GRYPHON GROWL

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The Gryphon Growl is a collection of news reporting produced by the 21st Intelligence Squadron and is designed to make acquisition professionals and leaders more fully threat informed. Articles are chosen because they impact AFLCMC programs or address larger national security issues in line with the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, National Defense Strategy, Reoptimizing for Great Power Competition, and AFMC/AFLCMC priorities. The Gryphon Growl is designed to generate discussions in your respective workspace on current events. If any topic drives interest at higher classifications, please contact your PEO's Director of Intel or the ICE, using the phone number listed above or at https://usaf.dps.mil/sites/21IS. The articles in this product are gathered from unclassified, open sources and are not evaluated intelligence products. The included articles do not reflect the official position of the 21 IS, AFLCMC, or DoD.

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Gryphon Growl Feedback Form: https://forms.osi.apps.mil/r/WhpBtWbWYi

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Your input helps improve and enhance our product.

INDOPACOM

STARS AND STRIPES: NORTH KOREA'S KIM JONG UN CALLS AI, DRONE DEVELOPMENT A 'TOP PRIORITY'

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to boost production of military drones and further develop artificial intelligence technology to prepare his military for "modern warfare," according to state media. Kim supervised the test of reconnaissance and attack drones on 18 September and was pictured alongside an unnamed bulbous-nosed aircraft resembling the U.S. military's RQ-4 Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle, according to a Korean Central News Agency report published the next day. The mass production and development of drones and AI is a "top priority and important task in modernizing the armed forces of [North Korea]," Kim said in the report.

Despite sharing some physical characteristics with the Global Hawk, the North Korean drone is highly unlikely to match it in flight distance and surveillance capabilities, said Yang Uk, a research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul. North Korea may have used the KCNA report, which also included photos of one-way attack drones, to show off its military capabilities ahead of the 80th anniversary of the ruling Workers Party on 10 October, Yang told Stars and Stripes by phone on 19 September. "They want to make it a political achievement," he said.

Kim has visited factories and other spots related to drone development four times, Ministry of Unification deputy spokeswoman Chang Yoon Jeong said during a news conference on 19 September. South Korea will continue to monitor the regime's drone program, she added. Last year, North Korea publicized its attack drones by releasing images of it striking an armored vehicle resembling the South Korean army's K-2 Black Panther tank.

DEFENSE NEWS: CHINA BRISTLES AT U.S. ARMY'S TYPHON MISSILE LAUNCHER IN JAPAN

China criticized the U.S. Army's move to deploy the Typhon missile launcher in Japan this week, warning it increases the risk of military confrontation and undermines regional security interests. The reaction comes after the U.S. Army officially unveiled the mid-range missile system in Japan during annual bilateral exercise Resolute Dragon. This year's iteration is the largest to date, with more than 19,000 American and Japanese troops.

China made the claim weeks after showcasing its nuclear arsenal and hypersonic capabilities in a Victory Parade early this month. The parade was attended by Russia's Vladimir Putin, North Korea's Kim Jong Un, and Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto. The Typhon's presence in Asia has ruffled China after the missile system made its first showing in the Philippines last year. China has alluded to the launchers in its annual defense white paper and repeatedly claimed the missile system destabilizes regional security.

The Typhons' deployment in Japan has attracted Russia's attention. In a commentary published on 28 August, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that Typhon poses a direct strategic threat and warned that should the deployment proceed, Russia would take appropriate "military-technical measures." China and Russia have deepened their cooperation in recent years, alarming Tokyo. Japan's defense ministry has reported a marked increase in the presence of Chinese and Russian warships, missile systems, and fighter jets close to Japanese territories.

AP: CHINA'S DEFENSE MINISTER RENEWS THREATS TO TAKE OVER TAIWAN AS HE OPENS SECURITY FORUM

China's defense minister renewed threats that his country would take over self-ruled Taiwan as he opened a security forum in Beijing on 18 September. The "restoration" of Taiwan to China "is an integral part of the post-war international order," Dong Jun told an audience of international military officials attending the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, an annual event where China aims to project regional leadership and boost military cooperation.

While not mentioning the U.S. by name, Dong chided "behaviors such as external military interference, seeking spheres of influence and coercing others into taking sides." He called those a means to "plunge the international community into chaos and conflict." The security forum comes after Beijing earlier this month held a massive military parade marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. China's army, the world's largest, showcased its advanced weaponry at the parade, including Chinese-made hypersonic missiles and tanks.

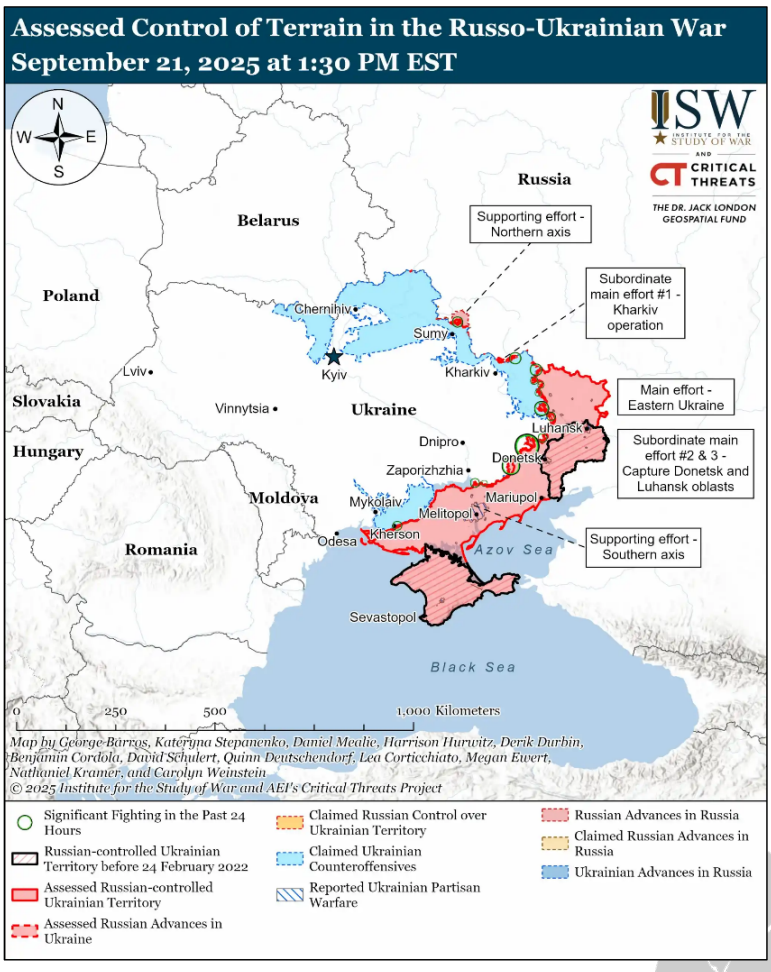
Dong stressed the importance of upholding the "UN-centered international system" as a framework for global peace and stability. "We must defend the post-war order," he said. "We do not intend to overturn the existing order or to create a new one. Rather the goal is to reinforce the cornerstone and pillars of the system."

EUCOM

ISW: RUSSIA-UKRAINE UPDATE

Key Takeaways:

- Russia continues to test the limits of NATO's air defenses over the Baltic Sea as Russia increases the frequency of its violations of NATO states' airspace.
- Russian forces continue to develop drone technologies to increase the volume and precision of strikes against the Ukrainian near rear to further complicate Ukrainian logistics.
- The Kremlin reportedly dismissed former Northern Group of Forces and Leningrad Military District (LMD) Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin from military service. The Kremlin is likely punishing Lapin now as part of its ongoing campaign to scapegoat and punish high ranking officials for their failure to repel Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Pokrovsk, and Velykomykhailivka.



NEWSWEEK: RUSSIA TEST FIRES HYPERSONIC MISSILE ON NATO'S ARCTIC DOORSTEP

On 14 September, Russia's Defense Ministry shared footage it said showed its forces test-firing an advanced hypersonic missile in the Barents Sea. Russia is carrying out large-scale military drills, dubbed Zapad 2025, which kicked off on 12 September. The exercises are split across Russia and key ally Belarus, as well as in the Baltic and Barents Seas.

Russia regularly holds military drills, but Zapad 2025 started just after nearly 20 Russian drones crossed over into NATO member Poland in what the country's Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, called a "test" for the alliance.

The Zircon missile, sometimes referred to as Tsirkon or SS-N-33, has been billed by Russia as able to travel up to 1,000 kilometers, around 620 miles, and reach speeds of Mach 9, which is nine times the speed of sound. It is "strategically valuable due primarily to its speed," according to the U.S. nonprofit, the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance. Ukrainian analysts said in February 2024 they had evidence Russia had used the missile in combat for the first time. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in early 2023 that the Zircon, among other missiles billed as the country's "next-generation" weapons, would "reliably protect Russia from potential external threats and will help ensure the national interests of our country."

DEFENSE NEWS: EUROPEAN-UKRAINIAN COOPERATION SPARKS NEXT-GEN COMBAT ROBOT

European defense company ARX Robotics has introduced its new combat robot, designed in cooperation with the Ukrainian Armed Forces and based on their specific recommendations to solve key operational challenges in battle. The Germany-based company launched its latest unmanned ground vehicle, the Combat Gereon, during the DSEI trade show here last week.

The system, which combines the existing Gereon RCS platform with AI-enabled autonomous functions, was displayed here armed with the LOKI remote weapon station from Slovenian company Valhalla Turrets.

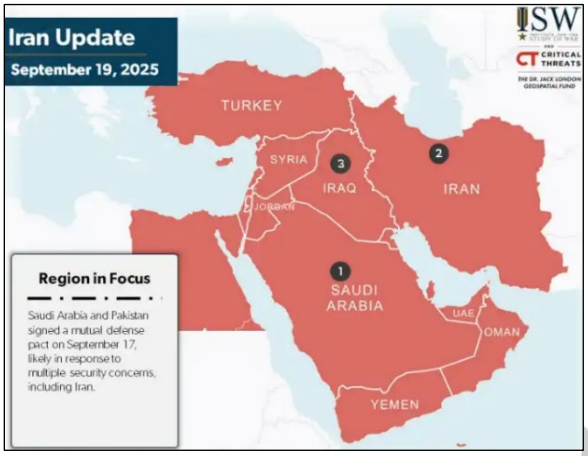
The use of combat robots across the battlefield in Ukraine has proliferated, with machines taking over tasks previously assigned to soldiers. While several European manufacturers already produce war robots, Wietfield said the main drawbacks of many of these platforms revolve around their size, cost and complexity. “The main weaknesses of many European combat UGVs are their large form factor and heavy weight, which prevent integration into front-line logistics – they are [also] often complex, expensive, and based on sensitive technology not designed for sustained battlefield use,” he said. He added that several of them require up to three operators, which can be an inefficient use of personnel, as many countries already face manpower shortages.

CENTCOM

ISW: CENTCOM UPDATE

Key Takeaways:

- Iran is attempting to prevent snapback sanctions by offering an interim deal that secures concessions upfront from the United States and the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) but avoids any meaningful commitments regarding its nuclear program and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) rejected a draft resolution on September 19 to permanently lift sanctions on Iran.
- Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a mutual defense pact on 17 September, likely in response to multiple security concerns, including Iran.



- The Iraqi federal government has reportedly suspended an agreement to import Turkmen gas due to U.S. pressure. The deal would have enabled Iran to manage the gas flow and receive 23 percent of the gas daily. Such an arrangement would have given Tehran additional revenue and leverage over Baghdad, depending on the specific terms of the deal.

NBC NEWS: SAUDI ARABIA SIGNS A MUTUAL DEFENSE PACT WITH NUCLEAR-ARMED PAKISTAN AFTER ISRAEL'S ATTACK ON QATAR

Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan have signed a mutual defense pact that defines any attack on either nation as an attack on both — a key accord in the wake of Israel's strike on Qatar last week. The kingdom has long had close economic, religious and security ties to Pakistan, including reportedly providing funding for Islamabad's nuclear weapons program as it developed. Analysts — and Pakistani diplomats in at least one case — have suggested over the years that Saudi Arabia could be included under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella, particularly as tensions have risen over Iran's atomic program.

"This agreement … aims to develop aspects of defense cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," the statement said. Zalmay Khalilzad, a former U.S. diplomat with long experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan, expressed concern over the deal, saying it comes in "dangerous times." "Pakistan has nuclear weapons and delivery systems that can hit targets across the Middle East, including Israel. It also is developing systems that can reach targets in the U.S.," Khalilzad wrote on X.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a defense relationship stretching back decades, in part due to Islamabad's willingness to defend the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina in the kingdom. Pakistani troops first traveled to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s over concerns about Egypt's war in Yemen at the time.

SOUTHCOM

CNN: VENEZUELA LAUNCHES MILITARY DRILLS AND DISPLAYS ITS RUSSIAN FIGHTER JETS

Venezuela has launched three days of military exercises and put on display its Russian-built fighter jets in a show of force aimed at the U.S. amid rising tensions over Washington's deployment of U.S. warships to the Caribbean. More than 2,500 soldiers have been mobilized on Venezuela's Caribbean island of La Orchila for the exercises, dubbed "Sovereign Caribbean 200," that will include air, sea and land maneuvers. Twelve naval ships of various classes and types, 22 aircraft and about 20 boats will take part, Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino said on the state-run channel VTV.

Separately, Venezuela has also been showcasing many of its Russian-made fighter jets equipped with anti-ship missiles. Padrino described the drills, which began on 17 September, as part of Venezuela's response to the deployment of the U.S. warships to the region.

The exercises come after Venezuela on 15 September released images of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets equipped with anti-ship missiles. Its air force posted a video on Instagram showing the aircraft, first on the ground, where the missiles can be seen hanging from the wings, and then in flight. According to the post, the jets are Russian Sukhoi Su-30 MK2 fighters from the 13th "Lions" Fighter Air Group, armed with Russian-made Kh-31 "Krypton" air-to-surface anti-ship missiles.

SPACECOM

REUTERS: RUSSIA DEVELOPING STARLINK RIVAL AT 'RAPID PACE,' SPACE CHIEF SAYS

Russia will soon have a rival to Elon Musk's satellite internet service Starlink, as it tries to shift away from outdated thinking that has allowed SpaceX to win the crown of satellite dominance, Russia's space chief said on 17 September. Starlink says it operates the world's largest satellite constellation with more than 8,000 satellites, and Musk is credited by Russian officials with revolutionizing the launch of space vehicles - to Russia's cost.

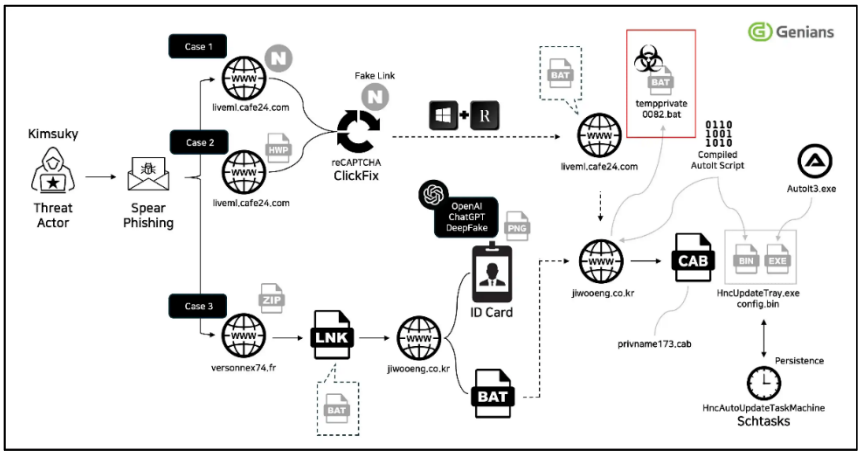
Dmitry Bakanov, the new 39-year-old head of Russia's Roscosmos space agency, admitted in an interview with Russian TV host Vladimir Solovyov that the space agency had to move away from "inertia" and attract more young talent. A Russian aerospace company, known as Bureau 1440, is developing a low Earth orbit satellite system for global broadband data delivery. Russia, Bakanov said, had learned from its mistakes - including from an episode in 2002 when it dismissed Musk's attempt in Moscow to buy an intercontinental ballistic missile for space launches. According to Ashlee Vance's 2015 biography of Musk, the Russians dismissed Musk in 2002 as if he was simply not credible - spurring Musk to find a way to undercut Russia's space launch fees.

The Soviet Union spooked the West in the early years of the space race by being first to launch a satellite to orbit the Earth - Sputnik 1, in 1957 - and then Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to travel into space in 1961. But after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's space program grappled with massive funding shortages, corruption and complaints from young engineers about poor management. Russia's ambitions to lead in space exploration suffered a massive blow in August 2023 when its uncrewed Luna-25 mission smashed into the surface of the moon while attempting to land. Bakanov is the former head of a company called Gonets, which operates a Russian satellite communications system that is much smaller in size and used mainly for government purposes.

CYBERCOM

CYBER SECURITY NEWS: HACKERS USING GENERATIVE AI 'CHATGPT' TO EVADE ANTI-VIRUS DEFENSES

In mid-July 2025, a novel campaign emerged in which cybercriminals weaponized generative AI to fabricate deepfake images of government IDs, embedding them within spear-phishing messages that bypassed traditional antivirus safeguards. These emails impersonated military and security institutions, complete with convincing visual assets generated by ChatGPT. Recipients were urged to review "draft" ID cards, triggering the download of malicious archives that executed obfuscated scripts. The sophistication of this operation underscores a troubling evolution in adversary tactics, blending artificial intelligence with legacy evasion techniques to infiltrate sensitive networks.



The threat actor, attributed to the Kimsuky group delivered a multi-stage payload from South Korean C2 servers. Despite its reliance on advanced AI heuristics, the campaign still hinged on classic persistence and obfuscation strategies. Victims' machines registered scheduled tasks under the guise of legitimate software updates, ensuring the payload ran at regular intervals. The combined use of generative-AI assets and automated scripting created a hybrid threat that challenges conventional antivirus products. Security teams must therefore augment their defenses with behavioral analysis and endpoint detection and response (EDR) solutions capable of monitoring script activity and scheduled-task creation in real time. This layered approach to infection and persistence illustrates a new level of adversary innovation, integrating generative AI with traditional malware delivery pipelines.

THE HACKER NEWS: CHINESE TA415 USES VS CODE REMOTE TUNNELS TO SPY ON U.S. ECONOMIC POLICY EXPERTS

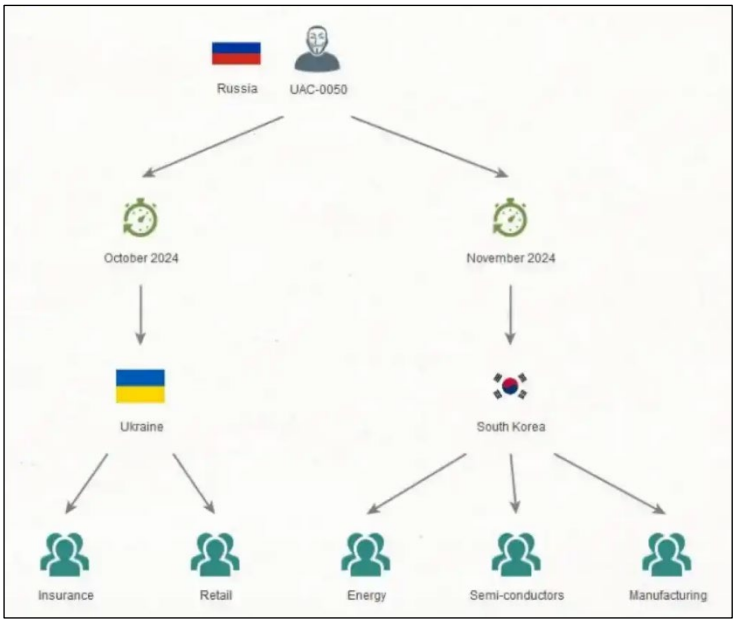
A China-aligned threat actor known as TA415 has been attributed to spear-phishing campaigns targeting the U.S. government, think tanks, and academic organizations utilizing U.S.-China economic-themed lures.

"In this activity, the group masqueraded as the current Chair of the Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as the U.S.-China Business Council, to target a range of individuals and organizations predominantly focused on U.S.-China relations, trade, and economic policy," Proofpoint said in an analysis.

The enterprise security company said the activity, observed throughout July and August 2025, is likely an effort on part of Chinese state-sponsored threat actors to facilitate intelligence gathering amid ongoing U.S.-China trade talks, adding the hacking group shares overlaps with a threat cluster tracked broadly under the names APT41 and Brass Typhoon (formerly Barium).

The findings come days after the U.S. House Select Committee on China issued an advisory warning of an "ongoing" series of highly targeted cyber espionage campaigns linked to Chinese threat actors, including a campaign that impersonated the Republican Party Congressman John Robert Moolenaar in phishing emails designed to deliver data-stealing malware. The campaign, per Proofpoint, mainly focused on individuals who specialized in international trade, economic policy, and U.S.-China relations, sending them emails spoofing the U.S.-China Business Council that invited them to a supposed closed-door briefing on U.S.-Taiwan and U.S.-China affairs.

CYBER SECURITY NEWS: PRO-RUSSIAN HACKERS ATTACKING KEY INDUSTRIES IN MAJOR COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD



A sophisticated pro-Russian cybercriminal group known as SectorJ149 (also identified as UAC-0050) has emerged as a significant threat to critical infrastructure worldwide, conducting targeted attacks against manufacturing, energy, and semiconductor companies across multiple nations. The group's activities represent a strategic shift from traditional financially motivated cybercrime to geopolitically driven operations that align with broader Russian state interests during the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. The threat actor has demonstrated remarkable adaptability by purchasing customized malware from dark web marketplaces and black markets, integrating these tools into comprehensive attack campaigns that span continents.

Recent investigations reveal that SectorJ149 has successfully infiltrated organizations in South Korea, Ukraine, and other strategic allies, focusing particularly on companies involved in secondary battery production, semiconductor manufacturing, and critical energy infrastructure. NSHC ThreatRecon Team analysts identified the group's sophisticated methodology through correlation analysis of multiple attack campaigns, revealing consistent tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) across different geographical targets.

This evolution reflects the increasingly blurred lines between state-sponsored operations and cybercriminal enterprises, particularly during periods of heightened geopolitical tension. The attacks have successfully compromised sensitive industrial data, intellectual property, and operational capabilities across targeted sectors. Initial evidence suggests that SectorJ149's activities may be part of a broader Russian strategy to undermine allied nations' industrial capabilities while gathering intelligence on critical technologies and infrastructure. The timing and target selection demonstrate sophisticated intelligence gathering and strategic planning capabilities that exceed typical cybercriminal operations. The infrastructure supporting these operations leverages legitimate cloud services and open-source platforms, making detection and attribution challenging for security teams.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

AFMC A2: World Threat Brief CAO: 10 June 2025
https://usaf.dps.mil/sites/22244/SitePages/Command-Intel-Threat-Brief.aspx

China Aerospace Studies Institute: CASI supports the Secretary of the Air Force, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other senior leaders of the Air and Space Forces. CASI provides expert research and analysis supporting decision and policy makers in the Department of Defense and across the U.S. government.
https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/

Research and Development Corporation (RAND): RAND is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that provides leaders with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions.
https://www.rand.org/

Institute for the Study of War: The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization. ISW advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education.
https://www.understandingwar.org/

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
https://www.sipri.org/

Strategic Forecasting Inc. (VIA AF PORTAL): Strategic Forecasting Inc., commonly known as Stratfor, is an American strategic intelligence publishing company founded in 1996. Stratfor's business model is to provide individual and enterprise subscriptions to Stratfor Worldview, its online publication, and to perform intelligence gathering for corporate clients.
https://worldview.stratfor.com/

Defense Intelligence Agency Military Power Publications: an intelligence agency and combat support agency of the United States Department of Defense, specializing in defense and military intelligence.
https://www.dia.mil/Military-Power-Publications/

Perun: An Australian covering the military industrial complex and national military investment strategy.
https://www.youtube.com/@PerunAU

Task & Purpose: Task & Purpose was founded in 2014 with a mission to inform, engage, entertain, and stand up for active-duty military members, veterans, and their families. The site quickly became one of the most trusted news and investigative journalism sources for the military, with its journalists reporting everywhere from the Pentagon to The White House and beyond.
https://www.youtube.com/@Taskandpurpose

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges.
https://www.csis.org/

FRONTLINE examines the rise of Xi Jinping, his vision for China and the global implications. Correspondent Martin Smith traces the defining moments for President Xi, how he's exercising power and his impact on China, and relations with the U.S. and the world.
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/china-the-u-s-the-rise-of-xi-jinping/