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TAJIKISTAN: Presents CIS Presidency Priorities

Summary: Tajikistan's CIS chairmanship grants Tajik President Emomali Rahmon the power to expand anti-Islamist campaigns within Tajikistan and abroad, likely intensifying already strained relations between the central government and Tajikistan's religious population.

Development: Tajik Ambassador to Belarus Kozidavlat Koimdodov issued a statement on 22 November listing priorities for Tajikistan as the country prepares to assume chairmanship of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2018. Key focuses of Tajikistan will include strengthening the southern CIS borders, strengthening counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics operations, investment in renewables and rail transportation, and regulation of migration and labor processes. Tajikistan was nominated as CIS chair following the CIS Council of Heads of State in Sochi in early October, with Turkmenistan receiving the position of Co-Chair.

Analysis: Tajikistan's nomination to the chairmanship of CIS gives President Emomali Rahmon the capacity to expand his campaign against Islamist opposition in the country as part of a counter-terrorism crackdown. President Rahmon's administration has been increasingly tough on the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in recent years. Tajikistan's Justice Ministry shut down the party in August 2015 after charging the party with supporting General Abdukhalim Nazarzoda, who was accused of attempting a coup the same month. Before the ban, the IRPT represented the most organized opposition to the majority People's Democratic Party, and had been the only legally registered Islamic party in Central Asia.

Tajikistan's CIS chairmanship in 2018 will also provide Rahmon with the ability to pursue IRPT members who have fled into the surrounding CIS states. The continued counter-terrorism and anti-Islamist efforts will likely be crucial to President Rahmon as he seeks to prepare his son to take his place as president. In the past Rahmon's campaigns have been highly effective in consolidating public support for the president. With many Tajik members of the Islamic State returning to the country following its losses in Syria and Iraq, it seems likely that Rahmon's crackdown on religious elements in the country will rise, along with tensions between religious groups and the central government.

Additionally, President Rahmon has pursued several other measures to further secure power for both himself and his eldest son, Rustam Emomali. In December 2015, the loyalist dominated Tajikistan parliament passed a bill granting Rahmon the title 'Leader of the nation', and life-long immunity for himself, his family, and his estate from legal proceedings and prosecution. In May 2016, a nationwide referendum removed presidential term limits, banned the formation of religious-based political parties, and lowered the minimum age for presidential candidates from 35 to 30. Consequently, Rahmon's son Rustam Emomali will be 30 when Tajikistan holds its next presidential election in 2020.

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SITUATION REPORTS

AUSTRALIA: Man Arrested for Planning Terror Attack

On 28 November, Ali Khalif Shire Ali was arrested for planning an attack on Melbourne's city center. He allegedly planned to open fire with an automatic weapon on those gathered for the New Year's Eve celebration. Although it appears he acted alone, Australian authorities claim he had connections to other Islamic extremists. Currently no other arrests have been made.

[Jack Lupori]

BURKINA FASO: French President Begins West Africa Trip

French President Emmanuel Macron made the first stop of his three-day west Africa trip in Burkina Faso on 28 November. During his trip, Macron will visit Ghana and a European-African summit in Côte d'Ivoire. Macron gave several speeches over the course of his stay in Burkina Faso, pledging to shed French colonial attitudes towards Africa and increase cooperation between France and the continent. Macron also stated he would declassify French files on former Burkinabé President Thomas Sankara, who was assassinated in a coup in 1987.

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DJIBOUTI: China Conducts Live-Fire Drills

Chinese troops in Djibouti conducted live-fire exercises on 24 November. The drills mainly covered gunnery training and use of communications equipment, and were done primarily to test-run strategies. The exercise follows talks between Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Chinese President Xi Jinping on 23 November, during which both pledged to establish a strategic partnership between the nations and strengthen cooperation.

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GERMANY: Merkel Attempts to Form Coalition with SPD

Due to the recent failure of coalition talks, German Chancellor Angela Merkel reached out to Social Democrats (SPD) in an attempt to break the deadlock. The SPD broke away from Merkel's grand coalition after suffering a massive defeat in the latest national elections. The SPD agreed to speak with Merkel's Christian Democrat Party (CDU), possibly giving the chance for a coalition to form and end the political crisis. To further encourage the SPD, Merkel stated that the Europe Union and the world need a stable and active German government capable of dealing with issues globally.

[Cade Seely]

IRAQ: Government Resumes Reparation Payments

Iraq, on 21 November, resumed reparation payments to Kuwait for the destruction of oil facilities during Iraq's 1990-1991 occupation of the country, according to the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC). Iraq agreed with Kuwait and the UNCC to pay 0.5% of the country's oil proceeds to Kuwait in 2018. Iraq owes \$4.6 billion to Kuwait and payments will increase annually until 2021. Payments from Iraq were previously suspended in October 2014 due to security and budgetary issues.

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

IRELAND: Deputy Prime Minister Resigns

Irish Deputy Prime Minister Frances Fitzgerald resigned on 28 November, following claims of a smear campaign within the Irish police force perpetrated by Irish Labour Party leader Brendan Howlin on 22 November. Further investigation resulted in the publication of emails on 27 November which show Fitzgerald had been directly aware of several such campaigns during her time as Ireland's Justice Minister. Fitzgerald's resignation avoided a snap election and a motion of no confidence which was to be proposed within hours by the opposition party Fianna Fáil.

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MALI: Election Delayed Following Continued Attacks

Government officials in Mali announced that the regional elections scheduled for December will be delayed until April 2018. This delay is due to security concerns, as UN peacekeepers and Malian soldiers continue to combat attacks from armed groups and terrorist organizations. Malian ministers have also stated a desire to hold inclusive elections which cannot be done amid the current hostile environment.

[Cassie Hettmansperger]

MOROCCO: HIV Infections Down 44 Percent

The number of new HIV infections in Morocco dropped by 44% between 2004 and 2016, according to Moroccan Health Minister Abdelkader Amara on 28 November. Amara stated the drop in new infections was due to progress made by the kingdom in areas of coverage and access to HIV care services. The number of people receiving free antiretroviral treatment had tripled from 4,047 in 2011 to 11,246 in 2017. Morocco launched a national HIV testing campaign in all regions of the country a day prior to Amara's statement, which is expected to last until 27 December.

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[RUSSIA: Regulators to Stop Foreign Print Media Distribution](#)

On 28 November, Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor created a plan that would allow it to stop the distribution of foreign print media within Russia. The procedure would require Roskomnadzor offices to monitor foreign media outlets for violations of abusing media freedoms. If an outlet is found to be in violation, it will enter a 16-day check process that may result in the revocation of its publication license. The development of this procedure comes after President Vladimir Putin signed a bill into law on 25 November allowing media sources to be labeled as ‘foreign agents’ if they receive funding from outside Russia.
[Kylin Andreotti, kylin.andreotti.ee@gmail.com]

[YEMEN: IS Attacks Security Forces](#)

A suicide car bomb used in an attack on 28 November claimed the lives of at least 6 people and wounded dozens. The Islamic state (IS) has claimed responsibility for the attack on Saudi-led coalition forces in the southern port city of Aden. This is the second suicide attack to occur in Aden this month. Since the onset of the Yemeni civil war in 2015, Islamic radicals such as IS and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have exploited the lack of authority to pursue their own interests.
[Christian Allen, Christian.allen.ee@gmail.com]

[BRIEFS](#)

[IRAN: IRGC Asserts Missile Capabilities](#)

Summary: While the international community condemns Iran’s advancement of its ballistic missile capabilities, Iran claims its current ballistic missile range can be extended if Europe becomes a threat.

Development: Brigadier General Hossein Salami, second in command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), announced on 26 November that Iran will extend the range of its ballistic missiles if Europe becomes a threat, despite purposefully limiting their range to 1,250 miles. The threat follows a statement earlier this month from French President Emmanuel Macron who called for an uncompromising dialogue regarding Iran’s ballistic missile program. The US imposed sanctions on Iran stating that their ballistic missile program and tests breach international law and violate a UN resolution. Iran continues to state that its nuclear capabilities are for civilian use only and that the missile program is for strictly defensive purposes and is not negotiable.

Analysis: While the international community continues to reach out to Iran for discussions on their missile programs, Iran has shown little interest in dialogue and will likely continue with tests to further its weapons capabilities. The limitation of the range of its ballistic missiles shows that Iran is somewhat heeding the warnings of the international community. Iran previously stated that the missiles' range of 1,250 miles ensures its ability to attack US forces and interests in the region, which is Iran's main perceived threat. However, this announcement shows that Iran may be beginning to see western Europe as a threat. Iran will likely continue to expand its ballistic missile program and increase its influence over the region as it feels more threatened by Western powers in the region.

[Cassie Hettmansperger]

ISRAEL: Saudi-Israeli Relationship Publicized

Summary: Israel and Saudi Arabia have brought their covert relationship into public view, focusing on countering Iranian influence in the region.

Development: On a Saudi-owned television station on 16 November, Israeli Defense Chief Gadi Eisenkot stated Israel's willingness to share intelligence gathered on Iran and Iranian backed groups with Saudi Arabia. The two nations have not announced any intention of conducting joint military operations in the near future, and public recognition of their longtime clandestine relationship has been met with relatively calm responses from both populations.

Analysis: The willingness of Saudi Arabia to engage in open cooperation with Israel highlights the flexibility of the Saudi people to change and adapt to radical policy changes implemented by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. An increasing partnership between the two nations would likely be beneficial for regional security concerning Iranian aggression, but could endanger Saudi Arabia's position of leadership among other Muslim nations. To mitigate this risk, Saudi Arabia is seeking cooperation with the Palestinian authority and its President, Mahmoud Abbas, to legitimize Saudi-Israeli collaboration in the eyes of the Muslim world. Israel likely hopes that openly acknowledging its relationship with Saudi Arabia may lead other Arab nations toward a partnership with Israel, and ultimately gain Israel acceptance among countries in the region.

[Robert B. Lundgren]

PAKISTAN: Courts Order Release of Lashkar-e-Taiba Founder

Summary: The release of Lashkar-e-Taiba's founder Hafiz Saeed leaves him free to begin plans for his party's 2018 election campaign.

Development: On 23 November, a Pakistani court ordered the release of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Muhammad Saeed. Saeed, who currently has a \$10 million American bounty, was placed under house arrest by the Pakistani government in January this year. While Lashkar-e-Taiba was banned in Pakistan in 2002, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) charity headed by Saeed is believed by analysts to fundraise for and has been labeled an affiliate of LeT by the US. In

August 2017, Saeed registered the JuD charity as a political party, rebranding the organization as the Milli Muslim League of Pakistan.

Analysis: The release of Hafiz Saeed and the party's formal entrance into Pakistani politics will likely further strain Pakistani-Indian relations and bring the organization's policies into mainstream Pakistani politics. In recent months, Pakistan has appeared to pursue a domestic policy of easing jihadist organizations into the country's political mainstream in an attempt to push these groups towards a more moderate position. While this transition may lead JuD towards moderation, the opportunity to openly campaign its ideological narrative to the Pakistani public risks further legitimizing the organization's brand of militant Islamism and extreme anti-Indian sentiment. With mainstream political parties in Pakistan dealing with numerous controversies and scandals and the country's capital swarmed with anti-government protests, JuD has an ideal setting to enter Pakistani politics.

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ROMANIA: Thousands Protest Proposed Anti-Corruption Cut

Summary: Thousands rally to protest a proposal to cut Romania's anti-corruption body, which could further destabilize Romania and Eastern Europe.

Development: On 26 November, thousands of protestors across Romania rallied against a proposed bill to cut government oversight. The legislation, proposed by Romania's Social Democratic Party (PSD), would remove power from the country's anti-corruption department. The department, known as the DNA, is well respected in Romania and acts independently from most government offices to investigate public officials for corruption. Over 25,000 people protested in the Romanian capital of Bucharest, with thousands more rallying in other cities across Romania.

Analysis: This is the second time the PSD has attempted to strip the DNA of its power since winning a majority share of parliament in December 2016. In February the PSD attempted to change justice laws to hinder corruption investigations, but they then backed off after being met by one of the largest protests in Europe since the Cold War. Given the public outrage, the PSD is unlikely to pass this legislation without significant political cost. However, if passed, this legislation would likely weaken Romania and could destabilize Eastern Europe further.

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RUSSIA: Government Provides Stipends for Family Building

Summary: Russia's population is in decline, prompting President Putin to offer stipends for families, likely hurting the Russian economy in the short term in hopes of a long-term payoff.

Development: On 28 November, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a new government plan that would subsidize families following the birth of their first child. Families would receive \$180 per month until the child reaches 18 months in age. Putin also announced

that families with two children will receive lower interest rates on mortgages starting in 2018. The new programs are expected to cost \$2.5 billion over three years.

Analysis: Putin's new initiative is not surprising given Russia's demographic situation. Russia's population has been in decline since 1992 and fertility rates remain below that required for population replacement. While still the most populous country in Europe, Russia also requires a much larger population given its immense geographic size. Immigrants from Central Asia and other former Soviet republics have mitigated the population loss, but Putin very likely views such immigrants as inferior compared to true Russians. Putin is most likely concerned that an influx of immigrants could disrupt Russia's largely homogenous culture and cause domestic unrest. However, any effort to bolster Russia's population will require considerable financial investment and will almost certainly hurt the already ailing Russian economy in the short term. In addition, population changes take time, something the Russian economy might not have if the workforce ages too quickly to keep up with the demand for labor.
[Cameron McCauley, cameron.mccauley.ee@gmail.com]

[SUDAN: President Strengthens Ties with Russia](#)

Summary: Sudanese President al-Bashir met with Russian counterparts to discuss increasing military and economic cooperation.

Development: On 23 November, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir travelled to Sochi, Russia to meet with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Al-Bashir expressed his desire to increase economic cooperation with Russia in the areas of energy and agriculture. During his visit, Al-Bashir accused the US of plotting to destabilize Sudan in order to split it into five countries, adding that Sudan needs protection from American aggression. The leaders also agreed that Russia would assist Sudan in modernizing its military and signaled that Sudan may allow Russia to use its naval bases along the Red Sea.

Analysis: US efforts to repair relations with Sudan appear to have failed. Despite the US lifting its decades-long embargo on Sudan and removing Sudan from its travel ban list, Sudan still views the US as an aggressor. Sudan, already a large importer of Russian grain, likely sees itself as a key African country for Russia to develop ties with, as Russia is currently attempting to increase its influence in other African nations such as Egypt and Libya. A Russian naval base in the Red Sea would give Russia improved sea access to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. This would mirror China's and Turkey's moves to establish naval bases in the Horn of Africa to expand their military reach. Meanwhile, Sudanese efforts to modernize its military are already underway; last week Sudan became the first Arab country to receive Russian Su-35 fighter jets.
[Ryan Shaw]

[VENEZUELA: Government Arrests Citgo Executives](#)

Summary: The arrest of top Citgo executives comes as part of a widespread anti-corruption campaign throughout the country's oil industry.

Development: Five vice presidents and president Jose Pereira of Citgo, the US branch of Venezuela's state oil company, were arrested on 21 November on a wide range of corruption charges. Of those arrested, five hold dual citizenship in the US. This follows the arrests of more than 50 officials of Venezuela's branch of Citgo, Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA), since August. Tarek Saab, the Venezuelan attorney general (AG), stated that the arrests are part of an attempt by the Venezuelan government to clean up corruption in the oil industry. The arrests come a week after an announcement by S&P Global Ratings that Venezuela is in selective default. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro appointed Major General Manuel Quevedo as the new head of PDVSA and Venezuela's Oil Ministry.

Analysis: The move to replace Citgo and PDVSA's executive officials appears to indicate a shift in President Maduro's current strategy of distancing his administration from Venezuela's increasing economic troubles. While Maduro has previously utilized members of the opposition as scapegoats for the country's economic troubles, Maduro appears to be shifting towards battling corruption as the next means of appeasing the Venezuelan public. With the powers Maduro secured via his party's complete control of the constituent assembly, President Maduro and AG Saab will likely continue to expand their anti-corruption campaign as the country attempts to pay its debts. Further elements of the Venezuelan economy are likely to be brought under Maduro loyalists' control as he seeks to solidify his power while marketing his ventures to the Venezuelan people in an attempt to regain their confidence. However, the success of these plans will likely depend on Maduro's ability to keep the country out of default and secure Russian and Chinese investment.

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YEMEN: UN Relief Ship Allowed Past Saudi Blockade

Summary: After a 20-day blockade of Yemen, Saudi Arabia allowed a UN humanitarian aid ship to enter the Yemeni port of Hodeidah. This aid shipment may ease tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Development: A ship carrying 6,063 tons of flour docked in the Houthi controlled port of Hodeidah on 26 November. The flour delivered is enough to feed the 1.8 million people of northern Yemen for up to a month. This delivery of humanitarian aid follows a blockade that was initiated on 6 November after a ballistic missile, launched from Yemen towards the Saudi capital of Riyadh, was intercepted. The UN humanitarian ship waited outside of Yemen for two weeks pending admission to dock. Prior to this delivery of food aid, a plane carrying medical supplies was allowed to enter the government held Yemeni capital of Sanaa on 25 November.

Analysis: Saudi Arabia has claimed that the missile fired at Riyadh was supplied to the Houthi rebels by Iran, despite Iran's denial of involvement. The blockade of all Yemeni land, air, and sea ports was likely intended to halt Iranian support of the Houthis, but also complicated the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The passage of this UN ship could signal the resumption of regular aid shipments to Yemen, which may ease the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Despite this reversal of the blockade, the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia are still complicated and will likely remain strained.

[Conor Shea]

ZIMBABWE: Mnangagwa May Extradite Former Ethiopian Dictator

Summary: The recent change of power in Zimbabwe puts a former Ethiopian dictator at risk of extradition, but President Mnangagwa will likely continue to provide amnesty.

Development: Following Emmerson Mnangagwa's ascension to the Zimbabwean presidency, the fate of Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam has been called into question. For 26 years, former president Robert Mugabe granted asylum to the former Ethiopian dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who received a death sentence for genocide from the Ethiopian Supreme Court in 2008. Mugabe granted asylum, and later citizenship, to Mengistu in honor of his contributions to Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. The opposition party in Zimbabwe has declared its aim to extradite Mengistu, despite that extraditing citizens is illegal in Zimbabwe.

Analysis: Despite the opposition party's urging for extradition, President Mnangagwa likely will not give up Mengistu. Apart from his recent fallout with Mugabe, President Mnangagwa had been a close ally of and a former revolutionary fighter with Mugabe, so he will likely honor his relationship with Mugabe by refusing to extradite Mengistu. While President Mnangagwa could change the law barring extradition of citizens, he will more likely support and extend Mengistu's asylum, considering his former partnership with Mugabe, Mengistu's contributions to the revolution, and current laws.

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