

The weekly briefing | 9 December 2013

Political and security risk updates

Africa: French deployment to Central African Republic reaches full strength as hundreds are killed in violence.

Americas: Argentine province rocked by police strikes and lootings as federal government deploys gendarmeries to most troubled areas.

Asia and Pacific: Joe Biden cautiously reassures South Korea of US commitment to Asia-Pacific.

Europe: Protests continue in Ukraine as government survives a no-confidence vote.

Middle East: Lebanese city of Tripoli placed under military control.

Polar regions: Canada submits Arctic territorial claims.

Africa

French deployment to Central African Republic reaches full strength as hundreds are killed in violence

French forces have reached their full level of deployment in the Central African Republic, with 1,200 troops now in the country. Violence continues despite French efforts to contain the situation, with at least 300 people killed over recent days. Seleka rebels attacked a hospital in the capital Bangui late on 6 December. On 7 December, interim authorities ordered all forces, except peacekeepers and the presidential guard, off the streets in an effort to control the situation. French forces have been deployed particularly in the north and west to secure roads and remote areas, where violence and looting between rival communities has left the country in chaos.

The latest round of violence began on 5 December, when a Christian militia raided Muslim neighbourhoods. This followed months of fighting and reprisals between Christians and Muslims after the Muslim Seleka rebels seized power in March this year. Interim President Michel Djotodia is struggling to control the situation, described by some as amounting to genocide, partly because the Seleka are a loose grouping, including fighters from neighbouring Sudan and Chad. France has intervened following the UN Security Council's authorisation to use force to assist the African peacekeepers already in the country. Despite general potential in terms of mining and agriculture, the unresolved instability continues to keep the Central African Republic dependent on foreign aid, constraining the possibilities for development. The political chaos that has engulfed the country over the past months also increases regional concerns, particularly considering the fragile state of peace negotiations in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



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For France, the second military intervention in a former colony this year highlights the country's increasing involvement on the African continent. On 6 December, French President Francois Hollande addressed 53 representatives of African countries as a French-African summit on peace and security opened in Paris, stressing French determination to confront the risks in the Sahel zone in particular. With the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Central Africa Republic, and the violations of human rights resulting in an estimated 66,000 refugees and 4000,000 internally displaced persons, it is planned that the African-led International Support Mission in the country (MISCA), which the currently deployed French troops are supporting, will be increased to a total strength of 6,000 troops and 1,700 police personnel. The Security Council also addressed the idea of a sanctions regime against the Central African Republic, though this was reserved as a future measure.

Other developments

The death of former South African president Nelson Mandela triggered international reaction after being announced by current President Jacob Zuma on 5 December. Tributes from around the world stressed Mandela's commitment to overcome the country's apartheid regime of racial segregation and his reconciliation of a divided country.

An American teacher was shot dead in Libya's eastern city Benghazi on 5 December, fuelling concerns about rising insecurity in the post-revolutionary country. While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet, risk remains high, with many foreign governments having warned against travelling to Benghazi since the 2012 attack on the US consulate. Benghazi has seen almost daily assassinations and bombings, often targeting army and police forces as militias and extremist groups continue to fight for power after the toppling of the Muammar Gaddafi regime in 2011.

Boko Haram has attacked a Nigerian airbase, following army operations against the rebel group. The attack on 2 December in Maiduguri, northeastern Nigeria, destroyed two helicopters and saw clashes in several areas of the city, leading to a curfew being imposed and the civilian airport closing. With a recent focus on rural areas, the latest attack in Boko Haram's founding city, deemed relatively safe after the military had confronted the group there, points to renewed intensification of the situation. The state of emergency in the regions most affected by clashes with Boko Haram continues.

On the radar

- **World leaders are to attend the memorial service for Nelson Mandela** in South Africa on 10 December, ahead of a state funeral.
- **Investigations are continuing into a mass grave discovered in Mali,** believed to contain bodies of a group of missing soldiers.
- **Measures under the Liberia sanctions regime are set to expire on 12 December,** with the United Nations expected to renew at least some of the sanctions.
- **Concern among foreign business owners in Zimbabwe is increasing as they move to indigenise their businesses** to avoid government penalties for operating in sectors to be reserved for nationals.
- **UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon will stress drug trafficking as a particular issue of concern** as he presents the outcomes of his visits to the Sahel region to officials, including representative of the World Bank, on 12 December.

Americas

Nationwide police strikes have led to a wave of lootings across major cities in Argentina

More than a thousand shops were looted in the province of Córdoba on 4 December following local police protests for rise in pay. An estimated 130 people were injured with 50 arrests during the pillages that affected the second most populous province of Argentina. As the news spread, police strikes extended to the San Juan, Catamarca, Neuquén, Río Negro and Santa Fe provinces. The governor of Córdoba Province, José Manuel de la Sota, was on an official visit to Colombia and Panama at the time. As such, it was only upon his return the following day that an announced 30% increase in police wages put an end to the strikes and lootings.

Many have criticised the federal government for its weak reaction to the security crisis in Córdoba. Indeed, it was only after the governor sealed a deal with police forces that the government sent a gendarmerie garrison in reinforcement. De la Sota is a long-standing rival to President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner within the Peronist coalition. Notably, in 2009 he supported farmers in their protests against a soybean export tax proposed by the Fernandez government.

The federal government fears that the unrest could affect other main cities, especially the capital, Buenos Aires. In response to the crisis, the government has deployed over 10,000 gendarmeries to the most troubled provinces, with 2,500 gendarmeries sent to Santa Fe and a further 2,000 to Córdoba. In addition, a special operational unit was created for the Buenos Aires province. Some instances of lootings have already occurred in Grand Bourg and Glew in Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, in Córdoba the situation has remained calm since the announced local police pay rise.

Other developments

In Mexico, petty criminals have been captured following the theft of a vehicle transporting medical equipment, including a radioactive element. The truck from the Tijuana hospital contained cobalt-60, which is used in chemotherapy. The isotope could be used in the construction of a dirty bomb, though Mexican officials said the thieves probably did not know what they were taking and were most likely targeting the truck. It is still unsure what the exact intentions of the thieves were and if they acted on behalf of a drug cartel.

Colombian small-scale farmers have returned to the streets to protest against farm policies. Several thousand Colombian farmers took to the streets of Bogotá on 4 December to demand that the government acts in accordance with the agreements made in September. The September agreements provided a solution to end two months of violent protests in the rural areas. Colombia's Agriculture Minister Ruben Dario Lizarralde has denied that the state has failed to comply with the settlement.

The Honduras Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) is to re-count the votes in the 24 November presidential election. The TSE has agreed to recount the votes following allegations of fraud made by Libre Party candidate Xiomara Castro. The official count gave the National Party candidate Juan Orlando Hernández eight points over his rival Castro. The president of the TSE stressed that Castro should publicly admit her defeat if the re-count confirms the original results.

On the radar

- **Demonstrations in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince against President Michel Martelly and the Dominican Republic are expected to continue.**
- **Disruption is expected on 9 December in Cochabamba, Bolivia,** due to a 24-hour strike by public transport staff.
- **Potential for disruptive protests in Jujuy province, Argentina,** by unionised public sector personnel if the authorities fail to meet their demands during a meeting on 9 December.

Asia and Pacific

Joe Biden cautiously reassures South Korea of US commitment to Asia-Pacific

US Vice-President Joe Biden has visited China, Japan and South Korea on a three-day tour. He stressed US concern over China's newly declared East China Sea air defence zone. In talks with South Korean President Park Geun-hye and at a speech at Seoul's Yonsei University on 6 December, Biden reiterated US opposition to Beijing's air defence identification zone. Biden has publicly stressed that the US pivot and commitment to Asia will not be derailed by such measures. Privately to Chinese President Xi Jinping, however, Biden was keen to promote a friendly and cooperative relationship.

China outlined an identification zone on the 23 November, stating that all aircraft must file flight plans or face 'emergency defensive measures'. The zone includes the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which are claimed by both China and Japan but currently controlled by Japan. The United States, South Korea and Japan see this as a unilateral escalation by China and have refused to back down. Numerous commercial and military aircraft have defied the Chinese order, including two US B-52 bombers on 27 November that China scrambled fighter jets in response to.

Biden has made clear, both publicly in Japan and South Korea and privately to the Chinese president, that the United States will not tolerate Chinese aggression. His visit to Beijing, however, was overwhelmingly of a friendly note. Biden called for a 'candid' relationship with China's top political leaders and his decision to not publicly condemn China while in Beijing was praised by Chinese media. US strategy in the region is therefore apparent: a commitment to the Asia-Pacific without upsetting China.

Other developments

US citizen and veteran Merrill Newman was released by North Korea on 6 December on 'humanitarian grounds'. This is after he 'confessed' and apologised for crimes in the 1950-53 Korean War. Pyongyang claims that Newman confessed to espionage, subversion and the killing of North Korean soldiers and civilians during the war. Newman's release came hours before the US vice-president was due to visit the demilitarised zone that separates North and South Korea.

The political standoff in Bangkok was temporarily halted to celebrate the birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej on 5 December. Anti-government protests have continued their demands that Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra step down to be replaced by a 'People's Council'. They allege Yingluck's government is controlled by her brother, the ousted former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. On 2 December, Yingluck ruled out her resignation as impossible on the grounds that it is unlawful and unconstitutional. However, Yingluck has recently claimed she is prepared call a national election if the opposition agree.

South Korean media has said that North Korea is facing the most serious political defection in 15 years from the man who managed funds for the recently purged uncle of North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. The media reports that the defector is being protected by South Korean officials at a secret location in China and seeks asylum in South Korea. The defector managed funds for Jang Song-thaek, whose marriage to Kim's aunt made him one of North Korea's most powerful figures until he was expelled from the government for a string of alleged crimes and leading a 'dissolute and depraved life'. Due to the defector's connection to this privileged but recently disgraced man, South Korean media have speculated he perhaps holds many secrets about the elusive workings of the Hermit Kingdom.

On the radar

- **Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will call for freedom of airspace** in a communiqué at a Tokyo summit this week.
- **The Malaysian Chinese Association, which forms a significant part of the opposition coalition, will elect a new leadership through party polls.**
- **Further disruption is expected across Bangladesh** during the ongoing nationwide 72-hour blockade of roads, rail tracks and waterways.
- **A planned rally by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party on 15 December in Dehradun, India,** is expected to cause considerable disruption and heightened security measures.

Europe

Protests continue in Ukraine as government survives a no-confidence vote

Pro-Europe protesters have continued their demonstrations against the Ukrainian government's recent decision not to sign an association agreement with the European Union. The demonstrators are occupying Kiev's Independence Square and since 2 December they have also occupied a number of government buildings. The number of protesters in the capital has increased since police forcibly expelled protesters from the square on 1 December. Political opposition groups have also joined forces to step-up pro-Europe protests and three former presidents of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko, have given their support to the protesters and warned tension could spin into an uncontrollable crisis.

On 3 December, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov's government survived a no-confidence vote in parliament. Azarov had apologized for the action of the police and promised personnel changes in the government before the no-confidence and the head of the police has ordered officers to not use force against peaceful protesters. Both government officials and opposition figures have confirmed that they are open to negotiations. However, the prime minister has warned that mass rallies must obey the law and in particular, targeted western Ukraine, the centre of the protest movement, and warned that it could face a cut off of federal funding.

Several international organisations and Western countries have condemned the violence used by the police on the protesters on 1 December. On 3 December, NATO foreign ministers voiced their disapproval of the violence and urged the government and opposition to open negotiations. However, an attempt by the Head of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland, on 4 December to arbitrate a meeting between government officials and opposition members to persuade them to enter into dialogue was unsuccessful. Russia, on the other hand, has vocalised its disapproval of Western intervention and the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, criticised NATO's statement, arguing that it was a domestic issue and he urged outsiders not to interfere. Over the last week, Russia has also sought to strengthen its ties with Ukraine and on 4 December, Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev announced the Russian government's plans to expand economic cooperation between the two countries in a number of sectors. Furthermore, President Vladimir Putin met Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on 6 December in Sochi (Russia) in an unannounced meeting. The media has speculated that Ukraine may join the Russian-led Customs Union and in return would receive reduced energy prices. However, the direction that Ukraine may take remains in limbo as according to media reports, on 2 December Yanukovich called the European Commission president, Jose Manuel Barroso, to seek a renewal of negotiations for an association agreement with the EU.

Other developments

Finnish police arrested 28 protesters following a riot in the southern city of Tampere on 6 December.

The country had been celebrating Independence Day when 200 protesters demonstrated outside the Tampere City Hall where the presidential ball was being held. A small group of protesters smashed windows and attacked police vehicles with bottles. Another group of protesters set off firecrackers around the Tampere railway station and attempted to set fire to a Finnish flag. The police dispersed the crowd with tear gas and truncheons.

On 6 December, the European Union's justice commissioner, Viviane Reding, rejected calls from Germany and the United Kingdom for the EU to tackle the issue of benefit tourism. The United Kingdom and more recently Germany have argued that the EU offices have failed to address their concerns over welfare tourism before the opening of borders to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens at the end of 2013. Reding contended that freedom of movement between the states should not be curbed and that it was up to the EU members to foolproof their laws to prevent abuse of their welfare systems. The commissioner also claimed that the EU had already sufficient protection against benefit tourism. In June, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland had asked the European Commission to develop new measures to stop people moving to different countries to use their welfare system. The issue of welfare tourism is likely to flare up again in the run-up to European Parliamentary elections in May 2014.

On 3 December, Romanian President Traian Basescu refused to endorse a memorandum as he opposed some of the measures in the latest policy package, proposed in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the World Bank. Basescu reportedly did not approve in the increase in the excise of fuels, a measure which the president believes would reduce the government's chances to re-launch the Romanian economy. In September, the IMF approved a €1.98 billion two year precautionary credit line – the third package in four years – and in November, the Romanian government agreed to implement a new excise of €7 per litre on fuel prices to raise money for a fund to finance roadwork. The IMF's executive board is likely to postpone another meeting to discuss the country's loan programme until March 2014.

On the radar

- **The Latvian President, Andris Bērziņš, is likely to nominate its next Prime Minister this week.**
- **Planned opposition rallies are expected on 15 December in Baku, Azerbaijan**, in protest against the government's decision to raise petrol prices.
- **Black Sea Cooperation meeting in Yerevan, Armenia, on 12 December.** The Turkish foreign minister is reportedly hoping to normalise Turkey's strained relations with Armenia during the visit.
- **Anniversary of the 1969 right-wing terror attack in Milan, Italy, on 12 December**, which killed 17 and injured 88.

Middle East

Lebanese city of Tripoli placed under military control

On 2 December, the Lebanese government took the decision to place the country's second city, Tripoli, under military control. Prime Minister Najib Mukati announced that Tripoli would remain under control of the army for a period of six months in an effort to suppress the sectarian violence that has escalated since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. The most recent episode of violence resulted in the deaths of at least 11 people over three days, 30 November to 2 December.

Sectarian clashes in Tripoli have become more frequent and more violent throughout 2013. The northern city is less than 30 kilometres from the Syrian border and the increase in violence is a direct spill-over from the Syrian civil war, with violence concentrated within the two opposing neighbourhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. Jabal Mohsen is an Alawite minority neighbourhood within Sunni majority Tripoli and Lebanon; the neighbouring district of Bab al-Tabbaneh is a Sunni community. The two neighbourhoods have been involved in sporadic conflict since the 1980s but the Syrian civil war has provoked old divisions over the past two and a half years. Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and his Alawite government have been locked in battle with Sunni minority opposition. Since being deployed, the army announced that it had detained 21 fighters in Tripoli on 3 December.

It is likely that the army will be able to reduce the number of violent confrontations between the two communities but tensions will remain in Tripoli and the rest of Lebanon. The sectarian incidents of violence in Tripoli reflect the geopolitical struggle in the region, with ethnic communities heavily influenced by wider regional politics. A regional struggle for influence between Sunni Saudi-Arabia and Shi'ite Iran has helped fuel conflict along ethnic lines in Iraq, Syria, and now, Lebanon.

Other developments

On 3 December, Transparency International, a leading anti-corruption NGO, released its annual Corruption Perception Index for 2013, with war-torn Middle Eastern countries perceived as among the most corrupt. The purpose of the index is to raise awareness about the abuse of power, bribery, a lack of transparency and accountability in public institutions. Of 177 ranked countries, Afghanistan (175), Iraq (171), Syria (168), and Yemen (167) all scored less than 20 on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 100 means a country is perceived as very clean. The perceived level of corruption in Iraq and Syria has increased since the 2012 report as instability, civil war and the presence of armed groups reduce the political authority and functionality of the government. The rule of law and accountability is also failing to be enforced in countries with weak institutions.

UN inspectors investigating Syrian war crimes have implicated Syrian government officials, including President Bashar al-Assad, in crimes against humanity. The UN high commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, made the comment in Geneva on 2 December, though UN investigators should refrain from implicating individuals and suspects until entering the judicial process. The remark is unlikely to affect the position of the government during the civil war but may weaken the position of the government at the scheduled Geneva II peace talks. The opposition Syrian National Coalition will not attend the talks if Assad will have any role in a transitional government.

On 5 December, a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle packed with explosives as gunmen from another vehicle opened fire at the Yemeni defence ministry in Sanaa. This is the worst militant attack in Yemen for over 18 months, leaving 52 people dead and a further 167 wounded. Although no group has claimed responsibility, attacks on government targets by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have been common in recent years. The United States believes that AQAP are the most active branch of al-Qaeda in the region. The interim Yemeni government is struggling to administer political authority as it contends with a separatist movement in the south, Houthi insurgency in the north and al-Qaeda-linked militants. The risk of further attacks on government targets remains high.

On the radar

- **Officials from Iran, the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia are scheduled to meet 9-10 December** to discuss the details of implementing the deal between Iran and the P5+1 that was agreed last week.
- **More violence is expected in Syria as government troops continue their offensive against opposition fighters.**
- **Hamas has cancelled the 14 December anniversary rally in Gaza,** citing financial difficulties.
- **Demonstrations possible following the killing of protesters during a rally in Yuksekova, Turkey.**

Polar regions

Canada submits Arctic territorial claims

The Canadian government officially submitted its claims to territory in the Arctic to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on 6 December. According to international law, states wishing to make extended claims on maritime territory may do so provided that it can be shown that such claims are based on the positions of their continental shelves. The claims are, however, also largely based on political calculations; Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper is reported to have rejected the original proposal submitted to his office earlier this week and to have demanded that the North Pole be included in the final draft. Furthermore the final draft was filed with the UN as a 'preliminary submission', meaning that Canada reserves the right to extend its claims in the future.

Until Harper's 11th hour intervention, there were no significant overlaps expected with the territorial claims of Denmark (based on the extension of the continental shelf of its territories in Greenland) and Russia. The former filed its most recent claim to the UN in November and is expected to finalise its declarations in 2014, and the latter submitted an extensive claim to large swathes of the Arctic in 2002. Russia's 2002 claim was rejected by the UN on the basis of not including sufficient evidence for its assertions, yet given the avowed importance of control over the Arctic for Moscow, subsequent claims are expected to be no less ambitious. The most important point of contention here is the Lomonosov Ridge, an underwater ridge of continental crust which spans 1,800 kilometres from the New Siberian Islands over the central part of the ocean to Ellesmere Island of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, over which Russia, Canada and Denmark all assert ownership to varying extents.

While the conflicting claims of these Arctic states set the scene for possible future confrontation, no significant upsets in diplomatic relations are expected in the short term. It will take many years for the UN to verify the alleged scientific and geological evidence submitted by Canada and Denmark; the latter may have to wait until 2019 for a verdict. Furthermore, while the insistence on maximising territorial claims is based on a scramble for the region's believed massive natural resource wealth (particularly oil and gas), the technology required for extracting such resources in the high Arctic is still a long way from development. Until this technology makes resource extraction economically viable, there is unlikely to be enough of an incentive to push Arctic states into risky diplomatic or military conflict.

Other developments

Russian President Vladimir Putin alleged that Moscow's recent military build-up in the Arctic is justified by the threat from the US military. The claim, made during a meeting with Moscow law students, cited the threat of US submarines operating out of the Barents Sea to the northwest of Russia. The United States, he asserts, can use this region to strike Moscow with missiles that can reach their target within 15-16 minutes. Since his return to power in 2012, Putin has frequently used anti-US discourse to justify his domestic and foreign policy decisions.

Sweden will contribute eight Gripen fighter jets to NATO'S Response Force, the alliance's most elite military unit, from next year. Sweden's contribution to the unit is likely to be a response to Russia's recent determination to display its military prowess to its nearby European neighbours. In September, Russia and Belarus held large-scale joint military exercises envisaging war with NATO states under the name *Zapad-2013* (West-2013). Even more threatening towards Stockholm were the simulated bombing attacks on Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, reported by *The Moscow Times* to have been conducted in November.

Norwegian MP Michael Tetzschner said that Sweden is capable of monitoring telephone and computer data since the bulk of Norwegian traffic travelling abroad passes through Sweden.

Documents leaked by the American whistleblower Edward Snowden show that Sweden collaborated with other European powers on massive covert surveillance of internet and telephone traffic. 'We want to ensure that traffic between Norwegian citizens does not fall under Swedish supervision. Although we have common infrastructure, Sweden cannot take liberties that are in violation of Norwegian law,' Tetzschner said.

On the radar

- **The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission will reconvene on 9 December** to continue working on their draft of Alaska's Arctic Policy, submission of which is expected on 30 January 2014.
- **Increased security measures expected on 11 December in Moscow, Russia, on the Anniversary of 2010 nationalist riots.**

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