

The weekly briefing | 25 November 2013

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Central African Republic 'on verge of genocide' as France steps up pressure on UN to act

International pressure to halt the escalating violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) is increasing. Former colonial power France is urging the United Nations to authorise a stronger peacekeeping force in the country, supported by French troops. On 21 November, in the strongest statement on the issue so far, the French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, stressed the need for urgent action. Earlier last week, the US State Department also argued that CAR was in a 'pre-genocidal situation'.

Conditions in CAR have progressively worsened since the Seleka, a group of Muslim rebel movements, seized the capital Bangui, overthrowing Christian president François Bozizé. When Michel Djotodia took office as the first Muslim president in the majority Christian CAR after Bozizé's fall, he quickly lost control over the Seleka. The ensuing anarchy has seen widespread violence between Muslim rebels and Christian militias, with the most recent escalations and attacks on civilians raising concerns about ethnic violence and potential genocide. This has been most pronounced in the west of the country, especially in the Bossangoa region.

Outside powers' concerns, highlighted by the French statement, focus on the prospect of CAR becoming a failed state similar to Somalia, used as a haven for extremist groups in an increasingly unstable region flooded with weapons. African media have reported that CAR authorities have been in contact with Joseph Kony, the Lord's Resistance Army leader wanted by the International Criminal Court, though reports are conflicted about whether Kony is in fact hiding in the country and planning to surrender.



open briefing
the civil society intelligence agency

Open Briefing
27 Old Gloucester Street
Bloomsbury
London WC1N 3AX

t 020 7193 9805
info@openbriefing.org
www.openbriefing.org

The existing regional peacekeeping force of 2,500 has been unable to halt the intercommunal violence. The African-led peacekeeping force will expand to 3,600 troops in December, coming under African Union control, with the United States pledging \$40m to the military effort. France maintains a 400-strong force guarding the international airport but calls for a much larger international force are likely to further increase given the dire situation in the country. Despite stressing the urgency of the situation and its readiness to send up to 1,000 troops, France, however, remains wary of becoming involved in CAR to the same extent as in Mali, where they are struggling to contain Islamist insurgents.

Other developments

In Libya, the head of Benghazi security, Colonel Abdallah al-Saati, narrowly survived an assassination attempt on 18 November. His motorcade was targeted by a bomb in the al-Hadaek area. The attack threatens hopes for stability in the city, which had seen relative calm after the latest deployment of more security forces and a shift in popular support towards the army. Meanwhile, it is hoped that the departure of militias from the capital will help restore a measure of stability following last week's escalation of fighting in Tripoli and concerns over lack of government control.

Mozambique's ruling party, Frelimo, is leading the polls after initial municipal election results.

Elections in 53 municipalities on 20 November, boycotted by the main opposition party, Renamo, saw the third-largest party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), make significant gains. Despite concerns that Renamo's boycott would trigger violence around the elections, incidents remained isolated and were contained by police using tear gas and rubber bullets. In the capital and other urban centres in particular, where opposition against President Guebuza's party is most vocal, the results appear to signify an end to decades of party duopoly. However, observers remain concerned about the potential for violence and protests.

Several African countries have strengthened their ties with Gulf States during the third African-Arab summit held in Kuwait on 20 and 21 November. In addition to expressing their commitment to countering terrorism in the region, efforts for closer economic cooperation saw Kuwait, already the largest Arab investor in Africa, pledge a further \$1 billion over a five-year period. Several African countries, including Uganda, Mauritania, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, also signed economic agreements with Saudi Arabia. Although Ethiopia was also included, negotiations were clouded by the recent controversy over the treatment of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, talks between Ethiopia and Egypt about Ethiopia's plans to dam the Nile failed.

On the radar

- **Military trial of Democratic Republic of the Congo soldiers over mass murder and rape in 2012 set to continue in Goma.**
- **Sudan expects food shortages** following devaluation of the Sudanese pound and a shortage of foreign currency.
- **South Africa will continue to review its bilateral investment treaties**, which have already led to termination of agreements with several European countries.
- **UN plans to repatriate up to 500,000 of the Somali refugees in Kenya are to continue** despite concerns about Somalia's readiness.

Americas

Bolivian President Evo Morales orders double Christmas bonuses as part of electoral campaign

On 20 November, Bolivian President Evo Morales issued a decree to double Christmas bonuses. It concerns the 300,000 public sector employees but it is still unclear whether it will also apply to the private sector as well. Compulsory Christmas bonuses are common in Latin America but Morales' announcement doubles its value for affected Bolivians. The measure is designed to continue as long as Bolivia's annual GDP growth exceeds 4.5%. According to International Monetary Fund projections, Bolivia's output growth should be 5.4% in 2013 and 5% in 2014.

Critics argue that the decree is demagogic and hinders efforts to attract investment and to curb inflation. While the government has boasted the merits of its economic policies, experts point to the rise in the price of Bolivian exports, particularly minerals and gas, as drivers of the current growth.

A controversial ruling of the Bolivian Supreme Court in April 2013 authorises Morales to run for a third term. The enforced bonus pay increase can be seen as part of Morales' electoral campaign for the December 2014 presidential election. His announcement is aimed at increasing support for his campaign among the Bolivian middle class. In the run-up to the elections, Morales is likely to proclaim further unorthodox economic policies.

Other developments

Michelle Bachelet has won the first round of the Chilean presidential election with 48% of the vote.

The candidate of the centre-left New Majority coalition attracted almost twice as many votes as her closest rival, Evelyn Matthei, from the centre-right Alliance. The second round of the presidential election will take place on 15 December.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos launched a re-election bid on 20 November. The other main contender for the role is Óscar Iván Zuluaga from the Uribe Democratic Centre party (UCD). The UCD party opposes any peace settlement with FARC.

Protests against the government took place across cities in Venezuela on 23 November. The protests were led by opposition candidate Henrique Capriles and blamed President Nicolas Maduro for rising inflation and the shortage of basic goods.

On the radar

- **Further opposition protests are likely across Venezuela** in the run up to local elections.
- **Disruption and protests are expected in Chile** as public sector workers plan to hold a 72-hour nationwide strike from 25 November.
- **FENAES students' union to hold nationwide rallies across Paraguay** on 25 November to demand increased funding for education.
- **Anti-government protests are expected to cause disruption in major cities in Haiti.**

Asia and Pacific

China's contribution to the Philippines has prompted speculation over their role as a superpower

The size of China's aid contribution to the typhoon-hit Philippines has proven controversial. From an initial \$100,000 to a donation of \$1.6 million in supplies and the services of an emergency medical relief team, international media have lambasted the size of China's contribution, which is even outdone by the \$2.7 million donation from Ikea's charitable foundation. Unsurprisingly, Chinese media have accused the international media of double standards and defended the level of China's contribution.

Many have speculated that Beijing find it difficult to keep humanitarian aid and geopolitical considerations separate. In particular, many have highlighted China's longstanding territorial dispute with the Philippines over oil-rich islands in the South China Sea and Beijing's distaste at Manila's alliance with their regional rivals in Washington. Beijing was enraged by Manila's decision to send the territorial dispute to international arbitration at the United Nations and by their decision to allow US warships to be based at Filipino naval ports, including the to-be-developed Oyster Bay facility only 100 miles from the disputed Spratly Islands.

Such speculation is highly damaging to China's 'soft power' and their ability to easily conduct friendly diplomatic and economic influence over other states. The criticism in the international media and on social networks has not helped China's reputation as an uncaring neighbour unwilling to help those who they do not see as worthy allies.

Other developments

In the latest confrontation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, China has demarcated an 'air-defence identification zone' over the surrounding territory. China's defence ministry says that any non-commercial aircraft entering this airspace must comply with instruction or face 'emergency defensive measures'. Japan's foreign ministry has argued that this is a dangerous unilateral escalation of an already tense situation. In 2012, the Japanese government bought three of the islands from the Kurihara family, which sparked mass protests in Chinese cities. The issue has become a rallying point for nationalists in both countries and it is difficult to see how either will back down in the current climate.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono says that ties with Australia have been damaged by revelations by the whistleblower Edward Snowden. Snowden revealed that Canberra had listened in on the phone calls of top-level Indonesian officials. Yudhoyono added that Jakarta would review cooperation between their two countries. The Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott expressed regret but refused to offer an apology for 'reasonable intelligence-gathering operations'. Australia and Indonesia are key trading partners and allies but relations are already strained due to Indonesia's position as a stopping point for asylum seekers travelling to Australia.

Nepal's powerful Maoist leader and former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (known as Prachanda) has rejected the national election after his party appeared to be losing on 19 November. Political deadlock is not new since the Maoists ceased using violence seven years ago after a decade-long civil war. Six successive governments have failed to forge a constitution for a new republic. Neighbours India and China appear increasingly concerned that Nepal has become a haven for militants and criminal gangs. Without effective political reform, this is likely to continue.

On the radar

- **Members of the US House of Representatives will fly to Russia to meet with whistleblower Edward Snowden** to clarify allegations that Australia attempted to tap the phones of top Indonesian officials.
- **The Japanese government continues to push for legislation that would curtail public access to information** and punish whistleblowers.

Europe

Ukraine delays signing association agreement with the European Union

Ukraine announced on 21 November that it would not be signing an association and wide-ranging trade agreement with the EU at the Eastern Partnership in Lithuania this week. The Ukrainian parliament rejected six draft laws that would have led to the release of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The release of Tymoshenko was an essential condition for the EU to move forward with the association agreement. Following Ukraine's announcement, the EU expressed disappointment and the EU Enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Fule, cancelled a trip to Ukraine, which was to occur before the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius on 28-29 November.

On 22 November, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov claimed that the decision not to sign the deal was motivated by economics, adding that Ukraine had not received any IMF guarantees that it would be compensated for any closure of markets in the Moscow-led Customs Union and the IMF had imposed overly harsh terms for an aid package. Thousands of protesters have been rallying across Ukraine since 22 November to protest the Ukrainian government's decision. Major protests have been held in Kiev, Lviv and Luhansk and activists say that they will continue to protest for several days. Riot police have been deployed but the protests remain peaceful at present. The opposition leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk accused the Ukrainian president of 'selling out to Moscow in exchange for cash and ensuring in his re-election in 2015'.

Azarov claimed that the postponement of the agreement did not alter Ukraine's overall development strategy and that Ukraine is now looking to set up a joint commission to promote relations between Ukraine, the EU and Russia. Russia has been accused of pressurising Ukraine not to sign the agreement, as it wants Ukraine to join Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia in the Customs Union. Ukraine depends on imports of Russian gas and according to the supplier Gazprom, Ukraine had recently fallen behind with payments. Gas crises in 2006 and 2009 had severe economic and political impacts on Ukraine. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin in turn accused the EU of blackmailing Ukraine to sign the association deal by refusing to accept Ukraine's decision to postpone the agreement.

Other developments

On 19 November, the Spanish ambassador in London, Federico Trillo, was summoned to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to explain why a Spanish state surveillance ship had entered Gibraltar territorial waters on 18 November.

The vessel was accompanied by three Guardia Civil boats and came within 250 metres of the entrance to the Gibraltar Harbour. The Spanish boats ignored requests to leave for 22 hours and were eventually challenged by the Royal Navy. A British foreign office minister announced that the Royal Navy was reviewing its presence in Gibraltar. The latest increase in tensions between the United Kingdom and Spain comes days after the European Commission ruled that the strict controls imposed by Spain on the border had not broken EU law. However, the Commission did recommend closer cooperation between the two countries to ease congestion at the borders and said that it would revisit the dispute in six months.

On 18 November, a gunman attacked the Paris headquarters of the newspaper *Liberation* and the headquarters of the bank Societe Generale.

One victim was seriously injured at the first attack at the newspaper. On 20 November, the French Interior Minister, Manuel Valls, announced that police had detained the shooter, Abdelhakim Dekhar. According to reports, the police found Dekhar in an underground car park in a Paris suburb in a semi-conscious state after an apparent suicide attempt. The gunman had been imprisoned in 1998 for his involvement in a shootout with police, in which five people were killed.

On the radar

- **Fuel poverty protesters set to hold demonstrations on 26 November at the headquarters of six British energy firms** including British Gas and npower.
- **The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders are to meet on 25 November** in the buffer zone to discuss peace talks.
- **The Eastern Partnership summit will be held in Vilnius, Lithuania,** on 28-29 November.
- **The Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP) plan to stage anti-austerity demonstrations across Portugal** on 26 November.

Middle East

Double suicide bombing targets Iranian embassy in Beirut, Lebanon

On 19 November, two suicide bomb attacks took place at the gates of the Iranian embassy in southern Beirut, a distinctly Shi'ite district of the city. The double-tap style attack claimed the lives of 23 people, including six Iranian officials, and injured almost 150 others. Reports suggest that the initial attack was used to damage the perimeter wall of the compound and the second was used to cause as much physical damage as possible. The Sunni jihadist group Abdullah Azzam Brigade has claimed responsibility for the attack. The al-Qaeda-linked group has previously issued threats against Shia communities that support President Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria.

The targeting of the Iranian embassy in Beirut signifies an escalation in sectarian violence that has spread throughout the region as a result of the Syrian civil war. The attack comes one week after Hezbollah's support of a Syrian military offensive had pushed back anti-Assad opposition in suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo. Assistance from Iran (in an advisory and training capacity) and Lebanon's Hezbollah (in combat) is helping to reclaim opposition held territories in Syria. The attack on the Iranian embassy may signify an alternative approach by opposition fighters in Syria. Suppressed militarily, soft targets linked to Assad may be singled out.

Sunni jihadist groups operating in Shia dominated Iraq, Lebanon and Syria have links to al-Qaeda and the attack in Beirut resembles the tactics employed by jihadist groups in Iraq. Lebanese Sunni and Shi'ite communities have taken part in running gun battles and targeted bombings in Beirut and Tripoli have occurred over the past year. Tactics employed by Sunni groups do not require large numbers of fighters and are able to single out soft targets, such as public spaces and buildings, for revenge attacks. The spillover from the war in Syria has ramifications throughout the region and Lebanon is in danger of becoming a sectarian battleground. Escalation in Lebanese sectarian violence is likely in the coming months with Sunni jihadist groups increasing operations against soft targets.

Other developments

On 20 November, 11 Egyptian soldiers were killed by a car bomb close to the town of el-Arish.

Reports have emerged that the soldiers were travelling by bus when the explosives were detonated remotely. This is the latest attack on security forces in the Sinai Peninsula, where the security situation has been unstable since the removal of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. Violence in Sinai has increased since the military escalated its counter-insurgency efforts in September. The Islamist militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis claim to have carried out the failed assassination attempt on the interior minister, Mohamed Ibrahim, in September. The military's heavy-handed tactics and influx of weapons in the region from Libya will likely increase the frequency of such attacks in future.

Crowded Shia neighbourhoods were targeted by several bombs in Baghdad on 20 November. Reports claim that seven bombs were detonated in the predominantly Shia neighbourhoods of Amil, Azamiyah, Hurriyah, Karrada, Sadria, Shaab and Tobchi. Iraqi security and medical reports place the death toll at between 23 and 28. However, media reports suggest that the death toll could be much higher and Iraq Body Count place the number of victims closer to 60. A further car bomb was detonated on 21 November at a market in Sadiya, killing at least 25 people. The rising violence throughout 2013 has reached levels not seen since 2008. Fighters linked to al-Qaeda have recruited frustrated Sunni minorities to target the Shia-dominated government and employ coordinated bomb attacks. It is likely that levels of violence will increase ahead of elections early next year.

On 21 November, almost 2,500 Afghanistan elders and political leaders gathered in Kabul to debate a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with Washington. The draft proposal, if agreed upon, will allow a US military presence to remain in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 withdrawal of NATO troops. Under the agreement, the United States will be provided with nine military facilities, including the Kandahar Air Force Base, and some 15,000 US troops would remain in Afghanistan. The US military would continue to equip and advise Afghan soldiers and security forces in the fight against the Taliban but has ruled out any US led combat missions 'unless otherwise mutually agreed'. Afghans are concerned by the permission the agreement gives to the United States to prosecute any of its own forces accused of crimes in Afghanistan. An accord to allow immunity from local prosecution was unacceptable to the Iraqi government in 2011 and prompted the withdrawal of all US troops from that country. Afghan President Hamid Karzai is expected to sign the BSA but it is not clear when, with Karzai himself seeking a delay until after elections in April 2014.

On the radar

- **Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu will visit Iran** on 26 and 27 November to discuss the Syrian crisis.
- **A UNSC briefing by special advisor Jamal Benomar on political transition in Yemen is expected on 27 November.** The briefing is due despite ongoing tensions and the unlikely conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference.
- **Yemen will celebrate Independence Day on 30 November,** marking the withdrawal of British troops from the port of Aden in 1967.

Polar regions

US Department of Defence releases new Arctic strategy

The US Department of Defence (DoD) published an Arctic strategy document on 22 November outlining a strategic vision for America's future role in the Arctic. The goal of US strategy should be, according to the document, to ensure the Arctic is 'a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is protected, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges'. This goal is to be realised by carrying out the strategy's eight-point plan for future US policy in the region. This plan envisages national defence, the preservation of the freedom of the seas, the development of infrastructure, and the need for close cooperation and consultation with other Arctic states and international bodies such as the Arctic Council.

The document is presented as the defence department's contribution to the National Strategy for the Arctic Region published by the White House in May 2013. While the DoD's strategy takes the expected posture on the need to 'detect, deter, prevent and defeat threats to the homeland', the document is unusual in its repeated emphasis of the need for cooperation with other international actors as a key part of the strategy rather than simply an expected diplomatic overture. Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel, speaking about the publication at the Halifax International Security Forum in Canada on 22 November, described cooperation with the other Arctic states and the Arctic Council as the cornerstone of the strategy.

Opportunities for cooperation are greater in the Arctic mainly as a result of its position as an area that is, in President Barack Obama's words, 'peaceful, stable, and free of conflict'. These opportunities are welcomed with such enthusiasm by the DoD partly for practical reasons: planned cuts to the department's budget may, according to the document, 'delay or deny needed investment in Arctic capabilities'. The strategy aims to close these gaps by reliance on partners in the region. Whatever the justification for this approach, the pursuit of closer cooperation is to be welcomed by those who desire a peaceful Arctic. Also to be welcomed are the conclusions that political rhetoric about competition for resources should be discouraged wherever possible, and that the United States should avoid aggressive moves in the Arctic in order to head off the possibility of a dangerous arms race in what, so far, has been one of the least militarised regions in the world. The DoD's strategy wisely refrained from directly mentioning Russia in the document, which has made increasing military and ideological claims on the Arctic, instead reaching out to its Arctic neighbour with an invitation to participate in bilateral and multilateral exercises and share military intelligence.

Further developments

Russian authorities have released on bail all the Greenpeace activists detained in the Arctic 30 case, with the exception of Australian activist Colin Russell. Greenpeace paid two million roubles (\$61,000) in bail for each activist's release. According to Russian news agency RIA-Novosti, Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov has suggested that once visa technicalities have been overcome the activists will be free to leave the country. Greenpeace lawyer Anton Beneslavski said Ivanov's comments should be treated with caution given that the legal process is still underway. The decision to release the activists on bail may indicate a willingness of the Russian authorities to back down under international pressure, which increased from its already very high level this week with the 22 November ruling from the International Tribunal on the Law for the Sea that Russia must release the Arctic Sunrise icebreaker and all of its 30-strong crew. Thus Russian President Vladimir Putin told journalists at RIA-Novosti on 21 November that the activists should be granted 'clemency'.

The Arctic Institute reported on 20 November that the Finnish government has appointed an advisory board to coordinate Finnish activities in the Arctic and implement its recent Arctic strategy. The new Arctic Advisory Board has a two-year mandate and will be chaired by Olli-Pekka Heinonen. Global political economists see Finland's motivation to increase its focus towards the Arctic as an attempt to profit from its expertise and technological innovations in such fields as arctic construction, arctic environmental technology and the development of Arctic infrastructure as well as Arctic transportation and navigation in ice-covered waters.

Russian geological surveys have allegedly revealed significant new oil resources in its Arctic waters, according to the federal sub-soil agency, Rosnedra. The agency summed up its geological exploration activities in 2013 in a press release published on 19 November, stating that 'a significant number of perspective oil and gas objects have been made ready for inclusion in the federal licensing programme'. State energy firms and companies in the private sector continue to assert their right to such resources in a national sovereignty and competition-focused discourse, with Rosnedra accompanying the press release with the assertion that its work is 'necessary to secure Russia's geopolitical interests'.

On the radar

- **The 2nd Annual Arctic Marine Logistics and Infrastructure Forum** will be held on 25-27 November in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- **The North Norway European Office is to hold a humans in the arctic seminar** on 26 November in Brussels, Belgium.
- **Clashes may occur between right wing nationalists and left wing counter demonstrators in Sweden on 30 November** one the day that marks the anniversary of the death of King Charles XII in 1718.

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Analysts: Laura Hartmann, Tancrède Feuillade, Gary Chan, Claudia Wagner, Daniel Taylor, Patrick Sewell, and Chris Abbott.