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## **UNITED KINGDOM: Uncertainty Following Brexit Likely to Continue**

**Summary:** Following the United Kingdom's (UK) official departure from the European Union (EU), the UK will likely enter a period of political and economic uncertainty. The tensions created as a result of Brexit proceedings will likely increase, showing through potential issues in domestic policy and the renewed push for Scottish independence.

**Current State of Brexit:** On 31 January, the UK officially left the EU, a little over three and a half years after the original Brexit referendum occurred on 23 June 2016. Immediately after its exit, the UK entered into a transition period that will last until 31 December 2020. During the transition period, the movement of citizens and trade will continue as normal, and although the UK will continue to pay EU dues, it will no longer have delegates in the European Parliament. The transition period will also allow time for negotiations for a new trade deal between the UK and EU to begin.

**Economic Issues:** Trade will likely remain a highly contested topic in the UK until parties can agree upon a deal with the EU, the contents of which will likely have a long-lasting impact on the UK's economy. During the transition period, trade between the UK and EU nations will largely remain the same. If a deal is not created and agreed upon when the transition period ends, trade rules would default to those set by the World Trade Organization (WTO), imposing tariffs that would likely hurt the UK's economy. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to form a zero-tariff, zero-quota deal before the transition period ends, while EU officials say that in exchange for those stipulations, Johnson must agree to fair competition rules. The likelihood of the implementation of such a deal before 31 December remains low, as Johnson remains against the fair competition rules and official negotiations will not begin until March 2020. If the UK fails to solidify a deal by year-end, Johnson will likely face pressure from pro-EU Members of Parliament (MPs) to extend the transition period to prevent implementation of the WTO's standards, and simultaneously face pressure from pro-Brexit MPs to stay true to his promise of no more extensions. The EU remains one of the UK's largest trading partners. Industry trade leaders will likely advocate for secured access to EU markets, for Johnson to agree to the EU's terms, and an extension of the transition period if necessary.

**Internal Political Tensions:** The political divide created by Brexit will likely impact domestic politics within the UK. Brexit escalated tensions, which will likely remain present in legislation debated in Parliament by MPs. The public will likely perceive any new proposed legislation through a post-Brexit lens, limiting the ability of MPs to easily pass legislation. Pro-EU MPs and parties such as the Labour Democrats, which opposed Brexit, may seek to push forward more legislation to potentially make up for leaving the EU, sparking opposition by Johnson's Conservative party. If MPs propose legislation that significantly impacts domestic policies, it will likely become the object of much debate and unanimous support will become harder to achieve. MPs may also try to take advantage of Brexit dominating the national conversation as

an opportunity to introduce and potentially pass controversial legislation, a move that may further inflame tensions.

**Scottish Dissent:** Members of the Scottish National Party (SNP) will likely begin to explore routes to Scottish independence. Results from an opinion poll released the week of the UK's official departure from the EU showed that 51% of Scottish voters would support Scotland's independence from the UK. In the 2016 Brexit referendum, 62% of Scottish voters supported the motion to remain in the EU, an opinion that caused tension in the following Brexit proceedings. SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon supports holding an independence referendum, but doing so requires approval from Johnson who has said he will not give the necessary support after the 2014 Scottish independence referendum resulted in a decision to stay. Johnson will likely try to prevent any independence movements from gaining strong momentum, as if granted, Scotland would likely try to rejoin the EU. This likely stems from the idea of UK sovereignty from the EU and depending on the outcome of the trade deal, keeping Scotland in the UK may help to build up its economy. However, tensions between the SNP and other MPs supporting Johnson's decision will likely continue to grow.

**Outlook and Implications:** The issue of the trade deal will likely remain one of the largest issues debated in UK politics, especially as the end of the transition period approaches. Due to the magnitude and complexity of creating such a deal, parliament will not likely agree on a deal before the 31 December deadline. As such, Johnson may ask for an extension on the transition period to ensure the approval of a favorable deal. Without a deal, the UK's economy will likely enter a period of decline, due to its large reliance on trade with the EU.

With rising internal tensions, the effectiveness of the UK's Parliament will likely diminish. UK lawmakers will likely find passing new legislation difficult for the foreseeable future amidst the political divide created by Brexit. Such internal turmoil in the UK will likely continue to influence domestic politics until MPs and citizens feel that a beneficial compromise on Brexit and a post-Brexit UK occurs.

Resolving dissent from Scotland will likely continue to prove difficult. Pressure will likely rise for the SNP and Sturgeon to make a decisive move on the issue, whether that be to drop the question or to begin negotiations with Johnson to allow a referendum. If Scotland leaves the UK, it will likely create similar problems to those that emerged during Brexit negotiations, primarily focusing around trade and borders. However, the support for independence may change depending on what occurs during the transition period between the UK and EU. Support for Scottish independence will likely rise if the Scottish view the trade deal as ineffective or inequitable. If the trade deal can result in a mutually beneficial agreement and the situation stabilizes within the UK, support may decline.

[Alli McIntyre]

### **IRAN: Support for Palestinian Armed Groups Will Likely Increase Regional Tension**

**Summary:** Iran's promised support for Palestinian armed groups in response to proposed shifts in the Israel-Palestine plan will likely increase regional instability and further polarize actors in the conflict.

**Development:** On 5 February, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed full support for Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in response to Washington's proposed plans for Israel-Palestine, which favors Israel and faces opposition from the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Khamenei announced the support of Palestinian resistance as Tehran's duty and called out Arab leaders in support of the proposed plan.

**Analysis:** Tehran's backing of Hamas through training and funding will likely increase, exacerbating regional violence and prompting other regional powers to join the conflict. Israeli-Palestinian relations will likely continue to strain and the frequent outbreaks of violence in recent history suggest that a catalyst such as the new plan and Iranian support may embolden Hamas to push back violently. As the plan threatens Palestine's regional sovereignty, Hamas will likely conduct more violent operations against Israeli forces and further domestic conflict, resulting in a more aggressive Israeli military and political posture.

[Timothy Fergus]

### **KAZAKHSTAN: 10 Dead in Ethnic Clashes that Will Likely Continue**

**Summary:** Violence will likely continue following ethnically-charged attacks in southern Kazakhstan and growing tensions in the region despite government intervention.

**Development:** On 8 February, ethnic clashes in Masanchi and other villages in southern Kazakhstan resulted in the deaths of 10 people and hundreds of others fleeing to neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh authorities deployed riot police to the area immediately after the conflict began. The conflict erupted between ethnic Kazakhs and Dungans, a Muslim group originating from China, although the cause of the fighting remains unknown. Several ethnic Kazakh men reported to journalists that Kazakhs resented the Dungan population's longstanding economic success. The regional governor declared a state of emergency late on 8 February, and authorities characterized the violence as a mass brawl instead of ethnic clashes, dictated by the long-standing national advertisement of unity despite existing ethnic tensions.

**Analysis:** While authorities deployed riot police and announced a state of emergency, the Kazakh government almost certainly will not combat ethnic tension further as it contradicts the nationally advertised notion of unity amongst ethnic groups. Additionally, police will likely not investigate the event beyond detaining people suspected of inciting violence. This will likely prompt more ethnic clashes in the region, especially as sentiment grows amongst ethnic Kazakhs that Dungans are prospering inequitably. As police seek to downplay the cause of the violence, Dungans may protest and press authorities to recognize discrimination, which may further incite anger among Kazakhs in the region.

[Gianna Geiger]

## **INDIA: Former Kashmir Minister Investigated Due to Treason Accusations**

**Summary:** Senior Congress member and former Jammu and Kashmir region minister, Ghulam Mohammad Saroori, along with other officials, may face treason charges from the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

**Development:** On 10 February, the NIA summoned Saroori for questioning due to potential links with the Hizbul Mujahideen, a pro-Pakistani militant group that seeks the integration of Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan. The NIA called Saroori to investigate his connection with a commander in the Hizbul Mujahideen, known as Osama. Police and security forces killed Osama alongside two other Mujahideen militants on 28 September 2019 in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir. The militants had killed Bharatiya Janata party leader Anil Parihar and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh party functionary Chanderkant Sharma in Kishtwar town on 1 November 2018.

**Analysis:** The NIA will likely arrest Saroori for conspiracy and treason against the state for his alleged connections to Hizbul Mujahideen. Officials in Jammu and Kashmir may come under close scrutiny as well, and Indian authorities may pursue further investigations for other government officials suspected of collaborating with Hizbul Mujahideen, potentially revealing corruption amongst Saroori's political allies and associates. Jammu and Kashmir Police will likely also take further action against Hizbul Mujahideen and groups spreading pro-Pakistani rhetoric in the region, exacerbating tensions in the regions.

[Dorian Taylor]

### **SYRIA: Five Turkish Soldiers Killed in Idlib Shelling After Peace Talks**

**Summary:** Artillery shelling in Idlib province that killed five shows that tensions between Turkey and Syria will likely only increase despite ceasefire talks with Russia.

**Development:** On 10 February, shelling in the Taftanaz village of Idlib province killed five soldiers, according to Turkish defense officials. The shelling prompted the Turkish government to retaliate the following day. Peace talks with a Russian delegation ended with no agreement following the shelling. Turkey called for Syria to pull back forces by the end of February, threatening to drive them back.

**Analysis:** Despite peace talks, this attack demonstrates a continuation of the violent civil war in Syria as Damascus sustains military operations into rebel-controlled territory and more than 700,000 refugees remain stranded in Idlib province. In the short run, Turkey will likely deploy more military forces to the civil war due to concerns about the continuing spillover from the refugee crisis in Syria. Syria will almost certainly refuse to pull back its forces as Turkish-backed rebels remain close to its territorial control. Russia may gain more traction as a mediating force and power broker in the region as it attempts to solidify a peace agreement between Turkey and Syria, bolstering its influence in the Middle East.

[Grace Knopp]

### **UNITED KINGDOM: Scottish Party Official Steps Down Amid Sex Scandal**

**Summary:** Derek Mackay, deputy finance minister for the Scottish National Party (SNP), stepped down after allegations of soliciting a minor, likely causing poor publicity for the SNP without major political losses.

**Development:** On 6 February, Mackay stepped down from office following an article alleging that he sent hundreds of sexually-motivated messages to a 16-year-old boy through social media. In conjunction with these allegations, further allegations charged the SNP with covering up Mackay's affair by attempting to obstruct the publication of this story. News of the scandal broke after the SNP's extremely favorable parliamentary election results in 2019.

**Analysis:** The SNP will likely face negative publicity from the scandal and may see a decline in poll numbers despite the large victory in parliament. The scandal probably will not affect the SNP's policy objectives, particularly its plans for Scotland's independence from the United Kingdom. Political opponents of the SNP will more than likely emphasize the importance of this scandal, potentially diminishing support for the SNP in future elections. However, any attempts to undermine the SNP and disrupt the status quo will likely fall flat due largely to its overwhelming hold on seats in parliament.

[Rhett Theobald]



**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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