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TAC-6

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Class of Light Armoured Tactical Vehicle



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APRIL 2024

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FEATURED

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The TAC-6 is built upon the robust Land Cruiser 79 series, but it has undergone such extensive reengineering that it stands as a significantly more capable machine.

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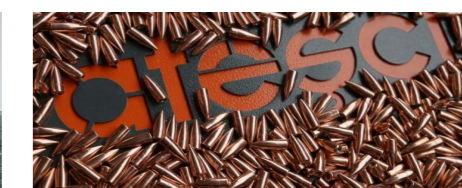
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FEATURED

TAC-6: A New Class of Light Armoured Tactical Vehicle

It can be equipped with a range of weapons, from light machineguns to anti-tank missiles, and has been tested with various weapon stations and turrets.



IMAGE:
Armormax TAC-6 6x6
multi-purpose vehicle

Johannesburg-based Armormax Defence has officially launched the TAC-6, a 6x6 multi-purpose vehicle that promises to redefine the standards of agility and versatility in both civil and military applications. Originally developed for the French Special Forces, the TAC-6 is now poised to serve a wide array of roles, from firefighting to acting as a weapons carrier.

The TAC-6 is built upon the robust Land Cruiser 79 series, but it has undergone such extensive reengineering that it stands as a significantly more capable machine. The addition of an extra axle not only enhances its offroad agility but also increases its payload capacity to a gross vehicle mass of up to seven tons. Armormax Defence emphasizes that the TAC-6 is over-engineered to guarantee reliability in the most unforgiving environments where failure is not an option.

Michael Broom, Manager of Sales & Marketing at Armormax revealed that the TAC-6's development was self-funded and initially catered to the French Special Forces before the Covid-19 pandemic caused interruptions. The vehicle's design is a significant evolution of the 6x6 Land Cruiser variants previously manufactured in South Africa, with notable contributions from Hansie Coetzee of Commander Defence Systems.

A standout feature of the TAC-6 is its OEM-spec eight-speed automatic transmission, developed and homologated by ZF in South Africa and Germany exclusively for this vehicle. This transmission, a departure from the initial manual gearboxes, was chosen to ensure optimal performance in high GVM off-roading conditions.

The TAC-6 boasts the ZF 8HP90 transmission, a core component purpose-built for the vehicle, which remarkably took only nine months to develop. Broom highlighted the vehicle's comprehensive over-engineering, including the use of gear drives instead of chain drives for the transfer case, which is crafted from aircraft-grade aluminium for maximum strength. Additionally, the TAC-6 employs heavy-duty DANA drive shafts and other standard OEM components to facilitate field servicing and minimize downtime.

With its reinforced design, the TAC-6 can carry

a payload of up to 4,400 kg and tow substantial loads. Its mobility is touted as surpassing any full-sized 4-ton truck currently available, a claim backed by over 250,000 km of rigorous testing in various terrains across Africa and Europe.

The TAC-6 is offered in single cab and double cab configurations, serving as a base for numerous modular units tailored for diverse missions. These include personnel carriers, weapons platforms, field workshops, and even water purification plants. Armormax Defence has already produced several versions of the TAC-6 and is working on an armoured personnel carrier variant, among others.

In terms of protection, Armormax offers various armour packages for the TAC-6, including STANAG Level I vehicle armour capable of stopping shell fragments and bullets from 7.62 mm and 5.56 mm firearms. The vehicle employs lightweight armour and 40 mm ballistic glass to replace the original windows.

The TAC-6 is marketed both within South Africa and internationally, with Armormax Defence identifying a larger market potential overseas due to the abundance of defence contracts. However, a secondary civilian and agricultural market is also anticipated locally.

The TAC-6 is designed for military deployment, including transport in a standard 20-foot ISO

shipping container for ease and discretion. It can be equipped with a range of weapons, from light machineguns to anti-tank missiles, and has been tested with various weapon stations and turrets.

Stability is a crucial factor for both on and off-road operations, and the TAC-6 platform has harnessed the power of a third axle to deliver unrivalled stability under heavy loads. This ingenious design eliminates the need for heavy-duty anti-sway bars, allowing the axles to articulate freely and maintain optimal traction on challenging terrains. Off-road, the platform's chassis remains flatter, reducing roll and ensuring maximum stability, even in the most demanding situations. On-road, corners and crosswinds are handled with ease, as the third axle minimizes chassis roll, providing an unwavering and secure driving experience.

As Armormax Defence prepares for the Africa Aerospace and Defence exhibition in September.

The cost of the base conversion for a manual gearbox starts at R1.5 million (excluding the base vehicle itself) while armouring options for STANAG Level 1 start at R850,000 (\$44,551.83) and a lightweight, discreet armouring package starts at R880,000 (\$45,608.10) or R1.3 million (\$67,375.60) for B4 and B6 levels of armour respectively. Multiple-vehicle orders reduce the production costs and timeline significantly and will result in a retail pricing reduction, Armormax Defence pointed out.

The ZF eight speed automatic gearbox can also be sold and fitted separately to any Land Cruiser 79 4.5 litre diesel V8 at a cost of R440,000 (\$22,804.05).



Funding hurdles threaten SANDF's fleet upgrade plans

Darek Liam

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) is facing a significant challenge as it seeks to modernize its fleet of Samil trucks, a project critical for maintaining the operational readiness of its forces. The ambitious plan to replace the ageing fleet with new-generation support vehicles by 2030 is under threat due to severe funding constraints.

Armcor, the state defence materiel agency, has been at the forefront of Project Phalama, which aims to procure new vehicles to replace the outdated Samil trucks. The project, estimated at R13 billion, was scheduled to begin production in June 2025, with a completion target of March 2030. However, the lack of allocated funds on the Strategic Capital Acquisition Master Plan (SCAMP) has put the project at "high risk," according to Armcor's presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV).

The current fleet, maintained by Cuban technicians under Project Thusano, has seen around 6,000 vehicles repaired and refurbished since 2015. Despite these efforts, the trucks face obsolescence challenges, and without a timely replacement, the SANDF's capabilities could be significantly compromised.

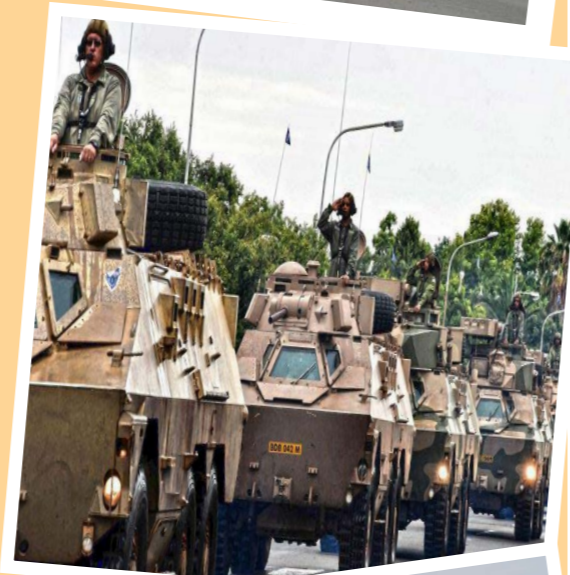
In a proactive move, Armcor

issued a request for information (RFI) in December 2018 for Project Phalama, seeking a broad range of vehicle replacement options, including new vehicles or upgrades. The RFI attracted interest from several companies, indicating a competitive market for military vehicle procurement.

The SANDF's reliance on the Samil trucks for logistics is well-documented, with the fleet playing a crucial role in exercises such as "Exercise Vuk'uhlome" in August 2023. The resuscitation of inoperable military vehicles by technical service personnel at De Brug, Army Base outside Bloemfontein, showcased the SANDF's commitment to maintaining its fleet despite financial hurdles.

In 2022, the collaboration with Cuban military specialists resulted in the refurbishment and repair of over 10,000 vehicles, including Mamba personnel carriers and Mfezi ambulances. This effort, which cost over R277 million, highlights the SANDF's commitment to maintaining its existing fleet.

As the SANDF continues its search for new armoured personnel carriers (APCs) to enhance border patrol capabilities, Over a dozen local companies received invitations from Armcor to submit their APCs for testing and functional evaluation along the border in October last year.



US and Zambia Co-Host African Land Forces Summit 2024



PARTNER CONTENT

On April 22, 2024, the U.S. Army Southern Task Force, Africa, in collaboration with the Zambia Army, held the opening ceremony for the African Land Forces Summit 2024. The summit took place in Livingstone, a picturesque town near the iconic Victoria Falls. This significant event brought together military leaders, thought experts, and government officials from across Africa and European partner nations.

The African Land Forces Summit (ALFS), now in its 12th iteration, serves as a vital platform for building partnerships, fostering cooperation, and addressing critical transnational challenges. Since its inception in 2010 (when it first took place in Washington, D.C.), ALFS has become a cornerstone event for land force chiefs, academic thought leaders, and government representatives.

The summit, which runs from 22 to 26 April, "brings together over 40 land force military chiefs from across Africa [and] other European

partner nations, along with academic thought leaders and government officials for candid dialogue to discuss and develop cooperative solutions," Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Major General Pat Ryder said during a briefing this week. Some 500 guests are attending the event.

The ALFS aims to foster candid dialogue and cooperative solutions. Over 40 land force military chiefs from African countries, along with representatives from European partner nations, participated in this crucial gathering. Academic thought leaders and government officials also engaged in discussions during the summit.

Africa's security challenges originate from different parallels such as ethnic, geographical and cultural sources," Ambrose Lufuma, defence minister of the Republic of Zambia, is quoted in an Army news release about the summit. "Therefore, it requires African solutions, in partnership with our cooperating partners."

ALFS 2024 focused on addressing shared challenges faced by African nations. The theme emphasized finding regional solutions to transnational issues. Minister of Defence, Ambrose L. Lufuma from the Republic of Zambia, highlighted the need for African solutions in partnership with cooperating allies.

The summit tackled pressing issues such as human trafficking, mass migration, environmental degradation, and climate change. These challenges transcend national borders and require collaborative efforts. Maj. Gen. Todd R. Wasmund, commanding general of the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), emphasized the importance of collective action.

“For any economic development to take place, a safe and secure environment is important, something that is not always the case, as there are a number of conflicts in Africa,” Lufuma said during the Summit’s opening session.

“This distinguished gathering provides a rare and special platform that allows for all of us to listen and learn from each other...to look for solutions to challenges of transnational nature,” said co-host Lieutenant General Sitali D Alibuz-

wi, commander, Zambia Army.

ALFS brought together leaders from Africa, Europe, and North and South America. Their exchange of ideas aimed to develop effective solutions. Lt. Gen. Sitali D. Alibuzwi, commander of the Zambia Army, described the summit as a rare platform for mutual learning and problem-solving.

Attendees had the opportunity to witness a military demonstration by the Zambian army’s special forces, Participate in a tree planting ceremony alongside local school children, and experience the rich Zambian culture.

At the summit’s conclusion, the Department of Defense (DOD) signed two new state partnership programs:

North Carolina-Zambia partnership
 North Carolina-Malawi partnership
 These programs facilitate military-to-military engagements and broader interagency cooperation. Through the State Partnership Program, the National Guard conducts military engagements in support of DOD security goals while leveraging “whole-of-society relationships and capabilities.”

Photo By Neil Ruggiero | Members of SETAF Africa work with The Zambian Army during the African Land Forces Summit 2024 Initial Planning Event in Zambia.



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Equatorial Guinea bolsters military with Chinese Z-9WE armed helicopters

Ekene Lionel

In order to modernize its military capabilities, Equatorial Guinea has recently acquired two Harbin Z-9WE armed helicopters from China. The acquisition was made public by the country's ruling Democratic Party (Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial, PDGE), highlighting Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue's inspection of the new aircraft on April 8.

The Armed Forces of Equatorial Guinea (FAGE) is now operating these new helicopters, which were showcased in photographs released by the PDGE. The images featured Vice President Mangue with the helicopters at what appeared to be the airbase at Malabo International Airport. These state-of-the-art aircraft are equipped with gimballed electro-optical systems for enhanced surveillance capabilities and weapon pylons capable of carrying guns, rockets, and anti-tank missiles.

Designed to carry eight passengers, the Z-9WE helicopters are fitted with advanced electro-optical gimbals for day and night operations, and hardpoints for an array of weaponry. This marks

a significant upgrade for the FAGE, which previously did not have any Chinese aircraft in its predominantly Soviet-era fleet.

The Z-9WE model is an export variant of the Z-9W light attack helicopter, itself a Chinese-built version of the Airbus AS365 Dauphin. The PDGE has identified the potential for acquiring additional combat helicopters to further strengthen the military, particularly to combat maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Equatorial Guinea's recent military acquisitions from China include Red Arrow-8 anti-tank missiles, a landing ship, SM-4 self-propelled mortars, and WZ-551 armoured personnel carriers. This trend reflects the nation's efforts to diversify and modernize its military hardware.

The air force branch has seen rapid expansion, adding various aircraft over the last two decades, including L-39s, Su-25s, An-32, Mi-26, An-72 transports, and Mi-24 attack helicopters from Ukraine. Russia has also contributed Mi-17 transport helicopters to the fleet.

3rd Africa Airforce Forum to celebrate Nigerian Air Force's 60th Anniversary with a Focus on Aerospace Innovations and Regional Security



PARTNER CONTENT

Marking the momentous 60th anniversary, the Nigerian Air Force, in collaboration with Great Minds Event Management, is proud to present the third edition of the African Air Forces Forum. This significant event is scheduled to take place from May 23 to May 24, 2024, at the Abuja International Conference Centre. The celebration continues with a ceremonial aerial display on May 25, 2024, at the Nigerian Air Force Base in Kaduna.

This year's forum, themed "Ni-
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gerian Air Force at 60: Leveraging Strategic Partnerships in Aerospace Innovations for Regional Security," honours the Nigerian Air Force's six decades of commitment to national and regional security through advancements in aerospace technology and strategic collaborations.

Air Marshal HB Abubakar, Chief of the Air Staff, Nigerian Air Force said, "We are privileged to host this historic edition of the African Air Forces Forum. As we celebrate 60 years of steadfast service and

commitment to national and regional security, we look forward to engaging in fruitful collaborations and discussions that will propel our collective security and technological advancement into the future."

The forum will be a focal point for exploring the integration of innovative aerospace technologies in enhancing regional security frameworks. It will bring together Chiefs of Air Staff, industry leaders, and security experts from across the globe to discuss the role of strategic partnerships in ad-

vancing air force capabilities and counter-terror operations.

Event highlights include a high-level international conference with keynote speeches and panel discussions focusing on the challenges and opportunities in aerospace and defence. An exhibition showcasing the latest equipment, technologies, and solutions essential for enhancing security and defence capabilities. Attendees will witness an unforgettable air show featuring precision flying skills, aviation excellence and related immersive experiences.

With over 300 regional and international attendees from over 40 countries and 20+ Chiefs and Senior Officers of the Airforce, the Africa Airforce Forum is an ideal networking and knowledge-sharing platform for the aerospace

industry in the region. The event will also feature more than 20 speakers, 20+ presentations & over 40 sponsors and exhibitors discussing strategic plans, forming lasting partnerships and discovering the latest in aviation technology.

The countries participating will span the African continent as well as partners from around the world. Main sponsors for the event include CPMIEC, Airbus, Embraer, Diamond Aircraft, Havelson, Jet Aviation, KAI, Go Beyond and Viva Jets. The forum aims to highlight the importance of collaborative efforts in leveraging airpower for stability and security across Africa. Attendees will include professionals from Air Forces, Aviation Authorities, Law Enforcement, Ministries of Defense, and Interior industries.



United States Air Force B1-B bombers fly to Ghana ahead of Flintlock 2024

Partner Content

To bolster military cooperation, the United States Air Force (USAF) deployed two B-1B Lancer bombers to Ghana for a bilateral exercise preceding the much-anticipated Flintlock 2024. This deployment marks a milestone in the USAF's commitment to supporting international military exercises and enhancing strategic partnerships.

On April 19, 2024, the B-1B Lancers, known for their impressive payload capacity and supersonic speed, took off from Morón Air Force Base in Spain and made their way to Ghana. Accompanying them was a KC-135R Stratotanker, ensuring aerial refueling capabilities for the long-haul flight.

The arrival of the bombers coincided with the conclusion of a rigorous three-day Air-to-Ground Integration training conducted by the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) and the United States Armed Forces at Bundase's Battle Training Camp. This training was the first of its kind, setting the stage for future collaborative efforts.

Flintlock 2024, scheduled to be the largest African partner-led and U.S. & international enabled Special Operations Forces exercise on the continent, is drawing considerable attention. The exercise aims to strengthen the operational capabilities of participating nations and foster mutual understanding among allied forces.

Exercise Flintlock 24 will be hosted in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire who also served as last year's hosts. The exercise will conduct four training outstations in Ghana and one outstation on Cote d'Ivoire. The outstations will showcase a diverse set of tactical skills aimed at bolstering interoperability and relationships to counter security threats on the continent.

"Flintlock's a mechanism that opens doors for all international SOF allies and partners to come together, to train together, to live together, to learn from each other," said U.S. Army Maj. Adam DeMarco, SOCAFRICA Flintlock 24 lead planner, "And it really builds enduring and sustainable partnerships that will last the test

of time, whether it's in Flintlock or in real world operations. We have five out of seven continents represented here at Exercise Flintlock and that partnership is only growing."

Civil affairs will also play a crucial element in the exercise with Medical and Dental Civic Action programs occurring throughout each host country. Operated by partner forces in coordination with U.S. joint services, MEDCAPs and DENTCAPs serve as temporary field clinics to provide limited medical treatment to the local population.

"Flintlock to us is an opportunity to test the combat readiness of our SOF community, which includes planning for logistics acquisition, respect for the rule of law and now equally and importantly the promotion of human security," said Col. George Dottey, Ghana Army chief of training. "Flintlock is making it possible for us in the subregion to maintain contact, exchange ideas, share information and therefore it helps to improve on the security of the continent."

Flintlock's objective is to strengthen the ability of key partner nations in the region to counter violent extremist organizations, collaborate across borders, and provide security for the population. Comprised of a high representation from African partners and NATO allies, the collective participation illustrates a shared commitment to target activity from malign threats throughout the Sahel and northwest Africa. Leveraging the partnerships forged at Flintlock aims to en-

hance security efforts throughout the continent.

Flintlock intends to strengthen the ability of key partner nations in the region to counter violent extremist organizations, collaborate across borders, and provide security for their people, while respecting human rights and building trust with civilian populations. The robust participation of African and international partners reflects a mutual commitment to countering malign activity and violent extremism throughout the Sahel and West Africa region.

During the air-to-ground integration exercise, GAF members demonstrated their proficiency in close air support operations. Utilizing radios, they effectively communicated with the B-1B Lancer crews, executing a nine-line brief—a critical component of coordinating air support in combat scenarios.

The combined training event also saw participation from U.S. Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF), the U.K.'s 1st Battalion Ranger Regiment, and GAF soldiers. This collaboration underscores the deepening defense relationships under the U.S. Africa Command, which are built on the principles of equality and mutual respect.

As Flintlock 24 approaches, the presence of the USAF B-1B Lancers in Ghana not only showcases the strategic mobility and readiness of U.S. forces but also reaffirms the United States' dedication to opposing aggression and up-

holding sovereignty alongside its African partners.

The exercise represents a concerted effort to promote security and stability in the region, reflecting the enduring partnership between the U.S. and its African allies.

Typically, US exercises in the continent sees the deployment of US strategic bombers to African host nations. Last year, a United States air force B-53H stratofortress strategic bomber flew over the Volta Region in Ghana in support of international military exercise Flintlock 2023. The United States air force deployed its signature B-52H Stratofortress strategic bomber over Ghana to support the international military exercise Flintlock 2023.

In 2022, two United States Air Force B-1B Lancer aircraft from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, carried out a Bomber Task Force mission to Morocco and Mauritania on 30 June in support of Exercise African Lion 2022 and counter-illicit maritime efforts.

Likewise in 2021, F-35B Lightnings from 617 Squadron, currently embarked aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth, joined American and French aircraft over Djibouti in East Africa. Two US Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers from the 9th Bomb Wing, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, flew a Bomber Task Force mission alongside two French Mirages, as well as two UK and two US F-35s from UK Carrier Strike Group's HMS Queen Elizabeth over Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, on 11 November.

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As a founding member of Tempest, Leonardo UK is helping to secure the RAF's combat air advantage for future decades. In the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), Leonardo is the UK lead for the ISANKE (integrated sensing and non-kinetic effects) and ICS (integrated communications system) domain, meaning that Leonardo's advanced electronics will be at the core of the future system's combat capabilities.

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DEARSAN launches second OPV 76 for Nigeria

Ekene Lionel

Turkish shipbuilder Dearsan Shipyard has successfully launched the second Nigerian Navy OPV 76 offshore patrol vessel (P 204) on the 19th of April 2024.

This launch marks a major step forward in enhancing Nigeria's maritime defence and security capabilities. The event was graced by the presence of Her Excellency the First Lady of Nigeria, Mrs Remi Tinubu, Minister of State for Defence, Dr. Bello Muhammed Matawalle, and the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ogalla, underscoring the importance of this milestone for Nigeria's naval operations.

In August 2021, the Nigerian Navy (NN) announced its intention to procure two new offshore patrol vessels (OPV) after receiving President Muhammadu Buhari's approval. Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS)

Vice Admiral AZ Gambo mentioned this at the dinner in honour of the Nigerian Navy graduates of the National Defence College course 29.

The contract for the two vessels was signed between Dearsan and the Nigerian Navy on the 3rd of November 2021. Dearsan Shipyard began constructing the vessel (P 203) on September 16, 2022. The first 76 meters vessel of the type for the Nigerian Navy was launched on October 26, 2023.

The OPV 76 vessel follows a modular design, offering versatility for a range of maritime operations. In peacetime, it will be deployed for offshore patrol duties, ensuring maritime security and surveillance. However, the vessel's design also allows it to be swiftly equipped with sensors and weapons, transforming it into a formidable force for warfare and maritime defense purposes. This adapt-

ability is achieved at a cost-effective price, a crucial factor for the Nigerian Navy.

The OPV 76 vessels have been customized to fulfill the specific needs of the Nigerian Navy. They were designed and built entirely at the Dearsan Shipyard in Istanbul. These vessels will be fitted with state-of-the-art systems to ensure optimal performance.

The vessels will expand the capabilities of the Nigerian Navy, enabling operations such as maritime interdiction, surveillance, special forces missions, naval fire support for land forces, search and rescue, anti-piracy operations, anti-smuggling efforts, counter-drug trafficking operations, and disaster relief missions, among others.

The high endurance offshore patrol vessel OPV -76 has an overall length of 76.90 meters, a beam of 11.90 meters and a displacement of 1,100 tons, according to the video released by the company. The vessel will be operated by 47 personnel and have a range of 2500 nautical miles at an economical speed. HE OPV 76 will be able to stay at sea for 16 days. The ship has a flight deck that can house a single helicopter but no hangar.

The main gun of the ship will be the 40-millimetre MARLIN gun of Leonardo and will be armed with the Aselsan's 30-millimetre SMASH at the stern of the ship. The ship will also be equipped with two Aselsan 12.7 mm RWS STAMP.

The Turkish company HAVELSAN will supply the ADVENT combat management system for the new OPVs, and the operator consoles will be supplied by another Turkish company, YALTES. The sensor suit of the new OPVs consists of the 2D surface search radar from the Italian company GEM Elettronica and the fire control system EO.

In addition, the vessels will be equipped with HAVELSAN ADVENT Combat Management System (CMS), HAVELSAN Ship Data Distribution System (SDDS), two operator consoles manufactured by YALTES (for ADVENT SYS), YALTES Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS), Italian GEM Elettronica product 2D radar (with surface and air surveillance capability), and GEM Elettronica product electro-optical fire control system.

OPV-76 ships will be fitted with four MAN product diesel engines (18VP185), and it is stated that the vessels can reach a maximum speed of 28 knots. Constructed in line with the Türk Loydu Ship Classification rules, the hulls of OPV-76s will be made of steel sheets, and marine aluminium (Sealium) will be used in the ship superstructure. A contract was signed with HeliPLAT Co.Ltd. for the certification engineering, testing, and HAT/SAT activities of the helicopter platform on the OPV-76 ships.

The high endurance offshore patrol vessels OPV-76s will carry two RHIBs for interdiction operations.



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Senegal Completes Naval Expansion with Final Patrol Vessel



EKENE Lionel

Senegal's Navy has taken delivery of its third and final OPV 58 S patrol vessel, marking the end of a successful four-year collaboration with French shipbuilder Piriou Group. The CAYOR joins its siblings, the WALO and NIANI, significantly bolstering Senegal's maritime security capabilities.

These 62-meter vessels are designed for both defense and a variety of civilian missions at sea. They are equipped for search and rescue, anti-trafficking operations, and environmental protection.

The first vessel, WALO, was delivered in June 2023 and arrived in Dakar in August of the same year. It was followed by the NIANI, delivered in November 2023, reaching Dakar in January 2024. Now, the CAYOR, bears the Senegalese flag, signifies the successful conclusion of a four-year construction program that engaged hundreds of employees and amounted to over 600,000 working hours.

Vincent Faujour, President of

Piriou, expressed gratitude to the Senegalese Navy for its trust and highlighted the OPV 58S program as a collaborative effort between Piriou's teams and the Senegalese Navy. Following the successful construction of the OPV 87 for Argentina, Piriou implemented a similar industrial approach for the OPV 58 S, splitting the hull production between its Concarneau shipyard and the Lorient shipyard, where Kership, a joint venture with Naval Group, operates.

"We were committed to being worthy of the trust that Senegal had placed in us, committed to building ships with remarkable deterrence and projection capabilities. We have designed and built new-generation patrol vessels that will further strengthen the Senegalese Navy's defence posture and enable the Navy to cover the full range of State actions at sea missions it is responsible.

"And, pointing out that human values are at the heart of the maritime world, he honored the memory of the 5 Senegalese

commandos who tragically lost their lives on mission: "We also wanted to be worthy of the trust placed in us by the Senegalese nation and its seafarers, who work, sometimes risking their lives, for the security and sovereignty of their country."

This project highlights strong ties between France and Senegal. Piriou emphasized their commitment to building ships that meet Senegal's needs and honor the sacrifices of its sailors. The vessels were constructed through a collaborative effort between Piriou, Kership, and Naval Group, showcasing French shipbuilding expertise.

Éric Langlois, President of Kership, and Olivier de la Bourdonnaye, Naval Group's Executive Vice President for Surface Ships, both acknowledged the significance of the program and the cooperative efforts that led to its success.

The CAYOR sets sail to join its sister ships, together enhancing Senegal's naval power and safeguarding its waters.

Nigerian Navy takes delivery of Offshore Survey Vessel from French Shipbuilder OCEA



Ekene Lionel

The Nigerian Navy has marked a significant milestone in its fleet expansion and modernization efforts with the acquisition of a cutting-edge Offshore Survey Vessel (OSV), the OSV 115, from the renowned French shipyard OCEA SA. This state-of-the-art vessel was officially delivered to the Nigerian Navy in Apapa, Lagos, on April 17, 2024, enhancing the nation's maritime capabilities.

In October 2021, French shipyards OCEA announced that it has won an international tender to deliver a new 35-meter hydrographic research vessel to the Nigerian Navy.

Designed and constructed by OCEA SA, the OSV 115 is a 35-meter vessel tailored for scientific hydrographic and oceanographic missions. Commodore Augustine Adams-Aliu, the Director of Information at Naval Headquarters,

highlighted the vessel's advanced technological features, including medium/shallow water multi-beam echo-sounders and other essential survey equipment. The OSV 115 is set to perform comprehensive surveys in shallow and medium waters, contributing to the Navy's mission to protect Nigeria's territorial waters.

The OSV 115 joins the Nigerian Navy's fleet alongside the OSV 190 'NNS LANA', another OCEA-built vessel delivered in 2021. The primary function of the new vessel is to conduct hydrographic and oceanographic surveys, aligning with the Nigerian Navy's ongoing efforts to secure the nation's waters and support the government's Blue Economy initiatives.

The Nigerian Navy's commitment to enhancing its hydrographic charting capabilities began with the local production of internationally rec-

ognized nautical charts in 2019. The addition of the OSV 115 is expected to further improve the Navy's proficiency in this area.

OCEA's partnership with the Nigerian Navy dates back to 2013, with a total of 18 vessels delivered, including various types of patrol boats. In January 2023, the Nigerian Navy awarded Ocea SSM a contract for the construction of nine vessels in different size categories, including three 46-meter OPV 190s, two 32-meter FPB 96s, and four 15-meter Interceptors. These vessels are set to be integrated into the Falcon Eye Maritime Domain Awareness system, bolstering Nigeria's maritime surveillance and security.

The longstanding relationship between OCEA and the Nigerian Navy is further evidenced by the inspection of two FPB 98 Mk1 vessels under construction in France by the Chief of the Naval Staff Vice Admiral A.Z Gambo in July 2022. The delivery of these vessels, along with an additional OSV 95, will bring OCEA's contribution to the Nigerian Navy's inventory to a total of 21 boats.

The recent delivery of the OSV 115 comes with comprehensive support services from OCEA, including training, spare parts, tooling, and necessary documentation, ensuring the vessel's seamless integration and operation within the Nigerian Navy's fleet. The OSV 115 SC-WB class vessel is fully equipped to perform various duties, such as offshore patrols, securing harbors and waterways, search and rescue operations, securing undersea energy infrastructure, and responding to environmental pollution. As Nigeria continues to enhance its military capabilities to address a variety of security threats, the addition of the OSV 115 to the Nigerian Navy's fleet represents a significant step forward in safeguarding the nation's maritime interests and promoting the Blue Economy.

Meanwhile, to support the fleet and provide maritime patrol capabilities, Turkish shipbuilder Dearsan Shipyard recently launched the second OPV 76 offshore patrol vessel for the Nigerian navy. Nigeria is enhancing its military capabilities rapidly to better deal with a variety of security threats plaguing the country.



The 35 metre long vessel has a capacity for 12 crew and passengers and is able to reach a top speed of 12 knots and a range of 3 000 nautical miles at 10 knots.

Turkish Atesci to produce munitions in three African countries



Ekene Lionel

Turkey's renowned arms manufacturer, Atesci, has announced a significant investment in a joint venture with Afridex, aimed at establishing a munitions production facility in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This strategic partnership is set to bolster local manufacturing capabilities, with an emphasis on producing a wide range of munitions calibres.

The collaboration is funded by an investment of tens of millions of euros, which highlights Atesci's plans to boost its defence manufacturing in the region. The initiative is not only a testament to Atesci's expansion strategy but also reflects the growing trend of international defence firms investing in African markets.

The production facility is expected to commence operations in July, marking a pivotal step towards self-reliance in munitions supply for the region.

Atesci also won a major contract in Nairobi to install ammunition production lines for the Kenya Army in 2022, however, it is uncertain if the business ongoing.

Proforce Nigeria Limited, a Nigerian company specializing in armoured vehicle manufacturing, repairs and refurbishment also signed a technical partnership with Atesci for ammunition production.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the just recently concluded IDEF'19, 14th International Defence Industry Fair held in Turkey.

Atesci which is located in Ostim, Yenimahalle, Ankara the largest industrial zone in Turkey designs and assembles various machinery, tooling and equipment as well as turn-key ammunition production line solutions.

Atesci's venture is part of a broader trend of Turkish defense firms increasing their global footprint. Since 2019, keen to reassert Turkey's international status, and also to help Turkish companies to break into the African market, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been spearheading a major diplomatic and business drive in Africa.

Meanwhile, Atesci designed, manufactured and supplied a large number of individual machines from its early inventory to all around the world including Namibia.



Patrick Kenyatte

Uganda has been acquiring a number of unmanned systems lately to enhance its military capacity.

To bolster its defence industry, Uganda has partnered with China's North Industries Corporation (Norinco) to embark on a joint venture that promises to revolutionize the country's military capabilities. This collaboration is set to establish a comprehensive unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) workshop in Nakasongola, marking a new era in Uganda's defence modernization efforts.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the UAV workshop was conducted by Uganda's Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs, Vincent Bamulangaki Ssempijja, and Norinco's Executive President, Yang Xiaoqing. This event not only signifies the commencement of the UAV project but also the inauguration of a Joint Research and Innovation Centre and an ANFO explosives production line for Kyoga Dynamics, a joint venture between Uganda's National Enterprise Corporation (NEC) and China Wanbao Engineering Company, a subsidiary of Norinco.

Minister Ssempijja expressed gratitude towards Norinco for their readiness to share expertise,

emphasizing that research and innovation are pivotal for enhancing Uganda's defence capabilities. Xiaoqing highlighted the significance of the commissioning and groundbreaking events, stating that within six months, the workshop dedicated to UAV assembly, testing, maintenance, and training will be operational, signifying a turning point for Uganda's UAV industry and defence modernization.

The Chief of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF), General Wilson Mbadi, lauded the partnership with Norinco as a testament to the growing ties between Uganda and China. He praised the advancements made in developing and modernizing the forces, which have proven effective both domestically and regionally.

Uganda's strides in developing its local defence industry are noteworthy. In August 2018, the country launched an Armoured Vehicle Manufacturing and Assembly Facility in Maga Maga, producing the Mamba-based Nyoka armoured personnel carrier in collaboration with South Africa's Twiga Services and Logistics. The UPDF also commissioned the Chui (Leopard) infantry fighting vehicle in 2021, manufactured at the same facility.

Further expanding its defence capabilities, Uganda, in partnership with the UAE-based St-

reit Group, opened a new armoured vehicle factory in Nakosongola in July 2022. The NEC-Streit Uganda Ltd aims to cater to the military, police, VIPs, and regional demands through technology transfer and security solutions.

On the aviation front, Uganda commissioned a helicopter maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility in January 2022, with the first locally overhauled Mi-24 helicopter unveiled in April the following year. This facility is a joint venture between the NEC and Pro-Heli International, a Russian company specializing in the overhaul of Mi-17 and Mi-24 helicopters.

The state-owned NEC, established in 1989, serves as the commercial arm of the UPDF, engaging in various sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, services, and defence industry projects. Its commercial ventures are executed through subsidiaries and joint ventures like Kyoga Dynamics, NEC-Streit, and Pro-Heli, showcasing Uganda's commitment to self-reliance and innovation in its defence sector.

Uganda has been acquiring a number of unmanned systems lately to enhance its military capacity. In 2023, Uganda acquired STM Togan surveillance and reconnaissance drone from Turkey.



Epail Nigeria begins serial production of CSK-131 Mengshi armoured vehicle

Ekene Lionel

Epail Nigeria, Equipment Protective Applications International Limited, a prominent Nigerian defense company, has announced the commencement of serial production of the reverse-engineered Chinese Dong Feng CSK-131 Mengshi armoured vehicle. This move is set to bolster the Nigerian military's operational readiness and reduce dependence on foreign military equipment.

EPAIL specializes in defence equipment, surveillance systems, and Technological solutions. In September, 2021, Epail entered an agreement to locally produce bulletproof vests and other military equipment with the Nigerian Government. Earlier in 2018, Epail

and Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria, DICON, a parastatal under the Ministry of Defence entered into a strategic agreement for the production of defence equipment.

The journey began at the 24th edition of the Nigerian Army Combat Support Services Training Week at Abalti barracks, Lagos State, in August 2023, where Epail first unveiled a locally produced light armoured vehicle. The Dongfeng CSK131, originally a Chinese light protected vehicle developed by Dongfeng as a private venture and known as Mengshi, meaning 'brave soldier', has been adapted for Nigerian use.

The CSK131, serving China's

armed forces and proposed for export, found its way to Nigeria around 2021, the deal, which likely included a technology transfer, has now borne fruit with the serial production of the vehicle.

This development is a direct consequence of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Bill, signed into law by President Bola Tinubu in 2023. The bill empowers DICON and private defense entities to operate subsidiaries, ordnance factories, establish research institutes, and attract private capital for defense production and innovation.

Retired Air Vice Marshal Abdulganiyu Olabisi, the administrative director of Epail, highlighted in a media briefing that President Tinubu tasked the Defence Industry Association of Nigeria (DIAN) to promote relevant technologies and develop infrastructure for military hardware production. "The light armoured vehicles assembled here are a testament to that directive," he stated, emphasizing the collaboration with Chinese partners in assembling these machines.

The DICON act also includes provisions for developing financing structures to support private sector investment in defense research and production. This aligns with Nigeria's strategic objective to lessen reliance on foreign defense suppliers, a vulnerability in times of geopolitical uncertainty or supply chain disruptions. Local production ensures greater control over timelines and processes.



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Morocco acquired Israeli SpyX Loitering Munition

Darek Liam

Morocco has become the first African and Middle Eastern nation to manufacture suicide drones, marking its entry into the exclusive club of drone producers. This development comes as part of Morocco's deepening strategic ties with Israel following the normalization of relations through the David Peace Accord.

The Royal Moroccan Armed Forces (FAR) have recently incorporated the new SpyX suicide drone into their arsenal, following successful field tests conducted by BlueBird Aero Systems, a subsidiary of Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). The SpyX drone, boasting a range of 50km and a deployment duration of an hour and a half, is designed for both reconnaissance and attack missions. It represents a significant step forward in Morocco's defence and security capabilities.

SpyX, developed by BlueBird Aero Systems, is an expendable electric mini-UAV, designed for loitering & strike missions, to enable tactical teams to organically detect, confirm and hit targets at ranges up to 50Km. To increase its target detection capabilities, the SpyX is integrated

with a revolutionary belly-mounted dual-sensor stabilized payload and advanced video tracker, to enable autonomous and accurate electro-optical guided attack on the target. To increase its effectiveness, the 2.5Kg warhead (like combined Anti-Personnel, Anti-vehicles, or Anti-tank warheads) is loaded to the SpyX Loitering Munition just before launch, as per the required effect-on-target.

The acquisition of SpyX is the latest in a series of defence collaborations between Morocco and Israel. In September 2022, Morocco ordered 150 WanderB and ThunderB drones from BlueBird and requested two Ofek-13 reconnaissance satellites to enhance its surveillance and intelligence infrastructure.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Morocco is a major recipient of Israeli arms, with 11% of Israel's weapons exports going to the North African nation. The defence relationship was further solidified in 2021 when Israel and Morocco signed a defence pact, showcasing a united front against common concerns such as Iran and Islamist militancy.



IMAGE: Bluebird SpyX strikes a main battle tank during a test.

BURKINA FASO'S AKINCI DRONES BREAKS COVER



Burkina Faso's newly acquired Akinci long-range combat drone as seen in public for the first time.

Ekene Lionel

Burkina Faso's newly acquired Akinci long-range combat drone have been seen in public for the first time.

The two new Akinci drones are part of a larger haul which includes five Bayraktar TB2s as well as an assorted guided and unguided munitions.

The Akinci are likely to have been delivered to the military of Burkina Faso earlier this year, while Five Bayraktar TB2 drones were delivered between April and May 2022.

This new delivery highlights the growing reliance on Turkish-made military products,

and also signifying that Africa is a new market for Turkish defence firms, and defence and aerospace exports to the continent are rising, from \$83 million in 2020 to \$288 million in 2021.

Bayraktar Akinci (meaning Raider in Turkey) is a high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) manufactured by the Turkish defence company Baykar. The drone has a 5.5+ ton maximum takeoff weight (MTOW), of which over 1,350 kg (2,980 lb) is payload. Akinci is equipped with two turboprop engines of either 450 hp (460 PS; 340 kW) or 750 hp (760 PS; 560 kW), as well as elec-

tronic support and ECM systems, dual satellite communication systems, air-to-air radar, collision avoidance radar, and advanced synthetic-aperture radar.

The Akinci UCAV was seen fitted with MAM-L and MAM-T munitions. However, ROKETSAN's TEBER GPS and Laser-guided general purpose bombs, and TÜBİTAK SAGE's HGK GPS guidance kits were presented alongside the UCAV, indicating that Burkina Faso has acquired heavier munitions for AKINCI UCAV as well.

The Akinci were inspected by Burkinabe Interim Leader Ibra-

UNMANNED SYSTEMS

him Traore, who came to power with a coup on September 30, 2022. Traore is known for his heavy opposition to French policies and represents an example of France's declining influence in African countries.

Since 2016, it has faced a growing threat from rival Islamist terror groups affiliated with the Islamic State group and with al-Qaeda, resulting in 10,000 casualties, and the displacement of some two million people.

Burkina Faso is facing a growing threat from Islamist mili-

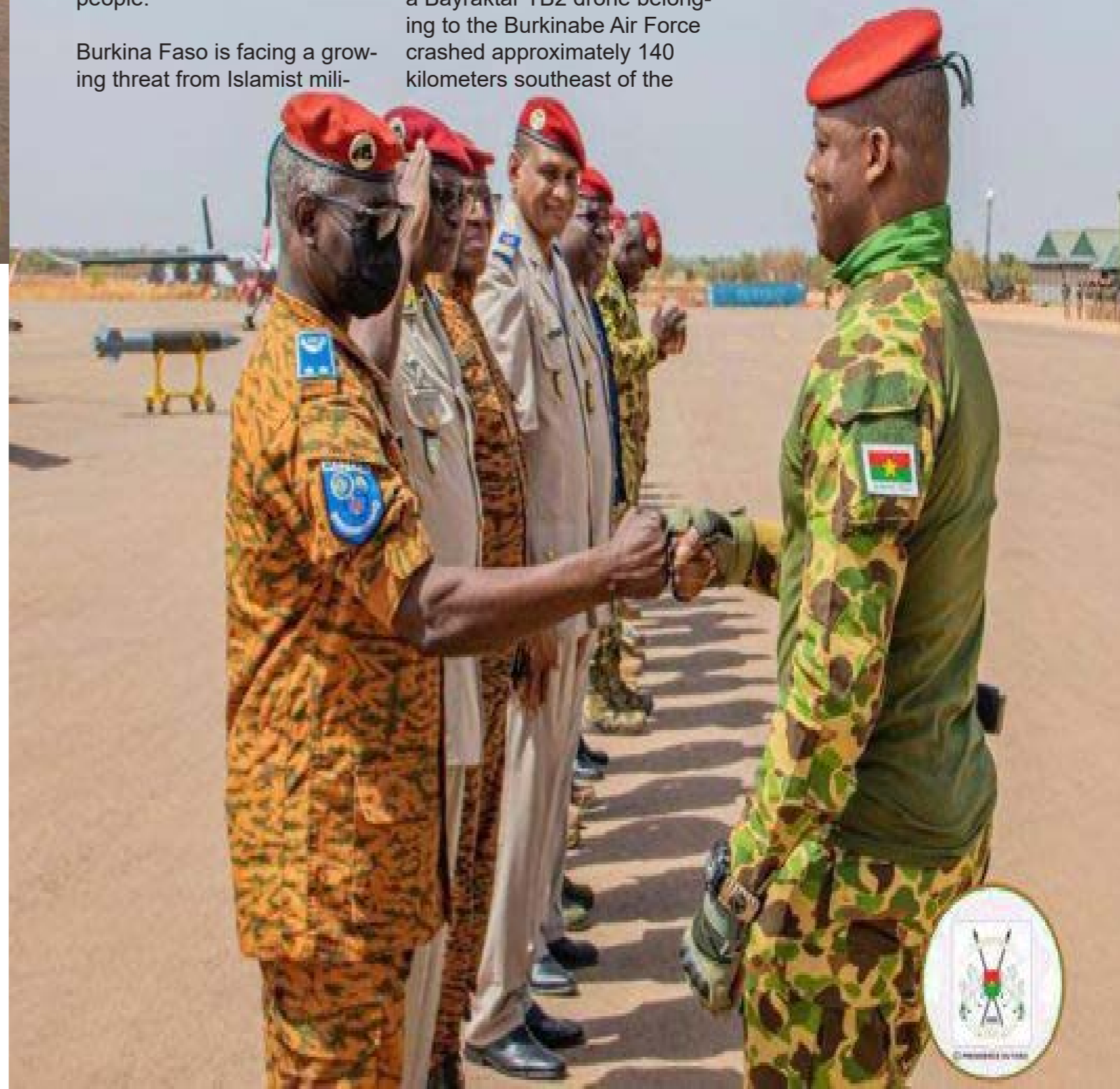
itants who have been launching attacks from neighboring Mali and Niger. The country has been struggling to contain the violence, which has killed thousands of people and displaced more than a million.

The Akinci drone will likely be employed against terrorist and insurgent targets, including groups of terrorists travelling on motor cycles.

Although, in a recent incident, a Bayraktar TB2 drone belonging to the Burkinabe Air Force crashed approximately 140 kilometers southeast of the

capital city, near Tenkodogo. Burkina Faso hopes that the drones will help it gain an edge over the Islamist militants who have been wreaking havoc in the region.

The Akinci is steadily witnessing export success. So far, among the nine customers of AKINCI UCAV, three are from Africa, and they are Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Libya (not confirmed).





Chad enhances Air Force capabilities with Turkish Akıncı drones

Ekene Lionel

The Chadian Air Force (AAT) has taken a significant step in bolstering its aerial capabilities by acquiring at least one Akıncı unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) from Turkish Aerospace (TUSAŞ). This move marks a pivotal moment in Chad's military modernization efforts.

On April 21, the AAT released a video showcasing an Akıncı drone adorned with AAT markings and the Turkish-for-

mat serial number 23013. The footage captured the UAV taking off from Adji Koseï Air Base, located at N'Djamena International Airport, equipped with eight MAM-L small laser-guided bombs. Additionally, the video highlighted the training of AAT personnel by TUSAŞ experts in Türkiye.

The AAT's current fleet includes two TUSAŞ Anka UAVs and three Hürkuş-C turboprop light-attack aircraft. These were first presented during a

visit by President General Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno to Adji Koseï Air Base in July 2023.

The Akıncı, initially known as Anka-2, is a twin-engine UAV that boasts a maximum take-off weight of 3,300 kg and can carry a payload exceeding 750 kg. This is a significant enhancement over the Anka's 1,700 kg weight capacity with a 350 kg payload. TUSAŞ has reported that the Akıncı is designed for a 50-hour endur-

ance, although the longest recorded flight to date is 41 hours.

Chad is now the second-known export operator of the Akıncı, following Kyrgyzstan's Border Guard Service. The latter displayed the UAV alongside a heavier Bayraktar Akıncı during a visit by the President of Kyrgyzstan to the new UAV base at Issyk-Kul International Airport on October 28, 2023.

The Akıncı is engineered for both day and night Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions, as well as strike operations. It can be outfitted with electro-optical/infrared and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) payloads, along with a variety of air-to-ground weapons. The UAV's three hardpoints support a 750 kg payload,

compatible with an array of munitions including TEBER-81 and TEBER-82 laser-guided bombs, and L-UMTAS, MAM-L, Cirit, and MAM-C guided missiles. Chad's Akıncı has been observed carrying eight MAM-L munitions and what seems to be a Hensoldt Argos II electro-optical gimbal.

Powered by two PD-170 twin-turbocharged diesel engines, the Akıncı can perform long-endurance operations at altitudes up to 12,000 metres. With an optional satellite communications payload, it can execute beyond line of sight operations. The UAV measures 12.5 metres in length, has a wingspan of 24.2 metres, and can endure up to 50 hours of flight time without weapons.

TAI also offers a maritime patrol variant of the Akıncı, equipped with a synthetic aperture radar, Automatic Identification System (AIS), sonobuoy pod, and magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) boom. Efforts are underway to integrate a lightweight torpedo onto the UAV.

Developed from the combat-tested Anka UAV, the Akıncı has been serving in the Turkish Navy since October 2021. Angola was the first African nation to place an order for the Akıncı, with TAI confirming the contract in March 2023. This followed an initial interest expressed by Angola in 2021, leading to a \$93 million contract for UAVs through the Angolan public corporation Simportex.

Although Algeria was reported to be the first African export customer for the Akıncı, with claims of an acquisition of six aircraft, this has not been officially confirmed.

The acquisition of the Akıncı by Chad comes shortly after the delivery of three Hürkuş-C trainer/light attack aircraft and two Anka UAVs from TAI, which were showcased by President Déby in July 2023. Alongside these aircraft, MAM-L and MAM-C munitions were also introduced into service. In January, Chad's Air Force recognized three pilots and seven technicians who completed qualifications on Hürkuş aircraft.

The ANKA-S and Akıncı share a common hull structure, offering significant benefits in maintenance, repair, training, and logistical support. To further enhance its operational capabilities, Chad sent 20 engineers for training at TUSAŞ.

In a related development, TAI disclosed the delivery of two Hürkuş aircraft to Niger in May 2023, marking the first confirmed export order for the aircraft type.

The Akıncı UAVs will play a crucial role in Chad's defense strategy, particularly in combating terrorism, mercenary activities, kidnappings for ransom, and various forms of banditry. This technological advancement signifies a leap forward in the nation's commitment to maintaining security and stability within its borders and the region.

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SECURITY

Russian troops, weapons arrive Niger



Russia increases its influence in the troubled Sahel region of West Africa with military instructors from the country arriving in Niger on Wednesday, public Radio Television du Niger said late Thursday.

Military instructors and personnel from Russia's defence ministry arrived in Niger on Wednesday, signaling that the West African country is building closer relations with Moscow like its junta-led neighbours.

The military instructors are bringing an air defense system and will train the Nigerien troops, it said in a post on its Facebook page.

RTN showed footage of a military cargo plane unloading gear as people in fatigues stood by. It said the deployment followed a recent agreement between Niger's junta and Russian President Vladimir Putin to boost cooperation.

"We are here to train the Nige-

rien army ... (and) to develop military cooperation between Russia and Niger," said a man in camouflage uniform. Russia had agreed to install an anti-aircraft system in Niger. "Our airspace will now be better protected."

Russia, first through Kremlin-backed Wagner Group mercenaries and now through the creation of the Africa Corps, has been extending its influence in countries in Africa including Mali and the Central African Republic.

Like Mali, which is also ruled by the military, Niger is fighting jihadists and has rejected help from former colonial power France, which had troops in both countries.

The arrival of Russian instructors follows Niger's decision in mid-March to revoke its military accord with the United States that had allowed Pentagon personnel to operate on its soil out of two bases, including a drone base it built at a cost of more than \$100 million.

Since 2020, a string of military coups in Niger and neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso have followed a similar playbook and reshaped international efforts to curb a decade-old fight with Islamist insurgents linked to Al Qaeda and Islamic State.

The three juntas have ended military deals with longstanding allies including France, fostered closer ties with Russia, and formed their own cooperation pact known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

Last December, Russia and Niger agreed to strengthen their military cooperation, as the West African country faces a security and political crisis following a coup in July. A Russian delegation led by the deputy defence minister met with Niger's military leaders in Niamey, in the first official visit by a member of the Russian government since the army ousted the civilian government of President Mohamed Bazoum.

US agrees to pull troops from key drone base in Nigér, as Russian troops arrive

Niger was long a linchpin in the US and French strategy to combat jihadists in West Africa.

Ekene Lionel

The United States has agreed to withdraw its more than 1,000 troops from Niger, officials said, upending its posture in West Africa where the country was home to a major drone base.

The long-expected move effectively marks a new regional gain for Russia, which has ramped up its focus on Africa and backed military regimes in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso. This April, Military instructors and personnel from Russia's defence ministry arrived in Nigér, signaling that the West African country is building closer relations with Moscow like its junta-led neighbours. The military instructors are bringing an air defense system and will train the Nigerien troops.

The arrival of Russian instructors follows Niger's decision in mid-March to revoke its military accord with the United States that had allowed Pentagon personnel to operate on its soil out of two bases, including a drone base it built at a cost of more than \$100 million.

Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell accepted the call to remove troops in a meeting in Washington with the prime minister of the junta, Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, US officials told AFP on condition of anonymity.

They agreed that a US delegation would head

within days to the capital Niamey to arrange an orderly withdrawal, the officials said. Nigerien state television earlier announced that the US officials would visit next week.

The State Department made no immediate public announcement and officials said no timeline was yet set to withdraw the troops.

Niger was long a linchpin in the US and French strategy to combat jihadists in West Africa. The United States built a drone base in the desert city of Agadez at the cost of \$100 million to fly a fleet of drones.

The US has had a significant military presence in Niger, with at least 650 personnel stationed there. In 2016, the US invested approximately \$100 million in constructing a drone base in Agadez, a major intelligence hub in Western Africa. This facility, crucial for surveillance operations against Islamic State and al-Qaeda-linked militants, now faces operational disruptions following Niger's airspace closure.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken in March 2023 became the highest-ranking American ever to visit Niger, vowing economic support for one of the world's poorest countries and seeking to bolster elected president Mohamed Bazoum, a stalwart Western ally.

But the military four months later sacked Bazoum and quickly kicked out troops from former colonial power France. The Sahel region has been plagued by jihadist activity, leading to instability and coups in Niger and neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, which have now formed a military alliance. The Nigerien army's overthrow of elected President Mohamed Bazoum last July, citing security concerns, and the subsequent departure of French troops, mark a significant shift in the country's military and foreign policy.

Unlike its anger toward France, the junta initially sounded an openness to maintaining its longtime defense relationship with the United States.

President Joe Biden's administration, however, has refused to mute concerns, insisting on the return of civilian rule and the release of Bazoum. After the July coup, the U.S. temporarily halted drone operations but has recently managed to resume a portion of these missions, primarily focused on ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) flights for force protection rather than direct counter-terrorism activities.

Meanwhile, in the wake of a recent coup in Niger, the United States and France are actively exploring alternative countries to host their drone bases for



U.S. Army Soldiers, assigned to 37th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 125th Infantry Regiment, 1st Battalion, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, board a CH-47 Chinook helicopter after a live-fire exercise at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, July 7, 2023. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Timothy VanDusen

counter-terrorism and surveillance missions. The coup in the West African nation has led to a significant reevaluation of their military presence in the region.

Russian military instructors arrived in Niger last month with an air defense system and other equipment, state media said, after talks between military ruler General Abdourahamane Tiani and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Nigerien military had announced in a statement on state television that it was breaking off a defense agreement with the United States

with immediate effect.

But diplomats said the Nigerian leadership had sent mixed messages and the United States initially said it was awaiting confirmation.

The United States puts a high priority on troops' safety, and concerns rose when thousands rallied outside the National Assembly headquarters chanting for US troops to leave.

Despite maintaining dialogue with the junta, the United States has for months been preparing for the likelihood it will need to exit Niger.



LEFT:
Airmen stationed at Nigerien Air Base 101 in Niamey, Niger, and Air Base 201 in Agadez, support partner forces and international efforts to counter violent extremist organizations in the region. U.S. Air Forces Africa

RIGHT:
U.S. airmen prepare an MQ-9 Reaper for flight at Creech Air Force Base, Nev., on May 15, 2014. (Nadine Barclay/U.S. Air Force)

SECURITY

General James Hecker, the US Air Force commander for both Europe and Africa, said late last year that the United States was in discussions for “several locations” elsewhere in West Africa to station drones.

While not publicly asking to station drones, the United States has pursued close cooperation with coastal democracies including Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast in view of possibly locating a drone base.

Western governments feared that the remote Sahel will offer a new hub for Islamist militants after jihadists overran much of Mali in 2012 as part of a rebellion by ethnic Tuaregs.

With Niger seen as comparatively stable, the United States based its drones in Agadez, building the site known as Air Base 101.

The United States resumed drone operations after the July coup in Niger but one of its main functions soon became surveillance for the sake of protecting the US troops based there.

With support from both parties, the United States in recent years has been retrenching its once sprawling military network set up as part of the “war on terror” following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Representative Matt Gaetz, a hard-right Republican known for his brash statements, wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Niger was an “extraordinary Biden foreign policy failure” and urged the safe withdrawal of troops.

Last October, French military forces began their withdrawal from Niger, with the first group of troops departing for France under the protection of the Nigerien Armed Forces.

French soldiers left their bases in Niger in a ground convoy under local escort, “heading for Chad”, said the military regime in power in Niamey since the end of July. This operation aims to bring all French soldiers

back to France by the end of 2023. The withdrawal follows last month’s announcement by French President Emmanuel Macron that France would recall its ambassador and end all military cooperation with Niger in response to a coup.

Niger had been a key security partner for both France and the United States, who used the country as a base to combat Islamist insurgents in the wider Sahel region of West and Central Africa. The departure of French forces represents a significant shift in the security landscape of the region.

French military involvement in the Sahel region had been part of Operation Barkhane, which aimed to counter Islamist extremist groups. However, the coup in Niger and the resulting diplomatic tensions have led to the end of this mission. The impact of the withdrawal on security efforts in the Sahel is substantial.

Some 1,400 French soldiers and airmen were deployed in the country to fight jihadists alongside European Union forces, and the Nigeriens, including around 1,000 in Niamey and 400 at two forward bases in the west, at Ouallam and Tabarey-Barey, in the heart of the so-called “three borders” zone with Mali and Burkina Faso.





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