

The weekly briefing | 13 January 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Fresh fighting erupts in Central African Republic after president and prime minister resign

Violence has again intensified in the Central African Republic (CAR), with reported shootings in the capital Bangui. This comes after President Michel Djotodia and Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye resigned from office on 10 January, following a two-day summit in neighbouring Chad, where regional leaders had summoned CAR's entire parliament to restore peace in the troubled country. European diplomats are considering sending up to 1,000 troops to CAR to reinforce the French force currently deployed in the unstable country. On 8 January, for the first time, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Catherine Ashton, proposed different options for deploying European troops. She was acting on an earlier request by EU leaders that followed increasingly urgent UN warnings of imminent humanitarian disaster in the country plagued by sectarian violence.

Pressure had been particularly high on Djotodia, with demands for him to step down after failing to halt the intercommunal violence that is tearing CAR apart. Djotodia had originally seized power in a March 2013 coup, which sparked the current unrest. The widespread pattern of attacks and reprisals between the mostly Muslim former rebels and Christian self-defence militias in the Christian-majority country has killed more than 1,000 people in the past month and displaced almost a million. At the Chad summit, Ahmat Allami, Secretary-General of the Economic Community of Central African states (ECCAS), announced that new leadership decisions were to be taken at a later date.



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While it had been widely held that no solution would be possible with Djotodia in place, concerns over a power vacuum are increasing both within CAR and internationally. The state appears to have collapsed, unable to deal with streams of refugees, shootings in Bangui and reports of massacres in remote areas. France, having already deployed 1,600 troops in its former colony alongside an African force, stressed that a lasting solution needs to emerge from within the country. The UN has called for urgent international action given the progressively worsening humanitarian situation, with almost two million people in total needing assistance. Yet, international observers remain sceptical about what peacekeepers could achieve.

Other developments

The United States has warned that South Sudan stands on the brink of failure, only three years after the popular vote for independence, and called on both sides to move towards negotiations. On 10 January, South Sudanese government troops tried to regain control over Bentiu, the capital city of the oil-rich Unity state. Meanwhile, rebel forces loyal to ousted Vice President Riek Machar continue to challenge President Salva Kiir's army across the country, causing the civilian population to flee. Rebel and government representatives met on 7 January in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, but a ceasefire agreement was further delayed due to disputes over detained political actors rounded up in the wake of Machar's alleged coup plot last year. The United States has called on Kiir to release the detainees, in the hope of easing the conflict, which has so far killed at least 1,000 people, though the UN estimates the actual figure to be much higher.

Tunisian Prime Minister Ali Larayedh stepped down on 9 January, as part of a transition plan to end political deadlock in the country, which is experiencing increased social unrest. The ruling Islamist Ennahda party politician is set to be replaced within 15 days by Mehdi Jomaa, the prime minister designate. He will lead a government of technocrats supposed to prepare the country for a new round of elections later this year, the next step in Tunisia's transformation since the 2011 revolution. Ennahda, which won the initial elections after the popular overthrow of former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, has faced increasing pressure, with controversies over the delayed new constitution. The centre of the country in particular, where the 2011 protests originated, has seen rising political action, with demonstrators also rejecting new tax measures.

The Nigerian military has claimed to have killed up to 38 Boko Haram fighters in the country's northeast. The militants were killed in 9 January attacks on a military camp and residents in Damboa, which were repelled by the army. The government stresses that the latest action demonstrates that authorities are winning the war against the group, which has stepped up its fighting since 2009 and aims to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria's mostly Muslim north. Since last year, the Nigerian government has established a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, while the United States classified Boko Haram as a 'foreign terrorist organisation'. UN figures released in December listed more than 1,200 people killed as a result of Boko Haram attacks since Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan set out on a campaign to crush the rebels in May 2013.

On the radar

- **Kenya is planning further operations against al-Shabab in Somalia** following the first major air strikes since initial retaliation for the Westgate Mall attack in autumn 2013.
- **Libyan Prime Minister Zeidan has warned international oil tankers to avoid Eastern ports controlled by armed protesters** or risk being sunk by the navy, as confrontations over the control of oil exports reach new urgency.
- **The deadline for Tunisia's national assembly to approve the new constitution will expire on 14 January**, marking the initial revolution's third anniversary.
- **The UN Security Council will consult on its stabilisation missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and Mali (MINUSMA).**
- **Russia will raise its dispute with Senegal over the seizure of a trawler for alleged illegal fishing with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**, accusing the West African country of piracy.

Americas

Murder of former Miss Venezuela highlights the country's increasing crime problem

On the evening of 6 January, actress and former Miss Venezuela Monica Spear and her husband were shot in their car by a gang of armed robbers. The incident took place on the highway that connects Venezuela's third city, Valencia, with the port of Puerto Cabello. The murder spurred a wave of compassion in a country seriously affected by violent crime. In response, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro promised to act with an 'iron fist' and organised an emergency meeting with mayors and governors from the ruling socialist party and the opposition. It was also reported that a new director was named to head the national police. On 8 January, several marches were held in the capital, Caracas, to protest against the rise in insecurity. Since 2003, the regime has ceased publishing full murder statistics but according to the non-governmental Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (VOV), the annual number of homicides has increased fivefold since 1998 and peaked at 25,000 in 2013.

The problem of insecurity is structural and is driven by the conjunction of several factors. Amongst them are easy access to illegal weapons, an ill-equipped police force, over-crowded prisons and a corrupt and overstretched judicial system, which results in roughly six out of ten crimes going unreported. However, polls suggest that less than half of the population blame the government for the surge in violence. Nonetheless, the theme of insecurity was a central issue in the April 2013 presidential elections. It is only the dramatic nature of Spear's murder that has brought attention back to the country's spiralling crime problem and forced Maduro to act.

Following the emergency meeting, Maduro announced the creation of an organisation for victims of crimes and promised the creation of a 'law of pacification'. General Miguel Rodríguez Torres, the interior minister, also proposed a number of adjustments to police structures and operations and to existing anti-crime plans. However, this will likely prove insufficient to reverse the trend in violence, as the decaying state of the judicial and police institutions has allowed the development of criminal organisations in the country, which has gradually become the regional epicentre of cocaine trafficking.

Other developments

A group of petty criminals set fire to the town hall of the Apatzingán district of Mexico on the night of 10 January. The perpetrators of the attacks remain unidentified and the reason for their action is unknown. Apatzingán is the most important district of the state of Michoacán. In recent years, Michoacán state has been the stronghold of the Knights Templars, one of Mexico's most violent drug cartels. To compensate for the lack of police forces in the region, citizens have formed self-defence squads that have opposed the cartel rule.

Protests were staged in the Colombian capital of Bogota in support of sacked socialist mayor Gustavo Petro. Tens of thousands of marchers gathered in the Plaza de Bolívar on 10 January to protest against the removal of Petro. The decision was taken by conservative Inspector-General Alejandro Ordóñez in beginning of December. Petro was accused of poor management of the local waste system. In turn, Petro has started a legal battle to contest his removal; however it remains unlikely that he will return to the Bogota mayorship as the inspector general retains the final say.

Forest fire smoke in the south sparks health warning in four regions of Chile. On 8 January, Chilean President Sebastian Piñera issued a health warning for the regions of Santiago, Valparaíso, Maule and La Araucanía. The National Office of Emergency has indicated that over 16,000 hectares are affected by 18 active forest fires. The fires, which started at the end of December, are the largest that the country has faced for 15 years. The decree will grant special powers to the sanitary authorities in order to protect local populations.

On the radar

- **Workers in central and northern Chile ports threaten to go on strike,** as they demand pay rises due from last year.
- **Further conflict and increased security is expected in Michoacan state, Mexico,** following the recent violence between drug cartels, security forces and vigilantes.
- **Further unrest is likely in the San Miguel de Cauri district of Huanuco, Peru,** following the degree of force used by security forces to disperse striking miners during a demonstration on 8 January.
- **Rice farmers plan to rally in San Jose, Costa Rica,** on 13 January as a result of failed negotiations with President Laura Chincilla.

Asia and Pacific

Is Africa the new front in Sino-Japanese rivalry?

As Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continues his tour of Ethiopia, Ivory Coast and Mozambique, he is expected to pledge more than \$14 billion (£8.5 billion) in aid and trade deals. Beijing has already pledged to double Chinese aid to Africa to \$20 billion a year. This has led to fresh exchanges of criticism between the rivals concerning their strategies for Africa. Chinese media has suggested that Abe is courting African support for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, while Japanese media claims that China has already bribed African leaders with lavish gifts.

Abe's tour has been widely seen as confirmation of a scramble for Africa's resources and Japan's desire to increase its diplomatic foothold on the continent. As Abe's spokesman, Tomohiko Taniguchi, admits, Japan is lagging behind China in terms of investment in Africa. This is seen as especially important in light of Japan's lack of domestic energy resources and reluctance among the younger generation to rely on nuclear power. Japan, like China, is therefore looking for new markets to sell its products in order to buy fuels and other raw materials.

Chinese and Japanese officials believe that African countries will become economic epicentres and enthusiastically promote ties. It is unavoidable, however, that the media in both countries will paint this as a scramble for Africa. In reality, Japan requires alternative sources of oil – regardless of China's presence in the continent.

Other developments

At least seven people have been injured when an unknown gunman opened fire on protesters in Bangkok on 11 January. This came a day after six people were injured in clashes between rival protests groups. Many protestors wish to block next month's snap election, which the governing Pheu Thai party is expected to win. The opposition, however, have been united in their aim to overthrow Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, whom many see as a puppet for disgraced former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Protest leaders are planning a total shutdown of the capital on 13 January, with the Thai army and police preparing for further incidents of violence.

The Chinese government has closed a number of labour camps on the outskirts of Beijing, releasing tens of thousands of political and religious prisoners who were originally imprisoned without trial. It is reported that four camps in Daxing have been shut, while another has been made into a drug rehabilitation centre and another integrated into a local prison. The Communist Party pledged in 2007 that Mao's 're-education through labour' would be stopped. If these reports are true, it marks a significant move forward in efforts to reduce human rights abuses.

North Korea has rejected South Korea's proposals for a temporary reunion of families that have been separated since the Korean War. Millions of families have been separated since the military border was erected after the 1950-53 Korean War. The reunion programme has been suspended since 2010 due to tensions over North Korea's nuclear ambitions; South Korean efforts to continue the programme have been spurned. A North Korean spokesman said talks could resume 'at a good season' if the South is willing to discuss 'the proposals of our side'. Analysts believe these proposals would constitute additional demands for more food and aid.

On the radar

- **Japan and Britain have begun talks on signing an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement to expand their bilateral security cooperation.**
- **Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission will investigate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono,** the son of Indonesia's president, in an effort to fight accusations of political bias.

Europe

Turkey's leadership continues crackdown on investigators into government corruption

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has intensified its crackdown on those driving investigations into the corruption rumours surrounding the government. On 7 January, the government removed from power around 350 police officers in 16 provinces, including the capital Ankara and the major provinces Diyarbakir, Izmir, Adana and Antalya, and 250 new candidates were appointed. However, Turkey's primary judicial body has called Erdogan's plans to reform the country's judicial system unconstitutional.

The Turkish leadership has been plunged into crisis since December 2013, when prosecutors launched a series of investigations into corruption probes and allies of Erdogan were subsequently arrested. In mid-December, the Turkish government began to sack those associated with the investigations and detained the sons of three cabinet ministers (Environment Minister Erdogan Bayraktar, Interior Minister Muammer Guler and Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan), who later resigned. The crisis has served to highlight the deep divides in Turkey's political centre and the crux is believed to be the intense rivalry between the Prime Minister and the exiled Fethullah Gulen, who is widely supported by Turkey's police and judiciary bodies.

The ruling AK Party, which is Islamist rooted, is currently attempting to overhaul traditionally secularist-dominated institutions, such as the judiciary and armed forces. Moreover, with hopes to join the European Union in the future, Turkey is under pressure to bring its justice system up to EU standards, making judicial reform even more sensitive an issue.

Other developments

Protesters clashed with Ukrainian police in the capital, Kiev, on 10 January. This followed the sentencing of three men who were found guilty of attempting to blow up a statue of the communist leader Vladimir Lenin. Their supporters claim the trial and verdict were a sham. Following the judgement, the large crowd gathered outside the court and attacked police vans, with clashes continuing overnight between the demonstrators and the Ukrainian security services. According to local media, members of parliament were among those injured, including Yuriy Lutsenko, the former interior minister. Those sentenced were ultra-nationalist members Igor Mosiychuk, Volodymyr Spara and Sergiy Bevz. The far-right has played an active role in the recent anti-government rallies against the Ukrainian government's decision to pull out of a partnerships agreement with the EU in November 2013.

On 10 January, Estonia announced that it was planning to purchase surveillance drones in the next few years in a bid to upgrade its reconnaissance capabilities. The commanding chief of the Estonian defence forces, Major General Riho Terras, informed local media that the decision had been made on the basis that it was increasingly evident that Russia had become a military superpower and the Estonian government was concerned over how quickly recent conflicts had developed. The Estonian military therefore believed that a priority was developing its surveillance capabilities.

On 6 January, Latvian President Andris Berzins nominated former Agriculture Minister Laimdota Straujuma to become prime minister. Straujuma, who will be the first female Latvian prime minister, will replace Valdis Dombrovskis, who announced his resignation on 28 November following the collapse of the roof of a supermarket in the capital, Riga. Accepting the nomination, Straujuma said that her government would follow her predecessor's tight fiscal policies and would endeavour to maintain stability. She has been in the government since 2011 and though not a party member her nomination was backed by the four-party-coalition. Straujuma's nomination comes a week after Latvia joined the eurozone on 1 January.

On the radar

- **MEPs will this week hold hearings with the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF to review their activities in Greece, Portugal, Cyprus and Ireland.**
- **Figures for UK inflation and EU industrial production are due this week.**
- **Nationalists plan to rally in Riga, Latvia, on 14 January** as they call for the resignation of Riga's mayor, Nils Usakovs.
- **EU members will continue to hold talks on their plans to send troops to the Central African Republic this week.**
- **EU and IMF officials are due back in Greece this week to discuss budget cuts.**

Middle East

Syrian rebel groups takeover Aleppo headquarters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

Fighters from the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Coalition clashed with fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on 8 January in the northern city of Aleppo. The al-Qaeda affiliated group has sought to gain a foothold in northern Syria as authority in the region has dwindled since the civil war in Syria began in 2011. The ISIL launched an offensive last week in Anbar province, Iraq, and became more active in Syria during 2013. Elsewhere in the country, the ISIL has been significantly weakened as local resentment against foreign fighters and imposed radical Islamic practices has reportedly caused fighters to switch sides and join the other Sunni groups in Syria. The Syrian Network for Human Rights state that 71 ISIL fighters, 20 opposition fighters and 21 civilians were killed during the period 6-9 January.

ISIL have been keen to take advantage of the sectarian resentment in both Iraq, as Sunni grievances against the Shi'ite lead government increases, and Syria, as Sunni opposition fighters struggle against President Bashar al-Assad's forces. The presence of several Islamist militant groups in Syria has further complicated the situation in Syria. Support from the international community for opposition groups has become increasingly difficult as several Islamist groups, some affiliated with al-Qaeda, battle for territory and influence. Moreover, this factional infighting between groups further weakens the opposition in its fight against al-Assad's forces.

It is unlikely that opposition fighters opposing the ISIL have acted in order to satisfy the international community, but rather because of the ISIL's attempts to impose radical Islamic laws and practices on local communities and accusations of atrocities committed against local communities in Syria. Further internal conflict between rival opposition groups is likely to continue in the short term after the ISIL declared that they would target militia groups aligned with the Syrian National Council.

Other developments

A suicide bomber killed 22 Iraqi army recruits in Baghdad on 9 January. A further 25 people were wounded. Reports claim that a man blew himself up among recruits at an airfield used by the Iraqi Army. On 8 January, gunmen killed 12 soldiers and wounded a further four at a military site close to Al-Adhim. The attacks appear to be retaliation for the military's recent role in suppressing fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Anbar province. The government has reiterated that the al-Qaeda linked group would be eradicated. Further violence is highly likely over the coming weeks in Anbar province and security forces will continue to be targeted by ISIL.

The Sunni led government in Bahrain took the decision to officially suspend dialogue with opposition groups that represent the country's Shi'ah majority. The reconciliation talks were intended to resolve tensions in the country after the government's heavy-handed crackdown on opposition protests in 2011. Pro-democracy demonstrations in 2011 left dozens dead and many opposition supporters were jailed. The main Shi'a opposition group, al-Wefaq, boycotted the talks in September 2013 after a prominent Shi'a figure was arrested on charges of inciting terrorism.

Two separate explosions on 6 January killed 11 people in northwest Pakistan. A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a government school in the Ibrahimzai area of Hangu district. The explosion in the Shi'ite-dominated district claimed the life of a teenage boy. The Taliban is known to have targeted schools in the past as part of a campaign against secular education. In the second incident, 10 people were killed after an explosion at the home of a tribal leader in Khyber district. Sectarian violence and clashes between the Pakistani military and Taliban fighters in northwest Pakistan are common.

On the radar

- **A constitutional referendum will be held in Egypt** on 14-15 January.
- **Memorial ceremony for former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is scheduled for 13 January.**
- **Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has been ordered to attend a hearing** on 16 January on charges of treason.
- **Further nationwide unrest and demonstrations are expected across Tunisia** following riots on 10 January.

Polar regions

Canada and Russia see eye-to-eye on the Arctic

Animosity between Canada and Russia on a number of topics has been evident in recent times, such as political prying in Ukraine, gay rights and disagreements over same sex adoptions. In the past, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird has publicly criticised Russia over a law that bans Canadian adoptions and for its anti-gay legislation amongst other issues, and also joined anti-Russian protesters on the streets of Ukraine's capital, Kiev. But in a recent interview, Baird stated that 'On the Arctic and other issues, we can, and have worked well. I have a professional relationship with my Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. I don't agree with him on some things but he's a smart, experienced and effective foreign minister for his government.'

Baird's pacifying statement on the two countries' Arctic views is seen as a key part of the Canadian government's agenda, which involves developing Canada's northern economic potential, including large deposits of undiscovered oil and gas. Baird's statement makes for good strategy when talking to Russia on Arctic issues, in the context of working hard to strengthen Canada's foothold in the region. However, it is a delicate balancing act. At the same time as Ottawa is reaching out to Moscow on Arctic issues, it must also deliver on the military assets it has promised as part of its northern strategy, which means delivering ships and overhead surveillance that would be seen as a counter to Russia's military build-up and an assertion of Canada's sovereignty.

Baird's diplomatic words come at a time of recent talks concerning the aforementioned political prying in Ukraine, disagreements over same sex adoptions and gay rights as the Winter Olympics are set to begin next month in Sochi, Russia.

Other developments

Non-governmental groups, government officials and local politicians are concerned that a proposed nuclear plant in Pyhäjoki, Finland, will affect northern Sweden's nature and fish stocks. Fennovoima Ltd, a Finnish nuclear power company, plan to build a nuclear plant in a Finnish-Russian joint venture in Pyhäjoki. Plans moved ahead in late December 2013 when Fennovoima Ltd sealed an agreement with Russian Federation national nuclear corporation, Rosatom. An assessment of the environmental impact of the project is to be completed by February.

Russia has commenced repair of the world's only nuclear-powered container ship. The vessel named Sevmorput has been inactive and was due to be scrapped, but will now receive extensive repair and be deployed for commercial and military operations in the Russian Arctic from 2016. The ship, which measures 260 metres in length, will be repaired by Rosatom, a Russian nuclear corporation. Sevmorput has icebreaking competencies and large cargo capabilities which will be utilised in the delivery of goods to Russia's northern territories, in addition to assisting in oil and gas projects. Its military capabilities will be utilised by conducting tasks for the Russian defence ministry.

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