

The weekly briefing | 4 November 2013

Political and security risk update

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Africa

Warnings over risk of genocide in Central African Republic

Sectarian conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) is at risk of escalating into genocide as armed groups increasingly incite Christian and Muslim hatred against each other within the post-coup security vacuum. In a briefing to the UN Security Council, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, has warned of killings under the guise of religion spiralling out of control in the country, which has been in turmoil since the northern Seleka rebels ousted President François Bozizé in March 2013.

Following Seleka attacks on Christian churches, increasing intercommunal violence is stirring up existing tensions in the region. Seleka attacks, the creation of Christian self-defence militias and increasing retaliations are rendering daily life and economic activities in the CAR, whose most significant resources include uranium, gold and diamonds, virtually impossible. Previous spill-over of violence from conflicts in neighbouring countries have also contributed to the current crisis.

Increasing references to the Rwandan genocide are putting political pressure on the international community to act. French diplomats have suggested that France, which maintains a small force securing the country's international airport, would be ready to provide logistical support and increase its presence in the CAR to between 700 and 1,200 troops if necessary. However, it seems unlikely that Paris will commit to another major intervention, given continuing instability in Mali. The African Union's plan to deploy a 3,600 strong peacekeeping mission is unlikely to be operationalised before 2014. The Security Council approved a proposal by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to send an initial force of 250 military personnel to the capital, Bangui, with the capacity to increase the deployment to 560 troops.



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Other developments

Kenyan warplanes targeted a suspected al-Shabaab training camp in Somalia's Dinsoor region, in retaliation for the attack on Nairobi's Westgate Mall in September. It remains unclear how many were killed in the attack on 31 October, as al-Shabaab denies the strike. In the same week, action against al-Shabaab included a Kenyan drone strike killing two leading members of the organisation, a US missile strike against a top operative and Somali government soldiers and African Union troops assaulted an al-Shabaab base near Kolbiyo in lower Jubba province.

Fighting between Mozambican armed forces and Renamo has recommenced following the capture of the former rebel group's main Sathundjira bush camp in the mountains of central Gorongosa on 21 October. This development has led to the collapse of the 1992 peace agreement and a string of tit-for-tat retaliations. The most recent confrontation occurred on 29 October in the town of Karamaja Napome, near the city of Nampula. The recent eruption of violence poses another conspicuous threat to stability in the region.

Two French journalists have been killed after being kidnapped in northern Mali on 2 November.

Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon of Radio France Internationale were reporting from the northern town of Kidal when they were abducted by gunmen. They were later found dead outside the town. According to reports, French security forces were seen near the location of the attack, heightening tensions during the latest French operation in Mali.

On the radar

- **The UN is warning of a severe food crisis in rural Zimbabwe**, with more than two million likely to need food assistance.
- **French President Francois Hollande and South African President Jacob Zuma are to meet next week** for energy discussions, including the development of South African nuclear power.
- **Tunisian President Mustapha Ben Jaafar has announced intentions to convene the Bureau of the National Constituent Assembly next week** in order to complete the democratic construction process.

Americas

Argentine midterm elections bring about the coming end of Kirchner family era

Last week, Argentines voted to elect new representatives for half of the parliament and a third of the senate seats. The results did not profoundly change the political landscape and President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's Front for Victory (FPV) party consolidated its majority in both chambers. However, it fared particularly badly in its traditional strongholds. This was especially so in the Buenos Aires province (where 37% of the country's voters live), where Sergio Massa's Renewal Front easily defeated the FPV candidate. As a result, Massa appears as a potential leader of the Peronist opposition and is now among the favourites to become president in 2015.

The election results mean that Fernandez now has no chance of presenting herself for a third presidential mandate. This would have required a two thirds majority in congress in order to ratify the necessary constitutional reform to lift the two-term limit. As such, the 2015 elections will put an end to 12 years of Kirchner family rule. Daniel Scioli, president of the Justicialist Party, is likely to be chosen by Fernandez as the next leader of the Kirchnerist movement.

The FPV majority in both chambers will enable the Fernandez administration to sustain its economic model. In that sense, little change is expected in the next two years and high inflation is likely to remain. The upcoming threat for the FPV will not, therefore, so much stem from the opposition itself but from potential dissidents within the FPV than might seek to create new alliances ahead of Fernandez's departure.

Other developments

Quito has reported that the Colombian drug trafficking organisation Los Rastrojos is expanding its activity in Ecuador's northern region. The group experienced rapid growth until 2012, when three of its leaders surrendered or were captured. Since then it has had no clear leadership, has been dogged by internal divisions and has lost about a fifth of its members. However, it is believed to use Ecuador as a drug trafficking transit country and they have a strong presence in Esmeraldas on Ecuador's northern coast.

Criminal gangs in Mexico attacked power plants and petrol stations in Michoacan State, leaving over 420,000 people without electricity. It is suspected that the Knights Templar drug cartel carried out the attacks in response to the recent organisation of self-defence groups. On 2 November, these civil militias marched on Apatzingán, a Knights Templar stronghold, but were attacked by unknown gunmen and snipers.

On the radar

- **Protests are likely to accompany a general strike on 5-6 November in the southwestern department of Potosí, Bolivia.**
- **Student protests are expected in major cities across Colombia on 7 November.**
- **Further demonstrations expected in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,** over various social grievances including the alleged excessive use of force by the police during protests.

Asia and Pacific

China increases security in Xinjiang region following incident in Tiananmen Square

Security levels in Xinjiang autonomous region have been raised after police say the recent incident in Tiananmen Square in central Beijing was 'carefully planned, organised and premeditated'. On 28 October, a car crash and explosion in the square killed two bystanders and all three passengers: the alleged attacker, Usman Hasan, his wife and mother. The attacker is thought to be an Uighur, a Muslim ethnic minority from the far western region of Xinjiang. Five suspects, also from Xinjiang were arrested soon after the incident.

Although there are nine million Uighurs living in Xinjiang, they live under the political and economic domination of the Han Chinese. The Uighur commonly argue they are unfairly vilified by the Chinese government, a problem many fear will worsen following the Tiananmen attack. Residents and authorities from Xinjiang have already reported an increase in alert levels and inspections targeting Uighurs. Many Uighurs have raised doubts over the police narrative of the incident and feel it is simply a useful pretext for further repression.

Chinese state media have criticised Western pundits for applying double standards over the incident, which Beijing views as a terrorist attack by religious extremists. Reports by CNN and Agence France-Presse provoked the *China Daily* to claim: 'Some in the West are clearly using double standards. Attacks on innocent civilians that take place in the US or European countries are terrorist attacks, but similar assaults on civilians in China are something else.'

Other developments

A stand-off between police and residents continues in Guangji, a hamlet in China's southern Yunnan province, following a violent confrontation between villagers and police last week. Forty-four villagers and 27 police officers have been injured after hundreds were involved in violent clashes. The villagers are fighting to save their farm land from provincial developers who are supported by the Communist Party and plan to build a \$3.6 billion dollar tourist attraction that recreates traditional Chinese buildings.

Itsunori Onodera, Japan's defence minister, has claimed that China's behaviour over disputed islands in the East China Sea is jeopardising peace. His statement comes after increased tensions over the disputed sovereignty of islands known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Japan scrambled fighter jets three times last week after Chinese military aircraft flew near Japanese airspace near Okinawa. On 28 October, four Chinese ships entered waters around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Thailand's legislative house has passed a political amnesty bill that the government says is vital to foster political reconciliation. There are concerns, however, it will grant amnesty to many involved in the country's often violent past political turmoil. It can also allow the return of the hugely controversial former prime minister Shinawatra Thaksin who is currently living in exile in Dubai. Hugely popular with the rural and lower classes, Thaksin was ousted in a coup in 2006 following what the Supreme Court believe to be an unprecedented abuse of financial and political power. Thousands rallied and protested in the capital as the bill passed.

On the radar

- **Asian nations continue to summon US and Australian ambassadors to explain the alleged US-led spying network.**
- **South Korea says they are currently debating lifting the sanctions imposed on North Korea** after the 2010 sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean warship.

Europe

Germany and United States to reach a 'Six Eyes' intelligence-sharing agreement?

German diplomats travelled to Washington on 30 October to discuss the latest revelations regarding the surveillance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone. The meeting produced no announcement of any concrete agreements, with both sides avoiding any public discussion of internal discussions. However Caitlin Hayden, spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said the meetings were part of an agreement between Barack Obama and Merkel to 'intensify further the cooperation between US and German Intelligence agencies.'

It seems likely that Germany and the United States will reach an accord along the lines of the Five Eyes agreement, a post-war intelligence sharing agreement by the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand that prohibits spying between these countries. Germany has in the past pushed for such an agreement but the United States refused, as other countries would demand similar agreements. In an unprecedented move, Hayden stated that the Obama was open to renegotiating intelligence agreements with Germany. Yet much will depend on the results of two country's reviews of NSA spying practices. Unless the United States wishes to further destabilise relations with Germany, it will likely have to sign a no-spying pact with its long-standing ally.

Other developments

Thousands in Portugal demonstrated against salary and public sector cuts as parliament approved the 2014 budget under the country's international bailout deal. A coalition led by the conservative ruling party holds a comfortable majority in parliament and it was able to approve the budget plan despite opposition MPs voting against it. Protests in Portugal have become more frequent since March 2011, leading to the resignation of former premier Jose Socrates when new austerity measures failed to pass in parliament. However the subsequent government of Pedro Passos Coelho has been able to hold its coalition together. It is highly likely that protests will continue given calls by labour unions for public sector strikes on 8 November and various other demonstrations, including a police protest on 21 November.

Two members of Greece's far-right Golden Dawn party were killed in a drive-by shooting outside the movement's offices in Athens on 1 November, raising fears of an escalation in political violence. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the incident, though police suspicion has fallen on one of several anarchist groups who have been behind a series of attacks in 2012 and 2013. There were 527 arson and bomb attacks in 2012 and 254 in the first six months of 2013. These numbers compare with 542 arson and bomb attacks over the 12 years from 1974 to 1986, when Greece had a reputation for widespread violence by left-wing groups. Whoever is actually responsible for this particular attack, the frequency of past attacks by anarchist groups and the lack a police strategy and resources to deal with them means that further acts of political violence are highly likely to occur in the near future.

Italian Justice Minister Anna Maria Cancellieri has faced calls to resign over accusations she used her influence to get the ailing daughter of a former insurance magnate out of prison. The loss of an influential minister could further destabilise Prime Minister Enrico Letta's fragile right-left coalition at a time tensions are already running high ahead of a vote to expel centre-right leader Silvio Berlusconi from parliament. There is intense disagreement over whether to hold an open or closed vote next month on whether to expel Berlusconi because of a tax fraud conviction.

On the radar

- **Planned opposition rally in Moldova's capital, Chişinău, on 7 November** to demand the government's resignation
- **Anti-capitalist rallies are expected in major cities across Europe on 5 November.**
- **More disruptive protests are likely in Brittany, France, in the coming week** over the controversial commercial road tax.

Middle East

Obstacles emerge before proposed peace talks to end Syria's civil war

Proposed peace talks are due to be held in Geneva later this month in an effort to bring the two and a half year conflict in Syria to a diplomatic end. Talks were originally proposed back in May and differences have emerged between Washington and Moscow relating to the role that Syrian opposition groups will play. Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad has stated that peace talks will not go ahead in Geneva if foreign powers continue to intervene and support opposition fighters. Furthermore, it emerged on 29 October that al-Assad had dismissed Syria's Deputy Prime Minister, Qadri Jamil, for meeting with former US ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, to discuss the peace talks without government permission.

Last week, Gulf and Western nations agreed that the proposed Geneva peace talks should be attended by single representations of the Syrian government and the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition opposition group. This is problematic given the fractured nature of the various anti-Assad groups in Syria and is not a legitimate representation of the Syrian people. Other armed groups, even those linked to al-Qaeda, should be included as stakeholders if the peace talks are to be successful. Moscow believes that the inclusion of only the Syrian National Coalition is not representative of the wider opposition and is critical of a proposed transitional government that does not involve Assad's associates at all. However, the Syrian National Coalition would refuse to engage in peace talks if Assad could possibly retain any form of power. Meanwhile the president, who has claimed that the opposition uprising is a Western-endorsed plot, believes that only the Syrian people can bring the civil war to an end.

Representatives from the United States and Russia are scheduled to meet with UN officials next week in order to discuss details of the Geneva talks. The provisional date set for 23 November seems unlikely to be met due to the complexity of peace agreements. However, based on recent Western governmental policy on Syria and Assad's willingness to dismantle the chemical weapons programme (the first stage was met on 31 October), peace talks are very likely to occur in the coming months.

Other developments

Students at the campus of the Islamic al-Azhar university in Cairo clashed with police during anti-government demonstrations. Police used tear gas to disperse supporters of former president Mohamed Morsi after the arrest of a leading Muslim Brotherhood figure. The vice-chairman of the Freedom and Justice party, Essam El-Erian, was arrested and detained by police in New Cairo early on 30 October. The detention is the latest in a government crackdown on the Brotherhood, which they claim are a terrorist group responsible for inciting violence throughout the country. The Brotherhood propelled Morsi into power and believes that the military coup that ousted him and the Islamist movement from power was illegal. Since the coup on 3 July, the military backed interim government has suppressed mass protests calling for Morsi's reinstatement. In September, a court ruled that the Muslim Brotherhood be banned, all of their assets be frozen and that senior Brotherhood leaders be detained to stand trial accused of inciting violence in December 2012.

On 30 October, Israel released 26 long-term prisoners as part of a deal backed by Washington, allowing peace talks between Israel and Palestine resume. Many of the prisoners have served 20 years or more and were convicted before peace talks began between the two neighbours in 1993. The renewed talks will be the first since 2008. For Israeli's, the prisoners are regarded as terrorists and murderers and protestors took to the streets in order to voice their frustration with their release. For Palestinians, they are symbols of resistance against the Israeli occupation and were met with a hero's welcome. The latest prisoner release comes just days after Israeli interceptors shot down one of two rockets fired from the Gaza Strip; the other fell into the sea. It is believed that Hamas, restrained politically and financially after Egypt's interim government severed ties with them, was responsible for the attack after the discovery of a tunnel into Israeli territory last week. It is likely that more attacks on Israel will take place as Hamas seeks to derail any renewed peace talks.

Almost two years since all but a few hundred US military personnel left Iraq, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has requested US support in an effort to stem the renewed levels of violence in the country. A meeting between Obama and al-Maliki took place in Washington on 1 November. The Iraqi prime minister had requested military assistance, thought to be in the form of Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter jets, but it is unlikely that his request will be met because of the Iraqi administration's ties to Iran. However, Washington did state that support and increased cooperation are needed in order to combat terrorist and extremist groups that risk sending the country back into civil war. It is highly likely that this support will come in the form of shared intelligence and, possibly, the use of UAVs.

On the radar

- **US Secretary of State John Kerry is due to visit the Middle East** as part of an extended trip that includes Europe and North Africa.
- **Former Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi is due to stand trial on 4 November.** Morsi is charged with inciting the murder of protestors in December 2012. Large demonstrations are expected.
- **The next stage of talks on Iran's nuclear programme is to be held in Geneva on 7-8 November** and follows on from last month's renewed diplomatic cooperation between Iran and the P5+1.
- **Pro-reform demonstrations relating to political and socio-economic issues in Jordan are expected to continue.**

- **A rally is planned on 7 November in Nusaybin, Turkey**, near the border with Syria, against the construction of a wall at the frontier between Nusaybin and Qamishli (in Syria) has potential to escalate into violence.

Polar regions

Russian military build-up in Arctic accelerates

Russian First Deputy Defence Minister Arkady Bakhin said on 29 October that Russian airborne assault forces and military transport aviation units have conducted a large-scale military exercise in the Arctic. According to the minister 'the operation showed that Russian armed forces are ready to provide assistance to Arctic expeditions, civilians and military units deployed in that region'. Russian news agency Arctic-info reported on the same day that the Russian Air Force has re-opened the Temp airfield on the Kotelny Island in the High North. Bakhin confirmed that the first military plane to fly into the base in 27 years completed a successful landing on 29 October and the minister claims that test flights will continue to gauge the suitability of the base for further flights and for all classes of military planes.

The recent flurry of activity is not isolated but rather the latest in a series of demonstrations of Russia's military capability in the region. However, the reopening of the airfield on Kotelny is particularly significant. Russia intends to open, or reopen in the case of abandoned Soviet-era bases, a string of such bases on arctic islands and its northern coast line. Thus work to re-establish meteorological stations and airbases on other arctic islands, specifically in the Franz Joseph Land Archipelago, will reportedly begin shortly. By reasserting in both a symbolic and logistical sense its sovereignty in the Arctic, Russia hopes to achieve two main foreign-policy goals. The first is to protect its claims on the huge untapped fields of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which the Arctic possesses. The second is to dominate the Northern Shipping Route. This shipping route, while still currently only navigable over a short summer period, is becoming more economically viable as the arctic ice continues to retreat, and Russia is looking to make considerable profits from providing services and infrastructure along the route to Asian shipping fleets enticed by the prospect of cutting average transit times to Europe by as much as a third.

Russia faces a daunting number of potential problems in realising these aims. Thus the opening of one airfield in the far eastern New Siberian Islands cannot disguise the fact that due to the absence of bases, ground support and air cover the ships of the Russian Northern Fleet can barely function east of the rather westerly Novaya Zemlya Island. Russia has allocated huge budgetary resources to develop this infrastructure but such development will undoubtedly have to confront both the age-old problem of corruption in the Russian military and the entirely novel problem of a northern coastline that, as temperatures increase, will turn from permafrost into a giant swamp. Finally, most serious for Russia are the accusations of many experts that both Russia's foreign policy goals in the Arctic are unrealistic in the first place. Many argue that no matter what treasures Russia may possess in the Arctic, be it sea lanes or fossil fuels, their exploitation presents such technical difficulties as to be completely unprofitable. This may be true in the short term but it would be unwise to dismiss Russia's gamble out of hand over the long term.

Other developments

Norwegian anti-terrorist forces have recently completed a training operation in Ny-Ålesund, the world's northernmost public settlement on the Svalbard Islands. The operation in the remote settlement contributes to the current campaign to ensure preparedness in case of any repetition of the 2011 Norway attacks carried out by Anders Behring Breivik.

Greenpeace reported on 1 November that Russian authorities in the northern city of Murmansk have now filed hooliganism charges against all the activists detained in mid-September during a protest at a state-owned oil rig in Arctic waters. Greenpeace Russia spokeswoman Maria Favorskaya also said that despite the Investigative Committee's promise, prosecutors have not yet officially lifted the previous charges of piracy.

On the radar

- **The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, based in Hamburg, will begin hearings on the Arctic Sunrise case on 6 November.** The court's ruling on the case is expected a few weeks later.
- **NATO training exercise Steadfast Jazz, which began on 2 November, will continue throughout the week until 9 November.** A total of around 6,000 troops will participate in locations across Europe, including the Baltic Region, during the largest combined NATO exercise since 2006.

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