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ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN: Border Clashes May Add to Economic Strife, Ethnic Tensions

Summary: Ankara and European governments will probably cultivate influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as it endangers the South Caucasus Pipeline System. Continued violence along the Line of Contact (LOC) in the Nagorno-Karabakh region will probably stir ethnic tensions in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The conflict will probably not result in direct Russian military intervention, though Moscow will continue to mediate the conflict due to continued interest in the South Caucasus, traditionally seen as a Russian Sphere of Influence by Moscow.

Energy Concerns: Reliance on the South Caucasus Pipeline system running through Nagorno-Karabakh produces anxieties in various European and Asian states but will probably not prompt these states, aside from possibly Turkey, to directly intervene. Conflicts between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces increased in recent months in the Ganja Gap, a 60-mile wide area north of Nagorno-Karabakh which hosts the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Baku-Supsa pipeline, and the South Caucasus pipeline. Elshad Nassirov, vice president of the Azeri energy company SOCAR, stated the risk posed to the energy transported through the region. Consistent fighting along the LOC will likely jeopardize the flow of one or more of the pipelines. The oil transported through this region remains vital to European energy security and will likely draw the attention of western actors as conflict in the region intensifies. Ankara maintains a heightened interest in the pipeline system as several of the lines flow directly through Turkish territory. European nations, as well as Turkey, may intervene in the conflict if fighting along the LOC escalates.

Ethnic Tensions: Ethno-religious tensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh region will likely worsen as fighting in the region intensifies and may expand further into either country. The international community largely considers Nagorno-Karabakh an autonomous province of Azerbaijan, but the population consists mostly of Armenian Christians as opposed to the Azeri Muslim majority. In July, conflict spread from Nagorno-Karabakh towards the northern Azeri and Armenian borders with Georgia. Historical ethnic anxieties and tensions will probably surge throughout both countries parallel with increases in border fighting.

Russian Influence: Moscow will probably continue to act as a primary mediator in the conflict to maintain influence in the greater-South Caucasus geopolitics by utilizing its position as leader of the OSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) Minsk Group without direct intervention. Russian goals in the region include the deterrence of Georgia, developing relations with Armenia, and the vital energy pipelines. Moscow sits on the OSCE Minsk Group, an organization created in 1992 to achieve a diplomatic solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Turkish Involvement: Ankara will likely continue to support Baku in the conflict through military and economic assistance to oppose Russian influence within the South Caucasus. Ankara and Baku share interests in both preserving Islamic strength and deterring Moscow's interference. The Turkish armed forces maintain a presence at an army base in Azerbaijan, allowing them to directly coordinate military operations with the Azerbaijani Army including a series of joint military exercises in August following deadly border clashes in the Nagorno-

Karabakh region. Ankara likely believes maintaining influence in the region will allow it to protect the South Caucasus pipeline system that traverses large amounts of Turkish territory.

Outlook and Implications: Baku and Yerevan may exploit ethnic tensions and domestic unrest to further support war efforts in the region. Direct Russian military intervention remains unlikely, but Moscow will probably uphold its position as a conflict mediator to retain influence in the South Caucasus region. However, Moscow may seek to fill the energy vacuum left by a threatened South Caucasus Pipeline System through infrastructure-building projects. Ankara may intervene in the conflict with military force due to concerns regarding the vital South Caucasus Pipeline System and pan-Islamic solidarity with Muslim Azerbaijan. Turkey's response may include conventional military build-up in Azerbaijan but probably not occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. Sustained conflict will almost certainly concern European and South-West Asian governments as it continues to threaten energy security, though directly engagement in armed conflict remains unlikely. Instead, Europeans will probably push to further diplomatic negotiations and attempt to resolve the issue peacefully while potentially seeking more stable energy sources

[Max Olson and Tim Fergus]

LEBANON: Hamas and Hezbollah Leaders Meet to Discuss Diplomatic Relations

Summary: Hamas' senior political leader Ismael Haniyeh and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah met to discuss diplomatic normalization between Israel and Arab countries. The meeting signals mending relations between the organizations and the maturation of diplomatic capabilities in the region.

Development: On 6 September, Hamas and Hezbollah leaders held a meeting to discuss concern over the diplomatic relations between Israel and Arab countries. This came after an announcement stating Israel and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to “normalize ties.” Haniyeh spoke of regional stability, the “axis of resistance” against Israel, and claimed that the formalization of relations does not represent the people of Israel and other Arab countries.

Analysis: Hezbollah and Hamas may seek to develop partnerships in Lebanon and Turkey to counter Israel as it develops diplomatic relations with the Gulf States. The meeting showcased Hamas' and Hezbollah's capacity to strategize as if independent states. The leaders' decision to meet without Palestinian Authority or Lebanese Officials present may be an attempt to prove the legitimacy and relevance of both organizations as both seek recognition as regional political actors.

[Autumn Champlin]

COLOMBIA: Bogota's Policy Inaction May Exacerbate Domestic Conflict

Summary: Bogota will probably not respond to recent massacres in Colombia as some of the victims were former members of narco-terrorist organizations. Government inaction will likely enable an increase in violence as resurgent Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) factions and right-wing paramilitary groups continue to clash in rural areas.

Development: On 8 September, Colombia witnessed the third in a string of three massacres in the course of 24 hours. In 2019, FARC declared an end to a civil war that killed over 260,000 people but redeclared war against the Colombian government following President Ivan Duque's refusal to honor the terms of the peace deal. The refusal of Duque to abide to the peace terms resulted in the reemergence of FARC as well as a rise in right-wing paramilitary groups in opposition. Unrest in the country, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, has strengthened the effects of the violence. Bogota remains quiet on any measures they plan to employ in the face of worsening skirmishes between various criminal and paramilitary factions.

Analysis: Unless Duque begins to reorient policy towards reconciliation with the FARC, the massacres will likely continue as FARC continues to resurge and former members to re-engage in armed conflict. The violence will almost certainly further domestic unrest within Colombia as the rural population now faces COVID-19 and competition between groups. Bogota's policy lack of action against these groups may further the development of right-wing/anti-FARC paramilitary groups. Violence between these organizations, former members of FARC and other narco-terrorist organizations will probably continue to increase. Bogota's reaction to continued violence remains uncertain but may include retaliation against FARC splinter-factions.

[Max Olson]

RUSSIA: Navalny's Poisoning Leads to Strong Foreign Opposition

Summary: The poisoning of Aleksei Navalny may embolden critics of Putin and heighten tensions with foreign opposition. Berlin's resulting threats to cancel a major natural gas infrastructure project will prove detrimental to the heavily oil-reliant Russian economy.

Development: On 7 September, German doctors eased Navalny, primary opposition leader in Russia, out of his medically induced coma following his exposure to a dangerous nerve agent while in Serbia. Authorities immediately transferred him to a hospital in Berlin. The Kremlin denies any involvement in the poisoning regardless of similarities with the 2018 London poisoning of Sergei Skripal. Berlin condemned Russia and discussed discontinuing the Nord Stream II project, a natural gas pipeline of significant import to Moscow.

Analysis: The poisoning may embolden Putin critics, both domestic and foreign, in the struggle for regime change in Moscow. Immediate consequences for Moscow may include cancellation of the Nord Stream project as well as an increase in domestic political unrest. Putin, likely concerned by the mass protests in Belarus, will almost certainly continue to view Navalny as a threat to regime stability. A cancellation of the Nord Stream project will probably restrict Russia's oil-dependent economy as it attempts to expand and diversify.

[Ethan Theobald]

TAIWAN: New Passport Design May Escalate Tensions with Beijing

Summary: The recently announced redesign of Taiwan's passport cover will likely increase tensions with Beijing, potentially prompting increased military operations in the region.

Development: On 2 September, Taiwan's foreign ministry publicized images of its new passport design, which includes notably smaller text to write Republic of China, highlighting Taiwan instead. Chinese military operations near Taiwan have become more frequent, prompting concern and defensive preparation on the island. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen declared Taiwan's liberation from China and continues to work towards updating its military in anticipation of a possible Chinese Communist Party (CCP) invasion.

Analysis: The act of openly broadcasting a different identity independent from China indicates Taiwan's objective of full independence. Consequences of this action may trigger China to further expand its military presence in Taiwan. While Taiwan continues to make steps towards separating fully from China, Beijing will likely increase political and military pressure on the country. This uptick in pressure may lead to military conflict in the South China Sea. Taipei's push for independence may indicate a perceived weakening of the CCP's control in the region.

[Clarisse Joy Absalon]

About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not represent the position Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University or the College of Security and Intelligence.

Riley Coder, a senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at editorsee@gmail.com or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708.

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