

# The weekly briefing | 20 January 2014

Political and security risk updates

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**Africa:** Ugandan army helping South Sudan fight rebels as UN warns of war crimes.

**Americas:** Federal troops battle with gangs and vigilantes for control over the Mexican state of Michoacán.

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## Africa

### Ugandan army helping South Sudan fight rebels as UN warns of war crimes

Uganda has issued a statement about its forces assisting the South Sudanese Army in its fight against rebels. On 15 January, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni admitted for the first time helping South Sudan's President Salva Kiir fight the rebels. Museveni stated that Ugandan soldiers helped defeat rebel forces outside of Juba on 13 January. On 16 January, Uganda's military spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Ankunda, announced that Ugandan troops were engaged in efforts to drive rebel forces from Bor, a strategically important town near the capital, Juba.

The statements from Kampala mark the first admission of Ugandan involvement in the South Sudanese conflict, after previous denials and official statements about only assisting the evacuation of civilians. The fighting started as a power struggle between Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, who now leads the rebel forces after being accused of planning a coup. The open involvement of an outside force risks further escalating the conflict and raises further concerns about the regional implications of the conflict. Other actors are likely to become involved should they perceive their interests to be at stake, which could lead to proxy confrontations.

On 17 January, the United Nations stated that it had evidence of the use of child soldiers and war crimes committed by both sides in the conflict. Meanwhile, peace negotiations continue in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa had previously declared that external troops engaging in South Sudan would be 'absolutely unwarranted'. As South Sudanese troops continued their advance on Bor, mediators met rebel leader Machar in an effort to bring ceasefire negotiations forward.



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## Other developments

**The acting president of the Central African Republic (CAR), Alexandre-Ferdinand Nguendet, has declared that 'the party is over'** as deserting soldiers and police returned to duty. Nguendet pledged on 13 January that the weeks of anarchy and sectarian violence would be swiftly brought to an end, issuing warnings to the warring parties, the predominantly Muslim Seleka and the Christian anti-Balaka fighters. The previous day, warring fighters had struck a truce in Southern Bangui, with hopes for a calmer period for the whole of the country. With 1,000 killed in the past month alone and a fifth of the country's population being displaced as a result of the violence, despite French and African intervention, Nguendet's provisional parliament now faces the task of stabilising the situation and finding a new transitional president. The United States, meanwhile, stated that more international peacekeepers may be needed to improve the situation in CAR.

**The trial of four men charged with helping al-Qaeda linked militants in the Westgate Mall attack has opened in Kenya.** The four men, who appeared in court on 15 January, all deny charges of using false documents and providing support and shelter to the gunmen who killed at least 67 people in the attack on the Nairobi mall on 21 September 2013. All the gunmen died in the attack, which was claimed by Somali Islamist rebel group al-Shabaab, highlighting the group's ability to strike outside Somalia.

**Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has sacked military chiefs after a court ruled their appointments were unconstitutional.** On 16 January, Jonathan's office stated that he had replaced the heads of Nigeria's army, navy and air force in what marks the fourth year of the country's conflict with Boko Haram. Last year, human rights lawyer Festus Keyamo had mounted a challenge to the military appointments, arguing they had not been approved by the national assembly. In July, the High Court in Abuja declared that the appointments had indeed been unconstitutional. Military operations against Boko Haram continue, with frequent clashes in the northeastern Borno state in particular. On 15 January, a car bomb killed at least 29 people in the key battleground of Maiduguri.

## On the radar

- **The UN Security Council will consult on the joint United Nations-African Union operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions.**
- **Madagascar braces itself for opposition protests** after the electoral court officially declares Hery Rajaonarimampianina president-elect among accusations of vote rigging.

## Americas

### **Federal troops battle with gangs and vigilantes for control over the Mexican state of Michoacán**

On 10 January, the governor of Michoacán, Fausto Vallejo, requested help from the federal government to respond to a security crisis in the state. This followed a recent spate of violence in which masked gunmen looted and set fire to shops and the main municipal building in the Apatzingán district. Michoacán state has become the stage for regular confrontations between the Knights Templar cartel and vigilante groups. In response to last week's events, President Enrique Peña Nieto announced the deployment of federal troops to re-establish order in the state. He warned that anyone caught with weapons would be punished in accordance with the law. However, civil militia have refused to surrender in some districts in spite of the government's demand.

The surge in violence in Michoacán demonstrates the limits of Peña Nieto's security policies. It is in the same state that former President Felipe Calderón first launched his unsuccessful war on drugs in 2007, sparking violence in which as many as 80,000 people are believed to have died. During his election campaign in December 2012, Peña Nieto promised to adopt a new approach to the country's drug cartels. This was reflected in an overall decrease in the number of deployed federal troops. But as the troops withdrew, drug cartels took advantage of the situation to expand their operations. It is in this context that civil militias emerged in response to the increased presence of the Knights Templars cartel in Michoacán state. Until recently, those groups benefited from the implicit backing of the government, which used them to fight a proxy war against the cartels. However, as the self-defence vigilante groups began to take over entire districts it became clear that such strategy was fraught with risk.

In the current climate, many remote villages rely exclusively on the militias for their security. The self-proclaimed leader of the militias, Jose Manue Mireles, announced that his men will not give up their weapons until the drug traffickers have been arrested. For Peña Nieto this violence is especially bad timing, as the country seeks to attract investments for its newly liberalised energy sector. Furthermore, the country is to host US President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper for a trade summit next month.

### **Other developments**

**A killing spree in Brazil raises concerns over the integrity of the country's security forces.** On the evening of 12 January, 12 people were murdered in the city of Campinas, in the São Paulo state. Following the killings, buses and cars were torched on 13 January in the same area. The 12 murders shared similar characteristics and occurred in a three-hour time interval. The weapons used in the murders were the same calibre as those used by the military police, arousing suspicions that officers were involved in a retaliatory attack. An investigation is now underway. The killings add to the continuing security concerns regarding the capacity of the national police to handle the 2014 World Cup and the Olympics in 2016.

**On 13 January, a Colombian court put a temporary hold on a controversial decision to remove Bogotá Mayor Gustavo Petro from office.** In early December, Inspector General Alejandro Ordóñez ordered the removal of Petro for alleged mismanagement of the rubbish collection system, and banned him from holding public office for a period of 15 years. For weeks, thousands of supporters have marched on Bogota's Bolivar Square in protest at Petro's sacking. As a former member of the M-19 guerrilla group, Petro is a symbol of Colombia's left. He is also held up as an example of how former rebels can be integrated into the political process. The court's decision is likely to positively impact the current government peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

**The Dominican Republic has suspended its deportation of undocumented Haitians.** On 17 January, the Dominican government announced that it would halt the deportation of Haitians descendants. The decision follows a controversial ruling on 23 September 2013 that stripped descendants of Haitian migrants of their citizenship, which affected in the region of 200,000 Dominicans and led to a spike in tensions between the Dominican and Haitian governments. The recent announcement is likely to relax the bilateral relationship somewhat.

## On the radar

- **Large crowds of urban youths from deprived backgrounds have flooded shopping malls across major cities across Brazil.** The flash mobs, known as 'rolezinhos', are expected to continue until at least 15 February.
- **On 27 January, the International Court of Justice is to rule on a maritime frontier dispute between Peru and Chile.**
- **Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and her Mexican counterpart Enrique Peña Nieto will attend the Davos summit** from 22 to 25 January.
- **Unrest in the Dominican Republic due to shutdown strikes over a proposed sales tax increase is likely to continue until 31 January.**

## Asia and Pacific

### Japan rebuts rumours that President Shinzo Abe is seeking to revise history textbooks

As tensions mount again with China, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida has rebutted rumours that Shinzo Abe's administration is seeking to revise history textbooks to display a pro-Japanese historical perspective. The statement, made during a press conference on 17 January, will go some way in allaying the suspicions and concerns of China's foreign ministry. It suggests that Abe, though seeking to re-write Japan's pacifist constitution, will not contradict his predecessors who acknowledged the suffering and damage which Japan caused in the past.

China consistently reminds the world of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, in which 300,000 people are claimed to have been murdered by Japanese troops in China's then capital. In Japan, many hardline conservatives deny these events and figures, and the stance of Abe's Liberal Democratic Party is that these accounts are biased. This has obviously angered the Chinese, and Abe's controversial visit to the Yasukuni War Shrine, which honours war criminals amongst its dead, was seen as deliberately inflammatory at a time when the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea have been the subject of much political rhetoric.

Abe has effectively portrayed himself as a strong, decisive and pragmatic leader. By using the symbolism of the Yasukuni Shrine, he has successfully rallied nationalist and conservative politicians to adopt a more aggressive policy against China's growing assertiveness. At the same time, though Abe is clearly not happy with the Chinese perspective of accounts, he has not outright denied China's historical perspective of the events in Nanjing. In doing so, excessive and unnecessary conflict has been avoided, and he has showed he will not completely give in to pressures coming from his nationalist party members. However, disputes in the South China Sea are ongoing and Abe's recognition of Japan's war crimes should not be seen as a less assertive stance.

### Other developments

**A grenade blast during an anti-government rally in Bangkok on 17 January killed one and injured more than 35 people.** This brings the total death toll since protests began in November to nine.

Protestors are calling for Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to resign and are planning to boycott the planned 2 February elections. Middle class protestors fear that their views will be drowned out by Shinawatra's lower class supporters and have therefore turned to mass protest. The protestors have caused severe disruption in Bangkok and refuse to leave until Shinawatra resigns.

**Indonesia has spoken out against Australia's accidental naval incursions into its waters as a 'violation of its sovereignty'.** Australian Immigration Minister Scott Morrison stated that these violations were not been sanctioned by the government and that Australia takes seriously the shared commitment to mutually 'respect the sovereignty of each nation'. The Australian Navy have cited positional errors as the cause. Relations between Indonesia and Australia have been strained, as Indonesia serves as a transit point for would-be asylum seekers heading to Australia's Christmas Island. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has been under scrutiny at the United Nations after his anti-immigration policies have seen boats being turned back to Indonesia.

**Chinese police have reportedly detained Ilham Tohti, an outspoken Uighur academic and critic of Beijing's ethnic policies.** Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said that Tohti was suspected of 'committing crimes and violating the law'. Security and alert levels in Xinjiang, home to nine million Uighurs, have been raised following an incident in Tiananmen Square in October 2013, which left five dead, and which Beijing argue was masterminded by Uighur separatists. Tohti's detention is the latest sign of an increased hardline stance on Xinjiang.

### **On the radar**

- **Thailand's anti-corruption commission is investigating Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra** in connection with a controversial government rice subsidy scheme.
- **The trial of Xu Zhiyong, the Founder the New Citizens' Movement and outspoken civil rights activist, will begin in China on 22 January.**
- **The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Foreign Ministers Summit will take place in Bagan, Myanmar, from 22-26 January.**
- **Khaleda Zia, the leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist party, will hold nationwide marches on 20 January to press for a fresh ballot.**
- **Opposition party Pakistan Awami Tehreek has called for nationwide demonstrations over the coming days.**

## **Europe**

### **Ukraine passes anti-protest legislation aimed at curbing ongoing anti-government demonstrations**

On 16 January, Ukrainian MPs loyal to President Viktor Yanukovich passed anti-protest laws, aimed at curbing the recent ongoing anti-government protests. Those who voted for the motion included members of the ruling Party of Regions, members of the Communist party and a number of independent voters. Voting was by the unusual method of 'voting by hand', rather than the traditional electronic voting and the laws were backed by 235 out of 450 politicians. The opposition argued that this was illegal and fear that the new legislation would enable the government to prosecute them and break up the protest movement. They called for a new wave of protests.

One of the new laws banned any unauthorised installations of stages, amplifiers or tents in public spaces and suspects will be fined or detained. Following the opposition's protests in recent days outside government offices including the president's countryside residence, the law also banned demonstrations that involve more than five vehicles to blockade buildings, with offenders facing up to five years in prison. The other new law makes it illegal to slander government officials (including on the internet), and those found guilty will face a year of corrective labour. The three main parties claimed that the government's decision for voting by hand was illegal and that the switch had been made after the government realised that they did not have enough supporters. The opposition attempted to disrupt voting, by blocking the speaker's platform. An MP for the Party of Regions Oleh Tsariov defended the laws arguing that they would prevent further escalation of this recent political crisis, whilst the Ukrainian opposition warned that the new restrictions would further inflame the protest movement. Vitali Klitschko, leader of Udar party, condemned the bills as a coup d'état.

Several EU countries and the United States expressed deep concerns over the new bill and urged Ukraine to scrap the legislation. The EU enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Fule, asserted that this recent move by the Ukrainian government contradicted the country's European aspirations as well as its commitment to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The non-state controlled Ukrainian media claimed that the new laws would limit democratic freedoms and placed Ukraine on the path to a dictatorship. The protest movement has dwindled in the last month but it is expected that a new wave of protests will begin again from last weekend.

### **Other developments**

**On 16 January, Czech police discovered a second bomb at the Palestinian embassy in Prague.** On 1 January, the Palestinian Ambassador was killed after a booby-trapped safe exploded. Following the death, the Czech foreign ministry accused the Palestinians of breaching international obligations, after security forces found 12 illegal weapons in the residency. The Palestinians have apologised and claim that they were received as gifts from the former Czechoslovakia. Czech police are still testing whether these weapons have been used.

**On 18 January, Russian anti-terrorism officers surrounded a house in Dagestan and killed seven people who security forces suspected of the terrorist attack on 17 January.** Militants had launched a grenade attack on a restaurant and detonated a bomb once police were at the scene. It is unknown if the suspects were criminals or Islamic militants. Russia has stepped up its security operations in the region in the lead up to next month's Sochi Olympics, which is located close to Dagestan, and the two terrorist attacks in Volgograd in December 2013, which the Russian government believes militants were behind.

**According to German media, the German government is leading negotiations with other members of the EU on a European anti-espionage agreement.** The reports say that the discussions have been going on for several months and have included topics such as banning political and economic spying on allies, not allowing citizens' data to be handed over if national laws forbid it and only allowing monitoring activities in order to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

## On the radar

- **The new Czech prime minister, Jiří Rusnok, will make his first visit to Slovakia later this month.**
- **EU Foreign Relations Chief Catherine Ashton will attend the Geneva II peace talks** on Syria in Montreux, Switzerland, on 22 January.
- **Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Brussels for the first time in three years** on 21 January.
- **On 22 January, the European Commission will unveil new targets for cutting CO2 emissions by 2030.**
- **Violent demonstrations are possible in Northern Ireland on 30 January, which marks the anniversary of the 1972 Bloody Sunday shooting in Londonderry.**

## Middle East

### **Egyptians vote in first ballot since military removed Mohammed Morsi from power**

On 14 and 15 January, Egyptians voted in favour of a new constitution drafted by the military-backed interim government. The referendum marks the first public ballot to be held in the country since the military deposed former elected president Mohammed Morsi in July 2013. The new constitution will replace that drafted by Morsi's government in 2012. Reports emerged that at least 11 people were killed in clashes throughout the country on 14 January.

Early turnout figures were placed in the region of 38%, higher than the 33% that voted in a referendum under the Morsi government in 2012. Unofficial figures estimate that 97% voted in favour of the new constitution, which will further strengthen the influence of the military, the police and the judiciary. Moreover, the overwhelming yes vote will be treated by the interim government as a vote of confidence in the direction that the country has taken since the military coup in 2013. However, Islamist groups, particularly supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, almost all boycotted the referendum in protest at the removal of Morsi and the subsequent crackdown on anti-government demonstrators. Furthermore, the interim government has been accused of suppressing the no campaign and conducting the referendum against a backdrop of fear.

In the run up to the referendum, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi hinted that a strong yes vote and significant turnout would be viewed as a mandate to run for the presidency later this year. The results provide al-Sisi with the endorsement that he was seeking. The new constitution, drafted by a panel of secularists, will remove certain Islamist-leaning clauses that were introduced under Morsi. Tensions between security forces and supporters of the excluded Muslim Brotherhood are likely to remain high.

## Other developments

**The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) retook control of the Syrian city of ar-Raqqah on 14 January.** Northern Syria has been engulfed in conflict between several militia groups with different ideologies. The ISIL were driven out of ar-Raqqah in the previous week by a coalition of anti-government groups but regained control after days of fighting. The city of ar-Raqqah is the only provincial capital that has remained out of government control and the subsequent infighting between the ISIL and other anti-government groups reflects the lack of stability and authority in northern Syria. On 15 January, the ISIL were suspected of detonating a car bomb that killed at least 26 people in the town of Jarabulus, north of Aleppo. The ISIL is made up of largely foreign fighters and has been accused of committing atrocities against local communities. Clashes between rebel factions are expected to continue.

**Two German diplomats were attacked in Saudi Arabia on 13 January as unknown militants fired upon their vehicle in the eastern town of Awamiya.** There were no casualties reported but their vehicle caught fire. The town of Awamiya is located in the Qatif district, an area that has been at the heart of civil unrest in the country since 2011. The Shi'ah population have been demonstrating against perceived repression by the Sunni-dominated Saudi state.

**Turkish counter-terrorism police raided the offices of an aid agency close to the Syrian border on 14 January.** The Humanitarian Relief Foundation office in the city of Kilis delivers aid to Syria across the border. However, operations have been accused of supplying al-Qaeda affiliated groups with aid. Investigations have increased since 1 January after Turkish security forces on the Syrian border detained a truck allegedly operating on behalf of the foundation that was loaded with arms and ammunition. The rise of al-Qaeda affiliated militant groups in northern Syria has led to accusations that Turkey has been lending support to radical Islamist groups, an accusation that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has denied.

## On the radar

- **A deal between Iran and the P5+1 that is intended to pave the way to a solution over Tehran's nuclear ambitions will commence on 20 January.**
- **Geneva II talks aimed at bringing an end to the Syrian civil war are scheduled to begin on 22 January.** It is still unclear which opposition groups will attend.
- **Senior delegates from Pakistan are due to arrive in the United States on 27 January** to discuss future bilateral cooperation.
- **The United States announced that it would soon deliver another instalment of small arms and ammunitions to Iraq** as the country battles al-Qaeda affiliated groups to regain control of Anbar province.
- **Demonstrations are likely across Yemen on 11 February,** which marks the anniversary of the 2011 civil uprising.

## Polar regions

### **New US Navy Arctic strategy calls for more icebreakers**

US Navy officials have called for the construction of more Arctic-ready ships, particularly icebreakers, in an as-yet-unreleased strategy document, a draft version of which was passed on to journalists at the *Wall Street Journal* on 12 January. According to the newspaper, the new navy strategy says that rapidly retreating levels of summer ice in the Arctic will lead to 'increased commercial traffic, oil and gas exploration and tourism', which in turn 'will create new demands in the Arctic'. The newspaper argues that the US Navy is unprepared to meet these challenges, as it lacks 'operational experience... ships properly outfitted for the extreme weather... and [sufficient] satellite coverage'. The strategy document follows the release of two major policy papers in 2013: President Barack Obama's May *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's *Arctic Strategy*, released in November. The authors of both papers were only too aware of the massive budget cuts to US defense spending planned for the next few years and shied away from making concrete procurement demands. In contrast, US Navy officials who spoke to the *Wall Street Journal* are clear about what is needed and how much it will cost. By far the most important item on their procurement wish-list is the construction of 10 new icebreakers at an estimated cost of \$784 million per ship.

If the president and defence secretary are serious about their commitment to increasing US military and commercial activity in the Arctic there is no doubt that these icebreakers will have to be built. The US Coast Guard is already tracking commercial traffic that is up 26% since 2011, an increase that it claims to be woefully underequipped to protect. Icebreakers are essential not only for opening new sea lanes but also for providing such services as search and rescue operations and protecting commercial traffic from potential piracy. But the US Coastguard currently only has two icebreakers in its fleet, the largest of which is the powerful yet ancient Polar Star commissioned almost 40 years ago in 1976. By contrast, Canada possesses three times as many icebreakers, and the Russian fleet stands at 25, six of which are nuclear powered.

With \$31 billion in spending cuts to be met this year, and a further \$42 billion in the next, the US Navy will struggle to persuade Congress to allocate the required funds. Meanwhile, the Russian government already has 77 billion roubles (\$2.3 billion) earmarked for the construction of two new giant icebreakers powered by twin nuclear reactors. With icebreakers an essential prerequisite for any expansion into the Arctic, the United States appears to be far behind in the race for the control of the region. Nevertheless, it remains an undecided question whether such a race is really necessary. Thus far, Arctic states have worked closely together in providing mutual security and search and rescue capabilities in the far north. While the pressure for one of these states to act unilaterally may increase if the Arctic region delivers on its apparent riches, as of yet there is no reason to significantly doubt that Arctic cooperation could continue long into the future. The US Navy is expected to officially publish its Arctic strategy paper in the next two weeks.

## Other developments

**The United States and Russia are drafting voluntary regulations to manage increased traffic in the Bering Strait.** No country owns the Bering Strait waters and no international law manages vehicle movement through the passage. As ice melts and traffic increases, this absence of regulation creates hazardous conditions for vessels. US Coast Guard Admiral Thomas Ostebo says the growing risk is his primary concern for the Arctic, likening the Bering Strait to the Panama Canal. The voluntary system would serve as a placeholder until the International Maritime Organisation passed laws to govern the strait, a process expected to take many years. Ostebo says the United States is sponsoring the law and is seeking support from Russia to help move the ruling forward.

**Finland's Officers' Union supports NATO membership, according to a poll conducted in November and December 2013 and published by Radio Canada International on 15 January.** 'Almost 80% of officers don't believe that we have an independent and credible defence force', says the Finnish Officers' Union General Secretary Hannu Sipilä, with 51% of those polled coming to the conclusion that NATO membership is essential to meet this capability gap. The poll found support for NATO much higher amongst the senior echelons of the Finnish armed forces. In 2013, both the United States and Russia weighed into the debate in Sweden and Finland as to whether to file for NATO membership; while US defence official James Townsend stated that 'the door is open' to Finnish membership, Russian defence chief Nikolai Makarov threatened that such a move could have 'serious political and trade consequences' for Russia's Scandinavian neighbours.

**With Arctic drilling on the horizon for 2014, Shell's new boss Ben van Beurden has issued a shock profit warning,** saying that the oil giant's fourth quarter figures were expected to be 'significantly lower than recent levels of profitability' because of 'weak industry conditions'. Greenpeace seized on the announcement to criticise the company's Arctic ambitions. The fact that Shell's share price continues to stagnate despite the promise of massive investment in the Arctic made in late 2013 could challenge the widely accepted orthodoxy that the oil majors' success on international stock markets is largely determined by their ability to point to investment in increased productive capacity, even where that investment is of dubious quality. If the trend continues, it could have a major impact on the financial feasibility of future drilling projects in Arctic waters.

## On the radar

- **Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende is to travel to Moscow on 20 January for talks with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.** The main item on the agenda is expected to be Russia's ban on Norwegian fish imports, which came into effect on 1 January following a surprise announcement in late December 2013.
- **Academics from around the world will meet in Tromsø, Norway, on 20-21 January** to discuss policy recommendations for Arctic states under the heading 'Arctic Frontiers: Humans in the Arctic'.

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