

The weekly briefing | 11 November 2013

Political and security risk update

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Asia and Pacific: Widespread opposition intensifies against Thailand's proposed political amnesty bill.

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Africa

M23 rebels to end revolt in Democratic Republic of the Congo

M23 insurgents announced on 5 November that they would end their 18-month-long rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Hours earlier, the country's government had declared 'total victory' over the group, following an army operation against their last remaining strongholds.

M23's commander, Sultani Makenga, and around 1,700 fighters are reported to have surrendered in Uganda. Kampala has not yet decided whether to hand them over to Kinshasa or not and has said no decision will be made until a peace agreement is signed between the DRC government and M23. Given the DRC army's current success and the M23's declaration of surrender and a return to peace talks, hopes are high for a settlement after the prolonged period of violence across the region, leaving thousands of civilians displaced. However, the M23's defeat is unlikely to result in instant peace, as both the DRC and the UN have stated that top M23 commanders will not be given amnesty.

Military reforms combating corruption and continuing government efforts to stamp out militias have yielded some results, but a political settlement of the entirety of the conflict, including economic elements linked to the country's vast reserves of fuel and mineral resources, remains the most important challenge. It is believed that some of the remaining rebels have fled to neighbouring Rwanda, which could still endanger the regional balance. The DRC military is now expected to focus its operations on other rebel groups in the country, with defeating the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) as its main priority.



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Other developments

Fighting among militias broke out in Tripoli, Libya, on 7 November. With at least one person killed and a dozen injured, this was the most serious eruption of violence in months. An armed group from Misrata entered the capital in a reprisal attack for a shooting two days earlier. The Libyan government is struggling to contain the militias, who helped overthrow the regime of Muammar Gadhafi in 2011. This is no longer only a problem in Benghazi but increasingly also in the capital. The widespread availability of weapons and the extensive arming of residents are adding to the difficulties.

South Sudan has deployed around 500 soldiers to Western Equatoria state, acting against Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) fighters in response to an attack earlier in the week. Killings, lootings and an unknown number of abductions caused many civilians in the area to flee into the bush. This follows LRA activities in the increasingly unstable neighbouring Central African Republic. The South Sudanese government stated it would remain on high alert for a likely spill-over of violence.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has claimed responsibility for the recent killing of two French journalists in Mali. The group cited the France's intervention in its former colony, which began in January this year, as the reason for the attack. The hunt for suspects has so far resulted at least 35 arrests. Having already delayed plans for two months, Paris has announced its intention to stick to its schedule of reducing its army presence from 3,200 troops to 1,000 by the end of the year.

On the radar

- **Ethiopia is now also expecting al-Shabaab attacks** in the wake of the latest bombing in Mogadishu, Somalia.
- **Further Kenyan military strikes against al-Shabaab are likely** as the government warns civilians of operations.
- **Tunisian Ennahda and Popular Front leaders are expected to attempt resumption of national dialogue.**

Americas

Colombian government reaches landmark agreement with FARC over participation in politics

On Wednesday 6 November, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) reached a landmark agreement on the rebel's political participation as part of the peace talks' six-point agenda. The peace talks are now a year old and the first agreement, which concerned land reform, was settled last May. This second agreement lays out the framework for the political integration of the left-wing FARC rebels into Colombian national politics. It involves the creation of new parties with guaranteed protection from the state as well as the formation of new constituencies in the hardest hit districts in order to guarantee a minimum representation of the FARC political branch in Congress.

This agreement marks a turning point in the negotiations but doubts remain over the feasibility of integrating FARC into the political system. The last participation of FARC in Colombian mainstream politics, through the Patriotic Union party in the 1980s, resulted in bloodshed and the assassination of 3,000 of its members by opposition paramilitary groups. Furthermore, the participation of senior FARC leaders who have been accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity is proving controversial. Former president Álvaro Uribe has condemned the eventual political integration of FARC.

The success in the peace talks is likely to lift support for Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos ahead of the May 2014 presidential elections. Weakened by the poor handling of a national strike from the agrarian sector in September, Santos's electoral success will rely on the legacy of the peace talks. As such, the peace rounds are likely to carry on during the political campaign. However, there is a risk that this strategy might backfire, as it is estimated that currently only a thin majority of the Colombian population favours a peaceful reconciliation with FARC.

Other developments

Thousands of people marched in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, demanding the resignation of President Michel Martelly. Tensions have mounted between the presidential and opposition camps in the last few weeks.

Mexican authorities have ordered the militarisation of port Lázaro Cárdenas in an effort to curb the activities of the Knights Templar (Caballeros Templarios) cartel. Lázaro Cárdenas is one of the country's principal ports on the Pacific coast. The cartel is believed to have bribed the port authorities and used the harbour as a drug shipment platform.

On the radar

- **The left-wing candidate Michelle Bachelet is the favourite in the Chilean presidential elections** to be held on 17 November.
- **Argentine President Cristina Fernández is to resume her duties** after a month-long absence following surgery to remove a blood clot on her brain.
- **Political rallies and demonstration in Honduras are likely** ahead of general elections.
- **Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro stated that by next week he will be able to rule by decree.** This would first require that the Emergency Law be approved by a majority in Congress.
- **Nationwide demonstrations are planned across Costa Rica on 11 November** to protest against government policies and economic conditions.

Asia and Pacific

Widespread opposition intensifies against Thailand's proposed political amnesty bill

Ten of thousands of demonstrators have taken to the streets of Bangkok to oppose the adoption of a political amnesty bill, which initially covered only ordinary protestors for involvement in past protests but now seeks to absolve all convictions relating to political conflicts since 2004. Protestors, who mainly hail from the middle class and Democrat Party supporters, argue that the legislation would allow the overturn the conviction of the controversial former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thaksin was removed by a coup in 2006 and has lived in exile since. Thaksin, however, denies he is planning his return. It is Thaksin's sister, the current prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, who is the most vocal advocate of the proposed bill, which she argues will lead to political reconciliation. Huge opposition to the bill is also present from Thaksin's own supporters, who argue it would absolve those responsible for ordering the military to open fire upon peaceful protestors in 2010.

The amnesty bill has passed through the lower house, which is comfortably dominated by the governing Pheu Thai party and its allies, and has been sent to Thailand's senate for approval. The senate has done little to fulfil its constitutional role to check harmful and undemocratic legislation in the past due to familial links and corruption. However, on this occasion the senate president has already announced that most senators will reject the bill in its current form. The government will perhaps continue undeterred, believing that opposition may eventually fizzle out.

Other developments

The chief of Cambodia's military force on the border with Thailand has called an emergency meeting after low-flying Thai aircraft were seen around the Preah Vihear temple. A helicopter and small spotter plane were seen early on the 9 November. Although a 1962 verdict by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared the temple to be Cambodian, the lands surrounding the temple have been disputed for centuries. Tensions have been high since 2008. Thai nationalists were enraged when Thailand withdrew its request for the temple to be listed as a joint Cambodian-Thai UNESCO world heritage site. In April 2009, soldiers exchanged cross-border fire. In February 2011, more than eight people were killed after several days of fighting which forced thousands to flee.

China's political elite have commenced the Third Plenum – the Communist Party meeting where the main political and economic agenda for the next decade will be discussed. Analysts believe the liberalisation of the financial sector, the future role of state-owned enterprises and the reformation of China's household registration system will be critical issues under discussion. The mouthpiece of the Communist Party, the *People's Daily* newspaper, has firmly rejected the possibility of discussing Western political reforms, such as liberalisation or democratisation. Beginning on 9 November, the meetings are expected to end on 13 November.

Taro Yamamoto, a member of Japan's legislative Diet, has been reprimanded by the media, public and government for attempted to break the Emperor's political neutrality. This comes after Yamamoto attempted to hand a letter to Emperor Akihito that detailed the impact of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Emperor's role remains highly sensitive nearly 70 years after Akihito's father renounced his divine status under pressure from the American occupation forces. This ensured a constitution where the Emperor could retain a figure-head role at the price of post-war political influence. Although right-wing groups would see the emperor assuming a more political role, they are a significant minority in a society who see any political contact with the emperor as taboo.

On the radar

- **The trial of suspected militant Separiano is expected to conclude with a death sentence in a South Jakarta District Court.** He is accused of plotting to bomb the Burma/Myanmar embassy in Indonesia.
- **Indonesia will review the way it shares intelligence with the United States and Australia** in the wake of the spying scandal.
- **The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) has scheduled anti-legislation rallies across a number of Thai provinces this week.**
- **Malaysia is currently gathering evidence to prove that the United States and Australia have conducted spying activities on its soil.**

Europe

The British ambassador in Berlin has been called in following spying allegations

The German foreign ministry called the British ambassador, Simon McDonald, for a meeting on 5 November to discuss allegations that the United Kingdom had been carrying out covert electronic surveillance on the German government from a 'spy nest' on top of the British embassy. This is reminiscent of devices used during the Cold War to intercept East German and Soviet communications.

Today, however, the interception of communication from within diplomatic buildings represents a violation of international law. British-German relations could worsen if the spying allegations are confirmed. The co-chairman of the left-wing Die Link party said that the party would call for a special EU summit to discuss financial sanctions against the United Kingdom.

The allegations were published a week after a German magazine revealed that the NSA had built a structure on the roof of the US embassy in order to monitor the phones of German officials in nearby government buildings.

Other developments

Kosovo's Central Election Commission (CEC) announced on 6 November that local elections in three polling centres in northern Kosovska Mitrovica would be repeated. Following the election on 3 November, the CEC annulled the results from these polling centres, after masked men stormed the centres and destroyed the election material. These elections were for the heads of municipalities and representatives in the local assemblies. The re-voting will occur on 17 November.

On 7 November, Greek riot police cleared the Athens headquarters of former state broadcaster ERT. The building had been occupied since June by former employees, 2,600 of whom had been laid off by the government to reduce public expenditure. Labour unions and opposition parties heavily criticised the government following the raid. Moreover, Greece's main opposition party, Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), tabled on 7 November a motion of no confidence in the government. The debate began on 8 November and a roll-call vote will be held at midnight on 10 November.

The head of the EU delegation to Afghanistan, Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, announced on 7 November that the EU would continue to support Afghanistan following the withdrawal of NATO-led troops by the end of 2014. Mellbin confirmed that the EU would support Afghanistan through its 'transformation decade' (2015-24) and that it would offer a comprehensive approach in order to ensure synergies between the political, development and security forces. The ambassador also emphasised the importance of swiftly concluding the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development (CAPD), which will serve as the legal framework for EU-Afghan relations for next 10 years.

On the radar

- **Further protests are likely across France in the coming week** over controversial road tax.
- **Rallies are due to take place in Athens and Thessaloniki on 17 November** in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the 1973 student uprising against the Greek former military dictatorship.
- **Planned rally to take place at the Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's residence in Madrid** on 14 November over education cuts.

Middle East

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks remain in limbo

Last week, US Secretary of State John Kerry shuttled between Jerusalem and Bethlehem as Washington attempted to keep the stumbling peace talks between Israel and Palestine alive. In a statement made on 7 November, Kerry remained optimistic about the talks and said both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had reaffirmed their commitment to the negotiations. However, that confidence did not appear to be in line with the sentiments of Netanyahu and Abbas.

Netanyahu remains sceptical of the Washington-backed peace talks. He has accused the Palestinians of dragging their feet and avoiding the tough decisions and sacrifices that must be made in order for the talks to be successful. On the other hand, Abbas has pointed to the recent announcement by Israel of plans to construct a further 3,500 homes in the West Bank as a major stumbling block. The territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem have been occupied by Israel since 1967 and settlements in these territories have been at the centre of failed peace talks in the past. Last month's release of over 100 Palestinian prisoners by Israel was part of a Washington-brokered deal to bring Abbas back to the negotiating table. However, Palestinians have strongly objected to any suggestions that their release was in exchange for overlooking settlements.

Kerry's attempt to revive peace talks between Israel and Palestine appear to have been unsuccessful and major obstacles between the two sides remain, both internal and external. Proposed extensions of Israeli settlements into the occupied territories reinforce anti-Israeli sentiment amongst Palestinians and are considered illegal under international law. Moreover, political divisions amongst Palestinians exist between Abbas's Fatah and Hamas and the Islamist movement has condemned any peace talks with Israel. Palestinian suspicion of Israel also increased after a report emerged indicating that revered former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat died with high levels of polonium-210 in his body. The US brokered peace talks are due to end in April and, based on the opening three months of talks, look likely to end without any significant progression.

Other developments

A UN backed ceasefire announced on 4 November has failed to curb sectarian fighting in Northern Yemen. At least 100 people have been killed as clashes broke out in the Yemeni Damaj on 30 October between Shi'ite Houthi and Sunni Salafist groups. Houthi fighters control most of Saada province along the border with Saudi Arabia. Anti-government Houthi groups have accused the government of socio-economic and religious discrimination and have fought many times with security forces. The latest incident occurred after Houthi fighters accused rival Salafists of recruiting foreign fighters to attack them. Sunni Salafists have links to Islamist groups in the region, particularly Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

On 7 November, 22 military and police personnel were killed and a further 26 were injured after coordinated attacks targeted Iraqi security forces. The attacks occurred at the headquarters of the 22nd Brigade of the Iraqi army in al-Tarmiya, north of Baghdad. Reports identified an initial suicide bomber attacked the main gate of the military base and a second detonated a charge as soldiers were tending to the wounded. Gunmen were also reported to have open fired on the military base. Further violence in the country on 7 November left eight dead after a series of car and roadside bombings. Militants have repeatedly targeted security forces and Shi'ite communities because of the government's neglect of Iraq's Sunni minority.

Mohammed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president, appeared in public for the first time since he was deposed by a military coup in July 2013. The former president appeared in court alongside 14 other co-defendants on 4 November. Morsi and his co-defendants are accused of inciting murder as Muslim Brotherhood loyalists attacked secular protestors in December 2012. The clashes outside the presidential palace left at least 11 dead and political turmoil ensued right up until July when the military intervened. Morsi used the opportunity to reinforce his position and shouted, 'I am furious that the Egyptian judiciary should serve as cover for this criminal military coup' and refused to acknowledge the authority of the court. The defendants believe that their arrests are politically motivated, though it should be noted that the charges relate to an incident that occurred prior to the military coup. The trial has been adjourned until 8 January after tussles broke out in the court between pro- and anti-Morsi supporters.

On the radar

- **The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukiya Amano, will meet with senior Iranian leaders on 11 November** with the aim of strengthening dialogue and cooperation.
- **On 15 November, the Syrian government is expected to present a plan on how it will destroy its existing stockpile of chemical weapons by the middle of next year.**
- **Countries across the Middle East will commemorate the day of Ashura which falls on 14 November.** The day commemorates of the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, an event that led to the split of Islam into Sunnis and Shi'as.

Polar regions

Shell has declared its intention to resume efforts at finding crude in Arctic waters

Shell officials declared their intention to resume efforts at finding crude in Arctic waters during the summer exploration season in 2014. The pledge, which was delivered during a call with reporters to discuss Royal Dutch Shell's third-quarter earnings, ends months of speculation about whether the company would be prepared for the coming summer season, when Arctic ice retreats sufficiently northwards to allow for oil exploration. Shell's chief financial officer Simon Henry indicated that the company's return to the Arctic would be downscaled; the company will not seek to resume drilling in the Beaufort Sea, whose shallow sea bed significantly complicates such efforts. Rather, the company intends to continue drilling in the Chukchi Sea, an area that Henry described as a 'multi-billion-barrel opportunity for Shell'.

Although Shell has invested nearly \$5 billion and eight years of work into its current project of Arctic oil exploration, analysts and industry experts were unsure whether the company would attempt to continue in 2014, due to a 2012 season that was plagued by technical failures and legal challenges. The long series of mishaps included a failure to complete scheduled repairs to its oil spill containment vessel the Arctic Challenger, a loss of propulsion and a fire on its drillship the Noble Discoverer, and the \$1.1 million in fines the company was compelled to pay to the US government for violating air pollution permits by emitting excess nitrogen oxide during drilling. The most dramatic setback was on 31 December, when the drilling unit Kulluk ran aground near an Alaskan island after a five-day struggle to tow the vessel through a storm. Shell claims to have resolved the technical problems concerning its fleet, although Kulluk will not be participating, having sustained such severe damage that the company is likely to scrap it. However, a number of legal hurdles remain, which undermine what Greenpeace International's Arctic campaign leader Ben Ayliffe dismisses as 'Shell's Arctic bravado'.

If Henry's statement proves to be more than simply an attempt to reassure the company's investors, and if the company manages to meet the strict legal regulations set by the US government, Shell's return to the Arctic in 2014 will significantly alter the political and security climate of the region. Russia's state-owned energy giants, where the zero-sum mentality dominates, are likely to respond by attempting to accelerate their programme of Arctic energy exploration. This will be used to justify and possibly intensify Russia's carefully-watched military build-up in the region, which in turn is likely to lead to competition from the United States and Canada.

Other developments

Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, said that the Russian military is planning to form a squadron of warships with ice-breaking capability by 2014 to protect vital shipping routes in the Arctic. Shoigu, one of Russia's most powerful politicians who in contrast to his colleagues enjoys considerable popularity with the Russian people, used the video conference, held at the Russian defence ministry on 6 November, to restate Russia's commitment to the Arctic, which he called a region of 'utmost importance in terms of natural resources and strategic interests'. He also used the conference to confirm the reports of local and international media concerning the reopening of a Soviet-era military base on the island of Kotelný in Russia's far northeast.

Construction of the world's largest and most powerful nuclear-powered icebreaker began on 5 November at the Baltic Shipyard in St Petersburg. The yet-unnamed vessel will be powered by two nuclear reactors, and it will be 173 metres long and 34 metres wide. The General Director of Russia's Atomflot, Vyacheslav Ruksha, claimed that the ship, which has a €1.1 billion price tag, will be ready for operations in 2017 and will make it possible to use the Northern Sea Route all year around. Russia is hoping to reap increasing economic benefits from the Northern Sea Route, by providing logistical and infrastructure services to Asian nations, primarily China, wishing to exploit the new shipping route for faster delivery of their exports to European markets.

Russia has lashed out at the Netherlands for what it says was its failure to prevent a Dutch-registered Greenpeace icebreaker seized by Russian border guards in September from entering Arctic waters. The comments by foreign ministry spokesperson Alexander Lukashevich refer to the Arctic Sunrise, which was detained by Russian authorities together with its 30-strong international crew of environmental activists and journalists after the activists attempted to scale a rig belonging to state-owned gas giant Gazprom in protest against drilling in the Arctic. The Netherlands is seeking the release of its vessel and crew through international arbitration at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, which began hearings into the case on 6 November.

On the radar

- **The portal for public comment and complaint concerning Russia's Arctic policy** will close on 11 November, after which the government will begin the implementation of its \$63 billion 'Social and economic development of the Arctic zone of Russia for the period up to 2020' plan.
- **The 9th Annual Arctic Oil and Gas Conference will be held on 12-13 November** in Oslo, Norway. Shell's recent announcement of its return to Arctic waters is likely to dominate the discussions.
- **Finnish aviation unions plan to strike from 15-23 November.**

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