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# Issue 461

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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## [CHINA: Hacking Discoveries Likely to Encourage Malicious Cyber Activity from Beijing](#)

**Summary:** Beijing's typhoon cyber-attacks presented a security threat to its competitors. The attacks possessed the capability to attack infrastructure, commit espionage, and monitor activity of United States presidential candidates and others. Beijing almost certainly will develop more powerful cyberweapons to replace the typhoon attacks. Beijing likely sees the discovery of its attacks as a potential advantage in raising its reputation as the global leader in cyber capability.

**Background:** In January, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that it had disrupted the Beijing-backed botnet hacking campaign "Volt Typhoon." The operation targeted infrastructure, with the capability of launching destructive attacks on critical infrastructure systems. On 18 September, the Beijing-backed botnet campaign "Flax Typhoon" became similarly disrupted. Unlike its predecessor, Flax Typhoon focused on cyberespionage for the People's Republic of China (PRC). "Salt Typhoon" is another component of China's 100-Year Strategy," according to former National Security Agency (NSA) Analyst Terry Dunlap.

**Replenish Cyberweapons:** The Typhoon hacker groups provided Beijing with a tactical advantage while they remained in operation. Potential attacks on infrastructure and espionage capabilities allowed for easy preparation and response from Beijing in the event of conflict arising with another nation. New activity from Beijing-backed cyber operations Volt Typhoon and previously unheard-of groups almost certainly suggests a desire from Beijing to replenish and replace its crippled cyberweapons quickly. Volt Typhoon's new activity shows signs of upgrades to make the botnet difficult to detect, according to MSN.com. A new hacker group "believed to be Chinese state-sponsored compromised two websites with ties to the Tibetan Community," said David Rising with MSN on 14 November. Known as TAG-112, the hacker group hid malicious file downloads on websites that allowed the group to transfer files, detect user keystrokes, and more, according to MSN. Discovery of new hacker groups originating from China indicates that Beijing almost certainly is expanding its cyberwarfare forces and weapons.

**Cyber Reputation:** Beijing plans to transform the PRC into the world leader in technological innovation and military capability. This goal functions as part of Beijing's much larger strategy of a "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation," according to PRC President Xi Jinping. Beijing recognizes cyberspace military capability as a necessary and essential domain for military

operation, according to the PRC's Academy for Military Science and the PRC's Ministry of National Defense. Beijing likely did not plan for the discovery of its hacking campaigns; however, Beijing almost certainly anticipates the potential for the cyberattacks to benefit China's reputation as a cyber superpower and undermine the US and its allies in the realm of cybersecurity. Chinese cyberattacks garner widespread media attention from media outlets likely due to their potentially devastating implications for the citizens and government officials of the victim country. Former White House security official Jamil Jaffer said Salt Typhoon "could be a counterintelligence failure of the highest order," according to MSN. Throughout history, major cyberattacks targeted toward corporations reduced the victim's reputation as a safe and secure business that customers trust with private and valuable information. The loss in reputation is tracked by profit decreases from before the attack to after the attack. For example, after the 2015 TalkTalk cyberattack, the company profits decreased from \$33 million in 2014 to \$14.7 million in 2015, according to BCS.org.

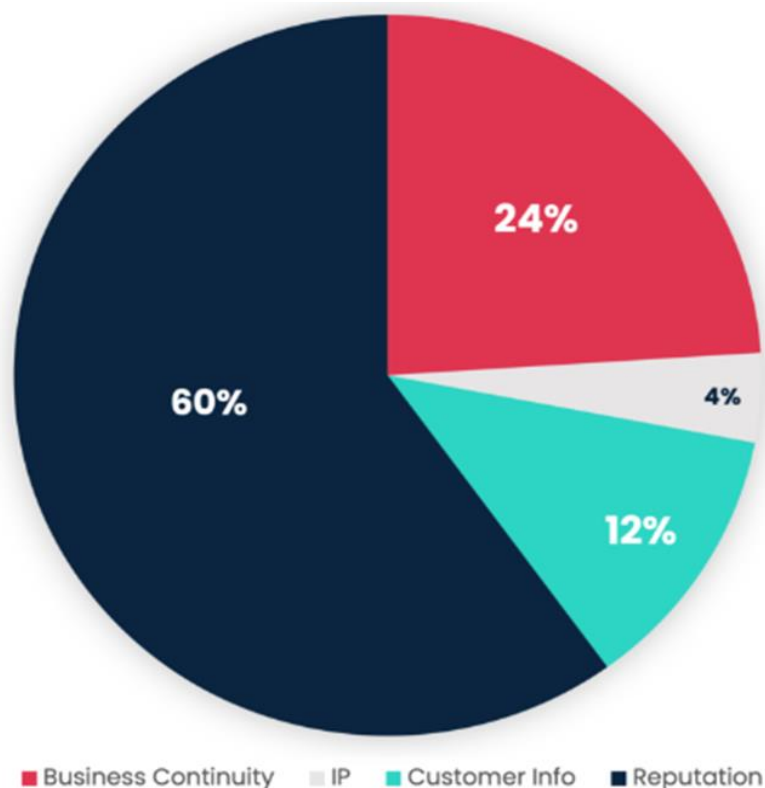


Figure 1: A graphic demonstrating which areas on average create the most potential loss for large companies after a cyberattack.

**Outlook and implications:** Due to Beijing's desire to expand and improve its cyberweapon arsenal, and the potential benefit of increasing its reputation as the world's leading cyber superpower, Beijing will almost certainly increase its usage and development of cyber warfare. Due to a majority of Beijing's competitors, including the USA, typically possess very few laws regarding the regulation of the press, further successful hacks will likely harm the reputation of the victim country. Since Beijing maintains tight control over the press in China, Beijing will likely continue to hack its competitors with little fear of its own reputation becoming damaged. Beijing may begin hacking operations with the main objective of tarnishing the reputation of its competitors. Beijing almost certainly will develop cyberweapons with more capability than the typhoon series of attacks, likely with the intent to remain hidden.

[Matthew Quackenbush]

## MEXICO: Mexico City's Plan for Cartel Crisis Likely Will Not Deter Violence

**Summary:** Since Mexico's first female president came into office, cartel violence increasingly continues to occur. With over a month since the start of her term, President Claudia Sheinbaum dealt with high cartel violence. To combat this, she plans to increase intelligence and investigative work but will follow her predecessor's approach of "hugs, not bullets." She likely will face implementation challenges enforcing her plan, and if not followed through, cartel violence likely will escalate along with more civilian casualties.

**Background:** On 1 October, Sheinbaum officially became Mexico's first female president, and received a country with several problems, according to AP News. Her mentor and former president Andres Manuel López Obrador left his presidency with numerous unsolved issues. He failed in his own strategy to bring down the homicide rate in Mexico and refused to confront the cartels. He also relied on the armed forces and appeals to keep peace with the cartels, according to AP News. Sheinbaum outlined a four-point strategy for dealing with cartels that emphasized intelligence-gathering, troop deployment, improved federal-state coordination, and providing opportunities to dissuade impoverished young people from joining organized crime, according to Yahoo News. She also plans on implementing her mentor's approach, "hugs, not bullets" for handling violence in Mexico, which means turning youths away from recruiting in as cartel gunmen. Critics called Sheinbaum's plan vague and unlikely to deter violence, especially in a nation where heavily armed cartels control large areas of territory, according to Yahoo News. Violence remains rampant across Mexico, with over a thousand killings recorded in Sheinbaum's first thirteen days in office, according to Fair Observer. Sheinbaum claimed that her team is investigating all the incidents, but Sheinbaum only dedicated a few minutes to talking about them, according to ABC News.

**Potential Flaws in Approach:** Sheinbaum's plan for cartel violence likely will not deter violence like her predecessor's plan. López Obrador left Sheinbaum with two pressing problems such as tackling violence and improving security nationwide. Sheinbaum plans to follow more than her mentor's approach to handling violence. In fact, she pledged to continue all his policies, even the ones that strengthened the power of the military and weakened the country's checks and balances, according to AP News. During López Obrador's six-year term from 2018 through

2024, he struggled to improve security and reduce violent crime in Mexico, according to AP News. His struggle led to his term marked as the most violent administration in modern Mexican history. Sheinbaum also plans to strengthen the National Guard even more, and critics argue this will only further militarize public safety and fail to address the root causes of violence, according to Fair Observer. A veteran Mexican journalist, Ioan Grillo, stated that the National Guard may fail and that there is not a strategy for dealing with the cartels, according to Forbes. These plans proved that they have not worked before, so Sheinbaum decided to increase funding to the National Guard again cartel violence likely will stay the same or rise.

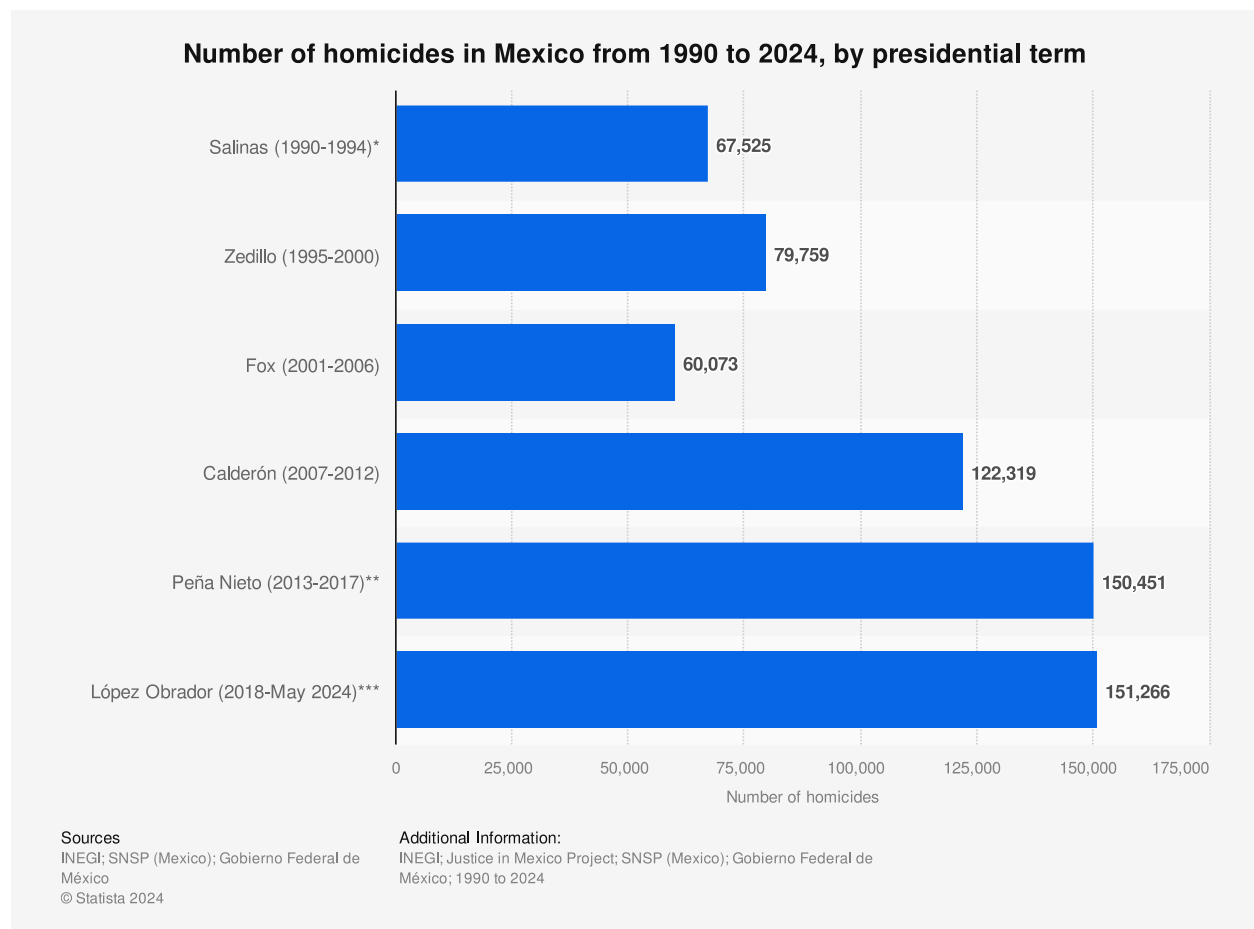


Figure 1: Statistic of number of homicides per presidential term from 1990-2024 in Mexico

**Continuity vs. Change in Policy:** If Sheinbaum shifts from military reliance to prioritizing law enforcement for combating cartel violence, violence likely will decrease and national security will improve, whereas continuing previous policies likely will allow violence to persist. A

security analyst stated that the National Guard does not correctly follow rules of engagement. Instead, they opened fire before investigating, according to ABC News. The operation of public safety in Mexico relies a lot on the military which leads to a limited strategy in solving cartel violence. Obrador's term showed that implementing more military upon the cartels did not help. Organized cartels such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the New Generation Jalisco now operate in Chiapas, a Mexican state known for its high impunity rate for homicide. Ultimately, worsening cartel violence is driving cartels to move to different states that offer exemptions from punishment or harm. If Sheinbaum resorts to a plan that specializes in bettering the police and their investigations as well as lessening the enforcement of the military, then a drastic change in violence likely will start.

**Outlook and Implications:** The policies and approach that Sheinbaum plans to conduct for the cartels likely will not solve any root causes. Cartel violence regularly affects Mexico, and if authorities implement the same plans for handling it, cartel attacks will probably not decrease. If these plans continue, the cartels likely will remain unintimidated, and likely will escalate their attacks on civilians. Since López Obrador mentors Sheinbaum, she likely will implement most of his policies. If she imposes a different plan to handle the cartels, it likely will become challenging, but trying a new approach likely will offer more effectiveness than past plans. If violence continues, people likely will start to leave the country, or they will do nothing about it and stand down. If she implements these plans, violence likely will increase, and cartels will tighten control over civilians, especially in states with lenient laws.

[Mya Thomas]



## CHINA: Increased Air and Naval Operations Likely to Escalate Regional Military Tensions

**Summary:** Beijing continues to escalate its naval and air operations across the South China and Philippine Seas, underscoring its ambition to project power and challenge foreign presence in the Indo-Pacific. Recent exercises involving the aircraft carriers *CNS Liaoning*, *CNS Shandong*, and over 100 aircraft highlight Beijing's intent to counterbalance regional forces. The rising naval activity near Taiwan and the Philippines likely will drive neighboring countries to adopt defensive postures, potentially increasing regional instability.

**Background:** On 31 October, Beijing's navy conducted its first dual aircraft carrier operation in the South China Sea, deploying the *Liaoning* and *Shandong*, along with 11 other warships. The *Liaoning*, Beijing's first carrier, operated near Guam and the northern Philippines from mid-September to early October, while the *Shandong* remained stationed in Hainan until recently, according to *Newsweek*. Satellite imagery and reports from Japan's Defense Ministry indicate that escort warships accompanied the *Shandong*, which later moved into the Philippine Sea. This movement beyond the "first island chain" marks a rare but increasingly common maneuver for Beijing. Taipei's Defense Ministry observed an uptick in Chinese aircraft activity near Taiwan following the *Shandong*'s deployment. On 14 October, Beijing deployed 125 aircraft along with the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier. Taipei's Defense Ministry confirmed that 111 aircraft breached Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), edging closer to Taiwan's borders, according to CNN. Another 44 aircraft breached the ADIZ on 30 October. Beijing officials framed these carrier operations as routine training, according to *Newsweek*.



Figure 1: CNS Liaoning location over the past two weeks in the Indo-Pacific

**Chinese Military Expansion:** Beijing's recent military exercises demonstrate its commitment to expanding naval capabilities and are likely indicative of preparing for regional resistance.

Beijing likely coordinates frequent incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ and conducts large-scale naval exercises to achieve its broader goal of dominating the Indo-Pacific. Beijing actively displays its recent technology, including the J-35A and J-15T fighter aircraft, at the Zhuhai Airshow on 12 October, according to DefenseNews. With Beijing's Navy having over 370 ships and submarines, they almost certainly aim to deter opposition in the Taiwan Strait and other contested areas, signaling a new level of military assertiveness.

**Escalating Tensions Around Taiwan:** Beijing sustains its military presence near Taiwan, focusing on large-scale exercises and multiple ADIZ breaches, in a clear effort to counter Taiwan's sovereignty claims, particularly in response to recent statements by Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te during Taiwan's national-day speech where Ching-te advocated for Taiwan's sovereignty. Beijing shows continued aggression in new ways, such as its intercontinental ballistic missile test on 25 September. These aggressive maneuvers reveal Beijing's strategic intent to pressure Taipei. Taipei has responded with its own defensive measures, including missile system deployments and constant monitoring of Chinese forces, as a clear sign of heightened readiness, and will almost certainly continue to buff its defensive capabilities. As both sides increase military activity, regional tensions likely will rise, furthering the risk of possible misinterpretations of military exercises leading to physical conflict.

**Outlook and Implications:** Beijing's aggressive military operations likely signal an ongoing and expanded military posture, challenging established forces such as Taipei and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region. By conducting exercises beyond the first island chain and near Taiwan, Beijing will almost certainly continue to establish power and challenge allied presence in contested waters. Beijing will probably persist with these exercises and demonstrations of power at this scale. While these actions may enhance Beijing's operational reach, they also heighten the risk of regional militarization, as neighboring countries likely will strengthen their own defensive capabilities in response. Beijing's strategy may provoke stronger regional alliances and defense initiatives, potentially fueling a prolonged power struggle and physical conflict. If Beijing persists with its assertive stance, the Indo-Pacific region likely will experience heightened instability and an arms race among regional powers, with Taiwan emerging as a central flashpoint for rising tensions.

[Matthew Keller]

## **RUSSIA: North Korea Mutual Defense Pact Likely to Shift Tide of War with Ukraine**

**Summary:** Moscow and Pyongyang recently signed a mutual defense pact providing additional Russia with North Korean forces, equipment, and munitions, which Russia deployed to the Kursk region to reclaim the territory currently occupied by the Ukrainians. The combined force likely will overpower the Ukrainian military in Kursk, although many North Korean deserters offered to assist Kyiv and may provide additional tactical support to combat the additional soldiers added.

**Background:** On 11 November, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un signed a mutual defense pact, sealing security cooperation between the two countries. This defense pact marks the first significant pact for both countries since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This pact follows recent security cooperation between the two countries and the deployment of thousands of North Korean soldiers to bolster Moscow's fighting forces, according to AP News. Pyongyang dispatched around 12,000 soldiers to the Kursk region of Russia, where there are ongoing skirmishes between Ukrainian and Russian forces.

**Significance of the Alliance with North Korea:** The additional 10,000 North Korean soldiers may help Russia reclaim the Kursk region. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the region face nearly 50,000 Russian and North Korean soldiers. The North Korean soldiers lack 21<sup>st</sup>-century experience and will only succeed if they can adapt to the modern conflict style, according to AP News and *Al Jazeera*. Pyongyang supplied Moscow with a large amount of 122mm and 152mm artillery, rockets, and mortars of reportedly poor and unreliable quality, according to *Al Jazeera*. The North Korean soldiers will support the Russians in the region allowing the reclamation of the area.



Figure 1: President Putin and Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong Un shaking hands after signing the mutual defense pact.

**Defectors Aiding Ukraine:** Many North Korean defectors recently joined Ukraine, potentially reducing the impact of the North Korean troops on Russia's side but likely not significantly improving Ukrainian capabilities. Additional defectors may join as the war progresses due to the lack of loyalty and the better living conditions that the defectors may experience with Kyiv. More than 30,000 defectors left North Korea and moved to South Korea. Almost 200 of these soldiers started to move to Ukraine to fight against Russia and its allies, according to the *Kyiv Post*. These additional soldiers likely will help Ukrainian military leaders modify their plans, negating the new tactics of the North Korean soldiers and leaders. The defected soldiers hope to use their prior service in the North Korean military to launch a psychological warfare campaign on the Pyongyang soldiers, according to the *Kyiv Post*. However, the number of North Korean soldiers deployed on the Russian side dwarfs the number of soldiers on Ukraine's side. As a result, Russia's strategic gain from these events likely far outweighs Ukraine's. Acting independently from any government, the defectors likely will not provide significant supplies or weaponry to Ukraine's cause.

**Outlook and Implications:** The deployment of North Korean soldiers in Moscow's Kursk region because of the Russia-North Korea mutual defense pact likely will overwhelm the Ukrainian forces that currently occupy the area. As the war continues, Moscow may rely more on the additional North Korean forces and equipment that provides, as Russia's military might continue to diminish. However, the lack of experience and dedication of the deployed North Korean soldiers in support of Moscow may result in additional soldiers who defect, bolstering the Ukrainian forces in the area. Kyiv may also utilize the new expertise of the North Korean defectors to assist in planning the defense for Kursk and subsequent battlefields as the war continues. Even with these additional soldiers, the Ukrainian forces may not withstand the combined Russian and North Korean forces in heavy conflict areas like Kursk and might have to concede the key terrain they currently occupy.

[Aidan Brewer]

## 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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Sebastien Bragg, 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 461, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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