

Foreign Military Studies Office



OEWATCH

Issue 6
2023

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



| | |
|---|---|
| CHINA | IRAN |
| 3 People's Liberation Army Changing Mission of Civilian Personnel | 23 Iran Unveils New Thermobaric Warhead |
| 5 Beijing Expands Counter-Espionage Law To Crack Down on Foreign Access to Chinese Information | 25 Iran Opens New Helicopter, Drone Base in Southeastern Provincial Capital |
| 7 Chinese Perspective on Manned-Unmanned Coordinated Operations on the Modern Battlefield | 27 Iran Ready To Help Syria Rebuild Its Defense Infrastructure |
| 8 China Justifies Naval Pressure Against Japan | TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME |
| 10 China Eyes Opportunity To Expand 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' With Mexico | 29 Organized Crime Engulfing Ecuador |
| RUSSIA | 31 Burkina Faso Claims Disguised Jihadists, Not Military, Responsible for Civilian Killings |
| 12 Regional Analyst Questions Effectiveness, Sustainability of Russian Missile Strikes in Ukraine | 34 Vast Majority of Malians Express Confidence in Russia's Ability To Address Jihadist Violence |
| 15 Russian Domestic Support for Ukraine Invasion Weakens as Fighters Return Home | GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT |
| 18 Russian Defense Ministry Approves Five-Year Plan To Expand and Modernize Arctic Air Bases | 36 Sudanese Conflict Harms Russian Military and Mining Interests |
| 19 Russia Strengthens Its Military Presence in Central Asia | 38 India's Perspective on Negotiations With China Over Line of Actual Control |
| 21 Russia Concerned About Dependence on Chinese Technology | 41 Key Arab Countries Join Chinese-Led Regional Body as Dialogue Partners |
| | 43 South African Army Chief Visits Russia To Discuss Arms Amid U.S. Tensions |
| | 46 UAE Seeking Greater Cooperation With Egyptian Defense Sector |

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:

President Putin and Chinese President Xi, Kremlin, June 2019.

Source: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60669/photos> Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE
OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 6

2023

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

Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Ryan Berg
Dodge Billingsley
Ray Finch
Les Grau
Kevin McCauley
Michael Rubin
Thomas Shrimpton
Matthew Stein
Jason Warner
Lucas Winter
Jacob Zenn

People's Liberation Army Changing Mission of Civilian Personnel

By Kevin McCauley
OE Watch Commentary

Civilian personnel have previously served in China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) primarily in administrative and support roles. However, the regulations on the management of civilian personnel within the Chinese military¹ were revised in January 2023 to improve recruitment, career development, incentives, and retirement. The revision is another effort to increase the quality of talent within the PLA² but also indicates an expansion of the missions that civilian personnel will be tasked to conduct. A recent article in China's official military newspaper, *PLA Daily*, discusses the roles civilians play in the world's militaries and describes the importance of civilian personnel to operational support missions in China's own Strategic Support Force.³ The article reiterates the need to improve talent to

Civilian personnel can not only provide support for forward combat operations but also independently undertake non-contact operational tasks. They play an irreplaceable and important role in preparing for war and are a new support for combat effectiveness.



Emblem of People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army_Strategic_Support_Force#/media/File:Emblem_of_People%27s_Liberation_Army_Strategic_Support_Force.png
Attribution: Public Domain

prepare for war and take on more mission responsibilities. Civilian personnel are a resource to increase scientific and technological innovation in the military, which the PLA currently views as insufficient. The article notes that as modern warfare becomes more intelligent, unmanned, and non-contact, the PLA should deeply integrate civilian personnel into the operational support system to play a key role in winning future wars. This indicates that within the Strategic Support Force civilian personnel will conduct non-contact combat operations possibly including intelligence, electronic warfare, and information warfare function.

Source: “发挥文职人员在作战支援保障任务中的重要作用 (Give Full Play to the Important Role of Civilian Personnel in Operational Support Missions),” *PLA Daily* (Official PRC Military Newspaper), 20 January 2023. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-01/20/content_332257.htm

A clarion call that civilian personnel are indispensable in preparing for war. With the deepening development of the world's new military revolution and profound changes in forms of war and combat styles, developed countries generally allocate and use civilian personnel as an important operational support force, and civilian personnel has become an important human resource for modern armies. At present, China is facing extremely severe and complex security challenges, and it is necessary to accelerate the preparation for military struggle and comprehensively improve the quality and level of preparation for war. This requires keeping up with the trend of military development, building a modern military force system, integrating civilian personnel into all aspects and the entire process of military training and preparation, allowing the vitality of all combat effectiveness elements to erupt and fully flowing the source of military modernization construction.”

continue on 4

Notes:

[1] PLA civilian personnel wear military-style uniforms with emblems to distinguish them from military personnel.

[2] For additional information, see: “构建新时代中国特色军队文职人员制度体系(Building a Civilian Personnel System of Systems in the Military with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era),” *PLA Daily*, 7 January 2023. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-01/07/content_331347.htm; also see Kevin McCauley, PLA Education Reforms: Problems Remain After More Than Twenty Years, *OE Watch*, 10-2022 file:///C:/Users/knPMC/OneDrive/Kevin/Pictures/a%20Twitter/OE%20Watch,%20Vol%2012,%20Issue%2010,%202022.pdf

[3] China’s Strategic Support Force is responsible for strategic missions such as space-based intelligence, reconnaissance, and electronic countermeasures, signals intelligence, information warfare, and communications.

Beijing Expands Counter-Espionage Law To Crack Down on Foreign Access to Chinese Information

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

In April 2023 Chinese lawmakers passed a wide-ranging update to Beijing's counter-espionage legislation banning the transfer of "all documents, data, materials, and items related to national security and interests" and broadening the definition of spying.¹ The amendments, as published in the excerpted statement from the Chinese government's *China.gov* website, note that they will take effect on 1 July 2023. The amendments appear to target foreign information-gathering efforts, especially by limiting access to key government and economic data and expanding the range of legal definitions of espionage.²

Since the introduction of the legislation in 2014, Beijing has detained dozens of Chinese and foreign nationals on suspicion of espionage.³ Several high-profile incidents have emerged, including those involving an Australian journalist and former TV anchor; a Japanese executive;

and even a U.S. citizen who has been detained in China since 2016 on charges of espionage related to research he published using open-source information that the Chinese government later deemed to be "state secrets." Collectively, these incidents have brought attention to Beijing's unclear definition of what constitutes "espionage." Earlier this year, Chinese government raids on foreign firms conducting due diligence work in China further underscored the often-questionable lengths to which Beijing will go to control access to information that could be used for a variety of efforts that run counter to the Chinese Communist Party's interests.⁴

Activities carried out, instigated or funded ... to steal, pry into, purchase or illegally provide state secrets, intelligence, and other documents, data, materials, or items related to national security.

Source: 中华人民共和国反间谍法 (People's Republic of China's Counter-Espionage Law)," *China.gov* (Official Website of the People's Republic of China's Central People's Government), 27 April 2023. http://www.gov.cn/yaowen/2023-04/27/content_5753385.htm

Article 4: "Acts of espionage" as used in this Law refers to the following conduct:

(1) Activities that endanger the national security of the People's Republic of China that are carried out, prompted, or funded by an espionage organization and its agents, or carried out by agencies, organs, individuals, or other collaborators domestically or outside the PRC borders;

(2) Participation in an espionage organization or acceptance of tasks from an espionage organization and its agents, or seeking to align with an espionage organization and its agents;

(3) Activities carried out, instigated or funded by foreign institutions, organizations, and individuals other than espionage organizations and their representatives, or in which domestic institutions, organizations or individuals collude, to steal, pry into, purchase or illegally provide state secrets, intelligence, and other documents, data, materials, or items related to national security, or in which state employees are incited, enticed, coerced, or bought over to turn traitor.

(4) Network attacks, intrusions, obstructions, control, or disruptions targeting state organs, units involved with secrets, or critical information infrastructure, that are carried out, prompted, or funded by a espionage organization and its agents, or carried out by agencies, organs, individuals, or other collaborators domestically or outside the PRC borders;

continue on 6

(5) indicating targets for enemies;

(6) conducting other espionage activities.

This law applies where espionage organizations and their agents engage in espionage activities targeting a third country within the territory of the People's Republic of China or using citizens, organizations, or other conditions of the PRC, endangering the PRC's national security.

Article 14: *No individual or organization may unlawfully obtain or possess any documents, data, materials or items that are state secrets.*

Notes:

[1] For an English-language translation of the Counter-Espionage Law, see: <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/counter-espionage-law-2023/>

[2] For a detailed analysis of China's Counter-Espionage Law and the new amendments, see: <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/bad-as-it-ever-was-notes-on-the-espionage-law/>

[3] The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) has determined many foreign citizens, including U.S. citizens, have been denied due process rights and that they are arbitrarily detained in violation of international law. In March 2023, China's Foreign Ministry released a report accusing the United States of arbitrary detention of individuals at home and abroad one month prior to releasing its amendments to its counter-espionage legislation. See: "The United States' Arbitrary Detention at Home and Abroad: Truth and Facts," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 29 March 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202303/t20230329_11050809.html

[4] In addition to due diligence firms, Beijing has blocked access to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), China's largest academic database, in an effort that analysts assess is aimed at limiting foreign researchers' access to public discourse and government data. For more on Beijing's restriction of access to CNKI, see: Lin Yang, "China to Limit Access to Largest Academic Database," *Voice of America*, 30 March 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-to-limit-access-to-largest-academic-database-/7029581.html>

Chinese Perspective on Manned-Unmanned Coordinated Operations on the Modern Battlefield

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

Researchers with China's Air Force Research Institute recently published an article in China's *PLA Daily* outlining five trends in coordinating manned and unmanned battlefield operations. Except for the potential for clustered autonomous systems to increase battlefield uncertainty, the authors argue that recent efforts to divide labor between complementary manned and unmanned systems have provided more options for tactical configuration and combat synergy.

The authors, Guo Yilun and Ma Quan assert there are three types of manned-unmanned platforms: 1) direct transmission of unmanned information for rear control, 2) interoperability between manned and unmanned platforms under limited control, and 3) completely controlled manned-unmanned platforms. As autonomous platforms continue to develop, the Chinese military will be able to combine manned and unmanned platforms into combat groups that will facilitate information processing, mission planning and decision-making, command distribution, and formation of operations to provide flexibility in constantly developing battlefield postures. A second benefit the authors believe will result from closer man-machine coordination is increased battlefield situational awareness. A real-time tactical "cloud" system will rapidly detect, process, and distribute requirements based on developing target data. Information from space platforms, sensors, and



Hongdu **GJ-11 Sharp Sword**
(Chinese unmanned combat aerial vehicle).

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hongdu_GJ-11#/media/File:Gongji-11_20221020.jpg
Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

weapon systems in the land, sea, air, and space domains will be cross-verified and integrated into a unified framework that coordinates manned and unmanned data. Third, distributed command-and-control systems will be able to disaggregate computing, collection, and decision-making functions and assign sub-problems to collaborative manned-unmanned groups. Fourth, the authors argue that systems of higher autonomous control bring greater uncertainty in warfare; as such, autonomous systems should be classified by the degree to which they are integrated with manned systems. The authors suggest four levels of autonomy: non-autonomy, single-machine autonomy, multi-machine autonomy, and clustered autonomy. Finally, the authors assert that further integrating unmanned systems will save more than 60 percent the cost of manned operations and double their effectiveness.

The manned-unmanned combat team has rewritten the modern battlefield formation model, with manned platforms leading unmanned platforms to form an integrated combat team.

Source: 郭一伦 (Guo Yilun) and 马权 (Ma Quan), “撬动战争形态衍变的新支点 (Prying a New Lever in Evolving Warfare Patterns),” *PLA Daily* (PLA-owned media), 27 April 2023. http://www.81.cn/bz_208549/10165050.html

In the face of future intelligent battlefield environments, the use of a large number of intelligent, unmanned weapons and equipment will reshape battlefield combat force systems. Manned/unmanned combat forces will be flexibly organized as needed, and can be combined into different types and sizes of combat groups, which can be linked for information fusion processing, mission planning and decision-making, command distribution, and formation operations according to combat tasks and battlefield posture.

China Justifies Naval Pressure Against Japan

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 10 May, the Chinese-language website [sohu.com](https://www.sohu.com) published the below excerpted article, which justifies Chinese naval activities in the East Sea as a response to perceived hostile actions by Japan. Moreover, the article indicates that Chinese pressure against Japan is achieving positive results. According to the article, a Chinese naval reconnaissance ship entered the Sea of Japan through the Tsushima Strait between South Korea and Japan, sailed around Japanese territory, and came within only six nautical miles the Japanese coast.¹ While the article refrains from claiming any strategic benefits, it argues the operation succeeded in frightening and thus sending a message to Japan.

The article also claims that Japanese media has interpreted the Chinese naval activities as treating Japan as an enemy. It suggests that as long as Sino-Japanese relations remain tense, Chinese naval reconnaissance ships will continue performing missions in the waters surrounding Japan. Likewise, the article notes that China dispatched several destroyers and other naval ships to conduct live fire drills in the East Sea after pro-Taiwan remarks were made by officials at the G7 foreign ministers meeting in Nagano, Japan.

When Sino-Japanese relations become extremely tense, there will be another reconnaissance ship that will continue to perform missions in the waters surrounding Japan.

The end of the article alludes to the alliance between China and Russia, where it notes that Japan erred by trying to restore militarism and embracing confrontation with China and Russia.² As a result of this, the article argues that Japan was exhausting its Self-Defense Forces in dealing with both Chinese and Russian military pressure. This implies that China is employing a strategy of weakening the Japanese military through over-extending its forces and wearing it down, a strategy China continues to use against Taiwan.



JS Kurama sails in the East China Sea during a trilateral exercise, June 2021.

Source: Paul Kelly https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JS_Kurama_sails_in_the_East_China_Sea_during_a_trilateral_exercise,_21_Jun._2012_a.jpg; Attribution: CCx2.0

Source: “解放军军舰横穿日本，距离海岸仅6海里，海自如临大敌 (The warships of the People's Liberation Army went across Japan, only 6 nautical miles from the coast, and freely encountered the enemy),” *sohu.com* (popular pro-government Chinese-language website targeting a youth and gaming readership), 10 May 2023. https://www.sohu.com/a/674302624_121462986

Japan has become an anti-China bridgehead, and the reconnaissance ships of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) approached its territorial waters to frighten the Self-Defense Forces sufficiently. According to the news released by the Ministry of Defense of Japan, the reconnaissance ship sailed around Japan in three weeks.... At the closest time, it was only about 6 nautical miles from the Japanese mainland.

When Sino-Japanese relations are extremely tense, there will be another reconnaissance ship that will continue to perform missions in the waters surrounding Japan.

In response to remarks related to Taiwan made at the G7 foreign ministers' meeting, China not only rejected such ludicrous remarks diplomatically. At the same time, a destroyer from the navy in the Eastern Theater Command of the PLA was dispatched to conduct live-fire shooting training in a specific area of the East China Sea.

In recent years, Japan has had to face regular military pressure from China and Russia, which has exhausted its Self-Defense Forces.

Notes:

[1] The Tsushima Strait was the site of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 in which Japan was victorious. More than one century later, since 2020, Japan has observed an increase in Russian naval ships that have passed through the Tsushima Strait and Soya Strait to its north nearly twice as often than a decade earlier. This has concerned the Japanese Ministry of Defense. See *Japan Ministry of Defense*, “Development of Russian Armed Forces in the Vicinity of Japan,” *mod.go.jp*, September 2021. https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/sec_env/pdf/ru_d-act_e_210906.pdf

[2] Although Japan has been upgrading its military capabilities over the past several years, this has been amid—and generally in response to—a military build-up by China. Further, Japan has consistently since the 1990s spent only between .09% and 1% of its GDP on the military. China, however, has viewed Japan as engaging in “military expansion planning” and has strongly criticized Japan for this. For more, see: Sheila A. Smith, “How Japan Is Upgrading Its Military,” *CFR*, February 24, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-japan-upgrading-its-military>

China Eyes Opportunity To Expand ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ With Mexico



A Mexican state dinner for Chinese President Xi Jinping, held by former Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cena_de_Estado_que_en_honor_del_Excmo._Sr._Xi_Jinping,_Presidente_de_la_Rep%C3%ABlica_Popular_China,_y_de_su_esposa,_Sra._Peng_Liyuan_%288959188433%29.jpg Attribution: Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 2.0

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China-Mexico relations date back to 1972, when Mexico broke diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan). For much of Mexico’s recent history, however, its economic and diplomatic relations have been dominated by its neighbor to the north. While its relationship with Mexico pales in comparison to that of the United States, China’s presence in Mexico continues to grow.¹ As noted in the excerpted article from business-focused Mexican daily *El Economista*, 2023 marks the tenth anniversary of the China-Mexico “comprehensive strategic partnership,” the highest form of partnership China maintains with foreign countries and one of seven such relationships in the Latin America region. The “comprehensive strategic partnership” category implies the

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs. As noted in the article, China’s direct investment in Mexico grew 18 percent in 2022.² Yet, the relationship goes beyond trade and investment. At a reception for Chinese Culture Day, Zhang Run, China’s Ambassador

to Mexico, said China has a desire to strengthen its ties to Mexico and push together toward a multipolar world and the “democratization” of international affairs.

Indeed, more recent controversies in the bilateral relationship have not managed to knock it off course. China’s role in producing chemical precursors for fentanyl, which have come to major public attention in recent years, has not damaged its ties to Mexico. President López Obrador insists that Mexico does not produce fentanyl but simply transits the finished product through the country to the United States after it arrives from China. López Obrador has sought help from the Chinese, according to Spanish daily *El País*. The outlet reported that China’s Foreign Ministry responded by proclaiming that there is no fentanyl trafficking between China and Mexico.³ While China-Mexico ties must be understood in the context of U.S.-Mexico relations, which continue to dominate Mexico’s orientation, China’s increased ties to Mexico have economic, diplomatic, and security implications for the operational environment, especially under López Obrador, who wants to build a buffer between Mexico and the United States by leveraging ties to China.

Source: “China ve potencial en la relación con México (China sees potential in relations with Mexico),” *El Economista* (a Mexican newspaper focused on business and economics), 15 April 2023. <https://www.economista.com.mx/internacionales/China-ve-potencial-en-la-relacion-con-Mexico-20230415-0017.html>

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries...Mexico and China have potential in exchange and cooperation in various areas such as culture, education, and tourism. In addition, the two countries are closely linked in the global industrial and supply chains, while direct investment from the Asian country to Mexico increased 18% in 2022.

Source: “López Obrador insiste en que México no produce fentanilo y afirma que llega de China (López Obrador insists that Mexico does not produce fentanyl and that it arrives from China),” *El País* (the Spanish newspaper with hemispheric coverage), 5 May 2023. <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-05-05/lopez-obrador-insiste-en-que-mexico-no-produce-fentanilo-y-afirma-que-llega-de-china-tenemos-pruebas.html>

López Obrador affirmed that the shipment, intercepted this week in the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, is the latest evidence that the substance [fentanyl] is not produced in the country, but that it arrives finished to be sold in the U.S. market. “We already have proof,” said the president at a press conference. López Obrador announced that he will send a new letter to request the cooperation of the Xi Jinping government in the fight against drugs to identify suspicious shipments and prevent them from leaving Asia.

Notes:

[1] For a more comprehensive history of Mexico’s ties to China, see: “The Evolution of PRC Engagement in Mexico,” *Global Americans*, 24 August 2022. <https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/08/the-evolution-of-prc-engagement-in-mexico/>

[2] For more information on China’s expansion of investment in Mexico, see: “Why Chinese Companies are Investing Billions in Mexico,” *New York Times*, 3 February 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/business/china-mexico-trade.html>

[3] For information on how cartels use social media to market and sell their product, see: Ryan Berg, “Latin America’s Cartels Embrace Social Media to Sell Drugs and Narco Culture,” *OE Watch*, 01-2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/380363>

Regional Analyst Questions Effectiveness, Sustainability of Russian Missile Strikes in Ukraine



Kh-47M2 Kinzhal on a **MiG-31K** Victory Day Parade 2018 Moscow.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2018_Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade_66.jpg; Attribution: Kremlin.ru, CCA 4.0 International

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Although the intensity of Russian missile strikes against Ukraine increased from March and April 2023 to May 2023, the somewhat limited nature of the strikes may be an indication that Russia is running into a supply problem that could have a strategic impact on its ambitions in Ukraine and its ability to sell weapons on the international arms market. According to the recent accompanying article from Republic of Georgia-based *Resonance Daily*, which monitors the war in Ukraine and Russian military affairs in general, Russia may be squandering its missile stockpile in a somewhat piecemeal effort to break or find a weakness in Ukraine's missile defense that it cannot currently exploit. From the perspective of the Georgian defense analyst quoted in the article, "Russia is increas[ing] the intensity [of missile strikes] to somehow find a loophole in these [Ukraine air defense] systems and break through them." This, the analyst points out, is due to Russia's inability to achieve any breakthroughs in the ground war.

Russia is increas[ing] the intensity [of missile strikes] to somehow find a loophole in these [Ukraine air defense] systems and break through them.

The article, published in the wake of a barrage of Russian missile and drone strikes on Kyiv on 16 May, underscores that Russia is thought to possess only 80 Kinzhal (dagger) hypersonic missiles, and that Ukrainian missile defenses destroyed one "dagger" on 6 May and six more on 16 May. Accordingly, it asserts, Russia now likely has 73 "daggers" in its arsenal. Collectively, these developments suggest that the **Kinzhal**, as well as other missiles in Russia's arsenal, are quickly becoming a finite resource due to attrition and sanctions, the latter of which makes it much more difficult to manufacture more of these weapons. If the estimations

of Russia's stockpiles are correct, and current sanctions hold, Russia will not be able to replenish its stockpiles in any meaningful way in the near future. As a result, Russia does not possess weapon systems in sufficient numbers to allow it to strike Ukraine with enough salvos to overwhelm Ukrainian missile defense. Moreover, Moscow will be severely impacted in its ability to wage war on any front, threatening its positions in Ukraine and Syria, as well as curtailing its ambitions elsewhere.

Source: Tamta Chachanidze, “ყველაზე მასიურებული სარაკეტო დარტყმა კიევზე და „სათაგური“ ბახმუტში - ბოლო ცნობები ფრონტიდან (The most massive missile attack on Kiev and the "keystone" in Bakhmut - latest news from the front),” Resonance Daily (Georgia based media outlet focused on foreign affairs)16 May 2023. http://www.resonancedaily.com/mobile/index.php?id_rub=8&id_artc=181367&fbclid=IwAR39bK06tvFq8JAzCvR9QhAJVVqUvU3uFI4iITkgHFPXru72jkKrz5f4yQQ

On May 16, Russia launched the most massive three-hour missile attack on Kiev in the history of war. Aeroballistic missiles of the "Kinjali" type were also used. According to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the air defense forces of the country neutralized all the missiles. The Russian side claims the opposite - that with one "Kinjali" the Ukrainians destroyed the air defense system "Patriot"....

From the footage spread on social networks, it can be seen that there were indeed fires in Kyiv after the May 16 rocket attack, however, according to the administration of the capital city, it was caused by the fragments of the downed rockets. According to military analysts, the Russians are already trying to force Ukraine to make some kind of concession with intense air strikes. Or is this a new strategy to "somehow look ugly" to the Western anti-aircraft systems transferred to Ukraine.

They also do not rule out that "Kinjal" was hit by "Patriot", because there is no such thing as 100% and ideal air defense, and "one or two missiles will defeat even the best air defense".

...

At dawn on May 16, the Russians launched the most massive missile attack on Kiev in the last year, which lasted more than three hours....

*According to Valery Zaluzhny, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, in the early hours of May 16, the Russian occupation forces attacked Ukraine from the northern, southern and eastern directions with 18 missiles. According to him, the opponent used 6 aeroballistic missiles "Kinjali", 9 missiles "**Calibre**" from naval bases and 3 ground missiles "**Iskander**". Air defense forces destroyed all 18 missiles.*

Several buildings and vehicles were damaged in different districts of Kyiv. 3 people were injured. According to Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko, it was caused by debris from Russian missiles. However, the Russian side claims otherwise.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, on May 16, a "Patriot" air defense system was destroyed with a "Kinjali" missile. In addition, according to the agency, "high-precision weapons struck warehouses of Ukrainian ammunition and weapons, which the West supplied to Kyiv".

*On the same day the Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that, "Russian air defense systems shot down seven **Storm Shadow** long-range cruise missiles recently handed over to Ukraine by Britain, the same number of Hymars shells, as well as three Harm-type radar-detecting missiles. In addition, 22 Ukrainian planes were destroyed in Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions.*

The Minister of Defense of Ukraine responded to the deadly attack on Kiev and thanked the Air Force of Ukraine for its work and impressive results. "The next incredible success of the Armed Forces of Ukraine! Last night, our sky defenders shot down six Russian hypersonic 'Daggers' and 12 more missiles," Reznikov wrote on Twitter.

In addition, the Minister of Defense of Ukraine wrote an arithmetic equation: "80-1-6=X", implying the total number of "Kinjali" missiles possessed by Russia to be only 80. On May 6, the Ukrainians destroyed 1 and 6

continue on 14

additional "daggers" on May 16. Accordingly, the Russians now likely have 73 "daggers" in their arsenal.

Colonel Lasha Beridze states to *Resonance Daily* that the Russians no longer have the resources of a ground attack and are now trying to compensate for this with air strikes.

"Russia no longer has options for a ground attack. They understand very well that they will not be able to defend themselves for a long time, and that is why they are already trying to take Ukraine to some kind of favorable concession with such airstrikes, or it is simply a punitive operation.

"Ukraine already has "Patriot" systems that can fight with "Kinjals" and quite successfully. It has been neglected many times already. Even the best air defense will be hit by one or two missiles, there is no such thing as perfect. Many developed countries could not withstand airstrikes like Ukraine.

"The Ukrainians are successfully repelling the attacks, and as time goes by, these air defense capabilities will increase.

"At the end of the day, Russian armaments with Western technologies have no chance to win and turn the battlefield in their favor. It seems they will increase their airstrikes if they have the chance. However, no matter how they increase missile strikes, there are all indications that they will not be able to increase its effectiveness. Don't get angry and the "daggers" will come out", said Lasha Beridze to "Resonance".

Caucasus International University professor and military analyst Vakhtang Maisaya told "Resonance" that massed strikes have become a common strategy of the Russians, which may be aimed at disrupting the existing anti-aircraft systems in Ukraine.

"It seems that this is already a kind of strategy of the Russians, when they try to break through the anti-missile defense, which is very effective, and they increase the intensity to somehow find a loophole in these systems and break through them. When the Ukrainians started intercepting missiles, the Russians now switched to intensive strikes," Maisaya said.

Notes:

[1] Missiles are not the only Russian weapon system to be in short supply. The number of Russian aircraft are also being diminished. For insight regarding the limited number of Su-35 fighter bombers, see: "Russia's Su-35: Are Its Military Aircraft Exports Headed for a Fall?," *The Rand Blog*, 20 October 2022. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/10/russias-su-35-are-its-military-aircraft-exports-headed.html>

Russian Domestic Support for Ukraine Invasion Weakens as Fighters Return Home

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

According to the excerpted article from official Kremlin news outlet *Parliamentskaya Gazeta*, during the Victory Day celebration on 9 May, President Putin declared “all of Russia has rallied to support the participants in the special military operation in Ukraine.” Despite some skepticism of such claims, indeed, most indicators suggest that Russian civil society support for the invasion has remained high over time. Some of this robust domestic support stems from the Kremlin’s control over the country’s major media, which has over the past 15 months asserted that Russian soldiers are protecting their country against a quasi-Ukrainian/Nazi threat (supported by the US and NATO). Alongside the 24/7 propaganda, the Kremlin has also enacted legislation that severely punishes any attempt to protest Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, despite the Kremlin’s tight control over the narrative, there are growing indications that some Russians are beginning to question the costs behind this conflict, and possibly, their support.

The second excerpt from a regional source in Krasnodar, 93.RU, describes the brutal kidnapping and murder of two local residents by three ex-convicts. The victims’ car had broken down, and after offering to help, the criminals forced them to withdraw money from the bank and then murdered them. The source suggests that these ex-convicts may have recently gained their freedom from prison by volunteering to fight with the Wagner private military company in Ukraine. One of them had been sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2016 for a similar murder, and the article questions how he could have been released so soon.

The funny thing is that now there will be many such heroes all over the country, which is scary.

Since “discrediting” the military is now a serious offense in Russia, the author of the article couches the assertion that these ex-convicts had been released from prison by volunteering to fight in Ukraine in vague terms. However, anonymous reader comments to this article are more forth-



President Putin, Victory Day, Red Square, 9 May 2023.

Source: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/photos/big2x/EONAWWmXRikYHMVEZF8vmNhVq99RsGK3.jpg> Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

right, pointing out that once these convicts had spent six months fighting in Ukraine, they were now free to return to former criminal habits. Another reader warns that “now there will be many such heroes all over the country, which is scary.” These comments suggest that the blowback from using convicted criminals as soldiers could reduce Russian domestic support for fighting in Ukraine.

Source: Anton Grebennikov, “Президент: Вся страна сплотилась для поддержки участников спецоперации (President: The whole country rallied to support the participants of the special operation),” *Parliamentskaya Gazeta* (official Kremlin site), 9 May 2023. <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/prezident-vsya-strana-splotilas-dlya-podderzhki-uchastnikov-specoperacii.html>

Today, all of Russia has rallied to support the participants in the special military operation in Ukraine. The country is proud of its heroes, Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized during the Victory Day Parade on Red Square.... “There is no more important thing now than your combat work. Today, the security of the country rests on you, the future of our statehood and our people depends on you, you honorably fulfill your military duty – you fight for Russia. Your families, children, friends are behind you, they are waiting for you,” RIA Novosti quotes the president....

Source: Valeria Dul'skaya, “Верили до последнего. Кто и зачем убил аниматоров на кубанской трассе (They believed until the very end. Who and why killed the animators on the Kuban highway),” *93.RU* (Krasnodar News Site), 4 May 2023. <https://93.ru/text/incidents/2023/05/04/72274256/>

On the evening of April 28, animators Kirill Chubko and Tatyana Mostyko disappeared on the highway near the village of Berezanskaya in the Krasnodar Territory, who were driving home from work. They broke the wheel, and after some time they stopped communicating. Two days after the disappearance, Kirill's car was found burned in the forest. More than 180,000 rubles disappeared from the accounts of the animators - they were withdrawn at night from different ATMs. Officers later arrested three suspects....

Unfortunately, that evening it became known that the animators were dead. On the morning of May 3, police reported that they had detained three suspects in the murder of Kirill and Tatiana. They were 31-year-old Demyan Kevorkyan from Krasnodar, 30-year-old Anatoly Dvoynikov from the Tikhoretsky district and 45-year-old Aram Tatosyan from the Apsheron district.

According to investigators, near the village of Berezanskaya, the alleged criminals noticed Kirill and Tatiana standing on the road on the road. The men decided to kill them in order to steal money and other valuables. They attacked the animators, took away their cards, “gaining access to the possibility of conducting banking operations on them.” Then the suspects withdrew more than 180 thousand rubles from several ATMs. Taking the money, the men killed Cyril and Tatyana. To hide the crime, they burned their car and hid the bodies, the press service of the regional Investigative Committee reported....

On May 3, the Investigative Committee announced the arrest of three suspects in the murder of Kirill and Tatyana - Demyan Kevorkyan, Anatoly Dvoynikov and Aram Tatosyan. According to the Russian Investigative Committee, all three had previous convictions.... The media suggest that they participated in the SMO, but there is no official confirmation of this.

Reader Comments: *One convict, who in 2016 was sentenced to 18 years for a similar murder, teleported out of the colony in some completely unknown way and killed the victims.*

The funny thing is that now there will be many such heroes all over the country, which is scary.

I don't understand either, they gave him 18 years and he is free. Everything goes according to plan...

continue on 17

Notes:

[1] Sviatoslav Hnizdovskyi, “How Strong is Russian public support for the invasion of Ukraine?,” *Atlantic Council*, 2 May 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-strong-is-russian-public-support-for-the-invasion-of-ukraine/#:~:text=The%20Levada%20Center%2C%20which%20is,public%20backing%20of%20over%2070%25>

[2] For additional background on how the Kremlin has used the media to generate support for its policies, see Ray Finch, CHAPTER 6. THE MOBILIZATION OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY, THE RUSSIAN MILITARY IN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE, 1 September 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20098.10>

[3] Even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Russian media space had become tightly controlled, especially on matters dealing with national security. For a brief snapshot on some of these restrictive measures, see: Ray Finch, “More Restrictions on Defense Information,” *OE Watch*, October 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/376377>; “Russia Moves Forward with New Restrictions on Military Reporting,” *OE Watch*, November, 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/397980>

Russian Defense Ministry Approves Five-Year Plan To Expand and Modernize Arctic Air Bases



In Kamchatka, **MiG-31** fighters of the Pacific Fleet worked out the interception of a mock enemy cruise missile (Author's note: In spite of the Russian description, the MiG-31 looks to be air-to-air refueling).

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:InterceptionOfMissile2018-11.jpg>; Attribution: CCAx4.0 International

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Russia is expanding its ability to maintain and launch military aircraft within its Arctic territories, possibly due to increased NATO naval exercises in the North Sea over the past three years. According to the Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, the Russian military is modernizing both Rogachevo air base on Novaya Zemlya and Nagurskoye air base on Franz Josef Land. As the ongoing war in Ukraine demonstrates, Russia's long-range bombers are a dual threat as they also serve as cruise missile launchers. Russian cruise missiles have significant range, and recent attacks on Ukrainian targets launched from military aircraft in the Caspian Sea are a poignant indication of the strategic value Russia stands to gain from these expanded and modernized Arctic bases.

Rogachevo air base is located some 10 kilometers northeast of Belushaya Guba, the main military settlement on Novaya Zemlya. The airport serves other facilities on the archipelago with helicopters, such as the main testing area of nuclear weapons near the Matochkin Strait. After modernization, the airfield will be able to base all types of aircraft, including long-range bombers.

Source: "Thomas Nilsen, "Further expansion for Novaya Zemlya air base aims to serve long-range bombers," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 17 April 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2023/04/further-expansion-novaya-zemlya-airport-aims-serve-long-range-bombers>

Rogachevo airfield is already upgraded to serve MiG-31 and Su-33 fighter jets. Such aircraft have since 2020 served the Arctic airport on a rotational basis from their airports on the Kola Peninsula. The new plans include special buildings for basing aircraft equipment and new houses for the military servicemen and their families.

*Rogachevo air base is located some 10 kilometers northeast of Belushaya Guba, the main military settlement on Novaya Zemlya. The airport serves other facilities on the archipelago with helicopters, such as the main testing area of nuclear weapons near the Matochkin Strait. After modernization, the airfield will be able to base all types of aircraft, including long-range bombers, according to the plans reported by *Izvestia*. Today's runway is 2,400 meters, likely too short for Russia's long-range bombers like the **Tu-95** and **Tu-160**.*

At the Nagurskoye base on Franz Josef Land, work is underway to extend the runway to nearly 3,600 meters. The Russian Air Force has over the last years significantly stepped up its presence in the Arctic.

Russia Strengthens Its Military Presence in Central Asia

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Russia's military bases in Central Asia have always been important to its strategic goals in the region, particularly for dealing with potential instability in Afghanistan. While the Russian government initially accepted U.S. airbases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan beginning in 2001 to support operations in Afghanistan, it later pressed both governments to evict U.S. forces. The United States left the Kharshi-Khanbad airbase (known as K2) in Uzbekistan in 2005¹ and left the Transit Center at Manas in Kyrgyzstan in 2014. Russian officials have claimed that U.S. security cooperation with Central Asian states in the 2000s took place as part of an effort to establish permanent military bases in the region, though the United States has not used a regional military facility since it left Manas.

Russia decided to increase the readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan because of "US attempts to restore its military presence in Central Asia."

The accompanying excerpted article from Kyrgyzstan's independent news website *Kloop* reports on a statement by Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on 28 April

2023 in New Delhi, India about increasing the combat readiness of Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Shoigu noted that Russia made this decision to increase combat readiness because the United States is trying "to restore its military presence in Central Asia... under the pretext of helping in the fight against terrorism." However, the article also notes that Shoigu did not offer facts to substantiate this claim. When Russian officials announced measures to strengthen its military bases in Central Asia in the past, they noted specific increases in capabilities, like the transfer of **S-300** air defense systems to Tajikistan in 2019.² Shoigu also stated that requests from members of the SCO to host military facilities is a "direct threat to stability in the SCO space." Shoigu did not mention which SCO member would potentially host the U.S. military, but SCO members in Central Asia include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. There have been no reports that any of the three have been negotiating to host U.S. forces, but Shoigu is warning fellow SCO members that Russia will consider hosting the United States as a threat.

The article also usefully provides a reminder of the current Russian military bases in Central Asia. These include



201st Military Base.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:201_military_base_09.jpg; Attribution: CCA 4.0

the Kant airbase outside Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the 201st Russian military base, home of the 201st Motor Rifle Division, in Tajikistan, the latter of which is Russia's largest military facility outside its borders. The article ends by noting that Ukraine claimed it destroyed a tactical group from the 201st military base last year, though this has not been

verified. While Russia claims it is strengthening its bases in Central Asia as a measure to maintain its presence in the region, without any specific information on how this will take place, it is possible that Russia is doing this to replace losses of the of the 201st in Tajikistan suffered in Ukraine.

Source: Munduzbek Kalykov, “Шойгу: Россия повышает боеготовность своих военных баз в Кыргызстане и Таджикистане (Shoigu: Russia will increase the combat readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan),” *Kloop* (an independent Russian-language news website in Kyrgyzstan), 29 April 2023. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2023/04/29/shoigu-rossiya-povyshaet-boegotovnost-svoih-voennyh-baz-v-kyrgyzstane-i-tadzhikistane/>

Russia decided to increase the readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan because of "US attempts to restore its military presence in Central Asia." This was stated by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu as reported by RIA Novosti.

According to Shoigu, "the United States and its allies, under the pretext of helping in the fight against terrorism, are trying to restore their military presence in Central Asia." However, he did not provide specific facts.

"We regard requests to the countries of the region to deploy military infrastructure as a direct threat to stability in the SCO space..." Shoigu said on April 28 at meeting of defense ministers of the SCO member states in New Delhi.

*A Russian military base has existed in Kyrgyzstan since the early 2000s. Its main forces are located in the small town of Kant, not far from Bishkek - these are **Su-25** attack aircraft and **Mi-8** helicopters. The Russian joint military base also includes a test site at Issyk-Kul, where Russian sailors test underwater torpedoes.*

The 201st Russian military base is located in Tajikistan, and the garrison is deployed in the cities of Dushanbe and Bokhtar. This is Russia's largest military facility outside its borders. The base includes motorized rifle artillery, reconnaissance, anti-aircraft missile and other units, as well as an air group...

...in mid-April 2022, the Ukrainian army announced the destruction of the tactical group of the 201st Russian military base, which has a permanent deployment in Tajikistan...

Notes:

[1] The withdrawal of U.S. forces from K2 cannot be solely attributed to Russian pressure. In May 2005, the Uzbek military forcefully put down public demonstrations in the Ferghana Valley, killing numerous civilians and drawing the ire of the Bush administration regarding human rights. This began a diplomatic row between the United States and Uzbekistan, which resulted in an Uzbekistani demand that the United States leave the base within six months, eventually withdrawing from K2 in November 2005.

[2] For more background on Russia's transfers of S-300s to Tajikistan, see: Matthew Stein "Russia Transfers S-300s to Tajikistan," *OE Watch*, December 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

Russia Concerned About Dependence on Chinese Technology

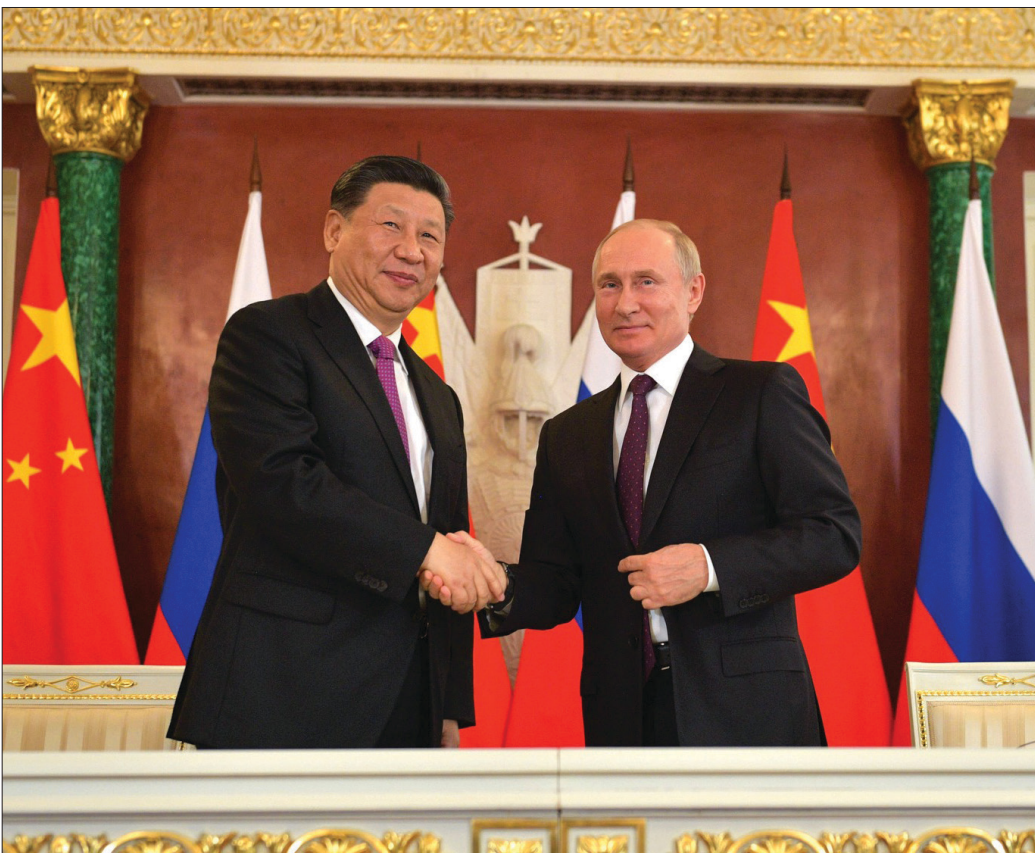
By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past decade, as the Kremlin leadership has touted and celebrated its growing ties to China as it has sought to distance itself from the West. This turn toward Beijing accelerated after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as Western governments imposed additional sanctions and many Western firms departed. As the first excerpt from Russian television channel *ORT* describes, during President Xi's visit to Moscow in March, there was talk of a comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation. Having only just recently been labeled as a war criminal by the Hague, the Chinese leader's decision to make his first foreign visit since the onset of COVID-19 speaks volumes regarding his support for Putin.

While political relations today are cordial, some in Russia are beginning to question their country's growing economic and technological dependence upon China.¹ The second excerpt from Russian-language Turkish news service *TRT*

captures this concern, which attributes it to Russia's conflict with Ukraine. Not only are there security concerns regarding Russia's dependence on this technology, but "Russian officials also fear that the growth of the presence of Chinese companies and developments in the Russian market could hinder the development of their own developments in the field of security." The article concludes by quoting statistics regarding the growth of Russian firms using "Chinese cybersecurity solutions," growing from 5 percent in 2022 to nearly 60 percent today. Should the current trend continue, China will gain considerable leverage over Russian information processing.

Russia's conflict with Ukraine is making Moscow too dependent on Chinese technology...



President Putin and Chinese President Xi, Kremlin, June 2019.

Source:<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60669/photos> Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

Source: Pavel Matveev, “Завершился государственный визит председателя КНР Си Цзиньпина в Россию (Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Russia ends),” *ORT* (Russian Main TV Channel), 22 March 2023. https://www.itv.ru/news/2023-03-22/449553-zavershilsya_gosudarstvennyy_vizit_predsedatelya_knr_si_tszinpina_v_rossiyu

The farewell ceremony took place at Vnukovo airport. State flags, anthems of the two countries, after which the Chinese leader followed the red carpet to his plane.

...A full program, many meetings and negotiations, as a result of which important documents were signed and a joint statement was published on deepening comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction.... In particular, Russia will support Chinese business, which is replacing Western companies. Settlements between the two countries have already mostly switched to rubles and yuan....

Source: “Российские чиновники опасаются растущей зависимости от Huawei (Russian officials wary of growing reliance on Huawei),” *TRT* (Turkish News Service in Russian), 20 April 2023. <https://www.trtrussian.com/novosti/rossijskie-chinovniki-opasayutsya-rastushej-zavisimosti-ot-huawei-12905704>

Russia's conflict with Ukraine is making Moscow too dependent on Chinese technology, as US and EU sanctions have barred Russian firms from accessing Western technology. Instead, the Russian Federation is forced to reorient itself to Chinese developments, in particular, to deliveries from Huawei....

...The document cited by the publication says: some high-ranking Russian officials are concerned that Chinese companies such as Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. may take a dominant position in the Russian market, thereby posing a risk to the information security of the country. ...In a report compiled by the Ministry of Digital Development of the Russian Federation in the summer of 2022, microcircuits, network devices and electronics are highlighted as areas of particular vulnerability.

...In addition to fears of growing dependence, Russian officials also fear that the growth of the presence of Chinese companies and developments in the Russian market could hinder the development of their own developments in the field of security...

...As TRT previously wrote in Russian, more than half of companies in Russia plan to switch to Chinese equipment in the field of cybersecurity after European and American manufacturers leave the Russian market.

The Russian newspaper Kommersant, citing a survey by K2Tech integrator, notes that until 2022, only 5% of Russian companies used Chinese cybersecurity solutions. Now 60% of companies have switched to them or are planning to switch to them to replace the products of departed Western players - Cisco, Palo Alto, etc....

Notes:

[1] This concern has been growing for the past several years. For additional background, see: Ray Finch, “Russia-China: Potential Allies or Adversaries?,” *OE Watch*, November 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/340594>

[2] The Kremlin has been careful not to publicize information regarding unfair Chinese business practices and espionage to protect the warming relationship between the two countries. For some relatively recent background, see: Ray Finch, “Russian Concerns over Chinese Espionage,” *OE Watch*, December 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/379981>

Iran Unveils New Thermobaric Warhead

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has long been an indigenously equipped military power,¹ and the Iranian press seemingly announces new weapons every few weeks. However, these announcements are often exaggerations. As not every prototype makes it into the arsenals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or the regular army. Those that do are apparent on the battlefield and across the broader region: **Mohajer** and **Ababil** drones,² Moudge-class destroyers, and **Fateh-110** and Fajr-5 missiles, for example. The Fajr-5 missile is an IRGC staple, which³ Tehran has acknowledged giving to U.S.-designated Palestinian terrorist groups. In 2012, a Fajr-5 fired by Hamas hit on an apartment building just outside Tel Aviv.

It is against this backdrop that reports like the accompanying article from IRGC news affiliate *Tasnim News Agency*, about a new, upgraded warhead for the Fajr-5 are notable. While Iranian press discussion focuses on the ther-

mobaric warhead's potential for Iran's own counterterror fight, presumably against Kurdish and Baluchi separatists (respectively located in the country's rugged northwest and southeast border regions), regional states and actors should assume that the IRGC will not limit a new thermobaric warhead solely to use in its domestic arsenal. Discussion of warhead stability also implies safer shipping and handling by groups less well-trained than the Iranian military. Should reports about the thermobaric warhead be accurate, a greater blast radius like that produced by the new thermobaric warhead, especially when fired against urban targets, will increase damage and lower the threshold for retaliation.

Fajr-5 missiles... are now equipped with a new warhead with greater destructive power.



An Iranian Fajr-5 rocket launch, February 6, 2017.

Source: <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1395/11/18/139511181130493069920644.jpg> Attribution: Tasnim News Agency

Source: "India in talks with Argentina, Egypt for possible Tejas sale," *The Hindustan Times* (Indian English-language daily), 14 February 2023. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-in-talks-with-argentina-egypt-for-possible-tejas-sale-101676399079273.html>

...The test of the new type of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)'s Fajr-5 rocket equipped with thermobaric warhead has been successfully completed. The IRGC's 333-mm Fajr-5 missiles, which had previously been delivered to the force as the Fajr-5C rocket, are now equipped with a new warhead with greater destructive power. This new warhead, produced by specialists of the IRGC's Ground Force's Self-Sufficiency Research and Jihad, has an explosive power of 1.5 times that of TNT, resulting in a greater radius of destruction and thermal effects. In addition, its lower sensitivity compared with TNT makes it safer to use than conventional warheads.

...When this type of ammunition explodes in the indoor space of underground bunkers or trenches, its destructive pressure stays in the shelter's enclosed space for longer and causes more destruction, and thus is an efficient weapon for clearing fortifications and trenches....

This new type of combat head for these rockets, due to their specific type of performance, is also a suitable weapon to deal with terrorist groups, especially in mountainous and difficult areas because these groups create shelters and strongholds in these areas using natural effects or engineering measures.

Notes:

[1] While many of Iran's neighbors purchase off-the-shelf platforms and weaponry from the global arms market, the isolation Iran suffered during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War changed Iran's strategic doctrine to favor production rather than acquisition of armaments. For more information, see: Michael Rubin, "Iran: Domestic Weapons Production Up 69 Percent," *OE Watch*, March 2017. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195239/download>

[2] For previous reporting on Fajr-5 development, see: Michael Rubin, "Iran: IRGC Debuts New Explosive Plant," *OE Watch*, July 2016. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195435>

[3] For background, see: Michael Rubin, "A Short History of the Iranian Drone Program," *American Enterprise Institute*, 26 August 2020. <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/a-short-history-of-the-iranian-drone-program/>

Iran Opens New Helicopter, Drone Base in Southeastern Provincial Capital

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran is beefing up its military strike capability in its southeastern province of Sistan va Baluchistan with a new helicopter and drone-capable air base in the provincial capital of Zahedan. While the region is the second-largest Iranian province by size, its population is sparse and the province itself has long been considered a backwater. Indian Ocean trade from its strategic port of Chabahar remains miniscule in comparison to Iran's Persian Gulf and Caspian ports.¹ According to the following excerpted article from *Azad News Agency*, the base will “accommodate IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] drones...[a]ll sorts of attack and combat helicopters, search and rescue craft, and unmanned aerial vehicles.” This announcement is notable since the region has long been a strategic Achilles' heel for the Iranian regime. Smuggling across Iran's frontier with Afghanistan is a problem that predates Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. The region has long been restive both because its harsh terrain gives shelter to criminals and terrorists and because of sectarian and ethnic tension between the local

Sunni and Baluch population and the Shi'ite Persians and Azeris who dominate the Iranian regime and the IRGC. There has been no shortage of unrest in recent years, including high-profile attacks on the IRGC in the region.²

These conditions may be the prime reason, albeit unstated in the Iranian press, why the IRGC has established the base in Sistan va Baluchistan. The move may also reflect the Iranian regime hedging its bets regarding future relations with the Taliban across the border in Afghanistan. Curiously, given previous Iranian investment in Chabahar, the decision to locate the base beyond helicopter range to the port raises questions about Iranian strategy, although it may reflect a rolling decision to deemphasize the strategic importance of the port in the future.

The helicopter fleet in the southeast of the country was strengthened for large security missions.



Helicopters purportedly at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' new helicopter and drone base in Zahedan.

Source: https://ana.press/files/fa/news/1402/2/20/228265_685.jpg; Attribution: Azad News Agency

Source: “Paygah-e Havaye va Balgard-e Niru-ye Zamini Sepah Aftah Shod (The Army Air Force Opens its Helicopter Headquarters),” *Azad News Agency* (an ostensibly private news agency that closely follows the government line), 10 May 2023. <https://ana.press/fa/news/846682>

...In the presence of General Hossein Salami, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), an air and helicopter base named “Ali Arabi” was inaugurated in Zahedan, in the southeast of the country. It will also accommodate IRGC drones. All sorts of attack and combat helicopters, search and rescue craft, and unmanned aerial vehicles can use the base that is built to the latest technical specifications and aviation standards.

General Mohammed Pakpour, Commander of the IRGC Ground Forces, spoke about the objectives in building the base. “With the operation of this base, the IRGC’s ground force helicopter fleet in the southeast of the country was strengthened and equipped for large security, defense, rescue and rescue missions, support, people assistance and service,” he said. “In addition to creating the capacity for maintenance and simultaneous take-off of dozens of helicopters, all capacity for refueling, hangering, repairs and maintenance have been created.”

Notes:

[1] For example, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran: Construction Begins on the Chabahar-Zahedan Railway” *OE Watch*, December 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/359394/download>

[2] For example, see: Michael Rubin, “Iranian Border Guard Post Overrun, Guards Abducted” *OE Watch*, December 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/252911/download>

Iran Ready To Help Syria Rebuild Its Defense Infrastructure

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

The 12-year-old Syrian civil war appears to be nearing its end. As the Arab League reembraces Syria and the international community begins to discuss reconstruction¹, an opportunity from which Iran also seeks to profit,² the Iranian Ministry of Defense also seeks to rebuild and reconstruct Syria's military, according to the excerpted news story from Iran's *Holy Defense News Agency*. While neither Tehran nor Damascus have yet reported an agreement for Iran to rebuild the Syrian military, the Iranian government expects repayment for its military investment in and dispatch of volunteers and advisers to Syria during the war.³ The recent visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Syria, among other bilateral visits and exchanges, suggest that cementing and augmenting the Iran-Syria axis is a strategic priority for Tehran.

Iran is now ready to use its capacities and capabilities to rebuild and contribute to the development of the infrastructure of the Syrian defense industry.

From the Iranian perspective, helping rebuild Syria's defense sector achieves two goals. Strategically, it advances Iran's



Iranian Defense Minister Mohammed Reza-Ashtiani meets with Abdul Karim Mahmoud Ibrahim, Chief of General Staff of the Syrian Army, 10 May 2023.

Source: <https://cdn.isna.ir/d/2023/05/10/3/62604330.jpg?ts=1683727966517>; Attribution: Iranian Students' News Agency

goal of militarily eliminating Israel as a Jewish state, while operationally, it provides an important revenue stream for Iran's domestic military industries.

Source: "Amir Ashtiani: Amadegi Iran baraye komak beh Tawseah Zirsakht-e Sanaea'-e Defah-e Suriyah (Amir Ashtiani: Iran Ready to Help Develop Infrastructure for Syrian Defense Industry)," *Holy Defense News Agency* (official news agency of Iran's Defense Ministry), 10 May 2023. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/588336>

Brigadier-General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, met with Lieutenant-General Abdel Karim Mahmoud Ibrahim, Chief of the General Staff of the Syrian Army. While commemorating the memory of General Haj Qasem Soleimani as a martyr in the fight against terrorism and for the security of the Syrian people and the region, Ashtiani stated, "Relations between the two countries are experiencing one of the best periods in their history. We have a strategic agreement, but this is rooted in our brotherly relations."

The Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, stating that the recent visit of the Iranian president to Damascus and his welcome by the Syrian government and people indicates deep bilateral relations, added, "This trip and its agreements as well as the issues I discussed with the Syrian Defense Minister in Moscow and Damascus are on the agenda..."

Ashtiani, emphasizing the work of the Joint Commission on Defense-Technical Cooperation between the

continue on 28

two countries, said, “Be sure, the Ministry of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Iran is now ready to use its capacities and capabilities to rebuild and contribute to the development of the infrastructure of the Syrian defense industry, just as it stood alongside the Syrian armed forces during the war against terrorism.”

Notes:

[1] Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime controls much of the country except for some northern districts occupied by Turkish forces or their proxies, and the far northeast of the country in which Kurds have established an autonomous administration. The war’s destruction has been vast. A quarter of the country’s population has fled creating a refugee crisis in surrounding counties, and many are Syrians are displaced inside Syria. In some towns, rocket strikes, battle damage, and looting by various militias and armies has rendered upward of 90 percent of the structures uninhabitable.

[2] For example, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Proposal To Build Railroads and Housing in Syria could Enrich IRGC” *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/429079/download>

[3] For example, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran: Basij Recruiting for Syria Fight” *OE Watch*, March 2016. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195441>

Organized Crime Engulfing Ecuador



Ecuador's Police patrol streets of the capital, Quito, after civilian unrest.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Police_Ecuador_Riot.jpg Attribution: Wikimedia, CC-BY 2.0

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

For several years, violent crime has risen rapidly in Ecuador. Guayaquil, the country's second largest city and its main port, now contends with a homicide rate of 46 per 100,000 citizens, making it one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America. A host of unsavory criminal organizations have established an operational presence in Ecuador, from Colombian criminal organizations operating over the border, to Mexican cartels, and even the Albanian mafia.¹

Criminal organizations take advantage of Ecuador's weak governance, convenient ports, and dollar economy. First, Ecuador's weak governance translates into safe havens for many groups. Second, the country's Pacific coastline provides a multitude of options for shipping illicit products out of Ecuador. Lastly, the country's dollarization means the proceeds from the sales of illicit products can be easily laundered.

If the State Public Security Council declares these groups as terrorists, the Armed Forces of Ecuador may intervene in security matters without the need to amend the country's Constitution.

The excerpted article from Argentina-based *Infobae*, reports that Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso, under signifi-

cant pressure to improve security, plans to declare criminal organizations "terrorist groups." By doing so, Lasso intends to use Ecuador's military to combat criminal organizations and bypass what would otherwise require constitutional changes.² Meanwhile, as the Spanish daily *El País* reports, Lasso's approval ratings have not only slipped dramatically, but he now faces impeachment charges in Congress. Lasso has lost significant support because of the country's public insecurity, and the impeachment charges involve a claim that his government has been penetrated by criminal organizations.³ Ecuador's slide into insecurity illustrates what is at stake when weak institutions, weak state capacity, and transnational criminal organizations converge.

Source: “El gobierno de Ecuador busca declarar a las bandas criminales como terroristas (The Ecuadorian government seeks to declare criminal gangs as terrorists),” *Infobae* (the Argentina-based outlet with some of the best regional coverage of any Latin American outlet), 20 April 2023. <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2023/04/20/el-gobierno-de-ecuador-busca-declarar-a-los-grupos-criminales-como-terroristas/>

The Ecuadorian government wants the State Public Security Council to declare criminal groups as terrorists. The purpose of the measure is for the Armed Forces to be able to participate permanently in what the Minister of Government, Henry Cevallos, has called a war due to the “unprecedented terrorist wave” that the country is facing. If the State Public Security Council declares these groups as terrorists, the Armed Forces of Ecuador may intervene in security matters without the need to amend the country’s Constitution. Currently, Ecuador’s Congress is processing partial constitutional reforms so that the military can support the police in internal control and in the fight against organized crime.

Source: “Las claves del juicio político del presidente de Ecuador Guillermo Lasso (The keys to the political trial of Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso),” *El País* (the Spanish newspaper with hemispheric coverage), 24 April 2023. <https://elpais.com/america-colombia/2023-04-24/las-claves-del-juicio-politico-del-presidente-de-ecuador-guillermo-lasso.html>

This is the first time that a president has been subjected to impeachment since the approval of the Ecuadorian Constitution in 2008...In the end, the political trial will be determined in a complex social situation with a high level of insecurity affected by organized crime that keeps the population in anguish with extortion and violent deaths.

Notes:

[1] For more information on Ecuador’s descent into criminal insecurity and the role of Albanian organized crime, see: “Ecuador’s Crime Wave and Its Albanian Connection,” *Americas Quarterly*, 12 April 2023. <https://americasquarterly.org/article/ecuadors-crime-wave-and-its-albanian-connection/>; for more information on the Mexican connection, see: Ryan Berg, “Mexican Criminal Organizations Consolidate Their Positions in South America,” *OE Watch*, 05-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/416680>

[2] Ecuador’s president has called for Ecuador to receive military and police assistance like the U.S. aid program Plan Colombia. For more information, see: Ryan Berg, “President Lasso Calls for ‘Plan Ecuador’ Amid Growing Security Concerns,” *OE Watch*, December 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/400849>

[3] For more information on Ecuador’s complex impeachment process, see: “Crisis in Quito: President Guillermo Lasso Heads to Impeachment Vote,” Council on Foreign Relations, 9 May 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/crisis-quito-president-guillermo-lasso-heads-impeachment-vote-0>

Burkina Faso Claims Disguised Jihadists, Not Military, Responsible for Civilian Killings

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Burkina Faso's ruling military regime has denied claims that its soldiers were responsible for the massacre of an estimated 136 people in the northern village of Karma in late April. According to the accompanying article from the pan-African news aggregator *AfricaNews.com*, Burkinabe Defense Minister Colonel Kassoum Coulibaly claimed that the mass killings, which took the lives of an estimated 45 children on 20 April 2023, were instead carried out by jihadists dressed as Burkinabe soldiers. In many reports, however, villagers have asserted that the attackers were wearing patches indicating they belonged to the 3rd Battalion of Burkina Faso's Rapid Intervention Brigade. According to Amnesty International, villagers have attested that the mass raids likely came as a result of their assumed complicity in allowing some members of jihadist groups to "pass through their village," before jihadists launched a deadly attack killing 40 members of Burkina Faso's Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) forces in the village of Aourema.¹ For several years, Burkina Faso has been overtaken by violence from armed groups associated with the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Along with neighboring Mali, it is now one of the most active sites of jihadist violence in the world.²

A lot of people think it's the Russians who are guiding us," said Coulibaly. "But the Burkinabe aren't children.

As the United Nations and human rights groups have urged an investigation of the so-called Karma massacres, leaders in Burkina Faso have also claimed that these calls are being led by an "international coalition"³ of unnamed enemies of Burkina Faso, which are angry about its closer ties to Russia.⁴ Many reports have suggested that the Wagner Group is operating inside Burkina Faso, although the Defense Minister denies it. As he articulated: "A lot of people think it's the Russians who are guiding us... But the Burkinabe aren't children." Though not necessarily implicating Wagner Group personnel, the massacre of civilians in Karma, Burkina Faso, looks and feels like another massacre of civilians in Moura, Mali, which killed an estimated 500-plus civilians under the guise of counterterrorism operations in March 2022. In that massacre, still under investigation, the culprits were not only members of the Malian army but also foreigners, widely believed to be part of the Wagner Group, which operates in support of Mali's fight against jihadist elements.⁵ Indeed, a notable trend in West Africa is the ever-deepening alliance between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, all led by military rulers, with the former two having likely welcomed Wagner mercenaries to address their destabilizing jihadist insurgencies.⁶ Collectively, these events indicate that civilians continue to bear the brunt of often-unrestrained counterterrorism efforts by African militaries. Where the Wagner Group seems to be in play, such widespread human rights abuses appear to be more severe than in other spaces where they are not.

Source: "Coulibaly dénonce 'une coalition internationale' contre le Burkina Faso (Coulibaly denounces an 'international coalition' against Burkina Faso)," *AfricaNews.com* (pan-African news aggregator, 4 May 2023). <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/05/04/coulibaly-denonce-une-coalition-internationale-contre-le-burkina-faso/>

Burkina Faso's defence minister on Wednesday denounced what he said was an "international coalition" lined up against his country and alleged there had been violations of the country's air space.

And the country's intelligence agency said an April massacre of civilians—which some rights groups have blamed on the army—was carried out by jihadist fighters dressed as soldiers.

continue on 32

Colonel Kassoum Coulibaly, appointed by the military junta running the country, also echoed the denials by the new regime's leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore, that the Russian mercenary force Wagner was operating there.

"A lot of people think it's the Russians who are guiding us," said Coulibaly. "But the Burkinabe aren't children."

Russia, he insisted, was not setting the rules, and "gives us nothing". It was the people of Burkina Faso who were contributing to the war effort against the jihadist insurgency in the country, he said.

"There is no Wagner here."

Coulibaly was speaking in Ouagadougou at a meeting with union representatives and leaders of other civil society groups.

He suggested that the international coalition aligned against the country—the members of which he did not identify—was responding to the country's closer ties with Russia since the coup last September that brought the military to power.

But the country only asked for what it needed, he insisted.

"We don't need anyone to send us a single foreign soldier," he insisted. "We have our VDP," he added, referring to the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP), an auxiliary force.

Notes:

[1] "Burkina Faso: Responsibility of the army indicated in Karma massacre," Amnesty International, 3 May 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/burkina-faso-la-responsabilite-des-forces-speciales-de-larmee-pointee-dans-le-massacre-de-karma/>

[2] For more on the Sahel's rise as the deadliest global region for jihadist-linked 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, "Global Terrorism Declined Slightly in 2022, With the Sahel as the New Epicenter," *OE Watch*, 05-2023.

[3] The trend of certain francophone African states decrying French, Western, or international forces targeting them or supporting violence within them has been on the rise. For examples, see: Jason Warner, "CAR Joins Mali in Accusing France of Funding Terrorists," *OE Watch*, 04-2023.; 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>

[4] As Burkina Faso has become one of the epicenters for jihadist violence globally, it has undertaken a shift away from historical reliance on France, and toward Russia. For more, 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>; Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso: A Bellwether on Russian and French Presence," *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429302>

[5] "Mali: Massacre by the Army, Foreign Soldiers," Human Rights Watch, 5 April 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/05/mali-massacre-army-foreign-soldiers>

[6] For more on the deepening diplomatic and security links between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, see: Jason Warner, "Russia-Supported Military Rulers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties," *OE Watch*, 04-2023.; Jason Warner, "West African States Ruled By Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Sanctions," *OE Watch*, 03-2023.

continue on 33



BURKINA FASO



LAMBERT CONFORMAL CONIC PROJECTION; STANDARD PARALLELS 10° N 14° N

2020-07794-vis-01 3-21

Map of Burkina Faso.

Source: <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=441923&picture=burkina-faso-transportation>

Vast Majority of Malians Express Confidence in Russia’s Ability To Address Jihadist Violence

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

In its annual report gauging public interest on various topics in Mali, the German foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) has revealed deep—and sometimes counterintuitive—insights about how Malians think about the security situation in their country.¹ According to the accompanying news article from pan-African news aggregator *AfricaNews.com*, which summarized the FES report, one of the key takeaways of the poll is the deep trust that a vast majority of Malians appear to place in Russia’s ability to help the country address violence caused by its various jihadist insurgencies. As the article relays, “More than nine out of ten Malians have confidence in Russia to help their country in the face of jihadist insecurity,” with 69 percent of respondents “very confident” and 22 percent “rather confident.” Also, four out of five Malians viewed there to be no negative impact from the withdrawal of the French Operation Barkhane, while 48 percent of respondents instead noted that the security situation had improved with the French counterterrorism force’s departure.² Another notable finding relates to Malian perspectives about their own defense and security forces: the most common sentiment expressed (by 58 percent of respondents) was the Malian defense and security forces represented a source of pride for the respondent. The next most common perception was that “I see them as my protectors,” a view offered by 36 percent of respondents. Only 1 percent said that “I have no confidence in defense and security forces,” and no respondent agreed with the sentiment that “I am afraid of the defense and security forces.”

More than nine out of ten Malians have confidence in Russia to help their country in the face of jihadist insecurity.

Given that Mali and its neighbor Burkina Faso are now the new epicenters of global jihadist terrorism-linked deaths,³ and both have engaged the Wagner Group,⁴ the findings of the FES report are perhaps counterintuitive for outside observers. Malians see security improving, their lots in life getting better, and they are generally satisfied with the military regime of Assimi Goïta and the way he is managing military and security affairs. The Wagner Group’s presence appears to be welcomed, and France is not missed. Such perspectives should be taken seriously as the United States and its allies seek to engage Mali and the broader region.



Map of Mali.

Source: <https://southafrica-info.com/africa/africa-from-a-to-z/attachment/map-of-africa-and-mali>; Attribution: Creative Commons 4.0

Source: “Les Maliens majoritairement confiants dans la Russie, selon un sondage, (A majority of Malians are confident in Russia, according to a poll),” *AfricaNews* (pan-African news aggregator), 4 May 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/05/04/les-maliens-majoritairement-confiants-dans-la-russie-selon-un-sondage/>

More than nine out of ten Malians have confidence in Russia to help their country in the face of insecurity and jihadism, indicates an opinion poll carried out by the German foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and published on Wednesday.

Malians are also satisfied in the same proportions with the leader of the junta, Colonel Assimi Goïta, who took power by force in August 2020, this survey shows.

The junta severed a longstanding alliance with France and turned militarily and politically to Russia from 2021.

The Malian army has received several deliveries of Russian military equipment as well as the reinforcement of hundreds of men, Russian army instructors according to it, mercenaries from the private company Wagner, whose actions are decried, according to France and its western partners.

The survey indicates that 69% of respondents are very confident and 22% rather confident in Russian aid in the fight against insecurity.

The general situation of the country has improved for more than four out of five Malians (82%), a result in clear increase compared to previous years, says the survey.

Nine out of ten Malians say they are satisfied with the management of the so-called transition period pending a return of civilians to power scheduled for March 2024.

Three out of five believe that keeping to the schedule [of the transition of power] is not important, the study notes. The first stage of this calendar, a constitutional referendum scheduled for March 19, has been postponed to an unspecified date.

Notes:

[1] For a full copy of the FES report, in French, see: “Mali-Mètre 2023 – Enquête d’opinion, Février 2023,” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, May 2023. <https://mali.fes.de/e/mali-metre-2023>

[2] For an example of the often-contentious relationship between Mali and France, especially regarding counterterrorism, 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>

[3] For more on the Sahel as a new epicenter for jihadist terrorism-linked deaths, see: Jason Warner, “Global Terrorism Declined Slightly in 2022, with the Sahel as the New Epicenter,” *OE Watch*, 05-2023.; 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>

[4] For more on how Mali and Burkina Faso have each approached their relationships with the Wagner Group, 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>; 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>

Sudanese Conflict Harms Russian Military and Mining Interests

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 18 April, the French-language website [francetvinfo.fr](https://www.francetvinfo.fr) published the excerpted article, which covers a French think-tank's perspectives on Russian interests in Sudan amid that country's conflict between two warring factions loyal to two different generals. The article notes that, according to the deputy director of the Franco-Russian Observatory think-tank, the conflict harms Russia's interests in Sudan because Sudan has long allied with Russia in return for supplies of Russian grain and arms.¹ However, the instability and uncertain result of the war in Sudan could put the alliance in jeopardy, while undermining Russian military and economic objectives in the country. According to the article, beyond Sudan's diplomatic support to Russia, Russia also engages in mining in Sudan, such as for gold, which helps Russia mitigate the impact of international sanctions. In addition, Russia has aspirations to use Port Sudan as a naval base.² According to the second excerpted Russian-language article from [gazeta.ru](https://www.gazeta.ru), the port would be significant for Russian geopolitical power projection by extending Russian influence to the Red Sea and, more broadly, the Indian Ocean. As a result, Russia's concerns about these negative outcomes of the war in Sudan explains why Russia has been vocal in calling for ceasefire between the warring parties in Sudan.



Darfur report - Page 3 Image 1.

Source: Sean Woo, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Darfur_report_-_Page_3_Image_1.jpg; Attribution: CCx2.0

The war that two Sudanese generals are currently waging for the seizure of power is not necessarily good news for Vladimir Putin, whose interests are very important there.

Source: "Pourquoi la guerre des généraux "n'est pas un scénario très favorable aux intérêts russes", selon un expert (Why the War of the Generals 'is Not a Very Favorable Situation for Russian Interests', according to an expert)," [francetvinfo.fr](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/soudan/soudan-pourquoi-la-guerre-des-generaux-n-est-pas-un-scenario-tres-favorable-aux-interets-russes-selon-un-expert_5777636.html) (French public service radio network), 18 April 2023. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/soudan/soudan-pourquoi-la-guerre-des-generaux-n-est-pas-un-scenario-tres-favorable-aux-interets-russes-selon-un-expert_5777636.html

By consistently opposing UN resolutions condemning Russia and its war on Ukraine, Sudan has proven itself a staunch ally of Moscow. This is no surprise when one knows that Russia is its main supplier of arms and grain. And the war that two Sudanese generals are currently waging to seize power is not necessarily good news for Vladimir Putin, whose interests are very important there.

Sudan has become one of the main entry points for Russian influence on the African continent, explains Igor Delanoë, deputy director of the Franco-Russian Observatory in Moscow: "Russian companies in the field of extraction, mining, and more have actually been working there for years... It gives a window for Russia to the heart of the African continent".

continue on 37

A Russian naval base project in Port Sudan in the Red Sea is even on the table. But the current crisis is not helping Moscow's affairs... Hence Russia is making repeated calls for ceasefires to end the Sudanese generals' war as soon as possible.

Source: “Зачем России база на Красном море? (Why a Russian Base on the Red Sea?),” 14 February 2023, *gazeta.ru* (pro-government Russian publication focusing on socio-political affairs) <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2023/02/14/16251997.shtml>

The diplomats of modern Russia should proceed exclusively from long-term national interests. Russia repeatedly tried to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean in both the 19th and 20th centuries. In the recent past, aspirations to create naval bases in the Indian Ocean did not end in success either.

There is hope that in the 21st century the country will finally establish itself both in the Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean, as well as in other critical points of the world oceans that are important from the geopolitical and geostrategic points of view.

Notes:

[1] After the first Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, Russia in October 2019, Moscow began to show growing importance to the continent. However, Russia developed particularly close cooperation with Sudan, which raised hopes in Moscow that it had acquired a foothold on the continent to access other countries of the continent, such as being able to increase its influence politically and economically in the Central African Republic. Even when Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was removed from power by the Sudanese military in 2019, Moscow, which had supported al-Bashir, was still able to maintain close ties with Sudan. See: Sergey Kostelyanets, “Russia-Sudan Relations in the Early 21st Century: A Lost Opportunity or the Foundation for a New Beginning?” *Asia and Africa Today* 9 (2019): 56-62.

[2] Sudanese General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (a.k.a. Hemedti) visited Russia for one week just before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The reasons for the meeting remain unclear, but Russia reportedly smuggled hundreds of tons of illegal gold from Sudan as part of efforts to protect itself from expected international sanctions over the war in Ukraine. More broadly, attempting to mitigate the impact of international sanctions is an important feature of Russia's policy in Africa, including in Sudan as well as in Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic. Since the military's overthrow of the civilian-led transitional government in 2021, Sudan had also been suffering an economic crisis, which was at least partly a result of the West halting financial aid to Sudan. This brought Russian and Sudan closer together ahead of the Russian war in Ukraine. Hamdi Abdel Rahman, “Uncovering the reasons behind Sudan's Hemedti visit to Moscow amid the war in Ukraine,” *futureuae.com*, 10 March 2022. <https://futureuae.com/ar-AE/Mainpage/Item/7191/a-silovik-as-the-best-choice-uncovering-the-reasons-behind-sudans-hemedti-visit-to-moscow-amid-the-war-in-uk>[4] For more on the relationship between Burkina Faso, France, and Russia, see: Jason Warner, “Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism with Recruits and Russia,” *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fms0/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436264>

India's Perspective on Negotiations With China Over Line of Actual Control

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

India and China have been negotiating to resolve disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the *de facto* India-China border, since a series of clashes in May 2020 resulted in dozens of deaths and numerous injuries. While both Indian and Chinese officials have stated that progress has been made to resolve the disputed border, the accompanying excerpted articles from India provide a look at how Indian officials differ in their assessment of the situation compared to China.

The first excerpted article from the independent English-language news website *The Wire* reports on the foreign ministers of India and China, who met in India in early May on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) ministerial meeting. The article notes that while Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang stated the situation at the border is “generally stable,” Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar believes there continues to be an “abnormal position” on the border. Jaishankar noted that both sides need to move forward on resolving the dispute but stated that India-China relations cannot be normal if there is no peace in the border areas. The article also notes that the border stand-off at the LAC has been going on for three years and that despite negotiations, “only four of the disputed points have been ‘de-escalated’ by creating buffer zones.” The article points out how Chinese officials have been hesitant to acknowledge that the two remaining disputed border points are a part of the ongoing situation and that since last September they believe the dispute “has largely been resolved.”

Despite several rounds of talks at the military and foreign office levels, only four of the disputed points have been ‘de-escalated’ by creating buffer zone.

The second excerpted article from the independent English-language news website *The Print* reports on the signing of over 100 contracts by India’s army, navy, and air force under the emergency procurement power that



S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi - 25 March 2022.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S._Jaishankar_and_Wang_Yi_-_25_March_2022.jpg Attribution: Government Open Data License – India (GODL)

the government set up for the armed forces several years ago. The government established the acquisition powers in response to the 2016 Uri terrorist attack but has allowed them to continue in the wake of the 2020 LAC border dispute with China. The powers allow the armed forces to make acquisitions outside of the requirements of the Make in India initiative if there is an operational requirement for them.¹ The article notes that a few of the acquisitions are with Indian and not foreign companies, including air defense systems, radar, and coastal missile batteries. Ultimately, the articles show that India continues to have a different perspective than China on how well the negotiations over the LAC are going and will allow emergency acquisitions for the armed forces to continue in support of its own position in this dispute.

Source: “Jaishankar Reiterates Abnormal Position at Border Standoff Despite China's Claims of Stability,” *The Wire* (an independent English-language news website), 5 May 2023. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/jaishankar-reiterates-abnormal-position-at-border-standoff-despite-chinas-claims-of-stability>

After Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang reiterated that border situation is “generally stable”, Indian external affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Friday, May 5, reiterated that the boundary stand-off continues to show that there is an “abnormal position” along the boundary.

...Speaking at the post-SCO meeting media briefing, Jaishankar disagreed with his Chinese counterpart’s assessment. “I think the issue is that there is an abnormal position in border areas. We had a frank discussion about it”.

The Indian minister added, “We have to take the disengagement process forward. I have made it very clear, publicly as well, that India-China relations are not normal and cannot be normal if peace and tranquility in the border areas are disturbed”.

Qin and Jaishankar engaged in talks for almost 70 minutes at the Taj Exotica in Goa before the commencement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation’s ministerial meeting on Thursday...

The stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh has lasted for almost three years, leading to the first deaths at the border in four decades.

Despite several rounds of talks at the military and foreign office levels, only four of the disputed points have been ‘de-escalated’ by creating buffer zones. The Chinese authorities have been hesitant to acknowledge that the remaining two points, Demchok and Depsang, are also part of the current border crisis, causing a stalemate in negotiations.

China have been stressing since September 2022 that the border crisis has largely been resolved, and they have been advocating for a “normalisation” of border management. This message was reiterated by Qin Gang during his first meeting with Jaishankar in March...

Source: Snehesh Alex Philip, “Army, Navy, IAF get 6 more months for emergency procurement, MoD rushes to wrap up contracts,” *The Print* (an independent English-language news website from India), 7 April 2023. <https://theprint.in/defence/army-navy-iaf-get-6-more-months-for-emergency-procurement-mod-rushes-to-wrap-up-contracts/1503627/>

The Indian Army, Navy and Air Force are in the process of signing over 100 contracts under the emergency procurement powers given to them.

These powers were first given to the armed forces after the 2016 Uri attack to help them circumvent the slow bureaucratic system of procurement, and under these, the services can ink contracts worth Rs 300 crore each on their own.

Since 2016, these emergency procurement powers have been renewed multiple times, and have now been extended for an additional six months...

According to sources, these procurements, which will be indigenous with at least 60 per cent localisation, will cater to a large number of niche technology, drones and ammunition...

continue on 40

“The March rush is always there, including in the defence ministry, just like other ministries. The capital budget has also increased every year and hence the spending powers increase,” Laxman Kumar Behera, chairperson, Special Centre for National Security Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, told The Print.

“Also, the fact is that they are not signing many contracts with foreign companies but with Indian companies. It might take time initially because of the various trials, but it is good in the long term,” he added.

...On 30 March, the ministry signed contracts for the procurement of an improved Akash air defence system and 12 Weapon Locating Radars Swathi (Plains) for the Army at an overall cost of over Rs 9,100 crore.

While the Akash systems are manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited, Swathi is manufactured by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

*On the same day, the ministry inked a contract with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL) for procurement of Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries (Long range) weapon system and **BrahMos** missiles at an approximate cost of over Rs 1,700 crore...*

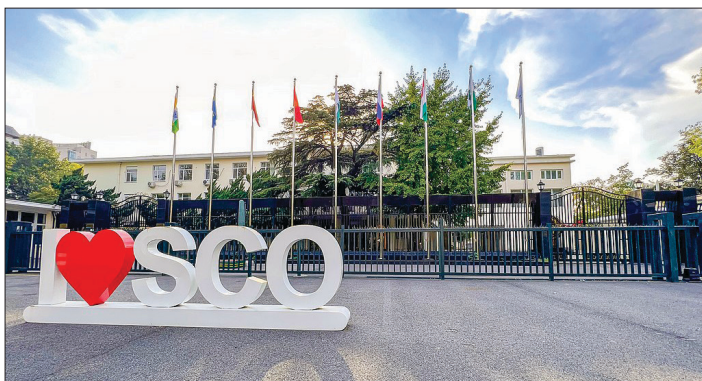
Notes:

[1] For more background on India’s emergency procurements amid the Make in India initiative, see: Matthew Stein “Emergency Spending for the Indian Armed Forces,” *OE Watch*, August 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

Key Arab Countries Join Chinese-Led Regional Body as Dialogue Partners

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

A growing number of Arab countries are joining the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as "dialogue partners." The SCO was established in the early 2000s as a mechanism for deepening political, economic, and security cooperation between countries of Central and South Asia. It has eight member nations (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and over a dozen "observer" and "dialogue partner" nations, which may send delegates to SCO meetings and negotiate with the bloc on particular issues but do not have voting rights or official sway within the organization.



N509FZ.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shanghai_Cooperation_Organization_Secretariat_%2820220909162501%29.jpg Attribution: CC 4.0

In the past year, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have all been officially granted "dialogue partner" status, with Bahrain expected to follow suit. With this, roughly two-thirds of countries in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility have joined the SCO in some capacity.¹ While these developments bear watching, SCO partnership is—at least for now—not necessarily at odds with existing security commitments and arrangements.² Instead, engagement with the SCO is seen as part of a strategic diversification approach being pursued by Arab countries in response to emerging multipolarity. Arabic-language media largely sees these moves through an economic lens and as part of what the first accompanying excerpt, published in the Qatari-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, considers China's "efforts to consolidate a new multipolar world economic order."

Arab countries' interest in the SCO, however, should not be dismissed as a purely economic phenomenon bereft of potential strategic implications. According to a former Egyptian diplomat cited in the second accompanying article, published last September in the prominent Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Russia will seek to use the SCO "as an additional point in its confrontations with the West." Russian attempts to use the SCO for strategic leverage against NATO would likely cause friction within the organization, clashing not only with China's more regional and economic focus but also with the strategic interests of other SCO members. Nonetheless, growing Russo-Chinese geostrategic alignment may eventually enable the SCO's orientation to gradually shift toward global geopolitics, particularly if its membership begins extending beyond Central and South Asia. Especially noteworthy in this regard is Iran's interest in full SCO membership (it is currently an observer country). This interest, combined with the recent China-mediated Saudi-Iranian détente, makes the SCO a potential venue through which Iran may seek to compete with the United States. Last April, Iran was for the first time invited to participate in the SCO defense ministers' meeting in New Delhi. As reported in the third accompanying excerpt, from the pro-Iranian Lebanese media outlet *al-Mayadeen*, Iran's Defense Minister called for the establishing of a "Shanghai Maritime Security Belt" and more broadly using the SCO to promote a "balance of power." Iranian ambitions notwithstanding, the SCO remains an "alternative" rather than a "challenge" to the West, as articulated by an Indian journalist cited in the fourth accompanying excerpt, from the Saudi English-language daily *Arab News*. Still, in a competitive world, today's alternatives may become tomorrow's challenges. Present Arab involvement in the SCO remains limited and largely economic in nature, but the potential for this involvement to morph in a way that erodes U.S.-Arab security partnerships, while not imminent, is worthy of consideration.

The group's expansion, however, should not be interpreted as meant to pose a challenge to the West, but rather as a means to provide an alternative...

Source:

منظمة شنغهاي.. ترسيخ الصين لاقتصاد التعددية القطبية يتمدد عربيًا

(Shanghai Organization.. China's consolidation of the multipolar economy is expanding in the Arab world)," *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 16 April 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/muamystt>

China is seeking to attract a larger number of economically active countries to membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as part of its efforts to consolidate a new multipolar world economic order.

Source:

ماذا يعني انضمام 5 دول عربية إلى منظمة «شنغهاي»؟

(What does the accession of 5 Arab countries to the 'Shanghai Organization' mean?)." *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (influential Saudi daily), 17 September 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/bdf9f2v8>

Ambassador Raouf Saad, the former Egyptian assistant foreign minister and former Egyptian ambassador to Moscow, acknowledged that Russia will work to exploit the matter as an additional point in its confrontations with the West. However, he stressed the constants of Egyptian foreign policy, which refuses to "enter into alliances directed at the expense of its interests."

Source:

وزير الدفاع الإيراني: يجب تفعيل حزام الأمن البحري لمنظمة "شنغهاي"

(Iranian Defense Minister: The 'Shanghai Organization' maritime security belt must be activated)," *al-Mayadeen* (pro-Iran Lebanese media outlet), 29 April 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/35dfp45z>

Today, Saturday, the Iranian Minister of Defense, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, proposed adopting the "Shanghai Maritime Security Belt" mechanism with the aim of maintaining the security of communication lines and collectively guaranteeing global trade with the participation of the armed forces of member states...

During his remarks at the meeting of defense ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states in New Delhi, India, Ashtiani said that the achievements of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization "should promote global multilateralism and balance of power."

Source: "Middle Eastern participation grows in China-led security bloc as new countries join," *Arab News* (English-language Saudi daily), 5 May 2023. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2298341/world>

"It is a question of moving the weight or the center of gravity from the Western world — the US and EU combined — to the Eastern world, the place where the population of the world actually now exists overwhelmingly, the place where the fastest-growing economies are also present," Suhashini Haidar, diplomatic editor at the English-language daily the Hindu, told Arab News. The group's expansion, however, should not be interpreted as meant to pose a challenge to the West, but rather as a means to provide an alternative, she said.

Notes:

[1] Of the 21 countries in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility, only eight (Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Yemen) do not have any status in the SCO. However, Iraq, Israel, and Syria have all applied for dialogue partner status, while Turkmenistan has attended SCO summits as a guest attendee. That leaves Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, and Yemen as the only countries with no relationship to the SCO.

[2] SCO partnership alone means little in terms of defense commitments: Turkey, a NATO member, is an SCO dialogue partner. Full membership in the SCO should also not be equated to membership in a defense alliance, such as NATO, given that both India and Pakistan are full members. Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have an adversarial relationship with one another, are both dialogue partners.

South African Army Chief Visits Russia To Discuss Arms Amid U.S. Tensions

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Calling into question its self-proclaimed non-aligned status in the Russia-Ukraine war, South Africa's army chief recently took a trip to Russia to discuss arms trade, following a diplomatic row with the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa. According to the Johannesburg-based *The Daily Maverick*, the head of the South African army, Lieutenant General Lawrence Mbatia, traveled to Russia in mid-May to discuss "issues relating to military cooperation and interaction aimed at the implementation of projects aimed at improving the combat readiness of the armed forces of both countries." The visit is being read by many, including the author of the accompanying article, as coming in response to recent accusations by the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa that South Africa had loaded weapons and ammunition onto the Russian ship *Lady R*, when it docked in the country in December 2022. South Africa has denied the allegations. However, further reporting shows that South Africa's National Conventional Arms Control Committee, the overseeing authority for such transfers, had indeed approved exports from South Africa to Russia prior to the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, some of which may have been delivered many years late. For its part, the South African National Defense Forces emphasized that Lt. Gen. Mbatia's visit to Moscow had previously been scheduled before the U.S. Ambassador's accusations. The

opposition Democratic Alliance party has described the visit undertaken by members of the ruling African National Congress party to Russia as "shameful" and decried that "this unsolicited visit is the latest incident in a string where the South African government clearly and unashamedly demonstrates its support for Russia."

The timing, if not the mission of Mbatia's visit, seems likely to blow another hole in Pretoria's claim to be non-aligned in the stand-off between Russia and the West over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Long a reliable partner of the United States, South Africa has been taking the approach of many African states to the war in Ukraine.¹ It officially has a policy of non-alignment, which in practical terms, means active engagement with both Russia, on the one hand, and Ukraine and its NATO allies on the other. For its part, Russia is waging an all-out charm offensive in much of Africa,² which is broadly proving to be successful.³ Just how sustainable this sort of status quo is for any of the parties—South Africa, the United States, or Russia—remains to be seen.



Vladimir Putin arrives in South Africa for the 10th BRICS Summit in 2018.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_arrived_in_South_Africa_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_arrived_in_South_Africa_(2).jpg); Attribution: BY-SA 4.0

Source: “SA army chief visits Moscow for talks about military cooperation,” *The Daily Maverick* (centrist newspaper from Johannesburg, South Africa), 15 May 2023. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-05-15-sa-army-chief-visits-moscow-for-talks-about-military-cooperation/>

Lieutenant-General Lawrence Mbatha is meeting, among others, his Russian counterpart Colonel-General Oleg Salyukov. The timing, if not the mission of Mbatha’s visit, seems likely to blow another hole in Pretoria’s claim to be non-aligned in the stand-off between Russia and the West over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The two military chiefs discussed “issues relating to military cooperation and interaction aimed at the implementation of projects aimed at improving the combat readiness of the armed forces of both countries,” TASS quoted Russia’s Defence Ministry as saying.

The Russians appeared to be maximising the strategic character of the visit, possibly to embarrass the US and the West. The SANDF, by contrast, tried to play down the significance – and the timing – of what it called a “goodwill” visit, saying it was a “long standing arrangement... planned well in advance.”

It said Mbatha would visit the “higher combined Army Academy and the Artillery Military Academy” and would have staff talks with military officials. “It must be noted that South Africa has Military to Military bilateral relations with various countries in the continent and beyond,” the SANDF said....

The visit comes just days after a major diplomatic row erupted between South Africa and the US when US ambassador to SA, Reuben Brigety, told journalists he was confident South Africa had loaded weapons and ammunition bound for Russia on to a US-sanctioned Russian cargo ship, the Lady R, in Simon’s Town naval base in December 2022....

DA defence spokesperson Kobus Marais said Mbatha’s mission to Moscow “once again demonstrates the ANC government’s callousness and insensitivity to our diplomatic and trade dilemma. This unsolicited visit is the latest incident in a string where the South African government clearly and unashamedly demonstrates its support for Russia.

“Even after the collapse of the rand and the call from the United States to honour relationships they still went ahead and conducted this visit. It is shameful,” he said in a statement....

The government has insisted that it did not authorise any arms sales to Russia, meaning that the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) had not approved any exports. This appeared to leave open the possibility that arms might have been loaded on to the Lady R in a rogue operation.

However, the records of the NCACC do in fact indicate that some exports of arms to Russia have been approved by the NCACC.

Replying to questions in Parliament from DA leader John Steenhuisen in November last year, Mondli Gungubele, the minister in the presidency who also chairs the NCACC said:

“The National Conventional Arms Control Committee has not received any request from any South African arms manufacturers for permission to export to the Russian Federation and/or Belarus arms, munitions, propellants and/or technology that may be used in the manufacture of the specified products since 24 February 2022.”

continue on 45

Notes:

[1] For more on African diplomatic approaches to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, see: Jason Warner, "African Stances on the Russia-Ukraine War Demonstrate Reliance on, Antipathy Toward West," *OE Watch*, 09-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425767>

[2] For more on Russia's long-term attempts to garner African allies, see: Jason Warner, "Russia Laying Groundwork Ahead of July 2023 Russia-Africa Summit," *OE Watch*, 01-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434265>

[3] For more on Russian and the Wagner Group's successful attempts to garner African allies, see: Jason Warner, "Top Ugandan General Adds to List of Growing Pro-Russian African Military Personnel" *OE Watch*, 05-2023; 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>; 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>; Jason Warner, "Russia-Supported Military Leaders in Mali, Burkina, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties," *OE Watch*, 04-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russia-supported-military-rulers-in-mali-burkina-faso-and-guinea-continue-to-deepen-ties/>

UAE Seeking Greater Cooperation With Egyptian Defense Sector

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

In April 2023, UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed made a state visit to Egypt. Although the visit took place in the shadow of conflict in Sudan, where Egypt and the UAE support opposing factions, it was primarily focused on expanding economic cooperation in various sectors, according to the first accompanying excerpt from the Saudi daily al-Sharq al-Awsat. One sector where deeper cooperation would be highly consequential is military production. On paper, the Egyptian and Emirati defense industries are complementary. Egypt has a relatively strong industrial base and a history of military production but lacks funding and investment in new technologies. The UAE, meanwhile, has invested heavily in new military technologies but lacks a large national industrial base or history of military production. According to the second accompanying article, from the Arabic-language Defense Arabia website, "the United Arab Emirates has expressed great interest in investing in Egypt's defense." The article highlights a Memorandum of Understanding on defense cooperation signed at the IDEX defense expo in February 2023 between Egypt's Defense Ministry and the UAE's Tawazun Council, a key Emirati defense industry government entity.

In 2020, the Egyptian government launched an initiative to bolster weapons export production, with a view to making inroads in the African market and helping its moribund economy rebound. The initiative remains stalled

in part due to financial constraints, but it could receive an important boost from Gulf countries seeking regional influence via economic investments. While Emirati entities have shown interest in investing in Egypt's state-owned enterprises, they have also grown increasingly frustrated by the Egyptian government's lack of transparency and market reforms. Thus, potential Emirati investment in Egypt's defense sector remains a theoretical win-win scenario that is unlikely to move forward unless the Egyptian government is willing to accept at least some of its creditors' conditions.

The United Arab Emirates has expressed great interest in investing in Egypt's defense industry...



H.E. Mr. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt emplanes for Egypt (State Visit of President of Egypt to India (January 24-26, 2023)

Source: India Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/meaindia/52651633276>; Attribution: CC 2.0

Source:

هل تعزز زيارة محمد بن زايد القاهرة الاستثمارات الإماراتية في مصر؟

Will Mohamed bin Zayed's visit to Cairo strengthen Emirati investments in Egypt?" *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (influential Saudi daily), 13 April 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8nuwpm>

Egyptian economist Dr. Rashad Abdo told Asharq Al-Awsat that "the Emirati president's visit to Cairo and his talks with the Egyptian president are economic talks par excellence. Whatever the political files for discussion, the context in which the visit comes confirms that economic issues will prevail." According to Abdo, "the talks contribute to strengthening and increasing Emirati investments in Egypt in various sectors, and it is likely that the meeting focused on consolidating economic cooperation mechanisms and discussing specific Egyptian proposals for investment opportunities."

Source:

الإمارات تستثمر في الصناعات العسكرية المصرية.. ماذا وراء تعزيز التعاون الدفاعي بين البلدين؟

The UAE is investing in Egyptian military industries. What is behind the strengthening of defense cooperation between the two countries?" *Defense Arabia* (military news website), 29 April 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/47yzpj82>

The United Arab Emirates has expressed great interest in investing in Egypt's defense industry, seeking to take advantage of the country's strategic location and its growing defense sector...

In an important step towards enhancing defense cooperation between the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, in February 2023 at IDEX the Tawazun Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Egyptian Ministry of Defense. The memorandum aims to enhance cooperation in the defense and security industries and to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries.