

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH

Issue 1

2024

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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ON THE COVER:

Damage in Gaza Strip during the October 2023.

Source: Palestinian News & Information Agency (Wafa) in contract with APImages, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Damage_in_Gaza_Strip_during_the_October_2023_-_32.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

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China Celebrates New Turbofan Engine Design as Giving It a Strategic Advantage

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

China claims its new turbofan could give it an edge during a high-intensity war. According to the first article posted on the publicly owned Chinese Internet platform *Tencent*, the Institute of Engineering Thermophysics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences has developed a new-generation, low-cost, easy-to-manufacture turbofan engine, which can be used in high-speed, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and missiles. A turbofan engine, first conceptualized in the 1930s is also known as a fanjet, is a modern variant of the gas turbine engine.

What makes the recent Chinese version unique is that it has a significantly reduced number of parts. According to the second article, published by leading Chinese Internet and gaming provider *NetEase*, there are only two stages, a fan stage and a high-pressure compressor stage. In contrast, according to the article, the U.S. Global Hawk's turbofan engine has 13 additional stages. This less complex structure makes it 20 to 30 percent lighter and less expensive to manufacture than other turbofans. The first article argues that these simpler turbofan engines will allow China to produce them faster and increase "the operational efficiency of frontline combat forces." For example, the People's Liberation Army will be able to turn to private enterprise with lower technical capabilities than specialized military industrial complex to manufacture the



China's **WZ-7** ("Soaring Dragon") is a high-altitude, long-endurance drone, shown here on display during the 2022 Zhuhai Airshow.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WZ-7_at_Airshow_China_Zhuhai_2022.jpg; Attribution: CCA-Share Alike 4.0 Int

new variant. Noting lessons learned from the Ukraine conflict, the article argues that "the side able to dominate the battlefield is often not the Ukrainian military with its advanced NATO equipment, but the Russian military, which can steadily supply less advanced equipment to the frontlines." The article also notes that by leveraging its cost and production capacity to provide a continuous supply of units to power its weapons, China can ensure that "when a conflict does break out between [it] and the United States," the U.S. military will not be able to "engage in a high-intensity war of attrition."

"With its inherent advantages of having a world-leading industrial system and strong production capacity, China already has an absolute advantage in the Sino-US arms race around UAVs, loitering munitions, and cruise missiles."

Source: Jiang Fuwei, “中美无人机军备竞赛,中国抢先立于不败之地,可以让美军更清醒 (In Sino-U.S. UAV Arms Race, China’s Advanced, Invincible Position Can Make the U.S. Military Sober Up),” *Tencent* (a major Chinese platform company that connects users, businesses, and industries with technology and innovation, 1 November 2023. <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20231101A03WF100>)

“Zhu Junqiang, director of the Institute of Engineering Thermophysics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that they have developed a new-generation low-cost turbofan engine, and this new engine has been used in a certain type of high-speed, long-endurance UAV.

This type of turbofan engine reportedly adopts a very unusual single-shaft high-pressure direct-drive configuration, which integrates the compressor and fan that must be arranged separately in conventional twin-shaft engines, reducing the number of engine parts by more than 60 percent. This reduces the overall weight and size of this type of engine by 20 to 30 percent compared to conventional twin-shaft configuration engines with the same thrust, and it also reduces fuel consumption by 10 percent.

In other words, the emergence of this type of engine not only signifies that the performance of domestic UAVs, loitering munitions, and even cruise missiles using turbofan engines will be significantly improved, but also that the manufacturing costs of these types of equipment will be further reduced to what can be called a “formidable” level. With its inherent advantages of having a world-leading industrial system and strong production capacity, China already has an absolute advantage in the Sino-US arms race around UAVs, loitering munitions, and cruise missiles...

Once China can produce a new turbofan engine, which costs only 20 percent of that of the existing turbofan engine, even if [the engine] currently can only be used in weapons such as UAVs and cruise missiles, significantly reducing the overall cost can increase the output and equipment quantity of these weapons systems, thereby increasing the operational efficiency of frontline combat forces...

Due to the significant reduction in the number of parts, the degree of difficulty in producing this type of engine is greatly reduced...

Looking at the experience of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the side able to dominate the battlefield is often not the Ukrainian military with its advanced NATO equipment, but the Russian military, which can steadily supply less advanced equipment to the frontlines.

At this point, once the PLA can leverage these advantages in cost and production capacity, it can establish strong anti-loss capabilities and continuous supply capabilities for weapons such as UAVs and cruise missiles.

So, when a conflict does break out between China and the United States, the US military in the Western Pacific will not have the ability to engage in a high-intensity war of attrition with the PLA....

Source: Jianduan Fangu, “我国研制成功高空低油耗涡扇发动机,战略无人机将傲视全球 (My Country Has Developed a Successful High-Altitude, Low-Fuel-Consumption Turbofan Engine and Will Dominate the World of Strategic Drones),” *NetEase*, (a leading Chinese internet and gaming provider centered around premium content), 26 October 2023. <https://www.163.com/dy/article/IHVD86H205565PRU.html>

The Institute of Engineering Thermophysics of the Chinese Academy of Science developed a high-performance, high-altitude, low-fuel-consumption turbofan engine, with greatly improved technology... First, the Institute of Engineering Thermophysics’

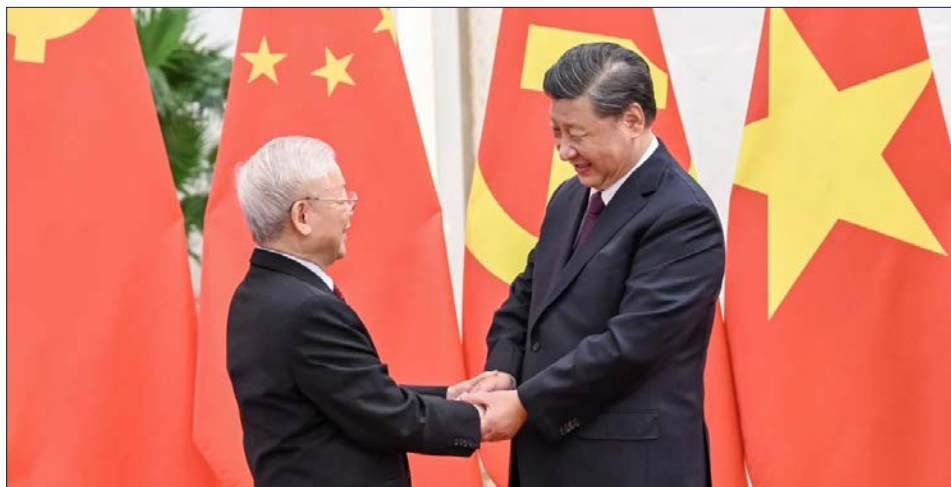
high-altitude, low-fuel-consumption turbofan engine has greatly simplified the engine structure. There is only one stage for the fan and one stage for the high-pressure compressor. The first stage uses a diagonal flow compressor, and the second stage uses

continue on 5

a centrifugal compressor. The pressure ratio of each stage is very high, which significantly reduces the number of compressor stages. Comparing it to the Global Hawk's engine, there are 13 fewer stages,

which greatly reduces the number of parts. This reduces the complexity of the engine, which reduces fuel consumption and makes it cheaper.

Chinese and Vietnamese Leaders Meet Over Tensions in South China Sea



Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Vietnam's Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong (left) in Beijing.

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3244526/xi-jinping-set-woo-vietnam-new-rail-and-rare-earth-projects-bid-curb-rising-us-clout>; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

By Alpha Ngo
OE Watch Commentary

The waters surrounding the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea are paramount to the interests of the surrounding states due to the potential energy reserves, geo-strategic locations, and fishing resources. Although China maintains *de facto* control over the Paracel Islands, Vietnam also has laid claim to them, leading to increasing tensions. On 12 December 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, Nguyen Phu Trong to ease these tensions. According to the first excerpted articles from the Vietnamese news media aggregator *Báo Mới*, General Secretary Trong requested both sides respect each other's legitimate interests and resolve disputes by peaceful means per international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As per the second excerpted article from

the military-focused *China Military Network*¹, it was noted that China and Vietnam were at a “critical stage of reform and development.” The article also highlighted the nearly three dozen agreements signed during the visit as proof of improving relations between the two countries.

“Regarding issues at sea, the two leaders exchanged sincere and frank opinions in depth, emphasizing the need to better control and actively resolve disagreements at sea.”

However, the December Xi-Trong meeting is set against the backdrop of longstanding tension between China and Vietnam stemming from both countries' claims of sovereignty over

both the Paracel and Spratly Island in the South China Sea. China has codified its claims across the region with its nine-dash line maritime policy, a visual representation of China's claims that appears on some official and comparative maps of disputed claims in the region, but which has been refuted by international maritime law.² While China would like to settle tensions with Vietnam, it is unlikely that the recent meeting between Xi and Trong, and subsequent bilateral agreements, would dissuade Vietnam from its current claims of Vietnamese features in the South China Sea.³

Source: “Việt Nam và Trung Quốc nhất trí xây dựng Cộng đồng chia sẻ tương lai (Vietnam and China agreed to build a Community of Shared Future),” *Báo Mới* (Hanoi-based Vietnamese news aggregator), 12 December 2023. <https://baomoi-com/viet-nam-va-trung-quoc-nhat-tri-xay-dung-cong-dong-chia-se-tuong-lai-c47792276.epi>

General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong emphasized that in the context of complex international and regional developments, it is important that countries jointly implement policies of peace, cooperation, and

development, and comply with the law. Internationally respecting each other’s equality and legitimate interests.

Source: “志同道合携手行，命运与共创未来中共中央政治局委员、外交部长王毅谈习近平总书记、国家主席对越南国事访问 (Like-minded people join hands to create a shared future – Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Minister, talks about General Secretary Xi Jinping and President Xi Jinping’s state visit to Vietnam),” *China Military Network* (Chinese military news focused media aggregator), 14 December 2023. https://www.81.cn/yw_208727/16273510.html

Currently, both China and Vietnam are at a critical stage of reform and development. Strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation has both inherent advantages and practical needs. During this visit, the two sides signed more than 30 cooperation agreements, covering all aspects of the “Belt and

Road,” development cooperation, digital economy, green development, transportation, inspection and quarantine, defense and law enforcement security cooperation, maritime cooperation, etc., expanding the breadth of China-Vietnam relations.

Notes:

- 1 *China Military Network* can also be translated “Chinese military web.” The page banner includes links to the Chinese Ministry of Defense, military newspapers, and topical sites like “Strategy,” and Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry press briefings. The URL is significant because 81 represents 1 August 1927, the founding date for the Red Army.
- 2 In 2016 the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague had ruled China’s nine-dash line maritime policy to be illegitimate. China had disregarded the Court’s ruling, and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and has continued to aggressively enforce its nine-dash line maritime policy. For a U.S. government’s perspective of the Arbitration’s ruling see: “South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: What Happened and What’s Next?,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 12 July 2016. [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Issue Brief, South China Sea Arbitration Ruling What Happened and What%27s Next071216.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Issue%20Brief,%20South%20China%20Sea%20Arbitration%20Ruling%20What%20Happened%20and%20What%27s%20Next071216.pdf)
- 3 For additional context, see: Jacob Zenn, “Vietnam Taking Diplomatic Approach to Spratly Islands Territorial Disputes,” *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/vietnam-taking-diplomatic-approach-to-spratly-islands-territorial-disputes/>; For a comparison of China’s claims and recent confrontations with the Philippines in the Spratly Islands, see: Dodge Billingsley, “China and Philippines Spar Over Grounded Ship in Spratly Islands,” *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/china-and-philippines-spar-over-grounded-ship-in-spratly-islands/>

Chinese Media Defends PLA Navy in Maritime Dispute With the Philippines

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

China has multiple maritime disputes with neighboring countries in the South China Sea, but tensions have risen primarily with the Philippines since September. Chinese media, however, has defended and downplayed China's actions, while placing blame for the increased tensions on the Philippines and its "external" allies, such as the U.S. For example, on 28 September, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) website, *huanqiu.mil*, published the excerpted Chinese-language article, which acknowledges rising tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea. The article notes a Chinese Coast Guard ship intercepted a Philippine Naval ship that, according to the article, illegally entered the area around Scarborough Shoal, which the CCP refers to as Huangyan Island.¹ In addition, according to the article, a Philippine diver removed a "floating

barrier" placed by China southeast of the shoal. However, the article did not mention that the barrier's purpose was to prevent Philippine fishermen from fishing in those waters. The Philippines claims the shoal is within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) while China seeks to access its fishing waters and other natural resources, such as petroleum and gas.

The article claimed the international media reported that regular military exercises the Philippines announced it would hold with the United States, Japan, and other partner navies, were in response to the increased tensions. Yet, the article held the CCP line that rejects any role for countries from outside the South China Sea region in resolving local maritime territorial disputes or defending the claims of adjacent South China Sea countries.² The article further portrayed the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) actions

as legal and reasonable and the Philippine Navy's actions as selfish and based on psychological manipulation or deceit (*niēzào shìshí*).

Two weeks after the article's publication, the second excerpted Chinese-language article on the popular social media news website, qq.com suggested that China would only engage in naval conflict with the Philippines if all other options had been exhausted. Further, it claimed any such conflict would only please the United States. Both articles, therefore, portrayed China as defensive and the Philippines or its external allies' actions as contributing to the rise of tensions. These tensions rose to the fore on 22 October when Chinese and Philippine naval ships clashed.³ After the clash, the Chinese media continued to justify the PLAN as being in the right and the Philippines and its backers as the aggressors.

“The Chinese Coast Guard will continue to protect its rights and conduct law enforcement activities in waters under China’s jurisdiction and strongly defend national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.”



People's Liberation Army (Navy) frigate PLA(N) Yueyang (FF 575) steams in formation with 42 other ships and submarines during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014.

Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Shannon Renfro; [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s_Liberation_Army_\(Navy\)_frigate_PLA\(N\)_Yueyang_\(FF_575\)_steams_in_formation_with_42_other_ships_and_submarines_during_Rim_of_the_Pacific_\(RIMPAC\)_Exercise_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s_Liberation_Army_(Navy)_frigate_PLA(N)_Yueyang_(FF_575)_steams_in_formation_with_42_other_ships_and_submarines_during_Rim_of_the_Pacific_(RIMPAC)_Exercise_2014.jpg); Attribution: CC x 2.0

Source: “菲律宾宣布将与美日等国举行军演，外媒借机炒作南海紧张局势 (The Philippines announced that with the United States, Japan and other countries it will hold military exercises, foreign media exaggerated tensions in the South China Sea),” *Huanqiu.Mil.com* (Chinese Communist Party online news website presenting pro-government perspectives), 28 September 2023. <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/4EivRbNVa0W>

The Philippine navy issued a statement that it would conduct annual military exercises with the United States and other countries south of Luzon in the Philippines. Reports suggested this action came at a time when tensions between the Philippines and China are rising due to disputes in the South China Sea. The Chinese Coast Guard intercepted a Philippine official ship that illegally entered Huangyan Island.

Previously, the Philippine Coast Guard claimed to have dismantled the “floating barrier” placed by China in the southeastern waters of Scarborough

Shoal. This action led to a warning from the Chinese government and required the Philippines not to cause provocations and cause trouble.

The Chinese Coast Guard will continue to protect its rights and conduct law enforcement activities in waters under China’s jurisdiction and strongly defend national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. In addition, China has asserted many times previously that the South China Sea is the common homeland for regional countries and should not become a hunting ground for external powers.

Source: “美国盼着菲律宾与中国开战？中菲不会在南海发生冲突原因有四 (Is the United States looking forward to a war between the Philippines and China? There are four reasons why China and the Philippines will not conflict in the South China Sea.)” *QQ.com* (Chinese social media platform run by the Tencent technology company), 5 October 2023. <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20231005A07M3600>

Will the Philippines conflict with China in the South China Sea? I believe that this is a topic that everyone is very concerned about.... My country’s Coast Guard took restrained and rational measures such as warnings and monitoring, but did not take action to remove the illegal beachside vessel from the Philippines that was stationed on Renai Reef. Therefore, China will not easily use force against the Philippines until the last minute.

When the time comes, China will definitely seize the opportunity to teach the Philippines a lesson.... However, judging from the actual situation, it seems that we are not ready for a conflict with the Philippines. Therefore, China’s best choice at the moment is to exercise restraint and calm down and avoid conflict with the Philippines.

Notes:

- 1 The Philippines asserts claims to Scarborough Shoal as well as around 50 other features in the Spratly Islands, which are known in the Philippines as the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG). According to a Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) report, the evidence in favor of the Philippine claims compared to the Chinese claims “is hardly a legal ‘slam dunk,’ but the evidence supporting Philippine sovereignty appears stronger. The fact that [Scarborough Shoal] is 400 nautical miles closer to the Philippines than to China and well within the Philippine EEZ weighs in on this determination.” See: Mark E. Rosen, “A CNA Occasional Paper Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis,” August 2014. https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf
- 2 For more on China-Philippine tension in the South China Sea, see: Dodge Billingsley, “China and Philippines Spar Over Grounded Ship In Spratly Islands, *OE Watch*, 08-2023. <https://fmsso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/china-and-philippines-spar-over-grounded-ship-in-spratly-islands/>
- 3 On 22 October, a Philippines boat sending supplies to forces at the Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands was disrupted by a Chinese “blocking maneuver,” which the Chinese Coast Guard claimed was a “slight collision” from a Chinese ship into a Philippine boat that was transporting “illegal construction materials” to a Philippine warship. See: Nikkei Asia, “China and Philippines trade accusations over latest clash at sea,” 22 October 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/China-and-Philippines-trade-accusations-over-latest-clash-at-sea>. See also *ANI News*, “Deadly collision caught on cam! China coast guard hits Philippines supply boat in South China Sea,” 24 October 2023. [youtube.com/watch?v=EDXzs7To7Xc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDXzs7To7Xc)

China Nears Completion of Large Port in Peru With Dual-Use Capabilities

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Weeks after the tenth anniversary of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is on schedule to inaugurate one of its biggest port development projects to date: the \$3 billion Port of Chancay, just north of Lima, Peru. In recent years, Chinese-owned and operated deep-water ports around the world have captured the attention of many analysts for their dual-use potential, for both commercial and military purposes.¹ In the past, China has used its owned and operated ports as logistical points and ports of call for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).² Chinese-owned and operated ports also offer the potential for China to track data on trade flows, which could open the door to economic coercion against the host countries as well as other third-party countries.

In response to rising questions about the Port of Chancay project, Peruvian media conglomerate *RPP* reports the Peruvian government maintains that the port is purely economic in nature and that the local population will be compensated for displacement and any environmental damage to the surrounding areas. The second excerpted article in the Peruvian energy and mining-focused news outlet *Energiminas*, says that the port will play an important role in helping China to solidify its dominant position in Latin America's critical minerals supply chains.³ Peru also maintains that the port, built by Chinese state-owned enterprise Cosco Shipping, will save an average of 10 to 12 days on goods traveling to



A worker stands in front of a map depicting the massive Port of Chancay in Peru.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puerto_Chancay_2.jpg; Attribution: Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED

Asia from Latin America. Further, the Peruvian government has confirmed its commitment to the project and stated its goal is to leverage its role as host of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 2024 to officially inaugurate the Port of Chancay.

China has dozens of contracts to upgrade, build, and/or operate deep-water ports in the Western Hemisphere, an economic reality with implications for the region's operational environment. Given China's past use of deep-water ports for naval port calls, the Western Hemisphere may soon witness an uptick in the PLAN presence.

“Cosco Shipping seeks to improve China’s access to minerals from the mountains to the coast, and from there execute shipments through the port of Chancay.”

Source: “Puerto de Chancay estaría listo para iniciar funcionamiento a fines de noviembre de 2024 (Port of Chancay would be ready to start operations at the end of November 2024),” *RPP* (Peruvian radio, television, and print media company located in Lima), 23 October 2023. <https://rpp.pe/economia/economia/puerto-de-chancay-estaria-listo-para-iniciar-funcionamiento-a-fines-de-noviembre-del-2024-noticia-1512135?ref=rpp>

The port of Chancay would finally be inaugurated in November 2024 with cutting-edge technology... ‘we hope to finish the port at the end of November 2024 and inaugurate it on that date taking advantage of the APEC Summit’... ‘We have more than 3,000 families

registered with a baseline of the conditions of their house and with a commitment letter from Cosco, responsible for solving any environmental damage,’ said an official with the company.

Source: “Puerto de Chancay evalúa mejoras en acceso de inerals de sierra de Oyón a la costa, señala Gobierno Regional de Lima (Port of Chancay evaluates improvements in access of minerals from the Sierra de Oyón to the coast, says Regional Government of Lima),” *Energiminas* (Peruvian news outlet focused on the country’s energy and mining sectors) 18 October 2023. <https://energiminas.com/puerto-de-chancay-evalua-mejoras-en-acceso-de-minerales-de-sierra-de-oyon-a-la-costa-senala-gobierno-regional-de-lima/>

The Regional Government of Lima indicated that the operator Cosco Shipping seeks to improve China’s access to minerals from the mountains to the coast, and from there execute shipments through the port of Chancay... For the Peruvian Ministry of Transport and

Communications, this megaproject, led by the Chinese company Cosco Shipping, is key for international trade and will be a hub that will redistribute cargo from the countries of Chile, Ecuador and Colombia as well.

Notes:

- 1 For a useful dashboard of Chinese-owned and operated ports around the world, see: “Tracking China’s Control of Overseas Ports,” Council on Foreign Relations, 6 November 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/tracker/china-overseas-ports>
- 2 Researchers tracking Chinese port calls have found that the PLA Navy has called at about one-third of the nearly 100 Chinese owned and operated ports overseas. See: Jennifer Rice and Erik Robb, “The Origins of Near Seas Defense and Far Seas Protection,” *CMSI China Maritime Report*, no. 13 (February 2021).
- 3 For more information on China’s role in Latin America’s minerals exploration and production, see: Ryan C. Berg, “China Deepening Cooperation in Latin America’s Sizeable Lithium Sector,” *OE Watch*, 01-2023. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmsso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/434262>

Russian Military Working To Respond to U.S. “Multi-Domain Operations”

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

Russia is working to understand the U.S. Army’s “multi-domain operations” (MDO) concept,¹ which can roughly be described as the coordinated employment of the domains of war (land, air, sea, space, cyber, etc.) to achieve an operational-level objective. The accompanying excerpted article from the monthly Russian military periodical, *Armeisky Sbornik*, discusses the Russian Armed Forces’ understanding of the U.S. MDO concept, the potential effects of MDO if employed against the Russian Ground Forces, and what course of action a Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) should execute to best overcome it.² The authors believe that a successful first strike on a Russian BTG by a U.S. Army MDO Brigade could be decisive due to the attrition of the BTG’s command and control and combat capabilities. The authors posit that the best defense for a BTG against an attacking MDO Brigade is the use

of positional defense (as opposed to maneuver defense), and a preemptive attack. To achieve this, up to one-third of the combined arms subunits in the BTG should act as flanking or raiding detachments and conduct preemptive actions to hinder the enemy. These actions might include defeating artillery, air defense systems, and command posts, and disrupting command and control and logistics, thereby disrupting the MDO Brigade’s ability to conduct a decisive counter-attack.

It is important to note that the authors, and many other Russian commentators, see the so-called “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine as not only a testing ground for new Russian military technologies and tactics, but also as a testing ground for new U.S./NATO technologies and tactics by way of Ukrainian proxies. As such, this article will likely be the first of many analyses discussing the best ways for the Russian Armed Forces to counter U.S.

military technology and tactics based on the lessons from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“The main difficulty in conducting defense in the context of the enemy’s implementation of the “multi-domain battle” concept is that units, occupying strong points, positions and areas, are not able to quickly and effectively respond to enemy actions, especially when changing the direction of action and carrying out flanking maneuvers.”

Source: R. Shaykhtudinov, I. Starodubtsev, “Оборона батальонной тактической группы в условиях «многосферного сражения» (The conduct of a defense by a battalion tactical group under conditions of «multi-domain battle»),” *Armeisky Sbornik* (monthly Russian military periodical), October 2023. <https://army.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/521356/>

Against the background of strengthening the military power of Russia and China, the United States began to develop new approaches that would ensure the superiority of its troops in military conflicts with an enemy of comparable combat capabilities. The basic principles and procedures for conducting combat operations as part of interservice and coalition groupings of troops in various operational environments at the strategic, operational and tactical levels were formulated...

Military experts F.I. Ladygin, S.V. Afanasyev and A.V. Khomutov argue that such a model provides for the creation in the US ground forces of “a new type of formations deployed in advance in forward areas - “multi-domain brigade tactical groups”, which will be able to operate in all environments, in isolation from the main grouping of troops, in conditions of constant contact with the enemy to identify his vulnerabilities and ensure the involvement of the main forces in them”...

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The main difficulty in conducting defense in the context of the enemy's implementation of the "multi-domain battle" concept is that units, occupying strong points, positions and areas, are not able to quickly and effectively respond to enemy actions, especially when changing the direction of action and carrying out flanking maneuvers. Also significant is the inevitable disunity of battalion defensive strong points during defense — when on a wide front these strong points cannot provide mutual fire support to one another, which can allow the enemy to employ flanking and raid actions to infiltrate the battalion's combat formation....

The analysis of the views of the US and NATO command on the offensive and the experience of conducting a special military operation in Ukraine raises the need to search for new ways of conducting combat actions at the tactical level. The enemy's use of modern weapons supplied by the united West, especially during shelling of Donetsk, Lugansk and other liberated areas, requires improved methods of action of combined arms formations when defeating the enemy.

The extreme saturation of modern armies with guided anti-tank weapons, air defense and missile defense systems has sharply increased the importance of the positional defense. The combat formation of a battalion tactical group in positional defense is built primarily in one echelon and includes: the first echelon, combined arms reserve, artillery units, air defense units, anti-tank reserve, as well as regular and attached units and fire assets that remain directly subordinate to the commander of the battalion tactical group...

Notes:

- 1 "The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028 concept proposes a series of solutions to solve the problem of layered standoff. The central idea in solving this problem is the rapid and continuous integration of all domains of warfare to deter and prevail as we compete short of armed conflict. If deterrence fails, Army formations, operating as part of the Joint Force, penetrate and disintegrate enemy anti-access and area denial systems; exploit the resulting freedom of maneuver to defeat enemy systems, formations and objectives and to achieve our own strategic objectives; and consolidate gains to force a return to competition on terms more favorable to the U.S., our allies and partners." TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations – 2028 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 2018), iii. <https://adminpubs.tradoc.army.mil/pamphlets/TP525-3-1.pdf>
- 2 For an in-depth analysis of the Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG), see: Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, "Getting to Know the Russian Battalion Tactical Group," Royal United Service Institute, 14 April 2022. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/getting-know-russian-battalion-tactical-group>

An analysis of the possible distribution of forces and means of a battalion tactical group shows that with a "typical distribution" of forces and means of a battalion, taking into account the fact that before an attack the enemy will inevitably lay indirect and direct fires, shows that most of the fire will fall on strong points of the first echelon companies (on 50–60% of the battalion's forces). Losses of the battalion tactical group can reach up to 70%. Consequently, the existing methods of conducting the defense of a battalion tactical group raise questions regarding the capabilities of successfully completing a combat mission. To increase the effectiveness of the defense of a battalion tactical group, it must conduct "preemptive actions".

The method is based on active use of offensive actions when conducting defense, going beyond the front line. At the same time, up to 1/3 of combined arms subunits, acting as flanking and raiding detachments, carry out preemptive actions against the enemy, such as defeating artillery, air defense systems, command posts, and disrupting command and control and logistics.

The essence of preemptive attack is to defeat enemy targets by flanking and raid groups of combat vehicles operating forward of the front line of defense in order to prevent further enemy offensive actions...

Russia Details Plan To Overcome Military Drone Deficiencies

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

The use of unmanned armed vehicles (UAVs), or drones, on the battlefields of Ukraine has increased dramatically since the conflict began in February 2022. While Ukraine may have held the initial advantage, Russia continues to prioritize its drone capabilities.¹ In a recent meeting of the Ministry of Defense regarding weapons procurement, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu detailed the state of military drone procurement. According to the excerpted article from the Russian online publication *Free Press*, Shoigu noted that “Russia has trained 93,000 specialists to service the latest types of weapons, a significant part [of this workforce] of which are drone operators.” Shoigu also noted that drone operators were being trained at several military training centers “at universities,” and that the number of these training centers would soon rise from only 16 in 2022 to 139, although no timeline was given as to when all 139 training centers would be operational. The *Free Press* article also included an interview with Igor Korotchenko, the editor-in-chief of *National Defense*,² a magazine focused on Russian defense and security issues, who noted that although Russian front-line troops were being “saturated” with drones, “the military still faces a serious shortage of drones for strategic reconnaissance and subsequent strikes over fairly long distances.” Korotchenko also noted that drones with these capabilities are being delivered to the frontlines



Russia and Ukraine are engaged in a drone war. Here, an unidentified Ukrainian Special Forces soldier with small quadcopter UAV that will be modified to carry a small explosive charge.

Source: *Combat Films and Research*; Attribution: By permission of *Combat Films and Research*

but “the task is to saturate our battle formations with them as much as possible.” Finally, the article notes that at the end of 2022, Putin had declared Russia would boost spending on its military drone program from 4.4 billion rubles (approximately \$48 million) to 92 billion rubles (approximately \$1 billion) effective immediately, increasing spending up to 200 billion rubles (approximately \$2.2 billion) by 2030.

“The military still faces a serious shortage of drones for strategic reconnaissance and subsequent strikes over fairly long distances. Saturating the troops with them would greatly increase our ability to identify and destroy enemy equipment accumulations and other priority targets.”

Source: “СВО: Российской армии срочно нужны дроны для наступления. По мере изменений тактики будут видоизменяться и модели боевых БПЛА (SVO: The Russian army urgently needs drones for the offensive. As tactics change, combat UAV models will also change),” *Free Press* (Russian socio-political online publication specializing in political, socio-economic and cultural news), 21 November 2023. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/395461/>

Supplies of unmanned aerial vehicles to the army have increased 16 times compared to the beginning of last year. Sergei Shoigu announced this at a meeting of the Ministry of Defense dedicated to state defense procurement.

The head of the military department also cited other figures: the number of basic types of missile and artillery weapons in the troops increased by 4.9 times, high-precision long-range missiles by 5 times, and armored weapons by more than 3 times. In total, the supply of the army with various means of defeating the enemy has been increased 12 times. At the same time, the state defense order for the needs of the Northern Military District is clarified and adjusted 2-3 times a month depending on the needs of the front.

The breakthrough in the field of unmanned aircraft can be considered a special achievement because before the SVO, we paid practically no attention to this type of weapons, and in the first months of the operation, the superiority of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in this component looked deafening. Our soldiers had to make do mainly with Chinese quadcopters, which caring citizens bought for the front in regular stores.

Sergei Shoigu also said that in 2023, Russia has trained 93 thousand specialists to service the latest types of weapons, a significant part of which are drone operators. A certain percentage of them are now serving in the Northern Military District zone. Students at military training centers at universities are also learning to control combat drones. The number of such centers will soon reach 139, although the first 16 were created only last year.

Igor Korotchenko, editor-in-chief of the National Defense magazine, told Free Press about which drones are currently being used by our military in the Northern Military District zone, and which ones are in greatest need.

Thus, the time when soldiers and officers had to master the control of quadcopters directly in combat conditions is over. And the drones that are now going into the army are no longer a mishmash of different Chinese toys. They are collected in Russia and are sufficiently standardized.

— The Northern Military District zone is being massively saturated, first of all, with tactical-class drones, which are used for reconnaissance and attack operations against the enemy on the line of contact and the front line. These are mainly quadcopters. They can conduct surveillance and then be used like kamikazes. Such UAVs are most intensively used by the troops today,” says a military analyst.

“The military still faces a serious shortage of drones for strategic reconnaissance and subsequent strikes over fairly long distances. Saturating the troops with them would greatly increase our ability to identify and destroy enemy equipment accumulations and other priority targets.

*The most important task is to hit vehicles with weapons and ammunition in a timely manner. And if we consider that our enemies are now preparing to redeploy **F-16** fighters and ATACMS missiles with a range of more than 300 km to Ukraine, which can be launched from **HIMARS** installations, then our strategic drones must be able to identify and destroy such targets. This task is now No. 1 for our engineers and designers.*

Until the end of 2022, drones remained in short supply in our troops. In December, Vladimir Putin instructed the government to prepare a national project for the development of unmanned aircraft. And in April, the president visited the capital’s Rudnevo technology park, which became a cluster for the production of UAVs. A meeting was also held there with the government and drone manufacturers.

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The talk in the open part was about unmanned civil aviation, but it is clear that any aircraft or copter initially has a dual use.

During the meeting, the president gave a number of instructions. Among them is to increase the portfolio of government orders for unmanned aerial vehicles from 4.4 billion rubles to 92 billion, and by 2030 to

200 billion.

Technoparks for the production of UAVs, similar to the Moscow one, should be organized in all federal districts, and better yet, in all regions. Begin organized training and retraining of specialized specialists in the production and operation of UAVs.

Notes:

- 1 For additional reading on Russia's increasing use of drones on the battlefield, see: Charles Bartles, "Russia Plans To Add Remote Mining UAV Platoons To Engineer Units," *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russia-plans-to-add-remote-mining-uav-platoons-to-engineer-units/>
- 2 *National Defense* magazine is tied to Russia's military industry complex and bills itself as covering a "wide spectrum of problems related to safeguarding Russia's National Security." For more information about *National Defense*, see its website: <https://oborona.ru/>

Russia's Federal Budget Puts Economy on War Footing

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

On 27 November 2023, Russian President Putin signed the federal budget for 2024-2026. The budget dedicates a dramatic 30 percent of total expenditures to the Armed Forces and military industrial complex. According to the excerpted article from the Russian and English-language independent online newspaper *The Moscow Times*, the increase in funds dedicated to the military establishment is “2.3 times more than [was appropriated] in 2022.” For comparison, funds dedicated to the military represented only 17 percent of the federal budget in 2022 and 19 percent in 2023. That percentage will increase to 29.5 percent in 2024. The Russian government will also spend “another 3.338 trillion rubles under the heading ‘national security,’ which includes the budgets of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Guard, the special services and the FSIN¹ system. Thus, in total, nearly “40 percent of the [federal] budget will be spent on law enforcement agencies.”

To make this happen, Russia will



The new Russian budget, 2024-2026, will throw a lifeline to the Russian defense industry as well as the war in Ukraine. Russian pavilion at a previous International Defence Exhibition & Conference (IDEX) held in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Source: Combat Films and Research; Attribution: By permission

have to pull funds from other parts of its economy including healthcare (which will be cut by 10 percent), aid to small businesses (which will lose 20 percent), and the “development of Infrastructure for Scientific Research,” (which will be reduced by 25 percent). Notably, “funding for state propaganda,” a line item of Russia’s federal budget and a critical part of its war in Ukraine, would remain the same as in the last budget. The signing into law of the new budget comes in conjunction with multiple other significant financial changes, including the Russian

reintroduction of capital controls² to stabilize the ruble against the dollar and other global currencies.³ Taken together, the signaling demonstrates Russia’s determination to see the war to a positive outcome—at a time when funding for Ukraine in the U.S. and among other Western powers is under scrutiny.

**“Everything for the front,
everything for victory.”**

**- Head of the Ministry of
Finance, Anton Siluanov**

Source: “Путин утвердил рост расходов на армию до рекорда со времен СССР (Putin approved an increase in spending on the army to a record since Soviet times),” *The Moscow Times* (a Russian-English language online newspaper), 27 November 2023. <https://www.moscowtimes.ru/2023/11/27/putin-razreshil-rosnefti-idesyatkam-goskompanii-zasekretit-informatsiyu-osebe-a114361>

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday, November 27, signed the law on the federal budget for 2024-26. According to the document, which was adopted by the State Duma on November 15 and approved by the Federation Council a week later, next year, for the first time since Soviet times, the

Russian authorities intend to allocate almost a third of all expenditures on maintaining the army and the military-industrial complex.

For the year, under the item “national defense” the budget will spend 10.775 trillion rubles - 70% more

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than in 2023 (6.8 trillion), 2.3 times more than in 2022 (4.7 trillion), and three times higher than the pre-war 2021 indicators (3.5 trillion).

The share of military expenditures in the budget, the total size of which will be 36.66 trillion rubles, will reach 29.5%. For comparison: the current year's budget initially included only 19% of defense spending (5 trillion rubles out of 26.1 trillion); in the first year of the war with Ukraine, this share was 17% (4.7 trillion rubles out of 27.8 trillion).

The USSR spent a third of its budget on defense in its final years. Thus, in the 1990 budget, 71 billion rubles out of 241.3 billion, or 29.4%, were allocated for "military purposes" (data published in the archive of ex-Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Yegor Gaidar).

According to the budget law, the government will spend another 3.338 trillion rubles under the heading "national security", which includes the budgets of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Guard, the special services and the FSIN system. Compared to the current year, these expenses will increase by 163 billion rubles. Thus, in total, almost 40% of the budget will be spent on law enforcement agencies.

To make ends meet, the government will cut costs to support the national economy: they will decrease from 4.125 to 3.889 trillion rubles. Funding for education and medicine - 1.6 trillion rubles each - will be "frozen", and in real terms - taking into account inflation - will be reduced.

Expenses under the national Healthcare project are planned to be cut by 10%, from 321.3 to 289.9 billion

rubles, and the sequestration will affect almost all of its subprograms. Expenses under the federal project "Modernization of Primary Health Care" will be reduced by 14%, to 81.64 billion rubles. The federal project "Fighting Cancer" will lose weight by 8%, to 147.4 billion rubles. Expenditures on the development of children's healthcare will be reduced by almost half - from 19.5 to 10.2 billion rubles; for the development of primary medical care - by 20%, to 7.677 billion rubles.

The national project to support small businesses will lose almost 20% of funding (67.7 billion rubles); Expenses for the federal project "Development of Infrastructure for Scientific Research" are reduced by 25% - to 47 billion rubles. Allocations for the state program "Development of the Aviation Industry" will be cut by 28% - 37.3 billion rubles. In addition, the government plans to save on supporting the regions: transfers to them from the federal budget will be less by 4% - 1.474 trillion rubles.

Funding for state propaganda will remain at record levels: state media will receive 121.3 billion rubles from the budget compared to 122 billion this year. Expenditures under the item "culture and cinematography," which includes budgets for the creation of war propaganda films, will increase by 11%, to 234 billion rubles.

"Everything for the front, everything for victory," said the head of the Ministry of Finance Anton Siluanov in September, commenting on the document. He urged people not to worry that there would not be enough money in the treasury. "But there will be enough for what is planned. A normal, healthy budget," the minister emphasized.

Notes:

- 1 FNIS is the Federal Penitentiary Service (ФСИН России), the federal authority for the detention of suspected and convicted persons, and the security and maintenance of prisons in Russia.
- 2 Capital Controls are measures taken by a government to limit the flow of foreign capital in and out of the domestic economy. Since the war in Ukraine began in February 2022, Russia has sought, among other regulatory actions, to stabilize the ruble by requiring that a large portion of all foreign currency profits made by Russian exporters be converted into rubles. For a recent discussion on some of the capital controls recently imposed by Russia, see: "Russia has tightened capital controls to help prop up ruble, report says," *The Guardian*, 31 October 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/31/russia-capital-controls-ruble-vladimir-putin>
- 3 For more on other Russian moves to reduce the dominance and dependency of the U.S dollar, see: Dodge Billingsley, "Russia Enlists Partners To Attack U.S. Dollar To Fund War In Ukraine," *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmsso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russia-enlists-partners-to-attack-u-s-dollar-to-fund-war-in-ukraine/>

Russian Arctic Naval Activity and Capability Continue To Expand



“Each of the Borei submarines can carry 16 ballistic Bulava missiles, each armed with 4 to 10 nuclear warheads.”

The Knyaz Oleg arrives at the Northern Fleet in February 2022. The Knyaz Oleg is the fifth Borei-class submarine on active duty.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_submarine_Knyaz_Oleg#/media/File:K-552_at_Northern_fleet.jpg; Attribution: CC by 4.0

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Despite the fighting in Ukraine, a military commitment in Syria, and Western sanctions, Russia continues to test new strategic systems and expand its Northern Fleet¹—but not without a few hiccups. According to the excerpted article from Norway-based The Barents Observer, a Russian Borei-class strategic ballistic missile firing submarine, the *Imperator Aleksandr III*, is currently

undergoing sea trials in the Arctic. The *Imperator Aleksandr III* is the seventh Borei-class submarine in operation with three more under construction and an additional two planned, for a total of twelve. The article notes that the *Imperator Aleksandr III* launched a Bulava strategic missile across the Russian Arctic from the White Sea to Kamchatka as part of its sea trials.² The article also notes that a nuclear triad exercise on 25 October featured

a canceled Bulava launch. According to the second excerpt, from the Russian Telegram channel Sirena, there have been six failed or canceled missile tests since June 2023. Despite the setbacks, and if a Bulava ballistic missile was fired from the *Imperator Aleksandr III*, Russia would continue to improve its missile capabilities and advance its strategic power in the Arctic.

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Newest submarine launched **Bulava** missile from White Sea,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 5 November 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2023/11/newest-strategic-submarine-launched-bulava-missile-white-sea>
*It was Sunday morning, 5 November, when the Defense Ministry in Moscow reported that the *Imperator**

Aleksandr III was sailing under the surface in the White Sea and launched a Bulava. A few minutes after breaking the surface in Russia’s northwestern region, the missile hit the designated target at the Kura range on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

*The *Imperator Aleksandr III* (K-554) was launched in December last year from the Sevmash shipyard in Severodvinsk and has since been undergoing state trials at sea and while at berth at the yard.*

*The submarine is the 7th Borei-class submarine and will likely be transferred to the Navy before New Year. Like the sixth submarine in the class, *Generalissimus Suvorov*, also the *Imperator Aleksandr III* will cross under the Arctic ice and sail for Russia’s Pacific Fleet.*

Each of the Borei submarines can carry 16 ballistic Bulava missiles, each armed with 4 to 10 nuclear warheads. Three more subs of the class are currently

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under construction in Severodvinsk, and two more are planned, but no contracts have been signed.

When Russia tested its nuclear deterrence triad on October 25, the only submarine-launched ballistic missile fired was an older Sineava, fired from the Northern Fleet's Delta-IV class Tula in the Barents Sea.

Source: “Шесть испытаний российских ракет отменились или провалились с июня (Six Russian missile tests have been canceled or failed since June). *Sirena* (Russian Telegram Channel), 1 November 2023. https://t.me/news_sirena/20870

Since June 30, 2023, at least six unsuccessful rocket tests have taken place in Russia, a source at one of the rocket and space industry enterprises told Sirena . Some launches failed altogether. Here are the details:

On June 30, the Poseidon device was tested unsuccessfully - an underwater nuclear torpedo that should hit coastal areas, ships and naval bases. According to our source, the cooling sensor showed a lack of coolant, the reactor did not start, and the Poseidon was thrown out of the shaft, after which it sank. The next launch was planned for late October - early November, but it has been postponed.

Notes:

- 1 It was previously reported that the Northern Fleet is expanding its capability by acquiring ice-class minesweepers for their Arctic waters. See: Atle Staalesen, “Three ships of Russia’s new class of minesweepers are being built for Arctic waters,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 22 June 2023. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2023/06/new-minesweepers-coming-northern-fleet>
- 2 For more information on the Bulava nuclear capable submarine launched ballistic missile see: *RSM-56 Bulava (SS-N-32)*, *MissileThreat*, CSIS Missile Defense Project, CSIS, 2 August 2021. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ss-n-32-bulava/>

On August 30, the third launch of the Sarmat complex did not take place. It was postponed due to a failure in the missile’s centralized control system, Sirena’s interlocutor claims.

On October 25, “presidential launches” took place - Putin led the tests. The Kremlin then stated that all the objectives of the exercises had been completed. Our source says that the Yars missile fell during the second stage of flight, and the Bulava launch was canceled at the last moment.

On October 31, the next Sarmat launch failed because the telemetry system failed. According to the source, this was explained by a mistake by the maintenance staff.

Today, the Sarmat fell 77 seconds into the flight, 300 kilometers from the launch site. This already happened to the complex in February. Test participants do not have clear versions of why something goes wrong.

In September, the head of Roscosmos, Yuri Borisov, said that the Sarmat complexes were put on combat duty. Sirena’s source believes that the Russian authorities were “obviously in a hurry” with this.

Russia Denies that North Korea Is Supplying It With Weapons for Use in Ukraine

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

Relations between Russia and North Korea are drawing concern as new evidence emerges that Pyongyang has supplied Moscow with conventional munitions and missiles for use in Ukraine. Satellite activity from October 2022 revealed that North Korea supplied an arsenal of weapons – including short-range ballistic missiles, anti-tank missiles, and portable anti-air missiles as well as rifles, rocket launchers, mortars and shells.¹ If confirmed, North Korean sales of weapons to Russia would violate several UN Security Council resolutions (1718, 2270, and 2321) going back to 2006, which ban the sales of all arms, ballistics systems, and related materials to and from Pyongyang.

“The accusations made by the ‘collective West’ of ‘illegal’ military-technical cooperation between Russia and North Korea are unfounded and unsubstantiated.”

It is estimated Russia received some 350,000 artillery shells from North Korea. At a rate of fire of 10,000 per day at its high at the time of this writing (down from an estimated peak of 60,000 per day in 2022²), that gives Russia just short of a two months’ supply. To put that figure in comparison, given American production levels



Meeting of Russian and North Korean Defense Ministers at Sunan International Airport in Pyongyang on 25 July 2023.

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meeting_of_Russian_and_North_Korean_Defense_Ministers_\(2023\)_01.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meeting_of_Russian_and_North_Korean_Defense_Ministers_(2023)_01.png); Attribution: CCA 4.0

of 24,000 artillery shells per month, that is more than the US produces in an entire year. The slower pace of Russian missiles fired (based on the 10,000 per shells per day statistic) on Ukrainian cities could reflect its lack of supply, or it could be a sign of stockpiling in anticipation of a winter offensive, as some analysts suspect.³

For its part, Russia’s foreign ministry has vehemently denied any violations. According to the excerpted article in the pro-Kremlin news site *Sputnik News*, Russia denies any “illegal” weapons transfers. Yet satellite imagery starting in August 2023 captures some 1,000 containers leaving North Korea’s Rajin port bound for an ammunition dump near Ukraine’s border.⁴ Indeed, as of October 2023, research from CSIS indicates that cross-border activity at North Korea’s Tumangang Rail Facility has spiked to its highest levels since before the pandemic.

In exchange, Russia has reportedly provided technical support to North Korea’s nascent space program, as well

as ICBM technology. Such assistance is likely needed given Pyongyang’s two previous attempts to launch reconnaissance satellites failed due to booster malfunctions. Theodore Postol of MIT has suggested that Russia also supplied North Korea with the **Topol-M ICBM**, the basis for its solid-fuel **Hwasong-18** missile.⁵

Though these reported arms transfers are notable, the Russia-North Korean nexus is not new. After the Cold War, observers raised fears that out-of-work Russian nuclear scientists were assisting Pyongyang to develop nuclear weapons. Today, fears of an arms race are rising in Seoul.⁶ That has prompted South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. to begin sharing real-time missile warning data emanating from North Korea.⁷ Experts disagree whether the Russia-North Korea nexus is a sign of Russian weakness (Russia is badly in need of arms) or strength (Moscow has allies and an arsenal it can call on rapidly for arms). Whatever the assessment, this nexus bears attention from the U.S. Army.

Source: “МИД РФ отрицает нарушение резолюций СБ ООН по Северной Корее (Russian Foreign Ministry Denies Violating UNSC Resolutions on North Korea),” *Sputnik News* (pro-Kremlin news outlet directed at foreigners), 11 November 2023. <https://sputnikglobe.com/20231111/russian-foreign-ministry-denies-violating-uns-c-resolutions-on-north-korea-1114884101.html>

“The accusations made by the ‘collective West’ of ‘illegal’ military-technical cooperation between Russia and North Korea are unfounded and unsubstantiated ... Russia is responsible in fulfilling its international obligations, including Security Council resolutions. This does not prevent us from deepening traditional relations of friendship and cooperation with our neighbors, including North Korea,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was quoted as saying by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Russian Foreign Ministry Ambassador at Large Oleg Burmistrov told Sputnik that Russia thoroughly abides by its international obligations towards Pyongyang within the Security Council’s resolutions.

Earlier in the day North Korean Foreign Ministry

said in a statement distributed by the Korean media that friendship between Russia and North Korea will only strengthen in the future, and the United States will face a “powerful and coordinated response” if it attempts to disrupt stability in the region.

“Relations of friendship and cooperation between two countries - Korea and Russia, striving for independence, peace and friendship, will unshakably strengthen and develop, and any attempts by the United States and its satellites aimed at disrupting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the region will face a powerful and coordinated response from independent sovereign states,” the statement said. It said the US administration should get used to the “new realities of Korean-Russian relations.”

Notes:

- 1 Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., Victor Cha and Jennifer Jun, “Ongoing Arms Transfer Activity at Najin Port,” *Beyond Parallel*, CSIS, 17 October 2023. <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/ongoing-arms-transfer-activity-at-najin-port/>
- 2 Jeff Schogol, “Russia is hammering Ukraine with up to 60,000 artillery shells and rockets every day,” *Taks and Purpose*. 13 June 2022. <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/russia-artillery-rocket-strikes-east-ukraine/>
- 3 Dara Massicot, “Putin’s Cannon Fodder: Foreign Affairs Interview,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2 November 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2sUEB_rRhA
- 4 The shipment came shortly before the leaders of Russia and North Korea met for five hours at Russia’s Vostochny Spaceport, according to TASS, the *Russian News Agency*. See: Five hours at Vostochny Spaceport: Putin, Kim Jong Un meet again four years later,” TASS (Russia’s main state news agency), 13 September 2023. <https://tass.com/politics/1674459>: The satellite imagery is further backed up by recent analysis by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) that found that two Russian vessels made at least five round trips between North Korea and Russia, believed to be arms transfers. See: Song Sang-Ho, “2 Russian ships made 5 trips between N. Korea, Russia since mid-Aug. in suspected arms transfers,” *YonHap News Agency* (South Korea’s leading news agency) 17 October 2023. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20231017000351315>
- 5 Theodore Postol of MIT suggests that Russia also had supplied North Korea with the Topol-M ICBM, the basis for its solid-fuel Hwasong-18 missile. See: Theodore Postol, “The Transfer of a Russian ICBM to North Korea?” *Beyond Parallel*, 17 August 2023. <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/the-transfer-of-a-russian-icbm-to-north-korea/>
- 6 Simon Hutagalung, “Russia and North Korea relations in transition,” *Korea Times* (English-language newspaper in Seoul), 5 November, 2023. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2023/11/137_362456.html
- 7 Anastasia Kostina, “Учения обстоятельств: США и Южная Корея отрабатывают оборону от КНДР (Exercises of circumstances: the United States and South Korea will practice defense against the DPRK: How Pyongyang and Beijing react to the maneuvers of Washington and Seoul),” *Izvestia* (Russian news outlet), 30 October 2023. <https://iz.ru/1596255/anastasiia-kostina/ucheniia-obstoiatelstv-ssha-i-iuzhnaia-koreia-otrabotaiut-oboronu-ot-kndr>

Iran's Supreme Leader Announces Maritime Development Strategy

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recently announced a new, multi-decade approach to develop Iran's coasts. While it is unclear if and how fast Iran might reconfigure or reorient its economy towards a maritime development strategy, the ambition of the maritime plan and its announcement by Khamenei set it apart from previous Iranian economic strategies and proposals.¹

As per the excerpted article from the official web portal of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Khamenei called for a whole-of-government approach in his nine-point directive, with the formation of new bodies and government reorganization to accomplish the ambitious plan. Khamenei does not describe where Iran will acquire the billions of dollars needed to actualize this plan. Regardless, he provides the clearest indication to date that Iran seeks

to develop the Makran Coast beyond the port of Chabahar, and that Khamenei envisions greater ties to Pakistan and Azerbaijan, two traditional rivals.² Khamenei's statement also provides diplomatic endorsement for ambitious north-south and east-west commercial corridor schemes involving trade across Iran to Russia through Azerbaijan and from China through Pakistan.³ Though his call to defend maritime resources from exploitation from other countries may signal a subtle warning about China, a country with whom Iran has developed warm diplomatic relations.⁴ Among Indian Ocean littoral states, China has a record of overfish-

ing and illegally exploiting other country's maritime resources.

While Khamenei signals that Iran seeks to become a regional hub for commerce, his emphasis that any development should conform to Islamic-Iranian values might undercut the attractiveness of foreign investment, especially among Iran's non-Persian, non-Islamic neighbors. Still, Iran's attempts to reorient its economy bear watching and, if even partly successful, this regional economic integration can have great impact on the operational environment.

“It is necessary to make use of the coasts, offshore areas, and the seas effectively.”



Iran's rugged but underdeveloped Makran coast littoral is pictured. Iran's Supreme Leader has recently articulated a maritime development plan.

Source: https://www.ibena.ir/files/fo/news/1401/9/27/24702_342.jpg; Attribution: ibena.ir

Source: “Ablagh-e Siyasatha-ye Kali Tawse’ah-e Darya Mahavar” (Communicating Sea-Oriented Development Policies), *Khamenei.ir* (official web portal of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei), 7 November 2023. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=54334>

The oceans are divine gifts with rich reserves and resources for the development of science and technology, for achieving job growth and increased wealth, for the provision of vital needs, and for increasing the country’s strength. Since Iran has a privileged geographical position and is located between two seas with thousands of kilometers of beaches as well as islands, many of which remain untouched, it is necessary to make use of the coasts, offshore areas, and the seas effectively.... Accordingly, we have determined General Sea-based Development Policies as follows:

1. The establishment of an integrated policy for sea-based affairs, for the division of work at the national level, and for an active, efficient management of the sea in order to make maximum use of the sea’s capacities to attain a fitting global position and to reach a top position in the region.

2. The development of sea-based-economic activities and the creation of advanced sea-based development centers to speed growth on the coasts, islands, and hinterlands in such a way that sea-based economy will always be at least twice the country’s economic growth rate over the next ten years.

3. The facilitation and development of domestic and foreign investments and partnerships by creating the necessary legal, economic, and security frameworks.

4. The formulation of a comprehensive sea-based development plan that includes zoning of the sea, the coast, and the backshore... with emphasis on an Iranian-Islamic identity....

5. Maximum, optimal utilization of the capacities, resources, and reserves of the marine ecosystem by preventing the destruction of the marine environment, especially by other countries.

6. The provision and advancement of committed, efficient human capital and management....

7. The expansion of economic and commercial cooperation...with neighboring and other countries....

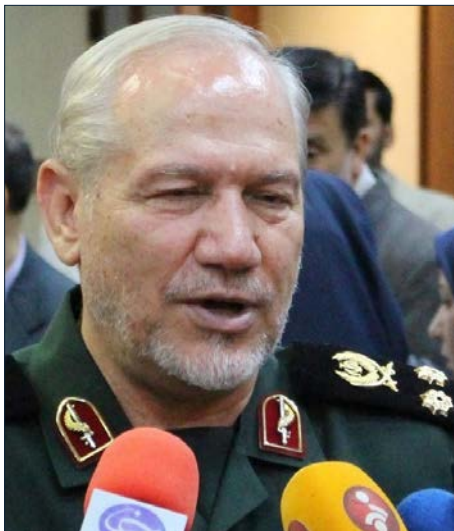
8. Increasing the country’s share in sea-based transport and transit by establishing and strengthening a combined transport network.

9. Supporting native and local investors in development projects... and also backing small and medium enterprises in local communities in various areas including fishing, agriculture, industry, and tourism.

Notes:

- 1 Across the Middle East, populations settled and cities grew alongside coastlines and rivers. See: Baghdad, Beirut, Benghazi, Cairo, Casablanca, Tel Aviv, Tunis, and Tripoli for example. Iran has been the exception. Cities developed across the Iranian plateau, separated from the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and Indian Ocean by mountain ranges or inhospitable badlands. While the 20th century oil boom brought some development to the Persian Gulf coast, nine of Iran’s top ten cities by population are landlocked, with Ahvaz connected to the Persian Gulf by the Karun, Iran’s only navigable river.
- 2 For previous discussion of Chabahar development, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran: Construction Begins on the Chabahar-Zahedan Railway” *OE Watch*, December 2020. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/379863>
- 3 For background into Iran’s developing ties with Azerbaijan, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Agrees To Gas Swap with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan” *OE Watch*, 01-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/403778>
- 4 For background about Iran-China economic ties, see: Michael Rubin, “Iranian Trade With China Is Up, but So Is Political Risk” *OE Watch*, 08-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/42208>

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Seeks Dominant Role in Maritime Development



Maj.-Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, speaks about Iran's new maritime strategy on the sidelines of a conference in Gilan on 8 November 2023.

Source: https://defapress.ir/files/fa/news/1402/8/17/2245434_929.jpeg; Attribution: Defapress.ir

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

In November 2023, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei announced a new maritime development plan to jumpstart Iran's "sea-based economy." The next day, according to the excerpted article from the Iranian Ministry of Defense's *Holy Defense News Agency*, former Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander and senior advisor to the Supreme Leader, General Yahya Rahim Safavi, expressed at a maritime conference the value of Iran's coastline and sea resources. His comments reflect how the IRGC will likely seek a central, organizing role in the implementation of the maritime scheme.¹ Safavi understands that government contracts to build ports, lay highways and railroads, and erect apartment blocks will funnel tens of billions of dollars into IRGC coffers.

The participation of both civilian and military universities at the conference highlights academia's close cooperation with the IRGC, which includes collaboration on Iran's ballistic missile and unmanned aerial vehicle programs.²

Safavi also noted that the IRGC Navy (IRCGN) would play an increased role in offshore scientific missions, conducting operations in the strategic Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, where Iran's oil and gas interests lie. The regular Iranian Navy, in contrast, focused on blue water operations in the northern Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, and further afield. For the IRGCN to take the lead on scientific missions gives it a reason to encroach on the regular Navy's traditional area of operation in a way that may complicate the operational environment for other navies in the region. After all, the regular Iranian Navy tends to maintain professional relations, even with ships from countries with which Iran has no diplomatic relations.

"This scientific work of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Navy will be important for other organizations involved in the maritime sector."

Source: “Major-General Safavi: ‘Eghtesad-e Daryamahavar’ az bistarha-ye Tahaval-e Navin-e Eghtesad ast” (Commander Safavi: The ‘Sea-Oriented Economy’ is One of the Foundations of the New Evolution of Iran’s Economy),” *Holy Defense News Agency* (official news agency of the Iranian Ministry of Defense), 8 November 2023. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/629041>

Major General Sayyid Yahya Safavi, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader, stated shortly before noon on Wednesday [8 November 2023], on the sidelines of the national conference on “Emerging Maritime Opportunities and Threats,” told journalists, “This conference has been organized by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy with the cooperation of several civilian and military universities and will continue for two days in Gilan. It is the culmination of a year of scientific study and research. About 300 papers were submitted from public universities and both military and governmental organizations, of which 30 were selected.

General Safavi, with reference to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic’s emphasis on maritime policies, stated, “Iran is blessed with a coastline of 2,700 kilometers [1,680 miles] in the south and along the Caspian Sea. There are 20 islands, and these islands provide a great opportunity for economic development, paying attention to the maritime economy, resolving economic bottlenecks, and solving the problems of the water crisis and producing renewable energy....”

The advisor to the Supreme Leader added, “We hope that by announcing the policies with a ten to 20-year plan, we can better focus on augmenting the private sector, encourage academic study, and adjust foreign policy to better attract investment in Iran. By having a codified plan to use the scientific capacities of the country, we can solve people’s problems according to the values and natural blessings of our country.

Emphasizing the necessity of maximizing capacity of the North-South and East-West transit corridors through Iran, he added, “Producing renewable energy and bringing fresh water from the shores of the Oman Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea to the central plateau of Iran are other goals that will be pursued. This scientific work of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps- Navy will be important for other organizations involved in the maritime sector.”

Notes:

- 1 IRGC firms dominate Iran’s construction industry, road building, and port operations. For discussion about the IRGC’s economic work, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran’s Proposal To Build Railroads and Housing in Syria Could Enrich IRGC” *OE Watch*, 11-2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/429284>
- 2 For background on other aspects of IRGC-university partnerships, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran: Preparing for Zafar III Satellite Launch” *OE Watch*, July 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/312353>

Iran Seeks To Assert Global Leadership in Determining International Cyber Policy

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has sought leadership roles at the UN and other international organizations on issues relating to human rights and crime prevention, and now it seeks to shape international cyber policy. The Iranian regime has looked at internet and cyber access as its Achilles' heel through which Western powers could influence and corrupt Iranian youth. However, Iranian officials appear ready to go on the offensive as regime confidence grows following the suppression of the 2022-2023 "Woman, Life, Freedom" protest movement and the expiration of some sanctions associated with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.¹

According to the excerpted article from the government-affiliated *Iranian Students' News Agency*, Mostafa Izadi, a previous IRGC ground forces gen-

eral who heads a new headquarters to address cyber threats, argued that Iran should lead cyber policy to increase its influence in the world rather than seek to isolate itself from the internet.² His comments may signal the abandonment of Iran's effort to cut itself off from the world, and a belief that it should instead seek to sway audiences abroad.³ Izadi cites the information operations accompanying the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel to underline the power of the internet when harnessed in Iran's favor. Subsequent demonstrations in favor of Hamas against Israel and the West not only in the Global South but also in Europe and the West seem to have given Izadi confidence. Izadi's argument conforms to a historical pattern in which Iranian leaders, after trying and failing to suppress new communication technologies, instead seek

to co-opt them. Today Iran translates Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website into ten languages ranging from Hindi to Russian to Spanish while state-owned and operated English-language *PressTV* pushes Iranian propaganda globally.

"If we can dominate the field, we can influence the whole world."

Izadi's discussion of artificial intelligence (AI) is also worth noting. While AI is a topic within regime rhetoric, Izadi's discussion of its role in the fight for hearts and minds and his new role focusing on countering cyber and new threats suggests that the IRGC now actively seeks to utilize AI to counter liberalism and advance Iran's line at home and abroad.



Mostafa Izadi, the Iranian Armed Forces' commander for cyber threats, speaks at a conference in Gilan, 8-9 November 2023. Izadi is now making the case for Iran's leadership in cyber and AI technology.

Source: <https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1402/08/18/140208180>; Attribution: Fars News Agency

Source: “Izadi: Hakmiyat bar Fezaye Sybari Ya’ani Tasirgozari bar kol Jihad” (Izadi: Sovereignty over cyber space means influencing the whole world),” Iranian Students’ News Agency (an ostensibly private news agency close to Iran’s security and intelligence apparatus), 9 November 2023. <https://www.isna.ir/news/1402081813261>

The commander for cyber and new threats at the central headquarters for Khatam al-Anbiya of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, referring to the creation of new intellectual space in the field of cyber governance, said, “To fight the enemy’s artificial intelligence and cognitive warfare, it is necessary to address the needs of the day.” Major-General Mostafa Izadi, commander of the new command for cyber and new threats, said at the conclusion of the national conference on emerging maritime opportunities and threats in Gilan, stated that the country’s scientific progress in various fields has led to the strengthening of the holy system of the Islamic Republic, and stated, “Physical, informational and artificial intelligence issues have entered a new space in the world, and America has launched a cognitive war to penetrate different countries.”

Referring to the creation of a new intellectual space in the field of cyber governance, he said, “Governance in cyber space presents an opportunity for our country to achieve great success across a variety of fields....” Emphasizing the need to pay attention to the enemy’s cognitive warfare across politics, the economy, and culture, he stated, “But piety is the secret to our success.”

Izadi added, “Today, our country is facing a hybrid war, and cyber, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and cyberspace have created a special situation that affects time, place and borders. If we can dominate the field, we can influence the whole world.

Notes:

- 1 The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, is the agreement reached in summer 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus the European Union restricting Iran’s nuclear program. For more information on the JCPOA see: “What is the Iran Nuclear Deal,” Council on Foreign Relations, last updated 27 October 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-iran-nuclear-deal>
- 2 The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and security forces initially sought to regulate the internet in Iran, banning VPNs, slowing access, and demanding all social media operators maintain servers inside Iran. For an overview of Iranian strategies toward the internet, see: Michael Rubin, “Evolution of Iranian Surveillance Strategies Toward the Internet and Social Media” in Munir Khasru and Riasat Noor, eds. *The Digital Age, Cyber Space, and Social Media: The Challenges of Security & Radicalization*. Dhaka: Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance, 2019. <https://www.aei.org/articles/evolution-of-iranian-surveillance-strategies-toward-the-internet-and-social-media/>
- 3 The IRGC later offered to operate a national intranet, firewalling Iran from the outside world. For background on the national intranet project, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran- Armed Forces Ready to Take Over National Intranet Project” *OE Watch*, October 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/329811>

Belarus and Iran Form Alliance Against the West

By Paris Gordon
OE Watch Commentary

In response to perceived Western aggression, Belarus and Iran have deepened their pre-existing relationship into a strategic alliance that now includes a developing partnership in military, economic, and political affairs. According to the excerpted press statement published by *The Press-Service of the President of Belarus*, the goal of the alliance is to “work closely with one another and cooperate together to resist...attacks.” In an additional press statement featured on the Belarus Ministry of Defense website, Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin, stated “from the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the coalition of Western states, led by the United States, has always tried to hinder the development and prosperity of Iran. But, despite the imposed eight-year war, numerous territorial acts, unprecedented sanctions and polit-

ical pressure, Iran has built a strong and independent government.”

Underscoring this alliance, earlier this

“Our answer is one: we must work closely with one another and cooperate together to resist these attacks.”

year the two nations signed a comprehensive cooperative roadmap that runs through 2026.¹ Prospective discussions between the two Ministries of Defense see the possibility of collaborative military training as well as bilateral cooperation of their Armed Forces. Through their alliance, Belarus and Iran seek to strengthen their military position in response to perceived threats from the West. This could indicate the possibility that Belarus and Iran are actively preparing for a military engagement, fueled by shared

feelings of Western aggression. The new agreement has set a precedent for military resources and information to be shared openly and freely, as we have seen from the discussions by the Defense Ministers about beginning joint field training. This new alliance strengthens the two nations through political, military, and economic preference and support on the perceived hostile global stage. From this accord, each nation has now gained a resource to increase their resiliency both in and out of military conflict. Iran and Belarus mutually benefit from sharing military training to increase proficiency, and outside of wartime, they each have a partner in economic and political growth globally.

Source: “Встреча с первым вице-президентом Ирана Мохаммадом Мохбером (Meeting with the First-Vice President of Iran Mohammad Mokhber),” *Пресс-служба Президента Республики Беларусь* (The Press-Service of the President of Belarus), 17 October 2023. <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vstrecha-s-pervym-vice-prezidentom-irana-mohammadom-mohberom-1697531352>

“I hope that you will not be disappointed with your visit. There are a lot of questions to discuss. Therefore, I also hope that our conversation will have a good practical result,” the head of state welcomed the Iranian guest. “You know the situation that Belarus is in. It is a similar situation to your own. Pressure, exerted on our states, without precedent, but you have already learned to resist it somewhat, and your experience for us is most important”...Alexander Lukashenko remarked that the situation in the world

is heating up, and the crisis in the Middle East contributes to the fact that unfriendly Western states, led by the United States, are constantly directing this conflict against Iran. “You feel it better. Our answer is one: we must work closely with one another, and cooperate together to resist these attacks,” stated the President (Lukashenko).

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Soucre: “Официальный визит Министра обороны Беларуси в Исламскую Республику Иран (дополнено) (Official Visit of the Minister of Defense of Belarus to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Updated)),” *Министерство Обороны Республики Беларусь* (The Ministry of Defense of Belarus), 01 September 2023. <https://www.mil.by/ru/news/162070/>

“The history of relations between Belarus and Iran has shown, that our people know how to be friends and highly value the relationship between our countries, built on the principles of mutual respect and common values,” stated the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Belarus Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin during the meeting with the Minister of Defense and Support of the Armed Forces of Iran Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani.

Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin also noted that from the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the coalition of Western states, led by the United States, has always tried to hinder the development and prosperity of Iran.

But, despite the imposed eight-year war, numerous territorial acts, unprecedented sanctions and political pressure, Iran has built a strong and independent government.

“And in this our nations are similar. We, like you, clearly and consistently defend our sovereignty and independence. We are brought together by the similarity of our positions in many international issues. It is not only the independent and pragmatic political leadership of our governments but the unity of views on the establishment of a just world order based on the development of multipolarity and non-interference in internal affairs. Our nations together defend the inviolability of international law,” noted the Minister of Defense...The parties discussed the state and prospects for bilateral cooperation in field training and usage of the Armed forces, also further steps were planned to deepen and intensify bilateral collaboration.

Notes:

- 1 For a more comprehensive understanding of the types of cooperation, military and other, that Belarus and Iran have agreed upon, see: “Лукашенко и Раиси подписали дорожную карту всестороннего сотрудничества до 2026 года (Lukashenko and Raisi sign roadmap of comprehensive cooperation until 2026),” *Gosstandart* (Belarussian State Media), 13 March 2023; <https://gosstandart.gov.by/lukashenko-i-raisi-podpisali-dorozhnyuyu-kartu-vsestoronnego-sotrudnichestva-do-2026>

Drug Trafficking a Prime Source of Financing for Venezuela's Maduro Regime

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

The Maduro regime in Venezuela has long maintained links to organized crime groups and drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).¹ However, a recent hack of documents from the Colombian Prosecutor's Office has revealed the depths of the Maduro regime's involvement with DTOs. According to the Argentine daily *Infobae*, the documents allege that Venezuelan Armed Forces are crucial to trafficking drugs through Venezuela. The outlet reports that they cooperate with Colombian guerrillas and are directly involved in the process of moving drugs, as opposed to passively permitting their passage and receiving bribes, as was the case in the past. The second excerpted article from *Infobae* states that the alleged center of these operations is Catatumbo, a borderland region between Colombia and Venezuela rich in coca production estimated to be 330 tons per year. The article paints a complex picture of rival criminal organizations from Mexico and Venezuela also occupying the same territory. The Maduro regime's spiral into criminality will likely have meaningful impacts on the operational environment.² Venezuelan Armed Forces' increased role in Latin America's drug trafficking operations will have spillover effects for most neighboring countries. At the same time, such activities are likely to deepen the Maduro regime's staying power.



The Venezuelan armed forces have become critical to the Maduro regime's ability to move drugs around the world.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ch%C3%A1vez_eyes_-_Venezuelan_armed_forces.png; Attribution: Wikimedia, CC BY 3.0 DEED

“Venezuela is currently an important bridge in global drug trafficking exports, from where between 250 and 350 metric tons per year leave, which has a street value of between 6 and 8 billion dollars.”

Source: “Un informe reveló cómo el régimen de Maduro hizo del narcotráfico su principal fuente de financiamiento (A report revealed how the Maduro regime made drug trafficking its main source of financing),” *Infobae* (Argentine daily with excellent regional coverage), 7 November 2023. <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2023/11/07/un-informe-revelo-como-el-regimen-de-maduro-hizo-del-narcotrafico-su-principal-fuente-de-financiamiento/>

Leaked documents from the Colombian Prosecutor's Office, analyzed and verified through additional interviews and other independent reports, reveal that Venezuelan military personnel, in association with Colombian guerrillas, are directly involved in drug trafficking operations...The epicenter of this network is the mountainous region of Catatumbo, on the border with Venezuela, an area that has a high

concentration of coca leaf plantations...More than 330 tons transited through the state of Zulia from the Catatumbo region last year alone, an alarming figure given that experts say that Catatumbo supplies only about 60% of the drugs entering Venezuela. The rest is transported by rivers in the plains region and the jungle region in the south of the country.

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Source: “Vínculos del Gobierno venezolano con el narcotráfico en la región del Catatumbo en Colombia revelan filtraciones de documentos de la Fiscalía (Links of the Venezuelan Government with drug trafficking in the Catatumbo region in Colombia revealed by leaks of documents from the Prosecutor’s Office),” *Infobae* (an Argentine daily with excellent coverage), 8 November 2023. <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2023/11/08/vinculos-del-gobierno-venezolano-con-el-narcotrafico-centran-la-atencion-en-la-region-del-catatumbo-en-colombia/>

In the department of Norte de Santander, there is also the presence of the Mexican cartels of Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation, along with the Venezuelan gang known as the Tren de Aragua... The investigation also highlighted the change in the roles of participation of the Venezuelan authorities,

which have gone from being bribed by the drug cartels to leading illegal operations themselves, which represents an increase in the complexity and severity of the criminal operations.

Notes:

- 1 For information on the Maduro regime’s links to criminal groups, see: Moises Rendón, “Maduro’s Mafia State,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 31 October 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/maduros-mafia-state>
- 2 For more information on how the Maduro regime uses criminal groups as an instrument of state power and power projection capability, see: Moises Rendón and Arianna Kohan, “Identifying and Responding to Criminal Threats from Venezuela,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 22 July 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/identifying-and-responding-criminal-threats-venezuela>

Syrian Regime, Opposition Wary of Hamas Despite Support for 7 October Attacks on Israel

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

On the surface, Hamas seems to enjoy widespread support in Syria among backers of both the government and the anti-government Sunni Arab opposition.¹ Media outlets associated with each side have used laudatory rhetoric to describe the 7 October Hamas “al-Aqsa Flood” operation. The first accompanying excerpt from the anti-Syrian-government news website *Syria TV*, describes the Hamas raid as “a source of pride for the Arab and Islamic nation in every sense of the word.” The second excerpt, from the pro-Syrian government daily *al-Watan*, states that Hamas’ raid “will be recorded in history in golden letters that time will not erase.” In addition to widespread support for the operation itself, outlets affiliated with both the Syrian regime and the opposition strongly oppose Israel’s military actions in Gaza. Thus, according to the author of the third accompanying excerpt from the Qatar-aligned *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, events in Gaza have forged the first “consensus among the various components of the Syrian people...since the beginning of the revolution.”

“Syrians received the news of the operation as a historic, heroic act that was able to break the prestige of the Israeli occupier...”



Damage in Gaza Strip during the October 2023.

Source: Palestinian News & Information Agency (Wafa) in contract with APImages, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Damage_in_Gaza_Strip_during_the_October_2023_-_32.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

And yet, while they agree with the operation, the Syrian government and its opposition also concur in being wary of Hamas. Hamas was an ally of the Syrian government until 2012, when it broke with Damascus and sided with members of the Syrian rebellion. In 2017, however, Hamas’s new leadership steered the group back into the pro-Iran camp, and in 2022, Hamas formally reconciled with the Syrian government.² Many in the Syrian opposition resent Hamas’s return to supporting the Syrian government, as expressed in the fourth accompanying excerpt from the Syrian opposition news website *SyriaDirect*. Similarly, the Syrian government remains skeptical of Hamas despite their recent rapprochement. Last August, Syrian President Assad accused Hamas’ leadership of “betrayal” for siding with Syrian rebels and against his government for much of the 2010s.³ Indeed,

since the “al-Aqsa Flood” attack on 7 October, the Assad government has taken steps to remove military assets from areas near the border with Israel, in a sign that it seeks to avoid becoming militarily entangled on Hamas’ side.⁴ This shared perspective between the Syrian government and opposition – widespread support for the “al-Aqsa Flood” operation, strong opposition to Israeli military activity in Gaza, and a general distrust of Hamas – is likely generalizable to other segments of the broader Arab public.

Source:

رهقي ال يذلا شيج ل ا ةر و ط س ا و ص ق ا ل ا ن ا ف و ط

Fayez al-Asmar. "Al-Aqsa Flood and the myth of the invincible army," *Syria TV* (Syrian opposition news website), 12 October 2023. <https://www.syria.tv/رهقي-ال-يذلا-شيج-ل-ا-ةر-و-ط-س-ا-و-ص-ق-ا-ل-ا-ن-ا-ف-و-ط>

In fact, the Hamas operation is an unprecedented military operation in terms of size and method of implementation in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict, and it in itself is a source of pride for the Arab and Islamic nation in every sense of the word.

Source:

ف ر ا ج ل ا ن ا ف و ط ل ا و «ص ق ا ل ا ن ا ف و ط» ن ي ب

Rifaat Badawi. "Between the al-Aqsa Flood and the torrential flood," *Al-Watan* (pro-government Syrian daily), 10 October 2023. <https://www.alwatanonline.com/ف-ر-ا-ج-ل-ا-ن-ا-ف-و-ط-ل-ا-و-ص-ق-ا-ل-ا-ن-ا-ف-و-ط-ن-ي-ب/>

The "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation will be recorded in history in golden letters that time will not erase, because it will remain engraved in the memory of the Palestinian and Arab generations who believe in

resisting and defeating the Israeli occupation, for all of Palestine, from the river to the sea, and its capital will be Holy Jerusalem, no matter how many sacrifices are made and no matter how long it takes.

Source:

ن ي ي ر و س ل ا ت د ح و ي ت ل ا ة ز غ

"Gaza, which unified Syrians," *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 15 October 2023. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/ن-ي-ي-ر-و-س-ل-ا-ت-د-ح-و-ي-ت-ل-ا-ة-ز-غ>

The "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation and the subsequent Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip formed a consensus among the various components of the Syrian people, with all their affiliations, the first of its kind since the beginning of the Syrian revolution. At

the popular level, in all opposition-controlled areas, and in diaspora countries, Syrians received the news of the operation as a historic, heroic act that was able to break the prestige of the Israeli occupier.

Source:

م ه ت ا س ا م ن و ر ك ذ ت س ي و م ه م ا ل ا ن ي ي ن ي ط س ل ف ل ا ن و ك ر ا ش ي ن و ي ر و س ل ا ة ز غ ا ن ه ب ل د ا ن م

"From Idlib to Gaza: Syrians share the pain of the Palestinians and remember their tragedy," *Syria Direct* (Syrian opposition news website), 21 October 2023. <https://syriadirect.org/م-ه-ت-ا-س-ا-م-ن-و-ر-ك-ذ-ت-س-ي-و-م-ه-م-ا-ل-ا-ن-ي-ي-ن-ي-ط-س-ل-ف-ل-ا-ن-و-ك-ر-ا-ش-ي-ن-و-ي-ر-و-س-ل-ا-ة-ز-غ-ا-ن-ه-ب-ل-د-ا-ن-م/>

Many Syrians feel let down by the Hamas movement, which restored relations with the Syrian regime in 2022, after ten years of estrangement that began when it left Damascus in February 2012. This in addition to Hamas's close relations with Iran, the regime's main ally in suppressing Syrians who protested against Assad in the spring of 2011, demanding freedom.

However, their position on Hamas did not affect their sympathy for the Palestinian cause and support for the people of Gaza, as expressed by a number of sources who spoke to Syria Direct.

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Notes:

- 1 For additional context see: “Syrians’ Reactions to the First Weeks of Israel-Hamas War,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy-Fikra Forum*, 24 October 2023. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/syrians-reactions-first-weeks-israel-hamas-war>
- 2 For additional details on Hamas in the region, see: Lucas Winter. “Hamas Rejoins the Resistance Axis,” *OE Watch*, December 2017. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/216805>
- 3 “After Assad Insulted its Leaders, Hamas to Open Office in Damascus,” *Syrian Observer*, 15 August 2023. <https://syrianobserver.com/news/84563/after-assad-insulted-its-leaders-hamas-to-open-office-in-damascus.html>
- 4 “Al-Assad Was Absent from Nasrallah’s Speech,” *Syrian Observer*, 10 November 2023. <https://syrianobserver.com/commentary/86113/al-assad-was-absent-from-nasrallahs-speech.html>

Fears of Gaza Violence Prompt Egypt To Reinforce the Sinai Border



Map of Egypt showing major cities as well as parts of surrounding countries and the Mediterranean and Red Seas.
Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/egypt/map>;
Attribution: Public Domain

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Egypt has turned its strategic focus toward its eastern border amidst rising concerns that violence from Israel’s military operation in Gaza could spill over into the Sinai Peninsula. Most concerning to Egypt’s military-led government is the potential of a massive influx of Palestinian refugees into the Sinai.¹ The Egyptian military, according to the first accompanying excerpt from the Qatar-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, is firmly opposed to any relocation of Gaza’s residents to the Sinai. Reflecting these principles, Egyptian President Sisi has stated that

“Egypt has not and will never allow the displacement of Palestinians from Gaza to Sinai.”² A secondary security concern for Egypt’s Armed Forces is cross-border fire from errant projectiles from both sides of the conflict.³

As a result of these concerns, Egypt has begun to quietly take precautions. It has increased its military and security presence around the Rafah border crossing.⁴ In late October, Egyptian military leadership conducted a readiness inspection of the Armed Forces’ 4th Armored Division, 3rd Field Army, based in Suez.⁵ Military and security measures alone, however, are

unlikely to ease the mounting pressure on Egypt’s border with Gaza. The second accompanying excerpt, also from *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, argues that Egypt will need to overhaul its strategic thinking to cope with these pressures. To do so, the author argues, the Egyptian government should provide immediate, open support for Hamas via all means possible short of war. In addition, he argues that Egypt should begin to “coordinate positions as closely as possible and share concerns and capabilities with Qatar, Turkey, Iran, and Jordan.”

Source:

دوق ع ل د ت م م ي ر ص م ض ف ر ... ء ا ن ي س ل ن ي ن ي ط س ل ف ل ا ر ي ج ه ت ت ا ط ط خ م
“Decades-long Egyptian rejection of plans to forcibly relocate Palestinians to Sinai,” *Al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 2 November 2023. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/م-ت-اط-ط-خ-م-ري-ج-ه-ت-ا-ط-ط-م>
ء ا ن ي س ل ن ي ن ي ط س ل ف ل ا ر ي ج ه ت ت ا ط ط خ م دوق ع ل د ت م م ي ر ص م ض ف ر

Despite these fears, this plan still depends on many factors in order to implement it, “some of which are

almost impossible,” according to the description of a former Egyptian security official, who spoke to

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Al-Araby Al-Jadeed on condition of anonymity. On top of these factors is “the position of the Egyptian military establishment, which absolutely rejects the idea of settling Palestinians in Sinai, due to many considerations related to Egyptian national security.”

The former official added, “The army’s rejection

of that idea existed previously, during the era of the late President Hosni Mubarak, and it still exists today, which can be seen in the messages conveyed in President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi’s recent speeches, which seemed to be directed to the armed forces in order to reassure its leaders and allay their fears.”

Source:

“Why should Egypt think about its national security in a different way?” Al-Araby al-Jadeed (Qatari-aligned daily), 12 November 2023. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/فلتختم-ل-كشيب-ي-موقل-اهن-م-أ-ي-ف-ري-كفتل-ا-ر-ص-م-ى-ل-ع-ا-ذ-ا-م-ل>

... Egyptian national security theory and its constants, or what remains of those constants, the most important of which is that threats usually come from the east, and Gaza is Egypt’s first line of defense, and that whenever Gaza collapses, Egypt’s defensive lines collapse, regardless of the degree of compatibility with the political or administrative system in power following the collapse...

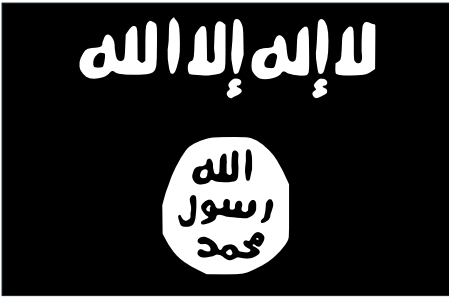
The Egyptian government must immediately stop talking about more than meager aid, as after a month

of aggression, no more people entered the Gaza Strip than they did one day before. It must restrain the “Samsung media”, as this is a major national security issue and a top priority, and this is not the time to export hatred for the Palestinian resistance and belittle it, nor the time to outbid it, condemn it, or blame the victims in any way. Rather, it is the best piece of chess through which everything you want can be achieved. Without a single concession. Egypt should coordinate positions as closely as possible and share concerns and capabilities with Qatar, Turkey, Iran, and Jordan.

Notes:

- 1 The idea of a population transfer from Gaza to the Sinai is not new and has been floated several times before. Since 7 October, several Israeli statements and documents have alluded to the forcible displacement of Gaza’s population as a policy option. See for instance: “An Israeli ministry, in a ‘concept paper,’ proposes transferring Gaza civilians to Egypt’s Sinai,” AP, 30 October 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-population-transfer-hamas-egypt-palestinians-refugees-5f99378c0af6aca183a90c631fa4da5a>; Giora Eiland. “It’s time to rip off the Hamas band-aid,” Ynet News, 12 October 2023. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/sju3uabba>
- 2 Statement quoted in: “Defend and populate Sinai,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 31 October 2023. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/511373.aspx>
- 3 This includes projectiles fired toward Israel from the south that have landed along the Sinai’s Red Sea coast, as well as cross-border Israeli fire that hit an Egyptian border guard post near Gaza. On the former, see: “Drone blasts hit two Egyptian Red Sea towns, Israel points to Houthi,” AP, 27 October 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/explosion-heard-egyptian-red-sea-town-near-israeli-border-witness-2023-10-27/> On the latter, see: “At least seven injured as Israeli tank ‘accidentally’ hits Egyptian border,” *al-Jazeera*, 22 October 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/22/at-least-seven-injured-as-israeli-tank-accidentally-hits-egyptian-border>
- 4 Images of Egyptian special forces deployed in Rafah can be found at: <https://twitter.com/mahmouedgamal44/status/1715623393909694745>
- 5 The inspection included the first official appearance of the South Korean K9A1 155 mm self-propelled howitzer in the Egyptian military. For images and description of the platforms involved see: <https://twitter.com/mahmouedgamal44/status/1717074441501290762>.

Pakistan Deporting Approximately 1.7 Million Undocumented Afghanis in Response to Terrorist Attacks



Flag of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Tehrik-i-Taliban_Pakistan.png#globalusage;
Attribution: Public Domain

By Christopher Betts
OE Watch Commentary

Pakistan continues to struggle with a series of terror attacks, leading the government to resort to mass deportations of Afghan refugees to curb the violence. According to the first excerpted article from the Pashto-language version of the German media company *Deutsche Welle*, terrorists carried out four separate attacks in Pakistan between 3 and 6 November 2023. The attacks, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Balochistan provinces, resulted in the deaths of 17 soldiers, five civilians, with another 24 wounded. The article notes that ten militants were killed in response, and “security forces have received Afghan ID cards from six of the militants killed in the Zhob [Balochistan] attack.” Amid rising tensions due to the ongoing acts of terrorism, the regional government of the Balochistan province alleged that both border nations, Iran and Afghanistan, were involved in recent attacks to increase political pressure on Pakistan. No evidence was provided to substantiate these allegations.

Pakistan’s proposed solution to counter the ongoing violence inside its borders includes the deportation of approximately 1.7 million undocumented Afghanis, some of whom have lived in Pakistan for up to 40 years, according to the second excerpt from the independent Afghan news outlet *Hasht e Subh*. As of December 2023, over 400,000 have left Pakistan.¹ A majority of the remaining refugees currently reside in either the Balochistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces that border Afghanistan.² The article notes that Pakistan has not been able to successfully contain the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP)) and has frequently accused the Afghan refugee population of collaborating with the TTP. The article alleges

and other like-minded groups, resulting in additional terrorist attacks.³ The mass expulsion of undocumented refugees has already created a burden on both the Afghan and Pakistani governments from an economic and human rights perspective.

“Suppose that the Pakistani government succeeds in deporting all Afghan refugees, will terrorism be eradicated? Obviously not.”

that the Pakistani military has used both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban to further its own geopolitical agenda when convenient. Some Afghan refugees allege that the Pakistani government is committing acts of terrorism by expelling them from the land. A mass deportation of a long-standing population may also lead to an increase in grievances by that community and possibly increased support for the TTP

Source: “۴ ڀيرو ۲۸ ساعون ۾ ۴ حملو ڪيو ويو (Pakistan: Militants have carried out 4 attacks in 48 hours),” *Deutsche Welle* (German news site), 6 November 2023. <https://p.dw.com/p/4YRJH>

According to security sources, militants carried out another attack in The Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa yesterday, but this is the fourth attack on Pakistani security forces in the past 48 hours. Last night, police raided a police checkpoint in Ismail Khan district with heavy weapons. The exchange between the police and the armed forces lasted about half an hour, but the militants eventually fled. Police say they have cordoned off the area and are searching for suspected attackers. In the past three days, terrorists have carried out major attacks in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Balochistan provinces, killing 17 security forces, five civilians and wounding about 24 others, including police. Police claimed to have killed 10 people in the attack.

In recent days, attacks in different parts of Pakistan

have increased. In the wake of the latest incidents, Balochistan’s regional government has claimed that two neighbouring countries are involved in the terrorist attacks because they want to pressure Pakistan. Balochistan’s Acting Information Minister, Jan Achakzai, told a news conference on Sunday that Pakistan was facing attacks “on both sides” but that it could not undermine the government’s will to defeat terrorists. He claimed that security forces had obtained identification cards from six of the militants killed in the attack. John Achakzai accused India of spreading insecurity in the region and that India’s intelligence agency, “Ro” is “involved in terrorist attacks in Pakistan.” Referring to the two terrorist attacks last week, he said: “We have repeatedly mentioned that India is involved in the terrorist attacks in the country, especially in Balochistan.”

Source: “د ځي ه ن ه ځن م هل ڀرگهرت ڀک ناتسکاپ ه ڀ هرس ولتسڀا ه ڀ ول اوډک د” (Terrorism in Pakistan will not disappear by expelling refugees)” *Hasht e Subh* (independent Afghan news site), 5 November 2023. <https://8am.media/ps/terrorism-in-pakistan-will-not-disappear-by-expelling-refugees/>

The interim government of Pakistan has started deporting Afghan refugees en masse, which has provoked widespread protests. The interim prime minister of Pakistan has emphasized that all those illegal Afghan refugees who have been living in Pakistan for the past 40 years will be deported. This move has deepened the crisis which is not new for the Afghans and they have been dealing with it for decades. With the rule of the Taliban, the crisis of immigration has not decreased, but has expanded and increased... This has caused citizens to move to neighboring countries. This is not the only result of the arrival of the Taliban. The strengthening of terrorist groups and the development of their activities is also one of the destructive consequences of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan... The government of Pakistan, which is unable to control the TTP and has not given the desired result to the pressure on the Afghan Taliban to suppress this group, has increased the pressure on the Afghan refugees and accuses the Afghan refugees of terrorist attacks... There is no

doubt that the Taliban is involved in many terrorist attacks in Pakistan and will continue to be in the future. But it cannot be that all Afghan refugees are considered terrorists or collaborators of terrorists and the solution is to seek their deportation. In reality, Afghan refugees have not only played an important role in the growth and strengthening of terrorism, but are considered the primary victims of the development of terrorist groups’ activities.

The terrorism that the government of Pakistan is using to expel Afghan refugees from their land today is the result of the deadly game that the soldiers of this country have skillfully played for years and the result was full of benefits for them. Thanks to the terrorist industry managed by the Pakistani army, the people of this country have not seen a stable civilian government and the army has control over all affairs. Terrorism is actually a pretense through which the soldiers introduce themselves as the saviors of Pakistan. If they are not there, the country will

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become food for wolves... It is not yet clear whether the TTP, as well as the Afghan Taliban, have really escaped the control of the Pakistani army or not; But what can't be doubted is that the main threat to Pakistan is the soldiers, or to put it bluntly, the managers of the terrorist industry, not the Afghan refugees or the Pashtuns of this country. The Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line are the main victims of terrorism trained by the Pakistan Army.

In the last few decades, one of the important tasks of the religious seminaries established in Pakistan with the support of the army was the training of the hard-line jihadi generation, who as proxy soldiers of the ESA during the invasion of the Soviet Union and also during the presence of the American forces in Afghanistan, the Pakistani army overthrew the western-backed government in Afghanistan and

established its own proxy regime in the country. But now that the jihad in Afghanistan is over, according to the terrorists, how and where will the thousands of jihadists trained in the religious schools of Pakistan quench their thirst for jihad... Suppose that the Pakistani government succeeds in deporting all Afghan refugees, will terrorism be eradicated? Obviously not. The main supporter of terrorism in Pakistan is the army, which is in control of the entire country, and thus, the main source of terrorism in Pakistan is religious madrassas, which continue to operate whether they are children of Afghan refugees or not. and the army does not care about them. Are only Afghans committing suicide attacks? No. Pakistanis are ahead of Afghans in terrorism and extremism...

Notes:

- 1 A supplemental report by the Associated Press detailing recent updates in the deportation of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan: Sattar, Abdul and Munir Ahmed. "A Pakistani province aims to deport 10,000 Afghans a day," *Associated Press*, November 30, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-baluchistan-deport-migrants-afghans-7393238ace4c49acce9d7c77ebd708bf>
- 2 For additional information on Afghan refugees in Pakistan, please visit the United Nations Refugee data website: "Registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan" United Nations Operational Data Portal. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak>
- 3 To learn more about the potential impact of grievances and their effect on terrorism globally, see: Murphy, Natalie. "Why Grievances Matter: An Analysis of the Influence Grievances Have on Domestic Terrorism Globally," Johns Hopkins University, [Thesis] May 2022. <https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/0f722198-6850-4d16-8250-5fcad421430b/content>

Malian Coup Leader Faces Challenges Reconquering Kidal

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Over the past half-decade, Malian insurgents, and especially the al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for Supporters of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), have expanded their influence across northern Mali and have begun to control key towns in that region, such as the primarily Tuareg-inhabited Kidal. However, according to the excerpted article from the French-language publication *togotimes.com*, interim president of Mali, Assimi Goïta, has vowed to reconquer Kidal. While the Malian Army may be more powerful than JNIM, the reconquest and government rule of Kidal raises questions about heavy-handed tactics the Malian Army will employ and whether the Army will cooperate with Russia's Wagner Group,¹ which has aided it in counterterrorism for the past year.²

At the same time, Goïta is rejecting any negotiations with the Coalition of the Movement of Azawad (CMA),³ which

seeks autonomy for Tuareg regions of northern Mali. Unlike JNIM, which is explicitly jihadist and unwilling to compromise with the state, the CMA accepts Mali's legitimacy as a nation-state. In his speech, Goïta stated he would send the Army to liberate any area of the country that disassociates from being "Malian," which hinted at little room for accommodation of the "Tuareg" CMA. Goïta's threats to send warplanes to bomb Kidal alongside his partnership with Wagner suggest that an excessively harsh military operation may be underway and that it could alienate civilians in northern Mali from government rule and ultimately favor recruitment into JNIM or the CMA.

Less than two weeks after Goïta's speech, discussed in the excerpted article in French-language media *agencecofin.com*, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) withdrew from its base in Aguelhok, Kidal region

following demands from Goïta and other Malian coup leaders.⁴ However, Goïta condemned MINUSMA for its accelerated exit from Aguelhok due to intensified combat with JNIM and not transferring the base or weapons to the Malian Army. Rather, MINUSMA destroyed them so they would not fall into the hands of JNIM, which ultimately took over the Aguelhok base for a short period of time.⁵

"I am sending planes to bomb their positions and the army will return to Kidal..."

The rapid MINUSMA withdrawal and JNIM advances in its aftermath will make Goïta's realization of his promise to reconquer and hold Kidal more difficult, even as his political credibility rests on it. On top of this, cooperation with Wagner could result in the alienation of northern Malian civilians from the government. Further, the chasm between Goïta and the CMA make any political resolution in northern Mali less likely as well.



MINUSMA Goundam 2015.

Source: Attribution: MINUSMA https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MINUSMA_Goundam_2015.jpg; Attribution: CC x 2.0

Source: “Ce message important d’Assimi Goïta au CMA, le JNIM et leurs llies (This important message from Assimi Goïta to the CMA, JNIM and their allies),” *togotimes.com* (French-language publication edited in Togo that provides commentary on current affairs in Francophone African countries), 10 October 2023. https://togotimes.info/2023/10/10/mali-ce-message-important-dassimi-goita-au-cma-le-jnim-et-leurs-allies/#google_vignette

The reconquering of Malian territory will not be a subject to discussion. Regarding this point, the latest transitional president Assimi Goïta is categorical. There is no question of him accepting a compromise with anyone. He refused the elders of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, who were sent by the CMA, JNIM, and their allies to negotiate.

“We must dissolve any entity from one state or another and dissociate ourselves from any movement. You have to accept being Malian.... I am sending planes to bomb their positions and the army will return to Kidal before the 30th and if MINUSMA gets involved, the Malian people will decide their fate.”

Source: “Bamako accuse la Minusma d’avoir précipité son retrait du camp d’Aguelhok sans le rétrocéder (Bamako accuses MINUSMA of expediting its withdrawal from the Aguelhok camp without handing it over),” *agenceecofin.com* (French-language publication based in Geneva, Switzerland and Yaounde, Cameroon that focuses on African economic affairs), 26 October 2023. <https://www.agenceecofin.com/securite/2610-113102-mali-bamako-accuse-la-minusma-d-avoir-precipite-son-retrait-du-camp-daguelhok-sans-le-retroceder>

The Malian army condemned in a press release released on Tuesday afternoon, October 24, the withdrawal of MINUSMA from the Aguelhok camp without handing it over. According to the FAMA, this rapid departure aided the introduction of “terrorists to destroy several installations,” the message added.

The areas abandoned by MINUSMA have, for several months, been at the center of violent clashes between the FAMA and armed rebel groups in the north of the country.... But faced with intensifying fighting, the UN mission decided to accelerate its exit from the area, and condemned in the process the destruction of some of its equipment in attacks.

Notes:

- 1 For additional details on Russia’s deepening engagement with Mali and neighboring Sahelian states, see Jason Warner, “Russia-Supported Military Rulers in Mali, Burkina, and Guinea Continue To Deepen Ties,” *OE Watch*, 04-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russia-supported-military-rulers-in-mali-burkina-faso-and-guinea-continue-to-deepen-ties/>
- 2 Human Rights Watch, for example, found that “Malian armed forces and foreign fighters apparently from the Russia-linked Wagner Group have summarily executed and forcibly disappeared several dozen civilians in Mali’s central region since December 2022.... They also destroyed and looted civilian property and allegedly tortured detainees in an army camp. See Human Rights Watch, “Mali: New Atrocities by Malian Army, Apparent Wagner Fighters,” July 24, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/24/mali-new-atrocities-malian-army-apparent-wagner-fighters>
- 3 The CMA is signed the Algiers Peace Accords in June 2015, which sought “to restore peace in Mali principally through a process of decentralisation or regionalisation, reconstituting a national army from the members of the former armed groups that were signatories, and boosting the economy (particularly in the north), based on dialogue, justice and national reconciliation.” The coalition is composed of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l’Azawad (MNLA), the Haut Conseil pour l’Unité de l’Azawad (HCUA), and part of the Mouvement Arabe de l’Azawad (MAA-CMA), which were all formerly pro-independence movements in northern Mali. However, the CMA has remained an umbrella organization for northern Mali Tuareg militias. See International Crisis Group, “Mali’s Algiers Peace Agreement, Five Years On: An Uneasy Calm,” June 24, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/laccord-dalger-cinq-ans-apres-un-calme-precaire-dont-il-ne-faut-pas-se-satisfaire>

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- 4 The latest era of pervasive instability in Mali began in 2012, when the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led an attack on Aguelhok and subsequently other northern Malian towns. Several weeks later, in March 2012, one of the future JNIM coalition components, Ansar al-Din, released a video of its fighters massacring dozens of Malian soldiers at the Aguelhok base. After this, Ansar al-Din and other al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) allies took control over most of northern Mali. This led to the military overthrow of the civilian government in Bamako and later, in early 2013, the French-led military intervention in northern Mali. The intervention expelled Ansar al-Din, AQIM, and their allies – at least temporarily – from the territories they held in northern Mali, including Aguelhok. See: Alexander Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, “A Handbook on Mali’s 2012-2013 Crisis,” Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), Working Paper No. 13-001, 2 September 2013. <https://sahelresearch.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/170/ISITA-13-001-Thurston-Lebovich.pdf>
- 5 France24 journalist Wassim Nasr posted on X (formerly Twitter) the claim by JNIM of an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on a MINUSMA convoy as it was departing the Aguelhok base. According to JNIM “all of the occupants” of one vehicle were killed. This claim reflected how JNIM was prepared to immediately frustrate and take advantage of the MINUSMA withdrawal to seize the base and pilfer items from it before the Malian armed forces could arrive. Wassim Nasr, “#Mali #JNIM #AQMI revendique un IED contre un convoi @UN_MINUSMA à #Aguelhok « le 23.10 un véhicule détruit [...] tous les occupants tués » // « le 24.10 un IED contre un blindé FAMA & #Wagner entre #Hombori et #Gossi [...] tous les passagers tués »,” X (formerly Twitter), 25 October 2023. <https://twitter.com/SimNasr/status/1717211647608021370>

Israel's Operation in Gaza Compounding Logistical Delays for India's Armed Forces

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Two months after Russia began its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, India began to experience delays in deliveries of weapons and equipment from Russia. The Israeli operations in Gaza have only compounded the delays.¹ The accompanying excerpted article from the independent English-language news website *The Wire* reports on the ongoing delays of military equipment from not only Russia, but now Israel, as it carries out its Gaza operation. The article examines how two of India's main suppliers of weapon systems and equipment, Russia and Israel, are currently engaged in conflicts. It also notes how Israel has not provided India with major platforms or systems like Russia has but provided components for various systems as well as different munitions. These components have been implemented into systems of all branches of the Indian Armed Forces making it difficult to quantify the number of Israeli systems in Indian platforms. The author of the article ends by mentioning that Russia's and Israel's conflicts could motivate India to pursue alternatives to continue building its defense industry. While the article does not offer specifics on how India will deal with the delays, the situation may push India to seek other partners to find short and long-term solutions to grow the country's defense industry.



Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the India-Israel Business Summit, in New Delhi on January 15, 2018.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Prime_Minister,_Shri_Narendra_Modi_and_the_Prime_Minister_of_Israel,_Mr._Benjamin_Netanyahu_at_the_India-Israel_Business_Summit_in_New_Delhi_on_January_15,_2018_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Prime_Minister,_Shri_Narendra_Modi_and_the_Prime_Minister_of_Israel,_Mr._Benjamin_Netanyahu_at_the_India-Israel_Business_Summit_in_New_Delhi_on_January_15,_2018_(2).jpg); Attribution: Government Open Data License - India (GODL)

“Consequently, in light of the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and now in Gaza, Russia and Israel, he warned, could well end up either failing to meet India’s numerous materiel requirements or delaying deliveries interminably.”

Source: Rahul Bedi, “Ukraine and Gaza May Impact Russia and Israel’s Ability to Sustain Materiel Exports to India,” *The Wire* (an independent English-language news website in India), 14 October 2023. <https://thewire.in/security/ukraine-gaza-materiel-exports-to-india>

The involvement of India’s two principal materiel providers – Russia and Israel – in their respective wars and conflicts has the potential to impact the inflow of defence equipment supplies into the country, warned a cross-section of service veterans and military analysts.

...This equalled a whopping 55% or so of Russian and Israeli military imports for India...

Retired Brigadier Rahul Bhonsle of the Security Risks

Asia consultancy in Delhi said that while the BJP-led government had launched the atamnirbhar initiative to indigenise Indian military needs, Delhi still topped the global list of defence equipment importers.

Consequently, in light of the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and now in Gaza, Russia and Israel, he warned, could well end up either failing to meet India’s numerous materiel requirements or delaying deliveries interminably.

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Unlike Russia, Israel does not provide India any major platforms, but supplies critical and innovative force multipliers like unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), assorted missile, guidance and avionics systems, precision-guided munitions, diverse sensors and surveillance and targeting radars, amongst other equipment.

Most of this was fitted onto combat aircraft, helicopters, warships, submarines and armoured vehicles.

But such equipment and component diversity made it difficult to quantify the exact or even near-precise percentages of Israeli military equipment in service with India's armed forces.

...(though) Israel's ongoing war in Gaza against Hamas was 'unlikely' to impact military hardware and spares supplies to India in the short term, they cautioned that an extended conflict could jeopardise deliveries.

...Once diplomatic ties with Israel were instituted under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992, the two sides fast-tracked their strategic and defence relationship based on mutual security and commercial interests.

Israel, for its part, rightly perceived a commercial opportunity, while India looked upon Tel Aviv as a reliable and 'no-questions-asked' materiel provider, especially of varied ammunition and missile systems which India's military badly lacked, and still does.

Nonetheless, it still took another six-odd years and the BJP's ascent to power under Prime Minister Atal

Behari Vajpayee for Israel's defence machinery to definitively establish itself in India...

However, it was the 11-week long Kargil war with Pakistan in 1999 that catapulted Israel's defence industry to centre stage domestically.

As the seriousness of the deadly conflict unfolded, commercially savvy Israel dug deep into its military reserves to supply India high-end hardware, especially badly-needed 155mm rounds for its FH-77B Bofors howitzers, laser-guided munitions and other ordnance that contributed largely to the Pakistan Army vacating the mountainous region's siege and ending hostilities.

Two decades later, the Indian Air Force's (IAF's) Mirage 2000H fighters in their attack on a Pakistani militant training camp at Balakot in Pakhtunkhwa in February 2019, fired specifically configured Israeli Crystal Maze Mk2 missiles (variants of the Rafael Advanced Defence Systems AGM-142 Raptor Have Nap/Popeye missile)...

...And though India had reduced its dependence on Russia for military equipment by some 33% between 2011 and 2020 in an effort to diversify its network of materiel suppliers, switching entirely to alternate sources was not an option military-planners in Delhi desired, as it entailed colossal expenditure, reworked infrastructure, inordinate delays and doctrinal changes.

Perhaps the individual wars in Ukraine and Gaza and the constraints these could impose on Russia and Israel's ability to export defence equipment may end up providing alternative routes to sustain and modernise India's military through indigenous efforts.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on India's issues with deliveries of ordnance since the war in Ukraine began, see: Matthew Stein "India Takes a Step Away from the Russian Defense Industry," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 31 July 2023. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3475660/india-takes-a-step-away-from-the-russian-defense-industry/>

Azerbaijan's Joint Exercise With Turkey Sends Familiar Warning Message to Armenia

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Azerbaijan has carried out several joint military exercises with Turkey in recent years as part of their security cooperation partnership. Past exercises with Turkey have often sought to prepare Azerbaijani forces for a potential conflict with Armenian-backed separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh and gain experience from Turkey's Armed Forces.¹ The accompanying excerpted article from the independent Caucasus-based news website *Kavkazskiy Uzel* reports on a joint Azerbaijan-Turkey exercise that took place in October 2023, which has sent a familiar

message to Armenia. According to an expert who previously worked in the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, the recent exercise serves as a warning to Armenia. Even though Azerbaijan regained control over Nagorno-Karabakh from ethnic Armenians in an operation a month prior to the exercise taking place, the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia have yet to reach an agreement demarcating their border, with disputes leading to several clashes along the border over the past few years. Azerbaijan's exercise ultimately shows how it continues to develop its Armed Forces with Turkey's help in preparation for a poten-

tial conflict with Armenia.

Yet, the article mentions that the most recent exercise is different from previous ones because it involved more types of units outside of Azerbaijan's Army, including missile and artillery, engineer, and special forces units. The exercise is also different because there are no longer Armenian troops on Azerbaijan's territory. Given that Azerbaijan regained control of Nagorno-Karabakh it presumably no longer needs to conduct that type of scenario in an exercise.

“The exercises are still another warning to Armenia to refrain from any border provocations and cool the attitude of those who harbor ideas and goals of revenge.”



Turkish Armed Forces at the Victory Parade 2020 in Baku.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_Armed_Forces_at_the_Victory_Parade_2020_in_Baku_2.jpg;
Attribution: CCA 4.0

Source: Faik Majid, “Аналитики в Баку оценили значение азербайджано-турецких учений (Analysts in Baku assessed the meaning of the Azerbaijan-Turkish exercise),” *Kavkazskiy Uzel* (independent Caucasus-based news website), 25 October 2023. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/393732>

“Up to three thousand military personnel are taking part in the joint Azerbaijani-Turkish military exercises “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk - 2023”, which began on October 23 in Baku, Nakhichevan, as well as in the territories of Karabakh that came under the control of Azerbaijan.

The current joint Azerbaijani-Turkish military

exercises differ from previous ones in that they involve almost all types of troops, military expert, former employee of the information and analytical department of the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan Azad Isazade told the “Caucasian Knot”...

Judging by official reports, units of the ground forces of the Azerbaijani army, a separate combined
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arms army stationed in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, the Air Force, missile and artillery troops, engineering troops, special forces, even special forces of the Navy and representatives of the relevant types of troops of the Turkish Armed Forces are taking part in the exercises...

“Azerbaijan, after the anti-terrorist operation on September 19-20, restored its territorial integrity. There are no longer Armenian troops on its territory. However, the exercises are still another warning to Armenia to refrain from any border provocations and cool the attitude of those who harbor ideas and goals of revenge,” the military expert suggested.

The algorithm of joint exercises between Azerbaijan and Turkey indicates Baku’s determination to transfer its army to the Turkish model of armed forces, says military expert, retired officer Adalat Verdiyev... One of the advantages of the Turkish army model is that small groups of special forces, commandos, even without the participation of artillery and other types of combat units, can independently successfully complete missions, going deep into rear of the enemy over long distances, or suddenly deliver crushing blows to the enemy’s forward positions,” said Verdiyev...

Notes:

- 1 For more information on past Azerbaijan-Turkey exercises, see: Matthew Stein “Azerbaijan’s Post-War Exercise with Turkey,” *OE Watch*, March 2021. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/382686>

African Government Support for Palestinian Territories Spreads

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

While the earliest days of the war between Israel and Hamas elicited the greatest amount of support for the Palestinian Territories from civil societies in North Africa, increasingly, both governments and civil societies in other locations around the African continent are similarly choosing sides, typically in support of the Palestinian Territories.¹

The most vociferous calls in support of the Palestinian Territories, and Hamas, have come from some of the continent's Muslim-majority states. According to the first article from the Mogadishu-based *Shabelle Media*, Somalia's prime minister, Hamza Abdi Barre, has rejected calls to label Hamas a terrorist organization. Instead, he publicly declared that "Hamas is a liberation organization... struggling to liberate the Palestinian land from Jews; we will not accept to call it a terror organization." Such rhetoric from Somalia's government is particularly interesting given that it faces its own significant threats from Al-Shabaab, itself one of the world's most violent jihadist terrorist groups. According to the second excerpted article from the pan-African news aggregator *AllAfrica.com*, similar manifestations of support for the Palestinian Territories have emerged in Libya. Though the country is currently divided into two warring factions vying for official recognition, the eastern side's parliament, overseen by General Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army (LNA), recently released a statement urging the expul-



Tunisians protest in support of Palestine in 2021. Since the Hamas attack on Israel in October, governments and civil societies around the African continent have shown a disproportionate amount of support for Palestine.

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

sion of entities that support Israel and the cessation of the export of oil and gas to those countries that support Israel. It particularly decried what it deemed to be hypocritical rhetoric on the support of human rights by the United States, the U.K., France, and Italy, which the parliament argued "support the Zionist entity [Israel] in its crimes."

For its part, Senegal's president, Macky Sall, has led his state to a slightly more balanced outlook. According to the third article from the Senegal-based *DakarActu*, Sall has decried deaths in Gaza, urged a two-state solution, but has still shown some degree of preference in proposing the creation of a global solidarity fund to support the people of Gaza. Outside of these pro-Palestinian government policies, African civil society support of the Palestinian Territories has also been evident, even in non-Muslim majority

states. According to the fourth article from the South Africa-based news site *GroundUp*, large pro-Palestinian marches have occurred in Cape Town, with protestors urging the closure of the Israeli Embassy in South Africa. African states in which the U.S. Army operates are demonstrating opposing views on the issue that have the potential to cause diplomatic friction given ongoing U.S. military aid to Israel.

"Hamas is a liberation organization and mujahideen struggling to liberate the Palestinian land from Jews, we will not accept to call it a terror group."

Source: “Somali PM says Hamas is not terrorist organization, calls it a liberation group,” *Shabelle Media* (Mogadishu, Somalia-based news publication), 2 November 2023. <https://shabellemedia.com/somali-pm-says-hamas-is-not-terrorist-organisation-calls-it-a-liberation-group/>

Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre said that the government of Somalia refused to call Hamas a “terrorist organization” and did not heed pressure.

“Hamas is a liberation organization and mujahideen struggling to liberate the Palestinian land from Jews, we will not accept to call it a terror group,” added Barre...

The Muslim world was divided, made enemies of each other, and forced to call Hamas a terrorist organization. We don’t say it, and we don’t accept it,” said the prime minister...

The Somali Prime Minister said the solution is to find two states – Israel and Palestine,” We will not compromise until we see a Palestinian government with Jerusalem as its capital.

Somalia is among many Muslim countries, including Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen that do not recognize Israel as a state.

Source: Jerry Chifamba, “Libya’s Parliament Orders Out of Countries Supporting Israel,” *AllAfrica.com* (pan-African news aggregator), 26 October 2023. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202310260518.html>

The Libyan parliament on Wednesday, October 25, requested that ambassadors from countries that “support” Israel in its conflict with Hamas in Gaza leave the country...

In an announcement posted on its official website, the parliament located in the east, supported by military leader Khalifa Haftar in Libya, which is divided between two opposing administrations, threatened to shut off energy supplies if “massacres” against Palestinians continued.

“We demand that the ambassadors of the states which support the Zionist entity (Israel) in its crimes leave the territory (of Libya) immediately,” the

statement read.

“If the massacres committed by the Zionist enemy do not stop, we demand that the Libyan government suspend the export of oil and gas to the states that support it,” it said.

The acts of “the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy” were condemned “in the strongest terms” by the parliament. According to the statement, the leaders of these countries “lecture on human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination” while they “support the Zionist entity in its crimes” in Gaza, it said...

Source: “Bombardements à Gaza: Macky Sall propose ‘la mise en place d’un fonds de solidarité en faveur du peuple palestinien,’” (“Bombings in Gaza: Macky Sall proposes “the establishment of a solidarity fund for the Palestinian people”), *DakarActu* (private Senegal-based news site), 11 November 2023. https://www.dakaractu.com/Bombardements-a-Gaza-Macky-Sall-propose-la-mise-en-place-d-un-fonds-de-solidarite-en-faveur-du-peuple-palestinien_a240238.html

From Riyadh where he is, the head of state, Macky Sall, says he is concerned about the situation prevailing in Gaza. He called for the establishment of a solidarity fund for the Palestinian people.

“As we sit here, I think of the unbearable human tragedy in Gaza. Senegal reiterates its serious concern at so many deaths, injuries and destruction.”...

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Thus, he said: “I call for the establishment of a solidarity fund in favor of the Palestinian people. Only a peaceful settlement, establishing two independent and sovereign States, Israel and Palestine, each within

secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, will bring peace for all.

Source: Matthew Hirsch, “Thousands march in Cape Town, call for ceasefire in Gaza,” *GroundUp* (private South Africa-based news site), 22 October 2023. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/thousands-march-in-cape-town-calling-for-ceasefire-in-gaza/>

Several thousand people marched through the streets of Salt River, Cape Town, on Sunday in a show of solidarity for the people of Palestine.

The march was organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Salt River Heritage Society. It was one many pro-Palestine marches across the world this weekend...Protesters held placards and flags, while chants of “free Palestine” and “stop the genocide, stop the hate” were heard.

The protesters demanded that the Israeli embassy be shut down. They also called for an immediate ceasefire and for support for humanitarian aid for Gaza. They called for South Africans who serve in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to be prosecuted.

Notes:

- 1 For more on early support for Palestine emanating from northern Africa, see: Jason Warner, “North Africa Shows Wave of Support for Palestinians at Start of Israel-Hamas War,” *OE Watch* 10-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2024/north-african-wave-of-support-for-palestinians-at-onset-of-israel-hamas-war/>

Ukraine Launches Counteroffensive in Sudan and Across Africa To Minimize Russian Influence

By Jason Warner
OE Watch Commentary

While the diplomatic implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been felt in Africa,¹ the security implications have been less so. That appears to be changing. As the first accompanying article from the Nigeria-based *Military Africa* monitoring site suggests, members of the Ukrainian special forces appear to have targeted members of the Russian Wagner Group operating in Sudan supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In April 2023, fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary RSF, two groups that had previously worked together to oust Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir in 2019, and then led a subsequent military coup in 2021. As tensions between the two groups rose post-2021 coup, fighting broke out in the spring of 2023. Reporting has suggested that Wagner Group forces—which have been in Sudan

since 2017 to support deposed President Al-Bashir—are now aiding the RSF, providing the faction surface-to-air missiles and other support. Notable is that Ukrainian special forces have taken their fight against Russia to Sudan, allegedly working with members of the SAF to attack the rival RSF/Wagner contingents in the country. As the article notes, other reporting has suggested that Ukrainian mercenaries not officially associated with the government may also be participating in fighting in Sudan on the side of the SAF.

Indeed, this news from Sudan falls in line with Ukraine’s August 2023 pledge to radically revive Ukraine’s relations with African countries to lessen what one Ukrainian diplomat called Moscow’s “grip” on the continent based on “coercion, corruption, and fear.”² Showing that the African continent is emerging as part of the broader landscape of the Russia-Ukraine conflict,



Following its invasion by Russia, Ukraine is now launching a counteroffensive against Russian influence in Africa.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa_Ukraine_Locator.png; Attribution: BY-SA 4.0

the second article from the Nigerian newspaper *Premium Times* describes how, even during its war, Ukraine plans to invest \$25 million to create ten new embassies in Africa over the coming years, adding to the current eleven. Sudan is among the ten countries in which Ukraine plans to open a new embassy. Commenting on the opening of new Ukrainian embassies in Africa to counter Moscow, President Zelensky has noted: “We are not afraid of Russia’s presence in any African country.”

“Ukraine’s involvement in attacking Wagner forces in Africa signifies a limited yet noteworthy expansion of the Ukrainian conflict.”

Source: “Africa emerges as the new battleground between Russia and Ukraine,” *Military Africa* (Nigeria-based military news aggregator), 9 November 2023. <https://www-military-africa.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www-military.africa/2023/11/africa-emerges-as-the-new-battleground-between-russia-and-ukraine/?amp=1>

Recent reports suggest that Ukrainian special services may have played a role in a series of attacks against forces affiliated with Russia’s Wagner Group and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan, thousands of miles from the main theater of war.

But, since the outbreak of war in Sudan earlier this year, there have also been reported suspicions of Ukrainian mercenaries fighting on the side of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in their battle against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This

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April, CNN reported that Wagner had supplied RSF paramilitaries with missiles.

Notably, the action didn't occur within Ukraine's borders, but rather against forces associated with Wagner Private Military Company (PMC) and the RSF...

The videos depict a special unit sniper of the Ukrainian Defense Intelligence Directorate (GUR)

conducting precision strikes on Wagner Private Military Company (PMC) forces in Sudan. This expands the theater of the Ukraine-Russia conflict into Africa, with Ukraine's intelligence agency vowing to hunt down Wagner forces anywhere in the world...

Ukraine's involvement in attacking Wagner forces in Africa signifies a limited yet noteworthy expansion of the Ukrainian conflict.

Source: Chiamaka Okafor, "Ukraine to invest \$25 million in establishing embassies in Africa," *Premium Times (Nigeria)*, (Lagos, Niger-based daily), 15 November 2023. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/643589-ukraine-to-invest-25-million-in-establishing-embassies-in-africa.html>

The Government of Ukraine on Wednesday said it is set to invest \$25 million in establishing nine embassies in African countries. This was revealed by Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal in Kyiv while meeting with African journalists. He said the establishment of these embassies was a part of Ukraine's African renaissance and rekindling its relationship with its African counterparts...

Ukraine, according to the prime minister, already has 11 embassies in Africa and is ready to open 10 more. Clarifying, he said plans to open an embassy in Ghana have already been finalised and not included in the \$25 million budgeted for the other nine. The other nine countries include Sudan, Mozambique,

Botswana, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Tanzania.

According to the prime minister's office, the plan to establish these embassies in Africa and other parts of the world had been developed in 2019 by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy until the war derailed the plans. Asked if he was concerned by the growing presence of Russia's Wagner Group in Africa, he said, "We are not afraid of Russia's presence in any African country..."

He added that the presence of Wagner in any part of the world is a bad signal although "no third party will stop us from moving forward."

Notes:

- 1 For more reading on the ways that Africa has responded to the Ukraine-Russia war, see: Jason Warner, "Morocco Sending Military Equipment to Ukraine," *OE Watch*, 02-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/morocco-sending-military-equipment-to-ukraine/>; Jason Warner, "African Stances on the Russia-Ukraine War Demonstrate Reliance on, Antipathy Toward West," *OE Watch*, 09-2022. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2022/african-stances-on-the-russia-ukraine-war-demonstrate-reliance-on-antipathy-toward-west/>
- 2 For more on the August 2023 Ukrainian declaration of a revival of its relations with Africa to lessen Russia's grip, see: "Ukraine announces a long fight against the 'Russian hold in Africa,'" *AfricaNews.com*, 17 August 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/08/17/ukraine-announces-a-long-fight-against-the-russian-hold-in-africa/>