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Issue 360
Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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In This Issue

CHINA: Cyberspace Development Will Likely Yield Strategic Dominance

Summary: Beijing will probably reorient towards a domestic tech-based industry amid the global race for cyber dominance. It will continue to utilize disinformation campaigns and exercise control over information to quell domestic and international criticism. China's international cyber and infrastructure policies will probably aim to entice developing nations to adopt Chinese technology. Beijing's cyber operations will probably increase as China develops more advanced cyber capabilities and dominance in the developing world's tech infrastructure.

Focus on the Technology: In 2019 and in the first half of 2020, Chinese companies Huawei and Lenovo surpassed many foreign counterparts in global market share. These firms will probably continue to account for an increasing share of the global market. A heightened focus on technology also marked a significant shift in China's technological revolution. Instead of manufacturing and assembling foreign products, China now designs its own products and uses its factories to assemble them. This shift gives Beijing a larger platform to expand its economic influence both domestically and globally.

Control of Information: Beijing will almost certainly continue to use disinformation to gain geopolitical influence and control over domestic political issues. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) utilizes artificial intelligence (AI) to censor information contrary to the government agenda. These censorship practices extend to individuals on instant messaging apps like WeChat, while censoring even the most innocuous references of issues that could weaken China's image. Beijing also uses AI to control information regarding democracy, the Uyghurs, and the protests in Hong Kong, leaving only state media to inform the population. Censorship and disinformation impact the international community as well as the Chinese people. China participates in disinformation campaigns that blame the Hong Kong riots, Uyghur genocide allegations and other domestic issues on foreign nations or third-party actors.

Adoption of Chinese Technology: Beijing almost certainly is using infrastructure development projects abroad to spread its influence. Chinese tech products' lower cost of production and high availability facilitated the spread of Beijing's cyber infrastructure and capabilities throughout the developing world. Developing African nations remain particularly susceptible to Beijing's ambitions through Chinese-funded infrastructure and human development projects. Chinese telecommunications company Transsion holds 58.7% of the African unit market share in phones. China also increasingly uses foreign aid to fund tech infrastructure projects as well as increase its market share in developing nations. In Ethiopia, China secured a contract to put up 4G telecommunication centers across capital city Addis Abbas. A similar expansion made its way to the European market through the Chinese 5G telecommunications standard.

Cyber Operations: Beijing's desire to expand its increasingly sophisticated offensive and defensive cyber capabilities almost certainly is driving its cyber activities. The international community increasingly views Beijing as the world's most aggressive cyber threat. In July 2020, New Delhi banned 59 Chinese software apps including TikTok, WeChat, and Helo after citing

the threat that Chinese-developed applications present to national security. The CCP engages in mass surveillance operations and counterintelligence cyber operations to defend its capabilities.

Outlook and Implications: China will almost certainly continue to grow its global influence by expanding its role in the tech industry while increasing its control of information and developing its cyber capabilities. Chinese technological growth will likely not slow given its control over low-cost manufacturing. As a result, global adoption of Chinese products will probably continue.

An increase in Beijing's influence may enable China's Belt Road Initiative as it expands globally. China previously found it difficult to start physical infrastructure projects in developed nations. However, a growing number of developed nations will probably adopt Chinese technology and standards due to significant cost-effectiveness. This growth in Chinese technology may increase China's influence and prestige as well as its control over technological standards globally.

China's growing control over technology and information indicates an increase in both the scale and scope of disinformation and misinformation campaigns, posing a significant threat to geopolitical rivals. The spread of disinformation and improved cyber capabilities demonstrate its growing control of information, which Beijing uses to dismiss allegations of human right's violations, maintain control, and undermine foreign opposition.

[Parker Labine, Max Olson, and Ethan Theobald]

MALI: Interim President May Set Dangerous Precedent and Stir Regional Conflict

Summary: The overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and subsequent appointment of Interim President Bah N'Daou following civil unrest may prompt regional instability.

Development: On 21 September, former Malian defense minister Bah N'Daou stepped in as the Interim President until the 2022 presidential election. The ousting of Keita in August came after months of civil disobedience due to the alleged election fraud committed by Keita in April. The June 5 Movement, led by Imam Mahmoud Dicko and named in correspondence with its first protests, sparked civil unrest against the government. It also claimed responsibility for the appointment of N'Daou as the Interim President in the absence of an elected official leading the country. The group's values address the instability and bloodshed plaguing the country dating back to the 2012 coup that many saw as a failure of the government to reinstate order and security in the region.

Analysis: The appointment of a military leader like N'Daou may improve the security against oppressive insurgent and terrorist groups but probably will not lead to aggressive action in his interim term as president. However, the military expertise of the new leader may prompt Malian's to bolster support of future military leadership should N'Daou's administration improve the country. While Mali may benefit from the internal coup, the stability of the region will likely suffer due to the precedent set by the recent events unfolding in Bamako. A region-wide political upheaval may allow terrorist groups to seize power in the region, possibly causing international intervention.

[Tim Fergus]

ITALY: Election Results May Lead to Decline of Right-Wing Party

Summary: The loss of support for Italian right-wing parties will almost certainly embolden the coalition government and may alleviate political pressure on Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

Development: On 21 September, regional election results indicated continued support for Conte's coalition government and for a national referendum to shrink the size of the Italian parliament. This follows the failure of right-wing opposition party leader Matteo Salvini to win Tuscany, a traditionally left-leaning region. Salvini's League party continues to face a decline in popularity following its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the popularity of previous nationalist policies. Polls prior to the election showed the League performing better than final results. The current left-leaning governing coalition formed in 2019 between the 5 Star Movement and the Democratic Party, following calls from Salvini and the League for a vote of confidence regarding Conte and a push for new elections. The formation of the coalition moved the League out of a position of power and into the opposition.

Analysis: Loss of support for Salvini and the League party will almost certainly continue, emboldening Conte's coalition government. The coalition may move to pass more legislation to shrink the parliament during this time, especially after widespread support for the referendum. Salvini's support within the League may diminish due to his failure to win the anticipated number of votes and may lead to the pursuit of new party leadership in an effort to effectively win back public support. In the unlikely event that Salvini and the League win more votes, the party would likely push forward with calls for new elections that may result in a change of power. Although the threat of Conte's removal remains minimal, he will probably switch primary policy focus to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Alli McIntyre]

IRAN: Cyber Capabilities Pose Threat to Geopolitical Rivals and Activists

Summary: Tehran developed malware capabilities and furthered Iran's ability to produce disinformation campaigns, threatening both domestic political opponents and geopolitical rivals.

Development: On 17 September, a Middle Eastern cyber security collective, the Miaan Group, released a report stating Iranian hackers infiltrated encrypted applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram with improved malware and phishing capabilities. The Miaan Group found evidence of Tehran's enhanced cyber capabilities while tracing Iranian malware used to target a Sufi religious group in 2018. The Miaan Group traced the malware to a private Iranian technology firm called Andromedaa, which Miaan linked to multiple cyber-attacks on human rights groups and political dissidents. According to the Miaan Group, Andromedaa freelances for the Iranian government, creating malware and software for Tehran's cyber operations.

Analysis: Iran will likely utilize cyber operations to target both democracies in the West and opposition groups in Iran. Furthermore, Iranian hackers could use data gathered through these malware attacks to supplement the government financially amid international sanctions. Tehran may use this economic relief to further increase cyber operations and capabilities. Iran's increasing cyber capabilities allow Tehran to conduct more sophisticated attacks on domestic and international critics of the regime.

[Ethan Theobald]

[AFGHANISTAN: Heightened Conflict May Prompt New Campaign Against Taliban](#)

Summary: Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) found on civilian roads and extreme increase in strikes against military forces indicate an emboldened Taliban, potentially leading to harsh retaliation from Kabul and the Afghan military.

Development: On 21 September, the Afghan National Army (ANA) safely detonated multiple IEDs found on public roads in Kandahar and Zabul provinces, with most in a stretch of road between Maiwand and Panjwai, and the remaining unearthed near Shinkai. The ANA believes the Taliban deployed these IEDs. These actions coincide with the influx killing of security forces across Afghanistan. Between 21 and 23 September, Taliban raids killed 70 military personnel.

Analysis: The recent increase in Taliban action may prompt the ANA to employ a harsh retaliatory campaign. Kabul will almost certainly see the recent attacks against its forces and explosives planted on public roads as acts of terror against citizens and may suspend peace talks to escalate defenses. In the coming months, Kabul will most likely increase investigations and armed action against all Taliban operations.

[Dorian Taylor]

About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

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Riley Coder, a senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at editorsee@gmail.com or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708.