

Daily Memo: Russian Demonstrations, Iranian Weapons

by Geopolitical Futures - February 1, 2021

Navalny protest crackdown. More than 5,000 people were arrested over the weekend in **another round of protests** across Russia against the detention of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. More than 1,600 people were arrested in Moscow alone, where authorities closed metro stations in an attempt to block demonstrators from reaching their gathering points.

Iranian nukes. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said **in an interview with NBC News** that it was a question of weeks before Iran had enough fissile material to develop nuclear weapons, which would cross a red line for Israel.

State of emergency. Myanmar's decadelong experiment with democracy ended with a whimper early Monday morning, with military-owned media announcing that **Gen. Min Aung Hlaing had taken control** and imposed a yearlong state of emergency. Myanmar President Win Myint and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, the government's de facto leader who spent decades under house arrest under previous military juntas, have reportedly been detained, as have other officials with the National League for Democracy.

Turkey's economic optimism. The Turkish lira rose 1.5 percent to 7.2 liras on the dollar on Monday, its highest point since late August, after **the central bank pledged to tighten monetary policy**. Optimism about prospects for economic recovery is also helping to boost manufacturing activity and export orders. The manufacturing sector purchasing managers' index **rose to 54.4 in January**, the biggest improvement in business conditions since July.

India's defense budget. India's military spending is set to increase by just around **1 percent under its new budget**, surprising observers who expected the surge in military tension with China to accelerate New Delhi's ambitious military modernization plans. But the headline figure is somewhat misleading. The share of the budget earmarked for weapons purchases **increased by around 18 percent**, for example, while the share devoted to pension liabilities actually shrunk slightly. This is important, as India's spending has traditionally been overly focused on personnel and land-based capabilities at the expense of the maritime realm.

It's official. The United Kingdom on Monday **applied to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement**. The U.K. would be the second-largest economy in the grouping of 11, which also includes Japan, Australia, Canada and Mexico. Joining the TPP would also bolster Britain's bona fides as a free trading nation with reach beyond Europe, even if **it would provide negligible short-term economic gain**.

Tension around the Pratas. **China sent yet another armada of warplanes** into Taiwan's air defense identification zone on Sunday, with at least seven reconnaissance aircraft, fighter jets and bombers tooling around near Taiwan's Pratas islands. A U.S. reconnaissance plane entered the same area while at least five of the Chinese warplanes were still there. The Pratas is an area where **the China-Taiwan conflict would be likely to start**.

Russian gas. **Russia's Gazprom increased its natural gas production by 6.4 percent** in January compared to the same period last year. The company also saw the highest export volume in its history. Elsewhere, **Ukraine resumed imports of Russian electricity** despite President Volodymyr Zelensky banning such imports in December.

Russia-Belarus integration. **Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitry Medvedev said** in an interview that integration between Belarus and Russia was mutually beneficial and that it should include a single currency.

Caucasus transport. The deputy prime ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia **met over the weekend** to discuss transport links between the three countries.

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