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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is part of the US Army Transformation and Training Command (T2COM), 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.

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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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China's 82nd Group Army Brigade Enhances Red-Blue Training To Improve Combat Readiness

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

A brigade in the 82nd Group Army in China's Central Theater Command has begun to incorporate learning more about the adversary into its training operations. The following article excerpt published by Chinese blog and news outlet *Sina* explains that previously, the "Blue Army" had set habits and routines they would incorporate into their ambushes and camouflage, which gave the "Red Army" an unrealistic advantage as well as a false sense of their capabilities.¹ To resolve this problem, the brigade began switching roles. The "Blue Army" now becomes the "Red Army." Feeling a sense of competition, the participants from both sides are forced to educate themselves on all factors surrounding the potential fight, including the battlefield situation, personnel configuration, weapons, and equipment. The "Blue Army" is forced to understand how the adversary

"If the enemy were faced with this situation, how would they respond?" and "If the enemy doesn't fall for our trick, what should we do?"



Chinese soldiers with the People's Liberation Army provide perimeter security while executing a cordon and search training event during Khaan Quest 2015 in Tavantolgoi, Mongolia, 26 June 2015.

Source: Defense Visual Information Distribution Service <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2032495/us-mongolian-armed-forces-conduct-cordon-and-search-training-together>.

fights, their decision-making processes, tactics, and strategies.²

According to the article, the brigade has so far developed a training program that covers over a dozen types of terrain, including mountains, jungles, and towns, relying on typical tactical maneuvers found in their tactical databases. They also developed a "confrontational problem list," which classifies and files the shortcomings seen during each training session. These shortcomings then serve as the primary targets for the next training iteration. This new method, while still in its testing phase,

is broadening soldier capability and awareness. For example, the article describes a squad leader who had served as a backbone of the "Red Army" for a long time. Since switching to the "Blue Army," he has been studying how to build defensive positions and use the terrain to set up a maze, which is enabling him to accurately predict the "Blue Army's" actions.

This change in the 82nd Group Army—from predictable, rote training to a dynamic, adversarial learning environment—represents a significant step in the PLA's ongoing effort to overcome its

shortcomings in realistic combat preparation. By forcing soldiers to understand both offensive and defensive perspectives and systematically analyzing training failures, the brigade is fostering

a more adaptable and insightful force. This approach, if widely adopted, could substantially reduce the PLA's reliance on established patterns and improve its ability to counter unexpected tactics.

Continued monitoring of this and similar initiatives will be crucial to understanding the PLA's capabilities.

Source: Liang Chao, “第八十二集团军某旅探索对抗训练新模式, (82nd Group Army Brigade Explores New Model of Confrontation Training)” *Sina* (Chinese blog and news outlet), 11 September 2025, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/zonghe/2025-09-11/doc-infqawwh6862624.shtml>

“This kind of confrontation [repetitive training scenarios] is like a student always taking the same test, which cannot test his true level.” The brigade party committee saw a deeper problem - in daily training, winning or losing is not important. What is important is whether the officers and soldiers can improve their actual combat skills under the “grinding stone” of the “Blue Army.”

“Not only must we learn to how to solve difficult problems, we must also know how to set up difficult problems, so as to hone our hard-core ability to defeat the enemy!”

The team pretended to be weak in defense, while secretly deploying elite forces to prepare for an ambush. When the main force of the “Red Army” was drawn to the area, the “Blue Army” launched a sudden attack, successfully disrupting their offensive deployment. With this ambush experience, when they later became the “Red Army”, if they encountered a similar situation, they would recognize the “Blue Army’s” tactical intentions and then adjust their attack accordingly.

Today, the brigade has developed a confrontation training program covering more than a dozen types of

Notes:

- 1 China employs a Red Team vs. Blue Team training concept, mirroring similar practices in Western militaries. The Red Team typically represents adversarial forces, while the Blue team represents friendly, Chinese forces.
- 2 Sun Tzu's *Art of War* famously states, “Know your enemy and know yourself; and in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”

terrain, including mountains, jungles, and towns, relying on typical tactical samples collected and organized in the tactical database. They have also established a “confrontation problem list” to classify and file the shortcomings and weaknesses discovered in each training session, which will serve as the main target for the next stage of training.

“It is difficult to find a ‘perfect opponent’ in confrontation training. Through role-swapping, officers and soldiers can constantly face new difficult, challenging and dangerous situations and continue to receive tests close to actual combat,” said the brigade leader.

War is a life-or-death struggle. During training, we should constantly ask and reflect on these questions: “If the enemy were faced with this situation, how would they respond?” and “If the enemy doesn’t fall for our trick, what should we do?” Only by thoroughly understanding the enemy’s situation, our own situation, and the battlefield environment can we continuously build the confidence to win.

Chinese Victory Day Parade Highlights Critical Strategic Shift

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was on full display at the 3 September Victory Day Parade, marking the 80th anniversary of China's victory over Japan and the end of World War II. The excerpted opinion piece published on China's largest multinational technology conglomerate, *Tencent*, focused on the PLA Information Support Force, Aerospace Force, and Cyberspace Force, describing the collective debut of these forces as "an important strategic turn completed in eight years."

In 2015, the Central Military Commission established the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) to solve the problem of "nine dragons governing the water," the article explains.¹ However, it found that forcing highly specialized fields

under one framework led to resource dispersion and not enough depth of expertise to run them. In April 2024 it dissolved the PLASSF and replaced it with the three individual forces, an acknowledgement "that different technological fields require independent development paths." Space warfare relies on orbital calculations and satellite control, cyber focuses on the defense of and attack on nodes, and information support focuses on data fusion. Each of these areas requires dedicated command systems, training standards, and operational regulations.

The article reminds its readers of the PLA's dramatic strategic shift, having gone from possessing a "people's war" mindset to one that relies on science and technology to strengthen

the military. China's armed forces no longer rely on human wave tactics but now on data links. It now seeks to replace protracted war with precision strikes and system-destroying attacks. Finally, it seeks to weave AI-driven technologies into its new combat network. The greatest challenge facing the PLA now, according to the article, is how to achieve cross-domain coordination. The article concludes that China might have the expertise and capabilities, but, unlike the U.S. military, it has not tested these capabilities in an actual combat setting.

"The establishment of the three new services is not the end, but the starting point for a new round of military innovation."



Line-up of the parade groups on 3 September 2025 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Sino-Japanese War and World War II.

Source: Kremlin.ru, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_China_Victory_Day_Parade#/media/File:2025_China_Victory_Day_Parade.jpg

Source: “中国3大新军种首次亮相，完成重要战略转身 (China's three new military branches made their debut, completing an important strategic turn),” Tencent (China's largest multinational technology conglomerate), 9 September 2025. <https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250909A03WMF00>

The three new branches of the People's Liberation Army's Information Support Force, Military Aerospace Force, and Cyberspace Force made their first collective appearance. This is not a simple equipment display, but a signal of profound changes in the Chinese military...

The original purpose of establishing the Strategic Support Force was to solve the problem of “nine dragons governing the water.” Emerging fields such as space, cyber, and electronic warfare were previously scattered across different departments, resulting in low efficiency. However, practice has shown that forcing highly specialized fields into a single framework leads to resource dispersion and insufficient professional depth. This is like having one commander manage both space launches and Cyber-attack and defense is technically unrealistic.

This split demonstrates the PLA's pragmatic approach—acknowledging that different technological fields require independent development paths. Space warfare requires orbital calculations and satellite control, cyber warfare relies on code attack and defense, and information support focuses on data fusion. Each

field requires a dedicated command system, training standards, and operational regulations. Directly under the Central Military Commission's command, It improves decision-making efficiency and avoids the embarrassment of laymen commanding experts.

On a deeper level, this reform reflects the PLA's strategic shift from a “people's war” mindset to a “strengthening the military through science and technology.”...

The real challenge lies in achieving cross-domain coordination—...The US military's advantage lies in its repeated war-tested capabilities, while the People's Liberation Army still needs practice to improve.

This military transformation essentially responds to the question of our times: When warfare enters an era of seconds-to-second confrontations, and when algorithms become the new ammunition, how should military structure evolve? China's answer is clear: it must not only keep pace with global trends, but also forge its own path. The establishment of the three new services is not the end, but the starting point for a new round of military innovation.

Notes:

- 1 “Nine dragons governing the water” is a Chinese idiom (九龙治水) that describes an attempt to govern water as chaotic and fragmented due to there being too many managers and unclear lines of authority. The phrase was originally tied to an old agricultural saying, “fewer dragons, more rain; more dragons, less rain.” This meant that if there were too many dragons trying to govern the rainfall, it would lead to bickering and a shirking of responsibility, ultimately leading to drought. On the other hand, fewer dragons would lead to better coordination and plentiful rain.

Taiwan Pursues Legal Framework To Combat Undersea Cable Sabotage

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

In response to “an unprecedented number of subsea cable disruptions” in 2025, Taipei is drafting a law aimed at protecting its undersea communication cable network and “protect[ing] national security.” According to the excerpted article from Japan-based *Nikkei Asia*, the pending law, about which no further detail is given, is intended to provide a legal framework for the policing of undersea cables and that most countries rely on “territorial sea laws or exclusive economic zone legislation” to protect their vulnerable networks.¹ The article also notes how

difficult it is to determine responsibility for the instances of sabotage under existing domestic and international law.² The drafting of the new legislation comes at a time when Taiwan officials worry that undersea cable cutting is part of a larger Chinese strategy of using grey zone tactics to degrade Taiwan’s defenses. According to Hsieh Ching-Chin, deputy director general of the Taiwan Coast Guard Administration, as quoted in the *Nikkei Asia* article, it is possible that even vessels registered for commercial purposes could “be instructed by the Chinese Communist

Party to support potential military operations, including blockades, disruption of digital infrastructure, or battlefield mapping to better understand the waters for future military activities.”

A law that codifies legal reactions, including the use of police or military force in response to the cutting of undersea cables, could affect not only the operational environment in the Taiwan Strait, but also set a legal precedent in other areas of the world where the cutting of undersea cables has been on the rise.³

“Taiwan has reported an unprecedented number of subsea cable disruptions in the first few months of this year...the surge has sparked mounting concerns that Beijing could use fishing and cargo ships as cover for gray-zone operations aimed at hitting Taiwan’s critical communications infrastructure.”



The Russian Navy’s special purpose intelligence gathering vessel, *Yantar*, has been accused of mapping Western Europe’s undersea cable network.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_research_vessel_Yantar#/media/File:Yantar_research_vessel_04.jpg

Source: Cheng Ting-Fang, Lauly Li and Thompson Chau, "Inside Taiwan's fight to protect its vital undersea cables," *Nikkei Asia*, 10 September 2025. https://asia.nikkei.com/business/technology/tech-asia/inside-taiwan-s-fight-to-protect-its-vital-undersea-cables?utm_campaign=GL_asia_daily&utm_medium=email&utm_source=NA_newsletter&utm_content=article_link&del_type=1&pub_date=202509101230000900&seq_num=5&si=__MERGE__user_id__MERGE__

Taiwan has reported an unprecedented number of subsea cable disruptions in the first few months of this year. Although some damage was attributed to natural aging, the surge has sparked mounting concerns that Beijing could use fishing and cargo ships as cover for gray-zone operations aimed at hitting Taiwan's critical communications infrastructure...

"We cannot rule out the possibility that, even if these vessels are registered for commercial or fishing use, they could still be instructed by the Chinese Communist Party to support potential military operations, including blockades, disruption of digital infrastructure, or battlefield mapping to better understand the waters for future military activities," Hsieh said.

Fourteen submarine cables carry the bulk of Taiwan's international communications, with 10 lines providing links to its outlying islands, according to government data. Growing tensions between Taipei and Beijing have left this vital infrastructure increasingly vulnerable.

Notes:

- 1 See: Dodge Billingsley, "Taiwan Detains Chinese Ship Captain in Undersea Cable Sabotage Investigation, *OE Watch*, 05-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-5-2025/>
- 2 The cutting of undersea cables is on the increase around the world. See. "Commercial shipping likely cut Red Sea cables that disrupted internet access, experts say," *AP*, 9 September 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/red-sea-undersea-cables-cut-internet-disruption-0b08fc5f02daf72710e0010c11ea21ae>
- 3 See: Dodge Billingsley, Damage to Undersea Cables in Baltic Hint at China – Russia Collusion, *OE Watch*, 01-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/damage-to-undersea-cables-in-baltic-hint-at-china-russia-collusion-2/?highlight=Damage%20to%20Undersea%20Cables%20in%20>

Taiwan is drafting a law aimed specifically at protecting its undersea communications cables. "Most nations rely on territorial sea laws or exclusive economic zone legislation to regulate the laying and maintenance of undersea cables. But when those cables are cut or damaged, determining responsibility under domestic and international law becomes legally complex and highly challenging."

National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Ming-yen warned earlier this year that international subsea cables and domestic communications infrastructure might be targeted by China...

This week, President Lai Ching-te said the Executive Yuan is drafting a new law specifically covering subsea cables to protect Taiwan's national security and the "lifeline" of the island's communications.

"When cables are cut or damaged, determining responsibility under domestic and international law becomes ... highly challenging."

Mexico Takes Strategic Steps To Raise Tariffs and Reduce Dependence on China

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Mexico's relationship with China has grown dramatically over the past decade. However, much of the relationship between the two countries is unidirectional exports flowing from China to Mexico. Container traffic from China to Mexico has soared recently.¹ Within Mexico, the growth has contributed to increased scrutiny of the relationship and political rhetoric about the urgent need to protect important Mexican industries from China's overcapacity and highly subsidized exports. Mexico, for instance, was the number one destination for China's automotive exports in 2024.² The excerpted article from Mexico's center-center-right daily newspaper, *El Universal*, reports on a plan to raise tariffs to 50 percent on 19 strategic sectors and over 1,400 products, perhaps most importantly on automotive products. The plan would impact imports from countries that do not have trade agreements with Mexico, hitting China especially hard, but also Vietnam and South Korea. As reported by *El Universal*, Mexico aims to preserve jobs and ward off dumping and other anticompetitive measures in a geopolitically heated environment. Mexico-based economic-focused media outlet, *El Economista*, reports on China's response to the tariff announcements, threatening Mexico with unspecified



Chinese investment in Mexico is under increasing scrutiny, especially in sectors where Mexico has been historically competitive, such as automotive manufacturing.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/121483302@N02/14624748456>

“Mexico would increase the tariff to the maximum level allowed by the World Trade Organization (WTO).”

retaliation. The outlet also states that China's response will likely set a precedent and send a message to other countries contemplating similar geopolitical decisions.

Mexico's decision is more than just economic. It represents an important signal for the operational environment—one of increasing alignment with North America and distancing from China. As other countries in Latin America seek to balance or hedge in a

dynamic and rapidly changing global order, Mexico's firm message is that it is casting its lot with North America, not just economically, but also strategically. If Mexico can successfully pivot from China and raise tariffs without Chinese retaliation, the decision could influence other countries in Latin America to take similar geopolitical decisions.³

Source: “México subirá hasta 50% los aranceles a autos y productos chinos; implementará el nivel máximo permitido por la OMC (Mexico will raise tariffs on Chinese cars and products by up to 50%; it will implement the maximum level allowed by the WTO),” *El Universal* (one of Mexico’s best known daily newspapers with center-center-right leanings), 10 September 2025. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/cartera/mexico-subira-hasta-50-los-aranceles-a-autos-y-productos-chinos-implementara-el-nivel-maximo-permitido-por-la-omc/>

To replace Asian imports with domestic products, the federal government plans to impose tariffs of up to 50% on auto parts, light vehicles, clothing, steel, textiles, paper, cardboard, glass, soaps, perfumes, and cosmetics. Additionally, tariffs of 35% are planned for all imports of motorcycles, plastics, household appliances, toys, furniture, footwear, leather goods, aluminum, and trailers. With this, Mexico would increase the tariff ‘to the maximum level allowed by the World Trade Organization

(WTO),’ according to the head of the Ministry of Economy, Marcelo Ebrard...With this, the agency assured that 325,000 jobs that were at risk of disappearing will be protected, especially in the large industrial centers of Nuevo León, Jalisco, the State of Mexico, Mexico City, Querétaro, and other states across the country...Ebrard commented that Chinese cars already face a 20% tariff, but the tariff will be raised to the maximum allowed by the WTO, which is 50%.

Source: “México eleva aranceles: la respuesta de China y el impacto en la industria automotriz (Mexico Raises Tariffs: China’s Response and the Impact on the Auto Industry),” *El Economista* (a Mexican outlet focused on economic and trade issues), 13 September 2025. <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/empresas/mexico-eleva-aranceles-respuesta-china-impacto-industria-automotriz-20250913-777062.html>

The measure, which sparked heated debate, aims to strengthen domestic industry, but has provoked an immediate reaction from China, the main trading partner affected...The Chinese government reacted immediately to the proposal, calling it ‘coercive’ and

urging Mexico to act with ‘caution.’ Through its embassy, Beijing warned that it will take the ‘necessary measures’ to defend its rights and interests. Although the actions were not specified, the diplomatic tension is evident.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on Mexico’s growing trade relationship with China and the one-sided nature of the relationship, see: Isabella Cota, “The trade route from China to Mexico soars by 60% in January and establishes itself as one of the largest in the world,” *El País*, 15 March 2024. <https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2024-03-15/the-trade-route-from-china-to-mexico-soars-by-60-in-january-and-establishes-itself-as-one-of-the-largest-in-the-world.html>
- 2 “Mexican officials to speak with China on tariffs next week,” *Reuters*, 12 September 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-officials-speak-with-china-tariffs-next-week-2025-09-12/>
- 3 Unrelated to protecting Mexican jobs, tariff increases on imports from Asia will have the additional benefit of aligning Mexico with the rest of North America once the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement is renegotiated in 2026. For more information, see: Diego Marroquin Bitar, Christopher Hernandez-Roy, and Anthony Earl Wayne, “USMCA Review 2026,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 18 August 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/usmca-review-2026>

Russian Perspective on Human Component of Drone Warfare

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from the Russian daily newspaper, *Izvestiya*, features a commentary by Dmitry Kuzyakin, the chief designer of the Central Design Bureau of the Russian Aerospace Industry, provides his assessment of the changing character of war and the nature of unmanned vehicle warfare. Kuzyakin is also the CEO of Russian UAV manufacturer Center of Integrated Unmanned Solutions (CUS), a significant supplier of domestically produced UAVs being used in Ukraine.¹ In the West, there has been much speculation and angst about the possibility of the use of artificial intelligence to supplant the need for the human operators of unmanned vehicles. But Kuzyakin argues that the human component is still the most important and valuable component of any unmanned vehicle system. Despite advances in artificial intelligence, humans are still required for the command and control of unmanned vehicles. In addition, due to the rapid changes on the battlefield,



Russian first-person-view (FPV) UAV and operator.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/FPV_drones_support_of_the_Dnepr_Grouping_of_Forces_%282%29.png

Russian and Ukrainian soldiers are required to maintain and modify equipment and adjust tactics in the field—activities that artificial intelligence cannot fully and independently accomplish. To be combat effective in this environment, servicemen must have a thorough understanding of the science and engineering technology that underpins unmanned vehicles so these

“The myth of the ‘drone war’ greatly simplifies the real picture.”

adjustments can be made. Kuzyakin suggests prioritizing targeting the human component of any unmanned vehicle.

Source: Dmitry Kuzyakin, “«Матрица» беспилотной войны: Главный конструктор ЦКБР Дмитрий Кузякин — о том, почему операторы БПЛА стали главной целью в зоне боевых действий (‘The Matrix of Drone Warfare: Chief Designer of the Central Design Bureau of the Russian Aerospace Industry Dmitry Kuzyakin on why UAV operators have become the main target in combat zones’), *Izvestiya* (Russian daily newspaper), 5 September 2025. <https://iz.ru/1948808/dmitrii-kuzakin/matrica-bespilotnoi-voiny>

Considering the relatively low cost of equipment and drones, the results of their [UAV operator’s] work can be phenomenal...But it is not drones that are conducting

combat operations, but people. The myth of the “drone war” greatly simplifies the real picture. It seems that a fighter simply sends a device on a mission without

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participating in it personally. However, behind each drone there is a person who literally controls it via a radio channel or optics. The problem is not solved by shooting down or suppressing a drone using electronic warfare – another one will arrive in a few minutes. Only by disabling the entire crew can you protect yourself for a long time. This is precisely why methodical work is underway to identify and suppress people controlling drones. The SMO [special military operation] is the first conflict where people with higher technical education literally shoot at each other. This emphasizes how much the nature of war and its participants has changed...

The work of the engineer support group, which prepares the UAV, configures, maintains and modifies the equipment, also goes unnoticed. For example, without understanding the polarization of radio waves, the directional diagram and the geometry of signal propagation, it is impossible to ensure long-distance flights, and our specialists work at very long distances...

Combat operations have turned into a race for technology and knowledge. The one who surprises with new solutions first gets an advantage. Today, the war is not so much for territory as for time and a small techno-

logical parity, which ultimately ensures success “on the ground”. And in this race, we are undoubtedly leading. It cannot be otherwise. Today, not only the fulfillment of combat missions, but also the lives and health of the fighters themselves depend on knowledge of the exact sciences and the latest technological achievements...

FPV pilots, operators, engineers, sappers and interceptors now make up the elite of the Russian Armed Forces. Each of them will be able to lecture and teach students after the war. These people are at the forefront of modern technology, where they learn in practice how to make their systems work and disable enemy equipment. There is no place for artificial intelligence “terminators” or fictional “combat robots”...

Thus, it turns out that in the drone war, people come first. And the protection of operators and pilots of FPV crews becomes a key factor in success. People, in addition to the fact that they must undergo expensive and very complex training, must also gain combat experience. The loss of such a specialist, in addition to a personal tragedy for loved ones, is also a resource that is difficult to replace...

Notes:

- 1 “Russian CEO Reveals New ‘Doomsday Drone’ to Use in Nuclear War,” Newsweek, 3 August 2024. <https://www.newsweek.com/russian-ceo-reveals-new-doomsday-drone-use-nuclear-war-1934156>

Russia Unveils Starlink Alternative To Reduce Global South Dependence on West

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

Russian state media is touting the development of a new domestic satellite internet system, described as a “hi-tech Starlink analog,” which Moscow claims could help the Global South reduce its dependence on U.S. technology.¹ According to Russian state-owned news agency *Sputnik*, the Russian system will provide affordable broadband access via low-Earth orbit satellites, marketed as both a tool for digital sovereignty and a counterweight to Western tech dominance.

The article frames the project—which is being produced by Roscosmos, Russia’s version of NASA—as part of Russia’s broader effort to position itself as a technology leader in the

“Nations of the Global South understand that dependence on the U.S. makes them vulnerable. Internet access via Starlink can be restricted at any time. Availability of a Russian system providing equally good or even better services is crucial.”



A stack of 60 Starlink test satellites atop a Falcon 9 rocket, close to entering orbit.
Source: Rexdanato, <https://flickr.com/photos/130608600@N05/47926144123>

emerging multipolar order. Russian analysts argue that countries across Africa, Latin America, and Asia remain vulnerable to Western digital platforms and sanctions regimes and that Russian-made platforms are safer and more secure. They suggest that Moscow’s initiative will allow states to avoid the risks of potential switch-off or surveillance by Washington. The system, which Russian officials say will be less expensive than Western counterparts and is set to roll out in 2027, is being positioned as an attractive alternative for developing nations that lack robust digital infrastructure.

The article also underscores the military implications of satellite internet, noting the uneven role that the Starlink system has played in Ukraine.² By promoting its version, Russia seeks to signal that it too can provide secure, sovereign communications to partners—and potentially deny adversaries the

monopoly on space-based internet services. The system will improve military command and control, “ensuring informed decisionmaking.”

This development reflects ongoing efforts by Moscow to deepen its technological and military ties with countries across the Global South. The Russian narrative reflects a consistent theme in its strategic messaging: portraying Moscow as a defender of “digital sovereignty” against Western hegemony while cultivating technological partnerships with the Global South. How feasible this system will be in practice—given Russia’s sanctions-constrained economy and lagging satellite manufacturing base—remains an open question.

Source: “Russia’s Hi-Tech Starlink Analog Can Free Global South From US Tech Dominance: Here’s How,” *Sputnik*, 17 September 2025. <https://sputnikglobe.com/20250917/russias-hi-tech-starlink-analog-can-free-global-south-from-us-tech-dominance-heres-how-1122802372.html>

Russia’s system uses laser beams, which “are more modern digital technologies providing faster & higher quality data transmission, as well as improved resistance to interference,” Knutov explains.

Longer Range

An effective range of up to 5,000 km “means far fewer satellites are needed than Elon Musk’s system (hundreds vs thousands),” Knutov explains. That makes the Russian system not only less costly, but less harmful to the already heavily overcrowded LEO environment.

Doppler Effect: Solved

“We’ve been able to completely compensate” for the Doppler signal frequency issue, occurring from the high speeds (27,000 km/h) at which satellites orbit Earth, “allowing the signal to be maintained virtually free of interference & distortion.”

Global Implications

The system will provide secure, high-speed communications to: Russian resource sector companies working in remote areas ships situated anywhere on Earth the military, for command, control & real-time battlefield reports, ensuring informed decision-making.

Notes:

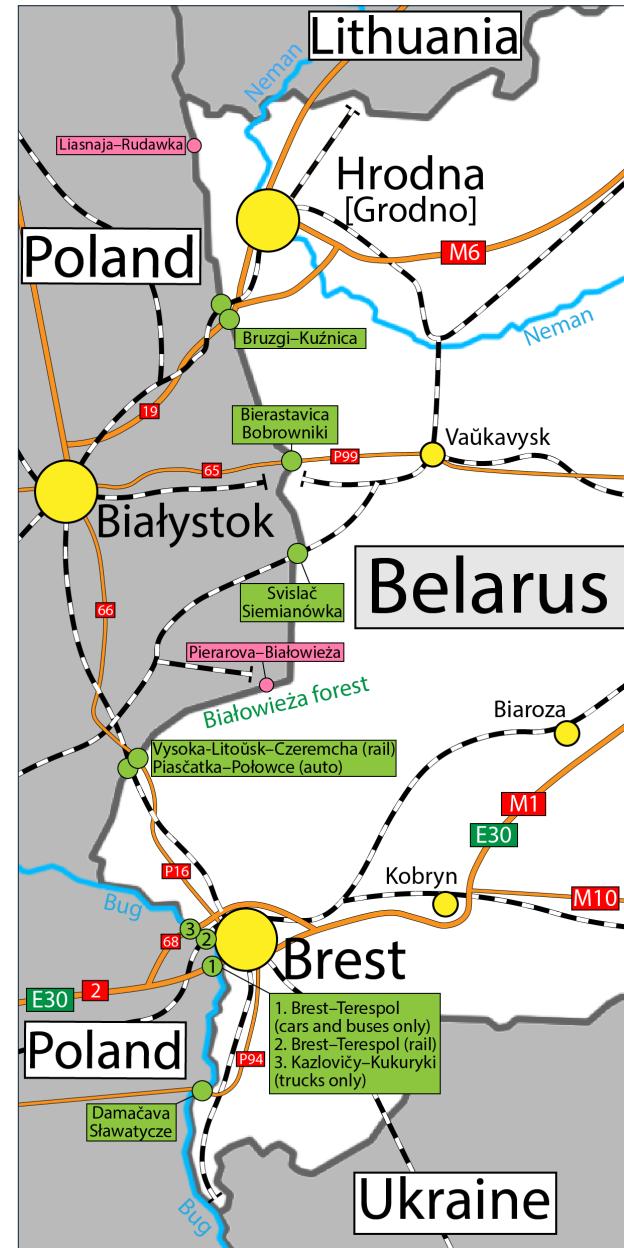
- 1 Global South is a term denoting a method of grouping countries based on their defining characteristics with regard to socioeconomics and politics. According to UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Global South broadly comprises Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia (excluding Israel, Japan and South Korea), and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).
- 2 Tim Zadrozny, “Starlink ‘down across the entire front line’ in Ukraine as internet service suffers global outage,” *The Kyiv Independent*, 15 September 2025. <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraine-affected-as-starlink-suffers-global-outage/>

Russian Military Action on NATO's Eastern Border Threaten Chinese Overland Trade Routes to Europe

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Russia's aggressive posture in Europe recently exposed a potential flashpoint with China. Poland shut its border with Belarus for nearly two weeks in response to the "incursion of 21 Russian drones" into Polish airspace on 10 September and Zapad-2025, an annual Russian-Belarusian military exercise that takes place in Belarus and puts Russian forces nearer the Polish border. According to the excerpted article published by Japan-based *Nikkei Asia*, the Polish border closure directly impacted China, a member of the CRINK alliance and one of a handful of states that continues to support Russia's war in Ukraine.¹ Poland is the primary overland gateway for Chinese freight entering Europe. One hundred thirty trains and 1,500 trucks were stranded in Belarus during the closure. According to the article, China put pressure on Poland to ensure the safe operation of the road and rail routes, while Poland appealed to China to put pressure on Moscow. Polish experts cited in the article

were split on what direction China would lean, noting that Beijing is more apt to take a pro-Russian position at the expense of its shipping interests that run through Poland. One Polish official countered that China needs Poland more than Poland needs China because most of the Chinese goods that are transported through Poland are bound for other European countries. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk acknowledged border closures will negatively impact Polish businesses involved in transporting Chinese goods. However, Tusk also stood fast on Poland's position vis-à-vis Russia, noting that "if tensions increase, we will not hesitate, and we will make appropriate decisions."



Map detailing the border crossings between Poland and Belarus, including roads and rail crossings.
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus-Poland_border-/media/File:Belarus-Poland_border_\(en\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus-Poland_border-/media/File:Belarus-Poland_border_(en).png)

"Poland is the main gateway for China-Europe freight trains into the EU."

Source: “Russian aggression in eastern Europe threatens China-EU trade Route,” *Nikkei Asia* (Japan based international news with good coverage of Asia), 25 September 2025. <https://asia.nikkei.com/economy/trade/russian-aggression-in-eastern-europe-threatens-china-eu-trade-route>

NATO member Poland shut all crossings it shares with Belarus on Sept. 12 ahead of the five-day Russian-Belarusian military exercise, called Zapad-2025. The closure followed the incursion of 21 Russian drones into Polish airspace two days earlier, three of which were shot down with backing from NATO, stoking fears in Europe that Moscow was testing the military bloc’s resolve.

Poland is the main gateway for China-Europe freight trains into the EU. Up to 90% of goods, worth 25 billion euros (\$29.5 billion), coming from China pass through the Malaszewicze crossing annually. The overland route is faster than sea freight and is used for higher-value or time-sensitive goods such as electronics, auto parts and seasonal fashion.

With more than 130 trains and 1,500 trucks stranded in Belarus during the shutdown, business ground to a halt. “The situation has caught the logistics industry by surprise,” said Radoslaw Pyffel, chairman of the Asian Forum in Warsaw and former head of Eurasia at PKP Cargo, the state-owned rail freight operator. “Companies were given only two or three days’ notice of closures, while a train from Asia to Europe takes at least 15 days.”

Beijing hoped Poland would introduce “effective measures to ensure the safe and smooth operation of the trains, and to safeguard the stability of international industrial supply chains,” a spokesperson from the Chinese Foreign Ministry told journalists ahead of Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Poland on Sept. 15, his first in six years.

Notes:

- 1 Although not a formal alliance or union, the acronym CRINK was introduced by Peter Van Praagh at the Halifax International Security Forum in 2023. CRINK stands for China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, all loosely aligned to counter what they consider global U.S. hegemony and a Western led world order.

Polish diplomats had hoped that by blocking the Chinese trade artery, Beijing might exert its influence over Moscow and press Minsk to ease security tensions along the eastern frontier.

“If China helps us, as it did in the past and stop Belarusian provocations, the border will be opened,” Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski wrote in a post on X.

Alicja Bachulska, policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said Poland’s approach risked miscalculation. “They closed the border with Belarus because of legitimate security concerns, while at the same time creating tensions with China ahead of the long-planned visit by Wang Yi,” she said. “The thinking seems to be that Beijing might be convinced to pressure Russia and/or Belarus to alter their behavior.” But Bachulska said Beijing was likely to prioritize ties with Moscow over relations with individual EU member states. Pyffel agreed, saying China’s insistence that it is not a party to the war in Ukraine and its repeated calls for a diplomatic settlement have little substance.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said lifting the border closure had helped to reduce threats and reflected the economic interests of Polish carriers and railways. But he did not rule out reinstating the measure. “If tensions increase, we will not hesitate and we will make appropriate decisions,” he said.

Sanctioned Russian Cargo Ship Completes Trans-Arctic Delivery of Unknown Cargo

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

As per reporting from the Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, on 3 September, the *Maia-1*, a ship owned by a company known for “cooperating closely with the Russian war ministry” and known to carry shipments between North Korea and Russia, arrived in the Russian port city of Arkhangelsk, a major Arctic seaport. According to the article, the *Maia-1* has made several suspicious voyages in the last few years, including a 2023 run that, according to international observers, was used to transport

North Korean weapons and ammunition to Russia for its war in Ukraine. The *Maia-1* is operated by MG-Flot, formerly Transmorsflot, a Russian/Dagestani shipping company founded in 2005, which has been involved in the transport of Iranian UAV components and systems across the Caspian Sea into Russia and North Korean arms and ammunition into Russia via the Pacific and Northern Sea Routes. MG-Flot is sanctioned by the U.S., U.K., and EU. However, the reason for *Maia-1*’s recent

port of call in Arkhangelsk is unknown. In addition to its history of transporting weapons and ammunition, the article suggests that *Maia-1*’s cargo could be connected to Russia’s floating nuclear power plant project in Pevek or to one of Russia’s major mining projects in the area.¹ The continued voyages of the *Maia-1* illustrate Russia’s ability to use its sanctioned fleet for cargo movement.

“The 131-meter-long Maia-1 is under international sanctions for its transportation of weapons used in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.”



The *Maia-1*, seen here in a previous photo when it was flagged Neptune One. The *Maia-1*, which has an ice class Arc4 designation, is under western sanctions for transporting numerous arms shipments between Iran-Russia and North Korea-Russia.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Navire_NEPTUNE_CROWN_en_mer_de_Casablanca.jpg

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Cargo ship involved in weapons deliveries from North Korea makes port call in Arkhangelsk,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 3 September 2025. <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/news/cargo-ship-involved-in-weapons-deliveries-from-north-korea-makes-port-call-in-arkhangelsk/436228>

The 131-meter-long Maia-1 is under international sanctions for its transportation of weapons used in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. On September 3 the general cargo ship arrived in the north Russian port city of Arkhangelsk after a several-thousand-kilometer long voyage from Pevek, a remote Russian settlement on the Chukotka coast. Cargo ship Maia-1 made port call in Arkhangelsk on September 3, 2025. The Maia-1 has a shady history. In fall 2023, it was observed transporting containers between North Korea and Russia. According to international observers, the containers were filled with weapons and ammunition later used in the war against Ukraine. The vessel was also spotted in India in 2022 with weapons on board. It is not clear what kind of cargo the ship transported on its latest voyage, but it could be connected with the floating nuclear power plant project in Pevek or the major mining development projects in the area.

It is not the first time that the Maia-1 sailed in far northern waters. The ship has ice class Arc4 protection and is licensed for sailing on the Northern Sea Route. Judging from information from VesselFinder, it crossed the maritime border between Norway and Russia on August 24 this year. According to Equasis, the electronic

quality shipping information system, the Maia-1 has been in the north repeatedly over the past two years.

The cargo carrier is owned and managed by MG-Flot, a company that previously operated under the name Transmorflot. The company is sanctioned by the US, EU, UK, as well as a number of other countries. The MG-Flot is believed to cooperate closely with the Russian war ministry.

According to Swiss authorities, MG-Flot LLC is “involved in a military transportation network of Russian cargo vessels shipping North Korean armaments from Pyongyang to military facilities in the Russian [Pacific] port of Dunai.”

“Subsequently, North Korean munitions transported by MG-Flot LLC are transferred to depots on Russia’s western border to be deployed in Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine,” Open Sanctions reported—according to Swiss authorities. Swiss authorities also state that ships owned by MG-Flot LLC have been involved in weapons shipments from Iran to aid Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Notes:

- 1 For additional background on Russia’s floating nuclear power plants, see: Les Grau, “Russia Continues Floating Nuclear Power Plant Expansion, OE Watch, 04-2025 <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-4-2025/>; and Les Grau “Russia Validates Floating Nuclear Power Plant Viability, OE Watch, 03-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-3-2025/>

Russian Misinformation Emerges After Closure of French Military Base in Senegal

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Russia is exploiting France's withdrawal from military facilities in West Africa by increasing information operations to undermine whatever remains of French credibility, goodwill, and influence in the region. On 11 July, for example, *Senegal-based Agence de Presse Africaine* published the first excerpt, discussing the closure of a French military base in the Rufisque district of Dakar. The base had once hosted some 350 French soldiers and managed French military communications on the southern Atlantic coast.

According to the article, in May, France agreed to return the base to Senegal, but the article suggests France and Senegal continue to foresee future military cooperation. Russian government-affiliated media nonetheless reacted to the "spy base" closure by promoting anti-French and anti-Western narratives and portraying France and Senegal as being on bad terms. According to interviews with Senegalese civilians from the second excerpt, from *Russia Today's* X thread, Senegalese civilians believe hosting a French base was hypocritical because West African countries "combined" would never be afforded as much land in France for a base as the French base occupied in Rufisque.



Senegalese president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, featured below, campaigned on a populist and nationalistic platform and, after coming into office in 2024, oversaw the departure of France from the final military bases it occupied in the country, including at Rufisque.

Source: SENEKO TV, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diomaye_Faye_entretien.jpg

The third excerpt, which is another X thread from *Sputnik Afrique*, similarly posted interviews with Senegalese. They suggested Senegal gained nothing from the French military and that foreign powers arm jihadists to destabilize the Sahel for their own imperialist purposes. According to Russian narratives, Africa Corps is then needed to help defend African governments from these threats and plots.¹

While the French military presence in Senegal is now virtually nonexistent, and Russian military activities may increase in the country, it is premature to expect Russia to predominate foreign security support to Senegal or that Western officials will become persona non grata in Senegal. In fact, the poor

counterterrorism record of Africa Corps in the region could indicate the French military withdrawal from Senegal will lead to a recalibration of Senegal's security partnership with France and the West.² Senegal may, in turn, sustain and improve its military partnerships with France and the West for a new era.

"Since March, several military facilities managed by French forces have been returned to Senegal."

Source: “La France transfère la station militaire de Rufisque au Sénégal (France Transfers the Rufisque Military Base to Senegal),” APANews (Dakar-based media agency that aggregates news from around Africa related to international relations, security, politics, and society), 1 July 2025. <https://fr.apanews.net/news/la-france-remet-la-station-militaire-de-rufisque-au-senegal/>

The process of revamping the Franco-Senegalese partnership reached a new landmark on July 1, 2025, with the official handover to Senegal of the Rufisque Joint Communications Base, which has been used since 1960 by the French Forces in Senegal (EFS). This strategic site previously provided military communications on the South Atlantic coast.

Emmanuel Macron emphasized that the Franco-Senegalese partnership was undergoing a profound overhaul, which he hopes will be rooted in “the interests of our peoples and our sovereignty.” Since March, several military facilities managed by French forces have been returned to Senegal. The final locations will be handed over by the end of July, according to the schedule agreed upon by both parties.

Source: “Senegal takes back the Rufisque base from France after 64 years—locals hail it as a bold step toward real sovereignty ‘Why give them our land? They’ve brought us nothing’ France’s military retreat across Africa is speeding up,” @RT_com (X account of Africa-focused extension of the Russian state-owned Sputnik news agency, which produces anti-Western narratives), 3 July 2025. https://x.com/RT_com/status/1940692068109820212

The “spy base” that allowed France to “dominate the Atlantic” was handed over by Paris to Dakar. This is to

avoid a repeat of the humiliation suffered in the Sahel, according to an expert.

Source: “Sputnik Afrique @sputnik_afrique Jul 8 La “base espionne” permettant à la France de “dominer l’Atlantique” a été rétrocédée par Paris à Dakar. Ceci, pour éviter de revivre l’humiliation subie au Sahel, selon un exer,” @sputnik_afrique (X account of Russian state-controlled international news television network’s website that promotes pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives), 3 July 2025. https://x.com/sputnik_afrique/status/1942631576489050488

Senegal takes back the Rufisque base from France after 64 years—locals praise it as a bold step toward real sovereignty ‘Why give them our land? They’ve brought

us nothing’ France’s military retreat across Africa is speeding up.

Notes:

- 1 This narrative mirrors those of Russian-backed Africa Initiative news agency, which spreads misinformation about Western and Ukrainian plots in Africa, including to allegedly support jihadists to undermine Sahelian governments and make them dependent on the West. See, for example: “Mali accused Britain and France of funding terrorism in the Sahel,” *Africa Initiative*, 6 June 2025. <https://afrinz.ru/en/2025/06/mali-accused-britain-and-france-of-funding-terrorism-in-the-sahel/>
- 2 See, for example, Raphael Parens, Christopher Faulkner, and Marcel Plichta, “The US May Have Lost the Sahel—But Russia is No Savior,” *FPRI*, 3 October 2024. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/10/the-us-may-have-lost-the-sahel-but-russia-is-no-savior/>

Iran Claims Successes Against Israeli Aircraft During 12-Day War

By Holly Dages
OE Watch Commentary

Iran's Air Force is now claiming big victories in the skies, according to the excerpted article from Iran's *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB), months after the ceasefire with Israel. Brigadier General Hamid Vahidi, commander of the Iranian Air Force, recently told a gathering that only minutes into Israel's aerial attack on Iran, "the pilots from Shahid Babaei Air Base in Isfahan and other bases carried out combat flights over the skies of Tehran and other sensitive parts of the country and were successful in several stages in downing the enemy's unmanned aerial vehicles."

The comments are a new development, as little information had been

disclosed about the Iranian Air Force role during the 12-day war. Vahidi noted that much of "the focus of commanders, pilots, and technical personnel was on carrying out combat operations and conducting patrol, reconnaissance, and scramble flights against enemy [jets and drones]." However, he further alleged that "brave pilots from various bases repeatedly attacked enemy squadrons, hindering their operations."

During the conflict, state media aired allegations that an Israeli jet had been downed and circulated images of what looked to be a jet with an Israeli flag. However, it was quickly debunked by internet sleuths as being a product of artificial intelligence (AI).¹ Given that

much of Iran's fleet consists of aging Soviet-era aircraft and U.S. F-14s dating back to the era of Shah, the idea that it could confront Israeli **F-35s** is widely viewed with skepticism.

Vahidi did not shy away from the fact that several air force personnel were killed while "protecting the Air Force's equipment and achievements." His comments come as Iran seeks to project pride and unity, despite its inability to defend the country's airspace. The remarks sustain a wartime mentality but also preserve the image and prestige of Iran's armed forces at a time when many ordinary Iranians question the ability of the military to respond to Israel, particularly in the event of another war.

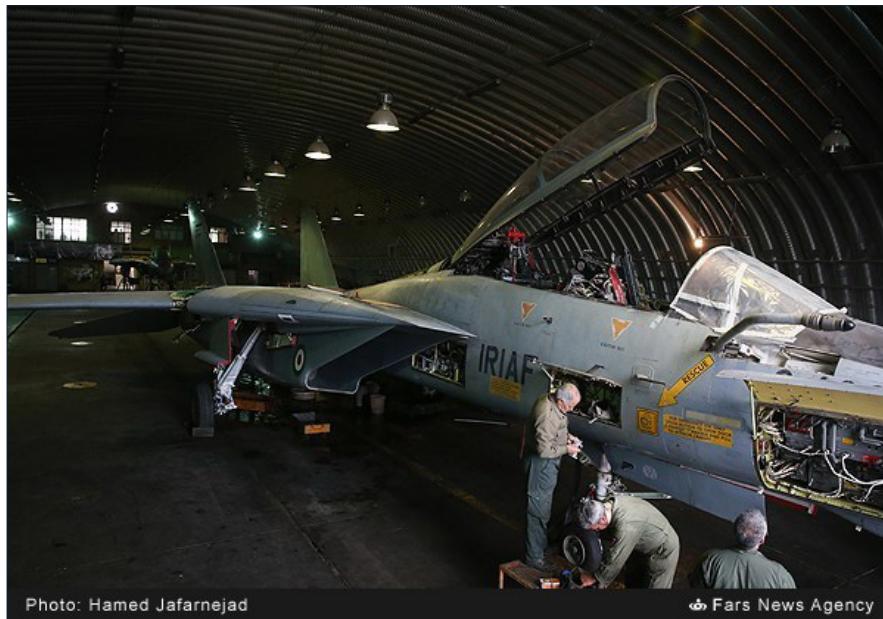


Photo: Hamed Jafarnejad

• Fars News Agency

A 1970s era U.S. made Iranian Air Force F-14 being serviced, circa 2015.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Overhaul_of_Iranian_F-14s_in_2015_%2823%29.jpg

"Only a few minutes after the official attack of [Israel] to our beloved country, the pilots from Shahid Babaei Air Base in Isfahan and other bases carried out combat flights over the skies of Tehran and other sensitive parts of the country and were successful in several stages in downing the enemy's unmanned aerial vehicles."

Source:

عملیات جنگنده‌های ارتش علیه پهپادهای دشمن در دفاع مقدس ۱۲ روزه

(Army fighter jets conduct operations against enemy drones in 12-day Sacred Defense)," *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 4 September 2025. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00NAdF>

According to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Brigadier General and pilot Hamid Vahidi, commander of the Army Air Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said in a gathering at the force's headquarters: "In the 12-day imposed war with [Israel], the focus of commanders, pilots, and technical personnel was on carrying out combat operations and conducting patrol, reconnaissance, and scramble flights against enemy's [jets and drones]."

He added, "Only a few minutes after the official attack of [Israel] to our beloved country, the pilots from Shahid Babaei Air Base in Isfahan and other bases carried out combat flights over the skies of Tehran and other sensitive parts of the country and were successful in several stages in downing the enemy's unmanned aerial vehicles."

Notes:

- 1 Nathan, Gallo, "No definite proof for Iran's claims it shot down Israeli F-35 fighter jets," *France 24*, 24 June 2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250624-iran-shot-down-israel-f-35-fighter-jets-no-definite-proof>; Matt Murphy, Olga Robinson & Shayan Sardarizadeh, "Israel-Iran conflict unleashes wave of AI disinformation," *BBC News*, 20 June 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0k78715enxo>

The Army Air Force commander stated that during the whole war, every request from the integrated air defense network was given a positive response, noting: "Brave pilots from various bases repeatedly attacked enemy squadrons, hindering their operations."

He continued: *"During this time, even pilots and personnel who were on leave immediately returned to their units and entered combat missions in the shortest possible time."*

Brigadier General Vahedi added: *"During the recent imposed war, the Army Air Force used all its capabilities to defend the skies and the people of Islamic Iran, and a number of its personnel attained the glorious status of martyrdom in the course of protecting the Air Force's equipment and achievements..."*

Iran Denounces Israeli Attack on Hamas in Qatar

By Holly Dages
OE Watch Commentary

Tehran has been vocal in condemning the 9 September Israeli strike on Hamas leadership in Doha, Qatar, despite having also attacked U.S. targets there months earlier. As per the excerpted article published in the wake of the Israeli attack by *Iran's Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB), General Abdolrahim Mousavi of the Iranian general staff vilified Israel, stating, “the brutal, barbaric, and undeniable aggression is a clear indication of the terrorist and aggressive nature of this illegitimate, illegal, and rootless Zionist regime.” Mousavi also claimed a U.S. role in the targeting of Hamas in Doha: “For the governments and nations of the world, it is obvious and evident that all the crimes of the savage [Israel] are carried out under the leadership and full coordination of the United States.

This shows that the U.S. government has been complicit in all these crimes and has no respect or regard for world public opinion, not even for its own allies.”

The irony of these comments is difficult to ignore. Just two and a half months earlier, Iran attacked Al-Udeid base in Doha in retaliation for the U.S. strike on its nuclear facilities during the 12-day war, which Tehran framed as a reciprocal measure. Qatar publicly condemned the Iranian attack.

Having dealt with its blows by Israel and the U.S. during the 12-day war, Tehran is using the Israeli strike in Qatar as an opportunity to reinforce the narrative that the U.S.—and especially Israel—are the true aggressors in the region. Mousavi noted that Israel’s

“This brutal, barbaric, and undeniable aggression is a clear indication of the terrorist and aggressive nature of this illegitimate, illegal, and rootless Zionist regime.”

attack “is not only a threat against an Arab country but also a challenge to the security and stability of the entire region and to international law.” The ongoing Gaza war and Israel’s actions across the region since the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 give Tehran an opportunity to deflect from its behavior while casting blame solely on Israel.

Source:

(Israel's aggression against Qatar reflects the nature of this regime),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 10 September 2025. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00NLTT>

تجاوز رژیم صهیونی به قطر، نشانگر ماهیت این رژیم است“

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) news agency, the general staff of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the military aggression and the insane and brutal terrorist action of [Israel] against the friendly and brotherly country of Qatar.

The statement added: “This brutal, barbaric, and undeniable aggression is a clear indication of the ter-

rorist and aggressive nature of this illegitimate, illegal, and rootless Zionist regime (Israel).”

The general staff of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated: “For the governments and nations of the world it is obvious and evident that all the crimes of the savage [Israel] are carried out under the leadership and full coordination of the United States. This shows that the U.S. government has been complicit

continue on 26

in all these crimes and has no respect or regard for world public opinion, not even for its own allies.”

The statement emphasized: “The United States, by directly and indirectly supporting the crimes of [Israel], seeks to create insecurity in the world and the region and promote international terrorism in order to implement its sinister, colonial, and exploitative objectives. The expansion of [Israel’s] brutal and shameless aggression is a serious warning to the entire world and to the countries of the region...”

The statement further noted: “The armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran assure the freedom-loving

nations, the fighters, and the supporters of the Resistance Axis around the world that the mission and ideology of resisting oppression and arrogance will never be eliminated, and the fighters of the Resistance, with divine and iron will, will defend the defenseless and oppressed people of Palestine and Gaza and will never allow the U.S. and [Israel] to achieve their sinister goals...”

This widespread wave of condemnations once again demonstrated that [Israel’s] attack on Qatari territory is not only a threat against an Arab country, but also a challenge to the security and stability of the entire region and to international law.

Hamas Utilizes Gaza's Rubble-Strewn Environment for Tactical Advantage

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Gaza's armed factions have turned the strip's rubble-strewn terrain into a tactical asset, as documented in recent *al-Jazeera* reporting. Paired with Hamas's still-functioning tunnel network, the destroyed cityscape strengthens the group's capacity to lay ambushes given the difficulty of mapping the shifts in terrain caused by the destruction of buildings, as noted in the first excerpt.¹ Over the summer, Hamas fighters targeted Israeli combat engineers several times with large, explosive charges concealed in debris, turning the conflict into what one retired Israeli officer calls a "war of explosive devices." The second excerpt, also from *al-Jazeera*, reports on Israeli eavesdropping devices hidden in the rubble that Hamas "successfully repurposed...for military and intelligence purposes." Hamas's own fixed lenses and quadcopter feeds have led Israeli sources cited in the third excerpt, also from *al-Jazeera*, to surmise that the group monitors IDF movements "around the clock." Those camera feeds—combined with fighter-worn footage—have allowed Hamas to package videos of the ambushes for Telegram channels and Arabic-language media (most notably *al-Jazeera*), thus maximizing psychological effect and projecting an image of a resilient, deeply



Gazan woman walking through destroyed residential area, September 2024.

Source: UN Women via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomen/54055785453/in/photostream>

entrenched force prepared to fight through the rubble.

"Former [Israeli] Brigadier General Ziv described the current situation in the Gaza Strip as a 'war of explosive devices,' and that the resistance is 'planning ambushes and taking the initiative to seize control of vital points.'"

ضابط إسرائيلي: حماس درست نقاط ضعف جيșنا واستغلتها في عملياتها

Source:

“Israeli officer: Hamas Studied and Exploited our Army’s Weaknesses in its Operations,” *al Jazeera* (Qatari news channel), 12 July 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2025/7/12/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%B6%D8%B9%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4>

In this regard, security expert Rami Abu Zubaydah explains that the resistance was able to exploit “the heavy rubble and the changing terrain” following the Israeli bombardment, which caused “a near-total disruption of the technological and robotic systems the occupation relies on in its ground operations.” It also relies on previously collected data and high-resolution satellite imagery, along with 3D maps of buildings and streets. However, the destruction caused by the occupation in the Gaza Strip has caused the “reference structure of this data to disappear,” according to Abu Zubaydah on his Telegram channel.

Former Brigadier General Ziv described the current situation in the Gaza Strip as a “war of explosive devices,” and that the resistance is “planning ambushes and taking the initiative to seize control of vital points.” He pointed out that Hamas had had enough time to study how the Israeli army operates, and that the fighters “exploit this to their advantage,” as their war is built “on our weaknesses. They are not defending land, but rather searching for targets,” he said.

Source:

“Watch: The resistance dismantles spy devices planted by the occupation and its agents in Gaza,” *al Jazeera* (Qatari news channel), 7 July 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2025/7/7/%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%83%D9%83-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%A7>

شاهد.. المقاومة تفكك أجهزة تجسس زرعها الاحتلال وعملاً بغزة

In detail, the occupation forces planted a booby-trapped eavesdropping device, disguised as a worn-out plastic container, on the side of a road near a central shelter in Gaza City. According to the security official, resistance engineers dismantled the device and determined its mechanism and purpose. This led to broader operations through which the resistance seized control of additional devices.

The resistance also seized a spy device camouflaged inside a concrete block that the occupation had planted through an agent in the courtyard of a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip for the purpose of eavesdropping and gathering information. The resistance also seized a video transmission and recording device camouflaged

among the rubble of buildings in a vital area. It was supposed to take pictures and record footage whenever any movement was detected in the area, day and night, and then send it over the internet to the collection and analysis bases of the occupation army’s intelligence.

A resistance security official confirmed to Al Jazeera that resistance factions had successfully repurposed the seized spy devices for military and intelligence purposes, as part of the open war with the occupation. He called on residents to remain vigilant and alert, and warned that the devices could be booby-trapped.

Source:

“The Return of Hamas’s Drones Raises Concerns within the Occupation Army,” *al Jazeera* (Qatari news channel), 5 June 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2025/6/5/%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%AA%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4>

According to testimonies from reserve soldiers, Hamas is increasingly using drones, along with binoculars and remote surveillance equipment, to continuously gather intelligence on Israeli military movements, an

indication of its growing field intelligence capabilities. Reserve officers confirmed that the prevailing assumption is that Hamas gathers intelligence on the Israeli occupation army “around the clock.”

Notes:

- 1 For more on Israeli attempts to interdict Hamas’s subterranean network in the 2010s, see: Lucas Winter, “Egypt and Israel: Tunnel Neutralization Efforts in Gaza,” *Engineer: The Professional Bulletin of U.S. Army Engineers*, September-December 2017. https://archive.org/details/2017_12_01_Egypt_and_Israel_Tunnel_Neutralization_Efforts_in_Gaza_Lucas_Winter

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Côte d'Ivoire Avoids Counterterrorism Crises Affecting Russia-Backed Regional Neighbors

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

The Ivorian government's calculated approach towards counterterrorism and national security provides optimism that in a region falling under increasing al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for Supporters of Islam and Muslim (JNIM) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) control, Côte d'Ivoire will remain an exception. The following excerpted article from the French-language and military-focused *armees.com* discussed the Ivorian response to the 25 August attacks on the border town of Difita, which killed four civilians. Although responsibility for the attack has not been claimed, the attackers are suspected of being JNIM members.¹ The last major jihadist attacks in the country occurred in 2021, making this a rare incident for Côte d'Ivoire.²

Since 2011, Côte d'Ivoire has been a presidential republic, committed to preventing border incidents and ensuing political tensions. According to the article, in the last decade the government has spent around \$775 million on its military and claims to have become the second strongest military in Africa. Moreover, the article predicts the government will continue its military buildup, which already includes a combat simulation center, military logistic chain digitization, and ammunition plant construction.



Ivorian soldiers, like their counterparts in neighboring Ghana, seen in the adjacent image, are preparing for future terrorist incursions from the Sahel into the borderlands of their countries.

Source: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kacie Benak, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raid_Ghana_and_British_Armed_Forces_220227-A-HA781-2008.jpg

The article also states Côte d'Ivoire is taking a balanced approach in engagement between the West on one end and China and Russia on the other end, despite the country depending on China for military supplies and Russia seeking to hasten the elimination of French, American, and Western influence broadly from West Africa. The article, for example, acknowledges that France's military withdrew from its base in Côte d'Ivoire at Port-Bouët, just as it has from its bases in Senegal. However, the Ivorian government still asserts that France is a strategic ally and will remain a partner in countering

terrorism in the future. West African juntas that have refused counterterrorism cooperation with the West and excessively relied on Russia, in contrast, have been wholly ineffective at halting JNIM or ISGS advances.

“The Ivorian authorities consider this threat of armed violence a national priority. To counter it, Côte d'Ivoire has significantly strengthened its military capabilities.”

Source: “Attaque à Difita: la Côte d’Ivoire engagée face à la menace djihadiste (Attack in Difita: Côte d’Ivoire confronts the jihadist threat),” *armees.com* (France-based French-language website covering Francophone military affairs and commonly aimed at a military readership), 9 September 2025. <https://armees.com/attaque-a-difita-la-cote-divoire-engagée-face-a-la-menace-djihadiste/>

On August 25, 2025, a terrorist attack killed four people in Difita, in northern Côte d’Ivoire, near the border with Burkina Faso. This attack broke a period of relative calm that had lasted for more than four years and reignites fears of jihadist insurgency spreading from the Sahel. Recognizing the threat, Ivorian authorities have been investing for several years to bolster their capacity to respond to terrorist groups.

For more than ten years, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have faced a surge in terrorist attacks: often

orchestrated from the Sahel, these relentless assaults have contributed to the rise of military juntas in these three countries. In recent months, political tensions and border incidents have increased between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

The Ivorian authorities consider this threat of armed violence a national priority. To counter it, Côte d’Ivoire has significantly strengthened its military capabilities.

Notes:

- 1 See, for example, “Armed men kill four in attack in Ivory Coast near Burkina Faso border,” *France24*, 26 August 2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250826-armed-men-kill-four-in-attack-in-ivory-coast-near-burkina-faso-border>. The article notes “the attack comes as fears grow of a spillover of the Sahel region’s jihadist insurgencies towards coastal west Africa,” and that government sources suggest it was a “revenge attack targeted at people ‘suspected of bringing support to Burkina Faso’s Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland.’” The Volunteers, or VDP, may, however, have also conducted the attack on individuals suspected of supporting JNIM.
- 2 According to ICG, “in March 2021, a second attack on army positions in Kafolo killed three soldiers... Three months later, in what appeared to be an attempt at mass recruitment, jihadists entered a mosque in the village of Bolé seeking to persuade the congregants to adhere to JNIM’s version of Islam and warn them not to collaborate with government forces.” Notably, however, like the Difita attacks, the attacks in 2021 were not claimed by JNIM. See: “Keeping Jihadists Out of Northern Côte d’Ivoire,” *ICG*, 11 August 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/cote-divoire/b192-keeping-jihadists-out-northern-cote-divoire>

Turkey Establishes Military Cooperation Agreement With Syria

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Turkey's Ministry of Defense announced on 13 August 2025, that it had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on defense cooperation with Syria's Ministry of Defense. The accompanying excerpted article from Turkey's daily newspaper *Daily Sabah* provides a few details of the agreement, noting Turkey will provide training, consultancy, and technical support to Syria.¹ The agreement is the result of several months of diplomatic efforts by Turkey to establish positive relations with Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in December 2024. The article goes on to note that Turkey is providing this support to strengthen Syria's efforts against terrorist groups. It also mentions that Turkey is monitoring the integration of the People's Protection Units (YPG) into the Syrian army based on the March 2025 agreement, with integration expected to be completed by the end of 2025.² Even ahead of the YPG's deadline

to integrate, both Turkish and Syrian officials have expressed doubt that it will take place based on the YPG's actions thus far.³ Lastly, the article brings up how Turkey had repeatedly offered operational and military assistance to Syria to combat terrorism before this agreement was signed. Earlier this year, Turkey surveyed a few airbases in

Syria that could be used by Turkish aircraft to carry out operations against terrorist groups in Syria. In response to Turkey's surveys, Israel conducted airstrikes against the airbases, looking to limit Turkey's presence and influence in Syria.⁴ While Turkey lost out on establishing airbases in Syria, it now appears that Turkey has gained a presence in Syria through the recent agreement and will likely use this location as it works to eliminate the threat from terrorist groups (at least from the Turkish perspective).

"Israel compares Turkey's rising influence in Syria and its relations with the government of Ahmed al-Shara to Iran's previous influence, considering that Ankara has become a greater danger."

Per the accompanying article from *al-Majalla*, Turkey and Israel increasingly "monitor each other's movements with suspicion" in the region, particularly in Syria. Some Israeli assessments go as far as judging Ankara's expanding footprint

Soldiers from the Turkish Army SPH Battalion conduct a live fire exercise with the AK40-GL Bombaatar during (NATO) Exercise Steadfast Defender 2021. The experience of Turkey's armed forces and the Turkish defense industry could have an impact on the capabilities of Syria's armed forces and increase Turkish influence in Syria.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soldiers_from_the_Turkish_Army_SPH_Battalion_conduct_a_live_fire_exercise_with_the_AK40-GL_Bombaatar_during_Exercise_Steadfast_Defender_2021.jpg



in Syria to be on par with—if not more troubling than—Iran’s earlier influence there. The mutual suspicion is sharpest in Syria’s south, where Turkey and Israel back opposing actors.⁵ Days before the August 2025 MoU was signed, Turkish officials reportedly visited areas in Syria near the Israeli border, per the third

excerpt, from independent Lebanese news site *The Cradle*, Turkish officials, it claims, were there to establish a Turkish “information branch” inside Syria’s intelligence apparatus. The purported branch will be responsible for tracking and monitoring cross-border movement, opposition group

activities, and potential Israeli or U.S. operations. The likelihood of a clash between Turkey and Israel in southern Syria is remote, but as noted in the *al-Majalla* article, “with the abundance of parties and conflicting interests in a narrow area, the risk of ignition remains.”

Source: “*Türkiye aims for further defense cooperation with Syria*,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkish daily newspaper), 21 August 2025. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkiye-aims-for-further-defense-cooperation-with-syria/news>

Türkiye seeks to cement its flourishing ties with post-Assad Syria with a win-win approach...

Sources also reported that a Joint Training and Consultancy Memorandum of Understanding was signed on Aug. 13 to enhance Syria’s defense capacity and foster concrete military cooperation. It added that “within the framework of the agreement, the process of restructuring the Syrian Armed Forces has gained momentum; training, consultancy, technical support and reciprocal visits have been initiated.”...

Ankara has pledged to continue supporting Syria’s political unity and territorial integrity, providing training and technical support upon request from Damascus to strengthen its fight against terrorist groups.

Ankara is closely monitoring the integration of the PKK terrorist group’s Syrian wing, the YPG, into the Syrian army, a process expected to conclude by the end of the year. Turkish officials have said earlier that this development will be decisive for Syria’s long-term security architecture.

The new Syrian government, established after the ouster of former regime leader Bashar Assad on December 8, 2024, has been working to restore order nationwide.

*Ankara, which has developed cordial ties with the new leadership, has repeatedly offered operational and military assistance to Damascus to combat Daesh and other terrorist threats. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed that *Türkiye* “will not allow terrorists to drag Syria back into chaos and instability.”...*

Syrian interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa on Sunday noted discrepancies between the PKK terrorist group’s Syrian wing’s, YPG, publicly stated position and their actual on-the-ground actions concerning the March 10 agreement. “At times on the ground, there are signals opposite to what they say in the negotiations,” al-Sharaa said...

Al-Sharaa said that the YPG declares through the media and in negotiations that it is ready to implement the March 10 deal while giving contradictory signals in practice. He noted that discussions are still ongoing regarding the mechanisms for implementing the agreement.

*The president said that Syria, the SDF – an umbrella group of various factions dominated by the YPG, the U.S. and *Türkiye* have reached an understanding under the deal...*

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Source: Omar Ounhon, "How Will Israel Respond to the Turkish-Syrian Military Agreement?," *The Majalla* (Saudi-owned political magazine), 15 August 2025. <https://www.majalla.com/node/326917>

The two countries monitor each other's movements with suspicion. While Israel believes that Ankara supports Hamas and seeks to encircle it through the Syrian arena, Turkey believes that Israel is using the Kurdish card, building alliances with Greece and the Greek Cypriots in the Eastern Mediterranean, and exploiting its influence in the US Congress and administration to increase pressure.

Relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv have witnessed recurring crises over fifteen years, and have deteriorated to their lowest levels, especially since Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip...

Israel strongly opposes the establishment of Turkish military bases inside Syria. The question remains as to whether Ankara and Damascus will move towards such a step within the framework of their military cooperation, and what the Israeli response will be, which constitutes a real test of the region's balances...

Despite the intense hostility between the two sides, Israel and Turkey do not usually tend to engage in direct conflict, but with the abundance of parties and conflicting interests in a narrow area, the risk of ignition remains, even if limited.

Source:

"Yedioth Ahronoth": Turkey Strengthens Its Intelligence Presence in Southern Syria," *The Cradle* (Beirut-based news website), 19 August 2025. <https://thecradlearabic.com/articles/32621>

بيانات أخرونوت: تركيا تعزز حضورها الاستخباراتي في جنوب سوريا

The Israeli newspaper "Yedioth Ahronoth" reported on Tuesday that Syrian and Turkish officials held a closed meeting in Quneitra between August 10 and 12... According to the source, the meeting discussed the establishment of a new "information branch" within the Syrian Ministry of Interior aimed at transferring intelligence to Ankara. The source mentioned that the body will report directly to the Syrian Ministry of Interior but will serve Turkish intelligence priorities in southern Syria.

The newspaper stated that Ankara's choice of southern Syria to enhance its intelligence presence was no coincidence, as Suwayda and Quneitra, with their Druze majority, are witnessing calls for separation from Damascus, in addition to calls to join Israel, adding that this "highlights how regional conflict lines intersect in

the governorate." "Yedioth Ahronoth" pointed out that Syrian security services use aid as a means to monitor loyalties and suppress dissent, noting that "the overlap between aid and information is precisely the means by which the new 'information branch' is likely to operate. By integrating within civilian structures, Ankara can monitor local networks and influence the flow of resources."

The source indicated that Syrian employees will be appointed to the new body, including figures associated with Islamist factions such as "Ahrar al-Sham", to be tasked with collecting and analyzing information on cross-border activities, opposition bodies to the regime in Damascus, and potential Israeli or American operations. The former FSA officer explained: "This goes beyond cooperation. Turkey is establishing permanent influence within the Syrian security services."

Notes:

- 1 According to a source in Turkey's Ministry of Defense, the agreement will include Turkey providing specialized training programs for Syria and allow for the sharing of military intelligence and best practices. Turkey will also supply Syria with weapons, logistical support, and technical assistance among other efforts to modernize Syria's armed forces, see: "Turkey-Syria Military Cooperation: A Strategic Partnership for Stability," *The Syrian Observer*, 15 August 2025. <https://syrianobserver.com/foreign-actors/turkey-syria-military-cooperation-a-strategic-partnership-for-stability.html>
- 2 The Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG, make up the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF controls territory in northeastern Syria and Turkey views it as a terrorist group due to its ties with Kurdish groups in the region. The SDF signed an agreement with Syrian President al-Sharaa in March 2025 to integrate into the Syrian armed forces. Turkey sees the March 2025 agreement, which would put Kurdish forces under Syrian command, as one avenue to reduce the threat from Kurdish-affiliated groups in the region.
- 3 Turkish and Syrian officials have accused the SDF of being too slow to integrate with the Syrian armed forces since they signed the March 2025 agreement. It has been reported that the SDF has been cautious to integrate and give up weapons and control over its territory after watching clashes between government-aligned Bedouin tribes and the Druze in Syria in July 2025. In the wake of this, some SDF officials have reportedly considered ties with Israel instead of integrating with the Syrian government, see: Barin Kayaoglu, "Can Turkey dismantle PKK, push SDF integration while rewriting rules in Syria?," *Al-Monitor*, 3 August 2025. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/07/can-turkey-dismantle-pkk-push-sdf-integration-while-rewriting-rules-syria>
- 4 Turkish officials were not present at the airbases when the Israeli airstrikes took place but it added to already difficult relations between Turkey and Israel over issues in Syria, see: By Lazar Berman and Nava Freiberg, "Israel confirms talks with Turkey on Syria aimed at preserving 'security stability,'" *The Times of Israel*, 10 April 2025. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-confirms-talks-with-turkey-on-syria-aimed-at-preserving-security-stability/>
- 5 See: Lucas Winter, "Israeli Support for Syria's Druze Strains Ties With Syria, Creates Security Challenges for Druze Community," *OE Watch*, 06-2025. https://g2webcontent.z2.web.core.usgovcloudapi.net/OEE/OE%20Watch/2025/31JUL2025_TRAOCG2_FMSO_OEW_Issue6_anonymous.pdf

India Deploys New Bhairav Light Battalions Along Northern Border

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

To counter its adversaries of China and Pakistan, India has been making a few, but consequential, changes to its army units deployed along the country's northern borders. The accompanying excerpted article from the English-language newspaper *The Times of India* reports that the Indian Army began establishing the first of five so-called "Bhairav light commando battalions" that will have a strength of 250 soldiers and deploy along the borders with Pakistan and China by October 2025. It has been several years since Indian forces clashed with China, but this change comes only a few months after India and Pakistan fought in May 2025.¹ India plans to eventually have 23 of these battalions, which will draw from

existing units.² The article mentions that the Bhairav battalions will fulfill a role between regular infantry and the "Para-Special Forces," though they will be smaller and nimbler than infantry battalions and are meant to free up special forces to concentrate on more critical tasks.³ Lastly, the article notes that soldiers for the Bhairav battalion will potentially be ready in three to four months following training. Reforms like this in the Indian army have often taken a few years to implement. The initial phase taking place in a matter of months demonstrates the importance for India and what Indian officials believe they need to have in a conflict against China, Pakistan, or potentially both.



Under the command of General Upendra Dwivedi, the Indian army has established new units like the Bhairav battalions based on lessons learned from the May 2025 clashes with Pakistan.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_Upendra_Dwivedi,_PVSM,_AVSM_\(2024\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_Upendra_Dwivedi,_PVSM,_AVSM_(2024).jpg)

"The plan is to progressively raise 23 "agile and lethal" 'Bhairav' battalions from existing troops to bridge the gap between regular infantry soldiers and the elite Para-Special Forces."

Source: Rajat Pandit, "Bhairav commandos to add muscle to Army by October 31," *Times of India* (English-language daily newspaper in India), 30 August 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/bhairav-commandos-to-add-muscle-to-army-by-october-31/articleshow/123592968.cms>

The Army is now raising the first lot of five 'Bhairav' light commando battalions, each with 250 specially trained and equipped soldiers, to enhance swift strike capabilities along the borders with Pakistan and China.

The plan is to progressively raise 23 "agile and lethal" 'Bhairav' battalions from existing troops to bridge the gap between regular infantry soldiers and the elite Para-Special Forces. "The aim is to have the first

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five such units in place by Oct 31, though it can take a little more time,” a source told TOI.

Three of the first five ‘Bhairav’ units are coming up under the Army’s crucial Udhampur-based Northern Command, one each for the 14 Corps at Leh, 15 Corps at Srinagar, and 16 Corps at Nagrota. The fourth unit is in the desert terrain of the western sector and the fifth in the hilly terrain of the eastern sector...

... (the) Army is drawing ‘Bhairav’ commandos from its regular infantry battalions, which number 415 (each has 800 soldiers), under the “save and raise” concept without fresh troop accretions. “Much smaller and nimble than infantry battalions, the ‘Bhairav’ units will be equipped with the latest weapons, gadgets and drones...

Notes:

- 1 The decision to establish the battalions has been noted as a reform from several years ago but also based on lessons drawn from clashes with Pakistan and China, see: Rahul Bedi, “Rudra, Bhairav, Shaktibaan: Army’s Mythology-Infused Brigades Revive an Old War Plan in New Garb,” *The Wire*, 10 August 2025. <https://thewire.in/security/rudra-bhairav-shaktibaan-armys-mythology-infused-brigades>
- 2 Similar to the Bhairav battalions, India established a new division, the 72nd Infantry Division, in early 2025 that drew soldiers from existing units instead of increasing the number of billets in the Indian army. The 72nd Infantry Division is now deployed near the India-China border, see: Snehesh Alex Philip, “Cleared in 2017 for Mountain Strike Corps, 72 Division now being raised in Ladakh. Here’s why,” *The Print*, 27 March 2025. <https://theprint.in/defence/indian-armys-new-72-division-being-raised-in-eastern-ladakh/2567292/>
- 3 The “Para-Special Forces” refers to several battalions in India’s Parachute Infantry Regiment. These battalions are capable of operating behind enemy lines and have conducted a few operations in recent years, see: “Indian Special Forces Operations since 2014: Key Inferences,” *Manohar Parikar Institute For Defence Studies and Analysis*, 9 May 2024. <https://www.idsa.in/publisher/issuebrief/indian-special-forces-operations-since-2014-key-inferences/>

“The ‘Bhairav’ battalions, each with seven-eight officers, are also meant to relieve Special Forces, who can then concentrate on their more critical tasks,” another source said.

The ‘Bhairav’ commandos will undergo specialised training for two-three months in their respective regimental centres and then be attached to the Special Forces units in their respective theatres for another month for advanced training.

On July 26, Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi had announced the move... He also said all infantry battalions will now have dedicated drone platoons...