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Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Conflict in Libya intensifies as armed groups pledge support for Islamic State

Fighting intensified last week around Kikla in western Libya and Benghazi in the east of the country. Approximately 23 people were killed in fighting around Kikla, and in Benghazi a car bomb was detonated near a demonstration in support of the Libyan government. The activities of the Ansar al-Sharia Islamist militia group are of particular interest in the conflict. The group holds strategic areas of Benghazi, and has recently pledged support for the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. It is widely believed that lax border controls along Libya's 1,115 kilometre border with Egypt are facilitating the traffic of arms and personnel to groups such as Ansar al-Sharia inside Libya. Relief might be in sight on this front, as Egypt has promised to train Libyan border patrols.

In the short term, the increasing number of Islamist militias claiming association with IS is likely to exacerbate the current dichotomy present in the Libyan political field. Moreover, the involvement of militias who support IS is likely to reduce the possibility of a negotiated political solution to the conflict given the particularly hardline position of IS ideological tenets. It is also possible that such proclaimed support may create internal divisions between IS-affiliated organisations and other Islamist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda who are vying for political power within Libya, thus further exacerbating and prolonging the civil war.



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To date, approximately 290,000 people have been displaced within Libya and are in urgent need of food, health care and adequate shelter. If those armed groups who have pledged support to the Islamic State follow up with a hardening of their modus operandi in line with IS ideology it is highly likely to worsen the current humanitarian situation through prolonging the conflict and increasing the likelihood of sectarian violence between opposing groups. Furthermore, the presence of IS-affiliated Islamist militias is likely to draw increasing international attention to Libya since the formation of the US-led coalition against the Islamic State. This is even more likely following the 3 October declaration by the Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam (MSSI), or Islamic Youth Shura Council (MSSI), that the Libyan port city of Derna was now part of the Islamic State caliphate.

Other developments

French forces have attacked a convoy in Niger in an effort to destroy weapons being transported from Libya to Mali. This is the first known operation by French troops in Niger. In total, 3,000 French troops now operate in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad in a continued effort against Islamic militants in the region. The operation follows a stark increase in attacks by militants in the north of Mali. Most recently, a French-UN military camp was attacked by rocket-propelled grenades. One Senegalese UN peacekeeper was killed in the attack.

Rival forces in South Sudan have violated the ceasefire agreement on numerous occasions. The most recent clashes occurred in two locations in the Doleib Hills, where rebels from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM-in-Opposition) under the leadership of former vice-president Riek Machar attacked the South Sudan Army on 10 October. Fighting has continued since the initial attack. On 12 October, a rebel spokesperson claimed that two Ugandan soldiers had been killed in the fighting, along with 400-500 South Sudanese government soldiers.

Following last weeks' re-capture of the port of Barawe in Somalia, AMISOM forces have continued strikes against the al-Shabaab insurgent group. According to reports, the most recent operations in the region of Middle Jubba, southern Somalia, killed at least 60 al-Shabaab fighters. The attacks come after the publication of a number of reports implicating the Kenyan military in the illegal export of charcoal as well as other reports of Somali military weapons being sold on the open market.

On the radar

- **Tunisian parliamentary election to be held on 26 October**, with the presidential election scheduled for 23 November. A legitimate election outcome is considered highly important for domestic stability and international recognition.
- **Heightened security to be employed in Mogadishu, Somalia**, following a car-bomb on 12 October.

Americas

Election result highlights the resilience of traditional parties in Brazil

There will be a second round in Brazil's presidential election after President Dilma Rousseff won the most votes on 5 October but failed to reach the majority needed to win a second term. Rousseff and her centre-left Workers' party (PT) garnered 41% of the vote, trailed by the centrist pro-business Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) of Aécio Neves with 34%, and the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) of Marina Silva with 21% of the vote. The high volatility in the pre-election polls created a 'rollercoaster' feeling in the election campaign. Silva initially led the polls following her nomination to the helm of the PSB after the party's original candidate, Eduardo Campos, died in a plane crash last August. But the candidate of the 'third way' suffered from the financial and structural weakness of her party, and dwindled in polls a week ahead of the vote as her opponents unleashed a severe negative ad campaign. In a public speech following her defeat, Silva refused to nominate the candidate she would support, but on 12 October she gave her support to Neves. The second round of Brazil's presidential election is scheduled for 26 October.

The results of the election first-round are strikingly similar to those of the 2010 election, in which Silva stood third with little less than 20%, and Rousseff defeated her PSDB rival in the runoff. The noted similarity appears astonishing given the changes undergone in the country's political and economic climate since 2010. Whilst in 2010 Rousseff was praised for Brazil's spectacular economic rebound following the 2008 crisis, over the last year she has been perceived as largely responsible for the country's poor economic performance. In addition, the 2013 protests, in which millions of Brazilians marched in the streets to voice their discontent with national politicians, represented a direct attack on the political establishment, and affected both the PT and the PSDB support bases. The dissonance between the result of the first round of the election and the expressed desire for change by the Brazilian people was reflected in the defeat suffered by Rousseff and Neves in their home territories – Porto Alegre and Minas Gerais respectively. It is thought the reason why the PT and PSDB fared so well in the election is due to the clout of their party machines. The complexity of Brazilian politics makes party structure and finance the most important factors in an election campaign, and the result of the recent election confirmed the resilience of such mechanisms.

On 11 October, Neves gave a televised speech in Recife, the capital of the Pernambuco region where the PSB support was the strongest, in response to Silva's enounced conditions. The PSDB candidate recited a number of new policies that were part of Silva's manifesto, such as the protection of indigenous communities, social programmes and political reform to bolster nationwide environmental regulations. However, despite Silva's backing, it remains uncertain if a majority of PSB supporters will vote for Neves in the second round. As a result, a remake of the 2010 second round election, with victory for the PT, appears to be the most probable scenario.

Other developments

The discovery of 28 charred bodies on 6 October near the city of Iguala, Mexico, has created outrage.

The bodies are believed to be those of some of the 43 students that were reported missing last month after clashing with police. State and federal officials have accused the Iguala police of cooperating with a local drug cartel, the Guerreros Unidos, which is alleged to have ties with the wife of Iguala's fugitive mayor, José Luis Abarca. The missing students were left-wing activists who had assembled to take part in protests. It remains unclear why a criminal gang would kill left-wing activists, and why the federal authorities have not previously investigated allegations of ties between Abarca and the cartels. The case draws further negative attention on President Enrique Peña Nieto, who is criticised for the country's poor human rights record.

Jesus Torrealba has emerged as a new leader within the fragmented opposition in Venezuela. The tough-talking former communist was recently appointed to head a coalition of political parties known as the Democratic Unity Roundtable. His style of oration lies in sharp contrast with that of previous opposition leaders who hailed from the traditional wealthy elite. On 8 October, Torrealba called for a nationwide campaign in poor neighbourhoods to reach people who once supported the ruling socialist party but have now become discontent with the regime. The formation of a new unified front is vital as the opposition prepares for the next major vote, congressional elections in December 2015.

On 9 October, thousands of students marched in Chile's capital, Santiago, to protest against President Michelle Bachelet's education reform. The march was organised by several student unions, but gathered less momentum than previous demonstrations, as major organisations refused to participate. The first student marches occurred in 2011 as protestors demanded free quality higher education. The education reform was a major cornerstone of Bachelet's presidential programme; however, many student leaders criticise the government for only pushing for partial reforms. In addition, the reform faces opposition from the business sector, the Catholic Church, and right wing politicians. It is likely that further marches of this sort will be organised, as the demands of the student unions remain unmet.

On the radar

- **Uruguay's general election scheduled for 26 October.**
- **'State of prevention' in Guatemala City, Guatemala, extended** until 17 October.
- **Anti-government rallies planned to take place in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas,** on 18 October.
- **The National Banking Association union to protest in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires,** on 16 October.
- **Further protests expected in Lima, Peru,** amid the indefinite strike by health workers demanding wage increases.

Asia and Pacific

Hong Kong's chief executive tells pro-democracy protesters he will not resign and China will not cave in to demands

Hong Kong's beleaguered leader, Leung Chun-Ying, has said in an interview on local television channel TVB that the recent pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have zero chance of changing Beijing's attitudes despite more than two weeks' of protests that have seen key parts of the Asian financial hub brought to a standstill. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets at the end of September to demand full, free and fair elections after the National People's Congress Standing Committee announced that only two or three vetted candidates will be allowed to stand in the landmark first direct elections for Hong Kong's leader in 2017. Protester making up the Occupy Central movement accused the Chinese government of trying to implement a 'fake democracy' in order to appease the growing demand for further devolution of power from the Chinese mainland to the semi-autonomous city. Leung's statements come after a tense week in which crunch talks between student leaders and city officials collapsed and counter-demonstrators attacked and damaged Occupy Central encampments.

The Chinese government's reaction to the protests has so far been one of caution. Almost as soon as the first tents were pitched on Gloucester Road, comparisons to Tiananmen Square were made by Western media who, the Chinese government claim, are at least partially responsible for the ferocity of the protests. This attention has encouraged a more moderate approach from government authorities than many were expecting. However, Leung and other Chinese officials have suggested that the police may use 'appropriate' force to evict the protestors. The Chinese government has also embarked on a campaign to arrest public figures that have voiced support for the protests, such as the famous poet Wang Zang and a number of his students in Beijing.

Hong Kong's future is uncertain. The youth of the city are losing faith in the system that Deng Xiaoping devised when Britain returned Hong Kong to China in 1997. The 'one country, two systems' model is failing to reassure students and other young Hong Kongers that the two systems will remain separate. Ideas of nationality are also changing: many of the students involved with the protests identify first as Hong Kongers then as Chinese. Indeed, many protesters began targeting Chinese immigrants with abuse and chants of 'go home', as they were seen as the source of most of the counter-protest's support. This anti-China sentiment has been one reason that the protests have not taken hold in mainland China. There is not much sympathy for protesters who are widely perceived by the Chinese press and public as anti-China, arrogant, rich and spoilt – demanding increased political rights in a city that already enjoys a greater amount of freedom than any other in China (including an independent judiciary and a semi-open media). The real concern for the Chinese government is the impact that these protests may have on any further political integration with Taiwan, and the impact of the protests on China's reputation. Xiaoping saw Hong Kong as an opportunity to win over hearts and minds in Taiwan – proving once and for all that China was able to include, as part of its territories, politically and culturally diverse regions without threatening their identity. Lately, progress towards the reintegration of Taiwan had been perceived in China and among Chinese officials to be encouraging. Events in Hong Kong will undoubtedly raise questions regarding the progress that the Chinese believe they have made in the Taiwanese talks and the image of a new China that they believe will be crucial to the country's development over the coming years.

Other developments

North Korean officials have, for the first time, acknowledged the existence of the country's labour camps. Choe Myong Nam, a prominent official in the North Korean foreign ministry said at a meeting with reporters that his country has no prison camps but did briefly discuss the 'reform through labour' camps. North Korea's deputy ambassador, Ri Tong Il, said the Workers' Party's secretary had visited the EU in order to open a dialogue with Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU's top human rights official regarding 'rights issues'.

North Korea's Leader Kim Jong-un was absent from a list of dignitaries attending the anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party in the capital, Pyongyang, last week. An official media dispatch listed senior officials of the party and the North Korean military but not Kim who has been seen limping at previous public appearances. Kim's absence has led to speculation that the leader may have diabetes, gout or some other illness, or even that there had been a coup and he was under house arrest, which is though unlikely. News of the dictator's absence came a week after a high-level North Korean delegation made a trip south of the border in an apparent effort to re-ignite talks that had been side-lined after the last collapse in dialogue in February.

US deputy defence secretary Bob Work highlighted plans to shift the bulk of the United States' naval and air forces to the Asia-Pacific by 2020. His comments came while speaking to a Washington-based think tank on 11 October. Important players in the region, such as the Philippines and Japan, have been involved in potentially dangerous maritime disputes as China makes claims to territory through the strategic use of civilian vessels and reclamation projects. Citing defence secretary Chuck Hagel, Work stated that the United States' alliances remain the backbone of its posture in the region. This echoes comments from US Vice President Joe Biden on 2 October that 60% of US naval assets and air power will be stationed in the Asia-Pacific region by 2020.

On the radar

- **The Future Cities Asia conference will take place in Hong Kong on 12-15 October.** The conference will discuss harnessing technology in government agencies and the private sector.
- **The Asia: Incident Response conference will take place in Melbourne, Australia, on 16-17 October.** The conference will focus on transforming traditional incident response strategies to accommodate a rapidly developing technological world.
- **Further protests possible in Pambahinna, Sabaragamuwa province, Sri Lanka,** as student groups have denounced the construction of a student residence facility at Sabaragamuwa University.
- The Changing Asia: A Japanese Perspective conference will take place in London, United Kingdom, on 13 October. The conference will look at the repercussions for Japanese security and foreign policy of the rapidly developing regional geopolitical landscape.

Europe

Minsk summit exposes growing tensions within Commonwealth of Independent States

The leaders of the nine members and one of the two participating states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) attended a summit in Minsk, Belarus, on 10 October. Notably absent was the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko. At the annual summit, the former-Soviet Union countries were due to discuss greater cooperation in the economic and law enforcement spheres; however, political dissonance between CIS leaders stifled any successful discussion. There was a distinct change in Russian and CIS member states' attitude towards the West during the meeting. At the summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the CIS was seeking rapprochement and greater ties with the European Union. The Russian president also added that Moscow was prepared to discuss compromises and settle differences with the West over Ukraine and Moldova's EU Association Deals.

The contrary nature of the CIS leaders' positions throughout the meeting revealed fault lines in the organisation caused by the Ukrainian crisis. Traditionally a pro-Russia supporter, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko underlined the need to resolve the Ukrainian crisis due to its negative effect on the security and economic development of the post-Soviet region. Uzbek President Islam Karimov painted Poroshenko's absence as Ukraine's attempt to distance itself from its former Soviet neighbours in order to demonstrate Kiev's preference for an alliance with the EU. The summit also began with tense relations between Russia and Moldova over Moldova's trade agreement with the EU and Russia banning the import of some Moldovan products. However, CIS members – and most significantly Russia – later indicated that greater integration with the European Union would not be unwelcome, as long as the risks to CIS trade zone were mitigated. Russia is seeking a solution to the issue by December 2015.

It is likely that the notable impact of Western sanctions on the Russian economy and the likely irresolvable crisis in Ukraine has altered the Kremlin's attitude to greater integration between the EU and countries of the former Soviet bloc. It is likely that from now on Russia will seek to gain a greater input into the Association agreements in order to limit the economic ramifications for Russia and its trade with other CIS countries, rather than attempt to prevent any form of association between CIS members and the EU. The change in tone of Russia towards CIS relations with the European Union indicates that the sanctions are likely having a significant impact upon the Russian economy. As Russia has recently faced increased isolation by the West through the sanctions imposed over the Ukrainian crisis, the Kremlin has sought to forge even closer ties with neighbouring countries, for instance at the Caspian Sea Summit earlier in October. However, Russia is struggling to unite these countries with tensions running high between some member states. Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the lack of consensus on Russia's actions in Ukraine are notable sticking points. It is likely that the Kremlin was also swung to some extent by the conclusion of negotiations on the EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement on 9 October.

Other developments

Tajikistan's authorities cut off access to certain internet sites and social media on 10 October. The blocked sites included Facebook, YouTube and Russian social media sites. Tajik mobile operators also reported that the authorities had demanded that they block SMS services. The government cracked down on internet usage after the opposition Group 24 called for supporters to protest at an anti-government demonstration on 10 October in the capital city, Dushanbe. On 9 October, after a request by the general-prosecutor's office, the supreme court ruled that Group 24 was an extremist group that was attempting to overthrow the government. Local media reported that few citizens had responded to calls to attend the rally 'Tajikistan Demands Change' on the afternoon of 10 October.

On 9 October, the former prime minister of Slovenia, Alenka Bratusek, withdrew her bid for the post of vice president for energy union due to strong opposition from the European Parliament. MEPs in two committees decided late on 8 October to reject her candidacy after MEPs voted against Bratusek's nomination during her hearing on 6 October. This is the first time that a former prime minister of a member state has had their candidacy withdrawn. Jean-Claude Juncker, the incoming president of the European Commission, nominated Bratusek for the position, and the rejection by MEPs indicates the European Parliament may exercise greater power in picking pick the officials in the European Commission in the future.

On 8 October, the United Nations reported that at least 331 people have been killed since the Ukrainian ceasefire was put on place on 5 September. Moreover, the report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that 3,517 people had died since the fighting in the eastern regions of Ukraine started over six months ago. On 9 October, the United States ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Daniel Baer, claimed that the OSCE's monitoring was 'grossly inadequate'. Baer criticised the OSCE's failure to implement buffer zones between Ukrainian troops and the pro-Russian rebels, and called for OSCE's to monitor the 300 kilometres of Ukrainian border with Russia, which is no longer under control of the Ukrainian troops.

On the radar

- **On 13 October, the European Parliament's foreign affairs and civil liberties committees will hold a debate with the UN executive director on counterterrorism, Jean-Paul Laborde,** on new terrorism threats stemming from the rise of the Islamic State and its implications for EU security.
- **Chinese Premier Li Keqiang will visit Moscow, Russia, on 13 October,** where he is expected to sign more than 30 agreements on finance, energy and high-speed rail cooperation.
- **The Asia-Europe Meeting summit will be held in Milan, Italy,** on 16-17 October.
- **Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and US secretary of state John Kerry are expected to discuss the situation in Ukraine** at a meeting in Paris, France, on 14 October.

Middle East

Suicide bombers target Iraq in weekend of terror attacks

Three coordinated car bomb attacks targeted the Kurdish-controlled sub-district of Qara Tapah, 186 kilometres northeast of Baghdad on 12 October. The blasts are reported to have killed at least 25 Kurdish fighters and injured a further 10 outside a government building. Separately, the police chief of Anbar province, in western Iraq, was killed along with 38 others in a roadside bomb attack in Baghdad on 11 October. Dozens more have been injured during the attacks.

Although no single group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, the targeting of Shi'ite and Kurdish neighbourhoods implicates Sunni rebels in the capital and the Islamic State in Anbar. Significantly, as Iraq's largest province, Anbar represents a strategic asset to both national and Islamic State fighters. The province neighbours Syria and is home to the crucial Haditha dam. Coalition airstrikes have been instrumental in attempts to hold back advancing ISIS fighters in the province, though they continue to control large swathes of the territory nonetheless.

Where the majority of airstrikes have targeted Iraq's north, with some 275 confirmed strikes since 8 August, the advance of the Islamic State in Anbar is likely to necessitate strategic strikes beyond Haditha and its surroundings. Moreover, the number of terrorist attacks taking place throughout Baghdad's Shi'ite areas are likely to be of concern to the international community. As such, the United States and other instrumental allies, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, should be expected to further address the weaknesses in the Iraqi national army and Kurdish Peshmerga forces and their inability to defend Baghdad and prevent the further spread of the 'caliphate'. It is highly likely that this will require foreign ground forces in at least a limited capacity.

Other developments

The death-toll within Kobane in northern Syria is now reported to have reached 554 as the Islamic State and Kurdish Peshmerga battle for control of the strategic border town. US-led airstrikes have continued to target Islamic State positions in a bid to support local ground forces. Kurdish fighters have reported regained some of the city's territory, of which some 30% is believed to be under IS control. The fall of Kobane to the Islamic State threatens security within neighbouring Turkey, Iraq and the presently non-interventionist Iran, each of which house large numbers of ethnic Kurds. As such, international pressure will mount on neighbouring allies.

A suicide bomber detonated a device in Yemen's capital city, Sanaa, on 9 October killing 47 and injuring 75. State officials believe al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is behind the latest attack following their declaration of war on rival Houthi factions in September. Nonetheless, Houthi sympathisers have implicated external forces in the killings, which they claim was a bid to destabilise the already volatile country. The attack follows the rejection of newly appointed Prime Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak by Houthi rebels amid concerns surrounding levels of international support. The country's political turmoil appears set to continue as Houthi rebels continue their campaign for autonomy and sectarian tensions are again inflamed throughout the country.

The Palestinian Authority began its aid conference in Cairo, Egypt, on 12 October in a bid to raise \$4 billion in reconstruction funds for Gaza. The summit follows the recent 50-day Israel-Hamas war and Israel's Operation Protective Edge, which damaged some 60,000 homes, businesses and vital Gazan infrastructure. In total, 50 countries and prospective donors have attended the talks: the United States has pledged \$212 million to the fund, the United Arab Emirates \$200 million, and Qatar a further \$1 billion. However, the issue remains that despite raising reconstruction funds, genuine reconciliatory dialogue between the warring parties is yet to be achieved. Palestinian President Mohammad Abbas stated his intent to reconvene peace talks with Israel; however, Israel's position in engaging Abbas remains unclear while he is in coalition with Hamas.

On the radar

- **120 Canadian troops are to be deployed to Kuwait** to join the air campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq. **EU high representative Catherine Ashton will lead meetings with the Iranian foreign minister and US secretary of state on Iran's nuclear programme** in Vienna, Austria, on 14-15 October.
- **Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani to visit China** on 28 October to participate in the Istanbul Process talks.

Polar regions

Arctic coastguards face increasing operational demands as level of maritime activity rises

The level of activity in Arctic waters is increasing sharply due to an expansion in shipping traffic as new sea lanes of communication (SLoC) open as a side effect of the reduction of Arctic ice. Furthermore, the petroleum and fishing industries in the region are seeing increases in both infrastructure and capacity, leading to unprecedented maritime activity across the Arctic seas. One notable example can be seen in relation to Greenlandic waters, where the number of registered vessels has almost quadrupled.

These increases in maritime activity create a very real structural challenge for the Arctic states, as coastguards across the Arctic are commonly under-resourced. Increases in shipping traffic, fisheries and industrial activity are creating instability on many levels, including legal, environmental, security and safety.

Without concurrent increases in coastguard capacity and cooperation between member states from across the Arctic Council, the northern seas could soon face serious issues, including illegal maritime irregular activities, vessel collisions, over-fishing and an increased potential for environmental disasters. The need for strong regulatory and law enforcement expansion is becoming increasingly salient.

Other developments

The Finnish air force has increased aerial combat preparations in northern Finland, increasing flight activity from its northern base, Rovaniemi. The base has also seen a steady increase in aircraft numbers, contrasting starkly with its counterpart base in western Finland, Satakunta, which is now winding down. The increasing regularity of drills and the increased operational capability in northern Finland comes amid increased tensions between Russia and the western Arctic states over Arctic territorial matters and the Ukrainian crisis.

Russia's newest submarine, the Vladimir Monomakh, has passed its trials and is now ready for commissioning with the Russian navy. The Borey-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile ready vessel has been undergoing trials in the White Sea since January 2013, including weapons, acoustic and mooring tests. With over 100 Russian nuclear missiles now in the northern seas, the announcement of the new submarine could deepen tensions in the already fragile region.

New research published in the scientific journal *Nature Climate Change* has suggested that the Southern Hemisphere's oceans are warming more rapidly than previously thought. The research concludes that the amount of heat energy entering the top 700 metres of the oceans has been underestimated by anything from 48% to 152%. The new research has significant ramifications for the Antarctic region, as rising ocean temperatures directly correlate to increased ice melting and, in turn, rising sea levels.

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