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Authors

Riley Callan
Christina Muchow
Gavin Packard



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IRAN: Nuclear Talks Likely First Step Towards Easing Tensions

Summary: If the nuclear disarmament negotiations with Tehran in Istanbul succeed, it will likely accelerate efforts to de-escalate regional tensions.

Background: On 2 February, Tehran agreed to enter diplomatic talks in Istanbul alongside other regional powers over the nuclear disarmament of the Iranian armed forces. On 29 January, Iranian state-run television announced that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy would hold live-fire exercises in the Strait of Hormuz on 1-2 February. However, on 1 January, an Iranian official stated that the naval exercises would not occur, denying the reporting. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has made comments supporting the idea of a deal, according to *The Diplomatic Insight*.

Analysis: The agreement to launch nuclear-deal negotiations with Tehran reduce the likelihood of foreign intervention against Tehran, thus lowering the risk of Iranian retaliation, for the duration of the talks. Tehran likely planned the reported live-fire naval exercises but cancelled them and denied responsibility to avoid increasing tensions ahead of the talks. This, combined with the lowered risk of foreign intervention, likely increases the probability of the talks producing a deal. It remains unclear if the discussion will go beyond purely the Iranian nuclear program and into the recent massacres of protesters, but that would likely slow development of a deal significantly. If negotiators reached a deal, it would likely mark the first step towards de-escalation. A successful nuclear deal emerging from the talks in Istanbul will almost certainly not occur, but Tehran's agreement to engage with the talks and not conduct the live-fire exercise likely reveals significant fear within the government of foreign intervention endangering the survival of the regime.

[Riley Callan]

GHANA: New Framework Unlikely to Significantly Improve Counterterrorism Efforts

Summary: The new framework announced by nine West African governments on 30 January will likely fail to meaningfully improve counterterrorism efforts due to political tensions and instability in the region, especially related to the wave of coups and coup attempts since 2020.

Development: On 30 January, leaders from nine West African governments announced a resolution to establish a standing framework for counterterrorism efforts, as increasing terrorism in the region has led to an average of 44 deaths per day. The announcement came at the end of the High Level Consultative Conference on Regional Cooperation and Security, held in Accra, Ghana. Accra, Monrovia (Liberia), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Bamako (Mali), Nouakchott (Mauritania), Abuja (Nigeria), Dakar (Senegal), and Lome (Togo) sent representatives to the meeting, according to News Ghana. The resolution did not provide details but called for increased intelligence sharing and cooperation on pursuing and prosecuting terrorism and international crime, according to *Nigerian Observer*. In January 2025, Ouagadougou and Bamako, along with Niamey, left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), according to the Associated Press. Eight governments in Africa, including those three, fell to coups since 2020, with additional unsuccessful coup attempts against Abuja and Porto-Novo.

Analysis: This framework will likely fail due to political tensions and instability in the West Africa region. Tensions between the junta-led and non-junta-led governments, exemplified by Bamako and Ouagadougou's withdrawal from ECOWAS, will almost certainly undercut effective cooperation. Furthermore, the wave of coup attempts throughout Africa demonstrates very high levels of enduring political instability; even the failed coup attempt in Abuja almost certainly demonstrates extreme underlying weakness within the government. These coup attempts will almost certainly persist and continue to spread, undermining the rule of law and countries' ability to control their territory. This would almost certainly empower terrorist organizations further. The combination of political instability, diplomatic tensions, and the sheer scale of the terrorism problem in the region will likely prevent any meaningful cooperation.

[Christina Muchow]

IRAN: European Union Designation Likely to Increase Proxy and Gray-Zone Activity

Summary: The European Union's (EU) designation of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization will likely constrain the group's overt political and financial activity in Europe while incentivizing Tehran to rely more heavily on proxies.

Development: On 29 January, the EU designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization following accumulated intelligence assessments linking the group to external operations, proxy support, and internal repression, according to Reuters. European officials cited the IRGC's role in violent suppression of domestic unrest and its involvement in destabilizing activities outside Iran as justification for the designation, according to Reuters. The move expands legal authorities for asset freezes, financial investigations, and counterterrorism coordination across EU member states. The designation follows years of law enforcement investigations into IRGC-affiliated individuals, front companies, and logistical networks operating in Europe, according to *The Guardian*.

Analysis: The EU's designation of the IRGC will likely increase restraint within Tehran's overt activities while driving a longer-term shift toward deniable and more indirect operations. Tehran will likely assess that direct IRGC-linked activity in Europe now carries increased legal risk and more public exposure, in turn incentivizing greater reliance on proxies, criminal intermediaries, and cyber-enabled operations. Soon, Tehran may likely seek to signal deterrence through asymmetric means while avoiding actions that could trigger additional European countermeasures. In the longer term, intelligence services will likely observe IRGC-linked networks restructuring financial and logistical pathways to obscure attribution, complicating detection and early warning. Although the designation raises operational costs for the IRGC, it is unlikely to significantly degrade Iran's strategic intent or regional influence absent sustained intelligence pressure.

[Gavin Packard]

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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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 or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 488, 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