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# Issue 486

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

### *Authors*

Hunter Flanagan  
Riley Grant  
Armaan Needles  
Christina Muchow



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## [SYRIA: Escape of Islamic State Fighters Unlikely to Alter Ceasefire and Integration](#)

**Summary:** The Kurdish Coalition known as the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) is likely responsible for the release of Islamic State (IS) fighters from several Syrian detention facilities on 19 January. The prisoners' escape is unlikely to affect the current ceasefire agreement.

**Development:** On 19 January, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish led coalition, evacuated positions guarding IS prisoners, according to Reuters. The SDF claims that they lost Al Shaddadi, a prison in Hasaka Province, to fighters loyal to the government in Damascus, according to NBC. The event comes just days after a decree by Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa that expands Kurdish rights in Syria, according to Arab News. Decree No. 13 claims that it grants Kurdish Syrians rights and acknowledges Kurds as having their own identity and language, according to Arab News. On 18 January, Damascus and the SDF also agreed to an immediate ceasefire stipulating the SDF pulling out of Raqqa and Deir al Zour provinces, leaving only Hasakah province under SDF control, according to *New York Times*. The ceasefire also requires that the SDF transfer control of oil and gas fields over to Damascus, according to *New York Times*, and that the SDF integrate into the existing government forces in four days, according to Reuters. IS has lost geographic control in the region since 2014 and their military capabilities have similarly atrophied, according to *Strife*.

**Analysis:** The SDF likely used the prison break as an attempt to slow the process of integration and keep progress stalled to plan an alternative. It is unlikely that fighters loyal to Damascus attacked and freed IS fighters. The escape of IS fighters is unlikely to hinder the integration of the SDF into the Syrian state because of the recent decline in IS strength and organization. While IS fighters remain a threat, their capability has waned significantly as their occupied land diminishes. Interest from international allies of the Kurds and enemies of IS will likely mirror this decrease. The Kurds will likely continue to cooperate with the process outlined in the ceasefire to obtain major social justice gains, while Damascus will almost definitely do the same to stabilize the region and regain land and resources.

[Hunter Flanagan and Riley Grant]

## VENEZUELA: Border Guerrilla Risk Likely Intensifying

**Summary:** Venezuelan and Colombian guerrilla groups operating along the Colombia–Venezuela border are likely to exploit the post-operation security vacuum to expand insurgent activity, including renewed guerilla mobilization over the next 90 days.

**Development:** On 15 January, Colombian guerilla leader Nestor Gregorio Vera Fernandez (Ivan Mordisco) called for disparate armed groups in Colombia and Venezuela, most notably Colombia’s Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EC) and Venezuela’s National Liberation Army (ELN) to unite following U.S. military intervention to capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. The ELN issued a statement condemning the U.S. intervention as an “imperialist” action. Colombian authorities activated security alerts and sent troop reinforcements to their border with Venezuela amid concerns about cross-border incidents. Latin American nations, including Brazil and Cuba, publicly condemned the U.S. strikes on Venezuela as violations of sovereignty. On 19 January, two Colombian guerilla factions clashed in El Retorno, Colombia, over control of drug trafficking routes in the region.

**Analysis:** While Mordisco’s call has not been heeded, Venezuelan and Colombian armed groups that maintain operations along the Colombia–Venezuela border are likely to escalate mobilization in the next 90 days since the removal of Nicolás Maduro has created political and security uncertainty in frontier regions. Ongoing clashes indicate that frontier security is extremely weak and highly volatile. Bogota’s reinforcement of its border positions demonstrates state recognition of the heightened risk environment. Regional reactions to the U.S. operation have almost certainly reinforced narratives among insurgents and sympathizers that external military actions justify intensified mobilization. Taken together, ongoing guerrilla activity, recorded battlefield actions, public ELN protests, and reinforced security deployments suggest armed groups have both the motive and opportunity to expand insurgent operations along border corridors in the near term.

[Armaan Needles]

## IRAN: Regime Almost Certain to Maintain Crackdown Following Protests' Conclusion

**Summary:** Large-scale protests in Iran will likely not reignite, but Tehran will almost certainly maintain its ongoing security crackdown, including an internet blackout and the deployment of militia forces alongside security forces, rejecting reform to maintain power.

**Development:** From 14-18 January, no large-scale protests occurred in Iran, although some small-scale signs of dissent persisted, according to ABC News and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). Protests initially began on 28 December over economic conditions and escalated, with protestors calling for the end of the regime. The National Army of Kurdistan (SMK), an Iranian Kurdish separatist group, claiming to have participated in armed clashes with security forces. The PAK's claims come after security forces' violent crackdown on protestors, with an estimated between 2,000 and 20,000 killed, according to ISW. In addition to police and military forces, Tehran also deployed Iraqi militia forces under its control to counter the protests, according to ISW. On 8 January, Tehran initiated a near-total internet shutdown in the country, contributing to the uncertainty surrounding the exact death toll.

**Analysis:** Tehran will almost certainly maintain its crackdown, as the regime seeks to ensure its survival. Despite the protests and ongoing economic crisis, the regime will likely not collapse in 2026. Rather, Tehran will almost certainly intensify its grip on power as relatively disorganized, nonviolent protestors and small-scale insurgent groups face highly militarized armed forces, police, and militia groups loyal to the regime and dependent on it for their status and survival. These protestors will almost certainly not re-emerge at scale without a new trigger, given the lack of protests from 14-18 January. If protests reignited, the regime would still almost certainly survive unless the armed forces defected. The regime will likely refuse any reforms, even ones intended to aid the economy, out of fear of appearing vulnerable.

[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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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 Business, Security, and Intelligence.

Christina Muchow, 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](mailto:editorsee@gmail.com) or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 486, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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Eagle Eye Intelligence  
3700 Willow Creek Rd.  
Prescott, AZ 86301 [eagleeyeintel.com](http://eagleeyeintel.com)