

OEWATCH



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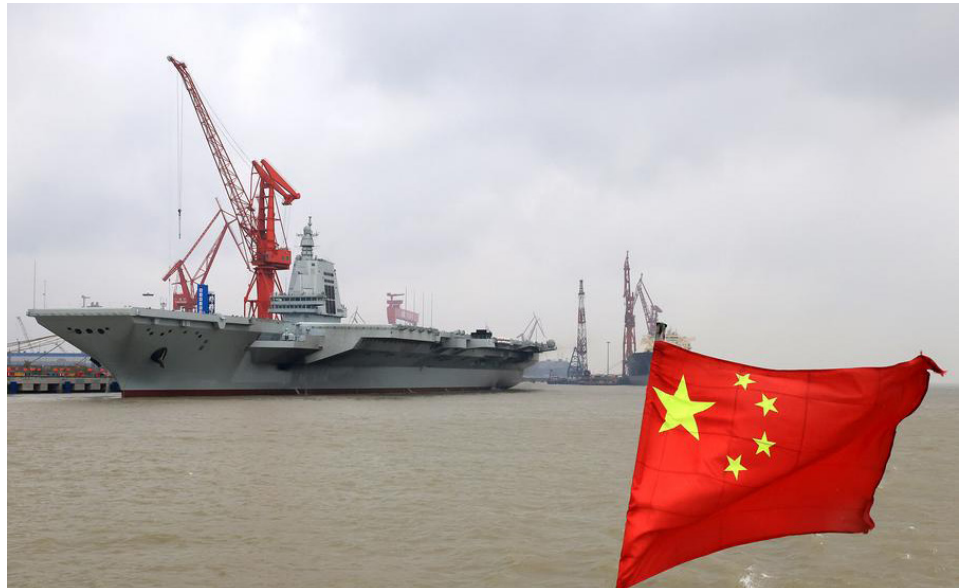
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China Unveils Its Most Advanced Aircraft Carrier

By MAJ Kevin Kusumoto
OE Watch Commentary

On 1 May 2024, China's third aircraft carrier, *Fujian*, began its maiden sea trial¹ marking a pivotal stride in Chinese power projection. The *Fujian* is the largest and most advanced carrier in China's fleet and will significantly enhance Beijing's capacity to project power over greater distances and expand its 'blue water' capabilities.

According to the first excerpted article published by one of China's largest internet companies *NetEase*, *Fujian* is China's first domestically designed and built aircraft carrier featuring an electromagnetic catapult system. This key capability allows *Fujian* to launch heavier and larger aircraft than its predecessors, the *Liaoning* and the *Shandong*. With increased payload capacity and extended range, *Fujian* enhances the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) 'blue-water' capabilities.² Notably, *Fujian* surpasses its predecessors in tonnage and technological capabilities. Its construction also underscores China's growing expertise in domestic carrier construction and development, marking a departure from reliance on Soviet designs. After completing sea trials and officially entering service, *Fujian* will significantly advance the PLAN capabilities, marking the beginning of the "three carrier era," wherein one carrier can undergo maintenance, another can maintain training read-



China's third aircraft carrier, *Fujian*, docks at the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai.

Source: <https://english.news.cn/20240501/72b54c6bb8f34058a011c44971de3c0e/c.html>; Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

iness, and the third can undertake carrier presence operations in strategically important maritime areas.

“The construction of the People’s Navy aircraft carriers has achieved a remarkable transformation from nothing to something.”

The second excerpt, published by the Chinese Communist Party newspaper *China Daily*, states that the sea trials of *Fujian* may be considerably longer than its two predecessors. This is due to *Fujian*'s technology upgrades, particularly the electromagnetic catapult, the evolution from a Soviet foundation, and its ability to accommodate

additional equipment and aircraft. Further, an expert cited in the article details that *Fujian*'s sea trials will be divided into two primary components: equipment and personnel.³ He states that sea trials related to equipment are based on six characteristics, reliability, maintainability, testability, supportability, environmental adaptability, and safety. The sea trials related to personnel include habitability and people's experience of the work environment.

While the recent launch of *Fujian* marks significant progress for China, the United States still maintains a considerable lead in aircraft carrier application, experience, and technology.⁴ The US Navy's operational experience with carriers, dating back to World War II, provides a depth of knowledge that China cannot

match. Through decades of maritime experience, the US Navy has developed a mature and highly effective doctrine for carrier combat operations, integrating them into broader joint and

combined arms strategies. In contrast, the PLAN lacks this historical, practical, and combat experience.⁵ Despite this, through rigorous sea trials, *Fujian* will not only enhance China's technolog-

ical prowess but also gain invaluable operational experience, positioning itself for greater maritime prominence in the future.

Source: Fu Qianshao, “超燃!我国将进入“三航母时代”!(Super Hot! My Country Enters the “3 Aircraft Carrier Era”),” *Netease* (one of China's largest internet companies, subject to regulatory oversight and censorship by China's Cyberspace Administration), 02 May 2024. <https://m.163.com/dy/article/J16ADKLT0514R9KQ.html>

On June 17, 2022, China marked the launch and naming of its third aircraft carrier, christened 'Fujian Ship of the People's Liberation Army Navy.' On May 1, 2024, the carrier embarked on its inaugural sea trial. With the addition of Fujian, China now boasts three aircraft carriers, each with unique performance and combat capabilities, joining the Liaoning and Shandong in its naval fleet.

The Liaoning, originally a Soviet carrier commissioned in 1985, serves as China's inaugural aircraft carrier, boasting a 60,000-ton displacement. Despite its origins, extensive upgrades have rendered it a crucial asset for China's maritime and aerial operations expansion. In contrast, the Shandong represents China's first indigenous medium-sized aircraft carrier, featuring a design, development, and construction entirely undertaken within the country. Slightly larger than the Liaoning, the Shandong features an expanded flight deck and significant advancements in internal systems, elevators, and shipboard weaponry. The latest addition, Fujian, marks a significant technological leap for China's naval capabilities. As the country's first carrier equipped with an electromagnetic catapult system, Fujian boasts a load displacement exceeding 80,000 tons, surpassing its predecessors in both size and technological sophistication.

As with new surface vessels across naval fleets

worldwide, Fujian will undergo rigorous sea trials before entering active service. These trials encompass two primary aspects: equipment and personnel evaluation. Equipment trials scrutinize the ship's reliability, maintainability, testability, supportability, environmental resilience, and safety standards. Meanwhile, personnel trials assess aspects such as habitability and operational effectiveness.

With the successful completion of sea trials and Fujian's official commissioning, it is poised to significantly advance the capabilities of the PLAN. This heralds the commencement of the 'three carrier era,' wherein one aircraft carrier can undergo maintenance, another can maintain training readiness, and the third can undertake crucial carrier presence operations in strategically important maritime areas.

With its adoption of cutting-edge electromagnetic catapult technology, Fujian will have a higher dispatch rate for carrier-based aircraft compared to its predecessors. Furthermore, its integration of domestically developed technologies underscores China's commitment to indigenous innovation and self-reliance. Through rigorous sea trials, the PLAN will not only enhance its technological prowess but also gain invaluable operational experience, positioning itself for greater maritime prominence in the future.

Source: Gao Linlin, “你好, 18舰! 欢迎, 福建舰! (Hello, Ship 18! Welcome, Fujian Ship!),” *China Daily* (a daily newspaper owned by the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party), 02 May 2024. <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/02/WS6633074fa3109f7860ddc054.html>

On 01 May 2024, China's third aircraft carrier, Fujian, unmoored and set sail from the docks of Jiangnan Shipyard to conduct its inaugural sea trials. These sea trials aim to assess the reliability and stability of Fujian's power, electricity, and other essential systems. Fujian stands as a significant emblem of the navy's evolution and the emergence of high-quality combat forces. The rapid expansion of China's aircraft carrier force underscores a deliberate effort to enhance combat capabilities. Progressing from a single carrier to three, China has charted a distinct trajectory in the construction of its aircraft carrier force, reflecting a transformation tailored with Chinese characteristics.

Before new ships are commissioned, navies worldwide conduct sea trials to assess their performance across various metrics through actual navigation at sea. The sea trials of Fujian are divided into two primary components: equipment and personnel evaluation. Equipment trials scrutinize reliability, maintainability, testability, supportability, environmental adaptability, and safety. Concurrently, personnel trials focus on factors such as habitability and operational experience within the work

environment.

Fujian marks a significant leap forward in technology and tonnage compared to its predecessors, garnering attention as the first Chinese aircraft carrier not based on a Soviet template. With its considerably larger tonnage, Fujian has increased capacity to accommodate additional equipment and aircraft. Furthermore, the incorporation of new technologies such as the electromagnetic catapult underscores its cutting-edge capabilities. Given these substantial upgrades and the absence of a Soviet foundation, the sea trials for Fujian may be longer compared to those of the two previous carriers.

With the official commissioning of Fujian, the navy will transition into a 'three carrier era,' facilitating a rotation system where one carrier can undergo repairs, another can maintain training readiness, and the third can engage in combat training. This strategic deployment enables the PLAN to always ensure the presence of an aircraft carrier in strategically important sea areas. Furthermore, equipped with an electromagnetic catapult, Fujian is poised to play a pivotal role in executing key tasks within critical maritime domains.

Notes:

- 1 To watch the full CCTV-7 video report of *Fujian's* unmooring, see CCTV's video post, CCTV, 02 May 2024. <https://tv.cctv.com/2024/05/02/VIDEtGTVEkVgMH4Cp34Hli4M240502.shtml?spm=C53074552346.P4BWJvWoMUky.S51904.6>
- 2 Brandon Lendon, “China's newest aircraft carrier heads to sea for first time,” *CNN*, 01 May 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/01/china/china-navy-newest-aircraft-carrier-fujian-sea-trial-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>
- 3 CCTV-13 features a special military commentator, a former PLAN officer commissioned from Dalian Academy, to provide insights into *Fujian's* sea trials, *CCTV-13 News Channel*, 09 May 2024. <https://tv.cctv.com/2024/05/09/VIDEYJxMXBbSzJFnn5zSoBNr240509.shtml>
- 4 Greg Torode, Eduardo Baptista, Tim Kelly, “China's aircraft carriers play 'theatrical' role but pose little threat yet” *Reuters*. 05 May 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-aircraft-carriers-play-theatrical-role-pose-little-threat-yet-2023-05-05/>
- 5 Benjamin Brimelow, “US vs. Chinese aircraft carriers: How the world's top flattops stack up,” *Business Insider*, 01 June 2024. <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-vs-chinese-navy-aircraft-carriers-2024-5>

China Introduces People's Liberation Army-Information Support Force

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

On 19 April, the Chinese Communist Party joined the Central Military Commission to unveil the new People's Liberation Army-Information Support Force (PLA-ISF), a strategic arm of the PLA responsible for overseeing the development and application of the network information system. The PLA-ISF appears to have replaced the PLA Strategic Support Force, which was responsible for strategic missions including space-based intelligence, reconnaissance, electronic countermeasures, signals intelligence, information warfare, and communications.¹ The role and responsibilities of the PLA-ISF are expected to be much broader and will integrate artificial intelligence into military operations.

While there are still few specifics available about the PLA-ISF, the first article, published in one of Asia's largest English-language pan-Asia digital news platforms, *Asia Times*, opines that the aim of the PLA-ISF is to "better integrate emerging AI, Quantum, and other technologies into multi-domain operational concept against the United States and its allies." The author argues that this new development underscores the importance to the PLA of shifting its warfare strategy from informationized to intelligitized.

The establishment of the PLA-ISF is being hailed as a significant move. According to the second excerpted article from the PLA's official newspaper *PLADaily*, the PLA-ISF is the key support for coordinating the construction and

application of network information systems. It will improve the army's joint combat capability and multi-domain combat capability by having a network information system at its core. Finally, it will help to achieve China's goal of becoming a world-class force by the 100th anniversary of the founding the PLA in 2027. This sentiment is echoed in the third excerpted article published on the website of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense. In it, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, Director of the Information Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense, gave a press conference in which he explained that establishing the PLA-ISF will accelerate the pace of China's national defense and military modernization and give the country "the ability to fight and win in modern warfare."

"The Information Support Force is a newly created strategic force and a key support for coordinating the construction and application of network information systems. It plays an important role and has a major responsibility in promoting the high-quality development of the army and winning modern wars."

Source: Gabriel Honrada, "New PLA Unit Underscores Intelligitized Warfare Shift," *Asia Times*, (one of the region's largest English-language pan-Asia digital news platforms), 22 April 2024. <https://asiatimes.com/2024/04/new-pla-unit-underscores-intelligitized-warfare-shift/>

PLA-ISF aims to better integrate emerging AI, quantum and other technologies into multi-domain operational concept against the US and its allies.

China has just unveiled its People's Liberation Army-

Information Support Force (PLA-ISF), a rebranding of its previous PLA-Strategic Support Force (PLA-SSF) to reflect new responsibilities and capabilities and guide the military's technology-driven integrated

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combat concept, Chinese state media reports said.

In contrast to traditional PLA services such as the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force, the

PLA's strategic arms, such as the Aerospace Force, Cyberspace Force and Joint Logistics Support, focus on more specialized areas critical to modern warfare.

Source: “解放军报评论员：努力建设一支强大的现代化信息支援部队 (PLA Daily Commentator: Strive to Build a Strong Modern Information Support Force),” Chinese Ministry of National Defense, reposted from *PLA Daily* (Official newspaper of the PLA), 20 April 2024. <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/jmsd/16302172.html>

... As a newly created strategic branch of the military, the information support force is the key support for the coordinated construction and application of network information systems, and plays an important role in promoting the high-quality development of our army and winning the battle against the enemy. The information support force plays an important role and has great responsibilities in modern warfare. Reform will be successful and a strong army can be expected. The establishment of the information support force will definitely help improve our army's joint combat capability and all-domain

combat capability based on the network information system, and will definitely help achieve the goal of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the army as scheduled and accelerate the construction of the people's army into a world-class army.

The reform and strengthening of the army is in full swing, and the clarion call is sounded to open a new chapter. At present, the entire army is going all out to fight a tough battle to achieve the goal of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the army. The responsibility is heavy and the mission is urgent.

Source: “信息支援部队是全新打造的战略性兵种 (The Information Support Force is a New Strategic Branch of the Military),” Chinese Ministry of National Defense website, 19 April 2024. <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/16302053.html>

Question: *The conference inaugurates the Information Support Force. What kind of force is it?*

Wu Qian: The adjustment and establishment of information support forces is a major decision made by the CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission from the overall perspective of strengthening the military. It is a strategic move

to build a new type of military structure and layout and improve the modern military force system with Chinese characteristics. It has great and far-reaching significance for accelerating the modernization of national defense and the military and effectively fulfilling the mission and tasks of the people's army in the new era...

Notes:

- 1 China's Strategic Support Force was responsible for strategic missions including space-based intelligence, reconnaissance, electronic countermeasures, signals intelligence, information warfare, and communications. See Kevin McCauley, “People's Liberation Army Changing Mission Of Civilian Personnel,” *OE Watch*, 06-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/peoples-liberation-army-changing-mission-of-civilian-personnel/>; and Tim Thomas, “China's New '4+2' Service Branch Structure,” *OE Watch*, Volume 06, Issue 10, p27. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195241>

Potential Flashpoint Stemming From Undersea Data Cable Network Access Restrictions

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

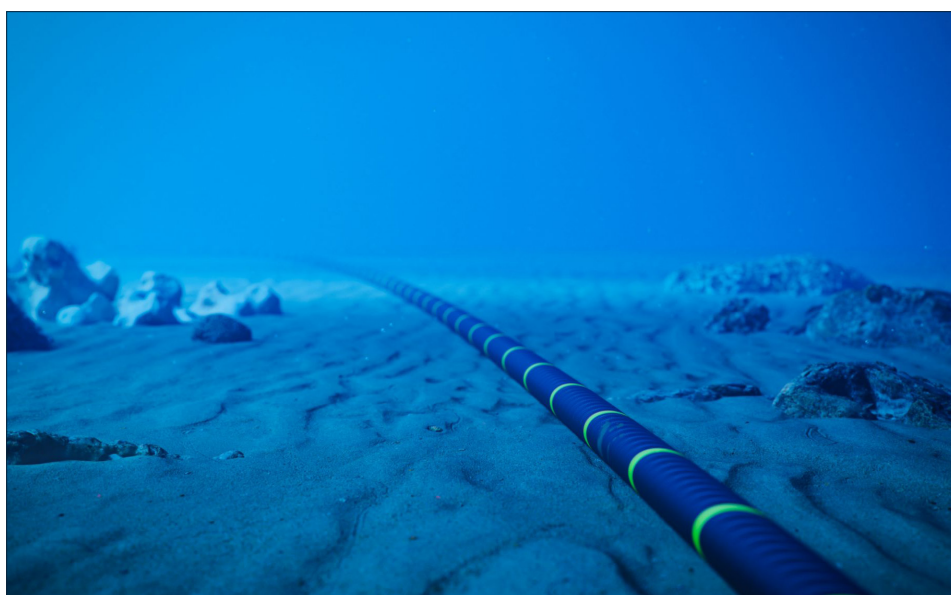
The United States is working with global technology companies, and regional neighbors, to actively exclude China from future undersea cable networks that will connect the region to the rest of the world according to the excerpted article from Japan-based *Nikkei* news agency. Subsea cables form the backbone of the exchange of global information, carrying 99% of the world's data traffic—including information considered important to national security. While the *Nikkei* article doesn't delve into the geopolitical concerns between the United States and China, the move to restrict the flow of data available to China via these undersea cables, should be seen as a mechanism to isolate China. China, which was once expected to be the future hub for subsea networks that form vital arteries

of international communication, is on schedule to receive only three cables laid after this year. All three to Hong Kong, which was relatively more independent when the contracts to lay those undersea cables were struck. By comparison, in the next few years an additional 11 cables are scheduled to be laid in the region: four cables to Japan and seven to Singapore.

According to a researcher interviewed for the article, the moves to isolate China from the conduit that carries global information is manifestation of a “subsea cold war” going on between the United States and its partners and China.¹ The U.S. process to isolate China began in 2020 when the Trump administration, “adopted The Clean Network initiative² to freeze Chinese businesses out of telecom infrastructure projects.” This initiative has continued under

the Biden administration, citing the “need to ensure data security.”³ The article notes that with the decrease in this important data conduit, the share of data centers in China will stay stagnant or begin to recede as well, while increasing in other Asian countries such as Japan, Philippines, and Southeast Asia. This hi-tech form of economic blockade will be a risk to China as its technology prowess begins to lag behind its regional competitors. These second and third order of effects make the subsea cable issue another potential flashpoint between U.S. – China relations, which given the numerous flashpoints between the two super powers, could result in additional tension and possible military action.⁴

“China has arisen as an economic superpower rivaling the U.S. and now consumes large amounts of data... [however] China’s presence in subsea cable networks is fading rapidly.”



◀ Underwater fiber optic cable on the ocean floor.

Source: <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/article/protecting-submarine-cables-enhanced-connectivity-subsea/155612/>; Attribution: CC by 4.0

Source: Kentaro Takeda, “More subsea cables bypass China as Sino-U.S. tensions grow,” *Nikkei*, 11 May 2024. https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/More-subsea-cables-bypass-China-as-Sino-U.S.-tensions-grow?utm_campaign=IC_asia_daily_free&utm_medium=email&utm_source=NA_newsletter&utm_content=article_link&del_type=1&pub_date=20240513123000&seq_num=3&si=91811959-21c4-44f4-9028-13136a8d0104

Growing geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China have begun to affect the flow of global data due to an expected sharp fall in new undersea cables linking China with the rest of the world...

China is expected to see only three cables laid after this year—fewer than half the number planned for Singapore. The lack of undersea projects is also expected to weigh on the construction of data centers in the country.

Subsea cables form the backbone of the internet, carrying 99% of the world’s data traffic. Roughly 140,000 kilometers of such cables will be completed this year, three times more than five years ago... The increase reflects growing demand for data traffic prompted by the spread of video streaming and cloud services.

On April 10, Google announced a \$1 billion project to build two submarine cables to connect Japan, Guam and Hawaii...The leaders said in a joint statement that they welcomed the investment “to improve digital communications infrastructure between the United States, Japan and Pacific Island Nations.”

Behind this seemingly coordinated public-private initiative was “the subsea cold war” between the U.S. and China, said TeleGeography’s research director, Alan

Mauldin.

China has arisen as an economic superpower rivaling the U.S. and now consumes large amounts of data. Fifteen 1,000-km-plus submarine cables, all put into use since 1994, link China and the rest of the world....

The tide began to change around 2020, when the U.S., led by then-President Donald Trump, adopted the Clean Network initiative to freeze Chinese businesses out of telecom infrastructure projects. The U.S. has since kept this tough stance against Beijing, citing the need to ensure data security...

China’s presence in subsea cable networks is fading rapidly. Three international cables to connect Hong Kong are due for completion in 2025, but no undersea projects are scheduled for the country thereafter. There are plans to lay four cables to Japan and seven to Singapore after 2024. In addition, nine cables will be laid to Guam, midway between the U.S. mainland and Southeast Asia.

Subsea cables and call centers are two pillars of digital infrastructure that move large amounts of data. Their presence could determine the power and influence of host countries and the businesses operating within them.

Notes:

- 1 See: “US-China tech war’s new battleground: undersea internet cables,” *South China Morning Post*,” 14 December 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3042058/us-china-tech-wars-new-battleground-undersea-internet-cables>
- 2 For more information on The Clean Network, see U.S. Department of State summary. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-clean-network/>
- 3 In 2021 Google and Facebook announced they had halted efforts to lay undersea cable connecting California and Hong Kong due to U.S.-China tension. See: “Google, Facebook unveil new Asia undersea data cable plan linking Singapore, Japan, others,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 August 2021. https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3145253/google-facebook-unveil-new-asia-undersea-data-cable-plan?campaign=3145253&module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article
- 4 The gradual restricting of subsea cables to China is occurring at the same time that the U.S. officials are warning that existing subsea cables could be sabotaged or tampered with by Chinese maintenance vessels contracted to maintain existing subsea cables. See: “U.S. Fears Undersea Cables Are Vulnerable to Espionage From Chinese Repair Ships,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 May 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/china-internet-cables-repair-ships-93fd6320>

Peru's Stance On Megaport Is a Test of China's Influence

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China's megaport in Chancay, Peru, just north of Lima, is set to be inaugurated by Chinese President Xi Jinping later this year during the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference. One of the largest deep-water ports of its kind, Chancay represents one of China's most ambitious projects in South America. Built by state-owned enterprise Cosco Shipping, Chancay is meant to catalyze the China's food security and dominance over critical minerals, while cutting shipping times to Asia by around one week. However, according to Argentine media outlet *Infobae*, Peruvian officials have announced an "administrative error" permitting Cosco Shipping to both build and operate the port exclusively.¹

"Now the National Port Authority is trying to rescind the exclusivity, claiming it made a mistake...The Chinese company, however, remains firm and even hints that it could withdraw if it does not obtain exclusive access."

According to the article, Peruvian regulators have rejected Cosco's exclusivity, declaring it incompatible with having built the port under domestic law.² As per the second excerpted article from *Infobae*, Cosco has said it will initiate legal action against Peruvian regulators, insisting on its economic model of exclusivity.

The fallout from the Port of Chancay legal wrangling is notable, and likely to have a lasting impact. China sees the moment as precedent-setting for other countries with Chinese state-owned enterprises controlling key infrastructure projects, while Peru finds itself in a major bind after years of burgeoning Chinese influence over strategic sectors in the country. If Cosco manages to win exclusive control of Chancay, China will further solidify its control over strategic infrastructure in the Western Hemisphere; if Peru manages to safeguard its autonomy, it may furnish a blueprint for other regional powers willing to test the limits of China's infrastructure ownership models.

Source: "El 'error administrativo' que pone en jaque al Perú: dio el control total a China del Megapuerto de Chancay (The 'administrative error' that puts Peru in check: it gave China full control of the Chancay Megaport)," *Infobae* (an Argentine outlet with excellent regional coverage), 14 May 2024. <https://www.infobae.com/peru/2024/05/14/el-error-administrativo-que-pone-en-jaque-al-peru-dio-el-control-total-a-china-del-megapuerto-de-chancay/>

With a projected investment of more than three billion, China is now bringing out its true intentions and at the same time taking advantage of an 'administrative error' on the part of Peruvian officials by granting operational exclusivity to Cosco, which has put the project in check...a situation that the National Port Authority of Peru is currently trying to solve...The Peruvian government assumed that the Chinese shipping giant would simply use

the port of which it will be the majority owner and would not have exclusive rights over it. But during the negotiations, Cosco somehow obtained precisely these rights. Now the National Port Authority is trying to rescind the exclusivity, claiming it made a mistake... The Chinese company, however, remains firm and even hints that it could withdraw if it does not obtain exclusive access.

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Source: “Megapuerto de Chancay: Cosco Shipping no da su brazo a torcer y anuncia sus acciones legales por conflicto con el Estado peruano (Chancay Megaport: Cosco Shipping does not give in and announces its legal actions due to conflict with the Peruvian State),” *Infobae* (an Argentine outlet with excellent regional coverage), 8 May 2024. <https://www.infobae.com/peru/2024/05/07/megapuerto-de-chancay-consorcio-chino-no-dara-su-brazo-a-torcer-y-anuncia-sus-acciones-legales-por-conflicto-con-el-estado-peruano/>

Through a statement, the Chinese consortium Cosco Shipping Ports Chancay Peru SA, in charge of the megaproject, recognized that the port infrastructure work in the country has been ‘seriously harmed’ by a change in the regulatory scheme...the company

reported that they have found it necessary to initiate legal actions to defend its operating model and ensure its classification as private infrastructure, despite the public benefits it offers.

Notes:

- 1 At an earlier period, U.S. officials warned Peru about China exerting control and exclusivity over Chancay. See: Michael Stott and Joe Daniels, “U.S. Raises Concern with Peru over Chinese Control of Infrastructure,” *Financial Times*, 3 October 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/2c77be69-60d7-4d5c-a0c6-c7978bde3888>
- 2 According to noted analyst Elisabeth Braw, this situation is likely the result of Peru failing to read the fine print of the agreement. See: Elisabeth Braw, “Peru Learns to Read the Fine Print in China Deals,” *Foreign Policy*, 13 May 2024. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/13/peru-learns-to-read-the-fine-print-in-china-deals/>

Russia Evaluates Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Combat Missions

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article in a monthly journal of the Russian Ministry of Defense, *Armeisky Sbornik*, discusses the importance of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on the modern battlefield. Russia believes that current UAV usage is not just a feature of the current conflict, but also indicative of the changing character of war. Therefore, Russia is now considering how UAV usage will be employed for all types of combat actions (offense, defense,

raid, meeting battle) and when on the march.¹ Although not explicitly stated, the article suggests that UAVs will no longer be concentrated in a single unit as they were before 2022.² Russia's understanding of the situation suggests that individual units will likely each have their own UAVs and counter-UAV technologies. In the Russian view, success on the modern battlefield requires that all types of units, not just electronic warfare and air defense personnel, need some degree of UAV and counter-UAV

technologies to accomplish their respective missions.

“One of the main military-technical features of the special military operation in Ukraine, along with the use of high-precision and hypersonic missiles, has been the massive use of small commercial UAVs.”

Source: V. Dyatchin and I. Starodubtsev, “Влияние беспилотных летательных аппаратов на способы действий общевойсковых подразделений (The influence of unmanned aerial vehicles on the methods of action of combined arms units),” *Armeisky Sbornik* (monthly journal of the Russian Ministry of Defense), May 2024. <https://army.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/573847/>

One of the main military-technical features of the special military operation in Ukraine, along with the use of high-precision and hypersonic missiles, has been the massive use of small commercial UAVs.³ Without UAVs, it is impossible to imagine the actions of assault detachments and groups, the destruction of the enemy by tube artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, including the use of high-tech weapons, the conduct of actions by reconnaissance elements, the fight against special detachments of foreign states and illegal armed groups, and other armed sabotage and terrorist formations. This also applies to the work of the command staff of combined arms formations in assessing the current situation and organizing combat actions.

Combined arms units participating in military conflicts use various forms and methods of action in the defense; on the offense; conducting combat, route, and direct security; enforcing martial law; during administrative movements; maneuvering on the battlefield, when locating targets.

The method of action means the sequence of use of all available forces and means, chosen by the unit commander and approved by the higher-level commander. When combined arms units are saturated with UAVs, unit commanders make changes to all methods of action, thereby achieving high efficiency when performing combat missions.

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In the defense, UAVs conduct the following tasks in support of combined arms units:

- *conduct reconnaissance of enemy targets in front of the forward edge of the defense and in the immediate depths of their combat formations, transmit enemy target coordinates to artillery, combat vehicles, and air defense systems in real time;*
- *support air, missile, artillery and combat vehicle (tanks, infantry fighting vehicles) fires in order to increase their accuracy, increase damage and reduce the combat potential of attacking enemy units;*
- *inflict effective defeat on the opposing group of troops with fires from the defending combined arms formations;*
- *help unit commanders study the terrain in combat areas and assess the nature of the actions of advancing enemy units;*
- *monitor the nature of the actions of the enemy's second echelons and reserves, and changes in the combat area;*
- *control the actions of enemy units, their sabotage, reconnaissance and terrorist groups in the gaps between defensive strongpoints and on the flanks of units;*
- *provide assistance to combat, route, and direct security elements in carrying out their tasks;*

- *intensify electronic warfare against enemy electronic zones in order to disrupt the work of troops and weapons control centers;*
- *perform other tasks in the interests of achieving defensive tasks by combined arms units.*

In the offense, UAVs conduct the following tasks in support of combined arms units:

Laying fires, correcting air and artillery fires, increasing the accuracy of the destruction of targets by determining their coordinates in real time, reducing ammunition consumption, and assisting in creating the required superiority [of forces and means] over the defending enemy. They also help carry out the tasks of assault, raid and encircling detachments to destroy strongpoints, fortified areas (objects) and command posts of the opposing group. Thanks to UAVs, which perform tasks to identify strongpoints, artillery and mortar firing positions, and the nature of the defending enemy's actions, the losses of friendly personnel and equipment in an offensive are significantly reduced.

When combined arms units are on the march, UAVs are used to strengthen route security and inflict preemptive fires on enemy formations that attempt to impede the movement of the column, as well as when encountering an enemy group and conducting meeting combat. When units occupy rest areas, UAVs take an active part in protecting them and repelling surprise enemy attacks...

Notes:

- 1 For additional recent analysis on Russian drone development and operations, see: Dodge Billingsley, "Russia Details Plan To Overcome Military Drone Deficiencies," *OE Watch*, 02-2024. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2024/russia-details-plan-to-overcome-military-drone-deficiencies/>; and Charles Bartles, "Russia Plans To Add Remote Mining UAV Platoons To Engineer Units," *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russia-plans-to-add-remote-mining-uav-platoons-to-engineer-units/>
- 2 Typically, a UAV company for a maneuver brigade or division.
- 3 Moscow uses the term *spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya* ("special military operation") or *spetsoperatsiya* ("special operation") to describe its campaign in Ukraine.

Russian Import-Substitution Impacts Armored Vehicle Production

By MAJ Andrew Fisher
OE Watch Commentary

Recent articles in Russian military publications regarding **Typhoon**¹ armored vehicle production highlight the advantages – and tradeoffs – of import-substitution measures across Russia’s defense industry. Moscow’s inability to import critical components has forced Russian manufacturers to simplify designs and shift component production to domestic manufacturers. According to the Russian military journal *Material’no-technicheskoe obespechenie Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, initial development of the Typhoon series of 4x4 and 6x6 armored vehicles in the 2010s was in response to the Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) order to create vehicles capable of protecting crews on par with foreign offerings through 2020. The Typhoon-K and Typhoon-Y capable of carrying a variety of armaments depending on mission requirements were Russia’s answer to the American-made Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle. Despite their official adoption by the Russian MoD, the number of components of foreign origin prevented mass production of initial models.

The journal further details how the military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 underscored the urgent need for armored transport. While domestic production has been a Russian military focus prior to the Ukrainian



Typhoon K-4386 “Typhoon-VDV” at Armiya-2021. Issues in bringing the Typhoon-VDV to serial production, due to the number of imported components and sophistication in design, illustrates the gap between Russia’s military modernization aspirations and industrial base capabilities.

Source: ROSOBORONEXPORT, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air-droppably_special-purpose_protected_vehicle_%28ZASN-D%29_during_the_%22Armiya_2021%22_exhibition.jpg; Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED

conflict, the war has accelerated import-substitution measures. Using existing multi-purpose vehicle chassis and domestic components, Russian military manufacturers began rapidly producing armored vehicles to meet pressing battlefield needs. However, current Typhoons suffer from reduced payload capacity, mobility, and less protection than initial test models using foreign produced parts. Some variants, such as the Typhoon-VDV, remain in limited production due to continued reliance on foreign parts.

The second excerpted article from the Russian military journal *Armeiskii sbornik* noted the extent of these changes in manufacturing and capability to the current Ground Forces model **BMM**,² the ZCA-T “Linza,” a Typhoon-K variant. The “simplified

chassis” version of the Linza features transmission, transfer block, bridge, power steering, and armor made by domestic manufacturers—primarily KamAZ but lacks a multifunctional command and control terminal. The case of the Typhoon demonstrates the impacts of import-substitution measures on the Russian defense industry and the rapid tradeoffs being made to maintain the current manufacturing tempo.

“Currently, measures are being taken to engage specialized enterprises and organizations in the development and manufacturing of domestic components necessary for the production of protected military vehicles. Solving these issues is now considered by military leadership as one of the priority directions for enhancing combat readiness and reducing combat losses of the troops.”

Source: Evgeniy I. Kotyga, Vasily A. Novikov, Ksenia N. Moskalyuk, “Броня На Колесах (Armor on Wheels),” *Logistics of the Military Forces of the Russian Federation* (Monthly Russian military periodical), No. 4, April 2024. <https://on-demand.eastview.com/browse/publication/144326>

Pg. 75-76: “Following the tests, the protected vehicles OKR “Typhoon-K” and “Typhoon-U” were accepted for supply to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation by orders of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation. However, due to the high complexity of the design and the large number of imported components, they were not mass-produced.

With the beginning of a special military operation, the issue of equipping the forces with protected vehicles became acute. To meet the urgent operational needs of the troops, the production of protected vehicles was organized based on the chassis and components of existing domestic multi-purpose vehicles (similar to unrealized projects with codes “Vodnik,” “Medved,” “Karatel,” etc.).

Pg. 78: “To address technical issues related to “import substitution” in protected vehicles of the “Typhoon-K” 4x4 wheeled formula and “Typhoon-VDV” families, a series of measures have been taken and is currently being implemented in the following main directions:

- Utilization of domestic armored steels, titanium alloys, and composite ceramic panels instead of foreign-produced armor materials like Armox and Plasan.
- Full localization of Cummins engines and ZF transmissions by domestic enterprises.
- Import substitution of automotive components in suspension systems, steering control, electrical equipment, and other vehicle systems and assemblies with domestic counterparts.”

Pg. 80: “The effectiveness of the introduced changes in the design of protected vehicles has been positively evaluated based on the results of the conducted tests. Samples of modernized protected vehicles were accepted for supply to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation at the beginning of 2023. Thus, summing up the creation of new and modernization of existing protected vehicles, it should be noted the effectiveness of measures for ‘import substitution,’ simplification of sample designs, and the use of domestic materials, components, and assemblies, which meets the high demand of the troops for this type of equipment.

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Source: R. Pokutny, R. Kurmaev, V. Stolbunov, “Красный Крест На Броне (A Red Cross on Armor),” *Army Digest* (Monthly Military journal), No. 4 (128-129), April 2024. <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/publication/470>

Pg. 129: However, during the operation of the BMM (Armored Medical Vehicle), a number of shortcomings related to the excessive complexity of the design were identified. Taking into account the changes made (Table 1), on the basis of the ZSA-T “Linza” was created with a simplified design. The goals of creating this modification are to eliminate unnecessary complexity, reduce cost and time indicators at the production and operation stage, and replace imported components with domestic ones.

The main changes to the ZSA-T “Linza” of a simplified design include the use of a single-volume body layout formula with a simultaneous increase in the protection class of the medical department, the provision of a spare wheel, and the installation of a “Tucha” smoke screen system, while BIUS (multifunction command and control system) and ABS (most likely the acronym for “anti-brake system”) are excluded.”

| Changes to ZSA-T “Linza” of Simplified Design | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Part, Unit | Changes Made | |
| | Chassis | Chassis (Simplified) |
| Transmission | Mechanical ZF | Mechanical KamAZ |
| Transfer Case | ZF | KamAZ |
| Bridges | Texelis | KamAZ |
| Power Steering | ZF | KamAZ |
| Armor Steel | ArmoX (Sweden) | Steel-7 (Russia) |
| Frame | With closed side members | With channel-type spars |
| Suspension | Independent Spring | Dependent Spring |
| BIUS | Available | Excluded |
| ABS | Available | Excluded |
| Lighting | LED | Incandescent Lamps |
| Spare Wheel | Absent | Installed |
| Loopholes | None | Installed |
| Installation of “Tucha” smoke screen system | Absent | Installed |

Table 1 – Army Digest

Notes:

- 1 The Typhoon armored vehicle is produced by ROSOBORONEXPORT, a subsidiary of Rostec State Corporation and manufacturer of military equipment across the Russian Ground, Air, Naval, and Air Defense Forces. Products range from the T-90 tank to the Orlan family of UAVs.
- 2 “BMM” is the overarching term in the Russian Ground Forces for armored medical vehicles.

Russian Iskandar Brigade Moves Closer to Finland

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

With the reestablishment of the Leningrad Military District, previously neutral Finland has become a focus of Russian and NATO interests. The excerpted article from Norway-based *The Barents Observer* highlights Russia's decision to form a missile brigade featuring Iskander missiles in the Republic of Karelia, near Finland. Former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu noted that due to Finland's decision to join NATO, and "NATO's desire to build up military potential near the Russian borders, as well as to expand the North Atlantic Alliance at the expense of Finland and Sweden," Russia was required to undertake "retaliatory measures... to create an appropriate grouping of troops in Northwest Russia." Russia's decision to form a missile brigade so close to Finland also coincided with the annual U.S.-led Immediate Response 2024 exercise which took place in northern Europe in April and included Finland. Immediate Response featured U.S. equipment sent to Europe to support the exercise.¹ What probably interests Russia most is how much of what equipment the U.S. leaves behind and where they leave it.



A member of the Finnish Army watches a **K-9 Thunder** 155mm Self-propelled Howitzer drive by after a live fire exercise with U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, on a range near Rovaniemi, Finland, May 17, 2024.

Source: DVIDS, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8418866/northern-forest-exercise>; Attribution: Public Domain

***“Iskanders performed very well during the Special Military Operation [read: war], so the Finns should know that if something happens, such joy can come to them,” military expert Dmitry Boltenkov said to Izvestia.*”**

Source: Thomas Nielsen, “Finland relaxed over Moscow’s plans to deploy Iskander-M missiles near border,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 24 April 2024. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2024/04/finland-relaxed-over-moscows-plans-deploy-iskander-missiles-near-border>

In its Kremlin-loyal newspaper Izvestia the Russian Defense Ministry reports on the new formation of a separate missile brigade in the Republic of Karelia. “Iskanders performed very well during the Special Military Operation [read: war], so the Finns should know that if something happens, such joy can come to them,” military expert Dmitry Boltenkov said to Izvestia.

***Iskander-M** is mobile and each vehicle can carry two missiles. The missile flies ballistic at a hypersonic speed of Mach 6 and has a range of 400-500 kilometers. Several different conventional warheads can be attached to the missiles, including a cluster munitions warhead, enhanced-blast warhead, high-explosive fragmentation warhead, an earth penetrator for bunker busting and an electromagnetic pulse device for anti-radar missions. The missile can also carry nuclear warheads.*

Moscow has repeatedly said Finland’s decision to join NATO is provocative and will destabilize the security landscape in northern Europe. “Given NATO’s desire to build up military potential near the Russian borders, as well as to expand the North

Atlantic Alliance at the expense of Finland and Sweden, retaliatory measures are required to create an appropriate grouping of troops in Northwest Russia,” Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu previously stated.

The fact is that it was Russia’s brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine that destabilized geopolitics in all of Europe. Finnish NATO-membership was not on the political agenda in Helsinki before February 24, 2022.

Finland shares a 1,340 km border with Russia from the Baltic Sea in the south to the Kola Peninsula in the north. The border has been closed by Helsinki since last fall when Russia’s FSB directed huge crowds of migrants to enter Finland in what Finnish authorities have called a hybrid operation....

Finland joined NATO in April 2023, a move that caused Russia to restructure its military forces by depriving the Northern Fleet of the status as a military district. Reestablishing the Leningrad Military District is considered a sign that Russia’s military planners now see the entire western border as one theater of operation in case of war.

Notes:

- 1 Equipment belonging to the US Army 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the 10th Mountain Division has been sent to support Immediate Response 2024 (IR24). The exercise includes allied training in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Czechia and Poland taking place between 21 April - 31 May, according to the Norwegian Armed Forces. See: Atle Staalesen, “US Army sends heavy equipment to Norwegian Arctic port of Narvik for transfer to Finland”, *The Barents Observer*, 24 April 2024. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2024/04/us-army-sends-heavy-equipment-norwegian-arctic-port-narvik-transfer-finland>

Russia Withdraws Its Forces from Nagorno-Karabakh

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

In April 2024, the government of Azerbaijan announced that the Russian peacekeeping mission had started withdrawing personnel, marking one of only a few instances a Russian peacekeeping mission in the Commonwealth of Independent States has ended.¹ The excerpted article from Azerbaijan’s news agency *Trend* reports that the Russian peacekeeping force from Nagorno-Karabakh has relocated to temporary deployment points in Armenia.² Armenia’s Secretary of the Security Council noted that these units cannot remain in Armenia. Lastly, the article notes that Azerbaijan requested the removal of the Russian

peacekeeping force and the Russian government complied but does not mention where Russian personnel will eventually be redeployed.

Additionally, a joint Russia-Turkey observation center in Azerbaijan that once monitored the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has also closed. The excerpted article from Turkey’s state-run *Anadolu Agency* notes that the joint observation center had been based in Azerbaijan since early 2021 as part of an agreement between Russia and Turkey to observe the ceasefire agreement. The article notes that the work of the center is no longer needed since Azerbaijan took full control of Nagorno-Karabakh in

September 2023.³ As a result, Russian and Turkish personnel, 60 from each country, are leaving.

Overall, the total number of Russian personnel redeploying from the peacekeeping mission and the joint monitoring center is not significant but is worth noting as Russia has historically reached agreements to leave some units in place even after a peacekeeping mission has changed or ended. Russia will likely continue to be involved in developments between Armenia and Azerbaijan going forward, but Azerbaijan’s complete takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh frees up Russian forces to use elsewhere, potentially in Ukraine.⁴



Map of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020_Nagorno-Karabakh_war.svg; Attribution: CCA 3.0

“Let us note that a few days ago, the press secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov confirmed the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh.”

Source: Rena Abdurakhmona, “Российские миротворцы направились из Карабаха в Армению (Russian peacekeepers have deployed from Karabakh to Armenia),” *Trend* (news agency in Azerbaijan), 23 April 2024. <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3889409.html>

Russian peacekeepers from Karabakh went to temporary deployment points in Gorus and Garakils (Sisian)...(the) Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia Armen Grigoryan told the Armenian media...

“Since Russian peacekeeping troops are leaving Karabakh, they, of course, cannot remain in the Republic of Armenia either. A group and convoy of peacekeepers from Karabakh headed to temporary deployment points in Goris and Garakils (Sisian),” he said.

Let us note that a few days ago, the press secretary

of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov confirmed the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh.

Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan - Head of the Department for Foreign Policy of the Presidential Administration Hikmet Hajiyev, answering a question from AZERTAG regarding information about the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from the territory of Azerbaijan, said that the top leadership of both countries made a decision on the early withdrawal of peacekeepers...

Source: Ruslan Rehimov, “Turkish-Russian joint center completes mission in Azerbaijan,” *Anadolu Agency* (state-run news agency of Turkey), 26 April 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkish-russian-joint-center-completes-mission-in-azerbaijan/3203012>

The Turkish-Russian joint observation center established in Azerbaijan’s Aghdam region has completed its mission after three years of service.

The center was established to monitor cease-fire and prevent violations after the Second Karabakh War, when Azerbaijan liberated most of the Karabakh region from decades of occupation by Armenia.

Karim Valiyev, Azerbaijan’s chief of general staff, praised the center’s contributions to peace at a ceremony on Friday attended by Azerbaijani, Russian,

and Turkish officials.

Valiyev said Azerbaijan has fully established its sovereignty in Karabakh, and therefore the mission of the monitoring center had been completed...

The center, established near the Marzili village of Aghdam, opened on Jan. 30, 2021, with 60 Turkish and 60 Russian soldiers...Azerbaijan established full sovereignty in Karabakh after an “anti-terrorism operation” in September 2023, after which separatist forces in the region surrendered.

Notes:

- 1 The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is made up of former Soviet Republics and remains an area where the Russian government has special relationships and works to maintain influence. Russian peacekeeping missions in the CIS in the past have typically been open-ended with Russian forces remaining in place in some capacity, which has allowed Russia to maintain influence. The Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping mission to Kazakhstan in January 2022 marks the other example of Russian forces ending a peacekeeping mission in the CIS and withdrawing its forces. For background on Russian peacekeeping missions in the CIS, see: Matthew Stein, "The Evolutionary Russian View of Peacekeeping as Part of Modern Warfare," *FMSO's Foreign Perspectives Brief*, 24 March 2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/2023-03-24-the-evolutionary-russian-view-of-peacekeeping-as-part-of-modern-warfare-matthew-stein-update/>
- 2 The Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh deployed in November 2020 as part of the Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan that ended the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. The peacekeeping force included around 2,000 Russian personnel, who established two dozen observation posts in Nagorno-Karabakh to monitor the ceasefire under a five-year mandate that would automatically renew for an additional five years unless Armenia or Azerbaijan gave notice to the other two parties to the agreement to terminate the mission.
- 3 In September 2023, Azerbaijani forces carried out an operation in Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in Azerbaijan regaining full control of the region from ethnic Armenians and ended the existence of the self-proclaimed breakaway region of Artsakh. The Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh closed a few observation posts following the September 2023 operation, but remained largely in place with the consent and cooperation of Azerbaijani authorities.
- 4 Russian peacekeepers dealt with several ceasefire violations from both sides in the years since then and notably allowed activists from Azerbaijan to blockade the Lachin Corridor, the single road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, starting in December 2022 until September 2023. For background on the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, see: Matthew Stein, "Ongoing Clashes In Nagorno-Karabakh Threaten Fragile Truce," *OE Watch*, 05-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/ongoing-clashes-in-nagorno-karabakh-threaten-fragile-truce/>

Russia Redeploys Military Police to Southern Syria

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

After over a year of absence, Russian forces have returned to Syrian territory near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, in theory, to curb spillovers of violence from Israel to Syria. Russia's deployments to date have largely been symbolic, including occasional aerial patrols and the establishment of three military police observation posts in the Syrian provinces of Quneitra and Daraa, near the buffer zone separating Syria and Israel. As reported in the first accompanying article from the Syrian opposition news website *Enab Baladi*, Russia established its third observation post in the area in early April 2024, after establishing two similar posts in January.

Southern Syria is often considered the cradle of the Syrian civil war, and was a hardened rebel bastion for several years. Daraa province remained highly volatile until Russian-sponsored settlements with rebel groups in 2018 stabilized local security conditions. With a modicum of peace achieved, Russian presence and influence in this part of Syria dwindled beginning in 2018 while



Map showing Syria, Israel, and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (1991).
Source: https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-pclmaps-oclc-25871248-golan_heights-1991.jpg; Attribution: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, Public Domain

“The [Russian] Military Police has set up an additional post near the buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights.”

Iranian-backed Syrian government forces and militias strengthened their grip in former rebel territory. Following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian forces all but disappeared from southern Syria, allowing Iranian militias to expand their influence in the area, often through local proxies and under the cover of Syrian Army forces.¹ Iranian influence in Syrian territory close to Israel has become a source of heightened concern not just for Israel but also for Russia, which fears that Gaza spillover could threaten Syria’s delicate status quo.

In the months following the 7 October attack, Russia successfully blocked Iranian attempts to launch attacks from southern Syria in support of Hamas in Gaza per the second accompanying excerpt, published in January 2024 in the Qatari-aligned *al-Araby al-Jadeed*. The redeployment of Russian military police to this part of Syria may therefore be seen as bolstering Russia’s ability to continue preventing escalation on this front. Indeed, Russia’s observation posts have all been set up in the aftermath of Israeli assassinations of high-ranking Iranian officials in Syrian territory: the first two posts were set up in the weeks following the killing of General Razi Mousavi in late December 2023, and the third one the day after General Mohammad Reza Zahedi was killed in April 2024. Russia’s return to southern Syria is less about supporting Iran against Israel than it is about deterring Tehran’s use of Syrian

soil to respond to Israeli attacks on Iranian personnel in Syria notwithstanding the deepening Russo-Iranian strategic cooperation.

However, experts are skeptical of Russia’s ability to succeed. According to Mustafa al-Naimi, a Turkey-based Syrian analyst cited in the third accompanying excerpt, also from *Enab Baladi*, Russia’s efforts are bound to fail. Even if it succeeds in preventing Iran from opening the Syria front against Israel, Russia will be unable to remove Iranian influence from the area, given that its proxies will simply “return to the region wearing the uniform of the Syrian regime.” As such, al-Naimi conjectures, Russia’s symbolic redeployment near the Syria-Israel border is unlikely to do anything other than postpone the inevitable: an expansion of the Gaza conflict into southern Syria.

Source: “Russia establishes third military post on borders of occupied Golan Heights,” *Enab Baladi* English (Syrian opposition English-language news website), 2 April 2024. <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/04/russia-establishes-third-military-post-on-borders-of-occupied-golan-heights/>

The Deputy Chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria (a division of the Russian Ministry of Defense), Major General Yury Popov, stated that the Military Police has set up an additional post near the buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan

Heights... This Syrian military post is the third of its kind established since the beginning of the current year, after Russia reduced its deployment in southern Syria at the beginning of 2022 following its invasion of neighboring Ukraine.

Source:

“What are Russia’s goals in setting up observation posts in Quneitra?” *Al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 6 January 2024. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics>

[Researcher Rachid] Hourani added to Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that, after the launch of the Israeli military operation against the Gaza Strip, Iran tried to activate several fronts based on the principle of “unifying the arenas.” There were several visits by Iranian military officials to Syria with the aim of opening that front, but they did not amount to much due to Russian rejection and its tendency to use the so-called “Iranian card” and control Tehran’s behavior in Syria.

Hourani considered that Russia can actually curb

ما أهداف روسيا من نشر نقاط مراقبة في القنيطرة؟

Iran in southern Syria “because it fully controls the military decision-making in regime areas, in addition to being a major party to the understandings related to Israel’s security threats from Syria, such as the settlement agreement with the Syrian opposition factions in mid-2018 and the Israeli-American-Russian security meeting that took place in mid-2019”...

Source:

“What is behind Russia’s setting up military posts on the occupied Golan border?” *Enab Baladi* (Syrian opposition news website), 14 January 2024. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/682917>

Mustafa Al-Naimi, a researcher on Iranian affairs, told Enab Baladi, “We are facing a scene of gradual escalation from both the Iranian and Israeli sides.” Al-Naimi believes that the Russian side is trying to reposition itself to ward off any attempt by the Israeli side to advance on the ground along this front by, at the very least, removing the Iranian militias from the southern region adjacent to the Golan.

He added that this measure will not work for these

militias, because they will return to the region wearing the uniform of the Syrian regime... because of this and the fact that the Israeli side does not trust that Russia has the ground forces needed to control the region at a depth of 45 kilometers, al-Naimi suggests that these measures are “postponing the battle, not preventing it.”

Notes

- 1 For more on the 2018 agreement, see: Armenak Tokmajyan. “A Flashpoint Looms in Southern Syria,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 26 March 2024. <https://carnegie-mec.org/middle-east/diwan/2024/04/a-flashpoint-looms-in-southern-syria?lang=en¢er=middle-east>. For more on post-Ukraine Russian and Iranian presence in Syria, see: Lucas Winter, “Iran Repositions Its Proxies In Syria As Russia Turns Focus To Ukraine,” *OE Watch*, 02-2024. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2022/iran-repositions-its-proxies-in-syria-as-russia-turns-focus-to-ukraine/>; Lucas Winter, “Iran Digs Into Central Syria, Filling Vacuum Left By Russia,” *OE Watch*, May 2022. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2022/iran-digs-into-central-syria-filling-vacuum-left-by-russia/>; Lucas Winter, “Russian Influence Fades In Southern Syria,” *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/russian-influence-fades-in-southern-syria/>

Revisiting Russian “Africa Corps” Organizational Structure

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Following the death of Russian Wagner Group founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in a suspicious airplane crash near Moscow in 2023, reports have emerged that his successor is Russian Deputy Defense Minister, General Yunus-Bek Evkurov.¹ However, in Africa, the mercenary company’s operation is rebranding as “Africa Corps” whereas the company’s operations elsewhere in the world seem to be retaining the Wagner brand. This new branding may help the company avoid the stigma of its Wagner predecessors for war crimes and smuggling and reduce international pressure against the company in Africa.

The excerpted French-language article in the Chadian publication, *alwihdainfo.com*, is an African perspective of the differences between Russia’s Africa Corps and its predecessor Wagner Group. The article acknowledges that Africa Corps is the successor to Wagner Group with important differences. First, it notes that Africa Corps is intended to legitimize the Russian military influence on the African continent while competing with the diminishing presence of the U.S. and European powers. Second, Africa Corps may have a smaller footprint than Wagner in Africa. For example, the article mentions it operates only in Libya, inheriting Wagner’s main

bases and most of Wagner’s fighters; Burkina Faso; Mali; Central African Republic and Niger. According to the article, Libya’s position on the Mediterranean Sea facilitates military supply lines and the movement of Africa Corps personnel into Africa. The previous iteration of Wagner had also operated extensively in Sudan and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in Eastern Africa, including Mozambique and Madagascar.²

Another difference highlighted in the article relates to the way that Africa Corps will operate. Africa Corps is now focusing on providing military support to African countries through instructors, weapons, and developing counter-terrorism strategies with host nations in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Defense. In

contrast, Wagner soldiers directly participated in missions against terrorist or insurgent groups and functioned separate from, albeit in support of, the Russian government.

The article indicates that the new Africa Corps will be more sustainable than the previous Wagner Group because of Africa Corps’ formal integration with the Russian state, and the ministry of defense. Further the ministry’s commitment to Africa Corps indicates that Russia is serious about its geopolitical ambitions in West Africa and Africa Corps’ impact on the region will not be fleeting. At a time when Western influence and partnerships with West African states are waning, Africa Corps is becoming the entity through which Russia will reassert itself.



Russian Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-Bek Evkurov (left) is heading the newly formed Africa Corps, which under his leadership is set to become a key entity through which the Russian state will project power in West Africa.

Source: kremlin.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deputy_Defence_Minister_Yunus-Bek_Yevkurov_and_Wagner_leader_Andrei_Troshev.jpg; Attribution: CC x4.0

Source: “De ‘Wagner’ à ‘Africa Corps’: la Russie toujours présente au Sahel (From ‘Wagner’ to ‘Africa Corps’: Russia always is present in the Sahel),” *alwihdainfo.com* (French-language Chadian publication with a reputation for independent reporting and being critical of the government), 3 May 2024. https://www.alwihdainfo.com/De-Wagner-a-Africa-Corps-la-Russie-toujours-presente-au-Sahel_a132053.html

Recently, many people have been curious about the difference between the Russian paramilitary group “Wagner” and the “Africa Corps”, which newly appeared on the African scene and which was also founded in Russia to be deployed in African countries. In this analysis, we will seek to explain the difference between the two organizations, how and where they operate, and what their ambitions are in Africa.

Africa Corps is a Russian military company that was created in early 2024 as a replacement for the Wagner Group. This organization reflects Russia’s desire to extend its military influence on the African continent and to provide legitimacy to its official and public presence in the face of the European and American presence. Africa Corps is deployed in 5 countries: Libya, Burkina Faso, Mali, Central African Republic

and Niger. Libya represents the core of the corps due to the previous activity of Wagner elements in the city of Tripoli.... Another factor in the choice of Libya as the headquarters of this corps is its strategic geographical location due to its connection with the Mediterranean coast, which ensures military supply lines and movement of corps members to other countries.

The Africa Corps’ modus operandi is entirely dependent on providing military support to African countries such as instructors and weapons. The company also is concerned with the development of strategies in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense, such as is the case in Mali and Niger... In short, the Africa Corps represents the new incarnation of Russian military influence in Africa.

Notes:

- 1 Since the death of Russian Wagner Group founder and CEO, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in a suspicious airplane crash near Moscow in 2023, reports have emerged that his successor is Russian Deputy Defense Minister, General Yunus-Bek Evkurov. For a profile of Evkurov, which argues that he “has the full backing of Russia’s military establishment and will not have to beg for ammunition or restrict himself to the use of contractors and mercenaries,” see: Andrew McGregor, “Yunus-Bek Evkurov: A Profile of Russia’s New Ingush African Corps Leader,” *Militant Leadership Monitor*, Volume: 15 Issue: 3, 18 April 2024. (URL?) The article notes that under Evkurov “the Africa Corps will have greater access to resources, but will be expected to be self-sufficient in many ways. This means Wagner-style associations with business interests will likely continue, although disentangling these interests from the Wagner network will be challenging.” In addition, it asserts that “Improving battlefield performance will be a priority for Evkurov. Thus far, Russian fighters have not proven any more effective in eliminating Sahelian terrorist formations than their French predecessors.”
- 2 See, for example, Brian Katz, Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, Nicholas Harrington, “Moscow’s Mercenary Wars: The Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies,” CSIS, September 2020, <https://russianpmcs.csis.org/>

Iran To Cooperate With Russia On Gas Infrastructure and Trade

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iran has the world's third-largest proven oil reserves and, even under sanctions, remains one of the top ten world producers. Yet Iran's gas industry lags far behind its oil extraction capabilities due to an antiquated refinery and pipeline network. Iran must import much of the gas that it utilizes both to fuel transportation needs and to inject into oil fields to facilitate extraction. Iran is increasingly looking to Russia, for assistance.

The excerpted report from Iran-focused Dubai-based brokerage *PCM Farsi*, addresses a meeting between Hossein Ali Mohammad Hosseini, the director of the Corporate Planning of the National Iranian Gas Company, and Russian energy officials. Hosseini's comments that Russia and Iran might cooperate regarding gas infrastructure modernization reflects the government's commercial agenda: if the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-linked National Iranian Gas Company can curb losses attributable to waste, then it will not need to spend as much to import refined gasoline.¹

The report also notes the vulnerability of Iran's gas infrastructure. Iran has blamed Israel, without evidence, for a February 2024 explosion on



Iran's gas infrastructure remains both antiquated and inefficient.

Source: Mojtaba Mohammadgholi, Shana Photo, <https://media.shana.ir/d/2023/08/20/3/392725.jpg?ts=1692521593000>;
Attribution: Shana.ir

“[Mohammad Hosseini] expressed Iran’s readiness to expand its cooperation with Russia to improve the safety of gas facilities against sabotage and terrorist attacks.”

a major pipeline. In the wake of the Woman, Life, Freedom protests, there have been numerous other gas infrastructure explosions across the country according to reports and social media discussions by ordinary Iranians. Many of these incidents go unreported, while the official Iranian media often dismisses the reported incidents as accidents, or the result of illegal tapping of gas lines to steal petrol. To acknowledge openly the

need to work with Russia against gas infrastructure sabotage and terrorism suggests that the Iranian gas industry officials do not fully believe the more innocent explanations from their government. Given the importance of hydrocarbons to Iran's economy, a faltering gas infrastructure and any vulnerability to sabotage, vandalism, or insurgency could disproportionately affect Iran's economy and potentially its military readiness.

Source:

تهران و مسکو همکاری‌های خود را در زمینه فناوری گاز گسترش می‌دهند" (Tehran and Moscow expanding their cooperation in the field of gas technology)," *PCM Farsi* (Persian language portal of Dubai-based PCM Brokerage), 14 May 2024. <https://pcmfa.news/2024/05/14/11977/>

Mohammad Hosseini mentioned the desire for Iran to expand relations with Russia in the energy sector, and said his country welcomes the proposal of the Ministry of Energy of Russia to hold a specialized meeting on digitization, monitoring, and data analysis at the Russian Energy Week, as well as at the St. Petersburg Energy Congress. In his remarks, the director of the

National Iranian Gas Company stressed the need to share common experiences in area such as reducing the amount of gas loss, and he expressed Iran's readiness to expand its cooperation with Russia to improve the safety of gas facilities against sabotage and terrorist attacks.

Notes:

- 1 For discussion of Iran's efforts for gasoline self-sufficiency, see: Michael Rubin, "Achieving Gasoline Self-Sufficiency in Iran," *OE Watch*, August 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/241432/download>

Iranian Commander Threatens Pursuit of Nuclear Weapon

By Holly Dagues
OE Watch Commentary

On 18 April 2024, Ahmad Haghtalab, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander the head of security for Iran’s nuclear sites, declared on *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting*, that “If the fake Zionist regime [of Israel] wants to use the threat of attacking nuclear sites to put pressure on Iran, it is possible and conceivable for [Iran] to revise its nuclear doctrine and policies, and deviate from its past declared considerations.” Haghtalab also threatened that if Israel attacked Iran, Tehran has identified Israeli nuclear sites and would respond in kind in the vein of Operation True Promise. This refers to Iran’s 13 April retaliation after Israel’s strike and killing of several high-ranking IRGC commanders at the Iranian embassy

“If the false Zionist regime wants to exploit the threat of attacking our country’s nuclear centers as a tool to put pressure on Iran, it is possible and conceivable to revise the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear doctrine and policies to deviate from previously declared considerations.”



“IRGC Commander Ahmad Haghtalab delivering speech,” IRIB video screenshot, 18 April 2024.

Source: <https://www.iribnews.ir/00Hf4p>; Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

compound in Damascus, Syria earlier in the month.

Other Iranian officials have also made public comments in recent months about the revision of the country’s nuclear doctrine. As per the second excerpted article, the IRGC-affiliated *Javan* newspaper noted that Haghtalab’s comments regarding Iran’s possible nuclear pivot were the first made by a high-ranking IRGC official and were made with “co-ordination with top decision-making bodies.” Iran appears to be testing the world stage, and with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in shambles,¹ Tehran may be preparing to fully pursue its nuclear program. Indeed, Iran has been incrementally pulling away from the JCPOA and is now enriching uranium at 60 percent purity—short of the 90 percent purity required to be weapons-grade.² In

strategic terms, a nuclear weapon could also be considered a deterrent against forced regime change, and the ailing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, now 85, may be thinking about Iran’s survival post-mortem. Whatever the rationale, the renewed discussions of a nuclear revival merit attention.

Source:

مراکز هسته ای کشور در امنیت کامل هستند

(Nuclear centers of the country are completely safe)” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 18 April 2024. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00Hf4p>

Chief Ahmad Haghtalab, pointing to the Zionist regime’s criminal act by attacking the consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the country of Syria, has stamped out international laws and regulations...

The IRGC commander of the protection and security of the country’s nuclear centers, emphasizing that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are fully ready, noted: the nuclear sites of the Zionist enemy have the necessary identification and information and is at our disposal, and so to respond to their possible action. Our hands are on the trigger of firing powerful

missiles to destroy specified targets.

He said that if the Zionist regime wants to take action against our nuclear centers and facilities, it will definitely and certainly be faced with our reaction...

If the false Zionist regime wants to exploit the threat of attacking our country’s nuclear centers as a tool to put pressure on Iran, it is possible and conceivable to revise the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear doctrine and policies to deviate from previously declared considerations.

Source:

اسرائیل تهدید اتمی مقام رسمی سپاه را جدی بگیرد

(Israel must take the nuclear threat of the IRGC official seriously)” *Javan* newspaper (daily newspaper closely tied to IRGC), 18 April 2024. <https://www.javanonline.ir/0058dL>

These statements, which are made for the first time by a senior IRGC official, are of serious importance in some ways...

Israel must take the message of this IRGC commander seriously because the red line of any country is its national security, and if Iran sees that its conventional weapons cannot provide security for

its nuclear facilities, it may reconsider its defense and nuclear doctrines...

Certainly this comment, which is widely published by the Islamic Republic’s official media, was not without coordination with the higher decision-making bodies of this system.

Notes:

- 1 In 2015, five world powers plus Germany signed what became known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which curbed Iran’s controversial nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 14 July 2015. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/joint-comprehensive-plan-action_en
- 2 In 2018 the Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 JCPOA deal and reimposed sanctions, despite Tehran having not violating the agreement at the time. See: “President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal,” White House, 8 May 2018. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/>; Francois Murphy, “Iran undoes slowdown in enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade -IAEA,” *Reuters*, 26 December 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-undoes-slowdown-enrichment-uranium-near-weapons-grade-iaea-2023-12-26/>



◀ “Photo of commander-in-chief of the army (Artesh), Sayyed Abdolrahim Mousavi,” Iranian Online (semi-official news agency affiliated with IRNA), Unknown.

Source: <https://inn.ir/news/article/6502>; Attribution: CCA-SA 4.0 Intl.

Iran’s Army Chief Claims It Is Accelerating Israel’s Destruction

By Holly Dagues
OE Watch Commentary

Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Army, Sayyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, recently declared on *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* that “just like the resistance of the people of

Gaza... Operation True Promise also created a strategic movement in the world.” Mousavi was referring to Iran’s retaliatory attack against Israel on 13 April in response to the Israeli air strike on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus, Syria that killed senior members of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps’ (IRGC) Quds Force earlier that month.¹ Mousavi highlighted how the history of the world had been divided before and after Iran’s operation against Israel.² Referencing comments by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Mousavi emphasized that Israel’s destruction would come in the next twenty-five years and was only accelerated by

the events of the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 as well as Operation True Promise, because the latter chipped away at Israel’s security and invigorated political divisions within Israeli society.

“History is divided into two eras, before and after Operation True Promise.”

Of note, Iran’s 13 April attack brought Israel and Iran out of their forty-five-year shadow war, which had been marked by assassinations, cyberattacks, and sabotage. Israel’s subsequent attack on Iran on 19 April restored deterrence for the time being, but Israel’s limited response—destroying an **S-300** air defense system, demonstrating Israel’s ability to attack and take out Iranian air defense—has given Iran’s clerics the space to contin-

ue making bold statements at a time when regional tensions are at an all-time high, and when miscalculation is always a possibility.³

Source:

(The world is divided between before and after ‘True Promise’ operation),” *Iranians Students’ News Agency* (ISNA), 9 May 2024. <https://www.isna.ir/news/1403022014474>

دنيا به قبل و بعد از عمليات «وعده صادق» تقسيم شده است

The commander in chief of the army said: History is divided into two eras, before and after Operation True Promise. Just like how al-Aqsa Storm and the resistance of the people of Gaza took the world in a new direction, Operation True Promise also created a strategic movement in the world.

Today (May 9), Commander Sayyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, on the sidelines of awarding the medal of sacrifice presented by the commander-in-chief to the families of martyrs in the presence of journalists, spoke about the achievements of the army in the country: In the constitution it is emphasized that the army is popular. The army is national capital that belongs to the people of Iran, and wherever the country needs, the army will act.

He continued: *If there’s a threat in the skies, the army will fulfill its duties. If needed in the sea, it will raise the proud flag of the Islamic Republic. If a conflict arises, they will fulfill their duty. Air defense forces are a broad umbrella in the sky that will constantly defend the country...*

The commander-in-chief of the army added: *As the Supreme Leader predicted, the Zionist regime (Israel) will not see the next 25 years, with al-Aqsa Storm and Operation True Promise this issue will accelerate, and it is likely that the life of this illegitimate regime will end sooner so that the whole world can be saved from this cancerous tumor.*

Notes:

- 1 “Iran says Israel bombs its embassy in Syria, kills commanders,” Reuters, 1 April 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-bombs-iran-embassy-syria-iranian-commanders-among-dead-2024-04-01/>; Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “What We Know About Iran’s Attack on Israel and What Happens Next,” *New York Times*, 14 April 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/14/world/middleeast/iran-israel-drones-attack.html>
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Jon Gambrell, “Satellite photos suggest Iran air defense radar struck in Isfahan during apparent Israeli attack,” *Associated Press*, 22 April 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/iran-israel-s300-radar-hit-isfahan-attack-ce6719d3df8ebf5af08b035427ee215c>

Iran Seeks To Cultivate Pakistani and Kurdish Support

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

While Tehran propagating anti-Israeli vitriol is neither new nor remarkable, its choice about where to direct that propaganda does signal those people that the Iranian regime seeks to cultivate as allies. As reported by *Dolat.ir*, a government information center, the high-profile annual Tehran International Book Fair recently featured an updated collection of Khamenei’s writings and speeches about Israel and the Palestinians, dating to 1979.¹ Iranian press attention on translations of Khamenei’s writing on the Palestinians into both Urdu and Kurdish suggests renewed efforts by Khamenei to influence both Pakistani and Kurdish audiences. Over the past two decades, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) has expanded its so-called “Axis of Resistance” to include not only Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad’s Syrian

regime, but also Iraqi militias and Houthi tribesmen in Yemen. In the early 1980s, the IRGC tried and failed to create a Hezbollah-like movement among Pakistani Shi’ites akin to its organization of Lebanese Shi’ites.

“Freedom fighters around the world will become familiar with the contents of this book.”

The effort to proselytize and disseminate Khamenei’s views to a Pakistani audience may suggest a renewed effort to cultivate the general Pakistani population. Such outreach would not limit itself to Pakistani Shi’ites but would seek to use Khamenei’s anti-Israel credentials to bolster Iran’s broader foreign policy leadership.²

The Iranian emphasis on cultivating Kurds suggests an effort to expand the Iranian regime’s influence among a population that has both been resistant to Khamenei’s worldview and has also cooperated closely with the U.S. military. While Iran maintains an open presence in Iraqi Kurdistan, the United States maintains a more overt presence. Both Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurdish-dominated Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria impede the IRGC’s “land bridge” between Iran and the Eastern Mediterranean. Flipping the Kurds may not be imminent in the short-term, but Iran tends to play the long game.

International Department of the Islamic Revolution Cultural & Research Institute unveils translations of Ali Khamenei’s book *Palestine* at the Tehran International Book Fair, May 10, 2024.

Source: <https://cdn-english.khamenei.ir/d/2024/05/11/3/40662.jpg>; Attribution: Khamenei.ir



Source:

کتاب «فلسطین؛ از منظر حضرت آیت‌الله سید علی خامنه‌ای» خشم نخست وزیر اسرائیل را موجب شد

(The book *Palestine* from the perspective of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, angered the Prime Minister of Israel.)” *Dolat.ir* (Government Information Center of the Islamic Republic of Iran), 11 May 2024. <https://dolat.ir/detail/448480>

The book Palestine is a compilation of descriptions, analyses, and proposed solutions by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the issue of Palestine. Given the significance and influential position of Imam Khamenei’s perspective on the Palestinian matter, and the unique current circumstances, this book has been translated and made available in various languages such as Arabic, English, Russian, Turkish, and other languages....

Hujjat al-Islam Saeed Solh-Mirzaei, a member of the Assembly of Experts said, “Due to the importance of Palestine for Urdu and Kurdish speakers, this book has been translated into these two languages, and it is hoped that all Muslims and freedom fighters around the world will become familiar with the contents of this book and fulfill their duties towards Palestine. God willing, they will soon pray together in gratitude in the noble Al-Qods.”

Notes:

- 1 *Filistin az manzar-i Ayatullah Khamini’i* (Palestine from the Perspective of His Holiness Ayatollah Khamenei), Tehran: Islamic Revolution Publication, 2011.
- 2 For discussion of Iranian efforts to create Afghan and Pakistani militias, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran Praises Revolutionary Guards’ Proxy Afghan Brigade,” *OE Watch*, 03-2023 <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/iran-praises-revolutionary-guards-proxy-afghan-brigade/>; and Michael Rubin, “Cleric Speaks on Iran’s Foreign Militias,” *OE Watch*, February 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/266059/download>

Mali Launches Successful Counterterrorism Operations



Assimi Goita, the current leader of Mali.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assimi_Goita,_August_2021.png; Attribution: Public Domain

By Christopher Betts
OE Watch Commentary

The Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) recently publicized a series of successful counterterrorism operations against armed extremist groups throughout the country. According to the first excerpted article from Arabic-language Moroccan electronic newspaper *Tamaghrabit*, FAMA announced that it had successfully eliminated Abu Hudhayfah, a former Polisario Front separatist and one of the leaders of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Prior to his time with the ISGS, Hudhayfah was allegedly trained by the Algerian Army and his joint affiliation has signaled a connection between separatist and terrorist organizations in the region.

Hudhayfah was also suspected to have assisted with attacks on U.S. and Nigerian forces in Niger in 2017. Mali and the greater Sahel region have faced a significant and sustained threat from armed extremist groups for multifaceted reasons ranging from weak governmental leadership, less international counterterrorism support, and instability in neighboring nations.¹ Although Hudhayfah will undoubtedly be replaced, the FAMA's successful operation against ISGC is a needed disruption and morale boost for local forces.

“The FAMA will relentlessly continue their mission of protecting populations throughout the national territory, reassures the Army.”

Following FAMA's successful operation against Hudhayfah, the Malian military claimed several other successful counterterrorism operations throughout the Diafarabé area, Ségou region. According to the second excerpted article from Burkina Faso's French-language independent newspaper, *24heures*, the General Staff of the Armed Forces announced air strikes and ground operations that targeted training camps and logistical bases near Nouh Bozo, a village in

the center of the country located along the bank of the Niger River. Before kinetic operations, FAMA used information derived from “specialized services” to conduct surveillance and reconnaissance on each target. It was believed that the unnamed terrorist organizations operating the camps intended to “transform the area into sanctuaries to prepare their dark actions against the populations and store their logistics there.” In addition to the destruction of training camps and logistical storage areas, FAMA claimed to have destroyed fuel shipments destined for terrorist organizations throughout the country.

The security situation in the Sahel continues to be plagued with instability and terrorism. External players like Russia continue to garner influence in the region. With U.S. troops withdrawing from neighboring Niger, the forces to counter a growing terrorist threat in the Sahel are even more sparse. Mali's ability to independently conduct kinetic operations against high-value targets may indicate a renewed focus on securing their nation, which could have a positive impact across the region.

Source:

الجيش المالي يعلن القضاء على الانفصالي "أبو حذيفة" ويؤكد علاقة البوليساريو بالإرهاب
(The Malian army announces the elimination of the separatist "Abu Hudhayfah" and confirms the Polisario's relationship with terrorism)," *Tamaghrabit* (Moroccan newspaper), 1 May 2024. <https://www.tamaghrabit.com/?p=19302>

The Malian army announced the elimination of the former Polisario Front separatist and leader of ISIS in the Sahara region, called "Abu Hudhayfah" and nicknamed "Hugo," in a qualitative operation in northern Mali.

It is noteworthy that "Abu Hudhayfah" had previously received intensive training in the Tindouf camps under the supervision of Algerian army officers... before he was sent to northern Mali to join what calls itself the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. He will then be succeeded by Adnan Abu Al-Walid Sahrawi, who was in turn a leader in the

Polisario terrorist organization, before leading ISIS.

The liquidation of the so-called "Abu Hudhayfah" confirms Morocco's view that the terrorist phenomenon and the separatist phenomenon are linked, and that terrorism is a form of secession... given that terrorist organizations seek to establish political entities on the outskirts of countries where the security focus is less... and thus create "zones of savagery." "It is managed to reach what is called in the organizational literature the "empowerment stage."

Source: "Des regroupements de terroristes identifiés et traités avec succès (Groups of terrorists identified and successfully treated)," *24heures* (Burkina Faso newspaper), 9 May 2024. <https://www.24heures.bf/mali-des-regroupements-de-terroristes-identifies-et-traites-avec-succes-communique/>

The harvest seems good for the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA). From May 6 to 8, they began a "hunt" against armed terrorist groups in several parts of the country. Several terrorists have been "neutralized" according to a press release from the General Staff of the Armed Forces dated May 8. A "major local terrorist leader" was also reportedly killed.

"Based on information obtained by specialized services, the FAMA has been carrying out an active surveillance and reconnaissance campaign for several days in the Diafarabé area, Ségou region," indicates the General Staff of the Armed Forces. This requires, he says, careful work and patience. These operations led to the location and identification of several fallback bases located in forest areas. According to the Malian Army, armed terrorist groups plan to transform this area into sanctuaries. To prepare their

"dark actions against the populations and store their logistics there." Air strikes followed by ground action targeted training camps and logistical bases around Nouh Bozo, on the right bank of the Niger River, on May 6 and 7, 2024.

"The FAMA will relentlessly continue their mission of protecting populations throughout the national territory," reassures the Army.

The Malian Forces are thus on the hunt for armed terrorist groups who sow terror and desolation both within the Defense and Security Forces and among civilians. In this context, several air and land operations are carried out in several parts of the national territory. This Sahel country also intends, in its drive to fight terrorism, to cut off the sources of fuel supply for armed groups.

Notes:

- 1 Mali has faced multiple radical Islamist factions, including Al-Qaeda's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), and the Islamic State's Islamic State in Greater Sahara affiliate branches, which have been responsible for numerous deadly attacks throughout the country and have even been able to control territory. The Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker published a detailed background and analysis on violent extremism in the Sahel to provide contextual information on the issues faced in Mali and neighboring nations. See: "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," *Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventative Action*, Updated 14 February 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>

West African Joint Task Force’s “Psychological” Approach Sees Increased Boko Haram Defections

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

In February 2024, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF)¹ launched Operation Nashrul Salam to dislodge Boko Haram from its bases around Lake Chad in the border region between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Although operations with similar objectives have been carried out regularly for several years,² the MNJTF has renewed hopes that this time the operation will be more lasting and decisive. The excerpted article in *Daily Nigerian* from 3 May detailed the MNJTF’s optimism about the operation, and highlighted how it differs from previous operations, namely in its use of psychological operations.

According to the article, written by the MNJTF chief of military public

information, Lieutenant Colonel Abubakar Abdullahi, the Lake Chad basin region is the lynchpin of security in West Africa. This was home to some 30 million people until Boko Haram launched an insurgency in 2010 that created widespread unrest and displacement in the region. This time, to dislodge Boko Haram, the MNJTF is not relying on the “hard approach” to countering terrorism³ but rather on what Abdullahi describes as a psychological operation.

“The success of Operation Nashrul Salam underscores the effectiveness of psychological operations in counter-terrorism efforts.”

The operation involved dropping fliers over islands where Boko Haram has hideouts in Kanuri, Hausa, Arabic, French, and English, the five languages spoken around Lake Chad. According to the article, many Boko Haram members surrendered after receiving information about how to defect and enter rehabilitation programs. The article also credits another non-kinetic program called Quick Impact Projects for assisting large numbers of villagers from the Chadian portion of Lake Chad to return to their home villages. MNJTF then provides security so the villagers can recommence their fishing activities and regain their livelihoods. In total, 95 Quick Impact Projects have been implemented in 31 villages, which have impacted an estimated 3,200 people.

While Abdullahi may have embellished the success of the operations, the article illustrates that the MNJTF is prioritizing “soft approaches” to counter-terrorism. Such approaches have long been called for by civil society as a complement to the MNJTF and Lake Chad basin region armies’ own kinetic operations and will likely be considered a welcome development.



◀ Major General Ibrahim Sallau Ali commands the MNJTF and greets officers from contributing states.

Source: NAweb, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gen_Ali_with_the_MNJTF.jpg; Attribution: CC x 2.0

Source: “How troops of MNJTF are progressing towards Lake Chad Basin stabilization,” *Daily Nigerian* (English and Hausa-language newspaper covering important matters affecting Nigeria, including corruption and military affairs), 8 May 2024. https://dailynigerian.com/troops-mnjtf/#google_vignette

The Lake Chad Basin serves as lifeblood for tens of millions, a unique ecological sanctuary, and a lynchpin in regional stability. Amidst its abundant resources, however, the region has faced its share of turmoil, exacerbated by the shadow of Boko Haram and other insurgent groups.

Enter the MNJTF, a coalition of forces from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin Republic, established with the purpose of counteracting the threat posed by these insurgent groups. Its multifaceted approach, combining kinetic and non-kinetic efforts, has proven effective. Notable successes include the dislodgement of insurgents from its strongholds, rescue of hostages, and reductions in the frequency and severity of attacks in the region. Moreover, the MNJTF has played a major role in facilitating the return of displaced persons and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected areas.

The MNJTF has conducted Operation Nashrul

Salam, a non-kinetic approach to break the cycle of terror. This psychological operation was tailored to foster surrender and disrupt unity among the terrorist factions. Operation Nashrul Salam disseminated messages across the Lake Chad region in 5 languages, Kanuri, Hausa, Arabic, French, and English, to ensure widespread comprehension. These tailored messages were air-dropped over specific islands known to harbour terrorists, targeting them directly in their hideouts. The operation’s impact was profound, culminating in a significant number of terrorists surrendering.

The MNJTF has executed Quick Impact Projects throughout the four sectors of the MNJTF. In particular, after successful kinetic operations, over 3,200 residents of the Bagatelerom community in Chad have returned to their ancestral homes, with MNJTF personnel assisting their resettlement in partnership with relevant agencies.

Notes:

- 1 The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprises the four Lake Chad basin states, including Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, as well as Benin and is intended to involve “sharing plans and intelligence, committing troops for longer operations and improving troops’ human rights compliance.” The MNJTF has not significantly reduced Boko Haram attacks or border incursions around Lake Chad, despite claiming several offensives against the group have been successful. See: , “What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?,” Report #291, International Crisis Group, 7 July 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/291-what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram>
- 2 See: Jacob Zenn, “Multinational Joint Task Force Lauds Counterterrorism Success Against Boko Haram,” *OE Watch*, 05-2023. <https://fmsotr.doc.army.mil/2023/multinational-joint-task-force-lauds-counterterrorism-success-against-boko-haram/>
- 3 The “soft approach” refers to “all non-military measures adopted by a government in addressing the root causes and containing the spread of terrorism and violent extremism.” This would include flier drops to encourage Boko Haram members to surrender as well as programs to reduce socio-economic inequality, create jobs, and foster political inclusion. In contrast, the “hard approach” to counter-terrorism refers to all military actions taken to contain terrorism, such as the use of air strikes and raids into Boko Haram hideouts. See: Ugwueze, M. I., Onuoha, F. C., “Hard Versus Soft Measures to Security: Explaining the Failure of Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Nigeria.” *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 15(4), 547–567, (2020).

Georgian Parliament Discusses Impacts of “Russia Law”



Video still frame of Georgian demonstrators in front of Parliament building in Tbilisi protesting Foreign Agents law, May 2024.

Source: Vakhtang Maisaia; Attribution: By author's permission

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Georgia has been rocked by waves of protests and counter-protests triggered by the re-introduction of a “foreign agents law,” the so-called “Russia law” in parliament by the Georgian Dream party. The legislation, similar to a law passed in Russia and currently in debate in Georgia’s break-away region of Abkhazia,¹ requires all non-governmental groups and media organizations to disclose foreign funding and influence, thus leading to its name of the “foreign agents law.” According to the excerpted article and interview published in Austrian-based *IGlobenews*, Georgian Parliamentarian Armaz Akhvlediani,² addressed the history behind the controversial bill as well as how it will impact Georgia’s

“The proposed Russia law... requires all non-governmental groups and media organizations to disclose foreign funding/influence.”

aspirations to be accepted into the EU. The article notes that “Georgian Dream still supports Georgia’s European Union and NATO membership, but has taken a pro-Russian attitude,” at least for the time being. “They do not want the conflict in Ukraine spreading to Georgia.” Akhvlediani notes however, that the governance style of the “Georgian Dream” administration excludes democratization and European integration and that

“the victory of Ukraine in the war and its accession to the European Union are of fundamental importance to Georgians.”

The foreign agents law will certainly impact the operational environment in Georgia. The United States has been involved in Georgia for decades to include military training partnerships and weapons transfers. While it isn’t yet clear what the impact will be, the foreign agents law will likely have a restraining effect on the military and security cooperation between Georgia and the United States and its western partners.

Source: Diana Mautner Markhof, “Exclusive iGlobenews Interview with Georgian Parliamentarian Armaz Akhvlediani,” *iGlobenews* (Austria-based non-profit news platform created by graduates of Diplomatische Akademie Wien), 8 May 2024. <https://www.iglobenews.org/interview-with-armaz-akhvlediani/>

The proposed Russia law, ... requires all non-governmental groups and media organizations to disclose foreign funding/influence. Georgian Parliamentarian Armaz Akhvlediani ... supports the protests, is strongly anti-Russian and believes the EU/US will fill any void once Russia pulls its considerable influence from Georgia.

Opponents of the bill, believe it will be used to crack down on those not in line with the governing party's pro-Russian stance. This law, say its critics, will be a roadblock on Georgia's road to EU membership.

Georgian Dream [political party] still supports Georgia's European Union and NATO membership, but has taken a pro-Russian attitude. They do not want the conflict in Ukraine spreading to Georgia. The Georgia government gathered its own supporters in the tens of thousands to counter-protest in front of Georgia's parliament in Tbilisi on 29 April. Georgia has learned the lessons of Ukraine's color revolution and will likely not back down nor relinquish the streets to the opposition.

Armaz Akhvlediani: *Achieving candidate member status is the result of a long-term, tireless struggle for the democratic and European values of the Georgian people. The ruling party, led by oligarch Ivanishvili,*

then and now fiercely opposes this process, flagrantly violating the country's constitution, which recognizes the European integration of Georgia as a priority. The governance style of the “Georgian Dream” administration excludes democratization and European integration. Through violence and moral terror, the party led by Ivanishvili aims solely to maintain power. However, most Georgian citizens strongly oppose this and strive to protect Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice. The victory of Ukraine in the war and its accession to the European Union are of fundamental importance to Georgians.

Armaz Akhvlediani: *The revival of the Putinist law on agents of foreign influence makes joining the European Union virtually impossible. This law, previously withdrawn by the ruling party under public pressure and promises not to revisit the issue, resurfaces, posing a threat to critical NGOs and media outlets akin to Putin's methods. Despite widespread protests by hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens and daily calls from Western partners urging the “Georgian Dream” to abandon this initiative, Ivanishvili's party obstinately persists in obstructing the country's path toward European integration and democratization.*

Notes:

- 1 Abkhazia is a de-facto independent state having broken free from Georgia by war in the Fall of 1993. It maintains its own government and armed forces while hosting Russian troops. Russia and only four other nations recognize Abkhazia's independence. Foreign funded NGOs have been very important to Abkhazia such as The HALO Trust, a Europe based de-mining organization that has spent decades in Abkhazia clearing mines left over from the Georgia-Abkhazia War 1992-1993.
- 2 Armaz Akhvlediani is currently serving his third term in Georgia's Parliament. He is member of Georgia's Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security and of its Ethics Council. He is the Founder and Director of the Tbilisi School of Political Studies.



Monastery Valley in Armenia.

Source: Unsplash, <https://unsplash.com/photos/aerial-photo-of-a-village-during-daytime-VQ07UveM3-U>; Attribution: Free to use under the Unsplash License

Armenia Hints It May Withdraw From Russia-Backed Regional Security Bloc

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

Armenia recently announced it will no longer pay its dues to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Moscow-led security organization comprised of countries from Central Asia and the South Caucasus. According to the first excerpted piece from the Russian state news agency, *TASS*, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told his countrymen that they can no longer rely on the CSTO and he had no answer to how Yerevan benefits from being a member. The move comes as relations between Yerevan

and Moscow have cooled, particularly after a series of clashes over the disputed Nagorno Karabakh region, last September with neighboring Azerbaijan resulted in the mass expulsion of the enclave's Armenian population.

Pashinyan, who did not attend the CSTO's last summit in Minsk in 2023, had hinted that Armenia plans to suspend its participation in the security bloc. Critics of the CSTO claim it is a tool for Moscow to wield military power over former Soviet-bloc countries. The last time CSTO forces were called in to preserve the peace came in January 2022, when roughly 2,500

CSTO peacekeepers—the bulk of them Russian—responded to anti-government rioting in Kazakhstan. But Pashinyan has criticized the alliance for not supporting Armenia during its various clashes with Azerbaijan, accusing Russian peacekeepers of abandoning their positions when Azerbaijani troops crossed into Nagorno-Karabakh.¹

According to the second excerpted article from Armenian TV and radio service *Azatutyun*, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Armenia is free to withdraw from the organization.² If Armenia does leave the CSTO, the move

“Armenia will refrain from joining the CSTO Collective Security Council resolution of November 23, 2023 on the CSTO budget for 2024 and from participating in financing the organization’s activity envisaged by this resolution. However, it will not object to adopting this resolution in a curtailed format.”

could signal a major realignment of the regional balance of power in the Caucasus, as Russia, preoccupied by the war in Ukraine, looks to keep a military presence in the region. Armenia recently held joint drills with

the United States, has sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and has expressed interest in one day joining the European Union. If the CSTO were to lose Armenia or other members, it could weaken Russia's military leverage in

the South Caucasus. Alternatively, it could make other regional security blocs like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which also comprises China, more relevant and powerful.

Source: "Armenia to refrain from financing CSTO activity in 2024," ("Армения воздержится от финансирования деятельности ОДКБ в 2024 году," TASS (Russian state news agency), 8 May 2024. <https://tass.com/world/1785765>

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said earlier that his country cannot rely on the CSTO and he cannot answer Armenian society's question why the country should be its member. In recent time, Yerevan has skipped numerous meeting in a range of integration formats. Thus, Pashinyan did not attend the CSTO summit in Minsk in 2023 and announced that Armenia

had suspended its participation in this organization.

CSTO Secretary General Imangali Tasmagambetov told TASS on April 22 that it was a matter of "an independent and sovereign country" to decide whether to take part in the upcoming CSTO summit or not. However, he said that he hoped that many might change for the better before the summit.

Source: "Armenia Free To Leave Russian-Led Bloc, Says Moscow," (Армения свободна выйти из возглавляемого Россией блока, заявила Москва), Azatutyun (Armenian TV and Radio service affiliated with U.S. funded RFE/RL) 3 May 2024. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32932373.html#>

"We still do not question the sovereign right of our Armenian partners to independently determine their foreign policy course, including in the context of the further work of the organization," the ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova told a news briefing in Moscow.

"Let me remind you that Article 19 of the [CSTO] Charter establishes the possibility of leaving the alliance," Zakharova said. "In that case, a member state ... must send an official notification no later than six months before the withdrawal date."

The Armenian government, she said, has taken no steps in that direction so far despite its "constantly

circulated accusations against the organization." This means that Armenia remains for now a full-fledged member of the Russian-led military alliance and must "must fulfill appropriate obligations," added Zakharova. She did not specify those obligations.

Over the past year or so, Yerevan has boycotted high-level meetings, military exercises and other activities of the CSTO in what Pashinian described in February as an effective suspension of Armenia's CSTO membership. The premier repeatedly said afterwards that he could pull his country out of the alliance of six ex-Soviet states altogether.

Notes:

- 1 "Армения воздержится от финансирования деятельности ОДКБ в 2024 году (Armenia to refrain from financing CSTO activity in 2024)," *TASS* (Russian state news agency), 8 May 2024. <https://tass.com/world/1785765>
- 2 "Армения свободна выйти из возглавляемого Россией блока, заявила Москва (Armenia Free To Leave Russian-Led Bloc, Says Moscow)," *Azattyun* (Armenian TV and Radio service affiliated with U.S. funded RFE/RL) 3 May 2024. <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32932373.html>Notes:

Cracks Appear in Maduro Regime

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Recently, the Maduro regime has shown signs of schisms within the ruling Chavista Party,¹ now known as the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The arrest and prosecution of regime insider, former Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami, is a watershed moment for elites in Maduro's inner circle. According to the first excerpted article from the centrist Colombian daily *El Tiempo*, Maduro accused El Aissami of being behind the assassination attempt, as well as corruption, pilfering roughly \$21 billion from the state-owned oil company while serving as oil minister.² According to the second excerpted article from the Spanish outlet *El País*, El Aissami, in addition to the assassination accusation, fell for endangering the PSUV's electoral prospects with his large-scale theft of public resources.

The outlet notes how the arrests of El Aissami and his associates sent a chill through many circles of regime



Tareck El Aissami was once one of the most powerful men in Venezuela and a top Maduro confidant.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/globovision/6336412991/>; Attribution: CC BY-NC 2.0 DEED

elites. They come in the context of Venezuela's July presidential election, in which Maduro faces stiff competition from an organized opposition that continues to lead Maduro in the polls. The fact that dozens have been arrested alongside El Aissami indicates a growing crisis of trust within Chavismo's elite ranks.³ Further, the money that El Aissami stole to grease his corruption networks has restricted the Maduro regime from greater social

spending during the campaign, contributing to his flagging prospects of winning the election.

“Maduro became a victim in the face of a violent opposition that wanted to kill him. It turns out that some of his own people were behind the attack.”

Source: “Traicionado por su propio círculo? Así fue cómo un ministro cercano a Nicolás Maduro casi implosiona al chavismo (Betrayed by his own circle? This is how a minister close to Nicolás Maduro almost imploded Chavismo),” *El Tiempo* (a Colombian daily generally considered politically centrist), 30 April 2024. <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/los-conspiradores-estaban-con-maduro-como-un-ministro-casi-implosiona-al-chavismo-3338641>

Less than a month ago, El Aissami was seen handcuffed, quite skinny, and with an emaciated appearance...even if it were true that El Aissami had been conspiring against Maduro, his imprisonment

could be more related to the accusation than to the ‘loss’ of 21 billion dollars from PDVSA, a plot that leaves more than 60 detainees, all allies of the former minister...With the drone attack story, Maduro became

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a victim in the face of a violent opposition that wanted to kill him. It turns out that some of his own people were behind the attack.

Source: “Venezuela detiene al exministro del Petróleo Tareck El Aissami, hasta hace poco un político íntimo de Maduro (Venezuela detains former Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami, until recently a close politician of Maduro),” *El País* (a Spanish outlet with excellent regional coverage), 9 April 2024. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-04-09/venezuela-detiene-al-exministro-del-petroleo-tareck-el-aissami-hasta-hace-poco-un-politico-intimo-de-maduro.html>

The tectonic plates of Chavismo have received a strong shock this Tuesday. The Venezuelan Prosecutor’s Office has announced the arrest of former minister Tareck El Aissami, a politician who until a year and a half ago belonged to Nicolás Maduro’s circle of trust...The definitive fall of El Aissami—a powerful and feared operator of Chavismo, around whom important layers of current national capital had been organized—seems to close the chapter of an expensive fraud on the nation,

orchestrated under the shadow of international sanctions, in a time in which...the country’s oil production and the economy, were completely bankrupt, in the midst of a massive emigration of people. This may be the most radical and merciless purge carried out by Chavismo since it came to power...El Aissami is not taken to prison for ideological differences, but for having endangered the revolution and abusing its authority.

- 1 Chavismo is the movement of those who follow Hugo Chavez, which today is encapsulated in the party formally called PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, in English). Chavistas are followers of Chavismo.
- 2 To understand more about the unfathomable scale of this theft from PDVSA, and the use of crypto currency and middlemen, see: Marianna Parraga, “Exclusive: Middlemen Have Left Venezuela’s PDVSA with \$21.2 billion in Unpaid Bills,” *Reuters*, 21 March 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/middlemen-have-left-venezuelas-pdvs-a-with-212-billion-unpaid-bills-2023-03-21/>
- 3 For more information on the opposition’s success in pressuring Maduro despite the long electoral odds, see: Ryan C. Berg, “This Could Be the Last Shot to Restore Democracy in Venezuela,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 4 April 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/could-be-last-shot-restore-democracy-venezuela>