

# OEWATCH



*FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT*

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First Live-  
Fire Exercise  
Integrating  
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# OEWATCH

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## Chinese Marines Participate in Brazil’s Military Exercise for the First Time

By Dodge Billingsley  
OE Watch Commentary

The participation of Chinese Marines in Operation Formosa, a multinational military exercise hosted by Brazil’s Navy, caps off a diplomatically busy summer between China and Brazil.<sup>1</sup> However, Chinese media coverage of the military exercise was muted. The excerpted article in the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported on a single statement from the Chinese Defense Ministry, which noted the exercise would “deepen friendship and cooperation between the Chinese and participating militaries and enhance their ability to jointly respond to security risk challenges.” The SCMP article noted the focus of the exercise was joint landing and anti-landing combat drills—the same type of exercises the U.S. is engaging in across the nations of the South China Sea, to include the Philippines. The SCMP article did acknowledge that the Chinese military participation in Brazil was unusual given that Chinese military exercises are overwhelmingly focused on the South China Sea.

The exercise received different coverage in the Brazilian press. According to the excerpted article in Brazilian flagship news outlet *Globo*, the annual exercise featured 3,000 military personnel from Brazil, 63 U.S. Marines, and 32 People’s

Liberation Army (PLA) Marines. Eight additional countries sent military observers.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. had participated in the same exercise in previous years, but it was the first time for PLA personnel. While Brazil heralded the trilateral military exercise as significant for bringing the United States and China together, U.S. defense officials confirmed that U.S. troops participating in the exercise did not train nor participate alongside the contingent of PLA Marines participating in the exercise.<sup>3</sup> No further explanations were publicized.

**“The People’s Liberation Army will take part in joint military exercises in Brazil, a rare step for the Chinese military in the western hemisphere.”**

While minimal in scope, the participation of Chinese PLA Marines in Operation Formosa is but one of a host of other diplomatic collaborations between China and Brazil. This includes Brazil’s July pronouncement that it would like to participate in China’s Belt and Road Initiative; the joint commemoration of the 50-year anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil in August;

and Brazil and Chinese participation at the recent BRICS summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, in September.<sup>4</sup> Seen in conjunction with these other events and pronouncements, the participation of Chinese Marines in Operation Formosa adds to the body of evidence of a deepening China-Brazil relationship.

**Source:** Yuanyue Dang, “In rare shift, China will send marine corps to Brazil for joint military exercise,” *South China Morning Post*, 6 September 2024. [https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3277473/rare-shift-china-will-send-marine-corps-brazil-joint-military-exercise?module=perpetual\\_scroll\\_0&pgtype=article](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3277473/rare-shift-china-will-send-marine-corps-brazil-joint-military-exercise?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article)

*The People’s Liberation Army will take part in joint military exercises in Brazil, a rare step for the Chinese military in the western hemisphere.*

*A detachment of the PLA Marine Corps will travel to take part in Exercise Formosa 2024 at the invitation of the Brazilian military, the Chinese defence ministry said on Thursday.*

*The exercises, with a focus on joint landing and anti-landing combat drills, would “deepen friendship and cooperation between the Chinese and participating militaries and enhance their ability to jointly respond to security risk challenges”, the ministry said in a statement on its website.*

*In recent years, China has hosted military medicine forums, senior military officer seminars and defence forums for Latin American countries, but it is not*

*common for the Chinese military to travel to the region to take part in operations.*

*This year has seen an improvement in relations between China and Brazil.*

*Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced in July that his administration planned to join the Belt and Road Initiative, China’s flagship infrastructure and investment project.*

*Also in July, Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun met visiting Brazilian army commander Tomás Ribeiro Paiva in Beijing.*

*Dong said during the meeting that the two militaries should “strengthen exchanges and learn from each other” to “jointly improve capabilities and take military relations to a new level”.*

**Source:** Filipe Vidon, “Marinha une tropas dos EUA e China pela 1ª vez em operação militar no Brasil; veja fotos (Navy unites US and Chinese troops for the first time in a military operation in Brazil; see photos),” *Globo*, 11 September 2024. [https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2024/09/11/marinha-une-tropas-dos-eua-e-china-pela-vez-em-operacao-militar-no-brasil-veja-fotos.ghtml?fbclid=IwY2xjawFOo7tleHRuA2F1bQIxMAABHeVMuBt cSg4CrxXj-qkWNDCN23gW46nn\\_DjRQtSe3RH3p3C5Vzl6nPBQTg\\_aem\\_Q98CjbLroQQSbos97saIrg](https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2024/09/11/marinha-une-tropas-dos-eua-e-china-pela-vez-em-operacao-militar-no-brasil-veja-fotos.ghtml?fbclid=IwY2xjawFOo7tleHRuA2F1bQIxMAABHeVMuBt cSg4CrxXj-qkWNDCN23gW46nn_DjRQtSe3RH3p3C5Vzl6nPBQTg_aem_Q98CjbLroQQSbos97saIrg)

*63 US Marines and 32 Chinese Marines are participating in the exercise simultaneously.*

*The Brazilian Navy has achieved a feat: uniting US and Chinese troops on the same side of the “battle”. This is not a preparation for an imminent war, but rather Operation Formosa 2024, an annual military training operation that began on the 4th and will run until September 17, in Goiás.*

*“Foreign military personnel, together with Brazilian troops, conduct workshops to exchange experiences,*

*known as Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE). During this exchange, various military subjects are addressed, promoting greater integration between Brazil and friendly nations,” the Navy told Globo.*

*As columnist Ancelmo Gois anticipated, the rivalry between the two countries is not only international, but also 63 US Marines and 32 Chinese Marines are participating in the exercise simultaneously. The Armed Forces will act together, simulating an amphibious operation, considered the most complex*

*continue on 7*

of military operations. All weapons used will use live ammunition. The training also aims to promote integration between the Brazilian Navy, Army and Air Force. The objective of the exercise is to prepare Brazilian military personnel to act together in live-fire activities, in controlling airspace and in executing the maneuver during the so-called “Operation of Replacement by Overtaking”. In this phase of the training, responsibilities are transferred between the Armed Forces, which take turns in controlling the actions to achieve the proposed mission. Armored vehicles from the Marine Corps (CFN), such as the JLTV, the **ASTROS** system, the **Piranha**, the Amphibious Tracked Car (CLAnf), the UNIMOG truck, in addition to the AF-1 Skyhawk fighter and

Navy helicopters. The FAB’s **KC-390 Millenium**, A-29 Super Tucano and R-99 aircraft, as well as the Army’s ASTROS, Guarani and M60 Combat Car, will also be on display in the operation.

“The holding of major military exercises, such as the Specific Joint Training for Combined Weapons Employment, is essential for optimizing the operations of the Brazilian Armed Forces, promoting efficient integration between the Navy, Army and Air Force. These exercises are designed to improve the coordination and execution of joint operations, addressing crucial aspects such as: fire support, airspace control, command and control, maneuver and logistics,” says the Navy.

Notes:

- 1 Operation Formosa has nothing to do with the island of Formosa, otherwise known as Taiwan. Brazil named the annual operation “Formosa” in the 1990s, reflecting its proximity to the Brazilian city of Formosa in the state of Goiás, near the capitol of Brasília.
- 2 Eight countries sent military observers to Operation Formosa 2024; Argentina, France, Italy, Pakistan, South Africa, Congo, Mexico and Nigeria. See: “Marinha une tropas dos EUA e China pela 1ª vez em operação militar no Brasil (Navy joins US and Chinese troops for the first time in military operation in Brazil),” *Globo* (mainstream Brazilian news service), 11 September 2024. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2024/09/11/marinha-une-tropas-dos-eua-e-china-pela-1a-vez-em-operacao-militar-no-brasil-veja-fotos.ghtml>
- 3 For additional information on the U.S. position regarding Chinese PLA Marines participating in Operation Formosa, and statement by Pentagon official noting that “U.S. Marines were only at Formosa to train with their Brazilian partners,” see: “Chinese troops to join Brazil’s military drills with US forces,” *Reuters*, 10 September 2024. [https://www.reuters.com/world/china-joins-brazilian-military-exercises-alongside-us-troops-2024-09-10/?utm\\_source=sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mil-ebb](https://www.reuters.com/world/china-joins-brazilian-military-exercises-alongside-us-troops-2024-09-10/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mil-ebb)
- 4 For reporting on the meeting commemorating 50 years of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil, see: “Chinese vice president attends reception for 50th anniversary of China-Brazil diplomatic ties,” *XinhuaNet* (English language Chinese Media), 14 September 2024. <https://english.news.cn/20240914/2a6daa8898ef41d29115085d83858256/c.html>; for additional reading on the recent Meeting of BRICS High-Ranking Officials Responsible For Security Matters/National Security Advisors in St Petersburg Russia, see: “China welcomes more Global South partners to join BRICS—senior Chinese official,” *XinhuaNet*, 12 September 2024. <https://english.news.cn/20240912/4f0d08a4cd98443694fa4fc8a4ddfcf0/c.html>



## Egypt is Rumored To Have Signed Purchase Agreement for Chinese J-10C Fighters



PLAAF J-10C in action during the 2023 Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) Exhibition in Malaysia.

Source: [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-10C\\_LIMA\\_2023.jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J-10C_LIMA_2023.jpg)

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

Unconfirmed reports indicate that the Egyptian Air Force may soon acquire the export variant of China’s **J-10C** fighter aircraft.<sup>1</sup> If confirmed, this would represent a clear deepening of Egypt-China military ties amidst growing regional uncertainty due to the conflict in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> Although the deal remains unconfirmed by either side, various English- and Arabic-language media outlets are treating the acquisition as a fact.<sup>3</sup> Many analysts and commentators, noting Egypt’s recent accession into BRICS, portray these developments as signaling an ongoing shift in Egypt’s security partnerships from the United States toward closer relations with Russia and China. The first two accompanying articles, from *defense-arabic.com*—an Arabic-language defense

news website and discussion forum—and *RT Arabic*—a Russian media outlet—illustrate the kind of reporting driving this narrative. For its part, the *defense-arabic.com* article suggests that Egypt’s decision to do so “reflects Cairo’s intention to diversify the sources of its military equipment and thus reduce its dependence on American defense systems.” Interestingly, the *RT Arabic* article sources its story from an Israeli news site, *nziv.net*, whose reporting has portrayed Egypt as a latent security threat to Israel.<sup>4</sup> Global and regional actors are likely to use this story regardless of the finalization of the deal, to further broaden agendas, particularly the notion of a growing rift between the United States and Egypt.

The strategic implications of Egypt acquiring Chinese fighter jets may be

**“The decision [to acquire Chinese J-10C fighter aircraft] comes at a time of geopolitical realignment for Egypt.”**

less dramatic than some predict, as suggested in the third accompanying excerpt from the prominent daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*. Egypt has long pursued a policy of diversifying its arms suppliers, and it has considered upgrading its fighter aircraft through deals with Europe, the United States, and Russia. However, the region’s heightened tensions and increasing geopolitical competition could interpret even relatively routine actions as strategically significant, warranting closer attention.

**Source:**

١٦- الأمريكية F١٦ لتحل محل مقاتلات J١٠-C مصر تعلن رسميا اختيارها للمقاتلات الصينية

“Egypt officially announces its choice of Chinese J-10C to replace it’s American F-16s,” *defense-arabic.com* (defense news and discussion forum), September 11, 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/38mhjsh3>

*Egypt has officially announced that it will replace its aging fleet of American F-16s with Chinese J-10C “Vigorous Dragon” fighters, after discussions that have continued over the past few months. The decision, announced during Egypt’s first international air show, reflects Cairo’s intention to diversify the sources of its military equipment, and thus reduce its dependence on American defense systems...*

*The decision comes at a time of geopolitical realignment for Egypt, which recently joined the BRICS bloc alongside major players such as China, Russia and India. In recent years, Egypt has also acquired defense equipment from Russia and France, including the MiG-29M and Dassault Rafale. The Chinese J-10C is set to become a key part of Egypt’s diverse arsenal.*

**Source:**

١٦- بمقاتلات صينية متطورة.. الإعلام العبري يتحدث عن الصفقة المنتظرة F١٦ مصر تستبدل مقاتلات

“Egypt replaces its F-16 with advanced Chinese fighter jets... Hebrew media speaks on the presumed deal,” *RT Arabic* (Russian media outlet), September 9, 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/59pvzwdp>

*According to Hebrew media, the Egyptian Ministry of Defense has placed its first-ever order to purchase Chinese fourth-generation fighter jets, with an unspecified number of J-10C aircraft ordered on August 19. According to the Israeli news website “nziv”, this development comes at a time when Cairo continues to strengthen strategic and economic relations with Beijing, after joining the BRICS bloc earlier this year...*

*from Russia in 2015, all of Egypt’s fourth-generation fighter jets are of Western origin, and the purchase of the J-10C is seen as a potential turning point for Egypt.” The Hebrew website report explained that Egypt is seeking to gradually stop relying on American weapons, especially since the United States had previously refused to sell the latest F-15 aircraft to Cairo, while it agreed to sell them to Israel, which angered the Egyptians. The website pointed out that the United States may stop the annual grant of billions of dollars to Egypt if it buys fighter jets from China.*

*The website added: “With the exception of three squadrons of **MiG-29M** fighter jets that Egypt ordered*

**Source:**

هل تتجه مصر نحو اقتناء مقاتلات صينية؟

“Is Egypt moving toward purchasing Chinese fighter jets?” *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), September 15, 2024. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/هل-تتجه-مصر-نحو-اقتناء-مقاتلات-صينية-؟>

*However, Dr. Merit Mabrouk, director of the Egypt Program at the Middle East Institute in Washington, believes that Egypt cannot replace the United States with China and Russia in terms of its total reliance on armaments. She explained to Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that “as for Russia, Egypt cannot buy weapons from*

*it, because American law stipulates that military aid is not granted to countries that buy weapons from Russia, and Egypt is one of the largest countries that receive American military aid.” She added that “as for China, Egypt’s cooperation with it in the military field is not a replacement for the United States, but rather*

*continue on 10*



*a kind of completion and diversification of weapons sources.”*

*“The United States was and will remain Egypt’s favorite, and it is Cairo’s first partner in this field, but it decided some time ago to expand its contacts and partnerships, and that it will not limit itself to one*

*partner, because it is not in its interest,” Mabrouk said. “The idea is that Cairo gives itself the right not to be forced to deal with Washington alone in this field, despite its strong desire to deal with it, and this is not only for Egypt but for many other countries,” she added.*

Notes:

1 In 2022, Pakistan became the first country to obtain the Chengdu J-10 (NATO reporting name is Firebird). If the rumors are confirmed, Egypt would become the second country to acquire the J-10. The J-10 is a relatively old aircraft, declared operational in 2003, and designed primarily for air-to air combat. However, the J-10 can also perform and participate in strike missions. In January 2024 Pakistan J-10CE’s escorted drones on a strike mission against Baloch separatists in Southeastern Iran.

2 In late August, Egypt hosted its first-ever International Military Airshow, where the J-10C was prominently displayed, and an alleged agreement was reportedly finalized. Egypt’s interest in the J-10C has been public for over a year, and negotiations seem to have accelerated in recent months. See for instance this May 2023 article mentioning Egypt’s interest in the fighter jets: “China in advanced negotiations for major arms deals with Egypt and Saudi Arabia,” *The New Arab*, 25 May 2023. <https://www.newarab.com/news/china-advanced-talks-major-saudi-egypt-arms-deals>; Last July, the Egyptian Air Force commander visited Beijing for discussions with his Chinese counterpart. See:

قائد القوات الجوية يلتقى نظيره الصيني

“Air Force commander meets his Chinese counterpart,” Egyptian Ministry of Defense, 16 July 2024. <https://www.mod.gov.eg/ModWebSite/NewsDetailsAr.aspx?id=44142>

3 In addition to Arabic-language outlets, an article in *The National Interest* reported the sale as a fact without providing evidence. See: “The Mighty F-16 Fighter Just ‘Lost’ to China’s J-10 (But Not in Battle),” *The National Interest*, 13 September 2024. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/mighty-f-16-fighter-just-lost-chinas-j-10-not-battle-212643>.

4 See for instance: “Israel spreads false allegations to downplay severity of its military setbacks: Source,” *Egypt Independent*, 30 May 2024. <https://www.egyptindependent.com/israel-spreads-false-allegations-to-downplay-severity-of-its-military-seStbacks-source/> and “Egypt ‘preparing for another Yom Kippur War,’ warns Israeli media site,” *Middle East Monitor*, 16 July 2024. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240716-egypt-preparing-for-another-yom-kippur-war-warns-israeli-media-site/>

## The China-Africa Cooperation Forum Focuses on Chinese Military Expansion in Africa

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

51 African heads of state attended, the tri-annual Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing from 4-6 September. While China currently has one base in Africa on the Djibouti coast, Chinese President Xi Jinping's FOCAC speech bolstered other reports about China's ambitions to expand its military footprint on the continent, including possibly establishing other military bases.<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping vowed that China would train 6,000 African soldiers and 1,000 African law enforcement officers, welcome 500 African military officers to China, commence joint patrols, mine clearance, and

***“Many countries have serious security problems in society, and there is a growing trend of heinous crimes against Chinese-funded companies and employees as well as overseas Chinese.”***

other military activities with African partners, and provide security for joint projects with African security officials.<sup>2</sup> This latter objective was underscored in the article, where it noted the growing trend of violent

crimes against Chinese-funded enterprises and employees and overseas Chinese in Africa, which are often seen as exploitative.

Only 20 African countries currently have police cooperation agreements with China, a fact the article lamented and stated needs to increase. This suggests a correlation in the future between Chinese economic activities in Africa, which will inevitably lead to security incidents and Chinese security cooperation with African countries.<sup>3</sup> The FOCAC and Xi Jinping's speech, therefore, signal a growing Chinese military and security presence in Africa.



◀ First held in Beijing in 2000, FOCAC has grown significantly over the past two decades and is now the largest diplomatic event organized by China.

Source: Stephen Wallis, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forum\\_on\\_China-Africa\\_Cooperation.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forum_on_China-Africa_Cooperation.jpg)

**Source:** “中非合作论坛峰会召开：为双边关系良性发展“提质增效”提供契机 (The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation is held: An opportunity is provided to ‘improve the quality and efficiency’ for the healthy development of bilateral relations)” *thepaper.cn* (Communist Party-affiliated Chinese-language newspaper that appeals to youths and has more editorial freedom than most Chinese media), 5 September 2024. [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_28634922](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_28634922)

*It is relevant to note that 51 of the African leaders who attended the summit are heads of state or government, which is far higher than other “Africa + 1” meetings, such as the US-Africa summit. Against the background of serious changes in Sino-US relations and Sino-EU relations, the importance of the “Global South” in China’s diplomatic grand strategy is rising sharply.*

*China’s large-scale financing and loans in Africa have become the focus of public criticism for a long time under the smearing and discrediting by the*

*United States and Europe. In fact, this has had a negative impact on the reputations of both China and Africa.*

*Many countries have serious security problems, and there is a rising trend of heinous crimes against Chinese-funded companies and employees as well as overseas Chinese. At present, only more than 20 African countries have signed relevant police cooperation agreements with China, so the cooperation between the two sides in the field of police law enforcement needs to be improved.*

Notes:

- 1 See: Jacob Zenn, “China’s Initiates Push To Establish a Military Base in Gabon,” *OE Watch*, 04-2024, 2024. <https://fmsso.tradoc.army.mil/2024/chinas-initiates-push-to-establish-a-military-base-in-gabon/>
- 2 “Full text: Xi Jinping’s speech at opening ceremony of 2024 FOCAC summit,” *CGTN*, 5 September 2024, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-09-05/Full-text-Xi-s-speech-at-opening-ceremony-of-2024-FOCAC-summit-1wDYKL8FhxC/p.html>
- 3 On Chinese private military contractors in Africa, see Paul Nantulya, “Chinese Security Firms Spread along the African Belt and Road,” *ACSS*, 15 June 2021. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/chinese-security-firms-spread-african-belt-road/>



## China Conducts First Live-Fire Exercise Integrating Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Assault Ships

By Kevin Kusumoto  
OE Watch Commentary

On 9 September, Chinese TV reported that the PLA Navy's **Shandong** carrier group recently conducted combat exercises in the South China Sea and the West Pacific. The report highlighted vessels frequently seen escorting the carrier, such as the **Type-055 destroyer**, the **Type-052D destroyer**, and the **Type-901 combat support ship**, but more notably, it featured the first-time inclusion of the *Hainan* **Type-075 amphibious assault ship**.<sup>1</sup>

**“The biggest threat to China from the US Navy is nuclear submarines. Therefore, the inclusion of the Type 075 amphibious assault ship into the Shandong carrier group is a rehearsal for such a scenario.”**

The first excerpted article, published on *ifeng*, an internet distribution channel for majority state-owned news network *Phoenix TV*, highlights three distinctive combat capabilities the Type-075 amphibious assault ship adds to this carrier group. First, the Type 075 can be equipped with

powerful carrier-based aviation assets for combat deployment across air, sea, and land. These aviation assets can also provide electronic warfare capabilities and other important support functions, expanding the carrier group's power projection abilities, amphibious operations, and threat response.<sup>2</sup> Second, the amphibious assault ship's aviation assets can take on some responsibilities of *Shandong's* air wing, allowing the air wing to focus on other crucial sea and air operations. In a contingency, the amphibious assault ship can replace *Shandong* as a command vessel, ensuring continuity of operations. Lastly, the amphibious assault ship can deploy multi-role helicopters such as the **Z-8** and **Z-9**, which significantly enhance the carrier group's anti-submarine warfare capabilities. The article emphasizes that the greatest threat to the PLA Navy beyond the second island chain is not U.S. aircraft carriers but U.S. nuclear submarines.<sup>3</sup> These helicopters improve the carrier group's ability to search, track, and neutralize enemy submarine activities, thereby securing unrestricted maneuvering.

The second excerpted article by Professor Jiang Fuwei of Dalian Maritime University, published on one of China's largest internet platforms, *NetEase*, highlights the addition of the Type-075 to the *Shandong* carrier

group as a significant milestone for the PLA Navy and positions China to better address two key hotspots: the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. In the event of conflict with the U.S. and Philippines in the South China Sea, the PLA would be able to execute more diversified military operations on Philippine territory, such as air assaults and amphibious lift. Similarly, in a potential conflict over Taiwan, the *Shandong* carrier group is now better equipped for amphibious beach landings, raids, and securing key areas of operation, particularly along Taiwan's east coast, which could complicate and delay U.S. military intervention. The Type-075 Amphibious Assault Ship is a critical addition for the PLA Navy's carrier group, improving its ability to conduct anti-submarine and amphibious operations while expanding its capacity to execute long range expeditionary missions far from China's shores.<sup>4</sup>

**Source:** Zheng Jiyong, “南海演习编入075, 能在最坏情况替山东舰挂帅, 中方已准备好摊牌 (The Type 075 Is Incorporated into the South China Sea Exercise, it can Replace the Shandong Aircraft Carrier in the Worst Case Scenario, China is Ready to Show Its Cards),” *iFeng* (an internet distribution channel for Phoenix TV, a majority state-owned news network), 12 September 2024. <https://news.ifeng.com/c/8coKnWTiFwi>

*The Chinese military recently released a report showing the Shandong aircraft carrier group conducting live-fire exercises in the South China Sea. Notably, the Type 075 amphibious assault ship, Hainan, was integrated into this group for the first time. The Type 075 has a displacement of 40,000 tons and is the largest surface combat ship in the Chinese Navy, following its aircraft carriers. It features a full-length flight deck and hangar and can carry at least 30 helicopters for various combat roles. The addition of this ship to the carrier group is akin to adding another quasi-aircraft carrier, which is significant for China's strategic positioning in the South China Sea.*

*Within the second island chain, the PLA's current capabilities are sufficient to handle any adversary. However, beyond the second island chain, the greatest threat to the PLA Navy is not US aircraft carriers, but US nuclear submarines. These submarines are difficult to detect, and their advanced performance presents a significant challenge to the PLA in the South China Sea.*

*This is why the Type 075 amphibious assault ship has been integrated into the Shandong aircraft carrier group. The Type 075 is equipped with powerful aviation assets, including anti-submarine helicopters designed to locate US nuclear submarines.*

*Additionally, its air assets can take over some of the Shandong air wing's responsibilities, allowing the carrier to focus more on sea and air operations. Lastly, in a contingency scenario, the Type 075 can serve as a replacement for the Shandong as the command vessel.*

*The Philippines is persistently challenging China's position in the South China Sea. To address the issue with the Philippines comprehensively, we must be prepared to confront the US, which supports them. The primary threat from the US Navy to China comes from nuclear submarines. Consequently, the integration of the Type 075 amphibious assault ship into the Shandong aircraft carrier group serves as a rehearsal for such a scenario.*

*The essence of the South China Sea dispute is not a conflict between China and the Philippines, but rather a power struggle between China and the US. China is committed to safeguarding its sovereignty in the South China Sea and ensuring that Chinese ships can navigate the area freely without obstruction. The US aims to use the Philippines to destabilize the South China Sea, thereby controlling vital shipping routes and leveraging advantageous positions to constrain China.*



**Source:** Jiang Fuwei, “西方卫星突然发现，航母两攻都在向南海集结，解放军将有大动作 (Western Satellites Suddenly Detect Both Aircraft Carrier and Amphibious Assault Ship are Gathering in the South China Sea, is the PLA Preparing for a Major Operation?)” *Netease*, (one of China’s largest internet companies, subject to regulatory oversight and censorship by China’s cyberspace Administration), 12 September 2024. <https://www.163.com/dy/article/JBT3EB7605532V6O.html>

*Last week, the PLA released footage showing the Shandong carrier and the Hainan Type 075 amphibious assault ship conducting joint combat training. For the Southern Theater Command, this joint operational capability marks a milestone for our naval forces in addressing potential situations in both the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.*

*The greatest advantage of aircraft carriers is their high tactical flexibility, enabling a carrier strike group to launch attacks, exploit weaknesses in enemy defenses—particularly against adversaries with limited maritime situational awareness—and reposition as needed. However, aircraft carriers are not designed to sustain continuous, large-scale blockades over a single area. As a result, carrier-based operations often follow a hit-and-run strategy, striking and then withdrawing to regroup for subsequent attacks.*

*When facing a significantly weaker adversary like the Philippines, the Shandong carrier can capitalize on its superiority in intelligence and situational awareness to carry out precise ‘surgical strikes,’ maximizing the effectiveness of its air wing. However, against a more capable opponent like the Taiwanese military, the carrier’s air wing may cause substantial damage, but the extended intervals between attacks would allow the Taiwanese military time to regroup. As a result, amphibious operations and providing cover for landing forces exert a greater strategic impact than relying solely on airpower.*

*For instance, if a conflict between China and the US were to break out in the South China Sea, the PLA would need to find ways to neutralize US*

*Typhoon missile systems in northern Philippines. The problem is that the area is densely covered in tropical rainforests, making it difficult for satellites and aerial reconnaissance to be effective, rendering carrier-based air strikes inefficient. Therefore, the most effective method would be to deploy and attack from the ground. Similarly, in a Taiwan Strait conflict, the Shandong carrier group, equipped with amphibious landing ships, could act as a surprise force, conducting small-scale landing operations to disrupt Taiwan’s defensive posture.*

*Once the PLA begins organizing landings in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan’s forces will inevitably concentrate on the island’s western coast, leaving the eastern coast largely undefended. At this point, the Shandong carrier group could conduct landings on Taiwan’s eastern coast, targeting and destroying facilities, thus undermining any hopes of delaying the conflict until US intervention.*

*With the addition of the Hainan Type 075 Amphibious Assault Ship, it will play a crucial role not only in landing operations but also in anti-submarine warfare. The Hainan can establish an anti-submarine network around the fleet, making it nearly impossible for even US submarines, despite their world-class technology, to evade detection. This capability will significantly reduce the likelihood of US submarines launching surprise attacks on the PLA fleet.*

*Given time, the Shandong carrier group will not only serve as a vanguard for China’s blue-water operations but will also function as an aerial guardian for frontline landing forces during amphibious operations.*

*continue on 16*

Notes:

- 1 To watch the CCTV-7 news report on the Shandong carrier group exercise, see CCTV-7 China Defense and Military channel, *CCTV*, 9 September 2024. <https://tv.cctv.com/2024/09/09/VIDEPTsqIV4ywN1OtwIHnDRe240909.shtml>
- 2 Matthew P. Funaiole and Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., “China’s New Amphibious Assault Ship Sails into the South China Sea,” *CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies)*, 24 November 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-amphibious-assault-ship-sails-south-china-sea>
- 3 Alexander Palmer, Henry H. Carroll, and Nicholas Velazquez, “Unpacking China’s Naval Buildup,” *CSIS*, 5 June 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-chinas-naval-buildup>
- 4 Conor M. Kennedy and Daniel Caldwell, “China Maritime Report No. 23: The Type 075 LHD: Development, Missions, and Capabilities,” *US Naval War College, China Maritime Studies Institute*, 07 October 2022. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/23/>

## Possible New Chinese Frigate Offers Clues on Future Weapons Testing

By Cindy Hurst  
OE Watch Commentary

An image of a new stealth corvette or possibly light frigate<sup>1</sup> moored to a pier appearing on Chinese social media and blogs has drawn significant attention and speculation. According to the excerpted article published in the popular pro-government Chinese website *Sohu*, some observers speculate that the new warship will be classified as a Type-057 frigate and replace the **Type-056**. Despite being smaller than the Type-056, the Type-057 frigate incorporates a unique

**“The fact is that this frigate is more like a technology verification platform. Through it, the PLA can test new technologies and designs on a smaller scale and accumulate experience for future large stealth ships.”**

A People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) 8 round HQ-10 short range surface to air missile system shown on a Type 056 corvette used by both PLAN and Chinese Coast Guard. Other sources note this image as the 8 round FL-3000N short range surface to air missile. However, the FL-3000N is basically the export version of the PLAN HQ-10, with relatively the same capabilities.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HQ-10\\_-\\_media/File:Type\\_056\\_corvette\\_FL-3000N\\_8-round\\_SAM\\_launcher.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HQ-10_-_media/File:Type_056_corvette_FL-3000N_8-round_SAM_launcher.jpg)

stealth design, featuring an integrated mast design that can significantly reduce enemy radar detection. The hull’s surface is smooth and inclined, with no edges or corners, which gives it a smaller optical and infrared signature, making it difficult to detect.<sup>2</sup>

Notably, the ship fields what looks to be the Hongqi-10 short-range air defense missile launcher. However, according to the second excerpted article published on the tightly regulated website hosted by China’s largest multinational technology conglomerate, *Tencent*, some sources believe the apparatus could be a ship-borne laser weapon system used to counter threats from drones, missiles, and small speedboats. Laser weapons can attack targets at the speed of light, as the first article points out, which significantly improves the response time. Additionally, a

high-energy weapon system operates without emitting detectable electromagnetic signals during operation, which further reduces the likelihood of being detected by the adversary, increasing its survivability.<sup>3</sup>

However, the Type-057 likely lacks combat effectiveness because of its smaller design, which allows limited space for weapons. Hence, as the excerpted article from *Sohu* speculates, the ship’s existence could serve as a platform to test some of China’s newer technologies on a smaller scale and to gain experience for future large stealth ships, but at a lower cost. There is no evidence that the PLAN will ultimately populate its fleet with this new stealth frigate. However, at the very least, its presence, according to the *Tencent* article, has “already given people a glimpse of future warfare.”



**Source:** “我国再添重器，解放军057隐形护卫舰再次亮相！台媒眼馋：科幻产物 (my country adds another heavy weapon, the PLA 057 stealth frigate makes its debut again! Taiwanese media are jealous: a science fiction product),” *sohu.com* (popular pro-government Chinese-language website targeting a youth and gaming readership), 1 September 2024. [https://roll.sohu.com/a/805465679\\_121966179](https://roll.sohu.com/a/805465679_121966179)

*It is speculated that this new warship will be named 057 frigate and will shoulder the heavy responsibility of replacing 056 frigate...*

*The biggest feature of this frigate is its unique stealth design - the surface of the hull is inclined and smooth, with almost no edges or corners. This design can not only effectively reduce the exposure of optical and infrared signals, but also significantly reduce the chance of being detected by radar and sonar. When facing enemy reconnaissance, it can almost “come without a trace and go without a trace”.*

*From a distance, it seems to be equipped with Hongqi 10 short-range air defense missiles. But upon closer inspection, this is most likely an advanced ship-borne laser weapon. This configuration will greatly enhance*

*its survivability and combat capabilities in complex battlefield environments.*

*The introduction of laser cannons is actually a revolutionary advancement. This weapon is launched at the speed of light and hits the target instantly, which is a perfect solution for the modern battlefield that requires rapid response...*

*So, what is the significance of the existence of the Type 057? The fact is that this frigate is more like a technology verification platform. Through it, the PLA can test new technologies and designs on a smaller scale and accumulate experience for future large stealth ships. This approach not only reduces the risk of testing new technologies on full-scale warships, but also saves costs.*

**Source:** Meng Yan, “解放军新型护卫舰亮相，一大装置让台媒直呼科幻 (The PLA Unveiled Its New Frigate, Large Device Prompts Taiwanese Media to Call It Science Fiction),” Tencent (China’s largest multinational technology conglomerate, operating within a tightly regulated media and tech environment), 08 September 2024. <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20240906A07E7Z00>

*At the same time, the frigate adopts an integrated mast design. This integrated structure can significantly reduce radar reflection signals and improve stealth performance.*

*The most important thing is that an “unprecedented” device appeared on this stealth frigate, which looks similar to the HQ-10 ship-to-air missile launcher. U.S. media speculated that this might be a ship-borne laser cannon weapon system. Generally speaking, light stealth frigates undertake regional defense and maritime patrol missions and may face threats from drones, missiles and small speedboats. If equipped*

*with laser cannons, they can attack targets at the speed of light, further improving the response speed.*

*Some analysts said that the emergence of this new stealth frigate not only means technological progress, but also a concrete manifestation of the strategic transformation of the Chinese Navy. Now that the Chinese Navy is shifting from coastal defense to blue water escort, this type of ship with advanced stealth technology and equipped with more lethal weapons will become an important pillar of the PLA’s future operations.*

*continue on 19*

*But it is different as a test ship. By testing and verifying key technologies such as the ship design and stealth design of the new generation of ships on*

*board, it can lay the foundation for the birth of more advanced ships in the future.*

Notes:

- 1 There have been differing opinions on what type of ship this is. Some observers are referring to it as a corvette class and others as a frigate. The difference between the two classifications is that
- 2 For more information and an image of the ship, please see “China’s New Stealth Warship Unveiled: Possible Laser Weapon Testing Sparks Speculation,” Army Recognition Group website, 6 September 2024. <https://armyrecognition.com/news/navy-news/2024/chinas-new-stealth-warship-unveiled-possible-laser-weapon-testing-sparks-speculation>
- 3 An earlier report published on *bulgarianmilitary.com*, talks about China putting high-energy weapons on its Type 057 warship. See Boyko Nikolov, “China is Putting High-Energy Weapons on Its Type 057 Warship,” *bulgarianmilitary.com*, 8 February 2024. <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2024/02/08/china-is-putting-high-energy-weapons-on-its-type-057-warship/>



## Chinese Icebreaker Makes Port Call in Murmansk

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

China keeps pushing itself into the Arctic, and Russia is partnering in the effort. The excerpted article from Norway-based *The Barents Observer* notes that the Chinese icebreaker ***Xue Long 2*** recently visited the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk for the first time. The article notes that the *Xue Long 2* is on a scientific mission but also suggests that there is a political mission and that the port call reflects the deepening of relations between Moscow and Beijing. China is eager

to expand its presence in the Arctic and have access to its resources.<sup>1</sup> The docking of the *Xue Long 2* will likely not be the last Chinese vessel in Russia's Arctic waters: "Beijing is increasingly interested in the Arctic and is building new vessels designed for shipping through the remote and icy waters."<sup>2</sup> Under diplomatic, military, and economic pressure, Russia has thus far been pleased to oblige, granting China more access than before to Russian Arctic waters and ports.

***“The research icebreaker that is owned and managed by the Chinese Polar Institute is on its annual Arctic expedition.... But the state-owned vessel is also on a political mission. The visit to Murmansk is the first ever of its kind and comes as relations between Murmansk and Beijing get increasingly intimate.”***

Chinese icebreaker *Xue Long 2* docked at Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong, 2024.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV\\_Xue\\_Long\\_2\\_-\\_/media/File:202404\\_Xuelong-2\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV_Xue_Long_2_-_/media/File:202404_Xuelong-2_in_Hong_Kong.jpg)



**Source:** Atle Staalesen, “Chinese icebreaker makes port call in Murmansk,” *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 29 August 2024. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2024/08/chinese-icebreaker-makes-port-call-murmansk>

*The Russian Arctic region actively seeks to strengthen ties with Beijing. This week, a Chinese icebreaker for the first time paid a visit to Murmansk. The Xue Long 2 set out from the Chinese port city of Qingdao on the 7th of July and subsequently set course for the Bering Strait. Following its passage into the Chukchi Sea, the 122-meter-long ship is believed to have sailed towards the North Pole. One and a half months later it sailed into the Kola Bay and moored in a downtown port. Locals in the Russian Arctic city could see the vessel being assisted by tugs into the harbor area on the 28th of August.*

*The research icebreaker that is owned and managed by the Chinese Polar Institute is on its annual Arctic expedition. About 100 expedition members take part in research geology and geophysics of the Arctic seabed and conduct investigations of atmospheric, sea ice and marine environments.*

*But the state-owned vessel is also on a political mission. The visit to Murmansk is the first ever of its kind and comes as relations between Murmansk and Beijing get increasingly intimate. In May 2023, Murmansk Governor Andrei Chibis paid a visit to*

*Shanghai as part of a major Russian delegation to the China-Russia Business Forum. During the event, a special emphasis was made on the development of the Northern Sea Route and new joint industries, among them in production and processing of minerals.*

*In September 2023, Chibis welcomed a Chinese business delegation to Murmansk. “We are entering a new level of partnership with China,” the regional leader said during the visit. The Chinese businessmen representing port and shipping companies stated that they were interested in the development of the Northern Sea Route. In August 2024, the Chinese MCC International Incorporation Ltd will join the development of the Kolmozerskoye lithium resources in the Kola Peninsula.*

*Beijing is increasingly interested in the Arctic and is building new vessels designed for shipping through the remote and icy waters. In early July this year, Chinese authorities officially commissioned its new icebreaking research vessel, the Jidi (“Polar”). At the same time, China is expanding its research activities in the far northern region, including in the Norwegian Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard.*

Notes:

- 1 See: Les Grau, China and Russia in Joint Venture To Mine Lithium in Arctic, *OE Watch*, 08-2024. (URL not yet available)
- 2 See: Les Grau, “Chinese Icebreaker Sails To The Arctic,” *OE Watch*, 09-2023. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/chinese-icebreaker-sails-to-the-arctic/>



## Russia Conducts Its Largest Naval Exercise in More Than 30 Years



Russian Buyan-M corvette Uglich of the Caspian Flotilla firing countermeasures during maneuvers part of Ocean-2024. Note the letter “Z” in reference to forces involved in the invasion of Ukraine. The Caspian is essentially a Russian lake, the only other significant naval power in the Caspian is Iran and most of Iran’s naval forces are deployed and focused on the contentious Middle East.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defence, published by Naval News, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/09/ocean-2024-russian-navy-flexes-its-muscles-china-assists/>

By Dodge Billingsley  
OE Watch Commentary

Russia conducted its largest naval exercise in more than 30 years, likely to dispel the notion of its failures against Ukraine in the Black Sea.<sup>1</sup> According to the excerpted article by Russian flagship news outlet *Ria Novosti*, the exercise, known as Ocean-2024 strategic command and staff exercise, took place across the globe, with maneuvers in the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, the Mediterranean, Caspian, and Baltic Seas.<sup>2</sup>

The *Novosti* article claims Ocean-2024 maneuvers involved more than 400 vessels and more than 90,000 personnel. Four Chinese naval vessels also participated in Ocean-2024, part of the Pacific Fleet maneuvers. Scenarios included fighter interception of hostile aircraft intent on bombing the surface fleet. In the case

highlighted, the attack aircraft was an **IL-38** anti-submarine maritime patrol aircraft—no match for the **MiG-31BMs** sent to intercept. The tactics practiced were tried-and-true naval drills, reflecting long-standing naval threats that still exist but do not consider the ongoing evolution in naval warfare, including drone and counter-drone scenarios, the types of naval warfare that have proved devastating to Russia’s Navy in the Black Sea. While pru-

the exercise to reflect the current and future threat environment begs the question if Ocean-2024 was more a public relations operation, especially in the wake of the U.S.-led RIMPAC naval exercise earlier in the year. Russia’s Ocean-2024 is likely serves as a morale booster for its Navy at a time when it has not been able to restore any operational capability in the Black Sea

**“The maneuvers... involve more than 400 warships, submarines and auxiliary fleet support vessels, more than 120 aircraft and helicopters of the naval aviation of the Navy and the Aerospace Forces, about 7,000 units of weapons, military and special equipment, as well as more than 90 thousand personnel.”**

dent to train in general naval combat operations, Moscow’s failure to reset

**Source:** “МиГ-31БМ перехватили условного противника на учениях “Океан-2024” (MiG-31BM intercepted a mock enemy during the Ocean-2024 exercises),” *Ria Novosti* (mainstream Russian media outlet), 15 September 2024. <https://ria.ru/20240915/istrebiteli-1972773873.html>

*MOSCOW, 15 Sep - RIA Novosti. A pair of MiG-31BM interceptors intercepted a mock enemy over the neutral waters of the Sea of Japan as part of the Ocean-2024 exercises, the Russian Defense Ministry reported.*

*“A pair of high-altitude MiG-31BM interceptor fighters, while performing a flight mission to provide fighter-air cover for the Pacific Fleet’s naval strike group over the neutral waters of the Sea of Japan, intercepted a mock enemy as part of the Okean-2024 strategic command and staff exercise,” the statement said.*

*It is noted that as part of the exercise, the role of an airspace violator was played by an Il-38 aircraft, which attempted to approach a detachment of naval ships to launch a bomb strike on it. And the crews of the MiG-31BM interceptor fighters, having received coordinates from the radio engineering units, took off from one of the airfields, reached the designated area and independently classified the target, after which they launched long-range tactical air-to-air missiles at it.*

*“After completing the task, the crews of the fighters practiced elements of air combat with mock enemy fighters performing cover missions “enemy” bombers,”*

*the ministry added.*

*Russian Navy formations and units began the Okean-2024 strategic command and staff exercises on Tuesday, which will last until September 16. The exercises are being held in a bilateral format under the general leadership of the Navy Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Alexander Moiseyev.*

*The maneuvers, which will take place in the waters of the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, the Mediterranean, Caspian and Baltic Seas, involve more than 400 warships, submarines and auxiliary fleet support vessels, more than 120 aircraft and helicopters of the naval aviation of the Navy and the Aerospace Forces, about 7,000 units of weapons, military and special equipment, as well as more than 90 thousand personnel.*

*“Ocean” is the code name for naval exercises conducted by the General Command of the USSR Navy in 1970, 1975, 1977, 1983 and 1985. The “Ocean” exercises (maneuvers) were the largest operational and combat training events of the USSR Navy in the post-war period and the largest in world history for their time.*

Notes:

- 1 For a western perspective on Ocean-2024, see: “Ocean-2024 – Russian Navy Flexes Its Muscles, China Assists,” *Naval News* (Europe based naval focused news service), 13 September 2024. <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/09/ocean-2024-russian-navy-flexes-its-muscles-china-assists/>
- 2 Notably, no maneuvers took place in the Black Sea, once a naval strongpoint for Russia built upon its Black Sea Fleet, but now under constant threat from Ukrainian naval drones. Ukrainian surface drones have wreaked enough havoc and forced Moscow to redeploy and scatter its Black Sea Fleet to various ports on the eastern Black Sea.

## Russian Duma to Strengthen Pro-Kremlin Youth Movements

By Lionel Beehner  
OE Watch Commentary

The Russian State Duma announced on Telegram it will be transforming its Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, or *Rosmolodyozh*, into a larger body to strengthen and consolidate the country's youth ideological education initiatives, from kindergarten to higher education. According to the excerpted 12 September post, the Duma introduced a draft law titled "On Systematizing the Sphere of Youth Policy" to instill "a willingness in young people to fulfill their constitutional duty to defend the Fatherland." The restructuring may signal a need to whip up patriotism and pro-Kremlin ideology in younger generations, as the Kremlin looks to rally more support for its "special military operation" in Ukraine, especially after the Ukrainian Army's incursion into Kursk and the potential use of longer-range missiles into Russian territory.

Modern Russian state support of youth movements has historical roots and contemporary benefits. The youth movements are a modern analog to the Soviet-era "pioneer camps" that indoctrinated young Russians with Leninist dogma. In recent years, a number of patriotic youth movements backed by the Ministry of Defense emerged to educate youth about Russian and Soviet history.<sup>1</sup> In Fall 2023, the Kremlin held a nationwide school lesson to teach children



First meeting of the patriotic youth movement called Yunarmiya 2 June 2016.

Source: Russian Federation Ministry of Defense, [https://function.mil.ru/recruiting\\_campaign/gallery.htm?id=29948@cmsPhotoGallery](https://function.mil.ru/recruiting_campaign/gallery.htm?id=29948@cmsPhotoGallery)

***“One of the areas of youth policy will be devoted to developing the readiness of young people to fulfill their constitutional duty to protect the Fatherland.”***

that Russian elections were free and fair.<sup>2</sup> Prior to that, in 2022, the Russian government launched an outfit called The Movement of the First, a pro-Kremlin youth movement aimed at “preparing children and youth for a full-fledged life in society, including shaping their world views on the basis of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” and instilling “love and respect for the Homeland.”<sup>3</sup> The former head of this movement,

Grigory Gurov, will lead the newly restructured *Rosmolodyozh*.<sup>4</sup>

The latest restructuring may indicate an unease among Russian leaders about the “forever war” in Ukraine and the need to recruit more young conscripts. The move could also signal flagging domestic support for the war. Surveys suggest that two out of three Russians support it,<sup>5</sup> yet these polls may not reflect the true sentiment of most Russians, including Russian youth.



**Source:** Artem Metelev (a member and spokesperson of the State Duma), post on *Telegram* (a social messaging app) from 2 September 2024. <https://t.me/artemmetelev/7162>

*The special military operation and modern challenges make logical adjustments to the state youth policy. Patriotic education of youth has always been a priority. We propose to reflect new tasks and work tools in federal legislation.*

***After the adoption of our law this fall:***

- *Patriotic clubs, historical and local history and search organizations, specialized military-patriotic centers will receive priority support from the state;*
- *One of the areas of youth policy will be devoted to developing the readiness of young people to fulfill their constitutional duty to protect the Fatherland;*
- *The effectiveness of patriotic work will be analyzed as part of annual monitoring;*
- *A set of measures to educate youth in citizenship, patriotism, respect for history and readiness to serve their country will be approved at the federal and regional levels.*

Notes:

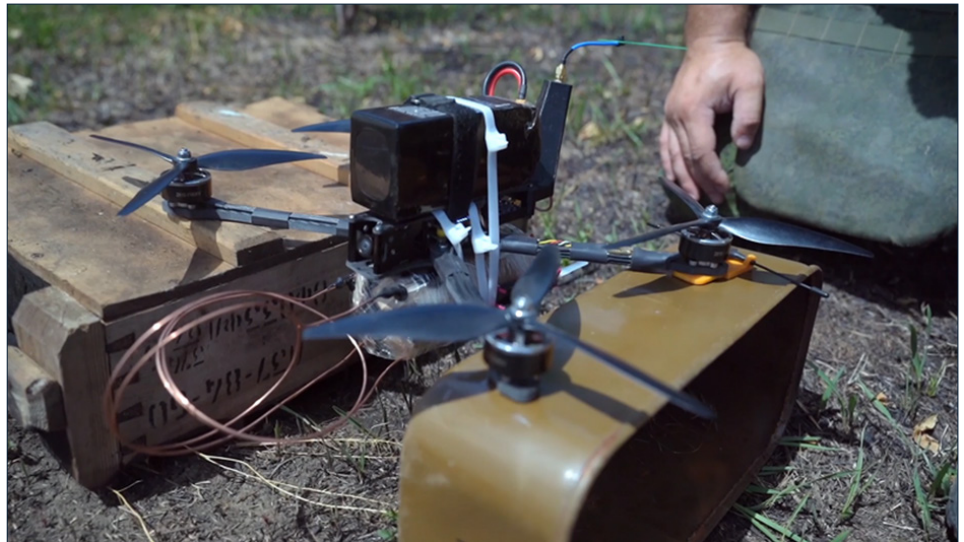
- 1 Evan Gershkovich, Russia's Fast-Growing 'Youth Army' Aims to Breed Loyalty to Fatherland," *The Moscow Times*, 17 April 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/17/russias-fast-growing-youth-army-aimst-to-breed-loyalty-to-the-fatherland-a65256>
- 2 Pyotr Kozlov, "As Putin's Re-election Looms, Kremlin Pushes to Indoctrinate a New Generation of Voters," *The Moscow Times*, 29 September 2023. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/09/29/as-putins-re-election-looms-kremlin-pushes-to-indoctrinate-a-new-generation-of-voters-a82580>
- 3 Website of Movement of the First. <http://wefirst.ru>
- 4 Maxim Ivanov, Elena Mukhametshina, "Новым начальником Росмолодежи может стать глава «Движения первых» Григорий Гуров" ("The head of the 'Movement of the First' Grigory Gurov may become the new head of Rosmolodezh"), *Vedomosti* (Moscow-based business newspaper) 12 September 2024. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2024/09/12/1061695-novim-glavoi-rosmolodezhi-mozhet-stat-glava-dvizheniya-pervih>
- 5 Vladimir Milov, "How Strong is Russian public support for the invasion of Ukraine?" *Atlantic Council's UkraineAlert blog*, 9 January 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-strong-is-russian-public-support-for-the-invasion-of-ukraine-2/>

## The Evolution of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in Ukraine

By Chuck Bartles  
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from the monthly journal of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, *Voyennaya Mysl*, discusses the evolution of UAVs use since the inception of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The article notes that, early in the conflict, UAV use was primarily characterized by reconnaissance and strike missions, carried out by larger UAVs, such as the large Turkish **Bayraktar TB2**. As the conflict progressed, these types of UAVs were supplanted by small and relatively cheap UAVs, such as the Chinese-manufactured *DJI* family of commercial drones, also used for reconnaissance or modified to carry explosive devices. Those drones were then complemented by a new class of first-person view (FPV) kamikaze/suicide UAVs that have recently dominated UAV use on the battlefield.

Undoubtedly, UAV use is one of the most salient aspects of the current conflict in Ukraine, and it is clear small and relatively cheap UAVs will play a part in future armed conflict. The wide-scale use of UAVs solves a wide range of problems in modern war, such as: providing situational awareness; acquiring and lasing targets; signal retransmission; electronic reconnaissance and warfare; isolating a given area; interfering with supplies, rotations, and evacuations;



A Russian first-person view UAV with small payload attached.

Source: [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12523237@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12523237@egNews)

electronics in the hands of innovative personnel.

**“One of the main military-technical components of combat actions in the special military operation in Ukraine is the mass use of unmanned – aircraft and robotic systems.”**

destroying stationary and moving targets; supporting assault operations; mining, demining of terrain and water obstacles; and resupply. Although large weapon systems have certainly proved their value in Ukraine, these UAVs show that there is also an important role for relatively cheap

**Source:** N.A. Sokolov, “Анализ тенденций применения беспилотных платформ в специальной военной операции (Analysis of trends in the use of unmanned platforms in the special military operation),” *Voyennaya Mysl*, (monthly journal of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces), August 2024. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/PWOpmGbLL3.pdf>

*The experience of military conflicts and crisis situations of recent decades, the analysis of the actions of terrorist organizations, testify to the increasing role of promising means of conducting armed conflict. One of the main military-technical components of combat actions in the special military operation in Ukraine is the mass use of unmanned aircraft and robotic systems.*

*A special feature of the use of unmanned platforms at the initial stage of the special military operation was the widespread use of reconnaissance and strike systems created on the basis of operational-tactical unmanned aircraft of the medium-altitude class. As in the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh. The strike loitering munitions class of UAVs were also used as part of mixed groups for reconnaissance and strike UAVs (**Orion**, Bayraktar TB2).*

*Currently, the main emphasis in methods and technical means of development and application has shifted towards the mini class and micro class of UAVs, which is due to the massive use of affordable consumer components, and so are being seen in all environments — air, land, and sea.*

*Small attack UAVs were used to some extent in Libya, Syria, etc. (mainly of Israeli, Turkish, Chinese manufacture), but in the conditions of the special military operation, they became the very means that changed the situation on the battlefield. The increase in the share of aerial UAVs began with the use of civilian products from the well-known Chinese company DJI. At the initial stage, these UAVs had a number of advantages (flight time, altitude, modular high-resolution optical-electronic*

*modules), but they also had disadvantages associated with their built-in software, which significantly limited their use. The relatively high cost of DJI UAV kits also dictated the requirements for their reusability, limiting the range of tasks to observation and one-time drops of combat loads.*

*The situation with DJI changed with the appearance of alternative factory firmware, which removed the altitude restrictions, no-fly zones, and added additional functionality for flight in difficult weather conditions and at night. The modified firmware currently supports the entire Mavic 3 series of DJI UAVs, including the Classic Pro, Enterprise, and Matrice 30. After reprogramming, the DJI UAVs are usually used as relatively reusable reconnaissance and surveillance assets (day and night); as part of reconnaissance and strike loops, including systems that have wired power sources that can provide constant situational awareness; electronic warfare systems; and repeaters for other UAVs...*

*However, the most widespread class of airborne UAVs during the special military operation are the kamikaze UAVs, also known as FPV UAV (from English - “first person view”), or simply FPV. From the point of view of an external observer, these devices are controlled by their operator as an “avatar”, from the point of view of the operator himself — immersively, with the operator immersed in reality, as broadcast “from the point of view” of the UAV. FPV UAVs are used, as a rule, together with homemade munitions or standard munitions, which are modified for use with UAVs. The use of FPV UAVs is characterized by flight ranges up to 20 km (with a repeater), and with an average aloft time of up to 10 minutes.*

Notes:

- 1 Moscow uses the term spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya (“special military operation”) or spetsoperatsiya (“special operation”) to describe its campaign in Ukraine.

## Iran Exports Important Nanotechnology to Russia

By Michael Rubin  
OE Watch Commentary

As Iran's oil fields decline due to decades of use and mismanagement, nanotechnology and the production of industrial catalysts become more important in enabling the extraction of the oil essential for the regime's survival and the funding of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.<sup>1</sup> The excerpted article from semi-official *Mehr News Agency* is remarkable for its blunt assessment of the current state of Iran's hydrocarbon extraction industry and its assessment that, absent nanotech catalysts, Iran's oil production could decline precipitously. The Iranian leadership will be hard-pressed to increase, let alone hold production steady, without laying 2,000 new wells, each of which requires more than a half-year to drill. The recognition of this looming shortfall combined with the Iranian regime's failure to so far plug the gap either suggests decades-long incompetent management at the highest level and/or that the Iranian oil fields are far more past their prime than the Iranian regime publicly acknowledge.

The Iranian leadership appears in control of the decision to produce certain nanocatalysts. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps controls most of the factories established to produce catalysts reinforces the military's dominance of Iran's economy. This highlights the extent to which the



A sampling of nano-tech catalysts.

Source: <https://img9.irna.ir/d/r2/2021/05/03/4/166253257.jpg>

**“Energy imbalance should be considered one of the major national challenges.”**

command economy controls Iranian development.

The decision to export \$20 million in nanocatalysts to Russia is significant for two reasons. First, it reflects the breadth of the military-industrial trade between the two states. Previously, Russia had provided Iran with nuclear technology in support of the Bushehr reactor; now, Iran is returning the favor. Second, Iran and Russia openly collude in efforts to evade sanctions, Iran for terrorism and Russia for its war in Ukraine. Such collusion exposes a loophole when countries respond to adversaries using targeted sanctions. As Iran works increasingly with Russia, North Korea, and perhaps Venezuela,

it can conduct sanctioned research or production outside its territory to evade inspectors; likewise, its allies can relocate their own work to Iranian territory to do the same.



**Source:**

(Export of \$20 million in Iranian nanocatalysts to Russia),” *Mehr News Agency* (semi-official news agency owned by Iranian government’s Islamic Development Organization), 2 August 2024. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/6182966>

“صادرات ۲۰ میلیون دلاری نانوکاتالیست‌های ایرانی به روسیه”

*The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution approved the National Document for the Development of Science and Nanotechnology in November 2022. The Development Headquarters for Nano- and Micro-technologies has now published the report on the implementation of this plan through the end of Persian year 1402 [19 March 2024] in six chapters. Considering the importance of technology in the country’s economic development and its great role in improving productivity and creating added value, policy programs have long considered the development of technological capabilities.*

*Governments employ different policies to develop research and technology. These policies can be divided into two categories. The first are functional or diffusional policies that promote innovation capacity and improve scientific and technological capabilities. The second are targeted or mission-oriented policies that support precise research or the development of needed technology or solve specific problems....*

*“Improving the competitiveness of the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries using nanotechnology” is one of the special missions of the nano-tech headquarters.... Energy imbalance should be considered one of the major national challenges that is becoming increasingly sensitive and complex due to the increasing growth of energy consumption in the country. Achieving a daily production of 5.8 million barrels of oil by 2029 requires the drilling 2,000 new*

*wells in order to resolve the energy imbalance, which is unattainable given the high cost of investment (\$160 billion) and the time-consuming drilling (at least 200 days to drill each well). Therefore, there is no choice but to increase the extraction from operational wells, which requires the use of advanced technologies such as nanotechnology. The sanctions imposed on the country and consequently, the lack of supply of catalysts needed by refineries and petrochemicals from abroad, also caused the prioritization of support of projects that solve the aforementioned challenges....*

*The export of Iranian nanocatalysts to Russia is estimated at \$20 million, experts of a knowledge-based company in three Russian steel and petrochemical complexes are setting up catalyst production units for this country, and the world’s largest petrochemical producer of urea and ammonia is also supposed to enter the production circuit with Iranian catalysts. The world’s only catalyst for ethylene production is an acetylene hydrogenation catalyst. This catalyst was placed at the top of the sanctioned goods, and the purpose of this sanction was to hit value-creating companies in the petrochemical industry. The advantages of producing these catalysts in the country are reducing the purchase price (compared to foreign catalysts), increasing the knowledge of Iranian experts, and increasing the production efficiency of important products such as urea, ammonia, and methanol in the country.*

Notes:

- 1 For previous discussion of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ economic wing, see: Michael Rubin, “The IRGC Wins Multi-Billion Dollar Economic Contracts,” *OE Watch*, August 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/274485>

## Iran Is Building a Wall Along Its Afghan Border

By Holly Dagues  
OE Watch Commentary

As border tensions between Iran and neighboring Afghanistan continue, Tehran has started building a border wall. Per the excerpted article by the Iranian state broadcaster *IRIB*, Brigadier General Kiumars Heydari of the Iranian Army's ground forces visited the Iran-Afghanistan border on 11 September, where the army's engineering units are building the "physical blockade." This news comes as Iran struggles with an influx of Afghan refugees, drug trafficking, and border disputes.

According to the second excerpted article by IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency*, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the Supreme National Security Council support the 330-kilometer wall being built in Razavi Khorasan province, reinforcing how the project is a critical national security issue. The border wall, which is in collaboration between the IRGC and the Army, has been a topic of discussion for months. In February, the brigadier general declared, "We intend to block our borders, and no one can object why we erect a fence near their border. This is not unjust to neighboring countries, as it is common practice in all countries," an indirect reference to Pakistan's border wall with Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi described it as "not a wall" but a "border blockade

that is being pursued according to the plan."<sup>2</sup>

Iran appears to be building the border wall for several national security reasons. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, tensions have been at an all-time high between the eastern neighbors over the Helmand River, which flows from Afghanistan into Iran, leading to numerous clashes on the border and political tensions.<sup>3</sup> However, the second excerpted article states, "these security plans are being implemented at the border with the cooperation of the caretaker government," referring to the Taliban, which Tehran doesn't recognize.

***"The length of this wall is extensive, and it takes time, but these security plans are being implemented at the border with the cooperation of the caretaker government."***

At the same time that it is building this wall, Iran is now the largest host for refugees in the world, with the majority coming from Afghanistan, though Tehran has expelled approximately 100,000 refugees since the beginning of the year.<sup>4</sup> While drug smuggling

has always been a contentious issue, Iranian officials are also thinking about the reality that its eastern neighbor is now host to an array of terrorist groups—including the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham-Khorasan Province and al-Qaeda—raising concerns about their potential to launch attacks into Iran.

With anti-Afghan sentiment at an all-time high in Iran, Tehran's building of a border wall may appease some Iranians. Nevertheless, this project demonstrates the complex relationship between Tehran and Kabul since the Taliban takeover and how Iran has evolved its thinking about its national security to prevent further escalation.

**Source:**

بازدید فرمانده نیروی زمینی ارتش از طرح انسداد مرزهای شرقی

(Visit of the commander army ground forces to the plan to block the eastern border),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 11 September 2024. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00IA6v>

*According to IRIB, the commander of the army’s ground forces, during his trip to the eastern borders of the country, visited this morning the construction sites where Iran-Afghanistan border is being physically blocked by army engineering units.*

*During the visit, he inspected the progress of the project and reviewed the activities of the army’s engineering combat units involved in the construction. The visit also included assessments of the military and operational readiness of soldiers stationed along the border, with a focus on enhancing security measures in the region.*

*Amir Brigadier General [Kiumars] Heydari also visited the bases of the 277th Mobile Assault Brigade of Shahid Tolaei in order to check the military and operational preparations of the soldiers and had a*

*conversation with them at the border’s zero point.*

*The deputy commander of the Northeast Regional Headquarters, the commander of the 77th Division of Saman Al-Aimeh/Eighth Imam Division, the commander of the 277th Mobile Assault Brigade, and Shahid Tolaei Brigade, accompanied Brigadier Heydari on this visit and business trip.*

*The project of physical blocking the eastern borders of the country for a length of 330 km in Razavi Khorasan is being implemented by four engineering brigades.*

*The Islamic Republic of Iran shares a 945-kilometer common border with Afghanistan, where the provinces of Razavi Khorasan, South Khorasan, and Sistan and Baluchistan are situated.*

**Source:**

جزئیات انسداد فیزیکی مرز با افغانستان

(Details of the physical blockade of the border with Afghanistan),” *Tasnim News Agency* (IRGC), 13 September 2024. <https://tn.ai/3155310>

*According to the foreign policy correspondent of Tasnim [News Agency], Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the acting head of the Iranian embassy in Afghanistan, explained in a discussion regarding the plan to physically block the border with Afghanistan: We in Afghanistan with the caretaker government have the same border security issue, which is the issues of fighting terrorism, drug trafficking, and similar issues.*

*He added: One of the issues is that the caretaker government supports the plan to physically block the border. The work has already begun along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and fortunately it is*

*in line with the directives of the Supreme National Security Council and orders of the Supreme Leader, as commander-in-chief.*

*The special representative of the president for Afghanistan affairs stated: The general staff of the armed forces started this movement in collaboration with the IRGC and the army of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of course, the length of this wall is extensive, and it takes time, but these security plans are being implemented at the border with the cooperation of the caretaker government.*

Notes:

- 1 “Iran Insists On Its Right To Block Borders With Afghanistan,” *Iran International*, 16 February 2024. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402167106>.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Christina Goldbaum, “At Least Three Are Killed in Clashes on Iranian-Afghan Border,” *New York Times*, 28 May 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/28/world/asia/afghanistan-iran-border-clashes.html>
- 4 Ayaz Gul, “Taliban: Pakistan, Iran expelled over 400,000 Afghan refugees so far in 2024,” *VOA*, 10 June 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-pakistan-iran-expelled-over-400-000-afghan-refugees-so-far-in-2024/7650196.html>



## Iran Believes Israel is Too Weak to Take on Hezbollah



Deputy Coordinator of the Army Ideological-Political Organization, Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia, speaking out against Israel on 10 September 2024.

Source: IRIB (Iranian media outlet) <https://www.iribnews.ir/0019ou>

By Holly Dagues  
OE Watch Commentary

As tit-for-tat strikes continue between Israel and Lebanon since 7 October 2023, Iran believes the Jewish state is too weak to take on a new war front with Hezbollah. As reported by Iranian state broadcaster *IRIB*, Deputy Coordinator of the Army Ideological-Political Organization, Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia, said on 10 September that Israel lacks “the capability to open a new front in the region, and the continuation of the Gaza war is not feasible for them and will not achieve anything for them.” The comments come after Lebanese Hezbollah retaliated on 25 August for Israel’s assassination of its military commander, Fuad Shukur, at the end of July.<sup>1</sup>

In the excerpted article, Brigadier General Akraminia explained that Israel continues to threaten the Lebanese militant group, which he believes has “precise” missile and drone capabilities, due to Israel’s failure to destroy Hamas and release the remaining hostages, as well as its inability to stop the Hezbollah’s attacks. He emphasized that “internal issues and high casualties in the Gaza war have left the occupiers with no choice but to retreat and accept a ceasefire,” referring to Israel.

comments suggest that Tehran and the Resistance Axis—led by its crown jewel proxy, Hezbollah—believe they have been in a position of strength since 7 October 2023, suggesting that these proxy groups will continue responding to Israel as long as the Gaza war continues.

***“The Zionists alone lack the capability to open a new front in the region, and the continuation of the Gaza war is not feasible for them and will not achieve anything for them.”***

Due to its failures, the Brigadier General believes Israel is trying “to draw actors such as the United States and Europe into the battlefield, hoping to save itself from the Gaza quagmire.” In other words, Israel is trying to start a war with its northern neighbor to distract from its failings in Gaza. However, Akraminia noted that the upcoming U.S. presidential election makes it unlikely a full-scale war would be supported. Akraminia’s

**Source:**

(The Zionists are not capable of an all-out battle with Hezbollah),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 10 September 2024. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00I9ou>.

صهیونیست‌ها قادر به نبرد همه‌جانبه با حزب‌الله نیستند

*According to IRIB News Agency, Brigadier General [Mohammad] Akraminia, in an interview regarding the Zionist authorities' threat of a full-scale attack on Lebanon, stated: "Given the failure of the Zionist regime in achieving its declared goals, including the release of prisoners, the destruction of Hamas, and the inability to stop Hezbollah's attacks, the authorities of this regime are constantly threatening the Lebanese resistance forces."*

*The Deputy Coordinator of the Army Ideological-Political Organization added: "The Zionist regime is trying to expand the war in the region in order to draw actors such as the U.S. and Europeans into the battlefield, hoping to save itself from the Gaza quagmire."*

*Noting that the Zionist regime is battling the Resistance Axis on several fronts, Brigadier General Akraminia said: "The Zionists alone lack the capability to open a new front in the region, and the continuation of the Gaza war is not feasible for them and will not achieve anything for them."*

*The Deputy Coordinator of the Army Ideological-Political Organization stated that the Gaza battle is being fought directly with U.S. and Western countries' military aid and remarked: "Considering the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, it is unlikely that they would support a full-scale attack on Lebanon and the opening of a new front in the region."*

*Brigadier General Akraminia stressed the precision of Hezbollah's missiles and drones and their success in various operations against the Zionists, stating: "The Zionists are well aware of Lebanese Hezbollah's capabilities, and we only witnessed a small part of these capabilities during the Arbaeen operations," referring to Fuad Shukur retaliation.*

*The Deputy Coordinator of the Army Ideological-Political Organization, referring to the Zionist officials' acknowledgment of Hezbollah's high capabilities, noted: "Internal issues and high casualties in the Gaza war have left the occupiers with no choice but to retreat and accept a ceasefire."*

**Notes:**

- 1 Ronen Bergman, Adam Rasgon, Euan Ward, Farnaz Fassihi, and Hwaida Saad, "Israel Says It Killed Hezbollah Commander in Airstrike Near Beirut," *New York Times*, 30 July 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/30/world/middleeast/israel-hezbollah-lebanon.html>

## North Korea Unveils New 12-Axle ICBM Launcher

By Anthony W. Holmes  
OE Watch Commentary

North Korea publicly revealed a new, larger ICBM transporter erector launcher (TEL) system, potentially for a new ICBM class. The communist Workers' Party of Korea newspaper *Rodong Sinmun*, released a picture of Kim Jong Un inspecting a new 12-axle TEL. The disclosure happened as Kim Jong Un visited a defense industrial enterprise site on 8 September as part of events commemorating the 76th anniversary of the founding of the state.

Since North Korea's first ICBM test launch on 4 July 2017, the PRK has been testing progressively larger ICBM missile systems and associated TELs. The **Hwaseong-17**, North Korea's known largest ICBM, tested in 2023,

already has an associated 11-axle TEL.<sup>1</sup>

The 12-axle TEL's unveiling was uncharacteristically subdued by North Korean standards, presented almost as an afterthought buried in a technical piece about the PRK's defense manufacturing goals. Apart from the associated image, the *Rodong Sinmun* article makes no reference to the TEL, instead highlighting Kim Jong Un's visit to the site and his speech about the important work of the national defense industrial enterprise.

However, the photo release could not have been an accident and most likely had a messaging purpose.<sup>2</sup> These could have included promoting a new, even larger missile system under development which the regime

might reveal or test closer to the U.S. presidential election. Possibly, but less likely, it could represent a new and more survivable design for the existing Hwaseong systems. The subdued nature of the unveiling could likewise represent North Korea's attempt to influence the narrative in Western, Japanese, and South Korean media, a sort of "we are still here" message that carries an implied threat to the next U.S. administration.

***“Kim Jong Un acquainted himself with the production of military hardware in the second half of the year.”***

**Source:** Rodong Sinmun, “경애하는 김정은동지께서 국방공업기업소를 현지지도하시였다 (Dear Comrade Kim Jong Un Visits Defense Industrial Enterprises),” *Rodong Sinmun* (communist Workers' Party of Korea daily newspaper), 8 Sep 2024. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/8bc7076c7ecb6af9065c66977903f00c.kcmsf>

*Pyongyang, September 8 (KCNA)—Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, visited a defence industrial enterprise under the Second Economy Commission to learn about the production of military hardware...*

*Highly appreciating the indomitable fighting spirit and extraordinary ideological and spiritual world of its officials and workers, he expressed thanks to them*

*for carrying out the huge munitions production tasks in a responsible and correct way and making a great contribution to the development of our armed forces, true to the Party's policy on munitions industry.*

*Learning about the structural characteristics, performance and tactical and technical specifications of military hardware under development and production, he stressed the need to put the munitions production on a more scientific and modern basis and thoroughly guarantee the combat performance of military hardware.*

*continue on 36*

*Repeatedly expressing his satisfaction over the fact that the prospect for confidently attaining the goal of military hardware production within the five-year period decided and assigned by the Eighth Party Congress is guaranteed thanks to the*

*dynamic struggle of the munitions industry workers, he clarified the principles and ways for the defence industrial enterprise to hold fast to in the munitions production permanently.*

Notes:

- 1 For more information on North Korean *Hwaseong* tests over the last three years, see: <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/weapons/north-korea-reveals-12-axle-tel>
- 2 North Korea has a pattern in engaging new U.S. administrations in order to achieve its diplomatic and military goals. For further discussion on Pyongyang's assessed course of action, see: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/How-North-Korea-will-look-to-play-the-next-U.S.-president>



## North Korea Reveals Previously Undisclosed Uranium Enrichment Site

By Anthony W. Holmes  
OE Watch Commentary

North Korean state media is releasing stories at a steady pace highlighting its advancements and intent regarding its illicit nuclear weapons program and associated delivery systems. According to a 13 September article in state-controlled broadcaster *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, Kim Jong Un visited a previously undisclosed uranium enrichment facility designed to produce material for nuclear weapons. Notably, North Korea emphasized that the facility was for development of nuclear weapons targeted against the United States, not for the productions of civilian nuclear fuel, as the regime routinely claims.

This disclosure comes as part of a weeks-long celebration of the 76th anniversary of the founding of North Korea, during which state media has issued a steady drumbeat of articles about the party's military plans and goals. During the same period, North Korea also released an image of a new

12-axle transporter erector launcher (TEL) for a possible new type of ICBM, the test firing of a new 600mm MRLS,<sup>1</sup> and Kim inspecting special operations forces training.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last decade, North Korea has sought to portray its nuclear weapons and missile program as what a “normal nation” would do. However, North Korean media historically fluctuated between two extremes. On one hand, it would aggressively hype the program, threaten the United States and our allies, promise first strikes, and publicly identify its intended nuclear targets on the U.S. mainland. Then, depending on the political environment, it would shift to a message of simple deterrence, disclaiming any first use, and promising to be a responsible nuclear power.

North Korea is portraying its nuclear weapons development targeted at the United States as the new normal, similar to its uncharacteristic restraint in unveiling its new 12-axle TEL. The Regime probably does not feel the need to use its trademark over-the-top, anti-U.S. rhetoric to justify the program when matter-of-fact statements will do. The Regime's message is clearly that this is the way things are now.

**“Noting that anti-DPRK nuclear threat moves of the U.S. imperialists and their vassal forces have become more undisguised and crossed the red-line...require the DPRK to steadily expand and bolster up its military capability for self-defense and the capability for preemptive attack with the nuclear force as the backbone.”**

**Source:** “경애하는 김정은동지께서 핵무기연구소와 무기급핵물질생산기지를 현지지도하시였다 (Dear Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Inspects Nuclear Weapons Institute and Production Base of Weapons-grade Nuclear Materials),” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 13 September 2024. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/8bc7076c7ecb6af9065c66977903f00c.kcmsf>

*Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, inspected the Nuclear Weapons Institute and the production*

*base of weapons-grade nuclear materials, acquainted himself with the production of nuclear warheads and the current production of nuclear materials and set forth important tasks concerning a long-term plan for*

*continue on 38*

*increasing the production of weapons-grade nuclear materials.*

*He highly praised the scientists, technicians and officials in the field of nuclear weapons production for carrying out without fail the plan for producing weapons-grade nuclear materials needed for manufacturing nuclear warheads, cherishing the firm and steadfast revolutionary spirit and faith to firmly defend the victorious advance of the revolutionary cause of Juche with the strongest nuclear force.*

*He expressed great satisfaction after being briefed on the fact that the base is dynamically producing nuclear materials by studying, developing and introducing all the system elements including centrifugal separators and various kinds of sensors and controllers with its own efforts and technology.*

*Personally looking round the production site, he said that it is invigorating to see the place, and continued: In order to exponentially multiply the nuclear weapons for self-defence true to the Party's line of building the nuclear force, it is necessary to further increase the number of centrifuges, not content with the successes achieved, and, at the same time, to enhance the individual separation ability of the centrifuge and push forward with the introduction of a new-type centrifuge, which has already reached the completion stage, as planned, so as to consolidate the foundation for producing weapons-grade nuclear materials.*

*Going round the construction site for expanding the capacity for the current production of nuclear*

*weapons, he learned in detail about the daily plan for the assembly of equipment.*

*Noting that anti-DPRK nuclear threat moves of the U.S. imperialists and their vassal forces have become more undisguised and crossed the red-line, he said the security environment facing the DPRK, the peculiarity of the Korean revolution compelling the country to constantly confront the U.S. and contain it and prospective threats require the DPRK to steadily expand and bolster up its military capability for self-defence and the capability for preemptive attack with the nuclear force as the backbone. He stressed again that a more rapid and sure advance should be made in the struggle to always maintain the thoroughgoing counteraction posture of the nuclear force and improve the posture to a high level.*

*The combatants in the field of nuclear weapons production, assuming the most important responsibility, that is, the historic mission to bolster up the nuclear war deterrent of the country in quality and quantity and in a sustained and accelerated way, should keep exerting themselves in production and thus more creditably fulfil the sacred duty they took on for the Party and the revolution, he instructed.*

*He stressed the need to set a higher long-term goal in producing nuclear materials necessary for the manufacture of tactical nuclear weapons and concentrate all efforts on making a fresh leap forward, and set forth important tasks and orientation.*

Notes:

1 See: “경애하는 김정은동지께서 새형의 600mm방사포차성능검증을 위한 시험사격을 보시였다 (Dear Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Oversees Test-fire for Verifying Performance of New-type 600mm Multiple Rocket Launcher),” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 13 September 2024. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/d5a6198af96d278695d7978c6d8bd74f.kcmsf>

2 Ibid.

## Drone Warfare Is Becoming a Common Tactic in Mali



A Turkish-manufactured Bayraktar TB2 UAV on the runway.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar\\_TB2\\_Runway.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_Runway.jpg)

By Christopher Betts  
OE Watch Commentary

Recent reporting indicates that both the Malian military and Tuareg separatist groups are utilizing drone warfare.<sup>1</sup> According to the first excerpted article from the Africa-focused UK-based news publication *Qiraat Africa*, rebel forces reported 21 civilian deaths, including 11 children, following Malian military air strikes on the village of Tinzaouatine.<sup>2</sup> The strike was part of intensified fighting following the recent defeat of Malian Army and Africa Corps mercenaries by rebel fighters who allied with militants from the Al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). The Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) is a coalition of Malian separatist groups fighting against government forces in northern Mali and is the latest evolution of the Tuareg rebellion. The Tuareg people, who inhabit the areas of northern Mali, Niger, and parts of western Libya,

have been fighting with the Malian government for autonomy on and off since the 1990s. While these separatist groups have been geographically close to radical Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, also based in northern Mali, their motivation has consistently been about independence as opposed to an Islamic caliphate. According to the rebels, the airstrikes allegedly targeted a pharmacy and groups of gathered people in the village. The Malian Armed Forces confirmed the attack but stated that the strikes were precise and specifically targeted terrorists. These strikes and associated civilian casualties are likely to continue as fighting persists, and government forces cannot conduct a persistent ground campaign in the Kidal region of the country.

Seemingly in retaliation for the Tinzaouatine attack, the rebels conducted a drone strike against a Malian

Army camp. According to the second excerpted article from French news radio RFI, rebel forces struck a Malian Army camp approximately 60 miles from Timbuktu, though no casualties were reported. The strike marked an evolution in the conflict, with both sides now utilizing drone warfare. Although the rebel forces indicated they did not acquire the drones through Ukraine or JNIM, there are few open-source details on the type or quantity of drones they use. The leadership of the rebel faction did acknowledge that they have had access to the drones for ten months to train with and manufacture grenades. While still an effective tool, rebel forces are likely not using as technologically advanced drones as the Malian Army, who, alongside their Africa Corps counterparts, have been using Turkish-made **Bayraktar TB2** drones with significant effect.<sup>2</sup>



Drone warfare in Mali and possibly other non-state actors could signal a fundamental shift in the conduct of battles and the power balance in the region. The only other time rebel forces utilized drones was in July 2024, when they defeated Africa Corps and the Malian armed forces. Though the CSP currently denies drone use in

***“The use of drones by the CSP rebels, if it were to increase, could change the contours of the war between the Malian army, its Wagner auxiliaries, and the CSP rebels.”***

conjunction with terrorist organizations like JNIM, their successful use in the region has the potential to also expand the usage by jihadist groups. Drone warfare on both sides will also likely impact civilian casualties and cause problems for the Malian armed forces, similar to what the Russian military is currently facing in Ukraine.

**Source:** “Au moins 21 civils tués par un drone dans le nord du Mali, selon un groupe dirigé par des Touaregs (At least 21 civilians killed by drone strike in northern Mali, Tuareg-leg group says),” *Qiraata Africa* (independent UK-based magazine focused on sub-Saharan Africa), 26 August 2024. <https://qiraatafrican.com/fr/12604/au-moins-21-civils-tues-par-un-drone-dans-le-nord-du-mali-selon-un-groupe-dirige-par-des-touaregs/>

*Airstrikes on a village in northern Mali near the Algerian border killed 21 civilians on Sunday, including 11 children, a spokesman for a coalition of predominantly Tuareg pro-independence groups said. The attack on the village of Tinzaouatine marks the highest number of civilians killed by drones since the breakdown of a peace deal between the country’s ruling military junta and pro-independence armed groups in northern Mali last year.*

*The Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad is a coalition of predominantly Tuareg groups fighting for the independence of northern Mali, which they call Azawad. Sunday’s strikes targeted a pharmacy, followed by additional strikes targeting people gathered near the initial damage, the coalition said in a statement. “The provisional toll of these criminal strikes stands at 21 civilians killed, including 11 children and the head of the pharmacy, dozens of injured and enormous material damage,” said the statement signed by Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane, spokesman for the rebel coalition present in the village.*

*In a statement broadcast on national television, the Malian armed forces confirmed these strikes. “The army general staff confirms the airstrikes in the Tinzaouatine sector on the morning of August 25, 2024. These precision strikes targeted terrorists,” the press release states. The strikes come weeks after the Malian army and mercenaries from the Russia-based Wagner Group were defeated by Tuareg rebels and fighters from Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, a group linked to al-Qaeda.*

*Sunday’s strikes targeted a pharmacy; then others targeted people gathered near the initial damage, the coalition said in a statement. “Both Malian forces and Russian mercenaries lack a strong ground presence in the Kidal region, so using air assets, including drones, is the only way for them to engage armed groups in the region,” said Rida Lyammouri, a senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, a Moroccan think tank. “Therefore, airstrikes, including on civilians, are likely to increase as revenge for the recent major setback suffered by Wagner mercenaries in northern Mali”*



**Source:** “Mali: les rebelles du CSP combattent désormais avec des drones (Mali: CSP rebels now fight with drones),” *RFI (French-based radio station and part of the France Medias Monde group)*, 12 September 2024. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240912-mali-les-rebelles-du-csp-combattent-d%C3%A9sormais-avec-des-drones>

*In Mali, the rebels of the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) are now fighting with drones. They used them on September 11, 2024, against a Malian army camp about a hundred kilometers from Timbuktu. No casualties were reported. But it was on this occasion that the rebels revealed that they had drones and that it was the second time they had used them. A new addition to their arsenal could change the shape of the war between the Malian army, its Wagner auxiliaries, and the rebels in the North.*

*The rebels claim to have used it [drones] for the first time at the end of July in Tinzaouatène, during their only but important victory against the Malian soldiers and the Wagner group, who had lost several dozen men and were forced to turn back. Where do these drones come from? How many do the rebels have? What model exactly? No details have been released. CSP spokesman Mohamed el Maouloud Ramadane says only that they were “purchased,” and assures that they were not supplied by Ukraine – nor by the al-Qaeda-linked Jnim (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims). The jihadists, who are also fighting the Malian army in northern Mali, use drones to film their propaganda videos. To date, JNIM has not claimed responsibility for any drone attacks.*

*According to several CSP fighters contacted by RFI, the rebels have had these drones for about ten months*

*now. “We had to train people and make the grenades; it’s dangerous, and it takes time,” explains one of them. Regarding their use in Tinzaouatène at the end of July, the rebels assure that it was “decisive”, particularly “against the armored vehicles”. At the time, the CSP rebels had not communicated on the unprecedented use of these drones. Nor had the Malian army, which had exceptionally acknowledged “a significant number of losses in human and material life” (press release of July 29).*

*The Fama (Malian Armed Forces) and their Wagner auxiliaries themselves use armed drones. The first Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2s, acquired by the Malian army, were received in December 2022. Other deliveries followed, always relayed on state media to illustrate the army’s “rise in power”. These drones actually proved decisive during the capture of Kidal, a rebel stronghold, last November. The strikes forced the CSP men to withdraw, without even attempting ground combat. If the use of drones by the CSP rebels were to increase, it could change the contours of the war between the Malian army, its Wagner auxiliaries, and the CSP rebels. It could help to rebalance the forces because, until now, the Malian army and Wagner dominate the terrain. Since the use of armed drones requires particularly reliable intelligence and careful targeting, it could also increase the risk for civilians, whom the CSP rebels have made it their mission to protect.*

Notes:

- 1 The linked article by Le Monde goes in-depth on the Tuareg rebellion that has been going on in Mali since the 1990s. For more information, see: Philippe Baqué, “For the Tuaregs, unite or disappear (Mali’s Tuaregs: ‘For us, this war is existential’),” *Le Monde*, April 2024. <https://mondediplo.com/2024/04/13mali>
- 2 The Bayraktar TB2 is described as a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE), Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, capable of a 27-hour maximum flight time and a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet. For additional information see: “Bayraktar TB2,” Bayraktar, n.d. <https://baykartech.com/en/uav/bayraktar-tb2/>

## Cartel Internecine Warfare Erupts in the State of Sinaloa

By Ryan C. Berg  
OE Watch Commentary

The state of Sinaloa, along Mexico's Pacific coast, is synonymous with cartels and home to one of the most notorious transnational criminal groups in the country.<sup>1</sup> Following the arrest of longtime cartel kingpin, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, at the U.S. southern border, violence has broken out between two opposing factions of the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>2</sup> Anticipating further violence between the two major factions, one controlled by the children of former Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera and the other by those loyal to El Chapo's former business associate, El Mayo, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador pleaded with the cartel to "act with a minimum of responsibility," according to the excerpted article from right-leaning Mexican daily *El Universal*. The newspaper reports that the Mexican gov-

ernment is downplaying the number of deaths in Sinaloa; however, the violence has escalated rapidly, triggering the cancellation of Mexico's Independence Day celebrations in the state of Sinaloa.

***"President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called on the criminal groups—Mayos and Chapitos—that are facing the attack to act 'with a minimum of responsibility.'"***

Argentine news outlet *Infobae* reports that at least 18 people have reportedly died in a wave of violence that includes roadblocks, the destruction of public infrastructure, and the closure of businesses. The escalating turf war between the two factions of the Sinaloa Cartel has significant



Mugshot of Sinaloa Cartel leader, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, one of the most wanted men in the world, extradited to the United States in 2016.

Source: <https://picryl.com/media/booking-photo-of-joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-front-873b60>

ramifications for the operational environment. First, incoming president Claudia Sheinbaum will likely start her term on 1 October with an escalating security crisis in the Sinaloa state. Second, whichever faction emerges victorious in this internecine battle will have more consolidated control over Mexico's criminal landscape and lucrative routes to traffic, among other things, fentanyl to the United States.

**Source:** "AMLO llama a grupos criminales que se enfrentan en Sinaloa a actuar 'con un mínimo de responsabilidad' (AMLO calls on criminal groups fighting in Sinaloa to act 'with a minimum of responsibility')," *El Universal* (right-leaning Mexican daily), 13 September 2024. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/amlo-llama-a-grupos-criminales-que-se-enfrentan-en-sinaloa-a-actuar-con-un-minimo-de-responsabilidad/>

*After four days of violence in Culiacán, Sinaloa, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called on the criminal groups—Mayos and Chapitos—that are facing the attack to act 'with a minimum of responsibility.' He said, 'With the presence of the Armed Forces to ensure that there is no confrontation, to protect the population, they must also act with a*

*minimum of responsibility. It is their family, their fellow countrymen, their municipality, their state and their country.' At a press conference, the President considered that the violence in Culiacán so far 'is not a major issue.'...Out of prudence, the Independence Day celebrations in Culiacán were cancelled.*

**Source:** “Al menos 18 muertes en una nueva ola de violencia en Sinaloa (México) (At least 18 dead in a new wave of violence in Sinaloa (Mexico)),” *Infobae* (Argentine outlet with excellent regional coverage), 15 September 2024. <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2024/09/15/al-menos-18-muertes-en-una-nueva-ola-de-violencia-en-sinaloa-mexico/>

*During the second week of September, 18 homicides, 36 carjackings and 28 reports of deprivation of liberty have been recorded, in an escalation of violence carried out by criminal groups in the Mexican state of Sinaloa, according to authorities...Sinaloa Governor*

*Rubén Rocha Moya has acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and has attributed these clashes to disputes between factions of the Sinaloa Cartel, specifically between Los Chapitos and Los Mayos.*

Notes:

- 1 For an updated profile of the Sinaloa Cartel and its activities, see: Insight Crime, “Sinaloa Cartel,” last updated 15 March 2024. <https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/sinaloa-cartel-profile/>
- 2 The story of El Mayo’s arrival at the U.S. southern border is long and still not fully known, but for a comprehensive background on what may have transpired, see: José de Córdoba, “Betrayal and Capture of Sinaloa Cartel Leaders Spark Fears of Turf War,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 August 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/world/americas/betrayal-and-capture-of-sinaloa-cartel-leaders-spark-fears-of-turf-war-d1a805f8>

## German Opinion Divided on Increased Multi-Domain Task Force Capabilities



It is proposed that the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) surface-to-surface hypersonic missile be deployed to Germany as part of the U.S. Army's 2nd Multi-Domain Task Force. Opponents to the deployment of such weapons suggest it will antagonize Moscow and lead to a new arms race.

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/c4/LRHWfirstThunderBoltStrike.jpg>

By Second Lieutenant Vinzent Speierl  
(German Army)  
OE Watch Commentary

A U.S. and German pronouncement on 10 July 2024 that the United States will start deploying long-range fires units to Germany in 2026 sparked a sharp Russian rebuke. On 12 July, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, made a statement that involved some thinly veiled nuclear threats.<sup>1</sup> These events have spurred debate in Germany about whether increasing U.S./NATO capabilities will make Europe safer or will simply antagonize Russia and start a new arms race.

The accompanying excerpted article from the German political think tank, *Stiftung Wissenschaft*

*und Politik*, specifically lays out the capabilities of the BGM-109 Tomahawk surface-to-surface missile, the SM-6 ballistic defense missile, and the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon surface-to-surface hypersonic missile that are proposed to be deployed to Germany as part of the U.S. Army's 2nd Multi-Domain Task Force. The think tank, which also advises the German government, explains the advantages of deploying the weapon systems and argues against possible concerns. In contrast, the second accompanying excerpted article from the German media company *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk*, notes that the German civilian population is highly critical of the decision to deploy these weapons,

***“Two thirds of those surveyed are against the plans to station long-range missiles and hypersonic weapons in western Germany in 2026. A large majority fear that the stationing could lead to a new arms race and make Germany a target for attack.”***

with citizens expressing various concerns. Of particular note, the article mentions a recent poll that found that two-thirds of respondents opposed plans to station these weapons in Germany. The third accompanying article from the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt*, lays out some expert German opinions for and against this deployment. It also notes another German poll in which 50 percent of respondents feared that such a force structure increase would further escalate conflict with Russia.

On 1 September 2024, state elections in the German states of Thuringia and Saxony saw significant gains for the right-leaning Alternative for Germany party and the left-leaning



Sarah Wagenknecht Alliance party, which both oppose the deployment of these U.S. weapons and disapprove of German support for Ukraine in its current form. These results may be an indicator of the upcoming German

federal elections in 2025 and could influence the German position on the stationing of additional U.S. weapon systems.

**Source:** “Große Mehrheit lehnt Stationierung von US-Raketen in Deutschland ab (Large majority rejects stationing of US missiles in Germany),” *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk* (German media company), 21 August 2024. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/politik/mdrfragt-umfrage-ergebnisse-waffen-raketen-stationieren-nato-100.html>

*Two thirds of those surveyed are against the plans to station long-range missiles and hypersonic weapons in western Germany in 2026. A large majority fear that the stationing could lead to a new arms race and make Germany a target for attack. These are two results of the current MDRfragt survey from Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia with almost 24,000 respondents...*

*Only one in three believes that the deployment of weapons provides Germany with protection and*

*strengthens its own defense capabilities (31%). A quarter of respondents believe that the US weapons systems could serve as a deterrent (26%).*

*In recent weeks, several parties have called for parliament to be involved in such a far-reaching decision. More than three quarters of MDRfragt participants also believe that the deployment of the weapons systems announced by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz has not yet been sufficiently discussed in politics.*

**Source:** “Gewichtig und richtig: weitreichende US-Mittelstreckenwaffen in Deutschland (Significant and Sound: US Medium-Range Missiles in Germany),” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (The German Institute for International and Security Affairs), 29 July 2024. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/gewichtig-und-richtig-weitreichende-us-mittelstreckenwaffen-in-deutschland>

*The German-American plan envisages the deployment of three types of land-based US medium-range weapons in 2026. The first is the Tomahawk cruise missile... Second, the Standard Missile (SM) 6... Third, the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW), also called Dark Eagle...The three missiles will be deployed in Germany as part of the US Army’s 2nd Multi-Domain Task Force. Its core mission is to counter Russia’s anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities with new technologies and concepts: In the event of war, Moscow hopes to keep the bulk of NATO forces away from the combat zone along its*

*border by using ballistic and cruise missile strikes to prevent the alliance’s troops from deploying and resupplying, or by forcing NATO to back down with strikes against individual member states. The Alliance could not effectively defend itself against these Russian options with air and missile defense systems alone because Europe’s territory is vast, and comprehensive protection against Russia’s missile arsenal would be too expensive. Nevertheless, with its own medium-range precision weapons, NATO can thwart this Russian plan in two complementary ways....*

*continue on 46*

...Opponents of the deployment plan argue that the US weapons would become targets for Moscow's missiles, thereby exposing Germany to an increased threat. This narrative must be countered: Although the Kremlin is likely to consider future medium-range US weapons legitimate targets, Putin sees Berlin as an adversary anyway. As a NATO logistics hub with many US bases, Germany is already a priority target for precision strikes if Moscow wants to keep NATO at a distance in the event of war. New US missiles deployed there will not significantly exacerbate this situation.

Another concern is that the deployment of US

weapons will force Russia to produce even more missiles and station them in Europe. The result would be an "arms race". Indeed, the Russian government announced vague military countermeasures during the NATO summit... Nevertheless, due to Russia's current arms build-up and the sanctions imposed upon the country, Russia's defense industrial sector is already reaching its limits. Production capacity, skilled labor and financial resources are limited. Therefore, even Russian and US experts who share concerns about an arms race have serious doubts that the Kremlin could launch a missile arms race with new programs in the short or medium term....

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**Source:** "Was für US-Raketen in Deutschland spricht – und was dagegen (What speaks for US missiles in Germany – and what speaks against it)," *Handelsblatt* (German business newspaper), 20 August 2024. <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/verteidigung-was-fuer-us-raketen-in-deutschland-spricht-und-was-dagegen/100059925.html>

From 2026, the USA wants to station long-range missiles and cruise missiles in Germany. Many fear that this could escalate the conflict with Russia. Military experts assess the situation. The USA wants to station Tomahawk cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles and SM-6 anti-aircraft missiles in Germany from 2026. This was announced by the governments of both countries in July on the sidelines of the NATO summit. Many citizens view the plan with skepticism. According to a survey for the Funke media group, 50 percent of those polled feared that this could further escalate conflict with Russia...

When the planned stationing became public knowledge, former SPD party chairman Norbert Walter-Borjans was upset. The fact that "such a far-reaching decision is practically not debated, that it is more or less made and announced unilaterally" is problematic, he told Deutschlandfunk. Walter-

Borjans was still in office as party leader when the US announced in March 2021 that it would locate the second of five planned Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTF) in Germany and opened the headquarters in Wiesbaden in September 2021...

Sahra Wagenknecht, founder of the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW), described the missiles planned for deployment as "offensive weapons". The SPD [Social Democratic Party] executive committee, however, sees things differently: The planned deployment is "not a confrontational build-up of arms, but a strengthening of our country's defense," it says in the three-page letter in which the executive committee recently backed Chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision...

What is the rule now, an offensive or defensive weapon? Both. Military expert Carlo Masala from the Bundeswehr University recently said in an interview

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with *Handelsblatt* that the cruise missiles and the hypersonic missiles still under development are designed to destroy command centers, bases or supply lines far behind the front in the event of a Russian attack. This is intended to make it impossible for the enemy to expand its attack over a large area. But if it realizes that it cannot win a major war, it will probably not attack at all, argues Masala. That is why the weapons serve as a deterrent and a defense.

FDP leader Christian Lindner recently told the newspapers of the Funke media group that Germany has been within range of Russia's nuclear-capable missiles for years. "That is why it is of paramount importance for us to establish a balance of deterrence." For example, Russia has stationed Iskander missiles in the Kaliningrad exclave and in Belarus, which carry nuclear warheads and can reach Berlin. But the balance called for by Lindner is not to be achieved through nuclear weapons. The weapons planned for stationing would be "equipped with conventional warheads," says the SPD presidium

Notes:

- 1 See: "Special op experience shows Russia needs clearer nuclear doctrine — diplomat," TASS (Russian news agency), 12 July 2024. <https://tass.com/politics/1816259>

paper. "There are no plans to arm the systems with nuclear weapons."

Federal Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) is calling for a public debate "to make the seriousness of the situation clear... On one hand, we are experiencing a new threat situation in Europe due to Russia's aggressive behavior, and on the other hand, we have a capability gap that we can only close in the short term with the help of our US allies until we have developed these weapons ourselves," he emphasized...

Security expert Claudia Major from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) recently wrote in a guest commentary in the *Handelsblatt* that the Europeans lack their own land-based missiles with which they could reach Russian territory. From Major's point of view, the planned stationing of the missiles could even help to make a nuclear escalation less likely. In the event of an attack, they would give NATO additional options for action short of a nuclear counterattack, writes the SWP expert...

## India Considers Implications After the Collapse of the Bangladeshi Government

By Matthew Stein  
OE Watch Commentary

In early August 2024, protests in Bangladesh resulted in the collapse and resignation of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. While this did not result in an immediate threat for India, the accompanying excerpted article shows how the situation in Bangladesh will remain a security issue for India. The article from the Indian independent think tank *The Centre for Land Warfare Studies* examines what happened in Bangladesh and outlines what India can do to adjust. The author, a retired Indian Army general, provides some background on what led to Sheikh Hasina's resignation.<sup>1</sup> As the author points out, the history between India and Bangladesh has at times been contentious, but India and Hasina had favorable relations for a number of years due to Hasina's working closely with India on security issues. This included India and Bangladesh cooperating to resolve their border and maritime disputes and Hasina working with India to help end its conflict with the United Liberation Front of Assam.<sup>2</sup> The author goes on to note how China has gained considerable influence in Bangladesh through exports of weapons. He also mentions that because the Bangladeshi Army has played a role in the regime change, India should reach out to work closely and strengthen



The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi meeting the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, in New York, USA on September 27, 2019.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Prime\\_Minister,\\_Shri\\_Narendra\\_Modi\\_meeting\\_the\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_of\\_Bangladesh,\\_Ms.\\_Sheikh\\_Hasina,\\_in\\_New\\_York,\\_USA\\_on\\_September\\_27,\\_2019\\_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Prime_Minister,_Shri_Narendra_Modi_meeting_the_Prime_Minister_of_Bangladesh,_Ms._Sheikh_Hasina,_in_New_York,_USA_on_September_27,_2019_(1).jpg)

military ties. This could set up further competition between India and China in the region. Lastly, the author states that India needs to do everything possible to protect Indian nationals and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, with the latter group referencing the Hindu religious minority in the country. The majority Muslim population in Bangladesh has periodically attacked Hindus, but Hasina's government has

provided them with protection. Indian Prime Minister Modi and the interim government in Bangladesh appear to have established positive relations, but the status of Hindus in Bangladesh could be a point of contention and an issue for India to resolve.

**“Referring to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine as well as Israel-Hamas conflicts and the current situation in Bangladesh, the Minister exhorted the Commanders to ‘analyze these episodes, predict the problems that the country may face in the future, and stay prepared to deal with the unexpected.’”**



**Source:** Lt Gen PS Rajeshwar, (Ret), “India – Bangladesh Relations: Navigating The Turmoil,” *The Centre for Land Warfare Studies* (independent think tank in India), 16 August 2024. <https://www.claws.in/analysis-india-bangladesh-relations-navigating-the-turmoil/>

*The developments of 5 August had resulted in very short notice to Indian authorities...What appeared initially to be a student movement against the quota system for descendants of freedom fighters in government jobs finally turned into a call for the resignation of the then Prime Minister...*

*Under these circumstances, how does one look at the strategic dimensions of India-Bangladesh relations? The ties between the two nations were forged through the sacrifices of people in both countries during the Liberation War of 1971. The economic, cultural, and linguistic aspects were strengthened further during the last 15 years of the Sheikh Hasina rule.*

*Bangladesh has a special place in our policy matrix and security calculations...She shares a more than 4000 km border, much of which abuts our critical NE region. In a significant 2015 agreement, the border was simplified by exchanging enclaves trapped in each other's territories...The two countries also settled their maritime dispute amicably. Earlier, in*

*2010, the Awami League government had helped India by removing all camps of Indian rebel groups, which broke the back of the ULFA, pushing it to a peace agreement.*

*India has been very concerned about China's influence in Bangladesh, from participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2016 to importing 72% of its arms from China in 2019-2023...*

*Second is our strategic intelligence, which must be comprehensively improved to anticipate such abrupt events better...*

*Fifth, since the Bangladesh Army has played a defining role in this crisis and could remain a key factor, we must strengthen our military-to-military ties.*

*Finally, we need to do everything to secure Indian nationals while insisting on the safety and protection of minority communities in Bangladesh, lest there be a backlash back home.*

Notes:

- 1 For a more detailed timeline and background on the protests in Bangladesh in 2024, see: “From job quota to Sheikh Hasina’s resignation: Timeline of the Bangladesh student protests,” *The Hindu*, 5 August 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/from-protests-to-sheikh-hasina-resignation-timeline-of-bangladesh-student-protest/article68488361.ece>
- 2 The ULFA was a militant group that had operated out of Bangladesh with a goal of establishing an independent government in India’s State of Assam (bordering Bangladesh) until Hasina’s government agreed to eliminate its safe have in Bangladeshi territory. India and the ULFA reached a peace agreement in December 2023, see: Gaurav Dwivedi, “The Path To Peace: ULFA’s Journey From Insurgency To Accord,” *NDTV*, 29 December 2023. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/the-path-to-peace-ulfas-journey-from-insurgency-to-accord-4763730>

## Tuareg Separatist Militants Form an Alliance Against Junta-Led Governments in Mali and Niger

By Jacob Zenn  
OE Watch Commentary

Since 2021, West African security and political dynamics have deteriorated as a result of coups by military juntas in the region's three central states—Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. In July 2024, these three juntas agreed to a new regional Alliance of Sahelian States (AES) after leaving the pre-existing regional bloc, the Economic Community of West African States. They replaced Western military support with that of the successor to Russia's Wagner Group, known as the Africa Corps. Now, however, two of the Sahel's ethnonationalist and mostly secular Tuareg rebel groups, the Patriotic Liberation Front (FPL) in Niger and the Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad (CSP-DPA)<sup>1</sup> in Mali, have formed their own alliance.

According to the excerpted French-language article from French state-owned radio news website *rfi.fr*, both the FPL and CSP-DPA oppose the respective juntas that are now ruling their countries. The main function of their newly established alliance is for both rebel groups to promise to aid each other in the case of an attack by AES armies, forcing them to confront a more complex and even multi-national insurgency. The article also states that the FPL and CSP-DPA plan to defend each other's interests on the



Tuareg ethnonationalist militants who launched the most recent phase of their insurgency in Mali in 2012 are now linking with ideologically similar militants in neighboring Niger.

Source: Magharebia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le\\_Mali\\_confront%C3%A9\\_aux\\_sanctions\\_et\\_%C3%A0\\_l'avanc%C3%A9e\\_des\\_rebelles\\_islamistes\\_\(6904946068\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_Mali_confront%C3%A9_aux_sanctions_et_%C3%A0_l'avanc%C3%A9e_des_rebelles_islamistes_(6904946068).jpg)

international level, although whether that entails advocacy or operations or both is left ambiguous. However, by targeting Chinese-funded pipeline projects, the FPL insurgency has already achieved internationalized operations status. The FPL believes such projects fund the junta in Niamey at the expense of predominantly Tuareg and other minority regions of Niger.<sup>2</sup> Such attacks serve as a form of leverage and pressure against the junta.

The article also highlights that the alliance-making meeting between FPL and CSP-DPA leaders occurred in the northern Malian town of Tinzaouatène. This town near the

Algerian border is the CSP base, and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), which is under the CSP umbrella,<sup>3</sup> and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Group of Supporters of Islam and Muslims massacred dozens of African Corps and Malian troops in separate attacks on 28 July. According to the article, the Tinzaouatène meeting sent a message that the new FPL and CSP-DPA alliance could launch similar massacres if their goals for independence or autonomy are not met. This would represent a new development in the Sahel, where Tuareg rebel groups have historically remained relatively independent of each other and have mostly focused on reacting

only to their own nation's political and military developments.

At a time when the AES military juntas have largely lost legitimacy internationally and when Africa Corps is reeling from the massacre it suffered at the hands of the CMA, the FPL and CSP-DPA are escalating their confrontation with the embattled juntas in the political, military, and international realm. Neither group is particularly antagonistic towards the United States or the West. However,

**“The Malian and Nigerien rebels have decided to assist each other, but also to defend their interests together on the international level.”**

even if democratic rule eventually returns, their strengthening insur-

gencies will make it more difficult to reunite Mali and Niger and restore sovereignty to both nations.

**Source:** “À Tinzaouatène, les rebellions du Niger et du Mali se réunissent pour renforcer leurs relations (In Tinzaouatène, rebellions from Niger and Mali meet to strengthen relations),” *Radio France Internationale* (French state-owned radio news website reporting on international affairs), 28 August 2024. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240901-%C3%A0-tinzaouat%C3%A8ne-les-rebellions-du-niger-et-du-mali-se-r%C3%A9unissent-pour-renforcer-leurs-relations>

*The delegation of the Niger rebels of the Patriotic Liberation Front (FPL) was led by Barak Taher Hamit, who holds the title of “commander-in-chief” of the armed movement opposed to the Niger junta. The delegation of the Malian rebels of the Strategic Framework for Defense (CSP) was headed by Alghabass Ag Intalla, who is the leader of the militant group and opponent of the Malian junta. To begin discussions with an aim towards strengthening relations between them, the site of the meeting was*

*quite symbolic: Tinzaouatène in northern Mali, located on the Algerian border.*

*During the meeting, no document was signed, or at least not made public. But the Malian and Nigerien rebels have decided to aid each other, and also to defend their interests together on the international level. According to sources close to both parties, other meetings are being planned about “fighting hand in hand against the militaries in power in Mali and Niger”.*

Notes:

- 1 “Azawad” is the term that Tuareg ethnonationalists use to refer their homeland.
- 2 In June 2024, the FPL, for example, disabled a section of Niger’s PetroChina-funded crude oil pipeline with the intent to force China to cancel a deal between the junta and China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC). See: Emmanuel Addeh, “Tensions Escalate As Armed Group Attacks Niger’s PetroChina-Funded Pipeline, Threatens More Attacks,” *Arise.TV*, 19 June 2024. <https://www.arise.tv/tensions-escalate-as-armed-group-attacks-nigers-petrochina-funded-pipeline-threatens-more-attacks/>
- 3 See: “Northern Mali: A Conflict with No Victors,” *ICG*, 13 October 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/nord-du-mali-une-confrontation-dont-personne-ne-sortira-vainqueur>