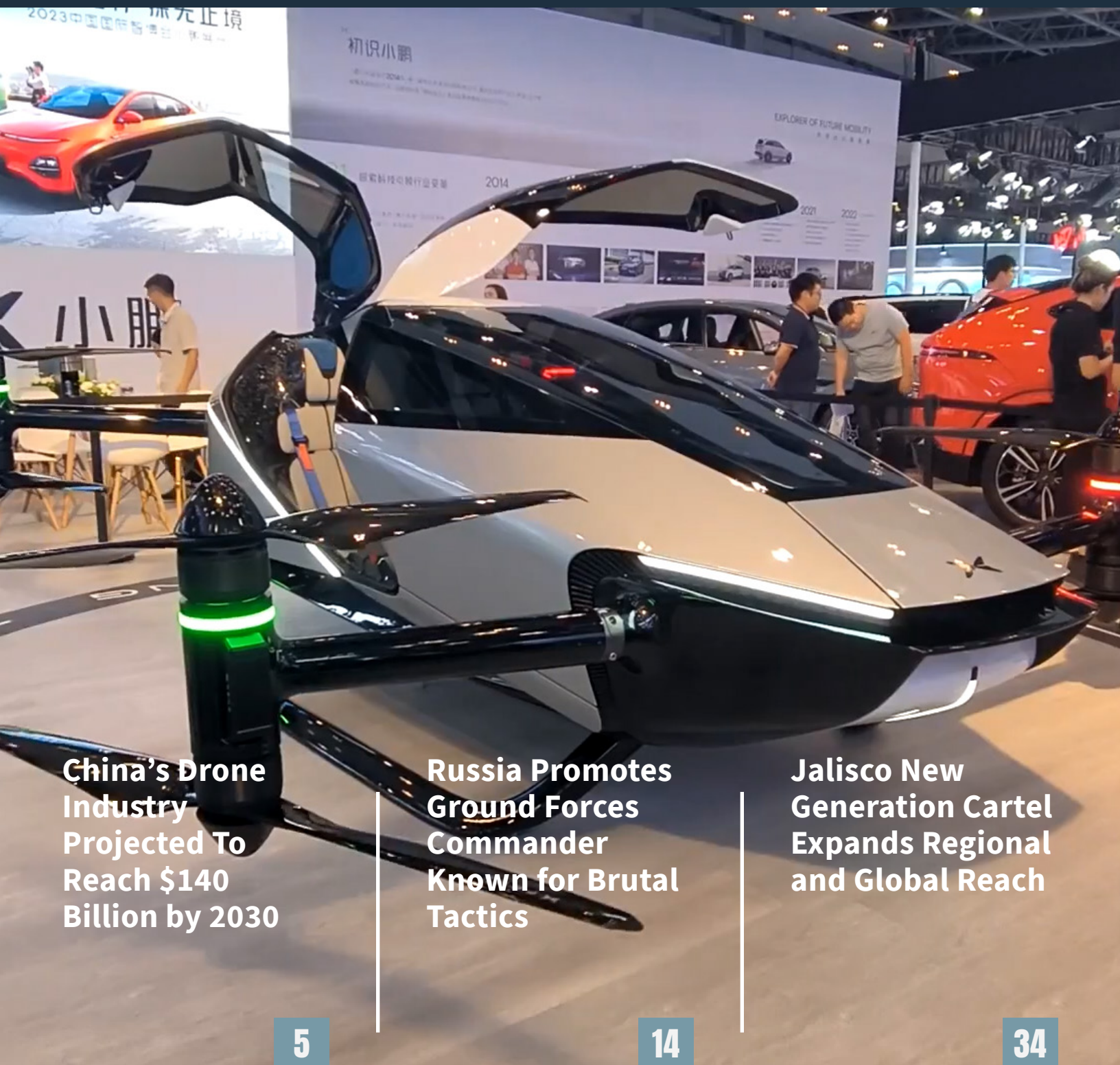


OEWATCH

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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



China's Drone Industry Projected To Reach \$140 Billion by 2030

5

Russia Promotes Ground Forces Commander Known for Brutal Tactics

14

Jalisco New Generation Cartel Expands Regional and Global Reach

34

CHINA

China's Drone Industry Projected To Reach \$140 Billion by 2030 5

China expects to be the first nation to achieve a nearly \$140 billion drone industry by the end of 2030.

China Claims First Sixth-Generation Test Network for Target Sensing 7

China claims to have unveiled the first 6G network for target sensing, which is expected to expand 5G ISAC capabilities to leverage AI and advanced computing for more versatile applications critical to evolving technologies, such as AI-driven swarms.

Chinese Littoral Warships Practice Antimine Operations 9

China's North Sea Fleet practices antimine operations, considered key to amphibious operations to take Taiwanese ports.

Chile Halts Chinese Space Station Approval Over Dual-Use Concerns 12

The Chilean government freezes the Chinese space observatory project at Cerro Ventarrones with dual-use potential, causing the Chinese government to respond angrily to the loss of access to an important deep space facility.

RUSSIA

Russia Promotes Ground Forces Commander Known for Brutal Tactics 14

Putin's elevation of General Mordvichev signals a tilt toward an aggressive military posture as Russia retools its command structure for potential escalation in Ukraine.

Russian Navy To Gain Unmanned Vehicle Regiments 16

Russia is creating a branch of arms called the "Unmanned Vehicle Troops" in response to the changing character of war. The naval component will consist of regiments with unmanned vehicles operating on air, land, and sea.

Baltic Sea Exercises Reveal Russian Antisubmarine Warfare Vulnerabilities 18

The Russian Navy conducted antisubmarine exercises in the Baltic Sea, but NATO state navies may have the advantage.

World Demand for Russia's Liquid Natural Gas Complicates European Security 21

Despite European sanctions to weaken Russia, Russian LNG still makes its way to Europe.

Russia Provides S-300 Missile Systems to Kyrgyzstan, Strengthening Its Own Base 23

Kyrgyzstan receives S-300 surface-to-air missile systems from Russia as part of an agreement for a joint air defense system, but the S-300s will be deployed to protect Russia's Kant Airbase, not Kyrgyzstan military facilities.

Russian Support for Mali Strains Algeria Relations 25

Recent tensions between the governments of Mali and Algeria are partly due to unwavering Russian support for the government in Mali, potentially jeopardizing future Russian relations with Algeria.

IRAN

Iran Expanding AI Capabilities With Swarm Intelligence 28

Iran, which is already integrating AI into its drone capabilities, is now working on swarm intelligence.

NORTH KOREA

North Korea Admits Military Support for Russia in Ukraine War 30

After months of silence, Kim Jong Un publicly announced his participation in Russia's war against Ukraine under the guise of defending Russia under their recently signed comprehensive military partnership.

Japan Considers Cutting Funding for North Korean Schools 32

Japanese authorities' moves to end taxpayer funding for North Korean-affiliated schools in Japan represent a major threat to North Korea's economic, ideological, propaganda, and intelligence collection interests.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Jalisco New Generation Cartel Expands Regional and Global Reach 34

Mexico's Jalisco New Generation Cartel expands into Colombia, with dozens of high-level operatives arrested. Colombia is an attractive recruiting ground for battle-hardened former guerrilla fighters.

Nigerian Official Disputes Claims of Progress Against Boko Haram 36

Borno State Governor Babagana Zulum publicly disagrees with other Nigerian officials who express overconfidence in the fight against Boko Haram. Zulum promises continued military efforts to defeat the terror group while maintaining the confidence of the citizenry in government efforts.

GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Suspension of India-Pakistan Agreements Raises Clash Risk 38

Pakistan suspends agreements with India following the Pahalgam attack, including the Simla Agreement, which established the Line of Control, the de facto Pakistan-India border. The suspension of the Simla Agreement could allow either side to justify future operations.

Israeli Support for Syria's Druze Strains Ties With Syria, Creates Security Challenges for Druze Community 41

Israel has conducted airstrikes in Syria in support of Syria's Druze community in ways that are expected to increase division within the Druze community and create additional security challenges for the new Syrian government.

Algerian Analyst Criticizes the Joint Military Staff Committees Absence From Sahelian Security Efforts 45

An Algerian expert argues that regional security body CEMOC is failing to resolve disputes between Sahelian states and to counter terrorism, drug trafficking, and external geopolitical influences after Algeria shoots down a drone from Mali. However, AES and ECOWAS are still more likely to play key security roles than CEMOC in the future.

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Editor-in-Chief	Jason Warner
Editor	Dodge Billingsley
Creative Director	Susan Littleton
Publisher/Webmaster	Cynthia Gonzalez

Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Chuck Bartles	Anthony Holmes
Lionel Beehner	Cindy Hurst
Ryan Berg	Matthew Stein
Dodge Billingsley	Lucas Winter
Holly Dagres	Jacob Zenn
Les Grau	



China's Drone Industry Projected To Reach \$140 Billion by 2030

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

China has been making huge strides in low-altitude technology and is expected to become a global leader by 2030. The low-altitude industry covers a range of applications that operate typically below 3,000 feet. These include drones, electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, air taxis, and related devices and services. According to the first article excerpt, published in the Chinese state-run network *China News*, the “Low-Altitude Economic Development Trend Report”¹ predicted that by 2030, China will be the first country to achieve a one trillion-yuan (approximately \$138.7 billion) drone industry. An earlier report published

in the Chinese Communist Party newspaper *Global Times* predicted that China's overall low-altitude economy will surpass three trillion yuan (approximately \$416.3 billion) by 2030, with drones taking the lead.

Currently, China leads the world in the production of consumer-grade drones. The application of drones, however, is rapidly evolving beyond recreational use into a wider range of uses, including defense-related. This shift is driven in great part by technological advancements. As the first article points out, drones will be increasingly integrated with artificial intelligence in the future.²

If the predictions noted in the excerpted articles prove to be accurate, this could carry certain military, security, economic, and geopolitical implications. Being a global drone exporter gives China more strategic flexibility and a wider base for innovation. As a form of soft power, it also gives China a diplomatic tool to influence its growing customer base. Finally, it is worth noting that China's increasing investment in research and development of drone technology will also make it more challenging for the West to compete.

“At present, drones are changing from consumer-grade to large, medium-sized and functional ones, and each segment is worth hundreds of billions of yuan.”



Xpeng SkyTravel X2 on display at the 2023 China International Intelligent Industry Expo. This fifth generation flying car is another example of one of China's Low-altitude developments.

Source: China News Service, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:XPeng_X2_at_Smart_China_Expo_2023-A.png; Attribution: CC-BY-3.0

Source: “China’s Drone Industry Will Be the First to Achieve a Trillion-Yuan Scale,” *China News Network* (Chinese state-run news network), 27 April 2025. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cj/2025/04-27/10406684.shtml>

The “Low-altitude Economic Development Trend Report” released on the 27th predicts that by 2030, China’s drone industry will be the first to achieve a trillion-yuan scale.

Regarding the positioning and development of drones, Luo Jun [chairman of the China Low-altitude Economic Alliance] said that drones and AI will be

more closely integrated in the future. The report also pointed out that China is a leader in the drone industry, but primarily in consumer-grade drones. At present, drones are changing from consumer-grade to large, medium-sized and functional ones, and each segment is worth hundreds of billions of yuan.

Source: Chen Qingrui, Tu Lei, and Tao Mingyang, “China’s Low-altitude Economy Expected to Reach 1 Trillion Yuan in Market Size in 2025,” *Global Times* (Chinese Communist Party news service focusing on international affairs from a Chinese nationalist and populist perspective), 20 January 2025. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202501/1327231.shtml#:~:text=By%202030%2C%20the%20industry%20is,China%20Low%20Altitude%20Economy%20Alliance.>

China’s low-altitude economy is expected to achieve a scale of approximately 1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion) in 2025, the Global Times learned at a press conference on Monday. By 2030, the industry is projected to surpass 3 trillion yuan, with drones taking the lead at more than

1 trillion yuan, according to the China Low Altitude Economy Alliance.

Driven by rapid technological advancements and the policy support, China’s low-altitude economy is experiencing unprecedented growth and gaining new momentum...

Notes:

- 1 The “Low-altitude Economic Development Trend Report” is likely released by the “China Low-altitude Economic Alliance, which was established in August 2024, initiated by over 100 upstream and downstream enterprises. “Over 100 Companies Launch Low Altitude Economic Alliance,” *China Daily* (English language (Chinese Communist Party newspaper), 7 August 2024. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202408/07/WS66b35e8da3104e74fddb8eac.html>
- 2 In conjunction with integrating AI into drones, China has been striving to pave the way in 6G communication technology which experts believe will lead us to a new era of drone technology. For more information, refer to “China Claims First Sixth-Generation Test Network for Target Sensing” in this issue of *OE Watch*.

China Claims First Sixth-Generation Test Network for Target Sensing

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Sixth-generation (6G) network technology is anticipated to launch around 2030, and China is determined to become the global leader in this field. Recently, in May 2025, during a 6G-themed conference, Purple Mountain Laboratories,¹ based in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, claimed to have unveiled what appears to be the world's first field test for a 6G Integrated Sensing and Communication (ISAC) platform.² According to the article excerpted from the state-run English-language news channel China Global Television Network, staff members utilized three different types of drones to evaluate and test the 6G network's perception capabilities. The test involved a main

base station transmitting a wireless signal. This signal was designed to reach the target drones and then return to the base station, forming a reflected wave.³ The base station subsequently analyzed this wave to determine the drone's exact position.

The article asserts that Purple Mountain Laboratory is the first globally to achieve “extreme connectivity capabilities—over 10 times greater than those of 5G—and a new high-precision target perception capability.”⁴ Although the article does not detail the test's outcome, China's reported achievement of the testing phase, if accurate, could be significant. While 5G ISAC has already been deployed,⁵ the technology

is still evolving. 6G ISAC is expected to expand upon 5G ISAC capabilities by leveraging artificial intelligence and advanced computing for more versatile applications. These include high-accuracy localization, which will be critical for emerging technologies such as AI-driven drone swarms. Detecting drones and managing the traffic of large drone formations are examples of areas where 6G ISAC could play a crucial role. As one expert noted, under 6G ISAC technology, “in high-intensity conflicts, swarms of small, interconnected devices could further real-time intelligence to enhance situational awareness, rapidly identify threats, and streamline strategic decisionmaking.”⁶

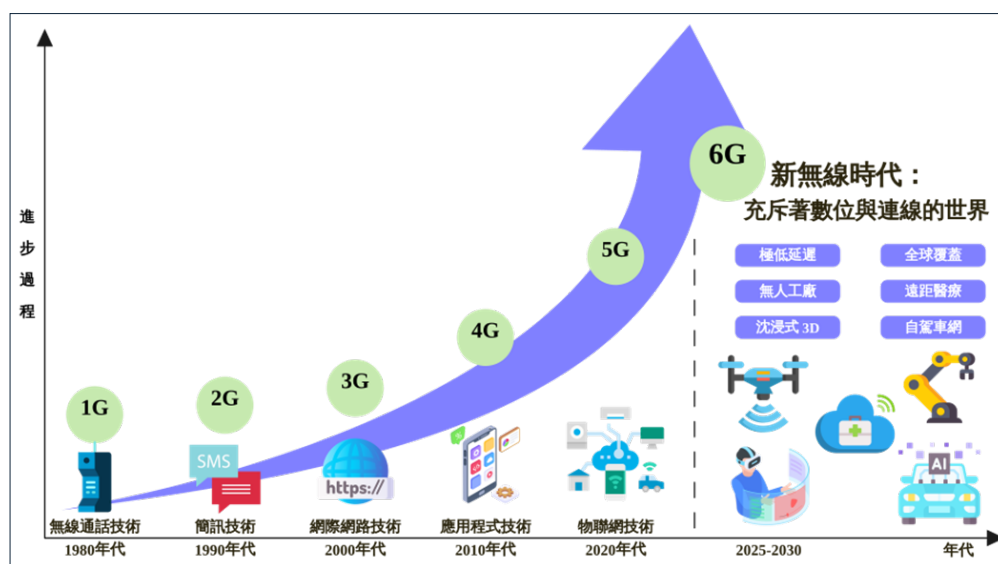


Illustration of the evolving scenarios from 1G to 6G communication protocols.

Source: Ding Zhiren, <https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1-6gUsageScenarios.svg>; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

“The facility [Purple Mountain Laboratories]... is the first in the world to achieve extreme connectivity capabilities—over 10 times greater than those of 5G—and a new high-precision target perception capability.”

Source: “China Tests 6G Tech Featuring Better Connection, High-Precision Target Sensing,” *China Global Television Network* (state-run English-language news channel based in Beijing), 14 April 2025. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-04-14/China-unveils-world-s-first-field-test-network-for-6G-communication-1Czr9yo5XqM/p.html>

Purple Mountain Laboratories, based in Nanjing, the capital of east China’s Jiangsu Province, unveiled the world’s first field test network for 6G communication, intelligence and perception integration at a recent 6G-themed conference.

At the laboratories’ testing ground, staff members used three different types of drones to evaluate the 6G network’s perception capabilities.

“In the scenario we just saw, the communication base station transmits a wireless signal. When the wireless signal reaches the drone, it will be sent back to the station, forming a reflected wave. The base station will

then analyze the reflected wave to determine the position of the drone,” said

The facility...is the first in the world to achieve extreme connectivity capabilities—over 10 times greater than those of 5G—and a new high-precision target perception capability.

This technology can be applied in scenarios such as low-altitude logistics and security, providing technical support for 6G innovation and the development of future industries powered by 6G.

“This technology has significant application prospects in emerging fields such as drones...

Notes:

- 1 Purple Mountain Laboratories is described as a scientific and technological innovation platform that focuses on basic and cutting-edge research on future networks and endogenous security. With over 1,000 researchers, it is focused on gaining world-leading achievements in future network B5G/6G communication network security and other fields. See “A Closer Look at Purple Mountain Laboratories in Nanjing,” *China Global Television Network* (State-run English-language news channel based in Beijing), 7 July 2023. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-07-07/A-closer-look-at-Purple-Mountain-Laboratories-in-Nanjing-1lffLfGTBxC/index.html>
- 2 The article, which was published in English, lacks clarity. It is highly likely it was originally drafted in Chinese, but then run through a machine translation. While the article states that “the Purple Mountain Laboratories unveiled the world’s first field test network for 6G communication, intelligence and perception integration at a recent 6G-themed conference.” Later in the article references “Integrated Communication and Perception,” and then “Integrated Communication and Sensing.” All three of these terms are likely references to “Integrated Sensing and Communication” (ISAC).
- 3 Simply put, a reflected wave’s purpose is to bounce back once it encounters a target, in this case it would be a drone, and effectively transmit information about it back to the base station.
- 4 Anna Vichnevetskaia, a senior technical writer at Huawei, explained in a blog post that “extreme connectivity will be one of the pillars of 6G – delivering the ultimate network performance to support a wide range of applications that are simply impossible today. For example, one of the biggest impacts Ms. Vichnevetskaia sees coming from 6G technology will be in the Enhanced Mobile Broadband+ (eMBB+) technology, which builds upon 5G’s eMBB, a key service category that delivers significantly faster data speeds, increased capacity, and is more reliable than its 4G LTE predecessor. 6G eMBB+ will significantly impact Extended Reality by enabling a fully immersive experience in the areas of Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and Mixed Reality, with ultra-fast speeds and low latency. Anna Vichnevetskaia, “The Next Horizon: How 6G eMBB+ Will Redefine Reality,” *Huawei BLOG*, 11 August 2022. <https://blog.huawei.com/2022/08/11/next-horizon-6g-embb-define-reality/>
- 5 In November 2024, China Unicom and ZTE, Chinese state-owned telecommunications companies, claimed to have completed the first 5G-Advanced low-altitude ISAC commercial deployment for blood delivery services See “China Unicom Henan, Yuhuan Connected Drone Technology Co., Ltd. And ZTE Complete 5G-A Low-altitude ISAC Commercial Deployment for Blood Delivery Services,” ZTE website, 28 November 2024.
- 6 Jens Holzapfel, “6G: Cybersecurity and Defence Implications,” Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2025. <https://www.ui.se/butiken/uis-publikationer/ui-brief/2025/6g-cybersecurity-and-defence-implications/>



PLAN type 056A corvette Huangshi. The A models denote enhanced littoral warfare capabilities the previous versions did not have, including antisubmarine warfare (ASW) features. Note the hull number 502. The PLAN has since renumbered the early 056A corvettes including the Huangshi. The current hull number for the Huangshi is 655.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_056_corvette#/media/File:PLANS_Huangshi_\(FSG-502\)_20170815.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_056_corvette#/media/File:PLANS_Huangshi_(FSG-502)_20170815.jpg); Attribution: CC BY 4.0

Chinese Littoral Warships Practice Antimine Operations

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Three People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) corvettes recently conducted a series of exercises in the Yellow Sea, which included an antimine scenario. According to an excerpted article from the Chinese Communist Party military newspaper, *People's Liberation Army Daily*, the *Huangshi*, *Qinhuangdao*, and *Zhangjiakou* simulated one ship striking a mine.¹ During the exercise, the *Qinhuangdao* reportedly hit a floating mine, causing an explosion and multiple fires that disabled the vessel. Alerted to the presence of mines, the *Huangshi* utilized its enhanced littoral warfare capabilities to scan the area, locate a second mine, and destroy it with its deck gun. Following the destruction of the second mine, the *Huangshi* used its high-pressure water cannon to extinguish the fires aboard the *Qinhuangdao*.² Concurrently, the crew of the *Zhangjiakou* prepared to

tow the crippled *Qinhuangdao* to the designated "target sea area." Shortly thereafter, the flotilla detected two enemy aircraft approaching on an irregular flight path. The aircraft were tracked, engaged with missiles, and downed. The article stated that the operation was intended to provide practical training in "comprehensive attack and defense, emergency response, and other subjects to test various tactics and training methods under complex conditions."

These exercises occurred just days before the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published an article reiterating earlier studies. These studies suggest the PLAN would need to use its littoral navy to capture ports to successfully conquer Taiwan and that inexpensive mines are crucial for Taipei to protect its ports and the island. While the Australian analysis concluded that Taiwan must significantly improve its mine capabilities to

"[A] fleet of ships consisting of Huangshi, Qinhuangdao and Zhangjiakou ships of a detachment of the Northern Theater Navy carried out a practical training around comprehensive attack and defense, emergency response and other subjects to test various tactics and training methods under complex conditions."

thwart the PLAN, both articles highlight a seldom-publicized yet potentially important aspect of the operational environment concerning a potential conflict over Taiwan.³

Source: “北部战区海军某支队组织舰艇编队开展多科目训练— (A detachment of the Northern Theater Navy organized a fleet to carry out multi-subject training—),” *People’s Liberation Army Daily* (Chinese Communist Party military newspaper), 6 May 2025. http://www.81.cn/zq_208553/16384473.html

Radars spun to detect the sea and air situation in real time; sonar waves were detected to continuously search for underwater targets...

In late spring, a fleet of ships consisting of Huangshi, Qinhuangdao and Zhangjiakou ships of a detachment of the Northern Theater Navy carried out a practical training around comprehensive attack and defense, emergency response and other subjects to test various tactics and training methods under complex conditions.

“The right side of the Qinhuangdao ship contacted the ‘floating mine’ and caused an ‘explosion’, and many fires broke out!” During the fleet’s maneuvers, a special situation suddenly occurred, and officers and soldiers at various combat positions moved upon hearing the order and quickly launched emergency rescue.

The secondary gun operator of the Huangshi ship stared at the “enemy” target on the screen and carefully checked the aiming point. “Fire!” As the order was given, the secondary gun of the Huangshi ship fired decisively and successfully hit the unexploded “floating mine”.

After confirming the safety of the sea area, the Huangshi ship quickly adjusted its course and speed, and

used a high-pressure water gun to remotely extinguish the fire. Subsequently, the Zhangjiakou ship organized officers and soldiers to carry out towing operations and towed the Qinhuangdao ship to move. With the tacit cooperation of the officers and soldiers of the two ships, the special situation was successfully handled, and the formation continued to maneuver to the target sea area.

Two ‘enemy’ planes quickly flew close to my formation! As soon as the formation maneuvered to the target sea area, the commander suddenly received a notification, and then commanded the officers and soldiers to join forces to meet the “enemy”.

However, the “enemy” aircraft did not fly according to our predicted route, but took a series of tactical actions to evade radar detection and attempted to break through the air defense area. The formation commander was calm and issued orders quickly: the Qinhuangdao ship fired multiple jamming bombs in succession, successfully jamming the “enemy” target; the Zhangjiakou ship operator pressed the launch button, and the air defense missiles whizzed out...

Source: “China needs Taiwanese ports to take the island. Mines are the key to protecting them,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute. 6 May 2025. <https://www.aspi.org.au/strategist-posts/china-needs-taiwanese-ports-to-take-the-island-mines-are-the-key-to-protecting-them/>

The success or failure of a future invasion of Taiwan would likely hinge on whether or not Chinese amphibious landing forces are able to seize, hold and exploit the island’s large port facilities.’

Defending the most important ports from a large-scale assault from the sea—there are five ports that Easton concluded are top targets—should be the Taiwanese defence ministry’s main priority. And the most effective weapon for this defence should be obvious.

Mines. Inexpensive, hard to detect and clear and just as capable of deterring an attack as defeating one, sea mines should be Taiwan’s first maritime line of defence. But it’s not clear Taiwanese leaders appreciate this.

The waters around Taiwan are ideal for mines, said Chris O’Flaherty, a retired Royal Navy captain with deep experience in mine warfare. ‘The conditions of Taiwan are much less conducive to [mine countermeasures] than most areas of the world,’ he explained. There’s ‘a

lot of rock, and a lot of fast currents, thus MCM [mine clearing] will be slow.' And Taiwanese anti-ship missile batteries could complicate any mine-clearing effort by shooting at the ships doing it.

A dense minefield at the entrance to each vulnerable port could deter, delay or defeat a Chinese invasion force—if the Taiwanese navy can get the minefields in place in time. In a sortie lasting several hours, a minelayer with a payload of around 200 mines should be able to fill an area of 800 metres by 800 metres with mines a few tens of metres apart.

But a minefield intended to hold up China indefinitely outside just one port might have to measure several kilometres on each side and contain 3,000 or more mines. Even if three minelayers were available at each port, each would have to make several runs to sea over

the course of several days to seed this minefield—and that's assuming none gets sunk while trying.

The job must be done much more quickly.

Other Taiwanese warships and even commercial vessels could help lay mines—and they'd need to, given how strained even a 14-vessel minelaying flotilla would be trying to mine the approaches to at least five major ports, quickly and potentially while under fire.

After all, Beijing may be willing to accept the loss of many ships and many lives in pursuit of its top foreign-policy objective, incorporation of Taiwan. 'If you are prepared to take heavy casualties, you can overwhelm the minefield and drive through, accepting all losses of people and equipment,' O'Flaherty says.

Notes:

- 1 Named after prefecture-level cities, all three corvettes, the *Huangshi*, *Qinhuangdao*, and *Zhangjiakou*, are all Type 056A corvettes (NATO reporting name Jiangdao-class corvette). China built 50 of the 056A platform before closing the production run. All are intended to operate close to shore and are equipped with enhanced littoral warfare capabilities including towed array and variable depth sonars for more potent antisub capability. All three are capable of launching and receiving helicopters, and hence capable of deploying small numbers of special operations personnel to land based targets. See: Ridzwan Rahmat, "China inducts second Type 056A corvette into East China Sea Fleet," *IHS Jane's 360*, 18 November 2014. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150614094000/http://www.janes.com/article/45876/china-inducts-second-type-056a-corvette-into-east-sea-fleet>
- 2 Most, if not all, recent attention given to China's use of high-pressure water cannons has been in the context of China's Coast Guard using them to harass other navies over disputed territorial features in the South China Sea. See: Dodge Billingsley, "China Employs AI Enabled Water Cannon to Enforce South China Sea Territorial Claims," *OE Watch*, 05-2024. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/china-employs-ai-enabled-water-cannon-to-enforce-south-china-sea-territorial-claims/?highlight=cannon>
- 3 Additional island nations in the region are taking the threat of sea mines seriously. Singapore recently signed an agreement with France for the development and "supply a fleet of mine countermeasures (MCM) systems." See: Singapore navy orders new submarine and unmanned mine countermeasure assets," *Breaking Defense*, 12 May 2025. <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/05/singapore-navy-orders-new-submarine-and-unmanned-mine-countermeasure-assets/>

Chile Halts Chinese Space Station Approval Over Dual-Use Concerns

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China possesses more space infrastructure in Latin America and the Caribbean than anywhere else outside of mainland China.¹ Developing greater space cooperation and ensuring access to space facilities in the region have been key components of China's strategy in its competition with other major powers. Chile, with its exceptional environmental conditions for astronomical research, is a prime example. By the end of the decade, the country is poised to host nearly 70 percent of the world's astronomical equipment, much of which will be clustered around Antofagasta in the Atacama Desert.²

According to Chilean media outlet Antofagasta TV, Chile has postponed the approval for China's latest space observatory at Cerro Ventarrones—a joint project with the Universidad Católica del Norte—due to questions

regarding its legality. The report cites alleged failures to follow bureaucratic procedures, particularly concerning an agreement between a private Chilean university and a foreign country. An excerpted article from the regional daily *Diario Antofagasta* indicated that the Chilean government was not notified of the agreement between Universidad Católica del Norte and China. This suspension jeopardizes China's assured access to Cerro Ventarrones. The *Diario Antofagasta* article also highlights broader challenges posed by the observatory that extend beyond Chile, especially its capacity to track satellites in orbit and its links to the People's Liberation Army. The article further claimed that China responded angrily, accusing the United States of hindering scientific progress and warning Chile against succumbing to international pressure.

These developments hold serious implications for the region's operational environment. Space domain awareness and satellite communications are among China's primary objectives in its space policy with Latin America. Both goals illustrate how China's space infrastructure can readily transition from civilian to military applications. Given its favorable conditions, Chile, and the Southern Cone more broadly, are set to become a central arena for space competition within Latin America. Lastly, the nature of this agreement demonstrates China's strategy of developing relationships with sub-state entities to advance its interests.

“The ministry reiterated that doubts persist about the scope of the agreement, given that it involves a private university and a foreign institution.”



A space observatory facility featuring a large telescope, similar to the one in question at Cerro Ventarrones.

Source: <https://renopenrose.getarchive.net/media/astronomical-observatory-astronomy-space-exploration-1c36b0>; Attribution: CC0 1.0

Source: “UC del Norte se pronuncia por cuestionado proyecto en Cerro Ventarrones (UC del Norte speaks out against the controversial Ventarrones Hill project),” *Antofagasta TV* (local media outlet with TV, radio, and print media), 24 April 2025. <https://www.antofagasta.tv/categoria/antofagasta/uc-norte-pronuncia-cuestionado-proyecto-cerro-ventarrones#>

The evaluation was initiated following legal challenges and diplomatic pressure...Nearly a month after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs temporarily froze the project to review its viability, the ministry reiterated that doubts persist about the scope of the agreement, given that it involves a private university and a foreign

institution...In a statement, the university defended the legality of the agreement, signed in January 2023, asserting that it has complied with current institutional frameworks and that it is actively collaborating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is leading the review of the agreement.

Source: “La disputa China-EE.UU. aterriza en Antofagasta: Gobierno congela proyecto astronómico chino tras advertencias de Washington (The China-US dispute hits Antofagasta: Government freezes Chinese astronomy project after warnings from Washington),” *Diario Antofagasta* (daily local to the Antofagasta region), 18 April 2025. <https://www.diarioantofagasta.cl/regional/antofagasta/207041/la-disputa-china-ee-uu-aterriza-en-antofagasta-gobierno-congela-proyecto-astronomico-chino-tras-advertencias-de-washington/>

The Chilean government, which was initially unaware of the agreement signed between the university and the Chinese observatory, ordered a review of the agreement through the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The result: it was not an agreement between two states, but rather an initiative between a private university and a foreign state entity, which is not permitted under current regulations for projects of this type. The review established that this is an agreement between a private university and a Chinese entity. The scope of this agreement remains to be specified, and we

are continuing discussions with the parties involved,’ Chile’s Foreign Ministry said in an official statement. Furthermore, it was added that the fiscal lands used were granted by the Ministry of National Assets, which also requires reviewing whether the conditions established for the land’s use were met. The Chinese government’s reaction was swift. In a statement issued by its embassy in Chile, the Asian country blamed the United States and accused it of trying to hinder scientific cooperation between Chile and China.

Notes:

- 1 For more information about the space station in Neuquén province, see: Matthew P. Funairole, Dana Kim, Brian Hart, and Joseph S. Bermudez, “Eyes on the Skies: China’s Growing Space Footprint in South America,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 4 October 2022. <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-ground-stations-space/>.
- 2 Noah Rosen, “US Engagement in Chile: The Development of Chilean Astronomy,” Center for Latin American Studies, American University, 8 December 2021. https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/upload/chile-astronomy_case-vignette.pdf

Russia Promotes Ground Forces Commander Known for Brutal Tactics

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

On 15 May 2025, Colonel General Andrey Mordvichev was appointed as Commander of the Russian Ground Forces, replacing General Oleg Saliukov, who moved to a position as Deputy Secretary of the Security Council.¹ According to the Russian government newspaper *Russiskaya Gazeta*, Mordvichev is a favored ally of President Vladimir Putin, who awarded him the title of Hero of Russia for the capture of Avdiivka in March 2024.

“Mordvichev made the tactics of ‘meat assaults,’ waves of Russian soldiers attacking and taking heavy casualties as they advanced, the key strategy of the Russian military in Ukraine, said military analyst Yan Mateev.”

Born in Kazakhstan, Mordvichev is best known for leading Russian forces in

the 2022 siege of Mariupol, considered one of the deadliest urban assaults of modern war, which resulted in tens of thousands of civilian casualties, according to Ukrainian sources. During the siege, according to *Russiskaya Gazeta*, he coordinated with Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov to plan the storming of Azovstal, the steel plant where the last Ukrainian troops and civilians had entrenched themselves. That earned Mordvichev the moniker “Breakthrough General,” according to the second excerpted article from the Polish news agency *TVP World*. He is known for using the tactics of so-called “meat assaults,” sending waves of Russian soldiers to attack and take heavy casualties as they advance. Ukrainian intelligence services have formally accused Mordvichev of war crimes, including the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

His battlefield experience and reputation for ruthless operational execution could suggest a shift toward more



Colonel General Andrey Mordvichev.
Source: Дмитрий Кучер 34, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrey_Mordvichev_-_media/File:Морвичёв_Андрей.jpg; Attribution: CC BY SA 4.0

aggressive Russian military leadership, symbolizing the Kremlin’s preference for a commander willing to inflict an increasing number of casualties, both on the enemy and on his own soldiers, to achieve battlefield victories. His promotion comes amid Western speculation that Moscow may be preparing for a new offensive in Ukraine. On *Telegram* and other social media channels, pundits speculate that the new commander-in-chief will coordinate the work of Russia’s military districts—Mordvichev was previously head of Russia’s Central District—and once the special military operation in Ukraine has ended, it is said he will prioritize demobilization issues.

Source: Ruslan Melnikov, “Генерал-прорыв: Кто такой Андрей Мордвичев, который возглавил Сухопутные войска России” (“General Breakthrough: Who is Andrei Mordvichev, who headed the Russian Armed Forces?”) *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 16 May 2025. <https://rg.ru/2025/05/16/general-polkovnik-andrej-mordvichev-stal-komanduiushchim-suhoputnymi-vojskami-vs-rf.html>

In 2023, Andrei Mordvichev headed the Central Military District and the group of troops “Center”. And at the beginning of 2024, he led the liberation of Avdiivka, which the enemy purposefully strengthened for several
continue on 15

years, claiming that the city had become an impregnable citadel. When Avdiivka came under the control of Russian troops, Mordvichev received a telegram of thanks from the president. In March 2024, the combat general was awarded the title of Hero of Russia.

Another of his achievements was the creation of the so-called “Ocheretin flower”, a bridgehead near the village of Ocheretino in Donbass, from which the rapid offensive of the Russian army subsequently began. Also, under the leadership of Mordvichev, Selidovo, Kurakhovo and Ukrain were liberated. In social networks, it is suggested that, among other things, the new Commander-in-Chief will coordinate the work of military districts, and in case of completion of the SVO - to resolve demobilization issues.

Previously, the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Land Forces was held by Army General Oleg Salyukov. He was dismissed from this post by President Vladimir Putin. The reason, apparently, is the age of the general. In May, Oleg Salyukov, born in 1955, turns 70 years old and, as experts note, he has already served the deadlines. Salyukov has been the commander-in-chief of the ground forces since 2014 and it was he who commanded the Victory parades on Red Square in Moscow all this time, including the parade on May 9, 2025. Vladimir Putin appointed Salyukov as Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

Source: “Putin makes general who devised ‘Meat Assault’ strategy commander of Russian Land Forces,” *TVP World* (a Polish public broadcaster), 16 May 2025 <https://tvpworld.com/86749551/putin-makes-general-who-devised-the-meat-assault-strategy-commander-of-russian-land-forces>

Mordvichev, who has also earned the nickname ‘General Breakthrough, was previously head of the Central Military District, and commanded operations that led to the 2022 surrender of Ukrainian units holding out in the Azovstal steel works after a siege of about 80 days in the southern port of Mariupol.

In 2024, he led Russian troops in capturing the mining centre of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region on the war’s eastern front, a key operation in a town where Ukrainian authorities had built up fortifications.

Rossiiskaya Gazeta said he also led Russian forces in retaking three key towns in their slow advance

westward through the Donetsk region - Selydove, Kurakhove, and Ukrainsk.

Mordvichev made the tactics of “meat assaults,” waves of Russian soldiers attacking and taking heavy casualties as they advanced, the key strategy of the Russian military in Ukraine, said military analyst Yan Mateev.

“It was due to the endless rolls of infantry and huge losses that Russian troops managed to reach Pokrovsk,” Mateev wrote on Telegram.

Notes:

- 1 His predecessor, General Saliukov, who turned 70 in May, had led the Ground Forces since 2014 and presided over the annual Victory Day parades. His reassignment aligns with Russia’s mandatory retirement age for senior officers, unless exemptions are granted. See: Yuliia Taradiuk, “Putin appoints general who led Mariupol assault as new Russian Ground Forces Commander,” *The Kyiv Independent*, 16 May 2025. <https://kyivindependent.com/putin-appoints-general-who-led-mariupol-assault-as-new-russian-ground-forces-commander/#:~:text=Putin%20appoints%20general%20who%20led%20Mariupol%20assault%20as%20new%20Russian%20Ground%20Forces%20Commander,-Share&text=Russian%20President%20Vladimir%20Putin%20has,media%20reported%20on%20May%2015>.

Russian Navy To Gain Unmanned Vehicle Regiments

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, there has been a rapid development of airborne, land-based, and sea-based unmanned vehicles by both Ukrainian and Russian forces—manifest in the mass proliferation of relatively cheap unmanned vehicles that are being produced at scale.¹ As a result of this proliferation, both doctrine and force structure continue to evolve. To that end, Russia has created a new branch of arms—the Unmanned Vehicle Troops—to facilitate the adaption of unmanned vehicles across its military.² The accompanying

“Unmanned vehicle regiments are being created within the Navy. They will have different types of robotic systems: [operating on] air, land, and sea.”



Uran-9 combat unmanned ground vehicle.

Source: <https://www.vitalykuzmin.su/Military/Day-of-Advanced-Technologies-2017-Part1/i-qFc3qGb>; Attribution: Vitaly Kuzmin, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

excerpted article from the Russian daily newspaper *Izvestiya* discusses the naval component of the Unmanned Vehicle Troops. According to the article, each of the Russian Navy's fleets will have at least one unmanned vehicle regiment, and the Caspian and Dnieper Flotillas may have one as well. These regiments will have unmanned vehicles operating in the air, land, and at sea. The unmanned vehicles will be used to inspect the waters around ships during anchorage, detect saboteurs, destroy enemy unmanned vehicles, and provide security around coastal defense facilities.

Source: Roman Kretsul and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Будет полк: в ВМФ создают морские части беспилотных систем (There will be a regiment: the Navy is creating naval units of unmanned vehicles),” *Izvestiya* (Russian daily newspaper), 13 May 2025. <https://iz.ru/1884980/roman-krecul-bogdan-stepovoi/budet-polk-v-vmf-sozdaut-morskie-casti-bespilotnyh-sistem>

Unmanned vehicle regiments are being created within the Navy. They will have different types of robotic systems: [operating on] air, land, and sea. The new regiments, which will be formed in all fleets, will perform reconnaissance and strike functions. According to experts, bringing together different types of drones will allow for effective reconnaissance, surveillance, and destruction of sea and coastal targets...

The equipment of various types collected in such units will be transformed into complexes that conduct oper-

ational missions in the interests of the fleet, the former deputy commander of the Pacific Fleet for armament, retired Rear Admiral Igor Korolev, told Izvestia.

The Russian Armed Forces are currently creating an Unmanned Vehicle Troops branch, the regiments being formed will most likely form the backbone of the naval component of these troops, military expert Dmitry Boltenkov told Izvestia.

It can be assumed that there will be no less than five regiments, the expert noted. Three will be part of the

continue on 17

fleets based in the European part of Russia, and two will be for the Pacific Fleet. There is a very large distance between Primorsky Krai and Kamchatka [in the Eastern Military District], and so two regiments may be needed to control such remote regions. It is possible that the Caspian and Dnieper flotillas will receive similar units.

According to the expert, UAVs will be responsible for reconnaissance, surveillance, and destruction of marine and coastal objects. The regiments will be armed with

medium- and long-range systems – these are Orlans, Forposts, Lancet loitering munitions, and more substantial platforms. FPV [first-person-view] drones that conduct tactical missions are logically included in these units. Unmanned boats will also be responsible for monitoring waters, reconnaissance, mine countermeasures, anti-submarine defense, and, if necessary, attacking the enemy, the expert noted.

Notes:

- 1 There has been much interest in how UAV tactics are changing, but the production process is changing as well. Military and industry personnel work together to rapidly modify unmanned vehicles and associated equipment. These modifications may involve programming, the addition of specially designed or commercial off-the-shelf components, or any combination thereof. These modifications are then rapidly incorporated into the production process of new unmanned vehicles. In terms of procurement, these unmanned vehicles are treated more as expendable munitions (and some literally are expendable munitions), than as weapons systems with long life-cycles involving procurement, sustainment, and eventual retirement. In December, Defense Minister Andrei Belousov stated the Russia uses 3,500 unmanned vehicles each day, and other Russian sources have claimed that Russia produced 1,500,000 unmanned vehicles in 2024.
- 2 The term “branch” (род войск], is used in the sense of “branch of arms” – infantry, armor, artillery, etc. and should not be confused with the term “branch of service” (вид вооружённых сил] – Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.

Baltic Sea Exercises Reveal Russian Antisubmarine Warfare Vulnerabilities

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Estonia's Navy detained the Panama-flagged tanker *Kiwala* on April 11, preventing it from continuing its journey to the Russian port of Ust-Luga until several safety issues were resolved. Four days later, on April 15, Russia's Baltic Fleet commenced a maritime safety exercise.¹ According to an excerpted article from the Western European-based *Naval News*, the exercise may have been intended to demonstrate Russia's resolve in the face of more assertive maritime policing by NATO member navies. This increased vigilance follows a series of undersea sabotage incidents attributed by Western nations to Russia's "shadow fleet" of tankers, which transport oil

from the Baltic and other regions to the international market.²

While most analyses focused on efforts related to Russia's shadow fleet, the article noted that the exercise was divided into three distinct phases, culminating in antisubmarine warfare (ASW) drills. A key concern for Russia's Baltic Fleet is the threat posed by smaller, non-nuclear submarines operated by NATO members, including one of NATO's newest additions, Sweden. According to an excerpted article from the Russian news service TASS, Russian antisubmarine ships and helicopters conducted joint antisubmarine exercises over two days.³

"The third phase of the exercise took place on April 22nd and 23rd with antisubmarine exercises on the Baltic Sea training ranges of Kaliningrad. An unidentified Kilo class submarine played the role of the hostile submarine and was subsequently engaged by at least three surface vessels of the Baltic Fleet."

With Sweden's accession, NATO has significantly altered the operational environment in the Baltic Sea, partly due to NATO's enhanced submarine capabilities. To keep the Baltic Sea open

Parchim-class Corvette MPK-205 *Kazanets* in Saint Petersburg, circa 2014. Notice the two RBU-6000 antisubmarine depth charge rocket launchers.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_corvette_Kazanets_-_/media/File:MPK-205_Kazanets_in_SPB.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.



during a blockade or war, Russia will face a substantial ASW challenge. Russia maintains an older fleet; many ships participating in the Baltic Sea exercise, including the ASW-equipped *Kazanets* and the *Zelenodolsk*, are decades old. In contrast, Sweden is set to deploy a new generation of smaller, conventionally

powered submarines by 2028. While retrofitting older platforms with new weapon systems is possible, it is costly. Under sanctions, Russia will have to make difficult choices regarding its defense budget. Simultaneously, new submarine technology and the Baltic Sea's average depth of around 100 feet

favor the use of smaller, more agile attack submarines—the type Sweden is preparing to deploy. In a 2023 media report, the commander of Sweden's First Submarine Flotilla stated, “with five submarines, we can close the Baltic Sea.”⁴

Source: “Russian Navy’s Baltic Fleet holds Safety of Navigation exercise.” *Naval News* (western European based news outlet), 2 May 2025. <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/05/russian-navys-baltic-fleet-holds-safety-of-navigation-exercise/>

*The exercise started a couple days after the Estonian Navy stopped the Panama-flagged tanker *Kiwala* on April 11th and prevented it from continuing its journey to the Russian port of Ust-Luga until it has resolved several issues regarding maritime safety. Though not mentioned directly, this recent exercise by the Baltic Fleet could be viewed as Russia demonstrating its capabilities and intent to provide military escort to its commercial fleets in light of Estonia’s actions.*

The tasks set forward are described as escorting and protecting civilian ships and defend them from attacks made by unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned surface vehicles, conventional surface warships and submarines as well as providing assistance to damaged ships.

The exercise was clearly split across three distinct and separate phases centered on respectively surface combat, defense against USV attacks and anti-submarine exercises. The third phase of the exercise took place on April 22nd and 23rd with anti-submarine exercises on the Baltic Sea training ranges of Kaliningrad. An unidentified Kilo class submarine played the role of the hostile submarine and was subsequently engaged by at least three surface vessels of the Baltic Fleet.

Several European Union nations have in recent weeks started to take a more active stance against Russia’s so-called Shadow Fleet... In recent weeks, both Ger-

*many and Estonia have taken more direct actions against the Shadow Fleet. On March 21st, Germany impounded the Panama-flagged tanker *Eventin* that was anchored off Germany’s Baltic Sea coast since January after being adrift in heavy seas.*

It is highly possible that the Safety of Navigation exercise held by the Baltic Fleet is a direct response against the German and most likely Estonian actions. The exercise was focused on demonstrating the Baltic Fleets military capabilities in fighting off attempts to intercept, board and detain Russian civilian warships as well as provide direct support in the form of firefighting and damage control to civilian shipping. The exercise appears to have been purely offensive in nature as no reports were made about the Baltic Fleet setting up procedures to actually escort ships or organize convoys.

continue on 20

Source: “Балтийский флот провел учения по обеспечению безопасности судоходства (The Baltic Fleet conducted exercise to ensure the safety of navigation),” TASS (Russian news service), 22 April 2025.

The Baltic Fleet involved about 5 thousand servicemen, about 20 ships and vessels during the exercises to ensure the safety of navigation in the Baltic Sea. “The Baltic Fleet held an exercise on the safety of navigation, during which military sailors trained to defend sea communications, accompany and protect civilian vessels from UAV attacks, uncrewed boats and submarines. As part of the exercises, the ship tactical groups of the fleet left the bases and deployed them in the specified areas of the Baltic Sea,” the [Baltic Fleet] press service said.

It is specified that about 20 warships and support vessels, 10 aircraft and helicopters, as well as about 100 units of combat and special equipment were involved in the exercises. About 5 thousand servicemen of the navy took part in the maneuvers.

“According to the scenario of the exercise, special attention was paid to working out the task of escorting and protecting civilian vessels, including against attacks

by unmanned aerial vehicles and unmanned boats of the enemy, submarines and ships,” the press service emphasizes.

They also said that as part of the exercise, the crews of the corvettes “Sovetny” and “Boykiy” launched an artillery strike on a sea target imitating an enemy surface ship. During the firing, the ship’s electronic warfare means used active and passive interference. Anti-submarine helicopters Ka-27 and Ka-27M, based on corvettes, practiced the search, tracking and destruction of the submarine of the conditional enemy with training bombing.

In addition, Baltic sailors were trained to assist emergency vessels damaged during the attack of a conditional enemy. The crews of the ships worked out the elimination of fires, sealed holes, rescued personnel on the water and towed damaged ships to ports.

Notes:

- 1 For additional reporting, see: “Российские корабли провели учения в Балтийском море,” Russian ships conducted exercises in the Baltic Sea, Ria Novosti, 17 May 2025. <https://ria.ru/20250517/korabli-2017559333.html?in=t>
- 2 Commercial ships continue to ply the Baltic Sea in and out of Russian harbors. NATO countries which share the Baltic Sea with Russia have ramped up surveillance after a series of undersea cable cutting incidents presumably conducted by Russia. See: Dodge Billingsley, “Russia Issues Warning to Estonia as Undersea Cable Sabotage Heats Up,” *OE Watch*, 05-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-5-2025/>
- 3 For a daily summary of the Russian exercise, see: “Baltic Fleet – Safety of Navigation Exercise – April 2025,” Russian Navy – News and Analysis, blogspot. 25 April 2025. <https://russianfleetanalysis.blogspot.com/2025/04/baltic-fleet-safety-of-navigation.html>
- 4 See: Anne Kauranen and Johan Ahlander, “How Sweden and Finland could help NATO contain Russia. *Reuters*, 5 July 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/natos-new-north-fresh-chances-contain-moscow-2023-07-03/>

World Demand for Russia's Liquefied Natural Gas Complicates European Security

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Europe's ongoing need for energy continues to conflict with its sanctions imposed on Russia. According to an excerpted article in the Norway-based *High North News*, Russia's Yamal LNG gas plant, which extracts liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Yamal Peninsula, dispatched 287 vessels in 2024, each carrying 74,000 tons of the supercooled gas. Eighty percent of this LNG was destined for Europe. France, Belgium, and Spain were the primary recipient countries, although the article notes that a portion of the LNG arriving in Europe was "passed through" European terminals before being re-exported. The article further points out that most

"Europe has remained a key market for Russian LNG from Yamal, despite ongoing policy discussion to phase out the fuel. Close to 80 percent of deliveries, 227 out of 287, were bound for Europe."

Russian LNG, either as an energy source or through transit fees. Notably, the volume of Russian LNG from the Yamal plant in 2024 was 2.5 percent higher than the previous record set in 2022. This continued LNG trade with Russia starkly contrasts with Europe's commitment to militarily support Ukraine, its rearmament efforts, and discussions about imposing fresh sanctions on Russia.

of the LNG transiting through Europe en route to Asia does so during winter months when the northern sea route to China is blocked by ice. Regardless of its destination, Europe benefits from

Russian President Vladimir Putin, center, at ceremony of the loading of the first LNG tanker within the project of Yamal LNG, 8 December 2017.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yamal_LNG_-_media/File:Ceremony_of_loading_of_the_first_LNG_tanker_within_the_project_of_Yamal_LNG.jpg; Attribution: CC BY 4.0



Source: Malte Humpert, “Russia’s Arctic ‘Yamal LNG’ Gas Plant Saw a Record 287 Cargo Loadings in 2024”, *High North News* (independent newspaper published by the High North Center at the Nord University, Norway), 29 April 2025. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russias-arctic-yamal-lng-gas-plant-saw-record-287-cargo-loadings-2024>

The liquefied natural gas (LNG) business in Russia keeps on booming, especially in the Arctic. New data show that the country’s largest active liquefied natural gas plant, Yamal LNG, dispatched 287 vessels each loaded with 74,000 tons of supercooled gas during 2024.

More than 200 voyages passed along Norway’s coastal waters in the Barents and Norwegian Seas. In total exports from Novatek’s Yamal plant reached 21.2 million tons last year. This represents 2.5 percent more than during the previous record year of 2022 and 5 percent more than last year.

For around half the year the facility can only be reached by highly specialized Arc7 ice-class LNG carriers. But increasingly during the summer and fall months vessels of lower ice classification or even conventional gas carriers can travel to the facility.

Out of the 287 voyages, 19 were conducted by medium Arc4 ice-class ships and 17 LNG vessels had no ice-strengthening at all.

Russia’s efforts to ship LNG through the Arctic continues to rely on a fairly small fleet of gas carriers. Just 26 vessels completed the 287 deliveries in 2024. And the composition of the fleet has remained highly consistent over the past several years. The core fleet of 15 Arc7 vessels is supplemented by less than a dozen other gas carriers.

Europe has remained a key market for Russian LNG from Yamal, despite ongoing policy discussion to phase out the fuel. Close to 80 percent of deliveries, 227 out of 287, were bound for Europe. In Europe the countries of France (88 deliveries), Belgium (62), and Spain (54) were the largest buyers of Russian LNG, though some shipments only passed through terminals in the countries before being re-exported.

Shipments to Europe are highest during the winter months when the direct route to Asia via the Northern Sea Route is blocked by thick sea ice. During the summer months transport to EU ports is reduced in favor of dispatching cargos directly to Asia.

Russian officials have long spoken of the possibility of year-round shipments to Asia via the Northern Sea Route, but this option has not materialized beyond a handful of trial voyages. For now, trans-Arctic shipments remain limited to the months from June to December.

During those six months the Yamal project dispatched 41 voyages to Asia, with China as the primary buyer receiving 35 shipments. The relatively quick delivery time from Yamal to China via the Arctic is key to the facility’s economics. Voyages from the Yamal peninsula to ports in China took just 19 days on average, around 50 percent faster than deliveries via the traditional route through the Suez Canal.

Russia Provides S-300 Missile Systems to Kyrgyzstan, Strengthening Its Own Base

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Russia's security assistance to the Central Asian states over the years has provided a boost to the capabilities of the armed forces of the region but still largely serves Russian interests. The accompanying excerpted article from the independent Russian-language news website *Fergana Agency* reports that Kyrgyzstan, where Russia maintains several military bases, recently received **S-300** surface-to-air missile systems from Russia, additionally outlining how the new systems will fit into air

defense in Kyrgyzstan.¹ The article notes that Kyrgyzstan's Secretary of the Security Council, Marat Imankulov, confirmed delivery of the S-300s, though it is not reported how many of the systems were delivered. Imankulov also mentioned Kyrgyzstan having a joint air defense system in operation based on an agreement with Russia from November 2023.² The article notes that Russia will coordinate the activities of the joint air defense system, while Kyrgyzstan will have operational

control of the air defense system in its territory. It also notes that the new systems will be deployed in an area next to Russia's Kant airbase.³ So, while the S-300 systems will boost Kyrgyzstan's air defense, they are deploying in an area to protect a Russian base in Central Asia. This provides a good indication that despite the war in Ukraine taking up a lot of Russia's focus and efforts, the Kant Airbase remains important for Russia's long-term interests.

“For the deployment of troops and equipment, the Kyrgyz authorities have allocated a 5-hectare area next to the Russian military base of Kant.”

A Russian **Su-25** on display during a public event at the Kant Airbase, located outside the city of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant_\(air_base\)_05.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kant_(air_base)_05.jpg); Attribution: CCA 4.0 International



Source: “Кыргызстан получил российские зенитно-ракетные комплексы С-300 (Kyrgyzstan has received the S-300 Russian anti-aircraft missile systems),” *Fergana Agency* (independent Russian-language news website reporting on Central Asia), 28 April 2025. <https://fergana.agency/news/137677/>

Kyrgyzstan received S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems from Russia...

“We have a unified air defense system in operation. We have now received elements of this joint system - S-300...” Imankulov said.

It is not specified how many systems Russia sent to Kyrgyzstan.

An agreement on the supply of S-300 air defense systems was reached in 2021 during the visit of Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov to Moscow. In November 2023

came into force agreement on the creation of a Joint Regional Air Defense System (JRADS) with Kyrgyzstan. According to the document, Russia coordinates the actions of the joint air defense system in the collective security zone, while Kyrgyzstan manages their operations. For the deployment of troops and equipment, the Kyrgyz authorities have allocated a 5-hectare area next to the Russian military base of Kant...

Notes:

- 1 The largest and most notable of Russia’s military facilities in Kyrgyzstan is the Kant airbase outside the capital Bishkek. There are an estimated 400 Russian service members, a dozen Su-25SM attack aircraft, and several variants of Mi-8 transport helicopters deployed at Kant. The aircraft would be part of any Russian-led military response by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), of which both Russia and Kyrgyzstan are members, to a threat in Central Asia. The other Russian military bases in Kyrgyzstan include a torpedo testing facility on Lake Issyk Kul, seismic monitoring stations, and a naval communications relay.
- 2 Russia maintains similar air defense agreements with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, see: Ayturgan Azimzhanova, “Kyrgyzstan ratifies agreement on joint air defense system with Russia,” *Kursiv* (independent news website in Kazakhstan), 11 October 2023. <https://kz.kursiv.media/en/2023-10-11/kyrgyzstan-ratifies-agreement-on-joint-air-defense-system-with-russia/>
- 3 Kazakhstan has been operating S-300 systems that it purchased from Russia, while Tajikistan received S-300s a few years ago as part of its security assistance from Russia. Tajikistan’s S-300s are deployed to protect facilities of the Russian 201st Military Base in Tajikistan, see: “Россия перебросила С-300ПС на российскую базу в Таджикистан (Russia transferred the S-300PS to the Russian base in Tajikistan),” *Asia-Plus* (Russian-language independent news website in Tajikistan), 28 October 2019. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20191028/rossiya-perebrosila-s-300ps-na-rossiiskuyu-bazu-v-tadzhikistan>

Russian Support for Mali Strains Algeria Relations

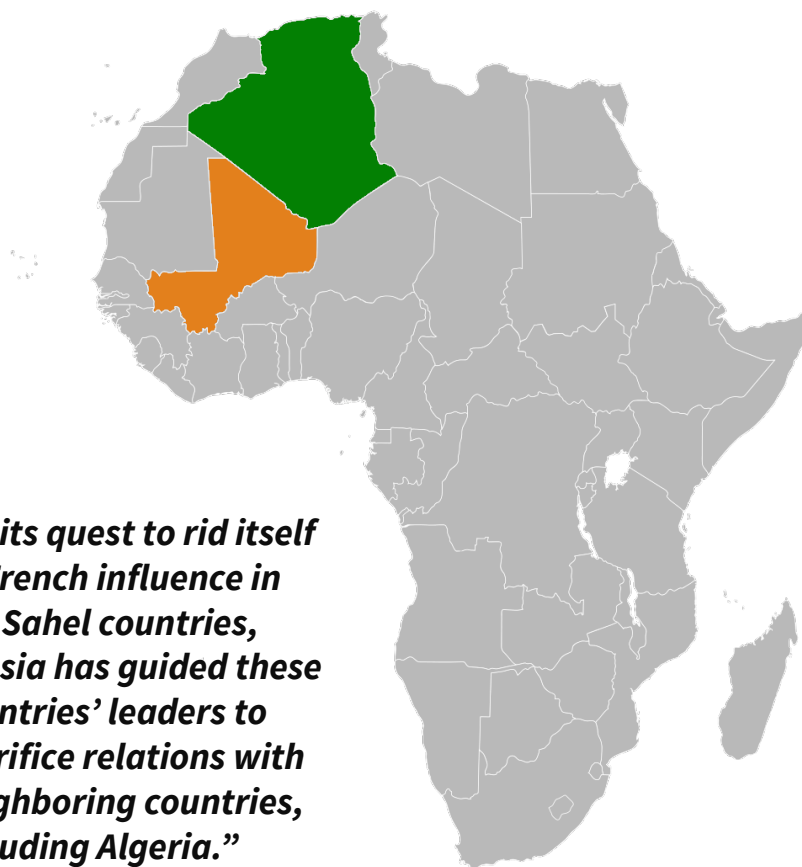
By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Russian support for Mali's military government is straining Russia's relations with Algeria, according to the accompanying excerpt from the Arabic-language daily *al-Quds al-Arabi*. Russia and Algeria have often been considered strategic allies, per the article's author, but the relationship has been highly transactional and may be coming under strain. Russian activities in the Sahel—specifically direct military support for the military coup leaders in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—are at odds with the Algerian government's aversion to foreign intervention in African affairs, particularly in neighboring countries. Furthermore, as the author notes, Russian support has emboldened Mali's junta, leading to increasing assertiveness in its military operations in areas near the Algerian border. “In its quest to eliminate French influence in the Sahel countries,” the author argues, “Russia has guided these countries' leaders to sacrifice relations with neighboring countries, including Algeria.”

The tension between Mali and Algeria has an operational history. In early April 2025, the Algerian military shot down a Malian military drone along their shared border.¹ Mali has previously flown armed drones in this area as part of its campaign against armed

“In its quest to rid itself of French influence in the Sahel countries, Russia has guided these countries' leaders to sacrifice relations with neighboring countries, including Algeria.”

separatists and government opponents in the country's north. As reported in the second accompanying excerpt, from the prominent weekly *al-Majalla*, in the summer of 2024, Malian forces and Russian mercenaries suffered a “crushing defeat” in a battle near the Algerian border. In the aftermath, Malian authorities accused Algeria of “harboring terrorists, playing the role of a disruptor, and disrespecting good neighborliness.” Since then, and following the UAV shoot-down in early April, Algerian authorities accused Mali's leaders of seeking to “divert attention from the abject failure of the ongoing coup attempt, which has plunged Mali into a spiral of insecurity, instability, devastation, and deprivation,” as noted



▲ Africa map showing Algeria (green) and Mali (orange).

Source: PlanespotterA320, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algeria_Mali_Locator.png; Attribution: CC0 1.0 (Public Domain)

in the third excerpt, from the Algerian Foreign Ministry. On the whole, the rising tensions between Algeria and Mali suggest that Russia's strong military support for the coup-led governments of the Sahel—Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—is beginning to create real friction in its relations with other countries of the region, in this case Algeria, potentially forcing Russia to reconsider its strong support for the coup governments of the Sahel.

Source:

"الظل الروسي في الأزمة بين الجزائر ومالي"

Tawfiq Rabahi. "The Russian Shadow in the Crisis Between Algeria and Mali, *al-Quds al-Arabi* (prominent Arabic-language daily), 14 April 2025. <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84/>

Aside from local causes and overlapping regional factors, it is difficult to ignore that Russia has a role in the escalating crisis in Algeria's relations with some of its surrounding African countries, primarily Mali. It is hard to imagine the ruling military junta in Mali "acting boldly" towards Algeria if there were not an international power behind it, encouraging it and promising protection. Most likely, this power is Russia.

In the worst-case scenario, Russia pushed towards escalation; in the best-case scenario, it did nothing to prevent it...

The incident of the Malian drone shot down by the Algerian air force in Tinzwatine is a symptom of the crisis, not one of its causes. Is it a coincidence that the coolness turned into hostility with the beginning of Russia's hand creeping into the African continent under

various pretexts, most notably assisting ruling regimes in crushing their local opponents? And is it a coincidence that the coolness between Algeria and Mali coincides with the thawing of the traditional rapprochement that existed between Algeria and Moscow?...

Algerian diplomacy repeatedly stated its rejection of foreign interventions in African countries, while intervention became a cornerstone of new international relations, and while Russia was expanding on the continent, and in countries on Algeria's doorstep, through its security companies and mercenaries, influencing internal conflicts according to its own calculations...

In its quest to rid itself of French influence in the Sahel countries, Russia has guided these countries' leaders to sacrifice relations with neighboring countries, including Algeria.

Source:

"أزمة الجزائر وبلدان الساحل"

Rabia Abdel Salam. "Crisis of Algeria and the Sahel countries... Scenarios and repercussions," *al-Majalla* (Arabic-language news magazine), 21 April 2025. <https://www.majalla.com/node/325263/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA>

Relations between Algeria and Mali have witnessed escalating tension in the last two years, reaching a peak after the incident of the armed drone being shot down after it attempted to cross the national border and infiltrate Algerian territory by about two kilometers...

[I]n the summer of 2024, the 'Wagner Legion' suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Azawadi movements in the Ashbirish area on the outskirts of the Azawadi Tinzwatine region, which cost them material

and human losses after three days of fighting alongside the Malian army."

The Malian authorities did not take this failure well, and fearing a loss of public trust, its Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop accused Algeria of "harboring terrorists, playing the role of a disruptor, not respecting good neighborliness, and that it should know Mali is not an Algerian province." Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf responded to Diop's statements, describing them as "despicable words, utterly unbecoming."

continue on 27

Source:

بيان وزارة الشؤون الخارجية - اتحاد دول الساحل

“Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Confederation of Sahel States,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algeria (via Embassy of Algeria in Abu Dhabi website), 7 April 2025. <https://embabudhabi.mfa.gov.dz/ar/news-and-press-releases/statement-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-confederation-of-sahel-states-07042025>

The Algerian government has noted, with profound displeasure, the statement issued by the transitional government in Mali, as well as the statement issued by the council of heads of state of the Confederation of Sahel States. In its statement, the transitional government in Mali leveled serious accusations against Algeria. Despite their gravity, all these false allegations represent nothing but desperate and futile attempts to divert attention from the abject failure of the coup project that remains in place and has plunged Mali into a spiral of insecurity, instability, ruin, and deprivation...

The failure of this unconstitutional clique is clear and evident at every level, including politics, the economy, and security. The only successes this clique can boast of are those in satisfying its personal ambitions at the expense of sacrificing Mali's ambitions, ensuring its own survival at the expense of protecting its country, and preying on the meager resources of this sister nation at the expense of its development.

Notes:

- 1 For more on the UAV incident and subsequent diplomatic fallout, see: “Algeria-Mali: Defusing a Dangerous Escalation,” International Crisis Group, 18 April 2025. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali-algeria/algerie-mali-desamorcer-une-dangereuse-escalade>

Iran Expanding AI capabilities With Swarm Intelligence

By Holly Dagres
OE Watch Commentary

As the world accelerates the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), Iran is also taking strategic steps by embracing swarm intelligence. In a discussion with a reporter from state broadcaster *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB) on 19 May, Commander Mohammad Reza Hasani Ahangar, the president of Imam Hussein University in Tehran,¹ said, “This year, additional achievements will be unveiled using artificial intelligence.” While thin on additional details, he emphasized the development of “swarm intelligence” to control micro-drones, not only for military operations, but also for “crisis management and firefighting.”

Hasani Ahangar’s declaration builds on news from January, when the Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) unveiled a “comprehensive artificial intelligence roadmap” during the first annual

International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Future Civilization. At the conference, IRGC Commander-in-Chief Hossein Salami described the roadmap as integral for advancing AI across all fields, including defense, education, healthcare, and national security.² He also stated that “The AI roadmap will guide the military’s efforts in advancing artificial intelligence knowledge and technology.”

Hasani Ahangar, a member of the National Artificial Intelligence Steering Council, noted that his institution’s AI products are not exclusive to the IRGC but are available to “all branches of the armed forces.” Per the excerpted article, these technologies are manufactured by the Defense Ministry and deployed by other organizations, including crisis management authorities.

“This year, additional achievements will be unveiled using artificial intelligence.’ However, he did not specify the exact timeline for these unveilings.”

Iran’s continued emphasis on AI—including advancements in swarm intelligence—suggests its broader ambition to remain self-sufficient and modernize its military capabilities, regardless of the outcome of the ongoing nuclear negotiations with the United States that could lead to sanctions relief.

Source:

(Using “artificial intelligence” to guide and control micro-drones),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 19 May 2025. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00IzjM>

استفاده از «هوش مصنوعی» برای هدایت و کنترل ریزپرنده‌ها

Commander Mohammad Reza Hasani Ahangar, in a conversation with a reporter from IRIB, has broke the news and said: “This year, additional achievements will be unveiled using artificial intelligence.” However, he did not specify the exact timeline for these unveilings.

The head of Imam Hossein University also stated that in order to implement the IRGC’s artificial intelligence roadmap, laboratories have been equipped, and algo-

rithms (platforms) are being deployed for voice, image, and image recognition and processing.

Commander Hassani Ahangar said: Drones that are using “swarm intelligence” to control micro-drones are not limited to just military applications: “In addition to battlefield management, they are also used for crisis management and firefighting.”

Swarm intelligence or collective intelligence is a concept defined in the field of artificial intelligence.

continue on 29

Inspired by nature and animal behavior, it refers to “the collective effort of a group working together to complete a task.”

Famous examples of swarm intelligence include ant colonies and the coordinated movement of birds, where responsibilities are distributed among the components of the group. With advancements in AI, the concept of swarm intelligence is also used to increase efficiency in industries.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) unveiled a “Comprehensive artificial intelligence roadmap” at the first international conference on artificial intelligence and future civilization.

The IRGC commander-in-chief said at the conference that “The AI roadmap will guide the military’s efforts in advancing artificial intelligence knowledge and technology.”

However, the president of Imam Hossein University noted that their products are not necessarily offered exclusively to the IRGC... “The general staff of the armed forces supports the defined plans, and these can be used across all branches of the armed forces.”

He also mentioned that their products are manufactured by the Defense Ministry and are utilized by other organizations, including crisis management authorities.

Notes:

- 1 Hussein University in Tehran is affiliated with Iran’s Defense Ministry and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other state security entities.
- 2 Morteza Ahmadi Al Hashem, “Iran to increase use of AI in military areas: IRGC chief,” *Mehr News Agency*, 29 January 2025. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/227600/Iran-to-increase-use-of-AI-in-military-areas-IRGC-chief>

North Korea Admits Military Support for Russia in Ukraine War

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

On 28 April, North Korea's state media, the *Korea Central News Agency* (KCNA), published two articles openly acknowledging that its military forces were fighting in Russia's war against Ukraine. The first report is a purported statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin praising North Korean forces for their involvement "in the elimination of the neo-Nazi units of the Kiev authorities that invaded our territory" in Kursk. The second report is a letter sent by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to KCNA in his role as chairman of North Korea's Central Military Commission.¹ In the statement, Kim said he personally ordered North Korean combat involvement under Article IV of the North Korea-Russia Treaty.²

Both the Russian and North Korean statements acknowledge that North

"Kim Jong Un decided on our armed forces participation in the war based on his analysis and judgment that the prevailing situation corresponds to the triggering of Article 4 of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (between North Korea and Russia)."

Korean forces suffered casualties, without providing any more detail. Additionally, both statements characterize North Korean forces as assisting in dislodging the Ukrainian salient in Kursk. However, prior to these reports, North Korean propaganda had not

admitted its battlefield support for Russia, even though that fact is widely known around the world and is likely recognized by Kim's own population. The closest acknowledgement came was a carefully worded and legalistic working-level foreign ministry statement on 25 Oct 2024.^{3, 4}

There are a few reasons why Kim Jong Un may have waited so long before admitting North Korea's role in Russia's war. He may have waited until there was a victory.⁵ The announcements also coincide, perhaps coincidentally, with regime founder Kim Il Sung's birthday on 15 April, which is North Korea's most important state holiday and militarist celebration built around anti-Japan and anti-U.S. themes.

Source: "로씨야련방 대통령 올라지미르 뿌쨌동지가 조선민주주의인민공화국무력 전투구분대들의 로씨야 꾸르스크지역해방작전참가와 관련한 성명 발표 (President of the Russian Federation Comrade Vladimir Putin issued a statement regarding the participation of the combat units of the armed forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the Kursk region liberation operation in Russia)," *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned broadcaster for general consumption), 28 April 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/c555ddd2b262a3b1439e65c861e80efc.kcmsf>

On April 28, Comrade Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, made a statement regarding the participation of combat units of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's armed forces in the Kursk region liberation operation of the Russian Federation.

On April 26, 2025, the Russian Federal Armed Forces conducted combat operations and completed the operation to destroy the Ukrainian troops that invaded

Kursk Oblast. This ended the criminal provocations of the Ukrainian authorities, who were trying to seize some territories of the Russian Federation.

The Korean People's Army units actively participated in the elimination of the neo-Nazi units of the Kiev authorities that invaded our territory. This is fully in accordance with international law and the wording and spirit of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic

continue on 31

Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea dated June 19, 2024, especially Article 4 of the Treaty, which stipulates that military assistance will be provided without delay in the event of an armed invasion of either side.

The Russian people will never forget the feats of the Korean special forces fighters. We will forever remember the Korean heroes who gave their lives for Russia and our common freedom, just like our Russian comrades.

Source: “조선로동당 중앙군사위원회가 로씨야련방의 꾸르스크지역해방작전에 참전하여 영웅적위훈을 세운 조선민주주의인민공화국무력 전투구분대들을 높이 평가 (The Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea highly praised the combat units of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea armed forces that performed heroic feats in the Kursk region liberation operation of the Russian Federation),” *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned broadcaster for general consumption), 28 April 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/31dad32db7521d14c899e32fd4be46b9.kcmsf>

The Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea highly praised the combat units of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea armed forces for their heroic exploits in the operation to repel the grave violation of sovereignty by the Ukrainian authorities that invaded the territory of the Russian Federation and to completely liberate the occupied areas of Kursk Oblast.

The Kursk region liberation operation, aimed at repelling the Ukrainian authorities' adventurous military aggression against the Russian Federation, ended victoriously.

Our armed forces units that took part in the Kursk region liberation operation under the order of the head of state of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Ukrainian authorities, who have stepped forward as the vanguard and shock force of the imperialist powers
Notes:

seeking to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia, launched a surprise attack on the Russian mainland with tens of thousands of elite troops equipped with Western-made cutting-edge weapons and combat technology equipment in August 2024, under the guise of reversing the situation in which they were at a disadvantage, occupying an area spanning over 1,200km² of Kursk Oblast, reducing numerous residential areas to rubble, and mercilessly massacring peaceful civilians.

Comrade Kim Jong Un decided on the participation of our armed forces in the war based on his analysis and judgment that the prevailing situation corresponds to the triggering of Article 4 of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership concluded between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

- 1 Kim Jong Un holds four party-state titles concurrently: Chairman of the Central Military Commission, President of the State Affairs Council, General Secretary of the Workers Party of Korea, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of North Korea. PRK propaganda takes care to make sure it appropriately ties a North Korean decision to the role in which Kim Jong Un issued the decision. Even though there is great overlap in the membership of many of these ruling bodies, outside analysts can glean some information about PRK decision making based upon which body is formally making the decisions.
- 2 Formally the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Russian Federation of 18 June 2024.
- 3 See: Anthony W. Holmes, “North Korea Tacitly Acknowledges Its Troops Are in Ukraine,” *OE Watch*, 01-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/north-korea-tacitly-acknowledges-its-troops-are-in-ukraine/>
- 4 See: Anthony W. Holmes, “North Korea has not Responded to Putin's Invitation to Ukraine Talks,” *OE Watch*, 05-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-5-2025/>
- 5 Kim's statement also includes a pledge to build a battlefield victory monument in Pyongyang.

Source: “조선법률가위원회 대변인 담화 발표 (Announcement of the Spokesperson of the Korean Lawyers Committee),” *Korean Central News Agency/KCNA* (primary state-owned broadcaster), 24 April 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/0fa35ca7a2d6e8c8af16581c0ef17f83.kcmsf>

The full text of the statement released on the 23rd by the spokesperson of the Korean Lawyers’ Committee, “No one can infringe on the sacred democratic national education rights of Koreans in Japan,” is as follows.

It is only right that Koreans in Japan teach their children our language and writing, and it is a basic requirement of international law that the best interests and financial support for children should be guaranteed.

The Japanese authorities are forcing Koreans in Japan to pay the same taxes as the Japanese, but by excluding the Korean schools their children attend from various educational support systems, including “free high school education” and “free early childhood education and childcare,” under unfair pretexts, they are driving nails into the hearts of innocent children.

The implementation of democratic national education by Koreans in Japan is a proper exercise of rights that

fully complies with numerous international laws that Japan has accepted, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights conventions, as well as UNESCO’s Convention Against Discrimination in Education, as well as domestic laws such as Japan’s Constitution and Basic Education Act.

The Japanese government has a moral responsibility and legal obligation to guarantee the national rights, including the right to education and the right to live, to the direct victims of Japan’s colonial rule over Korea and their children, the Koreans in Japan.

The Korean Lawyers Committee strongly demands that the Japanese authorities immediately withdraw all illegal and unlawful institutional and administrative discriminatory measures that infringe on the democratic national rights of Chongryon and Koreans in Japan and fulfill their legal and moral obligations.

Notes:

- 1 In 2019, the Japanese government disallowed Chosen Soren-affiliated early childhood education centers/daycares from renewing or applying for permits.
- 2 The Korea University in Tokyo is a North Korea-affiliated university in Kodaira, Tokyo, Japan.
- 3 For decades in fact North Korea’s external propaganda websites were hosted in Japan on Japanese servers owned by Chosen Soren.

Jalisco New Generation Cartel Expands Regional and Global Reach

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

The Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) is one of the most dominant and feared criminal organizations in Mexico.¹ It operates in most territories of the country, in the United States, and is thriving in several other Latin American countries. Recent news reports indicate that CJNG has even established a nascent presence in Africa.² The first article excerpt, from Argentine digital news outlet with regional scope *Infobae*, reports that Colombia provides a perfect launch point for CJNG in South America. It notes that over the past 15 months, Colombian authorities have arrested nearly three dozen high-level Mexican operatives belonging to the CJNG. The article also details recruitment activities of the CJNG in Colombia, which

mirror its efforts in Mexico. Notably, Colombia is an attractive recruitment ground because there are many former guerrilla fighters and military men who are unemployed, battle-tested, and highly recruitable. The article details how CJNG recruits men and women through fake job postings and adverts meant to lure them into working for the cartel.³ The second excerpted article from Mexican investigative news source *Animal Político*, mentions CJNG's recruitment of Colombians for their ability to operate high-powered weapons and build improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The CJNG's recruitment of battle-tested guerrillas and former Colombians demonstrates CJNG's

“This criminal group, known for its influence in international drug trafficking, has expanded its operations in Colombia, not only to acquire cocaine and gold, but also to establish human trafficking and forced recruitment networks.”

beguiling recruitment methods, indicating that high unemployment is the key factor in recruitment vulnerability. As the CJNG continues to challenge the Mexican state, Colombian recruits who were once part of challenging the Colombian state as guerrilla fighters could prove formidable additions to the cartel's ranks.



Former Colombian guerrillas are attractive recruits for expanding Mexican cartels such as CJNG.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ELN_Catatumbo_2019.png; Attribution: CC BY 4.0

Source: “El Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación extiende su red criminal a Colombia: trata de personas, narcotráfico y explotación laboral (The Jalisco New Generation Cartel expands its criminal network to Colombia: human trafficking, drug trafficking, and labor exploitation),” *Infobae* (Argentine digital news outlet with regional scope), 12 April 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2025/04/12/el-cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-extiende-su-red-criminal-a-colombia-trata-de-personas-narcotrafico-y-explotacion-laboral/>

In the past 15 months, Colombian authorities have captured 35 Mexican citizens allegedly linked to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. This criminal group, known for its influence in international drug trafficking, has expanded its operations in Colombia, not only

to acquire cocaine and gold, but also to establish human trafficking and forced recruitment networks...The CJNG not only focuses on the trafficking of women, but also on the recruitment of Colombian men, especially former military personnel, to join its ranks.

Source: “Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación recluta a militares colombianos para fabricación de minas terrestres en Michoacán (The Jalisco New Generation Cartel recruits Colombian soldiers to manufacture landmines in Michoacán),” *Animal Político* (Mexican investigative journalism site that is usually critical of all governments), 19 February 2025. <https://animalpolitico.com/seguridad/cjng-militares-colombianos-minas-terrestres-jalisco-michoacan>

The CJNG recruits Colombian weapons and explosives specialists to manufacture open-air improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or mines. A former Colombian soldier reveals that he was deceptively recruited by the CJNG but managed to escape with 10 of his fellow countrymen. After six years, El Pascual, as he is known, ended his military career in the Colombian

National Army. Upon his release, he was hired as a construction worker until 2023, when he learned of a job offer in Mexico, which appealed to him...The former military officer says the criminal organization demanded they murder innocent people, maim farmers, and bury explosives to create minefields and blow-up vehicles.

Notes:

- 1 For information on CJNG’s history, see: “Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG),” *InSight Crime*, 27 May 2024. <https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation/>
- 2 See: Ryan Berg, “Mexico’s Jalisco Cartel Expands Into Africa,” *OE Watch*, 05-2025. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/oe-watch-issue-5-2025/>
- 3 For more information on recruitment methods, including emojis used to evade content moderation rules on social media, see: El Colegio de México, “Nuevas Fronteras en el Reclutamiento Digital,” April 2024. <https://violenciapaz.colmex.mx/archivos/UHVibGljYWNpb24KIDExNQpkb2N1bWVudG8=/SVyP%20-%20TikTok%20reclutamiento%20%20-%2020abril%202024.pdf>

Nigerian Official Disputes Claims of Progress Against Boko Haram

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Since Babagana Zulum was elected governor of Borno State (Boko Haram's epicenter) in 2019, he has dedicated himself to overseeing the destruction of the insurgent group. However, Zulum is distinctly candid about the threats Boko Haram still poses, in contrast to other high-level Nigerian officials, who have boasted of the group's imminent demise.¹ According to the excerpted article from regional media *Punch*, Zulum conflicts with officials who convey an excessively optimistic attitude about Nigeria's current counterinsurgency progress.

The article claims a dispute began when Zulum stated the military was losing ground to Boko Haram and the group was increasing its attacks. The catalyst for Zulum's remarks was a Boko Haram roadside bomb on the vital Maiduguri-Damboia roadway, which killed the vehicle's eight passengers.² The roadway connects Borno State to the rest of the country, and interruptions to vehicular traffic undermine Zulum's goal to hasten Borno State's economic recovery after more than a decade of insurgency.³ Zulum was quoted in the article as lamenting that drivers often travel 700 kilometers to Damboa from Maiduguri to avoid the more direct roadway, which is only 100 kilometers.

Reacting to Zulum's pessimism, Minister of Information Mohammed Idris reportedly claimed Zulum could be

"The governor disclosed that he had met with top military officials in Abuja, including the Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, and Chief of Air Staff, who assured him of continued efforts to combat insurgency."

"ignored" and Boko Haram was not "taking over" Borno State. According to the article, Zulum responded that Idris was "naïve." Zulum also contacted chiefs of staff of the army, navy, and air force, who all reaffirmed their commitment to combat the insurgency. To reassure Borno's people considering negative security trends, Zulum also promised Boko Haram would not regain the capacities the group had when it conquered most major towns of Borno State in the mid-2010s and even invaded the Borno State capital, Maiduguri.

The back-and-forth between Zulum and Idris highlights Zulum's measured style as the highest-level official dealing with the Boko Haram insurgency on a daily basis. He avoids the bombast and overconfidence of other Nigerian leaders while also offering hope for a brighter future. Zulum himself, who comes from civil society and academia rather than the political elite or military, seeks to earn the trust of Nigerians—one piece in the puzzle of solving the insurgency.⁴ However, if the military's verbal commitments to defeating Boko

Haram are not met by results on the battlefield, Zulum's goal to restore livelihoods to the people in Borno, if not also to maintain their confidence in the Borno and federal government, will remain beyond reach.

Source: “‘You’re naive,’ Zulum slams minister over Borno blast comments,” *Punch* (Lagos-based publication with a southern Nigerian perspective and often critical of the government and northern Nigerian powerbrokers), 13 April 2025. <https://punchng.com/youre-naive-zulum-slams-minister-over-borno-blast-comments/>

Borno State Governor, Babagana Zulum, has criticised the Minister of Information, Mohammed Idris, describing him as “naive” about the country’s security realities following a deadly Boko Haram attack on the Damboa-Maiduguri Road. The explosion, which occurred on the major road linking the state capital, Maiduguri, to Damboa, killed at least eight people, severely injured seven others, and left 14 more with minor injuries. It is the latest in a series of attacks by Boko Haram insurgents, underscoring the persistent security challenges in the region.

[The Minister of Information] doesn’t know what is ongoing in the country,” Zulum said. He urged greater

resilience from both the affected communities and the Nigerian Army, calling for sustained efforts to secure the volatile road.

Despite the attack, Zulum reaffirmed the state government’s commitment to ensuring the safety of the Maiduguri-Damboa route. The governor disclosed that he had met with top military officials in Abuja, including the Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, and Chief of Air Staff, who assured him of continued efforts to combat insurgency.

Notes:

- 1 This includes former president Muhammadu Buhari, see: “Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants ‘technically defeated’ – Buhari,” *BBC*, 24 December 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35173618>
- 2 Zulum’s own advisers were also attacked on the same roadway in March 2025, although Zulum himself had flown by helicopter that day. See: “Troops on Gov. Zulum’s convoy Repel Boko Haram Attack on Buni Yadi Road, Rescue Seven Passengers.” *Zagazola*, 12 March 2025. <https://zagazola.org/index.php/breaking-news/troops-on-gov-zulum-s-convoy-repel-boko-haram-attack-on-buni-yadi-road-rescue-seven-passengers>
- 3 See: “Eight Persons Dead In IED Explosion By Boko Haram On Damboa-Maiduguri Road In Borno.” *Sahara Reporters*, 12 April 2025. <https://saharareporters.com/2025/04/12/breaking-eight-persons-dead-ied-explosion-boko-haram-damboa-maiduguri-road-borno>
- 4 The issue of trust in government resurfaced on 30 April 2025, when an armory blast at Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri led to fears and panic among citizens that Boko Haram had invaded the barracks. However, the government successfully assured the population that a “heatwave” caused the explosion. See: “Giwa Barracks fire: Borno Govt warns of possible secondary explosions.” *Lake Chad Times*, 1 May 2025. <https://lakechadtimes.ng/web/2025/05/giwa-barracks-fire-borno-govt-warns-of-possible-secondary-explosions>

Suspension of India-Pakistan Agreements Raises Clash Risk

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

The killing of more than two dozen Indian citizens in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on 22 April 2025 marked one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in India since the 2008 terrorist attacks in the city of Mumbai.¹ The Indian airstrikes on Pakistani targets on 7 May in response to the attack in Pahalgam, followed by a series of retaliatory strikes over

the next few days by both India and Pakistan, represented a significant escalation of hostilities between the two countries.² According to the accompanying excerpted article from Pakistan's English-language newspaper *Dawn*, the chance for additional confrontations may be heightened due to the suspension of agreements that took place

“Pakistan shall exercise the right to hold all bilateral agreements with India including but not limited to Simla Agreement in abeyance.”

before the May clashes, most notably the Indus Water Treaty³ on 23 April by India and the Simla Agreement on 24 April by Pakistan.⁴ India and Pakistan have clashed numerous times in the years since the Simla Agreement took effect, and while some of these instances could be considered violations of the agreement, the Line of Control (LoC) has remained unchanged. The suspension of the Simla Agreement allows either side to ignore or potentially alter the LoC to their own advantage, leaving the door open to another conflict, regardless of any ceasefire agreement to the May clashes.

An unofficial map from the UN shows the Line of Control (LoC), which was agreed upon and established as part of the Simla Agreement in 1972.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Un-kashmir-jammu.png>; Attribution: Public Domain



Source: “‘India’s worn-out narrative’: Full text of statement on NSC’s decisions,” *Dawn* (English-language newspaper in Pakistan), 24 April 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1906310>

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chaired a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC), today. The participants discussed the national security environment and the regional situation, particularly in the wake of Pahalgam attack in the Anantnag District of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) on 22 April 2025.

Expressing concern over the loss of tourists’ lives, the Committee reviewed the Indian measures announced on 23 April 2025 and termed them unilateral, unjust, politically motivated, extremely irresponsible and devoid of legal merit...

The Committee decided the following:

Pakistan vehemently rejects the Indian announcement to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance. The Treaty is a binding international agreement brokered by the World Bank and contains no provision for unilateral suspension. Water is a Vital National Interest of Pakistan, a lifeline for its 240 million people and its availability will be safeguarded at all costs. Any attempt to stop or divert the flow of water belonging to Pakistan as per the Indus Waters Treaty, and the usurpation of the rights of lower riparian will be considered as an Act of War and responded with full force across the complete spectrum of National Power.

Noting the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of India, which disregards international conventions, UN Security Council Resolutions and international obligations at will, Pakistan shall exercise the right to hold all bilateral agreements with India including but not limited to Simla Agreement in abeyance...

Pakistan shall close down the Wagah Border Post, with immediate effect. All cross-border transit from India through this route shall be suspended, without exception...Pakistan suspends all visas under SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) issued to Indian nationals and deems them cancelled with immediate effect, with the exception of Sikh religious pilgrims...

Pakistan declares the Indian Defence, Naval and Air Advisors in Islamabad persona non grata. They are directed to leave Pakistan immediately but not later than 30 April 2025. These posts in the Indian High Commission are deemed annulled. Support staff of these Advisors are also directed to return to India.

The strength of Indian High Commission in Islamabad will be reduced to 30 diplomats and staff members, with effect from 30 April 2025. Pakistan’s airspace will be closed with immediate effect for all Indian owned or Indian operated airlines...

Notes:

- 1 The attack occurred near the town of Pahalgam in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir on 22 April 2025 and killed 26 people, most of whom were tourists. India blamed Pakistan for supporting the terrorists that crossed into Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan to carry out the attack before fleeing back into Pakistan, which the government of Pakistan has denied. For background, see: Abid Hussain, “Pahalgam attack: A simple guide to the Kashmir conflict,” *Al-Jazeera*, 2 May 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/2/pahalgam-attack-a-simple-guide-to-the-kashmir-conflict>
- 2 For a summary of the clashes that took place between Indian and Pakistan 7-10 May, see: Christopher Clary, “Four Days in May: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2025,” *The Stimson Center*, 28 May 2025. <https://www.stimson.org/2025/four-days-in-may-the-india-pakistan-crisis-of-2025/>
- 3 On 23 April 2025, India announced the suspension in abeyance of the Indus Water Treaty as part of its response to the Pahalgam attack. The treaty, signed in 1960 by India and Pakistan, allows for cross-border water sharing of the tributaries of the Indus

River. Pakistan relies on India allowing water to flow through three of the eastern and upstream tributaries of the Indus River. The suspension of the treaty came alongside India closing the Attari-Wagah border, an important border point for trade, and cancelling current and future visas for the majority of Pakistani nationals. For more information on India's measures against Pakistan the day after the attack, see: Sahil Sinha, "Indus Waters Treaty paused, Attari border shut: India responds to J&K attack," *India Today*, 24 April 2025. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indus-water-treaty-suspended-attari-checkpost-shut-government-response-pahalgam-attack-2713599-2025-04-23>

- 4 India and Pakistan signed the Simla Agreement in 1972 following the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. As part of the agreement, the two sides exchanged territory each had captured during the 1971 war and established the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border between India and Pakistan in Kashmir. The LoC runs between the territory of Pakistan's Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan and India's Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh regions. For more on the suspension of the Simla Agreement, see: Sudha Ramachandran, "Pakistan Threatens to Suspend Participation in the Simla Agreement," *The Diplomat*, 6 May 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/pakistan-threatens-to-suspend-participation-in-the-simla-agreement/>

Israeli Support for Syria's Druze Strains Ties With Syria, Creates Security Challenges for Druze Community

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Israel's support for Syria's Druze¹—an ethnoreligious minority group that has been targeted by Syrian Sunni militias—is likely to create fractures within the Druze community and create additional challenges for the new Syrian government.

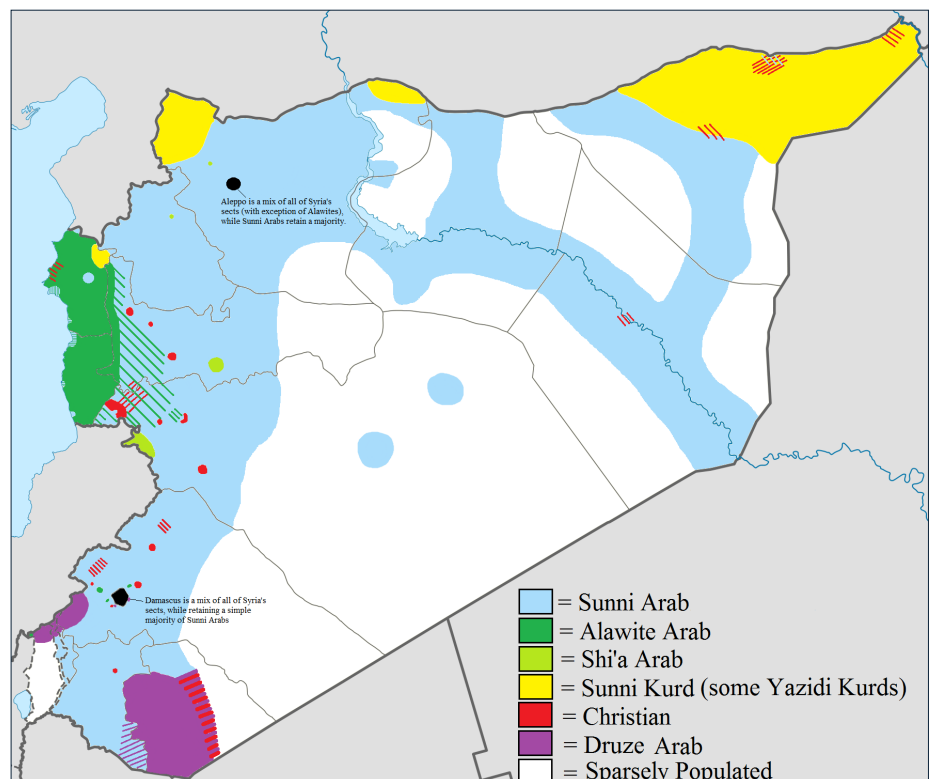
The first accompanying excerpt, from the Qatari-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, notes how Israel “continues to exploit discord in Syria and deepen the minority discourse that divides Syrians... to fragment the new Syria.” The second accompanying excerpt, from the prominent weekly *al-Majalla*, notes how Israel has used the narrative of protecting the Druze as a pretext for possible intervention in Syria in ways that create “greater tension between the rest of the Syrians and the Druze, which are dangerous indicators that could spark a conflict within the Druze community itself.” These developments serve what the first excerpt characterizes as Israel's “plans to fragment Syria and prevent the establishment of a strong, cohesive state that guarantees representation for all its groups, under the banner of national unity.”

In late April and early May, members of Syria's Druze minority came under attack after a fabricated audio recording was circulated on social media,

purportedly documenting a controversial Syrian Druze leader insulting the Prophet Muhammad. In the aftermath, the Israeli military conducted a limited airstrike campaign in Syria, which Israeli leaders linked directly to the protection of Syria's Druze. The Druze in Syria are divided on Israeli support and, for the most part, appear to reject it, according to the excerpt from *al-Majalla*.

Scattered as a minority group across Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, the Druze

have historically faced challenges maintaining cross-border unity. Intra-Druze divisions are emerging in Israel, where, according to the third accompanying excerpt, from the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, some members of the Israeli Druze community have criticized their government for not doing enough to protect their Syrian coreligionists, while others have warned those welcoming Israeli support against falling “into the trap set by Israel.”



Map showing the ethnic and religious distribution of Syria's sects. The Druze community (in purple) is concentrated in southern, southwestern Syria and the Damascus suburbs.

Source: By Supreme Deliciousness - File: Syria location map2.svg, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20607814>; Attribution: CC BY-SA 1.0

Syria's Druze will likely face greater challenges in the months ahead due to latent tensions with hardline Sunni supporters of the new Syrian government, internal disagreements on whether to integrate with the new Syrian Army, and increasing divisions regarding

Israeli support. More broadly, Syria's fragile new Sunni-led government will continue facing enormous challenges in managing relations not only with the Druze but also with Syria's other ethnic and religious minorities (Kurds, Alawites, Christians), particularly given

the fact that regional actors (primarily Israel, Turkey, and Iran) will continue seeking to exploit internal Syrian divisions to further their own regional goals and agendas.²

“Although some Druze voices in Syria may support the narrative of Israel’s protection of the Druze, they are insignificant compared to the voices of the majority of Druze in Syria and Lebanon who reject intervention.”

Source:

“إسرائيل تقتحم الفتنة في سورية بادعاء حماية الدروز”

Naif Zidani. “Israel Intervenes in Syrian Strife Under Pretext of Protecting Druze,” *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 1 May 2025. <http://alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2>

The Israeli occupation state continues to exploit strife in Syria and deepen the discourse of minorities that divides Syrians, along with some mistakes of the new regime in Damascus and extremist groups from various parties and sects, in order to fragment the new Syria, which is seeking to build itself in a sensitive phase. The latest that Israel is trying to exploit are the attacks that targeted the Druze in the cities of Jaramana and Sahnaya in rural Damascus, which resulted in deaths

and injuries, to destabilize and advance its plans aimed at fragmenting Syria and preventing the establishment of a strong and cohesive state that ensures representation for all its groups under the banner of national unity. Hence, it promotes the issue of defending the Druze, claiming it has received appeals to help them, while Druze leaders have stated more than once their rejection of Israeli intervention...

Source:

“إسرائيل والتلاعب بورقة ‘حماية الدروز’ في سوريا”

Sobhi Franjeh. “Israel and Manipulating the ‘Protecting Druze’ Card in Syria,” *al-Majalla*, 3 May 2025. <https://www.majalla.com/node/325426/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7>

Over the past few months, Israel has used the narrative of protecting the Druze as a pretext for any

possible intervention. It has issued numerous warnings through its officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin

continue on 43

Netanyahu, who stated that his country is “committed to protecting the Druze.” It has also launched several airstrikes to support this narrative. It has also used the Druze sheikh in Israel, Muwaffaq Tarif, to support this narrative, which many Druze in Syria see as a flimsy pretext to justify Israeli intervention in Syria. A military official in the Syrian Ministry of Defense told Al-Majalla, “Our Druze brothers know that Israel does not seek to protect them, but rather its own interests. We have witnessed this in numerous interviews with faction leaders in Sweida.” Religious figures and sheikhs in Sweida have also repeatedly declared their rejection of Israeli intervention under the pretext of protecting the Druze.

Although some Druze voices in Syria may support the narrative of Israel’s protection of the Druze, they are insignificant compared to the voices of the majority of Druze in Syria and Lebanon who reject intervention. This renders Israel’s narrative unrealistic and not a necessary demand of the Druze in Syria. This illegal and unjustified intervention complicates Druze unity in Syria and Lebanon, on the one hand, and creates greater tension between the rest of the Syrians and the Druze, which are dangerous indicators that could spark a conflict within the Druze community itself, and within the Syrian religious fabric, on the other...

Israeli attacks will further weaken Syria’s military and public security, particularly if the government redeploys its forces away from military sites to protect them from Israeli bombardment. This will make the country more vulnerable to internal movements by remnants of the regime, ISIS, which is attempting to strengthen its influence and equipment, and remnants of Iranian militias. This will inevitably delay any governmental or international efforts to support stability in Syria. Through its intervention in Syria, Israel is trying to counter the growing Turkish influence in Syria after the fall of the Syrian regime...

In the short—and perhaps long—term, Israel is expected to continue using the card of protecting the Druze and confronting Turkish influence to justify its intervention in Syria. Ultimately, it seems that Israel wants Syria to remain weak, militarily fragile, and lacking the elements of stability, because this protects its “national security,” as many Israeli leaders put it. However, this policy also threatens the Middle East, potentially leading to an explosion that threatens regional and international security. Israel is unlikely to be spared its disastrous repercussions for the “national security” it is trying to protect.

Source:

“تل أبيب تقصف دمشق... ومظاهرات دروز في إسرائيل”

“Tel Aviv Bombs Damascus... and Druze Demonstrations in Israel,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 17 May 2025.

<https://aawsat.com/%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/5138002-%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84>

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, the Israeli army attacked a site in the Damascus countryside, claiming to be “protecting the Druze,” at the behest of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Defense Minister, Israel

Katz. Netanyahu and Katz claimed in a statement that “the army carried out a warning operation and attacked a gathering of an extremist group” as it was preparing to attack Druze citizens in the Sahnaya area of Damascus.

continue on 44

The statement revealed that their governments conveyed a strong message to the Syrian regime that Israel intends to take action to prevent harm to the Druze. However, this measure did not convince the Druze community in Israel, and they staged noisy demonstrations warning against the government's leniency toward the regime.

It is noteworthy that leaders of the national movement of the Arab Druze community in Israel warn against creating a political crisis at the expense of the Druze in Syria. The Progressive Communication Movement, led

by writer and political activist Saeed Nafaa, said, "Israel is playing a game in Syria to drive wedges between the various components of the Syrian people and the Druze themselves, exploiting the complex reality in Syria and the region." The movement called on Syrians "of all components" not to fall prey to these suspicious steps, and on the Druze not to fall into the trap set by Israel, as their fate will be no better than that of the people of the "Saad Haddad" statelet in southern Lebanon when Israeli interests require it.

Notes:

- 1 The Druze are an esoteric, monotheistic ethnoreligious group that constitute 3% of Syria's population, concentrated in Suweida Province. There are also Druze communities on the Syria-Israel border and in Lebanon. For background see: Fabrice Balanche. "The Druze and Assad: Strategic Bedfellows," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 20 October 2016. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/druze-and-assad-strategic-bedfellows>; Also see: Lucas Winter, "Russian Influence Fades in Southern Syria," *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/russian-influence-fades-in-southern-syria/>
- 2 A recent *BBC Arabic* investigation found that disinformation networks based in countries throughout the region have been focused on enflaming ethnic and sectarian differences in Syria. See:

تحقيق لي بي سي يكشف عن شبكات خارجية تغذي الطائفية وخطاب الكراهية في سوريا

"A BBC investigation reveals foreign networks fueling sectarianism and hate speech in Syria," *BBC Arabic*, 11 May 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/c0r18wj2v2wo>

Algerian Analyst Criticizes the Joint Military Staff Committee's Absence From Sahelian Security Efforts

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 27 March, the French-language newspaper *Jeune Independent* published the excerpted article lamenting the inability of the Algeria-led Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC), whose establishment in 2010 was intended to foster cooperation amongst Sahelian defense forces, to mitigate the latest dispute between Algeria and Mali.¹

The dispute originated when an armed surveillance drone, allegedly from Mali, entered Algerian airspace for a third time in April 2025, which resulted in Algeria finally shooting it down. In retaliation, Mali and its Alliance of Sahelian States (AES) co-members, Niger and Burkina Faso, withdrew their ambassadors from Algiers, and Algeria withdrew its ambassadors from the AES capitals.

Citing an Algerian international affairs expert, Abdelaziz Medjahed, the article noted that Algeria had no choice but to shoot down the drone to defend national sovereignty. In addition, the

“Only sincere regional cooperation and active international solidarity will help stem the spiral of violence in the Sahel.”

expert questioned why the issue of drones crossing Algeria's borders was never raised to CEMOC. Ultimately, the expert concluded there is a flaw in the Sahel's regional cooperation system, and, if anything, cooperation is deteriorating at a time when terrorism, drug trafficking, and external geopolitical forces are undermining the region's stability. To address this problem, the expert envisions CEMOC as the solution to prevent the kind of incident that led to Algeria's dispute with Mali and the other AES states, if not also to curbing terrorism and other regional security issues.

West Africa requires regional coordination to solve its multiple security crises, but an Algeria-centric organization like CEMOC is unlikely to unite the region. This is not the least because of Algeria's rivalry with Morocco,

which the expert cites multiple times in the article as competing with, if not undermining, Algerian objectives in the Sahel.² Moreover, the Russia-backed AES and the pro-Western and democracy-inclined ECOWAS have stronger international backing and institutional histories than CEMOC.³ Although the AES and ECOWAS are currently rivals, they both are more likely than CEMOC to be called on by Sahelian states to respond to urgent security matters. Mali's withdrawal from CEMOC after this incident will further diminish the likelihood for CEMOC to become the premier regional security body at a time Algeria appears to be increasing cooperation with ECOWAS and the West on regional security matters.⁴

Source: “Sécurité au Sahel : Le Cemoc aux abonnés absents ! (Security in the Sahel: Cemoc Members are Absent!),” *Jeune Independent* (French-language Algerian daily newspaper known for independent reporting on the country's affairs since its founding in 1990), 27 March 2025. <https://www.jeune-independent.net/securite-au-sahel-le-cemoc-aux-abonnes-absents/>

Following the destruction last week of an armed drone that violated airspace in the south of the country, the Director General of the National Institute for Global Strategy Studies (INESG), Abdelaziz Medjahed,

continue on 46

denounced the serious failure in regional coordination. He warned of geopolitical excesses in the Sahel, blamed certain CEMOC partners, and criticized disinformation campaigns targeting Algeria in an increasingly tense climate.

Faced with this incursion, Algeria deemed it necessary to neutralize the aerial drone, citing national sovereignty and territorial security. However, this operation raises a central question: where was CEMOC, the Joint Operational Staff Committee, which is supposed to coordinate

security operations in the region between member countries, including Mali?

“This is a serious flaw in the regional cooperation system,” he insisted. The increase in these incidents demonstrates, according to him, a worrying deterioration in coordination mechanisms between Sahelian states, even as the region faces chronic instability fueled by terrorism, drug trafficking, and geopolitical influences.

Notes:

- 1 In 2010, after France demanded Algeria and Sahelian countries strengthen their counter-insurgency efforts, Algeria countered with a new initiative to reform Sahel counterterrorism defense coordination called the Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC). Algeria’s CEMOC initiative included Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, but not Morocco, and envisioned a joint military base hosting a 70,000-fighter Sahelian force in the Algerian desert town of Tamanrasset, although this vision has never fully materialized. See: Jacques Roussellier, “The Forgotten Maghreb–Sahel Nexus,” Carnegie Endowment, 31 October 2017. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2017/10/the-forgotten-maghreb-sahel-nexus?lang=en>
- 2 The long-simmering dispute between Algeria and Morocco largely stems from the frozen Western Sahara conflict. For more information, see: Lucas Winter, “Algeria Sees Threat from Morocco as Western Sahara Conflict Threatens To Reignite,” *OE Watch*, 06-2022. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/algeria-sees-threat-from-morocco-as-western-sahara-conflict-threatens-to-reignite/>
- 3 In January 2025, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which were all founding members of ECOWAS, announced they were leaving the organization. They alleged it had “drifted from the ideals of its founding fathers and the spirit of pan-Africanism” and claimed it had fallen “under the influence of foreign powers” and failed to mitigate the jihadist insurgencies in the region. See: Ebenezer Obadare, “ECOWAS Split Spells Trouble for Democracy in West Africa,” 2 February 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/ecowas-split-spells-trouble-democracy-west-africa>
- 4 See: “ECOWAS and Algeria agree to hold regular discussions on the political and security situation in west Africa and the Sahel, as well as on the fate of irregular migrants,” *African Business*, 3 May 2024. <https://african.business/2024/05/apo-newsfeed/economic-community-of-west-african-states-ecowas-and-algeria-agree-to-hold-regular-discussions-on-the-political-and-security-situation-in-west-africa-and-the-sahel-as-well-as-on-the-fate-of-irregul>