



# CHACR DIGEST #7

## EDITORIAL LEADER

The first three articles in this *Digest* build upon the questions that we have pondered in the immediately preceding issues. Why has there not been the cyber bombardment of the West that was anticipated as a ramping up of the 'sub-threshold' competition that characterised Russia's relationship with its potential protagonists? Is the attack on Ukrainian infrastructure (especially agricultural and carbon fuel infrastructure) just about Ukraine, or does it have wider design? How will Russia seek to re-establish the helpful divisions and disagreements between its potential protagonists (US/EU, intra-EU, UK/EU, intra-NATO, NATO/EU, etc) that have served its purpose so well in the so-called constant competition?



Perhaps Russia is having a strategic effect that means that it does not need to up the ante in its malign acts in the so-called grey zone and risk deeper irritation that may further unify its opponents against her. There is a growing line of thought that there may well have been much more of a strategic grand design behind the invasion of Ukraine than the simple desire to empire-build in the near abroad and a 'Peter The Great complex'.

Russia may well have thought through the long-term consequences of her actions in her strategic 'what ifs' and decided that a Ukraine unable to supply food, oil and gas to a large part of the dependant world, especially in Europe and Africa, may produce a long term global dynamic that is very much in Russia's interests (as the food and carbon fuels that she owns grow in value and scarcity so her income and strategic levers grow). An unexpected bonus of an action gone wrong, or an expected strategic benefit? Worth pondering...  
**– Maj Gen (Retd) Dr A R D Sharpe CBE, Director CHACR**

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Picture: Yohan Marion on Unsplash

## AID TO UKRAINE NEEDS TO BE WATCHED CLOSELY

As the war in Ukraine's East turns into a bloody protracted stalemate, numerous nations have lined up to increase their political, economic, and military support with US support in particular leading the way with \$53bn of assistance. In [this piece](#) Mark Cancian argues that now Ukraine is by some distance the largest recipient of US aid, that a greater oversight is necessary. The risk of increasing corruption and undermining the central government is a distinct possibility. Accordingly a special structure within the US government should be set up modelled along The Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

## THE INCREASING GLOBAL COSTS OF THE WAR

The war is increasingly having severe effects on the rest of the world. Particularly in the form of food and energy costs, which have now caused severe food shortages across the globe, particularly in countries with growing populations and high levels of food insecurity. In 36 countries, food inflation is at 15% or higher, causing major problems for poor families who spend upwards of 50% of their income on food. Sixty percent of low-income countries are at a high risk of or are already in debt distress, up from 30% in 2015. Fuel prices are at a seven-year high. In [this report](#) the United States Institute of Peace outlines what can be done to mitigate the most severe aspects of food insecurity across the world, keeping the aid flowing and refusing knee jerk reactions, such as trade tariffs are a good start.

## THE CYBERWAR THAT WASN'T?

It had been expected that Russia's assault on Ukraine would be accompanied by massive cyberattacks, particularly after Russia's nefarious activities in the cyberspace over the past decade or so. Yet, as Kristen Eichensehr highlights in a [recent episode of the Lawfare podcast](#), the cyber attacks have only played a relatively small part in the conflict to date, particularly when compared to the conventional component of the war. The conversation between Eichensehr and Lawfare host Scott Anderson is a timely stock-taking of where things stand, of how best to think about Russian cyber capabilities, and what might be expected in the coming months and years.



## BIDEN'S TAIWAN COMMENTS CAUSE A STIR (AGAIN)

On 23 May, during a visit to Japan, US President Joe Biden appeared to pledge that the US would militarily defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. [Asked by a journalist](#) if “you are willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan if it comes to that?” Biden simply answered “Yes.” For decades, the US has maintained a policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ – not officially recognising Taiwan as an independent state (the One-China policy), but maintaining close defence ties with the island’s government. It is not the first time that the President has been rather more forceful in his support of Taiwan than many of his predecessors, and some argue that Biden is right to change the tone: Writing in [Foreign Affairs](#), Richard Haass and David Sacks argue that the US should rethink its approach, leave behind strategic ambiguity, and make a clear commitment to Taiwan’s independence and security in order to deter China.



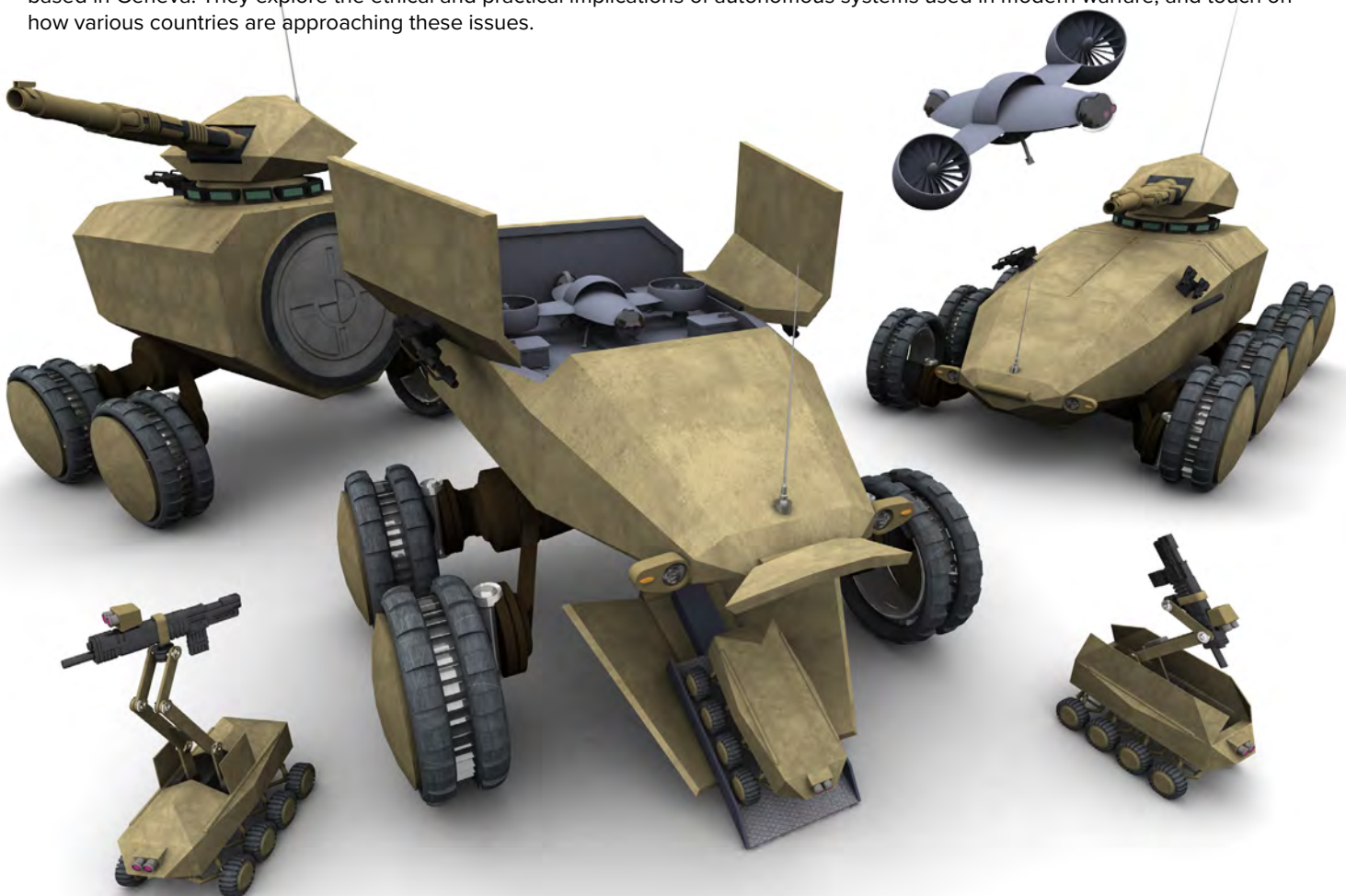
Picture: The White House, CC BY 3.0 US

## ARMS RACE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Despite the war in Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific remains the main long-term geostrategic focus of the US and other key western countries, including the UK. The region’s extraordinary importance to the global economy is illustrated by the fact that some 80% of the world’s trade passes through the Indian Ocean at some point during its journey. An [episode](#) of *The Red Line* podcast, featuring Michael Kugelman (Wilson Centre), Michael Wesley (University of Melbourne) and Dhruva Jaishankar (Observer Research Foundation), explores the increasingly significant arms race unfolding in the region with China, India and the US being the main protagonists. The discussion serves as a timely reminder of key trends shaping the strategic environment of the future beyond the war in Europe.

## AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS

As militaries around the world continue to invest in and pioneer autonomous weapons systems, this [podcast episode](#) from the German think tank Institute for International and Security Affairs, titled *From Eye in the Sky to Killer Robots: Rules and regulations for autonomous weapons* offers interesting insights from experts at the International Panel on the Regulation of Autonomous Weapons based in Geneva. They explore the ethical and practical implications of autonomous systems used in modern warfare, and touch on how various countries are approaching these issues.



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## NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the war in Ukraine and its multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

President Biden is [heading](#) to the Middle East next month, including for a controversial meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The [truce in Yemen](#) has been extended by another two months; the agreement was struck after Saudi-led mediation and the situation in the war-torn country remains highly fragile.

In Pakistan, ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan is not going quietly; he keeps mobilising his supporters and [issuing threats](#) against the new government, raising concerns about growing political instability in the country.

Somalia has undergone a remarkably peaceful transfer of power; now the new President is [working](#) to form his government.

North Korea appears to be [constructing](#) a second tunnel at its nuclear test site, raising alarm that it may be preparing for renewed tests of its nuclear arsenal.

China is [emerging](#) from its latest Covid-19 wave, but doubts about the sustainability of its zero-Covid approach remain.

India's foreign relations with the Muslim world are being rocked by Islamophobic [remarks](#) from some of the ruling party's representatives.

Following a recent spat between the Turkish President and the Greek Prime Minister, their Defence Ministers [emphasise](#) the need for continued dialogue.

## LIBYA: GROWING RISK OF CIVIL WAR

In Libya, the risk that the country's long-standing political conflict could escalate into another round of civil war appears to be growing. At the heart of the current crisis is an increasingly testy standoff between the Government of National Accord (GNU), established through a UN-led political process in 2021, and the Government of National Stability (GNS), appointed by the Libyan parliament earlier this year. An insightful recent [report](#) by Chatham House's Tim Eaton outlines how a US-led initiative to change the way Libyan state finances are managed could be the international community's best hope to prevent the standoff from escalating into war.



Picture: natanaeigning/freepik.com

## CHINA TO LAUNCH ITS NEW AIRCRAFT CARRIER

China's increasing military expenditure has been the subject of much analysis. However recent satellite footage shows that China is ready to launch its third aircraft carrier, which would greatly increase its strategic maritime capability. Although it will be years before the Type 003 enters military service and achieves initial operating capability, its launch will be a seminal moment in China's ongoing modernization efforts and a symbol of the country's growing military might. This [piece](#) analyses the recent developments surrounding the launch of the new carrier, and its implications for Chinese naval power.

## US APPROACH TO IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

The Iran nuclear deal (aka the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) is languishing in political limbo. A breakthrough at negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 in Vienna appears increasingly unlikely, leaving the US and European states to ponder how to reboot their non-proliferation policies towards Iran and ultimately prevent the Islamic Republic from acquiring a nuclear weapon. In an excellent [article](#) in the Texas National Security Review, Raphael BenLevi traces how the US – the main western power on this issue – has shifted back and forth between a policy focused on coercion and one emphasising diplomatic measures. He argues that this reflects competing grand strategic world views in Washington and that the interplay between the two will likely also determine what approaches America will pursue going forward – with regard to Iran and other proliferation candidates.

# OUT NOW & UP NEXT...

● “State-led exploitation of Western science and technology research, whether by China or any other country, poses a considerable risk to Western countries’ competitive advantage in innovation – and thus to their economies.” – **Elisabeth Brow**

But what can be done? Read CHACR's latest In-Depth Briefing, *Research security: A new frontier*, at [chacr.org.uk](#) for some suggested steps governments can take to curtail such activity and take the opportunity to review our other recent releases.

