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POLAND: Controversial Judicial Reform Bill May Agitate EU Relationships

Summary: The passage of a controversial judicial reform bill in Poland will likely inhibit judiciary capabilities and inflame tensions with the European Union (EU).

Development: On 4 February, Polish President Andrzej Duda authorized a bill allowing politicians to fine and fire judges who made decisions deemed harmful, the latest of Law and Justice Party's (PiS) controversial judicial reform. The Polish parliament originally passed the bill on 20 December 2019, sending it to the senate and then to Duda for final approval. The bill continues to receive strong criticism from both the EU and the United Nations (UN) due to fears of violating judicial independence and reducing checks and balances. As a result, the EU threatened to remove Poland's voting rights.

Analysis: The passage of this legislation will likely limit the judiciary's power of dissent against the parliament. If judges fear repercussions for publicly disagreeing with the government and PiS, they will almost certainly speak out less against unjust legislation or make unfavorable rulings. As a result, Duda and the PiS party will likely feel enabled to pass controversial legislation, which will likely expand tensions with the EU and may prompt the EU to deliver on its threat to remove Poland's voting rights. In the event of revocation of its voting rights, Duda and the PiS will likely try to grow anti-EU sentiment in Poland and garner support for policies.

[Alli McIntyre]

NICARAGUA: Conflicts Indicate Reduced Protections for Indigenous Populations

Summary: A series of attacks on the indigenous Mayagna people in Nicaragua combined with minimal resistance or government protection likely indicate the increasingly threatened security of indigenous people and their land in Nicaragua.

Development: On 30 January, armed settlers killed 6 indigenous Mayagnas and kidnapped 10 more. The attack reportedly occurred as a result of a land dispute between the indigenous Mayagnas and settlers who wish to harvest natural resources from the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve. Managua investigated the attack and confirmed the deaths of at least two of the victims. The Mayagnas responded with claims that groups similar to the ones that attacked wish to “exterminate” them to gain access to their land, and reports also indicate that such attacks persisted since 2014. Thus far, Managua’s response to the attacks lacked substantial enforcement action, despite passing laws to improve indigenous rights.

Analysis: Managua’s inaction against the attacks against the Mayagna people likely indicates a growing threat to human security and environmental conservation domestically. The settlers interested in the land’s resources will likely continue staging attacks due to significant action to protect the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve and the Mayagna people. As a result, the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve could lose its protected status, and settlers will likely escalate their pursuit of resources located in the region. The Mayagnas will likely face increasing difficulty protecting their land and livelihoods as Managua fails to protect nature reserves, indigenous people, and their lands in Nicaragua.

[Parker Labine]

TURKEY: Airstrikes on Syrian Military Positions Threaten Security Pact with Russia

Summary: The Turkish military (TSK) launched airstrikes on Syrian Arab Army (SAA) positions in northeastern Syria, escalating conflicts and threatening Turkey's security pact with Russia.

Development: On 3 February, Ankara launched several retaliatory strikes against SAA troops in Idlib province following artillery shelling that killed TSK troops near the Turkish border. Syrian state media denies claims that the Turkish offensive resulted in casualties, but the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stated that at least 13 SAA personnel died in the strikes. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Moscow to not engage in the conflict, citing the Sochi pact, a mutual security agreement from September 2018 that nominally sustains a cease-fire between the two countries. SAA forces have recently intensified bombing campaigns in Idlib province with the logistical support from Russia.

Analysis: Direct military conflict between Turkey and Syria will likely exacerbate tensions among actors involved in the Syrian civil war. The relationship between Moscow and Damascus will likely strengthen as their joint operations in Idlib province intensify while the Sochi pact continues to degrade relations between Moscow and Ankara. Russia will likely maintain its military operations supporting the SAA in combating Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and Turkish-backed rebels in Idlib, further deteriorating its relationship with Turkey and TSK's operations in Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syria. As the conflict continues to escalate, and more refugees flee Idlib province towards the Turkish border, Erdogan may fulfill his promise to relocate its approximately 3.6 million refugees back to Syria, furthering the humanitarian crisis in Idlib province and complicating military operations in the region.

[Riley Coder]

KOSOVO: Parliament Approves Nontraditional Prime Minister

Summary: The confirmation of a former leftist rebel as prime minister by Kosovo's parliament indicates a likely deviation from previous leaders' tactics.

Development: On 3 February, Kosovo's Parliament approved Albin Kurti, a former leftist rebel leader, as prime minister. This event follows a snap election in October 2019 after former prime minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned and four months of coalition talks between two of Kosovo's main political parties: Kurti's leftist-nationalist party Vetevendosje and the center-right Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). A former rebel leader, Kurti passionately protested for Albanian independence, nonviolence, and used disruptive tactics in previous parliaments as political tools. Kurti's ideals differentiate him from the ex-guerrilla Kosovo Liberation Army fighters that previously held power. Kurti vowed to cut unnecessary expenses in government, fight corruption, and to lead talks with Serbia. Previous EU-sponsored talks between Kosovo and Serbia stalled in November 2018 when Kosovo introduced a 100% tax on Serbian goods. Kurti promised to remove these trade tariffs, but announced plans to introduce other economic measures against Serbia.

Analysis: Kurti will likely face challenges in gaining support from members of parliament who supported the previous prime minister Haradinaj, weakening his ability to act. Kurti's strong political ideals may limit his willingness to compromise on key issues as prime minister. Kosovo's new government also faces the ongoing conflict with Serbia, which will likely continue despite attempts to diminish disputes. Kurti will likely lift the 100% tax on Serbian goods, but will likely seek to enact other economic countermeasures until Serbia recognizes Kosovo's independence.

[Gianna Geiger]

GREECE: Defense Support for Riyadh Likely Indicates a Developing Security Partnership

Summary: Athens announced its supply of defensive missile systems to Riyadh amid festering regional tensions with Tehran, likely signaling developing defense cooperation between Greece and Saudi Arabia.

Development: On 4 February, Athens announced upcoming support for Riyadh in the form of Patriot Missile Defense Systems, a ground-based, mobile missile defense interceptor with a range of approximately 60 miles. The missiles can target UAVs, cruise missiles, and short-range or tactical ballistic missiles. The support follows the attack on a Saudi Aramco oil facility on 14 September 2019, for which the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels claimed responsibility. Greek officials also stated that 103 personnel will assist in the transport and establishment of the missile defense systems.

Analysis: Athens will likely continue to lend further support to Riyadh. The threat against Saudi oil facilities and other key installations remains high, but the Patriot Missile Defense Systems will likely mitigate this threat and deter Iranian aggression in the region. Riyadh will probably seek more defense partners in their anti-Iranian coalition as tensions continue to rise in the region. In return for military aid, Athens likely hopes that Riyadh will extend economic aid to Greece. Both governments will likely continue to support each other in deterring Iranian aggression, possibly resulting in a stronger diplomatic and economic relationship.

[Dorian Taylor]

LIBYA: Military Aid from Turkey and the UAE Will Likely Escalate Conflict

Summary: The increase of foreign combatants and military supplies from Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to opposing sides of the Libyan conflict will likely cause the cease fire to fail and increase foreign intervention in Libya.

Development: On 4 February, two anonymous Libyan militia commanders in the Government of National Accord (GNA) reported to the Associated Press that Turkey will send 4,000 foreign fighters to support the GNA in the fight against the Libyan National Army (LNA), many affiliated with extremist organizations according to the militia commanders. Ankara reportedly will also supply the GNA with weapons and combatants. The United Arab Emirates committed to sending large supplies of weapons and supplies to the LNA as well. Both countries military aid violates the UN's weapons embargo on Libya.

Analysis: The violations of the arms embargo by the United Arab Emirates and Turkey will probably cause the Libyan cease fire to fail as both militias gain more access to weapons and combatants. Such an escalation will likely increase the participation of western nations in the conflict in Libya, and the escalation of foreign interference in Libya will almost certainly lengthen the conflict. Western countries will likely leverage their position to gain access to Libya's oil reserves. The United Nations will probably not respond to the embargo violations with punitive action but will likely increase their effort to broker a peace deal between the rival militias to end the conflict before foreign intervention increases.

[Robert Lundgren]

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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