

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



Issue 4  
2023

## FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

### CHINA

- 3 China Developing Improved Equipment for Deep Sea, Polar Exploration
- 6 China Developing Ultra-Low Earth Orbit Satellites With Possible Military Applications
- 8 Chinese Military Researchers Debut “Precision Strike” Concept for Cognitive Domain Operations
- 10 Micronesian President Warns Against Chinese External Influence Operations

### RUSSIA

- 12 Russia Widens and Tightens Conscription Policies
- 14 Russia Cutting Back on Nuclear Icebreaker Production
- 16 Russia Effectively Leaves Arctic Council
- 18 Russian Companies Using Central Asian Migrant Workers in Occupied Ukraine

### IRAN

- 21 Iran Unveils Updated Yasin Training Jet With Possible Close Combat Applications
- 23 Iran’s Increased Defense Budget Leading to More Arms Exports
- 25 Iran Capitalizing on Post-Earthquake Conditions To Deepen Influence in Syria

### TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

- 27 Colombia’s “Total Peace” Negotiations Face New Hurdles
- 29 CAR Joins Mali in Accusing France of Funding Terrorists
- 31 Al-Qaeda Leader in Maghreb Celebrates French Departure, Claims No Plans To Attack French Homeland
- 33 Mozambique Regains Control of Islamic State-Afflicted Northern Province With Rwandan Help

### GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- 34 Georgians Consider Outcomes of War in Ukraine
- 38 Georgian Separatist Republic Conducts Military Exercises
- 40 Western Efforts To Isolate Russia and Iran Falter in Latin America
- 42 Russia-Supported Military Rulers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties
- 44 New Milestone in China’s Support for Egypt’s Space Program
- 46 Philippine Interest in Trilateral Security Pact With United States and Japan Possibly Increasing

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is part of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2, whose mission is to Understand, Describe, Deliver, and Assess the conditions of the Operational Environment. For over 30 years, FMSO has conducted open source research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues, emphasizing those topics that are understudied or unconsidered.

Operational Environment Watch provides translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

The views expressed in each article are those of the author and do not represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government. Release of this information does not imply any commitment or intent on the part of the US Government to provide any additional information on any topic presented herein.

The appearance of hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the US Army of the referenced site or the information, products, or services contained therein. Users should exercise caution in accessing hyperlinks.

The Operational Environment Watch is archived and available at: <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso>.

#### ON THE COVER:

*Protesters in Tbilisi, 7 March 2023.*

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia\\_Protest\\_2023\\_VOA.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia_Protest_2023_VOA.png)

Attribution: Public Domain

# OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE  
OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 4

2023

---

<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	Jason Warner
<b>Editor</b>	Dodge Billingsley
<b>Creative Director</b>	Susan Littleton
<b>Publisher/Layout</b>	Thomas Tolare

## Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Ryan Berg  
Ray Finch  
Les Grau  
Michael Rubin  
Thomas Shrimpton  
Matthew Stein  
Jason Warner  
Lucas Winter  
Peter Wood  
Jacob Zenn

## China Developing Improved Equipment for Deep Sea, Polar Exploration

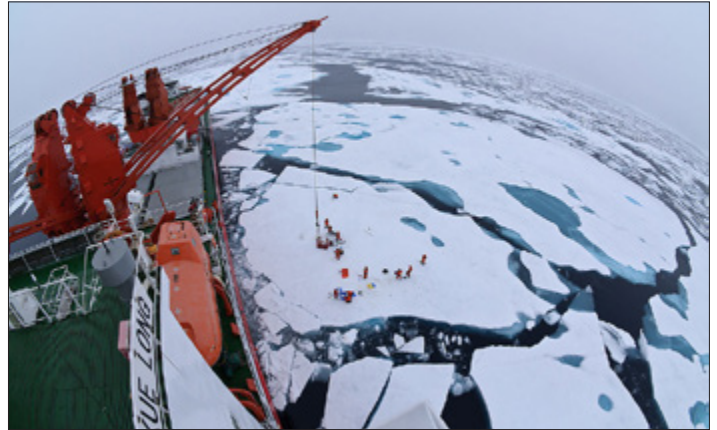
By Peter Wood  
OE Watch Commentary

China regards deep-sea<sup>1</sup> areas and polar regions as critical to its future development due to their abundant resources. President Xi Jinping even included them in his Holistic National Security Concept, which lays out domains that he regards as critical to China's development and national security.<sup>2</sup> However, both deep-sea exploration and polar regions pose significant technical challenges due to the extreme pressure or weather conditions encountered. As the following excerpts explain, China has made significant progress in overcoming these challenges.

The first excerpted article, from an early March 2023 edition of the official newspaper of China's Ministry of Science & Technology, examines some of the equipment China has completed or is developing to explore deep sea and polar regions as part of its efforts to become a powerful maritime country. The article focuses on two technologies: icebreakers and deep-sea drilling rigs. The [Xue Long 1](#) and [Xue Long 2](#) icebreakers, originally based on a Ukrainian design, have improved China's ability to explore polar regions. The article cites an acoustic engineer with experience studying polar environments, who highlighted how the Xuelong 2 had opened many previously inaccessible areas to exploration.

**The Xuelong 2 is like a mobile laboratory at sea, sailing into many areas that were inaccessible in the past.**

The latter half of the article focuses on deep sea drilling, noting the advances made with the "Manatee II" deep sea drilling rig, which is reportedly capable of operating at depths of 2,000 m or more and has set world records by drilling over 200 m into the ocean floor. A major priority for exploitation by this and future rigs is "combustible ice," a mixture of frozen water and natural gas present on the sea floor in the deep sea. According to the article, the Manatee II has carried out exploration missions searching for combustible ice in many areas surrounding China, as well as for traditional offshore oil and gas deposits. Due to the experience from operating the Manatee, China has improved its technologies in this niche but important area, and the first of China's next generation of deep-sea drilling ships is expected to be completed in 2024.<sup>3</sup> It will reportedly be capable of drilling in waters deeper than 10,000 m.<sup>4</sup> The minerals and natural gas potentially recoverable by these



Drift ice camp in the middle of the Arctic Ocean as seen from the deck of icebreaker Xue Long

Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Teadlased\\_j%C3%A4%C3%A4l.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Teadlased_j%C3%A4%C3%A4l.jpg) Attribution: Timo Palo, CC BY-SA 3.0

drills could create an economic bonanza and help China offset its reliance on imported energy.

The second article is based on an interview with Sun Bo, Party Secretary of the China Polar Research Center Polar Research Institute of China, which is part of China's Ministry of Natural Resources. Sun Bo noted how vital China's second icebreaker, the Xuelong 2, completed in 2019,<sup>5</sup> has been for China's polar exploration efforts, highlighting that having two icebreakers now allows China to effectively support research teams at both poles at the same time. While these articles underscore how China has clearly made important strides in overcoming technical bottlenecks, it might now face legal ones. The UN recently concluded negotiations about exploiting biological and mineral resources on the high seas, which might constrain China's activities in polar and deep-sea regions.<sup>6</sup>

## Continued: China Developing Improved Equipment for Deep Sea, Polar Exploration

**Source:** He Liang [何亮], “科技扬帆, 引领海洋探索挺进深蓝” (Science and Technology Set Sail, Setting a Course for Ocean Exploration into the Deepest Blue Sea), *Science & Technology Daily* [科技日报] (Official newspaper of PRC Ministry of Science & Technology [MOST]), 6 March 2023. [http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http\\_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-03/06/content\\_550015.htm?div=0](http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-03/06/content_550015.htm?div=0)

*Accelerating [China's] development into a maritime great power and making good use of marine resources is not possible the important support of science and technology. To protect the marine ecological environment, it is necessary to strengthen basic research and fully understand the ocean's riches; to develop marine resources, it is necessary to address the urgent requirements of improving development of technologies and equipment of scientific research for technology and equipment, and concentrate efforts to develop more “national strategic weapons.”*<sup>7</sup>

*“With the help of more and more advanced equipment, China's polar scientific research has maritime, land and aerial capabilities.” Yin Jingwei [殷敬伟], vice president of Harbin Engineering University,<sup>8</sup> has long been engaged in research on polar acoustic technology....According to Yin [Xuelong 2's] superior ice-breaking capabilities allow more scientific research facilities and supplies to be transported into the Antarctic regions. “It is like a mobile laboratory at sea, sailing into many areas that were inaccessible in the past.”*

*As of September 28, 2021, China has completed 12 Arctic expeditions. However, China is not an Arctic nation, and its deep-sea and polar-related research work started relatively late compared to other countries, and its support capabilities have also been limited to a certain extent. There are still many weak links and capabilities in the fields of polar science and technology research, polar equipment development, and deep-sea polar exploration. missing.*

*Yin Jingwei told the Science and Technology Daily reporter of that China does not yet have nuclear-powered icebreakers and underwater equipment capable of breaking ice in the polar regions, and the ability to collect maritime below the ice is also very weak. Additional efforts are needed to overcome technological and environmental hurdles to move forward.*

**Source:** “深耕新疆域, 推动极地科考再上新台阶——海洋领域专家谈建设海洋强国” (Exploring New Frontiers and Taking Polar Scientific Research to a New Level—Maritime Experts Discuss Building a Maritime Great Power), *Science & Technology Daily* [科技日报] (Official newspaper of PRC Ministry of Science & Technology [MOST]), 19 January 2023 [http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http\\_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-01/19/content\\_547740.htm?div=0](http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-01/19/content_547740.htm?div=0)

*In today's world polar regions have become a “new frontier” for development and a focal point for global governance, a new high ground for technological competition, an area with new sea routes and a new source of resources. The China Polar Research Center of the Ministry of Natural Resources adheres to the principle of “understanding, protecting, and using” these regions proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping, and is committed to providing support for China's polar scientific research. China continues to improve its independent innovation capabilities and overall there is momentum to continue improvements. The China Polar Research Center independently built the “Xuelong 2” icebreaker with, filling a major gap in China's capabilities required for polar scientific research and developed a way to use both the Xuelong and Xuelong two effectively in concert.*

*continue on 5*

## Continued: Chinese Military Exercises Highlight Improvements in Joint Operations

**Source Continued:** “深耕新疆域, 推动极地科考再上新台阶——海洋领域专家谈建设海洋强国” (Exploring New Frontiers and Taking Polar Scientific Research to a New Level—Maritime Experts Discuss Building a Maritime Great Power), *Science & Technology Daily* [科技日报] (Official newspaper of PRC Ministry of Science & Technology [MOST]), 19 January 2023 [http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http\\_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-01/19/content\\_547740.htm?div=0](http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-01/19/content_547740.htm?div=0)

*This new pattern of “Double Xuelong” Polar exploration (one assigned to each polar region) has greatly improved the on-site support capabilities for China’s polar scientific investigations.*

### Notes:

[1] Deep-sea areas are typically defined as those below 200 meters. According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 80 percent of the Earth’s ocean floor remains unmapped and unexplored. “How much of the ocean have we explored?,” NOAA [Accessed March 2023]. <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/exploration.html>

[2] See: Peter Wood, “China’s Holistic Security Concept Explained,” *OE Watch*, 07-2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/275650>

[3] The ship was developed by China State Shipbuilding Corporation’s (CSSC) 708 Research Institute and is subordinate to the China Geological Survey Bureau. The bureau also operates ships involved in mapping the seafloor in potential sensitive areas, which has drawn the alarm of nearby nations. See for example, Naoki Inoue, Tsukasa Hadano and Jun Endo, “Chinese survey ships straying into other nation’s EEZs, data shows”, *Nikkei*, 31 January 2021. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Chinese-survey-ships-straying-into-other-nations-EEZs-data-shows>

[4] “China’s first ultra-deepwater scientific research drilling ship achieved main hull penetration today” [我国首艘超深水科考钻探船今日实现主船体贯通], *China Mining News* [中国矿业报], 18 December 2022. [https://www.cgs.gov.cn/xwl/ddyw/202212/t20221218\\_720062.html](https://www.cgs.gov.cn/xwl/ddyw/202212/t20221218_720062.html)

[5] See: Les Grau, “China Developing More High Latitude Equipment”, *OE Watch*, 11-2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/337636>

[6] “UN delegates reach historic agreement on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters,” *United Nations*, 5 March 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134157>

[7] This phrase, 国之重器, is frequently used to describe strategically impactful or game-changing weapons systems (ballistic missile submarines, aircraft carriers etc.,) and civilian technologies such as nuclear reactors.

[8] Harbin Engineering University is one of the “Seven Sons of National Defense,” which are universities that work closely with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army.

## China Developing Ultra-Low Earth Orbit Satellites With Possible Military Applications

By Peter Wood  
OE Watch Commentary

The following excerpt from *Science & Technology Daily*, the official newspaper of China's Ministry of Science & Technology, quotes a senior leader of one of China's main developers<sup>1</sup> of space and missile technologies discussing ultra-low earth orbit satellites, which could potentially be used for military applications. The article notes that ultra-low orbits range between 150-300 km. Low Earth Orbit (LEO) is typically defined as orbits at an altitude between 160-1000 km; the "Kármán line" at 100 km above sea level is typically used to describe where space begins.

As explained by Song Xiaoming, President of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation's Second Academy, China plans to begin testing ultra-low-earth orbit satellites in September 2023. These satellites have higher revisit rates and can achieve superior or equal resolution in imaging at lower costs in both financial and weight terms, allowing mass production. Separate reporting claims that a manufacturing facility for the satellites could produce upwards of 240 such satellites per year.

Spacecraft in ultra-low and low-earth orbits experience greater drag from the atmosphere than those in higher orbits,

shortening their service life. Two efforts could help address these issues: miniature engines to raise their orbits, and orbital refueling to replenish maneuver and altitude-control thrusters. Chinese media reports suggest that progress has already been made in these areas. In September 2022, China successfully completed tests of Hall thrusters on its satellites, raising the altitude of a satellite in LEO by nearly 300 km.<sup>2</sup> Hall-effect thrusters use magnetic fields to ionize and accelerate propellants at very efficient levels with minimal weight requirements, making them optimal for spacecraft. China reportedly first tested on-orbit refueling in 2016 with the Tianyuan-1 satellite.<sup>3</sup> China has also recently tested orbital sails, which help de-orbit debris, as well as improved data-transmission satellites, space-based debris detection satellites, and other technologies.<sup>4</sup>

If successful, the development of ultra-low earth orbit satellite constellations will further improve the revisit rate and volume of satellite imagery it is able to gather. However, the rapid revisit times, high-resolution imagery, quick manufacturing, and mass launch capabilities of satellites into these orbits strongly suggest they could be used for military applications as well.

**Compared with traditional orbits, ultra-low orbits can effectively reduce satellite development and launch costs, improve efficiency in collecting and transmitting data, and is suitable for satellite mass production with high-frequency launches.**



Flatpack Starlink communications satellites aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/91/Starlink\\_Mission\\_%2847926144123%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/91/Starlink_Mission_%2847926144123%29.jpg), Attribution: CC0, 24 May 2019

## Continued: China Developing Ultra-Low Earth Orbit Satellites With Possible Military Applications

**Source:** “宋晓明委员: 超低轨卫星星座首发星在研制 9月具备发射条件” (Committee Member Song Xiaoming: First Ultra-Low Earth Orbit Satellite is Under Development; Launch Planned for September), *Science & Technology Daily* [科技日报] (Official newspaper of PRC Ministry of Science & Technology [MOST]), 3 March 2023. [http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http\\_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-03/03/content\\_549908.htm?div=-1](http://digitalpaper.stdaily.com/http_www.kjrb.com/kjrb/html/2023-03/03/content_549908.htm?div=-1)

*According to Song Xiaoming, President of CASIC's Second Academy, his institution is currently developing satellites for an ultra-low orbit satellite constellation, the first of which is planned for launch in September. After being placed into orbit, tests of key technologies are planned, including flight technology, high-resolution ground imaging, on-board intelligent processing, and information transmission to user terminals. Ultra-low orbit usually refers to an orbit at an altitude of 150-300 kilometers. Compared with traditional orbits, ultra-low orbits can effectively reduce satellite development and launch costs, improve efficiency in collecting and transmitting data, and is suitable for satellite mass production with high-frequency launches. Satellites in lower orbits can achieve the same resolution as satellites in higher orbits at a significant reduction in weight and cost. During the “14th Five-Year Plan” period (2021-2025), China proposed development of a remote sensing space infrastructure system with global coverage and efficient operation. Song Xiaoming said that in the face of urgent requirements such as higher resolution, shorter revisit cycles, and faster transmission speed, the Second Academy used its institutional advantages in small satellite, low-earth orbit communications and intelligent manufacturing to quickly carry out research on ultra-low orbits. The development of ultra-low orbit satellite constellations is intended to achieve similar performance as traditional satellite systems at lower costs and with a faster response time superior to other satellites. Other goals involve mass production and efficient, high tempo launches.*

### Notes:

[1] China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation's (中国航天科工) Second Academy [二院] has historically had responsibility for the development of surface-to-air missiles. See: Peter Wood, Alex Stone China's Ballistic Missile Industry, *China Aerospace Studies Institute* (Affiliated with USAF Air University), 11 May 2021. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLARF/2021-05-11%20Ballistic%20Missile%20Industry.pdf>

[2] “我国电推进系统首次完成低轨卫星升轨任务 (China's Electric Propulsion System Carried Out Altitude Raising Mission for Low-Earth Orbit Satellites for First Time),” *Xinhuanet*, 21 September 2022. <http://www.xinhuanet.com/techpro/20220921/0239ec258f514bc7a23d846a1be49735/c.html>

[3] The name of the satellite translates literally “space resources No. 1.” Wang Yaowen [王握文] Zhang Feibo [章飞钹], “我国实现在轨卫星 ‘太空加油’ (China Achieves 'Space Refueling' with a satellite in Orbit),” *PLA Daily* (the official newspaper of PRC military), 1 July 2016. [http://www.81.cn/201311jxjhh/2016-07/01/content\\_7182369.htm](http://www.81.cn/201311jxjhh/2016-07/01/content_7182369.htm)

[4] See: Peter Wood, "China Debuts New Space Capabilities," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/427695>

## Chinese Military Researchers Debut “Precision Strike” Concept for Cognitive Domain Operations

By Thomas Shrimpton  
OE Watch Commentary

Researchers with China’s National University of Defense Technology (NUDT)<sup>1</sup> recently published an article outlining a framework for “precision strike” in covert efforts by the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) to shape foreign audiences’ perceptions and behaviors. While the article is not singularly authoritative, the concept of precision strike broadly represents a military framing of the Chinese Communist Party’s “precise communication”<sup>2</sup> external propaganda strategy, which uses consumer data to segment target audiences so that messaging can be crafted to successfully influence those audiences’ perceptions and behaviors.

In the NUDT researchers’ concept, behavioral data collection and algorithmic targeting enabled by artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and machine learning (ML) technologies are seen as the “fuel” and “engine” of cognitive domain operations. They facilitate the monitoring, collection, analysis, and evaluation of a target audience to sketch an “intelligent portrait” of its beliefs, values, opinions, and behaviors over time. Dynamic pool-based labeling<sup>3</sup> and ML predictive models can then identify changing cognition and can suggest a time and place to inject bespoke messaging to maximize the impact of its messaging.

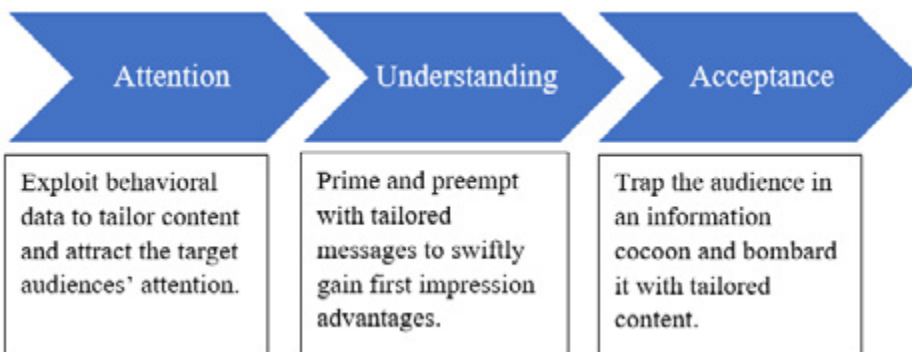
The authors assert tailored content is the “ammunition” of precision strike cognitive domain operations. The authors suggest that tailored content should match an audience’s cognitive profile to core messaging themes that align with their values. These may include legal persuasion, military deterrence, contradiction and diversion, emotional appeal, righteous guidance, and martial mobilization.<sup>4</sup> The

authors further conceive that such messaging could be used to build “information cocoons,”<sup>5</sup> or insulated and self-reinforcing media ecosystems that limit a target audience’s exposure to outside information. However, they do not suggest solutions for how Chinese propaganda and cognitive warfare practitioners could overcome what Chinese strategic communications experts often refer to as Western dominance in the international media layout,<sup>6</sup> or the fact that Western media and social media platforms have effectively monopolized international news feeds through first mover advantages.

**“The continuous application of artificial intelligence, big data, and other technologies [equip] the technically advantaged party with the ability to swiftly and efficiently collect cognitive data and then discover the weaknesses, sensitivities, and points of ignition in the adversary’s cognitive system.”**

Finally, the NUDT researchers consider social media to be both the “delivery vehicle and battlefield” for cognitive domain precision strikes. The authors assert Western social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are the key arena where China is competing for the hearts and minds of overseas audiences. Specifically, they assert Facebook is used for agenda-setting (what the authors call “preempting”),<sup>7</sup> while Twitter and YouTube are used for coordinating actions and disseminating content, respectively, which the authors call “bombardment.”

Precision strike’s parallels to precision communication showcases the degree to which PLA information and psychological operations are informed by the CCP’s propaganda work. While detailed open-source analysis of PLA information and psychological operations planning remains scant, analysis of China’s broader propaganda ecosystem can inform information operations and psychological operations practitioners as to how the PLA will seek to influence foreign audiences in the future.



Cognitive Change Cycle with Precision Strike in Cognitive Domain Operations.  
Source: Created by Author Attribution: Image by Thomas Shrimpton



## Continued: Chinese Military Researchers Debut “Precision Strike” Concept for Cognitive Domain Operations

**Source:** “如何实现认知域作战精准打击? (How to Achieve Precision Strike in Cognitive Domain Operations?),” *PLA Daily* (official news outlet of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army), 13 March 2023. [http://www.81.cn/yw\\_208727/16209631.html](http://www.81.cn/yw_208727/16209631.html)

*Cognitive domain operations should grasp the rhythm and strength of “temporal immersion” – select the right delivery time according to the target’s cognitive dynamics, and gradually seek to expand the effects. Before the target audience forms an initial understanding of an event, we should seize the priority of information dissemination and “bombard” them with information to strive to “preempt.” In addition, during the fermentation stage of an event, when the subject’s cognition is not yet solidified, repeated dissemination of specified information can achieve the purpose of subconsciously reconstructing the subject’s cognition.*

### Notes:

- [1] The National University of Defense Technology (NUDT, 中国人民解放军国防科技大学) oversees some of China’s top computer sciences, cyber, information and communications engineering, and intelligence portfolios. For more on NUDT, see: National University of Defense Technology (中国人民解放军国防科技大学), in China Defense Universities Tracker, *The Australian Strategic Policy Institute* (ASPI), 23 November 2019. <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/national-university-of-defense-technology/>
- [2] For more on precise communication and the CCP’s broader external propaganda strategy, see: Devin Thorne, “1 Key for 1 Lock: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Targeted Propaganda,” *Recorded Future*, 28 September 2022. <https://go.recordedfuture.com/hubfs/reports/ta-2022-0928.pdf>
- [3] “Dynamic pool-based labeling,” or “label pooling” (标签池) is a category of machine learning algorithms and subset of semi-supervised learning that ranks all unlabeled instances according to informativeness measurement and selects the best queries to annotate. The authors reference Cambridge Analytica as a model of such methods.
- [4] The authors do not distinguish between cognitive domain operations for overseas audiences and domestic. However, CCP researchers have discussed elements of legal persuasion in the context of sovereign claims over disputed territories. PLA researchers have frequently asserted its messaging can serve to mobilize domestic will-to-fight as a deterrence mechanism to weaken foreign audiences’ resolve to fight and win. Recent PLA propaganda research asserts that Syria’s use of women and children in anti-foreign intervention emotional appeals has successfully impacted support for foreign intervention.
- [5] “Information cocoon” (信息茧房) refers to the phenomenon that people’s attention to information domains is likely to be habitually guided by their interests, and thus their exposure and consumption of novel ideas.
- [6] International media layout (国际媒体布局), as opposed to international media structure (国际媒体格局), refers to the strength, structure, and strategy of (in this context) a country’s international media penetration and influence.
- [7] PLA researchers broadly recognize the influence of first impressions and identify first-mover advantages as key to winning in the cognitive domain.

## Micronesian President Warns Against Chinese External Influence Operations

By Thomas Shrimpton  
OE Watch Commentary



Federated States of Micronesia  
President David Panuelo.

Source: <https://www.fsmgov.org/ngovt.html>  
Attribution: Public Domain

**I believe that our values are presently being used against us. One of the reasons that China's political warfare is successful in so many arenas is that we are bribed to be complicit, bribed to be silent.**

According to the excerpted article from the Asia-focused outlet, *The Diplomat*, outgoing Micronesian President David Panuelo recently warned of Beijing's efforts to shape his country's external operational environment via "political warfare"<sup>1</sup> and "gray zone operations." To mitigate the China's influence, Panuelo suggested that Micronesia switch diplomatic allegiance from China to Taiwan in exchange for Taiwan providing Micronesia with \$50 million. The 13-page warning<sup>2</sup> letter detailed Chinese covert, coercive, and corrupting influence activities in Micronesia, including bribery, spying, and other external interference.

Panuelo provided examples stating a former Chinese ambassador had tried to bribe Vice President Palik with an envelope of cash to be seated in a place of prominence at a Chinese Embassy Banquet. When Palik refused, the Chinese ambassador said something to the effect of "you could be President someday." At the July 2023 Pacific Islands Forum, Panuelo relayed that he was followed by a People's Liberation Army intelligence officer stationed at the Chinese Embassy in Fiji. The letter also recounts Chinese efforts to manufacture international support for China at the China-Pacific Island Countries Political Dialogue by having a Micronesian private citizen represent the Micronesia when the Micronesian government declined to attend a meeting of the regional multilateral forum. In response to these claims, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson derided Panuelo's assertions as "smear[s] and accusations...completely inconsistent with the facts," adding Beijing has "always respected Micronesia's development path that it has chosen in light of its own national conditions and has supported the Micronesian side in safeguarding its independence." While it

remains to be seen if Micronesia will pursue the diplomatic shift Panuelo proposed after he steps down from office, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu has expressed concerns over the burden such "dollar diplomacy" would put on Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

**Source:** "Micronesia's President Writes Bombshell Letter on China's 'Political Warfare,'" *The Diplomat* (international current-affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region), 10 March 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/micronesias-president-writes-bombshell-letter-on-chinas-political-warfare/>

*It is on this basis that Political Warfare and Grey Zone activity occur within our borders; China is seeking to ensure that, in the event of a war in our Blue Pacific Continent between themselves and Taiwan, that the FSM is, at best, aligned with the PRC (China) instead of the United States and, at worst, that the FSM chooses to 'abstain' altogether.*

*We understand that Mr. Wu [Beijing's choice for ambassador to FSM] would, upon his arrival, be given the mission of preparing the FSM to shift away from its partnerships with traditional allies such as the U.S., Japan, and Australia. We know that Mr. Wu would expand PRC security activity, awareness, and interest in the FSM ... I declined the Ambassador-designate his position ... they're simply awaiting the new President to take power so Mr. Wu can become the Ambassador of China to the FSM.*

*You can imagine my surprise when I was followed this past July in Fiji during the Pacific Islands Forum by two Chinese men; my further surprise when it was determined that they worked for the Chinese Embassy in Suva; my even further surprise when it was discovered that one of them was a PLA intelligence officer; and my continued*

*continue on 11*

## Continued: Micronesian President Warns Against Chinese External Influence Operations

**Source Continued:** “Micronesia’s President Writes Bombshell Letter on China’s ‘Political Warfare,’” *The Diplomat* (international current-affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region), 10 March 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/micronesias-president-writes-bombshell-letter-on-chinas-political-warfare/>

*surprise when I learned that I had multiple Cabinet and staff who had met him before, and in the FSM. To be clear: I have had direct threats against my personal safety from PRC officials acting in an official capacity.*

*Ambassador Qian was formerly the ambassador to Fiji – and by extension was the one responsible for authorizing the two Chinese to follow me in Suva. ,, Ambassador Qian also would have been present during the 2nd China-PICS Political Dialogue. That itself is noteworthy insofar as that was the public meeting where the FSM Government found itself represented not by myself or a Cabinet member or even a member of our Foreign Service – indeed not by anyone in our Government at all but, rather, a private citizen named Mr. Duhlen Soumwei. I said to the PRC that we would not have formal representation at the meeting, and the PRC went to the extent of taking one of our citizens and then publicly having that citizen formally represent us. To say it again: China has established a precedent of taking out private citizens in multilateral meetings to formally represent our country without our Government’s awareness or approval thereof.*

*In November, 2021 – after the Secretary of Health and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and myself had changed cellphone numbers due to incessant calls from Ambassador Huang – the FSM signed an agreement that we accept the Chinese vaccines. We included various stipulations, such as that they were to be used only for citizens of China in the FSM; but that wasn’t what China wanted. What China wanted was for the FSM to be on the list of countries that they could publicly promote as having accepted their vaccines. China got exactly what it wanted.*

*Senior officials and elected officials across the whole of our National and State Governments receive offers of gifts as a means to curry favor. The practical impact of this is that some senior officials and elected officials take actions that are contrary to the FSM’s national interest, but are consistent with the PRC’s national interests.*

*This isn’t rare. This happens all the time, and to most of us – not just some of us. It is at this point that I relay, simply as a point of information, that 39 out of 50 members of Parliament in Solomon Islands received payments from China prior to their vote on postponing elections that were otherwise scheduled for this year. Have you personally received a bribe from the PRC? If the answer is “no,” you are in the minority.*

*When we sent our own patrol boats to our own Exclusive Economic Zone to check on PRC research vessel activity, the PRC sent a warning for us to stay away.*

### Notes:

[1] Political warfare [政治战] seeks to mobilize and utilize the spectrum of strategic resources (party, state, military, commercial, and civilian) to influence the conduct, policies, motives, and perceptions of foreign actors in a manner favorable to the strategic objectives of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Political warfare differs from public diplomacy in its lack of transparency and calculated manipulation of a target to influence its norms, policies, and strategies through inductive and coercive methods of persuasion. For a more detailed exploration of the CCP’s political warfare and political work concepts, see: Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute*, 14 October 2013, [https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/P2049\\_Stokes\\_Hsiao\\_PLA\\_General\\_Political\\_Department\\_Liaison\\_101413.pdf](https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/P2049_Stokes_Hsiao_PLA_General_Political_Department_Liaison_101413.pdf) and for more on the PLA’s conception of political warfare, see: Peter Mattis, “China’s ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective,” *War on the Rocks*, 30 January 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>

[2] For the full report see: LinkedIn Post, 10 March 2023. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/cleopaskal\\_panuelo-letter-on-switch-to-taiwan-prc-activity-7039672476045340672-8RmJ/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/cleopaskal_panuelo-letter-on-switch-to-taiwan-prc-activity-7039672476045340672-8RmJ/)

[3] “MOFA Response to Comments that Taiwan is Seeking New Allies through ‘Dollar Diplomacy,’” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China* (Taiwan), 10 March 2023. [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1330&s=99863](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1330&s=99863)

## Russia Widens and Tightens Conscription Policies

By Ray Finch  
OE Watch Commentary

The Kremlin continues to struggle to attract adequate military manpower to participate in its so-called special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine. The partial mobilization of 300,000 soldiers announced in September 2022 helped to stabilize Russian lines but so far has been insufficient to launch a counteroffensive or consolidate control of the four recently annexed provinces.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Russian private military companies (PMCs) like the Wagner Group and other local militias have also proven inadequate to consolidate gains. The Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) increasingly may be forced to rely upon conscript soldiers to fill Russia's manpower needs.

Russia is considering a proposal to change the age for draft-eligible Russians. In December 2022, the MoD announced that the age for draft-eligible Russian men would be changed from 18-27 to 21-30 years of age, which would supposedly provide for more mature and experienced conscripts.



Andrey Kartapolov (General-Ret), chairman of the Duma Defense Committee.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrey\\_Kartapolov,\\_2018.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrey_Kartapolov,_2018.jpg), Attribution: Mil.ru. CCA 4.0 Intl

However, according to the first excerpt from the pro-business site *Vedomosti*, “the transition to a new draft age in 2023 is unlikely.” There is simply insufficient time for local draft boards to prepare and carry out this change. However, the article quotes another expert who claims that the “law on raising the draft age could come into force in the fall of 2023.” At first, the draft will be of a mixed type, that is, men aged 18 to 30 will be subject to it.” Expanding the age limits from 18-30

for military manpower could help the MoD to fill the military's ranks.

The Kremlin is also cracking down on ways to evade military service. To avoid the draft, many young Russian men employ the services of various legal agencies to find legal or medical reasons to remain out of the military.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, as the second excerpt from the pro-business site *Kommer-sant* describes, legislation has been proposed that would “ban advertising of legal and consulting companies that provide services to conscripts.” The article quotes a Russian legislator who asserts that “the information space is filled with aggressive advertising of the services of commercial structures to evade military duty.” According to the Kremlin's narrative, military duty is a sacred honor, and as the SMO continues, more young Russian men will be forced to carry out this obligation if the conscript age eligibility is expanded and legal recourse for potential conscripts is curtailed.

**The information space is filled with aggressive advertising of the services of commercial structures to evade military duty...**

**Source:** Anna Vergazova, “В Госдуме оценили сроки перехода к новому призывному возрасту (The State Duma estimated the timing of the transition to a new draft age),” *Vedomosti* (Russian pro-business news outlet), 3 March 2023. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/03/03/965182-perehoda-novomu-prizivnomu-vozrastu>

*The transition to a new draft age in 2023 is unlikely, Yury Shvytkin, deputy head of the State Duma Defense Committee, told Vedomosti.... Viktor Bondarev, Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Federation Council, said on March 3 that the draft law on raising the draft age could come into force in the fall of 2023. He added that the introduction of the document is planned in the spring, and suggested that in this case it would come into force by the beginning of the autumn draft...*

*continue on 13*

## Continued: Russia Widens and Tightens Conscription Policies

**Source Continued:** Anna Vergazova, “В Госдуме оценили сроки перехода к новому призывному возрасту (The State Duma estimated the timing of the transition to a new draft age),” *Vedomosti* (Russian pro-business news outlet), 3 March 2023. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/03/03/965182-perehoda-novomu-prizivnomu-vozrastu>

*...A proposal to gradually increase the draft age was made by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on December 21, 2022 at an expanded meeting of the collegium of the Russian Ministry of Defense. According to his proposal, the draft age can be increased from 18 to 21 years, and the maximum - from 27 to 30 years. In addition, Shoigu called for an increase in the number of military personnel to 1.5 million people.*

*Earlier, Andrey Kartapolov, chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, told Parliamentary Gazeta that from April 1, conscription could take place according to the new rules. At first, the draft will be of a mixed type, that is, men aged 18 to 30 will be subject to it.*

**Source:** Bulat Bashirov, “Призывников оградят от юристов (Conscripts to be shielded from lawyers),” *Kommersant* (Russian pro-business news outlet), 7 February 2023. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5811945>

*...Deputies of the Parliament of Bashkiria took the initiative to ban advertising of legal and consulting companies that provide services to conscripts. The legislators propose to amend the federal legislation accordingly, since “aggressive advertising of services for evading military duty” provokes citizens to commit acts punishable in criminal and administrative order....*

*“The information space is filled with aggressive advertising of the services of commercial structures to evade military duty,” the explanatory note to the document says.... “Advertising ways to avoid conscription is widespread: cars with similar banners are literally parked near recruiting stations,” Vladimir Nagorny, head of the Bashkirian Kurultai Committee on State Construction, told Kommersant. “Their services are to find, they believe, a legal way to avoid conscription. The first way can be characterized as abuse of the right. On the advice of such lawyers, the recruit will appeal the decision of the draft commission in court, and even if he loses, by that time the draft campaign will already be over. The second method is friendly independent medical commissions, which find a disease in the conscript that exempts him from service. Lawyers do not hesitate to talk about this method.”*

### Notes:

[1] Russia annexed the four Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia in 2022, although the Kremlin does not fully control them.

[2] For additional information regarding how young Russian men avoid being conscripted see: Ray Finch, “Dodging the Draft” *OE Watch*, December 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/377105>

## Russia Cutting Back on Nuclear Icebreaker Production

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

As reported in the excerpted article from the Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, Russia will only build one of the three nuclear icebreakers it had previously planned but will compensate by increasing conventional icebreaker production. Although the cutback in production could be a response to the latest rounds of EU sanctions against Russia, the decision may have already been in process. In the past, Russia has cut back on expensive projects only to introduce improved projects later. The change in direction may indicate Russia believes it

already has enough atomic-powered icebreakers in an era of thinning polar icecaps.

**A**n updated version of Russia's Arctic Strategy states that Russia will only build one "Lider," not three as originally planned. The amended document signed by President Putin on the 27th of February reads that only the lead ship of the new class will be built before 2035.

**Source:** Atle Staalesen, "Moscow lowers ambitions in nuclear icebreaker program, will not build fleet of new super-powerful vessels after all," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 1 March 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2023/03/moscow-lowers-ambitions-nuclear-icebreaker-program-will-not-build-fleet-new-super-powerful>

*Only two days after the EU imposed sanctions against Russia's state nuclear icebreaker operator, the country announces that it will not build a fleet of Lider-class vessels. An updated version of Russia's Arctic Strategy states that Russia will only build one "Lider," not three as originally planned. The amended document signed by President Putin on the 27th of February reads that only the lead ship of the new class will be built before 2035.*

*The lead ship carries the name "Rossiya" and is currently under construction at the Zvezda yard in the Russian Far East. It is due to be ready for sailing in 2027. The Lider (project 20510) will be equipped with two RITM-400 type nuclear reactors and have a total capacity of 120 MW, twice the power of the currently most powerful icebreakers. It will be able to crush through ice thicker than four meters.*

*The vessel is very complicated to build, and it comes at an extraordinarily high price. The Russian government in January 2020 allocated 127 billion rubles (€1,85 billion) for the construction of the lead ship. The reduction of the number of Liders is compensated by the construction of more LK-60 icebreakers. While the original strategy document from 2020 includes the construction of "no less than five" icebreakers of the 22220 class, the updated documents reads "no less than seven" vessels of the kind.*

*Russia already has three ships of the class in operation: the Arktika, Sibir and Ural. By year 2035, also the Yakutia, Chukotka, Kamchatka and Primorie will be completed. The Arctic Strategy also outlines the construction of 30 rescue and support ships, as well as three hydrographic survey ships and two piloting ships by 2030.*

*The updated document comes only two days after the European Commission adopted its 10th package of sanctions against Russia, a part of which is aimed at nuclear icebreaker operator Atomflot. According to the Commission, the sanctions against Atomflot will reduce Russia's ability to take use of the Northern Sea Route to exploit its vast Arctic oil and gas reserves.*

*"With oil and gas exports shifting from Europe to Asia as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and subsequent Westerns sanctions, Russia's icebreaker fleet is key to the country's Arctic hydrocarbon strategy.*

*continue on 15*

## Continued: Russia Cutting Back on Nuclear Icebreaker Production

**Source Continued:** Atle Staalesen, “Moscow lowers ambitions in nuclear icebreaker program, will not build fleet of new super-powerful vessels after all,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 1 March 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2023/03/moscow-lowers-ambitions-nuclear-icebreaker-program-will-not-build-fleet-new-super-powerful>

*In order to escort oil and gas tankers on the much longer and more challenging voyage from the Yamal and Gydan peninsulas to Asia, rather than the much shorter and less ice infested route to Europe, Russia relies on Atomflot’s fleet of nuclear icebreakers,” an explanation from the Commission reads.*

*Vladimir Putin has since 2018 had the development of the Northern Sea Route as one of his key priorities and federal agencies have been commissioned to reach 80 million tons of goods per year on the route by 2024. The lion’s share of the projected goods traffic is oil, liquified natural gas and coal.*

## Russia Effectively Leaves Arctic Council

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

The Arctic Council, founded in 1996, lists its members as Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. The position of Arctic Council president rotates between member states, and though the Council currently has a Russian president, other members of the Council have refused to meet in his presence in response to the war in Ukraine. Underscoring the schism, the Council also recently met without its current president presiding and accepted a Canadian counterclaim to Arctic territory that is also claimed by Russia.<sup>1</sup> As the excerpted article from independent Norwegian news source *High*

**O**n 21 February, the Kremlin announced that Russia revised its Arctic policy by removing mentions of the Arctic Council, stressing the need to prioritize Russian Arctic interests, and striving for greater self-reliance for its Arctic industrial projects.

*North News* indicates, Russia has effectively pulled out of the Arctic Council as a result of the Council's actions and will now pursue its interests in the Arctic through bilateral relations and self-reliance. Russia's decision increases the chance of further political conflict in the Arctic that could lead to a physical confrontation between Russia and Arctic Council member states.

**Source:** Malte Humpert, "Russia Amends Arctic Policy Prioritizing 'National Interest' and Removing Cooperation Within Arctic Council," *High North News* (independent newspaper published by the High North Center at Nord University, Bodo, Norway). 23 February 2023. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-amends-arctic-policy-prioritizing-national-interest-and-removing-cooperation-within-arctic>

*On 21 February, the Kremlin announced that Russia revised its Arctic policy by removing mentions of the Arctic Council, stressing the need to prioritize Russian Arctic interests, and striving for greater self-reliance for its Arctic industrial projects. The hopes for cooperation with Russia in the Arctic continue to cool. Days after a U.S. diplomat stated that cooperation with Russia in the Arctic was now virtually impossible, the Kremlin published amendments to its Arctic policy. President Putin signed the decree on 21 February. The updated document places greater emphasis on Russian national interests in the region and removes specific mentions for cooperation within the Arctic Council.*

*While the original policy, published in March 2020, called for the "strengthening of good neighborly relations with the Arctic states" in the fields of economic, scientific, cultural and cross-border cooperation the amended version removes the above section and instead calls for the "development of relations with foreign states on a bilateral basis, "taking into account the national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic."*

*The amended text also removes mentions of "the framework of multilateral regional cooperation formats, including the Arctic Council, the coastal Arctic "five" and the Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region."*

*In the original policy the section on international cooperation, placed significant emphasis on work within "multilateral regional cooperation formats" for the purpose of building up economic, scientific and technological, as well as cultural cooperation. It did not make any mention of prioritizing Russian national interests. In contrast, the wording of the revised document now places the country's national interests in the Arctic ahead of work towards economic, scientific and technological, and cultural cooperation. Just last week, U.S. military leaders emphasized that the Arctic was now Russia's number one priority. The updated version also places a greater emphasis on Russian self-reliance in the region. It calls for ensuring "import independence of the shipbuilding complex," clearly a response to western sanctions which have affected Russia's ability to order and purchase ice-capable gas and oil tankers at foreign shipyards.*

*continue on 17*



## Continued: Russia Effectively Leaves Arctic Council

**Source Continued:** Malte Humpert, “Russia Amends Arctic Policy Prioritizing ‘National Interest’ and Removing Cooperation Within Arctic Council,” *High North News* (independent newspaper published by the High North Center at Nord University, Bodo, Norway). 23 February 2023. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-amends-arctic-policy-prioritizing-national-interest-and-removing-cooperation-within-arctic>

*The amended version of the policy calls for the” development and modernization of shipbuilding and ship repair facilities for the construction and maintenance of ships navigating in the waters of the Northern Sea Route. “In terms of energy supply for population centers and industrial facilities along the NSR the policy now calls for the use of domestically built “low-power nuclear power plants.” The first such facility, the floating nuclear power plant Akademik Lomonosov was towed through the Baltics and up the Norwegian coastline in 2018 to the Arctic town of Pevek to supply electrical power and residential heat.*

### Notes:

[1] For more additional information about the Canadian claim on the Lomonosov Ridge see: Les Grau, “Canada Makes Additional Claims to Arctic Territory Claimed by Russia,” *OE Watch*, 02-2023.

## Russian Companies Using Central Asian Migrant Workers in Occupied Ukraine

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

Russia has stated that it will not draft migrant workers in the country and send them to fight in Ukraine. While this has been largely true, the accompanying excerpted article from the Russian-language independent news website *Kloop* reports that Central Asians are doing non-lethal work on Russia's behalf within the zone of conflict in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> According to the article, Russia has contracted workers from Central Asia to construct fortifications in occupied areas of Ukraine. The article notes that private military contractor the Wagner Group, which is one of the Russian companies involved in building defensive structures in Ukraine for use by the Russian military, has recruited migrant workers to work there with promises of a good salary and other benefits. The article also mentions how "the work did not require documents," an incentive for Central Asians looking to work for Russian entities without needing to officially register to do so.

Such contracted work in Ukraine carries many risks. The article confirms the deaths of 84 workers in Luhansk who had been building such defensive structures, though it is unknown if this number included any Central Asian citizens. Other non-combat hazards of working in occupied Ukraine include poor working conditions, less pay than promised, and possible prosecution if they are captured by Ukraine.

**But, digging trenches for money and being citizens of another country, they violate the laws and customs of war and become criminals.**

Such migrant workers could also face charges in their home countries, including possible loss of citizenship in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have repeatedly



Migrant workers in Moscow, Russia.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moscow,\\_Vozdvizhenka\\_Street,\\_destroying\\_solid\\_pavement\\_with\\_spades\\_\(30645492273\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moscow,_Vozdvizhenka_Street,_destroying_solid_pavement_with_spades_(30645492273).jpg) Attribution: CCA 2.0

warned their citizens that they can face prosecution in their home countries for serving as combatants in the war in Ukraine, with exceptions for those who hold Russian citizenship and are required to serve in the Russian armed forces. While the article is concerned about the fate of these migrant workers, there have been only a few examples of the Kyrgyzstani and Uzbekistani governments opening a case against an individual for fighting in Ukraine, and in each case these individuals fought for Ukraine against Russian forces. The article concludes that migrants are likely to continue working in Ukraine and that authorities in Central Asia will not interfere as the work provides an economic benefit. Because of the importance of remittances to the economies in the region.

**Source:** "Тюрьма и смерть за копейки. Мигрантов зовут рыть окопы для российской армии (Jail and death for a kopek. Migrant workers are being called to dig trenches for the Russia army)," *Kloop* (independent Russian-language news website in Kyrgyzstan), 2 March 2023. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2023/03/02/tyurma-i-smert-za-kopejki-migrantov-zovut-ryt-okopy-dlya-rossijskoj-armii/>

*Migrant workers from Central Asia are being called to construct trenches for the Russian military, including in the occupied territories of Ukraine. They are offered up to 6,000 rubles a day for this work. But the real working conditions do not justify this money: dozens of workers are killed by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, employers are deceptive, and in their*

*continue on 19*

## Continued: Russian Companies Using Central Asian Migrant Workers in Occupied Ukraine

**Source Continued:** “Тюрьма и смерть за копейки. Мигрантов зовут рыть окопы для российской армии (Jail and death for a kopek. Migrant workers are being called to dig trenches for the Russia army),” *Kloop* (independent Russian-language news website in Kyrgyzstan), 2 March 2023. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2023/03/02/tyurma-i-smert-za-kopejki-migrantov-zovut-ryt-okopy-dlya-rossijskoj-armii/>

*home countries, migrants are threatened with jail time and loss of citizenship.*

*...It was announced in October 2022 by the founder of the Wagner Group, businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, that Russia will build defensive structures along the front line. And since November, Russian websites and Telegram groups of migrant workers from Central Asian countries started publishing announcements about the recruitment of workers to dig trenches, dugouts, anti-tank ditches, and strengthen structures for the military... Announcements about the recruitment of workers for the “arrangement of defensive lines” appeared on the Russian websites Headhunter, Avito, and at least two regional-scale announcement sites...*

*Employers are willing to pay from 45,000 to 180,000 rubles a month for the risk, or from 300 ru-bles (\$4) per hour. In addition, they promised a lot of free things: travel, medical examination, ac-commodation, three meals a day. The requirements are to be in good health and between 20 and 50 years of age...A feature of some of the announcements in these groups was that the work did not require documents...The authors of ads in telegram groups for migrants also offered help from the employer in obtaining Russian citizenship if the employee worked on the “trenches” for at least four months.*

*...84 workers recruited from Novosibirsk, who responded to these vacancies, died from the strike of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the occupied territory of the Luhansk region...Whether among them came from Central Asia or not, is still unknown...President Vladimir Putin, at a meeting with the government, confirmed that workers who were building “defensive structures” in the occupied territories had died.*

*In addition to the danger of dying from shelling from Ukraine, other troubles await the workers: unsanitary conditions, unheated living quarters and “the attitude is worse than for cattle.” This was told by “Present Time”...The Baza telegram channel also writes about this, citing one of the Tajiks, Aminjon. According to him, they were paid three times less than the promised amount. Other workers were even less fortunate: one had an attack of appendicitis, and another lost a hand, but they did not receive any adequate medical care. After Aminjon went to the police, they began to call him with threats, now he is afraid to leave the house.*

*Migrants can be prosecuted for at least four criminal offenses for digging trenches for the Russian military, especially in the occupied territories of Ukraine, human rights activist and migrant rights specialist Valentina Chupyk warns.*

*According to her, if such migrants are caught by the Ukrainian military, they will be tried for ille-gally crossing the border of Ukraine, as they dig trenches in the occupied territories - for this they face two to five years in prison...If Ukrainians find out that a migrant works for PMC Wagner or contributes to the illegal activities of the occupying authorities (for example, if the migrant was hired by the state), he will be sentenced in Ukraine for up to 20 years for complicity in the activi-ties of a terrorist organization.*

*According to the Convention on the Laws and Customs of War on Land, migrants who dig trench-es are not equated with combatants (combatants). But, digging trenches for money and being citi-zens of another country, they violate the laws and customs of war and become criminals. There-fore, they cannot surrender as prisoners of war, but can only turn themselves in to the legal au-thorities of Ukraine - and after that receive a life sentence.*

*It is difficult to say whether the construction of facilities for a clearly military purpose abroad will be interpreted in the homeland of migrants as participation in the conflict. However, the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Russia warned that, according to the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the participation of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in hostilities on the territory of foreign states is pun-ishable by imprisonment for up to 10 years with confiscation of property.*

*continue on 20*

## Continued: Russian Companies Using Central Asian Migrant Workers in Occupied Ukraine

**Source Continued:** “Тюрьма и смерть за копейки. Мигрантов зовут рыть окопы для российской армии (Jail and death for a kopek. Migrant workers are being called to dig trenches for the Russia army),” *Kloop* (independent Russian-language news website in Kyrgyzstan), 2 March 2023. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2023/03/02/tyurma-i-smert-za-kopejki-migrantov-zovut-ryt-okopy-dlya-rossijskoj-armii/>

*In addition, for participation in armed conflicts or hostilities on the territory of a foreign state, a citizen of Kyrgyzstan can be deprived of citizenship.*

*Now the danger of punishment at home may seem insignificant to diggers, because Kyrgyzstan is critically dependent on Russia. In 2022, the transfers of individuals from there to the republic set a historical record, exceeding \$2.7 billion...The authorities of Kyrgyzstan clearly do not want to quarrel with Moscow and are selective about the participation of their citizens in hostilities. Those who fight for Ukraine or simply support it, the authorities tend to punish, but those who fight for Russia do not. Thus, nothing is heard about investigations into the deaths of Kyrgyz citizens who fought with Ukraine on the side of the Russian Federation...*

*However, the foreign policy environment can change quickly. If at some point it becomes profitable for the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to demonstrate neutrality or a critical attitude towards Russian aggression, the citizens of the country, who today are digging trenches in the occupied Ukrainian lands, may end up in prison. Or lose citizenship.*

### Notes:

[1] A few resources have become available for Central Asians who are illegally drafted or not allowed to leave Russia, including contact information for organizations in Russia that help migrant workers. These have been distributed through media in the region amid reports that Central Asians have been drafted or denied permission to leave Russia. See: “Что делать, если вас пытаются мобилизовать или не выпускают из России? (What to do if you are possibly mobilized or not allowed to leave Russia),” *Asia-Plus*, 9 March 2023. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20230309/что-делат-если-vas-pitayutsya-mobilizovat-ili-ne-vipuskayut-iz-strani>

## Iran Unveils Updated Yasin Training Jet With Possible Close Combat Applications



The Yasin training jet, 11 March 2023.

Source: <https://cdn.isna.ir/d/2023/03/11/3/62547091.jpg?ts=1678512083735>

Attribution: Iranian Students' News Agency

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

In 2019 the Iranian military unveiled its new Yasin Training Jet to great fanfare. In March 2023, Iran announced the final prototype and Yasin production line, according to the excerpted article from the semi-official, pro-government

**T**he Yasin will be able to be used...  
for close air support.

*Iranian Students' News Agency.* The latest variation of the training aircraft is said to include many upgrades, including new ejection seats, avionics, engine, and landing gear. An Iran-produced airborne weather radar has also been fitted into the Yasin. According to the article, since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, pilot training was put “on the agenda” of the Armed Forces, but Iran has continued to suffer from an aging fleet and untrained pilots.<sup>1</sup> The article suggests that pilot training is paramount in the development of the Yasin,<sup>2</sup> but there is also speculation that Iran may fit the aircraft with weaponry, allowing it to become a low-cost, easy-to-operate, multi-role fighter with a focus on close air support. If Iran can produce the Yasin at scale, not only would it be a valuable training platform, but it could also be deployed to many of the conflict zones in which Iran has previously relied on drones for air support—namely Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The introduction of the Yasin, or any Iranian manned aircraft, into any of these conflicts would risk escalating these proxy wars further.

**Source:** “Ravanma-ye az Namuneh Ma’yar Tawlid-e Jet-e Amuzesh-e ‘Yasin’ (Unveiling of the Training Jet Prototype ‘Yasin’),” *Iranian Students' News Agency* (semi-official student-run news agency that promotes the Iranian government’s line), 11 March 2023. <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401122013717>

*The Yasin’s training jet production prototype was unveiled in the presence of the Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, while the mass production line of this training jet was also inaugurated.... Pilot training is one of the most advanced and complex training regimens that any country can do. The Islamic Republic of Iran has succeeded in applying world-class education in the fields of science and technology, and training pilots is no exception.*

*After the end of the [Iran-Iraq] war, the necessity for pilot training was put on the agenda of the Armed Forces. From that time, with the input of veterans and professors, faculties for training pilots were created....*

**So, how does the Islamic Republic of Iran train pilots and what is the role of Yassin training jet?**

*The training of the fighter aircraft pilot is fundamentally different from the civilian pilot. For military pilots, training is done in three stages: First, basic training for learning flight basics. Second, training for flight skills, regulations and maneuver. And, third, advanced training for tactical flight ability with advanced fighters. An important feature of advanced training jets is that pilots from operational bases continue to exploit them, and pilots become familiar with air combat and ground combat tactics and techniques, and learn the use of various weapons. All of these advantages and features have been the reason for...the Ministry of Defense to design and build this aircraft.*

**Does the aircraft also have combat capability?**

*continue on 22*

## Continued: Iran Unveils Updated Yasin Training Jet With Possible Close Combat Applications

**Source Continued:** “Ravanma-ye az Namuneh Ma’yar Tawlid-e Jet-e Amuzesh-e ‘Yasin’ (Unveiling of the Training Jet Prototype ‘Yasin’),” Iranian Students’ News Agency (semi-official student-run news agency that promotes the Iranian government’s line), 11 March 2023. <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401122013717>

*Since combat training is in many cases carried out with real weapons and in simulated battle environments, it is natural that Yasin jet has the capability to conduct combat missions as well. In the development plan, it will be able to be used as a light combat aircraft and for close air support.*

### Notes:

[1] For background on efforts within Iran to re-equip its air force, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran-China Air Force Cooperation on Horizon?” *OE Watch*, December 2015. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195975/download>

See also: Michael Rubin, “Iranian F-14 Crash Highlights Iran’s Need for New Fighter Contract,” *OE Watch*, August 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/421643/download>

[2] While a potentially positive step for the Iranian Air Force, the Yasin is not the bridge trainer required for Iran’s recent purchase of the Su-35 multi-role fighters from Russia. The Su-35 is far too complex and would necessitate a more advanced trainer. It is more likely that Russian pilots will train Iranian pilots to fly the Su-35.

## Iran's Increased Defense Budget Leading to More Arms Exports

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has steadily increased its defense budget following the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the lifting of many United Nations sanctions.<sup>1</sup> According to the excerpted article from the Ministry of Defense's *Holy Defense News Agency*, that windfall has now come to Iran's Defense Industry Organization (DIO), the state-owned conglomerate meant to bolster the Iran's indigenous military technology development and manufacturing base. In the excerpted article, Deputy Defense Minister Seyyed Mahdi Farahi, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general who previously headed Iran's Aerospace Industries Organization and served as DIO managing director, reported that the DIO budget tripled from the previous year. DIO exports have reportedly more than doubled, suggesting that Iran has recouped some of the investment it made to develop the same weapons it deploys itself. Iran's exports of drones to Russia likely comprises a large portion of these export revenues.<sup>2</sup>

**This year, the [Defense Industries] Organization has grown by 200 percent.**

Iranian arms exports might also be bolstering IRGC coffers given that Farahi may funnel the proceeds of Iranian weapon sales to the IRGC. IRGC-run businesses seldom if ever return their profits to the central treasury, and the IRGC's official budget allocation accounts for perhaps only a



Brigadier-General Seyyed Mahdi Farahi.

Source: <https://image.alkawthartv.ir/imagema/original/2021/12/31/637765384943630275.jpg>  
Attribution: Al-Kawthar Television

quarter of its actual funding. Farahi's celebration of DIO may also reflect renewed investment in Iran's nuclear and missile programs given that such public spotlight often coincides with an organization's growing centrality to Iranian strategy. The DIO would be the paramount organization coordinating domestic manufacture of military hardware for these programs as Iran is loath to rely on external manufacturing for such high-profile hardware because of Iran's vulnerability to sanctions. Both the European Union and the U.S. Treasury Department have sanctioned Farahi for his role in proliferating weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, work which often saw Farahi travel to and negotiate with North Korea.<sup>3</sup>

**Source:** "Rashad 200 dar sadi sazman-e sanaya'-e defah nesbat beh sal gerefteh (Two Hundred Percent Growth in Defense Industry Organizations Over Past Year)," *Holy Defense News Agency* (official news agency of Iran's Defense Ministry), 13 March 2023. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/578644>

*Explaining the favorable performance of the Defense Industries Organization in 2022-23, General Farahi said. "This year the Organization has grown by 200 percent over the previous year and has seen a 2.5 times growth in exports."*

*The deputy minister of defense and support of the armed forces continued: "The organization also produced 57 new products from its research this year and after production, delivered these to the armed forces and even exported some of these products, which is very gratifying for the country's defense industry..."*

*Farahi said that behind these successes was the employment of some great intellects. "Maintaining and*

*continue on 24*

## Continued: Iran's Increased Defense Budget Leading to More Arms Exports

**Source Continued:** “Rashad 200 dar sadi sazman-e sanaya’-e defah nesbat beh sal gerefteh (Two Hundred Percent Growth in Defense Industry Organizations Over Past Year),” *Holy Defense News Agency* (official news agency of Iran’s Defense Ministry), 13 March 2023. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/578644>

*attracting efficient, committed and expert human resources is the beating heart of the organization and is one of the most important issues that should be considered by the managers of armed forces industries in order to advance the supreme goals of the organization.”*

### Notes:

[1] For background on the death of Mahsa Amini and the ensuing protests, see: Maggie McGrath, “Mahsa Amini: The Spark That Ignited A Women-Led Revolution,” *Forbes*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2022/12/06/mahsa-amini-the-spark-that-ignited-a-women-led-revolution/?sh=6a9f7aeb5c3d>

[2] For a previous discussion on revolutionary fervor among a younger generation, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Supreme Leader Speaks on Martyrdom,” *OE Watch*, December 2021, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/399678/download>; Michael Rubin, “Khamenei Warns Veterans of Declining Revolutionary Fervor,” *OE Watch*, February 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/354648>



## Iran Capitalizing on Post-Earthquake Conditions To Deepen Influence in Syria

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

On 6 February, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck near the Syria-Turkish border, damaging and destroying countless structures in surrounding areas and killing more than 50,000 people. The Syrian province of Aleppo was especially hard hit, with damages estimated as high as \$3.2 billion, mostly in the eponymous provincial capital.<sup>1</sup> Iran and its allied Iraqi factions from the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have provided much publicized assistance to parts of Aleppo, in ways that are likely to deepen their influence among the local population. The accompanying excerpt, from the Syrian opposition news website *Enab Baladi*, highlights a visit to Aleppo by Ismail Qaani, Qasim Soleimani's successor as head of the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force. Qaani was the first foreign official to visit Syria after the earthquake, and his visit to Aleppo preceded that of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad by two days. When al-Assad finally went to Aleppo, he met briefly with Abdel Aziz al-Muhammadawi (a.k.a. Abu Fadak), the head of PMF, who was there to oversee PMF post-earthquake assistance in Aleppo. Like his predecessor, who was killed in the same strike that killed Soleimani, al-Muhammadawi is considered a close Quds Force ally. According to the *Enab Baladi* report, al-Assad thanked al-Muhammadawi and his organization for their humanitarian assistance. Iranian-backed entities are now seeking government permits to rebuild

**Local media sources also indicated that the excavation machinery of the Iranian IRGC-affiliated 'Khatam al-Anbiya' company began demolishing a number of residential buildings in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, under the pretext that they were cracked as a result of the earthquake**

parts of the city, as they have across the war-ravaged suburbs of the Syrian capital Damascus in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The second accompanying excerpt, from the Qatari-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, explains how the IRGC-linked construction company Khatam al-Anbiya had demolished some buildings in eastern Aleppo and sought to lay the foundations for a future bastion of Iranian support in the area.

Other media reports have speculated that Iran also has used post-earthquake humanitarian aid as a cover to trans-



Aleppo in the war (2016).

Source: Louai Barakat, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aleppo\\_in\\_the\\_war\\_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aleppo_in_the_war_2.jpg)  
Attribution: CC 4.0

fer weapons to Syria. The Israeli government was quick to warn of this possibility, and in early March, it bombed Aleppo airport, targeting purported Iranian drones being stored there. As noted in the accompanying article, from the Saudi-aligned daily *Independent Arabia*, there are conflicting reports about what exactly was targeted, with some sources claiming it was drones transferred from a nearby, recently rehabilitated airbase that is now under Russian control (al-Jarrah), and others claiming it involved weapons brought in by land and air under the cover of humanitarian assistance. Regardless, the strikes led to a temporary halt in operations at Aleppo's airport, forcing a diversion of humanitarian aid flights and prompting UN and government officials to warn of dire humanitarian consequences.<sup>3</sup>

## Continued: Iran Capitalizing on Post-Earthquake Conditions To Deepen Influence in Syria

### Source:

"الحشد الشعبي" يضغط على النظام في حلب بشقق سكنية لمتضرري الزلزال (PMF pressures the regime in Aleppo via apartment buildings for earthquake victims.) *Enab Baladi* (Syrian opposition news website), 28 February 2023. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/631353>

*On February 8, Ismail Qaani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, visited Aleppo where he inspected earthquake victims' conditions and supervised the work of Iranian rescuers at rubble-clearing sites, according to the Iranian Mehr News Agency. He was the first foreign official to arrive in Syria after the earthquake, and appeared in Aleppo two days before the head of the regime arrived in the city...*

*The researcher on Iranian affairs, Mustafa al-Nuaimi, explained that Iranian activity in Syria falls within two tracks, political and military...On the military level, the cargo planes that land in Aleppo and Damascus may be loaded with precision-strike missile technology and drones, although they were not bombed by Israel... this is a major military track that can be exploited under the guise of aid.*

### Source:

"ما السياق الإقليمي لضربات إسرائيل ضد إيران في سوريا؟" (What is the regional context for Israel's strikes against Iran in Syria?) *Independent Arabia* (Saudi-aligned daily), 10 March 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2s364yp8>

*Opposition media outlets reported that the bombing of Aleppo airport was due to the existence of a weapons and missile depot. The Israeli "Alma" Research Center (close to intelligence) reported that some of them had arrived by land through the Al-Qaim crossing with Iraq, in trucks transporting weapons with humanitarian aid for those affected by the earthquake that hit northern Syria and Turkey on 6 February, while some of these weapons also arrived in a plane to the airport. In another version, the opposition media outlet Orient Net indicated that the weapons were transferred from al-Jarrah Military Airport in Aleppo. The Russian army is now deployed there and allegedly asked the Iranians to transfer their equipment away from the base.*

### Notes:

[1] "Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report," *World Bank*, 20 February 2023. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099084502282328299/pdf/P1721710045bd103f089f109cfbcb15aa2b.pdf>

[2] For more see: Lucas Winter, "Iran Cements its Presence in Syria," *OE Watch*, 05-2019.

[3] According to the UN, the "closure could have severe humanitarian implications for people in Aleppo, one of the worst earthquake impacted governorates in Syria...We call on all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law, including by taking all feasible precautions to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of hostilities." See: "United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim for Syria, El-Mostafa Benlamlah statement on the Aleppo International Airport strikes," 8 March 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/united-nations-resident-coordinator-and-humanitarian-coordinator-ad-interim-syria-el-mostafa-benlamlah-statement-aleppo-international-airport-strikes>

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Colombia's "Total Peace" Negotiations Face New Hurdles



Senate President Roy Barreras at the inauguration ceremony of Colombian President Gustavo Petro.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/142236467@N07/52274493713> Attribution: Flickr, CC BY 2.0

By Ryan Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro arrived in office in the summer of 2022 promising a radical change in the way the government deals with criminal organizations, touting a broad-based peace plan with the country's remaining guerrilla groups. Petro calls his plan "Total Peace," which seeks to end six decades of armed conflict that has left hundreds of thousands dead.<sup>1</sup> According to the excerpted article in Columbia's major newspaper, *El Tiempo*, Columbia's Attor-

ney General has opened an investigation into Petro's son, Nicolás, as well as the President's brother, Juan Fernando, for alleged corruption related to the peace negotiations. The two men stand accused of accepting bribes from criminal organizations seeking to profit from the peace negotiations before they started. Columbia's largest weekly, *Semana*, also reported that Roy Barreras, Colombia's Senate president and a key ally of Petro's, has asked the government to suspend the talks. Barreras' support of Petro's Total Peace plan is critical since reduced sentences to members of criminal organizations who surrender themselves, hand over earnings, and reveal drug trafficking routes cannot be granted without Colombia's Congress first passing enabling legislation granting the authority to reduce sentences. The investigation of Petro's son and brother, as well as Barreras' apparent shift away from the Total Peace plan, cast serious doubt on Petro's signature policy of achieving peace with guerrillas and criminal organizations, with which the government has already entered a ceasefire.

**The president of the Congress, Roy Barreras, expressed his concern about the rumors that are gaining more strength every day and that are related to alleged charges that include Nicolás Petro and the efforts of drug traffickers to benefit from the "total peace" policy of President Gustavo Petro.**

**Source:** "Procuraduría le abre investigación a Nicolás Petro por acusaciones sobre campaña (Attorney General opens investigation into Nicolás Petro for campaign accusations)," *El Tiempo* (the daily with the highest circulation in Colombia), 3 March 2023. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/nicolas-petro-procuraduria-abre-investigacion-contra-hijo-del-presidente-747067>

*The ex-wife of Nicolás Petro assured in an interview...that President Petro's eldest son allegedly received money from Santander Lopesierra, "El hombre Malboro" and Alfonso "El Turco Hilsaca," both former defendants of Colombian justice, for the presidential campaign... According to the woman's version, Petro's son received them at his apartment in Barranquilla and there they gave him one billion pesos.*

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan

**Source:** “Roy Barreras le pide al presidente Petro suspender cualquier tipo de diálogo con narcotraficantes (Roy Barreras asks President Petro to suspend any type of dialogue with drug traffickers),” *Semana* (the largest weekly magazine in Colombia), 6 March 2023. <https://www.semana.com/politica/articulo/atencion-roy-barreras-le-pide-al-presidente-petro-suspender-cualquier-tipo-de-dialogo-con-narcotraficantes/202338/>

*The president of the Congress, Roy Barreras, expressed his concern about the rumors that are gaining more strength every day and that are related to alleged charges that include Nicolás Petro and the efforts of drug traffickers to benefit from the “total peace” policy of President Gustavo Petro. For this reason, Barreras asked the Colombian president to stop negotiations and thus any possibility that there are people who profit from peace...“I ask to suspend the official or unofficial negotiation dialogue with the drug traffickers, as it must be clear that they are not necessary,” he said.*

### Notes:

[1] For an understanding of the broad contours of Petro’s plan, see: Ryan Berg, “Colombia Deemphasizing Coca Eradication in Counterdrug Strategy,” *OE Watch*, 03-2023, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437260>; Ryan Berg, “Colombia’s Congress Authorizes “Total Peace” Negotiation With Guerrilla and Criminal Groups,” *OE Watch*, 01-2023, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434199>

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## CAR Joins Mali in Accusing France of Funding Terrorists

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

The leader of the Central African Republic (CAR), Faustin-Archange Touadéra, is taking a now-familiar tack in the region by accusing French entities of funding insurgents in the country. As described in the first accompanying article from the pan-African news outlet *Jeune Afrique*, at a recent UN meeting of the Least Developed Countries in Doha, Touadéra offered a fiery speech denouncing his country's destabilization thanks to "certain Western countries or their companies which finance armed terrorist groups." Of note is the inclusion of "or their companies" in this statement. The second excerpted article, from the pan-African news aggregator *Le Journal de l'Afrique*, reveals that the French beverage manufacturer Castel is being investigated for potentially having funded rebels in CAR to allow Castel to maintain production there. Touadéra's decision to implicitly claim that France and its companies are funding insurgents in the country may sound familiar: the president of the transition government in Mali, Assimi Goïta, did essentially the same thing during a speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2022.<sup>1</sup> Anti-French, and relatively newly pro-Russian sentiment, is most visibly taking hold in Mali<sup>2</sup> and Burkina Faso,<sup>3</sup> but it is also evident in CAR, which likewise employs Russian Wagner Group mercenaries. These three countries, along with Guinea, are now all



View from Bangui, Central African Republic

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gridarendal/31380037380>, Attribution: Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

**The Central African Republic has been subjected since its independence to systematic looting facilitated by the political instability maintained by certain Western countries or their companies which finance armed terrorist groups.**

seemingly establishing closer ties, especially in the security realm. Denouncing France as the source of instability would appear to be a tactic that will continue to be used by all four in the future.

**Source:** "Faustin-Archange Touadéra charge les Occidentaux (Fausting-Achange Touadéra accuses the West)," *Jeune Afrique* (centrist pan-African news site), 6 March 2023. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1424138/politique/faustin-archange-touadéra-charge-les-occidentaux/>

*During a summit of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) under the aegis of the UN in Doha, Central African President Faustin-Archange Touadéra violently attacked Westerners, accusing them of "maintaining political instability" to plunder the wealth of the country and prevent its development. The Head of State deemed his country "a victim of geostrategic aims linked to its natural resources".*

*The Central African Republic [CAR] has been subjected since its independence to systematic looting facilitated by the political instability maintained by certain Western countries" and "armed terrorist groups whose leaders are foreign mercenaries", he denounced. "The recurring attacks" of these groups aim to "make the country ungovernable, to prevent the State from exercising its right of sovereignty over natural reserves and its legitimate right to self-determination".*

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: CAR Joins Mali in Accusing France of Funding Terrorists

**Source:** Omar Lucien Koffi, “Centrafricaine: Touadéra dénonce le ‘pillage’ de l’Occident (Central African Republic: Touadéra denounces the ‘pillage’ by the West),” *Le Journal de l’Afrique* (pan-African news aggregator), 6 March 2023. <https://lejournaldelafrique.com/republique-centrafricaine-touadera-denonce-le-pillage-de-loccident/>

*In Bangui, in the Central African Republic, pro-government activists took to the streets of the capital to denounce the “Machiavellian plan of Westerners” against their country. Among the targets of the demonstrators: Castel. The beverage giant has been the target of an investigation by the French anti-terrorist prosecutor's office since last summer after revelations about alleged remuneration for the Unit for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) by Castel, which had thus been able to continue its activities in Ouaka province, despite rebel control. In February, several campaigns were launched against Castel, and more precisely its local subsidiary, the Mocaf brewery, under the leadership of Wagner.*

*From now on, it is no longer simply Castel that poses a problem, but the West. And now, it is no longer a question of a simple campaign on social networks or in the streets of Bangui. This Sunday, March 5, it is the President of the Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who attacked the West. A resounding exit, in full United Nations Conference on the least developed countries. And which echoes a discourse that is increasingly widespread throughout the continent.*

*“The Central African Republic has been subjected since its independence to systematic looting facilitated by the political instability maintained by certain Western countries or their companies which finance armed terrorist groups whose main leaders are foreign mercenaries”, launched Touadéra who considers that the CAR is a “victim of geostrategic aims linked to its natural resources.” Thus, “foreign interference” would keep the CAR in “dependence, insecurity, and instability,” to better plunder the wealth of the country, therefore.*

*But at the same time, the president of the Central African Republic is asking for the relaunch of international budgetary aid, while his government has had to do without it since it has been in contact with the Russian group Wagner. Touadéra met Emmanuel Macron in Libreville, during the One Forest Summit, on March 2.*

### Notes:

[1] See: Jason Warner, "Mali Claims France Funded Terrorists: France Denies," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428171>

[2] See: Jason Warner, "Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance," *OE Watch*, 3-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437332>

[3] See: Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso: A Bellwether on Russia and French Presence," *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429302>; Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism with Recruits and Russia," *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436264>

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

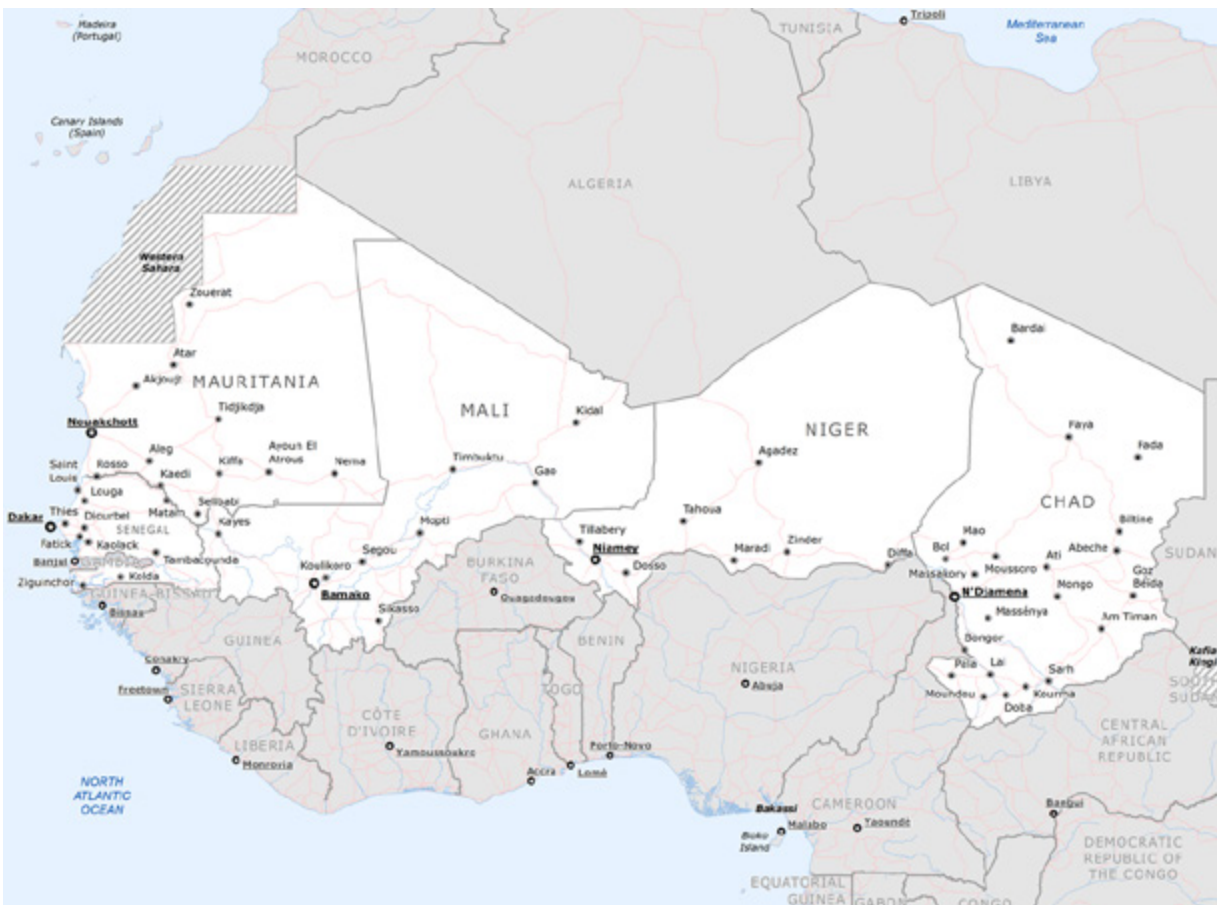
## Al-Qaeda Leader in Maghreb Celebrates French Departure, Claims No Plans To Attack French Homeland

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

In what has been hailed as a groundbreaking interview, *France24* journalist Wassim Nasr was recently granted an interview with Abu Obeida Youssef al-Aanabi, the head of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM, which has been an al-Qaeda branch since 2006/2007,<sup>1</sup> is also the parent group of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin', which has contributed to the profound uptick in jihadist violence in the Sahel region of West Africa in the past five years.<sup>2</sup> The interview, described in the text and published as a video via *France24*, offers unparalleled insights

**AQIM considers it a victory that French troops withdrew from both Mali in August last year and Burkina Faso in February 2023, calling it a vindication of 20 years of jihad in the region.**

into AQIM's current worldview. In the interview, al-Aanabi claims that one of the group's greatest successes has been to help precipitate the withdrawal of most French military forces from the wider Sahel over the past two years, calling it "vindication of twenty years of jihad in the region." Moreover, when asked about AQIM's plans to attack the French homeland, al-Aanabi relayed that the group has no plans to do so, noting frustration that Western countries failed to understand that its qualms against France primarily stem from the latter's activities in West Africa. He also stated his opinion that the Sahel is currently "the epicenter of jihad," and that there were no limits to AQIM's expansion. Finally, al-Aanabi noted that the group is at war with the Islamic State in the region and views the entrance of Russian Wagner mercenaries as being equally colonial as the French presence.



Map of West Africa.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahel\\_Base\\_Map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahel_Base_Map.png) Attribution: JRC, European Commission, CC BY 4.0

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Continued: Al-Qaeda Leader in Maghreb Celebrates French Departure, Claims No Plans To Attack French Homeland

**Source:** Nasr, Wassim, "Le chef d'Aqmi, Abou Obeida Yousef al-Annabi répond à 17 questions de France 24 (The head of AQIM Abou Obeida Yousef al-Annabi responds to 17 questions from France 24)," *France 24*, (centrist state-owned French news outlet), 6 March 2023. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230306-le-chef-d-aqmi-abou-obeida-youssef-al-annabi-r%C3%A9pond-%C3%A0-17-questions>

*Algerian Islamist Abu Obeida Youssef al-Aanabi, the current leader of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), granted an exclusive interview to FRANCE 24 in which he officially confirmed his group is holding French journalist Olivier Dubois, who was kidnapped in Mali in 2021, and discussed the role of jihadism in the Sahel....*

*When asked whether AQIM was planning attacks in France, al-Aanabi said his group's dispute with France was limited to local issues in the Sahel and wider Africa. He went on to criticise Western leaders for failing to acknowledge that AQIM's interests were exclusive to Africa.*

*He said AQIM considers it a victory that French troops withdrew from both Mali in August last year and Burkina Faso in February 2023, calling it a vindication of 20 years of jihad in the region. But Nasr points out that the French withdrawal was due to friction with the Malian junta as well as the arrival of Russian mercenaries. Al-Aanabi said the increasing presence of the Wagner Group was no better, calling them yet another colonial force.*

*Al-Aanabi touted the success of AQIM's recruitment strategy in the Sahel, describing the region as the "epicentre" of jihad today, according to Nasr. Moreover, he said, there are no limits to the group's possibilities for expansion. Al-Aanabi went on to say that AQIM is essentially at war in the Sahel with the Islamic State group, whom he views as "deviants".*

*Al-Aanabi has been on the US watchlist of "international terrorists" since September 2015.*

### Notes:

[1] For more on global reactions to the death of the leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in July 2022, see: Jason Warner, "Global Reactions Vary After Death of Al-Qaeda Leader Al-Zawahiri," *OE Watch*, 09-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425695>

[2] For more on the nature of the Sahel as an epicenter of global terrorism, see: Jason Warner, "Coastal West African States Brace for Wave of Terrorism from the Sahel," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428040>; Jason Warner, "African Leaders, UN See Terrorism in the Sahel as Dire," *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429303>; Jason Warner, "Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance," *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437332>



## Mozambique Regains Control of Islamic State-Afflicted Northern Province With Rwandan Help

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

In March 2023, *Portuguese Radio and Television*, which produces perspectives from Portugal and the broader Portuguese-speaking world, published the excerpted article noting that Mozambique northern province of Cabo Delgado, which two years ago was under siege by militants affiliated with the Islamic State (IS), is now back under the control of the Mozambican government. The key turning point was the intervention of Rwandan troops to support Mozambican military personnel.<sup>1</sup> Mozambique-Rwanda military forces continue to work together in Cabo Delgado to ensure that IS militants do not return. Although the article states that civilians have expressed their gratitude for the newfound security in Cabo Delgado, civilians also claim that the violence is still close by in towns such as Palma.

Roads leading into rural areas remain at risk, and militants still erect flash checkpoints on roadways and abduct, steal from, and even kill civilians. According to the article, while the military's counterinsurgency strategy has been a success, there has been no economic revival plan for Cabo Delgado, which could impede future progress. While some businesses have benefitted from the renewed security, there are still few jobs and significant unemployment among Cabo Delgado's working-age population. As the article asserts, if the counterinsurgency strategy does not include or result in an economic revival in Cabo Delgado, jobless disaffected youth may still turn to the militants out of economic desperation.

**U**nder the watchful eye of heavily armed Mozambican and Rwandan soldiers who guard the streets, the regular activity in the town center has revived again.

**Source:** “Vida regressa a Palma sob patrulha, dois anos após ataque no norte de Moçambique” (Life returns to Palma under patrols two years after the attack in northern Mozambique), *rtp.pt* (popular Portuguese-language broadcaster covering Lusophone affairs), 9 March 2023. [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/vida-regressa-a-palma-sob-patrulha-dois-anos-apos-ataque-no-norte-de-mocambique\\_n1472006](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/vida-regressa-a-palma-sob-patrulha-dois-anos-apos-ataque-no-norte-de-mocambique_n1472006)

*Under the watchful eye of heavily armed Mozambican and Rwandan soldiers who patrol the streets, the regular activity in the town center has revived again. Some contractors already announced their return to Afungi, the site of the energy facilities, in the middle of this year, but decisions from the French oil company TotalEnergies are pending.*

*Meanwhile, the population complains about the lack of opportunities to benefit them from the largest private investment in Africa.... Unemployment and lack of opportunities – namely in emerging investments linked to gas – have been indicated by several observers as some of the reasons why young people are recruited into the ranks of the rebels in northern Mozambique.*

### Notes:

[1] The Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) entered Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique in 2021 to combat the IS-loyal militants in the country. The RDF succeeded in reducing the violence in much of Cabo Delgado and training Mozambican troops in counterinsurgency and, as a result, the RDF deployment period has been extended. For more on Rwanda's military interventions in the region, see: Brendon J. Cannon & Federico Donelli, “Rwanda's Military Deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Neoclassical Realist Account,” *The International Spectator*, 58:1, 109-127, (2023).

## Georgians Consider Outcomes of War in Ukraine

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

The Georgian government condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine initially but has not taken part in any sanctions against Russia out of concern of being drawn into the conflict. Additionally, Georgia's economy remains closely tied to Russia's, and the government continues to contend with the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which have been occupied by Russia-supported forces since the end of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War.<sup>1</sup> While Georgia will likely maintain its neutrality on Ukraine, the accompanying excerpted article from the independent, non-profit think tank *Georgian Institute of Politics* offers a Georgian perspective of five possible outcomes of the Russia-Ukraine war. The article is a follow up to the think tank's initial assessment of possible outcomes, which was published just a few weeks after the war began in 2022. While the report acknowledges that Georgia will not have a direct impact on the outcome of the war, each of the scenarios shows how Georgia will be affected in some way.

**In any case, Georgia needs to start preparing and working on increasing its civil defense capabilities.**

In the first scenario, Ukraine wins the war, which the article's authors believes is probable, resulting in Georgia joining NATO and having deeper integration with Europe. Conversely, the article believes that this would come with the risk that Russia will then destabilize Georgia regardless of who is in power in Moscow. The second scenario examines what could happen if Ukraine turns into a frozen conflict or returns to the status quo before the war began. The article states that a frozen conflict would allow Russia time to restore its military but also would push additional Russian migrants into Georgia. Georgia could also become the focal point of Putin's ire as he looks to claim a quick victory to compensate domestically for losses in Ukraine. This would in turn cause Georgian officials to move away from integrating with Europe and pursue a policy more in line with Russian interests.



Protesters in Tbilisi, 7 March 2023.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia\\_Protest\\_2023\\_VOA.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgia_Protest_2023_VOA.png), Attribution: Public Domain

In the third scenario, Russia achieves its strategic goals in Ukraine, and in the fourth scenario, Russia and NATO engage in full-scale war. These are unlikely according to the article. The fifth and final scenario, which the authors believe is very likely, is that a war of attrition will continue for two or more years and that this will put Georgia in a difficult position. The article notes how Georgian Dream, the ruling party in Georgia's parliament, has been improving ties with Russia, though many in Georgia still see Russia as a threat. In early March, the Georgian government withdrew a bill requiring NGOs to register as foreign agents in Georgia after facing protest that the bill had been influenced by Russia.

Lastly, the article notes that Georgia will face "major strategic dilemmas" regardless of how the war ends and recommends that Georgian officials increase civil defense capabilities and cooperation with Turkey.<sup>2</sup> While the article does not claim to be an official Georgian perspective, it makes clear that Georgia will be impacted by the outcome of the war in Ukraine.

## Continued: Georgians Consider Outcomes of War in Ukraine

**Source:** “One Year of War in Ukraine and Risk Assessment for Georgia: Five (updated) Scenarios,” *Georgian Institute of Politics* (an independent non-profit think tank in Georgia), 13 February 2023. <https://gip.ge/one-year-of-war-in-ukraine-and-risk-assessment-for-georgia-five-updated-scenarios/>

*In March of 2022, just a couple of weeks after Russia launched the full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, GIP proposed four possible scenarios of future developments and their possible implications for Georgia...However, almost one year since the invasion, the conflict seems to be reaching its decisive point...*

*As the war continues reshaping global geopolitics, the following piece will revisit GIP’s previous assessments and offer insights into what has changed over the last 11 months since its publication. Although the war is far from over and significant battles are still ahead, five scenarios discussed in detail below offer some insights into the dilemmas and potential risks that Georgia may face considering different possible developments in Ukraine.*

### **Scenario 1: Ukraine wins the war (Probable)**

*As western support for Ukraine continues to increase, leading to a successful counteroffensive operation, and eventual victory, the geopolitical paradigm in the wider Black Sea region would change drastically... If the situation is going to develop in this direction and Ukraine is going to achieve full de-occupation of its territories (including the Crimean Peninsula), it’s not excluded that the window of opportunity may appear for NATO’s further enlargement to the East...In the best-case scenario, this would also imply Georgia joining the alliance. In addition to NATO enlargement, Russia’s defeat and retreat from the region will also make Georgia’s European integration irreversible...*

*...This scenario implies risks for Georgia from another perspective...Defeat in Ukraine may result in regime change in Russia, leading to internal instabilities and power struggles. This could lead to a spillover of chaos in the already volatile North Caucasus, creating a range of challenges on the border of Georgia. In other words, while a strong Russia is a serious threat to Georgia, an unstable Northern neighbor is no less dangerous for its security.*

*Risks will increase for Georgia even if the Russian regime survives defeat in Ukraine. Since it can still act as a spoiler, the Kremlin might be keen to restore its tarnished prestige by continuing adventurous foreign policy towards Georgia...*

### **Scenario 2: Freezing the conflict and/or returning to status quo ante (Possible)**

*As the war drags on causing an immense number of casualties on both sides, there is a possibility that both Russia and Ukraine could reach the point of exhaustion...*

*This would be either freezing the conflict or returning to the status quo in the Eastern part of Ukraine... the existence conflicts with frozen solutions will also allow Russia to restore its forces and prepare for a new assault. This scenario also implies a risk for Georgia, as preparing for a new offensive would intensify the ongoing “silent” mobilization. This, in its turn, may lead to an increase in Russian migrants to Georgia...*

*Moreover, with conflict intensity decreased in Eastern Ukraine, Russian Federation could apply pressure on Georgia through South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As in the first scenario, amid the upcoming presidential elections in 2024, Putin might need a quick victory on the foreign front to compensate for the damage caused*

*continue on 36*

## Continued: Georgians Consider Outcomes of War in Ukraine

**Source Continued:** Dinakar Peri, “IAF to procure new transport aircraft to replace AN-32,” *The Hindu* (independent English-language newspaper), 3 February 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iaf-issues-tender-to-procure-a-medium-transport-aircraft-to-replace-an-32s/article66467760.ece>

*by the failures in Ukraine. In the worst-case scenario, officials in Tbilisi might be forced to give up its policy of Euro-Atlantic integration and align its external policies with the Kremlin’s...*

### **Scenario 3: The Kremlin achieves its strategic goals (Unlikely)**

*In this scenario, Russia achieves a successful breakthrough in the upcoming major battles. With Western support decreasing, Ukrainian resources exhausting, and a raising death toll among civilians, Ukraine might be forced to concede. Ukraine’s concession would imply the change of the government in Kyiv, recognition of occupied territories as part of Russia and the end of Euro-Atlantic presence in the region for decades to come.*

*As it was outlined in our scenario 2: Georgian nightmare published in March 2022, there is no doubt that in case of such developments, the Kremlin may pose an ultimatum to Tbilisi or may even establish a puppet regime in Tbilisi. Georgia could be dragged into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or even into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)...*

### **Scenario 4: NATO-Russia Full-Scale War (Highly unlikely)**

*Out of all the possible scenarios outline here, this seems to be the least likely, yet still a possibility. Especially if, after a successful counteroffensive in the East, Ukraine will start military operations to free the Crimean Peninsula. Attacks on Crimea or deeper territories in Russia might further escalate the conflict and lead to the Kremlin using a tactical nuclear weapon...*

*In case of a war between Russia and NATO member states, the Black Sea region gains strategic importance. It includes Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, members of the alliance and most likely get involved in the conflict...In this context, Georgia’s strategic location gains vital importance for Russia and NATO allies...*

### **Scenario 5: Attrition warfare continues for 2 or more years (Very likely)**

*There is also a possibility that neither Russia nor Ukraine is going to back down that might lead to the protracted attrition warfare. In this context, illicit trade and alternative imports of the western technology is going to gain even more importance for the Kremlin. This will put Georgia in a difficult position due to its transactional foreign and security policy towards Russia. And deliberately or not, by improving economic ties with Russia, Georgian Dream did end up moving Georgia closer to its erstwhile enemy...*

*Despite the GD’s rhetoric, existing occupied territories remain an obstacle to improving relations with the Kremlin. Opinion polls repeatedly show that the majority of Georgians perceive Russia as a threat and support the country’s pro-European foreign policy...*

*continue on 37*

## Continued: Georgians Consider Outcomes of War in Ukraine

**Source Continued:** Dinakar Peri, “IAF to procure new transport aircraft to replace AN-32,” *The Hindu* (independent English-language newspaper), 3 February 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iaf-issues-tender-to-procure-a-medium-transport-aircraft-to-replace-an-32s/article66467760.ece>

### **Conclusion**

*...All the scenarios outlined above suggest that regardless which direction the situation is going to develop, Tbilisi will be facing major strategic dilemmas. In any case, Georgia needs to start preparing and working on increasing its civil defense capabilities. Similar to what was suggested in our last year’s scenarios, Georgia needs to intensify its cooperation with Turkey a NATO member and a large regional military power that has a potential to counterbalance Russian regional dominance...*

### **Notes:**

[1] For more information on Georgia’s security issues in Russian-occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia, see: Matthew Stein ““Borderization” Continues in Georgia,” *OE Watch*, 03-2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

See also Dodge Billingsley “Russia Flexes Its Muscles in Abkhazia While Citizens Recall Anniversary of War with Georgia,” *OE Watch*, 09-2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/268081>

[2] For more background on Georgia’s security cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, see: Matthew Stein “Trilateral Security in the Caucasus,” *OE Watch*, 07-2017. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

## Georgian Separatist Republic Conducts Military Exercises



Map of Abkhazia.

Source: Sémhur, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abkhazia\\_map-fr.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abkhazia_map-fr.svg);  
Attribution: CC x 3.0

By Dodge Billingsley  
OE Watch Commentary

In March 2023, the government of the Georgian separatist region of Abkhazia conducted a series of military exercises in response to demonstrations in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi calling for the retaking of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>1</sup> According to the excerpted article from the independent but pro-Abkhaz media outlet *Abkhaz World*, Abkhazia conducted a series of military and counterterrorism exercises in the Gali sector, the de facto border between Abkhazia and Georgia. The Gali sector is defined by the Ingury River, a natural but not impenetrable barrier between Georgia and Abkhazia and the scene of periodic infiltration, insurgency, and sabotage by Georgian nation-

als since 1993.<sup>2</sup> According to the excerpted article from Bulgaria-based *Bulgaria News*, Abkhazian Major General Dmitry Dbar told reporters “that the Gal<sup>3</sup> exercises are as close to combat as possible and are aimed at countering subversive groups.”

The current tension between Abkhazia and Georgia is being fueled by Russia’s war in Ukraine. For months, Ukrainian officials have called on Georgia to open a second front against Russia by reclaiming Abkhazia and South Ossetia to diverting Russian forces and attention from Ukraine. Yet, while this scenario might help Ukraine, it could be a military disaster for Georgia, which has taken a more neutral position regarding Ukraine despite numerous anti-Russian and pro-West public protests and hundreds of Georgian volunteers fighting for Ukraine. There is a common presumption that Georgia could only attack Abkhazia if a Western power, most usually said to be the United States, were to facilitate the operation. At the same time, nearly everyone in Geor-

**A**s part of a three-day exercise, employees of the State Security Service... will practice measures to counter terrorist attacks. The exercises of the security forces began on March 12 in the Gal[i] district, where military equipment and personnel were transferred.

gia and many in the West continue to think of Abkhazia only being able to defend itself with Russian forces.<sup>4</sup> The truth probably lies somewhere in between, and the recent Abkhazian military exercises are meant to demonstrate to Georgia that Abkhazia can and will take care of itself, regardless of current nationalist and regional pressures to reignite the conflict.

**Source:** “Abkhazia’s Law Enforcement Agencies Practise Measures to Combat Terrorism and Sabotage,” *Abkhaz World* (independent but pro-Abkhaz media outlet based in London and Turkey), 13 March 2023. <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/current-affairs/2223-practice-measures-to-combat-terrorism-and-sabotage>

*The head of State Security Service under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, Dmitry Dbar, stated that the exercises will simulate combat situations and will take place in several stages.*

*“We will conduct these exercises frequently to prepare for anti-terrorist threats. The fighters must know each other, interact, and be able to carry out coordinated combat missions,” he said.*

*Interior Minister Watler Butba added that the Ministry of Internal Affairs staff will practice measures to release hostages and neutralize attackers at the state border checkpoint.*

## Continued: Georgian Separatist Republic Conducts Military Exercises

**Source:** “Абхазия следи с тревога събитията в Грузия (Abkhazia is watching events in Georgia with concern),” *News Bulgaria* (Bulgarian news source), 14 March 2023. <https://news.bg/int-politics/abhaziya-sledi-s-trevoga-sabitiyata-v-gruziya.html>

*The head of Abkhazia’s State Security Service, Major General Dmitry Dbar, told reporters on Monday that “the exercises are as close to combat as possible and are aimed at countering subversive groups.”*

*“We used to conduct such exercises regularly once a quarter, but given the situation in Georgia and possible threats, we will conduct such events more often, to work out mechanisms to ensure anti-terrorist protection of the population,” he said.*

*We remind you that on March 7 and 8 thousands of people protested against the foreign agents law in Tbilisi, which led to clashes between police and demonstrators. On March 7, the draft law “On transparency of foreign influence”, developed by a group of deputies from the “People’s Power” faction, was adopted in the first reading by the Georgian parliament. On the morning of March 9, the ruling party “Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia” withdrew the bill.*

**Peskov:** *Russia is worried about what is happening in Georgia The Kremlin spokesman hinted that an outside power was trying to bring in an anti-Russian element*

*We recall that Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent more than a decade ago. Moscow has a significant military presence there.*

*Georgia condemns the ongoing Russian “occupation” of the territory.*

### Notes:

[1] South Ossetia and Abkhazia are/were ethnic enclaves within Georgia that petitioned unsuccessfully for independence at the end of the 1980s. Georgia resisted the moves and a war between South Ossetia and Georgia was fought in 1990-1991. A year later war broke out between Abkhazia and Georgia (1992-1993). Georgia lost both conflicts and both territories became de facto independent. Georgia has always maintained that it was defeated in both ethnic enclaves by Russia. The truth is complicated and subject to debate, but the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia (South Ossetia) consolidated the de facto independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

[2] There has been much speculation and rumor as to the nature of the Georgian paramilitary individuals and units raiding Abkhazia. While many believe the Georgian government is behind the low-grade Georgian insurgency in Abkhazia, there are many individuals and groups that appear to be operating on their own initiative—a characteristic of Georgian forces during the war for Abkhazia 1992-1993. See: Dodge Billingsley, “Georgia’s Lingering Border Security Issues,” *OE Watch*, 08-2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/315067>

[3] Georgian place names frequently end in “i,” whereas Abkhazian placenames omit the Georgian spelling and pronunciation. For example, “Gali” in Georgian becomes “Gal” in Abkhazian. Most Western scholarship and media coverage of Abkhazia refers to Abkhazian locations using the Georgian language spellings.

[4] See: Dodge Billingsley, “Georgian Defense Minister Offers Modernization Plan in Face of Russia Threat.” *OE Watch*, 09-2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/395195>

## Western Efforts To Isolate Russia and Iran Falter in Latin America

By Ryan Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

Latin American countries have often spoken in terms of “neutrality” as they have tried to remain “non-aligned” regarding the Russia-Ukraine war.<sup>1</sup> While some countries in the region have condemned Russia’s invasion, none has joined the Western-led sanctions campaign. Nor has any of the six Latin American countries with old Soviet weaponry stepped forward to donate it to Ukraine. Under-scoring these trends is the first article from the Spanish-language outlet *BBC Mundo*, covering German Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s recent trip to Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. At each stop, Scholz implored his counterparts to consider donating their Soviet weapons systems to Ukraine. All three leaders firmly declined. For his part, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva even blamed both Russia and Ukraine for the current conflict. Colombian President Gustavo Petro said he would rather see Colombia’s equipment become “junk” than send it to Ukraine where it could prolong the war. Latin American countries have been similarly reluctant to turn away from Iran. According to the second accompanying article from Argentina’s leading daily newspaper, *La Nación*, two Iranian warships sanctioned by the United States recently docked in Rio de Janeiro. Taken together, these developments suggest neither Russia’s war in Ukraine nor Iran’s domestic crackdowns on protestors and its provision of kamikaze drones to Russia for use in Ukraine have managed to isolate these countries in Latin America.



Photo: Mahdi Marizad Fars News Agency  
 Naval vessels of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy.  
 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ceremony\\_to\\_welcome\\_the\\_33rd\\_and\\_send-off\\_the\\_34th\\_naval\\_groups\\_of\\_the\\_Islamic\\_Republic\\_of\\_Iran\\_Navy\\_%2813%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ceremony_to_welcome_the_33rd_and_send-off_the_34th_naval_groups_of_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran_Navy_%2813%29.jpg)  
 Attribution: Wikimedia, CC-BY-4.0

**In recent days, Russian media in Spanish, such as Sputnik and Russia Today, highlighted the rejection of the various Latin American governments to the requests of...Berlin. ‘The arms race in Ukraine does not have the support of South America,’ the outlets declared.**

**Source:** “Por qué los países latinoamericanos se han negado a enviar armas a Ucrania (Why Latin American countries have refused to send weapons to Ukraine),” *BBC Mundo* (the Spanish-language outlet of the popular British state-owned network), 3 February 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-64506590>

*During a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is visiting several Latin American countries this week, Fernández clarified that Argentina “is not thinking of sending weapons” to the conflict zone. A few days earlier, his peers in Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil had made similar claims...In recent days, Russian media in Spanish such as Sputnik and Russia Today, highlighted the rejection of the various Latin American governments to the requests of Berlin.*



## Continued: Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance

**Source:** “Brasil permite que dos buques de guerra iraníes atraquen en Río pese a las presiones de EE.UU (Brazil allows two Iranian warships to dock in Rio despite US pressure),” *La Nación* (Argentina’s leading daily newspaper), 28 February 2023. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/brasil-permite-que-dos-buques-de-guerra-iranies-atraquen-en-rio-pese-a-las-presiones-de-eeuu-nid28022023/>

*Once Lula’s trip [to the White House] ended, the docking of the ships was authorized. Vice Admiral Carlos Eduardo Horta Arentz, deputy chief of the Brazilian Navy General Staff, gave his approval for the ships to dock in Rio between February 26 and March 4, according to an announcement published on February 23...The Brazilian Navy authorizes a foreign ship to dock in Brazil, but only with prior authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which takes into account the request of the embassy in question and the logistics...Diplomacy with Iran was one of the highlights of Lula’s attempts to bolster Brazil’s international position during his previous presidential terms. In 2010, he traveled to Tehran to meet then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as he tried to broker a US-Iran nuclear deal.*

### Notes:

[1] For more background on Latin America’s response to Russia’s war in Ukraine, see: Ryan C. Berg et al., “A Hesitant Hemisphere: How Latin America Has Been Shaped by the War in Ukraine,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 12 February 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hesitant-hemisphere-how-latin-america-has-been-shaped-war-ukraine>

[2] For more information on the estimated six countries in the region that could donate Soviet-era weapons systems to Ukraine, see: Jeff Seldin, “U.S. Pushing Central, South American Countries to Give Ukraine Quick Military Boost,” *Voice of America*, 20 January 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-pushing-central-south-american-countries-to-give-ukraine-quick-military-boost-/6927591.html>

## Russia-Supported Military Rulers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties

By Jason Warner  
OE Watch Commentary

A new nexus of West African allies is emerging that bears watching. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, which are all led by military dictators generally sympathetic to Russia and antagonistic towards France, continue to deepen their ties, especially regarding military and counterterrorism affairs. As detailed in the first article from the pan-African news aggregator *Africanews.com*, in March 2023, the prime minister of Burkina Faso suggested on a visit to Mali that the two countries create what he called “a federation.” A similar idea had also been broadly discussed in February 2023, when leaders from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea—all of whom had faced sanctions from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for unconstitutional assumptions of power—also discussed the creation of a new regional

organization to help them circumvent ECOWAS.<sup>1</sup> Of note is the inclusion of Guinea in the mix. Since Guinea faces no similar jihadist insurgency as Mali<sup>2</sup> and Burkina Faso,<sup>3</sup> it does not appear to have the same degree of pro-Russian sentiments as Mali and Burkina Faso, which host or are presumed to host mercenaries from the Russian private military company Wagner Group, respectively. Yet, the fact that Guinea is ruled by a military leader may be sufficient to pull Guinea into the pro-Russia orbit of the other two.

As detailed in the second article from *Africanews.com*, this nexus of geopolitical affinities and antipathy was displayed at a January 2023 rally in Burkina Faso decrying French presence and promoting Burkinabè sovereignty. As the article articulates, “Giant posters of Malian Presidents Assimi Goïta and Guinean President Mamady Doumbouya, who seized power like the Burkinabè transitional president, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, were brandished by the demonstrators next to Russian flags.” As this alliance deepens, other francophone West African countries with pro-Russian, anti-French sentiments from civil society, namely, the Central African Republic and Chad, may well be targeted for future recruitment.

**Giant posters of Malian Presidents Assimi Goïta and Guinean President Mamady Doumbouya, who came to power through coups like the Burkinabè transitional president, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, were brandished by the demonstrators next to Russian flags.**

**Source:** “Le Burkina Faso aspire à créer ‘une fédération’ avec le Mali (Burkina Faso seeks to create a federation with Mali),” *africanews.com* (pan-African news aggregator), 2 March 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/02/02/le-burkina-faso-aspire-a-creer-une-federation-avec-le-mali/>

*Burkinabe Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachimson Kyelem de Tambela, visiting neighboring Mali this week, has suggested the creation of a “federation” between his country and Mali.*

*The two states, faced with jihadist violence, and led by putschist soldiers who demanded the departure of French soldiers from their territories, have come closer in recent months.*

*In a speech during a dinner, the head of the Malian government, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, estimated that this working visit will strengthen the ties of cooperation on the security and economic levels between the Republic of Mali and Burkina Faso.*

**Source:** “Des milliers de Burkinabés manifestent pour la ‘souveraineté nationale’ (Thousands of Burkinabe protest for ‘national sovereignty’),” *africanews.com* (pan-African news aggregator), 30 January 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/01/29/des-milliers-de-burkinabes-manifestent-pour-la-souverainete-nationale/>

*Gathered in Place de la Nation, in the center of the capital, at the call of the coordination of associations and organizations of civil society, the demonstrators held up placards on which one could read: “Imperialism, down”,*

*continue on 43*

## Continued: Russia-Supported Military Rulers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties

**Source Continued:** “Des milliers de Burkinabés manifestent pour la ‘souveraineté nationale’ (Thousands of Burkinabe protest for ‘national sovereignty’),” *africanews.com* (pan-African news aggregator), 30 January 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/01/29/des-milliers-de-burkinabes-manifestent-pour-la-souverainete-nationale/>

*"French policy in Africa, down", "No to Macron's diktat", or "Forward for the sovereignty of Burkina".*

*Giant posters of Malian Presidents Assimi Goïta and Guinean President Mamady Doumbouya, who came to power through coups like the Burkinabè transitional president, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, were brandished by the demonstrators next to Russian flags.*

*"Sovereignty, freedom of choice of its partners, obstinate defense of the interests of the Malian people. I am certain that these principles are shared by all the countries which want to take charge of themselves and our brothers and friends of Faso, I am convinced of it, must have similar requirements."*

### Notes:

[1] See: Jason Warner, “West African States Ruled by Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Future Sanctions,” *OE Watch*, 03-2023. Awaiting online publication.

[2] See: Jason Warner, "Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance," *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437332>

[3] See: Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism with Recruits and Russia," *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436264>

## New Milestone in China's Support for Egypt's Space Program

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

Egypt's domestic space program is slowly taking off, thanks in part to a modest Chinese investment that is likely to pay dividends for years to come.<sup>1</sup> The latest milestone in Sino-Egyptian space collaboration came in late February and early March 2023, when China launched into orbit two Egyptian-assembled, remote sensing, low-earth orbit satellites, Horus-1 and Horus-2. As remote sensing tools, the Horus satellites will have various uses for the Egyptian government, including monitoring the vast desert stretches that make up approximately 95 percent of the country's surface. In space, they join two other Egyptian-owned satellites that were launched in 2019: EgyptSat A, a Russian-made earth-observation satellite, and Tiba 1 (Thebes 1), a French-made military communications satellite.<sup>2</sup>

**We are achieving one of the main goals of Egypt, which is the localization of the satellite industry and technology... through this cooperation with China...**

The accompanying excerpt from Egyptian news website *El Watan* cites the head of the Egyptian Space Agency (EgSA), who explained on a popular morning TV show that cooperation with China had put Egypt on the road toward achieving one of its key goals in space, namely the "localization of the satellite industry and technology." The Horus satellites were made at an assembly, integration, and testing center built with Chinese grant money. Egypt hopes to eventually have a satellite launch site and a series of control stations for indigenously produced satellites.<sup>3</sup>

The EgSA, which was established in 2019, has collaborative agreements with the space agencies of several coun-



Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt at Night (NASA, International Space Station Science, 10/28/2010).

Source: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gsf/12868402644>  
Attribution: CC 2.0

tries; however, Chinese financing and know-how may be playing an outsized role in its early development. Chinese support for Egypt's space program dovetails with investments in other information and communications technology sectors that could eventually lead to deepening bilateral cooperation on military satellite and communications technology. Last February, at the IDEX 2023 arms fair in Abu Dhabi, Egypt's Arab Organization for Industrialization signed a deal with the China Aerospace Construction Group Company to "localize manufacturing technology in several defense industries fields, including co-producing a 3D radar to detect and track UAVs."

## Continued: New Milestone in China's Support for Egypt's Space Program

**Source:** وكالة الفضاء المصرية: قمر «حورس 2» يستخدم في الكشف عن الثروات المعدنية" (Egyptian Space Agency: Horus-2 used to uncover mineral resources)," *El Watan* (Egyptian news website), 13 March 2023. <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/6473128e>

*The CEO of the Egyptian Space Agency continued: "We are achieving one of the main goals of Egypt, which is the localization of the satellite industry and technology. We are talking about a major goal in the national space program, one that was partially achieved through this cooperation with China"...*

### Notes:

[1] The Chinese investment consists of three cumulative grants: \$23 million in 2016, \$45 million in 2018, and \$72 million in 2019. See: "Egypt Commences Implementation Phase Of China-funded MisrSat II Satellite And AIT Centre," *al-Monitor*, 9 September 2019. <https://africanews.space/egypt-commences-implementation-phase-of-china-funded-misrsat-ii-satellite-and-ait-centre/>

[2] Egypt's space program is still in its infancy, but its near-term ambitions should not be dismissed. A 100-acre tract of land has been set aside for "Space City" in the yet unfinished New Administrative Capital, to the east of Cairo. Space City hosts the African Space Agency (AfSA), whose headquarters were formally opened in January 2023. See: "African Space Agency formally inaugurated," *Spacewatch Africa*, 30 January 2023. <https://spacewatch.global/2023/01/african-space-agency-formally-inaugurated/>

[3] "Egypt considers space program," *al-Monitor*, 28 September 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/09/egypt-manufacture-satellite-launch-space-technology.html>

## Philippine Interest in Trilateral Security Pact With United States and Japan Possibly Increasing



Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force butai01 – 04

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Japan\\_Maritime\\_Self-Defense\\_Force\\_butai01\\_-\\_04.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Japan_Maritime_Self-Defense_Force_butai01_-_04.jpg); Attribution: Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, CCx4.0

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

In March 2023, the nationalist *Japan Times* published the excerpted article written by Kuni Miyake, the research director for foreign and national security affairs at the Canon Institute for Global Studies in Tokyo. Miyake argues the Philippines has growing concerns about Chinese policies in the South China Sea, including the building of military outposts on atolls claimed by the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Philippines is more likely than in previous decades

to be open to a trilateral partnership with Japan and the United States.

Miyake acknowledges that Philippines leader Rodrigo Duterte has signed economic agreements with Beijing related to issues ranging from oil and gas exploration to fishing rights. However, provocative actions by the Chinese navy, including targeting a Philippine Coast Guard ship with a laser device in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, and China's harassing other smaller Southeast Asian countries, has contributed to momentum building in the Philippines government for closer security partnerships with Japan and the United States. In contrast to Beijing, Miyake argues that Japan must stress to the Philippine government the important geopolitical role of the Philippines in their bilateral relations.

**Beijing is determined to change the status quo in the South China Sea by continuing to harass neighboring 'small' countries.**

Miyake's article comes after the Philippines began contemplating a visiting forces agreement (VFA) with Japan.<sup>2</sup> For example, the second excerpted article in the Philippine publication *Inquirer* from November 2022 quoted the country's Senate President, Juan Miguel Zubiri, who supports a VFA. Another senator stated a VFA would not only be beneficial to the Philippines because of the training Japan can provide, but also because the VFA would increase mutual preparedness between Japan and the Philippines for natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies.

**Source:** Kuni Miyake, "The geopolitical trajectory of the Philippines is changing," *japantimes.co.jp* (English-language daily with a nationalistic editorial perspective), 8 March 2023. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2023/03/08/commentary/world-commentary/philippine-trilateral-cooperation/>

*Returning to Manila this time, I was struck by a series of developments: a growing anxiety toward China among the populace, dramatic improvement in U.S.-Philippine relations and growing momentum to advance trilateral-security cooperation between Japan, the Philippines and the United States, which until a few years ago would have been only a dream.*

*In January of this year, Marcos was invited to China as a state guest and signed 14 agreements as the Chinese business community expressed intentions to invest \$22.8 billion in the Philippines. Nevertheless, Beijing is determined to change the status quo in the South China Sea by continuing to harass neighboring "small" countries. In February this year, for example, a Chinese Coast Guard vessel blocked the path of a Philippine Coast Guard ship within the island nation's exclusive economic zone while another Chinese vessel targeted a Philippine ship with a laser device.... What I found most fascinating in Manila was the idea that security cooperation between Japan, the U.S. and the Philippines is gaining momentum these days.*

## Continued: Philippine Interest in Trilateral Security Pact With United States and Japan Possibly Increasing

**Source:** “Senators push for VFA with Japan,” *inquirer.net* (popular pro-democracy newspaper in the Philippines), 14 November 2022. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1692799/senators-push-for-vfa-with-japan>

*Senators are keen to endorse a visiting forces agreement (VFA) with erstwhile invader Japan, making it only the third nation with which the country has such an extraordinary agreement, next to the United States and Australia. “I’m sure we can muster enough support in the Senate for a visiting forces agreement with Japan. They’re good partners,” Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said during the Senate plenary’s marathon budget deliberations on Thursday night.*

*Forging a VFA with Japan would not only be helpful in joint training but also during natural disasters, said Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda. “This is not just military training but it will also include disaster response and disaster risk reduction.”*

*China’s force buildup in the region and opportunities for trilateral coordination and cooperation will be among the key topics on the agenda.*

### Notes:

[1] One of the first significant South China Sea confrontations between China and the Philippines occurred with China’s seizure of Scarborough Shoal in 2012. At the time, the Philippines believed an agreement existed whereby both countries would withdraw naval patrols from the shoal as typhoon season approached. However, when Philippine ships left the shoal, China placed a barrier across the entrance to the shoal and stationed coast guard boats there to chase away Philippine fishing boats. See: Mark Raymond and David A. Welch, “What’s Really Going On in the South China Sea?,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 42(2), 214-239, August 2022. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/18681034221086291>

[2] Since the rise of China in the 1990s, Philippine and Japanese political leaders and high-ranking defense officials have conducted goodwill visits and high-level dialogues, while Japan has consistently provided emergency relief assistance to the Philippines in the wake of earthquakes and typhoons. However, a VFA between the two countries would represent a significant elevation of the two countries’ bilateral ties. See: Renato Cruz De Castro, “Exploring a 21st-Century Japan-Philippine Security Relationship: Linking Two Spokes Together?,” *Asian Survey* Vol. 49 (4, 691-715), 2009. <https://online.ucpress.edu/as/article-abstract/49/4/691/24277/Exploring-a-21st-Century-Japan-Philippine-Security?redirectedFrom=fulltext>