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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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ON THE COVER:

Signing of the Republic of Djibouti – HKATG MoU. President of Djibouti Ismail Omar Guelleh (center).

Source: Djiboutian Government <https://twitter.com/IsmailOguelleh/status/1612488089603309568>
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New Domain Forces and Combat Capabilities in Chinese Military Thinking

By Peter Wood
OE Watch Commentary

In 2021 the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) adopted “Multidomain Precision Warfare” as its core operational concept. While few sources address this topic in much detail, a related concept has remained prominent in Chinese media. In October 2022, in his speech at the 20th Party Congress, President Xi Jinping declared that China must “increase the proportion of new-domain forces with new combat capabilities.”¹ New-domain forces with new combat capabilities are also a focus area for Chinese military force development for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). While these concepts are abstract and rarely include more than vague descriptions of what they entail, Chinese media emphasize them as essential to the PLA’s evolution from informatization toward intelligent warfare. The following excerpt from Chinese party-owned media outlet *PLA Daily* provides some insights into what is meant by these ideas and how they may take shape in coming years.

The excerpt, a commentary, acknowledges that clarity about the “newness” of some of the domains covered in this effort is important. The author provides an overview of the characteristics of these new domain forces and capabilities, which include flexible architectures, dynamic reorganization, and mutation of operational concepts in response to new technologies.

Fundamentally, these concepts demonstrate a recognition that the most effective use of combat capabilities will not be the single-domain clash between similar forces and that the PLA must instead be able to flexibly deploy forces across domains against enemy weaknesses to maximize their effects. Of course, Chinese military thinking does not develop in a vacuum. Multi-domain precision operations



appear to have many of the same core assumptions about the future of war as in other countries’ concepts, such as “Multidomain Operations” (MDO).⁶ However, despite the rhetorical similarities to U.S. concepts, at a more basic level, Chinese warfighting is likely to unfold differently due to core differences resulting from the direction and structure

of PLA, which has Chinese Communist Party committees and political officers throughout as an essential part. The PLA’s development of an integrated command platform and other informatized tools, such as those referenced in the article, appear intended to not only make its forces more survivable in modern informatized or intelligentized war

With the support of intelligent network information systems, the new domain forces with new combat capabilities can make full use of intelligent [AI-enabled] technology based on the autonomous and intelligent real-time command and control of the battlefield.

but also to be “designed to” the PLA’s structure itself and improve the speed of decision making that its structure might otherwise impede.⁷ While China’s focus on achieving multidomain effects is noteworthy, in the interim much of these concepts may remain aspirational for the PLA, a mil-

itary that has, for much of its recent history by its own admission, struggled to effectively train to the standard of being able to carry out combined arms operations, much less joint operations.

Terms ²	Characteristics and Examples
New Domain Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible architectures • Reliant on intelligent systems (integrated command platform, etc.) • Dynamic reorganization • Mutability in response to technological developments • Cross-domain strikes • Focus on achieving strategic paralysis of the enemy
New Combat Capabilities ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncrewed systems (air, sea, and ground-based) • PLA Strategic Support Force⁴ • PLA Ground Force long-range rocket artillery (MLRS)⁵

Continued: New Domain Forces and Combat Capabilities in Chinese Military Thinking

Source: Liu Haijiang (刘海江), “新域新质作战力量‘新’在哪里 (Explaining the ‘new’ in new-domain forces with new combat capabilities),” *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of China’s armed forces), 29 November 2022. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/29/content_328869.htm

With the expansion of the scope of human activities and the development of national interests, where military struggle takes place has moved beyond traditional domains such as land, sea, and air and continues to expand into the deep sea, space, electromagnetic spectrum, and other domains. As required by the times, forces and types of combat power to be fielded in these domains have emerged.

Driven by advanced technology, new domain and new quality combat forces have broken through traditional spaces such as land, sea, air, and space, and the scope of activities has become more three-dimensional and diverse. Deep sea, space, underground, and polar regions have all become new territories where new domains and new quality combat forces compete.

New-domain forces with new combat capabilities involve dynamic reconfiguration and cross-domain integration of combat elements. With the support of intelligent network information systems, the new domain forces with new combat capabilities can make full use of intelligent [AI-enabled] technology based on the autonomous and intelligent real-time command and control of the battlefield.

Notes:

[1] “New combat capabilities” is the more anodyne translation used in the official version of Xi’s remarks, but the Chinese here means something closer to “enabled by new capabilities.” For consistency, “new combat capabilities” is used throughout.

[2] This table is partially constructed from other articles in *PLA Daily* that were either too short or did not have enough details and explanation to warrant translation.

[3] The delineation between “new combat capabilities” and “New Type Combat Forces” [新型作战力量], another buzzword of PLA modernization, is unclear.

[4] China’s 2019 Defense White Paper describes the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF). The PLASSF is a new type of combat force for safeguarding national security and an important driver for the growth of new combat capabilities. China’s National Defense in the New Era [新时代的中国国防] State Council Information Office [国务院新闻办公室] 24 July 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-07/24/c_1124792450.htm

[5] One article in August 2022 described new long-range rockets launched by PLA ground force units belonging to the Eastern Theater Command toward the vicinity of Taiwan in response to then-U.S. Speaker of the House’s visit using the same language. “Our ground forces’ development of new combat capabilities continues to advance long-range rocket forces represent a new era of precision firepower” [我陆军新质作战力量建设持续推进 远程火箭炮兵成为新一代火力精兵], *PLA Daily*, 29 October 2022. http://www.81.cn/xue-xi/2022-08/29/content_10180334.htm

[6] In his article, Liu Haijiang also highlights the U.S. Army’s fielding of the AI decision-making assistant FIRES Synchronization to Optimize Responses in Multi-Domain Operations (FIRESTORM) as indicative of the future direction of intelligent warfare.

[7] Peter Wood, “PLA Fields New Integrated Command Platforms, Improving Combined Arms Operations,” *OE Watch*, December 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/400756>

A Chinese Perspective on the Pitfalls of Military Intelligentization

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Chinese military strategists are increasingly focused on developing practices of military “intelligentization,” the next generation of warfare expected to improve the military’s combat efficiency.¹ Intelligentization, also referred to as intelligent warfare, is the Chinese concept of applying machine speed and processing power of artificial intelligence (AI) to military planning, operational command, and decision support.² The rate of developing intelligent weapons and systems is progressing at such a rapid pace, however, that it comes with potential risks, according to the following article published in the People’s Liberation Army’s official newspaper *PLA Daily*. According to the article, the anti-jamming ability of current intelligent systems is too weak, making intelligent systems more vulnerable. For example, drone command and control relies on communication links that connect the drones to rear personnel. If the communication link is jammed, the operator will lose control of the drone. Therefore, improved anti-jamming capability is necessary to ensure communications links are not disrupted. The article also explains that the reliability of today’s AI technology is questionable. While the AI systems’ level of intelligence is superior to that of a human, there is not yet a reliable test to ensure they will not fail in a complex combat scenario.

The article also warns that using intelligent weapons and equipment increases the risk of losing control in a crisis. For

example, military operations that rely on intelligent weapons and equipment could surpass the speed of political decision making. This could weaken the decision-maker’s ability to control the situation. The article further warns that the use of intelligent weapons and equipment in large-scale combat could increase tension between countries as well as lead to changing the psychology of combatants, potentially causing them to become more desensitized to killing because of their greater distance from the battlefield and gradually reducing caution in decision-making.

The growing use of intelligent weapons and equipment increases the risk of losing control in a crisis.

The article notes that countries are increasingly pouring money into AI technology to gain military advantage, and this struggle for predominance could lead to a dangerous arms race. With current AI technology, for example, the algorithms used to distinguish civilians from combatants are not yet reliable, thereby potentially putting the lives of civilians at risk. Based on the article, there is still a long way to go before China has perfected the software to not only drive AI weapons and equipment, but also to test them to ensure they are ready to meet all the demands of the battlefield.

Source: Luo Zhaocheng, “关注智能化武器装备运用风险 (Pay Attention to Risks in Using Intelligentized Weapons and Equipment),” *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army), 5 January 2023. http://www.81.cn/11/2023-01/05/content_10209877.htm

... Currently, the world’s major countries are vigorously pursuing the development of military intelligentization of weapons and equipment across the different operational domains. While the new technology greatly enhances combat capabilities, it also could pose some great risks.

...the anti-jamming capability of intelligent weapons and equipment is weak. This could cause a loss of operational control over systems. The intelligent weapons and equipment currently used by various countries often require command and control to be conducted by rear area personnel who rely on communications links. As these links are jammed, it will be difficult to return them to operational effectiveness... Iran’s successful capturing of U.S. drones through jamming technology is a typical example...

Artificial intelligence technology in certain fields is shown to far exceed human intelligence. However, its
continue on 6

Continued: A Chinese Perspective on the Pitfalls of Military Intelligentization

Source Continued: Luo Zhaocheng, “关注智能化武器装备运用风险 (Pay Attention to Risks in Using Intelligentized Weapons and Equipment),” *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army), 5 January 2023. http://www.81.cn/11/2023-01/05/content_10209877.htm

reliability and interpretability are questionable... Presently, countries have conducted repeated simulation tests and even actual combat using intelligent weapons and equipment. However, there is still no reliable testing method to ensure its dependability should it run into a complex battlefield environment.

Wide-scale application of intelligent operations could trigger an arms race, leading to the risk of disposition for unsafe AI systems...

The use of intelligent weapons and equipment can impact the international strategic balance and increase the risk of war breaking out. The use of smart weapons and equipment increases the risk of “firing the first shot.”

The growing use of intelligent weapons and equipment increases the risk of losing control in a crisis...

...Intelligent weapons and equipment put participating personnel further away from the battlefield. Participants’ apathy will grow as distance increases...

Notes:

[1] For other Chinese insights on intelligentization, see Cindy Hurst, “China: ‘New Concepts’ in Unmanned Combat,” *OE Watch*, October 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/376077> and Peter Wood, “A Chinese Perspective on Intelligent Warfare and Future Urban Operations,” *OE Watch*, November 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/376999>

[2] For an example of intelligent warfare, see Cindy Hurst, “The ‘Blade of Victory’: A Chinese Perspective on Drone Swarms,” *OE Watch*, March 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/358341>

China Addresses Challenges to Critical Mineral Supply

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

In an interview with Chinese party-owned media outlet *People's Daily* this January, Chinese Minister of Natural Resources Wang Guanghua explains that Beijing will launch a new round of domestic strategic mineral mining operations to offset dependence on foreign suppliers of critical energy resources. Recent external shocks, including a global pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and a growing trend toward "resource nationalism," threaten to disrupt Beijing's access to the strategic minerals necessary to power its economy and military technologies.¹ The new Chinese initiative includes policies to stimulate domestic exploration, prospecting, and processing of raw strategic minerals, with particular emphasis on oil- and gas-bearing basins and key metallogenic belts.² According to the director of the State Key Laboratory of Safety and Health for Metal Mines, Wang Yunmin, around two-thirds of China's strategic mineral production and supply for minerals like iron, chrome, manganese, cobalt, nickel, copper and oil is highly dependent on foreign sources.

One of Beijing's greatest concerns over strategic minerals lies in its ability to transition energy supply from fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal to cleaner alternatives. China is the world's single largest consumer of lithium-ion batteries, relying on them to not only power its electric car and renewable energy industries, but also military weaponry, including drones and submarines.³ Three core ingredients for the lithium-ion battery traditional recipe include cobalt, lithium, and nickel.

China's critical mineral supply faces challenges from resource rich countries where local governments have announced restrictions on mining and exports of cobalt, lithium, and nickel. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Zimbabwe are among China's top lithium supplier states while the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Indonesia are among its largest cobalt and nickel suppliers respectively. Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, collectively known as the 'lithium triangle' for their prospected vast lithium reserves, are reportedly discussing a possible OPEC-like agreement for lithium.⁴ In December 2022, Indonesia and Zimbabwe announced export restrictions requiring firms to processing raw materials in-country.⁵ While Chinese lithium-ion battery production firms like CATL and SVOLT have recently reported production of lithium-ion batteries that rely on little or no nickel or cobalt, China is still far off from integrating these technologies across its military-economic structure.⁶



PRC Minister of Natural Resources, Wang Guanghua

Source: Chinese Government, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/王广华/69366>
Attribution: Public Domain

International geopolitics has become an important factor affecting China's resource supply." – Wang Yunmin

Source: Shi Yimin (施毅敏), "工程院院士: 中国战略性矿产对外依存度高地缘政治影响资源供给 (Chinese Academy of Engineering Scholar: High Degree of Chinese Foreign Dependence on Strategic Mineral Production, Geopolitics Influencing Resource Supply)," *Caixin News* (Beijing-based Chinese non-state media organization), 24-December 2022. <https://companies.caixin.com/m/2022-12-24/101981473.html>

Wang Yunmin introduced, Chinese foreign dependence on 10 types of minerals exceeds 50%. Among these, iron ore at 82%, chrome ore at 98%, manganese ore at 96%, cobalt ore at 95%, nickel ore at 90%, and both copper ore and oil at 78%. Wang said, "This determines the external environment's strong influence over China's resource supply and production."

Continued: China Addresses Challenges to Critical Mineral Supply

Source: “优化要素保障 建设美丽中国 (Optimizing Factors to Ensure Construction of a Beautiful China),” *People’s Daily* (official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party), 5 January 2023. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0105/c1001-32599955.html>

China has a high degree of foreign dependence on some important mineral resources, and once the international situation changes, it will certainly affect economic security or even national security.

A new round of domestic prospecting for strategic minerals will be launched in an all-round way. The focus will be on strategic minerals, particularly important oil and gas-bearing basins and key metallogenic belts. New policies will be implemented to promote exploration, prospecting and processing.

Notes:

[1] Resource nationalism (资源民族主义) refers to the tendency of people and governments to assert control over natural resources located within their territories.

[2] In 2021, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology published its plan to facilitate the development of the country’s raw materials industry during the 14th Five-Year Period (2021-2025).

[3] For more on China’s use of lithium-ion batteries in military weaponry, see: Stephen Chen, “China’s submarine fleet may soon be powered by lithium batteries,” 29 October 2022, *South China Morning Post*, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3197670/chinas-submarine-fleet-may-soon-be-powered-lithium-batteries>; Zhang Tong, “Chinese scientists’ new gel filling could triple lifespan of lithium batteries for EVs, drones,” 4 November 2022, *South China Morning Post*, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3198333/chinese-scientists-new-gel-filling-could-triple-lifespan-lithium-batteries-evs-drones>

[4] Connor Mycroft, “China’s lithium hold won’t be undercut by Opec-style cartel as Argentina, Chile, Bolivia consider alliance,” 5 November 2022, *South China Morning Post*, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/global-economy/article/3198440/chinas-lithium-hold-wont-be-undercut-opec-style-cartel-argentina-chile-bolivia-consider-alliance>

[5] For more on recent Indonesia and Zimbabwe’s export restrictions, see: Fransiska Nangoy and Bernadette Christina, “Indonesia confirms bauxite export ban to proceed as scheduled,” 21 December 2022, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/indonesia-announce-ban-exports-commodity-without-saying-which-2022-12-21/> and “Zimbabwe bans raw lithium exports to curb artisanal mining,” 21 December 2022, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zimbabwe-bans-raw-lithium-exports-curb-artisanal-mining-2022-12-21/>

[6] Keith Bradsher and Michael Forsythe, “Why a Chinese Company Dominates Electric Car Batteries,” 22 December 2021, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/22/business/china-catl-electric-car-batteries.html> and “Completely Cobalt-Free Battery Cells from SVOLT Available for Order Now,” 2 February 2021, *SVOLT*, <https://svolt-eu.com/en/completely-cobalt-free-battery-cells-from-svolt-available-for-order-now/>

Hong Kong Firm To Develop Satellite and Rocket Launch Site in Djibouti

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

On 9 January 2023, Djibouti signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Hong Kong Aerospace Technology Group (HKATG)¹ and Touchroad International Holdings² to develop a \$1 billion satellite and rocket launch site in Djibouti. The project includes seven launch pads and three rocket test pads in addition to power stations, water plants, spaceports, roads, and maritime ports in Djibouti's northern Obock region. The MOU stipulates that the government of Djibouti will provide the necessary land (a minimum of 10 square kilometers) with a co-managed lease that runs for a minimum of 35 years. The government of Djibouti will take over the lease after 30 years of co-management.

According to the state-affiliated *China Daily*, the project would alleviate high demand for commercial satellite launching facilities in China, which are largely dependent on the Wenchang Space Launch Site and Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center for commercial launches. China currently maintains four official space launch centers, all state-owned and operated by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). A 2021 State Council Information Office white paper identified the country's demand for "commercial launch pads and launch sites to meet different commercial needs" as a priority for China's space capabilities through 2026.³

For its part, Africa's expanding space industry relies heavily on international partners, including private firms, universities, and national space programs. Several countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Tunisia, have already ventured into the space domain relying on

Beijing's capabilities. In 2007, China launched Nigeria's first communications satellite. Moreover, Beijing launched Algeria's first communication satellite, and in 2019 it launched Ethiopia's and Sudan's first satellites. In 2020, China's launch of a second satellite for Ethiopia from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center was aired live on Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation.

The MOU signed this time not only involves the construction of 7 satellite launch pads and 3 rocket testing pads, but also covers supporting projects such as power stations, water plants, aerospace ports, roads, and ports.

The announcement represents a major expansion of China's involvement in Djibouti, where it has hosted its first official overseas military base since 2017. It remains to be seen what launch capabilities the site will support or to what extent Chinese firms will use the facility upon its projected completion in 2028. However, the involvement of HKATG and Touchroad, with their close ties to state-owned corporations, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects—coupled with a permanent PLA presence and other strategic investments—may allow China to be looked to as African states' space partner of preference.⁴



Signing of the Republic of Djibouti – HKATG MoU. President of Djibouti Ismail Omar Guelleh (center) with HKATG Vice President Allen Fung (center left).

Source: Djiboutian Government <https://twitter.com/IsmailOguelleh/status/1612488089603309568> Attribution: Public Domain

Continued: Hong Kong Firm To Develop Satellite and Rocket Launch Site in Djibouti

Source: “与吉布提政府合作建太空港 助力商业航天突破限制 (Partnership with Djibouti Government to Build Spaceport Aids Commercial Aerospace Breakthroughs),” *China Daily* (PRC state-affiliated media), 12 January 2023. <https://tech.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202301/12/WS63bfb3d4a3102ada8b22ae3e.html>

The construction of the spaceport in the Republic of Djibouti is expected to take at least five years, that said, from a commercial point of view, the project is still of great benefit to the business of HKATG.

At present, most commercial satellites are launched in the new mode of "carpooling" of shared rockets, that is, "one rocket with multiple satellites" at the Wenchang Space Launch Site and China's Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center. Facing the high demand for commercial satellite launches in China in recent years, the demand for launch pads has been far outstripping supply, the development of Djibouti's Spaceport will break the restrictions of the existing business model and have a positive impact on HKATG's business development.

It is noteworthy that the parties will work together to establish research centers, universities and provide aerospace technologies, products, services and programs in addition to infrastructure development.

Source: “驻吉布提大使胡斌会见香港航天科技集团有限公司 (Ambassador to Djibouti Hu Bin Meets with Hong Kong Aerospace Technology Group Co., Ltd. Vice-President),” Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, 5 January 2023. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zwbd_673032/jghd_673046/202301/t20230106_11002946.shtml

Ambassador Hu Bin expressed his affirmation of the cooperation between Hong Kong Aerospace Technology Group Co., Ltd. and encouraged the enterprise to strengthen feasible research, to establish a firm sense of compliance, to balance corporate interests and social responsibilities, to promote the diversified economic development of Djibouti, and to contribute to Sino-Djiboutian cooperation. The embassy will actively provide the necessary support and assurances.

He Liehui, vice president of the Chinese African People's Friendship Association, attended the meeting.

Notes:

[1] HKATG (香港航天科技集团有限公司) maintains close ties with Chinese state-owned and affiliated giants Huawei Technologies (华为) and China Aerospace Technology Corporations (中国航天科技集团公司), both of which are main players in China’s military-civil fusion research and development programs. HKATG’s board members maintain strong ties to the CCP and its united front system. Vice Chairman and Executive Director Claire Ku previously served as the founding CEO of the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), a documented CCP united front organization. Vice President of Business Development, Allen Fung, is a member of the CCP’s All-China Youth Federation and a Standing Committee Member of the Guangdong Youth Federation.

[2] Touchroad International Holdings is owned by Africa-focused Chinese investor He Liehui, who is the current Vice President of the Chinese African People’s Friendship Association, another known united front organization with development projects across the African continent.

[3] For more on China’s space ambitions, see “China’s Space Program: A 2021 Perspective,” State Council Information Office, 28 January 2022, <http://www.cnsa.gov.cn/english/n6465645/n6465648/c6813088/content.html>

[4] Other strategic BRI investments include China Merchant Ports Holdings’ operation and ownership stake in the Port of Doraleh’s Terminal Container and a high-capacity standard gauge railway that terminates at the Port of Doraleh.

Russia To Add New Naval Infantry Divisions

By Charles Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

At the beginning of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian Naval Infantry included five brigades and one regiment. During the invasion, Russia has formed at least three more naval infantry battalions from volunteers and mobilized personnel, trained based on existing naval infantry formations such as the 155th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade in Primorye.¹ In late December, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced a large expansion of the Russian Armed Forces, including the addition of 12 new divisions. Five of these new divisions will be formed by converting five naval infantry brigades into naval infantry divisions.² The accompanying excerpted article from the pro-Kremlin daily

The current world tectonic events require a significant strengthening... of the Naval Infantry of the Russian Navy.

newspaper *Izvestiya* states that these new naval infantry divisions will consist of two naval infantry regiments, a tank battalion, reconnaissance battalion, artillery regiment, and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) battalion. The naval infantry regiments in the divisions will likely resemble the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment subordinated to the Caspian Flotilla, consisting of three battalions, an airborne reconnaissance company, UAV company, artillery, and other units. These divisions will be much smaller than equivalent U.S./NATO echelons, likely having less than 5,500 personnel per division when fully staffed.



Russian Naval Infantry

Source: <https://xn--80ahclcogc6ci4h.xn--90anlfbebar6i.xn--p1ai/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=34108@cmsPhotoGalleryAttribution:CCBY-SA4.0>



Russian Naval Infantry

Source: <https://xn--80ahclcogc6ci4h.xn--90anlfbebar6i.xn--p1ai/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=34108@cmsPhotoGalleryAttribution:CCBY-SA4.0>

Source: Dmitry Boltenkov, “Морскими темпами: как изменится структура черных беретов в ближайшие годы (At the Sea’s Pace: How the Structure of Black Berets Will Change in the Coming Years),” *Izvestiya* (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 3 January 2023. <https://iz.ru/1450124/dmitrii-boltenkov/morskimi-tempami-kak-izmenitsia-struktura-chernykh-beretov-v-blizhaishie-gody>

The current world tectonic events require a significant strengthening, first of all, of the Naval Infantry of the Russian Navy. On December 21, 2022, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced plans to form five Naval Infantry divisions.

In 2018, the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment was created in Kaspysk to support the Caspian Flotilla. It consists of three battalions, an airborne reconnaissance company, UAV company, artillery and other units. Most likely this promising regimental structure will be basis for future naval infantry regiments...

continue on 12

Continued: Russia To Add New Naval Infantry Divisions

Source Continued: Dmitry Boltenkov, “Морскими темпами: как изменится структура черных беретов в ближайшие годы (At the Sea’s Pace: How the Structure of Black Berets Will Change in the Coming Years),” *Izvestiya* (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 3 January 2023. <https://iz.ru/1450124/dmitrii-boltenkov/morskimi-tempami-kak-izmenitsia-struktura-chernykh-beretov-v-blizhaishie-gody>

In Kamchatka, the 40th Krasnodar-Kharbinskaya twice Red Banner Brigade is practically the only formation capable of resisting the attempts of a potential enemy to seize this remote territory... In Primorye, the 155th Guards Brigade is also, in fact, the only large formation in the Vladivostok region capable of defending the region and participating in counter-landing operations on Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands... In the north, on the Kola Peninsula, Russia currently has only three brigades: the 61st Kirkenesskaya Red Banner MP, the 200th motorized rifle and Arctic brigades. Sweden and Finland finally decided to break with their neutrality and join NATO. Accordingly, Russia will have to strengthen its northern borders. The 336th Guards Brigade and a number of other units of the coastal troops of the Baltic Fleet are deployed in the Kaliningrad exclave. The exclave is surrounded by the most hostile NATO states to Russia - Poland and the Baltic states. In 2023, we should expect the integration of parts of the DPR and LPR into the Russian Armed Forces. It is possible that the Black Sea division of the Naval Infantry will be deployed on the basis of these units. And in general, the situation in the Ukrainian direction for many years will require the presence of powerful forces capable of also conducting amphibious assault operations.

Do not forget the fact that on long-distance cruises there are groups of Naval Infantry on warships and auxiliary vessels to defend these units themselves from enemy saboteurs. With the increase in the naval fleet and the intensification of the Russian Navy's combat service, more Naval Infantry are required to defend our ships.

Thus, at present there is a direct need for Russia to increase the number and power of its amphibious strike formations. Even now such work is underway. So, for example, in the brigades of the Naval Infantry of the Pacific Fleet operating in the Donbass, 152-mm artillery systems are observed, these systems were not previously in service with the Naval Infantry units. The divisions themselves, presumably, will look like this: two regiments of naval infantry, tank battalion, reconnaissance battalion, artillery regiment, and UAV battalion...

Notes:

[1] Russian Naval Infantry have been active in Ukraine since the first day of Russia's 2022 invasion. The Naval Infantry reportedly conducted a successful landing in Berdyansk and was involved with the taking of Mariupol. Russian sources also claim that the possibility of a landing of Black Sea Fleet Naval Infantry units near Odessa, which never materialized, was successful in the sense that many Ukrainian forces were fixed for a time to defend against the landing, providing freedom of maneuver for other Russian forces. Naval Infantry units were also active around Kyiv, Kharkov, and Pavlovka. Eight Naval Infantrymen have earned the title “Hero of Russia,” some posthumously, since the onset of the conflict. The honorary title of “Guards” was bestowed on the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet, and the 336th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Baltic Fleet was awarded the Order of Zhukov. The 810th Naval Infantry Brigade reportedly requested to have “Mariupol” added to its official unit title due to its role in supposedly liberating the city.

[2] The Naval Infantry has been reorganized many times since its inception in 1705. The most recent organization occurred during the “New Look” reforms, resulting in each Russia's four fleets having its own Naval Infantry brigade (although the Pacific Fleet has two Naval Infantry brigades). By 2017, the standard structure of Naval Infantry brigades consisted of a reconnaissance battalion, an air assault battalion, one or two naval infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, a tank battalion or company, a UAV company, a sniper company, and a few other units.

Russia Justifies Bringing Back T-62 Tank

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from the official logistics publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense, *MTO Journal*, discusses Russian reasoning for bringing the T-62 tank back into service for use in Russia's conflict with Ukraine. The **T-62** was retired from active service in the Russian Armed Forces after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War because it was seen as outdated and obsolete compared to newer tanks. In considering the T-62's reintroduction, the author argues that the move is not due to

There is little doubt that the SMO could become a prelude to a more serious armed conflict with countries that have more advanced militaries. And that is why more modern and advanced vehicles should be reserved for this hypothetical war, since the modernized T-62 is more than enough for the current stage of the SMO.

recent massive tank losses, or the impact of international sanctions on the ability of UralVagonZavod, Russia's tank manufacturer, to produce modern tanks such as the **T-72B3**, **T-80BVM**, and **T-90M**. Instead, he says that it is because in 2021, even before the start of its conflict in Ukraine, Russia had already established a new refurbishment program for the T-62. Furthermore, the author posits that more modern tanks should be conserved in the event of "a more serious armed conflict with countries that have more advanced militaries." **T-62** Russian Medium Tank.



T-62M Tank

Source: <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/T-62M-in-Kubinka-Tank-Museum/i-pr9rCnS/0/a00d74a4/X2/T-62M-Kubinka-04-X2.jpg> Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0



T-62M Tank

Source: <https://photos.smugmug.com/photos/i-6jZc4FQ/0/X3/i-6jZc4FQ-X3.jpg> Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: Boris Dzherelievsky, "T-62: ветеран снова в строю (T-62: The Veteran Returns to the Ranks)," *MTO Journal* (official logistics publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense), January 2023. <https://mto.ric.mil.ru/upload/site193/3jW5JVfPpXH.pdf>

The launch of UralVagonZavod's large-scale modernization program of the Soviet-era T-62 main battle tank has been the cause of interpretations by both potential and real opponents. Almost all of these interpretations stem from the fact that the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, due to "huge losses of armored vehicles" in the SMO (special military operation), can only produce old vehicles, since the production of modern models has stopped due to sanctions. In fact, the production of the T-72B3M, T-80BVM, T-90M MBTs (main battle tanks) did not stop. And, by the way, the losses of our tanks in the SMO in comparison with other campaigns is not so great. In addition, the modernization program for the T-62 MBT was launched long before the SMO and is more likely associated with military operations in the Middle East, as well as with certain export plans...

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Continued: Russia Justifies Bringing Back T-62 Tank

Source Continued: Boris Dzherelievsky, “T-62: ветеран снова в строю (T-62: The Veteran Returns to the Ranks),” *MTO Journal* (official logistics publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense), January 2023. <https://mto.eric.mil.ru/upload/site193/3jW5JVfpXH.pdf>

It should be noted that the statements about the "complete obsolescence" of this tank are nothing more than a myth. The T-62 is the same age as the American M-60, which is still in service with Israel, Turkey, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Spain and many other countries, while surpassing it in most parameters. It is quite possible to compare it with the German Leopard MBT (adopted for service 4 years later than the T-62), the supply of which from Germany, Spain and Greece is being sought by the Kyiv regime. It is worth noting that our vehicle also surpasses this tank in a number of parameters, for example, in terms of gun power. The T-62 can hit the frontal armor of the "Leopard" from a distance of 3 km, while the German tank still needs to close to a distance of 1.5-2 km in order to break through the armor of the "62"...

*The modernization program, launched by Uralvagonzavod in 2021, includes equipping the tank with a multispectral gyro-stabilized electro-optical system, an electromechanical mast and a new thermal imaging sight with a IPN-96MT-02 laser rangefinder. The new thermal imager allows the tank gunner to detect targets at a distance of up to 3,000 meters. The dynamic protection "Kontakt-1" and lattice screens are installed on the sides of the vehicle. According to experts, the first modernized **T-62Ms** sent to the SMO zone were supposed to only be used in the second echelon, as well as to protect stationary objects or in "self-propelled gun mode" to support the advancing infantry, so they are not intended to be "dueling" with more modern MBTs with 125 mm guns. However, at the moment, most (Ukrainian) **T-64s** and **T-72s** have been knocked out, and the enemy is happy to use **T-55s** received from the countries of Eastern Europe, or even various infantry fighting vehicles including the old American **M113** armored personnel carrier. It is clear that in such a situation, the modernized "62" can become a real king of the battlefield. To this we can add that it is much easier to train reservists called up for partial mobilization on these vehicles, especially since many of the reservists served on them while they were in military service. Finally, there is little doubt that the SMO could become a prelude to a more serious armed conflict with countries that have more advanced militaries. And that is why more modern and advanced vehicles should be reserved for this hypothetical war, since the modernized T-62 is more than enough for the current stage of the SMO.*

Russia Taking Steps To Improve Mobilization Capabilities

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

In September 2022, Russia began mobilizing 300,000 soldiers for its so-called special military operation in Ukraine—its first mobilization since World War II—exposing weaknesses in its infrastructure to track, prepare, and equip personnel for military service had deteriorated. As the two accompanying excerpts indicate, the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) have recently enacted changes that they believe will improve the mobilization process.

The first excerpt from Russian pro-business news outlet *Kommersant* describes how President Vladimir Putin instructed the Ministry of Digital Development to create “a centralized database by 1 April 2024, which will contain information about all Russians liable for military service.” Currently, the article says military enlistment offices store the “personal files of those liable for military service... exclusively in paper form, and each military enlistment office forms databases of citizens to be mobilized independently without any centralization.” During the partial mobilization, this antiquated system resulted in considerable confusion, where draft notices were sent to “wheelchair users, IT specialists who received a deferment, those unfit for health reasons, and fathers of many children.” The plan now is to develop a centralized, digital database, which

includes pertinent personal information “about all Russians liable for military service.”¹ The article concludes by asserting that creating this digitized “mobilization resource of 25 million people in Russia” will be a “colossal” undertaking.

Currently, in the military enlistment offices, the personal files of those liable for military service are stored exclusively in paper form, and each military enlistment office creates databases of citizens to be mobilized independently without any centralization.

There have also been problems providing newly mobilized soldiers with the required personal military kit (uniforms, boots, protective gear, etc.). The second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news organization *RIA Novosti* describes the recent decision to appoint the “Kalashnikov Concern... the coordinator of the supply of combat equipment (bulletproof vests, helmets and other items of equipment) to the Russian army.” According to the article, this decision was based on the “unprecedented challenges [faced by the MoD] associated with a special military operation and providing all necessary supplies for the mobilized.”

Source: Nikita Korolev, “Айтикоматы: Военскому учету указана цифровизация (ITcomats: Military registration ordered to digitalize),” *Kommersant* (Russian pro-business site), 25 November 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5692024>

Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the Ministry of Digital Development to create a centralized database by April 1, 2024, which will contain information about all Russians liable for military service. The Ministry of Digital Transformation will have to create an IT system that will include sets of all kinds of data about the life of citizens liable for military service: from their level of education and place of residence to current mobile phone numbers, email addresses and information about the available transport.

The coordinator of the new information system, follows from the document, will be the Ministry of Defense.... After the start of partial mobilization in Russia on September 21, 2022, the media and human rights organizations reported numerous mistakes that the military commissariats made when sending out subpoenas and instructions. For example, summons were received by wheelchair users, IT specialists who received a deferment, unfit for health reasons, fathers of many children, etc....

...Currently, in the military enlistment offices, the personal files of those liable for military service are stored exclusively in paper form, and each military enlistment office creates databases of citizens to be mobilized

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Continued: Russia Taking Steps To Improve Mobilization Capabilities

Source Continued: Nikita Korolev, “Айтикоматы: Воинскому учету указана цифровизация (ITcomats: Military registration ordered to digitalize),” *Kommersant* (Russian pro-business site), 25 November 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5692024>

independently without any centralization, says the interlocutor of Kommersant, who is engaged in the digitalization of one of the law enforcement agencies.

...Taking into account the fact that, according to the official statements of the Ministry of Defense, the mobilization resource of Russia is 25 million people and their data will need to be digitized in a month, “the work ahead is simply colossal,” a top manager of a Russian IT company engaged in developments in the field of artificial intelligence told Kommersant.

Source: “Калашников назначили руководить поставками экипировки, сообщил источник (Kalashnikov was appointed to lead the supply of equipment, the source said),” *RIA Novosti* (pro-Kremlin news outlet), 13 November 2022. <https://ria.ru/20221113/ekipirovka-1831120404.html>

The Kalashnikov Concern has been appointed the main enterprise - the coordinator of the supply of combat equipment (bulletproof vests, helmets and other items of equipment) to the Russian army, this measure is needed, among other things, to provide the necessary equipment for the mass replenishment of the Russian Armed Forces - more than 300 thousand mobilized, an informed source told RIA Novosti....

...The interlocutor of the agency explained that this decision was made to unconditionally provide the Ministry of Defense with combat equipment in a situation where the military-industrial complex and the entire system of state defense orders are facing "unprecedented challenges associated with a special military operation and providing all the necessary mobilized."

Notes:

[1] The plan to digitize data within the Military Commissariats has been discussed for quite some time. For more information see Ray Finch, “Russia Digitizing the Military Commissariat,” *OE Watch*, October 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/397925>

Russia Compares Ukraine Conflict to WWII

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

The Soviet victory in World War II (WWII), which it calls “The Great Patriotic War,” is the central to the Kremlin’s current ideology, which recasts it to justify the so-called special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine.¹ According to Kremlin propaganda, just as the USSR fought against the evils of Nazi Germany, so too today, Russian soldiers are defending their country from a Ukrainian “Nazi” threat. By framing this conflict as a fight against Nazism, the Kremlin has been able to tap into narratives of pain, fear, and sacrifice experienced by the Russian people during WWII. However, the accompanying excerpt from the semi-independent Russian news source *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* argues that viewing the SMO in Ukraine through a WWII lens presents its own set of challenges.

The author asserts that “comparing the special operation in Ukraine with the Great Patriotic War is unreasonable,” proceeding then to remind readers of basic facts surrounding WWII and how they differ from those surrounding the SMO in Ukraine. For instance, in June 1941 “the Red Army had a very significant (several times) quantitative superiority in military equipment over the Wehrmacht.” This was not the case in February 2022, when the Russian military “did not have any quantitative superiority over the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine.” Comparing casualties during the two conflicts, the author points out that so far, Russian total losses in Ukraine are small, noting that “during the Great Patriotic War, the Red Army lost the same number of servicemen on average in one day!”



Soviet Victory Parade, Red Square, Moscow, June 1945

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/bdnrfsex>

Attribution: Russian Ministry of Defense (Mil.ru) CCA 4.0 Intl

Comparing the special operation in Ukraine with the Great Patriotic War is unreasonable.

Responding to those who assert that there can be no negotiations with the current Ukrainian leadership, the author reminds readers that in the summer and autumn of 1941, the USSR tried to reach a negotiated settlement with Nazi Germany. To those who claim that the USSR was the sole victor in WWII, the author reviews the critical role which the Western lend-lease program played in the Allied victory.² The author makes other cogent comparisons, suggesting that to measure progress in the SMO through a warped WWII lens will only “multiply losses and delay victory.” It is noteworthy that this sober assessment of the SMO was published given Russian press restrictions and the pervasiveness of pro-Kremlin propaganda.

Source: Alexander Khramchikhin, “Уязвленный патриотизм порождает истерику (Wounded patriotism breeds hysteria),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* (semi-independent Russian news source), 1 December 2022. https://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2022-12-01/4_1216_patriotism.html

Alexander Khramchikhin, “Уязвленный патриотизм порождает истерику (Wounded patriotism breeds hysteria),” Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye (semi-independent Russian news source), 1 December 2022. https://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2022-12-01/4_1216_patriotism.html

Comparing the special operation in Ukraine with the Great Patriotic War is unreasonable. A large part of Russian society is experiencing difficult feelings about the course of the military campaign in Ukraine. Many do not understand why we have not yet won, and sometimes retreating - moreover, from the territories included in the Russian Federation.

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Continued: Russia Compares Ukraine Conflict to WWII

Source Continued: Alexander Khramchikhin, “Уязвленный патриотизм порождает истерику (Wounded patriotism breeds hysteria),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obezreniye* (semi-independent Russian news source), 1 December 2022. https://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2022-12-01/4_1216_patriotism.html

Such a reaction to the Ukrainian events is quite understandable in itself, but not should not incite hysteria. Expressing dissatisfaction with what is happening, outside observers cite the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War as a positive example for today's Russia....

As of June 22, 1941, on the Soviet-German border, the Red Army had a very significant (several times) quantitative superiority in military equipment over the Wehrmacht.... As of February 24, 2022, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the Russian-Ukrainian border did not have any quantitative superiority over the Armed Forces and other military formations of Ukraine. And the qualitative superiority of the Russian side was and remains not so fundamental as to compensate for the quantitative superiority of the enemy.

At the same time, however, hostilities are taking place exclusively on the territory of Ukraine (meaning the territory at the beginning of the current campaign). Ukrainian strikes on the territory of the Russian Federation (taken at the same time) are of microscopic proportions. Irretrievable losses of the RF Armed Forces over the entire period of hostilities are small. During the Great Patriotic War, the Red Army lost the same number of servicemen on average in one day!

Regular statements by some Russian officials about “creating a favorable background” for negotiations with “respected Western partners” produce a painful impression on the Russian population, to put it mildly.... But in the summer and autumn of 1941, at the direction of Stalin and Beria, Soviet representatives... tried to transfer to Berlin proposals for a virtually complete repetition of the Brest Peace. That is, about the surrender to the Germans of the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and maybe also Karelia. ...If the Anglo-Saxons had not fought against Hitler (for whom almost all of continental Europe worked), and if Lend-Lease had been supplied not to the Soviet Union, but to Germany, we would have had a very bad time.

...But criticism is different. It is absolutely unacceptable to question the legitimacy of the actions of the army, to talk about its non-existent losses and, moreover, about non-existent crimes. But to ignore failures in various types of support and obvious mistakes in the preparation of the campaign as a whole means to multiply losses and delay victory.

Notes:

[1] For additional background on the Kremlin’s attempt to create a new state ideology, see: Ray Finch, “Russian Culture Ministry Proposes Possible Framework for New State Ideology,” *OE Watch*, Issue #5 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/417836>

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

Anticipating Russian Collapse, Chechen Diaspora Groups Jockey for Position

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Russia’s so-called “special military operation (SMO)” in Ukraine has breathed life into the Chechen diaspora hungry for Russian defeat and the chance to liberate Chechnya. However, the excerpted article from the Caucasus news service *Kavkaz Realii* describes how two separate Chechen diaspora groups have become bitter enemies as they seek to capitalize on what many Chechens believe is their best chance to reclaim their ancestral homeland.¹ At the core of the contention are two summits that members of the Chechen diaspora held to discuss their future: one in Antwerp and another outside of Paris. The Antwerp summit, held in November 2022, was headed by former minister and commander Akhmed Zakaev, who has taken a leadership role within the Chechen diaspora since he left Chechnya in 2000 after being wounded in battle. He has many followers and has held the title of prime minister of the “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in exile” for more than a decade. However, many Chechens do not consider Zakaev or his government in exile to be the legitimate heirs to a future independent Chechnya. For its part, the summit outside of Paris, which occurred a day before Zakaev’s summit in Antwerp, was organized by the Tolam movement. This was arranged under the direction of Jambulul Suleymanov and Anzor Maskhadov, the latter the son of former Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov. Since the summit occurred, Tolam has morphed into United Force.²

In addition to Zakaev’s government in exile and the United Force, there are at least two other organizations—the Presidium of the Chechen Republic and Chechen Democrats—vying for a leadership role in the independence effort. In a bid to strengthen their respective positions, both

the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in exile and the United Force have military presences in Ukraine, fighting against Russia. The second excerpted article from Paris-based *Intelligence Online* describes the Chechen political movement’s connections to military units in Ukraine. For his part, Zakaev and his government in exile founded the Separate Special Purpose Battalion (OBON), which is attached to the Ukraine Foreign Legion. Underscoring the importance that he places on Ukraine, Zakaev has also placed his appointed

These congresses became a kind of political duel between the two leaders of the Diaspora: some participants in the events spoke openly about the division of the Ichkerians into opposing camps.

defense minister, Magomed Dikiev, in Kyiv. Zakaev’s OBON will join two notable Chechen units already fighting within the Ukraine Foreign Legion: the Sheikh Mansur Battalion, believed to have several hundred men, and the smaller Djokhar Dudayev Battalion. However, as the article notes, the battalions are close to Suleymanov’s United Force faction and therefore do not recognize Zakaev’s authority. Notably, neither article mentions more radical Chechen movements operating out of Turkey, which are also vying to lead a would-be independent Chechen Republic. If an independent or autonomous Chechnya could emerge, the infighting between these groups described above, which fractured the Chechen independent movement during earlier wars with Russia, is likely to again hamper the movement.

Source: “Раздор в чеченской диаспоре? В Европе прошли съезды противоборствующих сторонников Ичкерии (Discord in the Chechen diaspora? Congresses of opposing supporters of Ichkeria were held in Europe),” *Kavkaz Realii* (U.S. government supported but independent news service focused on the Caucasus), 29 November 2022. <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/razdory-v-chechenskoy-diaspore-v-evrope-proshli-sezdy-protivoborstvuyuschih-storonnikov-ichkerii-/32152173.html>

According to the chairman of the congress Suleymanov, the purpose of the event was the formation of a new social movement. The presidium was attended by veterans of the Chechen political movement: social activist Makhmud Bibulatov, Chechen activist Yaragi Sulumov living in Germany, as well as new figures in the person of the head of the Chechen opposition movement IADAT Ibragim Yangulbaev, Saikhan Muzaev (mentioned in the

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Continued: Anticipating Russian Collapse, Chechen Diaspora Groups Jockey for Position

Source Continued: “Раздор в чеченской диаспоре? В Европе прошли съезды противоборствующих сторонников Ичкерии (Discord in the Chechen diaspora? Congresses of opposing supporters of Ichkeria were held in Europe),” *Kavkaz Reali* (U.S. government supported but independent news service focused on the Caucasus), 29 November 2022. <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/razdory-v-chechenskoy-diaspore-v-evrope-proshli-sezdy-protivoborstvuyuschih-storonnikov-ichkerii-/32152173.html>

media as a refugee in Georgia and a friend of the one killed in Berlin in 2019, former Ichkerian field commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili) and others.

...Speaking on behalf of the Chechen diaspora, Maskhadov and the Yangulbaev brothers (the youngest of them, Baysangur, who was recently included in the list of extremists in the Russian Federation, was also here) called for intensifying political activity and confronting certain forces that, in their opinion, lead to disunity among supporters independent Ichkeria. No one has been able to pinpoint what these powers are.

An unnamed representative of the Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion, who is fighting on the side of Ukraine, expressed support for Suleymanov. On his personal Facebook page, Bogdan Chechensky, a representative of the Sheikh Mansur volunteer battalion also expressed support for the leader of "Tolam".

Suleimanov himself spoke sharply about the so-called government abroad, headed by Akhmed Zakayev, and accused the latter of "a trail of adventures and state crimes." He did not go into details.

...Khusein Dzhambetov, a member of the [Zakaev's] Separate Special Purpose Battalion participating in the war on the side of Ukraine, and his deputy Hadji-Murat Zumso said that their military units will become the base of the army of Ichkeria in the future.

Source: “Divided Chechen diaspora redoubles efforts to woo Kyiv,” *Intelligence Online* (Paris-based subscription news outlet), 28 November 2022. <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/2022/11/28/divided-chechen-diaspora-redoubles-efforts-to-woo-kyiv,109868303-eve>

Both groups are striving for the same goal: to free Chechnya from what they consider to be its illegal occupation by Ramzan Kadyrov's pro-Russian regime, an aim shared by other opposition groups and some members of the Ukrainian government. On other matters, however, the two factions are deeply divided, which is why they are holding separate events.

In June, Zakayev, who has appointed himself prime minister in exile, brokered an agreement that was signed by a Ukrainian deputy defence minister, to create a special battalion of Chechen fighters, OBON, within the regular Ukrainian army under contract. OBON currently has around 20 members. The new unit joins other Chechen troops, which have been in Ukraine since 2014: the Sheikh Mansur Battalion, which has several hundred men in rotation, and the smaller Djokhar- Dudayev Battalion. Both battalions are close to the Suleymanov faction and do not recognise Zakayev's authority.

Zakayev has been active in Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion. As early as February, he made public appeals from London to President Volodymyr Zelensky, encouraging the head of state to create a clear framework for foreign volunteers to become legally involved in the fighting. He regularly visits Kyiv, where he has placed his defence "minister", Magomed Dikiev, in a permanent diplomatic role.

RUSSIA

Continued: Anticipating Russian Collapse, Chechen Diaspora Groups Jockey for Position

Notes:

[1] The inability of the Chechens to unite is complicated and has to do with many factors including culture, the importance of family clan, and the national myth, which values every male as a warrior. In an interview for a documentary film, former Chechen warlord and field commander Salman Raduev said, “We are a nation of one million people, we are a nation of one million generals... every Chechen is a general.” Although intended as hyperbole, Raduev’s comment speaks volumes about the Chechens’ inability to fight or govern together. See; *Immortal Fortress: Inside Chechnya’s Warrior Culture*,” Combat Films and Research for PBS, 1999. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/immortalfortress>

[2] Both movements draw their followers from about 200,000 Chechens who emigrated to Europe during the first and second Russian-Chechen wars between 1994 and 2009.

OEWATCH

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Canada Makes Additional Claims to Arctic Territory Claimed by Russia

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Canada recently filed a claim to the Arctic Ocean seabed encompassing the full length of the Central Arctic Plateau, including the Lomonosov Ridge. This most recent claim follows a previous Canadian claim made in 2019 that included up to 1.2 million square kilometers of ocean seabed and part of the Lomonosov Ridge. According to independent Norwegian news site *The Barents Observer*, Canada's claims to Arctic territory involving the Lomonosov Ridge run counter to Russia's earlier claim over much of that area. Canada's claim also comes at a time when Russia's

relations with the West are severely strained. Normally the Arctic Council, comprised of states with a presence in the Arctic, would meet to help solve competing claims. However, due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Arctic Council first ceased operating but is now meeting without Russia and the Russian president of the Arctic Council. It is unlikely that the overlapping claims in the Arctic will be solved diplomatically in the near term since the Arctic Council is dysfunctional and tensions between Russia and West, in this case Canada, are worsening.

The addition is to Canada's 2019 partial submission that claimed approximately 1.2 million square kilometers of the Arctic Ocean seabed and subsoil. 'This addendum to that partial submission regarding the outer limits of the continental shelf in respect of the Arctic Ocean covers an additional area of continental shelf extending beyond the limits provided for in that partial submission, encompassing the full length of the Central Arctic Plateau...'

Source: Eil'is Quinn, "Canada extends continental shelf claim, increasing overlaps with Russia in Arctic," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 23 December 2022. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2022/12/canada-extends-continental-shelf-claim-increasing-overlaps-russia-arctic>

The Lomonosov Ridge is a kind of underwater mountain chain that extends across the seafloor of the Arctic Ocean and is something that Canada, Russia and Denmark all claim is an extension of their respective continental shelves.

Canada's new filing comes at a time of high tension between Russia and the West. In March, the seven western states on the Arctic Council paused their participation in the body's work in protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, saying the war undermined many of the founding principals of the forum, which include sovereignty and territorial integrity based on international law. In June, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the United States said they'd resume limited council work in areas that did not include Russia.

Global Affairs Canada was not able to immediately reply to a request for comment on Thursday concerning Canada's new Arctic claims and its interactions with Russia during the process. But in the addendum document, Canada says it had regular consultations with Russia, as it did with Denmark and the United States, countries with which Ottawa also has overlapping claims.

"During the preparation of this submission, regular consultations between Canada and the Russian Federation revealed overlaps in their respective continental shelves in the Arctic Ocean," the addendum said.

"Through an exchange of letters, Canada and the Russian Federation reached an understanding that: When one State makes a submission to the Commission that includes the Arctic Ocean, the other State will promptly transmit a diplomatic note to the Secretary-General of the United Nations."

continue on 23

Continued: Canada Makes Additional Claims to Arctic Territory Claimed by Russia

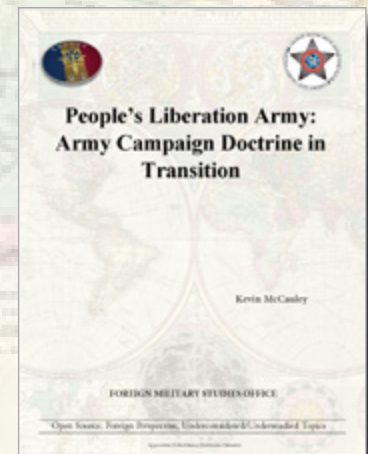
Source Continued: Eil'is Quinn, "Canada extends continental shelf claim, increasing overlaps with Russia in Arctic," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 23 December 2022. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2022/12/canada-extends-continental-shelf-claim-increasing-overlaps-russia-arctic>

In 2021, Russia filed a claim with the U.N.'s Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf that goes up to Canada's exclusive economic zone in the Arctic. It takes the commission several years to study the scientific merits of claims filed. Afterwards, countries use the commission's recommendations to negotiate final boundaries between themselves. Canada ratified UNCLOS in 2013.

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.



Armenia Takes Another Step Away From Russia

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Armenia's frustration with Russia and its role as the *de facto* leader of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) appeared to reach a head at the organization's November 2022 summit, when Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan abruptly ended a meeting with leaders of the other member states and refused to sign two documents drafted during the summit. For his part, Pashinyan had previously criticized Russia's response to multiple attacks by Azerbaijan against Armenia in 2022 and Russia's inability to deliver weapons that Armenia purchased. The accompanying excerpted articles provide additional context on Pashinyan's actions during the recent CSTO summit as well as how the Armenian government continues to pursue other security cooperation partnerships—namely with India—due to what it perceives to be continued failures by Russia and the CSTO.

The first article, from the Armenian state news agency *Armenpress*, reports on Pashinyan's speech during the CSTO summit. Pashinyan mentions the three major clashes that took place between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War ended and how "Armenia's membership in the CSTO did not deter Azerbaijan from aggressive actions." He states that these clashes caused "great damage to the image of the CSTO both within our country and abroad." Pashinyan goes on to outline the Armenian government's position on how its borders have been violated by Azerbaijan and that these actions should have been considered an attack that would have necessitated a strong response from the CSTO. According to the CSTO's charter, this could have included military assistance,

It is dispiriting that Armenia's membership in the CSTO did not deter Azerbaijan from aggressive actions.

but the organization denied Armenia's request. Pashinyan ends his speech by explaining how his government proposed negotiating the withdrawal of Azerbaijan's forces from Armenian territory through the CSTO Security Council, but that he would not sign the draft put together by the council because he believes it is insufficient to prevent Azerbaijan from continuing to act with impunity.

Underscoring Armenia's disillusionment with Russia, the second accompanying article from the Armenian independent online newspaper *Hetq* reports on an agreement Armenia signed with India's Kalyani Strategic Systems two weeks before the CSTO summit to acquire 155 mm artillery systems. The article notes that Armenia's Defense Minister visited India's defense exposition in October and that this most recent agreement comes after Armenia signed a contract in September to purchase India's Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher as well as anti-tank rockets and different types of ammunition.

Overall, there is no indication that Armenia will be leaving the Russia-led CSTO despite calls to do so from Pashinyan's political opposition. Armenia's bilateral economic and military ties to Russia make this difficult. Instead, Armenia's refusal to sign the CSTO's official response to the situation with Azerbaijan is an example of the types of protest steps we expect the Armenian government to continue to register.



Nikol Pashinyan.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nikol_Pashinyan_Apri_2021_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nikol_Pashinyan_Apri_2021_(cropped).jpg), Attribution: CCA 4.0

Continued: Armenia Takes Another Step Away From Russia

Source: “Для нас принципиальную важность имеет подтверждение зоны ответственности ОДКБ в Армении: речь премьера на СКБ ОДКБ (The confirmation of the zone of responsibility of the CSTO in Armenia has the most significance for us: the address of the prime minister at the Special Security Council of the CSTO),” *Armenpress* (state news agency in Armenia), 23 November 2022. <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/1098011.html>

“...The presidency of the Republic of Armenia in the CSTO ends today. This period was very eventful...Over the past two years, the CSTO member state Armenia has been subjected to aggression by Azerbaijan at least three times.

It is dispiriting that Armenia's membership in the CSTO did not deter Azerbaijan from aggressive actions... These facts cause great damage to the image of the CSTO both within our country and abroad, and I regard this as the main failure of Armenia's chairmanship in the CSTO...

Our position is as follows: according to the Alma-Ata Declaration of December 21, 1991, the founding countries of the CIS, as independent states, recognized each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of existing borders. This means that the aforementioned countries became independent with the administrative borders that existed between the republics during the Soviet Union. That is, the former administrative borders became state borders, and the territories of the above-mentioned countries were determined by these borders. It is within these borders that the Republic of Armenia became a member of the UN and the CSTO.

Since May 11, 2021, Azerbaijan has used armed forces three times and occupied approximately 140 square kilometers of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. This happened on May 11 and November 14, 2021 and September 13, 2022.

So, according to the UN resolution of December 14, 1974, number 3314, the above actions of Azerbaijan are regarded as aggression.

What do we expect from the CSTO in this regard? Statements of this fact, in the form of a clearly formulated political assessment. To refrain from such an assessment, saying that there is no border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, means to assert that there is no zone of responsibility of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and if there is no zone of responsibility, then there is no organization itself. It can at least be interpreted that way.

These nuances are also important because they play a decisive role in further collective actions. In this context, I want to respond to comments according to which Armenia is trying to draw the CSTO countries into a war with Azerbaijan. This is pure manipulation, because Armenia cannot be interested in a war, if only because it has suffered enough from wars, including in September of this year.

...Armenia also proposes, by decision of the CSTO CSC, to accelerate the necessary political and diplomatic work with the Azerbaijani side, aimed at the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia to their original positions as of May 11, 2021.

Such a position is important not only for restoring the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, but also for deterring Azerbaijan from further aggressive actions against our country...Under these conditions, the lack of a clear political assessment of the situation and the failure to make the above decision may mean not only the CSTO's refusal of allied obligations, but may also be interpreted by Azerbaijan as a green light from the CSTO for further aggression against Armenia...

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Continued: Armenia Takes Another Step Away From Russia

Source Continued: “Для нас принципиальную важность имеет подтверждение зоны ответственности ОДКБ в Армении: речь премьера на СКБ ОДКБ (The confirmation of the zone of responsibility of the CSTO in Armenia has the most significance for us: the address of the prime minister at the Special Security Council of the CSTO),” *Armenpress* (state news agency in Armenia), 23 November 2022. <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/1098011.html>

Therefore, based on this, dear colleagues, at the moment I believe that the draft “Declaration of the CSTO CSC and on joint measures to provide assistance to the Republic of Armenia” submitted for signing is not sufficiently finalized, and in this form, with all due respect, I am not ready to sign these documents...

Source: Vahe Sarukhanyan, “\$155M for Artillery: Armenia Signs Another Arms Deal with India,” *Hetq* (independent online newspaper in Armenia), 11 November 2022. <https://hetq.am/en/article/150099>

The Indian press, referring to a November 9 statement released by the local Bharat Forge company, reports that the latter's military-industrial subsidiary, Kalyani Strategic Systems, has received a US \$155 million order to export 155 mm artillery gun systems to Armenia over the next three years.

Although Bharat Forge didn't disclose the identity of the customer, the Indian Business Standard news site writes that according to its sources in the Indian Defense Ministry the contract was signed with the Armenian government...

...In October, Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan led a delegation to a defense industry exhibition (DefExpo-2022) in Gandhinagar, India displaying locally manufactured armaments and defense systems.

This latest arms deal follows a September 2022 \$245 million contract Armenia signed with India to purchase Indian-made Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers, anti-tank rockets and various types of ammunition...

Notes:

[1] For more context on Armenia's acquisition of Indian systems, see: Matthew Stein, “Armenia Acquires Indian Multiple Rocket Launcher System Amid Delays in Russian Deliveries,” *OE Watch*, Issue #11, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429405>

[2] For background on the recent incidents between Armenia and Azerbaijan, see: Matthew Stein, “Armenia Questions Russian Peacekeeping After Nagorno-Karabakh Incident,” *OE Watch*, Issue #9, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425540>

Iran Moves Sea-Borne Drone Fleet Closer to Reality



Drone launches during surface and submarine naval exercises, August 2022.

Source: <https://static2.borna.news>
 Attribution: Borna News

By Michael Rubin
 OE Watch Commentary

Iran increasingly uses its navy and its drone fleet to project power, and new reporting suggests that Iran has continued to make strides to integrate the two capabilities¹ In the excerpted article from the official outlet of the Iranian Ministry of Defense *Holy Defense News Agency*, Admiral Shahram Irani, who took command of the regular Iranian Navy in 2021, announced in November 2022 that the Iranian Navy would soon station drones and helicopters onboard its ships. This declaration, which partially repeats an announcement from July 2022 about launching drones from carriers, for the first time was accompanied by photographs of drone launches from both submarines and surface vessels, suggesting that the Iranian Navy has taken the capability to a new level.² While Iranian officials often exaggerate Iran’s military capabilities, the Iranian Navy now appears to have attached a “drone section” to the Navy

Today, the economic highway of the country in the Persian Gulf is safe.

and made the skill set to launch, maintain, and operate drones more standard among naval personnel. Admiral Irani’s announcement that there would be a “massive” drone exercise in the Indian Ocean in coming months underscores that the ambition to activate a naval drone fleet is moving quickly from the realm of rhetoric to reality.

Such new investment in the Iranian navy continues an effort, now more than a decade old, to make the Navy the

vanguard of Iran’s projection of power. Its operational range has expanded, with port calls in recent years ranging from Syria to South Africa, Sri Lanka, and as far as China.³ Yet, promises by Irani to expand the Iranian Navy’s operational range to the Suez Canal and Strait of Malacca exaggerate both the navy’s capabilities and Iran’s diplomatic room to maneuver. While Iran’s mention of separate Indian Ocean, Atlantic, and Pacific commands within the Iranian Navy are likely theoretical, they reflect a growing Iranian ambition to become a blue water navy and operate beyond Iran’s traditional areas of operation.

Source: “Alhaq Balgardha-ye Hajumi va Pehpadha-ye Jadid ba Navegan-e Niru-ye Daryaye Artesh dar Ayendeh Nazdik” [“Addition of New Attack Helicopters and Drones to the Navy Fleet in the Near Future”], *Holy Defense News Agency* (official news agency of Iran’s ministry of Defense), 22 November 2022, <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/557328>

Admiral Shahram Irani added, “Soon we will have naval attack helicopters that will help us to escort our ships and also a drone section, and soon we will be equipped with modern drones. The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy’s carrier will cover a radius of at least 2,000 kilometers [1,242 miles] and carry unmanned aerial vehicle systems.” The command of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army’s Navy continued, “The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy’s drone carrier also has the capability to fly hundreds of drones in its waters and manage various missions with them.” He added, “Today, the economic highway of the country in the Persian Gulf is safe, and our fleets have strong activity in this area.” The Iranian admiral continued, “All ships of the Islamic Republic of Iran are under the escort of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy’s combat carriers, and our combat carriers are conducting missions in three areas: The Indian Ocean command, Atlantic Command and Pacific Command.”

Continued: Iran Moves Sea-Borne Drone Fleet Closer to Reality

Notes:

[1] For background on Iranian drone developments and strategies, see: Michael Rubin, “A Short History of the Iranian Drone Program,” *American Enterprise Institute*, August 2020. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-short-history-of-the-iranian-drone-program.pdf?x91208>

[2] For analysis of the July 2022 announcement, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Reportedly Using New Carrier, Submarines To Expand Reach of Drones,” *OE Watch*, Issue 9, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425542>. For Persian-language reporting on Iran’s quest to build an aircraft carrier, see: “Sakht-e Nav-e Havapaymabar dar Niru-ye Darya-ye Iran (Construction of an aircraft carrier in the Iranian Navy),” *Asr-e Iran*, 29 September 2011. <https://www.asriran.com/fa/news/183171>

[3] For more on the expansion of the Iranian Navy, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Navy Expands Operational Range,” *OE Watch*, January 2013.

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.



Iranian General Reiterates Goal To Expel United States From Region

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

In the early morning hours of 3 January 2020, a U.S. drone strike killed both Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force chief Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chief of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (*al-hashd al-shaabi*) on the outskirts of Baghdad International Airport.¹ Five days later, the IRGC retaliated with Operation Martyr Soleimani, consisting of about a dozen missiles fired at Ayn al-Assad Air Base in Iraq's western al-Anbar Governorate and Erbil International Airport in Iraqi Kurdistan.² Both are Iraqi facilities where U.S. forces are present. While no American personnel were killed, more than 100 U.S. military personnel were injured in the strike. As the accompanying article describes, over three years later, Soleimani's death continues to resonate in Iran, with major Iranian military figures calling for the expulsion of the United States from the region.

The excerpted statement from Mohammad Bagheri, an IRGC general who has, since June 2016, served as Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, expresses outrage at the death of Soleimani. As he writes in the below, Operation Martyr Soleimani was "the beginning of the work... of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the axis of resistance to fulfill the efforts of Martyr Haj Qasem to expel American terrorist forces from the region." Bagheri's likening of the Iranian retaliation against supposed U.S. planners at Ayn al-Assad Air Base to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor suggests,



Iran launch missiles targeting U.S. forces on Al Asad Airbase, Iraq, to avenge the death of General Qassem Soleimani, 8 January 2020.

Source: https://nournews.ir/Media/photo/20/01/20011101000958_org.jpg
Attribution: NourNews.ir

at least in the IRGC's mindset, that Iran is at war with the United States. Also notable is that the reformist news outlet *Shargh Daily* published this piece, as it underscores how, even across Iran's divided political spectrum, Soleimani's death remains resonant.

This goal [to expel American forces] will be pursued until the result is achieved.

Source: "Payam Sarlashkar Bagheri beh Monasabat-e Shahid Soleimani 'Amaliyat-e (General Bagheri's Message on the Anniversary of the Martyr Soleimani Operation)," *Shargh Daily* (website of one of Iran's more popular reformist newspapers), 7 January 2023. <https://www.sharghdaily.com/ش-خ-ب-6/866489-م-ای-پ-ت-س-ای-س-ش-خ-ب>
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On the morning of 3 January 2020, the terrorist U.S. government killed Lt.-Gen. Haj Qasem Soleimani, the national hero and the Muslim world, and a group of commanders and comrades of the resistance front at Baghdad Airport with a drone strike. This act of terrorism left the Iranian nation, Islamic nations and other nations of the world perplexed as to how a government had been able to target with a drone strike an official guest of the Iraqi government contrary to all legal, political and international rules!

It was obvious that under such circumstances and the martyrdom of the master of the martyrs, the first demand not only of the Iranian people but also the rightful nations was to confront the U.S. terrorist act, but also the rightful nations. The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, realizing this demand prepared to bomb

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Continued: Iranian General Reiterates Goal To Expel United States From Region

Source Continued: “Payam Sarlashkar Bagheri beh Monasabat-e Shahid Soleimani ‘Amaliyat-e (General Bagheri’s Message on the Anniversary of the Martyr Soleimani Operation),” *Shargh Daily* (website of one of Iran’s more popular reformist newspapers), 7 January 2023. <https://www.sharghdaily.com/ش-خ-ب-ت-س-ای-س-6/866489-ین-امی-ل-س-دی-ه-ش-ت-ای-م-ع-ت-ب-س-ان-م-ه-ب-ی-ر-ق-اب-ر-ک-ش-ل-ر-س-م-ای-پ>

and destroy the U.S. base of ‘Ayn al-Assad on Iraqi soil, which was known as one of the bases where the United States plotting the assassination of General Soleimani. Therefore, on the morning of 8 January 2020, the IRGC’s aerospace force fired 13 ballistic missiles to inflict a hard slap against the terror planning and execution center in the first countermeasure and an action that was unprecedented in the past 70 years and it was able to destroy America’s hegemony in the region and the world. Of course, this operation was the beginning of the work and the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the axis of resistance to fulfill the efforts of Martyr Haj Qasem to expel American terrorist forces from the region. This goal will be pursued until the result is achieved.

Notes:

[1] For a brief overview of both Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, see: Nectar Gan, “Who was Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian commander killed by a US airstrike?” *CNN.com*, 3 July 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/03/asia/soleimani-profile-intl-hnk/index.html>

[2] For an American account of the Iranian attack on Ayn al-Assad Air Base, see: David Martin and Mary Walsh, “Who would live and who would die: The inside story of the Iranian attack on Al Asad Airbase,” *CBS News*, 8 August 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iranian-attack-al-asad-air-base-60-minutes-2021-08-08/>



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 Fires Indigenous Torpedoes From Submarines for First Time



An Iranian Navy helicopter drops a Mark-46 torpedo on 31 December 2022 during Zulfiqar 1401 joint exercises.

Source: <https://cdn.isna.ir/d/2023/01/01/3/62473566.jpg?ts=1672563255357>

Attribution: Iranian Students' News Agency

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Every year, the Iranian military hosts the Zulfiqar joint military exercises to demonstrate air, naval, and ground components from both the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and regular army, often acting in concert.¹ As detailed in the accompanying article from the pro-regime

Iranian Students' New Agency, the most recent exercises occurred in late December 2022. They spanned the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and northern Indian Ocean, and featured demonstrations of Iran's indigenous Mi'ad (vow) torpedoes launched from Kilo-class Tareq attack submarines against naval targets and Valfajr torpedoes launched from Qadir submarines.² The exercises also included Iranian Army Sikorsky SH helicopters launching Mark-46 torpedoes. While it is not possible yet to assess whether the capabilities of Iran's indigenous torpedoes match the promise of regime officials, the emphasis on torpedo development and multiple launch platforms underscores the danger that increased Iranian capabilities may pose to shipping in the Persian Gulf and northern Indian Ocean. The Persian Gulf is both narrow and shallow. After the U.S. defeat of the Iranian navy and air force in 1988's Operation Praying Mantis, IRGC tactics shifted.³ Rather than risk direct confrontation with large ships or jet fighters, the IRGC-Navy embraced small speed boats as a low-cost, low-risk way to harass warships and commercial traffic. The development of torpedoes may mark a further shift in strategy that could make IRGC speedboat operations obsolete.

Torpedoes fired from Fateh and Ghadir-class submarines also destroyed their targets.

Source: "Shalik-e Azhdarha-ye Mi'ad va Valfajr az Zirdarya-yehaye Niru-ye Artesh (Firing of Iranian Mi'ad and Valfajr Torpedoes from Navy Submarines)," *Iranian Students' News Agency* (a semi-official student-run news agency that promotes the Iranian government's line). 1 January 2023, <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401101106235>

During the operational phase of the army's Zulfiqar 1401 joint exercise, the Iranian torpedo Mi'ad fired from a Tareq [Attack] submarine for the first time and destroyed its target... Iranian Valfajr-2 torpedoes fired from Fateh and Ghadir-class submarines also destroyed their targets in the Oman Sea and northern Indian Ocean. A SH helicopter also hit its target at sea by launching the Mark-46 torpedo. These types of torpedoes are designed and manufactured by young navy specialists in collaboration with the country's scientific centers and defense industries.... Valfajr intelligent torpedoes combine anti-deception capability, high speed and an explosive warhead with great destructive capacity, and are able to strike with surprise and completely destroy and sink large sea targets and vessels within seconds. They also boast short preparation time that increase tactical power, speed of action and rapid response compared to similar torpedoes.

Continued: Iran Fires Indigenous Torpedoes From Submarines for First Time

Notes:

[1] Zulfiqar is a Persian rendition of the Arabic *Du-l-Faqir*, Imam Ali bin Abi Talib's legendary split tip sword. Shi'ite Muslims consider the Imam Ali (600-661) to be the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

[2] For more on the Valfajr torpedo, see: Michael Rubin, "Iran: Submarine-to-Surface Missile Launch System Entered Mass Production," *OE Watch*, January 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/380351>

[3] Operation Praying Mantis was a 1988 operation by the U.S. military to retaliate against Iran's mining of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. For greater background, see: Lee Allen Zatarain, *America's First Clash with Iran: The Tanker War, 1987-88*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2008.



To request equipment be added to the WEG, email the TRADOC G-2 Operational Environment Integration at odin_feedback@army.mil

The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's World Wide Equipment guide was developed to support the U.S. Army training and doctrine, including the Opposing Force (OPFOR) portrayal in training simulations (constructive, virtual, live, and gaming).

The equipment in this WEG represents military systems, variants, and upgrades that U.S. forces may encounter now and in the foreseeable future. The authors continually analyze real-world developments, capabilities, and trends to guarantee that the OPFOR remains relevant.

[HTTPS://ODIN.TRADOC.ARMY.MIL/WEG](https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/weg)

Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism With Recruits and Russia

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Burkina Faso has adopted a two-pronged approach to fighting terrorism: through massive military and vigilante recruitment programs and by moving towards reliance on Russia. In the first excerpted article published by centrist pan-African think tank *Institute for Security Studies*, the authors offer a useful overview of Burkina Faso's domestic military recruiting efforts aimed at extending military force structure, which are marked by volunteer recruitment. Notably, they relay that after receiving some 90,000 applications for citizens to become members of the Volunteers of the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) brigades to combat violent extremist groups, the country has selected some 50,000, which it will assign to posts around the country following only 14 days of military training. The authors worry about the numerous challenges that such a large and likely underresourced mobilization might engender. In the second article from the Mali-based daily *Le Journal du Mali*, details emerge about the recent meeting between Russia's Ambassador to Burkina Faso and the latter country's Prime Minister. As the article details, the two have agreed to work together to fight terrorism, fueling rumors about the presence or entrance of Wagner mercenaries, which Burkina Faso has formally denied but which in-country observers have claimed to exist. The Ambassador also promised to work with Burkina Faso on issues of technology transfers, which is indicative of Russia's broader approach to garnering African allies. Burkina Faso's new approach suggests a willingness to risk future instability by training and arming citizen militias, as well as to turn



Memorial of the Martyrs in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial_of_the_Martyrs-Ouagadougou-4.jpg Attribution: CC BY 2.0

toward pariah states like Russia even if that means risking international isolation. While the efficacy of such new approaches remains to be seen, a key takeaway is that the traditional approaches of addressing African terrorism that have defined the last 20 years—primarily significant French and American assistance—are now in flux in West Africa.

Are two weeks enough to train combatants? Does Burkina Faso have enough arms and ammunition to equip the 50,000 recruits? Will [the government] be able to control the numerous VDP groups scattered throughout the country's 351 communes?

Source: Hassane Koné and Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné, "Risks of Burkina Faso's New Military Approach to Terrorism," *Institute for Security Studies* (centrist pan-African think tank), 9 January 2023. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/risks-of-burkina-fasos-new-military-approach-to-terrorism>

Fifty thousand Burkinabe civilians have joined the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) to fight the violent extremists currently occupying nearly half of the country. The recruitment campaign, launched in October 2022 by Burkina Faso's authorities after the 30 September coup, ended on 18 November. More than 90,000 applications were received, and those selected will undergo 14 days of military training.

The military authorities intend to assign 35,000 VDPs in their residential communities and the remainder alongside the country's Security and Defence Forces nationwide.

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TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism With Recruits and Russia

Source Continued: Hassane Koné and Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné, “Risks of Burkina Faso’s New Military Approach to Terrorism,” *Institute for Security Studies* (centrist pan-African think tank), 9 January 2023. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/risks-of-burkina-fasos-new-military-approach-to-terrorism>

The use of civilian auxiliaries to support the security forces in the fight against terrorism has been tested since 2020 under Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who was ousted as president in last year’s January coup. The civilians intervened mainly in the Kaya (North-Central), Ouahigouya (North) and Fada N’gourma (East) regions.

Captain Ibrahim Traoré, the new president of the transition, has made recovery of the territory lost to violent extremists his priority as did Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who Traoré overthrew in September. While Damiba considered dialogue with terrorists, Traoré seems to be focusing on military action based on the concept of popular defence.... Traoré also invited citizens to participate in the war effort by making in-kind or cash contributions...

Are two weeks enough to train combatants? Does the country have enough arms and ammunition to equip the 50 000 recruits? What living and working conditions will they have? Regarding supervision, will the Brigade of Vigilance and Patriotic Defense be able to control the numerous VDP groups scattered throughout the country’s 351 communes? Could inadequate supervision and human rights training not encourage abuses by the civilian auxiliaries?

Source: “Burkina-Russie: Élaboration d’une feuille de route pour lutter contre le terrorisme (Burkina Faso-Russia: Elaboration of roadmap to fight terrorism),” *Le Journal du Mali* (privately-owned Malian daily), 12 January 2023. <https://www.journaldumali.com/2023/01/12/burkina-russie-elaboration-dune-feuille-de-route-pour-lutter-contre-le-terrorisme/>

The Russian ambassador accredited to Ouagadougou, with Abidjan as his residence, is staying in the Burkinabe capital where he met the Prime Minister of Burkina, Me Apollinaire Kyelem de Tambèla and several members of his government. Ouagadougou and Moscow will “develop a roadmap of their bilateral cooperation. From this, we will see what Russia could bring to Burkina in the context of security and the fight against terrorism,” Russian Ambassador to Burkina Faso Alexey Saltykov said.

Beyond the security issue, the discussions also focused on the possibilities of formalizing technical and financial cooperation between Moscow and Ouagadougou... The Russian diplomat added that his country is willing to support Burkina through a transfer of emerging technologies in several sectors...

Since the beginning of September 2022, voices have regularly called on the new authorities to move closer to Russia to the detriment of France, to find a solution to the terrorism that has plagued the country for seven years. The head of government, who has stayed in Moscow, has repeatedly affirmed the need to diversify partnerships, fueling rumors about the Burkinabé authorities resorting to the services of the Russian paramilitary group, Wagner.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

After New Gains, Somali Government Claims Al-Shabaab Seeks Negotiations

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Nearly seven months into what Somalia has called a “total war” against the group, the Somali National Army (SNA) has consistently wrested territory away from al-Qaeda’s East African branch, al-Shabaab. Somalia recently claimed that its gains against al-Shabaab have led the terrorist organization to seek, for the first time ever, to negotiate with the government. As articulated in the first article from *Shabelle Media*, the recent government successes are a result of assistance from the United States, Somali clan militias, increased citizen support, and more draconian measures from the government itself.¹ In January, the SNA captured the port town of Harardhere, an important al-Shabaab economic hub. In the second article from *Garowe Online*, the Deputy Defense Minister of Somalia, Abdifatah Kasim, proclaimed that al-Shabaab has suggested the idea of negotiations; however, Al-Shabaab members have denied that the group as a whole forwarded such an offer.

Taken together, the above stories are noteworthy in that they potentially signal a rare turning of the tide against al-Shabaab. Indeed, for years the war against Al-Shabab



Members of the Al Qaeda-affiliated militant group Al-Shabaab stand after giving themselves up to forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in September 2012.

Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/au_unistphotostream/8019360014
Attribution: Public Domain (CCO)

The army and their allied locals captured the strategic Indian Ocean city of Harardhere, which has been Al-Shabaab’s nerve economic and command center for years.

has been at a stalemate despite significant international assistance. Sustained progress might be made if the current gains can be capitalized upon by Somalia and the international community. However, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda have historically proven to be resilient and the recent gains in no way portends the group’s defeat.

Source: “Somali troops dislodge third town from Al-Shabaab in two days,” *Shabelle Media* (independent Somali/English language news center), 17 January 2023. <https://shabellemedia.com/somali-troops-dislodge-third-town-from-al-shabaab-in-two-days/>

The war against Al-Shabaab is raging on at a speed time as the Somalia National Army (SNA) and vigilantes take over three towns within two days, a victory that will live long. The minister of defense Abdulakadir Mohamed Nur ticked with a green pen the seizure of the El-Dhere in Galgadud from Al-Shabaab peacefully as the militants fled from their bases.

El-Dher joined dozens of liberated areas in southern and central regions of Somalia during the current all-out offensive assisted by US military and local clan fighters.

On Monday, the army and their allied locals captured the strategic Indian Ocean city of Harardhere, which has been Al-Shabaab’s nerve economic and command center for years.

The latest gains came at no cost of lives as Al-Shabaab leaves every district without posing resistance to the SNA assault. The Al-Qaeda-linked militants carried out ambush attacks against military bases in Hiran and Middle Shabelle regions, where the group faced big losses on the battlefields. The government of Somalia has pledged to liberate the whole country from Al-Shabaab in this year with the support of foreign partners and local communities who joined the war.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: After New Gains, Somali Government Claims Al-Shabaab Seeks Negotiations

Source: "Al-Shabaab extremists deny contact with Somalia's government," *AfricaNews* (pan-African news aggregator), 9 January 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/01/09/al-shabab-extremists-deny-contact-with-somalia-govt/>

The Somalia-based al-Shabab extremist group has denied having contact with the Somali government after the country's deputy defense minister claimed that the extremists had for the first time asked to negotiate.

An unnamed al-Shabab official with the group's media unit told a pro-al-Shabab website in comments published Sunday that "there is no talk between us."

On Saturday, Deputy Defense Minister Abdifatah Kasim told journalists in Mogadishu that "al-Shabab requested to open negotiations with the Somali government, but there are two groups within al-Shabab."...

It was the first time Somalia's federal government had claimed the extremist group had requested talks.

The comments came amid a military offensive the government launched last year and has described as "total war." Al-Shabab is an al-Qaida-affiliate that for well over a decade has carried out high-profile bombings in Somalia's capital and controlled parts of the country's central and southern regions, complicating efforts to rebuild the once-failed state after decades of conflict.

Al-Shabab numbers several thousand fighters, including an unknown number of foreigners, both from regional countries like neighboring Kenya and beyond.

Notes:

[1] For instance, the government of Somalia recently outlawed the reporting about al-Shabaab by media outlets. For more, see: Jason Warner, "Somalia Government Bans Media Reporting on Al-Shabaab," *OE Watch* #11, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429366>

Nigerian Leadership Seeks Renewed Regional Cooperation Against Boko Haram

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 30 November, the business-oriented Lagos-based publication *The Nation* reported in the excerpted article on Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari's speech to heads of state of Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) countries, which include Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin.¹ Buhari argued for greater financial and political commitment to enable the MNJTF to defeat Boko Haram. Prior to Buhari's speech, on 25 September, the southern Nigeria-based publication *This Day*, which often reports critically on northern Nigerian affairs, featured the second excerpted article that highlighted the importance the Nigerian army is placing on the MNJTF to combat Boko Haram. According to the article, Nigerian Brigadier General Abdulsallam Abubakar visited the MNJTF headquarters in Chad and, like Buhari, stated that the MNJTF was degrading Boko Haram but additional resources would be needed to finish



Trigger time at Flintlock 20.

Source: USAFRICOM from Stuttgart, Germany, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trigger_time_at_Flintlock_20_\(50111204252\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trigger_time_at_Flintlock_20_(50111204252).jpg) Attribution: CC x 2.0

the job. In particular, Abubakar pointed to the increasing operational tempo against Boko Haram, which comprises two factions around Lake Chad whose mobile bases were largely dismantled during a Chadian-led operation in 2019.²

The operations conducted by MNJTF have seriously degraded the insurgents and there is, therefore, the need to bring all resources together to completely defeat the BHT/ISWAP.

Although there are other security challenges facing Nigeria, such as banditry and cross-border trafficking, which were the MNJTF mandates when it formed in the 1990s, Buhari urged the MNJTF countries to continue to primarily focus on combatting Boko Haram. This has been the top priority for the MNJTF since Boko Haram launched its insurgency in 2010. The MNJTF was most effective in combating Boko Haram in 2015, but it has since suffered from a lack of coordination, if not also unity of purpose and sufficient resourcing. Ultimately, results will need to be seen on the battlefield in future MNJTF confrontations with Boko Haram along Lake Chad's shorelines for Buhari's and Abubakar's statements to be validated. Their statements nevertheless demonstrate that Nigeria is not conducting a go-it-alone strategy against Boko Haram. Rather, the country considers the contributions of neighboring countries—and specifically the MNJTF—crucial to the military effort.³

Source: “Boko Haram: Buhari urges MNJTF to exert final push to end terrorism,” *thenationonline.ng* (business-oriented Lagos-based daily newspaper), 30 November 2022. <https://thenationonlineng.net/boko-haram-buhari-urges-mnjtf-to-exert-final-push-to-end-terrorism/>

President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday urged the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin to exert the final push towards ending terrorism in the region. The President said this in his opening address at the 16th summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) at the Conference Hall of the Presidential Villa in Abuja. President Buhari, who ended his tenure as chairman of the commission at the end of the 16th summit, also charged his colleagues from the other five member-countries of to provide the requisite political and material support for the LCBC/MNJTF in order to motivate the formations to deliver on their mandates.

President Buhari noted that the fight against Boko Haram terrorists and other forms of threats in the region must remain the lead priority.

Continued: Nigerian Leadership Seeks Renewed Regional Cooperation Against Boko Haram

Source: “MNJTF Seeks Joint Resource Pool to End Boko Haram, ISWAP Menace,” *thisdailylive.com* (independent Lagos-based daily newspaper), 25 September 2022. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/09/25/mnjtf-seeks-joint-resource-pool-to-end-boko-haram-iswap-menace/>

The Force Commander of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), Maj. Gen. Abdul Ibrahim, yesterday called on stakeholders to mobilise resources to bring to an end the menace posed by terror groups, Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. The Force Commander spoke as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Lucky Irabor, said joint training of the armed forces was crucial in dealing with security challenges afflicting the nation.... Speaking in Chad, the Force Commander, MNJTF stated that to effectively bring hostilities in the region to an end and “completely wipe out Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region,” all stakeholders must pool resources to contain insurgency. He said so far the operations conducted by MNJTF had significantly degraded the insurgents.... “The operations conducted by MNJTF and Operation Hadin Kai have seriously degraded the insurgents and there is, therefore, the need to bring all resources together to completely defeat the BHT/ISWAP,” he said.

Director of Army Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Mr. Sunday Attah, affirmed that “the objective of the competition, which is to reinforce the existing cordial working relationship between members of the Armed Forces, has been achieved.”

Notes:

[1] The MNJTF, which is based in N'Djamena, Chad, was originally based in Baga, Nigeria until Boko Haram overran the military base there in 2015. Considering that Boko Haram has gained strength since 2015, the MNJTF is generally not regarded as having succeeded despite winning several battles with the group. In particular, it has been hampered by distrust between the member states. See Albert, Isaac Olawale. “Security Regimes in Africa – Prospects and Challenges.” *Africa Development*, Vol. 42, No. 3. 2017, pp. 119-135.

[2] Chad launched Operation Bohoma Wrath against Boko Haram after the terrorist group, led by Abubakar Shekau, massacred roughly 90 Chadian soldiers in the town of Bohoma along the Lake Chad shoreline in a surprise raid in early 2020. For additional information see: United Nations S/2020/373 Security Council, “Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel: Report of the Secretary-General,” May 8, 2020. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3861622?ln=fr>

[3] A book chapter on the MNJTF notes that the four MNJTF countries besides Nigeria are incentivized to participate in military operations against Boko Haram to build their own military capacities by receiving training and weapons from foreign armies. In this regard, these countries have tended to seek only limited engagements with Boko Haram on Nigerian territory, but still just enough to assure that the capacity-building of their armies continues. See Emmanuel, Nikolas. “External Incentives and the African Subregional Response to Boko Haram.” *African Border Disorders*, 1st ed., vol. 1, Routledge, 2018, pp. 136–50. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315166483-7>

Morocco Sending Military Equipment to Ukraine

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

New reporting has revealed that Morocco has agreed to send T-72 tanks and tank parts to Ukraine, breaking a stalemate of African states reluctant to take sides in the conflict. As the accompanying article in *Le Journal de l'Afrique* relays, Morocco agreed to send the tanks and spare parts to Ukraine at the request of the United States.¹ Ukraine had previously asked Morocco for spare parts for its [T-72](#) tanks in July 2015.

Within a broader geopolitical context, Morocco's move to support Ukraine with such heavy weapons signals a notable departure among African countries, which so far have largely declined to take a stand in the conflict. Western observers have been notably disappointed that African

allies have not been more forceful in their condemnation of Russian moves in Ukraine. Such African neutrality has been most clearly evidenced in UN voting resolutions in March and August, with many African states abstaining from condemning Russian actions, and in other cases, voting against resolutions condemning Russia.² For its part, Morocco abstained from the UN vote condemning Russian aggression in March. However, it remains wary of Russia's assistance to its neighbor and rival, Algeria, with which it cut diplomatic ties in August 2021.³ In contrast, Morocco's move signals the clearest sign of any African country supporting either side and will likely inform if and how other African countries might decide to take sides in the conflict.

Morocco...will deliver spare parts of T-72 tanks to Ukraine. The kingdom is increasingly taking a stand in the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow.



Modernized [T-72B3](#) with additional armor.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alabino05042017-40.jpg> Attribution: Creative Commons 4.0

Continued: Morocco Sending Military Equipment to Ukraine

Source: Frédéric Ange Touré, “L’armement de l’Ukraine par les Américains passe par le Maroc (The arming of Ukraine by the Americans goes through Morocco,” *Le Journal de l’Afrique* (independent pan-African news outlet), 6 December 2022. <https://lejournaldeafrique.com/larmement-de-lukraine-par-les-americains-passe-par-le-maroc/>

Morocco, on the recommendation of the United States, will deliver spare parts of T-72 tanks to Ukraine. The kingdom is increasingly taking a stand in the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow.

Last April, the United States was looking for T-72 tanks to deliver to Ukrainian forces in the war between Kyiv and Moscow. These tanks have become a rare commodity in the West... The New York Times indicated, on April 1, that Washington was negotiating with its NATO allies to supply T-72s to Ukraine after the request made by President Volodymyr Zelinski, who sought in particular to solidify his defense in the Donbass. A few days later, we learned that Poland was in the process of delivering 200 T-72 tanks to Kyiv...

The Royal Moroccan Armed Forces have several dozen T-72B/BK type tanks, acquired between 1999 and 2001 from Belarus. In July 2015, the Ukrainian public company Ukroboronservice asked Morocco for spare parts for its T-72 tanks. Kyiv is therefore used to working with Rabat on this subject...

After a statement to recall that Morocco advocates "respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and national unity of all United Nations member states", the kingdom took part in a meeting with 40 allies of the United States, all NATO members and several invited countries, in Germany to discuss increasing military aid to Zelensky's government.

An alignment with the American position, therefore, the culmination of which is this agreement on the delivery of spare parts for T-72 tanks to Ukraine.

Notes:

[1] Between 1999 and 2001, the Royal Moroccan Army acquired dozens of T-72/BK type tanks from Belarus. Developed in 1972, these Soviet-era tanks have been sold and used throughout the world, especially by former Warsaw Pact countries.

[2] For more on African stances of the Russia-Ukraine war, see: Jason Warner, “African Stances on the Russia-Ukraine War Demonstrate Reliance on, Antipathy Toward West,” *OE Watch* #9, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425767> See also: “GCKN Running Estimate: Russian Global Influence Efforts,” December 2022, Update 9. <https://community.apan.org/wg/gckn/m/russiaproduct/429266>

[3] For more on Algerian-Morocco relations, see: Lucas Winter, “Algeria Media Dismissive of Morocco-Israel Security Cooperation,” *OE Watch* #9, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425770>

Syrians Fighting for Russia in Ukraine Playing Limited Role

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

There have been several reports of Syrian fighters being recruited to fight on the Kremlin's side since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. A March 2022 report claimed that 40,000 Syrians had been recruited to fight in Ukraine, and early in the conflict Russian officials suggested there were 16,000 Middle Eastern "volunteers" ready to fight alongside Russia. However, as of late 2022, reports place the number of Syrians sent to Russia for training and eventual deployment at around only 2,000. Of those, several hundred were reportedly deployed in September, and another few hundred in November, primarily in "non-combat roles," according to the first accompanying excerpt, from a report published in the English-language news website *Middle East Eye*. More specifically, the bulk of Syrian fighters in Russia appear to be associated with the Syrian military's 25th Special Mission Forces Division, formerly known as the "Tiger Forces."¹

Several other Syrian regime loyalist militias have also reportedly provided Moscow with recruits, including the Syrian-Palestinian "Liwa al-Quds" (Quds Brigade), the Iran-backed Afghan-majority Shiite "Liwa al-Fatimiyun" (Fatimid Brigade), militias affiliated with operatives in Syria's ruling Baath Party, former rebels in the Russia-controlled 5th Division, and fighters recruited by Christian militia leaders from Hama Province.² On 6 November, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), an opposition NGO, reported in the second

accompanying excerpt that Liwa al-Quds fighters had joined fighters from the 25th Division in deploying on the Ukrainian battlefield, without providing details.

The third accompanying excerpt, a December 2022 report from an opposition NGO called Syrians for Truth and Justice, claims that recruitment and transfer of Syrians to fight on behalf of Russia continued through the second half of 2022. Among others, the report details three distinct routes taken by flights suspected of ferrying Syrian fighters to Russia for training. The report also identifies a series of Russian sites where Syrian fighters either train or are stationed, as well as several Ukrainian locations to which they are ultimately deployed, including Kherson, Melitopol, and Donetsk. Per the first referenced entry, the *Middle East Eye* report, Syrian fighters appear to be mostly providing "security and protection for areas managed by Wagner and other

military contractors in Luhansk and Donetsk," though they may be called to the frontlines if need be. The report mentions a Russian military contractor called "Shchit" ("Shield") and a Wagner subsidiary known as "Task Force Rusich" as the key Russian entities employing the services of Syrian fighters. As Russia appears to gear up for a new offensive, it seems likely that additional Syrian fighters could be deployed, though based on current trends, their impact will likely remain marginal.



Logo of the Syrian Special Forces, used by the 25th Special Mission Forces Division.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syrian_commando.png Attribution: Jakednb, CC BY-SA 3.0

The main task of the Syrian fighters was providing security and protection for areas managed by Wagner and other military contractors in Luhansk and Donetsk ...

Continued: Syrians Fighting for Russia in Ukraine Playing Limited Role

Source: "Ukraine war: Russia deploys Syrian fighters to shore up its defences," *Middle East Eye* (Qatari-aligned English-language news website), 9 November 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ukraine-war-russia-deploys-syrian-fighters>

Russia has deployed more than 500 Syrian fighters in Ukraine for primarily non-combatant roles, tasking them generally with safeguarding facilities in Luhansk and Donetsk in the past few months, regional intelligence sources told Middle East Eye...

The official said the main task of the Syrian fighters was providing security and protection for areas managed by Wagner and other military contractors in Luhansk and Donetsk, but they could be called to the front for combat if an emergency or pressing need presented itself...

Those sources told MEE that the Syrians might be serving under the Russian military contractor Shchit ("Shield") and a Wagner subsidiary group called Task Force Rusich, which earned a reputation for its self-declared neo-Nazi ideology during its deployment to eastern Ukraine in 2014...

However, the Syrian government official said the number of Syrian fatalities was much higher than reported, with at least 50 killed in the Ukrainian bombardment so far. "The Syrians aren't partaking in the actual fighting, they are mainly functioning as logistics near the front lines. However, there is a small number of them that work as part of the artillery," the official told MEE.

"Nine Syrian mercenaries killed and Liwaa Al-Quds brigade join war alongside Russians," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (opposition Syrian NGO), 6 November 2022. <https://www.syriahr.com/en/274960/>

Reliable sources have informed SOHR that Liwaa Al-Quds brigade has engaged in fighting alongside the Russians in the Russian war on Ukraine, while the 25th Division has been fighting since mid-September 2022.

"New Testimonies: Russia Continues to Deploy Syrian Mercenaries to Ukraine," Syrians for Truth and Justice, (opposition Syrian NGO), 20 December 2022. <https://stj-sy.org/en/new-testimonies-russia-continues-to-deploy-syrian-mercenaries-to-ukraine/>

In this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) presents an update on the Syrian mercenary activities in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, revealing new information obtained in December and the second half of November 2022. The information corroborates that Syrian security companies continue to transfer fighters to Ukraine, operating as proxies for the Russian Wagner Group...

Notes:

[1] For background, see: Lucas Winter, "Suheil al-Hassan and the Syrian Army's Tiger Forces." *Small Wars Journal*, Jul 22.9 (2016). https://community.apan.org/cfs-file/__key/docpreview-s/00-00-00-97-25/20160906-Winter_2D00_-Suheil-al_2D00_Hassan-and-the-Syrian-Army_2700_s-Tiger.pdf

[2] For background on Syrian militia recruitment and transfers abroad, see: Lucas Winter, "Oil, Fighters, Mercenaries, and Diplomats: Increasing Flows Between Libya and Syria," *OE Watch*, April 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/359091> and Lucas Winter, "Mercenary Recruitment and PMC Growth in Syria," *OE Watch*, January 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/380367>; For background on the Quds Brigade, see: Lucas Winter, "The Quds Brigade: Palestinian Militia Emerges as Key Russian Partner in Syria," *OE Watch*, November 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/377063>; For background on Syria's pro-Russian Christian militias in Hama Province, see: Lucas Winter, "Russia Strengthens Ties with Loyalist Christian Militias in Syria's Hama Province," *OE Watch*, March 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/382766>

Tajikistan and China Deepen Security Cooperation

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

The government of Tajikistan has, in recent years, only rarely released information about its security cooperation activities with China.¹ The accompanying excerpted article from Tajikistan’s independent news website *Asia Plus* reports on a recent agreement signed by the governments of Tajikistan and China to carry out a series of joint biennial exercises focusing on counterterrorism. While the Tajik government again provided few details about the agreement, there is enough information to gauge how it fits within broader expectations of Tajik-Chinese security cooperation going forward. The article reports that the agreement calls for joint counterterrorism exercises between Tajikistan and China to take place “at least once every two years” and that their purpose is “to strengthen and develop a comprehensive strategic partnership.” The article also mentions that both sides are looking to increase coordination between special forces units as well as tactical skills for counterterrorism. Special purpose units from Tajikistan and China have carried out a handful of joint exercises over the past seven years, all focusing on a counterterrorism scenario, though none of them had been part of a series of exercises.²

The article goes on to note that a “temporary exercise control department is being created to prepare and conduct the exercises” and that both sides will “not disclose details about the timing, location, scale, and leadership of the exercises before the start of the exercise.” It is likely that each side will release some information about future exercises after they take place, but this aspect of the agree-



Gorno-Badakhshan map.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gorno_badakhshan_map.png Attribution: Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

ment demonstrates how Tajikistan continues to develop a deeper partnership with China. Lastly, the article provides a reminder that China provided 55 million Chinese yuan (around \$8 million) last year for a facility for Tajikistan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. This new facility appears to be for Tajikistan and is not another Chinese base. Ultimately, Tajikistan’s agreement with China to carry out joint counterterrorism exercises may not appear as significant as Tajikistan’s partnership with Russia, but it does signal a more consistent effort from both sides to develop the partnership.

A temporary exercise control department is being created to prepare and conduct the exercises.

Source: Mazhab Juma, “Не реже одного раза в два года. Таджикистан и Китай договариваются, как проводить антитеррористические учения (‘No fewer than one time every two years’. Tajikistan and China agreed to carry out counterterrorism exercises),” *Asia-Plus* (independent news website in Tajikistan), 21 November 2022. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20221121/ne-rezhe-odnogo-raza-v-dva-goda-tadzhikistan-i-kitai-dogovarivayutsya-kak-provodit-antiterroristicheskie-ucheniya>

Tajikistan intends to carry out counterterrorism exercises with China at least once every two years. The text of the agreement between the governments of Tajikistan and China, published on the information and legal portal of the (Tajik) Ministry of Justice), states that the purpose of the exercise is to strengthen and develop a comprehensive strategic partnership.

continue on 44

Continued: Tajikistan and China Deepen Security Cooperation

Source Continued: Mazhab Juma, “Не реже одного раза в два года. Таджикистан и Китай договариваются, как проводить антитеррористические учения (‘No fewer than one time every two years’. Tajikistan and China agreed to carry out counterterrorism exercises),” *Asia-Plus* (independent news website in Tajikistan), 21 November 2022. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20221121/ne-rezhe-odnogo-raza-v-dva-goda-tadzhikistan-i-kitai-dogovarivayutsya-kak-provodit-antiterroristicheskie-ucheniya>

Another goal is to increase the level of coordination between the special counterterrorism units, the level of interaction between the units, and the training and tactical skills of the two countries...

... It is also noted that a temporary exercise control department is being created to prepare and conduct the exercises... the parties will take strict secrecy measures and will not disclose details about the timing, location, scale, and leadership of the exercises before the start of the exercise.

...in October last year, the Parliament of Tajikistan approved an agreement in which China is building a special base in the Wakhan Gorge of the Gorno Badakhsahn Autonomous Oblast... The base will be built in accordance with an agreement between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan and the Ministry of Public Security of China. “As part of the cooperation agreement between the two countries, China will provide grant assistance for the construction of the base for the rapid response team of the Organized Crime Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan...

The cost of building the base is 55 million Chinese yuan (approximately 100 million somoni)...

Notes:

[1] For instance, the 2019 revelation that China had established a base in Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakshan region near the Tajik-Afghan border only came out after a Western journalist had traveled to the remote region.

[2] For more information on joint Tajik-China exercises, see: Matthew Stein, “Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity,” 20 January 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/360801>

Chinese-Arab Summit Signals Growing Saudi-Chinese Defense Alignment

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Much of the Saudi reporting and commentary on Xi Jinping's December 2022 visit to Riyadh highlighted the visit as a turning point in the birth of a new, multipolar world order. Commentators in Saudi media consider the kingdom a key player in this new world order, one that can maintain good relations and effectively balance between competing poles of global power to safeguard its own national interests. In this view, as articulated in the first accompanying excerpt from the influential Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, expressions of deepening Saudi-Chinese relations do not by definition threaten the Saudi-U.S. security partnership, but rather are signals of engagement "based on common interests."

Saudi Arabia spent \$1.4 billion (5.1 billion Riyals) in incentives to boost its local military sector over the last two years ...

Statements and agreements from the Saudi-organized Chinese-Arab summit revealed a growing alignment of Saudi and Chinese defense priorities that could put pressure on a key pillar of the Saudi-U.S. strategic partnership—arms sales. For now, China seems in no position to surpass the United States as a Saudi weapons supplier: between 2000-2019, the United States accounted for 60 percent of Saudi arms imports by value, while Chinese arms constituted less than 1 percent.¹ The fact that no weapons deals were signed or even publicly discussed during Xi's visit to Riyadh indicates that arms trade is not yet a priority in the Saudi-Chinese relationship, although this may also be because the two sides had reportedly signed a blockbuster arms deal at the Zuhai Air Show only one month before the summit.²

From the Saudi perspective, reducing its arms imports has become a key priority. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has begun shifting its defense priorities to better align with the kingdom's "Vision 2030," which includes localizing weapons manufacturing and developing an indigenous, high-tech national defense industrial base.³ As noted in the second accompanying excerpt, from the Saudi news channel *al-Arabiya*, the director of the Saudi military industry's regulatory body explained that the kingdom has in the past two years channeled \$1.4 billion toward "incentives to



Flag of Saudi Arabia.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/03/Flag_of_Saudi_Arabia_%28type_1%29.svg Attribution: Public Domain

boost its local military sector." Speaking at the Saudi 2023 Budget Forum last December, he added that more than half of that money has gone into research and development, mostly in Saudi Arabia's priority defense production sectors, which include "unmanned systems, radars and cybersecurity." Thus, it seems likely that licensing agreements and technology sharing, rather than weapons sales, will emerge as a centerpiece in future Saudi Arabian defense partnerships.

Many of the deals signed at the Chinese-Arab summit were memorandums of understanding and other documents of intent expressing a shared vision and approach, rather than contractual agreements. Notable domains where a bilateral shared vision and intent to deepen cooperation were expressed include space, information technology, telecommunications, and artificial intelligence. The two countries also signed a wide-ranging "digital economic partnership," which covers a vast array of new technologies, detailed in the third accompanying excerpt, from the official Saudi news agency's press release on the agreement. These various agreements and statements of intent, although not essentially military in nature, will likely bolster a growing partnership in high-tech weaponry such as unmanned systems, and are likely to feed into the kingdom's broader defense and security efforts over the next decade.

Continued: Chinese-Arab Summit Signals Growing Saudi-Chinese Defense Alignment

Source:

Hoda al-Husseini. (Saudi-Chinese relations and the calculation of interests), "العلاقات السعودية - الصينية وحسابات المصالح" *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (influential Saudi daily), 8 December 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/k342vwkd>

... Saudi Arabia does not seek to replace the U.S.'s role in the Middle East and stop considering it the main guarantor of regional security; rather, it seeks to find a balance through which it safeguards its own interests. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States is deeper and greater than a crisis with a transient American administration. At the summit, Prince Mohammed bin Salman will prove to the Chinese president that the Kingdom cannot be infiltrated by benefiting from tensions, but rather must be engaged through equal interaction based on common interests.

Source: "Saudi Arabia spent \$1.4 bln in incentives to boost local military sector in 2021-22," *al-Arabiya English* (influential Saudi news media channel), 12 December 2022. <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2022/12/12/Saudi-Arabia-spent-1-4-bln-in-incentives-to-boost-local-military-sector-in-2021-22>

Saudi Arabia spent \$1.4 billion (5.1 billion riyals) in incentives to boost its local military sector over the last two years, the governor of the sector's general authority Ahmed al-Ohali said on Monday...

SAMI's chief executive officer Walid Abukhaled said the company will focus on unmanned systems, radars and cybersecurity in coming years. Both were speaking at a forum in Riyadh on Monday, in the wake of Saudi Arabia's 2023 budget announcements.

Source: "Saudi Arabia and China Strengthen Strategic Partnership in Digital Economy," *SPA – Saudi Press Agency* (official Saudi news agency), 9 December 2022. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=2407961>

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has signed a strategic partnership for cooperation in the fields of digital economy with the People's Republic of China, as part of the framework of the current official visit of President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China to the Kingdom...

The partnership develops a framework for cooperation between the two friendly countries, covering the fields of digital economy, communications and information technology, and promoting research and innovation in the field of emerging technologies, in addition to improving aspects of communications infrastructure, and enabling the growth of digital entrepreneurship through emerging business models such as financial technology and e-commerce. It also covers cooperation in the fields of artificial intelligence, advanced computing and quantum information technology, in addition to robots and smart equipment, and work to develop their technologies and applications for industrial and commercial purposes. Moreover, this partnership memorandum aims at enhancing the two friendly countries' cooperation in the fields of the modern generation of mobile communications technology and emerging technologies. Within the framework of this partnership, the two sides will also cooperate in the field of digital technology applications and radio frequency spectrum management, in addition to their cooperation in developing and building local capabilities in communication and data centers, developing digital platforms and cloud computing services, and expanding submarine cable projects.

Continued: Chinese-Arab Summit Signals Growing Saudi-Chinese Defense Alignment

Notes:

[1] "Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy," *U.S. Congressional Research Service*, Updated 23 November 2020, p. 23. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf>

[2] Several media outlets reported that Saudi Arabia and China signed a stack of weapons sales agreements worth around \$4 billion at the November 2022 Zhuhai Air Show in China, a few weeks before the Saudi-organized Arab-Chinese summit. The deal reportedly included TB001 UAVs, YJ-21 anti-ship missiles, carrier-based hypersonic missile systems, and an anti-drone laser system known as the "Silent Hunter." A Chinese military analyst cited by the English-language South China Morning Post is bullish on the prospects of growing Saudi-Chinese arms trade. He considers Saudi Arabia to be potentially interested in several Chinese land systems, including tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery—to include long-range rocket artillery. See: "Why is Saudi Arabia looking to China to buy weapons after years of arms deals with the US?" South China Morning Post, 8 December 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3202245/why-saudi-arabia-looking-china-buy-weapons-after-years-arms-deals-us>; For more on the "Silent Hunter," see: Lucas Winter, "Saudi Arabia Turns to China for Low-Altitude Air Defense," *OE Watch*, Issue 4, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/415161>

[3] For background on Vision 2030's impact on Saudi military industry and Saudi-Chinese defense industry relations, see: Lucas Winter "Saudi Arabia and the UAE Streamline Military Industry," *OE Watch*, January 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/353022>; "Radars and UAVs: Saudi Arabia Taking Steps to Localize Military Industries," *OE Watch*, November 2020. [https://community.apan.org/search?q=Radars and UAVs%3A Saudi Arabia Taking Steps to Localize Military Industries](https://community.apan.org/search?q=Radars+and+UAVs%3A+Saudi+Arabia+Taking+Steps+to+Localize+Military+Industries); "Continued Growth and Development in Domestic High-Tech Military Industries of Saudi Arabia and the UAE," *OE Watch*, March 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/382665>; "Will Saudi Arabia's Domestic UAV Program Slow Get Off the Ground?," *OE Watch*, Issue 1, 2022 <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/405136>; "UAV Technologies Proliferating in Yemen and Saudi Arabia," *OE Watch*, Issue 7, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/420430>; and "Saudi Arabia Continues Buying Missiles and UAVs From China as Part of Broader Foreign Policy Rebalancing," *OE Watch*, Issue 11, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429585>

Russian Interference in Colombian Election Roils the Region

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Russia’s digital influence operations are robust throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. In the past, Russian bots and other digital interference strategies have worked to amplify divisive messages and pour fuel on social movements and protests in the regions.¹ More recently, Russia has engaged in robust propaganda and disinformation campaigns regarding the war in Ukraine.² Recently, Colombia’s largest weekly magazine, *Semana*, published a report on Twitter’s release of materials about the country’s 2022 presidential campaign. Those materials, the outlet reports, show a strong level of support for then-candidate Gustavo Petro and false news about Petro’s principal rivals for the presidency. Moreover, they also amplified anti-U.S. and anti-Western rhetoric. Further, many of the message

Gustavo Petro’s presidential campaign received a strong boost from Russia with fake accounts, orchestrated hashtags and mentions that sought to position the then candidate of the Historical Pact.

regarding Petro revolved around security cooperation and the so-called war on drugs, amplifying his message of the previous administration’s failure.³ The second excerpted article from Medellín’s leading daily newspaper, *El Colombiano*, states that Russia’s support for Petro included bots and fake accounts, orchestrated hashtags, mentions, and use of its outlets like *Russia Today* to support the candidate’s



Colombia President Gustavo Petro’s campaign received strong support from Russian bots and disinformation campaigns.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gustavopetrourego/21474562099>. Attribution: CC BY-NC 2.0

election and sow propaganda. The disclosures generated wide reaction among Colombia’s political class and generated further division between parties. Russia’s strong influence on Latin America’s information environment highlights its capacity to place propaganda in Spanish and Portuguese and elevate the messaging of fringe candidates who threaten constitutional order and stability throughout the hemisphere. Colombia is certainly not an isolated case. Latin American governments are often poorly equipped to deal with these challenges and for their parts, social media entities are often slower to take down fake news in Spanish and Portuguese than they are in English.

Source: “Twitter desclasifica archivos secretos y estalla polémica contra el Gobierno: hubo injerencia indebida desde Rusia a favor de campaña de Gustavo Petro (Twitter declassifies secret files and controversy erupts against the Government: there was undue interference from Russia in favor of Gustavo Petro’s campaign),” *Semana* (Colombia’s largest weekly magazine and major news source in the country), 3 January 2023. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/atencion-archivos-secretos-de-twitter-revelan-injerencia-indebida-desde-rusia-a-favor-de-la-campana-presidencial-de-gustavo-petro/202343/>

Gustavo Petro’s presidential campaign received a strong boost from Russia with fake accounts, orchestrated hashtags and mentions that sought to position the then candidate of the Historical Pact. This is evidenced by secret Twitter documents that were recently declassified by order of the CEO of the social network, Elon Musk... During the campaign, it was discovered that Sebastián Guanumen, one of the leaders of Petro’s digital strategy, gave the order to ‘run the ethical line’ to discredit then-candidate Petro’s main contenders. In this sense, digital narratives were created in which lies, insults and slander were then amplified.

Continued: Russian Interference in Colombian Election Roils the Region

Source: “La campaña de Petro en Twitter tuvo ayuda rusa (Petro’s Twitter campaign had Russian help),” *El Colombiano* (the city of Medellín’s leading daily newspaper), 4 January 2023. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/politica/rusia-habria-influido-en-las-elecciones-presidenciales-para-apoyar-a-petro-KJ19760596>

In one of the confidential texts, it was stated that in the midst of monitoring Twitter activity in South America, with special analysis in Venezuela, Cuba and Colombia, accounts were discovered that talked about the Petro campaign... In addition to the alleged support of Russian bots, the presidential campaign of the candidate of the Historical Pact was also involved in other controversies. The one that caused the most commotion was that of the ‘Petrovideos,’ in which conversations about communication strategies were recorded so that Petro would stand out by discrediting his competitors.

Notes:

[1] For more on Russia’s attempt to sow chaos and social division in Latin America, especially when protests break out, see: Lara Jakes, “As Protests in South America Surged, So Did Russian Trolls on Twitter, U.S. Finds,” *New York Times*, 29 January 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/19/us/politics/south-america-russian-twitter.html>

[2] For more details on Russia’s propaganda campaign and disinformation operations in Latin America regarding its war in Ukraine, see: Jessica Brandt and Valeria Wirtschafter “Working the Western Hemisphere: How Russia Spreads Propaganda about Ukraine in Latin America and the Impact of Platform Responses,” *Brookings Institution*, December 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/working-the-western-hemisphere/>

[3] For more information on President Petro’s drug policies and critique of the war on drugs, see coverage of his inaugural speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022: “Irrational War on Drugs, Destruction of the Amazon, Expose Humanity’s Failures, Colombia’s Petro tells the U.N.,” *United Nations*, 20 September 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1127151>

Venezuela’s Dictatorship Strengthens While Opposition Is in Disarray

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Venezuela’s long struggle against the Maduro dictatorship began 2023 with yet another setback. In 2019, the opposition established an interim government structure to push for a democratic transition in Venezuela, replete with an interim president (Juan Guaidó) who was recognized by nearly 60 countries. That experiment was recently terminated when three of the country’s four main opposition parties voted to dissolve the interim government structure, a move that had been rumored for several months. Since voting to dissolve its own constitutional arrangement, the opposition to Maduro’s regime has fractured. According to an article from Peruvian media conglomerate *Redacción RPP*, three of the opposition parties voted to dissolve the structure because it had failed to achieve its objective of a democratic transition away from Maduro’s dictatorship. The article also notes that opacity in the financing and management of international assets had made some opposition legislators uneasy about extending the arrangement. The second excerpted article from Spanish daily *La Voz de Galicia* reports that the Maduro regime has transitioned to a more offensive posture after several years of being on the back foot, rattled by the opposition’s interim government structure that had been recognized by dozens of countries. Maduro is looking to reassert himself diplomatically and shore up key allies. The Maduro regime’s survival and strengthening serves as a conduit for Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence in South America and the Caribbean because of



Then Venezuelan Interim President Juan Guaidó with Secretary General of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro during a trip to Washington, D.C.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/oasoea/49499293397> Attribution: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

their support for Maduro during the regime’s darkest days. Close security relationships with other authoritarian states mean that Venezuela will continue to represent a hemispheric security threat and an important staging ground for countries like Russia and Iran.

A few hours after the fragmented Venezuelan opposition put an end to the figure of the interim government of Juan Guaidó, the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, launched a diplomatic and political offensive.

Source: “Venezuela: El ‘Gobierno interino’ de Juan Guaidó se extinguió sin claridad en sus cuentas (Venezuela: The ‘interim government’ of Juan Guaidó was extinguished without clarity in its accounts),” *Redacción RPP* (the largest radio and television broadcasting company in Peru), 10 January 2023. <https://rpp.pe/mundo/actualidad/venezuela-el-gobierno-interino-de-juan-guaido-se-extinguio-sin-claridad-en-sus-cuentas-noticia-1459150?ref=rpp>

The ‘interim government’ of Juan Guaidó, eliminated... by the majority of the former deputies who supported him in 2019, leaves a shadow in Venezuela due to poor accountability. No one knows how much money he managed or what this sort of parallel power that had the support of foreign powers spent it on... in the next 45 days, Guaidó is obliged to account for the period given to him by the former anti-Chavista deputies who abolished the interim government, considering that the structure did not achieve its objectives, not to mention that they do not know the status of the resources managed under this arrangement.

Continued: Venezuela's Dictatorship Strengthens While Opposition Is in Disarray

Source: “Maduro pasa a la ofensiva tras la disolución del Gobierno interino de Guaidó (Maduro goes on the offensive after the dissolution of the interim government of Guaidó),” *La Voz de Galicia* (a Spanish daily newspaper with good coverage of Latin America), 2 January 2023. https://www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/noticia/internacional/2023/01/03/maduro-pasa-ofensiva-tras-disolucion-gobierno-interino-guaido/0003_202301G3P18993.htm

A few hours after the fragmented Venezuelan opposition put an end to the figure of the interim government of Juan Guaidó, the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, launched a diplomatic and political offensive... Maduro also stated in the interview that he awaits the release of the country's resources frozen in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Notes:

[1] For more information on some of the international legal implications of this decision to dissolve Venezuela's interim government, see: Ryan C. Berg and Alexandra Winkler, “The Interim Government of Venezuela was Dissolved by its Own Promoters,” *CSIS Commentary*, 12 January 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/interim-government-venezuela-was-dissolved-its-own-promoters>

[2] For information on infighting in the opposition and its impact on the Venezuelan opposition's standing among voters, see: Luis González Morales, “Knives Out: Venezuelan Opposition Edition,” *Caracas Chronicles*, 29 December 2022. <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2022/12/29/knives-out-venezuelan-opposition-edition/>

[3] For more information about Venezuela's deep security relationship with Russia, in particular, see: Vladimir Rouvinski, “Russia's Continued Engagement with Venezuela in 2019 and Beyond,” *Wilson Center*, February 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/russias-continuing-engagement-venezuela-2019-and-beyond-update>