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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Chinese President Xi Jinping and former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa

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Provincial Exercises Highlight China's Whole-of-Government Preparations for Conflict

By Peter Wood
OE Watch Commentary

As described in the excerpted article from official government source *China National Defense News*, a recent exercise in Shandong Province sheds light on Chinese efforts to ensure that all parts of the government can support combat operations in the event of conflict. Chinese municipalities prepare not only for natural disasters such as floods, typhoons, and earthquakes, but also for large-scale military conflict. To this end, many cities host large, and often intra-regional or inter-city emergency exercises.¹ China has civil air defense offices in most cities, which are intended to act as direct support to the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In the exercise described here, associated units practiced providing emergency rescue services and putting out fires from enemy air raids. With support from an expert repair team, the training also tested rapid road repair, quickly restoring a road's ability to handle heavy wheeled and tracked vehicles.

The exercise was primarily focused on three phases: preparations made before air attacks, including using camouflage and moving critical facilities into underground spaces; how to respond during an air raid, such as using obscurants and aerial barriers (balloons or wires to interfere with low-flying aircraft); and post-strike operations, which involves repairs and emergency response. The exercise also highlighted how newer technologies, such as quadcopters, are being adapted in practical ways to support operations. Accompanying images in the article showed quadcopter drones being used to deliver medical supplies. The report indicated that these drones could carry 10kg (22 pounds) over 10km (6.2 miles). UAVs are regarded as an optimal delivery system as they would not be limited by traffic in a dense urban environment during a crisis.



Emblem of the Chinese People's Civil Air Defense
Source: Chinese Government, Attribution: Public Domain

The article also highlights the fact that cities are also making agreements with local companies to ensure that the latter's resources can be quickly brought into support in a crisis, following the PLA's lead in working with China's major technological and logistic companies under the rubric of the "Military-Civil Fusion Strategy."² Taken collectively, these efforts likely mean that China will be able to mobilize effectively if a crisis were to strike, and that many aspects of Chinese society may show resiliency during a conflict.

The boundaries between front and rear in modern warfare are blurred, and ground targets are vulnerable to air strikes. We must pay attention to protection and rescue work...

Source: Wang Dongliang [王栋梁] and Chen Maoxin [陈毛欣], “既支援前线，又防护后方——“鲁中支援-2022”国民经济动员保障演练剪影 (Not only supporting the front line but also protecting the rear - ‘Luzhong Support-2022’ outline of a national economic mobilization support exercise),” *China National Defense News* (official Chinese government publication on defense matters), 14 October 2022. http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2022-10/14/content_4923396.htm

Recently, the ‘Central-Shandong Support-2022’ National Economic Mobilization Support Exercise was held in Zibo City, in Shandong Province.³ Breaking with previous exercises, this not only involved support to front-line units but also added new content involving support to areas behind the battle line.

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Continued: Provincial Exercises Highlight China's Whole-of-Government Preparations for Conflict

Source Continued: Wang Dongliang [王栋梁] and Chen Maoxin [陈毛欣], “既支援前线, 又防护后方——“鲁中支援-2022”国民经济动员保障演练剪影 (Not only supporting the front line but also protecting the rear - ‘Luzhong Support-2022’ outline of a national economic mobilization support exercise),” China National Defense News (official Chinese government publication on defense matters), 14 October 2022. http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2022-10/14/content_4923396.htm

In recent years the city has worked with large-scale enterprises to establish a number of national economic mobilization centers. Combined with statistical analysis of (the cities' base potential to support) national defense mobilization, it is necessary to determine the potential of each mobilization center, how many are necessary, how many personnel are required, and how to operate in a given situation, laying a solid foundation for rapid and precise mobilization.

“The boundaries between front and rear in modern warfare are blurred, and ground targets are vulnerable to air strikes. We must pay attention to protection and rescue work,” explained Fang Shijun [房施军], director of the Military District's Combat Readiness Construction Division.

Notes:

[1] See: Peter Wood, “Civil Air Defense Organizations in South China Sign Cooperative Agreement” *OE Watch*, February 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/354216>; Peter Wood, “Civil Air Defense Exercises Held in Western China” *OE Watch*, August 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/315036>

[2] For more on how the PLA is supported by Chinese companies, see: Peter Wood, “Military-Civil Fusion Cooperation in China Grows in the Field of Logistics,” *OE Watch*, February 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/301719>

[3] The name for this exercise, “Luzhong” [鲁中] is derived from 鲁, the shorthand for “Shandong province,” and 中, meaning “central.” Zibo, the city where the exercise was held, is in north-central Shandong, a province on China's east coast.

Xi Jinping Sets Milestones for Next Five Years of Chinese Military Modernization

By Peter Wood
OE Watch Commentary

Every five years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds a party congress, an event that brings together nearly 2,300 delegates drawn from the CCP's over 96 million members. The most recent of these was held in mid-October 2022. These congresses are important for several reasons.

First, key positions are filled as politicians age out or are replaced. This includes the membership of the Politburo Standing Committee, which represents the apex of power in China, and the Central Military Commission, China's highest military decision-making body. Some insights regarding Xi's plans for the Chinese armed forces can already be drawn from the new composition of the Commission, which saw three generals replaced (Xu Qiliang, Wei Fenghe and Li Zuocheng). The CMC's new membership still includes at least two combat veterans of the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979-1991), including Vice-Chair General Zhang Youxia and General Liu Zhenli.⁴ The former has also been on the CMC since the previous Congress and has long experience in China's organizations for military equipment development and modernization (the Equipment Development Department and its predecessor, the General Armaments Department). Other figures, such as General Li Shangfu, have extensive experience in units dedicated to space operations, highlighting the strong focus of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on the domain. Two others, Admiral Miao Hua and Zhang Shengmin, are political officers and play important roles in maintaining the Party's control over the military.

A second important part of the Congress is a "work report" delivered by the Party General Secretary (Xi Jinping) at the beginning of the Congress. The most recent report, as described by state-run *Xinhua News Agency* summarizes the Party's efforts over the past five years and sets out guideposts for the next five years. The language of the most recent report is always a staple of subsequent official pronouncements and state media discussions, and language including that in the excerpted portions below are likely to feature prominently in official media.

One additional note is that Chinese military modernization is frequently linked to important dates, such as the centenary of the founding of the CCP (which passed in 2021), centenary of the founding of the PLA in 2027, and of the People's Republic of China in 1949, by which time China wishes to "fully transform the people's armed forces into world-class forces." China likely missed some of its targets for the 2021 milestone, such as "achieve completion of efforts of mechanization... with significantly enhanced informationization and greatly improved strategic capabilities." Perhaps, as a result, there is a palpable urgency in the language of the report in Xi's demands to continue radical improvements to the PLA.

In terms of military modernization, three major themes⁵ can be seen in the excerpted text: first, faster development and iteration of high-tech weaponry and 'new-domain forces' and unmanned systems; second, enhanced combat preparedness—particularly through realistic, joint, and OPFOR training; and third, a systemic approach to bringing the entirety of China's capabilities to bear. The first acknowledges that China is in a race with its competitors to build strategic capabilities, which include not just nuclear weapons, but also critical technologies and the ability to operate in new or emerging domains. The second, an emphasis on realistic and joint training, is perhaps one of the most difficult modernization efforts despite the PLA making major headway in recent years. The last of these comes in a rather innocuous-sounding phrase: "We will consolidate and enhance integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities." This consolidation of national strategies represents the culmination of China's military-civil fusion strategy, which attempts to achieve efficiencies through resource sharing between civilian and military sectors and, more broadly, to coordinate China's economic developmental and military modernization efforts so that they are self-reinforcing.

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We will establish a strong system of strategic deterrence, increase the proportion of new-domain forces with new combat capabilities, speed up the development of unmanned, intelligent combat capabilities, and promote coordinated development and application of the network information system.

Continued: Xi Jinping Sets Milestones for Next Five Years of Chinese Military Modernization

Looking ahead, China is facing strong domestic economic and demographic headwinds—many of which are the true focus of this recently released work report. However, despite these challenges, the language used here demonstrates the

continued emphasis on the speedy transformation of the PLA, seen since Xi first took the reins of the CCP in 2012 at the 18th Party Congress.



20th CCP Central Military Commission (2022-2027)

Source: Peter Wood Attribution: Peter Wood

Source: Xi Jinping [习近平], “高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗——在中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会上的报告 (Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects - Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China),” Xinhua News Agency, 16 October 2022. <https://news.ifeng.com/c/8K9I4qcZtaw>

Achieving the goals for the centenary of the People’s Liberation Army in 2027 and more quickly elevating our people’s armed forces to world-class standards are strategic tasks for building a modern socialist country in all respects. To this end, we must apply the thinking on strengthening the military for the new era, implement the military strategy for the new era, and maintain the Party’s absolute leadership over the people’s armed forces...

We will simultaneously carry out operations, boost combat preparedness, and enhance our military capabilities. We will continue integrated development of the military through mechanization, informatization, and the application of smart technologies and work faster to modernize military theory, organizational forms, personnel, and weaponry and equipment. We will enhance the military’s strategic capabilities for defending China’s sovereignty, security, and development interests and see that the people’s armed forces⁶ effectively fulfill their missions and tasks in the new era...

continue on 7

Continued: Xi Jinping Sets Milestones for Next Five Years of Chinese Military Modernization

Source Continued: Xi Jinping [习近平], “高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗——在中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会上的报告 (Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects - Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China),” Xinhua News Agency, 16 October 2022. <https://news.ifeng.com/c/8K9I4qcZtaw>

We will intensify troop training and enhance combat preparedness across the board to see that our people's armed forces can fight and win. We will study and gain a good grasp of the characteristics of informatized and intelligent warfare and the laws that govern it, provide new military strategic guidance, and develop strategies and tactics for People's War.⁷

We will establish a strong system of strategic deterrence, increase the proportion of new-domain forces with new combat capabilities, speed up the development of unmanned, intelligent combat capabilities, and promote coordinated development and application of the network information system.

We will improve the command system for joint operations and enhance our systems and capacity for reconnaissance and early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support, and integrated logistics support.

We will intensify military training under combat conditions, laying emphasis on joint training, force-on-force training, and high-tech training...We will speed up the development of modern logistics, implement major projects to develop defense-related science and technology, weaponry, and equipment, and move faster to translate scientific and technological advances into combat capabilities...

We will consolidate and enhance integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities. We will better coordinate strategies and plans, align policies and systems, and share resources and production factors between the military and civilian sectors. We will improve the system and layout of science, technology, and industries related to national defense and step-up capacity building in these areas.

Notes:

[4] Liu Zhenli replaced Li Zuocheng, who was awarded for his actions in combat during that war. Based on public descriptions of his career, Co-Vice Chair He Weidong also has a long history in operational PLA units, but it is unclear if he served during the conflict.

[5] Not included in the excerpts below but which are repeatedly highlighted in the full text are mentions of political work—which involves not only loyalty to the CCP but also morale. National pride is a major point of emphasis in the speech. Notably, Xi mentions that there are additional efforts being made to improve the “institutions and mechanisms” of the Chairman’s responsibility system, which refers to Xi’s personal control over Chinese military affairs.

[6] While PLA is often used generally to refer to the Chinese military, according to Chinese law, the Chinese Armed Forces are, “composed of the active and reserve forces of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force and the Militia.”

[7] Chinese official publications define “People’s War” as referring to confronting foreign aggression or safeguarding national unity by arming and relying on the people (i.e., a whole of nation approach).

Taiwan Testing Satellite Program To Overcome Communications Vulnerabilities

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Over the next two years, Taiwan plans to test a satellite program to ensure its command systems continue to operate should the country lose connectivity through its conventional links. As shown in the first article, according to the Singapore-based *Straits Times*, in September Taiwan Minister of Digital Affairs Audrey Tang announced the launch of a telecommunication network resilience plan. The article explains that international internet traffic currently relies heavily on fiber optic cables lining the ocean floor. There are 15 submarine data cables connecting Taiwan with the rest of the world. Taiwan would be cut off from the Internet should these cables be cut. According to the article, experts warn that Taiwan's network vulnerabilities are very real.

As demonstrated in the second article from Chinese state-owned multi-language news source *Xinhua*, in President Xi Jinping's speech kicking off the 20th National Congress in mid-October, Xi asserted that the Taiwan question remains an important matter for the China. He asserted that while China would continue to strive for peaceful reunification, it will not rule out the use of force. Such a message, it appears, could put even more urgency in Taiwan's plans to improve its communications vulnerabilities.

Taiwan's network vulnerabilities are very real.

Source: Yip Wai Yee, "Taiwan Plans for Ukraine-Style Back-Up Satellite Internet Network Amid Risk of War," *The Straits Times* (Singapore-based daily), 22 September 2022. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/taiwan-plans-for-ukraine-style-back-up-satellite-internet-network-amid-risk-of-war>

Over the next two years, (Taiwan) is set to trial a N[ew] T[aiwan]\$550 million (US\$24.67 million) satellite programme that aims to keep Taiwan's command systems running if conventional connections get cut, Ms. Tang (Taiwan's minister of Digital Affairs) said. Several Taiwan companies are now in discussions with international satellite service providers, she added, without providing details.

Currently, international Internet traffic is mostly carried through fibre-optic cables lining the ocean floor. Taiwan is connected to the world via 15 submarine data cables. "The Internet used in Taiwan relies heavily on undersea cables, so if (attackers) cut off all the cables, they would cut off all of the Internet there," Dr Lennon Chang, a cyber-security researcher at Monash University, told The Straits Times. "It makes sense for the government to have alternative forms of communication ready for emergency situations," he added.

Already, some analysts say that concerns over Taiwan's network vulnerabilities are very real.

Source: "(CPC Congress) CPC to Unswervingly Advance Cause of National Reunification: Xi," *Xinhua* (Chinese state-owned multi-language news source), 16 October 2022. <https://english.news.cn/20221016/29113f9cbf3247978534dd1f4aee299e/c.html>

Xi Jinping said... the Communist Party of China (CPC) will implement its overall policy for resolving the Taiwan question in the new era, and unswervingly advance the cause of national reunification. "Resolving the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese, a matter that must be resolved by the Chinese," said Xi at the opening session of the 20th CPC National Congress.

"We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary..."

Xi said that the wheels of history are rolling on toward China's reunification...

Taiwan Set To Cooperate with Turkey on Cost-Effective Drone Technology

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

Appearing to take note of Ukraine's success in using Turkish-made Bayraktar TB-2 drones, Taiwan is considering the value of small and cost-effective drones to protect its own territory in the face of a Chinese attack.⁸ The accompanying passages report on Taiwanese drone producers' efforts to develop indigenous, cost-effective drones, and a recent agreement between Taiwanese and Turkish drone researchers to cooperate and exchange information on doing so. In contrast to numerous countries that are purchasing the Bayraktar TB-2 drones from Turkey, Taiwan wants to develop indigenous drones of its own, based on the lessons learned from the use of TB-2s in different conflicts.⁹ Perhaps the most notable lesson for Taiwan from the war in Ukraine is the ability to achieve overmatch by deploying large numbers of small, cost-effective drones.¹⁰

As the first accompanying article from Taiwan's national news agency *Focus Taiwan* reports, Taiwan's domestic drone producers are working on several small and cheap drones, including the Albatross II, which is effectively a Taiwanese TB-2 with a longer range of 250 km. There is also the Flyingfish drone, which reportedly costs less than \$3,000,

making it cost effective to deploy in large numbers in urban or naval warfare. The passage quotes the drone's developer as saying, "When the enemy approaches [Taiwan's] coastal waters, the Flyingfish drones will prove to be a formidable weapon for asymmetric combat, because they are so easy to use and can be used in great numbers."

The second excerpted article, from Turkey's oldest secular newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, discusses a recent agreement between Turkish and Taiwanese institutions that conduct research and development on drone technology. It reports that Gebze Technical University, which conducts research on drone technology, and Turkey's Fly BVLOS Technology, which conducts drone pilot trainings and produces world-class drones, participated in the "Taiwan-Turkey UAV Technology Forum" held in Chiayi, Taiwan in August. Chiayi is home to Taiwan's new, state-run drone research and development center. The two Turkish institutions signed an agreement with Taiwan Formosa University, which conducts academic research in drone technology, to encourage and strengthen academic-technical exchange and cooperation in the field of UAV technology.

Ukraine has demonstrated [drones'] effectiveness in asymmetric warfare... It is a lesson that has not been lost on Taiwan.

Albatross 9733 Display at Gangshan Air Force Base

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NCSIST_Albatross_9733_Display_at_Gangshan_Air_Force_Base_Apron_20170812a.jpg Attribution: Public Domain



Continued: Taiwan Set To Cooperate with Turkey on Cost-Effective Drone Technology

Source: Sean Lin, “Asymmetrical warfare focus has Taiwan drone companies upping the ante,” *Focus Taiwan* (Taiwan’s national news agency), 10 September 2022. <https://focustaiwan.tw/sci-tech/202209100016>

Ukraine has demonstrated [drones’] effectiveness in asymmetric warfare as it blunts the advances of more numerous Russian forces, deploying Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones and Switchblade suicide drones donated by the U.S. to attack targets and gain intelligence. It is a lesson that has not been lost on Taiwan, itself threatened by a larger neighbor and committed to a defense strategy centered on asymmetrical warfare.

At the inauguration of a state-run drone research and development (R&D) center in Chiayi County last month, President Tsai Ing-wen pledged to support drone research to strengthen the country's asymmetric combat capabilities. But it is domestic drone producers, eager to upgrade the first-generation of domestically made drones Taiwan currently possesses, that could offer the quickest shot in the arm to Taiwan's defenses.

JC Tech President Robert Cheng said his company now has built and tested prototypes of a suicide drone called the Flyingfish... Costing less than US\$3,000, the Flyingfish 200 has a much lower price point than cruise missiles or other combat drones, making it cost effective to deploy in large numbers in urban or naval warfare, he said... "When the enemy approaches [Taiwan's] coastal waters, the Flyingfish drones will prove to be a formidable weapon for asymmetric combat, because they are so easy to use and can be used in great numbers," Cheng said.

Meanwhile, aviation company GEOSAT, which began developing drones in 2008, has been collaborating with the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) — Taiwan's state-run weapons developer and manufacturer — on the Albatross II drone... The GEOSAT CEO believed that the Albatross II, which is compatible with locally developed Sky Sword air-to-air missiles and 2.75-inch rockets, could outperform the Bayraktar TB2 drones, which gained fame for sinking the Russian cruiser Moskva in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Su Tzu-yun, an analyst at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, said... suicide drones... can be used to great effect when targeting smaller PLA ships during amphibious warfare, and military drones can be used in place of radar stations should the latter be destroyed to keep command centers informed of what is happening on the front lines of combat... Su agreed with Cheng on the power and importance of numbers... The combination of different drones will "allow Taiwan to amass a sizable arsenal of precision strike munitions to counter the PLA's numerical advantage, greatly leveraging the efficacy of Taiwan's armed forces in defending the nation," Su said.

Source: “Türkiye ile Tayvan arasında İHA iş birliği (Drone Cooperation between Turkey and Taiwan),” *Cumhuriyet* (the oldest secular Turkish daily newspaper), 11 August 2022. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/dunya/turkiye-ile-tayvan-arasinda-ih-is-birligi-1968257>

Gebze Technical University, which conducts research on drone technology and Fly BVLOS Technology [which conducts UAV pilot trainings and produces world-class UAVs]... participated in the "Taiwan-Turkey UAV Technology Forum" held in Chiayi, Taiwan, [and] signed an agreement with Taiwan Formosa University to encourage and strengthen academic-technical exchange and cooperation in the field of UAV technology. With the agreement, Fly BVLOS Technology became a partner of UAV Technology Center, headquartered in Taiwan and working in the field of UAV technology. [The sides] will carry out R&D activities together... especially for products such as motors, chips and batteries. In addition, all stakeholders will share their expertise and

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Continued: Taiwan Set To Cooperate with Turkey on Cost-Effective Drone Technology

Source Continued: “Türkiye ile Tayvan arasında İHA iş birliği (Drone Cooperation between Turkey and Taiwan),” *Cumhuriyet* (the oldest secular Turkish daily newspaper), 11 August 2022. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/dunya/turkiye-ile-tayvan-arasinda-iha-is-birligi-1968257>

experience in the field of UAV technologies. While Gabze Technical University and Fly BVLOS transfer their experience in UAV production to Taiwan, they will also benefit from the work of Taiwan Formosa University, an important technology manufacturer, and its partner UAV Technology Center.

Fly BVLOS Founder Kamil Demirkapu said: "Turkey... has come to an important place in the world with the breakthroughs it has made in various fields from R&D to production. As everyone knows very well, some of the best UAVs in the world are produced by Turkish engineers. Gabze Technical University, together with the logistics and aviation sectors of the future, will change the entire commercial life. ... With this agreement, the experience of Taiwan Formosa University, which has carried out valuable academic studies in the field of UAV technology, will also join these two very strong partners from Turkey. With this cooperation, we aim to contribute both to our country's R&D and production activities in the field of UAVs and to make Turkey's expertise and experience more visible in the international community by signing important research and innovations in the sector."

Notes:

[8] See: Karen Kaya, “Turkish-Made Bayraktar TB2 Drones Play Important Role in Ukraine,” *OE Watch*, Issue 6, 2022.

[9] See: Karen Kaya, “Turkey as a Drone Superpower: A Case Study of a Mid-Size Power Driving the Operational Environment,” Foreign Military Studies Office, September 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/421179>

[10] See: “Turkey and the TB-2: A Rising Drone Superpower with Karen Kaya,” Army Mad Scientist Convergence Podcast, September 2022. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/65-turkey-and-the-tb-2-a-rising-drone/id1495100075?i=1000579565167>

China’s cyber policy appears to have three vectors —peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner— that dominate China’s cyber policy. Some are always hidden from view while others are demonstrated daily. *Three Faces of the Cyber Dragon* is divided into sections that coincide with these vectors.



Russian Military Watcher Identifies Problems With the Russian VDV and Parachute Assaults

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from a Russian military enthusiast website, *Voyennoye Obozreniye* (notably still allowed to remain active), features a Russian military watcher's assessment of issues concerning, and possible reforms of, the Russian Airborne Troops (VDV). As some of his chief concerns, the author highlights insufficient armor, artillery, air defenses, and airlift capabilities for the VDV. He also posits that the requirement of air supremacy for parachute landings and the hazards of the proliferation of air defense systems make parachute landings unfeasible. Although the author questions current VDV equipment and doctrine, he seems confident the overall VDV concept is sound and may just need to be updated.



Combat Vehicle of the Airborne **BMD-4M**

Source: [https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Moscow-Victory-Parade-Vehicles-9-May-2019/i-LvCkZH](https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Moscow-Victory-Parade-Vehicles-9-May-2019/i-LvCkZH Attribution: CCA-4.0) Attribution: CCA-4.0

These issues have led to the fact that, as after every war in the past, the future of the Airborne Troops is now being called into question. We will also call it into question, but at the same time it is necessary “not to throw out the baby with the bathwater” and assess what of the existing potential of the Airborne Troops still needs and should be preserved...

Source: Alexander Timokhin, “Реформа ВДВ в свете опыта боёв на Украине и предшествующих войн (Reform of the Airborne Troops: In light of the experience of fighting in Ukraine and previous wars),” *Voyennoye Obozreniye* (Russian military enthusiast website that has been allowed to remain active), 13 September 2022. <https://topwar.ru/201636-reforma-vdv-v-svete-opyta-boev-na-ukraine-i-predshestvujuschih-vojn.html>

...Let us briefly list the problems that arose in connection with the large-scale use of the Airborne Troops in military operations.

1. The seeming senselessness of using these [VDV] formations as paratroopers in a war against an enemy with a conventional army, air defenses and aviation. It is worth recalling that part of the forces that were planned to be dropped near Kyiv from the air (presumably also near Gostomel) were preparing specifically for a parachute landing...Today, knowing the situation there and then, we can only be glad that this landing did not happen. Military transport aircraft loaded with parachute platforms with airborne equipment, prepared for a parachute landing on the Gostomel airfield. The parachute landing was later cancelled.

*2. Low survivability of airborne armored vehicles at a huge price. It is known that the **BMD-4** [Combat Vehicle of the Airborne] costs approximately the same amount as a T-90M tank. However, it (BMD-4) can be destroyed by small arms fire. Despite the very light weight, the BMD uses a very advanced fire control system by Russian standards and uses powerful weapons — 100mm and 30mm guns. The BMD's thin aluminum armor provides little protection, but there is no alternative, as it must be [lite enough to be] dropped by parachute. The BMD-4 has performed well in Ukraine (aside from survivability issues), but only two can be*

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Continued: Russian Military Watcher Identifies Problems With the Russian VDV and Parachute Assaults

Source Continued: Alexander Timokhin, “Реформа ВДВ в свете опыта боёв на Украине и предшествующих войн (Reform of the Airborne Troops: In light of the experience of fighting in Ukraine and previous wars),” *Voyennoye Obozreniye* (Russian military enthusiast website that has been allowed to remain active), 13 September 2022. <https://topwar.ru/201636-reforma-vdv-v-svete-opyta-boev-na-ukraine-i-predshestvujuschih-vojn.html>

air dropped from an airplane [presumably the Il-76] as opposed to three. [of older versions of the BMD]

3. The parachute squad [3-4 dismounts] is too small and lightly armed to fight on foot, the Airborne Troops have few heavy weapons, tanks, large-caliber artillery, however, now it is being attached to units or the artillery is being upsized from D-30 122mm howitzers to Msta-B 152mm howitzers or other howitzers of the same caliber. At the same time, the Airborne Troops have weak strike capabilities compared to motorized rifle troops and are relatively expensive.

4. During Soviet times, the Airborne Troops could parachute not only their light armored vehicles and artillery, but also vehicles (GAZ-66 cars), and even multiple launch rocket systems. Now the Airborne Troops has vehicles that cannot be dropped by parachute, such as tanks, and the vehicles that can be dropped by parachute are lightly armored.

5. Insufficient number of military transport aircraft. It is currently not possible to parachute drop a VDV division.

6. The lack of a clear concept of the use of the troops in combat, which require [for a parachute drop] complete air supremacy over the areas of flight and landing, with the subsequent retention of such air supremacy over the combat area, parachute drops are almost impossible against an enemy with at least some kind of air defense.

7. The need to keep in the Airborne Troops very large number of selected personnel who are much better trained and more expensive than those in the Ground Forces, whose potential cannot be fully realized due to the afore mentioned shortcomings.

8. The lack of VDV air defense capabilities, despite the fact that the VDV must act in isolation from the main forces.

In addition to these issues, there is a deficit of infantry in the Russian Armed Forces for the conduct of operations in the mountains and other such inaccessible terrain, as well as during assaults on cities. Also, the Russian Armed Forces lack airborne assault units and formations trained to operate in conjunction with helicopters and parachute from them. These issues have led to the fact that, as after every war in the past, the future of the Airborne Troops is now being called into question. We will also call it into question, but at the same time it is necessary “not to throw out the baby with the bathwater” and assess what of the existing potential of the Airborne Troops still needs and should be preserved...

Russian Airborne Troops Get First Material-Technical Support Brigade

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from the pro-Kremlin daily newspaper *Izvestiya* discusses Russian plans to establish the Russian Airborne Troops' (VDV) first material-technical support (MTO) brigade. Currently, MTO brigades are only found in the Russian Ground Forces' Combined Arms Armies and one Tank Army. According to the *Izvestiya* article, VDV operations in Syria, Kazakhstan, and presumably in Ukraine, have shown that the VDV requires a dedicated logistics formation (*soyedineniye*) to support the VDV's unique needs for not only long-term combat operations and/or deployment abroad, but also peacekeeping operations.



KAMAZ-4386 Typhoon-VDV rigged for air drop

Source: <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2021-Static-part-2/i-Px9gHXf/A>
Attribution: CCA-4.0

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has made a fundamental decision to form a material-technical support (MTO) [logistics] brigade for the Airborne Troops.

Source: Roman Kretsul and Alexey Ramm, “Снаряд вне очереди: в ВДВ появится собственное тыловое соединение: В Воздушно-десантных войсках сформируют отдельную бригаду материально-технического обеспечения (Projectile out of turn: the Airborne Troops will have their own logistic formation: A separate logistics brigade will be formed in the Airborne Troops),” *Izvestiya* (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 12 October 2022. <https://iz.ru/1408667/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/snariad-vne-ocheredi-v-vdv-poiavitsia-sobstvennoe-tylovoe-soedinenie>

...The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has made a fundamental decision to form a material-technical support (MTO) [logistics] brigade for the Airborne Troops. The organizational and staffing structure, composition and tasks of the formation are still being worked out, sources in the military department told Izvestia. The brigade will report directly to the Airborne Troops command, working in the interests of the paratroopers. Almost all the equipment of the formation will be able to land by airborne means, and some by parachute.

In general, it is difficult to organize a system of interaction with the regular structures of logistic support, subordinate to the Deputy Minister of Defense for Logistics,” said Colonel Alexander Perendzhiev, Associate Professor at the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics. - As they say, "the convoys are late." And the Airborne Troops move very quickly, and so it is necessary that the "wagons" keep up with them. I think that this is shown from not only the experience of Syria, but also CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization] operations at the beginning of the year in Kazakhstan, where paratroopers formed the basis of Russian forces. “the usual logistic services do not act quickly enough, because they are not paratroopers,” said Alexander Perendzhiev. - They can supply motorized rifle and tank units. But the Airborne Troops are special, rapid reaction forces. Today the winner is the one who builds a more effective system of combat and logistics support. Much depends on the delivery of shells, cartridges, grenades, and the ability to quickly repair damaged equipment...

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Continued: Russian Airborne Troops Get First Material-Technical Support Brigade

Source Continued: Roman Kretsul and Alexey Ramm, “Снаряд вне очереди: в ВДВ появится собственное тыловое соединение: В Воздушно-десантных войсках сформируют отдельную бригаду материально-технического обеспечения (Projectile out of turn: the Airborne Troops will have their own logistic formation: A separate logistics brigade will be formed in the Airborne Troops),” Izvestiya (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 12 October 2022. <https://iz.ru/1408667/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/snariad-vne-ocheredi-v-vdv-poiavitsia-sobstvennoe-tylovoe-soedinenie>

In January of this year, at the request of the government of Kazakhstan, peacekeeping forces of the CSTO countries arrived in the unrest-ridden republic. The Russian contingent was represented by the Airborne Forces. All units, together with equipment, were transferred to the airfield near Alma-Ata within one or two days by Il-76 military transport aircraft. After the situation stabilized, units of Russia and other countries participating in the treaty left this state just as quickly. This was the first experience in history of the real use of the CSTO forces.

The operational transfer of troops to one direction or another and the organization of their supply are also being actively worked out during the exercises of the countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. So, last year, near Orenburg, in the rear of a mock enemy, helicopter landings were landed, which cut off the path to retreat. During the maneuvers, the “militants” were squeezed out of the border...

The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's World Wide Equipment guide was developed to support the U.S. Army training and doctrine, including the Opposing Force (OPFOR) portrayal in training simulations (constructive, virtual, live, and gaming).

The equipment in this WEG represents military systems, variants, and upgrades that U.S. forces may encounter now and in the foreseeable future. The authors continually analyze real-world developments, capabilities, and trends to guarantee that the OPFOR remains relevant.

[HTTPS://ODIN.TRADOC.ARMY.MIL/WEG](https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/weg)

To request equipment be added to the WEG, email the TRADOC G-2 Operational Environment Integration at odin_feedback@army.mil

Equipment highlighted in OE Watch articles are [hyperlinked](#) to the Worldwide Equipment Guide (WEG).



Lack of PTSD Treatment for Russian Soldiers



Work[ing] to preserve the psychological health of military personnel in the SMO zone should now be a priority.

President Putin meets with injured Russian soldiers, 25 May 2022

Source: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68479> Attribution: CCA 4.0

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpt from the semi-independent Russian news site *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* looks at the question of repairing military morale, arguing that Russia “lacks comprehensive measures to preserve the mental state of people who are in the zone of the SMO [special military operation].” The article begins by pointing out that Russian medical personnel have experience with dealing with “stress, trauma, [and] post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).” It describes how during operations in Chechnya (1994-1996), Ministry of Defense doctors developed a multi-step process to identify “servicemen with adaptation disorders caused by severe psycho-emotional stress” and then provided treatment based on the degree

of trauma. The article also discusses research and methods recently demonstrated at the Army-2022 exercise designed “to increase the efficiency of the professional activities of servicemen and extend their professional longevity.” However, Russia has not yet fielded the new diagnostic equipment required even though, as the article points out, “such complexes are now in great demand among the troops.” The article further asserts that “work to preserve the psychological health of military personnel in the SMO zone should now be a priority.” The article concludes by warning that “due to psycho-traumatism, we expect an increase in cardiovascular and nervous diseases, alcoholism, disability, and mortality among various categories of citizens.”

Source: Yuri Avdeev, “Психологические травмы войны излечимы (The psychological trauma of war is curable),” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (semi-independent site), 22 September 2022. https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2022-09-22/7_1207_medicine.html

...For more than six months, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have been conducting a special military operation (SMO) to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine. At the same time, in many ways, there is a lack of comprehensive measures to preserve the mental state of people who are in the zone of the SMO, in the territory controlled by the RF Armed Forces....

Combat operations are accompanied by social stress, which arises in the event of an extreme threat to the survival of the individual personality. Or the survival of entire social groups to which it belongs.... However, practicing physicians and psychologists have their own view of psychological trauma. They consider them treatable and distinguish between concepts such as stress, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

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Continued: Lack of PTSD Treatment for Russian Soldiers

Source Continued: Yuri Avdeev, “Психологические травмы войны излечимы (The psychological trauma of war is curable),” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (semi-independent site), 22 September 2022. https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2022-09-22/7_1207_medicine.html

...During the operation to restore constitutional order in Chechnya in 1994–1996, doctors from the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and other interested departments searched for the most informative psycho-diagnostic and effective psycho-corrective methods used at various stages of medical care. The result of the work done was the formation of a three-stage (three-stage) system for the provision of psychological and psychiatric assistance, which has been actively used since the beginning of the counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus region in 1999.

The first stage was carried out by specialists (psychologists and psycho-neurologists) directly in units and subunits using express diagnostic and express correction techniques. Active identification of servicemen with adaptation disorders caused by severe psycho-emotional stress, when the human psyche is not able to adapt to the changes in life, was carried out. The second stage is the provision of medical and psychological assistance to military personnel with a treatment period of up to seven days.... The third stage is specialized medical care for military personnel with treatment periods of up to 30 days.

In January 2021, the Military Medical Academy. Kirov, under the leadership of the Main Military Medical Directorate on the basis of the ERA Military Innovation Technopolis, created a laboratory where a project is being implemented to study and implement technologies of the platform for medical and psychological monitoring of the professional reliability of military personnel based on the principles of personalized medicine. The main goal of scientific research was to increase the efficiency of the professional activities of servicemen and extend their professional longevity....

Active work is underway to develop specialized psychophysiological equipment. One of its samples was demonstrated at the international forum "Army-2022".... Made in the interests of the main military medical department of the Ministry of Defense, it is compact and allows in the field using various sensory sensors placed on a soldier to determine his psychophysiological state in a few minutes.

...Representatives of the department could not give any intelligible explanations about the possibilities of finalizing the system in the interests of the Ministry of Defense. It is also unclear why there are no developed mobile models of complexes for psychological relief rooms. Meanwhile, such complexes are now in great demand among the troops.

While in the profile of psychologists, work to preserve the psychological health of military personnel in the SMO zone should now be a priority. And also, if necessary, the fastest restoration of their combat capability and ability to work. ...Those who do not think about distant difficulties are sure to face close troubles. Therefore, today the primary task of Russian health care is the creation and effective operation of a system of medical and social support aimed at restoring the mental and somatic health of citizens who were on the territory of the SMO. Otherwise, due to psycho-traumatism, we expect an increase in cardiovascular and nervous diseases, alcoholism, disability, and mortality among various categories of citizens.

Russia Demands Mandatory History Lessons for College Students

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past two decades, and especially since February 2022, the Kremlin leadership has used its extensive media resources to promulgate its version of Russian history. Key components of this narrative revolve around the continuity of the Russian state and how the West has always presented an existential threat. As the first excerpt from Russian government news source *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* points out, college students will now receive a mandatory “144 hours for the study of the history of Russia... in all universities without exception.” Students will not be permitted to review the materials on their own, but as the excerpt emphasizes, “educational institutions will have to spend 80 percent of this time on the so-called contact work, that is, not online.”

The second excerpt from the pro-business site *Kommer-sant* describes one of the concepts prepared by the Russian Historical Society (RHS), which might be selected to write the curriculum. Rather than allowing individual universities to develop their own courses of instruction, the draft concept developed by the RHS urges the “unity of historical education at the country’s universities and is aimed at the formation of a common civic identity of Russian society.” Not surprisingly, this draft concept mimics the Kremlin’s view of history, where the focus is on “the heroic pages of Russia’s struggle for freedom and independence against foreign invaders, for ensuring national interests and security.” The Kremlin’s perspective on current events is given special emphasis. For instance, describing the situation in Ukraine, “whose leadership turned it into ‘anti-Russia’ and, with the help of NATO, was preparing for the ‘return of Crimea and Donbass,’ led to the inevitability of a special military operation by Russia in 2022.”

The focus of the course on the formation of Russian patriotism is ensured by priority attention to the heroic pages of Russia’s struggle for freedom and independence against foreign invaders, for ensuring national interests and security.



Vladimir Putin laid flowers at the monument to Kuzma Minin and Dmitry Pozharsky on Red Square, 4 November 2020

Source: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64332/photos>, Attribution: CCA-4.0

The article cites a Russian historian who refers to the official description of the Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as propaganda. It also raises the “question of how modern students will relate to the words of the teacher in the presence of many sources of information.” Nevertheless, the article concludes by stating that “RHS representatives promised that the document would undergo a wide public discussion” prior to being finalized. However, this discussion may not be very candid given the current political climate in Russia today.

Continued: Russia Demands Mandatory History Lessons for College Students

Source: Elena Novoselova, “Во всех неисторических вузах вводится 114 часов истории России (All non-historical universities introduce 114 hours of Russian history),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Official government source), 7 October 2022. <https://rg.ru/2022/10/07/vo-vseh-neistoricheskikh-vuzah-vvoditsia-114-chasov-istorii-rossii.html>

It was decided to allocate 144 hours for the study of the history of Russia in non-historical specialties in all universities without exception. Educational institutions will have to spend 80 percent of this time on the so-called contact work, that is, not online.

Source: Anna Vasilyeva, “От Руси до спецоперации (From Russia to special operation),” *Kommersant* (pro-business site), 10 October 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5606420>

The Russian Historical Society has prepared a draft concept for a university course in the history of Russia for all students, regardless of their specialization. It covers the period from Ancient Russia to modern Russia and ends with the expansion of NATO, the entry of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine and the announcement of Western sanctions. As conceived by the authors, such a concept should form in students the ideas of citizenship, patriotism and all-Russian unity. Teachers are advised to “avoid negative bias and slander” when talking about the problems and contradictions of Russian history.

A team of experts from the Russian Historical Society (RIO), led by Yuri Petrov, director of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has developed a draft unified concept of teaching Russian history for non-historical faculties.... Now universities have the right to determine the content of the subject, its chronological and geographical scope, as well as methodological aspects. As a result, “conflict persists and even deepens in approaches to the selection of content, in interpretations and concepts in relation to both the history of Russia as a whole and many topical problems of the past,” the concept says.

According to the authors' plans, it should ensure the unity of “historical education at the country's universities” and is aimed “at the formation of a common civic identity of Russian society.” ... “The focus of the course on the formation of Russian patriotism is ensured by priority attention to the heroic pages of Russia's struggle for freedom and independence against foreign invaders, for ensuring national interests and security.”...

...The “anti-constitutional coup in Kyiv” in 2014 and the circumstances of the annexation of the Crimean peninsula are also mentioned. The relevant appeals of President Vladimir Putin are almost directly quoted here: “The situation in Ukraine, whose leadership turned it into “anti-Russia” and, with the help of NATO, was preparing for the “return of Crimea and Donbass,” led to the inevitability of a special military operation by Russia in 2022,” the concept says....

...Candidate of Historical Sciences, teacher at Tyumen State University Alexander Fokin directly calls ‘propaganda’ that part of the concept that describes the latest events: “It is clear that they need to show that we have developed, and here we are faced with villains that hinder development. But it is difficult to evaluate the present from the point of view of a historical view.... It seems to them that if a teacher at a university begins to bend a certain line, then students will believe it as the truth. But the big question is how modern students will relate to the words of the teacher in the presence of many sources of information.”

...So far, the concept has been sent to the Ministry of Education and Science and presented on Friday at the forum of history teachers in Tobolsk. There, RHS representatives promised that the document would undergo a wide public discussion.

Russia Conducts Submarine Sea Trials and Amphibious Landing Exercise in Arctic

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Historically, the Russian Far East has not been a high priority on the Kremlin's military spending list, but that is changing. According to independent Norwegian news site *The Barents Observer*, Russia has added two new nuclear-powered submarines to its Pacific Fleet. The Pacific Fleet now has three of the latest long-range nuclear-powered strategic **Borei-class** submarines, while the Northern Fleet has two. The second excerpted article from *The Barents Observer* reports that the Northern Fleet's annual summer/

autumn exercise continues as scheduled with amphibious assault landings, but no riverine exercise up the Yenisei River to the riverport of Dudinka and then overland to Norilsk. Riverine exercises are complicated, and according to the excerpted article, elements of the Arctic brigades have fought in Ukraine and many of the current soldiers and sailors of the brigades are new. Amphibious assault landings are a good starting point before attempting a riverine exercise in the Arctic.

Two of Russia's newest nuclear-powered submarines have completed a 5,500 nm voyage under the Arctic ice cap.

Source: Thomas Nielsen, "Nuclear subs made trans-Arctic under-ice transfer from Barents to Pacific," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 28 September 2022. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/09/nuclear-subs-made-trans-arctic-under-ice-transfer-barents-pacific>

Two of Russia's newest nuclear-powered submarines have completed a 5,500 nm voyage under the Arctic ice cap. Built at Sevmash shipyard in Severodvinsk and tested in the White- and Barents Seas, the two submarines "Novosibirsk" and "Knyaz Oleg" are now ready for combat patrols.

The inter-fleet transit from the Northern Fleet to the Pacific Fleet contributes a substantial strength to the submarine forces in the Russian Far East. "Knyaz Oleg" of the Borei-class carries 16 ballistic nuclear missiles, while the "Novosibirsk" is armed with some of the navy's most modern long-range cruise missiles, torpedoes and mines.

Both submarines participated in the Umka-2022 naval exercise taking place in the Chucki Sea in September before sailing into Vilyuchinsk naval base near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy according to the Defense Ministry.

There are now three Borei-class ballistic missile submarines in active service with the Pacific Fleet. The "Novosibirsk" is the first 4th generation Yasen-class multi-purpose sub to be deployed in the Pacific.

Source: Thomas Nilsen, "Russia shows off Arctic Military Power", *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 22 September 2022. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/09/russia-shows-arctic-military-drill-amid-ukraine-war>

The official press statement says nothing about how the mock enemy managed to get to Cape Chelyuskin. The cape is the northernmost tip of the Taymyr Peninsula, also known to be the northernmost coastline of the Eurasian mainland.

Here, between icebergs and frozen tundra, the soldiers of Russia's Northern Fleet countered an

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Continued: Russia Conducts Submarine Sea Trials and Amphibious Landing Exercise in Arctic

Source Continued: Thomas Nilsen, “Russia shows off Arctic Military Power”, *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 22 September 2022. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/09/russia-shows-arctic-military-drill-amid-ukraine-war>

imagined illegal armed sabotage reconnaissance group. The drill this week included landing amphibious assault forces supported by choppers and artillery fire from the destroyer “Admiral Levchenko” - the lead warship on the Arctic voyage.

September expeditions with exercises along the Northern Sea Route have been an annual highlight for the Russian navy over the last decade. This year, the voyage is supervised by Vice Admiral Oleg Golubev, Deputy Commander of the Northern Fleet.

Armored personnel carriers were brought to shore by “Aleksandr Otrakovsky”, the landing ship that last year sailed side-by-side in the Black Sea with the cruiser “Moskva”. That warship sank after being hit in Putin’s war off the coast of Ukraine earlier this year.

Troops now training for Arctic warfare on the top of the world come from the same infantry brigades that have lost hundreds of soldiers on the battlefields in Ukraine since Putin ordered them to invade on February 24th.

Thousands of kilometers from the violent fighting in Ukraine, the soldiers practiced tactical actions to capture the beach and made a five-kilometer march on the permafrost of the peninsula.

The navy ships set out from the Kola Bay on August 10 and have conducted navy drills at Franz Josef Land, near the offshore oil rig Priazlomnaya in the eastern Barents Sea and in the Kara Sea on their way to Severnaya Zemlya and the Laptev Sea where a drill took place at the Koteln Island last week.



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.

Iran Vaunts Persian Language as Marker of National Identity Despite Country's Ethnic Diversity

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

While the Persian language and its long literary history are central to shaping Iranian nationalism, Iran is linguistically diverse.¹¹ As recently as a decade ago, Iranian demographic data suggested only half the country spoke Persian as its primary language. Because the Middle East interlinks ethnicity and language, this also highlights Iran's ethnic diversity. Persian might be the dominant language in major cities like Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, or Shiraz, but other languages predominate in cities on Iran's geographic periphery: Azerbaijani in Tabriz, Arabic in Ahvaz, Kurdish in Sanandaj, and Baluchi in Zahedan. These same peripheral regions are also among Iran's most restive.

The individual and social identity of each of us depends on the Persian language.

Against this backdrop, the speech by Iran's Minister of Islamic Guidance and Culture, Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, on the National Day of Persian Poetry and Language is of note. As the excerpts here translated from the ministry's website show, Esmaeili promoted the Persian language in nationalistic tones when he said: "Persian language is an important factor in the national unity of Iranians and the common heritage of all Persian speakers."

Looming in the background to his remarks, but unmentioned by Esmaeili himself, are both Iran's history of sep-



Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, minister of culture and Islamic guidance

Source: Donya-e-Eqtesad, <https://static4.donya-e-eqtesad.com/thumbnail/E2NKNyIBifNX/QHn8O9nsSzT8qCU7RegsN6Pbb5v74eEtbKeSOh05Rab3-SRYPP1-Ekt7TZyzEhnm/pRNdqkr1kRaj.jpg> Attribution: Public Domain

aratism and the tendency of local protestors to chant anti-regime slogans in their local languages. Not only do the roots of Iranian nationhood predate the 19th and 20th century organization of states around ethnicity but also, except for more organic Kurdish nationalism, many of the most famous Iranian separatist movements had foreign sponsorship. That said, the growing tendency of non-Persian Iranians to rally around their ethnic identity, if only to organize against the regime, highlights a growing sense of unease within Iran.

Source: "Peyam-e Vazir-e Farhang va Erhad-e Islami beh Ayin-e Bazargdasht Roz-e Melli Sha'ar va Adab-e Farsi (The message of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance to the commemoration ceremony of the National Day of Persian Poetry and Literature)," *Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, 19 September 2022. <https://dashti.farhang.gov.ir/fa/news/656734>

Persian language is an important factor in the national unity of Iranians and the common heritage of all Persian speakers. The history of this ancient country is filled with advice, doctrines and witticisms embedded in the institution of this proud language that over the years have made the lovers of culture and wisdom sweet and pleasant. Therefore, preserving, strengthening, and expanding this civilization-creating language is an essential and valuable duty to protect the independence and dignity of our land and nation. The individual and social identity of each of us depends on the Persian language, which, like a prism, forms the cultural basis of all Iranians and must be preserved and pursued in advance of this long-held treasure away from any narrow-mindedness and archaeological, ethnic and racial perspective.

Continued: Iran Vaunts Persian Language as Marker of National Identity Despite Country's Ethnic Diversity

Source: “Peyam-e Vazir-e Farhang va Erhad-e Islami beh Ayin-e Bazargdasht Roz-e Melli Sha’ar va Adab-e Farsi (The message of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance to the commemoration ceremony of the National Day of Persian Poetry and Literature),” *Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, 19 September 2022. <https://dashti.farhang.gov.ir/fa/news/656734>

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Notes:

[11] Despite its efforts after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran was never able to entirely subordinate ethnic and historical pride to the ayatollahs’ religious identity. Iranians continued to celebrate the Persian New Year, a holiday with roots in the pre-Islamic era. They continued to read and memorize the Shahnameh, a national epic that celebrates Persian kings dating to the dawn of time, and promoting Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the ancient Persian Empire.

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's Proposal To Build Railroads and Housing in Syria Could Enrich IRGC

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

In May 2022, the UN hosted a conference in Brussels to seek \$10.5 billion in donor commitments to rebuild Syria. While pledges fell short, the money that the international community will spend on reconstruction in Syria is significant. The excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, an outlet sponsored by Iran's Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, reports on a visit by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Rostam Ghasemi, to Damascus to meet with top Syrian officials including President Bashar Al-Assad. During his visit, Ghasemi floated the possibility of a railroad from Iran through Iraq to Syria. This seems farfetched given both insecurity in regions of Iraq and Syria, which the railroad would transect, as well as the length of time it would take to complete the project. Ghasemi also promised that Iran would help support the construction of housing projects in Syria—an offer that the Syrian government appeared to welcome. Construction projects of this sort have military implications given that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) economic wing, *Khatam al-Anbiya*, dominates Iran's construction sector. Should the Syrian government contract with Iranian firms to aid Syria's reconstruction, this could essentially provide the IRGC with funds at a time when both sanctions and the expense of countering internal protests drain Iran's treasury.

Iran stands by the people and government of Syria.



Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi meets with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, October 7, 2022 in Damascus, Syria

Source: Tasnim News Agency <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1401/07/15/1401071513335913426208374.jpg> Attribution: Public Domain

Source: “Amadegi Iran baraye Sakht-e Peruzheh-ha-ye Bozorg Moskan dar Suriya (Iran is Ready to Build Large Housing Projects in Syria),” *Mehr News Agency* (media outlet sponsored by Iran's Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization), 7 October 2022. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5603757>

According to Mehr News Agency, Rostam Ghasemi, the minister of Roads and Urban Development, during his trip to Damascus and in a meeting with Syrian Prime Minister Hossein Arnous, emphasized Tehran's support for Syria and stated: Iran stands by the people and government of Syria. We are with Syria in various fields, especially economic, and we can have good cooperation and participate in the fields of trade, commerce and large housing construction projects.

In this meeting, Arnous also mentioned the all-round support of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the people and the country of Syria and stated, “I thank and appreciate the leader, people and government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the all-round and continuous support to Syria.”

He added, “In the difficult situation we are facing to supply oil and its derivatives, we thank Iran for helping us to supply oil. We are under an unfair siege and we welcome Iranian investors who want to be in Syria.”

Referring to the process of rebuilding Syria after the war and the devastation caused by the 11-year war, Arnous stated: Opening wider horizons of cooperation between the two countries is for the benefit of the two nations and the two countries, and positive results are created from joint cooperation.

Iran Lauds Air Defense, Claims Sepehr Radar Will Soon Be Operational

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

On 26 September 2022, Brigadier General Alireza Elhami, deputy commander of the Iranian Army, granted an interview with Radio Tehran that was transcribed and published by the Defense Ministry's *Holy Defense News Agency*. Elhami began by saying that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had described air defense as the "front line" of Iranian defense. He lauded the history of the Army's Air Defense, including its supposed success during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, reflecting on the importance that the eight-year "Holy Defense" continues to play in Iranian military and political culture.¹² Not only did he speak about the continuation of air travel during the war, but he also said that Iran's air defense prevented the Iraqis from cutting off Iranian oil exports.

After praising past success, Elhami described new platforms and developments within the army's air defense. While he gave progress reports on the Bavar-373 surface-to-air missile system and announced that the range of Sayyad missile system would increase from 60 to 80 miles, the pride of his talk was the Sepehr radar. Although Iranian military officials frequently exaggerate capabilities, Elhami claims the new radar could provide over-the-horizon coverage to more than 1,800 miles, a range with which it could theoretically monitor air traffic across the entirety of the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia.

Air defense is the front line of all defense.

Source: "Radar-e Mavara-ye Afegh Sepehr behzudi 'Amaliyati Mishavad (Sepehr over-the-horizon radar will soon be operational)," *Holy Defense News Agency* (official media outlet of Iran's Defense Ministry), 26 September 2022. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/547521>

What is the importance of the army's air defense from the perspective of the commander-in-chief?

The deputy commander of the army's Air Defense [Alireza Elhami] said, "My take on this mission and the heavy responsibility that the Supreme Leader placed on the shoulders of his soldiers in the air defense is because in recent wars, especially regional wars, it was proved that the main threats will be due to the speed, effectiveness and result of airborne airstrikes. Therefore, the Supreme Leader has said that air defense is the front line of all defense of the country...."

"One of our greatest honors in air defense is that we did not allow oil exports to be cut off for a moment with all the heavy and massive attacks by the Ba'athist enemy," he said. "We did not allow any of the country's airports to be closed. During the eight years of holy defense, not a single day was the country's space closed to commercial aircraft. It was the zeal and efforts of the army's air defense specialists who did not allow the radars to be dismantled for a moment...."

Brigadier General Elhami said that today not only in the region but also in some areas, Iran is among the top 10 powers in the world [in radar technology] and stressed, "We will soon have native radar beyond the horizon. Maybe a number of countries in the world have it, but fewer than five countries in the world have the knowledge to produce it indigenously."

The deputy commander of the army's air defense said that today we are proud of our radar beyond the horizon that is named Sepehr and which will soon be operational. He noted, "This radar with a range of 3,000 kilometers [1,864 miles] provides operational ability for air defense. This radar can monitor a variety of flying objects ranging from commercial aircraft, fighters, control command aircraft, communication relay aircraft and drones. He continued, "This radar is able to detect all air threats and provide us with information to make decisions and counteract them."

Notes:

[12] Iran's Army Air Defense is a coequal division within the Iranian military to the ground forces, navy, and air force.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Large Hack of Latin America's Defense Departments Puts Security Services on Edge

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

A group of anonymous, self-described social justice advocates called the Guacamayas have carried out a large cyber-attack and hack of Latin America's Defense Ministries. The Guacamayas are a loose network of hackers that aim to expose corruption within the highest echelons of Latin American governments, abuses of Indigenous rights, and the internal governance structures of mining and oil companies. The Guacamayas have engaged in several high-profile hacks of the Colombian and Guatemalan governments before and are thus known to many throughout the region. The Guacamayas are a dispersed group without a known physical location.

The Guacamayas' recent hack is suspected of exposing upwards of 10 terabytes of information, including information from security services in El Salvador, Chile, and Colombia. However, as *BBC News Mundo* reports, the portion of the data pertaining to Mexico's security forces is expected to be the largest—around 6 terabytes of information. While Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador says the Army has nothing to hide, *BBC News Mundo* says that the

leaks have already roiled Mexico's Defense Department, exposing corruption and links to organized crime groups, as well as a concerning level of advancement of criminal cartels within the country. According to Mexican daily *El Universal*, the leaks have also revealed connections between criminal organizations and extra-hemispheric actors, such as Russia. In one instance, a Russian national linked to the country's special forces, trained and provided weapons to a group of self-defense forces in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero. These leaks have the potential to further cause deep concern in Latin America's defense ministries and security forces for months and years to come. They also demonstrate that despite countries' best efforts to professionalize their bureaucracies and tackle corruption, many security services throughout the region remain mired in corruption and penetrated by the interests of transnational organized crime groups.

The information produced... also shows the military's knowledge of relations between authorities and criminal groups.

Source: "Guacamaya Leaks: 5 revelaciones del hackeo masivo que sufrió el ejército de México (Guacamaya Leaks: 5 revelations of the massive hacking suffered by the Mexican army)," *BBC News Mundo* (Spanish-language version of the popular British outlet), 6 October 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-63167331>

The information produced... also shows the military's knowledge of relations between authorities and criminal groups. For example, there are reports about possible links between 20 mayors of the state of Guerrero with drug gangs and leaders when the Ayotzinapa students disappeared... [the leaks] exposed that there are files on politicians across the entire political spectrum of the country, from legislators to governors, and their possible links with criminals... there are also reports about corruption and weaknesses in customs and how this facilitates the trafficking of drugs and products through the points of entry and exit of the country. Politicians have sought out the armed forces themselves to connect contractors and service companies in the many important infrastructure projects they control.

Source: "Guacamaya Leaks revela conexión rusa con autodefensas de Guerrero...y de éstas con un cártel (Guacamaya Leaks reveal Russian connection with Guerrero self-defense groups...and of with a cartel)," *El Universal* (one of Mexico's oldest and most read dailies), 4 October 2022. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/guacamaya-leaks-revela-conexion-rusa-con-autodefensas-de-guerrero-y-de-estos-con-un-cartel>

This self-defense group emerged in 2017 and is located in one of the areas with the highest poppy production in the country... Bogdanov Rustam, a Russian national, is identified as an instructor... he is a former operator of the Russian Special Forces Unit and the Antiterrorism Unit... The document also specifies that the purpose of this course for the self-defense groups is to 'train them to face their antagonists and control their areas of presence.'

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Burkina Faso: A Bellwether on Russian and French Presence

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

The September 2022 military takeover in Burkina Faso appears to be an indication of the continuing shifts in geopolitical affinities among Burkinabe away from France and towards Russia. In the accompanying article from the Burkina Faso-based daily *L'Observateur Paalga*, a journalist interviews Alouna Traoré, a survivor of the 1987 Burkina Faso coup d'état, a seminal event in Burkinabe history.¹³ In the interview, Traoré articulates why he supports what is perceived to be Russian influence in the September 2022 military takeover which saw Interim President Paul-Henri Sandogo Damiba ousted by Army Captain Ibrahim Traoré (no known relation) due to the former's inability to control the spiraling jihadist insurgencies plaguing the country. In the aftermath, international media reported the presence of numerous Russian flags carried by civil society members supporting the change of power. While Russia's role in Burkina Faso remains murky, next door in Mali, Russian Wagner mercenaries have been in the country assisting the ruling military junta there to try to stem the tide of its own fight against jihadists associated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Meanwhile, even despite years of Sahelian counterterrorism assistance via Operation Barkhane, a strong anti-French sentiment persists throughout the Sahel.¹⁴

As the interview details, Traoré, a longtime supporter of Russia, views Russian support positively and pragmatically. Given the dire situation that the country faces, Traoré believes Russia to be the country's only option, especially



Memorial of the Martyrs in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial_of_the_Martyrs-Ouagadougou-4.jpg Attribution: CC BY 2.0

for weapons, as neither France nor the United States offers what he views to be acceptable assistance. Importantly, he also articulates that simply because he advocates for engaging with Russia, he views this not as Burkina Faso being co-opted, as many intellectuals in his country interpret, but rather, as a pragmatic and necessary move. As he notes: "We are drowning and clinging to everything. But just because we're attached to [Russia] doesn't mean you become our owner."¹⁵

Russia delivers the equipment to us and shows us how to use it and that's it. What it is given in return, if it is indecent exploitation, there is no problem. France has exploited us for a long time without it bothering anyone.

Source: "Lutte contre le terrorisme: 'Ceux qui ont des problèmes avec Wagner n'ont qu'à rester là' (Alouna Traoré, le rescapé du 15 Octobre 87) (Fight against terrorism: 'those with problems with Wagner can just stay there' (Alouna Traoré, survivor of 15 October 87)," *L'Observateur Paalga* (daily newspaper from Burkina Faso), 12 October 2022. http://www.lobservateur.bf/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=6727

You are known to be a defender of the Russian cause. Can you give us an explanation for this Russophilia?

When you say defender of the Russian cause, that's a bit of an exaggeration. The people of Burkina Faso find themselves shipwrecked. And when you're in that situation, you cling to anything to get yourself out of trouble.
continue on 28

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Burkina Faso: A Bellwether on Russian and French Presence

Source Continued: “Lutte contre le terrorisme: ‘Ceux qui ont des problèmes avec Wagner n’ont qu’à rester là’ (Alouna Traoré, le rescapé du 15 Octobre 87) (Fight against terrorism: ‘those with problems with Wagner can just stay there’ (Alouna Traoré, survivor of 15 October 87),” *L’Observateur Paalga* (daily newspaper from Burkina Faso), 12 October 2022. http://www.lobserveur.bf/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=6727

The main thing is not to die. However, we are on the way to extinction with regard to what is happening to us. I cannot slander those who attack us because they are sending us a message....

To come back to your question, I have the feeling that Burkinabe intellectuals are a bit dangerous. They act exactly like France and the United States. We perish, we die, we lose parts of the territory and we find that normal. France does not speak, it has the ammunition and the techniques, but it does nothing. France’s mentor, the United States, says nothing either...

We have to make allowances: Russia delivers the equipment to us and shows us how to use it and that’s it. What it is given in return, if it is indecent exploitation, there is no problem. France has exploited us for a long time without it bothering anyone. Russia gives us weapons that we did not have with France in a short time and that is a problem. It is an insult to our intelligence. The African intellectual makes me ashamed. People who don’t know what they want in a situation of extreme peril is dangerous.

Some believe that those who support Russia, in particular Wagner, are financed. Is this your case?

At my age, am I incapable of knowing what is good for me? Do I need someone to show me the path that suits me? How are they [the Russians] going to come and arm me and instrumentalize me? Russia manufactures weapons like the Kalashnikov which has shown its effectiveness around the world. We are asking for Kalashnikovs in quantity to arm our people...

We are drowning and clinging to everything. But just because we’re attached to [Russia] doesn’t mean you become our owner. One does not leave slavery to go to another slavery. We want the emancipation of the African man because Westerners have never considered us as humans. When are we going to understand it?

Do you think the Russians can make us happy?

I saw something with the Russians I want. Do we manufacture weapons in Burkina Faso? We go to countries that manufacture weapons. Russia is looking out for its interests, I agree. I agree that the Russians are after the money, but in return I have the weapons to defend myself... Burkina Faso is looking for weapons and Russia has them. And better quality. What Russia will take in return cannot finish our wealth. That’s what it’s all about.

Notes:

[13] In that episode, then Captain Blaise Compaoré orchestrated a coup d’état, killing Burkina Faso’s far-left President Thomas Sankara. Among other reasons, Compaoré had justified the act by noting that Sankara’s left-leaning rhetoric had created problems with former colonial France; resultantly, the coup is a symbol for varying perspectives on Burkina Faso’s alignment, or not, with France.

[14] For more on the phenomenon of anti-French “fake news” in the Sahel, see: Matthew Kirwin, Lassane Ouedraogo, and Jason Warner, “Fake News in the Sahel: ‘Afranx News,’ French Counterterrorism, and the Logics of User-Generated Media.” *African Studies Review*. July 2022.

[15] For more on African stances on the Russia-Ukraine war, see: Jason Warner, “African Stances on the Russia-Ukraine War Demonstrate Reliance on, Antipathy Toward West,” *OE Watch* Issue 9, 2022.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

African Leaders and UN See Terrorism in the Sahel as Dire

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary



President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nana_Akufo_Addo,_Jan._2020.jpg Attribution: CC BY 2.0

All of us in the [West African] region are being forced to spend huge amounts of money on security.

Terrorism in the Sahelian region of Africa—broadly, the area of desert south of the Sahara—is among the world’s most active locations of terrorist activity. The UN recently released a sobering report detailing that in 2021, nearly half of the world’s victims of terrorism came from Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 3,500 people. The Sahel accounted for a significant percentage of those.¹⁶ Across coastal West Africa, countries historically spared from terrorist violence, like Ghana and Togo, are now preparing for an impending wave of terrorist threats from the Sahel.¹⁷

Ghanaian President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo underscored the severity of the terrorist threat in the Sahel in his recent address to the UN General Assembly’s 77th Session in New York. As the accompanying transcript, taken

from the Office of the Presidency of Ghana, recounts of his speech, he summarized: “[Terrorism in the Sahel] might look to many, today, as a local conflict which affects only the countries in that region. We, in Ghana, know differently, we have watched in horror as the unrest has moved from the Sahel, inexorably, to the West African coastal countries. All of Ghana’s neighbors have suffered terrorist attacks, and some have lost territorial space to the invading forces.” He then connected the prevalence of terrorist violence in the Sahel to the significant number of coups that have affected West African states over the past several years. At the core, he said, West African states have been forced to spend so much money on security that they can no longer adequately provide social services, thus leading to civil unrest.

Source: “Address By President Akufo-Addo at the 77th Session Of The United Nations’ General Assembly,” *The Presidency of the Republic of Ghana* (Office of the President of Ghana), 21 September 2022. <https://presidency.gov.gh/index.php/briefing-room/speeches/2285-address-by-president-akufo-addo-at-the-77th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly>

...A case in point is the destabilising conflict in the Sahel. It might look to many, today, as a local conflict which affects only the countries in that region. We, in Ghana, know differently, we have watched in horror as the unrest has moved from the Sahel, inexorably, to the West African coastal countries. All of Ghana’s neighbours have suffered terrorist attacks, and some have lost territorial space to the invading forces.

Furthermore, the terrorist pressure has provided a pretext for the unhappy reappearance of military rule in three (3) of the fifteen (15) member ECOWAS Community, two (2) of whom have borne the brunt of the terrorist outrages in the Region – Mali and Burkina Faso. It is a development we are determined to reverse, so that the ECOWAS space remains a democratic one.

All of us in the Region are being forced to spend huge amounts of money on security. This is money we should be spending on educating and giving skills to our young people; on building much needed roads, bridges, hospitals and other such infrastructure, which we are spending to fight terrorists or to keep them out from destabilising our countries. This is a global problem, deserving the attention of the world community for a global solution.

Notes:

[16] For more on the UN report, see: “Nearly half of the world’s terror victims are African, with organized crime increasingly entrenched,” *UN News*, 6 October 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129312>

[17] For more on the preparations West African states are taking as they brace for a wave of terror from northern Sahelian neighbors, see: Jason Warner, “Coastal West African States Brace for Wave of Terrorism from the Sahel,” *OE Watch*, Issue 10, 2022.

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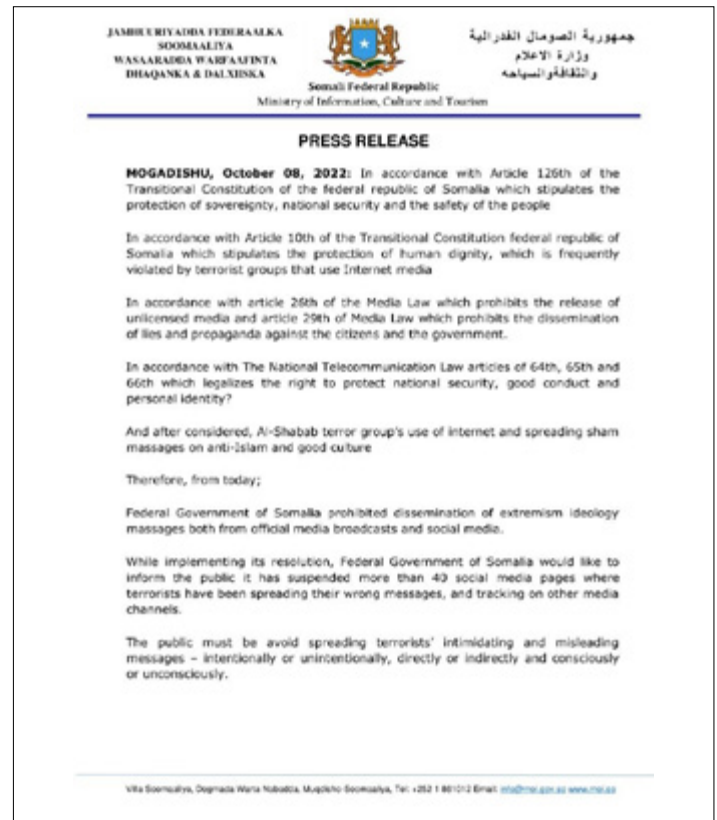
Somali Government Bans Media Reporting on Al-Shabaab

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

As the accompanying excerpted article from the Somalia-focused East African news site *Somali Guardian* relays, Somalia's Deputy Minister of Information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al Adala, recently decreed that Somali media were henceforth banned from "the dissemination of extremism ideology messages both from official media houses and on social media." In practice, the announcement meant a *de facto* ban on reporting on the activities of Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda's East Africa branch and one of the deadliest terror groups in the world.¹⁸ The announcement came as Somalia's new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who took office in May 2022, has promised to take a hardline stance against Al-Shabaab, which conducted a suicide bombing in late September in Mogadishu that killed seven people.¹⁹ For its part, the United States and the broader international community have been fighting Al-Shabaab for nearly a decade. In May 2022, the U.S. deployed 450 troops to Kenya to help battle the group.

I want to inform the Somali media and all Somali people in general that we'll regard all al Shabaab-related propaganda coverage including their terrorist acts and their ideology as punishable crimes.

The move to restrict reporting on Al-Shabaab has largely been condemned. Most broadly, reactions seem to suggest that the decree's bans remain ambiguous in practice: just where the line between simply reporting on the group's activities and disseminating pro-al-Shabaab propaganda begins is unclear. While it was stated that reporting on Al-Shabaab was not allowed, separately, the same Deputy Minister relayed that the new law would not prohibit normal news coverage of Al-Shabaab's activities. In its tone, however, the ban on reporting has sparked dissent by Somali and global media rights groups. As the second article, also from the *Somali Guardian* details, a local Somali journalist organization, Somali Journalists Syndicate, saw its Secretary General arrested approximately a week after the announcement of the decree following his criticism of the new law. The Ministry of Information denied that his arrest was connected to the criticism. Amnesty International has also condemned the new law. Given the prevalence of Al-Shabaab in the security and political fabric of Somalia, just how the new decree will play out remains to be seen.



A copy of the Somali Government's Press release on 8 October 2022, banning the dissemination of extremist ideology in formal or informal outlets.

Source: <https://twitter.com/SOMNALIVE/status/1578774905986093056/photo/1> Attribution: Public Domain

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Somali Government Bans Media Reporting on Al-Shabaab

Source: “Somalia bans media from reporting Al-Shabaab attacks,” *Somali Guardian* (East Africa-based news platform), 8 October 2022. <https://somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/somalia-bans-media-from-reporting-al-shabaab-attacks/>

Somalia’s government on Saturday banned journalists from covering stories of Al-Shabaab attacks, weeks after the government launched an offensive against the militant group.

In a press conference, Somali deputy information minister Abdirahman Yusuf Al Adala said the government had banned local media from reporting Al-Shabaab attacks in accordance with national media regulations and those who breach the order will face justice.

He added that dozens of social media accounts linked with the group had been removed and a number of others would be next....

Somali media associations have not yet commented on the decision. The government had previously restricted reportage of conflict stories by local journalists, with dozens killed, others arrested and many more wounded in crackdown to stifle media.

Source: “Arrest of media activist in Somalia sparks outcry,” *Somali Guardian* (East Africa-based news platform), 13 October 2022. <https://somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/arrest-of-media-activist-in-somalia-sparks-outcry/>

The arrest of media activist Abdalla Mumin in Somalia’s capital on Tuesday by security forces sparked an outcry from journalists and rights groups, days after authorities introduced a media gag order.

The activist was arrested in a raid by security forces on his office, just a day after he had criticized an order by the Ministry of Information that banned journalists from covering reports on the Al-Qaeda-linked militant group Al-Shabaab. He accused authorities of having an intention to muzzle media.

Amnesty International said it was concerned by the “arbitrary arrest and detention” of Abdalla. “Authorities in Somalia must immediately & unconditionally release him & must also respect, protect and promote freedom of expression,” It added.

Somali Ministry of Information, in a statement, distanced itself from Abdalla’s detention and alleged that he was arrested on challenges unrelated to his work by police. But journalists and media activists accused the ministry of playing a role in the detention.

Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), where Abdalla has been serving as secretary-general, said he was transferred on Tuesday to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), days after being held incommunicado.

The media clampdown came months after the incumbent Somali president, who accused his predecessor of using unlawful force to silence journalists, promised to promote press freedom during his election campaign.

Notes:

[18] For a comprehensive list of the best resources available to study Al-Shabaab, see: Christopher Anzalone and Jason Warner, “Al-Shabaab,” Oxford Bibliographies, 23 June 2021. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0303.xml>

[19] For more on Al-Shabaab’s use of suicide bombing as a tactic in its arsenal of violence, see: Jason Warner and Ellen Chapin, *Targeted Terror: The Suicide Bombers of Al-Shabaab*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 2018. <https://ctc.usma.edu/targeted-terror-suicide-bombers-al-shabaab/>

Ecuador Seeks New Relationship With China After Debt Deal

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Ecuador is performing a balancing act as it undertakes a strategic review of its with China while making overtures to Washington. Under President Rafael Correa (2007-2017), Ecuador racked up billions in debt, with China as the country's largest lender. Since Correa's departure, Ecuador has struggled to repay China, making repeated requests to restructure debt deals. In contrast, current President Guillermo Lasso recently announced the renegotiation of Ecuador's debt, reports center-right daily *El Universo*. According to the article, the agreement will free Ecuador's oil production, previously tethered to the repayment of the Chinese debt, to be sold on the spot market. The newspaper notes that this should provide additional revenues for the government, which it badly needs to invest in both social programs and to combat rising insecurity and criminality. The debt renegotiation is part of a broader repositioning of the Ecuador-China relationship, notes another *El Uni-*

verso article. One large source of debt is the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam project, which has generated controversy throughout the country. The project is mired in cost overruns, environmental degradation, and questions over the structural integrity of the infrastructure (it has thousands of cracks and is unstable). As a result, a review commission within Ecuador's government recommended a rejection of the project, with a threat to withhold repayment of the loan that financed it if China does not fix the structural deficiencies.

The idea is that part of the oil is released, and it is allowed to be sold at market price, which is an additional benefit for Ecuador. And with those resources, the president can further strengthen social investment.

Source: "Presidente Guillermo Lasso anuncia renegociación de deuda con China en Nueva York (President Guillermo Lasso announces debt renegotiation with China in New York)," *El Universo* (one of Ecuador's largest dailies, generally seen as center-right), 19 September 2022. <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/economia/presidente-guillermo-lasso-anuncia-renegociacion-de-deuda-con-china-en-nueva-york-nota/>

The government... said that, in general, these agreements represent a relief of \$1.4 billion in debt service for Ecuador until 2025, since amortizations to the China Development Bank will be reduced by more than \$745 million over the next three years and amortizations to Eximbank will be reduced by about \$680 million over the next four years... The idea is that part of the oil is released and it is allowed to be sold at market price, which is an additional benefit for Ecuador. And with those resources, the president can further strengthen social investment.

Source: "Informe de Fiscalización recomienda no recibir central Coca Codo y revisar designación del Ministro de Energía por conflicto de intereses (Audit report recommends not receiving Coca Codo Sinclair Dam and reviewing the appointment of the Minister of Energy due to conflict of interest)," *El Universo* (one of the country's largest dailies, generally considered center-right), 9 September 2022. <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/economia/informe-de-fiscalizacion-recomienda-no-recibir-central-coca-codo-y-revisar-designacion-del-ministro-de-energia-por-conflicto-de-intereses-nota/>

At least 121 conclusions and 13 recommendations, which include asking the President of the Republic, Guillermo Lasso, that his government reject the work of the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant (due to its multiple structural problems) and that it review the appointment of the current Minister of Energy, Xavier Vera Grunauer, for allegedly having a conflict of interest, came out of a final report of the investigation carried out by the Supervisory Commission of the National Assembly, on the contract and construction of the largest hydroelectric power plant, the Coca Codo Sinclair Dam.

Erdoğan Relying on Russia To Bolster Support Ahead of Turkish Elections



Putin with Erdoğan.

Source: Kremlin.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Putin_with_Erdo%C4%9Fan.jpeg, Attribution: CC BY 3.0

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

As he prepares for elections in June 2023, Turkish President Erdoğan will face a more united and determined domestic opposition than ever. Polls show that the most important issue for the Turkish electorate is the economy. Given the high inflation and economic crisis in the country, polls also show that if elections were held today, Erdoğan's victory is not guaranteed. It is in this context that a series of recent moves made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in support of Erdoğan, are significant. As the first accompanying passage taken from respected Turkish journalist Murat Yetkin's *YouTube* channel details, Russian President Vladimir Putin is making "gesture after gesture" to secure Erdoğan's victory in 2023 elections by helping him claim that he is improving Turkey's economy.

In the second accompanying passage from independent news and analysis platform *Medyascope*, former Turkish diplomat Sinan Ülgen points out that the current pronouncements about making Turkey the largest natural gas center for Europe is a significant change in Russia's stance on the issue. He begs the question: "Why now?" and suggests that Putin prefers Erdoğan to win. Ülgen also notes that Russia's state-run Rosatom, which is building Turkey's first nuclear power plant, wired around \$15 billion to its Turkish subsidiary recently, helping relieve a shortage in Turkey's foreign currency reserves, a notable benefit for Turkey in an election year. In the third excerpted passage, also from *Medyascope*, expert Ömer Taşpınar claims the transfer of funds represents Putin's "investment in Erdoğan's election victory." Shortly after the transfer, Erdoğan criticized the West's sanctions on Russia, while voicing support for Putin's decision to block natural gas sales to Europe. Taşpınar says this was Erdoğan thanking Putin for the transfer.

In addition to Turkey's economic woes, Erdoğan also faces resentment from the Turkish public regarding the approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees that it currently hosts. From the fourth excerpted passage, also from *Medyascope*, expert Gönül Tol predicts that Putin may help Erdoğan with this challenge too, by allowing Erdoğan to conduct an operation into northeastern Syria before the elections, something Putin has objected to in the past. This would enable Erdoğan to claim that such an operation would allow for the creation of a safe zone where Syrian refugees could be resettled back in Syria. Turkish observers would seemingly not be surprised if Putin gave the green light to Turkey to conduct at least a limited operation in the coming months.

Putin is making "gesture after gesture" to...President Erdoğan...
No Turkish administration in the past has received such political support from a world power... Putin is behaving like a provincial AKP leader, to get [Erdoğan] reelected...

Continued: Erdoğan Relying on Russia To Bolster Support Ahead of Turkish Elections

Source: Murat Yetkin, “Erdoğan Putin’le aylık olağan görüşmede: Rusya yeniden seçilsin istiyor (Erdoğan in his monthly regular meeting with Putin: Russia wants [him] to get reelected),” *Murat Yetkin via YouTube* (veteran journalist Murat Yetkin’s own YouTube channel providing neutral analysis on Turkish developments), 12 October 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzz1YSqsOUc&t=2s>

Russian President Putin is making “gesture after gesture” to Turkey, specifically to President Erdoğan... Back to back statements coming from Moscow about natural gas are surprising even for Ankara. No Turkish administration in the past has received such political support from a world power... Our journalist friend Nevsin Mengu says that Putin is behaving like a provincial AKP leader, to get [Erdoğan] reelected...

Source: Sinan Ülgen, “Putin’in Türkiye’deki “seçim yatırımları” ve tüm yönleriyle gaz merkezi (Putin’s “election investments” in Turkey and the gas hub [debate] from all angles),” *Medyascope.tv* (independent Turkish news and analysis platform), 15 October 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOPh5Hrd53o&t=16s>

Russia’s capital investments into the Turkish banking system for the Akkuyu nuclear plant, certain statements, other ways that Russia has provided financial help to Turkey such as sending the money for the Akkuyu nuclear plant in advance, suggest that Putin prefers that Erdoğan stay in power, since he knows how to work with Erdoğan and has a working relationship with him, one that has produced results for Putin. Because it does seem like sending the money for Akkuyu in advance has no benefit for Russia, but a notable direct benefit for Turkey. The natural gas issue is a bit different. On this issue, Russia has a benefit, but... if Russia is really proposing to make Turkey a gas hub, as opposed to a transit country, this points to a huge policy change for Russia, ...which begs the question, “Why now?”... given that Turkey has wanted this for 25 years. So it does seem that Putin is taking steps to help Erdoğan in the upcoming elections.

Source: Transatlantik: Ankara-Athina hattında gerilim: Savaş kapıda mı? Enerji krizi | Biden-Trump çekişmesi (Transatlantik: Tension in the Ankara-Athens route: Is war knocking on the door? The Energy crisis | Biden-Trump Competition),” *Medyascope.tv* (independent Turkish news and analysis platform), 7 September 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szU-hgn-6_w&t=2270s

The billions of dollars that came from Russia, I’m not sure how that’s coming, but... it seems that Putin is making an election investment for Erdoğan. He wants Erdoğan to win elections... and he gave this money for him to win. And in return, we see that Erdoğan is protecting Russia in his statements. Erdoğan’s comments [criticizing Europe’s sanctions and voicing support for Russia’s decision to cut natural gas to Europe] are pro-Russia...and his position is one that is closer to Russia on the issue of energy... He is criticizing the EU for the sanctions and saying that Russia is a strong country when he should be saying that Russia should not weaponize gas...

Source: “Transatlantik: Kılıçdaroğlu’nun ABD ziyareti | ABD’den F-16 kararı | Erdoğan-Putin görüşmesi (Transatlantik: Kılıçdaroğlu’s USA visit | The USA’s F-16 decision | Erdoğan-Putin meeting),” *Medyascope.tv* via YouTube, 13 October 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG3YglxALwA>

Erdoğan has been a lifeline for an isolated Russian economy... Putin is also a lifeline for Erdoğan [domestically]... In this context, Putin’s injection of money into the Turkish economy ... is important for Erdoğan... I think Putin can provide important help for Erdoğan in Syria... Before the elections, I think an operation into Syria would be beneficial to Erdoğan because he could use the narrative that “I know you are resentful about the refugees but I can fix this problem. I will conduct an operation into Syria to establish a zone [for the refugees to be resettled]. Until now, Putin had not given a green light to Turkey on this, but today, given how much Putin depends on Erdoğan, he might give a green light for this, which would be a huge favor to Erdoğan.

Armenia Acquires Indian Multiple Rocket Launcher System Amid Delays in Russian Deliveries



Pinaka MBRL at rehearsal of Republic Day Parade 2011.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pinaka_MBRL_at_rehearsal_of_Republic_Day_Parade_2011.jpg Attribution: Government Open Data License – India

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

The Armenian government has become increasingly critical over what it sees as a lack of Russian support in the wake of several incidents with Azerbaijan, particularly Armenia's clashes on 12-14 September 2022 that resulted in dozens of service members killed on both sides. While Armenian officials have previously mentioned looking for alternative partners beyond Russia to provide security cooperation and other support, the accompanying excerpted articles offer a look at one way the Armenian government is dealing with a lack of support from Moscow. The excerpted article from Armenian independent news website *Hetq* reports on comments from Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

following an incident with Azerbaijan on 28 September. Pashinyan noted ongoing reforms of the Armenian Armed Forces and he blamed Azerbaijan for trying to prevent these from taking place. He went on to mention that Armenia "paid hundreds of millions of dollars" for new weapon systems from "allied countries," but that these have not yet been delivered. While Pashinyan does not mention Russia as one of the allied countries that failed to deliver weapons, it remains one of Armenia's most significant providers of weapon systems and equipment.²⁰

In the absence of assumed Russian deliveries, the second excerpted article, from India's independent English-language news website *The Print*, reports that Armenia signed a contract with India in September to acquire the Pinaka multiple rocket-launcher system (MLRS) and that its order "would be fast tracked." The article notes that the agreement includes an unknown number of Pinaka systems, ammunition, and anti-tank rockets. It also mentions that Armenia previously purchased four Swathi radar systems from India in 2020. As Armenia continues to carry out military reforms and prepare for potential clashes with Azerbaijan, the purchase of the Pinaka MLRS from India is an indication of what weapon systems Armenia believes it needs in the near term and demonstrates its willingness to look beyond Russia for supplies.

There are cases when our country paid hundreds of millions of dollars, but the obligation to supply Armenia with weapons was not fulfilled, including by allied countries.

Source: Lusine Akopyan, "Обязательства по поставкам оружия Армении не выполняют и союзнические страны – Н. Пашинян (Allied countries are not fulfilling their obligations of supplying weapons to Armenia – N. Pashinyan)," *Hetq* (independent news website in Armenia), 29 September 2022. <https://hetq.am/ru/article/148783>

At a government meeting on September 29, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said that yesterday the Azerbaijani armed forces carried out another provocation on the southeastern section of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, striking at Armenian units performing engineering work.

Engineering work was carried out on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, and the Azerbaijani units that opened fire were also on the territory of the Republic of Armenia...

"I also want to draw attention to the following circumstance. We have begun a large-scale process of reforming our armed forces, and Azerbaijan is trying to prevent Armenia from carrying out reforms in the Armed Forces with such provocations..." Pashinyan said, adding that there are cases when our country paid hundreds of millions of dollars, but the obligation to supply Armenia with weapons was not fulfilled, including by allied countries...

Continued: Armenia Acquires Indian Multiple Rocket Launcher System Amid Delays in Russian Deliveries

Source: Snehesh Alex Philip, “As tensions rise with Azerbaijan, Armenia buys Pinaka rockets & ammunition from India,” *The Print* (an independent English-language news website from India), 29 September 2022. <https://theprint.in/defence/as-tensions-rise-with-azerbaijan-armenia-buys-pinaka-rockets-ammunition-from-india/1147833/>

Armenia has signed a contract with India for procuring the indigenous Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers, unspecified missiles and ammunition, amid its growing tensions with Azerbaijan...

Sources in the defence and security establishment confirmed that the government-to-government contract, valued at about Rs 2,000 crore, was signed earlier this month and that the supplies would be fast tracked as per the requirement.

While the exact quantity is not known, the order includes the indigenous Pinaka system, ammunition and anti-tank rockets...

The ex-Soviet republic had bought four indigenous Swathi weapons locating radar in 2020 from India which was delivered in the backdrop of its conflict with Azerbaijan...

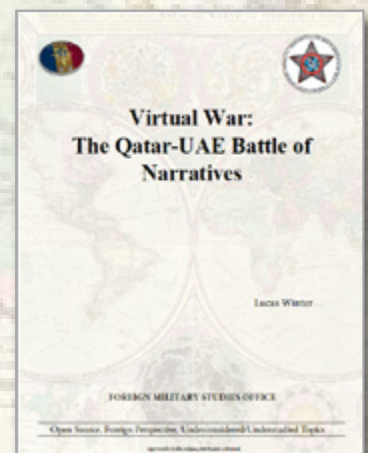
Notes:

[20] See: Matthew Stein, “Armenia Acquires Russian Helicopters as Part of Armed Forces Modernization,” *OE Watch*, Issue #3, 2022.

VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter
May 2020

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



Members of Collective Security Treaty Organization Show Less Support for Russia-Led Body

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Despite various disputes and conflicts, member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) have until recently appeared to put aside their differences to continue working jointly within the Eurasian intergovernmental military alliance. However, as the accompanying excerpted articles illustrate, these internal frictions may be taking a toll. The first article excerpted from semi-independent Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* reports on Armenia's refusal to participate in a CSTO exercise that took place in Kazakhstan. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had requested that the CSTO provide military assistance following the mid-September 2022 clashes with Azerbaijan, but member states "insisted on the need to resolve the conflict situation through diplomacy." This marked the second time that the CSTO refused military assistance to Armenia in its clashes with Azerbaijan. The second article, from independent news website *Fergana*,

reports on Kyrgyzstan's refusal to take part in a CSTO exercise in Tajikistan because of ongoing clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. The article also notes that the Ministry of Defense of Kyrgyzstan cancelled a separate CSTO exercise in Kyrgyzstan a week prior. The CSTO exercises in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were part of an annual series that focuses on preparing CSTO joint operational forces for a variety of scenarios. The third article, from Kazakhstan's independent news website *Vlast*, reports on a comment from an official from Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry that CSTO forces will not get involved in the war in Ukraine, noting Kazakhstan's respect for the territorial integrity of existing states. While Kazakh officials have previously mentioned their position on this, the statement comes at a time when other member states are showing less overall support for the organization.



The question of the participation of the troops of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the war between Russia and Ukraine is not on the agenda.

Flag of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization.svg Attribution: Public domain

Source: Andrey Sapozhnikov, "Армения не будет участвовать в учениях ОДКБ (Armenia will not participate in the CSTO exercises)," *Kommersant* (semi-independent Russian daily newspaper), 26 September 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5581954>

The exercises of the countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which will be held from September 26 to October 8 in Kazakhstan, will be held without the participation of Armenia. The reason for the country's refusal to participate in military activities was the border conflict with Azerbaijan...

On September 13, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated...Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan requested military assistance from the organization. The CSTO member countries, however, insisted on the need to resolve the conflict situation through diplomacy.

Continued: Members of Collective Security Treaty Organization Show Less Support for Russia-Led Body

Source: “Кыргызстан отказался от участия в учениях ОДКБ в Таджикистане из-за «неостывшей крови» (Kyrgyzstan refused to participate in the CSTO exercise in Tajikistan because of “bad blood”),” *Fergana Agency* (an independent news website focusing on Central Asia), 11 October 2022. <https://fergana.agency/news/128011/>

The military contingent of Kyrgyzstan will not take part in the exercises of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) "Frontier - 2022" in Tajikistan due to the military conflict between the two countries. This was stated by Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan Edil Baisalov...

...on October 9, the Ministry of Defense of Kyrgyzstan announced the cancellation of the CSTO exercises "Indestructible Brotherhood - 2022", which were to be held from October 10 to 14 at the Edelweiss training center in Balykchy. The reasons for the cancellation were not reported.

Source: Tamara Vaal, “Войска ОДКБ не будут принимать участие в войне между Россией и Украиной – МИД (The Forces of the CSTO will not take part in the war between Russia and Ukraine – Ministry of Foreign Affairs),” *Vlast* (independent news website in Kazakhstan), 3 October 2022. <https://vlast.kz/novosti/51937-vojska-odkb-ne-budut-prinimat-ucastie-v-vojne-mezdu-rossiej-i-ukrainoj-mid.html>

...The question of the participation of the troops of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the war between Russia and Ukraine is not on the agenda, Aibek Smadiyarov, the agency's official representative, said at a briefing at the Foreign Ministry on Monday...

He also stressed that Kazakhstan proceeds from the principles of the territorial integrity of states, their sovereign equality and peaceful coexistence in accordance with international law and the UN Charter.



OEWATCH

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Saudi Arabia Continues Buying Missiles and UAVs From China as Part of Broader Foreign Policy Rebalancing

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Saudi Arabia's continued unwillingness to act against Russia in global energy markets should be understood in the context of a broader Saudi foreign policy recalibration, formulated prior to the Ukraine conflict and in response to a perceived geostrategic transformation in which it views China playing a key role. Early in the Ukraine conflict, Saudi leadership countered U.S. pressure to undermine Russian interests in global energy markets with demands that the U.S. bolster security assistance for the kingdom. Looming behind these demands was the prospect of turning to China as a complementary, if not alternative, security partner. As detailed in the first excerpted article, a columnist in the influential Saudi daily *al-Riyadh* recently noted: "Saudi foreign policy has adapted to international multipolarity," leading the kingdom to strengthen political, economic and military relations with several countries, including China. Chinese-Saudi military cooperation, which is likely to come under increased scrutiny in coming months, primarily involves weapons and technology transfers, most notably involving ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

At the core, Chinese-Saudi defense cooperation is rooted in missiles, and has been a relationship shrouded in secrecy from the start. Such cooperation began with a 1986 deal for around 50 medium-range **DF-3 (Dongfeng 3)** missiles, conducted surreptitiously and before the establishment of official bilateral relations in 1990.²¹ In 2007, following a landmark visit to China by King Abdullah, Saudi Arabia purchased the upgraded **DF-21** ballistic missile system; however, neither country publicly admitted to the deal, which was reported on several years later. Today, the secret China-Saudi missile development program appears to continue evolving, with recent media reports and analyses claiming that Saudi Arabia, with Chinese assistance, has begun producing missiles domestically.

In contrast to the clandestine missile program, Saudi-Chinese cooperation on UAVs and counter-UAV systems is mostly in the open. In the past decade, Saudi Arabia has purchased the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group's Wing Loong II and the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation's Rainbow CH-4 UAVs, employing them in the Yemen conflict and signing cooperation agreements for CH-4s to be coproduced in Saudi territory. Saudi military industry has also contracted with the China Electronics



A Chinese DF-21A transporter erector vehicle on display at the "Our troops towards the sky" exhibition at the Beijing Military Museum.

Source: Max Smith, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:DF-21A_TEL_-_Chinese_Military_Museum_Beijing.jpg Attribution: Public Domain

Saudi foreign policy has adapted to international multipolarity...

Technology Group to jointly develop drones and counter-drone systems.²² Last February, during the first edition of the Saudi *World Defense Show*, the Saudi government signed a deal with China's Poly Technologies to purchase an anti-UAV laser system called "Silent Hunter"²³ amid Saudi accusations that the United States was an unreliable security partner. As a prominent journalist wrote at the time in the regionally influential Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*: "When Houthi terrorism targets Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles and Iranian drones, Washington rushes to Vienna to complete the nuclear agreement," in reference to negotiations to revive the Iran nuclear deal.

A few weeks before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the defense ministers of China and Saudi Arabia met virtually and, per the accompanying tweet by the Saudi Defense Minister, "explored ways to strengthen our military and defense cooperation." Similar discussions took place in June 2022, on the sidelines of the 2022 Shangri-La Asian Security Dialogue. There was much expectation that Chinese President Xi Jinping would visit Saudi Arabia last summer, but the visit never materialized. If such a visit takes place, defense and security cooperation will very likely be on the agenda.

Continued: Saudi Arabia Continues Buying Missiles and UAVs From China as Part of Broader Foreign Policy Rebalancing

Source:

المملكة وسياسة الرصانة.. تنويع التحالفات وتعزيز التوازن الدولي

Fahim al-Hamed. "The Kingdom and its Sober Policy... Diversifying Alliances and Strengthening International Balance," *al-Riyadh* (influential Saudi daily), 15 October 2022. <https://www.alriyadh.com/1977312>

The kingdom is governed by mutual strategic interests, but has always set limits to its flexibility and to being pressured. At this stage, the kingdom maintains its interests in light of a changing international system and major international conflicts, to ensure its leading role in the global scene. Saudi foreign policy has adapted to international multipolarity; thus, the kingdom has strengthened its political, economic and military relations with China, Russia and India, and has recently been restoring the relationship with Turkey.

Source:

حان وقت العقلانية السياسية

Tariq al-Hamid. "It is time for political rationality," *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (regionally influential Saudi daily), 23 March 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/4663yaye>

It is unreasonable for the price of oil to rise, so Britain and the United States rush to contact Saudi Arabia, and when Houthi terrorism targets Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles and Iranian drones, Washington rushes to Vienna to complete the nuclear agreement...

Is there a serious stance from the US administration, which is now talking about "partnership" and "alliance" with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states? Where is the serious American position on the security of the Gulf, as the Americans demand the Saudis and the Gulf states now to reduce oil prices and support international stability?

Source: @kbsalsaud (Khalid bin Salman, Saudi Minister of Defense), *Twitter*, 26 January 2022. <https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1486308204455804932>

Upon the direction of HRH the Crown Prince, I met with the Minister of National Defense in the people's republic of China General Wei Fenghe. We reviewed the historic ties between our two countries and explored ways to strengthen our military and defense cooperation.

Source: @defensearabia (Defense Arabia, Arabic-language military news and analysis website), *Twitter*, 11 June 2022. <https://twitter.com/defensearabia/status/1535634061141725184>

Saudi Assistant Defense Minister meets Chinese Defense Minister in Singapore, to discuss defense and military cooperation relations.

Notes:

[21] The DF-3 missiles were expensive and inaccurate, to the point of allegedly making them unusable during the first Gulf War. Yet, according to the memoirs of former deputy defense minister Khalid bin Sultan—the key Saudi official involved—the deal marked a turning point in Saudi military development and in its relations with China.

[22] See: Lucas Winter, "UAV Technologies Proliferating in Yemen and Saudi Arabia," *OE Watch*, Issue 7, 2022.

[23] See: Lucas Winter, "Saudi Arabia Turns to China for Low-Altitude Air Defense," *OE Watch*, Issue 4, 2022.

Morocco and Algeria Strengthen UAV Capabilities With Imports From China, Turkey, and Israel

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past year, both Algeria and Morocco have bolstered their unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities by importing technology from China, Turkey and—in the case of Morocco—Israel.²⁴ As detailed in the first excerpted article, in October 2022, the Spanish news website *OkDiario* reported on a video showing a Chinese Wing Loong II UAV flying over Morocco, seemingly confirming that Morocco had acquired several of these platforms after expressing interest in them earlier this year. Also in October, as detailed in the second excerpted article, the independent Algeria-focused military news website *Menadefense* reported that Algeria, which has a Wing Loong II fleet of its own, had become the first export client for the Turkish TAI Aksungur long-range UAV, after signing a deal to acquire six units.

While China and Turkey appear willing to sell technology and deepen security cooperation with both Morocco and Algeria, Israeli-Moroccan cooperation has likely geopolitical implications given fears of Iranian and Russian meddling in the region.²⁵ As shown in the third excerpted article, in September the Moroccan English-language news website *Morocco World News* reported that Morocco had acquired at least 150 small vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) unmanned aircraft from the Israeli firm BlueBird Aero Systems. The deal includes both the small WanderB

model and a larger ThunderB model, as well as an agreement to build two UAV manufacturing plants in Morocco, the first of their kind.

In the fourth excerpted article, in early October, as reported by the Moroccan news website *Le360*, an official from the Polisario Front, the Western Sahara independence movement that is supported by Algeria and opposed by Morocco, claimed that Sahrawi fighters would soon begin employing armed UAVs against Moroccan forces. These remarks prompted Morocco's Foreign Minister to equate Polisario with Yemen's Houthi Movement, accusing Iran of arming Polisario with Algerian complicity. Indeed, Moroccan accusations of Iranian support for Polisario are not new, as explained in the fifth article from the Qatari-aligned *al-Araby al-Jadeed*. While the accusations may have seemed fanciful four years ago, they seem less so now, given Israel's quickly growing security footprint in Morocco and the fact that Algeria's key security partner—Russia—is itself relying on Iranian military support in Ukraine.

Morocco issued a warning to Iran, which is accused of militarily supporting separatist and terrorist groups



TAI Aksungur at Teknofest 2019.

Source: CeeGee (own work), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TAI_Aksungur_Teknofest2019_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TAI_Aksungur_Teknofest2019_(1).jpg) Attribution: CC 4.0

Continued: Morocco and Algeria Strengthen UAV Capabilities With Imports From China, Turkey, and Israel

Source: Pelayo Barro. "Marruecos compra los drones militares chinos más modernos mientras España le regala 4x4 (Morocco buys the most advanced Chinese drones while Spain gifts it 4x4s)," *OkDiario* (Spanish news website), 2 October 2022. <https://okdiario.com/espana/marruecos-compra-drones-militares-chinos-mas-modernos-mientras-espana-regala-4x4-9739842>

The latest [Moroccan] acquisition has not been ignored by Spain's military intelligence: new-generation strategic Chinese drones with air-ground attack capabilities and endurance of over 7,000 kilometers... Mohammed VI's armed forces had previously eyed these drones – called Wing Loong II – and had even proposed acquiring them to replace a previous Chinese drone they had already employed in their war against the Polisario Front.

Source: "L'Algérie achète des drones d'attaque Aksungur (Algeria purchases Aksungur attack drones)," *Menadefense* (independent Algeria-focused military news website), 7 October 2022. <https://www.menadefense.net/algerie/lalgerie-achete-des-drones-dattaque-aksungur/>

The Algerian Air Force has ordered six Turkish MALE drones from TAI. They are the Aksungur, a larger, more modern, and better performing version than its Anka-S counterpart.

Source: Aya Benazizi. "Morocco Purchases 150 Israeli Military Drones," *Morocco World News* (Moroccan English-language news website), 22 September 2022. <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/09/351475/morocco-purchases-150-israeli-military-drones>

Morocco has purchased 150 military drones of the WanderB and ThunderB types, manufactured by Israel's BlueBird Aero Systems, a company specialized in designing and developing Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) equipment...

The agreement concerned the construction of industrial units in Morocco for the manufacture of Israeli drones.

Source: البوليساريو تعلن أن الجزائر ستتمدها بطائرات "درون" إيرانية لمهاجمة المغرب
Mohammed Ould Boah. "Polisario announces that Algiera will provide it with Iranian drones to attack Morocco," *Le360* (Moroccan news website), 4 October 2022. <https://ar.le360.ma/politique/197102>

According to the so-called "interior minister" of the Polisario, the separatists have obtained military drones, which they will use in their attacks against Moroccan territory. In the face of this dangerous escalation, Morocco issued a warning to Iran, which is accused of militarily supporting separatist and terrorist groups.

Source: البوليساريو تعلن أن الجزائر ستتمدها بطائرات "درون" إيرانية لمهاجمة المغرب
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Continued: Morocco and Algeria Strengthen UAV Capabilities With Imports From China, Turkey, and Israel

Source:

Abdelhamid Ajmahiri. "Iran and Morocco: Shiization, missiles and drones," *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 11 October 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/2p83v8hm>

إيران والمغرب: تشييع وصواريخ ودرونز

Almost four years after accusing Tehran of handing the separatist Polisario Front advanced weapons – especially Strela surface-to-air missiles – last week Rabat accused Tehran of providing Polisario with drones... It is clear that relations between Rabat and Tehran have entered a bleak zone, now that the [Western Sahara] conflict has been resolved in favor of Moroccan national unity.

Notes:

[24] See: Lucas Winter, "Morocco and Algeria Bolstering Their Drone Fleets as Bilateral Tensions Rise," *OE Watch*, Issue 11, 2021; Lucas Winter, "Morocco Denys Conducting Drone Strike Against Algerian Targets in Western Sahara," *OE Watch*, Issue 12, 2021; Lucas Winter, "China Arming Algeria To Fight Its 'New Generation Wars'," *OE Watch*, Issue 8, 2022.

[25] See: Lucas Winter, "Algeria Sees Threat from Morocco as Western Sahara Conflict Threatens To Reignite," *OE Watch*, Issue 6, 2022; Lucas Winter, "Algeria Likely To Deepen Military Ties with Russia as Morocco–Israel Security Cooperation Expands," *OE Watch*, Issue 9, 2022.

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.

India Responds to Chinese and Pakistani Naval Activities in Sri Lanka

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

The independent Indian daily newspaper *Deccan Herald* recently published an article, the first excerpted below, regarding India's response to Chinese and Pakistani naval operations at Sri Lankan ports. According to the article, India is concerned that it risks losing its preeminent position as the primary security provider for Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean region at large. The article also emphasizes the importance of the timing of India's deal to supply Sri Lanka with Dornier 228 maritime aircraft as a means of reasserting its geopolitical standing in the region. The provision of the Dornier 228 to Sri Lanka occurred shortly after Sri Lanka granted permission to the Strategic Support Force of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, which tracks satellites and intercontinental ballistic missiles, to visit Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port. In addition, Sri Lanka allowed the Pakistani Navy frigate *PNS Taimur* to refuel at Colombo Port when returning home from naval exercises in Cambodia and Malaysia. In a recent statement published by the Chinese Communist Party *People's Daily*, as shown in the second article, a China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson noted that Chinese support to port infrastructure in Sri Lanka and other developing nations is simply a sign of Chinese cooperation between nations, and therefore India's concerns are unwarranted. In the third excerpted article, from the Indian publication *The Hindu*, the author argues that the Dornier 228 will revamp Sri Lanka's capabilities to contribute more to the security of the Indian Ocean region, which, in turn, supports India's regional interests. At the same time, the new capabilities will reaffirm Sri Lanka's



India Navy continuity drill.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_Navy_continuity_drill_1.jpg Attribution: www.indiannavy.nic, CC BY 2.0

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role as a member of the Colombo Security Conclave, whose other three members are India, the Maldives and Mauritius. The article nevertheless acknowledged that India's increased maritime security interest in Sri Lanka is being driven by its apprehension over Sri Lanka's cooperation with China in maritime naval affairs.

Source: "Sri Lanka allows Pakistani warship, Chinese recon vessel to dock in its ports, to get maritime patrol aircraft from India," *deccanherald.com* (independent daily newspaper targeting youth readership), 14 August 2022. <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/sri-lanka-allows-pakistani-warship-chinese-recon-vessel-to-dock-in-its-ports-to-get-maritime-patrol-aircraft-from-india-1135976.html>

Even as China's recon ship 'Yuan Wang 5' is back on course towards the Hambantota Port of Sri Lanka, India is set to gift the island nation a Dornier 228 maritime patrol aircraft soon, subtly reasserting its role as the net security provider to the island.... New Delhi will replace the used aircraft with a newly-built one two years later and will then discuss with Colombo the modalities for handing over another aircraft to the Sri Lankan Navy or the Coast Guard.

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Continued: India Responds to Chinese and Pakistani Naval Activities in Sri Lanka

Source Continued: “Sri Lanka allows Pakistani warship, Chinese recon vessel to dock in its ports, to get maritime patrol aircraft from India,” *deccanherald.com* (independent daily newspaper targeting youth readership), 14 August 2022. <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/sri-lanka-allows-pakistani-warship-chinese-recon-vessel-to-dock-in-its-ports-to-get-maritime-patrol-aircraft-from-india-1135976.html>

India's move to help Sri Lanka enhance its maritime surveillance capabilities appears to be a subtle move by it to reassert its role as a net security provider for the Indian Ocean, notwithstanding increasing forays by the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

Beijing had on August 8 dismissed New Delhi's security concerns as “senseless” and tacitly asked it to desist from “disturbing normal exchanges and cooperation” between China and Sri Lanka.... India also pointed out that it was its sovereign right to express its security concerns over the arrival of China's ship with military capabilities in Sri Lanka.

India's move to help Sri Lanka enhance its maritime surveillance capabilities appears to be a subtle move by it to reassert its role as a net security provider for the Indian Ocean, notwithstanding increasing forays by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy and Pakistani Navy in the region.

Source: “毛宁：中国将为发展中国家做更多实事、好事 (Mao Ning: China will do more practical and good deeds for developing countries),” *people.com.cn* (largest Chinese newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party), 8 October 2022. <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2022/1008/c1002-32541066.html>

The infrastructure of these countries includes ports, bridges, and power stations, in addition to mosques, parliament buildings, stadiums, and libraries. They are all beautiful business items made in China, and they are also golden images of China's cooperation with developing countries.

Source: “India hands over Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft to Sri Lanka Navy,” *thehindu.com* (widely circulated Indian daily newspaper), 15 August 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-to-hand-over-dornier-maritime-surveillance-aircraft-to-sri-lanka-navy/article65770998.ece>

Sri Lanka Air Force announced that the Indian Air force was gifting it a Dornier 228 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, while noting another aircraft would be donated within two years.... Sri Lanka is a member of the ‘Colombo Security Conclave’ that began as a trilateral initiative involving India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and later included Mauritius, for maritime cooperation in the region.