Operations against the PKK in Iraq
- 59 Kurdish Jihadism and Extremist Groups
- 61 Renewed Tension Between Turkey and Greece
- 63 The Role of UAVs in Transforming Turkish Combat Capabilities
- 65 Iran Eager to Enter the Global Market as a Military Equipment Exporter
- 67 Iran's IRGC Navy Unveils 3rd Khordad Defense System
- 68 Iran: What's Behind the Government's Secrecy on Handing Over Kish Island to Chinese?
- 70 Iranian Armed Forces Change Health Insurance Procedures
- 71 Iran: Khamenei Speaks on Corruption

### AFRICA

- 72 Africa's Losses, China's Gains from COVID-19
- 73 Despite AU Efforts, 'Silencing the Guns' in Africa Remains Elusive
- 74 Russia's Nuclear Projects in Africa: Profits and Political Gain
- 75 Somaliland and Taiwan: Proposed Ties in Trouble
- 76 South Sudan's Bitter Independence Anniversary
- 77 Northern Mozambique Between Terrorism and COVID-19
- 78 Boko Haram Still Able to Inflict Damage in Nigeria
- 79 Nigeria: Local Conflicts Driven by Illegal Mining
- 80 Côte d'Ivoire Responds after Terrorist Attack

### LATIN AMERICA

- 81 Venezuela and the Alex Saab/Cape Verde Affair
- 82 Argentina and Hezbollah
- 83 FARC Update
- 84 ELN Update
- 85 Indigenous Leaders Targeted in Amazon
- 87 Colombia Supports Venezuelan Refugees during Coronavirus
- 88 Fentanyl: The New Cash Cow of Mexican Drug Cartels
- 89 Mexican Cartels Expand Operations in the Netherlands
- 90 Mexico: Foiled Attack Against Refinery in Salamanca
- 91 Peruvian Self-Defense Groups Impose Coronavirus Social Isolation Rules
- 92 Bolivia and Coronavirus



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Operational Environment Watch provides translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

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#### ON THE COVER:

*Members of the Indian contingent on Red Square during 2020 Victory Day parade.*

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91513145>, CC BY 4.0

# OEWATCH

## Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 10 | Issue 8

August | 2020

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## Russia's Development of Robotic Combat Vehicles

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted articles from *RIA Novosti* discuss Russian plans to develop robotic platforms for military purposes. As Vitaliy Davydov, head of the Advanced Research Fund's Scientific-Technical Council (Russia's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency equivalent) explains, the development of semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons platforms is of keen interest to the Russian Federation. As the second passage reports, Russia has already started conducting tests regarding the robotization of the armored equipment. The passage points out, "the T-14 tank mounted on the heavy tracked "Armata" platform has undergone testing in the unmanned mode." **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

*“Neither we nor other countries will depart from the use of combat robots, if we do not wish people to continue to die on the field of battle. Living combatants will gradually begin to be supplanted by their robotic “brothers,” who can act more quickly, more precisely and selectively than people. However, a man will assign the mission and control the operations of the robots.”*



T-14 Armata.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Victory-Day-Rehearsal-in-Moscow-18-June-2020/i-Sz5RNDj/0/23d48c5e/X3/ParadeRehearsal-18062020-18-X3.jpg>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0





## Continued: Russia's Development of Robotic Combat Vehicles

**Source:** Dmitriy Strugovets, “Виталий Давыдов: живых бойцов заменят терминаторы (Vitaliy Davydov: They Will Replace Live Warriors with Terminators),” RIA Novosti Online, 21 April 2020. <https://ria.ru/20200421/1570298909.html>

*The Advanced Research Fund (FPI) – the Russian analog of the American DARPA – works on various projects, including in the field of robotics. The anthropomorphic space robot “Fedor” was developed on an order from the fund, and in 2019 flew into space. In October 2019, the FPI presented to the public the experimental “Marker” robotic platform, supporting autonomous fulfillment of quite complex missions in support of troop subunit operations.*

*Formed on the base of the FPI, the National Center for the Development of Technologies and Base Components of Robotic Equipment is actively cooperating with the developers of maritime and aviation unmanned vehicles. Head of the FPI's Scientific-Technical Council, and Deputy General Director of the Fund Vitaliy Davydov talked with RIA Novosti special correspondent Dmitriy Strugovets about the prospects for the development of military robotics in an interview.*

***In October, the “Marker” robot was presented to the public for the first time. At that time, it showed off its capabilities in autonomous navigation and repositioning. It was announced that in the first half of the year the robot will be able to demonstrate its capabilities in firing from various weapons. Based on the results of the tests, what will “Marker” be able to do?***

*In future, “Marker” will become fully autonomous and be able to independently fulfill a wide circle of tasks. The operator will provide only target designation, while the robot itself will decide how to move to the target taking into account the type of terrain, overcome obstacles met with en route and once in place select and use the optimal type of weaponry.*

***Will the robot itself make a decision on inflicting a strike?***

*Everything, naturally, must be under the control of a commander. This means several variants of “Marker” actions are being developed. One of them envisages the fulfillment of combat missions in autonomous mode in an area designated by the commander. A second variant is – supporting troop subunit operations. In this case the robot is delivered or itself proceeds into the area of combat operations and is placed at the disposal of a specific subunit, the commander of which assigns it specific combat missions.*

***That means the Fund is coming ever closer and closer to the future of the film, “Terminator:” initially there was the anthropomorphic robot “Fedor,” and now a wheeled combat robot.***

*Neither we nor other countries will depart from the use of combat robots, if we do not wish people to continue to die on the field of battle. Living combatants will gradually begin to be supplanted by their robotic “brothers,” who can act more quickly, more precisely and selectively than people. However, a man will assign the mission and control the operations of the robots.*

***In Russia development of the heavy “Okhotnik” strike unmanned flying vehicle is being carried out, and also of strike and intelligence collection vehicles of other types, and the possibility of the development in future of a pilotless tank based on the “Armata” platform was announced. They all use software and technical solutions for the fulfillment of the missions, for example, in the area of artificial vision. Is the FPI, in completing the “Marker” and other projects, cooperating with Russian industry for the development of unified standards, so that the robotic equipment from various manufacturers can interact with each other on the field of battle?***

*For this, based on the Fund, the National Center for the Development of Technologies and Robotic Components, coordinating work in this field, was created. Today, at any hardware display one can be sure that the development of robotic equipment occupies hundreds of collectives from all over the country. They duplicate each other and often invent the bicycle. Our Center has the mission of assuring integration of their efforts, and providing interested developers with the opportunity to use the best scientific-technical and technological solutions, existing within the sphere under review. The “Marker” platform, which has an open architecture, providing each developer with the opportunity to practically test in it their own robotic components, will also have to play a specific role in the solution of these tasks.*

*The results of all of the projects, carried out in the field of robotic equipment at the expense of budgetary resources, is being provided to the National Center, stored in a unified database and through the Center collective access can be used by interested developers. This facilitates raising the level of domestic robotics, and enables the formation of unified standards and creates a technical basis for the effective interaction of robotic complexes from various manufacturers, including even at the software level.*

**Source:** “Танк Т-14 ‘Армата’ испытали в беспилотном режиме (T-14 ‘Armata’ Tank Tested in Unmanned Mode),” RIA Novosti Online, 4 July 2020. <https://ria.ru/20200704/1573878330.html>

*The T-14 tank mounted on the heavy tracked “Armata” platform has undergone testing in the unmanned mode, a source in the defense industrial complex informed RIA Novosti.*

*In 2016 Aleksandr Shevchenko, ex-chief of the Main Armored Tank Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, said in an interview with RIA Novosti that the unmanned, robotic version of the latest T-14 “Armata” tank will be created in 2018. In his words the uniqueness of the new vehicles was the presence of an open digital architecture, which created a “reinforced concrete foundation for the robotization of the armored equipment.”...*





## Russian Army Starts Receiving Kamaz Trucks with Armored Compartments

**OE Watch Commentary:** The “Kamaz Мыстанг (Mustang) 5350” is a workhorse in the Russian ground forces. It is widely used in maintenance and supply units and as the mount for the Pantsir air defense gun and missile system. An armored cab is one of the options for the Kamaz 5350. As the accompanying article from *Izvestia* discusses, another option has now been added. An armored compartment can now protect the contents of the truck bed from IEDs and small arms attack-and jam IED electronic triggers. According to *Izvestia*, the first compartmented trucks are going to reconnaissance and Spetsnaz forces in the Southern Military District for use in desert and mountain terrain. It will initially be a troop carrier. The article does not mention another use for the armored trucks.

During the heavy city-fighting in Grozny during the First Russo-Chechen War of the last century, the Russians were often unable to resupply forces in contact, refuel vehicles and evacuate wounded since their standard trucks could not survive the drive in and out of the city. Troops drank contaminated water and entire units became ill. Wounded soldiers died for lack of proper treatment. Psychiatric trauma mounted. Armored fighting vehicles were pulled out of fighting to perform resupply and medical evacuation missions when possible. A Russian lesson-learned was that urban combat required armored trucks and armored ambulances. As the Russian Ground Forces receive more compartmented Kamaz 5350s, their urban combat potential should increase. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

*“Armored compartmented vehicles are being returned to service. Kamaz trucks, with crew compartments installed on the body protect soldiers from bullets, fragments, and mines. Also, they will be equipped with electronic warfare systems, which make it possible to suppress cellular communications and jam UAVs.”*

## 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>







## Continued: Russian Army Starts Receiving Kamaz Trucks with Armored Compartments

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm, Anton Lavrov and Bogdan Stepovoy, "Compartmented vehicles: Reconnaissance forces and Spetsnaz receive armored trucks," *Izvestia*, 17 June 2020. <https://iz.ru/1024339/aleksei-ramm-anton-lavrov-bogdan-stepovoi/kapsulnye-mashiny-razvedchiki-i-spetcnazovtcy-poluchat-bronegruzoviki>

### **Compartmented vehicles: Reconnaissance forces and Spetsnaz receive armored trucks**

Armored compartmented vehicles are being returned to service. Kamaz trucks, with crew compartments installed on the body protect soldiers from bullets, fragments, and mines. Also, they will be equipped with electronic warfare systems, which make it possible to suppress cellular communications and jam UAVs. The army had already purchased such-equipped Kamaz trucks in the beginning of the 2010's, but later they were replaced by Tayfun vehicles. Modern armored compartmented vehicles have better off-road capabilities, experts noted. A decision was made to supply these vehicles to special-purpose detachments and reconnaissance subunits, which will be operating in the mountains and deserts.

The critical decision on delivery of Kamaz-5350 trucks with armored compartments has already been made. Thirteen multi-purpose vehicles have arrived in the Southern Military District, including the first Kamaz trucks with multifunctional MM501 modules -- the army designation for special protection modules. They will enter the inventory of reconnaissance battalions and special-purpose brigades, according to sources in the Defense Ministry.

The vehicles will augment special-purpose detachments and reconnaissance subunits operating in the mountains and mountain-desert terrain. Armored compartments are better off-road in this terrain, and their performance characteristics are higher. The Tayfun series armored vehicles will continue to be the workhorse for the rest of the reconnaissance and Spetsnaz servicemen.

The modules will be equipped with electronic combat systems. They can jam cellular communications -- as a rule, telephone signals are used to remote detonate land mines. Also, they can jam UAVs and conventional radio stations.

Vehicles with armored compartments are needed to transport personnel to combat location where an attack land mines and small arms can be expected at any moment. This is often the situation in Syria, according to military expert Aleksey Khlopotov. ...

In addition, the Kamaz vehicles with armored compartments have gained the reputation of a workhorse in the army -- it is a simple and effective machine. It is easily mastered by personnel and is maintenance friendly, because it is not very different from a civilian truck. Last but not least, they are repairable and have a long service life. They can be used to deliver servicemen (including reconnaissance personnel) or cargo to the forward edge. The Tigr light armored vehicle is best suited for operations in the enemy rear."

Improvised armored compartments were mounted on domestic army trucks during the first campaign in Chechnya. This equipment gained a great deal of popularity in the Combined Troop Grouping in the North Caucasus during the second campaign. It was used especially often in military police companies. Armored vehicles were used to transport personnel and to convoy columns. Sometimes they were additionally equipped with machine guns.

Ten years ago, the Army purchased Kamaz vehicles with armored compartments. Then, deliveries of Tayfun-U and Tayfun-K specialized armored vehicles began. They were supplied to mountain riflemen, Spetsnaz brigades, reconnaissance subunits, and military police. Mainly this equipment was supplied to the Southern and Central military districts.

...The off-road Kamaz-5350 weighs 17 tons. The armored module is fitted with special suspended seats, which help mitigate the effects of a blast wave in case if the vehicle is exposed to an explosion. The compartment is also equipped with independent heaters and air filtration units. If necessary, air conditioning can be installed in it. This will allow the personnel to be transported comfortably both at low and high temperatures. Swinging doors are located in the rear of the module for loading and rapid landing.

There are two round hatches on the roof -- they improve observation when on the move, and also serve as emergency exits in the event that the vehicle is exposed to an explosion. Apertures are equipped with gun slits -- three on each side. There are two more gun slits cut in the rear doors of the compartment. They allow soldiers to conduct fire from small arms while on the move or halted.

The armored compartment provides all-round protection of personnel and internal equipment located in the cab from 7.62-mm bullets of the SVD sniper rifle and similar caliber Kalashnikov assault rifle. It is impossible to penetrate its walls even from a distance of 5-10 meters.

Inside is a "cab-module" communication device and weapons brackets. If necessary, the compartment can be quickly removed from the truck's frame, which makes it possible to use it as a stationary checkpoint. From above, the capsule can be covered with a tarp, after which the armored truck can hardly be distinguished from a common one.

The cabs of these vehicles are designed for three people. It can be manufactured in two versions -- with or without a bunk. The windshield as well as the door glass are made of multilayer special bulletproof glass. They are also equipped with gun slits, which enable the driver and the accompanying officers to conduct fire from light small arms. The roof is fitted with an armored emergency hatch.

The battery, fuel tanks, and main assemblies are protected from high-explosive impact and fragments. These vehicles can also be used to tow artillery. In total, this Kamaz can carry 17 servicemen: three in the cab and 14 in the armored compartment.





## MLRS is Becoming a Precision Weapon

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *RIA Novosti* features an interview with the director of the ‘Tekhmash’ company, Alexander Kochkin. According to Kochkin, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) were once just seen as mass fire weapons, but now these systems may also be described as ‘precision weapons.’ Kochkin discusses that these weapons may still be used as mass fire weapons, but thanks to recent technological advances, they may also be equipped with precision guided munitions. In addition, the ranges of these systems are substantially increasing. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



2B17M combat vehicle of 9K51M Tornado-G MLRS.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/ARMY-2016-Demonstration/i-8H55xTq/0/7181035f/X3/Army2016demo-061-X3.jpg>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

***“If initially MLRSs were developed to fire on large areas, today we see the development of these systems as precision weapons.”***

**Source:** Ivan Surayev, “Александр Кочкин: РСЗО становятся высокоточным оружием (Alexander Kochkin: MLRS will Become a Precision Weapon),” *RIA Novosti* Online, 27 May 2020. <https://ria.ru/20200527/1572042951.html>

*The Russian defense sector is continuing to adapt to operation under conditions of the coronavirus pandemic: workers are returning to the enterprises, renewing testing of advanced models of weaponry, and the designing of new systems has not ceased...The leading domestic enterprise, specializing in the development and assembly of multiple launch rockets systems, flamethrower systems, aviation missiles and munitions, the “Tekhmash” Science/Manufacturing Concern (managed by the “Rostekh” State Corporation’s “Tekhnodinamika” Holding Company), is no exception to this tendency. Acting Director Alexander Kochkin in an interview with RIA Novosti correspondent Ivan Surayev talked about the plans to transform multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) into a precision long-range weapon...*

***Recently, information appeared on the transfer to Russia’s Defense Ministry of “Tornado-G” and “Tornado-S” multiple launch rocket systems, and how much were the specifications of these MLRS improved?***

*Actually, new 122 mm caliber “Tornado-G” multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) have begun to arrive in the RF Armed Forces, and this is the furthest development of all of the well-known “Grad” systems, and the “Tornado-S” is – correspondingly, a development of the “Smerch” system. We were able to seriously improve the specifications by means of automating command-and-control and firing.*

*These machines are equipped with navigational systems, thanks to which they can open fire from unprepared positions, and, naturally, we increase their range of fire, and introduced highly efficient munitions into the combat load. For example, in the “Tornado-G” a new round is used, which, in power and area of destruction exceeds the old “Grad” munitions five-fold. The range of fire was increased two-fold, from 20 up to 40 km. This means for the “Tornado-S” the effective range of this MLRS is more than 100 km against 70 for the “Smerch.” In this I want to note that while increasing the range, we are preserving and even increasing the firepower of the munitions.*

***How do you plan to further develop the field of MLRS?***

*If initially MLRSs were developed to fire on large areas, today we see the development of these systems as precision weapons. Along with salvo fire, even now they can destroy targets with individual rounds – munitions are expensive, and missions can best be resolved by a single rocket-propelled round. Now we are developing new precision rounds for the MLRS, and several are already in the inventory of the RF Armed Force.*

*The systems entering service in operational units today have great upgrade potential. We begin with the fact that they have already served for several decades and are working on the development of new long-range munitions. We assigned the task of increasing the range of destruction of the “Tornado-S” by an additional several tens of kilometers.*

*Certainly, at such distances it is only useful to operate with guided missiles, because the dispersion of conventional rocket-propelled rounds at such long ranges with a small number of warheads is too large. For now, this involves self-funded development, but it goes without saying, we coordinate all of our work with the state purchaser so as to not expend funds needlessly. Today we are carrying out scientific-research projects on this topic, and there are already experimental models going through test firing, but it is still rather far to acceptance into the inventory. I think that after 5-7 years we will manufacture these long-range munitions – and to all appearances, their delivery will be envisaged in the new State Armaments Program.*





## Updated Ka-29 Helicopters to Make Arctic Debut

**OE Watch Commentary:** Kamov has pioneered the development of shipboard helicopters. The Ka-27 (NATO “Helix”) began production in 1981 and continues to the present. It has an export military and civilian version (Ka-28 and Ka-32) with customers in 15 countries. It produced the Ka-29 for service on amphibious landing craft, but these were mothballed when Russia quit building the “Rhinoceros” amphibious warfare ship in order to buy French Mistral helicopter carriers in 2009. After the Crimean crisis of 2014, France refused to provide its four contracted Mistral carriers. As the accompanying passage from *Izvestia* discusses, Ka-29s are now being updated and squadrons of the updated helicopters will operate above the Arctic Circle. Pacific Fleet pilots from Kamchatka will be the first to get hands-on experience with them; while Northern Fleet crews will also start flying there in 2021. The return of the Ka-29 assault transport helicopters may indicate that Russia will start producing amphibious landing ships again.

As the passage discusses, the Russian Armed Forces are currently carrying out “a wide-ranging modernization of their helicopters.” The passage notes that a test of the brand-new Mi-28NM attack helicopter ended in Syria last year and soon, a program to upgrade the Mi-35M will start. This will entail new armor, engines, and long-range optics to enable it to find and destroy targets several kilometers away. In addition, devices are apparently being developed for the upgraded Ka-52M, to enable it to talk directly to unmanned aerial vehicles. The passage points out that the pilots will be able to watch in real time images transmitted by drones, and subsequently control the drones in flight. The new technology will allow the crew to “find targets behind enemy lines and deliver surprise strikes.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

*“Squadrons of “sea hunters” -- updated Ka-29 helicopters – will fly in the Arctic.”*

*“The Armed Forces are currently carrying out a wide-ranging modernization of their helicopters... This new technology will enable the crew to find targets behind enemy lines and deliver surprise strikes.”*



Kamov Ka-29 ‘16 yellow’

Source: Alan Wilson from Stilton, Peterborough, Cambs, UK via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamov\\_Ka-29\\_%E2%80%9916\\_yellow%E2%80%99\\_\(24221038748\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamov_Ka-29_%E2%80%9916_yellow%E2%80%99_(24221038748).jpg), CC BY SA 2.0





## Continued: Updated Ka-29 Helicopters to Make Arctic Debut

**Source:** Anton Lavrov and Bogdan Stepovoy, “On the Polar Wind: ‘Sea Hunters’ Fly to the Arctic,” *Izvestia*, 29 June 2020. <https://iz.ru/1028439/anton-lavrov-bogdan-stepovoi/poliarnym-vetrom-v-arktiku-letiat-morskie-okhotniki>

### ***On the Polar Wind: ‘Sea Hunters’ Fly to the Arctic***

*Squadrons of “sea hunters” -- updated Ka-29 helicopters – will fly in the Arctic. The first to get hands-on experience with these unique transport and combat machines are Pacific Fleet pilots from Kamchatka. Ka-29s are being upgraded to operate above the Arctic Circle and Northern Fleet crews will also start flying there in 2021. They will be used to supply military bases, move personnel, and patrol the polar region. The Ka-29 ...is an attack helicopter that can carry several tons of cargo.*

*Until recently Mi-8AMTSh (including its special “Arctic” version), Mi-26, and sometimes shipborne Ka-27 helicopters were mostly used in the Arctic.*

*The Arctic “sea hunters” are part of the 317th Composite Aviation Regiment, stationed outside Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. There will be two detachments of “sea hunters”, each with four aircraft. After Kamchatka, aviation units of the Northern Fleet will be augmented with the updated Ka-29s. The 830th Separate Shipborne Antisubmarine Helicopter Regiment, which is stationed not far from the town of Severomorsk on the Kola peninsula will receive the aircraft.*

*The Ka-29 helicopter was in serial production in the 1980s but is not yet obsolete, according to military expert Dmitriy Boltenkov. The Kamovs can operate from dry land and from a ship. After modernization, they will be in demand for a long time to come because of their firepower, load-carrying capacity, and unique assault landing capabilities. In the Arctic the Ka-29 can patrol deserted tracts of land, take part in counter sabotage and rescue operations, and supply remote northern garrisons and military bases.”*

*Ka-29 crews are now busy familiarizing themselves with the machine. Exercises were held in Kamchatka in June, in which Pacific Fleet helicopters took part: They attacked shore and surface targets of a simulated enemy. In particular they destroyed practice targets representing hardened fire emplacements, fighting vehicles, and troops of an assault landing, firing 80-mm rockets and GSh-23 cannons. And not long-ago Northern Fleet pilots practiced supporting an assault landing and checked navigators’ preparations for carrying out missions in challenging weather conditions in the far north.*

*In all, more than 60 Ka-29s were produced. They were initially intended for carrying cargo, disembarking naval infantry from ships, and also for fire support of assault landings. The plan was that they would significantly expand the capabilities of the Project 1174 “Rhinceros” large amphibious landing ships, each of which would carry four helicopters. But after cutbacks to the Navy almost all the Ka-29s were mothballed, in the north of the country’s European part and in Kamchatka.*

*The overhaul, upgrade and restoration of the fleet of naval Ka-29s to technical readiness has been underway over the past several years. On the upgraded machines the main rotor masts and engine and transmission shafts have been replaced, and the paintwork refreshed. But most importantly, they have received modern weaponry and avionics. The helicopter can carry 16 assault troops at a cruising speed of 235 kilometers per hour. It has four mounting points for rocket pods, cannons, and bombs. It can also use the Shturm-V and Ataka antitank missile systems.*

*The cockpit, vital assemblies, and the engine are armored and can withstand a direct hit by a rifle bullet.... It can be fitted with screens over the engine exhaust outlets, for protection against heat-seeking missiles and electro-optical jammers.*

...

*The Armed Forces are currently carrying out a wide-ranging modernization of their helicopters. A test of the brand-new Mi-28NM attack helicopter ended in Syria last year and in addition, a program to upgrade the Mi-35M starts very soon: It will get new armor, engines, and long-range optics to enable it to find and destroy targets several kilometers away. Devices are being developed for the upgraded Ka-52M, to enable it to talk directly to unmanned aerial vehicles. The pilots will be able to watch in real time images transmitted by drones, and subsequently control the drones in flight. This new technology will enable the crew to find targets behind enemy lines and deliver surprise strikes.*





## Pacific Fleet to Conduct Arctic Amphibious Assault Exercise

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Pacific Fleet has a lot of Russian coast to protect, including Russia's Northeast Arctic coast. Although the Northern Fleet has control of most of the Northern Sea Route, the Pacific Fleet has responsibility for that portion flanking the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Pacific Fleet's Naval Infantry has not spent much time there. During the major 2018 Strategic Exercise "Vostok," which was held in the Eastern Military District, there were naval infantry amphibious landings on Russia's Northeast Arctic coast, but they were from the Northern Fleet (see "Vostok 2018 in the Arctic," *OE Watch*, October 2018). As the accompanying passage from *Izvestia* discusses, now the Naval Infantry of the Pacific Fleet gets to do an Arctic amphibious landing and coastal defense exercise as part of a larger Pacific Fleet exercise. This exercise will differ from the 2018 exercise in that it will be a force-on-force exercise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“Russia’s Pacific Fleet will hold a large-scale coastal exercise above the Arctic Circle for the first time. Two naval Infantry brigades, naval ships, and aviation will take part. During this year’s maneuvers, they will conduct an amphibious assault landing on the coast, lengthy road marches, and deploy equipment in Arctic latitudes...”***

**Source:** Roman Kretsul, Anton Lavrov, and Aleksey Ramm, “Naval Infantry will participate in Exercise above the Arctic Circle,” *Izvestia*, 22 June 2020. <https://iz.ru/1026389/roman-kretcul-anton-lavrov-aleksei-ramm/brigadnyi-riad-morpekhi-primut-uchastie-v-ucheniakh-na-poliarnym-krugom>

### ***Naval Infantry will participate in Exercise above the Arctic Circle***

*Russia’s Pacific Fleet will hold a large-scale coastal exercise above the Arctic Circle for the first time. Two naval Infantry brigades, naval ships, and aviation will take part. During this year’s maneuvers, they will conduct an amphibious assault landing on the coast, lengthy road marches, and deploy equipment in Arctic latitudes...*

*The 155th Naval Infantry Brigade from Vladivostok and the 40th from Kamchatka will participate in the exercise. They will maneuver against each other in force-on-force training.... As *Izvestia* reported earlier, the military began deploying mobile detachments in the Arctic last year. These included Bastion coastal missile complexes and naval infantry subunits. In the upcoming large-scale exercise, the brigades’ maneuvers will be supported by Bastion and other artillery as well as combat ships and naval aviation.*

*The precise place and time of the exercise has not yet been determined. *Izvestiya* sources clarified that the Chukotka Peninsula is one option. In May, Pacific Fleet servicemen already rehearsed a landing on the peninsula’s austere coast. The large landing ships (BPKs) *Nikolay Vilkov*, *Oslyabya*, *Admiral Nevelskoy*, and *Peresvet* transited from Vladivostok to *Bukhta Provideniya*. They carried some 200 naval infantrymen and 80 units of engineer and special equipment. The landing was made directly onshore using the ramp. After disembarking, the “Black Berets” set up a field camp and reconnoitered the terrain.*

*In the upcoming exercise, the naval infantrymen will practice landing on the Arctic coast, as well as conducting an anti-landing defense. Military historian *Dmitriy Boltenkov* told *Izvestia*, “Most likely the ‘Primor’ye’ 155th Brigade will conduct the landing and the ‘Kamchatka’ 40th will oppose the landing. The attacking naval infantrymen will be supported by ship fire, and the defenders by the Bastion Coastal Missile Defense System that will fire against naval targets.” Pacific Fleet forces will have to operate under difficult hydrometeorologic conditions on unfamiliar terrain. *Boltenkov* stated that “The naval infantrymen know the Primor’ye region and Sakhalin Island well; they constantly rehearse their landings there. The mission here will be enormously more difficult. If ... Chukotka becomes the site of the maneuvers, then it will be necessary to measure depths, conduct terrain reconnaissance, and organize support for the units. A combat ship detachment will form for the landing. Corvettes and Bastion missiles will certainly be part of it. I am sure that the command ship *Marshal Krylov* and hospital and rescue vessels will be involved. ...*





## Second Borei Class Strategic Nuclear Submarine Joins Northern Fleet

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia continues to balance its upgraded strategic submarine fleet between the Northern and Pacific Fleet. As the accompanying passage discusses, the Sevmash [Northern Machine building] shipyard in the Arctic City of Severodvinsk has produced its fourth Borei [Boreas-the Greek God of the North Wind] class strategic delivery nuclear submarine. There are now two each in the Northern and Pacific Fleets. The Borei-class submarines carry 16 Bulava intercontinental missiles, each capable of containing 6-10 MIRV warheads (see “Strategic Missile Test for Submarine Slated for Northern Fleet,” *OE Watch*, December 2019).

The first new ballistic missile submarine delivered to the Northern Fleet since January 2013, Knyaz Vladimir [Vladimir the Great], is named after the Prince of Novgorod, Grand Prince of Kiev, and ruler of Kievan Rus’ from 980 to 1015. Knyaz Vladimir is known for expanding Russia, utilizing the Dniepr River to expand into the Black Sea and Crimea and bringing Orthodox Christianity to Russia. He carried his own Bulava [medieval mace]. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“A total of eight Borei-A class submarines are expected to be built at the Sevmash yard. In addition to Knyaz Vladimir, four others are already at different stages of construction, while the two last are planned to be laid down later in 2020. Half of the submarines will be based with the Northern Fleet on the Kola Peninsula, while the other half will sail for Russia’s Pacific Fleet.”***

**Source:** Thomas Nilsen, “Sevmash shipyard handed over SSBN Knyaz Vladimir to Northern Fleet,” *The Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 1 June 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/06/sevmash-shipyard-handed-over-ssbn-knyaz-vladimir-northern-fleet>

*On June 1st, the Day of the Northern Fleet, Navy Commander Nikolay Evmenov signed the approval document of the long-delayed ballistic missile submarine...Admiral Evmenov stated that a formal ceremony for the submarine will soon follow. The admiral’s signature is a milestone for the submarine that originally was supposed to be handed over from the Sevmash yard to the Northern Fleet in 2017. Technical problems...delayed both the construction and the commissioning. Last fall, the plan was to deliver the submarine by year-end, as the Sevmash yard in Severodvinsk celebrated its 80th anniversary. Further troubles, though, caused further delays.*

*In mid-May, Knyaz Vladimir sailed out to the White Sea on its final test voyage, making sure that previously discovered technical challenges were solved.*

*Following the voyage, the final acceptance certificate was signed at the Sevmash yard on May 28th ...confirming its readiness for transfer to the Navy....Knyaz Vladimir will be the first new ballistic missile submarine delivered to the Northern Fleet since January 2013, when the first of the Borei-class, the “Yury Dolgoruky” entered service.*

*In contrast to the Yury Dolgoruky, the Knyaz Vladimir has a different exterior. The tower doesn’t have the front overhang, the bow is more streamlined and the superstructure of the hull is changed. The biggest differences, however, are likely inside where more of the control room and steering gear are computerized. Improvements include vertical endplates to the hydroplanes for higher maneuverability, improved pump-jet propulsion system making the submarine quieter.*

*The submarine can carry 16 Bulava missiles. Each missile is believed to hold 6 to 10 nuclear warheads, bringing the total number of nuclear warheads onboard the submarine up to somewhere between 96 and 160. Gadzhiyevo on the Barents Sea coast will be the submarine’s new home base, together with the six Delta-IV submarines and the “Yury Dolgoruky” Borei-class.*

*A total of eight Borei-A class submarines are expected to be built at the Sevmash yard. In addition to Knyaz Vladimir, four others are already at different stages of construction, while the two last are planned to be laid down later in 2020. Half of the submarines will be based with the Northern Fleet on the Kola Peninsula, while the other half will sail for Russia’s Pacific Fleet.*





## Soviet Era Frigate Update Includes Pantsir Air Defense System

**OE Watch Commentary:** The upgrade of the Russian Pacific Fleet has been getting a lot of press lately (see “Going Blue by 2030: Upgrading and Refitting the Pacific Fleet,” *OE Watch*, July 2020). As the accompanying passage from *Izvestia* reports, now the refit of the ASW/Frigate ship Marshal Shaposhnikov will also include the lethal Pantsir missile/gun air defense system. The Soviets and now Russians have built a large number of air-defense missile systems, but they have not abandoned anti-aircraft artillery. Many of their tactical air defense systems combine guns and missiles on the same platform. Space is limited on board ship and the question is, how many modern systems can one put on a 35-year-old hull and still achieve maximum effectiveness? The Dalzavod yard in Vladivostok is finding out. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The upgraded frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov will have an impenetrable shield. Installing the Pantsir-M anti-aircraft missile and gun system... is ... being worked on. Pantsir has the firepower to destroy any enemy aircraft, helicopter, cruise missile, or drone within a radius of 20-30 kilometers. Experts say that this will make the frigate, whose main weapon should be the Tsirkon hypersonic missile, invincible.”***

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Russian Frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov will gain Pantsir Air Defense System during Refit,” *Izvestia*, 15 June 2020. [iz.ru/1022607/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/narastili-pantsir-fregat-marshal-shaposhnikov-osnastiat-novoi-pvo](https://iz.ru/1022607/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/narastili-pantsir-fregat-marshal-shaposhnikov-osnastiat-novoi-pvo)

### ***Russian Frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov will gain Pantsir Air Defense System during Refit***

*The upgraded frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov will have an impenetrable shield. Installing the Pantsir-M anti-aircraft missile and gun system ... is ... being worked on. Pantsir has the firepower to destroy any enemy aircraft, helicopter, cruise missile, or drone within a radius of 20-30 kilometers. Experts say that this will make the frigate, whose main weapon should be the Tsirkon hypersonic missile, invincible.*

*Several options for installing the Pantsir-M on the Project 1155 Udaloy-class frigate ... are being considered according to Defense Ministry ... There are some technical challenges determining the weapon's optimal location. Stern and amidships are currently under consideration. The Shaposhnikov was commissioned in 1986, when the requirements of ships were different and the dimensions of the air defense systems available to the Navy were different than those of today.*

*The frigate is currently at the Dalzavod ship repair center, which is completing its refit. As part of that work, more than 20 percent of the superstructure was removed and rebuilt from scratch, and the outboard fittings have been replaced. These changes are needed so that the ship can take the most modern equipment including missile and gun systems.*

*The Shaposhnikov was built as a large ASW [antisubmarine warfare] ship and had no strike missiles or powerful air defenses because it had a narrow specialization -- to hunt submarines. At sea, these ASW ships are supposed to operate in conjunction with project 956 Sovremennyy-class destroyers, which have strike and anti-aircraft missiles. The result was that they were effective at killing enemy submarines but unable to attack targets on land, and they were helpless against missiles and aviation. The Shaposhnikov was armed with the Kinzhal close-quarters anti-aircraft missile system and the AK-360 30-mm automated anti-aircraft gun.*

*The I is the naval version of the Russian ground troop's anti-aircraft missile and gun system, the I. Military historian Dmitriy Boltenkov told Izvestiya, that “The arrival of the Pantsir will significantly increase the frigate's air defense capabilities against cruise missiles, UAVs, and smart bombs.” In terms of range and target engagement effectiveness, the Pantsir greatly outperforms the Kinzhal, which was developed in Soviet times. The ground version received its baptism of fire in Syria, where it acquitted itself well. It has already been tested aboard warships and is fitted on ... the Karakurt-class small missile ship Odintsovo, which is currently completing sea trials and is being made ready to join the fleet. In the future, all small missile ships of this class will carry the new anti-aircraft system.*

*Each Pantsir-M unit incorporates eight missile launchers and two six-barreled 30-mm automatic cannon. The system's purpose is to protect ships of various displacements against massed attack by cruise and antishipping missiles, smart bombs, drones, and also aircraft and helicopters.*

*The Pantsir implements the principle of dual-layer air defense. It can protect surface craft against practically any type of enemy attack from the air within a range of 20-30 kilometers using its anti-aircraft missiles. Weapons systems surviving that encounter the rapid-fire 30-mm guns, which can complete their destruction within a radius of 4 kilometers. By comparison, the Kinzhal has only missiles and engages targets at up to 12 kilometers.*

*When the refit is complete the Marshal Shaposhnikov will be a versatile ship. It will be able to track and kill enemy submarines and deliver missile strikes against surface and ground targets. During its refit, the frigate will have Kalibr launchers installed on it. These missiles have a range of at least 1,400 kilometers, and their low flight altitude and highly precise navigation make them invisible even to the most hi-tech detection systems.*

...

*The ship's modernization is not proceeding as quickly as one would like: Handover to the fleet was due to take place at the end of last year. The long-term plan is to upgrade Pacific Fleet ships along similar lines.*



## Russia Forms Mobile Air Defense Reserve of Pantsir-S

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to create air defense mobile reserves of Pantsir-S gun-missile systems. The intended purpose of these units is to protect high-value targets, such as S-400 systems, from mass US cruise missile strikes. Russian S-400 regiments typically have a Pantsir-S battalion, but apparently there is concern that a mass cruise missile strike could overwhelm these defenses. The author believes that cruise missiles would first be used to attack these targets, in order to create holes in air defense zones, enabling manned aircraft to enter and get closer to other targets. Due to the Pantsir-S wheeled chassis, these air defense mobile reserves will be able to rapidly deploy to defend such key military systems and other critical infrastructure. This development complements existing plans to put a high mobility air defense regiment in each of the Aerospace Forces' Air and Defense Armies. (Russia has one of these armies in each of its five military districts.) These regiments will likely be based upon the wheeled S-350 Vityaz, and intended as a mobile reserve that can be rapidly deployed to defend hostile air corridors. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



96K6 Pantsir-S1 on wheeled chassis.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Engineering-Technologies-2012/i-XP2nDJx/0/47f70a6a/X3/TVM2012ch2p1photo018-X3.jpg>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

***“The USAF mostly tries to use aerial means of attack, in particular cruise missiles, without entering the air defense zone... Creating the mobile regiments will make it possible to rapidly reinforce air defenses, most of all in sectors of danger. This is a timely decision and it is a response to present-day threats.”***

***-Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy***

**Source:** Anton Lavrov Roman Kretsul, “Прикроются «Панцирем»: в армии формируют мобильные полки ПВО (Covered by the Pantsir: Army Forming Mobile Air Defense Regiments),” *Izvestia* Online, 10 July 2020. <https://iz.ru/1033585/anton-lavrov-roman-kretsul/prikroiutsia-pantcirem-v-armii-formiruiut-mobilnye-polki-pvo>

...Regiments in the air defense mobile reserve will begin to be formed this year in Siberia and the Far East and also in a number of other regions of the country, *Izvestiya* was told by sources in the Defense Ministry. So far Russia has just one such unit, an experimental one that is protecting Moscow and the surrounding area as part of the special-purpose air and missile defense army responsible for covering the capital. The new subunits will be intended to repulse massed cruise missile strikes against key sites. The chief of the Central Military District 14th Air Force and Air Defense Army, Colonel Gennadiy Shlag, announced earlier that a similar regiment armed with the Pantsir will also be formed in the Urals. *Izvestiya* reported last year on plans to organize one mobile reserve unit in each of the currently existing air force and air defense armies...

Aviation has always had the upper hand over air defenses, if only because it holds the initiative, but mobile air defense subunits should even the odds, military expert Viktor Murakhovskiy believes. “The USAF mostly tries to use aerial means of attack, in particular cruise missiles, without entering the air defense zone,” he said to *Izvestiya*. “Creating the mobile regiments will make it possible to rapidly reinforce air defenses, most of all in sectors of danger. This is a timely decision and it is a response to present-day threats.”

Cruise missiles and, in the future, drones that can be carried by manned aircraft are highly challenging targets, Murakhovskiy emphasized. They are hard to see, fly low, and are designed to beat air defenses. Examples of this can be seen in Syria and Libya.

An experimental mobile air defense regiment was formed in 2018 and armed with the Pantsir-S as part of the 1st Special-Purpose Air and Missile Defense Army outside Moscow. According to the military, it was sent to the Ashuluk training ground for the first time last year, where it held live-firing exercises.

Pantsir-S short-range anti-aircraft missile and gun systems have been in service with the Russian military since 2010, most of them as part of Aerospace Forces air defenses. They are included in the complement of S-400 Triumf long-range SAM regiments, whose positions they protect against drones, precision weapons, and helicopters.

The weapon's developer is also working to extend the variety of ammunition. Alongside conventional anti-aircraft missiles, the upgraded Pantsir will also have hypersonic ones with greater range and maneuverability. Low-cost and simplified anti-aircraft rounds are being developed to engage small-dimension targets such as drones and rockets. And instead of one pod with missiles, it will be possible to load four at once. Combat vehicles with such missiles were shown to the public for the first time during the Victory parade in Moscow on 24 June...





# Russia's Energy Strategy 2035: A Breakthrough or Another Impasse?

by Sergey Sukhankin

Republished and edited for OE Watch in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol: 17, Issue: 78, dated 2 June 2020. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-energy-strategy-2035-a-breakthrough-or-another-impasse/>

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 2 April, Russia adopted the “Energy Strategy 2035” (ES-2035) planning document. As noted by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, the country’s fuel and energy complex (FEC) is a driver of domestic economic growth; therefore, “we need to start planning now for how to continue our energy policy once global markets have recovered” after the COVID-19 pandemic. The energy document suggests that the Russian FEC will become the “central pillar of Russia’s economy in the upcoming decade.” And the domestic economy itself will undergo two major changes: a shift toward “resource-innovative development” as well as a transition of the FEC from a “donor” to the “locomotive of the Russian economy.”

To achieve these broad goals, the ES-2035 puts forth five key objectives. First is boosting domestic consumption to a new level, through an integrated complex of measures aimed at modernizing the FEC. Specifically, these measures will consist of new financial transparency requirements among leading players and corporations operating on the Russian market, the gradual liquidation of some sectoral subsidies, and greater transparency on tariffs.

Second is a greater diversification of exports, drawing particularly on investments in liquefied natural gas (LNG), whose production is to increase by 3.4 times by 2024. Within the scope of this objective, two LNG clusters are to be completed, on the Yamal and Gyda peninsulas. Furthermore, the ES-2035 states that Russia should develop in-country production of hydrogen and helium to become one of the global leaders in the hydrogen economy.

Third is the modernization and development of Russia’s FEC infrastructure. This will involve increasing the gasification of the Russian regions, developing energy infrastructure in Eastern Siberia and the Far East, and integrating them into the Russian energy infrastructure system, as well as commercially developing the Arctic region and the Northern Sea Route, in particular.

Fourth is achieving technological independence and increasing national competitiveness. This is to be accomplished via domestically produced technologies, which falls within the import substitution strategy adopted by Russia after 2014.

Fifth is digital transformation, premised on several essential pillars: the digitalization of the FEC; increasing the role of artificial intelligence (AI), which is to attain 100 percent penetration (by 2035) in some areas of the FEC, such as electricity meters; the introduction of AI-based systems of control of electricity grids; and the realization of the National Technological Initiative (launched in 2014) aimed at the development of a domestic cybernetics market by 2035.

This optimistic plan faces some substantial obstacles, however, which cast doubt on the feasibility and main postulates identified in the ES-2035. Namely, the implementation (and feasibility) of the strategy document could be challenged by the following factors.

First is the retrograde nature of the ES-2035, as illustrated by a stress-test conducted by the Russian Ministry of Energy in line with the energy strategy’s outlined requirements. Notably, the stress-test identified five main threats and risks that the FEC faces:

1. The rapid growth of new energy-sector technologies;
2. The globalization of the world energy market;
3. Growing competition, primarily posed by LNG and shale oil;
4. Increasing non-competitive means of economic competition (a.k.a. sanctions);
5. Promotion of green (renewable) energy.

Analysis of these risks underscores that Russia perceives any type of external competition to its leading global energy position—including emerging new players as well as structural trends related to the transformation of the global energy market—as existential threats that must be mitigated rather than as incentives or potential opportunities for adaptation and innovation.

The second hindrance to fulfilling the ES-2035 involves Russia’s internal competition and transparency issues. For instance, while the document argues for increasing both, officials from the Ministry of Energy are pushing for greater state subsidies and earmarking large funds for specific projects developed by Russia’s largest energy companies. As notoriously highlighted by Gazprom’s Nord Stream Two and TurkStream gas pipelines, some of those Russian energy project are clearly of dubious commercial value and grossly overstate their resource potential.

(Continued)



## Continued: Russia's Energy Strategy 2035: A Breakthrough or Another Impasse?

Third, the ES-2035—though filled with such concepts as “innovation, effectiveness, social-orientation, development of human capital and eco security”—in effect, provides no real solutions or definitive proposals on how to modernize the FEC. Nor does the document explain how the errors of the past could be corrected. Specifically, the energy strategy fails to provide any viable clarification on how FEC regulations might be adjusted to fit new market realities defined by (relatively) inexpensive hydrocarbons. Furthermore, the document does not pay due attention to the nexus between energy extraction and ecology.

A fourth (somewhat unexpected) issue might also challenge the implementation of certain aspects of the new energy strategy. Namely, the gasification of the Kamchatka region—planned by the Russian gas company Novatek and including the creation of an LNG terminal—is reportedly being thwarted by the Russian navy, the Military-Maritime Fleet (VMF). While the VMF has so far abstained from any comments on the subject, presumably its position is primarily stipulated by the fact that the defense ministry has its own plans for Bechenivka Bay (where the LNG terminal is to be established), which, potentially might include the restoration of a Soviet-era military base.

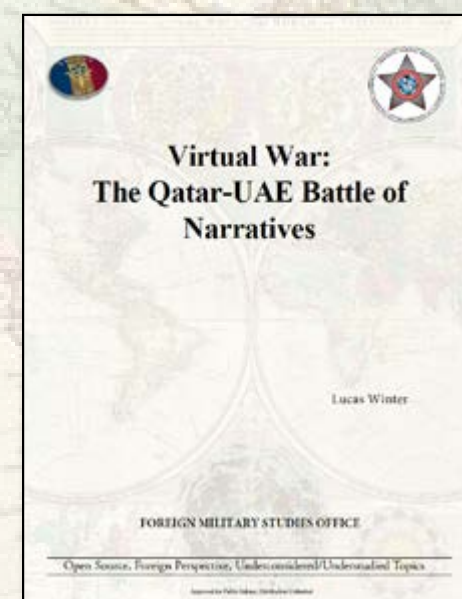
In the final analysis, as noted by Mikhail Krutikhin (the co-founder and partner of RusEnergy, a Moscow-based independent analytical agency), the ES-2035 “is a terrible document... Russia persists in selling its oil, gas and coal to the rest of the world, and everything that obstructs this goal is considered to be a peril and a challenge.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**

### VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter

May 2020

For much of the past decade, Qatar and the UAE have been engaged in a battle of narratives. Their ongoing dispute dates to 2011 and is rooted in foreign policy and ideological disagreements. Following a hack of the Qatari News Agency in 2017, the nature of Qatari-Emirati competition shifted from being primarily the purview of government officials, spokespeople, journalists, analysts and authors, to one where coders, influencers, trolls and cybersecurity experts played a vital role. Since then, both countries have worked to increase their capabilities in the cyber and informational domains. Their relationship in these domains has evolved into one of strategic competition. This paper looks at how these dynamics may affect the regional operational environment, with a particular focus on the cyber and informational domains.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/329799>





## The Kremlin's Critique of Western Values

**OE Watch Commentary:** Nikolai Patrushev is a former Director of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), Secretary of the Security Council of Russia since 2008, and by all accounts, one of Putin's closest and most trusted advisors. The accompanying excerpted commentary by Patrushev in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* provides insight into the Kremlin's critique of Western values. Patrushev argues that the West is forcing its values on Russia and many other countries. Patrushev asserts the majority of the world opposes these values, especially the imposition of Western-style "freedom and democracy" which the Kremlin has cited as the cause of much of the current instability in the Middle East. Specifically, he claims that these values "cannot exist in [certain places] ... due to historical, religious, ethnological, and other reasons" and their imposition has led to the "tragedies of Iraq, Syria and Libya."

Patrushev believes that Russia offers an alternative to the West (particularly the United States and United Kingdom). As Patrushev states: "Russia, in fact, offers a new civilizational choice, the content of which includes equality, justice, noninterference in internal affairs, and the absence of a mentoring tone and any preconditions for mutually beneficial cooperation." A major component of this Russian worldview is the belief of 'noninterference in internal affairs.' Russian commentators often point out that NATO set a precedent for using military force when it attacked, and later portioned, Serbia over Kosovo. Unsurprisingly, Patrushev makes no mention of the now acknowledged use of Russian troops to annex Crimea and reported use of Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine.



*Nikolai Patrushev.*

Source: Duma.gov.ru via Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai\\_Patrushev#/media/File:Nikolay\\_Patrushev\\_2019.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Patrushev#/media/File:Nikolay_Patrushev_2019.jpg), CC BY 4.0

In many ways, Patrushev's commentary is much more important than Chief of the General Staff General Valeriy Gerasimov's often misunderstood article of 2013, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations." Patrushev succinctly explains the Kremlin's understanding of the reasons for deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, Russia's counternarrative, and path for Kremlin leadership on the world stage. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***"New western values have turned into the imposition of an alien worldview on the planet..."***

***"Russia... offers a new civilizational choice, the content of which includes equality, justice, noninterference in internal affairs, and the absence of a mentoring tone and any preconditions for mutually beneficial cooperation."***



*The Kremlin.*

Source: Pavel Kazachkov from Moscow, Russia / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>); [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moscow\\_Kremlin\\_at\\_night\\_\(7990921836\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moscow_Kremlin_at_night_(7990921836).jpg)





## Continued: The Kremlin's Critique of Western Values

**Source:** Nikolai Patrushev, "Нужны ли России "универсальные" ценности? (Does Russia Need 'Universal' Values?)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 18 June 2020. <https://rg.ru/2020/06/17/nuzhny-li-rossii-universalnye-cennosti.html>

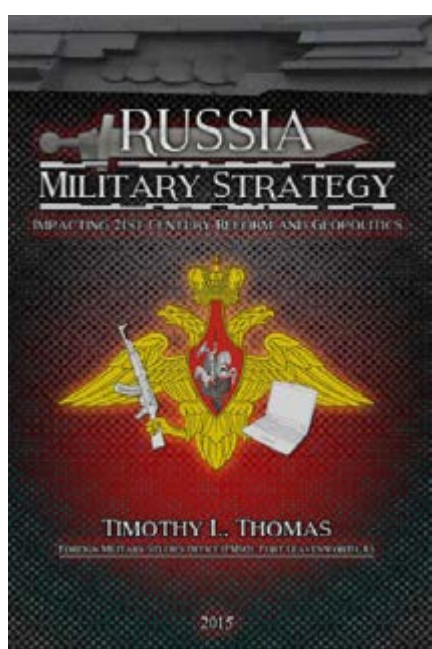
*The system of traditional Russian values, which formed over centuries, serves as the spiritual and moral foundation of our society. This system was at the basis of the Soviet people's victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, which was of global historical importance. This very foundation allows us to protect and strengthen sovereignty and to build the future regardless of all the difficulties and contradictions of historical development...The values of our multiethnic and multireligious society should be protected from the aggressive promotion of values of the neoliberal trend which in many respects contradict the very essence of our perception of the world and are being actively imposed by our geopolitical opponents in the fight for influence on the development of civilization and their dominance in the world...We usually refer to values that are not inherent in our Russian society and that are dominant in foreign culture as "Western values."...It must be noted that some European values, for instance, an eight-hour working day, equality between women and men, or women's electoral rights appeared solely thanks to the events that took place in Russia in 1917...In the social sphere, neoliberalism imposes individualism, egoism, the cult of pleasure, unrestrained consumption, and absolutizes the freedom of any self-expression...*

*It is no longer about replacing some values with others. We should talk about the emergence of a new ideological system that ultimately aims to destroy any traditional religious and spiritual-moral values as the fundamental basis for the cultural and political sovereignty of countries and nations...New western values have turned into the imposition of an alien worldview on the planet. The ideologues of the west put whole countries and nations before a choice -- either you accept "universal values" or your values will be wrong and immoral...Thus, any attempts to standardize Russian or other values under the officially accepted "universal" ones are a manifestation of sociocultural aggression aimed at destroying traditional value systems in a particular state.*

*The impact of these norms on the international security system has been equally devastating. Replacing international norms with the law of the strong, with fire and sword, imposing "freedom and democracy" where they cannot exist in such a Western sense, by definition, due to historical, religious, ethnological, and other reasons, has already led to the tragedies of Iraq, Syria, and Libya. A separate shameful page of history for all NATO countries was and will always remain the barbaric bombing of Yugoslavia.*

*An offensive is being conducted on "all fronts" of this "hybrid" war. The direction of the main blow was chosen to blur the traditions of various peoples that have developed over the centuries, their language, faith, and historical memory of generations. Such norms and values cannot be accepted by the multiethnic Russian nation under any circumstances. Against this background, the question of what Russia offers the world in return is very important. In contrast to the West, Russia, in fact, offers a new civilizational choice, the content of which includes equality, justice, noninterference in internal affairs, and the absence of a mentoring tone and any preconditions for mutually beneficial cooperation.*

*Russia proposes that national sovereignty, including cultural and spiritual and moral sovereignty, be elevated to the status of the greatest value and the basis for the subsequent construction of human civilization. There is no doubt that the number of followers of such a choice in the world will grow, creating more and more favorable conditions for the development and prosperity of different countries and nations.*



### 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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## Let the Army Expo and Games Go On

**OE Watch Commentary:** Primarily because of coronavirus concerns, only a modest number of high-level, international delegations attended this year's massive Victory Day parade on 24 June in Red Square. Nevertheless, millions, both within Russia and abroad, watched the parade virtually. Indeed, from the Kremlin's perspective, the public relations benefits from staging such an elaborate affair may be nearly as important as commemorating those who fought in the Great Fatherland War (WW II). As the brief excerpt from the popular daily *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* suggests, positive publicity may also be a driving factor behind the decision to hold the "VI international military-technical forum 'Army' ... from August 23 to 29 in the Military-Patriotic Park," located outside of Moscow (Army expo website: <http://mil.ru/army2020.htm>).



Logo for the Army 2020 international military-technical forum.

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://mil.ru/army2020.htm>, CCA 4.0 Intl

This annual event is designed to both showcase Russian military equipment as well as provide an international forum where Russian officials can explain their perspectives on various security issues. Despite a steady rise in the number of new COVID-19 cases within Russia, the Army-2020 exposition will be held, and according to the excerpt "over a thousand domestic and foreign companies" will display "more than 25 thousand different exhibits of weapons and military equipment." Furthermore, as the excerpt points out, in a change from past exhibitions, "for the first time the forum will be held along with the opening of the Army International Games." These competitive military games allow Russian arms manufacturers to advertise their wares, as well as provide another forum for the Russian armed forces to demonstrate their prowess (since the games began in 2015, Russia has been the overall victor every year). While the article does not mention which countries will send representatives to the Army expo, it does assert, "official delegations from 133 countries have already been invited to the upcoming military-technical forum 'Army,'" reminding readers that last year, "official representatives of one hundred and twenty countries took part... and [the event] was visited by over a million people."

The current Kremlin leadership remains intent on impressing audiences, domestic and foreign, that the Russian military is a force to be reckoned with. And despite pandemic concerns, they also appear determined to increase the country's share in foreign military exports. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“For the first time, the Army International Games will open simultaneously with the Army forum...”***

**Source:** Maxim Kislyakov, "Более тысячи предприятий будут участвовать в предстоящем форуме 'Армия' (More than a thousand enterprises will participate in the upcoming Army forum)," *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 26 June 2020. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/06/26/bole-tsyachi-predpriyatiy-budut-uchastvovat-v-predstoyashhem-forume-armiya.html>

*...The world will see more than 25 thousand different exhibits of weapons and military equipment at the VI international military-technical forum 'Army'. They will be represented by over a thousand domestic and foreign companies.... It is also noted that for the first time the forum will be held along with the opening of the Army International Games.*

*...The international military-technical forum 'Army' will be held from August 23 to 29 in the Patriot Military-Patriotic Park.... For the first time, the Army International Games will open simultaneously with the Army forum.*

*The Ministry of Defense admitted: they expect that such a new format will increase the quality and effectiveness of all events, make them more attractive to visitors. And the most important thing in the framework of the Army forum: it will expand the possibilities of official negotiations and meetings.*

*Already more than a thousand domestic and foreign companies want to participate in the upcoming forum have already announced more than one thousand. They are ready to provide over 25 thousand different types of weapons and military equipment.*

*...The heads of defense ministries and departments, as well as official delegations from 133 countries have already been invited to the upcoming military-technical forum "Army".*

*Official representatives of one hundred and twenty countries took part in the last anniversary forum "Army," including more than forty high-level delegations. In total, "Army-2019" was visited by over a million people.*



## A Russian Military Look at the Personnel Factor in Chinese Information Warfare Development

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to assessments by Russian General Staff analysts, the Chinese approach information warfare with some key principles. These include targeting the power supply of the server system or “master computer,” striking command and control systems and their various network components, “artificially overload[ing]” the adversary’s network to get direct control of the information flow, and software attacks in the form of viruses and unauthorized access. While their findings were not startling, the Russian analysts saw an emphasis on personnel and described the Chinese military and political leadership’s consistent and practical “steps to organize and conduct information warfare” with “personnel training, operational training, and direct conduct of and counter-action against information and psychological operations” on a “digital battlefield” that required “IT-savvy troops.”

According to the article, China has three categories of service members that are designated to become qualified in “information domination.” The first category is the highest command level of the PLA, who would have a focus on study of fundamentals of information technologies and IW concepts. The second category are PLA commanders, who study principles of information systems and the “forms and methods” (a key field of study in Russian military science) of conducting information warfare. The last category are officers, who know fundamentals of computer technology and programming, and are trained longer and more in depth on strategy, forms and methods, and applications.

It is interesting that the Russian analysts paid particular attention to age differentials of each group: over 40 for the first group, 30-40 for the second, and “generally 30 years of age or under” for the third group.

The Russian analysis also noted that Chinese information warfare specialists were trained in a number of centers including the PLA’s Communication Command Academy, the Information Engineering University, the Science and Engineering University and Tianjin University. Adding to this, according to the article, the PRC government recruits competent specialists from Chinese civilian, military, and state security institutions and from those Chinese who were educated abroad.

To ensure the loyal quality of the personnel developed for Chinese IW, the Russians stated that, through Communist Party control of the information infrastructure and mass media, the PRC is developing a “system of organized information” designed to “impact on the consciousness and minds of servicemen and civilians.” The Russian analysts believed that the Chinese considered this systemic psychological approach as a “key element of [China’s] military might.”

The Russian analysis also makes clear that the goal of their neighbor and putative partner is superiority and dominance in the information domain. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**



*Vintage Chinese propaganda poster, showing the PLA. The caption reads, “The People’s Army is invincible”. The pilot (on top) holds a flagstaff and a copy of “Selected Works of Chairman Mao Zedong.”*

Source: Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Peoples\\_army.jpg#/media/File:Peoples\\_army.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Peoples_army.jpg#/media/File:Peoples_army.jpg), Fair Use

***“...In order to prevail in information warfare, the Chinese military analysts believe that two important elements need to be created: a digital battlefield and IT-savvy troops.”***





## Continued: A Russian Military Look at the Personnel Factor in Chinese Information Warfare Development

**Source:** Р.А. Полончук, Т.А. Ганиев (R.A. Polonchuk, T.A. Gantiev), “Взгляды китайских военных специалистов на сущность и содержание информационной войны в современных условиях (Views of Chinese Military Experts on the Nature and Content of Information Warfare Today),” *Военная Мысль [Military Thought]*, No.3, 2020, p. 133-139.

*The Chinese media report that the PRC’s military and political leadership has been consistently taking practical steps to organize and conduct information warfare in three main areas:*

- *personnel training;*
- *improvement of the forms and methods of information warfare during CPLA operational and combat training;*
- *direct conduct of and counteraction against information and psychological operations.*

*An analysis of Chinese military periodicals leads to the conclusion that a special training program for three categories of servicemen has been developed to train qualified personnel in information domination.*

*Category one is the highest command level of the CPLA. These are generally individuals over the age of 40. The main objective of their training is to study the fundamentals of information technologies and the concepts of conducting information warfare.*

*Category two is the commanders of the forces and units of the Chinese armed services. These are primarily individuals aged 30 to 40 years. The main objective of their training is to study the forms and methods of conducting information warfare, as well as to study the basic principles of the functioning of information systems.*

*Category three is the commissioned officers, who know the fundamentals of computer technology and programming and are generally 30 years of age or under. The main objective of their training is to study in depth the strategy, forms and methods of conducting information warfare, followed by their application in crisis situations. The training period for this group is longer than that of the first two groups.*

*The study program of each of the categories also includes the following topics to a greater or lesser degree:*

- *strategy and tactics, methods and means of conducting information warfare;*
- *computer simulation;*
- *fundamentals of information technologies;*
- *principles of the functioning of telecommunication systems;*
- *in-house information security and measures to counter the technological tools of foreign intelligence services.*



**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>



## Russia's Balance Between India and China

**OE Watch Commentary:** Much has been written about the strengthening military relationship between Russia and China over the past several years. President Putin has even used the term “strategic partnership” to describe Russia’s close military ties with Beijing. However, as the accompanying brief excerpts suggest, the current Kremlin leadership appears unwilling to sacrifice its extensive military sales and cooperation with India to curry favor with their Chinese “strategic partner.”

The first excerpt from the pro-business *Kommersant* asserts, “Russia will accelerate the implementation of a key defense contract with India, which provides for Delhi’s delivery of five S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems (SAM), and will also intensify negotiations on the supply of 33 MiG-29 and Su-30MKI fighters to India.” As the article points out, the Indian Defense Minister recently met with senior Russian defense officials to expedite the deal “to receive Russian fighters and air defense systems as soon as possible.” The article points out that while the Chinese side did not officially comment on the contracts, an article in the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party advised “if Russia wants to soften the hearts of both the Chinese and Indians, it is best not to supply India with weapons at sensitive moments.”

The second excerpt from the mostly pro-Kremlin *Svobodnaya Pressa* includes comments by military expert Viktor Litovkin, who asserts “India is the largest buyer of Russian weapons,” and that “up to 30% of our arms exports go to India.” Litovkin describes the “joint arms production” Russia has with India, to include: “Su-30MKI aircraft..., T-90S tanks..., and BrahMos supersonic ship rockets.” The article also quotes retired Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov who claims “India is our most important geopolitical ally in the 21st century.” Ivashov reminds readers that “India is not only a member of the SCO, it is part of the BRICS group of countries,” and that it is in Russia’s interests “to maintain multilateral relations of strategic and geopolitical cooperation” with India.

Less than two weeks after a border clash, soldiers from India and China participated in the Kremlin’s Victory Day parade on 24 June. By selling advanced weapon systems to India, Kremlin officials apparently believe that they can prevent a broader conflict while still maintaining strong ties with China and India. As Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov claims in the second excerpt, the “Russia-China-India triangle - while maintaining the balance of power - ...is the stabilizing geopolitical factor for the whole of Greater Eurasia.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

*“India is our most important geopolitical ally in the 21st century...”*



*Members of the Indian contingent on Red Square during 2020 Victory Day parade.*

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91513145>, CC BY 4.0





## Continued: Russia's Balance Between India and China

**Source:** Sergey Strokan, "Российское оружие спешит в Индию (Russian weapons rush to India)," *Kommersant*, 26 June 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4391564>

*Russia will accelerate the implementation of a key defense contract with India, which provides for Delhi's delivery of five S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems (SAM), and will also intensify negotiations on the supply of 33 MiG-29 and Su-30MKI fighters to India. The agreement to boost military-technical cooperation with the largest buyer of Russian weapons was the main result of the visit to Moscow by the head of the Indian Ministry of Defense Rajnath Singh. Delhi's desire to receive Russian fighters and air defense systems as soon as possible is caused by the growing need to neutralize threats from China and Pakistan, which are carrying out accelerated modernization of their air forces.*

*...Although the main purpose of the visit was to participate in celebrations marking the 75th anniversary of the Victory, Rajnath Singh held a series of meetings and negotiations in Moscow in which Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov.... citing sources in Delhi, reported that the Indian delegation would ask Moscow to expedite the supply of Russian weapons....*

*...The Chinese side has not officially commented on the planned acceleration of the implementation of Russian defense contracts with India. However, on the eve of the Indian delegation's negotiations in Moscow, a comment appeared under the heading "Will India Test Russian-Chinese Friendship?" ... People's Daily notes: "If Russia wants to soften the hearts of both the Chinese and Indians, it is best not to supply India with weapons at sensitive moments...."*

**Source:** Andrey Polunin, "Назло Америке: Русские С-400 долетят до Индии с ускорением (To Spite America: Russian S-400s will fly to India with acceleration)," *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 26 June 2020. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/269282/>

*Moscow at the request of Delhi will accelerate the execution of the contract for the supply of five S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems (SAM) to India, and will intensify negotiations on the supply of 33 MiG-29 and Su-30MKI fighters. This was made clear by the head of the Indian Ministry of Defense, Rajnath Singh, following a three-day visit to Russia, which ended on June 25....*

*... "India is the largest buyer of Russian weapons," said military expert, retired colonel Viktor Litovkin. "Delhi acquires significantly more than Beijing - up to 30% of our arms exports go to India. Moreover, India is the only country in the world with which we have joint arms production enterprises. For example, we, together with the Indians, are making the Su-30MKI aircraft. ... India and Russia also have a joint program for licensed production of T-90S tanks - it has recently been extended to 2028. ... India and Russia are doing BrahMos supersonic ship rockets, which Indians now use not only on land and ships...."*

*... "India is our most important geopolitical ally in the 21st century," said Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov... "In fact, it is the Russia-China-India triangle - while maintaining the balance of power - that is the stabilizing geopolitical factor for the whole of Greater Eurasia."*

*"We need India precisely as a balance between China and Russia. Let me remind you that India is not only a member of the SCO, it is part of the BRICS group of countries, and Delhi and Moscow simply need to maintain multilateral relations of strategic and geopolitical*

### 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>





## Russian Allies: Examining Russia's Relations with CSTO Members

**OE Watch Commentary:** Due to coronavirus concerns, during this year's Victory Day parade on 24 June, President Putin was mostly flanked by leaders of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). While these countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia) are most often cited as "allies" of Russia, there are significant differences in their level of cooperation. A recent book, titled "Союзники" [Allies] written by experts at the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, examines each of these countries as Russian allies. The book was recently reviewed in *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, and some of the findings merit closer attention.

The review begins by explaining "after the reign of Peter I, when Russia began to play an active role in the European system of international relations, it almost always acted in the international arena as part of [a] coalition." However, after the collapse of the USSR, "the Russian Federation found itself in a unique foreign policy situation," which one author has defined "as strategic loneliness, [where] for almost the first time in its long history, our country has no real allies." The book suggests that the CSTO consists of only "formal" allies of Russia, which "are more likely consumers of security, rather than its providers." To date, other than Armenia, none of Russia's allies have helped in Syria, nor have any recognized Russia's annexation of Crimea or the "independence" of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The review posits that Belarus is Russia's closest ally, since it "is the only country in the territory of the former USSR where Russian remains the official language," but that such support "costs a lot." Conversely, the review points out that "our much more powerful and strategically important ally - Kazakhstan - has long embarked on the eradication of all Russian," where not only has the Cyrillic alphabet [been changed] to the Latin alphabet, but that "Russian specialists are being squeezed out from all leading positions."

The review concludes on a curious note, pointing out that "Moscow traditionally treats the CSTO members condescendingly," and in return, CSTO members assume that Russia will "guarantee military assistance in the event of the activation of Islamic militants." While the review repeats the oft-quoted phrase "Russia has only two reliable allies - its army and navy," it also emphasizes, "Russia has always won from having allied relations." After the Kremlin's armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014, Russia's CSTO allies have looked at Moscow in a less favorable light. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"Who are our allies today? What is the degree of their loyalty to Moscow?..."***



*Meeting of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO in Bishkek, Nov 2019.*

Source: The President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62146>, CCA 4.0 Intl





## Continued: Russian Allies: Examining Russia's Relations with CSTO Members

**Source:** Sergey Serov, "Союзнический долг и союзнические обязанности (Allied debt and allied duties)," *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 25 June 2020. [https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2020-06-25/12\\_1097\\_allies.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2020-06-25/12_1097_allies.html) A copy of the book can be downloaded at this link: <http://cast.ru/upload/iblock/23f/23f1ca6f13cdecf505dc27bcd93270df.pdf>

*Who are our allies today? What is the degree of their loyalty to Moscow? Which of them is the most reliable and loyal? Is anyone ready today not in words but in action to stand up for a friend? After 1991, for some reason, these issues in our country were considered inconvenient for in-depth analysis....*

*...It seems that the first to try to understand the difficult relationship between Moscow and its official allies - Bishkek, Dushanbe, Yerevan, Minsk and Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) were experts from the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies. The findings were very interesting. The center prepared and published a unique book, "Allies," edited by Konstantin Makienko.... The authors focus on the fact that after the reign of Peter I, when Russia began to play an active role in the European system of international relations, it almost always acted in the international arena as part of coalitions. Moreover, in most cases, the combined potential of Russia and its allies exceeded the power of our opponents.*

*Even the Soviet Union, which was alien to the West, Makienko emphasizes, was not left alone in the face of the Nazi invasion. The socialist USSR fought against Hitler in alliance with the most powerful military and economic capitalist states. After World War II, Moscow led a strong military-political bloc of Eastern European countries. In addition to officially allied relations with members of the Warsaw Pact Organization, the USSR had very valuable and loyal partners — Cuba, Vietnam, Mongolia, and South Yemen.*

*But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation found itself in a unique foreign policy situation, which political analyst Dmitry Trenin defined as "strategic loneliness." For almost the first time in its long history, our country has not had real allies. The paradox is that from a legal point of view this is not so. Almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was created in 1992, and the participants in this bloc - Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - formally became Russia's military allies. Alas, it is formally.... Today, Moscow's CSTO partners, according to the authors of the book, are more likely consumers of security, rather than its providers....*

*Who is our most faithful ally, not only within the framework of the CSTO? Almost everyone will answer - Belarus. And he will be right. But there are nuances.... It cannot be overestimated that Belarus is the only country in the territory of the former USSR where Russian remains officially the official language. It costs a lot. In addition, Minsk always shows full solidarity with our country in the voting on anti-Russian resolutions at the UN.*

*But our much more powerful and strategically important ally - Kazakhstan - has long embarked on the eradication of all Russian. The apotheosis was the change of the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. It is a fact that squeezing out Russian specialists from all leading positions.... Moreover, Yerevan actively and publicly supported Moscow's actions in Syria and even sent its sappers to this country, who cleared mines hand in hand with the Russian military....*

*...Moscow traditionally treats the CSTO members condescendingly.... They are supplied with the latest weapons on soft loans. They are guaranteed military assistance in the event of the activation of Islamic militants. And the leaders of the allied states, it seems, are absolutely sure that this will always be so.*

*Meanwhile, the Russian Federation is absolutely self-sufficient. As Emperor Alexander III used to say, Russia has only two reliable allies - its army and navy. So it was in the past, it remains so today. By the way, if we objectively evaluate the allied relations of our country at all times - tsarist and Soviet, then Russia has always won from having allied relations.*



Flag of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Source: Unknown author / Public domain  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_Collective\\_Security\\_Treaty\\_Organization.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization.png)



## Debating the Pros and Cons of Russia's Syria Campaign

**OE Watch Commentary:** September will mark the 5th year anniversary of Russia's combat operations in Syria. Throughout the summer, the military news source *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* published a series of articles arguing both for and against Russia's continued armed support for the Assad government in Syria. These arguments reflect the wider debate within Russian society surrounding the ongoing Syrian campaign.

Arguing against continued involvement, the first excerpt contends "that the civil war in Syria is still far from over," and that given the problems associated with millions of refugees and the low support for the current Syrian leadership, "it is hardly advisable to conclude any long-term and costly agreements and contracts with the Assad government." The author compares the current situation in Syria to the chess condition known as "zugzwang, when each subsequent move only worsens the position of the losing player," asserting that "only with the new coalition government in Damascus will it become possible to



*Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on a working visit to Russia, November 2017.*

Source: The President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56135>, CC BY 4.0 Intl

discuss the issue of the military bases of the Russian Federation on a long-term basis." Also arguing against continued involvement, the second excerpt mostly focuses on the future economic costs of the Syrian campaign, pointing out that to rebuild Syria will be "ten times" more expensive than the price Russia paid to restore Chechnya. Given the state of the Russian domestic economy, "and the embitterment of an impoverished society," the author states that "it's time to really stop wasting resources in dubious foreign policy endeavors and focus efforts on our own salvation."

The third excerpt identifies some of the positive aspects of Russia's continued military operations in Syria. First and foremost, the Russian military has been able to destroy radical volunteers from Russia "on someone else's territory [which] is a unique historical success." The author argues that had the Kremlin not got involved in Syria, these terrorists would have almost certainly staged "another wave of terror against Russia." The author also asserts that the fighting in Syria has provided "the best training grounds," allowing Russian military personnel to gain experience that "no exercises and training grounds will provide." While the current Kremlin leadership has portrayed the Syrian campaign as an overwhelming success, these articles suggest that not all Russians agree with that assessment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"We should not forget that the civil war in Syria is still far from over..."***

**Source:** Stanislav Ivanov, "Камень на шею (Stone around the neck)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 24 June 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57495>

*...How justified are the plans of the Russian Federation to expand cooperation with Assad? The Russian media reported on the intentions of the Russian leadership to expand military cooperation with the Assad government in Syria....*

*...However, from a political point of view and future prospects, many questions arise. We should not forget that the civil war in Syria is still far from over. ...*

*But it should be borne in mind that most of the Syrians were still not with Assad. Seven to eight million people live as refugees abroad in camps, most of whom fled not from terrorists or opposition militants, but from missile and bombing and shelling of the Syrian armed forces and their allies....*

*...Under the circumstances, it is hardly advisable to conclude any long-term and costly agreements and contracts with the Assad government....*

*...Thus, it is not necessary to speak seriously about the stability and strength of the Assad regime. The situation in the country, speaking the language of chess, resembles zugzwang, when each subsequent move only worsens the position of the losing player.... Only with the new coalition government in Damascus will it become possible to discuss the issue of the military bases of the Russian Federation on a long-term basis.*





## Continued: Debating the Pros and Cons of Russia's Syria Campaign

**Source:** Y. Karny-Rozshuk, "А если взвесить все трезво? (And if you weigh everything soberly?)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 24 June 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57494>

*...Syria destroyed by the war is a "black hole" in the economy.... Imagine the epic of the restoration of Chechnya, only increased ten times. Yes, and the Assad government will have to be maintained. Sorry, but we need to equip Crimea with Sevastopol... it is criminal to lift Syria at the expense of the Russian hinterland.*

*Due to the economic recession and the embitterment of an impoverished society, it's time to really stop wasting resources in dubious foreign policy endeavors and focus efforts on our own salvation.*

**Source:** A. Khramchikhin, "Сирия: боевой опыт недорого (Syria: combat experience cheap)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 1 July 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57586>

*...The fact that we finally had the opportunity to destroy this enemy with literally "little blood, a mighty blow, on someone else's territory" is a unique historical success.*

*...After the fall of Assad, the arrival of another wave of terror in Russia would have been a matter of several months, the damage from it would certainly have exceeded many times the notorious unknown "so much".*

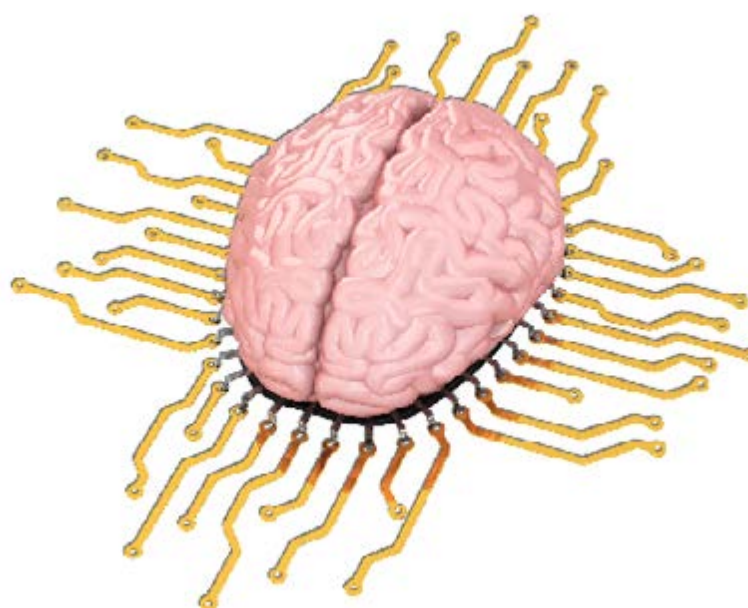
*...Nevertheless, even such a war is better than the most remarkable teachings and the best training grounds. Only on it is a weapon really tested. And the main thing, of course, is not advertising for the sale thereof, but the identification of its real flaws. No training ground and no training will ever reveal these shortcomings like war.*

*...In addition, even a "facilitated" war gives such a level of combat and moral-psychological training for personnel that, again, no exercises and training grounds will provide....*

## 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.**





## Russian Patriotism and Values

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past several years, patriotism has become a prominent theme among Kremlin officials, the Russian media and society. Citing recent poll data, the first brief excerpt from the pro-business site *Kommersant* points out, today “89% of Russians consider themselves patriots.” However, as these poll results make clear, the Russian definition of patriotism does not necessarily translate into support for the current Kremlin administration or its policies. When asked to “name the person living now, whom the country could be proud of,” 51% could not name anyone. According to the poll, only 13% of the respondents claimed that they were “proud of Vladimir Putin,” followed by [Defense Minister] Sergey Shoigu (6%). When queried which events over the past decade Russians were most proud of, just 16% mentioned the “annexation of Crimea,” followed by 10% supporting “the holding of the Olympics.”

The second excerpt from the centrist *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes pending legislation that would mandate “universal patriotic education for schoolchildren, college students and university students.” A chief sponsor of the bill posited that such education “will foster respect for law and order, a person of work and the older generation, respect for the cultural heritage and traditions of the multinational people of the Russian Federation, for nature and the environment.” However, despite these noble goals, the article cites a recent study “examining the content of patriotic education programs in the Russian Federation,” which found that “98% of them contain militaristic tasks.”

The third excerpt from the liberal *Novaya Izvestiya* cites the results of another recent poll designed “to find out the so-called values professed by Russian citizens.” As the excerpt points out, “the results were somewhat unexpected,” in that Russians preferred “a happy, well-fed life with relatives and friends, as well as material well-being,” over “patriotism, the so-called ‘traditional values’ and religion.” The article cites an analyst who asserts that “Russians are adherents of normal Western liberal values,” despite the attempts of various Kremlin officials (who themselves are “bathing in luxury,”) to proclaim “spiritual over material values...” While not necessarily authoritative, these articles suggest that despite Kremlin efforts to promulgate a state-approved, top-down form of patriotism, Russians have continued to develop their own values and love of country.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

### “89% of Russians surveyed consider themselves patriots...”

**Source:** “ВЦИОМ: почти 90% россиян считают себя патриотами (VTsIOM: almost 90% of Russians consider themselves patriots),” *Kommersant*, 11 June 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4348137>

*89% of Russians surveyed consider themselves patriots, follows from a survey conducted by VTsIOM.... 35% of respondents found it difficult to name an event in the life of the country over the past 10-15 years, which causes them a sense of pride. 16% of respondents chose the annexation of Crimea as such an event, 10% - holding the Olympics in Sochi...*

*...Half of the respondents (51%) could not name the person living now, whom the country could be proud of. 13% of Russians surveyed believe that the country can be proud of Vladimir Putin, 6% - Sergey Shoigu....*

**Source:** Elena Gerasimova, “Депутатский запрос на выращивание поколения будущих победителей (Deputy request for growing a generation of future winners),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1 July 2020. [https://www.ng.ru/education/2020-07-01/1\\_7899\\_winners.html](https://www.ng.ru/education/2020-07-01/1_7899_winners.html)

*The other day, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted in the first reading amendments to the law on education in 2012 on the introduction in schools of universal patriotic education for schoolchildren, college students and university students....*

*Education Minister Sergei Kravtsov, introducing the current bill in the State Duma, listed his principles. This is the formation of a sense of patriotism and citizenship, respect for the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland and the exploits of its heroes. Also, according to him, the children will “foster respect for law and order, a person of work and the older generation, respect for the cultural heritage and traditions of the multinational people of the Russian Federation, for nature and the environment.”*

*...In addition, examining the content of patriotic education programs in the Russian Federation, sociologists at the Higher School of Economics National Research University concluded that 98% of them contain militaristic tasks....*

**Source:** “Никакой духовности... Опрос показал, что россиянам важнее сытость, чем патриотизм (No spirituality ... The survey showed that satiety is more important to Russians than patriotism),” *Novaya Izvestiya*, 23 June 2020. <https://newizv.ru/article/general/23-06-2020/nikakoy-duhovnosti-opros-pokazal-chto-rossiyanam-vazhnee-sytost-chem-patriotizm>

*Family and material well-being turned out to be much more valuable for Russian citizens than love of the motherland and faith in God.*

*Experts of the ZIRCON research group (Center for Intellectual Resources and Cooperation in the Social Sciences) tried to find out the so-called values professed by Russian citizens. The results were somewhat unexpected: all the first places in the preferences of the Russians were given to a happy, well-fed life within a narrow circle of relatives and friends, as well as material well-being. But at the end of the list were contrary to the assurances of the propagandists - patriotism, the so-called ‘traditional values’ and religion.*

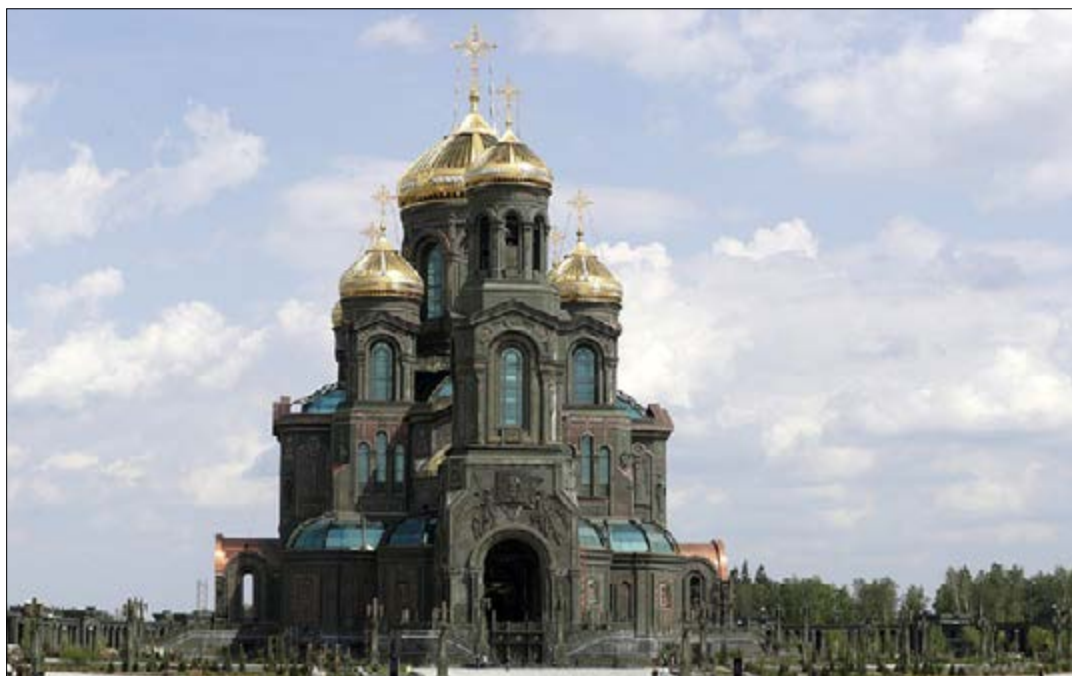
*Network analyst Dmitry Milin commented on this chart as follows: “Russians are adherents of normal Western liberal values, in spite of budget parasites like Patrushev and Co. preaching for others (but not for themselves, who are bathing in luxury) spiritual over material values ...”*





## Bond Between Russian Religion and Military

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the first passage from *Izvestia* discusses, on 14 June, Patriarch Kirill consecrated the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ – which is to be the main church of the Russian armed forces – after its construction was recently completed in Patriot Park near Moscow. Built to honor the 75th anniversary of World War II, this location was chosen because it was there that Soviet forces held the German army at bay. The building itself is full of symbolism plucked from the Great Patriotic War; the belfry is 75 meters tall, and the diameter of the central dome is 19.45 meters. The dark green walls of the cathedral are covered in extravagant and detailed painted scenes from the war. While this is perhaps one of the more imposing tethers between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the state, it is part of a longer progression of Putin using the public reverence for the Church and the military to solidify and consolidate his power.



*Russian Armed Forces Cathedral, July 2020.*

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63543>, CC BY 4.0 Intl

The idea of declaring an official cathedral of the armed forces might seem like a strange entanglement of state and religious institutions, but there is a long history of the ROC, going back deep into the Imperial era, being essentially wielded as an arm of the state. This was certainly less true in the Soviet period – and the irony that this cathedral honors the military achievements of an atheistic regime is not lost – Orthodoxy and the Russian state have been wrapped up in each other for over a thousand years. Especially since Peter the Great, the state has exerted an exceptional amount of influence over the Church.

Since taking power in 2000, Putin has consistently placed himself in close association with the ROC, calling upon it to justify his authority and the expansion of Russian power abroad. In 2014, amid the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, Putin gave an address to the Duma wherein he pointed to a shared history with this part of Ukraine, pointing to the baptism of Prince Vladimir in the Crimean city of Kherson in 988 CE. As highlighted in the second passage, Putin said, “His spiritual feat... of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture... that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.” Putin has taken every opportunity to use Russian Orthodoxy to strengthen his control on Russia and the surrounding region.

Now, in a decision which further cements the relationship between the Russian state, church, and military, Patriarch Kirill will be the head priest in charge of the official cathedral of the Russian armed forces. As the passages point out, Patriarch Kirill praised Russia’s return to promoting Orthodoxy, state officials including Defense Minister Shoigu and President Putin, as well as the Russian military, “which especially feel the need for divine protection.” This enormous cathedral, and the institutional, cultural, and political ties which lie beneath it, is intended to stabilize and strengthen the power not only of the Orthodox Church and the Russian military, but also the authority of Putin himself. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rodger)**

***“The Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, having the status of the main temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, will become a symbol of the turn of Russia and its Armed Forces from unbelief to faith after decades of state atheism...”***



*Patriarch Kirill.*

Source: Serge Serebro, Vitebsk Popular News / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Patriarch\\_Kirill\\_I\\_of\\_Moscow\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Patriarch_Kirill_I_of_Moscow_03.jpg)



## Continued: Bond Between Russian Religion and Military

**Source:** “Патриарх Кирилл сам станет настоятелем храма Вооруженных сил России (Patriarch Kirill Himself Will Become the Rector of the Temple of the Armed Forces of Russia),” *Izvestia*, 14 June 2020. <https://iz.ru/1023399/2020-06-14/patriarkh-kirill-sam-stanet-nastoiatelem-khrama-vooruzhennykh-sil-rossii>

*Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill on Sunday, June 14, announced that he himself would become head of the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ - the temple of the Armed Forces of Russia.*

*“It’s wonderful that after decades of timelessness imposed on our country by ridiculous atheism, people turned to faith. The armed forces, which especially feel the need for divine protection, and many, many people,” he added during the consecration the temple.*

**Source:** “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *Kremlin.ru*, 18 March 2014. <http://en.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

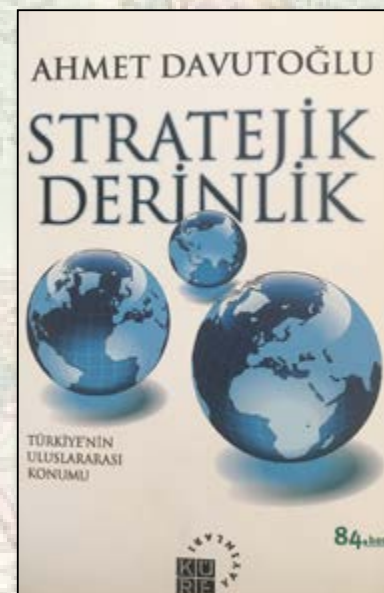
*Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea.*

**Source:** “Патриарх Кирилл назвал главный храм Вооруженных сил символом поворота России к вере (Patriarch Kirill Called the Main Temple of the Armed Forces a Symbol of Russia’s Turn Toward Faith),” *TASS*, 14 June 2020. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/8719179>

*The patriarch expressed special gratitude for the construction of the cathedral to its initiator, Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Shoigu, as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin, all the Armed Forces, builders and the artists who designed the church. He presented the Minister of Defense with the icon of the Mother of God of Kaplunov, before which, according to legend, Peter the Great prayed before the Battle of Poltava to serve in the newly consecrated cathedral. He also personally handed over the icon of the Holy Trinity to the church.*

## 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>





## Russia's Increasing Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan



Kant Air Base.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant\\_\(air\\_base\)\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant_(air_base)_01.jpg), CC BY SA 4.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian airbase at Kant, just outside Bishkek, has undergone various changes since its establishment in 2003. The accompanying excerpted article reports on some recent changes regarding the airbase and Russia's overall presence in Kyrgyzstan.

The article from the Kyrgyz independent news website *Kloop* reports that Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov “signed a law ratifying the protocol on the status and conditions of the Russian military base in Kant” on 23 June. The article points out how this comes a few years after the Russian and Kyrgyz governments “carried out a joint topographic survey” that helped determine how much land Russian forces have been using at their military facilities across Kyrgyzstan, not solely at the Kant airbase. The survey revealed that Russian forces “use 924.52 hectares of territory instead of 866.2 hectares” at Kant (pointing out that this is 58.32 hectares more than what was written in the original Agreement). It also notes how “Russia expanded the territory of the communication facility in Chaldovar from 811.2 to 851.2 hectares as well as the test base in Karakol from 55 to

73.3 hectares.” Chaldovar (a communications relay) and Karakol (a torpedo test site on Lake Issyk Kul) are Russian naval facilities, though they fall under a unified command of all Russian forces in Kyrgyzstan.

The article mentions that the Russian government will be paying more for rent because of the increase in use of land and that it “plans to deploy drones on the base” and that the two governments “will sign an interagency document outlining the use of drones.” The Russian government discussed the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles at Kant over a year ago (see: “Russia's Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan,” *OE Watch*, May 2019), but the article reports that the deployment has not yet taken place. Overall, the article provides an update to the ongoing discussion of whether or not the Russian government would ever establish another military facility in Kyrgyzstan. If the recent news on the status of Kant is any indication, regardless of whether the Russian military establishes another facility, it is increasing its presence at existing facilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“According to the survey results, Russians use 924.52 hectares of territory instead of 866.2 hectares – 58.32 hectares more than what was written in the “Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the status and conditions of the Russian military base on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic.”***

**Source:** Aiday Tokoyeva, “Президент подписал закон об условиях пребывания российской военной базы в Канте (The President signed a law on the conditions of stay of the Russian military base in Kant),” *Kloop*, 23 June 2020. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2020/06/23/prezident-podpisal-zakon-ob-usloviyah-prebyvaniya-rossijskoj-voennoj-bazy-v-kante/>

*On 23 June Sooronbai Jeenbekov signed a law ratifying the protocol on the status and conditions of the Russian military base in Kant...in 2016 and 2017, during preparations of the protocol the two sides carried out a joint topographic survey.*

*According to the survey results, Russians use 924.52 hectares of territory instead of 866.2 hectares – 58.32 hectares more than what was written in the “Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the status and conditions of the Russian military base on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic.”*

*Specifically, Russia expanded the territory of the communication facility in Chaldovar from 811.2 to 851.2 hectares as well as the test base in Karakol from 55 to 73.3 hectares...rent for the areas specified in the agreement is \$4.5 million. After the protocol comes into effect, this amount will increase by \$291,600. It is noted that the amount will be prorated from 2012...*

*Russian also plans to deploy drones on the base...After the protocol takes effect, Kyrgyzstan and Russia will sign an interagency document outlining the use of drones...*



## Armenia's Defense and Strategy Reforms

**OE Watch Commentary:** The government of Armenia has looked at the April 2016 clashes with Azerbaijan, which resulted in Azerbaijani forces taking territory, as a measurement of what capabilities need to be developed in the armed forces in order to avoid a similar scenario in the future. These lessons-learned inform Armenia's current defense reforms. The accompanying excerpted article from *Eurasia Daily* reports on a recent presentation given by the Armenian Minister of Defense David Tonoyan, in which he discussed his vision for the development of the Armenian armed forces over the next two years and beyond.

The article reports that Tonoyan pointed out how the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily limited the scope for military cooperation while “threats of a direct military nature remain very likely.” He noted some key areas of reform for the Armenian armed forces, including “providing for the decentralization of command and control of the armed forces” and “the reequipping of the armed forces.” Tonoyan also noted that training for the armed forces “should not be only about defense” and considers it “necessary to actively use assault units, which could deliver preventative strikes.” One of the assessments that the Armenian government took from a review of the April 2016 clashes is that a preemptive strike might be necessary. Tonoyan mentioned how the Armenian government is putting together “a mobile army capable of rapid reaction,” but also noted that they are only at the beginning of the reform process.

Lastly, the article notes a few of the new systems Armenian forces acquired over the past year and how the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that “Armenia spent 4.9 percent of its GDP on the military last year.” Armenia's military expenditures rose only slightly in 2017 following the April 2016 clashes, but increased in 2018 and again in 2019. The Armenian government has proposed purchasing additional Su-30SM multi-functional fighters in the next two years, but have not announced any other major acquisitions. If the Armenian government continues to increase defense spending alongside reforms, Yerevan might achieve its objective of “curb[ing] the revanchist ambitions of Baku,” as the article title notes.

The update on the reforms from the defense minister came right before more clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces took place in mid-July, at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border north of the occupied region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“The combat training of the Armenian Armed Forces should not be only about defense. [Defense Minister] Tonoyan considers it necessary to actively use assault units, which could deliver preventative strikes.”***

**Source:** “Стратегия армянской армии: Ереван обуздает «реваншистские амбиции» Баку (The strategy of the Armenian army: Yerevan will curb the “revanchist ambitions” of Baku),” *Eurasia Daily*, 10 June 2020. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/06/10/strategiya-armyanskoy-armii-erevan-obuzdaet-revanshistskie-ambicii-baku>

*Armenian Minister of Defense David Tonoyan presented today, 10 June, on a new vision at the development of the armed forces over the next two years. The lengthy document is also a concept for the develop of the armed forces over a long-term period...*

*Tonoyan pointed out that the matter of ensuring the security of Armenia in the region has not gone through positive changes. Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily limited the scope for military cooperation and “threats of a direct military nature remain very likely.”...*

*Within the framework of the new vision of the development of the Armed Forces of Armenia, the defense minister outlined areas of activity, including:*

- 1. Providing for the decentralization of command and control of the armed forces*
- 2. The reequipping of the armed forces, one of the goals of which is the “establishment of a military capability that will not only curb the enemy's revanchist ambitions and prevent the temptation to launch large-scale military operations, but also quickly deprive him of his ability to wage war.”*

*...The combat training of the Armenian Armed Forces should not be only about defense. Tonoyan considers it necessary to actively use assault units, which could deliver preventative strikes. The creation of a mobile army capable of rapid reaction suggests its large-scale reform – from small arms to long-range and precision missile systems as well as multi-functional aviation. The process of reforming the armed forces has already started, however, “we are only at the beginning of the path” the defense minister emphasized...*

*Remember that in the past year Armenia acquired a large amount of weapons and systems: Su-30SM multi-functional fighters, TOR-M2KM and Osa-AK anti-aircraft missile systems, among other equipment...According to official information, the Armenian Armed Forces were replenished with artillery, anti-aircraft systems, small arms, ammunition and hundreds of vehicles.*





## Georgia Announces Plans to Produce Su-25 Aircraft

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the first accompanying passage reports, in June, Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announced that Georgia would once again produce Su-25 ground attack aircraft. This is only the latest such announcement since Georgian independence. This author was told by Ministry of Defense personnel—in 1994—that Su-25 production would be restarting shortly. The accompanying passages from regional sources discuss this announcement and the challenges Georgia faces.

Many Georgians are proud of their legacy as the primary place of Su-25 production during the Soviet years. The first Su-25 plant opened in Tbilisi in 1979 in time to produce aircraft destined for service in the Soviet Air Force in Afghanistan. A second production facility was established in 1991 in western Georgia, now the separatist region of Abkhazia. Aircraft production was a major boost to the country's economy employing an array of skilled workers at both facilities prior to the Soviet breakup.

The Soviet regime had built its aircraft industry with extended supply lines spanning multiple Soviet republics. When the Soviet Union collapsed, so too the supply lines. Su-25 engines, never produced in Georgia, were impossible to get. As a result, the Su-25 manufacturing facility has been unable to put any aircraft together.

As Georgian media sources indicate, there is buzz around the announcement. But the reality may still be difficult to overcome. As the second passage discusses, Georgia doesn't make many of the components that are required to produce a flyable and functioning Su-25. This isn't to say that the factory sits idle. The Georgian facility has maintained its relevance as a location to refit, upgrade and maintain Su-25s from a variety of countries.

Georgia has become moderately successful producing smaller military items such as mortars, rifles and grenades but the Su-25 is a big ticket item requiring lots of investment and since Russia is an unreliable supplier, a variety of international, likely western looking supplier partnerships are critical to the success of Georgia's Su-25 program. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

***“We have absolutely all the resources—technical, intellectual or human—to restore Su-25s, produce new ones and then sell them.”***

**Source:** “საქართველო იარაღის წარმოების დაწყებას აპირებს – რა გეგმები აქვს თავდაცვის უწყებას (Georgia intends to start arms production - what plans does the Defense Ministry have?),” *Sputnik*, 9 June 2020. <https://sputnik-georgia.com/politics/20200609/248682928/saqarTvelo-iaraRis-warmoebis-dawyebas-apirebs.html>

*Georgia has started working on the production of NATO-compliant fighter jets, grenade launchers, grenades and missiles in the country, said Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili.*

*“We have absolutely all the resources - technical, intellectual or human - to be able to restore, produce, produce and then sell new Su-25s on our own,” Gharibashvili told PalitraNews.*

*According to him, there are many conflicts in the world and countries are expressing interest in this type of aircraft for defense purposes.*

*“Apart from the fact that the Su-25 country could use it for its own defense purposes, it could also become a commercial project,” the minister said.*

*Gharibashvili noted that Georgia owns many aircraft - airplanes, helicopters that need to be repaired, and this can be done with existing factories - “Delta” and “Aviamsheni”. Delta manufactures armored vehicles, combat modules, unmanned aerial vehicles, armored vehicles, etc. And exports these products.*

*According to the Minister, the condition for starting the construction of a factory for the production of cartridges is also in force.*

*“On my instructions, we have already started working on the production of grenades, grenades and missiles in accordance with NATO standards. “I want to thank our unique people who work there, because their contribution to Georgia is extremely great,” Gharibashvili said.*

**Source:** “რის წარმოება შეგვიძლია ქართული არმიისთვის და საექსპორტოდაც... (What can we produce for the Georgian Army and for export ...),” *Kviris Palitra*, 15 June 2020. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/65956-ris-tsarmoeba-shegvidzlia-qarthuli-armiisthvis-da-saeqsportodac.html>

*Russia shutdown production of the aircraft during the war in Abkhazia (1992-1993), when it banned the export of details and parts needed for this fighter jet in Georgia, especially the engines. However, the Su-25 consists of several thousand details and devices, most of which were manufactured in various republics of the former Soviet Union and sent to the Tbilisi Aircraft Factory. Today most of these businesses either no longer exist or are producing other products, so it will be very difficult to obtain the needed parts to restore serial production of this fighter, although there are other options. Significant modifications of the fighter will be to replace the Soviet-era jet engines, radio-electronic equipment, eject seats, chassis and other critical components with similar components of modern Western design and production.*



# Communist Party of China Claims Strong Party Leads to Strong Military

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Communist Party of China (CPC) is the indisputable absolute power center in China. It is the second largest political party in the world (after India's Bharatiya Janata Party), and presides over all politics as well as the country's armed forces through its leadership of the Central Military Commission. July marks the 99th anniversary of the founding of the CPC, a noteworthy anniversary in light of its rapidly approaching centennial and related "First Century Goal." As the first article from China's state-run *Xinhua* notes, the "First Century Goal," (the first of "Two Century Goals") is to "realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Simply put, this means that China will have achieved its goal of creating a more prosperous nation. The article claims that China is on track to achieve this goal.

At the end of June, Xi Jinping presided over a meeting with the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee (Politburo). Members met to discuss how to strengthen the party (what the article refers to as "party building") in the new era and to review regulations on the CPC Military, among other things. As both accompanying articles discuss, according to Xi Jinping, "party building" is critical for the "construction and development of the armed forces of the people" as well as the military's failure or success. Xi explains that "party building" requires that all levels of the party organization master "the theoretical weapons of Marxism and enhance their theoretical and application level of Marxism... to advance the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era." Xi claims that this will ensure the vitality and longevity of the party, while also making it "stronger and more forceful." Xi has been pushing to strengthen the party since the 18th National Congress took place in November 2012. That effort has included cracking down on corruption as well as following and strengthening the Marxist ideology throughout all levels within the party.

The second article, also from *Xinhua*, further emphasizes the importance of the party, tying the successes of the military directly to the party. According to the article, without party building, the military and the long-term stability of the country would be in jeopardy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

**Source:** "Xi Jinping, During the 21st Politburo Collective Study Session, Stresses the Need to Implement Party's Organizational Line in New Era to Make It Stronger and more Forceful," *Xinhua*, 30 June 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/30/c\\_1126177453.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/30/c_1126177453.htm)

## ***Xi Jinping, During the 21st Politburo Collective Study Session, Stresses the Need to Implement Party's Organizational Line in New Era to Make It Stronger and more Forceful***

*In the afternoon on 29 June, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee [Politburo] held the 21st collective study on "In-Depth Study and Understanding of the Implementation of the Party's Organizational Line in the New Era." When Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee presided over the meeting, he emphasized that organizational building is an important foundation for party building. The party's organizational line serves the party's political line. Xi Jinping said that for the party to be in power for a long time, we must maintain sustainable vitality and, in unity, lead the people of all ethnic groups of the nation to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The most important thing is to build the party stronger and more forceful. ... We must unswervingly adhere to and perfect the party's leadership.*

*...The most fundamental guarantee to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is still in the party leadership. It is necessary to educate and guide all party members to consciously maintain a high level of unanimity with the party Central Committee in ideological thinking, political thinking, and action, and to maintain strong political stance and correct political direction.*

*He (Xi) said it is necessary for party organizations at all levels and for the vast numbers of party members and cadres, especially the leading cadres to master the theoretical weapons of Marxism and enhance their theoretical and application level of Marxism so that they can jointly transform the party's innovative theory into a practical force to advance the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. All party committees and their organizational departments at all levels must consciously use the party's scientific theory to lead in the party's organizational construction, to combine new reality in the promotion of party reform and innovation so that the various party works can better reflect timeliness, regularity, and creativity, and provide a guarantee of strong party organization in the realization of the party's historical mission in the new era.*

*...He said that since the 18th NPC, the party Central Committee has focused on party construction. The first focus is on the organizational construction of the party Central Committee, the Politburo, and the Politburo Standing Committee. The party formulated various internal laws and regulations and set high standards for the central leadership and comrades to follow.*

**Source:** "（时政）中共中央政治局召开会议 审议《中国共产党军队党的建设条例》和《中国共产党基层组织选举工作条例》 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议 (Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee Holds a Meeting To Review 'Regulations on the Construction of the CPC Military,' 'CPC Primary-Level Political Affairs' and 'Regulations on CPC Primary-Level Elections' with Xi Jinping Presiding Over the Meeting)," *Xinhua*, 29 June 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/29/c\\_1126173307.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-06/29/c_1126173307.htm)

## ***Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee Holds a Meeting To Review 'Regulations on the Construction of the CPC Military,' 'CPC Primary-Level Political Affairs' and 'Regulations on CPC Primary-Level Elections' with Xi Jinping Presiding Over the Meeting***

*...Party leadership and party building are the keys to the construction and development of the armed forces of the people. Party leadership and party building are related to the overall success or failure of the cause of a strong military, and to the long-term stability of the party and the country. The formulation of the "Regulations on the Construction of the CPC Military" is an important measure to thoroughly study and implement the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the spirit of the 19th party congress. ...*

*The meeting emphasized the need for all to unswervingly uphold the party's absolute leadership over the armed forces, comprehensively and thoroughly implement the CMC chairman's responsibility system, and continue to deepen political training to attain absolute loyalty, absolute purity, and absolute reliability...*

*The meeting called for all to strengthen the study, promotion, and implementation of the "Regulations on the Construction of the CPC Military."*





# Building China's Militia: An Integral Part of China's Armed Forces

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the Law of the People's Republic of China on National Defense, promulgated in 1997, China's armed forces must consist of active-duty forces and reserve forces of the People Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Armed Police Force, and the militia. Like the People's Armed Police, the militia is a largely paramilitary reserve group that is not considered part of the PLA, even though it conducts military training. The militia falls under the unified leadership of the State Council, the Central Military Commission (CMC), and the leadership of local Party committees, local governments, and local military commands. An important part of China's security apparatus, their duties include providing logistics and security support to the PLA, as well as disaster relief and internal security. In times of national emergency, they are expected to integrate with the military.

The militia is expected to achieve "first-rate combat power," but, as the accompanying article extract explains, it has some weaknesses that need to be addressed. According to the article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, these weaknesses can be attributed to what some analysts might refer to as "peace disease." Some members of the militia possess "peacetime" thinking more than "wartime" thinking, which makes "their identification as 'soldiers' become less pronounced."

According to the article, another challenge is that the militia consists of a large number of people from diverse backgrounds, which makes them more complex and results in "uneven military preparation." They also face training and equipment issues, and possess few specialized cadres. Finally, the article points out the difficulty in organizing training for the militia given that "the militia-organizing enterprises focus on economic activities and [are] unwilling to train."

The article goes on to recommend a number of steps to resolve some of the inefficiencies of the militia. For example, it suggests making the militia's military training central, important, and essential because "it is the most important task in the construction of militia forces in the new era." It also pushes for them to make combat-realistic training tough. In the past, training was "unoriginal" with the same routines being rehashed every year. Training should follow the mission and talented individuals should be the lynchpin. The goal, according to the author, is to "improve the militia's capability to carry out a diverse set of missions, constantly innovating in respect of the construction of the militia forces in the new era, and ensuring the long-term development thereof." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“Failure to faithfully and rigorously carry out the militia’s military training will result in a lack of innovation and progress in the generation of combat power, leading to the embarrassing situation of the militia being useless during peacetime and ineffective during wartime.”***

**Source:** “Du Xin and Li Yingjiu, “全力推动民兵军事训练提质增效 (Fully Advancing the Militia’s Military Training to Improve Quality and Effectiveness),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 30 June 2020. [http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2020-06/30/content\\_264804.htm](http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2020-06/30/content_264804.htm)

## ***Fully Advancing the Militia’s Military Training to Improve Quality and Effectiveness***

*As an important part of the armed forces, the militia must be able to “mobilize effectively, deploy efficiently, and perform successfully” at the critical juncture. ...*

*...there is still much room for improvement in the ability of militia forces to carry out missions. The underlying reason is that, with the expansion of the militia’s missions and tasks, some people possess “peacetime” thinking more than “wartime” thinking, with their identification as “soldiers” becoming less pronounced. At the same time, the makeup of the militia is complex, consisting of a large number of persons from a wide variety of backgrounds, with uneven military preparation. Also, the militia faces many practical difficulties, such as issues relating to training facilities and equipment. Several factors also cause the quality of the militia’s military training to be lacking in improvement, such as a low number of specialized military cadres at the rank and file and difficulty of organizing for training, the militia-organizing enterprises’ focus on economic activities and unwillingness to train, as well as individual soldiers’ fear of hardship and unwillingness to train, etc.*

*The fact is, the militia’s military training must be a task that remains central, important, and essential; it is the most important task in the construction of militia forces in the new era, directly affecting the [militia’s] ability to carry out a diversified set of missions. Failure to faithfully and rigorously carry out the militia’s military training will result in a lack of innovation and progress in the generation of combat power, leading to the embarrassing situation of the militia being useless during peacetime and ineffective during wartime.*

*...Therefore, we must promote national defense education so that it expands to and permeates various fields...*

*The rules of the battlefield are written in blood; they are not in any way contrived. To generate combat power that is effective in actual combat, combat-realistic training must be tough. Thus, to take the initiative in the militia’s military training, we must abandon traditional practices that involve unoriginal training, the same routines every year, and repeated foundational training... Instead, by taking our mission as the guiding force, the training outline as the basis, talented individuals as the lynchpin, task force units as the focus, our bases as the foundation, and institutions as the guarantee, we must appropriately reduce the amount and time required for training on basic subjects and increase the proportion of training on subjects that have greater applicability, urgency, and relevance to war fighting... We must truly improve the militia’s capability to carry out a diverse set of missions, constantly innovating in respect of the construction of militia forces in the new era, and ensuring the long-term development thereof.*



# China Reforms Military Reserve System

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late June, the CCP Central Committee and Central Military Committee announced a new adjustment to the Military Reserve System. The adjustment entails a change in the command structure, bringing the reserves under the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Central Military Commission (similar to the 2018 reform of the People’s Armed Police). The reserves are currently parceled out across China and subordinate to the local civilian government (province, prefecture, etc.) and military authorities (military districts).

The PLA is a Party Army—officers take their oath of loyalty directly to the CCP, not the Chinese state or constitution. The control of the armed forces by the CCP is one of the foundational principles of Chinese governance, most famously summed up by Mao Zedong as “The Party commands the gun” [党指挥枪]. As such, the adjustment will strengthen CCP’s control over all of China’s Armed Forces. The accompanying passage from *Xinhua* discusses this change.

This is a significant undertaking. Public estimates (2009 and 2019) of the size of the reserve force have hovered around 510,000. Within the reserves, active-duty PLA officers occupy some positions such as Division, Regiment, Battalion, and Company leaders while the remaining billets filled with reservists. The reserves train to the same standards as active duty PLA units, are better equipped than militia units, and receive 240 hours of military and political training each year. Others serve as civilian or technical cadres. In peacetime, the reserves are involved in national economic construction projects or disaster response. There are reserve units of all types across branches and services.

While the PLA initially established a reserve force in 1955, it abolished this in 1958. Reforms that began in the early 1980s reconstituted the reserves as a real force, wearing the same uniforms and being formally part of the PLA Ground Forces order of battle. In the 2000s, the overall number of reserve infantry divisions was reduced, replacing some with brigades or specialized units. The PLA Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force (now the PLA Rocket Force) added reserve forces in 2005. The Army reserves includes infantry, artillery, AAA, tank and engineering forces, among others. Navy reserve units include reconnaissance, minesweeping and laying, radar and communications units. PLA Air Force reserve units include SAM, radar and other specialized forces, while PLA Rocket Force reserve units largely appear to serve in maintenance and other support roles. More recently reserve units have been created with new combat capabilities, such as UAV units.

In early 2016, the CMC National Defense Mobilization Department (NDMD) [中央军事委员会国防动员部] was established with the goal of streamlining responsibilities ranging from conscription and militia forces to the reserves. However, these reforms appear to have encountered some difficulties, and media reports on the results of inspection tours conducted to assess the state of reforms indicate the reforms were far from complete.

The new reforms directly affect the chain of command for reserve units, which is believed to be a source of problems, including corruption. It is too early to judge the impact of the change on combat effectiveness, but the most important consequence of this will be the CCP’s strengthened control over all of China’s Armed Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



***“From July 1 China’s reserve military forces will be brought under the centralized and unified command of the Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.”***





## Continued: China Reforms Military Reserve System

**Source:** “中共中央印发《关于调整预备役部队领导体制的决定》(CCP Central Leadership Issues ‘Decision on Adjustment of Reserve Forces Leadership System’),” *Xinhua*, 28 June 2020. [http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-06/28/content\\_9842325.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-06/28/content_9842325.htm)

*The CPC Central Committee has issued a Decision Regarding Adjustment of the Reserve Force Leadership System. According to the Decision, starting from July 1 China’s reserve military forces will be brought under the centralized and unified command of the Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.*

*The Decision points out that the Reserves are a component of the PLA and that the adjustment in the leadership structure is aimed at upholding the CPC’s absolute leadership over the army and building a strong military in the new era, bringing the PLA a fully world-class force, and carry out the adjustment according to the principle that military forces are military, police are police and civilians are civilians (i.e. forces should clearly follow chains of command and have clear status regarding their makeup).*

*The Decision requires Central and National organizations, local party committees and governments to fulfill their responsibilities for national defense construction in accordance with relevant laws and regulations and support the construction of reserve forces. It calls on relevant military and civilian units to take active and coordinated measures to implement the changes to the leadership structure, actively coordinate, work closely together, do the relevant work in detail, and ensure the smooth transformation and orderly convergence of the leadership system of the reserve forces.*

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# China Completes Global Deployment of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System

**OE Watch Commentary:** China recently launched the 55th and final navigation satellite, which completes the full deployment of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) constellation. As the first article from *People's Daily* writes, the project first took root in 1994 and has since become the country's first major aerospace infrastructure that provides public services worldwide. The BDS satellite system and launch vehicles were completely developed in China, by the China Academy of Space Technology and China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, both affiliates of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation.

The first two articles tout BDS as being a landmark step in the country's "peaceful exploration of space and international cooperation, such as UN activities in outer space. The system is now said to be used by half the countries in the world.

BDS is also being touted as primed for the whole world and being an alternative to the US-owned Global Positioning System (GPS) for global users because "it provides more stable and reliable services," according to the second article. In 2011, an article published in *Global Times* referenced a report, which stated that China and "especially its military" have long been concerned about relying on the GPS network, "fearing that Washington might take the system offline in a conflict or an emergency." In the same article, Ran Chengqi, director of the China Satellite Navigation Office, said that without an independently established and operated navigation satellite system, China would lack a reliable safeguard for its economic and social development. He went on to note, the "Beidou system will highlight China's status as a great nation and reflect its comprehensive national power" as well as provide a new area of economic growth for the country.

The completion of the global deployment of the BeiDou system marks a step in China's hopes to pave the technological path toward superiority. By 2035, according to *People's Daily*, China is expected to "build a more advanced, ubiquitous, integrated and intelligent comprehensive positioning, navigation and timing system, which will offer more powerful abilities for spatial and temporal information services, and make greater contributions to the further exploration of mankind." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***"The BeiDou system will highlight China's status as a great nation and reflect its comprehensive national power."***

**Source:** Yu Jianbin, "China Completes Global Deployment of BeiDou Navigation Satellite System," *People's Daily*, 27 June 2020. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0627/c90000-9704111.html>

**China Completes Global Deployment of BeiDou Navigation Satellite System**

*The last BeiDou Navigation Satellite-3 constellation satellite, also the 55th of the BeiDou satellite family, was successfully launched on board a Long March-3B rocket at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Southwest China's Sichuan Province at 9:43 am on June 23.*

*The full deployment of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) constellation, accomplished six months ahead of schedule, has come to a successful closure and drawn worldwide attention.*

*By 2035, China will build a more advanced, ubiquitous, integrated and more intelligent comprehensive positioning, navigation and timing system, which will offer more powerful abilities for spatial and temporal information services, and make greater contributions to the further exploration of mankind.*

*The BDS satellite and the launch vehicle for this mission were developed by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST) and China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT) respectively. Both institutions are affiliated to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. This was the 336th flight of the Long March launch vehicle*

**Source:** Gao Wencheng, "China's BeiDou System Primed For Serving Whole World," *Xinhua*, 23 June 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/23/c\\_139161296.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/23/c_139161296.htm)

**China's BeiDou System Primed For Serving Whole World**

*China launched the last satellite of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) on Tuesday, marking the completion of the country's independently developed orbital navigation network, and a landmark step of its peaceful exploration of space.*

*The BeiDou network, a major infrastructure independently constructed and operated by China, can better meet the demands of the country's national security, economic as well as social development. It can also provide more stable and reliable services, as well as an alternative to*

**Source:** Yang Jinghua, "China's BeiDou to Rival GPS," *Global Times*, 28 December 2011. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/690206.shtml>

**China's BeiDou to Rival GPS**

*The AP said Tuesday that China, and especially its military, have long been wary of relying on the GPS network, fearing that Washington might take the system offline in a conflict or an emergency.*

*Ran did not shed light on Beidou's possible military uses, but said without an independently established and operated navigation satellite system, China would lack a reliable safeguard for its economic and social development.*

*He noted that the Beidou system will highlight China's status as a great nation and reflect its comprehensive national power.*

*"It will also be a new economic growth point for China."*





# PLA Ground Force Adopts 155mm Mobile Artillery System

**OE Watch Commentary:** Chinese media reports indicate that a mobile 155mm artillery system, the PCL-181, has been adopted by several military units across China. As detailed in the accompanying article, the system recently entered service with units of the Eastern Theater Command. Others have been identified as belonging to the Western Theater Command.

The PLA is estimated to have thousands of towed artillery pieces, mostly in 122mm or 152mm, but has adopted more mobile systems as the force becomes more mechanized.

As the passage reports, the six-wheeled PCL-181 weighs 25 tons compared to its 40-ton tracked equivalent, the PLZ-05. Chinese media reports indicate the PCL-181 has a top road speed of 90 kilometers per hour (km/h) and that its L52 howitzer has a firing rate of 4-6 rounds per minute. This represents an exchange of lethality for mobility and survivability, as the tracked vehicle has a reported top speed of 40 km/h and a maximum firing rate of 8- 10 rounds per minute.

To accommodate the long barrel, the cab is partially divided to allow the barrel to rest during transit. Photos of the interior of the system show that the PCL-181 has a digitized fire control system for rapid targeting. The system is capable of direct fire modes in limited arcs, and photos of the system in action appear to show partially deflated tires, which could help manage recoil.

While information about the ammunition fired by the PCL-181 has not been released, previous Chinese reporting noted that the tracked PLZ-05 self-propelled howitzer’s 155mm was capable of firing rocket-assisted and base bleed (which reduces drag from the low-pressure area at the rear of a projectile) projectiles.

Several types of 155mm shells have been displayed at various arms expos including Beidou-navigation system-guided shells, the GS-1, which has terminal phase search capability for use against armored targets, GP-6 laser-guided shells and base-bleed and rocket-assisted shells that can hit targets 25 kilometers away while hybrid shells with both rocket-assist and base-bleed can hit targets 54 kilometers away.

Compared to its tracked equivalent, the PCL-181 is unarmored and lacks the secondary armament, such as a pintle-mounted 12.7mm machine gun.

However, wheeled systems offer a number of important advantages compared to tracked systems, particularly lower weight, which means they can be more easily airlifted to crisis areas and operate in certain types of terrain, and at greater ground speed. As noted in the article, China’s strategic cargo aircraft, the Y-20, can transport two PCL-181s. The ability to more rapidly transport the systems could be important in a crisis on the Tibetan plateau or overseas as China develops expeditionary capabilities.

Chinese arms company NORINCO first developed 155mm artillery in the early 1980s, offering towed variants for export that resemble Belgian and Austrian designs. The first self-propelled howitzer to incorporate a 155mm main gun, the PLZ-45, was designed in the late 1980s. It has also been exported, primarily to customers in the Middle East. The PCL-181 is a further development of the SH-1 developed for the export market in the mid-2000s.

More recently, China has adopted or offered for export a number of truck-mounted howitzers and indirect fire systems. A 122mm variant, the PCL-09 is a six-wheeled version in service, and a lighter-weight four-wheeled system that may be a 120mm automatic mortar system has also been shown on Chinese media. The PLA Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC) has, for example, fielded a wheeled 122mm MLRS system called the Type 81, which offers superior mobility compared to tracked MLR systems such as the Type 89 already in service with the PLA Ground Forces.

While tracked systems will continue to play an important role in the PLA, wheeled systems like the PCL-181 represent the future direction of the PLA: highly mobile, networked systems providing precision fires in support of other combatant arms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

### PLA Mobile Artillery

<b>PLZ-07</b>
Crew: 5
Weight: 25 tons
Length: 6.66m
Primary 122mm
Armament: howitzer
Ammunition 40
carried:
Secondary 12.7mm
Armament: machine gun

<b>PLZ-05</b>
Crew: 4
Weight: 45 tons
Length: 11.6m
Primary 155mm
Armament: howitzer
Ammunition 40
carried:
Secondary 12.7mm
Armament: machine gun

<b>PCL-181</b>
Crew: 6
Weight: 29.5 tons
Length: Unknown
Primary 155mm
Armament: howitzer
Ammunition 60
carried:
Secondary None
Armament:

All data from public sources

Graphic by Peter Wood



## Continued: PLA Ground Force Adopts 155mm Mobile Artillery System



Y-20 at Airshow China 2016.

Source: Alert5 / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Y-20\\_at\\_Airshow\\_China\\_2016.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Y-20_at_Airshow_China_2016.jpg)

***“A single Y-20 can likely carry two PCL-181s, or a combination of one PCL-181 and one 30 ton-class Type 15 lightweight main battle tank, both of which are choices that offer frontline troops immense firepower... this will give the Chinese military more tactical flexibility in strategic transport and quick reaction operations.”***

**Source:** “China’s latest, most advanced howitzer enters Eastern Theater Command service,” *Global Times*, 30 April 2020. [http://www.81.cn/jwywpd/2020-04/30/content\\_9804758.htm](http://www.81.cn/jwywpd/2020-04/30/content_9804758.htm)

China’s most advanced vehicle-mounted howitzer, the PCL-181, recently entered service with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command, the theater command confirmed on Thursday. With technical details revealed for the first time, experts say the weapon is one of the best in the world.

In the past few days, troops of a brigade under the Eastern Theater Command received the 155mm vehicle-mounted howitzer, which made its public debut as a newly developed weapon at the National Day military parade on October 1, 2019 in Beijing, the Eastern Theater Command confirmed on its Sina Weibo account on Thursday.

The statement came after China Central Television (CCTV) on Wednesday reported the weapon had been commissioned. This report is also seemingly the first time an official source has identified the designation of the howitzer as the PCL-181.

Neither the Eastern Theater Command nor CCTV has specified how many howitzers were included in this delivery, but at least 18 were seen in the report.

The 155mm wheeled vehicle-mounted howitzer weighs only 25 tons, making it much lighter and faster and with longer endurance than the previous self-propelled howitzer which uses crawler tracks and weighs more than 40 tons, the CCTV report said, noting it can also hit targets at longer ranges with increased firepower.

This data means the PCL-181 not only has high mobility, but it can also be transported by large transport aircraft like the domestically made Y-20, which has a cargo capacity of more than 60 tons, a military expert who requested to remain anonymous told the *Global Times* on Thursday.

A single Y-20 can likely carry two PCL-181s, or a combination of one PCL-181 and one 30 ton-class Type 15 lightweight main battle tank, both of which are choices that offer frontline troops immense firepower, the expert said, noting that this will give the Chinese military more tactical flexibility in strategic transport and quick reaction operations.

The vehicle the howitzer is mounted on has a large driver’s cab that can accommodate all six artillery squad members, protecting them with bulletproof glass that enhances the unit’s survivability.

Digitalized control panels can be found in the cab, and this highly digitalized system allows artillery gun deployment with the press of a button, automatic gun calibration and half-automatic ammo reload. This can shorten the preparation time to shoot the weapon, giving the artillery stronger combat capabilities, according to the report.





# Fighting the Battle for the Pandemic Narrative: The PRC White Paper on Its COVID-19 Response

by April A. Herlevi

Republished and edited for OE Watch in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol: 20, Issue: 11, dated 24 June 2020. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/fighting-the-battle-for-the-pandemic-narrative-the-prc-white-paper-on-its-covid-19-response/>

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 7 June, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) State Council Information Office released an official White Paper outlining China’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. The document, titled “Fighting COVID-19 – China in Action” is a clear articulation of how the authorities of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hope to control and shape the narratives surrounding their role in the state response to the virus. Several inter-related key themes emerge from the White Paper, including China’s timely sharing of information with international organizations; narratives of “battle” against the virus; China’s positive international engagement; and the need for economic stabilization. The purpose of the White Paper is for the PRC to “clarify its ideas on the global battle,” which cannot be “won” without international engagement. This is a version of events that emphasizes the “open, transparent, and responsible manner” that China claims to have undertaken amid the crisis.

## Timely Notification or Curious Timelines?

According to the White Paper, the official response began on 27 December 2019, when the “Wuhan city government arranged for experts to look into” the cases of viral pneumonia occurring in the city. However, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission had earlier indicated that initial cases of “an unidentified pneumonia outbreak” were identified by 12 December 2019. The official timeline from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission “reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan” on 31 December 2019, and that “a novel coronavirus was eventually identified.”

The timeline articulated in China’s COVID-19 White Paper leaves at least two weeks entirely unaccounted for, which raises questions about the interaction between local, national, and international officials. Action at the local level was critical for the identification of this new illness, and several doctors working on the front lines in Wuhan died from the disease. A draft resolution introduced at the World Health Assembly in May—spearheaded by Australia, and now supported by over 110 countries—calls for an “impartial, independent, and comprehensive evaluation” of the events associated with the pandemic. The PRC has resisted all such calls, and the White Paper reveals a continuing determination to deflect criticism of its early handling of the outbreak. The document calls for the international community to “resist scapegoating or other such self-serving artifices, and [to] stand against stigmatization and politicization of the virus.”

The White Paper is one attempt by the PRC to show that it is “open and transparent” and that “China gave timely notification to the international community.” However, in its present form the White Paper raises questions about the initial phase of the outbreak: its timeline begins too late to fully answer these questions, which could hamper efforts to assess the origin of the virus and how it spread initially.

## Narratives of Battle

The White Paper makes clear that one of its key goals is to address the “global battle” against COVID-19. The narrative of battle explains both how the PRC “fought” the virus and how it must continue to maintain its story internationally. According to the White Paper the “all-out battle” against COVID-19 was fought with “confidence and solidarity, [and] a science-based approach and targeted measures.” As a result, after “approximately three months, a decisive victory was secured in the battle to defend Hubei Province and its capital city of Wuhan.”

The “battleground” narrative makes the central government look strong in its fight against the pandemic, and shifts focus to the virus as an enemy. Shifting blame is important, because if there is a perception that the central government knew there was an “enemy” lurking in early or mid-December and did not take action, then there would be questions about the government’s decisiveness. Consistent with the “battle” narrative, the White Paper highlights the role of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), stating that 4,000 military medical personnel were dispatched to respond to the crisis, with the PLA Air Force performing important logistical support. The PRC government has also maintained the narrative that no PLA personnel contracted the virus, despite the heavy concentration of PLA forces located in the vicinity of Wuhan.

## International Engagement

While the “battle” on the ground may have been declared “won” in Wuhan, the battle for the international narrative continues. The White Paper argues that “international solidarity” and “multilateralism” are critical in dealing with the crisis, and highlights these efforts in Section IV, titled “Building a Global Community of Health For All.” Consistent with Xi Jinping’s narrative of a “community of common destiny for mankind,” it describes how “China has fought shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the world” given “the world is a global community of shared future.”

(Continued)



# Continued: Fighting the Battle for the Pandemic Narrative: The PRC White Paper on Its COVID-19 Response

Like many other PRC reports in the last decade, the measure of success for international engagement has become a numbers game: what can be counted up and measured to show “results”? At the top level of government, “President Xi has personally promoted international cooperation” via “phone calls or meetings with nearly 50 foreign leaders and heads of international organizations.” At other levels of government, the PRC has “conducted over 70 exchanges with international and regional organizations including ASEAN, the EU, the African Union (AU), APEC, the Caribbean Community, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.”

In addition to top-level meetings, the White Paper promises “\$2 billion of international aid over two years” for a “global humanitarian response depot” in China. It also calls for sharing scientific information via multilateral meetings and promises assistance to “developing countries with weaker public health systems in Asia, Africa and Latin America – especially Africa.”

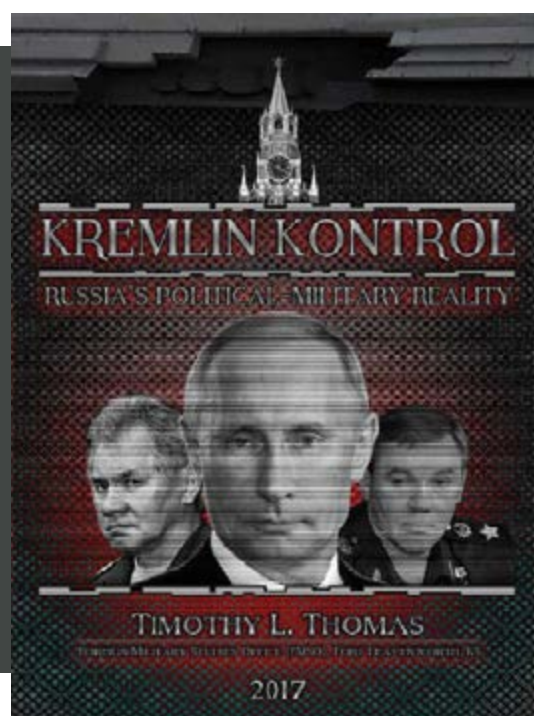
## Economic Stabilization

International engagement and solidarity are major themes of the White Paper, but Beijing acknowledges that global economic cooperation could be heavily impacted by the crisis. The White Paper argues that economic cooperation must continue, while also noting that “the global spread of the pandemic” is “making a severe global economic recession unavoidable.”

At the international level, the White Paper makes clear that the PRC remains committed to the global economic system. In particular, “China believes that the international community should proceed with globalization, safeguard the multilateral trading system based on the WTO, cut tariffs, remove barriers, facilitate the flow of trade, and keep international industrial and supply chains secure and smooth.” The PRC argues that “COVID-19 is changing the form but not the general trend of economic globalization.” Despite this seemingly optimistic tone, the economic and political challenges of US-China relations over the past several years are acknowledged, on which the White Paper writes, “Decoupling, erecting walls, and deglobalization may divide the world, but will not do any good to those who themselves are engaged in these acts.”

On the domestic front, the State Council argues that economic stabilization must occur in “employment, finance, foreign trade, inbound investment, domestic investment, and market expectations.” In addition to these “six fronts” for stabilization, the White Paper assigns “six priorities” for social and economic order: “jobs, daily living needs, food and energy, industrial and supply chains, the interests of market players, and the smooth functioning of grassroots government.” Stabilization in trade will be difficult given the drop in exports, but China still hopes to attract foreign investment, as evidenced in the changes adopted to its Foreign Investment Law, entailing a package of laws on “construction, fire protection, digital signatures, urban and rural planning, vehicle and vessel taxes, trademarks, unfair competition, and administrative approval.” The full economic toll of the crisis for China or the global economy is not yet known, but so far, China is staying the course. The White Paper noted that “supply-side structural reform and high-quality economic development” remain on the agenda for 2020.

China’s White Paper shows Beijing’s imperative to control the COVID-19 narrative. International engagement is highlighted throughout, but the “battle” is also about the timeline. By focusing on the events that transpired in 2020—rather than the events early in the crisis—Beijing has emphasized the measures to stop the spread of the virus, rather than discussing its origins. Yet, the timeline is critical to future examination of the virus and how it spread. China’s unwillingness to articulate the timing of events in December 2019 undermines the narrative of its “open and transparent” reporting in a timely manner. **End OE Watch Commentary (Herlevi)**



**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>





# Huawei and 5G: Update on the Tech Cold War

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the first accompanying passage from the UK-based *The Times* reports, the UK recently floated an important new plan to forge a 5G alliance of 10 democracies: The G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the United States) plus Australia, South Korea, and India. According to the article, the goal is to explore 5G alternatives to Huawei, after new concerns about the Chinese telecommunications company surfaced when “security officials began a review into its involvement in the mobile network upgrade.” The idea is to explore investing in technology companies based within its member states. Currently, the only European suppliers of 5G are Nokia and Ericsson, which the passage notes, “cannot provide 5G... as quickly or as cheaply as Huawei.” Two weeks later, the UK banned Huawei from its 5G network.

This is a departure for the UK, which had declared in January that it would allow a role (albeit a restricted one) for Huawei in shaping the 5G network, over concerns that banning the company may add years of delays and billions in costs to their 5G network

launch. As the second passage notes, this was based on a European Commission (EC) recommendation that states should allow Huawei to operate within the bloc, under the condition that Huawei tech would be blocked from “critical and sensitive” parts of the network, including the core, which keeps track of data. As the article notes, this comprise was meant to provide “cover for European capitals to resist Washington’s demands.”

The shift may be due in part to China’s approach to information surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. As the third passage discusses, following the emergence of the pandemic, members of the UK parliament raised concerns about China’s approach to data. In early May, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee set up the China Research Group (CRG) to “hold China accountable for the misinformation around COVID-19.” The article notes “they are concerned about the transparency of China’s strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues,” and are calling for a “rethinking [of] Britain’s engagement with China.” (See: “China’s COVID-19 Information Campaign is Backfiring in Europe,” *OE Watch*, June 2020).

The issue of 5G has been cited as causing a resurgence of Cold War reflexes between the US and China, with Europe’s position in this Cold War being unclear (see: “Huawei in Europe: Debating Europe’s Position in a New Technological Cold War,” *OE Watch*, March 2020). The recent UK call for a new club of 5G democracies-- even if it doesn’t materialize-- suggests that the UK may be shifting to a clearer position. As the final passage from the *Global Times*, a Chinese government-affiliated newspaper makes clear, China is taking note and warning that “if the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US...” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Kevin Tao, President of Huawei, Western Europe, talking about 5G; “Digitising Europe Summit”; Gasometer, Berlin; December 2014.

Source: Vodafone Institut via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vodafone-institute/15368562844>, CC BY-ND 2.0

***“If the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US...”***



## Continued: Huawei and 5G: Update on the Tech Cold War

**Source:** “Downing Street plans new 5G club of democracies,” *The Times (UK)*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/downing-street-plans-new-5g-club-of-democracies-bfnd5wj57>

*Britain is seeking to forge an alliance of ten democracies to create alternative suppliers of 5G equipment and other technologies to avoid relying on China... New concerns about Huawei, the Chinese telecoms giant, have increased the urgency of the plan after security officials began a review into its involvement in the mobile network upgrade.*

*The government has approached Washington about a “D10” club of democratic partners, based on the G7 plus Australia, South Korea and India... One option would see the club channel investment to technology companies based within its member states. Nokia and Ericsson are the only European suppliers of 5G infrastructure and experts say that they cannot provide 5G kit as quickly or as cheaply as Huawei.*

**Source:** “EU rules out Huawei ban- but maps out strict rules on 5G,” *Deutsche Welle*, 29 January 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-rules-outhuawei-ban-but-maps-out-strict-rules-on-5g/a-52184309>

*The EU has said member states should allow Chinese telecoms giant Huawei to operate within the bloc — but with strict regulations to protect national security. The US has urged allies not to use the technology. The European Union on Wednesday unveiled security guidelines for “high-risk” suppliers in the opening up of fifth-generation, or 5G, telecoms network across the bloc.*

*... Recommendations include blocking high-risk equipment suppliers from “critical and sensitive” parts of the network, including the core, which keeps track of data and authenticates smartphones on the network.*

...

*Any ban on Huawei would ultimately be left for individual member states to impose, but the commission’s compromise recommendation provides cover for European capitals to resist Washington’s demands. On Tuesday, the UK’s government said it would also allow a restricted role for Huawei in shaping the 5G network in Britain.*

**Source:** “UK Parliament goes from Eurosceptic to China-sceptic,” *The Sunday Guardian Live*, 2 May 2020. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/uk-parliament-goes-eurosceptic-china-sceptic>

*China is now centre stage. Instead of Eurosceptics, Parliament is now full of PRC-sceptics.*

*...Tom Tugendhat, MP, is actively challenging the government’s and especially the Foreign Office’s approach to relations with China. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on April 6, the Committee published a report entitled, “The FCO’s role in building a coalition against COVID-19”, which is critical of the Chinese authorities’ approach to data and WHO’s procrastination. ...*

*Tugendhat has also set up the China Research Group (CRG), likely comprising many of the powerful ERG members. This is a collection of MPs who seek to inform the debate on Beijing’s economic and diplomatic policies. It seems they are concerned about the transparency of China’s strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues. Tugendhat is focusing on rethinking Britain’s engagement with China. ... In a published letter to First Minister Raab, Tugendhat outlines an idea to hold China accountable for the misinformation around Covid-19 that has resulted in the pandemic, demanding investigations into China’s interference in the Hong Kong judiciary and the recent sea/air military activity around Taiwan, and to know how UK will support Taiwan in the future. And regarding China’s military activities in the South China Sea, Tugendhat is encouraging a G7 representation, outreach to Japan and ASEAN for security co-operation.*

**Source:** Yu Ning, “‘D10’ 5G club an outdated idea with Cold War mind-set,” *The Global Times*, 31 May 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1190107.shtml>

*It was less than six months ago that the Boris Johnson government granted Chinese tech company Huawei a limited role in the country’s 5G networks, but recently it’s widely believed that the UK is signaling an about-face.*

...

*Many of these countries, which used to be advanced technology leaders, cannot accept and adapt themselves to the fact that China is leading the world in 5G technology. Some Western politicians and media outlets are hyping up the “threats” China’s 5G technology may bring. China has adopted technologies from the West in its development, but China has never narrowly believed they are security threats.*

*China’s 5G technology has aroused suspicion and anxieties in some Western countries. They are upset that the West is losing its technological superiority and because of their deep-rooted ideological prejudice against the Chinese political system.*

*With the US ratcheting up its crackdown on Huawei and intensifying confrontation with China, the Huawei 5G issue has wide ramifications. If the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US and serving the latter’s interests as foolishly as Australia.*





# China and Iran Announce \$400 Billion Trade Deal

**OE Watch Commentary:** China and Iran have recently announced a new trade deal worth \$400 billion over 25 years. In the accompanying excerpted article, Dr. Fan Hongda, a Chinese expert on Iran, lays out China's perspective of the deal. Dr. Fan is a professor at the Middle East Research Institute of Shanghai International Studies University [上海外国语大学], and a respected scholar of Iran, having taught in Tehran and written two books on US-Iran relations.

Dr. Fan notes that this is a natural extension of the groundwork laid in January 2016, when CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Iran, signing a set of trade agreements including high-speed rail projects, and deepening of cooperation in oil and gas production. He notes that this was delayed due to the effects of sanctions against Iran, but that an uptick in relations (particularly due to China-Iran cooperation surrounding the COVID-19 response) makes this an expected development.



*Chinese & Iranian Flags.*

Source: Peter Wood

It is also important to contextualize the \$400 billion over 25 years in terms of the existing trade relationship between Iran and China. In 2018, the latest year for which data is readily available, China imported \$13.4 billion of crude petroleum from Iran, representing over 70 percent of its total imports from that country (\$18.9 billion). Iran imported \$14 billion worth of goods, mostly machinery electronics and other manufactures. The \$400 billion, spread over 25 years, then represents less than China's annual imports per year. Many analysts have already pointed out that the figure likely accounts for a wish list rather than a set of concrete plans.

Most of the proposed projects also fit naturally into existing Chinese initiatives: transport networks including subway lines and high-speed rail and airports, are a regular feature of Belt and Road projects. Other aspects, such as extensions of the Beidou GNSS or cooperation on surveillance, are areas that China is pushing across the board.

While China formally describes its relations with Iran as a "comprehensive strategic partnership" [全面战略伙伴关系], it is worth noting that it has a similar relationship with Iran's arch-rival Saudi Arabia. Despite this apparent alignment, China has gone against Iran in international organizations at key moments, notably in 2010, when it voted for UN sanctions against Iran. However, these sanctions were regularly avoided (during the author's time in China in the early 2010s, he was told by multiple Chinese businesspeople that Chinese companies were seeking to evade sanctions to do business in Iran).

Whatever China's agreements with Iran over development programs and attitude toward the United States, its support of extremist militants and nuclear weapons development programs are in strong opposition to Chinese policies.

China has increased its level of military cooperation with Iran, with several high profile port calls and visits by senior leaders. In 2014 two Chinese warships visited Iran's Bandar Abbas port for joint naval exercises in the Gulf. In 2015 PLA General Staff Department (GSD) Deputy Chief Admiral Sun Jianguo visited Iran. While China has sold military equipment, including cruise missiles, missile-armed fast attack boats, and missile guidance systems to Iran in the 1990s and early 2000s, there have not been significant overt transfer of systems and technology since at least the early 2000s. Meanwhile, China has become a larger exporter of weapon systems including drones to Saudi Arabia, which it has had an extensive weapons export relationship (including DF-4 and DF-21 ballistic missiles) since the 1980s.

As acknowledged by Dr. Fan, a core reason that China's relations with Iran have been significantly constrained is US diplomatic and economic pressure. It is clear that China considers its relationship with the US to have adversely affected its ability to interact with other countries, but believes that it is gradually making itself more independent.

China may attempt to use the prospect of deepened military cooperation or sales of equipment as a bargaining chip, but its close relationships with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, courting of Israel for technology, and fundamental disagreement on core issues make the full realization of a military partnership unlikely. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



## Continued: China and Iran Announce \$400 Billion Trade Deal

***“Another factor that cannot be ignored in the improvement of Sino-Iranian relations is that China is increasingly constrained by American factors when considering diplomacy with Iran...”***

**Source:** Fan Hongda [范鸿达], “伊朗宣布与华25年全面合作计划，中伊关系能否进一步走近?” (Iran announced a 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan with China, can Sino-Iranian relations get closer?), *Shanghai Observer* [上观新闻], 30 June 2020. <https://www.shobserver.com/news/detail?id=264494>

On the 23rd of June Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei announced that China and Iran’s 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan has been approved; on the 24th, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a video conference which included promotion of the 25-year bilateral cooperation plan.

The plan points out that the key cooperation points of the two countries include economic and trade development, university scientific and technological cooperation, security cooperation, mutual support and cooperation in international and regional organizations, and development of military cooperation. And it is also worth mentioning that the cooperation plan also focuses on eradicating poverty and improving the living conditions of people in less developed areas.

Judging from the areas announced by the Iranian government, this is indeed Iran’s China’s “Comprehensive Cooperation Plan” with a longer-term agreement of 25 years. If the plan can be given real attention and effective implementation by both sides, the future development of bilateral relations is worth looking forward to.

In announcing the comprehensive cooperation plan between Iran and China, Ali Rabiei noted the basis of the cooperation plan is the joint declaration issued by the two countries in January 2016 when Xi Jinping visited Iran and the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership. The publication of the “Joint Statement of Partnership” laid the foundation for the establishment of a comprehensive cooperative relationship between the two countries.

China and Iran not only have the historical legacy of friendly contact through the “Silk Road,” but also contemporary friendly exchanges. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1971, China has always regarded Iran as one of the most important partners in the Middle East. Especially after China proposed the “Belt and Road” initiative, Chinese policy makers have given Iran, an important country along the “Belt and Road”, greater attention. President Xi Jinping’s visit to Iran in 2016 highlighted this point. From China’s perspective it is ready for a better development of China-Iran relations.

On the other hand, after Iran and the UN Security Council “P5” and Germany signed a nuclear agreement in 2015, Iran was generally more optimistic about the expansion of foreign relations, and it is more inclined to historical inertia with European and American countries to some extent affect Iran’s development. The enthusiasm for relations with China is also the key reason why relations between the two countries did not usher in a new upsurge as planned after President Xi Jinping’s visit to Iran in 2016. Nevertheless, China has always stood on the side of Iran in upholding international fairness and justice in opposing US sanctions against Iran and maintaining the Iranian nuclear agreement.

As the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018 and imposed “maximum pressure” on Iran, Iran’s plan to develop relations with Europe and the United States was blocked, and China, which has been implementing friendly policies against Iran, has once again become a prominent option for Iran’s diplomacy. During his visit to China in late August 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif said on social media that “I am proposing a 25-year plan for a comprehensive strategic partnership in Beijing”; in October of the same year, Iranian President Rouhani publicly expressed the hope to study and formulate Iran as soon as possible...

The new coronary pneumonia epidemic that is sweeping the world is a disaster that humans are still experiencing. In the face of this common disaster, China and Iran have written a new chapter of friendship. When the epidemic first broke out in China, Iran, which has long been subjected to international sanctions promoted by the United States, soon brought to China urgently needed masks and other medical supplies. Tehran’s famous landmark Freedom Tower (Azadi Tower) also lit up to cheer on China. When the outbreak subsequently broke out in Iran, China immediately provided medical supplies to Iran, and sent a team of medical experts to Iran. The mutual help between China and Iran under the epidemic has further brought the two countries together.

It is worth noting that on issues such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet, which are related to Chinese sovereignty, Iran has clearly stood with China.

Another factor that cannot be ignored in the improvement of Sino-Iranian relations is that China is increasingly constrained by American factors when considering diplomacy with Iran. The United States, which has long been hostile to the Islamic Republic of Iran, was once an important factor affecting the development of Sino-Iranian relations, because Sino-US relations have affected the diplomacy of Chinese policymakers to other countries for a long period of time, including Iran, and the author has repeatedly heard complaints from Iranian friends about China’s diplomacy. With the US’s almost comprehensive suppression of China, Sino-US relations have encountered freezing points; on the other hand, China’s diplomacy is gradually getting rid of the situation where Sino-US relations have excessively affected other bilateral relations. Under such circumstances, China has more room to develop relations with Iran.

...  
But it should be noted that there is still significant difference between planning and implementation. China and Iran are expected to work together to promote the true and effective implementation of the comprehensive cooperative relationship between the two parties in various fields and specific matters.





# Philippines Army Recruiting Tausug to Help Fight Abu Sayyaf

**OE Watch Commentary:** Zamboanga, a peninsula of the Philippines, has been an area where Abu Sayyaf has historically operated. It also is home to the Tausug, a mostly Muslim ethnic group that Abu Sayyaf seeks to recruit, for attacks on the government and Christians. The excerpted article from a well-known Philippines publication discusses the army's attempt to recruit and train Tausugs as privates to help combat Abu Sayyaf and other criminal and security challenges in the region.

The article states that 237 Tausug youths participated in a four-month military training program, including 217 men and 20 women, where unity between Muslims and Christians was highlighted. The participants in the program were trained in basic skills to prevent what the article described as "lawlessness." This involved marksmanship, field survival, land navigation, and other discipline and team-building exercises.

The article also points out that the training occurred despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and notes that the graduation ceremony was restricted to outsiders, including family members, and special health protocols were followed during the training. The Philippines army considers the training a success and now views the training graduates as allies in its War on Terror. In particular, the military emphasized that the Tausug people should be responsible for their own homeland.

In a country with dozens of ethnic groups and impenetrable jungle and multiple islands in its southern regions, it is especially important for the army to cooperate with civilians and youths in the local areas of Zamboanga, who know the terrain better than anyone in the military. This appears to be the army's goal with this training program. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Ph locator zamboanga del sur dinas.

Source: The Coffee at the English Language via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ph\\_locator\\_zamboanga\\_del\\_sur\\_dinas.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ph_locator_zamboanga_del_sur_dinas.png), CC by 3.0

***“The military profession knows no religion. Muslims and Christians alike are truly committed [to] preventing lawlessness in Sulu...”***

**Source:** “237 Tausug finish training as gov’t soldiers, ready for war on terror,” *Newsinfo Inquirer*, 10 June 2020. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1289536/237-tausug-finish-training-as-govt-soldiers-ready-for-war-on-terror-in-sulu>

*At least 237 young members of the warrior tribe Tausug had finished four months of military training that went on amid the COVID-19 pandemic and would be deployed in the war on terror, according to ranking Army officials. Basat said the 237 new soldiers, who belong to the Makusug Class 620-2020, consisted of 217 men and 20 women. Makusug stands for “Muslim at Kristiano, Unang Susulong Upang Gapiin ang Terrorismo sa Sulu.”*

*The military profession knows no religion. Muslims and Christians alike are truly committed in preventing lawlessness in Sulu,” Basat said. For four months, the recruits underwent various skills training such as marksmanship, field survival, land navigation, map reading and field exercises aimed at instilling in them military discipline and principles. The recruits’ graduation rites pushed through despite the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusted to meet health protocols, which meant no visitors were allowed.*

*This was designed to enable the Tausug to become one with the AFP in bringing peace to their homeland. The new soldiers are set for deployment as organic members of the Army’s 11th ID.*



# Myanmar's Dilemma: Cooperate with Kachin Rebels on COVID-19 or Not?

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is one of several domestic insurgencies that the Myanmar army is combating. As such, Myanmar's laws call for prosecution of people accused of being affiliated with or providing support to this group. However, COVID-19 creates a dilemma: With the KIA controlling territory where around 100,000 people live (near the Chinese border), cooperation is imperative to counter the spread of the disease. The excerpted article for *Irrawaddy*, a politically neutral news source from Myanmar, discusses complications that have arisen from this.

The article notes that the KIA has not signed the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and is instead hoping for a bilateral ceasefire with the government. One effect of this, according to the article, is that it is illegal for the government to cooperate with the KIA on countering COVID-19. The article indicates it is in both the government's and the KIA's interest to cooperate on COVID-19, but Myanmar's government representatives and Kachin religious leaders have failed to come to any agreement in their talks. The KIA argues that the government needs to relax restrictions on military leaders' meeting with the KIA itself so such meetings would not be considered unlawful. As the article notes, such meetings are illegal based on Myanmar's "Unlawful Association Act" which is used to prosecute people accused of being affiliated with or providing support to armed groups fighting government troops. If such meetings can occur, then the KIA asserts it would be willing to elevate combating COVID-19 over other militant priorities.

The article also shows the regional dimension of the crisis. The KIA, which controls territory where around 100,000 people live near the Chinese border, has established a hospital to treat COVID-19 patients. However, because Myanmar's government will not provide testing kits to the KIA, the militant leaders had to buy kits from China. The government was only able to financially support 150 civilians in areas controlled by the KIA by providing them stipends during their period in COVID-19 quarantine. This was through a national peace and reconciliation program.

According to the article, one other way the KIA is attempting to respond to COVID-19 challenges is to communicate with other rebel movements in the north of the country; although it is not clear if any cooperation has resulted from this. Overall, the situation demonstrates the dilemma of governments dealing with rebels or insurgencies, on whether to cooperate on mutual public health interests during a pandemic, at the risk of violating their own regulations that prohibit any interaction with such groups. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“Because government labs are not conducting testing for the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the group has bought test kits for screening and negotiated with China over possible lab tests.”***

**Source:** “Kachin Rebels Blame Law for Stopping COVID-19 Cooperation.” *Irrawaddy*, 15 May 2020. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/kachin-rebels-blame-law-stopping-covid-19-cooperation.html>

*The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) says the Unlawful Association Act creates a barrier to cooperation between the government and ethnic armed groups in fighting coronavirus.*

*Article 17(1) of the colonial-era Unlawful Association Act has been used to prosecute people accused of being affiliated with or providing support to armed groups fighting government troops.*

*The KIA is a non-signatory to the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement but is still in negotiation over a bilateral ceasefire. Kachin religious leaders, including Kachin Baptist Convention president Reverend Hkalam Samson, attended the meeting, but the Northern Command of Myanmar's military, which oversees Kachin State, did not send a delegation. The two-hour meeting could not reach any agreement on practical cooperation, said Col Naw Bu.*

*The KIA's central committee said that it would prioritize fighting COVID-19 over armed clashes with Myanmar's military, and that it would cooperate with the government in tackling the pandemic. The Kachin State government, in cooperation with the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), provided 5.7 million kyats (US\$4,000) to feed those under quarantine in areas controlled by the KIA.*

*Around 100,000 civilians live under the KIA and around 150 people are reportedly in its quarantine centers. Because government labs are not conducting testing for the KIA, the group has bought test kits for screening and negotiated with China over possible lab tests.*

*The coordinating committee led by Dr. Tin Myo Win held talks with the Karen National Union and New Mon State Party through video conferencing to discuss potential cooperation.*





# Indonesia Banned from Blocking Internet During Protests

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 4 June, the popular Indonesian-language national publication *Kompas* published the excerpted article about the Indonesian government’s attempt to block the Internet in Papua last year and a recent court decision to outlaw that move. The country’s easternmost province, Papua, has seen a small-scale insurgency against Indonesian rule, but what provoked the Internet blockage were protests by Papuans in Papua against discrimination, which had been affecting Papuans in the city of Surabaya on the island of Java. The article notes Indonesia blocked the Internet in Papua because it had feared news spread about the protests online could have led to rioting in Bumi Cendrawasih, Papua in August and September 2019.

The article stated that the judges in Jakarta ruled that only specific content, but not broad-based Internet blockages, were lawful in Indonesia. Therefore, this ruling would not affect cases where terrorist groups attempt to recruit on the Internet because that specific content could still be blocked. Other reasons for rejecting the full Internet blockage in Papua were that the Ministry of Communications never transparently provided information regarding its decision-making behind ordering the blockage and the blockage could have had an adverse impact on the economy. Although the judges ruled Indonesia’s president was also mistaken to have allowed the blockage, they did not mandate an apology, which plaintiffs from civil society organizations had requested.

According to the article, the case is significant because it allows Papuans to engage in continued advocacy and defend human rights workers and academics working on human rights issues. The Indonesian government’s acceptance of the ruling also demonstrates its commitment to the rule of law. Lastly, the case was important because it limits the government’s power when dealing with lawful protests by not granting it the same amount of powers it has to restrict the Internet to respond to terrorism or other unlawful activities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



**West Papua Province Emblem.**

Source: Government of Indonesia via wikipedia [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lambang\\_Provinsi\\_Papua\\_Barat.gif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lambang_Provinsi_Papua_Barat.gif), Public Domain

***“If there is content that violates the law, then restrictions are placed on that content and not on Internet access as a whole.”***



**Papua in Indonesia.**

Source: TUBS / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Papua\\_in\\_Indonesia.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Papua_in_Indonesia.svg)

**Source:** “Saat Presiden RI Divonis Bersalah atas Pemblokiran Internet di Papua (The Time When the Indonesian President Made a Mistake by Blocking the Internet in Papua),” *nasional.kompas.com*, 4 June 2020. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/06/04/06102581/saat-presiden-ri-divonis-bersalah-atas-pemblokiran-internet-di-papua?page=3>

*The judges of the Jakarta State Administrative Court (PTUN) ruled that the President of the Republic of Indonesia and the Minister of Communication and Information (Menkominfo) were guilty of blocking the Internet in Papua. The Internet blocking occurred in August and September 2019 after demonstrations that led to riots in a number of regions in Bumi Cendrawasih. According to the judge, if there is content that violates the law, then restrictions are placed on that content and not on Internet access as a whole.*

*The plaintiffs in this case were a combination of civil society organizations. In their lawsuit, they demanded that the government not repeat the Internet blockage again in any regions of the country. They also demanded President Jokowi openly apologize for the blocking of the Internet.*

*At the time the people in Papua were angered due to racism experienced by Papuan students in Surabaya. If internet access were to have remained open, the government was worried that the dissemination of information could actually worsen the riots.*



## Emergency Spending for the Indian Armed Forces

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the government of India continues to deal with the aftermath of the recent clashes with Chinese forces on the Line of Actual Control, the accompanying excerpted article reports on one way the conflict has impacted the Indian armed forces. The article, from *The Wire*, reports that the Indian government “has granted the three services emergency financial powers of up to Rs 500 crore (\$66.9 million) per procurement project to buy ammunition and weapons in view of the escalating border standoff with China.” This is worth comparing to the allowance the Indian government granted to the armed forces following the February 2019 terrorist attack in the Pulwama District (Jammu and Kashmir) in the amount of Rs 300 crore (\$43 million) to fast track purchases of weapons and ammunition (see: “Changes for Indian Forces after Pulwama,” *OE Watch*, June 2019).

It is worth noting that this new allowance sets the amount “per procurement project,” though the article does not mention any limit on the number of procurements. The article does mention that the armed forces can “procure weapons and military hardware at short notice to enhance their operational preparedness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)” and that the government “relaxed certain rules to cut delays in military purchase like allowing the three services to procure required weapons and equipment from a single vendor,” so it appears that the government is waiving the ‘Make in India’ initiative with this.

The article also notes how the army is reportedly “going to use the emergency financial powers to expand its stock of ammunition” and recounts the recent conflict, including how “Chinese soldiers used stones, nail-studded sticks, iron rods and clubs.” The Indian government reported that 20 of its soldiers were killed in the recent conflict, but there were no reports of firearms being used by either side. The Indian army had previously declared that it planned to increase caches of ammunition in areas near the border, and this allowance will likely enable that to take place. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Kashmir Region, November 2019.

Source: US CIA via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashmir\\_Region\\_November\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashmir_Region_November_2019.jpg), Public Domain

***“Military sources said the Army is going to use the emergency financial powers to expand its stock of ammunition as there is little possibility of any resolution of the standoff soon...”***

**Source:** “Galwan Valley Clash: Government Grants Emergency Financial Powers to Three Services,” *The Wire*, 22 June 2020.  
<https://thewire.in/security/galwan-valley-clash-emergency-financial-powers-armed-forces>

*The government has granted the three services emergency financial powers of up to Rs 500 crore (\$66.9 million) per procurement project to buy ammunition and weapons in view of the escalating border standoff with China, government sources said on Sunday.*

*“The special financial powers have been given to the forces to procure weapons and military hardware at short notice to enhance their operational preparedness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC),” they said.*

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

*Military sources said the Army is going to use the emergency financial powers to expand its stock of ammunition as there is little possibility of any resolution of the standoff soon...*

*The clash in Galwan Valley was the worst cross border confrontation between the two sides in 45 years. China’s People’s Liberation Army has not yet talked about the number of casualties it suffered.*

*The Chinese soldiers used stones, nail-studded sticks, iron rods and clubs in carrying out brutal attacks on Indian soldiers after they protested the erection of a surveillance post by China on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control in Galwan.*

*The two armies were engaged in a standoff in Galwan and several other areas of eastern Ladakh since May 5 when their troops clashed on the banks of the Pangong Tso.*

*...The incident in Pangong Tso was followed by a similar incident in North-Sikkim on May 9...*





## Preparing for the Post-COVID-19 World: A Turkish Perspective

**OE Watch Commentary:** Like many countries, the government of Turkey has commissioned studies on what the post-COVID-19 operational environment will look like, and how to be prepared to address the vulnerabilities that this pandemic has exposed. A noteworthy study conducted by the Turkish Foreign Ministry's own *Strategic Research Center* collected input from 26 experts and academics on various issues ranging from medical intelligence to the changing world order. The Turkish Foreign Ministry published the study as a book entitled, "The Global System after COVID-19: Old Problems, New Trends." The accompanying passages shed light on some highlights, providing a foreign perspective on the issue from a country that sees itself as "one of the most important and key actors in the post-COVID-19 world."

As the first passage reports, the book's preface was penned by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who summarized the questions the study seeks to answer, such as "What kind of system will we face after COVID-19? What kind of global trends will emerge after the pandemic? What kind of threats will we face? What kind of opportunities will emerge?"

One of the key themes is a rising focus on medical intelligence and a need for intelligence agencies to have closer dialogue with the medical world. As notable defense expert Can Kasapoğlu writes, "It is imperative that our capabilities in medical intelligence (MEDINT) are developed" and incorporated into military planning. Similarly, another expert points out, "intelligence agencies will be required to enter into closer dialogue mechanisms and cooperation with the medical world." Other academics also discuss the issue of intelligence, claiming that "economic intelligence, industrial and medical spying" will be in greater demand, replacing the former focus on defense intelligence.

In fact, one expert argues that the economy and technological spying will be the main area of conflict within "a new Cold War between China... and a US-centered West." However, trying to analyze the post-pandemic world through the lens of a US-China competition would be too narrow, writes another expert. Instead, it would be more accurate to think of the post-pandemic world as having a "global leaderless-ness" problem. Given this absence of global leadership, the expert argues that countries that take steps to fill this void have an opportunity to emerge as leading global actors. In this context, Turkey is cited as a top candidate to become one of the most important and key actors in the world. However, given its geography and proximity to the Middle East, another expert warns, Turkey "must be prepared for instability and humanitarian crises that could last years" in its region.

Other highlights from the study include a focus on bio-security, chemical-biological threats and a need to incorporate these into military training exercises. Another theme is rising xenophobia, given that it will be harder to obtain travel visas, which will require "health reports, vaccination forms, blood tests..." One expert points out that these "additional requirements will likely limit human movement. Countries will have strict immigration policies, which will be emulated by institutions and the public, leading to a rise in xenophobia." The study sheds light on Turkey's efforts to be prepared for the operational environment that will emerge after "this turning point in history," as Çavuşoğlu describes it in the preface. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Political World Map.

Source: Piqsels.com, <https://www.piqsels.com/en/public-domain-photo-zknwr>, Public Domain

***“The main area of conflict within a new Cold War between China... and a US-centered West... will be the economy and technological spying...”***

***“COVID-19 has... highlighted the rise of ‘medical intelligence.’ Intelligence agencies will be required to enter into closer dialogue mechanisms and cooperation with the medical world.”***



## Continued: Preparing for the Post-COVID-19 World: A Turkish Perspective

**Source:** “Yeni dünya düzeni geliyor (A new world order is coming),” *Hürriyet*, 25 April 2020. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/yeni-dunya-duzeni-geliyor-41503018>

*The Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu wrote in the preface: “We are assessing the challenges and opportunities we have to prepare for, in the international context that will emerge after this important turning point in history. What kind of system will we face after COVID-19? What kind of global trends will emerge after the pandemic? What kind of threats will we face? What kind of opportunities will emerge? It is very admirable that we undertook this project at the very early stages on the crisis.”*

...

*Some of the assessments from experts are:*

*Prof. Dr. Mustafa Aydın (from Kadir Has University): We can foresee that chemical-biological threats will be at the top of any future planning. No doubt, the army will consider this issue in its trainings and processes.*

...

*Can Kasapoğlu (EDAM Security and Defense Program Director): The importance of bio-security will increase. It is imperative that our capabilities in medical intelligence (MEDINT) are developed and incorporated into military planning.*

...

*Dr. Merve Seren (Yildirim Beyazıt University): COVID-19 has revealed the extent of risk and threats related to economic intelligence, industrial and medical spying. It has also exposed the rise of medical intelligence....*

...

*Emrah Zarifoğlu (IBM): The main area of conflict within a new Cold War between China on the one hand and a US-centered West on the other, will be the economy and technological spying, instead of defense and intelligence. In the post-COVID-19 world, Turkey is absolutely a candidate to become one of the most important and key actors in the world.*

**Source:** “Koronadan sonra yeni dünya düzeni (A new world order after corona),” *Milliyet*, 26 April 2020. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/koronadan-sonra-yeni-dunya-duzeni-6198964>

*[Turkey’s] Foreign Ministry published a book entitled, “The Global System after Covid-19: Old Problems, New Trends,” which compiles input from 26 experts on the changes and opportunities that the Covid-19 pandemic will bring. The book is based on a study by the Strategic Research Institute, which analyzed the impact of coronavirus on numerous issues ranging from global security and defense, to the post-Covid world order, to the rise of medical intelligence and its effect on international relations.*

...

*Ferhat Piriñçi (Bursa Uludağ University): In obtaining visas, in addition to previous requirements, visitors will now have to provide health reports, vaccination forms, blood tests, etc. These additional requirements are expected to limit human movements. Countries will likely have strict immigration policies, which will be emulated by institutions and the public, leading to a rise in xenophobia.*

...

*Can Kasapoğlu (EDAM Security and Defense Program Director): Turkey, given its borders with the Middle East, must be prepared for instability and humanitarian crises that could last years.*

...

*Merve Seren (Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University): COVID-19 has exposed a need for authority and efficiency in all of the intelligence disciplines, and highlighted the rise of “medical intelligence.” Intelligence agencies will be required to enter into closer dialogue mechanisms and cooperation with the medical world.*

**Source:** “COVID-19 Sonrası Küresel Sistem: Eski Sorunlar, Yeni Trendler (The Post-COVID-19 Global System: Old Problems, New Trends),” *Strategic Research Center (Turkish Foreign Ministry)*, 23 April 2020. <http://sam.gov.tr/tr/covid-19-sonrasi-kuresel-sistem-eski-sorunlar-yeni-trendler/>

*Emre Erşen writes that COVID-19 will be one of the developments like 9/11 or the Arab Spring, that opens up a new era; and argues that trying to analyze the pandemic’s impact on the international system through the lens of a US-China competition would be too simplistic. ... Ferhat Piriñçi... writes that the pandemic has exposed a “global leaderless-ness” problem and notes that actors who take steps to fill this void will emerge as leading global [actors].*





## Russian Information Operations to Leverage Competition in the Eastern Med

**OE Watch Commentary:** In June, the Arabic-language website of *Russia Today* (*RT Arabic*) published a handful of articles discussing “secret weapons” Egypt has procured from Russia since President Abdel Fattah Sisi gained power in 2013. For evidence, the articles rely on anonymous “military sources.” The accompanying excerpts provide some insight into the articles, which come at a time of growing Egyptian-Turkish hostility on the Libyan front, including 20 June statements by President Sisi that his troops were ready to intervene in Libya if Turkish-backed Libyan fighters crossed the Sirte-Jufra frontline. They also come as Israel continues to challenge Russian supremacy over Syria’s skies. One of the *RT Arabic* headlines synthesizes a Russian take on the strategic dynamics evolving between these four Eastern Mediterranean competitors: “The Egyptian Military Aims to Obtain Russian Weapons to Close Egypt’s Coast to Turkey and Israel.”



K-300P Bastion-P.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:K-300P\\_Bastion-P.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:K-300P_Bastion-P.jpg), CC BY 4.0

Egypt’s secret Russian weapons, according to *RT*’s anonymous sources, include an integrated air defense network anchored by the S-300 missile system, 9K720 Iskander SRBMs and the K-300P Bastion-P mobile coastal defense missile system. The articles claim that the Egyptian military is in possession of the former two and seeking expedited delivery of the Bastion system. Egypt’s desire to establish an A2/AD zone along its northern coast is logical, the articles note, given escalating tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly with Turkey.

Through information operations and weapons sales, Russia can leverage competition between Turkey and Egypt to its advantage and in the service of Russia’s own interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Israel, whose military strategy is premised on having and maintaining a qualitative edge over its neighbors, is also likely to become more actively involved in the strategic maneuvering, particularly if its military advantage is significantly eroded. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

**“Egypt has developed a major armament plan that includes secret weapons...”**

**Source:**

“Strong Russian Weapons Emerge with the Egyptian Military in 2020... What Else is Hiding in Egypt’s Military Arsenal?” *RT Arabic*, 10 June 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yd4596bx>

...many expect that Egypt is hiding weapons that have not yet appeared to the public... many experts confirm that Egypt has the S-300 air defense system, as some leaked photos showed the moment the system was shipped to Egypt, in addition to the presence of other weapons that have not been announced yet.

**Source:**

“The Egyptian Military Aims to Obtain Russian Weapons to Close Egypt’s Coast to Turkey and Israel,” *RT Arabic*, 13 June 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y97tbb3a>

A military source confirmed to *RT* that the 2015 weapons contracts between Egypt and Russia included the “Bastion” system. The source noted that Egypt’s acquisition of these systems is logical and not surprising in the framework of a comprehensive development plan for the Egyptian navy that includes modern coastal defense systems to replace older systems.

**Source:**

“Does Egypt Have Secret Weapons and Why Does it Diversify its Weapons Sources?” *RT Arabic*, 21 June 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y9loxsf>

The source noted that Egypt has developed a major armament plan that includes secret weapons, as Egypt does not announce all the weapons it possesses... “Egypt possesses other secret, undeclared weapons that are not announced or shown in military exercises and maneuvers, since the military system has many secrets that can be used to surprise enemies in wartime.”

**Source:**

“Has Egypt Obtained Russian Iskander Missiles? A Military Official Comments” *RT Arabic*, 21 June 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y9loxsf>

Commenting on social media chatter about Egypt’s possession of Russian Iskander missiles, a military source confirmed to *RT* that the Egyptian army has secret weapons that are not being disclosed... He noted that in 2013, Egypt concluded a major deal with Russia, the first of its kind, to purchase “MiG-29” fighter jets that are stronger than the American “F-16,” in addition to the Buk, Tor and S-300 missile systems along with other radars that were not officially announced... an official source of the Russian Federation for Military Technical Cooperation announced that Moscow had for the first time supplied a North African-Middle Eastern country with the deadly Iskander tactical missiles. Egypt is the only country in the Middle East and North Africa at the same time.



## UAE's Information War against Turkey

**OE Watch Commentary:** News stories and social media rumors highlighting Turkish activity in Yemen have proliferated in recent months. Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Yemeni political party that is influential in the Saudi-backed, internationally recognized government, is accused of encouraging and enabling Turkish actions. UAE-linked publications, most notably the English-language *Arab Weekly*, have taken the lead in making this argument. The accompanying passage, for instance, accuses a former transportation minister affiliated with Islah of carrying out a “Turkish scheme with Qatari financing to create anti-Arab coalition militias.” From the perspective of *TRT World*, Turkey’s state news channel, this and similar reports are part of an Emirati “information-war against Turkey” that aims to “insert Turkey’s name into the Yemeni crisis by promoting a non-existent Turkish security role in Yemen.” The UAE’s goal, according to this analysis, is “to shape regional and global opinion, incite it against Turkey’s increasing role and influence, and shift the attention away from its malicious and dark role in the region.”

Turkey is a minor player in Yemen. Not so in Libya, where Turkish-Emirati competition has escalated into armed proxy conflict. Emirati perceptions of Turkish regional ambitions, gleaned from the July issue of the UAE military’s monthly journal *Nation Shield*, include the observation that Turkish policy in Arab countries “includes continuous attempts to sneak into the Horn of Africa.” Yemen is highlighted as one of the countries where Turkey sought to exploit 2011 protests to help the Muslim Brotherhood obtain power.

Assuming the Emirati assessment of Turkish regional ambitions and capabilities is accurate, there is reason to think that conflict within the Saudi-Emirati alliance in Yemen is indeed a strategic opportunity for Turkey. On the face of it, Iran and the UAE would seem unlikely to encourage Turkish involvement in Yemen. However, such involvement could fracture the Saudi-backed Hadi government along pro and anti-Islah lines, a development that both the Houthis and the Emirati-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) would likely welcome. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“Turkish interest in the Arab region... also includes continuous attempts to sneak into the Horn of Africa...”***

**Source:** “Qatar finances Turkish scheme to form militia in Yemeni province,” *The Arab Weekly*, 15 June 2020. <https://the arabweekly.com/qatar-finances-turkish-scheme-form-militia-yemeni-province>

*Private sources revealed to The Arab Weekly that the resigned Yemeni transport minister, Saleh al-Jabwani, has opened a militia recruitment camp in the city of Ataq, the capital of Shabwa province in Yemen, in accordance with a Turkish plan and with Qatari financing... As transport minister, Jabwani was known for his stance against the Arab coalition and took it upon himself to sign a bilateral agreement between his ministry and the Turkish government that was later rejected by the Yemeni government... Doha’s agenda in Yemen is to confuse the Arab coalition and create the right political and security environments for a supposed Turkish role in Yemen (that the Muslim Brotherhood’s media outlets are now clamouring for).*

**Source:** “How the UAE is using fake news to manufacture a Turkish role in Yemen,” *TRT World*, 9 July 2020. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/how-the-uae-is-using-fake-news-to-manufacture-a-turkish-role-in-yemen-38006>

*The UAE is engaged in an information-war against Turkey as it seeks to draw the country in a mess that it has no one to blame for but itself... an increasing barrage of fake news and reports that are specifically dedicated to insert Turkey’s name into the Yemeni crisis by promoting a non-existent Turkish security role in Yemen... The UAE move should be understood as an attempt to shape regional and global opinion, incite it against Turkey’s increasing role and influence, and shift the attention away from its malicious and dark role in the region.*

**Source:** الدور التركي في المنطقة العربية: الأبعاد والأهداف والتأثيرات الاستراتيجية  
“Turkey’s Role in the Arab Region: Dimensions, Goals and Strategic Impacts,” *Nation Shield*, 7 July 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/ybp63g7c>

*... Turkey found an opportunity in the events of the second decade of the twenty-first century in the Arab region. The opportunity was to achieve its ambitions in several Arab countries including Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and Syria, by helping the “Muslim Brotherhood” obtain power, to the point of directly intervening militarily in Syria and Libya. Turkish strategic interests with important Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Emirates were cast aside, and its policy even became a constant endeavor to harm the interests of these countries by building unrealistic tactical alliances with the regime in Qatar, the Sarraj government in Libya and extremist terrorist organizations that were able to conclude suspicious secret deals with the Turkish regime to open passages for terrorists to cross into Syria and elsewhere... Turkish interest in the Arab region is not limited to Syria and Libya or to pressuring some countries and harming their interests, but it also includes continuous attempts to sneak into the Horn of Africa...*





## UAE Looks to China in Post-COVID Economic Future

**OE Watch Commentary:** The coronavirus seems likely to accelerate the UAE's fast-moving ambitions of becoming a regional hub of the digitally powered global economy. The UAE has invested significantly in AI-driven domains, which are poised to become growth sectors in an otherwise dismal economic landscape. The UAE government was recently restructured "in a drive to create a more agile government" that can optimally respond to "this new phase in history." The restructuring is part of a broader plan to help the UAE become "the fastest country in recovery" from the COVID-19 crisis. The projected recovery plan, if implicitly, will rely largely on the UAE's position as a transport, logistics and distribution hub in China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). China is already the UAE's leading trade partner in non-oil commodities.

In June, the UAE and Egypt - another country which stands to benefit economically from the BRI - participated in a "BRI Ministers" videoconference focused on

"Combating COVID-19 with Solidarity." In a joint statement, the ministers agreed on the importance of re-establishing and strengthening "cross-border and trans-regional transport and logistic passages" and encouraging "interoperable and multi-modal transport." The BRI transport and logistic passages will in theory be powered by new technology and linked via a digital communications network that, as of now is informally referred to as the "Digital Silk Road." For the UAE, the BRI is an opportunity to capitalize on its investments in digital technology and its strategic focus on controlling access to ports and strategic locations throughout the Arab region. China's BeiDou satellite navigation system, which became fully operational in June, will likely be used to guide movement along the BRI's high-tech trade corridor (see: "China Completes Global Deployment of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System" in this issue of *OE Watch*). Tunisia and Saudi Arabia have already sought to position themselves as early adopters of this new system, with the UAE and Egypt likely not far behind.

The Emirates see themselves as a bridge between China and the West, cooperating with both but beholden to neither. As summarized in the accompanying passage from *The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research*, a local think tank: "China today is a great economic and military power. Strengthening cooperation with China, especially economic, is in the interest of Arab countries, as it allows them to balance their relations between East and West and to diversify their options and mix between different models." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



*Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation participants. (2019).*

Source: President of Russia, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/photos/big2x/7L3BE2AgFAia2dowMxUGeAKU1DKK7xev.JPG>, CC by 4.0

***“Strengthening cooperation with China, especially economic, is in the interest of Arab countries...”***

**Source:**

"UAE Cabinet reshuffle appoints new ministers and merges departments," *The National*, 5 July 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/uae-cabinet-reshuffle-appoints-new-ministers-and-merges-departments-1.1044316>

التعاون الصيني العربي يتطلع لمستقبل مشترك أرحب على أساس التطورات المثمرة السابقة

*Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Prime Minister and Vice President of the UAE, merged ministries and departments in a Cabinet reshuffle on Sunday in a drive to create a more agile government... The goal was for a government that was quicker in its decision-making, effectively adjusted to changes and better seized opportunities in dealing with this new phase in history – “an agile government quick in solidifying the achievement of our nation”, he wrote on Twitter... “Anyone who thinks that the world after Covid-19 will be the same as the one before it is mistaken,” he said on May 13 after a three-day meeting of senior officials. “The goal is to draw up a plan for the UAE after the Covid-19 virus crisis, a plan that will ensure that we are the fastest country in recovery.”*



## Continued: UAE Looks to China in Post-COVID Economic Future

**Source:** “Ministers of ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ issue joint statement on combating COVID-19,” *Emirates News Agency*, 20 June 2020. <http://wam.ac/en/details/1395302850046>

*... We support comprehensive and multi-modal infrastructure connectivity and sustainable transport system. We encourage countries to enhance their air, land and sea links through interoperable and multi-modal transport. We recognize the importance of cross-border and trans-regional transport and logistic passages, which include land, air and sea routes as well as transport infrastructure projects, in delivering vital medical supplies, equipment, food, critical agricultural products, and other essential goods, securing supply chains and promoting international trade, and meeting the needs of people’s livelihood and economic development. We will cooperate to keep those passages open or resume operation as soon as the situation permits.*

**Source:** “Chinese-Arab Cooperation Looks to a Common Future Based on Past Fruitful Developments,” *China in Arabic*, 6 July 2020. <https://www.chinainarabic.org/?p=54396>

*In terms of space, five Arab countries, including Egypt, Algeria, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, have cooperated with China in several ways in the field of space, including communications satellites, building assembly and installation centers, and testing and building space cities. In this context, the first Chinese-Arab center for the BeiDou system for satellite navigation was established in Tunisia, while China signed an agreement of intent to cooperate with Saudi Arabia on advancing the construction of a Chinese-Saudi center for the BeiDou GNSS. A growing number of Arab countries have made their space dreams come true on the wings of Chinese technology.*

**Source:** نحو تعاون عربي-صيني أوسع يعزز السلام العالمي  
 “Toward Broader Chinese-Arab Cooperation to Strengthen World Peace,” *The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research*, 8 July 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yajuvtqv>

*China today is a great economic and military power. Strengthening cooperation with China, especially economic, is in the interest of Arab countries, as it allows them to balance their relations between East and West and to diversify their options and mix between different models, especially in the field of modern technologies and the elements that it needs in the context of its endeavors to achieve a renaissance and catch up with technological developments, as well as to protect its markets from being monopolizing for the benefit of a specific entity or conglomerate or a specific product, whether it comes to raw or manufactured materials.*

### 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>



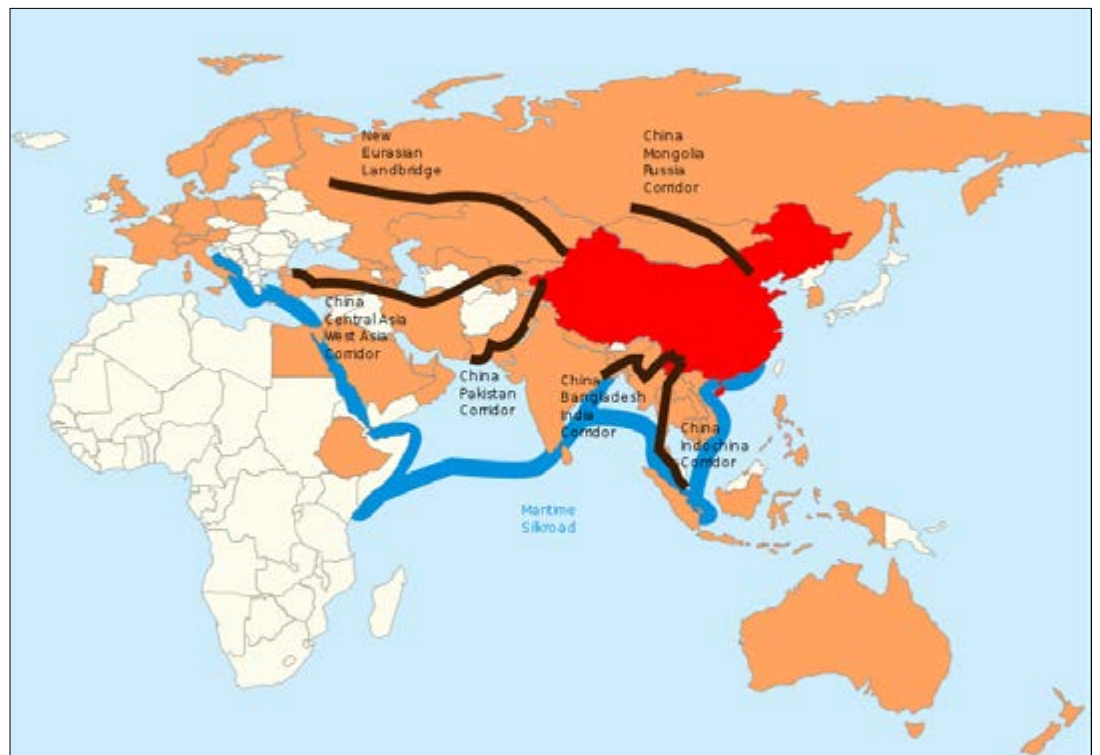


## Turkey and China Renew Currency Swap Agreement

**OE Watch Commentary:** Chinese companies have invested around two billion US dollars in Turkey in industries ranging from energy, infrastructure and logistics to finance, telecommunication, mining, and livestock. Turkey has been searching for ways to boost its declining economy by increasing its trade with China. It has already signed multilateral trade agreements with China and wants to play an essential role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Most recently Turkish and Chinese central banks renewed a currency swap agreement, as the accompanying article from Turkish-state owned *Anadolu Ajansı* reports.

China has been one of Turkey's biggest trading partners for some time now. The article notes that according to the agreement, both countries will use their respective currencies in bilateral trade, avoiding the dollar or euro. This will save companies additional money by not having to exchange the currency from dollars or euro. The article also reports that in April, Turkish Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan had a meeting with her Chinese counterpart Zhong Shan to discuss Turkish-Chinese trade relations, including: "finding balance in trade relations, Joint Economic Commission agenda, trading in local currency, [BRI], e-commerce, and exporting Turkey's agricultural goods."

The article also points out that Turkey has been committed to China's BRI and is a central part of the project with its Middle Corridor initiative which links Turkey to China through Central Asian countries. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which is the main transportation route of the Middle Corridor, has remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic with increased capacity. As such, this route will continue to be essential in sustaining the supply chain. While the article seems to advocate for more Chinese investment in Turkey, it also cautions against projects financed by China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which seem to demand concessions for many years, and "participates in other investment decisions of the country." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



One Belt One Road (Belt and Road Initiative).

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

***“Turkey has planned to attract more investors from China [through the Middle Corridor initiative] and expressed this desire in every platform.”***

**Source:** Prof. Dr. Elif Nuroğlu, “Denge arayışındaki Türkiye-Çin ticareti ve swap anlaşması (Turkey-China trade and currency swap agreement in search of balance)” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 22 June 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/denge-arayisindaki-turkiye-cin-ticareti-ve-swap-anlasmasi/1885585>

*...the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey and the People's Bank of China renewed a currency swap agreement... On the same day Turkey agreed to make all future contracts in Chinese currency Yuan... In the meantime, the currency of a third country such as the dollar or euro will not be used in bilateral trade. According to this agreement, Turkish companies in various sectors will purchase their imports from China by paying in Yuan.*

...

*In April, Turkey's Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan had a meeting with Chinese Commerce Minister Zhong Shan via teleconference to discuss Turkey-China trade relations. In this meeting they discussed bilateral trade relations between the two countries, finding balance in trade relations, the Joint Economic Commission agenda, trading in local currency, the Belt and Road Initiative, e-commerce, and exporting Turkey's agricultural goods.*

...

*Turkey has planned to attract more investors from China [through the Middle Corridor initiative] and expressed this desire in every platform.*

...

*While cooperating with China, Turkey needs to pay attention to some matters...As it is known, China has been demanding concessions for many years in the countries where it provides infrastructure financing and also participates in other investment decisions of the country.*

## Turkey Launches New Round of Operations against the PKK in Iraq

**OE Watch Commentary:** In mid-June, Turkey launched a cross-border operation into northern Iraq to combat the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency against Turkey since 1984. Turkey has launched similar operations into the region numerous times in the past to pursue PKK militants via air and ground operations. While the first article argues that this operation – named “Claw-Eagle” by Turkish Air Forces and “Claw-Tiger” by the Land Forces, is mostly motivated by domestic politics, the second article claims that the operation’s objective is to disrupt the PKK’s plan to create a corridor and a logistical center for its operations. The third article provides insights into Iran’s role in this operation.

The first article describes the events on the ground and the reaction of Iraq and the PKK to the operations; and then offers the following points as proof that the operations are to boost the Turkish government’s tanking approval ratings due to a worsening economy exacerbated by COVID-19. First, unlike previous operations, “Claw-Eagle” is being supervised by the Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, rather than an active duty commander. Second, within Turkey, there is a simultaneous crackdown campaign on pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) officials, including elected mayors and lawmakers. In fact, the airstrikes started on the same day that HDP lawmakers and supporters launched a march to protest the crackdown on their officials. The article quotes an HDP official who claims there is “no doubt that the airstrikes in Iraqi Kurdistan” are connected to the HDP march.



PKK female fighters.

Source: Kurdishstruggle via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PKK\\_female\\_fighter%CC%80A002.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PKK_female_fighter%CC%80A002.jpg), CC-BY-2.0

The second article states that this operation is linked to Turkey’s operations into Syria to dismantle what Turkey calls a “terror corridor” linking Kurdish groups from Syria to Iran. Through its nearly 20 military bases in the region, Turkey already collects significant intelligence. However, most recently Turkey has been deploying its domestically-made drones to strike targets in Sinjar, an Iraqi city that Turkey sees as a key connection between the Kurdish groups in northern Syria with the PKK’s headquarters in the Qandil Mountains on the Iranian border. The article reports “the main objective of the PKK is to create a corridor stretching from the Iranian border to Syria, through Sulaymaniyah, [another city targeted by Turkish air strikes] and Sinjar provinces and integrate their fragmented structures.”

Finally, the third article from *Rudaw*, a Kurdish news outlet, indicates that Turkey and Iran might be coordinating strikes against the PKK and its Iranian affiliate the Kurdistan Free Life Party, or PJAK. The article reports that Iranian shelling is occurring at the same time as Turkey’s operation in the area. In addition, the article points out that media outlets close to the IRGC have confirmed, “Turkey and Iran agreed to jointly fight” the terrorist threat emanating from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The operation came right after Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Ankara and his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu acknowledged coordination to combat terrorism was among the issues discussed.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

**Source:** Amberin Zaman, “Turkey bombs PKK targets in northern Iraq as government’s ratings sag” *Al Monitor*, 15 June 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/06/turkey-strikes-pkk-kurdistan-iraq-sinjar-erdogan-hdp-akp.html>

*Turkey has launched a wave of airstrikes against Kurdish militants in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, part of an ongoing campaign to destroy and degrade the group that has been battling the Turkish army on and off for Kurdish self-rule since 1984.*

*Turkey’s Defense Minister Hulusi Akar announced that “terror hideouts” where attacks against “our country, our people, our police stations, our bases” were planned and carried out had been “razed to the ground” hours after Turkish jets bombed 81 separate targets....*

*The PKK said it had suffered no casualties and vowed “to respond in the strongest possible manner to all attacks on our forces.”...*

*Iraq’s Defense Ministry condemned the strikes today, saying they were violation of Iraqi sovereignty...*

*[Turkey’s] military and intelligence presence in Iraqi Kurdistan — despite occasional tut-tutting from KRG leaders — continues to grow. It’s believed to have around 20 bases of varying sizes in the region and since last year Turkish ground troops have been deploying in Kharkurk, where the Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian borders converge.*

*The Turkish army has pursued the PKK in northern Iraq for decades... The PKK settled in the Qandil mountains separating Iraq and Iran in the early 1990s...*

*Turkey’s attacks against Sinjar are more recent and have grown increasingly lethal as Turkey refines its homegrown drone technology...*

*Turkey says that Sinjar serves as a critical conduit for PKK cadres moving between their headquarters in Qandil on the Iranian border and northeast Syria...*

*PKK sources told Al-Monitor that on Saturday, Turkish planes struck mountains in the Ahmedi region east of Dohuk where veteran PKK commander Murat Karayilan is based...*

*On the political front, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) government simultaneously unleashed a ferocious campaign to hobble the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP), detaining and prosecuting thousands of its members and sympathizers, including democratically elected lawmakers and mayors. ...*

*Hishyar Ozsoy, an HDP lawmaker from Bingol, told Al-Monitor there was “no doubt” that the airstrikes in Iraqi Kurdistan and the HDP’s march “are connected.” Ozsoy noted that Turkey’s recent economic troubles have been made significantly worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, rendering the AKP increasingly desperate. “They are melting like ice cream” in recent opinion polls, he said...*



## Continued: Turkey Launches New Round of Operations against the PKK in Iraq

***“[Turkey’s] military and intelligence presence in Iraqi Kurdistan... continues to grow. It’s believed to have around 20 bases of varying sizes in the region.”***



Kurdish PKK Guerillas.

Source: Kurdishstruggle / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish\\_PKK\\_Guerillas\\_\(15689940354\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish_PKK_Guerillas_(15689940354).jpg)

**Source:** Serkan Demirtaş, “Turkey aims to cut PKK’s Syria-Iran corridor,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, 22 June 2020. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/turkey-aims-to-cut-pkks-syria-iran-corridor-155889>

*For many security experts, the ongoing Operation Claw-Eagle and Operation Claw-Tiger is the continuation of the [Turkish Armed Forces]’s earlier anti-terror engagements in [Iraq and Syria]. It’s believed that the PKK is trying to spread its influence toward the southern parts of northern Iraq as it is expelled from the Turkish border. Sinjar is one of the locations where the PKK is trying to use as its second most important headquarters after the [Q]andil Mountain.*

...  
*But Sinjar is not the PKK’s only destination. It has also been increasing its visibility and influence in Sulaymaniyah, another important spot near the Iranian border. Turkey has long warned the local government over the PKK’s activities in that city, too.*

...  
*According to security officials, the main objective of the PKK is to create a corridor stretching from the Iranian border to Syria, through Sulaymaniyah and Sinjar provinces and integrate their fragmented structures. The objective of the Turkish operations is to disrupt the PKK’s plans to create a new lifeline by breaking this corridor which serves as the logistical center of the terror organization.*

*Ankara sees breaking the corridor in northern Iraq just like it did in eastern Syria as a necessary and strategic move against the PKK’s ambitions to reenergize and launch a new terror campaign against Turkey.*

**Source:** Zhelwan Z. Wali, “Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omeran for second day straight: officials” *Rudaw*, 17 June 2020. <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/170620201>

*A second day of Iranian shelling, as well as Turkish drone flight, was reported over the area of Alana in Erbil province’s Haji Omeran district bordering Iran, local officials and witnesses said on Wednesday, after media outlets close to the Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said Turkey and Iran agreed to jointly fight what they called Kurdistan Region-based cross-border “terrorism”. ...*

*According to... local official, Iranian shelling is occurring at the same time as Turkish operation in the area.*

...  
*“It is reported that hours before the [IRGC strikes] the Turkish jets bombed the same area, however official sources have not confirmed the joint operation of the two countries,”...*

*Bitawan, a news website close to the IRGC said the same-day attacks came after Turkey and Iran mutually agreed to fight “terrorism”.... Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu met in Ankara on Monday, reiterating their commitment to fight “terrorism” amongst a host of other issues.*

## Kurdish Jihadism and Extremist Groups

**OE Watch Commentary:** Kurds have waged a successful battle against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to end its territorial control. However, thousands of Kurds also have formed or joined the ranks of extremist groups in the region. The excerpted article from *Rudaw*, a news network based in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), provides an extensive analysis of Kurdish jihadist groups.

The article provides historical background on several Kurdish groups, which led to the creation of Ansar al-Islam (AAI), the most prominent Kurdish extremist group. AAI was founded in Iraq in 2001 by Mullah Krekar. However, its roots date back to the 1990s and consist of several factions split from the Kurdistan Islamic Movement (KIM), which was founded in 1979 in Halabja, a town in the IKR bordering Iran.

The article also explains how jihadi ideology spread among the Sunni Kurdish population of Iran and Iraq. Two Iranian Kurds have shaped the radicalization among the Kurdish population: Abdul Qader Tawhidi who created the Islamic Movement for the Sunnis of Iran after negotiations failed with Iranian Shia clerics in 1984; and his student Abdul Rahman Fattahi. In 2016, Fattahi was a top mufti of the Movement of the Muhajerin of Iran's Sunnis (Muhajerin) when the group pledged allegiance to Abu Mohammad al-Julani then head of Fath al-Sham (now Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, HTS). Halabja, on the Iranian border, where Tawhidi studied Islamic teachings, has been a significant center for Kurdish jihadism with the help of Iran, which directed the Kurdish jihadists to fight Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s.

The article bases its analysis on digital data including announcements, pictures, and videos. The data indicates extremist groups such as HTS have actively engaged in propaganda to radicalize and recruit many young Sunni Kurds from Iran to fight in Syria. These radicalized young Kurdish men were initially used to fight in the ranks of AAI mostly in Iraq. However, with the Syrian Civil War, Kurdish jihadists from Iran traveled to Syria to join the ranks of Jabhat al-Nusra (JAH), which rebranded itself several times before currently becoming HTS. While these Kurdish jihadists previously fought under the banner of JAH, they have formed their own group called Muhajerin. The author claims that violent jihadi ideology spread among Iranian Kurds "with the tacit approval of Iranian intelligence and paramilitary services allowing [Kurdish] jihadism to become woven into" the "global holy war."

While Kurdish extremist groups including KIM were mostly blending Kurdish nationalism and Islamism, "Hezi 2 Soran was particularly important in the establishment of a multi-ethnic, transnational brand of Kurdish-led jihadism." In fact, Hezi 2 Soran was one of the groups comprising AAI. Soon after it was founded, AAI "established the Byara Emirate, a mini Islamic state in the highlands of the Hawraman region that straddles the Iraq-Iran border." While the AAI leadership disbanded itself to join ISIS in 2014, the Syrian branch rejected the merger and continued to operate under the same name. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Mullah Krekar.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mullah\\_Krekar.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mullah_Krekar.jpg)

***“Thousands of young, Sunni, Kurdish men from Iran have sought solace in carrying out religious warfare, or jihad, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and beyond.”***





## Continued: Kurdish Jihadism and Extremist Groups

**Source:** Fazel Hawramy, “Journey to jihad: Iran’s Sunni Kurds fighting a holy war in Idlib” *Rudaw*, 23 June 2020. <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/23062020>

*Thousands of young, Sunni, Kurdish men from Iran have sought solace in carrying out religious warfare, or jihad, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and beyond.*

...

*Kurds have been a critical part of the international, ongoing fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. But a smaller current of Kurds have travelled to these two countries over the years to perform their religious duty of jihad, on the side of ISIS, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly the Nusra Front), and other groups.*

...

*Guided by the digital materials, Rudaw’s investigation in the Kurdish area in Iran has revealed that the group has actively promoted jihad, and continues to recruit many young Kurdish men to the battlefields of Syria.*

*These Iranian Kurdish jihadists once operated as part of the better known Ansar al-Islam group, a sophisticated and independent Kurdish jihadist group that has repeatedly refused to come under the yoke of the international jihad ringleader al-Qaeda. Ansar al-Islam was founded sometime in late 2001 and gained infamy when they soon established the Byara Emirate, a mini Islamic state in the highlands of the Hawraman region that straddles the Iraq-Iran border.*

...

*Iranian Kurdish jihadists who had made the journey to Syria chose to fight under the Nusra umbrella, but retain their own name and structure. They operated as the “Movement of the Muhajerin of Iran’s Sunnis”, a mostly Kurdish group that also counted jihadists from the Arab, Turkmen, Gilaki and Balochis areas of the country among its ranks.*

...

*The group pledged allegiance to Fath al-Sham head Abu Mohammad Jolani in July 2016, in a statement calling for unity among jihadist groups. The Muhajerin’s top mufti, or advisor, is Abdul Rahman Fattahi, an Iranian Kurd who began his journey to jihadism in the early 1990s.*

...

*Fattahi’s course embodies how violent jihadist ideology spread in the Kurdish areas in Iran with the tacit approval of Iranian intelligence and paramilitary services, allowing Kurdish jihadism to become woven into a holy war of global proportions.*

...

*Fattahi was shaped by Abdul Qader Tawhidi, an Iranian Sunni Kurd who studied in Halabja, Iraqi Kurdistan in the mid-1970s, then travelled across Kurdish areas of Iran to familiarize himself with its Islamist religious currents. The two became a near inseparable student–teacher duo in the 1990s who shaped Kurdish jihadism for decades to come.*

...

*With IRGC support, Halabja became a gravitational centre for jihadism, where local subscribers to the movement and smaller jihadist groups were brought together to establish the Kurdistan Islamic Movement (KIM), fighting Saddam Hussein’s regime for two years before Iran withdrew its support from Kurdish opposition groups...*

*...The KIM’s hardcore elements, along with other smaller jihadist groups, came together to establish the now-infamous Ansar al-Islam.*

*One Ansar al-Islam contingent, Hezi 2 Soran, was particularly important in the establishment of a multi-ethnic, transnational brand of Kurdish-led jihadism.*

...

*Hezi 2 Soran ... was established in 1995, named after the Erbil province city where the KIM ran an important military academy...*

...

*A long-established principle in the KIM was that it be an exclusively Kurdish nationalist Islamic project, but Hezi 2 Soran provided training to Iraqi and Syrian Arab jihadists who sought it.*

...

*The most radical of the KIM’s groups – Hezi 2 Soran, and two smaller factions, Tawhid and Hamas – came together to establish Jund al-Islam in September 2001. The group lasted around 100 days, before merging with Krekar’s Islah to become Ansar al-Islam.*

*Ansar al-Islam took charge of Iraqi Kurdish Hawraman to establish the Byara Emirate, implementing a severe interpretation of Islamic penal code.*

...

*Iranian Kurds who aided Ansar al-Islam refuge in Iran “obtained approval from the Iranian side, on the condition that the transportation [of Ansar fighters] was done quietly and secretly...*

...

*Many Iranian and Iraqi Kurds carried out jihad for the Islamic State when the group took over parts of Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014.*

...

*It appears that the Muhajerin of Iran group operated as part of Ansar al-Islam up until mid-2016... On July 2, 2016, the Muhajerin issued its first announcement pledging allegiance to Julani, and called on other jihadist groups to do the same.*

## Renewed Tension Between Turkey and Greece

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey and Greece have had decades-long tensions over a multitude of issues. The most prevalent ones pertain to sovereignty over some islands and maritime boundaries in the Aegean; presence in Cyprus, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The accompanying articles from Turkish state news agencies provide the Turkish perspective on some of the issues causing renewed escalation between the neighboring nations.

The first article focuses on the issues surrounding the Aegean Sea. These include issues of territorial waters and the continental shelf; airspace; the flight information region; the disarmament of the Aegean islands and ambiguity around disputed islets and rocks in the Aegean Sea. The author claims that while Turkey's approach is to solve these issues through negotiations, Greece wants to take these issues to international entities such as the International Court of Justice for a resolution or to find a solution within the framework of the 1982 the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

As the article discusses, the continental shelf dispute in the Aegean Sea stems from the absence of a delimitation agreement and has been ongoing since the 1970s. In the 1990s, it escalated when Greece tried to expand it to 12 miles. At the moment, Turkey and Greece each only have sovereignty over the six miles of sea extending from their landmass and Turkey's position has been that any unilateral expansion of the continental shelf by Greece will be a cause for war between the two nations. The article states that Greece has long advocated for its islands in the Aegean to also have continental shelves, which may overlap and violate the borders of Turkey's continental shelf. According to the author, theoretically Turkey could declare an EEZ in the Aegean Sea. In fact, Greece did not claim EEZ for its islands in the Aegean Sea when signing an accord to establish maritime boundaries with Italy on 9 June. However, the author notes, Turkey will probably face a backlash from the European Union and NATO if it declares an EEZ overlapping that of the Greek islands in the Aegean.

The second article analyzes the accord Greece signed with Italy and its implication on Turkish-Greek relations pertaining to maritime boundaries ranging from the Aegean Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean. As the article states, after signing the agreement, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias criticized Turkey by saying "delimitation of maritime zones is accomplished with valid agreements, not with invalid ones like that signed by Turkey and the Libyan government of Faye al-Sarraj and with maps unilaterally submitted to the United Nations." Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu reacted to the accord saying Turkey is not concerned about this deal; in fact, "[t]heir deal has proven the validity of Turkey's argument on such maritime deals." The article suggests that without engaging with Ankara, a sustainable solution is unlikely on maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean. The author claims that a sustainable solution is only possible through an agreement that includes all regional actors." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Topographic maps of Greece.

Source: Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-greece.jpg>, CC-BY-SA-4.0

***“Greece’s anti-Turkey actions in the region continue to create more friction and have led to diplomatic failures.”***





## Continued: Renewed Tension Between Turkey and Greece

**Source:** Prof. Dr. İrfan Kaya Ülger, “Türkiye’nin Ege Denizi’nde tek taraflı MEB ilanının kapısı aralandı (An opportunity appeared for Turkey to unilaterally declare an exclusive economic zone in the Aegean Sea),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 01 July 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/turkiye-nin-ege-denizinde-tek-taraflı-meb-ilaninin-kapisi-aralandi/1895936#!>

*The number of political and legal disputes between Turkey and Greece are close to a dozen. Besides the status of the Turkish minority living in Western Thrace, the Fener Greek Patriarchate and the Cyprus problem, the disputes are generally regarding the Aegean Sea. To sort them out by titles, first of all, there is the problem of territorial waters and continental shelf; followed by the airspace, the FIR line (flight information region), the disarmament of the Aegean islands, and finally, ambiguity around disputed islets and rocks.*

*Turkey’s official position regarding the dispute in the Aegean Sea is to, instead of addressing each problem alone, take the general perspective of the Greek-Turkish relationship into account to resolve with equitable principles and the negotiation process. However, Greece defends the view that the disputes in the Aegean Sea should be moved to the International Court of Justice and resolved within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea...*

*... still territorial water in the Aegean Sea is 6 miles for both Greece and Turkey.*

*In the middle of the 1990s, the Greek government has attempted to move its territorial waters to 12 miles, but after Turkey stated that it will see this as a reason for war [Greece] had stepped back... if the territorial waters are increased to 12 miles by Greece, the Aegean Sea becomes ...a Greek lake.*

*...*

*On the basis of the provisions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, Turkey is able to unilaterally declare an exclusive economic zone in the Aegean Sea. But a declaration made in this way will receive a negative reaction in the Western world, in NATO and EU circles. Greece and Italy making the exclusive economic zone delimitation agreement has opened the door for Turkey to utilize such an option.*

**Source:** Enes Yavuz, “Greek actions stifle a resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean” *TRT World*, 16 June 2020. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/greek-actions-stifle-a-resolution-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-37317>

*... Greece signed an accord with Italy on their maritime boundaries to establish an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between the two countries.*

*...*

*As the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlut Cavusoglu, has emphasized, “their deal (the accord) has proven the validity of Turkey’s argument on such maritime deals.”*

*...*

*Greece’s anti-Turkey actions in the region continue to create more friction and have led to diplomatic failures.*

*After the signing of the accord, the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias stated, “The delimitation of maritime zones is accomplished with valid agreements, not with invalid ones like that signed by Turkey and the Libyan government of Fayed al-Sarraj and with maps unilaterally submitted to the United Nations.”*

*It is better for all parties, especially Greece, to negotiate a new regional partnership that includes all actors rather than trying to marginalize Turkey and Turkish Cypriots.*

*...*

*...all short or long term opportunities for cooperation must be utilized for a political settlement and a comprehensive resolution that serves the interests of all stakeholders in the region. Otherwise, the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean can get out of hand, and a violent incident in the region by accident or otherwise is not unthinkable.*



## The Role of UAVs in Transforming Turkish Combat Capabilities

**OE Watch Commentary:** In the 1990s, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) focused on overcoming hybrid warfare challenges as it fought an intensified conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In the past decade, this focus has shifted to integrating technologically advanced weapons systems into the TAF's arsenal. Supported by government contracts, Turkey's defense industry has been delivering these advanced weapons systems, especially unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), to the TAF. The accompanying article provides insights into how UAV's have transformed the TAF's combat capabilities and how this has been demonstrated on the battlefields of Syria and Libya.

The article discusses that the wars in Syria and Libya are two priority issues for Turkey's national security. In these conflicts, the author writes that Turkey has been able to achieve significant military successes thanks to its indigenous UAVs, electronic warfare systems and the integration of the two systems. Regarding Turkey's

"Operation Spring Shield" in Syria, the author writes that besides achieving results on the ground, the TAF recorded and distributed videos from battle on social media, increasing the psychological effects of its operations. Regarding Turkey's involvement in Libya, the author describes how Turkey's indigenously made UAVs waged a successful battle against Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), including destroying the Russian-made Pantsir air-defense systems.

According to the article, Turkey utilized UAVs to execute three main functions in Syria and Libya: "reconnaissance-surveillance-intelligence, target detection and marking for shooting missions, and assault." Turkey has been using drones for reconnaissance-surveillance-intelligence for some time now in its domestic and cross-border operations. In the past decade, Turkey's indigenous drones TB2 and Anka-S have taken on these missions. The detection of targets by UAVs have been instrumental for the success of Turkey's fighter jets and ground troops. In addition, carrying indigenous hardware such as MAM-L and MAM-C, laser-guided smart munitions systems, the TB2 and Anka-S were able to carry out effective strikes, especially against high value targets. As the article states, while using drone technology is not unique to the Turkish military, utilizing them in this way is relatively new.

The article points out that since the 1980s, the TAF have also heavily invested in communication, command and control and intelligence capabilities. One of these systems is the TAFICS (Turkish Armed Forces Integrated Communication System) which has integrated the communication between land, naval and air forces and has capabilities to share data in real time. Overall, Turkey's military power and successes in recent operations are the result of decades long investment in military technology and hardware. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Bayraktar TB2.

Source: Kingbjelica via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar\\_TB2\\_S-%C4%B0HA\\_Teknofest\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_S-%C4%B0HA_Teknofest_2019.jpg), CC-BY-SA-4.0

***“Even though UAVs are at the forefront of these operations, the technological transformation of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) has been determinative to both achieving results and increasing the influence of Turkey in the region.”***





## Continued: The Role of UAVs in Transforming Turkish Combat Capabilities

**Source:** Arda Mevlütoğlu, “Türkiye’nin Askeri Dönüşümünün Sahadaki Yansımaları (The reflections of Turkey’s military transformation on the ground)” *perspektif.online*, 11 July 2020. <https://www.perspektif.online/turkiyenin-askeri-donusumunun-sahadaki-yansimalari/>

*The Syrian and Libyan Civil Wars are two of the most significant priorities of Turkey’s foreign policy and national security...*

*With UAVs and electronic warfare systems, [Turkey] inflicted major blows on the Syrian regime’s army through Operation Spring Shield and Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) in Libya...*

*Even though UAVs are at the forefront of these operations, the technological transformation of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) has been determinative to both achieving results and increasing the influence of Turkey in the region.*

...

*In both the Syrian and Libyan operations, Turkey’s most important military equipment has been UAVs developed by the national defense industry.*

*In addition to their exploration, surveillance and intelligence gathering tasks, ...TB2 and Anka-S UAVs carried out assaults with ROKETSAN produced precision-guided ammunition...*

...

*When examining Turkey’s usage style of the UAVs in both operation environments, it appears they carried out three types of jobs. These are reconnaissance-surveillance-intelligence, target detection and marking for shooting missions, and assault.*

...

*Turkish Armed Forces are in the process of gaining capability that can effectively and efficiently transform tactical gains into strategic outcomes...*

*The backbone of this capability lies the communications, command - control and intelligence network that the Turkish Armed Forces have invested heavily in since the 1980s.*

*Significant progress has been made to transition to TAFICS which connects air, land and naval forces to share data with each other in real time...*

## Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

**By Matthew Stein**

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

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





## Iran Eager to Enter the Global Market as a Military Equipment Exporter

**OE Watch Commentary:** Under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which also encompasses the Iran nuclear deal, the ban on arms transfers to and from Iran is scheduled to expire 18 October 2020; though some UN members have called for an extension to this ban, while others have resisted the idea of an extension. Despite this ongoing effort, Iran continues to visualize the import and export opportunities they could pursue, as evidenced in the accompanying passage.

The excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, an outlet owned by the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization located in Tehran, describes the end of Iran's arms embargo as "one of the most important issues in the world." The article writes that "the Zionist regime [Israel] and the US have now started wide spread efforts for extending these sanctions and restrictions again" referring to a draft resolution to the UN Security Council, for an indefinite extension for Iran's arms embargo, which the article claims is meant "to prevent Iran's entry into the conventional weapons trade market."



*Iranian drones and helicopters at 2014 defense presentation.*

Source: Fars News Agency via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian\\_drones\\_and\\_helicopters\\_at\\_2014\\_defense\\_presentation.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian_drones_and_helicopters_at_2014_defense_presentation.jpg), CC BY 4.0

Iran considers global trade on military equipment as one of the most prosperous and profitable markets in the world economy. As the article points out, Iran is eager to enter the market with "very advanced and up-to-date military equipment."

The article identifies some of Iran's most significant defense weapons, ranging from missiles, naval vessels, drones, air defense, and ground defense systems. Further, it highlights Iran's advantages of their military equipment on the foundations of affordability, capabilities, and specifications to gather interested buyers. Iran considers itself "one of the largest producing powers of ballistic, point-to-point, and cruise missiles in the world" and claims the world has witnessed its missile capabilities in multiple operations against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-associated terrorist groups and others. While Iran recognizes they are not among the top countries for exporting naval equipment, Iran still deems their submarines, speedboats, and destroyers to be comparable to foreign models and attractive to international customers.

From a drone perspective, Iran exhibits many applications for their unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in a variety of industries apart from military applications. According to General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, Commander of the Air Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iran holds dominance in the region and is considered one of the top four countries in the world and as a result, Iran should secure a place in the drone export market. Iran also claims to have made significant advancements to their aircraft fleet. Noting their capabilities in evading radar detection, Iran recounts the success of their air defense system, Third of Khordad, which was used to take down "a very advanced American UAV" (see "Iran's IRGC Navy Unveils 3rd Khordad Defense System" in this issue of *OE Watch*). Finally, Iran has made significant strides in the manufacturing of light weapons, cars, and tanks. Iranian-manufactured Karrar tanks were purportedly used in the fight against ISIS affiliate groups in Iraq, and is comparable to Russia's T-90 tank.

Sanctions continue to block Iran from providing a variety of manufactured products to the world market; however, if favorable conditions are met after the end of the sanctions in October 2020, Iranian officials in the military equipment sales industry will see it as a profitable business opportunity and could take advantage of it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Plude)**

***"The end of Iran's arms embargo for some may mean that after years of sanctions and restrictions, Iran will be able to enter the market with very advanced and modern military equipment..."***





## Continued: Iran Eager to Enter the Global Market as a Military Equipment Exporter

**Source:** “Amadegi e Iran Baraye Saderat e Nezami/Sabad e Neroo haye Mosalah Baraye Tejarahat e Jahani (Iran’s Readiness for Military Exports/Armed Forces Portfolio for World Trade),” Mehrnews.com, 4 July 2020. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4957031/اناری-یگدام-یناچ-تراجت-یارب-حلسم-یافوری-دبس-یماظن-تار داص-یارب>

Mehr News Agency, Political group; With the approach of 27 Mehr (18 October 2020) and the deadline under the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) falls under, Iran’s arms embargo must end no later than 5 years after the acceptance of the JCPOA. This matter in recent days has become one of the most important political issues in the world, and it should be noted the Zionist regime (Israel) and the U.S. have now started wide spread efforts for extending these sanctions and restrictions again. The latest move (by the U.S. and Israel) was to submit a draft resolution to the UN security Council, demanding the indefinite extension for Iran’s arms embargo in order to prevent Iran’s entry into the conventional weapons trade market.

The end of Iran’s arms embargo for some may mean that after years of sanctions and restrictions, Iran will be able to enter the market with very advanced and modern military equipment and weapons, or like other countries in the West Asia region, they will decide to spend a great deal of money and enter a never-ending competition to buy up military equipment and become a destination for the world’s largest arm factories. However, an important and significant matter that should not be overlooked is that the children of Iran have come to believe that no one help Iran achieve this dream, due to the needs of the nation and its defense under the shadow of all the limitations and sanctions that exist, even during the imposed eight-year war (Iran-Iraq War). With trust and self-confidence and using the available capacities, they have made noteworthy strides by not only provided for the needs of Iran in the last four years and bringing active deterrence and exemplary security in the most crisis-stricken regions of the world, but also, they can compete in the world market with the most advanced foreign counterparts.

Currently, world trade on military equipment is one of the most prosperous and profitable markets in the world economy, and according to recent statistics and information from the Stockholm International Peace Institute, it has been growing. A significant portion of exports in this industry are appropriated by countries like U.S., Russia, France, Germany, and China.

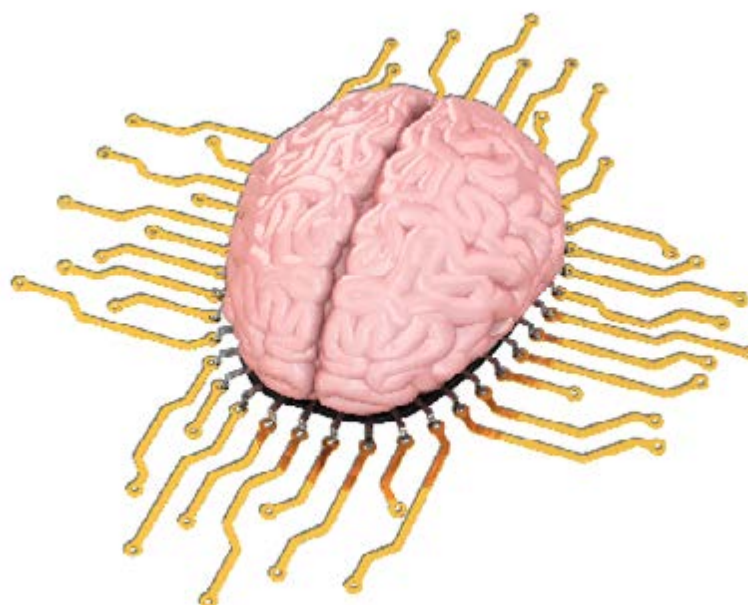
Iranian officials have always peacefully emphasized on Iran’s defense capabilities, and in practice, it has been proven. These capabilities have significantly helped security and peace in the chaotic regions of West Asia. Through global trade, in order to strengthen friendly and allied countries, it’s possible to export efficient defense products. In addition to strengthening the defense of allies, Iran can also benefit from the profits of this industry.

Therefore, we are taking a look towards some of the most significant defense products in our country that could be included in Iran’s military equipment export portfolio. Given their affordable features specifications, capabilities, and cost, Iran can attract the attention of their buyers and benefit from this lucrative global market.

## THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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

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.





## Iran's IRGC Navy Unveils 3rd Khordad Defense System

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 20 June, Iran's IRGC-Navy unveiled a new defense system, coinciding with the one-year anniversary of Iran downing a US drone over the Strait of Hormuz. According to the accompanying excerpt from *Fars News*, the new defense system – 3rd Khordad – is located on IRGC-N vessel Shahid Siavash. The indigenous system is capable of target lock and missile firing from a moving frigate. The article further states that the defense system can engage and intercept four active targets and can be used for countering tactical and strategic aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, and UAVs, and can also shoot down its targets under electronic warfare conditions.



IRGC-N vessel with 3rd Khordad system.

Source: Fars News, <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13990329000724/> ری‌واصت-راشتن-اداد-خ-موس-ی-دن-فاد-پ-ن-ام-اس-ی-ی-ای-ر-د-ه-خ-س-ن-ز-ای-ام-ن-ور

According to another Iranian news outlet, *Mashregh News*, a full development of the 3rd Khordad defense system sea model is being prepared for other IRGC vessels. The article relates that the increase in air defense capability in medium to high altitude and at high altitude is necessary for Iran's national security. The 3rd Khordad system can use missiles such as the Saed-2 and 3 and, according to the article, this development is an important event in the country's defense field to increase deterrence and for times of conflict.

A vessel and air-defense system analysis suggest that the Shahid Siavash and Khordad integration is derived from the placement of a mobile ground-to-air missile launcher parked on the aft section of a Revolutionary Guard logistics vessel. While this improvised 'new defense system' may primarily fulfill propaganda narratives, it does indicate the creativity of the Iranian regime and its willingness to explore cross-domain weapons systems modularity. The validity of the claim of moving vessel system target lock and firing is unknown, however, given the standard static launch protocols of the Khordad system and the lack of a wake behind the Shahid Siavash while firing (based on the imagery reviewed), it is suspect. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**

***“The 3rd Khordad defense system can fire Taer-2 missiles, which are also indigenous, and mass produced. It can also launch Saed-2 missiles with a range of 75 kilometers. The system has the ability to engage simultaneously with four targets, including tactical and strategic aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, and UAVs.”***

**Source:** “Roonamahi az noskhe darya-ee samane padafandee sevom Khordad/enteshar tasaveer khat toleed baraye nokhosteen bar (Unveiling of a sea version of defense system third Khordad/publishing pictures of the production line for the first time),” *Fars News*, 20 June 2020.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13990329000724/> طخ-ری‌واصت-راشتن-اداد-خ-موس-ی-دن-فاد-پ-ن-ام-اس-ی-ی-ای-ر-د-ه-خ-س-ن-ز-ای-ام-ن-ور

*The system, which was unveiled for the first time during the Supreme Commander-in-*

*Chief's visit to the IRGC Air Force Exhibition, has the ability to engage four targets simultaneously, and its mission is to counter tactical and strategic aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles and UAVs.*

*It is worth mentioning that last year, Sardar Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the commander of the IRGC Air Force, announced in a televised interview that the defense system was designed and built. It destroys.*

*The Tayer-2 missile, which is the main missile of the 3rd of Khordad defense system, has also been developed by the IRGC Air Force and has been mass-produced. In addition to Tayer-2, the 3rd of Khordad system is capable of firing Sayad-2C missiles with a range of 75 km.*

**Source:** “Cherah Amrika do bar be shanavar ‘shahid siavash’ nazdeek shodand? (Why did Americans approach ‘Shaid Siavash’ twice?),”

*Mashregh News*, 20 June 2020. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1085399/> دن‌دش-کی‌دزن-یش‌وای‌س-دی‌هش-روان‌ش-مب-راب-۲-اه-ی-ای-اک‌یرم-آ-ر-چ

*A full development of the 3rd Khordad defense system sea model is being prepared for IRGC Navy vessels.*

*The increase in air defense capability in medium to high altitude is due to the success of Saed-2 and Saed-3 and others. The 3rd Khordad is important to the country's defense both for current conflicts to increase deterrence and in times of future conflict.*





## Iran: What's Behind the Government's Secrecy on Handing Over Kish Island to Chinese?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Historically, Iran has sought alliances to help extricate itself from more dominant countries, which it viewed as threats to its territory or sovereignty. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, Iranian leaders turned in succession to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Belgium, and Germany to help defend the country against pressure from Russia or the United Kingdom. In the mid-20th century, shortly before the outbreak of the Cold War, Iranian leaders embraced the United States for the same reason: It was an increasingly powerful country, which they did not believe would interfere in Iran's internal affairs.



*An Aerial View of Kish Island in the Persian Gulf.*

Source: Press TV, <https://cdn.presstv.com/photo/20191228/380f0fbf-09bd-4d60-b2f0-549f7e6a2958.jpg>

The excerpted articles discuss rumors of Chinese deals with Iran. The first excerpt from *Alef.ir*—a website affiliated with conservative populist parliamentarian Ahmad Tavakkoli—highlights populist concerns and rumors that previous Sino-Iranian deals would allow China to have a long-term lease

for a military base on Kish Island, a resort island largely operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' economic wing. These deals and understandings apparently date back to the Mahmoud Ahmedinejad era (2005-2013) and were confirmed during President Xi Jinping's 2016 visit to Iran. The article notes that the deal has not been debated in parliament and claims that "behind-the-scenes and secret events are taking place."

Multiple Iranian officials have denied the rumors. In the second excerpt, Iran-China Chamber of Commerce director Majid Reza Hariri downplays the rumors, which have continued for more than a year. He argues that bilateral agreements do not mean forfeiture of sovereignty and points to frustration that many Chinese projects have shown no progress. He does reveal, however, that most Chinese projects focus on the energy and industrial sectors. The unfulfilled Chinese project in Jask—the location of an Iranian submarine base—would give China a presence just outside the Strait of Hormuz.

The persistent rumors about Chinese dealings infringing on Iranian sovereignty show the continued sensitivity Iranians feel toward any great power hosting military forces on Iranian territory. It also underscores the broad distrust Iranians have toward their leadership when it comes to the defense of Iranian sovereignty. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“Negotiations were underway ... to hand over Kish Island to the Chinese for 25 years”***



**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>



## Continued: Iran: What's Behind the Government's Secrecy on Handing Over Kish Island to Chinese?

**Source:** “Mokhafi Kari Dawlat dar Vandazi Jazirah Kish beh Chinha? (The government's secrecy in handing over Kish Island to the Chinese?),” *Alef.ir*, 24 March 2019. <https://www.alef.ir/news/3980104002.html>

*The government's secrecy in handing over Kish Island to the Chinese?*

Meanwhile, a few months have passed since the issue of handing over Kish Island to the Chinese in the form of a long-term contract, in which the senior officials of the Free Zones Organization have remained silent.

According to *Tasnim*, it was on February 20, 2019 that a delegation member of the parliament's chair publicly noted to the president of handing over the island of Kish to the Chinese. A day later, the Kish Free Zone's Deputy Minister of Economy and Investment denied the transfer of Kish Island to the Chinese.

Mohammad Reza Saeedi, stating that some people inside and outside the country are exploiting the sense of patriotism and nationalism, said: “We will never allow the people's calm to be damaged by these actions.”

Emphasizing that according to the laws, no person, legal or otherwise, is allowed to sell land to foreigners, at the same time, he added: “Of course, we welcome any domestic and foreign investment in Kish Island.”

About a month later, on March 20, 2019, the same representative who had warned the president about handing over Kish Island to the Chinese once again emphasized that the government had no right to hand over Kish to the Chinese.

Hojjatul-Islam Hassan Norouzi, a member of parliament for Robat Karim, told *Tasnim* that he had written to the president about handing over Kish Island to the Chinese: “Negotiations were underway by the government to hand over Kish Island to the Chinese for 25 years.”

He stressed that if such negotiations and transfers are to take place, they must also be discussed in parliament, adding that the government does not have the right to conclude such agreements. Treaties relating to the transfer of part of the land must be debated in parliament, and the government cannot directly address such issues.

“The government is secretly doing things, secretly signing the 2030 and the FATF, or secretly handing over fishing privileges in southern waters to the Chinese,” he said, referring to the Caspian Sea, which has not yet been reported. And the country suffered from all this.

Nowruzi emphasized: “If there is any discussion about this, we will definitely stop it, and the Chinese officials should also know that such transfers will not take place.”

For several months now, the issue of handing over Kish Island to the Chinese has been raised, and the interesting point in this regard has been the lack of comments from the CEO of the Kish Free Zone. The secretary of the High Council of Free Zones did not comment on the matter. Although the Kish Free Zone's Deputy Minister of Economy and Investment has denied the transfer, the follow-up inquiries indicate that behind-the-scenes and “secret” events are taking place. The secret of the officials at the Free Zones in relation to the handing over of Kish Island to the Chinese is still unknown.

**Source:** “Joz'iyat-e Tavafaqnameh-e Jomeh va Estategik-e Iran va China (Details of the Iran-China Comprehensive and Strategic Agreement),” *Tasnim News*, 29 June 2020. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/04/09/2296322>

### **Details of the Iran-China Comprehensive and Strategic Agreement**

Referring to the various agreements between Mr. [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad's government and China, [Majid Reza Hariri] the head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry stressed that in recent days, the regime's opposition networks have been focusing on the recent remarks of the former president. However, it should be noted that during Mr. Ahmadinejad's time, various agreements were signed with China. Why should bilateral mean the transfer of the country...?

The head of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce, referring to the important bilateral agreement on the construction of an industrial town in Jask (on the shores of Makran coast) by the Chinese, said: “Six years later, nothing special has happened. The same example shows that these types of contracts are very slow, and in order to achieve them, there must be a firm determination.”





## Iranian Armed Forces Change Health Insurance Procedures

**OE Watch Commentary:** International coverage of the Iranian military tends to focus almost entirely on its capabilities or support for insurgencies and terrorist groups. The Iranian military, however, is a huge bureaucracy with nation-wide reach. While the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is a volunteer and elite organization, the regular Iranian army is conscript-based, incorporating almost all 18 and 19 year-old men in the country.

Consistently, one of the primary complaints from Iranian veterans is poor health care. In the excerpted article from Iran's official defense press service, the chief executive officer of the Armed Forces Health Service Insurance highlights recent changes to make the process less bureaucratic for its customers and to diminish the need for its staff to hold in-person meetings. While armed forces and veterans' health care reform is long overdue in Iran, one of the reasons why the bureaucracy was so large was the Islamic Republic's need to provide jobs for its most politically-connected adherents. Any reforms that allow customers to bypass various offices and processes, leading to layoffs, may ultimately increase employment pressure on Iranian authorities.

It appears that COVID-19 is forcing long-resisted bureaucratic reforms, a telling sign that the disease is not as under control as Iranian authorities now claim. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



A Sample Iranian Armed Services Health Insurance Card.  
Source: Imam Hossein Hospital of Mashhad, <https://www.imhh.ir/images/bime/niro.jpg>

***“We hope to be good servants for the great and honorable society of the armed forces”***

**Source:** “Hazaf-e Tarikh-e ‘Etebar az Daftarcheh Bimah Khodmat Darmani Niruha-ye Moslah (Remove the Validity Date from the Armed Forces Health Insurance Booklet),” *Defa Press*, 30 June 2020. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/403635>

*Remove the validity date from the Armed Forces Health Insurance Booklet*

Amir Norouzi informed the executive units of the organization about the instructions for removing the credit renewal process for medical records of the armed forces. According to the Press Defense Social Group, Amir Norouzi, CEO of the Armed Forces Health Services Insurance, stated that the necessary plans have been made to eliminate the process of renewing the medical records of the Armed Forces and that, in the future, there is no need to refer the insured and their dependents to the organization's electronic services branches and offices.

Nowruzi emphasized that this plan is not subject to the employees and their families covered, and stated that, in the first phase of this plan starting from 21 June 2020, the date of validity of the booklet was removed, only for retired and employed supervisors (except for contract employees) and their spouses. On the letterhead and papers of the above-mentioned insured's booklet, the text “Credit up to the last page of the booklet” has replaced the booklet's validity date and, in the second phase, after necessary examinations, if possible, it will be operational for various groups and insurance associated organizations.

The managing director of the Armed Forces Health Services Insurance Organization named “Sakhid,” said it is conducted to promote the dignity and satisfaction of the target community, reducing the insureds' visits to branches and offices of the organization across the country, preventing transmission and coronavirus virus, and saving the booklet as one of the main reasons for this action and added that, “We hope that in order to play the role and social responsibility of the organization, we can take big steps and be good servants for the great and honorable society of the armed forces.” In order to prevent disruption in the provision of services to caregivers and their spouses, all contracting centers have been notified to accept and perform services via text messages.



## Iran: Khamenei Speaks on Corruption

**OE Watch Commentary:** Corruption remains endemic in Iran. According to Transparency International's 2019 corruption rankings, the Islamic Republic ranks 146 out of 180 countries, on par with Mozambique and Nigeria, and below many other sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries. In the excerpted remarks to the judiciary, posted on the Supreme Leader's website, Ali Khamenei addresses the need for the judiciary to tackle corruption. He notes that in many American films and television shows, judges are depicted as honorable and incorruptible but in Iran's own cinema, judges are often seen as cruel or corrupt. That Khamenei must address the topic openly and to the judiciary itself shows the severity of the problem. After all, corruption was a major factor around which Iranians rallied in the run-up to the Islamic Revolution. So if Khamenei feels the issue is unavoidable and undeniable even though acknowledging the problem now is politically embarrassing, then corruption is severe.



Khamenei Speaks by Video to the National Conference of the Judiciary, June 27, 2020.

Source: Khamenei.ir, <https://english.khamenei.ir/d/2020/06/27/4/22935.jpg>

There may also be a political component to Khamenei's remarks, however. Ebrahim Raisi, the head of the Judiciary, is one of the major candidates positioning himself to succeed Khamenei. By implying that Raisi's judiciary is corrupt, Khamenei may hope to better the odds that his son Mojtaba Khamenei could be his successor.

That Khamenei is delivering speeches via teleconference also shows that COVID-19 remains widespread in Iran and that, contrary to its early months, Iranian officials are abiding by social distancing and other precautions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“You should begin to combat corruption inside the judiciary branch itself...”***

**Source:** “Biyarat dar Ertebat-e Tasviri ba Hamayesh Sarasari Qavah-e Qaday’i (A Statement on the Video Conference with the National Conference of the Judiciary),” Khamenei.ir, 27 June 2020. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=45974>

### ***A Statement to the National Conference of the Judiciary***

*I would like to raise some points about corruption as well. Thankfully, attention to the issue of corruption has reached its peak in the judiciary branch. Of course, it began in the previous term, but now, it has thankfully reached its peak and it is receiving good attention. When the people look at it, they see that you confront corruption, that you do not show any consideration and that you enter the arena in a decisive manner. Therefore, they really become happy and hopeful. This is because corruption and corrupt individuals deal a grave blow to the people's lives, morale, faith and belief. Financial corruption – as well as other forms of corruption: but in the present time, it is financial and economic corruption which is at the top of the agenda of the judiciary branch – is a grave plight and dangerous virus, just like the coronavirus. It is epidemic like the coronavirus as well. It is extremely contagious and transmittable. In other words, corruption in one area rapidly and acutely spreads to other areas. A corrupt person does not only corrupt himself. He drags others into corruption with various reasons as well. In the case of the coronavirus, dirty and infected hands transfer the virus. In the case of corruption too, dirty and impure hands cause corruption to be transferred hand-in-hand. However, in the case of the coronavirus, if we use soap to wash our hands, the issue is resolved, but in the latter, the issue is not resolved by using soap on our hands. There is no solution other than cutting off the hands of the corrupt! Therefore, the issue is a very important one.*

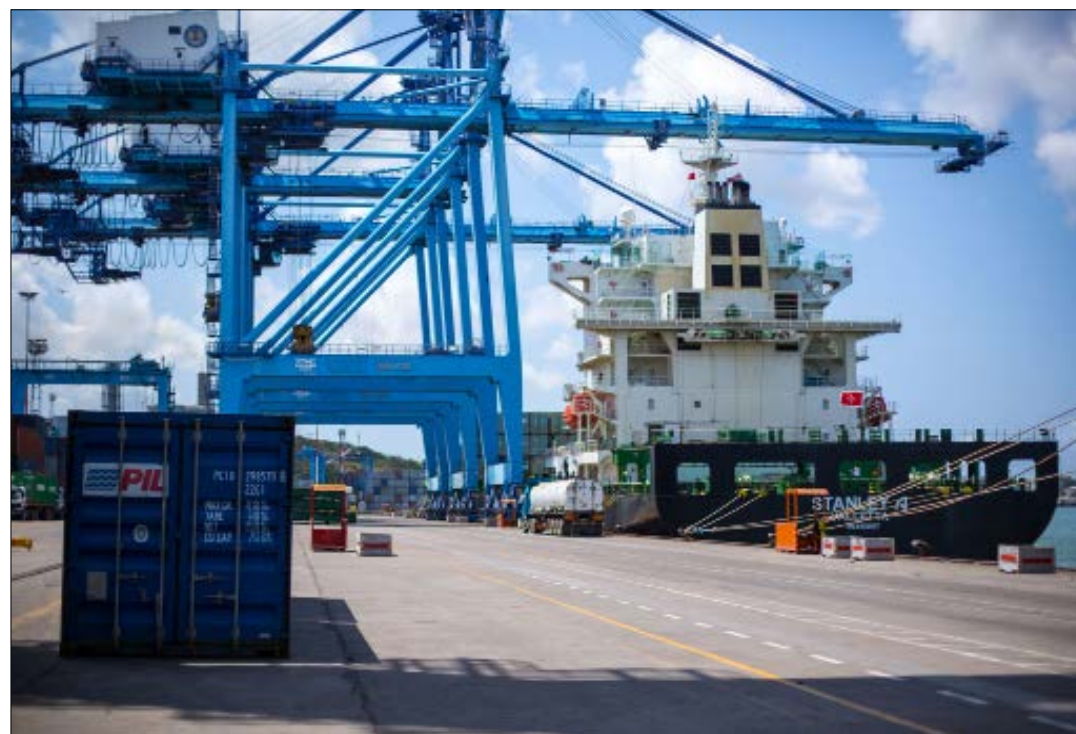
*The mission of the judiciary branch is obviously to combat corruption in the whole of society. In other words, your intention is to combat corruption in the whole of society, but more importantly, you should begin to combat corruption inside the judiciary branch itself. I have frequently discussed this matter in my annual meetings with you dear ones in the judiciary branch and I have placed great emphasis on it. If some corruption is witnessed inside the judiciary branch, the harm that it does is several times larger than corruption outside the branch. It is like the poem “They pour salt on everything that might spoil, but woe is us the day salt itself spoils!” In other words, we cannot fight it the way we fight against other forms of corruption. The blow that it delivers is grave and therefore, it requires serious confrontation based on expert opinion. Therefore, you should primarily focus on corruption inside the judiciary branch itself. Of course, when I say, “primarily”, this does not mean that you should wrap up this matter and then attend to other areas. No, as I said before, all these areas should be pursued in a simultaneous and balanced way.*





## Africa's Losses, China's Gains from COVID-19

**OE Watch Commentary:** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, several large-scale, internationally financed projects in Africa were struggling. Now, with the pandemic several months old and wreaking havoc on businesses, African nations that assumed foreign largesse would help them achieve their development dreams, are instead finding themselves in a nightmare scenario. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* reports, two African ports - Kenya's Mombasa and Sudan's Port Sudan - which were used as collateral for massive loans, are in danger of being turned over to the foreign entities, China and UAE, respectively, that lent the money.



Kenya's Mombasa Port.

Source: Kenyan Ministry of East African Affairs, Commerce and Tourism/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/meact/20154637050/>, Public Domain

As the article points out, the Mombasa port in particular is being cited as an example of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" in which Beijing loans large amounts of money to poor countries, often in Africa, for massive infrastructure projects, knowing that the countries receiving the funds have little chance of repaying them. When these debts come due and the countries default, the projects, which served as collateral, may be forfeited. In Kenya, the Mombasa port serves as collateral for the construction of the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). China reportedly lent billions for its construction, and according to some accounts, the railway had various degrees of financial success, though this was in part because the Kenyan government mandated train use for certain transport needs even though cheaper alternatives existed. However, with the pandemic came an even greater economic strain on the railroad, and now it is clearly having considerable financial difficulties.

The article writes that it remains unknown if the UAE will be added to the "rogues gallery of debt-trap diplomats." As of mid-July, it has been reported that cash-strapped Sudan is planning to hand Port Sudan over to the UAE-owned company Dubai Ports World, though the Sudanese government denies it.

The article writes that it remains unknown if the UAE will be added to the "rogues gallery of debt-trap diplomats." As of mid-July, it has been reported that cash-strapped Sudan is planning to hand Port Sudan over to the UAE-owned company Dubai Ports World, though the Sudanese government denies it.

While China, and perhaps also the UAE, have been branded as "villains," the article claims that not everyone thinks this is fair. One view is that China, in taking over these infrastructure projects, is privatizing state-owned entities. An example would be when the debt-distressed DRC conceded its Chinese financed highway to a Congolese-Sino-French consortium who operate it as a toll road. Still, not all are convinced that China's intentions are benevolent or even benign, and there is fear that COVID-19 will accelerate the transfer of African assets to China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***"Is Beijing executing a grand strategy of control or just doing business like everyone else?"***

**Source:** Peter Fabricio's, "Is COVID-19 Enabling Debt-Trap Diplomacy?" *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 30 April 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-covid-19-enabling-debt-trap-diplomacy>

*Is Beijing executing a grand strategy of control or just doing business like everyone else?*

*Overall Kenya's foreign debt amounts to around US\$60 billion – some 61% of GDP – with China holding about US\$6.5 billion of these loans. Kenyan media have reported that the 2014 loan agreement specifically waived Kenya's sovereign immunity on the Mombasa port's assets and that any dispute arising from the loan would be arbitrated in China.*

*Certainly China has long been branded the villain in chief of this club. Many Western commentators especially have seen its Belt and Road Initiative – through which it has lent many billions of dollars to countries along the route – as essentially a debt-trap initiative to control the strategic corridor linking China with the Middle East, Europe and Africa.*

*Regarding Port Sudan, [it was reported] last week that Sudan's cash-strapped transitional government was preparing to hand control of the country's principal seaport to Dubai Ports World (DP World), a company owned by the UAE. Dubai has set its sights on Red Sea ports before. A few years ago it was engaged in a tussle – ironically, with China – for control of the nearby port of Djibouti, which is even more strategic as it hosts several foreign military bases.... Anonymous Sudanese officials told it the deal would allow the UAE company to run the South Port Container Terminal at Port Sudan. Khartoum denies this, saying, 'Port Sudan is an asset that belongs to the people of Sudan.' Whether or not this is a sign that the UAE is about to be added to the rogues' gallery of 'debt-trap' diplomats remains to be seen.*



## Despite AU Efforts, 'Silencing the Guns' in Africa Remains Elusive

**OE Watch Commentary:** Seven years ago, when African leaders were commemorating the 50th anniversary of the African Union (AU), they pledged to bring peace to the continent. The pledge led to the 2016 Lusaka Road Map which envisioned achieving continent-wide peace by 2020 through 54 steps focused on political, social, economic, legal and environmental issues. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from South Africa's *The Conversation* notes, that effort to "silence the guns," as the AU initiative is often called, will not result in peace throughout the continent in 2020. Numerous obstacles to fully implementing all 54 steps are likely to postpone the goal for the foreseeable future.

The article discusses several reasons why the pledge has been unable to meet the 2020 deadline. The first is the large number of on-going conflicts when it was signed; there were simply too many to resolve within four short years. Second, many of these conflicts are internal, having arisen from grievances citizens have with their governments. The inability, or in some instances the unwillingness, of governments to meet their citizens' demands is not always readily remediable by outside organizations such as the AU. Instead these problems need to be solved by the governments themselves, which frequently does not happen for myriad reasons.



Despite the African Union's pledge to 'Silence the Guns by 2020,' the number of conflicts on the continent is on the rise.

Source: CT Snow/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mogadishu\\_technical.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mogadishu_technical.jpg), CC BY 2.0

Another problem is the sheer difficulty in implementing some of the 54 steps. For example, the Road Map mentions stopping the flow of illicit arms into Africa. While this is a worthwhile objective, in practice, accomplishing it is proving incredibly difficult.

Finally, there is the challenge of funding, as can be seen in the final column of the Road Map, marked "Source(s) of Funding." Frequently that source is listed as the "Member States" though many African nations, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, are struggling economically and thus unable to provide sufficient funds to meet the objectives.

To be sure, there have been some successes related to the Road Map on the continent, with many attributable to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional bloc. For example, the article points out that ECOWAS helped reform the security sectors in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia as well as assisting in their post-conflict reconstructions. However, despite these and several other accomplishments, the goal of continent-wide peace remains elusive. Perhaps most telling, since the pledge to silence the guns, the number of conflicts in Africa has increased, not decreased. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***"The efforts to 'silence the guns' has been singularly ineffective. Since the pledge was signed, conflict in Africa has increased."***

**Source:** Chris Changwe Nshimbi, "Why the African Union has failed to 'silence the guns.' And some solutions," *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 30 June 2020. <https://theconversation.com/why-the-african-union-has-failed-to-silence-the-guns-and-some-solutions-139567>

*The efforts to 'silence the guns' has been singularly ineffective. Since the pledge was signed conflict in Africa has increased.*

*To make some headway the African Union needs to recognize this, and design solutions to conflicts that are informed by the need to protect human rights. The continental body should be empowered to act against any party that violates core values centered on human dignity.*

*Eighteen years ago the African Union changed its Constitutive Act, allowing it to intervene in the internal affairs of member states. Nevertheless, it's been reluctant to do so. For example, it is conspicuously absent while bloody conflict escalated in Cameroon and Libya... There has been one notable exception: the organization's refusal to countenance the coup in Sudan, and suspending the country's membership in June 2019. This should be the norm.*

*Ordinary people can also provide vital information to early warning systems. It's thus imperative to set up long-term, people-centered, innovative and inclusive measures to promote peace. Such bottom-up solutions, based on intimate knowledge of local areas, are key to success.*





# Russia's Nuclear Projects in Africa: Profits and Political Gain

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia's state-owned nuclear conglomerate Rosatom recently received permission from Rwanda to construct a nuclear research center and reactor in the capital, Kigali. As the accompanying article from *Deutsche Welle* reports, the complex, with its 10-megawatt capacity research reactor, is intended to be completed by 2024. Rosatom has inked similar deals with Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zambia, and less extensive ones with Ghana, the Sudan, Uganda, and the DRC.

Since Western sanctions for its invasion of Crimea, Russia has been looking to Africa for business opportunities, though these agreements mean more than just profits for Russia. As the article discusses, with these investments, Russia also gains new friends in Africa, and important new partners on international issues which may come up for votes in the UN, where Africa has the greatest number of votes. The article describes that this is all part of Putin's need to remain relevant in Russia and ensure the country has significant international influence. Large deals with African countries help provide that influence.

Exactly how large that contract is with Rwanda is unknown. However, it must be noted that Rosatom, the world's biggest nuclear company when it comes to foreign orders, offers all-in-one deals. Thus, it can be expected that besides constructing the Kigali plant, it will train Rwandan researchers and technicians, supply uranium for the plant's entire lifetime, and dispose of nuclear waste. Russian state loans will probably also finance the deal.

The article discusses the many benefits to having small reactors, such as the production of radioisotopes for medical care, but also notes that many experts feel that nuclear technology is inappropriate, at least at this time, with some concerns centering on potential terrorism and instability in several of the countries looking to obtain them. However, the biggest worry appears to be their enormous expense and the drain they will have on many African countries with limited financial resources. Thus, despite Russia's promotion of the technology, the fear is that the future African landscape could be dotted with "white elephants"-- what the article describes as costly projects that countries end up being locked into, and perhaps radioactive ones at that. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



The Research Reactor (ETRR-2) in Inshas, Egypt was built by the USSR in 1958. Rosatom, the Russian owned nuclear conglomerate, has agreements to build several nuclear reactors in Africa..

Source: IAEA Imagebank/Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visit\\_to\\_the\\_Research\\_Reactor\\_\(01814267\)\\_\(46962219542\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visit_to_the_Research_Reactor_(01814267)_(46962219542).jpg), CC BY 2.0

***“Rosatom has been aggressively wooing African nations since the mid-2000s... the nuclear deals are seen as part of Russia’s push turn a profit and gain influence in Africa.”***

**Source:** Kate Hairsine, “Russia’s nuclear play for power in Africa,” *Deutsche Welle*, 30 June 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-nuclear-play-for-power-in-africa/a-54004039>

*“There is good money if you can sell a research reactor,” said nuclear scientist Gatari.*

*“Unfortunately, the convincing capacity of [Rosatom’s] marketing is very high, and the understanding of those who are buying is low.”*

*Rosatom has been aggressively wooing African nations since the mid-2000s and the nuclear deals are seen as part of Russia’s push turn a profit and also gain influence in Africa.*

*“For Putin to remain relevant in Russia, he really has to ensure that Russia has a big influence,” said Ovigwe Eguegu, a geopolitics analyst with the international affairs platform, Afripolitika. “That’s why he is looking at African markets so he has more parties to partner with when it comes to international issues.”*

*In addition, on a continent where more than half of the population lack access to electricity, there is “immense potential” for nuclear to provide a clean source of energy to meet Africa’s large energy deficit, the Center for Global Development study, Atoms for Africa, found.*

*Rosatom funds scholarships for students from sub-Saharan Africa to study nuclear sciences and engineering in Russia. As of January 2020, around 300 students from more than 15 African countries were studying nuclear specialties there.*

*Currently, South Africa is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa with a functioning nuclear power plant, while Nigeria and Ghana have research reactors, which are primarily used for studying and training and to test materials, such as minerals....*

*Gatari [a professor at the University of Nairobi] warns of countries becoming locked into costly projects that end up being “white elephants”.*



## Somaliland and Taiwan: Proposed Ties in Trouble

**OE Watch Commentary:** Taiwan, which China essentially considers a breakaway province, is attempting to establish diplomatic relations with Somaliland, which Somalia considers a breakaway province. This proposed new relationship between Somaliland and Taiwan would include the former establishing a representative office in the latter. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* reports, China is quite opposed to Taiwan's overtures, labeling them illegal and stating they would never be recognized by the People's Republic of China. The Chinese embassy in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, explained that it violates the One China Policy in which Beijing is the only entity allowed to represent Chinese affairs abroad.

There is an interesting concept behind Taiwan's and Somaliland's actions, as both are looking for international recognition. Taiwan has seen its diplomatic relations in African countries dwindle down to only the tiny nation of Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland. This is a direct result of the enormous Chinese pressure on African countries given the substantial financial investments China has made in the continent. By developing ties with Somaliland, Taiwan is hoping to gain that breakaway province in its corner.

As for Somaliland, which overall is relatively stable, peaceful, and democratic – three characteristics lacking in much of the rest of Somalia- these ties with Taiwan would be most welcome. The proposed relationship is not as strong as the international recognition of sovereignty the people of Somaliland have been hoping for, but it can possibly be considered a step in that direction. However, just as China opposes diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Somaliland because it claims Taiwan as a breakaway Chinese province, Somalia, though it has not yet commented on this proposal, has maintained that Somaliland is part of Somalia and as such should not be entering into relations with foreign governments or businesses.

The article does not mention it, but the African Union (AU) is also opposed to the formation of new African nations. Any move by a foreign country to recognize Somaliland would likely be met with disfavor, though it is uncertain how the AU would deal with something short of recognition. One thing is clear: Chinese pressure is not limited to African nations; it also extends to the AU itself. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*Somaliland, in the northwest corner of Somalia, and Taiwan have been exploring establishing diplomatic ties..*  
Source: US Government/Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Somaliland-map-en.png>, Public Domain

***“China has criticized a bid by Taiwan to establish diplomatic relations with Somaliland, the breakaway region of Somalia that announced its independence nearly 30 years ago.”***

**Source:** Abdulkadir Khalif, “China rejects Taiwan bid for diplomatic relations with Somaliland,” *The East African*, 5 July 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/China-rejects-Taiwan-bid-to-establish-relations-with-Somaliland/4552908-5587870-3vehrez/index.html>

*China has criticized a bid by Taiwan to establish diplomatic relations with Somaliland, the breakaway region of Somalia that announced its independence nearly 30 years ago.*

*“There is one China in the world. Taiwan is part of China and the government of the PRC [People’s Republic of China] is the sole legal government representing the whole of China.”*

*The statement came after Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen acknowledged Somaliland’s announcement to establish a representative office in Taiwan as meant to boost “mutually beneficial cooperation.”*

*Somaliland, not recognized by any other sovereign state in the world, could be using this to push for its own recognition, something it has tried to get since declaring independence from Somalia in 1991.*





## South Sudan's Bitter Independence Anniversary



South Sudan's Presidential Guard on Independence Day, 9 July 2011.  
Source: Steve Evans/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South\\_Sudan\\_Independence.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_Sudan_Independence.jpg), CC BY 2.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** South Sudan “celebrated” nine years of independence on 9 July 2020. As the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* relates, “celebration” would be a stretch: Two years after its official break from Sudan, a civil war broke out, fueled in large part by ethnic tensions. Repeated attempts to end the conflict failed until an agreement was reached in February between President Salva Kiir and his former vice president, Riek Machar, who has been the leader of the main rebel opposition. However, the peace agreement is fragile, especially since the country has yet to create the legislative assembly necessary to implement the legal reforms that would help bind the nation together.

South Sudanese politicians made great promises to the country’s population nine years ago, including the provision of roads, piped water, and schools. Almost none of these came to fruition, and in fact, infrastructure was destroyed during the civil war. Perhaps one individual whose father was killed in the fight for independence describes the mood best when he says his father’s death was in vain.

The long and bloody civil war might be over, but ethnic distrust continues. The article notes how fear still hangs in the country. Combined with endemic corruption and what is perceived as a lack of a clear strategy to improve conditions, an interesting situation has emerged: Some South Sudanese would like to go back to Sudan as they feel it would be safer.

South Sudan’s independence occurred after a decades-long Sudanese civil war that left much of what would become South Sudan devastated. South Sudan’s own civil war furthered the destruction. However, with the new peace agreement, as imperfect as it is, the politicians are expressing optimism that those infrastructure projects will finally be started. Meanwhile, surely cognizant of the young country’s violent history and what would likely happen if the warring factions are unable to maintain the peace, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is using this ninth anniversary to remind political leaders, as the article states, “to unswervingly implement” the peace agreement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“South Sudan’s nine years of independence may have become a story of sadness and ‘waste’, rather than freedom, some activists say.”***

**Source:** David Mayen, “As South Sudan turns nine, citizens hope for freedom,” *The East African*, 10 July 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/as-south-sudan-turns-nine-citizens-hope-for-freedom-1465768>

*South Sudan’s nine years of independence may have become a story of sadness and ‘waste’, rather than freedom, some activists say.*

*After the decades-long civil war, South Sudan seceded from Sudan in 2011 but fighting broke out in 2013 throwing the country into turmoil and severely dented its economic development. Millions were displaced with more than 400,000 losing their lives.*

*South Sudan would plunge into a successive series of conflicts as leaders fought over influence and political power just two years later in 2013. The turn of events left citizens longing for the freedom they had yearned for with independence.*

*Christina Kide, the chairperson of South Sudan Youth Organisation Coalition, says many citizens have lost hope in the past and current governments because of their failure to fulfill promises they stated earlier.*

...

*In his Independence Day speech, David Shearer, the head of United Nations Mission in South Sudan (Unmiss) reiterated his calls to political leaders to unswervingly implement the 2018 peace deal.*



## Northern Mozambique Between Terrorism and COVID-19



Pemba Bay.

Source: Ton Rulkens via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pemba\\_Bay\\_\(5092988538\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pemba_Bay_(5092988538).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpt from the Portuguese-language Mozambican publication *O País* highlights the reaction of the Bishop of Pemba, Luís Francisco Lisboa, regarding instability in northern Mozambique that has accelerated since 2017. The Bishop notes that although COVID-19 is a concern, it has become second priority compared to the terrorist attacks afflicting the region. The terrorist attacks have not only caused losses of lives, but also, according to the Bishop, increasing numbers of displaced people. The Bishop notes that everybody is living in fear in the region.

The Bishop's greatest concern appears to be the displaced civilians. He notes for example, that many displaced civilians rapidly left their homes and had no time to take their clothing and belongings with them. While the Bishop finds that the bright side is the solidarity and hospitality offered by people in northern Mozambique, he laments the lack of food and security for the displaced people as well as the lack of cell phone communication and electricity.

The article also mentions that the terrorists, who are loyal to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have changed their strategy, which has made it more difficult to counter them. For

example, they have begun to attack small villages in separate small groups simultaneously, which diverts the attention of the security forces. They make shows of strength in the villages and even larger towns they conquer, but leave once the security forces begin approaching. The militants appear to be adopting classic guerrilla strategy.

The article concludes with a worst-case scenario, in which the militants could even capture the port city of Pemba in northern Mozambique. An academic, João Feijó, who is cited in the article notes that the Mozambican government's turn to private military contractors with air support was intended to expel the militants from areas they were occupying. At the same time, Feijó acknowledges that the militants have no plans to end the fighting soon, with members coming to fight from southern Mozambique and other East African countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“To prevent the defense of the national territory, they attack, in small groups, two or more villages simultaneously.”***

**Source:** “O nosso vírus principal, em Cabo Delgado, é a guerra (Our main virus, in Cabo Delgado, is war),” *O País*, 3 June 2020. [http://opais.sapo.mz/o-nosso-virus-principal-em-cabo-delgado-e-a-guerra?fbclid=IwAR3j\\_ax9B3BDyp0aZhF\\_xRHjfCaX7DXHFUzukKdDN8kEQ4snGmrfpRki-zQ](http://opais.sapo.mz/o-nosso-virus-principal-em-cabo-delgado-e-a-guerra?fbclid=IwAR3j_ax9B3BDyp0aZhF_xRHjfCaX7DXHFUzukKdDN8kEQ4snGmrfpRki-zQ)

*In a context of insecurity, the Bishop of Pemba argues that finding food and shelter for so many people who are fleeing attacks is a great difficulty faced. Among those who need help, in fact, are thousands of people who hurriedly left their homes, taking only a few pots and pieces of clothing with them. Faced with this scenario that destabilizes Cabo Delgado, Luís Fernando Lisboa clarifies: “our main virus, here in the province, is war. COVID-19 is in the background.” This is because the reception centers, for example, in Metuge, near Pemba, are full of people who have nowhere to go. The same is true of private homes, where the displaced are received by some benevolent families.*

*At this time, support has essentially reached the displaced people who are in the city of Pemba or in the neighboring districts, as there is no passage and no security to the north of the province. The few who are in the areas affected by the attacks either have no cell phone communication or have run out of electricity.*

*Contrary to what had been happening until recently, terrorists have now changed their strategy. To prevent the defending of national territory, they attack in small groups two or more villages simultaneously. With the intensification of attacks, terrorists are making a show of strength.*

*João Feijó believes the terrorists are pressing more closely to the capital Pemba, which forced the Defense and Security Forces to turn to private mercenary forces, which, with air support, managed to expel the terrorists further north of the province. He predicts this scenario may last for a long time. According to the scholar, some abductees who escaped the terrorists claim that the leaders are people who speak Swahili with a Kenyan accent, but there are also local people and even southern Mozambique involved.*





## Boko Haram Still Able to Inflict Damage in Nigeria



Nigerian Army Boko Haram demonstration.

Source: VOA/Nicolas Pinault via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerian\\_Army\\_Boko\\_Haram\\_demonstration.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerian_Army_Boko_Haram_demonstration.jpg) CC by SA 2.0

in years in Gubio, Borno State. According to another widely read Nigerian publication, *Vanguard*, more than 80 villagers were killed while others were injured and taken captive by Boko Haram's Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-loyal faction. Cattle and other livestock were also stolen.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has entered its tenth year, and the Nigerian army has had mixed results in fighting the group. Boko Haram is still able to inflict significant damage, especially on civilians, even as the military is winning battles elsewhere in northeastern Nigeria, as evidenced by the two accompanying excerpts from local sources.

The first excerpted article in *Punch*, a popular Nigerian publication, discusses military attitudes after the military conducted several clearing operations in villages in northeastern Nigeria's Borno State and some Boko Haram commanders surrendered to the military. The Nigerian soldiers recovered weapons from Boko Haram fighters and uncovered their hideouts. After the operations concluded, a Nigerian general stated that the army was moving toward final victory over the insurgents and more insurgent enclaves and hideouts would be struck with artillery. Despite this, the article also pointed out that the military found the insurgents had sophisticated battle trenches to ward off army offensives.

On the other hand, just over one week after the article was published, Boko Haram carried out one of the largest massacres

***“Troops of Army Super Camp 11 Gamboru uncovered a Boko Haram criminals’ hideout with well-constructed battle trenches.”***

**Source:** “Boko Haram built battle trenches in Borno community –DHQ,” *Punch*, 2 June 2020. <https://punchng.com/boko-haram-built-battle-trenches-in-borno-community-dhq/>

The Defence Headquarters, Abuja, says troops of Operation Lafiya Dole have uncovered battle trenches built by the Boko Haram terrorists in Isari community in the Gamboru Ngala Local Government Area of Borno State. The Defence Media Operations in a press statement also said some top Boko Haram members surrendered to troops and were undergoing profiling.

The DMO Coordinator, Maj Gen John Enenche, said, “As the military inches closer to the final defeat of insurgency in the North-East region, more Boko Haram surrender amidst sustained artillery bombardments and offensive onslaught against their enclaves and hideouts. “Troops of Army Super Camp 11 Gamboru uncovered a Boko Haram criminals’ hideout with well-constructed battle trenches. Another Boko Haram fighter, Adamu Yahaya, surrendered to troops of the 242 Battalion.

**Source:** “Boko Haram kills 80 in Borno, bandits hit Katsina, rape women, kill 40,” *Vanguard*, 10 June 2020. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/06/insecurity-as-boko-haram-kills-80-in-borno-bandits-hit-katsina-rape-women-kill-40/>

As Borno confirmed 81 deaths, Katsina recorded 40, with many sustaining degrees of injuries. Houses were reportedly burnt down and dozens of women raped.



## Nigeria: Local Conflicts Driven by Illegal Mining

**OE Watch Commentary:** While the terrorist organization Boko Haram often dominates the news about conflict in Nigeria, there is another significant, yet underreported problem that also fuels violence in Africa's most populous nation. As the accompanying article from South Africa's *Enact Observer* points out, illegal mining is behind much of the conflict in certain regions of the country. This activity is often, though not always, composed of small-scale criminal enterprises centered on the extraction of gold and other valuable minerals. In addition to plundering Nigeria's mineral resources, these criminal enterprises deprive the nation of badly needed tax revenue for development.

As the article points out, one reason illegal mining is so successful is corruption of high-level officials, with some state governments actually supporting and protecting the operations. Even deployment of the military to stop the activity has had little impact, though periodically there have been clashes between soldiers and miners which have resulted in casualties on both sides.

The article discusses two ways the illegal mining leads to violence. First, the organizations that fund the activity, which include a number of Chinese corporations, fight over control of the mining fields. Second, in order to displace people from certain areas that might be rich in gold ore, those corporations often push for cattle rustling and rural banditry to occur, thus leading to conflict among the locals who breed and rear cattle. Subsequently people leave the conflict-ridden area, allowing the illegal miners to move in.

The rise in illegal mining reflects underlying socioeconomic problems. With extreme poverty and a government failing to deliver basic services, unemployed youth are readily recruited to work as illegal miners. The illegal mining also exposes the inability of the government to implement regulatory oversight with regards to foreign corporations. One example of that is when several Chinese nationals were arrested for illegal mining, "political godfathers," as the article calls them, put pressure on the government to set them free.

Finally, the article points out another challenge with illegal mining related to the government. Ownership and control of minerals is at the federal, not state, level. This results in the states not doing enough to protect the minerals because they see them as federal resources. Thus, with little government interference, the minerals are illegally extracted and then smuggled through neighboring Togo and Niger as they make their way to Dubai. What is left back in the Nigerian regions where they were mined is a lot of deadly conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*Illegal gold mining in Nigeria.*

Source: Dame Yinka/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Illegal\\_Gold\\_mining\\_Nigeria2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Illegal_Gold_mining_Nigeria2.jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

***“Illegal miners often front for politically connected individuals who collaborate with foreign nationals and corporations to sell and smuggle gold.”***

**Source:** Maurice Ogbonnaya, “Illegal mining drives Nigeria’s rural banditry and local conflicts,” *Enact Observer*, 28 May 2020. <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/illegal-mining-drives-nigerias-rural-banditry-and-local-conflicts>

*Nigeria’s federal system bias allows organized criminals to keep plundering the country’s mineral resources.*

*An estimated 80% of mining in the North West region is carried out illegally and on an artisanal basis by local populations. This mining of large untapped deposits of minerals in the area, especially gold, because of its strategic importance and economic value, is at the root of violent local conflict.*

*Even when the governors of Katsina, Niger and Zamfara states led negotiations with the sponsors of illegal mining, this was under conditions determined by the sponsors. This shows the level of political connectedness and state protection they enjoy.*

*The situation clearly shows the deep-rooted structural crisis that characterizes the lopsided nature of Nigeria’s fiscal federal system in favor of the central government. To address the challenge, Nigeria’s National Assembly should amend the mining act to place ownership and control of mineral resources on state governments rather than on the federal government.*

*Illegal miners often front for politically connected individuals who collaborate with foreign nationals and corporations to sell gold and routinely smuggle it to Dubai through neighboring Niger and Togo.*

*Some political ‘godfathers’ put pressure on the government to free Chinese nationals arrested for illegal mining in Zamfara State. This lends credence to the existence of a powerful network of organized criminals involving local populations and foreign nationals in Nigeria’s mining and extractive sector.*





## Côte d'Ivoire Responds after Terrorist Attack

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 11 June, there was an unprecedented terrorist attack in Côte d'Ivoire that killed 12 soldiers in Kafolo, near the Burkina Faso border. This was the first major attack in the country since al-Qaeda's Sahel affiliate attacked a tourist resort in 2016. The same group is suspected of involvement in this attack.

According to the excerpted French-language publication that focuses on news from Côte d'Ivoire, the country's military retaliated decisively. Four days after the attack, the air force bombarded areas in Comoé National Park suspected of being the terrorists' bases, while ground troops were also involved. Because those areas are near civilians' villages, civilians were ordered to stay indoors. Although specific numbers were not provided, the article indicates that several terrorist bases were destroyed.

The article also emphasizes that the military had known that terrorists were based around Comoé National Park for over a year. The area is known for illegal gold mining, making it an area that various criminal entrepreneurs and terrorists seek to infiltrate.



*Armed Islamist fighters race near the Mauritania-Mali border on May 21st.*

Source: Jemal Ould Mohamed Oumar via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armed\\_Islamist\\_fighters\\_race\\_near\\_the\\_Mauritania-Mali\\_border\\_on\\_May\\_21st.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armed_Islamist_fighters_race_near_the_Mauritania-Mali_border_on_May_21st.jpg), CC x 2.0

For the time being, the article indicates the Ivorian army does not expect other attacks imminently and is satisfied with its response to the attack. The article also points out that the counter-attack is believed to have matched the scale of the initial terrorist attack. At the same time, the article leaves several unanswered questions, including why the 11 June attack was considered a surprise, despite the military's having been aware of the terrorists' presence in the area. Moreover, the article notes the military is purposely not disclosing details of the counter-attack, so the nature of the response also remains somewhat obscure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“It should be noted that the presence of jihadists north of the Comoé National Park had been detected for over a year.”***

**Source:** “Le Parc national de la Comoé pilonné hier, lundi à plusieurs reprises (Comoé National Park shelled yesterday, Monday several times),” *Crocinfos.com*, 16 June 2020. <http://crocinfos.com/cote-divoire-securite-le-parc-national-de-la-comoe-pilonne-hier-lundi-a-plusieurs-reprises-sources-locales/>

*The response has just been the same scale as the surprise attack by terrorists given the size of the airstrikes by the Ivorian Armed Forces all morning on Monday June 15, 2020. During this operation, some troops were airborne, while others rushed into the dark depths of the forest with military vehicles. The loud noises of heavy strikes forced the civilians of the area to remain bound to their various homes.*

*It should be noted that the presence of jihadists north of Comoé National Park had been detected for over a year. Comoé Park is of interest for entrepreneurs and exporters of terrorism in the sub-region because of illegal gold mining in the area. For the time being, there is a big silence on the exact result of the strikes.*



## Venezuela and the Alex Saab/Cape Verde Affair

**OE Watch Commentary:** Alex Saab became a major antagonist personality in the regional political press in June, when he found himself jailed in Cape Verde. Hardly a household name previously, he was nevertheless widely known as an alleged smuggler and more so as an alleged money launderer. The possibility that authorities in Cape Verde might deliver Saab into the hands of US drug law enforcement, along with an evidently urgent mounting of Cuban, Russian, Chinese and perhaps Iranian pressures to have Cape Verde release Saab, is significant.

First, Saab's falling into US custody raises the possibility of a potentially milestone haul of data about the criminal network within which Saab is thought to be a significant node. Second, Saab's backstory and his arrival into the public imagination underscore the tight interweave of a group of national governments, Marxist political parties and illicit criminal business enterprises. The second accompanying reference is of a lengthy investigative report in *Semana*, a leading Colombian weekly newsmagazine. The report provides details about the alleged illegal network and criminal activities of Mr. Saab. The current, ongoing episode of his arrest and potential movement into US law enforcement could be of major significance in terms of diplomatic power and lawfare. It underscores the battle of recognitions created by the failed attempt in January 2019 to oust the Bolivarians from power, which resulted in the partial international recognition of Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela and the concomitant partial de-recognition of the Maduro regime. The Bolivarians are now arguing that Saab is a diplomat of theirs who is due diplomatic immunity.

The international reach of the legal power to arrest and transport a wanted criminal is undergoing an odd test as a result. Extraterritorial law enforcement is one of the few elements of coercive power that has been effectively levied against the Bolivarian hierarchy. The Cape Verde/Alex Saab affair is testing that. The Maduro regime's legal play, meanwhile, seems to be a double-edged sword. On one edge, if the play succeeds, it would demonstrate effectively superior influence over a small country's government – in addition to having protected the regime from a potentially devastating loss of sensitive information. On the other edge, if the Bolivarian legal-diplomatic efforts fails, the Bolivarian regime will be left having admitted, perhaps for use in future indictments against the Bolivarians, that Saab has been a trusted agent of the regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“Venezuela insists that the matter involves a special agent of the Bolivarian government...”***

**Source:** Editors, “La Justicia de Cabo Verde rechazó la maniobra de Alex Saab para evitar su extradición a EEUU: seguirá detenido (Cabo Verde justice rejected the maneuver of Alex Saab to avoid extradition to the US: he will continue detained),” *Infobae*, 24 June 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/06/23/nueva-maniobra-de-alex-saab-para-evitar-su-extradicion-a-eeuu-presento-un-habeas-corpus-para-ser-liberado/>

*“The defense team for presumed Maduro front man had entered a motion for habeas corpus alleging ‘illegal confinement’ of the Colombian in the African country this past 12 June, but it was rejected by the Supreme Court of the African country...His detention occurred on the 9th after the Colombian Attorney General imposed a freeze for the purpose of expropriation of eight properties that ‘constituted part of Saab’s ‘illicit patrimony’.”*

**Source:** “Niegan la libertad a Álex Saab en Cabo Verde (Liberty denied for Alex Saab in Cabo Verde),” *Semana*, 23 June 2020. <https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/niegan-libertad-a-alex-saab/681618>

*“Venezuela, for its part, insists that the detention of the businessman was illegal and violated international law, because it was done, according to the government in Caracas, without there having been a red circular from Interpol that could be ordered against an ‘agent of the Venezuelan State’ who enjoys diplomatic immunity.”*

**Source:** Investigative Unit, “Se mueve extradición de Álex Saab en Cabo Verde (Movement in the extradition of Alex Saab in Cape Verde),” *El Tiempo*, 10 July 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/unidad-investigativa/alex-saab-solicitud-de-extradicion-ya-llego-al-tribunal-de-apelacion-516318>

*“This Thursday, the case file ...arrived at the Appeals Court, as envisioned by that country’s legislation, as a guarantee to defendants, constituting the formal beginning of the study of the request of transfer to the United States...Saab’s defense team, sponsored by Venezuela, insists that the matter involves a special agent of the bolivarian government, who has immunity as carrying a diplomatic passport.”*





## Argentina and Hezbollah

**OE Watch Commentary:** The first accompanying reference reports the freezing of a transnational money-laundering gang's assets by the Argentinean government. Argentinean investigators linked the gang's activities to Hezbollah, and the court action was taken on the anniversary of the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Buenos Aires that was carried out by that terrorist group. This recent news appears directly related to the Alex Saab episode reported in another of this month's *OE Watch* articles, as well as to earlier reports on relations between the regime in Tehran to the Bolivarians (see "Venezuela and Iran Strengthen Relations," *OE Watch*, April 2020) and to the shipment of Iranian oil to Venezuela in particular (see "More Iran in Venezuela," *OE Watch*, July 2020). The second accompanying article is of an interview of an Israeli security expert, Ely Karmon conducted by a journalist from the same news outlet. In the interview, Mr. Karmon notes the probable connection of the Argentinean asset freeze to the Maduro regime in Caracas. The mix of intertwined security issues bearing on this event includes the recent changes in ideological and geopolitical orientations of various governments in the region. Here, for instance, an unraveling of clandestine money laundering networks was apparently accelerated by the Brazilian government's arrest of Assad Ahmad Barakat, who is described as a cartel leader and, like Alex Saab, someone linked to large-scale money laundering. The money is evidently the common denominator for the global movement of oil, terrorism, diplomatic relations and an array of transnational criminal activity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***"...The key is about the Barakat clan, led by Assad Ahmad Barakat..."***

***"Do you consider that Venezuela continues to be a risk for the region as to terrorism?' ... There is no doubt'..."***

**Source:** "La justicia argentina congeló fondos de Hezbollah por financiación del terrorismo (Argentinean courts froze Hezbollah funds for financing terrorism)," *Infobae*, 7 July 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2020/07/07/la-justicia-argentina-congelo-fondos-de-hezbollah-por-lavado-de-dinero-y-financiacion-del-terrorismo/>

*"The key is about the Barakat clan, led by Assad Ahmad Barakat, detained September 2018 in Brazil. Assad Ahmad Barakat was one of the most wanted persons of the Three Borders area [Brazil, Uruguay Argentina], accused of money laundering to finance international terrorism, occasionally to the Hezbollah group... 'According to the Argentina Financial Information Unit, members of the Barakat Clan completed the purchase of prizes for \$10 million, without declaring their value, in a casino in the city of Iguazú, Argentina for the purpose of laundering funds of the organization'...The Argentinean government froze property and accounts of the clan that would have a connection with Hezbollah...The attack on the AIMA [Argentine Israelite Mutual Association] occurred in 18 July 1994 when a truck bomb exploded in the entrance of the Jewish coop. 85 persons died and more than 300 were left injured...The Argentine courts determined the attack was committed by Iran and ordered the detention of seven individuals with Interpol red circulars."*

**Source:** Silvia Mercado, "Ely Karmon: "Argentina tiene que mandar un mensaje muy claro a Teherán si quiere evitar un nuevo atentado" (Argentina has to send a message to Tehran if it wants to avoid a new attack)," *Infobae*, 12 July 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2020/07/12/ely-karmon-argentina-tiene-que-mandar-un-mensaje-muy-claro-a-teheran-si-quiere-evitar-un-nuevo-atentado/>

*"[Ely Karmon]: 'This person, Alex Saab, a Colombian citizen of Lebanese origin... made a stopover in Cape Verde, which was in fact a stop to negotiate the sale of petroleum from Iran to Venezuela. It concerns something useful to both countries because Venezuela needs petroleum while Iran has sanctions and cannot sell internationally. It is believed that this person was who organized the five tankers that arrived in Venezuela two weeks ago... [Question from interviewer] Do you consider that Venezuela continues to be a risk for the region as to terrorism? [Answer of Ely Karmon]: 'There is no doubt...although Iran is weaker than in past years, it needs Venezuelan territory to penetrate into the continent'..."*



## FARC Update

**OE Watch Commentary:** The FARC still exists. Some of its more active combat units in the field are euphemistically referred to as dissidents, and some of the FARC is addressed as a legal political party. Regardless, the FARC seems to be suffering a variety of internal organizational disruptions. The first of the accompanying set of references is TV reportage, relying on Colombian military information, of deforestation being carried out by a FARC unit in a remote national park for the purposes of planting coca. The second accompanying reference is from the left-leaning legacy publication *El Espectador*. It is a longer piece about a military operation in a central-eastern lowland zone that was home to FARC headquarters for a time in the past. It is now still controlled in great measure by the FARC, and has increasingly become a coca producing zone. An Army eradication operation was met with considerable community resistance, which was apparently organized in part by the FARC itself. The third reference reports internal difficulties within the FARC political party. The party recently expelled some leaders, and the current head of the party, Rodrigo Londoño, is promising to tighten down on leaks about internal affairs of the party. It seems, given the contemporaneous reportage from the leftist propaganda *Prensa Libre* (the fourth reference), that Cuban instruction probably has something to do with Londoño's evident contrition. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“Rodrigo Londoño: ‘I’m not going to commit the same violation of making ‘leaks’...”***

***“(FARC) party thanked Cuba... for its support...”***

**Source:** Producers, “Disidencias de las Farc destruyeron hectáreas en Putumayo para la siembra de coca (Dissidents of the FARC destroyed hectares in Putumayo for the sowing of coca),” *Noticias RCN*, 9 July 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/disidencias-de-las-farc-destruyeron-hectareas-en-putumayo-para-la-siembra-de-coca-359736>

*“...where trees of over 20 meters had towered above no longer exist since in that place they have been felled by the chainsaws of members of the FARC dissidents First Front, commanded by alias Ivan Mordisco, with the order to clear-cut so as to then plant illicit crops...”*

**Source:** Sebastián Forero Rueda, “Las denuncias de los campesinos del Guayabero contra el Ejército y las disidencias (Accusations by campesinos against the Army and the dissidents),” *El Espectador*, 6 July 2020. <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/campesinos-del-guayabero-denuncian-abusos-del-ejercito-y-las-disidencias/>

*“The accusations that the communities of Guayabero have tried to make known to the national authorities are a series of events that have happened since 26 may, when around a dozen helicopters discharged hundreds of uniformed personnel in the Tercer Millenio township, along with elements of ESMAD [Mobile Anti-riot Squad]. It was there that the first confrontations occurred, according to organizations in the zone, leaving three campesinos wounded in the legs... For his part, General Raúl Hernández Flórez told this daily that that day a company of 200 men was surrounded by a some 400 demonstrators that restricted thier movement... This daily learned of a series of accusations ...in which is detailed that in the townships of the rural part of Vista Hermosa, members of the dissident group that operates in the zone, that of Gentil Duarte [aka Miguel Botache Santillana], has directly pressured the presidents of the boards of communal action to send residents to support the demonstrations in Guayabero.”*

**Source:** Las Farc imponen el silencio sobre expulsión de ‘París’ y ‘Ramírez’ (FARC imposes silence regarding expulsion of ‘París’ and ‘Ramírez’),” *El Tiempo*, 25 June 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/partidos-politicos/timochenko-impone-el-silencio-en-el-partido-farc-por-expulsion-de-paris-y-ramirez-511026>

*“Rodrigo Londoño: ‘I’m not going to commit the same violation’ of making ‘leaks’. The case demonstrates that the brief trajectory of the political party that emerged in 2017 from the agreement signed between Santos and the longest-lived guerrilla on the continent, the FARC, is filled with difficulties... Silence. That is the decision taken by the party Alternative Revolutionary Force for the Common (FARC) about the expulsion from the collective of four of its most important leaders, among them the venerable ‘Andrés París’ and ‘Fabián Ramírez’. Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, president of the party, told *El Tiempo* that in effect, ‘the leadership has come to take some disciplinary decisions after having received the recommendations, some we recognized and some not, by the ethics commission’...”*

**Source:** Editors, “FARC thanks Cuba for its support to Peace Agreement,” *Prensa Latina*, 11 July 2020. <https://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=57689&SEO=farc-thanks-cuba-for-its-support-to-peace-agreement>

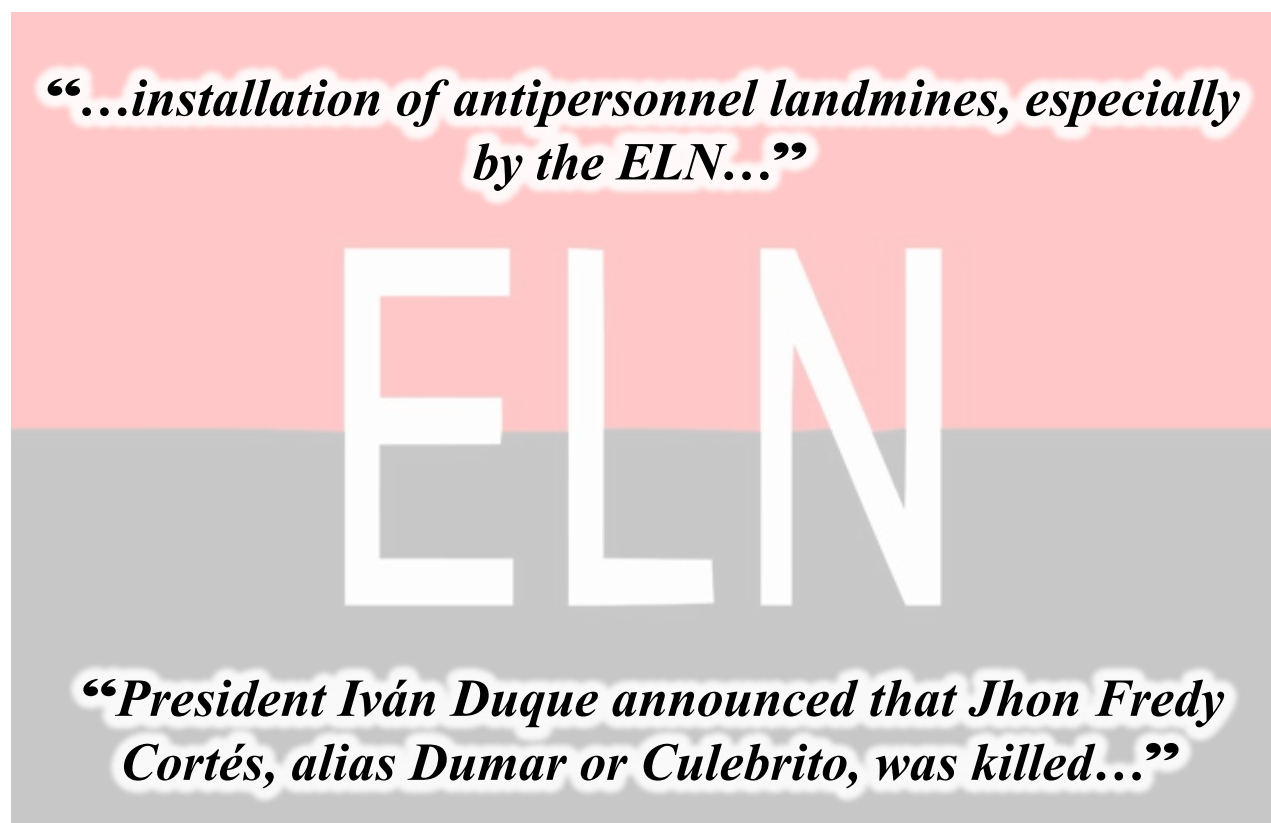
*“...Colombian Revolutionary Alternative Force of the Common (FARC) party thanked Cuba today for its support and position as guarantor for the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed in Havana in 2016... Cuban Vice Foreign Minister Rogelio Sierra stressed that Cuba decided to maintain for the time being its status as guarantor of the peace agreements ... ‘Cuba has always acted with impartiality, transparency, discretion and at the request of both parties, with the aim of helping the shared desire for comprehensive peace in Colombia’, he added.”*





## ELN Update

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the first accompanying reference, the ELN has continued to fight for territory during the pandemic, in the highly conflictive zone called the Catatumbo, which straddles the border of Colombia and Venezuela southwest of Lake Maracaibo. As part of its modus operandi, the ELN is increasing its use of anti-personnel landmines, a scourge that affects many civilians including those not associated with gang warfare. The second accompanying reference is of what appears especially positive news for the Colombian state and especially negative news for the ELN. A senior ELN leader was taken out, and while he is not a directorate member, his killing appears to be part of an increasingly effective effort by the Colombian government to bring to justice those members of the ELN associated with the deadly attack on the police academy in early 2019. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



ELN flag.

Source: jolle / Public domain  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_ELN.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_ELN.svg)

**Source:** Producers, “Accidentes con minas antipersonal en Colombia han aumentado un 35% (Accidents with antipersonnel mines in Colombia have increased 35%),” *canalrcn.com*, 5 July 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/accidentes-con-minas-antipersonal-en-colombia-han-aumentado-un-35-359489>

*“...This Thursday, as every day, this young man went out to do the milking, and that was when he stepped on an anti-personnel mine... Asael is on more victim of these explosive artifacts installed by criminal organizations who fight tooth and nail for territorial control in the Catatumbo... So far this year there are already 32 accidents of this type, an increase of 35% with respect to last year... Authorities revealed that during the pandemic there has been a worsening in the installation of antipersonnel landmines, especially by the ELN. Álvaro Jiménez, director of the anti-landmine campaign, stated that, ‘Eight percent of the total of the known victims nationally are minors’...”*

**Source:** Cabecilla del ELN, alias Dumar, fue abatido en operativo en Arauca (ELN leader, alias Dumar, was killed in an operation in Arauca),” *RCN Noticias*, 4 July 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/lluvias-en-colombia-siguen-causando-desbordamientos-y-deslizamientos-359461>

*“Just now the Government gave a hard blow to the structure of the Army of Liberation (ELN) in Arauca. President Iván Duque announced that Jhon Fredy Cortés, alias Dumar or Culebrito, was killed. He was considered the right hand of alias Pablito, military head of the terrorist group. According to the executive, alias Dumar was part of the Domingo Laín Front, that orchestrated the attack on the General Santander School of Cadets that occurred 17 January 2019 in which 23 persons died... In the scope of the investigations that the authorities are pursuing regarding the attack perpetrated at the General Santander School, the government announced the capture of eight presumed members of the ELN involved in the event...”*



## Indigenous Leaders Targeted in Amazon

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 4 July, indigenous leader and human rights defender Rodrigo Salazar was assassinated by unknown persons in Nariño, Colombia. The incident sparked condemnation from various indigenous peoples' organizations and led to calls to prevent assassinations of indigenous leaders, which is becoming increasingly common in Latin America. The accompanying passages from Latin American sources provide insight into this debate.

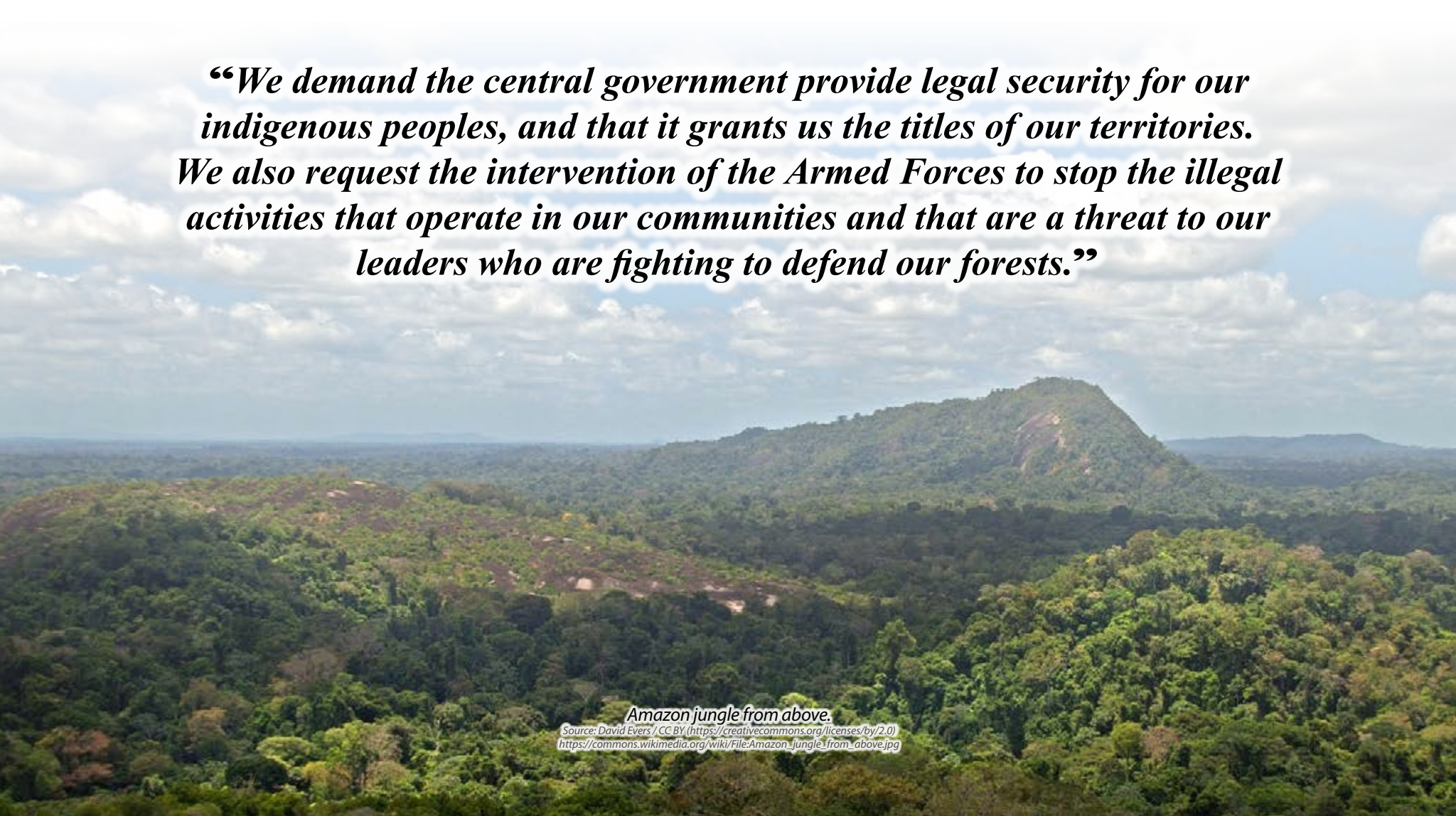
According to the accompanying excerpt from *El Espectador*, a weekly liberalist publication and the longest running newspaper in Colombia, the crime was “condemned at national and international levels.” The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) denounced the murder on Twitter and commented on the systemic nature of the crime against indigenous peoples, and directly challenged Colombian President Ivan Duque, asking him how long he will maintain his silence on the issue. Linked in the accompanying tweet was a statement from one of the two widely recognized centralized governments of the Awá people, the Piguambi Palanga Indigenous Reserve, condemning the murder and asserting Salazar “was a recognized leader and defender of the territory’s human rights, as well as a counselor for the UNIPA Indigenous Guard.” (UNIPA, or Indigenous Unification of the Awá People, is the other of the two widely recognized centralized governments of the Awá people.)

Assassinations of indigenous leaders such as Salazar has become commonplace in Colombia, and throughout South America. According to the excerpt from *Ojo Público*, an online Peruvian investigative journalism outlet founded in 2014, indigenous leaders who defend their Amazonian territories from illicit activities such as mining, illegal logging, and drug trafficking are frequently targeted by violence. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the danger these leaders face has increased as there is little territorial surveillance by the police and the armed forces.

In April 2019, the Peruvian Ministry of Justice published a protocol to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders. This document included an early warning procedure to safeguard threatened leaders and called for the creation of a registry of complaints and incidents of attacks and threats that these leaders receive, and the dangerous situations to which they are exposed. As the passage from *Ojo Público* reports, all of the protection requests received by the Peruvian Ministry of Justice since then have been related to illicit activities such as illegal logging, drug trafficking, and other unauthorized business activities.

According to the excerpt from *El Tiempo*, a daily centrist publication and the most highly circulated newspaper in Colombia, the situation in Colombia is even more pronounced, and less action has been taken by the Colombian government to protect indigenous peoples, despite a call from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2018 for the Colombian State to reinforce protections for members of indigenous communities. As a result of armed conflicts raging between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) since 1964, many indigenous peoples in Colombia are in danger. Despite expectations, the violence against indigenous peoples in the region was not alleviated by the end of the Colombian conflict brought about the November 2016 peace agreement, taken up instead by other armed groups involved in illicit activities such as illegal logging and drug trafficking, as in other parts of South America. **End OE Watch Commentary (Lundell)**

***“We demand the central government provide legal security for our indigenous peoples, and that it grants us the titles of our territories. We also request the intervention of the Armed Forces to stop the illegal activities that operate in our communities and that are a threat to our leaders who are fighting to defend our forests.”***



Amazon jungle from above.

Source: David Evers / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amazon\\_jungle\\_from\\_above.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amazon_jungle_from_above.jpg)





## Continued: Indigenous Leaders Targeted in Amazon

**Source:** “Asesinan a Rodrigo Salazar, líder indígena de Nariño (Indigenous Leader Rodrigo Salazar Assassinated),” *El Espectador*, 9 July 2020. <https://www.elspectador.com/noticias/nacional/rodrigo-salazar-lider-social-asesinado-en-narino/>

*Salazar, a member of the Awá community, was killed in the township of Llorente in the municipality of Tumaco. Carlos Negret, the ombudsman, denounced the act and said that this type of crime “has become a panorama for us of Colombians.”*

*Indigenous leader and human rights defender Rodrigo Salazar was assassinated this Thursday by unknown persons in Nariño. The crime was condemned at national and international levels.*

**Source:** @ONIC\_Colombia, Twitter, 09 July 2020. [https://twitter.com/ONIC\\_Colombia/status/1281291461884067841](https://twitter.com/ONIC_Colombia/status/1281291461884067841)

*# ATTENTION | A few minutes ago, Rodrigo Salazar, Awá indigenous leader and alternate governor of the Piguambí Palangala reservation, was MURDERED. The extermination of Indigenous Peoples is systematic. How long will @IvanDuque remain silent? @luiskankui @ONUHumanRights @MAPPOEA @CIDH.*

**Source:** “Morir por la tierra: diez indígenas asesinados en la Amazonía desde el 2013 (Dying for the land: Ten Indigenous People Assassinated in the Amazon Since 2013),” *Ojo Público*, 18 May 2020. <https://ojo-publico.com/1779/morir-por-la-tierra-indigenas-asesinados-en-la-amazonia>

*The most serious attack, reported in Madre de Dios, occurred in June 2018, when a group of 30 miners came in contact with the Masenawa community in the buffer zone of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, and ambushed the Harakbut indigenous people.*

*Anoshka Irey Cameno, indigenous leader of the Masenawa community, said that to date they have not been able to obtain justice for this attack. “The miners have money, they buy judges. To this day, they continue to threaten us, they tell us they are going to shoot us. Right now, during the state of emergency [due to the coronavirus pandemic] they are still working, we can hear their engines. They continue moving deeper and we are concerned about this. We only want to take care of the forest,” he told OjoPúblico.*

*...A 2018 Global Witness report reported 164 murders of land and environmental defenders around the world. “Most of them” ordinary people killed for defending their homes, forests, and rivers from destructive industries. Many more people were silenced through violent attacks, arrests, death threats, or lawsuits.*

**Source:** “El exterminio de los pueblos indígenas de Colombia (The Extermination of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia),” *El Tiempo*, 26 August 2019. <https://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/columnistas/otros-columnistas/el-exterminio-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-de-colombia-columna-de-francisco-quintana-404566>

*For more than five decades, the indigenous peoples of Colombia have resisted the whip of war, refusing to abandon their lands. When, finally, in November 2016, the echoes of the peace agreement reached their territories, many thought that bullets and bombs had gone away forever. But two years after the agreement, the threat of extermination, physical and cultural, persists.*

*This could be read as the preface to the history that the Siona People go through, located at the door of the Colombian Amazon, in the Buenavista and Santa Cruz de Piñuña Blanco resguardos. Once the FARC troops left the area, the indigenous guard of the Siona People tried to exercise territorial control, as happened in many regions of the country, to rehabilitate their culture, which was saturated with pain.*

*But as a result of confrontations between legal and illegal armed groups looking to dominate this border territory between Colombia and Ecuador, the people have been confined without any possibility of living without fear within their lands.*



## Colombia Supports Venezuelan Refugees during Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** Colombia responded quickly to the coronavirus outbreak and implemented a mandatory quarantine in addition to closing borders and airports in late March. The quarantine has affected Colombia in many ways, but what is certain is that the informal economy has taken a big hit and fears exist that it could exacerbate the countries' ongoing migratory crisis. This is because the South American nation is home to an estimated 1.8 million Venezuelan refugees and nine out of every 10 depend on the informal economy to survive according to news source *La Semana*.

Colombian news sources *El Tiempo* and *La Semana* indicate that Colombia is trying to accommodate refugees during the coronavirus by asking for increased international funding and by prohibiting landlords from evicting anyone who cannot pay. In some areas of the country, the government is also allocating buses to transport Venezuelans who want to return home. Argentinian news source *Infobae* reported that most recently, 400 migrants living at a temporary campsite in Bogota voluntarily accepted transportation to the Venezuelan border. Officials believe that many of the Venezuelans leaving will return when the Colombian economy stabilizes.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Venezuelan Refugees in Cucuta, Colombia.

Source: PROVEA via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venezuelans\\_on\\_C%C3%BAcuta\\_streets.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venezuelans_on_C%C3%BAcuta_streets.jpg), Public Domain

***“9 out of 10 Venezuelans in Colombia make their living off the informal economy...”***

**Source:** “Colombia solicita apoyo internacional para migrantes por coronavirus (Colombia Seeks International Support for Migrants during Coronavirus),” *El Tiempo*, 20 April 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/piden-apoyo-para-atender-a-venezolanos-en-colombia-484148>

*Colombia made an urgent request to the international community to increase resources for the Venezuelan migrants living in the country during the covid-19 outbreak.*

**Source:** “Hay alguien aquí con vida? El grito de un venezolando que resuena en Bogota (Is Anyone Alive Here? The Cry of a Venezuelan Resonates in Bogota),” *La Semana*, 26 June 2020. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/hay-alguien-aqui-con-vida-el-grito-de-un-venezolano-que-resuena-en-bogota/682217>

*9 out of 10 Venezuelans in Colombia make their living off the informal economy.*

**Source:** Palomares, Milagros. “Desalojo de migrantes: la respuesta de Claudia Lopez al ministro de Vivienda (Evicting Migrants: Claudia Lopez Responds to Housing Minister),” *Migra Venezuela*, 31 March 2020. <https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/migrantes-cerraron-via-en-bogota-para-exigir-ayudas/1790>

*Decree 0938 was established on March 25, 2020 and is intended to protect Bogota's vulnerable population. As part of this decree, landlords cannot evict renters during the coronavirus if they are not able to pay.*

**Source:** “Crisis de migrantes por el coronavirus: 400 venezolanos que acampaban en Bogota aceptaron regresar a su país (Migratory Crisis during the Coronavirus: 400 Venezuelans Camped Out in Bogota Agree to Return Home),” *Infobae*, 3 July 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/07/03/crisis-de-migrantes-por-el-coronavirus-400-venezolanos-que-acampaban-en-bogota-aceptaron-regresar-a-su-pais/>

*A group of 400 Venezuelans living in at a temporary camp site in northern Bogota agreed to take it down and return to their home country in busses rented out by the Colombian government. The campsite was used during a 35-day time period during which time its size exceeded 700 individuals.*



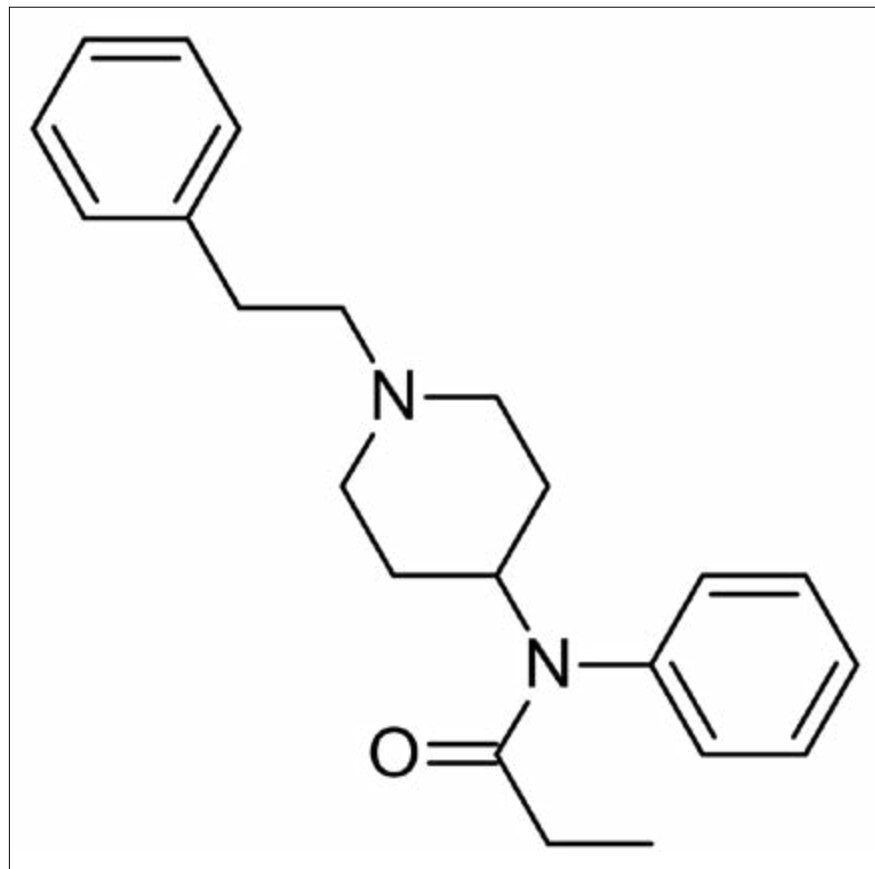


## Fentanyl: The New Cash Cow of Mexican Drug Cartels

**OE Watch Commentary:** Mexican cartels produce what is profitable and fentanyl fills that role. Cartel production of this drug is a relatively new phenomenon and in recent years, the number of legal and clandestine labs increased as production began to skyrocket in Mexican states located along the US/Mexican border and in Central Mexico according to Mexican news source *El Sol de Mexico*. This source also indicates that fentanyl is popular because it is a very potent pain killer in addition to the fact that it is relatively cheap for cartels to produce and consumers to purchase.

A secret interview conducted by *Univision* with a cartel informant supports the claim that cartels are producing and consumers are buying large quantities of fentanyl pills by saying that a single cartel may export up to 50,000 pills of fentanyl every 15 days. The informant also indicated that the pills sell within 2-3 days.

At present, it is believed that all cartels operating in Mexico traffic fentanyl on some scale but those with the most involvement are the Sinaloa Cartel and the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Fentanyl's 2D molecular structure in ACS style.

Source: Fuse809 via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fentanyl2DACS.svg>, CC by SA 3.0

***“Fentanyl production started out as a small project in Sinaloa. Now, we ship more than 50,000 pills every 15 days and those sell within two to three days.”***

**Source:** “Fentanilo, la nueva epidemia que infectará a México (Fentanyl: The New Epidemic Invading Mexico),” *El Sol de Mexico*, 24 February 2019. <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/fentanilo-epidemia-frontera-estados-unidos-3102057.html>

*States with the highest fentanyl seizures in Mexico are Baja California Sur, Mexico City, Sonora, Chihuahua and Puebla. The popularity of this drug is due to its potency level which is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. Other reasons fentanyl is so popular is because it is cheaper for consumers than cocaine and heroin. It is also cheaper for Mexican cartels to produce. For example, a kilogram of kilogram fentanyl powder can produce more than 1,000,000 (1mg) pills that sell for up to \$20 a piece.*

**Source:** Ramirez, Peniley and Reyes, Gerardo. “Fentanilo, la droga que lucra a mexicanos y mata a miles en EE. UU (Fentanyl, the Drug that Makes Mexican Cartels Rich and Kills Thousands in the United States),” *Univision*, 21 March 2020. <https://www.univision.com/noticias/especiales/exclusiva-carteles-mexicanos-controlan-el-multimillonario-negocio-del-fentanilo>

*“At the beginning, fentanyl production started out as a small project in Sinaloa. Now, we traffic more than 50,000 pills every 15 days and those sell within two to three days.”*



## Mexican Cartels Expand Operations in the Netherlands

**OE Watch Commentary:** Mexican drug cartels have had a heavy footprint in Europe, but according to recent news reports, it appears that they are increasing their crystal meth operations and evolving their business model in the Netherlands. According to the Ecuadorian news source *La Hora*, there are at least four reasons. First, organizations such as the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco and the Sinaloa Cartel can utilize the busy Port of Rotterdam to bring in chemical precursors needed to produce methamphetamines. Second, Mexican cartels know that traffickers in the Netherlands are willing to convert ecstasy labs into crystal meth labs as profit margins for the latter are much higher. The article notes that the Dutch criminal producers already have the equipment to manufacture crystal meth and a supply chain to distribute it. Third, Mexican cartels realize that to create international bonds, it may be necessary to share their tried and true crystal meth recipe. And fourth, Mexican cartels want to take advantage of advanced infrastructure in the Netherlands so they can seamlessly ship their finished product throughout Europe. Current open source information indicates that expanded Mexican presence in the Netherlands first became apparent in 2019 when authorities seized a floating synthetic drug lab that had been operational for an estimated 10 months. When questioned about its potential, one Dutch counter-drug agent deemed it as “large and professional.” He also indicated that three Mexican nationals were arrested in the incident and stated they “knew what they were doing” in relation to producing methamphetamines. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

***“We have indications that Dutch drug traffickers are working with Mexican drug cartels and are purchasing expertise to replace ecstasy labs with laboratories producing crystal meth.”***

***-Andy Kraag, Dutch National Criminal Investigation Division***



Port of Rotterdam.

Source: Kees Torn via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Port\\_of\\_Rotterdam\\_\(13375851284\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Port_of_Rotterdam_(13375851284).jpg), CC by SA 2.0

**Source:** “Carteles mexicanos invaden Holanda con laboratorios de metanfetaminas (Mexican Cartels Invade Holland with Methamphetamine Labs),” *La hora*, 26 May 2020. <https://lahora.com.ec/loja/noticia/1102319149/carteles-mexicanos-invaden-holanda-con-laboratorios-de-metanfetaminas>

*Mexican drug cartels have established themselves in the Netherlands. They have taken advantage of Dutch shipping ports where they import raw materials needed to produce methamphetamines in clandestine labs.*

*According to Andy Kraag of the National Criminal Investigation Division, “We have indications that Dutch drug traffickers are working with Mexican drug cartels and are purchasing expertise to replace ecstasy labs with laboratories producing crystal meth. This is because profits abroad are often tenfold and because it is easy for Dutch ecstasy producers to make. They already have the necessary hardware, raw materials, and distribution networks. Only the recipes were missing.”*

*In May 2019, Dutch authorities seized the first ever floating synthetic drug lab. Per a statement made by Anti-Narcotics Operations Chief Max Daniel, “the lab was big and professional. At the time it was seized, it had been operational for at least 10 months and could produce sizeable amounts of methamphetamines. Three of the four individuals arrested in conjunction with the incident were identified as Mexican nationals. Per Daniel, they were not “big bosses but they knew what they were doing.”*





## Mexico: Foiled Attack Against Refinery in Salamanca

**OE Watch Commentary:** On the evening of 24 June, Mexico's National Defense (SEDENA) foiled an attempted attack against a refinery in Salamanca, Guanajuato. According to the accompanying Mexico based news outlets, *Milenio* and *Diario de Mexico*, a white armored Range Rover, which was not reported stolen, was abandoned near Antonio M. Amor PEMEX refinery. The vehicle was located in the La Luz community, on the federal highway that connects Salamanca with Celaya. Secretariat of National Defense Luis Cresencio Sandoval explained that authorities found 12 homemade grenades, three firearms, and ammunition. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said in a press conference on 25 June that security was reinforced in the area after authorities secured the explosive laden vehicle.

The accompanying Guanajuato based news outlet, *La Silla Rota Guanajuato*, reported that government sources stated Santa Rose de Lima Cartel (SRL) leader José Antonio Yépez Ortiz, also known as "El Marro," threatened to attack the refinery. Elements of the Mexican army deployed to the refinery and the surrounding area. There was a heavy presence since the early hours of 23 June. According to *El Sol de México*, President Obrador explained that federal intervention in Guanajuato was necessary given the seriousness of the threat and the increase in homicides in Salamanca.

The events surrounding the interdicted attack by SRL are fragmentary at best. The use of a high-end armored SUV does not fit the profile of a cartel car bomb type attack—even a symbolic messaging event in which such an attack is being threatened with the vehicle parked in the vicinity of the refinery. Rather, the inhabitants of the Range Rover were likely forced to ditch the vehicle leaving their firearms, ammunition, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) during an aborted mission due to the SEDENA deployment around the facility. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker & Keshavarz)**

*“Security was reinforced at the Salamanca refinery as it is considered a strategic facility.”*

**Source:** Pedro Domínguez, “Hubo intent de ataque a refinería de Guanajuato, revela SEDENA (There was an attempted attack against a Guanajuato refinery, according to SEDENA),” *Milenio*, 25 June 2020. <https://www.milenio.com/policia/guanajuato-anoche-intentaron-atacar-refineria-sedena>

*President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said, “Last night, there was an attempted attack where a vehicle with 12 explosive devices inside was abandoned by criminals near the refinery. Measures have been taken to guarantee the security of the facilities.”*

**Source:** “Frustran explosión de coche-bomba afuera de la refinería de Salamanca (Car bomb attack foiled outside Salamanca refinery),” *La Silla Rota Guanajuato*, 25 June 2020. <https://guanajuato.lasillarota.com/estados/frustran-explosion-de-coche-bomba-afuera-de-la-refineria-de-salamanca-coche-bomba-salamanca-sedena-12-explosivos/406138>

*Government sources said that ‘El Marro’ threatened to attack the refinery. Upon the warning, elements of the Mexican Army deployed a security operation to the area and its surroundings. The refinery was heavily armed since the early hours of Tuesday, 23 June 2020.*

**Source:** Carlos Lara, “Intentaron atacar refinería de Salamanca, revela SEDENA (Attempted attack against the Salamanca refinery, SEDENA revealed),” *El Sol de México*, 25 June 2020, <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/intentaron-atacar-refineria-de-salamanca-revela-sedena-5410241.html>

*Security was reinforced at the Salamanca refinery as it is considered a strategic facility.*

**Source:** “Auto con explosivos es asegurado en refinería de Salamanca (A car with explosives was secured near Salamanca refinery),” *Diario de Mexico*, 25 June 2020, <https://www.diariodemexico.com/auto-con-explosivos-es-asegurado-en-refineria-de-salamanca>

*“Last night (Wednesday, June 24), there was an attempted attack with an abandoned vehicle laced with 12 explosive devices,” according to Luis Cresencio Sandoval.*



## Peruvian Self-Defense Groups Impose Coronavirus Social Isolation Rules

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the accompanying references describe, local groups operating in the isolated VRAEM region (Valley of the Apurimac, Ene y Mantaro Rivers) of Peru are imposing their own rule of law during the coronavirus pandemic. More than 1,500 indigenous participants—so-called peasant self-defense groups—are working non-stop along principal roadways to inhibit the entrance of individuals who they fear may be infected. The self-defense groups decide which vehicles are essential; currently allowing food and medicine in. A principal complaint made by a group leader is that self-defense groups are not being supported by the regional government and that they have ended up providing their own justice to deal with individuals who violate coronavirus rules. Individuals who are found to disobey social isolation rules run the risk of being flogged with thin branches. Overall, according to regional reporting, these groups have allowed the VRAEM to avoid the coronavirus and its spread. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



VRAEM Region of Peru.

Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/7/70/20171018025729%21EL\\_Vraem.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/7/70/20171018025729%21EL_Vraem.png), CC by SA 4.0

***“Thanks to peasant self-defense groups, we are not experiencing the devastating effects of the pandemic.”***

***-Estaban Ayquipa, the Peasant Self-Defense Leader in San Roman***

**Source:** “Ayacucho: Ronderos azotan a los que incumplen el aislamiento social obligatorio (Ayacucho: Peasant Self-Defense Groups Punish Individuals Who Don’t Follow Obligatory Social Isolation),” *Peru 21*, 26 March 2020. <https://peru21.pe/peru/coronavirus-peru-i-ayacucho-ronderos-azotan-a-los-que-incumplen-el-aislamiento-social-obligatorio-nnpp-noticia/?ref=p21r>

*Self-defense groups in the VRAEM region of Peru are imposing their own form of justice on individuals who are not following coronavirus rules established by the government concerning social. In some areas of the VRAEM, witnesses have uploaded videos on social media sites where self-defense groups flog individuals caught violating mandatory social isolation. Authorized vehicles carrying food and medication can still enter the VRAEM region.*

**Source:** “Las Rondas Campesinas y su papel para contener la COVID-19 en la sierra peruana (The Rural Groups and their role in containing COVID-19 in the Peruvian highlands),” *RPP*, 18 June 2020. <https://rpp.pe/peru/actualidad/coronavirus-en-peru-con-disciplina-las-rondas-controlan-la-covid-19-en-localidades-de-la-sierra-noticia-1273970>

*Estaban Ayquipa, the Peasant Self-Defense Leader in San Roman stated that*

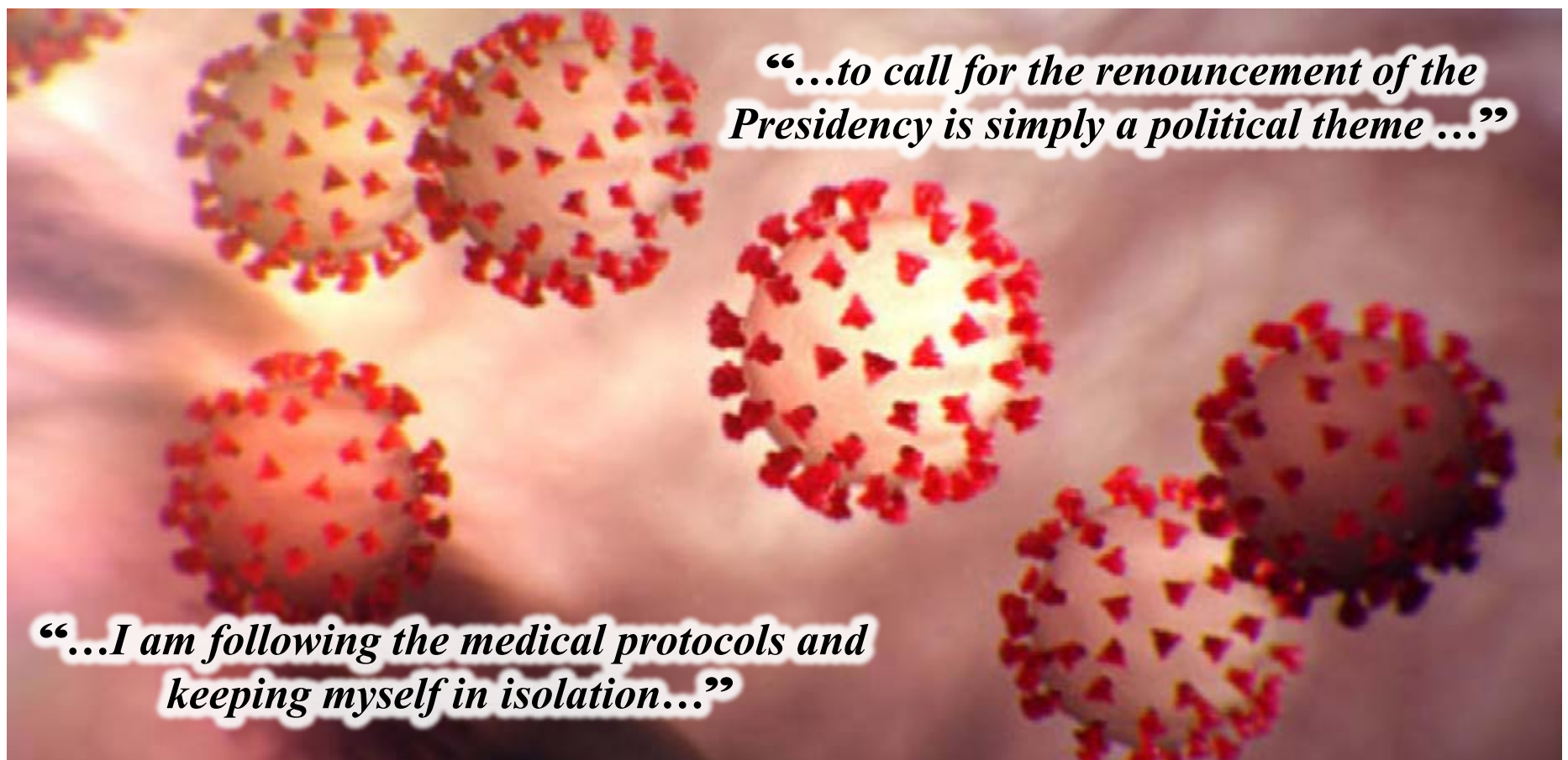
*“Thanks to the peasant self-defense groups, we are not experiencing the devastating effects of the pandemic. We have avoided infection through serious and continuous work.”*





## Bolivia and Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** Bolivia seems to be still in the throes of the coronavirus, although the specific data appear so unreliable as to not be worth reporting. Nevertheless, President Jeanine Áñez apparently contracted the disease, news of which quickly lured opposition calls for her to resign and the constitutional succession implemented, as it had been after the ouster of Evo Morales last year. That succession would have returned the presidency to Morales's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. The calls didn't last long, however, as the next day, the legislator who would have assumed the presidency announced that she herself had COVID-19 also. Both women stated they were doing fine and would continue to work from home. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Source: U.S. Army Photo; <https://www.tradoc.army.mil/News/Photos/igphoto/2002258405/>

**Source:** Ministro Núñez descarta una sucesión constitucional (Minister Núñez discards constitutional succession),” *HoyBolivia.com*, 10 July 2020. [https://www.hoybolivia.com/Noticia.php?IdNoticia=317997&tit=ministro\\_nunez\\_descarta\\_una\\_sucesion\\_constitucional](https://www.hoybolivia.com/Noticia.php?IdNoticia=317997&tit=ministro_nunez_descarta_una_sucesion_constitucional)

*“The Presidency Minister [analogous to White House Chief of Staff], Yerko Núñez, assured that President Jeanine Áñez, who yesterday tested positive for COVID-19, is not absent and continues carrying out her daily activities virtually from her isolation, for which he discarded any possible constitutional succession...‘To hope, to want to call for the renouncement of the Presidency is simply a political theme that is not framed in the Political Constitution of the State because there is no absence of our President, rather quite the contrary...”*

**Source:** Iván Bustillos, “La Presidenta del Senado confirma que tiene COVID-19 (The President of the Senate confirms that she has COVID-19),” *La Razon*, 11 July 2020. <https://www.la-razon.com/nacional/2020/07/10/la-presidenta-del-senado-confirma-que-tiene-covid-19/>

*“The President of the Chamber of Senators and Acting President in exercise of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, Eva Copa, confirmed this Friday afternoon that she suffered from the new coronavirus...‘I am following the medical protocols and keeping myself in isolation for the necessary amount of time, my condition is stable and I am not leaving my work in the ALP, I will continue working by way of virtual platforms...”*