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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE  
OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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## Respected Russian Academic Speculates on War in the Arctic

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

A recent article in the pro-Kremlin news outlet *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* sees the possibility of a military conflict breaking out in the Barents Sea region of the Arctic Ocean. The author envisions a scenario emanating from a U.S. Navy freedom of navigation test of the Northern Sea Route (See: “Freedom of the Seas to Be Tested in Arctic?” *OE Watch*, April 2019). Well-known Russian political scientist Aleksandr Khramchikhin, Deputy Director of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis, is the article’s author. He has long argued that China is Russia’s primary security threat and that the United States is looking

to the Global Strike Command to defeat Russia’s nuclear capability with non-nuclear strikes. Khramchikhin lacks a military background, but his reasoning and commentary are respected. Khramchikhin’s description of the Arctic operational environment includes scenarios of engagements that are narrow in their potential locations and application of forces. Paratroop drops, submarine missile launches, fighter aircraft engagements, and ground force incursions with limited objectives seem to capture the nature of conflict, according the author. He admits that “imagining a battle in this region is very difficult indeed.”

“The Northern Fleet can only effectively counter American nuclear submarines in close proximity to its bases on the Kola Peninsula, and further to the East the adversary can operate more or less freely.”

**Source:** Aleksandr Khramchikhin, “Очень холодное поле боя: Война за акватории высоких широт может начаться с провокации на Северном морском пути (A very cold battlefield: A war for the high-latitude waters could begin with a provocation on the Northern Sea Route),” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* (pro-government weekly focused on Russian military and military-industrial complex), 22 November 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64758>

*Competition for the Arctic, possibly spilling into war over the region, is a subject at least two decades old. As the Arctic ice melts, interest is growing fast in a region where near-free navigation, unfettered access to offshore hydrocarbons, and military operations are becoming possible.*

*Nobody is planning to share out the Arctic lands, since they were claimed long ago. This is about sharing the waters, where the picture is not quite so clear and the number of potential competitors is limited. The air forces of Finland... and Sweden... have some potential but these countries do not directly border onto the Arctic Ocean so there is nothing for them to fight over. Iceland does not have an air force so it has nothing to fight with, even if it wanted to.*

*Canada's forces... are generally somewhat feebler than Finland's and Sweden's, and are either stationed in the south of the country (on a similar latitude to Moscow) or are busy in various American wars in the Middle and Near East. Canadian forces in the Arctic are purely symbolic, without even a proper northern regiment in total and armed with only light weapons.*

*The Danish Air Force is weaker even than the Canadian and is practically all stationed in Denmark itself, that is, on the Jutland peninsula and adjacent islands. In Greenland there is only the Sirius ski patrol — 30 men, that is, a single platoon, and also armed with only light weapons. One or two patrol boats are also based there.*

*So any involvement by Denmark and Canada in a fight for the Arctic is purely theoretical (regarding the military component of the fight). Deployment of Canadian and Danish forces to the Arctic is in practice unrealistic — they are too few and anyway do not train for war on ice. The most that Ottawa and Copenhagen could do is send to the Arctic a few warships (one or two submarines, three or four frigates from Canada and two or three frigates from Denmark) and to airfields in the Arctic — up to 10 or so warplanes (Canadian F-18A/Bs, Danish F-16A/Bs). You cannot do much fighting with those.*

*Fairly large groups of US air and ground forces are stationed in Alaska. They could capture Chukotka, where there are no Russian forces, with ease. And the USAF could safely block the deployment to there of Russian contingents from Kamchatka, not to mention from the Vladivostok region. Strange as it may seem, it would be easier for Russia to send Airborne Troops units to Chukotka from the European part of the country. The Americans could in theory even land forces in Yakutiya (in the Tiksi area, for example). True, Russian paratroopers could just as successfully turn up on the islands of Canada's Arctic archipelago, which also have nothing and nobody to defend themselves with. However, the point is that all these reciprocal assault landings are completely senseless and would create more problems for the protagonists than for the other side. This is simply because an American expeditionary force in Chukotka and Yakutiya and a Russian one in northern Canada would be at a hopeless dead end with no chance of developing an offensive to the south, and with desperate supply issues.*

*The only place where potential "fighters for the Arctic" might come into direct contact is northern Europe. The greater part of Norway's air force... is stationed in the north of the country and in close proximity to the group of forces of Russia's Northern Joint Strategic Command on the Kola Peninsula. The Russian presence is of course more powerful, especially in terms of the two countries' ability to grow their forces. Imagining a battle in this region is very difficult indeed. Between 1941 and 1943 on the entire gigantic Soviet-German front, the Arctic was the sole sector in which the Germans captured nothing, other than a few hundred square kilometers of lifeless tundra. Imagining that the Norwegians will be more effective and successful than the Germans is, to put it mildly, hard. It is even harder to imagine how the Norwegians' NATO allies would come to their aid in the ice and snow. On the other hand, in the fall of 1944 the Soviet army liberated only the Norwegian border county of Finnmark,*

## Continued: Respected Russian Academic Speculates on War in the Arctic

**Continued Source:** Aleksandr Khramchikhin, “Очень холодное поле боя: Война за акватории высоких широт может начаться с провокации на Северном морском пути (A very cold battlefield: A war for the high-latitude waters could begin with a provocation on the Northern Sea Route),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (pro-government weekly focused on Russian military and military-industrial complex), 22 November 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64758>

*and went no further. The Supreme Command could not see any point in fighting for frozen mountains crisscrossed by fjords. Modern-day Russia needs them even less.*

*It is practically impossible to conceive of an armed conflict in the Arctic over a disputed oil or gas field. Hydrocarbons extraction in the region is a highly complex and expensive business, so no oil or gas company will start work on a deposit unless the legal status and national affiliation are settled.*

*Much more realistic is an incursion into Russia's Arctic waters by American nuclear submarines, which from there could in theory fire Tomahawk cruise missiles at numerous military and economic targets in the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East. The Northern Fleet can only effectively counter American nuclear submarines in close proximity to its bases on the Kola Peninsula, and further to the East the adversary can operate more or less freely. In that case, the hopes lie with air rather than submarine defenses, that is, with eliminating the Tomahawks rather than their carriers. But this kind of scenario could materialize only if matters get to the stage of full-scale war between Russia and the United States.*

*However, a dispute over "freedom of navigation" in peacetime cannot be discounted. Washington believes that both Russia's Northern Sea Route and Canada's Northwest Passage are international waters in which civilian and military ships of any country may sail freely without the need to notify anybody. A direct conflict between the United States and Canada, close allies, over the Northwest Passage is unlikely, and anyway, it is not greatly needed as a transport route (easier to take the Panama Canal). The Northern Sea Route, which greatly shortens the time from Europe to Asia and back, is much more in demand.*

*On more than one occasion, American warships have sailed across the South China Sea, which Beijing regards as its own. Matters have not yet reached the stage of direct confrontation with ships of the PLA, but it cannot be ruled out. Similarly, nothing is stopping the Americans from just turning up and sending one or a number of warships through the Northern Sea Route without officially notifying Russia first.*

*Will Moscow be as restrained as Beijing? Or will it require the Americans to scrupulously comply with Russian law and in the event of a refusal do what is necessary to head them off, including forcibly? In that case, how far might the dispute go? It is possible that Washington will allow us to find out, and very soon: It badly wants to prove to the whole world and to itself as well that America can still do anything, including what others cannot.*

### **KREMLIN KONTROL** RUSSIA'S POLITICAL MILITARY REALITY by Timothy L. Thomas

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





## Russian NBC Defense Troops Increase Thermobaric Munition Capabilities

By Chuck Bartles  
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted articles from Russian government news service TASS and pro-Kremlin daily newspaper *Izvestiya* discuss Russian efforts to increase thermobaric munition capabilities in the NBC Defense Troops. Although thermobaric munitions, referred to as “flamethrowers” in the Russian military, exist elsewhere (artillery, aviation, etc.) in the Russian Armed Forces, thermobarics are considered primarily an NBC Defense Troops’ weapon. The TASS article features an interview with Aleksandr Smirnov, the General Director of Splyav, the firm that produces the soon to be fielded TOS-2 “Tosochka” wheeled heavy flamethrower.

In the current structure of the Russian Ground Forces, shoulder-fired flamethrower squads and platoons may be present in the NBC defense companies of Russian maneuver brigades. Company-sized flamethrower units are only present in the flamethrower battalions, in the NBC defense regiments of the Combined Arms Armies, Tank Army, and Army Corps. The typical Russian flamethrower battalion consists of two companies of shoulder-launched flamethrowers, and one company of vehicle-launched heavy flamethrowers. The typical heavy flamethrower company has 35 personnel; three TOS-1A ‘Solntsepek’ heavy flamethrowers, each with 24 220mm thermobaric rockets mounted on a T-72 chassis; and six TZM-T transporter/loader vehicles, which are also mounted on a T-72 chassis. *Izvestiya* notes that the Southern Military District will increase its number of heavy flamethrower systems to 42 by 2024, with the intent of eventually having a heavy flamethrower battalion in each regiment by 2027, resulting in a six-fold increase in firepower from current capabilities. Another edition of *Izvestiya* states that Russia is considering developing a UAV capable of dropping a thermobaric munition for the NBC Defense Troops. Although Russia has not shown much interest in mounting weapons on small UAVs, this may be beginning to change as the Russian Ground Forces experimented with such a system—the “Lastochka” Complex—during Zapad-2021.



**TOS-2 ‘Tosochka’ Flamethrower.**

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Dress-rehearsal-of-2020-Moscow-Victory-Day-Parade/i-mJSph2x/0/8f6db545/X4/DressRehearsal-20062020-086-X4.jpg>  
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**TOS-1A ‘Solntsepek’ Flamethrower.**

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Dress-rehearsal-of-2020-Moscow-Victory-Day-Parade/i-g6NjHj7/0/b0e26385/X4/DressRehearsal-20062020-083-X4.jpg>  
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“The Defense Ministry has told *Izvestiya* that three new battalions will be formed in the Southern Military District, armed with the TOS-1A Solntsepek and TOS-2 Tosochka heavy flamethrowers.”

**Source:** Milena Sineva and Dmitriy Fedyushko, ““Тосочка”, “Земледелие” и новые РСЗО: Глава “Сплава” о перспективах ракетной артиллерии РФ (‘Tosochka’, ‘Zemledeliye’, and New Multiple Rocket Launchers: The Chief of Splyav on the Prospects for Russia’s Rocket Artillery),” TASS (government news service of the Russian Federation), 18 November 2021. <https://tass.ru/interviews/12958773>

*Multiple rocket launchers are an integral component of Russia’s rocket and artillery forces, who directly support the Ground Troops on the battlefield. Since the appearance of the legendary BM-13 Katyusha, multiple rocket launchers have become much more modern in terms of their accuracy and are gradually catching up with operational-tactical systems. Aleksandr Smirnov, general director of the A.N. Ganichev Splyav Science and Production Association (part of the Technodinamika holding company in the Rostec state corporation) discussed the latest advances in Russian rocket artillery with TASS...*

### What is being done now regarding work on the TOS-2 “Tosochka” heavy flamethrower system?

*Joint testing is now under way at enterprises of the Rostec state corporation, in particular Splyav and “Special Design Bureau” of the military division at Motovilikha Plants. The plan is to complete it by the end of the year. The forces are looking forward to these machines. We are already training crews to operate the new system, because its engineering is radically different from the TOS-1A. We hope that the TOS-2 will be much in demand in our armed forces. As far as I know, when the system was first displayed during the parade on Red Square it sparked interest among foreign customers.*

## Continued: Russian NBC Defense Troops Increase Thermobaric Munition Capabilities

**Continued Source:** Milena Sineva and Dmitriy Fedyushko, ““Тосочка”, “Земледелие” и новые РСЗО: Глава “Сплыва” о перспективах ракетной артиллерии РФ (‘Tosochka’, ‘Zemledeliye’, and New Multiple Rocket Launchers: The Chief of Splav on the Prospects for Russia's Rocket Artillery),” TASS (government news service of the Russian Federation), 18 November 2021. <https://tass.ru/interviews/12958773>

### Are new projectiles in development for the TOS-2?

*Yes, a new rocket has been developed. State tests are being conducted and an initial batch of prototypes has been made for troops to try out. We are also planning to complete all the testing of another munition for the TOS-2 this year. Its distinguishing feature is its longer range, and it can be used by the TOS-1A.*

### How can the TOS-1A and TOS-2A coexist on the battlefield?

*They can do so just fine. Depending on the tactical environment, commanders will be able to employ either a weapon that moves on wheels or one that is on tracks.*

### When can we expect to see the TOS-2 on the world market?

*The promotional materials for the weapon were drawn up this year. Bearing in mind foreign customers' interest in the TOS-1A, we can safely predict a similar export potential for the TOS-2 because a number of its specifications have been improved, such as longer range, a wheeled chassis, and better ergonomics.*

### Could the Tosochka be mounted on other chassis types?

*It is technically possible, but not worthwhile. The artillery part is attached to a specific type of chassis.*

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “ТОС уполномочен, юг страны усиливают тяжелыми огнеметами: В ЮВО сформируют сразу три батальона с системами «Солнцеpek» и «Тосочка» (The TOS Is Be Empowered, South of the Country to Be Reinforced with Heavy Flamethrowers: Southern Military District To Form Three Battalions at Once With Solntsepek and Tosochka Systems),” *Izvestiya* (large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 15 November 2021. <https://iz.ru/1253152/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/tos-upolnomochen-iug-strany-usilivaiut-tiazhelymi-ognemetami>

*The Defense Ministry has told *Izvestiya* that three new battalions will be formed in the Southern Military District, armed with the TOS-1A Solntsepek and TOS-2 Tosochka heavy flamethrowers. They will cover the south of the country — the Caucasus, Crimea, and the border with Ukraine. According to *Izvestiya*'s sources they could also be deployed to the strategic western sector. The mobility of the Tosochka, which is mounted on wheels, enables it to travel hundreds of kilometers on public roads.*

*In Russia's army the TOS-1 is in service with individual units of the radiation, chemical, and biological defense troops. Sources say that delivery of the flamethrowers to the Southern Military District will be a phased process. During the first phase — up to 2024 — their numbers in existing units will be increased to 42 systems.*

*During the second phase the number of flamethrowers is expected to increase gradually as additional subunits are created in the radiation, chemical, and biological defense regiments of combined-arms armies. The plan is to create three new heavy flamethrower battalions by 2027, which will provide their groups of forces with a six-fold increase in firepower on what they have today...*

*Large-scale exercises with NATO ships and aircraft ended recently in the Black Sea region and there is unrest in Ukraine and on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. In such circumstances the southern strategic sector is begging to be beefed up, says military historian Aleksey Khlopotov.*

*"Heavy flamethrower systems proved their effectiveness during the fighting in Syria and Iraq," he said to *Izvestiya*. "They're indispensable when eliminating an enemy who is hunkered down in well-fortified positions or buildings or in mountains. The Solntsepek and Tosochka will complement each other. The tank armor of the former means it can be used in forward positions and deliver strikes from close range. The Tosochka, which has a wheeled chassis, will be good when conducting mobile operations."*

*The wheeled chassis gives a number of advantages, Aleksey Khlopotov said. In terms of speed when traveling and on the move the TOS-2 is comparable to ordinary cars, which makes it particularly effective in places with extensive road networks and also in steppe and desert terrain and areas of stony ground. "The wheeled-chassis system is cheaper to produce and service and has a longer operating life — they're cheaper to maintain," Khlopotov concluded...*



## Continued: Russian NBC Defense Troops Increase Thermobaric Munition Capabilities

“Unmanned aerial vehicles will permit the rapid destruction of targets in urban area, and also targets that are hidden in terrain folds or are located in fortifications... They are needed in order to destroy important facilities in the enemy tactical rear - for example, munitions and fuel dumps, communications centers, and unarmored vehicles, in which command posts are based...”

**Source:** Anton Lavrov and Bogdan Stepanovoy, “Летающей наводкой: российская армия заказала беспилотные огнеметчики: Новая система позволит наносить по противнику удары термобарическими и зажигательными бомбами (Using the Flying Artillery Spotter: The Russian Army Has Ordered Unmanned Flamethrowers: New System Will Permit the Conduct of Strikes against the Enemy using Thermobaric and Incendiary Bombs),” *Izvestiya*, (large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 5 October 2021. <https://iz.ru/1230786/anton-lavrov-bogdan-stepanovoi/letiashechi-navodkoi-rossiiskaia-armiia-zakazala-besplotnye-ognemetchiki>

*Flamethrower Drones will appear in the Russian Army. The Ministry of Defense has approved the performance specifications for new weapon systems for the Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops, sources in the Military Department told Izvestiya. In particular, unmanned aerial flamethrower systems ended up on the list of new weapons. They will be manufactured based upon small aircraft or quadcopters. The UAVs will be able to destroy the enemy using compact thermobaric or incendiary charges. The experts emphasize that those weapon systems will become especially dangerous in conditions of an urban engagement and also during the destruction of enemy reinforcements. They will help to save the lives of peaceful residents and soldiers in street engagements...*

*The NBC defense units have weapon systems to accomplish any missions. Among them - are handheld "Shmel" rocket-propelled flamethrowers and "Buratino", "Solntsepek", and "Tosochka" heavy flamethrower systems. But the NBC Defense Troops will get the full spectrum of weapons with the appearance of the flame-thrower unmanned aerial vehicles, Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy told Izvestiya. "Unmanned aerial vehicles will permit the rapid destruction of targets in urban area, and also targets that are hidden in terrain folds or are located in fortifications...They are needed in order to destroy important facilities in the enemy tactical rear - for example, munitions and fuel dumps, communications centers, and unarmored vehicles, in which command posts are based..."*

*Precision strikes using incendiary and thermobaric munitions will permit the minimization of collateral damage during the course of combat operations, he pointed out. "Those unmanned aerial vehicles will be invaluable in house-to-house fighting", Viktor Murakhovskiy concluded. "They will permit us to avoid the destruction of structures, which are not related to the military infrastructure, and to also reduce losses among the peaceful population and servicemen. It is better to lose two drones or robots than one soldier.*

*Small drones from the latest "Lastochka" Complex have already been tested in the role of strike UAVs at the "Zapad-2021" Strategic Exercises, which were conducted in September of this year. They dropped antipersonnel and hollow-charge bombs on the targets. Small multicopters, which are capable of dropping small bombs with various warheads on targets, are being developed in Russia today. Those aircraft can hover over a target in order to achieve greater accuracy. The capability for a hollow-charge bomb to end up on a mockup of a tank was confirmed in tests. In the process, the flamethrower drones can be used to destroy and ignite larger facilities...*

### 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.

## Russians View Military Increasingly Favorably as Extortion and Other Negative News Go Underreported

By Ray Finch  
OE Watch Commentary

Domestic attitudes toward the Russian military have improved significantly over the past decade. As the first excerpt from the official Russian news agency TASS points out, during the December meeting of senior military leaders, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu “stressed that Russian citizens highly value the activities of the military department. According to polls, more than 90% of Russians are confident that the military is capable of protecting them, and 88% are proud of the army and navy.”

Some of this improvement may be because of policies implemented by the Kremlin, which restrict negative reporting about the Russian military, including recent news about extortion of Russian soldiers. The second accompanying excerpt from the mostly independent Russian news outlet *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes an adverse incident “where contract servicemen (including officers) were imposed tribute by criminals... in the military garrison in Yurga (Kemerovo region).” As the article points out, even though this example of military extortion was “actively discussed in social networks and on internet portals,” official media almost completely ignored it. The article quotes mili-

tary journalist Viktor Baranets, who asserts, “extortion from contract soldiers in distant garrisons is a fairly typical picture for Russia. There have been several cases in my memory when local criminals actually impose tribute on military personnel.” The article concludes by citing a recent senior military investigator who claims that in 2021, “the number of crimes against the order of military service has increased.”

Not surprisingly, as the third excerpt indicates, shortly after this article was published, a senior official in the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense wrote a letter to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* claiming that the story was false. According to this official, “inspections carried out by the command and law enforcement

“... Extortion from contract soldiers in distant garrisons is a fairly typical picture for Russia.”

agencies in the military units of the Yurga garrison did not reveal a single case of extortion of money from servicemen in 2021.”

**Source:** Stanislav Krasilnikov, “Миротворцы и спасатели: главные достижения армии России за 2021 год (Peacekeepers and rescuers: the main achievements of the Russian military in 2021),” TASS (official Russian news agency), 29 December 2021. <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/13314335>

*Summing up the results of the activities of the Russian Armed Forces in 2021, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stressed that Russian citizens highly appreciate the activities of the military department. According to polls, more than 90% of Russians are confident that the army is capable of protecting them, and 88% are proud of the army and navy.*

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “Беспредел в гарнизонах искоренить не удалось (The chaos in the garrisons could not be eradicated),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (mostly independent Russian news source), 26 December 2021. [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-12-26/2\\_8336\\_army.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-12-26/2_8336_army.html)

*At the events of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation dedicated to summing up the results of the activities of the army and navy, official reports available in the public domain this year did not provide data on the state of military discipline and law and order among personnel.... The media are discussing the scandal in the military garrison in Yurga (Kemerovo region), where the contract servicemen (including officers) were imposed tribute by representatives of the local criminals.*

*The situation in the military garrison in Yurga is actively discussed in social networks and on Internet portals..., about the alleged extortions from contract servicemen (including officers), organized by representatives of the local criminals. According to media reports, the military are threatened, they are blackmailed, while they are afraid to go to law enforcement agencies and “pay tribute without complaint.” ...One of the gangster leaders, whose photo is quoted on the portal, allegedly “even has a whole list of almost a hundred military men who regularly pay tribute to him.”*

*...This situation seems wild. Viktor Baranets, a member of the Public Council under the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, shares his concern... “Extortion from contract soldiers in distant garrisons is a fairly typical picture for Russia. There have been several cases in my memory when local criminals actually impose tribute on military personnel.”*

*...In July 2021, summing up the work of military investigators in the first half of the year, the then acting head of the GVSU, Lieutenant General of Justice Sergei Fedotov, said that “in the field of military service, the number of crimes against the order of military service has increased....”*

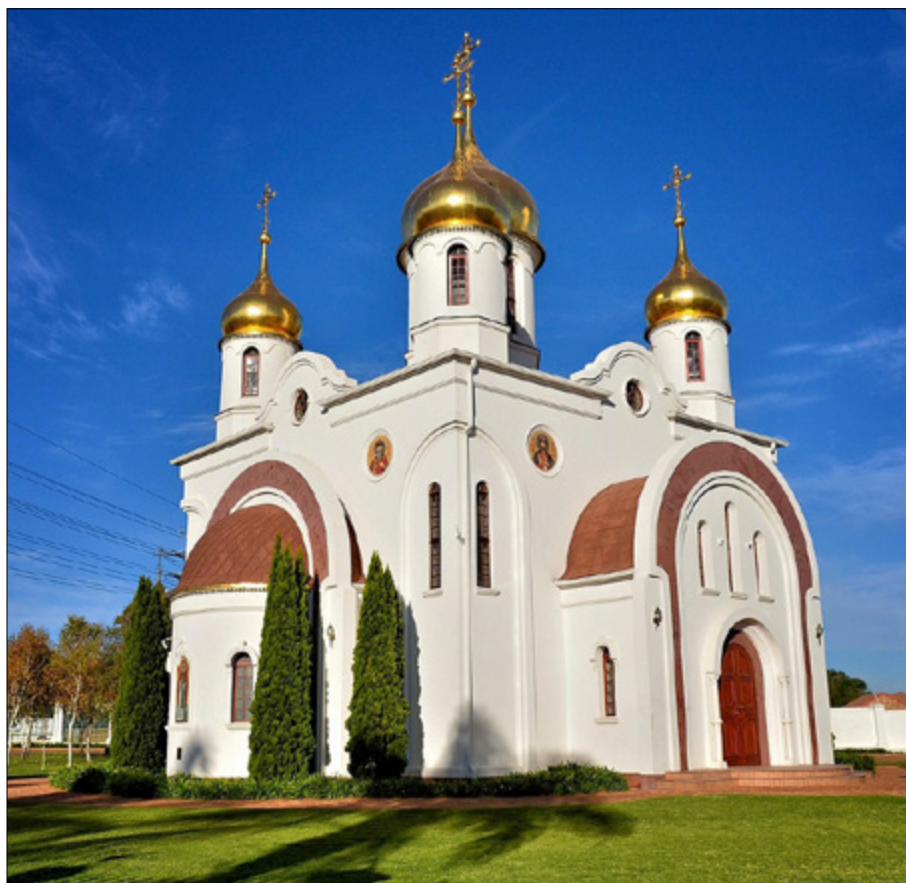
**Source:** A. Volosatov, “Ответ Министерства обороны РФ на материал ‘Беспредел в гарнизонах искоренить не удалось’ (Response of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation to the material ‘Lawlessness in garrisons could not be eradicated),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 December 2021. [https://www.ng.ru/letter/2021-12-28/2\\_8338\\_answer.html](https://www.ng.ru/letter/2021-12-28/2_8338_answer.html)

*In the material of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, published on December 27... provided about the allegedly unsatisfactory state of law and order in the military garrisons associated with extortion of money from servicemen... This article is absolutely untrue. The inspections carried out by the command and law enforcement agencies in the military units of the Yurga garrison did not reveal a single case of extortion of money from servicemen in 2021....*

*Deputy Head of the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation A. Volosatov*



## Russian Orthodox Church Strengthening Its Position in Africa



**St Sergius Russian Orthodox Church in Noordwyk, Midrand, South Africa.**

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St\\_Sergius\\_Russian\\_Orthodox\\_Church,\\_Noordwyk,\\_Midrand.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_Sergius_Russian_Orthodox_Church,_Noordwyk,_Midrand.jpg)  
Attribution: CCA SA 4.0 Intl

By Ray Finch

OE Watch Commentary

Even before open war broke out in late February, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine shook the international community of believers who share the Orthodox faith. In 2019, the Ecumenical

Patriarch of Constantinople officially recognized and established the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) interpreted this as weakening their influence in Ukraine, as well as furthering the divide between the Ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople and its counterpart in Russia. Since then, the leadership of the ROC has been working to expand its influence in regions that have traditionally fallen under the mandate of those churches that support the Ecumenical Patriarch. The accompanying excerpt from the pro-business Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* describes how the ROC has recently made significant inroads among Orthodox believers in Africa at the expense of the Ecumenical Patriarchy. The article does not make it clear whether or not the Kremlin is using the ROC as a soft-power tool in this case.

The article begins by stating, “the Holy Synod accepted into the Russian Orthodox Church more than a hundred clerics of the Patriarchate of Alexandria from eight African countries.” These clerics, according to the article, “came under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate due to their categorical disagreement with the decision of the Patriarch of Alexandria to recognize the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.” The article quotes a religious expert who asserts that “the expansion of the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church to Africa is an important ecclesiastical and political step.” This expert concludes by stating that “Orthodoxy is developing quite dynamically in various states of the continent and attracts millions of people, [which will] strengthen the role of Moscow in the global Christian mission, despite all political crises.”

“...The expansion of the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church to Africa is an important ecclesiastical and political step..”

**Source:** Pavel Korobov, “Русская православная церковь укрепила позиции в Африке (The Russian Orthodox Church has strengthened its position in Africa),” *Kommersant* (pro business Russian daily newspaper), 29 December 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5154738>

*...On Wednesday, the Holy Synod accepted into the Russian Orthodox Church more than a hundred clerics of the Patriarchate of Alexandria from eight African countries. The clergy came under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate due to their categorical disagreement with the decision of the Patriarch of Alexandria — he recognized the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, established by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. The expert is convinced that the decision of the Russian Orthodox Church will irritate the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Constantinople, but will lead to the strengthening of Moscow's role in the global Christian mission....*

*...To date, at least a hundred parishes of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, headed by their pastors, have declared their desire to transfer to the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church....*

*The head of the Center for the Study of Problems of Religion and Society at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Roman Lunkin, called the decision “echoes of the conflict” between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople... “The expansion of the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church to Africa is an important ecclesiastical and political step,” says Mr. Lunkin. “The development of preaching among Africans has great prospects, Orthodoxy is developing quite dynamically in various states of the continent and attracts millions of people.” ...In this regard, Mr. Lunkin speaks of “strengthening the role of Moscow in the global Christian mission, despite all political crises: Irritation of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Alexandria is inevitable.”*

## Russia Highlighting Use of “Cube” and “Lancet” Loitering Munitions in Syria

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

As reported in the accompanying December 2021 article from Russia’s Arabic-language media outlet *RT Arabic*, the KYB-UAV “kamikaze drone” (also referred to as KUB-BLA or “Cube”) has passed government field tests and is now ready for procurement by Russian forces, which is expected to begin this year. The KYB-UAV is made by ZALA AERO, a subsidiary of the Kalashnikov Concern, itself a subsidiary of Rostec. The KYB-UAV was first made public at Abu Dhabi’s 2019 weapons expo (IDEX-2019). In December 2020, Rostec’s CEO explained that the KYB, along with a more advanced ZALA AERO loitering munitions platform called the Lancet, distinguishable by its double x-shaped tail, had both been tested in Syria that year. A documentary that aired last December on the state-owned Russian-language news channel Russia 24 includes an interview with a purported Russian Lancet operator who oversaw more than 40 strikes in Syria, including a pair of targeted assassinations in Hama Province in April 2020. Recently, Russian state television networks featured several clips of Lancets being used in Syria to target rebel positions and infrastructure. As the article from the Syrian opposition news network *Shaam News Network* notes, a recent clip shows a Lancet targeting a small oil refinery in rural Hama Province. However, the accuracy of Syrian opposition media reports on these platforms is limited, given the difficulty in distinguishing them from other weapons, and because Iranian and Syrian government forces operate similar, though more rudimentary, kamikaze drones.



**ZALA Lancet loitering munition.**

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin Military Blog, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2019-Exhibition-pavilions/i-HwGLLZC/A>  
Attribution: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Copyright-policy>

“...government tests of the KYB loitering munition have been completed, and the results of the tests are considered positive... it was recommended that the Russian army be armed with this new type of strike attack drone...”

### Source:

(Russian Source Announces Success of ‘Cube’ Suicide Drone Tests),” *RT Arabic* (Russian Arabic-language news network), 16 December 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/2p86e54n>

مصدر روسي يعلن إنجاز اختبارات الدرون الانتحاري كوب

*A source close to the Russian Ministry of Defense said that government tests of the KYB loitering munition have been completed, and the results of the tests are considered positive. The source added: “As a result of these tests, it was recommended that the Russian army be armed with this new type of strike attack drone.” The source indicated that the delivery of these drones to the armed forces will most likely start in 2022.*

### Source:

(Russian Defense Ministry Displays Use of ‘Lancet’ Suicide UAV in Video Clip from Syria),” *Shaam News Network* (Syrian opposition news network), 26 December 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/bddd8f9p>

الدفاع الروسية تستعرض مسيرات لانسيت الانتحارية بمقاطع تظهر استخدامها بسوريا

*The Russian Ministry of Defense published a video clip showing the use of “Lancet” Russian suicide drones, which it said shows the destruction of a small oil refinery factory belonging to the rebel factions in the countryside of Hama. Sham News Network was unable to determine the target location. Video clips were also posted on the telegram channel of Russia-1 journalist Alexander Rogatkin. The full version will be shown on Saturday on the Russia 24 TV channel. The journalist explained on his channel: “A small oil refinery belonging to Syrian militants was destroyed in the Hama countryside with the help of two munitions by the special operations forces of the Russian Armed Forces. It is assumed that Lancet drones were used.”*

Source: “Война Дронов – 2021 (Drone Wars – 2021),” *Russia 24* (State-owned Russian-language news channel), 25 December 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Me7shKOc0c>



## Russia's Increasingly Visible Military Presence in Mali

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

Although Mali has longstanding military ties with France, Russia is filling the void left in the region following France's withdrawal of forces from Mali. According to a recent French-language article in *tvmonde.com*, Russian personnel have replaced French troops at a base in Timbuktu. The article further suggests there may be up to 400 Russians in Mali operating as military instructors.

The article contends there is also growing confirmation of Russia's Wagner Group in Mali, implying that the Russians are, in fact, mercenaries rather than regular armed forces. According to the article, a Malian official in Timbuktu noted mercenaries were what outsiders might call the Russian troops, but from the Malian perspective all that matters is that the Russians are instructing Malian soldiers. Meanwhile, according to a 12 January report in Russian-language *Interfax military news.com*, Russia denies any government role in Wagner Group activities in Mali and considers the company as having the right to independently pursue business interests in Mali.

The *tvmonde.com* article also notes that France and UN forces in Mali remain suspicious of the Russian presence and have reportedly



Map showing Russia and Mali.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali\\_Russia\\_Locator.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mali_Russia_Locator.svg) Attribution: [CC x 2.0]

conducted flights over the Timbuktu base hosting the Russians. The article states that this angered Russia and caused Mali to request that France discontinue flights over the base.

“You speak of mercenaries, it's your business. For us, they are Russian instructors,” said the Malian official.”

**Source:** “Mali: les Russes présentés comme des instructeurs de plus en plus nombreux (Mali: Russians presented more and more as instructors),” *information.tv5monde.com* 7 January 2021. <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/mali-les-russes-presentes-comme-des-instructeurs-de-plus-en-plus-nombreux-439418#:~:text=Un%20des%20responsables%20maliens%20a,notre%20camp%20militaire%20de%20Sofara.&text=Mais%20un%20influent%20%C3%A9lu%20d,%C3%AAtre%20tu%C3%A9%20des%20mercenaires%20russes%22>

*Many Russian instructors have been deployed in Mali in recent weeks, especially on the Timbuktu base (north) recently left by French forces, said Malian military officials. One of these officials responded in the affirmative to the possibility that these instructors now number about 400 across the country.*

*The apparent strengthening of cooperation with Russia coincides with the reconfiguration of the French forces and the planned reduction of the Barkhane anti-jihadist force, which will drop from around 5,000 soldiers in the Sahel in the summer of 2021 to around 3,000 in the summer of 2022. Barkhane recently handed over three bases in the north to the Malians, the most recent in Timbuktu in mid-December. Russian instructors recently arrived in Timbuktu to accompany the delivery of Russian helicopters, a Malian official said. Another Malian official, also on condition of anonymity, confirmed the presence of “Russian military instructors in several parts of Mali. You speak of mercenaries, it's your business. For us, they are Russian instructors,” said the chief official.*

**Source:** “Москве неизвестно, сколько граждан РФ, сотрудников ЧВК "Вагнер", находятся в Мали” (“Moscow does not know how many citizens of the Russian Federation and employees of Wagner PMC are in Mali),” *Interfax militarynews.ru* (Russian language news service), 12 January 2022. <https://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=564129&lang=RU>

*As a high-ranking diplomat stressed, “the officials of the Russian Federation have nothing to do with the activities of our private companies. This is capitalism. Everyone earns as they can,” he added. The interlocutor provided a negative answer to the question of whether, in principle, a register of Russian citizens in Mali is maintained.*

## Chinese Army Division Independently Improves Integrated Reconnaissance System

By Cindy Hurst  
OE Watch Commentary

According to a recent article posted on the Chinese Ministry of Defense website, a Chinese division has fielded a new type of integrated reconnaissance system. The new system is supposed to enable more rapid reconnaissance and strike capability against enemy targets. The article explains that China had developed past reconnaissance equipment in piecemeal fashion over extended periods, often making systems incompatible and therefore inefficient at reconnoitering and strike. Hoping to improve efficiency, the unidentified army division set up a team of experts who spent nearly half a year tackling key problems,

as well as researching, developing, and testing equipment interconnections. Their efforts reportedly streamlined levels of command and improved the interconnection and communication between the different reconnaissance systems, including unmanned aerial vehicles, reconnaissance devices at forward sentry posts, and infrared thermal imaging devices. While this article does not indicate whether or not this sort of localized innovation is a common practice in the PLA, it is at least a demonstration of alignment with President Xi Jinping's general directive for more innovation in the PLA.

“After the integrated reconnaissance system was introduced to other units in the division, the intelligence and reconnaissance capability of the units was substantially enhanced.”

**Source:** Zhang Jin and Hu Wenbo, “陆军某师紧盯战斗力建设难点问题推进科研攻关自主创新挖掘侦察装备潜能 (Army Division Focuses on Difficult Issues in Building Combat Power, Promotes Key Scientific Research, Independently Innovates and Explores Potential of Reconnaissance Equipment),” *Chinese Ministry of Defense website*, 17 December 2021. [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2021-12/17/content\\_4901281.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2021-12/17/content_4901281.htm)

*Officers and soldiers utilized a new type of independently developed, integrated reconnaissance system to achieve rapid reconnaissance and rapid strikes against "enemy" targets.*

*According to information provided, due to the incompatibility of reconnaissance equipment distributed at different times in the past, the efficiency of reconnoitering and striking targets was not high. With respect to this issue, the division set up a team that sought to collect expertise and tackle key problems. Under the guidance of relevant experts, the team repeatedly tested the interconnection sequences of equipment, streamlined levels of command, researched and built new types of connecting cables and interfaces for the equipment, and achieved interconnection and communication among various kinds of reconnaissance equipment, including reconnaissance UAVs, reconnaissance devices at forward sentry posts, and infrared thermal imaging devices.*

*... After the integrated reconnaissance system was introduced to other units in the division, the intelligence and reconnaissance capability of the units was substantially enhanced.*



**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."**



## China Wages Cognitive Warfare To Shape Taiwanese Public Opinion

By Cindy Hurst  
OE Watch Commentary

Amid tensions across the Taiwan Straits, Taiwan media has been reporting about the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) use of cognitive warfare to reunite the two Chinas. One such article was published in the Military Affairs Forum of *Taipei Ch'ing-nien Jih-pao* (*The Youth Daily*), a government-sponsored daily that reports on military, government, and general news. According to the accompanying excerpts, the CCP is using non-military, gray zone tactics to change people's perception of China. The CCP uses both traditional media and various forms of internet media to carry out its war of public opinion, legal warfare, and psychological warfare. As an example, the article describes how the CCP will tell the "Chinese story" in an effort to "expand its influence, create controversies, and widen differences and conflicts." It transmits false information to various foreign media outlets or "infiltrate social media to disseminate specific messages abroad; and reproduce foreign media reports to shape or embellish [China's] own image and perception both domestically and abroad." According to the article, behind the war of influence is the CCP's United Front Work Department, which is in charge of propaganda; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Propaganda Department, which focuses on external propaganda and control domestic public opinion; and the Ministry of State Security,

which combines both civilian hackers, who launch cyber-attacks, with false information produced on content farms.

The second article, published in Taiwan's English-language publication *Taipei Times* explains, "the CCP is adept at using seemingly innocuous political tools to advance its 'united front' strategy, and psychological and cognitive warfare offensives against its target, including Taiwan." To accomplish this, it resorts to both hard and soft power (i.e. culture, education, sports exchanges, media organizations, and economic means) "to control and manipulate Taiwanese public opinion." While none of this is particularly new, this recent spotlight in Taiwanese media shows that the cognitive warfare strategy that China uses to win without fighting is persistent, far-reaching, and controlled by the CCP (as opposed to spontaneous, independent media).

“...the CCP is adept at using seemingly innocuous political tools to advance its “united front” strategy, and psychological and cognitive warfare offensives against its targets, including Taiwan.”

**Source:** Shu Hsiao-huang, “反制認知作戰 抵禦灰色地帶威脅 (Countering Cognitive Warfare and Resisting Gray Zone Threats),” *Taipei Ch'ing-nien Jih-pao* (Youth Daily News: Published by the government of the People's Republic of China), 9 December 2021. <https://www.ydn.com.tw/news/newsInsidePage?chapterID=1467725&type=forum>

*Cognitive warfare is the use of information or various communication platforms to change the mindset of an opponent in order to change his or her behavior. The Chinese Communist Party has been waging a united war against Taiwan for many years, carrying out “The Three Warfares” of public opinion, legal, and psychological warfare. It uses old wine in new bottles, along with both traditional print and electronic media, as well as Internet media (platforms) and other means to carry out its war of influence.*

*The United Front Department is in charge of propaganda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Propaganda Department focus on external propaganda and control internal public opinion, and the Ministry of State Security combines cyber-attacks, carried out by civilian hackers, with fake information produced on content farms to carry the war of influence.*

*...(The CCP) shares the “China story” to expand its influence, create controversies, and widen differences and conflicts. The modus operandi includes spreading falsehoods and spreading them rapidly across platforms; it uses foreign media or infiltrates social media to disseminate specific messages abroad; and reproduce foreign media reports to shape or embellish its own image and perception both domestically and abroad.*

**Source:** Change Yan-ting and Paul Chiou, “Resolutions to Engage with China,” *Taipei Times* (Taiwan based English-language publication), 11 January 2022. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2022/01/12/2003771189>

*As we embark upon a new year, tensions across the Taiwan Strait continue to heighten by the day.*

*However, the CCP is adept at using seemingly innocuous political tools to advance its “united front” strategy, and psychological and cognitive warfare offensives against its targets, including Taiwan.*

*The regime consistently uses soft and sharp power, such as culture, education and sports exchanges, as well as media organizations and economic means, to control and manipulate Taiwanese public opinion.*

## Beyond the Glitzy Projects: China's Far-Reaching Impact on Kenya



**China's influence in Kenya extends far beyond large scale projects such as the railroad it financed and helped build.**

Source: Macabe5387/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nairobi\\_Terminus.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nairobi_Terminus.jpg)  
Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

By Robert Feldman  
OE Watch Commentary

In Kenya, China's influence can be clearly seen in the high-profile Mombassa-Nairobi Railway, the Lamu deep seaport, and the towering Global Trade Centre. However, beyond these massive projects built by Chinese companies, often with Chinese money and labor, there are numerous other means, including much smaller projects, through which China is making its mark in Kenya. As the accompanying excerpted article from the Kenyan news agency *Capital News* explains, that mark is enormous, with China, and particularly Chinese technology, revolutionizing the country's infrastructure and helping to supercharge its manufacturing base. Chinese influence on Kenya includes charitable actions, such as deliv-

ering substantial amounts of medical supplies critical to helping Kenya deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, all the while garnering appreciation from the Kenyan population. Chinese online education platforms also filled the gap created when 2,000 Kenyan students found themselves cut off from their university as the disease spread.

The influence of Chinese companies is vast: they have donated food, established industrial parks, held educational workshops, and are transferring technology to Kenyan factories. However, as the article notes, perhaps the most important impact China has had on Kenya is the growing attitude among young Kenyans that through hard work and knowledge, the country can accomplish projects of all sizes important to national development. This outlook is in large part a result of Kenyans witnessing, and learning from, successful Chinese businesspeople living and working in Kenya.

The article does not mention any of the pushback against China often discussed in other publications, such as that concerning an unsustainable debt load, poor quality of some Chinese goods, and Chinese workers doing jobs that Kenyans could fill. However, despite this editorial omission, the article does bring to light the influence China has in Kenya beyond the "glitzy" projects, which tends to be underreported and as a result possibly underappreciated. China's influence in Kenya is far larger than just the high-profile projects would indicate, and as the article describes, that influence is building strong relationships, including diplomatic, between the two countries. It behooves other countries wanting to deal with Kenya to take note of how China has grown that relationship through the breadth and depth of its business activities.

“By going beyond the call of duty to provide auxiliary services to Kenyans, Chinese firms are building [a] strong foundation for public diplomacy in the country.”

**Source:** Adhere Cavince, “How Chinese firms have changed the face of Kenya's capital, Nairobi,” *Capital News* (a Kenyan news agency), 22 December 2021. <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2021/12/how-chinese-firms-have-changed-the-face-of-kenyas-capital-nairobi/>

*The 8th Ministerial of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation held in Senegal last month resolved to support private sector partnerships between China and African countries. Given the strong record of Kenya to attract and sustain high caliber international businesses, more Chinese firms should consider investing in the country and further promote economic integration of the two countries. By going beyond the call of duty to provide auxiliary services to Kenyans, Chinese firms are building strong foundation for public diplomacy in the country.*

*There is increasing confidence that Kenyans too, can follow the footsteps of their Chinese counterparts and improve their socio-economic standing. As more Kenyans get a chance to interact with Chinese firms, more learning points emerge. Nairobi is for instance home to young and skilled professional in rail and road construction, capable of providing their services beyond Kenya.*

*In the course of implementing big-ticket infrastructure projects across the country, Chinese enterprises have also engaged in building community roads, setting up water pans and upgrading learning institutions through donation and renovation of classrooms and provision of learning materials. During the floods and landslides witnessed in West Pokot in 2019, for example, Chinese firms donated food and non-food items in a show of solidarity with the affected households.*

*Yet, beyond these glitzy projects, the firms have equally been engaging in small acts of charity that have equally left inedible marks in the lives of individuals and households across the country.*



## China Strengthening Position in Central America with Recognition by Nicaragua

By Ryan Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

At the end of 2021, Nicaragua's dictator Daniel Ortega announced that his country would recognize China after severing over 30 years of diplomatic relations with Taiwan (See "Nicaragua's Ortega Consolidating Dictatorship with Russian and Chinese Backing," *OE Watch*, 1 2022). One of the country's oldest dailies, *Confidencial*, states that the diplomatic switch should be viewed through the lens of China's escalating attempts to curtail Taiwan's diplomatic relations; increasing Chinese interest in Central America; and an ideological alliance with Ortega, who also runs a single-party regime. The move gives China momentum in terms of developing deeper relations in the region. Panama and El Salvador have ruptured relations with Taiwan, and the election of Xiomara Castro in Honduras could see a similar maneuver in the coming months. If Castro follows through on her campaign pledge to drop Taiwan, Guatemala and Belize would remain the only two countries in Central America to recognize Taiwan, potentially tipping the geopolitical balance decisively in favor of China.



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen attends the inauguration of Daniel Ortega in 2017.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/31429913323> Attribution: Flickr

Nicaragua now counts China, Russia, and Iran among its closest allies. Another *Confidencial* article speculates that Ortega seeks to buffer against international isolation by recognizing China, something his existing relationships with Russia, Iran, North Korea, and others cannot provide. The outlet reports that Ortega will seek financing and export markets in China, especially in the face of international financial pressure and sanctions.

“The reestablishment of relations with the People's Republic of China is the conjunction of several circumstances: a Chinese escalation in the diplomatic battle between Beijing and Taipei; the interest of the Asian giant to consolidate in Central America; and the 'logical' alliance of Daniel Ortega with a single-party regime.”

**Source:** “Ortega se adelanta a Ley Renacer y suspensión del CAFTA al alinearse con China (Ortega anticipates the Renacer Law and suspension of CAFTA by aligning himself with China),” *Confidencial* (one of the country's oldest dailies still operating), 18 December 2021. <https://www.confidencial.com.ni/economia/ortega-se-adelanta-a-ley-renacer-y-suspension-del-cafta-al-alinearse-con-china/>

*In addition to challenging the United States, Ortega is also looking for options in the face of the... Renacer Law... excluding Nicaragua from the free trade agreement (CAFTA), and that Europe does the same with the Association Agreement, which would make Nicaraguan exports to both markets much more expensive.*

**Source:** “La “afinidad” de Ortega con China es que el gigante asiático tiene “un régimen de un solo partido” (Ortega's “affinity” with China is that the Asian giant has “a one-party regime”),” *Confidencial* (one of the country's oldest dailies still operating), 16 December 2022. <https://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/editorial/muerte-en-la-frontera-editorial-el-tiempo-643053>

*The reestablishment of relations with the People's Republic of China is the conjunction of several circumstances: a Chinese escalation in the diplomatic battle between Beijing and Taipei; the interest of the Asian giant to consolidate in Central America; and the 'logical' alliance of Daniel Ortega with a single-party regime.*

## Iran and Syria Discuss Transportation Cooperation

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

Ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Syria has been Iran's most trustworthy if not only Arab ally. During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, Syria was the only Arab country to side with Iran. Iran returned the favor during the Syrian civil war, dispatching the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in what the Iranian press described as train-and-assist missions, but which included combat resulting in IRGC casualties. The IRGC also activated Lebanese Hezbollah units to fight on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Now that the Assad regime has largely regained control over Syria, Iran and Syria increasingly discuss how they might cooperate both in rebuilding Syria and post-conflict trade (See: "Iran and Syria Seek to Jumpstart Economic Ties," *OE Watch*, 1 2022). The excerpted selection from Iran's official news outlet, *Islamic Republic News Agency*, reports

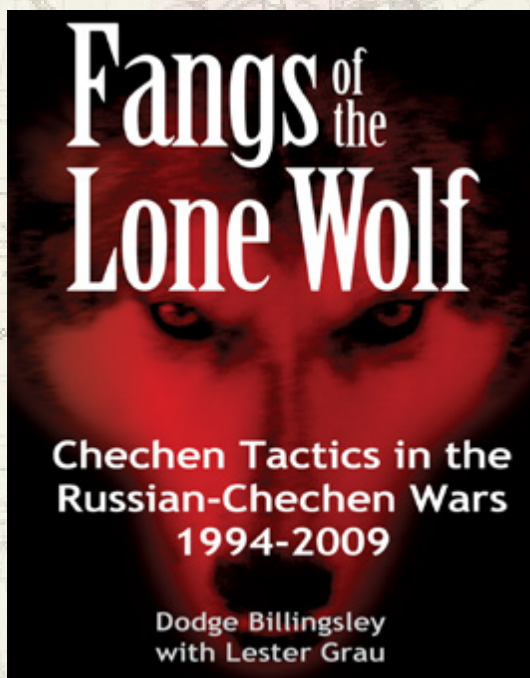
from Syria on a meeting between the heads of Iranian companies soliciting business in Syria and the Syrian Transport Minister Zuhair Khazim. The air link between Syria and Iran is not new. IRGC owned airlines have long shuttled men and material between airports in Tehran or the nearby city of Karaj and both Damascus and Beirut. However, the frankness with which Khazim and the Iranian businessmen discussed reviving the land route suggests confidence that Iraq will no longer pose an impediment to overland trade between Iran and Syria. Also relevant is the open acknowledgment that both countries seek to bypass sanctions imposed by the United States and other Western countries.

“It [is] important as well for Iran to overcome these sanctions.”

**Source:** “Iran va Suriya dar baraye Tawse’ah-e Hamkariha dar hawzeh-e hamal va Naqel Goftegu Kardand (Iran and Syria Discussed Transportation Cooperation),” *Islamic Republic News Agency* (Iran’s official news outlet), 23 December 2021. <https://www.irna.ir/news/84588042>

*...In a meeting with representatives of a number of Iranian companies, [Syrian] Minister of Transport Zuhair Khazim referred to the unilateral Western sanctions affecting the Syrian people, and called for the development of cooperation in the field of transportation between Syria and Iran. He considered it important as well for Iran to overcome these sanctions.*

*The meeting, held in Damascus, called on the Syrian Minister of Transport to define the framework for cooperation for both air and land sectors between Iran and Syria in accordance with the legal provisions and to have the relevant committees in each sector review them. According to Syrian media reports, the Iranian delegation also considered the possibility of establishing joint airlines and supporting road maintenance projects and investing in the construction of new roads and bridges in Syria.... At the end of March 2011, Syria became embroiled in a crisis backed by some of its neighboring Western-oriented Arab countries and the Zionist regime. The presence of more than 360,000 terrorists from 120 countries in various cities in Syria caused the widespread destruction of many important cities during the nearly nine years of war in this country.*



### FANGS OF THE LONE WOLF

by Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau

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



## Iran's Purported Counter-Hijacking Record

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

Since 1984, the U.S. State Department has classified Iran as a leading state sponsor of terrorism. Iran not only funds proxy militias aimed at destabilizing regional states, but also sponsors many terror groups that engage in bombings, assassinations, and hijackings. In the official Iranian regime narrative, none of this is terrorism, but rather legitimate “resistance,” which Iranian diplomats argue it is their right to support. Here, the Iranian government simply takes advantage of the absence of any international consensus definition about what constitutes terrorism.

Post-revolutionary Iran has also experienced terrorism. In the chaotic first years of the revolution, groups such as the Mujahedin al-Khalq conducted both assassinations and bombings targeting regime officials. These often maimed and killed innocent civilians, however. The excerpted article from the Iranian Defense Ministry’s press outlet, *Holy Defense News Agency*, provides a brief history of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-linked Aviation Protection Corps. It reports that the Aviation Protection Corps has foiled 128 attempted hijackings over the past 34 years, more than 20 percent of which occurred in the air. The article lacks clarity however as hijacking and terrorism was a far greater problem in Iran in the 1980s, but the statistics reported in the excerpt did not begin until 1988. There has been very little mention

of domestic hijacking attempts in Iran since then. If there have been 128 hijacking episodes since 1988, it suggests there may be significant discord and continued attempts at domestic terrorism, even if these go unreported. That the Aviation Protection Corps now operates on 19 airlines and in 67 airports suggests that the fear of hijacking remains a concern.



*The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps counter-hijacking drills, January 2017.*

Source: Hamshahri Online, <https://media.hamshahronline.ir/d/2021/12/30/4/4627094.jpg>

“This statistic indicates a 100 percent success rate of the IRGC operations.”

**Source:** “Khansisazi 128 Mavarad Aghdam beh Havapeymarbayeri Tawset Sepah (Neutralization of 128 Attempted Air Hijackings by the Revolutionary Guards),” *Holy Defense News Agency* (Iranian defense ministry’s press outlet), 29 December 2021. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/496930>

*Western countries have dubbed it the "Iron Guard", but in Iran it is referred to as the Aviation Protection Corps. The Aviation Protection Corps is a unit that was formed in January 1988 by the order of Imam Khomeini to the then-commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Since the IRGC took over the responsibility [for aviation security], it has foiled 128 hijacking attempts. Of these, 100 episodes were cases in which the saboteurs were identified and arrested on the ground and 28 included interference and [attempted] air piracy while flying. This statistic indicates a 100 percent success rate of the IRGC operations in dealing with hijacking. These efforts have come to fruition while the Flight Safety Unit has not given a single martyr in connection with the assigned mission, although it has suffered 77 martyrs from other reasons, such as during the Holy Defense, plane crashes and the defense of the Shrines.... Today, the Aviation Protection Corps has reached such a position due to its 33 years of experience in protecting flight safety that some countries want to have Iran's experience in this field; the Aviation Protection Corps provides security and safety services to 19 domestic airlines at 67 airports in the country.*



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

## Iran Busts Weapons and Ammunition Smuggling Ring

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has long had difficulty controlling illicit weaponry within its borders. At the conclusion of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, there was little if any organized demobilization or disarmament: conscripts simply returned home, often with their weapons. Over subsequent years, successive Iranian administrations offered amnesties to enable citizens to return weapons without penalty as gun ownership and possession is, in most cases, a crime. The fact that they have had to do so repeatedly suggests the ineffectiveness of their efforts.

Beyond the war-related and unaccounted for arms making their way into the public domain, Iran has long faced weapons smuggling from neighboring states. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has found it difficult to operate in southeastern and northwestern Iran, two regions populated both by ethnic and sectarian minorities and with borders drawn through inhospitable terrain. The conflicts and drug trade in both Afghanistan and Iraq have increased arms smuggling opportunities in these border areas. The excerpted article from Iran news media outlet *Fars News Agency* suggests Iran faces a problem with loose weapons in Khuzestan, the oil-producing region of Iran at the top of the Persian Gulf and adjacent to southern Iraq. It relates successful operations against two alleged arms smuggling operations

in the refinery city of Ahvaz and Karun county in Khuzestan Province, where authorities seized 87 illegal weapons.

While the excerpted article alludes to smugglers' efforts to create "instability" in Iran, the article does not address possible motives nor possible connections to active terror cells in the area (See: "Iranian Government Details Ahvaz Terrorist Incidents," *OE Watch*, November 2018). It is unclear if the weapons stay in Khuzestan or are smuggled deeper into Iran. If the former, it could suggest a vulnerability that unknown cells are smuggling weapons into Iran's chief oil-producing region that is responsible for the majority of Iran's foreign currency earnings. The weapons in the photograph accompanying the story appear to be short-barreled shotguns commonly designated as riot, as well as breaching or tactical shotguns not designed or intended for hunting or other more pedestrian uses.

“Two heavy shipments of weapons... were discovered.”

**Source:** "Anhedam Do Band-e Qacheq-e Salah va Mohemat dar Khuzestan (Destruction of Two Arms and Ammunition Smuggling Gangs in Khuzestan)," *Fars News Agency* (media outlet close to the Islamic Republic's security forces), 3 January 2022. <https://www.farsnews.ir/khuzestan/news/14001013000043>

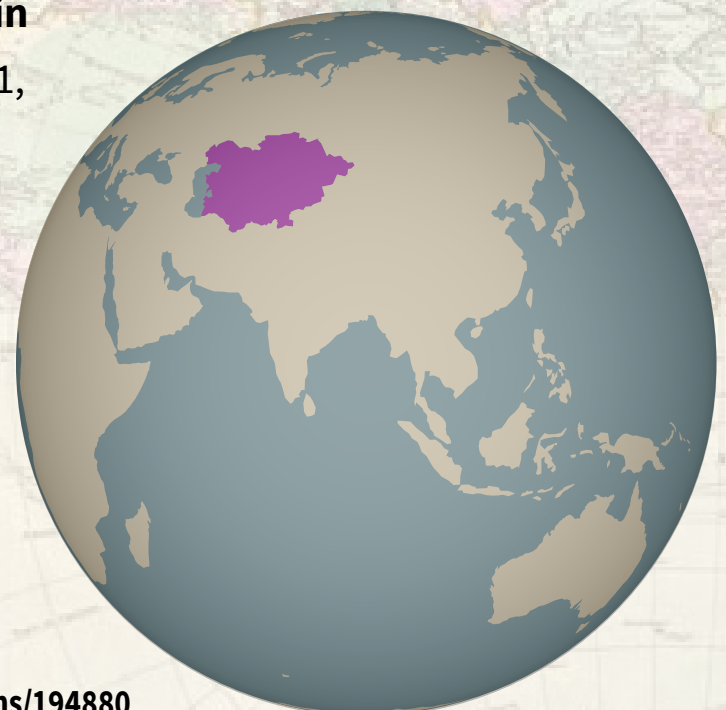
*According to the Fars News Agency in Ahvaz, the Khuzestan police commander issued a statement announcing: Police intelligence and security officers in the province, by means of superior intelligence, learned that two smuggling gangs had entered the cities of Ahvaz and Karun with the aim of creating insecurity in the country, conducted an operation, identified and destroyed them. In these comprehensive operations, two heavy shipments of weapons, including 87 weapons of war and hunting, and a significant amount of ammunition were discovered.*

## Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194880>





## Guerrilla Groups Continue To Threaten Colombia Along Border with Venezuela

By Ryan Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

The border region between Colombia and Venezuela is experiencing some of its worst violence in years. Since 2 January 2022, several dozen have died in what could be a series of contract killings, according to center-left Colombian daily *El Espectador*. The daily states that originally, Colombian prosecutors suspected the dead were members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a guerrilla group operating along the border, contesting territory with the National Liberation Army (ELN), another prominent guerrilla group. According to an article in the politically centrist Colombian daily *El Tiempo*, Colombian President Iván Duque has increased the troop presence in the border region to combat drug trafficking and establish greater state presence in these remote stretches.

Violence along the border between Colombia and Venezuela is certainly nothing new. However, this flare-up is a reminder of the criminal sanctuary provided to Colombia's FARC and ELN by the Maduro regime in Venezuela, and the instability fomented throughout Latin America by the actions of these groups. Unlike previous flare-ups in Apure state in Venezuela, these incidents have not led to migratory



Members of Colombia's National Liberation Army, which operates along the border area between Colombia and Venezuela, pose with their weapons.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/brasildefato/32317009638> Attribution: Flickr

flows but underscore that Colombia has yet to realize fully the fruits of its demobilization efforts with guerrilla groups. Lastly, with Colombia's presidential election slated for May 2022, guerrilla groups and demobilization efforts will be key issues in the campaign.

“Very early in 2022, the horror of the war showed its face again in Arauca, where not only have the effects of peace with the FARC not been seen, but, on the contrary, violence has reached levels of the crudest stages of the armed conflict.”

**Source:** “No hubo Combate:” Fiscalía elevó a 27 los muertos en Arauca y dio nueva hipótesis (There was no combat:” Prosecutor's Office raised the dead in Arauca to 27 and gave a new hypothesis),” *El Espectador* (Colombian daily generally considered to be center-left in its political orientation), 5 January 2022. <https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/no-hubo-combate-fiscalia-elevo-a-27-los-muertos-en-arauca-y-dio-nueva-hipotesis/>

*Since January 2, 27 dead have been found in different rural areas of Arauca, the Prosecutor's Office reported on Wednesday. The attorney general, Francisco Barbosa, provided a new hypothesis based on what investigators have found in the field and in the autopsies of the deceased: apparently, there were no combats, but the people were murdered in the form of contract killers.*

**Source:** “Muerte en la frontera (Death on the Border),” *El Tiempo* (one of Colombia's oldest dailies generally described as politically-centrist), 4 January 2022. <https://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/editorial/muerte-en-la-frontera-editorial-el-tiempo-643053>

*Early in 2022, the horror of the war showed its face again in Arauca, where not only have the effects of peace with the FARC not been seen, but, on the contrary, violence has reached levels of the crudest stages of the armed conflict...All this within the framework of the complicity, when not open participation in the crime, of the authorities of the Nicolás Maduro regime...Understanding the challenge posed by the natural conditions of the border and the lack of collaboration from the authorities on the other side to curb crime, it is clear that more efficient efforts and strategies are still needed.*

## Somalia: Puntland Troops Fight Each Other, Not Terrorists

By Robert Feldman  
OE Watch Commentary

Puntland's armed forces are expected to fight al-Shabaab and Islamic State terrorists. However, according to the excerpted accompanying article from a Kenyan media group's publication, *The East African*, the military members from this autonomous, federal state of Somalia recently turned their weapons on each other in the port town of Bossaso. Specifically, fighting occurred between forces loyal to Puntland's government and an elite antiterrorism brigade known as the Puntland Security Force (PSF). Heavy and light arms were used in the fighting, reportedly intense at times, resulting in both combatant and civilian casualties.

Purportedly, Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni's attempt in November to sack Mohamud Osman Diyaano, the director of the PSF, was the cause of the hostilities. The same decree that dismissed Diyaano also appointed Brigadier General Mohamed Amin Abdullahi as his replacement. As the article notes, Diyaano rejected the move and, along with top PSF officers, declared the dismissal and replacement to be illegal.

There are concerns that the clash between the two components of the armed forces will weaken its capabilities and resolve to combat

“Somalia's forces in Puntland State have turned their guns against one another, leading to fears that al-Shabaab could take advantage to establish their base in the area.”



**While this al-Shabaab leader was killed, future progress against the terrorist organization in Puntland is threatened by military in-fighting.**

Source: Wargeyska Saxafi, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Godane.jpg>  
Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

al-Shabaab and the Islamic State. Unlike neighboring Somaliland, which has declared its independence from Somalia and wishes to be recognized as a sovereign nation, Puntland has decided to remain part of Somalia. Puntland's contribution to combating al-Shabaab and the Islamic State is valued and important, and any distraction from its military objective benefits these terrorist organizations. Unfortunately, the terrorists threaten the stability not just of Puntland but of the entire geostrategic nation of Somalia, whose neighboring waters see tremendous amounts of tanker traffic helping to supply the world with oil.

**Source:** Abdulkadir Khalif, “Puntland soldiers turn weapons on each other,” *The East African* (a Kenyan media group), 25 December 2021. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/puntland-soldiers-turn-weapons-on-each-other-3662910>

*Somalia's forces in Puntland State have turned their guns against one another, leading to fears that al-Shabaab could take advantage to establish their base in the area.*

*In the past couple of weeks, an armed clash in the port city, some 1,500km northeast of Mogadishu, has seen the law enforcers mostly engage in vicious fights, rather than guarding civilians.*

*Neither the pro-government side nor the PSF officers have issued clear information on the status of the fighting and the casualty levels.*

*Bossaso, the commercial capital and the main port of Puntland, had become a ghost town as residents fled for cover on Tuesday. Businesses remained largely closed.*



## Sahel Drug Trade Mixes with Militancy



2014 02 19 Handover of Uniform to Somali Custodial Corps 07.

Source: AMISOM Public Information [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014\\_02\\_19\\_Handover\\_of\\_Uniform\\_to\\_Somali\\_Custodial\\_Corps\\_07\\_\(12632984573\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014_02_19_Handover_of_Uniform_to_Somali_Custodial_Corps_07_(12632984573).jpg) Attribution: CC x 2.0

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

On 11 January, the Burkina Faso-based *Norbert Zongo Cell for Investigative Journalism in West Africa (CENOZO)* wrote the attached, excerpted French-language article on criminal drug trafficking in the Sahel. CENOZO was founded by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to report on corruption, organized crime, bad governance, and violations of human rights. According to the article, a number of factors are contributing to drug financing of terrorism in the region, including the lack of state authority, weak judicial systems, the collapse of the traditional pastoral economy, and corruption.

In particular, the article points to northern Mali as a transit point for cocaine in West Africa, which disrupts the stability of state institutions

and benefits from the complicity of political or military figures. The article also notes that drugs often pass through the three coastal West African countries of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo and suggests that drug lords in Burkina Faso remain unknown and have evaded security forces crackdowns. Although the article acknowledges UNODC has launched several programs to counter drug trafficking, including surveillance at airports, the indifference and corruption of government officials has limited the ability of such programs to curtail the drug trade in the Sahel.

One of the drugs that the article highlights with concern is tramadol, often used by laborers. However, the northern Nigeria-focused news outlet *Daily Trust* noted in a 5 June article that the Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has intercepted tramadol shipments from the coastal city of Lagos. These were destined for Boko Haram in the country's northeast. The drug is used to keep fighters awake and vigilant during long battles or when hiding in the bush to evade security forces.

Besides high-level officials and militant group involvement in the drug trade, the article argues the abuse of drugs by impoverished youth can also result in their being recruited by armed groups. Consistent with previous reporting from as early as January 2014 by the Geneva-based *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, the excerpted article by *globalinitiative.net* states that the origin of some of the drugs in the Sahel is Latin America, including Colombia and Brazil, as well as Bombay, India. Therefore, the problem of drug trafficking and its inter-relation with terrorism and militancy in the Sahel remains complex, with distinct local and global factors contributing to its perpetuation.

“All in all, drug trafficking is intensifying and constitutes a funding opportunity for crime and a threat to the security of states.”

**Source:** “Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: Sur les routes criminelles de la drogue au Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: On the criminal drug routes in the Sahel),” *cenozo.org* (UN sponsored media consortium based in Burkino Faso), 11 January 2022. <https://cenozo.org/burkina-mali-niger-sur-les-routes-criminelles-de-la-drogue-au-sahel/>

*Several types of drugs transit through Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, with Europe as their destination. Facilitated by porous borders and insufficient means of control, this traffic fuels crime in the Sahel. Between January and October 2021, Burkina Faso customs seized at least 78.11 tons of drugs.*

*Tramadol is trafficked for non-medical use and is widely consumed by people performing physical work: gold miners, agricultural producers, workers on major construction sites. Its trafficking constitutes a great threat in West, Central and North Africa, underlines the UNODC.*

*The drugs usually come from Bombay in Asia and Colombia and Brazil in Latin America. UNODC describes the Sahelian region as a trade and migration route where “the lack of state authority, weak judicial systems, the collapse of the traditional pastoral economy, corruption and the presence of fire have created an ideal conducive environment for illicit trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, corruption and money laundering.” The UNODC cites Mali in its 2013 report as one of the main transit countries for cocaine in West Africa, combining several related activities that dangerously disrupt the stability of institutions.*

**Source:** “Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: Sur les routes criminelles de la drogue au Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: On the criminal drug routes in the Sahel),” *cenozo.org* (UN sponsored media consortium based in Burkino Faso), 11 January 2022. <https://cenozo.org/burkina-mali-niger-sur-les-routes-criminelles-de-la-drogue-au-sahel/>

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# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: Sahel Drug Trade Mixes with Militancy

**Continued Source:** “Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: Sur les routes criminelles de la drogue au Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: On the criminal drug routes in the Sahel),” *cenzo.org* (UN sponsored media consortium based in Burkino Faso), 11 January 2022. <https://cenozo.org/burkina-mali-niger-sur-les-routes-criminelles-de-la-drogue-au-sahel/>

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**Source:** “Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali: Past, Present and Future,” *globalinitiative.net* (Geneva based civil society organization), January 2014. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Illicit-Trafficking-and-Instability-in-Mali-Past-present-and-future.pdf>

*Cocaine first entered these networks in 2002, after South American wholesalers began using West African ports as an intermediate step in reaching consumers in Europe. The consequent rise of organized criminal syndicates in coastal states such as Nigeria and Ghana gained the attention of international bodies and policymakers. Although some amount of cocaine arrives by boat or plane directly to Mauritania and Morocco, the main ports of entry for South American wholesalers to the region are still believed to be Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.*

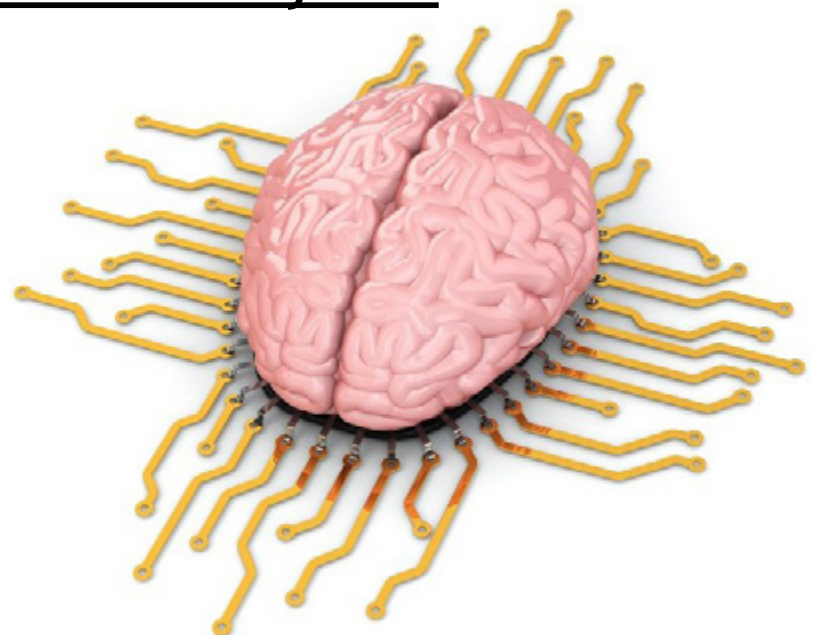
**Source:** “NDLEA Seizes 34,950 Tramadol, Diazepam Capsules Enroute To Boko Haram,” *dailytrust.com* (news outlet covering social and political affairs of northern Nigeria), 5 June 2021. <https://dailytrust.com/ndlea-seizes-34950-tramadol-diazepam-capsules-in-lagos>

*Spokesman of the agency, Femi Babafemi said in Abuja that a 25-year-old, Mohammed Isah, was recruited to move the drugs from Lagos to Borno was arrested. The suspect claims he accepted the offer because of the monetary benefit due to pressure on his finances as his wife and three children displaced by Boko Haram activities.*

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# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Southeast Asia Sees Decrease in Terrorism



DSA 2016 - Close Quarters Battle.

Source: Rizuan [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DSA\\_2016\\_-\\_Close\\_Quarters\\_Battle.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DSA_2016_-_Close_Quarters_Battle.jpg) Attribution: CC x 2.0

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

On 10 January, Malaysian business news outlet *malaymail.com* covered a report from a Singaporean think tank, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis, at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. According to the article, the report indicated that terrorism was decreasing in Southeast Asia due to factors associated with COVID-19.

The article noted lockdowns forced militants, like all citizens in Southeast Asia, to reduce their activities, but it also noted that the lockdowns may have produced longer-term security risks. During the lockdowns youths spent more unsupervised time online and could have been exposed to radical ideas as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) continued its online recruitment efforts.

In Peninsular Malaysia itself, the article noted that there were no terrorist arrests at all in 2021, which is consistent with the trend line of reduced terrorism in the region. In Sabah of Malaysian Borneo there were 15 terrorist arrests in 2021, roughly one-fifth the number of arrests there in 2019. As reported in Singapore's *Straits Times*, the terrorist arrests in Sabah relate to Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf's maritime activities, including piracy and kidnapping, that are carried out between the borders of the Philippines and

Malaysia and also involve Indonesian militants. The *malaymail.com* article attributed the reduction in terrorism in the Philippines to the army's capturing of militant bases in southern Mindanao.

As for Indonesia, the *malaymail.com* article suggested Jamaah Ansharut Daulah's stagnation since 2020 and Mujahidin Indonesia Timor's decline was caused by increased cost of movement, a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions. The only country that saw similar numbers of violence in 2020 as 2021, according to the article, was Thailand, where an insurgency has festered for more than a decade in the country's majority Muslim south. In general, however, the article points to the combination of COVID-19 travel restrictions and successful counter-terrorism operations to arrest militants as key factors behind the downturn in militancy in Southeast Asia.

“The government-imposed lockdowns have forced people to spend more time online, raising the likelihood of vulnerable individuals being exposed to radical ideologies in the cyber domain.”

**Source:** “Terrorist threats in South-east Asia decline in 2021, according to Singapore report,” *malaymail.com* (Malaysian business news outlet), 10 January 2021. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/01/10/terrorist-threats-in-south-east-asia-decline-in-2021-according-to-singapore/2034142>

*Terrorist threats in South-east Asian countries declined in 2021, a Singapore think-tank said in its annual threat assessment. There were fewer terror-related incidents in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines as governments battled Covid-19. In Thailand in 2021, meanwhile, violent incidents connected to an insurgency in the far south were similar to those in the previous year, the researchers found.*

*The report specifically linked the Covid-19 pandemic to the drop in terror activities in Malaysia last year. Authorities made no terror-related arrests in Peninsular Malaysia last year, but made about 15 in Sabah between May and September. The government-imposed lockdowns have forced people to spend more time online, raising the likelihood of vulnerable individuals being exposed to radical ideologies in the cyber domain. Around the region, groups such as IS have increased their recruitment and radicalisation efforts through social media during the pandemic.*

*Elsewhere, the armed forces of the Philippines drew praise for retaking terror bases in the southern region of Mindanao.*

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: Southeast Asia Sees Decrease in Terrorism

**Source:** “Malaysia’s Sabah is South-east Asian terrorists' preferred transit point: Experts,” *straitstimes.com* (Singapore based news outlet), 5 September 2021. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-sabah-is-south-east-asian-terrorists-preferred-transit-point-experts>

*As security threats posed by extremists rise in South-east Asia, Malaysia's Sabah state has emerged as a preferred route for Indonesian militants to enter the southern Philippines to carry out their terrorist activities, according to a regional intelligence source.*

*Sabah appeared to be a transit point for Indonesians who want to join terror groups or learn to make IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in the Philippines, according to the source.*

**Source:** “Annual Threat Assessment,” *rsis.edu.sg* (Singapore based think tank), 1 January 2021. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CTTA-January-2022.pdf>

*Whilst this reflects a continuous declining trend of attacks and plots compared to the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 terrorist landscape was particularly marked by aggressive counterterrorism (CT) operations that hauled in more than three hundred terrorist suspects – the largest figure since 2018 – including key militant group leaders.*



## OEWATCH

Check out *back issues* of FMSO’s **Operational Environment Watch** dating back to 2011. They provide translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.



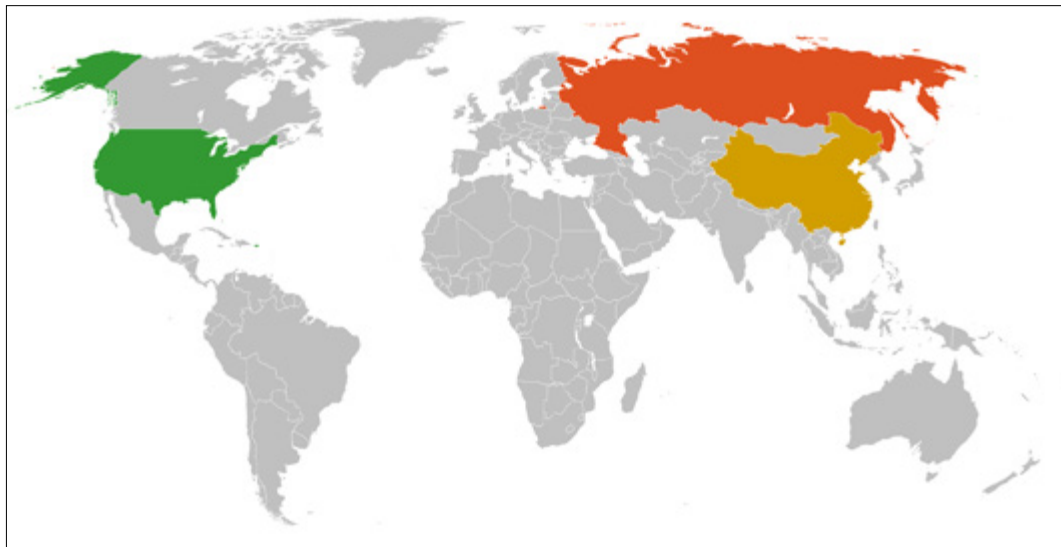
## A Turkish Perspective on Great Power Competition in 2022 and Beyond

By Karen Kaya  
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying passages from the *Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research*, a reputable and independent Turkish think tank, provide a foreign and balanced perspective on how great power competition may evolve in 2022 and beyond. The passages also include astute observations about the current strategic competition among what they call “the prominent players”—the United States, Russia, and China.

First, the authors note that each of these actors is trying to expand its partnership network. For the United States, this includes the G7, NATO, the U.S.-EU Summits, the Democracy Summit, and the security partnership between Australia, the UK, and the United States (AUKUS). They note that the United States and its partnerships revolve around common values based on democracy, individual freedoms, and the rule of law. In contrast, they note China is focused on expanding its partnership network by providing economic opportunities to certain countries, especially through its Belt and Road Initiative. Meanwhile Russia is trying to “transform the rules-based international order into an order where its desired behavior [is achieved], especially in areas where it sees the rules-based international order as a “red line” for itself.” The Ukraine crisis is a case in point. Second, they note the world is becoming polarized between democratic countries and countries governed by authoritarian regimes. In this context, they warn that democracy is regressing in some Western democracies and claim it is critical to reverse this trend.

Third, they note that the United States is trying to protect its technological superiority over the others. On this point, they suggest that even though China is investing more and allocating more resources to gain superiority, “the return on this investment...will not turn the current balance in its favor in the short run.” They write that each player is investing in groundbreaking technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, autonomous capabilities, space, cloud technologies, hypersonic and new missile technologies, quantum, and biotechnology to achieve technological superiority and become more resilient, especially in their supply chains. They note that the use of



Map showing the US, Russia, China.

Source: Keith via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second\\_Cold\\_War\\_locator.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second_Cold_War_locator.png) Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

these technologies and the hybrid warfare they enable is eroding the distinction between peacetime and conflict.

Finally, they claim that the deciding factor for the future of the international system will be whether, or to what extent, competing countries can cooperate on global challenges such as climate change or pandemics; as well as on contentious issues that are zero-sum games.

“In the new international environment... the existing separation between democratic countries and countries governed by authoritarian regimes will become more acute over time... In such an environment, stopping the regression of democracy, which has also been felt in Western countries in recent years, and eliminating the deficiencies [of Western democracies] is becoming paramount.”

**Source:** Sinan Ülgen and Tacan Ildem, “2022’ye Bakış (A Look at 2022),” *EDAM.org.tr [Turkish] Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research* (a reputable, independent Turkish think tank based in Istanbul), January 2022. <https://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022ye-Bakis.pdf>

*...Today’s international environment is witnessing a systemic and strategic competition. The USA, China and to some extent Russia are the prominent players in this strategic competition. ...Each of these players is trying to expand their partnerships to gain superiority over the other. For the USA, this means keeping its partnership network (such as the G7, NATO, USA-EU Summits, Democracy Summit and finally AUKUS) strong, which brings together the countries that share common values based on democracy, individual freedoms, and the rule of law. For China, this means developing its partnership network by providing economic opportunities, especially [via] the Belt and Road Initiative. Russia... is trying to transform the rules-based international order into an order where its desired behavior [is achieved], especially in areas where it sees the rules-based international order as a “red line” for itself... The Ukraine crisis should be read in this context.*

*In the new international environment where strategic competition is felt more... the existing separation between democratic countries and countries governed by authoritarian regimes will become more acute over time. Global polarization is taking place between groups of democratic countries and authoritarian systems. In such an environment, stopping the regression of democracy, which has also been felt in Western countries in recent years, and eliminating the deficiencies [of Western democracies] is becoming paramount.*

# GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

## Continued: A Turkish Perspective on Great Power Competition in 2022 and Beyond

**Continued Source:** Sinan Ülgen and Tacan Ildem, “2022'ye Bakış (A Look at 2022),” *EDAM.org.tr [Turkish] Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research* (a reputable, independent Turkish think tank based in Istanbul), January 2022. <https://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022ye-Bakis.pdf>

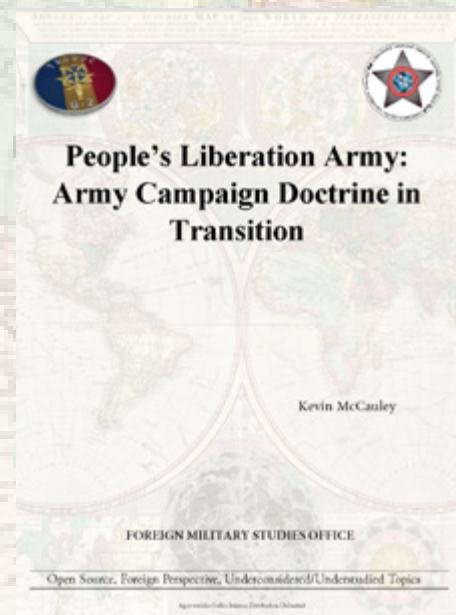
*Meanwhile... emerging and groundbreaking technologies create game-changing challenges and opportunities in an increasingly complex security environment where strategic competition is increasing. In fact, we are witnessing that the USA, together with its allies and global partners, focusing more on protecting its technological superiority against its rivals. Although China invests more and allocates more resources to gain superiority in technology against its competitors, the return on this investment, at least for the moment, is not in a size that will turn the current balance in its favor in the short run. ... Competing countries are trying to gain technological superiority and strengthen their resistance and resilience capacities, especially in the supply chain... In this context, access to emerging and groundbreaking technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, autonomous capabilities, space, cloud technologies, hypersonic and new missile technologies, quantum, and bio technologies is a priority.*

*By making use of these technologies... hybrid warfare methods are increasingly being used to achieve strategic goals without the need to resort to conventional power by using tactics in military, diplomatic, economic, cultural, information and other fields... This makes the distinction between peacetime and conflict, where the use of kinetic force used to be decisive, less clear. Increasing social resilience and resilience against hybrid activities is gaining importance. Cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns are a threat and test for every society. As such, the protection of critical infrastructure emerges as a vital issue.*

*What will be decisive for the future of the international system is to what extent competing countries can develop cooperation in other fields, as well as the contentious areas that are seen as a zero-sum game in this strategic competitive environment. For example, will the USA and China, which seem to be facing an increasingly fierce competition in technology, be able to set common goals in the fight against climate change? Likewise, will it be possible to include China in the negotiation of international agreements ... in the field of arms control and disarmament? ...*

## People's Liberation Army: Army Campaign Doctrine in Transition Kevin McCauley September 2020

This monograph examines current People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army campaign doctrine, with a discussion of PLA theorists' vision of the evolutionary development of warfare to provide context for current doctrine as well as potential future direction. The PLA develops doctrinal joint and service campaign scenarios for possible offensive and defensive operations. PLA campaigns represent the operational level of war between strategic operations and tactical combat. The PLA's current focus on specific campaigns provides insight into Beijing's perception of potential conflict scenarios. The campaign scenarios provide commanders and staff data on command and control, coordination, combat actions, support, and other critical campaign elements for specific operational environments. The description of each campaign's operational environment and combat actions provides valuable support to operational planning and a context for staff and unit training for their specific operational mission. The Army campaigns are executed as components of a joint campaign, or as a primarily independent Army campaign with support from other services.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/351019>



## The Future of Turkish-Russian Relations

By Ihsan Gündüz  
OE Watch Commentary

Turkey's recent purchase of S-400 systems from Russia has led to questions about Turkey's "western-ness" and trustworthiness as a NATO ally. Traditionally a pro-Western country, Turkey's increasing shift towards Russia despite their complex relationship is one of the biggest geopolitical shifts since the Cold War. As such, the evolution of Turkish-Russian relations will have implications for the United States, NATO, and great power competition. The accompanying articles from Turkish sources provide an outlook on Turkish-Russian relations, discussing both issues of contention and cooperation.

The articles, one from pro-government Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* and another from the Istanbul-based independent think tank *Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM)*, note that the points of friction between Turkey and Russia are the implementation of the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh; developments in Libya; tensions in Syria's Idlib Province; and changes in eastern Ukraine. The Syrian conflict has the potential to impact Turkish-Russian relations the most because, as the *Hürriyet* article highlights, Russia continues to strike Turkey-backed Syrian opposition forces around Idlib and Turkey's areas of operation. The tensions between Russia and Turkey will likely increase once the Russia-backed Syrian regime launches an operation on Idlib. Both articles note the Ukrainian conflict will be another high-level point of friction between Turkey and Russia because of Turkey's drone sale to Ukraine. However, according to the *EDAM* publication, despite these frictions, Turkey and Russia cooperate in the energy sector, including Russia supplying natural gas to, and building a nuclear power plant in, Turkey. Russia also maintains strong trade relations with Turkey, investing in its tourism and



**Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.**

Source: Russian Presidential Executive Office, kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62936, via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir\\_Putin\\_and\\_Recep\\_Tayyip\\_Erdogan\\_\(2020-03-05\)\\_04.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Recep_Tayyip_Erdogan_(2020-03-05)_04.jpg), Files from Kremlin.ru | CC-BY-4.0 | Russia photographs taken on 2020-03-05

defense industry. The *Hürriyet* article also refers to President Erdoğan's statement from September 2021 that Turkey will deepen its defense cooperation with Russia and is considering purchasing other weapons systems in addition to the recently purchased S-400s.

The *EDAM* article states that the foundation of Turkish-Russian relations is built on a personal dialogue between their presidents rather than on an institutional foundation, and Presidents Erdoğan and Putin have managed to de-escalate tensions so far when they rise. However, considering the points of friction, Turkish-Russian relations remain fragile. Finally, the *Hürriyet* article notes Turkish-Russian relations are asymmetrical and the scale will further tilt in Russia's favor if Turkey continues to drift away from its Western allies. Therefore, the article suggests that Turkey should ensure its relations with its Western allies remain strong to counterbalance Russia.

“...as long as Turkey keeps its relations with the West strong, it will find a more comfortable space for itself against Russia.”

**Source:** Sedat Ergin, “2021’den 2022’ye Türk Dış Politikası (5)-Rusya ile çatışarak işbirliği modeli ilerlemeye devam ediyor (Turkish Foreign Policy from 2021 to 2022 (5)- Adversarial Cooperation model with Russia continues),” *Hürriyet* (a pro-government Turkish newspaper), 04 January 2022. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/2021den-2022ye-turk-dis-politikasi-5-rusya-ile-catisarak-isbirligi-modeli-ilerlemeye-devam-ediyor-41974354>

*The Russians see no harm in continuing their air operations in a region where TAF [Turkish Armed Forces] units are present. We can guess that with these attacks, Russia wants to maintain a certain pressure on Turkey, which prevented the regime's army from entering Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria...*

*The previous day also witnessed the first telephone conversation of the New Year between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Brief statements with largely similar content were made from both sides. In the Kremlin's statement, there was an indirect reference to the Ukraine-linked NATO-Russia tension. Apart from this, it was stated that the topics of the Caucasus, Libya, and Syria were on the agenda in both of statements. Intention and determination to further the cooperation between the two countries were also emphasized as an important common theme in the texts.*

*Meanwhile, the importance of 2021 was that it was a year...[of] cooperation in Turkish-Russian relations that would extend to the coming years... President Erdoğan went to Sochi at the end of September and during the meeting he held with Putin, he proposed to his counterpart the construction of two new nuclear power plants in Turkey, in addition to Akkuyu... Putin also offered to cooperate with Turkey on launching rockets into space by establishing platforms at sea and on land.*

## Continued: The Future of Turkish-Russian Relations

**Continued Source:** Sedat Ergin, “2021’den 2022’ye Türk Dış Politikası (5)-Rusya ile çatışarak işbirliği modeli ilerlemeye devam ediyor (Turkish Foreign Policy from 2021 to 2022 (5)- Adversarial Cooperation model with Russia continues),” *Hürriyet* (a pro-government Turkish newspaper), 04 January 2022. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/2021den-2022ye-turk-dis-politikasi-5-rusya-ile-catisarak-isbirligi-modeli-ilerlemeye-devam-ediyor-41974354>

*A more critical development was that Erdoğan also suggested to Putin “deepening cooperation” in the defense industry during this meeting. In this context, the President announced that they discussed the further development of the S-400 project, and listed aircraft engines, warplanes, warship, and submarine construction as new potential areas of cooperation.*

*In this respect, Erdoğan is also trying to intimidate the USA and European countries by stating that the weapon systems that Turkey cannot obtain or have difficulty in obtaining from the West can very well be obtained from Russia. Although the second chapter of the S-400 project has not been signed, it remains on the table...*

*President Erdoğan keeps cooperation with Russia as a bargaining card in his hand against the West...*

*... Erdoğan followed a delicate balance between the USA and Russia throughout 2021... In any case, the continuation of cracks, conflicts, and tensions within the Western alliance, as well as the realization of new potential arms sales to Turkey, will be developments that will please the Kremlin.*

*This asymmetry will be widened further [in Russia’s favor] as Turkey’s relations with the West deteriorate... It should not be forgotten that as long as Turkey keeps its relations with the West strong, it will find itself in a more comfortable space against Russia. The decline in Turkey’s foreign relations with the west will also weaken Turkey’s hand against Russia.*

**Source:** Doç. Dr. Çiğdem Üstün, “2022’de Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri: İşbirliği-Rekabet İkileminin Devamı Beklenirken... (Turkey-Russia Relations in 2022: Expecting the Continuation of Cooperation-Competition Dilemma...),” *Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM)* (Istanbul-based an independent think tank), 13 January 2022. <https://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022ye-Bakis.pdf>

*Although relations with Russia have been handled on the axis of cooperation, especially in the energy and defense sectors in recent years, it is not a relationship model free from crises and problems... Because Turkey’s relations with Russia are based on bilateral relations between leaders rather than on institutional foundations, it has a relationship model that is difficult to be called sustainable...*

*The ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, the possible developments in Libya, the tensions in and around Idlib, Ukraine and Belarus are noticeable issues that have the potential to affect relations.*

*Of course, it should not be ignored that as much as their problems [need a resolution], there are areas where Turkey and Russia are trying to develop cooperation. After the Blue Stream, the Turkish Stream project is a step taken to strengthen the energy ties between Russia and Turkey. Energy takes first place in Turkey’s imports from Russia.*

*Considering the problems experienced in its relations with the West, both the EU and the USA, it is expected that Turkey’s relations with Russia will continue to be economically important. However, every step taken towards Russia has risks to further wear down Turkey’s relations with its Western allies... the issues that occupied the agenda in 2021 also occupy the agenda in 2022, and that it is more important to benefit economically and geopolitically for Russia in the framework of possible tensions, than to provide a permanent peace environment in the region...*



## The Collective Security Treaty Organization Demonstrates Its “Peacekeeping” Capabilities



**CSTO collective peacekeeping forces in Kazakhstan 2022-JAN-11, Kyrgyzstan soldier in Almaty Power Station-2.**

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO\\_collective\\_peacekeeping\\_forces\\_in\\_Kazakhstan\\_2022-JAN-11,\\_Kyrgyzstan\\_soldier\\_in\\_Almaty\\_Power\\_Station-2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO_collective_peacekeeping_forces_in_Kazakhstan_2022-JAN-11,_Kyrgyzstan_soldier_in_Almaty_Power_Station-2.jpg) Attribution: CC 4.0

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an intergovernmental military alliance of select post-Soviet states, made history on 6 January 2022, when the organization’s leadership agreed to a request from the government of Kazakhstan to deploy peacekeepers to support Kazakh security forces after a few days of civil unrest across the country. This marked the first time the CSTO sent units from its Collective Operational Reaction Force and demonstrated how the organization can respond to an incident on short notice.

According to the excerpted article in semi-independent Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant*, the CSTO Security Council agreed to Kazakhstan’s request for peacekeepers based on Article 4 of the organization’s treaty. The article notes that this section of the treaty provides for a collective response in the event of a threat to the “security, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty” of a member state. It also points out “the authorities of Kazakhstan said the attacks were coordinated from abroad, but did not say by who.” The article mentions how previous requests to the CSTO for military support, in 2010 by Kyrgyzstan and in 2021 by Armenia, were not granted. The CSTO did not respond to Kyrgyzstan with military support in 2010 because its articles at the time did not allow a response to an internal security issue. After the 2010 unrest, CSTO member states changed the articles to allow the collective forces to be used to respond to an internal security threat of a member state. The lack of a response to Armenia in 2021 is notable as it involved clashes with Azerbaijan, an external threat to Armenian security, but the CSTO had not previously provided the Armenian government support for its conflict with Azerbaijan and stated the 2021 clashes were a border incident, which essentially did not require an actionable response.

The article from Central Asia-focused independent news website *Fergana Agency* reports on the units deployed and breaks down contributions from member states. The majority of these came from Russia, including companies of the 31st Airborne Brigade, 98th Airborne Division, and the 45th Guards Special Forces Brigade. A company of the 103rd Vitebsk Guards Airborne Brigade from Belarus, soldiers of the 25th “Scorpion” Special Forces Brigade from Kyrgyzstan, as well as special forces units from Armenia and Tajikistan also deployed. The units in this peacekeeping force closely match the units that conduct annual joint military exercises of the CSTO’s collective forces. The article also notes that the peacekeeping force tasks included protecting key infrastructure and airfields and that “the CSTO peacekeepers in Kazakhstan will not be involved in the active operational measures of local law enforcement and security agencies.” This included Russian forces at Almaty’s international airport. While the CSTO peacekeeping forces reportedly began withdrawing on 13 January, the deployment demonstrated the capabilities of the CSTO to respond to an incident involving a member state.

“The Russian Ministry of Defense noted that the CSTO peacekeepers in Kazakhstan will not be involved in the active operational measures of local law enforcement and security agencies...”

**Source:** Kiril Krivosheev, Yelena Chernenko, Yuri Barsukov, and Arshaluis Mgdesyan, “ОДКБ спешит на помощь (The CSTO is hurrying to help),” *Kommersant* (semi-independent Russian daily newspaper), 6 January 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5156017>

...Around midnight (on 5 January), President Tokayev held a meeting of the Security Council, at which he announced a “counter-terrorist operation.” “The groups are, in fact, international, which have taken part in serious training abroad and their attack on Kazakhstan should be regarded as an act of aggression,” President Tokayev explained. “In this regard, today, I turned to the CSTO heads of state to assist Kazakhstan in overcoming this terrorist threat.”...

A confirming response to this request was sent overnight. The statement was, ironically, made by a politician who himself unsuccessfully sent a similar request not long ago, Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, who is the current head of the CSTO Collective Security Council...

the Council made a decision in accordance with Article 4 of the treaty...It involves collective assistance, including military, if “one of the participating states is subjected to aggression (an armed attack that threatens security, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty).” ...The authorities of Kazakhstan said the attacks were coordinated from abroad, but did not say by who...

It is unknown how long the peacekeeping mission will last...It should be noted that the CSTO collective forces are being used for the first time. In 2010, authorities in Kyrgyzstan asked for a deployment of the organization’s forces (against the backdrop of interethnic conflict in the south) as well as in 2021, when authorities of Armenia requested it (against the backdrop of an armed confrontation with Azerbaijan). However, these requests were not granted...

# GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

## Continued: The Collective Security Treaty Organization Demonstrates Its “Peacekeeping” Capabilities

**Source:** “Alexander Rybin, “Охранники инфраструктуры с боевым опытом (The guards of infrastructure with combat experience),” *Fergana Agency* (independent news website focusing on Central Asia), 7 January 2022. <https://fergana.agency/articles/124563/>

*On the night of 6-7 January, the first units of the Russian Airborne Forces arrived in Almaty and took control of the airport of the largest city in Kazakhstan...The total number of the peacekeeping force in Kazakhstan should stand around 2500. This includes a company from Belarus (around 150-200), 200 from Tajikistan, 150 from Kyrgyzstan and another 100 from Armenia. The remainder are from the Russian Army.*

*All of the Russian units in Kazakhstan have previously been involved with military operations in the post-Soviet period.*

*The 31st Airborne Brigade, which is permanently garrisoned in Ulyanovsk, took part in the Second Chechen campaign and the war in South Ossetia in 2008...Since 2013, the 31st has been part of the Rapid Reaction Forces.*

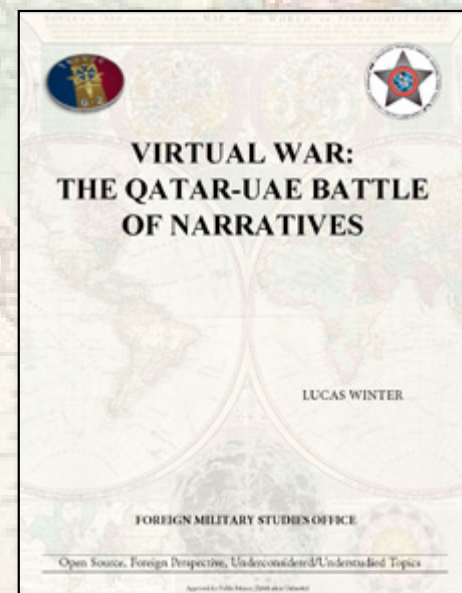
*The 98th Airborne Division is located in Ivanovo. This unit has experience in participating in peacekeeping missions – in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, in Georgia-Abkhazia in 1998 and in Kosovo in 1999...The 45th Guards Special Forces Brigade of the Airborne Forces is one of the most elite units in the Russian Army...*

*A peacekeeping company from the 103rd Vitebsk Guards Airborne Brigade deployed from Belarus...Kyrgyzstan sent 150 soldiers from the 25th “Scorpion” Special Forces Brigade to Kazakhstan...It is still unknown which units Tajikistan and Armenia deployed, but, according to local media, they are special forces...*

*As stated by the ministries of the CSTO governments, which agreed to take part in the peacekeeping mission in Kazakhstan, the military personnel will carry out task to protect key infrastructure and airfields. The Russian Ministry of Defense noted that the CSTO peacekeepers in Kazakhstan will not be involved in the active operational measures of local law enforcement and security agencies...*

## 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>



## Algeria Obtains Chinese Integrated EW Reconnaissance/Jamming System

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

Algeria's electronic warfare (EW) capabilities have been bolstered by recent acquisitions, including the Russian Kvant 1L222 Avtobaza ELINT system and the Chinese DWL002 passive detection radar. The latest acquisition is an integrated EW system from China. A handful of Twitter users focused on Algerian military affairs first noticed the delivery. They identified it as a CHL-906, based on visual similarities to a model exhibited last November at EDEX 2021, Egypt's recently established annual arms show. The Algeria-focused military blog *MenaDefense* quickly picked up news of the delivery, and several Arabic-language media outlets subsequently reported it. The CHL-906 is manufactured by the China Electronics Corporation (CEC) and sold for export by the China National Electronics Import & Export Corporation (CEIEC) and ELINC China (ELINC), a CEC subsidiary. The ELINC website describes it as an integrated EW system that provides comprehensive "reconnaissance, interference and warning on the enemy's electronic information systems." The chassis-mounted CHL-906 has a purported 600 km detection radius and a 300 km jamming radius. The latest Algerian acquisition is almost certainly in part a reaction to its neighbor, Morocco, recently bolstering its UAV arsenal.



*The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) arrives in Algiers, Algeria, March 5, 2019.*

Source: Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Ford Williams, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. Sixth Fleet. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5149959/190305-n-ji086-036> Attribution: Public Domain

“...The integrated electronic countermeasure system can carry out reconnaissance, interference and warning on the enemy's electronic information systems...”

**Source:** @kmlodial70. “#Algeria probably received a package of very modern #Chinese EW systems recently,” *Twitter* (social media network), 1 January 2022. <https://twitter.com/kmlodial70/status/1477238084823658496>

**Source:** @Aln54Dz “Electronic warfare department acquires the system CHL-906 ELINC #AlgerianArmy,” *Twitter* (social media network), 1 January 2022. <https://twitter.com/Aln54Dz/status/1477404225168683014>

**Source:** “Un nouveau système de guerre électronique pour l'Algérie (A new electronic warfare system for Algeria),” *MenaDefense* (Algeria-focused military blog), 1 January 2022. <https://www.menadefense.net/algerie/un-nouveau-systeme-de-guerre-electronique-pour-lalgerie/>

*This is the Integrated Electronic Warfare system from the Chinese company ELINC and CEIC... which is used to:*

- Detect enemy radio and radar emissions over a distance of 600 km
- Determine the position, identify and classify enemy emissions over these distances
- Protect radars and anti-aircraft systems from anti-radiation missiles by “covering” radar frequencies
- Block communications over a distance of 300 km
- Prohibit the enemy (air, sea, land) from using GNSS satellite positioning systems (GPS, Baidu, Galileo, Glonass) over a distance of 300 km
- Jam frequencies from 0.5 to 40 GHz
- Detect stealth aircraft and ships
- Detect remotely piloted drones and sever their data link to the ground
- Detect AEW aircraft over a distance of 500 km
- “Fry” certain radio-electric equipment thanks to the directed emission power of 500 Kw

**Source:** “Integrated EW System,” *ELINC Company Website* (China Electronics Corporation Subsidiary), undated. <https://www.elinc.com.cn/business/defense/IntegratedElectronicWarfare/>

*The integrated electronic countermeasure system can carry out reconnaissance, interference and warning on the enemy's electronic information systems such as early warning detection, communication transmission, multi-dimensional reconnaissance, navigation and positioning, and guided fire control. Combat operations such as ground-to-air defense, air interdiction, border control, anti-terrorism and stability maintenance, seize and maintain the battlefield system information rights.*

## Service Rifles and Fighter Jets: Pakistan's Defense Acquisition Priorities



A J-10B carrying PL-10 and PL-12 air-to-air missiles landing at Zhuhai Jinwan airport ahead of Airshow China 2018.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu\\_J-10#/media/File:J-10B\\_with\\_PL-10\\_and\\_PL-12.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-10#/media/File:J-10B_with_PL-10_and_PL-12.jpg)  
Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

In late 2015 Pakistan announced it would conduct trials to find a new infantry rifle as the country's army sought to phase out the Heckler & Koch G3. After a few years of testing, the government did not select a rifle from bids of several well-known companies and instead looked to the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) for a potential replacement (See: "A New Domestically Produced Service Rifle in Pakistan?" *OE Watch*, December 2019). While Pakistan's Army has yet to acquire a new service rifle, the accompanying excerpted articles report on a possible replacement for the G3 and other defense acquisition priorities.

The article from Pakistani defense focused news website *Quwa.org* reports on the POF's introduction of the BW20

and BW21. The article notes that the POF is "pitching the BW20" as the next-generation rifle and that the cost of it could be lower due to "existing production infrastructure" for the G3. It also notes that BW20 "has some commonality with the G3," though it is considered a new rifle and not an upgrade. The article also mentions that Pakistan's Army "did not select any of the 7.62×51 mm designs for local adoption" and that one reason for not selecting a new rifle was that "the added improvement they offered may not have justified the total cost of adopting and locally manufacturing a foreign design." While the cost of the BW20 and BW21 might be lower than purchasing a foreign rifle, it could still be some time until it is in a position to become the standard service rifle in Pakistan's Army.

The article from independent Pakistani English-language newspaper *Dawn* reports on the country's recent acquisition of J-10 multirole fighters from China. The article mentions the new fighters, but only in reference to them appearing as part of a fly over during Pakistan Day ceremonies on 23 March 2021. Pakistan did not make a widely publicized announcement of the acquisition of a reported two dozen J-10s, which are estimated to cost \$28 million each. *Dawn* quoted the country's Interior Minister as saying that the J-10s are an answer to India's 2021 purchase of Rafale jets from France.

“For the first time, Pakistan Air Force will introduce J10 C fighter jets during the fly past in collaboration with China and these fighter airplanes are an answer to Rafale jets.”

**Source:** "Pakistan Reveals New Rifles – POF BW20 and POF BW21," *Quwa.org* (news website focusing on defense issues in Pakistan), 19 December 2021. <https://quwa.org/2021/12/19/pakistan-reveals-new-rifles-pof-bw20-and-pof-bw21-2/>

*Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) took the shrouds off its new in-house, original rifle projects – the BW20 and BW21. The POF BW20 and BW21 are chambered for 7.62×51 mm rounds.*

*...It seems that POF is pitching the BW20 for the PA's next-generation rifle requirements...the BW20 is a new rifle design that delivers cost savings by re-leveraging POF's existing production infrastructure, which is geared for the HK G3.*

*Though the BW20 has some commonality with the G3 (around 30%), the BW20 is not an upgrade of the HK G3. It is a new rifle...*

*In 2015, the Pakistan Army issued a tender for a new-generation assault rifle. It had tested many designs from all over the world, including the FN SCAR, Beretta ARX-200, CZ BREN, AK-103 and others. In the end, however, the Army did not select any of the 7.62×51 mm designs for local adoption...*

*Ultimately, it seems that POF was given the greenlight to design an original rifle. Part of the reason seems to stem from a sense that none of the foreign designs substantially improved upon the G3 in terms of its accuracy and durability. This is not to say the other rifles were not good, but the added improvement they offered may not have justified the total cost of adopting and locally manufacturing a foreign design...*

**Source:** "Aamir Yasin, "Every party seeks patronage of establishment, says minister," *Dawn* (independent English-language newspaper from Pakistan), 30 December 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1666604>

*Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed on Wednesday said every party and politician wanted to be patronised by the establishment, terming the debate on the return of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif useless...*

*"It does not matter whether he comes or not; it will not make any difference to the government," he said, adding it was strange that people who spent most of their lives in this country eventually left it instead of loving it...The minister reiterated his offer of a one-way ticket to Pakistan for Nawaz Sharif.*

*Talking about the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of opposition parties, the minister said he wanted the alliance to move the date of its protest from March 23 to the 30th as it coincided with Pakistan Day celebrations.*

*"For the first time, Pakistan Air Force will introduce J10 C fighter jets during the fly past in collaboration with China and these fighter airplanes are an answer to Rafale jets," Mr Ahmed said...*