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ON THE COVER:

Tunisians protest in support of Palestine in 2021. Since the Hamas attack on Israel in October, North African civil societies have shown a wave of support for Palestine.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protest_for_palestine_Tunis_Kassba_17-05-2021_By_Brahim_Guedich-3582.jpg; Attribution: BY-SA 4.0

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

Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Chuck Bartles	Kevin McCauley
Ryan Berg	Alpha Ngo
Christopher Betts	Michael Rubin
Dodge Billingsley	Matthew Stein
Paris Gordon	Jason Warner
Les Grau	Lucas Winter
Cindy Hurst	Jacob Zenn
John Lubianetsky	

China's Attempt To Increase Regional Influence

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) wrote in a recent report that China is trying to erode U.S. military dominance and economic power through a "covert military agenda," according to Taiwan state-run press agency *Focus Taiwan*. The MND bases its conclusion on several phenomena, including China's expanding influence beyond the Second Island Chain,¹ which sees Beijing courting military allies through economic inducements. According to the article, China has pushed to establish a military base in the Solomon Islands, with which it plans to form a strategic partnership, particularly based on economics. China established official diplomatic relations with Solomon Islands in 2019, following the Solomon Islands' cutting of ties with Taiwan. In celebrating the shift, the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated the new ties with China will bring the Solomon Islands "unprecedented development opportunities."² The article expresses concern that establishing a military base in the Solomon Islands will help China to better project power past the Second Island Chain.

China is also using cognitive warfare, gray zone tactics and intimidation, to gain the upper hand over the United States. This includes deploying naval forces and maritime police and militia to interfere with freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Recent reports, such as the second article excerpt, published in the independent Philippine *Daily Tribune*, underscore this reality. The article argues that China is combining lawfare³ and gray zone tactics to wear down its neighbors in the South China Sea and is waiting for "a suitable administration in the United States, which would give less importance to America's stabilizing role in the Asia-Pacific region."

China is attempting to erode the United States' status as the world's leading military power and largest economy by pushing "militarily-motivated" regional economic cooperation around the world.



First and Second Island Chains.

Source: Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Geographic_Boundaries_of_the_First_and_Second_Island_Chains.png; Attribution: DoD

Source: Matt Yu and Sean Lin, “China Pushing Military Agenda Behind Economic Exchanges: Defense Ministry,” *Focus Taiwan* (Taiwan state-run press agency), 11 October 2023. <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202310110023>

China is attempting to erode the United States’ status as the world’s leading military power and largest economy by pushing “militarily-motivated” regional economic cooperation around the world, as evidenced by its plan to set up a military base in the Solomon Islands, which seeks to expand its power projection past the Second Island Chain, according to Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND).

In a report delivered to the legislature on Wednesday, the MND pointed out that China has a “covert military agenda” aimed at diminishing U.S. military dominance and economic power under its Belt and Road Initiative.

For instance, China has in recent years attempted to establish a military base in the Solomon Islands to consolidate the two countries’ strategic partnership, which is a move aimed at expanding Chinese power projection past the Second Island Chain, according to the report.

In addition, China has adopted aggressive maneuvers in an attempt to establish control over issues relating to the South China Sea, including engaging in “gray zone” activities by deploying its naval forces and maritime police and militia to interfere with other countries’ freedom of navigation in the region, the report said.

Source: “Long-Game Scenario,” *Daily Tribune* (an independent Philippine daily newspaper), 17 October 2023, <https://tribune.net.ph/2023/09/21/long-game-scenario/>

The tactic (lawfare and grey zone) involves wearing down its opponents in the South China Sea conflict while waiting for a suitable administration in the United States, which would again give less importance to America’s stabilizing role in the Asia-Pacific region.

China’s preparations for a protracted conflict are evident in its latest moves, from making public the 10-dash line claim, the absence of Chinese President Xi Jinping from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit in Jakarta, and the water spraying by a Chinese Coast Guard vessel of a Philippine Navy boat on a mission to resupply the grounded Sierra Madre.

Regional analysts said China is employing a combination of lawfare, which is the use of legal systems and institutions to undermine an opponent, and gray zone tactics, which are maneuvers short of war that point to a conflict for the long haul.

China’s drafting of a new map was timed to reassert its territorial claims and flex its muscles ahead of the ASEAN and G20 Summits.

Notes:

- 1 China’s Island Chain strategy is a maritime strategic concept that the country adopted in the 1980s. For most of its history, China focused on its internal and continental security issues. Then, as China began to open to the rest of the world, it recognized that to be a viable power, it would have to extend out into the maritime domain. The First Island Chain, which consists of the Kuril Islands, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryuku Islands, Taiwan, northern Philippines, and Borneo is the line of defense to which China would project power to protect, deny, and contest other strategic powers. The Second Island Chain reaches out to the Japan Bonin Islands, the Marianas, the western Caroline Islands, and Western New Guinea. The Third Island Chain is the Aleutian Islands, the center of the Pacific Ocean through Oceania, the Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, New Zealand, and Australia. See Beatrice Heuser and Paul O’Neill, “Episode 5: Admiral Liu Huaqing and China’s Island Chain Strategy,” RUSI, 9 August 2022. <https://rusi.org/podcasts/talking-strategy/episode-5-admiral-liu-huaqing-and-chinas-island-chain-strategy>

- 2 “2019年9月17日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会 (On September 19, 2019, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying Hosted a Regular Press Conference),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 17 September 2019. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/fyrbt_673021/jzhsl_673025/201909/t20190917_5418035.shtml
- 3 Lawfare, or legal warfare, is the use of legal systems to damage or delegitimize an opponent. China is said to have the most advanced lawfare strategy, which it incorporated as a major military strategy as early as 1999. An example of China’s use of lawfare is when it drafted a new map to reassert its territorial claims and flex its muscles prior to the ASEAN and G20 Summits. Lawfare is one of China’s “Three Warfares” strategy, used to drive the country’s military influence operations. (The other two “warfares” are public opinion warfare and psychological warfare). States. See: Jill Goldenziel, “Law as a Battlefield: The U.S., China, And the Global Escalation of Lawfare,” *Cornell Law Review*, Vol. 106, 23 September 2021. <https://www.cornelllawreview.org/2021/09/23/law-as-a-battlefield-the-u-s-china-and-the-global-escalation-of-lawfare/>

China Vaunts Its Fifth Generation Stealth Fighter



Chengdu J-20 fighter displaying its weapon bays, missiles, and avionics during the 2018 Zhuhai Airshow.

Source: emperornie, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-20_fighter_\(44040541250\)_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-20_fighter_(44040541250)_cropped.jpg); Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.0

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

China's **J-20** fifth-generation stealth fighter has undergone many changes since its maiden flight in January 2011, and is now reported to be deployed to all five Chinese Theater Commands.¹ China is now applauding these accomplishments.

According to the excerpted article from the Chinese Communist Party newspaper *Global Times*, the J-20 stealth fighter can “launch missiles under extreme battlefield environments,” providing tactical advantages in combat. In testing the J-20's capabilities, chief test pilot Li Gang was able to open the bay hatch and launch a missile while performing high-G rolling maneuvers simulating the evasion of an enemy missile attack. The test proved the J-20 could successfully conduct both attack and evasion operations simultaneously.

Over the past decade, the aircraft has evolved becoming more streamlined, decreasing the shock wave angle and wave resistance at transonic speeds, and improving flight maneuverability.² The sensor suite is being upgraded with a new gallium nitride radar, which has a larger bandwidth, stronger detection capability for small targets, and better anti-electronic interference capability.³ The fighter is now

equipped with domestic WS-15 turbofan engines. The WS-15, as compared to the previous Russian A1-31 and domestic WS-10C engines, marks a significant milestone providing higher thrust and more dynamic performance envelope originally meant for the J-20.⁴

The J-20 can not only launch missiles under optimal conditions but also under emergency and extreme conditions, which can bring important tactical advantages.

It is unknown how many J-20s are currently deployed. Various sources put the number between 150 and 200. The general consensus is the number of J-20s exceeds (or will soon exceed) the number of **F-22As**, the most capable U.S. fifth-generation fighter.⁵ The second excerpted article from the *Global Times* reported that the J-20 has been operational in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan Strait, where it is used to “safeguard China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and development interests.” As the J-20 extends out over disputed territorial waters, it improves China's ability to respond to emergencies and could alter the strategic landscape of the region. The J-20 could also intensify tensions and raises the question about what the United States' strategic response should be.

Source: Liu Xuanzun, “China’s J-20 Stealth Fighter Can Launch Missiles Under Extreme Conditions: Test Pilot,” *Global Times* (Chinese Communist Party’s English language newspaper), 6 October 2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202310/1299318.shtml>

Despite having to hide its munitions in an internal weapons bay to achieve a high level of stealth, China’s J-20 stealth fighter jet can still launch missiles under extreme battlefield environments, bringing tactical advantages in combat, [Li Gang] the chief test pilot of the aircraft revealed recently.

It took nearly seven years for the J-20 to be commissioned into the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force since its maiden flight in 2011, and during this period, the aircraft underwent a series of combat-oriented test flights that challenged its limits and validated the warplane’s safety under all kinds of extreme conditions, Li Gang, the chief test pilot of the J-20, said in an interview with China Central Television (CCTV) that was aired during the National Day holidays this week.

“It takes some time for the missile to launch after I press the launch button. If an enemy missile were to come for me during this period, I would have to make emergency maneuvers at high speed and high G forces. In this scenario, my missile needs to be ejected from the weapons bay without hitting my own aircraft and without leading to any danger,” Li said.

The test flight confirmed that the J-20 can not only launch missiles under optimal conditions, but also under emergency and extreme conditions, which can bring important tactical advantages, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Friday.

Source: Wei Qi and Fan Wei, “八一飞行表演队换装歼-10C,专家:体现中国空军装备更新加速度更快 (Ba Yi Aerobatics Team Refitted with J-10Cs, Experts: This Reflects Acceleration of Upgrades to Chinese Air Force’s Equipment),” *HUANQIU SHIBAO* (Chinese language version of Global Times—Chinese Communist Party newspaper), 17 May 2023. <https://3w.huanqiu.com/a/de583b/4CvJfBS6E1?p=2&agt=61>

[According to military expert] Zhang Xuefeng, “...In the past, when we just had third-generation aircraft, only elite troops could equip the advanced fighters. Now, the J-20 has been deployed in all military theaters...”

Notes:

- 1 Wang Yanan, “歼20首次部署就在西部战区,卫星看清后,印度收到一好一坏两消息 (J-20 Deployed for First Time Western Theater Command; After Being Clearly Seen by Satellite, India Received Two Pieces of News, One Good and One Bad),” *Tencent*, 26 September 2023. <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20230926A093WB00>
- 2 Ma Haoliang, “歼20B新战甲超音速新境界 (J-20B’s New Armor Brings a New Level of Supersonic Speed),” *Ta Kung Pao*, 30 January 2023. <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2023/0130/812950.html>
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Rick Joe, “China’s J-20 Gets Another Upgrade,” *Diplomat*, 1 August 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/chinas-j-20-gets-another-upgrade/>
- 5 Richard Fisher, e-mail message to author, 19 October 2023.

People's Liberation Army Ground Force Fields First Armed Reconnaissance Drone



A China Caihong-4 drone at Airshow China Zhuhai in 2022.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CASC_Rainbow#/media/File:CH-4_at_Airshow_China_Zhuhai_2022.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

By Alpha Ngo
OE Watch Commentary

According to the first excerpted article from the Chinese government news outlet Tianjin Daily, on 14 September, the 6th China Helicopter Exposition displayed 65 helicopters and drones to over 350 firms at the Industry Base of the AVIC Helicopter in Tianjin. On 18 September 2023, according to the second article from China Daily, a Chinese government newspaper, officials confirmed that the People's Liberation Army Ground Force (PLAGF) had unveiled their first armed reconnaissance drone, the KVD-002. The KVD-002 was displayed at the 6th China Helicopter Exposition. The **CH-4**, a predecessor to the KVD-002, is China's best-selling unmanned combat aircraft. Prior to the KVD-002 release, the PLAGF did not have the capability for unmanned combat air reconnaissance. The KVD-

65 helicopters and drones, nearly 50 sets of flight simulators and special vehicle equipment and other large exhibits were on display.

002's ability to provide up to 30 hours of air surveillance along with an air-to-ground strike package, adds additional capabilities to support China's overseas expansion interests. The KVD-002 provides the PLAGF with battlefield and intelligence support to helicopter units, and guides attack helicopters to their target, increasing the PLAGF's operational capability. Additionally, the KVD-002 could be utilized to support airborne early warning, control aircraft, and provide Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities to ground forces.

Source: “第六届中国天津国际直升机博览会开幕 (The 6th China Tianjin International Helicopter Expo opens),” *Tianjin Daily* (Tianjin Municipal People's Government news outlet), 15 September 2023. https://www.tj.gov.cn/sy/tjxw/202309/t20230915_6406971.html

“On September 14, the 6th China Tianjin International Helicopter Expo opened in Tianjin Airport Economic Zone. Municipal Party Committee Secretary Chen Min'er met with Hao Zhaoping, Deputy Secretary of the Party Leadership Group and General Manager of Aviation Industry Corporation of China, who came to Tianjin

continue on 9

to attend the conference, and Lieutenant General Deng Zhiping of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and witnessed the cooperation between the Tianjin Municipal People's Government and Aviation Industry Corporation of China. Signed a comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement."

More than 350 companies from more than 20 countries and regions participated in the exhibition... 65 helicopters and drones, nearly 50 sets of flight simulators and special vehicle equipment and other large exhibits were on display. The audience is expected to exceed 60,000. During this period, more than 150 business negotiations and business activities will be held to build a platform for aviation companies to connect on-site and expand cooperation.

Source: "陆军推出战斗无人机 (Ground Force unveils combat drone)," *China Daily* (English language Chinese Communist Party newspaper), 18 September 2023. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202309/18/WS6507b43da310d2dce4bb644f.html>

The People's Liberation Army Ground Force has unveiled its first combat drone, a move observers said will strengthen the service's operational capability.

"The drone can cooperate with helicopters in combat operations. It can provide battlefield intelligence and fire support for the helicopter units, and can guide attack helicopters to their targets," the introduction said, adding that the model can make short takeoffs and landings on a plateau."

The Ground Force did not disclose the KVD002's developer. However, observers said that judged on its configuration and the AR-1 missile, the drone must have been designed based on the Caihong-4, or CH-4, China's bestselling unmanned combat aircraft on the international market. The CH-4 is built by the China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics in Beijing, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

Taiwan Addressing Drone Technology Gap With China

By John Lubianetsky
OE Watch Commentary

Taiwan has taken an interest in Ukraine's ongoing war with Russia. Namely, Taiwanese policymakers are researching how Ukraine continues to counter the military advantages of a significantly more powerful opponent. According to the first excerpted article from the *Liberty Times Net*, an influential Taiwanese news outlet, reports from a 77-page briefing given to the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, outlining the reason that Taiwan thinks Ukraine has been successful: drones. The briefing elaborates that, "At the beginning of the war, Ukraine was believed to lack air superiority but created their own partial air superiority through drones." The briefing comes against the backdrop of increased tension between Taiwan and China. The Taiwanese briefing expresses concern that disparities between Taiwan and China's drone capabilities could endanger Taiwanese national security, given the Ukraine conflict has demonstrated the importance of drones.

According to the article, the drone technology gap between China and Taiwan has developed into a "dangerous" stage. China surpasses Taiwan in the fielded varieties and number of UAVs by a significant margin. China possesses over fifty types of drones with a fleet numbering in the tens of thousands while Taiwan has four types of drones in a fleet num-

bering in the hundreds. This gap motivated President Tsai to initiate the "Drone National Team" project, which aims to create a self-sufficient Taiwanese drone industry by mid-2024. The same article remarks that "Taiwan seeks to manufacture 3,200 military drones, ranging in design from mini drones under 2 kilograms to large reconnaissance aircraft with a cruising range of more than 150 kilometers."

While Taiwan develops its drone industry, the United States is assisting Taiwan to close the drone gap. As per the second article from *The Central News Agency*, Taiwan's national news agency, in August, Taiwan received some \$345 million in U.S. military aid, which includes the transfer of four MQ-9A unarmed reconnaissance drones.¹ The arms deal coincides with Taiwan's national goal to bolster its drone fleet.

Drones will play a significant part in Taiwan's strategy to deter China. As China increases its aggression toward Taiwan, Taiwan will have more opportunities to increase security cooperation with like-minded countries. However, new Taiwanese security deals with foreign countries will likely provoke China's ire. Growing tensions will place larger burdens on Taiwan's diplomatic partners to support the island against external threats. As demonstrated by other global conflicts with similar matchups, Taiwan believes that drones will make significant contributions to deterring Chinese aggression.



Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen attends the "Asian Drone AI Innovation Application R&D Center Opening Press Conference and Unveiling Ceremony" on 13 August, 2022.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/52282054928/>; Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl

Source: “俄烏戰爭無人機成關鍵 台灣加速製造望明年擁3000架以上 (Drones Have Become Key to the Russia-Ukraine War, Taiwan is Accelerating Manufacturing and Hopes to Have More Than 3,000 Drones Next Year),” *Liberty Times Net* (independent Taiwanese news outlet), 22 July 2023. <https://def.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/4371980>

According to Reuters, when President Tsai Ing-wen met with top leaders of the Democratic Progressive Party last summer, the 77-page briefing stated, ‘At the beginning of the war, Ukraine was commonly believed to lack air superiority, but created their own partial air superiority through drones.’ This is the reason that, while Russia’s initial advantages and military power are much greater than that of Ukraine, Ukraine was able to successfully resist the Russian army. However, this answer is not good news for Taiwan.

Reuters pointed out that in the face of China, which has more powerful capabilities and is arming drones, the drone development gap between Taiwan and China has entered into a “dangerous” stage. Two sources and an internal security report revealed that Taiwan currently has only four types of drones, and the number of drones in the fleet is likely in the “hundreds.” However, according to national defense analysis, Reuters’ review of China’s commercial military manufacturing information, Chinese Communist Party official media reports, and other sources, it is estimated that the Chinese People’s Liberation Army has more than 5’ different types of drones, and the number of drones in its fleet is “tens of thousands.”

Therefore, President Tsai Ing-wen “pressed the button” and launched the drone program to narrow the gap with China. Within the “Drone National Team” plan, the government convenes commercial drone manufacturers, aerospace companies and the military to cooperate to quickly create a self-sufficient supply chain. According to the government plan, it is expected to be completed by mid-2024, Taiwan seeks to manufacture 3,200 military drones, ranging in design from mini-drones under 2 kilograms to large reconnaissance aircraft with a cruising range of more than 150 kilometers.

Source: Kai-hsiang Yu, “知情人士：美對台軍事援助 包含4架MQ-9A無人機 (People Familiar with the Situation: US Military Assistance to Taiwan Includes 4 **MQ-9A** Drones),” *Central News Agency* (Taiwan’s national news agency), 14 August 2023. <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202308140105.aspx>

Following the military’s purchase of MQ-9B, people familiar with the situation told CNA reporters in the morning that the \$345 million in military assistance announced by the United States at the end of July to Taiwan includes four MQ-9A unarmed drones used for reconnaissance. The United States is currently adjusting the MQ-9A advanced agility and sensitive equipment, and the delivery date has not yet been finalized. This will help improve intelligence, surveillance, and intelligence link abilities in the airspace around Taiwan...

Notes:

- 1 The deal also comes with an intelligence sharing agreement including Taiwan, the United States, the Philippines, and Japan. See; Kathrin Hille & Demetri Sevastopulo, “US to link up with Taiwan and Japan drone fleets to share real-time data,” *Financial Times*, 8 June 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/bde0db76-a7f8-4ecd-b5d5-03de0b5a8659>

China Pursues Increased Access To Critical South American Resources



Chilean President Gabriel Boric has focused extensively on the country's lithium reserves as a source of global influence and for Chile's development.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/consejocultura/52377478252/>; Attribution: CC BY-NC-SA.2.0 DEED

We highly value the spirit of collaboration and shared growth in the spirit of building a new world order based on peace and harmony among peoples.

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China has viewed Latin America as an important source of critical minerals, such as lithium, copper, graphite, cobalt, and nickel for well over a decade.¹ The tenth anniversary of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Beijing, with representatives from nearly 130 countries including Chile's President Gabriel Boric and Argentina's President Alberto Fernández, provided another occasion for China to make further advances in the competition for access to Latin America's critical minerals, specifically, lithium. While Chile has the region's most developed lithium mining industry, Argentina is developing the sector, and Bolivia, with the largest lithium reserves, has the least developed mining sector. Chile permits only a small number of mining companies to operate in the lithium industry, one of which is China's state-owned Tianqi Lithium. Meanwhile, China's mining companies have made inroads in Argentina's lithium industry. Ganfeng Lithium, for example, is a majority stakeholder in Argentina's Caucharí-Olaroz operation, which will soon be one of the world's top lithium production mines.

As per the first excerpted article from the second-largest daily newspaper in Chile, *La Tercera*, while in Beijing, President Boric reiterated Chile's commitment to China's BRI and thanked President Xi Jinping for the "spirit of collaboration and shared growth." Boric also pronounced Chile's support for a multipolar world order and thanked China for its focus

on development. Meanwhile, according to the second excerpted article from Spain's largest daily, *El País*, Boric announced a multimillion-dollar investment by the Chinese company Tingaran in battery production in Chile. Boric's trip to Beijing for the tenth anniversary of the BRI is significant because it demonstrates China's steadfast focus on lithium as a key driver for future economic growth and global economic governance through reusable battery technology. Further, China's investment in Chilean battery production represents the first investment in Chile's nascent battery production potential. Moving up the lithium value chain is a stated goal of the country's National Lithium Strategy released earlier in Boric's administration. China has worked hard to position itself as Chile's long-term economic partner of choice and showing that it is interested in building value chains beyond mineral extraction in the country will be key to that endeavor.

Sources “Boric sostiene bilateral con Xi Jinping: ‘Valoramos mucho el espíritu de colaboración y crecimiento compartido’ (Boric maintains bilateral with Xi Jinping: ‘We highly value the spirit of collaboration and shared growth’),” *La Tercera* (second largest daily newspaper in Chile), 16 October 2023. <https://www.latercera.com/politica/noticia/boric-sostiene-bilateral-con-xi-jinping-valoramos-mucho-el-espiritu-de-colaboracion-y-crecimiento-compartido/FFSYQHIWVRDBLO4EIOOLE6ECVA/>

While visiting with Xi Jinping, Boric announced: ‘We maintain and are going to defend multilateral spaces and the principle of ‘one China,’ a premise that has been observed in an unrestricted manner by our country throughout the more than 50 years of bilateral relations. Furthermore, we highly value the spirit of collaboration and shared growth in the spirit of building a new world order based on peace and harmony among peoples.’ For his part, the Chinese president maintained that ‘relations between Chile and China are one of the best in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Chile is the pioneer of the Belt and Road in that region. China pays a lot of attention to relations with Chile.’

Source: “Boric anuncia una millonaria inversión de una empresa china para fabricar baterías de litio en Chile (Boric announces a million-dollar investment by a Chinese company to manufacture lithium batteries in Chile),” *El País* (Spain’s largest daily with some of the best coverage in Latin America), 16 October 2023. <https://elpais.com/chile/2023-10-16/boric-anuncia-una-millonaria-inversion-de-una-empresa-china-para-fabricar-baterias-de-litio-en-chile.html>

The president of Chile...announced an investment of more than 250 million dollars by the Chinese group Tingaran, specialized in lithium, that will create hundreds of jobs...the group is engaged in the research and development, production and sales of lithium-ion battery cells applied to power systems of electric vehicles, including electric mining trucks, and other equipment. According to Boric, the most important thing is that ‘we are not going to limit ourselves only to extraction but we are going to create value chains and also transfer knowledge because one of the commitments that the company has made is to generate exchange programs so that Chilean professionals can travel to China and also train in the development of this industry. So we are going to be advancing the National Lithium Strategy with investments like these with which we are very happy.’

Notes:

- 1 For more information on China’s advance in important mining spaces such as the lithium industry, see: Ryan C. Berg and T. Andrew Sady-Kennedy, “South America’s Lithium Triangle: Opportunities for the Biden Administration,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 17 August 2021. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/south-americas-lithium-triangle-opportunities-biden-administration>

Russia Continues Investment In Arctic Route Expansion

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Despite fighting in Ukraine and Western sanctions, Russia continues to push the expansion of its Northern Sea route's capacity. According to the excerpted article from the Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, the Russian state's push followed a significant investment in Arctic infrastructure development by sanctioned Russian oligarch Andrei Patrushev.¹ According to the article, Patrushev will take an ownership stake in the Arkhangelsk Seaport. Much of the shipping currently goes east to the Russian Far East and China, but many non-European countries are expanding trade with Russia. In the past, President Putin set increased shipping goals for the North Sea Route which have been met. Still, this current goal to increase from 34 million metric tons to 83 million metric tons

is quite ambitious. Who the intended customers are, where the demand exists, and what type of goods are still unknown. Much of this cargo will continue to be LNG, coal, oil, timber, grain, and processed metals. Indeed, Russia is investing in its north for the long term, and the Patrushev family seems convinced that it is a good place to invest. Their financing, in tandem with state investment, may provide insight into the relationship between the oligarchs that keep Russia's economy functioning and the Russian political state.

The Russian government decided that a terminal for shipment of zinc and lead will be built in the archipelago of Novaya Zemlya and the Seaport of Arkhangelsk will have its capacity tripled.

Source: Atle Staalesen, "Following Andrei Patrushev's infrastructure investment comes a major government development plan for seaports in Arkhangelsk and Novaya Zemlya," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 2 October 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2023/10/following-andrei-patrushevs-infrastructure-investment-comes-major>.

The Russian government decided that a terminal for shipment of zinc and lead will be built in the archipelago of Novaya Zemlya and the Seaport of Arkhangelsk will have its capacity tripled. "The Government continues to systematically develop the Northern Sea Route," Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin underlined this week as he presented a new infrastructure plan for the north Russian region of Arkhangelsk.

According to the document, the local seaport will have its capacity tripled by 2035. While it handled 6.5 million tons of goods in 2022, it will be able to handle 25 million tons in 2040. This should involve major dredging operations in the Northern Dvina river and improved railway connections to the seaport. The construction of the new terminal will be started no later than 2026 and it is to be completed in 2031. The key commodities for the new port in Arkhangelsk will be zinc and lead concentrates. The plan also includes the construction of a terminal in Novaya Zemlya, which is to be ready for operations in 2026. The construction of the new infrastructure will be covered by non-budgetary funds.

The terminal in the far northern and heavily-militarised archipelago has been under planning for several years. It is due to be built in the Bezimyannaya Bay, not far from the local nuclear weapon test sites. It will handle ores and concentrate from the Pavlovskoye mine. State nuclear power company Rosatom and its subsidiary First Ore Mining Company are behind the project.

The Russian government's approval of the infrastructure plan comes only few months after Andrei Patrushev acquired an ownership stake in the Seaport of Arkhangelsk. Andrei Patrushev is the son of Russian national

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security strongman Nikolai Patrushev.

In early 2023, Patrushev bought a 10 percent stake in the seaport. With the acquisition, Patrushev teamed up with port owners TD Bulat-SBS, Investment Industrial Partner and Vaiz Invest. The latter reportedly controls 60 percent of the port.

Andrei Patrushev is the youngest son of Nikolai Patrushev, the Russian Security Council Secretary. The Patrushev family is closely associated with the FSB. Andrei Patrushev is a major owner of the Gazprom Shelf Project, a company that has management responsibility for several of Russia's best Arctic drilling rigs and vessels. He also controls a major share of Arctic exploration company Marine Arctic Geo Exploration Expedition (MAGE).

Arkhangelsk is one of Russia's biggest Arctic seaports. It is extensively used for shipments of goods and construction materials to far northern industrial projects like the Syrdasayskoye coal field and Rosneft's Vostok Oil.

As the new federal plan was approved in Moscow, a Chinese cargo ship loaded forestry products from the terminal. According to regional Governor Aleksandr Tsybulsky, Chinese furniture manufacturers are ready to start shipping up to one million cubic meters of wood products on the Northern Sea Route. The first shipload includes 300 containers sent on the Chinese ship Xin Xin Hai 1.

Notes:

- 1 See: "The West has imposed a barrage of sanctions on top Russian figures. See how they're connected to Putin," *The Washington Post*, 15 March 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/putin-inner-circle-russia/> and the official U.S. government notice; *U.S. Treasury Announces Unprecedented & Expansive Sanctions Against Russia, Imposing Swift and Severe Economic Costs*, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, 24 February 2022. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0608>

Russia Signs Agreement To Open Naval Base In Abkhazia

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Abkhazia has signed a bilateral agreement to host a Russian naval base near the southern Abkhazian city of Ochamchira. Western observers have interpreted the announcement as proof Ukraine is having success driving Russia's Black Sea Fleet out of Crimea, while the Russian and Abkhazian press are focused on the regional implications of the proposed Russian naval base.

According to the first excerpted article from the Russian daily *Izvestia*,¹ the agreement is intended to increase defense cooperation between Russia and Abkhazia, recognized as an independent state by Russia.² However, the second excerpted article from the regionally focused *Echo Kavkaz* points out, Russian coastal patrol boats already use the port at Ochamchira. This port is small in comparison to Novorossiysk, the naval port to which Russia has moved much of its Black Sea fleet after Ukraine demonstrated it is capable of attacking naval assets at Sevastopol on Crimea. According to political figure and Hero of Abkhazia³, Aslan Kobakhia, the announcement is part of the information war between pro-Russian Abkhazians and those Abkhazians who prefer a more independent political path for Abkhazia. He noted there has been talk of an expanded base in Ochamchira for years, further observing that “no matter how deep you go, it’s a small port, only a few ships can be there at a time, and large ships cannot base there.” How-

ever, Kobakhia did conclude an expanded port at Ochamchira could be used as a vital refueling hub for Russia's Navy. According to Giva Kvarchia, as quoted in the third excerpted article from the Abkhaz diaspora media website *Abkhaz World*, the base in Abkhazia would be mutually beneficial as it would be an economic boon to Abkhazia and provide a military advantage to Russia. A base at Ochamchira would also serve as a deterrent against any future military action by Georgia to take back Abkhazia. Kvarchia acknowledged that the base would be provocative and both “a protection and a potential threat.”

The interaction between Moscow and Sukhum in terms of military-technical cooperation is aimed at increasing the level of defense capability of both Russia and Abkhazia, says Bzhania.

A Russian naval base in Abkhazia presents an interesting security dilemma for the region. Ukraine has proven capable of attacking Russian naval vessels in Novorossiysk, Russia, and Sevastopol, on the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula, which has been annexed by Russia. Given that Abkhazia is not Russian territory, any decision to engage the Russian Navy there would necessarily be seen as an attack on the territory.⁴ While, the announcement of the Russian naval base in Abkhazia is merely that, the positioning of additional Russian assets there could impact the operational environment of the whole eastern Black Sea region.

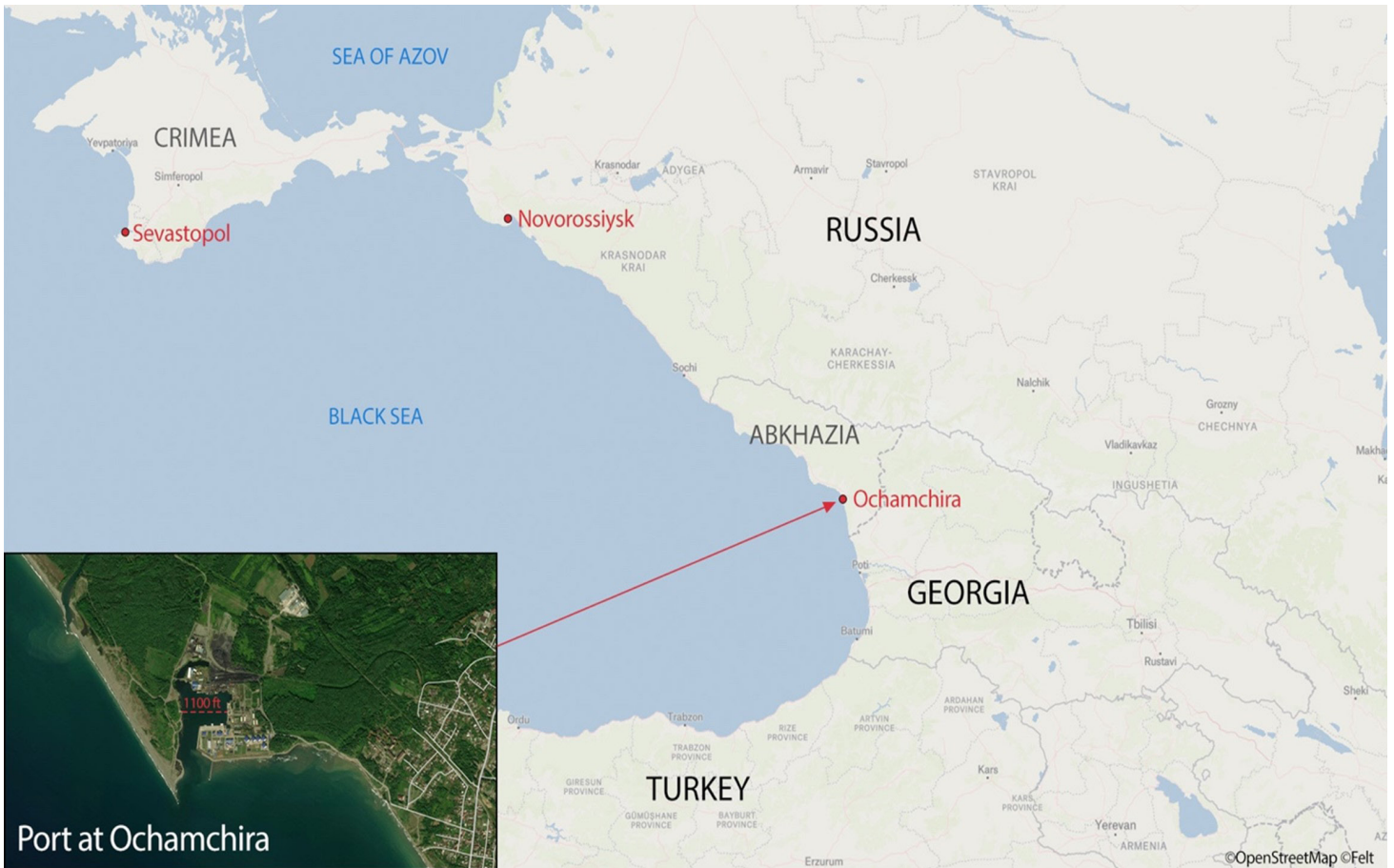
Source: “Бжания сообщил о размещении в Абхазии пункта постоянного базирования ВМФ РФ (Bzhania announced the deployment of a permanent base for the Russian Navy in Abkhazia), *Izvestia* (pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 05 October 2023. <https://iz.ru/1584377/2023-10-05/bzhaniia-soobshchil-o-razmeshchenii-v-abkhazii-punkta-postoiannogo-bazirovaniia-vmf-rf>

A new permanent base for the Russian Navy will appear on the Black Sea coast in Abkhazia; a corresponding agreement between Russia and Abkhazia has already been signed, Abkhaz President Aslan Bzhania said in an interview with Izvestia.

“Two states, but we have a common Fatherland”

“On the day of our holiday [in honor of the 30th anniversary of Victory Day in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of

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Map of Russian Black Sea naval bases Sevastopol and Novorossiysk and the proposed base at Ochamchira on disputed Georgian territory.

Source: Combat Films and Research; Attribution: Combat Films and Research by permission using map data from OpenStreetMap

1992–1993 and Independence Day, which was celebrated on September 30], a small missile ship came to us, we boarded it – a very modern ship with serious combat capabilities . We have signed an agreement, and in the near future there will be a permanent base for the Russian Navy in the Ochamchira region,” Bzhania said.

In addition, the President of the Republic noted that Russia continues to provide support, providing the opportunity for Abkhaz specialists to undergo advanced training in educational institutions of the Russian Federation.

The interaction between Moscow and Sukhum in terms of military-technical cooperation is aimed at increasing the level of defense capability of both Russia and Abkhazia, says Bzhania.

From August 21 to September 1, 2023, joint Russian-Abkhaz military special-purpose, flight and tactical exercises were held in four regions of Abkhazia, aimed at increasing the level of field training of troops and forces, coordinating their actions when performing combat missions.

Russia recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia on August 26, 2008. This year, ceremonial events were held in the republic in honor of the 15th anniversary of this event. Currently, the Russian and Abkhaz military jointly ensure the security of the republic. Also, the borders of Abkhazia are guarded by the border service of the Russian FSB.

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Source: Vitaly Shariya, “Аслан Кобахия: «Шум вокруг Очамчирского морпорта – буря в стакане воды» (Aslan Kobakhia: ‘The noise around the Ochamchira seaport is a storm in a teacup’),” *Ekho Kavkaza* (regionally specific news source), 12 October 2023. <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/32634876.html>

“I’ve been there several times. No matter how deep you go... It’s a small port. Only a few ships can be there at a time. There are no such opportunities that some people are talking about - they left Sevastopol, they left Novorossiysk... The Russian fleet cannot leave either Sevastopol or Novorossiysk, there are no such opportunities. Five percent of those ships will not fit on the territory of Abkhazia. You need to know a little to speak. There is no place to base large ships there. Ships can enter there, refuel, and go back to sea. The Russian Federation doesn’t comment at all, but here we start, you know, creating a storm in a teacup... Why, I can’t understand.”

Source: “Givi Kvarchia: ‘Military Bases: A Double-Edged Sword of Protection and Threat,’ *Abkhaz World* (pro-Abkhaz web news service run by Abkhaz diaspora in Europe), 6 October 2023. https://abkhazworld.com/aw/interview/2536-givi-kvarchia-military-bases-a-double-edged-sword-of-protection-and-threat?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

[Q]. *Aslan Bzhania also made a statement indicating that Sukhum is prepared to deepen its military-technical cooperation with the Russian Federation, and that a new permanent base for the Russian Navy will be established on the Black Sea coast in Abkhazia. Could you comment on this matter?*

- [Givi Kvarchia]. *As for the enhanced military-technical cooperation between our nations, it is already outlined in the broader alliance and strategic partnership agreement, as well as in interdepartmental agreements between our defence ministries. This ‘sn’t a new development; it has been in planning for a long time. Perhaps it h’sn’t proceeded at the pace we’d desire, especially in terms of military-technical cooperation. Regarding the Ochamchira port and the basing of certain Black Sea Fleet ships or a portion of it there, this ‘sn’t new in Abkhazian politics either. Discussions and negotiations about the joint use of the Ochamchira port by the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia have been ongoing for years, and as far as I know, an agreement has been reached to use this port on mutually beneficial terms.*

[Q]. *Givi, could you elaborate on the essence of the “mutually beneficial terms”?*

- [Givi Kvarchia]. *The crux of it is that a portion of this port will be used by the Abkhazian side for economic purposes. Meanwhile, another portion will be utilized by the Russian Federation for military objectives.*

[Q]. *Givi, considering the war in Ukraine and recent information that a drone made its way to Sochi, aren’t you concerned that a Naval base in Ochamchira might pose a security threat to the citizens or the country as a whole? What are your thoughts?*

- [Givi Kvarchia]. *Any military base or basing point can serve as both protection and a potential threat. However, our discussions about the Ochamchira port began before the military operation in Ukraine unfolded. To put it simply, it’s a double-edged sword, but from our perspective, it represents more of a security measure than a threat, in my view.*

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Notes:

- 1 Although Russian media outlet *Izvestia* broke the story of the proposed Russian naval base at Ochamchira, there was very little additional Russian coverage of the topic. In a separate article from *Izvestia*, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov deferred on the topic, noting that it was a military issue and inferring that questions about the basing agreement should be directed to the Russian Ministry of Defense, see: “Песков переадресовал вопрос о размещении ВМФ в Абхазии в Минобороны (Peskov forwarded the question about the deployment of the Navy in Abkhazia to the Ministry of Defense), *Izvestia*, 5 October 2023. <https://iz.ru/1584547/2023-10-05/peskov-pereadresoval-vopros-o-razmeshchenii-vmf-v-abkhazii-v-minoborony>
- 2 Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, are break-away republics within the Republic of Georgia. Georgia considers both territories occupied by Russia, which is not factually accurate, especially in the case of Abkhazia which has fought to be recognized as an independent state and maintains its own security apparatus. Only a handful of countries have recognized Abkhazia’s independence: Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria.
- 3 Hero of Abkhazia, much like Hero of the Russian Federation, is a title given to Abkhazians who have performed a heroic deed in the service of the state, usually veterans of the war between Abkhazia and Georgia (1992-1993).
- 4 For more on current Russia-Abkhazia relations see: Dodge Billingsley “Abkhazia Pushes Back Against Russia’s Suggestion Of Incorporation,” *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/abkhazia-pushes-back-against-russias-suggestion-of-incorporation/>

The Evolution Of Russia’s Peacekeeping Mission In Nagorno-Karabakh

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

On 19 September 2023, Azerbaijani forces launched an operation against the break-away republic of Artsakh, and within days, succeeded in ending ethnic Armenian control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The excerpted article from the independent news website *Kavkazskiy Uzel* reports on how Azerbaijani control of Nagorno-Karabakh has impacted the Russian peacekeeping mission.¹ The article notes that Russian peacekeepers dismantled a few observation posts and established new ones, some of which were set up with Azerbaijan to jointly protect the weapons and equipment surrendered by the armed forces of Nagorno-Karabakh. The dismantled observation posts were situated in eastern Nagorno-Karabakh near Azerbaijan. The article also notes, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that its peacekeepers will adapt to the new situation, even as a large percentage of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh has left the region.

The conditions under which the Russian peacekeeping contingent was introduced into the region in 2020 have been seriously adjusted.

The mandate of the Russian peacekeeping mission runs through November 2025 and will be automatically extended for another five years unless the governments of Armenia or Azerbaijan request to terminate it. The article notes that the Armenian government signed a declaration recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan two weeks after Azerbaijan took control of the region, essentially ending support for the break-away republic. While one of the main tasks of the Russian peacekeeping mission has changed, it appears likely that Russia will continue to operate in the region.



Map of the 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh war showing Azerbaijan day-to-day advances.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2023_Nagorno-Karabakh_War.svg; Attribution: CCA 4.0

Source: “МИД России пояснил смену постов миротворцев адаптацией к новым условиям (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia explained the change to the posts of peacekeepers as adapting to the new conditions),” Kavkazskiy Uzel (independent news website reporting on the Caucasus), 10 October 2023. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/393302>

Peacekeepers are adapting to new conditions against the backdrop of a mass exodus of the population from the region, reported Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

As the “Caucasian Knot” wrote, on October 5, peacekeepers reported on the dismantling of observation posts in the Askeran, Martakert and Shusha regions, and on October 8, the Russian peacekeeping contingent dismantled posts in the Martuni and Martakert regions...

A day earlier, the Russian peacekeeping contingent reported that the Russian peacekeeping contingent had set up 25 guard posts in the North (seven posts) and South (18 posts) areas of responsibility, including 14 jointly with the Azerbaijani side. Peacekeepers are taking part in the protection of warehouses with ammunition, weapons, military and special equipment surrendered by the armed forces of Nagorno-Karabakh, as stated in the bulletin dated October 9.

The activities of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh will adapt to new conditions against the backdrop of a mass exodus of the population from the region, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said today...

As a result of the virtual capitulation of Stepanakert, Azerbaijan gained control over the region. On September 28, the President of Nagorno-Karabakh signed a decree ending the existence of the republic. After the military operation carried out by Azerbaijan on September 19-20, almost all residents left Nagorno-Karabakh, in which, according to various sources, about 120 thousand people lived...

If the Russian peacekeeping contingent leaves Nagorno-Karabakh, it must return to Russia, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said today in an interview with the Public TV Channel when asked about the possibility of deploying peacekeepers in Armenia... On October 5, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed a declaration recognizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, including the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh...

Notes:

- 1 Russian peacekeepers were deployed as part of the ceasefire agreement that ended the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. For background on the Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh and how Russia uses peacekeeping missions to achieve strategic objectives beyond conflict resolution, see: Matthew Stein “The Evolutionary Russian View Of Peacekeeping As Part Of Modern Warfare,” *FMSO’s Foreign Perspectives Brief*, 24 March 2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/2023-03-24-the-evolutionary-russian-view-of-peacekeeping-as-part-of-modern-warfare-matthew-stein-update/>

Poland And The Baltic States Express Concern About Regional Stability

By Paris Gordon
OE Watch Commentary

Since the Wagner Group, a private Russian military company known for its brutality and criminal activities, began training in Belarus in July, concerns amongst the neighboring states have steadily risen regarding regional border security. Belarussian President Lukashenko offered the Wagner Group employment in Belarus -- with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of the Belarussian military -- following its attempted run on the Russian capital in June of 2023.¹

It can be expected that the Wagner troops will be used for border provocations against Polish uniformed services... It also cannot be ruled out that some of the mercenaries will try to infiltrate Poland and other countries mainly on the Eastern Flank.

As the excerpted publication from the Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych) indicates, despite interacting under the auspices of improving Belarussian military readiness and effectiveness, Belarus's neighbors fear that Belarus is readying additional means of offense against its neighbors. Poland's concern is that as Belarus' offensive forces become better trained, they may create instability in the delicate border peace that the two countries have reached. Furthermore, the article suggests that the Wagner Group's location in Belarus suggests the possibility of a larger-scale engagement within Poland and other border countries like Lithuania. In essence, Belarussian "Wagner-trained fighters" could enter the open border zones with a Belarussian passport with the intent to identify viable targets in Poland, specifically within the critical infrastructure.² Additionally, the statement requests the Wagner Group be declared a terrorist organization. Such a designation would significantly broaden the legal bounds of recourse and response available to both Poland and NATO, both as a preventative measure to increase border security but also as a guarantee of support from NATO should Belarus pursue further provocative actions.



Members of the Wagner group training Belarussian troops in summer 2023.

Source: https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fcommons.wikimedia.org%2Fwiki%2FFile%3APMC_wagner_in_belarus_2; Attribution: CC By 3.0 Deed.

As expressed in the second excerpted piece, a joint statement from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia released on Poland's Ministry of Internal Affairs X (formerly *Twitter*) feed, Belarus, by collaborating with Wagner and, more broadly, with Russia, is taking deliberate steps to destabilize the region. The joint statement declares that the four nations would take decisive and swift action should further provocation occur, noting that any border infractions would result in the immediate shutdown of all Belarussian border crossings. In addition, the governments called for the immediate removal of all Wagner Group members and holdings from Belarussian borders. Their statement asserts that the Wagner Group poses a threat not only to each country's respective national security but to the security of the free world as well.

Source: Anna Maria Dyner, “Grupa Wagnera na Białorusi - potencjalne zagrożenia dla Polski (Wagner Group Arrives in Belarus - Potential Threats to Poland),” *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych* (official website of Polish Institute of International Affairs), 27 July 2023. <https://pism.pl/publications/wagner-group-arrives-in-belarus-potential-threats-to-poland>

The mercenaries in Belarus give the Belarusian and Russian authorities additional tools for hybrid action against NATO countries, in particular Poland and Lithuania. It can be expected that the Wagner troops will be used for border provocations against Polish uniformed services, including the possible use of arms or attempts to destroy barriers. They may also be used to coordinate and command operations at the border. It also cannot be ruled out that some of the mercenaries will try to infiltrate Poland and other countries mainly on the Eastern Flank (both illegally and, for example, with the use of Belarusian passports) with the task of identifying critical infrastructure facilities. Some of them may also be prepared to carry out acts of sabotage on Polish soil. ... These activities will increase tensions and have a psychological impact on Polish society in the context of, among other things, the Belarusian-Russian military exercise Union Shield, scheduled for the end of September, or the October parliamentary elections in Poland.

It may also be necessary to recognize the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization. This would allow the use of the Anti-Terrorist Activities Act, which, among other things, broadens the spectrum of activities that can be undertaken by the relevant security services and authorities against persons suspected of seeking to carry out terrorist activities. In addition, Poland may hold consultations within NATO and propose a common approach by Alliance members to the Wagner Group, chiefly by pointing out that they are being used by Belarus and Russia as a tool of hybrid action that requires a coordinated response from the Alliance, for example, in the form of an increased Allied presence at the border.

At the same time, Poland and NATO should announce that they will use all available instruments to fight the Wagner Group mercenaries if they pose a threat, with Belarus and Russia fully responsible for their actions on the border.

Source: Mariusz Kamiński, Angé Bilotaité, Māris Kučinskis, Lauri Läänemets, “Oświadczenie Ministrów Spraw Wewnętrznych Polski, Litwy, Łotwy i Estonii po spotkaniu konsultacyjnym w Warszawie (Statement by the Ministers of the Interiors of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia after the consultation meeting in Warsaw),” *Twitter @MSWiA_GOV_PL*, 28 August 2023. https://twitter.com/MSWiA_GOV_PL/status/1696123142249283636

We emphasize that the actions taken by Russia and Belarus cooperating as an attempt to deliberately destabilize the situation in the region. We declare we are determined to oppose this together. Our answer will be joint, decisive and appropriate to the current situation- up to the possibility of further isolating both regimes by closing border crossings. We are determined to defend the borders of the democratic world, leaving access to our territories for the...Belarussian oppositionists.

In this regard we call on the Belarussian regime to remove the “Wagner” group from the territories of Belarus...

Notes:

- 1 For a Belarussian perspective on the Wagner Group’s presence, as well as their views regarding Polish and neighboring states reactions, see: “Тенденции военно-политической обстановки и обновленную Концепцию нацбезопасности обсудили в Витебске (Trends in the military-political situation and the updated National Security Concept were discussed in Vitebsk)” *Белта* (A news service of Belarus), 13 September 2023. <https://www.belta.by/amp/regions/view/tendentsii-voenno-politicheskoy-obstanovki-i-obnovlennuju-kontseptsiju-natsbezopasnosti-obsudili-v-587792-2023/>
- 2 For more information on the operational tactics of Wagner Group from their previous engagements in Ukraine, see: Charles Bartles, “The Composition And Tactics Of Wagner Assault Detachments,” *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/the-composition-and-tactics-of-wagner-assault-detachments/>

Russia Uses Diplomacy To Increase Military Influence In Libya



Russian military assets in Al Khadim airfield, Libya, 2020.

Source: US AFRICOM Public Affairs, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/33034/russia-and-the-wagner-group-continue-to-be-in>; Attribution: Public Domain

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

A series of recent diplomatic visits involving Russian officials and Libyan military leader Khalifa Haftar could eventually lead to deepening bilateral military relations, according to regional press coverage.¹ In August, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov led the first-ever Russian military delegation to visit Haftar.² Yevkurov went back less than a month later, in mid-September, quickly followed by a visit to Moscow by Haftar, where he met with Russian President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu. According to the first excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, a Qatari-aligned daily newspaper, Haftar is seeking a more formal defense relationship with Russia, which would include official political recognition for Haftar and his allies, as well as sustained military support for forces under Haftar’s control. In exchange, per the second accompanying excerpt, from the Turkish news agency *Anadolu Agency*, Russia would establish a long-term aerial and naval military presence in eastern Libya, similar to its current presence in Syria. As the excerpt notes, Libya’s proximity to Europe, the Sahel, and Sudan gives it unique geopolitical value to Russia, creating a corridor of influence linking its bases in Syria to territories ruled by friendly governments in the African Sahel.

Although the discussions remain nothing more than talks at the moment, the intensity of Russia’s military-diplomatic efforts signals Moscow’s growing interest in increasing its military influence in eastern Libya.

Libya offers at least two advantages to Russia: its ports are only about an hour’s flight from the European coast, and its air bases in the south are very close to Sudan and the African Sahel countries...

Source: “*ةنل عم ةيركسع ةكارش نع ثح ب: ايسور يف ني لوؤسم عم ةفتكم تاءاقل يرجي رتفح*” (Haftar holds intensive meetings with Russian officials: Seeking over military partnership?),” *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 28 September 2023. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/ح-رتفح-ي-رجي-تاءاقل-ةفتكم-عم-ةيركسع-ةكارش-نع-ثح-ب>

In other details about Haftar’s discussions in Moscow, sources’ information agreed that Haftar asked Moscow to upgrade the level of bilateral relations by signing a defense and security agreement stipulating that he would obtain more military equipment, such as Russian air defense systems, drones, and the establishment of advanced workshops to maintain his militia’s military equipment, most of which are Russian-made.

According to the same sources, Moscow summoned Haftar after he repeated his request during Yevkurov’s two visits to Benghazi, last August and the week before last. The sources confirmed that the discussions are still in early stages, as Moscow is still unwilling to officially announce its presence in Libya by signing any official and announced agreement.

Source: “*يسورل ام عدل ا نادن سو ةيكيرم ال تابوق عل ا قرطم ني ب رتفح*” (Haftar between the hammer of US sanctions and the anvil of Russian support),” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkish news agency), 2 October 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/ةاض-ا-ي-سورل-ام-عدل-ا-نادن-سو-ةيكيرم-ال-تابوق-عل-ا-قرطم-ني-ب-رتفح-ري-راق-تل/3005791>

... Haftar has not abandoned Russian support and is asking for a price in return, not the least of which is recognition of his legitimacy and the provision of heavy and advanced weapons such as combat aircraft, drones, and air defense systems... [Russia] is still prepared to provide more weapons and training to his soldiers, and maintain military equipment in exchange for establishing its military presence on the southern front of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This makes it difficult for Haftar to choose between US sanctions and Russian military and diplomatic support...

Libya offers at least two advantages to Russia: its ports are only about an hour’s flight from the European coast, and its air bases in the south are very close to Sudan and the African Sahel countries. Although Wagner elements were deployed in several Libyan air bases in the east and south, such as Al-Jufra (central), Al-Kharrouba (east), Brak Al-Shati and Tamanhint (south), they have not yet been able to have an independent naval base in Sirte nor an air base in Al-Jufra (east of Tripoli)—as is the case with the Hmeimim air base and Tartus naval base in Syria—due to American pressure on Haftar. Therefore, observers expect that Moscow will seek to seize more than one military base in Libya, and connect them to its air supply line from Russia to Syria, passing through Libya and from there to its allies in Sudan and the African Sahel countries, all the way to the Central African Republic.

Notes:

- 1 For additional reporting and context, see: “Russia Seeks to Expand Naval Presence in the Mediterranean,” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 September 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/russia-seeks-to-expand-naval-presence-in-the-mediterranean-b8da4d>; “Libya: The security relationship between Khalifa Haftar and Moscow is intensifying,” *Le Monde*, 11 October 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/10/11/libya-the-security-relationship-between-khalifa-haftar-and-moscow-is-intensifying_6162923_124.html; and “After Libya’s floods, Russia throws its weight behind Haftar,” *The New Arab*, 9 October 2023. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/after-libyas-floods-russia-throws-its-weight-behind-haftar>
- 2 The Russian Defense Ministry’s *Telegram* channel reported on it being the first-ever such visit https://t.me/mod_russia/29689. Yevkurov first visit was on 22 August, the day before the head of the Wagner Group was killed in an airplane crash and in the context of reassuring African countries with Wagner presence that the PMC was now under government control. Yevkurov returned to Libya on 17 September, in the aftermath of the Derna floods. Haftar traveled to Moscow on 28 September.

Iran Announces Integration Of Artificial Intelligence Into Drone Fleet



Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, describes new military capabilities of supposed artificial intelligence-directed drones during a 4 October 2023 conference of medical students.

Source: https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1402/07/06/14020706000363_Test_PhotoN.JPG; Attribution: FarsNews.ir

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iranian drone development could threaten the blue water navies of its adversaries at extended ranges. According to a statement by General Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), published by the state-run *Fars News Agency*, Iran has successfully integrated artificial intelligence into its drone fleet.¹ While the statement appears aspirational, Iranian tactics have indeed evolved from the pinpoint use of drones to the use of drone swarms.² Simultaneously, Iran has increased drone range by switching from line-of-sight to global positioning system navigation. Iranian strategists realize adversaries will likely apply the same long-range swarming tactics the IRGC now utilizes. In response, the IRGC is seeking a way to counter this innovation by having drones “decide” which enemy drones and other targets to destroy without human input.

Given technological advances, and the global proliferation of artificial intelligence applications, it is only a matter of time until Iranian aspirations about artificial intelligence-infused drones become fully realized. When this happens, it will change the maritime operational environment in the

Anyone who wants to harm our country... will be eliminated.

region. While the Iranian Navy has invested in new ships, its blue water capacity remains limited.³ For their part, long-range, autonomous drones will be able to leapfrog over this naval deficit to project power hundreds of miles offshore where more advanced navies can operate but Iranian power is minimal. As such, artificial intelligence-infused drone operations could ultimately rectify a major Iranian capability gap.

Source: “Sardar Salami: Pehpadha-ye ma Qadarand dar Fasleh Chand Hazar Miley Shanavarha ra Hadeh Qarar Dehand (General Salami: Our Drones are Capable of Targeting Vessels Several Thousand Miles Away),” *Fars News Agency* (news agency closely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 4 October 2023. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020712000483>

“Our country is progressing, but our enemies don’t want us to build the future of our country with the blossoming minds of our youth.” Today, our country is equipped with new technologies, artificial intelligence and a variety of emerging phenomena in biochemistry, biophysics, and genetics and so on. We have something to say and we are growing... Many people tell us that the enemy is just an illusion of the mind, but it is not an illusion; it is reality. Our youth must build the future of our country, Western countries have no rights in our country. Anyone who wants to harm our country and our youth will be eliminated....”

The Commander-in-Chief [of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Hossein Salami] continued, “In the unmanned arena, you see that with the help of Artificial Intelligence, today we have the capability that our drones can target any moving vessel a few thousand miles away and even assess the extent of destruction.”

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Notes:

- 1 For previous discussion of the Iranian military claiming to enhance its arsenal with artificial intelligence, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Claims Development Of Cruise Missiles Guided By Artificial Intelligence” *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/iran-claims-development-of-cruise-missiles-guided-by-artificial-intelligence/>
- 2 For background on Iranian drone developments and strategies, see: Michael Rubin, “A Short History of the Iranian Drone Program,” *American Enterprise Institute*, August 2020. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-short-history-of-the-Iranian-drone-program.pdf?x91208>
- 3 For background into the Iranian Navy’s problems operating in the open ocean, see: Michael Rubin, “Khamenei Orders Investigation into Naval Accident” *OE Watch*, June 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/336632/download>

Iran Equips Drones With Heat-Seeking Missiles

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran's growing drone fleet is a pillar of its weapons arsenal and military strategy. In recent years, the Iranian military as a whole has expanded both the number of drone models and capabilities at its disposal.¹ In the excerpted article from the IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency*, Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi-Fard, commander of the regular Iranian Army's Air Force, announced the successful upgrade of the **Karrar** platform² to carry short-range heat-seeking missiles that he claimed had been used successfully to shoot down other UAVs in tests.³ General Sabahi-Fard noted that the modified Majid surface-to-air missile is now used on its Karrar drone platform. While the Majid missile's five-mile range is not impressive, the Karrar/Majid combination gives Iran a relatively inexpensive counter-drone capability as Iran looks for less expensive alternatives to surface-to-air missiles to engage enemy drones. Finally, General Sabahi-Fard highlighted Iran's increasing role as a drone-exporting power, implying that Iran will continue to encourage the proliferation of its drones for both economic profit and to tilt the battlespace and operational environment to its advantage.

The Karrar UAV is equipped with a heat-seeking missile.



Launch of a Karrar drone modified to carry the Majid heat-seeking missile on 21 October 2023.

Source: <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1402/07/13/1402071309480492128494654.jpg>; Attribution: Tasnimnews.com

Source: “Tajiz-e Karrar beh Mushak-e Majid ba Bared 8 Kilometr baraye ahdaf-e havaye” (Equipping Karrar [drone] with Majid [missile] with an 8 kilometer range for aerial targets), Tasnim News Agency (news agency affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 22 October 2023. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/07/30/2976015>

[Brigadier General Alireza] Sabahi-Fard continued, “The Rasul [Prophet] UAV project has followed nine stages of field and operational tests and extensive and sensitive flights, which is one of the most important points in conducting various flight tests, deep and effective cooperation of all sectors.

The commander of the Army Air Defense Force added, “In this plan, using UAVs upgraded to carry indigenous air-to-air missiles with the ability to track and engage against any hostile aerial targets in the operational range has been achieved....

Sabahi-Fard said that in this project, the Karrar UAV is equipped with a heat-seeking missile with a range of eight kilometers, adding, “After over a year and a half of extensive research and field tests to determine which missiles to install on the Karrar UAV, we finally the Majid’ surface-to-air missile after we made technical changes in in order to enable it to fire from the air.”

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Notes:

- 1 For background on Iranian drone developments and strategies, see: Michael Rubin, “A Short History of the Iranian Drone Program,” *American Enterprise Institute*, August 2020. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-short-history-of-the-Iranian-drone-program.pdf?x91208>
- 2 In 2009 the Iranian Defense Ministry unveiled the Karrar (Striker) prototype. Within a year, it was mass-producing the model that it claimed to have a 600-mile range. Press accounts at the time said that Iranian forces could configure the Karrar to either launch two C-705 cruise missiles or carry 500-pound guided bombs. Shortly after, Hezbollah used a Karrar as a kamikaze drone. For previous discussion of the Karrar UAV, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Combat Drones Fitted with Missiles” *OE Watch*, September 2012. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195613/download>
- 3 For previous mention of Alireza Sabahi-Fard, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Unveils New Bahman Radar System,” *OE Watch*, April 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/374628/download>

Iran Demands Disarmament Of Kurdish Dissidents In Iraq

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Kurdish separatist groups in Iran and neighboring countries have been a scourge to Iran for decades.¹ However, over the past two years, the Iranian government has become much more assertive in demanding that Iraqi Kurdish authorities dismantle Iranian Kurdish bases inside Iraqi Kurdistan.² In a series of recent meetings, Iranian officials have demanded that Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish authorities completely disarm and relocate Iranian Kurdish separatist groups away from the Iranian border.

In the excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, Mohammad Bagheri, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general who serves as the Iranian military's chief-of-staff, argues for a complete elimination of Kurdish safe havens inside Iraq. Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish authorities suggest that Turkey's establishment of a de facto buffer zone against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) along the Iraq-Turkish frontier, combined with Turkey's frequent bombing of alleged PKK targets in both Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish territory, motivated Iran to request similar privileges along Iraq's eastern frontier. It is unclear if Iraq will act on Iran's demands, but the possible creation of dual Turkish and Iranian buffer zones raises the prospect of the two countries fighting by proxy inside Iraq.



Mohammad Bagheri, chief-of-staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, speaks by phone with Türkiye's Minister of Defense Yaşar Güler with regard to events in the Gaza Strip, 20 October 2023.

Source: <https://img9.irna.ir/d/r/2/2023/10/20/4/170678817.jpg?ts=1697791786262>; Attribution: Islamic Republic News Agency

The main agreement was not their displacement but rather their complete disarmament.

Source: "Bagheri: Iraq Bayad Tajziyeh Taliban ra Tabegh Tavafegh ba Iran Haleh Saleh Konad" (Bagheri: Iraq Should Disarm the Separatists According to its Agreement with Iran)," *Mehr News Agency* (semi-official news agency owned by Iranian government's Islamic Development Organization), 7 October 2023. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5904819>

[Mohammad] Bagheri [chief-of-staff of the Iranian Armed Forces] continued, "The countries of Southwest Asia, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran, are exceptional and unique due to having strategic and political geography, sitting astride the world's communication highway and the strategic strait [of Hormuz]. They have rich mineral resources and fossil fuel resources, are home to the great heavenly religions, including the existence of the Qibla [in Mecca] and the shrine of the holy Imams of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and various other factors."

He emphasized that the rich resources of the West Asian region and the special place of this region have always been coveted by the powers; our region is constantly witnessing foreign interference and discord among nations and governments.

He said, "We see that the enemies are always trying to create differences between countries in the region between ethnicities, tribes and religions and by weakening the legal sovereignty of countries, they constantly engage the region so that they can justify their aggressive presence due to the they create. A clear example of this

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was the creation of the Islamic State, which even to the leaders of the oppressive American state admitted was created by them....”

He said, “The problem of the borders of Iran and our neighbors and the insecurities we have on our borders is an investigative and extremely important issue.” Referring to the movements of terrorists from across the borders of Sistan and Baluchestan [with Pakistan] and the [Iraqi] Kurdistan Region, Bagheri said, “What does it mean for Iranian separatist groups to be based in Iraqi Kurdistan and carry out all kinds of terrorist acts in our country? And we have to keep a lot of forces at the border. Iraqi officials also confirm that this issue must be resolved definitively. Last month, an agreement was reached between the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran and the national security advisor of Iraq to complete disarmament within six months. In recent weeks, the Iraqi government and all the dear officials who are trying there have made some efforts. They have moved these groups from bases near our border, The main agreement was not their displacement of separatist forces but rather their complete disarmament.

Notes:

- 1 Iranian Kurdish insurgency predates Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. Kurdish tribal revolts spanned the Ottoman-Persian frontier in the late 19th century. In the wake of both World War I and World War II, Iranian Kurds sought to assert local autonomy to fill the vacuum left by weak central government. This culminated in the 1946 establishment of the Mahabad Republic. In the years after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution, Kurds again rose in revolt, upset not only by traditional Persian ethnic condescension, but also by the Shi’ite Islamist regime’s new layer of sectarian discrimination against the largely Sunni minority. For background into these Kurdish tribal revolts, movements, and secessionist groups, see: Michael Rubin, *Kurdistan Rising?* Washington: AEI Press, 2016.
- 2 For previous discussion of Iranian impatience with Iraqi Kurdistan providing a safe-haven for Iranian Kurdish dissidents, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Vows Action Against Iraqi Kurdistan-Based Insurgents,” *OE Watch*, November 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/397213/download>

Arabic Media Boasts Narrative Of Victory Following Hamas' 7 October Attack Of Israel

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

In the aftermath of the 7 October attack by the Hamas Qassam Brigades into Israel's Gaza Envelope, a narrative of victory regarding the operation appears to be crystalizing in Arabic-language media. The accompanying excerpts from mainstream Arabic-language publications illustrate the contours of this narrative, in which Israeli forces are portrayed as largely ineffective and Qassam forces as highly effective. The first accompanying excerpt, from Qatari-aligned daily newspaper *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, emphasizes that the raid brought to light a disconnect between the image and reality of Israeli capabilities. According to the article, Israel's elite forces and its military-security technology both suffered a reputational defeat that will lead the "Israeli public, especially those in the settlements surrounding Gaza, to lose confidence in the 'professional army' model."

Parallel to the narrative of Israeli military ineffectiveness is a narrative of the Qassam Brigades' competence and operational success. The second accompanying excerpt, from Qatari-funded and pro-Arab *al-Jazeera*, is centered on Hamas's information advantage and effective operational planning and execution, highlighting the group's "strategic deception" and the effective coordination between various Qassam units (elite forces, engineering teams, drone operators, rocket/artillery units, and marine commandos).¹ The third accompanying excerpt, from Lebanon's *al-Akhbar*, presents Qassam's elite forces as devoted, committed, religious, mentally and physically strong young men. These young men, the author concludes, have replaced Qassam's rockets as "the most permanent and effective strategic weapon."² The divergence between this emerging narrative of Hamas's competence and heroism, and the Western portrayal of Hamas's fighters as brutal terrorists, is striking.



Israel strikes targets in Gaza Strip, October 2023.
Source: Palestinian News & Information Agency (Wafa) in contract with APImages, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Damage_in_Gaza_Strip_during_the_October_2023_-_01.jpg; Attribution: CC 3.0

What happened...will cause the Israeli public, especially those in the settlements surrounding Gaza, to lose confidence in the 'professional army' model that the occupation army has promoted in the last two decades...

Source: «هجوم ي-ف-م اسقل-ة بخن» (Qassam's elite faces 'Yamam'), *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 14 October 2023. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/investigations/هجوم-ي-ف-م-اسقل-ة-بخن>
ة زغ-ف ال غ-ي-ف-ط ق س ت-ة ي ل ي ئ ا ر س ال-ة ي در س ل ا م ا م ي ل ا

Al-Najjar... confirms that the clashes that took place with the Qassam elite forces were isolated pockets, and were carried out by individual settlers, who were killed or captured immediately, while the occupation army did not resist...

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The occupying state, which promotes the capabilities of its elite forces, even through drama, as in the case of the widely known “Fauda” series, needs a long time to repair the damage to the prestige of its own units, according to Saeed Abu Moalla, professor of media at the Arab American University...

It is not only the reputation of the elite combat units that was damaged in the battle of the “Al-Aqsa Flood,” says Ahmed Rafiq Awad, head of the “Jerusalem Center for Future Studies” at Al-Quds University. The military technology units in the occupation army, which market themselves as being the top in manufacture spyware, as well as the military industries that established the separation fence with the Gaza Strip, including its surveillance tools, have also been subjected to a profound shock that will affect their reputation around the world...

Ultimately, what happened, according to Mansour, Awad, and Erekat, will cause the Israeli public, especially those in the settlements surrounding Gaza, to lose confidence in the “professional army” model that the occupation army has promoted in the last two decades, which relies on elite units and high technology.

Source: *“صقأل ان افوط”* (The Resistance’s military tools in the ‘al-Aqsa Flood’ battle), *al-Jazeera* (pro-Arab Qatari media company), 14 October, <https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2023/10/14/صقأل-ان-افوط-مواقم-لل-ة-ي-ركس-ع-ا-تاودال>

The resistance used all military operational tools, starting with intelligence deception operations of the intelligence services in the occupying state, led by the “Aman” [military intelligence] apparatus, which is responsible for giving estimates of the army’s position to the political leadership. The resistance was also able to hide the details of the operation and preparations from Israeli technology and espionage systems, and to mobilize forces, organize equipment, and maintain leadership and command during the battle, through the resistance’s continuous affirmation of the progress of the prepared plan, and its later announcement of rotating forces on the front and supplying the fighters with ammunition and equipment.

Source: *دعب اوربكي مل ني ذل ان وان بأء الؤه: “ةبخنل”* (Those going through the ‘elite’ wing: these are our children who have not yet grown up), *al-Akhbar* (pro-Hezbollah leftist Lebanese daily), 9 October 2023. <https://www.al-akhbar.com/Palestine/370863/دعب-اوربكي-مل-ني-ذل-ان-وان-بأء-الؤه-ةبخنل-ح-ان-ج-ى-ل-ع-ن-ورباع-ل-ا-تاودال>

Out of every 100 fighters, the resistance selects one or two who succeed in passing the physical, psychological, and spiritual tests...

What is it like for Muhannad to be among the elite? A young man free from all restrictions, single, of pure nature, who believes in authentic slogans untainted by reality, whose heart is attached to God, who is enthusiastic and has an excellent physical structure, and also, wholly ready for sacrifice...

Before the day before yesterday, missiles were, in the eyes of both enemy and friend, the only resistance weapon capable of limited action and morally acceptable impact. Today, rockets have become a secondary weapon, while men’s forearms, which trampled on Zionist military honor, have become the most permanent and effective strategic weapon.

Notes:

- 1 Planning is important for the Qassam Brigades. A Qassam training manual, published in 2011, appears to have been used by ISIS for training. See: “Military Training in the Islamic State,” *OE Watch*, August 2015.
- 2 These elite forces are purported to include 5,000 well-trained and well-equipped forces, per a 2017 study by Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GazaCrisis_ENG-51-62.pdf

North African Wave of Support For Palestinians At Onset Of Israel-Hamas War



Tunisians protest in support of Palestine in 2021. Since the Hamas attack on Israel in October, North African civil societies have shown a wave of support for Palestine.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protest_for_palestine_Tunis_Kassba_17-05-2021_By_Brahim_Guedich-3582.jpg; Attribution: BY-SA 4.0

President Tebboune [of Algeria] reiterated to the Palestinian President, ‘the unwavering solidarity of Algeria, both people and government, with the brotherly Palestinian people.’

By Jason Warner

OE Watch Commentary

Civil societies across North Africa have shown staunch solidarity with the Palestinian cause in response to Israeli retaliation for the 7 October attack by Hamas. The first article from the pan-African news aggregator *AfricaNews.fr*, provides a broad overview of the pro-Palestinian reactions emanating from Morocco, Libya, and Algeria. Namely, it underscores how civil societies have demonstrated in support of Palestine, and in the case of Morocco,¹ and to a lesser extent, Libya,² have used the conflict to call for the cessation of their states’ efforts to normalize relations with Israel. The protests also denounce the role of the United States and France in the conflict. As per the second article, also from *AfricaNews.fr*, Tunisians gathered to show support for Palestinians, similarly seeking to penalize their own state for its efforts for rapprochement with Israel. The third article from the Algerian government-owned *Algeria Press Service* emphasizes the unanimity between Algeria’s government and its citizens on the issue. While protestors in Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia sought to punish their leaders for would-be softening stances towards Israel, in Algeria, President Tebboune faced no such backlash. In a call with Mahmoud Abas, the President of the State of Palestine, he underscored, “the unwavering solidarity of Algeria, both people and government, with the brotherly Palestinian people.”

Source: “Manifestations pro-palestiniennes dans plusieurs pays arabes (Pro-Palestinian protests in several Arab countries),” *AfricaNews.fr* (pan-African news aggregator), 14 October 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/10/14/manifestations-pro-palestiniennes-dans-plusieurs-pays-arabes/>

Pro-Palestinian rallies, both organized and spontaneous, in response to the conflict between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups have taken the MENA region by storm. In North Africa, demonstrators gathered in Algeria, Libya, and Morocco to show support in favour of Palestine.

“The entire Algerian people are in solidarity with the Palestinian people and stand by their side. The Palestinian people are in distress and need the support of the Arab and Muslim communities,” shared Khaled Sofiane, pro-Palestinian protester in Algeria.

Despite, Morocco’s normalized ties with Israel in exchange for U.S. recognition of its sovereignty over the long-disputed Western Sahara territory, Prince Moulay Hicham El Alaoui, cousin to the Moroccan monarch, has

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voiced his support for Palestine on social media.

Thousands of Moroccans also protested to ask the government puts an end to the normalization.

“This is a call to the Moroccan state to stop normalization. An appeal to Morocco, which chairs the Jerusalem Committee, to act urgently, to close the liaison office with Israel. And to withdraw from all agreements. This is what Moroccan people demand today,” expressed Rachid Fellouli, pro-Palestinian protester in Morocco.

In Libya, the 5 El- Emad towers illuminated in the colors of the Palestinian flag in support.

The Libyan government has always publicly sided with Palestine and has not recognized Israel. A couple of months ago, Libya’s head of diplomacy was suspended for meeting with her Israeli counterpart. The news of the encounter had created unrest in the already unstable country.

Source: “Guerre Israël-Hamas: des Tunisiens manifestent pour les Palestiniens (Israel-Hamas War: Tunisians protest for Palestinians),” AfricaNews.fr (pan-African news aggregator), 13 October 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/10/13/guerre-israel-hamas-des-tunisiens-manifestent-pour-les-palestiniens/>

Thousands of trade unionists, civil society representatives, political activists, lawyers and high school students demonstrated in the centre of Tunis on Thursday in support of the Palestinian people and called for the criminalisation of any normalisation of relations with Israel.

Denouncing the Israeli strikes against the Gaza Strip, the demonstrators, brandishing the Palestinian flag, gathered in front of the headquarters of the trade union centre, the UGTT, before marching to Avenue Habib Bourguiba, the main thoroughfare in the city centre, AFP journalists observed.

“The people want to penalise normalisation” with Israel, chanted the demonstrators, angry at “Zionist crimes” and “international silence on the genocide in Gaza”, the Palestinian enclave.

The demonstrators also denounced the support of France and the United States for Israel, which had become “allies in the attack on the Palestinians”.

Source: “Algeria: President Tebboune Receives Phone Call From President of State of Palestine,” Algeria Press Service (government-owned news service from Algeria), 9 October 2023. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202310090525.html>

President of the Republic, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, has received a phone call from his brother the President of the occupied State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, the presidency of the Republic said on Monday.

Abbas informed the president of the Republic “about the grave abuses committed by the occupying forces against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank,” the statement said.

President Tebboune reiterated, to the Palestinian President, “the unwavering solidarity of Algeria, both people and government, with the brotherly Palestinian people.”

He stressed that “these developments remind everyone that a just and comprehensive peace, as a strategic choice, can only be achieved by establishing an independent, sovereign Palestinian State.”

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Notes:

- 1 For more on the Israel-Morocco normalization pact of 2020, see: "Israel, Morocco agree to normalise relations in US-brokered deal," *Al-Jazeera*, 10 December 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/10/israel-morocco-agree-to-normalise-relations-in-us-brokered-deal>
- 2 While Libya has never formally recognized Israel, protests erupted in Libya in August 2023 when Israel revealed that Libya's Foreign Minister, Najla Mangoush, had met with Israeli representatives. Mangoush was subsequently suspended and fled the country. For more, see: Sam Magdy, "Libya's foreign minister suspended, flees country after meeting with Israel's top diplomat," *Associated Press*, 28 August 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/libya-israel-meeting-normalization-arab-world-62d6d37df1838ecba9a604e80b675733>

Maduro Regime Claims Victory Over Tren de Aragua Criminal Network

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

The Maduro regime in Venezuela recently conducted a military operation in the Tocarón prison, the power center of the transnational Tren de Aragua criminal network.¹ According to the excerpted article from the Argentine outlet *Infobae*, the regime uncovered a large stockpile of weapons and munitions at the prison, including anti-tank launchers, artillery rockets, and a cache of rifles and pistols. Additionally, the article reports that prisoners controlled a small town where family members lived, replete with amenities such as a pool, baseball stadium, and zoo. This level of criminal control is common in Venezuela, where the Maduro regime has relied on prison gang leaders, called “*pranes*,” to maintain a semblance of stability and control, and to reduce violent prison uprisings.² In exchange, groups like the Tren de Aragua possess a high degree of autonomy within prison walls to continue criminal activity. In reasserting state control over the Tocarón prison, the Maduro regime claims to have defeated Tren de Aragua, as reported by Colombia’s center-left daily *El Espectador*. There are many reasons to doubt this claim notably, Tren de Aragua’s leader, Héctor Guerrero Flórez (alias “Niño Guerrero”), escaped before the raid with forewarning about an impending operation.

Despite this, the Maduro regime’s military operation is significant for a few reasons. First, it allows the Maduro regime to claim that it is addressing the complaints of its neighbors in the region, who have openly fretted about the regional growth of the Tren



The aftermath of a deadly prison riot in Lara state, Venezuela in 2013.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/diariocriticove/8422860917>; Attribution: CC BY 2.0 DEED

de Aragua criminal network. Second, the operation could pay domestic dividends as the Maduro regime seeks to convince voters that it is tackling the country’s security crisis ahead of the anticipated elections in the latter half of 2024. Lastly, the regime’s recent operation serves as an important testing ground for the strength of its security forces, which it may resort to using to suppress any opposition mobilization in 2024.³

Its fugitive leader, “El Niño” Guerrero, benefited from complicity and even negotiated with the government to leave the prison before the security operation began, according to the NGO Venezuelan Prison Observatory.

Source: “El sorprendente interior del penal de Tocarón, el centro de operaciones del Tren de Aragua en Venezuela (The surprising interior of the Tocarón prison, the operations center of the Tren de Aragua in Venezuela),” *Infobae* (Argentine outlet with excellent regional coverage), 27 September 2023. <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2023/09/27/el-sorprendente-interior-del-penal-de-tocoron-el-centro-de-operaciones-del-tren-de-aragua-en-venezuela/>

More than 11,000 members of the security forces occupied the prison controlled by this gang that has spread its tentacles to several Latin American countries...There was tranquility, there was a swimming pool, a zoo... its fugitive leader, “El Niño” Guerrero, benefited from complicity and even negotiated with the government to leave the prison before the security operation began, according to the NGO Venezuelan Prison Observatory.

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Source: “Gobierno de Maduro dice que el temido Tren de Aragua fue desmantelado ‘totalmente’ (Maduro’s government says that the feared Tren de Aragua was ‘completely’ dismantled),” *El Espectador* (Colombia’s center-left daily), 23 September 2023. <https://www.elespectador.com/mundo/gobierno-de-maduro-dice-que-el-temido-tren-de-aragua-fue-desmantelado-totalmente/>

We have total control of this prison, of this penitentiary center, and, in addition to that, we have completely dismantled the self-proclaimed former Tren de Aragua. We have 88 people detained at this moment, providing information of interest, all members of that group, which was abandoned by those who led it,” said the Minister of the Interior of Venezuela, Remigio Ceballos, when presenting a balance of the operation...Ceballos denied that the government had negotiated with the leaders of this gang dedicated to, among other crimes, kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on Tren de Aragua, its origin, and its historical evolution from railway construction union to criminal organization, see this excellent and comprehensive profile of the group; “Tren de Aragua,” InSight Crime, 12 May 2020. <https://insightcrime.org/venezuela-organized-crime-news/tren-de-aragua/>
- 2 The history of *pranes*, or leaders of prison gangs in Venezuela, is complex. For a condensed version of this history, see; Marie Metz, “Venezuelan Prisons and the Power of Pranes,” Foreign Policy Association blog, 15 October 2012. <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2012/10/15/venezuelan-prisons-and-the-power-of-pranes/>
- 3 For more information on the idea that the Maduro regime may be testing the security forces in anticipation of the 2024 election season, see; Ryan C. Berg and Henry Ziemer, “The Only Threat of Violence in Venezuela’s Opposition Primaries Comes from the Regime,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 17 October 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/only-threat-violence-venezuelas-opposition-primaries-comes-regime>

Pakistan Struggles In The Tri-Border Region After Multiple Terrorist Attacks

By Christopher Betts
OE Watch Commentary

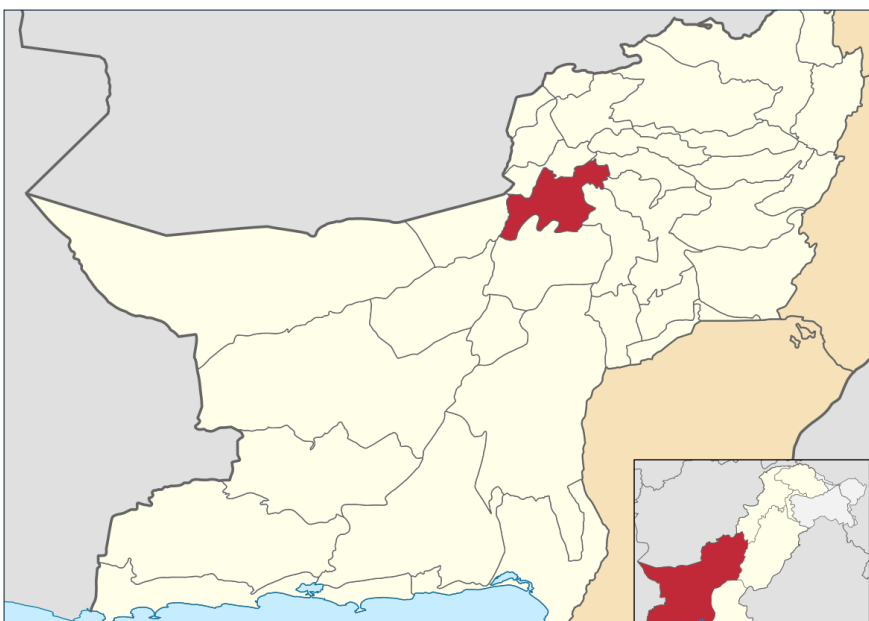
As attention turns to developing terrorism trends in other regions of the world, Pakistan has recently suffered a series of deadly suicide attacks in its Balochistan province.¹

According to the first excerpted article from the London-based, Afghan-run independent news outlet *Afghanistan International*, on 29 September, 59 people were killed, and more than 60 were injured, in a suicide attack during the Milad al-Nabi ceremony in Mastung, Balochistan. Milad al-Nabi is an important Muslim holiday celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.² The Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) quickly condemned the attack and denied responsibility, claiming they provided information to Pakistan's intelligence agency before the bombing. While the TTP denied this bombing, the pro-Pashtun group has been responsible for multiple deadly attacks in the province, as well as the greater Balochistan region.³ No group has claimed responsibility for this attack, though Pakistan's Acting Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti claimed India was involved.

The second excerpt from the Pashto language branch of Radio Free Europe, *Mashal Radio*, describes some of the complex issues that Pakistan's Balochistan province is facing. In addition to TTP activity, the Islamic State (IS)

and Baloch separatist groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have claimed responsibility for multiple recent attacks.⁴ Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department conducted kinetic operations in the area, killing a prominent IS member days before the bombing in Mastung. Hours after the Mastung attack, an additional suicide bombing was conducted in Doaba, a small city in the Hangu district of Pakistan. It is currently unclear whether the attacks are related.

Recent attacks in Balochistan province – as well as the greater tri-border region – have created a delicate security situation. The Taliban, IS, and Baloch separatist groups conducting attacks in the same area make it difficult for counterterrorism units to combat them effectively and accurately attribute attacks to the appropriate groups. Although Pakistan has stepped up counterterrorism efforts in its own province, the larger Balochistan region is remote and challenging for each country to police. Terrorist groups can base their operations out of Afghanistan or Iran and conduct attacks in Pakistan, with little ability for Pakistan to conduct follow-up operations inside bordering nations. If these groups gain a permanent foothold in the greater Balochistan region, transnational groups could use the area to coordinate international attacks or further destabilize the relationship between Pakistan and India.



Recently, the insecurity and activities of militants have increased in different parts of Balochistan, and a number of security forces, government employees, and civilians have been killed in attacks and clashes.

Location of the Mastung district in Balochistan, Pakistan.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/39/Pakistan_-_Balochistan_-_Mastung.svg/1172px-Pakistan_-_Balochistan_-_Mastung.svg.png?20211017045741;
Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0

Source: “و و یرک کی ریش تامول عم هرس ناتس کاپ هل هل که هپ دی رب د ناتس چولب د و نابلاط :داصرمل ا” (Al-Mursad: The Taliban had shared information with Pakistan about the attack in Balochistan),” *Afghanistan International* (London based Afghan run independent news outlet), 1 October 2023. <https://www.afintl.com/pa/202310018517>

Al-Mursad, a website close to the Taliban, says that the group had shared the information about the Baluchistan attack and other similar attacks and the names of those involved with Pakistan’s intelligence.... The previous day, 59 people were killed and 60 were injured in a suicide attack on the Milad al-Nabi ceremony in Mastung, Balochistan. Pakistan’s Acting Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti said in Quetta yesterday that India is involved in the Balochistan attacks. But al-Mursad says, reliable evidence shows that Pakistan is carrying out the project of raising and strengthening ISIS as a proxy organization in Afghanistan and the region.... They [Al-Mursad] add in their report that Balochistan is considered a large and lawless area for ISIS in this country. Even before this, Daesh has claimed responsibility for some attacks in Balochistan, the last of which was Hafiz Ahmad, the leader of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, in Swabi last month. ISIS has not yet said anything about the Mustang attack.

Source: Terin, Ayub, Majeed Babar, Shahin Buneri, Daud Khattak, “ناسک هونوگسل ېک هوندواچ گنوتسم د” (Dozens of people were killed in the Mustang explosion),” *Mashal Radio*, 29 September 2023. <https://www.mashaalradio.com/a/eid-miladunnabi-explosion-in-mastung-many-killed/32615419.html>

[H]e did not say anything about the nature of the explosion, but the Reuters news agency quoted a police official, Munir Ahmed, as saying that the suicide bomber detonated near the “Madina Mosque” when people were attending the Milad ceremony. Achakzai said the government declared a state of emergency in the hospitals of Quetta after the incident.... A few hours after the explosion in Mastung, a number of people were killed in a suicide attack in Doaba, Hangu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation condemned the attacks in Doba and Mastung in a statement on September 20. The statement says that the organization’s Secretary General Hussain Ibrahim Taha condemns “any form of terrorism” and expresses “full support for Pakistan’s efforts in the fight against terrorism.”

This is while 11 people, including the spokesman and former senator Hafiz Hamdullah, were injured in a bomb blast in Mastung on September 14. The police had said at that time that Hamdullah’s convoy was going towards the Mustang from Quetta when an explosion occurred at the checkpoint. The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the Mastung blast.... The Pakistani army has said that four soldiers were killed in a missile attack on a security post in Zhob. The Army Public Relations Office (ESPR) said in a statement that the attack took place on the evening of September 28. It has been claimed in the statement that the missile was sent by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants from Afghanistan, but that group and the Taliban government in Kabul have not yet said anything in response.... Recently, insecurity and activities of militants have increased in different parts of Balochistan and a number of security forces, government employees and civilians have been killed in attacks and clashes. On the 9th of September, six local football players were going from Dera Bugti to Sawai in a car to participate in the championship called “Al Pakistan Chief Minister Gold Cup” when armed men kidnapped them. Before this, a soldier was killed in two attacks on the traffic police and the Levies force in the afternoon of August 16.... On August 13, militants attacked the convoy of Chinese engineers in the port city of Gwadar, after which a clash with the security forces began....

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Notes:

- 1 Balochistan has been conquered and divided by multiple empires, gaining partial independence in the 18th century, and is now divided amongst three nations, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan—with other ethnic majorities. While not as commonly known as the Pashtun, Kurdish, or Punjabi people, the Baloch are ethnically, linguistically, and historically unique. Years of subjugation and marginalization – along with its remote and sparsely populated geographic location – have contributed to the fragile state of the region, allowing nationalist and radical Islamist groups to further destabilize the province through violence. For more information on the history of the Balochistan region, see: Mickey Kupecz. “Pakistan’s Baloch Insurgency: History, Conflict Drivers, and Regional Implications,” *The International Affairs Review*, 16 May 2012., <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/8er0x982v5pj129srhre98ex6u8v8n>
- 2 For more information on the Mawlid al-Nabi celebration, see: “Birthday of the Prophet: Mawlid al-Nabi,” *The Pluralism Project – Harvard University*, 2020. <https://pluralism.org/birthday-of-the-prophet-mawlid-al-nabi>
- 3 For additional background information on Tehrik-E Taliban Pakistan, see: “Tehrik-E Taliban Pakistan (TTP),” *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*. <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/ttp.html>
- 4 For additional information on the Balochistan Liberation Army, see: “Balochistan Liberation Army,” *Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation*, Updated 2019. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/balochistan-liberation-army>

Indonesia Attempts To Calm Sentiments After Counterinsurgency Operation

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Indonesia has been combatting separatist insurgents in its Papua region since 1965. While the long-running insurgency has ebbed and flowed, there has been a notable increase in tempo in the last five years.¹ The excerpted article from the Papua-based Indonesian-language media outlet *Seputar-papua.com* describes Indonesia's calculus in attempting to win over the Papuan civilian population despite their opposition to certain counterinsurgency operations.

The article focuses on the 17 September arrests adjacent to a Papuan church of five suspected members of the Free Papua Organization (OPM), which the Indonesian government calls the "Armed Criminal Group" (KKB). Indonesian police justified the operation by claiming the suspects' confessions and cellphone content strengthened the evidence of their affiliations and support to KKB. According to the article, the operation enflamed local sensitivities because the house was behind a church and the officers broke down the doors of the house and scuffled with the suspects.² Following the arrests, local Papuans began protesting the perceived desecration of church grounds.

The local police chief and the head of the operation responded to the public dissent by meeting with the regional secretary, the chairman of the People's Representative Council of Papua, the families of the five suspects, and the neighbors of the house where the arrests occurred, explaining the legal process and providing justification for the arrests. In addition, as per the second excerpted article from the independent online Catholic news agency *Union of Catholic Asian News*, on 22 September, the police chief acknowledged that police engaged in violence and encouraged officers to maintain professionalism to not provide any reasons for critics to use their actions to discredit the security forces. The response demonstrates Indonesian authorities' determination to defuse controversy over the arrests to avoid losing the support of the local population.

The protest focused on the government, and in this case the security forces, for actions that the public considers immoral.



A picture of Wamena, Papua, Indonesia, from 2019.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wamena,_Papua,_Indonesia_2019_21.jpg
Attribution: Spasimir Pilev, CC x 2.0

Source: “Tangkap 5 Warga Sipil di Nduga, Polisi: Mereka Diduga Kuat Dukung KKB (Police Arrest 5 Civilians in Nduga: They Allegedly Strongly Support the KKB),” *seputarpapua.com* (Papua-based Indonesian-language media outlet claiming to provide the most current and accurate news from Papua), 18 September 2023. <https://seputarpapua.com/view/tangkap-5-warga-sipil-di-nduga-polisi-mereka-diduga-kuat-dukung-kkb.html>

Nduga Police Chief Commissioner Vinsensius Jimm, through the operational head, AKP Bayu Pratama Sudirno, confirmed the arrest of five civilians by personnel. The police suspect that the five civilians are KKB supporters in the area. “This is because of the perpetrators’ confessions regarding their participation [in KKB], which is supported by documentation such as photos on the confiscated cellphones,” stated the operational head in his written statement.

The arrests were made in one of the houses in the neighborhood behind the church. At the time of the arrest, there were attempts of resistance, such as locking the door from the inside to prevent the officers from entering, which resulted in a clash and attempts to push the officers when they were making the arrests.... The local community and congregation from several churches staged a protest. The protest focused on the government, and in this case the security forces, for actions that the public considers immoral.

Because of this, the Nduga police chief accompanied by the operational met directly with the Nduga regional secretary and the chairman of the DPRD to discuss the arrest process. [They] also met the families of the five individuals who were arrested as well as other residents at the house where the arrests were made.

Source: “Indonesia police slammed for violent action inside church,” *ucanews.com* (independent online Catholic news agency reporting on multiple Asian countries), 22 September 2023. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesia-police-slammed-for-violent-action-inside-church/102685>

The Secretariat for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of Jayapura Diocese and Papua Bureau of Union of Churches in Indonesia joined the coalition in condemning the incident and demanding action against the police personnel involved in the incident.

Papua Police Chief Mathius Fakhiri said the five people were arrested because they had links to an armed criminal group, a term used by the Indonesian government for those fighting for Papuan independence. Fakhiri though admitted there “had been acts of violence by the police” and said he “had admonished the local police chief to act professionally.”

Notes:

- 1 Data collected by Amnesty International Indonesia showed that at least 179 civilians, 35 Indonesian soldiers and nine police officers, as well as 23 Papuan insurgents were killed in clashes between the insurgents and security forces between 2018 and 2022. In contrast, a fewer 95 people were killed in the eight previous years from 2010 to 2018. See abc.net.au, “West Papua Liberation Army fighters linked with kidnapped pilot Phillip Mark Mehrtens killed in clash,” 2 October 2023. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-03/independence-fighters-killed-indonesia-papua-phillip-mehrtens/102927194>. See also Amnesty, “Indonesia: Police and military unlawfully kill almost 100 people in Papua in eight years with near total impunity,” 2019. <https://amnesty.org.nz/indonesia-police-and-military-unlawfully-kill-almost-100-people-papua-eight-years-near-total>
- 2 Catholic and Protestant churches have long “played a leadership role through developing the ‘Papua Land of Peace’ campaign calling for dialogue, demilitarization and respect for human rights” in Papua. The churches also have been among the most critical and influential voices against Indonesian military activities in Papua and are seen as “representing the overwhelming majority of Papuan opinion.” Jason MacLeod, “The Struggle for Self-Determination in West Papua (1969-present),” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, March 2011. <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/West-Papua-1.pdf>

Military Junta-Led Sahelian States Create New Collective Security Organization

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

With the string of coups d'état that have engulfed the African continent over the past three years, a steady drumbeat of alliances has been growing among military juntas.¹ As per the article from leading Africa-focused French language publication *Jeune Afrique*, the increasing amity between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has coalesced into a formalized mutual security cooperation organization. Called the "Alliance of Sahelian States," the grouping is a defensive alliance that commits each country to respond to the aid of the others in the event of any "attack on the sovereignty or integrity of the territory" of one of its members. Additionally, the Alliance of Sahelian States also includes economic dimensions (likely to help each of the regimes, all of which have faced threats of economic sanctions for unconstitutional transfers of power) and counterterrorism dimensions (as the three collectively constitute the epicenter of jihadist violence undertaken by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State-linked groups).²

While Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have been getting closer since 2022 – often with support from Russia³ – the

The military regimes led by Assimi Goïta in Mali, Ibrahim Traoré in Burkina Faso and Abdourahmane Tiani in Niger signed a charter on Saturday establishing a defensive alliance.

real impetus for the formalization of the Alliance of Sahelian States was Niger's July 2023 coup. In the aftermath, West Africa's primary regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), threatened to launch a military intervention to restore power to the democratically elected president. This proposal starkly divided West African states, with Nigeria, Benin, and Senegal falling on one side, and Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Algeria, on the other. Mali and Burkina Faso intuitively aligned behind Niger given the vulnerabilities that other military juntas would face if ECOWAS made good on its word. Whether or not the Alliance of Sahelian States is more than a paper tiger remains to be seen. However, the spate of military coups overtaking the region is having serious implications for patterns of alliances and rivalries.



Colonel Assimi GOÏTA ✓
@GoitaAssimi

...

J'ai signé ce jour avec les Chefs d'Etat du Burkina Faso et du Niger la Charte du Liptako-Gourma instituant l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) ayant pour objectif d'établir une architecture de défense collective et d'assistance mutuelle au bénéfice de nos populations.

पोस्ट भाषांतरित करा



The leader of junta currently ruling Mali, COL Assimi Goïta, recently tweeted an announcement about the new mutual defense pact between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

Source: <https://t.co/ljT43NHRkS>; Attribution: BY-SA 4.0

Source: “Le Mali, le Burkina Faso et le Niger scellent ‘l’Alliance des États du Sahel’ (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger seal ‘The Alliance of Sahelian States’),” *Jeune Afrique* (centrist pan-African news outlet), 16 September 2023. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1483586/politique/le-mali-le-burkina-et-le-niger-scellent-lalliance-des-etats-du-sahel/>

The military regimes led by Assimi Goïta in Mali, Ibrahim Traoré in Burkina Faso and Abdourahamane Tiani in Niger signed a charter on Saturday establishing a defensive alliance.

This “Charter of Liptako-Gourma” creates “the Alliance of Sahel States” (AES), wrote on X (former Twitter), the head of the junta in Mali, Assimi Goïta. Its goal is “to establish an architecture of collective defense and mutual assistance,” he stressed. The charter provides (art. 6) that “any attack on the sovereignty and integrity of the territory of one or more contracting parties will be considered as an aggression against the other parties and will engage a duty of assistance and relief of all parties, individually or collectively, including the use of armed force to restore and ensure security within the area covered by the Alliance.

Since the July 26 coup in Niger, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has maintained a consistent position: the military authorities must “restore constitutional order immediately” by releasing deposed President Mohamed. Bazoum and reinstalling him in his functions. The West African organization has repeatedly threatened armed intervention and imposed heavy economic sanctions on Niger.

“This alliance will be a combination of military and economic efforts between the three countries,” Malian Defense Minister Abdoulaye Diop told journalists. “Our priority is the fight against terrorism in the three countries,” he added.

Notes:

- 1 For more on the growing ties between these three countries, see: Jason Warner, “‘Axis’ of Military Regimes Strengthens In West Africa, With Support From Russia,” *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/axis-of-military-regimes-strengthens-in-west-africa-with-support-from-russia/>; Jason Warner, “West African States Split On Potential Intervention In Niger,” *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/west-african-states-split-on-potential-intervention-in-niger/>; Jason Warner, “West African States Ruled By Military Leaders Seek To Circumvent Future Sanctions,” *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/west-african-states-ruled-by-military-leaders-seek-to-circumvent-future-sanctions/>; Jason Warner, “Russia-Supported Military Leaders In Mali, Burkina Faso, 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/>
- 2 For more on the differing approaches that West African states have taken in dealing with these groups, see: Jason Warner, “As Sahelian Jihadists Expand South, Côte d’Ivoire Stands As Model Of Success,” *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/as-sahelian-jihadists-expand-south-cote-divoire-stands-as-model-of-success/>; Jason Warner, “Sahelian Countries Divided On Negotiating With Al-Qaeda, Islamic State Militants,” *OE Watch*, 07-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/sahelian-countries-divided-on-negotiating-with-al-qaeda-islamic-state-militants/>; Jason Warner, “Burkina Faso Claims Disguised Jihadists, Not Military, Responsible For Civilian Killings,” *OE Watch*, 06-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/burkina-faso-claims-disguised-jihadists-not-military-responsible-for-civilian-killings/>; Jason Warner, “Vast Majority Of Malians Express Confidence In Russia’s Ability To Address Jihadist Violence,” *OE Watch*, 06-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/vast-majority-of-malians-express-confidence-in-russias-ability-to-address-jihadist-violence/>
- 3 For more on Russia’s role with these three countries, see: Jason Warner, “‘Axis’ of Military Regimes Strengthens In West Africa, With Support From Russia,” *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/axis-of-military-regimes-strengthens-in-west-africa-with-support-from-russia/>; Jason Warner, “Burkina Faso Claims Disguised Jihadists, Not Military, Responsible For Civilian Killings,” *OE Watch*, 06-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/burkina-faso-claims-disguised-jihadists-not-military-responsible-for-civilian-killings/>; Jason Warner, “Vast Majority Of Malians Express Confidence in Russia’s Ability To Address Jihadist Violence,” *OE Watch*, 06-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/vast-majority-of-malians-express-confidence-in-russias-ability-to-address-jihadist-violence/>; Jason Warner, “Russia-Supported Military Leaders In Mali, Burkina Faso, 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/>

Niger Sees Wave of International Departures Post-Coup

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

The military junta that took over Niger in July 2023 is consolidating its power, kicking out numerous international entities, and severing relationships with others. As the first article from the pan-African news aggregator *AfricaNews.fr* relays, after several contentious months, French troops are leaving Niger via Chad. Soon after the military takeover by General Tiani, Niger began to annul security cooperation agreements with France, which to that point, had relied on Niger as its most reliable ally after being ousted from other African states. When Paris was slow to initiate the request to move its 1,500 soldiers out of the country, the Nigerien government accused France, and other West African states, of colluding to launch an armed intervention to reinstall the ousted president, Mohamed Bazoum.¹ Anti-French sentiment, especially as regards Paris' role in military and security affairs, has been a marker of the political ethos in West Africa for several years.²

The regime in Niger...ordered the UN coordinator...to leave it within three days, denouncing in particular the “obstructions” of the United Nations to its international recognition.

France is not the only entity to be ousted. As per the second article, also from *AfricaNews.fr*, in mid-October the military junta in Niger demanded the departure of the UN's country coordinator and its highest-ranking member in the country, Canadian Louise Aubin. The junta decried the “obstructions” that the United Nations had placed on it being an internationally recognized government. Niger's anti-UN stance is in line with its new ally Mali, which recently demanded the end of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) mission in Mali. The article noted that the absence of a UN coordinator will worsen humanitarian conditions in Mali where an estimated 4.3 million people are in need of humanitarian aid.

In addition to the physical departure of French troops and the UN coordinator, other entities in Niger are leaving of their own volition. In October, the United States formally



Forces Armées Nigériennes (Niger Armed Forces) personnel complete a training course in February 2020. Following the coup d'état in July 2023, the Nigerien military junta has seen a wave of international departures from the country.

Source: <https://nara.getarchive.net/media/forces-armees-nigeriennes-niger-armed-forces-personnel-65f554>; Attribution: Public Domain Dedication.

declared the transition of power to be a coup and suspended more than \$300 million in aid. Algeria, which has been leading the mediation efforts between the junta and the deposed president, also asserted in mid-October that it would suspend its efforts. In an official statement, Algeria noted that the decision came as “official and public declarations from Nigerien authorities have raised legitimate questions as to their real willingness to follow up on their acceptance of Algerian mediation.” The Prime Minister of the new government in Niger has called the attempts by Algeria “manipulation.”³

Source: “Niger: départ des forces françaises en direction du Tchad (Niger: departure of French forces towards Chad),” *AfricaNews.fr* (pan-African new aggregator), 11 October 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/10/11/niger-depart-des-forces-francaises-en-direction-du-tchad/>

French soldiers left their bases in Niger on Tuesday in a first land convoy under local escort, heading “in the direction of Chad” indicated the military regime in power in Niamey since the end of July.

“The troops based in Ouallam (west) left their base today. These are operations for the departure of the first land convoy towards Chad under escort of our Defense and Security Forces,” specifies the regime of Niamey, in a press release read Tuesday evening on national television.

In addition to this departure by land, “three special flights” were recorded at Niamey airport , two for the departure of “97 special forces elements” and one “dedicated to logistics.”

The regime which had assured that it wanted this withdrawal to take place “in complete safety” specified that the disengagement will continue in accordance with “the timetable agreed by both parties.”

The withdrawal of the French was quickly demanded by the Nigerien generals after their arrival in power and French President Emmanuel Macron announced their departure at the end of September.

Source: “Niger: l’ONU “regrette” l’ordre d’expulsion de sa représentante (Niger: the UN “regrets” the order to expel its representative),” *AfricaNews.fr* (pan-African new aggregator), 12 October 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/10/12/niger-the-un-regrets-the-order-to-expel-its-representative/>

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres “deeply regrets” the order to expel the UN coordinator in Niger given by the military regime, which will “hinder” humanitarian operations, his spokesperson said on Wednesday.

This expulsion of Louise Aubin, requested within 72 hours by the regime resulting from a coup d’état in July, “will hinder the ability of the UN to fulfill its mandate and disrupt essential work” in Niger where “4.3 million people need humanitarian aid, mainly women and children,” insisted Stéphane Dujarric, adding that this order was contrary to international rules applicable to United Nations representatives.

The regime in Niger on Wednesday ordered the UN coordinator in this country, Canadian Louise Aubin, to leave it within three days, denouncing in particular the “obstructions” of the United Nations to its international recognition. He had previously denounced the “perfidious actions” of Secretary General Antonio Guterres for, according to him, hindering the participation of the representative of Niger in this event and “undermining any effort to end the crisis.”

Source: “Crise au Niger: l’Algérie suspend sa médiation (Crisis in Niger: Algeria suspends its mediation),” *AfricaNews.fr* (pan-African new aggregator), 10 October 2023. <https://fr.africanews.com/2023/10/10/crise-au-niger-lalgerie-suspend-sa-mediation/>

Algeria announced on Monday that it was “suspending” its mediation intended to put an end to the crisis that has shaken Niger since the takeover by the military...

But the exchanges between the two chancelleries on “the program and content of this visit” were not “conclusive”, added the press release.

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Algeria also deplores that “official and public declarations from Nigerien authorities have raised legitimate questions as to their real willingness to follow up on their acceptance of Algerian mediation.”

The Prime Minister of Niger, Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, declared that he had learned of the acceptance of this mediation on social networks, half-heartedly accusing Algeria of “manipulation.”

Notes:

- 1 See: Jason Warner, “West African States Split On Potential Intervention In Niger,” *OE Watch* 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/west-african-states-split-on-potential-intervention-in-niger/>
- 2 See: Jason Warner, “Anti-French Sentiment Undergirds Overthrow Of Nigerien Government,” *OE Watch* 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/anti-french-sentiment-undergirds-overthrow-of-nigerien-government/>; Jason Warner, “French Researchers Respond To Wave Of Anti-French Sentiment In Africa,” *OE Watch* 07-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/french-researchers-respond-to-wave-of-anti-french-sentiment-in-africa/>; Jason Warner, “CAR Joins Mali In Accusing France Of Funding Terrorists,” *OE Watch*, 04-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/car-joins-mali-in-accusing-france-of-funding-terrorists/>
- 3 “Algeria ‘postpones’ its mediation in Niger”, *AfricaNews.com*, 10 October 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/10/10/algeria-postpones-its-mediation-in-niger//>

Côte d'Ivoire's Stance On Military Interventions Prioritize Democratic Principles

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 29 September, the Turkish website of *Anadolu News Agency* published the excerpted French-language article on Côte d'Ivoire's intention to comply with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) if the organization military intervenes in Niger. The article notes that ECOWAS has threatened to intervene militarily in Niger to reinstall deposed president Mohamed Bazoum to power. A spokesperson for Côte d'Ivoire's government confirmed that the country will not make any decision regarding Niger unilaterally but will respect the outcomes of ECOWAS member states' debates.

The decision to follow ECOWAS into battle in Niger differs from Côte d'Ivoire's announcement in November 2022 that it would withdraw its forces from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), despite MINUSMA's continued counterinsurgency efforts against al-Qaeda and Islamic State-loyal militants. According to the excerpted French-language article in *tvmonde5.com*, Côte d'Ivoire's withdrawal from MINUSMA came after Mali's coup leaders alleged that Ivorian troops who entered Mali to operate with a German contingent were "mercenaries."¹

Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to ECOWAS and reduction in military support to MINUSMA can be interpreted as a reflection of how opposition parties have been permitted to participate in Ivorian politics and how other reforms have improved electoral competition since 2020.² Côte d'Ivoire is willing to support military efforts to restore democratically



Members of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center honor guard stand in formation during a welcoming ceremony for Ivory Coast Gen. Soumaila Bakayoko.

Source: MSG Montigo White https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Members_of_the_Kofi_Annan_International_Peacekeeping_Training_Center_honor_guard_stand_in_formation_during_a_welcoming_ceremony_for_Ivory_Coast_Gen._Soumaila_Bakayoko%2C_the_Economic_Community_of_West_African_130626-A-ZZ999-016.jpg;
Attribution: CC x 2.0

elected civilian rulers, such as Bazoum, to power. However, the country is refraining from offering its troops for regional military efforts to support governments, such as in Mali, that refuse to return power to democratically elected leaders and that express allegiance towards Russia, including its proxy, Wagner Group.

If ECOWAS chooses a particular option to resolve the regional crisis, Côte d'Ivoire will follow this option in solidarity with other member states.

Source: "L'option d'une intervention militaire de la Cédéao au Niger reste possible (The option of ECOWAS military intervention in Niger remains possible)," *Anadolu News Agency* (Turkish state-run news agency aligned with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP)), 29 September 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/loption-dune-intervention-militaire-de-la-c%C3%A9d%C3%A9ao-au-niger-reste-possible/3003520>

The option of military intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Niger remains on the table and Côte d'Ivoire will comply with the decisions adopted collectively by the community "if ECOWAS decides on this option," said Ivorian government spokesperson Amadou Coulibaly. The government spokesperson affirmed that Côte d'Ivoire is a member that respects its commitments in ECOWAS.

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In Niger, members of the presidential guard took power on July 26, pushing aside President Mohamed Bazoum and announcing the suspension of the Constitution and the formation of a National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland. ECOWAS threatened to intervene militarily to enable Bazoum to regain power and considered this an option ready to be implemented alongside strict punitive measures.

Source: “La Côte d’Ivoire va retirer progressivement ses soldats du Mali (Ivory Coast will withdraw its soldiers from Mali gradually),” *tvmonde5.com* (French public television broadcaster’s website focusing on worldwide affairs affecting France), 16 November 2022. <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/la-cote-divoire-va-retirer-progressivement-ses-soldats-du-mali-1424754>

Côte d’Ivoire indicates that the soldiers and other elements active within MINUSMA will not be relieved in August 2023.

Relations between Côte d’Ivoire have become significantly strained in recent months, particularly after the arrest last July of 49 Ivorian soldiers in Bamako.

Notes:

- 1 The bilateral dispute between Côte d’Ivoire and Mali reached a culmination in January 2023 when Côte d’Ivoire honored 49 soldiers after they were released from detention in Mali, where they were held for half a year, and returned home. Only weeks before their release from detention, a Bamako court had sentenced most of the Ivorian soldiers to 20 years in prison and others to death for being “mercenaries”. Although Ivorian soldiers had been invited to Mali by the German contingent of MINUSMA, the Malian coup leaders alleged the “Sahel Aviation Service (SAS),” which is a private company, transported the Ivorian soldiers. In contrast, the Wagner Group, which is affiliated to the Russian government, was welcomed into Mali by the Malian coup leaders. It is possible that the Ivorian and German governments’ criticism of the coup in Mali and lack of transition back to democracy underscored the Malian coup leaders’ initial actions to detain the Ivorian soldiers. See; “Mali detains Ivorian soldiers, accuses them of being mercenaries,” *Rfi.fr*, 12 July 2022. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220712-mali-detains-ivorian-soldiers-accuses-them-of-being-mercenaries>
- 2 The U.S. State Department notes that since the Ivorian president’s election to a third term in 2020, the country’s democratic processes have been “generally considered free.” Similarly, the election monitoring group, New Dawn, assessed that the latest Ivorian local and regional elections in September 2023 “had gone smoothly.” Consistent with these democratic trends, Ivorian foreign policy has become increasingly aligned with ECOWAS and its member-states’ oppositions to military coups in West Africa. See; “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cote d’Ivoire,” U.S. Department of State, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cote-divoire>. See also; “Sweeping win for ruling party in Ivory Coast local and regional elections,” *france24.com*, 5 September 2023. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230904-sweeping-win-for-ruling-party-in-ivory-coast-local-and-regional-elections>

India Upgrades Its Artillery Systems Based On Lessons From The War In Ukraine



Dhanush howitzer during Republic Day Parade 2017

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dhanush_howitzzer_during_Republic_Day_Parade_2017.jpg; Attribution: Government Open Data License - India

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

India continues to draw many operational and tactical lessons from the war in Ukraine.¹ The excerpted article from *The Hindu* reports that India's Branch of Artillery, an operational arm of the Army, conducted a study of the Ukraine conflict and will subsequently convert all existing towed and self-propelled artillery systems making 155mm the standard caliber. The arti-

cle also notes that the Army will be looking to India's defense industry to update these systems with a focus on buying indigenously produced munitions. Officials in India's Ministry of Defense stated concerns about the availability of ordnance for various systems after the war in Ukraine began.² Overall, this marks an example of Indian officials taking another lesson from the war in Ukraine resulting in a long-term change for the country's armed forces.

The war also brought out the matter of increased survivability, the source said, referring to reports which suggested that Russia had lost 5,000 guns and rocket systems so far.

Source: Dinakar Peri, "Indian Army draws lessons from Ukraine war, revises artillery requirements," *The Hindu* (English-language newspaper in India), 17 September 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/army-draws-lessons-from-ukraine-war-revises-its-artillery-requirements/article67315823.ece>

Drawing lessons from the Ukraine war, the Indian Army has revised the profile of its Artillery regiment, with focus on a mix of mobility and augmented long-range firepower.

The Army expects to achieve its target of converting the entire artillery to medium 155 mm gun systems by 2042...

"The Regiment of Artillery has done a detailed study along with the Operations Branch. In the revised Artillery profile, Army is going for more self-propelled and mounted gun systems," the source said...

The Army has embarked on a plan to make 155 mm the standard calibre of all artillery guns...

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The war also brought out the matter of increased survivability, the source said, referring to reports which suggested that Russia had lost 5,000 guns and rocket systems so far.

There is a need for methods for force preservation as well as to adopt shoot-and-scoot techniques. “The Russia-Ukraine conflict also shows that we need to be prepared for such a prolonged war,” the source said.

...the Army inducted the M777 Ultra Light Howitzer (ULH) in November 2018. It has since inducted all 145 guns contracted. In addition, 100 K9-Vajra Self Propelled Guns have been inducted and the Defence Acquisition Council has approved procurement of 100 more.

...The Army has also placed orders for 114 Dhanush guns, indigenously upgraded based on the Bofors guns, and 300 Sharang guns, which are upgraded from 130mm guns to 155 mm...

In addition, Request for Proposals (RFPs) have been also issued for two more gun systems — 155mm/ 52 calibre Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) and Mounted Gun System (MGS). The MGS has crew and ammunition onboard the vehicle and has shoot-and-scoot capabilities, officials said. The Army is looking for around 300 guns.

...In addition to guns, there is a major focus on indigenisation of munitions, officials said, stating that four types of munitions were currently under trials.

Notes:

- 1 The Indian Army carried out an exercise in the summer of 2022 that worked through tactical communication issues related to the war in Ukraine and earlier this year policy makers outlined several capabilities that India should develop in its armed forces after watching how Russia and Ukraine have made adjustments on the battlefield, see: Matthew Stein “Lessons For India From The War In Ukraine,” *OE Watch*, 05-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/lessons-for-india-from-the-war-in-ukraine/>
- 2 For more information on India’s issues with deliveries of ordnance since the war in Ukraine began, see: Matthew Stein “India Takes a Step Away from the Russian Defense Industry,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 31 July 2023. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3475660/india-takes-a-step-away-from-the-russian-defense-industry/>