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NIGER: Regional Energy Dominance Likely with Cooperation with Sahel Nations

Summary: Niamey's energy meeting with the other nations from Sahel stated will likely make Niamey a dominant regional energy supplier.

Development: On 17 February, energy ministers from Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, and Togo discussed diesel supply plans for Niamey. ECOWAS-imposed sanctions disrupted electricity supply in Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Niamey, according to BBC. Niamey can refine 20,000 barrels a day of either diesel or gasoline and pump refined products to Lomé through a new pipeline, according to Togo First. Niamey can export as much as 110,000 barrels of oil to Lomé once work finishes on the pipeline and infrastructure near the port of Cotonou, according to BBC. Niamey split the responsibilities of the minister of mines, petrol, and energy into three separate ministerial positions following the meeting, according to Reuters.

Analysis: The Niamey-centric energy cooperation will likely place it in a beneficial position as the prime fuel exporter in the Sahel. Niamey's shared sanctioned status with Ouagadougou and Bamako will likely compel it to invest more in energy product development. The split of a single ministerial position into three likely suggests Niamey's effort in pushing this development. Its pipeline relationship with Togo will likely grant Niamey a loophole against general ECOWAS sanctioning, as Togo will likely rely on this pipeline for the foreseeable future.

[Markus Weinzinger]

LEBANON: Hezbollah Will Likely Target Israeli Civilians in Upcoming Attacks

Summary: Hezbollah will likely retaliate against Israeli strikes on military infrastructure near civilians in Ghaziyeh by striking populated areas in Israel.

Development: On 19 February, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched two attacks on the Lebanese town of Ghaziyeh. The IDF increased the frequency of its strikes, targeting cities in Lebanon, according to *Al Jazeera*. On 16 February, Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah stated that Jerusalem would pay “with blood” during a televised speech. In 2007, Nasrallah missiles repeatedly hit populated areas in Israel, with no legitimate military targets nearby, according to Human Rights Watch. Beirut and Jerusalem continue engaging in peace talks, according to the *Jerusalem Post*. On 21 February, Nasrallah launched 13 attacks on IDF targets, weakening Israeli presence on the Lebanese border. The anti-colonist mission of Nasrallah aims to expel the Americans, the French, and their allies. The document also outlines the mission to put an end to Israel, according to The Hizballah Program.

Analysis: After the IDF strike on Ghaziyah, Nasrallah will probably target Israeli-populated areas to follow through on his commitment to put an end to Israel. Jerusalem will almost certainly continue to attack Lebanon, moving closer to Beirut. Due to previous Hezbollah attacks on populated areas in Israel, Nasrallah will probably focus on non-military targets. Despite the ongoing peace talks with Paris, Hezbollah forces will likely continue striking the IDF, pushing for an end to the war in Gaza. Hezbollah almost certainly intends to continue missile strikes to disrupt the repeated IDF strikes in southern Lebanon. Nasrallah’s missions for Hezbollah align with the destruction of Israel and its people, which indicates that Nasrallah will probably expand his targets from the IDF to the Israeli-civilian population.

[Elliot Bankler]

YEMEN: Houthi Attacks on American Drone Will Likely Lead to Greater Conflict

Summary: The Houthi's destruction of an American drone near Yemen may lead Western countries to escalate involvement in the Middle East to reduce future attacks.

Development: On 19 February, the Iranian-backed Houthis shot down an MQ-9 Reaper drone hovering near Yemen, according to ABC News. Funding from Tehran and majority control of the most populated areas in Yemen gives the group significant strategic leverage in Middle Eastern conflicts, *Al-Jazeera*. Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for recent attacks on ships in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden and claim responsibility on several attacks on ships aiding Israel in the war in Gaza, according to *Al-Jazeera*. Despite the group's Iranian backing, Tehran renounces any involvement with the attacks, according to the *Tehran Times*. The Houthis shot down an American drone for the second time in the last few months in addition to the ship attacks. This resulted in a warning against future attacks to prevent the group from becoming added to Washington's "terror" list, according to *Al-Jazeera*. Some European governments, such as Paris and London, retaliated against the Houthis by shooting down drones attacking Israeli ships in the Red Sea or attacking known Houthi targets in Yemen, according to *The Times of Israel*. Houthi rebels claim that their aggressive actions will continue until attacks on the Gaza Strip cease, according to US News.

Analysis: The attacks on an American drone likely indicate an expansion of the conflict in the Middle East. This will likely result in the involvement of surrounding Middle Eastern countries and include European or Western influence in the conflict, as evidenced by retaliation from Paris and London. Houthi rebels will almost certainly continue attacking ships intending to provide aid to Israel, continue assaults against Washington, and will likely capitalize on distractions caused by other regional conflicts to enhance the likelihood of executing successful attacks.

[Caileigh Tax]

UKRAINE: Arrests of Cybercriminals Likely to Dismantle Future LockBit Operations

Summary: Officials in London and Kyiv announced the arrests of two men affiliated with the LockBit cybercrime organization, likely signaling the beginning of a larger operation against the group's members and assets.

Development: On 20 February, London's National Crime Agency (NCA) and Kyiv's National Police of Ukraine (NPU) announced the arrest of two men in Kyiv likely affiliated with the LockBit cybercrime organization. The arrests take place as a part of a larger international law enforcement effort against LockBit, nicknamed "Operation Cronos." The men deployed ransomware against various enterprises and state institutions across Europe and extorted them for payment, according to *Reuters*. The NPU conducted several searches of the men's residence, seizing several mobile phones and computer equipment likely used for illegal activities, according to *The Kyiv Independent*. LockBit, a cybercrime group in operation since 2019, conducted several cyberattacks across the world, including 920 of the 4,000 global cyberattacks that happened in 2023, according to *The Washington Post*. Operation Cronos dismantled 34 servers linked to criminal activity and seized nearly 1,000 decryption keys and 2,000 cryptocurrency accounts, according to *The Hacker News*.

Analysis: The Operation Cronos arrests signify a major development in global efforts against cybercrime and the criminal activities of LockBit. The initial seizure of assets and dismantling of servers seem unlikely to permanently halt LockBit's operations due to its larger size as a cybercrime group but will likely decrease its presence in criminal operations to avoid future law enforcement backlash. Additionally, initial government responses suggest the arrests act as the early stages of Operation Cronos, meaning that a larger operation against LockBit will happen soon. As a result, LockBit will likely face further setbacks in operations and additional arrests of affiliate members, but the extent of setbacks will likely depend on the future success of Operation Cronos and responses from LockBit leadership.

[Brandon Greenaway]

[ARMENIA: Visit to France Likely to Increase Ties and Fuel Caucasus Instability](#)

Summary: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's recent visit to France will likely increase the two countries' economic and military ties. Despite the visit's potential benefits with France, it will likely worsen both countries' relations with Azerbaijan and contribute to increased militarization along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

Development: On 21 February, Pashinyan began a two-day diplomatic visit to France. On 21 February, Pashinyan met with French President Emmanuel Macron; in a joint press conference, Macron condemned the Azeri army's killing of four Armenian soldiers. On 13 February, Pashinyan had called for peace in the South Caucasus and pledged further diplomatic and military support for Armenia. Pashinyan also met with French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, President of the French Senate Gerard Larcher, and the heads of several major French companies. Attal accepted Pashinyan's invitation to visit Armenia this year. French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu visited Armenia for the first time on 22 February. Baku criticized Macron's statements and recently condemned both Yerevan and Paris for anti-Azeri sentiments and sabotaging the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Analysis: Paris and Yerevan will likely increase their bilateral ties to an extent but may worsen their relations with Baku. French companies will probably intensify investment in Armenia, especially in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Paris will almost certainly intensify its military support to Armenia, most likely including both the sale of military equipment and joint training exercises. Yerevan will likely continue to acquire French weaponry, especially previously supplied Russian anti-missile and missile systems, which would almost certainly for fortifying the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Baku will probably react by increasing its military production and troop buildup at the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. In result, it will likely increase regional instability and reduce the likelihood of success for ongoing peace talks between Baku and Yerevan. In the event of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Paris will almost certainly not directly intervene on behalf of Yerevan, and Yerevan would almost certainly lose despite recent military buildup.

[Christina Muchow]

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, 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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Sebastien Bragg, 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. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 448, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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