



The Future of Security: A Deeper Look at the Lanka Blasts

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Journalism Vs Espionage

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The Trump Administration has been increasing its efforts to improve relations with Eastern Bloc nations through increased trade and defence



NATO vs SCO: A New Multipolar Order

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently attended the 19th annual Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which



Cyber-Attack on U.S. CBP

Government surveillance photos of international travellers and license plates were hacked as part of a malicious cyber-attack. Is the use of biometrics being carried out at the





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Background

On Easter Sunday (21 April, 2019), between 8:25 am and 9:05am, three churches in Sri Lanka (in Negombo, Batticaloa, and Colombo) were attacked by suicide bombers. The bombers entered the churches during mass, mingled with the congregation and set off their deadly explosives. Almost simultaneously, between 9:15 am and 9:20 am, three more suicide bombers attacked restaurants in three high-end waterfront hotels (the Shangri-La, Cinnamon Grand and Kingsbury). Reports suggest that the bombers carried IEDs in their backpacks and used steel-ball bearings to increase lethality. So far, the death toll is 258, including 46 foreigners, with more than 500 injured.

Sri Lankan authorities claim the attacks were carried out by two little known fundamentalist organizations; National Tawheed Jamaath (NTJ) and Jamatheh Millathu Ibrahim (JMI). All nine suicide bombers have been identified as Sri Lankan nationals. The suicide bombers, led by Zahran Hashim, were well educated Muslims belonging to well-off families. The Islamic State (IS) has claimed association and released a video with the eight suspected suicide bombers.

Analysis

More than a month after the devastating bombings, there is still little clarity about the exact nature of the attack. The biggest question that presented itself at the roundtable was “Why?”. Why was Sri Lanka the intended target, and what were the attackers trying to achieve?

Experts have explored the possibility of the bombings being a response to the Christchurch mosque shooting. But a time-line analysis reveals that there wasn’t enough time between the two incidents for a coordinated attack of such magnitude to be planned and executed.

The fact that suicide bombers were employed also reveals a lot. It takes a few months to radicalize an individual and even longer to convince individuals to take on suicide missions. Only a few from a large pool of recruits are willing to give up their lives for a stated cause. This suggests that the radicalization movement in

Sri Lanka is extensive, and not entirely home-grown. The alleged involvement of ISIS might imply some Saudi and Salafi influences. The Salafi movement which has its origins in the Middle-East has found its way to the south Asian peninsula, which is becoming a turf for spreading radical ideas.

So what led to such an escalation, ultimately culminating in a deadly attack? Since the formation of the Sri Lankan state in 1948, minorities have been marginalised. The constitution does not provide for minorities to occupy high offices in the country. Communal discord between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka has been escalating over the past couple of years. Since the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, successive Lankan governments have been unable to bridge this ethnic divide. A larger distribution of wealth among the Muslim community, who have been successful merchants, might have led to feelings of resentment among the majority community. It is quite obvious that despite seventy one years of independence, Sri Lanka is still searching for solutions to maintain communal harmony and inter-faith trust.

A more glaring lacunae is the manner in which the Sri Lankan government responded to the attacks and handled its aftermath. Many concur that the political climate of the island nation was not conducive for the deployment of a sophisticated security apparatus. The last 4 years of President Sirisena’s term, has been the weakest in Sri Lankan history despite the party having a majority. This is primarily because of his inability to take action against his own cabinet ministers who are believed to be corrupt. There also exists an asymmetry in the status quo of power sharing between the Sri Lankan President Sirisena and his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe who was kept out of the loop and not invited to attend cabinet meetings concerning the island’s security. There was a serious failure to act on real-time intelligence provided to Sri Lankan authorities from India, Australia, America, and Canada. It is now apparent that there was a total lack of cohesion between the various security bodies, which prevented them from proactively addressing the security concerns.

Counterpoint

It is possible to assume that the Easter day attacks might not have been religiously motivated at all. Christians and Muslims are both minority communities in Sri Lanka, and it doesn’t make much sense for one minority to attack another. The involvement of ISIS might suggest that the attack on Christians in Sri Lanka could be a symbolic attack on the West. So why were these targets chosen by the perpetrators? The answer is simple – to maximize impact. Churches, and hotels on Easter morning were vulnerable targets due to the large crowds of foreigners that gathered together in a single enclosed space.

It is also possible that ISIS merely used this attack to spread the message that that it was still active and had the capacity to strike wherever and whenever it wanted to. A local event was simply hijacked by an international terrorist organization wanting to make a statement for their cause.

Assessment

It is our assessment that the Sri Lanka blasts continues to be a red flag for the international community. Combatting terror should be a global coordinated effort and forming strategic security alliances with near-by nations is the need of the hour. Sri Lanka would greatly benefit from sharing resources and technology with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives.

Going forward, we believe that increased levels of transparency and effective communication within the Sri Lankan government might help authorities deal better with security crises in the future. The failures of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe coalition government have set the stage for the upcoming Sri Lankan presidential election which will take place in December 2019.

We feel that the Lanka blasts also have implications for India. Porous physical and cultural borders could lead to the spread of radicalization among the educated Muslims of Peninsular India. We can prevent this by using the Easter attacks as a case study to try and understand the pattern of radicalization so that authorities can take the required steps to counter it.



The Future of Information

In the age of the internet, information is increasingly becoming a powerful political resource. What sources of information are strategic in nature, and what is the future of information warfare? These are excerpts from a speech delivered by Toby Simon, President, and Founder of Synergia Foundation at the June 2019 plenary meeting of the Trilateral Commission in Paris.

Background

The digital age began in 1948. During that year, two seismic events took place - both of which happened in Bell Labs. First, was the invention of the transistor which forms the basis of our present digital platforms. The second, was Claude E. Shannon's ground-breaking paper, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" which provided a launch-pad for the theory of information.

The basic idea was that information isn't a function of content, but the absence of ambiguity which can be broken down into a single unit, a choice between two alternatives. It's like a coin toss, which lacks information while it is in the air, but takes on a level of certainty when it lands - information arises when ambiguity disappears. When Guttenberg invented his first printing press, he ushered the age of renaissance with the spread of information. It is commonly said that information is power. We can have all the information in the world but if we don't do anything with that information, it renders itself useless.

Analysis

Wars of the future will use computational propaganda and advanced digital deception to distort the enemy's perception of reality and manipulate public opinion. Such a type of information warfare will have five key characteristics - Reconnaissance, Weaponization, Attack, Infection, and Destruction.

Reconnaissance: An adversary scrapes and steals a target's meta-data to create a psychological profile to identify the target's vulnerability.

Weaponization: Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled editing software is used to generate malicious fake news and audio content.

Attack: Bot armies strategically pump deceptive content onto online information systems. Machine learning enabled bots can then feed content to people who are most likely to share fake news.

Infection: Social media feeds enable wide-spread sharing and viewing of deceptive content.

Destruction: Disinformation runs rampant online, endangering society's trust in institutions, leading to chaos, confusion, and rebellion.

Information wars can be summed up in a century-old word "Provokatsiya", the Russian word for provocation. Provokatsiya describes the act staging cloak and dagger deception to discredit, disarm, and confuse the opponent. It is said to have

been practised by Russian spies dating back to the Tsarist era and can continue even today via technology abled tools.

Diplomacy manipulation can be undertaken by grafting audio clips onto realistic lip-synced video. AI can be used to create fake digital content through Generative Adversarial Neural Networks (GAN). GAN's are a type of AI used to carry out unsupervised machine learning. In a GAN, opposed neural networks work together to facilitate realistic audio and visual content. Such neural networks also make it easier to fake audio as they are able to convert the elements of an audio source into statistical properties which can be rearranged to make "original" fake audio clips. Stanford researchers have also published results indicating that it is possible to alter pre-recorded faces in real time to mimic another person's expression.

Memes and social life have finally become weaponized, and many governments seem ill-equipped to understand and deal with the new reality of information warfare. DARPA, the same defense agency that helped spawn the internet has recommended the establishment of a meme control center.

Assessment

It is our assessment that strategically speaking, information can be both an asset and a liability. We are witnessing technological developments that facilitate the manipulation of information in unprecedented ways.

We feel that governments need to recognize this and take precursory steps to protect sensitive information that is vulnerable to such manipulation by adversaries. The exercise of protecting and preserving information is as important as gathering and producing it. We think that counter AI measures seem to be the need of the hour when it comes to information security. If AI enabled disinformation cannot be contained, its effects on society can be disastrous - to the government, as well as democracy itself.

We believe that as a source of information, social media possesses a high level of strategic influence. What we have witnessed thus far is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to social media based misinformation. Adversaries are yet to exploit the full potential of social media weaponization, but once they do, governments must be prepared with the necessary infrastructure and know-how to pre-emptively counter any attempt to undermine information security. Since misinformation is almost impossible to contain once it has proliferated the internet, strategic prevention is certainly better than cure.



The Future of Conflict: South Sudan

South Sudan is in the midst of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis resulting from five years of brutal civil war. Despite clarion calls for the resolution of the conflict, could we be heading towards a predicament that was witnessed in Rwanda and Syria?

Background

The political struggle between President Salva Kiir (Dinka tribe) and former vice-President Riek Machar (Nuer tribe) is at the root of the civil conflict that began in 2013. After four years of belligerence, Machar agreed to return to the capital of Juba to cement a fluid peace agreement, signed in August 2015, which included his opposition group's participation in the government of national unity. The deal was subsequently broken in July 2016, after five days of fierce combat between the two military factions. Opposition troops under Machar were defeated due to the imbalance of forces and the superiority of weapons used by the government forces.

An estimated figure of over 400,000 lives have been lost in the conflict. Despite a 2018 peace agreement between Kiir and Machar inspiring hope for a lasting peace treaty, a lot still remains to be done, assuming that the agreement is adhered to in the first place.

Analysis

Some political analysts consider South Sudan to be a country hostage to the 'gun class', i.e., an elite group of men, referring to Kiir and Machar here, who are using violence channelled through appeals in favour of ethnic nationalism, diverting resources and finances to their personal advantage.

Although the conflict was initially being fought between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, a number of South Sudan's 64 different ethnic groups joined the conflict. Some of them did so by joining on either of the two sides and others entirely on their own. The conflict thus extended beyond the two belligerent groups and had separate rebel ethnic groups join the fight.

The reason that the strife metamorphosed from a political crisis to a full-blown civil war was not entirely due to ethnic divisions, but more that the army was neither professionalised nor institutionalised. Rather, it was a collection of militias, each of which was built on the basis of personal loyalty to its commander. In effect, they were nothing more than ethnically-based armed units. Thus, when ethnically-based grievances were not redressed, people fled to their kinsmen for security when the fighting broke out.

Added to this, there prevails a total lack of accountability, epitomised by the rapes of and violence against aid workers and civilians alike in 2016 by soldiers at a hotel in Juba.

Assessment

Our assessment is that unless the two politicians genuinely take it upon themselves to resolve the conflict, the situation is likely to escalate further. At the moment, the prevailing uncertainty in South Sudan has caused it to overtake Syria and Yemen as the fastest-growing humanitarian crisis in the world.

To de-escalate, we believe that regional instability and disunity must be dealt with first. East Africa is an extremely volatile region since political instability in any region will impact neighbouring states, as they are likely to be overwhelmed with refugees. Moreover, more than a third of South Sudan's population is internally displaced, a potential security risk, that these people are often targeted for recruitment by rebels and even terrorists.

The way the South Sudanese tribes presented a united front in their war for independence, although inspiring, has never been seen since. We believe that rediscovering this unity must be a top priority. Unless the two SPLMs (Sudan People's Liberation Movements) find common ground, Sudan will continue on its current trajectory towards becoming the next Rwanda or Syria in terms of the utter devastation seen there.

Finally, the violation of the ceasefire in the past is worrying and must be nipped in the bud if South Sudan, the African Union and the world are truly committed to a sustainable peace process.



Geopolitical tussle in Eastern Europe

The Trump Administration has been increasing its efforts to improve relations with Eastern Bloc nations through increased trade and defence collaborations. On the same parallel, both Russia and China are trying to maintain their economic influence in the region, and are concerned that increased US military presence might be a threat to regional stability and economic progress. Is Eastern Europe getting mired in a geopolitical game of one-upmanship, quite reminiscent of the Cold War?

Background

Europe's Eastern Bloc is a loosely defined geopolitical region which includes Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Slovakia, as well as the republics of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Several eastern European countries were former USSR member-states which exercised their sovereignty and looked westward after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. These countries were predominantly communist nations, but today they are mostly representative democracies. Following the disintegration of the USSR, the Eastern Bloc countries have strived to maintain their national identities. During the Second World War, these nations lost considerable territory to both the Axis and Allied powers. This might partly explain why European Bloc nations find themselves in a quandary to choose when it comes to reconciling diverging interests between the East and the West. The geographic positioning of Eastern bloc places them at an ideological crossroads between the democratic values of Western Europe and its historical ties to communism in the East, primarily due to Russia.

Analysis

President Trump recently signed a new defense deal with the Polish president, Andrzej Duda. Under the terms of this deal, he will be sending 1,000 troops to Poland in deference to Poland's decision to purchase Boeing's F-35's. This deal is intended to demonstrate US commitment to Eastern Europe and a clear pointer to Russia of their strategic intent.

Trump is also working towards improving America's relationship with Hungary. At a recent meeting with the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban, Donald Trump lauded Orban's immigration policies and stated that the two leaders were more similar than different.

Donald Trump was actually the first President to meet with the Hungarian Prime Minister in over 15 years after both Obama and George W. Bush refused to meet with him. There is a bi-partisan concern among American lawmakers that endorsing leaders who have tried to undermine democracy will send the wrong message. It appears that, capitalising on economic opportunities in Eastern Europe is a more important objective for Trump than the protection of democratic values.

US relations with Eastern Europe has improved due to the fact that the current administration is more center-right than preceding presidencies in the recent past.

This has helped leaders from both sides develop some commonalities where agreements can be reached and deals made. Such an improvement in diplomatic relations comes at a crucial time for the US with both Russia and China trying to capitalize on eastern-European markets.

Russia has also for a long time held a monopoly over the eastern European energy sector which enables it to wield considerable political influence in the region. China has a large presence in the telecom sector and has made several investments in critical infrastructure projects in Eastern Europe. Trump's trade-war with China threatens the latter's economic interests in the region. Due to information security concerns, the US has taken action against Chinese tech giant Huawei, which has a very large presence in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Bloc countries, in their interest, must weigh the trade-off between Chinese led economic progress versus a strengthened US-led defense force in the region. This comes at a time when Russia is furthering its geopolitical objectives in Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. Stronger ties between the US and Eastern Europe will give Trump an opportunity to strategically develop a counter-narrative to both Russia and China.

Counterpoint

Not all Eastern European nations are so deeply divided between the East and the West. Countries like North Macedonia and Albania have submitted applications to accede to the European Union (EU). They have been willing to undergo reform as directed by EU nations to be considered for membership.

Assessment

It is our assessment that Eastern European nations are under considerable pressure to choose between the US and China.

We believe that an increase in defence spending by NATO in Eastern Europe is consequential to Russia being perceived as a threat to these countries. But major defence deals do not come without their caveats and expectations. The leaders of Eastern Bloc countries must carefully negotiate between national security and economic growth while maintaining control over their system of governance.

We feel that Trump's focus on Eastern-Bloc nations is motivated more by economic interest rather than ideological differences with the East (as was the case during the Cold war). Under Trump's administration, US-Russia diplomatic relations have been less acrimonious. We feel that it wouldn't help Trump to his status - quo with Putin by challenging Russia's primacy in Eastern Europe.



NATO vs SCO: A New Multipolar Order

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently attended the 19th annual Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The aftermath of the summit raises some interesting questions about the global positioning of the SCO and its member states in the new world order. Can the

Shanghai Cooperation Organization compete with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the global political arena?

Background

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a Political, Economic, and Security Alliance that was formed in 2001. Membership to the SCO consists of Member States, Observer States, and Dialogue Partners. It currently has eight member states including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan. India and Pakistan are the latest additions to the alliance after being formally inducted in 2017. Observer states include Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia. The bloc's Dialogue Partners include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. Combined, the members of the SCO make up almost half of the world's population and nearly 3/5 of the Eurasian landmass making it the largest regional political alliance in the world. Often called the "Eastern Alliance", the SCO aims to enhance trust and feelings of neighborliness among nation states, promote cooperation and collaboration in matters of security, trade, intelligence, technology, research, and culture, and collectively work to fight the three evils - Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental political and military alliance that was established in 1949 to implement the North Atlantic Treaty, signed after the end of WW2. The organization promotes a collective defense strategy in which all member states pledge to align themselves together against a common foreign enemy. While the NATO started off with 12 members, it now boasts a membership of 29 states from North America and Europe with more states applying for membership. The original members were: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and United States. Montenegro is the latest member state, joining the NATO in 2017. NATO has also recognized five potential member states which are known as aspiring members - Bosnia, Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, and Ukraine.

Analysis

Leaders from 8 SCO member states, as well as several other dignitaries, gathered together in Kyrgyzstan last week to discuss matters of security, multilateral trade cooperation, economic development, and counter-terrorism.

We are witnessing the emergence of a strong East vs. West narrative in international politics which suggests that the contemporary balance of power is being dictated along a cultural and geographical faultline between the East and the West. In this context, one might wonder whether the SCO has grown to become NATO's eastern counterpart in terms of global power and influence.

Although the SCO is not exclusively a military alliance, its member states do participate in joint military exercises and war games. With the induction of India and Pakistan, four SCO members have significant nuclear capabilities and this has definitely strengthened the bloc against NATO. But of all member states, very few meet NATO's requirements for military spending (2% of GDP), which puts a great amount of pressure on a select few nations to carry the torch during a conflict. Plus, since member states have not pledged military support, they would be free to refuse involvement in future military conflicts.

But what SCO lacks in terms of joint military capacity, it might be able to make up for in terms of economic opportunities. The markets of several SCO nations have not yet been completely tapped into, and the bloc possesses vast natural and human resources. India and China are two of the world's fastest growing economies, and with greater economic cooperation, other SCO member states might benefit from their growth as well. The SCO member states account for 1/4 of the world's GDP.

One of the biggest challenges facing the SCO is finding a way to reconcile the diverging political interests of its member states. The SCO's aim of increasing cultural and humanitarian exchanges might help it overcome this hurdle. But the NATO isn't as united as many may think either. Member states aren't necessarily compelled to participate in NATO's operations, and may even choose to conduct their own operations unilaterally.

More and more NATO nations are failing to meet the defense spending requirements with only 7 countries meeting the threshold in 2018. US president Donald Trump, who backed out of a landmark NATO nuclear deal with Iran, has suggested time and again that the NATO might be on the decline. If this is true, we might be witnessing a paradigm shift in international relations with the advent of a multipolar balance of power.

Counterpoint

While the two organizations might have overlapping objectives, the mission and vision of these organizations are markedly different. The NATO seems to have a more global focus while the SCO seems more concerned about internal issues. It might not be the best idea, therefore, to make a comparison between the two at all. The SCO as a body will not pose a direct threat to NATO, but independently, Russia and China might be able to serve as formidable opponents in a conflict.

Assessment

It is our assessment that while the sheer size and influence of the SCO can give NATO a run for its money, it cannot compete with NATO in the global political arena. This has less to do with the military and economic capabilities of both blocs, and more to do with the objectives of these organizations. The NATO was built to be an alliance against a common enemy, and in the absence of one, the western political bloc might lose its cohesive force. The SCO, on the other hand, was established during peace-time and has interests beyond military collaboration - including its various economic and cultural pursuits in the region.

We believe that establishing a powerful presence in Eastern Europe and the Middle East is the key for either of these organizations to be considered dominant. We feel that tensions between the two organizations could potentially arise in central and eastern Europe, where NATO is building up a presence to counter Russian advances in the region. With tensions rising, several eastern European countries might feel pressured to pick a side. Either way, we feel that the regions in question will remain divided between the two blocs - with neither organization establishing geopolitical dominance.

We think that SCO member states will be hesitant to push any sort of agenda in the Middle East, primarily because SCO member states including India and China, are dependent on the Gulf for oil. Besides this, advancing into the Middle East would be stepping on US toes. Amidst existing economic tensions between the US and China, and now India, it might not be wise to pursue anything that would harm American interests. We think that self-preservation would prevent SCO nations from displaying a united front against the western NATO bloc. However, we feel that this view is complicated by the fact that Iran is due to receive membership status to SCO anytime soon. Amidst growing tensions with the US and Iran as well as China, Iranian membership might force the SCO to set its sights on the Middle East. This could either strengthen the bloc or severely weaken it.

India Watch

At the Summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a brief speech addressing the need for greater economic cooperation and coordinated efforts against terrorism. We think that the SCO serves as a powerful platform for India to engage in multilateral collaboration with Asian countries in order to further both domestic and regional interests.

We feel that India's membership to the SCO gives India greater access to Central Asian markets, which have been relatively elusive till now. China's trade with Central Asia is worth over \$50 billion compared to India's \$2 billion. The scope for Indian trade with energy-rich Central Asian countries is very broad, but we feel that India needs to act fast in the region to avoid losing opportunities to China.

During the 2019 SCO Summit, India refused to endorse China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and turned down an invitation to join the BRIs Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar corridor. While joining the BRI would significantly improve connectivity between India and Central Asia, this improved connectivity might come at the expense of Indian national interests in Kashmir and its Eastern provinces.



Will Trump's GSP sanctions persuade India to open up its markets

President Donald Trump recently revoked the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) privileges from India which permits the duty-free entry of nearly 2,000 Indian products. The Indian government seems unfettered by the curiously timed sanction which fell into place just as soon as Narendra Modi was sworn in for his second term as India's Prime Minister. This move seems to be a power-play tactic to persuade the Indian government to open up its economy to more favourable trade deals with the US. What exactly does the Trump administration hope to accomplish and how will Modi's government react?

Background

The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is an American trade benefits program offering tax incentives to 129 beneficiary nations by providing them with the duty-free entry on up to 4,800 different products in an effort to promote economic growth in developing countries. India is the largest beneficiary of the GSP with a total of \$6.35 billion in exports benefiting under GSP in 2018. Donald Trump first began toying with the idea of suspending India's GSP privileges in March 2019, but formally gave notice of the sanction only on May 31st. The official withdrawal of benefits began on June 5th.

Analysis

Ever since the Trump administration announced its decision to withdraw India from its list of beneficiaries for the GSP program, political analysts have been quick to note that the American president waited for Narendra Modi to be sworn for his second term as India's prime minister before announcing his proposed sanction. Trump's timing raises some interesting questions about his motive for revoking India's GSP privileges. In an official statement, the American president said that "India has not assured the US that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to its markets". This refers to the fact that Modi has refused to reconsider existing data localization policies which hurt American e-commerce ventures such as Amazon and Walmart and prevents the expansion of US fintech giant PayPal into India.

Modi's government has responded to the GSP sanction as being "unfortunate" but appears to believe that the impact of such an economic sanction is not significant enough to compromise national interests. According to the Federation of Indian Export Organizations, out of the \$6.35 billion exports under GSP, Indian exporters enjoy a net benefit of only \$260 million. The sectors that stand to lose the most include Imitation Jewelry, Leather Articles, Pharmacy and Surgical, Chemical and Plastics, and Agriculture (basic & processed). The organization's president Mr. Ganesh Kumar Gupta suggested that the government should extend some additional support to exporters most affected by the loss of GSP by extending the Rebate of State & Central Tax Levies Scheme (RoSCTL) on such products. He also alluded to potential benefits to China as a result of GSP sanctions against India and suggested that this might incentivize the US to rethink their decision.

Interestingly, when the US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu met in early May, there was no discussion of the plan to withdraw

India's GSP privileges. The topics of discussion included India's e-commerce policy, data localization for payment companies, high tariffs imposed by the US on steel and aluminium, and visa issues. According to an official statement published by the Commerce Ministry, "Both sides agreed to deepen economic cooperation and bilateral trade by ensuring greater cooperation amongst stakeholders, including Government, businesses, and entrepreneurs." Yet, less than a month later, the US removed India from its list of GSP beneficiaries in a move that seems to put pressure on Modi's government to meet US demands.

Counterpoint

Despite the fact that the Indian Government does not seem too worried about the GSP sanctions, several domestic suppliers are demanding that the benefits be reinstated. India has proposed a retaliatory tariff hike on 29 American goods but has not yet acted on it, and instead decided to postpone the tariff imposition to June 16th. In the past, the US has reinstated GSP benefits to nations like Argentina and Myanmar but such reinstatement is conditional and the Indian government does not seem keen on asking for it any time soon.

Assessment

We think that Trump's decision to impose GSP sanctions is not an isolated policy decision. The announcement comes at a time when India is seeking alternatives for the procurement of oil after the USA threatened to impose sanctions on nations that try to import oil from Tehran. Reports suggest that both India and China are still trying to find a way to continue buying oil from Iran, which would pose a threat to Trump's effort to cut off Iran's oil revenues. However, Iran met 10% of India's oil needs and cutting Iranian oil supply would require the government to fish out an alternative source – the U.S, perhaps?

It is also quite plausible that the GSP sanction is a product of Donald Trump's Make America Great Again Scheme which got him elected in 2016, and might help him get re-elected in the upcoming 2020 elections. This scheme aims to minimize imports in an effort to encourage domestic production within the USA and generate jobs in the process. But we predict that as a result of the withdrawal of GSP benefits for several products, many American importers (several of which are small businesses) will be burdened with absorbing the additional costs. Such a result would certainly be counter-intuitive to Donald Trump's agenda and might backfire if Modi retaliates with tariffs.

The Indian government, however, remains optimistic that there is only room for growth and improvement and in a statement announced that "In any relationship, in particular in the area of economic ties, there are ongoing issues which get resolved mutually from time to time. We view this issue as a part of this regular process and will continue to build on our strong ties with the US." The determining factor at this point will be whether India decides to impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 American goods post June 16 or bows down to US demands for increased access to Indian markets.



Julian Assange: A Case of Journalism, Hacking and Espionage

Julian Assange, co-founder of Wikileaks has been charged with 17 counts under the Espionage Act for receiving and publishing information from Army intelligence analysts in

2010. Does Assange fit the definition of 'journalist'? Should a journalist be exempt from the Espionage Act?

Background

Julian Assange is an Australian journalist and computer programmer who founded WikiLeaks in 2006. The organization is known for revealing war crimes, human rights abuses and corruption.

WikiLeaks came to international attention in 2010 when it published a series of leaks provided by Chelsea Manning. These leaks included Collateral Murder video (April 2010), the Afghanistan war logs (July 2010), Iraq war logs (October 2010) and Cable Gate (November 2010). After the leaks, the United States government launched a criminal investigation into WikiLeaks and asked allied nations for assistance.

In 2016, WikiLeaks hosted emails sent or received by candidate Hillary Clinton from her private email server when she was Secretary of State. The U.S. Intelligence Community, as well as a Special Counsel investigation, concluded that the Russian government carried out a hacking campaign as part of broader efforts of interference in the 2016 United States elections.

Analysis

Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks co-founder, has been indicted on 17 new counts of violating the US's Espionage Act for his role in publishing classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010, the US Justice Department announced, in a novel case that raises profound issues around the country's first amendment of their constitution.

The new charges were part of a superseding indictment obtained by the Trump administration that significantly expanded the legal case against Mr. Assange, who is already fighting extradition proceedings in London, based on a charge brought by federal prosecutors in northern Virginia - of conspiring to commit unlawful computer intrusion. The secret documents that Mr. Assange published were provided by the former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who was convicted at a court-martial in 2013 of leaking the records.

Mr. Assange was arrested in London in April after being dragged out of the Ecuadorean Embassy, where he had resided for years to avoid capture. The US has asked the UK to extradite Mr. Assange, who is fighting the extradition. The Obama administration reportedly rejected the option of a criminal charge against Assange under the Espionage Act, in recognition of the danger to press freedom. "Julian Assange is no journalist"; Assistant Attorney General John Demers pronounced in announcing the indictment. By this reasoning, imprisoning Assange for publishing documents poses no dangers to "real journalists" because press freedoms are inapplicable to Assange.

WikiLeaks published many of those documents in collaboration with an international consortium of leading news organizations — including The Guardian, the New York Times, Le Monde, El País, and Der Spiegel — which ensured that the charges against Assange were immediately denounced by journalists and free speech advocates as an unconstitutional assault on press freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.

The First Amendment of the US Constitution states: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..." But, the U.S. government has now issued a legal document that formally declares that collaborating with government sources to receive and publish classified documents is no longer regarded by the Justice Department as journalism protected by the First Amendment, but rather as the felony of espionage.

Counterpoint

The Espionage Act of 1917 does not criminalise national security journalism. The law bans the publication of government secrets and offers no explicit protections to the press under the amendment guaranteeing freedom of speech.

In the case of Julian Assange, the charges do not directly relate to his publishing activities. Instead, he faces one count of "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion," alleging that Assange agreed to help Chelsea Manning by trying to crack the password on a Defense Department computer in order to obtain classified government documents, which would then be leaked to WikiLeaks. Trump's Justice Department has argued that by encouraging Chelsea Manning, the whistle-blower, to hack

material from inside secure servers, and publishing without regard for the safety of people named in the documents, Assange does not fit the definition of a journalist.

Assessment

Our assessment is that a “journalist” can be anyone, regardless of education, credentials or employment status, who informs the public about newsworthy matters. Though Mr. Assange is not a conventional journalist, much of what he does at Wikileaks is difficult to distinguish in a legally meaningful way from what traditional news organisations do: seek and publish information that officials want to be secret, including classified national security matters, and take steps to protect the confidentiality of sources. We feel that justifying the prosecution on the grounds that he is not a journalist gives licence to only those designated by the government, to publish material about powerful actors which is a threat to press freedom.

Since the government routinely over-classifies a wide array of information, it would leave every journalist at constant risk of surveillance and prosecution. We feel that the criminal case against Assange, if it were to succeed, would set a powerful precedent for journalists, whistle-blowers and other journalistic sources that the US government may wish to pursue in the future.

Once the case is established in favour of the government, the act of working with sources to publish classified information is no longer considered journalism, but espionage.



Cyber-Attack on U.S. CBP

Government surveillance photos of international travellers and license plates were hacked as part of a malicious cyber-attack. Is the use of biometrics being carried out at the expense of privacy solving surveillance issues? How is the outsourcing of data leading to privacy breach?

Background

The US government maintains vast databases of travellers’ personal information, including passport and visa photos, and airlines have also increasingly used facial recognition technology, sharing biometric data with federal agencies that store the sensitive information. The customs and border agency is part of the Homeland Security Department, which has primary responsibility for cybersecurity inside the United States.

Analysis

A US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data breach has exposed travellers’ photos and license plate information, renewing concerns about expanded facial recognition and federal surveillance systems.

The CBP’s own networks were not breached and instead one of its subcontractors had quietly copied the data to its own servers without CBP’s knowledge and against CBP policy. It was this subcontractor’s networks that were subsequently compromised, resulting in the exposure of the data. CBP said, “*none of the image data has been identified on the dark web or internet*.” “*This breach comes just as CBP seeks to expand its massive face recognition apparatus and collection of sensitive information from travellers, including license plate information and social media identifiers*,” Neema Singh Guliani, American Civil Liberties Union senior legislative counsel, said in a statement.

“*This incident further underscores the need to put the brakes on these efforts and for Congress to investigate the agency’s data practices*.” The best way to avoid these kinds of breaches, Guliani added, “*is not to collect and retain such data in the first place*.” CBP has reached out to members of Congress, other law enforcement agencies, and cybersecurity entities as part of its investigation of the incident.

“*Government use of biometric and personal identifiable information can be valuable tools only if utilized properly. Unfortunately, this is the second major privacy breach at the Department of Homeland Security this year. We must ensure we are not expanding the use of biometrics at the expense of the privacy of the American public. I intend to hold hearings next month on Homeland Security’s use of biometric information*” said Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, in a statement.

In May, San Francisco lawmakers voted to make the city the first in the US to ban police and other government agencies from using facial recognition technology. The state of California and other municipalities across the country are now considering similar proposals.

Assessment

Our assessment is that traveller photos like fingerprints fall under the umbrella of biometric data, are extremely valuable to hackers, especially as the use of facial recognition technology becomes more widespread. Hackers can create profiles of people using biometric data and combine them with other information such as financial or personal records obtained in other breaches. The more information they have, the more valuable their profile of a person becomes.

It can be noted that the effort to set up alarm systems which would provide early warning when large amounts of data are removed, has been hampered by a shortage of funds, focus and expertise.

We feel that breaches of government contractors have been a persistent security issue. It can be noted that this was how the United States lost many of the designs for the F-35, the most expensive fighter jet in history. Also, the first breach of data from the Office of Personnel Management started with a contractor doing interviews for security clearances.

Companies outsource an increasing percentage of their business operations, from payroll and HR systems to their customer management and helpdesk systems, to their software development and data management. While much of this outsourcing is to established Internet companies that actually offer greater cybersecurity than the company’s own networks, there are myriad small vendors that even large companies rely upon for speciality services, which can pose a particularly dangerous insider threat. We feel that companies can mitigate these risks by choosing vendors with a particular focus on cyber defence, conducting rigorous audits of their integration points and deployment of network monitoring and data loss prevention technologies to flag unusual accesses and activity.

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