

The weekly briefing | 6 January 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

South Sudan ceasefire negotiations delayed as fighting spreads

On 4 January, South Sudan's warring government and rebel groups declared that planned ceasefire negotiations would be delayed until both sides agreed on an agenda. Ahead of the planned negotiations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's foreign ministry had announced on 3 January that the rival South Sudanese forces were holding preliminary meetings. The meetings was overshadowed by increasing clashes within South Sudan, with the country's government warning that forces loyal to ousted Vice President Riek Machar were preparing to march towards Juba.

The violence, which has escalated in the past three weeks, highlights ethnic tension and a power struggle within the ruling party – worsening dramatically since President Salva Kiir dismissed Machar in July 2013. Kiir continues to stress that the fighting was sparked by an attempted coup on 15 December, in which soldiers loyal to Machar conspired to overthrow the government. Yet, some party officials have disputed this version of events, claiming that fighting began when presidential guards from Kiir's ethnic group, the Dinka, tried to disarm those of Machar's, who are from the Nuer community. These ethnic clashes quickly escalated across the country. The government has declared a state of emergency in two states, Unity and Jonglei, where the respective capitals have come under rebel control. Jonglei in particular has seen heightened fighting between government troops and rebels.

With 1,000 killed and 200,000 civilians displaced so far, the humanitarian effects of the ongoing crisis are expected to worsen. On 2 January, news broke that rebels were preparing to march from Bor, the Jonglei state capital, to Juba. This has spread increasing concern among Juba residents, as the fighting is expected to come closer.



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South Sudan's government is struggling to contain the situation. Machar has called for Kiir to stand down and to open negotiations. The US State Department, meanwhile, ordered a further withdrawal of embassy personnel from Juba given the deteriorating security situation, with an evacuation flight on 3 January. South Sudan peacefully seceded from Sudan in 2011, after a 2005 peace deal ending decades of war between the southern and northern parts of the country.

Other developments

Tunisia's national assembly has begun voting on the country's new constitution. The process has faced long delays and must now be adopted before 14 January, marking the third anniversary of the 2011 revolution. The charter will be voted on individually for each of the 150 articles and 225 proposed amendments under scrutiny, and must be approved by a two-thirds majority or put to a referendum. Whether the constitution passes is considered to be a crucial milestone in Tunisia's democratic transition, with the delays stemming mainly from disagreement between Ennahda, the ruling Islamist party, and opposition groups.

On 3 January, Madagascar's electoral commission declared former finance minister Hery Rajaonarimampianina the winner of the presidential run-off, with 53.5% of the vote. His rival, former health minister Robinson Jean Louis, continues to contest the result of the 20 December vote, with his camp filing several hundred complaints with the electoral court. Rajaonarimampianina's candidacy was backed by ruling President Andry Rajoelina, who had overthrown his predecessor in a 2009 coup. The first election since the coup was held in the hope of improving the country's situation following an economic slump and the departure of foreign investors. However, it is feared that a prolonged dispute of the result could have the opposite effect, increasing the need for external budget support.

Libyan troops have found the bodies of a British man and a New Zealand woman, who had worked as teachers in Tripoli. They were found shot dead outside an Italian-Libyan oil and gas complex outside the western town of Zuwarah. This latest attack further raises concerns over the deteriorating security situation in Libya, where the government continues to struggle to control the militias that helped overthrow Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. In the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, meanwhile, two Americans were being held at army headquarters, with the US government currently investigating the matter, following the detainment of American military personnel only a week ago. The United Kingdom has also called for an investigation into the matter.

On the radar

- **The UN and humanitarian agencies are increasing calls for aid to Central African Republic refugees around Bangui airport,** with the number of displaced people reaching 935,000.
- **The hunt for the killer of former Rwandan spy chief Karegeya continues in Johannesburg,** South Africa, causing concern for exiles in the country.
- **Investigations are to begin into a grenade attack on the tourist town of Diani, Kenya.**
- **UN peacekeepers are on high alert in the Democratic Republic of the Congo** after the assassination of Colonel Mamadou Ndala, the commander of government troops fighting Ugandan Islamist rebels in the east of the country.

Americas

Unprecedented heat wave hits Argentina, sparking power cuts and protests

In late December, Argentina faced its worst heat wave since 1906, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without electricity in the province of Buenos Aires, as the power supply could not meet the increase in demand. Entire districts of the capital were left deprived of electricity for as long as two weeks. Thousands of shops were affected by the power cuts and had to close down or dispose of merchandise. The opposition has blamed the shortages on the energy policies of Cristina Fernandez's government. The government, in turn, has blamed the private utility companies. However, on 29 December, blockades were built on roads, motorways and train lines in protest against the government. Following an abundant rainfall on New Year's Eve, the heat wave alert has been downgraded from red to yellow. Nonetheless, some districts of Buenos Aires still suffer from power cuts.

Local energy production and distribution networks have suffered from severe under-investment in the last decade. The opposition argue that the government's control over energy prices, which have remained frozen since 2001, is at the root of such inefficiencies. The fixed prices have undermined the capacity of private companies to increase their output, while at the same time artificially low energy bills have boosted consumption. However, the government has until now rejected any proposals for a tariff increase. Following the recent power cuts, it has fined the two leading electricity companies, Edenor and Edesur, for an alleged breach of the concession contracts and distribution services. The government has also threatened to nationalise the two companies if they failed to substantially improve their services.

The last few months have proved arduous for the Fernandez government. Following police strikes and subsequent lootings at the beginning of December, this energy crisis has furthered damaged President Fernandez's image. Last month, the president tried unsuccessfully to boost her popularity amongst the private sector by undertaking an important cabinet reshuffle. Further protests and demonstrations are expected this week in Buenos Aires over the continued electricity power shortages.

Other developments

Brazil has created an elite force to support the police during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The head of the National Security Force announced on 31 December that a special force of 10,000 personnel will be deployed to the 12 cities hosting the World Cup games in 2014. This increase in personnel comes in response to the World Cup posed by the Black Bloc anarchist group.

The Colombian guerrilla group FARC is not upholding its self-imposed ceasefire. In mid-December, The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced that it would uphold a month-long ceasefire. This declaration was made in the context of the Colombian government negotiation with FARC over the issue of the rebel group's integration into national politics. However, recent reports indicate that FARC have been involved in several attacks in the past few weeks.

Peruvian President Ollanta Humala is pushing for legislation to limit the concentration of media ownership in the country. On 2 January, Humala stated that congress should legislate on the issue of media ownership. This comes a week after media conglomerate El Comercio, which owns a national newspaper and stakes in two television channels, bought its competitor Epena.

On the radar

- **San Antonio, Marga Marga and Melipilla provinces in Chile remain under red alert** (the highest tier) due to ongoing wildfire risk.
- **Argentina to launch a new voluntary price-control accord with local supermarkets.**
- **Increased security to continue in Mexico's capital, Mexico City**, due to events commemorating Día de Reyes (Kings Day).

Asia and Pacific

Bangladesh votes amidst opposition violence and arson attacks

Voting in Bangladesh's national election commenced on 5 January. However, police and election officials have reported arson attacks at more than 100 polling stations over the weekend. Police also reported an attack in the northwest town of Natore, where 12 people were injured by a petrol bomb. This is the latest incident in a string of violent attacks that has seen over 100 people killed. The election, however, will continue; Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has dismissed demands for her to resign and has deployed 50,000 troops to oversee the election.

Bangladesh has traditionally held general elections under a neutral caretaker government, which was to ensure a fair process. However, this was amended by the Awami League government in 2010, who used their two-thirds supermajority, arguing that it was no longer necessary. Khaleda Zia, the leader of the opposition and the Bangladesh National Party, believes this undermines the legitimacy of the election and her supporters agree. Describing the election as a 'scandalous farce', her supporters have been encouraged to boycott the vote with a two-day general strike on 4 and 5 January. Many have taken it upon themselves to challenge the government through violence.

The outcome of Sunday's election is not in doubt; as more than half of the parliamentary seats will be uncontested because of the opposition's boycott, the governing Awami League will certainly retain power. The issue, however, is the credibility of Bangladesh's democracy, which has traditionally seen violence in the run up to elections. Another key issue in the election is the safety and rights of garment workers, who have been the most vocal and violent in these protests. So far, third party arbitrators such as the UN and EU have refused to send election observers.

Other developments

Cambodian authorities dispersed opposition protesters in the capital, Phnom Penh, on 3 January. This came after police launched a deadly crackdown on striking garment workers on 2 January, which left three people dead and which human rights campaigners condemn as the regime's worst display of state violence in a decade. Cambodia's opposition party, the National Rescue Party, have boycotted parliament since the results of the disputed July 2013 elections, which saw the incumbent prime minister, Hun Sen, return to power. In solidarity, protestors have occupied Democracy Park in central Phnom Penh since December, which grew to 20,000 strong on 29 December. Hun Sen has repeatedly denied the July elections were rigged and has rejected calls for his resignation or for a new election.

Myanmar's President Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi have both called for reform of Myanmar's 2008 constitution, which is a military constitution written in Myanmar's junta era and currently bars certain citizens from becoming president. These reforms are currently being debated by a parliamentary panel that includes soldiers, as a quarter of legislative seats are reserved for appointment military personnel. These reforms will therefore test whether the military is willing to loosen its current grip on power and therefore whether Myanmar's democratisation efforts will continue. Currently, constitutional provisions ensure that those whose spouse or children are overseas citizens cannot become president (and this includes the democrat Aung San Suu Kyi herself, whose two sons are British.)

Dozens of Malaysian journalists protested on 4 January against the government's suspension of *The Heat*, a weekly business magazine, which has raised fresh criticism of the extent of press freedom. *The Heat* boasts its aim is to 'push the boundaries of press freedom' through investigative journalism of current affairs. The government however claim the suspension is temporary and merely due to a violation of its printing permit. The ruling United Malays National Organisation has long maintained a political majority through questionable restrictions on civil liberties, electoral gerrymandering and ethnic favouritism. Prime Minister Najib Razak, however, has vowed to change this and promises to loosen decades-old security laws that are deemed repressive. The week's events question the extent of this change.

On the radar

- **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will start the new year with a diplomatic initiative** by visiting Turkey, Oman, Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Ethiopia.
- **Taiwan is accelerating efforts to join regional trade agreements**, amid pervading political and territorial rows.
- **US Secretary of State John Kerry and his South Korean counterpart, Yun Byung-se, will likely focus on efforts to denuclearise North Korea** in their meeting in Washington this coming week.
- **Increased security surrounding the East of the Black Nazarene procession on 9 January in Manila, Philippines.**

Europe

Former militants from separatist group ETA accept responsibility for consequences of conflict

On 4 January, at a press conference in the Basque town of Durango, 61 former prisoners and ETA members accepted responsibility for the 45-year conflict in northern Spain, in which 800 people died. ETA also demanded an amnesty for their members who remained imprisoned. Although a majority of political parties in Spain have welcomed the statement, the Popularity Party (PP), the ruling right-wing party, said it was insufficient and on 3 January the PP said it was against granting concessions to any current and former prisoners. Interior Minister Jorge Fernandez Diaz argued that 'The only communiqué that the government is interested in is that ETA announces its dissolution'.

On 28 December, EPPK, which represents the 600 ETA members who remain imprisoned, released a video statement in which they admitted that their actions had caused suffering and officially recognised the authority of the Spanish justice system. A spokesperson for the Basque Country regional government welcomed the statement but said that actions such as surrendering arms caches were needed to bolster ETA's new direction. ETA activities have not killed anyone since 2009 and in 2011 the group announced a permanent ceasefire. It has not carried out any terrorist activities since the ceasefire. In recent weeks, many ETA prisoners have been released after the European Court of Human Rights had overturned the 'Parot Doctrine', which had forced individuals with long-term jail sentences to serve 30 years (the maximum sentence under Spanish law). The group is now looking to find a political solution to the question of Basque independence.

In December 2013, the president of Catalonia, Artur Mas, wrote to 27 European leaders to seek their support for his plans to hold a referendum on independence from Spain in 2014. In the letters published online on 2 January, Mas claimed that the results would not be legally binding but would encourage secession talks with the Spanish government. In December 2013, the Spanish government argued that a referendum would be unconstitutional; however, Mas has since counter-argued that there are 'a number of legal and constitutional options which allow this referendum to take place'. The Spanish prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, is likely to use parliament and the Supreme Court to block any move for a referendum; whilst the Catalan Separatist Movement could appeal to an international tribunal. Mas wishes to hold the referendum in November 2014 – two months after the Scottish referendum on independence from the United Kingdom. No European leader has yet answered.

Other developments

The Palestinian ambassador to the Czech Republic, Jamal al-Jamal, died at his residency in Prague on 1 January. The Palestinian Foreign Ministry released a statement on 2 January, explaining that Al-Jamal, who took up the office in October 2013, had been killed by the explosion of an anti-theft system from an old safe that he had been trying to open. Czech police agreed with this statement, reporting that there were no indications that the explosion had been a terrorist attack or an assassination. On 3 January, the Prague-Suchbát municipal hall made a request to the Czech foreign ministry to move the Palestinian embassy, claiming that the Palestinian's illegal possession of arms and explosives violated Czech and international laws.

On 1 January, Latvia became the 18th member of the eurozone. On 3 January, the Europe Union reported that the euro changeover from the lat to the euro was running smoothly and that no problems had been reported from Latvian banks and retailers. By 2 January, 30% of payments in retail were made in euro and 25% of Latvians reported that they mostly had euro change. The country is having a transitional period for the first two weeks of January, when both currencies have legal status. Latvia is the second Baltic country to join the currency, after Estonia in 2011.

The residency of the German ambassador to Greece was attacked by gunfire before dawn on 30 December. Security forces believe that this was an attempted assassination of Ambassador Wolfgang Dold and anti-terrorism police recovered over sixty bullet casings at the scene. The Greek government condemned the incident, which they labelled a terrorist attack. No group has claimed responsibility and the Greek police have yet to charge a suspect. A statement released by the Greek foreign ministry claimed that the aim of the incident was to damage Greece's reputation before its assumption of the European Union presidency on 1 January (the country will hold the presidency until 30 June). However, in recent years, many Greeks have blamed Germany for the tough austerity measures that the European Union has enforced on the country in exchange for Greece's bailout.

On the radar

- **The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs is to visit Cuba this week** to strengthen ties between the two countries.
- **Loyalists plan to protest on 11 January in Belfast, Northern Ireland.**
- **Greece will announce this week their plans for their six-month rotation of the European Union presidency.**
- **Disruption expected at Malpensa and Linate airports, Italy, on 9 January** due to industrial action by unionised baggage handler personnel.
- **Political rallies are expected in Bishkek and Osh, Kyrgyzstan, from 8 January** when the candidate registration process for the mayoral elections closes.

Middle East

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claim responsibility for attacks in Yemen

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed responsibility for an attack carried out in the Yemeni city of Aden that killed at least four police officers and wounded seven others. The attack took place on 31 December as armed men in several cars attempted to infiltrate the police headquarters in the city. One of the vehicles contained explosives and was detonated by a suicide bomber. A previous suicide bomb attack on the same building was reported to have been foiled and resulted in the arrest of two suspected members of AQAP. The group issued a statement claiming that the attack in Aden was a warning message directed at the government and the military.

AQAP are believed to be the most active arm of al-Qaeda, with attacks on Yemeni security infrastructure in the country showing an increase in recent months. AQAP also claimed responsibility for the attack on the Yemeni defence ministry in Sanaa that killed more than 50 people in December 2013. Nobody has claimed responsibility for similar attacks that are believed to have been carried out by AQAP. This suggests that separatist groups or factions closely associated with AQAP may be carrying out attacks using similar tactics.

The interim Yemeni government has struggled to maintain political authority since protests in 2011. AQAP, other Islamist militants such as Ansar al-Sharia, separatists and tribal militias have grown in strength as resentment towards joint Yemeni-US drone attacks increases. The risk of further attacks on government and security infrastructure remains high.

Other developments

Protests in Egypt continue as confrontations between pro-Islamist protestors and police turn violent. On 1 January, two people were killed in Alexandria as demonstrators supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood clashed with police. Three police officers were also injured. Police used water cannons and tear gas to disperse further pro-Islamist demonstrations in Cairo. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands arrested since the military ousted former President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. Morsi and several other leading Muslim Brotherhood figures are currently on trial accused of inciting violence. In December 2013, the interim military government blacklisted the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group and confrontations between protestors and security forces have increased since the introduction of a law that banned demonstrations that had not been approved in advance by the government.

At least six people were killed on 2 January when a car bomb detonated in the Lebanese capital Beirut. The attack occurred in the southern Beirut district of Haret Hreik, a neighbourhood stronghold of the Shia group Hezbollah. A further 66 people were wounded by the explosion in the district that is considered to be a safe zone and under the protection of Hezbollah. This is the latest in a string of reprisal bombings and attacks that have been carried out in Lebanon targeting Sunni leaders and areas that are associated with Hezbollah. Incidents of violence have increased over several months as the conflict in Syria continues to inflame sectarian divisions in the Muslim world. Further incidents in Lebanon are likely.

Militants with links to al-Qaeda battled with Iraqi police and tribesmen in the Anbar provincial cities of Ramadi and Fallujah on 30 December. Security forces removed a Sunni anti-government protest camp in Ramadi. Riding on the back of Sunni anger against the Shi'ite led government, militants attacked police stations and took control of several districts in Ramadi and Fallujah. Violence peaked on 3 January as police and tribesmen battled with militants linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Officials reported that at least 32 civilians and 71 ISIL fighters were killed but did not know how many police and tribesmen were killed. The ISIL has gained territorial control and influence in Anbar province since the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011. Sunni grievances against the Shi'ite led government in Iraq have boosted recruitment for militant groups and the removal of the protest camp in Ramadi has further angered Sunni communities in Anbar province. Further clashes between militants and security forces are likely to continue in the province.

On the radar

- **Anti-government protests expected to continue in Egypt** as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrate against being branded a terrorist group.
- **Increased security expected in Tel Aviv, Israel**, on 6 January as migrants plan to protest outside the UN building and embassies.

Polar regions

Two suicide attacks strike Russian city of Volgograd

An unidentified suicide bomber struck the central train station and busy transport hub of the Russian city of Volgograd on 29 December. In the same city less than 24 hours later another terrorist, identified by Russian media as Pavel Pechyonkin, carried out a suicide bombing on a trolleybus during the morning rush hour. Russian officials put the total number of dead and wounded from both attacks at 104. Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin claims that the same type of explosive was used in both attacks, which together with their proximity in terms of time and place, indicate links between the events. While no organisation has yet come forward to claim responsibility for the bombings, the foreign ministry in Moscow said in a 30 December statement that the bombers had ties to Chechen Doku Umarov, the leader of an Islamist and separatist insurgency in Russia's North Caucasus region. Last July, Umarov lifted a previous ban on attacks aimed at civilian targets, inciting followers to launch a series of strikes that would derail the Sochi Olympics in February 2014.

Despite Umarov's threats, in the wake of the Volgograd bombings both the Russian and International Olympic Committees have expressed full confidence in the ability of Russia's security services to ensure the safety of the approaching Olympics. Indeed, with the city blocked to traffic, with all guests of the Olympics subject to passport checks before being allowed to purchase tickets, and with the 37,000 policemen and troops projected to protect Sochi in February, Umarov's insurgents will be hard pressed to carry out a coordinated attack. This is particularly so as his organisation has been severely weakened by the elimination in recent years of several of its ablest fighters and tacticians. Nevertheless, despite the confidence of the International Olympic Committee, no security operation, no matter how extensive, can entirely guarantee the event's safety.

Russia's security forces will be strained by the need to step up security in Volgograd, a problem that local authorities are trying in part to resolve by employing hundreds of volunteers from the local Cossack population. Security services will still be distracted from protecting other cities in the region beside Sochi and Volgograd, leaving them vulnerable to attack. In response, the interior ministry has announced that security measures will be stepped up throughout the country, with an increase in vehicle checks and an ambiguous promise to pay 'special attention' to crowded places and transport hubs. While the possibility of such an attack occurring in Russia's Polar regions seems remote (though not impossible – Murmansk, for example, has a large population and is strategically significant), the weeks ahead will be difficult throughout the country.

Other developments

The Prirazlomnaya platform, Russia's first oil producing offshore field in the Arctic, finally began extraction in late December, after having lain idle in the Pechora Sea since August 2011. According to Gazprom, which runs the platform, the production target for 2014 is an 300,000 tons, while peak annual production of six million tons is due to be reached by 2020. Gazprom CEO Aleksey Miller, in a barely veiled response to the September 2013 Greenpeace Arctic Sunrise protest, suggested in a press release that there should 'be no doubt – Gazprom continues the development of the Arctic'. Meanwhile, the Greenpeace protestors were released and charges against them dropped in a late December amnesty of Russian prisoners. The activists have all since returned to their home countries.

Passengers from the Russian ship MV Akademik Shokalskiy, currently stuck in Antarctic pack ice, have been rescued by a Chinese helicopter. They are now safely on board the Australian registered ship Aurora Australia. The Russian ship has been stuck in pack ice since 25 December, and the 52 passengers were lifted to safety by helicopter on 2 January as part of a rescue operation conducted by the Chinese icebreaker Snow Dragon. The Aurora Australia, after its scheduled resupply mission to the Antarctic Casey Station base, will take the passengers to Tasmania, from which they will be able to return to their home countries via the Australian mainland. The 22-strong crew of the Akademik Shokalskiy have remained behind awaiting a change in the weather that will allow them to sail out of Antarctic waters. The US Coast Guard icebreaker Polar Star is expected to arrive in Antarctic waters within the next seven days to help free the Russian ship Akademik Shokalskiy. Meanwhile, the crew of the Chinese ship Snow Dragon have since announced that their own ship is now also stuck in ice.

Danish shipping company Nordic Bulk Carriers told Canadian press on 3 January that it is holding talks with the Canadian government about the possibility of regularly using the Northwest passage for commercial shipping. The announcement follows a successful journey along the legendary route by the company's ship Nordic Orion last September. The vessel hauled 15,000 tonnes of coal to Finland from Vancouver through waters once covered by impenetrable ice. It took four days less than it would have taken to traverse the Panama Canal, and greater depths allowed the Orion to carry 25% more coal, saving the company about \$200,000. An increase of Arctic shipping brings the possibility of increasing competition for control of sea routes by Arctic states, though it should be stated that warnings of imminent conflict in the Arctic are greatly exaggerated.

On the radar

- **Demonstrations expected on 7 January in a park area in the Khosta district of Sochi, Russia** to protest against the Russian government. The protests are likely to last until March.

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