

The weekly briefing | 16 December 2013

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Leader of the Renamo rebel group rejects further talks with Mozambican government

Negotiations have ground to a halt between rebel group Renamo and the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM), as a Renamo delegation boycotted another proposed round of negotiations with a Mozambican government delegation headed by Agriculture Minister Jose Pacheco on the 9 December. Renamo has threatened not to partake in any further dialog without the presence of both national and international mediators and observers, whilst the incumbent government argues against a requirement for international participation.

Political tensions have been running high since the December 2012 vote on electoral laws, with the incumbent Frelimo Party and the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) voting in favour and Renamo voting against the reforms. Since then, 24 rounds of dialog have occurred but electoral reforms have proved a sticking point in the negotiations. On 21 October 2013, these tensions were significantly exacerbated when the FADM seized the Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakamas' bush headquarters in Satunjira, driving Dhlakama into hiding and provoking a resurgence in violence in northern Mozambique. This resulted in the collapse of the 1992 peace agreement that ended the 1977-92 civil war. Dhlakama reappeared for the first time on last week, in a telephone interview with the editor of the *Canal de Moçambique* weekly newspaper. He insulted the current president, Armando Guebuza, and the MDM leader, Daviz Simango (who was expelled from Renamo in 2008), and argued that the occupation of Satunjira represented an attempted assassination.



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Recent failures may suggest that the post-conflict Mozambique's democratic institutions may prove insufficient to provide a political solution to the renewed conflict. It is important to recognise, however, that the capabilities of Renamo to engage in violent conflict are lower than previously, and violence is concentrated around the Gorongosa Mountain and neighbouring Nhamadzi District to the west. Despite this more localised conflict, the discovery of gas reserves worth approximately \$350 billion has resulted in growing financial inequality throughout Mozambique. Without an appropriate redress of this disparity, widespread discontent amongst Mozambique's electorate may serve to sustain violent conflict and to exacerbate the volatile state of the country's existing political processes. The ultimate success of peace-building efforts will rely on the ability of the incumbent Frelimo party to engage opposition parties in an inclusive and flexible democratic process and to appropriately redress existing social and financial inequalities.

Other developments

African Union to increase presence in Central African Republic. On 13 December, the African Union authorised an increase in troop deployment in the Central African Republic from 2,500 to 6,000, with the first deployment of 850 personnel arriving from Burundi by US air transport. The decision follows the earlier deployment of 1,600 French personnel in a UN-backed operation to quell the growing sectarian violence between Christian 'anti-Bakala' defence groups and the largely-Muslim 'Seleka' forces that took control of the country following a coup by rebel leader Michel Djotodia in March that ousted President Francois Bozize. Operations to forcibly disarm these groups are being conducted throughout the country in a bid to limit the scale of the humanitarian crisis.

Twenty five fatalities as Nigerian Army clashes with Boko Haram in Borno State. The 7th Division of the Nigerian Army clashed with Boko Haram militants in the Bama Local Government Area. The militants, who crossed into the Sambisa forest were routed on contact with government troops and subsequently engaged by airstrikes. The clash followed several attacks on civilians travelling along the northeast federal highway throughout the course of last week.

M23 group sign peace agreement with Congolese government in Kenya. The agreements signed on 12 December in Nairobi outline the steps necessary to cease and disarm the activities of M23 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, following the surrender of the group to Ugandan forces in Kisoro on 7 November 2013. The terms include the amnesty of M23 rebels for acts of war and aggression, the demilitarisation and disbandment of the group and the release of combatants from government custody.

On the radar:

- **Parliamentary elections in Madagascar** on 20 December.
- **Increased security measures in Kidal, Mali**, following the killing of UN peacekeepers in a car bombing.

Americas

Municipal elections in Venezuela strengthen President Nicolás Maduro's authority

Venezuelans went to the polls on 7 December to elect the representatives for 335 municipalities and two metropolitan districts. The main challenge for President Nicolás Maduro's left-wing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) was to preserve its nationwide presence amid growing support for the right-wing Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance led by Henrique Capriles Radonski. Although the MUD alliance won the mayorships of Venezuela's four largest urban areas, including the capital Caracas, the PSUV prevailed in a majority of municipalities, especially in rural areas. Overall, PSUV candidates gathered 49% of votes against 43% for the MUD.

Under Capriles leadership the MUD alliance sought to turn the election into a national plebiscite. Since his close defeat in the presidential election in April 2013, Capriles' campaign strategy has been to contest Maduro's popular legitimacy. However, rather than undermining the Venezuelan president's rule, the recent election has bolstered his support base. Given that the country faces its worst economic crisis in 30 years, the results clearly show sustained support for Maduro and for the Bolivarian socialist model inherited from his predecessor Hugo Chávez.

Maduro's strengthened legitimacy will increase his political leeway. As such, his 'economic war' that led to increased state controls in consumer goods prices and in currency exchanges might give way to more prudential economic policies. According to this view, the government is likely to proceed with devaluation in order to tackle the problems of the foreign exchange regime. On the other hand, with a strengthened mandate Maduro could also be tempted to deepen the Bolivarian socialist model through increased state controls. In contrast with Maduro's fortified position, the failure of the MUD to build on the momentum of last April's presidential election will put extra pressure on Capriles' leadership.

Other developments

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announce unilateral 30-day ceasefire. The guerrilla group stated that the ceasefire would take place from 15 December. It also said that the ceasefire would be revoked if the government launches further counter-guerrillas operations. The Colombian government led by President Santos has consistently refused to ease military pressure until a definitive agreement is reached.

Removal of Bogotá's mayor from office spurs protests in the capital. The left-wing mayor Gustavo Petro was accused by Colombia's inspector general, Alejandro Ordoñez, of mismanaging the local refuse system. Petro had former ties with the M-19 guerrilla group that demobilised in 1989. In that sense, the ruling may threaten the current government peace talks with FARC, which promises to integrate demobilised rebels into national politics.

Lootings continued in Argentine amid sustained police strikes. The lootings that first occurred following a police strike in Córdoba province on 4 December subsequently spread nationwide. In some cities, such as Chaco and Tucumán, clashes between shop owners and looters have led to a number of casualties. The unrest has now been resolved in most places through a pay rise for police officers and an increased gendarmerie presence.

On the radar

- **Argentinian public sector workers to strike** in the central Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, on 18 and 19 December over wage disputes.
- **Supporters of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide plan to rally on 16 December** in the capital Port-au-Prince.

Asia and Pacific

Recent purge is most significant North Korean political upheaval since Kim Jong-il's death

Chang Song-thaek (also Jang Song-thaek), the once powerful uncle of North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, has been executed for 'acts of treachery'. In a lengthy statement issued by KCNA state news agency on 13 December, Chang was denounced as the 'traitor for all ages' and a 'wicked political careerist', whose crimes ranged from drug abuse to 'half-hearted clapping' during a ceremony. South Korean news agency Yonhap reports that North Korean businessmen and officials in the Chinese cities of Shenyang and Dandong have been summoned back to Pyongyang as part of the crackdown on Chang loyalists.

Chang was regarded as the second most powerful man in North Korea and was frequently seen by Kim Jong-un's side. He is thought to have mentored his nephew during the transition of leadership, which saw Kim take the helm after his father's death. While being in charge of economic ties with China, Chang was inspired by Chinese economic growth and was subsequently an advocate of the economic reform and liberalisation of Asia's most impoverished country.

Kim's motives have been widely scrutinised. Some believe this as a way of augmenting power and asserting independence. Others similarly argue this is a way to instil fear in the older generation of officials who, while obedient to his late father, question the authority of his 30 year old son. These more experienced officials, who may have secretly harboured doubts and felt better qualified to influence North Korea's future direction, will no doubt now remain silent. Most agree that Chang's demise, as well as the execution of Chang's closest aides, signals the beginning of a wider purge of high-profile figures to demonstrate the authority of the young dictator.

Other developments

In a summit marking the 40th anniversary of Japan's ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations, leaders have pledged to ensure 'freedom of overflight' in the region. This comes after weeks of increased tensions after China announced an 'air defensive identification zone'. This is part of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's efforts to rally support from regional states – many of whom also have territorial disputes with China and are disgruntled that China insists that the control of the oil and resource rich South China Sea constitute its 'core national objectives'.

Twenty seven people, most of them Indian nationals, were arrested in Singapore after an accidental road death triggered what is described as the worst social unrest since 1969. The riot occurred in the area dubbed Little Asia, in which the vast majority of inhabitants are ethnically Indian and Bangladeshi. There are signs that Singaporeans feel increasingly uneasy over the influx of foreign workers from South and Southeast Asia and that migrant workers feel threatened. The government, however, denies the riots are an indication of labour unrest and instead insists it is an isolated case of excessive drinking. The sale and consumption of alcohol was accordingly banned on 14 and 15 December.

According to reports from Tibetan officials in Dharamshala, India, a record number of Tibetans have been displaced in their own homeland in recent years. This is amidst rampant mining and the hydroelectric damming of rivers by Chinese companies and authorities, which has forced the relocation of Tibetan pastoralists. The Central Tibetan Administration Office believes 240 mining sites now exist that were once home to nomads. The organisation also claims that the displacement of tribesman is often aggressively enforced – it is suggested that the Chinese military had staged a crackdown on Tibetans who were protesting against gold mining in Yulshul County in eastern Tibet. Environmental concerns have also been raised.

On the radar

- **The Indian government is considering decriminalising homosexuality,** a day after a Delhi High Court order upheld a law which criminalised it.
- **Xu Zhiyong, a Beijing-based legal scholar, and founder of the New Citizens' Movement, which aims to expose corruption, will face trial in coming weeks.**
- **US Secretary of State John Kerry has arrived in Hanoi, Vietnam,** to discuss deepening trade and security ties as part of his three-day visit this week.
- **Opposition protestors in Thailand are now pushing for an interim constitution** until the snap election, which is promised by caretaker Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, takes place in February next year.

Europe

Two senior Ukrainian officials suspended following alleged abuse of power and police violence against protesters in Kiev

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich suspended the Head of Kiev City Administration, Oleksandr Popov, and the Deputy Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, Volodymyr Syvkovych, on 14 December while prosecutors investigate claims that they pressurised police into using violence during a small anti-government demonstration that took place in the early hours of 30 November in Independence Square in the capital, Kiev, leaving dozens of protesters injured. In addition, the former head of the Kiev police force, along with his deputy, also face investigations into the use of excessive force by riot police who used batons and stun grenades to dispel demonstrators.

The opposition Udar party leaders along with anti-government protesters had last week demanded that investigations be carried out on the four aforementioned and also demanded that Yanukovich removes two of his closest allies from office – Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and Interior Minister Vitali Zakharchenko – whom it is claimed played an indirect part in the disproportionate violence during the 30 November unrest. However, the Udar party believe that Yanukovich's move to investigate is simply a small attempt to diffuse the ongoing conflict.

An estimated 60,000 people lined the streets of Kiev on 14 December to rally in support of Yanukovich's potential move to back away from signing an association treaty with the European Union in favour of turning towards Russia, though he has yet to announce a deal with any side. Yanukovich's supporters gathered adjacent to opposition protesters, separated by lines of riot police, while other pro- and anti-government demonstrators descended on Independence Square for further planned protests on 15 December.

Other developments

Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) votes in favour of a 'grand coalition' government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel. 76% of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) that voted in an unprecedented party referendum were in favour of the coalition that will see Merkel re-elected to serve a third term. Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) welcomed the outcome. The chair of the Social Democrats, Sigmar Gabriel, thanked party members and said he would now strive to convince the 24% (that voted against the coalition) that the 76% (that voted in favour) were right. Merkel, along with her new ministers, will be formally sworn in on 17 December.

British MI6 intelligence agent captured in Iran and detained on spying charges. The male, who has not yet been identified, was captured last week by Iranian security forces in the southeastern province of Kerman after allegedly being tracked by intelligence authorities for 10 months. The accused is said to have had contact with four MI6 officers whom he previously met on 11 occasions, both within the country and outside of its borders, to exchange intelligence. Iranian officials stated that the accused has confessed to the offences and is now being held awaiting trial. A spokesperson for the British Foreign Office refused to comment.

France to expand surveillance powers. Less than two months after labelling the allegations of extensive surveillance on European citizens by the US National Security Agency as 'totally unacceptable', the French government has passed a law that will allow intelligence agencies wider access to personal data without requiring prior approval of a judge. The new law, approved on 10 December and due to come into force in 2015, was quietly passed and almost went unnoticed within a military spending bill. It will allow intelligence agencies to obtain data and gain access to telephone conversations, internet traffic, emails and also the location of mobile devices. The law has been opposed by several organisations stating that the new powers could lead to uncontrolled surveillance and have requested a review by the Constitutional Council.

On the radar

- **Former US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden will make a pre-recorded video appearance at the European Parliament's civil liberties committee** around 18 December.
- **Portugal's largest trade union, the CGTP, plan anti-austerity protests** at the Belém National Palace in the capital Lisbon on 19 December.
- **Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich is set to travel to Moscow on 17 December** for further talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- **Activists plan to protest in Rome, Italy, on 18 and 21 December** against government tax policies.

Middle East

United States and Britain suspend non-lethal aid to Syrian opposition

On 11 December, both the United States and United Kingdom announced that they have suspended all non-lethal aid to Syrian opposition fighters. The decision came after it emerged that Islamic Front forces had taken control of bases and warehouses belonging to the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The Free Syrian Army is aligned to the anti-Assad opposition National Coalition and is backed by Western governments. It is unclear if any equipment that was under the control of the FSA has gone missing, but the two countries have suspended the delivery of equipment while investigations are carried out. Non-lethal aid generally consists of communications equipment, medical supplies, intelligence assistance and body armour.

The Islamic Front is a coalition of six rebel Islamist groups that is not affiliated with al-Qaeda. The United States and Britain have asked that any items that were stolen be returned. The warehouses are thought to contain anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry. The various opposition factions and infighting within Syria represent a real dilemma for countries that have backed moderate opposition groups. Moreover, the dynamic of the anti-Assad opposition appears to be shifting as Islamist groups become more powerful. The main fear of the United States and the EU is that supplied weapons and ammunition may fall into the hands of al-Qaeda affiliated groups.

The FSA continues to lose popularity amongst Syrian opposition fighters and appears weak as the Syrian military continue to make significant gains into opposition held territories. The decision to suspend non-lethal aid does not impact the humanitarian effort that is distributed via aid organisations and the United Nations. Continued infighting and divisions within the opposition movement will likely weaken the position of the Western-backed FSA and National Coalition at the Geneva II peace talks scheduled for January 2014.

Other developments

Egypt will hold a constitutional referendum in mid-January, a government minister revealed on 9 December. Minister of Administrative Development Hany Mahmoud made the comment during an interview on Egyptian television. The new constitution is being drafted by the interim military-backed government that has lead the country since the removal of President Mohammed Morsi and is an important step in the planned political transition. However, the draft constitution will ban Islamist parties, such as the popular Muslim Brotherhood, and further entrenches the already powerful role of the military. The draft constitution will further polarise divisions within Egyptian society, which has seen civil unrest since Morsi was removed from power in July 2013. Related protests and demonstrations are expected to continue.

A suicide bomber targeted a Shi'ite funeral in Ba'qubah, Iraq, on 10 December. The funeral was for a group of Shi'ite shepherds that had been killed by unknown gunmen outside the city of Ba'qubah, northeast of Baghdad. The bomber claimed the lives of 11 people and wounded a further 20. Other major incidents in Iraq included a coordinated bomb attack on several neighbourhoods in Baghdad on 8 December. The majority of the attacks took place in Shia districts of the city but also targeted a Sunni district and security forces, killing at least 30 people. Sectarian violence in Iraq has reached levels not seen since the sectarian war between Shia and Sunni Muslims peaked in 2006-07. The United Nations reports that over 8,000 people have been killed in 2013.

A US drone strike claimed the lives of 13 people as their convoy was targeted as they travelled to a wedding in Badya province. Conflicting reports have been unable to identify who was killed in the strike that took place on 12 December. It is unclear if there were militants travelling with the convoy or that the convoy itself was mistaken for militants. The strike occurred in the wake of the attack on the Yemeni defence ministry on 5 December by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who claimed they had acted in response to US drone strikes in Yemen. Public resentment in Yemen against the joint Yemeni-US drone programme in the country has been increasing in recent months and further reprisal attacks on symbols of Yemeni political authority remain likely. The United States does not acknowledge individual drone strikes and refuses to disclose further information.

On the radar

- **Afghan President Hamid Karzai is expected to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement**, which will allow a US military presence to remain in the country.
- **The plan for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons is to be announced** on 17 December.
- **Unauthorised commemorative rallies to take place 16 and 19 December in Cairo, Egypt.**
- **Disruption expected during events to commemorate the third anniversary of the 2010-11 uprising in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia**, 16 and 17 December.
- **Further sectarian clashes expected in the al-Faj area of Hajjah, Yemen**, following recent violence which left up to 45 people dead.

Polar regions

Canada's North Pole claim elicits aggressive responses domestically and internationally

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird confirmed at a 9 December press conference in the House of Commons the rumours that Canada's recent decision to make only a partial submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf was based on the government's refusal to give up its claim to the North Pole. The minister said that Canada is delaying a full international bid for seabed rights in the resource-rich Arctic until scientists can gather sufficient data to back up this territorial expansion. Due to the many claims currently being examined by the UN commission it will be several years before Canada's claim is scrutinised. Baird has claimed that this delay gives Ottawa the necessary time to assemble a compelling case for Arctic seabed rights.

The North Pole claim elicited aggressive responses both domestically and internationally. Within Canada many scientists and Arctic experts were shocked that the results of 10 years of painstaking scientific research could be so carelessly overturned by such clearly political considerations. Leading the charge was academic Heather Exner-Pirot, who pointed out not only the anger of the scientific community but also the political ramifications of a move that threatens to derail the process of joint exploration. Within a day of Baird's announcement, Russian President Vladimir Putin told a number of his top generals that 'we are returning to the Arctic and must possess all instruments of power for the protection of our national security interests'. During the meeting, which took place at the Russian Ministry of Defence, the Russian president urged his commanders to ensure the completion by the end of 2014 of a range of military infrastructure projects, including a number of abandoned Soviet era airfields. When the work is completed, Russia will have operative airfields at all its major Arctic archipelagos, the Franz Josef Land, the Novaya Zemlya and the New Siberian Islands.

Putin's sabre rattling is nothing new and the danger of open military conflict in the Arctic will remain inconceivable for many years to come. Yet Exner-Pirot was correct to point out that the Canadian government's rash lunge for the Arctic carries the risk of a serious set-back to Arctic cooperation. Many analysts argue that Putin's bellicose stance towards the Arctic is based more on calculations of directing a tough image to the domestic audience than on any genuine strategic considerations. While the great interest Putin has taken in Arctic affairs even in his earlier presidencies indicates that this is not entirely the case, the domestic aspect is certainly a vital one. Canada's grandstanding gives Moscow the foil it needs to make such political strategies possible.

Other developments

Russia has frozen its programme to develop Arctic infrastructure, as the government failed to find the necessary resources to invest. The 9 December announcement, made by member of the Federation Council's Committee for Northern Affairs Igor Chernyshenko, came one day before Vladimir Putin's assertion that Russia is 'returning to the Arctic', revealing that the government, with hands currently tied by a year of much lower than expected economic growth and the prospect of stagnation in the near future, may not have the means to realise the president's grand vision. The 'Plan for the Social and Economic Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation' initially envisaged around 2 trillion roubles (\$60 billion) of spending, with 600 billion roubles (\$18 billion) to come from the state budget and the rest from the private sector.

Greenpeace activist Anne Mie Jensen won't be able to leave Russia despite bail. The Danish activist received a letter on 13 December informing her of the decision, taken by the Investigative Committee, which is handling the prosecution of a case which began when the environmentalists staged a protest by scaling a Russian oilrig in the Arctic. Greenpeace said in a statement that they 'expect all of the non-Russian defendants to be treated in the same way by the authorities, meaning they would now be forced to stay in St Petersburg for Christmas and possibly well beyond'.

The Alaska Board of Marine Pilots has fined Greenpeace \$15,000 for state law violations during its 'Save the Arctic' tour. Greenpeace allegedly violated state law while travelling in Alaskan waters near the Arctic community of Point Hope in July 2012, having entered compulsory pilotage waters around Point Hope on Alaska's North Slope without having a state-licensed marine pilot on board. Greenpeace disputed the ruling in a 13 December statement, which asserts that the ship in question, the *Esperanza*, maintained a distance of 20 nautical miles from the protected waters.

On the radar

- **Russia is threatening Norway with an embargo on fish imports**, which could be set in motion in the next couple of weeks.
- **The new China-Nordic Arctic Research Centre will begin its first week of academic work 16 December.** Key research areas are to include climate change, Arctic economic development and Arctic shipping routes.
- **The Russian State Legislative has until the end of December to approve an amnesty** that could include, among others, the Arctic 30 activists.

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