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## **SITUATION REPORTS**

### **EGYPT: Population Growth Sparks Push for Contraceptives**

On 1 October, Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity, Ghada Wali, responded to the rapidly increasing population indicated by the most recent census by promoting birth control programs in Northern Egypt. Between 2006 and 2017, the population has grown by 2.56 percent, straining Egyptian resources and job availability. Birth control is not supported by many Egyptians as Muslim conservatives disapprove of contraceptives and rural families often rely on their children as additional sources of income.

[Caitlyn Aaron, caitlyn.aaron.ee@gmail.com]

### **HONG KONG: Protests Break Out During National Day**

The National Day of the People's Republic of China (PRC) occurred from 1 October to 3 October. The year 2017 marks the three-year anniversary since the Umbrella Movement in 2014. Pro-democratic leaders Joshua Wong, Nathan Law and Alex Chow, were arrested in September, sparking protests on 1 October. The protesters call for democracy and independence in Hong Kong and are estimated to be around 4,300 strong. Hong Kong's PRC representative, Wang Zhimin, called for "zero tolerance" regarding the Umbrella Movement. In addition, the PRC recently passed a ban on insulting its national anthem.

[Ben Robinson]

### **IRAQ: IS Releases Audio of Leader**

On 28 September, audio was released that is believed to be the voice of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State (IS). The speech was released following 11 months of silence from Baghdadi in which there were rumors of his death. The recording calls for jihadi attacks worldwide and for the perseverance of IS fighters in the Middle East.

[Blake Kaufman]

### **KYRGYZSTAN: Competitive Presidential Election Enters Final Weeks**

Kyrgyzstan's presidential candidates are intensifying their efforts ahead of the 15 October election. Kyrgyzstan is set to peacefully transfer the office of the presidency, a rare event in largely authoritarian Central Asia. The two frontrunners in the election are Sooronbai Jeenbekov and Omurbek Babanov. Jeenbekov is affiliated with the outgoing president's party. He is opposed by Babanov, a former oil trader whose campaign includes the promise of reforms. Both are currently engaged in smear campaigns against one another as the race enters its final weeks. Polling is deemed unreliable at this time.

[Gianna Geiger]

### [SPAIN: FC Barcelona Joins Referendum Protests](#)

Football Club (FC) Barcelona, a well-known soccer team and cultural symbol of Catalonia, will join a region wide strike over recent events. FC Barcelona openly backs the Catalonia Independence Referendum and protests the actions the Spanish government took on 1 October that injured around 900 in an effort to stop the independence vote. The club also played their most recent home game behind closed doors as a form of protest. Training for all of FC Barcelona's teams was cancelled on 3 October and the club's administrative offices were closed. [Zach Coffee, zachary.coffee.ee@gmail.com]

### [SYRIA: Terrorists Attack Damascus Police Station](#)

On 2 October, upwards of 10 people were killed in a terrorist attack in Damascus. The assault began when a car bomb was detonated near the police station. Four militants then entered the station where two of the attackers detonated explosive belts. There have been several similar attacks in Damascus, the most recent occurring in July. This attack has yet to be claimed by any groups. [Cassie Hettmansperger]

## [BRIEFS](#)

### [CHINA: Xi Tightens Control as Senior Official is Removed](#)

**Summary:** The CCP expelled a senior official just prior to the Party Congress, indicating that President Xi is working to ensure the continuation of his hold over the CCP.

**Development:** On 29 September the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) expelled senior official and former administrator of the megacity Chongqing, Sun Zhengcai, on accusations of corruption and abuse of power. Sun was removed from his duties in Chongqing in July as the corruption investigation began. After Sun's removal, Chinese President Xi Jinping installed a protégé, Chen Min'er, as Sun's replacement. Sun's removal mirrors the 2012 removal of Bo Xilai, another former head administrator for Chongqing, who currently is serving a life sentence for a similar charge of alleged corruption. Sun's removal comes before the 19th National Congress of the CCP on 18 October, a crucial leadership event for Chinese officials.

**Analysis:** Sun, a member of the governing Politburo, was a strong contender for promotion to the Standing Committee, the CCP's top decision-making body, and was even considered a possible successor to President Xi. Sun's expulsion prior to a pivotal party congress likely illustrates Xi's aspiration to solidify his political authority and power. Xi, who is considered one of China's most powerful leaders since Mao, will most likely use the National Congress as a chance to remove opposition by promoting allies into senior positions. Xi's ambitions for China require loyal allies in the Politburo and Standing Committee to ensure the desired results. Sun's abrupt dismissal may be an attempt to block a political successor from rising, boosting Xi's

chances of remaining in office after the end of his second term. Expelling Sun before a major political event may also serve as a warning to other challengers to Xi's authority.  
[Cade Seely]

### **CUBA: Rise in Tensions Upon Diplomatic Expulsion**

**Summary:** Cuban diplomats were expelled from the US as tensions continue to rise over the unexplained illnesses affecting US embassy staff in Cuba.

**Development:** On 3 October, the Trump administration ordered 15 Cuban diplomats to be expelled. A week prior, the administration ordered over half of the U.S. Embassy staff and family members to depart from Cuba. The moves were made in response to the unresolved investigation examining the mysteriously deteriorating health experienced by 22 American diplomats in Cuba. Unusual attacks upon Americans left individuals with hearing loss, dizziness, fatigue, tinnitus, headaches, and cognitive problems and the source of the issue remains unidentified.

**Analysis:** The progression of the mysterious events taking place in the recent months has placed tension on the developing relations between the US and Cuba, which were only restored in 2015. The Cuban government perceived the expulsion of diplomats as an unjustified decision and accused the US of insufficient cooperation in the investigation to the attacks and for politicizing the issue. The US, however, has claimed that the Cuban government failed to uphold the obligations under the Vienna Convention for the protection and integrity of diplomats. Although Cuba showed initiative on resolving the investigation in September by proposing a meeting between the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs and US Secretary of State Tillerson, insufficient progress has been made in the eyes of the US. The Trump administration attempted to reassure the Cuban government that the expulsion was a reciprocal action and not retaliation. However, for relations to stabilize greater efforts by Cuba will likely be needed, in addition to increased cooperation by the US.

[Athena Bowman, athena.bowman.ee@gmail.com]

### **ETHIOPIA: Annual Festival Reignites Anti-Government Protests**

**Summary:** The 2017 Ireecha festival began with protests, placing pressure on the Ethiopian government to prevent a repeat of the tragedy at the 2016 festival.

**Development:** 1 October marked the start of the weeklong Irreecha festival celebrated by the Oromos, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. This annual festival has traditionally been celebrated as a time to give thanks and pray for prosperity and abundance in the upcoming harvest. During Ireecha in 2016, protests erupted and activists began shouting anti-government slogans, prompting the police to release tear gas into the crowd. These actions caused a stampede, killing at least 50 people. Violence ensued over the following months, leaving over 940 people dead before Ethiopia declared a state of emergency. The Human Rights Watch has urged the

Ethiopian government to act with restraint at this year's festival as unrest still exists among the Oromos.

**Analysis:** In the last few years Irreecha has become a platform to protest the government. The bloodshed that occurred during the 2016 festival increased tensions between the Oromos and the Ethiopian government, and the memory of last year's tragedy could both fuel the Oromo's anger and incite fears of repeated violence. Protests started on 1 October and will likely persist throughout the festival. International rights groups and political viewers have been pressuring the Ethiopian government to keep the peace at the festival. If the government presence is less antagonistic, and guards are unarmed, then the protests will likely continue peacefully. However, as long as the Oromos feel threatened and ignored by the government they will continue to protest, increasing the possibility of the festival turning violent.  
[Cassie Hettmansperger]

### **GREAT BRITAIN: Monarch Airlines Collapses**

**Summary:** Monarch Airlines collapsed, leaving 110,000 people stranded, and opening opportunities for further critique of Brexit.

**Development:** On 2 October Monarch Airlines, Britain's fifth largest airline, failed to renew its Air Travel Organizer License and ceased operations, leaving 110,000 people stranded in foreign countries. Monarch was forced to cancel all 300,000 outstanding reservations. The British government has ordered the country's largest ever peacetime repatriation to bring 110,000 people home who are now stranded at their destinations. Monarch executives blamed the reduced value of the pound following the Brexit vote and concerns over terrorism that may have scared passengers away from the airline's most popular destinations such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey.

**Analysis:** Monarch Airlines' collapse is representative of multiple criticisms of the British government, post-Brexit. Monarch was obliged to pay their fuel costs and aircraft leases in dollars, which became much more difficult after Brexit significantly devalued the pound. Many are also critical of the fact that the government did not step in and loan money to Monarch. A similar incident occurred in Germany with Air Berlin, except the German government issued a loan to keep the airline afloat. The increase in terrorism may also have stopped people from traveling to Monarch's most profitable destinations. In all, the events leading to Monarch's collapse will likely give Brexit opponents further motivation and reason to oppose the current path the government is taking.  
[Zach Coffee, zachary.coffee.ee@gmail.com]

### **INDIA: President Visits Africa on First Foreign Trip**

**Summary:** President Kovind's visit to East Africa marks the first trip abroad by the newly elected president and may mark a shift in India's foreign policy toward an African economic and political focus.

**Development:** Indian President Ram Nath Kovind's first trip abroad will consist of a two-leg trip to Djibouti and Ethiopia beginning 3 October. President Kovind's visit to Djibouti is the first by an Indian head of state since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1969. The visit follows reports on 26 September of plans by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to construct a multipurpose wharf capable of docking a four-ship flotilla at their Djibouti military base.

**Analysis:** Indian investment and presence in Africa has received increased priority in recent months after India's launch of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with Japan in May. The choice of Africa as the destination for the Indian president's first foreign trip appears to demonstrate India's commitment to the AAGC as a serious alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative and as India moves to expand its influence into eastern Africa. Additionally, President Kovind's trip presents an opportunity to strengthen ties between Africa and the AAGC, ties which are likely to become increasingly important for maintaining an Indian presence in the Indian Ocean to offset the ongoing expansion of the PLAN. While the likelihood of provocative naval actions in South Asian waters is unlikely, increased Chinese naval posturing in the region threatens the Indian Navy's ability to project power and defend India's economic interests. As China continues to develop its East African influence and expand its Indian Ocean naval presence, India will likely continue to advance its AAGC program and pursue additional defense and political ties with eastern African nations.

[Jake Delinger, jake.delinger.ee@gmail.com]

### **IRAN: Influence Set to Increase Despite Qatar Boycott**

**Summary:** The Iranian foreign minister visited Qatar amid growing Iranian influence and rising tensions among Gulf states, likely providing further justification for Qatar's economic isolation.

**Development:** Iranian Foreign Minister (FM) Mohammad Javad Zarif traveled to Qatar on 3 October to discuss how relations between the two countries have caused retaliation from other Arab nations. On 4 June, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates imposed a boycott on Qatar for allegedly supporting international terrorism and increasing ties with Iran. Iranian FM Zarif first travelled to Oman on 2 October to discuss regional conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen as well as politics among the Gulf nations. Oman has maintained relations with Qatar despite the boycott and has traditionally had a closer relationship with Iran as opposed to its neighbors on the Arabian Peninsula.

**Analysis:** Doha reports that the boycott has caused Qatar to draw closer to Iran while the Arab states show no signs of alleviating the pressure. While the objectives for the boycott were originally to lessen Iranian influence in the Arabian Peninsula, it has forced Qatar to rely on Iran and Iran's allies like Turkey for food and other necessities. While the stated goal of Iranian FM Zarif's visits is to discuss regional issues, the visits will also likely increase Tehran's influence in the region. The visit to Qatar will also likely have a negative impact on the boycott against Qatar because the Arab nations imposing the boycott will almost certainly see FM Zarif's visit as an affront to their efforts to diminish Iranian influence. Therefore, they will probably increase the

pressure on Doha and maintain the boycott. As the economic isolation continues, Doha will likely continue to draw closer to Iran, further straining Qatari relations with other Gulf nations. The main actors in the conflict, Saudi Arabia and Iran, could draw closer to direct conflict if Saudi Arabia sees Iranian influence continue to increase. The ongoing proxy conflict is further destabilizing the region and will likely put the US in a difficult position as domestic debates over how to handle Iran's ballistic missile program escalate.  
[Christian Allen, christian.allen.ee@gmail.com]

### **RUSSIA: Pledges Cooperation with Turkmenistan**

**Summary:** Recent agreements between Russia and Turkmenistan could open the door for a formal alliance between the two nations.

**Development:** On 2 October, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov signed a strategic partnership agreement during Putin's visit to the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat. In addition to the partnership agreement, the two also signed agreements on counternarcotics cooperation and immigration. In a meeting after the signings, Berdymukhammedov said that Russian involvement in the region is a stabilizing force. The signings come on the heels of recent disputes between the two countries over natural gas and telecommunications access. Neither leader mentioned the disputes during the visit.

**Analysis:** While the signed agreement is vague and lacks substance, it highlights the Russian desire to strengthen relations with former Soviet satellite nations in Central Asia. Since the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, Russia has been concerned about losing its influence over former Soviet republics, and has moved to improve ties with nations in Central Asia. Recent talks between Russia and Kyrgyzstan to open additional Russian military bases in Kyrgyzstan continue this trend. This agreement could also signal a shift within the Turkmen government away from its historically neutral position and toward possible membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization.  
[Mitchell Dallas]

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