

The weekly briefing | 28 October 2013

Political and security risk update

Africa: Ethiopian troops arrive in south of Somalia for mediation talks between the federal government and a Sufi paramilitary group.

Americas: Wave of violent demonstrations in Brazil amid sustained popular discontent.

Asia and Pacific: Shinzo Abe approves plan to allow the Japan Air Self-Defence Force to engage drones violating Japanese airspace.

Europe: Germany and France to renegotiate intelligence cooperation with the United States following revelations of widespread US eavesdropping on European leaders.

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Polar regions: Russian prosecutors to drop piracy charges levelled against Greenpeace activists in the Arctic 30 case but will seek hooliganism convictions.

Africa

Ethiopian troops arrive in south of Somalia for mediation talks between the federal government and a Sufi paramilitary group

On 26 October, Ethiopian troops arrived in the south of Somalia to help resolve long-running grudges between the federal Somali government troops and Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a, a Sufi militia opposed to al-Shabaab. Looming threats of instability had manifested on the previous day in clashes between the two forces, in which three people were killed. Ethiopian troops requested both sides to come to the negotiating table over the matter. It was reported that Ethiopian soldiers set up temporary positions in the outskirts of the Gedo regional town of Beled Hawo.

This latest development signifies the greater involvement of Ethiopia in Somalia's domestic affairs. Ethiopian troops intervened in south Somalia in late 2006 but withdrew in early 2009. Since then, Ethiopian troops have been actively involved in southern Somalia's troubled regions of Gedo, Bakool and Bay in support of the Somali federal government's security operations.

The further involvement of Ethiopian troops in Somalia is likely to provoke militant groups such as al-Shabaab, who have repeatedly stressed their objection to Kenyan and Ethiopian intervention in their internal affairs. This objection has manifested in numerous border clashes between the two sides, and more recently, a failed bomb attack in which two Somali men were killed in Addis Ababa.



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

Other developments

On 24 October, Ethiopian troops reinforced Somali government troops in a battle against al-Shabaab militants in the Bay region of southern Somalia. The fighting began when Somali government troops engaged al-Shabaab militants after they had set up an illegal roadblock in the Ufurow district. According to reports, approximately 10 troops from both sides were killed and the al-Shabaab fighters fled the area when Ethiopian troops arrived. The federal Somali government has been attempting to reassert control over the southern regions and has been successful in removing al-Shabaab militants from numerous strategic border towns.

Approximately four civilians were killed and 14 others wounded in a grenade attack that targeted Somali federal government soldiers in the Lower Shabelle region of south Somalia. Unidentified assailants launched the attack in a busy market. Soldiers responded with gunfire, which according to some reports killed and wounded nearby civilians. Such attacks have been commonplace since Somali troops backed by African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops successfully drove al-Shabaab militants from the region.

On 20 October, a delegation headed by the United Nations Special Representative to Somalia, Nicholas Kay, arrived in Puntland for reconciliation and security talks. According to reports, issues such as the further democratisation of Puntland were discussed with the President of Puntland Abdirahman Farole. This visit will inevitably be seen as a boost to the legitimacy of the Puntland government, who have been engaged in a power struggle with the federal government over their powers to grant foreign companies oil exploration licenses within the semi-autonomous territory.

On the radar

- **President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is due to travel to Kismayo** in southern Somalia to hold talks with the Jubbaland president, Ahmed Madobe.

– *Mohammad Nur*

Americas

Wave of violent demonstrations in Brazil amid sustained popular discontent

Weekly clashes between protestors and Brazilian security forces have occurred since the beginning of October. Last week, two further peaceful demonstrations turned into violent protests. The first, on 21 October, targeted the Libra oil exploration auction in Rio de Janeiro and left five injured. The second, on 25 October, was directed against public transport fares in São Paulo and resulted in 92 arrests. In both cases, the presence of the Black Bloc anarchist group among the demonstrators spurred confrontation with the security forces.

Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff condemned these incidents as 'anti-democratic brutalities'. However, these protests are symptomatic of wider problems. The public school teachers' 79 days strike that has just ended, the current stand-off with banking sector employees and the recent demands from military forces are all suggest a broader malaise shared across different segments of Brazilian society.

Following the June 2013 protests, in which millions of Brazilians took on to the streets to express their grievances, Rousseff proposed a series of political and economic reforms. The president's move succeeded in calming the situation at the time but structural changes have yet to be introduced and the much publicised plebiscite on political reform failed to receive congressional approval on 10 July. Although the current demonstrations are less intense than last summer, the current climate suggests that a return to the June mass protests could happen at any moment.

Other developments

Peruvian police forces report the capture of a suspected leader of an armed group made up of remnants of the Sendero Luminoso. The Shining Path used to be a major Maoist insurgent group in Peru. At present, the group's main operations consist of raising finances through the illicit drugs trade and kidnappings. Founded in 1980, its activity declined following successive counter-insurgency operations in the 1990s. The capture of Rolando Pantoja Quispe is likely to further weaken what is left of the fragmented organisation.

Colombia's indigenous community reaches an agreement with the government following a national strike. Indigenous representatives have approved a 25-point agreement with the government over territorial and human rights matters. The agreement likely paves the way for further demands from Colombia's large indigenous community.

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has been severely criticised by local media for his faint-hearted response to US spying claims. Following the accusations that the NSA hacked the then President Felipe Calderon's public email account in 2010, Nieto's response has been to summon the US ambassador. Mexico City's weak response lies in contrast with Brasilia's, where US spying allegations led President Rousseff to postpone her state visit to Washington.

On the radar

- **Results due in the 27 October midterm congressional elections in Argentina**, which will seal the fate of President Fernandez's Victory Front party.
- **Nationwide demonstrations called by the Democratic coordinator in Paraguay** for 28 October to denounce a proposed privatisation law.
- **Localised disruption and unrest likely in Haiti** in the coming weeks due to continuing opposition protests against President Michel Martelly's administration.

– *Tancrede Feuillade*

Asia and Pacific

Shinzo Abe approves plan to allow the Japan Air Self-Defence Force to engage drones violating Japanese airspace

According to government sources, Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, has given his approval to a plan that will allow the Japan Air Self-Defence Force to engage unmanned aerial vehicles violating the country's airspace. China's defence ministry responded saying, 'If Japan does resort to enforcement measures like shooting down aircraft, that is a serious provocation to us, an act of war.'

These are the latest in a series of provocations by both China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands territorial dispute. Japan controversially purchased three of the islands from the Kurihara family in 2012, which promoted the long-unsettled dispute to the forefront of the relationship between Tokyo and Beijing.

Territorial and maritime disputes remain a great source of volatility in the region. The issue has greatly transformed Japanese strategic planning and electoral politics. General anxiety over Chinese regional ambitions has prompted a nationalistic upsurge in Japan. Although it will be seen as justified by some, intercepting or shooting down foreign drones will be seen by others as a further step away from Japan's constitutional pacifism.

Other developments

South Korean forces have carried out a military drill on the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands.

Though the islands have been occupied by South Korea since 1954, both South Korea and Japan lay claim to the territory on the basis of long-standing historical ties. The South Korean defence ministry insists that the islands 'would be defended by South Korea, in whatever circumstances.' There has, however, been no immediate backlash from the Japanese government.

The sultanate of Brunei has announced a strict new code of Sharia law that will apply to Muslims only. Measures include capital punishment by stoning for adultery, dismemberment for theft and flogging for the consumption of alcohol. Brunei already adheres to the strictest form of Islamic law in the region and this new code, which will be enforced in six months, will further differentiate Brunei from neighbouring Muslim countries Malaysia and Indonesia.

South Korean officials say that North Korea has returned six South Korean defectors. In a rare move, the men were handed over on 25 October at the truce village of Panmunjom, which lies on the border between the two countries. This seems to be an attempt to soothe relations following North Korea's controversial cancellation of the annually organised event where families who have been split by the 38th parallel following the Korean War are temporarily reunited.

On the radar

- **The first round of the re-run for the Maldivian presidential election** will take place on 9 November. Protests, strikes and allegations of harassment will likely continue.
- **Beijing will send a team of officials to Japan** this month to garner expertise and technological know-how to use in the effort to tackle air pollution.
- **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has prepared a new law that seeks tougher penalties for leaking classified information** on defence and diplomatic issues.

– Gary Chan

Europe

Germany and France to renegotiate intelligence cooperation with the United States following revelations of widespread US eavesdropping on European leaders

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that together with French President Francois Hollande she will be launching a joint initiative to renegotiate their intelligence services cooperation with the United States. She said protocols must be met following revelations of widespread US eavesdropping on European leaders. Merkel said other countries were welcome to join the initiative but at the outset they would involve only parallel bilateral efforts between US intelligence agencies and, separately, Paris and Berlin. She said she and Hollande hoped to complete the agreements with the United States by the end of the year.

The current antagonism between the United States and some European countries could impact further trade talks between the European Union and United States, with the second round of talks already cancelled. The move could also foretell Europe-wide data protection laws that will affect the Big Data Industry, which specialises in the collection and analysis of complex data sets whose work is of critical importance to the technology sector including Facebook, Ebay and Amazon. The Industry needs lower privacy standards in order to maximise the value of individuals' personal information; tighter privacy laws could lead to lower profits for the sector. However, there seems to be little desire for a specific EU legal framework for data protection. Instead, Germany, along with Brazil and a growing number of other countries, has drafted a somewhat general UN document calling for the right to privacy to be upheld in online communications, while the European parliament has passed limited legislation restricting the ability of US telecoms firms to export European user data to the United States.

What may really be at stake is Germany's desire to form an intelligence pact with the United States along the lines of the Five Eyes agreement. Five Eyes is an agreement drawn up between the United States and the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia and New Zealand following World War II. It involves cooperation in signals intelligence between the five countries and an understanding that they will not spy on one another. Germany has reportedly been seeking such an agreement for years but has been repeatedly snubbed by US officials.

Other developments

The Czech legislative elections have ended with the Social Democrats as the winners after having garnered 20.5% of the vote. ANO, a pro-business party founded by Slovak Billionaire Andrej Babis came second with 18.7% followed by the Communist Party with 14.9%. Having failed to gain a majority with the Communists, their natural ally on economic policies, the Social Democrats need an agreement with the other parties, who are opposed to some of their most important priorities such as tax increases on top-income earners and debt limits. ANO, which ran on an anti-political corruption platform, stated that they will reluctantly back a Social Democratic government if there is a policy overlap. The only way for the Christian Democrats to be enticed into a government is through some form of power sharing given their stated intent to play a more active role in formulating their own policies.

Around 2,000 Golden Dawn supporters demanded the release of party leader Nikos Michaloliakos outside the Greek neo-Nazi party's offices in Central Athens. Golden Dawn's image has been tarnished recently following the stabbing of rapper Pavlos Fyssas and consequent criminal charges. Funding for the party has been cut and their MPs have been stripped of their immunity. But the party still remains the third largest party despite its damaged popularity and the polls may not be accurate given many people's reluctance to publicly show support for the party following revelations of its criminal activity. The likely stability of Golden Dawn's support reflects the economic roots of the rise of the far right in Greece.

EU leaders have put off any immediate change to European migration policy until June 2014. In the 25 October meeting in Brussels, the EU ruled out any appraisals of a long-term strategy on the immigration crisis for at least eight months. Short-term measures will include the strengthening of the EU's border management agency, Frontex. Germany is resistant of any proposal to spread immigrant flows across the EU through a common immigration policy because they have already accepted more asylum seekers than any other European state. Given high unemployment and current public opposition to further flows of immigration it is not surprising that Germany and other European countries are reluctant to change conventional policy.

On the radar

- **The International Atomic Energy Agency will convene in Vienna** on Monday to discuss Iran's nuclear programme.
- **EU diplomat Pierre Vimont to visit Israel this week** to discuss a recent row regarding new EU guidelines covering Jewish settlement on Palestinian land.

– *Stelios Papadopoulos*

Middle East

NGO reports renew concerns over US drone strike programmes in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere

On 22 October, Human Rights Watch published a report concerning US drones strikes in Yemen. The report examined six unacknowledged US military attacks targeting alleged members of al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula. The attacks, taking place in 2009 and 2012-13, killed 82 people, with claims that at least 57 of these were civilians. Amnesty International also released a report, highlighting the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by the US in strikes on suspected terrorists in northwest Pakistan's tribal areas. The report condemns the lack of transparency surrounding the US drone programme and investigates incidents involving the deaths of civilians that could amount to war crimes under international law. A further report released by War Child, details how automated weapons, such as unmanned drones, are unsuitable for use in internal conflicts. War Child highlighted the failure of such weapons to distinguish between combatants and civilians, including children.

The latest reports and criticisms are likely to fall on deaf ears in Washington due to the ease with which drones can be deployed and the lack of risk involved to US and allied troops. As with previous strikes in Yemen and Pakistan, the CIA has refused to investigate and acknowledge allegations of civilian deaths as a result of drones. Such a lack of transparency makes it difficult to scrutinise incidents that may, indeed, have broken international law.

Washington has repeatedly claimed that drones have killed very few civilians and remain the strategic option least likely to result in civilian casualties. Drone usage is a controversial topic in international law and relies upon the technological capability of the drones in tracking and verifying targets. However, a lack of transparency and disclosure of information brings strikes, such as those mentioned in the reports, into disrepute. The reports coincided with meetings between US President Barack Obama and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to discuss concerns over the use of drone attacks.

Other developments

Further deaths across Iraq as attacks increase, targeting both civilians and security forces. On 20 October, eight suicide bombers targeted police stations and checkpoints close to Baghdad, leaving eight dead including council members and policemen. On the same day, a car bomb targeted the house of a police chief in the town of Tikrit, killing 10 civilians. Later that night, a suicide bomber drove his car into a cafe in Baghdad's Amil neighbourhood, killing 36 people. Further reports emerged on 22 October that up to 25 members of the security forces were killed as suicide bombers and gunmen targeted checkpoints in the western province of Al Anbar. Figures obtained by the Associated Press place the death toll for October at over 520. Iraq Body Count places the number of civilian deaths for October at 827. Violence in Iraq has been on the rise since April 2013 and may be attributed to groups reinvigorated by the war in Syria, such as local al-Qaeda affiliates and marginalised Sunni groups.

Violent clashes erupted in Tripoli, Lebanon, following a television interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad broadcast on 21 October. Six people have been killed and a further 50 wounded in neighbourhoods home to supporters and opponents of the Syrian president over five days. The violence between residents is reported to have been the fiercest since renewed sectarian tensions spilled over from Syria, with machine guns, rockets and mortar rounds being used. Security forces have been deployed to return order to the neighbourhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh.

A suicide truck bomb targeted a checkpoint on the outskirts of Hama, Syria, on 20 October, leaving at least 30 dead. State media reported that the Syrian opposition drove the truck into the checkpoint at the eastern gate to the city. On 25 October, a car bomb was detonated in the Damascus province town of Suq Wadi Barada, killing at least 20 people. The blast occurred close to a mosque in the opposition held town, however both government and opposition groups have blamed each other for the incident.

On the radar

- **The joint mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations** is expected to report on the progress of the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme on 1 November.
- **Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is due to meet with President Obama** in Washington on 1 November.
- **The Syrian National Coalition is expected to convene in Istanbul on 1 November** to discuss whether or not they will take part in peace talks in Geneva next month.

– Daniel Taylor

Polar regions

Russian prosecutors to drop piracy charges levelled against Greenpeace activists in the Arctic 30 case but will seek hooliganism convictions

Spokesman for the Russian Investigative Committee Vladimir Markin this week told the Itar-Tass news agency that Russian prosecutors are to drop the piracy charges levelled against Greenpeace activists in the Arctic 30 case. The case was opened shortly after an 18 September environmental protest staged by Greenpeace activists on the Prirazlomnoye oil rig in the Pechora Sea. The 23 October statement does not, however, signal the end of the case: Markin announced that prosecutors were still pursuing a hooliganism charge, which carries a maximum seven-year prison sentence.

Far from welcoming the news, Greenpeace representatives fear that the much more subjective charge of hooliganism will be easier to prove in court, making a prison sentence for the activists more likely. However, it is unlikely that the difficulty of proving the original piracy charges would have prevented a guilty verdict; in Russia, cases of national importance such as this are usually determined by politicians rather than judges. Given that Russian President Vladimir Putin stated his scepticism towards the piracy charges soon after the case began, the new development is likely to be a sign from the Investigative Committee that it is not intending to act independently but rather to interpret and follow the presidential lead.

Those seeking the activists release should thus concentrate their efforts on the president. Last week's phone call from Angela Merkel was a powerful contribution to such diplomacy, and should be followed by similar appeals from those world leaders who exercise some kind of influence over Putin. On the other hand, the tougher approach taken by the Dutch authorities could be counterproductive, affording more hardline figures in the Investigative Committee and parliament the opportunity to exploit the narrative of western attacks on Russian sovereignty. With the correct combination of domestic and foreign pressure, the Greenpeace activists could be spared a Russian jail sentence.

Other developments

Officials from Russia's Foreign Ministry informed their Dutch partners on 23 October that Moscow will not participate in the case that Amsterdam is preparing for the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Dutch lawyers hope to use the international court to force the release of the Dutch-registered Arctic Sunrise along with its crew, the 30 Greenpeace activists who are currently awaiting trial in the northern Russian city of Murmansk. Russian officials assert that according to Russia's 1997 ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the sea, they have no obligation to take part in settlement procedures that are concerned with the enforcement of its territorial rights.

The Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials held their first meeting under Canada's Arctic Council chairmanship in Whitehorse, Yukon, 21-23 October. Leona Aglukkaq, the Canadian Minister for the Arctic Council and its current chair, named responsible resource development, safe Arctic shipping and sustainable circumpolar communities as the Council's top priorities over the next two years of Canada's chairmanship.

Iceland's finance minister, Bjarni Benediktsson, expressed doubts that a national referendum regarding Iceland's possible entry into the European Union would take place during his tenure. EU accession talks have stalled since the financial crisis, and with Iceland holding several high profile Arctic conferences in the last week it is possible that the small island nation sees its future not with the EU but as a kind of Arctic 'hub' state.

On the radar

- **The Royal United Services Institute is to hold a one day conference on polar issues** entitled Poles Apart? on 29 October.
- **The Russian Ministry of Regional Development is expected to publish its 2 trillion rouble (\$63 billion) plan 'Social and economic development of the Arctic zone of Russia for the period up to 2020'** on 1 November.

– *Patrick Sewell*

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