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Analysis

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# Strategic Intelligence and Foreign Affairs Initiative

## Weekly Newsletter

Liberty University

Helms School of Government Students

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# Chinese African Naval Bases

## BLUF

- China is expanding its influence on the continent of Africa with the inclusion of Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea and China have been developing a close economic and geopolitical relationship for the last 20+ years, culminating recently in Equatorial Guinea's signing of China's One Belt One Road Initiative. China has invested heavily in the construction of a large port in the city of Bata, that holds the same potential capabilities and capacities as China's only African naval base located in Djibouti.

## Analysis

### Overview

- The Chinese naval base in Djibouti opened in 2017, following a series of Djibouti-Chinese economic dealings. The base has been updated multiple times, as recently as 2021, when a new berth was added capable of supporting a multitude of PLAN ships.



- The Bata Port project's construction began in 2009, with a construction period of 65 months. The port hosts two berths capable of receiving Chinese ships, including their own indigenous carrier, the Shandong. The location of the port is strategic as it lies directly on the western coast of Africa posing a threat to U.S. naval influence in the region. While China has not made naval visits to Equatorial Guinea at this time, the possibility of which is a great matter of U.S. interest as the potential of a westerly Chinese port supports China's overarching strategy to have naval dominance worldwide.



### Analysis Technique

- **Strategic Predictions, short to long term**
  - Short Term: Chinese naval visits to Equatorial Guinea
    - China has navally visited multiple countries that it is attempting to grow closer to. Beijing has a close relationship with Equatorial Guinea's leader, Teodoro Obiang.
  - Medium-Long Term: China establishes a naval base at Port Bata
    - Chinese companies are responsible for construction of the Bata port, allowing them to hold economic and geopolitical influence over Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea has also welcomed multiple Chinese infrastructure projects into their country.
  - Long Term: China builds a naval base in the Caribbean
    - If China is able to create a naval foothold in West Africa, they would then possess the incentive to put further pressure on the U.S. with a potential base in the Caribbean, with countries like Venezuela and Cuba, that align with China's ideology. China desires naval support bases to combat piracy and terrorism and capabilities to safeguard their trade and the large amount that comes through the Panama Canal.

### Conclusion

- China is expanding its influence across Africa which is manifesting itself in several countries including Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea has a military port that matches the Chinese requirements for a foreign naval base, like the one which China maintains in Djibouti. China has the economic and geopolitical influence to set its eyes on Equatorial Guinea and push for a naval base to be stood up there.

### Sources

1. [Green Finance & Development Center](#)
2. [Global Security](#)

3. [MarineTraffic](#)
4. [Critical Threats – Africa](#)
5. [Maritime Executive](#)
6. [Bloomberg](#)

## Russia-Ukraine Updates

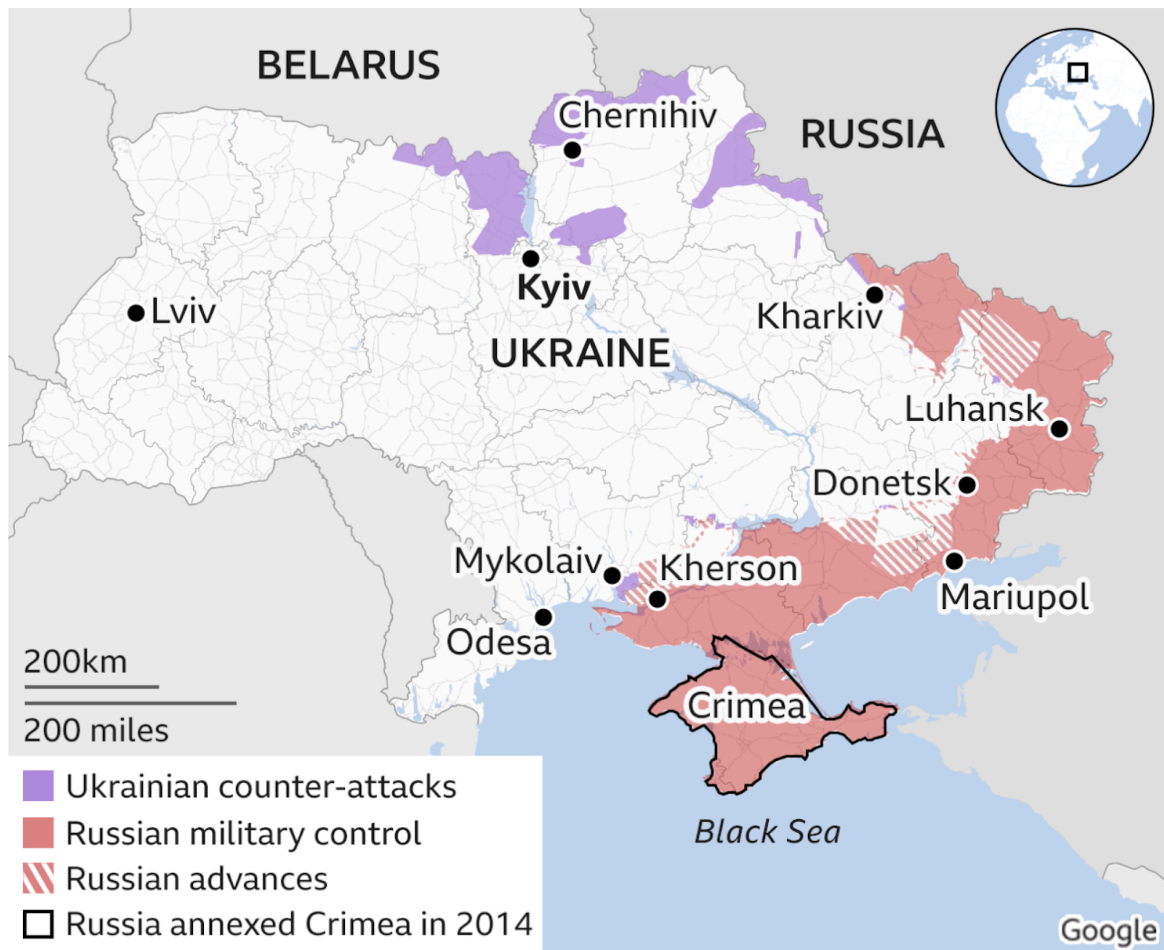
### BLUF

- Russia has refocused the strategic operation to the Eastern region of Ukraine and has also appointed Alexander Dvornikov to take over the special operation.

### Analysis

#### Overview

- Multiple sources confirm that Russia has abandoned its offensive against Kyiv, focusing heavily on the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia has been seeking control of the port city Mariupol to connect the eastern and southern regions of the offensives. Ukrainian forces have been holding out so far but have been split to two areas of the city while Russian forces have reached the port itself. A new Russian General, Alexander Dvornikov, has been appointed to take over the “special operation”.



Source: Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 10 April)

## Analysis Technique

- Indicators and Warnings

Scenarios	Peaceful Independence of the Donbas Region	Double down on Eastern offensive, continue civilian targeting	Attempt complete takeover of Ukraine, offensive on Kyiv
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuation of peace talks with Ukrainian officials</li> <li>Slow down conscription/military buildup</li> <li>Concrete list of demands for peace</li> <li>Ukrainian officials willing to continue peace talks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buildup of military forces in the East</li> <li>Leadership amendable to civilian targeting</li> <li>Continue rhetoric of pursuing independence for the Donbas region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move forces into Kyiv</li> <li>Conscript more soldiers</li> <li>Heavy military buildup in Belarus</li> <li>Pursuing targets all over Ukraine withing the Northern and Easter fronts</li> <li>Continuing a “total war” offensive including civilian targets</li> </ul>
Increased likelihood of scenario/positive indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ukrainian officials are open to peace talks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forces have left the northern and eastern fronts</li> <li>Buildup of forces in the east</li> <li>Dvornikov has a history of targeting civilians, this has been seen as a precious game changer for Russia in Syria</li> <li>Russian media outlet TASS has stated that the special operation will be stepped up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased conscription</li> <li>Special operation will continue</li> </ul>
Decreased likelihood of scenario/negative indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Russia said they will not stop military offensive for the peace talks</li> <li>Increased conscription</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued peace talks with Ukraine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Troops have been moved from northern regions, strategic losses in Kyiv</li> <li>Rhetoric has shifted to only the Donbas region</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

- It can be assessed that Russia will further its offensive in the East while continuing to target civilians.

## Sources

1. [BBC](#)
2. [NPR](#)
3. [NPR](#)
4. [NPR](#)
5. [World Bank](#)
6. [PBS](#)
7. [RFERL](#)
8. [The Guardian](#)
9. [TASS](#)
10. [TASS](#)
11. [TASS](#)
12. [Reuters](#)
13. [Aljazeera](#)

## Finnish Cyber Attacks

### BLUF

- From the start of the Ukraine invasion, Finland and Sweden have been pushed towards joining NATO. As the situation has continued the two neutral states have been leaning even more so towards NATO membership. Recent cyber-attacks on Finland occurred shortly after the Finnish President and Prime Minister stated that Finland was opting towards joining NATO, leading to the key assumption that Russia conducted the cyber-attacks. While there are indicators for Russia being the attack conductor, this has not been confirmed.

## Analysis

### Overview

- The primary actors in this conflict are Finland, Russia, and NATO. There is a likely chance that Sweden could also get involved due to their neutral-stance tradition to stand and support Finland. Key indicators to look for would be Sweden's involvement, Russian's potential continuity, Russian military aggression, and NATO response. The indicators to support that Russia conducted the cyberattack on Finland include Russia's passive aggressive threat that Finland and Sweden would face military and political consequences, Ukrainian President's presence, Finland's geostrategic positioning as a buffer state between Eastern and Western European and Nordic NATO and non-NATO members, and Finland expelling two Russian diplomats from the embassy, as well as denying visa extension from a Russian Embassy employee.

### Analysis Technique

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- **SWOT on Finland**

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to defend themselves militarily as they have had four decades of preparation</li> <li>• Strong democracies and capable militaries that meet basic NATO requirements</li> <li>• Increasingly positive bilateral relationship between Helsinki and Washington</li> <li>• Participates in alliance through Partnership for Peace program</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of official NATO membership</li> <li>• Lack of support from non-NATO or NATO “friends” or “neighbors”</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In case of an invasion, Russia is heavily occupied by Ukraine</li> <li>• Increasing ties between Helsinki and Washington on the arctic, cyber security, and intelligence sharing</li> <li>• Sweden shares history of support and neutral standing with Finland since WWII</li> </ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential launch of second full invasion</li> <li>• Serious military and political consequences from Russia</li> <li>• Espionage and influence operations</li> <li>• Expulsion of two Russian diplomats from Helsinki</li> </ul>

- **Impact/Probability Scenarios**

- High Impact/Low Probability: Russia Launches a second full invasion
- High Impact/High Probability: Finland and Sweden join NATO
- Low impact/High Probability: U.S. and Finland progress relations

## **Conclusion**

- From the start of the Ukraine invasion, Finland and Sweden have been pushed towards joining NATO. As the situation has continued the two neutral states have been leaning even more so towards NATO membership. Recent cyber-attacks on Finland occurred shortly after the Finnish President and Prime Minister stated that Finland was opting towards joining NATO, leading to the key assumption that Russia conducted the cyber-attacks. While there are indicators for Russia being the attack conductor, this has not been confirmed.

## **Sources**

1. [Reuters](#)
2. [Reuters](#)
3. [Breaking Defense](#)
4. [Breaking Defense](#)
5. [The Hill](#)
6. [Bloomberg](#)
7. [Global Circulate](#)
8. [The White House](#)

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*“The question shouldn’t be what we ought to do, but what we can do” – Rory Stewart*

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