

The weekly briefing | 6 October 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa: Violence escalates in Libya as rival 'governments' vie for military and political dominance.

Americas: Recent capture of Mexican drug lord exposes links between cartel and politicians.

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Africa

Violence escalates in Libya as rival 'governments' vie for military and political dominance

In an attack on troops loyal to renegade Lieutenant General Khalifa Haftar near Benghazi airport, at least 29 Libyan soldiers were killed and more than 60 injured in two car bombings and clashes that followed the bombings on 3 October. The attacks have been blamed on the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, a military coalition of Islamist militias who are attempting to take over and consolidate vital territory in and around Benghazi, Libya's second largest city. The militias have already overrun army bases in the area, which leaves the airport as one of the last places under control of Haftar's self-declared Libyan National Army, which has been battling 'terrorism and extremism' under the banner of Operation Dignity since May.

The attack represents the latest in a series of operations targeting 'government' troops in Libya as rival factions continue to press for control of the country. In particular, two bodies currently claim to represent the Libyan people: the elected and internationally-recognised Council of Deputies (CoD), based in the Operation Dignity stronghold of Tobruk in the far east of the country, and the self-proclaimed General National Congress (GNC), which is supported by Islamist armed groups and meets in Tripoli. However, neither side has been able to monopolise the use of force, and therefore neither has been able to establish military or political dominance. As a consequence, it is increasingly likely that if other states do not intervene on the behalf of the Council of Deputies the ongoing power vacuum will result in territories controlled by opposing militias. This would likely notably increase the number of refugees leaving the country – a concern for Libya's neighbours, particularly southern European countries.



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While the current conflict often appears to be drawn along ideological lines, the most prominent driving force is the desire for political power and control of Libya's rich deposits of natural resources (oil in particular). Peace remains unlikely until either the Council of Deputies or General National Council are able to establish control over the country and enforce the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Alternative options, such as the talks that began this week lead by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), are already being criticised for not including the GNC, and hence are unlikely to succeed in the short term. However, over the past weeks, Egypt has appeared to actively support the CoD, and has offered to train the military and intelligence services of Libya. While this might not provide a short-term solution, it could certainly provide crucial support for the internationally-favoured Council of Deputies 'government'.

Other developments

An attack on a fuel convoy in Mali represents the worst attack on UN peacekeepers since the start of the UN mission in the country (MINUSMA) in July 2013. Nine soldiers from Niger were killed when insurgents belonging to the al-Qaeda-linked Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) attacked a fuel convoy between the towns of Menaka and Ansongo in the region of Goa. The attack raised the total number of UN soldiers who have died since last July to 30, with a further 90 wounded in the same timeframe. The attack is the most recent in a rising number of attacks on the 9,000-strong UN force in Mali.

Somali troops supported by African Union peacekeepers recaptured the port of Barawe from al-Shabaab on 5 October. According to military sources, al-Shabaab insurgents fled before Somali troops reached the city. The offensive follows the killing of al-Shabaab's leader and co-founder, Ahmed Abdi Godane, in a US drone strike last month. Barawe, located 200 kilometres southeast of Mogadishu, was the last port held by al-Shabaab. Its capture is considered a major operational success against al-Shabaab, as the port had allowed the militant group to export at least \$25 million of charcoal annually to Gulf states.

Boko Haram attacked Kubi and Watu villages in Adamawa State, Nigeria, in the early morning of 29 September. The Islamist insurgent group destroyed over 500 houses, and killed an unconfirmed number of civilians. According to witness reports, many burned to death after being asleep while militants set houses on fire. It appears the area was completely deserted by state security personnel. Meanwhile, 300 Boko Haram fighters were arrested in Cameroon after they entered the country in an apparent attempt to seek refugee status.

On the radar

- **Tunisian parliament elections to be held on 26 October.**
- **Pro-Mohammed Morsi groups to protest on 6 October in Egypt.**
- **Increased risk of anti-government protests in Uganda on 9 October,** which marks the celebration of Independence Day.
- **Rallies expected in Libya on 20 October,** which marks the anniversary of the capture of Muammar Gaddafi.

Americas

Recent capture of Mexican drug lord exposes links between cartel and politicians

On 1 October, Mexican authorities announced the capture of Héctor Beltrán Leyva, the leader of the Beltrán Leyva cartel, and Germán Goyeneche Ortega, the organisation's alleged financial operator. The two suspects were arrested in a seafood restaurant in San Miguel de Allende, an old colonial town in the centre of the country, during a brief operation that concluded an 11-month long investigation led by the federal police and the Mexican Army, in collaboration with US intelligence services. Leyva took the helm of the family cartel in 2009 after his brother was killed in a shootout with marines in the city of Cuernavaca. Despite having endured a relative decline over recent years, the cartel remains among the country's largest criminal organisations. It is for the most part involved in the trafficking of cocaine from South and Central America to the United States and Europe. The gang used to be particularly active in central Mexico, including in Morelos, a state south of Mexico City. Leyva was one of the most wanted criminals in Mexico, and represents the second most significant arrest by the country's authorities, after the capture of Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán earlier this year.

The recent arrest is a fortuitous event for President Enrique Peña Nieto amid the ongoing state-backed war on drugs. The human rights record of the Mexican leader has come under fire following revelations of the alleged execution of 22 people by Mexican soldiers during a shootout in San Pedro El Limón, and the suspected involvement of local police in a mass disappearance of students in Iguala. However, the capture of Leyva appears also to have undermined the credibility of the Mexican political class, especially those of the opposition political parties. According to recent reports in the country's media, Ortega maintained links with the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico (PVEM) and the National Action Party (PAN). The alleged financial operator of the Beltrán Leyva cartel was a member of the PVEM, and was reportedly close to the party's secretary general and federal deputy for Querétaro, Ricardo Astudillo. Astudillo went so far as to recommend Ortega for the presidency of the Querétaro chapter of the Citizen's Parliament of Mexico, a position he ultimately received. In addition, Ortega is reported to have fostered ties with prominent members of PAN. After the announcement of his capture, the municipal president of San Miguel de Allende, Ricardo Villareal García, a member of PAN, admitted to knowing Ortega but has until now denied having a close relationship with him.

Leyva's capture and the recent revelations surrounding Ortega are likely to serve the interests of Nieto and his ruling party, Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). If a close relationship between Ortega and Villareal were confirmed, it would represent a serious blow for the party that broke Mexico's history of single-party rule. However, the recent revelations also undermine the credibility of the country's wider political class, and expose the inability of the currently waged war on drugs to address issues of institutional reform and transparency.

Other developments

Argentina's central bank governor resigned on 1 October, a day after being publicly criticised by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Juan Carlos Fábrega was considered a moderating influence on the government, which displays a more interventionist stance in its handling of economic issues. In a public speech on 30 September, Fernández blamed the central bank for failing to control the depreciation of the peso, and suggested that privileged information had been leaked. Fábrega was known for his doubts over the appointment of Axel Kicillof, the current economic minister and a staunch supporter of the Argentine economic model. The departure of Fábrega is likely to herald further intervention from the government in monetary policy. He is to be replaced by Alejandro Vanoli, head of the Argentine national securities commission (CNV).

The youngest deputy of Venezuela's ruling socialist party was assassinated in his house on 1 October. Robert Serra, a 27-year-old lawmaker, was the victim of a planned attack on his house in the capital, Caracas. According to UN figures, Venezuela has 54 homicides per 100,000 people, and is the only country in South America to have seen that rate rise consistently each year since 1995. Polls show that personal safety represents the first concern among Venezuelans. As a result, the approval rating of President Nicolás Maduro is at its lowest since he first took office 18 months ago. The rise of insecurity in Venezuela over the past decade has been caused by the convergence of several factors, including arms proliferation, ill-equipped police forces, over-crowded prisons and a corrupt and overstretched judicial system.

On 1 October, the Ecuadorian justice minister apologised to an indigenous community following the conclusion of a 2012 ruling from the Inter-American Human Rights Court (IACHR). Ledy Zuniga visited the Sarayaku indigenous community to apologise for the violation of community rights, cultural identity and communal property. In 1996, the Ecuadorian government illegally granted a concession for oil exploration and exploitation throughout Sarayaku territory, located in the heart of the Ecuadorian rainforest, to the Argentinian company General Fuel Company (CGC). The conclusion of an IACHR ruling in favour of an indigenous community represents a unique precedent. The case is likely to strengthen the bargaining power of indigenous communities in their struggles against governments and industries with regard to the use of their lands for resource extraction purposes.

On the radar

- **Bolivia general election scheduled for 12 October.**
- **Uruguay general election scheduled for 26 October.**
- **'State of prevention' in Guatemala City, Guatemala, extended** until 17 October.
- **Further protests and clashes are likely between members of the community and police in Region VIII, Chile,** following the killing of an indigenous Mapuche on 1 October.

Asia and Pacific

Hong Kong pro-democracy protests continue despite violence against demonstrators

The pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have continued despite violence aimed at the demonstrators. Reports from Hong Kong media allege that the police are ignoring attacks upon protestors and their camps by pro-Beijing mobs. Local information indicates that protestors were severely beaten and supplies were destroyed. Following the attacks, student leaders called-off planned negotiations with the local government. Police have denied the allegations. Hong Kong chief executive Leung Chun-ying, who is largely seen as Beijing's puppet, strongly urged protestors to leave the streets, but also stated that he did not want any harm to come to the demonstrators. Earlier, the police had used tear gas and riot gear to attempt to disperse the crowds. These efforts were counter-productive, attracting more people to the demonstrations. Protestors set an ultimatum of 2 October calling for Leung to resign and for Beijing to withdraw its plans to vet all candidates in the 2017 election for Hong Kong's next leader.

The most-recent iteration of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, referred to as Occupy Central, began in late September 2014. At that time, the Chinese Standing Committee of the National People's Congress decided that it would appoint nominees for the election of Hong Kong's chief executive. Since the announcement, various student groups have occupied government buildings and facilities, and thousands of protestors have taken to the streets of downtown Hong Kong. Beijing has condemned the protests. Leaders in Taiwan have expressed support for the protestors, and have urged the government in Beijing to honour its previous promise to maintain the autonomy of Hong Kong. The island has been run under a system referred to as 'one country, two systems' since Britain transferred sovereignty to China in 1997.

The current round of protests has been likened to the student protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, which ended the hundreds of deaths at the hands of the Chinese military. Additionally, observers have raised the possibility of such protests spreading to other areas in China. It is unlikely, however, that these protests will degrade to that level of violence, or significantly spread to the mainland. Media coverage in Hong Kong, Taiwan and elsewhere has been robust, focusing particularly upon the implications of democracy for greater China. In contrast, Chinese media has not publicised the events, reporting the impact of hooliganism in Hong Kong on traffic, business and other social factors but not mentioning the implications of the protests for democracy and the future of China. In addition, the government in China has blocked the photo-sharing platform Instagram.

Other developments

Rebels in the Philippines killed two soldiers on 30 September. Seven suspected members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) attacked several unarmed soldiers as they left a church in Datu Piang in Maguindanao in southern Philippines on the morning of 30 September. BIFF is the militant organisation affiliated with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM). BIFM was formerly a part of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the country's most well-known Islamist rebel group. In 2008, BIFM split from MILF over disagreements surrounding peace talks with the government. BIFM seeks an independent Muslim state in the southern Philippines. The organisation is responsible for a number of deadly attacks, largely targeting government and military facilities in the region. The most recent attack is likely a part of the group's ongoing efforts to undermine peace negotiations between MILF and the Philippine government.

The United States has lifted sections of the arms ban on Vietnam. The decision to ease the ban on exports of lethal weapons to Vietnam was announced and welcomed by officials in Hanoi on 3 October. The US Department of State commented that the sales of maritime surveillance and security equipment would be approved on a case-by-case basis. The US-Vietnam arms embargo was enacted in 1984 because of human rights concerns. The recent agreement is likely aimed at improving Vietnam's ability to defend its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Although China and Vietnam traditionally have had friendly relations – Communist parties rule in both countries – relations have recently deteriorated over territorial disputes. Earlier this year, anti-Chinese protests became violent and led to several Chinese deaths in Vietnam over the Chinese government's oil rig located near the Paracel Islands. The move by the United States is consistent with a string of security agreements signed by the United States and several Southeast and East Asian countries.

North Korean officials have agreed to resume high-level talks with South Korea in the coming weeks. During a visit to South Korea for the conclusion of the Asian Games, North Korean officials agreed to resume the talks that had effectively been suspended since February 2014. The North Korean delegation comprised of several high-level advisors to Kim Jong-un, including Hwang Pyong-so, largely considered the second-highest ranking official in North Korea. This is the most senior North Korean delegation sent to South Korea in years. It is likely that a motivating factor for the agreement was North Korea's desire to lift the May 24 Measures, a set of severe economic sanctions imposed in 2010 after the North Korean army sank a South Korean vessel. Despite Kim Jong-un's apparent absence, the trip made by his closest advisors indicates that he likely still maintains full control of the government. The North Korean leader is believed to be ill and has not been seen in public for nearly a month. Separately, North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations, So Se Pyong, stated that the country was ready to resume international talks regarding its nuclear programme.

On the radar

- **Chinese Premier Li Keqiang will participate in a joint cabinet meeting in Berlin with German Chancellor Angela Merkel** on 10 October.
- **The Malaysian government is expected to announce a controversial new budget this week** aimed at balancing the country's national budget.
- **Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha will travel to Malaysia on 9-10 October** on his first foreign trip since assuming office.
- **The Chinese Communist Party of China will hold its 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee in Beijing** on 20-23 October.
- **Japanese and US authorities are expected to release an interim report on bilateral defence** on 7 October.

Europe

Civilians killed in eastern Ukraine as heavy fighting escalates in Donetsk

Last week's confrontations in eastern Ukraine represented the heaviest fighting between government forces and separatist rebels since the ceasefire was agreed on 5 September. Government forces began shelling residential areas of the rebel-held city of Donetsk on 1 October, killing at least nine residents and wounding 30. In response to the recent operations, the EU's high representative of the Union for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton, lamented that such fighting in residential areas is not admissible. On 4 October, military spokesman Andriy Lysenko reported that 12 pro-Russian separatists had been killed in fighting around the Donetsk airport. The Ukrainian government has refuted claims that Ukrainian forces have lost control of the airport, a strategically-important facility that could provide rebel forces with the ability to resupply.

The ceasefire agreement in eastern Ukraine stands, de facto, ineffectual given the current levels of violence in the region. The new NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, reiterated last week that the crisis in Ukraine represents a major challenge to European security, and voiced strong support for his predecessor Anders Fogh Rasmussen's robust stance against Russia's involvement in the crisis. The West is also concerned that Russia may retaliate by imposing further financial constraints on the Ukrainian economy. The Kremlin agreed in September to not alter trade provisions between the two countries in exchange for the postponement of the EU-Ukraine trade accord until 2016. However, the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, has warned that Russian decrees, which have recently been adopted, already breach the current trade agreement.

It is likely that violence will continue to prevail in eastern Ukraine, despite the weak ceasefire arrangements. It appears that the progress of Ukrainian armed forces against pro-Russian separatists has become notably stifled in recent weeks, and it is highly likely that, should the high levels of collateral damage continue to mar Ukrainian offensives, Russia will seek to capitalise upon this high civilian death toll within international political platforms. It is less likely that Russia will overtly impose trade restriction upon Ukraine, given the current economic sanctions already imposed upon its economy by the West; however, a more subtle and gradual tightening of these provisions is likely to occur in order to exert greater pressure upon the Ukrainian government as the conflict continues.

Other developments

A Catalanian referendum has been pledged by parliamentary groups despite the Spanish constitutional court ruling to suspend the referendum on 29 September.

On 3 October, the leaders of four parliamentary groups who support the vote for an independence referendum in Catalonia affirmed that they would endeavour to hold a referendum vote. The constitutional court has ruled it necessary to review the legality of the referendum, after the Spanish government appealed to the court to declare the referendum illegal. On 30 September, Catalonia's regional government suspended the publicity campaign for the referendum; however, the independence movement pushed ahead with administrative plans with the announcement on 2 October that Artur Mas, the president of the Catalunya, had set up a commission to supervise the referendum. The Spanish government has vowed to return to court to ban the commission. On 4 October, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy called for talks between the government and Catalan regional authorities to discuss the referendum.

On 29 September, the leaders of Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan met at the fourth Caspian Sea Summit, held in the city of Astrakhan in Russia. The five presidents agreed to recognise 15-nautical miles sovereign space adjacent to each country's shoreline, as well the right to fish an additional 10 nautical miles beyond this 15-mile zone. The leaders also warned that military presence of non-Caspian countries in the sea would not be accepted. At the summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the leaders would sign an agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea at the next summit, to be held in Kazakhstan on a yet undetermined date. The countries have failed to agree in the past whether the Caspian Sea is a lake or a sea – a classification that would give countries disparate access to a body of water rich in resources, such as oil and gas.

Latvians voted in parliamentary elections on 4 October, with the current centre-right coalition led by the Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma set to return to power. Ahead of the election, polls suggested that Latvia's relations with Russia would be a key issue for voters. The current coalition government has pushed for a greater presence of NATO in the Baltic area in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine and recent Russian activities near the border with Baltic countries, including the detention of a supposed Estonian intelligence agent. The opposition Harmony Party is backed by ethnic-Russian Latvians seeking greater cooperation between the two countries. In the weeks leading up to the election, Latvian police reported that a small group of Russian-speaking Latvians had joined pro-Russian separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine.

On the radar

- **President Schulz of the European parliament will meet Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Hamburg, Germany** on 11 October.
- **The European parliament's budget committee will vote on the final figures it proposes for the EU's 2015 budget** on 7 October.
- **The Asia-Europe Meeting summit will be held in Milan, Italy,** on 16-17 October.

Middle East

British aid worker Alan Henning beheaded by Islamic State in Syria

Footage of the beheading of British aid worker Alan Henning by an Islamic State (IS) militant in Syria emerged on social media on 3 October. Although the footage is yet to be verified by official sources, it is widely accepted as legitimate due to its similarity to the Islamic State's previously broadcast executions. Moreover, Henning was named as a second hostage in footage of fellow aid worker David Haines' execution the previous month. Henning's murder follows international pleas to the Islamic State for his release from charities and a number of prominent Islamic groups and Imams within the United Kingdom.

The latest executions have complicated much of the debate on the Islamic state. While the latest act of brutality exhibited by the group has drawn unified criticism and revulsion, the purpose and response to such acts has divided opinion. Many believe the international stature of the executions and the naming of individual state policies are being used to draw the West into further military campaigns in the region in order to amass support and recruitment. Conversely, counter-arguments have highlighted that the extreme brutality of the executions are simply acts of fear-inducing and dehumanising propaganda: tools often used in ideological conflict.

It is for these reasons it is difficult to predict the likely outcome, even with credible threats made against a further hostage, US aid worker Peter Kassig. What remains clear, however, is that the United Kingdom and its international allies will continue air campaigns against the Islamic State and support for Kurdish Peshmerga forces on the ground in Iraq. Significantly, the number of British Islamic groups, including radical clerics, condemning the killings as un-Islamic and in opposition to Sharia law may have an impact on the number of individuals being radicalised and travelling to the region in support of the caliphate.

Other developments

The Syrian Army regained territory in the northern strategic border areas of Aleppo province on 3 October. State forces relieved three key villages close to Aleppo city that have been under the control of the Islamic State for the past year. Reports confirm dozens of casualties have been sustained from both sides in the latest offensive. Strategically, the national army have made considerable gains in the country's north – blocking a number of crucial rebels supply links with Turkey. Problematically, while US-led airstrikes in northern Syria may serve to aid state advances against the Islamic State, the demographic picture within the country is far more complex than that of neighbouring Iraq. A lack of credible domestic coalitions, coupled with greater numbers of rival groups, is likely to generate an increase in violence and casualties in the coming weeks and months.

The Pakistani Taliban expressed support for the Islamic State on 4 October. Taliban spokesperson Shahidallah Shaid issued a statement in Urdu, Pashto and Arabic commemorating the holy festival of Eid al-Adha and declaring unity with the armed group. He also stated that regional alliances ought to be formed between Islamic militant groups in the provision of Mujahideen fighters to the region. The latest development is likely to cause concern for India in particular, as Islamic State makes inroads in South Asia. IS activists have been seen distributing pamphlets recently in the Peshawar, Pakistan, and IS flags have been seen at rallies in Indian-administered Kashmir. It might be that the Islamic State can exploit bitter internal rivalries within the Pakistan Taliban in order to extend its global reach into a region rife with anti-Western ideologies.

The Islamic State publicly executed six soldiers in Iraq's largest and westernmost province, Anbar, on 5 October. The latest killings follow weeks of fighting in the province and the success of IS in capturing the towns of Hit and Kubaisa on 2 and 4 October respectively. The capture of Iraqi forces and loss of territory serves to highlight the strength of IS in spite of targeted airstrikes. The Islamic State continues to make gains within the province with an assault expected on the Ain al-Assad military base close to the Syrian border. Ain al-Assad currently provides troops and support to the Haditha dam where Sunni tribesmen and Kurdish forces are engaging in conflict with Islamic State fighters.

On the radar

- **Lebanon to receive \$1 billion in military aid from Saudi Arabia.** Saudi Arabia will retain a further \$2 billion until legislative assurances can be made that Hezbollah will not be made beneficiaries.
- **Israel's foreign ministry to summon the Swedish ambassador to dispute the planned recognition of the Palestinian state** proposed by Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven on 4 October.
- **NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to visit Turkey** from 8-10 October to discuss the latter's

Apologies for the lack of Polar regions analysis this week.

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