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THAILAND: Military Influence and Instability Likely to Continue

Summary: Despite the recent announcement of parliamentary elections in Thailand after years of delays and following coups in 2006 and 2014, Thai military leaders appear intent on ensuring that the balance of power will remain in their favor. Dissatisfaction with the military's influence runs deep, but so does a lack of confidence in Thai democracy, and the military has embedded itself legally within parliament, making a military-free government highly unlikely.

Low Confidence in Government: Repeated election delays and a new constitution have raised the stakes for the 24 March elections. Shortly after the 2014 coup, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-Cha suggested holding elections at end of 2015, but skeptical government officials postponed the election to 2016. Since the 2014 election, the National Council for Peace and Order, headed by coup leader Chan-o-Cha drafted a new constitution.

Under the 2017 constitution, military leaders changed the composition of parliament and the way the public votes so that Thai citizens can only cast one ballot for constituency and party. The military drafted the new constitution with the intent of limiting the power of major political parties in the country and strengthening military involvement. The public did not understand the scope of these changes until weeks after the changes.

Thailand's political atmosphere historically struggled with maintaining a democratically elected government, but the current political crisis stems from the 2006 coup. In September 2006, the Thai Military took control of Bangkok while Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra attended a UN summit in New York. The military alleged that Shinawatra abused and possessed too much power. Following these events, two major political groups emerged, known as Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts. The Red Shirts identify themselves as rural voters and middle to lower class Bangkok residents. The Yellow Shirts include royalists and pro-military citizens. Yellow shirts have strongholds in Bangkok and Southern Thailand within the middle and upper class. After the 2006 coup removing Shinawatra, the populist Thai Rak Thai Party dissolved, and the Pheu Thai Party and Red Shirts emerged to put political pressure on military leaders and the government. On 24 March, Red Shirts will support the Pheu Thai Party as they have in past elections.

Political Parties and their Positions: Four major political parties will compete in the 24 March election:

- **Pheu Thai (Center Right):** As an offshoot of the former Thai Rak Thai Party, the party of Shinawatra maintains a strong presence in rural Thailand. Parties linked to Shinawatra have won every election since 2001, and many observers believe Pheu Thai will win the upcoming election.
- **Palang Pracharat (Center Right):** Lead by current Prime Minister and coup leader Prayut Chan-o-Cha, the newly founded party favors the military and includes former government officials loyal to Chan-o-Cha. Additionally, Palang Pracharat will likely use the revised constitution and courts to its benefit.
- **Democrat (Center Left):** As the oldest party in Thailand, the Democrat Party has the advantage of loyal party voters from urban Bangkok and Southern Thailand. Lead by former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, the party hopes to gain votes from the younger

population by increasing economic opportunities. The party that wins the largest number of votes will likely need the support of the Democrat Party to form a governing coalition.

- **Future Forward (Left Wing):** Billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the leader of the youngest major political party, Future Forward, hopes to gain support from first time voters. The party also recognizes that many Thais are dissatisfied with the current state of “Red and Yellow” politics and want to reform the political system. Recent polls suggest that Future Forward will likely win the second largest number of seats.

The barring of the Thai Raksa Chart Party from the election removed an important player. On 8 February, the Thai Raksa Chart Party announced that its candidate, Princess Ubol Ratana, the older sister of the Thai King Vajiralongkorn. Following the announcement, Vajiralongkorn quickly condemned her candidacy as inappropriate. Additionally, on 7 March, the constitutional court, strengthened by the new constitution, passed a ruling barring the Thai Raska Chart Party from the upcoming election. The party anticipated to win more than 50 constituencies that would give them influence in a coalition government formed with Pheu Thai. The current government likely did not anticipate a member of the royal family declaring candidacy for parliament, a move that likely benefited the military government.

Outlook and Implications: Regardless of the election results, the military will likely retain control of government, and many impediments stand in the way of a stable, democratic government, as people lost confidence in both military rule and democratically elected governments. The Pheu Thai Party, the party likely to win the most seats, will likely attempt to align themselves with either the Democrat Party or the Future Forward party, which may cause instability in the coalition as the political agendas of those parties do not align. A Pheu Thai win would send a strong message to military leaders that, regardless of their intervention in government, Pheu Thai will remain a dominating force within Thai politics. Moreover, all three of the major non-military parties oppose military influence. Provided that the Constitutional Court has no evidence of invalid voting, the Pheu Thai Party’s candidate, Sudarat Keyuraphan, will likely be the next prime minister, provided that she is voted in by the senate. The military-appointed senate was restructured in 2017 to prevent one political party from holding large amounts of power. If the senate elects a prime minister of its own choosing, the prospects of Thailand returning to a constitutional-monarchical governing system will fall further.

[Allyson Campbell, Carlton Dorrrough, Tyler Wilkins]

ALGERIA: President's Promises Unlikely to Appease Protestors

Summary: Despite President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's announcement of a government reshuffle and his intentions to eventually resign, protestors will likely continue protesting until he steps down and the government holds its indefinitely postponed elections.

Development: On 18 March, Bouteflika announced he would step down when his mandate expires on 25 April, allowing a transitional government to take over and prepare for upcoming elections. This transitional government consists of several presidential advisers, who maintained close ties with Bouteflika. Anti-government protests began on 16 February following Bouteflika's bid to run for a fifth term. In response to the protests, Bouteflika announced his decision to withdraw his candidacy, and the government postponed the 18 April elections without setting a new date. Protestors are demanding Bouteflika step down immediately and claim the transitional government would continue to serve his interests rather than the peoples'.

Analysis: While Bouteflika's recent announcements could convince some citizens of a legitimate government transition, protestors will most likely continue protesting until Bouteflika steps down and the government allows for elections to take place. Protestors will likely remain adamant because they do not trust Bouteflika's or the transitional government's intentions and thus want to elect and empower their own leader as soon as possible. Until Bouteflika steps down, this transition process cannot take place, so protestors will most likely persist in demanding his immediate resignation to hasten the process. After he resigns, protestors will almost certainly demand the government set a date for and hold elections because many protestors suspect the transitional government will serve as an extension of Bouteflika's power even after he steps down. Their protests will likely continue until they can elect a new president who could then coordinate a new government, excluding officials that citizens suspect as Bouteflika supporters.

[Caitlyn Aaron]

ISRAEL: Increased Conflict Will Likely Erupt at the Israel-Gaza Border

Summary: Upcoming protests and elections will likely cause heightened conflict between Israelis and Palestinians to erupt along the Israel-Gaza border in the coming weeks.

Development: On 1 March, tensions escalated between Israel and Hamas at the Israel-Gaza border following an increase in Palestinian riots and arson in anticipation of the 30 March to 15 May March of Return protests. These protests, which also occurred last year, demand the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land, taken from them by Israel. In response to these riots, the Israeli Air Force (I.A.F) launched five airstrikes in the last four days against Hamas terror compounds in the Gaza Strip.

Analysis: The conflict along the Israel-Gaza border will most likely worsen for Israel as the 30 March protests and 9 April Israeli elections near. Palestinians in Gaza will likely launch more balloon arson attacks at Southern Israel because of this arson method's proven success in causing significant damage to Israeli property. The I.A.F will probably subsequently respond to these Palestinian acts of terror with repeated airstrikes on Hamas terror compounds, Israeli's usual tactical response. Lastly, Netanyahu may use this current Israel-Gaza conflict as an opportunity to showcase Israel's strength to secure his 9 April reelection, similarly to when he used the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense to his 2013 election advantage.

[Michelle Riffer]

KAZAKHSTAN: Longtime President Abruptly Resigns, Creating Uncertainty

Summary: Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned on 19 March after 30 years of leadership. His shock departure could signal transition uncertainty that may slow Kazakh reforms and economic growth.

Development: On 19 March, Nazarbayev abruptly resigned after ascending to power in 1989. Nazarbayev will still retain considerable powers in the new role as Leader of the Nation despite stepping down from the presidency. A law passed in May 2018 also allows Nazarbayev to remain as head of Kazakhstan's powerful National Security Council for the remainder of his life. Nazarbayev appointed Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the speaker of Kazakhstan's upper house of parliament, to succeed him until the scheduled 2020 elections.

Analysis: Nazarbayev will likely remain influential in his post as Leader of the Nation, despite his abrupt departure from the presidency. Nazarbayev possibly desired to preserve his legacy and help facilitate a smooth transfer of power by staying in a powerful role. Similarly, the stagnating Kazakh economy and some unrest among politically active Kazakhs likely also inspired Nazarbayev's exit. Kazakhstan will likely soon face a problem of succession, however, with some members of Nazarbayev's family potentially eyeing the presidency. Nazarbayev's politically active eldest daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva and Nazarbayev's nephew Samrat Abish, who holds the number two position in the National Security Committee, may seek the presidency following Nazarbayev's resignation. Regardless of who succeeds him, a transition of power will likely slow reforms in Kazakhstan's energy sector and in other areas already in progress in the Kazakhstani government. Additionally, despite Nazarbayev remaining in some key roles, uncertainly may turn away some investors that initially invested in Kazakh state-owned companies under Nazarbayev's rule.

[Gianna Geiger]

[NETHERLANDS: Tram Shooting Leads to Concerns of Similar Attacks](#)

Summary: A shooting in Utrecht, will likely put the region on high alert for terrorism and similar attacks.

Development: On 18 March, a man boarded a tram in the Dutch city of Utrecht and opened fire, killing three people and injuring five others. The same day authorities took a suspect into custody and identified him as 37-year-old Gokmen Tanis, who has a criminal record. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte released a statement noting the possibility of terrorism but did not state a definitive motive for the attack. Later, authorities identified a possible personal motive as relatives described his involvement in a dispute with his ex-wife. This attack comes three days after the mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, leading to mosques and schools across the Netherlands temporarily closing and placed under protective services.

Analysis: This latest attack will likely cause an increase in the fear and vigilance surrounding terrorist attacks. Regardless of the true cause of the attack, the chance of terrorism will likely dominate public discussion. To date, the Netherlands experienced few major attacks, terrorist or otherwise, compared to other European nations. The community of Utrecht and the rest of the Netherlands will likely take a long time to fully recover, and it likely broke the perception of many citizens that they have a “bubble” surrounding them. As a result, both the public and authorities will likely remain on high alert in the coming days and weeks. Additionally, Dutch legislators may pass new legislation to prevent such an attack from happening again.

[Alli McIntyre]

SUDAN: New Presidential Cabinet May Exacerbate Protests

Summary: President Omar al-Bashir swore in a new cabinet, claiming it will tackle Sudan's current economic crisis. However, nationwide protests will most likely continue and could worsen.

Development: On 14 March, al-Bashir swore in 20 new cabinet members amid widespread protests. The protests called for an end to al-Bashir's tenure began in December 2018, following a massive rise in commodity prices. Al-Bashir claims that he intends this new cabinet, in which a majority of its members hold ties with al-Bashir's National Congress Party, to serve as a measure to improve the economy. These claims, however, did nothing to diminish the demonstrations. Police deployed tear gas against the protestors and made several arrests, and Human Rights Watch states the protests have already claimed up to 51 lives since December.

Analysis: Given that most of the cabinet members support al-Bashir's own political party, many citizens in Sudan likely view this move as an attempt to ensure that he maintains power rather than to ameliorate Sudan's economic crisis as he claims. With loyalty from his cabinet, al-Bashir could better garner continued support for his continued rule, which directly conflicts with citizens' calls for him to step down and could thus prompt further unrest. The steady nature of the protests following the instatement of the new cabinet likely indicates that the Sudanese public will not back down from its demands despite police confrontations. This may lead to greater violence across the country as protestors and police forces clash.

[Thomas Perkins]

This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.

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