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# Issue 453

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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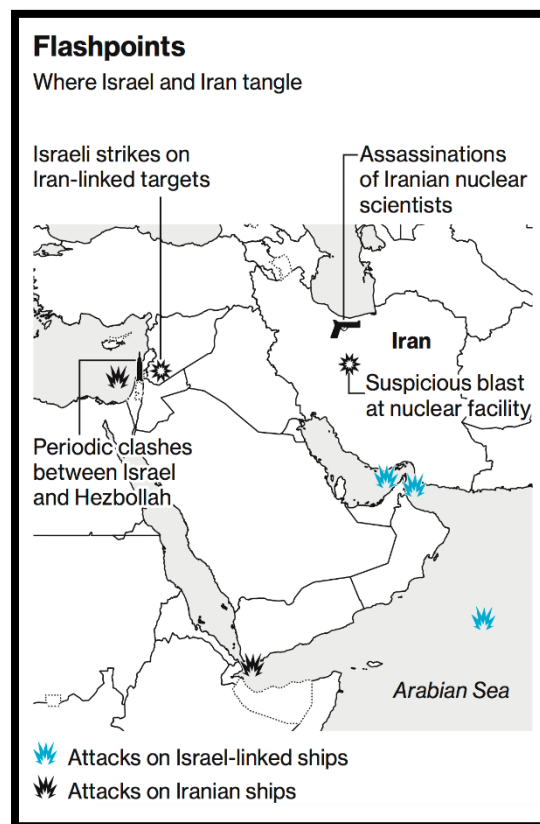
## IRAN: Jerusalem Strike on Tehran Leaders Will Likely Escalate Ongoing Proxy War

**Summary:** Jerusalem's most recent strike on Iranian leaders will likely lead to a heightened conflict with Tehran. Tehran has vowed to retaliate, which will likely lead to an increase in the frequency of alternating attacks. Tehran's retaliation will likely involve the use of proxy groups to strike, while Jerusalem will likely continue air strikes and attacks on Iranian targets in Syria.

**Background:** On 1 April, Jerusalem struck an Iranian Embassy in Syria, killing seven people, including two high-ranking Iranian commanders, according to *Al-Jazeera*. The strike killed Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Jerusalem pinning him as a target many years ago, according to *Al-Jazeera*. This strike will fuel Tehran's retaliation, perpetuating the conflict between Israel and Iran, according to France 24. With conflicting beliefs after the 1979 Revolution, Tehran and Jerusalem engaged in an ongoing proxy war, also known as the Israel-Iran Shadow War. Both Tehran and Jerusalem often deny involvement in attacks on each other, deeming the conflict "shadow war." In the last few decades, Jerusalem carried out several attacks on Iranian targets, including nuclear scientists, ships, and, most recently, an embassy, according to the Center for Strategic & International Studies. Jerusalem also struck targets in Syria on many occasions, as Tehran's "Axis of Resistance" remains well supported in that area. Tehran utilizes its proxy groups to discretely attack Israeli targets such as ships, military posts, and even innocent citizens, according to *Al-Jazeera*. Tehran cannot directly link itself to some of these attacks due to its lack of complete control over these groups; however, the fact that they provide funds, weapons, and training to these groups connects them.

**Tehran's Use of Proxies to Attack:** Tehran will almost certainly continue its use of the "Axis of Resistance" to attack Israel and will almost certainly retaliate for the most recent airstrike using its proxy groups. Tehran's proxy groups form the "Axis of Resistance," allowing Iran to hold militia power in several locations across the Middle East, putting it in a strategic position to attack adversaries throughout the region, according to *The New York Times*. This network will likely continue to boost Tehran's influence and give it more power to confront its enemies. Tehran relayed its intent to retaliate to Jerusalem's assassination of high-ranking Iranian generals, according to *The Times of Israel*. The retaliation will likely display intense animosity and strategy, reflecting the intention of Tehran to respond forcefully to the strike.

**Jerusalem's Use of Air Strikes to Remain Anonymous:** Because Jerusalem does not possess proxy group power, Jerusalem will almost certainly continue air strikes that it denies responsibility for as its main form of attack. As shown in Jerusalem's most recent strike on Tehran, Jerusalem launched an air strike and refused to comment on the situation, according to *Al-Jazeera*. The determination of both sides to remain anonymous will likely escalate into a wider conflict, as both Jerusalem and Tehran refuse to claim responsibility. This escalating tension will likely further destabilize the region and draw in other actors, exacerbating an already volatile situation. In a shadow war, covert actions often occur, often through deniable means, to achieve strategic objectives without openly declaring hostilities, according to the Digital Scientific Archive. The lack of accountability begins a cycle of retaliation and escalation, which poses significant consequences for regional stability and global security, according to the Digital Scientific Archive.



*Figure 1: Infographic showing placement of important strikes in the Israel-Iran Shadow War.*

**Outlook and Implications:** The air strike on Iranian leaders will likely lead to an escalation of conflict between Tehran and Jerusalem and may lead to a dispute involving surrounding nations. Tehran's vows to retaliate will likely lead to a response from Jerusalem and the continuation of this ongoing dispute. Tehran will almost certainly use its "Axis of Resistance" to retaliate against Israel. While Tehran continues to use proxy groups to strike, Jerusalem will likely continue to use air strikes to avoid claiming responsibility. As Tehran continues to use its proxy groups in surrounding nations to execute attacks, conflicts may arise with nations where the "Axis of Resistance" operates actively. As Jerusalem does not possess proxy group power, Jerusalem will almost certainly continue anonymous air strikes to attack foreign combatants.

[Caileigh Tax]

## TAJIKISTAN: Migrant Workers' Return Likely to Cause Social, Economic Unrest

**Summary:** Numerous Tajiks are leaving Russia due to harassment. This will likely lead to economic downturn and social unrest in both countries and increased radicalization in Tajikistan.

**Development:** On 22 March, four Tajik nationals attacked the Crocus City Hall, a concert hall in Moscow, shooting numerous patrons before setting the venue on fire, killing 145 and wounding hundreds more. All four suspects in the attack are Tajik nationals, and Moscow arrested at least six other Tajiks in connection to the attack. Islamic State – Khorasan (ISIS-K), which has operated within and recruited fighters from Tajikistan for numerous years, claimed responsibility for the attack. Tajiks living in Russia are facing significant and increased harassment, including arbitrary deportations, beatings by police, and more. This has led numerous Tajiks to leave Russia or attempt to, according to a statement made by Tajik Deputy Labor Minister Shahnoza Nodiri on 30 March. Tajikistan, the poorest country in the former Soviet Union, has a population of approximately 9.2 million. Russia has a GDP approximately 6.7 times as large as Tajikistan's, and migrant workers earn approximately four times as much in Russia than they do in Tajikistan, often with a higher standard of living than they would have in Tajikistan, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Tajikistan also has widespread unemployment, and 50.9% of the Tajik GDP comes from remittances, an overwhelming majority of which comes from Russia.

**Analysis:** Tajik workers will likely continue to leave Russia in large numbers, leading to social unrest and economic downturn in both countries, including a potential spike in terrorist radicalization in Tajikistan. Anti-immigrant sentiment in Russia will likely persist for several years. While Moscow likely will not significantly tighten immigration protocols due to the country's labor shortage, numerous Tajiks will likely leave the country anyway due to increasingly widespread harassment, leading to labor shortages in certain industries, reduced production, and economic downturn in Russia. Tajikistan's unemployment crisis and critical infrastructure overburdening will likely become considerably worse due to an influx of returning workers. Even more significantly, poverty in Tajikistan will almost certainly spike in the absence of these workers' wages. This unemployment, harassment, and poverty will likely increase the number of Tajiks susceptible to terrorist radicalization, especially by the already-present ISIS-K.

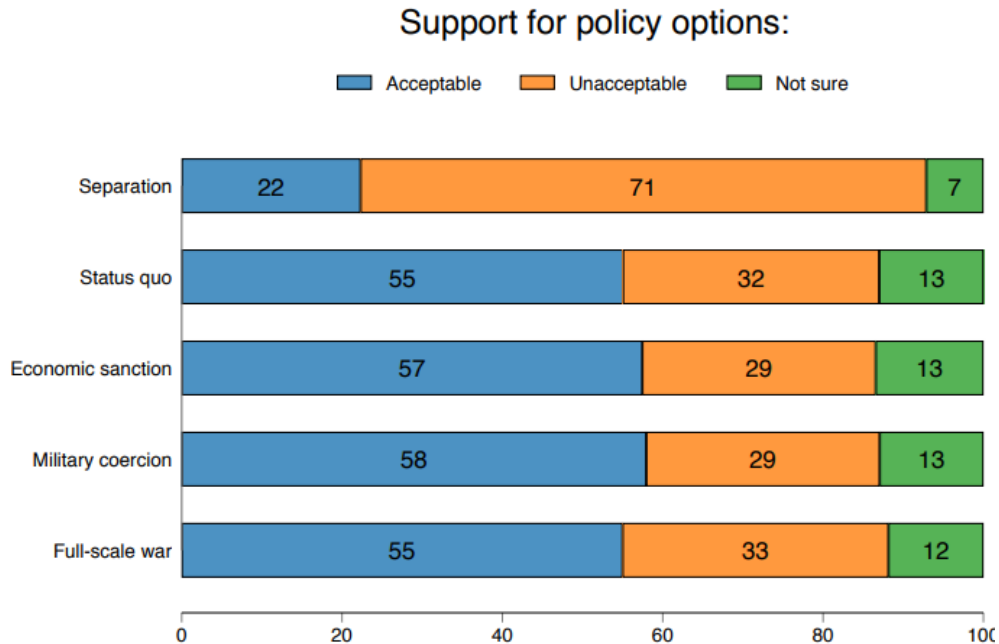
[Christina Muchow]

## CHINA: Multiple Factors Suggest Armed Invasion of Taiwan Unlikely to Occur Soon

**Summary:** Over the last year, Beijing has struggled with corruption and graft within the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Additionally, both Chinese President Xi Jinping and high-ranking General He Weidong are demanding reform of the PLA's structure and operations. A national survey indicated that a significant amount of the Chinese population opposes an armed invasion of Taiwan. These factors will probably force Beijing to delay or reconsider an armed invasion of Taiwan.

**Background:** In December 2023, Xi Jinping, in conjunction with the National People's Congress (NPC), announced the replacement of nine high-ranking officers from the PLA. Among these officials were Zhang Zhenzhong, Liu Guangbin, and Li Yuchao, all senior officers in the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF). Only two months prior, Beijing dismissed China's former Defence Minister, General Li Shangfu, and Foreign Minister Qin Gang. Following these removals, Xi called for senior officials to restructure the PLA to enhance strategic capabilities in emerging areas. Similarly, General He Weidong advocated for the revision of PLA combat exercises to be more realistic. In March 2023, roughly six months prior to these removals, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century China Center conducted a national survey assessing common public opinion toward different means of Taiwanese reunification.

**National Survey Shows Mixed Opinions Among Chinese:** In March 2023, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century China Center published a research paper which indicated that Chinese citizens would most likely disapprove an armed reunification of Taiwan. The survey sought to assess popular approval for various methods of reunification. Previous surveys by other institutions largely neglected any method beyond either armed or peaceful reunification. The survey measured the popularity of five methods, labelled 'Separation,' meaning a total lack of reunification going forward, 'Status quo,' meaning the maintenance of the current situation, 'Economic sanction,' meaning Beijing imposes economic sanctions and naval blockades to impede the Taiwanese economy, 'Military coercion', meaning military invasion of Taiwan's offshore islands, and 'Full-scale war,' meaning an armed invasion of mainland Taiwan. Approximately half of all respondents rated all methods but separation as acceptable, with only 22% of respondents rating separation as acceptable. In stark contrast, 71% of respondents rated separation as unacceptable, indicating that the Chinese population probably generally supports the reunification of Taiwan.



*Figure 1: A graph displaying the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chinese Center’s collected data regarding the popularity of various reunification methods among Chinese citizens.*

The survey also labelled these methods as either ‘pacifist,’ ‘ambivalent,’ or ‘bellicose,’ with each term corresponding to each method’s level of aggression. The survey used these labels in conjunction with the collected demographics of respondents to determine correlations between approval of aggressive methods and demographics like age, nationalism, sex, knowledge of the PLA, geographic location, education, and income. The study found that respondents considering the economic and/or reputational cost of armed reunification prefer less aggressive reunification methods. More generally, the data collected by the national survey indicates that a large portion of the Chinese populace opposes aggressive reunification with Taiwan.

**Military Purges Affect PLA Readiness:** High-ranking purges in key leadership will most likely delay the possibility of an armed invasion. Over the last year, the NPC dismissed over a dozen high ranking officials in the PLA and the Chinese government, indicating that the PLA will likely suffer from leadership issues. The removed officials included PLARF commander Li Yuchao, his four predecessors, and his former and present deputies, Zhang Zhenzhong and Liu Guangbin. This purge continues a pattern of Xi and the NPC dismissing high ranking officials. Two months prior to this purge, the NPC officially announced the dismissal of former Defence Minister Li Shangfu and former Foreign Minister Qin Gang, demonstrating that these purges are



not limited to the PLA. Xi claimed that they are part of an anti-corruption campaign meant to strengthen the PLA in preparation for potential conflict. This aligns with Xi's goal of turning the PLA into a 'world-class force.' The frequent removal of senior PLARF officers could possibly indicate underlying problems in the structure of the PLARF, creating the need to restructure the PLARF and likely other parts of the PLA.

**Calls for Change:** On 7 March, Xi Jinping called for deeper reform to enhance Beijing's strategic capabilities, probably meaning that Beijing is not organized enough to invade Taiwan. Xi stressed coordination between maritime economic and military security as well as the optimization of China's developmental aerospace and cyberspace defense systems. These are all areas that Beijing has already been working to improve so that it may compete as a world superpower. Similarly to Xi's calls for maritime military security, He Weidong, the vice-chairman of China's Central Military Commission (CMC), called for a restructuring of PLA exercises to better reflect real combat. As the Vice Chairman of the CMC, He Weidong ranks second to Xi in military authority. These comments from the two highest ranking officials of the CMC likely suggest that the PLA is not currently prepared to pursue its objectives. It is highly unlikely that Beijing can affect a successful armed invasion of Taiwan.

**Outlook and Implications:** While Beijing maintains the reunification of Taiwan as one of its top priorities, multiple factors indicate that it will most likely not launch an armed invasion of the Taiwanese mainland soon. A large section of the Chinese population appears opposed to an aggressive reunification. Beijing probably holds public opinion of its reunification efforts in high regard and will probably avoid armed reunification as best it can in this context. Additionally, ongoing purges in the PLA and the NPC signals probable leadership breakdowns in Beijing. The PLARF's continual rotation of purging and receiving new commanders is most likely hindering its ability to consolidate operations and support Beijing's objectives. Xi and He Weidong's emphasis to the PLA to change its structure and operations probably means that the PLA is suffering from larger organizational issues, greatly debilitating its operational capacity. He Weidong's comments are probably especially noteworthy, as his demands to move beyond 'fake combat capabilities' likely indicate that the PLA made no proper preparation for a legitimate conflict.

[Kaden Burleson]

## 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.

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Sebastien Bragg, 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](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 453, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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