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BELARUS: Unrest to Continue, Direct Russian Intervention Probable

Summary: Tensions between protestors and law enforcement in Belarus following the recent contested presidential election will almost certainly continue to escalate, especially if Russian intervenes directly.

Current Tensions: Following the 9 August presidential election, protests erupted across Belarus over concerns of fraud. After 26 years in power, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko currently faces unprecedented political unrest and a growing opposition. Reports stated that Lukashenko received 80% of the vote, while his primary challenger, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, received only 10%. Tikhanovskaya contends that if polling locations were properly counted, she received between 60-70% of total votes. Protests and an internet blackout ensued following the election announcement. Belarusian law enforcement continues to combat protests harshly.

EU Inaction: The European Union (EU) stated that it would sanction Belarus in response to the election and resulting protests, major action remains unlikely. Following an emergency summit in mid-August, the EU released a statement stating that it does not recognize the reported results of the election and would move forward in pressing sanctions, though the EU has yet to enforce such sanctions. EU members remain divided over how to approach the situation and the its role. Inaction combined with the threat of a second wave of COVID-19 in the EU and internal division indicate the EU's inability to react. Overt Russian intervention may prompt the EU into action, but otherwise remains unlikely.

Russian Intervention: Ties between Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin may lead to Russian support of the current government. Following a 14 September meeting with Lukashenko, Putin announced a \$1.5 billion USD loan and joint military exercises. Relations between the two leaders remain tense at times, but Putin likely views Lukashenko as the "least bad option." While the loan lacked explicit conditions, Moscow may utilize it as leverage in future negotiations. Putin stated a desire for Belarus to resolve the issues internally, but Moscow will probably intervene if power shifts to opposition leaders. Moscow likely aims to mitigate Western influence and overt intervention from the EU or other powers would almost certainly prompt direct Russian involvement.

Continued Unrest: Reports of police brutality and the mass arrests of protestors exacerbate protests and violence. Opposition leaders believe that the state failed to report an accurate number of protestors and claim that actual numbers reached up to 100,000 people. The primary opposition leaders, including Tikhanovskaya, have fled the country due to concerns over personal safety. Following Putin and Lukashenko's 14 September meeting, Tikhanovskaya and other opposition leaders condemned Russia's cooperation with the Belarusian government, but agreed with Putin's statement that issues should remain resolved within the country. Sustained unrest despite the threat of injury and imprisonment indicate a strong desire for change amongst the Belarusian people. However, due to Lukashenko's insistence that he will not willingly step down will almost certainly escalate domestic conflict.

Outlook and Implications: Nation-wide political and social unrest will almost certainly continue unless Lukashenko steps down or quells the opposition movement, likely with Russian assistance. Unless Moscow intervenes in Minsk or international outcry over human rights violations grow, major EU action against Lukashenko remains unlikely except potentially offering to mediate between Lukashenko and the opposition. However, Russian intervention remains probable, due to geostrategic interest in the country. Moscow may seek to exploit the situation, by promoting a candidate more sympathetic to Russian interests. Should Lukashenko fail to suppress protests, Moscow may intervene despite stating otherwise. As tensions continue, violence against protests will almost certainly continue to worsen in an effort to deter opposition. This in turn will only serve to anger protesters and opposition leaders, further escalating tensions.

[Alli McIntyre]

IRAN: Developing Arab-Israeli Relations May Prompt Stronger Regional Posture

Summary: The signing of the Abraham Accords officially normalized ties between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, threatening Iran's regional power projection strategy as the agreement includes military, economic and cultural agreements.

Development: On 15 September, leaders from the UAE, Israel, and Bahrain signed a historic agreement brokered by the West to formalize diplomatic relations between the Arab states and Israel. Backlash against the deal swept across the Middle East as Iran, Qatar, and other Arab countries voiced their disapproval. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani condemned the deal in a televised public address, highlighting the perceived danger the accord poses to the Arab World. The UAE issued a response declaring the Iranian rhetoric a threat to regional stability. The deal presents a major blow to Tehran as the country faces mounting internal issues such as economic instability caused by tough sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with civil unrest and frustration with the government.

Analysis: The Abraham Accords will likely prompt Tehran to adopt a militarized posture towards the Arab states involved in the deal, due to the growing cohesion between anti-Iran states. Tehran's internal instability will likely increase amid the geopolitical shift in the region. The deal between Israel and the Gulf States will likely extend past economic and cultural ties, potentially developing into security partnerships which may spur Tehran's adoption of new regional strategies. As Tehran's stability and power continues to slip, these strategies may evolve into desperate measures that could worsen the geopolitical situation of the Middle East.

[Tim Fergus]

ISRAEL: Palestinian Reconciliation Remains Doubtful Despite Bahrain Peace Agreement

Summary: The diplomatic agreement between Manama and Jerusalem will probably not catalyze a policy shift in Ramallah.

Development: On 11 September, Bahraini King Hamad bin Salman al-Khalifa and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu established full diplomatic relations between the nations. Newly formed diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) precede the Declaration of Peace signed by al-Khalifa and Netanyahu. On 17 August, Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdulla expressed support for Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem's diplomatic agreement. Surrounding states in the region remain predominantly neutral to the policy shifts. However, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas criticized the UAE-Israel deal, calling it despicable and a betrayal. Despite Abbas' condemnation, Al-Khalifa expects Palestine and other Gulf nations will follow suit.

Analysis: The Bahrain-Israel diplomatic agreement will probably not shift Ramallah's policy towards reconciliation with Jerusalem despite support amongst the Gulf States. Palestinian rhetoric toward the UAE-Israel deal indicates Ramallah will not engage in the current peace negotiations. Abbas' criticisms will likely remain unchanged amidst shifting regional geopolitics, though it remains unlikely that Abbas will pursue stronger actions or policy changes in response to the deal. Oman will likely follow the UAE and Bahrain in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, while attempting to maintain a positive relationship with Palestine.

[Abigail Clark]

MEXICO: Corruption Investigation Request Signals New Election Strategy

Summary: Mexican President Andres Lopez Obrador's requested corruption investigation of former Mexican presidents likely signifies a new political strategy. Lopez Obrador may level corruption charges against political opponents during the Mexican mid-term elections in 2021.

Development: On 15 September, Lopez Obrador requested the Mexican senate open corruption investigations against five presidential predecessors. The investigations, if approved, will occur in June or August of 2021, on the eve of mid-term elections in Mexico. All five accused former presidents belong to the centrist Institutional Ruling Party (PRI) or the conservative National Action Party (PAN), opponent parties of Lopez Obrador's leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Critics of the regime believe the investigation request may stem from Lopez Obrador's desire to divert attention from his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national economy.

Analysis: Lopez Obrador will probably level corruption charges against not only predecessors but also political opponents as the mid-term elections draw nearer. The PRD may believe its political legitimacy in Mexico is in jeopardy due to poor management principles amidst a faltering economy and the COVID-19 pandemic. Fears of a mid-term defeat, internal unrest, and growing political opposition will likely drive further calls for corruption investigations from Lopez Obrador. However, the effectiveness of investigations remains questionable and will serve primarily as an electoral strategy.

[Max Olson]

RUSSIA: Opposition Leader's Recovery, Return to Politics May Embolden Allies

Summary: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny's recovery from exposure to the Novichok chemical nerve agent and return to Russia will likely threaten the current regime's authority.

Development: On 15 September, Navalny posted to social media after coming out of his medically induced coma and regained both consciousness and most of his mental acuity. On 20 August, Navalny became sick after exposure to a chemical nerve agent of Soviet origin, bringing the government's potential involvement in the incident into question. According to Navalny's official spokesperson, once Navalny recovers he plans to continue his work in Russia, following a drop-in support for President Vladimir Putin due to the country's recent economic downturn.

Analysis: Navalny's continued campaigning against Putin despite the recent attempt on his life will likely weaken the current government and fuel its opposition. The Russian people appear to place blame for the attack on the Russian government and view Navalny as a martyr. This may inspire the Russian people to turn against Putin and the Russian state, especially in light of economic problems. Potential civil unrest may propel Navalny to the spotlight and threaten Putin's legitimacy as opposition forces will likely employ the poisoning to further weaken public support for Putin and his government.

[Ethan Theobald]

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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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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