

Prodigy Intelligence Threat Centre

28 Sept 2020

Prepared for: Paladin Security

INTSUM 004/2020

Executive Summary

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Analysis

COVID-19 - Global Overview

Reports: COVID-19 has reportedly infected over 32 million people in 188 countries and killed over 990,000 people. More countries are beginning to report they are seeing a spike in new cases with experts declaring the second wave of COVID-19 is starting as the autumn season begins in the northern hemisphere. Europe as a whole and parts of the Middle East are seeing the highest increase in daily infections rate. India remains the leader in new cases per day. Despite the alarming rise in cases in Europe, protests have erupted in response to new restrictions in the UK.

Assessment: If experts and scientific modeling proves correct the world is starting the second wave of the pandemic. It will very likely require a strong response by governments to keep their respective infection rates low. Governments in Europe will likely employ new modified lockdowns guided by what has been learned about COVID-19 in the face of growing civil disobedience. If India fails to control the outbreak, it could possibly surpass the United States in total infected by the end of October.

Reports: In the United States, COVID-19 has infected over 7 million and killed over 203,000 people. States in the American Heartland, notably Wisconsin, Missouri, and South Dakota are seeing record increases in new infections and hospitalizations. In the South, the governor of Florida is lifting all COVID-19 restrictions despite the evidence that the second wave is starting. This week New York daily virus cases top over 1,000 for the first time since June. A model from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), forecasts potentially 400,000 deaths in the US by the end of year if trends continue unchanged.

Assessment: The increase in new infections is alarming given that colder months are approaching and the second wave is likely to have already started. It is up to individual states to balance their response between the severity of their hospitalizations and the economic impacts of their control measures. If anti-lockdown sentiment continues to grow in the face of reactive regulations it is likely that many states will fail to control the outbreak of the second wave.

COVID-19 - Canada's Case Update

For national figures, you can find COVID-19 case updates [here](#).

For Alberta, you can find the COVID-19 case updates [here](#). On this page, scroll down to the data table for Alberta and information by health zone.

For British Columbia, you can find the COVID-19 case updates [here](#).

Reports: In Canada, COVID-19 has infected over 147,000 and killed over 9,300 people. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia see a significant increase in cases in the past week. Provincial governments closed specific venues and limited gathering sizes in an attempt to control the latest outbreaks. Prime Minister Trudeau has selected the head of the National Research Council of Canada, [Iain Stewart](#), to be the new president of the Public Health Agency of Canada. PM Trudeau has also signed an order for 20 million units of the University of Oxford vaccine being produced by Astrazeneca, making it the sixth vaccine candidate that Canada has backed.

Assessment: Provincial health officials are reacting to the increase in cases after restrictions to control COVID-19 were relaxed just a month ago. It is likely that these new restrictions will have minimal impact on the spread of new infections given that the environmental factors changing with the season and pandemic fatigue will likely have a stronger influence on the direction COVID-19 takes in Canada.

COVID-19- Global Vaccine Development Tracker

For Global figures, you can find COVID-19 Vaccine Development updates [here](#).

Reports: More than 100 teams of scientists worldwide are developing and testing a vaccine against the virus SARS-CoV-2 as quickly as possible. Many groups are working on a COVID-19 vaccine using technologies that have been in development for decades but have never yet been approved for wide-scale human use, such as DNA, RNA, and viral-vector vaccines. Of the now 42 vaccines in human clinical trials 11 are in phase three and experts say more than one could potentially be approved before the end of the year.

Assessment: An effective vaccine against COVID-19 is the only likely event that would allow the world to return to a pre-pandemic quality of life. Even in countries with a devastating number of deaths from COVID-19, there is nowhere close to a level of "herd

immunity" within the population. The number of candidates in phase three trials likely suggests a proven vaccine could be announced before the end of the year.

COVID-19 Operations Sitrep

Chicago: The rolling seven-day statewide positivity rate is 3.7%, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health. That figure is higher both in Cook County (4.6%) and Chicago (4.7%)

Houston: Houston appears to have survived the Labor Day weekend without a COVID-19 spike, according to the most recent data.

Las Vegas: Data released Saturday notes 602 new COVID-19 cases in Nevada and 425 in Clark County, a first for the month of September. Despite this data Governor Sisolak announced Friday that he will lift certain restrictions across the state.

Phoenix: Gov. Doug Ducey emphasized his commitment to keeping the state open in a "safe and healthy way" during a news conference this week, with no current plans for "dramatic changes" to be made despite "a gradual rise in cases."

Salt Lake City: Among the 15-24 age group, cases have been spiking dramatically, leading to record-high case counts. As of Thursday, outbreaks at eight high schools have caused them to temporarily stop in-person classes.

Seattle: While domestic air travel at airports including Sea-Tac is up from the lows when COVID-19 first struck, it's still about 70% below where it was last year. Operators are considering rapid COVID-19 testing for passengers to possibly increase capacity and traffic.

St Petersburg: Gov. Ron DeSantis Lifts Florida's Capacity Limits on Restaurants, Other Businesses Due to COVID-19.

Black Lives Matter (BLM)

Reports: The Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Anti Facist (Antifa) movements enter their 17th week of unrest in US cities since the murder of George Floyd on May 25th. Protests were held in cities across the US including riots centered in Louisville, Kentucky, after the Commonwealth of Kentucky announced there would be no charges for officers involved in the shooting death of Breonna Taylor, who was killed during a police raid on her apartment in the early hours of March 13, 2020. At least two police officers were shot the first night of riots September 23. The early details of the case were misleading, causing more unrest amid the tensions between BLM and authorities. Despite the release of new details that indicate officers acted appropriately, voices on the left, mainstream media, and BLM, continue to report outdated information regarding the case leading to continued rioting. Unrest in other cities, including Los Angeles and Portland continue, with violent incidents between protesters, counter protesters, and police.

Assessment: BLM/Antifa have demonstrated they are more interested in spreading unrest using any narrative, factual or not, that fits their agenda than being justified in their cause. As BLM/Antifa radicalizes, it is likely to draw out increasingly unstable individuals to be used to cause harm. Messaging from left wing media will likely continue to push a victim narrative that emboldens the radical left and downplays the true circumstances of cases like Breonna Taylors, putting police, local officials, and politicians at risk of further targeted attacks.

Operations BLM Sitrep

Chicago: Dozens of activists marched in defiance of the Breonna Taylor decision.

Las Vegas: Six protestors were arrested after clashes with police after the Breonna Taylor decision.

Phoenix: Over 100 people attended a candlelight vigil after the Breonna Taylor decision.

Salt Lake City: Around 200 people marched in defiance of the Breonna Taylor decision.

Seattle: Protests erupted into violence with police after the Breonna Taylor decision. A police officer is being investigated after being recorded riding his bicycle over the head of an injured protester.

St Petersburg: Protesters in St. Petersburg, Florida, told a diner they would knock him 'the f*** out' as they took over his table the night of the Breonna Taylor decision.

Africa

Nigeria

Reports: The Nigerian military claims 18 people have been killed after an ambush on a government convoy in the country's north-east. Insurgents killed four soldiers, ten police officers and four civilians in the attack. The militants planted improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on the road between the town of Monguno and the fishing town of Baga, said Maj Gen John Enenche, the spokesperson of the Nigerian Defence Headquarters. Officials were on their way to finalize arrangements for displaced people to return to Baga when they were ambushed. Borno State Governor Babagana Zulum was in an earlier convoy and unharmed. The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the attack, claiming 30 people were killed instead. Troops later captured a gun truck from the militants and recovered two police vehicles the attackers had seized.

Assessment: The military has been battling Islamist militants for more than a decade. More than 30,000 people have been killed, and millions have fled their homes because of the insurgency by Islamist militants Boko Haram. They launched their military operation in 2009, and their attacks have spread from north-eastern Nigeria to neighbouring countries Chad, Niger and Cameroon. This attack could signify that rural areas are still not safe enough for displaced people to return.

Mali

Reports: Former Defence Minister Bah Ndaw was picked by the coup leader, Colonel Assimi Goita, to head a transitional government until elections, which are expected in 18 months. Col Goita chose himself for vice-president. The appointment of a civilian president was a condition for the West African regional group, ECOWAS, to lift the sanctions it imposed after the coup. Food and commodities are running low in the Malian capital, Bamako. After Mr. Ndaw's inauguration, ECOWAS officials said they would only lift the embargo after a civilian prime minister was also appointed.

Assessment: One unclear thing is if Bah Ndaw will be able to lead the country after he's sworn in. He was chosen because he is well respected by both in the military and the general public. He is also favored by Col Assimi Goita. Portraying a unified front will be central to the success of Mr. Ndaw and his vice-president. Any perception that the interim president is not in charge could lead to renewed international pressure on the junta. West African heads of state are afraid the coup in Mali may lead to other uprisings in a region that is facing several elections in the coming months. Members of the opposition M5-RFP coalition, which organized mass protests against the ousted leader, will also be watching closely, having already felt sidelined in the process of appointing a replacement. The next 18 months will be crucial in determining how close or far Mali steers from democracy.

China

Report: On September 21, Indian and Chinese military officials met and agreed to stop sending troops to the disputed green line in the Ladakh region where tensions have been high following a border dispute which killed 20 Indian soldiers. Despite this both militaries have been reported to be sending large stocks of equipment, ammunition, tanks, artillery and supplies to the region ahead of the winter season. President Xi has called for the fortification of the Chinese frontier to ensure that no “incursions” take place.

Assessment: Despite the increased militarization of the green zone it is unlikely that there will be a large-scale conflict between China and India in the coming months. Chinese military operations currently prefer to utilize the element of surprise in their operations, an element they have lost in this area. Furthermore India has shown that they are willing to commit resources to secure their territory. The tensions and conflict between India and China, as well as other issues such as China hoarding medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, has also shored up support against China by regional partners, notably the US and a number of countries in the region. Unless China can alter the perceptions of this situation and other issues it is likely that China will continue to become politically isolated, though given China's dominance of the world's supply chain this will have little impact on its economy.

Report: China’s President Xi Jinping stated at the United Nations general assembly last week with a pledge to reach “peak carbon” before 2030 and drive down emissions to be carbon neutral by 2060. As China is the world's largest coal user this would require a complete rework of the Chinese energy infrastructure. This would also make China a green energy world leader. As demand for energy increases in China and auto manufacturers brace for a wave of electric vehicle sales in China, energy demand in China will continue to increase.

Assessment: This comes at a time when China is facing backlash for being the world's largest polluter and this pledge is likely an attempt to increase good will towards the country as well as improve China’s energy independence. Energy independence from other nations would provide both military and economic opportunities for China.

Report: The United States has placed new restrictions on exports to Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), China’s most advanced manufacturer of computer chips after stating that they were likely supplying the Chinese military. In a letter on Friday, the Department of Commerce told American chip manufacturers that they must first acquire a license to sell technology to SMIC. The department said it was taking the action as the Chinese company “may pose an unacceptable risk of diversion to a military end use in the People’s Republic of China.” This comes after the US banned Huawei from its 5G network and as the US government looks to ban TikTok and WeChat from use in the US. Last year, China imported more than \$300 billion in computer chips, more than it spent on crude oil. Despite a large share of the world's consumer electronics being manufactured in China, the chips that power them are often purchased from other countries.

Assessment: The US government continues to limit the ability of US firms to sell technological goods to China and Chinese companies. This is likely to increase already strained tensions between the two countries. As China will require these processors to manufacture numerous computer equipment the loss of supply to any of its manufactures could have an economic impact on the country as well as strain suspected procurement for its military.

Iran

Report: Iranian oil exports have been reported to increase dramatically in defiance of sanctions against the country. Data from Tanker Trackers shows that oil traffic via tankers has doubled from 750,000 barrels per day (BPD) in August to 1.5 million BPD in September. Despite this higher volume of traffic overall volume is down since the US withdrew from the nuclear agreement with Iran, where Iran was averaging an export of 2.5 Million BPD. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh stated that documents were forged in order to hide the origin of the oil to ensure that Iran could continue to export its oil.

Assessment: Iranian oil exports are likely to increase in the next months for a number of reasons. The first of these is that US politicians are distracted by the upcoming November 3rd election and will be focusing their efforts there. Iran also likely feels embolden to act in the area as it has recently been able to carry out a number of actions, such as monitoring the USS Nimitz in the Straits of Hormuz via drones flying over the carrier, as well as the rebuke of the US by its allies over the placement of sanctions on Iran. These circumstances will likely further embolden Iran to act in its own interests and increase oil exports to support its embattled economy.

Report: Iran opened a new naval base in the town of Sirik this week. Sirik is at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz from the Gulf of Oman. Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Chief Commander Major General Hossein Salami states that this base will further allow “the country’s combat operations, ship operations, reconnaissance as well as defensive and offensive operations in the Persian Gulf will further develop.” 21% of global oil shipping sails through the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran has regularly threatened to close the Strait should it be unable to export oil. Last year President Trump tweeted that the US Navy had orders to “blow out of the water” any Iranian military craft which was harassing US Naval Forces in the area.

Assessment: Increased Iranian military activity in the Strait of Hormuz will likely increase tensions with US Naval Forces operating in the area. This poses a risk for low level conflicts in the area between US and Iranian forces. It is unlikely though that Iran will take any steps in the near to midterm to close the Strait of Hormuz given the increase in Iranian oil exports and its dependence on uninterrupted oil exports.

Report: Iran is reportedly now in a third wave of COVID-19, with the majority of its provinces in a “red” state, the most severe for the pandemic, and the worst outbreak taking place in Tehran. “Do not underestimate Corona,” Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei said in a live televised speech last week as health officials in the country stressed the importance of health measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. This comes at a time when the value of Iran’s currency has fallen 49% in the last year and rent prices have spiked. These factors have hit Iran’s economy hard with an annual inflation rate of 34.4%. It is expected that Iran’s unemployment rate will hit 16.3% this year.

Assessment: Increased illicit oil exports from Iran will have little to no positive effect on Iran’s economy as COVID-19, US sanctions and severe unemployment impact the ability of the country to recover in any meaningful way. This will likely push the regime to export increasing amounts of oil, increasing the risk of detection for these exports and tensions with the US.

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