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(e- Scan 01-15 MAR 2022)

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ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01-15 MAR 2022

CHINA (Geo-Strat, Geo-Politics & Geo-Economics)

China Struggles to Balance its Stance on Ukraine-Russia Conflict.

(<https://theprint.in/world/china-struggles-to-balance-its-stance-on-ukraine-russia-crisis/866577/>)

Comments. China and Russia relations have become closer since 2014 when it stepped in to help Russia, which was dealing with heavy economic sanctions post its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. China stepped in and helped Russia's economy to recover by buying oil and investing in companies, etc. Further, both the countries have converging strategic interests: China and Russia share a similar stance of opposition to Western powers. While China has opposed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) presence in Ukraine, Russia has stated that it recognized Taiwan to be part of China. Russian President Vladimir Putin had gone to Beijing for the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games at a time when China was being diplomatically boycotted over allegations of human rights violations and genocide of Uyghurs Muslims. Putin and Xi held a summit where the former declared closer relations with China and also their common stand against threats to internal security.

It may be of interest to note that just after the Winter Olympics concluded, Putin declared recognition of the independence of two regions in Ukraine, accused Ukraine of violating treaties and launched offensive against Ukraine. Though, China has neither supported nor denounced Russia's actions against Ukraine but there are reports that China has issued directives for covering the Russia-Ukraine crisis by not showing Russia in an unfavourable light and not being pro-West. Comments are also to be monitored on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter. State-run press accounts are heavily promoting comments in support of Russia and opposing the US.

However, the continuance of the ongoing crisis has placed China in a difficult position as Beijing struggles to balance its stance to protect its economic and strategic interests:-

- (a) China is Ukraine's biggest trading partner as it imports wheat, corn, iron ore, sunflower oil and barley from Ukraine and exports machinery and consumer goods to the country. Since 2018, Ukraine has been supplying modern engines for jets to China. Ukraine is also a major arms supplier to China. Ukraine joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's ambitious infrastructure project, in 2017. In 2020, Ukraine and China signed agreements for the financing and cooperation of BRI.
- (b) Huawei, a Chinese company providing telecommunication services and hardware, has robust operations in Ukraine. Huawei was selected to improve cybersecurity in Ukraine in 2020. China is also undertaking several infrastructural projects in Ukraine such as installing 4G and metro lines.
- (c) China needs to maintain friendly relations with Ukraine because of extensive trade relations as supporting Russia would bring China's robust trade with Ukraine to halt.
- (d) China would also face severe backlash and economic sanctions from Europe as well.

There are wide speculations that China will need Russia when it moves against the US over Taiwan. Presently, China's stance on the Russia-Ukraine crisis has been ambivalent. China is providing moral support to Russia but not actively supporting Russia in an attempt to maintain friendly relations with Ukraine. However, there are reports that Russia is seeking greater Chinese support in terms of weapons and equipment. This might be dangerous as it would further worsen China's already strained relations with the US, EU and even Japan, China's biggest trading partners. The US has warned China not to do this as it would invite sanctions against China also.

China's Defence Budget 3 Times That of India's

(<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/at-230-billion-chinas-defence-budget-3-times-that-of-indias-focus-combat-readiness-2805020>)

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1254113.shtml>

The Chinese government has proposed the defence budget for the fiscal year 2022 at 1.45 trillion Yuan (USD 230 billion), a 7.1 per cent year-on-year increase, from last year's USD 209 billion.

Comments. The hike makes China's defence budget over three times that of India's defence budget of 5.25 lakh crore (about USD 70 billion) for 2022. In 2021, the defence budget grew by 6.8 per cent to USD 209 billion. China has the world's second-largest defence budget after the United States.

It is difficult to estimate actual PLA military expenditure due to China's general lack of transparency about how its official defence budget is calculated, poor accounting and incomplete transition from a command economy to a market economy. The U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) had earlier estimated that China's actual military spending has been twice (low) or maximum thrice (High) the Chinese Official Military Budget (For further details about China's military expenditure, see CENJOWS Issue Paper 'Is China Heading for a Soviet Union Type Collapse?').

However, in response to Western media's one-sided interpretation that hypes the military spending plan being the fastest increase since 2019 and outpaces the country's GDP growth target, Chinese officials justify by stating that China's 7.1 percent increase to its defense budget in 2022 is a restrained move that aims to safeguard the country's national sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and development interests, as well as to provide public security goods to the world.

Despite admitting that China has kept its defense budget increase to single-digit for seven consecutive years, foreign media reports, like those by Reuters and Bloomberg, hyped the increase at being the fastest pace since the 7.5 percent proposed for 2019, and comes in above the targeted slower economic growth of around 5.5 percent.

IOR (MARITIME)

Naval Exercise MILAN - 22 Concludes in Visakhapatnam.

(<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/multilateral-naval-exercise-milan-concludes-in-visakhapatnam/article65193406.ece>)

Indian Navy's largest Multilateral Exercise Milan 2022, which saw the participation of over 40 countries, ended on 05 Mar 22. The sea phase of the 11th edition saw the participation

of 26 ships, one submarine and 21 aircraft, the maritime exercise, was hosted in Visakhapatnam for the first time, was earlier supposed to take place in 2020, but was deferred due to the Covid pandemic. 13 countries sent their warships, others sent their highest-level delegations. Warships of Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia, South Korea, Bangladesh, Indonesia US, Japan, Australia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Seychelles and France took part in the Multi-Nation Exercise.

A series of complex and advanced exercises were undertaken in all three dimensions of Naval operations to enhance compatibility, interoperability, mutual understanding and maritime cooperation amongst the partner Navies. The harbour phase was held from February 25 to 28 and the sea phase from March 1 to 4. The sea phase commenced with a series of exercises to enhance the interoperability amongst the participating Navies, the statement said. The first two days at sea included complex anti-air warfare drills, with U.S. P-8A aircraft shepherding a strike of Indian fighter aircraft on a formation of warships of the participating Navies. Additionally, weapon firings against low-flying air targets were conducted, which reflected the proficiency of the crew and high levels of interoperability.

Comments. The Sea phase witnessed an increase in the complexity of exercises including underway replenishment, advanced anti-submarine exercises with participation by aircraft, surface target firings and simulation of complex operational scenarios. Increase in the complexity goes on to prove the strong interoperability among the partner Navies and readiness to take on any common threat. The conduct of a Multi-National Exercise amid tensions between the West, Russia and the crisis in Ukraine, saw the participation of warships of the Quad countries, France, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam and among others participating in the practice drills. In addition participation of Russian, Iranian, Israel and Saudi Arabia delegations without ships, goes on to establish the prowess of India as a Maritime Power with strong interoperability and ties with other IOR and ERF Navies.

AEROSPACE

Ukraine Using Drones to 'Great Effect' on Russian Forces: Pentagon Updates.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/ukraine-drones-great-effect-russian-forces-pentagon-updates/story?id=83391603>

Comments. The armed drones have been used in past by Iran backed Houthi rebels from Yemen against Saudi Arabia (Sep 2019) and UAE (Jan 2021) and in 44 days conflict of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno –Karabakh in 2020. The military lessons have eluded the military strategists since the drones are considered slow and unsuitable for well defended areas and in areas where the adversary has air superiority. What has emerged that both Saudi Arabia and UAE though, were well defended with formidable THAAD and Patriots defence systems but, both faced combined attack by missiles and drones. While both succeeded in neutralizing some attacking missiles and drones but, the element of surprise and multiple and simultaneous raids resulted in extensive damage to both. Saudi's suffered destruction of nearly 50% Saudi Oil production / storage while, in UAE, the Houthi rebels successfully attacked the Abu Dhabi international air port and the oil storage of oil giant Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).

In Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Azerbaijan used the Turkish and Israeli make armed drones successfully against the Armenian offensive potential and in SEAD operations. The open source information suggests that drones were effectively used to destroy a huge number of Armenian tanks, fighting vehicles, artillery units, and air defenses and for disrupting the Armenian supply lines and logistics, facilitating later Azerbaijani success in battle. Any

action against the drones was possible only if these were detected well in advance but, Azerbaijani drones due to their small size were often not detected nor engaged due critical deficiency of Short Range Air Defences Systems (SHORDS). Armenia's larger air defenses like the S-300 though formidable are not designed for counter-UAV missions and itself fell prey to the Israeli loitering ammunition. The primary lesson from the air war over Nagorno-Karabakh is to have full-spectrum air defense capability. At the same time due attention also needs to be given to both Active and Passive Air Defences and imaginative use of Electronic Warfare to impair the Command and Control (C2) of the drones which unfortunately was not given due attention.

In ongoing Ukraine-Russian war, at the preliminary analysis shows same lessons, which is surprising since Russian are generally proficient in use of drones and in electronic warfare after having participated in Syria for so long. It was expected that Russian invasion will achieve their objective in less than a week but, even after 20 days of war, the progress is far from satisfactory. The Russian advance has been badly hindered by the resolute defence put up by the Ukraine forces in that they have effectively used Turkish Bayraktars drones TB2 to target the advancing Russian Armours and disrupt the Russian supply lines.

This has surprised the military strategists as it was doubted that armed drones can be an effective air targeting weapon especially where the adversary has an air superiority, effective air defences with good detection and engagement capability. At this time, while Russia is able to launch large number of offensive missions but, they continue to remain vulnerable in the Ukrainian air space. The ground forces too remain vulnerable to drones and have suffered extensive damage. Russia was well aware of this fact and was expected to be prepared for this. Under the circumstances, it shows that Russia has underestimated the Ukraine fighting potential and It also appears that their armoured columns are advancing without proper air defenses. It is not clear why the Russian ground forces do not have enough air cover. The Russians could taken out drone bases that control and service the Turkish-made unmanned vehicle and used their electronic warfare and jamming systems prowess to defend against the drones but , for inexplicable reasons the drones have proved as great hindrance to the Russian advance.

It is clear that in future, drones apart from their use in traditional roles, would be extensively used in the future wars/ armed skirmishes. Therefore, full spectrum air defenses are needed in key areas and for the offensive elements of the armed forces. The areas that need attention are detection resources, drone countermeasures, including kinetic interceptors, electronic jammers etc. Armour and other heavy ground units will remain vulnerable to drones until mobile SHORAD systems improve and proliferate. In addition, due importance must be given to the passive defences. The militaries will need to consider ways to camouflage and harden their forces. Open and static armour or when moving slowly in poorly camouflaged condition and clumped in tight massed formations will remain vulnerable to an air offensive therefore, adequate precautions are called for by the fighting forces.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan Demands Joint Probe into 'Accidental Firing' of Indian Missile

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/pakistan-demands-joint-probe-to-accurately-establish-facts-on-accidental-firing-of-indian-missile-461817>

Pakistan said it was not satisfied with India's "simplistic explanation" on the "accidental firing" of a missile that landed in Pakistan's Punjab province and demanded a joint probe to accurately establish the facts surrounding the incident. The Indian missile landed near Mian Chhunu city in Pakistan's Punjab province without causing damage to civilian property. The Pakistani army had indicated that it was a Brahmos missile, fired near the Sirsa in India and flying at 40,000 feet and three times the speed of sound when it entered 124 kilometres inside Pakistan. India's Press Information Bureau's Defence Wing regretting the accidental firing of the Indian-origin missile into Pakistani territory on March 9 due to technical malfunction and the decision to hold a high-level Court of Inquiry.

Comments. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in Rajya Sabha that the Government has taken serious note of the incident. A formal high-level inquiry has been ordered and government is evaluating the set standard operating procedures followed during operations, maintenance and inspections of the weapons systems. United States said there is no indication that the recent firing of a missile from India which landed in Pakistan was anything other than accidental. India has always prided itself on fool proof processes and systems which enhance risk mitigation measures. This accidental firing is bound to dent that reputation and raise a lot of questions. The incident raises several fundamental questions regarding security protocols and technical safeguards against accidental or unauthorized missile launch in a nuclearised environment. India and Pakistan have an agreement to notify each other ahead of flight tests of ballistic missiles and military exercises. However, the pact doesn't extend to cruise missile tests. The incident happened at a time when there is a chill in bilateral relations between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. Pakistan had downgraded diplomatic ties with India after India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

To Counter India's Rafale, Pak Inducts Chinese J-10C Fighter Jets into Air Force

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/to-counter-indias-rafale-pak-inducts-chinese-j-10c-fighter-jets-into-air-force-461538>

An unknown number of J-10C multi-role fighter jets have been formally inducted by Pakistan into its Air Force. The planes, which have been acquired from all-weather ally China, will bolster the country's combat capabilities. Prime Minister Imran Khan, said, "When F-16s were inducted 40 years ago, the whole nation was jubilant and now that time has come again as Pakistan is strengthening itself." Pakistan seems to have inducted the new fighter jets in reply to India's acquisition of Rafale fighter jets from France.

Comments. The Jian 10, or a J-10, is a multi-role fighter indigenously developed in China by the Chengdu Aircraft Industry. The J-10 is a single engine, lightweight multirole fighter that is capable of operating in all weather conditions, with strike mission and air to air warfare being its primary objects. The J-10C is similar to F-16s that forms the mainstay of the Pakistan Air Force. Rafale is heavier than the J-10C, it also packs "far greater" thrust, something that gives it "better agility and higher energy, which is the deciding factor in WVR combat", or dogfights. Also, short-range MICA-IR missile carried by the Rafale is considered to be "generations ahead" of the PL-8/9 missiles used by the J-10C. As to BVR combat, the Rafale again scores with its "technology superior radar with greater detection ranges in excess of 200 km and the tracking mode, prioritization of targets is fully automated". On a long-range missiles, too, the Rafale is seen as holding the advantage. Many others features, Rafale is superior to J-10C. Moreso, J-10C has not seen any combats while the Rafale has been tried in battles theaters in Mali, Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria. But the overall strength of the aircrafts in PAF has increased. Pakistan is most likely acquired a full squadron of 25 Chinese multirole J-10C fighter jets.

Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Peshawar Mosque Suicide Blast that Killed 57

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-peshawar-mosque-suicide-blast-that-killed-57-459183>

The Islamic State's regional affiliate, Islamic State Khorasan, or ISIS-K, claimed responsibility for the explosion at a Shiite mosque in Peshawar city of Pakistan that killed at least 57 people and injured more than 200. The suicide blast occurred around 190 kilometres (120 miles) to the east of Rawalpindi where Australia and Pakistan are playing the first Test cricket match. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the suicide blast, saying "houses of worship should be havens, not targets".

Comments. Peshawar is just 50 kilometers from the porous border with Afghanistan. It was a frequent target of militants in the early 2010s but security has greatly improved in recent years. The attack broke a relative lull in violence in Peshawar, which has borne the brunt of Taliban militancy in recent years. It is an attempt to disrupt peace and tranquility of the provincial capital. Shiite groups across the country organized protests in the evening to condemn the attack. The deadly suicide bombing comes at a time when cricketing nations have been reluctant to send their teams to Pakistan over security concerns, ever since the Sri Lankan team was attacked in 2009. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Pakistan Government to Deploy Paramilitary Forces in Islamabad Ahead of No-Confidence Motion

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/pakistan-government-to-deploy-paramilitary-forces-in-islamabad-ahead-of-no-confidence-motion-462596>

With an eye on the no-confidence motion moved by the opposition parties against the Imran Khan government later this month in the National Assembly, Pakistan's federal government has tightened the security to maintain law and order situation. The decision to deploy paramilitary forces was made after the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party announced a plan to hold a public gathering in Islamabad on March 27.

Comments. The opposition parties in Pakistan are jettisoning mutual hatred to oust Imran Khan as they submitted the no-trust motion in the National Assembly secretariat. While the PTI government has exuded confidence to defeat the no-trust motion, the Opposition is sure that they will oust Imran Khan. Amid the looming no-confidence motion, cracks have begun surfacing in Pakistan's ruling coalition led by Imran Khan's PTI with ministers alleging attempts of blackmail by coalition partners. Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) was "blackmailing" the government in return for support during the Opposition's no-trust move. It seems that the three other allies -- the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) -- are waiting for each other to make a decision. Imran Khan has strained the relationship of between Pakistan's civilian and military leadership. Imran Khan's political space is also in danger due to the poor state of the country's economy and unemployment. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Corruption Runs Amok Among Pakistani Army Generals

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/corruption-runs-amok-among-pakistani-army-generals-report-459250>

The recent leak of data from Credit Suisse, an investment banking firm registered in Switzerland which implicated the ex-ISI chief, General Akhtar Abdur Rahman Khan, has again brought to light the extent to which greed and corruption run amok in the Pakistan Army, especially among its Generals. General Rahman had reportedly helped funnel billions of dollars in cash and other aid from the United States and other countries to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan to support their fight against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Comments. These leaked documents only touch the tip of the iceberg as far as how much the top Generals of the Pakistan Army skimmed in the name of the Holy War against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The motto of the Pakistan Army officers seems to be 'Greed is Good'. There are innumerable scandals and sordid stories of the financial bungling, bribery, extortion, influence peddling by serving and retired generals for personal profit. There are also reports of their involvement in smuggling rackets and narcotics trafficking. It is suspected that many Pakistani Generals have had secret Swiss Bank accounts with some of these accounts getting closed later because the money was either moved elsewhere or invested in business or property. Several examples of scandals and corrupt deals that the Pakistani Generals have been involved in over the past few years, including running extortion networks and protecting and partaking in smuggling networks in Balochistan, leasing out government properties at extremely low prices and even taking bribes in defence deals. The corruption reaches the highest levels of the army with former Army Chief General Ashfaq Kiyani's brothers involved in a multi-billion rupee housing scandal in Islamabad. The sordidness that exists in the Pakistan Army is no secret. And yet, the Army has painted itself as a knight in shining armour that is ever ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of the country. The corruption is hardly surprising as the State of Pakistan does not have an army, the Pakistan Army has a State.

SRI LANKA

Timely Help from India Rescues Sri Lanka from Economic Crisis

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/timely-help-from-india-rescues-sri-lanka-from-economic-crisis-458912>

Due to a severe shortage in oil, gas, medicines, and food items because of a shortage of forex, Sri Lanka was under huge economic crisis, however, India's timely help rescued the emerald island. India in the last six months has provided assistance on several fronts to its tiny neighbour to tide over its economic crisis.

Comments. Sri Lanka Government made serious policy errors when it announced an unsolicited, attractive tax concession to income taxpayers. The consequence of this extraordinary money growth was the building up of inflationary pressure in the domestic economy on one side, and the depletion of foreign reserves putting pressure on the rupee to depreciate in the market, on the other. The result of all this was that 500,000 people according to the World Bank have fallen below the poverty line, whilst food inflation hit 21 per cent. Assistance from India in the last six months have come in the form of; a USD 500 million oil line of credit; USD 1 billion lines of credit for essentials to be imported from India under negotiation; Currency swap of USD 400 million; Deferral of USD 515 million under Asian Clearance Union; 40,000 MT of fuel on credit; 100,000 Rapid Antigen Test kits and supply of 1,000 tons of liquid medical oxygen. India is expected to extend a food and health security package to Sri Lanka on an urgent basis, along with an energy security package and currency swap, and also push Indian investments. The food and health security package would envisage the extension of a line of credit to cover the import of

food, medicines and other essential items from India. The Indian assistance at this time is timely and impactful on several fronts.

INDO-PACIFIC

First Big Step Towards 'Anti-China' AUKUS Pact - Australia Announces New Base for Nuclear-Powered Submarine Fleet

<https://eurasianimes.com/aukus-pact-australia-base-for-nuclear-powered-submarine/>

On 07 Mar 2022, Australian PM, Mr. Scott Morrison, announced plans for a nuclear submarine base on the country's east coast. The Aus\$10-billion (US\$7.4 billion) facility will support Australia's new nuclear-powered submarine fleet, likely to be acquired under the Australia-Britain-US defence alliance (AUKUS) pact. The Australian government has chosen three east coast sites but the final decision is only expected by the end of next year. Mr. Morrison stated that "... to support our decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, establishing a second submarine base on our east coast will enhance our strategic deterrent capability, with significant advantages in operational, training, personnel, and industrial terms." He also suggested that the new facility would allow nuclear-powered submarines from the United States and the United Kingdom to visit on a regular basis.

Comments. Australia, after cancelling a deal with France to provide 12 conventional submarines, entered into a deal to buy nuclear submarines from the U.S. and U.K. last year, even though it is not yet clear which of the two would finally provide them to Australian Navy.¹ The Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement between the AUKUS partners came into effect on February 8. Australia already has a submarine base on its west coast, where it keeps its aging fleet of Collins-class vessels, and this is also expected to be upgraded to handle nuclear submarines. Both US and UK have promised increasing logistics, maintenance and sustainment capabilities in Australia. In November 2021, a Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarine made a port visit to Perth, demonstrating the UK's commitment to the region.

This is another move in response to the growing Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region and deteriorating Sino-Australian relations. It would also enable U.S. to increase its footprint in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, the national political opposition has questioned the deal for its actual benefits to Australia.

Australia Pledges \$28 Billion to Expand Defence Personnel by a Third

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-pledges-28-billion-expand-defence-personnel-by-third-2022-03-10/>

On 10 Mar 2022, the Australian PM, Mr Scott Morrison announced that the nation will expand its active defence personnel by a third by 2040, describing the move as part of efforts to keep the country safe "in an increasingly uncertain global environment." The move is ostensibly to respond to the "threats and the environment that we face as a country, as a liberal democracy in the Indo-Pacific". The increase from 18,500 personnel to 80,000 over the 18-year period is expected to cost around Aus\$38 billion (\$27bn). The

¹Australia says it plans to arm the submarines with conventional weapons.

Australian Defence Minister, Mr Peter Dutton, added that the new forces would be deployed in areas including space, cyber operations, naval assets, and land and sea-based autonomous vehicles.

Comments. Recent developments in the Indo-Pacific region, the growing Chinese belligerence in the region, the dip in Sino-Aus relations and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have led to a rethink on security issues within Australia. The country is aiming at increasing self reliance, while deepening its military commitments with 'likeminded nations.' However, these statements should also be seen in light of upcoming Australian elections. More clarity on the actual commitments and the roadmap will become clear when the policies of the new government are laid out.

EURASIA

Russia–Ukraine: Selective Cyber Operations

https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/03/russia-ukraine-pressing-the-right-button-at-the-right-time?utm_source=IISS%20Newsletter&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=b%20|%20Cyber%20Ukraine%20MW%20|%20100322&utm_content=0&utm_term=0&_cldee=dGNoYW5kXzI1QHlhaG9vLmNvLmlu&recipientid=contact-96e91ce0ff3ee81180d8005056be3f90-64d9296e5b0e454fad78d176d46320f5&esid=cae67c94-5ba1-ec11-b400-6045bd1058a6

Predictions that a conventional war waged by Russia against Ukraine would inevitably be supported by highly destructive cyber operations have so far proved untrue. Marcus Willett of the IISS explained why Russia may hesitate to unleash offensive cyber strikes during the ongoing conflict with Ukraine².

Comments. Why Russia have not been reported to disrupt Ukrainian cyber systems so far could be due to one or more of the following reasons:-

- (a) Ukraine had been preparing for a likely Russian cyber-attack for the last so many years, especially after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and could have developed a high level of resilience against Russian possible offensive³. The Russian capability to deliver a surgical effect rather than an indiscriminate one is not fully known.
- (b) Russia may be keeping Ukrainian networks operating for their own use, and for intelligence gathering.
- (c) Russian doctrine views cyber operations as delivering most value as part of an 'information war' and is deliberately kept below the threshold of a use of force or armed attack⁴.

² Marcus Willett, "Russia–Ukraine: Pressing the right button at the right time", 10 March 2022, IISS, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/03/russia-ukraine-pressing-the-right-button-at-the-right-time?utm_source=IISS%20Newsletter&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=b%20|%20Cyber%20Ukraine%20MW%20|%20100322&utm_content=0&utm_term=0&_cldee=dGNoYW5kXzI1QHlhaG9vLmNvLmlu&recipientid=contact-96e91ce0ff3ee81180d8005056be3f90-64d9296e5b0e454fad78d176d46320f5&esid=cae67c94-5ba1-ec11-b400-6045bd1058a6, accessed 14 March 2022.

³Roman Shemakov, "Russia's cyberwarfare remains limited, while Ukraine is crowdsourcing its own", 08 March 2024, Global Voices, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/03/08/russias-cyberwarfare-remains-limited-while-ukraine-is-crowdsourcing-its-own/>, accessed 15 March 2022.

⁴ *ibid*

(d) Russian would have learned from reported earlier cyber-attacks during previous conflicts.

(e) NATO recently stated that not only could a highly damaging cyber-attack on any member of the Alliance trigger Article 5, but so could an accumulation of smaller attacks. Similarly, President Joe Biden has warned that the US is most likely to find itself in a real shooting war with a major power due to a cyber-breach⁵.

Contrary to generally held belief, Russia has not used highly destructive cyber operations extensively during armed conflicts before.

(a) During conflict with Georgia in 2008, Russia only carried out DDOS attacks, blocked some portals and also posted false information on Georgian websites.

(b) Cyber operations conducted by Russia against Ukraine during its annexation of Crimea in 2014 were also quite akin to the ones conducted against Georgia.

(c) Russia has been using cyber operations during peacetime, as, during 2015 and 2016 Russia used 'wiper' malware to incapacitate Ukraine's electric grid.

(d) Russia's used in 2017 a malware 'NotPetya' to lock computers in many important sectors rendering the infected computers completely unusable for a long period⁶.

(e) Leading to and during the 2022 conflict itself, Russian cyber operations have repeated the patterns of 2008 and 2014 with only a careful, small-scale use of wiper malware.

(f) Russia is reported to have exploited cyber domain for influencing Western democratic elections and collecting intelligence information.

Since February 24, effective cyber-attacks from Moscow are notably absent⁷. Another possibility is that the fog of war has obscured some Russian cyber activity⁸. Conflict is still on. Russia might use its cyber capabilities at appropriate time, regardless of the collateral damage, if it subscribes to its goals of denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine. The Ukrainian government has made plans to move some of its computer infrastructure out of Kyiv as Russian troops continue to pound the city. Preserving those digital records could be key to learning more about any additional Russian cyber activity during the war⁹.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Roman Shemakov, "Russia's cyberwarfare remains limited, while Ukraine is crowdsourcing its own", 08 March 2024, *Global Voices*, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/03/08/russias-cyberwarfare-remains-limited-while-ukraine-is-crowdsourcing-its-own/>, accessed 15 March 2022.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Sean Lyngaas, "Russia's cyber offensive against Ukraine has been limited so far, Experts are divided on why", 12 March 2022, *CNN*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/12/europe/russia-ukraine-war-cyber-attacks/index.html>, accessed 16 March 2022.

⁹ *ibid*