



# Biweekly Intelligence Report

4 - 17 Feb 2025  
Edition #014



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EUROPE

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Europe, U.S. – Munich Security Conference     | High     |
| 2. | Russia / NATO – Sabotage against NATO warship | High     |
| 3. | Russia – Assassination of businessman by UAV  | Moderate |

## CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Venezuela / Russia – Military engagement        | Moderate |
| 2. | Venezuela – External threats amplified & SIGINT | High     |
| 3. | Venezuela / Guyana – Essequibo update           | High     |
| 4. | Ecuador – Physical and political instability    | Moderate |

## NORTH AMERICA & INTERNATIONAL

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Mexico – Cartels allow use of UAVs against U.S. | Moderate |
| 2. | Mexico – U.S. citizen kidnapped and murdered    | High     |
| 3. | International – Avian Influenza update          | Moderate |

## MIDDLE EAST

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | Israel – Fragile ceasefire holds, for now           | High     |
| 2. | Israel / Iran – Strikes on nuclear sites considered | Moderate |
| 3. | Iran – Drone carrier commissioned                   | High     |

## AFRICA

AnCR

- |    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 1. | DRC / Rwanda – M23 rebels resume hostilities  | High     |
| 2. | Egypt / China – Collaboration in space sector | Moderate |

## INDO-PACIFIC

AnCR

- |    |   |      |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | China / Taiwan – Global support of China      | High |
| 2. | China / the Philippines – Red line reaffirmed | High |
| 3. | China / Cook Islands – Pacific expansion?     |      |

**Probability Yardstick**  
**AnCR (Analytical Confidence Rating)**

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# Munich Security Conference



**First reported use of FPV UAV outside the realms of war:** On 16<sup>th</sup> February, U.S. Vice President JD Vance delivered a contentious speech at the Munich Security Conference, asserting that Europe's greatest threats are internal, citing mass immigration and democratic backsliding. He suggested that challenges stem more from within than from external adversaries like Russia or China. His remarks provoked strong rebukes from European officials, with President Emmanuel Macron convening an emergency summit of European leaders in Paris on 17<sup>th</sup> February to discuss European security and Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky used the conference to call for a unified "European armed forces" to counter Russian aggression, advocating for a military force independent of NATO, incorporating Ukraine's troops. The proposal, however, has faced skepticism, with Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski dismissing it as unrealistic, highlighting internal European division on collective defense. Furthermore, President Zelensky directed his minister to withhold on signing the draft agreement granting U.S. access to Ukrainian rare earth minerals. On 17<sup>th</sup> February, President Zelensky traveled to the United Arab Emirates, though his itinerary is unclear at ICOD.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts toward a Russia - Ukraine peace deal have intensified. U.S. President Donald Trump has engaged in direct negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, with General Kellogg confirming the exclusion of European representatives from negotiations, raising concerns among European allies. U.S. and Russian officials are expected to meet in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to initiate talks intended to end the war in Ukraine.

**RMI Comment:** There is a *Remote Chance* that a European army will be stood up to defend either Europe or Ukraine; though the proposal indicates Ukraine's strategic shift toward European security, the broader EU's reluctance signals enduring reliance on NATO. Meanwhile, Trump's direct negotiations with Putin introduce uncertainty, as neither Russia nor Ukraine appears willing to make the concessions requested by the opposing side, *Highly Likely* serving to further protract the war. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** Access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals will *Highly Likely* be central in negotiations on the war. With details yet to emerge on the nature and scope of U.S.-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia, the war in Ukraine appears poised to continue dominating global geopolitics, with the U.S.' position as mediator drawing criticism from the EU, whose countries are *Highly Unlikely* able to meet Ukraine's security demands.

**Ends.**

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# EUROPE

## Russia & NATO



**Russia continues its sub-threshold sabotage campaign:** On 13<sup>th</sup> February, the head of the German Navy, Vice Admiral Jan Christan Kaack confirmed that Russia had conducted the sabotage of multiple German warships as well as additional incidents involving unauthorized attempts to access naval bases, indicating that Russia is determined in its campaign to weaken German maritime capabilities in addition to the established pattern of sabotage against NATO members' critical national infrastructure (CNI). As previously assessed, the Russian perception that NATO is bound to its binary response mechanism of Article 5 of its charter is *Likely* driving Russian opportunities to continue escalating its actions against the alliance. Recent reporting from intelligence sources confirmed the existence of a new Russian sabotage unit conducting operations across Europe, the Department of Special Tasks (SSD), which is responsible for assassination attempts, sabotage activities, and attacks on aviation. Germany is reported as the key target for SSD operations.

**RMI Comment:** In mid-2014, NATO sought to “accelerate plans to collectively prepare for and defend against hybrid warfare tactics”; however, NATO’s alliance structure of 32 states is *Likely* to continue hindering these efforts. Decision-making is *Highly Unlikely* to match the asymmetric tactics being effectively used by Russia, pushing NATO into an ineffective, reactive cycle. The incidents involving the German Navy align strategically with previous Russian operations targeting CNI, serving to identify and exploit vulnerabilities within the NATO alliance – all of which could feasibly be exploited more violently during the onset of war.

This comes as on 12<sup>th</sup> February the Danish Defense Intelligence Service warned that Russia is “*Likely* to be more willing to use military force in a regional war against one or more European NATO countries if it perceives NATO as military weakened or politically divided.” This assessment is credible, though it relies on Russia’s willingness to risk triggering Article 5, which is currently *Highly Unlikely*; the continued inaction of NATO in response to Russian sabotage will *Probably* serve to support this perception in Russian decision-makers. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat to NATO members is HIGH. Continued acts of sabotage on CNI are *Almost Certain* as Russia continues its destabilization operations and testing of the limits of the alliance. The Baltic Sea and Germany will *Highly Likely* host the concentration of Russian sabotage efforts, with energy and telecommunications infrastructure *Likely* to be targeted directly over the next 6 months. **Ends.**

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# EUROPE Russia



**First reported use of FPV UAV outside the confines of war:** On 10<sup>th</sup> February, Russian media reported on the assassination of a business rival by a first-person view (FPV) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The attack occurred in the early period of 2025 and resulted in the death of the businessman. Widely used throughout the war in Ukraine for the targeting of armored vehicles and against infantry, and increasingly by non-state criminal actors like Mexican cartels and violent extremist organizations worldwide, this event marks a critical shift in asymmetric threats posed to civil society – and the corporate world more explicitly.

**RMI Comment:** The assassination of a businessman using an FPV UAV is the first confirmed instance of UAV-enabled targeted killing in a non-conflict zone, marking a significant turning point in the weaponization of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) UAV technology by criminal actors. The combination of standoff capability, low cost, and attacker anonymity suggests this trend is *Highly Likely* to continue. The incredibly low barrier to entry and widespread commentary on the modifications required to weaponize a COTS UAV will *Almost Certainly* provide hostile actors the capability required to conduct future acts of targeted killings by UAV.

For organized crime groups, violent extremist organizations, radicalized lone actors and single-interest activists, the UAV offers a significant uplift in operational capability. Mass-casualty attacks in urban centers, targeted assassinations of high-profile individuals, and hostile reconnaissance of sensitive areas are all enabled without the need of a physical presence. The lack of counter-UAV infrastructure in civilian environments means that protection against these threats is minimal, with most mitigation strategies remaining limited to military contexts.

There is a high potential for escalation – the risk of the proliferation of assassinations by UAV should not be overlooked; the technology has a proven pedigree in its ability to ‘anonymously’ prosecute targets with explosive payloads at reach. The prospect of single-interest groups, lone actors, or violent extremist organizations utilizing this capability in line with their intent is *Almost Certain* over the next six months. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** Given the lack of counter-UAV infrastructure, awareness, and capabilities in the private sector, the assessed threat level is EXTREME. The war in Ukraine has proven the effectiveness of the UAV as a threat vector, as well as highlighted the difficulty in identifying and neutralizing the threat. An understanding of what C-UAV capabilities are available to you, and what threats you face, should be carried out. **Ends.**

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# Israel & Hamas



**Ceasefire fragile but remains intact despite recent warnings:** On 13<sup>th</sup> February, Hamas rescinded its prior decision to delay the release of Israeli hostages, which saw the U.S. calling for an end to the ceasefire if all Israeli hostages were not freed by 15<sup>th</sup> February. Israel has continued clearing operations in the West Bank against Palestinian militant groups throughout the Gaza ceasefire. Hamas has condemned this as violations of Palestinian sovereignty; however, the group does not consider Israeli operations in the West Bank a red line that justifies a return to conflict. Rather, it was the reported restriction of humanitarian aid and ceasefire violations in Gaza that prompted Hamas to declare a delay in the release of hostages. President Trump's 5<sup>th</sup> February plan for the U.S. to develop the Gaza Strip has drawn sharp criticism across the Arab world, and from Hamas, further enflaming regional hostilities. Negotiations are set to begin this week in Cairo on the second phase of the ceasefire.

**RMI Comment:** There is a *Remote Chance* that the current ceasefire between Israel and Hamas will hold over the long term due to fundamental disagreements and lasting security concerns. While hostage releases and diplomatic maneuvering have created a temporary environment of tenuous stability, the ongoing Israeli military operations in the West Bank, Hamas' continued demands, and U.S. involvement suggest that the Gaza ceasefire is transactional rather than a step toward lasting peace. This is reflected in the recent developments within the Gaza ceasefire - allegations from both sides of violations and calls to withdraw from the agreement.

Despite maintaining a ceasefire in Gaza, Israel continues to target militant factions in the West Bank, indicating that it still perceives active security threats. This *Highly Likely* implies that Israel does view the ceasefire as a temporary measure specific to Gaza, and *Probably* agreed to in large part due to pressure from the then-incoming Trump administration, rather than as part of a broader strategic shift towards conciliation. Meanwhile, Hamas, despite agreeing to release three Israeli hostages, has condemned Israeli actions in the West Bank and continues to demand concessions. Its participation in ceasefire negotiations appears tactical rather than indicative of a long-term commitment to de-escalation. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The fragility of the ceasefire in its initial stage does not bode well for the completion of the final two stages. Travel throughout Israel should be conducted in accordance with recent assessments on the situation as it is *Likely* that the dynamics of the ceasefire could change rapidly. Predictably, recent events have done little to improve the long-term outlook on stability between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a conflict driving existential crises for all parties involved in the conflict. **Ends.**

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# MIDDLE EAST

## Israel & Iran



**Israel considering significant strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities:** Israel is reportedly considering strikes on Iranian nuclear sites, assessing that Iran's weakened military posture provides an opening to degrade its nuclear program. While Washington maintains a sanctions-based strategy, Israel's defense leadership continues to signal a willingness to act unilaterally. Israel is *Almost Certainly* weighing strikes, leveraging Iran's weakened position following setbacks to Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Assad regime in Syria. During Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Israel on 16<sup>th</sup> February, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that Israel "can and will finish the job" against Iran.

**RMI Comment:** Israeli intelligence *Highly Likely* retains intelligence access to key Iranian nuclear sites, evidenced by prior operations such as the 'Taleghan-2' strike on Iran's warhead design program. However, an Israeli unilateral strike on enrichment sites in Natanz or Fardow without U.S. approval remains a *Remote Chance*, as breaching Iran's layered air defenses would *Likely* require U.S. logistical and materiel support. Israel is *Likely* more willing to conduct unilateral targeted strikes on research and development sites in addition to continuing targeted assassinations of nuclear scientists to avoid reciprocal actions that would escalate regional instability and force Tehran into action via the activation of Hezbollah, Hamas, and an increase in asymmetric maritime warfare via the Houthis.

The position of the Trump administration remains firm in balancing hawkish rhetoric with a preference for economic and diplomatic pressure. While President Trump's administration has reinstated its "maximum pressure" sanctions, there has been no commitment to actively supporting an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, leaving Netanyahu's government in a strategic dilemma – act unilaterally or wait for *Highly Unlikely* U.S. endorsement and support required to breach Iran's layered air defense network.

Sanctions are *Highly Unlikely* to prove effective in deterring Iran's progress toward obtaining nuclear weapons; conversely, "maximum pressure" is *Likely* to embolden Tehran towards uplifting both its conventional and nuclear capabilities, which in turn is *Almost Certain* to reinforce Israeli concern over Iran's military capabilities and intent into the coming years. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level is HIGH, President Trump's *Probable* reluctance to support Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities over the short-term will limit the potential of destabilizing strikes in the region, though Iran's commitment to achieving a nuclear weapons capability continues to threaten the long-term stability of the Middle East. **Ends.**

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# MIDDLE EAST

## Iran



**Significant enhancement of Iranian hybrid maritime capability?:** On 6<sup>th</sup> February, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) officially commissioned its first drone carrier, the IRGCN *Shahid Bahman Bagheri*, into service. The vessel, a converted roll-on/roll-off cargo ship, has been repurposed to launch and recover unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Iranian state media has emphasized the ship's ability to operate independently for up to a year without refueling while carrying both UAVs and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) and anti-ship cruise missile systems. The vessel's unveiling underscores Iran's growing reliance on unmanned capabilities as a means of enhancing its regional influence and challenging the naval dominance of its adversaries.

**RMI Comment:** Iran's deployment of the *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* represents a shift in its ability to project power beyond its traditional areas of influence and continues the IRGCN's longstanding effort to develop capabilities that offset its conventional naval inferiority. While the technical feasibility of operating large numbers of drones from a maritime platform remains in question, the vessel itself is a *Highly Likely* component of Iran's broader strategy to increase its operational reach and present a persistent challenge to U.S. and allied naval forces operating in the region. It must be stated, however, that the *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* remains vulnerable to warships and its cost and size counteract the traditional benefit of UAVs/UUVs being low-cost assets.

The *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* extends this approach by integrating unmanned assets, allowing Iran to conduct reconnaissance over critical maritime chokepoints, and, if required, launch strikes without exposing conventional naval units to direct retaliation. The Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman are *Almost Certainly* the primary areas of intended deployment, as the carrier's presence in these waters enables Iran to upkeep aerial surveillance and the ability to conduct long-range strikes against both military and commercial targets if desired. The vessel's effectiveness remains in question, however, as maritime drone operations require robust launch and recovery infrastructure, and advanced command and control systems, areas in which Iran has historically faced limitations. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level remains HIGH, as although the commissioning of the *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* uplifts IRGCN capability, there is a *Remote Chance* that it will conduct kinetic strikes in the near term and there are no indications that Iranian intent has changed to include targeting of vessels without the use of Houthis as a proxy. Heightened situational awareness and risk mitigation measures are recommended when transiting Iran's littoral waters as previously. **Ends.**

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# CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

## Venezuela & Russia



**Venezuelan – Russian military engagement:** On 4<sup>th</sup> February, an image showing a class of Venezuelan military cadets undergoing officer training at the Russian Tyumen Higher Military Engineer Command School was identified. This follows the 15<sup>th</sup> January report of Venezuelan military engineering in the tri-border area with Guyana and Brazil and the 19<sup>th</sup> December report of the construction of a road-bridge over the Cuyuni River. While regular military-strategic cooperation is common and expected among allies, the specificity of this academy is *Probably* indicative of Venezuela's attempt to enhance a niche capability gap in its forces.

**RMI Comment:** While the terrain varies significantly between Russia and South America and defensive engineering is *Almost Certainly* a lesser priority for the National Bolivarian Armed Forces of Venezuela (FANB), there are several other military engineering roles that are dual role. Although a large-scale FANB incursion into the Essequibo region remains *Highly Unlikely*, the terrain is exceptionally challenging and an uplift in FANB's engineering capability and a refinement of its doctrine could support and enable sub-threshold activity, including improving the local infrastructure to prove credibility to the local and indigenous population. Sales, or gifts of Russian military engineering equipment (and other materiel) and support by Russian personnel in Venezuela cannot be discounted over the longer term.

The most concerning development for Guyana would be the FANB increasing its capacity to cross the tributaries of the Essequibo River, *Possibly* with training and support delivered by Russian personnel. Venezuela has shown evidence of its ability to establish bridges to enable river crossings, but it is *Unlikely* that the FANB currently has sufficient resources to do this on a larger scale, and quickly. Considering Caracas' established military links with both Russia and Iran and the FANB's declared desire to strengthen its unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) capability, this development represents the continuation of an informal anti-Western military alliance which is *Almost Certain* to endure. **Ends.**

**RMI Recommendation:** Threat level is MODERATE, though if indicators and warnings are met, this would escalate significantly. No recommendations shared openly at this stage. RMI retains sensitive intelligence capabilities to monitor developments in the region. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



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# CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

## Venezuela



**External threats to Venezuela amplified:** On 6<sup>th</sup> February, President Nicolás Maduro announced the capture of two ‘terrorist groups’ who were allegedly planning attacks against the government with the use of explosives. This follows the 31<sup>st</sup> January remarks by Venezuela’s newly-promoted Secretary General of the PSUV, Diosdado Cabello that a terrorist attack to blow up a helicopter in the sky had been thwarted due to “big-mouthed” propagandists, *Almost Certainly* referring to the pro-opposition journalist, Norbey Marin.

**RMI Comment:** The timings of the announcements are suspicious. On 5<sup>th</sup> February, the Chilean prosecutor investigating the assassination of Venezuelan political dissident Ronald Ojeda suggested Diosdado Cabello was responsible for ordering the murder. With commitments also made by Chile to pursue legal action through the International Criminal Court if a link between Tren de Aragua (TdA), which is suspected of committing the crime, and the Venezuelan regime can be proven. Caracas denies involvement; claiming that the assassination was a Chilean ‘false flag’ operation and that TdA is “dismantled” in Venezuela.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez denounced the “organization and financing of terrorist groups in Venezuela” *Highly Likely* referencing the Venezuelan opposition, previously in receipt of U.S. financial support. According to Diosdado Cabello, this money was provided to “right-wing extremists” to conduct acts of terrorism against the Maduro regime.

This all reinforces the narrative that Venezuela is threatened by foreign states seeking to destabilize the government, which can be used to justify heightened security postures and suppression of political opposition. Internationally, it enables Caracas to deflect attention from its own *Almost Certain* links to transnational organized crime. While predictable, Cuba’s Foreign Minister’s remarks add weight to these narratives, aligning with the *Highly Likely* broader strategy of portraying U.S. influence in Latin America as a destabilizing force. This rhetoric not only ‘legitimizes’ internal repression but provides a basis for a *Likely* increase in military and intelligence cooperation with states hostile to the West (chiefly Russia and Iran), under the pretext of countering external aggression. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** As stated throughout this series of reports, Venezuela is an extremely dangerous location for U.S. passport holders due to the continued, and imagined, rhetoric of external threats against the Maduro regime. Despite President Trump’s success in repatriating six U.S. nationals previously held in Venezuela, further illegal detentions cannot be ruled out. **Ends.**

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# Venezuela, Cuba, China & Russia



**Chinese SIGINT facilities in Cuba:** Concern over Venezuela's *Highly Likely* deepening relations with states hostile to the West is underpinned by the threat that the most powerful states within that grouping present. For example, both Chinese and Russian signals intelligence (SIGINT) facilities in Cuba *Highly Likely* enable the interception of satellite communications and the collection of data on U.S. rocket launches from the Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. Imagery analysis has confirmed expansive updates across four sites in Cuba which are linked to China in open-source reporting as well as Russia's refurbishment of their Cold War SIGINT facility at Lourdes.

**RMI Comment:** SIGINT cooperation between China, Russia and Cuba *Likely* carries direct implications for Venezuela's ability to sustain its anti-Western posture. Cuba is *Almost Certain* to continue supporting Venezuela politically, as well as expanding the Venezuelan security architecture through the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM). Cuba's attractiveness as an ally stems from its proximity to the U.S., but for Venezuela, its vocal anti-imperialist narrative drives support from anti-Western states. As President Trump's administration is *Highly Likely* to continue pressuring the Maduro regime, this will *Probably* result in a deepening reliance on these allies. Venezuela now sits firmly alongside Russia, Iran, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, and when it suits Beijing, China.

While addressing and countering the influence of these states in South America is *Highly Likely* a national security priority for the U.S., Venezuela's position as the most prominent anti-Western autocracy in the region is *Highly Likely* to see hostile states continue their tacit and covert support of President Maduro, resulting in the *Likely* increased threat of espionage, counter-intelligence, technical collection and sabotage throughout Venezuela and across its immediate borders. More worryingly, the risk of Venezuelan escalation is *Likely* to increase in parallel to the perceived threat faced by President Maduro, which could *Plausibly* see U.S. adversaries moving beyond tacit encouragement, to the provision of much more overt military support to Venezuela – which could see Venezuela acting more directly in the interests of its backer-states, as per the Houthi rebels in the Red Sea. But, to date, this is *Unlikely* to happen unless the survival of the Maduro regime is credibly challenged. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** Maintain awareness of the developing military and security agreements taking place across the region in addition to the ongoing geopolitical conflict between the U.S. and Venezuela as this is *Likely* to shape the responses of adversaries. Consider risk management estimates given the long-term threats of the convergence of an emboldened yet weakened Maduro regime. **Ends.**

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# CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

## Venezuela & Guyana



**Venezuela considers the Essequibo region of “very high strategic” importance:** On 5<sup>th</sup> February, the Venezuelan Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace, Diosdado Cabello stated that given the Essequibo region’s strategic significance to Venezuela, a governor for the region will be chosen by consensus, rather than by popular vote on the elections, scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> April. This follows President Maduro’s comments on 4<sup>th</sup> February, reiterating Venezuela’s commitment to electing a governor of 'Guayana Esequiba'. The Venezuelan opposition has chosen not to participate in these parliamentary and regional elections until the real results of the 28<sup>th</sup> July presidential election are recognized. Building on recent statements, on 6<sup>th</sup> February, Vice President Rodríguez called for the ‘defense’ of the Esequiba region when briefing at the United Socialist Party of Venezuela’s (PSUV) congress.

**RMI Comment:** Venezuelan officials’ calls for the formalization of Venezuelan political rule over the Essequibo region remain at a high tempo, with the issue taking center stage during the ruling PSUV’s Fifth Congress plenary session, which focused on the upcoming elections. Even claiming the intent to hold elections in sovereign Guyanese territory constitutes an attempted political annexation of Essequibo, reinforcing Caracas’ *Almost Certain* intent to normalize its political presence on both sides of the border and to lay future claim of its sovereignty over the entire region despite international legal proceedings pursued by Guyana. The deliberate choice of language by VP Rodríguez is *Highly Likely* telling of Caracas’ position towards the disputed territory, i.e., that it is already part of Venezuelan territory, which *Likely* sets a precedent for future activity – be that military or politically.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on 3<sup>rd</sup> February that the U.S. has options to “harm the Maduro regime” – these will *Highly Likely* be tested if Caracas elects a governor of the Essequibo region; investor confidence in Guyana would *Likely* diminish if Venezuela moves to formalize its claim over Essequibo politically, signaling a risk to the long-term stability in the region. The most impactful & plausible U.S. action would be the revocation of oil licenses, and although this is *Unlikely*, it carries the greatest level of risk for the Maduro regime, which willingly violates international laws and norms and has proven to be resilient at weathering diplomatic and political pressure as well as non-targeted sanctions. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **MODERATE**



**RMI Recommendation:** Recent rhetoric by PSUV officials showcases Venezuela’s willingness to push boundaries and is a *Probable* shift towards a more active posture in the region. The dispute is *Highly Likely* to endure and will *Probably* intensify in the next six months as narrative and rhetoric lose their impact without credible moves to underpin official statements. Risk management planning, aided by an understanding of the *Likely* course of actions to understand how this issue could impact your business is recommended. **Ends.**

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# CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

## Ecuador

**Outcome of the Ecuadorian presidential race called into question:** On 11<sup>th</sup> February, the incumbent president of Ecuador, Daniel Noboa, cited irregularities with first-round results. No proof was presented by President Noboa and the Organization of American States' observers stated that its data aligned with the official results within a margin of error, a position mirrored by the European Union's election transparency group within Ecuador.

**Latest incident among a surge of violence in Ecuador:** On 14<sup>th</sup> February, a colonel in the Ecuadorian Air Force who led counter-narcotic operations was assassinated in the city of Guayaquil. This comes amidst increasing violence in the country driven by transnational criminal organizations. President Daniel Noboa's government has reaffirmed the continuation of the state of emergency, first enacted in January, as Ecuador faces an *Almost Certain* risk of further deterioration in security, which is *Highly Likely* compounded by political instability

**RMI Comment:** Ecuador's descent into crisis is *Highly Likely* the result of a confluence of factors, including the penetration of Mexican cartel influence, expansion of drug trafficking operations, and the inability of the state to counter entrenched corruption within the security architecture. Recent reports indicate that Mexican cartels, notably the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), have *Almost Certainly* expanded their drug production operations into Ecuador, utilizing the country as both a logistics hub and a new base for methamphetamine and fentanyl production.

This follows a pattern of cartel diversification seen in Central America, where groups previously reliant on trafficking now seek to control entire segments of the drug supply chain. The assassination of senior security personnel signals an increasingly *Likely* shift towards targeted killings aimed at weakening Ecuador's counter-narcotics capabilities. This aligns with trends observed in Mexico and Colombia, where eliminating key law enforcement officials precedes expanded cartel influence over state institutions. **Ends.**

**RMI Recommendation:** With narcotics gang violence surging and nationwide political instability *Highly Likely* to continue, Ecuador is assessed as HIGH risk. Travel should be conducted with the support of ongoing risk assessment and protection services. **Ends.**



Presidency of the Republic  
February 14, 2025

To Ecuadorians:

Today, a colonel of the Ecuadorian Air Force was murdered. Lieutenant Colonel Porfirio Cedeño Cedeño, who served in the Special Operations Group of the Ecuadorian Air Force (FAE).

These facts demonstrate the state of war in which Ecuador is immersed and the dedication of our armed forces to the country's security. Given this reality, it is clear that we are experiencing an internal armed conflict.

On behalf of each member of the Armed Forces and their families, the previously declared state of emergency will continue. We give our will, our dedication and our struggle, but the tools must be maintained.

To those who perpetuated this fact, let there be no doubt: our response will be forceful.

Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**

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## AFRICA

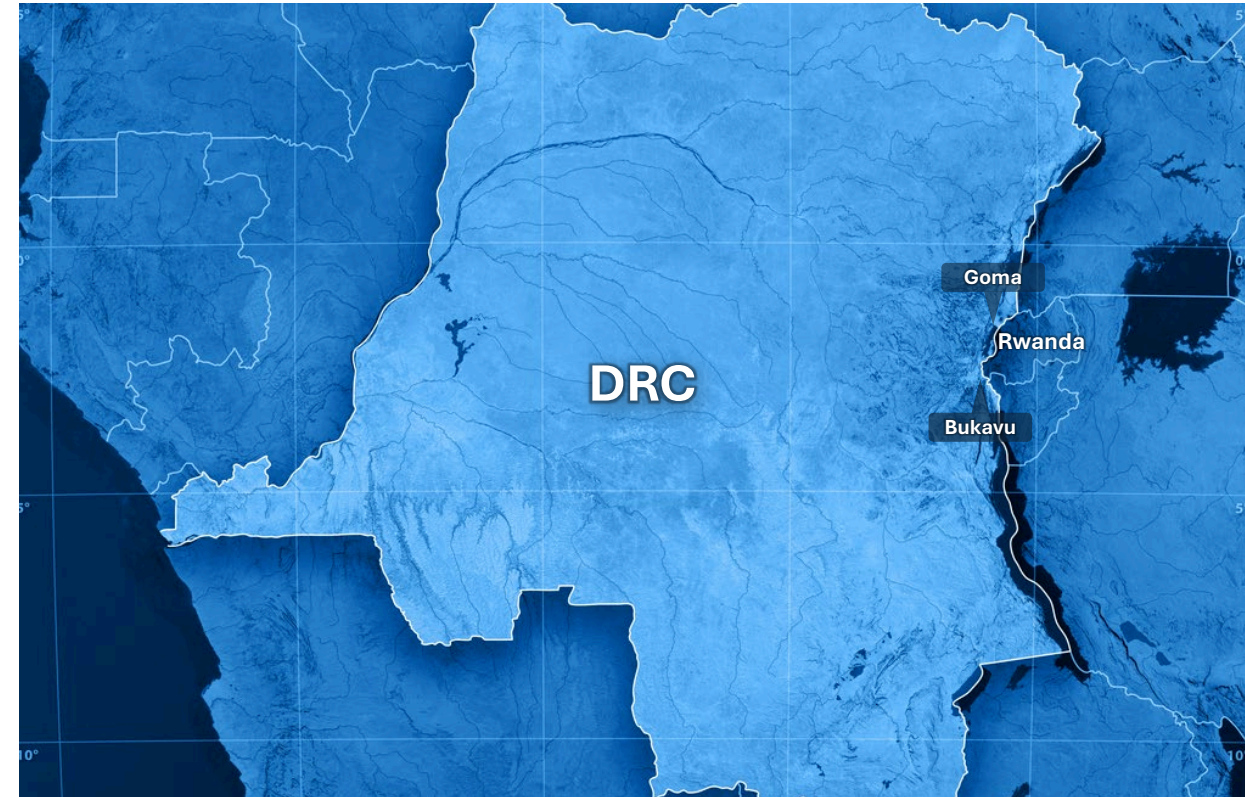
# DRC & Rwanda

**M23 resumes its offensive following operational pause:** On 11<sup>th</sup> February, M23 resumed offensive operations against Congolese government forces near the village of Ihusi, approximately 70km from Bukavu. The attack follows a two-day operational pause by M23, reinforcing M23's strategy of using 'unilateral ceasefire' declarations to consolidate control and prepare for future activity. By 16<sup>th</sup> February, M23 had reached the center of Bukavu in South Kivu province. The resumption of the offensive confirms M23's commitment to territorial expansion in eastern DRC, which is *Almost Certainly* supported by Rwanda and Uganda, key enablers of the M23 rebels.

**RMI Comment:** The renewed offensive by M23 underscores the group's persistent challenge to Kinshasa's control over North Kivu and South Kivu. M23 is *Almost Certain* to continue exploiting security gaps along DRC's border with Rwanda. The *Almost Certain* support of Rwanda mitigates the risk of overextension, enhancing the rebels' capacity to conduct offensives against the Armed Forces of DRC (FARDC).

Further escalation is *Highly Likely* across eastern DRC. As Congolese forces struggle to contain the M23 insurgency while also countering threats from CODECO and other armed factions, the risk of further territorial losses and prolonged displacement remains high. Sustained violence in eastern DRC is *Highly Likely* to destabilize the global supply chain of critical minerals, particularly cobalt and coltan, which are essential for high-tech industries. Both FARDC and rebel groups throughout eastern DRC *Highly Likely* view control over mineral extraction sites as a primary objective due to the revenue generated by the illicit smuggling of these resources.

In a separate development, on 11<sup>th</sup> February, the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) militia attacked an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp overnight; the attack, *Almost Certainly* ethnically motivated, underscores the broader destabilizing effects of M23's offensive, as rival factions exploit the security vacuum driven by M23's offensive. *Likely* Retaliatory violence and targeted massacres threaten to destabilize the region, which has seen the deaths of over 10 million people since the mid-1990s. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** The situation is becoming increasingly volatile as regional groups are exploiting the deteriorated security situation. The importance of minerals in eastern DRC to the FARDC and rebel groups is *Almost Certain* to continue driving violence, threatening supply chain disruptions and economic volatility. **Ends.**

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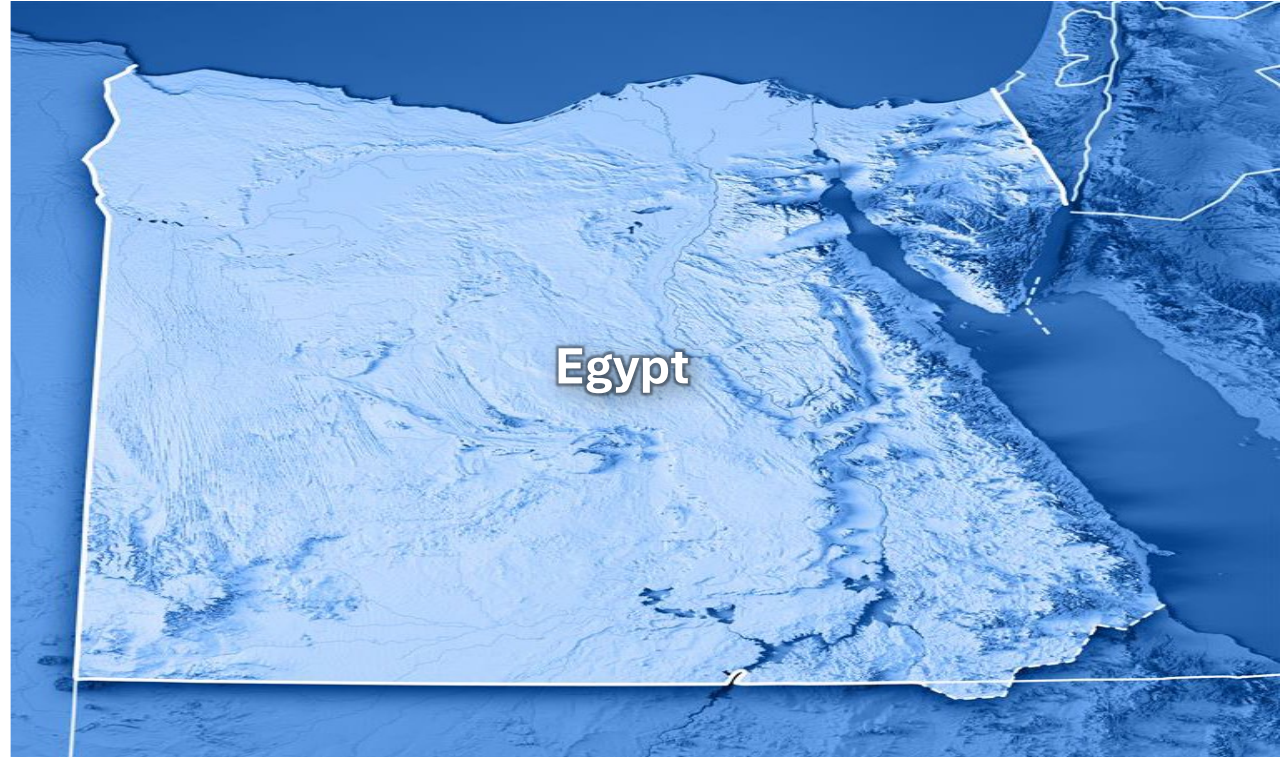
## AFRICA

# Egypt & China

**Engagement and cooperation on space-based technologies:** Since 2023, Beijing has been supporting Egypt's efforts in space technology through the gifting of equipment and assistance in production. Furthermore, China has signed space cooperation agreements with 23 African countries, funding satellites and ground stations to collect imagery and other data.

**RMI Comment:** The growing importance of space as both a commercial and military domain *Almost Certainly* drives China's aggressive expansion in the field. While officially framed as cooperation, China's involvement *Highly Likely* extends beyond infrastructure development - granting access to surveillance data, enhancing China's global reconnaissance posture, and embedding itself within a critical industry within a strategically vital region. Unlike past economic engagement in Africa, which focused on commodities and infrastructure, Beijing's space partnerships offer a new level of integration – one that is *Unlikely* to be reversible in the medium term given the reliance on Chinese-built technology, data-sharing agreements, and embedded personnel. Space-based technologies will be prioritized for the \$50 billion in Chinese loans and investment to Africa from 2023-2026.

China's space expansion directly counters U.S. strategic dominance and *Almost Certainly* reflects Beijing's ambition to surpass Washington in the space domain. While the U.S. remains the leader in commercial and military space capabilities, China has accelerated its low-earth orbit satellite deployments, invested heavily in offensive anti-satellite technologies – which its increased footprint across Africa could enable – and built a robust ground-based tracking network in developing nations. Access to African-based ground stations and surveillance satellites enhances China's military reconnaissance, secures independent global navigation capabilities, and strengthens its counter-space warfare potential. China's ability to monitor U.S. and allied military activities, disrupt satellite communications in conflict scenarios, and develop alternative space governance structures challenges Washington's longstanding hegemony in the space domain. If this continues, there is a *Realistic Possibility* That China could surpass the U.S. in strategic space control within the next decade. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed risk to U.S. and allies' space interests is HIGH, with competition *Highly Likely* to be decisive in the conduct of future wars between great powers. While space competition is primarily a concern for state actors, the implications of space warfare are immense to both private citizens and the global economy given the essential role that satellites play in the modern world. **Ends.**

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# Mexico – Part One

**U.S. Border Patrol agents facing heightened cartel threat:** An internal U.S. Border Patrol memo dated 1<sup>st</sup> February revealed that Mexican cartel leaders authorized the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) equipped with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other explosive devices against U.S. military and Border Patrol agents operating in the vicinity of the border. On 4<sup>th</sup> February, the potential U.S. – Mexico trade war was resolved, with Mexico committing 10,000 National Guard soldiers, who were mobilized to the border to curb the illicit flow of fentanyl.

**RMI Comment:** This development marks a significant escalation in cartel posture, posing a direct physical threat to life around the border, as well as providing a psychological deterrent. The cartel threats are *Highly Likely* credible; however, cartel members will *Probably* act with relative caution to minimize the anticipated U.S. response and test the limits of cross-border threats. While there have been no incidents of cartel UAVs engaging U.S. forces at ICOD, there have been two significant recent incidents in border locales; on January 27<sup>th</sup> when cartel members engaged in a firefight with U.S. Border Patrol agents during an attempted smuggling operation near Frontera, Texas. Additionally, on February 4<sup>th</sup>, gunfights in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico led to the suspension of flights and prompted warnings from the U.S. consulate.

There is a growing body of reporting relating to the increasingly widespread use of IEDs being used by Mexican cartels, both UAV-delivered and emplaced. Three IEDs were seized between 2020 – 2021, compared to 1,375 in 2022, 1,681 in 2023 and 1,571 by October 2024 (last Ministry of Defense data available). In addition to the drastic increase in production, cartel IEDs have become more sophisticated and widespread in their application – emplaced IEDs acting as landmines are common, as well as the use of vehicle-borne IEDs against Mexican security forces. Given that cartels operate with relative freedom across much of Mexico, a significant reduction in IED production and use is *Highly Unlikely*, hindering law enforcement efforts on both sides of the border as well as increasing the possible scale of lethality during armed engagements and the likelihood of deaths of innocent civilians transiting through cartel locations.

**Ends.**



Locations of the 1,571 IED seizures in Mexico between Jan - Oct 2024

Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** No change from Edition #013. The assessed threat level is EXTREME, but there are nuances depending on location and mitigations in place. Risk mitigation strategies for businesses operating throughout Mexico must be robust and understood by the entire chain of operations, including employee protection measures and threat monitoring. Contingency plans should be in place to safeguard operations against volatility at short notice. **Ends.**

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# NORTH AMERICA

## Mexico – Part Two



**U.S. citizen kidnapped and killed following the crossing of Mexican border:** On 13<sup>th</sup> February, an 81-year-old U.S. citizen crossed into Mexico to pay real estate taxes on a property he owned. He was subsequently followed and kidnapped by two gunmen outside of the Reynosa City Hall. His body was discovered on 15<sup>th</sup> February. Investigations are ongoing to identify individuals in association with the two gunmen who may have provided information on the individual to support the kidnapping and murder.

**RMI Comment:** Reynosa is currently experiencing waves of violence as factions of the Gulf Cartel battle for control of territory and access to smuggling routes across the border. This has previously seen a U.S. citizen killed when his vehicle struck a cartel improvised explosive device (IED) on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. While security operations by the Mexican Army and National Guard have resulted in temporary cartel disruptions and a reduction in migrant flows, achieving long-term stability remains *Highly Unlikely* without deeper structural reforms and a crackdown on corruption within state institutions. The threat to U.S. citizens is elevated, particularly for those crossing the border for business. The use of targeted intelligence to identify high-value kidnapping victims remains a *Realistic Possibility*, reinforcing the need for stringent security measures for cross-border travelers.

On 13<sup>th</sup> February, the U.S. military announced it was increasing its airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) collection on Mexican cartels. This intelligence, or elements of it, will *Probably* be shared with Mexican security officials to assist in their operations against cartels and marks a significant shift in U.S. counter-narcotics operations. The onus, however, remains on the Mexican authorities' willingness and capacity to degrade cartel operations through targeted operations against its leadership, distribution networks, and enforcers. Even with sophisticated ISR, this is *Highly Likely* to prove challenging if Mexico does not significantly shift its posture against cartels towards one that intends to sever command structures and degrade offensive capabilities. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **EXTREME**



**RMI Recommendation:** No change from Edition #013. The assessed threat level is EXTREME, but there are nuances depending on location and mitigations in place. Risk mitigation strategies for businesses operating throughout Mexico must be robust and understood by the entire chain of operations, including employee protection measures and threat monitoring. Contingency plans should be in place to safeguard operations against volatility at short notice. **Ends.**

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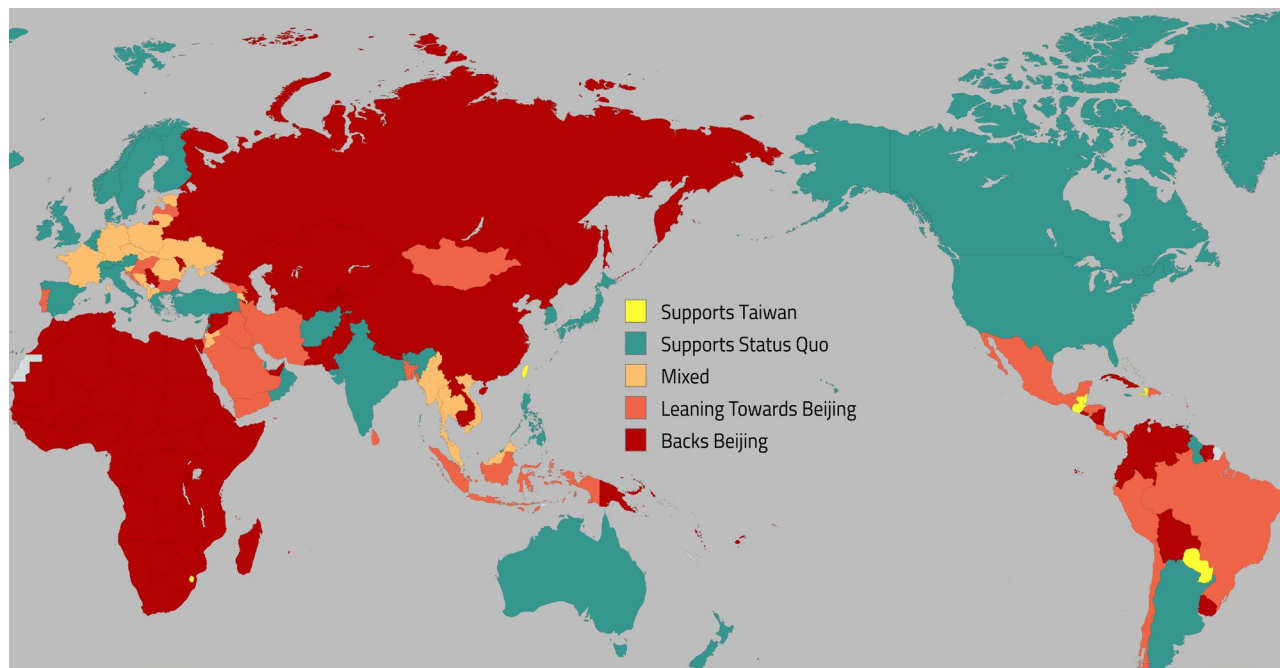
# INDO-PACIFIC China & Taiwan

**Global support for Chinese claim over annexation of Taiwan:** The Lowy Institute think-tank compiled a data-set on global opinions on China's stance towards Taiwan. The data revealed that 46% of UN member states back Beijing's one-China principle and, to varying degrees, affirm China's sovereignty over Taiwan, with only 11 states supporting Taiwan; the majority of which have limited geopolitical and economic sway. While the global opinion on China's strategic objective of reunification with Taiwan is skewed towards acceptance, on 16<sup>th</sup> February, the U.S. State Department revised the wording on its official website, removing language that explicitly stated opposition to Taiwanese independence.

**RMI Comment:** While the removal of explicit opposition to Taiwan's independence by the U.S. State Department does not equate to direct support for that, it signals a willingness to adjust policy in response to evolving geopolitical conditions. Beijing will *Almost Certainly* interpret this shift as provocative, *Highly Likely* triggering diplomatic retaliation or an escalation in military posturing towards Taiwan. Looking to avoid diplomatic isolation, like that experienced by Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, China's diplomatic outreach is a crucial element of shaping activity before an invasion of Taiwan and will *Almost Certainly* continue as shaping activity to support future activity directed towards Taiwan. **Ends.**

**U.S. admiral warns of Chinese exercises around Taiwan:** On 13<sup>th</sup> February, Admiral Samuel Paparo stated that Chinese exercises should instead be considered rehearsals for the invasion of Taiwan, an important distinction which is reflected by the scale and frequency of People's Liberation Army (PLA) activity towards Taiwan.

**RMI Comment:** As previously reported, it is *Highly Unlikely* that Beijing imminently intends to mount an invasion of Taiwan, though the PLA is rapidly modernizing and expanding its forces in line with this ambition. PLA exercises around Taiwan could feasibly be used to launch an invasion, though given the force requirements to achieve a successful invasion, it is *Almost Certain* that indicators and warnings would be identified in advance. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** While the likelihood of an imminent conflict between China and Taiwan is low, the assessed threat level in cross-strait relations is HIGH. Buoyed by global support, increasing Chinese assertiveness towards Taiwan is *Highly Likely* over the next year. The U.S.' firmer stance will *Likely* necessitate a response, which will *Probably* compel China to engage in retaliatory diplomatic and economic measures, threatening global stability. Longer-term planning is essential to understand the implications that a significant deterioration in cross-strait stability would have for your business. **Ends.**

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# INDO-PACIFIC

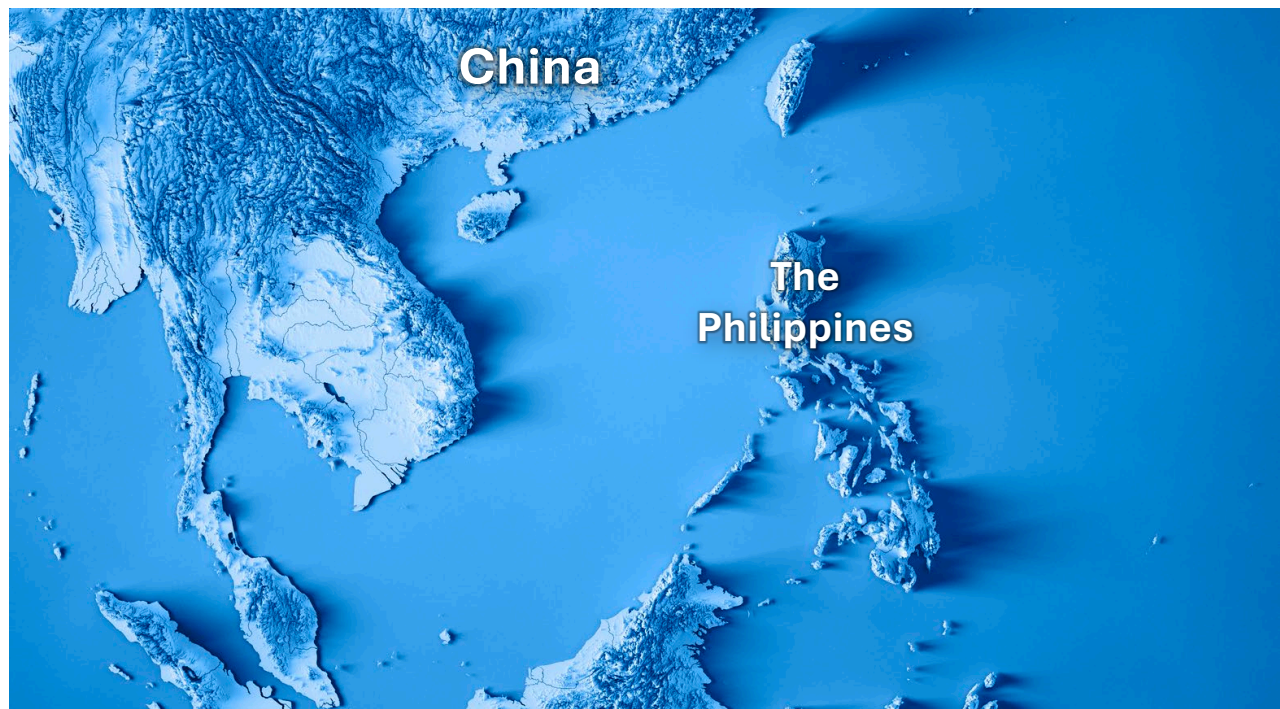
## China & the Philippines



**Chinese ‘red line’ reaffirmed in the South China Sea dispute:** During the Munich Security Conference, maritime tension between China and the Philippines was heavily discussed. Former Chinese vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying stated that the occupation of disputed features in the South China Sea (SCS) was a “red line”, referring to the Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal, where the two countries have been engaged in confrontations over the past two years. While these shoals are within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone, China has been assertively staking its claim to them, firing water cannons and sideswiping both Philippine fishing and coast guard vessels. Fu continued, stating that China has the capability to take control of additional territory across the SCS, but is exercising restraint – in line with China’s array of thinly veiled threats towards its regional adversaries.

**RMI Comment:** Additionally, the presence of a U.S. Typhon missile system in the Philippines, capable of striking mainland China, has driven tension between the two countries, with China calling for its removal, which the Philippines has rejected unless China ceases all hostilities. The declaration of Chinese ‘red lines’ is not new; instead, it forms the basis of China’s strategy to normalize its control over disputed territories in the SCS, providing a platform to threaten and coerce its adversaries with escalatory rhetoric.

Since 2013, China has claimed over 80% of the South China Sea, this strategic intent to assert control of the sea and air over the region is dictated by China’s economic dependence on the main trade routes along the Malacca Strait. This issue will *Highly Likely* remain a top strategic priority for the Chinese Communist Party far into the future. The disregard of international maritime law and the notion of sovereignty and territorial integrity are challenged across the region by China – which *Probably* serves to inform China’s Taiwan policy, as its actions are yet to be met with resistance beyond the small-scale deployment of mostly defensive weapon systems and freedom of navigation operations. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **HIGH**



**RMI Recommendation:** The assessed threat level is HIGH, though it is *Highly Unlikely* that Beijing is intending to escalate its activity beyond the usual harassment, posturing and intimidation of its adversaries. However, the baseline that China has established over the course of the SCS dispute is high and regularly violates international law. With further militarization of islands across the SCS *Almost Certain*, escalation is inevitable, though Beijing is *Likely* to limit direct confrontation which it deems significantly escalatory. **Ends.**

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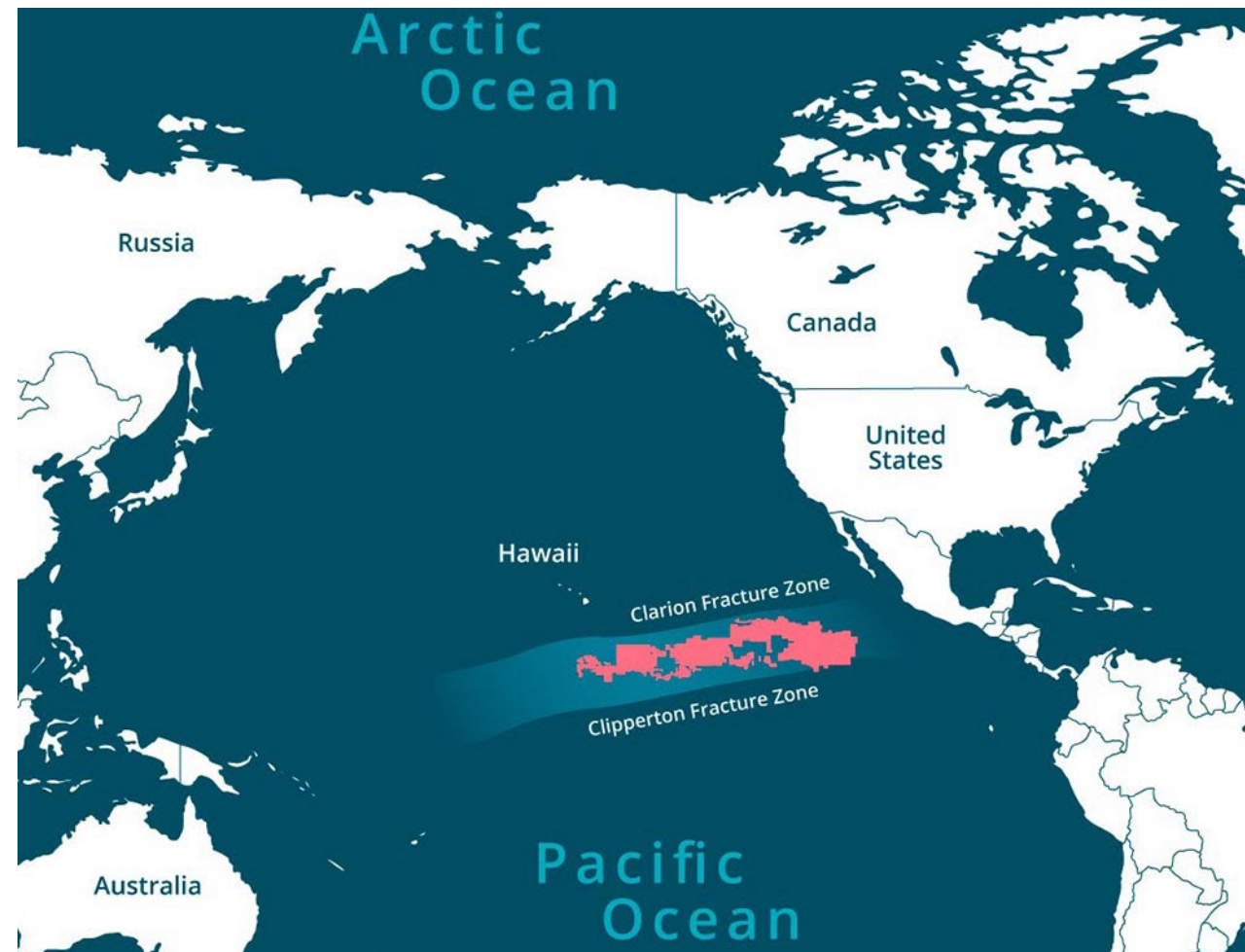
# INDO-PACIFIC China & Cook Islands

**Significant enhancement of Iranian hybrid maritime capability?:** On 13<sup>th</sup> February, the Cook Islands announced plans to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership with China on infrastructure, trade, and the economy. Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown emphasized that the agreement aims to enhance economic opportunities and does not include security matters. However, news of the strategic partnership raised concern over China's encroachment in the Pacific for New Zealand, given its traditional role as the Cook Islands' primary strategic partner.

**RMI Comment:** A significant aspect of this partnership is the potential collaboration in deep-sea mining within the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ), an area in the central Pacific Ocean rich in valuable metals such as nickel, cobalt, and manganese. The China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA) holds licenses for exploration in the CCZ and has been actively involved in deep-sea mineral research and development. China's involvement in deep-sea mining is part of a broader strategy to secure access to critical minerals essential for high-tech industries, which are then used in attempts to coerce the U.S. following diplomatic disputes.

By signing the strategic partnership with the Cook Islands, China *Almost Certainly* expands its access to critical undersea resources while also strengthening its geopolitical influence in a region traditionally aligned to the West. This approach mirrors China's earlier engagement with the Solomon Islands, which saw an increased Chinese security and military presence, condemned by various states in the West. This pattern of economic and security engagement is *Almost Certain* to continue across the Pacific as China seeks to dislodge the influence of the U.S. and its allies in what it considers its sphere of influence. **Ends.**

**RMI Recommendation:** China's strategic expansion in the Pacific is *Almost Certain* to drive sustained geopolitical tensions, with associated trade disputes *Highly Likely* to disrupt supply chains. Business exposure to Pacific resource sectors should anticipate shifts in the availability of critical exports over the longer term. **Ends.**



Current assessed threat level: **LOW**



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# INTERNATIONAL [Medical Intelligence]

## Avian Influenza



**First human H5N1 cases reported in Ohio and Nevada:** On 12<sup>th</sup> February, the Ohio Department of Health reported the state's first human case of H5N1 avian influenza. The patient, an adult male farm worker from Mercer County, had direct contact with deceased commercial poultry. This follows the report from Nevada on 10<sup>th</sup> February of the first human case of H5N1; a dairy farm worker who contracted the virus from exposure to infected cattle. These cases highlight the ongoing risk of zoonotic transmission among individuals working closely with infected birds and mammals.

**Detection of HPAI in vultures in Texas:** On 14<sup>th</sup> February, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in black vultures at Landa Park in New Braunfels. The detection of HPAI in scavenger bird species underscores its widespread reach. Authorities have advised the public to avoid contact with wild birds, refrain from feeding them, and maintain the cleanliness of bird feeders to mitigate the virus's spread.

**High levels of human influenza and migrations of birds increase risk of “pandemic potential”:** Director of DeGroote Institute for Infectious Disease Research at McMaster University, Matthew Miller, stated that as levels of human influenza increase, the more probable it is that the virus could combine with avian influenza to create a new virus with a “pandemic potential”, compounded by the migratory season of infected bird populations.

**RMI Comment:** There remains no evidence of human-to-human transmission of avian influenza, though comments by Matthew Miller underscore the clinical concern of possible future mutations of the virus, which could see human cases dramatically increase. **Ends.**



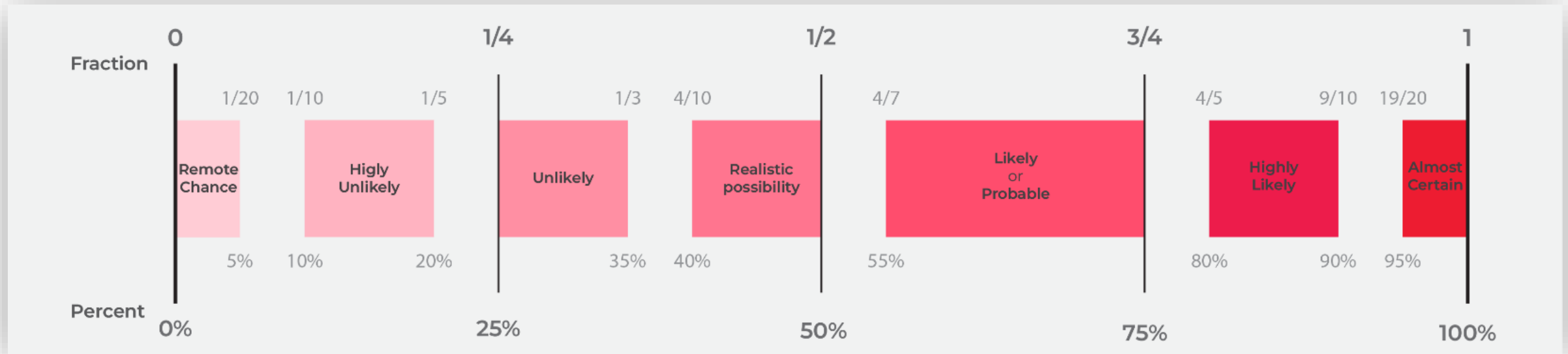
Current assessed threat level: **LOW**



**RMI Recommendation:** No change from Edition #013. The current assessed threat level is LOW. The WHO recommends limiting exposure to potentially infected poultry and environments and performing good hand hygiene to mitigate risk of infection. Experts warn of the risk increasing dramatically if human-to-human transmission is identified, but to date there have been no reported cases of this occurring. **Ends.**

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# Probability Yardstick



## Analytical Confidence Rating (AnCR)

**HIGH.** Uncertainties remaining should have negligible or no effect on the key judgement(s).

**MODERATE.** Uncertainties remain that could expose the key judgements to change.

**LOW.** Critical uncertainties remain that could invalidate the key judgements.

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