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## BRIEFS

### AFGHANISTAN: Taliban-led Attacks Demonstrate a Growing Threat

**Summary:** A series of Taliban attacks throughout Afghanistan continue while the Afghan people demand increased security measures.

**Development:** On 12 November, a suicide bombing near the Pashtunistan Square in Kabul wounded 20 and killed six. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing on a rally that the Shia-Hazara community held to demand action against the Taliban in the region. Prior Taliban attacks in the western province of Farah and the eastern province of Ghazni resulted in the deaths of at least 37 policemen and 20 members of Afghan security forces, which led to the recent protests in Kabul and the announcement of intensifying military operations in the Ghazni province.

**Analysis:** Afghanistan will almost certainly enhance security measures with the certainty that these terrorist attacks will persist. Afghan forces will likely focus specifically on ensuring security in Kabul, Ghazni, and Farah, which account for the majority of the population within government-controlled lands. Although the number of domestic attacks decreased drastically over the past eight years, the Taliban's strategic targeting of rural military outposts and political events strains the limited power of the Afghan government and economy. Additionally, political infighting for government control weakens military capability to combat the growing terrorist threat from the Taliban, which currently controls approximately 45% of the 407 districts of Afghanistan.

[Riley Coder]

### AUSTRALIA-CHINA: Vying for Influence in the Pacific

**Summary:** China is providing the Pacific islands with more loans and technological advancements, while Australia has countered China's donations and claims to limit Chinese influence on the islands.

**Development:** On 8 November, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison pledged to spend over \$800 million to improve relations with Pacific nations. Australia plans to use the funds to improve infrastructure, including setting up an infrastructure bank in the southwest Pacific as well as increasing military cooperation between the Pacific nations and Australia. Australia claims this will further build partnerships with the islands. Australia historically has outspent other countries in financial aid to the Pacific region; however, China has increased loans in the Pacific, competing for Australia's influence. Both countries share a common interest in the growth and prosperity of the Pacific islands.

**Analysis:** China likely is vying for Australia's position as the top influencer in the Pacific and most likely is attempting to bring the Pacific islands under China's sphere of influence. Australia's countering of Chinese influence in the Pacific islands will likely spark ongoing competition in having control of the islands. Considering the increased influence of regional hegemonic states, the Pacific islands may become more like pawns for Australia and China. The current conflict between the two countries could possibly lead to a persisting dispute if both continuously increase their actions in opposition to one another. China already froze its ministerial visits with Australia for over a year, adding tensions between the two nations. Both countries will likely match their words with actions which could potentially place great strain on their relations with one another.

[Allyson Campbell]

### **[EL SALVADOR: Woman's Abortion Accusation Unlikely to Provoke Political Reform](#)**

**Summary:** Imelda Cortez's trial for an alleged abortion will likely bring international attention to the strict abortion penalties in El Salvador, but will likely fail to provoke reform under the upcoming right-wing administration.

**Development:** On 12 November, Imelda Cortez, a 20-year old rape survivor, appeared in court to testify against her conviction of attempted aggravated homicide of her newborn baby. Cortez became pregnant at age 17 after her stepfather raped her. Police arrested Cortez in April 2017 at the emergency room, under charges of attempted murder with no option for bail since the law prohibits abortion under all circumstances. If convicted, Cortez will face 20 years in prison while her stepfather will only serve 15 years in prison for aggravated sexual assault of a minor. Cortez is just one of countless women convicted of murder related to abortion. Recently, campaigns for domestic and human rights freed five women accused of murder and imprisoned without investigation through creating international pressure on the Salvadorian government. However, proposals to legalize abortion often get stopped at the committee stage due in part to the current political atmosphere of a right-wing political party majority in the Legislative Assembly. In February 2019, citizens will elect a new administration into presidency, with the National Republican Alliance, or ARENA, expected to win.

**Analysis:** Because El Salvador has the highest rates of disapproval for the legalization of abortion, it will likely not pass under the political values of the conservative ARENA party predicted to win presidency in 2019. Regardless, human and women's rights groups will very likely continue to call international attention to the mentality of the Salvadorian legal system in convicting these women on the accusation of murder. Rights groups will likely push for the courts to provide investigation into the possibilities of medical complications during pregnancy, provide psychological attention to women as victims of trauma, and exploit rights violations as victims in the courtroom. If reform on any level takes place, judges might act objectively in the courtroom if under public watch, and may likely choose to look at evidence to prove abuse of the baby or evidence that the mother committed a crime, rather than convicting with no

consideration of these circumstances. Rights activists will likely use Cortez's case to advance their campaign for women's "reproductive rights" reforms, but ultimately the depenalization of abortion in cases of rape or in which childbirth puts the mother's life at risk will likely not pass. [Ashlee Boyle, ashlee.boyle.ee@gmail.com]

### **ETHIOPIA: Arrests of Military Officials Indicate a Push Towards True Democracy**

**Summary:** Recent arrests of military officials highlight the forward momentum of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's reform efforts.

**Development:** On 12 November, Federal Ethiopian Police arrested the former Chief Executive Officer of Metal and Engineering Corporation (MetEC), Kinfu Dagne, and former head of the Information Network Security Agency (INSA), Tekleberhan Woldearega. These leaders were attempting to flee Ethiopia to escape charges against corruption and human rights violations. These charges come as new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed enacted reforms targeting government corruption and human rights abuses. In total, the Attorney General announced 27 arrests within the MetEC for a total of \$2 billion of embezzlement with police apprehending 36 INSA officials for human rights violations. The administration before Abiy's election faced considerable backlash from human rights groups for its human rights violations.

**Analysis:** These recent arrests highlight Abiy's determination to ensure government reform as he likely plans to develop a more free and fair democracy. This new administration almost certainly intends to end the repression of political opposition through its crackdown on the previous government sanctioned human rights. Additionally, the new government's sanctioning of arrests for embezzlement probably further indicates an effort to create a functioning democracy that helps every Ethiopian rather than one that simply works for the party in power. By targeting MetEC in these new reforms, Abiy is likely sending a message to other government officials that morality takes a higher precedent than simply accomplishing objectives through any means possible. Abiy will most likely continue this crackdown until abiding by effective democratic means becomes the norm.

[Andrew Ruffini]

### **ISRAEL: Airstrikes and Covert Missions Prompt Swift Response From Hamas**

**Summary:** Military operations in Gaza spark a harsh response from Hamas, continuing an ongoing conflict since March that will unlikely deescalate due to the recent operation.

**Development:** On 10 November, an Israeli Special Forces operation in southern Gaza killed seven Palestinians, including Hamas commander Nour Baraka. Hamas responded, firing rockets and mortars into Israel; out of the hundreds of projectiles fired, the Iron Dome Missile Defense system intercepted 60. During the attacks, another clash with Palestinians occurred over the

discovery of a failed covert Israeli intelligence and security operation. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) claim their operation as purely an intelligence gathering mission with no intention to assassinate or abduct. Because of these events, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned early from Paris.

**Analysis:** Israeli efforts to calm the tension within this Gaza enclave likely seems even more unattainable after the most recent escalation. The discovery of the first known Israeli incursion within the Gaza Strip since 2014 means suspicion of Israeli covert operations within Gaza will likely rise, causing further unrest at the border wall. If the IDF did not intend to use covert action for anything but intelligence gathering purposes, then they will unlikely attempt further covert action in this unstable territory. Hamas and Israel will almost certainly continue to fight as they have been for the past seven months, waging a war of airstrikes and rockets. Additionally, increased protests will likely materialize in and around Gaza, which have been occurring since March, specifically protesting the Israel-Gaza border. Netanyahu will certainly immediately meet with the Ministry of Defense to address the increased tension and discuss the results of the operational failures that occurred, including the fierce response of Hamas.

[Hunter Binkley]

### **POLAND: Leaders March with Far-Right Groups During Parade in Show of Nationalism**

**Summary:** During the Independence Day parade, political leaders and members of far-right groups participated in a march, demonstrating a rise in nationalism that continues to divide Poland and bolster nationalism in other nations in Eastern Europe.

**Development:** On 11 November, Polish President Andrzej Duda led a march of over 200,000 people to celebrate the centenary of Polish independence. The event, however, experienced heavy criticism and controversy, as many alt-right and nationalist groups marched behind Polish politicians. In response, many opposition groups boycotted the event, declaring that allowing nationalist groups to march had surrendered Poland's Independence Day to radicalism. The march follows a legal altercation over a previous ban on a nationalist march put in place a few days earlier, due to the previous year's march making headlines over racist chants and police clashes. In the ensuing legal struggle, a Warsaw court sided with the nationalist organizers. Before the court made a decision, however, the Polish government announced a state march, which further strained the situation until the announcement of a joint march—one part of the procession for the government, and one part for nationalists. The event, despite earlier concerns, carried on peacefully.

**Analysis:** Despite Duda's calls for unity, many Poles condemned the march, criticizing the government for apparent concessions to nationalism—thus further demonstrating the growing political divide in Poland, as nationalism continues to rise throughout Europe. Additionally, the willingness of Duda and his Law and Justice Party (which came to power in 2015) to attempt to negotiate with far-right groups may embolden these groups in the future, especially as Poland

becomes more polarized. Acquiescing to right-wing groups might also create a rift on Poland's political right, as the Law and Justice party's tacit support may frustrate far-right groups as it has with center and left-leaning constituents. The fracturing in Poland also produces uncertainty over its status with the EU, as right-wing groups may continue to gain more platform despite internal disagreements. Poland's strong nationalism may also bolster nationalism in other countries, like Hungary and other nations in Eastern Europe, possibly leading the EU to take an increasingly stronger stance against nationalism and consider taking further action, which may include sanctions.

[Gianna Geiger, gianna.geiger.ee@gmail.com]

### **TAIWAN: Plans to Make English Second Language May Diminish Chinese Influence**

**Summary:** The National Development Council (NDC) of Taiwan announced its plan to establish English as the island's official second language—a symbolic step closer to the West and further from China.

**Development:** On 7 November, Taiwan's NDC announced its plan to make English its official second language. Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) called for the implementation as a method of raising its "international competitiveness" while critics accuse the plan as Taiwan's attempt to further distance itself from China. The announcement follows a high school curriculum change that occurred earlier this year that separated Taiwan's history from China's. Taiwan separated from China during the 1949 civil war but never formally declared its independence, and Beijing still sees the self-ruling island as part of its territory to be reunited. The NDC hopes to create a fully bilingual school system by 2030 and will reveal the final draft of the plan in early December, which requires the president's approval by the end of this year to take effect.

**Analysis:** Taiwan's decision to establish English as its second language likely suggests its desire to strengthen its ties with the West and weaken its ties with mainland China. Many of Taiwan's citizens—as well as the ruling DPP—are pro-independence-leaning and will almost certainly welcome the plan in hopes of diluting their Chinese identity and countering "mainlandization" of the island. The decision—as well as the previous decision to separate Taiwan's history from China's—will almost certainly incite criticism and contempt from mainland China, who likely sees the move as a threat to its hold on the sovereign island. President Tsai Ing-wen will probably approve the plan but argue that she solely intends the plan to heighten Taiwan's competitiveness on the international stage by making it a bilingual and more globalized nation—as opposed to symbolizing the island taking one step further from China's influence. Nevertheless, China will most likely increase its scrutiny on the self-ruling island and continue its efforts in inhibiting the consistent pro-independence rhetoric among the Taiwanese.

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