



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Strategic Digest

Vol. 4 | No. 14 | 16 July 2022

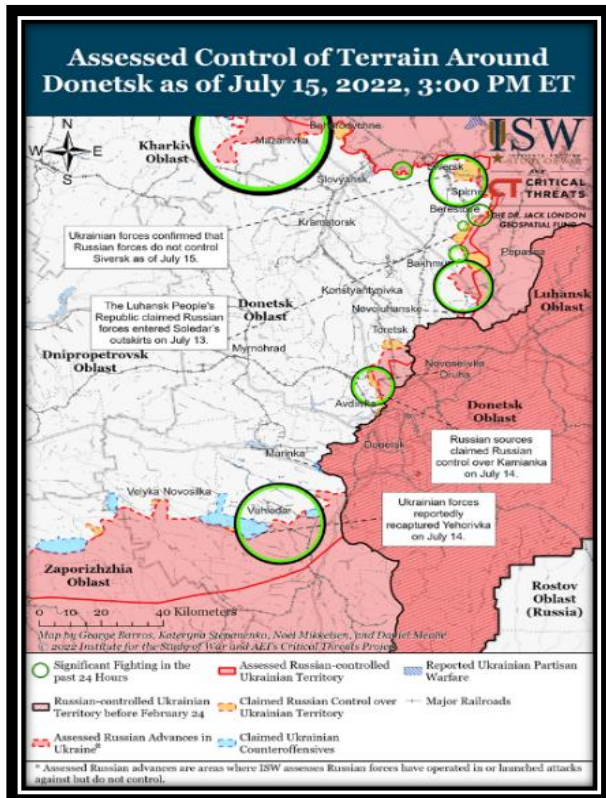
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Ukraine War Update 01-15 Jul

As the Ukraine conflict has progressively evolved into a creeping battle of inches, Russian forces have prioritised their military operations, eschewing concurrent, multi-front offensives. They have focussed on eastern offensive, and southern defensive campaigns. This permits the Russians to husband the military forces that remain from the original invasion.



On 07 July, Russia's defence ministry said that it is conducting an "operational pause" in the war in Ukraine to allow units that have been fighting to rest, prompting military analysts to suggest that Russia was not ready to press into a full assault within Donetsk Province after its capture of neighbouring Luhansk. Yet while Russian troops have eased up on the sort of intense, all-day artillery strikes that they unleashed to help capture the final city in Luhansk Province, they have begun launching almost daily strikes on the next line of cities — Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Bakhmut.

As on 15 July, it appears that Russian forces are emerging from their operational pause. Russian forces carried out a series of limited ground assaults northwest of Sloviansk, southeast of Siversk, along the Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway, southeast of Bakhmut, and southwest of Donetsk City. In the coming weeks, Russian forces are likely to focus on taking several small towns in the Donetsk region, including Siversk and Dolnya on the approaches to Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. The urban areas of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk likely remain the principal objectives for this phase of operations.

The Russian military has been struggling to counter daily Ukrainian strikes on its ammunition dumps and command centres in recent days. On 12 July, a Ukrainian missile strike on a large ammunition store in the town of Nova Kakhovka, in Russia-occupied Kherson caused significant fatalities. The Russian artillery and rocket attack on the Ukrainian town of Bakhmut have been assessed to be a reprisal for a Ukrainian attack using a US-supplied Himars missile system on a Russian air defence site in Luhansk. The strike in Nova Kakhovka was the fourth time in recent days that Ukraine has struck Russian ammunition stores in the town.

While Russian forces are likely to maintain their offensive momentum in eastern Ukraine, there are expectations of a widespread Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south. Ukrainian government officials have spoken of efforts to marshal up to one million troops and of their aim to recapture southern parts of the country. Whether the Ukrainian forces will be able to retake Kherson, a vital province, remains an open question.

In the meanwhile, a mass of cargo ships carrying Ukrainian grain has built up at the mouth of the Danube as negotiators from Moscow, Kyiv, the UN and Turkey hailed progress at talks in Istanbul on easing Ukrainian agricultural exports. The ships are waiting to access exit routes through the Sulina and Bystre estuary canals to reach a series of ports and terminals in Romania from where the grain can be transported around the world. Access to the Bystre estuary route has been possible after the withdrawal of Russian forces from Snake Island. Ukrainian officials hope that the new route for grain exports will allow an additional 500,000 tons to be exported, although that will still be far short of the amount of grain that was exported before the Russian invasion.



Biden's West Asia Visit: Key Outcomes

US President Joe Biden's visit to Israel, Palestine and Saudi Arabia from 13-16 July 2022 had significant bilateral and mini-lateral outcomes. As Biden himself noted in his 9 July Op-Ed in *The Washington Post*, this was the first visit of an American President, post 9/11, with US troops not involved in any regional combat mission. The first stop of Biden's visit was to Israel.

The Biden administration has provided Israel with nearly \$5 billion in military aid this year, including \$1 billion for the Iron Dome missile defence system. This amounts to the largest security aid that the US has given to Israel in a single year, in the backdrop of Iran's recent efforts to ramp up its nuclear activities. The Jerusalem Joint Declaration on 14 July affirmed that the US will 'use all elements of national power' to prevent the nuclearisation of Iran. Among other decisions included cooperation on critical technologies like climate change, and trustworthy tech relating to AI, among others. Biden's visit is expected boost to PM Lapid's standing in Israel's fractious politics,



While in Israel, President Biden took part in the first virtual summit of the I2U2 – dubbed the ‘West Asian Quad’, along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The new mini-lateral brings together these four countries with a common geo-economic vision of enhancing the well-being of their peoples, shunning long-

held ideological binaries that prevented mutually beneficial cooperation.

President Biden became the second US President after Clinton to visit Palestine. Biden met with Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and announced US funding of up to \$100 million to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network in addition to \$500 million in the assistance provided to the Palestinians, since April 2021.

While the Trump administration had threatened to stop funding UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Biden announced an additional \$200 million for the UNRWA bringing total US funding under his administration to more than \$600 million. Biden assured continued support for direct negotiations of PNA with Israel towards the establishment of a Palestinian state. At the same time, The US President reiterated the US positions about Jerusalem being the capital of Israel.

Ahead of Biden’s visit to Saudi Arabia, the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) announced that the Kingdom’s airspace ‘is open for all air carriers. While Israel was not specifically mentioned in that announcement, the move will allow Israeli civilian airliners through Saudi air space reducing their flying time to Asia Pacific destinations.

The US President’s interactions with Prince Salman were highly anticipated by analysts, given Biden's description of the Saudis as a ‘pariah’ state in his campaign speeches. A fist bump in front of the cameras between Biden and the Crown Prince neatly symbolized the anticipated reset in ties. President Biden told presspersons that the issue of Khashoggi with Salman ‘was raised during meetings.

The US and Saudi Arabia issued the Jeddah Declaration stating their shared views on regional issues like Iran, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Libya. Several new areas of cooperation aimed at reshaping US-Saudi relations

were announced including aspects relating to energy security, cyber security and high technology.

Biden attempted to reassert US leadership in the Middle East during the GCC+3 summit Saturday with key leaders in the region and promised that his administration would stay actively engaged in the region.

While there was no announcement on enhanced oil production by Saudis and GCC during the visit, the President did strike an optimistic note that regional leaders would soon take action given that the next OPEC meeting will take place in early August.

Japan in Post Abe Era- Enduring Legacy

It has been a momentous week on the Japanese political scene. Amid a House of Councillors (Upper House) election campaign, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot dead in Nara on July 8. The Upper House election was scheduled for July 10. In a dramatic turn of events, the accused who is now confirmed to be Tetsuya Yamagami, a former Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) personnel, shot Abe during his campaign rally. Abe's assassination not only sent jitters in the domestic political scene in the run-up to the Upper House election, but it also shocked the international community. Initial reports suggest that Yamagami has harboured certain reservations vis-à-vis a religious group called Unification Church, and targeted Abe under the impression that the latter had ties with the organisation. The Unification Church refuted this allegation about its association with the former Prime Minister.



Abe's service was held at Tokyo's Zojoji temple, and the government has confirmed that a state funeral will be organised in autumn. He served a total of 8 years and 8 months as Prime Minister. This would be just the second state funeral in post-war history for any former Prime Minister. The first being for

Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida who signed the San Francisco peace treaty.

While the nation grappled with a profound sense of loss, the Upper House election was held as scheduled, and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secured a majority of seats. LDP together with its junior coalition partner Komeito now holds a total of 146 as opposed to the opposition's 102. Following the election,

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated that ‘the election, which is the foundation of democracy, was challenged by violence and it carries a big meaning that the election was carried through’. Some of the key themes in the election campaign included easing economic pressures and bolstering national security in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.

Developments in Ukraine have infused new momentum into security debates and prompted some opposition parties to promise strong defence capabilities. Following the election results, the numbers indicate that the pro-constitutional amendment group, which includes the LDP-Komeito coalition, two opposition parties and independents, have the two-thirds majority required to pursue revision. Revising the Constitution was a top priority for late Prime Minister Abe.

Abe was one of the most avid supporters of Free and Open-Indo-Pacific (FOIP). During his first term in office from 2006-2007, he pushed the concept through his historic ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’ speech at the Indian Parliament. But it was in his second term from 2012-2020 that FOIP gained traction. He also remained central to the Quad framework. Just argued the case of pursuing Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond involving Australia, India, and the US in addition to Japan. He played an important leadership role from reviving the Quad to rescuing CPTPP. During his time in office, consequential reforms across all spectrums took shape, from Abenomics to the re-interpretation of Article 9 and expanding the scope of the right to collective self-defence. In addition to consolidating the US-Japan alliance, he also invested huge political capital in consolidating strategic partnerships with like-minded countries like India, Australia, Southeast Asia and Europe.

India-Japan relations expanded manifold under the stewardship of Shinzo Abe. Strong personal rapport between Prime Minister Abe and his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Modi had been a key factor in strengthening strategic trust between India and Japan and enhanced strategic cooperation in navigating geopolitical and geo-economic challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific.