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# Strategic Digest

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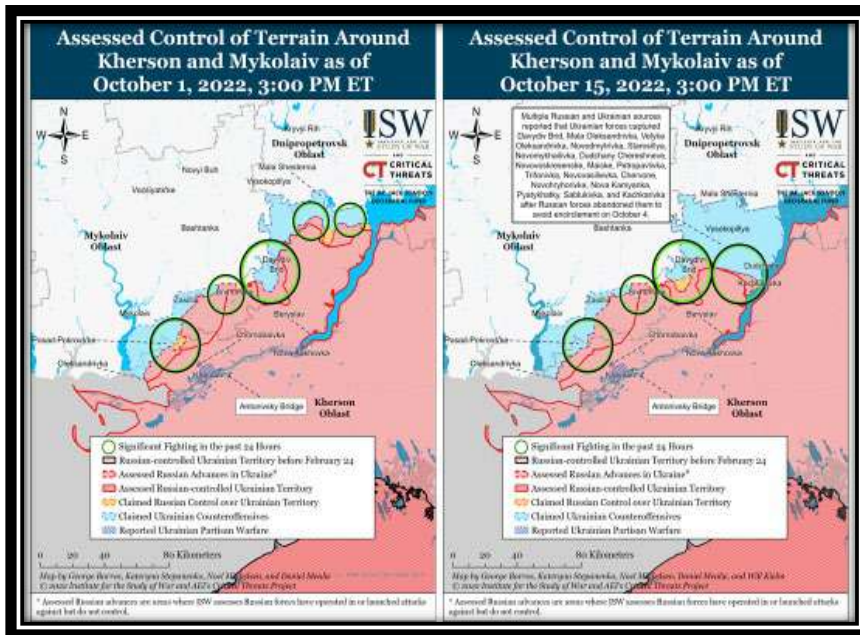
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## Ukraine War Update 01- 15 Oct 2022

During the last fortnight, Ukrainian forces have maintained their offensive momentum both in the Eastern and Southern axis. After capturing Lyman, Ukrainian forces continue to push further into Luhansk Oblast making incremental gains. In comparison to swift advances in the northeast around Kharkiv, Ukrainian advance in the southern sector around Kherson has been more laboured. In the past two weeks, Ukraine has recaptured significant territory in the Vysokopyllya region of the Kherson oblast. Russian counter-offensives near



Bakhmut in the Donetsk region have faced stiff Ukrainian resistance and have not been able to achieve tactical gains. With Ukraine pushing its advance in the east and south, Russian troops have been under pressure on both fronts. In Early October, The Russian president, Vladimir Putin appeared to concede the severity of the

Kremlin’s recent military reversals in Ukraine while insisting Russia would “stabilise” the situation in four Ukrainian regions assimilated within Russia.

On 08 October 2022, Kerch Bridge linking the Crimean peninsula to Russia was damaged due to an explosion disrupting the most important supply line for Russian troops fighting in southern Ukraine. Due to the explosion, three spans of the roadway deck on the Kerch-bound side were damaged and two collapsed into the water. Russia called the attack on the Bridge "a terrorist act" carried out by Ukrainian special services. While Ukrainian officials made no secret of their satisfaction over damage to Kerch Bridge, they denied their involvement in the attack. Ukrainian officials have suggested that Russian forces planned the attack as a pretence to escalate the war in Ukraine. On 12 October 2022, Russia's Federal Security Service arrested eight men alleged to have taken part in an elaborate scheme to destroy the Crimean Bridge. Investigators said a group comprising Ukrainians, Russians and Armenian camouflaged tons of explosives and shipped them to several countries before Saturday's attack.

On the day of the attack on Kerch Bridge, Russia appointed Gen Sergei Surovikin as its first overall commander for the war in Ukraine. General Surovikin took command of the southern front in Ukraine in June. Even before his formal appointment as overall commander, General Surovikin is believed to have directed the war for months. Nicknamed “General Armageddon” by his

colleagues, he has a fearsome reputation hardened over decades. With his appointment, Russia seems to be trying to improve coordination between its units. The operational effectiveness of this structural change in the Command organization remains uncertain at this stage. Surovikin's appointment has, however, softened some of the public anger among Russian hardliners, who were growing increasingly impatient with the country's military failures.

Just two days after General Surovikin's appointment, Russia launched a barrage of missile attacks over a dozen of cities in Ukraine causing widespread damage in retaliation for the Kerch bridge attack. Along with Kyiv, Lviv, Kherson, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and Mykolaiv were also among the areas targeted. While Across Ukraine, at least 26 people were killed and over 100 injured, the military effects of the Russian strikes were negligible. Despite Ukrainian energy infrastructure being a key target, Ukraine's cities quickly restored power. As per reports, Ukrainian air defence forces shot down an impressive 43 of the 84 missiles Russia launched on October 10th, and 20 of 28 the next day.

Russia's latest strikes have led Western countries to speed up deliveries of modern anti-missile systems. On October 12th Germany confirmed delivery of the first battery of its new IRIS-T Surface to Air Missile (SAM) system. A second advanced system on its way is the Norwegian National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS). UK and France have also committed to supplying air defence systems to Ukraine.

The tempo of the fight has already slowed in recent days as Ukraine consolidates the positions it has recently won. While Russia has made some incremental gains in the eastern Donbas, the Ukrainians maintain the initiative and the momentum at the moment. Thus far, the incremental arrival of recently mobilized Russian troops had no discernible impact. As winter brings snow and ice in the east and mud in the south, both sides will be significantly constrained in launching new offensives.

### The US National Security Strategy- Key Highlights

On October 12, 2022, U.S. The United States released the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS), a document mandated by Congress, that details the country's international interests and policies. The document outlined that the overwhelming challenge for the United States in the coming years would be "outcompeting China and restraining Russia" while focusing on restoring a damaged democracy at home.



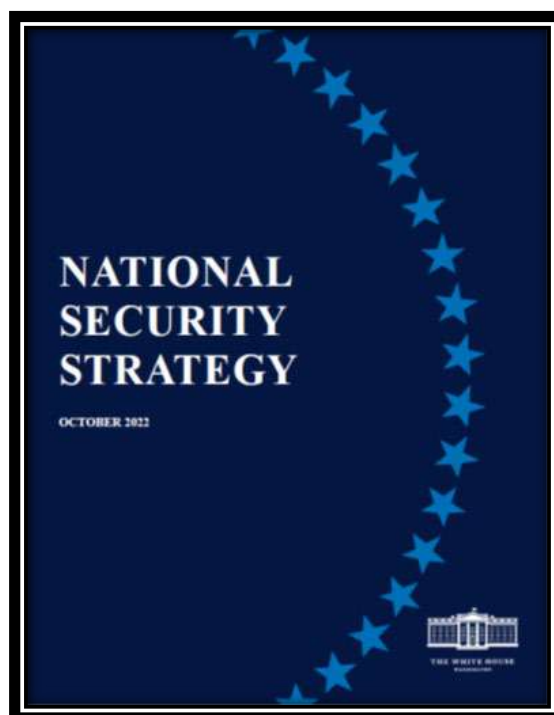
The national security strategy (NSS) depicts China as the most capable long-term competitor, but Russia as the more immediate, disruptive threat. In a foreword, Biden makes a distinction between the types of threats posed by Moscow and Beijing. “Russia poses an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown,” the president writes. He describes China, on the other hand as “the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to advance that objective”. The policy document portrays Beijing as “America’s most consequential geopolitical challenge”.

The new strategy outlines a summary of how the U.S. would operate under a concept of “integrated deterrence” across the whole of government defined as “the seamless combination of capabilities to convince potential adversaries that the costs of their hostile activities outweigh their benefits.” The document argues that the United States must be prepared to work with its rivals on worldwide problems like climate change, food insecurity and energy issues that affect people on a global scale. The document lays out three lines of effort:

- Invest in “tools of American power and influence” by strengthening the economy, securing critical infrastructure and making investments into key technologies like microchips and semiconductors
- Build “the strongest possible coalition of nations” to solve global challenges by deepening trade and security agreements
- Modernize the military to contend with strategic threats like China and Russia, while also maintaining the ability to protect the homeland from terrorist threats

Biden’s strategy repeats much of the worldview he set out during his campaign and in an “Interim National Security Strategy Guidance” document early last year. Those efforts, and the new publication, posited that domestic and foreign policy are closely intertwined — that American strength at home is the source of its strength abroad. But it still signals some important shifts in policy.

Early in his administration, Biden placed America at the centre of an urgent struggle between the world’s autocracies and its democracies. The new strategy keeps the democracy-versus-autocracy framing but tries for a more open approach. This shift is a step forward in meaningful engagement with identifying



geopolitical coherence with like-minded countries with different historical, cultural, and ideological outlooks.

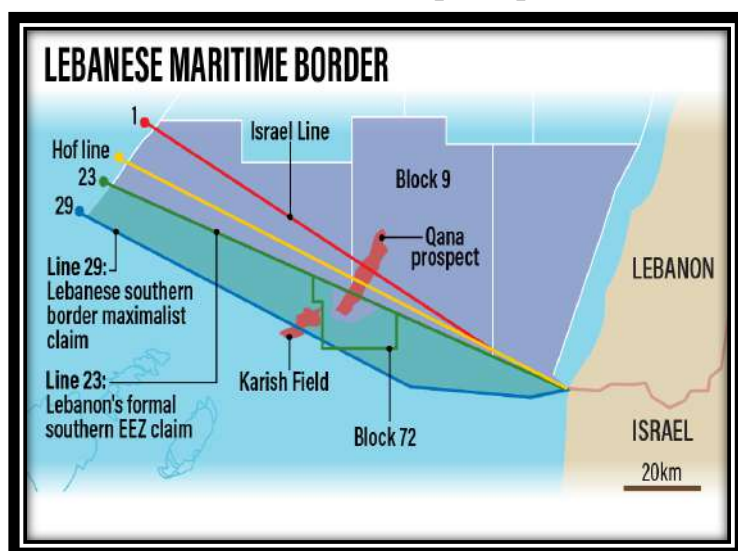
The second big departure is reduced emphasis on West Asia. A diminishing terrorism threat, American energy independence, a global effort to shift away from fossil fuels, and an end to the era of American nation-building seem to have contributed to this strategic shift. As a secondary theatre, the Middle East is now meant to fit into a broader global agenda, rather than dominate it.

The third important shift is the integration of foreign policy and domestic policy and a focus on issues that spill out of these two traditional silos – supply chains, foundational technologies, the energy transition, and even tax policy. The objective highlights the imperative towards framing active industrial policy that targets investment in infrastructure, education, training, cybersecurity, and green energy, among other fronts. Some experts have argued that this signals a distinct shift away from America’s long-standing role as the world’s leading proponent of a global free-market economy.

The new national security strategy paves the way for the Pentagon to publish in the coming weeks its national defence strategy and an associated document, called the nuclear posture review, which will describe the Biden administration's plans for the nuclear arsenal. As the US will need to deter two major nuclear weapons powers for the first time within a decade, these impending strategic articulations will provide more clarity towards implementing the NSS guidance.

### The Historic Israel-Lebanon Maritime Boundary Agreement

Israel and Lebanon reached an ‘indirect’ agreement to establish a permanent maritime boundary between them on 11 October 2022. The agreement was mediated by Amos Hochstein, Senior Advisor for Energy Security at the US State Department, who held meetings between the Israeli and Lebanese officials separately, given that both sides do not have diplomatic ties. Israel also invaded Lebanon in 1982 and occupied portions of its territory till 2000. Israel and Hezbollah also fought a bloody border war in 2006.



While the current phase of negotiations to find a solution to the maritime boundary issue began in October 2020, talks have been ongoing for at least a decade, spearheaded by the US. The contentions primarily related to exploiting the Karish gas field in the Mediterranean Sea, with both sides laying common claim to about 860 sq miles of area.

As part of the agreement, apart from establishing a permanent maritime boundary, Israel will continue to drill in the Karish field, while the Qana field to the north of Karish will go to Lebanon. As a part of the Qana field juts into the Israeli waters, Lebanon will share revenues with Israel. The percentage of these revenues, however, will be negotiated between Israel and the French company, Total, which is expected to begin prospecting for gas in the Qana field immediately.

The agreement is being hailed as a ‘historic’ development, even though Lebanese officials insist that they are not yet ready to have a ‘normalised relationship’ with Israel, given the festering Palestinian issue, in the words of the Deputy Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Elias Bou Saab, the chief negotiator from the Lebanese side. Moreover, the economic benefits of the agreement for Lebanon are not expected to materialise for another three to four years, given that the Qana field has to be developed by Total.

Even so, given Lebanon’s difficult economic and power situation – with electricity supplies heavily rationed, the deal is being seen as a major economic milestone. Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid asserted that the “unprecedented deal will strengthen Israel’s security, bolster our economy and deliver cleaner, more affordable energy to countries around the world”. While the Israeli Cabinet gave its initial approval to the agreement on 12 October, it is being vetted by the Knesset and is expected to secure final cabinet approval within two-three weeks.

While Hezbollah has welcomed the deal, within Israel, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted that it was a “historic capitulation” that would benefit Hezbollah and criticised Lapid for trying to evade parliamentary scrutiny. Hezbollah’s positive take is significant, given that in July 2022, it sent three unarmed drones towards an Israeli rig which was present near the waters of the Karish gas field. Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah chief, warned that in the absence of an agreement, Israel prospecting or exploiting gas of the Karish field is a “red line”. Israel’s Defence Minister Benny Gantz then warned that “If Nasrallah wants to try and harm and to complicate this process, he is welcome to do so: the price is Lebanon”. The three Hezbollah drones were shot down by an Israeli warship, with reports noting that it was the first time an air defence system mounted on an Israeli warship had downed incoming targets.

Given the above brinkmanship, lack of diplomatic ties, political and economic instability in Lebanon (with President Michel Aoun’s term ending in October 2022), political instability in Israel (with the country about to witness its fifth election in less than four years), the maritime boundary agreement between Israel and Lebanon is a testament to skilful diplomacy, on the part of the US, as well as the government of France, which has deep stakes in Lebanon.