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## SITUATION REPORTS

### CHINA: Central Bank Announces Policy to Address Poverty

On 15 January, the People's Bank of China announced a shift in policy to provide greater financial support in poverty-stricken regions. This shift requires financial institutions to increase credit support for impoverished individuals by lending to patrons that have previously been denied loans. In addition, institutions will be expected to broaden channels of direct finance. The initiative is projected to be fully implemented by the end of 2020.

[Andrew Ruffini]

### GERMANY: Government to Expand Terrorism Task Force

As of 15 January, Germany will expand its special police task force dealing with terrorist attacks, GSG 9, due to concerns that terrorists will target Berlin. The goal of the GSG 9 expansion is to improve its ability to react quickly to an attack on Berlin. The government is looking for 100 new GSG 9 members, which may be difficult given GSG 9's strict physical fitness standards.

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### IRAQ: Suicide Bombings Kill More Than 40 in Baghdad

On 15 January, two suicide bombers killed 38 and wounded over 100 people when they detonated their suicide vests at a major intersection in Baghdad. This attack follows two other suicide bombings, which took place on 13 and 14 January and killed approximately 8 each. No group has claimed responsibility for these attacks.

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### PAPUA NEW GUINEA: Volcanic Eruption Prompts Evacuations

On 12 January, a volcano on Kadovar Island, Papua New Guinea erupted. Approximately 1,500 people were evacuated from Kadovar Island and a nearby island. The International Red Cross has moved to provide aid to the evacuees who are now harbored on the mainland.

[Jack Lupori]

### PHILIPPINES: President Permits Chinese Research in the Philippine Sea

On 15 January, President Rodrigo Duterte announced that China would be allowed to conduct scientific research at the Benham Rise, located in the Philippine Sea. Due to concerns of maritime sovereignty in the area, China has invited Philippine scientists to join in its research to take place in the coming two months. The Philippines also announced that other interested countries would be permitted access.

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### [UKRAINE: CIA Attributes 'NotPetya' Attack to Russian Military](#)

The cyberattack 'NotPetya' that attacked Ukrainian banks, energy firms, and government officials in 2017 has been attributed to the Russian Military by the CIA. The attack was an effort to disrupt the Ukrainian financial system in support of the Russian separatists in the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

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## [BRIEFS](#)

### [AUSTRIA: Protests Erupt Over Right-Wing Coalition](#)

**Summary:** Thousands of Austrians protested the new far right coalition, signaling a pushback against Sebastian Kurz's populist government.

**Development:** On 13 January, around 20,000 demonstrators filled the streets of Vienna to protest the inclusion of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPO) in the majority coalition. The FPO was founded in the 1950s by former Nazis, and many in Austria accuse the FPO of being xenophobic and anti-Semitic. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's party, the Peoples Party (OVP), has insisted the government will remain pro-European and encouraged critics to wait until the coalition forms an agenda before passing judgement.

**Analysis:** Despite the OVP typically forming a coalition with the left-wing Social Democratic Party, recent tensions made the FPO a seemingly better partner for the OVP. Both parties have taken a hardline stance on immigration, which is a major political issue in Austria. Protests against the new coalition show a rejection of right-wing ideas among many people in Austria. Protests of this nature may continue, particularly if the agenda agreed upon by the coalition is unpopular among more moderate groups.

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## [CHINA: President Increases Influence by Dismissing Military Leader](#)

**Summary:** Xi Jinping further solidifies his influence over the military by dismissing and prosecuting a key leader from the CMC for bribery.

**Development:** On 9 January, Chinese state media announced that a former People's Liberation Army (PLA) region commander and Central Military Commission (CMC) member, Fang Fenghui, is to be prosecuted over allegations of bribery. The Chinese military will oversee the prosecution rather than a civilian court. Fang is the most recent victim of Chinese President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign following the death of General Zhang Yang. Yang committed suicide on 23 November after also being convicted of bribery.

**Analysis:** President Xi Jinping holds unquestionable control over the Chinese Communist Party while his influence and power within the CMC, which he heads, is growing rapidly. The prosecution and removal of Fang from the CMC will likely strengthen Xi Jinping's power over the PLA by eliminating undesirable influence from past CMC vice chairmen. This development further adds to the perception that Xi's anti-corruption campaign is a tool to remove opposition while ensuring political loyalties lie with him.

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## [KOSOVO: Serbian Politician Killed in Northern Kosovo](#)

**Summary:** An ethnic Serb Leader was shot dead outside his office, suspending EU peace talks between Kosovo and Serbia.

**Development:** On 16 January, ethnic Serb political leader Oliver Ivanovic was shot dead outside his offices in the Northern Kosovar city of Mitrovica. Serbian Media reports the killing as a drive-by shooting carried out by multiple suspects as Ivanovic was entering his office. Kosovar President Hashim Thaci strongly denounced the murder and Kosovo's government considers it "an attack on the rule of law." Serbian delegates walked out of EU facilitated talks with Kosovar representatives in response to the attack, deeming it "an attempt to sow 'chaos' in Serbia." Marko Djuric, the leader of Belgrade's delegation, and other Serbian representatives will return to Serbia, despite the talks being scheduled to continue through 18 January.

**Analysis:** Ivanovic's killing is a distinctive development among the already strained ethnic tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, which unilaterally declared independence in 2008. EU facilitated talks between Belgrade and Pristina will likely halt completely until suspects are

found and arrested, bringing any progress of normalizing relations to a stop as a result. Ivanovic's murder highlights many of the problems facing Serbia and Kosovo, including the internal divisions of Kosovo Serbs who take a hardline towards the independence of Kosovo. Recently, Ivanovic leaned towards compromise, which angered Kosovo Serbs as well as Belgrade. Ethnic divides create many of the roadblocks on the path to reconciliation, and it is likely Kosovar authorities will do all they can to bring the perpetrators to justice, in efforts to appease Kosovo Serbs and Serbians to resume peace talks.

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### [MYANMAR: Rohingya Refugees to Return Despite Concerns](#)

**Summary:** Thousands of Rohingya Muslim refugees are to return to Myanmar from Bangladesh within two years according to a new agreement.

**Development:** On 16 January, Myanmar and Bangladesh announced a plan to repatriate over 650,000 refugees that fled from conflict in Myanmar last year. It has been agreed that Myanmar will take in 1,500 refugees per week, 10% of the 15,000 requested by Bangladesh, beginning on 23 January. Five transit camps will be set up in Bangladesh to bring refugees to the two Myanmar reception areas. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed concern for refugee safety, urging them to return voluntarily and implying that they should be confident of the situation at their destination if they choose to return.

**Analysis:** 23 January is a tight deadline for Myanmar to prepare. While it has been stated by both countries that the process will be voluntary, refugee wishes have not been readily addressed. It is likely that refugee concerns will be continually ignored. Many of the Rohingya Refugees have noted that they will not return without guarantees of their safety, the rebuilding of their homes, citizenship, and fair treatment. Due to these factors, it is likely that many Rohingya will remain in Bangladesh until conditions improve. It is also possible that the Rohingya may be forced to return to Myanmar despite their protests. As of right now, the current reception of 1,500 refugees per week would take approximately ten years to complete if not increased, much longer than the desired two-year window.

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### [RUSSIA: Bombers Intercepted Near UK Airspace](#)

**Summary:** Two Russian bombers were intercepted by RAF on 15 January, signaling continued Russian escalation in its standoff against NATO allies.

**Development:** On 15 January, two Russian Tupolev Tu-160 bombers were intercepted by the British Royal Air Force (RAF) over the North Sea, as they approached UK airspace. Two RAF

Typhoon fighters were scrambled to monitor the incident and escort the Russian planes away. Belgian media reported two Belgian F-16s also responded to the incident. This event follows two earlier incidents in 2017, when RAF fighters intercepted Russian military planes on course for Scotland in September, and when two Russian planes penetrated UK airspace for unknown reasons, in May. Along with the UK, several nations are closely monitoring Russian air activity.

**Analysis:** As tensions climb between the West and Russia, the continuation of Russian planes encroaching on NATO-allied countries' airspace seems a likely side effect. These Russian actions echo the Cold War style of provocation the Soviet Union frequently used against NATO forces for decades and could possibly signal a new form of brinkmanship for Russia. Russia's air force's buzzing of UK and other NATO members' airspace creates a higher risk for military escalation across the European Continent. In addition to provocation, the aggressive activity of Russian planes may be to test these countries' reactions, gauging military systems and levels of international cooperation.

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## **TANZANIA: President Refuses to Extend Term Limits**

**Summary:** President Magufuli's disapproval of extending presidential term limits could spark a wave of democracy in Africa and impel leaders of other African countries to deny opportunities for corruption.

**Development:** On 13 January, President John Magufuli rejected the second proposal by his party to extend the presidential term limit from five to seven years. Instead, he called for Tanzanians to focus on improving the economy. The ruling party claims that the president needs more time in power to effectively govern and cites other countries in the region, such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, for successfully extending presidential terms. However, President Magufuli maintains that he intends to uphold the Constitution and its establishment of five-year presidential terms. Regionally, President Magufuli greatly increased Tanzanian political and economic influence in East Africa. Moreover, domestically, Magufuli fought corruption with his continued adherence to the existing Constitution and plans to peacefully hand over power.

**Analysis:** President Magufuli's continued refusal to extend term limits could indicate a positive shift in African democracy. His decision to uphold the Constitution and limit his power would directly contrast the decisions of the governments in Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, possibly demonstrating a shift in African governments from traditionally corrupt systems to those that respect their laws. Although some leaders of other African countries have also denied opportunities to increase power and allowed peaceful transition to new leadership, President Magufuli's rejections continue the precedent set by Tanzania as a highly stable democracy in Africa. In maintaining its record of stability and gaining influence in East Africa, Tanzania could stand as a contemporary example of lasting peace for other African countries to follow.

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## **TURKEY: Government Threatens to Attack Syrian Kurds**

**Summary:** Turkey plans to fight terrorism with an offensive attack against a Kurdish group in northern Syria, potentially endangering Turkey's relations with the US and Russia.

**Development:** On 14 January, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced an offensive military operation against the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria. Turkey considers the YPG as a terrorist group while the US views the YPG as an effective fighting force against the Islamic State (IS). Russian and US forces have supported the YPG with training, equipment, and funding since 2014.

**Analysis:** Turkey's plans to attack the YPG and eliminate the militia may harm Turkey's relations with the US and Russia, who continue to support the YPG. Turkey has publicly condemned this support, but tolerated it during the fight against IS. With the eradication of IS in Syria, Turkey likely expected the US, Russian, and YPG collaboration to end, allowing Turkey the opportunity to attack the YPG without repercussions. The US and Russia, however, maintained ties with the YPG. Despite this Turkey still aims to conduct operations against the YPG, seeming to accept the potential implications. Russia will likely not react to the operation unless it poses a direct threat to Russian forces. The US may, however, condemn Turkey for the operation, and will likely continue supplying the YPG with resources and training.

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