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In This Issue:

BRIEFS

BRITAIN: Former British Foreign Minister Rebukes Proposed Brexit Trade Plan

CHINA: New Anti-Terror Force to Protect National Interests at Home and Abroad

FRANCE: Iranian Bomb Plot in Paris May Halt Economic Aid

GUATEMALA: Court Ruling Unlikely to Provide Justice to Genocide Victims

SAUDI ARABIA: Kingdom Pursues Investment to Diversify Oil-Reliant Economy

SOUTH SUDAN: Peace Agreement Remains Fragile After Violence Continues

YEMEN: UN Extends Investigation into War Crimes

BRIEFS

BRITAIN: Former Foreign Minister Rebukes Proposed Brexit Trade Plan

Summary: Former British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson's comments about Prime Minister Theresa May's proposed Brexit trade deal indicate a growing dissent with current Brexit proceedings.

Development: On 28 September, Johnson criticized May's current Brexit plan regarding trade. May's current proposed plan would keep Britain's trade policies with the EU largely the same, but Britain would not have actual EU membership. Johnson opposes May's plan because Britain would continue operating under the same policies as those before Brexit but would leave the country with no representation in the EU. Johnson warned of "political and economic disaster" if May continues to go forward with this plan. In the same interview, Johnson also refused to rule out his desire to become Prime Minister when asked directly.

Analysis: Johnson's comments add to the opposition to May's handling of Brexit negotiations, but, unlike Johnson, most opponents favor undoing the current referendum rather than moving further from the EU. As the official March 2019 date of the Brexit approaches, many aspects of the final deal between the EU and Britain remain unresolved, and the likelihood of a deal that appeals to both sides grows smaller with each passing week. Johnson's public dissent will likely only make creating a final plan more difficult because it promotes the perception that May's government lacks a coherent strategy. As the EU does not fully support May's current proposed plan, and as opposition from the British Parliament grows, May will likely have to amend her current proposal or risk no Brexit deal at all. This only adds to the issues that have followed May since becoming Prime Minister and may increase the possibility for someone to challenge her or force her to resign.

[Alli McIntyre]

CHINA: New Anti-Terror Force to Protect National Interests at Home and Abroad

Summary: China announced its development of an anti-terror force created to protect national interests at home and overseas, but its role in helping combat international terrorism seems unlikely.

Development: On 29 September, Zhang Xiaoyi, intelligence chief of China's military police, announced China's plans to develop a first-class anti-terror force intended to operate both at home and abroad, "safeguarding national strategic interests anywhere." China claims it faces a threat from native radical Islamists inhabiting its far western region of Xinjiang as well as militants in the Middle East. Beijing blames these militants as well as ISIS for the hundreds of killings in Xinjiang in the past few years. China remains the only permanent member of the UN

Security Council that has not taken military action in Syria, and it consistently states it does not interfere in the affairs of other countries. The Chinese government has yet to release further information about its new anti-terror force and the types counter-terror operations it could carry out in the future.

Analysis: China will probably reserve its anti-terror force specifically for combatting domestic terrorism as opposed to international terrorism. Given its non-interference stance on international affairs and its reluctance to take military action in Syria, China seems most concerned in protecting its own interests and people. This means that the anti-terror force would mainly operate at home, likely battling domestic terrorism in predominantly Muslim Xinjian. China might even use this new anti-terror force in its containment of the Uighur peoples, a Muslim minority group the government has notoriously been detaining in massive internment camps. If China does decide to operate this new force abroad, it would likely only occur where Chinese interests (and citizens' lives) are at stake, such as its military bases established in Djibouti and in islands throughout the South China Sea, preventing and combating potential terrorist attacks there. Beijing would also likely deploy this force in the violence-prone Kashmir—which the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through—to ensure the operation of the projects and safety of Chinese citizens in the region. However, if China decides to use this force, it might face diplomatic problems if it chooses to execute such counter-terror operations overseas, as it would probably wish to avoid confrontations with both terrorist groups and nations themselves.
[Bea Francia, bea.francia.ee@gmail.com]

FRANCE: Iranian Bomb Plot in Paris May Halt Economic Aid

Summary: French officials blame Iran for an attempted bomb plot at a Paris conference. The failed attempt will likely leave Iran little to no support against US sanctions from a wary France.

Development: On 2 October, French officials accused Iranian intelligence of attempting to set off a bomb at the annual meeting of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in Paris. Iran denied the allegations, blaming the plot on those “who want to damage” its “long established relations with France.” Despite these statements, France has frozen assets of Iranian intelligence and suspended nominating a new ambassador to Iran, reasoning that the attempted bomb plot “confirms the necessity of a forceful approach” in its relations with Iran. France is the biggest supporter of setting up a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to assist Iran in circumventing US sanctions—the full force of which will go in to effect on 4 November.

Analysis: The failed bomb plot almost certainly will strain relations between Iran and France, which could probably leave Iran with little to no assistance in facing US sanctions. France has already shown a break in diplomatic relations between the two nations in suspending its nomination of a new ambassador to Iran. French officials will also probably be less inclined to assist Iran in avoiding sanctions from other nations in the future. Additionally, France might possibly consider abandoning the development of an SPV, which could halt the program entirely,

as it requires a unanimous vote from all EU nations to move forward. The SPV remains Iran's best chance of saving its crippled economy from further deteriorating, which might lead Iran to restart behaviors banned by the Iran Deal Nuclear Deal.

[Shay Weera]

GUATEMALA: Court Ruling Unlikely to Provide Justice to Genocide Victims

Summary: The national court acknowledged Guatemala City's role in genocide against indigenous peoples. Military officials will not face charges, likely indicating persistent racial discrimination throughout the government.

Development: On 26 September, the Guatemalan High Risk Court 'A' found the state of Guatemala and its military guilty of committing genocide against the indigenous Maya Ixil population during President Efraín Ríos Montt's rule from 1982-1983. Ríos Montt was originally tried in 2013, where the court convicted him of genocide and crimes against humanity and sentenced him to 80 years in prison, where he died in April 2018. This original suspension in 2013 left José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, chief of military intelligence, free from charges. The retrial on 26 September acquitted Rodríguez Sánchez once again, citing a lack of evidence that he actively commanded the extermination of the ethnic Ixil population. Despite the guilty verdict against the government, senior military officials will not face charges. The court did not order the state to provide reparations to the relatives of victims who have sought justice for decades.

Analysis: The court's decision to not convict senior military leaders will likely lead to more unrest among affected families and possibly cause citizens to distrust Guatemala's court system. While business elites and conservatives called the term "genocide" an exaggeration, Guatemala City's acknowledgement of the human rights violations could possibly show one step taken toward reparation for the Maya Ixil. However, these leaders will likely remain free from charges in the future due to a lack of explicit evidence of commands, unless further evidence is discovered. Rodríguez Sánchez, for example, will likely not be convicted in the future because his advisory role probably kept his name clear from official documents. The public might begin to believe that the court's ruling over this trial reveals a systemic oppression and discrimination against indigenous populations in Guatemala, likely increasing inequality between the class of elite politicians and less wealthy indigenous populations. Due to the lack of indigenous representation in the government, inequality and racial discrimination in Guatemala will likely persist, as the government has failed to show sympathy toward the ethnic groups since the genocide.

[Cam Zarnich]

[SAUDI ARABIA: Kingdom Pursues Investment to Diversify Oil-Reliant Economy](#)

Summary: Saudi Arabia is actively investing domestically and overseas to expand its currently highly specialized economy and to improve relations with its neighbors to maintain its economic and political security.

Development: On 2 October, Saudi Arabia donated \$200 million to Yemen's Central Bank to aid the rapidly declining value of the Yemeni rial and provide lasting stability in the economy. The Saudi government, in a coalition with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has supported the Yemeni government and President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi against the Shiite rebels that control the northern regions of the country. Earlier this year, the UAE and Saudi Arabia gave nearly \$1 billion to the Yemeni government and both countries have participated in joint attacks against the northern rebels. Besides this foreign investment, the Saudi government has been working to rebuild its own infrastructure. Construction projects totaling up to approximately \$64 million along the eastern coast are projected to conclude in March 2019. Saudi Arabia also announced a project along the west coast by the Red Sea for a city called Neom, which both the government and private investors will fund.

Analysis: Saudi Arabia will almost certainly continue investing in relevant foreign infrastructure projects and aiding relevant foreign conflicts to diversify the market and demand for its oil to ultimately benefit its highly specialized, oil-dependent economy. Although Saudi Arabia currently has the strongest economy in the Arab world, petroleum comprises 90% of its export economy and 42% of its GDP. Infrastructure projects will very likely bolster the Saudi economy because the projects, along with the suppression of Sunni religious police, demonstrate the Crown Prince's willingness to unify the 3 million Shia citizens with the rest of the Sunni majority country. Although economic incentives rather than a genuine interest in assimilating the two populations most likely drive Saudi efforts to unify the country, these decisions will likely benefit the future of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, The Neom project on the coast of the Red Sea reveals the government's plans for incentivizing economic activity within Saudi Arabia because the proposal prioritizes renewable energy, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, and tourism. The progressive design of Neom would revolutionize the kingdom's economy and improve relations with many foreign countries if successfully completed. The coalition between the UAE and Saudi Arabia to assist Yemen likely resulted from their desire to improve relations between the neighboring countries, not only to bolster Saudi Arabia's economic standing, but to further improve its security on the Arabian Peninsula.

[Riley Coder]

[SOUTH SUDAN: Peace Agreement Remains Fragile After Violence Continues](#)

Summary: Violence persists in South Sudan despite a peace agreement to end the ongoing civil war. Third-party actors will probably need to take more decisive action to keep violence from compromising the peace agreement between the warring factions.

Development: On 1 October, a grenade attack killed at least 10 people in a South Sudanese club. According to a police commissioner in Yambio, the act of violence was not related to the civil war. However, the conflict in South Sudan has left the general population exposed to leftover weapons and explosives—some of which killed five children who were playing with a hand grenade. The civil war started in December 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused Riek Machar, his former vice president, of orchestrating a coup against him. Since the beginning of the conflict, the civil war has claimed more than 380,000 lives and displaced close to 4 million refugees. In August 2018, peace negotiations put an end to the civil war, but acts of violence such as the attack and accidental deaths from unsecured weapons continue to add to the death toll.

Analysis: The peace agreement will likely fall apart, as the 2014 ceasefire agreement did, should violence persist in South Sudan, as relations between the two factions remain fragile. Consequently, maintaining peace in South Sudan would likely require greater involvement by the UN, neighboring countries, and other third-party actors. However, these groups have taken indecisive actions or shown favoritism toward one faction or another in the past that would almost certainly, in the current climate, aggravate divisions, escalate the violence, and drag out the civil war. If so, other neighboring African countries closely monitoring this situation may try to prevent the violence and instability from spreading, either by restricting border access from South Sudan to isolate the conflict, or by intervening themselves. Only a neutral intervention that seeks to protect the civilian population and secure weapons left over from the conflict would have a reasonable prospect of reducing future violence.
[Parker Labine]

YEMEN: UN Extends Investigation into War Crimes

Summary: As the civil war in Yemen continues, a UN vote to renew an investigation into war crimes passed, but the investigation will likely only halt these crimes temporarily due to opposition from Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Development: On 28 September, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UNHRC) voted to extend its probe into alleged human rights abuses in Yemen. In August, a UN backed group discovered evidence of war crimes including rape, torture, and the use of child soldiers. The initial report found the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) responsible for the majority of these war crimes, which occur as the countries fight the Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia denied the allegations and voted against the UN proposal. Yemen also objected to the proposal, despite the fact that one-third of the Saudi Arabian led air-strikes targeted civilians and hospitals. Some 130 children die daily as a result of the ongoing crisis.

Analysis: Considering both Saudi Arabia and Yemen opposed the renewed proposal, the UN investigation will almost certainly encounter opposition from these countries. The civil war itself

will most likely continue unhampered, and any attempt at an intervention will likely only halt the war crimes temporarily if Saudi Arabia and Yemen choose to cooperate. Otherwise, these crimes against humanity will probably continue after the conclusion of the investigation, but with less publicity as before, as the governments will likely try to keep them hidden from the public eye. As a result, an exodus of refugees appears likely, as many of these citizens and victims will almost certainly try to escape the violence from not only the war, but from the war crimes as well. If the UN investigation fails to produce a desirable result, the crisis may fall on the shoulders of outside groups such as NATO or individual countries to intervene.
[Kaylee Coffman]

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