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IRAN-RUSSIA Relations

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ON THE COVER: Iran leader along with Vladimir Putin & cabinet.
Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Supreme_leader_of_Iran_receives_Russian_President_Vladimir_Putin_in_Tehran.jpg



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Cyber Attacks, Russia and NATO's Article 5

“...Cyber attacks, which constitute an important part of Russia's hybrid war concept, will be categorized as part of Europe's collective defense; and [such] hybrid threats managed from the Kremlin will be fought [against] accordingly.”

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 June, during the NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Brussels, an important decision was made, reflecting NATO's efforts to adapt to changing warfare and security threats: cyber was categorized as an operational domain, and the ministers decided that a cyber attack can invoke NATO's Article 5 on collective defense. Turkey, which has been subject to cyber attacks from Russia, was particularly interested in the decision. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss this issue.

As the first passage discusses, the two main outcomes of the NATO defense ministers meeting were NATO's decision to categorize cyber defense as an operational domain and to deploy new battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. On the issue of the cyber domain, the passage points out NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's comments that cyber would now be accepted as a domain similar to sea, air and land, and be considered part of collective defense, and that such attacks would invoke NATO's Article 5 on collective defense, which says that an armed attack against one shall be considered an attack against all. The passage also notes that cyber attacks “constitute an important part of Russia's hybrid war concept,” and will be “fought [against] accordingly.” The new decision to include cyber in this scope points to the changing definition of “armed attack.”

The second passage discusses what it terms Russia's “hybrid war” tactics, which include simultaneous use of many elements ranging from disinformation propaganda and covert military operations to cyber attacks against the West. The passage notes that Russia conducts military operations without using its conventional army, pointing to its actions in Ukraine and Crimea.

The third passage also notes that cyber attacks will now be considered a war front, potentially requiring the use of Article 5. The passage notes Stoltenberg's comments that cyber attacks are now a part of collective defense, and that it is very unlikely for today's conflicts not to involve a cyber dimension. It also reminds the reader that Russia was behind cyber attacks on the Pentagon and NATO in the past.

Turkey has been increasingly subject to cyber attacks, with the largest one in March 2016 by Russia. Such new threats, which many NATO members also share, are behind the alliance's broader move to adapt to changing warfare and security needs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: “NATO'dan Rus saldirganlığına karşı siber savunma hamlesi” (NATO's cyber defense move against Russian aggression), *ABhaber.com*, 15 June 2016, <http://www.abhaber.com/natodan-rus-saldirganligina-karsi-siber-savunma-hamlesi/>

“NATO decided to categorize cyber defense as an operational domain; in addition to deploying four battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland against Russia.

...

The NATO Secretary General declared that the concept of “cyber domain” was also on NATO's agenda and said that the cyber domain would be accepted as a domain similar to sea, air and land, and be accepted as part of collective defense. He also said that a cyber attack may necessitate the implementation of the famous Article 5 (collective defense).

Accordingly, cyber attacks, which constitute an important part of Russia's hybrid war concept, will be categorized as part of Europe's collective defense and [such] hybrid threats managed from the Kremlin will be fought [against] accordingly.”

Source: “Rusya'nın ‘karma savaşı’ mercecek altında” (Russia's “hybrid war” under the microscope), *Konhaber.com*, 8 June 2016, http://www.konhaber.com/haber-analiz_rusya_nin_karma_savasi_mercek_altinda-552732.html

“Russia, who lost the Cold War, is conducting a “hybrid war” which includes simultaneous use of many elements from disinformation propaganda to covert military operations to cyber attacks on the West.

...

Another leg of Russia's “hybrid war” are military operations that Russia conducts without officially using their conventional army. [Russia's] methods in Ukraine and Crimea are examples of this.”

Source: “NATO savunma alanını siber aleme taşıdı” (NATO expands its defense scope to include cyber), *Tr.euronews.com*, 15 June 2016, <http://tr.euronews.com/2016/06/15/nato-savunma-alanini-siber-aleme-tasidi/>

“NATO Defense Ministers meeting in the Belgian capital of Brussels, declared cyber attacks a new war front for the first time.... It was decided that a cyber attack on one of the members requiring a joint response would come under the scope of Article 5. Saying that cyber attacks are a part of collective defense, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg claimed the following: “A cyber attack can prompt collective defense, because we view such attacks as very dangerous and potentially leading to huge damage. And... nowadays it is very unlikely for a conflict to not involve a cyber dimension.”...

...

Two years ago, Russian hackers were held responsible for the theft of secret information from Pentagon and NATO computer systems.”

Turkey Conducts Largest-ever Multinational Military Drill

OE Watch Commentary: On 30-31 May Turkey carried out its largest-ever multinational military exercise, featuring hybrid threat scenarios with air, land and sea components. The Efes 2016 Combined Joint Exercise included 860 military personnel from Turkey, the US, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Germany, Qatar, Pakistan and Poland. The scenarios shed light on the Turkish military's threat perceptions and priorities, in addition to its efforts to adapt to a changing operational environment. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss these issues.

The first passage, by respected Turkish military analyst Metin Gürcan, notes that the Efes drill featured many firsts this year. For one, it was turned into a multinational drill for the first time. Second, the scenario was based on a hybrid operation, which included a fight against terrorism, cyber-war and psychological warfare for the first time. Gürcan also points out that this was the first time that a terrorist organization (with an ethnic focus) was included in the scenario. He notes that the focus on an ethnic-separatist terrorist organization points to the fact that, within the strategic thinking of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), the fight against the ethnically-motivated PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) is a higher priority than the fight against the religiously-motivated ISIS. Another important first is that civilian personnel from government ministries and other public bodies were incorporated into the exercise. Gürcan suggest that this points to the TAF finally becoming aware of the need for civilian-military integration in future operations. Overall, the author claims that the Efes drill was a display of the TAF's efforts to adapt to future operational environments and hybrid threats, and points out that the scenario was relevant to the operational environment in northern Syria

The second passage discusses the equipment and operational maneuvers used in the drill, pointing out that the exercise featured air, land and sea components. It notes the use of UAVs, jets conducting reconnaissance flights, mine-clearing vehicles, helicopters carrying rocket launchers, and amphibious units, as well as armored vehicles and howitzers, which were unloaded onto land. It notes that F16 war planes dropped real bombs on 20 pre-determined targets. The piece also points out that the drill featured some of Turkey's indigenous military technology, such as its national combat helicopter and its new corvette. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: Metin Gürcan, "Efes Tatbikati ilklere sahne oldu" (The Efes drill featured many firsts), *Al Monitor in Turkish*, 7 June 2016, <http://m.almonitor.com/pulse/tr/sites/almonitor/originals/2016/06/turkish-military-exercise-major-show-of-force.html>

Source: "Yabancı konuklar hayran kaldı Efes Tatbikati nefesleri kesti" (Foreign guests were in awe; the Efes Drill took breaths away), *Star.com.tr*, 1 June 2016, <http://haber.star.com.tr/politika/yabanci-konuklar-hayran-kaldi-efes-tatbikati-nefesleri-kesti/haber-1115133>

"One noticeable change in the drill, which included observers from 79 foreign countries and some 900 foreign personnel, along with 7500 soldiers, was the scenario.... This year, for the first time, the scenario was based on a hybrid operation which included a fight against terror, cyber-war and psychological warfare.

...

The exercise aimed at planning, coordinating and executing combined operations; training personnel; and testing and developing command-control procedures, electronic warfare tactics and air-space control. The exercise also briefed participants on each other's procedures and tactics, and the joint use of weapons, and aimed to elevate the training levels of participating forces and their headquarters personnel.

...

Another first was the inclusion of a terror organization in the scenario. The focus on an ethnic-separatist terror organization points to the fact that, within the strategic thinking of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), the fight against the ethnically-motivated PKK is a higher priority than the fight against the religiously-motivated ISIS.

...

In addition, for the first time civilian personnel from government ministries and other public bodies were incorporated into the exercise. It seems somewhat belated, but by including civilians, the TAF showed it is finally becoming aware of the need for civilian-military integration in future operations.

...

As a result, the Efes military exercise was a display of the TAF's efforts toward an institutional turning point, to adapt to future operational environments and hybrid threats. Naturally, observers noted the relevance of the exercise scenario to the operational environment in northern Syria, and that the exercise was transformed into a multinational effort. Observers had a chance to see how the TAF is working tirelessly to improve its combat effectiveness with new tactics and operational methods."

"The drill included UAVs and jets conducting reconnaissance flights, and mine-clearing vehicles supporting the attack by opening the roads in a mined field. In the drill which featured 900 foreign military personnel and about 7500 personnel overall, the scenario also included helicopters carrying rocket launchers to certain places. The operation started out using boats, but in the second stage, amphibious units were used. Armored vehicles and howitzers were unloaded on land. In addition, howitzers and mortars were carried by helicopters in the air. F16 war planes dropped read bombs on 20 pre-determined targets.

...

The drill also featured, for the first time, the national combat helicopter ATAK. In addition, the Heybeliada corvette, within the MILGEM project was also used.

With the participation of foreign countries, the Efes Drill was transformed into a joint drill this year. It is being reported that the drill will be conducted as a joint drill every other year."

Turkey's Naval Projects to Watch

“Turkey has made a name for itself in the shipbuilding industry.”

OE Watch Commentary: As the 16th largest economy in the world and a regional power with the second largest army in NATO, Turkey has initiated various national military and defense projects in recent years, including the national combat aircraft project, the national tank, the national combat ship, the national unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and national helicopters. Most recently, the government announced its intention to expand its naval assets in the coming years, boosting the country's shipyards. The accompanying passage from the Turkish press highlights this development.

The passage notes the comments by Ismail Demir, Undersecretary for the Defense Industry (also considered Turkey's top procurement official), in which he claims that Turkey has become a noteworthy country in the shipbuilding sector and announces that four “new generation” MILGEMs (national warship) are coming, and they will be more advanced and larger vessels. He notes that “new type” submarines are also being built, and that although they are German design, they will be built entirely in Turkey.

In 2011 Turkey joined the ranks of the few countries in the world that can build their own warships. The warship, a corvette, was built by a local shipyard and joined the Turkish Navy fleet in late September 2011. It was part of the MILGEM project, which had kicked off in 2004. The first Turkish-built warship, the TCG *Heybeliada*, was designed for anti-submarine warfare. Its capabilities include reconnaissance and surveillance, target detection, recognition and identification, early warning, base and coastal defense, anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare, anti-air warfare, amphibious operations and patrolling. The new MILGEMs will be a more advanced version of these.

Other projects within Turkey's naval ambitions include its first landing platform dock, whose construction began in May 2016. The planned amphibious assault vessel will carry a battalion-sized unit of 1200 troops and personnel, eight utility helicopters and three unmanned aerial vehicles; it will also transport 150 vehicles, including battle tanks. Another noteworthy project is a domestically produced defense shield, the “Hızır,” a countermeasure anti-torpedo system to protect the corvettes.

Turkey has made it a strategic priority to reduce dependence on foreign weapons and become more self-sufficient and more competitive in the defense industry. In addition to serving the Turkish Armed Forces, the goal is also to increase export and transfer technology. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



The first Turkish-built Warship 'Heybeliada'.
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TCG_Heybeliada_\(F-511\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TCG_Heybeliada_(F-511))

Source: “Ismail Demir'den 4 Yeni MILGEM Müjdesi!” (Ismail Demir [Announces] 4 New MILGEMs!), *Denizhaber.com*, 9 June 2016, <http://www.denizhaber.com.tr/ismail-demirden-4-yeni-milgem-mujdesi-haber-68522.htm>

“ ‘New MILGEMs are coming’ ”

[The Undersecretary for Defense Industries, Ismail] Demir, said that Turkey has become a noteworthy country in the shipbuilding sector. Demir, who provided information about the projects in this field said the following: ‘The most widely known corvette in the shipbuilding sector is the MILGEM [Turkish acronym for ‘National Ship’]... Four ‘new generation’ MILGEMs are coming. They will be more advanced, bigger vessels. In the meantime, the private shipbuilding industry is very active. We have various ships; for example we have what we call aircraft carriers... We have Seismic Research Ships. This is important both in the economic field, and in conducting some underground research. We have search-rescue ships and submarine rescue ships. We have ships that carry armored vehicles. Turkey has made a name for itself in the shipbuilding industry. Our ships are one of our main export products.

‘A New Type of Submarine will be Produced in Turkey’

Demir, who noted that the construction for a new type of Submarine has started, highlighted that the submarine's design is owned by a German firm, but that all the construction activities would take place in Turkey. Demir said that, Turkey will be producing indigenous submarines within a generation.”

Iran's New Defense Technologies

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan unveiled three new defense technologies at the Malek-Ashtar University of Technology in Tehran. He told Iranian journalists that a team of Iranian researchers has created a one-megawatt local positioning system (LPS) transmitter, which is meant to rid Iran's dependence on the global positioning system (GPS). The second technology is a robotic vacuum plasma coating mechanism used in the production process of jet engine blades and power plant turbines. The third is a vacuum arc remelting furnace (VAR), which, according to Dehghan, can be used to melt and purify titanium alloys and remelt super alloys or steels.

At a ceremony hosted by the university, Dehghan explained that, due to the GPS's inaccuracies, there was a need for a LPS that would enhance positioning and timing. Additionally, the LPS is multifunctional; it can be used for nonmilitary functions such as enhancing aviation, rail transport, shipping, and other transportation developments. Iran plans to install five stations with LPS transmitters around Iran to support positioning, timing, and navigation for greater accuracy when compared to GPS satellites.

As the accompanying article notes, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has said that this will be the year of defense spending. Iran has recently made significant progress in defense, including this latest LPS development. Iranian defense leaders credit their new vacuum coating plasma device and VAR to their self-sufficiency in developing military essentials and improving other important defense systems. Dehghan spoke highly of Iran's technological advancements, stating that Iran is steadily becoming the center for science and technology in the Middle East. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**

Source: "Roonamai as 3 dastavard fanavary defaiee dar Iran" [Iran Unveils 3 New Defense Technologies], 1 June 2016, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/Fa/2016/06/01/468453/Iran-unveils-indigenous-defense-tech>

"Iran's Ministry of Defense announced Iran's successful creation of a one mega-watt local positioning system (LPS), a robotic vacuum plasma coating machine, and a vacuum arc re-melting furnace. Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan explained at an unveiling ceremony for Iran's three new systems that Iran's Navy will now use a one mega-watt local positioning system (LPS) to become independent from the Global Positioning System (GPS). Because other countries may want to try and locate Iranian naval ships, the new LPS capabilities will allow them to shut off the GPS quickly to avoid detection while still able to calculate travel time, distance, and positioning. Dehghan hailed the Malek-Ashtar University researchers who directed the LPS project and its successful completion. He added that Iran will install five power stations across the country in the near future to support their newly developed LPS and believes that it is already above standard compared to other countries."

"Dehghan said that the vacuum arc re-melting (VAR) furnace is used to melt and purify titanium alloys, re-melt super alloys and steels, and retain its heat. Dehghan stated this technology as well as their robotic vacuum plasma coating mechanism will assist with preventing the jet fuel used for ballistic missiles from overheating."



Iran Unveils New Tank and Drone

OE Watch Commentary: While Iranian military purchases from Russia and China might make international headlines, the domestic Iranian press increasingly features a drumbeat of stories regarding advances in Iran's own domestic military industries. During the May 2016 Beit-ul-Moqaddas 28 war game held in Iran's central Isfahan province, the Iranian military unveiled a new short-range (100 kilometer) Siraf UAV, designed by students at the College of the Ground Forces' Artillery Training Center, which can take digital images and transmit them in real time to command posts. Iranian leaders seem to place great psychological importance on their UAV program as well, perhaps believing that both Kurdish and Baluch insurgents, as well as neighboring states which do not possess such technology, will interpret Iran's possession of UAVs as giving the Islamic Republic such a quantitative military edge as to make further conflict pointless.

The Fallagh tank is a more curious development. While Iran's claim of equipping it with stabilizer automation does not seem credible, the possible use for such a platform is not clear, as such a lightweight tank would not be able to stand up to the resistance it would face in an extended international conflict. Nor is it clear that it would be of much use in the difficult terrain in which Iran faces insurgency, specifically along the Afghan border or in the Zagros Mountains along the Iraqi frontier. However, it would have utility in crowd control if and when the Iranian government faces any uprising.

The Iranian military, during the same exercises, also unveiled a heavy tank carrier, which suggests that the Iranian government has begun to work to counter logistical holes and weakness which face its military. Iran is a large country—six times the size of Great Britain—and so an ability to transfer tanks and other heavy equipment from one side of the country to the other is crucial for Iran's defense. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Iran's New Fallagh Tank
Source: cdn.mashregnews.ir/files/fa/news/1395/3/3/1648528_936.jpg

“The UAV unit is part of psychological operations as well.”

Source: “Az ‘Amaliyati Shodan Tank Fallagh dar Razmayesh Nazaja ta Ravanmaye az Pehpad Siraf’ (From Fallagh Tanks Entering an Operational Phase to the Unveiling of the Siraf Drone in Army Ground Force Exercises), Mashreg News, 23 May 2016. <http://www.mashregnews.ir/fa/news/577898/>
فارسی-س-دآپهپ-زا-ی-امنور-ات-اجازن-ش-ی-امزر-رد-د-قالف-کن-ات-ندش-یت-ای-لم-ع-زا

From Fallagh Tanks...to the Siraf Drones

Brig. Gen. Amir Mehrabi, Iranian Army deputy for ground operations, said that “in these exercises, combat and surveillance drones are used.”

Mehrabi said that “the special task done by the UAV unit in these exercises was to use them in areas of electronic warfare and also to jam [transmissions] in the area. In these exercises, the UAV unit is in part responsible for psychological war, too.”

Gen. [Masoud Reza] Zawarei, [Head of Army Ground Forces' Organization for Self-Sufficiency and Research], stated that “in these exercises, Fallagh tanks and fire distribution, used for psychological operations against the enemy, are going to be used for the first time.”

Zawarei said Fallagh tank “is equipped with stabilizer automation, a DShK machine gun, and a 12.7 mm weapon.” According to Zawarei, this ultra-light tank has incredible power considering its weight and is very quick.



Iran: Aiming to Integrate Drones into Military Doctrine

OE Watch Commentary: The international community might focus on Iran's nuclear ambition and ballistic missile program. While these certainly pose a threat to the region, the Iranian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) program has been the one program that the Iranian military has actively operationalized. The excerpted article from *Mashregh News*, a portal affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), addresses the history and variety of Iranian UAVs.

That the IRGC openly brags about drone warfare in Syria undercuts diplomatic statements from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and others to the effect that Iran is only providing training inside Syria and is not involved in actual combat. (So too do mounting Iranian casualty numbers.) That Iran is now operating multiple types of drones in single exercises shows the increasing integration of drone warfare and capabilities within broader Iranian military doctrine and practice.

The focus on Sistan va Baluchistan, Iran's southeastern province, highlights the concern which the Iranian military has about the restive region. With a region whose population is predominantly Sunni in addition to ethnically Baluch, and one that borders Afghanistan and Pakistan and is frequented by smugglers, the IRGC has for decades sought to restore order with very little success. While the IRGC might deploy drones in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and perhaps even Yemen, the emphasis of their utility in Sistan va Baluchistan might suggest that breaking the stalemate in this province is increasingly a top priority for the Iranian regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“...Surveillance and operational drones used in a critical region like Sistan va Baluchestan will decrease rebel and terrorists movements”

Source: “Avalin ‘Olimpik Pehpadi Sepah’ Cheguneh dar ‘Ahmaq Asman Bargazar Shod’ (How First ‘IRGC’s Drone-Making Olympiad’ Was Held in the Depth of the Sky), *Mashregh News*, 2 May 2016, <http://www.mashreghnews.ir/fa/news/566474/> ن ی ل و ا / 566474/news/566474/ س ک ع - د ا د - ه ج ی ت ن - ی ت ا ی ل م ع - ی ت ا ع ا ل ط ا - ی ا د ر گ ا و ه - ه ن ا د ن م ش و ه - ق ی ف ل ت - د ش - ر ا ز گ ر ب - ن ا م س آ - ق ا م ا ر د - ه ن و گ ج - ه ا پ س - ی د ا پ ه پ - ک ی پ م ل ا

Shahed: Shining Star of IRGC’s Drone Operation

...But we should call the other drone present in IRGC’s exercise the best operational UAV in the country right now. Shahed-129, a surveillance and combat drone, is among the Iranian drones whose lethal fame has crossed our country’s borders and has made the terrorists in Syria desperate.

This extraordinary defensive product, made by IRGC’s Aerospace Force experts has been upgraded recently and equipped with satellite connection system. With the new Shahed 129 model, IRGC’s Aerospace Force has joined the small pool of countries who possess armed drones equipped with satellite connection.

On this basis, the recent exercise in Sistan va Baluchistan could be known as the IRGC’s largest operational exercise in the drone field. In the meantime, accurate and smart observation of the region’s recent changes have had their own special impacts on their [IRGC’s] insight and type of exercise. On the other hand, while in the past few years it has provided our country a high level of security, using different types of surveillance and operational drones in a critical region like Sistan va Baluchistan will decrease rebels and terrorists’ movements in this region. Also, this will prevent the troops present in the region from being killed.

Designing tactics and operational plans in which at least five UAVs could be used, in different scenarios where ground control station and different units to control UAVs and their activities could be used coherently is an important evolution and promotion in organizing IRGC’s Ground Forces’ battles which is a highly valuable experience for developing drone operations and plans in the armed forces and it will be a successful test in the field where command and control is developed. This point should not be forgotten.



An Iranian border patrol vehicle after insurgent attack in Sistan va Baluchistan. Iran hopes increased UAV use might help ensure security in the area.

Source: www.irartesh.ir

Egyptian Military Upgrades Projection Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 June the Egyptian military commissioned the newly finished French Mistral-class assault ship “Gamal Abdel Nasser.” Originally called the “Vladivostok,” the “Nasser” will be joined by the “Anwar Sadat” (formerly the “Sevastopol”) in September. The ships were ordered by the Russian Navy in 2011; Egypt purchased the contract after the Franco-Russian agreement broke down in August 2015.

The Mistral-class helicopter carriers are part of a growing list of French military hardware headed to Egypt. The latest contract involves a military communications and surveillance satellite, which, according to the first accompanying excerpt, will work in conjunction with the Mistral naval vessels and the Russian Ka-52K (“Alligator”) attack helicopters bought from Russia as part of the Mistral deal.

The two new warships will allow the armed forces greater projection and “an expansion in Egypt’s potential theaters of operation,” according to an advisor at Egypt’s Nasser Military Academy, cited in the second excerpted article. According to an Egyptian military analyst quoted in the third article, the three likely tasks for the new assault ships are safeguarding commercial flows across the Bab el-Mandab Strait in Yemen and through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal; protecting the natural gas deposits recently discovered within Egypt’s Mediterranean maritime borders; and, patrolling Libya’s semi-anarchic coastline.

The Mistral deal is hardly Egypt’s only purchase from Russia and France. As the fourth accompanying excerpt notes, Egypt’s steep rise in military imports is occurring despite the government’s financial troubles. Egypt is not alone in ramping up its spending on military hardware in the region, perhaps signaling an expectation that the ongoing sectarian insurgencies will soon morph into a regional war. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



French Mistral-class Dixmude (L9015) in Jounieh Bay, Lebanon 2012.
Source: By Simon Ghesquiere/Marine Nationale - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25428936>

Source: حاملتا الطائرات ميسترال تغيير الاستراتيجية العسكرية المصرية
“Mistral Aircraft Carriers Change Egyptian Military Strategy,” *al-Ahram*. 12 October 2015. <http://www.ahram.org.org/NewsQ/443181.aspx>

The importance of modernizing the Egyptian fleet begins with protecting the Red Sea and securing Bab al-Mandab, which is threatened by piracy and Iran... on the Mediterranean there are new petroleum discoveries that must be protected, as well as defending Egypt’s national security from Turkish and Israeli threats... the threats which come from Libya, where ships arrive laden with ISIS fighters and outlaws.

Source: “Egypt Enters the Space Race,” *al-Ahram English*. 15 May 2016. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/216861/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-enters-the-space-race.aspx>

Cairo finalised on Tuesday the purchase of a military reconnaissance and monitoring satellite, the third in a series of deals within the framework of Egyptian-French military cooperation... the satellite has been classed as military it is capable of performing both military and non-military tasks. It orbits at altitudes above 700 km and can capture high-resolution images... the French satellite will work in conjunction with the Mistral naval vessels... the Russian-made helicopters that Egypt has contracted from Moscow will complete the Mistral weapons system...

Source: شراء ميسترال مؤشر لتوسيع مسرح العمليات
“Mistral Purchase an Indicator of ‘Broadening Theater of Operations’,” *al-Hayat*. 4 June 2016. <http://goo.gl/IOS3Em>

According to Brig. Gen. Mohammed al-Ghabbari, an academic advisor at the Nasser Military Academy, “The Mistral will not only be used on the Egyptian coast. The main goal is to allow the armed forces greater projection. Egyptian national security is threatened along the coast and our waters’ economic security must be protected... The first ship will dock in the Mediterranean, while the second is expected in the Red Sea.... Owning the two ships points to an expansion in Egypt’s potential theaters of operation.”



Egyptian Mistral-class “Gamal Abdel Nasser” (1010)
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/photos/pcb.840084099455907/840083092789341/?type=3&theater>

Source: مصر..صفقات السلاح تلتهم الدولار وتسلب مخصصات التنمية
“Egypt: Weapons Contracts Eat Up Dollars and Plunder Development Allocations,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 22 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/tHlsgu>

Notwithstanding the political significance of these contracts...Egypt’s financial situation simply does not allow for so many contracts in such a short period... The deals Egypt signed with Russia include: Mig-29s, S-300 air defense systems, Sukhoi S-30s, Tor SAM missile systems, Mi-17s, and Yak 130s. The Russian weapons purchases were valued at around 3.5 billion dollars in 2014 and 3.4 billion dollars in 2015. Egypt’s weapons contracts with France include Rafale fighter jets, Meteor air-to-air missiles, ships made by DCNS, and Mistral helicopter carriers. The Rafale contract alone is worth around 5.2 billion dollars...

Egypt Commissions Helicopter Carrier

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 June 2016 Egypt commissioned Gamal Abdel Nasser, the first of two carriers that Egypt has purchased from France. The second, to be named Anwar Al-Sadat, will be delivered in September 2016. A Mistral-class amphibious helicopter dock, Gamal Abdel Nasser is the first carrier operated by an African or Middle Eastern nation (first excerpted article). This is symbolically important: Egypt is the largest Arab country and has the largest military in Africa, with both identities being equally important to Egyptians. Egyptians have historically viewed themselves as playing a role in regional peace and stability, and commentators are describing the warship acquisition in this context (second excerpted article). Naming the ships after late Presidents Nasser and Sadat is a symbolic gesture as well, the implications of which are not lost on Egyptian commentators (third excerpted article). Among the messages the naming choice conveys is that of Egypt's secular identity – an overt and deliberate snub to the recently-deposed Muslim Brotherhood.

Practically speaking, the ability to project sea power is crucial to Egypt, especially into the Bab al Mandab Strait (third excerpted article). Virtually all Suez Canal traffic must also pass through the strait. Canal traffic revenue is one of the largest sources of income for Egypt, especially since domestic political turmoil and regional terrorist activity have curtailed tourism. The canal is therefore a strategic asset. Activities that impact canal traffic – including piracy and instability in Bab al Mandab strait region – affect Egypt as much as, if not more than, any other country in the world. With the acquisition of these carriers, Egypt can now play a more robust role in securing its own national interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**



Container ship viewed from Gamal Abdel Nasser at the northern edge of the Great Bitter Lake during 01 August 2007 transit.
Source: Kevin Freese; shared with permission.

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Egypt Raises Flag Aboard New Mistral-class Helicopter Carrier,” *Egypt Independent*, 02 June 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-raises-flag-aboard-new-mistral-class-helicopter-carrier>.

Egypt officially received the first of two French Mistral-class helicopter carriers ... The vessel, which has been named after late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, is the first of its type to be owned by any African or Middle Eastern nation... In addition to troops, the ship can hold up to 24 aircraft, 40 tanks, 50 armored vehicles and three radar units. It has a missile system for air defense and room on deck for six helicopters of various kinds. It is also equipped with a 20-room hospital unit, complete with surgical facilities ... A second Mistral vessel will be delivered to Egypt in September, and will be named after deceased President Anwar al-Sadat.

Source: Unattributed author(s), “A Capable Egypt Promotes Peace,” *Al-Ahram*, 06 June 2016, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/522718.aspx>.

... the Egyptian doctrine is clear; it states that the Egyptian forces serve “to defend the homeland” and to deter adventurers or any power that may fall into any miscalculations ...

It is certain that the fact that a French-made Mistral helicopter carrier has joined the Egyptian Navy marks an important step in enhancing the Egyptian defense capabilities ... A “capable Egypt” does not do this to attack or occupy the lands of another by force, but to perform its role as a “regional power” that promotes peace and stability in the region against all the forces of evil so that all peoples can enjoy peace, prosperity, welfare, and productive cooperation ...

Source: Karim ‘Abd al-Salam, “Egypt Celebrates Today,” *Al-Yawm al Sabi’*, 02 June 2016, <http://goo.gl/7Tn0Rq>

Today, Egypt is celebrating, not only for its ability to acquire the most powerful naval vessel, the Mistral helicopter carrier, but also for what this achievement symbolically represents ... Many were betting on the failure of the state ... This deal, which is regarded as an achievement, will change the balance of powers in the region to a large extent. It will make the regional powers ... think a thousand times before making a move. Not only that, but also such deal will support the Egyptian efforts to maintain our regional interests in the Upper Nile area, Bab al Mandab [Strait], and the Mediterranean Sea ... The Egyptian state can now regain its balance to a large extent, change the negative image of our security and economic situation internationally, and regain its Arab and regional role as an influential force that cannot be excluded from any future planning for the region ... What is remarkable is giving the names of the two leaders Jamal ‘Abd-al-Nasir and Anwar al-Sadat to the most important vessels owned by Egypt. The significances of that are many and inspiring, and they can be borrowed from recent history ...

For additional commentary on the Suez Canal, see “Suez Canal Expansion Plans Reflect both Hopes and Fears of Egyptians,” *OE Watch*, September 2014, p. 19, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201409/201409.pdf>.

Sunni Opposition to a Kurdish-led Offensive in Raqqa

OE Watch Commentary: The May 2016 offensive by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the countryside surrounding ISIS's Syrian capital of Raqqa has received a frosty welcome in mainstream Sunni Arab media sources.

The first accompanying article, from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, warns that Raqqa's population will pick up arms and fight against Kurdish-led forces, even if ISIS withdraws from the city. The article highlights prior reports of forced displacement by Kurdish forces in both Syria and Iraq as a key reason why ISIS's victims will become its collaborators if the SDF tries to storm Raqqa. The idea that Raqqa's residents will join ISIS to defend their city is corroborated by the accompanying tweets from "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently," a respected group of anti-ISIS activists who have for years documented the travails of living under ISIS rule. Indeed it is easy to imagine Raqqa's civilians reacting negatively to the well intentioned leaflets dropped from above, calling on them to abandon the city.

US support for Kurdish forces in the SDF-led Raqqa offensive has also been loudly criticized by mainstream Saudi media. The third accompanying excerpt, an op-ed by the influential columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, is illustratively titled "Saudi Arabia Will Reap What the US Has Sown in Iraq and Syria." He argues that the United States "chooses to align with wrong plans and bad intentions" and that a successful Kurdish-led attack on Raqqa will "spur further ethnic divisions along with sectarian ones" that will "only result in decades of disasters."

Raqqa is a case study in the complexities of the Syrian operational environment, particularly its social component. The absence of a viable Sunni-led plan to take and hold Raqqa from ISIS acts as a unifying force among Sunnis and makes it difficult for anyone else to take Raqqa. The ability to exploit this social dynamic both locally and regionally is arguably ISIS's greatest source of strength. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: اقترب معركة الرقة يزيد احتمالات عودة التطهير العرقي

"The Approach of the Battle for Raqqa Raises Likelihood of New Round of Ethnic Cleansing," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 21 May 2016. <https://goo.gl/xX1bLj>

... bringing back to the fore the repeated accusations that Kurdish forces have forcibly displaced Arabs from ISIS-controlled areas. They have also brought back accusations against the international coalition generally and the United States in particular of supporting these forces in their ethnic cleansing campaigns... No military campaign led by Kurdish ground forces and with coalition aerial support can be expected to succeed against ISIS. Local residents will be forced to defend ISIS-controlled areas for fear of the ethnic cleansing and displacement that will follow the group's withdrawal from the area...

"... #Raqqa the strategy of taking Raqqa by #SDF Which are managed by #YPG push a lot of people to join #ISIS to Defense for their city #Syria ..."

Source: Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently Twitter Timeline, 24 May 2016. https://twitter.com/Raqqa_SL/status/735221372461420545 and https://twitter.com/Raqqa_SL/status/735224624032710656

#Raqqa the strategy of taking Raqqa by #SDF Which are managed by #YPG push a lot of people to join #ISIS to Defense for their city #Syria

#Raqqa people in Raqqa in general Don't want #SDF to take Raqqa city , people are not welcoming them #Syria #ISIL

Source: السعودية ستحصد ما تزرعه أميركا الآن في العراق وسورية

"Saudi Arabia Will Reap What the US Has Sown in Iraq and Syria," *al-Hayat*. 4 June 2016. <http://goo.gl/Dpbr5U> (translation via: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2016/06/05/Saudi-Arabia-will-reap-what-the-US-has-sown-in-Iraq-and-Syria.html>)

Regardless of the rationale behind American approach in the region, it chooses to align with wrong plans and bad intentions. We will bear the dire repercussions of this approach in few years. The success of Iran and the separatist Kurds in Iraq and Syria will not eliminate ISIS. It will rather be a temporary victory out of the historic context and will spur further ethnic divisions along with sectarian ones after years of failure and autocracy. This will only result in decades of disasters.



"Time to leave Raqqa": Leaflet dropped over the skies of Raqqa.
Source: https://twitter.com/Raqqa_SL/status/736542090587410432

Russian “Awakenings” in Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: Since their partial withdrawal in March 2016, Russian forces in Syria have sought to sideline non-jihadist rebel forces through truces and negotiations. Following the February cease-fire agreement, the Russian military established a “coordination center” to monitor and expand truces between the government and non-jihadist rebels. Headed by Lieutenant General Sergei Kurylenko and headquartered at the Hmeimim (Khmeimim) Airbase near Lattakia, the center has also set up an office in the Damascus headquarters of Syria’s Ministry of National Reconciliation, according to the first excerpt. Ministry employees often join Russian personnel on their field visits. Rebels who join the truce regime may receive material assistance and Russian air cover in exchange for fighting jihadists and agreeing to negotiate the Syrian government’s fate at a later date. As the second accompanying excerpted article notes, it sounds like a Russian version of the late 2000s US-backed Sahwat (“Awakenings”) of Anbar Province.

Russian strategy in Syria aims to isolate the three national-level jihadi groups (ISIS, Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham) from the rest of the rebellion by flipping “moderate rebels” to the government side. Doing this effectively makes Syria a two-party conflict, pitting the Syrian government and its allies against an array of jihadists. The Russian strategy also hopes to force NATO’s hand. In a 27 May press briefing, Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoy of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces argued that the US is intentionally delaying in separating opposition units from terrorists, an action he claims “not only discredits so-called ‘moderate opposition’ but also leads to breaking the reconciliation process down and renewal of warfare in Syria.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: “Briefing by Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoy,” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, Air Force group in Syria. 27 May 2016. <http://eng.syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/news/more.htm?id=12086053@egNews>

Negotiations between officers of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides and heads of administrations as well as commanders of armed formations are held continuously... The Russian party has agreed to extend the time limits for working with separate armed formations aimed at their joining the ceasefire regime and strict definition of the areas under their control before the start of strikes against insurgents’ positions... When will the American party take measures on separating regions of “moderate” opposition formations from territories controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra militants, and provide their accurate coordinates to the Russian party?... delaying of separating opposition units from terrorists by the American partners not only discredits so-called “moderate opposition” but also leads to breaking the reconciliation process down and renewal of warfare in Syria.

“...Russian leaders seek to form what resemble “Awakenings” to fight ISIS and the Nusra Front by striking deals with Syrian opposition groups...”

Source: علي حيدر: أنجزنا مصالحات لـ50 منطقة ... ولا تعارض مع مركز حميميم “Ali Haidar: We Reached Truces in 50 Areas... There is no Disagreement with the Hmeimim Center,” *al-Akhbar*. 4 June 2016. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/259091>

...“There is communication between the Russian center and the Reconciliation Ministry via intensive meetings between the minister and the leaders of the center... regular efforts to make coordination between the ministry and the Russian center as tight as possible, shown by Russia opening an office in the ministry... high levels of coordination shown by the presence of a ministry representative with the Russian delegation at most events and field tours...”

Source: سورية: مشروع “صحوات” روسية لمحاربة “النصرة” وتفادي التورط برياً “Syria: Russian ‘Awakenings’ Project to Fight ‘Nusra’ and Avoid Boots on the Ground,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 26 May 2016. <https://goo.gl/0pRz4R>

Russia will continue leading the regime’s war at the lowest possible cost and casualty rates and without putting boots on the ground. With this in mind Russian leaders seek to form what resemble “Awakenings” to fight ISIS and the Nusra Front by striking deals with Syrian opposition groups... Russian officials continue their work on the ground in Syria via the Hmeimim Center by communicating with armed and civilian opposition groups to neutralize them under the guise of “national reconciliation.” These agreements are based on ending fighting with the regime and its allied militias in exchange for ending bombing and allowing humanitarian aid into besieged areas and fighting ISIS and the Nusra Front.



27 May Briefing by Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoy
Source: <http://eng.syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/news/more.htm?id=12086053@egNews>

Niger Delta Avengers and Choices in Nigerian CT Strategy

OE Watch Commentary: A new insurgency called the “Niger Delta Avengers” (NDA) in the southeastern Niger Delta is putting the Nigerian government and international oil companies on high alert and forcing the government to decide just how to handle it. As the excerpted article details, the Nigerian government, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, is faced with tough choices in constructing its counterinsurgency campaign: either launching a hard-nosed military attack or trying to appease the insurgency through financial means, as many of his predecessors have elected to do.

Because the NDA emerged officially in March 2016, details about the group are still coming to light. In general, it seeks to stop what it sees as an unfair manipulation of the oil and gas industry in Nigeria, in effect, attempting to halt the perceived collusion between multinational oil companies (like Chevron and Shell) and members of the Nigerian government, who control the county’s lucrative oil contracts with high personal rates of financial return. For their part, the majority of inhabitants of the Niger Delta remain impoverished. More specifically, the NDA has issued ultimatums that oil companies leave the Delta or it will bomb pipelines. Such ultimatums have gone unheeded, and the NDA is now unleashing nearly daily attacks on the region’s oil infrastructure. To that end, it has succeeded in crippling Nigeria’s oil industry, bringing production to its lowest point in the past twenty years.

The Buhari government is being forced to calculate a delicate counterinsurgency strategy, especially in light of historical precedents. When the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta insurgency ravaged the Niger Delta in the 2000s - with nearly identical goals - the Nigerian government of then president Umaru Yar’Adua placated it by offering amnesty to the militants and hiring some of them to serve as “security guards” of the multinational pipelines. Today, the Nigerian government pays about 25,000 former militants monthly.

As the article below details, Buhari is now caught between a rock and a hard place with how to deal with NDA. On one hand, he is considering a military-style takedown of the insurgents, though such a tactic could be viewed as repressive and an unnecessary use of force, and would unlikely solve the longer-term regional grievances: if anything it would exacerbate them. On the other hand, the old approach to dealing with Delta insurgents through amnesty and payments seems untenable too: not only is the program expensive, especially in light of low global oil prices and the costs of fighting Boko Haram, it also sends a signal that the Nigerian state is simply beholden to the demands of the insurgents. How Buhari and the country elect to proceed will be watched with interest. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“President Muhammadu Buhari is torn between armistice with the Niger Delta Avenger militants or [conducting a] military operation to conquer [them].”



The Niger Delta Avengers are the re-emergence of an insurgency in the oil-rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The Nigerian government is currently deciding how to pursue its counter-insurgency strategy.
Source: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201606060832.html>

Source: Odili, Paul. 2016. “Nigeria: Coming to Terms With Niger Delta Avengers.” *The Vanguard (Lagos, Nigeria)*. 6 June. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201606060832.html>

A retired old school Army General, strict and unbending, [Nigerian President Buhari] prides himself in promoting order and discipline above everything else, is now faced with one of the greatest existential threat yet to his administration [in the form of the Niger Delta Avengers].

Naturally, his first instinct would be to use military force and exterminate these saboteurs. He said as much when he declared that the Niger Delta militants would be dealt with like Boko Haram....

[The Niger Delta Avengers] have called his bluff. Almost on a daily basis one asset or the other has been blown up. Minister Ibe Kachikwu is lamenting the effect of this on oil production down to 1.4 million; the lowest production in two decades. With the hapless situation he is facing PMB must be torn between armistice with the militants or military operation to conquer...

Military effort will lead to greater destruction and sabotage. Negotiation and amnesty can only provide temporary truce. In any case, what kind of amnesty?

Overall, the cards are stacked against Buhari in the short term. It is either he climbs down and negotiate on a generous terms like other presidents before him he might succeed in deescalating the crisis or he pursues this war of attrition to its conclusive end.

Niger Delta Avengers: Links with Other Insurgencies

“Avengers are militants. Their philosophy, ideology, concept, mission and vision are quite extraneous from MASSOB.”

OE Watch Commentary: The emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) feels both new and old, all at once. In short, the aspirations and ideology of the NDA seem all too familiar, given that they generally align with those held by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which waged a similar oil insurgency in the region for much of the 2000s. Indeed, with the emergence of a new militant extremist organization in the Niger Delta, an understanding of the relationship between the NDA and other current and former militant groups is imperative.

At the broadest, the NDA is often compared to MEND. However, officially MEND has been disbanded. Yet, many observers believe it to be the case that former MEND fighters comprise much of the NDA’s militancy, especially due to the intimate knowledge of the areas of operation, and, more intuitively, their very similar goals and tactics. However, the NDA and MEND seem to be at ideological odds: as per the first excerpted article, former members of MEND have sought to delegitimize the NDA’s insurgency, calling it driven by NDA members’ “selfish interests for their own personal aggrandizement.” Moreover, MEND members have called for the NDA to sit down with the government of Nigeria to negotiate, and have also urged civic groups in the Delta not to support the NDA. Moreover, as per the second excerpted article, the leader of the pseudo-defunct MEND group, known as Tompolo, has actively refuted suggestions that he is associated with the NDA.

Importantly, in addition to the demands that the oil-rich lands be returned to members of the Delta, the NDA is also calling for a secession of the region from the Nigerian state and full legal sovereignty. To that end, early in its existence the NDA was believed to be associated with other secessionist groups in the country, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). While MASSOB has refuted the existence of links, the IPOB has not gone so far, though the fact that the NDA has openly supported the release of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, may indicate these links may be real.

Importantly, outside observers should be aware that the uptick in violence in the Niger Delta has connections to the country’s other counterinsurgency fight being waged against Boko Haram. The shift in Nigeria’s counterterrorism strategy towards Boko Haram seems to have had a connection with the uptick in violence from the NDA: the payments that were being provided to the NDA dried up as the Jonathan administration shifted them to fight Boko Haram. As a result, the band-aid that had been placed on the insurgency was ripped off, and the Delta militancy resumed. Finally, the NDA even seems to be splintering within its own ranks. At least one offshoot group, the Red Egbesu Water Lions, has already emerged (for more, see Warner, “New Insurgent Group Emerges in Niger Delta,” OE Watch, June 2016). Observers are unsure whether the group is an entirely new outfit or simply the merger and reemergence, under a different name, of two once defunct groups, the Egbesu Mightier Fraternity Of Izon (Ijaw) Land and The Water Lion. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

Source: Emuleomo, Adebayo. 2016. “MEND to Niger Delta Avengers: ‘Our Struggle Is Beyond Attacks on Oil Installations’” *YNaija (Lagos, Nigeria)*. 16 June. <http://ynaija.com/mend-formed-team-negotiate-fg-niger-delta/>

MEND also advised the rampaging Niger Delta Avengers to bury its sword....

The statement reads, “Our message to the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) is simple: The Niger Delta struggle is beyond attacks on oil installations”....

“If indeed your cause is to avenge the injustice done to the Niger Delta region; then, we urge you to ceasefire and join us to the table of negotiation with the Federal Government; otherwise, the Niger Delta struggle shall be hijacked, once again, by selfish interests for their own personal aggrandizement,” MEND told the NDA.

Source: Amaize, Emma. 2016. “Avengers: The New Face of Niger-Delta Militancy.” *Vanguard (Lagos, Nigeria)*. 8 May. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/avengers-new-face-niger-delta-militancy/>

Tompolo, who is currently on the wanted list of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, and the Nigeria Police, had stated: “My attention has been drawn to security reports linking me to a new militant group, the Niger Delta Avengers....”

“It is imperative to state, unequivocally, that I do not have a link with this new militant group. I am not part of the group. It is very unfortunate that I am still being accused of pipeline vandalism despite several press releases I have made, denying my involvement in the renewed hostilities in the Niger Delta region.”

Source: Achonu, Gibson. 2016. “No Connection Between MASSOB and Niger Delta Avengers – MASSOB Leader” *The Punch (Lagos, Nigeria)*. 16 June. <http://www.punchng.com/no-connection-massob-niger-delta-avengers-massob-leader/>

The Leader of the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra, Chief Solomon Chukwu, has said there is no affiliation between members of MASSOB and the Niger Delta Avengers.

Chukwu...said that while the Avengers were armed, MASSOB members were not and non-violent.

Chukwu said MASSOB was not supportive of the activities of the Avengers, describing their actions as ill, obnoxious and nefarious.

He said, “Avengers are militants. Their philosophy, ideology, concept, mission and vision are quite extraneous from MASSOB.”

Citizen Perceptions of African Counter Terrorism Efforts

OE Watch Commentary: When it comes to African citizens' confidence in their militaries and police forces, perspectives vary widely. The excerpted article details the outcomes from a continent-wide survey by a known polling company, Afrobarometer, with data about citizens' perspectives from 36 countries.

In the broadest terms, the survey reveals the wide rifts in citizen perceptions of the efficacy of their military and police. Certain countries received very high marks of citizen approval for trust in the military. States with particularly high levels of citizen trust in the military included Niger with a rating of 96% approval, Senegal at 86%, Uganda at 83%, Tanzania at 82%, and Cameroon at 81%. On the low end of the scores were Kenya, at 68% and Nigeria with 40%. Importantly, with the arguable exceptions of Tanzania and Senegal, all of these countries are actively fighting insurgencies. Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon are engaged in fighting Boko Haram in the context of the Multinational Joint Task Force, as well as the broader anti-ISIS and AQIM insurgencies in the Sahara. For its part, Uganda is actively engaged in fighting the Lord's Resistance Army, and, like Kenya, is shouldering a preponderant burden of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force. As such, the data reveal that simply being engaged (or not engaged) in a counterinsurgency effort fails to explain citizen approval. Surveys about confidence in police forces revealed that, in most cases, they were trusted even less than the military.

Another interesting facet of the survey relates to what citizens viewed as the most important national interests. When asked about their primary national preoccupation, citizens in the same countries where distrust of the military and police were low - Nigeria and Kenya - ranked "security" as their top concerns, though this was also the case in countries *not* facing insurgencies, like Mauritius.

In short, as insurgency and terrorism continue to ravage the African security landscape, such surveys serve as valuable points of interrogation to understand how African partner states and their citizens interface in their counterinsurgency efforts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“Both Nigeria and Kenya are facing ruthless insurgencies, but only about four in 10 of their citizens back the counter-insurgency efforts.”

Source: Ayandike, Obi. 2016. “Which African Country Is Worst at Fighting Insurgents?” *IRINews (Nairobi, Kenya)*. 10 June. <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2016/06/10/which-african-country-worst-fighting-insurgents>

Both Nigeria and Kenya are facing ruthless insurgencies, but only about four in 10 of their citizens back the counter-insurgency efforts. That score contrasts with high approval ratings in regional neighbours Niger (96 percent), Cameroon (81 percent), and Uganda (83 percent), which also face security threats.

The Afrobarometer surveys were carried out in 36 countries at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015 as face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with a maximum +/-3 percent sampling error....

Out of all the countries surveyed, public confidence in the police was lowest in Nigeria (21 percent) and Kenya (36 percent) – compared to Niger, where almost nine in 10 citizens said they trusted their police...

Forty-five percent of Kenyans voted security as their number one concern, as did 39 percent of Nigerians. But the most concern was found in the middle-income island nation of Mauritius (48 percent), followed by Tunisia (47 percent).

By contrast, only 10 percent of Ugandans said they were worried, despite the country's long battle with al-Shabab in Somalia. Sierra Leoneans were positively sanguine; just three percent mentioned security as an issue.

A recent report has shown the significantly varying levels of confidence that African civil societies have in their military and police. The Ugandan armed forces, shown above in a training exercise, had one of the highest levels of confidence on the continent.

Source: <http://royaltimes.net/18-african-countries-in-niger-for-joint-military-exercise-against-terrorism/33-3/#prettyPhoto/0/>



Malian Militants Monitor Movements of MINUSMA

OE Watch Commentary: On 20 May the excerpted French-language article in *Jeune Afrique* described an attack on a United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) logistics convoy by the al-Qaeda-affiliated militant group, Ansar Dine. According to the article, five Chadian peacekeepers were killed and their bodies were transferred to Bamako for a funeral and then to Chad. MINUSMA's own statement after the attack suggested that Ansar Dine received support from locals to place the improvised explosives device (IED) in the attack.

The main takeaway from the article is that MINUSMA knows that Ansar Dine has made inroads with local populations, who are watching MINUSMA movements to disrupt MINUSMA supply lines. The soldiers in MINUSMA often lack the local contacts to power brokers in northern Mali and language skills to identify and weed out collaborators with Ansar Dine. Moreover, MINUSMA morale seems to be suffering as a result of the fear that insiders are conspiring against it, which means the soldiers do not know whom to trust. Indeed, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) videos attest to AQIM and Ansar Dine fighters courting tribal and clan leaders in northern Mali and deploying young recruits who speak local languages, such as Bambara, Tuareg and Hausa, to help the militant groups make inroads with local populations.

MINUSMA is facing a test of its resilience. Three years after France intervened in northern Mali to oust AQIM, Ansar Dine and allied militant groups from the towns they controlled, the same militant groups are back, albeit with a more decentralized organizational structure. The article suggests that the most imminent task for MINUSMA is to gain the trust of locals and convince them of the righteousness of the MINUSMA mission so they inform on, rather than aid, the militants who are carrying out attacks on MINUSMA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The attack was made with complicity. People close to us have provided [Ansar Dine] our positions, our itinerary. That is very clear.”

Source: “Ansar Eddine revendique l’attaque meurtrière contre les Casques bleus près d’Aguelhok” [Ansar Dine claims deadly attack against peacekeepers near Aguelhok], *Jeune Afrique*, 20 May 2016.

Ansar Dine claims deadly attack against peacekeepers near Aguelhok

The attack was claimed May 19 by an official of Ansar Dine. The attack was the deadliest of those targeting the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) since February 12 against the base in Kidal in the same region.

The attack took place while the peacekeepers were escorting a logistics convoy. After striking an explosive device, the convoy was fired upon. “The attack was made with complicity. People close to us have submitted our positions, our itinerary. That is very clear,” said an African military source within the UN force.

According to a source within the MINUSMA, the bodies of five Chadian peacekeepers were expected in the night to arrive in Bamako, where they must receive a tribute at a ceremony before being returned to N’Djamena.



MINUSMA is suffering increasing attacks on its vehicles in Mali, such as the one depicted in the adjacent image, as a result of AQIM infiltrating into and collaborating with local populations.
Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/african-union-condemns-attack-on-un-peacekeepers/2473041.html>

Religious Counter-Radicalization Challenges in West Africa

OE Watch Commentary: Northern Mali is a sparsely populated region, where the government in Bamako in the south of the country currently has little influence or presence. The desert topography and inability of the government to provide services in the remote area means that militant groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) can operate relatively freely and use itinerant religious scholars (*marabouts*) to recruit in areas where the government is limited in capacity.

The excerpted article on *Maliweb* from 20 May shows that both civil society actors and the security forces recognize the government's vulnerabilities in northern Mali. The security forces have announced they will increase their presence in areas where they know extremist *marabouts*, such as Amadou Kouffia of the AQIM-allied Macina Liberation Front (also known as Ansar Dine's southern branch), exploit the political vacuum. Deficiencies in resourcing, morale, and socio-cultural intelligence of the population in northern Mali will, however, make such a pledge hard to realize. Thus, even though the article also shows that the security forces understand that their counter-terrorism efforts are undermined when *marabouts* can recruit for AQIM and replenish AQIM's ranks, solutions to this dilemma are still not imminent.

In counterinsurgency, winning the trust of the population is a key for any military. The same is the case for the Malian security forces. However, as the excerpted article shows, various geographic and organizational challenges are preventing the Malian security forces from winning the trust of the population in northern Mali. Roving *marabouts*, who have religious legitimacy and knowledge of rural villages, are winning the trust of the population and, unfortunately, AQIM is forming alliances with some of these *marabouts* to further its agenda. This issue is now most prominent in Mali, but it can also be seen in other countries in West Africa that have recently begun to face challenges from extremist groups like AQIM. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Marabouts, such as the one in the adjacent image, are commonly found in West Africa and have traditionally transferred Islamic knowledge and teachings, but this unregulated method is being exploited today by terrorist groups to spread their ideology and recruit

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/cameroon-hosts-conference-on-islamic-fundamentalism/2693629.html>

“Between nomadic encampments and sedentary villages, terrorists, in this case those of the southern branch of Ansar Dine led by Kouffia, quietly engage in a propaganda campaign that benefits from the absence of Mali’s security forces.”

Source: “Youwarou-Tenenkou-Macina : L’Etat fout le camp, Ançar Dine s’installe” [Youwarou-Tenenkou-Macina: The State Out on the Camp, Ansar Dine Installed], *Maliweb*, 20 May 2016.

Youwarou-Tenenkou-Macina: The State Out on the Camp, Ansar Dine Installed

With microphones, speakers and vehicles, Jihadists roam the central Niger River area preaching in the villages by night. Incredulous crowds have fallen into the trap of Jihad, becoming ready terrorists of Amadou Kouffia [of Macina Liberation Front] whose influence is growing in several communities in the localities of Youwarou, Tenenkou and Macina in central Mali.

“What [marabouts] are doing to have followers is simple: they go to the villages to install their speakers and preach all night,” says a marabout originating from the locality Youwarou.

Between nomadic encampments and sedentary villages, terrorists, in this case those of the southern branch of Ansar Dine, led by Kouffia, quietly engage in a propaganda campaign that benefits from the absence of Mali’s security forces. The authorities have recently announced an increase in the presence of security forces in the area.

But the problem remains the lack of administrative services in the circles of Youwarou, Ténékou and Macina. This distrust between population and security forces must be taken seriously.



Kuczynski President of Peru

OE Watch Commentary: Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (born 3 October 1938) was elected President of Peru on 5 June, beating Keiko Fujimori, daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori. President-elect Kuczynski is Peruvian born and a son of European immigrants, and has long work experience in the United States as a senior economist. He will be inaugurated in July. Keiko Fujimori's political party, however, holds a majority of seats in the Peruvian legislature.

Internationally, it did not take long for the president-elect to take a position opposed to the Bolivarian government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. Nevertheless, he did not project ideological stridency or tendency toward confrontation. It appears so far that he will be staking out mostly pragmatic positions and will be seeking international partnerships to do so.

The Peruvian election results, while perhaps not a sea change in Peruvian governance, appear to mark another degree in the continent's ideological and geopolitical pendulum swing away from the Bolivarian left. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...PERUVIANS FOR CHANGE (with a K) [Party of Kuczynski]...50.124%”



Source: Editors, “Kuczynski dice que en Venezuela tiene que haber respeto a derechos humanos” (Kuczynski says that human rights must be respected in Venezuela), *El Informador*, 12 June 2016, http://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=venezuela+OEA+Kuczynski&d=3325148280335&mkt=en-US&setlang=en-US&w=Fv-aqWmY6t9q3iQDyVR-0zoxPG_E4k92

“...PERUVIANS FOR CHANGE (with a K) [Party of Kuczynski]...50.124%”

Popular Strength [Party of Fujimori]...49.876%...

Citizens that voted (CV): 18,335,385

Qualified to Vote (EH): 22,901,954...”

Source: Peruvian government, “PRESENTACIÓN DE RESULTADOS” (Presentation of Results), *ONPE*, 12 June 2016, <https://resultadoselecciones2016.onpe.gob.pe/PRP2V2016/Resultados-Ubigeo-Presidencial.html#posicion>

“Kuczynski stated to the newspaper El Comercio that ‘what the government (of Nicolás Maduro is saying about amnesty for (opposition leader) Leopoldo López cannot stand when he has done nothing.’ In the opinion of the virtual chief executive-elect, it is not so easy to ultimately decide on a sanction against Venezuela because, for example, the Peruvian refinery at Talara depends on Venezuelan crude. ‘What is to be done has to be looked at carefully. In the case of Venezuela, the country that knows the situation best is Colombia. [We] have to work with Colombia for a position about that’, he asserted.”

Russian Tanks in Nicaragua

OE Watch Commentary: According to this excerpted Colombian article, Russia will soon deliver ten T-72B1 tanks to Nicaragua. Obviously the Colombian are not too worried the tanks will be used against them, but they ask the central question: What are the Russians up to?

The article gives a good summary of Russian military presence in the Caribbean over the past few years, notes Russia's chummy relationship with the Bolivarian bloc of Latin American countries, and speculates on the geopolitics. The Colombian view is plausible -- that the Russians are moving a piece on a distant part of the board, but with its concerns actually centered on matters pertaining to Eastern Europe. The Colombians observe that some countries closer geographically to Russia's partners in the Caribbean might meanwhile have a bit more to worry about. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“For what reason and how is Russian military presence advancing in the Caribbean, in Latin America?”

Source: John Marulanda, “Tanques rusos a Nicaragua” [Russian tanks to Nicaragua], *Acore Magazine* (Colombia), 13 June 2016, <http://acore.org.co/index.php/boletin/item/2133-tanques-rusos-a-nicaragua>

“For what reason and how is Russian military presence advancing in the Caribbean, in Latin America?...the geopolitical tensions on the Russia's western border and the Russia-NATO rivalry could very well make Putin donate obsolete war materiel in order to, quid pro quo, perturb America's periphery in the Caribbean...The Russian tanks of course worry Costa Rica and Honduras, are an early warning for Colombia, a question for the United States and make Russia, which has lately agreed with Evo Morales to construct a nuclear power plant in El Alto, La Paz, grin. The Chinese, who we have not heard on the airwaves recently, are carefully observing all of the happenings, thinking more in money than in weaponry, for now.”



Russian made T-72B1.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Was the Kirchner Government Corrupt?

OE Watch Commentary: Political and juridical facts are slipperier and more chimera-like than we often suppose them to be. We question as a humorous rhetorical proposition if the Pope is Catholic. We suppose him to be, and that the current one is from Argentina. But were the Argentinian administrations of the Kirchners corrupt?

This month we are given a juicy clue to that and more. The former Public Works Minister was caught in the act of tossing bags full of millions of dollars in foreign cash over the wall of the Prayerful and Penitent Nuns of Our Lady of Fatima convent, with which he seems to have been personally familiar (for purposes yet undiscussed). The set of facts in this instance has journalists and commentators across the entire region happily agog, but not aporetic. This case is just a bit more entertainingly comic-operatic than usual, seeming to fall under the “you can’t make this stuff up” category.

Less lively, graver accusations and evidence of government corruption during the socialist Kirchner administrations have been tossed at us by the bag-load for more than a year. The whole story, however, has byzantine after byzantine layer, to include the roles of the Vatican and the now-remodeling Argentinian intelligence services, possible clerical money laundering and a lot else. It appears, however, that we and Argentina may be witnessing an historic, serious turn toward consequences and accountability. **End**

OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)

Source: Raquel García, “More Kirchner-Era Officials Come Under Scrutiny in Argentina,” *PanamPost*, 2 May 2016, <https://panampost.com/raquel-garcia/2016/05/02/corruption-argentina-kirchner-officials/>

“Long List of Officials Appointed by Former President May Serve Time...On all levels there are accusations of corruption that call into question those who had a hand in controlling public funds between 2007 and 2015.”

Source: Carlos Tórtora, “Caso López: El entorno papal vería una conspiración macrista para identificar Iglesia con corrupción” (The López Case: The Vatican viewpoint would see a Macrista conspiracy to identify the church with corruption), *informadorpublico.com*, 15 June 2016, <http://www.informadorpublico.com/>

“The convent has become more than just the symbol of reining tensions between the Vatican and the Casa Rosada [equivalent of White House]...some at the Vatican are sure that the López case is part of an escalation on the part of the Macri people to undermine Francisco’s influence on local public opinion...With respect to the growing role of the AFI [Argentinean Intelligence Service], the latest government measures doubling its budget...”

“The convent has become more than just the symbol of reining tensions between the Vatican and the Casa Rosada.”

Source: Notimex, “Nuevo escándalo de corrupción en Argentina alcanza tono surrealista” (New Corruption Scandal in Argentina Reaches a Surrealistic Pitch), *CasiPolítica.com*, 14 June 2016, <http://casipolitica.com/noticia-36573-nuevo-escandalo-de-corrupcion-en-argentina-alcanza-tono-surrealista>

“This morning an anonymous call allowed the detention of José López, ex-Secretary of the Ministry that during 12 and a half years of the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández (2003-2015) awarded multimillion dollar contracts for public works. López arrived at the Our Lady of Fátima convent, of which he was a frequent visitor, and began to toss bags, which was seen by a neighbor who immediately called the 911 emergency number because the movements seemed suspicious to him. A first group of policemen arrived took barely three minutes to arrive and found the ex-functionary in flagrante, who tried to resist, including trying to bribe the agents.”

Source: Brenda Struminger, “El podio de la corrupción en 12 años de kirchnerismo, según el auditor general de la Nación” (The platform of corruption in 12 years of kirchnerism, according to the Auditor-General of the Nation), *La Nacion*, 8 July 2015, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1808500-el-podio-de-la-corrupcion-en-12-anos-de-kirchnerismo-segun-el-auditor-general-de-la-nacion>

“Today, after twelve years of auditing the spending of the Administration, [Leandro] Despouy discloses La Argentina Auditada [Argentina Audited], an extensive reflection based on his experience since he assumed the presidency of the AGN [National Auditor-General’s Office]...”

Food Rioting in Venezuela

OE Watch Commentary: Venezuelan instability seems to be earning perpetual presence as a topic in *OE Watch*, and this month we see uncountable reports of food riots in that country. The example chosen here has some interesting cultural attachment and it offers an instructive video compilation showing the spatial nature of the disturbances.

Cumaná is an iconic town. It is one of the first European settlements on the continent and birthplace to numerous famous South Americans. The Cumaná events serve as emblem of the widespread socio-economic illness in Venezuela. In the report chosen here, the author of the commentary apparently understates when he says “apparently...” **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Bolivar Opositor, “Cumaná (saqueos y disturbios por falta de comida) 14-06-16” (Cumaná (lootings and riots for lack of food) 14-06-16), Youtube, 14 June 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN_h4SWDT_k

[video, a man is lamentingly singing a patriotic hymn]

“...Apparently, some lootings have taken place...”

Source: “¡PUEBLO EN LAS CALLES! Disturbios y saqueos: Fuertes protestas en Cumaná por falta de alimentos #14J” (The People in the Street! Riots and lootings: Strong protests in Cumaná due to lack of food #14J), Dolartoday, 14 June 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/pueblo-en-las-calles-intensos-disturbios-y-saqueos-fuertes-protestas-en-cumana-por-falta-de-alimentos-14j/>

“During the afternoon this Tuesday, a strong protest was recorded in the city of Cumaná in Sucre state. The townspeople of the place are keeping various streets closed and have raised various barricades. Apparently, some lootings have taken place in the city.”



A woman shows a flour package outside a supermarket as they shout slogans over food shortage in Caracas.

Source: Reuters

Mexican Drug Cartel Resorts to Medellin Cartel Modus Operandi Following Extradition Threats

OE Watch Commentary: In the years preceding the demise of the Medellin Cartel in Colombia, Pablo Escobar resorted to terrorist-like attacks against the civilian populace in an attempt to intimidate the government into not passing extradition laws. These attacks included bombs in public forums, kidnappings, and random shootings of civilians on the street. In the short term, the terrorist tactics worked to stall the actual passing of the extradition law, as the government was caught up in maintaining peace and protecting innocent civilians. In the long run, however, the tactic backfired on Escobar as the Colombian government and his enemies (think Los Pepes and the Cali Cartel) worked together to destroy the organization, which was eventually brought to its knees in 1993.

Fast-forward 16 years, and it would appear that the same tactic is being utilized by the Cartel del Norte (formerly Los Zetas) in Tamaulipas, Mexico, as evidenced by the murders of three innocent civilians on 8 March 2016. Following this incident a narco banner signed by the group was hung in Ciudad Victoria (see excerpt 1 which is a partial translation of the narco banner) and indicated that the murders were carried out in retaliation for government negotiations regarding the pending extradition of currently incarcerated Cartel del Norte leaders. However, the narco banner may not be as straightforward as it seems, given the fact that, according to excerpt 2, Los Zetas has splintered into multiple rival factions that are actively looking to discredit each other and effectively gain control of key trafficking areas in northern Mexico.

Propaganda of this nature has been used in the past, as it is easy enough to sign and hang a narco banner with the end goal of prompting intensified police/military operations. Whoever the authors in this case, it becomes apparent that Mexican cartels are once again replicating strategies previously used by Colombian cartels and may continue, if they feel success can be achieved. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Fracción de Los Zetas, ahora Cártel del Noreste, advierte masacre por extradiciones “Los Zetas Faction Warns of Massacre if Extradition Occurs).” *La Vanguardia*. Accessed from <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/fraccion-de-los-zetas-ahora-cartel-del-noreste-advierte-masacre-por-extradiciones>

“Mr. President Enrique Peña Nieto and Governor of Tamaulipas: The murders carried out on 08 March are in retaliation for your attempts to extradite us. We financed your campaigns. If you continue with any extradition agreement to the United States, innocent people will continue dying in Ciudad Victoria because this is Cartel del Norte territory. You have been warned. Do not try to scare us with letters fabricated by a corrupt and traitorous government. Sincerely, L-40 and L-42.”

Source: “Fotos mas narcomensajes de los Zetas y el CDN en @Cd_Victoria, los autores de las ejecuciones (Narco Messages in Ciudad Victoria Claim Los Zetas as the Responsible Party).” *Blog del Narco*. Accessed from http://www.elblogdelnarco.com/2016/03/fotos-mas-narcomensajes-de-los-zetas-y-el-cdn-en-cd_victoria-los-autores-de-las-ejecuciones-.html

“It is possible that the narco banner hung on 08 March was a strategy launched by the “Zetas de la Vieja Guardia” in an attempt to make the Cartel de Noreste look like the responsible parties. The benefit to doing something of this nature is that authorities would mount increased operations to capture the responsible parties and thus, avoid additional civilian deaths.”



Narco, Zetas, and Paramilitary Groups: The New Reality in Chiapas

OE Watch Commentary: Cartel-related violence in Chiapas has never really been a topic of concern in Mexico, as levels have remained extremely low in comparison to other areas of the country. This is not to say that cartel activity does not exist in the state, because it most certainly does. In fact, Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel have been operating in separate parts of the state for more than a decade, thus avoiding confrontation.

In recent months a *Proceso* news media source indicated that this peace may be coming to an end as the rival cartels battle for the most desirable trafficking regions in the state, as indicated in excerpt 1. This same outlet highlighted concerns that cartels have aligned themselves with local paramilitary groups to supplement their ranks, as stated in excerpt 2. The aforementioned paramilitary groups were allegedly formed to combat the Zapatista National Liberation Army (ELZN) in the 90s and have since remained in the area, albeit non-operational. Now, as evidenced by excerpt 3, they have a reason to resume their activities in support of organized crime groups.

Cartel-precipitated violence in Chiapas is of concern because the state is one of the most disenfranchised in the country, with notoriously low levels of government intervention. This single factor will allow violence to flourish. Added to this issue is the fact that local citizens are the primary recruits who will support paramilitary groups. These individuals know the lay of the land and effectively control their respective territories. They also tend to exercise law enforcement duties, although they have no permission from the government to do so.

All of these facts are relevant because they are reminiscent of the current Michoacan affair, where federal and state authorities are trying to contain a state of chaos that has been created by drug trafficking and paramilitary groups working to further their respective interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: Chiapas, el refugio del narco (Chiapas, Refuge for Drug Trafficking Organizations).” *Proceso*. Accessed from <http://www.proceso.com.mx/436023/chiapas-refugio-del-narco>

“Areas currently under dispute by organized crime groups in the region include the Chiapas/Guatemala border, northern Chiapas near its shared border with Tabasco, and the Los Altos region where San Cristobal de Las Casas is located.”...

...“In recent years there has been a resurgence of paramilitary groups such as Paz y Justicia (Peace and Justice), Movimiento Indígena Revolucionario Antizapatista (Indigenous Anti-Zapatista Revolutionary Movement) (MIRA), Los Diablos (The Devils), Los Gómez, and Los Petules, amongst others, that have aligned themselves with drug and human trafficking groups in Chiapas.”

Source: Narco, zetas y paramilitares, la nueva realidad en Chiapas (Narco, Zetas, and Paramilitary Groups: The New Reality in Chiapas).” *Proceso*. Accessed from <http://www.proceso.com.mx/436192/narco-zetas-paramilitares-la-nueva-realidad-en-chiapas>

“The new violence can be attributed to a strategic fight launched by organized crime groups. They (Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas) want absolute control of Comitán and Frontera Comalapa because of their geographic proximity to Guatemala and because the corridor that connects Comitán with Palenque is used exclusively for the movement of drugs and weapons. In Tila (northern Chiapas), there is a new human trafficking route. These factors have fueled violence and a resurgence of paramilitary groups that were originally formed in 1994 to contain the EZLN. Now, these same groups are working with organized crime groups who are looking to dominate select territories for strategic gain.”



Costa Rica Plagued by Clandestine Airstrips Built by Drug Trafficking Organizations

OE Watch Commentary: During the first five months of 2016, Costa Rican authorities have discovered 33 clandestine landing strips used by drug-trafficking organizations along the Pacific Coast. While this is not the first time infrastructure of this nature has been discovered in the country, there is concern, as Costa Rica expects to make record seizures of cocaine during fiscal year 2016 due to reported production increases in South America, as indicated in excerpt 1. This increased production has led authorities to believe there will also be increased construction of clandestine airstrips in the country to accommodate flow for at least three reasons.

First, Costa Rica has become an increasingly important transit point to drug cartels moving shipments north towards Mexico. This is evidenced by the arrival of Mexican cartels in the country, increased levels of violence, and increased cocaine seizures since 2012. Second, as cited by *CR Hoy* in excerpt 2, Costa Rica does not have radar technology capable of detecting aerial flights, which limits the ability of authorities to thwart this type of activity. Furthermore, even if Costa Rica did have the necessary technology, many of the flights fly so low that the most advanced systems cannot detect illicit flights. Third, criminal groups are building airstrips in areas of remote access that have little to no oversight by authorities, as discussed in excerpt 3. The combination of these factors will likely continue to attract criminal organizations in the coming months and years unless steps are taken to definitively secure aerial traffic in Costa Rica.

End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)

Source: Policía prevé tráfico récord de cocaína por Costa Rica este 2016 (Costa Rica Expects Record Cocaine Seizures in 2016).” *La Nación*. Accessed from http://www.nacion.com/sucesos/narcotrafico/Policia-preve-trafico-record-cocaina_0_1551844831.html

“The Security Ministry expects an estimated 1,700 tons of cocaine to move through Costa Rica in 2016. The figure is alarming because in 2015 1,200 tons of cocaine were smuggled, while in 2014, it was between 663 and 670 tons. The increase in the trafficking is expected because of more and better crops of cocaine in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, countries that are considered the main producers, explained the Counternarcotic Police (PCD).”

Source: “Debilidad estatal empodera al narco en los aires (State Weakness Empowers Air Capacities of Drug Trafficking Organizations).” *CR Hoy*. Accessed from <http://www.crhoy.com/debilidad-estatal-empodera-al-narco-en-los-aires/nacionales/>

“Drug trafficking organizations have free reign to do what they want in Costa Rican air space.....We do not have radar detection systems in place or the state resources to monitor...”

Source: “Caribe y zona sur preocupan a Aviación Civil por ser vulnerables a vuelos del narcotráfico (Caribbean and Southern Zones Vulnerable to Narco Flights).” *CR Hoy*. Accessed from <http://www.crhoy.com/caribe-y-zona-sur-preocupan-a-aviacion-civil-por-vulnerabilidades-a-vuelos-del-narco/>

“The southern sector of the country is unpopulated and favors illicit activity. There is also limited law enforcement present to monitor.”



Costa Rica discovers more than 30 clandestine airstrips.
Source: <https://www.google.com/clangestineairstrips>

India Launches Earth-Imaging Satellite, Many Microsatellites

“The business of putting satellites into space is surging ...”

OE Watch Commentary: The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) began countdown on 20 June to launch 20 satellites aboard its domestically built workhorse rocket, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle C34 (first excerpted article). The primary payload of the launch is the CARTOSAT-2C, a military satellite providing electro-optical Earth-imaging. It will provide a capability that India has lacked, at least organically, for three years (second excerpted article).

In addition to CARTOSAT-2C, the launch has a secondary payload of 19 microsatellites, the largest number of satellites ISRO has ever launched (third excerpted article). More important than the number of microsatellites is the context: ISRO’s launch is being viewed as a move to demonstrate Indian ability to compete with private-sector launch companies in providing low-cost launch services (fourth excerpted article). ISRO’s competition with private industry should not be viewed as opposition to privatized space. As discussed in the commentary “Indian Military Reviewing First Space Law” in *OE Watch* for April 2016, the Indian government perceives private industry as a major part of the future of space travel, but private industry has not passed all the hurdles to enable privatized launches from India. What the launch does is highlight the ability of India to provide high-technology products and services at a low price using domestic resources. This makes the launch a coup for India’s “Made in India” campaign. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Unattributed author(s), “ISRO Clears 48-Hour Countdown for Launching of PSLV-C34,” *The Indian Express* redaction from PTI, 20 June 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/isro-clears-48-hour-countdown-for-launching-of-pslv-c34-2863784/>.

Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday night said it has cleared the 48-hour countdown ... for the launch of record 20 satellites in a single mission on June ... Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C34 will be used to carry the satellites ... from the second launch pad of the space centre at 9.26 AM on June 22.

Source: Rajulapudi Srinivas, “ISRO Gearing up for a Record Feat,” *The Hindu*, 16 June 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Vijayawada/isro-gearing-up-for-a-record-feat/article8734489.ece>.

... PSLV will carry one Indian Remote Sensing Satellite and 19 other satellites from the launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) ... Apart from remote sensing and two nano satellites, 17 other satellites developed by Indonesia, Canada, Germany and USA will be injected ... which is for the first of its kind in the history of ISRO ... In 2008 April, ISRO launched ten satellites using PSLV C-9 ...

Source: Madhumathi D.S., “3 Years On, ISRO To Launch Earth Observation Satellite on June 20,” *The Hindu*, 16 June 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/3-years-on-isro-to-launch-earth-observation-satellite-on-june-20/article8734275.ece>.

Monday’s satellite launch will see the Indian Space Research Organisation resuming its Earth Observation (EO) satellite activity after a gap of around three years. The space agency has scheduled to fly Cartosat-2C, an Earth imaging satellite of sub-metre resolution and meant purely for the Armed Forces, on board the PSLV launcher on the morning of June 20. It will also launch 19 other smaller external satellites, including two from Indian universities.

In the period since 2013, seven navigation spacecraft and a few communication satellites dominated the domestic space scene ...

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Indian Space Agency Challenges Musk, Bezos With 22 Satellite Launch,” *The Japan Times*, 16 June 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/16/asia-pacific/science-health-asia-pacific/indian-space-agency-challenges-musk-bezos-22-satellite-launch/>.

India’s space agency will launch a record 22 satellites on a single rocket as it tries to ease a global backlog and demonstrate the ability to compete with commercial spaceflight companies ... Most of the machines will observe and measure the Earth’s atmosphere, with another from an Indian university helping provide service for amateur radio operators. The business of putting satellites into space is surging ... India is touting its traditionally low-cost program along with achievements such as putting an orbiter around Mars and building a space shuttle prototype ... The 22 machines being launched next week include an Earth observation satellite to capture light invisible to the naked eye. It is the biggest single launch by India, trailing Russia’s 33 in 2014 and NASA’s 29 the year before ...

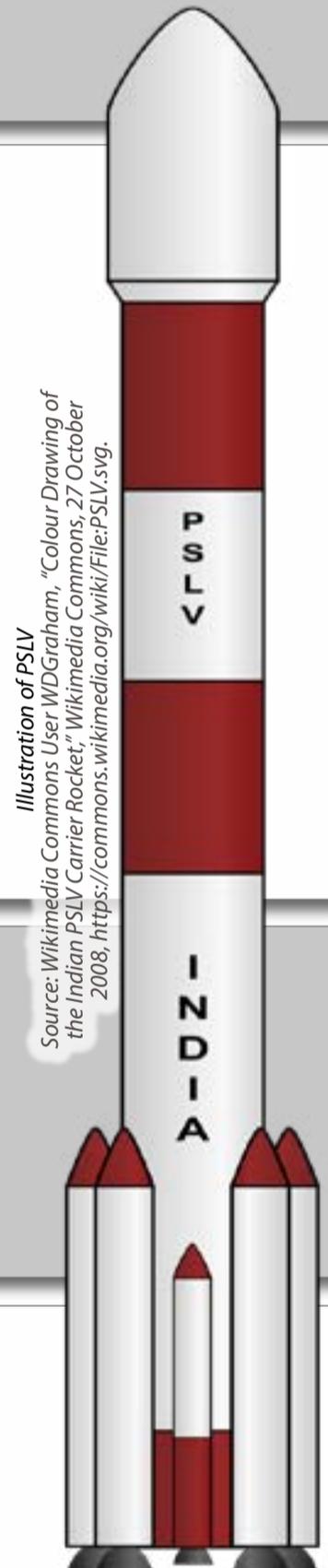


Illustration of PSLV
 Source: Wikimedia Commons User WDGraham, “Colour Drawing of the Indian PSLV Carrier Rocket,” Wikimedia Commons, 27 October 2008, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSLV.svg>.

India Tests Model Space Shuttle

OE Watch Commentary: India has successfully launched a model of its conceptual space shuttle, an essential step in developing its own space shuttle program. The shuttle program is still in an early phase: the model was 1/6th the size of the planned shuttle, intended to test glide control.

An operational shuttle is still 15 years out, but this test is a big step forward for India, particularly since Indians consider themselves to be in competition with China for Asian space leadership (article one excerpt). It is also another feather in India's hat for its "Made in India" initiative (article two excerpt), which is intended to strengthen its strategic position by reducing technology costs (India's labor costs are often lower than those of tech exporters) and developing domestic capability and expertise.

From a military perspective, the Indian space shuttle program is important because it will facilitate its ability to expand and maintain its military constellations over the long term, at a time when space capability is increasingly important for militaries around the world. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Tarek Bazley, "Indian Space Shuttle Makes First Test Flight," *Al Jazeera*, 23 May 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/indian-space-shuttle-test-flight-160523104211438.html>.

India's space agency ISRO has launched a rocket ... carrying an experimental spacecraft it hopes will mark an important step towards the country's first re-usable space shuttle ... The \$14 million dollar Reusable Launch Vehicle, or RLV-TD ... was lifted to an altitude of 70km before re-entering the Earth's atmosphere ... One-sixth the size of the planned shuttle, this test flight was also designed to see if the shuttle could glide and navigate at speeds of up to 6000 kmph, before attempting a landing on the sea in the Bay of Bengal ... The test mission was an important step towards developing a full-scale, reusable shuttle to send up satellites. The shuttle is not expected to come into service for at least 15 years ... "There is a flourishing space program under the Chinese military leadership and that is a direct challenge for India, which India has to respond, otherwise we are going to be left lagging behind," says [Rajeswari P. Rajagopalan, the head of the independent think tank Nuclear and Space Policy Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation]

Source: Unattributed author(s), "ISRO Launches Made in India Space Shuttle: Here's Why It Matters," 23 May 2016, *The Indian Express Tech* i.e., redaction from PTI, <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/isro-set-to-launch-indian-space-shuttle-heres-why-it-is-a-big-deal-2801811/>.

... The Indian space agency undertook its maiden launch of its very own indigenous version of a 'space shuttle', a fully made-in-India effort. Yes, the big powers abandoned the idea of a winged reusable launch vehicle, but India's frugal engineers believe the solution to reducing cost of launching satellites into orbit is to recycle the rocket or make it reusable. Scientists at ISRO believe that they could reduce the cost of launching stuff into space by as much as 10 times if reusable technology succeeds, bringing it down to \$2,000 per kg ...

"Scientists at ISRO believe that they could reduce the cost of launching stuff into space by as much as 10 times ...

There is a flourishing space program under the Chinese military leadership and that is a direct challenge for India ..."



Indian Space Research Organization Logo

Source: Indian Space Research Organization, "Logo of Indian Space Research Organization," Wikimedia Commons, 21 April 2011, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_Space_Research_Organisation_Logo.svg. Image in public domain.

Is Malaysia China's New Pal in Southeast Asia?

OE Watch Commentary: Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's office announced a new Malaysian-Chinese partnership, with Malaysia ready to discuss the possibilities of a joint military collaboration with China to tackle terrorism. According to excerpts from *New Straits Times*, their collaboration is a result of the security challenges in the Asia Pacific region, such as the threat of the Islamic State and food security, and military cooperation may be explored in the future, including intelligence exchange and formation of secure communication. It should be noted that this announcement came shortly before the *Bangkok Post* reported that China has stepped up efforts to resolve disputes in the South China Sea by calling for a joint military exercise with all Southeast Asian nations. Whether or not there is a connection between the two announcements remains to be seen, but the existing territorial dispute in the South China Sea marks these as a noteworthy turn of events.

As the accompanying excerpt points out, according to Royal Malaysian Navy Chief Admiral Kamalulzaman Ahmad Badaruddin, the armed forces of the two countries will engage in more training and exchange, such as port visits and a joint drill, codenamed "Peace and Friendship 2016" in Port Dickson, Malaysia, in mid-September. Badaruddin also pointed out that, although Malaysia and China are among the countries laying overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea, these claims will not have an impact on their military partnership.

According to the excerpted article, following the prime minister's announcement Chinese Minister of National Defense Chang Wanquan repeated his efforts to resolve the disputes in the South China Sea by calling for a joint military exercise with all Southeast Asian nations. He first announced this at the last Chinese-ASEAN defence meeting in October.
End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)

Prime Minister Najib addressing the 2013 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Najib_Razak#/media/File:Moht_Najib_Bin_Tun_Abdul_Razak_World_Economic_Forum_2013.jpg.

Source: "Malaysia Ready to Explore Military Collaboration with China to Tackle Extremism, Terrorism – Najib," *New Straits Times*, 25 May 2016. <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/05/147808/msia-ready-explore-military-collaboration-china-tackle-extremism-terrorism-najib>

Malaysia is ready to discuss further possibilities with China on joint military collaboration to tackle the threats of extremism, terrorism, kidnappings and other criminality.

Prime Minister's Office said in response to the dynamic security challenges in the Asia Pacific region such as the threat of Daesh and food security, other areas of defence and military practical cooperation, such as exchange of intelligence and the formation of a secured communication link, may be further explored.

Source: "RMN Chief: Maritime Challenges Won't Affect Malaysia-China Ties," *The Star Online*, 24 May 2016. <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/05/24/rmn-chief-maritime-challenges-wont-affect-malaysia-china-ties/>

The challenges in the South China Sea, where Malaysia and China are among the countries laying overlapping territorial claims, will not affect the close friendship between the military forces of the two nations, said Royal Malaysian Navy chief Admiral Datuk Seri Ahmad Kamarulzaman Ahmad Badaruddin.

He said the armed forces of the two countries will engage in more training and exchanges, such as port visits and a joint drill codenamed "Peace and Friendship 2016" in Port Dickson in mid-September.



Source: "China Calls for Naval Exercise with ASEAN," *Bangkok Post*, 30 May 2016. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/993905/china-calls-for-naval-exercise-with-asean>

China is stepping up its efforts in resolving the disputes in the South China Sea by calling for a joint military exercise with all Southeast Asian nations.

The call, made last year, was repeated in the Lao capital of Vientiane last week when Chinese Minister of National Defence Chang Wanquan met his counterparts from the 10-member Association of Southeast (ASEAN) ...

At the last informal Chinese-ASEAN defence meeting in October, Gen Chang expressed a willingness to hold a joint drill with ASEAN countries "...

President-elect Duterte is Already Creating Tension with Malaysia

OE Watch Commentary: Less than a month after becoming the Philippines President-elect, Rodrigo Duterte has said that he would pursue the country's claim to Sabah, an area south of Mindanao that is now administered by Malaysia. According to excerpts from *The Philippine Star*, Duterte's comment did not sit well with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who said that the next Philippine president might reignite the dispute between their countries. Shortly after this statement, Duterte maintained that he was not fueling the Sabah dispute and that he was just reiterating the Philippines's stance on the dispute, which is a result of the transfer of Sabah to the Federation of Malaysia in the 1960s. Sabah is a source of tension between the two countries, including clashes in 2013, when followers of then Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram from the Philippines entered Sabah to assert territorial rights over the area, leaving 52 of Kiram's followers and 8 Malaysian troops dead.

As the accompanying excerpt points out, although the claim should have been settled a long time ago, certain groups who have not given up their stake are a cause of concern, according to Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Joseph Pairin Kitingan. "It is well known that the claim should no longer be an issue by now, but it is unfortunately still not resolved as evident from situations like the armed intrusion in 2013 by those wanting to take over Sabah," he said.

According to the excerpts, the claims over Sabah are a result of a long-standing history between the countries. Prior to Philippine and Malaysian independence, the sultanate of Sulu ruled over parts of southern Philippines and Sabah. In 1963 the British government transferred Sabah to the newly-formed Federation of Malaysia. The Philippine government insists that Sabah was only leased, not ceded, to the British North Borneo Company, and the heirs of the Sulu sultanate still receive lease payments for Sabah. Malaysia, however, claims that the international community recognizes that Sabah has been part of its territory since the federation was formed in 1963. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "Sabah Claim: Duterte Unfazed by Malaysian Leader's Comment," *The Philippine Star*, 1 June 2016. <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/06/01/1589123/sabah-claim-duterte-unfazed-malaysian-leaders-comment>

President-elect Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday maintained that he was not fueling the Sabah dispute when he said that he would pursue the Philippines's claim to the area.

Last week, Duterte said he would pursue the Philippines' claim to Sabah, an area south of Mindanao that is now being administered by Malaysia.

Duterte's comment did not sit well with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who said that the next Philippine president might "reignite" the dispute between their countries. ...

The sultanate of Sulu used to rule over parts of southern Philippines and Sabah. In 1963, the British government transferred Sabah to the then newly-formed Federation of Malaysia.

The Philippine government insists that Sabah was only leased, not ceded, to the British North Borneo Co. The heirs of the Sulu sultanate still receive lease payments for Sabah.

Malaysia, however, claims that the international community has been recognizing Sabah as part of its territory since the federation was formed in 1963.

In 2013, followers of then Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram entered Lahad Datu in Sabah to assert their territorial rights over the area. The entry resulted in clashes that left dozens of Kiram's followers and Malaysian troops dead.

Source: "Sabah Leaders Reject Duterte's Claim on State, but Mixed on Resolving Philippine Issue," *Malay Mail Online*, 2 June 2016. <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/sabah-leaders-reject-dutertes-claim-on-state-but-mixed-on-resolving-philipp>

Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said that although the claim should have been settled a long time ago, certain quarters who have not given up their stake were a cause of concern.

"It is well known that the claim should no longer be an issue by now, but it is unfortunately still not resolved as evident from situations like the armed intrusion in 2013 by those wanting to take over Sabah," he said.

Pairin said security threats continue to plague Sabahans and called for them to be resolved at a higher government level.



President-elect Rodrigo Duterte in 2013 as Davao City Vice Mayor.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodrigo_Duterte#/media/File:Rodrigo_Duterte_Benigno_Aquino_III_04.png

Source: "Sabah Standoff Leader Dies in Tawi-Tawi," *Rappler*, 13 January 2015. <http://www.rappler.com/nation/80696-agbimuddin-kiram-dies>

In February 2013, Kiram led a group of about 200 armed followers of the Sultanate of Sulu to Lahad Datu, Sabah, to revive the sultanate's claim to the Eastern Malaysian state. ...

The stunt led to the standoff between the sultan's followers and Malaysian forces, causing the lives of 60 people - 52 Filipinos and 8 Malaysian policemen, ...

Philippine Military Captures Training Camp for MILF Splinter Group

OE Watch Commentary: In early June Philippine troops captured an Islamic militant training camp run by the Maute group, an offshoot of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and one of several Philippine Muslim militant groups that pledge allegiance to ISIS, as part of operations to clear insurgents from a remote jungle region in Mindanao. According to excerpts from *The Star Online*, the ten-day offensive, which was launched after the militants moved back into territory the military had secured during clashes in February, left 4 soldiers dead and 15 others wounded. According to Colonel Roseller Murillo, head of the Army's 103rd Infantry Brigade, Philippine troops found unexploded improvised explosive devices, a grenade launcher, and a black ISIS flag in wooden huts and concrete-reinforced trenches.

As described in the excerpts, the training camp used to belong to the MILF, but has been occupied by the Maute group since February, according to Colonel Murillo. At the time, MILF forces left the camp with plans to conduct a massive military operation, and the Maute group took advantage of MILF's absence to use the camp as a base to launch attacks.

According to excerpts, after moving into the old MILF camp the Maute group then attacked a remote army outpost in Butig, Mindanao, in February, triggering a week of fighting that the military said left six soldiers and at least twelve militants dead. The group, believed to have fewer than 100 fighters, then blew up power transmission towers and abducted and beheaded two employees of a local sawmill in April.

The Maute group and MILF are two closely related militant groups, according to excerpts from *ABS-CBN News*. The leaders of the former, Omar and Abdullah Maute, were once a part of MILF, and both groups share territory in Butig in Mindanao. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "Philippine Troops Seize Islamic Militant Camp," *The Star Online*, 4 June 2016. <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/06/04/philippine-troops-seize-islamic-militant-camp/>

Philippine troops captured an Islamic militant training camp after a 10-day battle, officials said, as part of operations to clear insurgents from a remote jungle region.

The offensive against the Maute group, one of several Filipino Muslim armed organisations which have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), left four soldiers dead and 15 others wounded, ...

Unexploded improvised explosive devices, a grenade launcher, a rebel uniform and a black ISIS flag were all that were left in the wooden huts and concrete-reinforced trenches, which were used by the gunmen, army Colonel Roseller Murillo said.

The offensive was launched after the militants moved back into territory that the military secured during clashes in February, they said.

... the Maute group attacked a remote army outpost in Butig in February, triggering a week of fighting that the military said left six soldiers and at least 12 militants dead.

The group, believed to have fewer than 100 fighters, blew up power transmission towers and abducted and beheaded two employees of a local sawmill in April.

Source: "Army Halts Hunt for IS Followers for Ramadan," *Inquirer.net*, 5 June 2016. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/789174/army-halts-hunt-for-is-followers-for-ramadan>

The camp used to belong to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) but has since been occupied by the Maute group, Murillo said.

In February, MILF forces left Camp Darul Iman to give way to massive military operations at that time. The Maute group took advantage of the MILF's absence and used the camp as a base to launch attacks.

Murillo said soldiers had recovered improvised explosive devices in the camp, a flag of IS and several belongings.

Source: "The Ties that Bind MILF and Maute Group," *ABS-CBN News*, 3 March 2016. <http://k2.abs-cbnnews.com/focus/03/03/16/the-ties-that-bind-milf-and-maute-group>

... Butig is also the center of power of the MILF in Lanao del Sur. Nine units and base commands are located in Butig.

... Omar and Abdullah Maute, the leaders of the Maute group, ...



Flag of Islamic State.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant#/media/File:AQMI_Flag_asymmetric.svg

Analysis: Islamic State and a Local Network Keep Abu Sayaff Going Strong

OE Watch Commentary: Abu Sayyaf transformed two years ago from a largely dismissed rag-tag group of bandits out for their next ransom payday to a group pledging allegiance to ISIS. According to excerpts from the article in *Southeast Asia Globe*, a news source based in Cambodia, two local experts provide analysis about how Abu Sayyaf’s pledge to ISIS has altered the group’s aims, and that the socio-economic inequality in their home area keeps the group well connected to the local population.

As described in the accompanying excerpts, Rohan Gunaratna, head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a think tank specializing in counterterrorism research, discusses the group’s pledge to ISIS. He said that viewing Abu Sayyaf activities as simply a continuation of the old ways of raiding and piracy is mistaken. “They are no longer operating as the Abu Sayyaf Group – we can see that they are displaying [ISIS] banners. They are thinking like they’re soldiers of Islamic State, representatives of Islamic State.” He also maintained that the pledge to ISIS had radically altered the group’s aims. “Abu Sayyaf is seeking to expand its military capabilities to the point where they’re able to hold ground and fight – very much in keeping with Islamic State’s state-building activities.”

Joseph Franco, an expert with S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said that the rise of terrorist groups in the impoverished regions of Sulu and Basilan (in Mindanao) is a problem rooted in socio-economic inequality: “It’s because they are well-rooted, those kinship links, those relationships that they have with the local communities there – those are the key reasons, and if you go for a military response to what is essentially a socio-economic problem you see that it doesn’t really stick.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

For more information, see: “Will the Philippines Finally Succeed Against Abu Sayyaf?,” OE Watch, November 2015

Source: “Does Abu Sayyaf Pose a Major Terror Threat to Southeast Asia?,” *Southeast Asia Globe*, 1 June 2016. http://sea-globe.com/19430-2-abu-sayyaf-isis/?fb_ref=X8CC9=OhCb-Twitter

Since then, sustained pressure on Abu Sayyaf operations by Philippine and US authorities have reduced the group to little more than a kidnap-and-ransom operation, ..., the group was largely dismissed as little more than a rag-tag group of bandits out for their next payday. In July 2014, that all changed.

... Rohan Gunaratna, head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a think tank specialising in counter-terrorism research and analysis, ...

Gunaratna said that viewing the group’s activities as simply a continuation of the old ways of raiding and piracy was mistaken. “They are no longer operating as the Abu Sayyaf Group – we can see that they are displaying [Isis] banners. They are thinking like they’re soldiers of Islamic State, representatives of Islamic State.”

And he maintained that the pledge to Isis had radically altered the group’s aims. “Abu Sayyaf is seeking to expand its military capabilities to the point where they’re able to hold ground and fight – very much in keeping with Islamic State’s state-building activities.”

Joseph Franco, an associate research fellow at the Singapore-based S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, ...

Franco suggested that the difficulty lay in the government’s refusal to treat the rise of terror groups in the impoverished regions of Sulu and Basilan as a problem rooted in socio-economic inequality. “It’s because they are well-rooted, those kinship links, those relationships that they have with the local communities there – those are the key reasons, and if you go for a military response to what is essentially a socio-economic problem you see that it doesn’t really stick.”



The map shows Sulu, the location of Abu Sayyaf’s headquarters in the Philippines. Just north of Malaysia and Indonesia, the island in the Sulu Sea has been a regular security concern for all three countries.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sulu#/media/File:Ph_locator_map_sulu.png.

Indonesian Police Stop Another Islamic-State-Inspired Attack

OE Watch Commentary: Indonesian police said they have arrested three ISIS-inspired extremists who were planning to launch suicide bombings in public places and government offices in the coming weeks to replicate the Jakarta suicide bombing on 14 January in Surabaya, the country's second-largest city. According to accompanying excerpts from an article in *The Jakarta Post*, Detachment 88 (Densus 88), the police's elite antiterrorism squad, detained the men in Surabaya on 8 June after police monitored their connections to one of the suspects in January's Jakarta bombing. During the raid Densus 88 agents found 23 bombs: 3 were already assembled and the remaining 20 were in various stages of assembly.

As the accompanying excerpted article in *The Straits Times* points out, the group was inspired by ISIS propaganda, according to national police spokesman Boy Rafli Amar. Police also said one of the detained men had links to Abu Jandal, an influential Indonesian militant fighting for ISIS in Syria. Analysts say Jandal and other Indonesians in Syria have been competing to impress ISIS leaders by encouraging their followers back home to launch attacks and have on occasion provided funds and guidance.

According to excerpts from *The Jakarta Post*, Indonesian police noted that the group was connected to the bomb attack in Central Jakarta in January and had regularly visited one of the suspects of the Jakarta bombing. Police were able to arrest the group in Surabaya after years of closely monitoring their interaction with the suspect in the Jakarta bombing. The January attacks in Jakarta that the group had planned to replicate were a series of explosions and shootings that saw police forces battling for hours, leaving four attackers and four civilians dead and more than twenty people wounded.

End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)

For more information, see: "Even After the Jakarta Attacks, there is Potential for More Lone Terrorist Cells," OE Watch, March 2016

Source: "Indonesia Nabs Three Suspects Plotting ISIS-Inspired Attacks," *The Straits Times*, 10 June 2016. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-nabs-three-suspects-plotting-isis-inspired-attacks>

Indonesian police said yesterday that they have arrested three extremists who were planning to launch suicide bombings, inspired by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terror group, in the country's second-biggest city of Surabaya.

The police's elite anti-terror squad Detachment 88 detained the men in Surabaya on Wednesday and seized bombs and firearms, said national police spokesman Boy Rafli Amar.

He said the group planned to attack public places and government offices in the city in the coming weeks, ...

"They were influenced by IS on social media," Mr Amar said, referring to the ISIS terrorist group, which has declared a "caliphate" in large areas of territory it has seized in Iraq and Syria. "They were inspired by IS leaders' speeches."

Police said one of the detained men had links to Abu Jandal, an influential Indonesian militant fighting for ISIS in Syria, but did not give further details.

Analysts say Jandal and other Indonesians in Syria have been competing to impress ISIS leaders by encouraging their followers back home to launch attacks, and have on occasion provided funds and guidance.

Source: "Foiled Bomb Attack in Surabaya Mimics Sarinah Bombing: Police," *The Jakarta Post*, 10 June 2016. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/06/10/foiled-bomb-attack-surabaya-mimics-sarinah-bombing-police.html>

National Police spokesman Insp. Gen. Boy Rafli Amar said the planned Surabaya attack was related to the Thamrin bombing and inspired by the teachings of the Islamic State (IS) organization that spread through social media.

"The Surabaya terrorist suspects are linked to the Sarinah attack through Shibgho, who was seen at the scene when Thamrin bombing occurred," Boy said on Thursday.

He said during the raid, Densus 88 counterterror agents found 23 bombs. While three were assembled and detonated by the bomb squad, the remaining 20 were in various stages of assembling.

According to Boy, the police were finally able to arrest the three after years of closely monitoring Priyo in particular after he often visited Shibgho ...

The bombs were initially meant to be detonated in areas around downtown Surabaya, apparently to replicate the Thamrin bombing.



Indonesian armed Police officers during the Jakarta suicide bombing.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Jakarta_attacks#/media/File:Indonesian_BRIMOB_police_officers.jpg

Source: "Facing More Unpredictable Terrorist Crimes," *The Jakarta Post*, 19 January 2016. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/01/19/facing-more-unpredictable-terrorist-crimes.html>

A series of explosions and shootings hit Central Jakarta on Jan. 14. So far eight have died, including the terrorist suspects, and more than 20 people were wounded in the assaults. After police forces battled for hours, four attackers died. These attackers were believed to be linked to the Islamic State (IS) movement.

Vietnam and China are Both Trying to Win Over Cambodia

OE Watch Commentary: Newly appointed Vietnamese Defense Minister General Ngo Xuan Lich made his first overseas trip to Cambodia to cement defense ties between the two countries. According to excerpts of the article from *Khmer Times*, their meeting signals Vietnam's interest in claiming its regional role, particularly in Indochina, and demonstrates the power competition between Vietnam and China in Cambodia.

As the accompanying article points out, Lich's visit to Cambodia follows other recent defense engagements between the two countries. In May newly appointed Minister of Public Security To Lam visited Cambodia to strengthen security cooperation, particularly to fight organized and transnational crimes, smuggling and drug trafficking. This year alone 1500 Cambodian military personnel will train in Vietnam, and Vietnam is supporting the construction of military infrastructure, particularly military camps, across Cambodia.

Regarding China, according to excerpts, Vietnam knows that it is impossible to compete with China for influence in Cambodia on the economic front, which is one of the reasons why the country is putting a greater emphasis on security and defense cooperation with Cambodia. As described in the excerpts, China has strong leverage in Cambodia, being the top trading partner and foreign investor, and largest aid donor there. Although Cambodia is trying to balance its external relations with both China and Vietnam, the reality on the ground shows that China has secured stronger economic and political influence there.

However, as described in the accompanying excerpts, Vietnam has an advantage in building close defense ties with Cambodia due to historical connections, strategic trust and social capital, with China catching up to Vietnam by building closer ties with Cambodia's defense sector. China is now Cambodia's largest donor of military aid, from providing military equipment to building military facilities and capacity building. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "Vietnam to Tighten Its Ties," *Khmer Times*, 13 June 2016. <http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/26029/vietnam-to-tighten-its-ties/>

Last month, newly appointed Minister of Public Security To Lam visited Cambodia to strengthen security cooperation, particularly in fighting organized and transnational crimes, smuggling and drug trafficking.

Early this month, newly appointed Defense Minister General Ngo Xuan Lich of Vietnam made his first overseas trip to Cambodia to cement defense ties between the two countries.

This year alone, 1,500 Cambodian military personnel will be trained in Vietnam. Vietnam will also support building military infrastructure, particularly military camps across the Kingdom.

... signal Vietnam's interest in claiming its regional role, particularly in Indochina....

Although Cambodia is trying to balance its external relations with both China and Vietnam, the reality on the ground shows that China has secured stronger economic and political influence in the Kingdom.

... China has had strong leverage in Cambodia. China has become the top trading partner and foreign investor, and the largest aid donor to Cambodia.

Knowing that it is impossible to compete with China for influence in Cambodia on the economic front, Vietnam gives more emphasis to security and defense cooperation with Cambodia.

Vietnam has an advantage in building close defense and security ties with Cambodia due to historical connections, strategic trust and social capital. Vietnam's security apparatus has maintained good and strong relations with its counterpart in Cambodia.

China is catching up with Vietnam in building closer ties with Cambodia's defense sector. China is now Cambodia's largest donor of military aid, from providing military equipment to building military facilities and capacity building.



Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, who came into power on April 7th, 2016.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Xu%C3%A2n_Ph%C3%BAc#/media/File:Nguyen_Xuan_Phuc.jpg

China Releases White Paper on Beidou Navigation System

OE Watch Commentary: Like Russia, Europe, and, more recently, India, China has been pursuing development of its own satellite navigation system, the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS). China has deployed the system in phases, starting with a test phase, then a regional coverage phase, moving towards global service.

China has now released a white paper, outlining the purpose, scope, and status of the system. According to the white paper, the BDS constellation currently is capable of providing navigation services within the Asia-Pacific region. By 2020 China plans to have a 35-satellite constellation operational, providing service globally. The paper also refers to manufacturing processes without any timeline about production and dissemination of end-user hardware (first excerpted article).

Global coverage is still years away; China continues to progress towards that goal, having launched the 23rd BDS satellite in June 2016 (second excerpted article). Although China emphasizes peaceful and public use of the BDS, the military remains the primary benefactor of domestic positioning, navigation, and timing capability (third excerpted article).

The timing China chose to release the white paper is interesting, as it comes only a few weeks after India deployed the final satellite in its regional navigation system, identified as NAVIC. (For the most recent FMSO commentary on the Indian constellation, please refer to *OE Watch* for June 2016 “India’s NAVIC Constellation Is Underway.”) This timing might be coincidental, but, given the perceived Asian space race, it seems more likely that releasing the white paper was a way for China to communicate that it was still the regional leader in navigation satellite capability and service. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Unattributed author(s), “China Preparing For New Era Of Space Economy,” *China Daily* redaction from *Xinhua*, 16 June 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-06/16/content_25737949.htm.

... During the first China Space Economic Forum, in Beijing on Thursday, government officials, aerospace scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs exchanged views on China’s space economy developments ... The government is accelerating cooperation with the military, discussing plans to share military space resources with enterprises to ensure government investment better benefits the public ... China has announced it will complete aerospace projects currently underway by around 2020, including manned space programs, lunar probes, the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System and the Gaofen observation satellite program. A Mars exploration program is scheduled to begin around 2020 ...

Source: Unattributed author(s), “China Launches 23rd Beidou Satellite into Space,” *China National Television*, 13 June 2016, <http://english.cntv.cn>.

China launched a satellite to support its global navigation and positioning network ... It is the 23rd satellite in the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), which is being developed as an alternative to US GPS ... The satellite ... will join others already in orbit and improve the stability of the system ...

Source: Unattributed author(s), “China’s BeiDou Navigation Satellite System,” State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, in “Full Text: White Paper on China’s Bei Dou Navigation Satellite System,” *People’s Daily Online* redaction from *Xinhua*, 16 June 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0616/c202936-9073084.html>.

The BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (... BDS) has been independently constructed and operated by China with an eye to the needs of the country’s national security and economic and social development. As a space infrastructure of national significance, the BDS provides all-time, all-weather and high-accuracy positioning, navigation and timing services to global users ... Navigation satellite systems are public resources shared by the whole globe, and multi-system compatibility and interoperability has become a trend ... China lays store by the construction of the BDS, ranking it one of its national key technical projects that supports its innovative development strategy. (I) Goals of Development: Building a world-class navigation satellite system to meet the needs of the country’s national security as well as economic and social development, and providing continuous, stable and reliable services for global users; developing BDS-related industries to support China’s economic and social development, as well as improvement of people’s living standards; and enhancing international cooperation to share the fruits of development in the field of satellite navigation, increasing the comprehensive application benefits of Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) ... The first step is to construct the BDS-1 (also known as BeiDou Navigation Satellite Demonstration System). The project was started in 1994, and the system was completed and put into operation in 2000 ... The second step is to construct the BDS-2. The project was started in 2004, and by the end of 2012 a total of 14 satellites - 5 GEO satellites, 5 Inclined Geosynchronous Satellite Orbit (IGSO) satellites and 4 Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) satellites - had been launched ... and provided users in the Asia-Pacific region with positioning, velocity measurement, timing, wide-area differential and short message communication services. The third step is to construct the BDS ... The goal is to provide basic services to the countries along the Belt and Road and in neighboring regions by 2018, and to complete the constellation deployment with the launching of 35 satellites by 2020 to provide services to global users ... Currently, B1I and B2I open service signals are being broadcast by the operating BDS-2 to provide open services to the Asia-Pacific region free of charge. ... To make breakthroughs in key technologies, China is developing chips, modules, antennae and other basic products based on the BDS and other compatible systems, and fostering an independent BDS industrial chain ...

(continued)

Continued: China Releases White Paper on Beidou Navigation System

“Navigation satellite systems are public resources shared by the whole globe, and multi-system compatibility and interoperability has become a trend ...”

“... The government is accelerating cooperation with the military, discussing plans to share military space resources with enterprises to ensure government investment better benefits the public ...”

“... China is developing chips, modules, antennae and other basic products based on the BDS and other compatible systems, and fostering an independent BDS industrial chain”



Long March 3B launch from Zichang Satellite Center; China has used Long March 3B launch vehicles to lift multiple BeiDou satellites.
Source: Wikimedia Commons user AAXanderr, "The launch of the Long March 3B Rocket, Xichang Satellite Center, China," Wikimedia Commons, 1997/1998, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Launch_of_Long_March_3B_Rocket.jpg.
Image in public domain.

Nepal Turns Increasingly Toward China to Lessen Dependence on India

“Besides restarting previously damaged roads to Nepal via Tibet, China in a strategic move last month opened combined road-and-rail services to Kathmandu to speed up supplies. The two have also beefed up their military relations.”

OE Watch Commentary: According to the two articles excerpted here, Nepal Telecom recently announced that it had connected its optical fiber network with that of China Telecom Corporation Limited, ending its dependence on India for its global connectivity services. This is interesting on at least two levels. First, historically, Nepal, a country landlocked between China and India, has long held closer ties and open borders with India. However, since late 2015 relations between the two countries have been somewhat strained due to a number of cultural and political issues.

At the end of 2015 Nepal passed a new constitution making the new republic a federal one. Having a diversity of languages and ethnicities, the new constitution raised concern that certain low-caste groups would not be represented in the national governing body. Some of the discontent with the new constitution prompted violent clashes and even resulted in the blocking of the Nepal-India border trade points. This had stopped the flow of essential supplies into Nepal, causing concern over too much reliance on one route, and has opened the door for China to step in. The optical fiber network is just one of a number of agreements between Nepal and China. Both sides have beefed up military relations and have also opened up a trade and transit agreement that will now pass through China, taking away Nepal's overdependence on India for critical supplies.

The second point to consider is the question of security and control. With China's level of governmental control and monitoring of its Internet within its own borders, how might that impact Nepal? **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: “China, Nepal Connected by Optical Fiber for First Time,” *China Radio International*, 11 June 2016, <<http://english.cri.cn/12394/2016/06/11/4261s930487.htm>>.

China, Nepal Connected by Optical Fiber for First Time

The connection now allows Nepal to be directly linked with the Hong Kong Data Center, which is one of the two biggest global data centers in Asia, via the Chinese mainland.

Following the connection with Chinese optical fiber, Nepal is also now able to purchase internet bandwidth with Chinese companies. Currently, Nepalese internet service providers have been purchasing bandwidth from companies from India and other countries.

Source: “China Links Nepal with Optical Fibre to End India Dependence,” *The Economic Times* (Mumbai), 12 June 2016, <<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/china-links-nepal-with-optical-fibre-to-end-india-dependence/articleshow/52706038.cms>>.

China Links Nepal with Optical Fibre to End India Dependence

For the first time, China and Nepal have been connected with an optical fibre network via Tibet as infrastructure between the two countries is being firmed up to extend high-speed Internet services to Nepal and end its “sole dependence” on India, Chinese state media reported today.

Their months-long protests, blocking Nepal-India border trade points had created a severe crunch of essential supplies in the landlocked Himalayan nation.

Besides restarting previously damaged roads to Nepal via Tibet, China in a strategic move last month opened combined road-and-rail services to Kathmandu to speed up supplies. The two have also beefed up their military relations.



China Firming Up Plans to Launch First Quantum Communication Satellite

OE Watch Commentary: China is closing in on its plans to carry out the launching of the world's first experimental quantum satellite. The following excerpts come from an article that goes more in-depth on the country's plans.

First, according to the article, a source from the Chinese Academy of Sciences has confirmed that China will launch the first experimental quantum satellite in July. If all goes as planned, the satellite will turn quantum communications between satellite and ground facilities into a reality.

A quantum communication network is theoretically unbreakable. The technology is based on the principles of quantum physics. (Note: For a more in-depth look at China's pursuit of developing the technology in quantum information, please see Ms. Hurst's 2015 presentation entitled *The Quantum Leap into Computing and Communication: A Chinese Perspective*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIKB1V8zWqA>).

The article goes on to further describe the make-up, location, and interworking of the experimental system. The satellite has been in the development stage for the past five years and China clearly feels it is ready to move to the next level, putting it one step closer to achieving its goal of establishing a global quantum communication network. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The launch will for the first time make it a reality to carry out quantum communications between a satellite and ground facilities and to build an integrated secured quantum communications and experiment system.”



Source: Wu Jingjing “我国首颗量子科学实验卫星将于7月择机发射-新华网 (China to Launch its First Experimental Quantum Satellite in July),” *Xinhua*, 28 May 2016, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/tech/2016-05/28/c_1118948988.htm>.

China to Launch its First Experimental Quantum Satellite in July

The launch will for the first time make it a reality to carry out quantum communications between a satellite and ground facilities and to build an integrated secured quantum communications and experiment system.

According to a source, the special quantum satellite project will develop and launch an experimental quantum satellite, establish a space-based experimental quantum system composed of four ground quantum communication stations and a space-based experimental quantum teleportation station. The satellite's payload includes a communications encryption device, a quantum entanglement transmitter, a quantum entanglement source, an experimental quantum controller and processor. In addition, the satellite has two sets of independent payload pointing mechanisms, which, through coordination with and control by its attitude pointing system, can establish quantum optical links between two optical [communications] ground stations that are a thousand kilometers apart.

... a large backbone “Beijing-Shanghai” quantum communications network is expected to be delivered in the second half of the year. The project aims to build a thousand-kilometer long, highly reliable, expandable and civil-military-integration friendly wide-area quantum communications network; it will build a large-scale platform for quantum communications technology's proof and verification, application research and demonstration. With the quantum satellite and the Beijing-Shanghai communications line, China is going to build an initial integrated space-to-ground, wide-area quantum communications system.

Sino-Pakistani Alliance Faces Pressure from Pakistani Religious Leaders

“China has also been subtly warning Pakistan to stop the flow of Islamic messaging to Xinjiang but to no avail.”

OE Watch Commentary: China and Pakistan have a long-standing military. Together they can contain India, with which both countries have a border conflict. China provides Pakistan with knowledge and expertise to maintain its nuclear weapons arsenal, while Pakistan provides China with a segue into the Middle East and broader Muslim World, including backdoor talks with the Taliban and access to the Pakistani port at Gwadar.

Beyond the purely military aspect of the relationship, however, influential members in Pakistani society are increasingly speaking out against China. As the excerpted article from Pakistan’s *The News* on 27 May shows, Hafiz Sayeed of the conservative Islamic group, Jaamat ud-Dawa, is publicly condemning China for its policies in Xinjiang toward the Muslims Uighurs. This came after Chinese leader Xi Jinping said at the Second National Conference on Religion in Beijing that China should be vigilant about Islamic tendencies in the country, such as the proliferation halal foods.

While pressure from religious leaders like Sayeed will likely not undermine the Sino-Pakistani alliance, the article suggests that Sayeed is taking his complaints to the diplomatic level, with his vow to speak directly to the Chinese ambassador. There are sympathizers and followers of Sayeed in the Pakistani military and political institutions who could be influenced by his rhetoric.

Negative perceptions of China’s treatment of its Muslims would likely result in the two countries’ alliance remaining strictly military and not extending to people-to-people ties. Should any friction arise between the countries over issues related to militancy, for example, these negative perceptions may make it harder to resolve them. Ill will towards China could also embolden and bolster support for militant groups in Pakistan, including both religious and secular ethno-nationalist groups that target overseas Chinese workers.

China’s alliances in its own backyard in Asia with countries like Pakistan and North Korea are not as deep as they often are portrayed. They are certainly not as deep as those that the US has, for example, with countries like Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and now India, which are predicated on military affairs, but also benefit from mutual goodwill of the peoples of those countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



In 2015, as seen in the adjacent image, Pakistan president Mamnoon guaranteed to Chinese leader Xi Jinping that Uighur militants had been eliminated from Pakistani territory. Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/as-pakistan-expands-nuclear-program-china-seen-as-most-reliable-partner/1912529.html>

Source: “Pakistan cannot accept China’s rejection of Islam says Hafiz Sayeed,” *The Week Post*, 27 May 2016.

Pakistan cannot accept China’s rejection of Islam says Hafiz Sayeed

Pakistan’s hardline leader and the head of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), Hafiz Mohammad Sayeed, has rejected China’s call to stop the practice of Islam, which was made by the Chinese leadership at the recently held Second National Conference on Religion in Beijing. Speaking to his congregation of hardline Islamists in Lahore, Sayeed said that it was true that China is Pakistan’s all weather friend, but “any comment that hurts our religion, Islam, is not acceptable and we urge the Chinese leadership to take it back.” “By uttering such statements, China is hurting its time-tested relations with the people of Pakistan,” said Sayeed.

Sayeed called upon the Pakistan Government to “show some courage and direct China to stay away from hurting Islamic sentiments”. The hardline leader told his followers that he plans to meet the Chinese Ambassador in Islamabad to lodge his protest.

President Xi Jinping is making efforts to tighten control over religious practices, as it is his belief that religion, especially Islam, could emerge as a competing force in society unless it is nipped in the bud now. Communist Party Officials strongly backed President Xi’s statements and cautioned citizens to be vigilant against Islamic tendencies.

China's Decides Not to Participate in South China Sea Arbitration

OE Watch Commentary: China is deeply concerned over the fact that a serious international situation is developing in the South China Sea region. For the past few years China has been in a regular dispute with the US and countries bordering the South China Sea over sovereignty issues and claims regarding reefs and islands in the area. It claims historical and legal documents prove its ownership of these assets. Bordering nations claim their own historical and legal rights over specific areas.

Now, as arbitration over the area has been offered to all claimants, China has refused to participate. It disagrees that arbitration is the way to solve the situation. Rather, face to face negotiations is the answer. Chinese negotiators think that a particular nation or “wirepuller” is behind the arbitration effort. This country, from outside the region, is employing its strategy in the Asia Pacific, and its military is putting money and equipment into the South China Sea area. The arbitration effort is being carried out for the benefit of this nation, with only the Philippines “reading the script.” From a negotiating point of view, China had made a “clear declaration in 2006 in accordance the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to exclude maritime delimitation from compulsory arbitration.” Thus, in China’s view, the arbitration effort has no ground to stand

Li Jianqiang, a professor at the University of Houston, supports China’s position. He noted that China complies with provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which allows the Middle Kingdom to neither participate in nor accept arbitration. To him, territorial disputes are settled through negotiation and consultation. In the current case under discussion, this would mean direct negotiations between China and the Philippines. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Unattributed report, “US Scholar: China’s Non-Participation in South China Sea Arbitration Legitimate and Lawful,” *China Military Online*, (in English), 12 June 2016.

Li Jianqiang noted that the disputes were between the two countries of China and the Philippines, and non-claimants should not intervene in the matter. He added that it is an open secret that the US is actively reinforcing its presence in Asia. The activities by American Navy in the region send a clear signal to countries involved in the South China Sea disputes that Washington has taken sides in disputes against China.

Li believed that peacefully settling the South China Sea disputes through consultation and negotiation should be a consensus of all concerned parties. The escalation of South China Sea tension will doubtlessly lead to negative spillover effects, affect the China-US cooperation in many other key areas, and impair the atmosphere for them to cooperate in major issues such as safeguarding peace and stability in Asia and the world in general.

He praised China’s principle and position of settling the South China Sea disputes peacefully through negotiation, and spoke highly of China’s consistent efforts for that purpose.

Li Jianqiang said “as a sovereign and independent nation, China has the right to take all necessary means to defend its territory and security. China’s assertion to settle the disputes through negotiation is the right approach, which can, to the largest extent, prevent irrelevant countries that harbor selfish motives and interests from dragging the South China Sea issue into a complex and dangerous situation.”

Source: Unattributed report, “US Scholar: China’s Non-Participation in South China Sea Arbitration Legitimate and Lawful,” *China Military Online*, (in English), 12 June 2016.

However, it now appears that the Philippines sees China’s self-restraint as being weak. It has therefore gone one step further. It not only wants Chinese islands and reefs but has also filed for arbitration to drape its illegal occupation in the cloak of law.

Yet the tribunal has no jurisdiction over the case at all. The submissions made by the Philippines appear to be related only to the classification of maritime features and fishery disputes, but are in essence inseparable from territorial sovereignty and maritime delimitation.

Despite the fact that this tribunal has no jurisdiction over either territorial sovereignty or maritime delimitation, the Philippines has abused its right of action by knowingly initiating an unlawful case.

The tribunal meanwhile has abused its right of competency by knowingly accepting a case that is clearly not within its jurisdiction.

The Law of the Sea clearly provides for a bilateral approach prior to any third-party mechanism, including arbitration. Yet it is clear that bilateral options between China and the Philippines have not been exhausted. The tribunal’s imprudent decision to start the compulsory arbitration process suggests a lack of even minimal respect for the spirit and principles of the UNCLOS to say the least

My advice for the Philippines is to return to a negotiated solution, and for some countries from outside the region to stop playing with fire.

The parties directly involved in the South China Sea should consult and negotiate face to face, drawing on historical facts and international law. This is the only way we will resolve the South China Sea issue, restore harmony, and bring about lasting peace, cooperation and prosperity to this region.

Questioning the Motives behind the Aktobe Attacks

OE Watch Commentary: The attack on two hunting stores and a National Guard detachment in the city of Aktobe, Kazakhstan, on 5 June left a number of people dead and has raised a number of questions about the men involved and their motive. The excerpted accompanying article questions the motives of the attackers and also asks why members of the National Security Committee (KNB) overlooked the threat from the group.

To recap, the initial attack took place when several men went into a hunting supply store, shot an employee and took an assortment of rifles, shotguns and ammunition. The group then split into two: one group stole a bus and drove to the National Guard detachment, where they clashed with members of the unit, leaving three service members and one of the attackers dead, while the other stole a police car and drove to another hunting store, where they clashed with a security guard and police, resulting in three policemen, a store customer, and three of the attackers dead. Early in the morning on 6 June security forces raided a house in the city, capturing two suspects and killing five, while a second operation later in the day resulted in three more arrests and one suspect killed. Five more suspects were killed on 10 June in another raid in the city.

The author of the article bluntly questions how the KNB missed the threat from the group and at the end of the article suggests that priorities in the department need to change. He is referring to events in April and May, when protests took place across Kazakhstan over a law that would have allowed the sale of land to foreigners. The government allowed some of the protests to take place, but a number of people were arrested, which led to more protests. In response to the protests the government reportedly revised the law so that now foreigners cannot purchase land, but frustration with the government only grew following the attack in Aktobe. A number of people, the author included, believed that the government spent too much time focusing on the protests of the land problem and not enough on threats like this group.

As for the events of 5 June, the author questions what the attackers were trying to accomplish and offers a couple of explanations. The attack at the first hunting supply store (Pallas) showed that the group had at least one firearm, and, while they did obtain more, a second store employee reportedly locked herself in a storage room with a number of weapons and ammunition and prevented the group from becoming better armed. It is unknown how many additional weapons the second group obtained at the other hunting store (Panther), considering that a security guard and policemen responded to the scene fairly quickly. The motive behind the attack on the National Guard facility is less clear, and the author believes that the group may have mistakenly attacked it while trying to steal explosives from an adjacent military facility. Ultimately, a clearer picture of what happened in Aktobe will take some time, but if this article is any indication, the security services of Kazakhstan could be under a lot of scrutiny until that happens.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)



"A photograph taken in aftermath at the hunting store "Pallas" in Aktobe on June 5 shows that the attackers stole weapons, but that several were left behind in haste."

Source: <https://en.tengrinews.kz/emergencies/Religious-extremists-kill-six-in-Kazakhstan-rampage-263334>

Source: Benditskiy, Gennadiy. "Почему КНБ проспал теракт в Актобе" (Why did the KNB sleep through the terrorist attack in Aktobe?), *Ratel*, 14 June 2016. http://www.ratel.kz/scandal/pochemu_knb_prospal_terakt_v_aktobe

Why did the KNB sleep through the terrorist attack in Aktobe?

...The first and most important question has already been stated: how did a large, militant group of radicals stay out of sight from the Kazakh security service?... "What is really surprising is that – in a difficult region like this, with a large group of people with a troubling background that gathered and made plans and discussed everything in social media, undetected, did not have its activities neutralized or prevented."...

Another question that no one really answered: what exactly did the terrorists need at the detachment of the National Guard unit? Government media is trying to convince us that they went to steal firearms. But, the attackers had already taken weapons from two hunting stores in the city and these are not any less combat capable, and in some cases, exceed it (military small arms). It would also have been easier to obtain Kalashnikovs by attacking any police department. There are less people there than at the National Guard detachment and it is easier to reach the armory...Next to the National Guard is another unit, an artillery brigade, literally over the fence...Based on the photos, the place is not well protected – no guards or sentries and this is a place with artillery shells...We all know that a favorite tactic of jihadists around the world is to attack with explosives...The attackers may have just chosen the wrong gate...

I believe it was only the circumstances that the National Guard repelled the terrorists...It was on this day that the unit waited for the arrival of the "Stolypin" car – the train with prisoners. They were armed, making it possible to engage with the attackers...perhaps the main question for the KNB: maybe it is time to change priorities in your department and pay attention to those who represent a real threat to the state and the public?...

Business as Usual at Kazakhstan's Defense Exposition?

OE Watch Commentary: In the first week of June Kazakhstan held the fourth iteration of its biennial defense exposition (KADEX), which has been providing a good look at the inventory of the country's Armed Forces, recent production from the Kazakh defense industry, and what weapons or equipment the Ministry of Defense (MoD) is looking to acquire. The accompanying excerpted articles report on several of the agreements that Kazakhstan signed during KADEX 2016, which took place not long after President Nazarbayev announced that Kazakhstan's defense expenditures are important to maintain, despite the economy going through a difficult period (see: June 2016 OE Watch, "Kazakhstan and the Economic Importance of the Defense Sector"). The agreements Kazakhstan signed with German, Spanish, and Turkish companies show the priority the government is placing on security in the Caspian Sea, but these are also unexpected, considering how much the Zenit shipyard in the city of Ural has produced over the past several years.

The government frequently publicizes Zenit's construction of various classes of ships, though these are typically produced for the Kazakh Border Guards and not the Navy. The articles notes that the agreements with the German and Turkish companies are for the acquisition of ships for the Navy and do not necessarily include any transfer of technology that would allow Zenit to produce a different class of ship, though this information could have just been left out of the report. The deal with the Spanish company for joint production of naval mines is also somewhat surprising, considering how Kazakhstan's defense of its maritime border has largely consisted of ships conducting patrols.

A few other agreements reported in the articles help to understand the Kazakh MoD's priorities in acquisition of new weapon systems. The article from *Kursiv* mentioned that Kazakhstan signed two contracts with China, one of which is for the transfer of technology to produce large-caliber ammunition. While the other contract is not stated, there was a report that it was for the purchase of a few units of an armed variant of the Wing Loong, a Chinese unmanned aerial vehicle (Chengdu Aircraft Group). The article from *Inform Buro* reports how Kazakhstan will receive four Russian Mi-35 attack helicopters to replace the Mi-24. The Mi-35 was on display at KADEX, but the purchase may have taken place sometime before the exposition, as Kazakhstan's Chief of the Air Force noted that Russian helicopter operations in Syria influenced Kazakhstan's decision to acquire it.

Overall, the number and type of agreements mentioned in the articles are an indication that Kazakhstan's defense expenditures will not decrease even as the economy struggles. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



"Kazakhstan is set to receive four Mi-35 attack helicopters this year from Russia. The Mi-35 (pictured here) is a variant of the Mi-24, but with upgrades to the targeting and navigation systems."

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mil_Mi-35M_%2854_yellow%29.jpg

Source: Капаров, Ернар. "Итоги 'KADEX-2016'" (The results of "KADEX-2016"), *Kursiv*, 6 June 2016. <http://www.kursiv.kz/news/vlast1/itogi-kadex-2016/>

The results of "KADEX-2016"

"KADEX-2016," the fourth international exhibition of weapons and military equipment, came to an end at an airbase in Astana...the Kazakh company "Kaztehnologi," with the support of the Ministry of Defense, signed two contracts with China...the deal was for the transfer of technology and equipment for the production of large-caliber ammunition from "Norinco Corp"...Deputy Defense Minister Talgat Mukhtarov signed a memorandum of understanding with the German company "Abeking & Rasmussen" for the delivery of rocket-artillery ships for Kazakhstan's Navy...

National Research Institute "Gidropribor" and Spanish company "SAES" are planning to carry out joint production of naval mines. A memorandum was signed by the director of "Gidropribor" and the CEO of "SAES"...

Source: "Казakhstan приобретет у турецкой компании ракетно-артиллерийский корабль" (Kazakhstan will acquire rocket-artillery ships from a Turkish company), *Ratel*, 3 June 2016. http://ratel.kz/kaz/kazakhstan_priobretet_u_turetskoj_kompanii_raketno_artillerijskij_korabl

...*"The memorandum was signed with the Turkish company "Dearsan" to acquire rocket-artillery ships for the Navy of Kazakhstan," – stated the press release on Thursday...*

Source: Bedenko, Grigoriy. "KADEX-2016: Главкомандующий Сил воздушной обороны рассказал о планах по перевооружению" (KADEX-2016: the head of the Air Defense Forces discussed plans on rearmament), *Inform-Buro*, 7 June 2016. <http://informburo.kz/stati/glavnokomanduyushchiy-sil-vozdushnoy-oborony-rasskazal-o-planah-po-perevooruzheniyu.html>

...*by the end of this year the Air Force of Kazakhstan will acquire the modern attack helicopter the Mi-35. This was reported by the Chief of the Air Force of Kazakhstan...the delivery of four Mi-35 will be carried out and a contract with Russia has already been signed... "We have removed the weapons from the Mi-24...They (Mi-35) showed themselves perfectly capable in combat in Syria...*

The Resurgence and Role of the Russian Naval Infantry

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Coastal Defense Troops consist of two separate organizations: the Coastal Defense Artillery Troops and the Naval Infantry. Naval Infantry units are co-located with each of the four fleets and one flotilla, totaling approximately nine thousand troops. The Naval Infantry garners much less coverage in the Russian media than the Russian Ground Forces and VDV, but still is a major beneficiary of efforts to reform and modernize the Russian Armed Forces. The Naval Infantry is undergoing an overhaul to improve equipment and training and has recently expanded the Third Naval Infantry Regiment of the Pacific Fleet and the Sixty-First Naval Infantry Regiment of the Northern Fleet into full-fledged brigades.

It is important to note that the Russian Naval Infantry is not the same as United States Marine Corps (USMC). Since the Naval Infantry is much smaller than the USMC and is subordinated to fleets/flotilla, the naval infantry is only capable of coastal defense missions and offensive missions at a tactical level, not large-scale (operational level) missions. Other differences involve the Naval Infantry's close relationship to the VDV, which dates back to the Second World War, when certain naval infantry units were commanded by VDV officers. These close ties continue today: naval infantry units have select units on jump status, and naval infantrymen routinely train at the VDV training center in Ryazan. Major-General Aleksandr Kolpachenko, the current Commander of the Coastal Defense Troops, is a career VDV officer.

The Naval Infantry likely has a far different doctrine for amphibious landings than the USMC. Although Russia does have an impressive array of armed hover and landing craft, Russian doctrine for amphibious assault likely involves using aviation assets to air assault or parachute initial forces to neutralize coastal defenses and secure a beachhead for the landing of heavier follow-on forces, as each Naval Infantry brigade has an airborne/air assault battalion.

The Russian Naval Infantry is a heavily mechanized force, and has much in common with the Russian Ground Forces and VDV in terms of tactics, doctrine, and equipment, including that these units do not possess organic aviation assets, but rely on the Russian Aerospace Troops (Air Force) for all aviation support. These similarities make the practice of detaching units from one of these services and attaching them to another a routine practice.

In terms of command and control, the Coastal Defense Troops are part of the Russian Navy. The Navy's command and control of these forces is exercised through the four fleets and one flotilla, where the commander of the Coastal Defense Troops units in each of these commands serves on the fleet (flotilla) staff.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Suvorovskiy Natisk* discusses a "joint" operation of Naval Infantry and Ground Forces units, illustrating how similarities of tactics, doctrine, and equipment facilitate joint operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Andrey Aleksandrovich, "Difficult in Practice, Easy in Battle," *Suvorovskiy Natisk* Online, 13 May 2016, <<http://www.redstar.ru/images/files/regions2016/1305/130516-suv-na.pdf>>, accessed 26 May 2016.

Difficult in Practice, Easy in Battle

Twelve tactical exercises were held in Eastern Military District as part of the performance-graded inspection for the winter training period. Over 25,000 servicemen and around 7,000 pieces of arms and military equipment were in action in the exercises with formations of district combined-arms combined formations of the Pacific Fleet Coastal Defense Troops. The exercises were held under the overall direction of Eastern Military District Commander Colonel General Sergey Surovikin at 12 ranges and in eight regions of Transbaikalia and the Far East...

A large-scale opposed-forces brigade tactical exercise was held on Klerk Range in Southern Primor'ye. The mission assigned to the Pacific Fleet separate brigade naval infantrymen was to take the beach, while separate motorized rifle brigade personnel were to hold this same beach...

Soon a naval infantry assault platoon and five BMP-2s landed on the shore of Bukhta Podkova. Crossing the shoreline and deploying into battle formation together with the previously landed combat engineers, the naval infantrymen began an attack on Hill 40...It was difficult for the "Black Beret" [Russian Naval Infantry wear black berets] forward detachment, but the naval infantrymen had to hold the captured beach until reinforcements arrived, and they held out staunchly. Then large landing ships Admiral Nevelskoy and Nikolay Vilkov approached Bukhta Podkova... I have been present at dozens of similar Pacific Fleet exercises, but not yet once had I seen landing ships putting T-72B battle tanks ashore...

Later it was learned that a motorized rifle brigade's tank company had been resubordinated to the naval infantrymen in this exercise. That same interbranch coordination was apparent without which not one large-scale military maneuver gets by now. Colonel Igor Plistik, acting deputy commander of the Eastern Military District Primor'ye Combined-Arms Combined Formation, noted that the tankers showed rather impressive results in the new role." For the motorized rifle brigade's driver-mechanics this is the first experience in landing ashore from ships," he noted. "Special drills helped master the new skills. Today the tankers showed rather cohesive work in moving equipment up and entering battle."

Russian Threat Perception and Asymmetric Responses to the ABM System

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has made no secret of its discontent about the recent anti-ballistic missile (ABM) infrastructure that has been placed in Eastern Europe. The accompanying excerpted article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* lays out some of the Russian reasoning for this discontent.

The primary Russian concern is the possibility that the missile system could be modified to allow the system to be used as an offensive weapon. This article, among many others in the Russian media, points out the similarities of the SM-3 interceptor missiles to the Tomahawk missile launch platform (namely, the Mk-41 launcher). Most Russian commentary about this topic is of the opinion that the SM-3 interceptor missiles cannot currently be used as offensive weapons, but once a decision is made to reconfigure the system it would only take a short time to do so for offensive purposes. Generally, Russian security pundits believe that these modifications are relatively minor, including some speculation that only a software update would be required. The Russian Federation often argues that this capability puts the ABM system in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)

Aside from the technical characteristics and proximity of the ABM system to Russian territory, Russian strategists have other arguments against the creation of an ABM system. Strategists such as former secretary of the Russian Security Council and preeminent Russian scholar Andrei Kokoshin have long argued that, in relation to US-Russian conflict, ABM systems are only of value to the side that attacks first, the logic being that, due to the vast arsenals of each side and the technological and cost limitations of ABM systems, an ABM system would only, possibly, be effective for countering a retaliatory strike, not a first strike. Therefore, he and other strategists have argued that an ABM system is a destabilizing factor that could lead to the side possessing such a system to initiate a first strike in a crisis situation. In the Russian view, only through equal security, where each side maintains parity through a credible nuclear deterrent, can stability be maintained.

The Russian Federation is considering several means of countering this perceived threat, such as short-range ballistic missiles or ground-launched cruise missiles, such as the Iskander, Bastion, and Bal, to destroy the SM-3 interceptor missiles in their silos. The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses another means of attacking the ABM system: not targeting the interceptor missiles on the ground, but targeting the satellites that provide the early warning and communication necessary for their use. The article suggests that the Russian Federation may again be developing “kamikaze satellites” that could collide with and destroy US space-based assets.

The accompanying article from *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* discusses another way the Russian Federation is considering defeating the ABM system: not threatening the ABM system itself, but using nuclear weapons to menace the US homeland in attempt to drive the US into negotiations and eliminate the US ABM system, not by military strike, but at the negotiation table. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, “With a Tomahawk Behind the Back,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 17 May 2016, <<http://rg.ru/2016/05/16/kakuiu-ugrozu-rossii-nesut-amerikanskiye-rakety-v-rumynii.html>>, accessed 15 June 2016.

With a Tomahawk Behind the Back

Yuriy Solomonov -- general designer at the Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology that designed ICBMs for the Bulava, Bulava-M, Yars, and naval Bulava nuclear systems -- explained what threat American missile defense elements that are being deployed in Romania pose to our country. “This type of missile defense system does not pose a danger to Russia’s strategic nuclear forces from a military-technical standpoint,” Solomonov believes. “But there are military-political aspects, and, you will agree, when you have something close by, that is always bad.”

...In the general designer’s opinion, there is another military-technical aspect. The thing is that the US base in Romania’s Deveselu utilizes missile launchers that can use not only SM-3 Aegis system interceptor missiles, but also Tomahawk cruise missiles. In view of their relative proximity to Russia, these munitions can realistically be used as medium-range missiles. “It is a ‘piece of cake,’ so to speak, to reconfigure a missile for that,” Solomonov is certain. “Even though it is intended for performing intercept missions, it is very easy to reconfigure it practically without changing anything -- it is a matter of software -- into a medium-range missile.”

...He gave a detailed description of the American SM-3 interceptor missiles as well. Each of these “Standards,” according to the general designer, represents a medium-range missile. Depending on the payload it can cover a range of between 500 and 1,000 kilometers. “And 1,000 kilometers is a direct threat to our highest command and control echelons that are located in Moscow,” Solomonov stressed. In that sense, in his opinion, both the president and Russia’s military leadership are absolutely correct in assessing the American SM-3s as a danger to our strategic nuclear forces. “They will not just shoot down a missile in flight, but they will be destroying the means of military command and control that guide these missiles. And in this sense there is a direct threat...”

(continued)

Continued: Russian Threat Perception and Asymmetric Responses to the ABM System

Source: Dmitriy Litovkin, "Space 'Kamikazes' Could Be Called to Duty," *Izvestiya Online*, 23 May 2016, <<http://izvestia.ru/news/614822#ixzz49bwYZlzP>>, accessed 15 June 2016.

Space 'Kamikazes' Could Be Called to Duty

The Ministry of Defense has rejected a list of exhibits of the future Cosmonautics and Aviation Center Pavilion at Exhibition of National Economic Achievements, which was prepared by the Military Industrial Commission. Izvestiya has ascertained that the Polet-1 (I-2B) spacecraft – the first satellite in the world that changes altitude and orbital plane inclination – became the reason. Based upon the military classification, it bears the designation "IS" - "killer satellite". The last time the "space interceptor" flew into space was at the beginning of the 1980s. However, Vladimir Polyachenko, in the past the system's chief designer, reported that he has the suspicion that the country has once again begun to ponder the restoration of space defense...

...the Defense Ministry's position with regard to the exhibits of the future "Cosmonautics and Aviation Center" Pavilion at VDNKh [Science and Technology Exhibition Center in Moscow] attests to the fact that the theme with space interceptors is far from closed. There are no confirmations of that. "The military firm where the designer works, has not received any official proposals to continue this research from the military. The firm is not conducting any work whatsoever in an initiative manner. The presentation of the "IS" system's apparatus at VDNKh within the overall exposition of the development of cosmonautics was no more than a desire to stress its contribution to history, which the decision of the Military Industrial Commission under the President also confirmed. Nevertheless, the "IS" is still classified secret...

Academy of Military Sciences Professor Vadim Kozyulin expressed the opinion that the situation surrounding the "declassified space 'kamikazes'" attests to the fact that Moscow is preparing for a confrontation with Washington in space. The United States did not sign the agreement banning the deployment of combat systems in outer space. The issue "has been suspended" and even systems of 1963 could have a serious impact in the new arms race. In any case, nothing more radical has been invented to this day," Kozyulin stressed.

Izvestiya didn't manage to obtain comments from the Ministry of Defense on the presence of killer satellites in the inventory of the Russian Aerospace Troops. Nevertheless, based upon the data of the Russian Strategic Nuclear Weapons website, there are 46 R-36M2 heavy missiles (SS-18 based upon the NATO classification), including those that have been designated to deploy the "IS" family of spacecraft, in the Strategic Missile Troops inventory as of 1 January 2016.

Source: Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, "Barguzin Is Not the Final Argument," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 25 May 2016, <<http://vpk-news.ru/articles/30764>>, accessed 15 June 2016.

Barguzin Is Not the Final Argument

Re-creation of the strategic rail-mobile missile complex is a necessary task for today. At a minimum this is an answering measure to development of the so-called American missile defense system in a package with the Prompt Global Strike concept, the mission of which is to nullify our nuclear potential and make it ineffective. We need to seek the means and methods of penetrating this missile defense; only then will there be confidence that a prompt global strike will not take place.

The rail-based complex has a number of advantages which forced returning to the idea of employing it. The main one is maneuverability. It will be very challenging for the enemy to pin down its location. But the Barguzin Rail-Mobile Combat Missile Complex (BZhRK) certainly will be equipped with a lighter missile than the previous Molodets developed by Dnipropetrovsk Design Bureau and produced in Pavlohrad. Most likely it will be a product based on the Yars...The BZhRK has shortcomings as well, which also should not be ignored, above all the problem of safe operation of such a complex...

There is no point in considering re-creation of the BZhRK to be an exhaustive response to the American approach of weapons of mass destruction to our borders. In order for nuclear deterrence to become effective, we need to create a grouping of precision weapons of the cruise missile type. We have them, but we have to increase the quantity and have to work on new and more effective models. And most important, we have to base these weapons as close as possible to US territory...we need to put strike forces, including those with small nuclear weapons, close to US territory... this will be the most effective means of deterrence... When the US projects Hiroshima and Nagasaki on themselves, they will immediately begin to negotiate.

We cannot create land bases in countries contiguous with the United States, so the main burden will rest on the surface and submarine fleet. We will have to have logistic support facilities where ships can call in the course of combat patrols, but no more than that. This also is an answer to those who say Russia does not need a powerful oceangoing fleet.

Russian Plans to Increase Space-Based Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying article from *Izvestiya*, the Russian Federation will launch ten new satellites to facilitate space object identification (the practice of monitoring and cataloging the numerous small objects that are orbiting the earth that can damage satellites and space craft). These satellites will also enhance Russia's Missile Attack Warning System (SPRN) and will be part of Russia's integrated air defense system.

If this system is as accurate as reported, the Russian Federation will be able to monitor objects as small as ten centimeters. This capability will be extremely valuable if it is successfully integrated with Russia's newest strategic air and missile defense systems, the S-400 Triumpf, and also the S-500 Prometey.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax* discusses tripling the number of Russia's remote sensing satellites by 2025, bringing the constellation to 23 satellites in total. The addition of new electro-optical and synthetic aperture radar systems will not only increase the capabilities of the Emergency Situations Ministry (Russia's militarized rough equivalent of the Federal Emergency Management Agency) to handle disaster management response and planning, but also enhance military and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance efforts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: "Emergency Situations Ministry Planning Threefold Increase of Satellite Grouping by 2025," *Interfax*, 08 June 2016.

Emergency Situations Ministry planning three-fold increase of satellite grouping by 2025

The Russian Emergency Situations Ministry will bring the number of satellites used for monitoring the Earth to 23 by 2025, Valery Akimov, head of the ministry's All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Civil Defense and Emergencies, told reporters on Wednesday. "The grouping of spacecraft for remote observation of the Earth will be increased to 23," he said. Currently, the ministry has eight active spacecraft there, Akimov said. This type of satellites helps not only to build a three-dimensional model of the Earth's surface, but also predict risks of any particular emergency. All information from the spacecraft is being fed to the ministry's national crisis management center where it is processed and analyzed by ministry specialists...

Source: "Advanced Self-Propelled Russian Rifle Gets Satellite-Navigated Shells," *Sputnik Online*, 24 April 2016, <<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20160424/1038522310/russiagunmissilesatellite.html>>, accessed 20 May 2016.

Russia Intends to Deploy more than 10 New-Generation Outer Space Monitoring Complexes by 2020

Russia Spetsstroy Main Directorate – the structure, which is involved with the construction of strategic facilities in support of the Ministry of Defense and other departments – has reported about the placement into service of the infrastructure of the Space Object Tracking Center near the City of Usolye-Sibirskoye. Candidate of Military Sciences, Retired Colonel-General Viktor Yesin told Izvestiya that the facility will be part of the country's Missile Attack Warning System (SPRN). This will permit the tracking and cataloging of any man-made space object with a size of from 10 centimeters.

"The Outer Space Monitoring System (SKKP) – is a special strategic system, the primary mission of which – is surveillance of artificial Earth satellites and other space objects," Viktor Yesin told the newspaper. "An analysis of the maneuvers of various spacecraft in outer space permits us to predict the time of the initiation of a massive missile-aircraft strike of an offensive air operation with a high degree of accuracy..."

The Moscow suburb of Noginsk – is the nerve center of the enormous network of outer space monitoring stations. Besides the Outer Space Monitoring System (SKKP) and the Missile Attack Warning System (SPRN) stations, the men and equipment of missile defense and air defense – S-400 Triumpf and also the S-500 Prometey in the future - have been included in the joint global monitoring system in space..."

In 2014, the Aerospace Defense Troops began to develop an additional network of ground-based space object identification complexes, which should expand the range of the orbits that are being monitored by two-three times and the minimum size of the space objects that are being detected. The facility at Usolye-Sibirskoye is one of them. By 2020, they plan to deploy more than 10 new-generation outer space monitoring system complexes in Russia, which will permit military personnel to form a space objects catalog [Joint Space Object Catalog]. According to the plans, it should surpass the similar catalog, which has been compiled by the American NORAD – the US main strategic command. The first two outer space monitoring stations have already been put into alert mode in the Moscow suburbs and in the Far East and two more – at Barnaul and Yeniseysk - are in test operation. Specialists have to calibrate the equipment and tune the antenna mirrors. Nevertheless, they are actively collecting and cataloging information on all orbital rovers, which have ended up in their field of view, already in this mode.

"Today the NORAD catalog contains approximately 15,000 objects and the Russian catalog has 12,000," Vadim Kozyulin said. "The beginning of combat alert at the Space Object Tracking Center near the city of Usolye-Sibirskoye will permit us to outshine the American indicators and establish permanent monitoring of near-Earth space on all orbit inclinations and altitudes. In so doing, we will see objects from 10 centimeters, which will substantially increase the capability on the conduct of the main space object catalog. Already right now it is being predicted that it will increase by a minimum of twofold. And, therefore, we will have maintained the monopoly on monitoring space traffic in space," the expert expressed his opinion.

Russia Establishes Corps Headquarters in Kaliningrad

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Vedomosti* discusses Russia's recent announcement about the establishment of a corps headquarters in Russia's semi-exclave of Kaliningrad. This development continues recent Russian trends of increasing conventional capabilities on its western border to counter perceived US/NATO hostilities. Other Russian activities to further this line of effort include the formation of the 20th Combined Arms Army and 1st Tank Army; upsizing several brigades to divisions; and redeploying the 28th Motorized Rifle Brigade from the Urals to the Bryansk Oblast. Although this announcement mentions no new major personnel or equipment being placed in Kaliningrad, it is another way Russia is showing discontent with the US and NATO.

The establishment of the 11th Army Corps is interesting for several reasons. The designation of the unit as a "corps" itself is interesting because it is the only corps in the Russian Armed Forces. The Russian Ground Forces are echeloned as brigades/divisions that report to army groups (not corps), which, in turn, report to their respective military districts. Although the Soviet/Russian Ground Forces and Airborne have used corps in the past, their use was mostly ad-hoc or for missions of a set duration, but rarely as permanent formations. In the case of Kaliningrad, a corps was likely formed instead of an army group due to the relative amount of combat power that the formation possesses.

The 11th Army Corps will have roughly the same amount of combat power as a US division. The accompanying article states that 11th Army Corps will provide command and control of the 336th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade, 79th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, and 7th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment. The formation will have few, if any air assets, but, based upon current Russian structures, it is likely that the coastal defense artillery and any Iskander missile systems would also fall under it.

Another interesting aspect is the units that will be controlled. This formation will place Ground Forces and Naval Infantry under the same command, and this command will report to the Baltic Fleet Headquarters. Due to the large amount of Coastal Defense Troops (Naval Infantry and coastal defense artillery) that will form the unit, and the fact that the unit will report to the Baltic Fleet, it is likely that the unit will be commanded by a Naval Infantry instead of a Ground Forces officer. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Nikolskiy, "Moscow Moves Staffers Up to the Front Line," *Vedomosti* Online, 12 May 2016, <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/05/12/640715-shtabistov-peredovuyu>>, accessed 15 June 2016.

Moscow Moves Staffers Up to the Front Line

During the Victory Day celebration the GTRK [State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company] Kaliningrad television channel reported that for the first time the troop parade in the city of Gusev "was reviewed by Major General Yuriy Yarovitskiy, commander of the recently activated 11th Army Corps." The report states that he recently was awarded the Order of Saint George Fourth Class for participation in the counterterrorist operation in Syria.

In the 1990s troops in the Kaliningrad exclave had been subordinate to headquarters, 11th Guards Army, which later had been disbanded and the Kaliningrad Defensive Region, subordinate to Baltic Fleet, had been established on its basis. Until recently it had included the following: combined-arms formations 336th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade, 79th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, and 7th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment. According to a person close to the Defense Ministry, Corps headquarters, subordinate to Baltic Fleet, will exercise command and control of these formations. In connection with NATO's growing activity in the Baltics and deployment of its troops in Poland and the Baltics, there are plans to deploy additional combined-arms formations in Kaliningrad Oblast, but this depends on what the United States and NATO eventually deploy in this region, the source adds...



Source: http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/45176000/gif/_45176311_russia_kaliningrad0511_08.gif

Ethics, Military Corruption, and the Grey Zone

OE Watch Commentary: Stomping out military corruption has been a top priority of both the Russian civilian and military leadership for quite some time. Due to the Russian Federation's Tsarist/Soviet past, Russia, and by inheritance the Russian military, has developed a nuanced view towards corruption, which makes its eradication difficult. Crimes of theft against individuals are viewed the same as in the West, but crimes of theft against the state are seen as much more tolerable, although still embarrassing.

The most recent high-profile military corruption fiasco involved the recent conviction and sentencing of Colonel General Vladimir Chirkin, the former Ground Troops Commander-in-Chief. Although there have been other high-profile gaffes, such as Airborne Troops Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Shamanov dispatching an airborne unit to interfere in the prosecutorial investigation of a family member, this case has garnered substantial public interest, as it is unusual for such a high-ranking and prominent official to be tried, convicted, and sentenced.

The accompanying excerpted article in *Kommersant* discusses the possibility that Chirkin could be appointed as the Chief of Design (procurement) for the Ground Forces, VDV, and Coastal Defense Troops. Despite his conviction for bribe taking and the fraudulent use of government resources, the Russian leadership has still deemed him fit for a position of great responsibility, and presumably one that could facilitate bribe taking in the future.

Although this situation is inconceivable in the US military, there appears to be much more latitude for both professional and personal indiscretions in the Russian Armed Forces. Aside from Russian cultural acceptance of some pilfering from the State, there is also a very different military culture. In the Russian Armed Forces, both professional and personal indiscretions can be overcome, and a career allowed to continue after some punishment for most of them. For these reasons, it is probably not surprising that Russia is having difficulty eradicating corruption.

Perhaps another reason that the Russian military is having difficulty dealing with corruption is the view that Russia and most Russians have regarding the relationship between what is legally and morally right. In Russia, whatever is considered "morally right" is usually interpreted to be "legally right." This can be seen in state asset seizures of wealthy oligarchs' property, the annexation of the Crimea, and the conduct of an undeclared war Eastern Ukraine (in order to destabilize the Ukrainian government, a government which Russia perceives to be illegitimate and installed by the US). This tendency to interpret morally right as legally right makes the Russian Armed Forces, intelligence, and security services well suited to operating in the ambiguous "grey zone" in which many operations do and will continue to occur, but this way of thinking is certainly making the eradication of corruption difficult, as subordinates see their superiors growing wealthy from graft, and decide that it is only right to take a little for one's self. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Sergey Mashkin and Ivan Safronov, "Designer General," *Kommersant* Online, 26 April 2016, <<http://kommersant.ru/doc/2973430>>, accessed 9 June 2016.

Designer General

Kommersant has learned that Colonel General Vladimir Chirkin may head up the council of chief designers for arms and equipment of the ground component of the general purpose forces -- a structure which will determine the look of the Ground Forces, VDV, Coastal Defense Troops, and even the National Guard. His candidacy already has been coordinated with the Defense Ministry and government, and the appointment can be disrupted only by the candidate's unresolved problems with Chief Military Prosecutor Sergey Fridinskiy...

We will recall that Col Gen Chirkin was removed from the position of Ground Troops Commander by presidential edict in December 2013. This was connected with his indictment by the Russian Federation Investigations Committee of the Main Military Investigations Directorate for "taking a large bribe" ...the court sentenced Mr. Chirkin to five years imprisonment, stripped him of rank and awards, and banned him from subsequently holding state positions. In December of last year, with consideration of the general's outstanding service record and recommendations received, it was the Moscow District Military Court that reclassified the indictment as "swindling" (Article 159 of the RF Criminal Code), returned rank and orders to Chirkin, and replaced the term of imprisonment with a fine of R90,000. Finally, in February of this year another garrison court, the 235th, expunged Chirkin's conviction...Meanwhile, the proceedings in Chirkin's criminal case are not yet over. Russia's Chief Military Prosecutor Sergey Fridinskiy recently filed a petition with the Supreme Court in which he demanded reversal of the Moscow District Military Court decision on reclassification of the criminal case

...Dmitriy Rogozin explained that it was extremely difficult to find one person who could understand the enormous nomenclature of arms (from armored vehicles to a soldier's personal gear and equipment), but a unified technical policy in their production still had to be developed. In this connection the vice premier promised to brief the head of state about the separately established council of chief designers who will specialize in specific models of arms...according to the statute approved by Vladimir Putin on 19 January 2015, a general designer is invested with a broad range of powers. In particular, he can receive the right to make decisions in matters of financial support for a project being implemented under his direction; coordinate drafts of state contracts; approve preliminary specifications for development of component parts of models; and carry out acceptance of RDT&E results. He also will monitor fulfillment of work to modernize arms and military equipment, select cadres, and recommend them for appointment to positions in specialized organizations. In fact it is he who must take on the functions of establishing a future backlog of accomplishment in the creation of arms and equipment.

Rare First-Hand Accounts from Avars of Corruption in Chechnya

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts are from a very long investigative article by Elena Milashina of *Novaya Gazeta*, one of the few remaining independent newspaper in Russia, with investigative journalism being among the publication's top strengths.. The article is about the mechanics of Chechnya's corruption and is supplemented with several short videos.

Milashina is the editor of special projects at *Novaya Gazeta*, the North Caucasus being among her specialties. She has written many other investigative articles on this topic, and her work is highly credible. In this article she focuses on Kenkhi, a village in Chechnya in the Sharoyskiy District. Chechnya is almost entirely ethnically Chechen; Kenkhi is unique, however, as its residents are primarily Avar, rather than Chechen. Avars are the dominant ethnic groups in neighboring Dagestan.

As Milashina points out, it is well known that Chechnya's government, run by Putin-appointed Ramzan Kadyrov, is vastly corrupt. Most Chechens, she observes, have been putting up with it, paying what they need to pay to survive. It is equally well known that those who disagree with Kadyrov have a high chance of losing their lives, or at least getting seriously hurt. Therefore, if the Chechens do talk about the corruption, it is under condition of anonymity.

The Avars in Kenkhi, however, speak about corruption publically, fully aware of the risks. In fact, they have been speaking about it for 14 years. In the accompanying excerpts Milashina describes how she urged the Avars with whom she spoke to rethink whether or not they wanted to give their names, in response to which they provided as detailed information about themselves as possible to ensure that there was no doubt to their identity.

Milashina focuses on compensation for war damages to civilians that Kadyrov's father, Ahmad Haji Kadyrov, had ordered in 2001 to be paid to Chechnya's residents. The entire article provides long quotes from individual interviews and focuses on one individual's story in particular, all of which is difficult to capture in a brief commentary. Yet the accompanying excerpts demonstrate the overall degree of corruption. To give one example, she writes that even in the case of the smallest one-time compensation of 2000 rubles to each family member (given the current exchange rate of approximately 65 rubles to a dollar at the time of this writing, this is roughly \$31), the authorities took 2000 rubles from the entire family as a kickback. "The most standard scheme (and not only in Sharoyskiy District)—is 'fifty-fifty,'" writes Milashina.

The excerpts touch on the level of detail when it comes to how the authorities take money that is "impossible to make up." For example, they describe how local authorities play the game "I believe you – I don't believe you," and choose in the end to give money only to a person they are sure will pay a kickback and will not complain.

Milashina's article adds to the overall research in Kadyrov's vast and multi-layered corruption throughout Chechnya. It also provides a rare glimpse into a very small but vocal, and very brave minority in Chechnya that is hardly ever reported about in the Russian or Western press. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: Elena Milashina, "Чеченский откат. Жители республики Чечни впервые свидетельствуют о том, как устроена система коррупции в республике" (Chechen kickback. Residents of the Chechen Republic for the first time testify to how the system of corruption in the republic is constructed), *Novaya Gazeta*, 30 May 2016. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/73292.html>

...In today's mono-ethnic Chechnya, the youngest and the most high up in the mountains Sharoyskiy District is a unique exception to the rule. The vast majority of residents living there are not Chechens but Avars (ethnic group dominant in neighboring Dagestan). Avars have lived for a long time in the village Kenkhi, which is the largest village in Sharoyskiy District...

This story—is about how the Chechen corruption is organized. State racket in Chechnya appeared immediately after the return to constitutional order, as soon as first budgetary payments came to the republic from Moscow through the military field banks. But the entire Chechnya is silent for many years, puts up with it, humbly pays tribute, in extreme cases write anonymous letters...

— No article is not worth a human life. Your life - I say to the residents of Kenkhi and ask again to consider whether this fight against the "windmills" makes sense [in the context of the article, the "windmills" are a reference to Don Quixote. The author compares on individual to the Don Quixote of Kenkhi]

In response, they take out their passports, so I can photograph their information and the Kenkhi propiska [domicile passport stamp]. They agree to videotape our meeting...

Even in the case of distribution of the most miserly one-time financial assistance (2,000 rubles per family member), 2000 rubles was taken from each family. For the issuance of large sums (from 20 to 50 thousand rubles) the kickback was, respectively, more. The most standard scheme (and not only in Sharoyskiy District)—is "fifty-fifty."

...In the stories of the residents of Kenkhi, the most interesting is precisely the details that are impossible to make up. A bank behind barbed wire, an abandoned mosque in which the village head takes money from his fellow villagers... playing a game of "I believe you – I don't believe you," when compensation is given primarily to those who will give a kick back for sure and will not complain. The mechanism of obtaining money from the population itself is terribly banal and typical for the entire Chechnya. The residents of Kenkhi have an erroneous perception that only they were treated poorly only because they are the illiterate Avars. But residents of Chechen villages of Shara, Khimoy, Hakmadoy, Kiri all say the same thing. However, unlike the resident of Kenkhi, they tell it anonymously...

An Azeri View of Armenia's Relationship with NATO

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 June 2016 *Haqqin.Az*, an Azeri information, analysis and monitoring portal of the non-profit "For Human Rights" association, published a commentary by Zaur Razulzade, who writes regularly on South Caucasus-related issues.

Razulzade first points out that, in his view, Azerbaijan "needs a geopolitical breakthrough" and therefore seeks closer relations with NATO. He feels that Baku has made some progress in the latter. "At any rate, of all the South Caucasus countries, Azerbaijan more than any other is involved in NATO exercises and the bloc's leadership clearly favors it," though he later admits that "sufficient" integration of the South Caucasus countries into NATO is impossible because "not all European countries agree to such a plan."

Razulzade expresses surprise that "knowing full well the severity of the Karabakh conflict, the Alliance for some reason began to butter up Armenia: as recently as a week ago, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has called this country a 'valuable partner.'" It is still unclear to him why Armenia, the closest Kremlin ally in the South Caucasus, which holds a major Russian military base in Gyumri, the second largest city in Armenia, and is a member of CSTO, is interested in NATO. If anything, in his view, it would be more logical for Armenia to oppose NATO.

While analysts tend to view Armenia as irrelevant, the author writes that the country is nonetheless strategically important to both the West and Russia, as both use it in a geopolitical struggle for influence in the South Caucasus. For Russia in particular, Armenia is also an "outpost on the southern border, and the presence of a Russian military base on the border with Turkey and Iran symbolizes Moscow's presence in the Middle East region and requires regional states to take the Kremlin into account." He concludes that in his view, Armenia, for its part, is playing a dangerous double-game with Russia and the West.

To give additional context, a possibility also exists that the Armenian government itself is of two minds. On the one hand, historically Yerevan sees Moscow as the only guarantor of its security, but on the other it resents what it views as Moscow's bullying behavior, and therefore seeks to diversify its alliances. In 2013 it appeared set to be on a European integration course after concluding a comprehensive trade agreement with the European Union. Yet it abruptly reversed course in the fall and joined the Russia-led Customs Union after a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan. At this point, Russia's influence in Armenia was already vast. It is possible that Sargsyan was simply in no position to refuse. Joining the Customs Union only increased Russia's influence.

Regardless, Armenia is certainly important on a number of levels, as Razulzade points out. It remains important to watch how Armenia's relations with NATO develop in the near future.
End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)

Source: Zaur Razulzade, "Сколько НАТО не корми, а все на Армению глядит," [No Matter How Much You Feed NATO, it still Looks at Armenia], *Haqqin.az*, 10 June 2016. <http://haqqin.az/news/72479>

Azerbaijan definitely needs a geopolitical breakthrough, which explains its desire to integrate as much as possible into NATO...

It must be said that Azerbaijan has achieved some progress in this direction ... At any rate, of all the South Caucasus countries, Azerbaijan more than any other is involved in NATO exercises and the bloc's leadership clearly favors it. Nonetheless, knowing full well the severity of the Karabakh conflict, the Alliance for some reason began to butter up Armenia: as recently as a week ago, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has called this country a "valuable partner"....

... At least it is unclear why Armenia, a CSTO member and Russia's ally, a country where there is a large Russian military base, is so interested in NATO, because essentially, it should be an opponent of the Alliance? And in general, isn't NATO and the US, by expanding its influence in the region, seek to undercut Russia's influence there, and more recently that of Turkey? ...

In any case, right now sufficiently deep integration of the South Caucasus countries into NATO is not working because not all European countries agree to such a plan....

Meanwhile, Armenia itself, as always, plays a double game: on the one hand seems to respond favorably to NATO's overtures, and on the other - wait for a sign from Moscow, without which Armenia so far will not make a serious move. Armenia, despite giving the impression of an "unimportant" state in world politics, in fact, is of strategic importance for the West and for Russia.

For Russia— this outpost on the southern border, and the presence of a Russian military base on the border with Turkey and Iran symbolizes Moscow's presence in the Middle East region and requires regional states to take the Kremlin into account. The West is using the opportunity to try to pull Armenia out of Russia's orbit and thus reduce Moscow's influence in the Caucasus. That's why Armenia has become a valuable partner. However, it started a clearly risky game of the Servant of Two Masters, which is very, very dangerous.

Caucasus Connection to ISIS, Russia's Syria Activities, and Azerbaijan a Transit Point into Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts are from a long article in *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, published on 8 June 2016. They provide further insight into how Russia's North and South Caucasus are connected to ISIS, and into the Kremlin's military activities in Syria since September 2015, when Russian President Vladimir Putin intervened in Syria militarily.

To provide a brief background, on 21 June 2015 thousands of militants from the Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz, or IK), Russia's main jihadi organization, pledged allegiance to ISIS. According to an audio recording posted on YouTube, these were militants from all wilayats (provinces) of the Emirate. The pledge, in effect, clearly signaled a decline of Imarat Kavkaz, as this was the first time that a group with its own goals and interests had abandoned it to ally themselves to another organization (ISIS). The Emirate had been significantly weakened in the previous several years, as Russia's special services killed the Emirate's leaders one after the other. In response to the pledge from the Caucasus militants, on 23 June 2015 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the official ISIS spokesman, declared the formation of a new wilayat in Russia's North Caucasus. According to press reports at the time, this declaration was the first time ISIS had made a territorial claim inside Russia.

As the accompanying excerpts demonstrate, the main contribution to ISIS from the Caucasus is foreign fighters. While ISIS has been linked to a number of small-scale attacks within Russia, it does not give direct orders for attacks inside Russia, nor provide the Caucasus with assistance. While the Russian government justifies its actions in the Middle East and in the Caucasus with fighting ISIS, the accompanying excerpts claim that the mass arrests that the Russian security services have made in recent months are of individuals who do not belong to ISIS, but rather to Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), a translational and extremist Sunni organization with a political wing. Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims it seeks to unite all Muslim countries into one Islamic Caliphate.

The article notes that the majority of Chechens in Syria come from the Chechen diaspora in Europe. According to the excerpt, this is because they are recruited on the Internet. In fact, according to the excerpt, those who receive Islamic education are less likely to join ISIS or become involved in violent jihadi activities in general. This claim is consistent with findings of other analysts, who argue that, while the Russian government goes after the mosques in the Caucasus, they are not the source of recruitment.

Another interesting claim in the accompanying excerpts is the relevance of Azerbaijan. According to the author, in September 2014 Azerbaijani authorities detained 26 citizens of the republic who at various times belonged to ISIS ranks and other terrorist groups. According to the article, Chechens often get to Syria through Turkey and Azerbaijan. Young people under different pretexts travel to Baku, and from there get to Turkey, from where they go directly to Syria. While the role of Turkey has been fairly widely reported on when it comes to providing transit for ISIS recruits into Syria, Azerbaijan has not received the same level of attention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: "Выходцы с Кавказа в рядах ИГ (ИГИЛ)" [Caucasus Natives in the Ranks of IS (ISIS)], *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, 10 June 2016. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/251513/>

...According to the opinion of Forbes journalist Orhan Jemal, IS members do not provide financial support or support that involves providing people to the Caucasus underground and do not give the underground direct instructions: absent are orders of terrorist attacks, assassinations of politicians and siloviks.

Activation of militants is connected to the operation carried out by the Russian military in the Middle East. In the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016 in Russia, including in the Caucasus, began mass arrests of suspected supporters of extremist organizations. Many of them, however, are members of the "Hizb ut-Tahrir" movement (organization of supporters of a "World Islamic caliphate," recognized in Russia as extremist and banned - comment of the "Caucasian Knot"). And not the IG ...

In September - December 2015 IG supporters in the North Caucasus twice attacked the Russian military in South Dagestan. According to expert opinion (Orkhan Jemal, Mikhail Roshchin, Ruslan Martagov), the tense situation in southern Dagestan directly related to the pressure in the Salafi community and in the near future we should expect further intensification of militant activity in the Caucasus ...

According to "Kommersant" commentator Musa Muradov, the majority of Chechens involved in the armed conflict in Syria arrived from Europe, having received initial indoctrination on the Internet As Muradov noted, students of Islamic schools are less susceptible to Islamist rhetoric

Meanwhile, recruitment of fighters occurred not only in the North Caucasus, but also in Russia's neighboring states. In particular, at the end of September 2014 the Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan has conducted an anti-terrorist operation. Security services employees detained 26 citizens of the republic who at various times belonged to IS ranks and other terrorist groups...

According to the "Caucasian Knot," Chechen residents involved in fighting in Syria move into the area of the Middle East conflict through Azerbaijan and Turkey. In Azerbaijan, there is a Chechen community, consisting of those who left in the late 1990s - early 2000s. Young people under different pretexts travel to Baku, and from there get to Turkey, and from where go directly to Syria

International Military Games

OE Watch Commentary: What began in 2013 to determine the best tank crew among Russian and teams from a handful of other countries has now expanded into a major two-week competition among all the major military branches and arms. “International Military Games-2016” will take place from 30 July to 13 August at 17 different training ranges in Russia and Kazakhstan. According to the first excerpt and the event website (<http://eng.armygames2016.mil.ru/>), 47 countries have been invited (21 have confirmed attendance), and these teams will be participating in 23 various military competitions.

The website provides detailed instructions for the conduct of the competitions for each of the many events. Teams will be contending in everything from clearing antipersonnel mines (Safe Route Competition) to running an obstacle course with a guard dog (True Friend Competition). There are a number of events which will measure a team’s ability to put steel on the target, whether from a tank, IFV, artillery, sniper, naval ship or aircraft. Combat support personnel will also have a chance to prove their mettle, whether they work in food service, maintenance, medical or NBC.

While such competition serves to enhance Russia’s military reputation among the international audience (last year Russia took 1st place in each of the 13 different categories), the Ministry of Defense also maintains that “these events help to strengthen the credibility of the Russian Army and raise the prestige of military service.” Though not mentioned in the article, these games also likely serve as an effective marketing tool for prospective buyers. Despite economic constraints, Russia’s military modernization efforts remain mostly on track, and by 2020 its Armed Forces will be a force to contend with, both in sporting competition and elsewhere. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: “Шойгу: Армейские игры укрепляют авторитет Вооруженных сил РФ” [Shoigu: Army games reinforce the authority of the Armed Forces], *Regnum News*, 12 April 2016. <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2116717.html>

The Army International 2015 games were a good platform for the dynamic display and capabilities of Russian arms and military equipment, as well as the demonstrated commitment of the participating countries for closer cooperation in the military sphere. On 11 April, Russian Defense Minister, Army General Sergei Shoigu said on a conference call with the leadership of the Armed Forces, “Without a doubt, these events help to strengthen the credibility of the Russian army and raise the prestige of military service. We cannot rest on our laurels. In 2016, the Army games should be even more spectacular.”

To this end, the decision to expand the format of games, increasing the number of competitions from 13 to 23 will increase significantly and the number of participants.

Currently, at the II International military games in 2016, invitations were sent to 47 states. At the moment, 21 countries have agreed to send their teams to the Games.

Logo for 2016 International Army Games.
Source: <http://eng.armygames2016.mil.ru/>

17 полигонов в России и 2 в Казахстане

23 вида соревнований

47 стран приглашено

21 страна подтвердила согласие

Unrelenting Russian Media Influence in Latvia

Source: Otto Ozols, "3D Kremlin Carbon Monoxide Flowing Freely Into Latvia," *Delfi*, 1 June 2016. <http://www.delfi.lv>

OE Watch Commentary: Ever since Russia's aggression against Ukraine, there have been growing concerns within the Baltic countries that the Kremlin might try to use similar tactics to reestablish greater influence within their countries. One possible scenario suggested that the Kremlin would work to exploit grievances among ethnic Russians within the Baltics, which might ultimately serve as a pretext for helping to "mediate the conflict." For the past few years Baltic defense officials have pointed out the potential influence that Russian propaganda could play in exacerbating ethnic tensions. The brief accompanying excerpt from a Latvian source bemoans the lack of progress in restricting what it refers to as the Kremlin's "deathly carbon monoxide gas that flows into" their country.

The author points out that Russian television programming has been included "in the basic packets of cable television," whereby customers "were not allowed to refuse them." He suggests that economic motives likely played a role as to which channels were offered to viewers, laconically observing that the "brainwashing of the residents of Latvia occurred at their own expense." The excerpt also refers to the high number (100,000-200,000) of households in Latvia that are clients of illegal cable television operators. Not only were these households consuming Russian propaganda, but such pirating also costs the Latvian government tens of millions of euros that have been lost in the form of unpaid taxes.

Most troublesome, the article attests that "Latvia's public media outlets were all but unavailable in the politically sensitive eastern border region of Latvia," where instead, the "residents there literally lived in Russia's information world." The author goes on to point out that this Russian media saturation will likely translate into political power for pro-Russian parties in Latvia.

The article concludes on a pessimistic note, pointing out that Latvian politicians have long known of Russia's powerful media influence in their country, but, except for some minor restrictions, no one within the Latvian government has really addressed these issues. If such indifference is allowed to continue, the author warns that "two years from now, power may be taken over by forces that openly support the aggressor state that is Russia, as well as its president, Putin." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Back in 2014, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Latvia's top officials suddenly realized that the Kremlin was waging a very refined cyberwar attack against Latvia, too. Most of the talk had to do with massive propaganda pressure against the people of Latvia, making use of television as the most effective medium. To this very moment, of course, no one has answered the question of why all of the big security and media specialists had not noticed that before, because the Kremlin's channels have successfully and substantially woven their influence in Latvia's information space for a long time. I will remind you that back in 2014, Ainars Dimants had been chairman of the NEPLP [Latvian National Electronic Mass Media Council] for two years. He and the council totally ignored the problem, which means that we can safely ask in the name of Latvia's national security -- why?

The NEPLP also ignored the fact that Russian channels made use of the opportunity to strengthen themselves in basic cable television packets, thus ensuring maximum distribution. Viewers of cable television who make up the absolute majority of television viewers were basically forced in a commercial way to accept subscriptions to Russian TV channels. That was done by including the Russian TV channels in the "basic packets" of cable television. Clients were not allowed to refuse them. There is no doubt that those were purposeful activities on the part of the owners of the Kremlin's television stations. Brainwashing of the residents of Latvia occurred at their own expense.

Also early in 2014 it was found that there were between 100,000 and 200,000 households in Latvia that were clients of illegal cable television operators. There is not much doubt about what kinds of TV channels dominated these "offers." We are talking about crippled competition in this sector and tens of millions of euros that have been lost in the form of unpaid taxes...

...It was also found back then that Latvia's public media outlets were all but unavailable in the politically sensitive eastern border region of Latvia. Residents there literally lived in Russia's information world. The situation was really critical....

...The pressure of propaganda from the Kremlin's television channels is like deathly carbon monoxide gas that flows into a room unnoticed, cannot be smelled, and puts people to sleep and kills them. Viewers are purposefully and professionally turned into zombies, and this is an example of elegant manipulation by specialists who have thoroughly learned the art of brainwashing. The Kremlin makes use of a "carbon monoxide" formula in Latvia that is respected by hybrid war specialists and that involves three D's -- disinformation, demoralization and destabilization.

...In Latvia's case, the greatest likelihood is that the next Saeima [Parliament] election some two years from now will be won by Harmony, which has long since been supported by Kremlin TV stations, and it will finally become the leading force in the government and the governing coalition....

(continued)

Continued: Unrelenting Russian Media Influence in Latvia

...So what has become different during this period? Has any of the aforementioned institutions done anything realistic to stop the flow of the Kremlin's carbon monoxide propaganda into Latvia? The truth is that the results are pitiful. A few Kremlin TV stations have been demonstratively chased around... The situation with the Kremlin's TV channels is exactly the same. Some of the smaller ones have been blocked or chased away, but the biggest and most influential ones continue to do their dirty deeds without any hindrance whatsoever -- disinformation, demoralization and destabilization in Latvia's society.

Two years have passed, and now we learn that at least 100,000 households, or one-fifth of all of those that have a TV set, watch illegal content that is delivered by pirates.

...It is also true that during the past two years, no one has addressed the fact that Latvia's public media stations are not available on the eastern frontier of the country....

In any normal and self-respecting country, no one would ask those who are responsible for this kind of situation why nothing has been done. Such people would have to leave their jobs. Action has been promised, the results are pitiful. That means that two years from now, power may be taken over by forces that openly support the aggressor state that is Russia, as well as its president, Putin.

Map of Latvia.

Source: Wikimedia Commons



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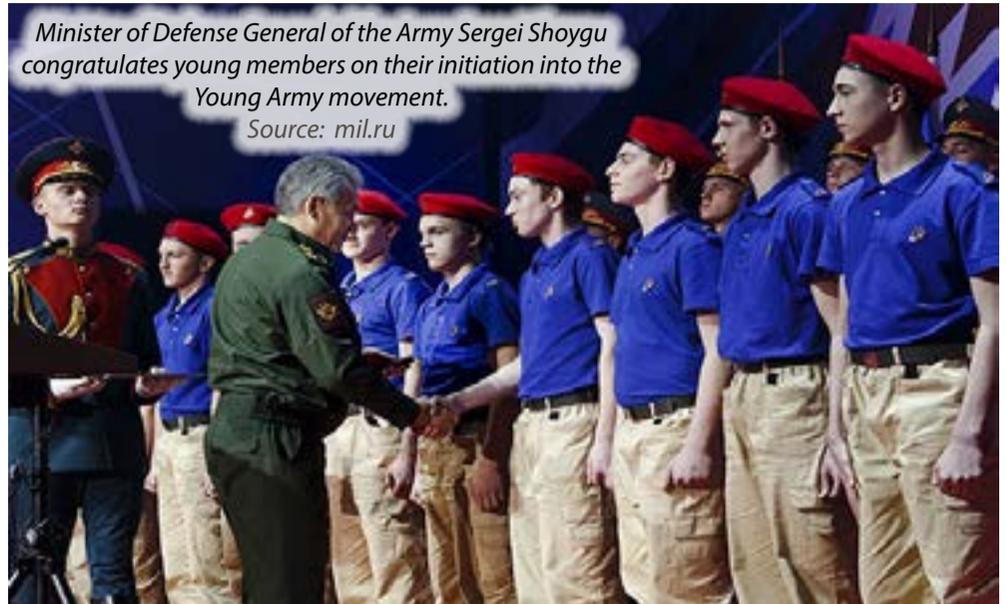
Russia's New "Young Army" Movement

OE Watch Commentary: Regardless of economic difficulties, patriotic sentiments continue to escalate in Russia. Indeed, as the first brief excerpt points out, earlier this year President Vladimir Putin commented that there "can be no other unifying idea in Russia other than patriotism." He went on to say that working to make the country stronger is a responsibility for every citizen regardless of any party or any social structure, and that this topic should be "talked about at all levels all the time." To this end, the Kremlin leadership continues to expend considerable resources to develop this ideology. As the second excerpt explains, in May the Kremlin introduced another new program (Yunarmiya or Young Army) to instill patriotic ideals among young Russians (ages 10-18).

Defense Minister Shoygu claimed that memories of his own youth were apparently the driving force behind the idea of creating the Young Army movement. The article points out that when he was a child Shoygu recalled hearing about the exploits of those "who from school went off to war and never came back, learning about who and where they performed military or labor exploits."

The inaugural Young Army event held at Patriot Park outside of Moscow in May was attended by 500 delegates from 85 regions of Russia. This new program is scheduled to be fully implemented throughout the country in September and will somehow consolidate the more than 5000 existing organizations which deal with instilling a sense of patriotism and military discipline among the younger generation.

Sharing the stories of past military achievements with young Russian students will not be the sole function of the Young Army program. Shoygu also mentioned that Young Army members will take part in various competitions, contests and reconstructions. The article stresses, however, that the main focus of the Young Army program is "to raise healthy, patriotic citizens of Russia, and not recruits for the Armed Forces." Still, the name of this new organization suggests that for many Russians the notion of patriotism remains closely linked to the military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Source: "Putin Says Patriotism is Russia's 'National Idea'," TASS, 3 February 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854250>

President Vladimir Putin has said that there can be no other unifying idea in Russia other than patriotism. "We do not have and cannot have any other unifying idea other than patriotism," Putin said at the meeting with the Leaders Club on Wednesday. He noted that business, officials and all citizens are working to make the country stronger "because every citizen will live better, will have larger income, will be more comfortable and so on. This is in fact the national idea."

The Russian president said that this idea is not an ideology and is not connected with the work of any party or any social structure. "It is connected with the unifying principle - if we want to live better, we need the country to be more attractive for all citizens, more effective, and both officials and state apparatus should become more effective," he added.

It is not enough for the president or anyone else to say it once to introduce the national idea, Putin went on. "For this, conscience is needed, and this should be talked about at all levels all the time," he concluded.

Source: Yevgeniya Ruchkina, "Юнармия — не армия: Сергей Шойгу пообещал сделать юных россиян 'самыми сильными, самыми умными и достойными'" [The Young Army is not the army: Sergey Shoygu promised to make young Russians 'the strongest, the most intelligent and worthy'] *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 29 May 2016. <http://www.mk.ru/social/2016/05/29/yunarmiya-ne-armiya.html>

The first ever meeting of the military-patriotic movement "Yunarmiya" [Young Army], created on the initiative of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, was held at "Patriot Park" over the weekend. The event was attended by 500 delegates from 85 regions of Russia. According to Sergei Shoygu, the main task Young Army— is to create Patriots for Russia, and not to serve in the military. To this end, throughout the country will soon open hundreds of Young Army centers.

"Today marks the start - this is, in our opinion, the long-sought-after and very necessary Young Army movement for our country. In our country, there are more than 5000 patriotic organizations, where people who love our country and want to engage in our history, those who believe that our country has a great future, those who believe in our youth, in school, in the younger generation," - the minister said.

Shoygu said what prompted the idea of creating a movement: "Each of has in mind how it was with us in our childhood." Among the minister's peers, he said, "were those who from school went off to war and never came back, learning about who and where they performed military or labor exploits."

The main objective of Young Army program as the minister explained, is to raise healthy, patriotic citizens of Russia, and not recruits for the Armed Forces....According to Shoygu, the Young Army members will take part in various competitions, contests and reconstructions. "We will do everything to ensure that you are the strongest, most intelligent, most beautiful, and most importantly - worthy citizens of our country," the minister promised the girls and boys.

A Murky Russian Perspective on Violence in Kazakhstan

“The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, and parties close to Al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan. They are all controlled by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey and are overseen by the United States with the support of Britain and France. All this logically presents a direct threat to Russia.”

OE Watch Commentary: Russia shares a 4250 mile border with Kazakhstan, most of which is completely open and unsecured. Not surprisingly, Russian authorities reacted with considerable concern in early June, when violence broke out in the Kazakh city of Aktobe, which is located only 65 miles from the Russian border. According to the brief excerpt from the Russian daily *Izvestiya*, this terrorist attack resulted in the death of six people, three of them servicemen, when the perpetrators “attacked weapons depots in Aktobe and a military unit of Kazakhstan’s National Guard. Around a further 40 were wounded. As a result of an operation 12 militants were successfully eliminated...”

The article goes on to point out that “the Kazakhstan Liberation Army, a previously unknown grouping, has claimed responsibility for the organization of a series of terrorist attacks in Aktobe.” This heretofore unidentified terrorist organization claimed that “this was the first battle of the supporters of the democratic path of Kazakhstan’s development against the dictatorship of Nazarbayev’s clique.” The author then quotes Russian Middle East expert Y. Satanovskiy, who posits that groups like the Kazakhstan Liberation Army are “controlled by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey and are overseen by the United States with the support of Britain and France.” This expert goes on to claim that such a force presents a direct threat to Russia.

Such a jaundiced interpretation of who was responsible for the June Aktobe terrorist attack aligns closely with the Kremlin’s master narrative. In its adverse portrayal, any protest or domestic violence is an attempt by the United States to spread geopolitical influence via its “color revolution” strategy. This anti-American propaganda may strengthen Russian political legitimacy in the short-term, but will do little to develop an effective long-term strategy for fighting terrorism in Central Asia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Darya Tsoy, “В Казахстане наступает ‘среднеазиатская весна’” [‘Central Asia Spring’ Comes to Kazakhstan], *Izvestiya Online*, 7 June 2016. <http://izvestia.ru/news/616954>

Kazakhstan is becoming a target for Islamic radicals and the republic itself risks becoming the first in the region where the so-called Central Asia revolution could arrive.

The Kazakhstan Liberation Army, a previously unknown grouping, has claimed responsibility for the organization of a series of terrorist attacks in Aktobe. Its statement says that this was “the first battle of the supporters of the democratic path of Kazakhstan’s development” against “the dictatorship of Nazarbayev’s clique.”

*In Kazakhstan a “Central Asia spring” is beginning similar to what happened in the Middle East several years ago. Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, president of the Middle East Institute, expressed such an opinion to *Izvestiya*.*

“The Kazakhstan Liberation Army, which yesterday did not exist, is the latest organization setting itself the goal of overthrowing Nazarbayev and Islamicizing Kazakhstan. This is the scenario of the ‘Central Asia spring.’ Its stratagem is the destruction of the republic as a state and the ending of supplies of energy sources to China (and Kazakhstan is one of the Middle Kingdom’s main suppliers)” Yevgeniy Satanovskiy believes.

In his words, similar groupings exist throughout Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, and parties close to Al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan. They are all controlled by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey and are overseen by the United States with the support of Britain and France. All this logically presents a direct threat to Russia.

“The collapse of any Central Asia regime, particularly of the regime in Kazakhstan with which we have a common border many kilometers long, is extraordinarily dangerous to Russia. Undoubtedly we must track this intently,” Satanovskiy noted.

A day earlier six people were killed, three of them servicemen, as a result of terrorist attacks on weapons depots in Aktobe and a military unit of Kazakhstan’s National Guard. Around a further 40 were wounded. As a result of an operation 12 militants were successfully eliminated although the highest threat level -- red -- continues to operate in the city still. Internet access has been blocked in Aktobe and a curfew has been imposed...

Expanding Russian Blimp Technology

OE Watch Commentary: As the largest country in the world, Russia faces challenges both in effectively monitoring its long borders and with transporting supplies, particularly in the poorly developed eastern part of the country. One possible solution recently discussed within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is greater use of lighter-than-air systems technology (e.g. dirigibles, aerostats, and air balloons). According to the first excerpt, Russia's Aerospace Forces (VKS) will be the lead agency for this project, where a "Lighter-Than-Air Systems" Department will be revived (like many other countries, the Soviet Union effectively ended using this type of aircraft by 1950).

The first excerpt points out that the MoD has already begun using this type of aircraft for surveillance purposes, apparently being employed both outside of Moscow to support training and near their airbase in Syria in a security role. It points out that a Russian airship was observed during the "historic concert" which the Russian authorities organized outside of the liberated Syrian city of Palmyra in early May. The article suggests that it may have been doing more than merely serving as a television relay, and may have been outfitted with electronic jamming units, which impede the employment of remote controlled munitions. While these slow-moving aircraft make for an easy direct fire target, this excerpt points out that the composite skin on some of these aircraft makes it absolutely invisible for an air defense missile.

The second excerpt refers to the movement of supplies over difficult territory, particularly in the Arctic, as another possible mission for this type of aircraft. The article refers to a recent exhibition in Moscow, where the problem is what to do with the lightened aircraft airship after the goods are delivered. According to the article, developments are underway which would allow this type of airship "to deliver the goods to a total mass of 16 tons at a distance of up to 2000 km and reach speeds up to 140 km/h." Given the country's long borders and rather undeveloped domestic road network, there are clear indications that Russia will place greater focus on lighter-than-air systems technology as a possible solution to both border security and domestic transport. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Dmitry Litovkin, "Воздушно-космические силы пошли по стопам Жюль Верна" [The Aerospace Forces Have Followed in Jules Verne's Footsteps], *Izvestiya Online*, 3 June 2016. <http://izvestia.ru/news/616552>

The Ministry of Defense has adopted the lighter-than-air systems technology development concept: dirigibles, aerostats, and air balloons until 2025. The "Lighter-Than-Air Systems" Department will be revived in the Aerospace Forces for this task. A military department spokesman told Izvestiya that the possibility is being examined of not only the replacement of the 1953 year of manufacture lighter-than-air aircraft...

... "The role of aerostats is entirely obvious in a contemporary military conflict," Aleksey Leonkov, a former associate of the Ministry of Defense 30th TSNII [Central Scientific Research Institute], who studied the possibility of the employment of unmanned and space systems, explained to Izvestiya. "One can suspend this for as long as possible over the battlefield beyond the range of interception systems".

Lighter-than air equipment is regarded as an alternative to unmanned aerial vehicles because its payload capacity is an order of magnitude higher and the loiter time "at the spot" is measured in weeks. Right now they call aerostats "static reconnaissance systems".

...Lighter-than-air vehicles "were spotted" during the course of the Russian Aerospace Forces' counterterrorist operation in Syria. A Ministry of Defense spokesman told Izvestiya that the security and defense of Khmeimim Airbase was carried out using a tethered aerostat. Information from the "balloon" arrived directly at the National Defense Center on Moscow's Frunzenskaya Embankment. The "air balloon" was also noted in the organization of the Mariinsky Theater that became an historic concert under the direction of Valeriy Gergiyev in Palmyra, which was liberated from the terrorists. During the television relay from the liberated city, the aircraft ended up in the television cameras' picture several times. Military personnel are not talking about the type of aircraft or about precisely which missions it was accomplishing, but some experts suggest that there were electronic jamming units, which impede the employment of remote controlled munitions, on it besides "video cameras"...

An aerostat was also noted among the unmanned aerial vehicles of the aircraft and helicopter type at Ministry of Defense exercises in the Moscow suburb of Alabino two weeks ago, where the capabilities of the employment of unmanned vehicles to support combat operations on the battlefield were demonstrated for the first time. The servicemen explained that the aircraft was accomplishing the functions of a scout: it detected targets, transmitted their coordinates to the command post, and recorded target destruction. Of course, the "balloon" hovered within visual range for display purposes but in a real situation it could have been located far beyond the clouds – in an area that is inaccessible to offensive air weapons. But then again, while even seeing the aerostat, it is very difficult to guide an air defense missile to it – the "air balloon's" composite skin does not reflect radar beams, which makes it absolutely invisible for an air defense missile.

(continued)

Continued: Expanding Russian Blimp Technology

Source: “Второе дыхание небесных тихоходов: зачем российской армии аэростаты?” [Second Wind for the Heavenly Balloons: Why the Russian Army Needs Blimps?], *TV Zvezda.ru*, 7 June 2016. <http://tvzvezda.ru/news/opk/content/201606071100-a2n2.htm>

In the past few years raises questions about the creation of manned airships to transport freight, particularly in the Arctic.... The main problem of such devices - their low mobility. The airship is capable of moving at a speed that is slightly greater than the speed of the train. In this case, the question arises, what to do with the airship after the goods are delivered: how will it make a return trip?...

...However, developments in this field are being made. For instance, the UAV exhibition in Moscow, which was held in May, demonstrated the unmanned airship DP-29....

...developers believe that in the future the use of airships may be beneficial in the Arctic regions: the profitability of freight and passenger transportation machines lighter than air in this area is much higher than with small aircraft, which means that after ballast problems are resolved, they will be able to find practical application.

...the airship project “Atlas” which was developed in 2015 is supposed to be used for military purposes. It was assumed that this device will be able to deliver goods weighing up to 16 tons at a distance of up to 2000 km and reach speeds up to 140 km /h. Completion of construction of this airship is planned for 2018.



Russian Aerospace Forces emblem.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_aerospace_forces_emblem.png

Cooperation in a Hostile Environment

“The Barents Rescue 2016 was conducted in the marine borderland between Norway and Russia. About 200 personnel and 16 ships took part in this year’s joint Norwegian-Russian emergency and rescue training.”

OE Watch Commentary: News of the Russian Arctic military build-up, Arctic missile launches and military exercises often crowd the good news off the page. The good news is that NATO-member Norway and Russia continue to cooperate in mutual search and rescue and environmental clean-up training. It is annual and it went just fine.
End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: Atle Staalesen, <http://www.thebarentsobserver.com/profil/atle-staalesen>, 6 June 2016.

“Mission completed”. Exercise Barents 2016

The exercise was well conducted and in line with the Norwegian-Russian agreements, according to Senior Adviser Alf Kristiansen of the Norwegian Coastal Administration. “This cooperation is very important for continued good preparedness in the High North”. The joint training was conducted on June 1. The training involved about 200 people, 16 ships, three helicopters and two aircrafts, according to the Coastal

Administration.

“We feel that there are different cultures involved during the training and exercise, however when we explain [to each other] what each side wants to do then it works out fine” stated Senior Adviser Kristiansen.

Exercise Barents was conducted for the 11th time. This year, the Norwegian side hosted the event, which took place in the two countries borderlands. The training scenario included the collision of two oil tankers and subsequent rescue of people and cleanup of spilled oil.

The Russian side was represented by the Marine Rescue Service, a unit of the Ministry of Transport. “The training proceeded successfully. The objectives were reached and the mission completed.”

High Op-tempo for Russian Arctic Submariners

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Fleet is clearly first-among-equals among the Russian Fleets. Most of Russia’s nuclear missile submarines belong to that fleet and are long accustomed to Arctic patrols. The Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) triangle, famous in Cold War days, is now a hot bed, errr, cold bed of activity. These exercises are an easy way to make a statement during tense times, but they are also a great way to get crews and vessels ready for the main event. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Atle Staalesen, <http://www.thebarentsobserver.com/profil/atle-staalesen>, 6 June 2016.

Submarines with Russia’s Northern Fleet have completed more combat drills during the winter than any time before in post-Soviet history

Russian submarines are increasingly assertive in the Barents Sea, Norwegian Sea and the Atlantic. NATO sources point to a particularly increased number of patrols in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom triangle.

After years of disarmament of the Northern Fleet, following the end of the Cold War, the naval bases along the Kola Peninsula are again receiving brand new and heavily armed submarines, including both ballistic missile subs and

multi-purpose subs.

Submarine live torpedo-firing during the winter training period increased by three times compared with the same period last year, according to Russia’s Ministry of Defense. On April 30th, the last day of the winter season, Russia’s top modern multi-purpose submarine, the “Severodvinsk”, launched a Kalibr cruise missile from a submerged position in the Barents Sea. The missile hit a training target on the Chizh testing ground on Cape Kanin north in the Arkhangelsk region.

Exercise-periods involving submarines from the Northern Fleet increased by 70 days last winter.

More than 50 crews of both surface ships and submarines have conducted combat readiness drills during the winter. In February, the Commander of NATO’s Maritime Command, Clive Johnstone, said that the Alliance today sees “more activity from Russian submarines than we’ve seen since the days of the Cold War. He continued: “I think none of that would worry us if we knew what the game plans were or we knew why they were deploying or what they are doing.”

In addition to “Severodvinsk”, four other submarines of the Yasen-class are under construction at the Sevmash naval yard by the White Sea. Vessel number six of the class, to be named “Perm” will be laid down on July 31, traditionally Navy Day in Russia.

It's Always about Logistics

OE Watch Commentary: One of the problems with extending facilities in the Arctic is that there is little local material available to supplement the building requirements. Summer marks a flurry of activity for training, supply, construction, evacuation of trash and broken equipment, and rotation of personnel. Those “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer” are mostly only crazy since so much needs to be accomplished in a short period of time.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“Sevmorput” is the world’s only nuclear-powered container ship and left the port of Murmansk on May 5. It was the ship’s first journey along the Northern Sea Route in ten years. The lion’s share of the goods shipped to the archipelagos is construction material needed for the major new base facilities erected on these sites. The Russian Ministry of Defense plans to complete construction of the bases in the course of this year, according to the Northern Fleet press service.

Source: Trude Pettersen, <http://www.thebarentsobserver.com/profil/trude-pettersen>, 26 April 2016

Northern Fleet vessels send several thousand tons of goods to its remote military outposts.

The tanker “Kotlas” recently sailed towards Alexandra Island in Franz Josef Land, loaded with 2,300 tons of diesel fuel, while the ship “Vasily Golovin” brought 2,200 tons of goods to the Northern Island. This is in addition to the 5,300 tons of goods that were delivered to the latter Northern Island earlier.

Meanwhile, Russia’s nuclear-powered container ship, the “Sevmorput” has returned to Murmansk from its maiden trip to Kotelny in the New Siberian Islands. The ship carried more than 5,800 tons of goods and was accompanied by the icebreaker “Yamal”.

The Warrior-Saint of the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has the largest and most powerful icebreaker fleet on the planet. Most of the them belong to civilian shipping concerns but work in close cooperation with the Northern Fleet.

Now the Northern fleet is receiving the first of four new military icebreakers. Worth mentioning is that they are diesel-electric powered. Atomic icebreakers are more powerful and have a wider sailing radius. This icebreaker is named after an actual medieval warrior turned saint from Kievan Rus. A fantastic fairy-tale genre has grown over the centuries, turning him into a warrior with super-human strength and star of epic medieval poetry and children’s movies. This modern Ilya Muromets appears to be powerful indeed, just not atomic-powered. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Source: Trude Pettersen, <http://www.thebarentsobserver.com/profil/trude-petersen>, 10 June 2016

Northern Fleet gets new icebreaker

The vessel will now start all necessary testing phases, and is planned to be ready to start its service in the Northern Fleet in 2017. In December 2014 the Northern Fleet became the nucleus for Russia’s new Arctic Joint Strategic Command. The command is responsible for Russian territories in the Arctic, including new and re-opened bases and airfields on Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands and other places.

Northern Fleet vessels have sailed to the new bases every summer the last years, and have used nuclear-powered vessels from Atomflot to secure safe passage along the northern coast of Siberia, where ice conditions can be difficult all year round.

Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Korolyov calls the launch of “Ilya Muromets” a significant event. “Use of the newest Russian technologies in the construction of ice-class ships for the Navy allows one to make the conclusion that domestic military shipbuilding has been able to preserve and develop its potential in this field.”

Icebreakers of project 21180, of which “Ilya Muromets” is the first, are 84 meters long and 20 meters wide. They have a displacement of 6000 tons and can make 15 knots.

One Ukrainian's Effort Against the Donetsk People's Republic Outside of the Battlefield

OE Watch Commentary: It has been well documented that when fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine in 2014, several Ukrainian territorial defense battalions formed to combat separatists, though it has not always been clear what support or connection these units have with Ukrainian government ministries. The excerpted accompanying article is an interview with Yevgen Dokunin, a network security auditor and computer programmer, who has been carrying out cyber-attacks against various targets in Russia and the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) for the past few years. The interview provides a good overview on another dynamic to the conflict in Ukraine, and there are a few things that can be taken away from it.

First, Dokunin represents another example of a Ukrainian taking action against the DNR on his own initiative. He mentioned having help from other people in some of his activities against the DNR, and, while he has had contact with officials in the Ukrainian security service, he claimed that he has not received any support from them. Despite this, he appears no less dedicated to targeting members of the DNR government.

Dokunin he has carried out a number of operations against the DNR and Russia, including obtaining information from the Russian Interior Ministry (see: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1517956695136771>) and taking control of security cameras in DNR territory and in Crimea (around a dozen videos on his You Tube channel are footage from these cameras, see: https://www.youtube.com/user/MustLiveUA/videos?shelf_id=0&sort=dd&view=0). Other actions like the blocking phones (apparently through a program Dokunin wrote that takes advantage of vulnerabilities in software) or having bank accounts closed appear to have taken place because of poor operations security by various elements of the DNR. All of this has had an impact on the DNR, especially on its finances, but Dokunin noted a couple of problems that are likely to have an effect on what he will be able to do in the future. While he has gone after targets in Russia and the DNR, the Russian Federal Security Service targeted him (and others involved with him) by publishing personal information, including his address. He also noted how members of the DNR do not post as much information as they previously did, making his work all the more challenging. Perhaps the most significant problem facing Dokunin is the difference in the amount of money he is able to spend compared to his adversaries, though he cites Russian media, and not the FSB, in that context.

Regardless, Dokunin has proven to be capable and remains determined to continue combating Russia and Donetsk despite challenges. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“He created the UKV in June 2014 and as of January 2016, Dokunin has blocked more than \$11 million in the accounts of people in the separatist movement...”

Source: Verstyuk, Ivan. “Одкровення українського хакера. Наскільки складно вести кібервійну з росіянами і як ставляться до сепаратистів в Facebook, PayPal і Приватбанку” (The Revelations of a Ukrainian hacker. How difficult it is to carry out a cyberwar with Russians and how to deal with separatists in Facebook, PayPal and Privatbank), *Novoye Vremya*, 14 May 2016. <http://nv.ua/ukr/publications/odkrovennja-ukrajinskogo-hakera-naskilki-skladno-vesti-kibervijnu-z-rosijanami-i-jak-stavljasja-do-separatistam-v-facebook-paypal-i-privatbanku-122492.html>

The Revelations of a Ukrainian hacker. How difficult it is to carry out a cyberwar with Russians and how to deal with separatists in Facebook, PayPal and Privatbank

Yevgen Dokunin, the founder of Ukrainian Cyber Forces (UKV), talks about how much the Donetsk separatists are forced to spend to counter cyberattacks. During an interview in a café the 32 year old Dokunin refuses to even order a cup of tea...he said that he invests all of his spare money in the cyberwar against Russia...He created the UKV in June 2014 and as of January 2016, Dokunin has blocked more than \$11 million in the accounts of people in the separatist movement...

...I rarely use the word “hacker.” Journalists wrecked this word in the pursuit of sensationalism, so it is synonymous with the word “criminal.”...I am not involved in crimes...After our attacks the separatists’ site had to spend thousands of dollars to change hosts, domains, and for protection...Unlike me, Russian propagandists have millions in their budgets – Life News and Russia Today. Even if I spend \$1000 a day on attacks, they still have more money to fight back.

Our first operations were block terrorists’ phones through SMS messages and phone calls...We found the terrorists’ phone numbers in the public domain, because in in 2014 they actively campaigned for people to join the militia and gave out their contact information. After our attacks, the terrorists got nervous and threw away their SIM cards...the (Ukrainian) security forces have tens of billions of hryvnias, but in two years they have done nothing for cyber counterterrorism operations. The only thing they do is beg me or someone else to “Please carry out a DDoS attack or block this.”...I have conducted almost 20 operations during this time...

...A couple of times the Ukrainian security service announced that they caught someone and in a private conversation they admitted that they had used my data...Websites controlled by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) have published articles about me with photos. They also write about other Ukrainian patriots and publish our addresses. I block out as much as I can of this...According to my information, most of these (DNR) accounts are in Privatbank...I went to the security service of Privatbank with this issue. I know these guys very well, because I have been working with them on a program of searches for liabilities since 2012. They blocked half of the accounts I gave them...Finding these accounts is becoming more difficult. Previously, separatists put them online and the search program copied and filed them, but now it is difficult to find such information...

Russia and Kamikaze UAVs

“Strike drones will now start appearing in our country too. It is reported, admittedly, that they will not fire guided missiles, but will begin independently attacking a detected target. That is to say, they will resemble Japanese World War II-era airplanes which were loaded with explosives and manned by suicide – kamikaze – pilots. This may be justified by the fact that such vehicles will prove to be fairly cheap to produce. It is no secret that a drone itself may cost mere pennies, whereas the equipment that is installed on board for reconnaissance or aiming a guided weapon at a target runs into hundreds of thousands, or even millions of rubles.”

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has developed numerous unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the past ten years. Specific types have been developed for the General Staff, the Main Intelligence Directorate, the West, South, East and Central Military Districts, Navy, Army, Federal Security Service, law enforcement, and the Emergencies Ministry.

Russia’s UAV force has been used for reconnaissance, precision attack, transmission of intelligence, unmanned combat air systems, patrols, monitoring, communications, data transmission, combat missions, and the identification of the source of radio waves. A recent addition to these uses appears to be as kamikaze UAVs. Reports indicate that they are being produced in Russia. They operate by finding a target and destroying it by exploding when they reach it, like self-destructing guided munitions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, “Kamikaze UAV’s Are Being Produced in Russia,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 28 May 2016.

Back around 50 years ago in the USSR, there were attempts to implement an interesting military-technical program. Jet aircraft that were being mothballed were being loaded with explosives, and a special program was being introduced into the autopiloting system. In the event of war, such airplanes were to take off and head for stationary targets – industrial plants, arsenals, missile bases, and other military-purpose facilities. The airplanes would follow a complex trajectory, performing various maneuvers, thereby creating an illusion that they were pilot-controlled. Apart from the fact that these aerial armadas of drones would have inflicted substantial casualties on the enemy, they would have totally exposed the latter’s air defense system.

At the MAKS airshow in 2007, a model of the future “MiG” RSK [Russian Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation’s] UAV was shown for the first and last time. It was named “Skat” [“Skate” or “Ray”]. It could have been produced as both a reconnaissance vehicle and a strike UAV. It has remained only in model form, alas. It is said that everybody liked it, but the money for designing and producing it was never found.

The Yakovlev firm has also been working on an interesting project, under the name “Proryv” [“Breakthrough”]. If that vehicle were to appear in the flesh, it would possibly become truly a breakthrough.



Dozor-600 UAV.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dozor-600_UAV_Maks-2009.jpg

Russian Robotics: Continuing to Make Progress

“Recently, under the terms of a Foundation for Advanced Research order, scientists managed to develop and even test under laboratory conditions, a neural interface which allowed an unmanned aerial vehicle to be operated using brain impulses.”

OE Watch Commentary: The field of robotics is experiencing rapid growth in Russia. In 2014 the country’s Ministry of Defense approved “The Development of Future Robot Technology to the Year 2025,” which predicted that the percentage of robots in the overall force structure would be approximately 30 percent by that year. In the spring the Joint Stock Company “Izhevskiy radiozavod” reported on the MRK-002-BG-57 mobile robot-technology (MRK) complex. In 2015 the Russian Army introduced the first underground robot-scouts, the 1K144 robotized multi-monitoring system from the “Sozvezdie” Company. Robot-soldiers are under construction, with capabilities comparable to those of a human, even though movement is still far from perfect. The Russian Navy is testing underwater robot-sappers and robot-scouts, which light up the sea bottom and sketch a three-dimensional picture of the area, such as ports or regions in the open sea. The Defense Ministry reported that in February 2016 it would host the first military-scientific conference on “Robotization of the Russian Federation Armed Forces.” For Russia, the era of robotics represents a revolution in the art of conducting warfare. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, “They Do Not Fear Death: In Russia Robots are Being Developed that Can Go into Battle in Place of People,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 25 May 2016.

Even specialists from the Sarov city of nuclear engineers were involved in the creation and, so to speak, the outfitting of combat cyborgs. They developed an acoustic system which allows a firing location to be determined and a counter-strike to be made based on the sound of the flight of a bullet or rocket-propelled grenade. Throughout the entire world attempts are being made to connect the operations of ground and airborne combat robots not only with a unified command post, but also with each individual soldier.

The essence is that information from all of the soldiers participating in the battle and from various monitoring systems, including robotic systems, is constantly streaming into the command post. The computer system processes all of this with enormous speed and makes the decision and issues the command concerning what type of weaponry should destroy the target identified by the soldier on the battlefield. If such net-centric capabilities are implemented the number of personnel of a fully-capable motorized rifle battalion can be reduced, in the opinion of military experts, to 50 men. Now it is several hundred soldiers and officers.

The android, performing all motions precisely and transmitting sensations (even including tactile ones), allows the operator on Earth to “see” with the eyes of the robot and to “feel” with the hands of the robot as it touches objects and instruments. The sphere of operations of man-like robots is virtually unlimited. For example, an android is capable of performing operations with its hands controlled by a surgeon via a radio signal relayed by a satellite.



2013 Russian Arms Expo.
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russia_Arms_Expo_2013_\(531-38\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russia_Arms_Expo_2013_(531-38).jpg)

IRAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Synopsis: This paper examines Iranian-Russian ties in the context of history. Iranian-Russian ties are at their warmest point in more than 500 years. The questions for policymakers and analysts, however, are whether the Russo-Iranian détente is an outlier or the new normal and, from the Iranian side, whether the new warmth toward Russia is limited to government circles or extends deeper into Iranian society. After all, Iranian historical distrust of Russia has deep roots that not even their common antipathy toward the United States might be able to overcome at the popular level.

In November 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin made his first visit to Iran in over a decade, nominally to attend the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Summit in Tehran. After a 90-minute meeting with the Russian leader, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei declared, “America’s long-term scheme for the [Middle East] region is detrimental to all nations and countries, particularly Iran and Russia, and it should be thwarted through vigilance and closer interaction.” Khamenei praised Putin for “neutralizing [Washington’s] policy.”¹ Putin was just as warm in response: “We regard you as a trustworthy and reliable ally in the region and the world.”

Both Khamenei’s and Putin’s words were more than polite rhetoric. The simple fact is Iranian-Russian ties are at their warmest point in more than 500 years. The questions for policymakers and analysts, however, are whether the Russo-Iranian détente is an outlier or the new normal and, from the Iranian side, whether the new warmth toward Russia is limited to government circles or extends deeper into Iranian society. After all, Iranian historical distrust of Russia has deep roots that not even their common antipathy toward the United States might be able to overcome at the popular level.

The Roots of Iranian Distrust toward Russia

It is a mistake to assume that borders have remained consistent over time. The border between Iran (or Persia, as it was called before 1935) and Russia was hundreds of miles apart well into the nineteenth century. Russians pushed into Siberia centuries before moving southward into the Caucasus and Central Asia. Indeed, it was really only after Russia’s southward expansion was checked during the Crimean War that it started its push to the southeast.

The Iranian leadership had passing familiarity with the Kingdom of Muscovy by the fifteenth century at least, as many European visitors to Iran would take the northern route through Moscow in order to avoid the Ottoman Empire.² However, Iranians worried not about Russians—whom they often described as a kingdom of illiterate and cultureless peasants—but were much more concerned by the threat posed by Uzbeks and the independent empires and khanates on the Central Asian steppes.

The Russians, for their part, were not overly concerned about Iran. Nadir Shah (1698-1747) fought to consolidate control over Iran against decades of encroachments by Ottomans, Afghans, Mughals, and Uzbeks.³ Perhaps not seeing Nadir Shah as a serious threat, in the 1730s Tsar Peter I withdrew Russian forces from along the Caspian coast, which Russian forces had seized from Iran the decade before. Such magnanimity would soon become the exception rather than the rule. In 1796 Catherine the Great sent a 50,000-man force into the Iranian territory in the North Caucasus, but her death led the Russian Empire to abort what might have been a wider invasion of Iran and withdraw its forces.

As Russia expanded elsewhere, however, British officials grew concerned, if not obsessive about the possibility that Russian forces might invade India. After all, the only thing that lay between the Russian frontier and the crown jewel of the British Empire was the shah’s domains. It was this fear that led the British crown to dispatch John Malcolm in 1800 to Tehran as ambassador. Suddenly, Tehran became a center for French, Russian, and British embassies. The Great Game had come to Iran.

Peace would not last. Between 1804 and 1813 Iranian forces intermittently battled their Russian counterparts in the Caucasus. The cost was extreme. The Shah not only lost the war, but also bankrupted the treasury. The tax on produce doubled to one-fifth of whatever the land could produce.⁴ In the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan, Iran ceded its claim to much of what today is independent Azerbaijan and eastern Georgia. Resentment simmered not only on the part of Fath Ali Shah, the Iranian leader who saw his defeat as an affront—after all, the Persian shahs saw themselves as the “pivot of the universe”—but also among the Iranian people, who disliked Russia on religious grounds and who greatly resented the cost which ultimately they had to bear. Fath Ali Shah sought revenge. Iran attacked Russia in 1826 in order to win back what it had lost. The war did not go well, and in the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchai the shah confirmed previous losses and ceded much of Armenia. The bitterness among the Iranian population never receded far. The following year a mob sacked the Russian embassy in Tehran, slaughtering all but one survivor.⁵ Conservative and oftentimes xenophobic Shi’ite clergy transformed Russia into a favorite whipping boy. In 1848 a Shi’a cleric whipped up a crowd after allegations surfaced that an Armenian servant in the Russian consulate had raped a young Muslim boy. The mob attacked not only Armenian homes and shops, but also those belonging to Russians and Greeks.⁶

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, increasing numbers of Russians settled in northern Iran, in cities like Tabriz, Tehran, and Rasht. Russian commercial interests spread, often aided by the interventions of the Russian embassy and geared as much to influence as profit. After the British set up the Imperial Bank of Persia in 1889, authorities in St. Petersburg established the Russian Loan and Development Bank to operate in Iran.

As the shah sought to modernize Iran, maintain his lifestyle, and pay for the many disastrous wars in which he and his predecessors had engaged, both Great Britain and Russia were willing to extend him loans, often at extortionate rates or with political conditions attached. The shah borrowed money from Russia in both 1900 and 1902; the gold which Tsar Nicholas II provided was a small price to pay to tie Iran further into the Russian sphere of influence. Ultimately, it was not the shah who would pay the price for such obligations; he instead passed the liabilities to the Iranian people in the form of austerity measures and exploitive taxes.

This led to a divergence of opinion toward Russia between the shah on one-hand, and ordinary Iranians on the other. For the shah, Russia could be a source of revenue, a bank that was always willing to give. For ordinary Iranians, Russia had become the enabler of autocracy and an imperial power with designs on Iranian sovereignty.

(continued)

Continued: IRAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS

In 1905 Iranian politicians and public alike watched as the Japanese defied the expectation of much of Europe and rolled to victory over Russia.⁷ Later that same year Iranians watched as Russians, facing bread shortages and an aloof monarch, rose up and won their demand for a parliament. As the British embassy reported, “The town Persian is ignorant, but observant, and by no means stupid. He knows that the Russian people are trying to obtain their freedom.”⁸

The Iranian public sought to achieve the same thing which the Russians had accomplished: an end to the absolute monarchy. However, just as Tsar Nicholas II, Muzaffar al-Din Shah sought to protect his prerogatives against the masses. After years of protests, both violent and nonviolent, and with British diplomats, missionaries, and even journalists egging on Iranian protestors toward their goal of a constitutional monarchy, the ailing shah finally acceded to the demands and granted a provisional constitution. Five days later, he died and his son Muhammad Ali became shah.

The new shah was unhappy to have seen what would have been absolute power denied him just days before his accession. He refused to invite parliamentarians to his coronation. With Russian support he immediately set out to reverse the decisions of his late father. He had spent much of his youth in Tabriz—the northern Iranian city where the crown prince often served as governor—socializing with Russian elites who had imbued him with a staunch conservative view of governance. As the shah worked to consolidate power and roll back reforms, the Russian government worked to cement its position in Iran. Muhammad Ali Shah continued his predecessors’ practice of selling offices to raise cash for his own expenses, and the Russian government took full advantage of this to finance its own candidates, who began to buy offices in strategic provinces, much to the chagrin of the liberal nationalists who dominated the Majlis (the Iranian parliament).⁹

In December 1907 the Shah attempted a self-coup. His guards surrounded the Majlis, where they were soon joined by a detachment of Russian-trained Cossacks. The constitutionalists responded in force. Merchants closed the Tehran bazaar, grabbed their rifles, and flocked to protect the parliament. News spread rapidly. Cities across Iran telegraphed their solidarity with the parliamentarians. Tabriz constitutionalists went so far as to telegraph the Majlis and foreign consulates that the city “no longer considered worthy to rule over Muslims a man who had broken an oath sworn on the Qur’an.”¹⁰ They demanded that the Shah be deposed and a successor appointed.

The first shots in the battle for Tehran began on 4 July 1909 and ended in fewer than two weeks. Russian troops, flooding into the country from the north, were too late. Muhammad Ali Shah took refuge at the Russian embassy, along with 500 soldiers and attendants. Many prominent religious figures celebrated. Prominent nationalists put Muhammad Ali’s 12-year-old son on the throne. Russia granted asylum to the ex-Shah and helped him organize an invasion two years later to once again try to defeat the parliament. This failed as well, but cemented the idea in the popular Iranian imagination that Russia was hostile to Iranian sovereignty and constitutionalism.

Russia’s opposition to the constitutional revolution was not the only event that solidified popular Iranian distrust of Russia. During the nineteenth century Russia and Britain had competed for influence in Iran. With the rise of Germany and the Kaiser’s increasing activism in Asia, however, both Great Britain and Russia deemed it in their national interests to formalize an agreement in order to better stave off the growing German challenge. What resulted was the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Negotiated in secret without the foreknowledge of the Iranian government, the treaty effectively divided Iran into spheres of influence. Despite a preamble promising to respect Iran’s “integrity and independence,” London and St. Petersburg divided Iran into three zones: a northern sphere of Russian influence, a central neutral zone, and a southern sphere of British influence. Most major cities, including Tehran, Isfahan (the former capital), Tabriz (the second largest city), and the Shi’ite shrine cities of Mashhad and Qom, fell within the Russian sphere. Thus, the bulk of the Iranian population found themselves living under Russian domination. The Russians closed the *anjumans* (secret societies) and other civil society outlets and re-imposed censorship.

Repression grew worse as World War I erupted. While Iran remained neutral, the Ottomans entered the war on the side of Germany and sent troops into Azerbaijan and Western Iran, forcing a Russian withdrawal from Azerbaijan in early 1915. Ottoman soldiers were every bit as noxious as the Russians had been. Chaos, lawlessness, and famine ensued in Azerbaijan, and the Russian respite was short-lived, as Russian forces simply re-entered northern Iran from across the Caspian, driving all the way to Qom. By 1917 both British and Russian forces had occupied most of Iran. In theory, the Shah continued to rule an independent nation, but in practice he had little economic control and even less political control.

The Bolshevik Revolution may have knocked Russia out of participation in the allies’ planned post-World War I divisions and state-building in the Middle East, but it did not end either its influence inside Iran or the antipathy that it engendered. Quite the contrary. As post-war deprivation, depression, and disorder grew—during and in the immediate aftermath of World War I, Iran lost more than 20 percent per cent of its population to disease and violence—Reza Khan, a seasoned officer in the Russian-led Cossack Brigade, led 2500 Cossacks from Qazvin to Tehran and ousted the prime minister.

Sayyid Zia al-Din Tabatabai became prime minister. While he only ruled for two months, he presided over both the defeat of a proposed Anglo-Iranian Agreement to tie Iran closer to the British Empire and also concluded the 1921 Soviet-Iranian Treaty, in which the Soviet authorities renounced agreements signed with Tsarist Russia and forgave Russian loans. In theory, that was a boost to Iranian nationalism and independence. The problem was two articles which permitted military intervention should either country host forces or be unable to resist forces seeking to interfere in the other. While the Bolsheviks included these, they said, to prevent Iran from becoming a base for White Russian forces, it was only a matter of weeks before the Soviets demanded that Iran expel all Germans from its territory. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin subsequently used the Soviet-Iran Treaty to justify Russian intervention in Iran and the World War II-era occupation of the north of the country, as well as the expulsion and abdication of Reza Khan (who had declared himself Reza Shah in 1925) in favor of his son Mohammad Reza, the shah who would lead Iran until the 1979 Revolution.

It was this World War II occupation that affirmed the worst suspicions for the Iranians. Whereas few Iranians talk about the American and British occupations during World War II—the United States was still considered a friend by most Iranians, at least until its involvement in the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq—the initial post-war Soviet refusal to withdraw from Iranian Azerbaijan,

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a region geographically larger and more populous than Soviet Azerbaijan, and its support and assistance to the 1946 Kurdish self-declared Mahabad Republic inside Iran reinforced the Iranian belief that the ruling system may have changed in Russia, but the imperial ambitions had not.

It was for this reason that Iran tripled its defense budget in the 1950s.¹¹ The shah understood that it was a dangerous time to be a Middle Eastern state allied with the West. Not only had major countries like Egypt and Iraq had their monarchies overthrown, but Iran also bordered the Soviet Union and so faced a direct military threat. It was for this reason that in 1955 the Shah agreed to join the Baghdad Pact, a NATO-like defense alliance for the “northern tier” states of the Middle East and South Asia.

The Russian threat—and the reality of Russian territorial designs and previous occupations—is one of the reasons why, even as Iranian revolutionaries whipped up passions against the United States and its deepening military relationship with Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, they remained just as hostile to the Soviet Union. Throughout the region—in Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan, for example—the Cold War raged, but what Ayatollah Khomeini envisioned was fundamentally different. “Neither East nor West but Islamic Republic” became a defining slogan of the Islamic Revolution. Indeed, while US policymakers often understand post-Revolutionary Iran through the lens of its Islamist ideology, nationalism remains deeply-rooted. Even under the Islamic Republic, Iranian elementary school texts teach children about the Iranian roots not only of cities like Baku, the capital of the Azerbaijan, but also cities further north like Darbent, which today is in southern Russia. Iran’s victimization at the hands of a stronger Russia has, at the very least, created popular hostility to the Russia and led Iranians to believe even the basest conspiracy theories about Russian intentions.

Part II: The Russian-Iranian Romance

It is against this backdrop of historical suspicion that the current diplomatic romance between Iran and Russia becomes so intriguing. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei claims to act as a representative for oppressed Muslims around the globe, from Palestinians to Rohingya Muslims in Burma,¹² but he remains largely silent about Chechens, Daghestanis, and perhaps even Tartars facing oppression inside Russia and Uighur Muslims seeking religious rights in China. Such inconsistency is seldom discussed in official channels inside Iran; even when it is, however, the excuses for inaction are thin. In response to a 2012 query, *Porsemani.ir*, a website associated with Khamenei’s office, simply answered that the case of the Palestinians was different than that of Russian and Chinese Muslims because Israel had “confiscated” Palestinian lands, whereas in Russia and China the issue was a secessionist struggle. While the website said that Iranian officials have spoken diplomatically to the Russian and Chinese governments to advocate on behalf of their Muslim population’s rights, it also said that too much activism would be tantamount to interference in Russian and Chinese affairs.¹³ Other papers argued that Iran had provided financial and “emotional support” for groups like the Bosnians and the Chechens, even if *realpolitik* prevented Tehran from appearing as active as it has been in other cases.¹⁴

Many Iranian officials and commentaries are quite blunt that the renaissance in Russo-Iranian ties is based less upon shared values and rests more on shared enmity toward both the United States and Sunni radicalism, as well as economic opportunism. One month before the 2009 Iranian elections, in which President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would eventually claim a second term, Hassan Rouhani, then acting only in his capacity as a former Supreme National Security Council Chairman, spoke at a roundtable examining, “Iran, Russia, and the West.”¹⁵ While Rouhani criticized Russian policy toward Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War, he suggested that then-speaker of parliament (and soon to be president) Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani’s trip to the Soviet Union in 1989 set the ground for a new partnership.¹⁶

Rafsanjani, for his part, agreed that the end of the Iran-Iraq war marked a new beginning for Russo-Iranian ties. In a 2012 interview he sought to temper expectations about just how far an alliance with Russia might go. “Russia is under pressure from the United States... sometimes, American pressure slows down Russia’s movements.” He also suggested that “like Western countries, Russia is also concerned about Iran becoming a power by acquiring nuclear weapons.”¹⁷

That may be true, but Rouhani argued that the US military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and the southern side of the Persian Gulf, and its efforts to manage Iran as a rising power have created a “[new] mutual understanding between the two countries,” and suggested that both the US military posture and Washington’s diplomatic initiatives were provocative to both Russia and Iran. Specifically, he singled out human rights advocacy as a tool which the United States exploited cynically and suggested that the growing power of both countries, based on then-rising oil prices, has increased other opportunities for partnership.¹⁸

Diplomatic factors also came into play. In 2007 Hassan Beheshtipour, a popular freelance blogger who writes frequently on national security, argued that, while Tehran should not rely too much on Moscow for help with uranium enrichment since the Russians might interpret the domestic Iranian enrichment industry as competition, Russian assistance might be vital to Iran’s desire to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.¹⁹

Still, there are limits to the defensive alliance. Whereas in the Western press, Russian, Syrian regime, and Iranian forces maintain a unified front against the Syrian opposition, there are occasional Russo-Iranian tensions about coordination. Admiral Hossein Alaei, a former cChief of the IRGC Navy who currently teaches political science at the IRGC’s Imam Hossein University, criticized Iranian inaction in the face of a Russian launch of cruise missiles toward Syria from ships in the Caspian Sea: “Russia’s missiles crossing [Iran’s airspace] harmed Iran severely because it made Iran’s airspace unsafe.” This had economic implications. “During the past two years, we had tried to show that Iran’s airspace is safe and, because of that, the rate of foreign airplanes crossing Iran’s airspace doubled... After this action, Iran’s airspace was shown to be unsafe and a lot of airline companies changed their airways to Iraq and Turkey.” Iran should have objected then, he said, and “it should not let Russia do it now either.”²⁰

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Is Russia Trustworthy?

Whatever the reality of Russo-Iranian cooperation, as ties have warmed an active debate has erupted regarding the wisdom of any alliance with Moscow. After Russia provided Iran with jamming technology to block Persian-language diaspora broadcasts, anti-Russian reaction was fierce, with commenters on *Asr-e Iran*'s news story about the jamming urging, "May God give Russia Death," "Russia is the biggest jerk," and "the Russian embassy is a nest of spies."²¹

The most vociferous critics tend to be Iranian bloggers, writing outside the constraints of the official press. One anonymous Azeri Iranian blogger has dedicated a blog to Russia's declining economy and regularly criticizes Putin for bullying in foreign policy.²² Likewise, on another blog, Jahangir Heidari, a geopolitics Ph.D. student in Iran, suggests that, despite mutual interests between Russia and Iran, "wisdom and experience suggest that Russians are untrustworthy... They have never been honest to [Iranians] and they are not stable partners."²³ Ahmad Vakhshiteh, a Ph.D. student in political science at the Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow, explained that Russia always acts in its own national interest, but Iranians expect them to act in Iran's national interest.²⁴

Such concerns, however, are hardly limited to the blogosphere. Rather, they are shared by many Iranian officials, albeit they often express them in more muted language. In 2012 Rafsanjani suggested that the reason for distrust lays in Afghanistan; "The Soviet Union's record on invading Afghanistan left a bad memory of Russians in Iranians' minds. It is too often overlooked that the Islamic Republic's relationship with Iran was formed in such an environment."²⁵ That same year Sadegh Kharrazi, a former ambassador to France, spoke at a conference entitled "New Russia, Putin's Russia," where he argued that Iran and Russia were not strategic allies: "Historically, there is a national distrust in Iranians' nature against Russia. We haven't been harmed by Americans like we have been by Russians."²⁶

In 2014 Behrouz Nemati, a member of parliament and the spokesman for its presiding board, said that the history of Russo-Iranian relations demonstrates a tendency toward Russian subterfuge and warned Iranian leaders to be careful "shaking Russia's hand."²⁷ Ali Khorram, a former Iranian ambassador to China and to the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, agreed that Russia was not particularly trustworthy. Writing in *Tabnak*, a web portal affiliated with the relatively pragmatic Rafsanjani, wrote that Iran should not trust "the East," be that Russia or China. "The Russians are good to Iran as long as it is in their interest," he explained, but "as soon as Americans and Western countries [extend a hand to Russia], they will turn their back to their commitments to the Islamic Republic of Iran." He warned Iranian leaders not to put all their eggs in the Russian basket. "History has shown whenever we have relied on them [Russians], they have immediately abandoned us."²⁸

On 25 November 2015 the pro-reformist *Etemaad* took on the debate head-on. "Is Putin Trustworthy?" it asked. The article, which ran without a byline, suggested that cooperation should continue so long as it was implemented in such a way that Iran would "stand up to the West by relying on Russia." Perhaps being mindful of the concept of "*Doveriyai, no proveryai*" (trust, but verify), it argued that trust was not really a factor in diplomacy in the first place.²⁹ It was not a ringing endorsement, and was not an argument which persuaded many readers. The website *Parsine.com* republished the article and allowed reader comments. While unscientific, all seven comments called Putin and Russia untrustworthy.³⁰ In a separate interview, Sa'dollah Zare'i, a political science professor at Allameh Tabatabaei University, suggested that the constant harping about Russia's trustworthiness was "negative propaganda," meant to weaken ties.³¹ In response, however, commenters to the article argued that Russia was as untrustworthy as the United States, and one cited Khomeini's statement that "these two countries [the United States and Russia] are two blades of the same scissors."³²

Mahmoud Shora, a professor at Tehran University and an expert at the Expediency Council's Center for Strategic Research, pushed back hard on any disparagement of Russia's trustworthiness. He insisted that Russia has neither tricked nor cheated Iran and suggested that Russians were the closest thing Iran had to a Cold War ally, adding that the Iranian people were only disappointed because their expectations of Russia had been too great. In the comments section, however, readers ridiculed Shora. "If this doctor knew as much as a high school graduate about his country's history, he never would have called Russia a good ally."³³ Rumors citing some Russian publications even circulated that, while omitted from his official biography, Khamenei himself spent time in Russia in the 1960s as a young student at the People's Friendship University.³⁴

Still, when it comes to Russia, there seems an increasing irony in which the most hardline and traditionally xenophobic factions in the Iranian political debate are those who are enthusiastic about the expansion of Russo-Iranian ties, whereas those who trend more toward pragmatism or reformism have more muted expectations, if not latent hostility toward Russia.

Is Trade the Key?

If there remains so much popular distrust among Iranians and many Iranian politicians toward Russia, why is the regime so intent on expanding relations? Here, trade may be essential. In 2012 Rafsanjani explained that weak Russo-Iranian trade had undermined relations. "In the past quarter century, despite some regional and international necessities, Iran and Russia have never been able to set and create a visible trade partnership. The most important commodity [oil] that Iran has to offer other countries is not attractive to the Russians, and many Russian commodities and technologies have always been the lowest priority for the Iranian side...."³⁵ Indeed, Russian exports to Iran decreased by almost 60 percent, from \$3.4 billion to \$1.2 billion, between 2010 and 2013, while Iranian exports to Russia grew only from \$272 million to \$433 million over the same period.³⁶

Much of the more recent trade relationship, however, has revolved around Iranian arms purchases. The arms trade, however, has not always gone smoothly. In 2007 Iran agreed to purchase the S-300, at the time Russia's premier anti-aircraft missile system, from Russia for \$800 million. However, Russia suspended the sale under international diplomatic pressure. This led Tehran to file a \$4 billion breach of contract suit against the Russian arms export firm Rosoboronexport, although Iran subsequently agreed in 2015 to drop the suit when Russia made good on its initial delivery, which it apparently has.³⁷

With the S-300 dispute rectified and many international sanctions lifted on Iran as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

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(JCPOA) and its corollary UN Security Council Resolution 2231, Iranian officials have sought to rapidly expand both aircraft and military purchases from Russia. They have, for example, explored and reportedly finalized the purchase of the Sukhoi Superjet 100,³⁸ and have also agreed to license the manufacture of Russian tanks inside Iran.³⁹

How Durable is the Russian-Iranian Alliance?

Many in Western governments hoped that the JCPOA might initiate a broader openness and rapprochement between Iran on one side and Europe and the United States on the other. Khamenei, however, has made clear that he will not compromise on ideological hostility to the United States. That hostility trumps historical animosity toward Russia at the official level of the Iranian regime. The irony here, of course, is that this is opposite to the broader feeling within Iranian society, where many have a more favorable impression of the United States and remain deeply suspicious of Russia.

Still, there is a recognition among most Iranian politicians that Russia's outreach to Iran is a practical one for the Kremlin. The Iranian leadership wants to upgrade its military, and the Russian government seeks a market for its arms industry. Both regimes are deeply suspicious of the United States and its policies in the region. Still, there is an element of caution among those Iranian officials with greater experience on the world stage, who warn that, while the Islamic Republic might be myopic in its hostility toward the United States, Russian interests are far more complex and that Moscow might suspend, downgrade, or reverse its positions should the realities of its relationship with the West require as much.

The Russo-Iranian relationship, however tenuous, may have some long-term implications. Three and a half decades of severed US-Iran relations, as well as the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, have increasingly pushed the United States solely into alliances with Sunni states. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt, for example, are all Sunni. Bahrain—host to the US Fifth Fleet—might be majority Shi'ite, but its political and military leadership are entirely Sunni. Iraq is majority Shi'ite, but, despite some military assistance to aid Iraq's fight to combat the Islamic State, the United States no longer remains the same investor there that it was prior to 2011. Azerbaijan, the only secular majority Shi'ite state, remains increasingly peripheral to US policymakers and so has increasingly re-oriented itself toward Moscow. Russia, meanwhile, faces a growing internal threat from Islamist radicalism—Chechen, Daghestani, and Tartar—and could face an external challenge as Sunni radicalism accelerates in the former Soviet states of Central Asia. Hence, the Russo-Iranian relationship might herald a growing Russo-Shi'ite alliance to combat Sunni radicalism.

While the bilateral relationship between Iran and Russia may slowly reshape alliances in the region, it remains on shaky ground. Centuries of distrust and hostility run deep. Iranians simply do not look at events of centuries past as distant and irrelevant. Neither Russia nor Iran has been able to significantly erode the legacy of centuries of conflict and distrust, and, despite some university exchanges, there has been no consistent or effective effort to address those historical suspicions.

In addition, while many ordinary Iranians and diplomats recognize the marriage as one of convenience, few analysts in either country are free to note openly that it is also a marriage between two essentially dictatorial states. Hence, the discrepancy between public and leadership attitude, at least on the Iranian side, may ultimately be its undoing, as any significant democratic reform in Iran will likely lead to a demand to downgrade ties or treat Iran's historical nemesis with more caution.

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