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Weekly Intelligence Brief

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China Sentences Three Cross-Border Crime Bosses to Death

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On 16 OCT, Chinese courts sentenced Wei Huairen, Chen Dawei, and Liao Jingfang to death for leading a Myanmar-based crime syndicate, which was found responsible for the deaths of four Chinese nationals. The three men were leading members of the Wei Syndicate, with Huairen being the head. Three other key members received life sentences, and 55 other people—all connected to the Wei Syndicate—received sentences for up to 24 years. Huairen is the head of one of the four major crime families operating in the Kokang region of Myanmar. The four families have committed crimes such as large-scale telecommunications fraud and human trafficking using their local political and military influence to protect their criminal activity.

Prosecutors courts accused the Wei Syndicate of numerous crimes ranging from extortion and operating illegal casinos to distributing narcotics and engaging in human trafficking across international borders. Investigators found that, through its extortion and casino activities, the Syndicate has processed $1.7 billion USD in criminal funds since 2019. Dawei, one of three sentenced to death, acted as the armed enforcer of the Syndicate, using private militias to carry out killings, and confessing to randomly murdering someone as a "ritual sacrifice" to prove his loyalty to the Syndicate.

In light of Dawei's confession, we can assess with high confidence that it is very likely that the Wei Syndicate has been engaging in more criminal activity that has not yet been brought to justice through the Chinese legal system. Authorities in China have been dismantling cross-border crime along the Myanmar-China border since 2023, when Beijing launched an aggressive law enforcement campaign. Due to this, we can also assess with high confidence that it is very likely that the success of this case will entice the Chinese government to continue this law enforcement campaign.

Norway Considers Investing Sovereign Wealth Funds in Weapons

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On 16 OCT, Norway drew international attention amid debate over whether its Sovereign Wealth Fund should invest in Western defense companies. Originally, the fund was barred from investing in firms that produced nuclear weapons, except those with obligations to a country under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Gjerden Committee, a government appointed commission concerned with the fund's appropriation activities, has proposed a revision to this longstanding standard.

The Committee has explained its new recommendation as an abundance of caution for threats or conflicts that could quickly escalate into war. The investment would support the expansion of Norway's domestic defense production through financial partnerships with established defense contractors. Similar calls for advanced weapons programs have emerged across Europe, driven by rising tensions with Russia, which borders Norway, and Russian threats against Ukraine. The fund had previously avoided investing in some of these firms, citing concerns that the countries they supported had contributed to human rights abuses.

Approval of the investment would expand American influence overseas through tactical defense capabilities and research and development. The proposal has drawn criticism from those who argue that it would implicate Norway in the same human rights abuses. The recommendation, together with a proposed revision to the fund's ethical framework, is due for public review by January 2027. We assess with moderate confidence that the sovereign wealth fund is likely to adopt the proposed change as tensions in Europe escalate.



NATO Increasing Military Presence in the Black Sea

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On 20 OCT, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced it will be increasing its military presence in the Black Sea amid recent deadly drone attacks on commercial ships off the coast of Romania and Bulgaria. Since the start of OCT, there have been at least seven attacks, resulting in two dead and 25 missing sailors, as well as four damaged and three sunken vessels. NATO has not directly attributed the recent attacks to a specific country, but military analysts have claimed Russia almost certainly carried out the attacks. NATO already conducts air policing over the Black Sea, using aircraft to patrol the region. However, in response to the latest attacks, NATO will be deploying additional patrol aircraft, radar systems, drones, and intelligence personnel to the Black Sea.

The Black Sea has long been a strategic area for Russia throughout the Russo-Ukrainian war, which began in 2022. Russian attacks have largely focused on Ukrainian ports, maritime infrastructure, and commercial vessels operating in Ukrainian waters. These recent attacks on commercial vessels near Romania and Bulgaria indicate Russia's broader geographic reach beyond Ukrainian waters. These attacks come amid recent reports warning that Russia could test NATO's willingness to respond to potential threats against member states. NATO's top military commander has said the alliance does not want war, but it is ready to fight if attacked.

We can assess with high confidence that it is likely that Russia will continue to carry out attacks and other activities near NATO territory. We can also assess that it is likely NATO will further increase its surveillance and defense measures in response to Russian activity.



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