ADVERSARY ENTENTE

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The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is launching a task force that will examine the strategic interactions between the United States' main adversaries: Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Iran, and North Korea. The new Adversary Entente Task Force will produce weekly products providing assessments on major developments between these adversaries in order to more holistically examine the evolution of the Entente, assess prospects of cooperation, and determine exploitable vulnerabilities within these adversary relationships. Adversary Entente Task Force publications will supplement the regional expertise in ISW's existing Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, Iran Update, and China-Taiwan Weekly Update.

Key takeaways:

- **Iranian nuclear negotiations:** Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to facilitate the United States-Iran nuclear negotiations. Putin likely seeks to portray Russia as a useful collaborator and partner that the United States needs to achieve certain global outcomes. It is far from clear, however, that Russia has the leverage to help secure a nuclear agreement.
- **Iranian military learning:** The Iranian Supreme National Defense University published its first-ever analysis on military lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war. The analysis may reflect whatever consensus is forming in the Iranian military establishment. The analytical insights focus especially on strategic innovation, tactical and operational drone operations, electronic warfare, and ground combat.
- **PRC-Russian tensions:** Russian intelligence has reportedly grown concerned about PRC espionage since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war. The FSB has reportedly concerned that the PRC seeks to exploit the Russian focus on fighting Ukraine, according to the *New York Times*. The PRC is specifically interested in recruiting spies and obtaining sensitive military information.
- **Russia-North Korea cooperation:** Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu recently visited North Korea, highlighting the reality that the expanding Russian-North Korea ties are an enduring geopolitical shift rather than a temporary alignment of interests. Shoigu's visit, during which he met with Kim Jong Un is his second to North Korea in less than three months.

Iranian nuclear negotiations

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to facilitate the United States-Iran nuclear negotiations. Putin likely seeks to portray Russia as a useful collaborator and partner that the United States needs to achieve certain global outcomes. Putin held a phone call with US President Donald Trump on June 4, during which they discussed the nuclear talks. Putin said that he "could be helpful" in quickly concluding negotiations with Iran and emphasized that Iran must make a "decision" "quickly," according to Trump.[1] Kremlin Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov claimed that Trump said during the call that the United States may need Russian help and would be grateful if Russia could work with Iran in the nuclear negotiations.[2] Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Ryabkov met with Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali on June 5 and discussed the Iranian nuclear program, the United States-Iran talks, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors meeting that includes discussions on Iranian non-compliance with its nuclear commitments.[3] Ryabkov said on June 8 that Russia is actively seeking "negotiated solutions" regarding the nuclear negotiations.[4]

Russian officials have signaled in recent months that the Kremlin is interested in mediating the nuclear negotiations. *Bloomberg* reported on March 4, citing people familiar with the matter, that Russia agreed to assist the Trump Administration in communicating with Iran, and Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told *Bloomberg* that Russia is "ready to do everything in its power" to help the United States and Iran negotiate.[5] Ushakov claimed on March 4 in response to a question about the *Bloomberg* article that the United States and Russia agreed during negotiations in Riyadh on February 18 to hold separate talks about the Iranian nuclear program.[6]

Putin's offer comes as the nuclear negotiations are at an impasse and may collapse. Iran has consistently rejected the US demand that Iran halt all nuclear enrichment.[7] The United States and E3 proposed a resolution that formally declares Iran as noncompliant with its nuclear safeguarding obligations during the IAEA Board of Governors meeting on June 11.[8] The resolution sets conditions for the E3 to impose international snapback sanctions against Iran through a stipulation in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JPCOA) agreement.[9] Iranian officials threatened in November 2024 to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) if the United States acted "coercively" against Iran or if the E3 imposes snapback mechanisms, though Iran has long threatened to withdraw from the NPT outside the current situation.[10] Iran recently threatened to expand its nuclear program if the IAEA passes the E3 noncompliance resolution.[11]

Russia likely seeks its intervention in the nuclear talks to help reset United States-Russia relations on Russian terms while avoiding an escalation in the Middle East that could adversely impact Russian interests. Russia has historically opposed Iran's nuclear weapons program and views it as a threat to Russian security interests in the Middle East.[12] Russia sought to limit the Iranian nuclear program during JPCOA negotiations in 2014 and 2015, and Russian officials have since said that Iran should fulfill its obligations under the JPCOA and the NPT and that Russia opposes the emergence of nuclear weapons-enabled states.[13] Russia also likely aims to avoid the consequences that failing to reach a nuclear deal may have on regional security and the Russian war effort in Ukraine. Israeli officials reportedly threatened to conduct

preemptive strikes against Iran should Trump signal that the nuclear negotiations have failed.[14] The advent of Iran entering an armed conflict with the United States or Israel would risk destabilizing Iran, which has becoming a close strategic partner to Russia, and possibly constrain the Iranian ability to supply Russia with weapons and components for its war in Ukraine, especially for the long-range Shahed drones on which Russia is reliant for its increasingly large strike packages.[15] Russia may also seek to negotiate a deal in order to avoid the constraints that snapback sanctions may impose on Iran's ability to export drones and drone components for Russia's war against Ukraine.

Russia also lacks the bandwidth to support Iran militarily in the event of an escalation with Israel or the United States due to the war in Ukraine, and Russia likely seeks to avoid the reputational impacts of failing to assist a strategic partner. Russia is technically not obligated to provide military assistance to Iran in an armed conflict under the January 2025 Russian-Iranian strategic partnership agreement. Still, it has already proved itself an unreliable partner in its failure to prevent the fall of Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria in December 2024 and suffered a strategic political defeat in the region.[16] Russia likely hopes to avoid another situation in which its promise as a strategic partner is called into question.

Putin likely also hopes to intervene in the nuclear talks in order to present himself to Trump as the only possible mediator who can facilitate a satisfactory nuclear deal with Iran. Putin has been attempting to reset US-Russian relations on terms beneficial to Russia and detrimental to the United States since November 2024, as he continues efforts to delay and protract peace negotiations in Ukraine and extract concessions not related to the war from the West, including the United States.[17] Putin's agreement to intervene with Iran on behalf of the United States likely supports Putin's effort to portray himself as an agreeable and desirable negotiating partner to the United States and to create the impression that he is amenable to restoring bilateral relations despite making no indication of being willing to compromise.[18]

Putin may ultimately want a nuclear deal for the economic benefits that it may entail for Russia. The removal of international sanctions on Iran would likely lead to Russia expanding some economic cooperation with Iran as well as using the Iranian market as an additional means to bypass international sanctions against Russia. Furthermore, Iran would regain the ability to sell crude oil to customers across the globe rather than sending the vast majority of its crude exports to the People's Republic of China, as Iran does currently. Iran and Russia both depend heavily on the revenue that they derive from crude sales to the PRC. Russia may have an opportunity to expand its sales to the PRC if Iran begins exporting more crude elsewhere.

It is far from clear, however, that Russia has the leverage to help secure a United States-Iran nuclear agreement. Both Trump and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei explicitly said that they will not compromise on their respective positions on Iran's ability to domestically enrich uranium.[19] Neither Trump nor Khamenei is likely to take steps that would undermine their publicly stated red lines. Putin will likely be unable to leverage Russia's strategic relations with Iran to compel Khamenei to act against Iranian interests, which reflects the strict limits of Russo-Iranian cooperation. Both Russia and Iran describe their partnership as mutually beneficial, but this does not require that either country act outside its best interests in order to assist the other. Iran

and Russia's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement notably lacks a mutual defense clause, for example. Iran may believe that Putin can convince Trump to back down from his stipulation that Iran not conduct any nuclear enrichment on Iranian soil. Iran may also believe that a Russian-brokered settlement would result in a nuclear deal unfavorable to the United States and provide Iran with more latitude to continue its nuclear weapons program while avoiding snapback sanctions. Russia is unlikely to secure a deal at all, much less one explicitly favorable to either Iran or the United States so long as Khamenei and Trump remain firm on their respective nuclear enrichment terms.

Russia has notably not diverged from its unified position with the PRC on the nuclear negotiations, despite Putin's outreach to the US administration on this issue. Russia and the PRC have both consistently opposed stated US objectives in the nuclear talks by supporting Iran's "right" to enrich uranium, though neither state supports the development of an Iranian nuclear weapon.[20] Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi met with the Chinese and Russian ambassadors to the United Nations on June 3 to likely encourage them to challenge efforts to impose snapback sanctions on Iran, and senior Russian officials have rallied around Iran to disparage the upcoming non-compliance resolution in the days since Gharibabadi's meeting.[21] Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov criticized on June 8 the non-compliance resolution that the United States and the E3 will submit to the IAEA Board of Governors meeting between June 9 and 13.[22] Russian Ambassador to Iran Alexei Dedov confirmed to Iranian state media on June 8 that Russia supports a resolution to the negotiations on "terms acceptable to our friends in Tehran."[23] Ryabkov criticized on June 5 the upcoming IAEA Board of Governors meeting and condemned the upcoming "anti-Iranian initiatives" from IAEA member states.[24]

Iran's strategic economic and defense ties with Russia and the PRC may offer a modicum of future relief for Iran as the collapse of the talks appears more likely. Russia and the PRC are highly likely to continue to assist Iran in circumventing future sanctions and supporting the rebuilding of infrastructure destroyed in a potential Israeli strike. The imposition of snapback sanctions would require all UN member states, including Russia and the PRC, to impose full sanctions on Iran. It is highly doubtful that Russia and China will enforce such measures against Iran, however, given their historic efforts to help Iran evade previous sanctions.

Iran has relied on both Russia and the PRC to mitigate the effects of US sanctions on the Iranian economy and to maintain Iran's regional posture and material support for its Axis of Resistance. The PRC, for example, purchases around 90 percent of Iran's oil exports at a discount, which has been a key lifeline for Iran's economy amid heavy sanctions.[25] PRC-based entities have also provided military or dual-use products to Iran.[26] A recent report from the *Wall Street Journal* indicates that Iran recently ordered thousands of tons of ammonium perchlorate from PRC-based entities to replenish Iranian solid-fuel ballistic missile stockpiles after Israel destroyed Iranian solid-fuel production sites in October 2024.[27] The PRC government is almost certainly aware of the shipments, despite denials by government spokespeople, because Iran has reportedly negotiated with the PRC to acquire missile propellant. *Politico* cited unspecified diplomats in April 2023 who said that Iran was negotiating with both Russia and the PRC to acquire large

quantities of ammonium perchlorate, which the diplomats said at the time could be used to produce missile propellant for missiles that Iran exports to Russia.[28]

Iran has simultaneously expanded economic cooperation with Russia since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine in order to undermine the Western sanctions imposed on both countries. Economic cooperation between Russia and Iran is a critical component of the broader Russo-Iranian strategic partnership. Iran has been able to exploit the revenue from its weapons sales to Russia to generate revenue for the Iranian economy.[29] Russian foreign investment and trade with Iran, including in the energy sector, has provided critical support to the Iranian economy and will likely continue to do so.

Iranian officials likely recognize that Iran can rely upon Russian and PRC support if snapback sanctions are reinstated and in the case of an Israeli or US strike. The well-established mechanisms of Russian and PRC assistance to help Iran circumvent international sanctions may have in part influenced Iran's uncompromising stance in negotiations with the United States. Continued Russia-PRC support will not fully shield Iran from the impacts of reimposed UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions or an Israeli or US strike on nuclear facilities or defense production sites, however.

Iran may more aggressively pursue cooperation with Russia and the PRC as sanctions and a possible Israeli strike loom. Iran has already taken some steps to rapidly increase cooperation with the PRC in particular after the imposition of the US maximum pressure campaign. Iran has increased oil exports to the PRC ahead of anticipated sanctions enforcement as part of the US maximum pressure campaign, which aims to reduce Iranian oil exports to zero.[30] US media reported that recent US sanctions on PRC independent refineries may be disrupting this oil trade, however, as Iranian crude oil exports to the PRC declined by about 26 percent in May compared to April.[31] Snapback sanctions or another bout of conflict with Israel may push Iran to more aggressively pursue cooperation with Russia and the PRC by necessity. Existing sanctions-evasion mechanisms that all three actors have employed in the past may be untenable under a stricter sanctions regime. The United States and international community must recognize that the factors that drive Iran-Russia-PRC cooperation are unlikely to fade under the economic impacts of international sanctions and concern over possible military action.

Iranian military learning

Iran's Supreme National Defense University (SDNU) recently published its first-ever analysis on the military lessons that Iran can learn from Russia's war in Ukraine.[1] The analysis is from the Spring 2025 edition of a strategic defense studies journal and covers the war from 2022 to the end of 2023**.** The SNDU is a subordinate entity to the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff and offers an advanced education in military doctrine, strategy, and management.[32] Many of Iran's senior-most military officers teach at the SNDU and co-author papers with doctoral students. The SDNU publishes a variety of defense and security-related journals and, given its direct subordination to the Iranian armed forces and close collaboration with senior military thinkers in Iran, its academic output is generally a reflection of whatever preliminary consensus is forming in the wider Iranian military establishment. The insights in this publication can be taken as the first instance of codification of the military establishment's consensus on lessons from Ukraine.

The publication's author begins by contextualizing the SDNU's stance on the war in Ukraine and amplifies several well-known and long-standing Russian information operations about the causes of the war in Ukraine, citing NATO's alleged eastward expansion and Russian security concerns, the need for a new "multipolar" world order with a weakened United States and Western coalition, and shifting regional power dynamics. The author also somewhat downplays Iran's own involvement in the war on Russia's behalf, noting that "Western pressure on Iran will continue to prevent Iran from playing an active role alongside Russia." The publication then concludes with a series of lessons learned for the Iranian military in thirteen different realms: command and leadership; structure and methods; organization; training; ground operations; naval operations; air operations; missile operations; cyber and electronic warfare; internal security; external security; internal consequences; and external consequences.

Iran has shifted its doctrinal emphasis over the last decade to focus on a more offensive strategy, premised on transforming the Iranian fighting force for external operations and expanding Iran's offensive arsenal.[33] The war in Ukraine offers several valuable lessons that would support Iran's wider offensive pivot. The SDNU analysis distills four insights that are particularly notable given current conditions and developments in Ukraine: strategic-level innovation; tactical and operational-level drone operations; electronic warfare (EW) lessons; and lessons for the ground war.

Strategic-level innovation:

The author of the paper is clear about the role of rapid technological and tactical innovation in Ukraine. They note that in conditions of pervasive attrition, "whichever side can innovate more will ultimately prevail," and highlight the fact that battlefield conditions impact technological development by accelerating the innovation cycle. ISW has previously assessed that the war in Ukraine can be characterized in part by an extremely rapid battlefield technological-tactical innovation loop, which can drive major changes across the thousand-plus-kilometer long frontline in two to three weeks.[34] The technological-tactical innovation cycle will be critical in all future conflicts, including any in which Iran becomes involved (such as a potential war with a technologically-savvy adversary, such as Israel). Russia and Ukraine are displaying the role of this strategic-level innovation in the way that Russia deploys Iranian-provided drones and the way in which Ukraine innovates and iterates defenses against Iranian drones.[35] The author also emphasizes the outsized role that Ukraine's civil society (namely start-ups and non-governmental organizations [NGOs]) has played in stimulating and supporting defense innovation—something with which Ukraine has succeeded but Russia has struggled.[36] Iranian civil society may struggle to undertake similar technological and tactical support functions for the Iranian military, however, due to the Iranian regimes' control over Iranian domestic society.

Tactical and operational-level drone innovation and operation:

The publication pays much attention to the proliferation of drones on the battlefield in Ukraine, which is an understandable focus given Tehran's view that drones are a key feature of its national security and defense strategy and given the prominent role that Iranian drones are currently playing on the battlefield in Ukraine.[37] The author notes

that the integration of ground, aerial, and naval drones into broader weapons systems and offensive capabilities "is critical" and advocates that Iran networks (merges and combines) drone and missile capabilities. The author also highlights the combined use of commercial and non-commercial drones—a frequent feature of the battlefield in Ukraine as both sides are widely fielding both cheap dual-use drones and more exquisite and expensive drones to accomplish a wide range of battlefield effects.[38] Drone operation is a critical component of Iran's wider military doctrine, and lessons from Ukraine will allow Tehran to bolster its drone-use theory for future conflicts.[39] The publication does over-estimate the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled drones in Ukraine, however. Neither Ukraine nor Russia have been able to field AI drones at scale as of June 2025, so the author's prediction of a fully automated and robotic battlefield is not yet a reality and likely will not be in the immediate to medium-term.[40]

Electronic warfare (EW) lessons:

The SDNU publication devotes an entire section of recommendations to the realm of cyber and electronic warfare. EW innovation in particular has been a core component of the war in Ukraine, with both sides investing heavily in EW development and generating unprecedented new EW capabilities.[41] The author emphasizes the importance of creating specialized EW structures and of maximizing training for EW specialists, as well as the need to generally improve the performance of launched projectiles such as drones and missiles in the face of adversary EW. The author may be drawing lessons from Russia's successful defense against Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive, wherein Russian EW capabilities greatly hindered Ukrainian communications and ground maneuverability.[42] Iran sees EW as a critical component of its wider hybrid warfare toolkit, so these tactical EW lessons will be important to Iran's planning for future conflicts.[43] Israeli media speculated in August 2024 that Russia had transferred several EW systems to Iran, but these reports remain unconfirmed as of June 2025.[44]

The ground war:

The author makes several notable recommendations for ground operations that elucidate where Iran is looking to Ukraine for military inspiration. The publication highlights several facts that are commonplace in Ukraine—for example, the need to ensure troop and equipment mobility throughout the battlespace, and the need to avoid massing armor and equipment in dense, easy-to target-areas where drones or artillery strikes can inflict maximal damage. The author also makes the suggestion to "network" drones and artillery in combat alongside other navigation systems, potentially a reflection of the fact that both Russia and Ukraine have come to use a combination of artillery fires and tactical drone strikes to recreate some of the tactical effects of traditional counterbattery operations in a way that increases the survivability of towed artillery systems.[45]

Iran has already displayed a propensity to implement tactical lessons from Ukraine into aspects of its offensive doctrine. Iran's Artesh Ground Forces unveiled three new tactical drones on May 22, the technical specifics of which suggest that Iran is already looking to institutionalize some tactical lessons from Ukraine into its domestic drone arsenal.[46] The newly unveiled Homa drone, for example, appears to be hardened in some fashion against EW disruptions, suggesting that Artesh is attuned to the role of EW in anti-drone defenses.[47] The newly unveiled Shahin-1 high-speed first

person-view (FPV) drone is meant to strike stationary and mobile targets, which may be a reflection of Ukraine's use of similar small and quick-moving FPV drones to inflict damage on moving Russian armor and stationary Russian air defense radars. On a more strategic level, Iran's April and October 2024 attacks on Israel stand as clear evidence of Iran's integration of lessons learned from observing Russia's use of multilayered missile and drone strikes on Ukraine.[48] These two strikes were generally unsuccessful, however, and Iran is likely to struggle implementing lessons from Ukraine effectively and at scale throughout its military due to a variety of bureaucratic and organizational challenges.

Iran may also be learning rhetorical lessons from Russia's nuclear brinksmanship operations, which the Kremlin has employed and honed against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. The SNDU publication remarked on Russia's use of "nuclear threat rhetoric against enemies" and warned of an increase in nuclear competition and escalation as a result. The Kremlin has frequently invoked nuclear threats in order to influence the battlefield situation and to discourage partner support for Ukraine.[49] Iran, by contrast, is at least publicly committed to Supreme Leader Khamenei's fatwa that forbids nuclear weapons under Islamic law, which has historically amounted to somewhat of a taboo on public discussions of nuclear weaponization.[50] Conversations about reversing this edict, as well as more full-throated domestic discussions of Iran's nuclear aspirations, have become far more common recently, however.[51] Iran may be learning from the success that Russia has had in weaponizing nuclear rhetoric to achieve both battlefield and policy outcomes (such as dissuading Western support for Ukraine) and is attempting to recreate some of these rhetorical effects by normalizing nuclear discussions at home.

North Korea-Russia relations

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu's recent visit to North Korea highlights the fact that North Korea's substantial material support for Russia's war likely represents an enduring geopolitical shift rather than a temporary alignment of interests. Shoigu met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on June 4. He thanked Kim for the contribution of North Korean troops in repelling Ukrainian forces from Russia's Kursk Oblast, reportedly saying that they "defended the precious part of the Russian territory as their own motherland, fighting shoulder to shoulder with Russian soldiers in the same trench."[52] Kim, in turn, told Shoigu that North Korea would "unconditionally support" Russia in its war in Ukraine and in international affairs.[53] The press service of the Russian Security Council said that the purpose of the meeting was to "discuss implementation of certain provisions of the Russia-North Korea treaty on comprehensive strategic partnership, and efforts to perpetuate the memory of Korean warriors, who helped to liberate the Kursk Region."[54] This is Shoigu's second meeting with Kim in less than three months. Official readouts from their previous meeting on March 21 were vague, likely because Russia and North Korea had not yet publicly confirmed that North Korean troops were fighting in Russia.[55]

Russia and North Korea are signaling that their strengthening relationship and military cooperation are an enduring partnership based on their June 2024 treaty. Shoigu met with North Korean Minister of State Security Ri Chang-dae on May 29 as part of the

multilateral 13th International Meeting of High Representatives for Security issues in Moscow.[56] Shoigu said after the meeting that Moscow-Pyongyang relations were "developing quite vigorously" and that the 2024 treaty is "a full-fledged agreement, which is not only on paper, but also on the battlefield, where our Korean brothers are fighting in the trenches shoulder to shoulder, back to back." Shoigu also said that North Korea's international isolation was wrong. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in September 2024 that Russia no longer opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons program.[57]

Russia is openly partnering with North Korea and involving it in its efforts to create a new multilateral world order in opposition to the United States. Shoigu's comments and Kim's pronouncement that North Korea would "unconditionally" support Russia in "crucial international political issues," including Ukraine, both clearly signal that the two countries intend to pursue close collaboration even now that North Korea's fighting in Kursk appears to be over. North Korean State Security Minister Ri pledged during his meeting with Shoigu that North Korea would help Russia build a multipolar world, and reportedly also discussed cooperation on intelligence sharing.[58]

The Russia-North Korea agreement, which Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed in June 2024, is the legal pretext for North Korea's intervention in Kursk and, in part, the basis for Russia's increased military, economic, and technological aid to North Korea. The treaty obligates each country to immediately provide military aid to the other if it is invaded, "in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter" and their own laws. It also calls for bilateral cooperation to strengthen defense, advance cooperation in science and technology, including "peaceful atomic energy" and AI, and opposition to "unilateral compulsory measures," such as US sanctions.[59]

An international investigation and Ukrainian intelligence found that Russia has provided North Korea with military technology, including at least one Pantsir surface-to-air missile system and Shahed drones, as repayment for North Korean military aid to Russia, in violation of UN sanctions. The Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team (MSMT) released its inaugural report on May 29 detailing unlawful arms transfers between Russia and North Korea in 2024. The MSMT is a group of 11 UN member states established in October 2024 to monitor compliance with North Korea-related sanctions, replacing the UN Panel of Experts that ended after Russia vetoed a 2024 UN Resolution to extend its mandate. The MSMT report cited intelligence from an unspecified participating state that Russia used cargo aircraft to provide North Korea with short-range air defense systems and advanced EW systems, including jamming equipment, and also transferred "operational knowledge" on how to use these systems. A member state said that Russia has transferred at least one Pantsir-class mobile air defense system to North Korea. The Pantsir is designed to target aerial targets, including fixed and rotary wing-aircraft, cruise missiles, precision munitions, and drones, and presents North Korea with more advanced air defense options than it previously had. The MSMT report also noted that Russia gave North Korea data feedback on the performance of its ballistic missiles, enabling technical improvements in missile guidance. These arms transfers are a clear violation of the UN arms embargo on North Korea.[60] The MSMT report found that Russia also far exceeded an UN-imposed cap on refined oil exports to North Korea, supplying North Korea with over a million barrels of

oil from March to October 2024, according to estimates from satellite imagery, emphasizing Russia's economic support for North Korea. A North Korean foreign ministry official denounced the MSMT report as a fabrication, a "political provocation," and a violation of North Korea's sovereignty, according to KCNA.[61]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov noted in an interview on June 7 that Russia is transferring knowledge and technology to North Korea for the manufacture of Iranian-origin Shahed drones. North Korea may use this manufacturing capability to build Shaheds and Shahed analogues either for Russia or for its own military. Shahed drones would enable North Korea to strike targets anywhere in South Korea, possibly in volumes large enough to overwhelm South Korean air defenses, which Budanov emphasized would change the military balance on the Korean peninsula.[62] Russia frequently uses Shaheds in high volumes to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems.

Russia-PRC intelligence community tensions:

Russian intelligence has reportedly been concerned about increased PRC espionage efforts since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[63] The *New York Times* reported on June 7 that it reviewed an internal planning document obtained from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB)'s Department for Counterintelligence Operations indicating that the FSB has been concerned that the PRC would exploit Russia's focus on Ukraine to increase intelligence operations aimed at recruiting spies, acquiring Russian military technology, and gaining insight into Western military weapons encountered on the battlefield. The report noted that it could not independently verify the document but that six Western intelligence agencies assessed that the document is authentic, and the *New York Times* assessed that the document was likely written in late 2023 or early 2024. The report noted that Russia created a new "Entente-4" counterintelligence program immediately before the February 2022 invasion to counter PRC spies and that the PRC had stepped up its efforts to recruit Russian officials, experts, journalists, and businesspeople closer to Russian power verticals since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine. The FSB document reportedly indicated that Russia had increased its counterespionage of PRC social media application WeChat and that the FSB sought to balance countering the PRC's intelligence in Russia with Russia's growing cooperation with the PRC. Russia and the PRC notably signed on Deepening Cooperation, Entering a New Era" in March 2023 and have increased bilateral cooperation since, including overt support of Russia's war in Ukraine.[64] PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Lin Jian responded to a question about the article that he is not aware of the article and that Sino-Russian relations are not directed against or affected by any third party.[65]

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