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[SYRIA: Assistance from Arab League Members Could Stabilize Relations](#)

Summary: The meetings attended by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad show a likely move to strengthen ties with members of the Arab League. The assistance provided by Arab League members for earthquake relief will likely evolve into more formal economic aid in the form of loans. The influence of Damascus in the Near East could increase with the assistance of Arab League members.

Background: On 23 March, officials from Damascus and Riyadh agreed to reopen embassies after the holiday of Eid, according to Reuters. A week before, al-Assad met with United Arab Emirate (UAE)'s President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to discuss stabilizing Damascus for increased regional cooperation, according to *Al Jazeera*. This visit followed a trip in February to Muscat where al-Assad met with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to discuss regional issues and allocation of humanitarian aid for earthquake victims, according to Firstpost. Al Nayhan's advisor Anwar Gargash mentioned how the UAE wanted to help Damascus regain its lost relations within the Arab world. The meetings come after the earthquake that struck northern Syria on 6 February that caused over \$5.1 billion in damages and over 6,000 deaths, according to the Associated Press. The quake also caused an expected five percent gross domestic product contraction, according to The World Bank. Damascus's isolation comes from the 2011 civil war following the suppression of the Arab Spring-inspired peaceful protests by Damascus forces, according to CBS. The civil war displaced 13 million citizens, with 15 million citizens requiring humanitarian aid, according to CBS.

Path of Humanitarian Aid: The progression of humanitarian aid throughout the civil war into the earthquakes will likely establish closer economic ties between Arab League members and Damascus. The passage of "*Resolution 2165 (2014)*" by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) allows for medical and surgical supplies to enter Syria through designated border openings, according to the *United Nations Press*. The United Nations (UN) sent over \$32 billion in humanitarian aid from 2012 through 2018, according to The Irish Press. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (UNOCHA) controls the coordination, financing, policymaking, advocacy, and information management behind the allocation of humanitarian responses, according to OCHA. UNOCHA collected over \$270 million in donations for humanitarian aid this year, according to the Financial Tracking Services. Another

branch of the UN, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) to vaccinate over 1.7 million citizens in northwestern Syria against ongoing cholera outbreaks. While the cholera outbreak started late last year, the damage created by the earthquakes and rain to pipelines and dams caused the contamination of drinking water, according to Reuters. Continued storms have affected earthquake camps and caused the destruction or damage to over 1,500 tents, according to Al Jazeera. Another UN branch, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), assists forcibly displaced individuals, according to UNHCR. To combat the effects of the earthquake, several Arab League Members have donated supplies to help the victims. His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Manama donated over 44 tons of medical equipment and materials along with a medical team specialized in disasters, according to Bahrain News Agency. King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein authorized delivering food, medical supplies, and tents to Syria, according to the *Jordan Times*. Baghdad's Prime Minister Mohammad Shai' Al Sudani owned two planes with over 70 tons of medical supplies and over \$14 million in donations, according to the Jerusalem Post. The Iraqi Red Crescent, an independent humanitarian society, sent at least 60 tons of food and medical supplies, according to Iraqi News. Cairo's President Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil el-Sisi sent aid trucks, supply ships with aid, planes with medical aid, and rescue teams, according to Ahram. The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center with permission from Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud provided over 80 tons of supplies delivered by trucks and over twelve planes delivered aid, according to Al Arabiya. Abu Dhabi sent over 3,300 tons of humanitarian aid and helped to negotiate border crossings in the north, according to Reuters.

The Resurgence of Allies: The reforming relations between Damascus and Arab League members could allow Damascus to regain influence in the Near East. Abu Dhabi began the process last year when Assad met with Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and later Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum to discuss the sovereignty of Damascus and humanitarian aid support, according to Reuters. The event marked the first meeting since 2011 when Assad traveled to another Arab country, according to *Al Jazeera*. Assad also visited Muscat to meet with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to start normalizing relations with other Arab nations, according to Reuters. Assad visited Abu Dhabi a second time after the earthquakes to

meet with Nahyan to discuss stabilization in the Near East for eased relations, according to Reuters. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed visited Assad in Damascus to continue bilateral relations and start the process of commercial partnerships, according to Al Jazeera. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ayman Safadi visited Assad to determine the needs of Damascus and how Amman can continue its relief effort, according to Al Jazeera. A large meeting between Arab Parliamentary heads that represented the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) met with Assad so that further dialogue could continue to bring Damascus back to the Near East, according to Al Jazeera. The AIPU formed from the Arab League to become the Legislative body, according to the Associated Press. The AIPU holds the power to promote the solidarity of Arab states through aid and funding, according to *AIPU*. The delegation included Baghdad's Speaker of the House of Representatives Mohammed Rikan Hadid al-Halbousi, Cairo's Speaker of the House of Representatives Hanafy Ali El-Gebali, Abu Dhabi's President of the Federal National Council Saqr Ghobash, Amman's Speaker of the House of Representatives Ahmed Al-Safadi, Tripoli's Speaker of the House of Representatives Aguila Saleh Issa, and other lower-level parliament members, according to Al Jazeera.



Figure 1: A map of Africa and the Near East including the members of the Arab League

Outlook and Implications: Assad used the increased humanitarian aid from the earthquakes to strengthen ties with Arab League members which will likely lead to Damascus rejoining the Arab League. The AIPU could likely use its authority to allocate funding and aid to Damascus to promote stability in the Arab world. This funding will likely improve the GDP to promote stabilization. The improvements could take the form of Abu Dhabi's investments in cooperative businesses to increase revenue and allow Syrian refugees to return. The allocated aid could further the fight against the current cholera outbreaks and allow Damascus to focus more on recovery for earthquake victims. The support for victims could continue with the provision of further aid for creating new tent camps with food and medical supplies. The earthquake camps could also see continued support from WHO to monitor the cholera outbreak. The planning for future disasters by UNOCHA could likely see a decreased response time and an improved allocation of humanitarian aid. For political improvements, the actions taken by Riyadh to reopen its embassy could likely cause other Arab League members to follow suit. The increased

bilateral relations with Muscat and Abu Dhabi could increase the frequency of meetings between Damascus and Arab League members and allow Tariq or Nayhan to act as the mediator. Increased dialogue between Damascus's neighbors Amman, Riyadh, and Baghdad could strengthen border security to maintain the sovereignty of Damascus. A benefit of these talks includes the UNHCR, and Arab neighbors could likely create a new plan to further the return of displaced Syrians back to Syria through proper channels.

[Riley Grant]

CHINA: Taipei Diplomacy Tour Likely to Accelerate Conflict Over Reunification

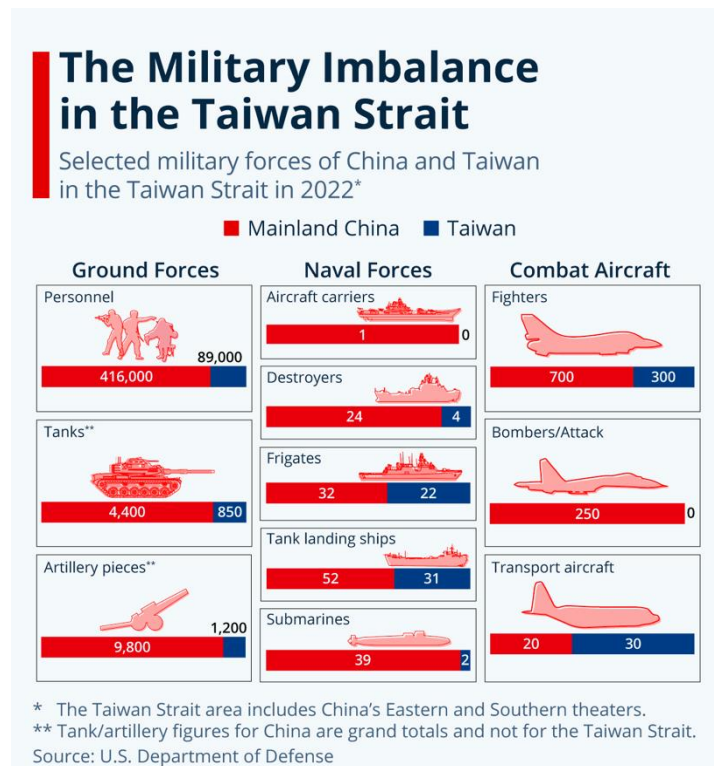
Summary: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen traveled to multiple countries seeking military and allied support against Beijing and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Beijing stands firm in its position towards reunification under the One China Policy and warns Taipei against seeking diplomatic aid from other countries. Despite this, Tsai increases foreign outreach, likely straining tensions and increasing the chance of cross strait interference between Taipei and Beijing.

Background: On 29 March, Tsai stopped in New York on her way to discuss diplomatic relations with Guatemala City and Belmopan. Beijing warned Taipei that should it establish further ties with Washington, Beijing will intervene. This warning, along with others, belongs to a series of tactical decisions to survey and intimidate Taipei along the Taiwan Strait median line. This does not represent the first attempt from Beijing to reunify Taiwan; the earliest conflict dating back to Taipei's initial creation and separation from Beijing in 1949. Taiwanese forces monitor the PLA's activity bordering the contiguous zone, a stretch of sea extending 24 nautical miles from Taiwanese shores. The PLA increases surveillance surrounding the strait each day, according to Taiwan News. Taipei shared that its view of the Russia-Ukraine conflict serves as a warning to prepare for the worst against Beijing. Beijing ranks third globally in military power compared to Taipei which ranks 23 out of 145, according to Global Fire Power. Considering this, Tsai continues to pursue foreign outreach as more governments declare its loyalty to Beijing. Taipei uses unofficial partnerships with western allies to receive military and security support, however, no government declared that it would send troops to Taiwan should conflict escalate. The graphic below from the *Financial Times* indicates the location of the Taiwan Strait median line, and its proximity to both China and Taiwan.



<https://www.ft.com/content/3a3a4235-3c4c-4a55-80e6-2a584960583d>

Taipei Rebukes Beijing's Policy: Taipei's strong defiance against Beijing likely appears to Beijing as a threat, potentially triggering an attack on Taiwan. Beijing views Taiwan as a part of China under the One China Policy, stating that the entirety of China follows and abides by a one-government system. Should Beijing proceed with force to combat Taiwanese resistance, the sheer size of China would allow the PLA to assemble a considerably larger military than Taiwanese forces, as shown in the graphic below, according to the U.S. Department of Defense as of December 2022. The PLA continues to monitor areas near Taiwan and the surrounding strait, which could escalate from surveillance into a possible attack. Taipei's continued defiance and preparation against Chinese military forces indicates that it will fight the conflict head on should Beijing choose to make a move against Taipei.



<https://www.statista.com/chart/3471/the-military-imbalance-in-the-taiwan-strait/>

Diplomatic Outreach from Taipei: Taipei continues to reach out to Western allies for military and security support, likely making a larger enemy of Beijing. Both countries currently work to

increase their military forces, indicating that a diplomatic compromise between Taipei and Beijing remains unlikely. President Tsai's diplomatic tour poses a threat to Beijing and other countries, likely increasing the stakes of the conflict and creating more political enemies worldwide. Should a foreign government side with Taipei, it must choose whether it can sustain a potential blow from Beijing regarding foreign relations, causing Beijing's reputation as a global superpower to prevent Taipei from receiving additional aid.

Outlook and Implications: Despite warnings from Beijing for Taipei not to meet with Western allies, Taipei continues foreign outreach, likely to send a message to Beijing and uphold consistent resistance against reunification. Beijing could view this as a blatant disrespect of its policies, and likely threaten to harm passage and trade through the South China Sea for Taipei and its allies.

Beijing will likely attempt to isolate Taiwan from surrounding countries and its support by sending increased military aircraft to Taiwanese waters. The presence of the PLA and its military drills near the strait likely shows an effort to tire Taiwanese military forces, which ostensibly contributes to rising tensions between the two nations. The growing uncertainty pertaining military aid in support of Taiwan likely indicates that Beijing surveys Taipei's efforts and current is focusing on scaring allies away from aiding Taiwan in potential conflict. Beijing will probably wait until Taipei feels less secure in its allied support to make an attack across the Taiwan Strait.

[C. Ellie Bryl]

[PERU: Leader Change Will Likely Negatively Shift Economy and Foreign Relations](#)

Summary: In December, former Vice President of Peru Dina Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra stepped into office after the impeachment of former President José Pedro Castillo Terrones. In the months following the change in leadership, death and violence riddled Peru, particularly in indigenous areas where support for Castillo remains strong. The change in leadership paired with the violence and opposition will likely tarnish Peru's reputation, relationships, and economy.

Background: On 7 December 2022, Peru's Congress forced the removal from office of Castillo, according to Reuters. The former president attempted to dissolve Peru's Congress, enact a government ruled by decree, and call for new legislative elections, according to CFR. These actions prompted several cabinet members along with top government officials to resign as they saw corruption in Castillo and his beliefs, according to CFR. Castillo's impeachment, paired with Boluarte stepping into his place, sparked immense violence within the country, according to Reuters. During the election, Castillo promoted taxing the rich, nationalizing the mining industry, and rewriting the Peruvian Constitution, according to CFR. Indigenous communities and impoverished farmers heavily supported Castillo as they saw Castillo as a victim of Lima and the "white elite" in Peru, according to CFR. Feeling ignored and neglected, the largest indigenous regions within Peru rose in dangerous protests, blockades, strikes, and attacks, according to CFR. They demanded Castillo's release, dissolution of Congress, new elections, and for Boluarte to step down, according to CFR.

Fire of Political Protests Stoked and Their Wake Left Behind: The economic status of Peru will likely decrease as opposition to Boluarte continues to rise. Several recent examples showcase the falling economic status of Peru as the rage of the political protestors increase:

- In late January, demonstrators stormed the sites of several copper mines, hindering the copper output of the world's number two supplier of this finite resource, according to Bloomberg. Around 30 percent of the copper production fell at risk due to the protests, at a time of high prices and low global stocks within the field, according to Bloomberg. The initial blockade led to the loss of about \$160 million in production within the mining industry in just 23 days of protest, according to Bloomberg. Moreover, Beijing owns most of the copper mines within Peru, according to Reuters. Foreign investors, such as China, that receive large amounts of Peruvian copper exports, may attempt to shelter their investments,

which could include revising international treaty protections or cutting ties with Peru altogether.

- On 15 February, the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu reopened after roughly 26 days of inactivity due to the political protests engulfing the country. The sanctuary welcomes roughly 2,500 foreign and local visitors a day, generating \$35.9 million a year for Peru's economy, according to Andina. Tourism plays a key role in Peru's economy and the ongoing protests caused an approximately \$6 million decrease in the economy, according to BBC News. A travel caution attached to Peru's name and a State of Emergency in some regions of Peru could turn tourists away from traveling to the region, according to SmartTraveller. With ongoing political turmoil, tourists will likely pick a different destination for family vacations, as many roads and sites remain shut down.
- On 28 March, in an attempt to oust Boluarte, indigenous regions such as Puno continued to sacrifice their livelihoods, according to Bloomberg. Alejandro Paricahua, for example, owns an apparel store and heads the leading merchant group in the Puno region, according to Bloomberg. Paricahua and other locals coordinated the economic boycott within the region, bringing almost 300,000 people to a financial halt, according to Bloomberg. The economic standstill remains after several months and will likely not end anytime soon even with Puno's poverty level skyrocketed to 80 percent, according to Bloomberg. Despite the protestors tireless efforts, the economic boycott within Puno will likely not impact Boluarte's position of power. The boycott may push Peruvian politicians to enact a State of Emergency within the Puno area and possibly send governmental help to the areas with the most abundant amount of poverty.



Figure 1: Protestors march the streets of Lima in disapproval of current President, Dina Boluarte. The sign in the photo translates to “Out Dina.” Figure taken from PBS News.

Foreign Nations Side with Castillo: Boluarte’s position in office likely jeopardizes Lima’s relationship with foreign partners. Several recent interactions between Lima and surrounding countries showcase how those foreign countries view Lima and its political leaders:

- On 24 February, Boluarte announced the “definitive removal” of Lima ambassador to Mexico City, according to Aljazeera. Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador publicly voiced his support for Boluarte’s overthrown predecessor, which sparked the ambassador recall, according to Aljazeera. Two months prior to the recall, López Obrador granted political asylum to Castillo and his family, leading Boluarte to force Mexico’s ambassador out of Peru, according to BBC News. During a February news conference, López Obrador declared that “Mexico will continue to support [Castillo] who was unjustly and illegally removed from office” and branded Lima as an “unconstitutional” government, according to Aljazeera. Following the comments of López Obrador, Boluarte announced that the relations between Lima and Mexico City now stand at the level of “chargé d'affaires,” according to UPI. The recall of the ambassador from Mexico will likely tarnish the existing relationship between Lima and Mexico City. As a result, trade between the two countries will likely diminish or severely decrease, affecting the economies and quantity of goods in both nations.

- On 30 March, Lima officials announced the “definitive recall” of Lima ambassador to Bogotá. Peruvian officials accused Colombian President Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego of “repeated interference and offensive expressions” ultimately downplaying Castillo’s power grab, which led to the ambassador’s removal, according to *Aljazeera*. During the Ibero-American summit, Petro argued that Castillo “should be here” implying that Lima unjustly impeached Castillo from his position of power, according to *Aljazeera*. Following the recall, the foreign ministry decided that diplomatic relations between Lima and Bogotá now formally stand at the level of “chargé d'affaires,” according to *Aljazeera*. The second recall within one month will likely bode poorly for Peru. Surrounding countries will likely consider Boluarte and other government official’s interactions with their neighboring countries. Meaning, Lima could possibly jeopardize its relationships with other Latin American countries, particularly Bolivia and Argentina that, along with Mexico and Colombia, serve as fervent supporters of Castillo.

Outlook and Implications: As the protestors continue to shut down the operation of several large tourism sites, mining sites, and other sources of economic stimulation, the Peruvian economy will likely diminish. If the indigenous people of Peru do not receive new elections soon, they will likely continue to coordinate economic boycotts. The boycotts will probably increase the chance of widespread poverty within some regions. Tourism remains a large portion of funding for Peru, thus as strained politics in Peru continue, prominent tourism sites, such as Machu Picchu, may experience another cease in operations. Trade between foreign investors in the copper industry, such as China, may discontinue. Beijing will likely attempt to protect their own assets and investments, possibly cutting off ties with Lima in the process. If foreign allies cut ties with Lima, the country will likely lose a significant amount of capital fueling its economy, which could lead to widespread poverty within the nation. Conversely, foreign copper investors may try to intervene in the clash between indigenous Peruvians and the Lima authorities. This intervention would likely either upset the protestors, causing an even larger blockade to occur, or influence foreign investors to support the protestors and release the blockade. If the investors support the protestors, Lima will likely cut ties with those investors due to a lack of support for the Peruvian government. Lima’s recent interactions with its neighboring countries will likely tarnish its reputation within Latin America. If Lima continues to recall its ambassadors to other countries, Lima will likely destroy any relationship left

between those countries. This could potentially affect trade between Peru and surrounding countries. For instance, López Obrador or Petro could potentially impose tariffs or other trade restrictions on exported goods to Peru in retaliation of Boluarte's apparent disdain toward those leaders. Trade restrictions on imports will likely add to the already declining economic state of Peru. Boluarte will likely not grant the wishes of the protestors and may add to the increasing tensions between Peru and other Latin American countries, ultimately negatively impacting the Peruvian economy. If Boluarte continues to refuse the protestors' requests, the protests will likely continue. Lima's bilateral relationships with other countries will most likely diminish, and the economy of the nation could fall into peril.

[Katie Stonecypher]

[IRAN: Agreement with Riyadh Will Likely Lead to Stability and Peace](#)

Summary: Reconstruction of the relationship between the Tehran and the Riyadh, will likely take place after revisiting diplomacy. With this reconstruction, tensions and instability in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf will likely decrease and begin to improve. Due to Beijing's involvement in the agreement, the Middle Eastern region could possibly benefit from Beijing's global aspirations and get weaved into their economic plans.

Background: On 27 March, the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian agreed to meet sometime during the Muslim holy month Ramadan to discuss a deal that will restore their diplomatic ties, according to Reuters. In January 2016, Riyadh executed Shia Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, which resulted in Iranians storming the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Tehran, leading to Saudi Arabia cutting all ties with Iran, according to BBC News. Chinese President Xi Jinping made an effort to host delegates from both Iran and Saudi Arabia to sponsor discussion between the two countries to solve disputes, according to Alarabiya News. After seven years of a strained relationship, Tehran and Riyadh announced that, after a meeting brokered by Beijing, they agreed to restore diplomatic relations and reopen embassies within the next two months, according to Alarabiya News. The countries look to renew two pacts that they signed over two decades ago. The first agreement, signed in 1998, focuses on cooperation within economic, communication, commercial, scientific, environmental, and sport sectors, according to the United States Institute of Peace. The second agreement, originally signed in 2001, focuses on security aspects that the two countries will work together to fight such as; drug smuggling, different crimes, terrorism, and money laundering, according to the United States Institute of Peace.

Houthi Movement in Yemen: Looking to lessen the efforts of the Houthi rebels, Riyadh will likely work hard to improve relations with Tehran. The Houthi movement started as a military rebellion against the Republic of Yemen Armed Forces and escalated into a civil war. Iran supports the Shia Houthi rebels who, in 2014, forced out the Saudi-backed government, which

led to Saudi attacks on the Houthi's, according to BBC News. Tehran remains the primary outside power to holds any influence over the Houthi rebels as Riyadh works to restore Sana'a to power, according to The New Yorker. On 4 November 2017, an Iranian ballistic missile, launched by Hezbollah from Houthi territory, targeted King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh; Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al Jubeir responded to the attack by saying it constituted an act of war from Tehran, according to the Wilson Center. The power the Houthi's hold in Yemen and the conflict brought about from the Houthi movement may lessen if Riyadh can get Tehran to cease backing the Houthi rebels.

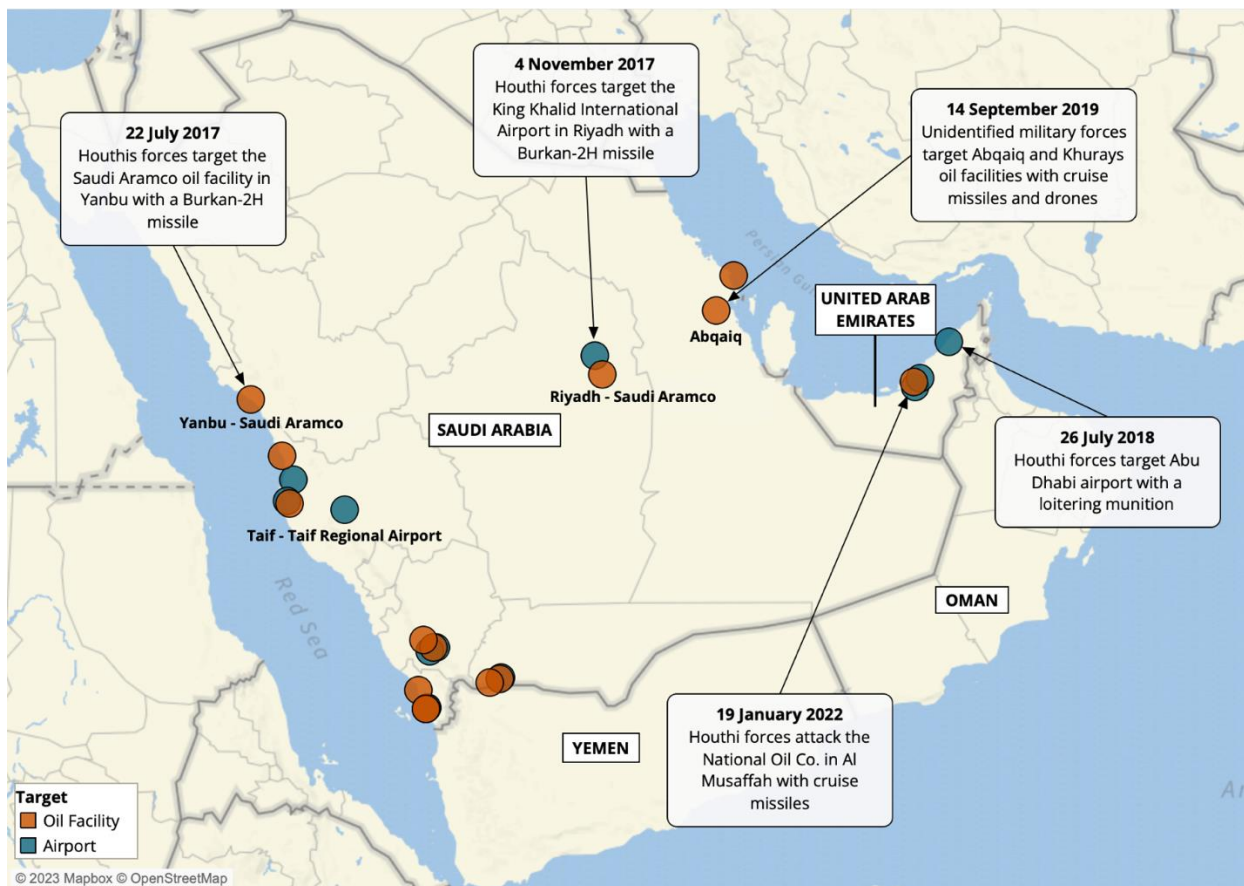


Figure 1: A map (from ACLED) of Iranian backed Houthi rebel's missile, drone, and rocket attacks on oil facilities and airports in and near Saudi Arabia.

Relations with China Could Result in Economic Stability: Due to Beijing's economic powerhouse status and its close relations with Riyadh, restoring relations with Saudi Arabia may improve economic relations with Beijing for Tehran and result in economic stability for the country. In December of 2022, President Xi made a visit to Saudi Arabia in order to deepen their

bilateral ties by signing investment agreements in 34 different sectors, according to Fortune. Stuck in a period of low economic growth, the Iranian economy struggles to gain its footing, according to The Iran Primer. Although Tehran already possesses economic ties with Beijing, they could possibly deepen these ties as a result of restoring relations with Riyadh. In 2022, Beijing held the title of Tehran's largest trading partner, reaching almost \$16 billion in trade, according to The Iran Primer. Since Beijing brokered the deal between Tehran and Riyadh with hopes of developing deeper relations and gaining more power in the region, it may bring these Middle Eastern countries further into their global aspirations and help stabilize the economic crisis occurring.

Outlook and Implications: The recent agreement between Tehran and Riyadh to restore their diplomatic ties could result in decreasing conflict in the Middle Eastern region along with more economic and political stability due to Beijing's facilitation for both Tehran and Riyadh. By improving relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Houthi movement in Yemen will likely lessen. If the Houthi movement loses Iran's backing and becomes less powerful, Saudi Arabia could possibly help Yemen in gaining control over its country again, which could result in less conflict in the Middle East, bringing peace to the region. Since Saudi Arabia supports Yemen and wants to take down the Houthi rebels, it may view this agreement with Iran as a way to form better relations to persuade them to withdraw their support of the Houthis. If successful, this agreement could possibly lead to political and military peace between Tehran and Riyadh; other Middle Eastern countries may benefit from the lack of attacks and fighting in the region. If these Middle Eastern countries no longer have to focus on Tehran and Riyadh, they will likely shift their focus to their country and citizens. The 1998 pact that Tehran and Riyadh look to renew will likely result in stabilization of the economy or a boost in their economies. With the renewal of the 2001 pact, a decrease in crime-related activities will likely occur, which could possibly result in more peace for the region. Due to Beijing's involvement in the brokering of this deal, Tehran could possibly hope to impress Beijing by cooperating with Riyadh in hopes of gaining even more support from Beijing which may potentially help stabilize its economy. If Beijing becomes more involved with Tehran and Riyadh, it could lead to other Middle Eastern countries benefiting from Beijing's global aspirations and their involvement in the region. If Beijing becomes an active partner in the Middle East, its involvement and status as an economic

powerhouse will likely have the potential to reduce volatility and encourage economic growth, which, in turn, could improve the Middle Eastern way of living.

[Tayte Domine]

CHINA: Cyber Attacks on European Entities Likely Increase Political Tensions

Summary: Since early January, the Beijing-aligned hacker group Mustang-Panda has taken action to promote an ongoing social engineering campaign targeting multiple governments and political organizations in Europe and Asia, focusing on Taiwan and Ukraine. Its current campaign shedding light on a new back door not based on existing families or publicly available projects will likely result in disruptions and growing influence will likely cause an increase in political tensions between Brussels and Beijing.

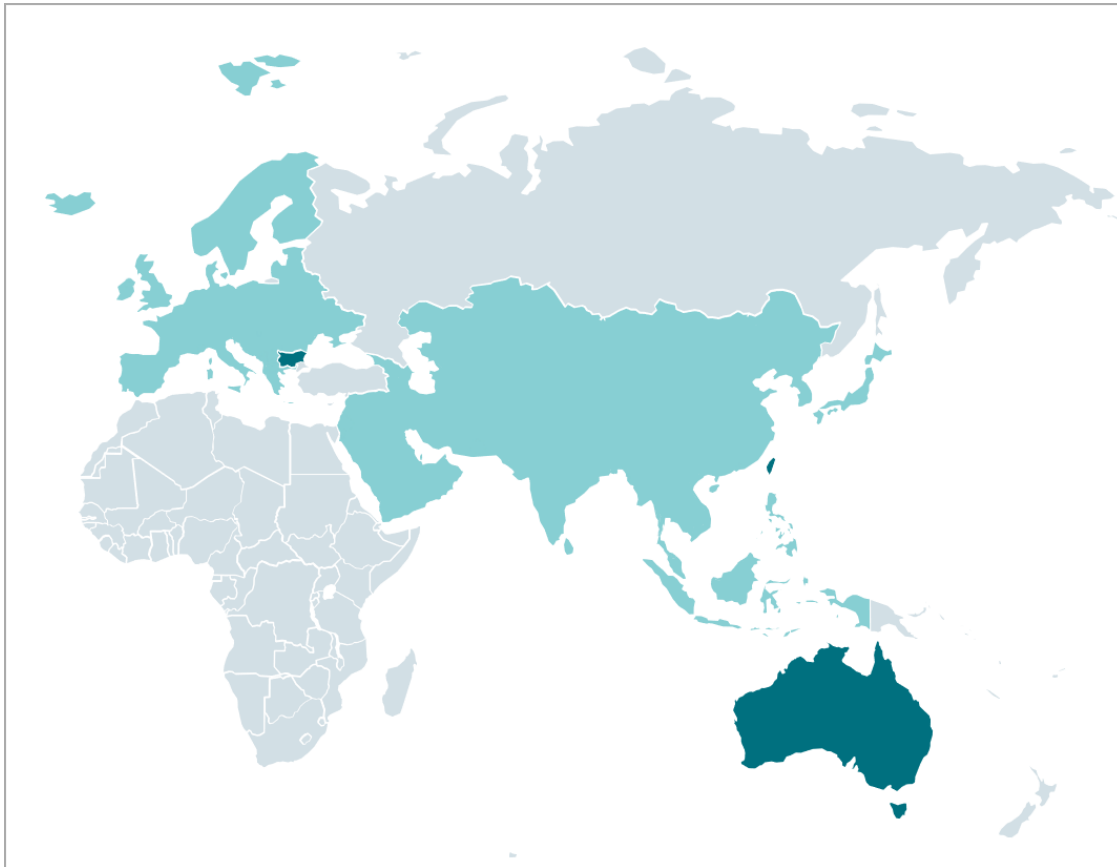
Background: Mustang Panda remains a persistent threat known for targeting worldwide organizations in data theft. The Mustang Panda group has reportedly remained active in Europe since at least 2020 and expanded its activity there more since Russia invaded Ukraine, according to *Industrial Cyber*. Authorities have connected this previous campaign to continued activity by the advanced persistent threat (APT) actor TA416, which relates to China. The group is targeting European diplomatic entities, including an individual involved in refugee and migrant services. The targeting remains consistent with previous activity seen across the APT actor landscape, showing an interest in refugee policies and logistics across the APT actor landscape which coincides with increased tensions and now the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Mustang Panda also has previous links to distributing the espionage malware PlugX in 2022 through malicious optical disc images (ISO) files to entities in Europe. The Mustang Panda group's main identifier remains its MQsTTang malware, which differentiates from previous malware structures. The unique MQsTTang backdoor provides a new remote access point that increases its ability to perform undetectable operations.

A Likely Platform for Political Turmoil: Mustang Panda will likely continue attacking European political organizations due to the increased tension within Brussels support of Kyiv during the current Moscow and Kyiv war operations. As several recent examples of operations have aimed against international viewpoints that currently conflict with Beijing's operations

since the 24 February 2022, Moscow invasion and occupation of part of Kyiv in its major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War:

- The China-aligned group tracked as TA416 (aka Mustang Panda) has consistently targeted European diplomats since August 2020, with the most recent activity involving refreshed lures to coincide with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- In March 2022, security analysts uncovered a malicious campaign targeting diplomats from threat actor Mustang Panda, which has continued for at least eight months with a new variant of the Korplug malware called Hodur and custom loaders.
- In April 2022, phishing campaign targeting Russian officials found evidence that points to the China-based threat actor tracked as Mustang Panda organizations.
- In November 2022, state-backed Chinese hackers launched a spear phishing campaign to deliver custom malware stored in Google Drive to government, research, and academic organizations worldwide.

With its previous attacks aiming at political organizations Mustang Panda will likely continue launching its attack chains with the target of European entities in the wake of current political tensions between Brussels and Beijing.



Latest campaign targets heatmap

<https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-hackers-use-new-custom-backdoor-to-evade-detection/>

Tension and Influence: Mustang Panda probably will continue conducting these forms of consistent attacks and data thefts to increase its influence and widen its support by furthering relations in European organizations. With this possibility, also leading to Mustang Panda furthering threats against any opposition and attacks performed against any Beijing aligned organizations or groups with shared viewpoints. As current escalating tensions between Moscow and Kyiv operations will likely continue to increase the risk of conflict between Beijing and its relations moving forward.

Outlook and Implications: Mustang Panda's progressing development within its tools and ability to leverage existing tools to compromise its target will likely increase attacks targeting high-profile entities in Europe, targeting private and public sectors, with a continued specific

emphasis on government entities. Efforts to sustain and further its attacks likely escalate current standings and increase conflict within Moscow and Kyiv war operations continue. Its efforts and support of these operations will probably only increase the opposition of Beijing and affiliated organizations like the Mustang Panda. European political organizations may conduct the same tactics as Beijing aligned groups and increase their influence and widen its support by furthering relations.

[Isabella Whalen]

ECUADOR: Authorization of Armed Civilians Likely to Increase Personal Security

Summary: Continued violence and unrest prompted Quito to authorize civilian use of firearms, likely to deter crime and increase feelings of safety among civilians.

Development: On 2 April, Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso announced over a televised broadcast the authorization for civilians to carry and operate guns, citing rising insecurity as the driving factor. With Ecuador located between the two largest producers of cocaine, Colombia and Peru, Lasso continues to struggle limiting its exposure to the drug trafficking ring. In addition to Quito recently cutting its prisons budget, Colombia's cocaine production continues to grow, leading to 64 percent of all Ecuadorians reporting they feel unsafe, according to Gallup. Ranking as one of the most dangerous Latin American countries in 2022, Quito faces several police killings with heightened gang violence. On 1 April, Lasso identified the common enemy as petty crime, drug trafficking, and organized crime, according to Reuters. Lasso further declared states of emergency in several cities, implementing curfews in hopes of increasing civilian safety.

Analysis: With rising crime rates and unsafe environments, this announcement will likely alleviate civilian fears. Although Ecuador remains located between the two largest producers of cocaine, Lasso will probably announce further measures to decrease crime. Lasso almost certainly announced the authorization for civilian use of firearms to address rising crime rates and increase perception of civilian safety. With 64 percent of all Ecuadorians reporting feelings of insecurity in their city, this announcement will most likely encourage perceptions of safety among civilians.

[Michael Tokos]

SOUTH AFRICA: Meeting in Moscow Will Likely Strengthen Political Ties

Summary: Members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) Party attended a meeting with the United Russia Party in Moscow. This will likely strengthen Pretoria's connections to Moscow through BRICS.

Development: On 1 April, the ANC sent senior representatives on a work visit to Moscow, according to *Le Monde*. Members of the United Russian Party solicited the ANC members to the summit, according to SABC News. Pretoria will host the upcoming BRICS summit in August, according to *Al Arabiya*. Pretoria's Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor stated that "...external pressure would not force a break in Pretoria's relationship with Moscow." Chairman Supra Mahumapelo stated that "Pretoria would interfere with the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant for President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin if the warrant risks Pretoria's relationship with Moscow," according to TASS. In 2015, Pretoria refused to arrest indicted President Omar al-Bashir while citing diplomatic immunity, according to Al Jazeera. Pretoria requested legal advice on addressing the arrest warrant, according to Africanews.

Analysis: Pretoria will likely attempt to secure stronger BRICS political ties with Moscow despite the ICC arrest warrant. The meeting of both political parties likely demonstrates a desire for bilateral cooperation in the scope of BRICS. Pretoria will likely mirror its previous refusal to arrest President Omar al-Bashir by securing legal or diplomatic security for President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin during the summit. Pretoria's allegiance with Moscow could diminish the influence of joint international criminal justice prosecution in BRICS.

[Markus Weinzinger]

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.

EE does not cite sources in the final publication; however, we log every source we use in our research and are happy to share them upon request. The official EE Source Database is available on our website's resources page for a general overview of our sourcing methods.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not represent the position Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University or the College of Business, Security, and Intelligence.

Savannah Gallop, a junior 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 429, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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