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# Issue 423

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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## CUBA: Presidential Trip to Mexico Likely to Cause Political Alignment

**Summary:** Meetings between Cuban and Mexican presidents will likely strengthen Cuban resistance against outside influences and create a hostile outlook toward democratic countries.

**Development:** On 11 February, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel arrived in Mexico to meet with his counterpart, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The two discussed cooperation agreements, and López Obrador praised Havana for remaining an “example of resistance” to outside influence. Just a few weeks prior, street protests occurred in Cuba, and Havana acted quickly and strongly against them. However, Havana’s dictatorship still faces opposition, as civil unrest progresses. Mexico City provided two ships full of food and medical supplies to Cuba in response to Washington tightening sanctions on Cuba, according to AP News.

**Analysis:** The unification of foreign policy between Havana and Mexico City will probably strengthen Havana’s anti-democratic policies. As protests occur over limited freedoms, Havana will almost certainly take a harsh stance against anyone who opposes the government. The support and backing of Cuban policies by Mexico City will likely encourage Havana to resist political reform in the face of opposition. Havana and Mexico City may work together on foreign objectives and increase hostility towards foreign democratic influence.

[Isabella Ponce]

## CHINA: Tech Company Likely to Forward Artificial Intelligence Capabilities

**Summary:** Chinese tech company Baidu announced development of an artificial intelligence (AI) powered chatbot, likely raising the prospect of competitiveness in the AI race and possible advancements Beijing can produce with the new technology.

**Development:** On 7 February, Chinese tech giant Baidu announced its development of an AI-based chatbot called “Ernie Bot,” expected to launch in March. Experts predict Ernie Bot will perform similar tasks to the well-known ChatGPT, launched by OpenAI. Baidu shared that its chatbot integrates extensive knowledge with massive data, resulting in outstanding generation capabilities and understanding, according to CNBC. Shares of the company increased more than 15 percent on Tuesday following the announcement. Robin Li, CEO and co-founder of Baidu, said AI has the potential to meet demand at a tenth of the cost and a hundred or thousand times faster, according to the *China Daily*.

**Analysis:** Baidu’s announcement of an AI-powered chatbot will likely advance China’s AI capabilities. Baidu’s key role in the AI race may act as a strategic move by Beijing. The company’s advancements will likely support the implementation of artificial intelligence into other high-focus sectors such as manufacturing, information technology, aerospace equipment, and military equipment. Beijing’s growing interest in the AI industry will probably lead to more government-supported research for AI. Beijing likely sees growth in AI as a strategy to enhance national competitiveness and reduce the amount of dependence on foreign technology.

[Rebekah Sokoloski]

## PERU: Landslide Likely to Further Political Uprising Following Months of Unrest

**Summary:** A fatal landslide swept through the Arequipa region of Peru, leaving dead citizens, tattered houses, and severe debris in its wake. The natural disaster will likely unite the citizens of Peru, further the political unrest, and increase the death toll.

**Development:** On 6 February, a deadly landslide left Peru in shambles. The massive landslide triggered by powerful rains swallowed dozens of homes, left at least 15 dead, and left many severely injured, according to *Reuters*. President Dina Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra offered condolences and unsuccessfully sought government aid for her people suffering from the landslide, according to *Latin Times*. For two months before the landslide, thousands of indigenous people stormed Lima in protest of the impeachment of the former president, Jose Pedro Castillo Terrones, according to PBS News. Due to the anti-government protests, violence and death riddles throughout the city, according to Reuters. The demonstrators demand a new constitution to reflect their rights and the resignation of Boluarte, according to *Reuters*. The governors of southern Puno, Cusco, and Apurimac regions insist Boluarte relinquish her authority over Peru, according to BBC News. Security forces have silenced more than 50 demonstrators in Peru, only fueling their hate toward the government, according to PBS News.

**Analysis:** Following two months of intense upheaval, the natural disaster destroying villages in Peru will likely stoke the political fire. In the streets of Lima, the effect of the landslide likely furthers the high-stress climate. Condolences and a futile effort to help from Boluarte will probably not incentivize the Peruvians to cease their protest efforts. With the recent landslide disaster, the politically torn southern region of Peru will likely unite. The protestors will probably act as one in an insurrectionist manner as opposed to a nationalistic manner. The landslide may initially subside the protests, but when the aftermath of the natural disaster settles, the force against Boluarte will likely reach an all-time high. In this case, the perfect recipe for rebellion probably includes a disaster tying the people together coupled with a generally unsatisfied attitude toward the government.

[Katie Stonecypher]

## [SYRIA: International Response to Earthquake Could Strain Relations in Iran](#)

**Summary:** The foreign aid entering affected regions of Syria will likely cause further strain on the relationship between Tehran and Damascus. The tension could lead to a reduction in military support and essential resources in Damascus.

**Development:** On 6 February, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Northern Syria, causing a humanitarian crisis. The earthquake heavily damaged four hospitals and destroyed unknown amounts of housing, according to Syrian American Medical Society. Reports indicate around 7,000 casualties occurred in Syria, with many more still unreported, according to *Al Jazeera*. The affected region within Syria remains split between Damascus and rebel forces, according to *The Washington Post*. The North acts as the last stronghold for rebel forces, including the Syrian Defense Force (SDF), backed by the United Kingdom, France, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The Syrian National Army (SNA), backed by Turkey and Qatar, acts as another group in the region. The conflict to claim leadership in Damascus made delivering supplies difficult for the rebel-controlled North. Emergency workers responding will have a difficult time as the winter temperatures will drop below freezing, according to Reuters. Countries from around the world sent support in the form of rescue teams and supplies. Local assistance from the Near East includes Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. Farther aid includes Spain, New Zealand, and China, according to Associated Press.

**Analysis:** The output of foreign aid to Syria could strain relations with Tehran by reducing trade on essential resources like medicine and food. The shipments of aid could possibly bring money and arms to the SDF and SNA, allowing a breakthrough in the stalemate with Damascus. The pushback would likely require support from an ally like Tehran, who may not want to continue supplying resources. The need in Syria for resources such as medical supplies and food will most likely increase as the support for rescue efforts relies heavily on the availability of these resources. Tehran could use international support as a reason to decrease the amount of food and medicine given to Damascus. The decrease would likely force Damascus to look for allies in the Near East, possibly provoking Iran to double down on resource reduction.

[Riley Grant]

## CHINA: Pro-Military Propaganda May Indicate an Impending Attack on Taiwan

**Summary:** Military propaganda released from Nanjing, China, depicts Lantern Festival traditions to support the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The circulation of the propaganda may indicate Beijing's preparation for an attack on Taiwan.

**Development:** On 6 February, reports indicated China's Eastern Theater Command (ETC) featured pro-military propaganda spliced with celebratory images of the Lantern Festival. Operating under the PLA, the ETC released a video depicting intimidating images of military strength from its headquarters in Nanjing, China, according to Taiwan News. The ETC's control encompasses the Taiwan Strait and conducts military drills nearby. Since the video's release, Chinese military aircraft and naval vessels continue to deploy near the median line. In addition, the ETC oversees the strait to combat Taiwan's resistance to reunification and to preserve its "territorial integrity," according to *China Military Correspondence*. In response to Beijing's consistent military presence, Taiwanese forces actively monitor the Taiwan Strait and surrounding areas. Taipei also increased its compulsory military service from four months to a one-year minimum and continues to purchase military equipment to combat Beijing's increased surveillance over Taiwanese waters.

**Analysis:** Beijing's upsurge in military surveillance and pro-military propaganda toward Taipei likely indicate a nearing attack on Taiwan or surrounding territories. Taipei's movement against reunification will almost certainly influence Beijing's presence in Taiwanese waters. The rise of propaganda could originate from potential cultural resistance surrounding the China-Taiwan conflict, likely leading to the notion that the PLA lacks military strength compared to its portrayal to the general public.

[Claire "Ellie" Bryl]

## **RUSSIA: Cyberattacks Likely Responsible for Destruction of Satellites**

**Summary:** A Russian satellite of unknown purpose broke apart in orbit with an unsubstantiated cause. The uniqueness of this attack likely indicates a cyberattack that targeted the reported satellite.

**Development:** On 6 February, the United States 18<sup>th</sup> Space Defense Squadron (18 SDS) publicly confirmed the rupture of Kosmos-2499, a Russian satellite of an undisclosed purpose. The latest in an unexplained series of Russian satellites, classified as “Object Es,” breaking up in orbit. Kosmos-2499 launched in December 2013 and performed a series of complex orbital maneuvers by raising and lowering its altitude, according to Russian Space Web. Kosmos-2499 conveyed a mock attempt to intercept a nonfunctioning Soviet-era satellite by steadying within 526 meters of its target in November 2014. After completing three similar tasks, Kosmos-2499 began malfunctioning on 23 October 2021, eventually splitting into 85 fragments on 4 January, according to *Russian Space Web*. Kosmos-2491, a similar satellite launched in December 2013, suffered a similar malfunction three years before the Kosmos-2499 disruption. Reports have not indicated Moscow’s comment on the rupturing of its satellite.

**Analysis:** Cyberattacks likely remain the cause of the recent destruction of Russian satellites. While the purpose of the satellites remains unknown, the unfamiliar objectives they completed could suggest their purpose served as orbital satellite interceptors or as research for future satellites. Moscow’s silence on the satellite’s destruction, combined with the unknown possibility of the satellite’s purpose, likely indicates Moscow created the satellite as a target for various anti-Russian nation-state threat actors. Satellite deterioration most likely provides Moscow the opportunity to test satellite destruction methods.

[Jeffrey Jensen]



## IRAN: Amnesty Likely to Increase Governmental Tension in

**Summary:** The number of arrests since the start of the Mahsa Amini protests in September 2022 surpassed 19,600 people. Political unrest in Tehran could increase from the granted amnesty and the likelihood of excluded protestors.

**Development:** On 5 February, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei granted amnesty to tens of thousands of Iranian prisoners during the yearly pardoning before the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The original presentation of the idea of amnesty to Khamenei came from Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, according to *The Washington Post*. Since the beginning of the Amini protests, authorities have killed upwards of 527 protestors, according to NPR. Tehran imposed the use of different police units, such as the Riot Control Team and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The units used excessive force and opened fire on multiple crowds, according to *The Iran Primer*. Crimes that protestors committed include propaganda against the regime, collusion against national security, encouraging people to commit murder, and destruction of property, according to *Human Rights Activist News Agency*. Authorities have placed tight restrictions on the granted amnesty, making many ineligible. Crimes such as espionage, murder or causing injury, destruction of government property, armed action, or having contact with a foreign intelligence service will not result in pardoning, according to *The New York Times*.

**Analysis:** With the recent granting of amnesty to prisoners, governmental tensions within Tehran will not likely subside. This will likely increase the political unrest in Tehran, causing a further divide in the country. Incarcerated protestors almost certainly will remain in prison despite the amnesty, most likely upsetting those still protesting. If the protests continue, political unrest from protests in Tehran could potentially reach its climax in the next few weeks. This unrest could cause a further divide between authorities and civilians, but also cause a divide between the citizens of Iran depending on their views of Tehran.

[Tayte Domine]

## IRAN: Drone Deal May Spark More Weapons Development Cooperation

**Summary:** The recent drone base deal with Moscow will likely increase cooperation and weapons trading between the countries. This strengthening relationship may result in Tehran receiving aid with nuclear weapons development.

**Development:** On 5 January, a high-ranking official of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Chief Executive of an Iranian aviation company toured a site in the Russian town of Yelabuga where several sources believe that the two countries will build a new drone factory. General Abdollah Mehrabi of the IRGC Aerospace Force research section and Ghassem Damavandian, the Executive Chief of Quds Aviation Industry, led the tour. The \$1 billion deal began in November 2022 with negotiations, solidifying into an official arrangement at the end of the month. One of the main goals of this plant is creating faster versions of the current Shahed-136 drones with the ability to travel longer distances. The Shahed drones act as suicide drones with a range of roughly 1,550 miles that explode when striking the intended target, according to *Firstpost*. Tehran still supports the Houthi rebels in their fight against the Royal Saudi Armed Forces in Yemen.

**Analysis:** Tehran probably desires this deal to convince Moscow to help Tehran's struggling nuclear weapons program. The rapid movement from negotiations to touring sites likely means that Moscow wants to use the drones to aid in the war with Ukraine. Moscow will almost certainly share any design improvements with the IRGC to maintain relations and possibly aid Tehran in its ongoing proxy war in Yemen. These improvements will likely prove difficult for targeted countries, specifically Ukraine, to deal with because of their increased speed.

[Hunter Flanagan]

## LATIN AMERICA: Alliance Forming Likely Indicates a New Cold War Will Occur

**Summary:** An alliance continues growing between Tehran, Caracas, Havana, and Managua, likely indicating a new cold war may break out between the United States and Russia.

**Development:** On 2 February, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian visited Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Faria, and Venezuelan Minister of Petroleum Tarek El Aissami and left for Havana the following day. The discussions focused on strengthening “anti-Western” ties and gaining oil access and support in response to Washington’s sanctions. Ortega voiced his opinion that Tehran and Pyongyang have a right to nuclear arms and suggested Managua is willing to become an Iranian platform in the Americas during said discussion.

**Analysis:** These visits likely indicate Tehran growing alliances to avoid Washington’s sanctions and to prove the willingness of countries to cooperate in opposition to Washington in case of hostilities. Tehran’s support of Moscow without direct involvement, with Washington indirectly aiding Ukraine, could show an emerging cold war. Moscow may reciprocate the favor to Tehran and its footholds growing in the Latin Americas to disrupt Washington’s interests. This support to Tehran through Moscow and its Latin American allies could spur Tehran to act against Washington, such as attacking its allies or influencing other countries, especially Latin America, to overthrow governments that support Washington.

[Connor Jay Tremblay]

## 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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Savannah Gallop, 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](mailto:editorsee@gmail.com) or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 423, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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