

GREAT DECISIONS

Winter 2014 Update

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Defense technology

By Oliver Barrett

American unmanned war birds, drones, flew from and back to their secret nests in 2013 with less frequency than in previous years. But no one should doubt the Obama administration's commitment to its controversial and highly secretive drone program.

The National Security Strategy (NSS)—a fourteen-page synopsis of how the administration views the international threat landscape and what it plans to do to counter those threats—doesn't hide the fact that drones are its counterterrorism tools of choice. The NSS explains the rationale for the open-ended use of drones in one short sentence: "The development of drone technology allows the United States to fight terrorism while limiting the over-commitment of troops abroad." For the administration, the program strikes the right balance between "threat reduction" and "troop preservation" while keeping the "war on terror" off American television screens.

However, there is a tradeoff.

Although 2013 witnessed one of the lowest rates in civilian casualties since the entry of the technology into battle space, collateral damage remains the program's biggest liability. In October 2013, Amnesty International released a report that expressed "serious concerns" that drone strikes have resulted in "unlawful kill-

ings that may constitute extrajudicial executions or war crimes." Has it all been worth it?

Should the success of the American global counterterrorism fight be measured by the number of names crossed out on a CIA "kill list"? Or should there be other far more sensible metrics being used to measure progress? Hopefully, President Obama will deliver a key speech in 2014—one that he might have given in 2013—explaining how American unmanned war birds have begun to measurably extinguish the flames of violent extremism.

Recommended Readings:

Sarah Kreps and Micah Zenko, "The Next Drone Wars," *Foreign Affairs*

Brendan I. Koerner, "Inside the New Arms Race to Control Bandwidth on the Battlefield," *Wired*

Joe Pappalardo, "Behind the Scenes at a Rehearsal For Armageddon," *Popular Mechanics*

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Turkey's challenges

By Eugene Steinberg

Since protests in Gezi Park and throughout Turkey nearly unseated Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan last summer, a new corruption scandal may pose an even greater danger to Turkey's democracy.

The scandal broke on Dec. 17, when police arrested some 30 high-ranking officials on various charges of corruption. The arrests struck uncomfortably close to Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP).

As prosecutors seized tens of millions of dollars used in bribes, fraud, money laundering and gold smuggling, AKP mobilized to stymie their progress, claiming that the charges were fabrications of an international conspiracy against Erdogan and Turkey itself. AKP dismissed or reassigned approximately 5,000 police officers, prosecutors and judges. New Internet laws further diminished press freedom in Turkey, which is already low given that it has the largest number of imprisoned journalists in the world. These laws permitted the government to censor websites hosting incriminating content with ease.

The catalyst for the unprecedented investigations is believed to be Fethullah Gulen, a moderate Muslim preacher and leader of the popular social movement Hizmet. Though Gulen has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, he was once a crucial ally to Erdogan. Their alliance has disintegrated in recent years, and the scandal appears to be but the latest manifestation of growing hostilities.

Political intrigue aside, the scandal makes it apparent that the traditional divide between secularists and Islamists is no longer quite as relevant as the divide between different Islamist factions. It has exposed concrete corruption, underlined the state's tendency towards authoritarianism, and further galvanized opposition to the president. Turkey's image as a model Muslim democracy today seems more fragile than ever before.

Recommended Readings:

Piotr Zalewski, "Divorce, Istanbul Style," *Foreign Policy*

Tom Keatinge, "Turkey's Dirty Money" *Foreign Affairs*

Suzy Hansen, "Whose Turkey Is It?" *The New York Times Magazine*

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Islamic awakening

By Hannah Gais

On Jan. 27, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki and the head of the National Assembly signed the country's new constitution, which represents a huge win for liberals in North Africa. However, Article 6, which covers religious freedom and protection of freedom to practice, may be problematic for relations between secular and Islamist groups going forward.

In particular, article 6's incorporation of a ban on *takfir*—an accusation declaring another Muslim an "unbeliever" (*kafir*)—has highlighted how tense these relations have become. The ban arose when an Islamist NCA member called his leftist colleague "an enemy of Islam," which allegedly resulted in death threats. Two political assassinations last year were also linked to a *takfir*.

While the ban is not irrational, it is unlikely to curb the violence it is trying to address.

As Intissar Fakir at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted, focusing on "symbolic issues" like *takfir* is "likely to widen the divide between [Islamists and secularists] rather than bridge it." These issues provide fodder for heated debates, but they do little to address the deeper questions about religion's role in society or the limits of free

expression.

In addition, critics of Tunisian Islamists can use the ban of the practice of *takfir* to muzzle opposition speech. But Article 6 only vaguely connects the practice with what the ban seeks to stop, namely “incitement to violence and hatred.” Religiously motivated violence will not cease unless the root causes—such as a weak civil society and high poverty rates—behind it are addressed.

Recommended Readings:

Amna Guellali, “The Problem with Tunisia’s New Constitution,” *World Policy Journal*

Alex Preston. “Boko Haram: Sons of Anarchy,” *GQ British*

Hazim Kandil, “Sisi’s Turn,” *London Review of Books*

Sam R. Kimball, “Rapping the Arab Spring,” *World Policy Journal*

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China’s foreign policy

By Mark C. Eades

In recent months, China’s increasingly aggressive approach to foreign and domestic policy has strained relations with its neighbors and the United States. Most importantly, China asserted far-reaching territorial claims and ramped up its military presence in the East and South China Seas. At the same time, Chinese leaders launched an aggressive crackdown on dissent and press freedom at home, even expelling American and other foreign journalists.

Tensions have been especially high between China and Japan over their competing claims on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the

East China Sea since China established an Air Defense Identification Zone including the disputed islands in November. China’s sovereignty claim over virtually the entire South China Sea, including islands claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam, has likewise raised tensions with those two countries. As a Pacific power with close allies in Asia, the United States has been unavoidably drawn into these disputes.

China is increasingly seen by its critics as a bully both at home and abroad. Its crackdown on domestic dissent and foreign media has included the jailing of a growing number of dissidents like Xu Zhiyong and Ilham Tohti and the expulsion of a growing number of U.S. journalists covering corruption in the Chinese leadership. Calls from Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry for greater press freedom and freedom of expression during recent visits to China, have apparently fallen on deaf ears.

Agreements between Secretary of State Kerry and Chinese leaders to cooperate on the issues of North Korea’s nuclear program and climate change have been rare bright moments in recent U.S.-China relations. Such moments tend to fade quickly, however, and continued tension with China seems far more likely.

Recommended Readings:

Clare Baldwin and John Ruwitch, “Special Report: How Caterpillar got bulldozed in China,” *Reuters*

David M. Lampton, “How China is Ruled,” *Foreign Affairs*

Jeff Himmelman, “A Game of Shark and Minnow,” *The New York Times Magazine*

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U.S. trade policy

By Tom Garry

Politics may make for strange bedfellows, but it seems that the politics of trade yields some particularly unlikely bunk-mates.

President Barack Obama and House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) are at swords' points on domestic issues. However, they do agree the president should have “fast-track authority” as the administration negotiates two massive trade agreements, one with Europe and the other with Pacific Rim nations (excepting, significantly, China).

Meanwhile, the President’s fellow Democrats in Congress are balking at giving him this power—formally termed “Trade Promotion Authority”—which would preclude legislators from amending trade agreements by limiting lawmakers to an up or down vote on those pacts. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and others came out against giving the administration this leeway shortly after President Obama appealed for it in his State of the Union address.

These Democrats say they are reluctant to forfeit the power to regulate foreign commerce granted Congress by the Constitution. Voicing the objections of two of their core constituencies—organized labor and environmentalists—they charge that the agreements could eliminate American jobs and weaken environmental protections.

President Obama, his erstwhile GOP allies, and business leaders counter that it is critical for U.S. trading partners to know that agreements reached at the negotiating table are not subject to alteration. They add that concluding the agreements—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—is critical to opening new markets, boosting exports and creating more jobs domestically.

With no compromise in sight, the outcome may well be determined by which side can make the most convincing jobs-related case to an American public still jittery about the na-

tion’s employment market.

Recommended Readings:

Carla A. Hills, “NAFTA’s Economic Upsides,” *Foreign Affairs*

James Traub, “Trading Up,” *Foreign Policy*

Jim Kolbe, “Alice in Trade-Land: The Politics of TTIP,” *German Marshall Fund Policy Brief*

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