**(U) Ariana and Donovia Politically support each other's regional interests**

(U) Politically, Ariana and Donovia broadly support each other's specific Caucasian regional interests, despite differences in social and religious makeup. While the majority of both nations practice Islam, Ariana has a dominant Persian culture while Donovia is primarily Arabic. Both Ariana and Donovia view the existence of the hydrocarbon-rich Atropia as an outpost of the "colonialist West," and both covet control of Atropia's natural resources. Economically, Atropia serves as one of the largest oil and gas producers in the world, with much of its hydrocarbon products used by Western countries. Atropian independence in setting its own gas/oil prices and policies has angered Ariana, who is also upset by the political independence that such oil and gas production and its accompanying hard currency income gives Atropia. Atropia also has a largely secular government (though not, strictly speaking, a democratic one). All things considered, Atropia is generally a less repressive state than its Arianian neighbor, although Ariana likes to claim that Atropia is quite repressive.

**(U) Atropia's neighbor and historical enemy, Minaria**

(U) Atropia's neighbor and historical enemy, Minaria, typically attempts to remain neutral in the growing regional tension. While broadly aligned with Donovia despite their religious differences, Minaria continually maneuvers to stay clear of the fight between Atropia and its neighbors. Unlike Atropia, Minaria does not export hydrocarbons but desires to become involved in the hydrocarbon export business, primarily through new pipelines. Minaria enjoys an unspoken but enduring security and economic relationship with Donovia, and a frosty relationship-punctuated by violence and ethnic tension-with Atropia.

**(U) Increasingly hostile area of operations (AO)**

(U) US operations in the Caucasus occur in an increasingly hostile area of operations (AO). The current situation involves a broad political alliance of Ariana and Donovia to redraw the geopolitical map of the Caucasus to the exclusion of Western powers, and the functional end of currently independent states such as Gorgas and Atropia. The continuing competition by both Ariana and Donovia with Atropia in the international oil and gas markets, the latent ethnic tensions within Atropia, and other regional flashpoints continue to defy permanent diplomatic solutions. Should deterrence fail, US-led coalition forces may need to defeat aggressor nations militarily to support critical national and regional security objectives.

**(U) Atropia determined to maintain indepencence**

(U) Atropia remains determined to maintain its independence and ensure the safe export of its hydrocarbon resources, primarily through the Black Sea pipelines of its neighbor, Gorgas. Both Atropia and Gorgas continue, with varying levels of success, to placate or balance the demands of Donovia and Ariana, while Atropia and Gorgas vigorously court European and US diplomatic support; possible inclusion in NATO; and, specifically, US security guarantees. The Atropians attempt to balance these diplomatic links to the West in a way that is less likely to inflame regional tensions, feed Arianian or Donovian perception management operations, or give either Ariana or Donovia a causus belli to attack Atropia.

**(U) Gorgans welcome US involvment**

(U) The Gorgans, on the other hand, willingly welcome US Government involvement in their country, including diplomatic and military "advisory groups" to build Gorgan military capability and interoperability with NATO forces. Gorgas has a frosty relationship with Donovia, and cooperation built on mutual need with Atropia. Ultimately, Gorgas remains Atropia's best outlet for its resources, and this relationship with Atropia gives Gorgas geopolitical value to the West.

**(U) Terrorist groups and other non-state actors**

(U) In addition to an unstable diplomatic situation, a variety of terrorist groups and other non-state actors are operating within the AO, some with state backing, and others pursuing religious and ethnic goals. Criminality in the form of significant trafficking in illicit goods, along with other organized crime, is endemic to the region.

**(U) Over the last 24 months**

(U) Undeniable intelligence shows a slow but steady redeployment of Arianian ground combat power, both in conventional and unconventional forces, to the Caucasus, primarily along Ariana's northern border shared with Atropia. Despite Arianian claims of a defensive build-up designed to protect Arianian interests from Western attack, other intelligence indicates Arianian hostile intent toward Atropia. Arianian military and government assets-including oil survey and coastal defense ships, civil and military aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles, and other military assets-continue to actively and aggressively reconnoiter Atropian hydrocarbon and defense interests. Ariana has also moved its air and missile strike assets into range of Atropia. Additionally, Arianian-based INFOWAR capabilities have been probing Atropian government networks (including those for oil/gas production) and using the Internet, including social media, to carry out an aggressive perception management operation against the Atropian population. Much of this content focuses on the repressive nature of the Atropian government and its close links to the US. The Arianian military has also made preparations for the mass expulsion of ethnic Atropians from the north of Ariana as well as preparations for advance northward.

**(U) Within the last year**

(U) The US President issued a Presidential National Security Directive (PNSD) that identifies respect for current Caucasus international boundaries and continued unfettered export of Caucasus oil and gas supplies as vital US national security interests. The PNSD also directed the Department of Defense to create and deploy a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) to the Caucasus to demonstrate US resolve and deter potential aggression. Should shaping and deterrence fail, the CJTF must be prepared to conduct decisive operations.

**(U) Over the last 12 months**

(U) Politically, the Arianians view Atropia's Western orientation as part of an encirclement of Ariana by the West and nations viewed as Western proxies. The Arianians also fear secularized and independent Atropia's growing power to encourage ethnic Atropians within Ariana to join their ethnic homeland. Over the last two years, Arianian political and religious figures have described the Atropian government in progressively more hostile terms. Combined with increasing military maneuvers and other display-of-force actions, the tone between Atropia and Ariana has chilled considerably. In perception management operations, Arianians have portrayed the large Atropian minority population within Ariana as well-treated and integrated, as compared to the majority of Atropians within Atropia, whom the Arianian government claims are exploited by the Atropian ruling family. Additionally the Arianians have claimed in revised textbooks and official maps that Atropia is an "historical part" of Ariana. The Atropian government has attempted to diplomatically extinguish such rhetoric, while quietly beginning preparations for potential conflict with Ariana.

**(U) In the last six months**

(U) The US has publicly responded to growing Arianian propaganda by demanding respect for all Caucasus state boundaries. The US approached multilateral organizations, but few other countries seem willing to risk the backlash of an Arianian-sponsored oil embargo. Border skirmishes between Arianian and Atropian border guards, overflight of Atropian terrain by Arianian air assets, and official Arianian naval vessel incursions into the Caspian Sea-home of the bulk of Atropian oil and gas fields-have increased. Six weeks ago, an Arianian military patrol "strayed" 10 kilometers into Atropian territory before being chased back into Ariana.

**(U) Last Week**

(U) Atropia responded by mobilizing a portion of its Reserves to increase its border security. Citing an "imminent attack," Ariana initiated artillery fire and air strikes on Atropian military structures, though clearly sparing oil fields and production facilities. Ariana then demanded that Atropia "demilitarize" its border with Ariana and stop all oil exports. Ariana also demanded a "free and fair election" in Atropia, to be administered by Arianian-affiliated organizations. Ariana threatened the world community, and specifically the US, against intervention. Ariana warned of dire consequences if the West-most clearly the US-threatened the "political development of Atropia with aggressive military action to prop up an anti-Islamic puppet state." Atropia refused to accede to the Arianian demands. The day after Atropia's refusal, Arianian forces commenced a conventional assault on Atropia, and the US announced deployment of combat forces within the CJTF to roll back Arianian aggression.