

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

SPECIAL ESSAY: Kurds in Iraq and Syria: Aspirations and Realities in a Changing Middle East

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SPECIAL ESSAY

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A New Kurdish Star in Turkish Politics

13 June 2015

“Demirtaş has now taken his place as a strong actor within the [Turkish] political scene, as someone who gives [the public] hope for “stopping Erdoğan,” strengthening the “peace process” and moving the country towards a lasting peace.”

OE Watch Commentary: The Turkish electorate went to the ballot box on 7 June to elect the 550 members of the Grand National Assembly. As a result of the elections, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time in 13 years, requiring the formation of a coalition government. While coalition governments are nothing new for Turkey, something unprecedented happened in this election: a pro-Kurdish party, the People's Democracy Party (HDP) entered the parliament by receiving 13% of the votes, translating into 80 seats. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the significance of this. Many are attributing the party's success to its co-chair, Selahattin Demirtaş, a 42 year old charismatic human rights lawyer.

As the accompanying passages discuss, President Erdoğan had made clear his ambitions to turn Turkey into an executive presidential system with powers that dominate the other branches of government and was hoping that the AKP would win enough seats to achieve this. Demirtaş ran on a campaign slogan of “We will not make you an [executive] president,” which proved successful. The passages also note that Demirtaş framed his party not as just a Kurdish party, but as a mainstream liberal party. His charismatic and peaceful style helped his party increase its votes by over 100% in this election. As the passages illustrate, he appealed to both Kurds and Turks who were worried about Erdoğan's increasing ambitions.

As the second passage discusses, Demirtaş was able to capitalize on the anti-AKP sentiment in the Western part of the country and garner votes from liberal Turks who would normally not vote for the HDP. These are being considered “strategic voters,” whose main priority was to push back the AKP and prevent Erdoğan's presidency.

There are an estimated 15-20 million Kurds in Turkey, making up almost 19-23 percent of the population. Despite this, there was never a pro-Kurdish party in the parliament until now, because the pro-Kurdish parties were unable to cross the 10 percent electoral threshold required to gain seats in the parliament. Thus, the votes cast for pro-Kurdish parties would translate into seats for the other parties that passed the threshold. Now that the pro-Kurdish HDP has entered the parliament, the votes that were cast will be reflected in the parliament in a more accurate fashion, creating a legislature that is more representative of the diversity of the country for the first time in Turkish history. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: Necati Özkan, “Demirtaş ve strateji kazandı (Demirtaş and strategy won),” Radikal.com.tr, 13 June 2015, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/necati_ozkan/demirtas_ve_strateji_kazandi-1378359

“...The 7 June elections were really held among two people: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who, in order to establish a “so-called Presidential system” designed for himself, said ‘Give me 400 parliamentarians and let's resolve this peacefully; and Selahattin Demirtaş, who got up on the Parliament podium and said, “We will not make you [an executive] president...” 42 year old Selahattin Demirtaş who is a young leader, was the only leader able to increase his party's votes based on his charisma, sympathy and political style.

With the results of the 7 June elections, Selahattin Demirtaş has succeeded in changing the fate of the Kurdish political movement. He was the main force behind the increase of the Kurdish political movement's voter support from 5.1% (the average support it has received in the last 10 elections) to 13.1%. With this performance, Demirtaş has proven himself within the Kurdish political movement... He moved HDP beyond an ethnic party and made it into a Turkey party, by expanding it and opening up new horizons for it.

Demirtaş has now taken his place as a strong actor within the [Turkish] political scene, as someone who gives [the public] hope for “stopping Erdoğan”, strengthening the “peace process” and moving the country towards a lasting peace.”

Source: “HDP kimden oy aldı (From whom did the HDP get votes?),” Radikal.com.tr, 15 June 2015, <http://blog.radikal.com.tr/politika/hdp-kimden-oy-aldi-103728>

“[Many of the votes that the HDP received] may be permanent, but there are also plenty of them that were given to push back the AKP and prevent Erdoğan's presidency. In particular, the HDP's “We won't make you president” slogan brought the party a lot of strategic votes.”



Co-chair of the pro-Kurdish HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş.
Source: <http://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/selahattin-demirtas-bizim-akp-ile-hicbir-uzlasmamiz-yoktur-109245>

Kurds Push Back ISIS in Tal Abyad

22 June 2015

“Tal Abyad is important for the anti-ISIS coalition. It was being used by ISIS as a transit point for supplies. It was also a transit point for foreign fighters wanting to join ISIS in Raqqa.”

OE Watch Commentary: On 15 June Syrian Kurdish fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG) declared victory against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the strategic jihadi stronghold of Tal Abyad on the border between Turkey and Syria. This development increases Kurdish territorial contiguity in northeastern Syria by connecting two of the three Kurdish cantons (Kobane and Jazeera) along the Turkish-Syrian border. The fighting led to a new wave of thousands of refugees into Turkey. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the Turkish government's perspective and other strategic factors regarding this declaration by the YPG, which is the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria.

The first passage, from the Turkish Hurriyet daily, discusses highlights from a briefing, which includes the assessments of the president, prime minister and the Turkish Armed Forces. According to this report, Turkey's red-lines are that “the Democratic Union Party (PYD) should not cooperate with the Assad regime; or act in a way that is inconsistent with the territorial integrity of Syria...” The report notes that the PYD's fight against ISIS has gained it the sympathy of the entire world and that Turkey is also happy with the fact that ISIS has been pushed back. It claims that this is why Turkey did not object to its allies' support for the PYD in its fight against ISIS. However, the report also notes the Turkish government's claim that PYD is replacing the Turkmen and Arab population in the region with a Kurdish population, and that Turkey's reaction to this has been conveyed to the international community. Ankara is also lamenting that a humanitarian tragedy in the region is being put on Turkey's shoulders.

The second passage discusses the strategic importance of Tal Abyad for both the Syrian Kurds and ISIS. It notes that Kurdish control of Tal Abyad “can produce the Kurdish unification of the cantons” in northern Syria. Thus, it claims that if the YPG is able to maintain control of the city, this would increase its strategic value in the eyes of the anti-ISIS coalition. The passage also claims that the city was a transit point for supplies and for foreign fighters wanting to join ISIS. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: “Dışişleri'nin Tal Abyad raporu: Türkiye IŞİD'le mücadeleyi sürdürecektir” (The Foreign Ministry's Tal Abyad report: Turkey will continue fighting ISIS), Hurriyet.com.tr, 22 June 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/29345818.asp>

“The following are the evaluations of the Presidency, the Prime Ministry and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF):

-Turkey sees ISIS as a terror organization. It will continue to participate in the International Coalition's fight against ISIS.

-Turkey's conditions have been conveyed to the PYD at the highest levels. It was explained that it would be unacceptable [for Turkey] for the PYD to cooperate with the Assad regime; act in a way that is inconsistent with the territorial integrity of Syria; that the future of Syria will be decided by the people of Syria; and that the PYD should not act inconsistent with any of these.

-The PYD's fight against ISIS has gained it the sympathy of the entire world. Turkey is also happy with the fact that ISIS has been pushed back. This is why it did not object to its allies' support for the PYD in its fight against ISIS.

-The PYD is replacing the Turkmen and Arab population in the region with a Kurdish population; our reaction to this has been conveyed to the U.S. administration, the UN, the UN Security Council, the European Union Commission, and the NATO Secretary General...

-The U.S. openly supports Turkey's views and desires regarding the Kurdish region in northern Syria, particularly in Tal Abyad.

-Ankara has conveyed this message to its interlocutors, “You cannot turn a blind eye to the humanitarian tragedy in the region being put on Turkey's shoulders...”



Source: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/isil-suffers-biggest-setback-as-kurds-take-syria-border-town-.aspx?PageID=238&NID=84052&NewsCatID=352>

Source: Cale Salih, “Tel Abyad, Suriyeli Kürtler için dönüm noktası mı?” (Is Tal Abyad a turning point for Syrian Kurds?), BBC in Turkish, 17 June 2015, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/06/150616_tel_abyad_analiz

In the long run, for the YPG to control Tal Abyad can produce the Kurdish “unification of the cantons” in northern Syria. These cantons are Afrin in the northwest of Aleppo, Kobane to the west of Tal Abyad and Jazeera in the northeast of Haseki. If the YPG manages to retain Tal Abyad and use it to connect Kobane to Jazeera, it will be able to increase its strategic value within the U.S.-lead coalition against ISIS. It would also strengthen the autonomous administrations in the Kurdish regions in Syria's northeast.

Tal Abyad is important for the anti-ISIS coalition. It was being used by ISIS as a transit point for supplies. It was also a transit point for foreign fighters wanting to join ISIS in Raqqa.”

Turkey to Open Military Base in Qatar

9 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Turkey is preparing to establish a military base in Qatar, following a defense agreement signed with the Qatari Emir in December 2014. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss this development, and why the agreement is significant for the two countries.*

As the first passage discusses, the agreement gives the Turkish Armed Forces the right to deploy military units in Qatar and it gives both sides the right to conduct joint military and training exercises and to benefit from the use of each other's military facilities, units, camps and air space. The agreement will stay in force for ten years.

The passage notes that the increased military cooperation comes at a time when Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are increasing their support to opposition groups who are fighting the Bashar Assad regime in Syria. It is significant that Turkey and Qatar, who are on the same page regarding the protection of opposition groups from the air while these groups fight the regime, are making this agreement at this time. The author reminds the reader that the Turkish government had signaled that if the US and other Western allies were not open to a no-fly zone, it might consider this option with other regional actors.

(continued)

“The military agreement with Turkey has special meaning for Qatar, which is concerned by increased Iranian influence in the Gulf, the improvement of US-Iran relations and China's growing role in the Middle East.”

Source: “İşte Katar ile askeri anlaşmanın detayları (Here are the details of the military agreement with Qatar),” Hurriyet.com.tr, 9 June 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/29234032.asp>

“The agreement gives the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) the right to deploy military units in Qatar; it gives both sides the right to conduct joint military and training exercises; and for each side to benefit from the use of the others' military facilities, units, camps and air space. The two countries' defense ministers had signed the “Agreement on the cooperation of military training, defense industry and the deployment of Turkish Armed Forces on Qatar territory” on 19 December 2014; and the agreement's details were published in the official gazette yesterday. The agreement, which will remain in force for 10 years foresees the following:

Turkish forces may be deployed in Qatari territory for training and operations.

The sides allow each other the use of their ports, airports, air space, territory (for deploying forces), facilities, camps, units, and military facilities.

Would it lead to cooperation in Syria? Another important aspect of the agreement is that it comes at a time when Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are increasing their support to opposition groups who are fighting the Bashar Assad regime in Syria. It is noted as significant that Turkey and Qatar, who are on the same page regarding the protection of opposition groups from the air, while they fight the regime, are making this agreement at this time. The government had signaled that if the U.S. and other Western allies were not open to a no-fly zone, it might consider this option with other regional actors.”



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Qatari Emir Sheik Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani at the presidential palace in Ankara, December 2014.

Source: <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/news/438088--turkey-qatar-share-concerns-in-syria-iraq-erdogan>

(continued)

Continued: Turkey to Open Military Base in Qatar

11 May 2015

The second passage discusses the importance of the agreement for each of the two sides. It claims that Qatar is concerned by increased Iranian influence in the Gulf, the improvement of US-Iran relations and China's growing role in the Middle East. Qatar lacks serious military power and appears determined to make up for its deterrence weakness in the Gulf by entering into a military alliance with Turkey and diversifying its defensive capacities. The piece, written by a Turkish analyst, also suggests that a strong military alliance with Turkey will enable Qatar to enhance its defense industry capacity, improve the training of its army and reduce its military dependence on the United States by diversifying its military partners to counter Iranian influence and perhaps even develop stronger cooperation with NATO via Turkey.

*As for Turkey, the piece suggests that Turkey wants to have a say in the Gulf. A close military alliance with Qatar will provide the Turkish Defense Ministry with a tempting opportunity to access a lucrative market. It will also offer Turkey a way to strategically counter Iranian influence in the region and boost Turkey's role in global security, including global energy security. The third passage also discusses the Gulf countries' increasing fear of Iran's influence in the region and claims that they view Turkey as a possible counterbalancing power to Iran in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)***

Source: Metin Gürcan, "Türkiye Katar'da sürekli askeri üs kurmaya hazırlanıyor (Turkey is preparing to establish a permanent military base in Qatar)," Al-Monitor.com, 3 June 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2015/06/turkey-qatar-what-are-turkish-troops-going-to-do.html>

"The military agreement with Turkey has special meaning for Qatar, which is concerned by increased Iranian influence in the Gulf, the improvement of US-Iran relations and China's growing role in the Middle East. Qatar lacks serious military power and appears determined to make up for its deterrence weakness in the Gulf by entering into a military alliance with Turkey and diversifying its defensive capacities. A strong military alliance with Turkey will enable Qatar to enhance its defense industry capacity, improve the training of its army and reduce its military dependence on the United States by diversifying its military partners to counter Iranian influence and perhaps even develop stronger cooperation with NATO via Turkey.

The next question is, what has motivated Turkey to enter such an agreement with Qatar? According to Mehmet Akif Okur, associate professor at Gazi University, the Gulf is important in the global economic-political equation, and Turkey wants to have a say in the Gulf. A close military alliance with Qatar will provide the Turkish Defense Ministry with a tempting opportunity to access a lucrative market. It will also offer Turkey a way to strategically counter Iranian influence in the region and boost Turkey's role in global security and global energy security."

Source: "Türkiye neden Katar'da askeri üs kuruyor? (Why is Turkey establishing a military base in Qatar?)," Kuremedya.com, 18 June 2015, <http://www.kuremedya.com/turkiye-neden-katarda-askeri-us-kuruyor-10396h.html#.VYi2a0t160s>

"From the point of view of the Gulf countries, the reason this relationship is so important and urgent is the Iran factor. The partial rapprochement between the West and Iran; and the possibility that a nuclear deal might be reached, has led Iran to act more aggressively and confidently in the region. This situation aggravates the Gulf countries' fear of Iran, in fact it causes a phobia. Iran's goals and claims towards the Gulf makes the situation even more chronic. Thus the Gulf is following a policy of balancing Iran, which is a regional actor, with another regional actor [Turkey]."

Doha Palace

Source: "Doha Palace". Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Doha_Palace.jpg#/media/File:Doha_Palace.jpg



Countering the Islamic State inside Iran

29 May 2015

“There is no blind spot for the Iranian intelligence officers today.”

Source: “Tamam-e Timha-ye Martabat ba Da’esh dar Keshavar Shenaseyeh va Dastgir Shavand” (All Cells Connected to the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Country Have Been Identified and Arrested), Tasnim News, 29 May 2015. <http://mobile.tasnimnews.com/fa/%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1/1394/03/09/754420>

OE Watch Commentary: *The 1979 Islamic Revolution made Shi’ism synonymous with Iran. While Iran officially became Shi’ite in 1501 and became majority Shi’ite by the middle of the eighteenth century, it was only with the victory of revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that the Shi’ite clerical leadership took control.*

Still, Iran is not entirely Shi’ite. While there has been no reliable census in recent decades, most analysts and scholars estimate Sunnis comprise at least ten percent of Iran’s population. These are concentrated along the periphery of the country, especially in Iranian Kurdistan and Baluchistan. While Iran is a multiethnic country, not all ethnicities are treated equally. Azeris have achieved a privileged position; indeed, the Supreme Leader is Azeri and not Persian. Armenians, while Christian and not Muslim, thrive in trade and commerce. Iranian Arabs often complain of discrimination, but they have traditionally faced less repression than either Kurds or Baluch, both of whom face discrimination from majority Persians not only because of their ethnicity, but also because of their adherence to Sunni schools within Islam.

While the Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) often reserves its greatest opprobrium for Shi’ites, the Iranian government has claimed to be the protector of Shi’ism both in Iran and beyond its boundaries. This makes Iran as much of a target as Iraq or Syria, although the strength of government control retards the Islamic State’s ability to operate in Iran. Nevertheless, given the level of dispossession and anger at the Iranian government on the part of Iran’s minority Sunnis, the Islamic State would find in Iran a valuable recruiting pool. Iranian intelligence often overstates its ability to prevent such Islamic State operations. After all, in June 2014 Iranian authorities also announced the shutting down of an Islamic State cell inside Iran (see July 2014 Operational Environment Watch). The detail with regard to alleged plots targeting an important shrine in Qom and the poisoning of food given for free to pilgrims suggest the plots were not simply paranoia. If true, they also suggest wider danger for the millions of Shi’ite pilgrims who visit shrines not only in Iran, but also in Iraq and Syria.

*Iranian Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi’s accusation that the United States and Israel sponsor the Islamic State parallels a conspiracy embraced publicly by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, even if Iranian diplomats involved in negotiations with American counterparts downplay such rhetoric. At the very least, this shows that for Tehran old animosities remain hard to break. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)***

Cells Connected to the Islamic State... have been Arrested

Speaking in the pre-sermon speech at Tehran’s Friday prayer ceremony on May 29, the intelligence minister referred to efforts by Iran’s enemies to damage security in the Islamic Republic and said: “Efforts of enemies’ intelligence services - spearheaded by America and Israel as well as regional intelligence services - are aimed at disturbing the exemplary security of this country so that the sound of an explosion is heard from Iran - the same way as the sound of explosion, smell of gunpowder, and color of blood is distressing the people in Iran’s neighboring countries.”

The intelligence minister added that thanks to the intelligence might of the country and solid work of the Intelligence Ministry, the country’s law enforcement and police forces, the judiciary, the brave Iranian Army and Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Iran has succeeded in dismantling the plots hatched by enemies. He added: “There hasn’t been a day where a plot by the enemy is not thwarted by the unknown soldiers of the intelligence forces.”

Praising the vigilance of intelligence forces and their full control over the country’s security threats, [Mahmoud] Alavi said: “There is no blind spot for the Iranian intelligence officers today,” and added: “Since last year, tens of plots have been defused and terrorists have been punished for the crimes they committed.”

“Takfiri elements intended to poison the food in a major religious mourning center in Tehran but they were identified and arrested and could not succeed in fulfilling their plot. Also Takfiri and terrorist elements were plotting to carry out an armed robbery in Tehran and then explode a bomb in Qom and the shrine of Fatima Masumeh, but they were identified and dismantled.”

The intelligence minister also referred to identification of the groups linked with the Islamic State and said: “Information and equipment has been confiscated, their men have been hit and despite all the support and help received by intelligence services, they have not yet been able to make any corner of the country insecure, and none of this is due to mere accident.”



Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi accuses Western governments of supporting the Islamic State. Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <http://www.irna.ir/en/News/2784493/>

Son of Former President Sent to Prison

11 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Islamic Revolution may have triumphed over the shah in 1979, but it never truly ended. A full ten percent of Iranians took part actively in initial revolutionary fervor, an amazing figure in an age before social media. As he consolidated power, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini turned on the revolution's disparate factions, purging nationalists and the Marxist-influenced Mujahidin al-Khalq, those open to rapprochement with the West, as well as members of the Hojjatieh Society, a theological group that believed that it could hasten the return of the Mahdi, Shi'ism's messianic figure.*

In 1997, Iranians shocked both the Iranian establishment and the international community when they elected Mohammad Khatami, a reformist former minister of culture, to the presidency over the establishment favorite, the hardline parliamentary speaker Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri. Utilizing security-force-linked vigilante groups, the Supreme Leader stymied Khatami's reforms until the end of Khatami's maximum two terms as president, and then simply disqualified many reformists from future candidacies. Simply put, the reformists, who just a decade ago represented the Islamic Republic, now find themselves beyond the bounds of acceptable political discourse. Disqualification may work with lower-level reformists, but prominent former politicians have too independent a power base to counter in such fashion. Sometimes, therefore, they are sentenced to house arrest (See "Imprisoned Cleric's Wife Writes Intelligence Minister," OEW, June 2015), but the following report about the son of former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani suggests that the Iranian leadership is expanding the breadth of its crackdown by going after politicians' sons. Rafsanjani, who occasionally subtly criticizes hardline rivals, will think twice with his son imprisoned.

At the same time, the sentencing of Mehdi Hashemi reinforces a tilt away from the reformists for another reason: while Americans use the term hardliners in Iran, Iranians themselves use the term "principlists" (Ogulgarayan), referring to those who seek to return to the principles of the initial revolution. This concept dates back to the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, when those returning from the front found that revolutionary clerics led by Rafsanjani had enriched themselves tremendously during the war years. By targeting Rafsanjani's son, the judiciary is appealing to popular sentiment resentful of Rafsanjani's enrichment, as well as a whole class of so-called "little princes," the sons of elite figures who have used their connections to enrich themselves.

*Any political motivation behind the charges does not necessarily mean the charges are unfounded. Even Iranian critics of the Hashemi prosecution may simply consider the decision to go after such a prominent family a case of selective prosecution, with the underlying assumption that other elites, including those who claim to be principlists, are engaged in similar financial dishonesty. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)***

“The three crimes to which Mehdi Hashemi was convicted are embezzlement, bribery, and security offenses.”

Source: “Mohseni-Ezhe`i: Mehdi Hashemi beh 10 Sal Habis Mohakaram Shod” (Mohseni-Ezhe`i: Mehdi Hashemi Sentenced to 10 Years), irna.ir, 11 June 2015. <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/81642509/>

Remarks in a Meeting with Leaders of the Law Enforcement Forces

On Thursday, in response to questions from the Islamic Republic News Agency, Hojjat ol-Eslam Gholamhoseyn Mohseni-Ezhe`i said that the preliminary court upheld the sentence yesterday but I had not had access to it because today I am in Gorgan.

According to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, given the confirmation of the three crimes, Mehdi Hashemi has been sentenced to 10 years in prison.

The first deputy of the judiciary said, “The three crimes to which Mehdi Hashemi was convicted are embezzlement, bribery, and security offenses, although there were initially 12 indictments, some of these were subsequently combined, and in some cases Hashemi was acquitted.



Mehdi Hashemi Rafsanjani. Source: *The Guardian*, <http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/About/General/2011/11/23/1322085036577/This-is-an-undated-photo--007.jpg>

“We Are at War with the United States and its Allies”

26 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Kayhan daily, from which this excerpt is extracted, is analytically perhaps the most important newspaper in Iran for understanding the thinking of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei because Khamenei appoints the paper’s chief editor. Hence, the declaration that Iran remains “at war” with the United States should raise concern that the Supreme Leader either has not fully embraced the notion of diplomatic rapprochement with the United States or that he has been unable to bring onboard the hardline circles which surround him. This latter possibility is less likely, however, as the Supreme Leader has ultimate authority to hire and fire and needs neither democratic buy-in nor consensus. The excerpt does show some exacerbation in hardline circles with President Hassan Rouhani’s policy of outreach to the United States, although this might also be a question of tactics.*

The editorial’s call for an investigation into how to best wage asymmetric war against the United States also suggests that, beyond the nuclear file which currently is a subject of diplomatic engagement among the United States, other permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and Iran, Iranian hardliners plan to continue their fight against the United States by other means.

*Lastly, the editorial’s attention to the economy suggests a forthcoming political battle in Iran about the extent to which a nuclear agreement will pave the way for the entrance of Western investment into Iran. This includes an unstated security angle, given hardline vigilante attacks on American businessmen in Tehran in 1998, during the last period of US-Iranian détente. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)***

Source: “Adab-e Nabarad Inguneh Ast” (This is a Battle of Etiquette), Kayhan, 26 May 2015 <http://kayhan.ir/fa/issue/438/2>

“We are at War with the United States and its Allies”

“He [Rouhani] has finally recognized that we are at war with the United States and its allies! His epic and sensational statements must be compared with his other speeches concerning engagement with these same countries, which he today calls ‘occupiers of our economy...’ Second, now that we recognize we are engaged on unequal terms in a war with the United States and all its agents... we must investigate how and with which tactics we want to wage war against the enemy... One must sincerely say that with the agendas of the government, one can’t liberate the tiniest bit of the economy of the country and should these tactics continue, we will end up losing more ground to the enemy.”

“We must investigate...with which tactics we want to wage war against the enemy.”



Hossein Shariatmadari, appointee of Supreme Leader Khamenei to edit Kayhan. Source: Rasa News, http://www.rasanews.ir/Images/News/Larg_Pic/21-11-1388/IMAGE634014099307107500.jpg

Syria's Army of Conquest

12 June 2015

“... the Army of Conquest can be considered an “Army” thanks to the Saudi TOW missiles...”

OE Watch Commentary: A Sunni rebel coalition calling itself the “Army of Conquest” (Jaysh al-Fatah) recently took over several important Syrian Army positions in northwestern Idlib Province. On 28 March its fighters seized the province’s eponymous capital city, making it the second provincial capital to fall out of Syrian government hands since conflict began in 2011 (Raqqa was the first, in 2013). The first accompanying article argues that the new coalition is the result of Saudi Arabia and Turkey reconciling their Syria policies. Working in tandem, the countries have unified the important Sunni fighting groups in northern Syria - including Muslim Brotherhood-linked “moderate Islamists” and Salafi jihadists from the al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham - under a single banner. This new coalition is well funded and heavily armed, most notably with a generous supply of TOW missiles, which they have used liberally and effectively against Syrian Army defenses in Idlib, as the article explains.

Source: السعودية وتركيا وقطر تتحرر من الضغوط الأميركية: استغلال «الجهاديين» في سوريا Mohammed Balut. “Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar Free Themselves of American Pressure to Take Advantage of Syrian Jihadis,” al-Safir. 18 May 2015. <http://assafir.com/Article/420194/MostRead>

The military outcomes and fates of individual battles are linked to the evolution of the Saudi-Turkish understanding. Militarily, one may argue that the Army of Conquest can be considered an “Army” thanks to the Saudi TOW missiles rather than to Turkey... during the first offensive in the battle for Jisr al-Shughur the Syrian Army was hit with 700 TOW ATGMs. Saudi Arabia, which is the main source of these rockets, bought 13,750 of them in December 2013 in a contract overseen by Bandar bin Sultan. In exchange, the United States received 1.1 billion dollars. Saudi Arabia has 25,000 of these rockets and is supplying them to the Syrian opposition. Their role in these operations should not be underestimated.

Source: “Will Aleppo be the next capital of ISIL?” Middle East Briefing, 12 June 2015. <http://mebriefing.com/?p=1733>

Helping ISIL gain control of Aleppo and its region seems to have been one dimension of Assad’s calculus. His plan was simple: If Aleppo and its region fall under the control of ISIL—not under the control of the non-ISIL opposition—several favorable strategic considerations will have been achieved... If the Army of Conquest were to be totally defeated and sundered between the hammer of the barrel bombs and the anvil of ISIL, and if the conflict turns to be Assad versus ISIL alone; then the US, and the world, would intervene on the side of Assad. After all, the US air raids in the region are directed only against ISIL... All these calculations on the part of Assad have been gaining more weight because of the intensive Arab-Turkish effort in the North of Syria...

Control over Idlib Province opens up two potential routes for the Army of Conquest to seek a showdown with the Syrian Army. The first is up steep mountains from the al-Ghab Plain toward the Alawite villages of Latakia and Tartous, where hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Syrians have taken refuge over the past several years. The other is northeast toward the city of Aleppo, where a three-way battle also involving the Islamic State (IS) is brewing.



Army of Conquest logo.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_Conquest#/media/File:Jaish_al-Fatah_Logo.jpg
“Jaish al-Fatah Logo” by Source (WP:NFC#4). Licensed under Fair use via Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jaish_al-Fatah_Logo.jpg#/media/File:Jaish_al-Fatah_Logo.jpg

The Army of Conquest was unable to capitalize on the momentum of its rapid victories in Idlib due to a surprise IS attack in the northern Aleppo countryside. The attack threatened to cut off a key rebel supply line from Turkey and forced the temporary diversion of resources away from further Idlib offensives. The Syrian Air Force has joined the northern Aleppo fighting on the side of the IS, in what the second accompanying article argues is a sign that the Syrian government - for broader strategic reasons - would rather cede Aleppo to the IS than have it fall in the hands of Saudi-Turkish allies.

Iran has responded to the new Turkish-Saudi push by injecting several thousand Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan fighters into strategic locations of the Syrian battlefield, most notably Damascus and the coastal provinces. These forces, per the third accompanying excerpt, are being brought into Syria clandestinely, under the guise of religious pilgrimage. New rumors of an overt Iranian troop deployment into Syria have been circulating, though Iranian authorities deny them.

(continued)

Continued: Syria's Army of Conquest

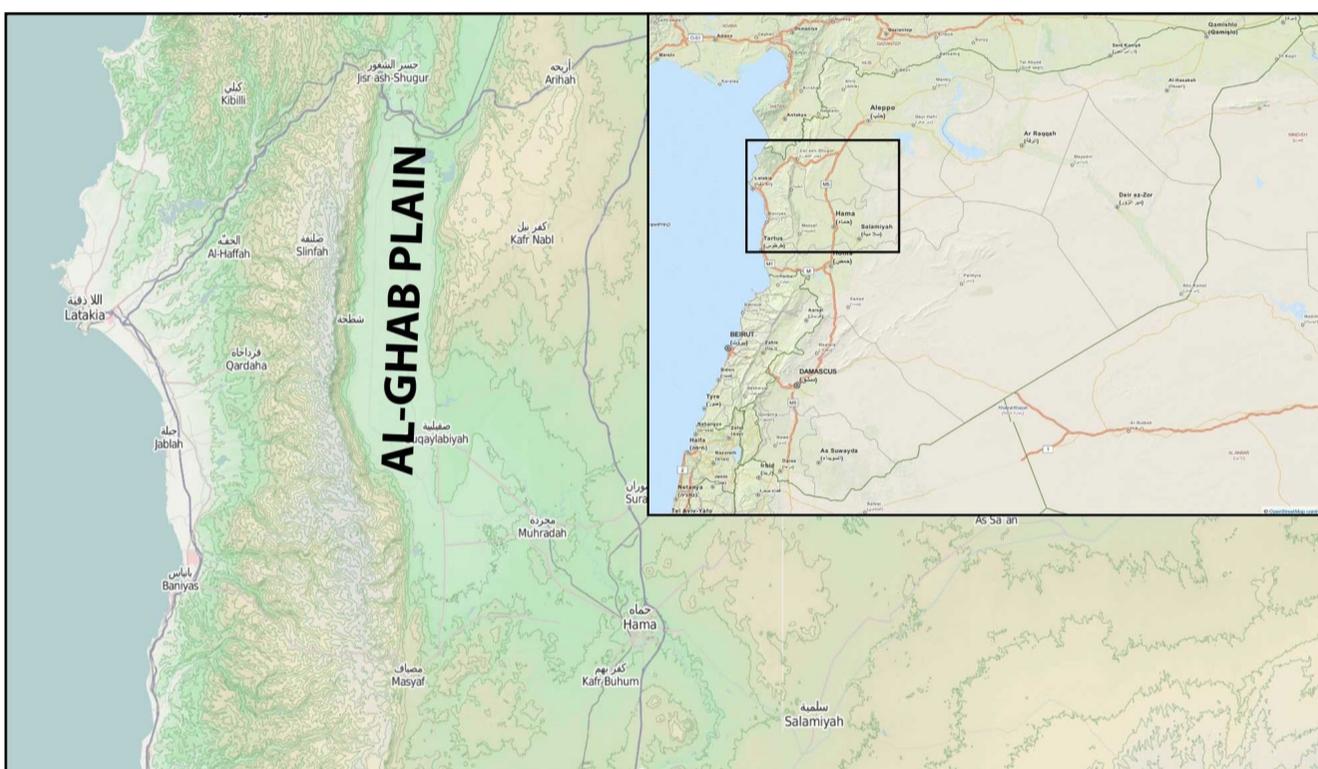
*Al-Qaeda and associated movements, which constitute the backbone of the Army of Conquest, have proven to be the strongest rebel force fighting in Idlib. Capable and desirable allies for some Gulf countries, these jihadists are unpalatable allies to Western countries for obvious reasons. The need to balance battlefield capability with political palatability is all too clear to many exile-led groups that remain highly relevant, given their "only viable partner" status. As the fourth accompanying excerpt notes, leaders of several militias that were routed by the Salafi-jihadi coalition in Idlib and Aleppo earlier this year have begun regrouping to challenge the legitimacy of the Army of Conquest. They are doing so by waiving the well worn yet still relevant banner of "moderate opposition." According to the article, they have received backing from the UAE. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)***

Source:

Abasi Smeisem. "Iran Mobilizes in Damascus and the Syrian Coast," 3 June 2015. <http://goo.gl/2IvUHw>

إيران تحشد في دمشق والساحل السوري

An anonymous source told al-Arabi al-Jadid about how thousands of Iranian elements have in fact entered Syria over the past two days, via Damascus International Airport, under the pretense of being religious pilgrims. The source said that they are taken to a private hall inside the airport and are brought in through an area separate from that for civilian passenger, and under tight security measures. He emphasized that most of them are Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan; this in addition to the Lebanese, who are brought in by land across the border crossings still held by the regime. In the same context, an anonymous opposition military source told al-Arabi al-Jadid of thousands of fighters being sent to the Ghab Plain, most of them Iraqis and Iranians...



Source: author's map based on: © OpenStreetMap contributors | www.openstreetmap.org/copyright

Source:

الإمارات تلقي بأوراق جديدة للقضاء على الثورة بعد انتصارات جيش الفتح
 "The UAE uses a new card to end the Syrian revolt following the Army of Conquest's victories," Syrian Mirror. 6 June 2015. <http://goo.gl/zlu6gS>

al-Nusra Front fighter posing with captured TOW ATGM
 Source: https://twitter.com/ldlib_JN/status/544443415363350528

Over the past two weeks, a group of leaders has held several meetings in Turkey and Jordan, with support and financing from the UAE. The aim is to create a new military entity which on the surface will belong to the Free Syrian Army. In reality, it aims to balance the Army of Conquest and subsequently attack it. The meeting included most of the leaders that were expelled from Syria following clashes with al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, in addition to members of the staff and the National Coalition...



Saudi Arabia's Border Troubles

10 June 2015

“... A Saudi source spoke of new tactics in dealing with the border situation...”

OE Watch Commentary: Jamal Khashoggi is arguably Saudi Arabia's most influential columnist. In a recent column, parts of which are excerpted alongside this commentary, he mulls on the possibilities of a Saudi-Iranian war. Although the high costs of such a war serve as a powerful deterrent for both parties, he notes, the conflict in Yemen has shifted Saudi calculations, and the kingdom “will not draw back from what it started, and will continue until complete victory.” According to Khashoggi, a bigger war - or at least the Saudi threat of a bigger war - is both good policy and a distinct possibility.

The road to complete Saudi victory in Yemen does not look smooth. Since May the Huthis and their allies have effectively opened a front along the western edges of the shared border. For their own reasons, media from both sides have amplified the border clashes, further contributing to the escalation. According to the Saudi campaign's spokesman, there have been over 300 attempts to infiltrate the Saudi border since hostilities began, as the second excerpt highlights. In early May Saudi airstrikes struck targets throughout the Huthi stronghold of Saada Province. The Yemeni side responded with intensified cross-border fire, forcing the Saudi military to deploy a large strike force - described in the third accompanying excerpt - to the border areas.

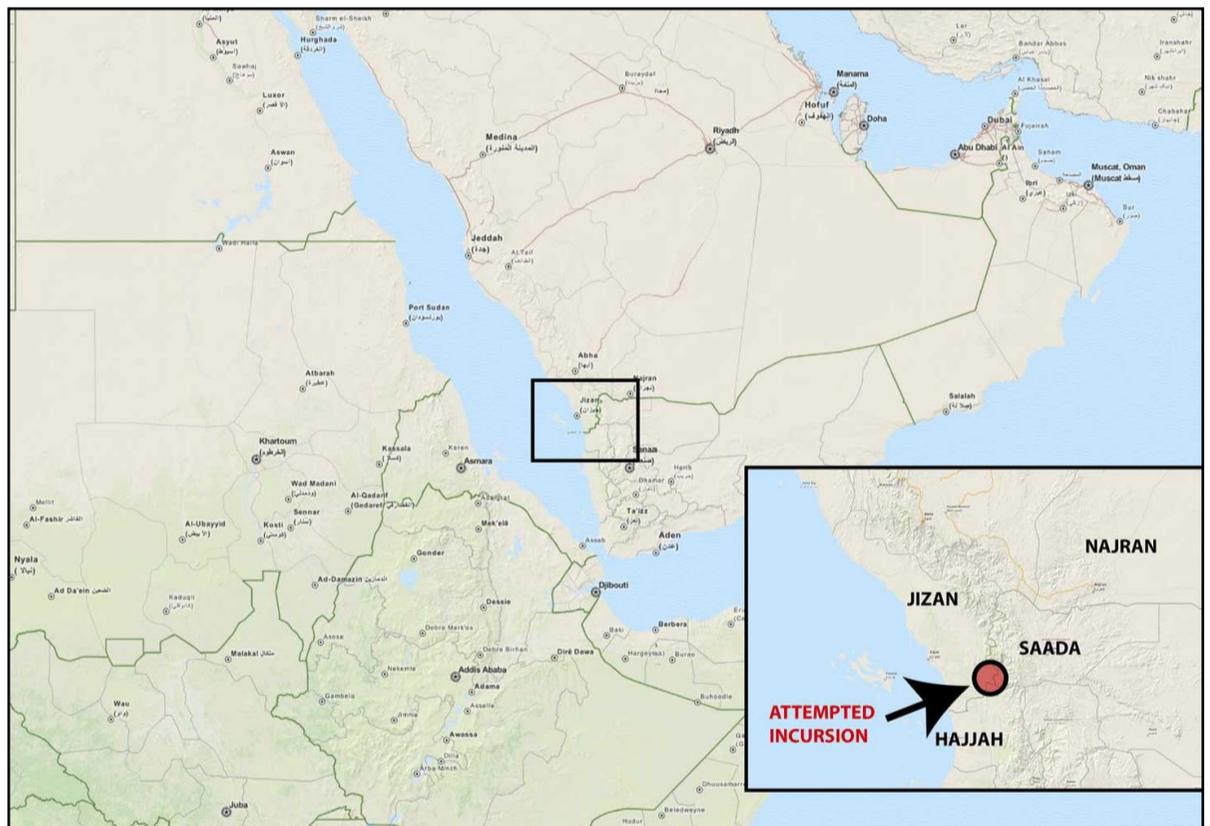
(continued)

Source:

هل ستقع حرب بين السعودية وإيران

Jamal Khasoggi. “Saudi Arabia and Iran heading to war?” al-Hayat. 6 June 2015. <http://goo.gl/2n4nPS> (translation via: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2015/06/08/Saudi-Arabia-and-Iran-heading-to-war-.html>)

It is wrong to look at Operation Decisive Storm merely as an incidental Saudi military operation against the Houthis. This is a Saudi policy combining diplomacy and war to stop Iranian influence then push it out of Syria and Yemen... Iran's allies in Yemen are subjected day and night to a Saudi-led war against them until they turn to peace... Victory to the Yemeni Popular Resistance can only be achieved by war, or the Saudi threat of a bigger war. Wars are always ugly, but a just war is necessary sometimes to achieve peace.



Map of border clashes region.

Source: author's map based on: © OpenStreetMap contributors | www.openstreetmap.org/copyright



Screenshot of Scud launch from pro-Huthi news channel al-Masirah.

Source: al-Masirah YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bket1BjQCas>

Source:

عسيري: أحبطنا 300 محاولة اختراق للحدود...

“Al-Asiri: We have foiled 300 attempts to cross the border,” Mareb Press. 8 June 2015. http://marebpress.com/news_details.php?sid=110363

According to [BRIG GEN Ahmed] al-Asiri, “It is no secret that in operations Decisive Storm and Restoring Hope, up through yesterday, more than 300 attempts at penetrating the Saudi border have been foiled. These attempts are made with the goal of taking photos and then publicizing them so the Huthis can say that they have taken a piece of Saudi territory.”

(continued)

Continued: Saudi Arabia's Border Troubles

In early June Yemeni forces fired a Scud across the border. The missile, which was intercepted by Saudi air defenses, was aimed at the sprawling King Khalid Airbase in the town of Khamis Mushait, around 80 miles from the border. Hours earlier Saudi forces claimed to foil a major attack by former Yemeni Republican Guard forces in Saudi's Jizan Province. Not coincidentally, this attack occurred a short distance from the very spot where in November 2009 Huthi fighters allegedly ambushed a Saudi Border Guard post. That attack precipitated a three-month Saudi bombing campaign in support of the Huthis' erstwhile foe and current ally Ali Abdullah Saleh.

*Per the fourth accompanying article, the attack in Jizan has forced Saudi Arabia to reconsider its strategy along the border. Specifically, the article argues that Saudi forces may begin taking on a limited offensive posture in the flat coastal areas dividing the Saudi province of Jizan from Yemen's Hajjah Province. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)***

Source:

ما هي القوة الضاربة في الجيش السعودي
 "What is the Saudi Army's 'Strike Force'?" Erem News, 11 May 2015. <http://www.aremnews.com/politics/arab-politics/gcc-politics/276694>

According to a Saudi military source, what sets this unit apart is that it possesses a broad range of weaponry, as well as large number of special forces and paratroopers. Analysts and observers, however, believe that what sets it apart is its ability to launch rapid ground assaults... According to statements by the strike force's commander, BRIG GEN Zaid Asiri, his men are trained to fight in mountainous areas both with light and mechanized infantry...

Source:

السعودية تبدل استراتيجيتها اليمنية: إلى حجة در
 "Saudi Arabia Changes Strategy in Yemen: to Hajja by Land," al-Araby al-Jadid, 10 June 2015. <http://goo.gl/l9zerG>

After the attack on Jizan was announced, major Saudi reinforcements arrived. A Saudi source spoke of new tactics in dealing with the border situation. Since there was no official announcement of the nature of this new plan to deal with the border areas, some analysts have speculated that it may involve a change from a defensive to an offensive posture, in an attempt to drive deep into Yemen's coastal areas, which are considered the easiest, starting from Hajja Province, considered less dangerous than the mountainous areas... Any Saudi advance will be difficult, and its soldiers expect to face ambushes and a long-term war of attrition. All of this lessens the likelihood of expansion other than in limited border areas and as hit-and-run attacks.



Screenshot of alleged Yemeni incursion into Saudi territory with burning Saudi armored vehicle in background.

Source: al-Masirah YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nod43rLiNIs>

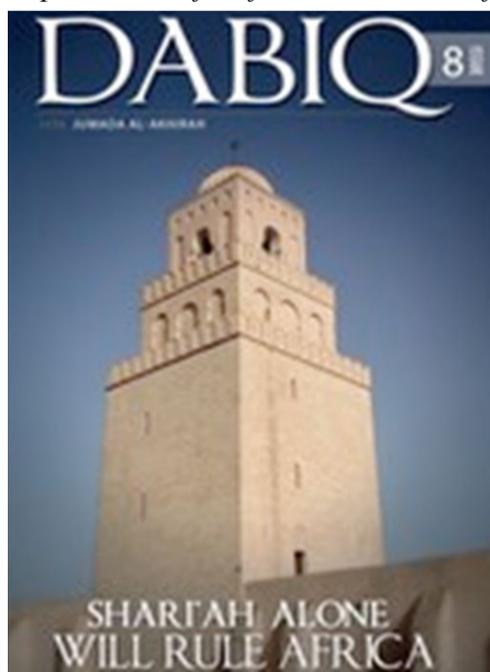
Libya is the New Iraq

8 June 2015

“... I am almost certain that the experience of ISIL in Iraq will repeat itself in Libya...”

OE Watch Commentary: *Libya is the new Iraq, according to the first accompanying article, written by a Mauritanian journalist well versed in Libyan affairs. The author argues that in both countries institutionalized exclusion and regular harassment have driven ordinary citizens into the arms of the Islamic State (IS). More often than not, he explains, their sole crime is to have been a civil servant or government employee. It is no wonder that the IS would emerge in former regime bastions.*

This general argument is being used to explain why Sirte (Surt) - Qaddafi's key stronghold - became the first significant population center in Libya to fully fall under IS control, in June 2015. The IS takeover of Sirte has been methodical. In February militants from the group seized the radio station and flooded the airwaves with their message. They took over important government buildings, including the Ouagadougou Conference Hall, set up checkpoints in the city's boulevards, took control of mosques, enforced their social mores, provided services where gaps existed, and - for their global audience - kidnapped and murdered a group of Egyptian migrants, releasing an effects-laden beheading video of the killings, set on the beaches of Libya. Several photo collections released by the IS's "Tripoli Province" narrate their expansion in Sirte, including one documenting the "repentance" of 42 former members of the Interior Ministry.



Cover of Dabiq Magazine.
Source: <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isis-propaganda-magazine-dabiq>

Source:

هل ينتقل سيناريو العراق إلى ليبيا
Shaykh Ould al-Salek. "Will the Iraqi Scenario Transfer to Libya?" al-Rai al-Youm. 1 June 2015. <http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=266020>

Yesterday I followed the news of ISIL controlling the city of Sirte and heading toward al-Jufra. It made me think of what I saw in Libya, and of what is still happening there. Events in Libya are very similar, to the point of being nearly identical, to what happened in Iraq. The tribes that supported the Qaddafi regime or which benefited from it have suffered greatly over the past years.... I am almost certain that the experience of ISIL in Iraq will repeat itself in Libya. Iraqi Sunnis whose only crime was to have been forced by circumstances to become an employee in Saddam Hussein's regime were punished for that, and as a result they became willing to make a pact with the devil. The same circumstances have been and are pushing the remnants of Qaddafi's regime to ally with ISIL.

Source: "Islamic State closes in on Libya's oil crescent," Middle East Eye. 8 June 2015. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/islamic-state-closes-libya-s-oil-crescent-143691546>

Harawa is thought to be the first Libyan town that IS had been forced to negotiate with before raising its flag above public buildings. Local resident Haithem said that despite its willingness to fight IS, the town had received no military support and, after the fall of Sirte had been left with no choice but to negotiate a truce. Heavily-armed militants entered the town after negotiations were completed, handing back three prisoners from Harawa that were seized during previous clashes, as a "goodwill gesture" intended to encourage the tribal elders to hand over local fighters who killed IS members in two rounds of clashes. Preaching at the town's main mosque, IS instructed people not to raise the Libyan flag of independence and said that members of the police and army should resign and sign recantations.

In late May IS fighters expelled the Misrata-based 166th Brigade from Sirte's key positions, including the power plant west of the city and the Gardabiya Airport/Airbase to the south. Shortly thereafter they took over the recalcitrant village of Harawa (Hrawah), around 70 km east of Sirte. As the second accompanying article explains, locals there had attempted to fight off IS fighters but were eventually forced to negotiate a surrender.

The takeover of Sirte has opened up two important corridors for IS expansion. The first is toward Libya's "oil crescent" east of Sirte. As of mid-June the IS was at the edge of Libya's major oil export terminals of Sidra (Sidr), Ras Lanuf and Brega. These ports have remained under the control of the one-time Petroleum Facilities Guard, which revolted in 2013. They are led by Ibrahim Jadhran, a native of Ajdabiya, who has refused to formally affiliate with either of Libya's two main coalitions, making him an attractive target for the IS. According to social media rumors his brother Osama recently pledged allegiance to IS. A subsequent rumor claims Osama was injured in the US airstrike targeting Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Ajdabiya.

The takeover of Sirte has also opened up the corridor linking Libya's Mediterranean coast to the African Sahel. IS will likely seek to command existing trafficking routes from southern Libya

(continued)

Continued: Libya is the New Iraq

through Niger and Chad, in order to link its Sirte-based Libyan faction with its Sub-Saharan African one (Boko Haram). As the fourth accompanying article notes, the potential for the IS to exert control over this corridor comes at a time of heightened concern among European powers on the delicate question of what to do about migrants crossing the Mediterranean. The political circumstances favor the IS, and one should expect the organization's hitherto quiet "Fezzan Province" - Libya's gateway to the Sahel - to become more active.

During his decades of rule, Qaddafi often turned to the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa for support. One should expect the IS to follow suit, replacing Qaddafi's politicking and theatrics with campaigns of recruitment and territorial expansion. It is no coincidence that the eighth issue of the IS propaganda magazine, Dabiq, published in late March, featured on its cover a picture of the Great Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia, considered the first mosque ever built in Africa. The issue is titled "Shari'ah alone will rule Africa." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



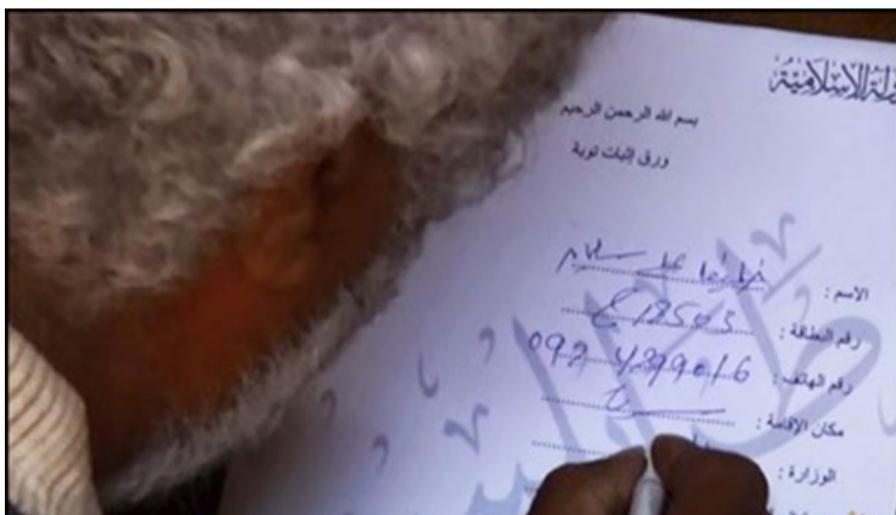
Source: Islamic State Tripoli Province, photoessay from Sirte on "repentance" of 42 interior ministry employees (February 2015)

Source: **إتحاد إعلامي فجر ليبيا**
7 June 2015. Libya Dawn Media Union (Facebook Page). <https://www.facebook.com/Media.Union.Fajr.Libya/posts/1439299199724725>

Osama Jadhran, Ibrahim Jadhran's brother, has pledged allegiance to ISIL! Ibrahim failed to sell oil through the so-called Oil Facilities Guard, his brother is trying a different method.

Source: **عين بoko حرام على ليبيا ، الخفايا، الأبعاد والتداعيات**
Mustafa al-Jari'. "Boko Haram eyes Libya: the secrets, the dimensions and the challenges," Le Maghreb. 30 May 2015. <http://goo.gl/zqbTk3>

The media leaks on Boko Haram's expansion toward Libya and in particularly the Fezzan region come at a time when the European Union seeks to mobilize international opinion toward a military intervention under the pretense of striking human-trafficking gangs...



Source: Islamic State Tripoli Province, photoessay from Sirte on "repentance" of 42 interior ministry employees (February 2015)



Source: author's map based on: © OpenStreetMap contributors | www.openstreetmap.org/copyright

Chair of African Union Calls for an African ICC to Try Western Leaders

19 June 2015

“Africa must establish its own International Criminal Court (ICC) which would be mandated to prosecute Western leaders who have committed crimes on the continent.” — Zimbabwean President and African Union (AU) chair Robert Mugabe

OE Watch Commentary: *In perhaps more of an anti-International Criminal Court (ICC) statement than an actual request, President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe, who is currently Chair of the African Union (AU), has called for Africa to establish its own ICC. This court, as the accompanying article relates, would try Western leaders and presumably Western nations for crimes they have committed, especially during the colonial period, on the continent.*

The ICC's recent request to South Africa to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir during his three-day visit to the country for an AU meeting triggered Mugabe's comments. However, much to the chagrin of the ICC, South Africa did not arrest Bashir, but instead allowed him to return to Sudan, placing him, at least for now, far beyond the ICC's reach.

*Anti-ICC feelings in Africa are not unique to Mugabe. President of Mali Ibrahim Boubacar Keita recently related that it is up to Africa to judge African leaders and not for the Europeans or Americans to do so. Indeed, other prominent Africans have expressed similar sentiments, though it should be pointed out that two of the three countries mentioned in this commentary - Mali and South Africa - are signatories to the statute that created the ICC and that many Africans would strongly like to see Bashir, accused of complicity in the Darfur genocide, as well as several others wanted by the ICC, brought to justice. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)***

Source: "Africa Must Set Up Own ICC to Try Europeans, Says Mugabe," News24Wire (South Africa), 19 June 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201506191644.html>

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who is also the African Union (AU) chair, says Africa must establish its own International Criminal Court (ICC) which would be mandated to prosecute Western leaders who have committed crimes on the continent.

According to the state-owned Chronicle newspaper, Mugabe said it was high time Africa set up a criminal court which would seek justice for “serious” war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the West, particularly during the colonial era.

“... You set up the ICC, we set our ICC to try Europeans, to try Mr [George] Bush and Mr [Tony] Blair,” Mugabe was quoted as saying.

Mugabe said the International Criminal Court was a court for Western countries, dispensing Western injustice on Africans.

Keita concurred, adding it was “up to Africans, not Europeans or Americans to judge their leaders”.

At the summit, Mugabe wanted a mass withdrawal of African states from the ICC.

The veteran leader harshly criticised the ICC after Al-Bashir dodged his arrest, saying the international court was not wanted in Africa.

Mugabe also took a swipe at the “foreign” funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs), whom he said were angling for Al-Bashir's arrest.



Robe Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe and Chair of the African Union, has a history of making controversial statements; his latest a call for the establishment of an African version of the International Criminal Court to punish Western leaders accused of crimes in Africa.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Mugabe_May_2015.jpg

Nigeria Demands to Stay in the Lead of Multinational Joint Task Force Against BH

11 June 2015

“[Rotating leadership of the MNJTF] will undermine, even if it is not intended, the military capacity to sustain the push against the insurgents.”

OE Watch Commentary: Nigeria wants to be in charge, and things have not changed. Abuja has once again shown its unwillingness to relinquish control of the fight against Boko Haram, this time rejecting the proposal from the other members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) – including Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, in addition to Benin – during a recent meeting in Abuja. They suggested that command of the Multinational Joint Force Task Force (MNJTF) rotate every six months. For its part, Nigeria has strongly denounced the notion that leadership of the command should rotate. Ostensibly, it has claimed that it should stay in the lead because “Nigeria will be providing the bulk of the troops and the main theatre of the war is on Nigerian soil.” Yet, the more likely scenario is that Nigeria wants to maintain control of the force, especially under the new (and locally much vaunted) leadership of its recently elected president, General Mohamadu Buhari.

Observers will recall that the LCBC – now in the lead in the fight against Boko Haram – was a virtually unknown regional grouping until January 2015. It was at that time, during the semi-annual African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that the topic of the havoc of Boko Haram had reached a fever pitch to

the extent that the African Union (AU) and its member states could no longer keep it off the agenda as per Nigeria’s wishes. Nigeria rejected the AU’s proposed 7,500 AU contingent, and instead, insisted that the fight remain localized. Upon the rejection of an AU presence, most observers understood the intuitive regional grouping to deal with the cross-border challenges presented by Boko Haram to be the sixteen-member West African bloc of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has had far more peacekeeping experience than any other regional economic community in Africa. This was not to be the case.



Nigeria has asserted that it needs to remain in command of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the fight against Boko Haram.

Source: <http://www.today.ng/news/mnjtf-lcbc-presidents-approve-nigeria-permanent-force-commander-in-mission-against-boko-haram/>.

Source: Staff. 2015. “Nigeria: Buhari Wants Nigeria to Lead Regional Anti-Boko Haram Force.” Daily Independent (Lagos). June 11. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201506120124.html>.

...Heads of state and government from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin jetted in to Abuja, after two days of preparatory talks involving military top brass and defense ministers.

But Buhari left no doubt about his desire to control the counter-insurgency, suggesting a six-month rotational command structure between the five nations could harm the fight-back.

“Such a process will undermine, even if it is not intended, the military capacity to sustain the push against the insurgents,” said the Nigerian president.

A single commander would improve “the effectiveness of military strategy, since Nigeria will be providing the bulk of the troops and the main theatre of the war is on Nigerian soil,” he added

.... An 8,700-member unit backed by the African Union was finally agreed with its base in N’Djamena, costing some \$30 million (27 million euros) to run over the next year.

The new force will replace an existing coalition of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon that has claimed a series of successes against Boko Haram since February

...Chad and Niger have both complained that Abuja prevented their troops from pursuing militant fighters deeper into Nigeria’s northeast, allowing the insurgents to get away and re-group.

Buhari has underlined the need for long-term, regional co-operation, particularly as Boko Haram has allied itself to Islamic State group militants in Syria and Iraq.

Yet, as per Nigeria’s historic tendency to need to fiercely retain control of its sovereign affairs, Abuja insisted instead that the fight against Boko Haram in the form of the MNJTF be carried out primarily through the LCBC and a grouping of states (in the Boko Haram area of operation) that had been previously used uniquely to manage the affairs in and around the multinational Lake Chad area, the administration of which is shared between Chad, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Although the MNJTF is currently headquartered in the capital of Chad, Ndjamen, Nigeria was forceful in its demands that it should be the largely impotent LCBC in the lead of the anti-Boko Haram efforts. This choice is indicative of Nigeria’s desire to retain control of the situation itself, with the input of as few exterior voices – like South Africa in the AU or Senegal and/or Ghana in ECOWAS – in the mix. And so, the recent Nigerian decision to fiercely fight to retain control of the MNJTF’s fight against Boko Haram is far from surprising. Rather, the decision to do anything else would have been a stark deviation from the norm. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

Nigeria Clarifies Policy on Use of Camouflage

13 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The battle against Boko Haram has become a whole-of-government fight for Nigeria, encapsulating members of the military, the police, citizen groups, and customs and immigration officials. Yet, the wearing of camouflage by various members from across the Nigerian security apparatus has led to a number of problems, including the proliferation of fatigues – some confiscated, some replicated – across the country, which is being used by both real and imposter members of the Nigerian military, and thus complicating efforts to determine who is an is not a member of Boko Haram.*

As such, the Nigerian military recently clarified its policy on the use of camouflage among various personnel. As per the article below, Nigeria has now demanded that the only personnel allowed to wear camouflage are the members of the Army, Air Force, and Navy. Moreover, Nigerian police will be able to wear camouflage, but only when engaged in the fight against Boko Haram, not in non-insurgent-related activities. For their part, members of immigration, customs, and civilian components connected to the fight against Boko Haram (like the Civilian Joint Task Force) will no longer be allowed to don the camouflage and are required to desist from wearing it by January 2016.

Indeed, the move to clarify the policy on the use of camouflage came at the request of the Nigerian National Security Council, which had highlighted the aforementioned issues of duplicity that obtaining Nigerian military fatigues could cause. Moreover, the fact that the fight against Boko Haram continues to be deeply transnational in nature, being led by the Lake Chad Basin Commission, maintaining a clearly articulated policy on the use of Nigerian uniforms is a cogent step forward. Yet, while the streamlining may have positive effects within the Nigerian military and police sectors, it remains unclear how the new move is intended to address the problem of Boko Haram members who may have stolen real fatigues.
End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)

Source: Iroegbu, Senator. 2015. "Nigeria: FG Bans Police, Immigration, Customs, Others From Use of Camouflage Uniforms." June 13. This Day (Lagos). <http://allafrica.com/stories/201506151163.html>.

The federal government has banned the use of camouflage uniforms by various security agencies other than the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

The Director of Defence Information (DDI), Maj-Gen. Chris Olukolade, announced this in a statement on Friday, clarifying that Nigerian Police would however use the uniform when in Joint Operation with the military or on special operation such as specific anti-riot missions.

....The Defence Spokesman further directed that "All paramilitary agencies using various camouflage/fatigues uniforms have up to January 2016 to withdraw such materials currently in their inventory".

....Olukolade noted that the proliferation and imitation by criminals and impostors using uniforms especially the camouflage have been generating some concern in national security circles.

“The proliferation and imitation by criminals and impostors using uniforms especially the camouflage have been generating some concern in national security circles.”



Nigeria has forbade non-military personnel, including the Nigerian Customs Services, pictured above, to wear camouflage. The move is intended to help reduce Nigerians, especially those in Boko Haram, from posing as Nigerian servicemen.

Source: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/184908-breaking-nigerian-govt-bans-police-other-para-military-agencies-from-use-of-camouflage-uniforms.html>

Nigeria and Kenya Looked at as Failed Models of Counterterrorism

6 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *From fighting al-Shebab in the Horn of Africa to attempting to subdue Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, the past several years have seen a distinct uptick in African states' engagement in counterterrorism activities. Yet, African observers themselves, like the Kenyan writer of this article, are very critical of the military and police tactics used to fight such groups, especially, she argues, when they fundamentally undercut a commitment to the protection of human rights and respect for the rule of law.*

In particular, the author is deeply critical of counterterrorism positions taken by two of Africa's most powerful states, Kenya and Nigeria, which are battling al-Shebab and Boko Haram respectively, in ways that the author finds less than commendable. As for Kenya, the author relays that citizens in Garissa – home of the university in which 147 students were killed by al-Shebab in April 2015 – have been reluctant to report colleagues or family members who might be in collusion with the group, since doing so might well lead to their detention as well. Put otherwise, overly eager security forces in Kenya have led to a lack of civilian cooperation, and are thus hampering the overall counterterrorism effort.

Yet the case is worse in Nigeria. Drawing from a recent report from Amnesty International (one of growing number of reports of its kind), the author laments, among other abuses perpetrated by the Nigerian military, the death and detention of some 7,000 young men held in military captivity since 2011, another 1,200 Nigerians who were allegedly murdered by the Nigerian military outright, and some 20,000 persons, including young boys, who have been detained arbitrarily. In addition to these, the Nigerian military is also frequently accused of arbitrary detentions and searches, poor treatment of those it is interrogating, lack of respect for human rights, and even rapes and harassment of women. Detainees have also complained of dehydration, malnutrition, repeated torture, and extrajudicial detention and murder.

“But this cannot be the way to do so. It is not intelligent. It is not targeted. It creates blowback in the form of grievance and resentment that actually grows the base from which both Al Shabaab and Boko Haram recruit.”

Source: L. Muthoni Wanyeki. 2015. “How Not to Fight Terror, Nigerian/Kenyan Style.” 6 June. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/OpEd/comment/How-not-to-fight-terror--Nigerian-or-Kenyan-style--/434750/2742412/-/g5bkjxz/-/index.html>.

Amnesty International released this past week a report on the counterterrorism operations in northern Nigeria, entitled *Stars on Their Shoulders, Blood on Their Hands: War crimes committed by the Nigerian military*.

Based on leaked military correspondence and reports, as well as 412 interviews with not just victims and witnesses, but also military officers, the report documents the deaths in military detention of no fewer than 7,000 boys and young men since March 2011. It also documents the unlawful murders of no fewer than 1,200 Nigerian citizens by the military since February 2012.

.....Just as we know we have to address Al Shabaab's ever-increasing activities within Kenya and across our borders, so Nigeria has to address Boko Haram's ever-increasing activities in Nigeria and across its borders.

But this cannot be the way to do so. It is not intelligent. It is not targeted. It creates blowback in the form of grievance and resentment that actually grows the base from which both Al Shabaab and Boko Haram recruit.

It places Kenyan and Nigerian citizens living in areas of Al Shabaab and Boko Haram operations between a rock and a hard place.

...What to do instead? A starting point would at least be admitting to all the above. And ending such criminal behavior. If even some of those tasked with conducting such behavior feel it's wrong, to the extent that they'd release classified information to help stop it, we should be paying attention.

*That members of African civil society hold such critiques of their states' counterterrorism efforts is, in general, a positive sign. On one hand, particularly in relation to Nigeria, members of the Western international community have long held similar critiques of the Nigerian counterterrorism efforts. On the other, such opinions show that members of African civil society are serving as watchdogs to protect human rights and, in so doing, are becoming ever more cognizant of the fine, but imperative, line that their governments must walk between providing counterterrorism measures, and thus security, and simultaneously respecting the rights of citizens. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)***

How to Improve the AU Military Staff Committee

25 May 2015

“Members of the committee say that...the committee hardly even meets. In the past three years, the committee would sometimes go for over a year and a half without a formal meeting...it is also reported that in many of the previous MSC meetings, attendance was below 50%.”

OE Watch Commentary: In theory, the African Union (AU) has a military staff committee, the AUMSC, comprising senior defense officials from around the continent. However, as the article suggests, the AUMSC is all but defunct; however, reviving it is both possible and necessary.

Unquestionably, the AU is the on-the-ground leader for ensuring peace and security in Africa. To that end, with its creation in 2002, it created a wide-ranging series of collective security mechanisms which fall under the responsibility of what it calls the “African Peace and Security Architecture” or APSA. Under the aegis of the African Union Commission, the APSA framework is led by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), which oversees various initiatives, including the African Standby Force, continental and regional early warning systems, and the Panel of the Wise.

In theory, the PSC is also supposed to have a military staff committee. On paper, the AUMSC is intended to include senior military personnel from various countries, who can offer the AU logistical and strategic support in instances wherein the PSC is charged with restoring order, or otherwise promoting peace and security. Yet, the AUMSC remains notional. As the article relays, “Members of the committee say that...the committee hardly even meets. In the past three years, the committee would sometimes go for over a year and a half without a formal meeting...It is also reported that in many of the previous MSC meetings, attendance was below 50%.” The article, one of the first that this author has seen to offer an analysis of the AUMSC, also details numerous other deficiencies with the AUMSC, including its being understaffed and the disproportionate amount of time it spends on adjudicating issues internal to the committee itself.

The impact of the nonfunctioning AUMSC is that what was supposed to be an integral component of the APSA is absent, thus retarding potential beneficial outcomes. Though other issues surrounding the PSC have historically taken precedence, this article interestingly highlights a new dimension of the ever-improving African collective security landscape that observers should follow in the future.

End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)

Source: Lule, Hallelujah. 2015. “Towards a Functioning Military Staff Committee of the AU.” International Relations And Security Network. June 12. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lng=en&id=191218>.

...Another vital element of the [African Peace and Security] architecture is the AU Military Staff Committee (MSC). Decisions and recommendations made by the [African Union Peace and Security] Council might lack technical depth and relevance without proper support at the conflict-prevention, management and intervention levels, which is provided by the MSC.

Inspired by the same structure at the United Nations (UN), the AU MSC aims to advise and assist the PSC on issues with military and security requirements. Composed of senior military officers from PSC member countries, the MSC is intended to submit relevant recommendations to the PSC chairperson on how Africa’s peace support capacities can be enhanced. It is also mandated to advise and assist the PSC to ensure that policies and actions in the fields of conflict prevention, management and resolution are consistent with sub-regional mechanisms.

Such engagements have rarely been translated into action, however. This is partly due to the underperformance of the MSC, which is largely linked to understaffing. Thus far, the AU MSC has attained very little visibility in terms of continental peace and security affairs. Its working relation with the PSC is far from what it should be, and the intended exchange of information and expertise is minimal.

...Members of the committee say this is not currently happening, adding that the committee hardly even meets. In the past three years, the committee would sometimes go for over a year and a half without a formal meeting. Some members told ISS Today that when meetings take place after such a long break, they are less likely to meaningfully contribute to the work of the PSC and the AU in general.

Another problem is that, in recent years, most of the meetings focused on the internal working procedures and regulations of the committee, rather than on improving the quality of decisions by the PSC on military issues. It is also reported that in many of the previous MSC meetings, attendance was below 50%.

...Members of the committee complain that they were not given the chance to look at or comment on the concept of the operation. No MSC input was requested or included. The committee is also frustrated by the lack of informal platforms to influence or contribute to the work of the PSC and the Peace Support Operation Division of the AU.

Despite the various documents and procedures, there is still little clarity on how the MSC should function and actively contribute on issues, including visiting AU and other missions on the continent, advising the PSC and examining relevant concept notes of the PSC meetings. There is also confusion about its mandate and responsibilities, and how it relates to and complements the work of the PSC. The draft rules of procedures are yet to be adopted.

...It is high time that the PSC seek the vital contribution of the MSC for effective peace support missions, and urge its members to be represented properly and consistently in the activities of the MSC. The Council should also work to improve relations between the two bodies through informing the MSC about its activities, and using the military and security expertise of the Committee.

2011 Libyan Intervention Divides African Countries

19 June 2015

“Mugabe “did not mention the countries by name, he stated that the countries on the council at the [Security Council] at that time [Nigeria and South Africa] betrayed the continent which could never trust them.””

OE Watch Commentary: *Though Qaddafi is gone, the ghost of his legacy remains. At the most recent African Union (AU) summit in June 2015, the 2011 NATO intervention that led to his ouster again became a topic of conversation. Indeed, the Libyan intervention has arisen as a symbolic dividing line around larger geopolitical forces, including leadership in the AU, African membership in the United Nations Security Council, and, ideologically, the contemporary nature of what is entailed in Pan-African Unity.*

As the accompanying article details, Robert Mugabe, the long-serving president of Zimbabwe and the current Chairperson of the AU (not to be confused with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazane Dlamini-Zuma), lambasted newly-elected Nigerian president Mohamadou Buhari over this country's decision to vote for the UN Resolution 1973 in the Security Council, which ultimately authorized the NATO intervention that ousted Qaddafi in 2011. As the article relays, Buhari faced severe criticism from Mugabe in front of the semi-annual AU meeting of African leaders, with Mugabe rebuking both Nigeria and South Africa for allowing the West to intervene. (Notably, UNSC Resolution 1973 is one of the hallmark cases of the invocation of the “responsibility to protect,” or R2P in both contemporary African and global politico-military affairs.) As the article relays, though Mugabe “did not mention the countries by name, he stated that the countries on the UN Security Council at that time betrayed the continent which could never trust them.”

*Mugabe's tirade against Africa's two largest and most geopolitically important countries was no doubt a strategic decision. On one hand, Mugabe is among the longest-serving leaders in Africa and, in many Western countries' eyes, one of the most unlikable due to his penchant for anti-Western rhetoric and anti-democratic tendencies. To be sure, Mugabe is trying to rally support across the continent for an anti-interventionist norm, the opposite of which might make him susceptible to the same fate as Qaddafi. On the other hand, his comments were interestingly timed, i.e., after he had ascended to a position of prominence within the AU, the continent's most capable mouthpiece in geopolitical affairs. As the article details, South Africa is annoyed that Zimbabwe is blocking discussion of a review of the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, which articulates the AU's demand for increased African presence on the UN Security Council. While South Africa and Nigeria are both the clearly intuitive candidates for such permanent seats, Mugabe is working assiduously to the contrary to try and get his country a seat as well. In short, the Libyan intervention has come to take on newly symbolic meanings for many states, all jockeying for geopolitical importance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)***



Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe shakes the hand of the late Libyan president Moammar Qaddafi. Mugabe has recently criticized South Africa and Nigeria for voting for UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized the use of force to oust Qaddafi from power.

Source: <http://www.novinite.com/articles/131657/Zimbabwe%27s+Mugabe+Regime+Expels+Anti-Gaddafi+Libyan+Ambassador>

Source: “Mugabe Slams Buhari At African Union Summit.” 2015. NAIJ.COM News - Nigeria News: Today's Breaking News & Headlines. 19 June. <http://www.naij.com/460929-mugabe-slams-buhari-at-african-union-summit.html>.

Nigeria's president, Mohamadou Buhari came under a severe attack by president Robert Mugabe, at the ongoing African Union summit in South Africa.

The Zimbabwean president slammed Nigeria and South Africa for their respective roles in voting the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 in 2011, which authorized military action against the regime of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Although reports from the meeting have it that Mugabe, Africa's oldest president, did not mention the countries by name, he stated that the countries on the council at the time betrayed the continent which could never trust them.

According to IOL news, South Africa and Nigeria were both on the council at the time, as they occupied two of the ten, non-permanent, two-year seats.

However, South Africa is livid Zimbabwe is avoiding review of the Ezulwini Consensus and insisting on a hardline, maximalist position on UN Security Council reform for fear of having bigger African countries like South Africa and Nigeria occupy permanent seats on the council.

ACIRC: Ending Before it Begins?

9 June 2015

“Word on the diplomatic grapevine is that it’s the end of the road for the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC).”

OE Watch Commentary: Rumors have begun to circulate the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) might be in trouble. In the attached article by noted South African international affairs commentator Simon Allison, the author notes that the South African-led initiative might not live to see its operationalization.

The ACIRC was proposed in July 2013 by South Africa to fill in for the lack of a rapid-deployment capability from the African Standby Force (ASF), which has been in the process of trying to stand up since 2003. In short, whereas the ASF seeks to serve as a wide-ranging, comprehensive collective security mechanism for the continent, the ACIRC is a far more nimble mechanism, which allows states to simply opt-in when contributing to the resolution of a conflict is in that state’s interests. Put otherwise, while the ASF is a wide-ranging and complex mechanism, the ACIRC is essentially a lead-nation troop contribution mechanism for peacekeeping missions.

As the following article relays, however, some observers with their ears to the diplomatic ground believe the end of the ACIRC proposal might be near. The overriding reason that the ACIRC might be done away is the perception that it seemingly duplicates – and thus draws resources away from – the concurrent ASF effort. As the article relays, particularly given the paucity of resources at play, parceling out funding between similar-seeming rapid-deployment capabilities of the ASF and ACIRC seems to make little sense. However, some have argued (including this author) that, in fact, the mutual standup of the ASF and ACIRC is indeed preferable, precisely because the continent



Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma is the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and the largest champion of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). Some have suggested that ACIRC might be collapsing before it has gotten very far off the ground.

Source: <http://www.living-in-south-africa.com/nkosazana-dlamini-zuma.html>

Source: Simon Allison, “AU Summit: Separating the News from the Noise.” Eyewitness News (South Africa). June 9. <http://ewn.co.za/2015/06/09/OPINION-Simon-Allison-AU-Summit-Separating-the-news-from-the-noise>.

... Word on the diplomatic grapevine is that it’s the end of the road for the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). This is Zuma’s baby: a continental rapid response force, which could be deployed anywhere in Africa at 14 days’ notice. But other major powers, especially Nigeria, have always been suspicious of South Africa’s enthusiasm for this project, and want to put resources into getting existing structures up to speed: specifically, the Rapid Deployment Capability of the African Standby Force, which was conceived long before ACIRC was forced into existence.

If ACIRC is scrapped, it will be a humiliating blow for South African foreign policy, which had invested a lot of diplomatic capital (not to mention cold, hard cash) into making ACIRC a reality. But it does make sense: Africa needs one rapid response force that works, not two that effectively compete for the same limited resources...

desperately needs a rapid-deployment capability to stem conflicts, which the ASF, in its twelfth year of existence, has yet to develop. Resultantly, the ACIRC is a laudable stopgap measure until the ASF can reach full operational capability, which, indeed, still seems to be a long time in coming.

Nevertheless, other recent reports contradict this one. At least one recent article has suggested that, to the contrary, South Africa is already well in front of the effort and will have its ACIRC contingent ready by June. More details should emerge after the conclusion of the current AU summit. Either way the future of the African collective security landscape, in many ways, hangs in the balance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

Lawfare in Colombia

21 June 2015

“It is for this truth that Colombian journalist Ricardo Puentes has found himself obliged to take the road to exile.”

OE Watch Commentary: Lawfare is the use of legal processes as an instrument of war in what are all-inclusive, no-holds-barred strategies generally known in strategy literature as war-by-all means, unrestricted war, hybrid war, etc. Colombia is a conflict venue in which ambivalence and divided loyalties have long been a feature of many of the country's formal institutions, including within the central state.

The Ricardo Puentes case has been brewing for a while, but as the accompanying articles indicate, this has apparently climaxed with him being forced to leave the country. Puentes is a prominent journalist known for having done investigative work on the prosecution of a Colombian army colonel accused of disappearing a number of Colombian citizens during a military response to a guerrilla take-over of the Colombian Supreme Court building in 1985.

Puentes' discoveries regarding what seems to be extreme prosecutorial misconduct provide out-of-scale damning material that makes his predicament of interest both to the student of lawfare and to observers of the Colombian War. His investigative reporting has been highly regarded generally, and his assessments have proven reliable in the past.

As portrayed in multiple sources, now he is hounded out of the country by the same Colombian prosecutorial and court systems he has apparently exposed. From claims that at this point seem credible, if not proven, the prosecutor involved not only violated basic rules of process, but also may be a sympathizer, if not associate of the guerrillas. If the accusations made by Ricardo Puentes' allies prove true (his work has often been in opposition to policies of the current government of President Manuel Santos), it would be highly damaging to the legitimacy of the current Colombian administration and to the negotiating process that the FARC has been furthering with President Santos' administration. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Eduardo Mackenzie, “Un periodista forzado al exilio” (Journalist forced into exile), Periódico Debate, 8 June 2015, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/8737-un-periodista-forzado-al-exilio>

“Ricard Puentes is one of the principal critics of the prosecution of the Supreme Court Building [case].” Through difficult investigation, he revealed what none of the country's other media cared to reveal: that the prosecution had grave procedural and civil rights defects, and that Ángela María Buitrago had played a central role [in the defects]. It was she who had admitted and exploited, against the interests of the accused officers, several false witnesses.”

Source: Ricardo Puentes Melo, “MURIÓ EDGAR VILLAMIZAR ESPINEL, VÍCTIMA DE LA FISCALÍA” (Edgar Villamizar Melo Died, Victim of the Attorney General's Office), Periodismo Sin Fronteras, June 21, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jKG8iTM_2qcJ:www.periodismosinfronteras.org/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

“Recently, Edgar Villamizar and I were working on an important lead to an M-19 terrorist who was present during the assault on the Supreme Court building and who left alive from there to take refuge in the Spain where she currently lives. The world thinks she is dead, we found serious indicators that she is still alive.”

Source: Eduardo Mackenzie, “La reina de los testigos falsos” (The queen of false witnesses), Periódico Debate, 12 June 2015, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/8773-la-reina-de-los-testigos-falsos/>

“Even worse was the invention of a strange episode in which an individual with two names, Edgar Villamizar and Edgar Villareal, affirmed that he saw Colonel Plazas give an illegal order at the Supreme Court building, at the moment of the rescue. In May, 2012, Ricardo Puentes managed to locate the whereabouts of the actual Edgar Villamizar and discovered the truth: he had never given testimony to any prosecutor, had never been present at any of the events at the Supreme Court building, and had never met Colonel Plazas.”

Source: CandiCat, “Esta es la verdad que descubrió el periodista Ricardo Puentes y que lo llevó al exilio” (This is the truth that journalist Ricardo Puentes discovered and that carried him into exile), CandiCat, 12 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz2mo3XUg8DkM9nlZeP0DYQ>

“It is for this truth that Colombian journalist Ricardo Puentes has found himself obliged to take the road to exile. Given the evident and obvious persecution by the Colombian attorney general's office, all of the evidence of what Mr. Puentes is claiming, which rests in the ombudsman's office, as well as with much of the media, is exposed in an open form on the Internet and social media.”

(Special thanks to Eduardo Mackenzie and Colombia News for his reporting and the sourcing for this entry)

Natural Disaster in Colombian News Headlines

18 Jun 2015

“...the FARC stopped 23 trailer trucks and forced them to spill 3,210 barrels of crude oil.”

OE Watch Commentary: A separate commentary in this edition of the OE Watch addresses the phenomenon of “lawfare” as a common element of unrestricted warfare. The war in Colombia gifts us with yet another aspect of that kind of war-by-all-available-means, in this instance economic warfare, in particular, attacks on the ecological environment.

From an article in the *Colombiano*, a major Colombian newspaper headquartered in Medellín, Colombia, we get news that the FARC is again forcing oil spills. The headline itself may be as disturbing as the news, however. It asserts that the “war” is perpetrating the spills and that the disaster is somehow natural rather than man-made. One might wonder if, as to an event in which culpability is so easily assigned, the amelioration and abstraction of the headline is not an effect of another dimension of unrestricted warfare or a byproduct of the ongoing FARC-government negotiations. In any case, the unmitigated truth seems to be that the FARC is attacking the natural environment. The journalist dutifully reported the FARC offense; the headline description was a typical, if not natural disaster. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Santiago Valenzuela, “La guerra está causando más desastres naturales,” (The war is causing more natural disasters) *El Colombiano*, 18 Jun 2015, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/la-guerra-esta-causando-mas-desastres-naturales-DF2153151>

[Citing the national attorney general’s office] “Public policies, to the extent there is political will, are being designed. As to these, however, we have to be realistic and keep in mind that there are problems that have to be solved. This past June 8, in the Port Vega-Teteyé corridor, in Puerto Asis [a county in southern Putumayo Department], the FARC stopped 23 trailer trucks and forced them to spill 3, 210 barrels of crude oil. There were 1,451 linear meters of roadway contaminated by hydrocarbons, 70 affected families and 50 students in La Cabana township. In 2014 alone, Corpoamazonia [Federal-regional organization like the EPA] responded to 84 hydrocarbon spills in Putumayo.”

Rafael Correa Worried?

20 Jun 2015

“Groups demonstrated against the legislative proposal of the Redistribution of the Wealth law...”

OE Watch Commentary: Ecuador has not come up on our OE Watch scope very often, but recent protest marches in Ecuadorian cities suggest that the regime of Rafael Correa might be facing a future something like that of Venezuela, or at least that is what Mr. Correa seems to fear in the accompanying article. He says the Ecuadoran opposition wants to destabilize his government and has recently pointed the finger at Venezuelan reactionaries as inciters. In the past year, however, he has spread the blame around quite a bit, to include not only the Venezuelans, but also the CIA, indigenous groups, some unionists, the international right and seemingly any appropriate group that comes to mind.

Ecuador’s economy is tied intricately to Colombia’s, and is not a rentier single product exporter as is Venezuela. As such, the Ecuadoran economy is not as vulnerable as Venezuela’s to international market forces. It is vulnerable to disabling socialist government economic policies, however. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: El Universo, “Ecuador: Marchas de rechazo y apoyo al gobierno en varias ciudades” (Ecuador: Marches supporting and rejecting the government in several cities), *El Universo* (Guayaquil), 11 June, 2015, <http://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2015/06/10/nota/4954827/marchas-protesta-apoyo-gobierno-varias-ciudades-ecuador>

“Groups demonstrated against the legislative proposal of the Redistribution of the Wealth law, better known as the law of inheritances, proposes new taxes on patrimonies. This Wednesday, for the third consecutive day, groups in favor and against the regime occupied some streets of Quito and Guayaquil. There were also concentrations of people in other cities such as Cuenca, Ambato, Latacunga and Ibarra. The opposition has self-convoked these mass events by way of social networks.”

Source: El Universal, “Correa alerta presencia de ‘venezolanos reaccionarios’ en Ecuador” (Correa warns about presence of ‘Venezuelan reactionaries’ in Ecuador), *El Universal*, Caracas, 20 Jun, 2015, <http://www.eluniversal.com/internacional/150620/correa-alerta-presencia-de-venezolanos-reaccionarios-en-ecuador>

“Reactionary, resentful Venezuelans have infiltrated so that they can make this show on the buses and worry the people. We are advised to grab them and leave them at the border or put them on a plane so they can return to their so beloved Miami’, advised the Ecuadoran executive.”

Government and FARC Leaders Sign Demining Agreement

May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *An agreement signed by Colombian government officials and FARC representatives to remove land mines is a step in the right direction to de-escalate the ongoing armed conflict in the country, but will likely take at least a decade to accomplish. While hopes for success are high, it is imperative to look at two possible factors that could impede this process.*

First, it will require a leap of faith on the part of the Colombian government, as it is trusting FARC operators to lead them to the emplaced mines. Tied into this first problem is how well the FARC has actually documented where it emplaced mines to begin with. Current estimates indicate that active landmines are in at least 688 of the country's 1,119 municipalities, but without exact geo-coordinates, it will be necessary to isolate possible minefields before actual excavation can begin. Even covering a small area of 4-10 meters suspected of having mines can take up to 24 hours, meaning that the process itself will be tedious.

Second, the project will not conclude until around 2025 and will require at least \$(USD) 200 million, as reported by Colombian open source news channels. This decade-long project will also require additional training for thousands of Colombian soldiers, as they will play a pivotal role in actually removing the mines. At present, the National Army Demining Battalion (BIDES) has 500 trained soldiers; the plan is to train an additional 9,500.

*Regardless of possible roadblocks associated with making Colombia a safer place, it appears that peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC are achieving unprecedented progress. Furthermore, with international support, it is likely that thousands of mines currently in place will soon be safely removed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)***



Source: "Gobierno y Farc llegan a acuerdo sobre desminado (Government and FARC Leaders Sign Demining Agreement)." El Espectador. Accessed from <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/paz/gobierno-y-farc-llegan-acuerdo-sobre-desminado-articulo-548125>

Government and FARC Leaders Sign Demining Agreement

This spring, Colombian government officials and FARC representatives announced their agreement to begin removing land mines previously emplaced by the guerilla organization. This historic announcement was made as part of peace talks being held in La Havana, Cuba during a press conference.

Additional sections of the agreement stipulate guidelines to remove rudimentary explosive devices, unused ammunition, and other explosives materials hidden in weapon caches within FARC controlled territories.

Who Will Be Responsible for Removing the Mines?

As reported by this source, Colombian soldiers, FARC members, and international NGO groups supervised by a team of Norwegian explosive experts will spearhead this project. FARC members will be responsible for identifying mine locations in addition to helping remove them. While participating in this capacity, they will not wear uniforms or carry weapons. Colombian soldiers from the National Army Demining Battalion (BIDES) will also play a pivotal role in disabling the mines under the supervision of the specialists from Norway.

Colombia Second only to Afghanistan in Number of Landmine Accidents

A definitive agreement to tackle the landmine problem in Colombia could not have come sooner as the country currently ranks second only to Afghanistan in the number of landmine accidents, with more than 11,000 victims in the past 25 years. Worse still, an estimated 800,000 Colombian civilians are at risk of stepping on a landmine as they walk to their fields, to school or to market, with 688 municipalities affected.

Finding the Mines

One of the largest challenges of the demining process is determining where they are actually located. According to a FARC deserter named Diomedes, "whenever my commander felt we were surrounded they planted landmines." And even though he said commanders usually kept maps of the minefields they laid, one leader fell victim to a mine. "He forgot where the mines were and he stepped on one," he says.

Demining is painstaking work. In this field three mines were found in an area of 3,100 square metres. Photograph: Sibylla Brodzinski for the Guardian. Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/25/former-farc-guerrilla-colombian-landmine-legacy>

Mexican Drug Cartel Shoots Down Military Helicopter

May 2015

Source: “El lanzacohetes que derribó aeronave en Jalisco, un “caza helicópteros” usado por 70 Ejércitos (Rocket Launcher That Shot Down Military Helicopter is Used by More than 70 Armies).” Animal Politico. Accessed from <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2015/05/cartel-de-jalisco-ataco-helicoptero-como-lo-hacen-terroristas-en-somalia-irak-o-afganistan/>

OE Watch Commentary: *Gunmen associated with the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco shot down a Mexican military helicopter on 1 May 2015 in the western state of Jalisco, killing three soldiers. This incident is of particular significance, as it marks the first time in Mexican history that a drug cartel utilized an RPG-7 to shoot down a military aircraft. Apart from its success in downing the French-made Cougar helicopter, this incident also highlights cartel proficiency in utilizing high-powered weaponry, as pointed out by this source.*

Mexican Drug Cartels and RPG-7 Possession

It is no secret that Mexican drug cartels possess RPG-7 technology, as during the Felipe Calderon administration more than 80 were seized, mainly in the northern sector of the country. In fact, multiple Mexican criminal organizations, including the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, the Sinaloa Cartel, the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco, La Familia Michocana, and Los Caballeros Templarios, are known to purchase these devices on the black market for as little as \$3000. The low cost of the device and its efficiency are likely factors that make it highly desirable to Mexican drug cartels.

Where are the RPG's Coming From?

*As reported by this source, RPG-7s were frequently used by all sides in Central America's armed conflicts in the 1980s. Since then, thousands have been stolen by gangs and resold on the black market. The Honduran government confirmed this activity when it reported that Los Zetas have traveled to the country with the sole intent of purchasing RPG-7s and other high-powered military-grade equipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)***

Weapons and War Training as Precursors for RPG-7 Helicopter Attack

Two factors were required for The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco to take down the military helicopter on May 01, 2015: Powerful firearms and previous training on how to use them. This is because the RPG requires practice to master if one is shooting a target that is beyond point-blank. It is also more difficult to shoot a moving target than a stationary target and the Cougar Helicopter downed by the cartel was armored and capable of flying up to 250 km/hour.

Other Cartels in Possession of Significant Firepower

The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco is not the only drug cartel that has an arsenal of RPG-7s. Groups including the Gulf cartel, Los Zetas, the Sinaloa Cartel, the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco, La Familia Michocana, and Los Caballeros Templarios also possess them. These groups are also known to possess fragmentation grenades, .50 caliber Barret rifles, M-60s, .30-caliber Browning machine guns, and grenade launchers.

Supply

Thousands of RPG-7s were used by all sides in the region's conflicts in the 1980s. Since then, gangs have stolen many from lingering stockpiles in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras to sell them on the black market. The Honduran government reports that it lost 22 RPG-7s and several rockets in a single 2010 theft. Many of these stolen devices later resurfaced in Mexico and Colombia. Regarding the attack on 01 May, it is not known where this specific RPG-7 device was purchased from.



Source: “Rpg-7”. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rpg-7.jpg#/media/File:Rpg-7.jpg>

The Hair-Raising Business of Assassins for Hire

13 April 2014

OE Watch Commentary:

John, an informant working for the news media source Clarin, lays out an interesting account in this article of how Colombian sicarios (hitmen) are contracted by narcos to carry out murders in Argentina. The process is quick and murders can be completed in as little as 24 hours. In fact, every detail is firmly in place before the sicario even arrives in country and mistakes are not tolerated. If everything is done correctly, this source reported that a single kill may net the sicario \$(USD) 20,000. More interesting still is the background of the average sicario.

A criminal investigation center in Risaralda, Colombia, conducted a study based on 630 minors arrested between 1 and 8 September 2007. Of these minors, 63% were accused of drug-trafficking crimes while the rest were accused of murder, kidnapping, and extortion. All were between the ages of 14 and 18, and the majority had been doing drugs since the age of nine. Other commonalities among the minors were that they all grew up in dangerous neighborhoods, they had all been abused physically or sexually, and none had education pass the second grade.

*These factors are not coincidental, as powerful narcos gravitate towards contracting the young, poor, and disenfranchised to work among their ranks for multiple reasons. First, they are swayed by the temptation to make quick money. Second, without education they do not have plentiful options to make a decent living. Third, in crime-heavy regions of drug-infested cities, being a successful sicario is associated with local fame and fortune. The downside to choosing the life of a sicario is that it is very short-lived. As reported by Clarin, the average age of death of a successful sicario is 25. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)***

Source: "El escalofriante "negocio" de los asesinatos por encargo (The Hair-Raising Business of Assassins for Hire)." Clarin. Accessed on March 17, 2015 from http://www.clarin.com/policiales/escalofriante-negocio-asesinatos-encargo_0_1119488117.html

The Hair-Raising Business of Assassins for Hire

John lights a cigarette and closes his eyes. Looking back, he remembers the party was on a Friday night at 10 PM in the same building as always. There were more than 100 Colombians celebrating a birthday just off of Rivadavia Avenue in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Plates with cocaine and marijuana were abundant and conversations revolved around new business associates, whose cocaine shipments had made it to their destinations, and who owed debt. At these same parties, there was always someone listening. If the information was valuable, it would be taken back to narcos in Colombia who tended to solve problems with a bullet from hired assassins known as sicarios.

John understood the narco world better than most. In fact, he was privy to key locations of safe houses in Mexico, Colombia, and Spain where he was responsible for guarding multimillion dollar cash and cocaine shipments. He was also responsible for hiring hitmen to take care of "problems" outside of Colombia while working in Argentina. All it took was a simple phone call from Buenos Aires back to Colombia asking if someone wanted to do a "job" which was code for asking if they were willing to kill for pay. The thing is, there were just too many who were happy to do the job. Self-proclaimed sicarios wanted to live the life of a narco in which they could afford luxuries and travel the world.

How the Process of Contracting a Hitman Works:

A phone call from Argentina starts the contracting process and the hitman is told to shower, shave, and put their best clothes on. They are then given an address where they will receive money to purchase their airline tickets. In another home, passports and false travel documents will be available for pick-up in as little as 5 hours. The whole process moves very quickly. After passing through customs in Buenos Aires, the sicario is given an address where they will receive information regarding their target, how much they will be paid, and where the hit should take place. The sicario knows that if they arrive to that address even five minutes late, they could lose the job and be sent back to Colombia where they may be killed for their simple mistakes. The same consequences apply if the sicario misses their intended mark. However, if the sicario arrives ready to work, they will get out of the taxi at the given address where a car will be waiting for them.

At that point, the sicario will finally be shown a photo of the victim and will be provided with a weapon, a motorcycle, and a driver. Once on the back of the motorcycle with the victim in sight, the gunmen will turn around and rest his back on the back of the driver for better control of the weapon. The thing is, all sicarios hired to do jobs abroad are experienced and know exactly what to do because to get the job in the first place, they must have at least 100 confirmed kills in Colombia. As for the drivers of the motorcycles, they are also experienced and come from cities including Cali, Medellin, Bucaramanga, and Cartagena.

How Much is a Sicario Paid for a Job Abroad?

In the case of a Colombian sicario in Colombia, first time jobs for new clients are free. In the case of jobs abroad, the going rate is \$20,000 unless the target is of extremely high value. Once the job is finished, the sicario will be given \$10,000 immediately as this is the maximum amount that they can take through customs without raising any red flags. The rest of the money will be delivered to his or her family before they even arrive back to Colombia.

Who is Responsible for Obtaining the motorcycle?

In the case of Argentina, Colombians who are not residents cannot buy a motorcycle under their name. For this reason, drug traffickers offer Argentinian residents between 1000 and 2000 pesos (\$120-230 USD) as an incentive to purchase a bike. Those most commonly purchased for this type of work are the Honda Tornado 250 or the Yamaha DR 350.

Travel Itinerary for a Sicario

Hitmen contracted to kill in Argentina arrive and leave on the same day if possible. Immediately after the kill, they are dropped off to a waiting vehicle and driven across the border. The drivers are chofers or bodyguards of narcos. Cars used for these transports are generally rented from agencies in the city. The owners of these cars are many times Argentinian but have no idea what their cars are being utilized for. Agencies on the other hand do realize it.

Why Colombian Sicarios are preferred by Colombians?

The only country in which Colombians contract hitmen locally is in Mexico. In the rest of the world, they rely on their own countrymen who many times started in the business as early as 9 years old as smalltime drug dealers. At the age of 10, they begin distributing drugs in schools and practice their marksmanship. And as early as 13 years of age, they begin their careers as sicarios.

The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco “Grows Like Cancer” in Mexico

9 April 2015

Source: “El Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación se extiende como cáncer en México (The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco Growing Like Cancer in Mexico).” Excelsior. Accessed on May 05, 2015 from <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/04/09/1017811>

OE Watch Commentary: *The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco (CJNG) is a growing threat in Mexico, as it is a group that is capable of assassinating government officials and police officers, of producing its own weapons, and of setting up paramilitary-type ambushes with little to no preparation. Recent attacks and the discovery of an AR-15 weapons factory further support these assertions. On 9 April 2015, the CJNG ambushed and subsequently killed 15 State Police officers in what Mexican officials are citing as one of the worst attacks against police in recent years. Weeks earlier in March, the same group carried out vicious attacks against Federal Police in Ocotlán, Jalisco, leaving five dead. Both attacks involved paramilitary-type tactics, including narco-blockades and strategic ambushes. Months earlier in October 2014, authorities discovered a home-grown weapons factory dedicated to producing AR-15 weapons for the group.*

These incidents, along with the CJNG’s rapidly expanding territorial control, have raised concerns as to how a criminal organization that possessed a limited power base just one year ago is now growing like an uncontrollable cancer in Mexico. Some open-source channels have even speculated that this rapid growth could aid the group in gaining control of Sinaloa Cartel territories, which would be a significant feat, given that the latter is currently classified as one of the most powerful organized crime groups in the world.

*A 9-year counterdrug offensive implemented by the Mexican government has resulted in the arrests of key cartel leaders from powerful groups such as Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel, and Los Caballeros Templarios. Originally, the CJNG worked as an armed group to the Sinaloa Cartel and later played a key role in debilitating the powerful Los Caballeros Templarios in Michoacan. Furthermore, Nemesio Oseguera, the leader of the organization, has managed to escape the governmental offensive unscathed, which has further contributed to the rising success of this criminal enterprise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)***

The New Generation Cartel of Jalisco “Grows Like Cancer” in Mexico

Since March 2015, the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco has carried out vicious attacks against federal and state police officers on at least two separate occasions. The most recent attack resulted in the deaths of 15 Federal Police officers and was conducted in retaliation for the arrest of a fellow cartel member. It also involved the use of grenade launchers and narco-blockades which have become popular amongst Mexican cartels over the last 5 years. The CJNG further gained notoriety in October 2014 when authorities dismantled a home-grown AR-15 weapons facility in Jalisco which clearly demonstrates that the group possesses highly sophisticated and very precise software needed to develop their own weapons.

According to some security experts, emboldened actions and home-grown weapons production are proof that the CJNG is seeking to establish definitive control of key drug trafficking areas in Central Mexico where they have proliferated as part of what is being called a “hydra-effect.” In short, this theory asserts that the arrests of key cartel leaders in Mexico has allowed for the CJNG to rise up and fill the power vacuum. Currently the CJNG controls methamphetamine routes that span from Jalisco to Cancun to the Texas border. In Michoacan, they have seized territories the formerly belonged to Los Caballeros Templarios. Security experts believe that if the CJNG continues to grow at its current pace, that it could potentially oust the Sinaloa Cartel from its ranking as the most powerful cartel in Mexico.



Source: “AR15 4” by Joe Cereghino - Flickr: IMG_9568.jpg. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AR15_4.jpg#/media/File:AR15_4.jpg

A Controversial Project: Building the Kra Canal

8 June 2015

“...the strategic and security importance of such a linkage...would significantly affect the balance of power in the region with implications as far as Indonesia or even West Australia.”

OE Watch Commentary: *The idea of building a canal through the Kra Isthmus, the narrowest part of the Malay Peninsula in southern Thailand, has been brought up at various times over the past three centuries. Most recently, on 18 May, media reports emerged out of Taiwan and Malaysia announcing that China and Thailand had signed a memorandum of understanding to build it. The agreement was reportedly struck during investment cooperation talks in Guangzhou, China.*

The day following the reports about the agreement, officials from both China and Thailand denied the claims. It is hard to determine whether or not these reports were true, but since 18 May there have been a number of articles written about the potential pros and cons of such a project. The following five articles offer a small sampling of ideas from different perspectives.

The first article, from Taiwan-based Want China Times, offers the perspective of and commentary from China-based experts. According to the article, a “motive behind the project [would be] China’s fear that the United States could blockade the Strait of Malacca, cutting off the country’s oil supply.” It cites a Macau-based military analyst as saying that the canal will improve the PLA Navy’s ability to react to international incidents. For example, China might react more quickly to an evacuation, such as the recent one in Yemen after the civil war escalated there.

The second article offers a Malaysian perspective. The author argues that building the Kra Canal will cause major changes in the world’s shipping map, with ports of Singapore and Malaysia suffering the greatest impact. While the article does not specify what the adverse effects would be, it is evident that the concern lies in the potential for an unfavorable economic impact. As the article points out, “Once this canal is ready, Chinese ships will not need to pass through Malaysia and Singapore to go across Southeast Asia...” It goes on to express concern over the Kra Canal affecting Port Klang and all other ports that play a role in the Strait of Malacca. About one-quarter of world trade passes through the

(continued)

Source: Liang Yunxiang and Li Zhenfu, “China to Team Up on Long-Proposed Kra Isthmus Canal,” Want China Times, 18 May 2015, <<http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20150518000069>>.

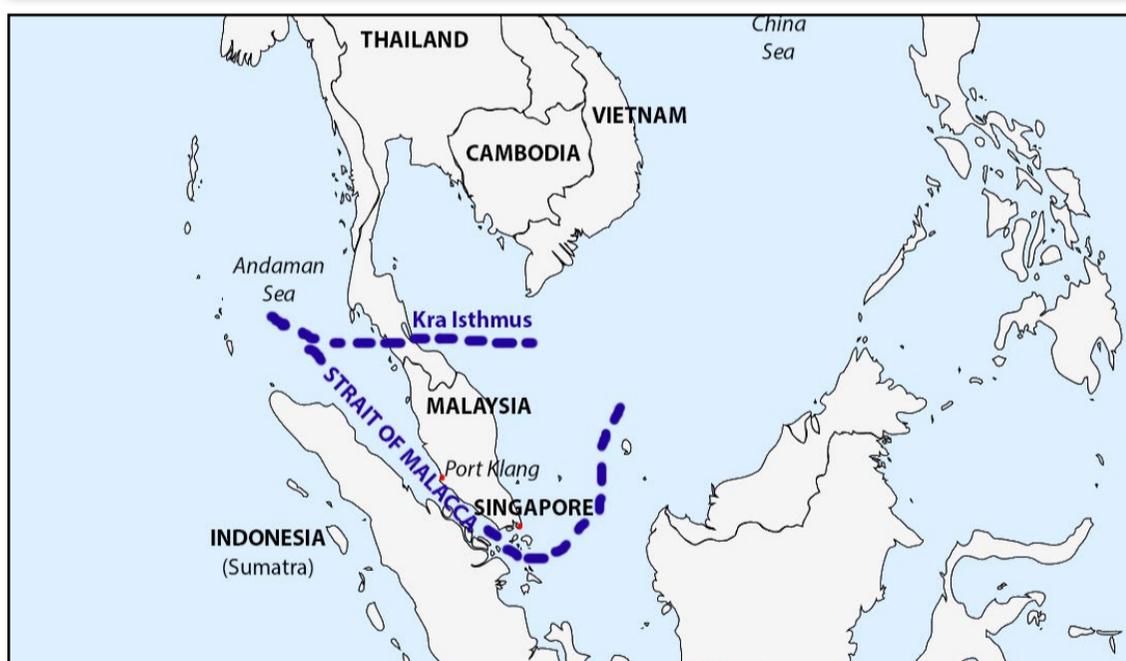
China to Team Up on Long-Proposed Kra Isthmus Canal

China and Thailand recently agreed in Guangzhou on a canal project through the Kra Isthmus, the narrowest part of the Malay peninsula in southern Thailand, which means the project, in the pipeline for years, may start construction soon, according to the website of Hong Kong-based Oriental Daily.

The agreement follows on from efforts by China to hammer out the implementation of its New Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives, with the ongoing push to establish a China-Pakistan economic corridor and a Sino-Russia high-speed rail project...

Another motive behind the project is China’s fear that the US could blockade the Strait of Malacca, cutting off the country’s oil supply, according to the website.

Macau-based military analyst Huang Dong said that the canal will also improve the PLA Navy’s ability to react to international incidents. The PLA Navy recently evacuated citizens of several countries from Yemen, for example, after the civil war there escalated.



Source: L Cai Xiaowei, “(航道缩短1200公里·马新料冲击大 中泰开凿克拉运河) China, Thailand To Build Kra Canal,” Nanyang Siang Pau, 18 May 2015, <[http://nanyang.com.my/node/701352?tid=702...>](http://nanyang.com.my/node/701352?tid=702...).

China, Thailand To Build Kra Canal

... After this plan is implemented and the canal is opened for navigation, there will be major changes in the world’s shipping map. Major ports of Singapore and Malaysia are expected to suffer the greatest impact...

...Malaysia is aware of the threat that this new shipping route will pose to the port...

Once this canal is ready, Chinese ships will not need to pass through Malaysia and Singapore to go across Southeast Asia. It has been described as escaping the “dilemma of the Strait of Malacca.”

He (Kong Cho Ha, Chairman of the Port Klang Authority) pointed out that the Kra Canal will not only affect Port Klang but all ports nationwide including the ports in Penang, Malacca, Johor and other places. All [Malaysian ports] need to jointly study this matter.

Continued: A Controversial Project: Building the Kra Canal

Strait of Malacca, including about 80 percent of China's oil imports from the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere.

The third article, from a Singapore source, also hones in on the economic impact of such a project. First, it would likely reduce the number of ships travelling through Singapore (at present, seven percent of Singapore's gross domestic product in 2014 comes from the maritime industry). On the other hand, such a project would be good for both Thailand and China. With regard to Thailand, the country's economy "could do with a boost from such a project." Some of the benefits include port fees, tolls, foreign investment, and infrastructure development. For China, building the canal would result in cost savings, with shortened time and transit. Additionally, it could give an economic boost to China's ports in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Shenzhen.

The fourth article also talks about the economic impact, but goes on to address the possible military benefits. The article, which references Hong Kong magazine Yazhou Zhoukan, explains that currently the United States, due to its alliance with Singapore, has control over the Strait of Malacca, giving US warships unlimited access and allowing the US Navy to quickly seal off the pivotal strait. The article also suggests that building the Kra Canal would "allow China to break the stranglehold the US has in the region."

*Finally, the last article, published by a Thai daily newspaper, expresses some concern over the possibility of building the canal. According to an expert interviewed in the article, "The strategic and security importance of such a linkage...would significantly affect the balance of power in the region with implications as far as Indonesia or even West Australia." The article talks briefly about the new balance of power in the region and the power struggles going on between China and the United States. According to the article, one way Thailand might overcome possible economic and security concerns is by turning such a project, should it come to fruition, to its advantage by setting up a naval base at the site or implementing some other endeavor, which would provide both an economic and societal benefit for years to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)***

Source: Chew Hui Min, "Renewed Hype Over China-Thai Canal Project: 5 Things About the Kra Canal," Straits Times, 21 May 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/renewed-hype-over-china-thai-canal-project-5-things-about-the-kra-ca>>.

Renewed Hype Over China-Thai Canal Project: 5 Things About the Kra Canal

The waterway is likely to reduce the number of ships travelling through Singapore. The maritime industry contributed about 7 per cent to Singapore's GDP in 2014.

Impact for Thailand and China

Thailand's economy could do with a boost from such a project, and potential benefits include port fees, tolls, foreign investment and infrastructure developments around the region.

For China, the shorter route would mean time and cost savings when importing oil from Africa and the Middle East. It could give a boost to China's ports in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Source: "Beijing's Thai Canal Aims Military as Well as Economic: Report," Want China Times, 1 June 2015, <<http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20150601000001&cid=1501>>.

Beijing's Thai Canal Aims Military as Well as Economic: Report

Currently, the United States, thanks to its alliance with Singapore, has control over the Strait of Malacca. US warships have no restrictions when it comes to using Singapore's naval facilities, and if there is an "incident" involving China, the US Navy can quickly seal off the pivotal strait.

However, if the Thai Canal is opened up and controlled by Beijing, it will allow China to break the stranglehold the US has in the region, the Hong Kong magazine Yazhou Zhoukan added.

Source: Nophakhun Limsamarnphun, "Kra Canal to Have Huge Security and Social Implications," The Nation, 8 June 2015, <<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Kra-Canal-to-have-huge-security-and-social-implica-30261841.html>>.

Kra Canal to Have Huge Security and Social Implications

... the strategic and security importance of such a linkage...would significantly affect the balance of power in the region with implications as far as Indonesia or even West Australia.

... moving it (the project) ahead will be an uphill task, as Thailand has to overcome significant negative factors before such an ambitious scheme could take off. From my perspective, the Kra Canal idea can either boost or hurt our national security," he said.

"It depends how we approach it or design our strategic security platform. If we could overcome the security challenge and turn it into an advantage, like setting up a naval base at the site, etc, that will be positive, and huge economic as well as social benefits may follow for decades to come.

Piracy on the Rise in Southeast Asia

25 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *While Somalia has been a hotbed for piracy, according to the following article, Southeast Asia now makes up 55 percent of global cases, with the more serious ones taking place in the Strait of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca. In some cases, organized syndicates are even hijacking oil tankers, which is considered a “grade 1 incident,” a category for the most serious events.*

The article goes on to compare the difference in occurrences of piracy in Somalia versus Southeast Asia. For example, piracy involving oil tankers in Southeast Asia has been on the rise since April 2014. Since January of this year there have been seven cases of piracy and robbery involving oil tankers. On the other hand, in the three years prior to this there were no reported cases of “grade 1 incidents.” In the first three months of this year there have been no incidents reported in Somalia.

The increase in Southeast Asian incidents might be attributed to heightened security measures off the coast of Somalia and, as one source in the article noted, the allure of higher quality oil. Approximately 15 million barrels of oil pass through the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Singapore each day. This constitutes about 80 percent of all oil transported to Northeast Asia. The article notes that more than half of the tankers robbed by pirates depart from Singapore and, according to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, it could be because the oil refined in Singapore is of a higher quality.

*The increased frequency of hijacked ships, especially oil tankers, in the Southeast Asian region is of great concern to authorities. Pottengal Mukundan, Director of the International Maritime Bureau, expresses concern that if no action is taken, “in the future the criminals may employ a higher degree of violence when they attack ships and commit crimes.” It is likely that there will be an increase in patrols and cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)***

“As the situation regarding pirate attacks and looting in Southeast Asia worsens, law enforcement agencies in this region have to boost their patrols and cooperation...”

Source: “占全球案件55% 马新海域最严重 东南亚海盗猖獗 (Pirate Activities Rampant in Southeast Asia, Make Up 55 Percent of Cases Worldwide; Most Serious in Waters off Malaysia, Singapore),” Nanyang Siang Pau, 25 May 2015, <<http://www.nanyang.com/node/702930>>.

Pirate Activities Rampant in Southeast Asia, Make Up 55 Percent of Cases Worldwide; Most Serious in Waters off Malaysia, Singapore

The situation involving pirates robbing ships and stealing oil in Southeast Asia started to worsen from April last year. A total of 15 cases were reported last year.

Meanwhile, the number of plunder cases that are categorized as random crimes has also increased substantially. A total of 20 cases have been reported in the first three months of this year and 13 out of the 20 cases happened in the Strait of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca.

The busy Strait of Malacca and Strait of Singapore see the passage of more than 60,000 ships every year. They are also major shipping routes to the Middle East and East Asia. Approximately 15 million barrels of oil are transported via the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Singapore everyday, which constitutes approximately 80 percent of the total volume of oil transported to Northeast Asia.

It is noteworthy that more than half of the tankers robbed by pirates departed from Singapore. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) believes that oil produced in refineries in Singapore may have been targeted because of the higher quality of the oil.

Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Nicholas Teo, deputy director of the ReCAAP Information Sharing Center, said that fuel is expensive and the demand for fuel from the black market remains “strong.” The large profits from selling stolen fuel are a huge temptation, prompting outlaws to rob oil tankers and steal fuel.

...As the situation regarding pirate attacks and looting in Southeast Asia worsens, law enforcement agencies in this region have to boost their patrols and cooperation,...



Source: “Defense.gov photo essay 100531-N-0553R-252” by Petty Officer 2nd Class Ja’lon A. Rhinehart - This Image was released by the United States Navy with the ID 100531-N-0553R-252. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_100531-N-0553R-252.jpg#/media/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_100531-N-0553R-252.jpg

Marcos Expresses Concern Over Bangsamoro Police Turning into a Private Military

2 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Bangsamoro, a region within Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines, has faced many challenges and requirements in its path to achieving complete autonomy. (See also OE Watch May 2013.) For example, a political and legal structure must be established and a local Bangsamoro police force is needed. However, general consensus on either one of these fronts seems to be difficult to reach.

According to the first article, which was published in April, there was a provision in the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), a draft law intended to establish the Bangsamoro political structure in the Philippines, that gives the chief minister operational, administrative, and disciplinary control over police forces in the region. However, a committee chairman stated that this provision would be deleted. "We will have to follow the PNP [Philippine National Police] law, which puts all police units throughout the country under a single chain of command. There cannot be a different chain of command for the Bangsamoro region," he said.

In the second article, which was published in June, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Senator of the 16th Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, voiced his concern, questioning the chain of command of the Bangsamoro police. According to the article, he argued that the relationship of the Bangsamoro police chain of command is not clear and that this could cause it to turn into private armies.

In the third article, which was also published in June, Marcos explained that the provision in the draft BBL that gives the Bangsamoro chief minister the power of operational control and supervision over the Bangsamoro police is of concern because this type of authority has never been granted to any other local government official before. So, evidently the draft BBL is still under dispute. Without a BBL that all sides can agree on, the country cannot move forward with its plan of setting up the autonomous region, and it will likely be difficult to control the region once it is set up. Additionally, if the police force does turn into a private army it could have unexpected consequences. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Sen. Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. on Tuesday questioned the chain of command of the Bangsamoro police, citing that it may turn into a private army of the chief minister.”

Source: Jess Diaz, “House Committee to Put Bangsamoro Police Under PNP,” The Philippine Star, 22 April 2015, <<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/04/22/1446552/house-committee-put-bangsamoro-police-under-pnp>>.

House committee to put Bangsamoro police under PNP

The House ad hoc committee on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will put police forces in the envisioned new autonomous Muslim region under the Philippine National Police (PNP), and not under the regional chief minister.

“We will delete the provision in the draft BBL giving the chief minister operational, administrative and disciplinary control over police forces in the region,” Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, committee chairman, said in a television interview.

“We will have to follow the PNP Law, which puts all police units throughout the country under a single chain of command. There cannot be a different chain of command for the Bangsamoro region,” he said.

Source: Patricia Lourdes Viray, “Marcos: Bansamoro Police May Become Private Army,” The Philippine Star, 2 June 2015, <<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/06/02/1461448/marcos-bangsamoro-police-may-become-private-army>>.

Marcos: Bansamoro Police May Become Private Army

Sen. Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. on Tuesday questioned the chain of command of the Bangsamoro police, citing that it may turn into a private army of the chief minister.

“It is not clear what exactly is the relationship of the Bangsamoro police when it comes to the chain of command. Where does the chief minister come in the chain of command?” Marcos asked.

...A few senators have earlier raised concerns on the proposed BBL, questioning its constitutionality.

On the other hand, the Citizens Peace Council’s review on the proposed measure declared that the BBL was constitutional but still needs refinement.

Source: “Bangsamoro Police Part of PNP,” Business World Online, 2 June 2015, <<http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Nation&title=&145bangsamoro-police-part-of-pnp&8217&id=109018>>.

Bangsamoro Police Part of PNP

According to Mr. Marcos, the provision in the draft BBL which gives the Bangsamoro Chief Minister the power of “operational control and supervision” over the Bangsamoro police is especially alarming as that authority has not been granted to any other local government official before.

“The reason why the Philippine National Police was taken out of local control was that it wouldn’t become a private army of the elected political official,” Mr. Marcos said in Filipino.

Citing his experience as Ilocos Norte Governor, Mr. Marcos said that provincial government was unable to issue any directive to the police in the same manner the PNP provincial director does...

Indonesian Leader Reaffirms the Government's Commitment to Religious Harmony

3 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Since its independence Indonesia has regularly faced internal religious conflict, including in Aceh province from 1976 to 2005. In addressing each of these factors, the federal government realizes that resolving religious conflict requires a multifaceted strategy. The accompanying article in Kompas discusses Vice-President Jusuf Kalla's presentation regarding the importance of religious harmony to a group of 250 participants at the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace in Bandung, West Java. Through the ideas set forth in Kalla's presentation, the federal government presents the tools to manage religious conflicts within its borders.

Indonesia is a country of 253 million citizens, including 87.2% Muslim, 7% Christian, 2.9% Roman Catholic, 1.7% Hindu, and 0.9% Buddhist and Confucian spread across 497 administrative districts. In setting its goals for religious harmony on the federal level, the federal government in Jakarta realizes the benefits of religious tolerance among local communities as a means to maintain peace throughout the country.

In his presentation Kalla also comments on political and economic instability serving as the root causes of Muslim extremism in Iraq, Syria, and Aceh province in Indonesia. Kalla's statements are noteworthy for two reasons: 1) the Indonesia federal government controls the system of law, but local districts administer federal laws, and 2) he acknowledges that different factors (religion, economy, and politics) cause religious conflicts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "JK: Extremism Grows Easily if the Country is Volatile," Kompas.com, 3 June 2015, <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/06/03/14202691/JK.Ekstremisme.Mudah.Berkembang.jika.Negara.Bergejolak>

Indonesian Leader Reaffirms the Government's Commitment to Religious Harmony

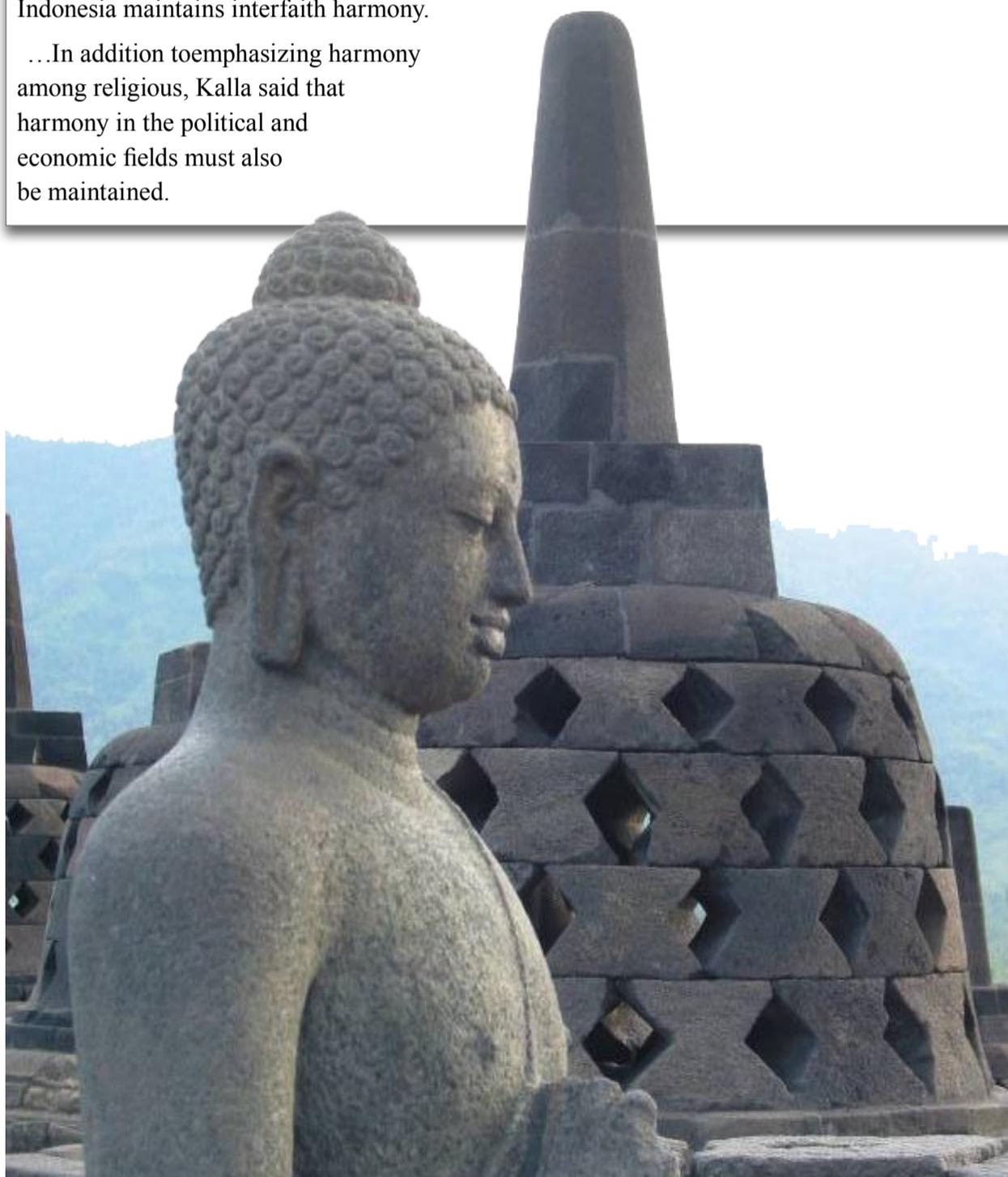
Vice President Jusuf Kalla emphasized the importance of maintaining harmony in a country, including inter-religious harmony. According to Kalla, each religious community should respect and value in order to create peace.

...Conflicts are more caused in a state system when there is a failure to protect its citizens. Moreover, there are political and economic problems that trigger the emergence of extremism.

"The same thing happened in Aceh. Not because of religious issues, but because of economic problems, the distribution of natural resources, because of its rich gas," he said.

In fact, said Kalla, solidarity is created through the system of religion. He also pointed out how Indonesia maintains interfaith harmony.

...In addition to emphasizing harmony among religious, Kalla said that harmony in the political and economic fields must also be maintained.



Source: "Borobudur Indonesia 2010 Bennylin 58" by Bennylin - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bobobudur_Indonesia_2010_Bennylin_58.jpg#/media/File:Bobobudur_Indonesia_2010_Bennylin_58.jpg

ASEAN-Chinese Declaration Put to the Test

10 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Filipino

Presidential Communications Secretary

Herminio Coloma Jr. stated that bilateral talks between the Philippines and China will not be easy as the President pushes forward that all parties must respect the ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. The accompanying article in The Manila Times reports official statements from President Benigno Aquino III regarding China's offer to share its facilities in the South China Sea ahead of the G7 summit, which plans to issue a statement expressing concern about unilateral efforts to assert sovereignty claims in the disputed sea.

Coloma comments, "[The Declaration of Conduct] was done in 2002 and based on that, [the signatories] must flesh out a legally binding Code of Conduct because the issues do not involve only two countries. There are many others, usually more than two in each disputed territory, features or maritime entitlements in the [West Philippine Sea]."

Coloma's statements present a true test for the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. The Declaration was signed on 4 November 2002 by all ASEAN members – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesian, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – and China. According to the Declaration, disputing parties are to resolve

Source: "PH Rejects China Sharing Offer," The Manila Times, 7 June 2015, <http://www.manilatimes.net/ph-rejects-china-sharing-offer/189985/>

Presidential Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said any bilateral talks between the two countries would not be easy in light of the Philippines' staunch position in favor of a more binding Code of Conduct among various claimants.

In an interview over state-run Radyo ng Bayan, Coloma noted that while they welcome the statement of Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua that Beijing is against any military solution to the dispute and is open to the possibility of holding bilateral talks to defuse tensions, the other claimants from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) should not be left out.

But Coloma argued that the sea dispute is not only between Manila and Beijing and that the Chinese government itself had signed the Declaration of Conduct that it must obey and respect.

"It was done in 2002 and based on that, [the signatories] must flesh out a legally binding Code of Conduct because the issues do not involve only two countries. There are many others, usually more than two in each disputed territory, features or maritime entitlements in the [West Philippine Sea]," he explained.

Also on Sunday, the Philippines welcomed reports that a G7 summit will express concern about the maritime dispute in the South China Sea.

Coloma said Manila had been seeking more global attention on the issue after Aquino raised it in his numerous overseas visits.

their territorial disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, through friendly consultations and negotiations, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law.

The article also reports that the Philippines welcome that the G7 summit will express concern about the maritime dispute in the South China Sea. Coloma said Manila had been seeking more global attention on the issue after Aquino raised it in his numerous overseas visits.

*With support from the Philippines, the ASEAN-Chinese declaration is being put to the test, as the Philippines is committed to using the declaration's stated goals. By utilizing the ASEAN way of constructive engagement, the Philippines hopes to balance conflicting interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)***



Secretary Coloma Jr at Malacañan Palace.

Source: <http://media.philstar.com/images/the-philippine-star/headlines/20140616/malacanang-herminio-coloma.jpg>.

Cambodian Press Notes Potential US Army Stockpile

12 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: According to The Phnom Penh Post, Cambodia is one of four countries, alongside Bangladesh, Malaysia and Vietnam, that are currently being considered as a potential host for cache of disaster response equipment that the US Army is planning to pre-position.

This year, 9 March marked the sixth iteration of the annual bi-lateral US-Royal Cambodian Armed Forces military exercise, Angkor Sentinel, which focused on providing humanitarian assistance and responding to disasters. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: Source: “US Army weighing cache in Cambodia,” The Phnom Penh Post, 5 June 2015, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/us-army-weighing-cache-cambodia>

The US Army is currently considering Cambodia as a possible host for some of its extensive stockpiles of equipment kept overseas, known as “prepositioned stocks”.

...such stocks can be placed to facilitate rapid regional deployment, and to foster bilateral and regional military cooperation, the US Army Pacific director of public affairs, Colonel Rumi Nielson-Green, said yesterday that any equipment stored in Cambodia would be “primarily related to disaster response and mitigation”.

Cambodia is one of four countries, alongside Bangladesh, Malaysia and Vietnam, being considered as potential new hosts for caches of equipment...

There is currently no agreement in place between Cambodia and the United States over the US Army storing such supplies in the Kingdom, and Nielson-Green was keen to stress the consultative process that would be involved prior to any decision. “The content of any future activity set would conform to the desires and needs of the accepting country and would be stored in accordance with host nation rules.”



Source: “Defense.gov photo essay 110823-Z-ZZ999-012” by Sgt. Joseph Rivera-Rebolledo - This Image was released by the United States Armed Forces with the ID 110823-Z-ZZ999-012. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_110823-Z-ZZ999-012.jpg#/media/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_110823-Z-ZZ999-012.jpg

Pirates of Hijacked Oil Tanker off the Coast of Malaysia Detained in Vietnam

20 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Eight pirates were arrested by Vietnamese authorities for hijacking the oil tanker MT Orkim Harmony, according to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.*

Deputy Director Admiral Maritime Datuk Ahmad Puzi Ab Kahar said in the accompanying article in Bernama that they were detained near Tho Chu Island after trespassing in Vietnamese waters while sailing in yellow lifeboats in a bid to escape.

The tanker, which was carrying 2.15 million gallons of fuel, went missing on 11 June in Malaysian maritime territory in the South China Sea. Ab Kahar said that the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency has been in touch with the Vietnamese authorities to extradite the pirates to Malaysia.

Finding the pirates was a coordinated effort. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency had contacted all maritime authorities in ASEAN member countries, as well as seeking the cooperation of the United States and Australia, in search of the missing tanker. In addition, they blocked all exit points in the waters off the coast. In doing this, Malaysia was able to cover 4,000 nautical square miles to find the tanker.

Piracy is not a new security concern in Southeast Asia. In the South China Sea alone this is the fourth case of maritime piracy in 2015. Between 1995 and 2013 Southeast Asia as a whole was the location of 41% of the world's pirate attacks. Pirate attacks regularly occur there in the maritime territories of four countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

*Economically, energy resources are a valuable commodity. Using current fuel prices with respect to the MT Orkim Harmony, the fuel in the tanker is valued at \$5.4 million. For this reason, it is expected that pirate attacks on tankers will continue to be a problem. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)***

Source: “Suspek MT Orkim Harmony Ditahan Pihak Berkuasa Vietnam,” Bernama.com 19 June 2015, <http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v8/bm/newsindex.php?id=1145731>

Eight suspects were seized tanker MT Orkim Harmony arrested the Vietnamese authorities, said the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency ...

Deputy Director (Operations) APMM Admiral Maritime Datuk Ahmad Puzi Ab Kahar said they detained near Tho Chu Island, southern Vietnam after the country's waters invaded by a yellow lifeboats while trying to escape.

Ahmad Puzi said he was in touch with the Vietnamese authorities ... to bring criminals to Malaysia.

Source: “Orkim Harmony: Siasatan Awal Menjurus Kepada Kes Rompakan Di Laut,” Bernama.com, 15 June 2015, <http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v8/bm/newsindex.php?id=1144383>

He said the MMEA and the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) has also surrounded the exit in the waters of the country, and has contacted all maritime authorities in ASEAN member countries, as well as to seek the cooperation of the United States and Australia in search of the missing tanker.

RMN also expand the search area to locate the tanker carrying gasoline was report missing ... covering about 4,000 square nautical miles.

Thailand Grants Temporary Amnesty to Members of Southern Insurgent Group

19 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Authorities in Thailand's Narathiwat Province announced that 473 members of southern insurgent groups had signed up for a program granting them temporary amnesty, allowing them to come home during Ramadan. The accompanying article in BenarNews comments on Thai efforts to grant temporary amnesty as the government moves forward with peace talks with insurgent groups during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.*

Registered insurgents are being granted temporary immunity on condition they not commit acts of violence during Ramadan. Compliance is a precondition for peace talks between the two sides, Thai officials said. Arrest warrants will be suspended and the insurgents will be able to return to their families from hiding places, including in Malaysia, which borders Thailand in the south, said Col. Somdej Yotha, Commander of the 151st Infantry Regiment in Narathiwat.

This move to grant temporary immunity comes as peace talks have resumed since March. In April soldiers from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Army Regions in the three southern border provinces also began to withdraw to their respective regions. With the current program, insurgents will receive temporary immunity, with the condition that they will not continue violence in the region, which is 18,331 square kilometers or 3.5% of Thailand's total land area. The Ramadan program covers insurgents who live in Pattani and Yala Provinces, as well as four districts in Songkhla Province. Narathiwat and all of these areas make up the predominantly Muslim Deep South. The map shows ethnic distribution in Southern Thailand. Since 1785 Thailand's southern insurgency has been in a conflict over ethnic divisions between the Malays and Thais.

End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)

Source: "Southeast Asia's Muslims Begin Ramadan," BenarNews. 17 June 2015, <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/ramadan-06172015175949.html>

... authorities in Thailand's Narathiwat province announced that 473 members of southern insurgent groups had signed up for a program granting them temporary amnesty and allowing them to come home during Ramadan.

Arrest warrants for insurgents will be suspended and they will be able to return to their families from hiding places, including in Malaysia, which borders Thailand in the Deep South, said Col. Somdej Yotha, commander of the 151st Infantry Regiment in Narathiwat.

The Ramadan-time program also covers insurgents who live in Pattani and Yala provinces, as well as four districts in Songkhla province. Narathiwat and all of these areas make up the predominantly Muslim Deep South.

Source: "Troop Withdrawals from South in April," 2 March 2015, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/486732/troop-withdrawals-from-south-in-april>

The army will in April begin withdrawing troops deployed to the troubled far South from regiments based in the North, Central and Northeast regions, supreme commander Gen Worapong Sanganeutr said ...



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Souththailandmap.GIF>

ASEAN Reviews Statistics Related to Islamic Extremism in Southeast Asia

25 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: During a three-day conference in Bangkok on “Effective Responses to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Situation in Southeast Asia”, officials state that there are approximately 1,000 foreign-born fighters from Southeast Asia fighting alongside the Islamic State. The accompanying article discusses the conference that presented on foreign-born fighters from Southeast Asia who have joined the Islamic State. These fighters were also recruited into the al-Nusra Front and other splinter groups of al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq.

Among recruits from Southeast Asia, about 300 to 500 were from Indonesia, 200 to 300 from Malaysia, and the rest from other countries. Singapore said it had confirmed two cases. The number from the Philippines was unclear while Thailand has no reports of any citizens joining the groups.

Indonesian terrorism expert Professor Rohan Gunaratna’s comments in AsiaOne describe the importance of preventing Islamic State recruitment in Indonesia. He said that when an area is declared a “province”, resources including foreign fighters move in and join local groups to impose ISIS’ will - this includes its vision of a caliphate. According to Gunaratna, ISIS now has a global vision and is looking to link up with groups around the world.

In February, militants, believed to be returnees, were suspected to have been behind an attempted chlorine bomb attack at a shopping mall in south Jakarta. Indonesian police said it was the first such attack ever attempted in Indonesia and that it resembled tactics employed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Southeast Asia has the population demographics for the Islamic State to continue its recruiting efforts throughout the region. Muslims represent 39.5% of the Southeast Asia’s total population and Muslims in Southeast Asia represent 15.4% of the world’s total Muslim population. Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia each have a Muslim majority in their respective total populations with percentages of Muslims among the total population being 78.80% in Brunei, 87.20% in Indonesia, and 61.30% in Malaysia.

With a large recruiting base to work with, Southeast Asia must prepare itself. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz).**

Source: “SE Asia ‘Must Unite’ to Stop Terror Threat” 24 June 2015, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/601648/se-asia-must-unite-to-stop-terror-threat>

... “Effective Responses to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Situation in Southeast Asia” which started Tuesday in Bangkok, Mr Douglas said about 1,000 FTF from Southeast Asia have gone to fight alongside Islamic State (IS).

They were also recruited into the al-Nusra Front and other splinter groups of al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq.

Of the figure, about 300 to 500 were from Indonesia, 200 to 300 from Malaysia, and the rest from other countries.

Singapore said it had confirmed two cases.

The number from the Philippines was unclear while Thailand has no reports of any citizens joining the groups.

Source: “ISIS war at our doorstep?” 15 June 2015, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/isis-war-our-doorstep>

Indonesia may be declared the next Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) province, said terrorism expert Professor Rohan Gunaratna.

And when an area is declared a “province”, resources including foreign fighters move in and join local groups to impose ISIS’ will - this includes its vision of a caliphate.

Prof Gunaratna said ISIS now has a global vision and is looking to link up with groups around the world.

Prof Gunaratna said that like the experience in Afghanistan, returnees will have even greater resolve coupled with battlefield experience. In February, militants, believed to be returnees, were suspected to have been behind an attempted chlorine bomb attack at a shopping mall in south Jakarta.

Indonesian police said it was the first such attack ever attempted in Indonesia and that it resembled tactics employed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Consequences of the Defection of OMON Commander Gulmurod Khalimov

28 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Ever since the genesis of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), security services among Central Asian states have remained on high alert. In particular, Tajik security services and authorities have felt this anxiety regarding the exit migration of their own citizens (who typically leave from working abroad in Russia) to fight in the ranks of IS. While the Tajik Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) recently developed a strategy of forgiveness and repatriation to Tajik jihadists who, appearing to be repentant, sought to return home, the recent defection of Tajik Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) Commander Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov to the ranks of the IS (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ5HdtBrUN8>) could lead Tajik authorities to reconsider this strategy. This is especially salient in the case of Khalimov, considering that he was recently forgiven and shortly thereafter appointed as the OMON commander after being fired for his alleged links to a Salafist movement. Since Tajikistan classified the IS as a terrorist organization immediately after the appearance of Khalimov's video statement, the window of opportunity previously provided by the policy of forgiveness could now be closed. The Tajik MIA's response to the professed repentant in the future will reveal whether or not the policy continues.

If the Tajik head of state orders purges of the security services like OMON and offices in the MIA, it is likely that their replacements could be ordered by the government to abandon the policy of forgiveness. This reversal would cut off hundreds of Tajik foreign fighters in the ranks of the IS from having a return route to their homeland, should they desire to do so. Many of them are ordinary citizens, but Khalimov's defection further complicates the scenario in that he is rumored to have brought at least ten of his colleagues from OMON over to the other side with him.

The consequences that could result from OMON and other security services facing the axe via administrative purges could also be devastating for the state of security. Tajikistan might suffer a reduction of security service personnel at a time when discontent is flaring up sporadically throughout the republic's periphery. As seen with the Tajik civil war, discontented forces in the periphery have posed serious challenges to the stability of the central government. If these security personnel are sacked, they could become more sympathetic to the message of former Colonel Khalimov.

Khalimov's defection could also be a blow for more than just Tajikistan. If it inspires other employees of security services from neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to defect, then the governments of the states of Central Asia could face a much wider rift of instability. Well aware of the Tajik OMON commander's history of affiliation with Salafi organizations, state authorities of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan might take a closer look at their own security service employees in order to identify and remove potential religiously motivated defectors. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rose)**

“It means that the Tajik official authorities ought to, at a minimum, think about how to neutralize the consequence of this attraction.”

Source: “Бегство коадира таджикского ОМОНа в ИГИЛ: мнения экспертов,” [Flight of the Tajik OMON commander to ISIL: opinions of experts] Fergana News, 28 May 2015.

Flight of the Tajik OMON commander to ISIL: opinions of experts

Journalists from Fergana News interviewed several experts from Tajikistan and Russian, asking for their comments on the matter. Muzaffar Olimov, the director of the Dushanbe-based “SHARK” Research Center, asked “how was a man thrice sent on trainings to the USA if he, as was made apparent, earlier was identified in participating in a Salafist movement?” He later added “I am sure that Khalimov is not the only person from the officer corps of Tajikistan who joined ISIS. Soon we will learn of yet more names and other people participating in this organization.”

Azhdar Kurtov, head director of the journal “Problems of National Strategies” of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, added that “a representative of the security agencies, designed in the service to fight terrorism, switched to the side of terrorists... this fact will bring to ISIL more and more new supporters, first and foremost of all from Tajikistan itself. It means that the Tajik official authorities ought to, at a minimum, think about how to neutralize the consequence of this attraction.”

Azhdar Kurtov also added “If the reaction from authorities will be in the traditional Soviet style, then a purge of law enforcement will be done, reappointments, additional checks made, then I think that it will have a big effect.”

Ammunition Manufacturing in Kazakhstan

12 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Most reports on Kazakhstan's defense industry mention the construction of ships for service in the Caspian Sea (with the country's Navy or the Caspian Sea border guards detachment) or the purchase of helicopters and armored vehicles from European companies. However, as the accompanying article demonstrates, the industry's growth has also been taking place through smaller ventures. The announcement that an ammunition factory will be built confirms a previous plan (see: October 2014 OE Watch, "Kazakhstan's Defense Industry Moves into Ammunition Manufacturing?"), though the type of small arms ammunition to be produced is different than what had been reported. The ammunition factory was supposedly going to produce cartridges for NATO caliber small arms, but the article here mentions calibers of Russian-made weapons that Kazakhstan's Armed Forces have in their inventory. The one exception is the 9x19mm listed in the article, but considering what is known about the inventory of Kazakhstan's Armed Forces and security services, it is not likely this will be produced in significant numbers.

The decision to build the factory in the special economic zone of "Saryarka" (Karaganda Oblast) is worth noting. Saryarka's website (<http://www.spk-saryarka.kz/eng>) does not mention the factory, but it appears to be the first defense-related project to be carried out in the special economic zone. The government of Kazakhstan created the zone in 2011 and will give tax breaks and other financial benefits to companies or investors that develop projects there. It is unknown if the 30 million cartridges that will eventually be produced at the factory would be enough to supply Kazakhstan's Armed Forces when the factory starts operations in a few years, but the factory does represent another effort of increasing domestic defense production to become more self-sufficient. Kazakhstan's past purchases of helicopters (Airbus Helicopters, formerly Eurocopter) and armored vehicles (from the Turkish company Otokar) included new equipment, but also a provision that manufacturing technology be transferred to Kazakhstan so that later units could be produced there. It is believed that Kazakhstan's manufacturing capability in this area needs a lot of improvement, but ammunition production at this factory is something that would take considerably less time and technical expertise to fully implement. If Kazakhstan's defense industry makes any strides in the next couple of years, a smaller venture like this might be the area where it will happen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Vykhodchenko, Lyudmila. "Патронный завод построят в Карагандинской области" (An ammunition factory will be constructed in the Karaganda Oblast), Inform Bureau, 12 May 2015. <http://informburo.kz/novosti/patronnyy-zavod-postroyat-v-karagandinskoy-oblasti--4317.html>

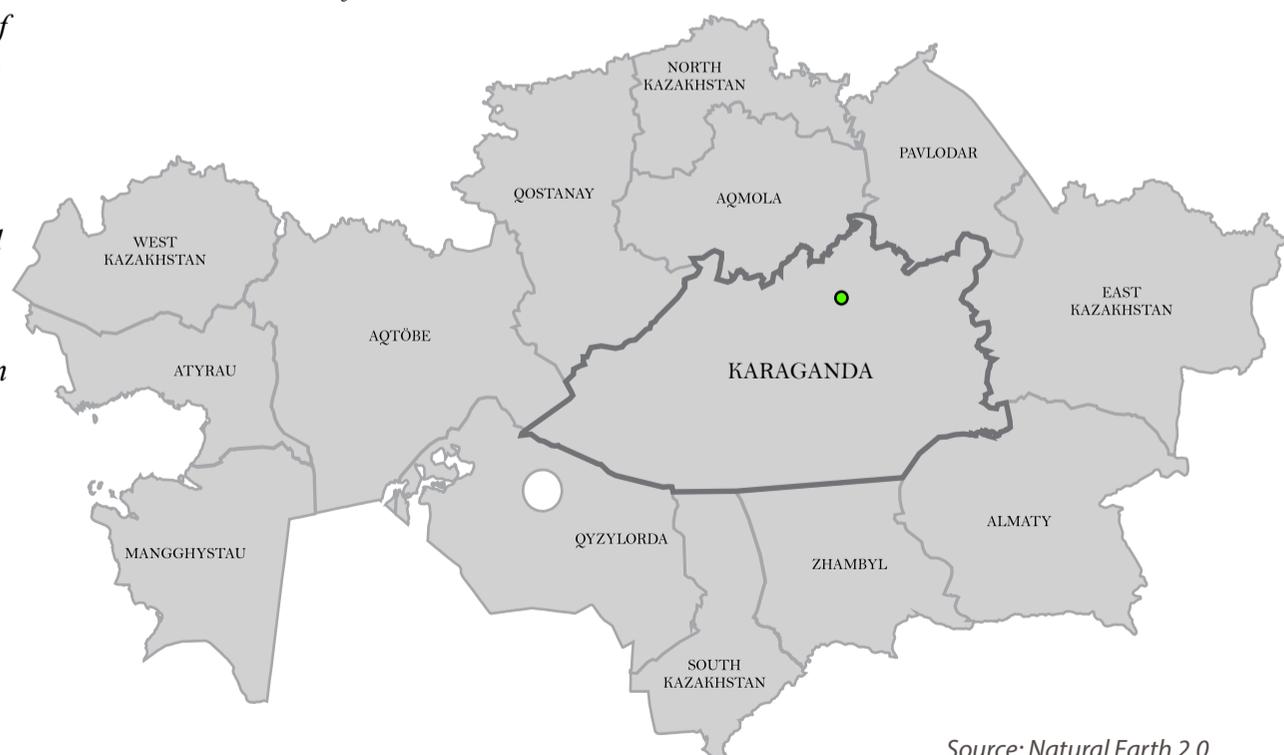
An ammunition factory will be constructed in the Karaganda Oblast

The Ministry of Defense, in cooperation with the join-stock company "Kaztehnologii" and "Steel Manufacturing" will start construction of an ammunition factory this year. The factory is expected to be opened in 2017 in the special economic zone "Saryarka" in the Karaganda Oblast...

The required investment cost of the project – 24 billion, 82.9 million Tenge (\$129.6 million)...Production output – cartridges of the calibers 5.45x39, 7.62x54, 9x18, 9x19mm...production capacity will be 30 million units per year...cartridges will be made from domestically produced brass and lead...

...The factory will occupy an area 14.6 hectares and provide 164 permanent jobs. The volume of cartridges will produce 3 billion Tenge (\$16.1 million) a year and it is expected that the construction cost of the factory will be recouped in 17 years...

“The Ministry of Defense, in cooperation with the join-stock company “Kaztehnologii” and “Steel Manufacturing” will start construction of an ammunition factory this year.”



Source: Natural Earth 2.0

Classifying Nationalist Groups in Kyrgyzstan

17 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *In the past several months in Kyrgyzstan there has been an increase in the activity of nationalist groups like Kalys and Kyrk Choro, which claim that their work protects Kyrgyz culture and values and, in some instances, the overall security of the country. The accompanying article reports on one of the more recent activities, when the two groups, in addition to a third group Kyrgyz Jashtar El Keneshi, worked together on 17 May in Bishkek to stop an event being put on by LGBT activists. The article provides a little more insight into these groups and what might be expected of them in the future. Footage taken by people at the event and posted on You Tube did show members of one of the groups climbing the fence of the café and eventually gaining entry for the groups by forcing the door open.*

It is worth remembering that a few days after Kalys said it would use athletes in a paramilitary role (see: May 2015 OE Watch, “A Paramilitary Organization in Kyrgyzstan?”), Kyrgyzstan’s National Security Committee (GKNB) and Interior Ministry (MVD) announced that they would not allow any of these types of groups to carry out law enforcement functions. Kyrk Choro’s raid last December on a nightclub in Bishkek included detaining Chinese nationals, in addition to Kyrgyz women who worked there, and recording everyone’s identity. The event on 17 May is one of the first times that these groups have taken action (other than making various statements to the press) since the GKNB and MVD announcement. Members of these groups could be charged with crimes because of this incident, including a few of them for assault, but it does not appear that they did something at the café that could be interpreted as an act of law enforcement. The article did mention that the arrival of the police caused members of all three groups to act less aggressively, though this may have been less about being caught acting as law enforcement and more of an attempt to avoid being arrested.

*In the past Kalys has claimed that it is ready and capable of taking action anywhere in the country on short notice against threats, including any number of external threats. Since these groups were formed they have only gone after what they perceive as threats to Kyrgyzstan’s culture and values and have yet to target anyone for any significant economic or political gains. There has been concern in Kyrgyzstan that a nationalist group like this would be used by a political party against its rivals. There is also the issue of members of these groups acting as enforcers in various economic activities, legal or otherwise. If this latest incident is any indication, nationalist groups in Kyrgyzstan remain focused on supposed threats to Kyrgyz culture and values, and while some members of the groups have committed crimes, they have yet to take action that would classify the whole group as paramilitary or criminal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)***

“An organizer of the event told Kloop.kg that activists of “Kalys” entered the café and demanded an end to the event and threatened to use violence...Eyewitnesses said that there were around 20-30 activists.”

Source: Bayaz, Malika. “«Калыс» и «Кырк чоро» атаквали мероприятие в честь Дня борьбы с гомофобией” (“Kalys” and “Kyrk Choro” attacked an event in honor of the day against homophobia) Kloop, 17 May 2015. <http://kloop.kg/blog/2015/05/17/kalys-i-kyrk-choro-atakovali-meropriyatie-v-chest-dnya-borby-s-gomofobiej/>

“Kalys” and “Kyrk Choro” attacked an event in honor of the day against homophobia

Members of the movements “Kalys” and “Kyrk Choro” stormed into an event in honor of the day against homophobia and tried to attack those present. The victims and the attackers themselves then spent around seven hours at the Pervomaisky District police station...The incident took place in a Bishkek café on May 17...

...An organizer of the event told Kloop.kg that activists of “Kalys” entered the café and demanded an end to the event and threatened to use violence...Eyewitnesses said that there were around 20-30 activists...“They started to climb over the fence and broke the door handle,” – said an eyewitness. After police arrived on the scene, the level of aggression from the attackers went down...Later in the evening it became known that police filed possible charges of hooliganism...

A representative of the movement “Kyrgyz Jashtar El Keneshi” told Kloop that they would “stop the event by any means” and that they learned about it from a taxi driver...no one has been named as a victim or a suspect...

The Purpose of Russian Military Training in Tajikistan

8 June 2015

“Russian officers will train 250 Tajik service members in different military specialties over a period of three months at three facilities, Lyaur, Sambuli, and Momirak.”

Source: “201 российская военная база начала подготавливать специалистов для вооруженных сил РТ” (The 201st Russian military base started to train specialists in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan), Vechyorka, 8 June 2015.
<http://vecherka.tj/news/201-rossijskaya-voennaya-baza-nachala-podgotavlivat-spetsialistov-dlya-vooruzhennyh-sil-rt/>

OE Watch Commentary: *Over the past several years in Central Asia and Russia there have been a number of predictions from the government and the media that instability in Afghanistan would spread to bordering states, in particular, Tajikistan. The Russian government has provided various levels of security assistance to Tajikistan over the years, and, as the accompanying article reports, the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division is involved in training members of Tajikistan’s Armed Forces. There are a couple of things to consider about the training and how it fits with other security issues for Tajikistan.*

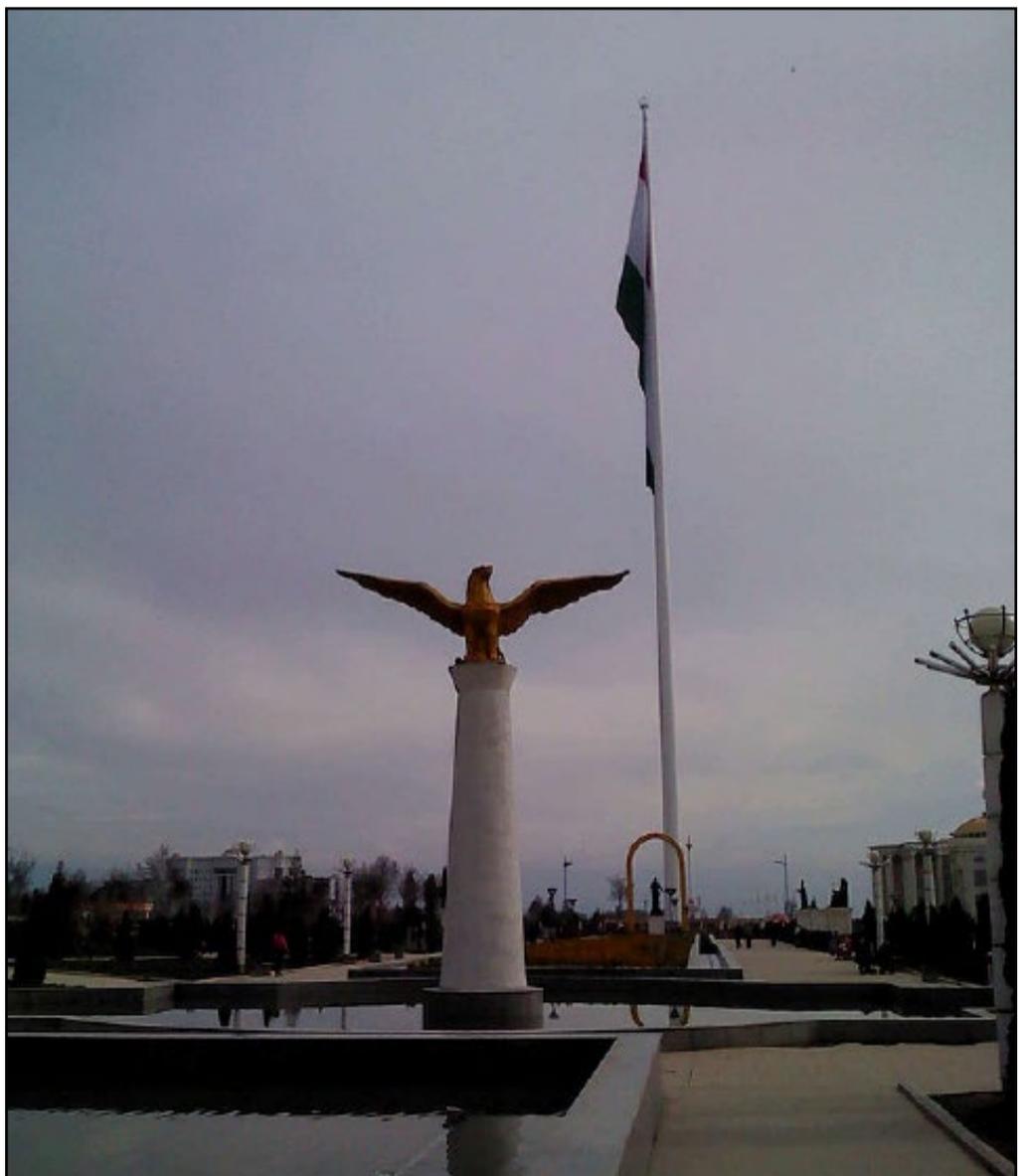
This training comes not long after a Collective Security Treaty Organization joint exercise that took place in Tajikistan earlier this spring and focused on a combat scenario in mountainous terrain. In addition to this, the government of Tajikistan opened a mountain combat training center in Vahdat (just east of Dushanbe) in May for the country’s military and security services. There is no question that preparing for combat in mountainous terrain is important for Tajikistan, but there is nothing in the article indicating that the training will include anything beyond navigating heavy equipment on mountain roads. All of these efforts are focused on scenarios of responding to a possible incursion by a group of militants and not on border security measures, which have proven to be a more significant problem, based on the number of violent incidents alone. The Russian government has expressed interest several times over the past few years in redeploying its border forces to Tajikistan, though the Tajik government has largely ignored this. Russian border guards served on the Tajik-Afghan border from 1991 until 2005.

*Despite the narrow scope of the training, it could prove to be somewhat useful, especially if the Russian government is providing the logistical support to make it happen. Considering Tajikistan’s defense budget and a lack of information on field exercises, it is unknown how often Tajik soldiers are able to train with their inventory of T-72 tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and BTR-80 armored personnel carriers. There could be additional training for these soldiers in the near future, such as tactical or live-fire exercises in the mountains; however, it is difficult to determine how this fits in with the constant issue of border security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)***

The 201st Russian military base started to train specialists in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan

Training at the 201st Russian military base has started for junior specialists of the armed forces of Tajikistan... Russian officers will train 250 Tajik service members in different military specialties over a period of three months at three facilities, Lyaur, Sambuli, and Momirak.

...they practiced maneuvering military vehicles on roads with large slopes, sharp turns, and different obstacles... Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu noted a need to “improve the combat capabilities of Tajikistan’s armed forces and the 201st Russian military base.”... in April of this year, Russian officers trained 250 service members of Tajikistan: drivers and gunners of T-72 tanks, and BMP-2 and BTR-80 armored vehicles.



Source: “TJ-Bagh Parcham Milli, Dushanbe (7)” by Soman - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TJ-Bagh_Parcham_Milli,_Dushanbe_\(7\).JPG#/media/File:TJ-Bagh_Parcham_Milli,_Dushanbe_\(7\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TJ-Bagh_Parcham_Milli,_Dushanbe_(7).JPG#/media/File:TJ-Bagh_Parcham_Milli,_Dushanbe_(7).JPG)

Russian Financial Support and Political Influence in Republika Srpska

22 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Bosnia Herzegovina lost its financial support from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the European Union due to political conflict within the country; its two political entities, the Republika Srpska, Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity, and the rest of Bosnia, must adopt a labor law by the end of June in order for the IMF to begin a new program and offer additional financial support.

As indicated in the accompanying article, the Republika Srpska is in need of money; its state-owned power company could raise electricity prices by four per cent, but this would be a highly unpopular move, as it would stress its poor population. However, a Russian loan is also criticized as it gives Russia more influence in the Republika Srpska government. Although not yet set in stone, the technical details of the pledge are underway as financial and political pressures mount. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“Some other local and international officials also expressed their concern that the Russian loan . . . would place the Kremlin in a position to effectively control the RS government.”

Source: Panic, Katarina. “Bosnian Serb Leader Puts Hopes in Russian Loan.” Balkan Transitional Justice. 22 June 2015. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnian-serb-leader-places-last-hope-in-russian-loan>

The president of Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity hopes a Russian loan can save Republika Srpska from an imminent liquidity crisis, but concerns have been raised over the economic and political cost.

The Republika Srpska government and Russian officials are to start working on Monday on technical details of a loan which Moscow has pledged to provide to Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity, its President Milorad Dodik has told media.

An RS government official told BIRN on Friday that Russia may be willing to provide a loan of up to 700 million euro, but with commercial interest rates and collateral guarantees, most likely in the form of control over the entity's power company.

Some other local and international officials also expressed their concern that the Russian loan would significantly increase Moscow's presence in Bosnia, and would place the Kremlin in a position to effectively control the RS government.

Bilateral Cooperation despite Macedonia and Greece's Name Dispute

OE Watch Commentary: As reported in the accompanying news article, Macedonia and Greece are looking to improve their bilateral relations despite years of disunity largely derived from their dispute over Macedonia's name. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Greece refused to recognize Macedonia under that name, instead calling it the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Although Greece recognizes Macedonia as a sovereign state, Greece protests Macedonia's strong national identification with Alexander the Great, who is a Macedonian national hero and is the subject of a large statue in Skopje's central square, Macedonia's capital.

In 2008 Greece blocked Macedonia's membership into NATO and also blocked Macedonia's EU bid in 2009 after it became a candidate in 2005. Greece and Macedonia have not signed a bilateral treaty since 2007. The new steps mentioned in the article indicate a step toward increased positive relations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“Greek Foreign Ministry officials are expected in Macedonia . . . to determine a list of steps towards greater bilateral cooperation.”

Source: Kostovska, Ivana. “Macedonia, Greece Mull Steps to Rebuild Trust” Balkan Insight. 18 June 2015. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-greece-mull-trust-measures>

Greek Foreign Ministry officials are expected in Macedonia on Thursday to determine a list of steps towards greater bilateral cooperation, a source from the Macedonian Foreign Ministry told BIRN.

Among the measures for cooperation being mulled, which will be presented later this month during the visit to Skopje of the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Kotzias, are the opening of a new border crossing in the Lake Prespa region as well as improving transport links between the towns of Bitola and Florina.

Further steps under consideration are improved cooperation between the two parliaments and between other institutions. A foreign diplomatic source told BIRN under condition of anonymity that the boost to bilateral cooperation could indirectly help solve the years-long dispute over Macedonia's name to which Athens objects.

“The two ministers [Greece's Nikos Kotzias and Macedonia's Nikola Popovski] met several times and agreed to work on the proposed-measures for building trust. Ideas from both sides should help us better understand each other in future over the ‘name,’” the source said.

Russian Missiles that Compel to Peace

29 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was signed 8 December 1987. It completely eliminated intermediate-range (500-5,500 kilometers) ballistic missiles and several other systems, including the land-based version of the Tomahawk cruise missile (BGM-109G Gryphon), Oka operational-tactical missiles, and the RK-55 Granat. Due to worries over the anti-ballistic missile defense system, Vladimir Putin stated on 22 June 2013 that Russia was considering withdrawing from the INF Treaty. There is one school of thought that this was an empty threat, because Russia would require many years to develop and field these new missiles, while another school speculates that Russia is not so constrained because it has already been thinking of a future without the INF.*

As the accompanying article makes apparent, Russia sees the INF treaty and the Iskander missile system as ways of “compelling” INF negotiations to deter the employment of a US/European anti-ballistic missile defense system.

*On the “long-end” the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN) are testing the RS-26 Rubezh. The Rubezh is based upon the Topol and Yars missile systems and has a maximum range of 5,800 kilometers. There have been accusations that this bypasses the spirit of the INF treaty by producing missiles with a maximum range at the lower limit of the intercontinental weapons category (5,500 kilometers), which will otherwise have the same characteristics of intermediate-range ballistic missiles. On the “short-end” the Russian Ground Forces operate the Iskander-M missile system. The Iskander-M officially has a range of 400 kilometers, but there are claims that it can reach up to 480 kilometers. It is also claimed that future versions of the missile could incorporate modifications that could allow a range of around 700 kilometers. Of particular concern is the development of the Iskander-K, “K” standing for cruise missile, which some analysts believe is closer in design to Russia’s naval missiles than the other missiles fired by the Iskander. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)***

Source: Andrey Ivanov, “Iskanders Are Compelling NATO to Peace,” Svobodnaya Pressa Online, 29 May 2015, <<http://svpressa.ru/war21/article/123448/>>, accessed 2 June 2015.

Iskanders Are Compelling NATO to Peace

Speaking at the Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg sharply criticized Russia for plans to station Iskander-M missile complexes in Kaliningradskaya Oblast. “This will fundamentally alter the balance of security in Europe,” Stoltenberg noted. He called our country’s actions “destabilizing and dangerous.”

At first glance NATO has something to fear. Missiles of the complex are capable of hitting targets at a distance up to 500 km and it is practically impossible to shoot them down. But it should be taken into account that the Russian leadership’s decision more likely was forced. The Alliance decided to use MK-41 versatile vertical launch system launchers in the Aegis-Ashore ground-based missile defense (PRO) complexes being stationed in Poland and Romania, but with such launchers the PRO systems become not only defensive, but also offensive, since they are capable of employing Tomahawk cruise missiles.

On the whole, the number of troops and amount of equipment near our borders is constantly increasing. Svobodnaya Pressa already has written about the substantial changes in NATO military power in Eastern Europe which occurred in the last three months. One should not forget that the NATO states sent their military instructors and combat equipment into Ukraine and generally are supporting in every way a Kyiv regime unfriendly to us. But the accusations are being addressed to Moscow.

Therefore it is not surprising that our country is preparing specifically to repel an attack. Stationing Iskanders in Kaliningradskaya Oblast is a part of these tactics.

True, should NATO believe the complexes will alter the balance of forces, then it certainly will take its own measures as well. To what extent is the West ready and able to draw forces up to our borders?

Journal Natsionalnaya Oborona Editor-In-Chief Igor Korotchenko is sure “the main destabilizing factor in Europe is NATO’s advance toward our borders, the installation of military bases and US PRO systems near our borders, and provocative exercises the Alliance conducts based on a possible clash with Russia. NATO is the chief provocateur. It stands to reason that the statement by the bloc secretary-general about a threat on the part of Iskanders has been pulled from thin air. There will be no destabilization of the situation in Europe at all from the stationing of Iskanders. We definitely will station the systems in Kaliningradskaya Oblast before 2018. The missile brigade stationed in the region will be fully rearmed with Iskanders. This is being done in accordance with the plan for modernizing our Armed Forces, and Kaliningradskaya Oblast is an integral part of Russia. We are not violating any kind of international agreements...

MGIMO [Moscow State Institute of International Relations] Center for Military and Political Studies leading expert Mikhail Aleksandrov says: “I take Stoltenberg’s statement as an attempt to remove the blame from NATO for the current crisis in Europe, which was the result of a long-term Alliance policy of eastward expansion. Everything would have been fine had the military infrastructure not been created in Romania,

(continued)

Continued: Russian Missiles that Compel to Peace

Bulgaria, Turkey, and Poland.

In addition to creating an infrastructure in Eastern Europe, the Alliance began to draw in states of the post-Soviet space. The Baltic republics became NATO members in 2004. There was the pretext that all have the right to join. Such a right exists theoretically, of course, but in fact this creates a threat to Russia's security. In addition to the right, there also has to be responsibility for the fate of peace, otherwise you can play your way into conflict. In essence, NATO now is balancing on the brink of war and the Alliance itself is at fault for this...

[SP] How are Iskanders so dangerous for NATO?

[Aleksandrov] Western systems cannot intercept Iskander missiles, since they are very maneuverable. Their new missile intercept system does not operate against our weapons. Our missiles have a range of 500 km; that is, we can hit targets in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Following the return of Crimea it is also possible to reach all targets in Romania. Bombers with cruise missiles capable of hitting any target in Europe now have been stationed on the peninsula.

The situation is such that we are forced to think about protection.

[SP] How can NATO respond to the stationing of Iskanders?

[Aleksandrov] The most sensible thing for the Alliance is to agree to talks on security in Eastern Europe. It has to give guarantees that it will not move up to our borders and will not build its facilities close to us. It has to stop discriminating against Russians in the Baltic. Then we can withdraw the Iskanders in response. But if NATO builds up forces, then we too will do this. By the way, we have the advantage. We can deploy hundreds of thousands of servicemen closer to the West, but NATO will have to spend enormous resources on this. We can withdraw from the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Missiles and station tactical nuclear weapons, of which we have more, in Kaliningradskaya Oblast. We have to clearly show the Alliance what prospects await it in case confrontation continues.

Anatoliy Tsyganok, director of the Center for Military Forecasting, believes the North Atlantic Alliance will be forced to seek a compromise with Moscow and that the "arms race" in Europe will not drag on for long: Objectively speaking, NATO is not that strong a party. It has the advantage in equipment, but Alliance combat readiness is only 15 percent. The majority of subunits have to spend three months moving into a combat status. Moreover, NATO has no money for an extensive confrontation. Despite the menacing statements, NATO has a good understanding of its weaknesses. Therefore it should be expected that the Alliance will cease to rattle sabers and will agree to talks.

Iskander-M

Source: http://nevskii-bastion.ru/VVT/ISKANDER_KBM_140719_02.JPG



nevskii-bastion.ru/index НЕВСКИЙ БАСТИОН фото: КБМ

Russia Puts US Navy on Notice with Improved “Shipping Container” Missile

25 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Russian Federation currently fields two coastal defense systems, the Bastion and Bal. The accompanying article excerpt provides a look.*

The Bastion resembles the Iskander missile system of the Russian Ground Forces, armed with two P-800 Onyx missiles with an approximately 600-km range (typically four systems in a battery). The Bal is equipped with eight Kh-35 missiles with an approximately 130-km range (typically four systems in a battery).

Interestingly, the same missile system used on the road-mobile Bal may also be operated from a standard sized shipping container. Russia sells this “shipping container” missile system as the Club-K on the export market. As the accompanying article discusses, Russia has recently increased the range of the Kh-35 to 300km (the Club-K can fire a variety of Kh-35 and 3M-54 missile types). The article touts the new range and concealability of the Kh-35 and the Club-K, and makes it very apparent that the system is intended to negate some of the US Navy’s overmatch of weaker navies. The modular design of the system allows for the missiles to be fired using their internal sensors for targeting, or they may use a similarly “containerized” C2/Radar system, or they may be directed from other target acquisition systems (AWACS, another vessel, etc.).

*Undoubtedly, an extended-range Kh-35 and Club-K combo that can “hide-in-plain-sight,” should be of some concern in increasingly crowded sea-lanes. Promotional materials for the Club-K also mention the possibilities of deploying the system on rail or on the back of a flatbed truck, a possibility that turns any common shipping container into a possible threat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)***

Source: Vadim Ponomarev, “New Kh-35 Missile: A Threat to American Destroyers,” Ekspert Online, 25 May 2015, <<http://expert.ru/2015/05/25/vezdesuschaya-raketa/>>, accessed 15 June 2015.

New Kh-35 Missile: A Threat to American Destroyers

Russia has responded to the increased power of the Western countries’ naval fleets with the emergence of a new antiship missile. It can be concealed anywhere, and a “swarm” of these missiles is capable of sinking the very latest American destroyer at a distance of 300 km.

Russia’s Takticheskoye Raketnoye Vooruzheniye [Tactical Missile Armament] Corporation has built what is essentially a new antiship missile (PKR). The range of the latest modernized version of the Kh-35-type PKR has been more than doubled -- from 120 km to 300 km, it will be guided to target with the aid of unmanned air vehicles and underwater robots, and ships, aircraft, and the Bal coastal defense missile system will perform the role of delivery platform...



Контейнерный комплекс ракетного оружия Club-K на статической экспозиции авиасалона МАКС-2011.

Club-K missile system at MAKS-2011 airshow.

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Club-K_at_MAKS-2011_airshow.jpg

The small dimensions (around 4.5 meters) and weight of the article in combination with a powerful warhead (145 kg), the capacity for target approach at a height of just 4 meters above the surface, an antijam combined autonomous homing system, and the relatively low cost of the missile have enabled it to be accommodated on delivery platforms in, practically, all environments. At sea, the Kh-35 forms part of the armament of missile patrol boats, corvettes, frigates, and even the Indian destroyer Delhi. In the air it’s part of the Su-30 and MiG-29K inventories. On the ground the Kh-35 is the main armament of the Bal-E coastal defense missile system (BRK). This BRK utilizes the missile transporter-launch canisters similar to those of the shipboard version, and these are mounted on wheeled chassis with a high off-road capability...

The four launchers making up one system can fire 32 missiles in less than 30 seconds, which is sufficient to inflict serious damage on any hostile naval force. And within 30 minutes the Bal-E is ready for a repeat volley. In the desire to impart an even greater surprise factor and mobility to a Kh-35 missile volley Russian military engineers have even contrived to accommodate the mounts for launching these missiles and their control stations inside standard 20- and 40-foot shipping containers. We are talking about the container facility for the Club-K

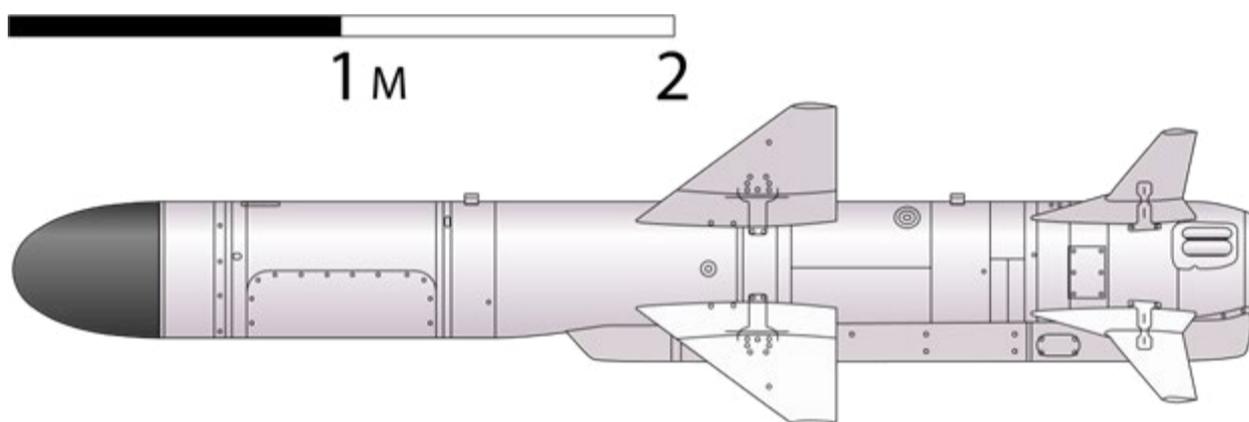
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Continued: Russia Puts US Navy on Notice with Improved "Shipping Container" Missile

missile system, the concept for which in its export modification was first revealed to the general public at the LIMA-2009 arms show...

"When we set about developing the Club-K missile system we started from the understanding that by no means all states possess the capability to maintain in their navies expensive 'toys' such as corvettes, frigates, destroyers, cruisers, and other formidable ships well equipped with missile armament. No one, however, has the right to deprive them of the opportunity to ensure their own sovereignty. In this context, a potential aggressor must really understand that he may sustain unacceptable damage," on one occasion the Morinformsystema-Agat concern alluded to the thinking underpinning the creation of this missile system. The Kh-35 missiles' small dimensions combined with their good combat power and volley launch capability allow even a shipping container equipped with these missiles to be transformed into a formidable weapon. Given a successful impact, several Kh-35s can send to the bottom even an American Arleigh Burke-class destroyer displacing almost 10,000 tonnes. The range of these missiles was just 120-130 km, however, which of course has posed (and is posing) a particular danger for the Kh-35 delivery platforms in terms of their engagement by an adversary's

"[The Kh-35 missile] really is practically undetectable, and it may encounter a potential adversary's ship anywhere at all, be it aboard a Rubin-class border patrol vessel in the northern seas, on the Crimean coast, or emerging unexpectedly from an old shipping container somewhere in Latin America."



Kh-35 flight sketch.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kh-35_flight_sketch.svg



Контейнерный комплекс ракетного оружия Club-K в 20-футовом исполнении с ракетами X-35УЭ (Container missile system Club-K in 20-foot variant with Kh-35UE missile).

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:International_Maritime_Defence_Show_2011_\(375-52\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:International_Maritime_Defence_Show_2011_(375-52).jpg)

long-range antiship (air defense) assets. Therefore the Tactical Missile Armament Corporation (TRK) has now developed, tested, and, evidently, already put into series production a Kh-35 modification in which the missile's range has been increased to 300 km. The press has already carried reports that TRK is testing some "export version" of the new missile under the designation Kh-35UE. As reported, by virtue of a new engine, new fuel, and a change to the design of the intake air duct it has been possible to increase the Kh-35's range to 260 km without altering its weight characteristics. Evidently, the Kh-35 version destined for Russia's sailors flies even farther. On top of that, the new missile also employs a new combined guidance system incorporating satellite navigation in addition to inertial and active radar homing systems...

Russia will thereby regain its world leadership in the development and manufacture of compact subsonic antiship cruise missiles. The American Harpoon is currently regarded as having the longest range in this class. Its D2 modification can travel 280 km. But, that said, it is over a meter longer (5.2 meters as opposed to 3.85 meters in the air-launched version), 1.5 times heavier (742 kg against 550 kg), and 70 percent more powerful in terms of warhead weight (235 kg against 145 kg) than the Russian missile. The new Kh-35 modification, however, remains "smarter" and more "agile" than its American counterpart. It really is practically undetectable, and it may encounter a potential adversary's ship anywhere at all, be it aboard a Rubin-class border patrol vessel in the northern seas, on the Crimean coast, or emerging unexpectedly from an old shipping container somewhere in Latin America.

3D Printers Will “Bake” Future Russian UAVs

4 Jun 2015

“Rogozin announced the beginning of a new industrial revolution. ‘Its main technological drivers will be digital, additive technologies and, of course, robotics’”

— Deputy Chairman of the Military Industrial Commission Dmitriy Rogozin

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying article discusses, Dmitriy Rogozin, the Deputy Chairman of the Military Industrial Commission, made some remarks at the “Technology and Industry: The Energy of a Technological Breakthrough” conference. Last year Rogozin had announced the beginning of a new industrial revolution, one that would replace factory production lines with engineers creating products on demand. Apparently, Russia has made some advances in the field and exhibited a UAV that was reportedly made completely from 3D printer components. Although it is unlikely that all of a UAV’s components really were printed in 30 hours, the capability to print components for the Russian Armed Forces’ growing UAV and robotics fleet could result in significant cost savings.

UAVs are becoming increasingly common in maneuver units and will likely be doctrinally required for artillery purposes, if not already. A capability to “print” components for UAVs (Grusha, Granat, Leyer, Zastava, Forpost, Orlan-10, etc.) will significantly lower both production and maintenance costs for a Russian UAV fleet that is growing both in terms of numbers and types of airframes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Yuriy Zaynashev, “The ‘Baking’ of Russian Unmanned Aerial Vehicles is Planned to be Put into Production,” Vzglyad Online, 04 Jun 2015, <<http://www.vz.ru/economy/2015/6/4/749145.html>>

The ‘Baking’ of Russian Unmanned Aerial Vehicles is Planned to be Put into Production

The international forum “Technology and Industry: The Energy of a Technological Breakthrough,” devoted to the priorities of Russia’s technological development, opened in Novosibirsk on Thursday. Speaking at the forum was the Deputy Chairman of the Government and Deputy Chairman of the Military Industrial Commission Dmitriy Rogozin, Assistant to the President Andrey Fursenko, as well as leading economists and businessmen, both Russian and foreign.

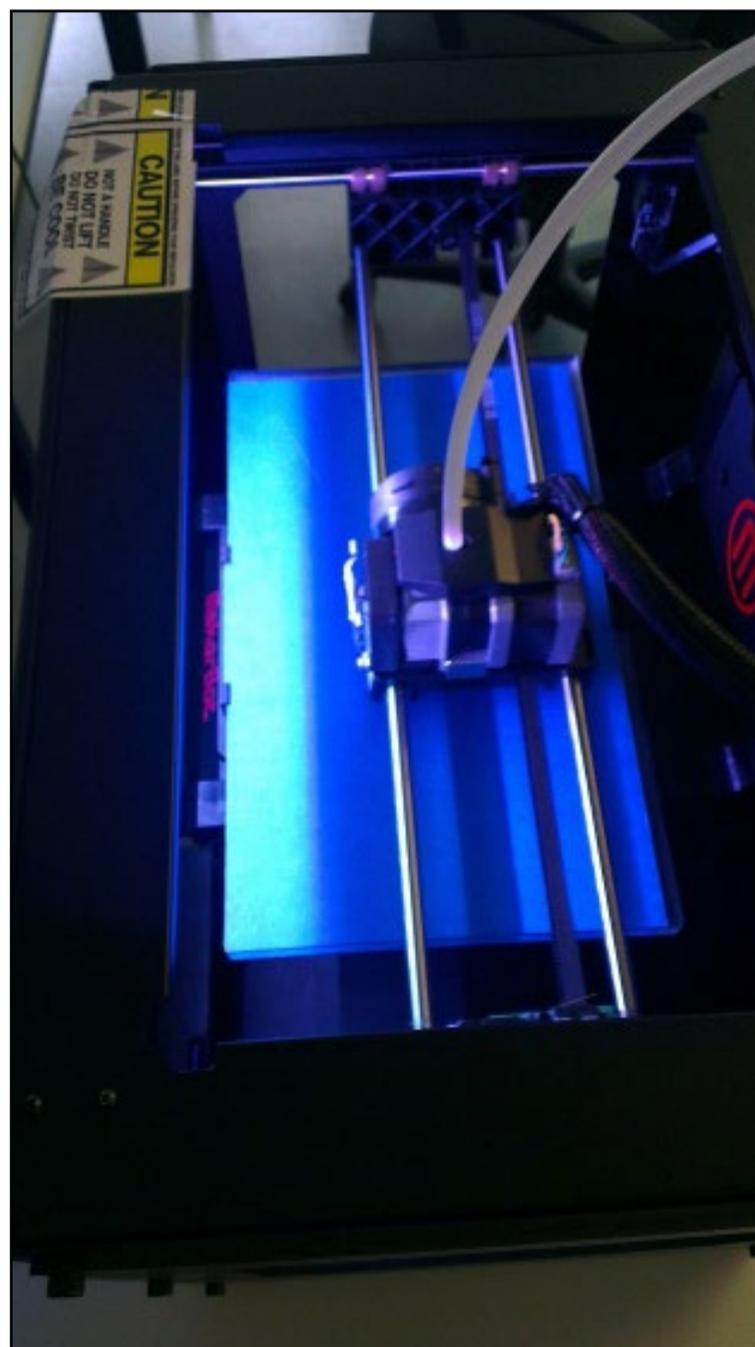
Speaking at the forum after Rogozin, Deputy Chairman of the VEB [Development and Foreign Economic Activity Bank] and former deputy head of the Ministry of Economic Development Andrey Klepach advised that while various agencies are individually engaged in additive technologies, no one is coordinating them in this. There are technologies which perhaps “are not so significant monetarily,” but he added that they themselves generate new technologies. “We should have several pilot “stretch” projects which need their own special coordination mechanism between the Ministry of Industry, Roskosmos

[Russian Space Agency], the Ministry of Atomic Energy, the Ministry of Education and Science, and some place in the Ministry of Defense. Here the Military Industrial Commission can play its role, because these are not only defense projects. All of them have a dual and even a somewhat greater civilian component,” summed up Klepach.

Vice Premier Dmitriy Rogozin is demanding a sharp acceleration of the development of technologies allowing equipment, including military equipment, to be literally printed on a special printer. The Military Industrial Commission has already tasked the preparation of a “road map” for the development of these technologies. As the newspaper Vzglyad has already managed to learn, the road map is expected by the end of the year. This must not be delayed: Russia must eliminate gaps in this field...

One of the main themes of the forum was digital, additive technologies (layer synthesis technologies familiar to many as the work of 3D printers). Thus, in his emotional speech Dmitriy Rogozin announced the beginning of a new industrial revolution. “Its main technological drivers will be digital, additive technologies and, of course, robotics,” he stated. In the words of the Vice Premier, information and communications technologies are now penetrating traditional branches of actual manufacturing and are fundamentally changing

(continued)



Source: “3d printer 2013-07-25 12-26” by User:Theredmonkey - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3d_printer_2013-07-25_12-26.jpg#/media/File:3d_printer_2013-07-25_12-26.jpg

Continued: 3D Printers Will “Bake” Future Russian UAVs

their image. Specifically, “large-scale digitization” of designing and manufacturing is occurring, and on this basis “unmanned technologies” are being developed which yield “an extremely powerful impetus for the development of labor productivity” (which in Russia, as is well known, is currently lagging behind the best that is desired).

“As early as the foreseeable future this will drive a change in the very worldview of industrial manufacturing, when the main link of manufacturing policy, at least in some branches, will not so much be the factories turning out huge series productions, but rather the engineering centers creating the products on demand,” added Rogozin...

The conference was accompanied by an exhibition. One of the first unmanned aerial vehicles UAVs to be “printed” in Russia was brought to the exhibition from Design Bureau ‘Luch’ at Rybinsk. All of the components and parts of the UAV were created on a special printer over the course of 30 hours. The specialists had only to assemble them. For the entire work a total of two months passed from the concept to the manufacturing of the unmanned aerial vehicle. And a year earlier an article by Rogozin appeared in Rossiyskaya Gazeta under the ambitious headline “We will be printing tanks.” “The Sixth Industrial Wave will allow weapons to be made on a printer.”

Incidentally, even before the forum it was decided in the VPK to put together a “road map” for the development of additive technologies which theoretically should also coordinate the work of all agencies in this sphere. The “map” is being prepared by an interdepartmental working group headed by Kablov and its first meeting was held at the end of May.

...the official declined to answer the question of when the Russian defense industrial complex may put production of such weapons on line.

However, VIAM Director Yevgeniy Kablov believes that in Russia it is already possible to produce UAVs using the new method. “We already have all of the conditions needed to produce such unmanned aerial vehicles. The manufacturing preparations determine everything -- the creation of the manufacturing and the creation of the entire set of documentation. I am responsible only for the materials,” the academician told Vzglyad newspaper. “We have created all of the necessary materials; there are backlogs for the fairing of both the airframe and the engine. It is only necessary for the designers to take this on more aggressively and start producing from domestic materials, so that they will not talk about what they will buy from overseas. No one will sell us modern materials.”

Then Kablov named another exact timeframe. In his words the working group must produce the “road map” by the end of the year. “The times are forcing it to be finished as soon as possible. In general, this is not defining the fine details, but determining who has what kind of zone of responsibility and defining the schedules, volumes and where the staffing will come from. This is a complex task, beginning with the materials and ending with the equipment and the mathematics. New software will be needed. Designers must approach the design of parts differently,” he enumerated.

Kablov acknowledged that Russia greatly lags behind in this area. “China already holds 10 percent of the world market, the Americans hold 38 percent, and the Europeans hold 20-30 percent. Ahead of us lies the task of not trying to recreate existing technologies, but to make our own,” summarized the academician.

“Ahead of us lies the task of not trying to recreate existing technologies, but to make our own”

— Director of the Scientific and Research Institute for Aviation Materials Yevgeniy Kablov



Source: “Dozor-600 UAV Maks-2009” by Pycckue - Own work. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dozor-600_UAV_Maks-2009.jpg#/media/File:Dozor-600_UAV_Maks-2009.jpg

Russia Fields New Tactical C2 System with FBCB2-like Capabilities

15 Jun 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Command and control (C2) has long been a problem in both the Soviet and Russian militaries. At the tactical level, radio technology was generally lacking, and the ability to transmit digitally nonexistent. In the last few years this has begun to change. The Russian Federation's efforts to overcome C2 problems include new tactical radios, a tactical digital mobile subscriber system (roughly a military digital cell phone and data system), and tactical laptops and tablets. Despite these advances, Russia has still had difficulties fielding a modern, unified C2 system for tactical units.*

*The answer to this problem, as the accompanying article discusses, is the fielding of the 'Andromeda' C2 system, which has been in development for several years. This system is in many ways similar in purpose and capabilities to the US's Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) system. The Andromeda is intended to provide situational awareness to the commander and allow for the real-time exchange of information from the highest commander down to the squad, and even individual soldier. The Andromeda can reportedly interface with space-based networks and has extensive counter-electronic warfare capabilities. It utilizes digital mapping technologies, allowing terminal operators to annotate the positions of troops, armaments, and equipment. Vehicles, and in some reports eventually even individual soldiers, will be automatically tracked via a GPS/GLONASS connection. If the fielding of the Andromeda is deemed a success for the Russian VDV, it is very likely the system would also be adopted by the Russian Ground Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)***

Source: Oleg Groznyy, Krasnaya Zvezda Online, 20 May 2015, "'Andromeda' Serves in the VDV: The Airborne Troops Are Transitioning to a New Command and Control System." <<http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/23776-andromeda-sluzhit-v-vedv>>, accessed 15 June 2015.

'Andromeda' Serves in the VDV

In the view of the overwhelming majority of people, who are at least a slightly familiar with the Army, the concept of "airborne troop" is associated with the sky, the parachute, a rapid onslaught, and, of course, victory. That certainly is so. And well it is more difficult to imagine a soldier in a blue beret with an assault rifle on his back, whose job is not in a infantry fighting vehicle but sitting at a computer monitor. At the same time, the Russian Airborne Troops can also have those specialists. Under contemporary conditions, it is impossible to accomplish practically a single mission without them...



Защищенный ноутбук HT-R1000 (NT-R1000 protected PC)

Информационная табличка (Datasheet in Russian)

Source: <http://77rus.smugmug.com/Military/MAKS-2013/i-RNDjz kf/0/O/MAKS2013part8-16.jpg>

21st century wireless communications is already not only transmission and reception devices, which permit the transmission of voice information over a distance. State-of-the-art radio communications – is a powerful integrated communications device, which is capable of accomplishing practically any missions: from a simple conversation from any point of the planet to the exchange of video and multimedia images. And, of course, not a single army in the world can get by without the equipment... Stable, reliable communications that is secure from outsiders – is the foundation of troop command and control, all the more so in the dynamic conditions of contemporary warfare. The latest automated command and control system, which has arrived in the VDV inventory, practically completely meets these requirements...

“The Andromeda automated command and control system is a totally domestic development. It is a complex of automation hardware of mobile command and control posts, which were developed while taking into account the VDV's characteristics as a highly-mobile type of troops. The system supports effective command and control of subunits in

(continued)

Continued: Russia Fields New Tactical C2 System with FCB2-like Capabilities

any conditions of the situation with the use of the most leading-edge digital telecommunications equipment, which consists of radios, which operate in various ranges, radio-relay stations, space communications stations, and the latest generation of command-staff vehicles,” the company commander explained. “Thorough theoretical knowledge and practical skills is required to work on this state-of-the-art equipment. Officers, warrant officers, and also sergeants and soldiers, who are performing service on contract, can handle this task well. Conscripts manage to learn how to deploy antenna-mast devices and electrical generators and to drive the transport vehicles.”

Regimental Commander Guards Colonel Aleksey Gamburg discussed the Andromeda’s unique capabilities, which doesn’t have any equivalents based upon individual parameters. He pointed out with pride that the new complex has qualitatively changed the airborne troops’ command and control structure and has permitted the VDV commander to constantly be in contact with all subordinate formations and military units, right down to the parachute and air assault battalion. Besides encrypted telephonic communications, Andromeda is capable of supporting a video conference of guaranteed security. Furthermore, it permits them to carry out the transmission of various graphic documents.

“By way of illustration, a battalion commander can practically instantaneously send his decision in graphic form directly to any higher command and control organ, right up to the VDV commanding general,” Aleksey Aleksandrovich explained. “This decision will be verified, clarified, approved, and returned for execution as soon as possible. Moreover, the capability has been set forth in this complex to display on a map the location of each airborne troop on the battlefield using a projector and to command and control his actions in real time”.

Of course, one cannot talk about all of the Andromeda’s hidden reserves for the time being. But what I have seen is impressive. Computers, projectors and plotters have arrived to replace telephone and telegraph equipment. And today an airborne troop with a tablet already doesn’t surprise you. As is the fact that the commander can observe his actions directly in the area of the accomplishment of the combat mission.



Защищенный командирский ПК. Предназначен для решения задач управления и ориентирования в тактическом звене младшего командного состава уровня взвод/отделение (Platoon/squad commander tablet PC)

Source: <http://77rus.smugmug.com/Military/MAKS-2013/i-bVdcKHb/0/O/MAKS2013part8-10.jpg>

Russian Airborne Will Add Division, and Expand to 60,000 Paratroopers

4 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Russian Airborne (VDV) has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Russian Federation's efforts to increase conventional military capabilities. It will add a third parachute/air assault regiment to each of its divisions and a new brigade (345th Air Assault Brigade), and will convert the 38th Signals Regiment to a C2 brigade.*

A new development, as discussed in the accompanying articles, is the reactivation of the 104th Air Assault Division, which would be the VDV's fifth division. The division will be created by reorganizing the 31st Air Assault Brigade headquartered at Ulyanovsk; the unit's three subordinate air assault regiments will be located in Ulyanovsk, Engels, and Orenburg.

*This increase in forces is in addition to current plans to add a tank battalion to each division and brigade, adding an estimated 18 tank battalions (576 tanks) to the VDV. In all, the VDV will grow from 45,000 to 60,000 troops, becoming approximately the same size as the German Army (60,707 troops). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)***

Source: "General Staff Source: Airborne Troops Ulyanovsk Brigade Will Be Reorganized as a Division," TASS Online, 04 June 2015, <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2018476>>.

General Staff Source: Airborne Troops Ulyanovsk Brigade Will Be Reorganized as a Division

The Russian Federation Defense Ministry will reconstitute the Ulyanovsk Brigade as the Guards 104th Air Assault Division, famed for its valor and military exploits in Soviet Union times and stationed in Kirovobad (now Gyandzha, Azerbaijan)," the Agency source said.

"The reconstituted unit [соединение] will have three regiments in the order of battle," he clarified. "It is planned to station these regiments in Ulyanovsk, Engels, and Orenburg." The Agency source did not clarify when the division will be reconstituted, giving assurances that "the necessary table of organization measures will be carried out in the next few years."

The Airborne Troops now include four airborne and air assault divisions and four air assault brigades as well as a separate Spetsnaz brigade.

Source: "The VDV Will in the Coming Years Become Part of the Rapid-Response Force," Argumenty i Fakty Online, 4 June 2015, <http://www.aif.ru/society/army/vdv_v_blichayshie_gody_voydut_v_sostav_voysk_bystrogo_reagirovaniya>, accessed 15 June 2015.

The VDV Will in the Coming Years Become Part of the Rapid-Response Force

The Airborne Troops will become wholly a part of the rapid-response force, which it is planned to form in the coming years," TASS reports, citing a source in the General Staff.

What changes await the VDV [Airborne Troops]? "The entire VDV, including support units, will without exception become part of the rapid-response troops as their backbone," the source said.

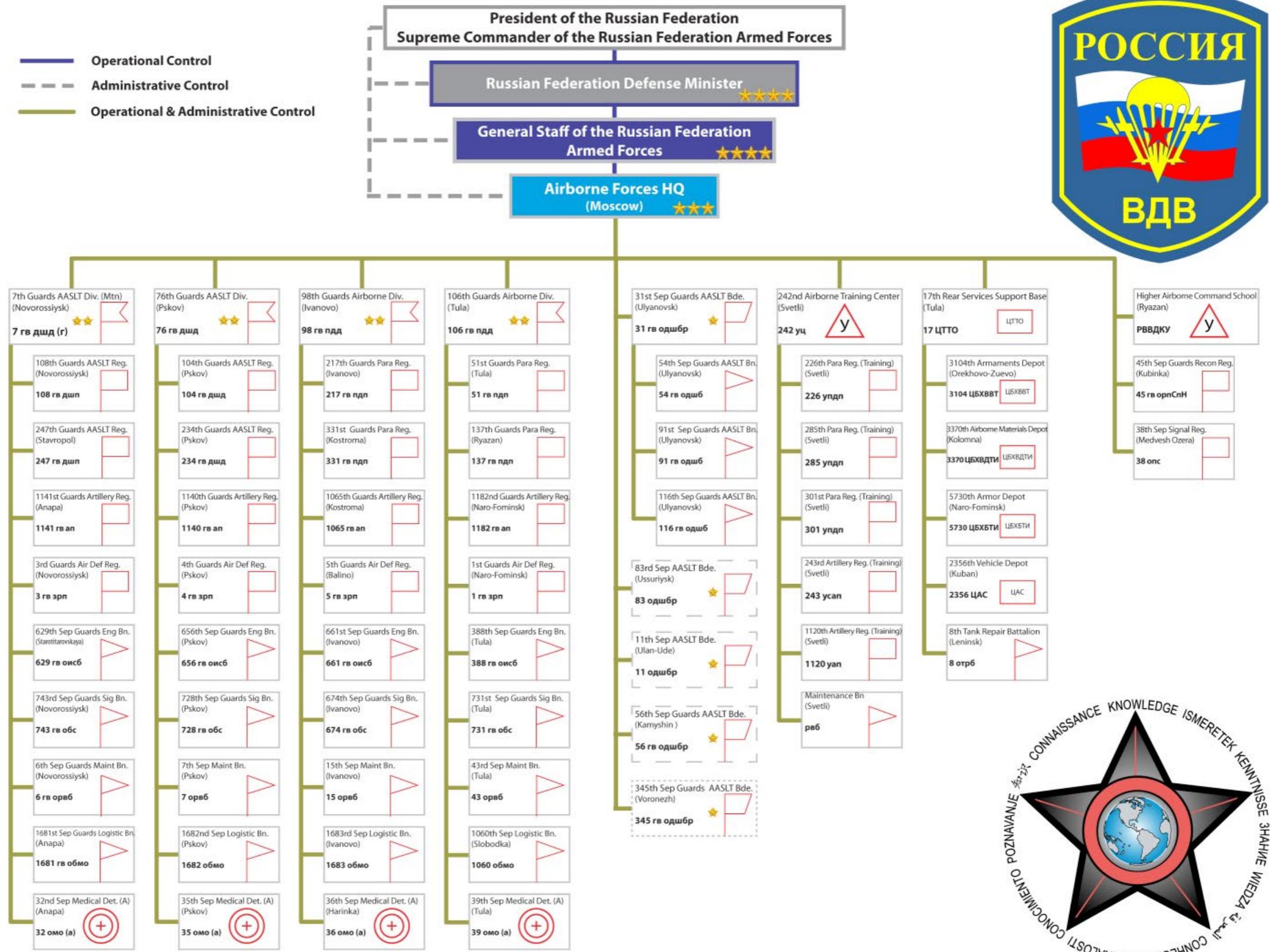
It is reported also that it is the formation of the new force which was the reason for the reinforcement of the Airborne Troops which has occurred as of late. "The 104th Air Assault Division will be reconstituted, a new air assault brigade will be formed, the number of regiments in all the current airborne and air assault divisions will be increased to three, and the separate signals regiment will be reorganized as a separate headquarters brigade in the VDV here," the source reported.

He added that other structural changes, after which the VDV strength will have grown from the present 45,000 to 60,000 servicemen, are possible also.

The formation of rapid-response troops was announced last week by Vladimir Shamanov, commander of the VDV of Russia. He explained that the new armed forces will operate both independently and "as part of aggregate contingents in particular sectors."

(continued)

Continued: Russian Airborne Will Add Division, and Expand to 60,000 Paratroopers



Russian Federation Opens First Joint Training Base and Simulation Center

6 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *The Russian Federation is opening its first joint training base and simulation center, the 333rd Combat Training Center, in Mulino. In Soviet times military districts ran a number of large training areas that catered to specific branches of service, but for the first time the Ground Troops, Airborne, and the Navy's Coastal Defense Troops (Naval Infantry and Coastal Defense Artillery) will train at one facility. This is a significant development considering that these units generally do not work with one another during field exercises.*

The establishment of the 333rd Combat Training Center continues trends in the Russian military of standardizing training and equipment and increasing warfare simulation and war-gaming capabilities. The Russians have long been impressed with the U.S.'s ability to simulate warfare in both field and virtual environments and have often expressed interest in developing their own similar capability. (Undoubtedly, the establishment of joint centers was also done to reduce costs.)

*The accompanying articles do not mention if the units would transport their vehicles and equipment to the training center or if they would, as in Soviet times, fall in on vehicles and equipment already there. Due to the variety of units training and Russia's recent interest in conducting brigade-level movements to ensure mobilization readiness, it is likely that units will move to the training center via rail as part of the training process. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)***

Source: Aleksandr Tikhonov, "333rd Is the Only One for Now..." Krasnaya Zvezda Online, 28 May 2015<<http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/23966-trista-tridtsat-tretij-poka-edinstvennyj>>, accessed 15 June 2015.

Only One for Now...

Russian Federation First Deputy Defense Minister General of the Army Arkadiy Bakhin inspected readiness of the Western Military District 333rd Combat Training Center in Mulino (Nizhegorodskaya Oblast) for the beginning of the winter training period and the Ground Troops leadership conference.

The Western MD 333rd Combat Training Center (Ground Troops, Airborne Troops, Navy Coastal Defense Troops) is a unique facility and the only one in our Armed Forces for now. A little bit more work will allow it to conduct all activities for combat training of motorized rifle and tank brigades as well as Airborne (VDV) and Coastal Defense Troops [Naval Infantry and Coastal Defense Artillery] initially in virtual space and in any theater of military operations, and then also on the terrain. The conduct of virtual battles is supported by more than 150 simulators installed in the center on which it will be possible for personnel in the brigade (assault riflemen, machinegunners, grenade launcher operators, fighting vehicle crews, artillerymen, air defense personnel, on the order of 700 servicemen at the same time) to execute combat missions...

All of the the center's simulators (Russian-made, by the way) are joined in a common virtual space, which will permit not only using them for individual training, but also conducting tactical exercises, including opposed-forces ones, in a unified virtual environment...

The intelligent content of the Combat Training Center is a Russian software product permitting command and control entities of a brigade and the staffs of its subunits to rehearse the combat work algorithm on receiving a combat mission.

In general, the 333rd Combat Training Center has several systems, including a leadership staff equipment complex, automated training system classrooms, simulator complex, as well as combat training facilities complex. The center's facilities are two military posts plus an APL-500 field camp; several tactical training fields, which also permit training personnel in urban combat; tank gunnery training facility; firing range; tank training area; driver training area; water obstacle training area; vehicle training area; tank gunnery range; and BMP-1, BMP-2, and BMP-3 gunnery ranges. Naturally, the center includes missile and artillery armament depots and an administrative zone...The 333rd Combat Training Center at Mulino, largest not only in Russia, but also in Europe, is to become an exemplary combat training facility...

Gen Army Bakhin demanded that appropriate officials take a systematic approach to training brigade personnel, with a clear understanding of specifically what the brigade will study and practice at the Combat Training Center during each of the seven weeks of the cycle...

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Continued: Russian Federation Opens First Joint Training Base and Simulation Center

Source: Aleksey Durnovo, "Western Military District 333rd Ground Troops, Airborne Troops, and Navy Coastal Defense Troops Combat Training Center," Ekho Moskvyy Online, 06 June 2015, <<http://echo.msk.ru/programs/voensovet/1561664-echo/>>, accessed 15 June 2015

Western Military District 333rd Ground Troops, Airborne Troops, and Navy Coastal Defense Troops Combat Training Center

[Durnovo] This is Military Council on Ekho Moskvyy, good afternoon to everyone, this is Aleksey Durnovo. I introduce our today's guest with great pleasure: Dmitriy Gorbatenko, chief of Combat Training Directorate/deputy chief of Russian Armed Forces Main Combat Training Directorate. Dmitriy Vilorovich, good afternoon...This is an entirely unique and new center, right?

[Gorbatenko] Yes, there has not yet been such a center in the Armed Forces. This center is the first one, the Western MD 333rd Combat Training Center...

[Durnovo] And will more such Armed Forces centers appear in the foreseeable future?

[Gorbatenko] Yes, we are planning this. There will be a total of four such similar centers in the Armed Forces, including the 333rd Center... One in each Military District

[Durnovo] How does the training differ for the rifleman, officer, and brigade commander (figuratively speaking)?

[Gorbatenko] ...All training activities are systematized and arranged successively according to the system of going from the simple to the complex... Subunits which come for training at brigade strength do not begin training from scratch; they already come with sufficient teamwork and coordination. That is, to the level of company and battery, according to the formation structure, they already come with teamwork and coordination, and we carry out training in the center...We plan to carry out training in the combat training center beginning with battalions. Teamwork training of battalions and then of the brigade as a whole. And the training differs: both in simulators as well as in the course of executing tactical missions...In the course of tactical actions without live fire. And the live-fire exercise is the crown of any training. So all three elements are interconnected within the scope of subunit training, and each subunit trains both in simulators as well as on the tactical field with and without live fire. Accordingly, subunits of the combat arms which do not take part in live-fire activities carry out their mission for their intended purpose as support subunits. And brigade command and control entities, simply put, brigade staffs, constantly perfect their teamwork and coordination during the staff, command and staff, and joint staff drills which are held. I will repeat that this is with reinforcing subunits, and we hold a brigade live-fire tactical exercise at the end of training, which for us is the seventh week.

[Durnovo] Can more than one unit [brigade] train at the center at a time?

[Gorbatenko] No, as a rule only the unit [brigade] and its supporting subunits can be trained. As a rule, these subunits accompany the unit for executing various missions, but they are not organic to it.

[Durnovo] What is the throughput capacity?

[Gorbatenko] ...We figure to train an average of five brigades year.

[Durnovo] And will a formation which already has taken the course return to the center at some time?

[Gorbatenko]...A regular formation must go through training in this center once every two years.

[Durnovo] And in general how many personnel work at the center?

[Gorbatenko]...Over 1,000 persons.

[Durnovo] Let's continue with our discussion of simulators.

[Gorbatenko] ...[Earlier produced simulators were] more primitive, and simpler than those now developed by our domestic manufacturers, our scientific research institutes, and production associations... So the center has 158 simulators of a varying type. All are crew simulators and are intended for training crews as a whole, crews and teams. Having said all that, all simulators have been put into a single information space, a single virtual field. And each person sitting in the simulator, which simulates a place in a fighting vehicle, can see the battlefield as if he actually were in a terrain sector, and he sees specifically that part of the terrain he actually would be in and could look through the vision devices or sights of his fighting vehicle. And the system of visualization will be arranged in such a way that the computer can supply an enemy and process information in such a way that the enemy is virtual...That is, we can combine subunits which will be in the simulators with subunits which actually are on the terrain, on the tactical field, and this all will be combined in a unified information system. And the subunits which will be in the simulators will actually see the actions of the subunit which is on the tactical training field and executing missions there, executing these missions, so to speak, in the role of the enemy. So this is a very serious and major innovation, this is a rather big step forward in our training. We can conduct servicemen's training both as applied to simulators of a virtual space as well as on the battlefield, with real actions of a subunit which is simulating enemy actions.

Armenia and Iran Discuss Military Cooperation

27 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Armenia and Iran are discussing military cooperation, according to the accompanying excerpt from Regnum.ru. A Defense Ministry delegation from Armenia came to Iran on 24-25 May to discuss this issue.

Traditionally, developing good relations with Iran has been important for Yerevan for a number of reasons. Yerevan's official position is that as a small country surrounded by larger regional players and isolated for political reasons, Armenia is helped by Iran to balance relations with Russia. The accompanying excerpt touches on this official position, quoting the 2006 report of then Secretary of the National Security Council to the Armenia's President, Defense Minister Serge Sargsyan's "Directions of National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia." Other official reasons for maintaining good relations with Iran, according to the report, include balancing Iran with Turkey, a NATO ally, as well as providing access for Armenia into the Middle East. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: Gevorg Mirzyan, "Армения и Иран согласовывают повестку сотрудничества в военной сфере" (Armenia and Iran Discuss Military Cooperation Agenda), Regnum.ru, 27 May 2015. <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1927793.html>

Armenian Defense Ministry delegation, headed by First Deputy Defense Minister David Tonoyan, visited Iran on May 24-25 for a working visit, announces Defense Ministry of Armenia press service.

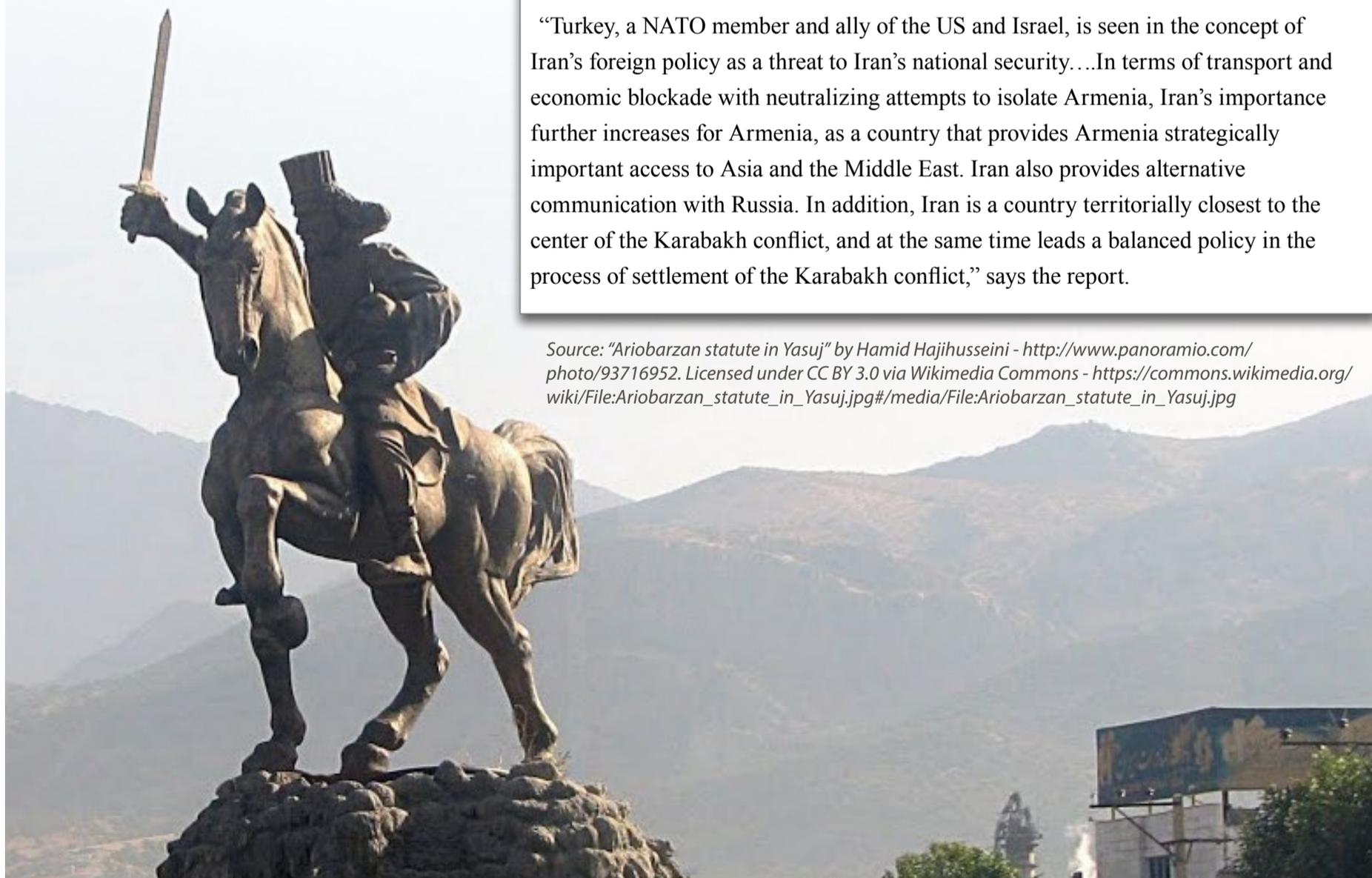
According to the source, the purpose of the visit was to discuss the Armenian-Iranian agenda in the sphere of defense, as well as upcoming events. During the visit, Tonoyan met with Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghani and Brigadier General Firuz Masih Purom. During the meeting they discussed the international and regional situation, as well as the latest trends in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On behalf of Armenian Defense Minister, Tonoyan invited Hossein Dehghani to visit Armenia. Iran's Defense Minister has accepted the invitation and promised to visit Armenia this year. ...

For Armenia, multifaceted cooperation with Iran is essential. As far back as 2006, the report of the then Secretary of the National Security Council to the Armenia's President, Defense Minister Serge Sargsyan's "Directions of National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia" clearly articulated strategic essence of Armenian-Iranian relations.

The official Yerevan believes that Iran, as a country with great economic, military, cultural potential and an independent foreign policy plays a key role in the formation of the military-political situation in the region and competes with Turkey in the economic and political field.

"Turkey, a NATO member and ally of the US and Israel, is seen in the concept of Iran's foreign policy as a threat to Iran's national security... In terms of transport and economic blockade with neutralizing attempts to isolate Armenia, Iran's importance further increases for Armenia, as a country that provides Armenia strategically important access to Asia and the Middle East. Iran also provides alternative communication with Russia. In addition, Iran is a country territorially closest to the center of the Karabakh conflict, and at the same time leads a balanced policy in the process of settlement of the Karabakh conflict," says the report.

Source: "Ariobarzan statute in Yasuj" by Hamid Hajihusseini - <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/93716952>. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ariobarzan_statute_in_Yasuj.jpg#/media/File:Ariobarzan_statute_in_Yasuj.jpg



Caucasus 2014 International Conference in Yerevan

26 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: On 26 May 2015 the thirteenth international conference “Caucasus-2014” began in Yerevan. This is an annual political science conference where experts review the past year’s critical events in the South Caucasus. The accompanying excerpts are examples of reports in the Russian-language press about some of the experts’ presentations.

The first is from NewsArmenia.ru, which cites a well-known Caucasus expert, Associate Professor of Foreign Area Studies and Foreign Policy of the Russian State Humanitarian University Sergei Markedonov. Markedonov believes that while Western diplomats are publically optimistic about the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and often present it as a stark example of cooperation between Russia and the West in the context of the Minsk Group tasked to work on the conflict’s resolution, the reality on the ground is that the Minsk Group has been ineffective in settling the conflict because neither Armenian nor Azerbaijani societies are ready for fundamental compromises required to end the conflict. The report does not provide further details on what those compromises should be.

Experts traditionally describe the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as “frozen.” Markedonov notes that it was actually “hot” in every sense of the word in 2014. Indeed, violence in the region had escalated since the Ukrainian crisis broke out in March 2014. In particular, cross-border skirmishes and violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan have increased, leading to greater casualties. While this increase in violence may not necessarily lead to full blown military hostilities, this is nonetheless possible, and Nagorno-Karabakh remains important to watch; certainly, it is among current crucial issues in the South Caucasus.

The remaining two excerpts from PanArmenian.net touch on another critical event of 2014—Armenia’s joining the Russia-led Customs Union. One excerpt quoted another expert, Pavel Baev, Research Director at the Norwegian Peace Research Institute (PRIO), originally from Russia. Baev believes that Europe can still find ways to cooperate with Armenia, despite Armenia’s joining the Customs Union: “For the EU, it is important to prove
(continued)

Source: “Общества в Армении и Азербайджане не готовы к фундаментальным компромиссам - Маркедонов” (Societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan not Ready for Fundamental Compromises--Markedonov), NewsArmenia.ru, 26 May 2015. <http://www.newsarmenia.ru/politics/20150526/43223462.html#sthash.KYs7A8p2.dpuf>

Societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan are not ready for fundamental compromises on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, says a well-known Russian political scientist, associate professor of Foreign Area Studies and foreign policy of the Russian State Humanitarian University, Sergei Markedonov.

“Many European diplomats fall into professional optimism, saying that only two small issues remain to be resolved - the problem of refugees and the status of Karabakh, while on all other matters a compromise has been reached. But, unfortunately, societies of the two countries are not ready for fundamental compromises,” Markedonov said Tuesday in Yerevan during the international scientific conference “Caucasus-2014.”

According to him, during the past year, the Karabakh conflict has been “hot” in the truest sense of the word.

“As for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, 2014 has brought a number of new unpleasant realities. In contrast to the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has long been presented as a successful example of cooperation between Russia and the West. However masterful the diplomatic maneuvering of the [Minsk Group] co-chairs might be, one cannot ignore the ‘broader context.’ Hence a certain paralysis of the Minsk Group, which, in general, becomes a ‘tape recorder’ for reproduction of the right things, but not very effective as a tool for settling [conflict]. We experience a terrible shortage of pragmatists,” he said...

Source: “У Армении может сложиться интересное сотрудничество с Европой, несмотря на ее участие в ЕАЭС” (Armenia May Develop Interesting Cooperation with Europe, Despite Participation in the Eurasian Union), PanArmenian.net, 26 May 2015. <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/192795/>

Armenia has interesting possibilities for cooperation with Europe, despite the fact that the country is a member of a very different integration process, he told journalists research director at the Norwegian Peace Research Institute (PRIO) Pavel Baev at the international scientific conference “Caucasus-2014.”

“For the EU, it is important to prove that it not an alternative to another, that it is possible to work in both directions. We are not talking about a tug of war, but about implementation of reforms. I think that the word ‘reform’ will be the key for Armenia. With it, many spontaneous political reactions are connected, but what comes to mind - is primarily a problem of human rights, where the situation is not great in Armenia,” he said.

According to Baev, the reform that is very difficult in the political sphere may turn out much better in other areas, such as reforms in the judicial system, which will be perceived very positively in Europe.

Baev noted that in the area of “Eastern Partnership” there is a “running” of countries in different directions, and the concept that all countries move in the same direction is not working at all, while reforms are possible even under difficult political conditions...

Continued: Caucasus 2014 International Conference in Yerevan

that it is not an alternative to another, that it is possible to work in both directions. We are not talking about a tug of war, but about implementation of reforms.” Indeed, Armenia requires many reforms, some of which Baev touches upon. While he acknowledges that political reform is an uphill battle, certain other reforms, such as reforms in the judicial sector (in line with EU standards), may still be possible.

The European Commission, for its part, according to the second PanArmenian.net excerpt, began negotiations with Armenia over a new legal format of relations. Head of the EU delegation to Armenia Traian Hristea made this announcement at the conference. He stressed that these relations will still be maintained within the Eastern Partnership format.

*While the conference covered other critical regional issues in 2014, Nagorno-Karabakh and cooperation with Europe certainly remain among the top ones for the South Caucasus. That the EU is looking for ways to continue working with Armenia, yet is looking to revise the format of relations, is particularly important in light of Armenia joining Russia’s Customs Union. It remains to be seen how these relations unfold, given Russia’s increased grip on Armenia, as well as what direction the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict takes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)***

Source: “Еврокомиссия и Армения начали переговоры вокруг нового юридического формата отношений” (Euro Commission and Armenia Began Negotiations Over New Legal Format of Relations), PanArmenian.net, 26 May 2015. <http://goo.gl/AnoC4s>

The European Commission began negotiations with Armenia over a new legal format of relations, he said on Tuesday in Yerevan the head of the EU delegation to Armenia Traian Hristea at the international scientific conference “Caucasus-2014”.

However, he stressed that the “Eastern Partnership” is the format that allows to transfer values and helps member states in implementing reforms...



Source: “Yerevan with Ararat”. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 de via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yerevan_with_Ararat.jpg#/media/File:Yerevan_with_Ararat.jpg

Khodorkovsky Calls for Major Shift in Chechnya Policy

27 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: On 27 May 2015 Russian Switzerland-based opposition leader in exile, author, and former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky wrote an opinion article in business-oriented *Vedomosti*, calling for a new approach towards Chechnya. His article comes at a time when the threat of radical Islam is on the rise in Russia, including, in particular, in Chechnya. A view such as his does not get reported often in the Russian press.

Khodorkovsky calls for Russia to take responsibility for helping Chechnya, rather than to continue subordinating it. He feels that the current policy of maintaining the veneer of peace in Chechnya through continually providing aid to the republic's ruling family of Ramzan Kadyrov will only lead to increased radicalism, direct conflict, and loss of innocent lives.

For the moment Chechnya still remains relatively peaceful, although Kadyrov's family is growing greedier, and the federal budget is becoming increasingly strained due to the situation in Crimea, Western sanctions, and broader economic decline in Russia. According to Khodorkovsky, once the Kremlin becomes unable to satisfy the Kadyrovs' appetites, terrorism in Russia will grow. Meanwhile, the Kremlin's policies are turning Chechnya's population against Russia. Despite relative peace, few in Chechnya have prospects for real social mobility. They have seen that the only way to succeed in their republic is not through honest and hard work, but by fighting and then making a deal with the Kremlin, as Kadyrov has done. This means, in Khodorkovsky's view, that once Kadyrov's clan loses power, Chechnya's population would look to break away from Russia, making Chechnya a prime magnet for radical terrorist activities.

Khodorkovsky calls for taking long-term responsibility for Chechnya by "bringing it out of the Middle Ages," investing in education, especially for children, raising the living standard, committing to keeping Chechnya part of Russia, and increasing the power of local municipalities while reducing that of the federal center. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: Mikhail Khodorkovsky, "Чечня: не подчинить, а починить" (Chechnya: not Subordinate, but Repair), *Vedomosti*, 27 May 2015. <http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/05/28/594035-chechnya-ne-podchinit-a-pochinit>

...Pro-government political scientists impose on us a false alternative: either the rigid authoritarian feudal system and paying de facto tribute to little local czars, or a new Caucasian war. In fact, there is a different alternative. In the long run, the current policies will lead not to the settlement of the situation in Chechnya, but to creation of two dangerous enemies, an with one of whom there will be inevitable conflict.

The first enemy— is Kadyrov's power clan, used to life at the expense of federal aid. Over the years, its appetite will only grow, while the abilities of the federal budget because of Crimea, sanctions, and general economic decline – will decline. If the federal government will try to curb the clan's appetites, we risk power excesses in other parts of Russia - from terrorist attacks to increase racket against business. It's a shame realize that these men will be armed at the expense of Russian taxpayers.

The second enemy, also one we created ourselves – is the Chechnya's population ... It sees that Russia stands behind in the regime, built in Chechnya, and that Russia they associate precisely Russia with the injustice happening in their republic. This leaves no chance of that, when the Kadyrov's regime ceases to exist, Chechnya will voluntarily remain part of Russia ... We send Chechnya's young population a very harmful signal, setting as example not a workaholic and but a robber. They understand that they have no social mobility in today's Chechnya, and the only scenario for upward mobility—is to fight, and then make a deal with the federal center. It is precisely in this manner that Chechnya's current generation of leaders "achieved success."

If we want to avoid this scenario, Russia needs a new policy and a new agreement with Chechnya.

First, we must recognize that the people of Chechnya – are Russia's citizens. Our government is responsible for establishing the power system in Chechnya, pounding it in the Middle Ages. Our responsibility – is to bring their living standards of living up to those of Russia...

Second, it is in our interest to keep Chechnya as part of Russia. This will avoid turning the region into a permanent threat to national security. A rebuffed Chechnya will become the center for export of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism...

Third, we understand that the transition from the Middle Ages back to modern society will require resources that should be spent primarily on the education and upbringing of children. Due to the inertia of the processes, the transition will take time.

Fourth, the very system of relations between the federal center and the regions should be revised. We must shift the emphasis on cooperation with the republic's leadership to the city governments and municipalities...

Soviet-Russian Laser Weapons

28 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *In rearming and modernizing the Russian military, Russian defense officials have been not only incorporating the latest technology, but also examining weapon models from the late Soviet period. While advances in technology over the past three decades have rendered many of these prototypes obsolete, there are a handful of areas (e.g., electronic warfare, lasers, WMD) where, theoretically, Soviet-era engineering remains competitive on today's battlefield. The adjacent excerpt describes various laser platforms developed during that period, explains why this technology fell into disrepair and suggests the likelihood that Russia will use these prototypes to develop laser weapons in the future.*

The article claims that "by the end of the 1980's the USSR had conducted successful firings of laser guns," with extensive ranges. Supposedly, these weapons were responsible for shutting down US "military satellite control systems... and even space shuttles ceased to obey their astronauts." The article also asserts that the USSR had created "laser-tanks" on the chassis of the T-80 tank platform which "were capable of burning out all enemy optics within direct line of sight in fractions of a second." It goes on to claim that "one laser tank could stop an armada of the very same kind of tanks." Soviet weapon engineers had even created a "portable laser device which also was capable of stopping an enemy tank armada" by burning out all of the enemy's electronic components.

The author's reasoning as to why this technology fell into disrepair is even more incredible than these extravagant claims. Not surprisingly, given that this article was published in Russia's main government newspaper, the primary cause turns out to be yet another Western plot to weaken the USSR. "Understanding that the West was losing to Russia in combat laser systems, certain international agreements were adopted hastily which set limits to the permissible power of laser radiation."

*The article concludes by suggesting that this technological know-how "has not been lost" and that some within Russia's military-industrial complex have continued to work in this field "without advertising it." The current Kremlin leadership has made military modernization a key priority and the results of their efforts have been on display both in Ukraine and during the Victory Day parade in Moscow in May. Yet merely hearkening back to (and exaggerating) the glory days of Soviet weapon design—without the requisite investment in the country's technological infrastructure—will not produce the next wonder-weapon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)***

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, "Лучи смерти: Когда в Российской армии появится "лазерный танк"?" [Death Rays: When Will a 'Laser Tank' Appear in the Russian Army?] Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online, 28 May 2015.

Laser-Gun Tanks Developed in USSR Examined

...Several major NII's [scientific research institutes], NPO's [scientific production associations], and KB's [design bureaus] in the USSR were working on a laser weapon. The leading developer of combat lasers was the Moscow Astrofizika NPO, formed on the basis of the classified Luch KB. The NPO also became one of the most highly classified Union enterprises....

...By the end of the 1980's the USSR had conducted successful firings of laser guns. The tests were held at different ranges. The largest and most highly classified one was in Kazakhstan. American intelligence tried long and unsuccessfully to find out what kind of systems were being tested there.... In the final account, one of the US reconnaissance satellites was able to photograph laser guns in Kazakhstan. Washington was shocked. They could in no way understand why their military satellite control systems would shut down periodically and even space shuttles ceased to obey their astronauts.

The fact is that our laser guns operated not only in the visible spectrum, but also in various spectra of electromagnetic frequencies.

Laser guns on a T-80 tank platform could instantaneously burn out all optics of enemy armored vehicles in a direct line of sight.

There were and are no official confirmations of this, although no one also made any denials. But one high-ranking official of the Yeltsin government once publicly let it slip that platforms were practically ready in the USSR for accommodating laser combat systems both on the ground and on naval ships as well as in near-Earth orbit. It is worth recalling that at that time the United States was only fumbling with its SDI, but achieved no real successes.

Following the disintegration of the USSR all work on powerful combat radiators was shut down and the experimental units in Kazakhstan were destroyed. Astrofizika essentially ceased to be funded. But it is impossible to ban scientific thought; enthusiasts continued to work without advertising it.

The creation of a laser tank which began back in the USSR succeeded in being completed in that same Astrofizika. It was tested and, difficult to believe, it was made operational.

Laser guns on the T-80 tank platform were capable of burning out all enemy optics within direct line of sight in fractions of a second. That is, when there was contact with enemy armored vehicles, Soviet laser tanks simply would blind them, making aimed fire impossible....

(continued)

Continued: Soviet-Russian Laser Weapons

...In parallel with the tank, the Precision Machine Building KB imeni Nudelman designed a portable laser device which also was capable of stopping an enemy tank armada without firing a shot and of disabling all PTURS [ATGM] operators and snipers who had taken up positions on the opposing sides' line of contact.

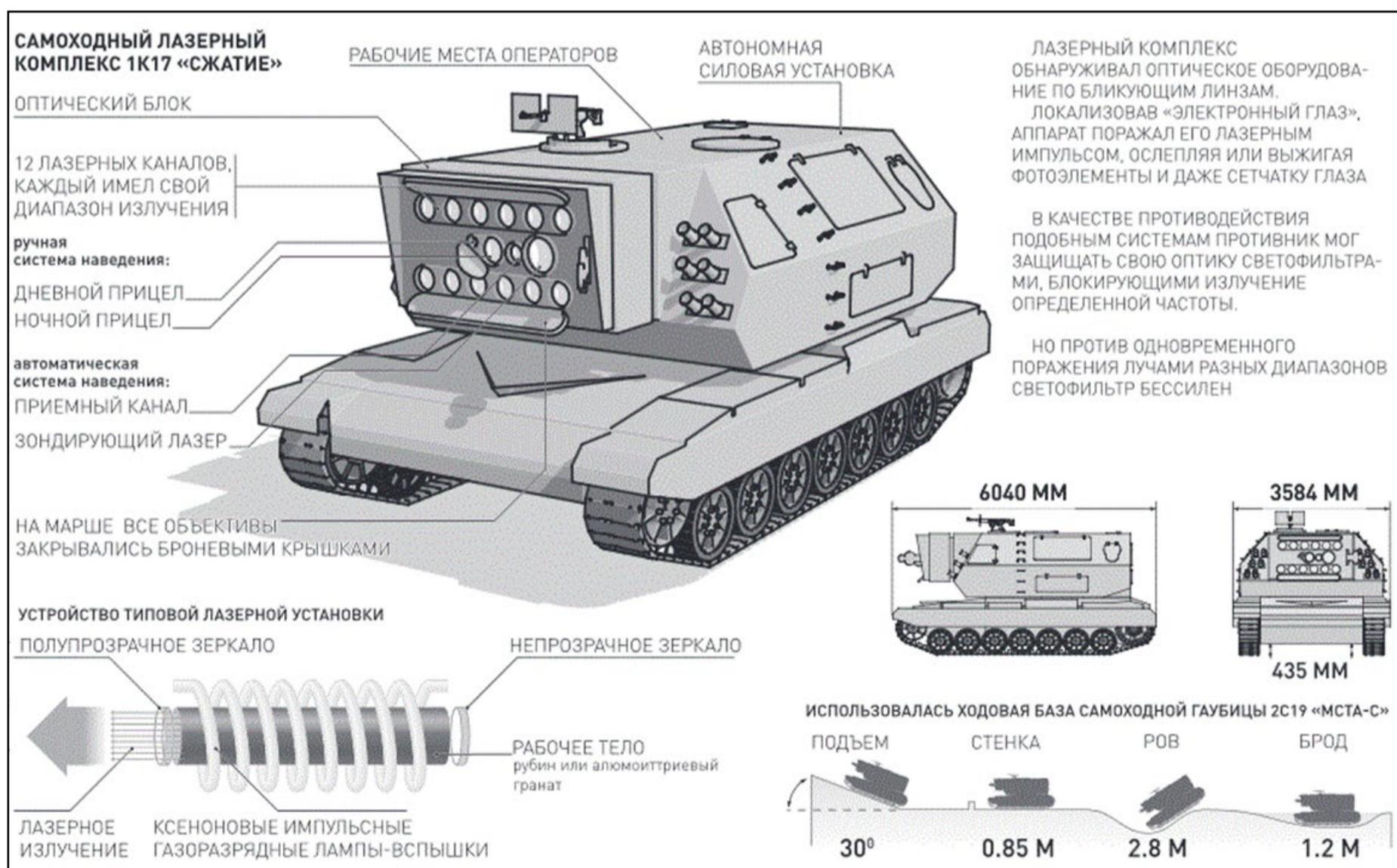
The essence of the unique system is simple. A laser beam radiated in the invisible frequency band scanned a potentially dangerous sector on the forward edge of defense. As soon as an enemy optical device ended up in the scanner's coverage, an attack was delivered against him by a combat laser, the powerful beam of which would instantaneously burn out optics as well as the eyes of those enemies looking through these optics.

Creators of the wonder-weapon began thinking about what to call their development so no one would guess anything and, most important, so there also was no mention of a laser. They called it the PAPV -- portable automated sighting device.

You will not conceive of a stranger name, but on the other hand it was impossible to guess its true purpose. But even this ruse did not save the unique combat system. Humane Westerners were able to communicate to the highest echelons of our power the idea of the impermissibility of making such a "barbaric" system operational, which (just think!) could blind a sniper or gunner glued to the sight. The "humanists" were not embarrassed that enemy soldiers were not looking through opera glasses, but were seeking targets to kill.

Understanding that the West was losing to Russia in combat laser systems, certain international agreements were adopted hastily which set limits to the permissible power of laser radiation. They are in the band from 1 mW to 2.5 mW per square centimeter. In this case a brief loss of vision is possible, but there are no irreversible consequences to the eye. The optics naturally do not even notice that effect. It turned out that it was more humane to kill a person than to damage his vision.

Today the laser tanks have been disassembled and are rusting in some bays. Meanwhile, the technology has not been lost.



Soviet schematic (in Russian) of the 1K17 "Grip" self-propelled laser complex.

Source: Leonid Kuleshov, RG.

Belarus Border Anxiety

5 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: According to recently published poll data, Russians consider Belarus to be their country's closest ally. The two countries share a considerable historical legacy and are linked today by many cultural, political, economic and military ties. Over the past two decades, in exchange for loyalty and support, Russia has helped to keep the Belarus economy afloat, which, in turn, has allowed President Alexander Lukashenko to remain in power. While there have been occasional disagreements, leaders in both countries have made the necessary compromises to keep the relationship strong. This may now be changing.

The leadership in Minsk expressed serious concerns after the Kremlin leadership decided to forcefully alter the borders with Georgia in August 2008, when it moved to recognize (and support) the independent statelets of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Much to the chagrin of Moscow, Belarus has so far refused to recognize these new states. Anxieties among the Belarusian leadership only increased when the Kremlin annexed Crimea in March 2014 (which Belarus has also refused to acknowledge) and have continued to percolate as Russia continues its military involvement in the ongoing conflict in SE Ukraine.

Over the past year, the leadership in Minsk has played an important role in hosting peace negotiations among the warring sides in the Ukrainian conflict. While the fighting continues, major combat operations have mostly ceased and the negotiations have created a shaky framework to build a more lasting settlement. In the process, the leadership in Belarus has become fully acquainted with the duplicitous strategies adopted by the pro-Russian separatists (and their Kremlin sponsors). They have seen firsthand the measures the Russian leadership will adopt to protect its interests.

The brief excerpt from a nongovernmental website in Belarus reflects this growing angst toward Russia. The article describes a training exercise whereby "special operations companies were transferred to the command of the border guards" to repel "undesirable elements from penetrating Belarusian territory." The exercise took place along the border between Belarus and Ukraine, since "any military activity near the Russian border would be 'diplomatically awkward.'" Still, the exercise was designed "at countering the threat of a hybrid war of the sort Russia is conducting in eastern Ukraine."

Given its close military and security ties and its significant control over the Belarusian economy, the Kremlin would not have to infiltrate the border with "hybrid forces" if it wanted to influence the leadership in Minsk. Presidential elections in Belarus will take place in October 2015, and at this point Lukashenko is expected to win a fifth term as president. However, should the leadership in Belarus begin to pursue too independent a course, the Kremlin has more effective tools than "polite green men" to keep Belarus as a trusted ally. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Pavel Sharamet, "Белорусскую армию стягивают к границе с Украиной: готовятся к гибридной войне?" [Belarus Army Deploys to Ukraine Border; Training for Hybrid War?] Beloruskiy Partizan, 5 June 2015. <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/306946/>

Belarus Army Deploys to Ukraine Border

The military exercises held jointly by two mobile special operations companies of the Belarusian Armed Forces and the Belarusian border service near the southern border with Ukraine, which began on 2 June, were aimed at countering the threat of a hybrid war of the sort Russia is conducting in eastern Ukraine, military expert Aleksandr Alyesin has said, the Beloruskiy Partizan news and analysis website reported on 5 June.

"I believe that Ukraine itself is not the reason [for these exercises]. An interesting peculiarity about them is that these special operations companies were transferred to the command of the border guards. This means that their task is to cover the border and the area near the border. It seems that they are executing a mission to prevent undesirable elements from penetrating Belarusian territory. These would be armed groups or unarmed persons, like extremists, maybe detachments, which are capable of destabilizing Belarusian territory," Alyesin said.

He said that border control is critical in preventing the onset of a hybrid war.

"As we see in Ukraine, an uncovered border means that no-one can know what is passing between Russia and Donbass. And now we see that Belarus has shifted from theoretical study of types and methods of hybrid warfare to practical action," he said.

Alyesin noted the use of mobile units and their transfer to border service authority in particular, since, in his opinion, only mobile special operations units can repel heavily armed extremist saboteur groups crashing the border.

As for the reason why the exercises were held near the border with Ukraine, Alyesin argued that they would be "justified", considering the war in Ukraine, while carrying out military exercises near the Baltic states or Poland would be "undesirable", since NATO is holding its own exercises there, and any military activity near the Russian border would be "diplomatically awkward".

Alyesin concluded by saying that the Belarusian military exercises were no threat to Kyiv.

Reporting of Russian Casualties-A Crime?

16 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Over the past 16 months Kremlin authorities have consistently denied any sort of military involvement in the conflict in SE Ukraine. In their rendition it has merely been patriotic Russian volunteers who have assisted pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to defend their territory from the predatory government in Kiev; the Russian military has played no role. If Russian soldiers were captured, they have claimed that these few Russian soldiers had taken leave to support the separatists. Separatist military equipment either was already present or was captured from Ukrainian units. Although considerable evidence has surfaced which contradicts these claims, Kremlin officials continue to assert that neither regular Russian military units nor their armaments have been employed against Ukraine. Dead Russian soldiers, however, are another matter.*

Over the past year unofficial reports of Russian military losses stemming from the conflict in Ukraine have appeared in a few small Russian media sources. For instance, in August 2014 a fearless local Pskov councilman and journalist reported on a series of funerals of paratroopers from the nearby airborne division. This story, like others, was ignored by Russia's national media, but spread quickly on social media and the few remaining independent media sites. Not surprisingly, the Pskov journalist who reported the story was beaten and other journalists who have dared to investigate his claim and other similar reports have been threatened. Mere physical intimidation, however, has proven to be insufficient to stop the reports. To prevent such leaks in the future, the Russian government has now enacted legislation which makes the reporting of military personnel losses "during periods when special operations are in progress" a state crime.

As the first excerpt points out, the Kremlin insists that this new legislation is not connected to the situation in Ukraine, but rather "a secrecy regime of this kind best meets state interests." The second excerpt elaborates on these "interests." It claims that the rationale behind this new law is to protect the state, since "figures relating to lives lost can be used in the information war

(continued)

Source: Sergey Goryashko and Grigoriy Tumanov, "Государственная и мирная тайна: Данные о потерях Минобороны не подлежат разглашению даже в отсутствие войны," [State and Peacetime Secret; Information on Defense Ministry Losses Not To Be Disclosed Even in The Absence of War], Kommersant Online, 29 May 2015. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2736210>

President Vladimir Putin introduced changes to the list of information categorized as a state secret: This now includes information revealing Russian Federation Defense Ministry losses sustained in peace time while conducting special operations. The Kremlin asserts that these measures are necessary to defend national interests and are in no way connected to events in Ukraine. Lawyers do not rule out the possibility that media representatives could be made criminally liable for publishing information of this kind.

The president's edict introduces changes to the list of information categorized as a state secret which President Boris Yeltsin approved 30 November 1995. Until yesterday it was information about personnel losses in war time which could not be disclosed, but now information about losses during special operations conducted in peace time is a state secret. Commenting on the edict's provisions, the president's press secretary Dmitriy Peskov said that its appearance is not connected to the situation in Ukraine: "The improvement of legislation in the state secrets sphere is taking place and in this case, in the opinion of the relevant departments, a secrecy regime of this kind best meets state interests." To the question, is Vladimir Putin planning to authorize special operations, Mr. Peskov replied in the negative. . . .

Source: Andrey Vinokurov and Vladimir Vashchenko, "О потерях лучше помолчать: Президент России отнес к гостайне сведения о потерях Минобороны в мирное время," [It is Better to Keep Quiet about Losses: The Russian President Has Classified Information on Losses of Defense Ministry Personnel in Peacetime], Gazeta.ru, 28 May 2015. http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/05/28_a_6737177.shtml

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed an edict whereby amendments are being made to the list of information which is classified as a state secret. This category now includes losses of Defense Ministry personnel "in peacetime, during periods when special operations are in progress." Experts believe that the new edict will enable the state to protect itself against persons who attempt to clarify whether Russia is fighting in Ukraine. . . .

Other experts, however, believe that the edict will nevertheless have consequences.

Aleksandr Perenzhiyev, a member of the Association of Military Political Scientists, explains that this measure may be connected with the "ruling elite's" security. According to the expert, the figures relating to lives lost can be used "in the information war being waged against Russia." "We are compelled to protect ourselves and to take precautions of this kind. Whereas previously the public could demand the publication of data on lives lost, the legal act has now even removed any such possibility." . . .

. . . Readers are reminded that the RF Criminal Code contains a number of articles concerning the divulgence of state secrets. Under Article 283, for disclosing information that constitutes a state secret, a person to whom it became known through work or official position will be punished by either four to six months' detention in custody or up to four years' imprisonment.

And, under RF Criminal Code Article 276 ("Espionage"), the collection, theft, or transmission to a foreign state of information that constitutes a state secret may lead to a term of up to 20 years' imprisonment. . . .

Continued: Reporting of Russian Casualties-A Crime?

being waged against Russia.” Supposedly, unscrupulous domestic and foreign media could use these casualty statistics to weaken Russia. The punishment for divulging this type of information is harsh: “transmission to a foreign state of information that constitutes a state secret may lead to a term of up to 20 years’ imprisonment.”

This latest Kremlin move to control negative information has not gone unnoticed by the wider Russian society. As the third excerpt points out, a group of Russian lawyers, journalists and public figures have appealed against Vladimir Putin’s decree classifying information about military losses in peacetime. They maintain that the president is guilty of exceeding his authority and that the decree “violates citizens’ constitutional right to seek and distribute information.”

*The matter has now been forwarded to the Russian court, which will decide whether or not it is lawful to prosecute journalists who investigate the deaths of Russian soldiers “in peace time while conducting special operations.” Even if the court does take the highly unlikely step of ruling against the Kremlin, Russian security officials appear determined to hide the truth from the Russian people of their military’s involvement in Ukraine. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)***

Source: “Kremlin says no comment on appeal against Putin decree on military losses,” Ekho Moskvyy Radio, 16 Jun 2015.

A group of Russian lawyers, journalists and public figures have appealed against Vladimir Putin’s decree classifying information about military losses in peacetime. The appeal has been submitted to the Supreme Court, editorially independent Ekho Moskvyy radio reported on 16 June.

They accuse the president of exceeding his authority. In their opinion, Putin’s decree violates citizens’ constitutional right to seek and distribute information and could lead to the prosecution of journalists investigating deaths of Russian soldiers....

...In the opinion of the group behind the appeal, the president has no right to classify this information because this is outside his authority. Only a federal law, rather than a bylaw, can restrict access to information, and a decree is a bylaw, Pavlov explained to Ekho Moskvyy.

The Kremlin sees no reason to comment on the appeal. “It is up to the court to decide,” Dmitriy Peskov, Putin’s press secretary, told journalists, as reported by Russian state news agency TASS. “The decree has been signed, [by appealing against it] people exercise their right,” the Kremlin spokesman said....

At the end of May the Russian president signed a decree on amendments to the list of information classified as a state secret. In particular, information on personnel losses not only “in wartime” but also “in peacetime”, during periods when special operations are in progress, is now regarded as a state secret....



Source: “Ceremony signing the laws on admitting Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation 1” by Kremlin.ru. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ceremony_signing_the_laws_on_admitting_Crimea_and_Sevastopol_to_the_Russian_Federation_1.jpg#/media/File:Ceremony_signing_the_laws_on_admitting_Crimea_and_Sevastopol_to_the_Russian_Federation_1.jpg.

Don't Mess with a Soldier's Chow, Pay, Leave or Mail

5 June 2015

“Voyennoye RF [Military of the Russian Federation] reports that serviceman on the Island of Kotelnyy are given spoiled food for lunch, have to wait for their pay for up to six months, and cannot travel to the mainland. According to the servicemen, their appeals to the command have had no effect.”

OE Watch Commentary: One of the adages that American officers and NCOs learn early in their careers is not to mess with a soldier's food, pay, leave or mail. Soldiers always complain, but the soldiers stationed on the Arctic Kotelnyy Island may have justification. The soldiers stationed in the Arctic are all contract soldiers, not conscripts. Part of their contract for service in the Arctic includes special Arctic duty pay and allowances plus credit for two years of active duty for every year served. Apparently regular pay is delayed and special pay is far below that promised. Leave is not granted and the food is lousy (or a least licey). Hopefully the soldiers are getting their mail.

Actually, wood lice are not insects, but crustaceans (think shrimp, crab and lobster). A common form of wood louse in America is the ubiquitous pill bug or roly-poly. This commentator has not tried it, but a survivalist friend assures him that a panful of boiled woodlice is “better than shrimp.” Maybe the Kotelnyy soldiers should think of this as a gourmet experience. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Vzglyad Online, <http://vzglyad.ru/>, 5 June 2015.

Russian servicemen in the Arctic have told journalists of delays in payment of their wages and problems with food.

“Moldy fish, rice and sprats with some strange bugs in them,” a serviceman described one of his lunches. It was probably wood lice. Information about the poor quality of food was confirmed by several other servicemen stationed in the Arctic.

They also spoke of getting their wages after a delay of several months. As an example, one of the servicemen arrived on the island at the beginning of the year but began receiving his pay only last month. Another serviceman said that he had not received his full pay even once after beginning his service in the autumn of 2014. “They recalculate the pay every month for some obscure reason. They keep recalculating it all the time and never pay the full amount.”

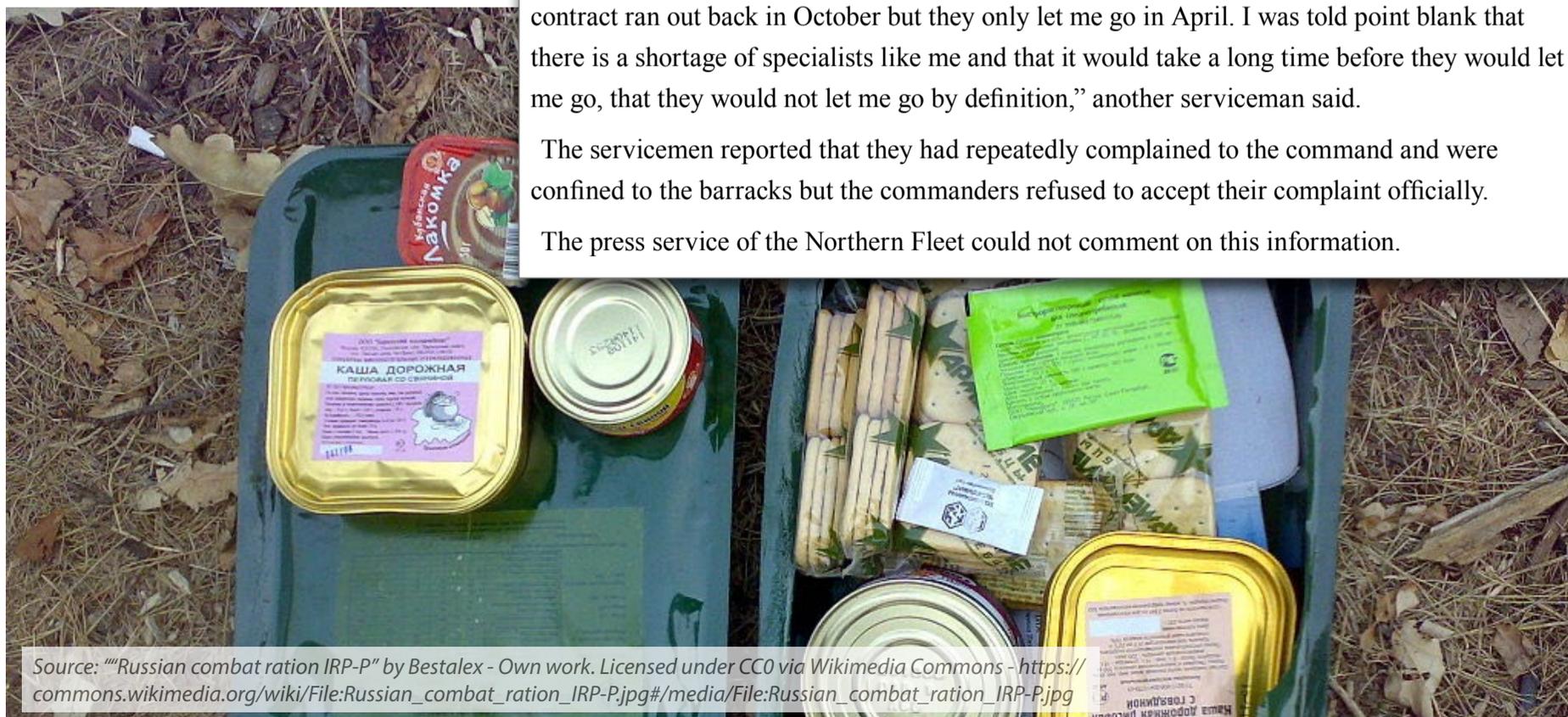
The servicemen do not get the promised additional payments either. “The wages went up only because of the regional factor. And they promised additional payments for serving on an island, for difficult conditions of service, and so on. Some guys only get R30,000 [\$540.00] despite serving in such a difficult environment,” the serviceman noted.

Apart from that, many servicemen cannot actually leave the island without “special sanctions” by the command. The majority of the servicemen went to serve on the Island of Kotelnyy for a period of up to six months. “I was supposed to spend three months on the island and then return to the mainland for two months of leave, a month of medical examinations and a month of training,” one of the men from the Kotelnyy Island base explained. The wife of another serviceman said that her husband was going to the island on a rotation basis: “They said in the beginning that he would spend three months there and three months at home. Then they talked of eight months there and four months at home. And now they talk of “from one leave to the next.”

“I had to resign before the end of the contract period and am now applying from scratch! My contract ran out back in October but they only let me go in April. I was told point blank that there is a shortage of specialists like me and that it would take a long time before they would let me go, that they would not let me go by definition,” another serviceman said.

The servicemen reported that they had repeatedly complained to the command and were confined to the barracks but the commanders refused to accept their complaint officially.

The press service of the Northern Fleet could not comment on this information.



Source: “Russian combat ration IRP-P” by Bestalex - Own work. Licensed under CC0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_combat_ration_IRP-P.jpg#/media/File:Russian_combat_ration_IRP-P.jpg

Northern Fleet Plans Active Summer Training and Large Exercise

3 June 2015

“The Northern Fleet is planning to conduct a large exercise focusing on defense of Russia’s important economic assets in the Arctic in course of 2015, Commander Admiral Vladimir Korolyov said in a press meeting on Monday.”

OE Watch Commentary: *The Northern Fleet continues to train and develop interoperability of its land, air and naval forces. The 98th Guards Airborne Division will probably provide the airborne drops, as this has been the go-to division for rapid ground force reinforcement in the Russian Arctic over the last 18 months. The division is located south of St. Petersburg and has acquired a good knowledge of conducting parachute operations in the Arctic region.*

The planned exercise will probably be the first major roll-out for the newly-established 80th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade. The Northern Fleet’s 61st Naval Infantry Brigade will most likely also participate in the ground exercise. End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: Trude Pettersen, Barents Observer, <http://barentsobserver.com>, 3 June 2015

Russia’s Northern Fleet is planning a large-scale exercise that will include Arctic rifle brigades, paratroopers and special forces, the fleet’s Commander says.

In the exercise, the Northern Fleet’s two Arctic brigades will interoperate with units from the airborne forces and special detachments, Korolyov said, and added that he did not want to unveil any more details about the exercise yet.

The two Arctic brigades are the 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade in Pechenga and the 80th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade in Alakurtti. The brigade in Pechenga became part of the Northern Fleet’s ground forces in December 2012, while the unit in Alakurtti was established in January 2015 as part of Russia’s increased Arctic ambitions.

The Northern Fleet also plans to conduct drills along the Northern Sea Route this summer, as it has done for the last couple of years. According to Korolyov, a task force of naval vessels and support ships will sail to the New Siberian Islands, where Russia in 2013 started the process of reopening an old Soviet air base that had been abandoned since the early 1990s.

“During the passage of the Northern Sea Route, there will be several drills related to salvage – rescue of vessels in distress in the Arctic, rescue of people at sea and response to different crisis situations that are typical for this area,” the Commander said.

Russia has in the last years increased its presence in the Arctic. In 2012, after a large-scale naval exercise which included more than 7000 people and some 20 vessels, personnel from the Northern Fleet conducted Russia’s first ever amphibious landing on the Arctic archipelago of the New Siberian Islands.



Sleeve Insignia of the Russian Northern Fleet

Source: by Thommy - Own work, based on Russian Northern Fleet patch.png and Russian Airborne Troops patch.svg.
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Official U.S. Navy Imagery - Chief of Naval Operations inspects the troops aboard Russian Navy cruiser.

Source: Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flickr_-_Official_U.S._Navy_Imagery_-_Chief_of_Naval_Operations_inspects_the_troops_aboard_Russian_Navy_cruiser.jpg#/media/File:Flickr_-_Official_U.S._Navy_Imagery_-_Chief_of_Naval_Operations_inspects_the_troops_aboard_Russian_Navy_cruiser.jpg

When Cartographers and Statesmen Collide

5 June 2015

OE Watch Commentary:

Ownership of Arctic waters is a contentious issue and the nations contiguous to the Arctic are all involved in protecting and advancing their claims. All maps distort distance, area, direction and shape, since one cannot make a perfect map of a spherical planet. A globe is more accurate, but hard to fold and store in a glove box. The world thinks in terms of maps using the Mercator projection and traditionally has used land maps, not sea charts, in treaty negotiation.

Now, however, ownership of waters is important for the harvest or extraction of fish, oil and underwater minerals. International law awards sea ownership to a maritime nation 200 nautical miles out from that country's drop off of the continental shelf. Russia, Denmark (Greenland is an autonomous country within the Danish Kingdom) and Canada all have claimed ownership to the underwater Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges that run to the North Pole. The UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf is due to rule on Denmark's claim this year. Attached is a Russian map that FMSO analyst Chuck Bartles electronically duplicated and translated from the Russian. The disputed area in the article is shown as number one on the map. There are far more territorial disputes than the four depicted on the map. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Interfax in English, <http://www.interfax.com/>, 5 June 2015.

Russia's bid to expand Arctic boundaries might be rejected - commission

During a sideboard, Remizov told Interfax that the main reason for this supposition is the direct conflict between the applications of Russia and Denmark. "There might be a situation where ours will be rejected and then the Danish one will be approved," he said.

In addition, the "body of evidence [for the Russian application] is not 100%, and there is also confusion between geological argumentation and international law [argumentation]," Remizov said.

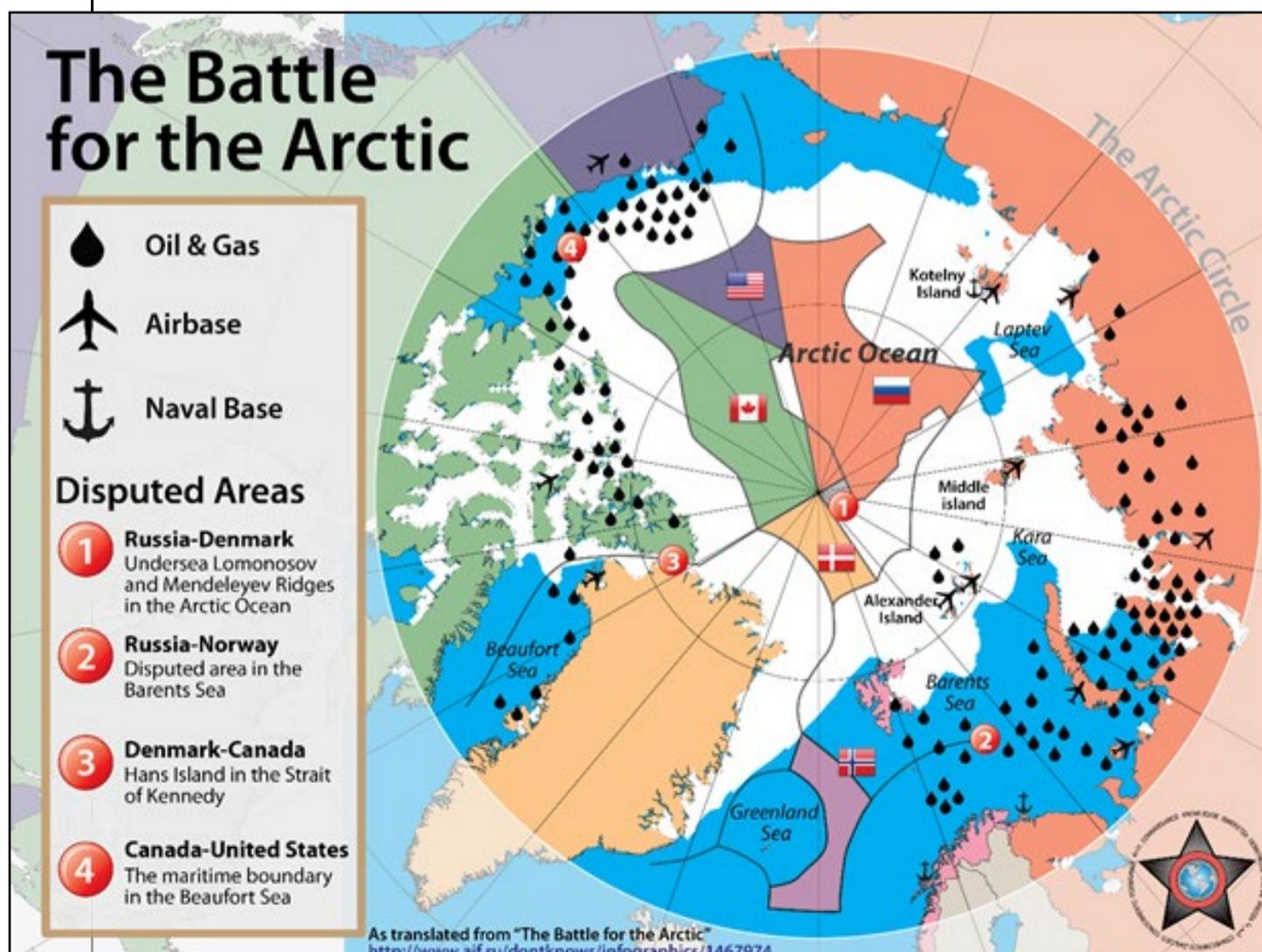
"Some orders have already been issued [by the Russian authorities] in this regard [if there are issues with the Russian application] but they are of a classified nature for now," Remizov said.

The current geopolitical situation also complicates the resolution of issues that require consensus, he said.

It was reported earlier that Russia still plans to submit an application this year to expand its boundaries in the Arctic. "The application will be submitted this year. The necessity of submission is quite justified, since consideration of the application will take years," Natural Resources Minister Sergei Donskoi said.

Donskoi said that Russia plans to partially include the Gakkel Ridge in the application to expand the boundaries of its continental shelf in the Arctic. For now, the claim submitted by Russia to the UN commission includes the Lomonosov Ridge, the Mendeleev Ridge and Podvodnikov Basin.

"The UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf might reject Russia's planned application to expand Russia's boundaries in the Arctic. The chairman of the expert council of the board of the Military-Industrial Commission, Mikhail Remizov stated this at the Tekhnoprom-2015 forum in Novosibirsk on 5 June."



Russian Reactivation of Lourdes SIGINT Collection Center under Consideration

28 May 2015

OE Watch Commentary: *Russia's State Duma is considering the reactivation of the electronic intelligence center in Havana, which Russia left in 2002. This center was the main Soviet and then Russian signal intelligence center. It is expected that the reactivation of the center would serve as a counter to the sanctions that the West has imposed on Russia, and it strikes directly at the warming of relations between Cuba and the US as well. Further, this report indicates that the Chinese may be invited to participate in the intelligence as well.*
End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)

Source: "Aleksandr Kondrashov, "Espionage: Return to Lourdes, Will a Russo-Chinese Signals Intelligence Center Appear in Cuba?" Argumenty Nedeli Online, 28 May 2015.

“This Electronic Center, which was located just 90 miles from the United States, was the main element of the early warning system about a surprise nuclear missile attack. Those unique methodologies, which no one in the world had, were developed there. With the closure of this Center, the country's security suffered enormous damage. The Center at Lourdes was officially subordinate to the Main International Military Cooperation Directorate and I was the directorate chief at that time. Therefore, even right now I cannot cite the precise figures of our losses due to classification considerations. But believe me, they are colossal.”

— Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov – the president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems and the former chief of the Russian Ministry of Dense Main International military cooperation Directorate

But why then did the Russian authorities with their own hands kill the ‘goose’ that was laying golden ‘intelligence eggs?’ I asked the old intelligence officer. Colonel Ivanov scowled: “You need to ask Medvedev and Kvashnin about this. This was their decision.” I didn’t manage to speak with Dmitriy Anatolyevich (Medvedev). But well I somehow managed to get an interview with Chief of the General Staff Anatoliy Kvashnin. During a conversation in his office, he fervently assured me that the danger from the south threatens Russia. And the United States is becoming nearly a friend and ally to us. Therefore, satellites are needed in order to conduct surveillance of terrorists. And it is better to purchase approximately 100 state-of-the-art radars and 20 spacecraft than to maintain a base in Cuba. He said that the annual savings will total \$200 million for the lease payment alone. This money will go for the purchase of new equipment and weapons.

The alleged technological backwardness of our Electronic Center in Cuba also turned out to be a bluff. They say that the very presence of the intelligence center in Cuba simply lost any practical sense as a result of the transition of the Pentagon, the CIA and other U.S. departments to digital types of communications. Because the GRU [Main Intelligence Directorate] electronic equipment that is located at Lourdes could have supported the interception of analog messages, it wasn’t capable of deciphering “digital.” In the process, Oleg Maksimovich, who served at Lourdes, only bitterly observed the “argument:” “The Center’s modernization ended in 1997. They brought in totally unique, super-expensive equipment. And using this equipment, we cracked this ‘digital’ like chestnuts. I remember how we smiled over a U.S. National Security Agency report, which reported to Congress that the Russians had spent over \$30 million on Lourdes. Here they measured in their own right. They obviously added a zero. But then again, even \$3 billion also doesn’t grow on trees. But they were frittered away.”

“We are not talking about the restoration of the presence of Russian personnel in Lourdes on the previous scale. During the times of the USSR, approximately 3,000 specialists serviced the Center and approximately 1,500 in the 1990s. There were fewer than a thousand recently prior to the withdrawal. State-of-the-art equipment has progressed very far as compared to Soviet equipment and that number of servicing personnel is not required. Furthermore, we could have used Lourdes for 300 years using the enormous Cuban debt, which Dmitriy Medvedev wrote off. And in the percentage with the allies for a total of 600 years.”

“Of course, it wouldn’t be so expensive to maintain the Signals Intelligence Center on a shared basis with the Chinese,” the journalist agreed with Ivanov.

Russia Is Considering Military Bases in Cuba Other Than Lourdes

8 May 2015

“Cuba is essentially the key to North and South America, so from the strategic standpoint the location of a Russian base there in one format or another, or a presence, will meet the national security interests of both Russia and Cuba.”

— Igor Korotchenko, member of the Public Council attached to the Russian Ministry of Defense and chief editor of the *Natsionalnaya Oborona* journal

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's interest in Cuba continues to grow. It is interested in establishing a military base there. Visits were made there last summer by President Putin, in February of this year by Defense Minister Shoygu visited, in May of this year by State Duma Speaker Naryshkin, thus giving the appearance that Russia is involved in a full court press to persuade Cuba to support its interest in establishing military bases there. Cuba's interest in the activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organization are of interest as well, since the organization's primary mission is to "protect the territorial and economic area of the treaty's member countries via the combined efforts of the armies and auxiliary subunits against any external military-political aggressors..."

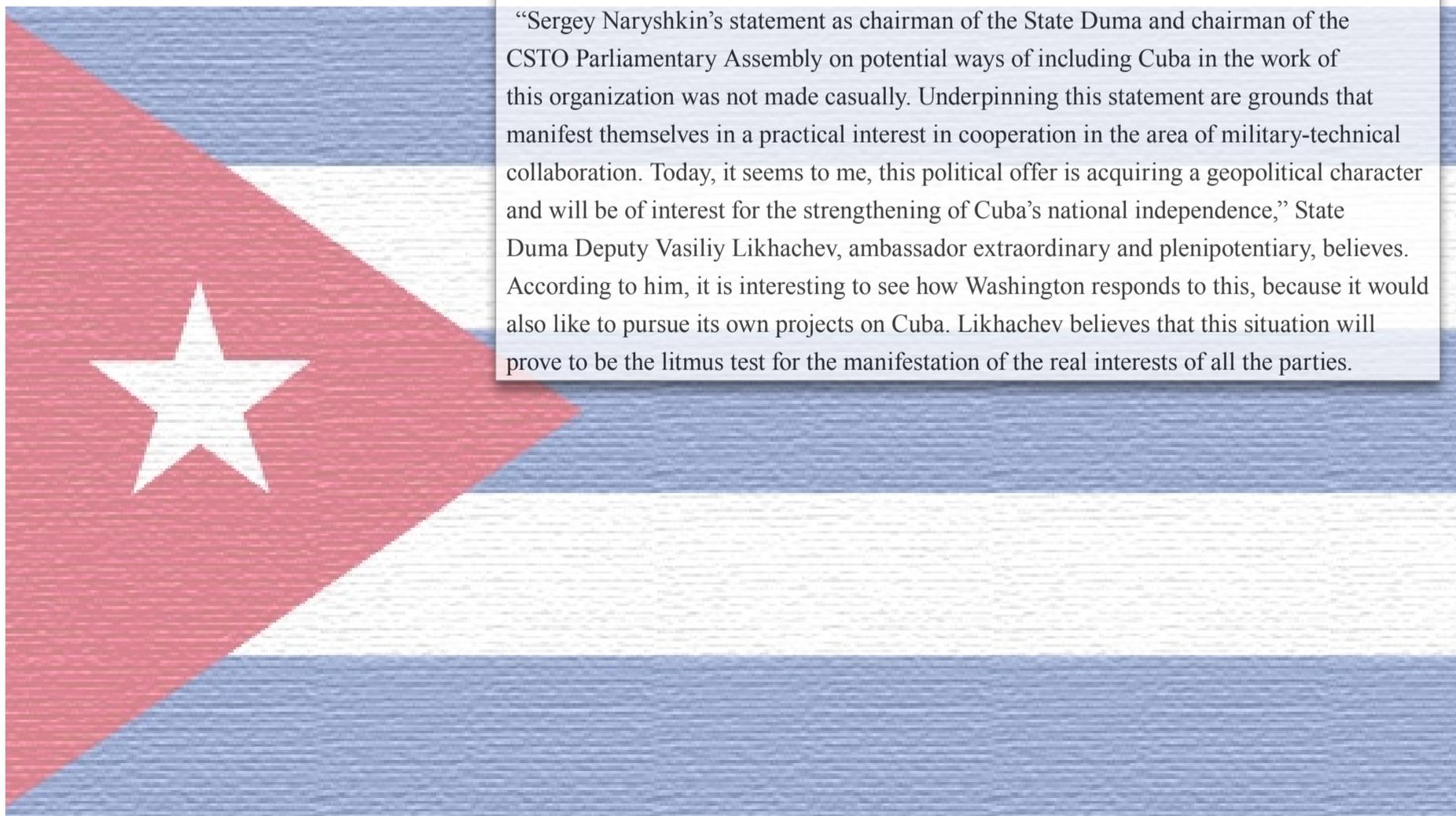
End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)

Source: Natalya Bashlykova, "Russia May Resurrect Military Base on Cuba. Countries' Military-Technical Cooperation Will Revert to Former Level," *Izvestiya Online*, 8 May 2015.

"I believe it is essential for us to resume the work of the Russian signals intelligence center on Cuba, previously this center acquired a considerable volume of information on the United States. Even today, in an environment of secure communications channels, a great deal of information is in the public domain," Korotchenko also pointed out. In his words, Cuba is of interest to Russia as a port of call for submarines performing missions in the said region, even if this base has a logistical and technical rather than a military format, we need, for example, one of the Cuban ports.

Let me mention that during his Cuba visit Sergey Naryshkin announced that Russia has a positive attitude toward the Cuban parliament's interest in the activities of the ODKB military alliance (Collective Security Treaty Organization). "We rate positively the interest shown by the parliament of the Republic of Cuba in the activities of the CSTO and its Parliamentary Assembly... We would welcome the Cuban parliament's involvement as an observer in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly," the State Duma speaker said, recalling that Cuban parliamentarians had already participated in the work of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly Council in Saint Petersburg in mid-April.

"Sergey Naryshkin's statement as chairman of the State Duma and chairman of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly on potential ways of including Cuba in the work of this organization was not made casually. Underpinning this statement are grounds that manifest themselves in a practical interest in cooperation in the area of military-technical collaboration. Today, it seems to me, this political offer is acquiring a geopolitical character and will be of interest for the strengthening of Cuba's national independence," State Duma Deputy Vasiliy Likhachev, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, believes. According to him, it is interesting to see how Washington responds to this, because it would also like to pursue its own projects on Cuba. Likhachev believes that this situation will prove to be the litmus test for the manifestation of the real interests of all the parties.



Source: "Flag of Cuba (WFB 2004)" by US CIA - The World Factbook. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Cuba_\(WFB_2004\).gif#/media/File:Flag_of_Cuba_\(WFB_2004\).gif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Cuba_(WFB_2004).gif#/media/File:Flag_of_Cuba_(WFB_2004).gif)

Russia Considers its Option in Transdniestria

25 May 2015

“The Russian Ministry of Defense is concerned about the possibility of a dramatic destabilization of the conflict in the Dniester Moldavian Republic (DMR) and is prepared for the most unfavorable scenarios. With this goal, the Operational Group of Russian Troops (OGRV), which is deployed in the Republic, recently conducted maneuvers for the defense of important military facilities.

In particular, he [defense ministry spokesman] reported information about a certain militarized plan for the elimination of the Dniester Moldavian Republic to a Nezavisimaya Gazeta correspondent. The U.S. intelligence services allegedly developed it with the participation of the military departments of Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. Kyiv’s decision to denounce the agreement with Moscow on the transit of Russian military personnel and their cargoes to the Dniester Moldavian Republic across Ukrainian territory became precisely part of this plan.”

OE Watch Commentary: Russia’s Foreign Ministry recently expressed its regrets at Ukraine’s decision to terminate an agreement regarding the transit of Russian military units stationed in Transdniestria via Ukrainian territory, which was one of five bills signed by the Verkhovna Rada denouncing Ukrainian-Russian defense cooperation agreements. These agreements were signed in 1995 for a five year term, to be automatically extended unless either party provided a six-month written notice of its intent to terminate the agreement.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko noted that the absence of a border between Transdniestria and Russia is the key difference between this situation and the one in Donbas, where Russia does have a border with Ukraine. This Russian report indicates that Russia is planning for the situation to erupt into a conflict instigated by NATO and the EU. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Wars and Armies: Moscow Prepares for Active Defense in the Dniester Moldavian Republic, Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online, 25 May 2015.

The Press Service of Western Military District, to which the Operational Group of Russian Troops is subordinate, reports that more than 100 of the grouping’s servicemen have been placed on alert. After a 150-kilometer march to the military supply depots in the village of Kolbasna, they entered into a training engagement with simulated terrorists, who were attempting to seize weapons and ammunition there.

A Military Department spokesman stresses that the OGRV soldiers operated under conditions, which simulated combat to the maximum extent possible. In the process, the counterterror subunit’s personnel successfully handled the assigned mission: “During the course of training on the destruction of the simulated terrorists, special attention was devoted to the improvement of the cohesiveness of the servicemen’s actions during the conduct of an engagement on open sectors of terrain in the composition of a subunit and small tactical teams (twos and threes)”. Right now not only Operational Group of Russian Troops servicemen are rehearsing these scenarios but also the Russian peacekeepers, who are deployed in the conflict zone. A Nezavisimaya Gazeta source at the Ministry of Defense explained the increased activity of the Russian troops in the DMR not only by summer training period plans but also by the real threats, which are emerging in the conflict zone right now.

Furthermore, Nezavisimaya Gazeta’s interlocutor stated that the conduct of saboteur and terrorist operations by Ukrainian and Romanian-Moldovan guerrillas, which are directed at the seizure of the ammo dumps in the DMR, which the Russian servicemen are guarding right now, are being planned already in the near future. At the same time, large-scale provocations with casualties and murders against the peaceful population, which are directed at discrediting our peacekeepers, will begin on the left bank of Dniester’s territory. These circumstance will become grounds for Chisinau’s official withdrawal from the peacekeeping process. The Moldovan authorities will seek assistance from the European Union and NATO. And there will obviously be the replacement of the Russian blue helmets in the form of the Moldovan-Romanian peacekeeping battalion by that time. Moldovan Defense Minister Viorel Chibotaru officially announced the formation of that subunit on 23 May while he was in Romania. After his meeting with his Romanian Colleague Mirsea Dusa, he announced that servicemen of Ukraine and Poland will be included in this battalion in the future.

Kurds in Iraq and Syria: Aspirations and Realities in a Changing Middle East

In his 1996 book, *The Ends of the Earth: Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*, journalist Robert Kaplan predicted, based on his travels around the world, that conflicts in the 21st century would take place around the “victory of ethnicity and culture over borders.”¹ Similarly, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson of Cornell University wrote in 1983, “Almost every year, the United Nations admits new members. And many ‘old nations,’ once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by ‘sub’-nationalisms within their borders- nationalisms which naturally dream of shedding their ‘sub’ness one day.” He explained that “...political maps enabled colonialists to think about their holdings and were ...bounded, determinate and countable... [Maps] shaped the grammar that would make possible such dubious concepts as Iraq, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria.”²

Just as Anderson claimed, Turkey, Iraq and Syria are all finding themselves challenged by the “sub”-nationalism of the Kurds within their borders. Kurds, divided by political borders, span parts of Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq, and dream of shedding their “sub”-ness by establishing their own country one day. It is estimated that there are about 32 million Kurds, with 15 million in Turkey, 8 million in Iran, 5-6.5 million in Iraq, about 2 million in Syria, and a total of half a million in other regions.³

The Kurds are the largest nation without a state (the Palestinians are the second largest). They view the regions they live in as “Kurdistan” and see it as a four-part region: eastern Kurdistan (Iran), western Kurdistan (Syria), southern Kurdistan (Iraq), and northern Kurdistan (Turkey). Kurdistan is not an official country, but one can argue that it is more real than several of the nation-states officially recognized as such in the international community (such as Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq). Unlike most countries in the African and Arab worlds, Kurdistan coheres in its geography and demography.

The borders that separate the Kurds are artificial. For example, the Turkish-Syrian border divides ethnic Kurds and traditional Kurdish lands. Drawn at the end of World War I to follow an Ottoman railway line, it is approximately 560-miles long and is the longest border Turkey shares with any of its neighbors. When Kurds in Turkey and Syria talk about their respective regions, they use the terms “above the line” and “below the line.” The two groups are really one and the same and the Turkish-Syrian border is really a Turkish-Kurdish Syrian border.

Why do Kurds want their own country? Many of them claim that they face problems in their home countries. In Iran Kurds are allegedly oppressed and risk numerous human rights violations ranging from arbitrary arrest to the death penalty after unfair trial, as well as restrictions on movement and denial of other civil rights.⁴ In Syria Kurds are not even considered full citizens, and face extreme difficulties in access to property rights, education, employment and health care.⁵ Those in Turkey are better off, but they still have their grievances: they want bi-

lingual education, greater cultural rights, a general amnesty for Turkish Workers Party (PKK) rebels, restoration of Kurdish place names in eastern and southeastern Turkey, and democratic autonomy in areas where Kurds have a majority.⁶ In Iraq hundreds of thousands of Kurds were massacred under the Saddam regime.

The Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq

In Iraq an autonomous Kurdish region has already emerged, with all the traits of an independent state, including its own constitution, parliament, flag, army, border and border patrol, national anthem, international airports and education system.⁷ David Phillips, author of, “The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East,” claims that the Middle East map will change to include the establishment of Iraqi Kurdistan as the world’s next newest nation.⁸ Iraqi Kurds do appear to be considering whether Kurdish independence from Iraq is feasible at this time.

In December 2014 Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, reaffirmed his commitment to Kurdish statehood after making a call for a referendum on the issue

in June 2014. This call came shortly after the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) entered northern Iraq, which resulted in the central Iraqi government losing control over some disputed territories, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. As the Iraqi Army left its positions, the Kurdish security forces took over additional territory, including Kirkuk, thus giving the Kurds potential economic independence. Barzani has since said that “Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan and we will not take one step back on this.”⁹

From the Kurdish perspective, the KRG stands as an inspiration to

Kurds in neighboring Syria, Iran and Turkey. As a consequence of the 1991 Gulf War, the region has already exposed the false “nation-statehood” of Iraq. A Syrian Kurdish region may not be far off: based on his conversations with locals, Kaplan claims that Syria, as a national-ethnic issue, has been dead for decades.¹⁰ As such, with the crisis, turmoil and uncertainty brought on by ISIS in Syria, authority vacuums are paving the way for a region in Syria similar to the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq.

Kurdish “Cantons” in Syria

The Syrian crisis and ISIS’s emergence has already led to the formation of a de-facto autonomous Kurdish region in Syria. As the Syrian crisis emerged in early 2011, the Kurds there focused on securing their own cities. They viewed the situation as a historic opportunity to plant the seeds of an autonomous Kurdish region there. Instead of getting involved in the fighting, they focused on Kurdish national unification, establishing an army and securing their own towns. As the fighting spread in the rest of the country, a string of Kurdish-majority towns in the north seized local authority from

(continued)



Demographic map of the Kurds. Source: globalsecurity.org

Continued: Kurds in Iraq and Syria: Aspirations and Realities in a Changing Middle East

the central government and took control of most state institutions in the north, including police stations. The Democratic Union Party (PYD) has emerged as the most powerful Kurdish faction in the region, and has sustained its dominance over Kurdish governance due to its organization, networks, and control over the law enforcement and military wings of the Kurdish groups.

In November 2013 the PYD declared the establishment of an interim autonomous administration in Syria's Kurdish northeast. The move was the first step of a three-part plan announced earlier, which also foresaw a constitution and elections. Subsequently it declared an autonomous region divided into three autonomous cantons, each with democratic autonomous self-administration. In January 2014 the Cizre, Kobane and Efrin Cantons declared autonomy. The Kurdistan Tribune, a platform for Kurdish news and opinion with an optimistic view for a united Kurdistan, claims, "What the Kurds are doing now in the west [Syria] lays the basis for a semi-autonomous region which can link with her sister in the south of Kurdistan [Iraq]... This is not a dream; this can become a reality..."¹¹

The PYD's recent success in pushing back ISIS from the Kobane Canton, considered a huge victory by all Kurds, has rekindled the Kurds' sense of unity and national identity. "Kobane will take its place next to Halabja [1988 genocidal attack on Kurds by Saddam Hussein, which is considered a symbol of Kurdish national identity] as a critical event in the construction of Kurdish identity," claims David Phillips.¹²

Iraqi Kurdistan as the World's Next New Nation?

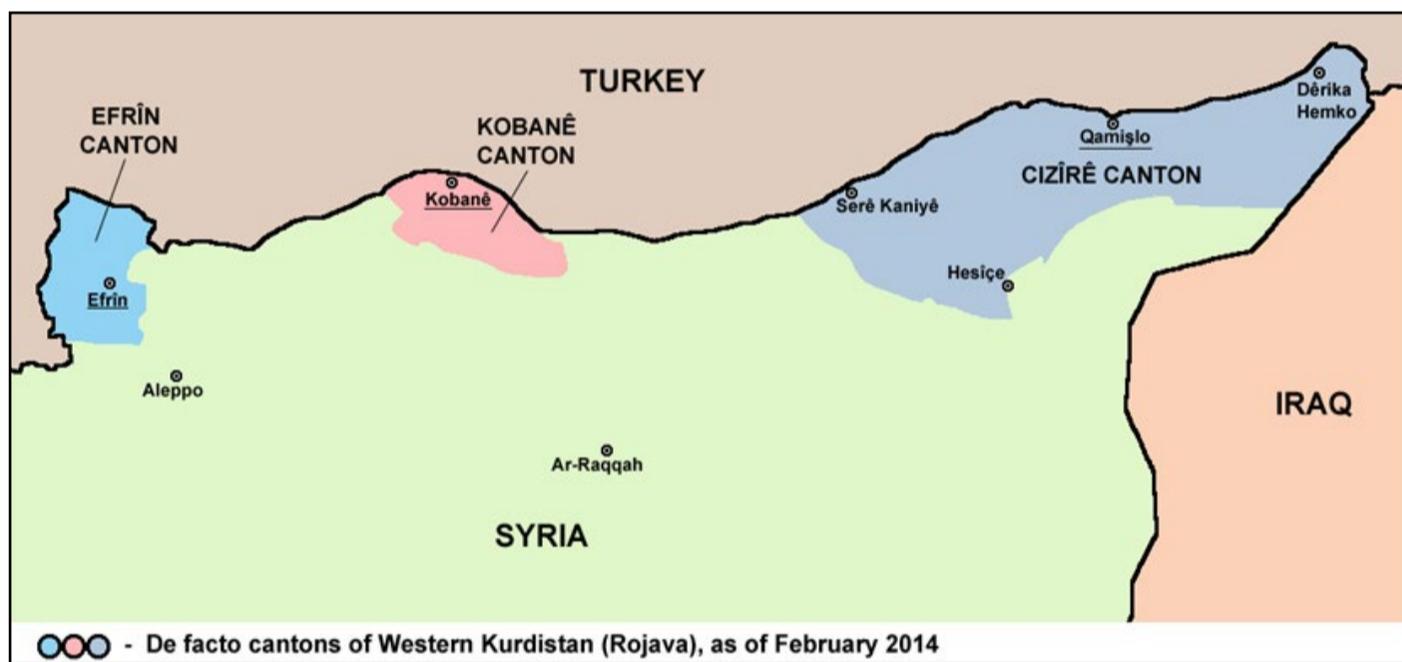
Despite all these developments, there is debate among Turkish and Middle East experts about whether it is the right time for Iraqi Kurds to declare independence. Some believe that it is not, citing the ISIS threat, against which Iraqi Kurds will need support to defend; the landlocked position of Iraqi Kurdistan, which would be dependent on Turkey for all its trade and exports; all neighboring and Arab states' opposition to the idea; and the Iraqi Kurdish economy's continued dependence on the central Iraqi budget. In contrast, there are some who claim that optimal conditions are present right now, but may not last very long.

In August 2014 Henri Barkey, a professor of international relations and topic expert, wrote:

This is not the right moment for independence....First, as the IS[IS] onslaught demonstrates, the threat from this insurgency is real and encompasses not just Iraq but also Syria. IS[IS] has proven itself to

be cunning and quite adept at tactics, if not strategy... the Kurds cannot stand up to IS[IS] on their own when it comes to defending the outlying areas. ...the KRG will need support from the central government... [Second] a forced and sour divorce from Iraq will leave them isolated in the region, relying solely on Turkey for all their trade and oil and gas export routes, not to mention airline connections. Being dependent on one country is bad enough, but being dependent on one which has its own domestic Kurdish problem that has yet to be resolved... is foolhardy. Iran, the Kurds' other major neighbor, is also hostile to Kurdish independence for fear that its own Kurds will be inspired to foment trouble along the same irredentist or separatist demands... The Kurdish economy in northern Iraq is still very dependent on the 17 percent it is allocated from the Iraqi budget.¹³

Barkey also claims that "Independence is likely to be contested by all of the putative state's neighbors, including the rest of the Arab world, which refuses to recognize a separate existence for the Kurds."¹⁴



The three Kurdish cantons in Northern Syria.
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobani_Canton

In contrast, Michael Tanchum of Tel Aviv University writes in the January 2015 issue of Foreign Affairs that the conditions for holding a referendum on Iraqi Kurdish independence are at near-optimal levels, but will only last about six months. He argues:

The series of peshmerga victories over ISIS in the Kurdish areas ... mean that the KRG now exerts effective control over these disputed territories.... But once the threat of ISIS in Iraq recedes and the West's focus shifts exclusively to Syria, the KRG may come under increasing pressure to postpone the referendum. However, if the Kurds were to vote for independence within the next few months, they can do so without worrying that Western powers might counter them by reducing their defense support; the United States and its NATO allies fear that any stand down would allow ISIS to resurge or Iranian-backed Shia militias to advance.¹⁵

Under the threat of ISIS and its victories against the group, the Kurds in Iraq appear united in their eagerness for an independent state. Despite disagreements on whether the time is now or not, it appears that this outcome may only be a matter of time. The future of the Syrian Kurds will depend on what a future Syria will look like and how long ISIS can maintain a long-term presence in the region.

Continued: Kurds in Iraq and Syria: Aspirations and Realities in a Changing Middle East

Endnotes

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