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RUSSIA: Interference in Former Soviet Bloc Possibly to Gain Power and Protect Borders

Summary: Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Moscow maintains influence in many regional affairs. It used its power to gain loyalty in parts of Ukraine and build strong ties with Nur-Sultan, which currently faces a critical decision regarding future relations with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Moscow most likely wants to gain political, economic, and military control in these former Soviet countries to bolster its power and pad its borders in the event of military conflict with Western powers.

Background: Moscow has made strategic moves to control its allies and gain power in Europe and Asia. In Europe, Moscow remains a threatening presence in Ukraine since 2014, when it annexed Crimea. More recently, Moscow has supported the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, two quasi-states in Donbas, Ukraine. Moscow wants to protect the Russians living in Donbas, according to Kremlin spokesperson Dimitry Peskov. The Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan poses a threat to many Asian countries, including Kazakhstan. In 2020, Nur-Sultan and Moscow updated a bilateral military agreement from 1994. In the past, both Ukraine and Kazakhstan belonged to the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the countries became sovereign nations independent from Russia. However, both countries still have close ties with Moscow for military and economic reasons.



Figure 1: Former USSR countries

Moscow has always had a rocky relationship with Western Powers. Currently, the West has issues with the Nord Stream 2 project, a pipeline that would transport gas from Russia directly to Germany, and the arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. NATO backed other countries' sanctions and even imposed its own against Moscow for actions like the build-up of troops along the Ukrainian border. The establishment of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002 meant to create a line of communication between the West and Moscow, but recently, Moscow has refused to meet with NATO.

Gaining Military Strength: Moscow probably supports the quasi-states in Donbass in hopes of undermining Kyiv, which could indirectly overthrow the government and possibly allow Moscow to add Ukrainian military power to Russian forces. Ukraine's military has grown immensely in size and strength with the help of NATO, gaining weapons from Turkey and other Western powers, according to Business Insider. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Kyiv started to focus on modernizing, training, and expanding its military.

Russia's military still exceeds Ukraine's military by several hundreds of thousands of troops, according to Business Insider. However, since Ukraine trained with NATO and Turkish forces, if Moscow absorbs the Ukrainian military, it will gain access to Western military tactics. With this valuable knowledge, Moscow would gain large insights into NATO military patterns and strategies, which could possibly give Russian military the upper hand in any future military conflict.

Political Power and Border Padding: Moscow may attempt to address Nur-Sultan's vulnerabilities by offering economic and military support in exchange for a political ally and border padding against Western powers. Kazakhstan's sparse population and relatively small military leaves the country open to threats. Since the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Nur-Sultan has had to contemplate how best to keep the country safe. Options include considering a trade deal offered by the Taliban.

Nur-Sultan has a strong relationship with Moscow. "For 30 years since the [Soviet] Union collapse, we have never had any disagreements or conflicts because Kazakhstan is determined to always be there and fulfill the agreements on our strategic partnership and eternal friendship," said Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Nur-Sultan has a large population of ethnic Russians loyal to Moscow. It also heavily depends on Moscow for economic and military support. Moscow may use this dependency to force increased loyalty from Nur-Sultan and keep foreign powers out of the country.

Outlook and Implications: Moscow may be attempting to increase control in Ukraine and Kazakhstan to grow more power on the European and Asian continents and with that, protect its borders. With the increased hostility between Moscow and NATO, Moscow most likely wants to secure itself in the event of a war with Western powers. By gaining bigger control in Donbass and Kazakhstan, and threatening Kyiv's authority over Ukraine, Moscow possibly hopes to put itself in a strong position to dominate Eastern Europe and Asia. It possibly anticipates that this will deter any outright aggression from the West and will allow Moscow to gain considerable power and strength.

[Kiara Bean]

PAKISTAN: Taliban Ultimatum Likely to Worsen Relations

Summary: A Taliban ultimatum issued against Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to either reduce ticket fares into Kabul or ground all flights into Afghanistan territories will likely worsen Islamabad's mixed feelings about the recently founded Taliban regime.

Development: On 14 October, PIA suspended all flights into Kabul after the Taliban threatened to halt PIA flight operations if ticket prices did not reduce to levels before the Afghan government fell. Most airlines flying to and from Kabul seized flight operations after the rise of the Taliban regime, with ticket prices rising to as much as \$2,500 due to the shortage of available seating, according to BBC Urdu. PIA spokesperson Abdullah Kahn stated that PIA only allowed aircraft to fly because of humanitarian purposes and evacuation efforts of Kabul citizens after the Taliban began seizing cities. Islamabad faces multiple accusations of sponsoring and harboring terrorists, including the Taliban, according to multiple designated terrorist organization lists. However, Islamabad disapproves of the Taliban-based terrorist group Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) that operates in Islamabad territories. The Taliban regime also sparked a massive refugee crisis along The Durand Line, the Islamabad and Kabul border. According to the United Nation High Commission for Refugees, roughly 1.4 million Afghanistan refugees fled their homes to The Durand Line.

Analysis: The Taliban's ultimatum against PIA likely will create hostilities and tension between Islamabad and the Taliban regime. The Taliban regime likely wants international attention, acceptance, and legitimacy, which could explain its insistence on restarting flights into Kabul. The recent problems generated from the Taliban seizing control, such as the refugee crisis and patronage to terrorist groups in Islamabad like the TTP, almost certainly prove more detrimental than helpful to Islamabad. The Taliban issuing the ultimatum will likely further distance Islamabad from the Taliban escalate the tension and mixed feelings Islamabad has for the Taliban. Islamabad may respond these problems by closing its borders to the Taliban and politically denouncing the Taliban regime.

[Michael Doolan]

IRAN: Bombing of Military Transit in Syria Could Lead to Attack on Israel

Summary: Tehran likely believes Jerusalem launched a deadly bombing attack against a military transport vehicle in Syria and may retaliate with military force.

Development: On 20 October, two bombs exploded in Damascus, Syria, killing 14 Iranian military officers aboard a Syrian army transit. No organization has claimed responsibility for this attack. Attacks in Damascus became rare after the Iranian and Russian militaries assisted the Syrian president in forcing opposition fighters from the capital and its surrounding area in 2018. Jerusalem disapproves of Tehran's continued integration into Syria. On 13 October, Israeli missiles targeted Syrian military infrastructure and killed a soldier in Palmyra, Syria. A similar attack occurred the previous week. Tehran stated that it would respond forcefully and without further warning if more Israeli strikes occur.

Analysis: Tehran probably suspects Jerusalem launched the bombing and will likely take retaliatory military action. Tehran likely views this attack as provocative action from Jerusalem but likely believes its military alliance with Damascus will protect the capital city from any large-scale Israeli attacks. The bombing will almost certainly result in rising tensions between Tehran and Jerusalem, increasing the likelihood of Iranian retaliation.

[Maren Rice]

RUSSIA: Likely to Send Additional Probes to Test Borders of International Rivals

Summary: Russian incursions will likely increase as Russia strives to prove its strength to its competitors.

Development: On 22 October, NORAD detected five Russian aircraft near the Air Defense Identification Zone in North America. TASS, a Moscow-backed publication, reported that two Russian bombers and several fighters performed a scheduled flight in the region. Additionally, two helicopters from Russia and China approached Japan on the same day, returning to their warships before interception by Japanese aircraft. These incursions are happening after multiple Russian intercepts of Western forces near Russian-claimed territory. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claims that the number of flights conducted by NATO near Russian airspace increased by 30% when compared to the previous year. In addition to this, Moscow claims that NATO is deploying weapons near Russian borders.

Analysis: Russia will likely increase the number of missions near rival countries. Moscow probably views the recent incidents near Russian-claimed territory as national threats. With this perspective, Moscow probably has a strong desire to project strength and test the resolve of its competitors. Using weapons near the borders of Russian rivals probably serves to project Russian strength and provoke a response from their competitors. Moscow probably hopes that the projection of strength will give the regime additional legitimacy and make its claims recognized by rival powers.

[Edward Micklos]

NORTH KOREA: Missile Test Likely in Response to Growing South Korea Arsenal

Summary: North Korea probably tested a submarine-launched missile to maintain its ego during South Korea's advanced missile and aeronautical technologies demonstrations.

Development: On 19 October, Pyongyang launched a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) that flew 267 to 280 miles towards the East Sea from its primary submarine hub in Sinpo. Pyongyang claims that its new 2,000-ton Gora-class diesel submarine fired the missile. Experts say these missiles contain striking similarities to the KN-23 short-range ballistic missile that possesses nuclear capabilities. It remains unclear if the KN-23 launched from a submarine or a barge seen in previous tests. Pyongyang's state media claims the missile's capabilities extend to skip-jump maneuvers; referring to how the missile separates a reentry vehicle that creates irregular, parabolic-shape movements during its final phase of the flight towards its target. The irregular flight allows for course corrections, extending range, and increasing the difficulty for missile interception. Pyongyang presented the KN-23 at its defense exhibition on 14 October, before the biannual Seoul International Aerospace & Defense Exhibition (ADEX) demonstrating advanced weaponry to the world. Seoul also tested its first SLBM from its new Dosan-class submarine on 15 September that Pyongyang criticized shortly after.

Analysis: Pyongyang most likely tested a SLBM in response to South Korea's growing missile capabilities. Pyongyang criticizing Seoul's SLBM launch likely indicates that Pyongyang feels pressured by Seoul's advancements in missile technology. Pyongyang most likely suddenly hosted a defense exhibition and tested its SLBM shortly after Seoul did to reaffirm its missile dominance. Pyongyang almost certainly relies on its missile program, and the threat of a nuclear strike that comes with it, to achieve diplomatic goals such as concessions and humanitarian relief. Seoul demonstrating and developing its advanced missile program probably makes Pyongyang anxious over the possibility of its neighbor surpassing it in missile technology.

[Sebastien Bragg]

CHINA: Missile Test Possibly Causing Superiority Shift in South Asia Region

Summary: Beijing's latest hypersonic missile suggests possible forthcoming dominance in acquiring nuclear weapons and technology.

Development: On 16 October, Western officials announced Beijing launched a hypersonic missile into space. China denied the report and stated a routine test for a vehicle that uses reusable technology took place. Beijing additionally claimed this test provided a low-cost and convenient method for space travel. The successful conclusion of the missile test showed capabilities of speeds reaches up to 21,000 mph and strikes any destination within minutes, missing the target by 20 miles Beijing's ability to build and test a hypersonic missile of this kind remains unknown and increases its chance of undermining global missile defense systems. China frequently issues updates on its progress in producing weapons yet failed to report this specific test because of its nuclear characteristics. Officials believe hypersonic missiles could aid Beijing greatly in its strategic advancements throughout Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Analysis: With its recent testing of a hypersonic missile, Beijing could likely become a global leader in advanced weaponry. These capabilities may put adversaries in an increasingly vulnerable position. Taiwan and assets in the South China Sea will possibly become the most susceptible territories to a missile attack from Beijing. These domains may then aid Beijing in its slowly developing goal of the region.

[Tatum Leyvas]

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. Currently, Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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Alli McIntyre, 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. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 390, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.

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