

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



Issue 5
2023



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China Now Claims To Have World’s Top Destroyer Force

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

According to the Hong Kong-based pro-Beijing news source *Ta Kung Pao*, the Chinese Navy recently saw its sixth Type 055 stealth-guided missile destroyer, “Wuxi,” achieve “total combat capability.” The article also claims that by having the **Type 055** stealth guided-missile destroyers now fully combat ready, “the detachment has become the world’s top destroyer force.” The second article excerpt, published in the Chinese state-run *Global Times*, explains that the Wuxi recently participated in a rigorous three-day trial in the Yellow Sea, where it conducted comprehensive air defense, missile defense, sea attack, and anti-submarine operations in a complex electromagnetic environment. The tests, focusing on “future missions, environments, and opponents,” incorporated surface ships, submarines, fighters, and other forces to produce multiple air, underwater, and surface threats that put to test the Wuxi’s integrated combat capability.

Now, as the four Type 055 destroyers of the first Destroyer Detachment of the PLA Navy are fully operational, they will provide more solid support for the Chinese Navy to penetrate the island chains and cruise the ocean.

According to *Ta Kung Pao*, Type 055 destroyers are equipped with China’s most advanced air defense, anti-missile, anti-ship, and anti-submarine weapons. They have “strong information perception, command and coordination, air defense and anti-missile, sea-to-sea and sea-to-land strike capabilities” and possess strong anti-ship

Hull Number	Name	Launch date	Combat ready date
101	Nanchang	June 2017	2020
102	Lhasa	April 2018	2021
103	Anshan	2019	2021
104	Wuxi	2020	2023
105	Dalian	2018	TBD
106	Yan’an	2018	TBD
107	Zunyi	2019	TBD
108	Xianyang	2023	TBD
109	TBD	TBD	TBD

Chinese Type 055 Destroyers

Source: Author’s own and given by permission Attribution: Cindy Hurst, Foreign Military Studies Office

capabilities that can “crush any opponent.” Previous reporting claimed that a dual-band radar system gives the Type 055 anti-stealth and anti-satellite capabilities in low-Earth orbit providing “Chinese forces a key edge over their opponents in modern warfare.”¹

The Type 055 destroyer’s primary mission is expected to be as an aircraft carrier escort: to provide a wider detection range and early warning capability, stronger firepower, and overall increased protection for the aircraft carrier. The Type 055 also has the capacity to serve as a command ship and is expected to help the Chinese navy break through the island chains² and ultimately achieve a blue-water capability.

There are currently eight operational Type 055 destroyers. The first four have been assigned to the First Destroyer Detachment in the North Sea Fleet, while the next four have been assigned to the Ninth Destroyer Detachment in the South China Fleet. The North Sea Fleet safeguards the country’s northern maritime borders from the Bohai and Yellow Seas. According to *Ta Kung Pao*, China is currently constructing its ninth Type 055 destroyer, which is expected to be assigned to the East Sea Fleet.



The Nanchang, China’s first launched Type 055 destroyer.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_055_destroyer#/media/File:PLANS_Nanchang_\(DDG-101\)_20210427.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_055_destroyer#/media/File:PLANS_Nanchang_(DDG-101)_20210427.jpg) Attribution: Japan Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff Office; CC-BY 4.0

Continued: China Now Claims To Have World's Top Destroyer Force

Source: “055型四剑合璧 护航母破岛链 (Four Type 055 Destroyers Escort the Aircraft Carrier Liaoning to Break Through the Island Chains), *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong-based, pro-Beijing news source), 3 April 2023, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232108/2023/0403/835819.html>

Wuxi, the Chinese Navy's sixth Type 055 stealth guided-missile destroyer, has recently passed a full-course test, officially achieving total combat capability. So far, all four 10,000 ton-class destroyers of the first destroyer detachment under the North Sea Fleet (NSF) have achieved full combat capability, and the detachment has become the world's top destroyer force.

The 13,000-ton Type 055 guided missile destroyer has been praised by U.S. media as the world's second most powerful guided missile destroyer after the U.S. Zumwalt-class. From January 2020, when Nanchang, the first Type 055 destroyer, came into service, to February 2023, when Xianyang joined the navy, eight 10,000 ton-class destroyers of this type have sailed across our country's vast seas in a short period of three years. ...As a result, the Type 055 destroyers have more robust comprehensive capabilities.

Destroyers are the indispensable main ships in the surface combat system. The Type 055 10,000-ton large destroyers are equipped with the Chinese Navy's most advanced air defense, anti-missile, anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons, with strong information perception, command and coordination, air defense and anti-missile, sea-to-sea and sea-to-land strike capabilities. In particular, equipped with the hypersonic anti-ship YJ-21 missile, the 055 large destroyers has the anti-ship ability to crush any opponent. The formation of several large destroyers of this type also enables the PLA Navy to adopt more flexible and diversified methods of warfare.

Now, as the four Type 055 destroyers of the first Destroyer Detachment of the PLA Navy are fully operational, they will provide more solid support for the Chinese Navy to penetrate the island chains and cruise the ocean.

Source: Liu Xuanzun, “PLA Navy’s Type 055 large destroyer Wuxi achieves operational capability, 'boosting North Sea Fleet's far sea capabilities',” *Global Times* (Chinese state-run news outlet), 26 March 2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202303/1287983.shtml>

Organized by a vessel training center affiliated with the PLA Northern Theater Command Navy, the Type 055 large destroyer Wuxi recently went through a three-day full-course acceptance test in the Yellow Sea over training subjects including comprehensive air defense, missile defense, sea attack and anti-submarine actions in a complex electromagnetic environment, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Saturday.

The vessel training center dispatched other forces including surface vessels, submarines and fighter jets to confront or support the Wuxi during the test, so the Wuxi could display its capabilities in dealing with all kinds of emergencies under multiple surface, underwater and air threats, CCTV reported.

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Continued: China Now Claims To Have World's Top Destroyer Force

Notes:

[1] For more information see: Liu Xuanzun, "China's Type 055 Destroyer has Anti-Stealth, Anti-Satellite Capabilities: Report," *Global Times*, 11 October 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202010/1203103.shtml>

[2] The island chain strategy was originally conceptualized in 1951 by the West to contain the Soviet Union and China by surrounding them with naval bases in the West Pacific to project power and restrict access. There are currently three island chains in the Pacific Ocean. The First Island Chain begins at the Kuril Islands and runs through the Japanese Archipelago, Ryuku Islands, Taiwan, northwest Philippines, and ends around Borneo. The Second Island Chain consists of the Bonin Islands, Volcano Islands, Mariana Islands, western Caroline Islands, and Western New Guinea. The Third Island Chain begins at the Aleutian Islands and runs through the center of the Pacific Ocean through the Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, Fiji, and New Zealand. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Island Chains became an area of focus in and around China. To break out of the island chains, among other things, China must have a "blue water" capable navy that can control the seas at wide ranges. See Andrew S. Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Why Islands Still Matter in Asia: The Enduring Significance of the Pacific 'Island Chains,'" *The National Interest*, 5 February 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-islands-still-matter-asia-15121>; and Joe Fallon, "Breaking the Island Chains," *Defence Viewpoints from the UK Defence Forum*, 10 February 2020, <https://www.defenceviewpoints.co.uk/articles-and-analysis/breaking-the-island-chains>

People's Liberation Army Exploring Military Applications of ChatGPT

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

Chinese regulators have acted swiftly since ChatGPT's launch in November 2022 to manage perceived political risks by laying out draft rules on the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI).¹ However, this has not stopped the Chinese military's *PLA Daily* from inviting security scholars to consider the potential applications of generative AI in the military.

In the three excerpted *PLA Daily* pieces, Hu Xiaofeng, Zhao Jingxuan, and Hu Yushan explore the risks and opportunities associated with integrating AI technologies and large language models (LLMs) in military planning, operational, and combat systems. Hu Xiaofeng, a professor at China's National Defense University, argues that the integration of ChatGPT with future information-based and intelligent warfare systems would bring a "qualitative leap to the commander's decision-making ability."² Hu Xiaofeng and Hu Yushan argue

ChatGPT will likely trigger an expansion of China's intelligence collection capabilities due to its ability to summarize large swathes of scientific and academic information, providing commanders with near real-time information perception and allowing them to make an accurate threat assessment. Hu Xiaofeng and

Hu Yushan also discuss the integration of ChatGPT with other military systems to complete more complex tasks, including training scenario preparation, combat plan generation, combat plan arrangement, action plan drafting, exercise result commentary, as well as higher-level planning tasks like war plan analysis, supply chain risk analysis, and crisis response plan evaluation. At an operational level, Hu Yushan identifies ChatGPT as a useful tool to produce fake news, fake emails, and imitate human language for information deception in cognitive domain operations and cyberattacks.

ChatGPT's role and impact on the military domain cannot be ignored.

PLA researchers are also wary of the potential negative implications of overreliance on AI technologies in military decision-making. Zhao Jingxuan draws upon the Roman mythology of Janus. Janus is the two-faced god of gates, transitions, doorways, and duality, with the front facing the future and the back facing the past. Zhao likens the use of AI technologies in military decision-making as a doorway presenting serious security, legal, and ethical dilemmas, echoing sentiments expressed at the call to action set forth in February 2023 at the first summit on Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAM).³



ChatGPT Logo.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ChatGPT#/media/File:ChatGPT_logo.svg; Attribution: Public Domain

Source: Hu Xiaofeng (胡晓峰), "ChatGPT, 我们该怎么看" (How Should We View ChatGPT)," *PLA Daily* (official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army), 21 March 2023. http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-03-21&paperNumber=07&articleid=901476&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

"In future information and intelligent warfare, ChatGPT can be used for basic data analysis and decision support, natural language processing, and the processing of massive volumes of battlefield information to facilitate a qualitative leap in commanders' decision-making abilities. On this basis, it may lead to transformational mutations in some traditional operational positions, thus triggering changes in established military systems. If it is professionally trained to work with other systems, it can be used for more complex work such as training idea preparation, combat program generation, combat plan arrangement, operational planning

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Continued: People's Liberation Army Exploring Military Applications of ChatGPT

and preparation, exercise result evaluation, etc. This will induce many adjustments to command and decision-making institutions, it may even reshape the command and decision-making process. If it continues to iterate and mutate in the future, it may also be involved in completing other higher-order work involved in war plan analysis and crisis management program evaluation, among others. ChatGPT technology may also be used to produce fake news, fake emails, or even imitate human language to implement information decoys, or be used in cyber-attacks.

Source: Zhao Jingxuan (赵静轩), “雅努斯的两副面孔 (The Two Faces of Janus),” *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army), 21 March 2023. http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-03-21&paperNumber=07&articleid=901476&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

When a large number of intelligent combat systems are applied to the battlefield, the cost of war will be greatly reduced, and the 'zero casualties' of combatants is expected to become a reality. However, in a complex battlefield environment, the intelligent combat system is very likely to have problems such as indiscriminate killing of innocent people due to identification errors, which will bring infinite hidden dangers to human beings.

Source: Hu Yushan (胡玉山), “作战+ChatGPT, 会撞出来什么样火花 (Combat + ChatGPT, What Kind of Sparks Will be Struck)” *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army), 21 March 2023. http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-03-21&paperNumber=07&articleid=901477&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

Based on ChatGPT's powerful analysis and judgement capability, it can act as a super scheduler and quickly solve issues arising in the logistics supply chain with the support of Internet of Things (IoT) devices, cloud computing, and big data. In the procurement link, through analysis of past material procurement data, it can automatically predict future material demand, and at the same time, according to market fluctuations, independently set funding budgets to improve the military's economic efficiency. In warehousing processing, it can analyze a series of data such as the number of materials in storage, reserve time, and maintenance to carry out intelligence allocation between personnel and people and materials and equipment. In the transportation link, it can determine the best means of delivery by intelligently analyzing demand, resources, and means of delivery to optimize transportation plans.

Notes:

[1] The Cyberspace Administration of China (网信办) released draft measures to lay out the ground rules that generative AI services must follow, including the type of content these products are allowed to generate. Importantly, Article 4 stipulates that all AI generated content must reflect the core values of socialism and should not subvert state power. For the full Chinese text, see: “《生成式人工智能服务管理办法 (征求意见稿)》 (Generative AI Service Management (Draft for Comments)),” Cyberspace Administration of China, 11 April 2023. http://www.cac.gov.cn/2023-04/11/c_1682854275475410.htm

[2] Hu Xiaofeng explicitly mentions integration with AlphaGo (阿尔法狗). AlphaGo is a computer program that was designed to play the strategy board game Go. AlphaGo uses a combination of deep neural networks and tree search techniques and was trained using a combination of supervised and reinforcement learning. In 2016, AlphaGo made headlines when it was the first program to publicly defeat a professional Go player. PLA researchers have discussed military applications of AlphaGO for over half a decade, but Hu admits it has made little progress in effectively applying the program to PLA decision-making processes.

[3] For more on REAIM and the call to action that 60 countries including the United States and China signed, see: “REAIM 2023 Program,” Government of the Netherlands, 20 April 2023. <https://www.reaim2023.org>. While China has yet to publish its own vision for governance of AI in military systems, the United States' “Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy” can be seen here: “Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy,” U.S. Department of State, 16 February 2023. <https://www.state.gov/political-declaration-on-responsible-military-use-of-artificial-intelligence-and-autonomy/>

Chinese Military Seeking To Use AI Disinformation Database for Cognitive Defense

By Thomas Shrimpton
OE Watch Commentary

According to the excerpted article from PLA-owned strategic communications journal *Military Correspondent*, the PLA is exploring an early warning mechanism for monitoring and combating digital disinformation utilizing the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)'s¹ "AI Rumor Crusher."² While the article is not a definitive accounting of how the CAC will use artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor and counter digital disinformation, it does provide insight into a methodology employed across China's information environment to control flows of information. The author, Li Beibei, a researcher at China's National Defense University's College of Politics, suggests that an ideal approach for countering disinformation would include a multipronged strategy that includes expansion of China's legal framework, improvement of data-sharing among social media platforms and the government, and improved media literacy.

Li explains AI Rumor Crusher's operational methodology as an eight-step iterative process composed of recognition, word separation, comparison with a rumor database, determination of credibility, analysis of rumor and non-rumor features, and finally supervised and reinforcement learning. In the first two steps, AI Rumor Crusher identifies the source of a piece of information and analyzes the disseminator. Next, it analyzes the information against preexisting rumor samples and tracks sources for their credibility

The models built by AI still need further language training. For example, some users share [rumors] with irony, sarcasm, or as a metaphor, and machines find it difficult to judge whether they are true expressions of emotion or not. Therefore, we should focus on improving the public's media literacy so that they are more serious about interacting and sharing content

(website, publisher, professionals, etc.). Finally, the key arguments are labeled and cross-referenced with authoritative knowledge databases³ to verify the veracity of the information. Li argues that AI, when compared to human counterparts, possesses a superior ability to work around the clock, identify and eliminate rumors in a timely way, track disseminators of disinformation, judge the veracity of information, and even determine the disseminator's motivation for sharing rumors.

Li further advocates for a multipronged approach to digital disinformation governance that would include the expansion and strengthening of China's relevant legal regulations and public media literacy to reinforce social values and ensure both originators and disseminators (witting or unwitting) do not exacerbate the issue.⁴



Rumor Crusher.

Source: <https://szzx.sust.edu.cn/info/1005/2532.htm>
Attribution: Public Domain

Continued: Chinese Military Seeking To Use AI Disinformation Database for Cognitive Defense

Source: “利用人工智能技术治理网络谣言探析 (An Exploration of the Uses of Artificial Intelligence in Governing Digital Rumors),” *Military Correspondent* (PLA-owned strategic communications journal), 23 February 2023. http://www.81.cn/rmjz_203219/jsjz/2023nd1q_244462/yldzgzyj_244467/16203061.html

Management of digital rumors has become an urgent issue. We can establish an early warning mechanism for digital rumors based in artificial intelligence technologies. With AI “Rumor Crusher” we can build a data-sharing platform for disinformation to monitor the trajectory of digital rumors and prevent them from spreading in order to effectively combat digital disinformation.

With the promotion of new media interactive platforms, the difficulty of Internet rumor management is gradually increasing, and users' behavior and speech on the Internet are difficult to be effectively and timely restrained, making rumor suppression a more complicated and difficult task.

The most central factor in the formation and dissemination of digital rumors is the openness and ambiguity of incoming information. People are most likely to generate and spread rumors in the absence of reliable information. ... people use their virtual identities to send and receive information over their various accounts without temporal, spatial, or moral constraints ... resulting in many online rumors leading to serious consequences.

Since August 2020, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)'s Reporting Center has organized more than 10 website platforms such as Weibo, Douyin and Baidu to carry out digital rumor tagging and labeling work. This ensures that digital rumor samples are promptly exposed, thereby minimizing the space for digital rumors to survive. However, despite the active measures relevant government departments have taken to control digital rumors, there is still a long way to go. In particular, the legal punishment for digital rumors should be strengthened so the disseminators of rumors can be punished according to the degree to which the rumor is malign and causes a negative impact.

Notes:

[1] Cyberspace Administration of China's Reporting Center (网信办举报中心, literally, “Illegal and Harmful Information Reporting Center, 违法和不良信息举报中心). As early as 2004, under the Internet Society of China, the China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center was established with the stated goal of standing up for “virtue and right thinking” while opposing pornography, violence, and fraud. See: Sumner Lemon, “Chinese website lets users report illegal content,” *Computer World*, 15 June 2004. <https://www.computerworld.com/article/2565362/chinese-web-site-lets-users-report-illegal-content.html>

[2] “Rumor (谣言)” is both a colloquial and legal term in the PRC. Colloquially, it connotes a similar meaning to the term “rumor” in English. According to the Cyberspace Administration of China (国家互联网信息办公室, 简称: 网信办), internet rumors网络谣言 refers to “false information that intentionally fabricates facts to cause harm to society and others.” This definition partly aligns with Western conceptions of disinformation (often translated as 虚假信息, lit. fake information). For further exploration of the PRC's unclear use of similar terms in legal matters, see: 谣言型犯罪中“谣言”该如何理解 (How Should “Rumor” be Understood in Rumor Crimes), *The Supreme People's Procuratorate of the People's Republic of China*, 12 February 2022. https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/llyj/202202/t20220212_544221.shtml

[3] While not explicitly stated, these would likely include both open source, commercial, and classified government databases accessible by government, military, and commercial personnel. Much of the labeling and tagging until recently has been conducted by human regulators working on behalf of social media companies like Alibaba, Baidu, ByteDance, and Tencent.

[4] Many of these same issues are addressed in China's preexisting legal infrastructure managing cyberspace including the Cybersecurity Law, Data Security Law, Personal Information Protection Law, and Cybersecurity Review Measures. For more on China's vision for global cyberspace governance, see: Thomas Shrimpton, “Beijing's Vision for Global Cyberspace Governance,” *OE Watch*, 1-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/433067>

Vietnam Defense Exhibition Shows Diversified International Partnerships To Balance Against China

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

According to the first excerpted 6 April article from Vietnam's national television broadcaster *vov.com*, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs deputy spokesperson denounced the National Natural Science Organization of China's plans to conduct surveys in 33 areas of the South China Sea. Among the archipelagos in the South China Sea are the Spratly Islands (*Truong Sa*), which are claimed and controlled by Vietnam but are also claimed by China. Vietnam considers the Chinese survey's encompassing of the Spratly Islands as an act of aggression.

One way Vietnam has responded to China's more aggressive military posture in the South China Sea, such as through surveying, is by branching out to multiple international actors to balance against China, if not also China's ally, Russia. This was demonstrated at the 2022 International Defense Exhibition in Hanoi last December.¹ As the second excerpted article on the government-funded Voice of Viet-

nam website *vtv.com* noted, the exhibition was intended to highlight Vietnam's military modernization and diversified international partners.² While Russian artillery systems, which Vietnam has historically acquired for its army, were on display alongside Vietnamese ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, there were also weapons from companies of Western countries and their partners, such as the United States, Czechia, Israel, and India. China was not among the nearly 70 countries that attended. The weapons at the exhibition are among those that Vietnam could acquire and employ during any future confrontation without relying on Chinese allies.³

A *n exhibition was officially opened for international partners and domestic citizens to observe the capacity, technological progress, and weapons and equipment manufactured by Vietnam.*



Vietnam claims Paracel and Spratly Islands.

Source: Tonbi Ko, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_claims_Paracel_and_Spratly_islands.JPG Attribution: CCx3.0

Continued: Vietnam Defense Exhibition Shows Diversified International Partnerships To Balance Against China

Source: “Việt Nam phản đối việc Trung Quốc công bố khu vực khảo sát bao trùm Trường Sa (Vietnam opposes China’s announcement of conducting a survey area throughout the Spratly Islands),” *vov.vn* (official website of the Voice of Vietnam radio broadcaster), 6 April 2023. <https://vov.vn/chinh-tri/viet-nam-phan-doi-viec-trung-quoc-cong-bo-khu-vuc-khao-sat-bao-trum-truong-sa-post1012290.vov>

Regarding the information that the National Natural Science Organization of China announced 33 survey areas, including some lines covering the Truong Sa archipelago in Vietnam’s waters, Deputy Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pham Thu Hang at the press conference on April 6 stated, As it has repeatedly affirmed, Vietnam has a full legal basis and historical evidence to affirm its sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagoes based on international law.

Source: “Người dân Hà Nội háo hức với Triển lãm quốc phòng quốc tế 2022 (Hanoians are enthusiastic about the 2022 International Defense Exhibition),” *vtv.vn* (Vietnamese government’s national television broadcaster), 8 December 2022. <https://vtv.vn/xa-hoi/nguoi-dan-ha-noi-hao-huc-voi-trien-lam-quoc-phong-quoc-te-2022-20221208183916675.htm>

On the morning of December 8, an exhibition was officially opened for international partners and domestic citizens to observe the capacity, technological progress, and weapons and equipment manufactured by Vietnam.... Many Vietnamese people witnessed the modern weapons of the army for the first time.

Notes:

[1] Among the purposes of the exhibition was to “diversify defense equipment procurement sources” and to “introduce Vietnam’s defense capabilities and Vietnamese-made weapons” to the international community. Although Russia has historically been Vietnam’s main weapons supplier, the presence of Western countries at the exhibition indicates Vietnam’s interest in gradually diversifying by engaging in weapons transfers with them. See: “Vietnam hosts its first international defense expo.” *rfa.org*, 8 December 2022. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/vietnam-defense-expo-12082022030531.html>

[2] Unlike *Truong Sa*, the *Hoang Sa* (Paracel Islands) have been under Chinese control since the Chinese navy expelled the South Vietnamese navy from the islands in 1974. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam has inherited the South Vietnamese claims over the islands since 1975, as well as concerns about China attempting to occupy *Truong Sa* in the future.

[3] After 1991, Vietnam sought to “multilateralize and diversify” its foreign ties by normalizing its relations with China and all Southeast Asian states and becoming a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). By 2001, Vietnam and Russia revived bilateral relations in the form of a strategic partnership and Vietnam and the United States signed a Bilateral Trade Agreement. Vietnam’s broader goal was to insulate the country from Sino-U.S. competition or other major power rivalries and protect its independence and self-reliance. See Carlyle A. Thayer (2017), “Vietnam’s Foreign Policy in an Era of Rising Sino-US Competition and Increasing Domestic Political Influence,” *Asian Security*, 13:3, 183-199.

Russia Tries To Appeal to New Contract Soldiers in Moscow

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past 15 months, polls in Russia have indicated significant public support (ranging from around 70 to 80 percent) for its invasion of Ukraine. Given the government’s control over the media (and most polling agencies), the genuine level of support could be considerably lower. The Kremlin’s ongoing challenge in attracting sufficient contract-military manpower may better reflect the actual public mood regarding this conflict. Few young Russian men appear willing to enlist as contract soldiers. As the accompanying excerpt from the popular Russian site *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* points out, Russian officials in Moscow are now pulling out all stops to attract sufficient contract military personnel for the so-called “special military operation” (SMO) in Ukraine.

Until recently, processing centers for Russian contract soldiers were bureaucratic, bare-boned operations with minimal staffing and infrastructure. As the article describes, this has all changed (at least in Moscow) with the recent inauguration of the new “five-story Unified Selection Point for military service under contract.” Instead of long lines amid grim surroundings, this new induction center boasts of “electronic queues, comfortable waiting rooms, with trained and competent specialists.” All the administrative and medical facilities are co-located, allowing potential contract soldiers to “comfortably and quickly go through a full cycle of events related to admission to the army.” The center is open all week and has the capacity to process 300 new contract soldiers daily.

The general atmosphere in the center is strikingly different from the environment of the draft board familiar to every male Russian.

The article also describes some of the terms and benefits of becoming a contract soldier. Quoting a Moscow military commissar, “each candidate has the right to choose his specialty,” and the ages of admission for contractors is between 18 and 60. Candidates can come from anywhere in Russia, as well as from any other neighboring country.



Russian advertisement for contract military service.

Source: https://www.n-vartovsk.ru/news/citywide_news/bvk/381142.html; Attribution: CCA-SA 3.0 Public Domain

According to the article, the pay and benefits package for new contract soldiers is quite impressive. Besides their regular contract pay, soldiers from Moscow will receive a one-time payment of 195,000 rubles (\$2,500) as well as similar monthly payments while participating in the SMO. There are also schooling benefits for eligible children and retired parents of contract soldiers. As the Kremlin continues to wrestle with manpower challenges, contract military service may become a more attractive option for Russians living in Moscow.¹

Continued: Russia Tries To Appeal to New Contract Soldiers in Moscow

Source: Yury Sukhanov, “В столице открылся сверхсовременный Единый пункт отбора на контрактную службу (An ultra-modern unified selection point for contract service was opened in the capital),” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* (popular Russian site), 3 April 2023. <https://www.mk.ru/moscow/2023/04/03/v-stolice-otkryl-sya-sverkhsovremennyy-edinyy-punkt-otbora-na-kontraktную-sluzhbu.html>

In Moscow, the modernization of all contours of the urban environment and public services continues. Following health care, education, housing and communal services, transport, the sphere of manning the Armed Forces, which is vital for the country, is brought to the standards of the 21st century. Within the framework of this program, a five-story Unified Selection Point for military service under a contract was opened ...where volunteers can comfortably and quickly go through a full cycle of events related to admission to the army....

“What I would like to note: with all candidates, events will be held for selection for a contract on the principle of one window, without leaving the territory of this building, - says the military commissar of the city of Moscow Maxim Loktev. - All logistics are thought out taking into account the wishes of those who have already been on the contract. All the services participating in the selection procedure are located in one building, and all the logistics of those wishing to enter the contract are organized along the lines of multifunctional centers that are well known to Muscovites. Electronic queues, comfortable waiting rooms, trained and competent specialists are just the tip of the iceberg: the basis is a competent division of the functionality of employees, verified routes and procedures....

...“Each candidate has the right to choose his specialty,” Loktev added. According to him, people from 18 to 60 years old can become contractors... After the interview and clarification of the capabilities and intentions of the applicant entering the Armed Forces, it is the turn of doctors...

...according to the military commissar of Moscow, candidates from all regions of the country are accepted. “We are faced with the fact that guys who want to serve under a contract work in Moscow and often represent different regions.... This option is also provided for those who are not citizens of the Russian Federation, from neighboring countries, we will also consider these candidates and offer them military service under the contract,” said Maxim Loktev.

...The center in its current configuration with specialists is designed to receive a hundred people per day, but it is possible to expand its capacity to 300 people daily.... The general atmosphere in the Center is strikingly different from the environment of the draft board familiar to every male Russian.

...Before leaving for the special operation zone, all contract soldiers... will undergo special professional training at the best training grounds in the Moscow region.

As for material support for military personnel and their families, in Moscow it includes regular monthly payments, as well as lump sum payments upon signing a contract and sending them to the SMO zone. When signing a contract for a year or more, a person entering the Armed Forces will receive a lump sum of 195,000 rubles from the city. Further, the system guarantees regular additional payments depending on rank and military position.

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Continued: Russia Tries To Appeal to New Contract Soldiers in Moscow

Moscow currently has one of the most extensive packages of social support and benefits for military personnel, primarily for participants in the special operation. These benefits apply not only to the soldiers themselves, but also to their families. Thus, the children of combatants have the right to extraordinary admission to the kindergarten closest to their home, the school of their choice (regardless of the place of permanent registration). And social workers will help elderly relatives of Muscovite soldiers in everyday life.

Notes:

[1] For additional background on recent incentives to attract new soldiers, see: Ray Finch, “Added Incentives for Those who Fight in Ukraine,” *OE Watch*, 3-2023.

Facing European Sanctions, Russian Redirects Grain and Coal to Asian Customers

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

In the face of sanctions and economic isolation from Europe, Russia's longtime export hub in Murmansk has become, at least for now, an unnecessary and out-of-the-way detour for Russian commodities being shipped abroad, especially to Asia. According to the excerpted article in the Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, Russia is increasing its exports to Asia on the northbound Siberian rivers to the Northern Sea Route. Grain barges have successfully shipped north on the Lena River to the Northern Sea Route to China at substantial savings over rail. Coal will now move by rail from the Siberian coal fields to the river port of Krasnoyarsk

and by barge on the north flowing Yenesei River to the Arctic Circle port region and then be loaded onto bulk carriers for China and India. Exploiting these additional routes will be more cost effective, quicker, and sanction-free, while providing Russia access to friendly markets and much needed export revenue.

As Europe no longer buys Russian coal and new markets in Asia take over, the export hub in Murmansk manifest itself as the world's longest detour.

Source: Thomas Nilsen, "Asia-bound coal finds Siberian shortcut route, avoiding Murmansk," *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 3 April 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2023/04/asia-bound-coal-finds-siberia-shortcut-route-avoiding-murmansk>

As Europe no longer buys Russian coal and new markets in Asia take over, the export hub in Murmansk manifest itself as the world's longest detour. The first test batch with 30,000 tons of coal from Kuzbass will be shipped via the Yenisei River and Northern Sea Route when ice is gone and the waterways open for navigation later this year.

"It is planned to organize an experimental shipping in 2023 [...] from Kuzbass with transshipment in Krasnoyarsk and Lesosibirsk. In Ust-Port region, the coal will be reloaded to ships and sent to China," stated head of the Yenisey inland waterways, Leonid Fedorov.

The coal will be sent by rail to Lososibirsk and Krasnoyarsk where it will be loaded on barges and shipped north the Yenisey River to Ust-Port inside the Arctic Circle. A larger bulk carrier will take over the cargo and sail to the outlet of the river and further east along the Northern Sea Route towards Asia. About half of all Russian coal comes from the Kuzbass region southeast of Krasnoyarsk.

Over the last decade, export via Murmansk has increased from about 9,5 million tons in 2010 to 16,2 million tons in 2019. After Putin's full-scale military attack on Ukraine last year, the European Union decided to ban Russian coal, and export from the ice-free port on the coast to the Barents Sea is now shipped via the Suez channel to Asia, for the most part to India and China. If increasing to large volume, export via the Yenisey River and the Northern Sea Route will be substantially shorter than the route via Murmansk.

Retired SHAPE Vice Chief of Staff Shares His Thoughts on Russia's War in Ukraine

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Former Vice Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) Lt. Gen. Michel Yakovleff (France) believes that Russia's stalled invasion of Ukraine cannot be won by any decisive Russian military campaign. He also believes Ukraine's military is incapable of "winning" in its current condition. According to an 11 April interview published in the Krakow-based *New Eastern Europe*¹ foreign affairs journal, Yakovleff believes Russia is already engaged in an offensive of its own but that its forces are "so diluted all along the line in Donbas" that "it will not collapse the Ukraine line" and thus be inconsequential. He also believes Ukraine is unlikely to have any meaningful offensive and should instead wait for Russia to make an operational blunder of which it can take advantage.

In the interview, Yakovleff, a descendent of Russian emigrants, discussed critical issues surrounding the conflict, including the conditional transfer of arms from the West to Ukraine. He recognized that high-end weapon systems like fighter aircraft and longer-range artillery and rocket systems would likely continue to be given only with promises that Ukraine would not use the systems to attack Russian territory. Yet Yakovleff noted that Belarus posed an interesting dilemma possible for exploitation: "If you allow a force on your territory to launch an attack from your territory, to launch missiles, with aircraft flying in your airspace, have artillery deployed on your soil firing barrages into your neighbour's territory – you are a participant to the war." According to Yakovleff, while Russia is off limits, Belarus, may be a different story

Yakovleff also expects, and favors, regime change in Russia. According to Yakavleff, "it will happen. Will it happen in months or years, I don't know... But I think this war has gone too far and exposed too much of the incompetence and the basic inhumanity of the current regime." His sentiment cuts to the heart of conflicting views of the war in Ukraine and the desirable outcomes. Ukraine views its conflict with Russia as total war, a fight for its very existence and thus the demise of Russia is the most favorable outcome. As



Ukrainian first responders clear debris from location of Russian missile strike. Uman Ukraine, 29 April 2023.

Source: Author's own and given by permission; Attribution: Dodge Billingsley, Combat Films and Research

the piecemeal and slower than requested weapons transfers might suggest, the West prefers to manage the war, to keep the war limited. Removing Putin may or may not be an objective of the conflict as a highly destabilized Russia and unknown leadership may be considered too high a cost for total Ukrainian victory.²

I think this war has gone too far and exposed too much of the incompetence and the basic inhumanity of the current regime, and all the signs, for me, of the unravelling of the Russian Federation are there. I think it's a disaster in the making, a trainwreck in the making and we'll have to sort it out.

Continued: Retired SHAPE Vice Chief of Staff Shares His Thoughts on Russia's War in Ukraine

Source: "Russia has already taken "Ukrainium" and its fatal," *New Eastern Europe* (Krakow based foreign affairs journal focused on Eastern Europe), 11 April 2023. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2023/04/11/russia-has-already-taken-ukrainium-and-its-fatal/>

VAZHA TAVBERIDZE: *We recently marked the anniversary of the infamous Russian attempt - or rather the failure - called "Take Kyiv in three days". We are witnessing a new Russian offensive gaining traction, as we speak. How do you rate their chances this time?*

MICHEL YAKOVLEFF: *Well, pretty dismal. It looks like the Russians have been engaged in an offensive for three or four weeks now. But it is diluted all along the line in Donbas with a focal point around Bakhmut. Even if they achieve success in Bakhmut, beyond symbolic value it doesn't take them much further than the next town of middling importance. So I don't believe they will collapse the Ukrainian lines. So okay, they may conquer a few square kilometres of real estate at tremendous cost. I have a suspicion they are wasting their resources, both human and ammunition. It's not a very pointed thrust.*

VAZHA TAVBERIDZE: *If that blunder does not come to pass, is the Ukrainian counter-offensive still a foregone conclusion? Must they attack?*

MICHEL YAKOVLEFF: *Well, I wouldn't advise them to attack if they don't have the necessary mass to do so. And the necessary reserves and ammunition and so on. They've been very good at this war without taking any advice of mine. So I've got to be humble about that. You know, and they know better in what situation they are.*

VAZHA TAVBERIDZE: *On the warplanes, French President Emmanuel Macron said that if France did send warplanes, he would not want any to be used to "touch Russian soil". Do you see that becoming a pre-condition for the rest of the would-be donors as well?*

MICHEL YAKOVLEFF: *Well, I suspect so. And I do think that the Ukrainians get the message, that they're reasonable themselves, they understand. In essence, we are in a limited war, as Russian doctrine written in the times of Putin calls it - a limited regional war. It's not limited in terms of violence and assets involved and numbers. It's limited in the geographical sense. So, the guarantee that warplanes wouldn't be used to attack targets on Russian territory - I can understand why strategically it's sound, because Russia is essentially sanctuary-ised in reality. It's immoral and it's not legally sound by the way - you have every right to strike an aggressor, including on his territory. And all nations have done that routinely, if I dare say so. But in this case, okay - it may be right, it may be legal, it may be moral - but it is not politically expedient. And it is not even politically expedient for the Ukrainians. So, of course, there would be guarantees. And I don't doubt the Ukrainians would abide by them.*

I must say there's an interesting side story, which is Belarus. Because Belarus, legally speaking, is an aggressor to the same degree as Russia. If you allow a force on your territory to launch an attack from your territory, to launch missiles, with aircraft flying in your airspace, have artillery deployed on your soil firing barrages into your neighbour's territory - you are a participant to the war. It's not complicit, it's a participant. And in that respect, technically speaking - and it would be amusing to see how politically expedient this would be, you know maybe Russia is off limits. Belarus, may be a different story. I think it's an interesting discussion.

VAZHA TAVBERIDZE: *To go back to the earlier argument that you made that the West is providing Ukraine with enough weaponry and just in time for it to save itself from being crushed. - every now and then we have*

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Continued: Retired SHAPE Vice Chief of Staff Shares His Thoughts on Russia's War in Ukraine

distinctions being made between Ukraine winning this war and Ukraine not losing this war. And I would like to ask what this "not losing" stands for, what it might look like.

MICHEL YAKOVLEFF: *Well, not losing means Ukraine is still alive and kicking, not necessarily in control of all this territory. So it's the situation now. Victory for me - the only measure of victory for Ukraine is that the bear has been defanged, and that the fear of Russia coming back recedes seriously. I have a suspicion that that does imply Ukraine recovering all its territory, if only so the Russian body politic understands that there was no reward in aggression, starting from 2014. That is a very extreme measure of victory, to be honest, and I don't think it is achievable right now, much to my regret.*

...I don't think liberating all its territory is within reach now of the Ukrainian army in the foreseeable future. And that is months, not years. The only real chance for Ukraine to recover its territory is the demise of the Putin regime, and bitter infighting inside Russia and the crumbling of Russia, and that will reopen the discussion. That is, that's not something I call for, advocate or desire. But I think it is the logic of this war. That's what I call Ukrainium. Ukrainium is the same as polonium. You know, it's Russian, and it's fatal. And it's tearing through the fabric of Russia now. Even if they win the war, by the way, the Russians, I think society has been too much stressed. So ultimately, I believe that the desirable outcome for Ukraine will be a change of regime in Moscow.

VAZHA TAVBERIDZE: *How far-fetched a future are we talking about here?*

MICHEL YAKOVLEFF: *I think it's the logic of what's happening now – it will happen. Will it happen in months or years, I don't know. And I am not very good at predicting. But I think this war has gone too far and exposed too much of the incompetence and the basic inhumanity of the current regime, and all the signs, for me, of the unravelling of the Russian Federation are there. I think it's a disaster in the making, a trainwreck in the making and we'll have to sort it out. And then, part of the sorting out will be Georgia, Transnistria, maybe Chechnya, Dagestan and other places, and of course, Ukraine [would] include Crimea.*

Notes:

[1] *New Eastern Europe (NEE)* foreign affairs journal is based in Krakow, Poland. While relatively unknown, it's readership has expanded greatly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is also subscribed to by significant research and academic institutions in the West. Most of the experts and authors featured in the journal are from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, giving the *NEE* an Eastern European perspective, counterbalancing the Western European and U.S. publications that look at the conflict from further afar.

[2] Yakovleff has not been spared Russian criticism for his outspokenness regarding how the war in Ukraine should be fought and the future of Russia. His comments and publications have earned him a spot on the Russia-run *Foreign Combatants* website, which tracks foreigners fighting in Ukraine. According to *Foreign Combatants*, Yakovleff "became famous for a number of public statements fueling conflict," including statements in August 2022 suggesting the French government should "introduce French armed forces into Ukraine." For additional information from a pro-Russian perspective see: Michel Yakovleff, *Foreign Combatants*, https://foreigncombatants.ru/en/index.php?title=Michel_Yakovleff

Iran Installs New Precision Missiles on Army Helicopters



A Shafagh missile mounted on an Iranian Bell-114 helicopter.

Source: <https://cdn.mashregnews.ir/d/2022/04/09/4/3446518.jpg>;
Attribution: Mashreg News

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Almost five years to the day after the Iranian Army unveiled a prototype short-ranged, “Shafagh” air-to-ground missile, Iranian Army Ground Force Commander Brig Gen. Kioumars Heydari announced that the Army has now equipped its aviation wing with a new generation Shafagh. In the accompanying article from *Mashreg News*, a source close to Iran’s intelligence and security apparatus, Heydari described the short-range missile as utilitarian, capable of mounting on manned and unmanned fixed-wing aircraft as well as helicopters, and able to find targets in all weather and times of day. The description of the Shafagh offered in the Iranian press suggests the missile is the Iranian equivalent of an AGM-114 Hellfire, though Iranian officials claim a slightly larger warhead and greater range. Even if Iranian figures exaggerate their claims regarding the Shafagh’s capabilities, an increased precision to drone-launched missiles could complicate regional operations for the United States, its Arab allies, and Israel.¹

The missile... is capable of destroying multiple ground targets in all weather conditions.

While Iran has recently modernized its helicopter fleet, Heydari’s emphasis on helicopter operations is curious, given both the vulnerability of helicopters to longer-range missiles and the lack of obvious use in the regional environment.² If the Iranian military wanted to attack shipping in

the Persian Gulf, for example, utilizing anti-ship missiles or drones would prove far less risky. Iran’s preference for proxy warfare to maintain plausible deniability and to avoid direct confrontation with superior military powers makes the use of helicopters to support operations unlikely.

Heydari’s unveiling of the Shafagh, therefore, may have more to do with Iran’s ambitions to be a military export power. Iranian commanders say that Iran’s indigenous military industry “stands among the world’s top states” regarding both drones and high-precision missiles. While Iran now reportedly exports drones to Russia among other states, a proliferation of Hellfire-like missiles to regional proxies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen—all of which already utilize Iranian drones—might augment the lethality of these groups. So too would the export of helicopters to Iran’s regional allies like Syria or Yemen’s Houthi-led government. Given the frequency of drone and missile strikes across the region, any increase in precision will reduce the diplomatic space to refrain from military retaliation in response to attacks perpetrated by proxies or militias. After all, it is more politically feasible to wave off retaliation for a strike that misses rather than one that strikes key infrastructure or kills multiple soldiers or officials.

Continued: Iran Installs New Precision Missiles on Army Helicopters

Source: “Nasib-e Nasal-e Jadid Mushakha-ye ‘Shafagh’ Ruye Balgaradaha-ye Havaniruz- Artesh (Installation of a New Generation of Shafagh Missiles on Army Helicopters),” *Mashregh News* (news source close to Iran’s intelligence and security apparatus), 9 April 2023. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1360280>

The new generation of “Shafagh” [Twilight] missiles that have special operational capabilities, compared to previous models were installed on Army Aviation’s Cobra and [Bell-] 214 helicopters. The missile, which is 1.9 meters long and weighs about 50 kilograms, is capable of destroying multiple ground targets in all weather conditions, and is also useful for night operations. The new model also has a range of 20 kilometers, a significant increase compared to previous generations. The new Shafagh missiles can be installed on all types of helicopters, drones, and fighters. They have laser guidance, travel at a speed of 750 meters per second [1678 mph] and can destroy both moving and stationary targets within a radius of 15-20 kilometers. They are precise to a margin of 0.20 meters.

The two-stage missile, using a 13-kilogram warhead, has significant penetration power and can destroy all types of armored systems. It can destroy, for example, tanks, personnel carriers, concrete trenches, floats, and other defense infrastructure.

The prototype Shafaghs are actually based upon the Shahab-e Saqeb defense missile that uses an infrared imaging seeker. This technology has the ability to track armored and floating targets from all angles, has a relatively high resistance to jamming and deception, and has much better sensitivity in detecting targets.

One of the advantages of this missile, which is similar to a Hellfire missile, is the ease of deployment and the need not to have to stabilize the helicopter in front of a target. Rather, the Shafagh is in the category of ‘shoot-and-forget’ missiles.

Notes:

[1] This is not the first time Iran has claimed enhanced missile precision. See: Michael Rubin, “Iran Claims Enhanced Missile Precision” *OE Watch*, May 2017. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195361/download>

[2] Michael Rubin, “Iran: Reconstruction and Overhaul of Helicopters” *OE Watch*, March 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/368233/download>

Iran Seeks To Reestablish Embassy and Consulate in Saudi Arabia Before Hajj

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

On 10 March 2023, regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia announced a deal to restore diplomatic relations for the first time in more than seven years. On 6 April 2023, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, met in Beijing to discuss the technicalities of resuming ties. According to the excerpted article from the Iran-based *Hamshahri* newspaper, these diplomatic efforts are taking place in earnest to normalize relations before the *Hajj*, which begins 26 June 2023.¹

Efforts will be made to reopen and activate our country's diplomatic representations before the annual Hajj.

Iran-Saudi ties have long been fraught. While ethnic tension between the two Middle East regional powers predates Iran's Islamic Revolution, sectarian and ideological differences in the post-1979 period created significantly more hostility.² Both countries accuse the other of supporting

terrorist groups targeting the other.³ So, while the restoration of diplomatic relations may appear straightforward, Iran's track record breeds suspicion, especially regarding the *Hajj*. In 1986, the head of the predecessor to the Quds Force, sought to infiltrate saboteurs into Mecca under cover of the Hajj to unleash a bombing campaign. The following year, clashes erupted between Iranian demonstrators and Saudi security forces, leading to the deaths of more than 400 pilgrims. Despite Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's willingness to reconcile with Iran, Saudi security forces and intelligence will tread carefully, especially regarding the size of the mission and the freedoms Iranian diplomats might enjoy inside the Kingdom. During the 1986 incident, hardline ideologues within Iran's security services ignored the Iranian government's desire to break out of its isolation. Almost four decades later, it remains to be seen if the same dynamics are at play, especially as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps do not fall under the authority of either President Ebrahim Raisi or Foreign Minister Abdollahian.



Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kana'ani speaks to the Islamic Republic News Agency in a November 2022 file photo.

Source: <https://media.hamshahronline.ir/d/2022/11/08/4/4752193.jpg?ts=1667935844000>;
Attribution: Islamic Republic News Agency

Continued: Iran Seeks To Reestablish Embassy and Consulate in Saudi Arabia Before Hajj

Source: “Talash baraye Rahandazi Saferat-e Iran dar Arabistan qabl az Ayam-e Hajj (The Struggle to Set Up an Iranian Embassy in Saudi Arabia before the Hajj),” *Hamshahri* (mass circulation general newspaper), 12 April 2023. <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/753453>

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kana'ani said that an Iranian technical delegation arrived in Riyadh on Wednesday [April 12] at noon in a new step toward the implementation of the agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume formal relations and diplomatic activities of political and consular representations of the two countries. Saudi officials welcomed the delegation.

The spokesman added that the Iranian delegation divided into two working groups to take the necessary measures to set up the embassy and consulate general in Riyadh and Jeddah respectively and also to discuss reestablishment of a permanent representation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the [Jeddah-based] Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman also added that the Saudi technical delegation, which arrived in Iran on Saturday [April 8, 2022], will leave for Mashhad tomorrow [April 13, 2022].

“Efforts will be made to reopen and activate our country’s diplomatic representations before the annual Hajj,” the spokesman added.

Notes:

[1] Within the United States, much of the ensuing coverage and commentary focuses on China’s role as diplomatic broker, but Iranian discussion largely focuses on the technicalities and timeframe for resuming its diplomatic missions in the Kingdom.

[2] Saudi Arabia was among Iraq’s most generous financial backers during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. After clashes at the Hajj in 1987, Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Iran, a freeze that lasted close to four years. During the 1990s, there was a brief rapprochement, but tensions renewed after the 2003 U.S.-led ouster of Saddam Hussein as Iranian-backed militias grew more powerful in Iraq at the expense of the country’s Sunni Arabs. In 2012, protests that Saudi authorities accused Iran of instigating wracked Saudi Arabia’s Shiite-dominated Eastern Province. Saudi Arabia responded with brute force, killing dozens and arrested Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, Saudi Arabia’s top Shiite scholar, who Saudi Arabia later executed. For more on the dynamics at the time, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Demands Release of Nigerian Shi’ite Cleric” *OE Watch*, September 2016. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195361/download>

[3] For example, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Prosecution of Arab Separatist Highlights Supposed Saudi Ties” *OE Watch*, 3-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/407738/download>

Iran Considers Rapprochement With Pakistan

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

While certain pillars of Iranian foreign policy, such as rejection of Israel's right to exist and opposition to the United States remain immutable, over the past two decades, Iran has undertaken diplomatic rapprochement on several fronts. Relations between Iran and Russia, for example, are at their closest in 50 years.¹ The March 2023 announcement that Iran and Saudi Arabia would resume diplomatic ties breaks down an important barrier between Iran and the Arab world. As the accompanying article from the Iranian *Fars News Agency* relays, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's call for greater strategic cooperation between Iran and Pakistan reflects Iran's continued efforts for rapprochement with traditional rivals.

He expressed hope that Islamic countries will... form a united and coherent front.

Raisi's outreach to Pakistan comes on the heels of exacerbated tensions between Iran and Pakistan over Afghanistan: Iran backed many Shiite Hazara groups and western Afghanistan's ethnic Persians, while Pakistan supported Sunni and Pashtun warlords culminating in its embrace of

the Taliban. In the wake of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, however, Iran sought a new approach. It cooperated with Pakistan to operate border markets on both sides of the Iran-Afghanistan and Iran-Pakistan frontiers. Iran also decided to engage the Taliban diplomatically rather than stonewall them or fight them by proxy.²

Iran's effort to build better relations with Pakistan also takes place amidst rumors of U.S. efforts to broker a rapprochement between Israel and Pakistan. The Iranian government would look at any such development as a security threat, much as it considers Azerbaijan's ties with Israel a threat to its security.

Any Iran-Pakistan rapprochement would also directly augment China's position. Pakistan's indebtedness to China as a result of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has increased Beijing's influence in Islamabad. China's efforts to broker Iran-Saudi rapprochement demonstrate Tehran's growing openness to China as well. While Raisi might pitch animosity toward Israel as the basis for growing ties, a position that would have populist appeal among Pakistanis, commonalities regarding China may be as important.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi meets with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, 20 September 2022.

Source: https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1401/06/29/14010629000909_Test_PhotoN.jpg Attribution: Fars News Agency



Continued: Iran Considers Rapprochement With Pakistan

Source: “Raisi dar Goftegu ba Nakohost Vazir-e Pakistan: Keshavarha-ye Islami ba Tashkil Junbeh-e Vahid Mana’ Tadavem Aghdamat-e Dadamenshaneh Siyonistha Shavand (Raisi, in a Conversation with the Prime Minister of Pakistan: Islamic Countries Should Form a United Front to Prevent the Continuation of the Abusive Actions of the Zionists),” *Fars News Agency* (news agency closely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 13 April 2023. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020124000742>

In a telephone call with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Ayatollah Sayyid Ibrahim Raisi expressed deep concern over recent developments in Palestine. He condemned the Zionist regime’s crimes, especially the indignity that the Al-Aqsa Mosque suffered, and expressed hope that Islamic countries will prevent the continuation of the Zionists’ brutal actions by forming a united and coherent front.

Later in the telephone conversation, the president pointed to the longstanding and friendly relations between the two countries, and expressed hope that these relations, especially in the field of economic and energy, will expand even further. He said that the policy of strengthening relations with neighbors and developing relations with Islamic countries is one of the priorities of the 13th [Raisi] government....

... Shehbaz Sharif also emphasized his country’s interest in strengthening Tehran-Islamabad relations, pointing to Iran’s privileged position in the region and the importance of expanding Islamabad’s relations with Tehran. He stressed his government’s readiness not only to review economic cooperation projects, but also Pakistan’s willingness to implement them.

Notes:

[1] Michael Rubin, “Iran-Russia Relations” *OE Watch*, July 2016. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195435>

[2] Michael Rubin, “An Afghan Perspective: New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations” *OE Watch*, July 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/340009> and Michael Rubin, “Iran Talking to the Taliban,” *OE Watch*, June 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/336632>

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Global Terrorism Declined Slightly in 2022, With the Sahel as the New Epicenter

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

A recent report from the new Australian-based Institute for Economics and Peace offers a useful overview of the state of global terrorism over the past year. The report claims that global terrorism declined slightly in 2022, along with the number of terrorist-caused deaths and attacks. The Islamic State (IS) has been named the deadliest global terror group for the eighth straight year.

As previous global assessments have underscored,¹ the accompanying report relays that the African continent, and especially West Africa's Sahel region,² now constitutes the global epicenter of terrorism. As the report notes, violence from the Sahel, where both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have substantial, feuding branches, has seen a rise in terrorist incidents by a factor of 17 since 2017. Indeed, it notes that deaths in the Sahel were 43 percent of the global total in 2022, compared to just 1 percent in 2007. Mali and Burkina Faso are the sources of the preponderance of violence. Notably, two of the three most deadly terrorist groups in the world are African: al-Shabaab, which is al-Qaeda's East African branch, and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen, which is the Sahel-based faction of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.³

Another notable takeaway from the report is that, although the African continent is the epicenter of global terrorism, the country with the single highest number of terrorism incidents in the past year was Afghanistan, albeit with a significant decline in deaths and incidents from the years prior. However, this decline is somewhat artificial because the Taliban are now state representatives, which means that any attacks that they carried out were not included as part of these tallies. Thus, notably, even in their absence, Afghanistan remains rife with terrorist incidents. Even as global attention has largely shifted away from a predominant focus on jihadist-linked terrorism and toward near-peer competition, the broader trend of Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and Taliban-linked violence has far from disappeared.



Flag of the Islamic State.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/121483302@N02/14690988398>; Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.0

Terrorism deaths in the Sahel constituted 43% of the global total in 2022, compared to just one percent in 2007.

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace. "Global Terrorism Index 2023: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," *IEP* (Australian think tank), March 2023. <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>

In 2022, deaths from terrorism fell by nine per cent to 6,701 deaths and is now 38 per cent lower than at its peak in 2015. The fall in deaths was mirrored by a reduction in the number of incidents, with attacks declining by almost 28 per cent from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955 in 2022. However, if Afghanistan was removed from the index, terrorism deaths would have increased by four per cent.

Afghanistan remained the country most impacted by terrorism for the fourth consecutive year, despite attacks and deaths falling by 75 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. The GTI does not include acts of state repression and violence by state actors and, as such, acts committed by the Taliban are no longer included in the scope of the report since they took control of the government.

The deadliest terrorist groups in the world in 2022 were Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates, followed by al-Shabaab, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).

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TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Global Terrorism Declined Slightly in 2022, With the Sahel as the New Epicenter

IS remained the deadliest terror group globally for the eighth consecutive year, recording the most attacks and deaths of any group in 2022. Despite this, terrorism deaths attributed to IS and its affiliate groups, Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISK), Islamic State - Sinai Province (ISS) and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), declined by 16 per cent. However, there has been a rapid increase in deaths attributed to unknown jihadists in the countries where ISWA operates, increasing by 17 times since 2017 to 1,766 terrorism deaths. Given the location, many of these are likely unclaimed attacks by ISWA. If most of the deaths caused by unknown jihadists were included as IS terrorism deaths, then the outcome would have been similar to 2021. Eighteen countries experienced a death from terrorism caused by IS in 2022, a slight decrease from 20 countries the year prior.

The Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa is now the epicentre of terrorism, with the Sahel accounting for more terrorism deaths in 2022 than both South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) combined. Deaths in the Sahel constituted 43 per cent of the global total in 2022, compared to just one per cent in 2007. Of particular concern are two countries, Burkina Faso and Mali, which accounted for 73 per cent of terrorism deaths in the Sahel in 2022 and 52 per cent of all deaths from terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa.

Notes:

[1] For information on the United Nations' recent assessments of the global state of terrorism, see: Jason Warner, "UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan," *OE Watch*, 3-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437258>; Jason Warner, "African Leaders, UN See Terrorism in the Sahel as Dire," *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429303>

[2] For how West African states view the current threats from terrorism, see: Jason Warner, "Coastal West African States Brace for Wave of Terrorism From the Sahel," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428040>; Jason Warner, "Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance," *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437332>; Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism With Recruits and Russia," *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436264>

[3] For more on how al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb views its current struggles in the Sahara and Sahel, see: Jason Warner, "Al-Qaeda Leader in Maghreb Says Group Has No Plans to Attack French Homeland, Though Celebrates French Departure," *OE Watch*, 4-2023.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Leader of Al-Qaeda's Sahelian Branch Explains His Group's Goals

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Following a groundbreaking interview with the head of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) by *France 24* in March 2023,¹ the independent website *Africa Perceptions* has published a new interview with the head of AQIM's Sahelian branch, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM). Meaning "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims," JNIM has recently been named one of the three deadliest terrorist groups in the world, one of the greatest threats to West African stability, and the core cause of the massive uptick in violence from the Sahel.² As the United States, its African allies, and the international community at large seek to stem the tide of terrorism decimating the Sahel and increasingly spreading into littoral West Africa,³ understanding the perspectives of the perpetrators of the violence remains as important as ever.

The interview of JNIM's leader, Saydin Ag Hita alias Uthman al-Qayrawani, is much longer than is portrayed below, touching on JNIM's relations with other jihadist groups and local populations in Mali among other topics. When asked about his group's broader goals, al-Qayrawani's responses reasserted the centrality of the jihadist mission: "The primary

The countries that attacked and fought us under the banner of France and its allies, we will do everything in our power to fight them and transfer the war to these countries.

objective of this group is what appears in its name, namely support for Islam and Muslims...It is about waging jihad for the cause of Allah, so that the word of Allah is supreme, and it also means that the earth and its inhabitants must be governed by the religion of Allah [Islam]." Given this desire to have the entirety of the world under Islamic rule, his interpretation is that the friends of his enemies are also his enemies. As such, he is clear that not only France (which led counterterrorism operations against the group until recently), but those countries that supported France or received support from France (such as Niger), the Malian regime and its allies (like the Wagner Group), other West African countries (including Benin, Togo, and Ghana), and the broader international NGO and humanitarian corps are all potentially in the crosshairs of his group. In the full interview, he also refused to answer a question about his group's adversarial relationship with the Islamic State.



Map of West Africa.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sahel_Base_Map.png; Attribution: JRC, European Commission, CC BY 4.0

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Leader of Al-Qaeda's Sahelian Branch Explains His Group's Goals

Source: "Exclusif: Le Chef De La JNIM, Alliée D'Al-Qaïda Au Sahel, Explique Le Sens Et La Raison De Ses Guerres (Exclusive: The Leader of JNIM, An Ally Of Al-Qaeda In The Sahel, Explains The Meaning And The Reason For His Wars)" *African Perceptions*, 16 April 2023. <https://africanperceptions.org/fr/2023/04/exclusif-le-chef-de-la-jnim-alliee-dal-qaïda-au-sahel-explique-le-sens-et-la-raison-de-ses-guerres/>

"African Perception" publishes here the entire exclusive interview given on March 22, 2023 by Saydin Ag Hita alias Uthman al-Qayrawani. Self-proclaimed governor of Kidal, in Mali, for the Sahelian branch of Al-Qaeda, Ag Hita notably evokes the religious and military objectives of the organization, both in Mali and abroad, its agreements with local groups such as the MSA (the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad) led by Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, and the GATIA, coordination with jihadist units throughout Africa, the future of the mercenaries of the Russian Wagner group and the course of the war with the Sahelian province of Daesh.

African Perceptions: *What are the goals of the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen? Are they limited to the application of the Islamic sharia in Mali or in the countries of the African Sahel, or do they target other countries? If yes, which ones?*

Uthman al-Qayrawani: *The primary objective of this group is what appears in its name, namely support for Islam and Muslims. Its purpose is clear from its name. In other words, it is about waging jihad for the cause of Allah, so that the word of Allah is supreme, and it also means that the earth and its inhabitants must be governed by the religion of Allah (Islam).*

As for what you say, the countries of the African Sahel, or the targeting of other countries, what is that? We launched our call for jihad in Mali and we also fought the regime in place in that country. The Malian government asked for help from France, which intervened with nearly 60 countries and all their military forces. Some of these countries were known as Takuba, others as G5 and still others as MINUSMA. On the other hand, Muslims fighting for the cause of Allah came from several countries to support their religion and their mujahid brothers, and most of them came from neighboring countries (I mean Muslims), and up to 'now the war has not ended.

The countries that attacked and fought us under the banner of France and its allies, we will do everything in our power to fight them and transfer the war to these countries. Those who abandoned us, we will abandon them, and those who fought us, we will fight them. And whoever started is the most unfair.

African Perceptions: *While you were fighting Daesh in Ménaka and battling the armies of Mali and Burkina Faso with intense operations, you launched operations targeting Benin and Togo. What is the objective of these, especially at a time when you need to unite your ranks in Mali against Daesh?*

Uthman al-Qayrawani: *Our operations in Togo and Benin are due to several reasons. For example, when these countries felt the presence of the mujahideen on the Burkinabè border, they tried to harass them from several sides and they also oppressed the Muslims, especially the Fulanis, with all forms of injustice - murder, imprisonment, and flight. These strikes were therefore carried out in retaliation for the actions perpetrated by these countries against the mujahideen and all innocent Muslims.*

African Perceptions: *You fought the French military presence in Mali by waging a war until the total withdrawal of their soldiers from the country. How do you see the future of Russian forces and Wagner's mercenaries in Mali?*

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TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Leader of Al-Qaeda's Sahelian Branch Explains His Group's Goals

Uthman al-Qayrawani: First of all, Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best in managing affairs. What we see in the future for Russian forces and Wagner's mercenaries in Mali is defeat, with Allah's permission. Allah the Almighty said: "Those who disbelieve spend their wealth to divert it from the way of Allah, and they will continue to spend it, but it will eventually cause them anguish." They will then be defeated. And those who disbelieve will be gathered in Hell" [Al-Anfal, 36]. We consider that this is the last card left to the military regime in place in Mali, and that if it is defeated, there will be no more allies to fight alongside it and try to eliminate his enemy.

Notes:

[1] For more on the interview with AQIM's leader, see: Jason Warner, "Al-Qaeda Leader in Maghreb Says Group Has No Plans to Attack French Homeland, Though Celebrates French Departure," *OE Watch*, 4-2023.

[2] For more on JNIM's contribution to West African terrorism, see: Jason Warner, "UN Warns About Islamic State Surging in Africa and Afghanistan," *OE Watch*, 3-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437258>
Jason Warner, "African Leaders, UN See Terrorism in the Sahel as Dire," *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429303>

[3] For more on the threats to littoral West African states from northern terrorism, see: Jason Warner, "Coastal West African States Brace for Wave of Terrorism From the Sahel," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428040>

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Multinational Joint Task Force Lauds Counterterrorism Success Against Boko Haram

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

In April 2023, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the five-nation grouping of West African states focused on countering terrorism in the region, released its first-ever documentary film on its official website to highlight the progress the military coalition is making against Boko Haram around Lake Chad.¹ The documentary included interviews of MNJTF commanders from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon² who emphasized several key themes regarding MNJTF strategy, including overcoming civilian mistrust as a result of past security forces abuses. The video noted that civil-military relations have improved since the mid-2010s when the Nigerian military committed numerous human rights violations throughout the Lake Chad region.³ This is important because, as an MNJTF commander interviewed in the documentary stated, Boko Haram operates like a Maoist insurgency and depends on moving among the people of Lake Chad like fish swimming in water. Good relations with the civilian population are essential to counter Boko Haram.

We are proud to release this documentary, which showcases the hard work and dedication of the MNJTF troops in the fight against terrorism.

Additional themes covered in the film included eliminating ungoverned spaces where Boko Haram operates with impunity, clearing territory to ensure traditional and national holidays can proceed without disruption to reflect a return to “normalcy,” and facilitating the travel of displaced persons back to their home villages. The documentary also noted the MNJTF’s primary focus was to conduct operations against Boko Haram in riparian areas along Lake Chad where Boko Haram often holds hostages for ransom and raises funds from the fish trade by taxing fishermen and selling fish that group members catch.⁴



Life goes on in Bosso, Niger, 19 April 2017.

Source: Nicolas Pinault (VOA), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Life_goes_on_in_Bosso,_Niger,_19_April_2017.png Attribution: (CCx2.0)

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Multinational Joint Task Force Lauds Counterterrorism Success Against Boko Haram

Source: “The Multinational Joint Task Force Releases Maiden Documentary,” *mnjtfmm.org* (official website of the MNJTF), 12 April 2023. <https://mnjtfmm.org/press-release-the-multinational-joint-task-force-releases-maiden-documentary/>

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has released a documentary showcasing its operational successes in the fight against insurgency in the Lake Chad Region. The documentary, titled “Victory Against Insurgency in the Lake Chad Region,” highlights the progress made by the MNJTF in the past few years in the fight against terrorism.

The documentary features interviews with the Head of Mission, the Force Commander, Former Force Commander, and MNJTF sector commanders as well as footage of successful military operations and the impact of the MNJTF’s efforts on the local communities.... The documentary is part of the MNJTF’s ongoing efforts to raise awareness about its mission and to solicit support from the public.

Notes:

[1] For more information see: Jacob Zenn, “Nigerian Leadership Seeks Renewed Regional Cooperation Against Boko Haram,” *OE Watch* 02-2023.

[2] Benin, the fifth MNJTF member-state, was not featured in the documentary. The country generally does not fight against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region.

[3] In 2015, an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report found, based on interviews of civilians affected by the Boko Haram conflict, that the military and security forces were causing a high number of civilian casualties, and most notably in Baga, Nigeria, where civilians were reportedly shot by security forces and 642 people were displaced. Also problematic were reports of civilian vigilante groups handing over Boko Haram suspects to the military, who then disappeared. Some of the suspects, however, were simply detained by the vigilantes as part of a personal feud, rather than any meaningful relationship with Boko Haram. See OHCHR, “Violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the countries affected,” Report A/HRC/30/67 of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Agenda Item 2, 9 December 2015.

[4] According to an informed report that included interviews of fishermen around Lake Chad, kidnapping for ransom makes financial sense for Boko Haram around the lake because there is a lot of money in circulation from agriculture and fishing from which ransom money can be paid. Moreover, the kidnapping-for-ransom tactic can serve as a punishment or a warning to deter civilians from paying “protection money” to Boko Haram’s Islamic State-aligned faction. Aside from this tactic, another faction collaborates with civilians who come from Niger to fish in the areas of Lake Chad under the militants’ control, and, in return for this “protection,” the Nigeriens bring goods that the militants need. See Maman Inoua Elhadji Mahamadou Amadou and Vincent Foucher, “Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin: The Bakura Faction and its Resistance to the Rationalisation of Jihad,” *Megatrends Afrika Policy Brief*, 8 December 2022.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

El Salvador's State of Emergency Marks One Year With No End in Sight



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele delivers a speech on security policy.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Discurso_de_Nayib_Bukele.jpg Attribution: Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA4.0

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

As part of an effort to fight the notorious MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele declared a special state of emergency suspending *habeas corpus* and incarcerating fully 2 percent of the country's adult population.¹ Recently, Bukele's state of emergency turned one year old, reports *France24*, the public-private media partnership associated with the French state. The outlet details how popular the plan is among Salvadorans, reporting they

appear willing to accept curtailment of rights in favor of greater security from the country's gangs, suggesting El Salvador's state of emergency is unlikely to end anytime soon.

Throughout his tenure, Bukele has shifted his strategy for fighting transnational organized crime, reports *El Faro*, the Salvadoran investigative outlet often at odds with the president. At the beginning of his presidency, *El Faro* broke the news that Bukele had negotiated a secret pact with the country's gangs, seeking to lower the homicide rate and earn their political support in exchange for turning a blind eye to drug trafficking and other activities. After a spate of murders in March 2022, however, Bukele terminated the informal agreement and reversed course drastically. The media outlet reports a decline in homicides in many neighborhoods throughout the country.

The perceived success of Bukele's crime-fighting strategy has inspired so-called "Plan Bukeles"—as multiple leaders repeat calls to imitate El Salvador's internal security plan.² Fighting transnational criminal organizations by deprioritizing human rights and allowing presidents to accrete greater power during states of emergency also risks democratic backsliding and consolidating authoritarian political projects.

The state of exception suspends various constitutional guarantees. It allows arbitrary arrests without a warrant, interrupts freedom of association, the right to legal defense, and extends the term of administrative detention to 15 days (when it is normally 72 hours). Under this special regime, the government brought thousands of soldiers and police onto the streets to carry out mass captures. Bukele arrested more than 65,000 suspected gang members, according to official figures, although multiple organizations estimate that thousands could be innocent.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: El Salvador's State of Emergency Marks One Year With No End in Sight

Source: “Qué ha pasado en El Salvador tras un año bajo el régimen de excepción (What has happened in El Salvador after a year under the emergency regime?),” *France24* (the public-private media partnership associated with the French state), 28 March 2023. <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20230327-que%C3%A9-ha-pasado-en-el-salvador-tras-un-a%C3%B1o-bajo-el-r%C3%A9gimen-de-excepci%C3%B3n>

After a year of emergency regime, El Salvador has not come out of its ‘war against gangs.’ The state of exception was originally approved at the end of March 2022 and was implemented by President Nayib Bukele to fight gang violence in the country... Since then, it has been renewed twelve times by the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador... a number that contrasts with what is permitted constitutionally... The Constitution of the Republic establishes very clearly that the emergency regime can only be extended once, that is, for 30 days.

Source: “El año en el que la excepción se convirtió en la norma (The year the exception became the norm),” *El Faro* (the Salvadoran investigative outlet often at odds with the president), 23 December 2022. https://elfaro.net/es/202212/el_salvador/26652/lo-mejor-y-lo-mas-leido-en-este-ano-bajo-regimen.htm

Bukele found his political crusade in the state of emergency in the face of the announcement that he would make six months later, his desire to run for re-election in 2024, violating several articles of the Constitution. Since then, brandishing his state of emergency, Bukele has presented himself as the strongman who will put an end to the criminal groups that have been bleeding and extorting Salvadorans for decades. Since March 2022, more than 60,000 Salvadorans have been detained, doubling the country’s prison population in nine months.

Notes:

[1] For more background on Bukele’s security plan and its impact on the country, and especially its democracy, see: “Democracy Dies Under Mano Dura: Anti-Crime Strategies in the Northern Triangle,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 12 April 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/democracy-dies-under-mano-dura-anti-crime-strategies-northern-triangle>

[2] For more information on the popularity of “Plan Bukele” regionwide, see: “Nayib Bukele’s Growing List of Latin American Admirers,” *Americas Quarterly*, 16 February 2023. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/nayib-bukeles-growing-list-of-latin-american-admirers/>

Top Ugandan General Adds to Growing List of Pro-Russian African Military Personnel

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past several years, a notable trend has seen various francophone states in the West and Central African regions begin to reject French political and military assistance, and instead, align themselves with Russia and the Wagner Group.¹ From Mali² to the Central African Republic³ to Burkina Faso,⁴ the most ardent African supporters of Russia have generally been francophone military commanders. However, the accompanying article from pan-African news aggregator *AfricaNews* illustrates how pro-Russian sentiment is now increasingly showing itself in anglophone countries, namely, in the East African state of Uganda.

As reported, Ugandan Lt. Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba made waves when he announced that if needed Uganda would send troops to help Russia defend itself. “Call me ‘Putinist’ if you want, we Uganda should send soldiers to defend Moscow if ever it was threatened by imperialists,” he tweeted. The only son of Uganda’s long-time president Yoweri Museveni, Kainerugaba is widely expected to be his father’s successor, the latter having served as the country’s president for the past 37 years. Kainerugaba, who attended the U.S. Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, previously served as the commander of land forces for the Uganda People’s Defence Force (2021-2022), and twice as the commander of Uganda’s Special Forces Command (2008-2017, 2020-2021).

The recent pro-Russian sentiments from Kainerugaba are in line with his own previous exaltations. In May 2022, he tweeted that “The majority of mankind (that are non-white) support Russia’s stand in Ukraine. Putin is absolutely right!” For its part, Uganda has abstained from the two 2022 UN Security Council resolutions condemning Russia, and in mid-2022, announced that its state broadcaster had signed a memorandum of understanding to disseminate two daily news bulletins from Russia’s state-funded RT news service. Though President Museveni has historically maintained good relations with the West, he has often been criticized for his illiberal rule.



Ugandan General Muhoozi Kainerugaba (right), meets with Rwandan President Paul Kagame (left) in Kigali, Rwanda on 22 January 2021.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulkagame/51836255739/>; Attribution: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Call me Putinist if you want, we Uganda should send soldiers to defend Moscow if ever it was threatened by imperialists.

While Kainerugaba’s outlooks are officially only his personal opinions, his high-profile role in the Ugandan armed forces and Ugandan society in general, in addition to the real likelihood that he may assume the presidency of the country, suggest that an anglophone African country that was once a reliable U.S. ally may now be leaning more toward a key U.S. adversary.

Continued: Top Ugandan General Adds to Growing List of Pro-Russian African Military Personnel

Source: Uganda will send soldiers to Moscow to defend Putin if need be - President's son," *AfricaNews* (centrist pan-African news aggregator)," 31 March 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/03/31/uganda-will-send-soldiers-to-moscow-to-defend-putin-if-need-be-presidents-son/>

The son of Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, said he would send Ugandan troops to defend Moscow in case of an "imperialist" threat.

"Call me Putinist if you want, we Uganda should send soldiers to defend Moscow if ever it was threatened by imperialists," he wrote on Twitter.

"The West is wasting its time with useless pro-Ukrainian propaganda," added the president's son, a staunch supporter of Vladimir Putin...

Uganda has abstained from UN votes on the Ukrainian conflict, including one in February on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which called on Moscow to withdraw its troops from the country...

In July, during a tour of Africa by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Kainerugaba said, referring to Russia, "How can we be against someone who has never hurt us?"

Russia has traditionally had strong ties to Africa because of its support for independence movements on the continent that were then struggling with colonial powers.

Observers have long considered Muhoozi Kainerugaba to be a likely successor to his father Yoweri Museveni, 78.

Notes:

[1] For more on Russian attempts to garner African allies, especially following its invasion of Ukraine, see: Jason Warner, "Russia Laying Groundwork Ahead of July 2023 Russia-Africa Summit," *OE Watch*, 1-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434265>; Jason Warner, "'African Stances on the Russia-Ukraine War Demonstrate Reliance on, Antipathy Toward West,'" *OE Watch*, 9-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/425767>

[2] For more on the relationship between Mali, France, and Russia, see: Jason Warner, "Mali Claims France Funded Terrorists: France Denies," *OE Watch*, 10-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/428171>; Jason Warner, "Mali Defends Reliance on Russian Counterterrorism Assistance," *OE Watch*, 03-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/437332>

[3] For more on the deteriorating relationship between the Central African Republic and France, see: Jason Warner, "Following Mali, CAR Accuses France of Funding Terrorists," *OE Watch*, 4-2023.

[4] For more on the relationship between Burkina Faso, France, and Russia, see: Jason Warner, "Burkina Faso Fights Terrorism with Recruits and Russia," *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436264>

Ongoing Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh Threaten Fragile Truce



Azerbaijani protesters during the 2022 blockade of the Lachin corridor.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azerbaijani_protesters_during_the_2022_blockade_of_the_Lachin_corridor_03.jpg Attribution: CCA 4.0

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

On 5 March 2023, a clash took place in the Lachin Corridor, which connects Armenia with the Armenian-occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The fight between Azerbaijani soldiers and Armenian policemen left five dead. The Lachin Corridor remains the only road connecting ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia following the ceasefire agreement that ended the 2020 war. The blockade is being carried out by so-called “ecologists” from Azerbaijan, who have stated they are concerned that mining operations in Nagorno-Karabakh are having a negative environmental impact on the region. However, there have been reports that the “ecologists” are likely working for the government of Azerbaijan. The incident brought increased attention to Azerbaijan’s ongoing blockade of the Corridor, which effectively cut off a significant lifeline for ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The blockade also raises questions about the role Russian peacekeepers have in the Lachin Corridor, as well as Armenians who are using routes outside the main road in the corridor to travel to Nagorno-Karabakh.

While the incidents have not spiraled out of control into a larger conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, they have added to what has been an unstable situation since the 2020 war ended.¹ The accompanying excerpted articles provide a look at the issues causing incidents in recent

months between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces.

The first article from the independent English-language newspaper *Novaya Gazeta Europe* is a reporter’s account of traveling to Nagorno-Karabakh and includes interviews with regional analysts on the situation since the blockade by Azerbaijani ecologists began in December 2022. The author details numerous issues for those trying to travel to Nagorno-Karabakh via the Lachin Corridor, including the cost to be escorted there and having to pass through multiple checkpoints. The author points out how “Azerbaijan is building very expensive roads from its side, carving tunnels in the mountains,” as part of an effort to not only cut off the Lachin Corridor, but also control additional routes to Nagorno-Karabakh. Another analyst interviewed for the article claimed that Armenians are using the corridor to transport military cargo and that vehicles continue to travel to Nagorno-Karabakh despite the ecologists’ blockade. The article also notes how the blockade has remained in place even after outside efforts to end it, including Putin’s attempt to maintain leverage in Nagorno-Karabakh and the wider region through the appointment of ethnic Armenian Ruben Vardanyan to the office of State Minister in Armenia. Vardanyan was later dismissed, reportedly at the request of Azerbaijani President Aliyev during negotiations to end the blockade.

The second article from Armenia’s state news agency *Armenpress* offers insight into an 11 April incident near the Lachin Corridor. While the article presents only the Armenian perspective, which blamed Azerbaijan for instigating the incident, the article notes that the Armenian military had been carrying out engineering work. It is unclear if this work is for a road or a defensive position, but it is taking

Thus, the corridor was blocked by two checkpoints—an “ecological” and a “peacekeeping” one. The peacekeepers are not letting ecologists enter Stepanakert, but they’re also not interfering with their blocking of the highway.

place near the corridor. With the ongoing blockade by Azerbaijani ecologists and both Armenia and Azerbaijan constructing and using roads in and around the Lachin Corridor to their own advantage, additional skirmishes are likely, increasing the chance of escalation to a wider conflict.

Continued: Ongoing Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh Threaten Fragile Truce

Source: Irina Tumakova, “‘The thing I miss the most? Freedom,’” *Novaya Gazeta Europe* (independent English-language newspaper), 24 March 2023. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/03/24/the-thing-i-miss-the-most-freedom-en>

While I was coming down the Lachin mountain serpentine, my phone started vibrating. It was someone from the Russian military base, which, as is commonly believed, maintains peace and security in the small part of Karabakh that is still controlled by the unrecognised republic. “Andrey Valeryevich,” the man from the Russian peacekeepers base introduced himself shortly. “I was told you want to cross over to Stepanakert. Why?”

I explained that I had to see how people in Nagorno-Karabakh are living under the blockade organised by Azerbaijani eco-activists.

“The blockade?” Andrey Valeryevich chuckled. “They’re doing great, better than before! It’s us, peacekeepers, who’re under the blockade. The prices are crazy! Take a dozen eggs — three hundred rubles [€3.6] in Russian money. Isn’t that crazy? Three hundred! These ‘blockade victims’, these Armenians, are the ones selling us eggs at such prices!”

...“There’s a passage to get into Karabakh, but it costs money, 150 thousand [Armenian] drams [about €360] per person,” Armenian politologist Andrias Gukasyan tells me a few days later. “You have to first go to the Russian peacekeepers base in Goris. Why are you so surprised? You’ve come from Russia, you know what it’s like...”

...From the Armenian side, the border is guarded by an Armenian military police post. This is where Karabakh’s blockade begins. There’s another post like that in Stepanakert, in between the two there are Russian peacekeepers and Azerbaijani “ecologists” who organised the blockade.

...Karabakh and Armenia are connected via the Lachin corridor in the mountains. The corridor’s width is stated at 22 km. In reality, it’s a narrow highway where even two cars aren’t always able to let each other pass...Driving here is hard and dangerous, so Azerbaijan is building very expensive roads from its side, carving tunnels in the mountains...

According to the trilateral agreement signed on 9 November 2020, Azerbaijan pledged not to interfere with Armenians’ coming and going to and from Karabakh. The corridor has to remain under the control of Russian peacekeepers, they’re the ones ensuring the aforementioned freedom of movement.

On 12 December 2022, the road was blocked by people from Azerbaijan. They referred to themselves as eco-activists who had to verify the compliance with the environmental protection norms on two Karabakh mines — the Drmbon mine and the Kashen mine...Thus, the corridor was blocked by two checkpoints — an “ecological” and a “peacekeeping” one. The peacekeepers are not letting ecologists enter Stepanakert, but they’re also not interfering with their blocking of the highway...

“After the death of police officers (on 5 March, a car of the unrecognised republic’s police department was shot at, three police officers were killed — editor’s note), we went to the Russian peacekeeper contingent, we wanted to express our protest against everything going on. There’s a lot of blame on our locals too when it comes to the police officers’ death...”

“According to the trilateral agreement, this road is a humanitarian corridor to connect Armenia with Armenian residents of Karabakh,” this is how Azerbaijani political analyst Ilhar Velidaze explains the recent protests in the Lachin corridor. “However, we are able to follow the cargo movement through satellites and we have observed several times that the road is used for military cargo too, as well as soldiers coming in from Armenia. We couldn’t just act indifferently...Unfortunately, the Armenian side is trying to misrepresent the situation as a humanitarian catastrophe,”

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Continued: Ongoing Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh Threaten Fragile Truce

he notes. “But there’s no catastrophe to speak of. Take a look at the so-called ‘blockade’...During the last three months of the Azerbaijani activists’ protest, the Lachin road was used by over 4,000 vehicles that were transporting various cargo, furthermore, these are heavy-duty vehicles. Can this be called a blockade?”

“Putin sent Ruben Vardanyan to Karabakh as his representative,” Arif Yunusov, Head of the Conflictology Department of Azerbaijan’s Institute of World and Democracy, notes. “He was conducting secret talks about these mines, but they fell through. But for Putin, the main thing wasn’t the mines. Russia, dissatisfied with Pashinyan, assumed that Vardanyan would gain power in Karabakh, the next step being his candidacy as Armenian Prime Minister...You may recall how Presidents [Robert] Kocharyan and [Serzh] Sargsyan came into power, they’re from Karabakh too. Karabakh is a jumping off point.”

Ruben Vardanyan, Russian billionaire of Armenian origin, came back to Armenia in September of last year, went to Karabakh, and was appointed State Minister... In February, it came out that Vardanyan was dismissed from his position, as per the condition put forward by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. That was soon after the UN International Court of Justice demanded the Lachin corridor be unblocked. But the “ecologists” pickets remained.

...When the condition of Vardanyan’s dismissal was fulfilled, Azerbaijan brought forward another one — this one has as much to do with the environment and ecologists (nothing)...“Now, they’re demanding there be a checkpoint built on that road because the Armenians are allegedly transporting weapons into Karabakh,” Arif Yunusov says...

Source: “Азербайджанцы потребовали от армянских военнослужащих прекратить инженерные работы: подробности о провокации в селе Тех (Azerbaijani demanded that Armenian soldiers halt engineering work: details on the provocation in the village of Togh),” *Armenpress* (state news agency of Armenia), 12 April 2023. <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/1108490.html>

...Presenting the details of the Azerbaijani provocation near the village of Togh on April 11, Khachatryan said that under the pretext of negotiations, an Azerbaijani car drove up to the Armenian positions from the territory controlled by them and demanded that the Armenian military personnel stop engineering work...

...On April 11, at about 16:00, on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, near the village of Togh, Syunik region, a group of servicemen of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, under the pretext of clarifying the border points of deployment, approached the servicemen of the RA Armed Forces, further provoked them, opened fire in the direction of the servicemen and positions of the Armenian Armed Forces...As a result of the Azerbaijani provocation from the Armenian side, there are 4 dead and 6 wounded. As of 0800 April 12, the situation on the front line remains relatively stable.

Notes:

[1] For more background on incidents between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the 2020 war ended, see: Matthew Stein “The Impact of Territorial Changes in Nagorno Karabakh,” *OE Watch*, July-2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

Lessons for India From the War in Ukraine

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

The Indian Armed Forces carried out an exercise in the summer of 2022 that drew on the lessons from the first few months of the war in Ukraine.¹ The accompanying excerpted article from the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), an independent think-tank in India, examines some additional lessons the Indian armed forces can draw from the war in Ukraine. While the article is not an official Indian position, ORF does have influence on Indian policy making. In early March 2023, the think-tank co-hosted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with India's Ministry of External Affairs as part of the Raisina Dialogue. The Raisina Dialogue is an annual event that brings in policymakers from around the world; while it only began in 2016, it has become one of the most significant forums in India on geopolitical issues.

The article's authors enumerate six lessons that India can learn from the war in Ukraine. First, the authors cite the battle for Bakhmut as an example of the importance of securing territory even when the battle is not important for the outcome of the war overall. This leads to the second lesson: "attritional warfare still matters" as armor, artillery, and engineers are not replaceable by cyber or other non-ki-

netic capabilities. From its perspective, this makes an army and land power vital for India's security and defense. Third, the authors note the importance of having "land-based ballistic and cruise missile forces" after having watched what happened to several ships in Russia's Black Sea fleet. Fourth, the authors note that rotary and fixed-wing aircraft have not had much of a strategic impact on the conflict. Thus, India's own capabilities in this domain would most likely take on a reconnaissance or close air support role in a potential war with Pakistan or China. As a result, the authors believe India should develop counter-UAV systems. Lastly, they note that the fifth and sixth lessons show how airborne and amphibious forces should be used selectively and that artificial intelligence can be used to increase targeting capabilities, respectively. The article concludes by noting that the Indian Army "has its task cut out" for itself and it should invest in kinetic capabilities and apply emerging technologies alongside them, "not as substitutes but as enablers." While it remains to be seen what changes Indian officials make for the armed forces, the article articulates how the war in Ukraine could influence these decisions.

If Indian Apaches have any role to play against Pakistan or China, it will most likely be in a reconnaissance role or missions involving close air support for ground forces.



Induction Of AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopter in Indian Air Force.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Induction_Of_AH-64E_Apache_Attack_Helicopter_in_Indian_Air_Force_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Induction_Of_AH-64E_Apache_Attack_Helicopter_in_Indian_Air_Force_(1).jpg); Attribution: Government Open Data License – India (GODL)

Continued: Lessons for India From the War in Ukraine

Source: Harsh V. Pant and Kartik Bommakanti, “Learnings from the Ukraine battlefield for armed forces,” *Observer Research Foundation* (independent think-tank in India), 22 March 2023. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/learnings-from-the-ukraine-battlefield-for-armed-forces/>

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, visibly evident in the bloody fighting in the Ukrainian town of Bakhmut, has again drawn attention to the constant – war is the ultima ratio or the supreme arbiter in international politics...

There are six key takeaways for India from the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

First, and specifically in the war underway between Russia and Ukraine, strategically, the success in the battle of Bakhmut is not consequential for the overall direction of the war for either party. Yet, despite its limited strategic or military value, the two warring States have been fighting a brutal campaign to win it for the last several months, reflecting how visceral the motivation remains in securing land-based territorial possession...

Second, this leads us to a corollary and related variable – attritional warfare still matters, making armies and land power vital to a nation’s security and defence, including India’s...Critical capabilities such as armour, artillery and technical personnel, such as engineers, will still matter, and they are not replaceable by cyber, space and other non-kinetic information-related capabilities.

Third, the Russia-Ukraine war has revealed the vulnerability of maritime forces to interdiction and destruction...As a result, the Russian Navy’s Black Sea fleet has effectively retreated to its bases or been compelled to maintain a safe distance from Ukrainian shore-based missiles. It is not for nothing the Chinese have built a whole range of “carrier killing” shore- and land-based projectiles in the form of Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles and Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles...India can also emulate Ukraine and China by building its land-based ballistic and cruise missile forces.

Fourth, deep penetration attacks inside enemy territory, employing rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, have proved ineffective in producing a strategic effect...

Take rotary-wing aircraft such as the Apache, which India operates, and is geared for deep strike missions... If Indian Apaches have any role to play against Pakistan or China, it will most likely be in a reconnaissance role or missions involving close air support for ground forces.

Ukrainian forces have used short-range anti-aircraft weapons and small arms fire with lethal effect against Russian fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. On the other hand, the Ukrainians have yet to gain much either, as they have been compelled to use their air assets to support ground forces and preserve combat strength. Consequently, neither side has gained air superiority. India could benefit considerably by developing Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems, instead of investing heavily in deep-penetration strike capabilities, which are highly vulnerable to adversary interdiction...

The fifth issue that Indian defence planners must consider is that airborne and amphibious missions are susceptible to lethal targeting by the enemy...For example, Russian airborne forces incurred heavy losses in trying to seize Hostomel airport in the early stages...Amphibious and airborne forces might not be relics of the past, but they must be used in selective and specific missions. Acquiring capabilities that increase the survivability and lethality of Indian forces should be the core aim of Indian military planners.

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Continued: Lessons for India From the War in Ukraine

Finally, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has already played an important role in the Ukraine conflict and will do so in future wars...Ukrainian forces have employed AI with devastating impact by deploying or embedding software engineers with combat units on the battlefield in Bakhmut.

The engineers have precisely adjusted functions of algorithms to augment their target-acquisition capabilities, enabling commanders to accurately locate Russian forces for destruction...Ukrainians have used a combination of sensor data derived from satellite intelligence and AI instruments to execute precise strikes against Russian forces...

The Indian armed services, especially the Indian Army, has its task cut out. It must invest in armour, missile and artillery capabilities and apply emerging technologies not as substitutes but as enablers of these firepower-intensive capabilities.

Notes:

[1] For more on India's exercise in 2022 drawing from lessons learned in the war in Ukraine, see: Matthew Stein "India Draws Lessons on Cyber and Electronic Effects From the War in Ukraine," *OE Watch*, 9-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>

Egypt and India Deepen Security Cooperation

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Egypt and India have recently accelerated security cooperation. In 2021, the two militaries held naval, air force, and tactical counterterrorism training exercises, and in September 2022, India's defense minister visited Egypt to sign a bilateral defense cooperation agreement. In January 2023, President Sisi of Egypt traveled to India as the guest of honor for Republic Day celebrations, where he and his Indian counterpart, Prime Minister Modi, signed an agreement to elevate bilateral relations to the level of "strategic partnership." According to the first accompanying excerpt from the final joint statement of that event, published by the Egyptian government's *State Information Service*, the Egyptian-Indian strategic partnership will include an expansion of bilateral military exercises, efforts to bolster defense co-production, and increased exchanges of technological expertise.

The two sides agreed to enhance and deepen defense cooperation in all fields, especially through exchanging technological expertise in defense industries, visiting military exercises, and exchanging best practices...

Indeed, the potential for their bilateral collaboration is clear, as Egypt's interest in strengthening its domestic defense industry aligns neatly with India's interest in growing its foreign military sales and partnerships. One platform allegedly being discussed in this context is India's Tejas Mk1A light combat aircraft. According to the second accompanying excerpt from the Indian English-language daily *Hindustan Times*, in February 2023, the chairman of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited revealed that talks are ongoing for Egypt to buy 20 aircraft. He added: "Egypt has also shown interest in creating a local aerospace ecosystem. We will help facilitate that." Media reports from early 2021 also point to Egyptian interest in the [BrahMos](#), a cruise missile developed by India and Russia, and in the Indian-manufactured [Akash](#) medium-range mobile surface-to-air missile system.¹ Both Egypt and India have significant Soviet and



A former Egyptian Helwan HA-300 aircraft is displayed in the *Flugwerft Schleißheim*.

Source: Photo by High Contrast, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helwan_HA-300,_Flugwerft_Schleißheim.jpg; Attribution: CC 3.0

Russian equipment in their arsenals, and maintenance and repair of these systems are considered a likely area of collaboration, particularly in light of Russia's expected Ukraine-related difficulties in meeting the needs of its defense export clients.

The deepening Indian-Egyptian defense partnership has generated several commentaries linking recent events to developments in the 1960s, when the future of Indian-Egyptian defense cooperation seemed bright. At the time, leaders in Egypt and India saw their countries playing a critical geopolitical balancing role as founding leaders of the Cold War-era Non-Aligned Movement. Perhaps not surprisingly, the official statement at the end of Sisi's January 2023 visit to India referred to both countries' commitment to, among others, "the founding values of the Non-Aligned Movement." As illustrated by the third accompanying excerpt from the Indian English-language news website *The Print*, this historical period is instructive as Egypt and India look to ramp up bilateral defense collaboration in an increasingly competitive geopolitical context. Specifically, the article looks at some of the lessons for the present from the short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to co-produce a light fighter jet—the Helwan HA-300—in the 1960s.

Continued: Egypt and India Deepen Security Cooperation

Source:

(President Sisi's visit to the Republic of India)," *Egypt State Information Service* (National Public Information Agency), 24 January 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/bderkpah>

زيارة الرئيس السيسي إلى جمهورية الهند

The two countries affirmed their commitment to... the founding values of the Non-Aligned Movement, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries...

The two leaders welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for defense cooperation during the visit of Mr. Rajnath Singh, Indian Defense Minister, to Egypt in September 2022, and expressed their appreciation for the bilateral military cooperation reaching a new level. The two sides agreed to enhance and deepen defense cooperation in all fields, especially through exchanging technological expertise in defense industries, visiting military exercises, and exchanging best practices. They also stressed the need for co-production in the defense sector and discussed specific proposals within the framework of the Joint Defense Committee.

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

India is in talks with Egypt and Argentina for a possible sale of the indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) to their air forces as the country sharpens its focus on getting a toehold in foreign markets and boosting defence exports, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) chairman CB Ananthkrishnan said at the Aero India 2023 air show on Tuesday. Egypt has projected a requirement for 20 aircraft, while Argentina needs 15 new fighters, he said. "Egypt has also shown interest in creating a local aerospace ecosystem. We will help facilitate that."

Source: "With Rajnath Singh in Cairo, India-Egypt pick up Nehru-Nasser thread left off in the '60s," *The Point* (Indian English-language news website), 19 September 2022. <https://theprint.in/past-forward/with-rajnath-singh-in-cairo-india-egypt-pick-up-nehru-nasser-thread-left-off-in-the-60s/1133839/>

Singh's talks with his Egyptian counterpart, General Mohamed Zaki, will explore new initiatives to intensify military-to-military engagements and deepen cooperation between the defence industries of the two countries. This, after decades of sketchy contact despite India-Egypt's close ties in the Nehru-Nasser heyday of the Non-Aligned Movement... Almost six decades on, though, the strategic imperatives that drove the collaboration still exist: Heavily dependent on imports, both countries know that true military modernisation will need the creation of a defence-industrial base at home.

Notes:

[1] See: "Egypt considers purchase of Indian missile system," *al-Monitor* (Middle East-focused news and analysis website), 2 February 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/02/egypt-india-russia-made-brahmos-missile-system-weapons.html>

Brazil's President Pushes 'Peace Club' for Russia's War in Ukraine

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva entered office with a flurry of diplomatic activity and initiatives. Most prominently, Lula has pushed for the idea of a "Peace Club" to mediate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine. This was a principal topic of discussion on Lula's first state visit to China, according to *Voz de America*, the American public-private media partnership with excellent media coverage of Latin America.¹ The outlet reports that Lula discussed his plan at length with Chinese President Xi Jinping, even mentioning it in a public appearance, but he was unable to secure Chinese participation. Nevertheless, Lula has positioned Brazil, according to this reporting, to be a neutral arbiter in the current conflict, at least rhetorically. The reality may be much different, however, according to *BBC Brasil*, the Brazilian version of the popular British media outlet. Lula's comments indicate that he considers both Russia and Ukraine at fault for the war, and the West responsible for "encouraging" greater fighting. While Lula has tried to pursue non-alignment in Brazil's foreign policy, serving as a prominent spokesperson for Global South countries on the war in Ukraine, these comments and his recent trip to China have called into question Brazil's neutrality as a potential arbiter in the war.



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva accepts the credentials of the Chinese ambassador.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/palaciadoplanalto/52666896871>
Attribution: Flickr, CC-BY 2.0

From the point of view of Brazilian diplomacy, it would be precisely the lack of alignment with either side that would make Brazil an accredited actor to participate in sewing a way out of the impasse.

Source: "Lula pide un 'grupo de paz' para negociar un acuerdo entre Ucrania y Rusia (Lula calls for a 'peace group' to negotiate an agreement between Ukraine and Russia)," *Voz de America* (the American public-private media partnership with regional coverage of Latin America), 16 April 2023. <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/lula-pide-un-grupo-de-paz-para-negociar-un-acuerdo-entre-ucrania-y-rusia/7052859.html>

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Sunday proposed the creation of a group of countries not involved in the war between Russia and Ukraine to mediate for peace, saying he had discussed the matter with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping. Lula had previously said that the group should bring together countries that would not 'encourage' the war, adding that nations that supply weapons had to be convinced to stop doing so. Lula repeated that the decision to start the war was 'taken by two countries,' seeming to blame Ukraine as well, adding that ending the war will be more difficult as more nations will have to be persuaded.

Continued: Brazil's President Pushes 'Peace Club' for Russia's War in Ukraine

Source: “Brasil tem chances reais de mediar negociações de paz na Ucrânia? (Does Brazil have a real chance of mediating peace talks in Ukraine?),” *BBC Brasil* (the Brazilian version of the popular British media outlet), 15 April 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cyxvz4y9gwpo>

Lula's position has been seen as ambivalent internationally. Although Brazil formally condemns the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territories in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN)...Lula has already said that the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was as responsible for the crisis as the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin. Recently, Lula suggested that Ukraine would have to give up the territory of Crimea in order to end the conflict, which was rejected by the Ukrainians and displeased western powers. From the point of view of Brazilian diplomacy, it would be precisely the lack of alignment with either side that would make Brazil an accredited actor to participate in sewing a way out of the impasse.

Notes:

[1] For more coverage of the Lula-Xi state visit, see: Oliver Stuenkel, “Courting Lula, China Seeks to Show It Has More to Offer than the U.S.,” *Americas Quarterly*, 12 April 2023. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/courting-lula-china-seeks-to-show-it-has-more-to-offer-than-the-u-s/>

[2] For more information on how Latin America has pursued a strategy of non-alignment on Russia's war in Ukraine and other issues, see: Ryan C. Berg et al., “A Hesitant Hemisphere: How Latin America Has Been Shaped by the War in Ukraine,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 27 February 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hesitant-hemisphere-how-latin-america-has-been-shaped-war-ukraine>

South Korea Bolsters Defense Collaboration in the Arabian Peninsula

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

South Korea is showing itself to be a potentially important player in the security landscape of the Arabian Peninsula thanks to deepening defense cooperation with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The most tangible Korean inroads in this regard have come from arms sales. In 2021, the UAE became the first publicly known export destination for the South Korean-produced **K239 Chunmoo** rocket artillery system. Similarly, in 2022, the UAE became the first export destination for the South Korean-produced **KM-SAM (Cheongung II)** air defense system. For its part, in April 2023, Saudi Arabia revealed its own previously undisclosed K239s, deployed along its border with Yemen. The revelation came in a video posted on *Twitter* by the Saudi defense ministry. This disclosure follows a visit in March 2023 of Saudi Arabia's defense minister to South Korea. As noted in the first accompanying excerpt, from South Korea's *Yonhap*

News Agency, the trip may have been partly related to Saudi interest in acquiring KM-SAM systems. South Korea appears poised to become an important actor in the lucrative Gulf states arms market.

The two sides agreed to further develop the bilateral relationship to a 'future-oriented strategic partnership'...

Saudi Arabia aspires to develop a robust indigenous defense industry, in line with the country's Vision 2030 strategic development plan. China has emerged as an important partner in these efforts; South Korea, it seems, is well positioned to follow suit.¹ Beyond merely arms sales, South Korean defense companies have shown a willingness to establish joint production ventures with countries in the Middle East.² In 2019, leading Saudi and South Korean defense entities signed a memorandum to form a Riyadh-based joint venture company focused on manufacturing and selling ammunition inside Saudi Arabia, to be called SAMI-Hanwha Munitions Systems. As reported in the second excerpted article, from the South Korean English-language daily *Korea JoongAng Daily*, the same entities inked a contract worth nearly \$1 billion involving undisclosed "support for Saudi Arabia's defense capabilities and supply chain services" at the 2022 Saudi World Defense Show.



K239 Chunmoo Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS).
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:K239_Chunmoo.jpg Attribution: CC 3.0

Source: "S. Korean, Saudi defense chiefs agree on regular ministerial dialogue on defense cooperation," *Yonhap News Agency* (South Korea news agency), 7 March 2023. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230307010900325>

The defense chiefs of South Korea and Saudi Arabia agreed Tuesday to install a regular ministerial-level dialogue on arms industry cooperation during their talks in Seoul, the defense ministry here said... [South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup] expressed expectations that ongoing negotiations on South Korea's defense exports to Saudi Arabia will be concluded successfully, while explaining progress that the country's arms industry has made. The ministry did not elaborate on the negotiations. Saudi Arabia is known to be considering the introduction of the South Korean-made Cheongung II midrange surface-to-air missile system.

Continued: South Korea Bolsters Defense Collaboration in the Arabian Peninsula

Source: "Time is ripe for Korea to sell Saudi Arabia more weapons," *Korea JoongAng Daily* (South Korean English-language daily), 16 November 2022. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/11/16/national/defense/Korea-Saudi-Arabia-South-Korea/20221116183935017.html>

Hanwha's contract, worth 3 billion riyals, entails company support for Saudi Arabia's defense capabilities and supply chain services. Both sides declined to specify which weapons would be supported under the agreement, citing a confidentiality clause.

Notes:

[1] For more on Chinese inroads in Gulf country defense industries, see: Lucas Winter, "Chinese-Arab Summit Signals Growing Saudi-Chinese Defense Alignment," *OE Watch*, 2-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/436350>

[2] Last year, South Korea and Egypt signed a sale and co-production deal for the Korean K-9 howitzer. For more on the deal, see: "Egypt, South Korea sign deals for joint manufacturing of K-9 howitzers." *al-Ahram* (Egyptian daily), 26 February 2022. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/1237/461786/Egypt/Defence/Egypt,-South-Korea-sign-deals-for-joint-manufactur.aspx>