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EGYPT: Pledge of Support to Libya Likely Indicates Future Cooperation

Summary: A meeting between the Egyptian President and the Interim Libyan Prime Minister will likely lead to Egypt taking more responsibility in rebuilding Libya's national government.

Development: On 18 February, more than six years after closing its embassy in Tripoli, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met incoming Libyan Interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh in Cairo and offered support for Libya's newly elected government. Al-Sisi stated that Egypt "backs the Libyan people" in their quest for stability. The meeting reportedly covered ways to boost security cooperation and to support the ceasefire between the Government National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA). Cairo previously supported the LNA lead by Khalifa Haftar before meeting with the western based GNA.

Analysis: The meeting will likely lead to a more stable Libya and may increase Egyptian influence throughout the region. Al-Sisi will likely seek to support Dbeibeh in achieving stability and preserving the ceasefire. Cairo likely reached out to both the GNA and the LNA to play a major role in building up a new Libyan government. Cairo almost certainly views the current situation in Libya as a way to increase its influence throughout Northern Africa and the Horn of Africa and will almost certainly seek to continue its involvement.

[August Kather]

RUSSIA: Increased Joint Military Capabilities in Armenia May Solidify Position

Summary: Increased Russian presence in Armenia, coupled with its help in the modernization and upgrading of the Armenian military, will almost certainly further secure Moscow's leverage in the Caucasus.

Development: On 22 February, Armenian Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan announced Russia's involvement in directly aiding and working with Armenia to reform, modernize, and upgrade its military. The Russian Defense Ministry in conjunction with Armenia announced its interest in expanding the current 102nd Russian Military base in Gyumri. Armenia, currently one of the only loyal Russian allies in the Caucasus, provides Russia with ample motivation to increase its local military presence and support the modernization and upgrading of Armenia's military.

Analysis: Russia will likely invest more resources to maintain its status as the major power of influence in the Caucasus. Moscow will almost certainly continue to maintain and improve its diplomatic and military relations with Armenia to secure the strategic defense of its southern borders. Moscow will likely continue to focus on this relationship and enhance joint military capabilities in this region to directly counter NATO and other Western bloc forces. Russia will likely utilize its assistance in these military changes to further solidify its leverage in Armenia.

[Erik Lechleitner]

PHILIPPINES: Detection of COVID-19 Variant May Raise Tensions Over Vaccine Rollout

Summary: Philippine health officials reported instances of the B.1.351 South African COVID-19 variant in Manila which will likely escalate public unrest and anxiety.

Development: On 2 March, Philippine health officials identified six instances of the B.1.351 COVID-19 variant. The World Health Organization warned that the variant originating in South Africa may have an increased likelihood of community transmission. These advisories prompted vaccine efficacy research indicating low efficacy of the AstraZeneca vaccine against mild to moderate B.1.351 infection. On 28 February, the Philippines received 600,000 donated doses of Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac from Beijing to supplement doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine purchased by Manila. Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte continues to call on Western and other wealthy nations to donate vaccines to the Philippines. Manila lifted domestic travel restrictions requiring viral tests on 27 February.

Analysis: Further community transmission of the B.1.351 variant in the Philippines may increase anxiety among the general public if research proves the vaccine ineffective against the South African variant. Should fatalities and hospitalization rates rise in the Philippines due to the spread of B.1.351, tensions will almost certainly rise between Manila and wealthier nations while Duterte continues to call for donations of vaccines. Travel restrictions will likely become stricter, reversing Manila's recent decision to relax requirements which will almost surely spur confusion, distrust, and dissatisfaction across the population.

[Savannah Grace Riddles]

NORTH KOREA: Cyberattacks May Persist to Fund Nuclear Program

Summary: Pyongyang will likely continue internationally targeted cyberattacks to fund North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs despite recent indictment and hacker controversy.

Development: On 17 February, three members of the Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) military intelligence agency of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) faced charges for allegedly engaging in criminal hacking of foreign financial institutions. The North Korean hackers' charges include conspiring to steal and extort more than \$1.3 billion from Western financial institutions. From 2014 to 2020, three RGB members allegedly conducted cyberattacks against the entertainment industry, cyber-enabled heists from banks, theft of cryptocurrency, and various other ransomware and cyber-enabled extortion operations. North Korea's theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 totals some \$316 million, according to the Associated Press.

Analysis: The DPRK-sponsored cyberattacks likely reflect efforts to cultivate and seize power. The RGB's theft of Western monetary assets will likely fund improvements in the North Korean nuclear and ballistic programs. The RGB and other Pyongyang-sponsored actors will almost certainly continue conducting offensive cyberattacks on the West following the success of past operations. The indictment of these three hackers will probably not dissuade Pyongyang from committing additional cyber-attacks on other Western nations, as it intends to meet funding objectives of nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

[Patrick Komanowski]

AFGHANISTAN: Directive Likely Indicates Potential for Peace Efforts

Summary: The Taliban ordered a new rule restricting members from harboring foreign fighters, which may indicate commitment to the Doha peace agreement in promoting stability in Afghanistan.

Development: On 23 February, the Taliban military commission published an order barring all commanders and mujahideen fighters from harboring foreign fighters. The document stated that anyone found attempting to harbor foreign fighters will find their group disbanded and removed from their assignment while facing further punishment. The Taliban published this directive a day after peace talks resumed in Doha. On 16 February, a UN report compiled from foreign intelligence services reported that little evidence exists confirming the Taliban severed ties with Al-Qaeda, a major condition of the Doha peace deal. Similarly, in 2000, the Taliban issued 13 directives aimed toward limiting foreign fighters.

Analysis: The Taliban order barring its ranks from harboring foreign fighters could indicate the Taliban's commitment to adhere with the Doha peace agreement and promote stabilization in Afghanistan. However, the directive may likely bring false hope of the Taliban's commitment to progress with the peace negotiations, similar to its directives in 2000 that aimed to please world powers while continuing to sustain ties with Al-Qaeda. This initiative will likely diminish the Taliban's relationships with terrorist organizations. If the Taliban's commitment to breaking away from terrorist organizations is sincere, it would appear as a sizable step in bringing peace to Afghanistan.

[Tyler Smith]

RUSSIA: Vaccine Distribution in Mexico Likely to Facilitate Further Collaboration

Summary: The Russian Federation announced the arrival of the first shipment of 7.4 million initial doses of the Sputnik V vaccine in Mexico, likely furthering cooperation between Russia and Mexico while increasing competition between superpowers in the region.

Development: On 23 February, the Russian Federation's initial shipment of 200,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, landed in Mexico City following an agreement between President Vladimir Putin and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador for 24 million doses. Russia expressed a heightened interest in Mexico, looking to boost positive public perception of itself to better compete with external powers in the region. These powers, specifically China, aim to develop further influence in Mexico for economic and sociopolitical gain through mining and infrastructure development.

Analysis: Moscow's distribution of vaccines likely represents an attempt to strengthen relations and grow its influence in Mexico and may pave the way for future collaboration. Using the Sputnik V vaccine to show the potential benefits of a Russian partnership could prompt reevaluation by Mexico of existing key allies. Russia likely noticed and worked to capitalize on an opportunity the vaccines presented. Russia's vaccine distribution likely attempts to undermine and counter China's growing influence in Mexico through Chinese infrastructure and mining operations, aiming to gain support of both local and government leadership.

[Austin Perez]

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. Currently, 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.

Alli McIntyre, a junior 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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