



OE WATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 1
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5 Russia Assists China's Military in Potential Taiwan Invasion



13 China Expresses Concern Over Potential Somaliland Breakaway



25 Iran Asserts U.S. Agenda Aims for Israeli Dominance in Region

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHINA

Russia Assists China's Military in Potential Taiwan Invasion

5

Leaked documents reveal that Russia is providing China with advanced military equipment, technology, and special forces training to support a potential invasion of Taiwan.

China Expands Economic Influence in Nicaragua

8

Nicaragua signs new loans with China and authorizes new mining licenses, furthering China's rapid advance in a key strategic country in Central America. The repayment obligations imposed on Nicaragua may have strategic consequences in the region.

Political Purges, Information Security, and Politicization of China's Rocket Force

10

China tightens its political requirements on military officer recruitment, particularly in the PLA Rocket Force, to ensure leadership loyalty to the Communist Party, prevent information leaks, and maintain control.

China Expresses Concern Over Potential Somaliland Breakaway

13

China views attempts to support Somaliland independence as undermining Beijing's influence in Africa, including Belt and Road Initiative shipping routes. China is prepared to take action, including militarily, to empower Somalia to prevent secession and to combat terrorism.

RUSSIA

Russian Influence in Syria Maintained Through Military Equipment Dependency

15

The Russia-Syria military relationship has become a partnership of necessity, driven by the new Syrian government's logistical dependence on Moscow for military maintenance rather than a shared strategic vision.

Russian Leadership Focuses on Anti-Aging Research With Military Implications

18

Russia is elevating its focus on anti-aging research, which could have implications for how leaders there and in other autocracies envision future threats and wars.

Gold Provides Russia a Financial Lifeline To Sustain War Efforts in Ukraine

21

Rising gold prices are helping Russia bolster its economy, providing financial support that enables it to sustain its military operations in Ukraine.

Dated Russian 2S19 Msta-S Self-Propelled Artillery Remains Prevalent on Battlefield

23

Even with high attrition, Russia's older 2S19 Msta-S self-propelled artillery system demonstrates that armor and artillery still have a place on the drone -enabled battlefield.

IRAN

Iran Asserts U.S. Agenda Aims for Israeli Dominance in Region

25

Iran claims Israel and the United States have an agenda to maintain dominance in the Middle East and North Africa, which includes reducing China's economic dominance.

Quds Force Commander Claims Assassination Rumors Are Intended to Track His Location

27

The Iranian Quds Force commander believes Israel is spreading rumors about his assassination to geolocate and target him.

NORTH KOREA

Kim Jong Un Continues To Criticize Corruption Within Ruling Party

For the second time this year, Kim Jong Un has publicly drawn attention to the need to fight official corruption on the part of the ruling party and government officials.

29

North Korean Leader Reaffirms Hostility Toward Seoul and Indifference to Washington

Kim Jong Un used a major government speech to strongly reject any interest in working with the South Korean government or negotiating with the United States toward denuclearization.

31

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Mexico's Navy and Ruling Morena Party Face Criminal Penetration

Mexico's government has been implicated in recent high-level cases of organized crime rings, complicating the fight against organized crime and raising questions about Mexico's commitment to the anti-crime fight.

33

GLOBAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Sign Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a strategic mutual defense agreement, leading to speculation that Pakistan may provide Saudi Arabia a nuclear umbrella; however, the conventional aspects of the agreement could have a greater strategic and operational impact for both.

35

Kazakhstan Assigns Ministry of Emergency Situations Responsibility for Territorial Defense

Kazakhstan has tasked its Ministry of Emergency Situations with territorial defense, allowing it to acquire weapons and equipment as part of an overall effort in recent years to increase the country's defensive capabilities.

38

Increasing Turkish-Egyptian Defense Cooperation Could Shift Regional Security Dynamics

A strategic rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt, marked by joint military exercises and defense co-production deals, is creating a new regional security axis that could alter the strategic balance in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

40

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Russia Assists China's Military in Potential Taiwan Invasion

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Leaked documents suggest that Russia is actively aiding China's military preparations for a potential invasion of Taiwan, which could take place as early as 2027. According to the following excerpted report, published by the United Kingdom's RUSI, an analysis of 800 pages of "verified contracts and correspondence" indicates that in 2023 Moscow had agreed to sell advanced airborne and amphibious equipment to the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This includes armored vehicles, antitank weapons, and relevant technologies that will allow China to scale up the local production of similar weapons. The second article excerpt, published by the private, non-profit media source, *Radio Free Europe*, explains that Moscow aims to bolster China's airborne and seaborne invasion capabilities. Training includes skills critical for seizing key Taiwanese infrastructure, such as the Taipei Port, which would give the

"The Russians appear ready to do anything to push China toward invading Taiwan, especially if that would lead toward an actual conflict between the United States and China."



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, during Putin's 2024 state visit to China.

Source: Государственный визит в Китай, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_meeting_Xi_Jinping_%282024%29_2.jpg

Chinese the control needed to conduct a seaborne invasion. Cooperation with Russia would significantly enhance China's air maneuver and rapid-deployment capabilities, areas where Russia retains a technological edge.

While China-Russia military relations have suffered various hiccups throughout the years, cooperation has clearly intensified over the past decade.¹ As explained in the *Radio Free Europe* article, RUSI's Oleksandr Danylyuk believes that Russia's motivations extend beyond profit, reflecting broader geopolitical ambitions. Danylyuk views a Chinese invasion of Taiwan as a means to provoke a prolonged conflict involving the United

States and its Indo-Pacific allies. Such a scenario could destabilize the global balance of power, stretch Western resources, and further cement an emerging "Axis of Upheaval" between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.² Russia's willingness to transfer sensitive technology—something it once avoided—signals a deepening strategic alignment with Beijing aimed at undermining the U.S.-led international order.

Source: Oleksandr Danylyuk and Jack Watling, "How Russia is Helping China Prepare to Seize Taiwan," RUSI.org (United Kingdom-based think tank), 26 September 2025. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/how-russia-helping-china-prepare-seize-taiwan>

Chinese President Xi Jinping has directed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to be ready to militarily seize Taiwan by 2027. A large-scale amphibious operation is highly risky, with the sites suitable for landing craft to deliver troops and equipment ashore constrained by the gradient and load bearing capacity of the beaches. Seizing airfields could allow troops to flow in by air, but as Russia discovered during its invasion of Ukraine, runways can be quickly denied. The PLA is therefore eager to identify ways of diversifying both the methods and locations at which it can move units onto Taiwan....

Russia has practical experience and capabilities for air maneuver that China lacks. According to contracts and correspondence obtained by the Black Moon hacktivist group, Russia agreed in 2023 to supply the PLA with

The Russian Offer

The agreements provide for the sale by Russia to China of:

- 37 **BMD-4M**, light amphibious assault vehicles with a 100 mm gun and 30 mm automatic cannon.
- 11 **Sprut-SDM1** light amphibious anti-tank self-propelled guns with a 125 mm cannon.
- 11 **BTR-MDM** 'Rakushka' airborne armoured personnel carriers.
- Several Rubin command and observation vehicles and KSHM-E command vehicles.

a complete set of weapons and equipment to equip an airborne battalion, as well as other special equipment necessary for airborne infiltration of special forces, along with a full cycle of training for operators and technical personnel to use this equipment. In addition, Russia is transferring technologies that will allow China to scale-up the production of similar weapons and military equipment through localization and modernization.

The approximately 800 pages of contracts and collateral materials appear genuine and details from within the documents have been independently verified. However, there is also the possibility that parts of the documents have been altered or omitted.

Historically, Russia has been wary of exporting its areas of military-technical advantage to China out of fears of intellectual property theft. However, Moscow increasingly sees the invasion of Taiwan – and subsequent division of the global economic order into opposing spheres – as a means of building leverage over Beijing by making Russia a supplier of critical raw materials and military industrial capacity....

Source: Reid Standish, “UK Think Tank Says Leaked Documents Show Russia Is Helping China Prepare To Seize Taiwan,” *Radio Free Europe* (private, Western non-profit media source), 1 October 2025. <https://www.rferl.org/a/china-russia-taiwan-invasion-rusi-danylyuk-putin-xi-/33545169.html>

Oleksandr V. Danylyuk, an associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), who obtained the leaked files along with his co-author, Jack Watling, spoke to RFE/RL about what the findings mean for future China-Russia military cooperation and why Russia may be in favor of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan....

RFE/RL: *The conventional wisdom has always been that Russia is very wary of exporting military equipment in more advanced areas to China out of fear that this would be stolen and reverse engineered. So why do you think that that's changing now, and what does that mean moving forward?*

Danylyuk: *Politically, this type of military cooperation is super important for the Russians because they don't want to be in this club of completely isolated*

countries. We can say that some kind of axis of like-minded countries [Editor's note: analysts have begun to refer to political and military coordination between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as the “Axis of Upheaval”] exists and for the Russians the most important element of this axis is China.

Russia has also invested so many resources into the means of war; and the only way they can convert that means into a proper geopolitical power is through a wider, global war. And the most desirable theater for that war is the Indo-Pacific.

So the Russians appear ready to do anything to push China toward invading Taiwan, especially if that would lead toward an actual conflict between the United States and China.

Notes:

- 1 For more in-depth information, please see China Power Team. "How Deep Are China-Russia Military Ties?" China Power, CSIS, Updated 17 July 2025. 7 October 2025. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-russia-military-cooperation-arms-sales-exercises/>
- 2 For more information on the growing “Axis of Upheaval,” see Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Nicholas Lokker, “The Axis of Upheaval, Center for a New American Security (An independent, bipartisan, Washington D.C.-based think tank), 28 July 2025. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/the-axis-of-upheaval>

China Expands Economic Influence in Nicaragua

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Nicaragua's dictatorship, led by Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, has deepened its relationship with China as a means of survival. The strategically located Central American country recognized Beijing in 2021 after its own stolen election, moving away from decades of official recognition of Taiwan.¹ Since then, China has moved quickly to bolster its strategic position in the country. The excerpted article published by *Confidencial*, one of Nicaragua's daily newspapers now operating from neighboring Costa Rica, reports on loans from state-owned enterprises such as the China Communications and Construction Company. From 2023 to 2025, the outlet reports on 10 separate loans from Chinese state-backed companies to Nicaragua, totaling \$1.2 billion. Separately, the Argentine digital media outlet *Infobae* says that the Nicaraguan regime has granted more than 20 mining concessions to Chinese companies during the same period, totaling 400,000 hectares. Many of these mining concessions are in ecologically sensitive areas or in border regions known for illegal mining activities.²

China's rapid advance in Nicaragua impacts the strategic environment in Central America. Not only has China's ascendance been rapid in a country that did not recognize it diplomatically for



A centuries' old idea for a canal through Nicaragua has attracted great interest from Chinese entrepreneurs and construction companies.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NicaraguaCanal.5.jpg>

decades, but its advance has occurred in key sectors such as infrastructure development and the mining of critical minerals. The Ortega-Murillo regime will have few good options for repayment of Chinese debt, meaning China could eventually seek to extract concessions of a military nature from Nicaragua. Chinese operation or ownership of ports or airstrips in Nicaragua would have an immediate strategic consequence for the Western Hemisphere.³

"Between 2023 and 2025, Nicaragua has signed ten loan contracts with five Chinese companies, totaling a debt of more than \$1.205 billion, according to official data."

Source: “Ortega y Murillo autorizan endeudar más a Nicaragua con empresas chinas (Ortega and Murillo authorize Nicaragua to further indebted Chinese companies),” *Confidencial* (one of the country’s main dailies, now driven into exile in Costa Rica), 2 October 2025. <https://confidencial.digital/nacion/ortega-y-murillo-autorizan-endeudar-mas-a-nicaragua-con-empresas-chinas/>

Nicaragua’s husband and wife, Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, authorized the country to incur an additional \$57.4 million in debt from companies in the People’s Republic of China.

Ortega and Murillo authorized the general treasurer of the Republic of Nicaragua...to sign the loan with China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC)...

Nicaragua reestablished diplomatic relations with China in December 2021...Between 2023 and 2025, Nicaragua has signed ten loan contracts with five Chinese companies, totaling a debt of more than \$1.205 billion, according to official data. Of those ten loans, four are with CCCC, for a total amount of more than \$277.6 million. With the new loan, the debt with that company will exceed \$335 million.

Source: “Avanza la destrucción ambiental en Nicaragua: el régimen de Ortega entregó más de 100 mil hectáreas a la minería china en zonas protegidas (Environmental destruction in Nicaragua continues: the Ortega regime handed over more than 100,000 hectares of protected areas to Chinese mining companies),” *Infobae* (an Argentine digital news outlet with excellent regional coverage), 5 August 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2025/08/05/avanza-la-destruccion-ambiental-en-nicaragua-el-regimen-de-ortega-entregó-mas-de-100-mil-hectáreas-a-la-minería-china-en-zonas-protegidas/>

In just one week, the Nicaraguan government granted three open-pit mining concessions to the Chinese company Thomas Metal SA, totaling more than 1,000 square kilometers in the southern part of the country, specifically in the department of Río San Juan...In total, the government granted the Chinese company 108,464 hectares, in territories that, according to environmental organizations, include protected areas and indigenous communities recognized by national legislation...One organization warns that these permits violate the Law on the Communal Property Regime of Indigenous Peoples and that mining activity in these areas lacks independent

environmental studies or prior consultation processes with the affected communities...In addition to the local impact, one NGO has warned of potential cross-border consequences due to the proximity of the concessions to the Costa Rican territory of Crucitas, where an increase in illegal mining has already been reported...this activity could be facilitating illicit trade routes and putting environmental pressure on shared ecosystems...The advance of Chinese capital in the Nicaraguan mining sector has been significant. In the last two years, the regime has granted more than 20 concessions to Chinese companies, totaling more than 400,000 hectares.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on Taiwan’s alliances in Latin America and the Caribbean, see: Bryan Burgess, “Competition Continues Between China and Taiwan for Latin America Allies,” *Aid Data*, 6 May 2025. <https://www.aiddata.org/blog/competition-continues-between-china-and-taiwan-for-latin-american-allies>
- 2 For more detail on Nicaragua’s participation in illegal mining schemes, including its participation with Venezuela, see: Ryan C. Berg and Karla Rios, “Authoritarian Survival: Venezuelan Gold and Nicaragua’s Ortega-Murillo Regime,” 8 March 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/authoritarian-survival-venezuelan-gold-and-nicaraguas-ortega-murillo-regime>
- 3 Speculation is rife that China’s refurbishment of the Punta Huete Airport, one of the few large-scale Belt and Road Initiative projects announced for Latin America, is a play for infrastructure that could serve a dual-use role. See: “Works Begin in Nicaragua on New China-Funded Airport,” *Latin News*, 19 August 2024. <https://www.latinnews.com/component/k2/item/102601-in-brief-works-begin-in-nicaragua-on-new-china-funded-airport.html>

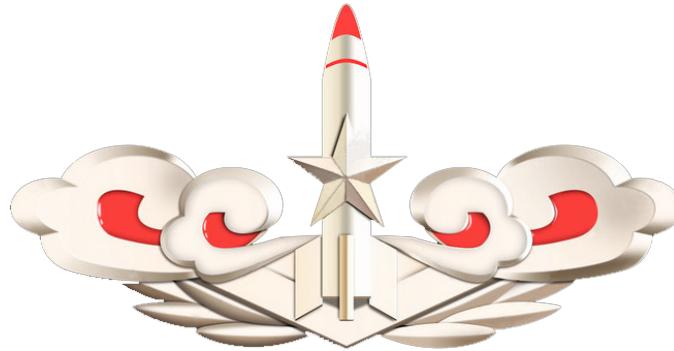
Political Purges, Information Security, and Politicization of China's Rocket Force

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

Recent and ongoing purges within the Chinese government and military, particularly impacting the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF), are linked to concerns over classified information leaks.¹ According to an opinion piece published by the popular Korean newspaper *Chosun*, exposure of sensitive military details in a 2022 U.S. Air University report appears to have triggered a wave of removals, arrests, and even suicides within the Rocket Force and related departments, ostensibly under the guise of anti-corruption efforts. This pattern highlights the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) prioritization of information control and the severe consequences for those perceived to compromise national security.

“The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a crime it will never forgive... leaking classified information.”

This emphasis on security is now demonstrably shaping the PLARF's recruitment practices. As seen in the second article excerpts, taken from a recent PLARF recruitment brochure posted on the Chinese web portal *Tencent*, not only are “excellent political qualities” desired in officer candidates,



Emblem of People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF).
Source: 漫漫长冬, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army_Rocket_Force#/media/File:Emblem_of_People%27s_Liberation_Army_Rocket_Force.png

but they are a fundamental requirement alongside academic and physical standards. Preference is explicitly given to Communist Party members, and this assessment is a critical, early-stage component of the selection process. This focus suggests the CCP is actively working to rebuild the PLARF with personnel deemed loyal and ideologically aligned. This is likely a direct response to the perceived failures that arise due to various factors, including information breaches.

The combination of harsh purges targeting people suspected of leaking information and the intensified politicization of PLARF recruitment signals the continuation of a systemic effort by the CCP to reassert control over its military apparatus and safeguard sensitive information. Hence, the CCP likely views technological advancement and military strength as insufficient without unwavering political loyalty and a culture of secrecy, particularly as China

pursues its ambitious military modernization goals and navigates increasingly complex geopolitical challenges.

Source: Ahn Yong-hyun, “Rocket Force Leak Sparks Xi’s Third Purge Year,” *Chosun* (popular Korean newspaper), 19 September 2025. <https://www.chosun.com/english/opinion-en/2025/09/18/IUSG7L5LQ5B47IBQG5R7SOMLLY/>

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a crime it will never forgive.... The answer is “leaking classified information.” ... The party labels even minor leaks to enemies as betrayal and punishes severely. A former Chinese embassy employee in South Korea received a harsh sentence for mentioning details related to Kim Jong-il’s visit to Beijing to South Korean authorities....

The rumors of “Xi Jinping’s downfall” have subsided. Behind such speculation lies the CCP’s purges and personnel changes within its power structure. However, tracing the root of these rumors leads not to a “downfall” but to a “classified information leak” incident. The origin lies in a 255-page report titled “PLA (People’s

Liberation Army) Rocket Force Organization” published in October 2022 by the U.S. Air University’s China Aerospace Studies Institute (CASI). What happened?

Xi Jinping established the Rocket Force as the fourth military branch in 2015, following the army, navy, and air force. It oversees nuclear and strategic missile units. As a core unit for building a military comparable to the U.S. by 2027—the 100th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army—Xi Jinping placed it directly under the Central Military Commission, which he chairs. He emphasized at its founding ceremony, “It must become the core force....”

- 2015: *Xi Jinping establishes nuclear and strategic rocket forces*
- 2022: *Rocket Force details leaked to the United States*
- 2023: *Rocket Force commander arrested, deputy commander commits suicide
Defense Minister Li Shangfu and FM Qin Gang are removed from office*
- 2024: *Miao Hua, member of the CMC/Head of Political Work Dept, purged*
- 2025: *He Weidong, Vice Chairman of the Military Commission arrested
Li Gang, Head of the Organization Department transferred to United Front
Ma Xingrui replaced as Xinjiang Party Secretary*

In 2023, a major purge centered on the Rocket Force occurred. Its commander, political commissar, and others were removed, while a deputy commander committed suicide. Li Shangfu, the defense minister, fell from power; and Wei Fenghe, the first Rocket Force

commander and former defense minister, was arrested. Foreign Minister Qin Gang’s downfall also coincided with this period. While “corruption” was the official reason, suspicions of leaking even minor information to the U.S. led to espionage investigations.

Source: “火箭军直接选拔招录军官宣传片《脊梁》发布！(Rocket Force Promotional “Backbone” Video To Recruit Officers Released),” Tencent (popular Chinese web portal), 15 September 2025. https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250915A03KYJ00?uid=&media_id=

Basic Requirements for Candidates

- **Basic Requirements:** *The basic requirements to serve as an officer are to be a Chinese national, have excellent political qualities and moral conduct, be willing to devote oneself to national defense, to love the military profession, and to meet the standard requirements through a political assessment.*
- **Physical and Mental Requirements:** *Candidates must possess the physical conditions and psychological qualities to perform their normal duties, participate in the physical exam, and pass a political assessment....*
- **Other Requirements:** *stipulated under laws and regulations.*
 - **Physical Exam and Political Assessment:** *The Political Work Department of the Rocket Force will send preliminary candidates directly to the Recruitment Office of the Ministry of National Defense. Preliminary candidates' respective (based on location) recruitment stations will coordinate the physical exam and political assessment in accordance with relevant regulations.*
 - *...preference will be given to candidates who have volunteered to work in remote and difficult areas such as remote islands, or who are members of the Communist Party of China, who have served as student leaders or been key members of sports teams, or have served in active military service.*
 - **Professional Evaluation:** *For shortlisted candidates who have passed the physical exam and political assessment, the employing unit will focus on assessing their professional qualities and innovative capabilities. For those who are to be assigned to grassroots command and management officer positions, the employer should also assess their leadership ability, willpower, physical fitness, and other potential.*
 - **Approval:** *In accordance with the direct selection and recruitment plan, the employing unit shall study and determine the list of candidates for direct selection and recruitment, and seek the approval of both the Rocket Force and CMC Political Work Department.*

Benefits

Officers enjoy corresponding political treatment, work treatment, living treatment, and related benefits in accordance with the law.

- **Political Treatment:** *Implement in accordance with relevant national and military regulations.*

Notes:

1 For more information on the PLARF, see: Maj. Christopher J. Mihal, “Understanding the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force,” *Military Review*, September 2021. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/China-Reader-Special-Edition-September-2021/Mihal-PLA-Rocket-Force/>

China Expresses Concern Over Potential Somaliland Breakaway

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

China has recently begun to weigh in on the prospect of Somaliland's potential breakaway from Somalia and is warning Somalia of the dangers of allowing such a split to occur. The excerpted article, published on Chinese tech company *Tencent*'s news portal, details major points of the first ministerial-level meeting between China and Somalia since the 1980s. The meeting occurred on 18 September at the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing and involved discussions on deepening security and defense partnerships. In particular, the article emphasizes the geopolitical dynamics shaping Chinese-Somali relations, especially regarding Somaliland.

According to the article, Somalia serves as a vital global shipping route for Chinese goods due to its location in the Horn of Africa, bordering the Red Sea. The article notes that terrorist attacks by al-Shabaab and governance crises have hampered Somalia's economic development and impeded the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)'s expansion in Africa.¹ As China depends on the government in Mogadishu to facilitate BRI programs in Somalia, Beijing opposes any formal recognition or separation of Somaliland from Somalia.

International support from various countries is bolstering Somaliland's confidence in its quest for independence.

The article points to several countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia, which have signed economic cooperation agreements with Somaliland, as well as Canada and Malaysia, which have established diplomatic ties with the country. The article also mentions U.S. support for Somaliland independence and indicates independence would be a red line, which would escalate Sino-U.S. competition in Africa.

According to the article, Somaliland independence would weaken the government in Mogadishu, thereby

continue on 14



Since the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia met with the Chinese Ambassador to Somalia in 2023, China has become vocal in supporting the government in Mogadishu, including expanding mutual defense and security ties.

Source: *Atmis Somalia*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SRCC_meets_with_Chinese_ambassador_to_Somalia_\(52793449624\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SRCC_meets_with_Chinese_ambassador_to_Somalia_(52793449624).jpg)

curbing Chinese influence in Africa. This is why China considers “interference” in Somalia’s internal affairs by recognizing Somaliland independence to be a broader threat to regional security

that could affect global supply chains. While the article refrains from predicting any Chinese responses to recognition of Somaliland by the United States or other countries, it does not take military options

off the table. At the least, it appears likely China would be willing to arm the government in Mogadishu to prevent Somaliland independence and maintain Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa.²

“China’s intervention is not only intended to support Somalia’s sovereignty, but also to maintain the consistent progress of the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa.”

Source: “索马里防长40年来首次访华 (Somali Defense Minister visits China for the first time in 40 years),” newsqq.com (news portal of Chinese tech giant, Tencent, which presents pro-Chinese government perspectives), 23 September 2025. <https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250923A003N400>

On September 18, the Somali Defense Minister was invited to attend the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart. This was the first ministerial-level meeting between the two countries in nearly four decades, marking a new stage in China-Somalia relations.

Located in the Horn of Africa, Somalia borders the Red Sea and serves as a vital global shipping route. However, the country has long been plagued by terrorist threats and governance crises, which severely hinder its economic development. China’s intervention is not only intended to support Somalia’s sovereignty, but also to maintain the consistent progress of the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa.

Notes:

- 1 On the BRI’s activities and influence in East Africa, including China’s attempt to change the international system through the BRI, see: Edward A. Lynch, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative in East Africa Finding Success in Failure?” *Military Review*, May-June 2023. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/May-June-2023/Chinas-Belt/>
- 2 As early as 2022, Somaliland officials warned of China providing military supplies to the government in Mogadishu. See: Goobjogg, “China’s military ware to Mogadishu an act of ‘provocation’-Somaliland,” 19 March 2022. <https://en.goobjoog.com/chinas-military-ware-to-mogadishu-an-act-of-provocation-somaliland/>

The issue of Somaliland’s independence has transcended Somalia’s internal affairs and become a central point in the Sino-US rivalry. China unequivocally supports Somalia’s sovereignty and believes that Somaliland’s independence would threaten regional stability. The Somali government is already facing a serious threat from the terrorist organization al-Shabaab. If Somaliland were to gain independence, it could further weaken its governance capacity and even trigger a new round of civil war. At the same time, this could affect shipping safety in the Red Sea and disrupt the global supply chain.

Russian Influence in Syria Maintained Through Military Equipment Dependency

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

The mid-October visit to Moscow by Syria's new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, highlights that his government's engagement with Russia is driven by necessity—especially in logistical maintenance of Syrian-owned Russian weapons—rather than true strategic alignment.¹ This presidential meeting followed a separate visit by a Syrian defense delegation earlier in the month, marking ten years since Russia's initial military intervention in support of the Assad regime. The first accompanying excerpt, from the Lebanese daily *al-Nahar*, reports that the high-level meeting in Moscow occurred concurrently with technical-level talks in Damascus involving Russian military officials and the director of training in the Syrian Air Force and Air Defense. While Russia may no longer be a dominant political partner for the new Syrian government, Syria's decades-long reliance on Russian military hardware makes Moscow an unavoidable, if transactional, player in the country's security future.

The nature of this “emergency partnership,” as *al-Nahar* describes it, is based more on logistics than on ideology or strategic alignment. The concurrent early October meetings highlight two parallel tracks: “high-level political-military delegations” on the one hand and “field experts

“The visit of the Syrian military delegation to Russia reveals that the relationship between Damascus and Moscow is no longer an alliance as in the past, nor a break as it appeared at the beginning of the year, but rather an emergency partnership...”

responsible for maintaining systems and training crews” on the other. This focus on the mundane realities of military maintenance is critical because, as the accompanying excerpt from *Independent Arabia* explains, Syria's military doctrine is built entirely on Soviet and Russian equipment. For the Syrian Army to function, it requires Russian “training, maintenance, and spare parts.” Any attempt to shift to a different supplier would introduce “logistical and training complexity” that, per the article, “Damascus cannot afford currently.”

For Russia, providing essential maintenance allows it to retain its key military foothold in the Levant and remain a relevant actor in the Middle East, even as its direct political influence over Damascus wanes. Syria's new government's dependence on Russia limits its strategic autonomy and constrains its ability to fully pivot towards other international partners. The arrangement ensures that while Russia may not be supplying the Syrian

military with advanced new weaponry, it will remain a persistent factor in Syria's security architecture for the foreseeable future.

Source:

“Syria and Russia after Assad... Return to rapprochement under the pressure of politics and opening,” *Al-Nahar* (Lebanese newspaper) 4 October 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/msfy9hmk>

A high-ranking Syrian military delegation, headed by Chief of the General Staff, Major General Ali al-Naasan, is visiting Moscow, where it was received by Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov on October 2... From a military perspective, the move seems understandable. The Syrian army still relies mostly on Russian weapons, from tanks to aircraft and air defense systems. The maintenance and development of this arsenal requires the continuation of the lines of communication with Moscow, regardless of Damascus, new political orientations. There is no army without Moscow. Furthermore, leaks about a Syrian request to resume Russian patrols in the south indicate the new leadership's desire to use the Russian presence as a de-escalation tool against Israeli escalation, rather than as a counterbalance. This shift alters the nature of Russia's role from a direct combat partner, as under Assad, to a field guarantor seeking to regulate the security situation. The message is clear: Russia is a safety valve, nothing more. Perhaps reinforcing this dimension is the fact that Damascus hosted a Russian military delegation on the same day, headed by Rear Admiral Oleg Viktorovich Kornienko, where technical discus-

سوريا وروسيا بعد الأسد... عودة إلى التقارب تحت ضغط السياسة والافتتاح

sions were held on training, artillery, and air defense. This coincidence between the Moscow and Damascus meetings demonstrates that coordination is taking place on two parallel levels: high-level political-military delegations and field experts responsible for maintaining systems and training crews....

In the end, the visit of the Syrian military delegation to Russia reveals that the relationship between Damascus and Moscow is no longer an alliance as in the past, nor a break as it appeared at the beginning of the year, but rather an emergency partnership dictated by the need for armament and maintenance, political calculations linked to the Security Council, and economic issues such as currency printing and debts... Moscow realizes that the era of dominating Syrian decision-making is over, and Damascus realizes that maintaining a Russian channel guarantees it some leverage on sensitive issues, but it does not compensate for the new network of relationships it is building with the world. The mutual visits are only part of this transitional equation: consolidating what is necessary now and leaving the door open to a future that may hold entirely different equations. What unites the two sides today is not trust, but necessity.

Source:

“From Damascus to Moscow and vice versa... Is the gun running over?” *Independent Arabia* (Saudi-British news website), 10 October 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/53dsycbk>

من دمشق إلى موسكو وبالعكس... هل انتهى “عداء السلاح”؟

Amer Fakhoury, a specialist in the field of international law at the American University in the Emirates, describes Damascus's trend towards bringing weapons and restoring the army with Russian experience as “realistic and justified” in political, military and legal terms, but at the same time it is governed by objective restrictions in terms of Russian capability and regional

conditions. He adds to “Independent Arabia” that because Syrian military doctrine is based throughout the decades on Russian and Soviet armament, any attempt to change the sources of armament will lead to a large logistical and training complexity, and to an additional cost that Damascus cannot afford currently. Maintaining

continue on 17

this historic line of cooperation with Moscow ensures the harmony of the military system and its continuity in terms of training, maintenance and spare parts....

*But at the same time, [Colonel Mohsen Hamdan] rules out Russia supplying the new army with effective weapons. “The Russian weapons in Syria have almost been completely destroyed and became obsolete, and Russia cannot provide effective weapons in its current situation. Those who think that it will provide us with air defense, especially the **S-400** system, are wrong, because at the height of its relations with the previous regime and for decades it did not accept to provide it....*

Notes:

- 1 Al-Sharaa's visit was initially to attend a larger Middle East conference organized by Russian President Vladimir Putin last April. The conference was cancelled last-minute and rescheduled for November due to low interest from other heads of state, with al-Sharaa among the only high-level dignitaries who confirmed his attendance. See: “Syria seeks to ‘redefine’ Russia ties, al-Sharaa tells Putin in Moscow,” *al-Jazeera*, 15 October 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/15/syria-seeks-to-redefine-russia-ties-al-sharaa-tells-putin-in-moscow> and “Putin’s embarrassing cancellation of Arab summit signals waning influence in Middle East,” *The Guardian*, 15 October 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/15/putins-cancelled-russia-arab-summit-signals-waning-influence-in-middle-east>

In any case, Syria has continued to represent a successful model of Russian influence abroad, imposing a balance with the West through its military presence in the heart of the Middle East. Damascus, on the other hand, views this cooperation as a means of survival and restoring its military and political balance amidst international isolation. This reciprocal equation sustains the alliance based on the principle of influence and mutual interests.

Russian Leadership Focuses on Anti-Aging Research With Military Implications

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

Russian leaders are elevating anti-aging research as a national strategic priority, according to the excerpted article from the independent news outlet *Novaya Gazeta Europe*. The article reports that the number of Russian Science Foundation (RSF) grants for anti-aging projects has risen sixfold since 2021, with funding jumping from roughly \$250,000 between 2016 and 2020 to \$2,100,000 since 2021. The state-backed RSF now provides annual grants of up to \$83,500 for projects ranging from studies on Alzheimer's markers to hypothalamic neuron activity during aging. Whether or not it proves to be true, the prioritization of this kind of science will have indirect military implications, as it will shape how U.S. adversaries and their leaders assess their own time horizons, sense of invincibility, and future wars.

One high-profile recipient of the RSF grant is Maria Vorontsova, Putin's eldest daughter, whose research into cell renewal and longevity reportedly received an outsized grant despite a relatively low publication record. While her award could signal nepotism, it also underscores the degree of Kremlin interest in longevity research, aligning with Putin's own public comments. In a hot-mic exchange with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a Beijing parade in September 2025, Putin claimed modern medicine would allow



Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks in Beijing with General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of China Xi Jinping, 4 February 2022.
Source: Presidential Executive Office of Russia, <https://tinyurl.com/34rvk25j>

humans to "feel ever younger and even achieve immortality," adding that this trend would bring major political and economic consequences.¹

In 2024, Putin launched a national project on health preservation aimed at saving 175,000 lives by 2030, with anti-aging forming a core component. Yet much of this research remains more aspirational than practical.² Investigative reports suggest elites also pursue pseudoscientific remedies, such as antler baths—a procedure where the patient is immersed in a warm infusion of blood from young deer antlers that have not yet ossified—promoted by former Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu.³

The military implications of this focus on immortality are still unclear.

If leaders like Putin and Xi believe that medical advances will allow them to live far longer than their democratic counterparts, this should alter their time horizon and strategic calculus. Authoritarian rulers who expect to remain in power indefinitely will likely be more willing to invest in long-term military buildups, plan for future wars decades in advance, and wait out their democratic adversaries whose leaders rotate with electoral cycles. Even if science remains unproven, the perception of extended lifespans could embolden them to adopt more aggressive strategies, convinced they will personally oversee the fruition of their efforts. A sense of immortality further holds important implications for leaders' succession plans, as neither President Putin nor President Xi has

continue on 19

chosen successors yet (the same holds for the leaders of North Korea and Iran). If longer lifespans will impact U.S. adversaries' time horizons, military planners should consider them when anticipating the character of future competition.

"Modern medicine and technology will allow people to 'feel ever younger and even achieve immortality'... with consequences that must be taken into consideration."

— President Vladimir Putin, September 2025

Source: Alexey Basmanov, "Stopping the clock: Why has Russia massively increased its funding of anti-ageing research?" *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, 16 September 2025. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/09/16/stopping-the-clock-en>

Scientific research into how to stop or slow the ageing process has become a boom industry in Russia over the past few years, with the number of anti-ageing projects funded by The Russian Science Foundation (RSF), a state-run nonprofit set up in 2013 to support scientific research, growing six times since 2021 compared to the previous five-year period, Novaya Europe has calculated. This year, according to its website, the foundation is offering annual grants worth between €41,000 to €71,700 to fund research, all of which can be extended by one or two more years if necessary. According to conservative estimates, the total RSF funding for anti-ageing research has risen from €215,000 [\$250,000] between 2016 and 2020 to €1.8 [\$2.1] million since 2021, though the true increase could be even greater.

The RSF was most active in its support for such projects between 2021 and 2023, issuing 34 grants in that period. The foundation awarded a grant to one project which looked into how innate immunity mechanisms affected ageing in different people and looked for markers that could help predict whether an individual would age normally or with pathologies. The authors of another RSF-supported study are trying to establish a link between certain changes in the brain and eye with Alzheimer's disease and to find a way to prevent the disease progressing. In 2024, the RSF's total grants amounted to approximately €410 million. This year, the

foundation has supported five medical projects related to ageing, including one examining "changes in the electrical activity of neurons in the dorsomedial nucleus of the hypothalamus in vitro during ageing." Financial support was also provided to at least one more project on an anti-ageing-related theme, looking into cell renewal processes in the body and longevity. The project is headed by none other than Maria Vorontsova, Vladimir Putin's eldest daughter.

Scientific journal T-Invariant noted that Vorontsova received the grant even though her Hirsch index — one of the most important indicators determining demand for a scientist's research — is significantly lower than that of other grantees. The grant Vorontsova received was also larger than most of the others typically disbursed, and could be as high as €308,000. Putin, now 72 years old, has increasingly shown an interest in the topic of prolonging human life and combating the ageing process. A conversation between Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping that was picked up on a hot mic during a military parade in Beijing on 3 September in which the pair discussed ways to prolong human life quickly spread online. Xi was heard to say that, according to the latest forecasts, some people born this century could live for up to 150 years. Putin, for his part, asserted that modern medicine and technology would allow people to "feel ever younger and even achieve immortality,"

continue on 20

and that modern medicine had given “humanity hope that life expectancy will increase significantly,” adding that this would have “social, political, and economic consequences, that must be taken into consideration.”

Notes:

- 1 Brawley Benson, “Putin’s musings on Immortality Highlight his Glaring Succession Dilemma,” *The Moscow Times*, 13 September 2025. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/09/13/putins-musings-on-immortality-highlight-his-glaring-succession-dilemma-a90508>
- 2 Russian President Vladimir Putin is not the only world elite seeking longer life spans. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* chronicles how the super wealthy in the U.S. have spent “more than \$5 billion over the last 2-1/2 decades to increase longevity. See: The Billionaires Fueling the Quest for Longer Life, *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 September 2025. <https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/billionaires-longevity-health-04dd205c?mod=Searchresults&pos=1&page=1>
- 3 Mikhail Rubin, Dmitry Sukharev, Mikhail Maglov, Roman Badanin, Svetlana Reuter, “Investigation for Vladimir Putin’s 70th Birthday,” *Proekt Media* (an anti-Kremlin investigative news outlet affiliated with Meduza), 1 April, 2022. <https://www.proekt.media/en/investigation-en/putin-health/#:~:text=Sergei%20Shoigu%2C%20the%20then%20head,Moscow%20mayor%20Sergei%20Sobyanin%20there>

Gold Provides Russia a Financial Lifeline To Sustain War Efforts in Ukraine

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

While international sanctions on Russian oil have proven to be insufficient to stop Russia from exporting it, the recent rise in the price of gold also helps Moscow manage its economy and continue spending on the war in Ukraine. According to the excerpted article in the Latvia-based Russian independent news organization *Meduza*, Russia's central bank has accelerated its purchase of gold since 2014, in conjunction with the imposition of Russian sanctions due to its seizing of Crimea. According to the article, it was the imposition of sanctions on Russia in 2014 that forced Moscow to move away from reserve currencies like the dollar and into gold as a reserve

asset to back the Russian economy.¹ That strategy is now paying huge dividends, frustrating the West's ability to win its financial war with Russia.² Russia is playing the gold rush from multiple angles. First, Russia was the world's second-largest gold producer in 2024, which allows its mining industry to sell Russian-produced gold to its own central bank. Russia's central bank currently holds more than \$300 billion worth of gold—nearly 37 percent of Russia's total reserve assets.³ Russia uses the gold to cover its bills at home and backstop the ruble, which has been under increased inflationary pressure since the war in Ukraine began. Second, although gold is also the target of Western sanctions,

Russia exports a substantial amount of gold—256 tons in 2024, the bulk of which “went to Armenia, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates.”

The implications are strategic. In addition to oil, Russia has another economic lever it can pull to stay its course in its current war of attrition against Ukraine. Should Russia's illicit oil exporting be shuttered or the price of oil crash, Moscow can fall back on its gold position to fund the economy and its war in Ukraine, while continuing to de-risk from the U.S. dollar. The implications, as noted in the excerpted article, suggest any strategy to hinder Russia economically will have to consider Russia's oil capabilities and its gold reserves.

“Russia has amassed one of the largest gold reserves in the world – a cushion that has helped prop up the economy amid the Kremlin’s record spending on the war against Ukraine.”

Residential building in Avdiivka after Russian rocket strike on 23 May 2023. Russia's ability to prop up its wartime economy has allowed Moscow to continue the war in Ukraine.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia-Ukrainian_war#/media/File:Avdiivka_after_Russian_bombing,_2023-05-23_\(01\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia-Ukrainian_war#/media/File:Avdiivka_after_Russian_bombing,_2023-05-23_(01).jpg)



Source: “Laughing all the way to the Central Bank: How skyrocketing gold prices support the Kremlin’s war machine,” *Meduza* (Russian bi-lingual independent news outlet based in Riga, Latvia), 16 October 2025. https://meduza.io/en/feature/2025/10/16/laughing-all-the-way-to-the-central-bank?utm_source=mail&utm_medium=share_en

According to RBC, gold makes up about a third of Russia’s total reserves, and the most recent rally has driven the value of these holdings of roughly 2,326 tons to more than \$302 billion.

That said, the Kremlin has been betting on gold for almost two decades. According to data from the World Gold Council, an international trade association, Russia became a net buyer of gold in 2006. The Kremlin then accelerated its gold purchases starting in 2014 — around the time Russia came under international sanctions over its annexation of Crimea.

Russia has amassed one of the largest gold reserves in the world — a cushion that has helped prop up the economy amid the Kremlin’s record spending on the war against Ukraine.

“Russia is lucky because sanctions — and preparations for them — forced it to increase the share of gold in its reserves and move away from investment in [U.S.] dollars. Accordingly, this strategy is now paying dividends,” Alfa Bank chief economist Natalia Orlova told RBC.

At the same time, the Russian Finance Ministry’s sales of gold from the National Wealth Fund — at record-high

prices — are partially covering some of the ballooning federal budget deficit, which is now projected at 5.7 trillion rubles (about \$71 billion), or 2.6 percent of GDP... Moscow sold just over three tons of gold, to the tune of around \$441 million. “Putin’s war in Ukraine has helped to drive up the price of gold in a Machiavellian virtuous cycle [sic] that has benefited Russia,” wrote markets editor Chris Price.

Despite international sanctions on Russian gold... Russia was the world’s second-largest gold producer in 2024, with an output of 330 tons. Russian gold mining companies continue to sell gold at prices consistent with those on leading global exchanges, Vasily Danilov, the lead analyst at the investment firm Veles Capital, told RBC.

Veles Capital estimated Russia’s gold exports in 2024 at 256 tons, the bulk of which went to Armenia, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates. While China only imported 2.8 tons of Russian gold directly, Danilov noted that “significant volumes” are likely re-exported there. “The UAE is said to be Russia’s largest hub for export routes,” Nikolay Dudchenko, an analyst at the investment company Finam FG, told RBC.

Notes:

- 1 As of September 2025, Russia maintained a foreign reserve currency basket of roughly \$405 billion. Whereas Russia’s gold reserves reached \$250 billion, accounting for nearly 37 percent of Russia’s total reserves of nearly \$690 billion. For detailed analysis, see: *Bank of Russia Statistical Bulletin No. 9*, Bank of Russia, 2025. <https://cbr.ru/collection/collection/file/59336/bbs2509e.pdf>
- 2 To highlight another aspect of the financial war between Russia and the west, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Western countries seized approximately 300 billion dollars of Russian Central Bank funds held in Western banks.
- 3 “‘россии везет’ что для экономики означает рекордный рост цен на золото (What does the record rise in gold prices mean for the economy?),” *RosBiznesConsulting* (RBC), 15 October 2025. https://pro.rbc.ru/demo/68ed17cd9a7947b648a21e88?utm_source=telegram&utm_medium=messenger&utm_campaign=selfinvestor&utm_content=68ed17cd9a7947b648a21e88

Dated Russian 2S19 Msta-S Self-Propelled Artillery Remains Prevalent on Battlefield

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

According to the excerpted article from vehicle- and equipment-focused Russian news media *AutoVzglyad*, despite it being old, multiple variants of the **2S19 Msta-S** self-propelled artillery system continue to provide Russia with reliable long-range artillery capable of hitting targets 15 miles away.¹ According to the article, as many as 720 Msta-S artillery systems may have existed at the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While the article suggests that more may still be deployed, it has been estimated that nearly 300 2S19 Msta-S's have been destroyed, abandoned, or captured. Roughly 420 supposedly remain in circulation.²

Sometimes referred to as a sniper, the Msta-S continues to be a workhorse on the battlefield, partly out of necessity. Russia continues to rely on its Msta-S stockpile due to the attritional nature of the conflict in Ukraine and Moscow's inability to produce newer systems like the **Koalitsiya-SV** in large numbers. It is simply more affordable and expedient for Russia to bring the older Msta-S self-propelled artillery out of storage and press them into service in Ukraine.³

Like other armor systems on the Ukrainian battlefield, the Msta-S has been modernized to account for the ubiquitous role of drones and other UAVs, including a variety of cages to protect

it from FPV drones and UAVs. Russia's continued use of the Msta-S demonstrates, that, in addition to the necessity of going to war with the weapons one has, tracked artillery systems, like other armored systems, still have a place on the drone-infested battlefield.

“Self-propelled crawler 152-mm howitzers 2S19M2 ‘Msta-S’ were developed at the end of the USSR. However, this does not prevent them from successfully participating in Ukrainian events after several stages of modernization.”



A Russian 2S19 Msta-S damaged in 2022 during the Russian invasion of Ukraine on display in Bialystok, Poland.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2S19_Msta-S#/media/File:2S19_Msta-S_PM_MWB_09.jpg

Source: “35 лет спустя: самоходная гаубица «Мста-С» кошмарит ВСУ под Покровском (35 years later: the self-propelled howitzer “Msta-S” is a nightmare for the Armed Forces of Ukraine near Pokrovsky),” *AutoVgzlyad* (Russian automobile news website with a section devoted to Russian military vehicles), 9 October 2025. <https://www.avtovzglyad.ru/voennaya-tehnika/67615-2025-10-09-35-let-spustya-samohodnaya-gaubitsa-mstas-koshmarit-vs-u-pod-pokrovskom/>

*Self-propelled crawler 152-mm howitzers **2S19M2** “Msta-S” were developed at the end of the USSR. However, this does not prevent them from successfully participating in Ukrainian events after several stages of modernization.*

During its existence, the 2S19 “Msta-S” self-propelled gun has undergone two major upgrades - in 2012 and 2020. The main improvements were related to the installation of modern communication and fire control systems. That is,

today Khokhla⁴ in Ukraine is not hit by the original 2S19, but by 2S19 M2.

Judging by open sources, the total circulation of “Msta-S” is currently 720 pieces. During the SVO, it must be assumed that their park could only increase. And the practical experience of operating howitzers obtained by Russian artillerymen will certainly give a powerful impetus to the further development of Russian long-range self-propelled vehicles.

Notes:

- 1 See: Dodge Billingsley, “Russia Increases Defense Spending for 2024,” *OE Watch*, 03-2024. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/russia-increases-defense-spending-for-2024/?highlight=msta-s>
- 2 For a breakdown of the number of 2S19 Msta-Ss destroyed, captured or abandoned, see: “Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses During the Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *Oryx*. Accessed 20 October 2025. <https://www.oryxspionkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html>
- 3 See: “Msta-S: Russia’s ‘Frankenstein’ Howitzer Still Thunders in Ukraine,” *National Security Journal*, 4 June 2025. <https://nationalsecurityjournal.org/msta-s-russias-frankenstein-howitzer-still-thunders-in-ukraine/>
- 4 Khokhla or Khokhol (Russian: хохол) is an ethnic slur for Ukrainians, usually used in a derogatory or condescending manner, see: Urban Dictionary, posted 17 July 2022, accessed 20 October 2025. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Khokhol>

Iran Asserts U.S. Agenda Aims for Israeli Dominance in Region



By Holly Dages
OE Watch Commentary

A senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reveals why he believes that Iran is at the top of the U.S. and Israeli agenda. In a 2 October interview aired on the *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB), Ali Larijani, the recently appointed secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, claimed that "the U.S. has a comprehensive plan" for the Middle East and that "Israel must become dominant in the region and that control remains in America's hands." Larijani further stated that "China has emerged as an economic hegemon and extended into the region" through its Belt and Road Initiative, arguing that Washington seeks to cut those ties. Larijani's comments shed light on how he, and arguably much of the national security apparatus of Iran, view the U.S. and Israel's role in the region.

According to Larijani, when it comes to "threats" to the Middle East, "Americans in their national security document consider China the first

issue, then Russia, and then Iran." Interestingly, Larijani went on to say that the countries of the Middle East have come to accept that it was only after the Israeli strike on Hamas leadership in Qatar on 9 September that "this enemy," referring to Israel, "is inside everyone's house; they realized they have no other way to assert dominance."¹

Historically, Iran has referred to Israel as the "Little Satan" and the U.S. as the "Great Satan." This view is not new, but the events since 7 October 2023 have given credence to Tehran's conviction that the U.S. and Israel operate in tandem and Israel does not act without U.S. approval. In Tehran's view, Washington is complicit in Israel's actions in the region post-7 October—be it in Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, Yemen, or Iran.

Ali Larijani meeting with Saudi Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman Al Saud in Riyadh on 16 September 2025.

Source: X, https://x.com/alilarijani_ir/status/1968015354116055088/photo/1

"The U.S. has a comprehensive plan for the region. Israel must become dominant in the region and they pursue these two goals: first, that the entire region be administered by Israel and that control remain in America's hands; and also cutting ties with China, because China has emerged as an economic hegemon and extended into the region."

Source:

آمریکا و اسرائیل چین، روسیه و ایران را تهدید می‌شمارند"

(America and Israel count China, Russia, and Iran as threats)," *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 2 October 2025. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00NQht>

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) news agency, Ali Larijani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, in the television program "Samr Idea...."

He said: What was the purpose of the war they waged against us? It was said that Iran is a great power in the region, and from the perspective of the hegemon, there is no way to dominate: this country is deeply rooted, it has technology, resources, a population of a hundred million, it is a large country and has had empires for years; in any case, it's a major country. How should one achieve domination? You cannot dominate it. "You're nuclear, aren't you yourself?" Even if we assume Iran has nuclear know-how, we currently don't have the weapon, but you who do have the weapon, what are you fighting for? These are all excuses; this enemy is inside everyone's house; they realized they have no other way to assert dominance.

Larijani said: After this very attack on Qatar, it was broadly accepted, but this must turn into practical will. That part has problems, because some of their comforts may be disrupted; struggle and fighting will be required; they must accept that they can no longer live this way and must act for their dignity. Now they have difficulties.

He added: It seems the U.S. and Israel's plan in the region is to separate them and misread the issue. The U.S. has a comprehensive plan for the region. Israel must become dominant in the region and they pursue these two goals: first, that the entire region be administered by Israel and that control remain in America's hands; and also cutting ties with China, because China has emerged as an economic hegemon and extended into the region; the "One Belt, One Road" economic route is opening toward you and is expanding; it wants to move toward Europe, so Europe has become somewhat guarded. But in the region the Americans in their national security document consider China the first issue, then Russia, and then Iran; they count them as threats.

Notes:

- 1 Ephrat Livni, "What to Know About Israel's Airstrike on Hamas in Qatar?" *New York Times*, 10 September 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/10/world/middleeast/israel-attack-qatar-hamas.html>

Quds Force Commander Claims Assassination Rumors are Intended to Track His Location

By Holly Dages
OE Watch Commentary

After numerous rumors of the assassination of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani—including during the 12-day war in June—Qaani himself explains why such reports continue to circulate. In an interview published by the popular daily newspaper *Hamshahri*, General Qaani said, “[Israel] publishes the news of my assassination so that friends become worried and contact me so they (Israel) can find my exact location.” These attempts, it is assumed, are so that Israel can target him. Qaani’s comments appear to have been prompted by the latest rumor of his assassination, spread by the X

account *Terror Alarm*, which, according to the excerpted article, is allegedly affiliated with the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad.¹

Qaani’s fear of being electronically surveilled and targeted is not unfounded. Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah was reportedly tracked via his cell phone and killed in October 2024. Since then, officials in Tehran have largely abandoned their cell phones, fearing they too may be compromised.² Still, that precaution did not stop Iran’s top military brass from being assassinated in their Tehran penthouses by Israel at the beginning of the 12-Day War.

“General Qaani in a recent interview talked about this kind of rumor and said: “[Israel] publishes the news of my assassination so that friends become worried and contact me so they can find my exact location.”



IRGC Quds Force commander, Brigadier General Esmail Qaani, seen here in 2020, believes Israel is trying to geolocate and assassinate him.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Esmaeil-ghaani.jpg>

Qaani’s comments reveal that the clerical establishment is taking serious measures to protect him and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei from potential Israeli assassination attempts despite the 24 June ceasefire. They also reveal Iran’s underlying belief that Israel’s war against the clerical establishment continues in the shadows, highlighting ongoing tension and the risk of renewed conflict between the two foes.

Source:

(Immediate reaction to the rumor of the martyrdom of General Qaani commander of the IRGC Quds Force)," *Hamshahri* (Iran based daily newspaper), 10 October 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/288cyxt4>

واکنش فوری به شایعه شهادت سردار قاآنی فرمانده نیروی قدس سپاه پاسداران"

According to Hamshahri (Newspaper) Online recent rumors circulated on social media and accounts associated with [Israel] claiming that General [Ismail] Qaani has been assassinated and has been martyred but follow-up indicates that this news is false.

Why [Israel] would Israel repeatedly spread this rumor? [Israel] since the beginning of Al-Aqsa Storm (7 October 2023) has raised the rumor of Qaani's assassination, the commander of the Quds Force, dozens of times.

An account affiliated with the Mossad with the name Terror Alarm usually publishes a mix of true and false news online, beyond the purpose of publishing the news are psychological operations to benefit Mossad's projects.

This account on many occasions has published news lies about assassinations.

General Qaani in a recent interview talked about this kind of rumor and said: "[Israel] publishes the news of my assassination so that friends become worried and contact me and that they can find my exact location."

Notes:

- 1 On 10 October, IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* was quick to post on X that rumors of Qaani's assassination were false. See: *Fars News Agency* post on X, @FarsNews_Agency, 10 October 2025. https://x.com/FarsNews_Agency/status/1976734842940453354
- 2 See: Holly Dages, Iran Concerned About Electronic Devices After Hezbollah Communications Attacks, *OE Watch*, 10-2024. <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/product/iran-concerned-about-electronic-devices-after-hezbollah-communications-attacks/?highlight=Holly%20dargas>

Kim Jong Un Continues To Criticize Corruption Within Ruling Party

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un has taken to criticizing what he views as corruption within his party. As per the excerpted article, on 22 September, Kim lamented what he called “a widespread bias” of officials showing “little regard for the working and living conditions of workers, and a focus solely on carrying out production plans or construction tasks.” Kim made this critique during the 13th Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly, which was carried by the *Korean Central News Agency*, North Korea’s main propaganda outlet.¹ Kim then criticized the practice of North Korean officials skimming off the top of farmers’ crops and laborers’ pay.

The first charge is commonly known as gross formalism and condemns

insufficient revolutionary zeal on the part of state and party agents who are charged with implementing the latest five-year plan or major party directive. The latter charge is simply one of rank corruption. Kim said, “we must never, under any circumstances, obscure the human-centered nature of socialism.”

This is the second time since January that Kim has publicly addressed ruling party corruption. In the January incident, Kim chaired a large party meeting to hear investigation reports about corruption in two party districts. That report ran over 2,200 words and was carried in its entirety by North Korean internal and external propaganda outlets.² In North Korea’s highly structured propaganda apparatus, speeches and statements attributed to Kim Jong

Un carry the highest authority and are beyond criticism.

Kim Jong Un has shown more willingness to publicly acknowledge corruption in his country. Publishing these reports in front of both state and party organs is likely designed to reassure the public that Kim is aware of their hardships.³ It also strongly implies that corruption

continue on 30

“We must mercilessly apply the blade of revolutionary dictatorship to any criminal acts that have been committed.”

Kim Jong Un votes in the rubber stamp Supreme People’s Assembly in 2022. Kim addressed the Assembly in September 2025 to once again highlight the need to address corruption by state and party officials against the North Korean people.

Source: <https://idsb.tmgrup.com.tr/ly/uploads/images/2022/09/09/230068.jpg>; Attribution: Korean Central News Agency via Reuters and hosted on a third-party site. Image is a reproduction of a KCNA image that is in the public domain under PD-KPGov under the North Korea Copyright Act of 2006 which holds that “documents for state management, current news or information data shall not be the object of copyright unless commercial purpose is pursued.” Additionally, North Korean images are immune from copyright claims because Pyongyang has not signed onto international conventions for the protection of copyrighted materials.



and abuse of the population are widespread and sufficiently well-known such that Kim feels forced to address them. Unfortunately, the available evidence

does not allow an assessment with any level of confidence as to whether Kim believes the corruption threatens the regime or his hold on power. However,

it is almost certain Kim understands that corruption negatively impacts his country's ability to achieve economic growth and other strategic goals.

Source: “조선민주주의인민공화국 최고인민회의 제14기 제13차회의에서 한 김정은동지의 연설 (Speech by Comrade Kim Jong Un at the 13th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea),” *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA) (primary state-owned propaganda broadcaster), 22 September 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/f2c6c6e3cf5a57003e0f67cdc9789876.kcmsf>

Dear Comrade Kim Jong Un delivered a speech at the 13th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly on September 21.

The government of the Republic must uphold the principle of further strengthening the popular character of its activities and maximizing the unity and creativity unique to our people.

Nowadays, a widespread bias is appearing in many units, with little regard for the working and living conditions of workers, and a focus solely on carrying out production plans or construction tasks.

We must never, under any circumstances, obscure the human-centered nature of socialism. We must prioritize people over production, and address, one by one, the fundamental issues of ensuring the health and well-being of producers.

Currently, projects to consolidate agricultural production are being implemented in earnest across the country. We must ensure that no one deducts their share

from the farm workers or mishandles grain under the pretext of implementing the plan.

We need the planned grain production, but the rights and interests of the farmers are more important, and the public's absolute trust in the party's policies are more valuable.

We must not allow even the slightest element that runs counter to the people-oriented character of our nation, such as the abuse of power and bureaucracy in the policy implementation process or the infringement of the people's interests, and we must thoroughly direct all state work toward strengthening single-minded unity.

We must mercilessly apply the blade of revolutionary dictatorship to any criminal acts that have been committed.

It is very important to transform the process of developing and implementing national projects into a process that maximizes the boundless power of the people.

Notes:

- 1 The Supreme People's Assembly is nominally North Korea's highest organ of state power, but in practice is a rubber stamp legislature.
- 2 See: Anthony W. Holmes, “Kim Jong Un Chairs Meeting Addressing Ruling Party Corruption,” *OE Watch*, 03-2025. https://g2webcontent.z2.web.core.usgovcloudapi.net/OEE/OE%20Watch/2025/TRADOCG2_FMSO_OEW3_06MAY2025_anonymous.pdf
- 3 Like other communist states, North Korea officially divides authorities among the party, state, and military. Kim Jong Un as supreme leader sits on top of all three, but they nominally have different staff, organs, and roles.

North Korean Leader Reaffirms Hostility Toward Seoul and Indifference to Washington

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

Kim Jong Un has reaffirmed his view of the world, expressing a continued hostility to South Korea and a general indifference to the United States.

On 22 September, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inveighed against South Korea in a speech in which he called his southern neighbor a “paralyzed, deformed, colonial nation with Americanization in every field and a thoroughly alienated foreign country.” He added “unification is completely unnecessary” and “cannot be achieved without one of them disappearing.” Kim’s statement during the 13th Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly was carried by the Korean

Central News Agency, North Korea’s main propaganda outlet.¹

In the same speech, Kim recalled his “fond memories” of the U.S. president before criticizing the United States as a destabilizing aspiring hegemon fixated on an “obsession” with denuclearization. Future dialogue with the U.S., Kim stressed, is predicated on Washington dropping its demand for denuclearization and recognizing North Korea as a nuclear power. Conversely, on the possibility of future dialogue with Seoul, Kim said, “I make clear that I will never sit down with [Seoul].”²

In North Korea’s highly structured propaganda system, statements made

by Kim Jong Un are sacred; therefore, the language and framing he uses are designed to send a clear message that North Korea will not pretend to negotiate over nuclear weapons and expects to be treated as an equal to great powers like Russia and the United States as a nuclear weapons state. In past negotiations, including ones that this author participated in from 2017 to 2021, North Korea refrained from defining “denuclearization” to provide a fig leaf for negotiations to continue and allow Pyongyang to solicit concessions in exchange for vague promises. This time, Kim Jong Un is, at the highest level, refusing to maintain the fiction that Pyongyang would ever negotiate toward denuclearization.

“Just as fire and water cannot be combined, so too cannot...socialist culture and Yankee culture be compatible. It’s an obvious lie.”



In this 10 Oct image released by North Korea’s state news agency KCNA, Kim Jong Un stands next to several world leaders invited to the 80th Birthday celebration of the ruling Korean Workers Party. Kim’s efforts to portray himself as the leader of a world power are clearly on display as he stands next to leaders from Russia, Vietnam, and China.

Source: https://s.yimg.com/ny/api/res/1.2/YWJaHWSwgYK1Xe_k4hbS1g--/YXBwaWQ9aGlnaGxhbmRlcjt3PTk2MDtoPTY0MDtjZj13ZWJw/ <https://media.zenfs.com/en/ap.org/24ca479ebd732d4e40ed4254dcde07c9>; Attribution: Korean Central News Agency via AOL and hosted on a third-party site. Image is a reproduction of a KCNA image that is in the public domain under PD-KPGov under the North Korea Copyright Act of 2006 which holds that “documents for state management, current news or information data shall not be the object of copyright unless commercial purpose is pursued.” Additionally, North Korean images are immune from copyright claims because Pyongyang has not signed onto international conventions for the protection of copyrighted materials.

Source: “조선민주주의인민공화국 최고인민회의 제14기 제13차회의에서 한 김정은동지의 연설 (Speech by Comrade Kim Jong Un at the 13th Session of the 14th Supreme People’s Assembly of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea),” Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) (primary state-owned propaganda broadcaster), 22 September 2025. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/f2c6c6e3cf5a57003e0f67cdc9789876.kcmsf>

This year, the new administrations in the United States and South Korea are flirting with the idea of being open to dialogue with us and seeking to improve relations, but their true nature is to weaken our power and destroy our institutions.

Not long ago, they brought up the concept of “phased denuclearization,” and with this, they destroyed with their own hands the justification and foundation for sitting down with us.

The concept of “denuclearization” has already lost its meaning. Our transition to becoming a nuclear power was an inevitable choice we made at a crossroads that determined our nation’s survival or demise.

Personally, I still have fond memories of the current U.S. President Trump.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify our position on our relationship with Korea. We will never sit down with Korea and we will never do anything together. I make it clear that I will not deal with it at all.

Notes:

- 1 The Supreme People’s Assembly is nominally North Korea’s highest organ of state power, but in practice is a rubber stamp legislature.
- 2 North Korean leaders have a well-established system of engaging with center-left leaders in South Korea to extract concessions, aid, and support in exchange for granting the South popular spectacles such as a family reunions, summits, and joint statements about unification. Kim’s speech clearly signals that North Korea is no longer interested in playing that game. Kim’s conditions for engaging the South are ones he knows Seoul could never tolerate, such as curtailing its military, abandoning its territorial claims over the North, and ending military training, are likely phrased as hypotheticals for this reason.

The fierce confrontation between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea over the past 80 years and the reality clearly show that, whether it claims to be “democratic” or “conservative,” South Korea’s innate ambition to destroy our system and regime has never changed and can never change, and that an enemy is an enemy after all.

Moreover, from the standpoint of national interest, we have no intention of unifying with a country that has left its politics and national defense to foreign powers. South Korea is a paralyzed, deformed, colonial nation with Americanization in every field, and a thoroughly alienated foreign country.

The unification of two entities that are not only completely different but also completely opposite cannot be achieved without one of them disappearing. Unification is absolutely unnecessary.

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Mexico's Navy and Ruling Morena Party Face Criminal Penetration

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Mexico's ruling Morena Party is popular and firmly in control of the country's political apparatus. However, in recent months, it has been contending with major corruption scandals involving powerful cartels and organized crime syndicates penetrating its upper ranks. Recent reports indicate that this web of corruption has also spread to Mexico's Navy, one of the premier organizations the Mexican state depends on to fight criminal groups. The excerpted article from Mexican economic-focused daily *El Financiero* reports on a major operation uncovering 14 officials involved in "huachicol," local slang for fuel theft.¹ Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico's former president, was fond of referring to the Navy as an "incorruptible" institution.² The recent operation uncovered millions of liters of stolen fuel, as well as the involvement of a vice admiral, who is also the nephew of the former minister of the Navy. Separately, the Argentine digital news outlet *Infobae* reports on the potential involvement of Senator Adán Augusto López in an organized crime ring called "La Barredora."³ This group is involved in



Former Mexican Defense Secretary Salvador Cienfuegos was also accused of high-level corruption, but the Mexican justice system declined to indict him.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thejointstaff/26965772836>

fuel theft networks, among other things, with some of López's former deputies from his tenure as governor of Tabasco state allegedly orchestrating many of these networks. One of those who worked directly below López, Hernán Bermúdez Requena, has been on the run since the allegations surfaced.

Corruption in Mexico's political and military ranks has important consequences for the operational environment. On the political level, President

Claudia Sheinbaum has defended politicians involved in high-level corruption, casting doubt on her campaign to counter cartels and enhance security in Mexico. On the military level, corruption within the Mexican Navy casts doubt on the reliability of an important force in countering criminal groups. Both indicate negative trendlines in the fight against criminal groups in Mexico and call into question the government's commitment to the fight and the Navy's capability to carry out those orders.

"He stated that this case...has resulted, in addition to the 14 arrests, in the freezing of bank accounts with hundreds of millions of pesos, the seizure of properties in an amount never seen before, and the recovery of millions of liters of fuel theft."

Source: “Captura de 14 personas por huachicol, incluidos mandos de Semar, sólo el comienzo: Harfuch (Arrest of 14 people for fuel theft, including SEMAR commanders, is just the beginning: Harfuch),” *El Financiero* (one of Mexico’s dailies focused mostly on economic storylines), 8 September 2025. <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/2025/09/08/captura-de-14-personas-por-huachicol-incluidos-mandos-de-semar-solo-el-comienzo-harfuch/>

The arrest of 14 people, including a relative of the former head of the Navy, José Rafael Ojeda Durán, is just the first result of an ongoing investigation that will go in depth against a criminal network involved in the illicit fuel market, and other crimes, said the federal Secretary of Security, Omar García Harfuch. In a joint conference with the Attorney General of the Republic, Alejandro Gertz Manero, and the Secretary of the Navy, Raymundo Pedro Morales, García Harfuch confirmed that among those detained are Manuel Roberto Farias Laguna, vice admiral of the Navy and

relative of former Secretary Ojeda Durán, as well as Francisco Javier Antonio Martínez, former manager of Administration and Finance of the National Port System Administration in Tampico...He stated that this case, related to two historic seizures of fuel theft—Baja California and Tamaulipas—has resulted, in addition to the 14 arrests, in the freezing of bank accounts with hundreds of millions of pesos, the seizure of properties in an amount never seen before, and the recovery of millions of liters of fuel theft.

Source: “Sheinbaum condena ‘linchamiento político’ a Adán Augusto; refiere que es distinto al caso de García Luna en EEUU (Sheinbaum condemns the ‘political lynching’ of Adán Augusto; she says it’s different from the García Luna case in the US),” *Infobae* (an Argentine digital news outlet with excellent regional coverage), 21 July 2025. <https://www.infobae.com/mexico/2025/07/21/sheinbaum-condena-linchamiento-politico-a-adan-augusto-refiere-que-es-distinto-al-caso-de-garcia-luna-en-eeuu/>

The president clarified speculation regarding her meetings with the senator, amid persistent criticism of the Morena Party. She also maintained that it is up to the legislator to clarify whether there is any evidence of links to crime or corruption, rejecting any kind of ‘media lynching’...Sheinbaum confirmed that she maintains communication with Adán Augusto López, but clarified that these conversations are limited to legislative agenda items. She explained that, every Monday during

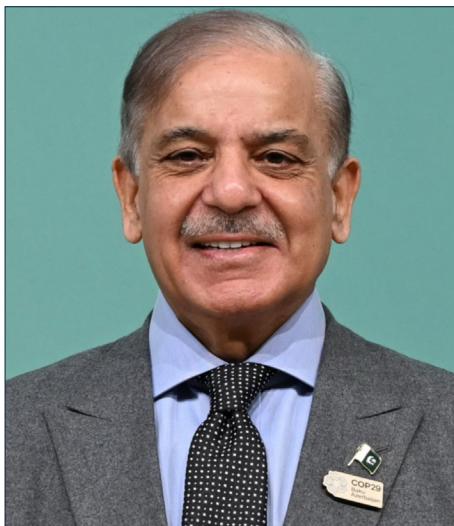
the regular session, she holds meetings with the senator and Ricardo Monreal to review the laws that have already been passed and those pending on the matter... He also indicated that Hernán Bermúdez Requena is under investigation and that there is an arrest warrant issued against him by the Attorney General’s Office. He added that any possible involvement of the senator will only be investigated if a complaint is filed accompanied by conclusive evidence.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on “huachicol” as a practice in Mexico, the Financial Times published a terrific digital report earlier this year. See: Christine Murray et al., “How Smuggled US Fuel Funds Mexico’s Cartels,” *Financial Times*, 11 June 2025. <https://ig.ft.com/mexico-fuel-theft/>
- 2 For more information on the supposedly “incorruptible” nature of the Mexican Navy, see: Zedryk Raziel, “La trama del huachicol golpea la reputación de incorruptible de la Marina en México,” *El País*, 9 September 2025. <https://elpais.com/mexico/2025-09-09/la-trama-del-huachicol-golpea-la-reputacion-de-incorruptible-de-la-marina-en-mexico.html>
- 3 For more information on “La Barredora” and its connection to the Tabasco state government, see: Veronica Ayala, “El gobierno de AMLO supo desde 2020 de mini-refinería ligada a ‘La Barredora,’” Mexicans Against Corruption, 8 September 2025. <https://contralacorrupcion.mx/el-gobierno-de-amlo-supio-desde-2020-de-mini-refineria-ligada-a-la-barredora/>

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Sign Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has significantly increased Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia in the latter half of 2025.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shehbaz_Shariif_in_2024.jpg

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a history of close relations dating back decades to include strong defense ties.¹ The accompanying excerpted article from Pakistan's English-language newspaper *Dawn* reports that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the "Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement" in mid-September 2025, further strengthening their relationship. The article notes that the agreement contains language like NATO's Article 5 on mutual defense, though it also mentions that there is a "deliberate ambiguity" in the scope of the rest of the agreement. This has led to speculation that the agreement includes Pakistan providing a nuclear umbrella for Saudi Arabia. When asked if the new defense pact might obligate

Pakistan to provide its nuclear umbrella, one official from Saudi Arabia stated that it is "a comprehensive defensive agreement that encompasses all military means."

Outside of the speculation this has caused, the article notes Pakistan's position on the use of nuclear weapons for self-defense and deterrence, and that, according to the author, this does not include extension to other states, including Saudi Arabia.² The article goes on to mention that the timing of the agreement is significant. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the agreement only a week after Israel carried out a strike on Hamas leadership in Doha, Qatar, which the article claims has caused Saudi Arabia to look for additional security partnerships. Lastly, the article describes how Saudi Arabia has been explicit about the conventional aspects of the agreement, which will expand military cooperation at multiple levels, including joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense industrial collaboration. The defense industrial collaboration is notable alongside increasing economic ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.³ Under this part of the agreement, Saudi Arabia will provide significant funding, while Pakistan will add operational and tactical experience. The mutual defense part of the agreement remains to be seen, but the conventional aspects of increased

"Pakistan's position on the nuclear deterrent is very clear; Islamabad was obliged to develop nuclear capability for self-defence and deterrence and it is intended solely for safeguarding the country's own sovereignty and territorial integrity, not for extension to other states."

military cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could have a significant strategic and operational impact on the Middle East and South Asia.

Source: Baqir Sajjad Syed, "The security pact heard around the world," *Dawn* (English-language newspaper in Pakistan), 19 September 2025. [vhttps://www.dawn.com/news/1943079](https://www.dawn.com/news/1943079)

The signing of a 'Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement' between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is being seen as a moment of tectonic significance for the Middle East and South Asia.

On the face of it, it is a declarative pact, containing a commitment to collective defence in the spirit of Nato's Article 5, from where the accord borrows language regarding an attack on one partner being considered aggression against both.

Beneath the surface, however, there is deliberate ambiguity about the scope of this agreement, which implies strategic signaling....

What is public is short and formal. The official statement gave only a brief description, saying the agreement aims "to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression."

That measured phrasing is a diplomatic curtain, but conversations behind it have been anything but modest. Because the written text is opaque and probably deliberately ambiguous, the debate that followed — especially among Western experts — focused first and foremost on one explosive possibility — does this pact imply a Pakistani nuclear umbrella for Saudi Arabia?

One senior Saudi official, when asked by Western media whether the pact might obligate Pakistan to provide such a guarantee, bluntly said, "This is a comprehensive defensive agreement that encompasses all military means."....

Speculation in western circles notwithstanding, Pakistan's position on the nuclear deterrent is very clear; Islamabad was obliged to develop nuclear capability for self-defence and deterrence and it is intended solely for safeguarding the country's own sovereignty and territorial integrity, not for extension to other states....

The Saudi side has also been quite explicit about the more conventional building blocks of the pact. As Jamal Al-Harbi, the press attaché at the Saudi embassy in Islamabad, wrote in Arab News: "The newly signed agreement aims to expand military cooperation on multiple levels. Key elements include joint military exercises to improve operational readiness and interoperability, intelligence sharing to counter emerging threats, particularly terrorism and cross-border insurgencies."

"Additionally, it includes defence industry collaboration, with potential for technology transfer and co-production of military equipment, as well as capacity building and training, building on the longstanding tradition of Pakistani military personnel working with Saudi forces. There is potential for mutually beneficial industrial partnerships in emerging security fields such as cybersecurity, drone technology, and space-based defence systems."....

If the partners follow through with joint planning, interoperability standards, intelligence fusion, and defence-industrial links, the result would be the most significant re-architecture of Gulf security....

continue on 37

Notes:

- 1 Pakistan has maintained an annual deployment of over 1,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia to provide Saudi forces with operational and tactical training since 2018. No other details of the deployment have been made public, but it comes out of a Pakistan-Saudi Arabia security cooperation agreement signed in 1982.
- 2 Pakistan has never made its nuclear doctrine public, but statements from Pakistani civilian and military officials have provided insight into the doctrine. Pakistan began developing nuclear weapons following its loss of territory in the 1971 war against India and first successfully tested a nuclear weapon in 1998. Since then, statements from Pakistani officials have demonstrated that the country sees its nuclear arsenal as a deterrence against India to defend its territory and sovereignty, including a potential first strike. Pakistan has not discussed supporting the development of a nuclear weapon for another government. For more background on Pakistan's nuclear weapons and statements that help shape the country's nuclear doctrine, see: Sitara Noor, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine," *Arms Control Association*, October 2023. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/pakistans-evolving-nuclear-doctrine>
- 3 Pakistan and Saudi Arabia already had close economic ties but the two have increased economic cooperation only weeks after signing the defense agreement, see: Irshad Ansari, "Pakistan forms high-level committee for economic talks with KSA after historic defence pact," *The Express Tribune*, 5 October 2025. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2570761/pakistan-forms-high-level-committee-for-economic-talks-with-ksa-after-historic-defence-pact>

Kazakhstan Assigns Ministry of Emergency Situations Responsibility for Territorial Defense

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Kazakhstan has made several important changes to its armed forces in recent years. The accompanying excerpted article from the news website *Kursiv* reports that the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan is now tasked with supporting territorial defense. The article mentions that a recent government resolution amended the responsibilities of the Ministry of Emergency Situations to become more involved in defense, including territorial defense planning and creating special units based on mobilization plans. The resolution takes on significance in light of recent changes to the armed forces, particularly regarding the Ministry of Emergency Situations'

role as an additional reserve force in the event of a war. Some officials in Kazakhstan have explicitly stated concerns over a war with Russia and have made changes to prepare for one.¹ The Ministry of Emergency Situations will also carry out regular civil defense training and work with the Ministry of Defense on military-patriotic education. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense has increased public outreach over the last decade as part of a broad effort to entice conscripts into the armed forces.² Military-patriotic education by the Ministry of Emergency Situations may not be any different from what is already taking place by the Ministry of Defense, but it will add to the overall

effort. The article also points out that the Ministry of Emergency Situations is being given expanded authority to acquire weapons and military equipment. These acquisitions will not likely include anything beyond small arms or be as well funded as the Ministry of Defense.³ Ultimately, the changes to the Ministry of Emergency Situations mark another effort by Kazakhstan to increase the country's defensive capabilities in responding to a conflict. Kazakhstan continues to have good political, economic, and military ties with Russia in addition to its other neighboring states, but it continues to make changes like this to be better prepared for a conflict.

“The Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan will oversee the circulation of weapons and military equipment under its operational control.”



A heavy transport **Mi-26** of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Emergency Situations carries out a training exercise. The ministry has trained to respond to natural disasters but will now include territorial defense among its tasks.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ми-26T_МЧС_Казахстана_во_время_учений.jpg

Source: Danil Tumashevich, “МЧС Казахстана займется военно-патриотическим воспитанием (The Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan will get involved in military-patriotic education),” *Kursiv* (news website in Kazakhstan), 11 September 2025. <https://kz.kursiv.media/2025-09-11/dnlt-mchs-kazakhstana-zaymetsya-voyenno-patrioticheskim-vospitaniyem/>

The Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan will oversee the circulation of weapons and military equipment under its operational control. The Ministry will also engage in military-patriotic education and participate in territorial defense planning. This is stated in a government resolution dated September 5, 2025, which entered into force on August 31.

The document, signed by Prime Minister Olzhas Bektenov, amends the Ministry of Emergency Situations' regulations, specifically the government agency's responsibilities....

The main areas of the Ministry of Emergency Situations' new responsibilities....

The Ministry of Emergency Situations is actively involved in territorial defense planning, as well as the protection and security of its facilities in accordance with approved plans. The agency is creating special units, providing them with the necessary material and technical resources based on mobilization tasks....

The Ministry of Emergency Situations ensures the constant readiness of civil defense agencies

Notes:

- 1 Kazakhstan changed its military doctrine in October 2022 to develop the combat capabilities of its armed forces in “strategic directions” in a move seen as a preparation for a potential conflict with Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. Kazakhstan has been concerned about Russia annexing its northern regions since it became independent in 1991. Kazakhstan has also drawn lessons from the war in Ukraine for multiple exercises for its armed forces over the past couple of years and in 2024 established a reserve force that can be quickly mobilized in the event of a war.
- 2 Kazakhstan still carries out an annual conscription for the armed forces but has increased the number of contract service members in the ranks over the past 10 years. Conscripts are offered contracts to serve in the armed forces beyond their conscription period. Kazakhstan's armed forces now made up of an estimated 65-70 percent contract service members with the remainder made up of conscripts.
- 3 Defense expenditures in Kazakhstan have steadily risen over the past 20 years and have stood at around 1.5 to 2 percent of the country's GDP. As Kazakhstan's GDP has grown in this time frame, defense spending has risen with acquisitions of fighter and transport aircraft, armored vehicles, and unmanned aerial systems, among other items.

to perform territorial defense tasks by conducting comprehensive training....

The Ministry participates in the development of a military-patriotic education system, collaborating with the Coordinating Council under the Ministry of Defense. This includes activities to promote patriotic values among the population....

The Ministry of Emergency Situations receives expanded powers in the defense industry and state defense orders.

The Ministry will:

- Monitor the circulation of weapons and military equipment.*
- Determine the performance characteristics of new weapons.*
- Select contractors for state defense procurement and ensure the fulfillment of their tasks.*
- Accept prototypes of military and special-purpose equipment.*
- Transfer unused military property or defense facilities to authorized bodies....*

Increasing Turkish-Egyptian Defense Cooperation Could Shift Regional Security Dynamics

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Turkey and Egypt stood as ideological and geopolitical rivals for much of the past decade. The relationship collapsed following the 2013 ouster of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and a close ally of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In the years that followed, Turkey and Egypt backed opposing factions in the Libyan civil war and clashed over maritime boundaries and energy rights in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The September 2025 renewal of joint naval exercises between Turkey and Egypt for the first time in over a decade provides tangible proof of a deepening

military relationship with major regional repercussions. According to Egypt's official daily *al-Ahram*, the "Sea of Friendship" naval exercises, which took place in the Eastern Mediterranean off the Turkish coast, are "tangible proof" of Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's recent characterization of bilateral relations as being at their "best level in modern history." The rapprochement, which began with tentative diplomatic contacts and the restoration of ambassadors in 2023, appears to be moving beyond these early symbolic gestures, signaling a significant strategic realignment between two regional powers that could reshape security dynamics

across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

This burgeoning Turkish-Egyptian security partnership also includes moves toward joint defense industrial production. As reported in the accompanying excerpt from *Asharq al-Awsat*, a recent agreement calls for the production of Turkish vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) UAVs in Egypt, with officials also hinting at future collaboration on unmanned ground vehicles.¹ The speed of Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement has been driven by the conflict in Gaza, where the third accompanying excerpt from *al-Jazeera* notes that "the



TCG Orucreis, one of the Turkish Frigates reportedly participating in the "Sea of Friendship" drills with Egypt, photographed in Glasgow in 2011.

Source: Mark Harkin, Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/markyharky/6208567901/>

volume of cooperation between the two countries" is "large and complex."

The regional implications of this shift from political rivals to security partners are profound. While one analyst cited in *Asharq al-Awsat* suggests the goal is not to "create a new military balance of power," the practical effects of increased cooperation may do just

that. This emerging alignment could fundamentally alter the strategic calculus for other regional powers. For one, it may signal the collapse of the anti-Turkish "East Mediterranean Gas Forum" coalition that had isolated Ankara and included Egypt, Greece, and Israel. It also forces new considerations in Libya, where Turkey and Egypt hold significant influence with opposing

factions, and for Greece, which is concerned about maritime demarcation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ultimately, as the *al-Jazeera* article highlights, this partnership could lead to the formation of "a new defense and security structure for the countries of the region" through the emergence of a unified Sunni bloc capable of challenging Israeli and Iranian regional influence.

"The first joint Egyptian-Turkish naval exercise in 13 years, which took place this week, came as tangible proof of the strong bilateral relations between the two countries, bearing out what Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan described as their being at their 'best level in modern history'."

Source: "Joining forces with Turkey," *al-Ahram Weekly* (English-language Egyptian weekly), 24 September 2025. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/553690.aspx>

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"The joint military exercise is very important, but what will come after it is even more important. It will prove whether the two states are willing to focus on issues of agreement and to try to bridge issues of difference,"

[political science professor at Cairo University] Tarek Fahmy said....

While the normalisation of relations is an important and welcome step, it does not mean that Egypt and Turkey have reached agreement on all their differences, however. [Turkish Foreign Minister] Hakan Fidan described the rapprochement with Egypt as still in its early stages but holding enormous promise. "By pooling our resources and capabilities, both nations could amplify their influence and foster stability in a region long plagued by fragmentation," he said in his TV interview.

Source:

"Joint Egyptian-Turkish military manufacturing crowns the rapprochement between the two countries," *Asharq al-Awsat* (Saudi daily), 26 September 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/j2bnj3j6>

Egypt and Turkey have strengthened their military cooperation by announcing a joint venture to produce drones and vehicles. This is a new step that culminates in a rapprochement the two countries have embarked on in recent years, following years of estrangement.

تصنيع عسكري مصري تركي مشترك يتوسّط التقارب بين البلدين

Turkish Ambassador to Cairo Salih Mutlu Şen announced via his Twitter account on Tuesday evening the signing of an agreement to produce vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) drones in Cairo between Turkish

continue on 42

defense technology company Havelsan and the Arab Organization for Industrialization in Egypt....

Ahmed Qandil, head of the International Studies Unit at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, said that “reaching the stage of co-industrialization is a natural development for the growth of Egyptian-Turkish relations, and the goal of the two countries is to keep with the growth of military technology effective in the war of Ukraine and the Israeli war on Iran.” In his statement to Asharq Al-Awsat, Qandil downplayed the possibility that “the goal of the cooperation is to create a new military balance of power in the region, based on the fact that both countries aim to maintain regional stability. Furthermore, the current open conflicts have

proven that the United States remains capable of guiding the situation toward escalation or de-escalation....”

Mahmoud Alloush, a researcher at the Istanbul Center for Policy Analysis, told Asharq Al-Awsat that “relations between Egypt and Turkey are progressing steadily, particularly in the defense industries. This reflects a shared desire as two regional powers. Cooperation will not be limited to drones, but will include other weapons that will be announced.” The Turkish ambassador’s tweet in Cairo included talk of another deal related to “the production of unmanned ground vehicles between the Turkish company Havelsan and the Egyptian factory Kader, affiliated with the Ministry of Military Production....”

Source:

“A clear warning to Israel from Egypt and Turkey,” *al-Jazeera* (Qatari news outlet), 4 October 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/y2srn7ky>

تحذير واضح لإسرائيل من مصر وتركيا

These maneuvers have raised important questions about the possibility of military cooperation to create a new defense and security structure for the countries of the region. Questions also naturally extended to the impact of this cooperation on the security of the Hebrew state, the pending issues in the Eastern Mediterranean regarding the demarcation of maritime borders, which concern Greece and the southern part of the island of

Cyprus, in addition to the Libyan issue, and the possibility of ending the division between East and West....

The region’s need for a new security architecture has become a top priority, and this is no longer limited to Arab countries alone. Rather, it has become necessary to rely on neighboring Islamic countries, most notably Turkey and Pakistan....

Notes:

- 1 The specific UAV model was not mentioned, beyond the fact that the MOU involves Egypt’s state-owned Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) and Turkish defense manufacturer Havelsan.