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LITTLE GREEN MEN INSIDE RUSSIA?

In a remarkable incident of strategic trolling, two hitherto unknown forces calling themselves the Free Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps infiltrated Russian sovereign territory inside the Belgorod Oblast. Although Ukraine officially denies having anything to do with the raid, tongue-in-cheek remarks from a Ukrainian presidential adviser implied that Ukraine may have been giving Russia a taste of its own hybrid warfare tactics. Russia has understandably not seen the funny side of this incursion and serious questions have arisen about the nature of its border security. [This colour piece](#) from CNN gives a good first-hand account of the mission as it crossed the border. And for those who read the *Economist*, [this is a good analysis](#) of the militias, describing their links to the Ukrainian government and other political groups.

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPERSONIC HYPE

Picture: Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0



On 4th May 2023, Ukraine used a US-supplied Patriot battery to down a Russian Kinzhal missile, a weapon Vladimir Putin described in 2018 as “hypersonic” and capable of overcoming all existing air defence systems. Patriot systems have since downed multiple of these hypersonic weapons. It seems that there are some myths around the system, no doubt enhanced by the Russian PR machine, which has sought to display that the balance of offensive hypersonic capabilities is tilting in Moscow’s favour. [In this punchy piece](#) from the Brookings Institute, Alexander H. Montgomery and Amy J. Nelson take five misconceptions about Russian hypersonic capabilities and analyse them in detail. Their conclusions point to a hypersonic threat from Russia that is, at best, over-hyped, with the US in a better position in the hypersonic race than the media would have you believe.

GUNS FOR HIRE

The Wagner Group and its boisterous leader Yevgeny Prigozhin have been all over the headlines since the beginning of Russia’s re-invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the group’s geographical reach and agenda goes far beyond Ukraine. It is particularly active in Africa – from Libya and Mali to Sudan and Burkina Faso. In fact, while many observers had expected that the Ukraine war would divert the Wagner Group’s attention away from the African continent, this is not the case, and the mercenary outfit continues to look to expand its foothold there. Alia Brahimi’s Atlantic Council podcast series [Guns for Hire](#) looks at the Wagner Group and the wider subject of mercenaries from a number of different angles. Brahimi talks to historians, ethicists and former mercenary fighters to understand the Wagner Group and explore different ways to counter it.



Picture: Alexander Davronov, CC BY-SA 4.0

ARMS RACE IN SPACE

Ever since US President Reagan launched the Strategic Defence Initiative – also dubbed the ‘Star Wars’ programme – in 1983, space has been an emerging defence environment. But general understanding of space and why it matters to security and defence remains relatively limited, as does public awareness of what global powers like the US, Russia and China are already doing in space. *The Red Line* podcast episode ‘Satellite Surveillance: The New Orbital Arms Race’ provides a useful primer. Drawing on experts like Tim Marshall, Keith Masback and George Nacouzi, the episode offers an accessible and entertaining primer of who is doing what in space.



REASSESSING THE POWER OF IRAN-BACKED MILITIAS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

One of the key features of the geopolitics of the Middle East during the first two decades of the 21st century has been the expansion of Iran-backed militias. In Lebanon, Hezbollah had been established in the 1980s, but it was its mid-2000s war against Israel that really demonstrated its power. In Iraq and Syria, Iran-backed militias have helped to entrench and secure pro-Iran political leaderships, while also playing a role in the fight against Daesh. In Yemen, the Iran-backed Houthis have strengthened their grip on power while facing down a Saudi-led military coalition since the mid-2010s. The Italian Institute for International Political Studies has published a useful [dossier](#) to examine where all these groups stand today – how much influence Iran really wields over them and what their trajectory in the region might be over the coming decades.

TOWARDS UK-GERMAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Few European countries were as disappointed by the UK's decision to leave the European Union as Germany. For Berlin, the EU is the primary lens through which it sees foreign policy and Brexit meant that one of Europe's most important foreign policy players left the Union. London wants to chart a new foreign political course, but that does not mean leaving behind all its old European partners. In a post-Brexit world, Berlin and London have to find new ways of working together – including in the area of defence and security. Germany and the UK are the top defence spenders in Europe and, after the US, they are also the top supporters of Ukraine. To chart a path for how Germany and the UK can find a means of working together, the Royal United Services Institute and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation have published a new [report](#) that includes both a sound rationale for more cooperation and numerous practical recommendations.

QUESTIONS FOR DEFENCE AI AND AUTONOMY PROGRAMME MANAGERS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is set to be the great disruptor of the 21st century. In 2017, the US Department of Defence established Project Maven – or the Algorithmic Warfare Cross Functional Team – as the most publicly visible initiative to integrate AI into US military thinking and operations. Writing for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Gregory Allen [outlines six key questions](#) – and provides informative answers – that anyone working on the intersection of AI and defence needs to focus on. Allen's analysis covers everything from the mission and purpose of AI and the required infrastructure and talent that will be needed, to how AI integration will ultimately affect budgets, both in the short- and long-term. The article provides a very useful introduction for anyone hoping to better understand how AI will be disrupting the defence and security sector in years to come.





NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the war in Ukraine and its multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

A [defence cooperation agreement between the US and Papua New Guinea](#) is the latest development in the growing geopolitical competition in the Pacific.

[Greece is headed for another election](#) as Prime Minister Mitsotakis hopes to expand his majority to be able to govern without coalition partners.

The Iranian regime has appointed a [new head of the Supreme National Security Council](#), the country's most influential foreign policy institution, after the resignation of Ali Shamkhani in mid-May.

The Colombian government has [suspended a national ceasefire with the Estado Mayor Central](#) armed group as President Petro continues to try to restore state control across the country.

In Ethiopia's [Tigray region](#), protesters are demanding the return of refugees and the withdrawal of outside forces, including troops from neighbouring Eritrea.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is due to hold elections later this year; [a record 43.9 million people have already registered to vote](#).

In Mexico, the country's [notorious drug cartels](#) are expanding into other criminal enterprises.

As [violence in Myanmar continues](#), the country's neighbours are divided on how to react.

IS PAKISTAN ON THE EDGE OF A MILITARY TAKEOVER?



Pakistan's already fractured politics have been pushed to breaking point since the recent arrest and subsequent release of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in early May. Pakistanis supportive of Khan openly attacked military positions, and anger swirled at rumours of an impending military coup. That has not materialised, but the situation remains precarious. Pakistan faces a so-called "polycrisis" of overlapping threats, economic woes, insecurity in its peripheries, and extensive damage and population displacement as a result of recent climate disasters. Under such circumstances, objective analysis of Pakistan's woes is hard to come by. But [this interview](#) with experienced journalist Cyril Almeida provides a nuanced understanding of what is happening in Pakistan, and what the risks of further instability may lead to for the country. For further reading, we recommend turning to Umer Karim's excellent analysis of civil-military relations in Pakistan in this [In-Depth Briefing](#) for CHACR.

POLAND'S MISSILE CRISIS

In December last year, an apparently unarmed Russian missile capable of carrying a payload of 200 kilotons landed in Poland uncomfortably close to Bydgoszcz, a city that hosts NATO's Joint Forces Training Centre. This missile has now become the subject of a major scandal in Poland. The country's leaders, including Prime Minister Morawiecki and Defence Minister Baszczak, claim that they did not know about the missile until media outlets reported that it had been found by a civilian in late April. Senior military leaders, meanwhile, have rejected all accusations that they did not adequately report the incident. Besides the public recriminations between politicians and generals, there is growing concern in Poland – and beyond – about the country's vulnerability to Russia. Slawomir Sierakowski's [article](#) about the entire saga, published by the German Council on Foreign Relations, offers both entertainment and cause for worry.

SUDAN'S DESCENT INTO CIVIL WAR CONTINUES

Since the evacuation of thousands of foreign diplomats and other foreign nationals from Sudan in late April/early May, the ongoing conflict in the country between the regular Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has mostly disappeared from the daily headlines. But as the violence continues, Sudan slides ever-further into civil war. While there seems to be some scope for mediation, mostly through a joint US-Saudi Arabian initiative, the two sides' leaderships seem intransigent. [Hager Ali and Gerrit Kurtz argue](#) that there is also a risk that a negotiated end to the fighting only further strengthens the SAF and RSF's hold on Sudanese politics and therefore incubates the possibility of further episodes of violence down the line.

OUT NOW...

● *"The Army is doing excellent work on how we might expect to fight in the future, but the intensity and proximity of this war [in Ukraine] have reminded us (and perhaps we should not have needed reminding!) that the Army needs to be ready, at all times to 'fight tonight' with what it has got. Operation Mobilise has given us our orders. Work in the Field Army over the last six months (including How We Fight 2026 and Project Lewes) has sought to ensure that we are clear on how we will meet that demand."* – **Lieutenant General Sir Ralph Wooddisse, Commander Field Army, is among the contributors featured in the latest issue of The British Army Review, which examines how Operation Mobilise is to be translated into current combat effectiveness. Visit CHACR's library of commentaries and articles at [chacr.org.uk](#)**

