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SITUATION REPORTS

AFRICA

EGYPT: Arrests Activist

On 31 March, Bassem Youssef, a satirical writer with a TV programme, turned himself in following a warrant for his arrest. Youssef's arrest warrant was issued following at least four legal complaints of unknown nature filed against him. His arrest follows violent protests in both Cairo and Alexandria on the same day.

EAST ASIA

CHINA: Moves Troops to North Korean Border

Ground troops have been moving toward the North Korean border through several cities in North China's Shenyang Military Region, including Chang Chang, Ji'an, Jilin, Dandong, and along the Yalu River. In addition, fighter aircraft have been active over these areas, while also supporting combined arms exercises in the West Sea off Korea's west coast.

CHINA: Receives Peruvian President

On 3 April, Peruvian President Ollanta Humala began a weeklong visit to Beijing. Humala aims to attract Beijing's interest for trade and diversification projects. Humala is also expected to sign several agreements, including technological and agricultural exchanges, before participating in a business forum.

INDONESIA: Restricts Press

On 2 April, new press rules relating to press privileges when covering legislative events went into effect. The new rules include a requirement to have written and verbal permission to interview, permission to place cameras, and a control on where reporters can eat. House Deputy Speaker Pramono Anung stated that the new rules will not affect legitimate reporters negatively and aims to restrict reporters not affiliated with a media outlet.

TAIWAN: Enhances Coast Guard

On 30 March, President Ma Ying-jeou presided over the commissioning of two new Coast Guard Administration (CGA) ships. One is a 1000 ton patrol vessel and the other a

2000 ton frigate, and both are part of a ten year plan to expand the CGA to protect and enforce Taiwanese maritime laws. The commissioning also included comments on the CGA response to the Tiaoyutai Islands, also called the Senkaku by Japan and Diaoyu Chi by China. Taiwan also claims the Islands, although it has not challenged Japan's claims directly on the high seas.

MIDDLE EAST

ISRAEL: Marks Land Day

On 30 March, Israel was subject to multiple marches marking Land Day, which primarily consisted of Palestinian protestors. Some of these marches were dispersed by Israeli security forces. Land Day marks the death of six Palestinians at the hands of Israel in 1976, who are considered martyrs. The protests also enable the Palestinians to protest unilateral land takings by Israel in long-settled Palestinian areas.

SOUTH AMERICA

COLOMBIA: Peace Talks Delayed

On 1 April, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced plans to delay meetings with Bogotá in order to analyze the government's proposed plans. The talks will be delayed until 18 April, and bears no promise that the plans will be accepted by the FARC. Diplomatic Team Member Ricardo Tellez also called upon the government not to bring politics into the negotiations.

PARAGUAY: Remains Silent

As of 1 April, Asunción has made no comment on accusations made by the United Nations Human Rights Council regarding the eviction of natives and farmers. The Human Rights Council also accused Asunción of sanctioning torture and murder on 28 March. The abuses follow the coup which removed former President Fernando Lugo.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

NEPAL: Protests Interim Government

On 3 April, members of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal seized about 35 acres of land from Interim Election Council Chairman Knil Raj Regmi in protest of his policy

regarding elections and polls. The party, along with several others, claim that Regmi was the incorrect choice for interim head, and should resign immediately. Regmi has made no specific comment, instead insisting that participation in the upcoming elections will solve everything.

BRIEFS

AFRICA

GHANA: Chinese Presence Increased

Summary: Ghana seeks to increase Chinese presence in order to further develop the country, possibly leading to increased difficulty of maintaining a U.S. military presence.

Development: On 4 April, President John Dramani met with a Chinese delegation to reaffirm Ghana's commitment to strengthening relations with China. Despite conflicts and increased tension with local Chinese due to illegal mining, President Dramani says it has not affected Ghana's relationship with China and that China is planning on making Ghana the shipping, financial, and trade center of Africa.

Analysis: The relationship between Ghana and China will likely continue to improve in light of their cooperation. China has invested in Ghana's national airlines and has partnered with the government to finance and build the Bui Hydroelectric Dam. It is also looking to develop telecommunications, mining and other infrastructure projects. The recent meeting with the Chinese delegation will ensure China's influence in Ghana. China's primary presence in Africa is economical in nature, while the US has a much more military focus. With Ghana allowing an increased Chinese presence in the country, China's economic influence will grow and possibly make AFRICOM operations in Ghana and surrounding countries, more challenging.
[Cody Jackson]

MOROCCO: Increases Border Security to Stop Terrorists

Summary: The US-Moroccan relationship continues to play an important role as Morocco is attempting to prevent terrorists escaping Mali and Algeria from entering Morocco by increasing the level of security of its borders.

Development: On 26 March, it was reported that Morocco was increasing its border security. Additional security and troops have been deployed to Morocco's border with Algeria because of the potential effects of the African and French military intervention in Mali. Morocco is preparing and protecting its borders in case Al Qaida fighters or Salafist groups attempt to flee from Mali and Algeria into Morocco. Sources have reported that

hundreds of Al Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) fighters have been moving from Mali into Algeria and possibly into Morocco.

Analysis: Morocco is trying to increase the level of security on its borders because it sees a possible threat of terrorist fighters escaping from Mali and Algeria. This act of defense shows that Morocco does not want Al Qaida or Salafist fighters entering the country, where they can join with Morocco's own fledgling Islamist movement. The increase in security of the borders may or may not keep the fighters out, but this act shows Morocco's stance on terrorism. The US-Moroccan relationship continues to be important, especially when the countries surrounding Morocco are facing serious terrorist problems. The US will likely continue to support Morocco's actions against terrorism, and possibly advise or assist Morocco in this fight.
[Victoria Laugalis]

EAST ASIA

CHINA: Influence Expanding into African Countries

Summary: The rise of Chinese influence in Africa is likely to draw greater US attention to current relations with the region.

Development: China has been investing in the economies of African countries with the hopes of accelerating industrialization. China's trade with Africa has swelled over the past decade, becoming its largest trading partner in 2009. China has focused largely on connectivity between the African Nations with new rail systems. President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni said "in my eyes, all the major railways in Africa, notably the railway from Tanzania to Zambia, were built by China, and this reflects the specialty of China-Africa ties". Liu Guijin, China's former special envoy for African affairs, said that Africans had very little knowledge of China and that what they did know was biased because of Western media. Liu added that the expansion of Chinese media in Africa, including the launch of China Daily's African edition, is helping to change the situation.

Analysis: China's interest in Africa is likely not focused on aid and charity. It is more likely that China is trying to secure resources and trading partners for the future. China is replacing the U.S. as the main trading partner in the region. This hurts the U.S. image and prestige. This could also lead to African nations turning to China in diplomatic and economic matters, including trade and fossil fuel agreements. The US will likely try to improve relations with African nations to combat a growing Chinese sphere of influence. Given the groundwork China has already established, it is likely to be a more difficult task than previously believed.
[Phil Hartman]

PHILIPPINES: Credit Rating Improved

Summary: A recent upgrade in the Philippines credit rating could lead to less economic reliance from the U.S.

Development: On 27 March, Fitch Ratings raised the Philippines' credit rating from BB (speculative grade) to BBB (investment grade). The upgrade to investment grade status allows investors to expect a low to moderate risk compared to speculative grade, which assumes that a default has already occurred or there is a high level credit risk. The move is an economic win for the Philippines and is expected to bolster investment in the nation's economy. The improvement in credit rating is expected to reduce the country's borrowing costs and widen Manila's base of potential investors. Standard & Poor's credit rating agency is also expected to award the Philippines investment grade status contingent on revenue improvements and continued growth. In December, Standard & Poor raised its outlook for the Philippines from stable to positive. Last year, the Philippines was the fastest growing economy in Asia after China and is expected to maintain its economic growth.

Analysis: Continued economic growth in the Philippines could see a decrease in U.S. aid as a stronger Southeastern Asian nation rises to contain Chinese aggressive moves in the South China Sea. The United States Foreign Military Fund (FMF) currently allocates 35% of its Southeastern Asian funding to the Philippines. The FMF is largely in response to Chinese aggression. A stronger Philippine economy would likely require less U.S. military assistance. If the economic growth is handled improperly, the vast areas of grinding poverty would likely remain unchanged while a small wealthy urban class develops. This could cause further conflict in poverty stricken areas like Mindanao. [Gianna Punzalan]

JAPAN: Debt Levels Unsustainable

Summary: Growing concern over the country's increasing debt level and the possibility of a severe decline in Japan's economy will affect defense spending and could lead to a higher reliance on the US for the defense of the island nation.

Development: On 28 March, the Bank of Japan's new governor Haruhiko Kuroda expressed concern over the increasing debt level in Japan following the government's aggressive stimulus measures. Mr. Kuroda noted how future stimulus packages could contribute to a greater degree of debt threatening the confidence in Japan's financial markets. The Japanese government has called on the banks to execute aggressive monetary easing by doubling the inflation target to two percent. Japan's public debt is about 230 percent of the gross domestic product.

Analysis: Earlier this year Japan approved a USD116 billion economic stimulus package, which has had very little success. Regardless of the success of the package, the Japanese debt will likely suffer as a result. Despite Japan's recent increase in defense spending, it

remains heavily dependent on US military forces for defense. Drawing a higher budget for defense could further cripple Japan's economy leading to a higher dependence on the US military.

[Chris Lelah]

MIDDLE EAST

IRAN: Approach of Elections Adds to Tensions

Summary: Potential presidential candidate Hooshang Amirahmadi may support a bilateral relationship with the US, at a time when increasing tensions from both internal and external sources threaten an already delicate situation between Iran and the P5+1.

Development: On 1 April, the Iranian government confirmed that an already double-digit inflation rate in the country has risen again for the sixth month in a row. There are concerns that the official rate may be an underestimate. This allows the government to avoid additional criticism of its current economic policies. In addition to the economic pressure, Iran is undergoing severe factional conflict, much of which is related to the upcoming presidential elections on 14 June. Hooshang Amirahmadi, a Western-educated professor, has declared his candidacy for the position of president, and begun campaigning.

Analysis: Regardless of Ayatollah Khamenei's intent with the ongoing nuclear program, Iran is facing growing tension, both internally and externally. The fact that the fragile situation between Iran and the West is being further threatened by the looming specter of presidential elections makes the coming months that much more critical. Amirahmadi has several ideas regarding reforms for the nation, which may be interpreted as pro-Western by the Ayatollah, who has the power to deny his candidacy. In particular, Amirahmadi wishes to see closer relations with the West, and has no interest in nuclear weaponry. His election as president of Iran could be a step in the right direction toward reestablishing diplomatic ties with Iran. However, Amirahmadi's candidacy is not at all certain. He previously announced his candidacy in the 2005 elections, but was blocked by the Guardian Council due to his dual citizenship with the US. It is possible that the Ayatollah will interpret his popularity and candidacy as another example of the West meddling in Iranian internal affairs.

[Kyle Parent]

SOUTH AMERICA

BRAZIL: Prison Gang Building Trans-national Drug Organization

Summary: The new drug trafficking organization's capacity to link with established narcotics networks locally and in Bolivia and other Central American nations, highlights the weaknesses of Brazilian law enforcement and raises security questions for upcoming international sports events.

Development: On 15 March, the Brazilian prison gang, First Capital Command (PCC), was identified as the directing organization for an international drug organization when Bolivian Special Anti-Narcotics Police (FELCN) arrested 15 drug traffickers in Santa Cruz. Officials identified suspects from the PCC, and representatives from Brazilian, Columbian, Paraguayan, and other Bolivian criminal gangs. Brazil suspects nearly 3,000 Colombian drug traffickers operate in the same geographical region as the PCC. The PCC tasked the Colombians and Bolivians to collect imported raw ingredients for processing coca into cocaine. The processed cocaine was then transported through Paraguay into Brazil. Reports state that the PCC established a presence in Bolivia approximately two years ago, giving the gang ample opportunity to establish domestic and international drug trafficking connections. Police also found indications of a PCC operation in San German, a city on the border between Brazil and Paraguay.

Analysis: Brazil recently reinforced government control in order to clean up the state of Sao Paulo, pushing the PCC to extend its territory into Bolivia and Paraguay. Now that Bolivia is working with Brazil to extinguish the PCC, the gang will likely be pushed to further expand into other countries, such as Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru. Since the PCC has already made a connection with Colombian drug traffickers, there is a possibility that the PCC could be working with the FARC or the BACRIM. With Brazil increasing pressure upon domestic drug trafficking, the PCC could expand its influence into the Northern Hemisphere countries, such as Mexico and the US. If the PCC spreads north with the help of the FARC, the United States could face an increasing drug-trafficking threat. It is possible that the South and Central American nations would be more receptive to US counter-narcotics support in light of the PCC's expansion.

[Kameron Saranto-Mercado]

SOUTH ASIA

INDIA: Building Futuristic Naval Base to Counter China

Summary: India is building a new naval base to house its nuclear submarines and to oversee maritime security in the Malacca Straits.

Development: On 26 March, the Indian government announced that its new naval base, which has been under construction for over a year in the Bay of Bengal's Andaman Islands, is of strategic importance to counter China's aggressive military expansion. The futuristic base will have bunkers to protect its submarines from an aerial attack and prevent satellites from spying on it. The base is part of a larger naval infrastructure that includes three forward operating bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, island chains that dominate the western exit of the Straits of Malacca. The Indian Navy has operated patrol vessels out of Port Blair since well back in the British Period and in recent decades has added naval patrol aircraft from its airbase at Port Blair.

Analysis: India's naval force posture will most likely play a major role as a deterrent in the region as China's military continues to expand. India has announced a fifteen percent increase in its naval manpower and is preparing to commission the INS Vikramaditya, the large, newly refurbished aircraft carrier (ex-Admiral Gorshkov) purchased from Russia. The new bases in the Andamans and Nicobars could increase tensions with China because 80 percent of its oil passes through the Malacca Straits. Senior Indian naval officers have also been discussing extending Indian naval coverage to joint Indian-Vietnamese oil exploration projects in the South China Sea. Naval exercises between India and the US could again be a possibility. Joint exercises could strengthen relations between India and the US. Stronger US-India relations could strengthen maritime security.

[Rodolfo Ayala]

PAKISTAN: Caretaker Government Preparing for Elections

Summary: Pakistani caretaker government officials met to discuss the upcoming elections, with a particular emphasis on ensuring transparency and security in the polling process and the transfer of power.

Development: On 29 March, caretaker officials met with the temporary prime minister, retired Justice Mir Hazar Khan Khoso, to discuss provincial security issues leading up to the election. Keeping order in Pakistan until the permanent government comes into power is currently one of the top priorities for interim officials. If the caretaker government is successful, the general elections on 11 May will mark the first time in Pakistan's history that an elected National Assembly has completed its five year tenure and led to the election of a subsequent Assembly. On 26 March, the US State Department stated "we have no favorites among Pakistani politicians and we are looking forward to work with whoever is elected." Secretary of State Kerry also recently canceled a trip to Islamabad in order to "fully respect...the on-going process."

Analysis: The biggest priority for the US is likely creating a steady appearance of impartiality in Pakistan's elections. As there is already a general perception of overbearing US influence on domestic policy in Pakistan, the US State Department may also have to take additional steps to show the nation's citizens that it will remain

uninvolved in election proceedings. Furthermore, due to a number of anti-American and militant-leaning candidates running for office, it will be very important for the US to firmly show its support for fair and transparent elections, regardless of the winner.

[Derek Rousseau]

ARTICLES

IRAN: Elections May Open Window for US-Iran Cooperation

Summary: As the presidential elections approach, the contest for power and political influence is heating up. The Ayatollah and the President continue to clash, and a new candidate interested in aggressive reforms begins campaigning, offering a chance for improved relations with the West and a resolution to the conflict over the Iranian nuclear program.

Development: Amid tensions between Iran and the Western powers, an internal struggle for power has emerged, which could potentially threaten any beneficial negotiations with the P5+1. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has confirmed that fair elections will be held on 14 June this year, despite evidence to the contrary. Currently, a large rift is growing between current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Ayatollah. Ahmadinejad, who faces future marginalization, is pushing to get his associate Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei into the presidential office, essentially to protect his political faction and its economic interests. Elections in Iran are seen as anything but open or fair. When President Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, the voter turnout was remarkably low, worrying some that Ahmadinejad may not have been the candidate the Iranian people wanted. In 2009, when Ahmadinejad was re-elected, many accused the government of rigging the elections. At the time, the Ayatollah backed the result to avoid hurting confidence in the government. A number of prominent critics, including candidates who were said to have failed, were summarily sentenced to house arrest.

In addition to the struggle between the Ayatollah and President Ahmadinejad, new candidates for the position are beginning to emerge. In particular, Hooshang Amirahmadi, a professor who submitted his candidacy for president in 2005 but was blocked by the Guardian Council, has been campaigning both in Iran and abroad for support in his bid for the presidency. He was educated in the US, and supports strong reforms within the nation. He has been called a Western stooge by some opponents, but there is a strong sense of Iranian identity in his calls for change. The charge thrown by his opponents, and the official reason for his disqualification in 2005, is that he has both Iranian and American citizenship. Between that and his radical views on reform, his chance of securing candidacy is not strong, particularly if the election comes down to a decision by the Ayatollah. Some of Amirahmadi's reformist views include closer cooperation with the US, the dismantling of any nuclear weapons program, and free speech.

Analysis: The upcoming election, regardless of the result, will mark an important milestone in US-Iranian relations. The possibility of a leader willing to cooperate with the West is there, as well as the possibility of a blow to the Ayatollah's stiff leadership of the nation. If Amirahmadi were to be elected, the potential for a normalization of relations with Iran will be much greater than any chance Ahmadinejad's presidency presented. Ultimately, the decision will eventually fall to the Ayatollah and the Guardian Council to decide whether or not to include Amirahmadi on the presidential ballot. It is entirely possible that the Guardian Council will decide that Amirahmadi's views are too radical for the office, and will deny his candidacy because of his citizenship. It is still unclear how the citizenry of Iran will respond to Amirahmadi's candidacy, or enforced non-candidacy, be that as it may. It is possible that the population will lose confidence in the Ayatollah's leadership if he chooses to deny Amirahmadi's candidacy. Of course, it is also possible that Amirahmadi is playing a longer game, one that establishes a popular base for a time when the religious establishment is pushed aside.

Many policy analysts looking at Iran are also pointing out that current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is also going to be a force that merits focus. His current political situation is deteriorating, as he has alienated most of his allies and supporters. He has taken steps to try to integrate himself into the political system, and is attempting to secure his ally Mashaei as the new president. It would be inconsistent with his policies and political maneuvers for him to accept a position of decreased importance. Though he probably lacks the political capital to secure the election of his associate or the public support to question the validity of the upcoming elections, it is certain that Ahmadinejad will attempt to find a place of influence for himself in the new administration.

[Kyle Parent]

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