

OEWATCH

Issue 7
2025

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



**China Develops
Capabilities for
Anti-AI Operations**

8

**North Korea's
Unusual
Acknowledgement
of Destroyer
Launch Failure**

34

**Latin American
Criminal Groups
Increase Drone Use**

39

CHINA

China Conducts First Western Pacific Dual Aircraft Carrier Drill

China conducted its first dual aircraft carrier exercises in the Western Pacific, with Liaoning operating beyond the Second Island Chain—demonstrating expanding power projection and the PLAN's growing far-seas combat capability.

5

China Develops Capabilities for Anti-AI Operations

The Chinese PLA is researching ways to mentally confuse, disrupt, and disable the adversary's AI systems through the manipulation and destruction of data, algorithms, and computing power.

8

China Pursues Quantum Information Capabilities

China has reportedly unveiled the first cryptographic system that integrates quantum key distribution and a post-quantum encryption algorithm, potentially giving a significant advantage in future domination of quantum information.

11

China's Response to Iran Attacks Shows Limits of Its Interests

Although China is an ally and supporter of Iran, it is unlikely to risk its core interest to capture Taiwan by getting militarily involved in the Iran-Israel conflict.

13

China's Growing Influence in Egypt

China is deepening ties with Egypt via joint drills, arms sales, and major SCZone investments. Egyptian commentaries affirming deepening ties with China are not necessarily at the expense of ties with the United States.

16

China Targets Colombia in Its Latest Latin America Advance

At a recent regional summit, Colombia signed an MOU to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. Shortly thereafter, China moved to displace previous agreements between Colombia and Sweden for fighter jets.

19

RUSSIA

Russia Offering Disparate Recruiting Bonuses To Fight in Ukraine

Reductions in enlistment targets suggest that Moscow believes it has enough, and the right type of, soldiers for conflict in Ukraine.

22

Russia's Arctic Economy Blunts Impact of Western Sanctions

Russia's Arctic economy is ramping up and will continue to blunt the impact of Western sanctions on Russia's wartime economy.

25

Putin Proposes Global Russian Language Center To Expand Soft-Power Influence

The Kremlin is expanding its cultural toolkit with a proposed global language center designed to project Russian influence abroad.

27

Russia Is Using the Gaming Industry for Propaganda and Training

Russia is increasingly using the gaming industry to advance propaganda efforts to gain support among youth for the war in Ukraine.

29

IRAN

Iran Fires New Missiles at Israel

31

Iran fires new missiles in combat for the first time, demonstrating its extensive missile program.

NORTH KOREA

North Korea's Unusual Acknowledgement of Destroyer Launch Failure

34

North Korea's failed destroyer launch is a public embarrassment Kim Jong Un cannot tolerate, and his subsequent orders for accountability and criminal punishments imply a coming crackdown.

Kim Jong Un Says Defeat of Ukraine Necessary To Maintain World Order

37

North Korea has moved from silence about its role in Russia's war against Ukraine to full-throated support and now argues that military support for Russia is necessary on a grand strategy level to maintain a multipolar world order.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Latin American Criminal Groups Increase Drone Use

39

Criminal groups aping battlefield success elsewhere increasingly turn to the use of drones in Latin America. Mexico and Colombia are unprepared and dangerously exposed for the next phase of confrontation with criminal groups.

Turkish Troops Deploy to Somalia Amid Al-Shabaab Advances

42

Turkey sends an additional 500 soldiers to Somalia to protect Turkish facilities in Mogadishu in response to al-Shabaab threats and to reinforce Somalia federal government, while also guaranteeing Turkey's geopolitical role in the Horn of Africa.

Houthi Reassess Communications Infrastructure After Hezbollah Breach

44

Houthi forces are rebuilding a decentralized, wired communications network using Chinese and Russian technology to reduce reliance on Iran and avoid breaches like Hezbollah's. U.S. strikes and Israeli infiltration accelerated this shift.

GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Cameroon Policy Addresses Citizens Joining Russia's Ukraine Effort

46

Africans are among key foreign fighter contingents fighting with Russian soldiers in Ukraine, and Cameroon is adopting measures to curb the flow of Cameroonian soldiers to Ukraine to ensure sufficient soldier numbers at home and prevent deception by Russian recruiters.

Armenia and Azerbaijan Each Conduct Joint Military Exercises With Iran

49

Iran recently carried out separate joint military exercises with Armenia and Azerbaijan, becoming more of a factor for both, as Armenia and Azerbaijan have yet to sign a peace agreement ending decades-long conflict.

Assessment of India's Artillery Used in Operation Sindoor

51

India used stand-off systems in Operation Sindoor against Pakistan; however, the use of artillery and Excalibur rounds played an important role throughout all phases of the operation and offers a look at how these can be used alongside modern systems.

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is part of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2, whose mission is to Understand, Describe, Deliver, and Assess the conditions of the Operational Environment. For over 30 years, FMSO has conducted open source research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues, emphasizing those topics that are understudied or unconsidered. Operational Environment Watch provides translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

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

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

OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 7

2025

Editor-in-Chief

Jason Warner

Editor

Dodge Billingsley

Creative Director

Susan Littleton

Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Chuck Bartles

Anthony Holmes

Lionel Beehner

Cindy Hurst

Ryan Berg

Kevin Kusumoto

Dodge Billingsley

Matthew Stein

Holly Dagres

Lucas Winter

Les Grau

Jacob Zenn



China Conducts First Western Pacific Dual Aircraft Carrier Drill

By Major Kevin Kusumoto
OE Watch Commentary



The aircraft carrier Liaoning conducts fighter aircraft launches in the Western Pacific, early June 2025. Photo: Official PLA Navy Weibo Account

Source: <https://wx3.sinaimg.cn/large/007IGSD8ly1i2ackpceh4j30rs0hv44a.jpg>; Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

For the first time, on 10 June 2025, two Chinese aircraft carriers, the *Liaoning* and *Shandong*, operated simultaneously in the Western Pacific,¹ with the *Liaoning* notably conducting its initial crossing of the strategic Second Island Chain.² As per the first excerpted article, published by the Chinese Communist Party-controlled English-language daily *Global Times*, COL Zhang Junshe, a researcher at the Naval Military Academic Research Institute, notes that dual aircraft carrier operations in far-seas environments are significantly more complex and demanding. He argues that this exercise demonstrates the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's growing proficiency in carrier operations, particularly in enhancing survivability, long-range strike capabilities, and integrated offensive and defensive combat effectiveness. He emphasizes that China's maritime power and far-seas reach are steadily expanding, allowing the PLA Navy to strike targets at greater distances and

gradually improve its overall combat capabilities.³ The progress since China's first dual carrier exercise in October 2024⁴ illustrates a continued trajectory towards enhancing the PLA Navy's ability to project power beyond its near seas.

The second excerpted article, by retired PLA Senior Colonel Du Wenlong and published on Baidu's content platform *Baijiahao*, emphasizes the extended sailing distance and broader training range as major improvements over the previous exercise. He illustrates the significance of breaching the Second Island Chain, specifically in the waters behind Iwo Jima and Guam.⁵ According to Du, Guam serves as the core node in the U.S. military's containment strategy against China. However, he argues that this exercise shows the United States' forward deployment capabilities in the region are "shrinking significantly," and its offensive strength is "declining significantly." He further states that

"Relying on dual aircraft carrier strike groups, carrier-based aircraft, and the air defense and land-attack weapons within the formation, Guam could be turned into a 'wasted island' in a short time."

similar exercises will take place in surrounding waters in the future and that Chinese naval presence in the region will continue to grow, framing this exercise as the first step of many beyond the Second Island Chain.⁶

This dual carrier exercise marks another significant milestone in the PLA Navy's transformation into a blue-water force, capable of operating beyond home waters with growing confidence and sophistication. By breaching and conducting drills beyond the Second

Island Chain, the PLA Navy demonstrated both symbolic and operational intent: to challenge U.S. presence in the

Western Pacific and normalize far-seas deployments. This exercise ultimately reflects a trend toward increasingly

complex carrier exercises, with future operations likely to involve China's third carrier, the *Fujian*.⁷

Source: “中国双航母首次在西太演练 (China's dual aircraft carriers first exercise in the West Pacific),” *Global Times* (tabloid newspaper under the CCP), 11 June 2025. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1834594098523344112>

In early June 2025, the PLA Navy's Liaoning and Shandong aircraft carrier formations conducted training in the Western Pacific and surrounding waters to test far-seas defense and joint combat capabilities. According to PLA Navy spokesperson Wang Xuemeng, the exercise was part of a routine, annually planned training schedule meant to improve operational readiness. He emphasized that the training complied with international laws and norms and was not directed at any specific country or target.

This was the first time two Chinese aircraft carriers had conducted a dual-carrier formation exercise in the Western Pacific, demonstrating that the PLA Navy's capabilities had reached a new level. Public records show that the first dual-carrier exercise took place in October 2024 in the South China Sea, focusing on enhancing the overall combat capability of carrier formations.

Zhang Junshe, a researcher at the Naval Military Academic Research Institute, explained that dual-carrier operations in the far seas involve significantly more complex command and control procedures. He stated that the successful execution of this exercise reflects the PLA Navy's growing proficiency in carrier operations, improvements in fleet survivability, and enhanced long-range offensive and defensive combat capabilities. Zhang added that dual-carrier formations are increasingly adaptable to small- and medium-scale conflicts and will be essential for maritime emergencies and far-seas defense. Though the training was not aimed at any specific adversary, Zhang acknowledged it sends a clear signal of China's expanding naval power. He concluded by linking this development to China's historical narrative, stating it contributes to the nation's sense of security following a century of foreign invasions prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Source: Du Wenlong, “双航母编队首次远洋训练, 现身关岛后方, 突破二岛链展示海军实力 (Dual carrier group conducts first distant-seas training, appears behind Guam, breaks through the Second Island Chain to showcase naval power),” *Baijiahao* (Baidu's content platform), 14 June 2025. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1834626896249842314>

The recent exercise marked the first long-distance deployment of China's dual aircraft carrier formation, with both the Liaoning and Shandong breaching the First and Second Island Chains and operating in waters behind Guam. Foreign media reported this as the first instance of both carriers appearing simultaneously in the Pacific, with their sailing distance and training range reflecting a significant advancement from previous

drills. Japanese media closely tracked the formation, highlighting its location behind Iwo Jima and Guam.

Guam is portrayed as the strategic centerpiece of the US military's containment posture in the Asia-Pacific—described as a “gateway” or “key” island due to its advantageous location and concentration of military assets, including nuclear submarines, strategic bombers, and the land-based Aegis system. However, if

continue on 7

China's dual-carrier group can operate near Guam, it indicates that US forward-deployment capabilities are "shrinking significantly," and its strike capabilities are "declining significantly." In addition, with a fully armed dual-carrier battle group, including air defense and land-attack systems, China could theoretically render Guam a "waste island" in a short period of time.

China's Ministry of National Defense emphasized that the exercise was legal, routine, and in line with international law. Similar operations will occur in

surrounding waters as part of a broader effort to showcase the qualitative improvements in the PLA Navy's capabilities. China's far-seas operations are necessary to safeguard national interests, preserve regional stability, and reflect China's responsibility as a major power. Such exercises will become routine, with more distant and realistic operations to follow—the deployment near Guam is merely "testing the waters" for longer and more advanced future missions.

Notes:

- 1 PLAN officials claimed the exercises were intended to "test the force's far-sea defense and joint combat capabilities." To watch official state news coverage of the aircraft carrier exercise, see: CCTV13 news coverage, *CCTV13 News Coverage*, 14 June 2025. <https://tv.cctv.com/2025/06/14/VIDEHBCxPgVeTc33E2Q9KOs2250614.shtml>
- 2 Takahashi Kosuke, "A Chinese Aircraft Carrier Crossed the 'Second Island Chain' for the First Time," *The Diplomat*, 10 June 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/a-chinese-aircraft-carrier-crossed-the-second-island-chain-for-the-first-time/>
- 3 To watch official coverage detailing the significance of the exercise, see CCT13 news coverage, *CCTV13 News Coverage*, 14 June 2025. <https://tv.cctv.com/2025/06/14/VIDEHBCxPgVeTc33E2Q9KOs2250614.shtml>
- 4 Ryan Chan, "China's Navy Flexes Muscles in First Dual Aircraft Carrier Operations," *Newsweek*, 31 October 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/china-news-navy-flexes-muscles-first-dual-aircraft-carrier-operations-1977887>
- 5 Liu Zhen, "China's Liaoning and Shangdong aircraft carriers sail beyond second island chain," *SCMP*, 10 June 2025. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3313809/chinas-liaoning-and-shandong-aircraft-carriers-sail-beyond-second-island-chain>
- 6 To watch Du Wenlong describe the importance of breaching the Second Island Chain, watch his commentary, *Haokan* (Baidu video hosting platform), 10 June 2025. <https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=1078864031904455011>
- 7 Liu Zhen, "China's Fujian aircraft carrier sets off on seventh sea trial," *SCMP*, 22 March 2025. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3303398/chinas-fujian-aircraft-carrier-sets-seventh-sea-trial>

China Develops Capabilities for Anti-AI Operations

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is focusing heavily on anti-AI operations, hoping to gain a distinctive advantage in future intelligent warfare. The first article excerpt, published by the PLA's official newspaper *PLA Daily*, breaks down AI technology into three key elements—data, algorithms, and computing power. The goal is to counter one or all three elements to weaken and confuse the adversary. In antidata operations, according to the article, small changes in data can cause AI models to fail by misleading the training and learning process of military intelligence models or their decisionmaking process. The second article excerpt, published on the regulated Chinese internet platform *Tencent*, explains that AI-enhanced imagery can create “data pollution,” which misleads the adversary. For example, adding non-existent enemy military targets onto an adversary's satellite data stream. These types of antidata operations would be cheap to conduct, requiring only a “few hackers and open-source algorithms.” The article also describes an attack against the electromagnetic spectrum by creating countless “ghost signals” over the battlefield, making it impossible for enemy sensors to distinguish which targets are real.

The *Tencent* article claims the PLA is also researching ways to confuse an

“From a strategic perspective, the militarization of AI is creating a dangerous paradox: The smarter the system, the more vulnerable it is. When both sides have the ability to paralyze the other side's intelligent system, the war may return to its most primitive form - just like peace under nuclear deterrence.”

adversary's AI systems through “algorithmic interference,” which could disrupt military operations and adversary cognitive processes. The AI system algorithm adaptability is somewhat limited. Therefore, AI could potentially fail when facing a wide variety of real-life problems.¹ Algorithms can be attacked by creating logical deceptions. The article recommends using anti-algorithm operations in conjunction with specific combat operations to achieve “misleading deception.” For example, in the reinforcement learning phase of programming drone swarms, creating irregular or abnormal maneuvers will cause the reward mechanism² in the reinforcement learning algorithm model to become inefficient or even invalid, the article explains. The *Tencent* article further elaborates by explaining that militaries rely on cloud computing centers, which are delicate and require stable power and temperature environments and robust fiber optic networks to function properly. China's growing focus on developing anti-AI strategies serves

as a forceful reminder of the paradox that increased sophistication can lead to new and potentially unforeseen vulnerabilities.

Source: “智能化战争面面观——关注智能化战争中的反人工智能作战 (A Comprehensive Look at Intelligent Warfare: Focus on Anti-AI Operations in Intelligent Warfare),” *PLA Daily* (official newspaper of the PLA), 20 May 2025. <http://www.news.cn/milpro/20250520/c2706a872cac4176ad969916e7091c48/c.html>

The extensive use of science and technology in the military has caused profound changes in the form of war and the way of fighting...

Research on the concepts, principles, and technical and tactical implementation of anti-AI warfare is not only needed to fully and dialectically understand intelligent warfare, but it is also a way to seize the future...

Currently, artificial intelligence technology is experiencing a leapfrog development stage from weak to strong, and from specific to general. From the perspective of its underlying support, data, algorithms, and computing power are the three key elements.

Anti-data warfare. ... AI models fail due to small changes in data... The basic principle of implementing anti-data operations is to mislead the training and learning process of military intelligent models or the judgment process by creating “polluted” data or changing the distribution characteristics of data. The “difference” in data can cause “errors” in the model, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the military intelligence model.

Fight against algorithms. ... Since the adaptability of such strategy mechanism [in algorithms] is limited, it may fail when facing a wide variety of real-life

problems. For example, drone swarm reconnaissance operations often use reinforcement learning algorithm model planning. For this situation, the reconnaissance path can be reduced by creating irregular or abnormal actions, which will cause the reward mechanism in the reinforcement learning algorithm model to become inefficient or invalid, thereby reducing its efficiency in reconnaissance.

Anti-computing power operations. The strength of computing power is in the speed of converting data to gain the advantage in information and decision-making. Unlike anti-data operations and anti-algorithm operations, which are mainly soft confrontations, the anti-computing power operations are a combination of soft and hard confrontation. Hard destruction mainly refers to the attack on the enemy’s computing power center, computing network facilities, etc., by cutting off its computing power. ... soft confrontation aims to increase the enemy’s computing power cost, mainly by creating war “fog” and data noise. For example, during combat, a large amount of meaningless data such as images, audio, video, and electromagnetic is generated to contain and consume the enemy’s computing power resources and reduce the effectiveness of its computing power.

Source: “The People’s Liberation Army Discloses Three Ways to Counter AI Warfare: data, Computing power, and Code,” *Tencent* (China’s largest multinational technology conglomerate, operating within a tightly regulated environment), 25 May 2025. <https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250523A04PX000>

Data pollution is the digital age’s equivalent of “adding sand” tactics. Imagine that when an enemy AI is analyzing satellite images to prepare for an airstrike, it suddenly receives thousands of deep-forged airport photos... and some use generative AI to create nonexistent air defense positions out of thin air:

The cost of this kind of attack is ridiculously low: a few hackers and open-source algorithms can launch it. The effect can make smart weapons worth hundreds of millions of dollars become blind.

Algorithmic interference is the reverse of psychological warfare. Traditional electronic warfare interferes with communication links, but the PLA is researching how

continue on 10

to “mentally confuse” the enemy’s AI...For example, if a swarm of drones is asked to perform “square dance-style” maneuvers, the seemingly chaotic flight trajectory is a carefully designed algorithm trap - just like an AI trained with abstract paintings will never be able to understand realistic oil paintings.

Computing power strikes are a ruthless move that cuts off the source of the fire. The cloud computing centers that modern military AI relies on are more delicate than aircraft carriers, requiring stable electricity,

constant temperature environments, and fiber optic networks. Electromagnetic pulse bomb in conjunction with cyber-attacks, the essence is to push the opponent’s “super brain” back to the dial-up Internet era.

From a strategic perspective, the militarization of AI is creating a dangerous paradox: The smarter the system, the more vulnerable it is. When both sides can paralyze the other side’s intelligent system, the war may return to its most primitive form - just like peace under nuclear deterrence.

Notes:

- 1 The article gives the example of Lee Sedol, a Korean former professional Go player, versus AlphaGo, a computer program, developed by Google DeepMind, which plays the board game Go. Go is a 2,500-year-old strategy board game that originated in China. Known as Weiqi in Chinese, the object is to place black and white stones on a game board to surround territory and capture opposing stones. Lee Sedol is the only person ever to have defeated AlphaGo, which was previously considered unbeatable. He did so by finding a loophole in the program.
- 2 The reward mechanism is a system that provides feedback to the agent (the AI system that makes decisions and takes actions) as it learns to perform different tasks.

China Pursues Quantum Information Capabilities

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

China has made significant advancements in quantum information technology over the past 25 years, seeing such moves as important steps toward gaining military and economic superiority. Most recently, in its pursuit of perfecting quantum encryption, China Telecom Quantum Group has reportedly conducted the world's first successful quantum-encrypted voice call spanning more than 1,000 kilometers (621 miles). The first article excerpt, posted on the Chinese social media platform *Weixin*, explains that the system integrates quantum key distribution (QKD) with post-quantum cryptography (PQC) to provide users with end-to-end quantum computing-resistant key distribution and key lifecycle management. In short, this integration means that one's encryption keys are safe from future

“The development of global quantum computing will pose severe challenges to information security based on public key cryptography, and it is necessary to accelerate the construction of a new information security infrastructure that is resistant to quantum computing...”

quantum attacks from start to finish, including by future quantum computers.¹ The article claims that integrating QKD and the PQC algorithm, which is still largely in the research and development phase in other countries, will reshape the boundaries of global communication security.

If accurate, this milestone could have significant national security, technological, and economic implications. Quantum encryption technology,

which enables unbreakable military, government, and other key information networks, can give China a leg up economically. Leading the quantum revolution could put China in a position to develop international standards, promote these standards, have a stronger position to export secure communications technologies, and avoid dependency on Western technologies.

Source: Cui Shuang, “全球首例！我国量子密码技术实现双重加密里程碑 (A World's First! My Country's Quantum Cryptography Technology Achieves a Milestone in Double Encryption, (Over 1,000 Kilometers! The World's First Successful Connection),” *Weixin* (mobile-based, social media platform on China's domestic network), 14 May 2025. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/xxGJernnqKQ34OFIrIXHlw?poc_token=HLQYR2ijBcmddNkdV4MV50fxx9sUR5FpeYxfYUSX

Recently, China Telecom Quantum Group released the world's first hybrid cryptographic system that integrates quantum key distribution (QKD) and post-quantum cryptography (PQC). This system innovatively integrates QKD and PQC technologies to provide users with end-to-end quantum computing-resistant key distribution and key lifecycle management, and has

commercial capabilities. At the same time, the world's first The cross-domain quantum secret phone call of the distributed cryptographic system was successfully connected across more than 1,000 kilometers. This means that the deep integration of QKD and distributed cryptographic architecture will reshape global communication security boundary.

continue on 12

Peng Chengzhi, professor at the University of Science and Technology of China and chief quantum scientist at China Telecom, said that the development of global quantum computing will pose severe challenges to

information security based on public key cryptography, and it is necessary to accelerate the construction of a new information security infrastructure that is resistant to quantum computing...

Notes:

- 1 QKD is a method of securely sharing encryption keys using the principles of quantum physics. In short, tiny particles of light (photons) are used in a way that no one can observe them without being detected. For more information on QKD and a history of China's pursuit of quantum information, see Cindy Hurst, "The Quantum Leap Into Computing and Communication: A Chinese Perspective," *National Defense University Press*, 1 April 2015. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/581868/the-quantum-leap-into-computing-and-communication-a-chinese-perspective/>. PQC is a type of encryption designed to be secure even against future quantum computers under any circumstance.

China's Response to Iran Attacks Shows Limits of Its Interests

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

China has remained muted and remarkably diplomatic in its response to the Israel-Iran war, capped off by U.S. strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, underscoring the limits of interest in coming to Iran's aid.¹ According to the daily press conference of the Chinese Foreign Ministry on 19 June, China cautioned both parties about the negative outcomes of escalation while noting that Beijing had taken a cautionary position by evacuating more than 1,600 Chinese nationals from Iran and "several hundred" Chinese nationals from Israel. The excerpted article from the Japanese news organization Nikkei Asia put the number of Chinese evacuated from Israel at 270. It also noted that the Chinese Embassy in Iran "urged remaining nationals to exit via land crossings

into Turkey, Iraq, or Armenia, avoiding congested ports on the borders with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan." The *Nikkei Asia* article also pointed out that past estimates suggest there are still thousands of Chinese nationals in Iran, many of whom are tied to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

While there is ample evidence to support claims of Chinese weapon transfers to Iran, it should be remembered that China is a global arms supplier and not party to Western sanctions imposed on Iran. Iran is an important market for Chinese arms² and it is possible that Iran will become more dependent on Chinese military and dual-use technologies. As pointed out in the *Nikkei*

Asia article, China also has important BRI projects in Iran—but it has those all over the developing world. China also has diplomatic and economic interests with many countries in the region, including Israel,³ with most of the electric vehicles in Israel imported from China.

Beijing's muted response to the escalating conflict between Israel and Iran suggests that while Iran is a meaningful market, China is juggling additional regional interests. More importantly, Iran is not a core interest for Beijing.⁴ Much like China's response to the Russia-Ukraine war, Beijing is unlikely to risk its strategic aims to reclaim Taiwan by getting militarily involved in Iran.

"The international community, major country with influence in particular, needs to maintain a fair position and responsible attitude, create conditions for reaching a ceasefire and returning to dialogue and negotiation, and prevent the situation from sliding into abyss and triggering an even larger disaster."



In March 2021 then foreign ministers, Wang Yi and Mohammad Javad Zarif, signed a 25-year cooperation deal between China and Iran.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93China_25-year_Cooperation_Program#/media/File:Wang_Yi_and_Mohammad_Javad_Zarif_at_the_Ministry_of_Foreign_Affairs_of_Iran_2021-03-27.jpeg
Attribution: CC BY 4.0

Source: “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference on June 19, 2025,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, 19 June 2025. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202506/t20250619_11653523.html

China-Arab TV: *On the early morning of June 19 Beijing time, Iran launched the 13th phase of Operation True Promise III on Israel, which lasted until 7 a.m. local time. It was the first time that Iran used the ultra-heavy, long-range Sejil missile to strike targets in Israel. In the meantime, Israel is also increasing strikes on Tehran. Do you have any comment?*

Guo Jiakun: *It’s been a week since military conflict broke out between Israel and Iran. The conflict continues to escalate, not only wreaking havoc on the people in both countries, but also gravely hurting peace and stability in the region and beyond. China is deeply concerned. To escalate the conflict creates no winners, and will only cause even more damage and lead to larger turmoil. China strongly calls on the parties to the conflict, especially Israel, to act in the larger interest of the wellbeing of people of countries in the region, stop the conflict immediately, and deescalate the situation.*

Bloomberg: *U.S. officials are preparing for the possibility of a strike on Iran in the coming days, according to people familiar with the matter. The situation is still evolving. It could change. We’re wondering if the Foreign Ministry has any comment.*

Guo Jiakun: *The situation in the Middle East is tense and delicate and facing the risk of getting out of control.*

China opposes any move that violates the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and a country’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and opposes using or threatening to use force in international relations. The international community, major country with influence in particular, needs to maintain a fair position and responsible attitude, create conditions for reaching a ceasefire and returning to dialogue and negotiation, and prevent the situation from sliding into abyss and triggering an even larger disaster.

AFP: *A follow-up on Israel-Iran. Can the Foreign Ministry share more details about its evacuation of Chinese citizens from the countries? How many citizens have been returned to China at this time?*

Guo Jiakun: *Up till now, our Ministry and the Chinese embassies and consulates in Iran, Israel and other neighboring countries have organized and coordinated the evacuation of over 1,600 Chinese nationals from Iran to safety, and several hundred Chinese nationals from Israel.*

Our Ministry and diplomatic and consular missions will continue to do everything possible to help our fellow nationals move to safety and evacuate.

Source: “Asian nations evacuate citizens from Israel and Iran as war escalates,” *Nikkei Asia* (Japanese news service with excellent regional coverage), 20 June 2025. https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Middle-East-crisis/Asian-nations-evacuate-citizens-from-Israel-and-Iran-as-war-escalates?utm_campaign=GL_asia_daily&utm_medium=email&utm_source=NA_newsletter&utm_content=article_link&del_type=1&pub_date=20250620190000&seq_num=21&si=be7d155e-99d8-4492-8070-8657af0c6aee

The conflict, now entering its second week since Israel launched an attack aimed at halting Tehran’s nuclear program, has drawn global condemnation and concern due to its potential to destabilize the broader

region. Asian countries, many with citizens working, studying or traveling in the region, are now grappling with complex logistical and diplomatic challenges.

continue on 15

China has carried out the biggest operation to date, with Beijing saying on Thursday that more than 1,600 Chinese citizens had safely left Iran, with another 270 evacuated from Israel. The Chinese Embassy in Iran has urged remaining nationals to exit via land crossings into Turkey, Iraq or Armenia, avoiding congested ports on the borders with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

While the current number of Chinese citizens still in the region is unclear, past estimates suggest thousands remain in both countries, particularly workers in Iran's energy sector, where China has long-term investments. Beijing's swift response reflects its increasingly proactive approach to consular protection abroad, particularly in volatile regions tied to its Belt and Road investments.

Notes:

- 1 On 19 June, Chinese president Xi Jinping proposed to Russian president Vladimir Putin a “four-point proposal” to de-escalate the Iran-Israel conflict. See: “The ‘four-point proposal’ injects stabilizing force into the crisis in the Middle East,” *Global Times*, 20 June 2025. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/OPINIONS_209196/Opinions_209197/16392440.html
- 2 See: “Instruments of Chinese Military Influence in Iran,” Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G2, U.S. Army, December 2023, <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/foreign-military-studies-office-fmso-instruments-of-chinese-military-influence-in-iran/?highlight=Instruments%20of%20Chinese%20Military%20Influence%20in%20Iran>
- 3 See, Dodge Billingsley, “China’s Economic Interests at Risk With Rise of Houthi Shipping Attacks,” *OE Watch*, 02-2024. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/chinas-economic-interests-at-risk-with-rise-of-houthi-shipping-attacks/?highlight=China%E2%80%99s%20Economic%20Interests%20at%20Risk%20With%20Rise%20of%20Houthi%20Shipping%20Attacks>; For a previous perspective on the conflict in Gaza’s impact on China interests in the region, see: “Israel’s close economic ties with China worked well – until the Gaza conflict,” *South China Morning Post*, 2 November 2023. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3240061/israels-close-economic-relationship-china-worked-well-until-gaza-conflict-revealed-its-limits>
- 4 In perhaps one of the most significant exchanges between Chinese and U.S. officials regarding Beijing’s priorities, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Qin Gang told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in person that “Taiwan is the core of China’s core interests.” See: Dodge Billingsley, “Chinese Officials Justify Reaction to Western Presence in Taiwan Strait,” *OE Watch*, 07-2023. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/chinese-officials-justify-reaction-to-western-presence-in-taiwan-strait-2/?highlight=Chinese%20Officials%20Justify%20Reaction%20to%20Western%20Presence%20in%20Taiwan%20Strait>

China's Growing Influence in Egypt

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Recent developments suggest that China is intensifying its efforts to anchor Egypt as a key node in its broader strategy across the Middle East and Africa, as noted in the two accompanying Arabic-language media commentaries, from the Saudi-owned *al-Majalla* and Egypt's semi-official daily *al-Ahram*. Both commentaries caution that this deepening of relations does not entail a rupture with the West. The *al-Majalla* article stresses how Egypt is “drifting from Washington’s orbit and drawing closer to Russia and China, the U.S.’s strategic rivals,” in a quest for “comprehensive strategic partnerships and greater balance in its foreign relations.” Yet, per the article’s title, this does not mean that Egypt is “divorcing America.” For its part, the *Al-Ahram* article emphasizes that the Sino-Egyptian strategic partnership is

“Egypt’s strategic partnership with China is not meant as an alternative to or opposition against partnerships with other major powers.”

“not meant as an alternative to or opposition against partnerships with other major powers.”

Over the past year, Beijing and Cairo have significantly deepened their military and economic ties. In May, the two countries conducted their first-ever bilateral air exercises, dubbed *Eagles of Civilization 2025*, sparking speculation that Egypt may soon acquire Chinese **J-10** fighter jets. That same month, Egyptian air defense units began operating Chinese **HQ-9B** long-range systems.¹ Even more notable has been the pace and scale of Chinese economic investment in Egypt’s Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone). A third

article—this one from the independent daily *al-Quds al-Arabi*—describes Chinese involvement in the SCZone as the “backbone of all long-term strategic activities” in the corridor. Chinese firms are investing billions of dollars across a wide range of sectors, including chemicals, renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and space technology. Notably, this activity continues even as Houthi disruptions affect Red Sea shipping lanes, underlying China’s long-term economic stake in the corridor.² Amid regional instability, the Chinese Communist Party appears increasingly positioned as a stable economic and political partner for Egypt’s government.



Chinese HongQi 9 [HQ-9] launcher during China’s 60th anniversary parade, 2009.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_HQ-9_launcher.jpg; Attribution: CC 3.0

Source:

مصر تقترب من الصين وروسيا... دون 'طلاق' مع أميركا

"Egypt Moves Closer to China and Russia... Without 'Divorcing' America," *al-Majalla* (Saudi owned media outlet), 24 May 2025. <https://www.majalla.com/node/325720/>

Egypt — home to nearly one-third of the Arab world's population and boasting the region's most powerful military — is unmistakably drifting from Washington's orbit and drawing closer to Russia and China, the U.S.'s

strategic rivals. As Cairo deepens ties with these two powers, its ambitions go beyond arms deals or tech acquisitions — Egypt is seeking comprehensive strategic partnerships and greater balance in its foreign relations.

Source:

مصر والصين .. شراكة استراتيجية متميزة

"Egypt and China: A Distinguished Strategic Partnership," *Al-Ahram* (semi-official Egyptian daily), 9 June 2025. <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/NewsPrint/983230.aspx>

Egypt's strategic partnership with China is not meant as an alternative to or opposition against partnerships with other major powers. Egypt maintains strategic cooperation with all global actors in a manner that maximizes its national interests and supports its domestic development model. This reflects an active, balanced, and principled Egyptian foreign policy...

China's rising role in the global political system, backed by its comprehensive power, benefits Arab countries seeking a more balanced multipolar order. The shift away from a unipolar international system, and from militarized foreign policy approaches that have fueled global conflict, aligns with Egyptian and broader Arab interests.

Source:

مصر والصين .. كيف جعلت الصين ممر التنمية لقناة السويس قاطرة لتصنيع مصر؟

"Egypt and China ... How China Made the Suez Canal Development Corridor a Locomotive for Egypt's Industrialization," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (independent Arabic-language daily), 17 May 2025 <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AC%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%82%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A/>

Chinese investments in the Suez Canal Development Corridor are the backbone of all long-term strategic activities there. They undisputedly hold the top spot among foreign investors in the region. By the end of last year, foreign investments in the corridor amounted to approximately \$8 billion, with industrial investments accounting for approximately 60 percent. The contractual value of investments this year is expected to

increase, particularly in the manufacturing industries, which include chemicals, textiles and clothing, auto parts, renewable energy supplies, dyeing, and household electrical appliances. Chinese investments are also widespread in digital services, cybersecurity technology, communications, remote sensing, and space technology. It is noteworthy that Chinese companies operating in Egypt, after entering the investment market with

continue on 18

extreme caution, are now confidently expanding into a broad market, taking advantage of the availability of cheap labor and raw materials, the low cost of land, and the tax and customs benefits enjoyed by companies operating in the region, which is considered a special economic zone that offers numerous advantages to

investors. Companies operating within the development corridor also benefit from the proximity of important markets in West Asia, the Gulf, the Middle East, Africa, and Southern and Eastern Europe, particularly since Egypt has preferential trade agreements with most of these countries...

Notes:

- 1 See: "Egypt has Chinese air defence system similar to Russia's S-400, say Israeli reports," *Middle East Monitor*, 16 April 2025. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250416-egypt-has-chinese-air-defence-system-similar-to-russias-s-400-say-israeli-reports/>
- 2 See: Tuvia Gering and Jason M. Brodsky. "China is supporting the Houthis. Here's how the Trump administration can respond," Atlantic Council, 14 January 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/china-is-supporting-the-houthis-heres-how-the-trump-administration-can-respond/>



A photo from the opening session of the China-CELAC Forum in Beijing, May 2025.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/palaciadoplanalto/54516203128/>; Attribution: CC BY-ND 2.0

China Targets Colombia in Its Latest Latin America Advance

By Ryan Berg

OE Watch Commentary

China continues to advance its interests in Latin America, especially at the most recent China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum, a triennial meeting between China and the Western Hemisphere that excludes the United States and Canada.¹ China-CELAC Summits produce a strategic roadmap document that hints at China's future regional engagement. Of note at the most recent China-CELAC summit is Colombia's formal accession to China's signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which the country had signaled as its intention since at least early 2025.² The first excerpted article, from Argentina's center-right daily *La Nación*, notes President Gustavo Petro's long-standing desire to join the BRI. The article also recalls Petro's 2023 visit to Beijing to strengthen trade ties and cooperation with Bogotá.³ The article also reports the opposition and

“Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced Tuesday that he will sign a ‘memorandum of understanding’ for the country’s entry into China’s New Belt and Road economic and trade agreement.”

apprehension from the private sector and labor unions alike in a broader climate of great power competition, especially given that joining the BRI may not bring immediate infrastructure benefits for Colombia. The second article, from Argentine online daily *Infobae*, reports that following the positive meeting in Beijing, China offered Colombia J-10CE fighter jets to replace some of Colombia's aging fleet, even though Colombia had earlier

signed a letter of intent with the Swedish company Saab for Gripen fighter jets. Further, the article notes that China is offering the J-10CE fighter at roughly half the cost of Western alternatives.

These developments have significant potential to alter the operational environment in Latin America. First, China is on a path to become Colombia's top trade partner in the next few years, and joining the BRI may catalyze that development. Second, many countries have opposed the introduction of Chinese weapons systems, especially fighter jets, in Latin America. The region primarily relies on U.S., European, and Korean systems. In the case of Argentina, the last country in Latin America to seriously consider Chinese fighter jets—in this case, the JF-17—the country ultimately opted for

continue on 20

F-16 fighters (purchased secondhand from Denmark). Weapons systems are “sticky,” locking in military-to-military relationships for decades as

replacement parts, maintenance, and training contracts ensure a long-term relationship of dependence. Lastly, the Chinese offer of J-10CE fighters

demonstrates how quickly China’s economic engagement through the BRI moves into other realms, in this case, security and defense cooperation.

Source: “Colombia anuncia intención de unirse a la nueva Franja y Ruta de China (Colombia announces its intention to join China’s Belt and Road),” *La Nación* (a center-right daily with regional coverage), 6 May 2025. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/agencias/colombia-anuncia-intencion-de-unirse-a-las-nuevas-rutas-de-la-seda-de-china-nid06052025/>

Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced Tuesday that he will sign a ‘memorandum of understanding’ for the country’s entry into China’s New Belt and Road economic and trade agreement during his trip to Beijing next week...In 2023, the Colombian president traveled to Beijing to strengthen trade agreements with the Chinese government, but this time he will sign the agreement... ‘Does Colombia want to do this now? In exchange for what? What justification is there from the

perspective of our international strategy these days? How does it affect our relationship with our trading partners who buy most of our exports?’ Bruce MacMaster, president of the National Association of Colombian Entrepreneurs... ‘In the current climate of global trade crisis and tariff war between the United States and China, this announcement is inconvenient,’ said Javier Díaz, president of the independent National Association of Foreign Trade.

Source: “China ofreció aviones caza J-10CE para renovar la flota aérea de Colombia y reemplazar a los Kfir (China offered J-10CE fighter jets to renew Colombia’s air fleet and replace the Kfirs),” *Infobae* (an Argentine online daily with full regional coverage), 17 May 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2025/05/17/china-ofrecio-aviones-caza-j-10ce-para-renovar-la-flota-aerea-de-colombia-y-reemplazar-a-los-kfir/>

The Chinese offer includes not only the aircraft, but also air-to-air weapons compatible with the model, as well as financing facilities and reduced delivery times thanks to the industrial capacity of Chengdu Aircraft Corporation (CAC), the aircraft manufacturer. The base price per unit of the J-10CE is around \$40 million, a significantly lower cost compared to other Western fighters, whose values range between \$70 and \$90 million...China’s proposal comes at a time when Colombia is evaluating various alternatives to renew its fleet of combat aircraft. In addition to the J-10CE, the

armed forces have considered other alternatives, such as the Gripen from the Swedish company Saab, the F-16 from the American company Lockheed Martin, the Rafale from the French company Dassault Aviation, and the Eurofighter Typhoon, developed by a European consortium. Of these options, the Gripen appeared to have the advantage, as Colombia signed a letter of intent with Saab in early 2025. However, the contract has yet to be finalized, opening the door for a Chinese bid to gain traction.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on the China-CELAC Summit, China's strategy, and the outcomes of the broader summit, see: Ryan C. Berg and Juan Carlos Pinzón Bueno, "What Will China do Next in Latin America?," *Foreign Policy*, 5 June 2025. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/06/05/china-latin-america-us-celac-brics-summit/>
- 2 For more information on President Petro's long-held ambitions with respect to China's BRI, see: Ryan C. Berg, "Colombia Signals Intent to Join China's Belt and Road Initiative," *OE Watch*, 4 April 2025. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2025/colombia-signals-intent-to-join-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>
- 3 For a summary of President Petro's generally friendly relations with China and the latter country's advance under Petro in manifold areas, see: Evan Ellis, "China's Advance in Colombia in the Time of Gustavo Petro," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 10 June 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-advance-colombia-time-gustavo-petro>

Russia Offering Disparate Recruiting Bonuses To Fight in Ukraine

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Russia's ability to field an army despite high casualty rates is a key driver of the war in Ukraine and a useful guide to gauge Russia's ability to continue to wage ground warfare. In addition to mobilizations, lucrative sign-up bonuses have been a primary driver of Russia's recruiting effort since it began its special military operation in Ukraine.¹ If Russian media is to be believed, Moscow may have all the soldiers it needs to fulfill its current objectives in Ukraine. Regional governments have made a slew of changes to these existing recruiting bonuses only weeks after President Putin claimed that 50,000 to 60,000 recruits were joining the ranks monthly.²

According to the excerpted article from the independent Russian news organization, *Moscow Times*, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Belgorod and Samara regions, and the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District all reduced the sign-up bonuses they are willing to pay to locals to join the war in Ukraine. The announcements could reflect the ample number of recruits available for duty suggested by Putin. However, at the same time, according to the excerpted article from *The New Times Russia*, Altai Krai, Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug, and Primorye were increasing enlistment bonuses. *The New Times Russia* article also clarified that while

Samara was reducing its enlistment bonuses for new recruits, officers and those who have re-signed a contract with the Ministry of Defense would continue to receive the higher bonuses previously put in place. Samara's bonus strategy appears to put a premium on experience and leadership. At a strategic level, the reductions and focus on experience could indicate that Moscow believes it has numbers. It could also imply that these regions of Russia have reached their limits in either available manpower and/or funding.

“Authorities in the republic of Bashkortostan... will lower one-time payments for men who sign army contracts, joining a handful of other regions in reducing financial incentives for military service in Ukraine.”



Russian troops march during the 2024 Moscow Victory Day Parade.

Source: Mil.ru, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Armed_Forces_-_/media/File:2024_Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade_28.jpg; Attribution: CCA BY 4.0

Source: "Bashkortostan Slashes Military Sign-Up Bonus for Ukraine War Recruits," *Moscow Times* (independent Russian news service based in Europe), 3 June 2025. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/06/03/bashkortostan-slashes-military-sign-up-bonus-for-ukraine-war-recruits-a89311>

Authorities in the republic of Bashkortostan later this week will lower one-time payments for men who sign army contracts, joining a handful of other regions in reducing financial incentives for military service in Ukraine.

Those who signed military contracts between January 1 and June 4 are eligible for a one-time payment of 1.6 million rubles (\$20,300), according to a decree signed by Bashkortostan's regional head Radiy Khabirov.

Starting Thursday, that amount will drop to 1 million rubles (\$12,700), the RBC news website reported Monday.

Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, regional governments have offered large enlistment bonuses to attract volunteer soldiers. By 2023, federal and local authorities were offering some of the highest salaries and sign-up payments seen since the Soviet era.

This year, however, some regions have begun rolling back those incentives. The Belgorod region,

which borders Ukraine and has come under regular shelling, cut its record-high 3 million ruble (\$38,100) bonus to 800,000 rubles (\$10,100). The Yamal-Nenets autonomous district and the Samara region also reduced enlistment bonuses in April.

Similarly, President Vladimir Putin last year introduced a new system of combat-related compensation, replacing a flat 3 million ruble injury payment with a tiered structure based on the severity of wounds.

Despite the reductions, military enlistment bonuses remain high in many areas. At least six regions have increased their one-time payments since the start of 2025, with two more raising them last month.

Putin claimed in May that Russia was recruiting up to 60,000 volunteers per month — nearly twice as many as Ukraine.

Source: "ВЛАСТИ ХМАО И АЛТАЙСКОГО КРАЯ УВЕЛИЧИЛИ ВЫПЛАТЫ ЗА ПОДПИСАНИЕ КОНТРАКТА С МИНОБОРОНЫ (AUTHORITIES OF KHAMAO AND ALTAI KRAI INCREASED PAYMENTS FOR SIGNING CONTRACT WITH MINISTRY OF DEFENSE)," *The New Times Russia* (independent Russian weekly), 27 May 2025. <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/250978/>

In KhMAO, it was raised to 2.65 million rubles, in Altai - to 1.5 million rubles. The authorities of Altai Krai almost doubled the one-time payment for citizens signing a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense. Now it is 1.5 million rubles instead of the previous 800 thousand. The previous increase was in October 2024 - then the amount increased from 400 thousand. Altai contract soldiers will receive another 400 thousand from the Ministry of Defense.

On May 26, the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug government increased the regional payment for signing a contract from 2.2 to 2.65 million rubles. The increased payment will be in effect until the end of July 2025.

Contract soldiers will receive another 400 thousand from the Ministry of Defense and 150 thousand from the municipality. The total amount will be 3.2 million rubles.

A larger payment exists only in the Samara Region (3.6 million rubles), but since February 2025 it is valid not for all contract soldiers, but only for officers and people who have re-signed a contract with the Ministry of Defense.

Previously, the highest payments were in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (3.1 million rubles, since April 2025 reduced to 1.9 million), Belgorod (3 million rubles, since 2025 reduced to 800 thousand) and Nizhny Novgorod (3 million rubles, now reduced to 1.5 million) regions.

continue on 24

At the same time, in some regions, payments were increased several times a year. In Primorye, the payment was raised twice since the beginning of the year: in January, it increased from 800 thousand to 1 million rubles, and in February it amounted to 1.6 million rubles.

Notes:

- 1 See: Dodge Billingsley, "Russia Offers Financial Incentives To Meet Troop Recruiting Targets," *OE Watch*, 01-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/russia-offers-financial-incentives-to-meet-troop-recruiting-targets-2/?highlight=Russia%20Offers%20Financial%20Incentives%20To%20Meet%20Troop%20Recruiting%20Targets>
- 2 At a recent Russian economic conference, President Putin claimed 50,000-60,000 new recruits every month, see: "Встреча с членами Общероссийской общественной организации 'Деловая Россия'," (Meeting with members of the All-Russian Public Organization 'Business Russia')," Office of the President of Russia, 13 May 2025. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/76914>



Russia's nuclear icebreaker, Yamal, operating in the Arctic, circa 2015.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear-powered_icebreaker_-_/media/File:Yamal_icebreaker_\(2225309\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear-powered_icebreaker_-_/media/File:Yamal_icebreaker_(2225309).jpg); Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

Russia's Arctic Economy Blunts Impact of Western Sanctions

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Despite Western sanctions, Russia continues to develop and exploit the resources of the Arctic portion of its Far North. According to the excerpted article from Norway's *High North News*. While some of Russia's Arctic projects have been hampered by sanctions, other existing projects, including Yamal LNG and the Arctic Gate oil terminal, continue to provide substantial revenue to the state budget as Moscow sells this oil and liquefied natural gas to China and other allies.¹ The article also points out that while the Kremlin's projections of Arctic-based revenues have not come to fruition, profits from Russia's Arctic regions are significant and likely to grow. Finally, the key driver behind Russia's Arctic economy will be the continued "development of infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route, including ports and nuclear-powered icebreakers

ensuring year-round access." To that end, Russia recently commissioned its eighth nuclear icebreaker, making it Russia's largest icebreaker fleet ever. Another two nuclear icebreakers are set to be commissioned by 2030.

It is impossible to understate the potential impact on the strategic operational environment of Russia's ability to capitalize on its Arctic territories. While the West seeks to weaken Russia's wartime economy via sanctions and other economic levers, Russia's Arctic provides Moscow a much-needed economic lifeline.

"New government figures highlight the critical role the Arctic plays in Russia's economy. Projects along the main shipping corridor may generate massive tax revenues over the next decade and account for a growing share of the country's export and GDP."

Source: Malte Humpert, “Russia to Earn \$160bn in Taxes from Northern Sea Route by 2035, Arctic Region Accounts for 7.5 Percent of GDP”, *High North News*, (independent newspaper published by the High North Center at the Nord university, Norway), 19 May 2025. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-earn-160bn-taxes-northern-sea-route-2035-arctic-region-accounts-75-percent-gdp>

Despite recent delays large-scale Arctic projects will remain a key driver of Russia’s economy in the future. The Russian government expects resource development in the region to contribute in over \$160bn in tax revenue to the federal budget over the next decade.

Western sanctions have halted or slowed down projects along the Northern Sea Route – namely Arctic LNG 2 and Vostok Oil – but existing projects including Yamal LNG and the Arctic Gate oil terminal already provide substantial revenue. Major Russian businesses Novatek, Gazprom, Rosneft, Norils Nickel, and Lukoil all appear poised to continue their push into the Arctic. The region already contributes significantly to Russia’s Gross domestic product (GDP) and exports. In 2024 the Arctic generated 11 percent of exports and accounted for 7.5 percent of the country’s GDP. Those figures are likely to increase in the coming years. It is one of the key economic engines of Russia’s development. In comparison the state of Alaska accounts for only 0.3 percent of U.S. GDP. In neighboring Canada that figure is 0.5 percent for the three northern territories. “The Arctic is a geostrategic territory on a global scale. It is one of the key economic engines of Russia’s development. As the projects that have already begun are implemented, the importance of the Arctic in the economy, logistics and national security of Russia will only increase,” stated Alexey Chekunkov, Minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic last week.

Russia has earmarked investments of \$40bn over the next decade to create an economic environment

to ensure implementation of all proposed projects. If the government can meet those significant financial investments remains to be seen. President Putin’s lofty goals of reaching 80 million tons of cargo along the North Sea Route by 2024 did not materialize, with the total tonnage only coming in at slightly less than half of that figure last year.

The development of infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route, including ports and nuclear-powered icebreakers ensuring year-round access, will be key to implementing the economic plan. Russia recently commissioned its eighth nuclear icebreaker, the largest nuclear icebreaker fleet it has ever operated, exceeding previous records set during the height of the Cold War. By 2030 the fleet is set to encompass ten nuclear vessels. Shipping traffic associated with oil and liquefied natural gas projects along the Northern Sea Route generates substantial revenue for Rosatomflot, operator of the country’s nuclear icebreaker fleet.

Fees for large oil tankers and LNG carriers can reach between \$300,000 – \$700,000 for a single escort, depending on the size of the vessel, the distance traveled and the time of year. In 2024 Atomflot provided escorts to 976 vessels. A standard delivery of supercooled gas from the existing Yamal LNG plant involves icebreaker fees of around \$400,000. Out of a total of 287 shipments in 2024, at least 120 required icebreaker escorts between the months of December and May, likely generating in excess of \$50m for Atomflot.

Notes:

- 1 For analysis of how Russia moves Arctic oil around the world, see: Les Grau, “Gabon Shadow Tanker Fleet Transports Sanctioned Russian Oil,” OE Watch, 10-2024. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/gabon-shadow-tanker-fleet-transport-s-sanctioned-russian-oil/?highlight=Gabon%20Shadow%20Tanker%20Fleet%20Transports%20Sanctioned%20Russian%20Oil>



Russian language for free in Neza City, 5 February 2015.

Source: Rexdanato, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_lessons.jpg; Attribution: Creative Commons License CC0 License

Putin Proposes Global Russian Language Center To Expand Soft-Power Influence

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

A central pillar of Russia’s projection of influence abroad, especially in its “near abroad,” is the promotion of the Russian language, along with Russian culture, literature, and the arts. To that end, on 5 June 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his support for establishing a centralized global organization to promote the Russian language abroad. As reported by the pro-Kremlin English-language news channel *RT*, the proposal was raised during a meeting of the State Council on Language Promotion by Nikita Gusev, head of the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. The proposed center would streamline and strengthen Moscow’s international cultural and linguistic outreach.

According to the Kremlin, the Russian language is currently spoken by over

255 million people, making it the ninth most widely used language globally. While Moscow already backs a range of language initiatives abroad—including via the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo (Russia’s equivalent of the former U.S. Agency for International Development)—Putin acknowledged these efforts as disjointed and suggested a new “dedicated center” could consolidate and amplify their impact.

Timed to coincide with Russian Language Day on 6 June, also the birthday of 19th-century poet and writer Aleksandr Pushkin, the announcement fits into a broader Kremlin strategy to wield soft power through linguistic and cultural influence, especially in Russian-speaking parts of the former Soviet Union. Putin emphasized the

importance of literary celebrations and national anniversaries as key instruments in this campaign.

However, the move comes amid a backlash against Russian language use in parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, including recent reports of an MP being expelled from an EU country’s

“We must work diligently to strengthen the position of the Russian language and to enhance Russia’s significance in the global cultural space.”

— President Vladimir Putin

continue on 28

parliament for speaking Russian.¹ By launching a centralized language promotion hub, Moscow appears to be countering what it sees as efforts

to marginalize the Russian language in the post-Soviet space. The move also comes amid a drop in Russian influence as Moscow continues to

wage its war against Ukraine and the countries along Russia's periphery seek greater autonomy.

Source: "Putin backs global Russian language center," *RT* (pro-Kremlin English language news channel, formerly Russia Today), 5 June 2025. <https://www.rt.com/russia/598823-putin-russian-language-center/>

The president added that he would instruct his administration and the Russian government to look into the project and provide support for it.

Putin said the authorities in Moscow are already working on promoting the Russian language abroad "through various channels," but that these activities would further benefit from the creation of "a dedicated center."

"We must work diligently to strengthen the position of the Russian language and to enhance Russia's significance in the global cultural space," the president told the participants of the video-conference.

The meeting took place on the eve of Russian Language Day, which is marked on June 6, the birthday of

Aleksandr Pushkin, a 19th-century poet, novelist and playwright, considered the founder of modern Russian literature.

"One of the most effective ways to promote the Russian language and literature, both within our country and abroad, is through meaningful and wide-ranging celebrations of significant anniversaries linked to great Russian writers," Putin stressed.

According to the Pushkin Institute, Russian was the ninth most-widely used language in the world in 2014, with over 255 million people speaking it.

Notes:

- 1 "EU state's parliament expels MP for speaking Russian," *Pravda*, 6 June 2025. https://news-pravda.com/world/2025/06/06/1402788.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Russia Is Using the Gaming Industry for Propaganda and Training

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

As part of its expanding propaganda toolkit, the Russian military has officially endorsed a new video game titled *Squad 22:ZOV* (Отряд 22:ZOV) as a tactical training tool for cadets.¹ According to technology news site *TechSpot*, the free-to-play shooter game, available on the gaming platform Steam, was developed with support from the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces and marketed as a realistic portrayal of the Russian experience in Ukraine. The game's title references the symbols "Z," "O," and "V," which have become widely used pro-war insignia in Russia during its invasion of Ukraine.²

The developers, SPN Studio and Zarobana Entertainment, claim the game is based on the firsthand experiences of Russian veterans and features combat missions in Crimea, the Donbas, and Mariupol. Notably, the game

“There’s also a section in bold that proudly announces, ‘Game is officially recommended by the Russian Military for use as a basic infantry tactic manual for cadet and Yunarmy [Russia’s Young Army Cadets National Movement] training’.”

includes the ability to rescue hostages, capture prisoners, and interact with civilians from the perspective of Russian forces. One of the featured consultants is a decorated Russian soldier involved in the siege of Mariupol. The game has reportedly been promoted at Russian military expos and is intended as a “basic infantry tactic manual” for the Young Army Cadets National Movement,

a Russian youth organization supported by the Ministry of Defense.

While the lead developer insists the game is fact-based and denies direct funding from the military, Ukraine’s Centre for Countering Disinformation has labeled the game a tool of Russian propaganda. This is not the first video game simulating wars in real-time—the makers of *Minecraft*, *Roblox*, and the Russian versions of *World of Tanks* and *World of Warships* were accused of spreading pro-Kremlin messages in subversive ways.³ But *Squad 22: ZOV* raises broader questions about the increased militarization by authoritarian regimes of the gaming industry—whose global \$500 billion in annual revenue dwarfs that of the film, television, and music industries. Further, it illustrates how Russian military doctrine is extending into the digital arenas to shape youth culture, public opinion, and military education.

Source: Rob Thubron, “A Russian military-endorsed ‘propaganda game’ has just landed on Steam,” *TechSpot*, 30 May 2025. <https://www.techspot.com/news/108127-russian-military-endorsed-propaganda-game-has-landed-steam.html>

To get ZOV on Steam, SPN’s lead dev Alexander Tolkach told PCGamer that it “went through [a] very long moderation process. Valve’s team literally requested access to all in-game content and checked it for about 60 days,” instead of what he said was the usual 5 to 7 days. He added that the team was careful not to include anything illegal.

Tolkach added that the idea for Squad 22 “came from GVPU,” Russia’s Military-Political Directorate, but funding came from “our own savings and in majority by a private investor.” He also made the dubious claim that no money made from the game will be filtered back to the Russian military.

continue on 30

“I understand why 99% of game developers stick to either long past (up to WWII) or fictional settings. And I understand Ukrainian players don’t like us. Maybe it’d be logical if Steam closes game sales for Ukraine, as they, by the way, did for Russia... But we have the right to tell the stories of our people. As a game designer and producer I always took maximum care to verify as much as possible that we put in only facts and ideas we know are real,” Tolkach argued.

“I don’t think you can deny that Western media are flooded with [a lot of] disinformation... So, we have all rights to defend our dignity and show the world how we see this conflict and, more importantly, why it actually began.”

Notes:

- 1 “Отряд 22: ZOV” official site, VKontakte. https://vk.com/squad22_game
- 2 As of early June 2025, *Squad 22: ZOV* holds a mixed rating on Steam and has drawn criticism for violating content moderation norms.
- 3 Steven Lee Myers, Kellen Browning, “Russia Takes its Ukraine Information War into Video Games,” *New York Times*, 30 July 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/30/technology/russia-propaganda-video-games.html>

ZOV currently has a mixed rating on Steam from the 250 people who have rated it. Several of the comments highlight what appear to be violations of Valve’s terms of service and ask for it to be removed from the platform.

Russia has been using games for propaganda purposes since it invaded Ukraine. It was reported in 2023 that Minecraft, Roblox, Russian versions of World of Tanks and World of Warships, Fly Corp, Armored Warfare and War Thunder were all named as games used to spread pro-Kremlin messages in various ways.

Iran Fires New Missiles at Israel

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

The war between Iran and Israel has resulted in several significant developments, including the first combat launches of Iran's **Sejjil** and **Kheibarshekan** ballistic missiles. According to the semi-official *Tasnim News Agency*, which is associated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the Sejjil missile, a medium-range ballistic missile controlled by the IRGC Aerospace Force, was used in combat for the first time on June 19, 2025. Three days later, following the U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities, Iran fired the Kheibarshekan missile in combat for the first time.¹ The Kheibarshekan, also under the control of the IRGC Aerospace Force, was launched during the 20th wave of retaliatory missile strikes. The article from *Tasnim News Agency*, dated June 22, noted that modern and surprising tactics were employed to enhance the accuracy and destructive impact of the missiles, although no details were provided. The article also mentioned

“The twelfth wave of Operation True Promise III began with the firing of ultra-heavy, long-range, two-stage Sejjil missiles.”

that 40 solid- and liquid-fuel missiles were fired during the 20th wave but did not specify how many Kheibarshekan missiles were fired.

Prior to these recent launches, the deployment status of the Sejjil missile was considered unknown,² as it had not been fired since early 2021 during the Great Prophet 15 military exercises. The Kheibarshekan missile, which features multiple independent reentry vehicles, was also relatively unknown but is at the forefront of Iranian missile development. The confirmed deployment of these missiles with a range to reach regional adversaries may pose new challenges for the region's missile defense systems.³ Additionally, these launches provide adversaries with the opportunity to analyze the performance and capabilities of these missiles.



The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps says it has, for the first time, launched what it describes as a heavy, long-range, two-stage Sejjil ballistic missile in its retaliatory strikes against Israel. Western sources describe the Sejjil as a medium-range ballistic missile having a range of roughly 1,200 miles.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sejjil_missile_launch_-_November_2008_\(13\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sejjil_missile_launch_-_November_2008_(13).jpg); Attribution: CCA 4.0 International License

Source: “Operation True Promise III: Iran Attacks Israel Using Sejjil Missiles for First Time,” *Tasnim News Agency* (semi-official news agency associated with Iran's IRGC), 19 June 2025. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2025/06/19/3338126/operation-true-promise-iii-iran-attacks-israel-using-sejjil-missiles-for-first-time>

“The twelfth wave of Operation True Promise III began with the firing of ultra-heavy, long-range, two-stage Sejjil missiles.”

To the residents of the occupied territories of al-Quds (Jerusalem):

The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, backed by the heroic Iranian nation, have shattered the
continue on 32

Zionist army's air defense systems in previous operations. Now, the skies of the occupied territories are open to Iran's missiles and drones.

The missile strikes will be precise, impactful, and continuous, just as yesterday, Mossad and Aman headquarters, along with the Zionist army's fighter bases across the occupied territories, were targeted.

The commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had warned that the gates of hell would open upon you. The thunderous missiles of the IRGC Aerospace Force will not allow you a single moment outside underground shelters. For days, you have not seen the light of the sun.

Rest assured, the sound of red alert sirens will not cease for a moment. You must either choose a slow death in the hellish life of shelters or save yourselves from the 24-hour missile barrage and flee the lands usurped by your ancestors as soon as possible so that you may survive."

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force has launched several rounds of retaliatory strikes against Israel since June 13 after the Zionist regime attacked Iran. The Iranian counterattacks have inflicted heavy damages on the Israeli military, intelligence and industrial sites.

Source: "Iran's Multiwarhead Kheibarshekan Missiles Fired at Israeli Targets," *Tasnim News Agency* (Semi-official news agency associated with Iran's IRGC), 22 June 2025. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2025/06/22/3340080/iran-s-multiwarhead-kheibarshekan-missiles-fired-at-israeli-targets>

The IRGC on Sunday gave details of the 20th wave of Iran's attacks against the Zionist regime as part of the Operation True Promise III.

It said the most recent stage of attacks was launched by firing 40 solid- and liquid-fuel ballistic missiles.

Multiwarhead Kheibarshekan ballistic missiles -the third generation of the IRGC Aerospace Force's missiles- were fired in Sunday's strike for the first time, the IRGC said, adding that modern and surprising tactics were employed to increase the accuracy of missiles and ensure their effective and destructive impact on the targets.

The Iranian missiles hit various targets such as Ben Gurion airport, the Israeli regime's biological research center, and its replacement command-and-control centers, the IRGC stated.

The guided ballistic missiles launched by Iran had maneuverable and highly-explosive warheads that were being guided until the final moment of devastating impact, the statement noted.

It said the sirens in the occupied territories sounded only after the missiles hit the targets, upsetting the balance of the enemy.

The IRGC warned that the main sections of the capacities of the Iranian Armed Forces have not become operational in the counterattacks so far.

The Zionist regime waged an unprovoked war of aggression against Iran on June 13. It has carried out airstrikes on Iran's nuclear, military and residential sites that resulted in the martyrdom of over 400 Iranians, including top military commanders, nuclear scientists and ordinary citizens.

The Iranian military forces started counterattacks immediately afterwards. They Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force has carried out 20 waves of retaliatory missile strikes against the Zionist regime as of June 22 as part of Operation True Promise III.

Notes:

- 1 According to a previous article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, the Kheibarshekan ballistic missile was first launched in combat in late 2024. See: "Iran Tells Region 'Strong and Complex' Attack Coming on Israel," *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 November 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-tells-region-strong-and-complex-attack-coming-on-israel-2804179f>
- 2 Sejjil, Missiles of the World, Iran, Missile Threat: CSIS Missile Defense Project, updated 23 April 2024. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/sejjil/>
- 3 See: Kheibar Shekan Missile: Iran's Third-Gen Ballistic Powerhouse," Defense Feeds, 19 June 2025. <https://defensefeeds.com/military-tech/army/ballistic-missiles/kheibar-shekan/>

North Korea's Unusual Acknowledgement of Destroyer Launch Failure

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

On 21 May, North Korea attempted, and failed, to launch a new destroyer, the KANG KON, under the supervision of Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un. As per the excerpted article published on 23 May by the state's *Korean Central News Agency*, the launch failure was an “unacceptable criminal act” demonstrating “lack of awareness, irresponsibility, and an unscientific empiricist attitude that is rampant in all sectors.” On 22 May, state media in North Korea’s complex and all-encompassing propaganda apparatus took the unusual step of describing how the launch failed,

blaming “inexperienced command and operational carelessness.”

It is uncommon for North Korea to admit failures, especially military setbacks. However, Kim Jong Un’s immediate acknowledgement of the failure, along with promises to hold perpetrators accountable, is in line with other recently observed behavior in North Korean state media, where the various ruling officials provide detailed analysis of failures.¹ It is unclear whether this acknowledgement represents a trend. North Korea may have assessed that it had to truthfully acknowledge the

“[T]he fact remains that this accident was an unacceptable criminal act, and those responsible can never cover up their crimes.”

mishap because of how well publicized, attended, and highly anticipated it was. Also, revealing the accident before foreign media smuggled the information to North Korean citizens allowed Kim to control the narrative. It is also possible that Kim Jong Un’s presence at the failed launch was an insult to his dignity that he could not overlook.



Kim Jong Un stands on the bow of the destroyer KANG KON during a re-launch ceremony on 13 June. On 21 May, the ship suffered a catastrophic failure during launch requiring extensive repairs.

Source: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/kim-jong-un-claims-his-capsized-warship-is-fixed/ar-AA1GDMdP>; Attribution: Korean Central News Agency, state-owned party-controlled central news service of North Korea. KCNA images are immune from copyright claims because North Korea has not signed on to international conventions on the protection of copyrighted materials.

Fundamentally, North Korea is striving to develop sophisticated military capabilities within a limited budget, amidst an atmosphere of perpetual paranoia under

constant threat of severe punishment for failure. It reinforces the assessment that North Korea can produce approximations of prestigious conventional military

capabilities as part of Kim Jong Un's vanity projects, but their function cannot be guaranteed.²

Source: “구축함진수사고와 관련한 조사사업 심화 (Intensifying investigation into the destroyer launching accident),” *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned propaganda broadcaster), 23 May 2025. <http://kcna.kp/article/q/a6981124e6d4bac2a1824e9ec3468c3c.kcmsf>

The destroyer launch accident investigation group has launched a full-scale investigation into the serious accident that occurred at the Cheongjin Shipyard. The accident investigation group included prosecutors and relevant experts.

As a result of conducting a detailed underwater and internal inspection of the ship, it was confirmed that, contrary to the initial announcement, there was no hull crater, but that the starboard side of the hull was scratched and a certain amount of seawater had flooded into the structural passage in the stern.

Experts estimate that it will take 2 to 3 days to pump out seawater from the flooded compartment and remove the bow section to restore the ship's balance, and about 10 days to restore the ship's side.

The extent of the damage to the ship was not serious, and the results of the flooding process immediately after the accident are information necessary for taking practical recovery measures, but are unrelated to determining the cause of the accident and responsibility.

The cause of the accident needs to be explained. I hereby order an investigation and arrest of the cause of this absolutely impossible and unacceptable accident and of the parties responsible for it. No matter how good the state of the ship is, the fact remains that this accident was an unacceptable criminal act, and those responsible can never cover up their crimes.

The purpose of making this accident a major incident is not because of the damage to the ship or the economic loss, but to sound the alarm and deliver a strong blow to the lack of awareness, irresponsibility, and unscientific empiricist attitude that is rampant in all sectors.

Based on the investigation data from the accident investigation group, legal authorities have begun procedures to first arrest and investigate those clearly responsible for the accident. Hong Gil-ho, manager of Cheongjin Shipyard, was summoned to the judicial authorities on the 22nd.

Source: “새로 건조한 구축함진수식 진행 (Ceremony to Launch New Destroyer Takes Place),” *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned propaganda broadcaster), 22 May 2025. <http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/5a28b8c39c4051d3035fe145716fcd30.kcmsf>

A serious accident occurred in the course of the launch of the destroyer.

Due to inexperienced command and operational carelessness in the course of the launch, the launch slide of the stern departed first and stranded as the bogie failed to move in parallel, holes made at some sections of

the warship's bottom disrupted its balance, and the bow failed to leave the slipway, leading to a serious accident.

After watching the whole course of the accident, the respected Comrade Kim Jong Un made stern assessment, saying that it was a serious accident and criminal act caused by sheer carelessness, irresponsibility and

continue on 36

unscientific empiricism which should never occur and could not be tolerated.

He seriously warned that the errors caused by the irresponsibility of the relevant officials...responsible for the accident that lowered the dignity and self-respect of

our state in a moment would have to be dealt with at the plenary meeting of the Party Central Committee to be convened next month, and censured them for the fault.

He gave important instructions on the work of the accident investigation group.

Notes:

- 1 See: Anthony W. Holmes, "Kim Jong Un Chairs Meeting Addressing Ruling Party Corruption," *OE Watch*, 03-2025, page 31. [https://g2webcontent.z2.web.core.usgovcloudapi.net/OEE/OE Watch/2025/TRADOCG2_FMSO_OEW3_06MAY2025_anonymous.pdf](https://g2webcontent.z2.web.core.usgovcloudapi.net/OEE/OE%20Watch/2025/TRADOCG2_FMSO_OEW3_06MAY2025_anonymous.pdf)
- 2 Kim Jong Un has prioritized nuclear weapons systems development and delivery while letting his conventional capabilities atrophy. It is unclear how much resources Kim has available to redirect to these prestige, vanity conventional capabilities but given the state of North Korea's economy, it is not much. It is also highly doubtful that if given the choice to reallocate resources from his nuclear program to conventional capabilities Kim would do so to an extent necessary to address the failures.

Kim Jong Un Says Defeat of Ukraine Necessary To Maintain World Order

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

On 10 May, Kim Jong Un gave a speech at the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and lay out North Korea's rationale for committing troops and equipment to Russia's war against Ukraine. The text of Kim's speech was carried by the nation's primary state-owned propaganda agency, the *Korean Central News Agency*. In the speech, Kim curiously argued that North Korea's military support for Russia against Ukraine was necessary to prevent South Korea from attacking the North. Kim said Ukrainian defensive actions against Russia were "tantamount to an invasion of our own state [by Ukraine]." Kim defended Russia's goals and Pyongyang's support under their mutual defense treaty, international law, and self-defense. Kim used Russia's propaganda narratives on the causes of the war and likened the defeat of Ukraine to the defeat of Germany in 1945.¹

However, Kim's characterization of support being required for defense of "nuclear powers" against upstarts is new. Kim cautioned that if Ukraine is not defeated, the belief that Russia and North Korea could be challenged would "spread like a highly contagious virus." Kim specifically noted that supporting Russia was critical to maintaining a "multipolar world order" of which

"If we leave it as it is, the Ukrainian puppets will become even more reckless and fearless in their military actions against the territory of the nuclear powers, and then the military in Seoul, the top henchman of the United States, will be able to follow suit and develop reckless courage."

Moscow is the leader. In closing, Kim said that he would "unhesitatingly issue an order to use the armed forces" of North Korea "if the United States or its lackeys...attempt another assault on the Russian Federation."

A Kim Jong Un speech or attributed statement carries the highest authority in North Korea's complex propaganda apparatus. Kim's promise that he would continue to support Russia and even expand operations in the future, if necessary, should be taken as authoritative foreign policy direction.



Kim Jong Un gives a speech at the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang on the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. In the speech, he likened defeat of Ukraine to defeat of Nazi Germany and argued defeat of Ukraine was necessary to prevent South Korea from becoming aggressive (May 10, 2025).

Source: <https://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/dunya/kuzey-kore-lideri-kimden-bomba-itiraf-rusyaya-asker-gondermek-mesru-hakimiz-1114828?s=1.kcmsf>; Attribution: Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), North Korean state-owned central propaganda agency. North Korean media is immune from copyright claims because Pyongyang has not signed on to international conventions on the protection of copyrighted materials.

Source: “경애하는 김정은동지께서 우리 나라 주재 로씨야련방대사관을 축하방문하시어 연설을 하시였다 (Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un makes a Congratulatory Visit to Russian Embassy in Our Country and Makes Speech),” *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned broadcaster), 10 May 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/628151ede653494fee1bf167a0fad174.kcmsf>

We must never forget that we are able to enjoy today's happiness because of the precious sacrifice of Russia that saved the world.

Today, the world is watching with great concern the rapid rise of modern-day Nazism, a group of extremely evil reactionaries who are attempting to distort history and tarnish the noble achievements of the heroic generations who sacrificed their blood and lives in the midst of a clashing international situation.

The revival of Nazism, which attempted to reduce humanity to its slaves in the last century, is a grave matter that is directly related to the fate of humanity and is a grave threat that cannot be tolerated in the slightest.

The fact that I am celebrating the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War together with my Russian friends today is itself an expression of the unwavering and powerful common will of our two countries to crush the challenge of neo-Nazism and contribute to ensuring world peace and the well-being of mankind.

I regard the adventurous military reckless actions of the hostile forces that have so brazenly violated the sovereignty and security of Russia, a fraternal country, as an invasion of our state, and I promptly shared with Comrade President my determination to sacredly fulfill the treaty obligations accordingly, and I gave an order to the combat units of the Republic's armed forces to eliminate the Ukrainian neo-Nazi occupiers and liberate

the Kursk region in cooperation with the Russian armed forces.

I believe that all the soldiers mobilized for the Kursk Operation, the great sons of our Korean people, are heroes and the highest representatives of this country's honor.

If they had not committed the heinous atrocity of invading Russian territory, they would not have been left to fend for themselves by our swords and spears.

If we leave it as it is, the Ukrainian puppets will become even more reckless and fearless in their military actions against the territory of the nuclear powers, and then the military in Seoul, the top henchman of the United States, will be able to follow suit and develop reckless courage.

That reckless bravery will spread like a highly contagious virus. We must responsibly exercise our duty to correct these wrong and dangerous phenomena.

If the United States and its Western lackeys, the Nuclear Weapons, do not give up their dangerous idea of military invasion against our brother country, the Russian Federation, and attack again, I will gladly and without hesitation order the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to use military force to repel the enemy's military invasion in accordance with all the provisions and spirit of the Treaty of 1945-46.

I consider this to be a sacred mission that we must fulfill as brothers and comrades.

Notes:

- 1 The end of World War II in Asia, and with it the end of Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula, is part of the founding mythology of the Kim regime. In North Korea's official version of history, regime founder Kim Il Sung and his guerilla fighters essentially single-handedly defeated the Japanese occupation of Korea. In discussions about the European theater of the war, North Korea historically has been happy to adopt the Russian narrative that the Soviets won the war.

Latin American Criminal Groups Increase Drone Use

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

It was inevitable Latin America's formidable criminal organizations began challenging state sovereignty with cheap, reliable, and deadly drones.¹ In videos proliferating around the internet, Latin America's criminal organizations appear to be using drones in battles against one another, in their challenge to state sovereignty, and occasionally, against civilians.² The first excerpted article, from Argentine online media outlet *Infobae*, reports that the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), one of Mexico's most potent criminal organizations, opened a dedicated division of drone operators, replete with its own insignia. The article notes that CJNG targets other criminal organizations in its effort to contest territory. Increasingly, the group has used drones to confront the Mexican state as well. In one attack, a drone was reportedly laden with a crude chemical device,

“Authorities have faced significant challenges in countering this trend, as criminals’ use of modern technology often exceeds the military’s response capacity. Additionally, these methods also pose a greater risk to civilians, who are exposed to the collateral effects of the attacks.”

which caused respiratory illness among the civilian population. The second excerpted article, also from *Infobae*, reports on the testimony of Colombia's head of the army before the country's congress, in which he admitted the state's deficiency in preventing and deterring drone usage by the country's criminal groups. In the same testimony, the head of the army mentioned that the institution will stand up an anti-drone unit with a budget to procure antidrone technology.

danger. Their use and proliferation also have homeland defense implications for the United States.³ As Latin America's criminal organizations come to increasingly rely on drones, states in the region will need to both track these supply chains and ultimately try to disrupt them, as well as defend critical interests against their use.



A quadcopter drone similar to the drones seen in videos demonstrating cartel usage.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quadcopter_Drone_in_flight.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

The incorporation of drones into the standard toolbox of Latin America's criminal organizations could be a game changer on the battlefield. Drones are cheap and reliable tools that criminal organizations can use to hold both the state and civilian populations in

Source: “‘Operadores Droneros,’ así inició la división especializada en el manejo de drones del CJNG (‘Drone Operators,’ this is how the CJNG’s specialized drone division began),” *Infobae* (an Argentine online media outlet with excellent regional coverage), 7 March 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/mexico/2025/03/07/operadores-droneros-asi-inicio-la-division-especializada-en-el-manejo-de-drones-del-cjng/>

The use of explosive devices and drones by criminal organizations such as the Familia Michoacana and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) persists. The latter even has a military unit dedicated to this task. These are ‘Drone Operators’...whose members are identified with a circular patch with a skull, the name of the unit and the acronym CJNG...Its mission is to use explosive-laden drones in attacks against rival groups and local communities, primarily in areas of Jalisco and Michoacán. Over time, the cartel began using them to expand its territorial reach and influence...The activities of Drone Operators are disseminated through social media, with the aim of demonstrating their capacity to

attack the population and other criminal organizations... in addition to explosive devices, criminal organizations like the CJNG have begun using chemical weapons via drones...In April 2024, the CJNG intensified its attacks in Michoacán, using drones to launch explosive devices containing chemical substances. According to affected residents, the bombs emitted gases that affected the respiratory tract...Mexican authorities have faced significant challenges in countering this trend, as criminals’ use of modern technology often exceeds the military’s response capacity. Additionally, these methods also pose a greater risk to civilians, who are exposed to the collateral effects of the attacks.

Source: “Comandante del Ejército Nacional expuso detalles de la ‘guerra tecnológica’ que se registra en Colombia (The National Army Commander explained details of the ‘technological war’ taking place in Colombia),” *Infobae* (an Argentine online media outlet with excellent regional coverage), 23 April 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2025/04/24/comandante-del-ejercito-nacional-expuso-detalles-de-la-guerra-tecnologica-que-se-registra-en-el-pais/>

In the wave of violence occurring in several regions of Colombia, the commander of the National Army, General Luis Emilio Cardozo, indicated before Congress that drone attacks by armed groups have intensified. This is a new type of attack implemented by criminal organizations, which have detonated explosives with this type of device against the civilian population and law enforcement in several areas of the country... ‘No institution is immune to this type of attack, which is constantly changing thanks to technological innovation,’ said General Cardozo Santamaría in his congressional testimony... ‘Two of our soldiers have already been killed

by drones launching explosive devices,’ the general said, speaking of the ongoing violence in the Catatumbo of the country. The commander indicated that so far there is no concrete way to predict the detonations, since ‘when you have the anti-drone on that frequency, criminal groups change it and then the anti-drone is no longer useful’... The commander of the National Army concluded his remarks before congress by revealing that the Ministry of Defense has contracted a permanent team of mobile units that will be used to protect strategic units. In addition, the possibility of building the institution’s own anti-drone systems has begun to be analyzed.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on how drones have been deployed by Mexican and Colombian criminal groups, see: Henry Ziemer, "Illicit Innovation: Latin America is Not Prepared to Fight Criminal Drones," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 11 June 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/illicit-innovation-latin-america-not-prepared-fight-criminal-drones>
- 2 In one well-known instance, drones have even been used in Latin America in an assassination attempt against a political leader, in this case Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro. See: "Venezuela President Maduro Survives 'Drone Assassination Attempt,'" BBC, 5 August 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45073385>
- 3 The Commander of U.S. Northern Command admitted in recent congressional testimony that there may be more than one thousand drone incursions per month into the United States. See: Matthew Olay, "NORAD Commander: Incursions by Unmanned Aircraft Systems on Southern Border Likely Exceed 1,000 a Month," U.S. Department of Defense, 14 March 2024. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3707785/norad-commander-incursions-by-unmanned-aircraft-systems-on-southern-border-like/>

Turkish Troops Deploy to Somalia Amid Al-Shabaab Advances

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 22 April, the Turkish-language website *Mepa News* reported on Turkey's decision to send 500 additional soldiers to Mogadishu to protect Turkish facilities in Somalia. They will join the nearly 300 Turkish soldiers already in the country, which could potentially reach as many as 2,500 soldiers if Turkey commits the full capabilities allotted to countering al-Shabaab.¹ According to the article, the Turkish and Somali authorities agreed to this two-year assignment of additional troops in July 2024, and it is now being implemented.

The timing of the new Turkish troop deployment to Mogadishu coincides with a key development in the insurgency. On 16 April, al-Shabaab captured the strategic town of Adan Yabaal, just weeks after the U.S. warned of imminent attacks.² The attack prompted AFRICOM to coordinate with Somalia to launch airstrikes on al-Shabaab.³ Al-Shabaab's threats in the video claim of the Adan Yabaal attack, which emphasized the group's desire to conquer all of Somalia, may be unrealistic. However, the AFRICOM airstrikes and additional Turkish troop deployment are intended to reduce the risk of further al-Shabaab offensives, especially those aimed at Mogadishu and the Turkish facilities that al-Shabaab would target in the capital.⁴

Al-Shabaab is unlikely to capture Mogadishu, but its threats to the capital are increasing and warrant the additional Turkish security presence. This presence, in addition to subsequent June 2025 Turkish deliveries of attack helicopters⁵ to the Somali federal government, both indicate Ankara is doubling down on securing the government and its interests in the country. Moreover, as the geopolitical stakes in the Horn of Africa become more contested, Turkey is ensuring it remains a key player in the region.

“It is expected that the troops deployed to the region will not play a combat role but will be deployed for security purposes in facilities belonging to Türkiye in Mogadishu.”



Since 2017, when the Turkish military established Camp Turksom in Mogadishu, the Turkish military involvement in countering terrorism in the country has increased, including most recently to protect Turkish facilities in Mogadishu amid an al-Shabaab offensive.

Source: VOA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_Army_Base_-_Mogadishu.jpg; Attribution: Public Domain

Source: “Türkiye Mogadişu’ya 500 asker gönderdi (Turkey has sent 500 soldiers to Mogadishu),” *mepanews.com* (Mepa News focuses on news, reports, political analyses and academic studies on international developments affecting Türkiye), 22 April 2025. <https://www.mepanews.com/somali-medyasi-turkiye-mogadisuya-500-asker-gonderdi-71943h.htm>

According to information conveyed by local Somali sources, Türkiye sent 500 soldiers to the capital Mogadishu to protect Türkiye’s facilities in the region. The military forces were dispatched to the TURKSOM military base in Mogadishu. The base is Türkiye’s largest base in Africa.

It is expected that the troops deployed to the region will not play a combat role, but will be deployed for security reasons at facilities belonging to Türkiye in Mogadishu. The move regarding the deployment of the Turkish Armed Forces units has been jointly agreed on by the two countries and will last for a period of two years.

Notes:

- 1 For details on Turkish forces in Somalia, see: “Turkey sends troops to Somalia amid Al-Shabaab advances,” *Somali Guardian*, 22 April 2025. <https://somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/turkey-sends-troops-to-somalia-amid-al-shabaab-advances/>
- 2 Adan Yabaal is only 220 kilometers north of Mogadishu. See: Jon Haworth, “US embassy in Somalia issues urgent warning of potential imminent terror attacks,” *ABC News*, 5 March 2025. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-embassy-somalia-issues-urgent-warning-potential-imminent/story?id=119466493>
- 3 See: “U.S. military strikes Al-Shabaab near Adan Yabaal district in Middle Shabelle region,” *Hiraan Online*, 22 April 2025. https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/Apr/201226/u_s_military_strikes_al_shabaab_near_adan_yabaal_district_in_middle_shabelle_region.aspx
- 4 According to the AEI Critical Threats Project (CTP), al-Shabaab “is highly unlikely to launch an offensive on Mogadishu to seize power in the short term but its gains in central and southern Somalia will allow the group to increase economic and military pressure on Mogadishu and thus destabilize the SFG and undermine the SFG’s legitimacy.” In addition, CTP noted that for the first time since 2022, al-Shabaab was “reconnecting support zones across central and southern Somalia to threaten key roadways linking Mogadishu to the interior for the first time since 2022.” See: Liam Karr, “JNIM’s Growing Pressure on Benin; Turkey to Somalia; Salafi-Jihadi Cells Continue to Grow Across Nigeria,” *Africa File*, 24 April 2025: 24 April 2025. criticalthreats.org/analysis/africa-file-april-24-2025-jnims-growing-pressure-on-benin-turkey-to-somalia-salafi-jihadi-cells-continue-to-grow-across-nigeria
- 5 See: “Türkiye delivers attack helicopters to Somalia as military support escalates,” *Türkiye Today*, 4 June 2025. <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/defense/turkiye-delivers-attack-helicopters-to-somalia-as-military-support-escalates-3202383>

Houthis Reassess Communications Infrastructure After Hezbollah Breach

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

The Houthi movement in northern Yemen is actively rebuilding and diversifying its command-and-control networks, according to the two accompanying reports from the Yemeni security-focused outlet *Defense Line*.¹ These efforts come in response to Israel's breaching of Hezbollah's communications systems. The rebuilding has been accelerated by U.S. airstrikes on centralized Houthi communications infrastructure. According to the reports, the Houthis are seeking to create a more decentralized, resilient, and secure network in response.

The 18 May article describes how the Houthis are working to reduce dependence on Iranian systems by

integrating Chinese, Russian, and other foreign technologies and components into a more decentralized and resilient network. The article notes how the group is motivated by "concerns over security and technical breaches similar to what Hezbollah has experienced in Lebanon." The excerpted article from 10 June, meanwhile, explains that the Houthis are building a decentralized communications system with "multiple smaller, localized communication networks in defined geographic zones and operational areas." In addition, they are extending wired communications infrastructure to reduce dependence on easily breached wireless systems. Although the Houthis have not yet faced persistent, multidomain

"Since the beginning of the U.S., British, and Israeli attacks on Houthi capabilities in early 2024...the group has shifted its internal command and control tactics, decentralizing its communications assets."

pressure from Israel of the type that was exerted on Hezbollah and Hamas, it seems that they are taking preemptive steps to harden their networks in anticipation of such a campaign.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Gravelly (DDG 107) launches Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles in response to increased Iranian-backed Houthi malign behavior in the Red Sea Jan. 12, 2024. As a part of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group, Gravelly is deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations to support maritime security and stability in the Middle East.

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8198875/gravelly-conducts-strikes-red-sea>; Attribution: Public Domain



Source:

اتصالات الحوثية.. 'الشفرة الحساسة' لتفكيك الجماعة

"Houthi Communications: The Sensitive Code for Dismantling the Group," *Defense Line* (Yemeni security-focused website), 18 May 2025. <https://defenseliney.com/posts/263>

The Houthi group, Iran's proxy in northern Yemen, has begun introducing new communications systems and equipment, localizing Chinese, Russian, and other technologies in an effort to reduce its reliance on the communication infrastructure that Iran has helped develop over the years. This infrastructure linked the group with the communications networks of the IRGC, Quds Force, and other "Axis of Resistance" factions. The move comes amid growing Houthi concerns over security and technical breaches similar to what Hezbollah has experienced in Lebanon...

A document obtained by Defense Line reveals that the Houthis are seeking to procure Chinese-made "data

extraction devices" worth over \$60,000 for use by their security and intelligence services...

With Tehran losing its technical connectivity and coordination across its proxies in southern Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, the Houthis have moved to import advanced technologies to replace Iranian systems.

Reports from local and UN sources indicate that the group has received equipment and components via flights and shipments arriving at Sanaa Airport and the ports of Hodeidah, as well as through ongoing smuggling operations run by a complex network operating via the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and land routes through the eastern border crossings with Oman.

Source:

جماعة الحوثي تعيد تأهيل شبكة الاتصالات وتنتشر معدات وتقنيات في المناطق الحيوية

"Houthi Group Rebuilds Communications Network and Deploys Equipment in Key Areas," *Defense Line* (Yemeni security-focused website), 10 June 2025. <https://defenseliney.com/posts/271>

Defense Line sources reported that the group has installed antenna systems and guidance units in its main strongholds and on elevated terrain, and has relocated broadcasting, jamming stations, and other equipment to military sectors and fronts.

The Houthis have also redeployed wireless military communication repeaters to frontline positions, key strategic sites, and forward operating bases, according to Defense Line.

Since the beginning of the U.S., British, and Israeli attacks on Houthi capabilities in early 2024 — a response to the group's assaults on shipping and missile/

drone launches against Israel — the group has shifted its internal command and control tactics, decentralizing its communications assets. It has built out multiple smaller, localized communication networks in defined geographic zones and operational areas...

Informed sources told Defense Line that the Houthis are extending a wired communications network into strategic regions, connecting command and control centers to frontline positions and critical sites. This indicates a shift toward greater reliance on wired networks and reduced dependence on wireless and broadcast systems.

Notes:

- 1 *Defenseliney* is a relatively new publication. Its Twitter account (<https://x.com/defenseliney>) was created in July 2024. Several of its recent stories, including the two used for this commentary, have been picked up by the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, which is among the most prominent Arabic-language publications.

Cameroon Policy Addresses Citizens Joining Russia's Ukraine Effort

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 23 April, the Ukrainian publication *focus.ua* reported on the high number of African mercenaries fighting with the Russians in Ukraine. According to the excerpted article, more than 1,500 foreign fighters have traveled to Ukraine to support the Russian invasion. Although the article claims the highest number of foreign fighters comes from Nepal, Cameroon is also noted for its significant contribution. Despite this, Africans are relatively few, at 72 total¹ compared to the roughly 800 from Asia and 500 from former Soviet states. Twenty from Ghana and 10 from Cameroon were the most among sub-Saharan countries. The article explained that the data on foreign fighters was based on an investigation of leaked Russian medical system data.² The data revealed that some foreign fighters earned hero status,

including one Iranian, while others fled combat, including one Nepali, and others became propaganda figures, including a Cameroonian, who became the subject of a Russian television documentary. Pro-Russian social media accounts have also released videos of Cameroonians proudly claiming to be fighting with Russia against Ukraine.³

In response to this trend, a second excerpted article from Nigerian publication *Humangle Media* notes that Cameroonian Army officers have begun to prohibit soldiers from leaving the country for fear that Cameroon's own soldier pool will be depleted. The heightened concern the officers express over this issue suggests that more Cameroonians may have traveled to support Russia in Ukraine since the above-mentioned statistics were released. As a result, now

only Cameroonian soldiers who receive authorization from their officers and are vetted by the Cameroonian military are allowed to leave the country. This is because many Cameroonian soldiers reportedly have been recruited by false promises of favorable service contracts. Cameroonian soldiers may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment because the Cameroonian Army has deployed soldiers to train in small arms, tank maneuvers, and artillery fire at a Wagner facility in Russia (reportedly in Molmino),⁴ where they developed connections to Russia via the private military company.

According to the article, there are no new restrictions on civilian Cameroonians who may be lured to fight for Russia in Ukraine. However, reports of incentives for Africans to fight for Russia in Ukraine, including release from imprisonment in Russia—as was the case of a widely reported Nigerian in July—indicate that Cameroonians and other Africans who fight for Russia are hardly limited only



Russian mercenaries in Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) have supported the military leaderships in multiple post-coup Africa countries, as seen in the adjacent image, but African countries, such as Cameroon, have become increasingly concerned about their own soldiers joining Russian armed forces in Ukraine.

Source: Clément Di Roma/VOA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RussiansecurityBangui.png>; Attribution: Public Domain

to army defectors.⁵ Due to Russia's need for manpower, the Kremlin is willing to take both trained soldiers and civilians with no military experience into its ranks in Ukraine, with the latter group being more susceptible to becoming targets.

African countries like Cameroon are grappling with risks of soldier defections and military-aged men fighting with Russia. Cameroon, however, is among the first African countries to develop policies to prevent its citizens from

joining Russia's fight in Ukraine, which, if duplicated by other countries, could hinder Russia's war effort and preserve counterterrorism forces' capabilities in Africa itself.

“Cameroon’s Ministry of Defense has taken measures to ensure that soldiers do not desert the country to fight in Eastern Europe, where a war is raging between Russia and Ukraine.”

Source: “Полторы тысячи наемников: росСМИ обнаружили схему зарубежного рекрутинга в ВС РФ (One thousand and five hundred mercenaries: Russian media discovered a scheme for foreign recruitment into the Russian Armed Forces),” *focus.ua* (Ukrainian publication focusing on national trends affecting Ukraine, including the ongoing Russian invasion and conflict), 23 April 2025. <https://focus.ua/voennye-novosti/703358-poltory-tysyachi-naemnikov-rossmi-obnaruzhili-shemu-zarubezhnogo-rekrutinka-v-vs-rf-infografika>

Russian Armed Forces have recruited mercenaries from Cameroon, as well as from more than a dozen countries. Throughout 2023-2024, more than one and a half thousand citizens of other countries who enlisted in the Russian-Ukrainian war were recruited into the Russian Armed Forces. Some of them died, and their bodies were brought home.

The journalists explained that they conducted an investigation based on a leak of data from the Russian

medical system (EMIAS), as well as by examining the social networks of mercenaries and specific Telegram channels. As the investigation showed, the largest number of mercenaries came from Asia (771 people). In second place were citizens of countries that were former Soviet republics (523 people), and in third place — Africans (72 people).

Source: “Cameroon Takes Measures to Stop Soldiers From Deserting to Ukraine-Russia War Fronts,” *Humangle Media* (Nigerian media organization co-founded by longtime Boko Haram insider, Ahmad Salkida, to provide insightful and objective coverage of Africa's conflict, humanitarian, and development issues), 22 March 2025. <https://humanglemedia.com/cameroon-takes-measures-to-stop-soldiers-from-deserting-to-ukraine-russia-war-fronts/>

At a time when soldiers are needed most at three war fronts in the Northwest and Southwest regions, Cameroon's Ministry of Defense has taken measures to ensure that soldiers do not desert the country to fight in Eastern Europe, where a war is raging between Russia and Ukraine. In a statement addressed to officers in charge of the defence and security units, the Minister

of Defense, Joseph Beti Assomo, ordered the unit heads to ensure that desertions do not occur again.... He instructed senior Cameroonian army officers to prohibit all outings from the national territory by elements of the defence and security forces who do not have authorisations duly signed by him after vetting by the chain of command and military security.

Notes:

- 1 There are varying definitions of “foreign fighter,” but, according to a standard definition of the American Sociological Association, the term means “those individuals who decide to leave their home to take part in a war in another country and for another nation or group.” Ori Swed, “Fighting Someone Else’s War,” *Footnotes*, Volume: 51 Issue: 1 (Winter 2023). <https://www.asanet.org/footnotes-article/fighting-someone-elses-war/#:~:text=The%20war%20in%20Ukraine%20has,for%20another%20nation%20or%20group>
- 2 There may not have been significant numbers of North Koreans in Ukraine according to the data because the data came from 2023-2024 and North Koreans were not widely reported in Ukraine as part of the Russian armed forces until late 2024.
- 3 See, for example: War Noir (@war_noir), X. 10 March 2022. https://x.com/war_noir/status/1502024593770532876
- 4 Reports of Cameroonians training in Molkino, which is east of the Ukrainian border, are credible, given that the Molkino training camp hosted Wagner mercenaries since around 2014 and was the group’s main training base in Russia. In the summer of 2023, the training camp was handed over to Africa Corps, which consists of former Wagner fighters under the authorities of the Russian Defense Ministry and, as its name indicates, focuses on operations in Africa. See: Jason Warner, ““Axis” of Military Regimes Strengthens in West Africa With Support From Russia,” *OE Watch* 11-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/axis-of-military-regimes-strengthens-in-west-africa-with-support-from-russia/>. See also a Cameroonian TV report on these Cameroonian trainees: Jack Margolin (@Jack_Mrgln), X, 10 May 2023. https://x.com/Jack_Mrgln/status/1656321927286255624
- 5 See, for example, the case of Nigerian Kehinde Oluwagbemileke: *The Nation*, “Nigerian fighting for Russia in exchange for reduced jail term captured by Ukrainian forces,” 6 July 2025. https://thenationonlineng.net/nigerian-fighting-for-russia-in-exchange-for-reduced-jail-term-captured-by-ukrainian-forces/#google_vignette

Armenia and Azerbaijan Each Conduct Joint Military Exercises with Iran

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Armenia and Azerbaijan took a significant step in ending their decades-long conflict when they finalized the text of a peace agreement in March 2025.¹ However, tensions remain. The excerpted article from the Armenian independent news website *Hetq* reports that Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to prepare their armed forces for potential scenarios, with both separately partnering with Iran on recent joint military exercises. The article notes that Armenia and Iran's joint military exercise took place in April 2025 along their shared border and emphasized improving the readiness of their respective units in the area. Earlier this year, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev issued a statement pressuring Armenia to allow the Zangezur corridor to move forward. The proposed corridor would run through southern Armenia parallel to the Armenia-Iran border and would connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan via a rail line. The Armenia-Iran exercise was the first ever between the two and has been seen as a response to President Ilham Aliyev's statement on Zangezur.²

The article also mentions Azerbaijan and Iran's joint military exercise that took place in May 2025 in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region, which had previously been under Armenian control. Azerbaijan took control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in September 2023 and is likely using the joint exercise with Iran as a deterrent. In the past year, Azerbaijan and Iran have conducted a few exercises that have focused on jointly responding to threats.³ Armenia and Azerbaijan's security cooperation with Iran is not extensive, but the exercises demonstrate that Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to prepare for different scenarios until their peace agreement is signed. While the extent and nature of potential Iranian involvement in further clashes between Armenia or Azerbaijan remain unclear, recent joint exercises underscore Iran's capacity to exert influence in the region.



The green arrow across southern Armenia roughly marks the location of the proposed Zangezur corridor, which would allow rail passage between Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan across Armenian territory.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020_Nagorno-Karabakh_ceasefire_map.svg; Attribution: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

“Iran has recently engaged in joint military exercises separately with Armenia and Azerbaijan along their mutual borders.”

Source: “Iranian Defense Minister Arrives in Armenia,” *Hetq* (independent news website in Armenia), 20 May 2025. <https://hetq.am/en/article/174447>

A delegation led by Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh arrived in Armenia today at the invitation of Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan.

A statement issued by Papikyan’s office provides no details regarding the visit...

Iran has recently engaged in joint military exercises separately with Armenia and Azerbaijan along their mutual borders.

In April, Iran and Armenia held a joint military exercise along their shared border in the Norduz region, emphasizing the importance of enhancing border

security and strengthening the combat readiness of operational units stationed in the area.

Two days ago, Iran and Azerbaijan launched a joint military exercise dubbed “Aras 2025” in areas of Karabakh once held by Armenian forces, aimed at bolstering border security and enhancing joint preparedness against potential threats.

The drill, taking place from May 18 to 21, involves special forces from Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces and the Azerbaijani Army.

Notes:

- 1 Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on the text of the peace agreement in March 2025 after going through a dozen drafts, but the two sides have yet to sign it as Armenia will have to amend its constitution to meet the obligations of the peace agreement. The change to Armenia’s constitution would nullify references supporting Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence from Azerbaijan; however, amending the constitution depends on ongoing domestic political issues in Armenia. For more on the delay to the peace agreement being signed and implemented, see: Thomas de Waal, “Armenia and Azerbaijan’s Major Step Forward,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 17 March 2025. <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/03/armenia-azerbaijan-peace-deal-next-steps?lang=en>
- 2 The Armenia-Iran exercise worked through a scenario of defending attacks along the border. For more on the exercise, see: Eduard Arakelyan, “Armenian-Iranian drills send strategic signal amid regional volatility,” *Civilnet.am*, 16 April 2025. <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/945310/opinion-armenian-iranian-drills-send-strategic-signal-amid-regional-volatility/>
- 3 Azerbaijan and Iran carried out an exercise similar to Aras – 2025 last year in Iran as well as a tactical naval exercise in Caspian Sea in 2024. For more on recent Azerbaijan-Iran exercises, see: Nigar Bayramli, “Azerbaijan, Iran Conclude “Araz-2025” Joint Military Exercise in Karabakh Region,” *Caspian News*, 22 May 2025. <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-iran-conclude-araz-2025-joint-military-exercise-in-karabakh-region-2025-5-22-0/>

Assessment of India's Artillery Used in Operation Sindoor

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

India began assessing Operation Sindoor immediately following the ceasefire agreement reached with Pakistan on 10 May 2025. Operation Sindoor marked the largest clashes between India and Pakistan in recent years.¹ The after-action largely focused on the increased use of unmanned systems by both sides and engagements between Indian and Pakistani aircraft.² The operation has also been noted as a shift in India's military strategy, which involved using more standoff weapons, such as its cruise missiles and loitering munitions.³ In addition to the use of standoff weapons, the English language *The Hindu* examines how India used artillery during Operation Sindoor.

The article notes that India's Regiment of Artillery successfully used

155-mm Excalibur rounds, which offer extended range and greater precision, as part of the initial strikes against terrorist groups in Pakistan's Azad Kashmir region on 7 May.⁴ Indian officials stated that their 155-mm artillery systems, **Bofors**, **M777**, and **Soltam**, successfully carried out retaliatory strikes against Pakistan. The article goes on to report that Operation Sindoor offered a look at how India used its artillery, having drawn lessons from the war in Ukraine, specifically, adding increased mobility and range. There were no recommendations or criticism of the use of artillery in Operation Sindoor, only that it took part in multiple phases of the conflict. Overall, India's use of 155-mm artillery systems and Excalibur rounds in Operation Sindoor demonstrates that despite India's increasing use of

“Seven of these terror targets were assigned to the Army, and of those, a majority were hit by the Artillery regiment using precision long-range Excalibur rounds and loitering munitions, officials stated.”

unmanned and standoff systems as part of a shift in strategy, artillery will play an important role for India going forward and offers a look at how it can be used alongside modern systems.



Vikramaditya Singh Sumbria

India used 155mm artillery systems, like the domestically-produced Kalyani Bharat picture here, in a couple of different capacities during Operation Sindoor.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kalyani_Bharat_ULH_155mm_39_CAL_Howitz.jpg; Attribution: Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

Source: Dinakar Peri, “Artillery’s firepower reverberates during Operation Sindoor,” *The Hindu* (English-language newspaper in India), 25 May 2025. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/artillerys-firepower-reverberates-during-operation-sindoor/article69615205.ece>

While the precision strikes by the Indian Air Force and the joint aerial defence with the Army were widely displayed during Operation Sindoor, the Army’s Regiment of Artillery, along with Army Air Defence, played a major role in both hitting terror targets in the initial phase and in the subsequent shelling and exchanges along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, multiple officials said.

In response to the terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22 that killed 26 civilians, the Indian military hit nine terror targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) overnight on May 6-7 under Operation Sindoor...

Seven of these terror targets were assigned to the Army, and of those, a majority were hit by the Artillery regiment using precision long-range Excalibur rounds and loitering munitions, officials stated...Most of the targets, especially in PoK, were within 6-16 kilometers from the border, another official noted, adding that the

type of weapon depends on the range and nature of the target, and the 155mm artillery is very accurate in a flat trajectory...

The Army has several artillery guns – Bofors, M777, and Soltam – deployed in the region, all of which were employed, officials said. In response to heavy shelling by Pakistan, concentrated artillery hits were undertaken by the Indian Army, causing extensive damage to several bunkers along the LoC, one of the officials stated.

In 2019, the Indian Army procured Excalibur precision rounds for all its 155mm artillery guns, which also extend their range...

As reported by The Hindu earlier, the Army has revised the profile of its Artillery regiments as a result of lessons drawn from the Ukraine war, with a focus on a mix of mobility and augmented long-range firepower, based on a detailed study by the Regiment of Artillery along with the Operations Branch...

Notes:

- 1 India launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May 2025 with airstrikes against terrorist groups based in Pakistan in response to the Pahalgam attack on 22 April that killed 26 people in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan retaliated by carrying out strikes against military targets in India, leading India and Pakistan to clash for a few days until the two sides reached the ceasefire agreement on 10 May. For a timeline on the 7-10 May clashes, see: “Operation Sindoor: A Timeline,” *Council for Strategic and Defense Research*, 10 May 2025. <https://csdronline.com/operation-sindoor-a-timeline/>
- 2 Assessments have come from both India and around the world, for a couple of examples, see: Rahul Rawat, “Testing Doctrine in Action: Operation Sindoor and India’s Military Calculus,” *Observer Research Foundation*, 21 May 2025. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/testing-doctrine-in-action-operation-sindoor-and-india-s-military-calculus>; and, Dr Walter Ladwig, “Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoor and the Future of Indian Deterrence,” *Royal United Services Institute*, 21 May 2025. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/calibrated-force-operation-sindoor-and-future-indian-deterrence>
- 3 For a look India’s shift in strategy, see: Arzan Tarapore, “Operation Sindoor and the Evolution of India’s Military Strategy Against Pakistan,” *War on the Rocks*, 19 May 2025. <https://warontherocks.com/2025/05/operation-sindoor-and-the-evolution-of-indias-strategy-against-pakistan/>
- 4 Azad Kashmir is the colloquial term for Azad Jammu and Kashmir region, abbreviated as AJK.