

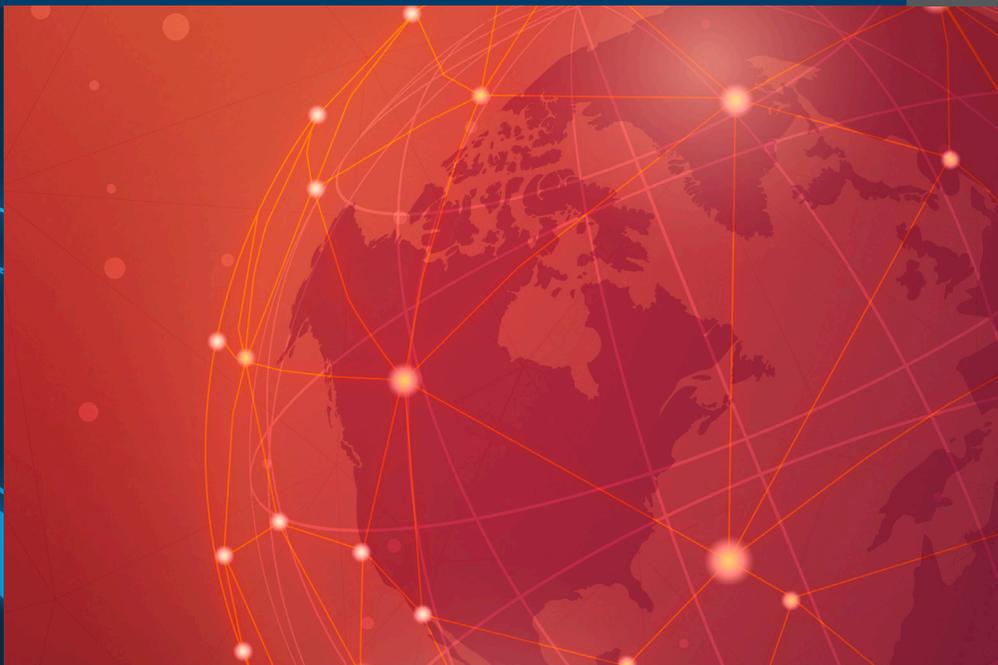
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SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

MARCH 2020



Top ten geopolitical risk in 2020



Top ten geopolitical conflicts of 2020



Maoist forces: showdown at Bastar



Stifling Shale: Saudi-Russia Feud



The eternal President: Vladimir Putin



COVID-19 and Threats to Critical Infrastructure

Top ten geopolitical risk in 2020



Along with global economic imbalance, an epidemic, and socio-political unrest ushering in 2020, here are the top 10 risks for the rest of the year.

Decoupling of supply chains

The U.S.-China trade war, Brexit, weakening of NATO, and the decline of the European manufacturing sector could see a few listless years ahead for global trade. Global economic growth has tempered to 2.5%, and trade expansion has come to an impasse.

Assessment

- With Brexit to be operationalised at the end of the year, financial predicament would engender high levels of uncertainty and disruption of trade. The crisis in China is bound to affect overall global commerce (23% of imports worldwide are from China) as factories remain shut while the pandemic persists.

2 degrees away from destruction

Ecological imbalances make up one of the greatest risks in 2020. Countries are on the track of 3.5-degree warming after failing to adhere to the Paris Agreement. This is a whole 2-degrees above the norm stipulated to control global warming.

Assessment

- Multilateral and multi-stakeholder coordination is the need of the hour. The rise of nationalist policies that favour local production certainly acts as an impediment to free trade. The civil society will continue to press investors and companies to adopt greener business practices.

The China trade

Beijing might be emboldened to part ways with the U.S. after a series of adverse policy measures by the latter. President Xi Jinping has called for a break to China's technological dependence on the U.S. It shall now expend its efforts to redefine technology, trade, and financial architecture to suits its own interests.

Assessment

- This trend will extend beyond the \$5 trillion global tech sector, to include trade agreements, industries, and institutions as well. There could be further financial sanctions (over Xinjiang or Hong Kong) and efforts to limit U.S. capital

to Chinese firms. In turn, China will continue to restrict space for foreigners by limiting freedom to operate.

Pandemics Abound

With the escalation of COVID 19, it is time to look seriously into how future pandemics can be contained. A pernicious climate, weakening ecological systems, and the spread of the anti-vaxxer movement necessitate precautions against new diseases.

Assessment

- There is a need to change the way we look at outbreaks and how to contain them. Instead of waiting for vaccines to come around, we must further study and infer about undetected viruses that could plausibly infect the world. A shift is needed in the way that tests, vaccines, and drugs are made.

A threat to democracy

Elections in the U.S. are at risk in 2020 because the very idea of democracy will be tested in unprecedented ways. We would see a U.S. election that many will view as illegitimate (According to a 2019 poll by IPSOS, only 53% of the public believed the presidential election would be fair), and a foreign policy environment that is suboptimal. A failed impeachment and a series of court challenges could make this the most volatile year for politics the U.S.

Assessment

- Things may look different if the Democrats win enough seats to control the Congress. Trump's vacillations will confuse and jeopardise longstanding relationships, especially with South Korea, Japan, India, Taiwan, and Saudi Arabia.

EU gets stern

With the U.K. leaving the EU, there are concerns that EU foreign policy is not robust. The EU wants to equip itself to react to unfair practices and anticipate further unilateral decisions by its commercial partners. They have also put pressure on China to level the playing field on procurement from the EU, so that European firms get improved access to the Chinese market.

Assessment

- A resurgent Europe creates risks of antagonising the United States, as Trump is no longer a supporter of the EU According to Ian Bremmer, "much as China insists that the world accept One China, Two Systems, a more assertive Europe will try to insist that China accept One System, 28 States."

The Middle East Kerfuffle

The U.S. policy of intransigence toward the Shia-led nations in the Middle East is faltering. This creates significant risks for stability in the Middle East, including a conflict with Iran; a surge in oil prices; and a rogue Syria involved with Moscow and Tehran.

Assessment

- The U.S.-Iran relationship will be volatile and destabilising. Lethal skirmishes in Iraq between the U.S. and Iranian forces are likely. This paves the way for Russia's influence in the Middle East. World energy security is bound to be affected in one of the main oil chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz.

Latin American Rage

The election of right-wing presidents in Argentina (2015), Chile (2017), Ecuador (2017), Brazil (2018), and Colombia (2018) have proven to be a backlash against existing political establishments, rather than an endorsement of market reforms.

Assessment

- Public anger will keep the risk of political instability-high across the region. Voter complaints of sluggish growth, corruption, and low-quality public services will cause unrest in coming elections.

Top ten geopolitical conflicts of 2020



Radical Islamists, drug wars, and fighting against the system- these are some of the geopolitical risks of 2020.

In a world with fewer rules, leaders are emboldened to test limits more often, jockey for power, and seek to deepen their influence – and weaken that of rivals – by interfering in foreign conflicts. An effective way of sensing one's freedom to operate is knowing what you can get away with.

Local strife serves as veritable dashboards for global trends in the manner they kindle, unravel, continue and are resolved. They reflect paradigm shifts in great power relationships and the intensity of their competition as well as the aspirations of regional actors.

Yemen: On the path of destruction

Yemen faces its biggest crisis in decades, with the overthrow of the government by the Houthis and an offensive led by Saudi Arabia. This along with a Saudi-imposed blockade have brought about humanitarian catastrophe, resulting in more than one million people being internally displaced, cholera outbreaks, medicine shortages, and threats of famine.

Assessment

- A lasting solution will require acquiescing to the three major factions: the Houthis, Hadi's government, and the Southern Transitional Council. Any new government in the interim will require foreign assistance to challenge the rival militias, rebuild the country's infrastructure, and address the ever-rising humanitarian needs.

Iran and U.S. lock horns

Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have increased since 2018, turning into an armed confrontation after the Commander of the IRGC Quds Force, Qassim Soleimani, was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Iraq in January 2020.

Assessment

- The renewed U.S.-Iran conflict could impact Iran's domestic stability. Soleimani's death shortly unified split sectors of Iranian society in nationalist sentiment. But the belated admission that Iran shot down a passenger jet has brought about anti-government protests. It now stands to be seen if security concerns will supersede the frustration over the political system.

Afghanistan's volatility

A U.S.-Taliban accord has made it possible for intra-Afghan talks to establish power-sharing arrangements, withdrawal of foreign troops, and a permanent ceasefire. But the refusal of the Afghan PM to release prisoners has broken the reduction in violence deal, leading the situation to be on shaky ground again. The continuing Taliban violence against the Afghan National Army, even after the accord, also does not bode well for peace in this troubled nation.

Assessment

- Before any reduction in violence can be achieved, the two sides will have to come to a decision about the future of Afghanistan's democracy, human rights, how to deal with armed warlords, and other testy issues.

Lebanon

A degrading economic crisis along with endemic government corruption has resulted in a protest movement against Lebanon's political system and the ruling elite. Students have been taking a prominent role in the demonstrations as well.

Assessment

- It is possible that violence could escalate, as unrest could intensify the longer this situation continues without major governmental reforms. With tensions high between U.S. and Iran-allied groups, it remains to be seen how this will play out in Lebanon between various political parties – particularly with Hezbollah.

Rising Indo - Pak tensions & internal disharmony

Tensions are heightened between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue, along with the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA, 2019).

Assessment

- Ruling party leaders have themselves admitted to being blind-sided by the outrage against the CAA, which raises concerns about their ability to anticipate violent scenarios and prevent them from taking place. The government must find a way to ensure communal clashes are kept to a minimum. It remains to be seen whether the ruling BJP will be willing to adopt a multipronged approach to address the growing challenges to governance.

The deadly drugs wars of Mexico

2019 saw a record number of drug-related homicides in Mexico: over 31,000. Apart from inter- and intra-organisational tensions, there are increasing reports of violent street crime affecting civilians on a day-to-day basis.

Assessment

- Mexico faces a complex and divided criminal market, and a resolution to these structural problems is unlikely in the short-term, which could once again see homicide rates peak this year.

The Sahel: domestic strategies or an Islamist focus?

Threats in the Sahel continue to escalate. Chad is beginning to experience insurgency in areas that have largely remained ungoverned; Niger's Tillaberi region—once able to stave off pressures on its porous borders—is now in the radar of Al Qaeda and ISIS; Burkina Faso is in the vortex of radical Islamism.

Incidences of violence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have doubled in 2019 compared to 2018.

Assessment

- Extended militant networks are getting a relatively free hand to recruit, train their cadre and indulge in arms trafficking. Such large-scale recruitment across porous borders amplifies the vulnerabilities of neighbouring states. A lack of understanding of local conflicts could potentially escalate violence in the Sahel, and the increased infiltration could bring about a change in the risk matrix.

Somalia and the Al- Shabaab

The recent increase in Al Shabaab operations against both Somalia and Kenya are likely to continue in 2020. Somalia has become a prominent example of destabilization brought by the rivalry between Qatar and the GCC.

Assessment

- Al Shabaab is likely to renew attempts at de-legitimizing the Somali government. Somalia's Gulf allies are as likely to increase efforts at securing political sway ahead of the general election. The events of this year will have a massive impact on the future of the country, raising the stakes for all involved.

Ethiopia's ethnic battles

Political violence in Ethiopia has moved from fighting against systemic issues to ethnic strife, featuring riots and clashes brought about by ethnic militias. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's failure to control the situation could cost him the upcoming elections.

Assessment

- Violence related to the borders and competition over resources could worsen if federal forces are not able to contain the situation. The push for greater autonomy in Ethiopia's regional states is already shaping the country's political landscape.

I Stifling Shale: Saudi-Russia Feud



Saudi's reduction of oil prices has intensified the price war with Russia that will also affect the U.S. Shale industry. Will the stricken world economy gain or lose?

Who will blink first?

On Friday the 28th of February 2020, Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak, strolled into the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headquarters, fully knowing that President Vladimir Putin was ready to upend the global oil market. Novak informed his Saudi Arabian counterpart, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, that Russia was unwilling to curtail oil production further. Moscow decided that shoring up prices, as COVID-19 wrecks energy demand, would be a bonus, to the U.S. shale industry. The fracking industry had added millions of barrels of oil to the world market, while Russian oil companies had to keep their wells unproductive due to low oil prices.

Moscow felt Riyadh was trying to coax Moscow into agreeing to production cuts by putting Russia in the position of either acceding or watching oil prices fall. After hours of inconclusive negotiations, the two ministers left Vienna without a deal and oil prices fell.

Demand shock vs. supply overhang in the new oil war

In times of excess supply, Saudi Arabia has surprisingly initiated an unprecedented price war. It has slashed its oil prices by 50 percent in the last two months and pledged to unleash its stored supply onto a market that is already seeing falling demands.

With the coronavirus outbreak slowing the global economy, the Saudi move has further spooked the markets. Asserting that this was not a one-off move, Saudi Arabia's state-run oil giant Aramco said that it would increase crude oil production to 13 million barrels a day in April.

Brent crude oil prices



Quartz | qz.com | Data: FactSet | Note: Intercontinental Exchange as of March 9

Sparking a new Russian-American oil war

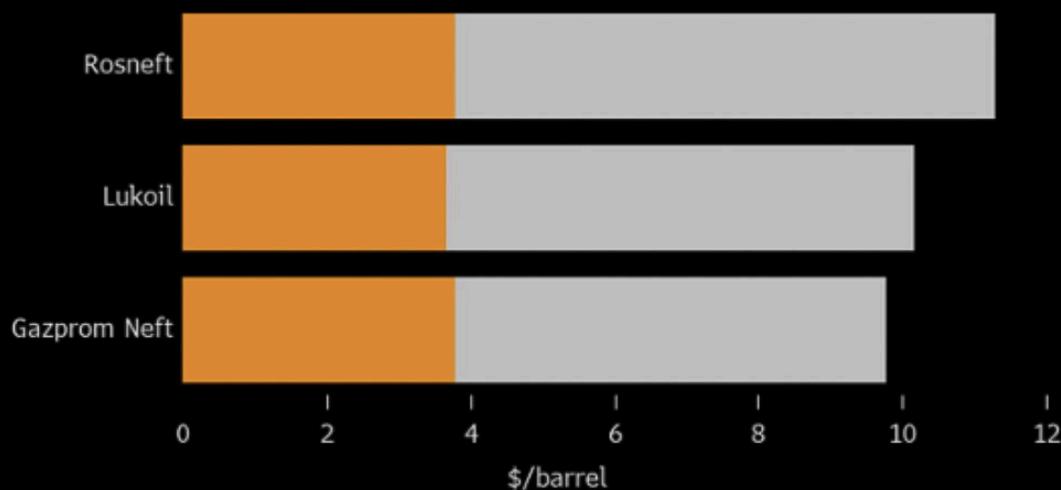
One view is that Russia's refusal to cut production was aimed at piling up losses to U.S. shale oil producers, who need higher oil prices to survive. The 2014-2016 oil crash caused dozens of oil and gas companies worldwide to file for bankruptcy. However, this was a boom time for the U.S. shale industry and resulted in the United States emerging as the world's leading oil producer. Over the past few years, the

shale industry has been largely unprofitable and was surviving solely on the huge capital it received in the previous decade. In 2019, investors began turning away from shale drilling and as a result, energy stocks collapsed. More than \$18 billion of debt from the oil and gas sector in the United States is due to mature in the next three months, which means companies need capital to repay their debts or refinance. While major corporations like Exxon Mobil and Chevron can weather the storm, smaller companies may find it difficult to survive.

Pumping Cheap

Production costs of Russian oil majors were below \$12 a barrel last year

■ Opex ■ Capex



Source: Bloomberg calculations based on the companies' 2019 financial reports
Note: Opex and capex for Lukoil and Gazprom Neft also include investments in gas; the costs do not include transportation expenses and taxes

Bloomberg

Assessment

- Kremlin mandarins have decided to forgo OPEC+ to stop shale gas producers from upping their profit and retaliate against the U.S. for meddling with the Nord Stream project. Nord Stream 2 is a Gazprom owned pipeline to supply Russian gas to Germany, whose completion has been stalled due to a U.S. sanction. The Saudi Russian feud signals a temporary end to the truce between the two major oil producers that helped Moscow secure a seat at the OPEC high table.
- The U.S shale oil industry may become the biggest victim of the current Saudi-Russian altercation. Many shale producers have hedged their production and if the current U.S. parity on oil continues, of around \$30 per barrel for a

longer period, there will be widespread bankruptcies. It is expected that US oil output will fall by more than 1 million barrel per day if the prices hold until the summer of 2021.

- Both Saudi Arabia and Russia can absorb the losses from low prices for a few months since Saudi has the lowest production cost compared to any country. Meanwhile, Russia has around \$570 billion financial reserves and a low debt GDP ratio of 25 percent giving it sufficient cushion to borrow. In the long run, both countries cannot sustain their economies, as Saudi Arabia runs a lot of welfare activities funded by oil, and Russia is heavily reliant on energy exports for its economy.

Maoist forces: showdown at Bastar



While the world grapples with the coronavirus, at least 17 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans lost their lives, at Bastar.

Bastar: A Maoist hotbed

On Saturday, March 21, 2020 the CRPF garrison deployed in Bastar suffered serious casualties. While at least 17 policemen were killed, 14 more were injured. This is the worst attack in the last two years after 24 CRPF policemen were killed in July 2018 in the Sukma District of Bastar Division in Chhattisgarh.

Apparently, lured by the information of a Maoist gathering at Elmagunda, a major offensive was planned, which involved almost 600 security force personnel. According to the plan, the security forces involving the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and CoBRA, advanced on three sides (Chitagufa, Burkapal and Tamelwada).

Since the region is underdeveloped and Elmagunda is located almost 40 km from NH-30, the final assault would have had to be conducted on foot, to preserve the element of surprise.

Sukma District is located in South Chhattisgarh, 513 Km from the capital Raipur. Connected by NH-30, to Raipur, Sukma is surrounded by Odisha to the East, Telangana to the South and Maharashtra to the West.

Analysis

Apparently, the task force could not establish contact with the Naxals as planned, at Elmagunda. However, on their return from the operation and while making their way to their vehicles, they were apparently ambushed by heavily armed Naxals. Reportedly, the engagement was fierce, lasting more than two hours.

The security forces broke contact and returned to their base, only to discover that 13 policemen were missing. In subsequent operations, all the bodies were recovered, but at least 16 weapons were lost; including 12 AK-47s and one UBGL (under-barrel grenade launcher).

Why did the CRPF undertake such a major operation, away from the axis?

The CRPF has a challenging role in Chhattisgarh; holding in check the activities of the CPI (Maoists), protecting nation-building activities (road-construction, mobile

towers etc.) and winning the hearts and minds of the local people. The national strategy appears to have significantly reduced the number of Naxal-affected districts in the country.

According to a 2018, MHA report, 89% of Naxal violence is now confined to just 30 districts. However, in objective analysis, the Bastar Division of Chhattisgarh has always had a disproportionate number of Naxal incidents, with associated killings. Bastar Division is the Southernmost region of Chhattisgarh, comprising seven districts; Jagdalpur, Dantewada, Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma, Kondagaon and Kanker.

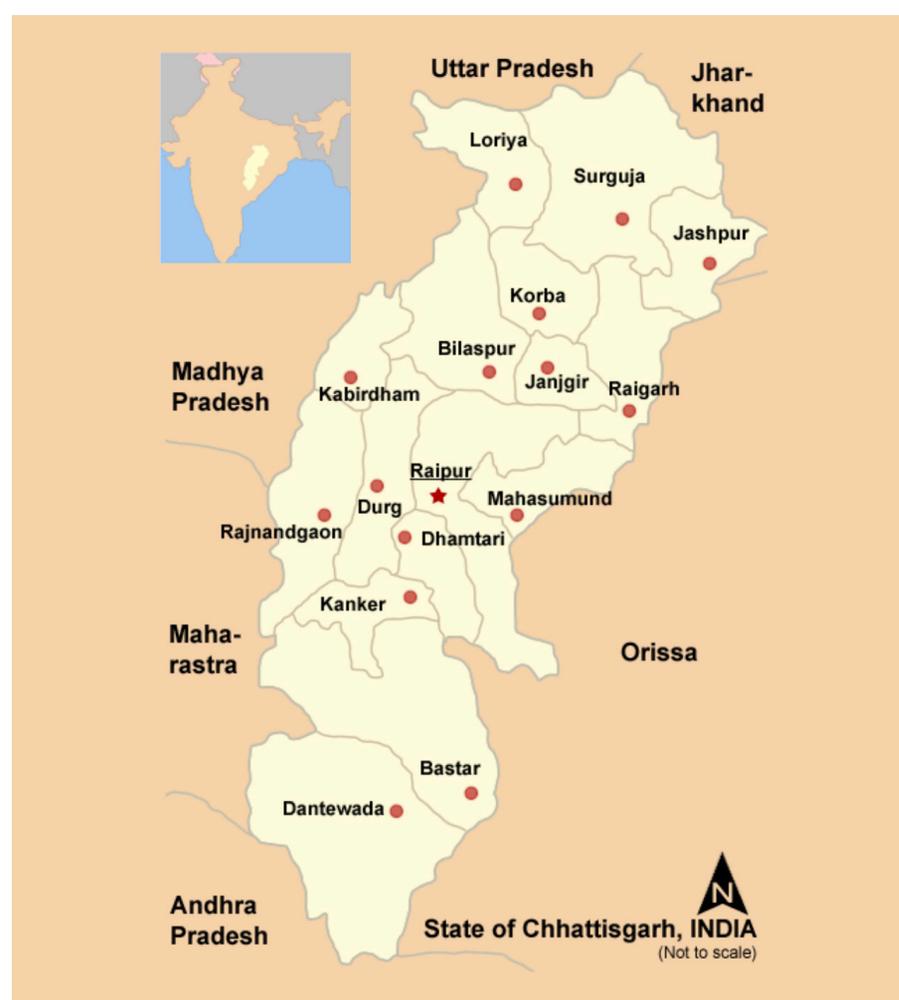
Analysis

Like with any other insurgency, the CRPF is required to establish bases, dominate the area and reduce the influence of Maoists, over the local population. With development (road communications and mobile telephones), it is becoming increasingly difficult for Maoists to assert themselves.

While development work is also progressing in the Bastar Division, the relative underdevelopment of the region still enables such attacks to be carried out. After carrying out the ambush, the Naxals are expected to have split into smaller groups and escaped to neighbouring Maharashtra, Telangana and Odisha.

Assessment

- CRPF operations in Chhattisgarh are reportedly supported by Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations. However, it is surprising that UAVs failed to detect such a major Maoist ambush and provide timely early warning. Also, it is difficult to accept that Maoists can escape with CRPF weapons with impunity. Surely, aerial surveillance, aerial pursuit and coordination with neighbouring states can facilitate the recovery of the stolen weapons and bring the culprits to book.
- Not too far away, in Afghanistan, the US conducts war from UAVs, with literally no boots on the ground. In contrast, are we conducting operations in the Red Corridor, with too many boots on the ground and literally no UAVs?



The eternal President: Vladimir Putin



The Duma's latest constitutional reforms have allowed for President Putin's extended stay in power. Has Russia invested in a visionary leader?

On March 11th, 2020, the Russian Parliament (Duma) approved several changes to the Russian Constitution. In the amendments, the tenure of President Vladimir Putin is proposed to be reset, after his current tenure expires in 2024. Thereafter, future Presidents will be allowed two six-year terms in office. Thus, President Vladimir Putin can now technically remain in power till 2036. The amendments were passed with an overwhelming majority of 383–0 votes, with 43 abstentions.

According to Russian constitutional procedures the proposed changes shall now have to be approved by the Constitutional Court at Kremlin and thereafter ratified by a national referendum, scheduled for April 22nd, 2020.

Vladimir Putin (67) has been in power for 20 years, since December 1999. On earlier occasions, he had rejected the idea of becoming "President for Life".

Who is Vladimir Putin?

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Putin was a mid-level KGB (Committee for State Security) officer, in Dresden, East Germany. With the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, he returned to St Petersburg, Russia and became closely associated with Boris Yeltsin. Later, when Boris Yeltsin became President, he was appointed as Director of KGB's successor organization, the FSB (Federal Security Service). A year later, he was appointed Prime Minister and four months after that, when Boris Yeltsin resigned, he became President.

Assessment

- Little was known of Vladimir Putin, prior to his gaining favor with Boris Yeltsin. Thereafter, his rise to Director FSB, PM and President, was meteoric. In President Vladimir Putin's two decades in power, it is difficult to discount three singular achievements. Firstly, after the disintegration of the USSR, he succeeded in building a strong Russian state. Secondly, through deft geopolitical manoeuvres, he has re-established Russia, as a superpower. These skills were particularly visible in the Middle East, where the new axis involving Russia – Iran – Syria, has become a pre-dominant power in the region. Thirdly, he has consolidated his grip on domestic political power, with no significant contender.

Why have Russia's relations with the West deteriorated?

After becoming the Russian President in 1999, Putin's popularity with the West began to sour after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (2003). In 2013, Russia gave asylum to Edward Snowden, a fugitive from the United States, who allegedly leaked confidential information, belonging to the United States NSA (National Security Agency). In 2014, Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian Revolution and the annexation of Crimea was widely condemned by the West.

In 2016, during US Presidential elections, Russian intelligence was accused of interference; allegedly to harm the candidature of Hillary Clinton and boost the prospects of Donald Trump. In 2019, Russia managed to sell the Russian S-400 air-defence missile system to Turkey, a NATO ally. In more recent months, Russia's support to the Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar appears to be gaining ground against West-backed forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA).

Analysis

Amongst liberal Americans, there are many who believe that Edward Snowden stood up for transparency and accountability and should have been granted amnesty. In this case, it is surprising that Russia, the "home of communism" is upholding individual liberty, while the U.S., the "home of the free", is defending nationalism with archaic sedition laws.

The annexation of Crimea consolidated Russia's control over Sevastopol, the main base of the Black Sea Fleet, with access to the Mediterranean Sea. Six years have passed since the United Nations General Assembly resolution affirmed Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea, but Russia's annexation only appears to have consolidated. In the last four years, much fanfare was created about the involvement of Russian intelligence in the United States Presidential elections.

All along, Russia denied these charges and the United States investigators have concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring conspiracy or even coordination charges, against the Trump campaign. In the case of the S-400 sale, the United States threatened Turkey with dire consequences and even removed them from the US F-35 fighter aircraft program; but still fell short of halting the Russian sale.

Assessment

- In all these geopolitical confrontations, Russia under Putin's leadership appears to have consolidated positions. Seen from the Russian point of view, President Putin's achievements are nothing short of remarkable. President Putin has a charming personality, a keen intellect and a mastery over geopolitical strategy. By investing in another 16 years of Putin leadership, the Russian people are backing a winning horse!



COLUMN: REAR VIEW

**Toby Simon**

Founder and President, Synergia Foundation

COVID-19 and Threats to Critical Infrastructure

While most governments and businesses have outlined resilience strategies to help them navigate through non-traditional security threats like natural disasters, technological failures, and other disruptions, planning for a pandemic requires a different set of skills as well as certain continuity assumptions.

Unlike natural disasters such as floods, which are often confined to certain spatial areas and is potent for finite periods, a pandemic might diffuse geographically and could appear in flutter that can persist for several months. Due to the boundless nature of a pandemic, resources cannot easily be altered topographically to help an area in need, as in the case of other crises. It is important for critical sectors and governments to work seamlessly to ensure that they can deliver essential goods and services while responding to a pandemic. Critical infrastructure such as health care and electric power will bear the additional onus to assist a contagion.

Critical Infrastructure entities could feel the aftermath of a pandemic much like any other business. It is estimated that up to 40 percentage of a company's employees could be absent sick, quarantined, or might stay home to care for ailing family members. Vendors and suppliers that critical infrastructure companies rely on could experience similar personnel shortages. Given the protracted impact of a pandemic, it would be difficult for organizations to depend on mutual assistance program that normally help utilities restore service after natural disasters.

Coronavirus 2019 and Spanish Flu 1918

It would appear that we are now facing an infection (COVID-19) that has the same epidemic characteristics as the 1918 influenza. While the fundamental trait of Spanish Influenza and COVID-19 are different, the best-available index on the proclivity of the virus to infect, referred to as the reproduction number (R_0) is comparable to that of the 1918 influenza. An R_0 for a virulent malady is generally intoned as a single numeric value and is interpreted as follows: an epidemic is expected to progress if the R value >1 and will terminate if R_0 is less than 1. It would be reasonable to assume that an R_0 less than 1 would attenuate the virus faster and render it ineffective.

Absenteeism and cross dependencies

The outcome of a COVID-19 pandemic will depend predominantly on the extent of absenteeism, the degree of know-how required to maintain utilities, and the proportion of the community that can be trained and rallied into action as required. Statistical estimates attributable to seasonal and pandemic influenza from the Canadian Labour Force concluded that absenteeism rates were approximated at

12 percent for seasonal influenza between 1997-98 to 2008-09 and 13% percent for the two H1N1 pandemic waves. It is now predicted that the corresponding rate for COVID-19 could be as high as 20 - 50%.

In the past 100 years, there has been significant advances in the complexity, architecture and the interdependency of our critical utilities. Before electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and consumption operated in silos, functioned at different frequencies and were often confined to cities and immediate suburbs. For example, the interdependency of goods and services i.e. water, electricity and power, transportation and shipping, communication, fire and emergency services, food and agriculture and public safety with the health care sector is critical. While the interdependency of the first five parameters are obvious, food and agriculture is the safety net for inpatients and public safety provides for patient transport and triage assistance.

Today electrical power grids are highly unified and operate at a single frequency. To compound further, there are major cross sector interdependencies like the indeed of the energy sector to power equipment operation, the chemical sector to provide requisite materials to treat water supply and the transportation sector to deliver critical supplies from the chemical sector.

A paradigm shift in the last one hundred years has been the privatization of utilities following government deregulation. This has ensured that commercial companies now operate under different protocols of budgeting, coverage, upkeep, monetary, and continuity of operation plans. This often stifles government because now it can only strongly advocate a course of action rather than stipulate a course of action to be taken.

Many infrastructure sectors today require high level of proficiency, such as adeptness in information technology, machine learning, robotics, communication skills, pharmaceutical specialist, additive manufacturing, etc. The challenge often is that there is a relatively small population that can execute these functions through years of schooling, training, and on-the-job experience decisive to perform well and securely. Industrial sectors tend to react differently to high absenteeism dependant on the skills sets required. However, effective planning of a unified private-sector response will be arduous, if not futile, during a potential COVID-19 pandemic.

Cyber vulnerability to CI during Pandemics

In a pandemic, governments need to be extremely vigilant about cyber security threats to critical infrastructure. A point to note is that terrorists and hostile nations are already looking to leverage more than one attack vector at a time. A cyber-attack at the time of any natural or man-made disaster becomes far more crippling and exponentially increases the impact than any single event. For instance, if a hostile group was to attack the power grids of a nation during a pandemic, the emergency response would be hampered to the point of damaging the overall effectiveness of the counter strategy. This is the catalyst for a perfect storm. With an antiquated infrastructure, adversaries will find a larger and more pliable surface area conducive for a cyber-attack. A targeted attack on the electricity supply of any major electric grid for 48 hours can cause inconsistencies in the supply of potable water in any major city in the subcontinent.

Conclusion

Critical infrastructure protection encompasses prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, which is primarily aimed at augmenting the resilience of the people, systems and physical infrastructure.

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