

OEWATCH

Issue 10
2024

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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@中国海警

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China Concludes Military Drills Near Taiwan

By Major Kevin Kusumoto
OE Watch Commentary

On 14 October, China conducted large-scale military drills, Joint Sword-2024B, around Taiwan and its surrounding islands. These drills expand upon the previous Joint Sword-2024A drills from late May 2024 and serve as a direct response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's "Double Tenth" speech in Taipei.¹

The *Beijing Daily*, the official newspaper of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, published the first excerpted article featuring Senior Colonel Zhang Chi, a professor from the National Defense University, and Senior Captain Zhang Junshe, a researcher from the Naval Military Academic Research Institute. According to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers, the Liaoning carrier group conducted joint exercises east of the Bashi Channel with the aim of enhancing joint combat capabilities between the army, navy, air force, and rocket force. A bomber formation accompanied the carrier group to enforce a maritime barrier, practicing the prevention of intervention and interference by external forces.² Senior Colonel Zhang Junshe stated that in the event of mainland military strikes against Taiwan, the Liaoning carrier group would also be capable of targeting the island's eastern cave bases, such as those in Hualien and Taitung, which are designed to preserve Taiwan's



The China Coast Guard posted a heart-shaped patrol route around Taiwan on their official Weibo account during the exercise, accompanied by the message, "The coast guard's patrol is in the shape of loving you."

Source: <https://m.weibo.cn/detail/5089406321691243>

"Every time separatist forces provoke, the PLA will push forward. The closer the separatist forces align with external forces, the tighter our 'chain' around Taiwan will be."

military combat power. The exercise also highlighted organized blockade drills on key major ports, which account for the majority of Taiwan's imports, potentially causing significant disruptions to Taiwan's energy supply, economy, and society during wartime.³ Lastly, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) emphasized the use of ships 1305, 1303, and 2102 for conducting law enforcement inspections around Taiwan to "control the island" and to practice preventing Taiwan independence elements from evading sanctions or escaping using civilian vessels. Notably, this marked the first time they patrolled around the entire island of Taiwan and the islands of Dongyin and Matsu, including the first use of the 2901 *Zhoutou-class* ship for this type of patrol, the largest armed coast guard cutter in the world. Senior Colonel Zhang Chi reaffirms China's

official statements made during Joint Sword-2024A, asserting that the PLA will deploy additional assets, improve joint operational capabilities, and progressively tighten Taiwan's defense perimeter with each successive exercise.⁴

The significance of the CCG patrols is further elaborated in the second excerpted article, published by *Yuyuan Tiantian*, a news outlet under the direct control of the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP. First, the CCG deployed six fleets, twice as many as the previous exercise. Second, diagrams released by the CCG indicate that not only did patrol ships encircle Taiwan for the first time, but they also suggest that the CCG will adopt a flexible and unpredictable approach to future patrols to enhance operational effectiveness and

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maintain strategic ambiguity. Lastly, the CCG entered restricted waters around the Matsu Islands, setting a precedent for future law enforcement patrols.⁵ Joint Sword-2024B ultimately establishes a precedent of the PLA

edging closer to Taiwan's periphery, employing salami-slicing tactics to normalize the increasing displays of military force. This gradual increase in military deployments and restricted geographic scope aims to shorten

Taiwan's response time while minimizing international pushback.⁶

Source: Bai Bo, “辽宁舰航母编队位台岛以东演练, 让“台独”势力无处可藏! (The Liaoning aircraft carrier group is conducting exercises east of Taiwan, “Taiwan independence” forces has nowhere to hide!),” *Beijing Daily* (the official newspaper of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CCP), 14 October 2024. <https://news.bjd.com.cn/2024/10/14/10934543.shtml>

On 14 October 2024, the Eastern Theater Command released a statement announcing that the PLA organized its army, navy, air force, rocket force, and other units to execute the ‘Joint Sword-2024B’ exercise in the Taiwan Strait and in areas to the north, south, and east of Taiwan. Later that evening, the Command issued another statement concluding the exercise, which was deemed successful in testing the joint capabilities of theater forces. This exercise came just days after Lai Ching-te’s “Double Tenth” speech in Taipei on 10 October 2024, where he promoted separatist rhetoric and inflamed tensions between both sides of the Taiwan Strait. According to military expert Zhang Junshe, who spoke to the Beijing Daily, the PLA’s exercise directly targeted the “Taiwan Independence” remarks in Lai’s speech.

During the exercise, the Eastern Theater Command conducted drills on blockading key ports, seizing regional power, sea assaults, and land strikes around Taiwan. These drills tested multi-domain coordination and precision strike capabilities. Professor Zhang Chi of the National Defense University emphasized that each time separatist forces provoke, the PLA will respond by advancing. He added that the closer

separatist forces align with external actors, the tighter the PLA will draw the “chain” encircling Taiwan.

The Liaoning aircraft carrier group was also deployed east of Taiwan to conduct joint exercises with the army, navy, air force, and rocket force, focusing on integrating the capabilities of all services. The carrier group was accompanied by bomber formations to establish a maritime barrier, simulating the blocking of external intervention and interference. Zhang Junshe further noted that Taiwan’s military has built large cave bases in Hualien and Taitung in eastern Taiwan to preserve combat power in the event of a mainland strike. However, the Liaoning carrier group will enable the PLA to target these cave bases.

Additionally, the Chinese Coast Guard carried out patrols around Taiwan, inspecting the waters surrounding the island. Notably, this marked the first time the Coast Guard’s 2901 Zhoutou-class ship was used in such patrols, as well as the first complete patrol of Taiwan’s entire island. The Coast Guard aims to prevent “Taiwan independence” elements from evading sanctions or escaping the island using civilian ships or other means during wartime.

Source: Yuyuan Tiantian, “环台岛巡航管控的三个突破 (The three breakthroughs in the patrol and control around Taiwan island),” China Media Group (a news media under the direct control of the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP), 14 October 2024. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1812852084058779861>

On 14 October 2024, the Fujian Coast Guard organized a fleet of ships to conduct law enforcement inspections in the waters near Taiwan Island, Dongyin Island, and Matsu Island. According to exclusive information provided to this news source, this coast guard operation marked three significant breakthroughs.

Firstly, a total of six fleets were deployed, twice as many as in previous operations. Notably, this marked the first time the coast guard’s largest 10,000-ton vessel, No. 2901, was used for a mission targeting Taiwan. This ship is equipped with a 76mm caliber rapid-fire naval gun and can reach speeds of up to 25 knots. The 2901 ship has considerable advantages over other law enforcement vessels in the region.

Secondly, a diagram released by the coast guard illustrated the fleets sailing around the waters near Taiwan, expanding from the eastern region to encompass the entire island. However, the diagram did not provide a specific navigation route or detailed latitude and longitude for each point. Instead, arrows were used to broadly indicate the direction of the operation, implying that there would be no fixed route and that the fleets would operate in multiple areas.

Lastly, during this operation, the coast guard entered the waters near Matsu Island and penetrated restricted areas established by Taiwan authorities. This indicates that the coast guard has successfully completed law enforcement patrols around all of Taiwan’s outer islands and may implement regular patrols around Matsu Island in the future.

Notes:

- 1 To watch the PRC’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) official response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te’s “Double Tenth” speech and to the Eastern Theater Command exercise, see the MOD’s video post, Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, 14 October 2024. <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/16345357.html>
- 2 Li Chun, “What signal does the Liaoning aircraft carrier formation’s participation in ‘Joint Sword’ exercise send?” China News Network (China state news agency), 14 October 2024. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1812887815509502820&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- 3 Zhao Xi, “东部战区演习演练封控台湾主要港口 (Eastern Theater Command exercises to seal off Taiwan’s main ports),” Beijing News (Newspaper for the Beijing Municipal Committee of the CCP), 14 October 2024. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1812875858653404816&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- 4 To watch Senior Colonel Zhang Chi discuss and analyze ‘Joint Sword-2024B,’ see his CCTV7 interview, CCTV7 Military Report, 14 October 2024. <https://tv.cctv.com/2024/10/14/VIDEkwdGI2h2huTtgoYG9xba241014.shtml?spm=C52346.PiumOrlYLNUM.E0VXtwLj8YU7.9>
- 5 Sean Lin, “4 Chinese coast guard ships expelled as PLA conducts drills near Taiwan,” Focus Taiwan (National news agency of the Republic of China), 14 October 2024. <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202410140007>
- 6 Helen Regan and Wayne Chang, “Taiwan condemns Chinese military drills around island as ‘unreasonable provocation,’” CNN, 14 October 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/14/asia/china-military-drills-taiwan-intl-hnk/index.html>

China Blurs Lines Between Military Drills and War

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

China's military exercises, which include many incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ), have begun to blur the lines between military exercises and actual war, according to the first article excerpt, published in the online newspaper *Taiwan News*. In May 2024, after Taiwan's newly elected president, Lai Ching-te delivered a pro-independence speech, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched Joint-Sword-2024A, a series of exercises surrounding Taiwan and its outer island territories. China referred to these exercises as a "powerful punishment for separatist forces seeking independence."¹ Five months later, while Taiwan celebrated National Day of the Republic of China (Taiwan Independence Day),² the PLA launched Joint-Sword-2024B, during which they sent planes across the median line in the Taiwan Strait. This was another stern warning against Taiwan's independence. The second excerpt published on Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense website noted the exercises lasted multiple days, with the biggest incursion taking place on 14 October. On that day, as many as 153 PLA aircraft, 14 PLAN vessels, and 12 official ships operating around Taiwan were detected, with 111 of the aircraft crossing the median line and entering Taiwan's western, southwestern, and eastern ADIZ.

“As China’s military drills around Taiwan increase, it is becoming harder to discern when Beijing might be transitioning from a training exercise to war.”



PLAAF Sukhoi **Su-30s** like this one participated in Joint-Sword-2024B in October 2024.
Source: Dmitry Pichugin, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army_Air_Force#/media/File:PLAAF_Sukhoi_Su-30_at_Lipetsk-2_\(modified\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army_Air_Force#/media/File:PLAAF_Sukhoi_Su-30_at_Lipetsk-2_(modified).jpg)

According to the *Taiwan News* article, Defense Minister Wellington Koo believes China is testing its ability to attack in various ways, including through gray zone tactics and cognitive operations, joint sea and air training, and targeted military exercises. Its gray zone tactics and cognitive operations can be seen in the ongoing military exercises, which could instill a sense of complacency within Taiwan and among its allies as Chinese military exercises surrounding Taiwan become more normalized. However, one day, a training scenario could unexpectedly escalate into all-out war.³ Koo warns that as the scale of China's exercises grows, it will be

increasingly difficult to discern when the PLA is transitioning from "training to a large exercise, and from a large exercise to war."

Source: Lily LaMattina, “Taiwan Says China’s Growing Military Activity Makes Exercise and War Harder to Differentiate,” *Taiwan News* (Taiwan-based English language news service), 19 September 2024. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/5938651>

As China’s military drills around Taiwan increase, it is becoming harder to discern when Beijing might be transitioning from a training exercise to war, said Defense Minister Wellington Koo (顧立雄).

Koo stressed, “We must consider how we differentiate between peacetime and wartime.” He said that as the scale of China’s exercises grows, it will be more difficult to discern when Chinese troops

are transitioning from “training to a large exercise, and from a large exercise to war.”

Taiwan has counted 2,076 incursions this year by China’s People’s Liberation Army into its air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Beijing has also sent non-military government ships such as coastguard, marine research, and maritime safety vessels.

Source: “Ministry of National Defense, ROC (Taiwan),” Ministry of National Defense website (official website of the Ministry of National Defense), accessed 17 October 2024. <https://x.com/mondefense?lang=en>

October 10: Taiwan celebrates its National Day of the Republic of China.

14 October (up until 0600): 153 PLA aircraft, 14 PLAN vessels, and 12 official ships operating

around Taiwan detected. 111 of the aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan’s western, southwestern, and eastern ADIZ.

Notes:

- 1 For more information, see Cindy Hurst, “Taiwan President’s Inaugural Speech Prompts Chinese Military Drills,” OE Watch, 07-2024. <https://fms.tradoc.army.mil/2024/taiwan-presidents-inaugural-speech-prompts-chinese-military-drills/>
- 2 National Day of the Republic of China commemorates the start of the Wuchang Uprising, overthrowing the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Shortly after, on 1 January 1920, they established the Republic of China. In 1949, pushed out of power by Mao Zedong’s Communists, the Republic of China relocated to Taiwan.
- 3 There are similarities between the recent Chinese exercises and events that led up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine when Russian forces began massing troops near the borders of Ukraine, calling it military exercises, right before the invasion. “Timeline: The Events Leading Up to Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” Reuters, 1 March 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/events-leading-up-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-02-28/>

Taiwan's Plan To Deter China With Submarines Faces Scrutiny

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Last year Taiwan unveiled its first attack submarine, the *Hai Kun*. Taiwan's ruling party and defense officials have pitched the *Hai Kun* as a critical deterrent to China's ever-expanding naval capability. However, according to the excerpted article from Japan-based Nikkei Asia, plans to build seven more submarines based on the *Hai Kun* prototype from 2025 to 2038 are facing stiff opposition in Taiwan from political rivals and analysts asking questions about the cost of and viability of the submarines themselves.¹

According to the article, there are calls within Taiwan and from the United States to urgently “develop asymmetric weapons in large quantities and learn how to use them effectively.” Some experts doubt whether the submarines are an

appropriate response to counter China's far more extensive fire-power. According to the *Nikkei Asia* article, Ivan Kanapathy, a former U.S. National Security Council director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia, stated that Taiwan's new submarines are not up to par to operate in “this threat environment” and that to launch them from Taiwan makes no sense. But not all agree. Head of Taiwan's National Submarine Task Force and former defense chief, Adm. Huang Shu-kuang,² had previously claimed that submarines would help to “counter China's efforts to encircle Taiwan for an invasion, attack, or a blockade.” The article does note that Taiwan is serious about acquiring large numbers of relatively inexpensive sea drones, taking a page

“The threat the submarines are intended to guard against was highlighted anew this week, as Beijing on Monday held a day of large-scale military drills surrounding Taiwan.”

out of Ukraine's playbook, which “deployed mobile coastal defense cruise missiles and ‘kamikaze’ sea drones, which acted as smart mines.” However, another Taiwanese defense analyst noted that the submarine program could be valuable in creating “a defense economy in Taiwan.”

Taiwan's success in thwarting a potential Chinese invasion may depend on Taipei's ability to correctly determine whether submarines or drones, or a combination of both, will give it the best chance of winning a war with China.



◀ Launch Ceremony of the ROCS Hai Kun, 28 September 2023. The Hai Kun is Taiwan's first and only submarine and the prototype of seven more proposed submarines to be built between 2025 and 2038.

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/89/09.28_總統主持「潛艦國造原型艦命名暨下水典禮」_-_Flickr_id_53219332200.jpg

Source: “Taiwan submarine program faces mounting questions over tactical merits,” *Nikkei Asia* (Japan based news service that specifically covers the Indo-Pacific region), 15 October 2024. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Taiwan-submarine-program-faces-mounting-questions-over-tactical-merits>

Taiwan faces fresh questions over its most ambitious defense program — a government plan to build seven more submarines — as opposition parties push back and some experts call for complementary reforms.

President Lai Ching-te and his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, have pushed the submarine program as a means to deter an aggressive Communist China, which claims Taiwan as its own. Political divisions over the subs reflect broader disagreements over Taiwan’s security and defense reforms that could have global consequences as Beijing ratchets up coercive measures while refusing to rule out an invasion....

Some experts doubt whether the submarines fit into this strategy for countering China’s far more extensive firepower. Ivan Kanapathy, a former U.S. National Security Council director for China, Taiwan and Mongolia, said at a recent Taiwan Foreign Correspondents’ Club briefing... questioned the wisdom of the submarine endeavor if it comes at the expense of smaller weapons such as sea drones. “The technology in Taiwan’s new submarine isn’t up to par to operate in this threat environment. Basing submarines here in the heart of the contested area is not smart. Submarines are going to be very useful if they’re coming from a thousand miles away but Taiwan doesn’t have an overseas base, so it begs the question,” he said. “Sending out large numbers of expendable sea drones would make a lot more sense...”

The defense ministry has indeed announced plans to acquire defense drones. Experts say Taiwan could consider establishing a vast drone operation based on lessons from the Ukraine war...

Adm. Huang Shu-kuang, then-head of the National Submarine Task Force and former defense chief, told Nikkei Asia last year that submarines would help to “counter China’s efforts to encircle Taiwan for an invasion, attack or a blockade.”

But one diplomat involved in Taiwan affairs argued that Lai’s administration may need to reconsider its submarine-centric approach... “The problem is that Taiwan’s government has now framed this as their most important reform against Chinese threats.”

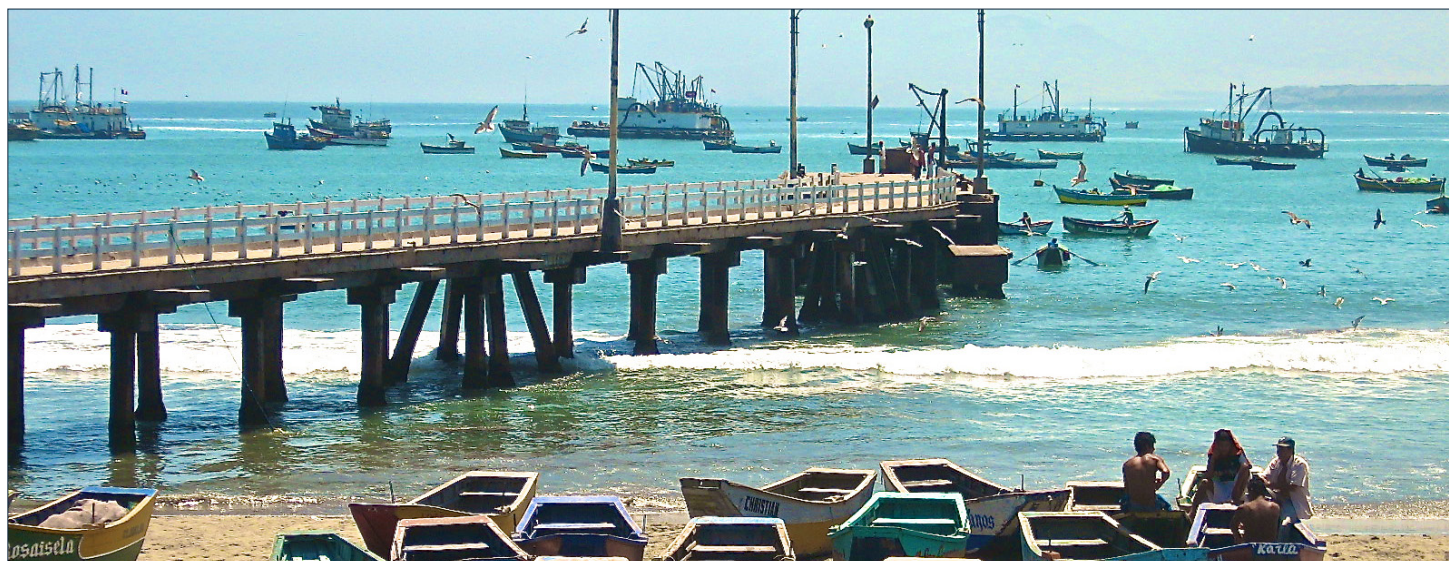
Others disagree, seeing broad benefits. Su Tzu-yun, a defense expert at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research think tank, emphasized the importance of submarines not only in fending off China’s blockade attempts, but also in driving Taiwan’s shipbuilding industry and strategic development.

“A submarine can create a counter or balance force to stop or reduce a blockade or quarantine operation by the PLA,” Su said during another TFCC briefing. “But there are additional benefits to the project. ... Building a fleet can create a defense economy. Taiwan can build submarines with a permanent shipyard and it can create an economic motor.”

Notes:

- 1 “Taiwan earmarks billions to build 7 more Submarines in bid to deter possible PLA attacks.” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong-based media outlet), 24 August 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/mtuvrrnu>
- 2 Admiral Huang Shu-kuang had offered his resignation in April 2024 due to, in his words, “unfounded accusations and slander targeting the IDS program.” His resignation was refused, and he currently heads up the submarine program. See: “Retired Navy Admiral to Stay on Sub Program,” *Taipei Times* (Taiwan English language news service), 16 May 2024. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2024/05/16/2003817950>

China To Cement Strategic Relationship With Peru



The site of the Chancay Port before China's megaport project; Chancay is a small fishing hamlet north of Lima, Peru.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/marirc19/8284806040>.

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

China has long held a special interest in Peru, both for its critical mineral endowments and its position in the Pacific. Peru was the first Latin American country to sign a free trade agreement with China and is one of the largest destinations for Chinese investment in Latin America.¹ To further cement its influence and commercial ties, China is constructing a megaport at Chancay, one of its largest and most comprehensive in the Americas, to increase its access to critical minerals and the bountiful harvest of soy, wheat, and other agricultural products from Latin America.² State-owned Cosco Shipping will own and operate the port, giving China outsized control over port operations.³

According to the first excerpted article from the digital outlet

Energiminas, once operational, the Chancay port will shorten the main route to Asia by 10 days. The second article from the Peruvian outlet *Gestión*, notes that Xi Jinping will inaugurate the port later this year at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and that the Chinese delegation promises to include 750 Chinese investors visiting alongside President Xi. The outlet conveys Peru's hope that Chancay will catalyze further Chinese investments in sectors such as telecommunications and electric vehicles. Earlier in the summer, China hosted Peruvian President Dina Boluarte for a state visit, where, according to the *Gestión* Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged support for elevating relations with Peru to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

“We are convinced that the port will become a strong driver for Peru’s economic development and a model for economic and commercial cooperation.”

The strategic implications of the Chancay megaport's inauguration as Peru hosts the APEC Summit this year are significant. Most importantly, these actions demonstrate China's march to gain influence in Latin America, where it already maintains several dozen agreements to own, operate, or upgrade port facilities. More importantly, many of these ports are deep water and feature docks with wide berths sufficient for the People's Liberation Army Navy to make port calls for refueling and logistics.

Source: “Cosco Shipping espera inaugurar megapuerto de Chancay en noviembre (Cosco Shipping expects to open Chancay megaport in November),” *Energiminas* (a digital platform focused on energy and mining), 27 June 2024. <https://energiminas.com/2024/06/27/cosco-shipping-espera-inaugurar-megapuerto-de-chancay-en-noviembre/>

The president emphasized that the Chancay megaport will be inaugurated in November, with the presence of the President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping. She (Xi) indicated that, to strengthen this work, the implementation of the Ancón industrial zone is planned near the port. ‘Hopefully, an electric vehicle assembly plant can be installed there, it is in the interest of both Peru and China to take care of

the environment. In our country we also have copper and lithium,’ she (Xi) said...For his part, Wan Min, president of Cosco Shipping, said...‘We are convinced that the port will become a strong driver for Peru’s economic development and a model for economic and commercial cooperation. Once its construction is completed, Chancay will become the most modern and intelligent port in South America.’

Source: “Perú buscará capitalizar la llegada de inversores chinos y coreanos en la APEC 2024 (Peru will seek to capitalize on the arrival of Chinese and Korean investors at APEC 2024),” *Gestión* (a Peruvian daily focused on business and economics), 15 August 2024. <https://gestion.pe/economia/apec-2024-peru-busca-capitalizar-la-llegada-de-empresarios-chinos-y-coreanos-al-foro-de-cooperacion-economica-asia-pacifico-voices-of-the-future-noticia/>

The upcoming APEC Economic Leaders week, which will take place in November in Peru, will not only bring together heads of state and senior officials from the 21 member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum. The arrival of a significant delegation of businessmen

is also anticipated, with the participation of up to 750 investors from China...It should be noted that Peru has, to date, trade agreements with 14 of the 21 economies that are members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Notes:

- 1 For more information on investment flows from China to Latin America, see: Inter-American Dialogue, “China-Latin America Finance Databases,” accessed 13 October 2024. https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/
- 2 For additional coverage of the various phases of Chancay’s development, see: Ryan Berg, “China Nears Completion of Large Port in Peru with Dual-use Capabilities,” *OE Watch*, 01-2024. <https://fmsso.tradoc.army.mil/2024/china-nears-completion-of-large-port-in-peru-with-dual-use-capabilities/>
- 3 For more information on the state of Chancay and the concerns about this megaport project, see: Henry Ziemer, “The Geopolitics of Port Security in the Americas,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 23 September 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geopolitics-port-security-americas>

Russia Continues To Adapt Training, Incorporating Lessons From Ukraine

By Chuck Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted article from the major Russian daily newspaper *Izvestia*, discusses how Russia continues to change soldier training based on lessons learned from its special military operation in Ukraine.¹ According to the *Izvestiya* article, the changing character of war necessitates combining both traditional combined arms warfare tactics with new skills to achieve success in modern warfare. In addition, many Russian forces in the security services, including the Ministry of Defense, and private military organizations are fighting as assault detachments/companies/groups, a method of or-

ganization that was widely practiced during the Second World War and abandoned as the Soviets/Russians fielded a fully mechanized force during the Cold War. Therefore, Russia is now using a combination of Second World War, Soviet-era combined arms, and emerging tactics from its combat experience in Ukraine to train its force. Specifically, Russia has regained its dismounted infantry culture, a marked change from the start of the war in 2022, when Russia suffered an inordinate number of casualties among troops riding to battle within their armored vehicles.²

“The special military operation is the first war with large-scale combined arms actions and assaults on prepared positions after a long period of local wars and anti-terrorist operations led to the fact that now old tactical techniques, both the developments of the 1980s and earlier ones, are simultaneously used with new tactics.”



◀ Russian soldiers training ostensibly using revised tactics, lessons learned during its operations in Ukraine.

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/83/AssaultTraining2015-01.jpg>

Source: Dmitry Astrakhan, “«Нет понятия идеального штурма, каждая операция планируется индивидуально»: Как новобранцы учатся навыкам ближнего боя на полигоне в ДНР (‘There is no such thing as an ideal assault; each operation is planned individually’: How recruits learn close combat skills at a training ground in the Donetsk People’s Republic),” *Izvestiya* (major Russian daily newspaper), 3 October 2024. <https://iz.ru/1768527/dmitrii-astrakhan/net-poniatiia-idealnogo-shturma-kazhdaia-operatciia-planiruetsia-individualno>

The experience of the special military operation has a significant impact on combat training. Now volunteer assault troops practice close combat in confined spaces of trenches and buildings, approaching strongpoints, clearing, evacuating the wounded and many other specific exercises. Izvestia visited at one of the training grounds and learned how recruits practice vital skills under the guidance of instructors with combat experience.

[T]raining takes place every day. On one day, recruits practice interactions with infantry fighting vehicles, on another day they focus on combating drones. In particular, they practice shooting at UAVs by shooting at clay pigeons. Camouflaging and stealth movement are also practiced to remain invisible to enemy UAVs...

Combination of the “old” school and the “new”

The special military operation is the first war with large-scale combined arms actions and assaults on prepared positions after a long period of local wars and anti-terrorist operations led to the fact that now old tactical techniques, both the developments of the 1980s and earlier ones, are simultaneously used with new tactics. At the same time, the latest experience is being implemented on the fly, since the character of

battles is constantly changing — a combination of the “old” and the “new.”

So, from the old school we take the experience of moving on armored vehicles, moving along a trench. But in any case, “adjustments” are always necessary in tactical terms, since FVP [first person view] UAVs have appeared now. “There is no concept of an ideal assault, it is important to act quickly, harmoniously and carefully,” — says a fighter with the call sign Potap.

Each trench, each settlement has its own differences, and therefore each assault operation is planned individually, without a specific template, he clarified...

NATO learns from our fighters’ assaults

It is worth noting that NATO is also looking at the experience of fighting in small groups at equipped strong points with trenches and dugouts. Almost all exercises held in Europe and the US in the last year have included practicing scenarios for storming forest belts and trenches, both according to old instructions and taking into account the experience of the special military operation. In addition, fighting in trenches has become part of the reservist training program in the British Army.

Notes:

- 1 Moscow uses the term spetsial’naya voyennaya operatsiya (“special military operation”) or spetsoperatsiya (“special operation”) to describe its campaign in Ukraine.
- 2 Interestingly, this was the same observation made by Chechens and outside observers during the Russian assault on the Chechen capital of Grozny in December 1994. Russian armored columns attacked from multiple directions, but mechanized infantry did not dismount and were cut down in their vehicles or dismounting under ambush conditions, before they could protect themselves and the armored columns.

Russia Pledges To Boost Support Abroad and Criminalize Russophobia

By Lionel Beehner
OE Watch Commentary

In October, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new decree pledging humanitarian support for “people who share our values.” The decree was short on specifics of what the support would entail, which values were taken into consideration, or who would be eligible for the assistance, but in a recent interview published by Russian news website *Pravda*, Dmitry Solonnikov, an influential political scientist and director of the Institute of Modern State Development, said the decree would apply to “all citizens of European states who have a positive attitude towards Russia and are often persecuted for it in their homeland.” The decree would also reportedly apply to people living in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Commentary on the new decree suggests it would chiefly be applied to migrant workers and others seeking Russian citizenship.

The new decree comes at a time of heightened awareness within Russian society—and the halls of power—of criticisms against the country. Russia’s State Duma just approved a bill, first proposed last summer, that would criminalize foreigners accused of “acts of Russophobia.”¹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs defines Russophobia as “a prejudiced, hostile attitude towards Russian citizens, the Russian language, and culture,



An antiwar protest in central London on 12 March 2022.
Alisdare Hickson, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alisdare/51937772099>

expressed, among other things,” through the attitudes of individuals, groups, or “unfriendly” states. The bill also establishes “legal norms, legal decisions” regarding “criminal liability” for acts of Russophobia exhibited by Russian officials, citizens, or nationals living across the post-Soviet space.

ally. The recent moves may also be a reflection of growing anti-Kremlin sentiments in Russia and the former Soviet Union, primarily on account of Russia’s stalled special military operation in Ukraine. The new laws could have implications for the millions of migrants currently seeking Russian citizenship, as now they must

“They need to provide all kinds of assistance and even more - both in terms of granting citizenship and in terms of legal protection from the persecution they have in European states, to build a system of constant communication with them, to provide work and so on.”

The latest raft of bills seeking to criminalize anti-Russia attitudes and incentivize greater support for the Kremlin could be an indicator of concerns within Moscow that Russia is facing greater isolation internation-

register for military registration or risk having their application—or citizenship—revoked.²

Source: Dmitry Plotnikov, “Собрать адекватных в стране. Для кого новый указ Путина по поддержке разделяющих ценности РФ” (“To Gather Greater Support in Country, Putin’s Signs New Decree to Support Those Who Share Values of the Russian Federation”), *Pravda* (Russian news website—formerly the official press organ of the Soviet Union’s Communist Party), 19 August 2024. <https://www.pravda.ru/politics/2084910-putin-podpisa-ukaz/>

If for their [pro-Russia] views, or their point of view, people suffer from the pressure of political circles in Europe, the United States, then we should support them, probably since they are our workers. But it is not limited only to Europe. Of course, we need to talk about citizens of all countries, both in Asia and in the ‘new world,’ no matter in Latin or North America. Therefore, there is no need to single out someone. These can be both citizens from far afield and citizens of the former Soviet Union.

We help citizens from the Baltic States, former republics of the USSR who treat us positively. And if these are citizens in distant Chile or in distant Venezuela, in Colombia, it’s quite different. We’re talking about everyone.

We are building special relations with Asian countries. Russia talks about a turn to the East, as well as the fact that our main allies are now in Asia. And secondly, the African strategy of the Russian Federation is one of the most important key tasks of the foreign policy course of our country. A year ago, the second ‘Russia-Africa’ Forum was held. And we are talking about the fact that we are actively entering the African continent.

Therefore, of course, we must build relationships with them. The question is not where these citizens came from. Yes, the question is that ... [we should] let everyone, anyone, come here to visit us and let’s report that we have accepted 10,000 such citizens, or 100,000 such citizens. It’s about who needs help in this situation, not where they will come from.

Notes:

- 1 Konstantin Pakhalyuk, “What does the Kremlin Mean by ‘Russophobia?’” *The Moscow Times* (English language online newspaper in Russia previously based in Moscow), 11 October 2024. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/10/11/what-does-the-kremlin-mean-by-russophobia-a86664>
- 2 Dmitry Plotnikov, “Новый российский закон для мигрантов: не встал на воинский учёт — давай, до свидания!” (“New Russian law for migrants: If you do not register for the military – good-bye!”), *Pravda* (Russian news website—formerly the official press organ of the Soviet Union’s Communist Party), 9 August, 2024. <https://military.pravda.ru/2080796-voinskiuchet/>

Gabon Shadow Tanker Fleet Transports Sanctioned Russian Oil



Russia's Sakhalin-1 oil project, one of many Russian oil facilities in the Arctic, extracts oil that is moved to international markets via an expansive shadow fleet of tankers.

Source: Politikparadox, <https://politikparadox.blogspot.com/2014/10/russen-finden-ol-in-der-arktis.html>

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

Despite international sanctions passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian oil is still available on the international market. According to the excerpted article from Norwegian news site *The Barents Observer*, a Gabonese-registered shadow fleet is now moving Russian oil through the Arctic. Many of the ships flying Gabon's standard are doing so under a flag of convenience or open registry. International law requires the regis-

tration of merchant ships in a host country. Ships registered in a different country than their ownership may fly the ensign, or flag, of the host country and abide by its laws. This flag of convenience, or open registry, may avoid the strict regulations of its home country, skirt safety standards, avoid taxes, or, in this case, provide political advantages. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Gabon has increased its ship registry by dozens, and that all of those newly registered ships are "engaged in shipments of

"Since Moscow launched its war against Ukraine and the international community introduced sanctions against the Russian oil and gas industry, the small West African state [of Gabon] has offered shelter to a quickly expanding fleet of shadow vessels that carry sanctioned Russian oil."

sanctioned Russian oil,"¹ according to the article. The inability of the international community to police shadow fleets like Gabon's will continue to weaken and ultimately render international sanctions against Russia ineffective. This situation will provide Russia with hard currency to fund its military operations in Ukraine and abroad, and stabilize its domestic economy during war.²

Source: Atle Staalesen, "Under flag of Gabon, tankers sail sanctioned Russian oil through Arctic ice", *The Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian news site in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 27 September 2024. <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/news/under-flag-of-gabon-tankers-sail-sanctioned-russian-oil-through-arctic-ice/231598>

The Sai Baba is sailing the Northern Sea Route from Murmansk to China and is part of a major Africa-registered shadow fleet that now operates in Russian

Arctic waters. Several more tankers are following in its wake. The Sai Baba is believed to have loaded crude oil in Murmansk in mid-September. It subsequently

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set course for the Arctic route that connects the North Atlantic with the Pacific. On the 18th of September, the tanker was located near the Kola Bay. Nine days later, it was sailing through the Kara Sea, according to data from Russia's Northern Sea Route Administration.

As it sails further east, the almost 20-year-old tanker with a deadweight of 158,889 tons will run into a major layer of multi-year sea-ice. The sea-ice in the Chukchi Sea has troubled regional shipments this summer. The Sai Baba is ice-class2.

The tanker carries the flag of Gabon and appears to be managed by a company from the United Arab Emirates. Judging from the Northern Sea Route Administration, it has permission to sail without icebreaker escort in light sea-ice conditions during the period from 10th of September to 31st of October.

The 274-meter-long tanker was built in 2006 and used to operate under the name Cap Guillaume under a Belgian shipper. It was sold in November 2022 and has since sailed under the name Sai Baba. It is due to arrive in the Chinese port of Huizhou on October 15.

The Sai Baba is not the only Gabon-registered tanker that now sails through the rough Arctic waters of the Northern Sea Route. As it embarked on its Arctic voyage to China, two other Gabon-registered tankers

were waiting in the waters outside Murmansk to be loaded. The NS Nordic (Liberia) and SCF Baltika (Russian Sovcomflot) are likely to follow in the wake of the Sai Baba. At the same time, the Moskovsky Prospect appears to be embarking on an East-West voyage on the route from India to Murmansk. Also, the SCF Yenisey, the Suvorovsky Prospect and the Nanda Devi sailed on the Arctic route in late September.

Since Moscow launched its war against Ukraine and the international community introduced sanctions against the Russian oil and gas industry, the small West African state has offered shelter to a quickly expanding fleet of shadow vessels that carry sanctioned Russian oil.

The country that experienced a coup d'état in 2023 is today one of the Russian oil industry's best friends. In addition to the seven tankers that currently sail in Russian Arctic waters, dozens of more carriers have been listed in the Gabon ship registry over the last two years. Among them are reportedly 50 ships owned by Sovcomflot.

According to Lloyd's List (behind paywall), the African nation has employed a private company based in the United Arab Emirates to run the registry. Almost all the tonnage of the Gabon-registered ships are now engaged in shipments of sanctioned Russian oil. In 2024, Gabon had the world's quickest growing ship registry.

Notes:

- 1 For a description of how Russia has regained its ability to drill for oil in spite of Western led international sanctions, see: Nidhi Verma, "Russia's Sakhalin-1 near full oil output after Exxon exit," Reuters, 9 January 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-sakhalin-1-near-full-oil-output-after-exxon-exit-source-2023-01-09/>
- 2 For a recent article regarding flow of and impacts of shadow fleets moving sanctioned oil around the world, see: Rebecca Tan, Pei-Lin Wu and Julia Ledur, "'Dark' tanker crash exposes dangers of China's thirst for cheap oil," The Washington Post, 2 September 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/china-da...F62dc0753ccfdb80ba057ddcf%2F11%2F38%2F66d5d9c2e3b3f24f576e400>

Russia Accused of Interference in Moldovan and Georgian Elections

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Election interference allegations against Russia have disrupted Moldova and Georgia's progress towards EU integration. According to the excerpted article from independent but partially U.S.-funded *FRE/RL's Georgian Service*, Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili declared that "as the only remaining independent institution," she would not recognize the election results. According to Zurbishvili, Georgia was the "victim of a Russian special operation." However, according to the excerpted article from the Russian daily *Izvestia*, the pro-Moscow Georgian Dream party,¹ won approximately 90 of the 150 seats in Georgian parliamentary elections, giving it "the opportunity to once

again form a one-party government." The *Izvestia* article confirms that the election was marred by tensions, intimidation, and physical violence but implies that Western observers present in Georgia, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "recognized the elections as legitimate." Multiple opposition parties, which had hoped to build a pro-Western coalition government, secured only 37 percent of the vote as a bloc and have vowed to challenge the election results.

Meanwhile, Moldova also held an election for president and a referendum on EU integration in October. According to the excerpted article from *RFE/RL's Moldova Service*, the election was also marred by Russian

election interference, including a vote-buying scheme orchestrated by Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor.² Shor is a convicted criminal and fugitive in Moldova and is thought to be residing in Russia. Pro-EU Moldovan President Maia Sandu, who failed to secure enough votes to win reelection outright and will now have to face a pro-Moscow candidate in a runoff election, accused "foreign forces" of the outcome.³ In response, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called on Sandu to "produce proof" to back up her accusations."

If substantiated, election interference in both Georgia and Moldova is a clear indication of Russia's ability to influence areas using what has loosely been referred to as hybrid operations, non-lethal operations, or influence operations, all of which fall short of actual armed conflict, but which are very difficult to counter.



◀ Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has called for protests in response to what she and opposition parties have claimed is Russian interference in parliamentary elections. Protests have been a semi-common occurrence in Georgia for years for a variety of causes. In this photo Georgians protest the arrest and imprisonment of those involved in violent attacks on journalists in July 2021.

Source: Jelger Groeneveld, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protest_in_Tbilisi_against_arrest_of_journalists_\(26_Sept_2021\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protest_in_Tbilisi_against_arrest_of_journalists_(26_Sept_2021).jpg)

“Pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili, who has broken with the ruling Georgian Dream party, said she will not recognize the results of parliamentary elections held on October 26 and alleged that the country has been the ‘victim of a Russian special operation.’”

Source: “Georgian President Won’t Recognize Vote Results, Calls For Protests, Alleges Russian Interference,” *RFE/RL’s Georgian Service* (independent but partially U.S. funded news service), 27 October 2024. https://www.rferl.org/a/33175194.html?utm_source=onesignal&utm_medium=pn-msg&utm_campaign=2024-10-27-Crisis-In-Georg

Pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili, who has broken with the ruling Georgian Dream party, said she will not recognize the results of parliamentary elections held on October 26 and alleged that the country has been the “victim of a Russian special operation.”

Zurbashvili did not present any evidence to back up her claim in a brief statement to the media in Tbilisi on October 27.

“As the only remaining independent institution in this state, I want to say that I do not recognize this election. It cannot be recognized. It would be the same as recognizing Russia’s entry here — Georgian subordination to Russia,” she said.

“I didn’t come to Georgia for [Russian domination]. Our ancestors did not live for this. We will not tolerate this. It cannot be taken away from Georgia — its European future,” she added.

She called for street protests starting on October 28 at 7 p.m. in the South Caucasus nation, which has seen mass demonstrations in recent months against the ruling Georgian Dream party, which critics accuse of being pro-Russian and of having eroded democratic norms.

She blasted what she called a “Russian special operation — one of the new forms of hybrid warfare

carried out on our people, our country.”

The Georgian Dream party celebrated an apparent win in the vote, but the pro-Western opposition cried foul and election monitors said that “critical violations took place,” including voter intimidation and physical violence.

Western observers also demanded an investigation into alleged irregularities.

The vote was seen as a crucial test of the EU-candidate country’s democratic credentials, and one that Brussels had said could determine Georgia’s chances of joining the bloc.

The OSCE also decried recorded instances of vote buying, double voting, physical violence, and intimidation.

Antonio Lopez-Isturiz White, the head of the European Parliament monitoring delegation, said Georgian Dream used hostile rhetoric and “promoted Russian disinformation” and conspiracy theories ahead of the election in an attempt to “undermine and manipulate the vote.”

“During our observation, we noted cases of vote buying and double voting before and during elections, especially in rural areas,” said Romanian lawmaker Iulian Bulai, head of the delegation sent by the

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Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), speaking at a joint news conference held in Tbilisi by heads of election-observation missions.

Source: “Давняя «Мечта»: готова ли Грузия к смене внешнеполитического курса после выборов (Long-standing “Dream”: Is Georgia Ready to Change Its Foreign Policy Course After the Elections),” *Izvestia* (long running Russian daily newspaper, sanctioned by the EU in May 2024 for spreading propaganda), 27 October 2024. <https://iz.ru/1781219/elizaveta-borisenko/davniaia-mechta-gotova-li-gruziia-k-smene-vneshnepoliticheskogo-kursa-posle-vyborov>

The Georgian Dream, which has ruled the country since 2012, managed to win a convincing victory. According to the Central Election Commission, it gained almost 54% of the votes in the parliamentary elections held on October 26, almost the same as in the previous elections in 2020. This gives it the opportunity to claim about 90 of the 150 seats in parliament and once again form a one-party government.

Nevertheless, the defeated united opposition actively tried to destabilize the situation. They planned to form a coalition government, but gained only half as many votes as the Georgian Dream, about 37%. Of the 18 registered political forces, in addition to the Dream, only four overcame the five percent barrier [to be represented in parliament].

OSCE observers recognized the elections as legitimate, but warned that “they will observe how the new government will adhere to the European path.” Later, the recognition of the elections as legitimate was confirmed by the Georgian Prime Minister, who called the OSCE’s conclusions quite logical.

It is not entirely clear how the relationship between the Georgian Dream and President Salome Zurbishvili, who openly supports the opposition, will develop. The head of state is exclusively in favor of the country’s European integration, and the government and parliament are in favor of balanced relations with both

the West and the Russian Federation...

The question of how Georgia’s relations with Western countries will develop after the victory of the Georgian Dream also remains open. It is worth noting that the dialogue between Tbilisi and the West sharply worsened in the spring, when the authorities initiated the adoption of the law “On the transparency of foreign influence”, which provides for assigning the status of a foreign agent to an NPO or media outlet if a “foreign force” receives more than 20% of its income from abroad during a calendar year... In addition, at the instigation of the “Dream”, a law banning LGBT propaganda was adopted in Georgia. Then, at the stage of opening negotiations on joining the union, the EU announced the suspension of the country’s integration.

If the West decides to push Georgia away, the political vector may change. So far, there is no clear political line on tearing the republic away from the West, says Vadim Mukhanov.

As for relations with Russia, they are unlikely to change significantly. After the elections, Irakli Kobakhidze said that Georgia does not plan to restore diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation due to the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Tbilisi considers its territories. It is worth noting that on the eve of the elections, the Georgian Dream promised to “apologize” to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Source: “Moldovan Police Accuse Pro-Russian Oligarch Of \$39M Vote-Buying Scheme.” *RFE/RL’s Moldovan Service* (partially U.S. State Department funded but independent regional news service), 25 October 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-police-accuse-shor-russia-oligarch-39m-vote-buying/33172951.html>

Moldovan police have accused convicted fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor of transferring \$39 million into the bank accounts of thousands of Moldovans over the past two months allegedly to buy votes for the pro-Russian camp in a referendum and the first round of presidential elections last week.

Investigators said on October 25 that they uncovered about 1 million bank transfers, which reached the personal accounts of Moldovan citizens in September and October through the Russian bank Promsvyazbank (PSB), Moldovan police chief Viorel Cernauteanu told a news conference in Chisinau.

He added that some 500 people had already been fined for “passive electoral corruption,” without clarifying what that means. No direct evidence of vote buying has been released, but under Moldovan law, it is illegal to accept large sums of money from abroad for political purposes.

Despite expectations of a landslide “yes,” the October 20 referendum on Moldova’s integration into the European Union only passed by a razor-thin margin of less than 1 percentage point...

The referendum was held simultaneously with a presidential vote, won by incumbent Sandu with some 42.5 percent of the vote - less than the 50 percent plus

one vote needed to avoid a runoff.

She will face pro-Moscow ex-Prosecutor-General Alexandr Stoianoglo in a crucial runoff on November 3.

On October 21, Sandu indicated that the stronger-than-expected showing of the pro-Moscow camp in both elections was due to what she said was an “unprecedented” assault from “criminal groups,” which she said tried to buy off as many as 300,000 votes with tens of millions of euros in an attempt to “undermine the democratic process.”

Russia has denied any interference, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov calling on Sandu to “produce proof” to back up her accusations.

The police investigation found that, in September, PSB bank, which has been under international sanctions for its support of Russia’s war in Ukraine, sent \$15 million followed by a further \$24 million this month. Cernauteanu said investigators had established the identities of some 138,000 Moldovan citizens in whose bank accounts the money ended up. The real number of those allegedly bribed by Shor, however, “is even higher” than the 300,000 mentioned by Sandu, because transfers made to one account were then shared between more people, he said.

Notes:

- 1 Georgian Dream party, founded in 2012, won the general election the same year as part of a coalition. It proceeded to win the 2016 and 2020 general elections as an independent party as well. Upon establishment, Georgian Dream was largely considered favorable to EU integration. However, it is now considered to be pro-Moscow by Georgian opposition parties and the current Georgian President, Salome Zourabichvili, based on its support of a number of controversial laws and the dissemination of anti-Western narratives. Georgian Dream leadership dispute this vilification claiming that their current platform seeks to look to both Russia and the West equally.
- 2 Shor, who also holds Russian and Israeli citizenship, was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison by a Moldovan court in April 2023 over a \$1 billion bank fraud. He is believed to be in Russia.
- 3 See: “Еврореферендум и выборы сделали Санду политическим трупом, считает эксперт (The Euroreferendum and elections have turned Sandu into a political corpse, says expert),” *Ria Novosti* (Russian daily), 23 October 2024. <https://ria.ru/20241023/sandu-1979672826.html>

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Exaggerate Missile Success in Israel Attack



An Iranian billboard celebrates the April 2024 missile barrage launched against Israel.

Source: <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1403/01/27/14030127094522670298182710.jpg>

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

On 1 October 2024, Iran launched close to 200 missiles at Israel to avenge the deaths of senior Hamas leader Dr. Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah. As with the 13 April 2024 missile and drone barrage, Israeli, U.S., and allied air defenses downed the majority of the missiles. Those that struck Israel appear to have caused only marginal damage. However, according to multiple Iranian media outlets, including the excerpted article published by *Mehr News Agency*, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) suggested a 90 percent success rate. While this number is false—the only confirmed casualty was a Palestinian in Jericho struck by

falling debris—the acceptance of such lies within Iranian command circles and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s base can have a profound impact on the operational environment.

“The Zionist regime is terrified of the Islamic Republic’s intelligence.”

Overconfidence, not oil or water, causes most wars in the Middle East. In the Iranian case, the IRGC has long exaggerated the effectiveness of its missiles.¹ While in an open society, the 1 October barrage might have embarrassed or caused the regime to question those who previously exaggerated claims; no such fallout

occurred in Iran. The supreme leader’s power base is perhaps 20 percent of the country. These revolutionary youth, from whom the IRGC draws its recruits, implicitly trust Khamenei and exist in a media bubble that the Iranian regime creates.² Not only do they suggest Israel’s air defense and that lent by the United States are little more than psychological operations, but the Iranian media narrative also downplays Israel’s ability to respond. The 19 April 2024 Israeli airstrike on Iranian anti-aircraft batteries in Isfahan demonstrated precision, but most Iranians are unaware of their success because the targets were not easily visible to the Iranian public.

The question now is whether a “zero-defect” dynamic is at play in Iran. If the Iranian or IRGC leadership

fails to accurately assess Iran's military ability, then it becomes more likely that Iranian leaders could order additional strikes not only on Israel but also potentially on U.S. bases in the region. A belief that only a set proportion of missiles equipped with

chemical, biological, or radiological warheads need to pass through complements this calculation. Any contributing factor that leads Tehran to believe they can inflict maximum damage if not dramatically win a conflict makes the region more dan-

gerous and mandates a recalibration of deterrence.

Source:

(Ninety percent of the shots hit their targets successfully)," *Mehr News Agency* (semi-official news agency owned by Iranian government's Islamic Development Organization), 1 October 2024. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/6243668>

“۹۰ درصد شلیک‌ها با موفقیت به اهداف اصابت کرد”

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

The Islamic Ummah of the Great Front of Resistance and the Noble Nation of Islamic Iran:

Following the previous announcement, your children in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in accordance with the promises made by the Islamic Republic officials and military commanders, with the help of other armed forces, during Operation True Promise II or the Messenger of God (Peace Be Upon Him).

They targeted strategic centers inside the occupied territories with missiles made by the youth of Islamic Iran.

This operation hit some air and radar bases, conspiracy centers which launched the assassination plots against the leaders of the Resistance, especially the [Hamas]

martyr Dr. Ismail Haniyeh as well as the leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, and the military commanders of Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Resistance, and the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards.

Despite the fact that the area was protected by the most advanced and high-volume defense systems, 90 percent of the shots successfully hit the targets, and the Zionist regime is terrified of the Islamic Republic's intelligence and operational dominance.

This operation was carried out within the framework of the right of legitimate defense and in accordance with international law, and any stupidity of the enemy will be met with a devastating and regretful response.

Public Relations of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Notes:

- 1 For previous discussion of Iranian claims about the precision of her missiles, see: Michael Rubin, "Iran: Khamenei Threatens to Use Precision Missiles," *OE Watch*, May 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/276811/download>
- 2 For previous discussion of how the regime constructs a media bubble, see: Michael Rubin, "Budget Cutbacks Force Iran Broadcasting Closings," *OE Watch*, February 2015. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195463>

Russia To Launch Two Satellites for Iran

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

While Iran-Russia military trade often makes headlines, the relationship between the two countries continues to expand in numerous ways:¹ Russian Special Forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) train together² while the two governments collude to avoid unilateral sanctions on each other's industries.³ Now, according to the excerpted article published in the IRGC media outlet *Tasnim News* these bilateral relations extend to Iran's space program.

“The launch of these two satellites indicates the significant progress of Iran's space industry.”

Iran's space program is a source of national pride. Iran has launched numerous domestically built satellites since 2008 and plans to open a spaceport next year.⁴ Iranian Space Agency head Hassan Salarieh has announced between five and seven planned launches by the end of the Iranian year (20 March). The success rate of Iranian satellite launches has been relatively low, however, perhaps between 25 and 50 percent. While the success rate has climbed in recent years, Iran's turn toward Russia could reflect internal uncertainty about its capabilities or acknowl-

edgment that its Semnan launch facility is not yet ready. There is also a military dimension to Russia-Iran space launch cooperation, as satellite launch vehicles share technology with intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The two satellites Iran plans to launch also reflect the military-private partnership that predominates in Iran and Iran's growing space capabilities. There is little firewall between Iranian students at government universities and the IRGC. Indeed, the IRGC mandates the participation of many Iranian students who have studied abroad in military related research. Iranian media describe the Kowsar satellite as a high-resolution satellite that can produce imagery useful for agricultural and environmental mapping and crisis management. Iran's reporting does not describe military

applications, but it does mention IRGC visits to the laboratory.

The Hudhud is a smaller communications satellite that the excerpted article claims can “provide communication services in remote and hard-to-reach areas where access to terrestrial communication networks is limited.” During periods of unrest, the Iranian government often cuts internet service. Should the IRGC compartmentalize access to the space-based internet, it might gain an upper hand over protestors.



Iranian scientists display the Kowsar and Hudhud satellites prior to their transfer to Russia for launch.

Source: <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1403/07/21/1403072109450377931177524.jpg>;
Attribution: Tasnim News

Source:

(Two Private Sector Satellites Sent to Russia for Launch),” *Tasnim News* (news agency affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 12 October 2024. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/07/21/3175967>

“۲ ماهواره ایرانی بخش خصوصی برای پرتاب به روسیه ارسال شد”

Two satellites made by the private sector of our country, named “Kowsar” [Abundance of Benevolence] and “Hudhud” [Hoopoe Bird], were sent to Russia for launch into space on Friday, October 11.

Both the Kowsar satellite that has a precision agriculture and mapping mission and the Hudhud satellite that is an Internet of Things telecommunication satellite, are ready for launch.

The construction of the “Kowsar” sensing satellite began in 2019, and the “Hudhud” satellite, which is the result of the use of advanced technologies used in “Kowsar,” was designed and built in a short time, only one year. It is important to note that these two great achievements have been achieved by a group of young

Iranians with an average age of 25 years in an Iranian technology company in the private sector....

The launch of these two satellites indicates the significant progress of Iran’s space industry and has important consequences for the country, including self-sufficiency in space technology, the development of space applications, job creation and technology development, and the promotion of international status.

Before sending these satellites to Russia for launch, Dr. Hassan Salarieh, the head of the Iranian Space Organization, witnessed the final stages of the construction and preparation of the satellites in the knowledge-based manufacturing company.

Notes:

- 1 For an overview of the history and evolution of Iran-Russia relations, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran-Russia Relations,” *OE Watch*, July 2016, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195435>
- 2 Michael Rubin, “Iran: Revolutionary Guards Take Part in Russian Military Games,” *OE Watch*, September 2016. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/195247?pi296680=1>
- 3 For discussion of industrial cooperation to avoid sanctions, see: Michael Rubin, “The Unexpected Ways Iran and Russia Are Building Military Ties,” *National Security Journal*, 6 October 2024. <https://nationalsecurityjournal.org/the-unexpected-ways-iran-and-russia-are-building-military-ties/>
- 4 For discussion of Iran’s new spaceport, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran to Open New Spaceport in 2025,” *OE Watch*, 07-2024. <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/oe-watch-issue-07-2024/>. For discussion of previous satellite launches, see: Michael Rubin, “Iran: Preparing for Zafar III Satellite Launch,” *OE Watch*, July 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/284140> and Michael Rubin, “Iran: Simorgh Satellite Ready to Launch,” and “Iran to Launch New Satellite by Year’s End,” *OE Watch*, August 2018. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-past-issues/241432>

Iran Concerned About Electronic Devices After Hezbollah Communications Attacks

By Holly Dages
OE Watch Commentary

Iran is concerned about Israel infiltrating its own electronic devices after twin communications attacks in mid-September targeting Hezbollah members in Lebanon killed at least 39 and injured 3,000 people.¹ As per the excerpted article from the semi-official Iranian *Mehr News Agency*, the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission held an emergency meeting during a 23 September session in parliament to discuss “various aspects and details of the recent terrorist operation in Lebanon, and the explosion of the pagers was thoroughly examined.” According to committee spokesperson Ebrahim Rezaei, part of the session focused on measures to prevent similar incidents in the country, which were widely attributed to Israeli intelligence agency Mossad.² Rezaei noted that the booby-trapped pagers were

“In this session, various aspects and details of the recent terrorist operation in Lebanon and the explosion of the pagers were thoroughly examined.”

“the result of industrial contamination,” in other words, that the devices had explosive substances inserted.³ According to Rezaei, Iran is “moving toward the localization of telecommunications equipment” and that it is “already capable of exporting some of this equipment,” likely a reference to providing Hezbollah with these domestically made devices.

Israel’s mid-September communications attacks in Lebanon have shaken the Iranian clerical establishment enough to prompt them to conduct investigations and make ensure

their electronic devices are not also compromised. With Iran and Israel out of the shadow war since Tehran’s first direct attack against Israel in April, Iran—which has become the Mossad’s playground for operations—is taking further precautionary measures to make sure they are not compromised yet again.

Source:

(Pagers incident has no connection to the martyrdom of ‘martyr [Ebrahim] Raisi’),” *Mehr News Agency* (semi-official news agency), 23 September 2024. mehrnews.com/x35Znz

ماجرای پیجرها هیچ ارتباطی با موضوع شهادت «شهید رئیسی» ندارد

According to the correspondent of Mehr [News Agency], Ebrahim Rezaei, in explaining the extraordinary session held this morning (Monday, September 23) by the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the parliament... He continued: “In this session, various aspects and details of

the recent terrorist operation in Lebanon and the explosion of the pagers were thoroughly examined.”

The communications minister provided explanations on this matter as well as on measures to prevent similar incidents in the country and said the recent operation in Lebanon was the result of industrial

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contamination and was a combined operation. He also stated that these pagers were primarily used in the healthcare sector.

The spokesperson for the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of parliament emphasized: “The Communications Minister stated that we are moving toward the localization of telecommunications equipment. This issue has been and continues to be on our agenda to support domestic production by localizing telecommunications equipment, and we are committed to supporting this effort. In fact, we are already capable of exporting some of this equipment.”

Rezaei added: “Regarding imported telecommunications items, the Minister of Information and Communications Technology said that we have sample verification laboratories aligned with our missions, and he stressed that the registry system must be strengthened...”

The spokesperson for the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of parliament added that during this session, the director general for West Asia and North Africa at the Foreign Ministry presented a report on the situation of the region. He emphasized that the recent terrorist operation in Lebanon will not affect Hezbollah’s and the Resistance [Axis]’s support for Gaza. Although the goal of the Zionist regime in

carrying out this operation was to deter Hezbollah from supporting Palestine and Gaza, they will not achieve their objectives.

Rezaei, referring to the views expressed by the members of the National Security Commission during the session, said: “The members expressed concern that a similar action might take place in Iran and stressed the importance of preventing and taking precautionary measures to ensure that such incidents are not repeated...”

The importance of electronic warfare and preparedness to counter the enemy’s electronic warfare was also emphasized. Additionally, strengthening the Passive Defense Organization was stressed. Moreover, during this session, it was clarified that the pagers incident had no connection to the issue of the martyrdom of martyr [President Ebrahim] Raisi and his companions.

Rezaei emphasized: “The members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the parliament unanimously stressed the need for readiness to confront the enemy’s conspiracies, including in the field of cyber and electronic terrorism, and to counter the inhumane actions of the Zionist regime.”

Notes:

- 1 On 17 and 18 September, beepers and walkie-talkies belonging to members of the militant group Hezbollah exploded simultaneously. Among those injured in the pager attacks on 17 September was the Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, who reportedly lost one eye with the other severely injured. Iranian officials and his family said the ambassador was in “good and stable condition.” See: Holly Dagues, “Iranian ambassador blinded in one eye,” *The Iranist*, 27 September 2024. <https://www.theiranist.com/i/149068347/iranian-ambassador-blinded-in-one-eye>
- 2 At the time, there were rumors that members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had been killed in the twin attacks, but per state broadcaster IRIB, IRGC spokesman Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini was quick to dispel media reports and online accounts as false. See:
هیچ نیروی سپاه در ماجرای پیجرها شهید نشده است
(No IRGC forces were martyred in the pagers incident),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 18 September 2024. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00IBdr>
- 3 David Gritten, “Death toll from Hezbollah pager explosions in Lebanon rises to 12,” *BBC News*, 18 September 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2kn10xldo>.

Iran Conducts First-Ever Military Exercise With Oman

By Holly Dagues
OE Watch Commentary

Despite regional tensions reaching an all-time high, Iran and Oman engaged in their first-ever bilateral military exercise on 30 September. Per reports in the first excerpted article by state broadcaster *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting*, the exercises, known as Mountain Falcons 1, took place in the Al Jabal Al-Akhdar province of Oman, involving ground forces from both countries, with support from the Royal Omani Air Force and Police.

According to the second excerpted article from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-controlled *Islamic Republic News Agency*, the exercises “focus[ed] on combating regional terrorism, establishing sustainable security, urban warfare, and the exchange and transfer of experiences between the two countries.” The timing of the joint military exercise

“[T]he first joint ground exercise between the ground forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman, which is known as “Mountain Falcons 1,” started on Monday, 30 September, in Al Jabal Al-Akhdar province of Oman.”

is significant, occurring just as Iran launched its second direct retaliatory strike against Israel on 1 October with the firing of 180 ballistic missiles. Arab countries in the Persian Gulf have expressed concern about the Israeli response, noting that they would not take sides in a conflict between Iran and Israel.¹ However, Oman is considered the “Switzerland of the Middle

East” for its neutrality and has for years played the role of interlocutor between the United States and Iran, who have had no formal ties since the 1979 revolution.²

Since 2019, Tehran has championed what it calls a “neighborly policy,” in other words, seeking better ties with its Arab neighbors. Not surprisingly, as the military drills continued, the Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was on a diplomatic blitz, visiting a host of Arab states to ease concerns of an escalation while also calling for a truce in Lebanon and a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.³ While regional tensions suggest otherwise, Tehran and Muscat’s military exercises with the threat of war looming seem to indicate that business is as usual in the region.

Source:

(Visit of the commander army ground forces to the plan to block the eastern border),” *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (state broadcaster), 30 September 2024. <https://www.iribnews.ir/00IA6v>.

آغاز نخستین رزمایش مشترک زمینی ایران و عمان

According to IRIB, the first joint ground exercise between the ground forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman, which is known as “Mountain Falcons 1,” started on Monday, 30 September, in Al Jabal Al-Akhdar province of Oman.

This exercise involves the ground forces of the

Islamic Republic of Iran Army and the Royal Sultanate of Oman, with support from the Royal Omani Air Force and Police. It is being conducted with the aim of exchanging and transferring experiences, conducting joint combat training, and improving the level of combat and operational readiness...

Source:

نخستین رزمایش مشترک و مرکب جمهوری اسلامی ایران و عمان برگزار شد

(The first joint exercise between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman was held),” *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRGC)*, 10 October 2024. www.irna.ir/xjRNKP

According to IRNA, from the army public relations, Brigadier General Kiumars Heydari stated: “At the request and invitation of the Omani Army for conducting an anti-terrorism exercise, the first joint and combined military drill between the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Army Ground Forces and the country of Oman with a focus on combating regional terrorism, establishing sustainable security, urban warfare, and the exchange and transfer of experiences

between the two countries, was carried out using day and night tactics in Oman.”

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is capable of conducting joint exercises with friendly and neighboring countries, adding: “This exercise, held over two days, involved rapid reaction units and special forces from the 65th NOHED Brigade of the Iranian Army, supported by the country of Oman’s Air Force and police and took place on Omani soil.”

Notes:

- 1 Samia Nakhoul, Parisa Hafezi and Pasha Magid, “Exclusive: Stop Israel from bombing Iran’s oil sites, Gulf states urge US,” *Reuters*, 10 October 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/stop-israel-bombing-irans-oil-sites-gulf-states-urge-us-2024-10-10/>
- 2 Kylie Atwood, “US held indirect talks with Iranian officials in Oman earlier this year amid tensions in Middle East,” *CNN*, 13 March 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/13/politics/us-iran-indirect-talks/index.html>
- 3 Natasha Bertrand, Kylie Atwood, Jennifer Hansler and Alex Marquardt, “Iran engages in urgent diplomacy as it braces for Israel’s response to missile attacks,” *CNN*, 12 October 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/11/politics/iran-nervous-israel-response-missile-attacks/index.html>

Kim Jong Un Speech Previews Military Action To Change Relationship With South Korea

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's recent policy speech to the Kim Jong Un National Defense University, published by the *Korean Central News Agency*, is likely intended to preview a military action by Pyongyang over the coming year. In the 8 October speech, Kim laid out his view of relations with South Korea, claiming that his regime no longer intended to reunify the south by military force but also had no interest in peaceful reunification. Kim's speech emphasized that North and South Korea are now separate and distinct countries, and any familial bond that may have once connected them is gone.

Practically, Kim's speech recognizes that North-South relations are at a diplomatic nadir. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol's policy has been to treat North Korea as a military threat first and foremost, managed

“For the Republic of Korea, all that it needs to do in order to guarantee its security is not provoking us into using our military strength.”

by a strong alliance with the United States and good relations with Japan. Moreover, North Korea likely realizes that it is incapable of reunifying South Korea by force of conventional arms and does not need to maintain the fiction.

Kim's speech probably has several concurrent objectives. First, it is meant to both galvanize and alarm the mainstream political left in South Korea, who are more likely than others to perceive the two countries as unnaturally divided and express a sense of shared history and kinship. Second, if a more accommodating leader were to assume power in Seoul or Washington, Kim would be positioned to demand unilateral, upfront concessions. Third, it sets the

stage for a dramatic event over the next year to change the status quo of enduring disputes. Speeches by and quotes attributed to Kim Jong Un in state media are the most authoritative the regime can issue. Such an abrupt policy change announced at a military venue is likely designed to preview some kind of military action over the next year when it will “react” to South Korean aggression in order to achieve by military force what it has not been able to achieve through diplomacy: such as monetary tribute, sanctions relief, and redrawing the de facto maritime borders. Kim's speech implies that as its enemy, South Korea only continues to exist due to Kim Jong Un's magnanimity.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gives a speech to the Kim Jong Un National Defense University (Oct 8, 2024).

Source: <http://kcna.kp/siteFiles/photo/202410/PIC0084398.jpg>; Attribution: Public Domain under Art. XII of the Copyright Act of North Korea, aka PD-KPGov which is "government or other works in the public domain."

Source: Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), “경애하는 김정은동지께서 김정은국방종합대학을 축하방문하시여 하신 연설 (Speech at Congratulatory Visit to Kim Jong Un University of National Defence),” KCNA (central state-owned broadcaster), 8 Oct 2024. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/aa579c643101bb7eb1a0e7e21f43d9a1.kcmsf>

The respected Comrade Kim Jong Un made a speech at the congratulatory visit to Kim Jong Un University of National Defence...

It is a matter of course that the more fearfully they become aware of their doomsday coming closer, the more frantic the ringleader of aggression and its lackeys, dependent on anti-communism and war for their existence, will go and rush to war till they collapse with sheer exhaustion...

I am saying this as you need to have a clear understanding of our enemy.

As you have learned through newspapers and broadcasts, some days ago I made clear my view of and stand towards this matter.

A wise statesman would not act so rashly as to endanger the security of his country and its population; in dealing with a nuclear-armed rival, rather than opt for a confrontation or face-off with it, he would put emphasis on, and concern himself about, how to handle the situation and avoid military conflict.

Even if there appeared a matchless commander unheard-of in the time-honoured history, he would

not be able to come up with a realistic method of overcoming the distinctions between the capabilities of nukes and conventional weapons.

For the Republic of Korea, all that it needs to do in order to guarantee its security is not provoking us into using our military strength.

This is so simple a method.

It would find itself safe if it refrained from provoking us or flexing its muscles before us at times, but it seems that Seoul has no one capable of doing such a simple thing.

To be honest, we have no intention of attacking the Republic of Korea.

Thinking of it is abominable, and we hate dealing with those in it.

Formerly, we often spoke about liberating the south and reunification by force of arms, but now we are not interested in it. And since our statement about two separate states, we have been all the more unwilling to be conscious of the state in the south...

North Korea Tacitly Acknowledges Its Troops Are in Ukraine

By Anthony W. Holmes
OE Watch Commentary

The official state-controlled broadcaster, the *Korean Central News Agency*, carried a North Korean vice foreign minister's statement on 25 October, marking the first known response by the regime to Western evidence of North Korean troops deploying to the conflict in Ukraine. In response, North Korean Vice Foreign Minister for Russia Affairs Kim Jong Gyu provided a nebulous answer that amounted to admitting that while Kim cannot answer the question of North Korean troops in Ukraine authoritatively, there would be no legal reason prohibiting North Korea from doing so. Importantly, Kim did not deny the story.

North Korea had several options for addressing this growing question. First, it could have stayed silent on the matter. Alternatively, it could have announced its troops in Ukraine in its trademark aggressive media

style as a concrete example of growing North Korea-Russia cooperation and North Korean military power. It instead chose a third option, whereby it acknowledged people were asking questions while framing its justification as hypothetical. North Korea's savvy media operators were doubtless aware of how such a statement would rock the global media environment—and it did.

say something about the story before everyday North Koreans heard about it from unauthorized, and therefore illegal, sources. It is also plausible that Russia resisted North Korea's acknowledgment in order to avoid portraying President Vladimir Putin as weak.

North Korea watchers should be on the lookout for supplementary statements from authoritative sources

“If there is such a thing...I think it will be an act conforming with the regulations of international law.”

The regime's response is intriguing as it does not appear to solve any existing problem in the information domain. It is possible that North Korea was compelled to make a statement on the matter because, for example, party officials had begun asking questions, the regime was preparing additional soldiers to deploy, and/or the regime's censors wanted to

within the regime, such as (in increasing order of authority) the foreign or defense ministers, the cabinet or state affairs commission, Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong, and Kim Jong Un himself. As North Korea decides to selectively reveal more information about its operations, they are likely to do so according to this assessed media authoritativeness ladder.

Source: “조선민주주의인민공화국 외무성 김정규 로씨야담당 부상 최근 여론화되고있는 대로씨야파병설과 관련한 입장 발표 (Vice Foreign Minister for Russia Affairs of DPRK clarifies stand on rumor of troop dispatch to Russia),” *KCNA* (central state-owned broadcaster), 25 Oct 2024. <http://kcna.kp/kp/article/q/1b5206685a5dd88f86da517afd511712.kcmsf>

Kim Jong Gyu, vice foreign minister of the DPRK in charge of Russian affairs, gave the following answer to a question raised by KCNA on Friday as regards a rumor that the troops of the Korean People's Army

are dispatched to Russia which is recently drawing public attention in the world: “I heeded the rumor of the dispatch of KPA troops to Russia, which the world media is building up public opinion.”

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The DPRK Foreign Ministry does not directly engage in the things of the Ministry of National Defence, and does not feel the need to confirm it separately.

If there is such a thing that the world media is talking

about, I think it will be an act conforming with the regulations of international law.

There will evidently exist forces which want to describe it as illegal one, I think.

Mexico's Sheinbaum Launches Plan To Address Security Crisis

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum assumed power in October in the middle of a full-blown security crisis. In just a few weeks, the State of Sinaloa has witnessed hundreds of deaths at the hands of warring factions within the Sinaloa Cartel.¹ Several public officials were assassinated, in one case—the mayor of Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero State—within a week of assuming office. Therefore, Sheinbaum presented her new security plan for Mexico at a critical moment. The excerpted article from left-center Argentine daily *Página 12* emphasizes the continuity of Sheinbaum's plan with that of her predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador's, security plan, dubbed “hugs, not bullets.” The article characterizes López Obrador as seeking

“During López Obrador’s six-year term, crime claimed a record number of more than 190,000 lives, but the new president has ruled out confronting violence with more violence.”

to attack crime at its social roots. However, there will also be some innovations in Sheinbaum's security plan. The *Página 12* article reports that Sheinbaum will concentrate security efforts on the top ten most violent cities in Mexico. The second excerpted article from Mexican business-focused daily *El Economista* notes that almost half of all homicides occur in six districts in Mexico. In these districts, the fight for territorial control between the two largest cartels,

Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation, is most intense.

The success or failure of Sheinbaum's security plan will have significant implications for the operational environment. Given their importance in the illicit drug and human smuggling routes, Mexico's criminal cartels operate transnationally and drive much of Latin America's criminal dynamics. A successful security plan in Mexico may have salutary effects for other countries, such as Ecuador, which are suffering from the expansion efforts of Mexican criminal organizations throughout Latin America.²



Journalists protest rising violence in Mexico.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/knightfoundation/5569178904>.

Source: “Sheinbaum presentó su nuevo plan de seguridad (Sheinbaum presented her new security plan),” *Página 12* (an Argentine daily known for a leftist bent), 9 October 2024. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/773339-sheinbaum-presento-su-nuevo-plan-de-seguridad>

The former mayor of the federal district, who took office on October 1, pledged to maintain the strategy of her predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who chose to employ a series of social policies to attack crime at its roots during his term...In her proposal, Sheinbaum projects what she calls a ‘100-day security strategy,’ according to which national

security would focus on the 10 most dangerous cities and states in the country...During López Obrador’s six-year term, crime claimed a record number of more than 190,000 lives, but the new president has ruled out confronting violence with more violence...‘What are we going to use? Prevention, attention to the causes, intelligence and presence,’ she said.

Source: “Sheinbaum presenta su plan de seguridad que busca abatir la espiral de violencia de otros sexenios (Sheinbaum presents her security plan that seeks to reduce the spiral of violence of other six-year terms),” *El Economista* (a Mexican daily focused on business and economy), 8 October 2024. <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/sheinbaum-presenta-plan-seguridad-busca-abatir-espiral-violencia-otros-sexenios-20241008-729110.html>

The president will launch her strategy after the mayor of Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero, one of the six districts of the country that account for almost half of all homicides, was beheaded last Sunday, a few days after taking office. Violence in Mexico is concentrated in strategic points (drug routes, borders, ports of entry for Chinese fentanyl components, and avocado and lemon

producing regions). In these areas, the two main cartels in the country, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), operate and fight each other...Sheinbaum has only been in office for a week and the violence is relentless: the decapitation of the mayor of Chilpancingo, the discovery of 12 bodies in the state of Guanajuato, and some 150 people killed in three weeks in the state of Sinaloa.

Notes:

- 1 For more on the internecine fighting within the Sinaloa Cartel, see: Christine Murray, “US Arrests Spark Cartel ‘War’ in Northern Mexico: ‘Like a Narco Pandemic,’” *Financial Times*, 28 September 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/0f883ce4-c922-48a7-b9e8-7793fccbf0c9>
- 2 For more information on the presence of Mexico’s criminal organizations in Ecuador, see: Ryan Berg, “Why Ecuador’s Security Crisis Demands Global Action,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 July 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-ecuadors-security-crisis-demands-global-action>

Terrorist Attack in Togo Reveals Turkish Counterterrorism Role



Togo's Savanes Region is JNIM's latest area of expansion, but it remains unclear whether Turkish PMCs can support the Togolese army to repel JNIM over the long term.

Source: EC-JRC/ECHO, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Togo_Base_Map.png

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

The littoral West African country of Togo, along with its neighbor Benin, is a main target of expansion for the al-Qaeda affiliated Group for Supporters of Islam and Muslims (JNIM).¹ As discussed in a French-language article in the Burkinabe publication, *24heures.bf*, on 2 October, JNIM attacked a construction site in northern Togo engaged in the building of trenches to defend against JNIM incursions. The attack claimed the lives of nine Togolese soldiers and 10 civilians. This is not the first time JNIM has specifically destroyed trench-building projects and killed construction workers. The article notes that Togolese Army reinforcements accompanied by Turkish instructors in helicopters, finally repelled the attack by firing on the JNIM militants.

Although Turkish instructors have reportedly operated in Niger alongside Russian Africa Corps personnel, it was previously unclear whether Turkish instructors operated in Togo.² The article, in fact, asserts that two Turkish instructors have been killed in previous JNIM attacks in Togo,

which suggests Turks may be more involved in counter-insurgency operations in Togo than previously known.

“The [JNIM] attack targeted soldiers who were patrolling the trenches under construction, and who were trying to prevent terrorist incursions at the border.”

The involvement of Turkish instructors in Togo seemingly differs from that of African Corps personnel operating in the Sahel, who not only engage in counterinsurgency operations against JNIM but are also involved in propping up post-coup junta military regimes in the Sahel, including Burkina Faso. Notably, Africa Corps has suffered numerous setbacks in battles with JNIM. The Turkish private military company, Sadat, had reportedly been active in Niger and Burkina Faso. The presence of Turkish instructors in Togo implies a likely expansion of the Turkish PMC and instructor presence in West Africa.

Source: “Attaque terroriste au Togo: 19 morts près de la frontière du Burkina (Terrorist attack in Togo: 19 dead near the Burkina border),” *24heures.bf* (independent French-language Burkina Faso-based publication with a focus on defense and security affairs), 4 October 2024. <https://www.24heures.bf/attaque-terroriste-au-togo-19-morts-pres-de-la-frontiere-du-burkina/>

A terrorist attack struck, on October 2, the town of Fanworgou in the Kpendjal region in northern Togo, exactly on the border with Burkina. The [JNIM] attack targeted soldiers who were patrolling along the trenches under construction, and who were trying to prevent terrorist incursions at the border. The result: 19 dead, including 9 soldiers and 10 civilians, including EBOMAF machine operators and

technicians.

Reinforcements, especially airborne, were deployed to the site to counter the attackers, who were repelled by military units supported by helicopters and piloted by Turkish instructors. Despite the construction of trenches, the terrorists seem to continue to adapt their tactics.

Notes:

- 1 Jacob Zenn, “Al-Qaeda’s Sahel Affiliate Targets Togo,” *OE Watch*, 07-2022, 2022. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/420353?pi296680=2>
- 2 According to Africa Defense Forum, “some of Sadat’s Syrian fighters in Niger have ended up under Russian command fighting violent extremist organizations affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group in the Liptako-Gourma region, the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.” Africa Defense Forum, “Turkish PMC ‘Sadat’ Competes for Sahel Influence,” *adf-magazine.com*, 30 July 2024. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/07/turkish-pmc-sadat-competes-for-sahel-influence/>

India's UAV Development Struggles To Take Off

By Matthew Stein
OE Watch Commentary

As India has made a push to build up its defense industry, it occasionally allows the armed forces to make acquisitions of weapon systems outside of Indian production venues. This occurs when there is an urgent operational requirement and no viable alternative available from Indian companies.¹ To that end, officials in the Indian armed forces announced earlier this year they had purchased **31 MQ-9B Reaper** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from the United States under an Acceptance of Necessity acquisition.²

India's acquisition of the MQ-9B UAVs, instead of a system from India, brought to light ongoing issues with UAV development in India as reported on by the accompanying excerpted article from India's independent think tank, the *Observer Research Foundation*. The article notes that Indian officials chose the MQ-9Bs over an equivalent Indian system, the TAPAS, due to numerous issues with the latter's development and testing. The author points out that TAPAS is being revived by the Indian Air Force despite the MQ-9B purchase, but significant issues remain. One of the most notable challenges is that TAPAS is apparently reliant on Chinese parts like other Indian-developed UAVs. While importing parts for UAVs from China is more cost-effective, it could



India's **Rustom-II** in Flight during a testing phase. Note: the Rustom UAV is now referred to as the TAPAS.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rustom_flight_2_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rustom_flight_2_(cropped).jpg)

compromise security, and India's Ministry of Defense has warned the defense industry about sourcing parts for UAVs from China.

The article concludes by stating that while India has yet to produce a UAV suitable for the military, like TAPAS, there is still potential for domestically produced UAVs if the government, the armed forces, the Defense Research Development Organization,³ and the Indian defense industry all continue to push for it. However, the impact of the Indian armed forces continued acquisitions from outside the country's defense industry on this situation remains uncertain.

“The TAPAS underwent tests before the armed services and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) proceeded to acquire the MQ9s.”

Source: Kartik Bommakanti, “Despite MQ9B purchase, the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy revive TAPAS,” *Observer Research Foundation* (independent think-tank in India), 13 September 2024. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/despite-mq9b-purchase-the-indian-air-force-and-indian-navy-revive-tapas>

Earlier this year, the Modi government’s announcement that India will purchase 31 MQ9-B Reaper Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs), also known as Predators, developed by the United States’ General Atomics, came as a shot in the arm for the Indian armed forces. The Indian Navy (IN) will get 15 naval variants of the MQ9 UAVs dubbed the Sea Guardians for maritime missions, whereas the Indian Army (IA) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) will get eight each... The Reapers are primarily geared for ISR missions, but they can also perform strike missions, and the ones being purchased by India are multirole...even if this purchase is not consistent with the government’s flagship Atma Nirbhar Bharat (ANB) initiative...

All the factors mentioned above outweighed whatever capabilities the Tactical Airborne Platform for Air Surveillance (TAPAS), India’s native Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drone, could bring to the armed forces...[TAPAS] was consumed by excessive development time and cost overruns, after its initial launch was pegged at a price of INR 1,650 crores or roughly US\$ 200 million. By early January of 2024, the revised costs surged to INR 1,786 crores or US\$ 215 million...

A key technical deficiency of the TAPAS drone is its engine, which is a fundamental weakness plaguing other Indian aircraft development programmes...The TAPAS underwent tests before the armed services and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) proceeded to acquire the MQ9s...

Thanks to the IAF and IN, the TAPAS is being revived despite its technological deficiencies. The IAF sees the TAPAS, notwithstanding its lack of endurance, worth improving on progressively, which it seeks to deploy along the Line of Actual Control (LaC)...

More recently, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has warned against both private sector enterprises and government-run entities like the DRDO sourcing drone parts from the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) for military UAVs. Nevertheless, private industry still relies on Chinese supplied spares...The TAPAS may have the support of the IAF and IN, but more broadly the domestic drone industry is heavily compromised by its dependence on spares and components from China. India confronts a trade-off—allow spares for military drones in particular to be sourced exclusively from non-Chinese sources, especially from native industry, thereby driving up costs and prolonging development time, or in a bid to keep procurement costs low for UAV components, allow the security of its drones to be compromised in key areas such as camera functions, communications, radio transmission and software security that are vital to military operations...

Although there is not a single Indian drone that can be considered militarily worthy...there is no reason to feel completely bleak about the future of military drone development in India, provided there is sustained effort by the government, the armed services, the DRDO and industry.

Notes:

- 1 The Indian government set this requirement as part of Prime Minister Modi's Atma Nirbhar Bharat initiative, or the "Make in India" initiative, beginning in 2014. The initiative mandates that the Ministry of Defense make acquisitions from the Indian defense industry to bolster growth and development of Indian companies. In recent years, India's Ministry of Defense has gone outside of the Indian defense industry under government allowed exceptions to the initiative for what Indians have called "fast track" acquisitions, which fulfill urgent operational requirements for items such as new assault rifles. For a recent example of this, see: Snehes Alex Philip, "Indian Army orders fresh batch of 73K SIG SAUER 716 rifles from US under emergency procurement," *The Print*, 27 August 2024. <https://theprint.in/defence/indian-army-orders-fresh-batch-of-73k-sig-sauer-716-rifles-from-us-under-emergency-procurement/2240975/>
- 2 The Acceptance of Necessity differs from the "fast track" acquisitions to allow for more expensive acquisitions, like the MQ9-B UAVs. For other recent examples of Acceptance of Necessity acquisitions, see: Dinakar Peri, "Defence Acquisition Council clears heavy weight torpedoes, mid-air refuelling aircraft among major deals," *The Hindu*, 16 February 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/defence-acquisition-council-clears-heavy-weight-torpedoes-mid-air-refuelling-aircraft-among-major-deals/article67854256.ece>
- 3 India's Defense Research Development Organization (DRDO) is an organization within the Ministry of Defense that has a history of working with companies in the defense industry to develop and produce various weapon systems.