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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Saudi Arabian soldier from the First Airborne Brigade with a UAE soldier.

Source: audi88hawk, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/Saudi_Arabian_soldier_from_the_First_Airborne_Brigade_with_a_UAE_soldier%2C_2016.jpg. Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

Chinese Delegates Discuss Requirements for the PLA to Lead the Next Military Revolution

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

2021 marks the beginning of China's 14th Five-Year Program for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Term Goals for 2035. Part of the 14th Five-Year Plan reportedly offers a blueprint for China to achieve the goal of building up the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by 2027, the 100th anniversary of its founding. The following article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the official newspaper of the Central Military Commission, explains that the 14th Five-Year Plan lays out a strategic plan for China to accelerate the modernization of its national defense and military.

The evolution of warfare is accelerating and “the construction of an intelligent military system has become a major trend in the development of the world's militaries.” In order to “leapfrog” the West, Li Daoming, a Navy representative, is pushing to accelerate construction of an advanced combat theory system and to “seize the initiative in the world's military revolution.” Wang Haidou, an Army representative, argues that in order to “leapfrog in intelligent buildout,” along with developing innovative products, China has to “master cutting-edge military technologies.” These comments underscore China's desire to lead the way in developing intelligent, autonomous systems. Intelligitization, a Chinese term, is viewed as the next generation of warfare. (See “China's Concept of ‘Intelligitization’: Self-Teaching Systems,” *OE Watch*, March 2021).

Another key conclusion from the article is that while China continues to aspire to lead the next “revolution of military affairs,” the PLA must focus on developing a talent base needed to support these and other military objectives.

While China has been making great progress in upgrading military weapons and equipment, there seems to be a general consensus among the delegates that having trained military personnel capable of operating these systems continues to be a challenge. Wang Xiaoxia, a professor at the Rocket Corps Non-Commissioned Officer School, argues that in training new military talent, the PLA first needs a new educational system that integrates military academy education, military training, and military vocational education.

“On the track of the world's new military revolution, China is still playing catch-up.”

Another representative points out that “without the support of a stable pool of talent, it will be difficult to keep up with the pace of transformation.” This representative further argues that developing qualified talent is essential to meeting new military requirements “of the integrated development of mechanization, informationization, and intelligitization” and that developing trained and qualified personnel should always stay ahead of the overall development of the military. Finally, Huang Xin, a representative from the 74th Group Army, sees modern warfare as a contest between high-quality talent.

Source: Qian Xiaohu and Han Chen, “军队代表委员热议“十四五”规划开局和全面深化改革工作 (PLA Delegate Members Hold Heated Discussions on the Start of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the Work of Comprehensively Deepening Reforms),” *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily, the official newspaper of the Central Military Commission), 5 March 2021. http://81.cn/yw/2021-03/05/content_9996713.htm

Sail through the waves, set sail after dreams. The “Proposals of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Formulating the 14th Five-Year Program for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Term Goals for 2035” orchestrated a lofty blueprint for starting the new journey of building a socialist modern country in a comprehensive way and marching towards the second centenary goal. This important document also made a strategic plan for accelerating the modernization of national defense and the military, clearly proposing to improve the strategic ability to defend national sovereignty, security, and development of interests, and to ensure the attainment of the goals for the centenary of the Chinese military in 2027.

“On the track of the world's new military revolution, China is still playing catch-up.” Representative Zhan Houshun from the Air Force said that only by racing against time and hurrying up can we nurture opportunities in a crisis and start a new game amid changes.

Representative Wang Haidou from the Army said: “If you want to leapfrog in intelligent buildout, you must first master cutting-edge military technology and develop independent innovative products.”...

“We must have a few more ‘trump cards’.” ... In his view, the military information network is the key material basis to promote the development of the integration of mechanization, informatization and intelligence of our army, and to win the future intelligent warfare.

Representative Wang Xiaoxia, a professor at the Rocket Corps Non-Commissioned Officer School, said that to train new military talent, it is necessary to accelerate the formation of a new military talent training system that integrates the “trinity” of military academy education, military training, and military vocational education, and promotes both the coupling and in-depth development of military vocational education and actual combat.

China's Cyber Range Industry



Cyber.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyber.jpg>
 Attribution: Kai Stachowiak, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons

By Cindy Hurst
 OE Watch Commentary

Cyber ranges have become more popular over the past few years for providing hands-on experience in cybersecurity training within a controlled environment, according to a recent article posted on *Weixin*, a mobile-based, social media platform on China's domestic network. According to the article, military units, business enterprises, universities, and research institutes are working to build medium- and small-scale network offensive and defensive simulation environments. They have also been conducting preliminary research on the key technologies and core equipment needed to operate national-level cyber ranges.

The article explains that from 2012-2015, China researched and developed a series of cyber range practice systems. After 2016, China's cyber ranges began moving out of the military sectors and into scientific research institutes. Eventually, the private market began manufacturing cyber ranges and developing commercial cyber range products, with national ministries and commissions, such as the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Science and Technology, guiding the industry.

Some of the research centers and institutes that have been involved in researching and developing cyber ranges include the CAS Institute of Information Technology, Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing

cyber ranges. Military-based cyber ranges are focusing on extending cyber operations to include electronic warfare, cyber security operations, psychological operations, electromagnetic spectrum, military deception, and operational security. Commercial cyber ranges focus more on "unknown threat analysis, security situation awareness, training of security skills, and security offensive and defensive drills."

The author describes China as still researching and developing cyber ranges due to rapid changing and advancing technologies, which need to be incorporated into the cyber range. With new technologies in cyber being introduced and cyber's broad application, according to the article, new-technology cyber weapons for attack and defense on the future cyber battlefield are the current prevailing trend in the industry. As a result, being able to successfully integrate new technologies into a cyber range is the key to their overall success and competitiveness.

Source: Tao Song, "网空靶场：从炒作到现实-2020 (Cyber Range: From Media Hype to Reality-2020)," *Weixin* (a mobile-based, social media platform on China's domestic network), 14 January 2021. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zu2Je_A_x06k78tZrXyjbG

...From the perspective of R&D trend of military cyber ranges, the content of military cyber range construction focuses on the extension of cyber operations, including the comprehensive employment of EW, cyber security operations, psychological operations, electromagnetic spectrum, military deception, and operational security. Its range construction model and system focus on joint ranges, joint training, and exercises. From the perspective of R&D trend of commercial cyber ranges, the content of commercial cyber range construction focuses on unknown threat analysis, security situation awareness, training of security skills, and security offensive and defensive drills.

...Furthermore, with the continuous introduction of new technologies in cyber and its broader application, the prevailing trend is the use of new-technology cyber weapons for attack and defense on the future cyber battlefields. In a cyber range, how to keep integration with new technology is the key to realizing comprehensive capability for cyber ranges and to maintaining the ranges' own competitiveness.

“In a cyber range, how to keep integration with new technology is the key to realizing comprehensive capability for cyber ranges and to maintaining the ranges' own competitiveness.”

University of Posts and Telecommunications, National Industrial Information Security Development and Research Center, Sichuan University, and Pengcheng Laboratories. These, and others, according to the article, have constructed their own cyber ranges. The article explains that today China has a complete, initial supply chain for the

Vietnam Cautious in Response to Chinese Missiles Bases Near Border

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 4 February *thanhvien.vn*, the widely read Vietnamese-language pro-government publication focusing on social affairs, published the excerpted article regarding China's construction of a surface-to-air missile base in Guangxi province—only 20 km from the Vietnamese border. When asked to comment on this missile base, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman stated that Vietnam was still verifying information about the reports. The article nevertheless compared this issue with China's military presence in the South China Sea.

When dealing with competing claims in the South China Sea, the article noted that Vietnam appeals to peace, order, stability, and international legal treaties. The article further noted that Vietnam, the UK, Japan, and other powers oppose any unilateral actions to undermine the status quo in the South China Sea. Moreover, the British navy, according to the article, has announced plans to deploy an aircraft carrier to the South China Sea in response to China's actions. A subsequent 25 February Vietnamese-language article from



Chinese honor guard in column.

Source: Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen (USAF), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_honor_guard_in_column_070322-F-0193C-014.JPG, Attribution: CC x 2.0

the mainstream online newspaper *vietnamnet.vn* noted that Vietnam responded to an additional report about a second Chinese missile base being built in Yunnan Province, which also borders Guangxi and Vietnam. Like the missile base in Guangxi, Vietnam stated that the defense policies of all countries must contribute to peace, harmony, stability, development, and cooperation. Vietnam did not specifically name or criticize China, but rather proposed a response based on shared principles, again showing restraint and patience in its China policy.

“Vietnam supports the maintenance of peace, regional stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight, and adherence to the principle of upholding the law on the seas and oceans, in accordance with the provisions of international law.”

Source: “Xác minh thông tin Trung Quốc xây căn cứ tên lửa cách biên giới Việt Nam 20km (Verifying the information that China built a missile base 20km from the Vietnamese border),” *thanhvien.vn* (widely read pro-government Vietnamese language publication), 4 February 2021. <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/xac-minh-thong-tin-trung-quoc-xay-can-cu-ten-lua-cach-bien-gioi-viet-nam-20km-1338550.html>

Vietnam will verify that a surface-to-air missile base is being completed by China in Ninh Minh district in Guangxi province, China, about 20 kilometers from the Vietnamese border, according to a Foreign Ministry spokesman. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang answered many questions from the press about the South China Sea issue. Specifically, a reporter noted the ministers of Britain and Japan issued a joint statement on Tuesday expressing deep concerns about the situation of the East Sea, and opposed unilateral behavior to change the status quo; the UK also plans to deploy the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth to the Indo-Pacific region.

In response to a question, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang emphasized that Vietnam supports the maintenance of peace, regional stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight, and adherence to the principle of upholding the law on the seas and oceans, in accordance with the provisions of international law, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982).

In a previous request to provide information and comment on the current presence of some satellite images and some information showing that a surface-to-air missile base is being completed by China in Ninh Minh district in Guangxi province, China, about 20 kilometers from the border of Vietnam, Le Thi Thu Hang said she would verify the information as asked by the reporter.

Source: “Việt Nam lên tiếng việc Trung Quốc xây căn cứ tên lửa gần biên giới hai nước (Vietnam raises voice about China's construction of a missile base near the border of the two countries),” *vietnamnet.vn* (mainstream Vietnamese online newspaper), 25 February 2021. <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/chinh-tri/viet-nam-binh-luan-viec-trung-quoc-xay-can-cu-ten-lua-gan-bien-gioi-hai-nuoc-715518.html>

A reporter asked to clarify whether China may be building a land missile base, with the second in Yunnan province near the border with Vietnam. The Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang responded that Vietnam's point of view is that the defense policies of all countries need to make a positive and practical contribution to maintaining peace, stability, and harmony and further cooperation and development in the region and the world.

China's Growing Interest in Turkey and the Middle East

By Ihsan Gunduz
OE Watch Commentary

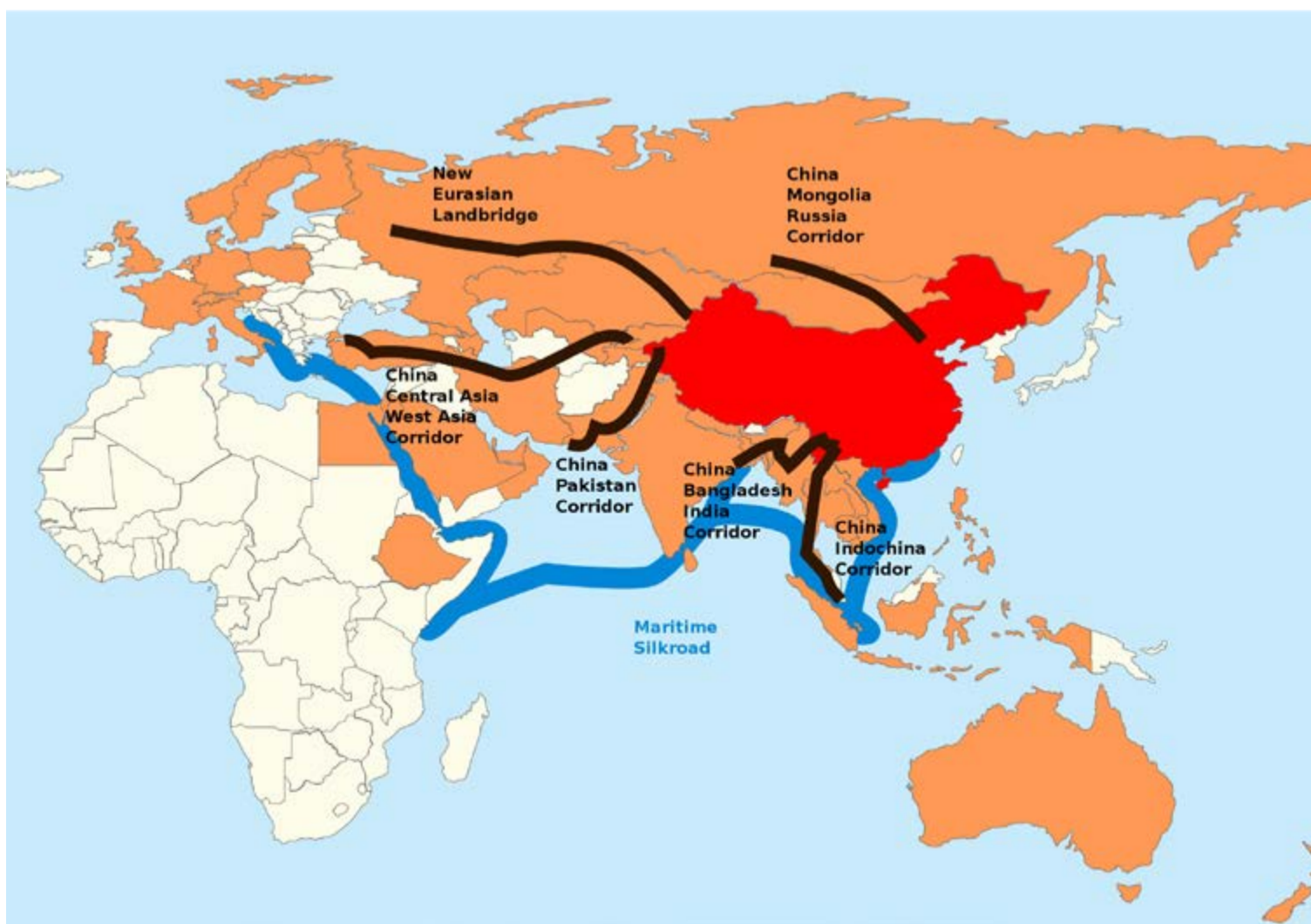
On 25 March 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held meetings with the Turkish President and Foreign Minister as part of his visit to several countries in the region. According to the first accompanying article by *al-Monitor*, a news site with analysts from the Middle East, China has shown increasing interest in the Middle East amid its growing rivalry with the United States. The visit occurring right after a tense first high-level meeting between China and the new U.S. Administration suggests it could be part of China's efforts to counter the United States' influence in the Middle East.

The author states that Wang's visit solidifies Turkey's importance in the Asia-Pacific power balance. Chinese and Turkish officials discussed importing the Chinese CoronaVac vaccine, enhancing trade volume, and cooperating under the framework of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. In this context, China sees Turkish cooperation as significant because Turkey links trade routes from China to Europe. Turkish officials hope that new trade routes will further boost the importance of Turkey in the region and in Beijing. The author notes that Wang and Turkish officials also discussed the peace process in Afghanistan. Recently, Russia and China proposed establishing a regional security dialogue platform to address security concerns in the region. As an extension of this, China will likely try to increase its profile in Afghanistan, and Turkey could be a significant partner there.

The second article from *Anadolu Ajansı*, Turkey's state-run news agency, states that this trip is an indicator that China is willing to play a larger role in the Middle East for a few reasons. First, China wants to ensure its energy supplies are secure as it purchases the biggest share of its oil from this region. Second, China wants to continue to improve its relations with the countries in the region to protect its trade interests and counter the United States. Third, China believes

“...Erdoğan's government appears bent on pursuing closer relations with Beijing amid its deep confidence gap with Turkey's traditional Western partners.”

a stronger Iran can help China counterbalance U.S. influence in the region, which explains why China is deepening its alignment with Iran. China's investment in Iran and desire to make Iran another link for OBOR, providing logistical connections to the Middle East, will benefit Turkey as well.



One Belt One Road.

Source: Lommes, via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:One-belt-one-road.svg>, Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0

Continued: China's Growing Interest in Turkey and the Middle East

Source: “Turkey, China assert rapprochement despite Uyghur protests, vaccine delay,” *al-Monitor* (a news site with analysts from the Middle East), 30 March 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/turkey-china-assert-rapprochement-despite-uyghur-protests-vaccine-delay>

...

From the broader optics of the US-China rivalry, Wang's visit confirms Turkey's role as an important player in the Asia-Pacific. Beijing feels the need to consolidate its relations with friendly countries to counter Washington's global campaign against China...

According to Cavusoglu,... the talks focused on ways to boost economic exchanges and cooperation against the coronavirus pandemic, including inoculation. Turkey was among the first countries to buy and use the Chinese CoronaVac vaccine, but the process has not been free of hitches.

...

China's cooperation with Turkey as part of OBOR projects is likely to have been a major topic in Wang's talks with Turkish officials. Turkey is of strategic significance for China's economic corridors to Europe as it lies on trade routes extending from western China to Central Asia, the Caspian and Europe, mirroring the ancient Silk Road.

Turkish-Chinese ties have in recent years extended also to financial cooperation...

Turkey hopes that the deal Russia brokered to end the Azeri-Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in November will also boost its prospects in trade with Central Asia and China. Among other terms, the deal calls for the reopening of some transport links in the region... The reopening of the routes, Turkey hopes, will boost its regional influence and significance in Beijing's eyes.

The peace process in Afghanistan was another topic on Wang's agenda in Ankara. China and Russia have recently proposed the creation of a regional “security dialogue platform” to address security concerns, including Afghanistan. Though the proposal is still premature, Turkey would be an indispensable partner in any effort by China to raise its profile in Afghanistan.

...

Erdoğan's government appears bent on pursuing closer relations with Beijing amid its deep confidence gap with Turkey's traditional Western partners. But managing the rapprochement is likely to grow more difficult for Ankara as China's rivalry with the West intensifies.

Source: Zaki Shaikh, “China looks at Middle East to counter US domination,” *Anadolu Ajansı* (Turkey's state-owned news agency), 26 March 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/opinion-china-looks-at-middle-east-to-counter-us-domination/2189387>

The coming months may witness China steering its pursuits and influence in the Middle East.

...Wang's trip has conveyed that China is willing to play a broader role in the Middle East.

China looks to prevent Iran's collapse as it believes that such an eventuality will disturb balance against the US in the region. China is also keen to prevent the US from inflicting severe damage to Iran...

Energy will continue to be at the core of China's relations with the Middle East. This factor reigns paramount among Beijing's geostrategic pursuits in and around the region...

So far, China's approach had generally been cautious in the Middle East and limited to ensure the supply of energy to safeguard its geo-economic interest, investments, and trade. Beijing believes that with an expansion in economic relations, countries' dependency on China will rise in defense and security spheres.

...

It may be in Turkey's interest that China now considers cooperation with Iran as a substantive part of its BRI agenda. The 25-year cooperation plan with Iran reflects that the Middle East is a strategic priority for China.

In the future, Turkey has much to gain if Iran serves well as a link providing logistical connections for energy transportation, commerce, trade, and tourism for its neighbors.

... [China's] objectives include making Iran a bridge to link South and West through Turkey and East and Central Europe via Central Asia.

Limits to China's Strategic Influence in the UAE and Saudi Arabia



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (Ecuador, October 2016).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_Foreign_Minister_Wang_Yi_visits_Ecuador,_October_2016.jpg, Attribution: CC 2.0

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Alongside the headline-grabbing strategic cooperation agreement with Iran, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent six-country Middle East trip showcased China's deepening energy supply cooperation and advanced technology collaboration with Arab countries. Energy cooperation is the key priority outlined in the Chinese government's 2016 "Arab Policy Paper," and China imports more oil from the Middle East than from any other part of the world. Saudi Arabia is China's top supplier, and the relationship seems set to continue: a few days before Wang's trip, as reported in the prominent English-language Saudi daily *Arab News*, the CEO of the Saudi oil company ARAMCO noted that the company's "highest priority" is ensuring China's energy needs "for the next 50 [years] and beyond."

Writing in the influential Qatari-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, a Jordanian expert on China mentions two factors that have stood in the way of a deeper relationship with Arab countries: China's association with the spread of COVID-19, and the government's treatments of its Muslim population. China's counternarrative on COVID-19, including its heavily publicized provision of supplies, equipment, and expertise to a majority of Arab countries, has helped improve its image vis-à-vis the pandemic. The latest and most substantial step in this regard, reported on by the UAE's official *Emirates News Agency* and announced during Wang's stopover in Abu Dhabi, is the official launch of a joint venture between China's Sinopharm CNBG and the Emirati tech company G42.

China's perspective on external criticism of how it treats its Muslim population, meanwhile, is summarized in the accompanying op-ed by its ambassador to Saudi Arabia, also published in *Arab News*. In it, Ambassador Chen Weiqing emphasizes Chinese opposition to interference in Saudi Arabia's internal affairs "under the pretext of so-called ideology and values." The leaders of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and most other Arab countries likely agree. Thus, the relationship remains transactional, and as the author of the *al-Araby al-Jadid* opinion piece argues, prevents the Chinese-Arab relationship from blossoming into the "civilizational association" that would pull Arabs out of their "civilized backwardness."

“...the long-standing and increasingly strong China-Saudi Arabia relationship has become more strategic...”

Source: "Saudi Aramco offers China partnership in energy transition," *Arab News* (prominent English-language Saudi daily), 23 March 2021. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1830541/business-economy>

Speaking at the 2021 China Development Forum, Aramco Chief Executive Officer Amin Nasser said: "Ensuring the continuing security of China's energy needs remains our highest priority – not just for the next five years but for the next 50 and beyond."

Source:

Samer Khair Ahmed, (The Chinese Threat to Arabs)," *al-Araby al-Jadid* (influential Qatari-aligned daily), 23 March 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/fsazwvy2>

الخطر الصيني على العرب

China does not help other countries unless they help themselves by investing in Chinese political and commercial needs. In other words, unless the Arabs have a strategic plan that puts pressure on China, China will continue its policy of paving the way for the sale of its products across the world, by controlling transportation routes, ports and global markets...

On the other hand, China's reputation has suffered greatly in the Arab region during the past two years, for two reasons, the second of which is the attribution of the emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus to China. The first and most important of them is the issue of Muslim Uighur nationalism in Xinjiang (northwest)...

China seems content to buy Arab oil and expand its markets in the Arab region. The Arabs are content with commercial revenues, while continuing their political alliance with the United States. It is a frustrating reality at the level of decision-makers, and the worst of all is that the image of China has been damaged in the Arab region, which means that an economic alliance with it will not, in the short term, be a popular Arab demand. In the end, this means Arabs will miss a new historical opportunity for a "civilizational association" with China, which could pull us out of the civilized backwardness in which we live...

Continued: Limits to China's Strategic Influence in the UAE and Saudi Arabia

Source: "UAE commences COVID-19 vaccine production with Hayat-Vax rollout," *Emirates News Agency* (official UAE news agency), 29 March 2021. <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302922579>

In a historic move in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Arab Emirates today announced the commencement of the manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccine in the country. The vaccine, called Hayat-Vax [Hayat means life in Arabic], is the first indigenous COVID-19 vaccine in the region that will be manufactured by a newly created joint venture between Sinopharm CNBG, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world that has supplied over 100 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine globally, and G42, the leading technology company based in Abu Dhabi.

Source: Chen Weiqing, "China, Saudi Arabia to cooperate in new ways," *Arab News* (prominent English-language Saudi daily), 25 March 2021. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1831976>

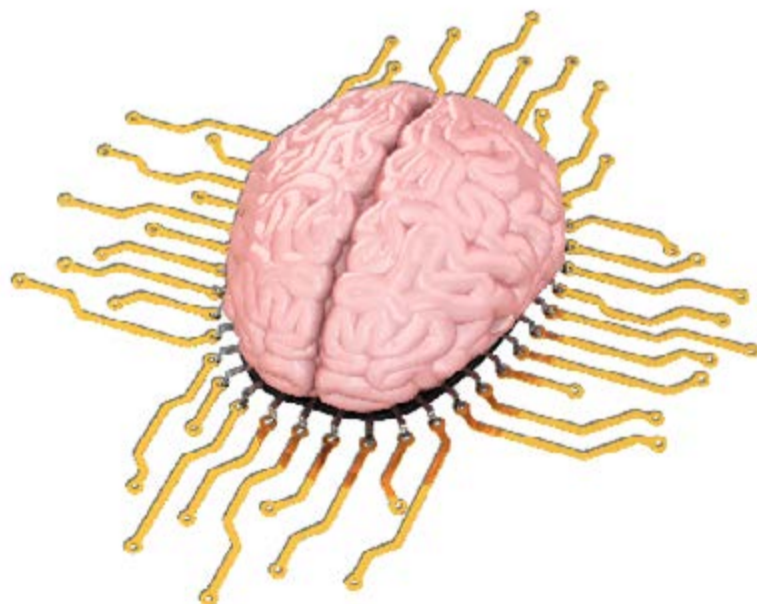
As China's comprehensive strategic relationship partner, developing relations with Saudi Arabia is the priority direction of China's Middle East policy. In the face of big changes unseen in a century and the new situation in the Middle East, the long-standing and increasingly strong China-Saudi Arabia relationship has become more strategic...

China supports Saudi Arabia in safeguarding its national sovereignty, security and stability, taking a development path that suits its own national conditions, and playing a greater role in international and regional affairs, while opposing interference in the Kingdom's internal affairs under the pretext of so-called ideology and values...

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

<https://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil/>

Mad Scientist Laboratory engages global innovators to report on the Operational Environment (OE), emergent disruptive technologies and their convergent impacts, and the changing character of warfare.

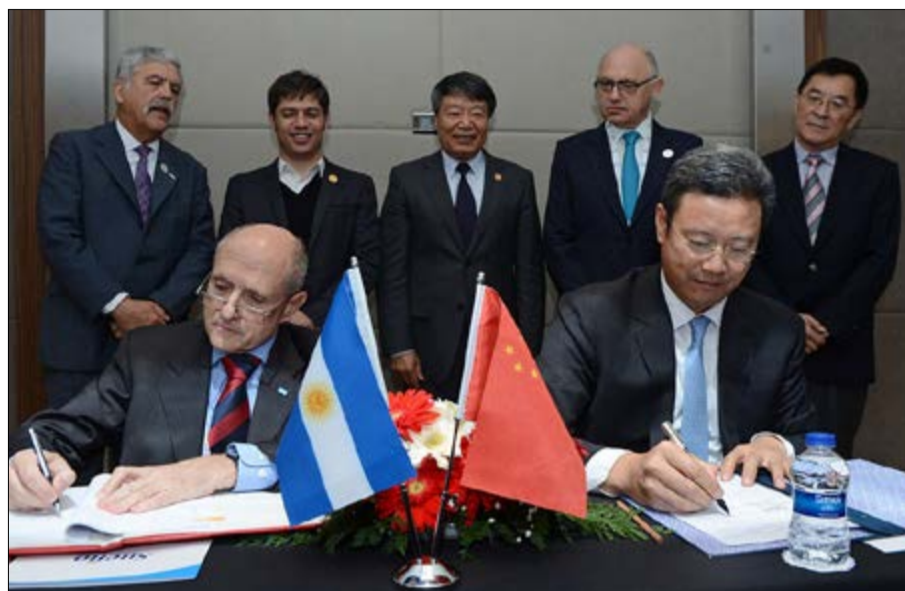


China Grows Its Political and Military Influence in Argentina

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China has expanded its influence, quietly and persistently, in a number of important domains in Argentina. According to reporting in *Tierra Pura*, a relatively new media site described as center-right politically, recent conversations between Argentina’s Defense Minister and the Chinese Ambassador broached the possibility of military equipment sales and manufacturing agreements, military exchanges, and the potential establishment of a Chinese military base in Patagonia. These discussions follow the controversial transfer of a space station with potential military applications in Neuquén (in the Patagonian desert) to the Chinese.

The possibility of greater Chinese maritime activity near Argentina’s shores generated immediate domestic backlash, notes *La Nueva*, a local Argentinian newspaper. Several civil society and environmental organizations petitioned Argentina’s Supreme Court to curtail Chinese fishing vessels in its territorial waters, which have often numbered in the several hundred at any given time. If China establishes airports, ports, and bases in Tierra del Fuego (Patagonia), as recent



Argentina and China have signed important agreements in a number of areas recently, ranging from construction to finance to military agreements.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Argentina_y_China_firman_contratos_para_construcci%C3%B3n_de_cuarta_y_quinta_central_nuclear_01.jpg, Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

conversations indicate it may, the People’s Liberation Army could control the strategic chokepoint of the Strait of Magellan, which is large enough to permit the transit of aircraft carriers between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

“The Argentine official and the Chinese diplomat addressed...the evaluation of possible military exchanges and peacekeeping missions, the development of the dock infrastructure and logistics services for the Ushuaia naval base, and the expansion of the Río Tercero Chemical Pole of Military Manufacturing.”

Source: “Influencia de China en Argentina: reunión con el Ministro de Defensa, base militar y capacitaciones (Chinese influence in Argentina: meeting with the Minister of Defense, military base and training),” *Tierra Pura* (a relatively new media site described as center-right politically), 4 March 2021. <https://tierrapura.org/2021/03/04/influencia-de-china-en-argentina-reunion-con-el-ministro-de-defensa-base-militar-y-capacitaciones/> <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2021/03/29/reforma-ministerial-as-trocas-de-bolsonaro-no-primeiro-escalao-do-governo-nesta-segunda.ghtml>

At that meeting, the Argentine official and the Chinese diplomat addressed various aspects related to the coronavirus pandemic and spoke about collaboration in cyber defense and Argentina’s interest in the purchase of JF-17 fighter jets and armored military vehicles... They also addressed the evaluation of possible military exchanges and peacekeeping missions, the development of the dock infrastructure and logistics services for the Ushuaia naval base, and the expansion of the Río Tercero Chemical Pole of Military Manufacturing.

Source: “Presentaron un amparo contra la pesca ilegal y depredadora en el sur (They filed an injunction against illegal and predatory fishing in the south),” *La Nueva* (an Argentina local newspaper based in the provincial city of Bahía Blanca), 10 April 2021. <https://www.lanueva.com/nota/2021-4-10-6-30-59-presentaron-un-amparo-contra-la-pesca-ilegal-y-depredadora-en-el-sur>

Several experts in marine resources, together with the Civil Association Observatory of the Right to the City, presented a “collective environmental protection” petition to the Supreme Court of the Nation to “stop illegal and predatory fishing” in the Argentine Exclusive Economic Zone and its adjacent areas...The lawsuit seeks to force the government to carry out actions to stop the serious environmental damage generated by the systematic activity of illegal and predatory fishing carried out for years by industrial fleets.



Uran-9 Unmanned Ground Vehicle.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Dress-rehearsal-2018-Moscow-VDay-Parade/i-PckBKsd/0/f9a51558/L/DressRehearsalMoscow6May2018-101-L.jpg>, Attribution: CC BY 4.0

“The Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Troops, Colonel General Vasiliy Tonkoshkurov, reported to Army General Sergey Shoygu that Russia’s army will soon form its first subunit with five Uran-9 robotic systems, or 20 machines.”

Russia to Field First Experimental Unit of Combat Robots

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, states that the Russian Federation will form its first experimental unit of unmanned ground vehicles. This unit will have four Uran-9 robotic systems, each consisting of five Uran-9 unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) and one control station mounted on a KAMAZ truck. In total the unit will have 20 UGVs and 4 control stations.

Although the Uran-9 has reportedly been field tested in combat during the Syria campaign, this is Russia’s first attempt at forming an experimental UGV unit. In the Russian Armed Forces, the use of new technology or tactics in experimental units is a normal step in the acquisition process before a given technology or tactic is adopted for serial production or regular use. At the end of the evaluation period, if this experimental UGV unit is considered successful, this endeavor could demonstrate that UGVs are not just a niche technology, but capable of functioning en masse to achieve military objectives in the Russian Armed Forces.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya*, a large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper, states the importance of robotics for the Russian Armed Forces. The article mentions that Defense Minister General Sergey Shoygu stated that equipping the Russian Armed Forces with military robotic systems has become a priority direction that will be expanded.

Source: Leonid Khayremdinov, “Робототехнический импульс для развития армии (A robotechnical impulse for the development of the Army),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* (newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense), 12 April 2021. <http://redstar.ru/robototekhnicheskij-impuls-dlya-razvitiya-armii/>

During his visit to the site he [Defense Minister General Sergey Shoygu] learned that the company has already made and is ready to hand over to the forces the latest batch of five strike robotic systems. Each system comprises one command post, installed on a KamAZ truck, and four machines. Delivery will take place in the very near future.

The Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Troops, Colonel General Vasiliy Tonkoshkurov, reported to Army General Sergey Shoygu that Russia’s army will soon form its first subunit with five Uran-9 robotic systems, or 20 machines. An experimental subunit is currently being set up at one of the Defense Ministry’s science and research centers to work out ways and means of deploying subunits with robotic systems. It will subsequently be used for training the personnel who will be operating Uran-9 robots in regular units....

Source: “Российские евреи поддержали предложение муфтия Гайнутдина о храмах всех вероисповеданий в парке Патриот (Russian Jews supported the proposal of Mufti Gainutdin about churches of all faiths in the Patriot Park),” ИА *IslamNews* (considered a mostly independent news source), 9 December 2020. <https://islamnews.ru/news-rossiyskie-evrei-podderzhali-predlozhenie-muftiya-gaynutdina-o-khramakh-vsekh-veroispovedaniy-v-parke-patriot>

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia supported the initiative of the head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation to build worship facilities of other faiths in the Patriot Park.... In Russia today there are good, warm relations between representatives of different religions and peoples. And it will be logical and correct that this fact will be reflected in the historical and museum complex.... This can be a good vaccination against the emergence of extremist and xenophobic sentiments.

Continued: Russia to Field First Experimental Unit of Combat Robots

“The Defense Minister [General Sergey Shoygu] stated that equipping the Army with military robot complexes has become one of the priority directions of the department’s work and it will expand the line of those systems.”

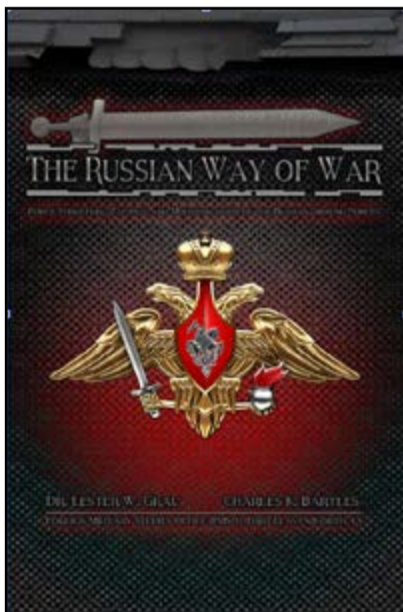
Source: Roman Krezul, Anton Lavrov, “Взошли на дрон: Минобороны наращивает производство боевых роботов (They have ascended to the drone: The Ministry of Defense is increasing the production of combat robots),” *Izvestiya* (large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 10 April 2021. <https://iz.ru/1149325/roman-kretcul-anton-lavrov/vzoshli-na-dron-minoborony-narashchivaet-proizvodstvo-boevykh-robotov>

...Ministry of Defense Head inspected the fulfillment of the State Defense Order for combat robots on Friday, 9 April. The Minister visited 766th Production and Fabrication Directorate (UPTK) and inspected the production and models of robot complexes of the “Uran” line. The “Uran-6” mine-clearing complex, the “Uran-14” firefighting robot, and also the “Uran-9” combat robot are among them. All of this equipment is already being delivered to the troops.

The Defense Minister stated that equipping the Army with military robot complexes has become one of the priority directions of the department’s work and it will expand the line of those systems. Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu during the inspection of the fulfillment of the State Defense Order at “766th Production and Fabrication Directorate (UPTK)” Joint Stock Company, where they are developing and manufacturing various types of robot complexes

“As expected, these will be heavy robots (mine-clearing - Izvestiya) and everything, which concerns the future development of reconnaissance complexes, radiation and chemical reconnaissance robots, and naval surface and submersible robots,” the Military Department Head reported. He ordered the increase of the protection of armored vehicles from the impact of hard electromagnetic interference and radiation. In particular, the engineers need to provide stable communications between the robot and the command and control post in any conditions...

“A large reserve in the production of military robots has been created in Russia, an entire line of ground-based machines has been created,” Vadim Kozyulin, the Diplomatic Academy’s Global Studies and Diplomatic Relations Center Chief, told Izvestiya. “It is important that there is high competition right now already not with foreign projects but of Russian developers amongst themselves. This always yields a good result. It is also that same situation with aircraft. Today Russia is one of three countries along with the US and China, which can provide the navigation of strategic unmanned aerial vehicles using space communications. The lag behind the leading countries in the military sphere on unmanned aerial vehicles began in the post-Soviet years. But the situation began to change several years ago, we overcame the lag in leaps and bounds, and are demonstrating a good rate in the development of new designs. They testify that we have preserved both the engineering schools and engineering cadres, who are prepared for new challenges both in the artificial intelligence sphere, in the cyber sphere, and in others...



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

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

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Poseidon Torpedo.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Посейдон_\(подводный_аппарат\)#/media/Файл:Status-6.jpg](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Посейдон_(подводный_аппарат)#/media/Файл:Status-6.jpg), Attribution: CC BY 4.0

Purpose Posited for Russia’s Poseidon Torpedo and Other “Superweapons”

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from *Naked Science*, a Russian website with science-themed articles, discusses Russian reasoning behind the Poseidon 2M39 nuclear-powered torpedo (sometimes referred to as ‘Status-6’), and other so-called “superweapons,” such as the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile, that Russia has been developing. According to *Naked Science*, the intent of these weapons is not to change the current strategic balance between the United States and Russia, but to maintain it. The author posits that the United States’ increasing missile defense capabilities could one

day nullify the threat of a Russian nuclear strike, thereby overcoming Russia’s main means of strategic deterrence. Since Russia’s economy is not capable of producing enough nuclear ballistic missiles to simply overwhelm these expected defenses, Russia must instead take a more novel approach. The author believes that weapons such as the 2M39 Poseidon are capable of circumventing future U.S. ballistic missile defense capabilities and are presumably a more affordable means of maintaining the current strategic balance.

“Even if the Poseidon’s strike is designed to radiate vast areas, it won’t last long. And in a year the areas “washed” by it will be absolutely safe. Yet, the new system will really change the strategic balance on the planet — but not in the way everyone thinks.”

Source: Alexander Berezin, Кобальтовый миф: почему Россия не будет травить планету «Посейдоном» (Cobalt myth: Why Russia won’t poison the planet with ‘Poseidon’), *Naked Science* (Russian website with science-themed articles), 31 March 2021, <https://naked-science.ru/article/tech/kobaltovyj-mif-pochemu-rossiya-ne-budet-travit-planetu-posejdonom>

For the Russian MoD’s perspective on its oceanic multipurpose system with unmanned underwater vehicles see <https://youtu.be/zrMdm13exWE>

The most sinister weapons project of all time and peoples is a thermonuclear torpedo designed to cause a nuclear strike and create an artificial tsunami. Never before has any state or entity declared an intention to do anything as dangerous to living things. Therefore, the Russian project “Poseidon”, which promises exactly that, is causing a storm of emotions. However, careful technical analysis shows that in reality it does not do those things, as they write about it in the media. Even if the Poseidon’s strike is designed to radiate vast areas, it won’t last long. And in a year the areas “washed” by it will be absolutely safe. Yet, the new system will really change the strategic balance on the planet — but not in the way everyone thinks.

Let’s try to understand the situation in more detail. In recent years, Russia has been trying to minimize the chances of a serious conflict with the United States. Hardly the only thing that can be done in practice is to guarantee that American missile defense will not give its country a false sense of security against a retaliatory Russian nuclear impact. As the industry observers from the United States have stated: “Today, American missile defense technologies are very mediocre, but on the part of Russian planners it would be careless to believe that it will forever stay that way.” We have already written that if the ‘Starship’ project is implemented, the US can deploy such ICBM defense systems that will make them capable to stop the bulk of Russian thermonuclear warheads. In such conditions, the question itself arises: how can the perspective US missile defense systems be bypassed? Building more Russian intercontinental missiles is going to be useless: it is too expensive. As modern Russian folklore says, “Doesn’t matter how much you feed the wolf, the elephant will still be thicker”: the US economy is much bigger than Russian, to maintain parity simply by building up production of missiles is extremely difficult. But there is another way - to bypass via technological advancement. Just like Tsirkon missile made the air defenses of American ships visibly obsolete, the thermonuclear torpedo Poseidon and a nuclear-powered cruise missile Burevestnik are designed to make obsolete the idea that there can be an effective defense against nuclear weapons by simply learning to shoot down ballistic missiles...

Russian National Guard Roles Still Evolving as of Fifth Anniversary

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

The Russian National Guard (RNG), which recently marked its fifth anniversary, was created largely to strengthen domestic security and has seen its mission and composition continue to evolve. The first brief excerpt from the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* describes the comments made by the RNG Director, General Viktor Zolotov, who “assessed the results of the activities of the Russian Guard over the past five years and spoke about the tasks of the department for the near future.”

After listing many accomplishments, Zolotov asserts that the RNG has “been entrusted with the authority to lead the United Group of Forces to conduct counter-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus region.” Interestingly, the RNG has not only been focused on improving domestic security but has also been widely employed in helping to stabilize the situation in Syria. According to Zolotov, “since 2018, on Syrian soil, soldiers of the National Guard have completed about 10,000 combat missions to control the situation in the region under the auspices of the military police forces of the Russian Ministry of Defense.” Combat missions were clarified as “activities to detect and neutralize explosive devices, ammunition and weapons, accompanying doctors, humanitarian supplies with water and food for the local population.” Zolotov also pointed out that the RNG has been charged with “strengthening the potential of troops as part of the special forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.”

The second excerpt from the official news agency *Interfax* points out that General Zolotov recently ordered the creation of “the Main Political Directorate (MPD) in the service, which will deal with the moral and political state of servicemen and employees.” A similar body was created within the Ministry of Defense in July 2018. Since the RNG serves as the linchpin in handling domestic protests, the

“Director of the Russian Guard Viktor Zolotov at the final board meeting said that by his order he created the Main Political Directorate (MPD) in the service, which will deal with the moral and political state of servicemen and employees....”

MPD will be charged with “ensuring a high level of moral, political and psychological state of servicemen and employees.” After five years, the RNG continues to expand its capabilities to handle both domestic and foreign operations while “strengthening and maintaining military and service discipline.”

Source: Alexander Boyko, “Виктор Золотов рассказал сколько задач выполнили его бойцы в Сирии, (Viktor Zolotov told how many tasks his fighters completed in Syria),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Popular daily), 24 March 2021. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27256/4386694/>

On the eve of the National Guard Day (celebrated on March 27), its director, General of the Army Viktor Zolotov, held an extended meeting of the final board with the leadership of the department.... Opening the meeting, General of the Army Viktor Zolotov assessed the results of the activities of the Russian Guard over the past five years and spoke about the tasks of the department for the near future....

“We are also entrusted with the authority to lead the United Group of Forces to conduct counter-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus region,” said the director of the Russian Guard....

...General of the Army Viktor Zolotov called the decision to carry out tasks in the Syrian Arab Republic by the forces of a specially created contingent of the National Guard troops as the most serious challenge of 2018.

“To date, since 2018, on Syrian soil, soldiers of the National Guard have completed about 10,000 combat missions to control the situation in the region under the auspices of the military police forces of the Russian Ministry of Defense,” the General of the Army said.

Earlier, the official representative of the department, Valery Gribakin, told reporters that Rosgvardia fighters in Syria are participating in activities to detect and neutralize explosive devices, ammunition and weapons, accompanying doctors, humanitarian supplies with water and food for the local population....

...Within the framework of international cooperation, Zolotov instructed to continue work on strengthening the potential of troops as part of the special forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, as well as to maintain a high level of performance of special tasks by the contingent of troops in Syria....

Source: “Золотов издал приказ о введении в Росгвардии замполитов (Zolotov issued an order on the introduction of political officers in the National Guard),” *Interfax* (Official news agency), 24 March 2021. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/757566>

Director of the Russian Guard Viktor Zolotov at the final board meeting said that by his order he created the Main Political Directorate (MPD) in the service, which will deal with the moral and political state of servicemen and employees....

...Political work in the troops of the National Guard will be a complex of campaigning and propaganda activities, psychological, cultural, leisure and other activities aimed at ensuring a high level of moral, political and psychological state of servicemen and employees, which is necessary for the successful fulfillment of the assigned tasks at strengthening and maintaining military and service discipline and law and order in the troops of the National Guard.

Russian Defense Official Articulates Kremlin’s “Mental War” Ideology



Andrei Ilnitsky.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrei_Ilnitsky.jpg Council.gov.ru
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By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

Defense against foreign attack remains a central component of the Kremlin’s current ideology. In this worldview, the West/United States is using every available tool to weaken Russia and prevent it from regaining superpower status. According to the brief excerpt from the state-run news agency *RIA Novosti*, Andrei Ilnitsky, an advisor to Defense Minister Shoigu, has determined that “the West, led by the United States, has unleashed a new type of war against Russia - a mental one.” While specifics are lacking, the objective of this new mental assault “is to destroy self-consciousness, change the mental - civilizational - basis of Russian society.” Furthermore, the article quotes President Putin who asserts that “a targeted information campaign against Russia’s achievements is being waged abroad,” designed to “ultimately weaken Russia and put it under external control.” To prevent dangerous ideas from infecting the minds of unsuspecting Russians, Ilnitsky recommends developing “sovereignty of the Internet, training personnel in information countermeasures, a reset of youth policy, and resuming an active and broad dialogue with the conservative majority.” While new technologies have greatly increased the flow of information, the Kremlin leadership appears increasingly determined to monitor, and perhaps block this flow, especially that info coming from the West.

“The West, led by the United States, has unleashed a new type of war against Russia - a mental one...”

Source: “В Минобороны заявили, что США начали против России ментальную войну (The Ministry of Defense said that the United States began a mental war against Russia),” *RIA Novosti* (Russian state-run news agency), 25 March 2021. <https://ria.ru/20210325/ssha-1602735487.html>

The West, led by the United States, has unleashed a new type of war against Russia - a mental one, the consequences of which will not appear immediately, Advisor to the Minister of Defense, an actual third-class state adviser, Andrei Ilnitsky, said in an interview with Arsenal Otechestvo magazine.

According to him, Western countries avoid direct military confrontation with Russia, since it is capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on them with its nuclear weapons and modern army, and the likelihood of such a conflict is excluded for the next ten years. Therefore, the adviser notes, the West under the leadership of the United States has unleashed an information-hybrid war against Russia.

“All this leads to the emergence of a new type of war. If in classical wars the goal is to destroy the enemy’s manpower, in modern cyber wars - to destroy the enemy’s infrastructure, then the goal of a new war is to destroy self-consciousness, change the mental - civilizational - basis of Russian society. I would call this the type of war as mental,” said Ilnitsky.

An adviser to the Minister of Defense listed the priority measures to counter mental warfare. In his opinion, this is the sovereignty of the Internet, training of personnel in information countermeasures in the power and civil spheres, a reset of youth policy, the resumption of an active and broad dialogue with the conservative majority - the supporting electorate of the current government.

President Vladimir Putin has previously stated that a targeted information campaign against Russia’s achievements is being waged abroad. The head of state added that Russia is facing a consistent and aggressive policy aimed at disrupting the country’s development and creating problems along its perimeter. As the president noted, this is being done to “ultimately weaken Russia and put it under external control.”

Three Russian Submarines Surface Simultaneously Near North Pole

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Russia continues to demonstrate an increased military and security commitment to the Arctic region. According to an article from *Zvezda Weekly*, a Russian Ministry of Defense publication, the Russian Navy recently completed the Umka-21 expedition. The Umka-21 expedition is billed as a joint expedition between the Russian Federation Navy and Russian Geographic Society. According to the article, the expedition pulled off a remarkable piece of underwater choreography as three strategic missile nuclear submarines simultaneously broke through 1.5 meters of polar ice and surfaced within 300 meters of each other. A Ministry of Defense video release captured the event. *The Independent Barents Observer*, an independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English, which is now blocked in Russia, concluded that the expedition was Russia's most complex military exercise in the Arctic to date. In addition to the headline grabbing submarine movements, the article claims there were a total of 43 unique components to the exercise, including air, air defense, and



The sail of one of the Delta-IV class ballistic missile submarines breaking through the ice.

Source: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/03/three-russian-nuclear-ballistic-missile-subs-broke-through-ice-north-pole>, Attribution: Screenshot from Russian Ministry of Defense video from Barents Sea Observer article

ground forces. The event also included a tactical exercise conducted by a unit of the Arctic motorized rifle brigade that was intended to challenge soldiers in difficult weather conditions and in unfamiliar terrain.

“Russia has appreciably increased its presence in the Arctic in recent years. New infrastructure is being erected, takeoff and landing strips are being rebuilt, and the dynamic deployment of air defense and missile defense men and equipment is also underway. So, the collective cruise of Russian submarines under the arctic ice fits into this trend. Russia is not only exploring the Arctic but is also prepared to stand up for its interests in the region.”

Source: “Ludmila Gundarova, “Umka-21-Showing the Andrew Flag with a subtle hint of missiles,” *Zvezda Weekly* (a Russian Ministry of Defense publication that is part of the Krasnaya Zvezda group of publications), 30 March 2021. <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/20213291639-EzNZP.html>

While discussing the unofficial results of the joint arctic expedition of the Russian Navy and the Russian Geographic Society, Vice-Admiral Anatoliy Shevchenko stated that the Russian nuclear submarines that surfaced near the North Pole graphically demonstrated that it is actually not that far to the United States of America. One can boldly state that these crews have circled the globe. On 26 March, three Russian nuclear submarines, having broken through 1.5 meter-thick ice, simultaneously surfaced in the high polar latitudes. After which, Navy Commander-in-Chief Nikolay Yevmenov promptly reported to Vladimir Putin on the accomplishment of the primary mission of the “Umka-21” Arctic Expedition.... A total of 600 military and civilian specialists participated in the polar military research event and 200 items of equipment were utilized.

Russia has appreciably increased its presence in the Arctic in recent years. New infrastructure is being erected, takeoff and landing strips are being rebuilt, and the dynamic deployment of air defense and missile defense men and equipment is also underway. So, the collective cruise of Russian submarines under the arctic ice fits into this trend. Russia is not only exploring the Arctic but is also prepared to stand up for its interests in the region. Vladimir Putin pointed out that the Russian submariners, who participated in the “Umka-21” Arctic Expedition, confirmed the “high combat capabilities of domestic weapons and their reliability during operations in extreme conditions”...

The fact that three nuclear submarine cruisers, surfaced through the polar ice at the same time at a distance of 300 meters from each other is a strong statement. But then, there have been even more complicated cruises under the arctic ice in the history of the domestic submarine fleet. But it was strictly prohibited to talk about them in the past...

But the most impressive thing is that Anatoliy Ivanovich Shevchenko was the captain of both of those submarines. Later, having transferred into the reserve as a vice-admiral, he developed the procedures for training nuclear submarine crews for the conduct of combat under the arctic ice. The Admiral's last duty station was the “Naval Academy” Training Center in Obninsk, where our most famous Arctic Submariner - the only one who has been at the North Pole three times and who conquered the pole of inaccessibility - trained missile submarine crews.

President Putin stated that the “Umka-21” Arctic Expedition has no precedent in history

Vice-Admiral Anatoliy Shevchenko stated: “We demonstrated that we have not forfeited the school of arctic cruises. This is not the first instance

Continued: Three Russian Submarines Surface Simultaneously Near North Pole

Source Continued: “Ludmila Gundarova, “Umka-21-Showing the Andrew Flag with a subtle hint of missiles,” *Zvezda Weekly* (a Russian Ministry of Defense publication that is part of the Krasnaya Zvezda group of publications), 30 March 2021. <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/20213291639-EzNZP.html>

when several ships have participated in these operations at the same time. We simply try to talk a bit less about this and to do our work. I recall how US President George Bush and behind him his National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice announced to the entire world that apparently the Russians “have steered clear of the Arctic”. But we undertook and fired missiles from the North Pole a couple of months later....Well, there’s your “have steered clear” and there’s your “forfeited the school of arctic cruises”...

It is customary for the Americans to shout to the entire world about how tough they are, but we are operating without any ado and with few words. We have a different nature, and we have different ethical standards. But if the mission has been assigned, we will accomplish it.

[Reporter Gundarova] “one can certainly consider the event in the Arctic ice of 26 March to be showing the flag. But didn’t we go overboard with the number of flags during the “Umka-21” Exercises - three at once? You certainly wanted to make a stronger impression on the Americans and, as they say, to bring to bear on their psyche?

[Shevchenko] Partners... The Americans call us enemies without any hesitation whatsoever, but why do we hesitate to call them that same thing? And they are worse than enemies, they are malefactors and hypocrites! They want to be better than others, higher than others, and, I think, they will never calm down. And only not everything is turning out for them. Something has turned out for us, but for the time being the crews are still at sea, and it is early to make definitive conclusions on the Arctic Expedition.

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Three nuclear ballistic missile subs surfaced simultaneously through the ice in complex Russian Arctic exercise,” *The Independent Barents Observer* (an independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English which is now blocked in Russia), 26 March 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/03/three-russian-nuclear-ballistic-missile-subs-broke-through-ice-north-pole>

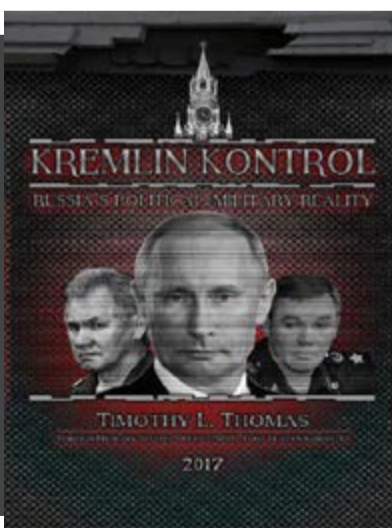
Exercise Umka-21 is Russia’s most complex military drill in the high Arctic, involving fighter jets, torpedo shootings and Arctic brigade soldiers training warfare on Franz Josef Land. “As part of the Arctic expedition, three nuclear-powered submarines surfaced from under the ice inside an area with a radius of 300 meters for the first time in the history of the Russian navy,” said Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov in a direct video-call with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

The three submarines, two Delta-IV class and one Borei class can carry up to 16 ballistic missiles each. It is assumed each missile can be armed with four to six nuclear individual warheads (up to 64 to 96 on each sub), bringing the total number of nuclear warheads surfacing in the high Arctic to more than 200.

Russia’s comprehensive Arctic military drill began on March 20th. “Under the leadership of the Headquarters of the Navy, the integrated Arctic expedition Umka-2021 is being conducted. For the first time, in accordance with a single concept and plan, complex combat training, research and practical measures of various directions is carried out in the circumpolar region.” Admiral Yevmenov stated in his video link to the President’s office. “A total of 43 events have taken place at Franz Josef Land and the nearby ice-covered waters in the frame of the exercise. Also, a tactical exercise was conducted for a unit of the Arctic motorized rifle brigade in difficult weather conditions, in unfamiliar terrain away from the main base.

The main base is located at Nagurskoye on the Aleksandra Island where Russia recently upgraded the airport with a 2,500-meter long runway capable of serving both fighter jets and larger military transport planes for year-round flights. Temperatures reached minus 25 to 30 degrees Celsius during the exercise and wind was up to 32 meters per second.

Simultaneously as the soldiers were training on the archipelago and the submarines were sailing under the ice-cap and shooting torpedoes, a pair of MiG-31 fighter jets were in the skies above the North Pole. The flight included mid-air refueling.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/ml/fmso-books/197266/download>

More Chechen Spetsnaz Training in the Arctic

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

The Russian Ministry of Defense has a close relationship with Chechen Spetsnaz, which has included Arctic parachute jumps, joint training, and riverine exercises. This special relationship now extends to the Russian National Guard (RNG), also known as Rosgvardia, a full-time professional military force that maintains internal security in Russia. According to the following excerpted articles from *The Independent Barents Observer*, an independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English, which is blocked in Russia, now the RNG are also training to recapture icebreakers from terrorists and have incorporated Chechen Spetsnaz in the effort. Not only are Chechen Spetsnaz involved in the operation but senior Chechen leaders are also overseeing Chechen participation. The articles point out that the regional RNG forces from which the Chechen Spetsnaz come are commanded by Chechen President

“The Russian National Guard is directly subordinated to the Russian President and the Arctic is one of its priority regions. In a meeting in January this year, the military service elaborated a set of consolidated proposals for its strengthened presence in the Arctic region.”

Ramzan Kadyrov’s first cousin Adam Delimkhanov. Kadyrov himself is quoted as saying, “The exercise in the Arctic zone plays an important role for Rosgvardia,” presumably meaning both the broader RNG and the North Caucasus regional Rosgvardia, of which the Chechens are a part.

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Chechen forces are back in the Arctic,” *The Independent Barents Observer* (privately owned internet newspaper covering Northern Norway and Russian economic and security news), 17 March 2021.
<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/03/chechens-are-back-arctic>

The Chechen forces are part of an exercise initiated by the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia). The training is taking place in the Taymyr area on the great Yenisei River near Dudinka. The exercise is reportedly headed by Daniil Martynov, the special adviser to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov on military issues. According to Kadyrov, members of the Chechen Spetsnaz University are taking part as instructors. “The exercise in the Arctic zone plays an important role for Rosgvardia,” Kadyrov stated emphasizing that new tactics, as well as new equipment, clothing and gear will be tested.

Daniil Martynov stated that several special purpose units are included in the exercise, including assault teams, paratroops and snow mobile groups. About 250 soldiers are engaged. Some of them will drive up to 700 kilometers on snowmobiles. It is not the first time that Chechen forces have engaged in Arctic training. In April 2016, a combat group of Chechen Spetsnaz trained at the North Pole. On their way north, they landed on the Norwegian Arctic archipelago of Svalbard. Chechen forces have also participated in National Guard training in Murmansk, as well as the far northern archipelago of Franz Josef Land.

The Russian National Guard is directly subordinated to the Russian President and the Arctic is one of its priority regions. In a meeting in January this year, the military service elaborated a set of consolidated proposals for its strengthened presence in the Arctic region.

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Militant Islamic fighters train counter-terrorism in Russian Arctic,” *The Independent Barents Observer* (privately owned internet newspaper covering Northern Norway and Russian economic and security news), 7 April 2021.
<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/04/jihadist-trains-anti-terror-russian-arctic>

“As-salamu alaykum,” stated Chechen Deputy Premier Vakhit Usmayev as he greeted the camera for a video recorded on the mighty Yenisei River near Dudinka in the Russian far north. The video records Spetsnaz from the Russian National Guard and instructors from the Chechen Spetsnaz University training in freezing temperatures down to minus 30. Usmayev ended his social media post with the words “Akhmat-Sila!” - a salute widely used in Chechnya to honor Akhmat Kadyrov, the Chechen strongman who was killed in 2004. He was the father of the current Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. “Akhmat-Sila” is normally combined with “Allah Akbar” (God is Great).

The Chechen training is taking place on the Taymyr Peninsula and started in mid-March.... This week, the training peaked with a counter-terrorism exercise onboard the icebreaking container vessel Nadezhda. Video footage shows the Chechens attacking with snowmobiles, special buggies and helicopters and subsequently taking control of the ship. The Nadezhda is one of several special ships shuttling to Dudinka as part of company Nornickel’s Arctic logistics shipping. It has top ice-class construction enabling it to sail up the icy Yenisei even in wintertime. The anti-terrorism exercise is conducted by the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya), and forces from several regions are participating. Rosgvardia leader Viktor Zolotov was present to observe the training.

The Arctic training continues with a several-hundred-kilometer expedition with snowmobile and buggies to Dikson... Chechen special forces have played a special role in the Russian National Guard ever since its establishment in 2016. They were actively involved in training in Murmansk in 2018 and a subsequent exercise in Franz Josef Land....

The regional Rosgvardia forces are headed by Adam Delimkhanov, a controversial former member of the State Duma, who repeatedly has been accused of grave human rights violations. The Arctic is a region of special attention for Rosgvardia. According to the service, it is responsible for the protection of three nuclear sites, seven nuclear-powered ships and nine seaports on the Northern Sea Route.

Turkey's Role in Russia-Ukraine Tensions

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

In the aftermath of the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, many discussed how Turkish drones and Turkey's military support to Azerbaijan brought about a decisive victory for Azerbaijan. With Russia amassing troops and weapons in the Donbas region, will Turkey do the same for Ukraine? According to Turkish expert Gönül Tol, the answer is no. In her commentary on *Medyascope*tv, an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube, she argues that Ukraine has high expectations about this, but it is unrealistic because eastern Ukraine is "a completely different story [for Russia]" than the southern Caucasus. Specifically, she claims that Russia views eastern Ukraine as an extension of itself, making this a much more existential issue for Russia compared to the southern Caucasus. She claims that Turkey is taking a big risk and that if it conducts its military cooperation with Ukraine in a threatening way for Russia, it can find itself in a real crisis with Russia.

However, others believe that Turkey is willing to take this risk. In the second accompanying passage, Turkish expert Amberin Zaman discusses the outcome of Ukrainian President Zelensky's visit with Turkish President Erdoğan on 10 April. In her piece in *al-Monitor*, an independent news website with analysts from the Middle East, she notes that the two presidents signed a 20-point declaration calling for "an end to the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, a former Ottoman dominion that is home to the Muslim Tatars, by the Russian Federation" and the "de-occupation" of the Donbas in Ukraine's east. She notes that Turkey also reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's membership in NATO. On this issue, she writes that Turkey's position is in lockstep with the United States and its NATO allies against Russia.



Map of Donbas.

Source: Rgloucester via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Donbass.png, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

“Ukraine’s expectations [from Turkey] are too high. Ukraine looks at what happened in the Caucasus, in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azeris won a huge military victory thanks to Turkish drones. So Ukraine wants to use the same Turkish drones and military cooperation to gain control of its separatist regions, and expects to win the same success against Russia, that Turkey helped Azerbaijan win. But this is not a realistic scenario.”

Source: “Transatlantik: Halkbank Davası, Ukrayna gerginliği ve Türkiye & Libya hükümetinin Ankara ziyareti (Transatlantic: The Halkbank Trial, tension in Ukraine and Turkey; Libya government’s Ankara visit),” *Medyascope.tv* (an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube), 12 April 2021. <https://medyascope.tv/2021/04/12/transatlantik-halkbank-davasi-ukrayna-gerginligi-ve-turkiye-libya-hukümetinin-ankara-ziyareti/>

Rusen Çakir: How does Turkey factor in to this [Russia-Ukraine] equation?... Turkey hosted the Ukrainian President recently... Isn't this a risky thing for Ankara?

...Ukraine’s expectations are too high. Ukraine looks at what happened in the Caucasus, in Nagorno-Karabakh-- Azeris won a huge military victory thanks to Turkish drones. So Ukraine wants to use the same Turkish drones and military cooperation to gain control of its separatist regions, and expects to win the same success against Russia, that Turkey helped Azerbaijan win. But this is not a realistic scenario. Why? in the southern Caucasus, Russia allowed Turkey some area of maneuver. But eastern Ukraine is a totally different story. Russia views eastern Ukraine as an extension of itself. So it’s a much more existential issue for Russia... Also, in Karabakh, Russia had some logistical problems since it doesn’t have a border with Armenia. But in Donbas, [Ukraine and Russia] share a border, Russia is amassing weapons and troops there.

So it’s a totally different context. I think in this crisis, it is very risky for Turkey to raise its voice too much, or conduct its military cooperation with Ukraine in a threatening way for Russia. It can lead to a real crisis with Russia.

Continued: Turkey's Role in Russia-Ukraine Tensions

Source: “Amberin Zaman, “Turkey, US in rare position of unity over Ukraine,” *al-Monitor* (an independent news site with analysts from the Middle East), 12 April 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkey-us-rare-position-unity-over-ukraine>

Turkey's relationship with the United States is on the rocks, and the most immediate cause is Ankara's refusal to get rid of its newly acquired, Russian-manufactured S-400 missiles that Washington says threaten NATO's security. Yet when it comes to Ukraine, Ankara and Washington are in perfect lockstep vis-a-vis Moscow as witnessed by the outcome of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's April 10 meeting in Istanbul with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

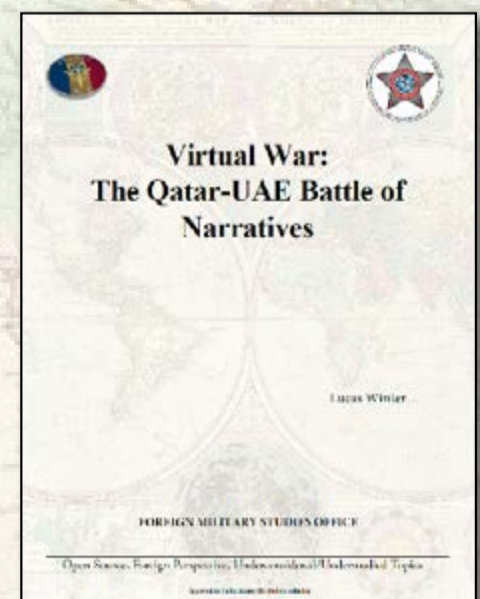
A 20-point declaration signed by the two presidents left no doubt as to Turkey's position. Notably, it called for an end to the “illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, a former Ottoman dominion that is home to the Muslim Tatars, by the Russian Federation” and the “de-occupation” of the Donbas in Ukraine's east, where Russian-backed Ukrainian separatists prevail. Turkey also reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's membership in NATO and “its intention to obtain a Membership Action Plan in the near future.”

VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter

May 2020

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



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/329799>

The Status of Russian-Uzbek Security Cooperation

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

When Shavkat Mirziyoyev became President of Uzbekistan following the death of Islam Karimov in 2016, the Russian government believed it had an opportunity to establish a better partnership with Uzbekistan after years of poor relations. Russian officials appear to have had some success in improving relations, including increasing the level of security cooperation, and the accompanying excerpted articles provide a look at how this continues to play out.

An article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a semi-independent news website in Russia, reports on the overall state of Uzbek-Russian relations. It notes how Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov, discussed preparations with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for the upcoming state visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Russia and how "more than 30 documents are planning to be signed, including a declaration on a comprehensive and strategic partnership between Russian and Uzbekistan." Uzbek forces have carried out a few joint military exercises with Russia after Mirziyoyev became president, but these were bilateral and not with multiple participants like Center-2019, which Uzbek military personnel merely observed. The Uzbek government, under Karimov and Mirziyoyev, has more often participated in bilateral security cooperation instead of organizations like the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.

“The Ministry of Defense of Russia views Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in Central Asia”

An article from *Kun.uz*, a news website in Uzbekistan, reports on a recent meeting between the Chiefs of the General Staff of Uzbekistan



Vladimir Putin had talks with President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent.

Source: Kremlin.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:State_visit_to_Uzbekistan_14.jpg, Attribution: CC BY YA 4.0

and Russia, Shukhrat Khalmukhamedov and Valery Gerasimov. The article mentions that the Russian Defense Ministry "views Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in Central Asia" and that Gerasimov "summed up the results of bilateral cooperation and proposed to outline prospects for further cooperation," though the article did not provide any more information on what that cooperation would or might include.

An article from the *Fergana Agency*, an independent news website reporting on Central Asia, and the second article from *Kun.uz*, report on a recent joint military exercise carried out by Uzbek forces with Turkey and another one with India. Both exercises worked out various tactical situations as part of ongoing bilateral security cooperation, similar to the exercises Uzbek units carried out with Russia. Overall, it appears that Russian officials have established a better security cooperation partnership with Uzbekistan over the past few years, but that for now it is not any different than Uzbekistan's other partnerships.

Source: Victoria Panfilova, "Москва укрепляет позиции в Центральной Азии (Moscow is strengthening its position in Central Asia)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (a semi-independent news website in Russia), 2 March 2021. https://www.ng.ru/cis/2021-03-02/5_8093_uzbekistan.html

The Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, discussed preparations with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for the upcoming state visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Russia. More than 30 documents are planning to be signed, including a declaration on a comprehensive and strategic partnership between Russian and Uzbekistan...

Uzbek military personnel were observers at operational-tactical exercises like Center-2019...

Source: "Новый начальник генштаба Узбекистана провел первую зарубежную встречу после назначения (The new Chief of the General Staff of Uzbekistan held the first foreign meeting after being appointed)," *Kun.uz* (a news website in Uzbekistan), 30 March 2021. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/03/30/novyuy-nachalnik-genshtaba-uzbekistana-provel-pervuyu-zarubejnyuyu-vstrechu-posle-naznacheniya>

A meeting between the Chiefs of the General Staff of Uzbekistan and Russia, Shukhrat Khalmukhamedov and Valery Gerasimov, took place yesterday in Moscow. They discussed prospects for Russian-Uzbek military cooperation...

The Ministry of Defense of Russia views Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in Central Asia...During the meeting (Gerasimov) summed up the results of bilateral cooperation and proposed to outline prospects for further cooperation...

Continued: The Status of Russian-Uzbek Security Cooperation

Source: “Ўзбекско-турецкие военные учения стартовали на полигоне «Термез», близ афганской границы (The Uzbek-Turkish military exercise has started at the “Termez” base near the Afghan border), *Fergana Agency* (an independent news website reporting on Central Asia), 23 March 2021. <https://fergana.agency/news/121830/>

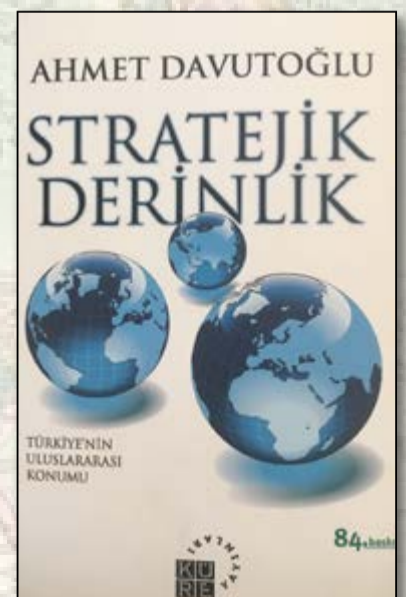
In Uzbekistan, at the Termez base near the border with Afghanistan, a military exercise with the special forces of Uzbekistan and Turkey has started... The exercise will continue until March 27, the soldiers will work out aspects of close combat, overcome a 15 kilometer complex, tactical course, conduct a live-fire and demonstrate survival in extreme conditions. The joint exercise is held based on the agreement of military cooperation signed between Uzbekistan and Turkey during the visit of Hulusi Akar in October of last year...

Source: “Ўзбекистан и Индия провели совместные военные учения (Uzbekistan and India carried out a joint exercise),” *Kun.uz* (a news website in Uzbekistan), 16 March 2021. <https://kun.uz/ru/news/2021/03/16/uzbekistan-i-indiya-proveli-sovmestnyye-voyennyie-ucheniya>

The Uzbek-Indian military exercise “Friendship-II” was held at the Chaubatiya training center, Ranikhet, India, the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan reports...Units in mixed formations, made of personnel from Uzbekistan and India, conducted practical exercises at the shooting range of the “Chaubatiya” training center and jungle areas...They performed a practical exercise to destroy the enemy in close quarters...

Book Review: A Look Back and Forward at Turkey’s “Strategic Depth” Foreign Policy Doctrine Karen Kaya February 2020

“Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)” is a Turkish book published in 2001. This was a time when international relations theorists were describing new frameworks of world order and security modalities following the end of the Cold War and bi-polar world. Works such as Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” and Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” were icons of this intellectual period. It was in this context of a changing international system that Turkish International Relations Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu (who later served as Foreign Minister between 2009-2014 and Prime Minister between 2014-2016) attempted to define Turkey’s position in his book “Strategic Depth.” From around 2002 to 2012, the foreign policy that Davutoğlu outlined in his book was considered the doctrine and roadmap for Turkish foreign policy.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/309386>



Titanium.

Source: Quds Online, <http://media.qudsonline.ir/d/2021/03/06/3/1031514.jpg>, Attribution: Quds Online

Iran Becoming a Titanium Producer

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

The Iranian government prides itself on its indigenous industry. For Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the issue is not only Iranian bragging rights but also security: The Iranian military was dependent upon foreign platforms but, against the backdrop of revolution and the hostage crisis, found itself cut-off from spare parts during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. Iranian policymakers swore in the war's wake that they would never again allow themselves to become dependent on outside powers.

Over the years, Iranian industrial ambitions increased and Iranian media frequently carry announcements of new capabilities, some real and many aspirational. In an excerpt from the *Islamic Republic News Agency*, the Iranian government's official news outlet, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran announces new breakthroughs in the production of titanium and titanium alloys.

Titanium has many uses. It is biocompatible and so useful for prostheses, orthopedic implants, and other artificial medical devices meant to be inserted into the human body. Its low weight and high strength also make it useful for automobiles, itself an important industry inside Iran. Its resistance to corrosion also makes titanium useful for industrial applications. While the Iranian government might emphasize these in its dealings with outside powers, the fact that the announcement of Iran's new titanium industry came from within the Atomic Energy Organization raises suspicions that its nuclear ambitions govern its titanium work. Titanium, after all, is an important component to store nuclear waste. Its heat resistance, low weight, and resistance to cracking also make it an important component in missiles and aircraft. At a minimum, the Atomic Energy Organization's role suggests that if titanium stocks are limited, then it will probably be allocated for nuclear or perhaps ballistic missile work.

“Titanium’s unique properties has placed titanium in the category of strategic metals”

Source: “Iran dar Zemara Keshavarzha-ye Tovalid Konand Filz Titanium Qarar Gefeft” (“Iran is Among the Countries Producing Titanium Metal”), *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 6 March 2021. <https://www.irna.ir/news/84254453>

According to a report from the Islamic Republic News Agency citing the General Directorate of Public Information at the Atomic Energy Organization [of Iran], with the efforts of the experts of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the first contract for the sale of medical grade titanium rebar was concluded with one of the largest companies producing orthopedic implants, and thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran is now one of the few countries in the world to produce the strategic titanium metal.

Prototypes of medical grade titanium ingots were produced by analysis in accordance with very meticulous medical standards and succeeded in passing various stages of quality control. The efforts and perseverance of these experts in achieving great goals are endless.

Extensive use of titanium metal and its alloys has grown tremendously over the last 50 years due to its unique properties, and this has placed titanium in the category of strategic metals. The great expansion of the titanium industry is due to its excellent mechanical properties because of its low density (55% iron density), its excellent resistance to corrosion, and its suitability for use in many industries such as aerospace and medicine. Pure titanium, grade 5 titanium, grade 5 medical titanium (or so-called grade 23), palladium alloy and grade 12 titanium are among the most widely used in this field.

Iran: The Revolutionary Guards' Role in Elections

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

While Iranian law charges the regular Iranian military, often called the Artesh (the Persian word for Army), with territorial defense, the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is broader. The IRGC's founding statutes charge it with defense of the revolution, meaning it combats enemies both foreign and domestic. It is against this backdrop that the *Holy Defense News Agency*, the official agency of the Iranian Defense Ministry, outlines the role and function of the IRGC in the forthcoming June 2021 presidential and local elections.

The excerpt is especially interesting because it illustrates the IRGC's self-perception of its role and purpose: Its primary reason to exist remains battling the influence of outside powers and the existing world order. This focus can be seen within official Iranian discourse, in which "arrogance" primarily refers to the United States. Support for the "oppressed" is the rationale for the IRGC's support for insurgencies and terrorist groups. The enumeration of the IRGC's principles also emphasizes its self-conception as representative of all elements of Iranian society. Fulfilling this goal remains elusive, however, in reality given the class differences that permeate Iranian society. While the IRGC is elite, it is traditionally more working class than intellectual or cosmopolitan. That it must aspire to be broad-based is a subtle acknowledgement both that it continues to fall short and that, in the eyes of some hardliners, those who fall outside its spectrum are somehow outcasts within proper Iranian society.

The IRGC's role in promoting "maximum and conscious

“The IRGC intervenes...in order to help realize the system's strategies in elections.”

participation" highlights the importance Iran continues to place on voter participation and its sensitivity to the notion that low participation would reflect a lack of popular legitimacy to the regime. How the IRGC will augment voter participation, however, is unclear.



Gholamhossein Gheibparvar, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' chief security official and commander of the Imam Ali Central Security Headquarters (above), has pledged that the Guards would secure Iran's forthcoming elections.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://farsi.iranbriefing.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1398120210102811119737154.jpg>

Traditionally, voter turnout is highest in Tehran. Often, the regime appears to sequester foreign journalists in the capital in order to prevent them from reporting low turnout in peripheral provinces such as Kordestan and Sistan va Balochistan. Within these provinces, security forces including the IRGC prohibit demonstrations. The government also seeks to tie voter participation to eligibility for civil service jobs, including teachers and road workers, and so often marks national ID cards to prove participation. During the Ahmadinejad era (2005-2013), the IRGC also fielded many of its own candidates from a tight network of both active duty and retirees. While the excerpt suggest that the IRGC will not intervene on behalf of any particular candidate, the Guardian Council's previous screening disqualifies any candidate with whom the IRGC would disagree. However, the excerpt's statement that the IRGC seek to help realize the Islamic system's strategies suggest that it will by direction of the Supreme Leader, massage the results if necessary.

Source: "Naqesh-e Mowsir-e Sepah dar Tashviq-e Mardam baraye Mosharakat dar Entikhabat" (The Effective Role of the IRGC in Encouraging People to Participate in the elections)," *Holy Defense News Agency* (official agency of the Iranian defense ministry), 31 March 2021. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/447547>

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are an institution born of the Islamic Revolution, and they have their own guidelines that direct the general policy of the IRGC's political behavior on various issues. Since we are facing presidential and municipality elections this year, it is not out of place to have a brief overview of some of the political principles of the IRGC:

One of the political principles of the IRGC is "anti-arrogance." This principle emphasizes the serious and continuous struggle against the ruling system of the world on the one hand and the support and defense of the oppressed on the other.... Another principle is "being popular." This means maintaining the popular support of the people by representing their interests and demands... Another principle is "maximum absorption and minimum repulsion" which means the IRGC must know all the groups in society and must attract the gray strata and even critics. But the principle relevant to elections and how the IRGC participates in the elections is the principle of "maximum and conscious participation." According to this principle, the IRGC must make a serious and comprehensive effort in its political behavior to achieve the maximum, conscious and purposeful presence of the people at the ballot box. Of course, this does not mean that the IRGC intervenes in the elections for the benefit or detriment of any particular group, but rather in order to help realize of the system's strategies in the elections.

Iran: Supreme Leader Speaks on What Makes a Good President

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

In June 2021 Iranians will head to the polls to elect a new president since Hassan Rouhani cannot constitutionally run for a third consecutive term. In the excerpted portion from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's annual Nowruz (Persian New Year) speech as per his personal website *Khamenei.ir*, Khamenei, himself a former president (1981-1989), highlights the attributes that he suggests Iranians should look for in a president. His words, of course, are not merely aspirational; they carry disproportionate weight because the Supreme Leader is Iran's most powerful figure and keeps his finger on the scale.

His commentary is interesting for a number of reasons. First, there is a certain irony to Khamenei preaching against corruption when he has used his political and religious career to become a billionaire several times over. Second, Khamenei's emphasis on religiosity should raise eyebrows because Khamenei seems to be conflating religious with a more hardline political doctrine that would seem to exclude the so-called reformists of years past. Khamenei's call for a "jihadi" outlook also fits into the Iranian self-conception of its revolution as ongoing rather than as running out of steam.

The forthcoming Iranian presidential elections in June and possible run-off elections in August will take additional importance because



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivers the annual Nowruz [New Year's] speech for Persian Year 1400.

Source: *Khamenei.ir*, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=47568#i/gallery/1/>, Attribution: *Khamenei.ir*

they will likely be the last presidential elections while Khamenei, already 81 years old, is alive. While the president is subordinate to the supreme leader, the incumbent president's influence will be enhanced during the vacuum of leadership Khamenei's death leaves. Hence, Khamenei's hints against a reformist president portends his efforts to ensure his own successor continues his own more hardline, less compromising posture.

“[The president] should be religious. If he were irreligious, it would not be possible to trust him.”

Source: “Sokhanrani Nowruzi Khatab beh Mellat-e Iran” (Nowruz Speech Given to the Iranian Nation).” *Khamenei.ir* (Supreme leader's personal website), 21 March 2021. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=47576>

The next point I direct to the masses of the people: I wish to mention the characteristics that an ideal president should have. You people should see if this is really the case. These characteristics are not my personal viewpoints. It seems that anyone looking for the welfare of the country wants such a president. Firstly, he should be competent. He should possess managerial qualities and competence. Secondly, he should be religious. If he were irreligious, it would not be possible to trust him. An irreligious person will sell the country and its interests and people. Therefore, he should be religious.

After that, he should be after justice and fight against corruption. This is one of the most important characteristics that a president should possess. He should pursue justice in the real sense of the word and want to fight against corruption in the true sense of the word. He should have a revolutionary and jihadi performance. One cannot work with a pretentious and ceremonial manner. With all the fundamental issues that exist in the country, there is a need for a jihadi and revolutionary performance. He should have such a performance. He should believe in domestic capabilities. Some individuals do not believe in domestic capabilities at all. They repeat the same cliché that inside the country, it is only possible to build clay ewers. However, they do not know what is happening inside the country. Once, a gentleman said something about our defensive capabilities. Then, I said that we should hold an exhibition so that such gentlemen come and see what is happening in the country in terms of defensive capabilities. Presidential candidates should be sure about the capabilities of the country. They should also believe in the youth. They should recognize the youth as the engine of the country's general movement and they should trust them. I have been in contact with youth since long ago and I have trusted them for years over different issues. In whichever area the youth enter – it is not necessary to mention which areas – they really untie difficult knots and solve the problems. So, the president should believe in the youth. He should also believe in the people and be an optimistic person. He should not be a hopeless and pessimistic person with a bitter and dark outlook towards the future. If there is such a person with the power to manage problems, he will surely help the country reach the ideal point.

You should find a president with such characteristics. Of course, it is not easy for all people to find such a person. Well, they can refer to others and ask for their opinion. In any case, they should try to find a candidate with such characteristics. We should ask God to help the Iranian nation find and elect a person with such characteristics.



Memorial for Samuel Paty.

Source: Thomas Bresson, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020-10-21_12-05-53_rassemblement-Belfort.jpg, Attribution: CC BY 4.0

France Teaming with Russia to Deport Purported Chechen Extremists

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

France is home to roughly 65,000 Chechens, Muslim refugees and immigrants from two wars with Russia—a very small number of whom have participated in jihadist actions at home and abroad. The grisly murder of high school teacher Samuel Paty in 2020, killed by a Chechen living in France, is a high-profile example. This and other incidents have put France’s relationship with its Chechen population on edge and led to a wave of deportations.

According to the excerpted article from *Novayagazeta*, a Moscow-based newspaper known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs, Chechen refugee Magomed Gadaev was recently deported from France to Russia. Gadaev was flown to Novy Urengoy, where he has family, and then handed over to Chechen authorities. He has since disappeared. The *Novayagazeta* article’s primary focus was Amnesty International’s plea to Russian authorities to protect Gadaev, citing “‘extreme concern’ for Gadaev’s life” since he had been a critic of the current Chechen government, as well as had been previously tortured and a witness to torture by Chechen security services.

According to Gadaev’s lawyer and other human rights advocates featured in an excerpted piece in *Euronews*, a France-based network focused on providing a European perspective, the deportation of Gadaev represents a gross violation of human rights. Moreover the article states that Gadaev isn’t the only one, claiming that recently at least 10 Chechens have been deported from France to Russia because of their alleged ties to radical Islam. The article also noted that the decision to send Gadaev back to Russia was done following a meeting between the French and Russian Foreign Ministers, suggesting that a possible informal and illegal arrangement may have been made.

Source: “Amnesty International обратилась к французским властям с требованием вернуть Гадаева во Францию из Чечни (Amnesty International calls on French authorities to return Gadaev to France from Chechnya),” *Novayagazeta.ru* (Moscow based newspaper known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs), 11 April 2021. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/04/11/amnesty-international-obratilas-k-frantsuzskim-vlastiam-v-trebovaniiem-vernut-gadaeva-vo-frantsiiu-iz-chechni>

The human rights organization Amnesty International has issued an emergency statement in connection with the deportation of Chechen refugee Magomed Gadaev from France to Russia.

Amnesty International’s statement cites “extreme concern” for Gadaev’s life and calls on the Russian authorities to “ensure [him] the right to life” and prevent him from being subjected to torture and “other inhuman or degrading treatment” and to ensure “His right to a fair trial.”

...
Amnesty International calls on the French authorities to “take all necessary measures” to ensure that Gadaev’s life is not in danger, that he is not tortured and that he is guaranteed the right to a fair trial. “The French authorities must also do everything possible to ensure the safe return of Mr. Gadaev to France and to provide him with international protection,” the human rights organization demanded.

...
The French branch of Amnesty also launched a social media campaign urging President Emmanuel Macron to send demands for Gadaev to return to France.

...
Gadaev is a board member of the Bart Marshaw organization and a member of the Assembly of European Chechens, which represents the interests of the diaspora. He previously fled Chechnya after being tortured in detention.

“[Amnesty International] “strongly condemns the expulsion by France to Russia of Mr. Magomed Gadaev”, which occurred “despite the existence of obvious fears for his life and safety, which is a flagrant violation of France’s international obligations prohibiting the expulsion of any person, regardless of circumstances, to a territory where it may be exposed to serious human rights violations”.”

Continued: France Teaming with Russia to Deport Purported Chechen Extremists

Source: “France Slammed for Deporting Chechen refugee to Russia despite risk of Torture,” *Euronews* (a France based news network focused on providing a European perspective), 15 April 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/15/france-slammed-for-deporting-chechen-refugee-to-russia-despite-risk-of-torture>

Gadaev was granted asylum in Poland before moving to France, where he became a witness in prominent torture cases involving Chechen security forces

... the decision to expel his client was made by the Ministry of the Interior as a consequence of rising stigma against migrants from the Caucasus, following the murder of teacher Samuel Paty in October last year by an 18-year-old Chechen.”

...

On April 10, Gadaev turned to the police in Novy Urengoy with a request to provide him with state protection. He was then handed over to Chechen security forces.

According to Memorial, a Russian human rights group, a criminal case was opened against Gadaev under Article 222 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation under a coat of illegal arms trafficking. Investigators said they found a cache of weapons.

...

Just three days after the terror attack [murder of Samuel Paty], Gadaev’s request was rejected because he posed a “potential threat to national security.”

About the same time, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin started security talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Kolokoltsev. According to media reports, those centered on the possibility of returning Russian illegal immigrants suspected of ties with radical Islamism and recorded in the so-called “S-File” (threat to state security) of French intelligence services.

...

“What kind of agreement was made? Was it just a verbal agreement? If not, the agreement should have been submitted for public discussion and taken under the control of Parliament,” said Jean-Francois Dubost, head of the “protection of populations” program at Amnesty International France.

...

The human rights activists added the case was based on so-called “white notes”—anonymous information about potentially dangerous individual compiled by intelligence services, which may contain unverified allegations.

...

According to Amnesty International, Gadaev is by no means an isolated case. In recent months, the NGO has become aware of at least ten Chechens deported under similar circumstances in France.

“... the decision to expel his client was made by the Ministry of the Interior as a consequence of rising stigma against migrants from the Caucasus, following the murder of teacher Samuel Paty in October last year by an 18-year-old Chechen.”

Western Mali Could Be Sahel's Next Terrorism Hotspot

By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

While much of the attention regarding terrorism in Mali is focused on the northern and central parts of the country, the western section of the embattled nation is seeing a troubling increase in terrorist activity. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African security policy think-tank the *Institute for Security Studies* explains, this region, with 77% of Mali's gold production, is an extremely rich target for such extremists. An additional concern is that the extremists exploiting vulnerabilities in Mali's gold mining industry could expand their activities into neighboring Guinea and Senegal.

Much of the gold mining in the Kayes Region, the westernmost part of the country, is artisanal. However, the government allocates gold-rich land to industrial mining companies instead of the local miners. Sometimes these miners are forcibly evicted. Additionally, artisanal miners are heavily dependent on illegal cross-border trafficking of mercury and cyanide. For these reasons the environment is ripe for terrorist groups to operate.

Another reason the Kayes Region is susceptible to terrorism is that most counterterrorism efforts, as well as development funds, are directed elsewhere in Mali. This leaves communities in the western part of the country feeling marginalized. While efforts to counter terrorism in the northern and central sections of the country remain important, as the article points out, the Kayes Region deserves additional attention because of its potential to fuel terrorist groups with more disenfranchised and disgruntled youths.



The Kayes Region in western Mali is seeing increasing terrorist activity.

Source: Syanarion based on work by Rarelibra/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Regions_of_Mali_2016.png, Attribution: Public Domain

“A flourishing gold mining economy in Kayes offers violent extremist groups an opportunity to expand their membership and reach.”

Source: “Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné and Nadia Adam, “West Africa: How Western Mali Could Become a Gold Mine for Terrorists,” *Institute for Security Studies* (a South African security policy think-tank), 1 April 2021. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-western-mali-could-become-a-gold-mine-for-terrorists>

A flourishing gold mining economy in Kayes offers violent extremist groups an opportunity to expand their membership and reach.

Earlier ISS research in the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region, straddling northern Burkina, southern Mali and western Niger, shows that groups operating in the Sahel are already tapping into gold mining. This helps them obtain the financial, logistical and operational resources needed to carry out attacks and sustain themselves. They do so partly by exploiting popular resentment, among other challenges, linked to government management of the mining sector. This enables them to recruit new members, gain communities' support, and expand their operational reach.

Regardless of government regulation efforts, most artisanal mining sites in the region continue to operate illegally. The sector is controlled by traditional leaders who aren't always fully aware of violent extremists' implantation strategies through the control of local resources. Communities in the Kayes region also feel neglected and marginalised. Despite the region's rich natural resources and the resulting income for the national economy, infrastructure is poor, and basic social services scarce. Successive governments have made little investment in roads, health, education and electricity supply.

ISIS Resurgence a Matter of Time in Al-Hawl



Al-Hol Camp, Syria, 17 October 2019.

Source: VOA via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VOA_in_Al-Hol_Camp,_Syria,_17_October_2019.jpg, Attribution: Public Domain

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

23 March 2021 marked the two-year anniversary of the Battle of Baghuz, in which Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with coalition support, expelled ISIS from its final population center (on the Syrian-Iraqi Euphrates border). Most of Baghuz's non-combatants ended up in the crowded al-Hawl refugee camp, a six-hour drive north from Baghuz. The camp presently houses over 60,000 refugees and internally displaced persons, mostly Syrian and Iraqi women and children, many of them the families of ISIS fighters. A string of near-

“...We carried out security operations on the ground, but the mentality in the camp is not gone...”

daily murders in March led the SDF to launch a security campaign that ultimately netted several ISIS leaders and operatives within the camp. As noted in the accompanying excerpt from the influential pan-Arab Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, they included two teenagers involved in ISIS's management of the camp, one a “communications expert” and the other a “security official.”

A recent report by a female correspondent from the widely viewed Saudi satellite news channel *al-Arabiya* caused a stir after young children in al-Hawl refused to respond to her entreaties that she was there to help. They instead called her an infidel, criticized her for not dressing appropriately, and eventually chased her out of the camp throwing rocks. Local and regional officials consistently describe the camp as a time-bomb and a bastion of ISIS influence. Local Kurdish officials emphasize that they are not receiving adequate assistance in managing al-Hawl. Moves to repatriate Iraqi nationals, who make up the vast majority of the camp's refugees, face political opposition and resistance from local communities, as the accompanying excerpt from the influential Qatar-aligned pan-Arab daily *al-Araby al-Jadid* details. Patience and steadfastness are key attributes in Salafi-jihadist thinking; in the case of al-Hawl, it would appear that time is on ISIS's side, as the uncomfortable status quo seems to suit the group just fine.

Source:

(The SDF Warns of Extremist Infiltration of al-Hawl Camp),” *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (influential pan-Arab Saudi daily), 4 April 2021.
<https://tinyurl.com/yzymmwr>

”قسد تحذّر من تسرب متطرفين من مخيم لهول

“We announce the end of the first phase of the humanitarian and security campaign, which lasted 5 continuous days,” said Ali Al-Hassan, the official spokesman for the Internal Security Forces of the [Kurdish] Autonomous Administration, during a press conference last Friday inside al-Hol camp. The security official revealed that the campaign led to the arrest of 125 members of ISIS sleeper cells... In addition, they arrested an ISIS communications expert named Mustafa Al-Khalaf, born in Mosul in 2003, and a security official, named Ali Al-Khalif, who was born in the Iraqi town of Al-Baaj in 2002. Al-Hassan confirmed that the detainees, Mustafa Al-Khalaf and Ali Khalif, entered al-Hol camp as minors and were among the Iraqi children who grew up in the camp, “but the Iraqi government and the international community abandoned their duties towards the camp's residents, especially Iraqi refugees, and they were affected by the ideology of the organization, becoming a time bomb that would explode, whether here or in Syria or anywhere else”...

Nuri Mahmoud, the official spokesman for the Kurdish People's Protection Units, revealed that the families of ISIS militants in the camp “have formed Hisbah committees and courts that have issued unfair laws and rulings. Since the beginning of the year, they have killed more than 47 people with weapons and sharp tools... The danger continues. We carried out security operations on the ground, but the mentality in the camp is not gone.”

Continued: ISIS Resurgence a Matter of Time in Al-Hawl

Source:

You are an infidel and we will kill you.’ How did the children of ISIS receive the al-Arabiya correspondent?” *al-Arabiya* (widely viewed Saudi satellite news channel), 21 March 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/yuacx65r>

”أنت كافرة وسنقتلك.. كيف استقبل أطفال داعش موفدة العربية؟

Al-Arabiya correspondent Rola Al-Khatib tried to approach the women in black to talk to them, but they refused even to answer her... And when the al-Arabiya correspondent told the children that she was there to help them, they quickly shot her down. One of them said: “My dear, first put on a hijab then come back... the hijab needs to be black... it is not like that, some other color, shame on you.” And when she asked what they would do if she did not wear the veil, one of them replied: “We will kill you ... We will kill you ... with weapons we count the infidels ... We will slaughter you.” The meeting did not come to an end here, but the children preferred to bid farewell to the unwanted visitor in their camp with stones, to ensure she would not try to visit them again.

Source:

(Baghdad Mobilizes to Retrieve Iraqis from al-Hawl Camp... at the Direction of the United States),” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (influential Qatari-aligned pan-Arab daily), 23 March 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/45tmtxej>

”بغداد تتحرك لاسترداد العراقيين من مخيم الهول... بإيعاز أميركي

This comes a few days after the statements of the Iraqi National Security Adviser, Qassem Al-Araji... warning about the presence of 20,000 Iraqi children inside the al-Hol camp, whom he considers “will become ISIS. And they pose a threat to Iraq and the region, if everyone does not unite to solve this problem that threatens the security of Iraq and the region”...

The director of the Zammar subdistrict of Nineveh Governorate, Ahmed Jaafar, revealed in press statements to Iraqi local media earlier that “the Iraqi government decided to stop plans to build a camp in the town of Zammar, northwest of Mosul, to transfer Iraqi families from the Syrian al-Hol camp to there, due to objections from local residents”...

A member of the “Rule of Law Coalition” led by former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, MP Gatah al-Rekabi, told al-Araby al-Jadid that they have “real concerns about the government’s behavior towards the al-Hol camp issue, as transferring them to Iraq poses real dangers and they are truly a time bomb.”

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<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

Al-Qaeda Possibly Misleading Members about Aymen al-Zawahiri's Status

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

The excerpted Arabic-language article in *akhbaralaan.net*, which is based in Dubai and covers Arab affairs, suggests al-Qaeda leader Aymen al-Zawahiri may be deceased. The article highlights al-Zawahiri's most recent video from 12 March, in which al-Zawahiri addressed the plight of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims. However, it noted that nothing that al-Zawahiri said indicated he was alive or occurred within the last two years, suggesting the video was, therefore, likely old and recycled.

In addition, the article noted the video featured al-Zawahiri for only five minutes and it was a still image of him broadcast over an audio speech. In fact, it was only the captions that referred to recent Myanmar's coup on 1 February, not al-Zawahiri himself, which he would have been expected to do if he was alive. Further, the video included no language such as "may God protect him" for a living person or "may God have mercy on him" for a deceased person, leaving ambiguities about al-Zawahiri's status. Moreover, al-Zawahiri's references to the United States' sanctioning the Aung San Suu Kyi's government in Myanmar related to events occurring around two years ago. All of this raised suspicions in the article that al-Qaeda was covering the fact that al-Zawahiri is no longer alive, which the Taliban had done for more than two years after its leader, Mullah Umar, died. According to the article, if lying about al-Zawahiri's death is supposed to maintain al-Qaeda supporters' morale, then al-Qaeda's inner circle must be "delusional" because once this secret becomes unraveled, it will embarrass al-Qaeda.

The article stated the last documented video of al-Zawahiri alive and referring to current events was released in September 2020. At



Hamid Mir interviewing Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri 2001.
Source: Hamid Mire, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hamid_Mir_interviewing_Osama_bin_Laden_and_Ayman_al-Zawahiri_2001.jpg, Attribution: CC x 3.0

that time, he mentioned a symposium in Manama, Bahrain in June 2019 and the United States' moving its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem in 2018. Thus, there is no corroboration that al-Zawahiri has been alive since 2019. If al-Zawahiri is deceased, the article mentions that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula leader Khalid Batarfi may be the highest ranking al-Qaeda member globally. Whoever becomes al-Qaeda's next leader will, according to the article, have to deal with the deaths of al-Qaeda senior commanders in Syria and other challenges from Yemen to West Africa. This will be no easy task, especially if, as the article presumes, al-Qaeda's reputation will be sullied by its covering up al-Zawahiri's death and deceiving supporters.

“If they think that they are raising the morale of the supporters of the [al-Qaeda] organization, then they are delusional.”

Source:

قيادة القاعدة المنسلخة عن الواقع تُخفق مجدداً في إثبات “حياة” الظواهري

(Al-Qaeda leadership, divorced from reality, is once again failing to prove Al-Zawahiri's "life")," *akhbaralaan.net* (Arabic-language news outlet based in Dubai covering Arab affairs), 13 March 2021. <https://www.akhbaralaan.net/news/world/2021/03/13/%d9%82%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%af%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%86%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%ae%d8%a9-%d8%b9%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%82%d8%b9-%d8%aa%d9%8f%d8%ae%d9%81%d9%82-%d9%85%d8%ac%d8%af%d8%af%d8%a7%d9%8b-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a5%d8%ab%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%ad%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b8%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%87%d8%b1%d9%8a>

The latest publication of as-Sahab Media Foundation did not bring anything new and did not answer the question of whether al-Zawahiri was alive or dead. The method indicates that the recording is old and recycled. The version broadcast by the as-Sahab Foundation on March 12, 2021 was titled: "The Rohingya Wound the Whole Nation". Of the twenty-one minutes of the video, al-Zawahiri spoke for only five minutes! He did not appear, but rather his voice was broadcast on a still image of him from an old recording.

It was a caption that referred to the recent coup in Myanmar that overthrew the government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021. Al-Zawahiri did not refer to any event that might indicate a recent time for recording his voice. Rather, he referred to "the democratic Myanmar government," which is the real government against which the coup took place. Al-Zawahiri did not refer to the coup and the return of the military.

Last September, As-Sahab broadcast a video by Al-Zawahiri, who mentioned events related to the date of Washington's moving of its embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018, and the holding of the Manama symposium in June 2019. Al-Qaeda leadership, which is divorced from reality, is once again failing to prove al-Zawahiri's "life." Dead or alive is not important. The most important thing is that al-Zawahiri's being alive or dead is no longer relevant in leading an organization mired in chaos from West Africa to Afghanistan. If they think that they are raising the morale of the supporters of the organization, then they are delusional.

Mozambique Militant Leaders Reveal Tactical Prowess in Palma

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 25 March, Mozambican insurgents loyal to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) invaded the town of Palma in northern Mozambique and killed civilians, soldiers, and several international employees of a liquefied natural gas site near the town. Only two weeks earlier, on 11 March, Portugal's most widely read Portuguese-language daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, which has a tendency towards populism and sensationalism, discussed the U.S. terrorist designation of the Mozambican insurgent leader, Abu Yasir Hassan. It noted his ISIS-loyal fighters had killed an estimated 1,200 civilians in Palma.

The excerpted 26 March for another Portuguese-language publication, *pinnacnews.net*, which covers northern Mozambican affairs and is written remotely by Mozambicans who have local contacts, further discussed Abu Yasir Hassan's fighters' attack on Palma. The article highlighted the tactical success of the insurgents in Mozambique, indicating they were under capable leadership. However, it did not specify whether Abu Yasir Hassan commanded this attack directly. According to the article, 100 insurgents attacked strategic locations in Palma from three different directions simultaneously. Further, the insurgents did not retreat after entering Palma, but stayed in Palma and even ate and prayed in the town. The article asserted that half of Palma was controlled by the insurgents, and another half that encompassed the liquefied natural gas site was being defended by the Mozambican armed forces.

Ultimately, however, as the politically neutral Lisbon-based *expresso.pt* reported on 1 April, the insurgents' capture of significant portions of Palma led to a humanitarian disaster and even the abandonment of the liquefied natural gas site. While the insurgents' leadership besides Abu Yasir Hassan is murky, their ability to consistently seize northern Mozambique's largest towns and even critical infrastructure has been unprecedented and caught Mozambique and the international community off guard. Although the *pinnacnews.net* article indicates that Mozambican soldiers stood their ground, it also states they became confused by the insurgents who were also wearing military uniforms. In addition, the article describes an unfolding chaotic situation as civilians attempted to flee Palma by boat and land amid heavy gunfire. The insurgents, therefore, appear to have tactically outmaneuvered the Mozambican army and, as all of the articles assert, they gained some level of control over Palma.



Palma, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. le 24 mars 2021.

Source: André Babtista, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palma,_Cabo_Delgado,_Mozambique._le_24_mars_2021.webp, Attribution: CC x 2.0

Source: “EUA designam ISIS-Moçambique como organização terrorista (USA Designates ISIS-Mozambique as a Terrorist Organization),” *pinnacnews.net*, 11 March 2021. <https://www.cmjornal.pt/mundo/detalhe/eua-designam-isis-mocambique-organizacao-terrorista>

There are dozens of civilians with decapitated or wounded bodies and at least twenty-one soldiers also killed in combat. Other civilians chose to sail away, without respecting the vessels' capacity limits, preferring the city of Pemba.

The largest local medical unit was abandoned by medical personnel and later assaulted by ISIS “Mozambique branch”. Palma's military barracks and government infrastructure were destroyed by heavy weapons. In tactical terms, all military personnel in Palma were instructed to remain in their positions and respond to moving targets. However, since insurgents wear the same military uniform, there are indications that there was confusion among troops to identify them.

The hunt for around 100 insurgents who entered attacking in three strategic directions in Palma simultaneously continues on the part of the military. However, there are times when the shooting by insurgents stops so they can pray or eat together. Palma is now divided into two parts, the residential area being 100% deserted and the location for gas prospecting dominated mainly by soldiers.

Source: “Moçambique. Mais de 9000 pessoas fugiram de Palma por causa de ataques jihadistas, estima a ONU (Mozambique. More than 9000 people fled Palma due to jihadist attacks, UN estimates),” *expresso.pt* (Lisbon-based politically neutral Portuguese-language news outlet), 2 April 2021. <https://expresso.pt/internacional/2021-04-02-Mocambique.-Mais-de-9000-pessoas-fugiram-de-Palma-por-causa-de-ataques-jihadistas-estima-a-ONU-6d702f37>

The terrorist attacks on populations in northern Mozambique had before the attack on Palma forced almost 670,000 people to flee, including 160,000 women, 19,000 of whom were pregnant, and adolescents. In Pemba, capital of Cabo Delgado Province, a reception center in the port and a sorting center in a sports hall were set up. Aid workers were distributing food to displaced people, setting up toilet facilities and treating people in need of more urgent medical care.

“The hunt for around 100 insurgents who entered attacking in three strategic directions in Palma simultaneously continues on the part of the military.”

Venezuela's Armed Forces Clash with Colombian Criminal Organizations for Control of Drug Trafficking

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Venezuela's armed forces have engaged in violent clashes with armed criminal groups along its border with Colombia. The criminal groups' sustained and indiscriminate attacks in the porous borderland have forcibly displaced thousands, according to *Infobae*, an Argentine outlet that leans slightly left and features excellent reporting from around the Americas. Dissident members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had previously sought refuge in Venezuela, at the invitation of President Nicolás Maduro, the article notes. According to *Semana*, one of Colombia's leading weeklies, generally viewed as center or center-left politically, the Venezuelan Army is selectively clearing out armed criminal groups; both the pattern and location of the armed force's operations indicate a preference for one faction of the FARC, headed by Colombian fugitives Jesús Santrich and Iván Márquez, over a competing faction led by Miguel Botache Santillana. For many years, Venezuela's armed forces have been accused of involvement with irregular armed groups and participation in a range of organized criminal activity. This development serves as further confirmation of the institution's enduring criminal ties, and their involvement in drug trafficking and other lucrative illicit economies ensures their loyalty to Maduro and is a major factor contributing to regime stability.



Dissident members of Colombia's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), which has found refuge for its operations in Venezuela.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/smoreno2007/2197940189>, Attribution: Silvia Andrea Moreno, Flickr

“The Venezuelan army is clearing certain territories to eliminate adversaries to the faction led by Jesús Santrich and Iván Márquez, with whom President Nicolás Maduro has shown some sympathy. In this sense, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) are not fighting in the same way all the residual groups of the old FARC guerrilla.”

Source: “Enfrentamiento en la frontera: ¿El ejército venezolano solamente combate ciertas disidencias de las FARC? (Confrontation on the border: Does the Venezuelan army only fight certain dissidents of the FARC?),” *Semana* (one of Colombia's leading weeklies, generally viewed as center or center-left politically), 22 March 2021. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/enfrentamiento-en-la-frontera-el-ejercito-venezolano-solamente-combate-ciertas-disidencias-de-las-farc/202105/>

The fighting this Sunday between the Venezuelan army and the illegal armed groups was concentrated in the camps led by aliases 'Arturo' and 'Farley,' for which some sectors have denounced that the armed forces have focused on fighting only some dissidents of the FARC. The Venezuelan army is clearing certain territories to eliminate adversaries to the faction led by Jesús Santrich and Iván Márquez, with whom President Nicolás Maduro has shown some sympathy. In this sense, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) is not fighting in the same way all the residual groups of the old FARC guerrilla.

Source: “Qué hay detrás de los ataques del régimen de Nicolás Maduro contra guerrilleros en la frontera entre Venezuela y Colombia (What is behind the attacks by the Nicolás Maduro regime against guerrillas on the border between Venezuela and Colombia),” *Infobae* (an Argentine outlet that leans slightly left politically with excellent reporting from around the Americas), 22 March 2021. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/03/22/que-hay-detras-de-los-ataques-del-regimen-de-nicolas-maduro-contra-guerrilleros-en-la-frontera-entre-venezuela-y-colombia/>

In what could be the most perverse use of the Venezuelan soldiers... led by Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López and operational strategic commander Remigio Ceballos Ichaso, it is not fighting the entire guerrilla, but only the FARC dissidents that did not want to subordinate themselves to Jesús Santrich.

A Perspective on Egypt-Greece Relations

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

In the views of two reputable Turkey experts, Greece and Egypt are forming a significant infrastructure, energy and security relationship, which is “changing the game in the Eastern Mediterranean.” While the prognosis could be overstated, the general description represents a regional perspective that sees potential for new multistate alignments. As the authors describe it, the enhanced Greece-Egypt relationship undergirds a set of economic and security alliances tying the Gulf States to Europe and Africa via railroads, roadways, electrical networks, and pipelines. In this new axis, Greece forms the European link while Egypt forms the African/Middle Eastern link. Both experts lament that Turkey is excluded from this network of relationships and isolated in the Eastern Mediterranean.

As the first accompanying passage by international relations professor Mitat Çelikpala discusses, Greece has been working to improve its military, political, and economic relations with Egypt, Israel, France and the United States. It has taken steps to expand the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum—which comprises Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians—to Africa and the Persian Gulf Region. For its part, Egypt has been expanding its relations within Africa, including a new railroad agreement to link the country with Sudan. The Gulf countries are also becoming linked to this network via various regional initiatives, such as the “Philia [Friendship] Forum” on 11 February, where Greece hosted Cyprus, France, Greece, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The seven countries issued a joint communique about their common objective of regional, peace, stability and stability; while the Greek Foreign Ministry declared the Forum as a “bridge” between Europe and the Middle East. According to Çelikpala, the Gulf countries are also involved in this new axis by financing the railroads and roadways as well as through multinational military exercises.



Map showing Egypt and Greece.

Source: Groubani at English Wikipedia, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Egypt_Greece_Locator.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

The second passage from an interview with Turkey expert Gönül Tol echoes many of the same points. In an interview discussing whether Turkey can break its isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean, Tol notes that there is very little that Turkey can do in the face of these deepening, expanding network of relationships. She points out that Greece has been signing a number of agreements with littoral states with the goal of becoming “Europe’s door to the Middle East and Africa.” Tol argues that Greece sees itself as a rising power in the Eastern Mediterranean and as a connector between the Middle East, Africa and Europe in terms of energy and transportation corridors as well as trade infrastructure.

“A new and comprehensive Europe-Africa trade route is being established, centered around Greece and Egypt.”

Continued: A Perspective on Egypt-Greece Relations

Source: Mitat Çelikpala, “Doğu Akdeniz’de oyun nasıl değişiyor? (How is the game in the Eastern Mediterranean changing?)” *FikirTuru.com* (IdeaTour- a new and independent idea platform in Turkish), 9 March 2021. <https://fikirturu.com/jeo-strateji/dogu-akdenizde-oyun-nasil-degisiyor/>

...Greece’s Move to Establish a Europe-Africa Trade Route

... It is being observed that Greece is increasing its political activities and cooperation initiatives [in the region]. One may remember that an anti-Turkey cooperation in the Eastern Med was formed on two main axes. The relations that both Greece and the Southern Cyprus Greek Administration formed with Israel, were merged with the signing of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in early 2020. Subsequently, this agreement turned into a seven-member organization based in Cairo, in September 2020. This structure, which received external support from the European Union and the US, is becoming more solidified with Greece’s improving military, political, and economic relations with Egypt, Israel, France and the US. Recently, it can be seen that Greece is taking concrete steps to expand this alliance to Africa and the Gulf.

By effectively using its cooperation with Egypt, Greece’s policy to become the third main route (after Italy and France) to connect Africa and the Middle East with Europe, has received support from its European partners. One of the concrete steps of this, was a meeting on 11 February called the Philia [Friendship] Forum, which took place with the participation of the Southern Cyprus Greek Administration, France, Greece, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The goal was to establish all kind of corridors (land, sea, electrical networks, pipelines) on the Greece-Egypt axis, by developing the already-increasing economic, trade and political ties between Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Arab world.

...A new and comprehensive Europe-Africa trade route is being established, centered around Greece and Egypt. Chinese companies are facilitating and accelerating this process, by becoming the managers of the main port routes in Egypt and Greece (particularly the Piraeus Harbor). It should be added that, with the departure of Omar al-Beshir in 2019, Egypt focused on its relations with Sudan, and an agreement was signed in October 2020 regarding a railroad route between Egypt and Sudan railroad, financed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

...

When we look at the trajectory of Turkey’s relations with Egypt, Israel and Greece, Ankara’s potential to re-make the game, given its lack of diplomatic initiatives, appears to be non-existent. The fact that Greece is taking the steps that Turkey should take (and doing so with the support of the EU and the US) is accelerating Turkey’s exclusion from the process. With the signing of bilateral or multi-lateral relations, regional relations are deepening with Ankara’s absence; and the anti-Turkey front is expanding and strengthening with economic and trade relations.

Source: “Transatlantik: İsrail, Mısır, Suudi Arabistan ve BAE ile ilişkilerde normalleşme mümkün mü? (Transatlantic: Is normalization in relations with Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE possible?)” *Medyascope.tv* (an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube), 15 March 2021. <https://medyascope.tv/2021/03/15/transatlantik-israil-misir-suudi-arabistan-ve-bae-ile-iliskilerde-normallesme-mumkun-mu/>

...Turkey wants to normalize its relations with Egypt because it is isolated in the Eastern Mediterranean. And it is trying to undermine all the agreements that Greece has been entering with littoral states in the Eastern Mediterranean. But I don’t believe it can do that. Because even if Turkey normalized its relations with Egypt, the odds of Turkey getting what it wants from Egypt seems very difficult to me. Egypt has had an ongoing cooperation with Greece, Israel and Cyprus for a while, not just in the Eastern Med, or just in energy, but also in defense. There are many things that bring these countries together in a much bigger picture. And in this picture, Egypt places great importance on its relations with Greece, in terms of trade, diplomacy and defense.

And when you look at it from Greece’s perspective, its relations with Egypt are part of a much bigger strategy: to be Europe’s door to the Middle East and Africa. The relations it has been developing with the Middle East are part of this strategy. So, it sees itself as a rising power in the Eastern Med and as a connector between the Middle East, Africa and Europe in terms of energy corridors, transportation corridors and trade infrastructure...

Bolsonaro Shuffles Cabinet and Fires Heads of Brazil's Armed Forces

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro recently removed six cabinet ministers in a single day, followed by the commanders of the army, air force, and navy the next day, according to *O Globo*, one of the country's top media outlets, generally considered to be conservative in its political leaning. Many of President Bolsonaro's selected replacements are seen as more closely aligned with him politically. The resignations and cabinet firings occur as Brazil has been buffeted by the coronavirus pandemic, and the *O Globo* article notes that rapid turnover at the ministerial level has engendered concern about the stability of Bolsonaro's government. Further, this move follows a period of tension between Bolsonaro and Brazil's armed forces, reports *Veja*, a leading weekly news magazine in Brazil generally described as center-right politically. In recent months, Bolsonaro has referred to the armed forces as "my army" and sought to politicize them, according to the analysis offered in the *Veja* article. The cabinet resignations and removal of commanders could affect readiness and morale, which in turn could affect the performance of the armed forces in some of their most important duties related to internal and external security. Further, the politicization of the armed forces, or any



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro participates in a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/arlingtonnatl/47376392692>, Attribution: Elizabeth Fraser, Flickr

move seen as potentially having such effect, is particularly sensitive in Brazil, which lived under a military dictatorship from 1965-1985. Consequently, Brazil's armed forces strongly guard their political independence, which they reasserted in a statement after Bolsonaro's cabinet shuffle and move to install new commanders.

“Whoever thinks that this law will be a magic formula that will reduce crime and homicides is being too optimistic...experts say that Mexico's only realistic possibility of confronting the cartels is through capable police institutions, which the country has failed to build.”

Source: “Bolsonaro faz aceno ao Centrão e busca maior influência nos quartéis com reforma ministerial (Bolsonaro nods to the ‘Big Center’ coalition and seeks greater influence in the barracks with ministerial reform),” *O Globo* (one of the country's top media outlets, generally considered to be conservative in its political leaning), 29 March 2021. <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2021/03/29/reforma-ministerial-as-trocas-de-bolsonaro-no-primeiro-escalao-do-governo-nesta-segunda.ghtml>

Authorities hope that Mexico's legalization for recreational use will increase competition, lower prices and reduce the black market for drug gangs. Some 200 organized crime groups operate in Mexico, where around 270,000 people have been killed since 2006... Whoever thinks that this law will be a magic formul President Jair Bolsonaro made the largest series of exchanges in a single day since the beginning of his government: six ministers left their positions. The changes affected: the Ministry of Defense; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Justice; the Civil House; the Federal Attorney General; and, the Government Secretary. At least two of these moves have a clear purpose: a nod to the central political coalition and an attempt to increase his support among the armed forces. a that will reduce crime and homicides is being too optimistic...experts say that Mexico's only realistic possibility of confronting the cartels is through capable police institutions, which the country has failed to build.

Source: “Manobra diversionista: as tensões entre Bolsonaro e os militares (Diversionary maneuver: tensions between Bolsonaro and the military),” *Veja* (a leading weekly news magazine in Brazil generally described as center-right politically), 7 April 2021. <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/os-bastidores-da-crise-de-bolsonaro-com-os-militares/>

Convinced that there is a campaign to take him out of power, Bolsonaro fired General Fernando Azevedo e Silva, who headed the Ministry of Defense, and the military commanders because he considered that they refused to support him, for example, in the clash with state governors over the adoption of pandemic lockdown measures. [Bolsonaro] hoped that the Army would be loyal and serve as a persuasive weapon in the political dispute. He used the presidential pen to reform the team in order to make it more aligned with his objectives.

Though Protesters Push for Change, Central African Presidents Won't Leave



By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

President Idriss Déby of Chad, in power since 1990 despite a number of rebellions against his rule, has died, purportedly while fighting rebels in the country's north and just hours after winning his sixth term in office. Though the excerpted accompanying article from *African Arguments*, a nonpartisan pan-African platform for news, was written shortly before the election, the predictions that he would win were overwhelming, in no small part thanks to his often brutal suppression of the democratic process.

However, while Déby is gone, several long-term rulers remain in Central Africa. Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang and Cameroon's Paul Biya have been in power for 42 and 39 years respectively, while Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of the Congo has ruled for 36 years over two periods. One could say Ali Bongo has only been president of Gabon for 12 years, but that would be overlooking his father who served for 42 years before him, causing some to refer to the duo as a dynasty. On a similar note, Deby's son, Mahamat Kaka, was named Chad's interim president.

As the article explains, many people across Central Africa are pushing back, often at great personal risk, against several of these long-term rulers. Besides disgust at their political disenfranchisement, domestic crises such as rising inequality and steep inflation are also fueling anger at corrupt ruling elites. These oppressed citizens are perhaps heartened that while difficult, it is possible to rid a country of a ruler who has long overstayed his time in office, as evidenced by the successful uprising of the Sudanese people to end Omar al-Bashir's 30-year reign. It is, however, too early to tell if such change will also come to the seemingly never-ending regimes of Central Africa, which have provided a modicum of stability for decades, even if through oppression. Additionally, several of these regimes have been important in the fight against Islamic terrorists. Thus, it is worrying to some in the international community as to what might happen should challenges to these entrenched rulers actually succeed.

Teodoro Obiang, President of Equatorial Guinea since 1979, is one of several long-term Central African rulers.

Source: Amanada Lucidon/Flickr/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teodoro_Obiang_Nguema_Mbasogo_at_the_White_House_in_2014.jpg, Attribution: Public domain

“Central Africa boasts many of the world’s longest-standing authoritarian rulers. But protests are growing.”

Source: David Kode, “Chad elections: President Déby seeks a sixth term in a region for old men,” *African Argument* (an unbiased pan-African platform for news), 7 April 2021. <https://africanarguments.org/2021/04/chad-elections-president-deby-seeks-a-sixth-term-in-a-region-for-old-men/>

Central Africa boasts many of the world’s longest-standing authoritarian rulers. But protests are growing.

Amid this increasingly unequal playing field, Chad’s main opposition leader, Saleh Kebzabo, quit the presidential race in early-March. His decision came shortly after two people were killed as security forces tried to arrest his fellow opposition leader Yaya Dillo.

This determination to cling onto power, along with the brutal treatment of opponents, is consistent with the broader picture in Central Africa. Throughout this region, politics has been militarised and electoral periods are characterised by violence and instability. Authorities target anyone who speaks out – from human rights organisations and the political opposition to trade unions – and presidents maintain a tight grip on power.

To support these movements and help reverse Central Africa’s authoritarian trend, regional and international civil society organisations should start building networks across the region. They should bolster groups that work on the ground to encourage people and governments to move towards democracy. At the same time, they should demand that foreign governments look beyond their own narrow strategic interests and recognise the impact of the militarisation of politics and the use of violence against civil society, the media and opposition.

Armenia Developing Additional Security Cooperation Partners



Harutiunyan at the Armenian Independence Day military parade on 1999.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vagharshak_Harutiunyan#/media/File:%D5%8E%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B7%D5%A1%D5%AF_%D5%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6_1999%D5%A9.jpg, Attribution: CC BY SA 4.0

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Even before the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War took place, Armenian officials stated that the country was looking for additional security cooperation partnerships (see: “Armenia Looks for Alternative Partners in Security Cooperation,” *OE Watch*, March 2017). While this was not necessarily an effort to reduce security cooperation with Russia, Armenia’s main partner, it has been an effort to boost the capabilities of the Armenian armed forces in other ways. The accompanying excerpted articles report on a couple of these security cooperation partnerships that the Armenian government is developing.

The article from *News.am*, an independent news website in Armenia, reports on the Armenian government’s trilateral cooperation with Greece and Cyprus and how the Armenian foreign minister claims it is not “against a third party,” presumably a reference to Turkey, their shared traditional regional threat. The foreign minister also mentions “Armenia should develop a pragmatic approach in constructing its

foreign policy, considering security threats in the region.” The article from *Arm Info*, an independent news agency based in Armenia, reports on the trilateral partnership from last year before the pandemic. It notes how the three defense ministries signed “the Trilateral Action Plan for 2020” and that the plan included “a dozen events in Armenia, Greece and Cyprus, involving training programs and military-political consultations in various fields.” A number of these events in 2020 were cancelled because of the pandemic, in addition to Armenia’s involvement in the Nagorno Karabakh War, but it appears that Armenian officials will continue to develop this trilateral relationship.

The article from the *Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia* reports on the recent visit of the Defense Minister of Iraq to Armenia. The article says the two sides “signed an agreement of intent on cooperation in defense [that] outlined 13 areas of cooperation and mutual interest.” While this arrangement with Iraq appears to be in an early stage, it stands as another noteworthy partner for Armenia going forward—particularly given the level of military aid that Iraq receives from the United States.

Lastly, the article from *Eurasia Daily*, an independent news website, reports on a recent conversation between the defense ministers of Armenia and Russia. Part of the conversation focused on “security measures being carried out by joint forces in the Syunik border region,” which has been an issue for Armenia since the war ended last November. The article also notes how officials “looked at the direction of the large-scale reforms being carried out in the Armenian army” and that some officials believe it is not “possible to restore combat effectiveness of the Armenian army to pre-war levels without Russian help.” As the Armenian government continues to look at ways to reform its armed forces following the 2020 war (see: “Armenian

“The development of relations with Greece and Cyprus remains on the agenda of Armenia’s diplomacy, but Yerevan is not building its foreign policy against a third party”

Assessments of the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War,” *OE Watch*, February 2021), these partnerships could provide a good indication of what capabilities it is looking to develop.

Source: “Глава МИД: Армения намерена развивать трехсторонний формат сотрудничества с Грецией и Кипром (Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Armenia intends to develop the trilateral format of cooperation with Greece and Cyprus),” *News.am* (independent news website in Armenia), 29 March 2021. <https://news.am/rus/news/636244.html>

The development of relations with Greece and Cyprus remains on the agenda of Armenia’s diplomacy, but Yerevan is not building its foreign policy against a third party. This was stated by the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ara Ayyvazyan, at the National Assembly of Armenia... “Armenia should develop a pragmatic approach in constructing its foreign policy, considering security threats in the region...” the minister said...

Continued: Armenia Developing Additional Security Cooperation Partners

Source: Marianna Mkrtchyan, “Армения, Греция и Кипр подписали трехсторонний оборонный план действий на 2020 год (Armenia, Greece and Cyprus signed a trilateral defense plan of action for 2020),” *Arm Info* (an independent news agency based in Armenia), 29 February 2020. https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=49731&lang=2

...after a meeting of the representatives of the Ministries of Defense of Armenia, Greece and Cyprus, the Trilateral Action Plan for 2020 was signed. The plan includes a dozen events in Armenia, Greece and Cyprus, involving training programs and military-political consultations in various fields...

Source: “Делегация во главе с министром обороны Ирака находится с официальным визитом в Армении (A delegation of the head of Ministry of Defense of Iraq is on an official visit in Armenia),” *Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia*, 25 March 2021. <https://www.mil.am/ru/news/9133>

On 24 March, a delegation headed by the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Iraq, Juma Inad Saadun Khattab, arrived in Armenia on an official visit...(the ministers) signed an agreement of intent on cooperation in defense, between the Ministries of Defense of Armenia and Iraq, which outlined 13 areas of cooperation and mutual interest...

Source: “Министры обороны Армении и России обсудили меры безопасности в Сюнике (The Ministries of Defense of Armenia and Russia discussed measures of security in Syunik),” *Eurasia Daily*, 23 March 2021. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/03/23/ministry-oborony-armenii-i-rossii-obsudili-mery-bezopasnosti-v-syunike>

The defense ministers of Armenia and Russia during a telephone conversation today, 23 March, security measures being carried out by joint forces in the Syunik border region...(they) also looked at the direction of the large-scale reforms being carried out in the Armenian army and issues of cooperation between the two sides, in particular, the United Group of Forces...

A number of officials and members of the political opposition stated the need to strengthen the partnership with Russia, largely in the military-political sphere, and that it would not be possible to restore combat effectiveness of the Armenian army to pre-war levels without Russian help...

Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars 1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau

Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>

Regional Support for Egypt Wavering in Nile Dam Dispute with Ethiopia

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

In late March, President Sisi of Egypt warned of “inconceivable instability” in the region if Egypt’s Nile water access is affected in any way by the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The two accompanying articles from the London-based, pro-Palestinian pan-Arab daily *al-Quds al-Arabi* dismiss the likelihood of Egyptian military action. Their authors argue that not only does Egypt lack the type of standoff precision weapons required to take down the GERD, but even if it had them, degrading or destroying the dam would have substantial downstream effects. Egyptian society is furthermore too divided to enter a war, the authors claim, and the reputational price Egypt would pay in Africa is immense. A more palatable—though hardly simple—alternative would be for Egypt to close the Suez Canal to Ethiopian commerce.

The excerpted article from the influential Qatar-aligned pan-Arab daily *al-Araby al-Jadid* interpreted Sisi’s remarks as, among others, serving as a litmus test for Arab government support of Egypt in the GERD dispute. The article’s author singles out the UAE as a party whose support for Egypt on this issue is wavering. *Al-Araby al-Jadid* and other Qatar-aligned publications have been consistently critical of the Sisi government since its inception in 2013; in recent weeks, though, they have covered the GERD with great empathy toward the Egyptian position. This change in tone may be interpreted as a sign of the public rapprochement between Egypt and Turkey, Qatar’s key regional ally.



Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Source: Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grand-Ethiopian_dam.jpg, Attribution: CC 4.0

The UAE has since 2013 been a steady supporter of the Sisi government; Erdogan’s Turkey, in contrast, has had a competitive and at times adversarial relation with Sisi’s Egypt. Both Turkey and the UAE enjoy good relations with Ethiopia, and both have offered to mediate the GERD dispute. The *al-Araby al-Jadid* article mentions four key reasons behind the Egyptian-Emirati estrangement: Libya policy, unfulfilled investment deals, the paucity of COVID-19 assistance, and Israel-Emirati infrastructure projects that could negatively affect Egypt. The GERD may soon join that list.

“...The advice to President Al-Sisi is... to discuss the matter seriously and in a way that puts everyone before their responsibilities, perhaps sacrificing some of the existing alliances that have not proven to be useful...”

Source:

Sameh Al-Mahariq. (Striking the Renaissance Dam... It’s Too Late),” *al-Quds al-Arabi*, (London-based pro-Palestinian pan-Arab daily), 1 April 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/4z3fka4t>

”ضرب سد النهضة... فات الميعاد

On the other hand, the military option is not the only solution available to Egypt, nor is it the most effective solution. As the first missile left the wing of an Egyptian plane, Cairo would lose its African position, and many African countries would be frustrated and bitter... The Egyptians can close the Suez Canal to ships carrying goods imported or exported by Ethiopian companies, which is a complicated matter that may face legal and procedural difficulties but remains less expensive than military intervention... The advice to President Al-Sisi is not to continue the rational and patient dialogue that proved to be fruitless and consumed a lot of valuable time, but rather to discuss the matter seriously and in a way that puts everyone before their responsibilities, perhaps sacrificing some of the existing alliances that have not proven to be useful.

Continued: Regional Support for Egypt Wavering in Nile Dam Dispute with Ethiopia

Source:

Hussein Majdoubi. (There will be no Egyptian attack on the Renaissance Dam),” *al-Quds al-Arabi* (London-based pro-Palestinian pan-Arab daily), 12 April 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/3e8anb3y>

”هجوم مصري على سد النهضة لن يقع

Egypt and Sudan are studying the type of response to Ethiopia’s decision to fill the Renaissance Dam and began issuing military threats even more frequently. The threats came from military figures such as President General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who threatened to turn the area into a powder keg if Egypt lost but one drop of water, as well as civilian politician Hamdeen Sabahi, who called for the mobilization of the Egyptian people in preparation to confront Ethiopia...

Since the success of the counter-revolution, violence has risen terribly in Egypt, with tens of thousands of victims and detainees. An atmosphere of fear prevails in all institutions, making national cohesion very weak. The involvement of a state with fragile national cohesion in wars often leads to loss and further disintegration...

Although Egypt ranks high in the global ranking of armies, it possesses a conventional army to fight a conventional war and does not possess weapons to decisively strike geographically distant threats, such as the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The danger of the dam’s collapse and the sweeping tsunami-like floods that it would cause make it all the more difficult to carry out a strike against the dam...

A Sudanese-Egyptian war against Ethiopia may explode, but it would not achieve its main objective, which is to destroy the dam, so it would be a meaningless military adventure.

Source:

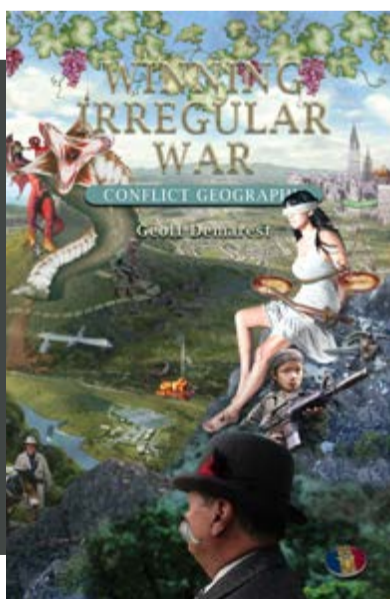
Renaissance Dam Crisis: 3 Reasons Behind Sisi’s Threats,” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (influential Qatari-aligned pan-Arab daily, 31 March 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/4sk7yhaf>

”أزمة سد النهضة: 3 دوافع وراء تهديدات السيسي

Egypt’s verbal escalation comes after six years of unserious negotiations... The first point relates to Sisi confirming the existence of Arab attempts to denude Egypt’s claims and implement all Ethiopian demands, harming Egypt strategically and economically. These attempts are primarily represented by Emirati efforts to convince Egypt and Sudan of non-radical technical solutions that would ultimately enable Ethiopia to begin the second filling of the dam while achieving a temporary state of non-harm to Sudan and Egypt...

Sisi’s dispute with the leaders of the UAE on this issue... has had various preludes over the past two years... [including] disagreement over the way to deal with Libya... the withdrawal of Emirati investors from a number of promised projects and investments, under the pretext of Egyptian mismanagement, as well as the UAE’s failure to extend a helping hand to Egypt in the Coronavirus crisis, with the apparent slowdown in sending vaccines. This comes in addition to talk of Abu Dhabi’s cooperation with the Israeli occupation state to implement logistical development projects that will negatively affect Egypt, most importantly the Suez Canal...

What added to the difference in the Emirati position in the Arab world is that several Arab allies of Egypt issued statements in support of Cairo and Khartoum’s position on the Renaissance Dam, including Saudi Arabia, which had previously offered to play a mediating role, saying that “water security Cairo and Khartoum are an integral part of Arab security.”



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

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195392/download>

Turkey Views Treaty as Important to Limiting U.S. Naval Activity in Black Sea



Turkish Straits.

Source: Interior via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_Strait_disambig.svg, Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.5

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying passages discuss the contemporary importance of the 1936 Montreux Convention, regarding naval ship transit, for Turkey and the United States. The passages are from an interview with popular Turkish commentator Kadri Gürsel on *Medyascope*tv, an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube. Gürsel claims that the Montreux Convention is key for Turkey to maintain good relations with Russia and to shield the Black Sea from becoming a conflict zone between great powers. He explains that the Montreux

Convention limits the United States' ability to project power in the Black Sea, claiming that the United States would want the Convention to be revised, especially at such a time of heightened tensions between Russia and Ukraine. His comments shed light on how U.S. great power competition with Russia factors into internal debates in Turkey.

Signed in 1936, the Montreux Convention regulates the transit of naval ships from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, and from there to the Mediterranean, via the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle Straits. The Convention gives Turkey full sovereignty over the Straits and allows free passage of commercial vessels in peacetime. Naval ships can only pass if they belong to a country that borders the Black Sea. Ships belonging to other countries are subject to tonnage limitations (can not exceed 15,000 tons), cannot stay more than 21 days, and must notify Turkey eight days prior to their sought passing. Gürsel notes that Montreux was signed to prevent the Black Sea from becoming another conflict area between the Soviet Union and Germany. Turkey considers the Montreux Convention (together with 1923 Lusanne Treaty) one of the main pillars of the new Turkish Republic and its sovereignty over the Straits.

In early April, the importance of the Montreux Convention became a heated topic in Turkey amid debates surrounding the pending construction of the "Canal Istanbul" project. The project involves a 30-mile artificial waterway through a land mass of Istanbul, running parallel to the Bosphorus Strait, connecting the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea. This has raised questions about whether ships using this waterway may bypass the Montreux Convention. If so, this would enable non-Black Sea littoral states to bring their warships to the Black Sea without being subject to the size/tonnage limitations of the Montreux Convention.

“...Does the US want the Montreux Convention to be cancelled? ...Of course it does.... The US can't project power into the Black Sea because of Montreux.”

Source: “Emekli amirallerin başlattığı tartışma - Ruşen Çakır ve Kadri Gürsel tartışıyor (The debate the retired admirals started - Ruşen Çakır and Kadri Gürsel discuss),” *Ruşen Çakır Medyascope* (an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube), 7 April 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LyhVfjwG7g>

Ruşen Çakır: ...Does the US want the Montreux Convention to be cancelled?

Kadri Gürsel: ...Of course it does. The US would want the current Montreux Convention, which is the 1936 version, to be revised. When a convention is revised, it is no longer valid. Today, whose interests are Montreux against? [It is against] any great power that is not a littoral country to the Black Sea. How many countries want to project power into the Black Sea, or want to send naval forces and have the power to do this? Primarily the US, and then the UK. But the UK and France are signatories of Montreux. So that leaves the US. The US can't project power into the Black Sea because of Montreux. It can only bring one destroyer into the Black Sea, which can only stay for 21 days and only do patrol missions. There are two classes of destroyers in the US Navy, one of these is within the 15,000 ton limit, but the other exceeds it. So the US cannot bring more than one destroyer into the Black Sea at a time.

So when Montreux was signed in 1936, the goal was to prevent the Black Sea from becoming another conflict zone between the USSR and Germany... In order to prevent Turkey from entering WWII on the side of the Germans, the province of Hatay was returned to Turkey, and the Montreux Convention was signed – and Turkey achieved sovereignty rights over the Straits. In the Cold War, that's how the Black Sea was shielded from being an area of tension. After the Cold War, it was shielded from being a tension and conflict point between great powers. So Montreux is very important for Turkey to maintain good relations with Russia.

Whoever wants to open Montreux up for debate... They are... against all of the gains of the [Turkish] Republic... and they...are defending the interests of the US...