

2 October 2026

An Analytic Intelligence
Wire Prepared by The
Students of Embry-Riddle
Aeronautical University

Issue 502

Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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25 September 2026

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CHINA: Naval Operations Likely to Fracture Provisional Agreement Amid Rising Tension

Summary: People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and China Coast Guard (CCG) assets increased operations within Second Thomas Shoal, which will likely increase tensions with Manila and Taipei.

Development: On 24 September, PLAN warships and CCG cutters blocked a Philippine resupply mission near Second Thomas Shoal, while a Chinese warship threatened "compulsory measures." This incident prompted Manila's first public confirmation of interference since an unpublished 2024 resupply agreement, according to USNI News and Rappler. On 27 September, PLA Southern Theater Command ran a joint naval-air exercise near Scarborough Shoal alongside separate CCG boarding drills, which Beijing commentary framed as retaliation against Manila, according to *The Diplomat*. Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration logged a record 244 Chinese vessels around the island in August, up from 30 in May, according to ANI News.

Analysis: Beijing's breach of the resupply arrangement, paired with explicit threats of "compulsory measures," likely signals a growing risk tolerance near Second Thomas Shoal. Manila's public disclosure of the incident likely reflects a shift toward visibility over discretion as diplomatic leverage. China's Southern Theater Command likely employed PLA and CCG assets to demonstrate sustained coercive pressure across two South China Sea flashpoints at once. The coast guard vessel count's rise from 30 to 244 likely indicates Beijing now treats the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea as coordinated pressure campaigns meant to normalize jurisdictional claims.

[Edwin Ferrell]

RUSSIA: Expanding Strikes on Digital Infrastructure Likely to Disrupt Communications

Summary: Moscow's strikes against Ukrainian data centers and telecommunications infrastructure have expanded in September, likely increasing disruptions to civilian, commercial, and government communications as the winter campaign approaches.

Development: On 23 September, Moscow began a bombardment of drone and missile strikes targeting data centers and telecommunications infrastructure in Kyiv and Odesa, causing extensive service disruptions. Ukrainian officials report that approximately 100,000 households experienced internet disruptions, according to the Institute for the Study of War. Attacks continue to target major Ukrainian digital infrastructure. On 25 to 26 September, Russian strikes damaged Datagroup and Inkom facilities, disrupting operations for various online services and media outlets. On 27 September, Moscow struck the head office of Kyivstar, Ukraine's largest mobile provider. The Russian Defense Ministry also claims a strike against a Vodafone Ukraine data center; however, Vodafone has not publicly confirmed the claim. These attacks follow strikes on 17 September, when Moscow disabled the De Novo Data Center and hit a facility containing Kyivstar telecommunications equipment.

Analysis: The repeated strikes against Ukrainian data centers and telecommunications facilities likely indicate that Russia is expanding its targeting of Ukraine's digital infrastructure beyond individual facilities. Damage to telecommunications and network infrastructure will likely affect the availability of civilian services, financial systems, government communications, and military-related networks. Ukraine's decentralized internet infrastructure makes a complete nationwide shutdown unlikely, but repeated strikes will likely increase outages and force providers to spend additional resources repairing and rebuilding damaged infrastructure. Continued attacks against data centers, internet exchanges, and telecommunications providers during the winter campaign will likely increase the disruption of Ukraine's digital services without requiring Moscow to completely disable Ukraine's internet infrastructure.

[Hunter Varin]

RUSSIA: Likely Expanding Partnership with Ulaanbaatar for Economic Benefit

Summary: Moscow is expanding trade and economic cooperation with Ulaanbaatar. Moscow likely intends to create new economic opportunities, enabling it to become less reliant on Western markets.

Development: From 14-15 September, Moscow and Ulaanbaatar held the Russia-Mongolia Regional Forum, according to *Russia's Pivot to Asia*. During the forum, Russian companies from Irkutsk signed foreign trade contracts with Mongolia worth an estimated than \$8.09 million. On 18 September, Moscow and Ulaanbaatar signed a memorandum of cooperation to expand trade and bilateral economic relations, according to *Interfax*. The agreement includes agriculture, infrastructure, information technology, light industry, logistics, and tourism, according to *Interfax*. Russia-Mongolia trade reached approximately \$2.69 billion in 2025, according to *Russia's Pivot to Asia*.

Analysis: Moscow is likely pursuing expanded relations with Ulaanbaatar to alleviate economic hardship caused by the Russia-Ukraine War. Building a stronger relationship with Ulaanbaatar will likely provide new economic opportunities, such as access to Mongolian agricultural products and infrastructure investments. Ulaanbaatar likely represents new markets that will almost certainly reduce Moscow's dependency on Western markets. Economic partnership with Ulaanbaatar will likely improve Moscow's long-term funding for the Russia-Ukraine war. Long-term trade and investments across a variety of Mongolian industries will likely more stable long-term revenue streams for Moscow.

[Isabella Cantwell]

JAPAN: Gyazo Data Breach Likely to Create Future Security Risks

Summary: Japanese media sharing company Gyazo recently reported a cyber-attack, during which unidentified hackers stole approximately 490 million files. The attack likely increases the risk of targeted cyber-attacks against Gyazo users.

Development: On 11 September, unidentified hackers gained unauthorized access to Gyazo's servers. The attackers gained access to about 490 million files. This includes 23.62 million user records, including names, email addresses, password hashes, user IDs, profile information, and more, according to TheHackerNews. The attackers also obtained a list identifying private images. The parent company of Gyazo, Helpfeel, stated that it cannot currently rule out that someone viewed private images, according to CyberInsider. The Gyazo media team sent out a message via X explaining that they have temporarily shut off the Gyazo service to mitigate the risk of unauthorized people viewing sensitive images. While Gyazo explained that it is investigating the extent of the attack, the attackers could exploit the stolen details to impersonate users or take over their accounts, according to CyberNews.

Analysis: The attack on Gyazo will very likely create additional user data-related and reputational risks for the platform. Uncertainty remains about the attackers' intentions. Misuse of the stolen user data would almost certainly pose a threat to Gyazo's credibility and users' security. This data breach would likely create additional security risks for Gyazo's users if the hackers leverage the stolen info in later attacks. Any new reported incidents would very likely make the platform appear untrustworthy, further harming Gyazo's reputation.

[Devin Barrow]

INDIA: Neighborhood Squeeze Likely Tightening as Beijing Deepens Ties with Islamabad

Summary: Beijing is deepening bilateral security, economic, and infrastructure ties with India's neighbors, generating measurable operational and economic leverage over New Delhi's regional position, particularly in Pakistan and Bangladesh. A newly reactivated China-Pakistan border commission covering Kashmir-adjacent territory, Beijing's confirmed military support for Islamabad during the countries' May 2025 conflict, and Dhaka's post-2024 pivot toward Beijing together point toward a sustained pattern rather than isolated incidents. The pattern does not appear uniform: New Delhi's recent gains in Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte show New Delhi can still contest this squeeze when it commits resources.

Background: The "String of Pearls" framework holds that Beijing is building infrastructure, extending loans, and strengthening diplomatic ties across South Asia, especially around India's periphery, according to Foreign Policy India. The clearest current instance of this pattern sits in Kashmir. Pakistan ceded the roughly 5,180-square-kilometer Shaksgam Valley to China under a 1963 boundary agreement, territory New Delhi claims as part of Ladakh and which does not recognize as legitimately transferred, according to News247Plus. New Delhi's position hardened further after it revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status in August 2019. Former Pakistani Ambassador Husain Haqqani argues that change gave Islamabad justification to formalize a de facto border arrangement with Beijing that had stood since 1963, according to News247Plus. Beijing and Islamabad held the first-ever meeting of a "Pakistan-China Boundary Joint Commission" on 16 September to reactivate that dormant mechanism, agreeing to cooperate on border management, joint surveys, and connectivity, according to News247Plus. New Delhi rejected the commission on 27 September as legally baseless. Indian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said Islamabad lacks any legitimate basis to make agreements involving territory New Delhi considers under illegal occupation, according to News247Plus.

Pakistan - From Economic Corridor to Battlefield Partner: Beijing is almost certainly expanding its economic and military cooperation with Islamabad. The Shaksgam Valley reactivation extends a partnership already anchored by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative valued at more than \$60 billion, according

to The Federal. Haqqani argues Beijing timed the Shaksam announcement to follow New Delhi's hosting of the BRICS summit, signaling to New Delhi that multilateral diplomatic warmth does not alter Beijing's underlying position on Kashmir, according to News247Plus. Operation Sindoor almost certainly shows that this alignment extends into military operations, not just infrastructure. New Delhi struck nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir on 7 May 2025 following a terrorist attack, triggering four days of fighting that included the first combat use of Pakistan's Chinese-made J-10CE fighter jets, according to the China Research Collective. In May, engineers from China's state-owned Aviation Industry Corporation confirmed that they provided on-site technical support to the Pakistani Air Force during the conflict, maintaining the J-10CE fleet in extreme heat so it could deliver its full combat capability, according to the China Research Collective. India's deputy chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Rahul Singh, separately alleged that Beijing supplied Islamabad with live updates on Indian troop positions during the fighting, according to The Wire. New Delhi's foreign ministry said the admissions confirmed its long-held claims about China's role and questioned whether responsible countries should assist a state that shelters terrorist infrastructure, according to The Wire.

Nepal and Bangladesh - Contesting India's Immediate Periphery: Kathmandu and Dhaka almost certainly show the same pattern playing out through economic and political rather than military channels. Nepal's government fell in September 2025 amid Gen Z-led protests, according to the *South China Morning Post*. The Rastriya Swatantra Party that won the resulting 2026 elections has signaled a foreign policy recalibration. Huang Yunsong, deputy director of Sichuan University's Institute of South Asian Studies, said the shift presents new structural opportunities for Beijing, according to the *South China Morning Post*. The stakes concentrate at a single, sensitive point: a China-Nepal industrial park under development in Nepal's Jhapa district sits near the Siliguri Corridor, the roughly 12-mile-wide strip of Indian territory connecting the country's mainland to its seven northeastern states, according to Outlook India. Kathmandu's dependence on Chinese reconstruction assistance deepened further after September 2026 floods destroyed the main Nepal-China border crossing at Rasuwa, according to *The Diplomat*. Bangladesh's experience almost certainly illustrates a sharper and more recent reversal. Sheikh Hasina, New Delhi's longtime ally, fled to India after a student-led uprising ousted her government in August 2024. Interim leader Muhammad Yunus made his first state

visit to Beijing rather than New Delhi in March 2025, securing \$2.1 billion in Chinese investment, loans, and grants, according to Fair Observer. During the visit, Yunus described Bangladesh as a potential extension of the Chinese economy and framed the country as a maritime gateway for India's landlocked northeastern states, rhetoric that names the same Siliguri-adjacent vulnerability China's Nepal investments approach from the opposite side, according to Fair Observer and the Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi responded by terminating cargo transshipment facilities it had extended to Bangladesh. Hasina's continued residence in India, despite Dhaka's extradition request, remains a separate, unresolved irritant between the two governments, according to the Lowy Institute.

Sri Lanka: A Front Where New Delhi Is Pushing Back: Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte's experience complicates a straightforward reading of this pattern, likely representing an expansion of New Delhi's influence. Beijing maintained significant, long-standing influence in the country. Chinese state loans exceeding \$1 billion financed the Hambantota Port, and when the port proved commercially unviable under Sri Lankan management, Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte granted a Chinese state-owned firm a 99-year lease in 2017 to remain solvent, according to *The Diplomat*. Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte has nonetheless limited Beijing's strategic return on that investment, formally barring Hambantota's use for military purposes even as Chinese vessels have periodically visited the port, according to the South China Morning Post. The direction of leverage shifted in April 2026, when an Indian state-owned shipbuilder acquired a majority stake in Colombo Dockyard, Sri Lanka's largest commercial shipyard, a transaction that reflects New Delhi's growing will and commercial capacity to compete directly in a space Beijing has dominated since the mid-2000s, according to *The Diplomat*. The acquisition does not reverse two decades of Chinese infrastructure lending, but it demonstrates Beijing's regional leverage is neither automatic nor irreversible where New Delhi commits comparable resources.

Outlook and Implications: Beijing's sub-regional maneuvering and the higher-level China-India relationship are likely not actually in tension, despite the apparent contradiction. New Delhi hosted the BRICS summit in September 2026, and the two countries resumed long-stalled border trade through the Lipulekh pass in August 2026 — developments that coexist with, rather than contradict, Beijing's continued efforts to deepen ties with Islamabad, Kathmandu, and Dhaka. Both tracks likely reflect the same underlying calculation: Beijing can pursue tactical

stability with New Delhi at the leadership level while continuing to build structural leverage throughout the neighborhood that constrains New Delhi's options regardless of how the bilateral relationship evolves. An alternative reading, that these four relationships reflect coincidental, country-specific dynamics rather than a coordinated strategy, is less likely given the pattern's consistency. In each case, Beijing offers financing and diplomatic backing with fewer political conditions than New Delhi or Western creditors typically attach, and the resulting leverage concentrates at a point of Indian vulnerability. This pattern will likely continue over the next six months on the Islamabad and Dhaka fronts, where alignment is already deep and, in Islamabad's case, has already proven itself in combat. Kathmandu's trajectory is less certain: the Rastriya Swatantra Party's government has signaled pragmatism rather than a clear foreign policy preference, and Kathmandu's history of balancing both neighbors makes a decisive shift toward Beijing less likely in the near term than continued hedging. Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte's example suggests New Delhi retains real tools to contest this pattern, but the Colombo Dockyard acquisition remains an isolated data point rather than a demonstrated strategy, and whether New Delhi can replicate that success in Nepal or Bangladesh, where Beijing maintains greater influence, is not yet clear. For New Delhi, the sustained squeeze across multiple neighbors simultaneously is almost certainly narrowing its strategic bandwidth, and New Delhi's ability to respond to a crisis on one front will probably depend on how many of the others become active simultaneously. This dynamic likely reinforces New Delhi's own hedging behavior, including its deepening security cooperation with Quad partners, as New Delhi seeks tools beyond its immediate neighborhood to offset a contest it is, at least for now, not uniformly winning closer to home.

[Armaan Needles]

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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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Christina Muchow, a Senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at pregleye@erau.edu or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 502, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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