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INDIA: Tensions on Three Fronts May Increase Effort to Improve Relations with Beijing

Summary: Border tensions with Beijing on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), violence in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and tensions in the northeastern region may prompt New Delhi to increase its efforts in improving border relations with Beijing.

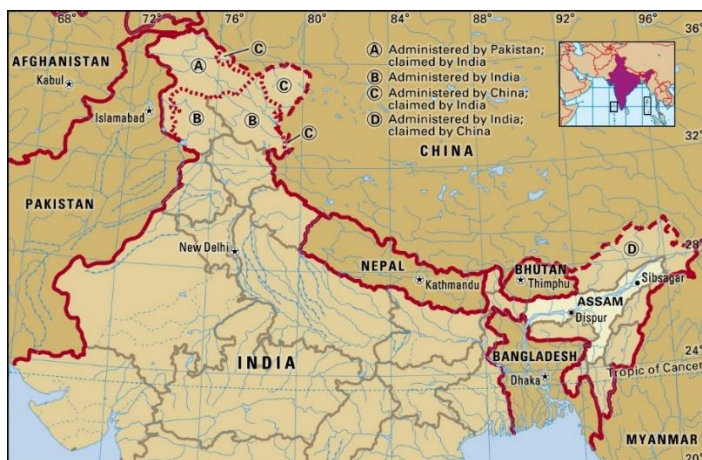
Background: On 15 December 2020, a deadly skirmish took place between Indian and Chinese soldiers at Galwan Valley, near the LAC. The LAC acts as the named demarcation between India and China, however, neither side can agree upon the exact demarcation, and the clash heightened the countries' disputes and has resulted in both sides reinforcing major patrolling points on or near the border. To ease conflict, troops at the hotspot points Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, and Gogra went through disengagement after a series of peace talks between New Delhi and Beijing. About two months ago, Beijing suddenly dispatched a large number of troops to the LAC causing New Delhi to also send in reinforcements, and both sides continue building up their forces diligently for the coming winter. To add to the increasing tensions, the 13th round of peace talks failed when both sides could not agree on any disengagement goals and blamed each other for the troop increase. On 2 December, New Delhi announced that Beijing proposed a 14th round of peace talks, which will take place in mid-December.

Failed 13th Round of Peace Talks: The failure of the previous round of peace talks will almost certainly motivate New Delhi and Beijing to reach disengagement goals. The 13th round of talks took place almost one week after New Delhi deployed troops in early October to the LAC in response to Beijing's own deployment. With both sides sending reinforcements, testing new military technology, and preparing for the upcoming winter tensions rapidly increased. That round of talks failed, and troops did not disengage from Hot Springs, another vital patrolling point. After the talks ended, both countries blamed each other for the failure. Despite this, both remained willing to communicate and resolve the border disputes. This understanding between the two will most likely push them to fulfill the Hot Springs disengagement goal.

Terrorist Infiltration into J&K: The increase of Pakistan-based terrorist infiltration into J&K probably will motivate New Delhi to quickly ease tensions on the LAC. In November, Indian Border Forces killed almost 138 terrorists and arrested about 55 more in J&K so far this year, according to the Times of India. Furthermore, after New Delhi relocated many of the troops from the Line of Control to the LAC in October, J&K experienced a sudden increase in terrorist activity and infiltration attempts; terrorists and other like-minded militant groups killed 11 civilians. In response, New Delhi sent additional security forces to J&K. This sudden increase of violence in J&K takes New Delhi's much-needed attention away from the LAC and strains the Indian military by stretching it between the two fronts. Easing tensions on the LAC could give New Delhi an opportunity to further stabilize J&K.



Violence in the Northeast: The recent outburst of violence in Manipur near the northeastern border may also cause New Delhi to want to deescalate tensions on the LAC. In mid-November, two insurgent groups ambushed an Indian Army convoy, killing an army colonel, his wife, eight-year-old son, and four other soldiers. This attack also marked the deadliest one within the region since 2018, which concerned New Delhi officials. As speculated in the past, said officials suspect these insurgent groups have ties with Beijing as well and believe that Beijing attempts to distract New Delhi from the LAC by stirring up trouble in the northeast, according to Hindustan Times. On 5 December, Indian security forces killed 14 civilians amidst protests and searches for insurgents. This surge of violence will probably add more to New Delhi's plate and further strengthen the military's capability, especially if the violence gets out of hand. Resolving conflicts in the Ladakh region of the LAC will probably allow New Delhi to focus its attention on the northeast and use more military power if needed.



Outlook and Implications: The failed 13th round of peace talks with Beijing, increased terrorist infiltrations into the J&K region, and the increase in violence in the northeast region will likely push New Delhi to resolve disputes on the LAC during the upcoming 14th round of peace talks with Beijing. Since both countries are willing to communicate, New Delhi probably will take this opportunity to disengage troops from Hot Springs and ease tensions along the LAC.

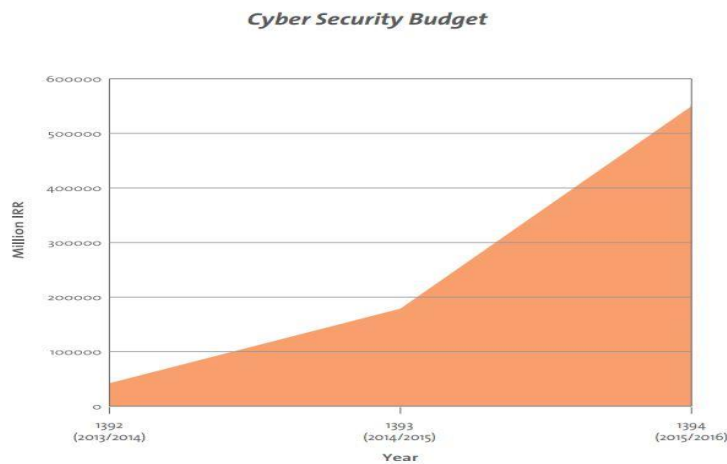
Disengagement probably will allow New Delhi to send more troops to J&K to deal with the terrorist infiltrations. Due to the delicate situations arising in the northeastern region, the violence could grow into a situation similar to J&K if more clashes between the military, insurgents, and civilians ensue. In this scenario, New Delhi will probably send reinforcements to the region. Previous tensions on the LAC and J&K have already stretched out the military; if the situation in the northeast worsens, New Delhi will probably face difficulties dealing with all three fronts at the same time. To not strain the military, New Delhi will most likely try to negotiate with Beijing for quick disengagement along the LAC.

[Isha Patel]

IRAN: Rapidly Evolving Cyber Capabilities Likely a Serious Future Threat

Summary: Following the devastating effects of the Stuxnet worm on Tehran’s nuclear weapons program, Tehran rapidly ramped up its cyber capabilities, viewing cyber warfare as a powerful tool to use against its much more powerful rivals while also defending itself. A fear of vulnerability to cyber-attacks coupled with the transition from simple retaliatory attacks to sophisticated covert surveillance and immediate damage cyber-attacks will likely soon transition Tehran from a medium-level cyber threat to a serious cyber threat.

Background: To curb Tehran’s nuclear program, Jerusalem and Western powers allegedly created the Stuxnet worm, a powerful malicious software that infiltrated Tehran nuclear facilities and disabled nuclear centrifuges, an essential component of nuclear weapons. A contracted cybersecurity firm first discovered the Stuxnet worm in 2010 following concerns over an unusual number of nuclear centrifuges breaking. The security firm eventually discovered the malicious worm on multiple on-site computers. According to Dangerous World, Stuxnet created intense and unforeseen political and technical ramifications. Stuxnet, the first high-tech cybersecurity weapon utilized by a nation, created a new era of cyber weapons as an effective and secret form of warfare. Following the Stuxnet attacks, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei established the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, tasked with creating strategies for using cyber weapons to control Tehran’s increasingly dissident population and technical disruption and sabotage to its more powerful rivals. Since 2012, Tehran’s budget for cyber development increased by 1,200% according to BESA.



Fear of Vulnerability: Motivated by its own vulnerabilities, Tehran likely will continue to increase its own cyber capabilities for not only the purpose of attacking, but also for defense. According to the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), Tehran possesses two major fears: fear of domestic dissent and fear of attack from its much more powerful enemies. While fear of cyber vulnerability likely drives Tehran to increase its cyber defenses, Tehran also views cyber as a means of controlling domestic dissent, which Tehran views as a critical,

existential threat against itself. According to CSIS, Tehran continuously revokes digital rights and internet freedoms inside the country, often infiltrating email accounts of political dissidents and censoring online content and communications. Tehran also employs disinformation campaigns to meddle election results in favor of Tehran interests.

Evolving Cyber Tactics: The transition from retaliatory, low impact cyber-attacks to covert and destructive operations likely indicates a more sophisticated understanding of cyber warfare when compared to current beliefs. Following the Stuxnet attacks, Western and Israeli assets experienced an increase in severity and duration of cyberattacks originating in Tehran, according to the Congressional Research Service. Previously thought to only have capabilities of simple defacement and social engineering attacks, Tehran has rapidly advanced to attacks such as data breaching, distributed denial of service attacks, and destructive cyberattacks that destroy applications and computers. In addition, years of cyber war against Jerusalem and Riyadh have improved Tehran's cyber capabilities dramatically. Reverse engineering of the Stuxnet worm contributed to the successes and increased technical skill of Tehran-sponsored hackers, according to BESA. A reverse-engineered version of Stuxnet called Shamoon hit several Saudi oil organizations and government ministries in 2016. Shamoon destroyed hard drives, wiped data, and prevented computers from turning on. In addition, cybersecurity attacks originating from Tehran only happen due to some form of Western action. For example, major general Qasem Soleimani's death in a United States (US) air strike at Baghdad International Airport led to a sharp rise of Tehran-sponsored attacks against US assets and infrastructure.

Outlook and Implications: Tehran's expertise and motivation to conduct aggressive cyber warfare against its rivals likely will transform Tehran from a medium cyber threat to a serious cyber threat on par with nations such as China, Russia, and Israel. Tehran will likely continue to improve its cyber tactics and become a bigger threat, especially given the frequency and severity of previous Tehran cyber-attacks. While likely not capable of conducting any meaningful and threatening large scale attack against its superior enemies, Tehran likely will continue to terrorize, disrupt, survey, and sabotage Western assets. Tehran may also continue to vest more resources into cyber development because of the size and power of its rivals. Unable to compete with the massive and capable powers such as the US and Israel, Tehran will likely turn to cyber warfare, as cyber warfare presents the ability to not only cause devastating damage but minimize the possibility of retaliatory strikes due to the difficulty of pinning definitive blame of a cyber-attack.

[Michael Doolan]

NORTH KOREA: Increased Sanctions Unlikely to Stop Nuclear Program

Summary: North Korea launched several missiles for a month displaying advancements in its nuclear program while restricted from developing nuclear weapons. Pyongyang most likely uses missile tests to achieve diplomatic goals and sanctions fail to punish this aggressive behavior.

Background: From 14 September to 18 October, Pyongyang launched six missiles demonstrating new or improved aspects of its nuclear program. Pyongyang notably tested its first hypersonic missile capable of Mach 5 speeds and a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) which caught global media attention. South Korea also launched its own domestically developed SLBM a month before Pyongyang responded with its own SLBM. All six missiles have nuclear payload capabilities despite the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) ban on testing such missiles. The rapid missile tests destabilized the region, leading neighboring countries to deploy additional forces and engage in strategic talks over the missile crisis. Pyongyang demanded Seoul cease its hostile policies against Pyongyang if Seoul President Moon Jae-in plans to fulfill his promise to end the Korean War.

Missile Launches as a Political Tool: Pyongyang most likely launches missiles as a political tool to resolve internal problems within the nation. On 6 January, Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un called the past five years the “worst of the worst” for the country. Kim spoke of severe food shortages the country faced in April, June, and October. Pyongyang falls 860,000 tons short of food it needs to support its population for the rest of the year due to failed harvests, typhoons, floods, and border closures. Since missile launches in the fall, Pyongyang negotiated and received humanitarian aid from the international community following the 4 October restoration of hotlines between Seoul and Pyongyang. In October, November, and December, Beijing and Moscow proposed easing sanctions against Pyongyang by citing a lack of missile tests since 14 October.

Sanction Failure: International sanctions against Pyongyang seem unlikely to stop its nuclear program. Despite sanctions against Pyongyang growing stronger with every illegal missile launch, Pyongyang’s nuclear program shows no signs of slowing as the missiles grow more advanced over time. As seen in Figure 1, Pyongyang planned to dismantle its primary nuclear facility, Yongbyon Complex, following an inter-Korean summit in 2018 for sanction relief. But as of 24 November, the facility resumed partial nuclear operations. Pyongyang funds most of its nuclear program globally and evades sanctions targeted at the program. Pyongyang avoids UNSC maritime sanctions by falsely registering ships under another nationality, disguising cargo contents that go undetected, and making ship-to-ship transfers of goods in local, coastal waters. Foreign nationals also procure funding and restricted material for Pyongyang; they establish front companies across the globe that allows Pyongyang to still export sanction-restricted goods such as coal and weapons.

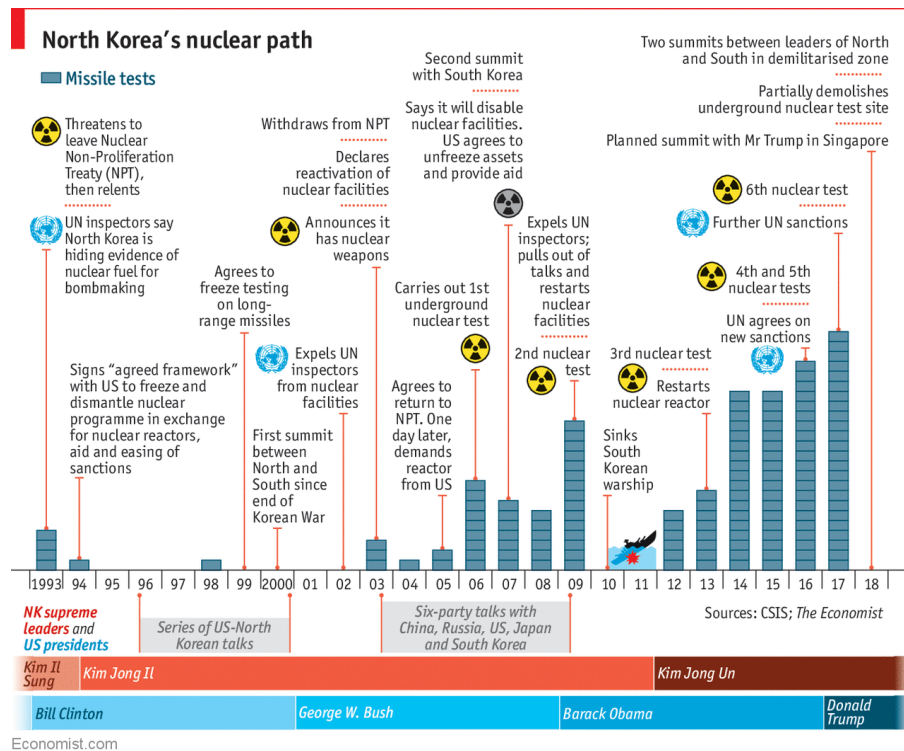


Figure 1: Timeline of North Korea's nuclear program 1993-2018

Outlook and Implications: Pyongyang's nuclear program seems unlikely to denuclearize as Kim uses the threat of nuclear warfare as a bargaining tool and international sanctions fail to punish the regime for developing nuclear weapons. Pyongyang most likely uses rapid missile tests to quickly increase tension in the region to achieve some desired diplomatic goals. Pyongyang probably times its missile tests to when the nation needs something from the international community such as humanitarian relief in exchange for temporarily halting aspects of its nuclear program. The UNSC sanctions seem unlikely to stop Pyongyang as the security council fails to enforce the sanctions, especially maritime sanctions.

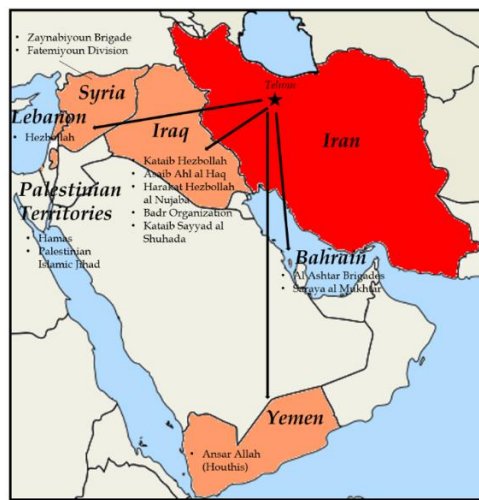
Pyongyang will likely continue to launch missiles if the food crisis worsens if it does not receive UNSC sanction relief proposed by Beijing and Moscow. Pyongyang will most likely continue to dominate the diplomatic tempo as it decides when to launch missiles to raise tensions, then work on a diplomatic solution in its favor. Beijing and Moscow will likely veto any UNSC sanction proposal harsher sanctions against Pyongyang. North Korea's ability to evade sanctions probably will continue to improve in time even if the UNSC proposes more sanctions, negatively affecting the populace but not the nuclear program.

[Sebastien Bragg]

IRAN: Lack of Resolution in Proxy Conflict Could Lead to War Over Syria

Summary: Tehran and Jerusalem's refusal to agree on nuclear advancements and influence in Syria will likely escalate proxy conflict to war in the region. Tehran shows no signs of halting enrichment in Syria, thus prompting Jerusalem's increasing attacks on Iranian property. Tehran will likely wait for Jerusalem to initiate an act of war, allowing more time for its military, economic and political developments in Syria to grow.

Background: During the Lebanese Revolution, Tehran interjected to support Shiite Muslims by donating to the radical group Hezbollah to enforce an Iran-style Islamic Republic in Lebanon. As a result of Tehran's funding, Hezbollah currently wields significant power in Lebanon as a political party and military group. Tehran continues to donate to Hezbollah, granting it some influence over Beirut. This revolution further divides the existing Palestinian, Israeli, and Syrian factions within the state. Jerusalem became involved to mitigate Iranian influence in Syria and Lebanon. Jerusalem's opposition to Iran plunged the two states into a proxy conflict for influence in the region, with particular focus in Syria. Tehran has expanded influence in Syria by establishing military bases and militias. Jerusalem has conducted several attacks in recent months to deter Iranian progress.



Map of Iranian proxy militias and radical political groups in the Middle East- Us Institute of Peace/The Woodrow Wilson Center

Enrichment in Syria: Tehran likely invests in Syria to mirror its great success with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Iran-based Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) funds the Fatemiyoun Division, a militia comprised of Shia Afghan refugees in Syria. Fatemiyoun defends Iran's interests in Syria and could become the next Hezbollah in Tehran's proxy arsenal. Tehran mobilized Fatemiyoun to fight against ISIS, and in 2021 directed it to conduct military drills along the Syrian Israeli border. Tehran operates 10 known military bases in Syria with two on the Israeli border. Tehran has used Fatemiyoun and a similar group, the Zaynabiyoun Brigade, to guard these military bases and protect nuclear developments in the country. This year Tehran

stockpiled uranium and centrifuges in Syria, breaking the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA). They have enriched uranium to 60%, just below the necessary percent for a military grade nuclear weapon. Tehran's enrichment of Syria has drawn global attention and even evoked action from rival, Israel.

Action and Advocacy: Jerusalem will likely use military force against an Iranian military base in Syria if Tehran continues to make nuclear advancements. Jerusalem supports several anti-Iranian groups aimed to weaken Tehran. For example, Jerusalem donated this year to the People's Mujahedin of Iran, which advocates overthrowing the current Islamic Republic of Iran and President Ebrahim Raisi. Earlier this year, Jerusalem targeted over a dozen Iranian cargo ships carrying valuable resources to Iranian allies in the Middle East. A limpet mine planted on an Iranian vessel set to deliver Iranian oil to Syria devastated the ship and confirmed Jerusalem's stance on Iranian involvement in Syria. Following the shipping attacks, Jerusalem launched airstrikes on Iranian military headquarters in Syria, and assassinated Syrian high-ranking officer, Midhat Saleh. These attacks likely aimed to weaken relations between Tehran and Damascus by creating tension around Iran's presence in the state. On 10 November, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid stated that if Tehran obtained nuclear weapons, Jerusalem would act.

Outlook and Implications: Tehran will almost certainly continue to develop its nuclear program despite international agreements and warnings from Jerusalem, likely leading to an escalation of military force from Jerusalem. Tehran will probably expand influence in Syria, prompting a heightened scale of attacks from Jerusalem who wishes to grow influence in this strategic geopolitical state. These attacks will likely include airstrikes on military bases to deter nuclear advancements and strikes on cargo ships to halt the delivery of necessary resources to Iranian bases in Syria. Jerusalem may additionally mobilize the People's Mujahedin of Iran to weaken internal stability thus slowing Tehran's nuclear advancements. There will likely come a breaking point for Jerusalem, where it must act to preserve a world where Tehran does not have nuclear weapons. Jerusalem would almost certainly lose a war against Tehran if Tehran obtained nuclear technology. To halt Iranian activity in Syria, Jerusalem will likely make an attack serious enough to warrant a response from Tehran. Tehran would probably not preemptively strike Israel to buy more time to build its arsenal in Syria before facing conflict.

Tehran's closeness to obtaining nuclear weapons in Syria could force Jerusalem to engage before the possibility of nuclear warfare with Iran. Tehran likely recognizes Jerusalem's attacks over the past year as an effort to slow its nuclear advancements. Tehran's acceptance of the Israeli attacks without backlash could indicate that obtaining military-grade nuclear weapons will occur faster than Jerusalem currently expects. President Ebrahim Raisi would likely accept a few low-cost attacks from Jerusalem without retaliation knowing that if he obtains nuclear weapons, Iran would likely become virtually untouchable by enemy forces in the Middle East.

[Maren Rice]

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 395, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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