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CHINA: Aggressive Actions Indicate New Strategy Towards Taiwan

Summary: In 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared at the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that his administration's hardline approach to cross-strait now constitutes official policy. Xi has taken unprecedented, diplomatic, economic, political subversion, and military actions towards Taiwan, the current ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and its leader, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. These aggressive actions indicate a new approach by Beijing towards achieving unification with Taiwan.

Promote Diplomatic Isolation: Xi's actions suggest a strategic goal to slowly delegitimize Taiwan and to lessen an international response in case of a cross-strait military crisis arises. After Tsai was elected in 2016, Beijing ended its tacit "diplomatic truce" with Taiwan and since employed a series of diplomatic attacks to isolate Taipei from the international community. In 2018, El Salvador, The Gambia, Sao Tome and Principe, Burkina Faso, and Dominican Republic all canceled diplomatic relations with Taipei to foster better relations with Beijing. Additionally, Beijing prevented Taiwan from participating in multiple international forums that it traditionally held access to such as INTERPOL, the UN World Health Assembly, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Exploit Economic Dependency: Due to Taiwan's enormous economic reliance on China, Beijing's policies can easily threaten economic harm to Taipei, allowing Beijing to maintain leverage against Taipei if it does not obey Beijing's demands. Moreover, China continues to grow as Taiwan's primary trading partner, giving China more economic leverage over Taiwan. Additionally, in February 2018, Xi's administration released a set of incentives, including tax breaks and government subsidies, to attract Taiwanese workers and students as a tactic to hurt Taiwan's economy while subsequently making mainland China more appealing to younger generations. To further harm Taiwan's economy, China changed its travel laws in 2016 to make travel to Taiwan from China much more difficult, which resulted in a 22 percent decrease in Chinese tourism to Taiwan. Developing Chinese economic influence in Taiwan will likely continue, signaling Xi's attempts to gain favor amongst Taiwanese citizens, harm Taiwan's economy, and overall deter support for the DPP.

Push Political Propaganda: Beijing's increase in subversion tactics against Taipei and the DPP likely reflect Xi's efforts to infiltrate Taiwan's democratic system to weaken public support for the DPP. In 2017, China began to spread disinformation via social media with the use of bots and content farms (a website that contains or aggregates large quantities of typically low-quality content, generated purely to ensure that it appears in top results on search engines) to flood Taiwan with pro-Beijing propaganda. Additionally, in July 2017, China sparked protests against the DPP and Tsai's administration. The most invasive tactic that Xi implemented, however, is using Beijing's intelligence to conduct outreach and support opposition parties and politicians that align with Xi's preferred cross-strait policy.

Intimidate Militarily: Beijing has shown a willingness to use its military might to challenge Taiwan's state and political sovereignty. Major increases in military demonstrations near Taiwan, under Xi, demonstrates Beijing's more aggressive posture towards Taipei. For example, on 31 March, Chinese aircraft crossed the maritime line, which separates China and Taiwan.

Additionally, in April 2018, China conducted its largest naval training exercise ever in the Taiwan Strait, and the first of its kind since 2015. Finally, China maintains a large arsenal of short-range ballistic missiles across the Taiwan Strait. Although the number of missiles remained stagnant since the early 2000's, Xi's emphasis on military development resulted in an increase in lethality through warhead and accuracy advancements in recent years. As a result, China's missile posture puts Taiwan at a disadvantage and thus allows Beijing to effectively intimidate Taipei. Consequently, Xi's uses a strategy of developing a top-tier military and increasing PLA exercises to intimidate Taiwanese voters to not support DPP or any other independence movements.

Outlook and Implications: Beijing's new aggressive strategy towards Taiwan under Xi, seems to seek complete unification between the two states, a breakaway from his predecessors whose strategies rather aimed to deter Taiwan from achieving de jure independence. Recent polls suggest that Xi's combined strategy of utilizing diplomatic, economic, political subversion, and military actions is working to undermine support for Tsai Ing-wen and the DPP, although Xi's aggressive strategy likely shows his true intention of causing overall political division in Taiwan. A divided Taiwan paired with the threat of complete war will likely inhibit Taipei from being able to muster a unified defense against Beijing's rapidly growing influence and military. China, as a result, could achieve such an advantageous position relative to Taiwan that Beijing can force Taipei to submit power without a major conflict, allowing Beijing to avoid a full scale war with Taiwan and possibly the United States. Much as, after being completely surrounded, Beijing submitted to Mao's People's Liberation Army in 1949 without a shot being fired.

If Taiwan falls to China without any significant opposition, Beijing will effectively gain control of the first island chain with an unscathed military allowing Beijing to extend their reach eastward into the Pacific and fulfilling Xi's current personal ambitions. This will allow Beijing to position its fleet on the southern flanks of South Korea and Japan, and access to the Luzon strait, overall, granting Xi with a newfound geostrategic advantage.



[Cade Seely, Andrew Ruffini, Riley Coder]

GREAT BRITAIN: New Deal Likely Due to Bipartisan Collaboration

Summary: As the new Brexit date quickly approaches, British Prime Minister Theresa May plans to work with opposition leader to create a new Brexit deal.

Development: On 2 April, May announced a plan to work with Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour party, to discuss a potential compromise for a Brexit deal. This comes 10 days before the new Brexit date of 12 April, which May negotiated with a European Union commission. The EU will also hold an emergency summit on 10 April to potentially approve a deal. The British Parliament has voted down all proposed deals brought to its floor, leading to the decision to postpone Brexit. EU leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron urged the UK to propose and approve a new deal to avoid a no-deal situation, and May released a statement citing plans to leave the EU with a deal.

Analysis: With increasing pressure from both British citizens and the EU, May and Corbyn will likely create some form of a compromise to propose to Parliament and the EU commission. Although previous Brexit deals did not pass, Corbyn's input on the new deal will give it a higher chance of passing in Parliament. Both leaders likely have an increased sense of urgency with an even tighter deadline, which increases the chances of reaching a deal. British citizens will likely continue pressing lawmakers to pass a deal, although the public does not agree on what the deal should look like. The direct collaboration of May and Corbyn has a strong potential to produce a compromise, as they have previously held opposite ideas of what a Brexit deal should look like.

[Alli McIntyre]

[ISRAEL: Disinformation Campaign Discovered Ahead of Upcoming Election](#)

Summary: A network of false social media accounts has escalated efforts to promote Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for Israel's premiership as the final week prior to the 9 April election begins, complicating an already contentious election.

Development: On 31 March, an Israeli watchdog organization discovered an extensive network of false Twitter and Facebook accounts used to promote Netanyahu through smear campaigns against his opponents. Notable members of Netanyahu's Likud party frequently reposted messages from accounts linked to the fake network, but the watchdog found no direct connections among the network to Likud officials or Netanyahu. Officials speculate this network behaves more complexly than other social media influence campaigns around the world, as the network intertwines apparently real people with fake or duplicate accounts. Additionally, the network operates in sync primarily through people under false names, rather than bots, and focuses on tarnishing opponent Benny Gantz' reputation.

Analysis: The disinformation campaign executed by the network of false accounts will likely bolster Netanyahu in polling for the upcoming election despite its public discovery, increasing the chances of a Netanyahu victory. This network demonstrates a higher level of sophistication than similar operations due to its lack of bots and the fact that accounts exploit current events at opportune moments. Additionally, although the watchdog found no direct connection to the Likud campaign, the network operates in parallel with the ideology of Netanyahu, likely signaling a connection to some of his supporters.

[Riley Coder]

[MALI: Peacekeepers Withdraw Amid Escalating Violence](#)

Summary: Canada and the Netherlands plan to withdraw troops from the UN operation in Mali, potentially leading to a power vacuum.

Development: On 29 March, Canada and the Netherlands announced plans to withdraw from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) despite UN requests for an increased peacekeeping presence. The UN considers MINUSMA the most perilous of its peacekeeping missions, and forces face upwards of 20 different armed groups, including the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), in Mali. Ethnic tensions between the Dogon and Fulani ethnic groups further complicate the UN mission in Mali, with the dispute between the Dogon and Fulani shifting from a regional conflict to a full-scale ethnic cleansing. Tensions between these groups run deep but most recently the Dogon, backed by Mali's military, have targeted the Fulani, claiming the Fulani partner with and support terrorist groups. The UN did not interfere in the ethnic massacre earlier this month, and Mali's government failed to resolve the conflict.

Analysis: If the ethnic war between the Fulani and Dogon continues, armed groups will likely take advantage of the situation to expand their influence, escalating tensions until the conflict becomes catastrophic. If the Fulani do side with the armed groups, as the Dogon accuses it of doing, it may provide the Fulani with the resources to escalate the violence with the Dogon. Mali already lost parts of the country to armed groups, and if the war escalates, the government's power will almost certainly diminish. Should the UN, or more individual countries, withdraw troops, the armed groups will likely gain significant ground. Additionally, given the weakened state of the government, one group may succeed in 'conquering' Mali as a place of operation. Between the terrorists in the north, the ethnic cleansing in central Mali, and the weakened state of the government, a decreased foreign presence will likely lead to a power vacuum in Mali. This would further destabilize the region, as IS, AQIM, or a similar group will likely move to fill the vacuum and advance further violence.

[Kaylee Coffman]

UKRAINE: Presidential Elections Move to Second Round

Summary: The 31 March election narrows the field of 39 candidates two, with the second round scheduled for 21 April.

Development: On 31 March, Ukraine held the first round of its presidential election. As no candidate earned a majority of votes, current president Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskiy will compete in a second round of elections on 21 April. Zelenskiy earned 30.4% of the first-round votes, while Poroshenko earned 17.8%. Zelenskiy has no formal political experience and portrays a president in a popular comedy show in Ukraine called “Servant of the People.”

Analysis: Zelenskiy’s lead suggests that he will perform well in the run-off and indicates his growing popularity among Ukrainians. In other circumstances, most would likely not consider Zelenskiy a serious candidate, but Ukrainians likely desire an outsider in office following years of governmental frustration. Popular belief that Poroshenko did not effectively fight corruption and limit Russian influence in the country likely helped to elevate Zelenskiy as the frontrunner. Zelenskiy’s lack of opinions and experience, however, may make him easy to influence, by either the West or by Putin, and both parties will likely attempt to gain a voice with Zelenskiy if he gains the presidency. Given the current political climate in Kyiv, Zelenskiy might likely lean more pro-Western than pro-Russian, however, his eagerness to end the war in Donbas could lead to him making concessions to Russia.

[Elizabeth MacManus]

This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.

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