

The weekly briefing | 2 December 2013

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Nigerian Army claims it has killed dozens of Boko Haram fighters in latest air strike

The Nigerian military has claimed it has killed up to 50 Boko Haram fighters in an air strike targeting a rebel base in the northeast of the country. Security forces carried out the operation on 28 November after receiving intelligence about Boko Haram fighters hiding in the hills of Gwoza, close to the border with Cameroon. Ground forces were dispatched to the area following the air strike.

This is the latest in a series of strikes as part of a government operation to curb the threat from the rebels fighting for an Islamic state in Nigeria. Due to the difficulty of access, casualty numbers are hardly ever confirmed, with authorities usually claiming large numbers of rebel deaths. For the past six months, the Nigerian military has stepped up its efforts against the armed group. President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency, which was recently extended by the country's House of Representatives for a further six months in the fought-over areas. In Africa's most populous country, which is split between Muslims and Christians, the deteriorating security situation has adversely affected the economy, with the oil sector additionally struggling with crude oil theft.



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Boko Haram has proved considerably resilient since it began to intensify its attacks in 2009, basing itself in the predominantly Muslim north and now further retreating to the hills near Cameroon in response to the government counter-operations. From this area, they have carried out reprisals against the army and, increasingly, on civilians. Recent reports by Human Rights Watch have alleged that Boko Haram is also using child soldiers. On 29 November, the Nigerian government announced it was holding talks with neighbouring Niger, Cameroon and Chad on cooperation in combating Boko Haram, which has developed into a threat to wider regional security.

Other developments

A deadly explosion at an ammunition depot in southern Libya on 28 November and continued fighting between the army and militia members in Benghazi increased concerns over the government's failure to achieve stabilisation. It was reported that an explosion rocked Brak al-Chaty, near the main southern city of Sabha, after local militias had tried to steal ammunition. Earlier last week, confrontations between the military and armed groups had left several soldiers dead. These were the latest clashes as authorities struggle to secure bases and curb the influence of militias in various parts of the country. This includes militant fighters and gangs who participated in the uprising against Muammar Gaddafi two years ago but now refuse to disarm and come under central control. Most notably, in Benghazi the security situation has deteriorated significantly, with near-daily car bombings and assassinations. This has prompted Libyan Army officials to appeal to the city's militias in a nationwide television address on 28 November, asking them to lay down their arms and start a national dialogue.

The leader of the Mali coup of March 2012, which triggered the ongoing instability and French-led intervention, Amadou Sanogo, was arrested on 27 November. Shortly after Malian soldiers entered his house in Bamako, the government announced that Sanogo, former leader of an officer group planning to overthrow then president Amadou Toumani Touré, would face kidnapping charges. The move to arrest him is widely interpreted as a step by newly elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to demonstrate resolve in strengthening the government's authority over the army and the rebel groups in the north of the country. Sanogo had previously been granted amnesty in May 2012.

Kenya has launched a multi-billion dollar railway project to link Mombasa to neighbouring countries.

A trilateral agreement between Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda outlines plans to develop the high-speed railway, which is supposed to be operational in 2018, connecting Mombasa, Kampala and Kigali. To be constructed by a Chinese state-owned company and funded in part by the Chinese government, the standard-gauge line is expected to replace the dilapidated colonial-era railway, improve freight transportation and further economic integration in the region. The Kenyan government meanwhile responded to criticism over its alleged isolation of Tanzania and undermining of the East African Community by announcing that another rail project linking to Tanzania was in planning.

On the radar

- **The UN is urging for a death penalty moratorium in South Sudan** after reported executions.
- **French troop deployment to increase in Central African Republic** as UN Security Council debates peacekeeping force.
- **Nigerian government ultimatum to striking academic staff to end on 4 December** with threat of instant dismissal after five-month dispute.

Americas

Contested presidential election results set the stage for civil unrest in Honduras

On 24 November, right-wing candidate Juan Orlando Hernández of the National Party won the presidential election in Honduras. His victory relied on a thin margin over rising star Xiomara Castro, candidate of the opposition Liberty and Refoundation Party (Libre) and wife of ex-president Manuel Zelaya. Castro's rise challenged over a century of a bipartisan system between the National and the Liberal parties. After the publication of the results, she urged her supporters not to recognise the elected government and accused Hernández of fraud.

Hernández's victory highlights continued popular support for the National Party but also a deepened division within national politics in Honduras. Hernández backed the 2009 military coup that eventually led to the replacement of Zelaya from the Liberal party by Porfirio Lobo Sosa from the National Party. His electoral campaign stressed further militarisation of the country in order to tackle insecurity. In contrast, Castro proposed a civilian response to the problem and downplayed the role of the army. Honduras has the highest criminal rate of the world for non-war affected countries and is the second poorest country of Latin America.

While external observers from the European Union have approved the accountability of the electoral process, Castro still refuses to concede defeat. In some areas, protesters have clashed with security forces; however, no major incidents have yet been reported. Despite the rejection of the results, the Libre party, which now represents the second political force in the country, is likely to participate in the newly formed congress. Hernández will also have to seal an alliance with the National Party's historic opponent, the Liberal party, in order to constitute a congressional majority.

Other developments

Rising tensions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic over immigration policies have led to diplomatic gridlock. On 27 November, the Dominican Republic withdrew its ambassadors from Haiti as the dialogue between the two countries broke down. This follows a 23 September ruling by the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic, which ruled a stricter immigration policy that led 240,000 Haitian descendants to lose their citizenship.

Chilean public sector workers called off a strike after successful negotiations over wages dispute. A planned strike scheduled for 29 November by the ANEF public sector workers' confederation was called off following successful negotiations with authorities. The industrial action, which initially commenced on 25 November, had resulted in rallies in the capital, Santiago.

Peace talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) resumed on 28 November. The discussions moved onto the guerrillas' involvement in illicit crop cultivation and drug trafficking. Solutions to drug cultivation and trafficking represent the third point in a six-point peace process that started over a year ago.

On the radar

- **The legitimacy of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to be put to test in municipal elections** on 8 December.
- **Protests in Paraguay by anti-corruption movement Indignados are likely to continue.**
- **Over 125,000 members of the National Confederation of Pensioners are expected to participate in a planned rally from Konani to La Paz, Bolivia,** on 2 December over bonus payments.
- **Further anti-government protests against Haitian President Michel Martellys' administration are expected** in Port-au-Prince.

Asia and Pacific

Political divisions reopen in Thailand as rival protestors turn violent

Despite the blocking of Thailand's political amnesty bill and the survival of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra through a no-confidence motion, anti-government protestors have remained defiant and show no signs of stopping. Protests aimed at unseating Yingluck's government have now continued for a week. One person has reportedly been killed and another three wounded by gunfire after clashes broke out between pro- and anti-government protestors in Bangkok. During 30 November, protestors managed to cut the electricity supply to the national police headquarters and forced Thailand's top crime-fighting agency to evacuate. The local police have called for military reinforcements to quell disruption – though the use of force has been prohibited.

Yingluck's proposed amnesty bill, despite its rejection in the senate and Yingluck's promise to not pursue the matter further, was enough to reignite simmering political divisions and reopened political turmoil in Thailand. The main consequence of the bill might have been the return of Thaksin Shinawatra, Yingluck's brother and a hugely controversial figure who fled to exile whilst being accused of financial and political corruption. Thaksin, however, is loyally defended by large segments of society and most notably the poorer rural farmers.

The protest movement, which is currently centred around Bangkok, where the majority of the anti-Thaksin rich are located, shows no signs of stopping. The movement claims to be prepared for a 'people's revolt' – a mass occupation of government buildings all over Bangkok. There is further risk of violence if an influx of Shinawatra supporters enters from the countryside. Historically, such political turmoil has been solved through military intervention but this seems unlikely on this occasion due to changes in perceived legitimacy of both the armed forces and the government.

Other developments

There have been daily developments concerning China's newly declared air defence zone around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which are controlled by Japan. China has insisted that aircraft encroaching upon their territorial claims must identify themselves or be met with 'emergency defensive measures'. However, some US, South Korean and Japanese military and commercial aircraft have continued to defy Chinese instruction. In the latest attempt to call China's bluff, two B-52 US bombers flew into the zone unannounced on 26 November. Chinese state media reports that warplanes have been sent in response. The United States and her allies claim China threatens to unilaterally destabilise the status quo, though Beijing insists they are merely defending their territorial sovereignty.

After months of political jostling, the lower house of Japan's national Diet has approved a state secrecy bill that will impose harsher penalties upon whistleblowing civil servants and journalists that disseminate secrets. The bill now passes on to the House of Councillors where it will likely be approved and passed. The bill has been vocally criticised by journalists, human rights campaigners and within social media for threatening to suppress freedom of the press. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe insists that it is necessary to encourage the United States to share national security intelligence. It is also likely that Abe will continue to move away from Japan's pacifist constitution while citing the need to check the rise of Chinese power.

Joas Dignos, an outspoken Filipino radio broadcaster and critic of human rights abuses and the lack of freedom of the press in the Philippines, was murdered on 29 November. Police say he was shot by motorcycle-riding men in Valencia City in the southern island of Mindanao. Although Filipino law enforcement have not yet commented on suspects or possible motives, Dignos's role as champion for freedom of the press and critic of corrupt city officials mean that many would conveniently benefit from his death. Human Rights Watch has said that 24 journalists have been murdered since President Benigno Aquino took office in 2010 – this is despite his promise to fight against such abuses.

On the radar

- **Ahead of David Cameron's visit to Beijing this week,** it is understood that the United Kingdom may distance themselves from the Dalai Lama in return for friendlier business and diplomatic relations with China.
- **Leading cadres of China's Communist Party are to disclose their family assets** in a pilot programme as part of an anti-graft campaign.
- **Taiwan's government will begin examining the possibility of legalising gay marriage,** which has pre-emptively attracted tens of thousands of people to protest in Taipei.
- **Bersih, a coalition of Malaysian NGOs, are organising a petition calling for all Election Commission members to step down** for failing to conduct a free and fair general election in May.
- **China will launch its first ever moon rover,** called Jade Rabbit, on 2 December.

Europe

Georgia and Moldova sign EU association agreements at the Eastern Partnership Summit

The European Union signed association agreements with Georgia and Moldova on 29 November at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Lithuania. The two countries signed up to political and trade agreements with the EU that will become official in 2014. Ukraine failed to sign the agreement and became increasingly isolated during the two-day summit. However, the EU has tentatively scheduled a bilateral summit with Ukraine in March 2014. Armenia had been due to sign a deal as well but did a U-turn in September and announced that it would instead join the Customs Union, which is led by Russia. The development at the Eastern Partnership Summit was a significant move towards the EU integration of the former Soviet Republics and its drive to boost ties with these six states. In the past two years, there has been significant progress in visa liberation, transport and energy.

Sources reported that on 28 November, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich made it clear to EU leaders that further incentives, such as increased financial aid, were needed if Kiev were to consider signing the association deal. However, the EU in turn made it clear that the agreement was not negotiable. In Ukraine, thousands rallied in Kiev for eight days over the decision to not sign the agreement and protesters demanded the resignation of Yanukovich. On 30 November, the Ukrainian Interior Minister announced that the Ukrainian police had broken up pro-EU integration protest in the capital and detained 35 demonstrators. Local media reported that the police had fired tear gas and used truncheons on the protesters, of which dozens were injured. Several countries have condemned the violence and the opposition has urged for early elections and a 'National Resistance' headquarters is to be established.

The European Union issued a rebuke over Russia's interference on 29 November after Ukraine failed to sign the deal. The European Council president, Herman van Rompuy, said that the action taken by Russia against Eastern Partnership countries would be in breach of the Helsinki principles of the OSCE, in which countries committed 'to respect each other's right to freely define and conduct as it wishes its relations with other states in accordance with international law'. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso echoed Van Rompuy's warning and rejected Ukraine's call for trilateral agreement between the EU, Russia and Ukraine. In recent months, Russia has put trade, energy and security pressure on Ukraine, and also banned dairy goods imports from Lithuania, the host of the Eastern Partnership Summit. This is the biggest rift in EU-Russia relations since the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008, which disrupted plans to put Ukraine and Georgia on the path to NATO membership. The next biannual Russia-EU summit is scheduled for January 2014 in Brussels.

Other developments

On 27 November, Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) agreed to form a coalition government with the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP). The negotiations lasted over two months, since the federal elections on 22 September. Angela Merkel has now secured 42% of the vote for the CDU. However, the Social Democrats members must vote on the proposal before the coalition becomes official and Merkel can be sworn in for a third term as Chancellor on 17 December. The terms of the deal between the CDU and SDP include the introduction of a national minimum wage in 2015, rent controls in major cities and also opposition to any mutualisation of the eurozone debt.

The Latvian government resigned on 27 November following the resignation of the Prime Minister, Valdis Dombrovskis. Dombrovskis had accepted political responsibility for poor government response to the collapse of a supermarket roof in Riga. Fifty four people were killed in the accident, which was the worst tragedy since Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The government's poor response emphasised the divide between the ruling party and ordinary people. Dombrovskis came to power in 2009 as Latvia was sinking into a deep recession. He had won little public support, having been accused of implementing harsh budget cuts and tax increases. President Andris Berzins accepted his resignation but has yet to announce a new prime minister to lead a coalition government.

On 26 November, Scotland's first minister, Alex Salmond, launched Scotland's independence campaign. The Scottish National Party leader unveiled the white paper on independence, which outlined Scotland's future should the people vote for independence: Scotland would retain the sterling currency and form a currency union with the United Kingdom; the country would aim to join the EU as a full member on the day it becomes independent; within its first term, it would get rid of Trident nuclear weapons and apply to join NATO; and Scotland would plan to form an army and set up a network of 70-90 embassies abroad. However, Salmond's plan for Scotland to join the EU immediately was dismissed by Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. At a press conference with the French President Francois Hollande, Rajoy insisted that Scotland would only be able to apply as a new state member outside the EU. It is thought that Spain would object to any automatic Scottish membership of the EU out of fear that this development would encourage separatist movements in Catalonia.

On the radar

- **OSCE ministerial council meeting to be held in Ukraine this week.**
- **Further protests are expected in France** in the coming days over a controversial road tax.
- **Luxembourg's new government will be sworn in this week** following the end of coalition talks on 29 November.

Middle East

Agreement reached between the P5+1 and Iran over Iran's nuclear programme

Negotiations between Iran and the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia and Germany concluded on 24 November in Geneva. The outcome was a deal between Iran and the P5+1 to restrict the expansion of Iran's nuclear programme in return for limited sanction relief. The first phase of the agreement is scheduled to last six months. A key point of the agreement is the interruption of progression to enrich uranium at the rapidly-advancing heavy-water reactor at Arak; a reactor that could yield plutonium for nuclear weapons in future. Moreover, Iran agreed to stop all enrichment activity above 5%, neutralise the stock of 20% enriched uranium, terminate the production of centrifuges and increase levels of transparency at the Fordow plant and Parchin missile-testing site. In return, the easing of sanction will permit trade in gold, petrochemicals and automotives. Furthermore, withheld assets of \$4 billion will be released.

The six-month agreement is only the first step in a long road to possibly ending Iran's isolation. For President Hassan Rouhani, the agreement recognises Iran's right to enrich uranium and that the reactors at Arak, Fordow and Nantaz will not be shut down. The announcement was met with jubilant scenes in Tehran. In contrast, US Secretary of State John Kerry insisted that the deal does not recognise Iran's right to enrich uranium. The agreement with Iran also represents a shift in relationships within the Middle East. The agreement was concluded despite Israel's objections; Israel wanted Iran to stop all enrichment programmes and shut down the reactors at Arak, Fordow and Nantaz. The role of Saudi Arabia, another strategic ally of the United States in the region, has also been brought into question. Riyadh sternly rejected any potential negotiation with its regional rival Tehran and recently rejected a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council in protest over the lack of military action in Syria.

The principal objective of the agreement between the P5+1 and Iran is to halt any advances in Iran's nuclear programme, to buy time for future talks and build trust between Iran and the international community. If Iran is able to restrict its nuclear programme and abide by the agreement, and the world compensates such restraint, trust between all parties has the potential to spawn more extensive agreements. Future developments may include the relief of oil sanctions, which could be worth \$30 billion to Iran.

Other developments

Deaths in Iraq for November topped 900 according to Iraq Body Count. Further violence indicates that the sectarian war that plagued the country from 2005 to 2007 is returning. Over 200 people were killed last week as result of bombings, kidnappings and shootings. The corpses of victims discovered by security forces in and around Baghdad resemble the tactics employed by militia groups at the height of the sectarian violence several years ago. In the worst attack, police discovered the bodies of 18 military personnel on 29 November in Meshahda, a Sunni area to the north of Baghdad.

On 25 November, interim Egyptian president, Adly Mansour, passed a new law that requires protestors to acquire permission from the government in advance of coordinated demonstrations.

This new law will allow the security forces to crackdown on protestors and demonstrations, many of which are already turning violent as heavy-handed tactics are employed. Many demonstrations since the removal of former president Mohammed Morsi have taken place at educational institutions, particularly at the Islamic Al-Azhar and Cairo University campuses. Protests have continued despite the introduction of the new law and have been dispersed by police with tear gas and water cannons. At least 86 people were arrested under the new law on 29 November alone.

The Syrian Army offensive continues as troops capture the town of Deir Attiyeh, north of Damascus.

The strategic town was captured by opposition fighters in recent weeks but was reclaimed by Syrian government forces on 28 November. The town lies on the strategic highway between Damascus and Homs on a crucial supply route with Lebanon, and has been used by opposition fighters as a base from which operations in Damascus are executed. Meanwhile, unverified reports claim that 35 people were killed on 27 November as government forces launched a Scud missile attack on the provincial capital of Raqqa. The Geneva II peace talks are due to be held in January 2014.

On the radar

- **IAEA inspectors are scheduled to visit the Arak heavy water production plant in Iran** on 8 December.
- **Potential for further protests in Israel by Bedouin groups** opposing the controversial Prawer Plan.
- **Aviation union members in Yemen are to continue their three-day strike until 3 December** and threaten to stage daily partial strikes from 4 December.
- **US Secretary of State John Kerry is to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 4-6 December** to discuss concerns on the Iranian nuclear agreement and the Palestinian peace negotiations.

Polar regions

Last of the Arctic 30 activists released on bail

A court in St Petersburg has granted bail to the last of the Arctic 30 activists detained since a September protest staged on a Gazprom oil rig located in the Pechora Sea. While Greenpeace insists that the protest was peaceful, Russian prosecutors allege that the act amounted to 'hooliganism', a successful prosecution for which attracts a prison term of up to seven years under Russian law. Furthermore, the hooliganism charge represents somewhat of a climb-down from the previous position of federal prosecutors at Russia's Investigative Committee, who had originally been preparing to charge the activists with more severe piracy charges. After spending two months in prison, mostly in the Arctic city of Murmansk, the St Petersburg court to which their case had been transferred began offering to release the activists on bail, pending a payment of 2 million roubles (\$60,000) for each activist. Greenpeace has paid the bail for each activist, with Australian citizen Colin Russell the last to be released on 28 November. The activists have been instructed to remain in Russia until their trial, a final date for which has not yet been set.

The ramifications of the highly-publicised case are numerous, both domestically and internationally. Regarding the domestic climate within Russia, recent polling data connected with the case illustrates some of the fundamental beliefs held by contemporary Russians concerning their country's global role. Thus while more than two thirds of respondents in an October poll agreed that the Arctic should remain neutral, another October poll showed that 60% of Russian citizens support the authorities harsh crackdown on environmental activists, believing that the response was appropriate given the importance of defending 'national interests'. This apparent contradiction indicates that while Russians in principle are in favour of international regulation of the Arctic, a zero-sum mentality still prevails, which sees any threat to national interests as a dangerous precedent. Polls also revealed that around 40% of Russians believe Greenpeace to be a foil for the interests of powerful governments and multinational corporations.

On the international scene, the case sets a number of precedents in various fields. Firstly, Russia's constitution states that lawmakers should always seek to abide by the rulings of international law, yet Russia is refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, which has demanded Russia immediately release the Arctic Sunrise ship used to stage the protest together with its crew. Secondly, relations between Russia and one of its most important trading partners, the Netherlands, have been seriously strained by the case, as the Arctic Sunrise was registered in the Netherlands and the government in Amsterdam has been one of the most outspoken critics of Russia's action. Finally, and most important in the long term, the case has called into question once again the possible benefit that governments and energy firms hope to reap from the exploitation of the Arctic's natural resources.

Other developments

The Norwegian Army will establish a rapid reaction force in northern Norway. Minister of Defence Ine Eriksen Sørreide told a Norwegian newspaper on 26 November. The new special unit will have the name HRS Nord (Rapid Reaction Force North) and will be based in Setermoen in Troms County. It will consist of about 700 enlisted soldiers and should be operational in 2017. The defence minister claims that the establishment of the unit will enhance the capacity of the Norwegian Armed Forces to take part in international operations, as well as 'strengthening national preparedness'.

US Senators introduced an amendment for legislation planned in late December, which calls for the construction of four new icebreakers. The bill in question, the National Defence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2013, is an annual legislation that authorises military pay and benefits as well as certain policy initiatives in the realm of defence. The amendment would authorise the US Navy to contract for the four heavy-duty icebreakers, have them built and then transfer them to the US Coastguard. The drafters of the amendment, four US Senators from Alaska and Washington states, cited the US Department of Defence's recent Arctic strategy, claiming that the icebreakers will enable a more effective implementation of the strategy.

Complete journeys between the Barents Sea and the Bering Strait are up more than 50 per cent from last year. This is according to Russian state corporation Rosatomflot, which manages the country's fleet of atomic-powered icebreakers. The statement refers to the increased use of the so-called Northern Sea Route (NSR), which Asian exporting nations hope to profit from by reducing journey times to European markets, and which Russia hopes to profit from by providing Asian ships with icebreaking and infrastructure services. According to Rosatomflot, a total of 71 ships made the crossing, a dramatic increase considering that the figure for 2010 was only four. However, a recent report entitled *The Future of Arctic Shipping – a New Silk Road for China?* by the Arctic Institute at the Centre for Circumpolar Security Studies concluded that the potential of the NSR is greatly exaggerated.

On the radar

- **The Russian government has until 2 December to comply with the demand of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea** concerning the release of the Dutch-registered ship 'Arctic Sunrise' and its 30-strong crew of Greenpeace activists.
- **Strong winds are again forecast for Northern Sweden on 3 December**, after storms in November twice left thousands of citizens without power.
- **The Russian International Affairs Council will hold an International Conference on 'The Arctic: Region of Development and Cooperation'** in Moscow on 2-3 December.

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