

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



Issue 3  
2023

## FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



### CHINA

- 3 Chinese Military Exercises Highlight Improvements in Joint Operations
- 6 China Issues Concept Paper on Its Role in Global Security
- 9 Taiwan Considers “Porcupine Strategy” Against Chinese Invasion
- 11 Chinese Spy Balloon Over Latin America Elicits Minimal Response

### RUSSIA

- 12 The Composition and Tactics of Wagner Assault Detachments
- 15 Russian Arctic Seaports Expand Activity Despite War in Ukraine
- 17 Russia Adds Incentives for Fighters in Ukraine
- 19 Kazakhstan Draws Lessons From the Russia-Ukraine War
- 20 Russia Losing to China in Central Asia
- 23 Russia Using Media Organizations To Garner Support From “Islamic” Countries

### IRAN

- 25 Iran Praises Revolutionary Guards’ Proxy Afghan Brigade
- 27 Iran Profiles the Female Police Seeking To Quell the Women’s Protests

### TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

- 29 UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan
- 31 Colombia Deemphasizing Coca Eradication in Counterdrug Strategy
- 33 Complications Surround Kenyan Peacemaking in DRC

### GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- 35 Russia’s Role in India’s Bids for New Carbines and Medium Transport Aircraft
- 37 Algeria Seeks Non-Alignment by Preserving Russia Ties While Welcoming NATO Overtures
- 39 Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance
- 41 West African States Ruled by Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Future Sanctions
- 43 Vietnam and Indonesia Resolve Maritime Disputes

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is part of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2, whose mission is to Understand, Describe, Deliver, and Assess the conditions of the Operational Environment. For over 30 years, FMSO has conducted open source research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues, emphasizing those topics that are understudied or unconsidered.

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

The views expressed in each article are those of the author and do not represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government. Release of this information does not imply any commitment or intent on the part of the US Government to provide any additional information on any topic presented herein.

The appearance of hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the US Army of the referenced site or the information, products, or services contained therein. Users should exercise caution in accessing hyperlinks.

The Operational Environment Watch is archived and available at: <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso>.

#### ON THE COVER:

*VDV (airborne) troopers on parade repetition.*

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comp\\_41.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comp_41.jpg) Attribution: CCA-SA 3.0

# OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE  
OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 3

2023

---

<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	Jason Warner
<b>Editor</b>	Dodge Billingsley
<b>Creative Director</b>	Susan Littleton
<b>Publisher/Layout</b>	Thomas Tolare

## Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Chuck Bartles  
Ryan Berg  
Ray Finch  
Les Grau  
Cindy Hurst  
Michael Rubin  
Thomas Shrimpton  
Matthew Stein  
Jason Warner  
Lucas Winter  
Peter Wood  
Jacob Zenn

## Chinese Military Exercises Highlight Improvements in Joint Operations

By Peter Wood  
OE Watch Commentary

China continues to improve the realism of its training through extensive use of Opposition Force (OPFOR) training.<sup>1</sup> The following excerpted articles describe the recent integration of PLA Airforce (PLAAF) opposition forces into PLA Army (PLAA) brigade training. In the first excerpt from the Chinese military news outlet *PLA Daily*, PLAAF advisers helped a PLA ground forces brigade improve its air defense training. The unnamed brigade leader notes that, for over a year, his unit has dispatched air defense personnel to PLAAF academies and technical schools to better absorb tactics and skills. In the full article, the reporter also noted the presence of PLAAF pilots and electronic countermeasures teams from an unnamed unit. This appears to be occurring across multiple theater commands. The second excerpted *PLA Daily* article describes joint training between other PLAAF and PLAA units in the Southern Theater Command that occurred in January 2023. More broadly, the PLA has also

**Since the end of last year, the brigade selected target drone operators to study at PLAAF academies and training institutions, and also invited PLAAF pilots to explain flight modes and attack methods of various aircraft types to the air defenders to help them improve their combat skills.**

embraced OPFOR training as a means to rapidly improve home station training at lower levels. A separate report in *PLA Daily* from March 2020, for example, indicated that at least some brigades in the Eastern Theater command were establishing dedicated OPFOR platoons in each battalion to enhance realism in training as well as the tempo with which they could conduct training.<sup>2</sup>



**J-10B**

Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/19.08.21\\_J10B\\_1200\\_7.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/19.08.21_J10B_1200_7.jpg) Attribution: Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0

## Continued: Chinese Military Exercises Highlight Improvements in Joint Operations

**Source:** Tong Zujing (童祖静), Sheng Yangdi (盛洋迪), Jiangwu Jingwen (江吴靖文吴靖文); “陆军演兵场迎来空中‘联合蓝军’ (PLAA Exercise Area Welcomes ‘Joint OPFOR’),” *PLA Daily* [解放军报] (Official Newspaper of the Chinese military), 9 February 2023. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2023/02-09/9950203.shtml>

*A brigade of the 72nd Group Army and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) cooperated to innovate, adopting a new approach to confrontation training, improve joint interoperability training and preparation for war...The brigade leader explained that since the end of last year, they selected target drone operators to study at PLAAF academies and training institutions, and also invited PLAAF pilots to explain flight modes and attack methods of various aircraft types to the air defenders to help them improve their combat skills.*

*The addition of a “Joint OPFOR” to the training area introduced essential elements of Air Force penetration and assault operations into the brigade’s target drone flight training.<sup>3</sup> The new training included different regions, mission profiles, and opponents using optimized flight routes and altitudes, along with operations in new domains and jamming helped force the brigades’ air defense units to improve their tactics.*

*Nie Dongfang, the acting squad leader of the brigade's target support squad, together with several Air Force pilots, focused on conducting flight effectiveness tests and demonstrations on the operational use of target drones in different scenarios and under different target conditions. The reporter also learned that they have carried out strenuous flight training many times in complex conditions such as the Gobi Desert, jungle covered mountain areas, etc...The brigade’s leader said that they will coordinate and absorb more joint elements into training, planning and design, and explore the creation of a regular confrontation drill mechanism. This will improve military training help shift attitudes toward training against a powerful opponent.*

**Source:** Chen Dianhong (陈典宏), Ye Xingguo (叶星国), Feng Dengya (冯邓亚); “陆空对抗锤炼实战本领 (Land-Air confrontation tempers actual combat skills China Military Online),” *China Military Online/PLA Daily* (PRC official military media outlets), 28 January 2023. <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0128/c1011-32613112.html>

*In the middle of the night, the air defense sirens sounded suddenly, and an unnamed Air Force unit playing the role of the “Blue Army” (OPFOR) took advantage of the night to launch a surprise attack on the brigade’s air defense position. In the command vehicle, battalion commander Li Chuan [李川] responded calmly and quickly deployed his force. Personnel immediately rushed to positions to build an emergency communications and command network, sending commands through the integrated command platform in real time. The surface-to-air missile group, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) group, and MANPAD group quickly formed up and waited for the “enemy” aircraft.*

*“A knife doesn’t sharpen quickly, a soldier doesn’t practice well alone, and an opponent is the best whetstone” Li Chuan told reporters, pointing at the radar screen. We should continue carrying out exchanges, setting up difficult tasks for each other to sharpen skills, make up for gaps in each other’s abilities and establishing set up growth strategies for each other's difficulties, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of military training, and improve the level of actual combat training.*

*The radar screen showed that multiple groups of “enemy” planes were rapidly approaching, attempting to attack important targets of the “Red force.” Xin Chengcheng, a radar technician, calmly operated the system, firmly locking onto the target. Suddenly, the simulated enemy aircraft disappeared from the screen. Analyzing the situation on the battlefield, Li Chuan judged that the “enemy” aircraft was penetrating at an ultra-low altitude,*

*continue on 5*

## Continued: Chinese Military Exercises Highlight Improvements in Joint Operations

**Source Continued:** Chen Dianhong (陈典宏), Ye Xingguo (叶星国), Feng Dengya (冯邓亚); “陆空对抗锤炼实战本领 (Land-Air confrontation tempers actual combat skills China Military Online),” *China Military Online/PLA Daily* (PRC official military media outlets), 28 January 2023. <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0128/c1011-32613112.html>

*and then ordered adjustments to the systems' search range.*

*Soon, the close-air blind-filling radar identified the low-flying target, leaving only five seconds to engage. Li Chuan decisively gave the command to shoot. Seconds later the point on the screen disappeared with the targets successfully destroyed.*

*“Get ready for the ‘Blue Army’ to attack again!” called Li Chuan as he issued a new order. He told reporters that in recent years, the amount and intensity of real combat training for troops has increased, including during poor weather conditions. Extended training under extreme conditions and through the night are now carried out on a regular basis.*

....

*After several hours the land-air confrontation exercise, came to an end as dawn's light crept up from the east. There was no time to rest, and the red and blue teams conducted an after action review of problems revealed by the drill.*

### Notes:

[1] In PLA parlance, the Red Team represents Chinese forces while the Blue Team is the opposing force.

[2] “Setting up ‘OPFOR’ platoons in each combined arms battalion to enhance confrontation exercises (在各合成营组建“蓝军”排, 增强演练对抗性),” *PLA Daily*, 9 March 2020. [http://www.81.cn/jmywy1/2020-03/09/content\\_9763188.htm](http://www.81.cn/jmywy1/2020-03/09/content_9763188.htm)

[3] The term used here, 极限飞行训练, which might also be translated as “flight training testing limits,” appears to refer to extended training covering long periods or multiple days, including day and night operations and during poor weather conditions.

## China Issues Concept Paper on Its Role in Global Security

By Thomas Shrimpton  
OE Watch Commentary

In February 2023, China released *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*, a document that describes China's perception of its role in international security governance. According to Beijing, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) is meant to address the “deficits in peace, development, security, and governance” with “Chinese solutions and wisdom.”<sup>1</sup> Most of the GSI's underlying principles—the “six commitments”—are the pillars of China's foreign policy as codified in the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.”<sup>2</sup> The GSI document also refers to a Chinese Communist Party treatise on *China's Peaceful Development*<sup>3</sup> and Xi Jinping's *New Asian Security Concept*<sup>4</sup> speech, citing claims about China's historical love for peace and commitment to common, cooperative, comprehensive, and sustainable security.

However, the fourth of the “six commitments”—“taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously”—has only in recent years achieved prominence in Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization endorses the underlying concept of indivisible security.<sup>5</sup> More recently, just weeks before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia signed a “no limits” partnership agreement evoking the spirit of indivisible security to oppose

NATO expansion.<sup>6</sup> Following Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, China's foreign influence apparatus has actively sought to frame Russia's invasion of Ukraine as induced by NATO expansion.<sup>7</sup> It has also sought to undermine U.S. efforts to hold Russia accountable by accusing the United States of “Cold War mentality, unilateralism, bloc confrontation, and hegemonism.” The GSI thus provides Beijing with a normative tool for advancing China's expanding national security interests, motives, policies, and conduct when it comes to international security. It legitimizes any aggressive motives, policies, and conduct on Beijing's part as defensive, while simultaneously enabling Beijing to denounce the United States, its allies, and partners as the aggressors.

**The legitimate and reasonable security concerns of all countries should be taken seriously and addressed properly, not persistently ignored or systemically challenged. Any country, while pursuing its own security, should take into account the reasonable security concerns of others.**



China Issues “The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper” at the 21 February 2023 Lanling Forum.

Source: Chinese Government, <https://twitter.com/WangLutongMFA/status/1628010620846227456> Attribution: Public Domain

## Continued: China Issues Concept Paper on Its Role in Global Security

**Source:** “The Global Security Initiative,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 21 February 2023. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221\\_11028348.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html)

*Stay committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously. Humanity is an indivisible security community. Security of one country should not come at the expense of that of others. We believe all countries are equal in terms of security interests. The legitimate and reasonable security concerns of all countries should be taken seriously and addressed properly, not persistently ignored or systemically challenged. Any country, while pursuing its own security, should take into account the reasonable security concerns of others. We uphold the principle of indivisible security, advocating the indivisibility between individual security and common security, between traditional security and non-traditional security, between security rights and security obligations, and between security and development. There should be a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, so as to realize universal security and common security.*

*Engage in wide-ranging discussions and communication on peace and security at the General Assembly, relevant UN Committees, the Security Council, relevant institutions, and other international and regional organizations based on their respective mandates, and put forward common initiatives and propositions to forge consensus in the international community to address security challenges.*

*Leverage the roles of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS cooperation, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the “China + Central Asia” mechanism, and relevant mechanisms of East Asia cooperation, and carry out security cooperation incrementally to achieve similar or same goals. Promote the establishment of a multilateral dialogue platform in the Gulf region and give play to the role of coordinating and cooperative mechanisms such as the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan and the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference to promote regional and global peace and stability.*

*Support the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum (Lianyungang) and other international dialogue platforms in contributing to deepening exchange and cooperation on security. Promote the establishment of more global security forums to provide new platforms for governments, international organizations, think tanks and social organizations to leverage their advantages and participate in global security governance.*

### Notes:

[1] For more on so-called “Chinese solutions and wisdom” on global issues, see: Wang Yi, “Acting on the Global Security Initiative to Safeguard World Peace and Tranquility,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 24 April 2022. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/kjgzbdyfyq/202205/t20220505\\_10681820.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/kjgzbdyfyq/202205/t20220505_10681820.html)

[2] The Five Principles are mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and, peaceful coexistence. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence make up the basic normative framework for modern China’s foreign policy and are codified in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China.

[3] For a detailed reading of China’s efforts to promote its “peaceful development” narrative, see: “China’s Peaceful Development,” *State Council Information Office*, 6 September 2011. [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm)

[4] For Xi Jinping’s speech on the New Asian Security Concept, see: “New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 21 May 2014. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/201405/t20140527\\_678163.html#:~:text=Common%20security%20means,regional%20security%20issues](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201405/t20140527_678163.html#:~:text=Common%20security%20means,regional%20security%20issues)

*continue on 8*

## Continued: China Issues Concept Paper on Its Role in Global Security

### Notes:

[5] China is the founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and has endorsed indivisible security through SCO. For more on the SCO, see: Rashid Alimov, “The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security,” *United Nations*, October 2017. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/role-shanghai-cooperation-organization-counteracting-threats-peace-and-security#:~:text=By%20reinforcing%20mutually,its%20respective%20regions>

[6] Indivisible security is the principle that the pursuit of one’s security should not be at the expense of another’s security. Indivisible security as a guiding principle is difficult to incorporate in practice, as defining “at the expense of another’s security” is highly subjective. For more on Chinese normative conceptions of security, see: Jerker Hellström, “Security/安全,” *Decoding China*. <https://decodingchina.eu/security/>

[7] For more on China’s accusations that NATO expansion undermined Russia’s security interests, see: “People’s Republic of China Efforts to Amplify Kremlin’s Voice on Ukraine,” U.S. Department of State, 2 May 2022. <https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/prc-efforts-to-amplify-the-kremlins-voice-on-ukraine/#:~:text=PRC%20and%20CCP%20media%20and%20officials%20have,the%20West%2C%20NATO%2C%20and%20the%20United%20States> and “China’s Position on Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 4 February 2023. [https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-position-russias-invasion-ukraine#:~:text=%5BStatement%5D%20Chinese%20Foreign%20Minister%20Wang%20Yi%20stated,Putin%20during%20his%20December%202021%20annual%20news%20conference\[](https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-position-russias-invasion-ukraine#:~:text=%5BStatement%5D%20Chinese%20Foreign%20Minister%20Wang%20Yi%20stated,Putin%20during%20his%20December%202021%20annual%20news%20conference[)

## Taiwan Considers “Porcupine Strategy” Against Chinese Invasion

By Cindy Hurst  
OE Watch Commentary

In recent years, Taiwan has felt an increasing sense of urgency to develop a strong system of defense because mounting cross-Strait tensions, China’s growing military might, and gray-zone activities that are one step short of the use of force. Since 2017, some Taiwanese commentators have advocated for the development of a “porcupine strategy” to ward off a potential Chinese invasion.<sup>1</sup> A porcupine strategy, viewed as asymmetric warfare, is used by a weaker opponent to counter an attack from a more powerful one. In Taiwan’s case, this would mean hardening its defenses and inflicting many small, but significant and early, losses for China using many weapons spread throughout the island. As described in the first excerpt, published in Taiwan’s English-language publication *Taipei Times*, “the pain of stepping on (a porcupine’s) quills become the main deterrent to crushing it.”

**Taiwan's asymmetrical warfare strategy is commonly referred to as the ‘the porcupine strategy.’ A porcupine braces itself by hardening its many quills when faced with a huge predator.**

The second excerpted article, published by the newly established English-language news and opinion site, *Japan Forward*, also discusses the porcupine strategy. The article attributes retired Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, who served as chief of Taiwan’s General Staff from 2017 to 2019, with being the architect of Taiwan’s overall defense strategy, at which a porcupine approach was the core. Lee argues that the best option is to deter the enemy from attacking. This article also describes a scenario in which People’s Liberation Army forces gather around Taiwan to conduct standard military exercises prior to the unexpected attack. While larger Taiwanese targets, such as fighter jets and large naval vessels, would be easier to see and therefore destroy if taken by surprise by China, smaller mobile weapon systems that are well dispersed throughout the island and its environs—such as small missile-equipped boats, multiple rocket launchers, and mobile missiles—would be less vulnerable. However, according to the article, while Taiwanese leadership understands the importance of asymmetric weapons, the Taiwanese armed forces have not yet fully embraced the “porcupine strategy.”

**Source:** “Editorial: ‘Porcupine Strategy’ the Right Move,” *Taipei Times* (Taiwan’s English-language sister publication of *Liberty Times*), 29 April 2022. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2022/04/29/2003777394>

*Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept is based on a strategy of asymmetric warfare. Instead of acquiring expensive jets and submarines, the strategy focuses on deployments of mobile and concealable defensive weapons across Taiwan, especially missiles for use against ships and planes. This is the “porcupine strategy” — the pain of stepping on the animal’s quills becomes the main deterrent to crushing it.*

**Source:** Yoshiaki Nishimi, “Taiwan Military Expert: ‘Porcupine Strategy’ Could Deter Chinese Invasion,” *Japan Forward* (a new English-language news and opinion website), 27 January 2023. <https://japan-forward.com/taiwan-military-expert-porcupine-strategy-could-deter-chinese-invasion/>

*...retired admiral Lee Hsi-ming, who served as chief of the General Staff of the Republic of China (Taiwan) from 2017 to 2019. He spoke to a group of reporters, including a Sankei Shimbun correspondent, in Taipei in November of last year. During his time in office, as the military power gap with China rapidly widened, [retired admiral Lee Hsi-ming, who served as chief of the General Staff of the Republic of China... from 2017 to 2019] sought ways to defend Taiwan through “asymmetric operations.” In fact, Taiwan’s “Overall Defense Concept,” which has this strategy at its core, is his brainchild.*

*continue on 10*

## Continued: Taiwan Considers “Porcupine Strategy” Against Chinese Invasion

**Source Continued:** Yoshiaki Nishimi, “Taiwan Military Expert: ‘Porcupine Strategy’ Could Deter Chinese Invasion,” *Japan Forward* (a new English-language news and opinion website), 27 January 2023. <https://japan-forward.com/taiwan-military-expert-porcupine-strategy-could-deter-chinese-invasion/>

*Taiwan's asymmetrical warfare strategy is commonly referred to as the "porcupine strategy." A porcupine braces itself by hardening its many quills when faced with a huge predator. Similarly, this strategy is designed to prevent occupation by an invading Chinese force by inflicting severe pain (damage) with smaller weapons widely dispersed throughout the island.*

*"Taiwan needs an asymmetric strategy to deter China," Lee emphasizes. "That means having a large number of small weapons that are less susceptible to long-range attacks, more mobile, and capable of conducting precision strikes."*

*"Taiwan does not have the strength to go toe-to-toe against China in a traditional 'symmetrical war' involving aircraft carriers against aircraft carriers, warplanes against warplanes, and tanks against tanks. After all, there is a disparity of more than twenty times between their defense budgets."*

*Taiwan's asymmetrical warfare strategy is commonly referred to as the "porcupine strategy." A porcupine braces itself by hardening its many quills when faced with a huge predator. Similarly, this strategy is designed to prevent occupation by an invading Chinese force by inflicting severe pain (damage) with smaller weapons widely dispersed throughout the island.*

*"The best course of action is to deter the enemy and keep him from making a move," explains Lee. "To that end, Taiwan must prepare itself as quickly as possible. We must demonstrate that we have the capacity to prevent a successful Chinese invasion."*

*Lee argues that the only option for Taiwan is "deterrence by denial." In other words, a defense capable of physically blocking an attack by the other side. What scenario does Lee offer in which Taiwan would be able to repel the People's Liberation Army (PLA)?*

### Notes:

[1] The concept of a porcupine strategy gained popularity following the 2008 release of a study published in the *Naval War College Review*. At the time, Taiwan was intent on building up its weapons systems to try to match those of the People's Liberation Army. Countering Taiwan's belief that like weapons would help to deter China from attacking, the study instead described using alternative asymmetric warfare to counter China's short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and manned tactical aircraft. For more information, please see: William S. Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3, Article 3, 2008. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1814&context=nwc-review>

## Chinese Spy Balloon Over Latin America Elicits Minimal Response

By Ryan Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

In February 2023, a Chinese surveillance balloon that traversed North American airspace captured the attention of policymakers and civil society in the United States and Canada for more than a week. In contrast, a similar balloon floating simultaneously over Latin America hardly garnered attention.<sup>1</sup> According to Spanish-language *CNN Español*, around the same time, a Chinese balloon passed over Costa Rica and Venezuela, ultimately hovering over Colombia's northern region for some time. Regional coverage of the balloon over Latin America generally refers to the "balloon" without mentioning its capacity to conduct surveillance operations. According to reports in one of Colombia's most important news dailies, *El Tiempo*, the Colombian air force discussed options to defend its airspace. In the end, how-



A Chinese surveillance balloon hovers over the Americas.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Balloon\\_over\\_MYR.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Balloon_over_MYR.jpg) Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

ever, Latin American leaders opted to observe the balloon's passage rather than take action. The muted response from regional leaders is telling of their desire to remain out of the fray in an international order that they recognize is increasingly contested by China's rise. It also comes months before important planned visits to China by the presidents of Colombia and Costa Rica, both of which are seeking development assistance.

**The Colombian Air Force said that the balloon did not present a threat to national security and defense and that it launched investigations to establish the origin of the object... Costa Rica also did not report threats to its national security.**

**Source:** "Lo que sabemos sobre el globo chino que sobrevoló Colombia y Costa Rica (What we know about the Chinese balloon that flew over Colombia and Costa Rica)," *CNN Español* (Spanish-language version of the popular U.S. news outlet), 7 February 2023. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2023/02/07/globo-chino-colombia-costa-rica-orix/>

*A spokeswoman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted for the first time that a balloon seen over the skies of Latin America belongs to the country... Two Latin American countries reported that they saw a balloon transit in their skies. One of them was Colombia, whose Air Force reported that its National Air Defense System "detected an object above 55,000 feet, which entered Colombian airspace in the northern sector of the country."... The Air Force said that the balloon did not present a threat to national security and defense and that it launched investigations to establish the origin of the object... Costa Rica also did not report threats to its national security.*

**Source:** "Globo espía chino: Colombia podría derribar objeto que entró al espacio aéreo? (Chinese spy balloon: Could Colombia shoot down an object that entered its airspace?)," *El Tiempo* (one of Colombia's most important dailies), 7 February 2023. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/globo-espia-chino-colombia-podria-derribarlo-si-entro-al-espacio-aereo-739897>

*Colombia is another country where an object "similar to a balloon" passed into its airspace in recent days. According to the Colombian Air Force, it will react by constant monitoring of its airspace and looking to guard its national interest... While a range of potential responses was discussed, the balloon passed from the country's airspace without representing "a threat to security and national defense" according to the Colombian Air Force.*

### Notes:

[1] For more information on the differences in regional coverage of the Chinese balloon over Latin America, see: Margaret Myers, "'O Globo Chino' Floats Over Latin America," Wilson Center, February 10, 2023. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/globo-chino-floats-over-latin-america>

## The Composition and Tactics of Wagner Assault Detachments

By Charles Bartles  
OE Watch Commentary

In February 2023, a pro-Russian Telegram channel called *Institute of the SMO/People's Translation*, which translates Ukrainian-language documents into, posted a document purported to be a translation of a Ukrainian General Staff analysis regarding private military company Wagner assault detachments. The accompanying excerpts from the document describe the composition and tactics of Wagner detachments.

The document also included the accompanying graphic depicting two dismounted Wagner assault platoons, supported by one tank and two *bronnegruppa*—infantry fighting vehicles, minus dismounts, providing supporting fires—attacking and penetrating a layered Ukrainian defense. There is an artillery platoon of two 82mm or 120mm mortars and one **D-30** towed 122mm howitzer. The graphic depicts many planned artillery concentrations, annotated as three-digit numbers, and shows how fires will shift in relation to the advance of the Wagner assault platoons. The artillery platoon fires on the 100-level positions first, then and shifts fire to the 200 level, and then subsequent firing positions as the assault pla-

toons advance. This scheme of fire suggests that the Wagner forces are expecting the Ukrainians to be well dug-in and dispersed. The relatively large number of artillery concentrations given such few artillery assets also suggests that there are additional artillery assets (not indicated on the graphic) that are supporting the attack, since the artillery platoon has insufficient assets and range (mortars) to fire the missions as depicted. There is likely an evacuation group that will advance behind the attack to repair or evacuate damaged vehicles. The adoption of these formations by Wagner illustrates how Russia is adapting trench warfare conditions more reminiscent of the First World War, as opposed to the high-speed maneuver warfare that was practiced during and after the Cold War. If these formations are deemed successful by Russia, it is likely the Russian Armed Forces will adopt similar ad-hoc structures for fighting in these conditions.

**T**he main task of the assault detachment for the day is to capture a platoon strongpoint.

**Source:** “Тактика ВСУ По Противодействию ЧВК «Вагнер» (Tactics of the Ukrainian Armed Forces against PMC ‘Wagner’),” *Institute of the SMO/People's Translation*, a pro-Russian Telegram channel that translates Ukrainian language documents into Russian for the benefit of those fighting against Ukraine, 2 February 2023. [https://tgstat.ru/channel/@svo\\_institute](https://tgstat.ru/channel/@svo_institute)

*This text is a direct translation from the Ukrainian language, compiled for scientific, educational, and reference purposes, has not been edited, should not be used for learning without understanding and interpretation, taking into account the circumstances of its origin. It does not reflect the position of translators and other participants in the "People's Translation" project...*

*In the areas of concentration of the main efforts by the enemy, the units of the Defense Forces of Ukraine are increasingly faced with active opposition from the units of the Wagner PMC [private military company]. The enemy is trying to exert constant pressure on the chosen directions, so the attacks actually have the character of constant battle of small groups of light infantry. The first attack involves location of our fires assets for the enemy's aerial reconnaissance platforms, and additional reconnaissance. As a result, the shelling of our positions after a repulsed attack is carried out in a way that is more massed than preparatory artillery strikes. And then a new attack is readied. This makes it possible to concentrate forces where Ukrainian troops have weaker reconnaissance, have fewer means of destruction, and have less resilience.*

*continue on 13*

## Continued: The Composition and Tactics of Wagner Assault Detachments

**Source Continued:** “Тактика ВСУ По Противодействию ЧВК «Вагнер» (Tactics of the Ukrainian Armed Forces against PMC ‘Wagner’),” *Institute of the SMO/People’s Translation*, a pro-Russian Telegram channel that translates Ukrainian language documents into Russian for the benefit of those fighting against Ukraine, 2 February 2023. [https://tgstat.ru/channel/@svo\\_institute](https://tgstat.ru/channel/@svo_institute)

*The enemy continues to apply new methods of warfare, testing them with the more trained units of the PMC "Wagner", further spreading the experience gained in the infantry units. Based on the generalized data, it has been established that in order to carry out counteroffensive (assault) operations in the Liman direction, the enemy uses assault detachments (groups) (hereinafter referred to as assault units) and “fixing” units. If earlier assault detachments were mainly involved in conducting assault operations in the city, now the enemy uses assault units to carry out an offensive in all sectors of the line of contact and various types of terrain (urbanized terrain, forest, swamps, steppe zone, etc.).*

*Assault detachments are formed on the basis of a motorized rifle company, which is reinforced with tanks, flamethrower [thermobaric rocket launcher] and mortar crews, and ATGM crews. The team may also include:*

- *an engineer squad;*
- *a group from the GRU Spetsnaz brigade (reconnaissance unit);*
- *a UAV crew;*
- *an evacuation group.*

*The assault detachment is divided into 5-8 assault groups.*

*The assault group includes: a motorized rifle squad, reinforced with a grenade launcher and flamethrower crew.*

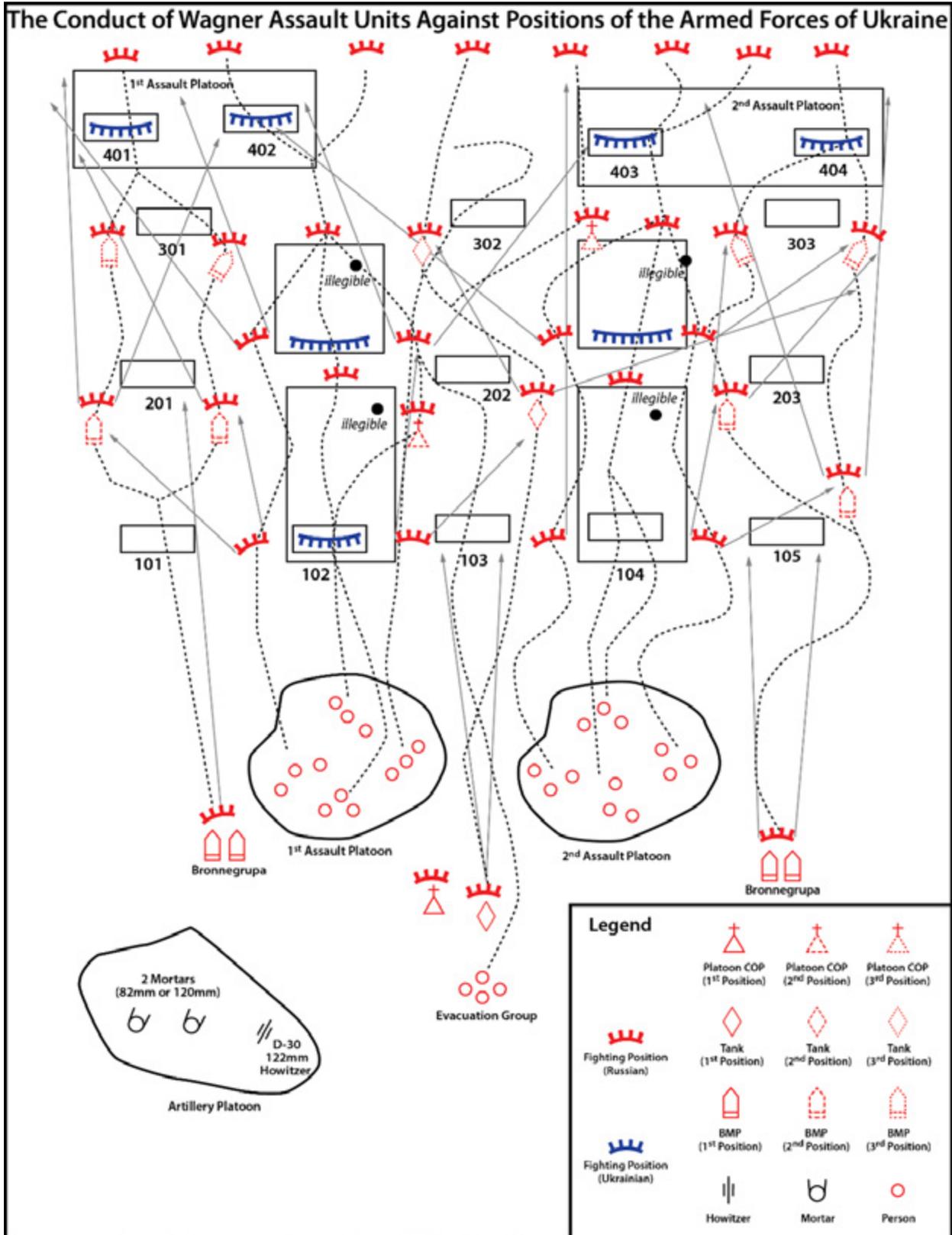
*The main task of the assault detachment for the day is to capture a platoon strongpoint. After completing the task, the detachment is withdrawn for 1-2 days to recover and rest. In place of the assault unit, “fixing” units are brought in. After reconstitution, the assault units can again be involved in combat.*

*A “fixing” unit is a reinforced motorized rifle company or (motorized rifle platoon), from among the combined arms units (military units), as well as BARS [reserve] units and/or territorial troops...*

*continue on 14*

# RUSSIA

## Continued: The Composition and Tactics of Wagner Assault Detachments



The Conduct of Wagner Assault Units Against Positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Source: Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army, Attribution: Public Domain

## Russian Arctic Seaports Expand Activity Despite War in Ukraine

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

According to the excerpted article from Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, despite fighting in Ukraine and sanctions by the West, Russia continues to strongly push the expansion of the Northern Sea Route's capacity. Most notably, the accompanying article notes that Russia seeks to expand from a shipment of 34 million tons of goods in 2022 to a projected 80 million tons by 2024. It also notes that Russia has set a target of implementing the construction of 41 new cargo vessels by 2030. In the past, President Putin has set increased shipping goals for the Northern Sea Route and, officially, they have been met. Yet, given the significantly ambitious increase from 34 million metric tons to 80 million metric tons, we do not know what goods are being shipped and who the customers are. Today, much of the Northern Sea Route shipping goes east to the Russian Far East and China; it

also remains the case that many non-European countries are ready to expand trade with Russia regardless of its invasion of Ukraine. In terms of what will get shipped, given Russia's natural resources and the never-ending need for sources of energy, much of this cargo will be liquified natural gas (LNG), coal, oil, timber, and processed metals. Grain shipments by barge up the Lena River to the Arctic Ocean and on to China have already been accomplished at a cheaper rate than rail. Still, it may be the case that the new proposed capacities might exceed demand. Annual increases of two to four million metric tons are achievable, but an increase to of the likes projected here would be unprecedented. If accomplished, though, any increase in shipping capacity could help Russia offset export losses due to ongoing sanctions.

**The most important issue on today's agenda is the fulfillment of President Putin's instructions to increase shipping volumes on the Northern Sea Route to 80 million tons by the year 2024.**

**Source:** Atle Staalesen, "Moscow assures it will not lower ambitions in Arctic," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 13 February 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2023/02/moscow-assures-it-will-not-lower-ambitions-arctic>

*"The most important issue on today's agenda is the fulfillment of President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin's instructions to increase shipping volumes on the Northern Sea Route to 80 million tons by the year 2024," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Truter said as he on the 11th of February opened a meeting in the State Commission on Arctic Development.*

*In the room were representatives of key federal ministries, regional governments, and state companies. Western sanctions have caused certain difficulties in reaching the president's objectives, the high-ranking government official admitted. But investment projects in the Arctic are still proceeding according to plans, he assured the group.*

*In 2022, a total of 34 million tons of goods was shipped on the route. "It is a good result," Trutnev underlined, and explained that the original plan for the year was only 32 million tons.*

*Despite the war against Ukraine and the severe economic hardships facing the country, the Northern Sea Route remains a top priority for the Russian government.*

*The cabinet headed by Premier Mikhail Mishustin continues to aim for an unprecedented boost in Arctic shipping, and the ambitions outlined in the federal "Plan on the development of the Northern Sea Route" as adopted in August 2022 remains intact.*

*continue on 16*

## Continued: Russian Arctic Seaports Expand Activity Despite War in Ukraine

**Source Continued:** Atle Staalesen, “Moscow assures it will not lower ambitions in Arctic,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 13 February 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2023/02/moscow-assures-it-will-not-lower-ambitions-arctic>

*The document says shipping on the route is to increase to 80 million tons in 2024 and later to 150 million tons in 2030 and 220 million tons in 2035.*

*In order to reach the target, a total of 41 new cargo vessels must be built by 2030, the leader of the Arctic Commission argued in last week’s meeting. Trutnev also underlined that the goods capacity of seaports along the Northern Sea Route will increase to 36 million tons in 2023 and to 83 million tons in 2024.*

*Behind the port development stands nuclear power company Rosatom, that in 2022 completed the construction of the Utrenneye terminal in the Gulf of Ob. In 2024, Rosneft’s Sever Bay terminal will stand ready on the coast of the Kara Sea, and the same year — the nearby new coal terminal of the Severnaya Zvezda.*

*But there are looming financial troubles in the horizon. “I do not exclude that we will have to find new solutions to financing the operations, so that there appears no deficit of funds in any phases of development,” Trutnev told his commission colleagues.*

*And despite the dramatic increase in federal deficit, the government official underlined that the state is ready to offer support. “If one of the companies will not have financing, that does not mean that it will be abandoned, [but] we must help,” Trutnev said.*

## Russia Adds Incentives for Fighters in Ukraine



VDV (airborne) troopers on parade repetition.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comp\\_41.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comp_41.jpg) Attribution: CCA-SA 3.0

By Ray Finch

OE Watch Commentary

Despite Russian propaganda efforts to promote military service, the Kremlin and the Defense Ministry have struggled to enlist adequate manpower to fight Ukraine. Even after mobilizing 300,000 new soldiers in the fall of 2022, the Defense Ministry continues to seek new and capable fighters, including immigrants and convicted felons. As the accompanying excerpts illustrate, additional incentives have been introduced to attract new recruits and to further motivate those already in uniform.

The first article from the pro-Kremlin news outlet *Izvestiya* describes how Russian veterans of the Ukraine invasion can expect extensive benefits. The list includes incentives such as vouchers for sanatoriums, free prostheses, and

various housing, tax, and health benefits. While the list is long, obtaining promised benefits is often another story. Recall that Russia has no equivalent to the U.S. Veterans Administration. As such, depending on the type of uniformed service and current place of residence, there is often a wide disparity of benefits and care provided to Russian military veterans.<sup>1</sup> The second excerpted article from the government site *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* describes additional payments Russian soldiers can receive “for destroyed or captured equipment of Ukrainian militants.” For example, soldiers can earn 300,000 rubles (\$4,300) for a downed aircraft or 100,000 rubles (\$1,450) for having “destroyed a large number of enemy manpower.” The article, however, does not spell out the procedures for receiving these payments. Finally, the third article, from the pro-Kremlin site *RT*, briefly describes a recent meeting between Putin and Russian judges, where they discussed “grounds for suspending legal proceedings, including if a citizen who is a party to the case participates in hostilities as part of the Russian Armed Forces or other military formations.” Behind this bureaucratic language, Putin is telling the judges that Russian military personnel should have criminal charges dismissed if they fight in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> The variety of additional benefits and incentives being introduced by Moscow suggest that Russian recruiting efforts have not proven sufficient, and that the Kremlin may soon have to rely more upon coercion to replenish its military ranks.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the rights of the Russian military and their families must be protected.**

**Source:** “Какие выплаты положены ветеранам боевых действий в России (What payments are due to war veterans in Russia),” *Izvestiya* (pro-Kremlin source), 16 January 2023. <https://iz.ru/1455408/2023-01-16/kakie-vyplaty-polozheny-veteranam-boevykh-deistvii-v-rossii-grafika>

*Veterans of military operations in Russia can count on financial and other support from the state. They are entitled to monthly payments and a number of benefits....*

*Combat veterans can apply for: cash supplement to the pension; partial compensation of expenses for housing and communal services; free vouchers for sanatoriums; free prostheses and rehabilitation aids; extraordinary service; a one-time payment for the construction of a house or the purchase of housing; tax and land benefits; other social preferences....*

## Continued: Russia Adds Incentives for Fighters in Ukraine

**Source:** Ilya Maksimov, “Представлен список поощрений за уничтожение и захват техники ВСУ (A list of rewards for the destruction and capture of Ukrainian military equipment),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Government newspaper), 15 November 2023. <https://rg.ru/2022/11/15/predstavlen-spisok-pooshchrenij-za-unichtozhennuiu-tehniku-vsu.html>

*A list of rewards for destroyed or captured equipment of Ukrainian militants is presented... The biggest bonus is for those who were able to destroy an enemy aircraft - 300,000 rubles will be paid for this. The helicopter was valued at 200 thousand rubles, the drone - at 50 thousand.*

*The award is also given for the destruction of ground equipment. The fighter who eliminated the tank can claim a bonus of 100 thousand rubles. For the destruction of infantry fighting vehicles, BMDs, armored personnel carriers, MTLBs, self-propelled guns, **S-300** systems, **Buk**, Tor, Osa complexes or MLRS launchers, they will pay 50 thousand rubles.*

*Bonus payments are also possible to military personnel who have destroyed a large number of enemy manpower or who have completed other tasks assigned to them. This premium is up to 100 thousand rubles.*

**Source:** “Путин: права российских военных и их семей должны быть защищены (Putin: the rights of the Russian military and their families must be protected),” RT (pro-Kremlin news outlet), 14 February 2023. <https://russian.rt.com/russia/news/1111177-putin-voennye-semi>

*Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the rights of the Russian military and their families must be protected. The President stated this during a meeting with the judges. He recalled the recent adoption of a number of legislative decisions on social support for the military, mobilized citizens and their families.*

*The new measures provide additional grounds for suspending legal proceedings, including if a citizen who is a party to the case participates in hostilities as part of the Russian Armed Forces or other military formations. According to him, the courts should carefully consider issues involving the military, taking into account not only legal aspects, but also specific life circumstances and situations....*

### Notes:

[1] For additional background on benefits for Russian veterans, see: Ray Finch, “Proposal to Restore Veterans’ Benefits,” *OE Watch*, July 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/277121>; Ray Finch, “Russian Military Experiencing Pay Problems,” *OE Watch*, 1-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/433072>; Ray Finch, “Lack of PTSD Treatment for Russian Soldiers,” *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429190>

[2] Notably, a similar strategy has also been used by the Russian private military company Wagner, wherein convicts can have their records expunged and earn their freedom in exchange for a six-month tour in Ukraine.

## Kazakhstan Draws Lessons From the Russia-Ukraine War

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

Like other countries around the world, Kazakhstan appears to be drawing lessons from the war in Ukraine to guide training for its armed forces, particularly in the use of or defense against unmanned aerial systems. In the accompanying excerpted article from Kazakhstan's *Inform Buro*, Kazakhstan's air defense forces carried out training on the "detection and destruction of drones for the first time" with the primary intent of the exercise being to "test the readiness to repulse enemy air attacks on military and civilian infrastructure." The article also notes that Kazakhstani air defense forces worked on eliminating "several small-sized, low-flying targets at once" as well as destroying "high-speed targets." While the article does not mention the war in Ukraine specifically, the scenario of the exercise resembles the types of attacks by unmanned systems being carried out in that theater of operations.

Kazakhstan has always been concerned that the northern regions of the country would be annexed by Russia under the guise of protecting ethnic Russians and the pre-

dominantly Russian-speaking population. A few Russian media outlets have been critical of Kazakhstan since the war in Ukraine began, particularly after Kazakh officials announced in the spring of 2022 that its armed forces would not take part in a Victory Day parade on 9 May to mark the Soviet Union's victory in the Second World War, but would instead carry out a training exercise to improve combat readiness.<sup>1</sup> These Russian news outlets went as far as to suggest that Kazakhstan could share the same fate as Ukraine. Despite this rhetoric, the governments of Russia and Kazakhstan have maintained mostly good relations since the war in Ukraine began.<sup>2</sup> However, Kazakhstan's air defense exercise shows that Kazakh officials are probably watching the war in Ukraine with concern and have carried out relevant military training to prepare for a similar conflict on its own territory.

**The main goal of the exercise was to test the readiness to repulse enemy air attacks on military and civilian infrastructure.**

**Source:** "Силы воздушной обороны Казахстана впервые отработали уничтожение беспилотников (The air defense forces of Kazakhstan worked out the destruction of unmanned aerial vehicles for the first time)," *Inform Buro* (news website in Kazakhstan), 2 February 2023. <https://informburo.kz/novosti/sily-vozdushnoj-oborony-kazakhstana-vpervye-otrabotali-unichtozhenie-bespilotnikov>

*The live-firing of anti-aircraft missiles of the air defense forces took place at the Sary-Shagan training facility... According to the Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, soldiers trained on the detection and destruction of drones for the first time...*

*The main goal of the exercise was to test the readiness to repulse enemy air attacks on military and civilian infrastructure... "(they) practiced actions to detect, track, and destroy several small-sized, low-flying targets at once," said Colonel Berik Moldakulov, commander of the air defense brigade... they also worked out tasks to detect and destroy high-speed targets.*

*...the exercise also showed the ability of anti-aircraft missile systems to rapidly deploy...*

### Notes:

[1] For more information on Kazakhstan's exercise and the cancelled parade, see: Matthew Stein "Kazakhstan Cancels Soviet-Era Parade To Focus on Combat Readiness," *OE Watch*, 3-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

[2] For more on the nature of recent Kazakh-Russian relations, see: Jacob Zenn, "Russian-Led Military Alliance in Central Asia Weakening Amid Quagmire in Ukraine," *OE Watch*, 1-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434130>; Matthew Stein, "Kazakhstan Suspends Defense Exports, Denying Russia Purchases," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/427937>; Matthew Stein, "Ukraine War Likely To Reduce Russian Security Commitments in Central Asia," *OE Watch*, 8-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/422028>

## Russia Losing to China in Central Asia

By Ray Finch  
OE Watch Commentary

The ripple effects of the Kremlin's decision to invade Ukraine in early 2022 continue to reverberate around the world, particularly among China and Russia's other neighbors. As the excerpted article from the semi-independent Russia-based *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye*<sup>1</sup> indicates, given the demands of fighting in Ukraine, "it is increasingly difficult for Russia to ensure the security of Central Asia." Furthermore, after its poor military performance in Ukraine, regional leaders see that the Russian armed forces are not nearly as formidable as they were once believed to be. And yet, Russia's unprovoked attack has led certain Central Asian countries to worry about being met with the same fate as Ukraine.

Given Russia's growing absence from Central Asia, the author, military journalist Alexander Khramchikhin, asserts that "with all these circumstances, China can dominate the region almost automatically."<sup>2</sup> He continues to say that a Chinese military presence in Central Asia is steadily developing, since over the last several years, the People's Liberation Army of China and the People's Armed Police have already conducted numerous joint exercises with the

armies, border police, and internal troops of various Central Asian countries. The author then concludes that "China can successfully form the image of a guarantor of the security of the countries of the region...replacing Russia in this capacity."

**China can successfully form the image of a guarantor of the security of the countries of the region, replacing Russia in this capacity.**

The author reviews Chinese involvement in all five Central Asian countries, reminding readers of the recently constructed Chinese base in Tajikistan, claiming that "the place of Moscow as a guarantor of the security of Dushanbe is confidently taken by Beijing." To ensure that China's economic interests are well protected, he maintains that it is only a matter of time before further Chinese bases materialize in other Central Asian countries. Khramchikhin concludes that "Beijing will act on the principle of 'crossing the river, groping for stones,'" suggesting that this transformation of China's growing military presence in Central Asia will be gradual.



Map of Central Asia.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central\\_Asia\\_-\\_political\\_map\\_2008.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Asia_-_political_map_2008.svg) Attribution: CCA-SA 3.0

## Continued: Russia Losing to China in Central Asia

**Source Continued:** Alexander Khramchikhin, “Пекин прибирает к рукам страны Центральной Азии (Beijing takes over the countries of Central Asia),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* (semi-independent Russian news source focused on military topics), 26 January 2023. [https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2023-01-26/5\\_1222\\_asia.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2023-01-26/5_1222_asia.html)

*...Central Asia is now in the deep shadow of the Ukrainian events. But this does not mean at all that the struggle for it has ceased. In addition to geographic proximity, Russia has powerful historical, linguistic, cultural, economic, political, and military ties with the countries of Central Asia. To a large extent, the labor markets of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are oriented towards Russia. This explains the very significant influence of Moscow in the region....*

*...However, these ties are also gradually beginning to blur and weaken. In particular, Ukrainian events contribute to this. Because of them, it is increasingly difficult for Russia to ensure the security of Central Asia: too large forces are deployed by Moscow in Ukraine. In addition, the countries of the region see that the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are by no means as strong as previously thought. On the other hand, some of these countries are beginning to fear sharing the fate of Ukraine.... In connection with all these circumstances, China can dominate the region almost automatically. In fact, competitors themselves give him this dominance....*

*The growth of China's economic influence in the countries of Central Asia automatically leads to an increase in political influence.... If the growth of China's economic influence in Central Asia is automatically followed by the growth of its political influence, then, obviously, the growth of political influence will be followed by the growth of military influence, which is already happening. In addition, most of China's economic projects in the countries of Central Asia are part of the global One Belt, One Road project. Accordingly, Beijing wants to ensure the safety of these projects.*

*In the 21st century, the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) and the People's Armed Police (PAP) have already conducted dozens of joint exercises with the armies, border and internal troops of the Central Asian countries.... Accordingly, China can successfully form the image of a guarantor of the security of the countries of the region from the well-known “three evils” (terrorism, separatism, extremism), replacing Russia in this capacity.*

*...The highest form of military cooperation between China and the countries of Central Asia is the deployment of Chinese military bases in the region.... Quite expectedly, it began with Tajikistan - the weakest country in Central Asia militarily and economically, the most remote from Russia, while having the longest border with Afghanistan... Dushanbe is experiencing a serious security deficit and is not sure that Moscow is able to solve this problem (especially now, in the context of the Ukrainian campaign). Therefore, the place of Moscow as a guarantor of the security of Dushanbe is confidently taken by Beijing....*

*The deployment of Chinese military bases in other countries of the region is apparently a matter of time. The pace and order of deployment of Chinese military facilities in the countries of Central Asia will be determined both by the general geopolitical situation and the degree of economic dependence of each specific country on China. ...Most likely Tajikistan will be followed by Kyrgyzstan, then Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The last one, apparently, will give consent to the deployment of PLA facilities in the country Kazakhstan.... Chinese military bases in Central Asia will ensure the smooth functioning of the Belt and Road Initiative and the stability of local regimes.*

*continue on 22*

## Continued: Russia Losing to China in Central Asia

**Source:** Alexander Khramchikhin, “Пекин прибирает к рукам страны Центральной Азии (Beijing takes over the countries of Central Asia),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* (semi-independent Russian news source focused on military topics), 26 January 2023. [https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2023-01-26/5\\_1222\\_asia.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2023-01-26/5_1222_asia.html)

*At first, Chinese facilities in the countries of the region are unlikely to be too large, but gradually the presence of the PLA and the PAP in these states will expand. As in all other areas, Beijing will act on the principle of ‘crossing the river, groping for stones.’ Almost always, the implementation of this principle leads China to success.*

### Notes:

[1] *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* (Independent Military Review).

[2] Alexander Khramchikhin was one of the few Russian military analysts who warned against an invasion of Ukraine, arguing that such an attack could have catastrophic consequences for Russia. See: Alexander Khramchikhin, “Полураспад Украины (Half-life of Ukraine),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye*, 11 March 2021. [https://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2021-03-11/8\\_1132\\_ukraine.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2021-03-11/8_1132_ukraine.html)

## Russia Using Media Organizations To Garner Support From “Islamic” Countries

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

In December 2022, the Moscow headquarters of the Russian news channel RT hosted a conference titled “Russia and the Islamic World: Practical Steps in Media Cooperation.” The conference was co-sponsored by three entities: the Group of Strategic Vision Russia–Islamic World (GSV); Russia's Sputnik International News Agency, which is highly influential in Arabic-speaking countries; and the Union of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) News Agencies (UNA).<sup>1</sup> The conference featured representatives from Emirati and Turkish media and aimed to not only strengthen media coordination between Russia and OIC countries, but also to harmonize broader narratives in order to counter “misinformation.” The accompanying excerpt, published in the Saudi English-language daily *Arab News*, highlights how “Moscow is shifting its focus to the Muslim world.” The Kremlin is looking to deepen policies promoting Russo-Muslim cooperation mechanisms—including

**C**ooperation with countries of the Islamic world in the media sphere is one of the key aspects of the Russian international policy.

the annual GSV-hosted Kazan Summit, one of the primary economic summits for Russia and OIC countries—which may provide Moscow with opportunities to skirt economic sanctions. The Kremlin also hopes that such efforts may promote the continued neutrality of Muslim countries vis-à-vis Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> As GSV chairman and Tatarstan Republic leader Rustam Minnikhanov expressed in his address to



President of the Republic of Tatarstan R.N. Minnikhanov.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rustam\\_Minnikhanov\\_official\\_portrait.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rustam_Minnikhanov_official_portrait.jpg)  
Attribution: CC BY 4.0

the December conference, excerpted alongside this commentary from the official GSV website, “cooperation with countries of the Islamic world in the media sphere is one of the key aspects of the Russian international policy.” Especially noteworthy is the role played by the GSV and similar organizations in strengthening Russo-Turkish cooperation, given the historical links between Turkey and Russian Muslim-majority areas such as Tatarstan, which some in Turkey consider part of the broader “Turkic World.” Thus, Russo-Muslim cooperation mechanisms such as the GSV are not only fulfilling an important and immediate geopolitical role, but they also push forward the type of historical, quasi-civilizational approach to geostrategic thinking that has steadily emerged in both Putin's Russia and Erdogan's Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

**Source:** Diana Galeeva. “Moscow shifts its focus to the Muslim world,” *Arab News* (English-language Saudi daily), 17 December 2022. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2217786>

*In addition to the activities of the Russian Muftiates, which Russia has used as part of its religious soft power since the 2000s, are the Group of the Strategic Vision “Russia-Islamic world,” the para-diplomacies of the Russian Muslim regions (Chechnya, Dagestan, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan), and the activities of Muslim NGOs, such as the Association of Muslim Businessmen of the Russian Federation. Arguably, these policies have helped Russia to achieve economic, political and security advantages, including investments in its regions (Chechnya and Tatarstan) by the Gulf Cooperation Council states. The neutral position of GCC states over the Ukraine crisis also suggests the positive outcomes of these policies.*

## Continued: Russia Using Media Organizations To Garner Support From “Islamic” Countries

**Source:** "International Conference ‘Developing Media Cooperation with the Islamic World – Russia’s Most Important Doctrine’," *Group of Strategic Vision Russia – Islamic World*, 15 December 2022. <https://russia-islworld.ru/en/novosti/international-conference-developing-media-cooperation-with-the-islamic-world-russias-most-important-doctrine-2022-12-15-29854/>

*Moreover, regular events held by the Group of Strategic Vision ‘Russia – Islamic World’ testify to the dynamics of fruitful international relations. Cooperation with countries of the Islamic world in the media sphere is one of the key aspects of the Russian international policy. Rustam Minnikhanov expressed his opinion that in the current difficult geopolitical situation the role of mass media was increasing and that the journalistic work of honest and verified mass media was crucial in combating false information and promoting traditional spiritual values.*

### Notes:

[1] The GSV is a Russian entity formed in 2006 to coordinate Moscow's relations with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a multilateral forum of Muslim-majority countries in which Russia is an observer state. In 2014, President Putin bolstered the GSV's capabilities as a conduit for Russian influence in Muslim-majority countries by increasing its visibility and appointing Tatarstan Republic leader Rustam Minnikhanov as its head.

[2] In January 2023, a presidential decree made the Kazan Summit an annual event. The summit's website is available at: <https://kazansummit.ru/en/>

[3] One of the most visible proponents of this type of thinking in Russia is Alexander Dugin, a Russian political philosopher whose geopolitical musings are thought to influence the strategic thinking of the Russian armed forces' leadership. See: Lucas Winter, "The Appeal of 'Duginism' in the Middle East," *OE Watch*. 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/427403>

## Iran Praises Revolutionary Guards' Proxy Afghan Brigade

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

Against the backdrop of the fight against the Islamic State that erupted in 2014, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force established a number of ethnic-based movements to fight in Syria.<sup>1</sup> The Quds Force deployed the Afghan Shia militia Liwa Fatemiyoun (Fatimid Banner) to Syria primarily to defend the Damascus shrine of Zaynab, the daughter of Imam Ali and the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>2</sup> In the excerpted article from IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency*, General Mohammad Reza Fallahzadeh, Deputy Commander of the Quds Force, speaks about the legacy of the Liwa Fatemiyoun upon the death of one of its commanders. He describes the Fatemiyoun, an Afghan proxy of the IRGC, as a core component of the Iranian strategy to foil the Islamic State. While this may be an exaggeration in terms of actual fighting, the IRGC used the crisis to form the Fatemiyoun and other ethnic militias to further the IRGC's aim to export revolution. That the Quds Force did not disband the Liwa Fatemiyoun after the defeat of the Islamic State inside Syria suggests that the IRGC seeks to preserve the group to utilize beyond its initial purpose. Fallahzadeh's discussion that absent the Afghan brigade, the Islamic State might have reached Bangladesh, suggests that Iran might be ready for a renewed push into South Asia. Shortly after the Iranian Revolution, the IRGC sponsored not only Lebanese Hezbollah but sought to create a corollary movement among Pakistani Shia. While infiltration of the Lebanese diaspora helped the Quds Force project power not only in the Middle East, but also Africa and Latin



Mothers of Fatamayoun Militiamen Hold Photos of Sons Killed in Action, 2017.

Source: [https://images.khabaronline.ir/images/2016/5/16-5-14-135413950108\\_0633065.jpg](https://images.khabaronline.ir/images/2016/5/16-5-14-135413950108_0633065.jpg)  
Attribution: Khabar Online

**If it were not for their sacrifices, today the Islamic State would have advanced to Bangladesh.**

America, it traditionally fell short in South Asia. Forty years later, the Quds Force might see the Liwa Fatemiyoun as a viable substitute for its failed Pakistan efforts to extend its influence as far to the east as it does to the west.<sup>3</sup>

**Source:** "Sardar Falahzadeh: Agar Aysargariha-ye Fatamayun Nabud, Emruz Da'esh ta Bangladesh Pishruye Kardeh Bud (General Falahzadeh: If It Were Not for the Sacrifices of the Fatamayun, the Islamic State Would Have Advanced to Bangladesh)," *Fars News Agency* (a news agency closely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 13 February 2023. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011124000424>

*General Mohammad Reza Fallahzadeh, the deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, met in Yazd with the family of the late Sayyid Qasem Hosseini, a warrior defending the shrine from the [Liwa] Fatemiyoun Division. In this meeting, General Fallahzadeh commemorated upon the memory of the martyrs defending the shrine and said, "the Islamic State was not a normal organization, but a vicious pedigree that was both determined and motivated by its false belief, and, in a single sentence, it can be said that the Islamic State was the army of false belief.*

*The deputy commander of the Quds Force added, "Usually mercenary armies try to avoid suffering casualties,*

*continue on 26*

## Continued: Iran Praises Revolutionary Guards' Proxy Afghan Brigade

**Source Continued:** “Sardar Falahzadeh: Agar Aysargariha-ye Fatamayun Nabud, Emruz Da’esh ta Bangladesh Pishruye Kardeh Bud (General Falahzadeh: If It Were Not for the Sacrifices of the Fatamayun, the Islamic State Would Have Advanced to Bangladesh),” *Fars News Agency* (a news agency closely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 13 February 2023. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011124000424>

*but the Islamic State, with their firm but vicious conviction, martyred our warriors with suicide operations and perished in the process. In Syria, all blasphemy was against all Islam, and it was the alliance between Muslims in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Iran that stopped the Islamic State because [our] correct belief was greater and stronger.”*

*... He described the Islamic State as a product of the American Zionist plan and continued, “The defenders of the shrine and Fatemiyoun warriors, led by the Supreme Leader and the commander of the hearts of Haj Qassem Aziz [Qassem Soleimani], defeated this plan and secured a victory for the Islamic Front.”*

*Referring to Fatemiyoun's role in defending the Shrine of [Al-Sayyida] Zaynab [in Damascus], the deputy commander of the Quds Force said, “These beloved ones played an essential role in defending Islam, Shi’ism and humanity and, if it were not for their sacrifices, today the Islamic State would have advanced to Bangladesh.”*

### Notes:

[1] For more background on Iran’s Afghan and Pakistani militias, see: Michael Rubin, “Cleric Speaks on Iran’s Foreign Militias,” *OE Watch*, February 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/266059/download>

[2] Liwa Fatemiyoun was formed in 2014, although it is possible that former Afghan National Army soldiers are now serving in the ranks of Liwa Fatemiyoun, as thousands have fled Afghanistan and now reside in Iran.

[3] For an earlier discussion of Iran’s concept of strategic boundaries extending to its west, see: Michael Rubin, “Iranian Influence Extends to the Mediterranean,” *OE Watch*, September 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/242569/download>

## Iran Profiles the Female Police Seeking To Quell the Women’s Protests

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

In September 2022, the death while in police custody of 22 year-old Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for alleged improper dress, sparked an unprecedented wave of protests and unrest across Iran, as Iranians rallied under the slogan “Women, life, freedom.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to brutal crackdowns that have killed hundreds and landed tens of thousands in prison, the Iranian government has engaged its state-run media to present an alternative narrative to its populace to argue that women support the Islamic Republic. The excerpted feature by a correspondent from *Fars News*, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, profiles a female police officer, but its awkward praise for her intellectual and athletic excellence and her choice to become a police officer unintentionally highlights the regime’s condescension that chafes at Iranian women.

The Iranian regime is aware that it has an ideological problem: many young Iranians are not committed to Revolutionary Leader Ayatollah Khomeini’s Shi’ite revolutionary values.<sup>2</sup> *Fars News’* decision to spotlight the women’s elite police unit coincides with a broader effort to counter this ideological erosion and renew revolutionary values among Iran’s youth. It also seeks to amplify the idea that the police

cracking down on the protestors are the true patriots by juxtaposing the anonymous subject with allegations that outside powers sponsored or manipulated those protesting on behalf of Amini and Iranian women. The emphasis in the *Fars News* profile on the special police unit members’ proficiency in both English and French is curious. It might seek to imply to the Iranian audience that the protests are not indigenous, but rather foreign agents spark and control the riots. At the same time, the mention of language proficiency

**S**ome people were paid to attack.

may also reflect an understanding inside regime circles that they must engage foreign journalists and diplomats in their own languages. While women have long played a role in specialized units of the paramilitary Basij, their traditional focus on enforcing dress and sexual segregation in public spaces has rubbed many Iranians the wrong way. Notably the article acknowledges the popular anger directed to the security forces, but it is not clear if information operations like this or even a new squad will improve Iranian women’s perceptions of their government and its security forces.



Members of the Women’s Police Special Unit pose in front of their motorcycles, February 2023.

Source: [https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1401/10/24/14011024000759\\_Test\\_PhotoN.jpg](https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1401/10/24/14011024000759_Test_PhotoN.jpg) Attribution: Farsnews.ir

## Continued: Iran Profiles the Female Police Seeking To Quell the Women's Protests

**Source:** Maryam Arab Ansari, “Ba Polis-e Zan-e Nukhbeh ‘Yagan Vizheh’: az Tobaher dar Rishteh-haye Razmi Taslet beh Inglis va Faransavi (With the Women’s Police Elite ‘Special Unit’: From Mastering Martial Arts to Speaking English and French),” *Fars News Agency* (news agency closely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 12 February 2023. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011122000164>

*She is a police officer, a woman, a member of the Special Operations Group, and has full proficiency in English and French. In 2021, she graduated with a straight A average, and ranked 300th in English [nationwide], entered the Amin Police University [in Tehran], where she had both general and specialized training. She also passed combat training including [basic] self-defense, judo, weapons training, rappelling, ninja crafts, shooting, arrest and detention. Every day, she periodically reviews her exercises, specialized and combat training because physical fitness is an integral part of sports and specialized training for special force officers, although her specialty is judo.*

*She is single. I ask during the riots and with your presence in the streets, didn't your mother worry that God forbid something would happen to you?*

*With calmness, she says, "There were no troubling issues, and we have learned not to worry our families...."*

*I ask about the days of turmoil, the unrest and how some people were paid to attack people in the streets and squares of the city and...The only answer she gives use is that insults and slander have no effect on our resolve, and our sole purpose and focus is to ensure the order and security of the people, and we are not going to react whether we hear insults or disrespect.*

### Notes:

[1] For background on the death of Mahsa Amini and the ensuing protests, see: Maggie McGrath, “Mahsa Amini: The Spark That Ignited A Women-Led Revolution,” *Forbes*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2022/12/06/mahsa-amini-the-spark-that-ignited-a-women-led-revolution/?sh=6a9f7aeb5c3d>

[2] For a previous discussion on revolutionary fervor among a younger generation, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Supreme Leader Speaks on Martyrdom,” *OE Watch*, December 2021, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/399678/download>; Michael Rubin, “Khamenei Warns Veterans of Declining Revolutionary Fervor,” *OE Watch*, February 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/354648>

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

In mid-February, the United Nations released its biannual report offering a broad overview of the state of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. Created with inputs from the intelligence analysis of participating UN member states, the report is a useful analysis of the state of play of transnational jihadist movements. As regards the Islamic State, the UN report underscored that the global terrorist organization is making its greatest gains in Sub-Saharan Africa, via its West Africa<sup>1</sup> (Lake Chad Basin) and Sahel (Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso) affiliates. The report also noted the importance of Somalia in the Islamic State's funding efforts. Outside of Africa, it asserts that violence is surging in the Islamic State's so-called Khorasan Province (Afghanistan-Pakistan), notably with attacks on the rival Taliban. The report emphasizes that the Islamic State's growth and resiliency are being most clearly demonstrated outside of its original core bases of Iraq and Syria, where it is known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). As it describes, "ISIL core continues to be under pressure,



Flag of the United Nations.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Nations.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_United_Nations.png) Attribution: Wilfried Huss, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons

with attrition in its leadership and depleting resources. It has proven resilient, but morale is low." The UN report continues to underscore that the current epicenter of terrorist violence has shifted away from being centered in the Middle East, and is now most heavily weighted in Africa and South Asia.<sup>2</sup> As global focus has moved away from terrorism and towards near-peer competition, the overriding implication is that the global terrorist threat has not disappeared.

**Issues of leadership were significant during the reporting period. ISIL core continues to be under pressure, with attrition in its leadership and depleting resources. It has proven resilient, but morale is low.**

**Source:** United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, 13 February 2023. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/monitoring-team/reports>

*The threat from Al-Qaida, ISIL (Da'esh) and affiliated groups remains high in conflict zones and neighbouring countries. It remains relatively low in other areas, but both groups continue to aspire to project threat.*

*Africa has emerged in recent years as the continent where the harm done by terrorism is developing most rapidly and extensively. Two of the three most dynamic ISIL affiliates are in Africa, and the continent has seen the greatest growth in ISIL affiliates, with several groups expanding their radius of influence often across national borders. ISIL continues its efforts to exploit regional and local grievances throughout the continent for propaganda purposes, publicizing related events and attacks to enhance its global footprint. Equally, Al-Qaida's most successful affiliate in Somalia, Al-Shabaab, continues to grow in strength and reach as the group's most brutal affiliate, and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) has been able to expand its operations in West Africa and the Sahel.*

*continue on 30*

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan

**Source Continued:** United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council,” United Nations Security Council, 13 February 2023. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/monitoring-team/reports>

*Issues of leadership were significant during the reporting period. ISIL core continues to be under pressure, with attrition in its leadership and depleting resources. It has proven resilient, but morale is low. The group is strengthening through its affiliates beyond Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic: in Africa and with the aggressive agenda of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan (ISIL-K) in Afghanistan, whose rivalry with the Taliban will continue to have a destabilizing effect in Afghanistan and the region. Most of the attacks by ISIL-K are against the Taliban. A new leader of ISIL was killed after barely eight months in charge. The function of leader has become almost totemic, a rallying point for the wider group. For the time being, ISIL core continues to produce leaders who meet this need, and members of affiliates pledge allegiance swiftly and without question, not anticipating close operational direction. Member States’ predominant view is that Sayf al-’Adl is now the de facto leader of Al-Qaida, representing continuity for now. But his leadership cannot be declared because of Al-Qaida’s sensitivity to Afghan Taliban concerns not to acknowledge the death of Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri in Kabul and the fact of Sayf al-’Adl’s presence in the Islamic Republic of Iran. His location raises questions that have a bearing on Al-Qaida’s ambitions to assert leadership of a global movement in the face of challenges from ISIL.*

### Notes:

[1] For more on the Islamic State’s history and evolution in Africa, see: Jason Warner et al., *The Islamic State in Africa: Emergence, Evolution, and Future of the Next Jihadist Battlefield*, Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2022.

[2] For more on how Africa has taken on new importance in the global jihadist landscape, see: Tricia Bacon and Jason Warner, “Twenty Years After 9/11: The Threat in Africa – The New Global Epicenter of Jihadi Terrorism,” *CTC Sentinel*, 14 (7), September 2021. <https://ctc.usma.edu/twenty-years-after-9-11-the-threat-in-africa-the-new-epicenter-of-global-jihadi-terror/>

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Colombia Deemphasizing Coca Eradication in Counterdrug Strategy



An aerial eradication operation conducted by helicopter.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/umpquawild/28702214956> Attribution: CC BY-NC 2.0

By Ryan Berg

OE Watch Commentary

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro campaigned on a platform of changing the country's policies toward illicit drugs,<sup>1</sup> and he is making good on that promise. According to Spain's largest daily, *El País*, which has excellent coverage of Latin America, the Petro government has announced plans to reduce counterdrug strategic efforts aimed at forced eradication of coca. Previously, these efforts constituted some of the country's main strategies to curb coca, the

raw ingredient in cocaine. Instead, Petro plans to pursue drug traffickers, especially those who do not participate in the ongoing peace negotiations. As an outcome, an end to forced eradication means a far less ambitious effort to reduce the number of hectares under coca cultivation. In the second article, U.S.-funded Spanish language news service *Voz de América* reports that Colombia now aims to reduce a mere 20,000 hectares under coca cultivation, compared to 50,000 hectares, which was its goal in 2022. Petro's predecessor, President Ivan Duque, eradicated 130,000 hectares of coca cultivation in 2020. Of note, since assuming office, Petro has also reversed course on fighting guerrilla groups and sought a broad truce with criminal organizations in a plan he calls "Total Peace."<sup>2</sup> Bridging the two concerns, the new, less ambitious coca eradication efforts will probably drive instability in Colombia and encourage criminal groups to control more territory to plant coca. Indeed, one outcome of this new counterdrug plan is that it has the potential to undercut Petro's attempt to bring about "Total Peace" in the country.

**The government of Gustavo Petro is taking increasingly decisive steps to achieve the reversal in the drug policy that the president of Colombia proposed on the campaign trail.**

**Source:** "El vuelco de Petro en la política de drogas empieza por reducir la erradicación forzada de coca (Petro's turnaround in drug policy begins by reducing the forced eradication of coca)," *El País* (Spain's largest daily with excellent coverage of Latin America), 12 January 2023. <https://elpais.com/america-colombia/2023-01-12/el-vuelco-de-petro-en-la-politica-de-drogas-empieza-por-reducir-la-erradicacion-forzada-de-coca.html>

*The government of Gustavo Petro is taking increasingly decisive steps to achieve the reversal in the drug policy that the president of Colombia proposed on the campaign trail. After having prepared the ground to bury once and for all the aerial spraying with glyphosate against coca crops, this week the National Police set its goal of eradicating illicit crops in 2023 at 20,000 hectares, a notable reduction of 60% with respect to the 50,000 that was proposed for 2022... At the end of 2021, the total area shot up from 143,000 to 204,000 hectares under cultivation, according to the latest annual report of the United Nations Integrated System for Monitoring Illicit Crops (Simci), the official measurement. Cocaine hydrochloride production potential reached 1,400 tons. Both are the highest figures since records were kept.*

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: Colombia Deemphasizing Coca Eradication in Counterdrug Strategy

**Source:** “Colombia anuncia reducción en su meta de erradicación de cultivos ilícitos (Colombia announces reduction in its goal of eradication of illicit crops),” *Voz de América* (the Spanish-language version of the state-owned network), 20 January 2023. <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/colombia-anuncia-reduccion-meta-erradicacion-cultivos-ilicitos-/6927613.html>

*Colombia reduced its goal of eradicating illicit crops to 20,000 hectares in 2023, a total of 30,000 fewer hectares compared to last year’s figure, which was set at 50,000... President Gustavo Petro has described the current anti-drug policy, which has been implemented since by previous governments, as a failure, and recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, once again assured that this is a failed policy – the main factor in the generation of violence in Colombia.*

### Notes:

[1] For more background on Petro’s campaign and his policy shift on illicit drugs, see: Ryan Berg, “Colombia’s Gustavo Petro Promises New Approach to Security and Drugs,” *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428038>; Missy Ryan, “In Test of Ties with U.S., Colombian Leader Proposes Shift on Drugs,” *Washington Post*, 27 September 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/09/27/united-states-colombia-drugs/>

[2] For more information on Petro’s views on guerrilla groups and Colombia’s security challenges more generally, see: Ryan Berg, “Colombia’s Congress Authorizes ‘Total Peace’ Negotiation With Guerrilla and Criminal Groups,” *OE Watch*, 1-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434199>; Ryan Berg, “Colombia’s Leftist President Seeks To Resume Negotiations With National Liberation Army,” *OE Watch*, 9-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425694>; Christina Noriega, “Colombia’s Radical New Approach to Cocaine,” *Foreign Policy*, 30 October 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/30/colombia-cocaine-coca-industry-policy-war-drugs-gustavo-petro/>

## Complications Surround Kenyan Peacemaking in DRC

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

In February 2023, *The East African*, an online outlet covering regional affairs in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, published the excerpted article on the challenges Kenya faces in mediating the conflict between the Congolese government and rebels of the March 23 Movement, better known as M23. The M23 is predominantly Tutsi and is backed by Rwanda, whose president, Paul Kagame, is Tutsi and sympathizes with M23's grievances against the Congolese government for neglecting their communities. In 2022, M23 suddenly renewed its offensive against the Congolese government after a nine-year hiatus, which began in 2012 when a fragile truce was achieved. The former Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta, who left office in 2022, is heading efforts by the East African Community (EAC) to find a resolution, but the complexities of the conflict make peace elusive. Nevertheless, the article notes there is no plan to replace Kenyatta and that he is incentivized by the goal to make Kenya proud as a regional peacemaker.

According to the article, the inability to reach an agreement is caused, on one end, by the Congolese government's insistence that M23 rebels are terrorists and refusal to negotiate with them on that basis. On the other end, M23 rebels are willing to meet with Kenyatta but demand direct

negotiations with the Congolese government. Kenyatta's most immediate recommendation is for the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) member-states to all contribute forces to separate the government and rebel lines. At present, however, only Kenyan forces are deployed in the epicenter of the violence in the town of Goma in eastern Congo, while deployments from Burundi, Uganda, and South Sudan have been pledged but not implemented.

**O**ne of the missing links has been the continued refusal by Kinshasa to negotiate with the rebel group M23.

Further complicating peace efforts is the article's claim that the Congolese government sees the EACRF mandate as militarily defeating M23, while the EACRF seeks to create conditions for a political process and dialogue. As noted in the excerpted article from Kenya-based publication *The Star*, 200 Kenyan troops traveled to eastern Congo to join the roughly 700 Kenyan troops already there. According to the article, their mission was not to defeat the M23 rebels, but to remain impartial and stabilize the region to enforce a conclusive peace agreement or at least a more enduring truce than one that had existed from 2012 until 2021.



M-23 launch attack on MONUSCO in Kiwanja .

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:M-23\\_launch\\_attack\\_on\\_MONUSCO\\_in\\_Kiwanja\\_\(7684320746\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:M-23_launch_attack_on_MONUSCO_in_Kiwanja_(7684320746).jpg)  
Attribution: MONUSCO Photos (CC x2.0)

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: Complications Surround Kenyan Peacemaking in DRC

**Source:** “Uhuru’s delicate balancing act in Congo peace talks assignment,” *Theeastafrican.co.ke* (regional-oriented weekly newspaper focusing on Kenyan, Ugandan, and Rwandan political, military, and economic affairs), 11 February 2023. [theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uhuru-delicate-balancing-act-in-dr-congo-4119666](https://theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uhuru-delicate-balancing-act-in-dr-congo-4119666)

*Former Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta has been praised for helping end the Tigrayan conflict in Ethiopia. As a retired president and a glad-handed statesman, he became an obvious choice for the East African Community (EAC) in its pursuit of peace in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. But the complexity of the Congo conflict has left Kenyatta gasping for breath, with support and opposition coming in equal measure.*

*Last week, Kenyatta skipped the EAC Summit in Bujumbura called by President Evariste Ndayishimiye to help broker a ceasefire to the violence in eastern DRC.*

*Kenyatta’s domestic troubles, however, are only part of the problem in brokering peace in the DRC. On Thursday, he endorsed the Summit’s call for a ceasefire and withdrawal of rebels from the positions.... One of the missing links has been the continued refusal by Kinshasa to negotiate with the rebel group M23.... The M23, on their part, are demanding “direct negotiations” with the Congolese government. The rebels also asked to express their grievance to Kenyatta, whom they have met at least twice this year.*

**Source:** “200 more KDF troops arrive in DRC to enforce peace,” *thestar.co.ke* (independent Nairobi-based newspaper focusing on Kenyan politics), 16 November 2022. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2022-11-16-200-more-kdf-troops-arrive-in-drc-to-enforce-peace/>

*The second batch of troops from Kenya to be deployed to fight M23 rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a joint regional operation left the country.*

*A team of about 903 has been deployed to the region to help contain the fighting that has displaced many. About 200 more troops left Nairobi for the troubled region of Goma. Gen Kibochi told the troops to remember their joint mission with other East African Community states to enforce peace. He urged the officers to obey the law of the land as they are deployed. The Commander of the team Major General Jeff Nyaga said they are there to help DRC stabilise.*

## Russia's Role in India's Bids for New Carbines and Medium Transport Aircraft

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the government of India has walked away from several agreements with Russia to acquire or upgrade weapon systems. Indian officials have stated that they do not believe the Russian defense industry could deliver the systems that had previously been agreed to because of the logistical challenges Russia now faces. While the canceled agreements have signaled a decline in bilateral security cooperation, some India-Russia joint ventures continue to operate and produce various systems for the Indian armed forces. Indian officials have noted that security cooperation with Russia will continue, though in a different capacity, as India has been pushing its armed forces to buy more domestically under the Make in India initiative.<sup>1</sup> The accompanying excerpted articles report on several developments within the Indian defense industry, particularly as they pertain to India-Russia security cooperation.

The first excerpted article from the independent English-language newspaper *The Hindu*, reports that the Indian Air Force recently opened a bid for a medium transport aircraft to replace its Russian AN-32s. The article notes that Indian officials previously stated that the Spanish-made C-295MW has been considered as a potential replacement and that India already ordered 56 C-295s. However, the recently opened bid specifies a heavier transport capacity than the C-295 can hold. India's current inventory of strategic airlifters consists of around 20 Il-76s from Russia and a

dozen C-17s from the United States, demonstrating how India has looked to multiple partners for heavier transport aircraft in the past. The article also notes that a previous joint India-Russia project to develop and produce a replacement for the AN-32 did not move beyond an initial design. The article does not mention if Russia is putting in a bid for the replacement. The result of the bid may not come out for several months, but it does not appear that Russia has an edge if it submits a bid.

The second excerpted article from the English-language magazine *Force* reports that India's Defense Ministry held a meeting with potential bidders for an order of 400,000 carbines chambered for 5.56×45 mm rounds and that the Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) joint venture "was not invited to this meeting." The article states how IRRPL started production on the order of 700,000 AK-203 rifles and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the joint venture as "one of the brightest examples of cooperation within Make in India." The article goes on to note how Kalashnikov produces a wide range of small arms and could fulfill the bid for the carbines, leading the author to question why a Russian firm was left out of the meeting even as the Indian and Russian defense ministers discussed strengthening cooperation. In any case, the bids illustrate how India is reliant on Russia to fulfill a requirement for its armed forces.

**The Indian Air Force (IAF) has initiated the process to find a replacement for the AN-32 transport aircraft in service.**

**Source:** Dinakar Peri, "IAF to procure new transport aircraft to replace AN-32," *The Hindu* (independent English-language newspaper), 3 February 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iaf-issues-tender-to-procure-a-medium-transport-aircraft-to-replace-an-32s/article66467760.ece>

*The Indian Air Force (IAF) has initiated the process to find a replacement for the AN-32 transport aircraft in service. It has issued a Request For Information (RFI) for the procurement of a Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) with a carrying capacity of 18 to 30 tonnes.*

*The RFI was issued on December 9, 2022, and the earlier bid submission date of February 3 has now been extended till March 31...*

*In the past, several IAF officials had stated that the just C-295MW, 56 of which have been just contracted, which continue on 36*

## Continued: Russia's Role in India's Bids for New Carbines and Medium Transport Aircraft

**Source Continued:** Dinakar Peri, "IAF to procure new transport aircraft to replace AN-32," *The Hindu* (independent English-language newspaper), 3 February 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iaf-issues-tender-to-procure-a-medium-transport-aircraft-to-replace-an-32s/article66467760.ece>

*falls in similar category as the AN-32 in terms of cargo carrying capacity would be considered as a potential replacement for the AN-32 given that a running assembly line would be available once the 56 aircraft are delivered. However, based on load carrying capacity specified in the RFI, 18 to 30 tonnes, the C-295 no longer fits the bracket as it is in the 5-10 tonnes category...*

*An earlier project to jointly co-develop and produce a MTA of 20 tonnes with Russia to replace the AN-32s was scrapped few years back after initial design discussions.*

*In September last year, the Defence Ministry signed a 21.935 Crore contract with Airbus and Space S.A., Spain for procurement of 56 C-295MW transport aircraft to replace the Avro aircraft in service with the IAF which it is executing in partnership with Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL)...*

**Source:** Vinit Shah, "By Invitation – Whither Kalashnikov," *Force* (English-language magazine reporting on defense topics in India), 25 January 2023. <https://forceindia.net/feature-report/whither-kalashnikov/>

*Apparently, the ministry of defence held a pre-bid meeting on January 10 with potential bidders for the purchase of 400,000 CQB carbines chambered for 5.56×45 mm. Surprisingly, the Amethi-based India-Russia joint venture, Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL), in which India holds the controlling stake, was not invited to this meeting.*

*This is doubly strange. One, because the production lines of IRRPL are running with 700,000 AK-203 assault rifles on order; and two, in March 2019, when the JV was announced, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said, 'the joint venture will contribute to the development of the capacity of the country's armed forces and strengthen national security... (IRRPL is) one of the brightest examples of cooperation within Make in India...'*

*It is well-known that the Russian concern Kalashnikov, a partner in IRRPL, produces the widest range of small arms. It will not be difficult for the company with such a diverse portfolio to produce another model of a modern carbine at its state-of-the-art facility in Korva of the Amethi district...*

*It is strange that the MoD gives preference to large-scale production in India of the AK-203 assault rifle chambered for 7.62×39 mm, and then suddenly decides to purchase a large batch of weapons for NATO ammunition 5.56×45 mm. Makes one wonder about the motivation for this, given that foreign minister S. Jaishankar in a recent meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov discussed the details of strengthening Russian-Indian military-technical cooperation...*

### Notes:

[1] For more information on the development of India's defense industry and the cancelled agreements with Russia, see: Matthew Stein "India Cancels Plans to Purchase Russian Equipment," *OE Watch*, 6-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fms/p/oe-watch-issues>

[2] The 5.56x45 mm are the standard round in service rifles in NATO, while some/most/many Russian Kalashnikov variants use the 5.56x39 mm round.

## Algeria Seeks Non-Alignment by Preserving Ties While Welcoming NATO Overtures

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

While Russia appears to be courting Algeria in a bid to reduce its isolation, Algeria is keeping its options open by engaging with both Russia and NATO member states. In January 2023, the Algerian government announced that President Abdelmadjid Tebboune would visit Moscow and meet with President Putin in May 2023.<sup>1</sup> At the May 2023 presidential summit, Russia is hoping to sign a new strategic cooperation partnership document with Algeria, if for no other reason than to make the case that Russia is not fully isolated and retains key strategic partnerships. In addition, Russia seeks to finalize a major weapons deal to show that its military export industry remains viable. The deal would be centered on the [Su-57](#) stealth multirole fighter aircraft, according to the second article excerpt from the Russian-language news network *RT Arabic* and other news stories regularly recycled by Russian Arabic language media over the past year. Indeed, Russian expectations for the presidential summit are high, and its media and officials are going out of their way to flatter Algeria: as detailed in the first excerpted article, in an early February interview with *RT Arabic*, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that, in trying to turn Algeria against Russia using pressure, the West was "messing with the wrong guy."

Algerian leadership, however, seems less enthusiastic about a singular deepening of relations with Russia: quite the opposite, judging by recent Algerian diplomatic activities. A week before the January announcement that he would visit Moscow in May, President Tebboune hosted Italy's prime minister and discussed expanding bilateral trade, of which Algerian gas supplies to Europe via Italian pipelines are a centerpiece. Concurrently, Said Chengriha, the Chief of Staff of the Algerian armed forces, led a large delegation to Paris, where he was received by President Macron, met with several high-ranking military and government officials, and signed a security cooperation "roadmap" on his government's behalf, as reported in the second accompanying excerpt from the Algerian monthly



Algeria hosts final planning conference for joint Russian-Algerian exercise Desert Shield 2022.

Source: [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12432277@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12432277@egNews)  
Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

military journal *El Djeich*. Shortly after returning from Paris, Chengriha hosted U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander Gen. Michael E. Langley, where he reiterated Algerian non-alignment and commitment to dealing "with many friendly countries," including the United States, as reported in the third accompanying piece, a *Facebook* post from the Algerian Ministry of Defense.

Algeria remains an appealing security partner for Russia, given its strategic location on NATO's southern flank and the historical links between the Algerian and Soviet militaries; however, Algeria is unlikely to sacrifice its substantial commercial relations with Europe. Indeed, except for arms deals, Russian-Algerian trade remains negligible, and Europe's embargo on Russian natural gas may ultimately benefit Algerian gas exports. Still, the fact that Algeria continues to value its partnership with Russia will force its government to carefully balance existing relations and new entreaties from both Russia and NATO countries. If Algiers continues to successfully navigate these competing pulls, its approach may well emerge as a model for other Arab countries seeking to do the same, most notably Saudi Arabia.

**A**lgeria clings to the principle of non-alignment.

## Continued: Algeria Seeks Non-Alignment by Preserving Russia Ties While Welcoming NATO Overtures

### Source:

"لافروف: الولايات المتحدة تحاول إملاء سياستها على الجزائر لكنها "هاجمت الشخص الخطأ" (Lavrov: The United States is trying to impose its policy on Algeria, but it messed with the wrong guy)," *RT Arabic* (Russian Arabic-language media outlet), 1 February 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/yjwsfake>

*In response to a question about whether Western pressures will affect the Algerian authorities' policy towards Russia, he added, "We have a popular saying that says, 'You messed with the wrong guy'. Algerians can't be told what to do in this manner, you cannot expect them to comply with and implement directives that contradict their national interests based simply on a hand signal from across the ocean. Algeria, like most countries, is a country that respects itself, its history and its interests, and draws its policies on this basis."*

### Source:

هل تحصل الجزائر على مقاتلة روسية تتبع 60 هدفا في وقت واحد؟ (Will Algeria obtain Russian jets that can simultaneously track 60 targets?)," *RT Arabic* (Russian Arabic-language media outlet), 1 February 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2uautj98>

*Russian media reported that Algeria might become the first country to possess the fifth-generation Russian Su-57 fighters, as talks were held with Russia at the end of 2020. There is talk of at least 14 aircraft being involved, scheduled for delivery before 2030.*

### Source:

"Monsieur le général d'armée, Saïd Chanegriha, chef d'état-major de l'Armée nationale populaire, en visite officielle en France (Army General Saïd Chanegriha, Chief of Staff of the National People's Army, on an official visit to France)," *El Djeich* (Algerian armed forces monthly magazine), February 2023. [https://www.mdn.dz/site\\_principal/sommaire/revues/images/EldjeichFev2023Fr.pdf](https://www.mdn.dz/site_principal/sommaire/revues/images/EldjeichFev2023Fr.pdf)

*The talks examined ways of strengthening military and security cooperation between the two countries. Subsequently, the meeting was formalized by the signing of a joint roadmap.*

**Source:** No title. *Algerian Ministry of Defense Facebook Page*, 8 February 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/mdn.gov.dz/posts/505345958434848>

*"I would like to emphasize on this occasion that Algeria clings to the principle of non-alignment, and jealously guards its history full of glories and heroism, as well as its independence and sovereign political decision-making. It interacts in a way that serves its own interests and deals with many friendly countries with which it has military and economic relations, such as the United States of America."*

### Notes:

[1] Although officially neutral vis-à-vis Ukraine, the Algerian government has been accused of aligning with Russia due to its abstention on UN votes condemning the Ukraine invasion and the extensive bilateral high-level security contacts that followed the invasion. The deepening partnership was to be bolstered by two much-anticipated late-2022 events: joint anti-terror exercises on Algerian soil in October ("Desert Shield 2022"), and the Algerian president's Moscow visit, which was supposed to occur before the end of 2022. In the end, the exercises were unceremoniously called off at the last minute, and the 2022 presidential visit has now been rescheduled for May 2023, though a firm date has not been set. For added context see: Lucas Winter, "Algeria Caught Between Neutrality and Strategic Relations with Russia," *OE Watch*, 5-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/415497>

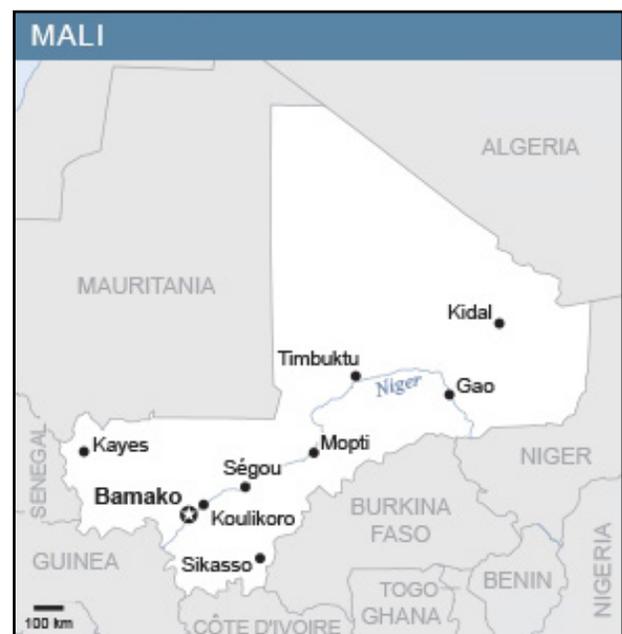
## Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

Mali and Russia’s security relationship appears to be ever-deepening. Even as both are criticized for their approaches to dealing with jihadist violence in Mali,<sup>1</sup> with many analysts suggesting that the Wagner presence is exacerbating the problem,<sup>2</sup> Malian leadership is full-throated in its defense of its Russian partner. In the accompanying article from *Le Journal du Mali*, Mali’s Foreign Minister dispels any pretense that international condemnation of its partnership with Russia may change its decision. One of the most important sentiments from his statements is that Russia is willing to provide Mali with the requisite material to make effective gains against the al-Qaeda and Islamic State-aligned groups that have, since January 2023, shown a clear interest in moving toward the capital, Bamako.<sup>3</sup> Implicitly, this nod is a slight directed at both France and the United States whose unwillingness, Mali and Burkina Faso have argued, to give more assistance to West African states to address their internal security challenges has forced them to turn to Russia.

**What matters...is how [Mali and Russia] work together to fight against jihadism, recalling that in certain cases, terrorism is manufactured to destabilize our countries.**

A second prevailing position in the Malian Foreign Minister’s remarks is that Mali views its partnership with Russia as one that is based on Bamako’s own autonomy to make sovereign security policy choices: in this instance, this is an implicit slight to the longstanding French military and counterterrorism presence that has been essentially expelled from the country, not least because of declining citizen opinion of France. Finally, a third, though more subtle line of rhetoric is the suggestion that “in certain cases, terrorism is manufactured to destabilize our countries.” This notion that external actors—again, namely France—have actually worked to support terrorist groups in the country has been a common false claim that the interim government has made, going so far as to bring the assertion to the UN Security Council in August 2022.<sup>4</sup> Such vociferous defenses of military collaboration with Russia are likely to continue, not only from Mali but from other African countries as well.



Map of Mali.

Source: <https://southafrica-info.com/africa/africa-from-a-to-z/attachment/map-of-africa-and-mali/> Attribution: Creative Commons 4.0

## Continued: Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance

**Source:** Abdoulaye Diop, “La Russie est ici à la demande du Mali (Russia is here at Mali’s request),” *Journal du Mali* (West African news aggregator), 8 February 2023. <https://www.journaldumali.com/2023/02/08/la-russie-est-ici-a-la-demande-du-mali-abdoulaye-diop/>

*According to the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs, this stay "is part of the new dynamic, initiated by the government, consisting in broadening and diversifying Mali's partnerships with a view to an effective response, and in sincerity, to the challenges we face."*

*For the diplomat, his country has chosen to "strengthen" its cooperation with Russia to "demonstrate" that it is free to decide with whom to walk on the basis of the essential pillars defined by the president of the transition: "respect of Mali's sovereignty, respect for strategic choices and the choice of Mali's partners, but also taking Mali's interests into account in all decisions."*

*Thus, the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs insisted on the fact that “Russia is here at the request of Mali.” And it “responds effectively to the needs of Mali in terms of capacity building of its defense and security forces” in the context of the fight against terrorism.*

*Because what matters, added Mr. Diop, is to see “how to work together to fight against jihadism” recalling that “in certain cases, terrorism is manufactured to destabilize our countries.”*

*In this sense, he deplored the instrumentalization and politicization of human rights for “hidden” or “barely hidden” agendas often aimed “to overthrow the regime in order to be able to achieve a certain number of objectives.”*

*The day before Sergei Lavrov's visit, Mali expelled the director of the human rights division of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) who is accused of having chosen Aminata Dicko to speak on behalf of Malian civil society during the recent review of the United Nations Secretary General's report on Mali. The latter, in her intervention by videoconference, denounced the abuses committed against Fulani civilians by the army and its Russian auxiliaries.*

*In his communication, the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs also wished to welcome the "interest" that Russia gives to "the regular supply of Mali with basic necessities in a particularly difficult context."*

*Finally, Abdoulaye Diop expressed his solidarity with Russia undergoing sanctions from Western countries in response to the war between it and Ukraine.*

### Notes:

[1] For instance, in January 2023, a UN human rights group called on authorities in Mali to launch an investigation surrounding the mass executions of several hundred civilians in Moura, Mali in March 2022. The executions were believed to have been carried out by the Malian military, which was operating alongside Wagner mercenaries. See “Mali: Independent rights experts call on probe into Wagner Group’s alleged crimes,” *UN News*, 31 January 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1133007>

[2] For more on how the Wagner Group’s presence is contributing to violence in the Sahel, see: Wassim Nasr, “How the Wagner Group is aggravating the Jihadi Threat in the Sahel,” *CTC Sentinel*, 15 (11), November/December 2022. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/how-the-wagner-group-is-aggravating-the-jihadi-threat-in-the-sahel/>

[3] For more on how al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups in Mali are increasingly moving toward Bamako as of early 2023, see: Caleb Weiss, “Al Qaeda’s JNIM pushes closer to Malian capital,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, 17 January 2023. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/01/al-qaedas-jnim-pushes-closer-to-malian-capital.php>

[4] For more on Mali’s claims to the UN that France funded terrorists in the country, see: Jason Warner, “Mali Claims France Funded Terrorists; France Denies,” *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428171>

## West African States Ruled by Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Future Sanctions

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

The Foreign Affairs Ministers of Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali—West African countries all led by military heads of state that claimed power outside of elections—recently convened in early February. The meeting ultimately concluded with them all seeking to fully rejoin the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has placed various sanctions on each of the countries over the past two years. According to the accompanying excerpted article from the francophone West African news site *Le Journal de L'Afrique*, the meeting is being read locally as an attempt to circumvent future sanctions by creating alternative forms of sub-regional unity. As the author of the article articulates, the countries “want to launch an unofficial organization of non-aligned African countries and unite to be stronger in the face of sub-regional bodies.” Of note,

**G**uinea, Burkina [Faso], and Mali want to launch an unofficial organization of non-aligned African countries and unite to be stronger in the face of sub-regional bodies.

Mali and Burkina Faso are the two West African countries most closely tied to Russia, whose Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, visited Mali days before the meeting.

A reversion to “non-aligned” rhetoric of African international relations suggests that as competition between the United States, China, and especially Russia, deepens on the continent, West Africans increasingly view such jockeying through the lens of a new Cold War, and thus seek to maintain policy autonomy. This appears to be true in this case, even though two of the three countries—Mali and Burkina Faso—are known Russian allies. While Guinea’s inclusion in the trifecta may be read, as it is by the accompanying article’s author, as “an encounter between marginalized countries,” meaning those sanctioned because of military takeovers, it can equally be read as a meeting of West African states in the Russian orbit. While Guinea clearly falls into the first category, it is not often discussed as part of the second., Guinea looks to be high on the list of which African states Russia might next target for allyship.

**Source:** Frédéric Ange Touré, “Pour le Mali, le Burkina Faso et la Guinée, l’union pourra-t-elle faire la force? (For Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, can unity be strength?),” *Le Journal de L'Afrique* (pan-African news aggregator), 9 February 2023. <https://lejournaldelafrique.com/pour-le-mali-le-burkina-faso-et-la-guinee-lunion-pourra-t-elle-faire-la-force/>

*While the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the various African countries are used to meeting, often under the aegis of sub-regional organizations or the African Union, the meeting between the heads of diplomacy from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea looks like an encounter between marginalized countries.*

*These three countries have in common to have suffered coups in recent years. But also for having tried to stand up to ECOWAS and other organizations that threatened them with sanctions – which were most of the time applied. Finally, from Bamako to Ouagadougou, via Conakry, the Russian temptation has succeeded partnerships with France.*

*Under the aegis of the Burkinabè government, the three foreign ministers, Abdoulaye Diop, Morissanda Kouyaté and Olivia Rouamba, wanted to meet to discuss the future of their countries. A meeting which, coincidence or not of the calendar, took place barely two days after the visit of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, to Mali. The latter, among other things, promised his aid "to the Sahelo-Saharan region and even to the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea."*

*Morissanda Kouyaté, before any joint declaration, sold the wick as to the message that would be sent.*

*continue on 42*

## Continued: West African States Ruled by Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Future Sanctions

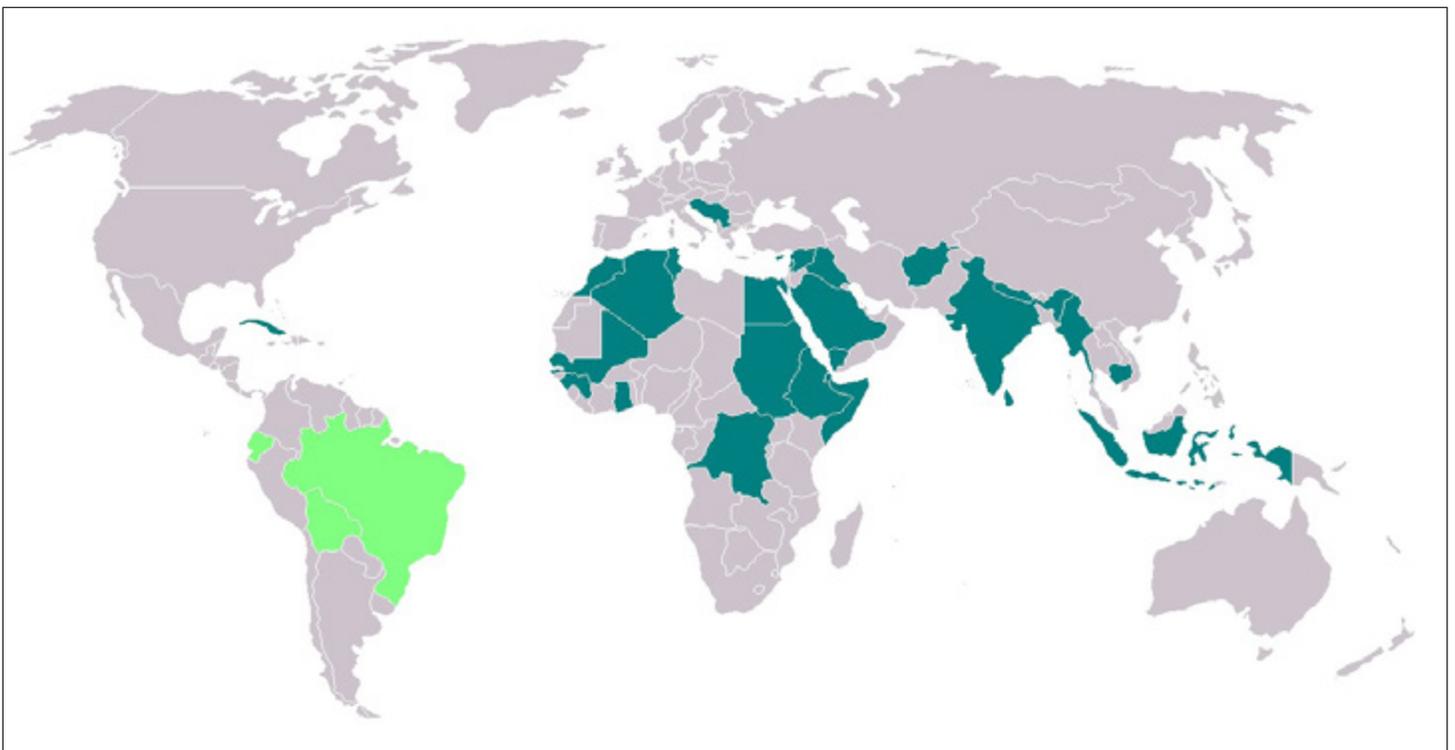
**Source Continued:** Frédéric Ange Touré, “Pour le Mali, le Burkina Faso et la Guinée, l’union pourra-t-elle faire la force? (For Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, can unity be strength?),” *Le Journal de L’Afrique* (pan-African news aggregator), 9 February 2023. <https://lejournaldefrique.com/pour-le-mali-le-burkina-faso-et-la-guinee-lunion-pourra-t-elle-faire-la-force/>

*“Together, we are going to make a statement to regional organizations, so that we can hear even more audibly the claims and requests of our peoples through our governments and our leaders”. In other words, Guinea, Burkina and Mali want to launch an unofficial organization of non-aligned African countries and unite to be stronger in the face of sub-regional bodies.*

### Notes:

[1] Mali experienced overthrows of the government in August 2020 and May 2021, Guinea in September 2021, and Burkina Faso in January 2022.

[2] For more on ECOWAS’ sanctions against these countries, see: “ECOWAS lifts Mali sanctions, agrees on Burkina transition,” *AfricaNews*, 4 July 2022. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/07/04/ecowas-lifts-mali-sanctions-agrees-on-burkina-transition/>



Map of the participants of the first Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (1961).

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1st\\_Summit\\_of\\_the\\_Non-Aligned\\_Movement.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1st_Summit_of_the_Non-Aligned_Movement.jpg) Attribution: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

## Vietnam and Indonesia Resolve Maritime Disputes

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past 10 years, Indonesia and Vietnam have clashed in the South China Sea, which Vietnam calls “The East Sea,” and which Indonesia calls “The North Natuna Sea.” For example, in 2021, Indonesia seized 25 Vietnamese fishing boats and then detained and extradited more than 350 Vietnamese fishermen.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this incident, in 2019, a Vietnamese coast guard boat and an Indonesian naval boat crashed into each other in disputed waters.<sup>2</sup> Before that, in 2014, the Indonesian navy accused Vietnamese fishing boats of entering Indonesian waters and sunk three Vietnamese boats.<sup>3</sup> However, the excerpted article published by the pro-government Vietnamese publication *tuoitre*, noted that after 12 years of negotiations, Vietnam has proposed a boundary line in the waters with Indonesia, which Indonesia has accepted. According to the article, this boundary line

will allow Vietnamese fishermen to avoid disputed waters and end the maritime clashes between the two countries. According to the excerpted article from Vietnamese military newspaper *quân đội nhân dân* the agreement followed the “Sea of Peace-Sustainable Resolution” conference. At the conference, experts recommended Vietnam cooperate with ASEAN nations based on international law to resolve disputes.<sup>4</sup> This was subsequently achieved with Indonesia and will allow ASEAN nations to be more unified when confronting maritime disputes with China, either diplomatically or military.

**It was very important to demarcate the overlapping waters between Vietnam and Indonesia...**



Vietnam People's Navy honor guard at ASEAN defense ministers meeting.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam\\_People%27s\\_Navy\\_honor\\_guard\\_at\\_ASEAN\\_defense\\_ministers\\_meeting\\_2010-10-12\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_People%27s_Navy_honor_guard_at_ASEAN_defense_ministers_meeting_2010-10-12_1.jpg) Attribution: Master Sgt. Jerry Morrison, U.S. Air Force, CC x2.0

## Continued: Vietnam and Indonesia Resolve Maritime Disputes

**Source:** “Việt Nam - Indonesia hoàn tất đàm phán phân định vùng đặc quyền kinh tế trên biển” (Vietnam - Indonesia complete negotiations on demarcation of exclusive economic zones at sea),” *tuoitre.vn* (pro-Communist Party newspaper covering current affairs and originally aimed at youth audiences), 12 December 2022. <https://tuoitre.vn/viet-nam-indonesia-hoan-tat-dam-phan-phan-dinh-vung-dac-quyen-kinh-te-tren-bien-20221222143434761.htm>

*Since 2010, the two countries have had dozens of rounds of negotiations regarding overlapping EEZ claims in the waters surrounding the Natuna Islands in the East Sea. The two sides have concluded negotiations on the demarcation of the exclusive economic zone on the basis of international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982*

*It was very important to demarcate the overlapping waters between Vietnam and Indonesia, because this was the justification for Vietnamese fishermen being accused by Indonesia of “fishing in Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone.”*

**Source:** “Hội thảo quốc tế về Biển Đông ‘Biển hòa bình - Phục hồi bền vững’ (International Conference on East Sea ‘Sea of Peace-Sustainable Resolution’),” *qdnd.vn* (Russian-language daily focusing on business and politics), 16 November 2022. <https://www.qdnd.vn/xa-hoi/tin-tuc/hoi-thao-quoc-te-ve-bien-dong-bien-hoa-binh-phuc-hoi-ben-vung-711217>

*The principles in the South China Sea will help shape other principles in other seas and oceans. Maintaining an order at sea, emphasizing compliance, trust and cooperation, more than ever before, is essential to ensuring a sustainable resolution. Vietnam’s policy on the East Sea is to fully respect and comply with international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982).*

### Notes:

[1] “Indonesia returns 166 detained fishermen to Vietnam,” *RFA*, 16 November 2014. [rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/returns-11162021162820.html](http://rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/returns-11162021162820.html)

[2] “Indonesian, Vietnamese vessels clash over illegal fishing,” *AFP*, 29 April 2019. [youtube.com/watch?v=SZh5t2y2NxY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZh5t2y2NxY)

[3] Mathias Hariyadi, “Jakarta sinks three Vietnamese fishing boats caught in its territorial waters,” *Asia News*, May 12, 2014. <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Jakarta-sinks-three-Vietnamese-fishing-boats-caught-in-its-territorial-waters-32882.html>

[4] Notably, prior to 2021, there was little optimism in the academic community that Indonesia and Vietnam would reconcile their maritime claims. However, Darwis and Putra noted that Indonesian President Jokowi sought to take a less confrontational stance when dealing with ASEAN navies in disputed waters. See Darwis and Bama Andika Putra, “Construing Indonesia’s maritime diplomatic strategies against Vietnam’s illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the North Natuna Sea,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 49:4, 172-192, 2022. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00927678.2022.2089524>