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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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China Continues To Beef Up Border and Coastal Defense

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

In October, a group of Chinese experts met to discuss their views on China's progress and efforts to build up the border and coastal defense infrastructure. The following article, published in the official newspaper of the People's Liberation Army *Jiefangjun Bao*, offers an interesting overview of their thoughts regarding future expectations. China first launched its border and coastal defense infrastructure project in 1996. According to the article, the country has since gone from "having nothing to having something." It went from "not being centralized and complete to being scalable and systematic."

There are reportedly 18,639 miles of border and coastal defense duty routes. Blockades and video monitoring cover key areas. China has stationed hundreds of thousands of militia forces along the border and coastal defense frontlines. They have added transportation support facilities including duty roads, bridges, and docks, focused on connecting border villages to the larger border security infrastructure.

Part of the infrastructure buildup of China's border and coastal defense includes an increased capacity to

conduct information-driven operations (informationization). China has built several thousand monitoring and control stations and centers along key areas in border and coastal defense. It has also laid nearly 6,213 miles of transmission lines. A portion of the border and coastal areas now also includes video monitoring and a "control network for 'vertical connection and horizontal cohesion.'"

In coming years, China will likely push to automate its border and coastal defense capability, through the "intelligentization" of its processes. A senior engineer, cited in the article, explained that he hopes to shape a "smart chain" that will use new-generation information technologies, such as big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things, to discover, report, make decisions, handle, and evaluate border and coastal defense situations to enhance the three-dimensional smart management and control capabilities.

“...the international situation is complex and changeable. Border and coastal defenses face security threats and challenges from all quarters and in various forms.”

Source: Pan Di, “筑起坚不可摧的钢铁防线 ——军地共话合力推进边海防基础设施建设 (Building an Indestructible Steel Defensive Line—Joint Military-Civil Promotion of Border, Coastal Defense Infrastructure Building),” *Jiefangjun Bao* (official newspaper of the People's Liberation Army), 13 October 2021, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2021-10/13/content_300707.htm

China is a major border and coastal defense country. Chairman Xi profoundly pointed out that order and coastal defense work is a major matter for national security and is related to the overall national security and developmental situation.

... since the launch of border and coastal defense infrastructure building in 1996 with unified planning on land and at sea, we have built a large number of duty transport, physical barrier, and informationized management and control facilities.

Liu Jun explained that China has now built more than 30,000 kilometers of border and coastal defense duty routes, with blockades and video monitoring essentially covering key management and control segments. It has taken the first steps in constructing a "three-in-one" management and control system including human, material, and technical defense. It has built a solid defensive line along its vast land and maritime borders.

In recent years, on border and coastal defense frontlines, hundreds of thousands of militia forces are stationed all year round, and their reconnaissance and monitoring, rapid response, and emergency handling capabilities have steadily improved. With the completion of a large number of transportation support facilities such as duty roads, bridges, and docks, many border villages have been connected to roads and offshore islands connected to navigation routes, thus further consolidating the foundation for the development of industries with special advantages such as border trade, cross-border tourism, and island development.

"The continuous advancement of border and coastal defense infrastructure building is the result of joint efforts by the Party, government, military, and police. According to an arrangement made by the Third National Border Defense Work Conference in 1994, a border and coastal defense infrastructure building system was launched in 1996 on the basis of organizing pilot projects.

...a "five-in-one" border management structure with the Party committee providing direction, the government running overall coordination, the military serving as a backbone, the police taking charge of administration, and the people as a foundation, making the iron wall of border and coastal defense even more impenetrable.

In recent years, China's border and coastal defense infrastructure has intensified its informatization efforts, building several thousand monitoring and control stations and centers along important sections for border and coastal defense and laying nearly 10,000 kilometers of transmission lines. A portion of border and coastal areas have formed a video monitoring and control network for "vertical connection and horizontal cohesion."

Li Guangwei, senior engineer at the Air Force Research Academy, is full of hope for the prospects of smart border and coastal defense. He hopes to shape a "smart chain" in which the whole process of discovering, reporting, making decisions, handling, and evaluating border and coastal defense situations through the application of new-generation information technologies such as big data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence, breaks through data barriers between the military and civilian sectors to enhance three-dimensional smart management and control capabilities for border and coastal defense."

Chinese Military Uses AI To Develop World's Smallest and Most Powerful Coilgun

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

A group of Chinese researchers from the Naval University of Engineering in Wuhan, China, used artificial intelligence (AI) to develop the world's smallest and most powerful coilgun. The coilgun, which is about the size of a pistol with a 4.5-inch barrel, contains three battery-powered coils that generate an electromagnetic field. As described in the following excerpts, published in Hong Kong-based English-language daily *South China Morning Post*, the kinetic energy of the bullet flying through the barrel has more than twice the energy needed to fire a fatal shot. The researchers claim the weapon is ideal for counterterrorism and stability operations. The advantage of the coilgun over a conventional gun is its "adjustable speed and very short response time."

AI is playing a key role in developing China's electromagnetic weapons. The article describes the coilgun as more sophisticated than a typical firearm and too complex for traditional weapons software to handle.

AI, however, can continuously improve an imperfect design through self-learning. According to the article, "it would have been impossible to achieve this level of performance without using AI in the design process." Chinese researchers have also been using AI to develop large-scale electromagnetic weapons, such as railguns, which have a range of "hundreds of kilometers." The Chinese navy now has a test facility in which AI is used to develop smart railgun munitions capable of enduring extremely high pressure and intense magnetic fields.

“Artificial intelligence can outperform humans in designing futuristic weapons...”

Source: Stephen Chen, "Chinese Researchers Turn to Artificial Intelligence To Build Futuristic Weapons," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong's most prominent online English-language daily), 5 December 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3158522/chinese-researchers-turn-artificial-intelligence-build>

Artificial intelligence can outperform humans in designing futuristic weapons, according to a team of Chinese naval researchers who say they have developed the world's smallest yet most powerful coilgun.

The prototype weapon developed by professor Zhang Xiao and her team at the Naval University of Engineering in Wuhan has a 12cm (4.5-inch) barrel, about the size of a pistol, which contains three battery-powered coils that generate an electromagnetic field.

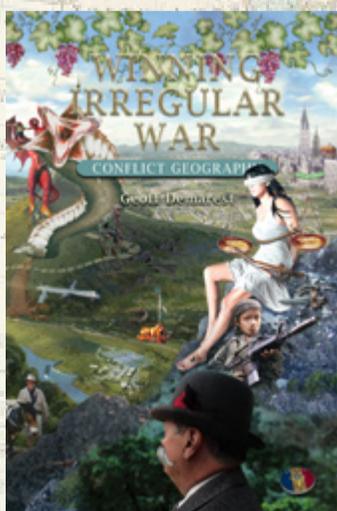
This electromagnetic field means that, unlike a conventional gun, the bullet does not touch the sides as it passes through the barrel.

Researchers found the bullet's kinetic energy as it was could reach almost 150 joules, more than twice the energy needed to fire a fatal shot.

The bullet speed can vary depending on factors such as size and weight, and the scientists said one of the major advantages of using a coil gun was that, unlike a conventional gun, it could be adjusted to fire deadly shots or non-lethal ones.

In a paper published in the Transactions of the China Electrotechnical Society last month, Zhang said the gun had the advantage of "adjustable speed and a very short response time", adding that it had great potential to be used for counterterrorism and maintaining stability.

The researchers say it would have been impossible to achieve this level of performance without using AI in the design process.



Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: "I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious."

PLA Practices UAV-Delivered Logistical Support for Airborne Operations



PLAAF Airborne Z-8 Helicopter (says airborne in white over the wheels) PLAAF Changhe Z-8KA – Zhao.

Source: Allen Zhao, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/PLAAF_Changhe_Z-8KA_-_Zhao.jpg

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to refine the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for tactical resupply through their integration into exercises. As noted in state media outlet *Science and Technology Daily*, a recent exercise held in the mountainous terrain of central Yunnan province describes a

“The brigade plans to further test combat support functions for the drones and improve logistical sustainment methods for airborne operations to improve combat effectiveness.”

Source: Peng Yueyun and Qi Yongqiang, “无人机参与助攻空降作战有了新帮手 (Drones participate in assists and airborne operations have new helpers),” *Science and Technology Daily* (State media outlet managed by the PRC Ministry of Science and Technology), 10 December 2021. http://www.stdaily.com/kjrb/kjrbbm/2021-12/10/content_1237995.shtml

“Begin the attack on the closest position!” Following the command of Li Qilong [李齐龙], the commander of a company under an airborne brigade, members of the unit charged bravely towards the “enemy” position. The unit is engaged in a ‘key point seizure’ exercise in an unidentified location in central Yunnan.

After their initial charge, the enemy was able to suppress the attackers. The lead assault team leader called out “Running low on ammunition! Requesting resupply!”

Standing by the radio in the rear, commander Li marked Ren’s location on the drone control terminal, issuing orders for supplies and a flight path. One minute later, a medium UAV with nearly a hundred kilograms of heavy equipment quickly lifted off and flew toward the battle. Thanks to the timely resupply, the attacking unit could renew their assault.

In this exercise, the brigade embedded transport drones in its support operations, making full use of their advantages in terms of ability to cover long distances quickly, with great precision and in spite of rugged terrain—advantages that traditional resupply methods overland or via large, vulnerable transport lack.

On the front lines of the battle, the firing is intense, and the support team has continued to take casualties even as neither side has gained the advantage. “Requesting casevac.” A signal from the assisting team came from the radio. In the rear, the rotors of a large UAV spin up under the operated by Chen Yao [陈遥], leader of the integrated support team. Hugging the ground, the drone dodges enemy fire while making its way toward the requested location of the ‘wounded,’ beaming back information to the support team.

“Found them,” Chen Yao said as he put the drone into a rapid descent. With the assistance of ground combatants, one of the simulated casualties was dispatched to the rear.

“Shift your position and prepare to defend!” After pushing the assault, company commander Li Qilong quickly pivoted to defense while coordinating resupply using the UAVs. A few minutes later, as coordinates for defensive positions were issued [to the attacking units], a “swarm” composed of eight quadrotor drones took off in succession, beginning “multi-target precision resupply operations.” Despite being spread out over more than ten kilometers, the “swarm” independently coordinated and accurately positioned themselves to quickly deliver emergency supplies from the rear to the new defensive positions.

Li described the transport drones as “Fast, stealthy and precise,” noting that “[due to their support] the length of the battle was reduced by nearly an hour and the number of casualties has been greatly reduced.”

The brigade plans to test combat support functions for the drones further and improve logistical sustainment methods for airborne operations to improve combat effectiveness.

Developments in Russia's BARS Reserve System



General Dvornikov inspecting BARS servicemen.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12383975@egNews
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By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted articles from Vologda Oblast provincial newspaper *Krasnaya Sever* and Leningrad Oblast-based online news site *47 News* discuss the operation of Russia's new reserve system known as the Special Army Combat Reserve (BARS) in some sources, and as the National Army Combat Reserve (BARS) in others. According to *Krasnaya Sever*, reservists participating in this program will perform up to eight 3-day training assemblies and a 30-day exercise annually. The article goes on to explain how the BARS will select, train, and compensate reservists. The article from *47 News* is notable as it mentions that BARS is not unique to the Southern Military District, as first reported, but can now be found in at least one other military district. This suggests that that BARS may, or has already, become a national program, and not just an experiment in the Southern Military District.

The accompanying excerpted articles from Krasnodar regional newspaper *Golos Pravdy* and Russian military and defense industry weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* discuss personnel issues with BARS. *Golos Pravdy* notes that the Krasnoarmeyskiy districts has only been able to fill 15 of its 424 reserve billets. Valeriy Poludnitsin of the local military commissariat sums up the BARS recruiting effort as: "Unfortunately and despite all our efforts, the numbers wishing to sign up are small." *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* suggests developing a special program for university students and another for personnel working in private military companies as potential ways of increasing participation in BARS.

“The military organization is making every effort to eliminate the possible consequences of a hybrid war against the Russian Federation and at the same time lacks human resources. One of the measures preventing attempts to disorganize the rear in a possible military conflict with geopolitical opponents of Russia is the creation of territorial defense troops.”

Source: Olga Burchevskaya: “А ты записался резервистом?! (Did You Sign Up to Be a Reservist?!),” *Krasnaya Sever* (provincial newspaper of Vologda Oblast), 27 October 2021. <https://www.krassever.ru/article/a-ty-zapisalsya-rezervistom>

...It was earlier, in Soviet times, that everyone in succession was called up into the "partisans": reserve officers and men traveled to military reservist active-duty training at least once in their lives. Everything changed in the new millennium: now a limited number of citizens are trained in case of enemy attacks according to the principle of "better less, but better."

The Russian Federation Presidential Edict establishing a human mobilization reserve came out in 2015. Initially a number of regions tried it out by assembling small subunits. This year it also came the turn of our Oblast: in August military commissariats were assigned the mission of manning an expanded battalion of reservists (around 500 persons). Then in September around 100 men signed a contract and set off for three-day training in Karelia...

Not just anybody will be taken as a reservist, they caution in the oblast military commissariat. According to the statute, this must be a person who has performed conscripted or contract service in the Army and who has a specific military specialty (tanker, motorized rifleman, specialist in servicing equipment and arms). The age for privates, NCOs, and warrant officers is up to 42 (greater for officers). Health also is assessed: those registered in health centers (drug rehabilitation, tuberculosis, psychoneurological) will not be accepted in the mobilization reserve, as well as persons with disabilities. In addition, citizens will be refused have a criminal record.

"The important thing is the desire of the person himself to become a reservist, we rely on him above all. Then there is screening and selection: a special board confirms the candidate. After that he signs a contract to be in the reserve: the minimum term of the first one is three years, and after that it can be even less," KS was told by Lieutenant Colonel Daniil Bugayev, of the Second Department of the Vologodskaya Oblast Commissariat. "There are eight training sessions with a reservist annually (each for three training days a month), as well as reservist active-duty training (30 days once a year). That said, an agrarian, for example, will not be called up for training during the harvest; he will be invited when it will be more convenient for him, in the off-season, let's say, and river transport workers are not put in action during navigation [season]."

A military uniform, three meals a day "like home" (prepared by civilian cooks), and medical services (what if there is a sudden toothache?) -- all this is free at state expense. Average wages and jobs are kept for reservists, plus they are authorized payments along the Defense Ministry line. Even if they are not called up for three-day training sessions, privates and NCOs will receive from R1,800 to R3,200 under the contract. They will be paid from R3,000 to R5,200 for attending such training sessions, and from R18,000 to R31,000 (officers up to R45,000) for month-long reservist active-duty training. Pay and allowances depend on a reservist's rank and position (plus the area coefficient for Karelia).

Continued: Developments in Russia's BARS Reserve System

Source: “БАРС соберёт на Северо-Западе несколько тысяч резервистов — их готовят для войск территориальной обороны (BARS [Special Army Combat Reserve] Will Assemble Several Thousand Reservists in the Northwest — They Are Being Trained for the Territorial Defense Troops),” *47 News* (online news site focusing on the Leningrad Oblast), 17 November 2021. <https://47news.ru/articles/203180/>

The second intake of the second phase of reservist active-duty training of subunits of the Special Army Combat Reserve (BARS) begins on 22 November in regions where Western Military District troops are stationed.

The Western Military District Press Service informed 47news that plans are to draw several thousand reservists to reservist active-duty training as part of separate subunits formed on the basis of Western Military District military units.

Based on results of reservist active-duty training, citizens who have taken the full combined-arms training course will enter subunits of the territorial defense troops.

During reservist active-duty training, reservists will go through training and improvement of qualification for providing security and defense of strategically important facilities as well as for employing modern arms and military equipment...

Source: “В Красноармейском районе мобилировано всего 3.5% запасников (Krasnoarmeyskiy Rayon Mobilizes Just 3.5 Percent of Reservists),” *Golos Pravdy* (newspaper of the Krasnodar region), 16 November 2021. <https://golos-pravda.ru/news/obshhestvo/76981-v-krasnoarmejskom-rajone-mobilizirovano-vsego-3-5-zapasnikov/>

Reservists are being mobilized in line with Edict of the President of the Russian Federation Number 370 of 17 July 2015 "On the creation of a mobilization personnel reserve of the Russian Federation Armed Forces." The rayon military commissariat reports that according to the plan for this year, 33 officers and 391 private soldiers and NCOs from our rayon should be sent to undergo reservist military training. But to date only 15 people have signed a contract to serve in the reserve.

The acting chief of the mobilization resources planning, assignment, training, and registration section, Valeriy Poludnitsin, said that the commissariat has been campaigning hard among the 1,500 reservists who are liable for military service. "Unfortunately and despite all our efforts, the numbers wishing to sign up are small," he commented. In his view this is due to fear of losing one's job although the contract makes it possible to maintain it during military drills and assemblies, during which the Defense Ministry reimburses the reservist's average wage to the employer... And along with everything else, when reservists are called up to assemblies and drills their employers are reimbursed their salary costs. Unemployed individuals receive the minimum wage and also the cost of travel and expenses from home to the military commissariat and back. If necessary, the cost of renting accommodation is paid...

Contracts to serve in the mobilization reserve are signed with warrant officers, sergeants, and soldiers up to the age of 42. With junior officers up to 47 years of age, and also with senior officers apart from colonels up to 52 years, and with colonels up to 57 years, for a minimum period of three years.

Source: Grigoriy Nokonorov and Igor Rodionov, “Служба возле дома: Из кого формировать подразделения территориальной обороны (Service Close to Home: Who to Form Subunits of Territorial Defense Troops?),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (Russian weekly newspaper focusing on the military and defense industry), 26 October 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64394>

...The military organization is making every effort to eliminate the possible consequences of a hybrid war against the Russian Federation and at the same time lacks human resources. One of the measures preventing attempts to disorganize the rear in a possible military conflict with geopolitical opponents of Russia is the creation of territorial defense troops...

Time has shown that deployment of territorial defense troops (and such events reflect difficulties of the future mobilization) is fraught with significant problems that have to be addressed. The first one is changes in the forms of ownership in the country -- increase in the share of the private sector, which entails the reluctance of owners to release employees to participate in annual musters, envisaged for reservists... The second problem is related to the demographic situation in the regions where it is planned to assemble forces and means of territorial defense, which mainly involve reservists. Not all regions are able to form the same number of units of territorial defense due to circumstances... The third problem is to increase the efficiency of the acquisition and harmonization of such units. It can be solved through the creation of military commissariats (or units that form the basis of territorial defense troops) in staffs, of a permanent organization core (unit commander and his deputies) directly involved in the selection of personnel, conscription, and coordination of reservists...

In the context of a difficult demographic situation in Russia, the main problem of manning the reserve service is about personnel. How to make the transition from patriotic education at the level of sports, exhibition volunteering, and participation in flash mobs to the practical formation of a youth's readiness to show their patriotic qualities in more serious situations? It seems reasonable to address male students from higher education institutions who have reached the age of majority. Currently, more than 4 million people are receiving higher education in the country in 213 nonstate (400,000 students) and 497 state universities (3.6 million people). Students at state universities, both in terms of their number and age, are the most active and controlled force that can either be directed into a destructive direction or involved in the fulfillment of defense tasks...

Continued: Developments in Russia's BARS Reserve System



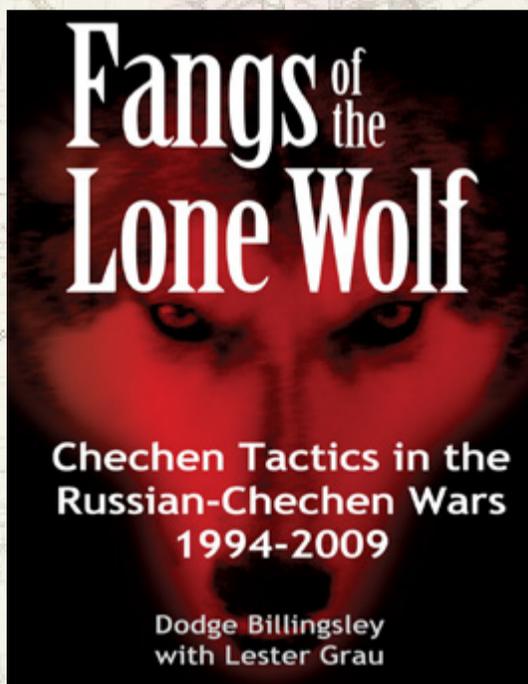
Reservists in training.

Source: Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, https://function.mil.ru/images/upload/2019/rezerv_550.jpg
Attribution: CC BY 4.0

Continued Source: Grigoriy Nokonorov and Igor Rodionov, “Служба возле дома: Из кого формировать подразделения территориальной обороны (Service Close to Home: Who to Form Subunits of Territorial Defense Troops?),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (Russian weekly newspaper focusing on the military and defense industry), 26 October 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64394>

Considering that half of the students in public universities are women and another third of the remaining men are exempt from military service, the remaining number of students who have expressed a desire to serve in the reserve can be considered a resource for recruitment into territorial defense troops. By amending the existing legislation, a mechanism can be envisaged to allow for compulsory service during the first three years of studies through annual mandatory musters, and then conclude a contract for service in the reserve, including in the territorial defense forces...In order to spark interest in service (including in the reserve) among students of draft age, it is possible to envisage mechanisms to reduce tuition fees (for those who study on a paid basis)...

Numerous private security companies, whose employees usually have appropriate health clearance and the right to carry weapons, may also be considered a potential reserve for manning territorial defense troops by allowing their employees to serve in the reserve...It is also possible to envisage the possibility of manning territorial defense troops with reservists from Cossack organizations and with members of military-patriotic clubs that satisfy the set requirements... The country is facing a lack of volunteers and reservists. Taking into account the evolving military-political situation and historical traditions, the country needs volunteers who, if necessary, can defend themselves and the country with weapons in their hands.



FANGS OF THE LONE WOLF

by 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.

Russia Develops and Implements Counter-UAV Tactics and Technologies

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary



Pishchal Counter-UAV Gun.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/ARMY-2020-Static-part-3/i-SCHRnzn/0/6a9634f0/X4/Army2020-Static-Part3-090-X4.jpg> Attribution: CC 4.0



Ratt Anti-UAV System (exterior view).

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/ARMY-2020-Static-part-3/i-N8H53ht/0/f9763ab1/X4/Army2020-Static-Part3-084-X4.jpg> Attribution: CC 4.0



Ratt Anti-UAV System (interior view).

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/ARMY-2020-Static-part-3/i-dMRnVvJ/0/5487d70d/X4/Army2020-Static-Part3-085-X4.jpg> Attribution: CC 4.0

“Many Russian electronic warfare manufacturers are now developing portable counter-UAV devices, mindful of the requirement for small military teams to be protected against the drone threat from the air. Most of them, like the Pishchal, are in the form of a firearm, which is convenient and what troops are used to.”

There is a consensus in Russian circles of military thought that the ability to counter unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) could be decisive in future conflicts. The excerpted articles from Russian Armed Forces monthly journal *Armeyskiy Sbornik* and pro-Kremlin daily newspaper *Izvestiya* discuss Russia’s development of counter-UAV technologies. *Armeyskiy Sbornik* describes the theory underpinning Russia’s tactics for countering UAVs. Russia intends to use both kinetic fires, such as the guns and missiles of air defense systems, and electronic warfare (EW), such as jamming, to counter UAVs. The article also mentions some of the unique technologies that Russia has developed to further this effort, such as the Pishchal counter-UAV gun. According to military and defense industry weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, during the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, EW caused approximately 15 UAVs to land, or fly-off course. The article posits that these EW means and conventional air defense systems could defeat Ukraine’s Turkish-made Bayraktar UAVs. The article from *Izvestiya* explains how Russia’s theory of kinetic air defense in conjunction with effective EW is not just theory, and Russia is already implementing it in training.

Source: Colonel M. Mitrofanov, Lieutenant Colonel D. Vasyukov, and Major V. Anisimov, “Практические Рекомендации Защита Элементов Системы Связи От Беспилотных Летательных Аппаратов (Practical Recommendations for Protecting Elements of a Communication System Against Drones),” *Armeyskiy Sbornik* (monthly journal of the Russian Armed Forces military and defense industry weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*), September 2021. <https://army.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/343042/>

Drones are becoming an increasingly common element of modern military operations and are now accessible not only to regular but also to irregular armed forces and also to terrorist organizations...Experience of countering drones during local conflicts across the world has shown that when they are airborne their data transmission channels are visible to signals intelligence and vulnerable to electronic jamming. The data transmission channels include:

- the operator's control channel to the drone
- the drone's channel for transmitting data to its control station
- the satellite navigation channel

Countering drones does not necessarily mean their physical destruction. Electronic jamming can be used to disable a drone's data transmission channel, also the channel for controlling it. Apart from disabling the control and data channels, you also need to disable the channel that receives the satellite navigation signals. Satellite data is used not only to plot the drone's route but also by weapons for target acquisition...Russian electronic warfare developers are actively working on ways of countering drones. For example, at the Dubai Airshow in 2019 the Rosoboronexport corporation displayed the design of a layered defense system that included Russia's latest counterdrone technologies, such as the Repellent-1, Sapsan Bekas, Kupol, Rubezh Avtomatika, Luch, and Pishchal...

Continued: Russia Develops and Implements Counter-UAV Tactics and Technologies

Continued Source: Colonel M. Mitrofanov, Lieutenant Colonel D. Vasyukov, and Major V. Anisimov, “Практические Рекомендации Защита Элементов Системы Связи От Беспилотных Летательных Аппаратов (Practical Recommendations for Protecting Elements of a Communication System Against Drones),” *Armeyskiy Sbornik* (monthly journal of the Russian Armed Forces military and defense industry weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*), September 2021. <https://army.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/343042/>

Particular attention is also being paid to portable devices for fighting drones. For example, the Luch and Pishchal systems, which can emit electromagnetic signals to disable drones 6 and 2 km away respectively, were displayed for the first time at the Dubai Air Show in 2019. The Pishchal weighs just 3.5 kg and is one of the lightest counter-UAV devices of its class on the market today, so it can form part of a soldier's personal kit (figure 8).

Many Russian electronic warfare manufacturers are now developing portable counter-UAV devices, mindful of the requirement for small military teams to be protected against the drone threat from the air. Most of them, like the Pishchal, are in the form of a firearm, which is convenient and what troops are used to. They comprise modules for detecting a drone's radio signals and creating the jamming to disable the control and navigation channels. Among these devices is the "Personal Drone Countermeasures Complex" made by the Special Technology Center company (reference 8), which can disable drone control channels from at least 2 km away and radio navigation channels from at least 10 km. Or the Rex 1 and Rex 2 portable counter-UAV systems made by the company Zala Group Unmanned Systems (reference 9), which also work against drone control and navigation channels. And these are by no means all the developments of our defense sector when it comes to fighting drones.

So, at the present time, we know of the following ways of countering drones.

1. *Destroy them using air defense or other fire assets.*
2. *Destroy their control stations.*
3. *Capture them (with nets or by intercepting their control channels).*
4. *Use electro-optical countermeasures (advanced directed-output laser weapons).*
5. *Electronically jam their control channels, reconnaissance data transmission channels, or their geopositioning systems.*
6. *Distort the navigation coordinates in the vicinity of a protected site.*
7. *Conceal protected sites.*
8. *Create dummy protected sites (deception).*

Source: Oleg Falichev, “«Байрактаров»: У России есть все необходимое для приземления турецких беспилотников (Snares for Bayraktar: Russia Has All Necessary Equipment to Force Turkish Drones to Land),” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* (Russian weekly focusing on the military and defense industry), 1 November 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64483>

The situation in eastern Ukraine has escalated once again. The Ukrainian Armed Forces subunits occupied the village of Staromarivka in the so-called gray zone, where 180 residents ended up hostages; about 40 of them own Russian passports. Trains with tanks and artillery arrive at the closest railway station. One of them had been spotted near Slovyansk, the second one -- near Svyate. Positions of Donetsk militia are bombed by Turkish-made Bayraktar UAVs. The situation is again on the verge of a full-scale war...So what should Russia do? It cannot be ruled out that Russia might hold new large-scale military exercises next to the borders with Ukraine to rehearse action against external threats, as was observed at the beginning of this year when, according to Western data, a Russian army numbering about 100,000-120,000 personnel was deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border.

[T]he best option is to create a full-fledged air defense grouping in this area, capable of covering villages and militia without crossing the demarcation line...However, Russia also has other weapons that work without firing...Based on the experience of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, about 15 UAVs were forced to land or were thrown off course with the aid of electronic warfare equipment...The Pantsir-S1 and Pantsir-SM anti-aircraft missile and gun systems are also excellent countermeasures against drones. The range of the latter has been increased to 40 kilometers thanks to the upgraded multifunctional aiming station. The range at which it detects and selects targets is substantially greater, and so is its resistance to jamming. However, this weapon, as they say, may be used in case of emergency. The main thing right now is to establish and secure a resilient system for radar surveillance and monitoring...

Continued: Russia Develops and Implements Counter-UAV Tactics and Technologies

Source: Alexey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “На новый маневр: войска отработали борьбу с беспилотниками в горах: Какую тактику отражения атак дронов опробовали на учениях в Крыму и на Кавказе (To New Maneuver: The Troops Worked Out Combating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in the Mountains: They Worked Out Which Tactic To Repel Drone Attacks at Exercises in the Crimea and in the Caucasus),” *Izvestiya* (large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 3 November 2021. <https://iz.ru/1244533/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/na-novyi-manevr-voiska-otrabotali-borbu-s-bespilotnikami-v-gorakh>

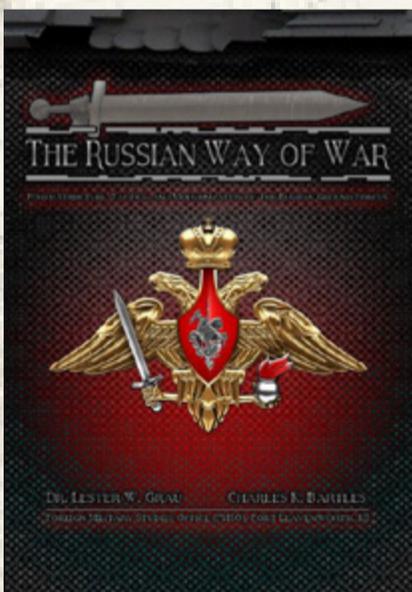
The Ministry of Defense has concluded a series of exercises in the Caucasus and in the Crimea, at which they worked out and studied Russian air defense capabilities to combat unmanned aerial vehicles in mountain conditions. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh showed that drones are becoming especially dangerous during combat on mountain terrain: it is difficult to detect and shoot them down due to the terrain's relief. They managed to repel a supposed mass attack of unmanned aerial vehicles through the joint operations of the air defense (PVO) and electronic warfare (EW) forces. In the experts' words, only the cohesive work of all subunits, which are participating in the engagement, can yield success in the mountains...

The Military Department previously reported that a composite detachment for combating UAVs of Southern Military District 49th Combined-Arms Army's Mountain Motorized Rifle Formation repelled the attacks of the notional enemy's drones at Kobu-Bashi Range in Karachay-Cherkessia. It consisted of EW and tactical reconnaissance subunits and crews of Tunguska-M1 [SA-19 GRISON] air defense missile-gun systems and Strela-10 [SA-13 GOLPHER] missile systems. During the course of the exercises, the PVO subunits managed to destroy all targets, and the EW complexes confirmed their high effectiveness, having used Zhitel jamming stations to jam the drones' command and control and navigation channels. More than 500 servicemen participated in the maneuvers...

Even simple UAVs gain many advantages in the mountains, which the defending side needs to mitigate, Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy pointed out in a conversation with Izvestiya.

"A drone is not visible for radars and optical systems behind mountain slopes," he explained. "As a result, the UAVs obtain good chances to conduct a surprise attack and the defending side's response time is reduced. The Syrian experience has demonstrated that the composite detachments make a good showing on that terrain, which PVO and EW weapons and even snipers with heavy caliber rifles can reach. It is also very important to organize monitoring of the air situation in the mountains..."

The Russian Army is prepared to confront the new threat. The PVO system is being improved constantly and new equipment is arriving in the troops. The Military Department has already reported that a new air defense command and control system was employed at the "Zapad-2021" Strategic Exercises. It consisted of all reconnaissance assets and also of air defense systems and complexes, which were involved in the maneuvers. The exercises demonstrated that the new equipment permits the creation of an impenetrable defensive dome over significant territory...



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR

by Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles

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

Russian Airborne Receiving Modernized SVD “Sniper Rifle”

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

The standard-issue infantry Kalashnikov family of weapons are not particularly accurate and have a modest effective range of 300 meters. Their purpose is to conduct suppressive automatic fire to keep the enemy pinned down. The rifle squad and platoon needed a specialty weapon to engage the enemy from 300 to 800 meters. The answer was the SVD Dragunov semiautomatic longer-range rifle. While titled a sniper rifle, it is really a rugged expert marksman’s rifle that routinely engages targets to 800 meters. Designed in 1963 and combat tested

“Reconnaissance and special-purpose subunits are going to acquire some accuracy. They will fully rearm with the SVDM sniper rifle, which outperforms the classic Dragunov. The new weapon not only has outstanding accuracy but can also be used with a number of accessories -- various sights, a silencer, and additional equipment can be attached to it.”

initially in South Vietnam, the SVD is older than most currently serving in the Russian military. According to a recent article in the pro-government newspaper Izvestia, the Dragunov has now been upgraded and airborne and reconnaissance troops are first in line for the upgrade. This is not the top-of-the-line professional Russian sniper rifle but seems ideal for rough-and-tumble field soldiering.

Source: Roman Kretsul and Aleksei Ramm, “Точнее, и не смажешь: войсковую разведку перевооружат на новые винтовки (More Precision, No Lubrication. Tactical Reconnaissance Upgrades to New Rifles. Specialized Sniper Subunits to Get the SVDM),” *Izvestia* (pro-government newspaper), 7 November 2021. <https://iz.ru/1245135/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/tochnee-i-ne-smazhesh-voiskovuiu-razvedku-perevooruzhat-novye-vintovki>

Reconnaissance and special-purpose subunits are going to acquire some accuracy. They will fully rearm with the SVDM sniper rifle, which outperforms the classic Dragunov. The new weapon not only has outstanding accuracy but can also be used with a number of accessories -- various sights, a silencer, and additional equipment can be attached to it. According to experts, this greatly increases reconnaissance troops' opportunities to eliminate targets at long range.”

The Defense Ministry has decided to upgrade tactical reconnaissance and special-purpose units with the SVDM sniper rifle... The move should enhance these troops' battlefield capabilities. The first consignments have already arrived in the Southern Military District. The Dragunov sniper rifle (SVD) has served the forces well for half a century and in its class has become a brand, like Kalashnikov for assault rifles. Even a less than expert soldier is sure to hit targets with it at ranges of up to 800 meters. The Dragunov combines greater firepower and range than an assault rifle with exceptional reliability and relative simplicity of use. Back in Soviet times the role of sniper armed with an SVD was inserted into the standard complement of a motorized infantry squad. This gave Soviet infantry a substantial increase in firepower compared to foreign armies.

Russian engineers have been working in recent decades on various options for modernizing this tried and true weapon. The latest modification is the SVDM. Made of advanced materials, it has improved ergonomics and greater accuracy.

The gun mounts Picatinny rails on which accessories to suit the mission at hand, such as optical or night sights or a silencer may be mounted in minutes. The SVDM has backup iron sights and a fixed point for a folding bipod. Many older models of the gun required some disassembly in order to mount the accessories, which is a lengthy process.

"In the army a sniper is actually a low-altitude precision weapon," military expert Vladislav Shurygin stated. "The Dragunov sniper rifle means you can deliver accurate fire over medium distances. In battle it is used to take out important targets. The sniper usually accompanies the commander and is tasked by him. A modernization for the Dragunov is further confirmation that this gun was created with future upgrades in mind, and it still has great potential today."

Albert Bakov, general director of TsNIItochmash [Central Scientific Research Institute for Precision Machine Engineering] told Izvestiya in an interview in 2019 that the Dragunov was so perfectly designed from the outset that in the category of army rifles for shooting at ranges between 500 and 800 meters "it cannot be made any better" -- only individual elements can be improved. You can paddle with it, you can throw it around -- and it works fine over ranges of 500 to 800 meters." The company is now working on larger-caliber rifles.

The Kalashnikov concern is currently upgrading the Chuvakin sniper rifle (SVCh), which should hit individual targets at ranges of up to a kilometer with the first shot. It is designed to take two types of cartridge -- the powerful Russian 7.62x54 mm flanged and the NATO 7.62x51 mm rifle cartridge. When it will acquire its final shape and enter serial production is unknown.

Until the Chuvakin is inducted into service, the Dragunov will remain the best sniper rifle option for the regular troops. There are longer-range and more powerful rifles in existence but they are far more expensive and technically complex, and are intended not for use in battle but for particular types of missions. These weapons are supplied in limited numbers to special-purpose subunits in the army and the security and law enforcement agencies.

The military has already begun to rearm its marksmen: Airborne Troops reconnaissance subunits have received the brand-new AK-12 assault rifle. Outwardly it resembles the classic Kalashnikov, but this is a fundamental redesign. It has acquired the ability to fire in fixed bursts of two rounds per trigger pull, it has a longer-lasting barrel, additional detachable accessories, and easier switching between shooting modes. New thermal imagers, silencers, and collimator sights are in production for it, enabling accurate fire at silhouette targets from ranges of up to 500 meters.

The new weapons and kit now arriving at the Airborne Troops are radically extending their capabilities. Izvestiya already reported that the blue berets' reconnaissance subunits have received the new Arbalet-2 parachute, with which they can jump from altitudes of up to 4,000 meters, or higher if they have oxygen tanks. The parachute's special canopy means that it can be steered while in flight, which means that troopers can travel dozens of kilometers while descending, to penetrate behind enemy lines undetected.



Portrait of Count Alexander Suvorov.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Suvorov#/media/File:Suvorov_Alex_V.jpg Attribution: Public Domain

Russian Theorists Contemplating Preemptive Wars

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

The confidence of the Kremlin leadership to employ, or threaten to employ, military force is increasing as Russia continues to modernize its armed forces. This growing assurance may have reached the point where Russian military experts are now advocating preemptive military actions to defend the country's interests. The accompanying excerpt comes from an article in *Voennaya Mysl'*, the flagship journal of the Russian Ministry of Defense. The authors argue that given the rapid nature of modern conflict and the increasing threats of potential adversaries, "it is now advisable to transfer the main military efforts to the beginning (and even before the beginning) of the armed struggle."

hinting at Russia's demographic challenges, they point out that "the superiority gained from a surprise attack makes it possible to more than compensate for a smaller number of his troops." The authors go on to suggest that Russia's growing arsenal of "high-precision long-range sea and air-based weapons" now gives the military the ability to conduct a preemptive strike against the enemies of Russia.

Framing time as a spatial concept, the authors liken this preemptive thinking as an element of a "further development of theory and practice of 'deep operation.'" Quoting another Russian military theorist, they assert that "in a war, the victory is won by the side that strikes earlier... which is necessary in order to break the enemy's moral and material resistance and force him to submit to our will." The authors conclude by stressing the importance of domestic propaganda when striking first, whereby the military's "preemption of a potential enemy in action," will gain the "support and develop the defense consciousness of the Russian people."

“If earlier, belligerents tried to preempt the enemy both before and during military (combat) actions, now it is advisable to transfer the main efforts in this matter to the beginning (and even before the beginning) of the armed struggle.”

The authors begin by describing how great Russian military leaders in the past understood the importance of striking the enemy first. Citing General A. Suvorov, they assert that "money is costly, human life is even more valuable, but time is the most precious thing!" Perhaps

Source: Major General V.V. Kruglov, Colonel A.S. Shubin, "О возрастающем значении упреждения противника в действиях (On the growing importance of anticipating the enemy in actions)," *Voennaya Mysl'* (flagship journal of the Russian Ministry of Defense), December 2021. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Nomera> (pp. 27-34).

...All social and military processes are accelerated to such an extent that there is a significant increase in the likelihood of missing any fundamental changes in military affairs that could threaten the security of the state. ...In this regard, military science is faced with the urgent task of studying the problem of rational use of the time factor in military affairs.

...Military history shows that one of the first generals who most deeply understood the importance of time in battle was A.V. Suvorov... Suvorov expressed this circumstance in immortal words: "Money is expensive, human life is even more valuable, and time is the most precious thing!"

The superiority gained from the surprise of the attack made it possible to more than compensate for the small number of his troops.

...More than 100 years ago, the Russian military theorist émigré A. Zalf approached this problem in the following way: "In a war, the victory is won by the side that strikes earlier... in order to break the enemy's moral and material resistance and force him to submit to our will."

...The emergence of new means of warfare, in particular high-precision long-range sea and air-based weapons (cruise missile "Caliber", hypersonic missile systems "Dagger", "Zircon", gives rise to such new forms of military action as a strategic strike and a missile air-naval strike.

... in fact, is a consequence of the further development of theory and practice "Deep operation".

...The arsenal of the RF Armed Forces should contain types of weapons, forms and methods of action that are unexpected for the enemy, guaranteeing the destruction of the aggressor in any conditions of the situation. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that at present the use of the time factor has acquired a qualitatively new feature that generates the following pattern. If earlier, belligerents tried to preempt the enemy both before and during military (combat) actions, now it is advisable to transfer the main efforts in this matter to the beginning (and even before the beginning) of the armed struggle.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to recall the words of the patriot of Russia A. Shcherbatov, addressed to its citizens many years ago: "Under modern conditions of international struggle, victory remains with the fighting force behind which there is a nationwide determination to win at any cost and at whatever cost. victims. It is easy to create such a mood in the Russian people, since the state principle always prevailed over personal interest..." In connection with the permanent aggravation of the military-political situation in the world, when an armed conflict or war may break out at any moment and one must be ready for them, military scientists and military command and control bodies at all levels should intensify efforts to find and implement the latest effective forms and methods of military (combat) actions, including those involving preemption of a potential enemy in action, and thereby support and develop the defense consciousness of the Russian people.

New Russian Film About Syrian Operations Promotes Kremlin Narrative

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

The Russian military has entered its seventh year of combat operations in Syria. The Kremlin-supported media has portrayed their country's military involvement in an overall positive light. According to their narrative, Russian forces have helped to decimate the terrorist threat in Syria, bringing large portions of the country back under Syrian government control. Their participation, however, has not been cost-free. While exact numbers are classified, more than 100 Russian security forces personnel have been killed in Syria since 2015, with an equal or greater number of injured.

One of the most dramatic and painful losses occurred in November 2015, when a Russian Su-24M bomber was shot down by a Turkish fighter after an alleged border violation. The Russian film industry, with financial help from the Ministry of Defense (MoD), recently released a movie "Небо" (Sky) to commemorate this event. As the two accompanying excerpts describe, this film illustrates how the Russian media can transform a misfortune into a triumph and further strengthen the Kremlin's narrative.

The first excerpt from the mostly independent Nezavisimoye Voennoye points out that "the film is based on real events that took place in Syria, when, during a combat mission on 24 November 2015, a Russian Su-24 was shot

down by a Turkish fighter." It reminds readers that the aircraft's "navigator (Murakhtin) was rescued, while the pilot, Peshkov was shot by terrorists in the air." The article quotes the commander of the Airborne Forces, who asserts that "the film 'Sky' can be considered one of the reference points for modern Russian cinema, allowing, figuratively speaking, to translate the arrows of Russian cinema, reorient, and reformat it toward the spirit of patriotism." The second excerpt from the popular Russian media site Vokrug TV provides some additional background. Not surprisingly, "the main villain in the film is an invisible puppeteer from the United States who controls the actions of terrorists..." This site also highly praises this new movie, asserting that "all this is filmed so spectacularly that even the last skeptic will stir up something like patriotism in his soul."

“The motion picture ‘Sky’ can be considered one of the reference points for modern Russian cinema, allowing, figuratively speaking, to translate the arrows of Russian cinema, reorient, reformat it in the spirit of patriotism.”

Source: Daria Lyubovik, "Небо летчик Олег Пешков: Вышел первый российский фильм о войне в Сирии (Sky of the pilot Oleg Peshkov: The first Russian film about the war in Syria was released)," *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye* (mostly independent), 25 November 2021. https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2021-11-25/1_1167_sky.html

The film company "Triix Media" together with the Ministry of Defense and with the participation of the channel "Russia 1" presented a film about the feat of the Russian pilot Oleg Peshkov, who died during the anti-terrorist operation in Syria. This is the first art picture, by the decision of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, included in the list of mandatory viewing in the Armed Forces.

The film is based on real events that took place in Syria, when, during a combat mission on 24 November 2015, a Russian Su-24 was shot down by a Turkish fighter. The crew - Oleg Peshkov and Konstantin Murakhtin - managed to eject. Navigator Murakhtin was rescued, and Peshkov was shot by terrorists in the air.

...After the premiere of the film "Sky", "NVO" asked to share his impressions of the Hero of the Russian Federation, the commander of the Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov.

- In the Soviet Union, films about the Great Patriotic War were an incentive to educate the younger generation. Does the Ministry of Defense plan to further promote the theme of glorification of people who are responsible for the security of the state?

- "I agree that in our youth there was a lot of glorification in cinema, serious films were shot, the heroes of which became an example for the younger generation. We were brought up on catch phrases from our favorite films. The motion picture 'Sky' can be considered one of the reference points for modern Russian cinema, allowing, figuratively speaking, to translate the arrows of Russian cinema, reorient, reformat it in the spirit of patriotism. I am sure that in the future, with the support of our leadership, many new patriotic films will be released."

Source: Leonid Kiskarkin, "Небо: военная драма о современном Маресьеве (Sky: a military drama about modern Maresyev)." *Vokrug TV* (popular Russian media site), 17 November 2021. <https://www.vokrug.tv/article/show/16370996521/>

The film describes the feat of Russian pilots, whose plane was shot down by the Turks on the border with Syria. ...On November 24, 2015, a Russian Su-24M bomber with tail number 83 took off from the Khmeimim military base to carry out a combat mission: launching a missile strike against terrorists. Near the Syrian-Turkish border in the Yayladagi region of Hatay province, a Turkish fighter jet shot down a plane of the Russian military space forces. The crew of two was ejected from the burning bomber. One of the pilots was shot in the air by opponents of the Assad regime, another was able to land safely in an area controlled by terrorists and was rescued during a special operation by the Russian military. This story formed the basis of the military drama "Sky," filmed with the support of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation....

...The main villain in the film is an invisible puppeteer from the United States who controls the actions of terrorists...

...The film culminates in the same ill-fated flight during which our bomber fell victim to a dastardly Turkish Air Force strike.... All this is filmed so spectacularly that even the last skeptic will stir up something like patriotism in his soul.

A Turkish Perspective on the Geopolitics of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

While critical reporting of the conflict in Ukraine is updated hourly, the accompanying passage from independent Turkish-language news and analysis site *Perspektif* takes a step back and puts the crisis into the greater context of global geopolitics and great power competition, including analysis of the possible long-term repercussions of the crisis.

The authors highlight the timing of the crisis, which is significant in two ways. First, the crisis erupted in the immediate aftermath of several developments that they claim had already “rattled” the Euro-Atlantic security community. In particular, the “defense pact between the U.S.-U.K.-Australia (AUKUS),” which they note reflects the “U.S.’s focus on prioritizing the Far East in recent years”; and “the trauma created by the withdrawal from Afghanistan.” They suggest the crisis erupted at a time when Euro-Atlantic relations were not at their peak. Timing is also important because the crisis is taking place when both the European Union (EU) and NATO are forming their future strategies. As the authors point out, the EU is in the process of finalizing its five-year Strategic Compass document, while NATO is preparing to ratify its new Strategic Concept for the next 10 years at the 2022 Madrid Summit. The authors note

that the crisis will “leave deep marks” in these documents, which will inform these two organizations’ future strategies.

The authors also point out that NATO will likely come to the aid of Ukraine, even militarily; while also warning that Ukraine contains certain unique “sensitivities” and should not be the stage for the next proxy war among great powers. Here they are likely alluding to the fact that Russia views eastern Ukraine as an extension of itself, making this an existential issue for Russia unlike the southern Caucasus or Syria. Finally, they point out that European countries have so far shown solidarity against Russia; however, they have differing levels of threat perceptions from Russia. In particular, “the Germany-France-Italy-Spain quad” does not perceive Russia as high a threat compared to East/Southeast Europe and the Baltic countries, which does not bode well for a long-term European unified front against Russia.

“The U.S. focus on prioritizing the Far East-- particularly the defense pact between the U.S.-U.K.-Australia (AUKUS) coupled with the trauma created by the withdrawal from Afghanistan-- have rattled the Euro-Atlantic security community. The Russia-Ukraine crisis erupted right in the aftermath of these developments...”

Source: Mithat Çelikpala and Fatih Ceylan, “Dinyeper’de Kabaran Sular Ukrayna ve Rusya’yı Nereye Sürükler? (Where will the Rising Waters in the Dnieper [River] Lead Ukraine and Russia?),” *Perspektif Online* (independent Turkish-language news and analysis site), 10 December 2021. <https://www.perspektif.online/dinyeperde-kabaran-sular-ukrayna-ve-rusyayi-nereye-surukler/>

The Ukraine crisis, re-ignited as of November 2021, is taking place within the big picture in ways that can be summarized below:

1. *In light of the U.S.’s recently adopted global strategy; the U.S. is in an open wrist fight with China in the Far East. Throughout 2021, the U.S. did not refrain from maintaining a military presence in the Taiwan Strait and the South/East China Seas to deter China; even though Biden had expressed that they do not intend to start a “Cold War” with China. The contention between the U.S.-China is among the top challenges on the international agenda.*

2. *The competition between these two countries is starting to expand into a greater geographic area, from the Middle East to the Mediterranean, from the Balkans to East/Southeast Europe, to include the greater Black Sea basin, within the framework of China’s BRI project.*

3. *Due to the Ukraine crisis, relations between the U.S./West/NATO and Russia have entered a period of spiraling tension. The situation has triggered an increased U.S. military build-up in the region and created circumstances that directly impact Black Sea security. Tension in the region will ebb and flow until a sustainable middle ground (modus vivendi) regarding Ukraine can be achieved within the strategic contention between great powers.*

4. *The U.S. focus on prioritizing the Far East-- particularly the defense pact between the U.S.-U.K.-Australia (AUKUS) coupled with the trauma created by the withdrawal from Afghanistan-- have rattled the Euro-Atlantic security community. The Russia-Ukraine crisis erupted right in the aftermath of these developments and resulted in both sides pulling their swords while also trying to establish dialogue.*

5. *Ukraine is not a member of NATO; it is a partner. Therefore, when Ukraine is attacked, NATO’s article 5 does not apply. On the other hand, it can be predicted that, in such a scenario, NATO and its members will provide all kinds of support, including military support, to Ukraine. However, it should be remembered that Ukraine has sensitivities that make it impossible for it to be the stage of a proxy war.*

6. *In the face of the Ukraine crisis, European countries have so far shown solidarity; but this does not mean that there is total agreement among them regarding the threat they perceive from Russia. In this context, for example, the Germany-France-Italy-Spain quad’s threat perception from Russia is different than that of East/Southeast Europe-Baltic countries. This is the main obstacle to [European countries] having a united stance.*

7. *The Ukraine crisis, which has been ignited in two separate time periods within the year, has erupted at a critical time. The European Union is at the late stages of preparing its five-year Strategic Compass document. NATO’s Strategic Concept for the next 10 years will be accepted at the 2022 Madrid Summit. If the crisis with Russia deepens at a time when these two important documents are being prepared, there is no doubt that its repercussions will leave deep marks in their future strategies.*

8. *In reality, Russia has lost Western Ukraine, but directly/indirectly gained control of the Crimea peninsula and the Donbass region. It will continue its efforts to legitimize the control it has established in these regions. It would be realistic to say the problems related to each of these areas are “frozen” and call them “hot disputes” which are difficult to solve; and to establish positions based on this view. However, this does not mean the recognition of illegitimate/illegal Russian domination in these areas. We are looking at a long-term challenge and diplomatically exhausting marathon in the region and beyond. The shadow of the geopolitical/geostrategic competition that impacts the entire world and that has become inflamed this year is poised to create new challenges and disputes from Ukraine to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean via the Aegean.*

Iran-Pakistan Bolstering Naval Cooperation

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

On 5 December 2021, three Pakistani ships made a port call in Bandar Abbas, Iran’s largest Persian Gulf port and the site of the headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), the regular military’s corollary to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Navy (IRGC-N). The excerpted article from the Young Journalists Club, an affiliate of the state’s official Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting group, covers the three-day visit and the ceremony held upon the arrival of the three Pakistani cruisers, the second such port call in eight months. That the IRIN rather than IRGC-N has taken the lead on the Pakistan visit does not diminish its importance. Traditionally, the IRGC-N maintains priority of operations in the Persian Gulf where much of Iran’s oil and gas infrastructure lies. The IRGC-N and IRIN operate alongside each other in the Strait of Hormuz, while the IRIN has taken the lead on operations in the Gulf of Oman and northern Indian Ocean. As such, much of the interaction between the navies of the two countries would involve the IRIN.

The rhetoric surrounding the visit suggests solidarity between Pakistan and Iran with regard to the line that their navies have a greater

right to operate in littoral international waters than outside powers and particularly the U.S. Navy. As China has increased its military cooperation with Pakistan and announced a long-term economic program with Iran, it also suggests a growing anti-American alliance that plays into China’s geopolitical vision.

The visit is especially important now as it suggests a commitment to maintain strong Iran-Pakistan military ties despite a past diplomatic and military proxy war between Pakistan and Iran with regard to Afghanistan. Unsaid in the article, however, is whether Iran is willing to sacrifice its traditionally good relationship with the Indian Navy in pursuit of stronger ties with Pakistan. If so, this would suggest a greater regional alignment is underway that coincides with the establishment of the United States, India, Australia, Japan “Quad.”

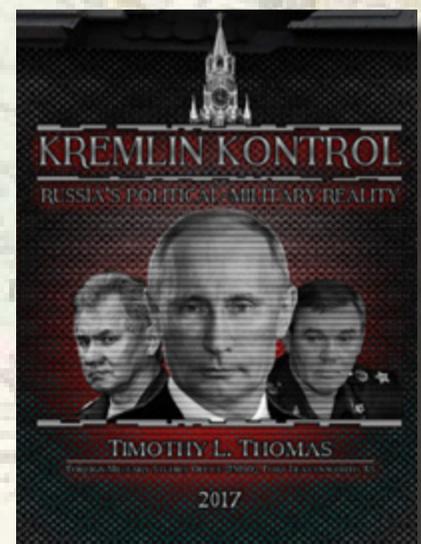
“The combat group... promotes maritime, military, and defense ties.”

Source: “Navgoruh-e Razmi Niruye Daryayi Artesh-e Pakistan Varud Bandar Abbas Shod (Pakistani Naval Combat Fleet Arrived in Bandar Abbas),” 5 December 2021. <https://www.yjc.news/fa/news/7988186>

...This morning, commanders of the first region of the [regular] Iranian Navy and Pakistani Army and Defense Attache Brigadier-General Imran Kashif welcomed the Pakistani Navy’s combat group to Bandar Abbas, where they berthed at the docks of Islamic Republic of Iran Navy’s first naval zone. The group consists of three cruisers and is due to be in Bandar Abbas for three days.... The presence of Pakistan’s combat group in the Islamic Republic of Iran is aimed to enable bilateral meetings between naval commanders and also to promote maritime, military and defense ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan’s ambassador to Iran was also present at a welcoming ceremony for the Pakistani naval ships. Captain Qadir Vazefah, deputy commander of the first Naval Zone at Bandar Abbas, said such naval interactions definitely show that regional states are well-positioned to manage regional security, especially among friendly and brotherly Muslim countries. He continued, “There is no need for [military] units from outside the region in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf, or the Gulf of Oman.” He added, “These port calls will further deepen these relationships.”

KREMLIN KONTROL RUSSIA’S POLITICAL MILITARY REALITY by Timothy L. Thomas

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.



Iran Agrees To Gas Swap with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan



Workers construct a pipeline in Iran near Azerbaijan.

Source: Fars News Agency https://cdn.yjc.news/files/fa/news/1400/9/10/15218933_862.jpg Attribution:

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has long had strained relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. On 28 November 2021, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi signed a tripartite gas swap agreement with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev and Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov. The excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, an outlet affiliated with the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization in turn supervised by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, details the background to the deal, the problems Iran has faced with its neighbors to the north, and the benefits Iran expects from the deal.

Even though Turkmenistan is a Sunni country, Iran historically had regarded it as a useful trading partner to make up for gas shortfalls. However, around 2007, Turkmenistan repeatedly moved to adjust the price of gas supplied to Iran, its long-term contract notwithstanding. While this created some tension, Iranian officials nonetheless continued their bilateral trade until Turkmenistan cut it off due to Iran's accrued debts.

Iranian relations with Azerbaijan are more complex. Two-thirds of the world's Azeris live in Iran while barely one-third live in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is also largely Shi'ite, but this ethnic and sectarian overlap has only heightened suspicion. Azerbaijan is a largely secular state and Iran is an Islamic Republic and a Shi'ite-led theocracy. Tehran also resented Baku's extensive relationship with Israel and suspected that Israeli agents used Azerbaijan as a launch point for operations against Iran's nuclear program. Tension flared in October 2021 when Iran held war games along its frontier with Azerbaijan, a move that Baku saw as an implicit threat.

Concerns aside, the recent agreement, which took effect on 22 December 2021, outlines a gas swap in which Iran would receive gas from Turkmenistan and supply an equivalent amount to the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan, a territory bordering Iran but separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenia. The Iranians expect 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas to be transported annually. Aliyev signaled that the deal could enable a sharp turn in the trajectory of relations. "From now on, Iranian-Azerbaijani relations will develop in all areas," he said. He also celebrated the fact that Azerbaijan was peeling Iran away from Armenia.

“Deficits and pressure drops caused early gas outages.”

The Raisi government hopes that the gas swap will help alleviate energy problems in northern Iran in time for winter. The excerpted article suggests that low pressure and inadequate gas contributed to energy shortages. Unmentioned in the article is that, in 2008, gas shortages combined with impassable roads due to heavy snows led to unrest in several northern provinces that took the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to quell.

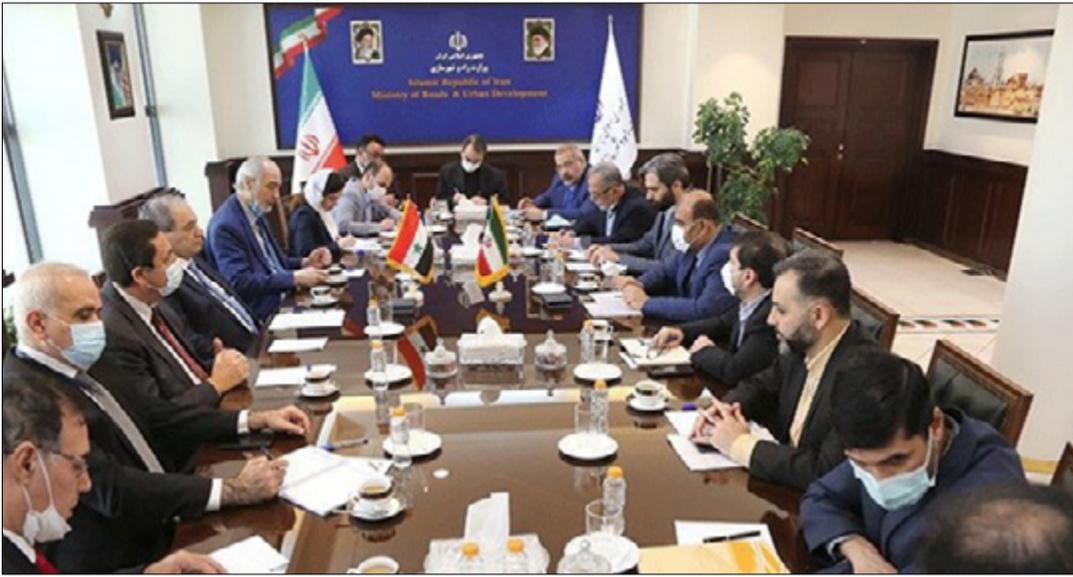
Source: "Qarardad-e Swap-e Gazi Seh Janehbeh (Tripartite Gas Swap Contract)," *Mehr News Agency* (affiliated with the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization supervised by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei), 30 November 2021. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5363718/>

...Last night, news was published that contract for gas swap with a capacity of 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan through Iran had been concluded. This important agreement was announced at a time when gas imports from Turkmenistan had long been suspended because of financial disputes and with Azerbaijan because of political disputes. In this regard, last night, Minister of Oil, Javad Owji, said, "Since December 2016, Iran's gas relations with Turkmenistan had been cut off, but with the conclusion of this agreement, a step forward was taken in the energy relations between the two countries...."

The most important aspect of this agreement is the restoration of relations with Turkmenistan. Iran and Turkmenistan gas relationship that began in 1996 with the conclusion of a 25-year contract. Gas imports from Turkmenistan were strongly in Iran's favor due to the low price of that country's gas compared to other countries. Of course, beginning around 14 years ago, Turkmenistan suddenly began to demand price increases against the opposition of Iranian officials. However, relations between Iran and Turkmenistan continued to be good until 2013, but in 2016, Turkmenistan cut off gas exports to Iran due to accumulated debts....

The most important advantage of the swap can be considered the proof of security and the country's ability to transfer energy between two different countries. This advantage becomes even more important in relation to the relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, which have been embroiled in political disputes in recent months. It should be emphasized that Iranian gas delivered to Azerbaijan is located in the small and strategic region of Nakhchivan....

The final advantage of this contract is to solve through the right of transfer the problem of gas deficits and pressure drops in the northern provinces of Iran. In recent years, such deficits and pressure drops caused early gas outages in industries and problems in domestic consumption. In this regard, the head of the National Iranian Gas Company stated, "In addition to economic importance, this contract will help the stability of the gas network in the north and northeast of Iran."



Syrian and Iranian officials meet in Tehran, December 2021.

Source: Fars News Agency, https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1400/09/17/14000917000452_Test_PhotoN.jpg

Source: “Takid bar Tawse’ah ravabet-e rahbardi Iran va Suriyeh dar Didr Velayati ba Faisal Mekdad (Faisal Mekdad Meeting with Velayati Emphasized Development of Strategic Relations between Iran and Syria),” 8 December 2021. <https://www.ettelaat.com/?p=595024>

The Advisor to the Supreme Leader on International Affairs [Ali Akbar Velayati] met with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad to discuss bilateral relations and international and regional issues. In addition to Ali Akbar Velayati, [Syrian] Deputy Foreign Minister Bashir Jaafari and others from his country attended the meeting which emphasized the strategic relation between the two countries. Velayati stressed the need for a special focus in order to promote and expand Iran-Syria ties, and said, “The path of resistance and confrontation with the enemies in Syria continues. The unity of the member states of the Resistance Front has led in recent years [to success] in this very sensitive region that has been coveted by the United States and Britain in the past, and shows it is possible to take effective, successful, and unprecedented measures against the continued domination of foreigners. He added, “The useful and fortuitous results of the formation of the resistance have given hope to the Islamic world that by resistance, the aggressor superpowers can be humiliated.

Velayati reminded, “What the Syrian president [Bashar al-Assad] has done with the support of Iran, Russia, Lebanese Hezbollah and most importantly the brave Syrian nation in recent years against the cowardly invasion of Syria by some 80 countries centered upon the United States, the Zionists and some reactionary countries in the region, is unique. Undoubtedly, the Resistance Front will achieve the final victory, God willing.

Iran and Syria Seek To Jumpstart Economic Ties

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

The relationship between Iran and Syria runs deep. Syria was the only Arab state to support Iran during the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War. There is also sectarian solidarity between Syria’s ruling Assad family and Shi’ite Iran. Syria’s minority Alawi sect, to which the Assads belong, is an offshoot of Shi’ism. The excerpted article from Iran’s newspaper of record *Ettelaat*, suggests that Iranian officials, if not their Syrian counterparts as well, expect to enhance their relationship in coming years. The article quotes Ali Akbar Velayati, Iran’s foreign minister between 1981 and 1997, who has since served as the principle foreign policy advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei with regard to his meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad. Velayati is perhaps Iran’s second-most important foreign relations figure after Khamenei himself, likely wielding greater influence than current Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Velayati highlighted joint Iran-Hezbollah-Russia assistance to Syria, and condemned the United States and other countries that have supported Syrian rebels. The Velayati meeting was just one of many that Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad had in Tehran. He also met with Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qassemi. Qassemi complained that the promise of fruitful bilateral economic cooperation was still unfulfilled and called on the Syrians to implement previous memorandums of understanding. Both Velayati and Qassemi also said that both countries need to do more to expand private sector cooperation. Mekdad, for his part, promised that Syria would welcome Iranian assistance in Syria’s reconstruction.

“By [our] resistance, the aggressor superpowers can be humiliated.”

Given the dominance of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-affiliated companies in Iran’s construction industries, any Iranian involvement in Syria’s reconstruction would likely further Tehran’s influence rather than reduce it. This will complicate debates in the West with regard to reconstruction as many countries will be hesitant or unable to contribute to international efforts to help Syria recover if such funds go to sanctioned entities.

COVID-19 Diverting Resources from Terrorism Fight in the Sahel

By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

The COVID-19 pandemic may have weakened security in the Sahel, according to the excerpted article from German international media outlet *Deutsche Welle*. With so many resources devoted by Sahelian nations to combating the pandemic, fewer resources have been available to combat terrorist groups. Those resources are more than just financial; they include soldiers who regional governments have pressed into public health services. It is uncertain if the terrorist groups are aware of, or have been able to take advantage of the current crisis but, according to the article, armed terrorist attacks have increased in Mali and Burkina Faso.

The situation has become so bad in Mali that there is concern the government might fall to Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qaeda-linked militant group whose territory has been steadily expanding. In Burkina Faso, Nadiagou became the first village in the country to fall to armed Islamists. A man who escaped the attack said the two police officers guarding the village fled because they could not do anything, a sentiment echoed on a larger scale by a retired Senegalese general who explained that the limited capacities of national militaries in the region are allowing terrorist groups to claim additional territory. Additional factors, such as the flow of weapons



Diversion of funds to fight COVID-19 has left the Burkinabe military with fewer resources to combat terrorism.

Source: Staff Sgt. Candace Mundt/AFRICOM/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usarmyafrika/26442708444/in/photolist-GhDMYh-GL3WpA-GhDMX5-GL3WoU-GnXmmQ-GnXmkh-GL3WpW-GL3WqC-GnXmn1-GnXmmu-GL3Wpq-23AcJG-GhDMXA-8D3wYX-CP9EA4-GG6bze-8D3wVx-8D3wWx-CP9bDc-8D3wX4-26817Lk-CP9bCv-88YSaH-23jU-wH1-CP9bCa-CP9bCF-88YRWR-7PymMU-8DEsaq-7PykYy-8uNPNs-hS2vPx-8uKMLK-7PygWA-7PunfD-7Puid2-7Pyg4f-8938Rj-7Pyhrd-hS2vGD-8937H1-hS2vLB-hS2vBi-8uNPLJ-88YTs6-hS2vGZ-89368d-8DEqJQ-8uKLGt-Svwee6>
Attribution: CC BY 2.0

from Libya and interethnic tensions, also fuel the growth of terrorist groups. African heads of state, at the recent Dakar Forum for Peace and Security, discussed the need for foreign aid to fight COVID in the Sahel and free funds to build up militaries to combat the growing presence of Islamist terrorist groups.

“The Sahel is reeling under escalating Islamist attacks. Is Africa's fight against the coronavirus eating up resources urgently needed to combat insurgency?”

Source: Philipp Sandner, “Has the COVID pandemic amplified insecurity in the Sahel?” *Deutsche Welle* (German international media organization), 8 December 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/has-the-covid-pandemic-amplified-insecurity-in-the-sahel/a-60058754>

The Sahel is reeling under escalating Islamist attacks. Is Africa's fight against the coronavirus eating up resources urgently needed to combat insurgency?

African economies were massively hit by the pandemic, he told DW in Dakar where he was attending the forum, adding that "this economic impact also had consequences on the capacities of African countries to design counter-terrorism strategies.

African heads of state meeting earlier this week at the Dakar Forum for Peace and Security called for easier access to international funding and stronger strategic support to combat Islamist groups.

"They were two [police officers] against many. Even if they had tanks, they couldn't have done anything," he said describing how easy it was for the armed group to capture Nadiagou, the first village in Burkina Faso to fall into the hands of Islamists.



Unlike the Russian mercenaries, Rwandan soldiers, such as the ones depicted here during a training exercise, made significant progress against terrorists in Mozambique.

Source: Sgt. Heather Doppke/SETAF/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usarmyafrica/48640726723/>
Attribution: CC BY 2.0

Mozambique: Foreign Mercenaries Not Enough To Beat Terrorism

By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

Mozambique's northernmost province, Cabo Delgado, has been under attack by Islamist insurgents since 2017. Initially the government declined offers of outside help by other nations, instead depending on its own military, which was poorly equipped and not well trained in counterterrorism or counterinsurgency tactics. As the excerpted article from the South African think tank *Institute for Security Studies* notes, Mozambique turned to Russia for help after two years of disastrous

results. In September 2019, Russian military contractor Wagner Group arrived in Cabo Delgado.

The terms of the agreement with Wagner Group were never made public. However, the Russian mercenaries were only in Cabo Delgado for about two months. Apparently they wanted to bomb various locations where terrorists were purportedly located. This strategy was at odds with what their Mozambican counterparts had planned. Also, during their short time in Mozambique, a number of the Russians were killed, reportedly including some who were beheaded during botched missions. The abrupt departure of Wagner Group personnel has been attributed to their failures and possibly confusion sown by the discord between the Wagner Group and Mozambican military.

Mozambique next turned to the South Africa-based Dyck Advisory Group (DAG). In April 2020 DAG arrived in civilian helicopters converted into gunships. While helpful, it was unable to stem extremist attacks. One year later DAG was gone and replaced by trainers and advisers from a South Africa-Dubai consortium. However, as the article explains, it was not until Mozambique finally agreed to let foreign troops, beginning with a relatively large contingent from Rwanda, assist in the fight, that real progress was made against the insurgents, including dislodging them from their bases. While it is not clear why Wagner Group and DAG were not more effective, it appears that unlike the mercenaries, trained militaries from other nations made swift and significant gains against the Islamists.

“The failed intervention in Mozambique by the Russian private military company, the Wagner Group, took place amid serious disagreements between the company and the Mozambican military.”

Source: Borges Nhamirre, “Will foreign intervention end terrorism in Cabo Delgado?” *Institute for Security Studies* (a South African think tank) 5 November 2021. <https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/will-foreign-intervention-end-terrorism-in-cabo-delgado>

The failed intervention in Mozambique by the Russian private military company, the Wagner Group, took place amid serious disagreements between the company and the Mozambican military.

Faced with the inability of government forces to stop the insurgency, even with private military support, liberation struggle veterans in Maconde-dominant districts of Cabo Delgado formed local militias to fight the insurgents. The contribution of the militias has not yet been studied in depth, but it seems that they were useful in blocking the insurgents' advance towards districts such as Mueda and Muidumbe.

Rwanda's quick achievements were due to better combat experience, but also better equipment, which allowed them great superiority over the insurgents. While the insurgents' bases had already been identified by the Mozambican military, they did not have the capability to dislodge the insurgents. The attempts that had been carried out in the past had resulted in failures and in some cases, tragedies.

Despite progress in combating violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, there is still a long way to go. After more than a decade of the radicalisation of local populations and a multi-year armed insurgency, three months of foreign intervention is just the start of the process towards building peace and stability in Cabo Delgado.

East African Special Forces Commit to Cross-Border Counter-Terrorism Operations

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 1 December, the Rwanda-based website *Taarifa Rwanda* reported on Uganda and Congo's joint special forces operations against Allied Defense Forces (ADF) militants in Congo. ADF is loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The article noted that Uganda and Congo believe they are preempting the siege of towns in Ituri and North Kivu, Congo by the militants. It was also noted that the Congolese National Assembly unanimously voted to support joint special forces operations and that there would be a long and protracted hunt by the two countries' special forces in the jungle to root out the militants.

In August, Rwanda itself deployed soldiers to Mozambique to combat ISIS-loyal militants in that country. This was the first-ever foreign military excursion for Rwanda to coastal East Africa. More than one month later, according to the excerpted 25 September article in Kenya-based *The East African*, Rwandan president Paul Kagame pledged to continue counterterrorism operations in Mozambique. The article noted that Kagame traveled to the epicenter of the insurgency in Cabo Delgado province to address the joint forces of the Mozambique Armed Defence

“In order to allow the state of siege to quickly restore peace in Ituri and North Kivu, the deputies supported during the debate the pooling of the Ugandan and DRC armed forces to hunt down the ADF and other negative forces.”



Rwandan Defense Force combat lifesaver training

Source: US Army Africa from Vicenza, Italy
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rwandan_Defense_Force_combat_lifesaver_training,_March_2011_-_Flickr_-_US_Army_Africa.jpg
Attribution: CC x 2.0

Force and Rwanda Defence Force, stating that Rwandan troops would not leave Mozambique until the security situation was stable.

According to the *The East African*, Rwanda's contingent in Mozambique includes 1,000 soldiers, who Mozambican president Filipe Nyusi regards as heroes. Both Nyusi and Kagame justified the Rwandan troop deployment as necessary to fight the ADF and other ISIS-loyal militants, who Kagame described as a regional threat. Kagame, for example, noted that the militants included Kenyans, Tanzanians, Congolese, Somalis, and Rwandans. The two articles demonstrate how East African states are increasingly viewing counterterrorism through a regional lens and how cross-border counterterrorism operations, such as Uganda in Congo or Rwanda in Mozambique, will likely become more common in the region.

Source: “Uganda-DRC Special Forces Search Bombed ADF Areas,” *taarifa.rw* (Rwandan based news website), 1 December 2021. <https://taarifa.rw/uganda-drc-special-forces-search-bombed-adf-areas/>

Members of the Congolese national assembly unanimously voted to support joint Ugandan and DRC operations to be more effective in tracking down the ADF, because, according to them, “before the state of siege is equal to during the state of siege.” In order to quickly restore peace in Ituri and North Kivu, the deputies supported during the debate the pooling of the Ugandan and DRC armed forces to hunt down the ADF and other negative forces.

Source: “Kagame says troops will stay put in Cabo Delgado to ensure stability, *theeastafrican.co.ke* (Kenya based publication covering regional developments), 25 September 2021. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kagame-says-troops-will-stay-put-in-cabo-delgado-3562164>

President Paul Kagame has praised the Rwandan troops deployed to fight insurgents in Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique for their good work fighting insurgents. While addressing the joint force of Mozambican Armed Defence and Rwanda Defence Force on Friday at Cabo Delgado, he also said the soldiers will stay put to stabilize and facilitate the return of displaced civilians to their homes. He was accompanied by his Mozambican counterpart Filipe Nyusi.

The Rwandan contingent is 1,000-soldier strong, made up of the army and the police who recently launched offensives against the insurgents in Cabo Delgado province. Botswana later sent a contingent of 296 and South Africa deployed 1,500 soldiers. President Kagame has defended the deployment, and said his country is footing the deployment bill for now, and the mission will stay on to train the Mozambican army, pointing out that the nature of the threat was regional given that the insurgents not only included Mozambicans, but also Tanzanians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Somalis, Yemenis, Congolese and Rwandan fighters.

Indonesia Casts Wide Net in Terrorism Arrests



Densus 88 element raid.

Source: multimedianeews.polri.go.id https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Densus_88_element_raid.jpg Attribution: CC x 2.0

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Indonesia's special counterterrorism detachment, Densus 88, conducted a series of arrests in late November targeting members of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). According to the excerpted article from Indonesian site *tribunnews.com*, which focused on domestic affairs, the scope of the arrests was unprecedented. The article notes the arrests

“Jamaah Islamiyah is estimated to have 6,000 to 7,000 members and sympathizers spread throughout Indonesia in its various branches and is thought to have infiltrated various government and civic institutions.”

extended not only to JI itself, but also to the Indonesian Ulema [Islamic Scholars] Council (MUI).

According to the article, JI has up to 7,000 members, some of whom have infiltrated government agencies and civic organizations. The justification for arresting MUI members, therefore, is not that MUI itself supports JI, but that JI has infiltrated MUI. The solution to JI's infiltration of MUI, according to Indonesian officials cited, is for MUI to conduct more robust background checks of members it recruits.

Although the recent arrests by Densus 88 of JI members has affected MUI, the latter's scholars have shown approval for Densus 88. The article reports that MUI announced that it supports the government's efforts to root out terrorism and maintain the security and territorial integrity of Indonesia. By working with the MUI, Indonesian authorities have been able to arrest JI and MUI members suspected of involvement in terrorism without alienating the MUI more broadly. Indonesian-language *kompas.com* also reported on 13 December that Densus 88 finally arrested one of the JI-affiliated suspects in the March 2021 bombing of a church in Makassar.

Source: “Forum Santri Dukung Densus 88 Polri Tangkap Terduga Pelaku Teroris (Santri Forum Supports Detachment 88 Police Arrest Suspected Terrorist), *tribunnews.com* (Indonesian public affairs focused media outlet), 25 November 2021. <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2021/11/25/forum-santri-dukung-densus-88-polri-tangkap-terduga-pelaku-teroris>

Densus 88 Anti-terror Police have again arrested suspected terrorists who are affiliated with Jamaah Islamiyah, one of whom is an active member of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). Jamaah Islamiyah is estimated to have 6,000 to 7,000 members and sympathizers spread throughout Indonesia in its various branches and is thought to have infiltrated various government and civic institutions.

The head of FOKSI emphasized that Jamaah Islamiyah should not only be viewed from the angle of terror attacks because its movement has entered into a socio-religious institutions in the community. Regarding the arrest of MUI individuals who are suspected of being linked to terrorism, he argues that terrorist network cells have infiltrated various circles and groups. He hoped that MUI would not be permissive to its administrators who support ideas of radicalism and terrorism. FOKSI conveyed that it supports the government's efforts in eradicating terrorism in order to maintain the integrity of the country because the Indonesian people must receive safety and freedom from radicalism and terrorism.

Source: “Densus 88 Tangkap Buron Teroris, Diduga Terkait Bom Gereja Katedral Makassar (Detachment 88 Arrests Fugitive Terrorist, Allegedly Related to Makassar Cathedral Church Bombing), *kompas.com* (Indonesian language news outlet), 13 December 2021. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/12/13/22194981/densus-88-tangkap-buron-teroris-diduga-terkait-bom-gereja-katedral-makassar>

The Special Detachment (Densus) 88 Anti-terror Police arrested a suspected terrorist in South Sulawesi. The Head of Banops Densus 88 Anti-terror Police confirmed the information. He said the arrest was made last week. According to him, the perpetrator was included on the terrorist wanted list (DPO) and suspected of being linked to the bombing at the Makassar Cathedral Church in South Sulawesi on March 28, 2021.

ISIS Ramps Up Attacks in Iraq's Disputed Territories



Disputed areas in Iraq.

Source: Rafy, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Disputed_areas_in_Iraq.svg

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By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Recent ISIS attacks in northern Iraq's "disputed territories" have raised concerns that the group is ramping up disruptive activities and seeking to re-emerge as a key player in the country. The "disputed territories" lie at the edge of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and control over them is contested by the Erbil-based KRG and the Baghdad-based central government. When it comes to these territories, the absence of effective security coordination between the two parties has created a security vacuum that ISIS fighters are exploiting, according to several media reports.

The attacks, which have mostly targeted Kurdish villages and Peshmerga checkpoints, have prompted high-level meetings and promises of better coordination between the KRG and the central government. Kurdish leaders have criticized central government forces for failing to provide them with proper support and equipment, most notably surveillance drones, as noted in the accompanying excerpt from the Saudi news website *Independent Arabia*. A second article from *Independent Arabia* details how the attacks have exposed fissures between the KRG's two main political factions, one based in Erbil and the other in Sulaymaniyah. Further entrenching the security vacuum, as explained in the accompanying excerpt from the pan-Arab daily *al-Quds*, is the likelihood of Shiite factions linked to Iran obstructing central government-KRG coordination, for reasons of their own. Meanwhile, a Peshmerga official, cited in the excerpted article from the Kurdish media outlet *Rudaw*, claimed that ISIS is receiving unspecified "financial and logistical support from abroad" and that 200 militants had recently entered Iraq from Syria to carry out attacks on the group's behalf.

These events are unfolding as Iraq's political factions continue to squabble over the results of the recent, low-turnout parliamentary election and as the US-led anti-ISIS coalition completed its transition from a combat to an advisory role. The uptick in ISIS activities also coincides with the four-year anniversary of what may prove to be a premature declaration of victory over ISIS in Iraq, made by then-president Haidar al-Abadi in December 2017.

“... there is a 100% likelihood that ISIS will launch more attacks on the Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army in the coming period...”

Source:

(ISIS Increases Attacks Against Kurds),” *Independent Arabia* (Saudi news website), 2 December 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/mr4385mn>

داعش يصعد هجماته ضد الأكراد

Peshmerga Minister Shorsh Ismail...criticized the performance of the federal army, saying that “its very slowness in taking measures gave ISIS an opportunity to reorganize itself. The army is unable to fill this vacuum, and the Peshmerga alone is unable to uproot ISIS, as it lacks aerial surveillance capabilities to monitor the group’s movements and the federal state will not provide us with the drones that we have been requesting for a long time, nor will the United States due to the federal government’s rejection.”

Source:

(Kurdish Divisions on Peshmerga Losses from ISIS Attacks),” *Independent Arabia* (Saudi news website), 7 December 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/3awp35wd>

انقسام كردي حول أسباب خسائر البيشمركة أمام هجمات "داعش"

Representatives and officials from the two parties that govern the semi-autonomous region, the “Democratic” party led by Massoud Barzani and the “Patriotic Union” led by the late President Jalal Talabani, disagreed on the nature of the problem in military coordination and different decisions, due to conflicting political orientations. The commander of the Patriotic Union Party organizations in the Qarachogh area of Makhmour district accused Barzani’s party of openly “cooperating with ISIS” by “publicly providing supplies to its gunmen,” as he put it, noting that “there are federal forces in Qarachogh Mountain and about a brigade of the Peshmerga led by Sirwan Barzani at the top of the mountain. This prevents any other force from coming to the area. ISIS fighters can be seen comfortably roaming around, and they go to the surrounding

Continued: ISIS Ramps Up Attacks in Iraq's Disputed Territories

Continued Source:

انقسام كردي حول أسباب خسائر البيشمركة أمام هجمات "داعش"

(Kurdish Divisions on Peshmerga Losses from ISIS Attacks)," *Independent Arabia* (Saudi news website), 7 December 2021.
<https://tinyurl.com/3awp35wd>

villages, despite the presence of 35 mounds held by the brigade there. When the attack occurred, they did not respond, or provide assistance, except for the regiment consisting of locals"... For years, Washington has been leading mediation efforts to unify the divided Peshmerga forces between the two parties, who had concluded an agreement in 2006 to unify the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah administrations, after they fought a civil war, and are still facing difficulties in implementing the terms of the agreement...

According to Kurdish leaders, ISIS militants have recently begun to change their fighting methods and expanded the scope and type of their attacks, moving beyond the stage of just planting explosive devices, killing individuals and displacing others, and now engaging in military operations aimed at asserting their presence, following the recent arrival of a group of fighters coming from Syria, calling themselves "Jund Allah," which swore allegiance to ISIS.

Source:

معلومات استخبارية: 200 مسلح لداعش تسللوا إلى الأراضي العراقية قادمين من سوريا

(Intelligence: 200 ISIS militants infiltrated Iraqi territory from Syria)," Rudaw (Kurdish media outlet), 30 November 2021.
<https://www.rudaw.net/arabic/kurdistan/301120211>

The official of the Qarah Tapah - Hamrin II axis of the Peshmerga forces, Major General Mardan Jawshin, announced that they had received intelligence information that a force calling itself "Guardians of Religion," consisting of 200 militants, "has pledged allegiance to ISIS and infiltrated into Iraqi territory coming from Syria"... regarding the recent increase in ISIS activities... he said that that ISIS is reorganizing its ranks and did not hide his belief that the organization "receives financial and logistical support from abroad," referring to information that says that "the organization pays salaries to its militants and also pays salaries to the families of its dead..." Major General Jawshin pointed to the security vacuum between the Iraqi army and the Kurdistan Peshmerga forces as "the reason for the increase in ISIS attacks"... He noted that the ISIS threat had reached a very high level, especially after the arrival of the aforementioned 200 militants from Syria, and said that there is a 100% likelihood that ISIS will launch more attacks on the Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army in the coming period.

Source:

تعاون بغداد وأربيل ضد «داعش» بين الضرورة وفقدان الثقة

(Baghdad-Erbil Cooperation Against ISIS Between Cooperation and Loss of Trust)," *al-Quds* (pan-Arab daily), 11 December 2021.
<https://tinyurl.com/2p8s5hay>

On the fourth anniversary of Baghdad's declaration of the elimination of ISIS in 2017, Iraqis are following with concern the resurgence of attacks in many Iraqi provinces, despite all the security campaigns to hunt down the group's remnants... observers fear that the state Shiite forces, which thwarted the Baghdad and Erbil agreement on the normalization of the situation in Sinjar, west of Mosul, will obstruct the agreement to deploy the Peshmerga in the disputed areas. This is especially true given that [Prime Minister] al-Kazemi, who was committed to concluding those agreements with the regional government, may not retain his post in the next government.

Therefore, the mutual accusations of exploiting terrorist organizations such as the Turkish Workers' Party and ISIS and supporting their presence on Iraqi soil to achieve local and regional political agendas are not limited to Kurdish parties on the one hand, and the Shiites and Turkmen on the other hand, but rather also extends to leaders of the al-Fateh Alliance, which includes pro-Iranian factions, and which considers that the recent attacks in Kirkuk were intentional and motivated by political agendas aimed at providing justifications for the presence of US forces in Iraq, which are scheduled to depart at the end of this year. They also accuse the Kurdish leadership of fabricating or exploiting ISIS attacks in order to seek to restore the region's control over Kirkuk and the areas disputed between the Baghdad and Erbil governments, after the expulsion of the Peshmerga from those areas in 2017, following the referendum on secession from Iraq.

Ethiopia Acquiring Emirati and Chinese Drones

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 25 November, the largely neutral Arab-language news service *khobar25.com* featured an article focused on the role of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in supplying unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to Ethiopia. According to the article, Ethiopia's interest in UAS from the UAE accelerated after the war began in November 2020 and the Ethiopian army faced greater resistance from the Tigrayan rebels than expected. The article suggests that supplying the Ethiopian army has become more difficult for the UAE since the Tigrayan rebels captured two bases in Aksum and Samara in the northern Tigray region, leaving the military base in Harar, south of Addis Ababa, as another option to supply the Ethiopian army.

However, the article emphasizes that several other countries are providing UAS to Ethiopia in addition to the UAE. For example, the article reports that China's Wing Loong UAS was seen at the Harar military base. Additionally, the *Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation* on 8 October featured an Amharic-language interview of Ethiopian General Yilma Merdassa, who was seated near a model of the Wing Loong. General Merdassa acknowledged that Ethiopia had received the UAS from China. The article also reports that Turkish drones are among



Wing Loong Baiweiflight.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wing_Loong.jpg Attribution: CC x 3.0

the UAE's purchases, UAS are a key part of the Ethiopian government's last ditch efforts to ward off the Tigrayan rebels before they approach the country's capital, Addis Ababa.

“The Ethiopian government has increased a large-scale recruitment drive in the army in the hopes that a string of purchases of an arsenal of drones and other weapons will be productive.”

Source: “اثيريوبيون يثالون ايموكحلل اييركسع امعد مدقي يتارامالايوجلا رسجلال (The UAE air bridge provides military support to the Ethiopian government),” *khobar25.com* (Arabic-language news outlet focusing on current military and technology affairs from a neutral perspective), 25 November 2021. <https://www.khobar25.com>

Satellite images show that the UAE is providing significant support to the Ethiopian army in the fight against the Tigrayan forces. The UAE opened an air bridge to provide military support to the Ethiopian government in its war against forces in the northern Tigray region. Between September and November, there were more than 90 flights between the UAE and Ethiopia, many of which deliberately concealed where they took off and where they landed.

Flight maps and satellite images show aircraft recently arriving from the Sweihan base in Abu Dhabi, UAE, to the Harar Meda base, south of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. The footage shows a Chinese-made Wing Loong drone, the first such aircraft ever to be documented at Ethiopian military bases.

The images also reveal that bases in Samara and Aksum were run over following clashes with Tigray forces, who said this week that they are about 200 kilometers from Addis Ababa. In recent weeks, the Ethiopian government has increased a large-scale recruitment drive in the army in the hopes that a string of purchases of an arsenal of drones and other weapons will be productive. The Ethiopian government signed a military cooperation agreement with Turkey in August, amid reports that it wanted to deploy drones to the war.

Source: “የመሻገሪያ ዘመን - ሜ/ጀነራል ይልማ መርዳሳ የኢ.ፌ.ዲ.ሪ አየር ኃይል ዋና አዛዥ (Maj. Gen. Yilma Merdasa, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force),” *Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation* (an Ethiopian government-owned public service broadcaster), 8 September 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOc1kBbEkvo>

Saudi Arabia's Domestic UAV Program Slow To Get Off the Ground

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Saudi Arabia's domestic UAV program continues to develop at what some consider a snail's pace. While Houthi-led forces in Yemen have relied extensively on domestically assembled drones, using Iranian technology and foreign-sourced components, Saudi forces have yet to employ any of their domestic UAV technology on the Yemeni battlefield. Saudi companies have contracted with Chinese and Turkish UAV manufacturers to assemble CH-4 and Karayel drones in Saudi territory, but there is an inherent expectation of a more robust Saudi domestic UAV industry, given the Houthis' success in employing drones and the importance that Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" development program gives to localizing military industry. According to the director of the Yemeni think tank *Abaad for Studies and Research*, Saudi delays in employing UAVs and its reliance on U.S. weaponry has been a critical element in allowing "Iran's expansion in the region."

The Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) recently announced that it would begin mass production of the "Sky Guard" UAV, a domestically developed platform that was initially scheduled for production in 2018. As noted in the accompanying excerpt from the military news website *Defense News*, Sky Guard is a tactical UAV intended for surveillance and electronic warfare, though it can also carry small munitions. Sky Guard joins another prominent Saudi domestic UAV project, the Saqr platform, which was first announced nearly a decade ago and went into production in 2017. Still, there is no indication that Saqr drones have been employed in Yemen or elsewhere.

“...Saudi Arabia has been very late in using unmanned weapons technologies and has relied on American weapons. The price of this delay has been Iran's expansion in the region...”



Personnel from the 378th Air Expeditionary Wing trained with Royal Saudi Air Force Police Wing members in a joint counter unmanned aerial system exercise Jan. 27, 2021 at Prince Sultan Air Base, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Senior Airman Leala Marquez, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6513425/joint-force-rsaf-perform-counter-uas-exercise>
Attribution: Public Domain

Source: Abdulsalam Mohammed (@salamyemen2), *Twitter*, 1 November 2021. <https://twitter.com/salamyemen2/status/1455138763110330369>

Riyadh intends to develop a homemade drone called Sky Guard. Will its effectiveness be tested in the Yemen war? Or is it too early for it to enter military operations?

Saudi Arabia has been very late in using unmanned weapons technologies and has relied on American weapons. The price of this delay has been Iran's expansion in the region.

Source: "Two Saudi firms to co-produce Sky Guard drone for operational use," *Defense News* (military news website), 20 August 2021. <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2021/08/20/two-saudi-firms-to-co-produce-sky-guard-drone-for-operational-use/>

*The drone was developed in 2015 and displayed in 2017 at Bahrain's BIDECE event and the Emirati conference IDEX, with an original expected date of mass production in 2018, according to Jean-Marc Rickli, head of global and emerging risks at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy... "The payload is light, 50 kilograms; range relatively short, 150 kilometers; and endurance of 8 hours," Rickli told *Defense News*. Sky Guard can also fly at a maximum altitude of 18,000 feet, and be equipped with high-resolution cameras as well as electronic warfare systems. "So this is a tactical UAV mainly used for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. I don't know if it has combat experience such as in Yemen," he said, but if Saudi Arabia wants to export it, proven combat experience would help. Asked whether the system can carry guided munitions, Rickli said: "I don't know specifically about this drone, but a payload of 50 kilograms — it is enough for transporting bombs." "As its description mentions: It was designed to be highly adaptable with several subsystem configurations. Thus one cannot exclude that it can be weaponized."*

Syrian Kurds Balancing Great Powers To Secure Future in Syria

By Ihsan Gündüz
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpts provide perspectives of Syrian Kurdish leaders about their discussions with the United States and Russia regarding their place in the future of Syria. The passages also highlight the circumstances they face on the ground, particularly in light of Turkish threats of another operation and demands by the Syrian regime to relinquish their quest for autonomy. As the final passage summarizes, the Syrian Kurds are “trying to achieve a status for themselves in the future of Syria...by following a remarkable policy of balance between Washington and Moscow.”

The first excerpted article, an interview with Mazlum Kobane, commander-in-chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), featured in security news site *Al-Monitor*, covers a range of issues impacting Syrian Kurdish territory. The first issue is Turkey’s threats to launch another operation into Syria. Kobane states that without consent from Russia or the United States, Turkey is unlikely to carry out such an operation because both countries have given the Kurds assurances. Regardless, he takes Turkish threats seriously and prepares his forces accordingly. Another topic is worsening economic conditions and increasing unemployment in Kurdish-controlled territory. He claims this diminishes the authority of their de facto administration and that ISIS takes advantage of this to regain ground there. Therefore, he says, an effective counterterrorism strategy requires addressing the economic situation of the region. As such, he wants the United States to exempt the Kurdish region from Caesar sanctions to alleviate the declining economy.

With respect to the negotiations with the Syrian regime, Kobane says that no serious negotiations have taken place so far, although they have engaged in some initial talks. Kobane expects that Russia will be more proactive in its negotiations with the Syrian regime and play a determi-

native role. Kobane notes the SDF’s good relations with Russia and ongoing cooperation on the ground within the framework of the Sochi agreement. He expects Russia will play a critical role in Syrian Kurdish negotiations with the Syrian regime. To that end, on 23 November 2021, after receiving an official invitation from Russian officials, a Kurdish delegation met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow. According to the second excerpt, a press release by the Syrian Democratic Council, Russian officials reiterated their support and encouragement for Kurdish dialogue with the Syrian regime and discussed possible political solutions to end the Syrian conflict.

The third article from pro-government Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*, analyzes the aforementioned Kurdish delegation’s visit to Moscow. The article highlights that the statement from Russian officials referenced the territorial integrity of Syria and the protection of the rights of all ethnic and sectarian groups. The article also points out that Lavrov personally welcomed the Kurdish delegation to highlight to the international community Russia’s attempt to broker a solution between the Syrian regime and the Kurds. The author of the article claims this role will likely push the Kurds towards Russia even though Kurdish officials have been trying to strike a balance in their relations with the United States and Russia as they try to maintain their current autonomous status and advance their rights within Syria.

“We have good relations with Russia. For the past two years, we have cooperated on the ground within the framework of the [Sochi] agreement. This problem cannot be solved without Russia.”

—Mazlum Kobane

Source: Amberin Zaman, “Syrian Kurdish commander says Russia opposes further Turkish land grabs” *al-Monitor* (a globally read security news site with regionally based reporting), 09 November 2021.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/syria-kurdish-commander-assured-washington-turkey-wont-invade-again>

Al-Monitor: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is making fresh threats to launch another military operation against the Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria, and daily there is speculation in the media as to where and when yet another Turkish invasion might occur. Do you believe that Erdogan will follow on his threats? He’s certainly always done so in the past.

Mazlum Kobane: Erdogan has always sought the support of international actors before embarking on a military intervention here. He’s made threats and continues to make threats. He insists he will intervene and will continue to insist. In doing so he is looking to prepare the ground for an operation. However, the existing situation in northeast Syria is different now. The balances have shifted. In the past instances, there were no binding agreements between Turkey and the international powers...But now there are two agreements in place... In my view, unless Turkey gets the approval of either Russia or the United States, Erdogan cannot take such a step. And as far as I am aware there is no such approval.

Al-Monitor: Have Russia and the United States provided you with such guarantees?

Mazlum Kobane: Yes. The United States has given us such assurances. They were relayed to us officially. The United States said they were opposed to, and would not accept, any attack by Turkey against us. The US officials we spoke to... informed us that during the last meeting between Erdogan and President Joe Biden [on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Rome] that Erdogan was told that the United States would not accept any attack against us. The Russians also told us that they had not made any deals with Turkey...

...Like I said, a Turkish attack does not seem likely in the current circumstances. Besides, the Russians told us that they had told the Turks that they would not accept an attack against us. However, they are unable to determine what Turkish-backed forces might do. They said they would not accept an attack by them either. But it remains to be seen what will happen in practice, on the ground.

Continued: Syrian Kurds Balancing Great Powers To Secure Future in Syria

Continued Source: Amberin Zaman, “Syrian Kurdish commander says Russia opposes further Turkish land grabs” *al-Monitor* (a globally read security news site with regionally based reporting), 09 November 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/syria-kurdish-commander-assured-washington-turkey-wont-invade-again>

Al-Monitor: *Are you saying they are not standing as firmly against Turkey as the Americans are?*

Mazlum Kobane: *No not at all. This is a very critical point and requires proper clarification. The Russians said there was no question of them allowing Turkey to attack but that Turkish-supported rebel groups might attack us without Turkey’s authorization...*

Al-Monitor: *Economic conditions in Rojava are getting harder by the day. On the one hand, there are the embargos imposed by Turkey and sanctions imposed by the United States on the Assad regime. On the other hand, there is the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most severe droughts in decades and Turkey’s continued suppression of water along with its threats of an attack. Can these factors give the Islamic State a new lease of life?*

Mazlum Kobane: *DAESH [the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State] is active all across Syria. And these unfavorable economic conditions are impacting our struggle against DAESH. Its ability to regain ground is increasingly linked to economic conditions in Syria. There are way too many unemployed people. There is widespread poverty. All such factors diminish the authority of our administration. DAESH takes advantage of this. Therefore, the international coalition forces and all powers fighting against terrorism must take immediate steps to address the economic situation here. Bolstering the economy has become one of the pillars of combatting terrorism. We as the Syrian Democratic Forces say this openly. If we are to fight DAESH effectively we need to prioritize the economy.*

...Our demand is that the whole of North and East Syria be exempted from the United States’ Caesar sanctions...

Mazlum Kobane: *So far nobody has gone to Damascus for any kind of negotiations. And so far there have been no serious negotiations with Damascus. There have been some contacts but none of those meetings evolved into negotiations.*

Al-Monitor: *Why not?*

Mazlum Kobane: *Damascus is not ready for this. However much they claim that there will be no return to the pre-2011 era their mentality remains unchanged. They need to be pressured. Plus, there’s an issue of trust, particularly for Damascus.*

Al-Monitor: *Are they telling you to sever your ties with the United States?*

Mazlum Kobane: *Not exactly. They are telling us, “We do not want a state within a state. We do not want an army within an army.”... Our project is autonomy and we are implementing it at this time. However, they want guarantees from us with regard to the aforementioned concerns. Severing our ties with the Americans is not their precondition...*

Al-Monitor: *Are the Russians sincere in their mediations efforts? Or do they simply want you to capitulate so they can get the lion’s share of the oil pie from the regime as some claim?*

Mazlum Kobane: *We have good relations with Russia. For the past two years, we have cooperated on the ground within the framework of the [Sochi] agreement. This problem cannot be solved without Russia. I believe Russia could be more proactive and apply more pressure on the regime.*

Source: “At an official invitation, “SDC” in Moscow to discuss the Syrian issue and bilateral relations,” *m-syria-d.com*, (Syrian Democratic Council Official website), 23 November 2021. <https://m-syria-d.com/en/?p=3302>

The meeting was positive, as the two sides discussed the Syrian situation in general and methods to find a comprehensive settlement...

The meeting focused on many common points, the most important of which are the Syrian-Syrian Kurdish dialogue and Moscow’s support and encouragement for dialogue between the “SDC” and the authority in Damascus.

The two sides also talked about the need to work seriously for the participation of “SDC” in the political process and to represent it in a balanced manner in the international paths as a main and active party in the Syrian scene.

Source: Sedat Ergin, “Rusya Suriye’de YPG/PYD üzerinden özerkliğe kapıyı aralıyor (Russia opens the door to autonomy in Syria through YPG/PYD,” *Hürriyet* (a pro-government Turkish newspaper), 26 November 2021. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/rusya-suriyede-ypg-pyd-uzerinden-ozerkligi-kapiyi-araliyor-41947615>

As it can be seen, the Syrian Kurds are trying to achieve a status for themselves in the future of Syria, where they aim to have advanced rights, by following a remarkable policy of balance between Washington and Moscow, keeping the doors of negotiations with both sides open.

Central Asian States Take the Initiative in Security Cooperation

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Much of the security cooperation analysis that takes place with Central Asian states often focuses on Russian, Chinese, or U.S. efforts in the region. While important, this particular scope overlooks how Central Asian states have been increasingly carrying out bilateral security cooperation with each other in recent years. The accompanying excerpted articles report on recent security cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and provide insight on how governments in the region are cooperating with each other outside of the influence of other partners.

The article from Central Asia-focused independent news website *Fergana Agency* reports that the presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan recently signed a “Declaration of Allied Relations.” The agreement allows for increased cooperation between the two sides in a number of areas, including defense. Additionally, both governments confirmed they have the same position on “countering challenges to security and stability in the region” in relation to the situation in Afghanistan.

The first article from Uzbek news website *Kun.uz* reports on a recent joint military exercise carried out by Kazakh and Uzbek units. The exer-

cise involved engaging “with an illegally armed group that had broken through the state border” and that Kazakh and Uzbek forces used multiple systems to eliminate the threat. The exercise marks another example of Central Asian forces conducting bilateral exercises annually for the past several years focused on eliminating a terrorist group.

The majority of Russia-led or China-led joint military exercises in the region involve similar scenarios.

The second article from *Kun.uz* reports on a November meeting between the defense ministers of both countries.

The article notes that the ministers “discussed the current state and prospects of bilateral military and military-technical cooperation and looked at strengthening it,” signing an agreement at the end of the meeting, which included “a number of measures for defense cooperation.” While there has been no indication of the bilateral security cooperation between Central Asian governments replacing what takes place with Russia or other partners, it demonstrates growing partnerships where Central Asian states take the initiative.

“Against the backdrop of countering challenges to security and stability in the region, primarily with the situation in neighboring Afghanistan, the two sides confirmed that the positions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan completely coincide on this.”

Source: “Государства-союзники (Government-allies),” *Fergana Agency* (independent news website focusing on Central Asia), 6 December 2021. <https://fergana.agency/articles/124124/>

Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Qasym Jomart-Tokyaev signed a Declaration of Allied Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan on 6 December... Within the framework of the visit, which took place 5-6 December, 22 documents were signed... including a plan of action to bring trade turnover between the two states to \$10 billion in the next five years...

Against the backdrop of countering challenges to security and stability in the region, primarily with the situation in neighboring Afghanistan, the two sides confirmed that the positions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan completely coincide on this...

Among the signed documents are agreements in the customs sphere, in the prevention and elimination of emergency situations, the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes as well as documents on further cooperation in the fields of trade, investment, energy, communications and defense...

Source: “В Термезе завершились совместные узбекско-казахские учения (The joint Uzbek-Kazakh exercise has finished in Termez),” *Kun.uz* (Uzbek news website), 25 November 2021. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/11/25/v-termeze-zavershilis-sovmestnyye-uzbeksko-kazaxskiye-ucheniya>

The soldiers of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan carried out the main stage of the joint exercise “Hamkorlik-2021” in Termez this week...

According to the plan of the exercise, the combined units of the two countries engaged with an illegally armed group that had broken through the state border with the support of fifty vehicles and three hundred service members.

Fighters, attack helicopters, armored vehicles, artillery, motorized rifle units and unmanned aerial systems were used to eliminate the mock enemy group...

GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Continued: Central Asian States Take the Initiative in Security Cooperation



Map of Central Asia.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Central_Asia.png Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

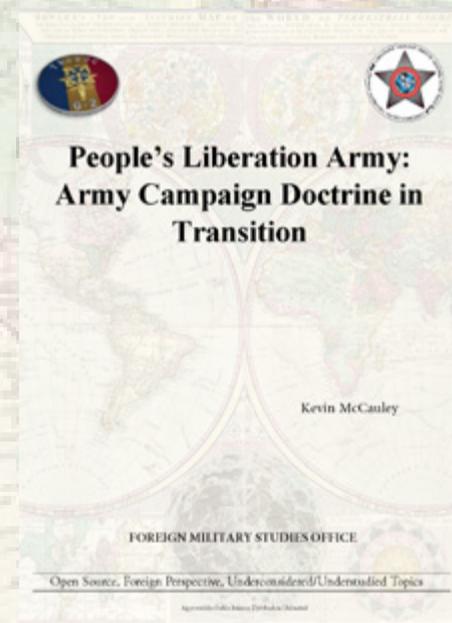
Source: “Главы Минобороны Узбекистана и Казахстана обсудили региональную безопасность (The head of the Ministries of Defense of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan discussed regional security),” *Kun.uz* (Uzbek news website), 23 November 2021. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/11/23/glavy-minoborony-uzbekistana-i-kazaxstana-obsudili-regionalnuyu-bezopasnost>

On 22 November, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Lieutenant General Bakhodir Kurbanov, met with a military delegation led by the Minister of Defense of Kazakhstan, Lieutenant General Murat Bektanov...the two sides discussed the current state and prospects of bilateral military and military-technical cooperation and looked at strengthening it...

Following the meeting, the ministries of defense signed an agreement, which includes a number of measures for defense cooperation...

People’s Liberation Army: Army Campaign Doctrine in Transition Kevin McCauley September 2020

This monograph examines current People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Army campaign doctrine, with a discussion of PLA theorists’ vision of the evolutionary development of warfare to provide context for current doctrine as well as potential future direction. The PLA develops doctrinal joint and service campaign scenarios for possible offensive and defensive operations. PLA campaigns represent the operational level of war between strategic operations and tactical combat. The PLA’s current focus on specific campaigns provides insight into Beijing’s perception of potential conflict scenarios. The campaign scenarios provide commanders and staff data on command and control, coordination, combat actions, support, and other critical campaign elements for specific operational environments. The description of each campaign’s operational environment and combat actions provides valuable support to operational planning and a context for staff and unit training for their specific operational mission. The Army campaigns are executed as components of a joint campaign, or as a primarily independent Army campaign with support from other services.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/351019>

Indian Forces Work on Airlift Capabilities in Ladakh

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Indian defense officials continue to make improvements to roads and other infrastructure in areas near the Indian-Chinese border to facilitate operations in the event of a war with China. The accompanying excerpted articles provide a look at how Indian forces are training for additional scenarios outside of the improvements in the border areas.

The article from independent news magazine *India Today* reports on a recent airlift exercise by the Indian Air Force and Army. The exercise took place to assess India's logistics supply chain as the "Indian armed forces are preparing for another winter of enhanced deployment of over 50,000 troops in Ladakh." According to the article, the exercise involved C-17, IL-76, and An-32 transport aircraft operating out of the country's Western Air Command.

The article from India-based independent English-language news website *The Print* reports on an exercise carried out by the "Shatrueet (airborne) brigade" in early November. The exercise took place in the north of the Union Territory of Ladakh and involved members of the brigade being "inserted to a drop zone at an altitude of more than 14,000 feet." The article notes that the soldiers had been acclimated to the change in elevation in Ladakh prior to the exercise and that the exercise took place in order to "validate rapid response capabilities and seamless integration." This is important because ground travel is



Indian Air Force C-17.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IAF-C-17.jpg> Attribution: Public Domain

relatively slow up to the Tibetan Plateau where the terrain is vulnerable to rock slides and other obstacles. Future flashpoints or confrontations with China may require a rapid response capability that only airlift can provide until follow-on forces arrive.

“The effort was a real-time demonstration of the inherent heavy-lift capability of the Indian Air Force.”

Source: Abhishek Bhalla, "Operation Hercules: Army, IAF prepare for winter deployment amid Ladakh standoff," *India Today* (an independent news magazine), 17 November 2021. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/ladakh-standoff-china-indian-army-air-force-operation-hercules-1877909-2021-11-17>

The Indian Army and Air Force carried out a joint exercise to assess their logistics supply chain. This exercise was held at a time when the Indian armed forces are preparing for another winter of enhanced deployment of over 50,000 troops in Ladakh amid continuing tensions with China...

Temperatures have begun to drop and will fall to minus 30-40 degrees during peak winter. The Indian forces are geared up for enhanced deployment in the harsh winter for a second successive year.

The exercise named 'Operation Hercules' was undertaken by the Indian Air Force and Indian Army on November 15 with transport aircraft of the IAF being pressed into action.

The platforms utilised for the airlift were C-17, IL-76 and An-32 aircraft, which took off from one of the forward bases of Western Air Command...

Source: "Army conducts airborne exercise in eastern Ladakh to check rapid response along LAC," *The Print* (independent English-language news website from India), 1 November 2021. <https://theprint.in/defence/army-conducts-airborne-exercise-in-eastern-ladakh-to-check-rapid-response-along-lac/760296/>

The Indian Army's Shatrueet brigade is conducting an airborne exercise along the northern borders in eastern Ladakh to validate its rapid response capabilities, sources said on Monday...airborne troops of the Army's Shatrueet brigade were inserted to a drop zone at an altitude of more than 14,000 feet as part of the exercise, the sources mentioned.

These pre-acclimated troops along with specialist vehicles and missile detachments were transported through C-130 and AN-32 aircraft from five different mounting bases to validate inter-theatre move, precision stand-off drops, rapid grouping and the capture of designated objectives with speed and surprise, they said.

...The exercise also involved combat free fall jumps and integrated battle drills by airborne forces, mechanised columns and attack helicopters, to validate rapid response capabilities and seamless integration...

Nicaragua's Ortega Consolidating Dictatorship with Russian and Chinese Backing

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Nicaragua held presidential elections in early November under highly repressive conditions, with seven major opposition candidates imprisoned and hundreds of political prisoners. Incumbent President Daniel Ortega ran practically unopposed. Pre-election polls revealed that majorities of Nicaraguans would have voted for an opposition candidate over Ortega if given the chance. Facing international isolation, a significant element of Ortega's survival strategy leans on extra-hemispheric actors, including Russia, for support. Spanish-language digital military journal *Diálogo* relays that Nicaragua's National Assembly recently ratified an agreement to permit Russia a larger role in Nicaragua's cyberspace. Russia has promised to help Nicaragua monitor its cyber domain, which includes bringing forth evidence that would fall under the country's repressive "cybercrimes" legislation, reports the outlet. Most recently, according to popular U.S. Spanish-language outlet *CNN Español*, Nicaragua announced official relations with China, dropping diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Facing criticism from much of the international community, the Ortega regime is eager to bolster its hold on power by deepening its partnership with Russia and China. Further, given that the country's opposition has used the internet to criticize and to organize itself politically (including in exile abroad), authoritarian great power rivals could ensure Ortega a much greater level of



Nicaraguan Foreign Minister, Denis Moncada, speaks to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mfarussia/49212557647/> Attribution: Flickr

“For years, the Russian government has been focused on occupying Nicaragua as a platform for cyber and electronic operations... This agreement is a delivery of the country's security to the Russians.”

control over the domestic security apparatus. As Ortega becomes increasingly isolated and desperate, Nicaragua will likely become an important platform for rivals to project power.

Source: “Nicaragua rompe relaciones diplomáticas con Taiwán y solo reconoce a China (Nicaragua breaks diplomatic relations with Taiwan and only recognizes China),” *CNN Español* (the Spanish-language outlet of the popular U.S. outlet), 9 December 2021. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/12/09/nicaragua-taiwan-china-orix/>

The Nicaraguan government decided to break relations with Taiwan and will only recognize China, as announced by Foreign Minister Denis Moncada at a press conference this afternoon...Nicaragua's announcement leaves just over a dozen countries around the world with official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, including Honduras and Guatemala.

Source: “Rusia interviene en seguridad informática de Nicaragua (Russia intervenes in Nicaraguan IT security),” *Diálogo* (a Spanish-language digital military journal), 15 October 2021. <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articulos/rusia-interviene-en-seguridad-informatica-de-nicaragua/#.YWnYwxrMI2y>

For years, the Russian government has been focused on occupying Nicaragua as a platform for cyber and electronic operations...This agreement is a delivery of the country's security to the Russians...and it will serve to launch, from a closer place in the hemisphere, cyber-attacks or interference in elections.



President-elect Xiomara Castro of Honduras campaigned on opening diplomatic relations with China.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xiomara_Castro_on_August_07,_2007_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xiomara_Castro_on_August_07,_2007_(cropped).jpg)
Attribution: Wikimedia

Honduras Election Likely To Expand China's Geopolitical Footprint

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

The most recent elections in Honduras could have outsized implications for geopolitics and emerging great power rivalry. In late November, Hondurans voted overwhelmingly in favor of Xiomara Castro, wife of deposed president Manuel Zelaya, in a vote that broke the Honduran Nationalist Party's hold on power. The generally center-left Argentinian daily *Clarín* reports that the election set a record for participation and votes cast. The outlet also reports that the post-election violence and accusations of fraud expected by some analysts, based on previous elections, did not come to pass. The Spanish-language outlet of the British news agency *BBC Americas*, highlights the similarities and differences between Castro's left-wing Libre Party and left-wing parties in the past. It also highlights Castro's campaign pledge to open relations with China and break relations with Taiwan as a major point of potential friction with profound ramifications. Xiomara's promise to

open relations with China and end relations with Taiwan would follow a wave of similar announcements in Central America. After Panama broke relations with Taiwan in 2017, El Salvador and Nicaragua have since followed. If Castro follows through on her pledge, Guatemala and Belize would remain the only two countries in Central America to recognize Taiwan, tipping the geopolitical balance decisively in favor of China. Further, Xiomara has pledged independence from her husband and his former administration, whose time in office was marked by close relations with Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, as well as controversial steps to weaken institutions and rewrite the country's constitution. Should Xiomara seek to develop similar relationships and pursue similar policies, it will contribute to Latin America's leftward political trajectory and could be deleterious to the region's already feeble democracies.

“Could the new left-wing Honduran executive repeat patterns that led to situations similar to those before the 2009 coup? ...Another question is whether the new Honduran government will bet on strengthening relations with left-wing Latin American governments...Castro also intends to establish relations with mainland China.”

Source: “Xiomara Castro se encamina a ser la nueva presidenta de Honduras (Xiomara Castro is on the way to being the new president of Honduras),” *Clarín* (the largest daily in Argentina and generally described as center-left), 28 November 2021. https://www.clarin.com/mundo/cerraron-urnas-honduras-final-incierto-ex-primera-dama-oficialismo_0_m6V1ox0TE.html

Fears of fraud, something that the opposition already denounced in the previous elections of 2017...fuel tensions...Current President Hernández managed to get reelected amid accusations of fraud by the opposition and international observers. That unleashed a wave of protests and state repression that left some thirty dead.

Source: “Xiomara Castro: en qué se diferencia la izquierda que regresa al poder en Honduras de la que fue derrocada por un golpe en 2009? (Xiomara Castro: how is the left that returns to power in Honduras different from the one that was overthrown by a coup in 2009?),” *BBC Americas* (the Spanish-language outlet of the British news agency), 1 December 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-59486468>

Could the new left-wing Honduran executive repeat patterns that led to situations similar to those before the 2009 coup?...Another question is whether the new Honduran government will bet on strengthening relations with left-wing Latin American governments...Castro also intends to establish relations with mainland China.

FARC Dissident Groups' High-Level Leaders Killed

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Colombia's continued struggle against dissidents of the now-disbanded Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) communist guerrilla group has achieved notable successes of late. Darío Velásquez, alias "El Paisa," and Henry Castellanos Garzón, alias "Romaña," were killed in separate shootouts in Venezuela, according to Medellín-based daily newspaper *El Colombiano*. Both were high-ranking commanders in the FARC guerrilla group, known as the Second Marquetalia, who continued their struggle against the Colombian state after the broader group signed the 2016 peace accords with the Colombian government. The outlet reminds readers that the deaths come on the heels of the killing of Seuxis Pausias Hernández Solarte, alias "Jesús Santrich," another prominent commander of the Second Marquetalia killed recently in Venezuela. This leaves Iván Márquez alone in his struggle to maintain the relevance of the Second Marquetalia.

Although conflict along the Colombia-Venezuela border is nothing new, the intensity

and number of actors involved is increasing, according to Colombia's politically centrist daily *El Tiempo*. Numerous groups have flocked to the area for a lucrative slice of Venezuela's illicit economies. *El Tiempo* reports the presence of several Colombian guerrilla groups, drug trafficking groups, and Venezuelan security groups. The vacuum left by the deaths of Paisa and Romaña is a significant blow to the Second Marquetalia and has created room for other groups to compete for territory. Further, while the Colombian state claims victory, it is unclear whether Colombian state security forces had a hand in the deaths of Paisa and Romaña. The possibility that the two were killed by rival groups and not by Colombia's security forces speaks to the shifting realities of the border area as a corridor for illicit goods.



Colombian FARC dissident, Iván Márquez, is the most significant remaining leader of the Second Marquetalia.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan-Marquez-GoraHerria.jpg>
Attribution: Wikimedia

“Although so far no evidence is known in this regard, the deaths of both dissident leaders occurred very close to the border with Colombia... However, the authorities do not rule out any theory.”

Source: “Romaña, El Paisa y Santrich: en 6 meses cayeron tres narcos de exFarc en Venezuela (Romaña, El Paisa and Santrich: in 6 months three ex-FARC drug traffickers fell in Venezuela),” *El Colombiano* (the major daily of the city of Medellín), 8 December 2021. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/muerte-de-romana-revela-cruel-guerra-por-coca-en-venezuela-PE16129372>

Both Romaña and El Paisa supported Márquez in the creation of the so-called Second Marquetalia—announced in August 2019—to return to arms under the excuse of non-compliance by the government with the agreement. But with the death of these two former members of the former Secretariat, and the murder of alias Jesús Santrich in May 2021, Márquez is left alone.

Source: “Las hipótesis sobre la autoría de los ataques a ‘Romaña’ y ‘el Paisa’ (The hypotheses about the origin of the attacks on ‘Romaña’ and ‘El Paisa’),” *El Tiempo* (one of Colombia's oldest dailies generally described as politically-centrist), 9 December 2021. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/romana-y-el-paisa-las-hipotesis-sobre-quienes-mataron-a-los-disidentes-637796>

The first hypothesis, of which the Colombian Public Force has spoken, is that they died at the hands of another dissident group...second, it has been said that they could have been assassinated by their own men...there is also another possible scenario: that the deaths were caused by Colombian forces...Although so far no evidence is known in this regard, the deaths of both dissident leaders occurred very close to the border with Colombia...However, the authorities do not rule out any theory