

OVERVIEW OF TERRORISM



Volume II Issue 3/2024

ISLAMIC STATE - KHORASAN ACCENTS UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEMS PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

ISIS • AL QAEDA • BOKO HARAM • AL SHABAB • JNIM • ABU SAYYAF

لا إله إلا الله
محمد رسول الله



لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ



2024 marks five years since the Global Coalition against Daesh declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. A part of its fighters was eliminated, another ended up in prisons in Syria and Iraq, and a third managed to escape and hide in Turkey and the countries of Central Asia.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is analyzed in order to evaluate the importance of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in contemporary wars. In conclusion the report refers to the geopolitical reflections on the use of UAS and the lessons learned on their future prospects.

Since the end of the Cold War, demand for private military – security companies (PMSCs) has increased to such an extent that there is now a major PMSC industry offering an ever-wider range of services with some companies employing well beyond 10,000 staff.

More



Research Center of Extremism and Terrorism

RAKOVSKI NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE

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OVERVIEW OF TERRORISM is quarterly bulletin of the **Research Centre for Extremism and Terrorism's**, focusing on global terrorist activity. The purpose of the bulletin is to provide information on the current state and assess the terrorism and extremism trends.

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RESEARCH MATRIX

Scope: The research is focused on the monitoring, analysis and assessment of radicalization processes, manifestations of extremism and terrorism globally, counter-terrorism and anti-terrorist actions of competent authorities, as well as other current security issues.

Sources: The information required for the purposes of the study is obtained entirely from open sources. The facts and circumstances that are disclosed, as well as the photographic and graphic material used, in no way constitute state or official secrets, as well as foreign classified information, including the information of NATO and the bodies of the European Union. When processing information, the principles of reliability, accuracy, timeliness and impartiality are respected.

Methodology: The analysis and evaluation of the information is carried out following predetermined indicators and criteria, which aim to reveal the regularities in the investigated security environment. The methodology used includes cognitive methods (comparison, generalization), epistemological methods (analysis, synthesis), logical methods (induction, deduction, analogy, abduction) and structuring methods (system method).

ISLAMIC STATE – KHORASAN AS A THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF EUROPE

*Svetoslav Yordanov, PhD candidate
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2024 marks five years since the Global Coalition against Daesh declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Although the terrorist organization continues to maintain dormant terrorist cells, it does not rule entire territorial sections after the liberation of the last city controlled by it in Syria in March 2024 - Al Baghuz Fauqani (Deir ez-Zor province). A part of ISIS fighters were eliminated, another ended up in prisons in Syria and Iraq, and a third managed to escape and hide in Turkey and the countries of Central Asia. The main power of the terrorist organization is weakening due to the limitation of funding sources, the loss of manpower, the destruction of most command and control centers, and the absence of an authoritative unifying leadership.

The greatest ability to adapt and reorganize, as well as readiness to carry out operational tasks, demonstrates those network structures of Daesh, which are located in the border area of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, known under the common name “Islamic State in Khorasan Province.”

The focus of public attention on this jihadist faction was placed after the terrorist act at the Crocus City Hall concert hall in Moscow (Russia) on March 22, 2024, when the Islamic State in Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the attack and the terrorist organization is beginning to be perceived by counter-terrorism authorities as a major terrorist threat to security and peace in Europe.

General characteristics of Islamic State - Khorasan

The name of Islamic State's Central Asian province of Khorasan has been used since the time of the Second Persian Empire to refer to a territory that mostly covers areas in present-day Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Later, the area acquired a religious significance, when after the appearance of Islam it was mentioned in one of the hadiths that an orthodox army would leave from these lands, which would conquer the entire Muslim world with its black flags. During the Middle Ages Khorasan also gained commercial

importance, the projection of which continues to this day, as the region is located on the Silk Road, which evolved into China's modern Belt and Road Initiative.

The aspirations for the imposition of the radical version of Islam by the Islamic State – Khorasan are not limited only to the historical borders of the district, but also demonstrate claims to expand the scope of the vilayet in the direction of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India and Pakistan.

The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), also written the Islamic State - Khorasan (IS-K), is composed of three structural elements: splinters of the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (Pakistani faction of The Taliban Movement); the joined old Jihadi core of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; former Al Qaeda fighters.

Although the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan organization itself is part of the Taliban Movement, it pursues different political goals than those of the Afghan wings of the Taliban. While Pakistani security services often cooperate with individual leaders of the Afghan Taliban, the Islamists of the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan are enemies of the Pakistani government as they aim to forcefully change the country's political system.

The first leader of IS-K, Pakistani Sheikh Hafiz Saeed Khan, a representative of the influential Orakzai tribe, which is of the Pashtun ethnic group, gained combat experience as a commander of the Pakistani Taliban. He pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State in 2013, initially in Pakistan, but gradually joined his organization and other armed groups on the territory of Afghanistan, leading to his proclamation as emir of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province in 2015. The baptism of fire for the new emirate was made in April of the same year, when a bomb attack¹ took place in the city of Jalalabad in Afghanistan, in which 33 people were killed and more than 100 were injured. Hafiz Saeed Khan was killed in 2016 in Afghanistan by the US armed forces in an airstrike with a combat drone.

The current leader of IS-K is believed to be Shehab al-Muhajir (born Sanaullah Ghafari), although there are conflicting reports that he was killed in 2023 in Afghanistan in a counter-terrorist operation by the ruling Taliban regime. According to Reuters², the terrorist survived and is located in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. Although he is not yet 30 years old, the Islamist has extensive military experience, his name being associated with membership in the Haqqani network (Taliban faction in Afghanistan), participation in fighting on the side of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and even with work as a bodyguard for Afghan government figures.

¹ Popalzai, M., Mehsud, S. (2015, April 19). *ISIS militant bomber on motorbike kills 33 at bank in Afghanistan*. CNN.

² Yavar, M., Ali, M., Rajesh, YP. (2024, March 26). *How ISIS-K leader forged one of Islamic State's most fearsome groups*. Reuters.

His ethnicity is disputed, with claims that he is Tajik or Pashtun. The US government has announced a \$10 million reward for information on Shehab al-Muhajir's whereabouts. The terrorist is believed to be the leader of the Islamic State - Khorasan as of the summer of 2020.

IS-K's areas of control in Afghanistan are concentrated in Nangarhar and Helmand provinces. Even before the Taliban seized power in the summer of 2021, the two organizations have had frequent armed clashes. Apart from competition in the imposition of territorial power, the reasons are also economic and ideological.

Islamic State jihadists oppose the cultivation of opium poppies, the trade of which is one of the main sources of funding for the Afghan Taliban. This also leads to clashes with individual clans and tribes, as the established socio-economic order is violated.

Ideological differences also define the feud between IS-K and the Taliban. Daesh jihadists consider members of the Taliban Movement to be nationalists who wish to dominate an emirate that develops diplomatic relations with other countries, while they themselves seek to establish a caliphate and forcefully impose Islam around the world.

After the establishment of the Taliban government in 2021, the fighters of the Islamic State - Khorasan have been pushed to the northeast, with some of them crossing the border with Tajikistan and others hiding in Pakistan. Their cells exist in the capital Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz, etc.

In Afghanistan and the region, IS's terrorist attacks have primarily targeted ethnic communities that do not practice the Sunni version of Islam, but also against members of other religions such as Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan.

Some of the known terrorist attacks carried out by the Daesh branch with Khorasan province area of responsibility are³: suicide bombing at the airport in the city of Kabul (Afghanistan) in August 2021; attack on the Russian embassy in the city of Kabul (Afghanistan) in September 2022; suicide bombing in Bajaur district (Pakistan) in July 2023; bombing in the city of Kerman (Iran) in January 2024.

Although the Republic of Turkey does not fall within the boundaries of the historical vilayet, in January 2024⁴, two IS-K fighters carried out a gun attack during a Sunday service in a Catholic church in the city of Istanbul, killing one person.



Shehab al-Muhajir
Source: U.S. Department of State, Rewards for Justice

³ Mapping Militants Project. (2024, August 1). *Islamic State in Khorasan Province*.

⁴ Al Arabiya News. (2024, January 29). *Turkey captures two gunmen linked to ISIS after deadly church attack in Istanbul*.

Islamic State Khorasan is estimated to currently have 4,000-6,000 fighters, preferring to recruit members from the Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen and Baluchi ethnic groups who practice Sunni Islam.

Terrorist activity of the Islamic State – Khorasan in the territory of Europe



Figure 1. Terrorist activity of the Islamic State - Khorasan on the territory of Europe for the period 2020 – 2024.

Figure 1 presents the terrorist activity of Islamic State – Khorasan on the territory of Europe for the period 2020 - 2024, showing the number of terrorist attacks carried out (marked in red) that are attributable to the terrorist group, as well as the number of arrests of jihadists (marked in blue) for whom there is sufficient evidence that they were preparing terrorist attacks on behalf of or sympathizing with IS-K.

Austria

➤ In the month of August 2024⁵, two persons were detained in the city of Vienna, where they were preparing a terrorist attack against an upcoming concert of the singer Taylor Swift. The main suspect is 19 years old and an Austrian citizen of *North Macedonian origin*, and the other person is 17 years old and of *mixed Turkish and Croatian origin*.

➤ In the month of May 2024⁶, a 14-year-old girl was detained in the city of Graz, who planned a terrorist attack with the use of a knife and an axe. The minor is *originally from Montenegro* and was found to have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in preparation for the terrorist act by watching Daesh propaganda material showing videos of beheadings.

➤ In June 2023⁷, three persons of *Bosnian and Chechen origin*, aged 14, 17 and 20, were detained in the city of Vienna on charges of preparing a terrorist attack against the Pride parade held in the Austrian capital. All three were supporters of the Islamic State.

➤ At the beginning of 2023, two persons aged 17 and 18 were detained in the city of Vienna, one of whom was of *Bosnian origin*. In November 2023⁸, they received an effective sentence on charges of propagating Islamic State ideology and shooting bystanders with an air rifle.

➤ In November 2020⁹, a terrorist act took place in the city of Vienna, in which 4 people died and 23 others were injured. An automatic weapon, a pistol



The detained 19-y-old jihadist
Source: Instagram

⁵ Kronen Zeitung. (2024, August 8). „Ungläubige töten“: Islamisten hatten „Großes“ vor.

⁶ Holzer-Ottawa, E. (2024, Mai 18). Terroranschlag in Graz geplant: Verdächtige ist erst 14 Jahre alt. KURIER.

⁷ Tanno, S. (2023, June 18). Three arrested including 14-year-old as police foil attack on Vienna's pride parade. CNN.

⁸ Kronen Zeitung. (2024, November 28). Junge IS-Fans erneut verurteilt: Zwei Jahre Haft.

⁹ Tagesschau. (2023, Februar, 2). Lange Haftstrafen für Terrorhelfer.

and a machete were used in the attack. The perpetrator is a 20-year-old person with dual citizenship – Austrian and North Macedonian, being of the Albanian ethnicity. He belonged to an Islamic State cell.



The perpetrator of the terrorist attack in the city of Vienna – Kuytim Faizulai. Sources: MEMRI, Daesh media channels

Belgium

- In July 2024¹⁰, three persons of *Chechen origin* were detained in the Brussels area and accused of preparing a terrorist act on Belgian territory as members of the Islamic State - Khorasan.
- In the month of May 2023¹¹, seven persons were detained who were preparing a terrorist attack in Belgium. Those arrested were supporters of the Islamic State, and four of them were of *Chechen origin*.

Germany

- On September 5, 2024¹², in the city of Munich, an 18-year-old Austrian of *Bosnian origin* shot at police officers in front of the Israeli consulate in the city. It is believed that the extremist intended to carry out a terrorist attack on the Israeli diplomatic mission.
- On May 21, 2024¹³, a 25-year-old person of *Afghan origin* was attacked with a knife in the city of Mannheim, in which one person died.

¹⁰ Reuters. (2024, July 26). *Belgium charges three with planning terrorist attack.*

¹¹ Reuters. (2023, May 4). *Belgium arrests seven suspected of planning terrorist attack.*

¹² Euronews. (2024, September 5). *Man killed in shootout at Israeli consulate in Munich was known to Austrian police.*

¹³ Kronen Zeitung. (2024, Mai 31). *Not-OP bei Islamkritiker, Polizist in Lebensgefahr.*

➤ In the month of May 2024¹⁴, in the province of North Rhine-Westphalia, three minors were detained - a 15-year-old girl, a 16-year-old girl and a 15-year-old boy, who were preparing a terrorist attack with knives and Molotov cocktails against churches and police employees. The three sympathized with Daesh and were inspired by the terrorist attack carried out by the Islamic State - Khorasan in the concert hall "Crocus City Hall" in the city of Moscow (Russia) on March 22, 2024.

➤ In the month of March 2024¹⁵, two *Afghan citizens* were detained in the province of Thuringia, who planned a terrorist attack against the Swedish parliament. Investigators have information that Islamic State - Khorasan assigned the task of one of the arrested jihadists to avenge the numerous cases of public burning of the Koran in Sweden. They have also procured financial means to support IS-K fighters in prisons in northern Syria.

➤ In the month of November 2023¹⁶, in the provinces of North Rhine-Westphalia and Brandenburg, two minors were detained - a 15-year-old *Afghan* and a 16-year-old *Chechen*, who intended to carry out a terrorist attack with a truck bomb against the Christmas market in the city of Leverkusen or against a synagogue in the city of Cologne. Those arrested were radicalized following the ideology of the Islamic State.

➤ In the month of July 2023¹⁷, in the province of North Rhine-Westphalia and the province of Lower Saxony, seven persons between the ages of 20 and 46 were detained - five of *Tajik origin*, one of *Turkmen origin* and one of *Kyrgyz origin*. The arrested have been identified as part of a cell of the Islamic State - Khorasan in the territory of the European Union, and are accused of financing terrorism and preparing to carry out terrorist attacks.

➤ At the beginning of 2021, in the province of North Rhine-Westphalia, five persons of *Tajik origin*, aged between 25 and 34, were detained, and in May 2022¹⁸, the court in Düsseldorf issued an effective conviction that they were part of a cell of the Islamic State - Khorasan, which planned terrorist attacks in the territory of Germany. The jihadists were members of a terrorist group that was involved in the terrorist act with a truck bomb in the city of Stockholm (Sweden) in 2017, as well as the terrorist attack in November 2020 in the city of Vienna (Austria).

¹⁴ Deutsche Welle. (2024, April 12). *Germany: 3 teens held over suspected Islamist attack plans.*

¹⁵ Leven, D. (2024, March 19). *Germany arrests 2 Afghans over Swedish parliament attack plot.* POLITICO.

¹⁶ Fröhlich, A. (2023, November 29). *Jugendliche in NRW und Brandenburg festgenommen : Islamistischer Anschlag auf Weihnachtsmarkt und Synagoge vereitelt.* TAGESSPIEGEL.

¹⁷ TAGESSPIEGEL. (2023, Juli 6). *Offenbar Anschlagziele ausgekundschaftet: Sieben Männer in Nordrhein-Westfalen unter Terrorverdacht festgenommen.*

¹⁸ Al Arabiya News. (2022, May 31). *Germany sentences five Tajiks to jail over ISIS plots.*

Italy

➤ In April 2024¹⁹, a 32-year-old person of *Tajik origin* was detained at the airport in Rome, who was wanted with the red notice of INTERPOL and is considered an active member of the Islamic State.

Netherlands

➤ In July 2023²⁰, two persons were detained - a 29-year-old man of *Tajik origin* and his 32-year-old wife of *Kyrgyz origin*. They are accused by the prosecutor's office in the city of Rotterdam of preparing to carry out terrorist attacks and of being members of the Islamic State - Khorasan. The jihadists are linked to other Islamists arrested in Germany, part of the same terrorist cell.

Russia

➤ On August 23, 2024²¹, four prisoners of *Tajik* and *Uzbek origin* took guards hostage in a penal colony in the town of Surovikino (Volograd region), killing one of the prison guards. They pledged allegiance to the Islamic State - Khorasan, saying they wanted revenge on the authorities for the captured perpetrators of the March terrorist attack on the Crocus City Hall concert hall in Moscow. All the kidnappers were eliminated during the counter-terrorist operation.



One of the participants in the terrorist attack in the prison colony in the town of Surovikino, Volograd region. *Source: Telegram*

¹⁹ ANSA. (2024, Aprile 09). *Arresto convalidato per il tagiko dell'Isis bloccato ieri a Roma.*

²⁰ Keim, M., Rosman, K. (2023, Juli 6). *Groep 'oorlogsvluchtelingen uit Oekraïne' aangehouden voor plannen IS-aanslagen.* Algemeen Dagblad.

²¹ Sauer, P. (2024, August 23). *Russian special forces free hostages taken by four men linked to Islamic State.* The Guardian.

➤ On June 23, 2024²², in the city of Makhachkala and the city of Derbent in the Republic of Dagestan (Russian Federation), terrorist attacks were carried out against Orthodox churches, a synagogue and a police post by five *Dagestani citizens* using automatic firearms and Molotov cocktails. More than 20 people died, including an Orthodox priest and police officers, and more than 40 were injured. The Islamic State – Khorasan claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack.



Two of the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in the city of Makhachkala shortly after the attack on a police post.
Source: Telegram

➤ On June 16, 2024²³, a terrorist attack was carried out by six prisoners using knives and improvised weapons in a detention center in the city of Rostov-on-Don. They took two prison guards hostage and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State - Khorasan. The terrorists were later eliminated by counter-terrorist forces.

One of the participants in the terrorist attack in the prison colony in the city of Rostov-on-Don together with his hostage
Source: Telegram



²² Al Jazeera. (2024, June 24). 'Terror attack' on synagogue, churches in Russia's Dagestan: What we know?

²³ Al Jazeera. (2024, June 16). Russian forces storm detention centre, free guards taken hostage.

➤ On March 22, 2024²⁴, a terrorist attack was carried out using automatic firearms, pistols, knives and improvised incendiary devices against the Crocus City Hall concert hall in Moscow, killing over 140 people and injuring hundreds. The perpetrators are four persons of *Tajik origin* with declared affiliation to the Islamic State - Khorasan.

France

➤ In the month of May 2024²⁵, an 18-year-old person of *Chechen origin* was detained in the city of Paris, who planned a terrorist attack against a football match in the city of Saint-Etienne during the Olympic Games. He was a supporter of the ideology of the Islamic State.

➤ On December 2, 2023²⁶, in the city of Paris, a 26-year-old person with dual French and *Iranian citizenship* carried out a terrorist attack with a knife and a hammer near the Eiffel Tower, killing one person and injuring two others. The jihadist pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

➤ On October 13, 2023²⁷, in the city of Arras, a minor of *Chechen origin* used a knife to kill a teacher and injure two other employees of the high school where he is a student. The boy was inspired by the ideology of the Islamic State.

➤ On October 16, 2020²⁸, in a suburb of Paris, an 18-year-old person of *Chechen origin* beheaded the history teacher Samuel Paty with a kitchen hatchet in front of the school building, offended by the fact that the teacher showed cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during the lessons. The authorities have information that the perpetrator of the attack communicated with terrorists from the Islamic State, as well as jihadists from other terrorist organizations.

Switzerland

➤ In April 2024²⁹, three persons aged 18, 16 and 15 were detained in the Swiss cantons of Schaffhausen and Thurgau, who were planning terrorist attacks using explosives. One of the Islamists is of *Chechen origin*. Those arrested were supporters of the Islamic State ideology and communicated with other jihadists in Germany.

²⁴ Al Jazeera. (2024, March 23). *Moscow concert hall attack: What do we know so far?*

²⁵ Associated Press. (2024, June 1). *France files preliminary terrorism charges against teenager accused of plan to attack Olympic fans.*

²⁶ FRANCE 24. (2023, December 03). *French prosecutors open probe into 'terrorist plot' after deadly Paris knife attack.*

²⁷ FRANCE 24. (2023, October 14). *School stabbing in France's Arras: What do we know about the suspect?*

²⁸ Al Jazeera. (2023, November 27). *French court opens case against teens over beheading of teacher.*

²⁹ RTS. (2024, Avril 13). *Arrestation de trois jeunes soupçonnés de terrorisme à Schaffhouse et en Thurgovie.*

Analysis and trends

The analysis of cases from practice shows that terrorists in Western Europe, whose activity is inspired or directed at the operational level by the Islamic State - Khorasan, can be divided into three groups based on their origin:

- *First group.* Persons originating from the Western Balkans – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia. Islamists from the listed countries are most active in Germany and Austria.

Although most of these individuals were not direct participants in the military conflicts that arose after the breakup of Yugoslavia, many of them were inspired by the stories of their relatives and dreamed of jihad and self-assertion as heroes.

Despite the practice showing that jihadists from the Western Balkans have traditionally joined terrorist organizations in eastern Syria such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the number of foreign fighters from the region has decreased in recent years, with radicalized youth preferring to join the "fight against the infidels" in Europe.

- *Second group.* Persons originating from the Caucasus region – Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. Islamists from the listed countries are most active in France and Belgium, but also in Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

- *Third group.* Persons originating from the Central Asian region – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Islamists from the listed countries are most active in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. There is also an Afghan community in Sweden.

The largest Central Asian diaspora is located in Germany, which explains the large number of captured jihadists of similar origin in the province of North Rhine-Westphalia. The German state also attracts foreigners for purely economic reasons.

After the start of the war in Ukraine, a large number of jihadists from the former Soviet republics entered the territory of the European Union under the guise of refugees fleeing the conflict. The relaxed border regime and the "open door" policy help the free entry of extremists.

The situation is similar with persons of Afghan origin, a large number of whom enter with the illegal migrant flows along the Eastern Mediterranean or Western Balkan migration routes.

In organizational terms, the terrorists connected to the activities of the Islamic State - Khorasan can be divided into three main groups: *"lone wolves"; self-organized terrorist groups; terrorist cells under operational command.*

"*Lone Wolves*". They are self-radicalized individuals who have no direct connection to recruiters, Islamist preachers or fighters of terrorist organizations. Radicalization takes place entirely in an online environment. They often come across targeted jihadist content aimed at a specific ethnic community.

Self-organized terrorist groups. Radicalization takes place again in the online space, but the drive to find like-minded people is characteristic. Closed chat groups are formed and communication is carried out through mobile encrypted applications.

Terrorist cells under operational command. As a rule, this type of terrorist is the most organized and can be expected to carry out an operation with a high impact. They have better funding, links to organized crime, access to firearms and explosives. It should be noted that the operational commanders of the Islamic State - Khorasan in Western Europe have less experience compared to their "colleagues" of Arab origin.



Fighters of Islamic State – Khorasan

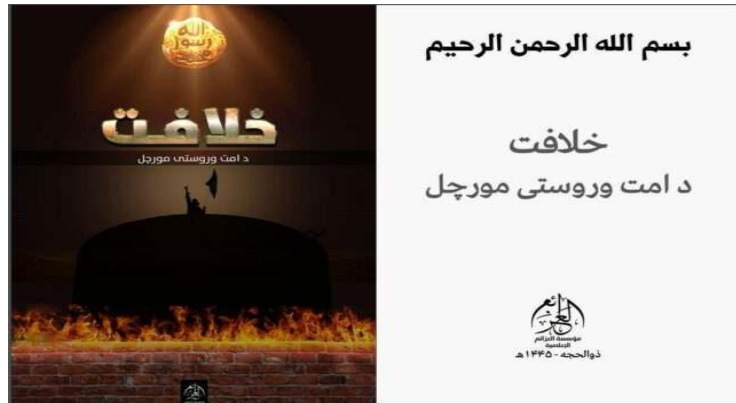
Source: MEMRI, media channels of Daesh

A key part of IS-K's strategy involves building a strong propaganda and media apparatus to radicalize minors and increase the asymmetric effect by launching multiple low-impact attacks.

Propaganda is carried out by building a network of independent servers that distribute jihadist content online. It is known that the Islamic State - Khorasan publishes its own magazine entitled Voice of Khorasan. The terrorist group also has its own media foundation, Al-Azaim, which publishes jihadist articles. An

analysis of one of her recent articles, entitled *The Caliphate: The Last Pillar of the Islamic Nation*, was done by Giuliano Bifulchi³⁰.

Islamic State – Khorasan has been extremely diligent and inventive in its online propaganda, with material published in over thirty languages, including Tajik, Uzbek, Urdu, Pashto, Dari, Hindi, Malaysian, Turkish, and Bahasa.



The cover and first page of the IS-K article

Source: *Special Eurasia*

In Western Europe, IS-K is mostly funded through legal

business, crowdfunding and personal funds, and cryptocurrencies are used to transfer the funds, one of the most preferred being Monero. Islamic State - Khorasan even created its own channels on Telegram, which are given instructions on how to use cryptocurrencies.

In conflict zones, the terrorist group has traditionally been financed by drug trade and trafficking, extortion, robbery and theft.

The activity of the Islamic State - Khorasan presents a challenge to the security services in Europe. Military conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria have committed an enormous intelligence resource, weakening other activities related to anti-terrorism. Moreover, while a large part of the returned foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq are kept under surveillance, the newly arrived jihadists from Central Asia after February 2022 remain off the radar.

Trends are that IS-K will seek to expand its influence and areas of interest by carrying out terrorist attacks outside the historical Khorasan region. The group will focus on developing the physical component of its military power, maintaining high combat readiness and diversifying its funding sources, while increasing its supporters among ethnic communities originating from Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Western Balkans.

³⁰ Bifulchi, G. (2024). *Geopolitical Report*, Volume 44, Issue 3. ISSN: 2785-2598

USE OF TURKISH AND ISRAELI UAS IN THE CONQUEST OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH

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ABSTRACT

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict marked a turning point in the use of military technology, with particular emphasis on unmanned aerial systems (UAS), which have become central to modern military strategy. This research analyses the integration and tactical use of drones by the Azeri Armed Forces, with particular attention to the models provided by Turkey and Israel. Through the study of military operations and geopolitical dynamics in the region, the work highlights the crucial role of drones in ensuring Azerbaijan's tactical superiority and redefining strategic balances in the South Caucasus. The methodology used is based on open-source data from analysts and specialist journalists, as well as case studies from military institutions in Italy and Bulgaria, where the author has collaborated with senior officials for an in-depth analysis of modern conflicts. The research also considers the prospects of using drones, highlighting how their effectiveness is linked to the evolution of air defenses and integration with other military technologies. The lessons learned from this conflict offer important insights into the future of high-intensity warfare and the impact of new military technologies.

MAIN THESIS

In this report the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is analyzed in order to evaluate the importance of UAS in contemporary wars. The focus is on the acquisition and integration of UAS in the Azerbaijani armed forces, the characteristics and tactical use of Turkish and Israeli UAS in the conflict and the use of decoy drones. In conclusion the report refers to the geopolitical reflections on the use of UAS and the lessons learned and on their future prospects.

In 2014 Aldo Ferrari stated: "In these two post-Soviet decades, the Caucasus is the center of the contrast between a «vertical» axis (Russia-Armenia-Iran) and a «horizontal» axis (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey-United States)." And we wonder, was it true? And if it was, is it still true?

In this area the main targets of Russia are two:

- *First.* To maintain direct control in the North Caucasus specifically Chechnya and the two separatist republics of Abkhazia and Ossetia.
- *Second.* To protect its interests in the Southern Caucasus country, as well Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The first objective was achieved with two bloody wars in Chechnya and the invasion of Georgia. Someway Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh have a similar history in which, in the first war, countries managed to secure an independence that they lost in the following war. Chechnya is among the regions with the youngest population, but at the same time highly unstable due to severe poverty (among the poorest regions in Russia). There is a significant distress among young people, who struggle to find work, creating fertile ground for Islamic radicalism. To prevent this problem after the conquest Putin invested many resources to improve the Chechen economy. To prevent the opening of a new internal front, during the war in Ukraine, economic aid has been increased during the war in Ukraine.

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict interests Russian second objective in Caucasus.

In Azerbaijan when Ilham Aliyev took power from his father Heydar Aliyev in 2003, he faced three main challenges: maintaining the cohesion of the elites, eliminating political opponents, and removing constitutional limits. At that time, the ruling elite were dominated by three main groups: the ruling family of the Aliyevs and Pashayevs, the Soviet-era "old guard" that controlled internal politics, and the oligarchs who managed regional patronage networks. In 2015, he appointed his wife Mehriban Aliyeva as first vice president, ushering in a massive renewal of the government elites with the replacement of 14 out of 18 ministers, including regional oligarchs, by more capable technocrats.

In Armenia the current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan became the first head of government in 2018 on the wave of the "velvet revolution" of which he had been the undisputed leader. The revolution had the objective of protecting democracy and it marked the beginning of the rapprochement of Armenia with the Western countries and the European Union. This attitude made of Armenia an unreliable ally for Moscow. Consequently, relations between Russia and Armenia deteriorated rapidly and on the occasion of Azerbaijan's offensive in 2023 Russia failed to intervene to defend Armenia.

On the other side during the governments of Heydar and Ilham Aliyev, Baku pursued a foreign policy of balance between Russia and western countries, avoiding openly taking a stance against Moscow when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Azerbaijan was aware that in case of conflict it would have been easier to negotiate with another authoritarian actor in the region like Russia than to deal with the West or the UN. It is surely not a coincidence the fact that the two days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a cooperation agreement that excludes economic policies that are harmful to the parties and on the mutual respect of independence and sovereignty.

After last Nagorno-Karabakh war Baku seems to approaches Moscow, with a growing militarist nationalism and anti-Western, probably freezing the era of “balanced foreign policy” in favor of an alignment with Putin’s Russia.

The following statement could be made: “The contrast between *vertical* axis (Russia-Armenia-Iran) and *horizontal* axis (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey-United States) is not relevant anymore. The situation has changed.”

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is, basically, an ethnic and religious war. Azerbaijanis are ethnic Turks and Muslims, mainly Shiites and Armenians are Indo-European people of Christian religion (Armenian Apostolic Church). This critical situation was temporarily frozen during the Soviet Union period when the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic was a state formed by the Russian government after the February Revolution and it included Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

With the end of URSS there was a clash between Azerbaijanis and Armenians and there were pogroms against the Armenians people in Azerbaijan so in the autumn of 1989 the Armenian Supreme Council and the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed the unification. This fact caused the outbreak of violence against the Armenians, which forced Moscow to intervene by sending troops against the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF).

According to that Law of 3 April 1990, if there was an autonomous region („oblast“) within an republic which decided to leave the Union, it had the right to choose, so on 30 August 1991 Azerbaijan decided to leave the Union and formed the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Council of Nagorno-Karabakh decided not to follow Azerbaijan and voted for the establishment of an autonomous state entity.

In January 31, 1992, Azerbaijan army attacked Artsakh. The war ended in 1994 when a ceasefire agreement was signed in Biškek in Kyrgyzstan. The victims of this war were more than 30.000 and Armenia won the war. In this first war both sides received military supplies from Russia and they did not have many differences about the armaments, both of Soviet origin.

Twenty-two years later in the night of first of April 2016 the Azerbaijani Armed Forces launched a violent attack, particularly in the northern sectors. The

first Armenian lines of defence fell and the Azerbaijanis penetrated a few kilometres into Armenian territory. The war lasted 4 days, Russia and USA imposed a ceasefire on 5 of April.

In the morning of September 27, 2020, the second war has started. It ended with the victory of Azerbaijan, which took control of four districts of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia imposed another ceasefire agreement in which Armenia agreed to withdraw from three more districts. The agreement provided the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces along the line of contact and the Lachin corridor that connects Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

Between 19 and 20 September 2023, Azerbaijan launched the last military offensive against the state of Artsakh. Previously, Azerbaijan has blocked the Lachin corridor by using fake environmental protesters, sparking a crisis that had both internal repercussions within the Republic of Artsakh and also international and humanitarian implications. This crisis ended with the 'anti-terrorism operation' launched between September 19 and 20. Just one day after the offensive Artsakh submitted, the armed forces of Artsakh were disarmed and the president of Artsakh, Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree to dissolve all state institutions by 1 January 2024. It is important to be noticed that the use of non-governmental protesters is a typical element of hybrid warfare.

What are the differences between first and last war

The distinction between the first and the last war of Nagorno-Karabakh is primarily influenced by the armaments and their deployment. This distinction is not merely a matter of quantity but also it reflects in the quality and varies origins of these armaments. Azerbaijan's ability to learn from various recent conflicts (such as these in Libya, Syria, Ukraine etc.) enabled the effective use of new technologies, especially drones.

Let's start by saying that both countries have always invested a lot in the field of war. In 2020 Armenia's military expenditure accounted for 4.9% of GDP (634 million \$) and Azerbaijan's 5.4% of GDP (2.238 million \$) considering that World Military Expenditure Average in the same year was 2.4% of GDP. Armenia received weapons mainly from Russia because of their reduced prices and military aid given to maintain its military bases and influence in the country. Azerbaijan instead diversified its military imports.

As shown below the main differences between the two armies are in rockets, missiles and artillery.

Military Asset Comparison

Military Asset	ARMENIA	AZERBAIJAN
Soldiers	45,000	67,000
Tanks	529	665
Troop Transport	1,000	1,637
Artillery	293	740
Rocket Launchers	105	196
Short to Medium Range Missiles	38	237
Vehicles	65	127

The Armenian missile arsenal consists entirely of Russian rockets: old Tochka, Scud and BM-30 SMERCH and new Iskander missiles received from Russia in 2016. The only exception is Chinese WM-80. Armenian Drones were Russian ORLAN-10 and Armenian X-55.

The Azerbaijan missile arsenal consists of Russian Tochka and BM-30 SMERCH too, but they had also TRG-300 from Turkey, POLONEZ from Belarus and Lora from Israel. On matter of drones Azerbaijan had Hermes-450, Harop and Orbiter from Israel and TB2 from Turkey.

The great advantage of Azerbaijanis over Armenians was a large number of drones. According to Gen. Col. Damiano D'ANGELO „the difference has been the drones; they were the real GAME CHANGER“.

Many international observers talked about ‘two magic bullets’: the substantial role of the UAVs provided by Turkey and Israel, and the leading role of Turkish military personnel in Azerbaijan’s operational plans and command.

Turkey is a natural ally of Azerbaijan but actually Azerbaijan imports weapons mainly from Israel - 60%, according to data from the SIPRI in Stockholm, between 2017 and 2020.

The Harop suicide drones, the Hermes-450 and the reconnaissance drones Orbiter-1K, Orbiter-2, and Orbiter-3, are all Israeli production.

Iran is Israel’s sworn enemy, but it is also a bad neighbor for Azerbaijan. In Iran there live among 12/20 thousand Azerbaijanis, for this reason Iran fears the rise of Azerbaijan and support Armenia, even though most Azerbaijanis are Shiites. The Aliyev’s regime would allow Mossad to use Baku as an anti-Iranian hub.

In return Israel, besides supplying weapons, provides Baku with computer tools for internal repression, such as the NSO group’s Verint systems and Pegasus

spyware - then used by the Aliyev regime against journalists, human rights activists and the LGBT community.

During the night of April 18, Israel retaliated in Iranian territory, launching missiles and drones against Iran. It is not known for sure where they have started, they were hardly launched from Israeli territory. The researcher Ugo Tramballi stated: "The Iranians say they have intercepted unknown aircraft, probably launched from neighboring Azerbaijan or from hostile organizations."

It is important to note that drones are capable of conducting deep strikes without revealing their launch sites.

Principal drones used in the last Nagorno-Karabakh war – Harop and Bayraktar TB2

HAROP – LOITERING MUNITION SYSTEM CONCEPT

Harop is a kamikaze drone, Loitering Munition systems, it could be launched from a hidden safe position, have very low signature and can fly to the target area, loiter above a target, locate and verify targets and strike precisely when the opportunity arises. If the conditions are negative, the operator can abort the mission and return the drone to its loitering condition or may decide to direct it to a different target. After a loitering period if conditions become more favorable, the operator can reposition it on the original target.

Harop drones, are called "loitering" because they can stay wandering above the target, they support tactical units with the characteristic of being very accurate and aimed to eliminate a precise target with a single shot, not requiring the support of other units. This type of weapon is programmed by the Ground Control Station (GCS) before being launched so that it goes by-itself on the target. The drone remains monitored by the "mission control unit" through the images it receives from it. The operator can then manage multiple "loitering munitions" simultaneously and select when they must finalize the operation. IT can be classified as a 4 level UAV with a high level of automation. The pilot is out of the loop, it has a backup system, and if one fails the platform will still be operational.

The HAROP is a loitering munition produced by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). The same company defines it as a "second generation member of IAI's Loitering Munition (LM) family of systems" as it is the successor of the HARPY and is also called the Harpy-2. Several units have been purchased by countries such as India, Turkey, China, Chile, South Korea, and of course Azerbaijan.

Just like the Harpy, the primary role of the Harop is to destroy enemy air defense systems, thanks to its ability to detect enemy radar emissions and identify their location, carrying out autonomous missions. However, due to the large empty space in its nose, the UAV can accommodate various instruments, such as

the electro-optical sensor, which, combined with the infrared camera with automatic tracking and 360-degree rotation, allows it to become a multi-purpose attack weapon capable of operating effectively against a variety of targets.

Its main features are a Communication Range of 200 Km, its Endurance is more than 9 hours, and its speed is up to 225 Knots. This drone has a Low RCS less than 0.5 m², reaches a maximum altitude of 15,000 Feet (4500 meters) and a precision strike with 16 Kg warhead of less than one meter.

BAYRAKTAR TB2 – REUSABLE DRONE

Bayraktar TB2 is the most famous Turkish drone, its “system” consists in the UAV platform itself, in a Ground Data Terminal (GDT) that manages communication between the drone and the ground control station, it transmits flight data, real-time video and other critical data, a portable Remote Display Terminal (RDT) that allows operators to view data and videos transmitted by the drone in real time even away from the main control station and finally in an advanced Base with Generator that provides logistical and energy support for drone operations. The main advantage of this system is the price. Costs for a TB2 are approximately 4 to 5 million dollars, less than a quarter compared to the American MQ-9 Reaper.

Its main features are a Communication Range of 150 Km due to the lack of a satellite connection, its maximum endurance is 27 hours, and its speed is up to 120 Knots. This drone reaches a maximum altitude of 27,000 Feet (8200 meters), and its payload is less than 100 kg. It is Vulnerable to electronic countermeasures, such as jamming and GPS spoofing, which can compromise its effectiveness in advanced electronic warfare environments.

The TB2 was used against Kurdish independence movements since 2016 from Turkish operations in northern Syria, where they began to develop a complex system for cooperation between drones and indirect artillery fire.

It was used in the early stages of the conflict in Ukraine when it provided intelligence and tracking of Russian supply lines during the Russian offensive on Kiev and probably was involved in the sinking of the RTS Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea fleet. Ukrainian navy has used its Bayraktar systems to distract the Moskva’s air defense in order to allow a successful strike by either western supplied Harpoon or by domestically produced Neptun anti-ship missile.

How drones were used in the last Nagorno-Karabakh war

Azerbaijani Armed forces were quantitatively and qualitatively superior due to their higher training level, more modern equipment, and more technologically advanced systems. In particular, drones have proved to be an effective weapon system that has guaranteed to Azerbaijan control and air dominance. Azerbaijanis

organized a command and control (C2) system, and it guaranteed with extreme precision the artillery fire delivery and the precise guidance of the actions of drones. This demonstrates how Azerbaijan gained superiority in data collection, dissemination, and situational awareness across the battlespace.

LESSON LEARNED IN THE RECENT CONFLICTS CONNECTED WITH USE OF DRONES

PROPAGANDA AND USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The conflict has shown the importance, even more now than in the past, of the control of communications and propaganda in order to influence the consensus and keep the morale of people and soldiers high.

Tactical Activity of Info-Warfare. It is achieved through the dissemination of numerous films made with the cameras of the tactical drones used in operations and through "the sensationalization of the conflict" in order to keep the morale of the population high by exalting its technological superiority.

The videos were broadcast by television networks and displayed on numerous giant LED screens set up around the city.

INTEGRATION OF INDIRECT FIRE AND DRONES

This concept was first experienced by Russia and Turkey in Syria. Turkish forces during Operation "Spring Shield" used their drones for intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) in support of 155mm howitzers "Firtina" and multiple rocket launcher systems. They were also used for Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) tasks, to verify the impact of attacks, particularly artillery and rocket. This assessment consists of three main components:

- *Physical Damage Assessment (PDA);*
- *Munitions Effects Assessment (MEA);*
- *New Attack Recommendations (Reattack Recommendations, RR).*

Russian forces did the same integrating the Orlan-10 drones with their 152mm artillery units.

In Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Azerbaijan Forces used drones to support ground fire units. The Azerbaijani artillery and rocket launchers operated in close coordination with the combat drone assets effectively used for target acquisition and for the BDA.

On the modern battlefield, it is crucial to deploy numerous sensors, even beyond the front line, and to connect them in order to activate the most effective shooter. This provides a significant advantage, enabling forces to maintain the

initiative and achieve rapid victories. It is important the creation of units in which assets for fire support (MLRS, artillery, etc.) and target acquisition assets (such as drones) operate together. With these units there is an advantage in the speed and accuracy of interventions.

SUPPRESSION OF ENEMY AIR DEFENCES MISSIONS

In Syria and Libya, the Turkish drone Bayraktar TB-2 gained the nickname of „Pantsir hunter”. It had the ability to destroy Russian mobile systems of air defense at medium-short distance “Pantsir”.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Azerbaijan used the TB-2 drones with MAM-L (Smart Micro Munition) intelligence ammunition to neutralize quickly air defense systems, in particular 9K33 OSA and 9K35 Strela, and Employed many Israeli kamikaze drones - Harop that resulted in winning new elements.

It has a great autonomy with the possibility of operating with or without a guide and has stealth capabilities. This means that the drone can fly autonomously for a long time and when it detects radar emissions, it can autonomously guide the explosive payload towards the source of the signal. This allowed the destruction of SAM S-300 systems of the Armenian air defense forces.

In the modern battlefield, it is advisable that ground units, particularly those that may constitute High Value Targets (Command Posts, communication nodes, A/A assets, etc.) must have Counter UAS capabilities, and generally an adequate multi-layer air defense capacity (short range/ medium range/ long range). In addition, the training of the individual fighter and units should be intensified to contain the thermal and especially electromagnetic signatures, and they should be able to operate using all possible camouflage techniques.

DRONE DECOY

In September 2020, on the second day of the war, the Armenian forces manage to lower an aircraft that flew at low altitude and with a slow speed. It was not an autonomous weapons system equipped with the latest technologies, but it was a single-engine propeller biplane, produced in 1940 by the former Soviet Union for use in agriculture as a disinfectant.

Azerbaijan converted many Antonov An-210 piston engine light aircraft into unmanned aircraft. Used as "decoy drones", the An-2 forced the Armenians to "activate" the air defense and radar units, thus revealing their position.

In addition Azerbaijanis also loaded explosives on these aircraft to ensure that the Armenian counterpart activated the c/a defenses by emitting electromagnetic signatures and opened fire on the bait for fear of being the target of a lethal attack.

The Azerbaijani use of bait drones demonstrates how the application of simple automation can significantly transform tactics, techniques, and procedures in modern warfare. This underscores the need for an integrated air defence capability across all ground units and the importance of minimizing and controlling electromagnetic emissions.

FUTURE OF DRONES

Over the last 10-15 years, the world has undergone significant changes, international relations deteriorated. China is now perceived by the USA as its main threat and at the same time Russia takes an "aggressive" position. So, the era of low-intensity conflict is ending.

Achieving air superiority against a peer or near-peer adversary is now a significantly more complex challenge. A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) bubbles are becoming more effective with new technologies and at the same time, Stealth fighter aircrafts are becoming more widespread.

Recent conflicts are demonstrating that today's drones are not adequate for high intensity conflicts. Drones designed to operate in permissive scenarios (such as Iraq and Afghanistan) have little chance of surviving against an opponent with technologically advanced air defences and aviation. The USAF intends to withdraw its MQ-9 Reaper and MQ-4 Global Hawks early and it does not want to give them to Ukraine because they would be prey to Russian defences and there is a risk of acquiring sensitive technologies. The BAYRAKTAR TB2 is less used too, since Russia reorganized its anti-aircraft forces, it appear not be designed for this type of conflict.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR DRONES – CCA: Collaborative Combat Aircraft

All countries are focusing on the development and construction of 6th generation fighting jets.

These designs are of a high secret but all programs are focused on: stealthiness boost, motor efficiency, sensors technology and advanced communication systems.

All 6th generation fighters must have the ability to operate alongside new combat drones (UCAV, Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle). UCAV will be aircraft capable to carry out combat missions in close cooperation with manned aircraft. 6th generation fighter could be "optionally Manned", so they will have the chance to have the pilot on board or not.

When drones will reach LEVEL 5 they will be fully *autonomous*. They will be able to perform various tasks without pilot intervention. It will not be an easy and fast process and will take a long time to develop such software.

The future UAV could be divided in three main macro categories depending on their role, characteristics and cost:

1. **LOW-COST SYSTEMS** - that could be sacrificed in the action. Decoys (to reveal enemy positions) or deep reconnaissance equipped with sensors, suicide drones against highly defended targets, usable in swarms. In this category, can be included the old restored and automated vehicles to use as bait, as we saw in Nagorno-Karabakh

2. **INTERMEDIATE VALUE SYSTEMS** - designed with a limited useful life, which would participate directly in the fighting and be exposed to enemy actions. They will be particularly useful against the anti-aircraft. We could define them as the drones that "may not return".

3. **HIGH-COST - REUSABLE SYSTEMS** - complex and sophisticated drones, designed to survive and be deployed on multiple missions. Could be loaded with AA/AG weapons or dedicated to EW/jamming communications, long-range reconnaissance, broadcasts, air refuelling, SIGINT/ELINT missions.

NOW WE ADDRESS THE CONCEPT "HI-LO"

The High/Low concept means a mix of assets, one more expensive (HI) and more capable and another cheaper (LO). The USAF's approach to modernizing its fleet reflects the following strategy: integration of the next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program and Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) as F-22 and F-35 (HI assets). At the same time maintain LOW level Integration with F-15s and F-16s, supported by CCA, to handle less demanding missions. The objective is to maintain efficient and useful older planes too, to maintain a high number of airplanes to maintain the air superiority.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be asserted about Caucasus situation that the geopolitical landscape and alliances have substantially changed. Azerbaijan has established new alliances using its natural resources and strategic geographical position while the new Armenian government establishing relations with Western countries has weakened its ties with Russia, its main ally found finally politically isolated.

Drones and unmanned military platforms have assumed an increasingly important role in recent conflicts. The Nagorno-Karabakh war was the first conflict where they were used extensively, making them a true "game changers."

Azerbaijan employed various tactics already used in asymmetric conflicts and depends on the support of highly experienced Turkish military personnel. Moreover, Azerbaijan used its financial resources to acquire a relevant quantity of drones and other high-quality weaponry.

As a final consideration it could be concluded that as it has been demonstrated in the case of Ukraine, when air defense systems are well-organized and technologically advanced, such as in Russian A2/AD zones, current drones are no longer adequate and effective. Consequently, major manufacturers are now developing next-generation drones with a variety of applications, ranging from expendable decoy drones to more advanced systems designed for greater integration with other weaponry. Drones that were once designed for reuse and combat against non-state actors must now be reassessed for symmetrical warfare, where they may be deemed “expendable” or “unlikely to return.”

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PRIVATE MILITARY – SECURITY COMPANIES IN COUNTER-TERRORISM

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PMSCs are private business concerns that provide military and/or security services, irrespective of how they describe themselves. Military and security services include: the provision of armed guards and the protection of persons and objects such as convoys, buildings and other places; maintenance and operation of weapons systems; prisoner detention; advice to or training of local forces and security personnel. Since the end of the Cold War demand for PMSCs has increased to such an extent that there is now a major PMSC industry offering an ever wider range of services with some companies employing well beyond 10,000 staff.

BACKGROUND

Provision of security in exchange for gaining (monetary) profit has always been presented in armed conflict. One might say that hiring outsiders to fight your battles is the second oldest profession in the world, as old as war itself. Profit-motivated private entities have been present/operating in every armed conflict throughout history on every continent. PSMCs are corporate actors that have been gaining an increasingly important role in the modern warfare. PSMCs' existence and operations are tied to the post-Cold War security environment which was conducive to the rapid boom in privatization and corporatization of security. They are legitimate business entities that are legally registered, based on the art of entrepreneurship and built along business structures, corporate standards, principles and values. Firms operating on the private security market represent legal business entities that trade in professional services intricately linked to warfare. PSMCs are defined by trading in security goods and services that are either financed, delivered, or both, by an entity other than a government.

The past 20 years have witnessed the rapid growth of private military and security companies (PMSCs). There is no universally accepted and legally binding standard definition of a PMSC and the sector often operates in a legal lacuna: the employees of PMSCs are not soldiers or civilians, nor can they usually be defined as mercenaries. The wars in Iraq (2003–11) and Afghanistan (2001–21) reshaped perceptions of the private military and security industry with the

massive deployment of contractors by the United States leading to new market opportunities across the globe. Factors contributing to the growth of PMSCs vary by region and state but they mostly fit with cost-efficiency calculations, where the sector provides skills and services that states do not possess or that would be too costly for states to develop or perform themselves.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework governing Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) is intricate and diverse encompassing international, national, and contractual regulations. At the international level there is no comprehensive treaty solely dedicated to PMSCs resulting in a patchwork of legal instruments. Key international laws that impact PMSCs include the Geneva Conventions which govern behavior during armed conflicts and prioritize the safeguarding of non-combatants and the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries which aims to restrict mercenary activities but does not fully cover modern PMSCs. Additionally, the Montreux Document, although not legally binding, offers guidance and best practices for states regarding the utilization of PMSCs emphasizing the importance of adhering to international humanitarian law and human rights law.

National regulations vary significantly from country to country reflecting diverse legal traditions, security requirements and political contexts. Some countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have established comprehensive regulatory frameworks to oversee the operations of PMSCs. These frameworks typically include licensing prerequisites, contractual obligations, and mechanisms for accountability and oversight. For example the U.S. has implemented the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) to regulate the export of defense-related services and technology which directly impacts the activities of PMSCs. In contrast other nations may lack specific regulations resulting in legal uncertainties and challenges in terms of accountability. This divergence in national regulations can lead to "forum shopping" where PMSCs choose to operate in countries with less stringent oversight.

Contract law is essential in overseeing PMSCs particularly in their dealings with states, international organizations, and private entities. Contracts outline specific terms, rules, and accountability measures for engagement. They may also include provisions requiring adherence to legal and ethical standards. However enforcing these obligations can be difficult, especially in conflict areas with limited legal infrastructure. Moreover self-regulation through industry standards

and codes of conduct like those endorsed by the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers, attempts to address regulatory gaps but lacks the enforcement authority of state or international law. As a result the legal framework governing PMSCs is a combination of international guidelines, national laws and contractual commitments, all aimed at ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) fulfill a range of roles and carry out various functions that go beyond conventional military activities. Their primary focus is on providing security and protection services to governments, multinational corporations, NGOs, and occasionally private individuals. This involves safeguarding personnel, securing facilities, and protecting critical infrastructure in high-risk areas. These services are particularly vital in conflict zones or regions with unstable political climates where PMSCs can offer a level of security that local forces may struggle to provide.

Additionally PMSCs are heavily engaged in training and advisory functions. They frequently deliver specialized training programs for military and police forces, emphasizing skills like tactical operations, counter-terrorism, and crisis response. Their advisory roles may involve strategic planning and operational assistance, aiding national forces in enhancing their capabilities. This aspect of their work is especially beneficial in countries with developing military capacities or those undergoing security apparatus restructuring.

Furthermore PMSCs play a significant role in logistics and supply chain management during military operations. They oversee the transportation and distribution of supplies, equipment, and personnel to and within conflict zones. This logistical support ensures the smooth and efficient running of military operations, even in challenging environments. Moreover some PMSCs participate in direct combat and operational support providing armed personnel and specialized units to supplement national military forces. While their involvement in combat operations is contentious, it highlights the wide range of services these companies offer often filling gaps where national military capabilities are stretched thin.

ETHICAL AND MORAL ISSUES

The ethical and moral issues surrounding private military security companies (PMSCs) are multifaceted and complex. One major concern is the use of force

and the rules of engagement. Unlike national military forces, which operate under strict rules and are accountable to their governments and international law, PMSCs often operate in a legal gray area. This can lead to incidents where excessive force is used, resulting in civilian casualties and human rights abuses. The lack of clear guidelines and oversight makes it difficult to hold PMSCs accountable for their actions, raising significant ethical questions about their operations.

Human rights concerns are another critical issue. PMSCs have been implicated in various incidents where they were accused of violating human rights, such as the notorious 2007 Nisour Square incident in Iraq involving Blackwater (now Academi). Such incidents not only undermine the credibility of PMSCs but also tarnish the reputation of their clients, often governments or large corporations. The potential for abuse is exacerbated by the fact that PMSCs frequently operate in fragile states with weak legal systems, where oversight and enforcement of international human rights standards are minimal or non-existent.

The impact of PMSCs on local populations in conflict zones is also ethically troubling. These companies often prioritize the safety and objectives of their clients over the well-being of the local communities. This can lead to situations where the presence of PMSCs exacerbates tensions and conflicts rather than alleviating them. Moreover the lucrative nature of PMSC contracts can divert resources away from local capacity building and sustainable development, fostering dependency on external security forces. This dynamic raises moral questions about the long-term implications of outsourcing military and security functions to private entities, especially in regions striving for stability and self-sufficiency.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The impact of Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) on the economy is complex, affecting both the global security market and national economies. PMSCs often provide a cost-effective alternative to conventional military forces, especially for countries looking to reduce military spending while maintaining security capabilities. The competitive pricing and specialized services offered by PMSCs can result in significant cost savings for governments, particularly in areas such as logistical support, training, and security services for diplomats and high-risk installations. This cost efficiency is particularly attractive during times of budget constraints or when there is a need for quick deployment without the lengthy processes associated with mobilizing national forces.

The global market for PMSCs has experienced substantial growth, driven by the increasing demand for private security services in conflict zones, high-risk environments, and even areas affected by natural disasters. This expansion of the market has led to the emergence of major players like G4S, DynCorp, and Academi (formerly Blackwater) who have diversified their offerings to include not only traditional security services but also cybersecurity, intelligence, and risk management. The financial performance of these companies reflects their growing significance with annual revenues reaching billions of dollars. The rise of PMSCs has also contributed to job creation, providing employment opportunities in various roles ranging from security personnel to strategic analysts.

Nevertheless PMSCs' economic advantages have not escaped controversy. Detractors argue that relying on PMSCs may result in the privatization of security, potentially prioritizing profit over public safety. Furthermore the substantial contracts granted to PMSCs can create economic dependencies, where local economies in conflict zones become reliant on the presence and expenditures of these companies. Concerns also arise regarding the potential for cost overruns and lack of transparency in contracting processes. Therefore, while PMSCs undeniably contribute significantly to the economy by providing cost-effective security solutions and driving market growth, it is crucial to carefully consider these benefits in light of their broader implications for public accountability and economic stability.

NOTABLE PMSC'S

Blackwater (Now Academi)

History and Background: Founded in 1997 by former Navy SEAL Erik Prince, Blackwater gained prominence during the Iraq War, providing security for U.S. personnel and facilities.

Controversies: Known for the 2007 Nisour Square incident in Baghdad where Blackwater operatives killed 14 Iraqi civilians, leading to significant backlash and legal challenges.

Rebranding: Changed its name to Xe Services in 2009 and then to Academi in 2011 to distance itself from past controversies.

Operations: Provides security, training, logistics, and consulting services worldwide. Involved in anti-piracy operations and training African Union troops.

DynCorp International

History and Background: Founded in 1946, DynCorp has a long history of providing support services to the U.S. government and military.

Services: Specializes in aviation maintenance, logistics, intelligence, and contingency operations. Also involved in drug eradication programs in Latin America.

Operations: Active in conflict zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan, providing security, training, and logistical support. Played a significant role in training the Afghan National Police.

Controversies: Faced accusations of human trafficking and labor abuses, particularly in Bosnia and Afghanistan.

G4S

History and Background: Founded in 1901, G4S is one of the world's largest security companies, operating in over 90 countries.

Service: Provides a wide range of security services including manned guarding, cash transportation, electronic monitoring, and risk management.

Operations: Involved in securing major events, critical infrastructure, and government facilities. Provides support in conflict zones and high-risk environments.

Controversies: Criticized for failures in managing detention centers and providing inadequate security at the 2012 London Olympics.

Triple Canopy

History and Background: Founded in 2003 by U.S. Army Special Forces veterans, Triple Canopy provides security services primarily to the U.S. government.

Services: Specializes in personal protection, site security, and convoy security in high-threat environments.

Operations: Major contracts in Iraq, protecting U.S. embassy personnel and facilities. Expanded operations to include logistics and training services.

Merger: In 2014, merged with Academi and other companies to form Constellis Group, creating a larger security services conglomerate.

Control Risks

History and Background: Established in 1975, Control Risks focuses on risk management and security consulting.

Services: Offers crisis management, cyber security, threat assessments, and protective services.

Operations: Provides support to multinational corporations, NGOs, and governments, helping them operate safely in complex environments.

Reputation: Known for its comprehensive approach to risk management and its ability to operate in politically sensitive regions.

Aegis Defence Services

History and Background: Founded in 2002 by Tim Spicer, a former British Army officer, Aegis quickly became a key player in the private security industry.

Services: Provides security services, intelligence, and training, primarily in conflict zones.

Operations: Significant contracts in Iraq, including the coordination of the Reconstruction Operations Center, which provides security information to contractors.

Acquisition: Acquired by GardaWorld, a Canadian security firm, in 2015, expanding its global reach and capabilities.

ArmorGroup

History and Background: Founded in 1981, ArmorGroup has provided security services in over 160 countries.

Services: Focuses on protective security, risk management, and training.

Operations: Extensive work in Afghanistan and Iraq, protecting diplomats, aid workers, and corporate clients.

Controversies: Faced scrutiny over its handling of security at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, with allegations of misconduct and poor management.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The political implications of Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) are significant, particularly in their impact on international relations and state sovereignty. By offering military services that were traditionally the responsibility of national armed forces, PMSCs challenge the conventional idea of the state's monopoly on the use of force. This shift can result in a reconfiguration of power dynamics, as states may choose to outsource military functions to PMSCs in order to bypass legislative constraints or avoid the political consequences of deploying their own troops. For example, during the Iraq War, the extensive use of PMSCs by the United States allowed the government to maintain a strong military presence without officially increasing the number of troops, thus minimizing domestic political backlash.

The presence of PMSCs in conflict zones also has implications for geopolitical stability and local governance structures. PMSCs often operate in fragile states where they may unintentionally support corrupt regimes or undermine the efforts of legitimate governments. Their involvement can escalate conflicts by providing military capabilities to factions that would otherwise lack the resources for prolonged engagements. This can result in prolonged instability,

as observed in regions such as Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, the participation of PMSCs in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions can complicate the impartiality of these efforts, as their primary loyalty lies with their contractual obligations rather than broader ethical or humanitarian principles.

On a larger scope, the dependence on PMSCs has the potential to alter global military tactics and partnerships. Nations with substantial private security sectors might employ these companies to expand their influence without deploying their own military forces, resulting in a type of proxy presence. This could pave the way for new types of neocolonialism, where economic interests are safeguarded by private entities rather than national armed forces, thereby reshaping traditional diplomatic interactions. Moreover, the absence of a unified international regulatory framework for PMSCs raises worries about responsibility and the risk of human rights violations, which could strain international relationships and prompt calls for more stringent global governance mechanisms.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Technological advancements have brought about significant changes in the capabilities and operations of private military security companies (PMSCs). One key area of progress is the utilization of advanced weaponry and equipment. PMSCs now make use of a variety of high-tech firearms, surveillance systems, and personal protective gear to enhance their operational efficiency and effectiveness. This includes night-vision goggles, thermal imaging cameras, and ballistic-resistant armor, providing a tactical advantage in different security situations. These technologies allow PMSCs to carry out their responsibilities with increased precision and safety, thereby reducing risks for their personnel and clients.

Moreover PMSCs have started incorporating cybersecurity and intelligence services into their offerings. With threats moving into the digital domain, the ability to defend against cyber-attacks and engage in cyber-espionage has become essential. PMSCs provide services like network security, threat evaluation, and digital forensics to safeguard their clients' sensitive data and infrastructure. This shift towards cybersecurity mirrors the broader trend of digitalization in the security and defense sectors, highlighting the importance of managing and protecting digital assets alongside traditional physical security measures.

PMSCs have seen a significant advancement in technology with the integration of unmanned systems, specifically drones. These UAVs are utilized for various purposes such as surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeted attacks.

Drones enable PMSCs to efficiently monitor vast areas, collect immediate intelligence, and react promptly to potential dangers without endangering personnel. The utilization of drones elevates the situational awareness and operational efficiency of PMSCs, enabling them to provide more thorough and agile security services. This technological progress not only enhances the effectiveness of PMSCs but also creates opportunities for their deployment in a wide range of complex environments.

IMPACT ON MILITARY OPERATIONS

The inclusion of private military security companies (PMSCs) in military operations has had a significant impact on the effectiveness and dynamics of modern warfare. One key advantage is the flexibility and speed at which PMSCs can be deployed. Unlike traditional military forces, which require extensive planning and political approval, PMSCs can quickly respond to immediate security needs. This agility is particularly beneficial in conflict zones where the situation can change rapidly. PMSCs have been utilized for tasks such as protecting convoys, guarding military installations, and providing close protection to important personnel allowing regular military units to focus on combat missions.

However the integration of PMSCs into military operations also brings challenges, particularly in terms of coordination and accountability. The presence of multiple actors on the battlefield can complicate command and control structures. Military commanders must ensure smooth communication and cooperation between regular troops and PMSC operatives despite their different training, procedures, and cultural backgrounds. Additionally the absence of a unified legal framework governing the actions of PMSCs often leads to issues of accountability and transparency. Incidents involving the misuse of force or breaches of conduct by PMSC personnel can strain relations with local populations and undermine the legitimacy of military operations, as exemplified by the Nisour Square incident involving Blackwater in Iraq.

The expanding role of PMSCs in military operations is expected due to the growing dependence of national militaries on their expertise and cost-efficient solutions. With the aid of technological advancements, PMSCs are now capable of providing advanced services like cybersecurity, drone operations, and intelligence gathering, which have become essential components of modern military strategies. However, in order to fully reap the benefits and minimize potential risks, it is crucial to establish stronger regulatory oversight and clearer

guidelines for their involvement in military operations. The successful integration of PMSCs will necessitate not only strategic and operational adjustments but also a steadfast commitment to upholding ethical standards and ensuring accountability in all their endeavors.

ACTIVITIES IN IRAQ

When the USA won a resounding victory against the Iraqi army in 2003, more than one out of every ten people it deployed to the theatre during the conflict were employed by private security companies (PSCs) performing the work (logistics, operational support of weapons systems and training) that used to be done by military personnel. As lawlessness followed the fall of the Iraqi government and coalition forces were stretched thin, an ‘army’ of private security personnel flooded into the country. Some were hired by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to train the Iraqi police force, the Iraqi army, and a private Iraqi force to guard government facilities and oilfields. Other PSCs worked for the US army translating and interrogating prisoners, or for Parsons providing security for employees rebuilding oilfields, or for ABC News or the Research Triangle Institute or any of a number of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the country.

By spring 2004, it was estimated that in excess of 20,000 private security personnel, mostly retired military or police from countries as varied as Chile, Fiji, Israel, Nepal, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the USA, employed by some 60 different PSCs worked for the US government, the British government, the CPA, private firms and NGOs in that country. A 2006 US Department of Defense census of contractors in Iraq showed over 100,000 working alongside the 133,000 US troops.

Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) have had a significant impact on military operations in Iraq since the early 2000s. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq by a coalition led by the United States PMSCs were extensively used for various tasks, including security, logistics, and reconstruction efforts. One of the most notable aspects of their impact was the provision of security services to different entities such as government officials, diplomatic missions, and civilian contractors. PMSCs played a crucial role in filling security gaps, particularly during the initial stages of the occupation when conventional military forces were stretched thin. However their presence also raised concerns regarding accountability, transparency, and adherence to rules of engagement.

The utilization of PMSCs in Iraq also had implications for military strategy and operations. These companies often operated alongside or supported conventional military forces, offering specialized services like convoy protection, base security, and personal security details for high-ranking officials. While PMSCs provided flexibility and rapid deployment capabilities, their involvement sometimes posed challenges in terms of coordination and command structure. Moreover incidents involving PMSC personnel, such as the infamous 2007 Nisour Square massacre involving Blackwater contractors strained relations with the local population and Iraqi authorities, highlighting the complexities of integrating private security forces into military operations.

In addition, the presence of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) in Iraq had enduring implications for the reform of the security sector and the reconstruction efforts after the conflict. The dependence on private contractors for crucial tasks, such as training Iraqi security forces and ensuring security for reconstruction projects, raised concerns regarding the long-term viability and effectiveness of such endeavors. Furthermore, the absence of adequate oversight and regulation of PMSCs contributed to instances of misconduct, human rights violations, and corruption, which undermined the establishment of a stable and functional state apparatus in post-Saddam Iraq. On the whole, while PMSCs played a significant role in supporting military operations in Iraq, their impact was a two-sided coin, highlighting both their usefulness and the challenges associated with their utilization in conflict environments.

ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

Private military security companies (PMSCs) have made a significant impact on operations in Afghanistan, especially in security provision, logistical support, and training. Since the early 2000s, PMSCs have been hired by various entities, including governments, international organizations, and private corporations, to offer a variety of services in Afghanistan. One of the main functions of PMSCs in the country has been to ensure security for personnel, facilities, and convoys operating in hostile environments. Leveraging their expertise in security and risk management, PMSCs have played a critical role in reducing security threats from insurgent groups and ensuring the safety of their clients' operations in Afghanistan.

Moreover, PMSCs have been crucial in providing logistical support for military and civilian operations in Afghanistan. This encompasses services like

transportation, maintenance, and supply chain management, which are vital for sustaining military and reconstruction efforts in the country. PMSCs have frequently been contracted to manage and maintain essential infrastructure, such as airfields, bases, and communication networks, facilitating the smooth operation of military and humanitarian activities in remote and challenging environments throughout Afghanistan.

Aside from security and logistical support, PMSCs have been pivotal in training and capacity-building programs for Afghan security forces. Drawing on their experience and expertise in military and security matters, PMSCs have been engaged to deliver training initiatives for Afghan military and police personnel, covering topics like counterinsurgency tactics, weapons proficiency, and intelligence gathering. These training programs have been essential in enhancing the capabilities of Afghan security forces and bolstering their ability to combat insurgency and uphold stability in the country.

Security and Protection: Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) have been hired to provide security and protection services for a variety of organizations in Afghanistan, such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), diplomatic missions, and private corporations. Their responsibilities include securing compounds, escorting convoys, and offering personal security to individuals.

Logistics and Support: PMSCs play a vital role in offering logistical support for both military and civilian operations in Afghanistan. This involves providing transportation services, managing bases, overseeing supply chains, and contributing to infrastructure development.

Training and Advisory Roles: PMSCs frequently deliver training and advisory services to Afghan security forces, including the Afghan National Army and Police. These services range from basic military training to specialized skills like counterinsurgency tactics, intelligence gathering, and bomb disposal. Combat and

Operational Support: Apart from defensive operations, some PMSCs have participated in offensive and operational support roles in Afghanistan. This includes supplying armed personnel for offensive missions, gathering intelligence, conducting reconnaissance, and acquiring targets.

Controversies and Criticisms: The presence and actions of PMSCs in Afghanistan have sparked controversy and criticism. Concerns have been raised regarding their accountability, transparency, and compliance with international law. Incidents involving civilian casualties, excessive use of force, and human

rights violations have damaged the reputation of certain PMSCs operating in the region.

Coordination with Military Forces: PMSCs working in Afghanistan must coordinate their activities with the Afghan government and international military forces, including those led by NATO. This coordination is crucial to prevent misunderstandings, reduce conflicts, and ensure effective cooperation towards shared goals.

CONCLUSION

The military history shows that private entities in security will always have a role, irrespective of the size. Their usage and motive can verify with the power group that hires their services, and the insufficient international laws and current political system does not guarantee that this services will protect the values of “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” or the rules of “Geneva Convention”. However with the right regulation, coordination and supervision their services can be in service for counter-terrorism and peace building operations. The advantages of PMSC’s can create a faster and cheaper option for protection and sustainable governments, therefore a more peaceful environment.

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