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Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Libyan parliament rejects prime minister's new cabinet as conflict widens to key institutions

On 18 September, Libya's elected parliament rejected the new 16-member cabinet named the previous day by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni after weeks of deliberations over the country's political future. The House of Representatives ordered the prime minister to put forward a cabinet of 10 members or less. The rejection further weakens al-Thinni's position after his government was forced to flee from Tripoli when rebels seized the capital last month.

Three years after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya is dominated by fighting divided along several tribal, ideological and geographical lines. Al-Thinni, acting prime minister since March 2014, originally stood down following elections in June, but was reappointed by the new parliament in early September. However, now working from the eastern city of Tobruk, his government has failed to impose order. Clashes between armed groups have incapacitated operations at the country's largest refinery in Zawiya, in addition to the El Sharara oil field in the Murzuq Desert. The shutdown is a huge issue for the Libyan government, as the facilities supply fuel commodities to the capital and the rest of western Libya.



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Concerns over Libya's future and the risk of further fighting between rebels are hitting the country's economic life, just as the Libyan oil industry began to revive over the course of the summer after major eastern oil ports reopened following the end of a rebel blockade. The divisions are now threatening to reach the country's central bank, after the House of Representatives dismissed its governor over allegations that he was siding with the rival assembly, General National Congress, re-established by an alliance led from Misrata in northwest Libya. The conflict is increasingly widening to Libya's key institutions, causing greater instability and posing risks to the country's long-term cohesion.

Other developments

Seven doctors and journalists supporting an Ebola awareness campaign were found dead in the Nzérékoré region of southeast Guinea. They had been reported missing on 16 September following an attack by local residents who believed that the campaigners were intent on spreading the deadly virus as opposed to creating awareness. Rural areas of the country, particularly the Guinée Forestière region, continue to oppose the government's efforts to combat and raise awareness of the virus, and often meet aid workers and campaigners with hostility and distrust. The recent killings follow an attack on 28 August on medical workers who had been deployed to a local market area to spray chemical sanitiser to prevent the spread of the virus. In its first emergency meeting on a public health crisis, the UN Security Council declared the Ebola outbreak in West Africa a threat to peace and security. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that the UN will deploy a Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) to stop the outbreak, treat those infected and preserve stability in the affected countries. The international organisation called for a 20-fold increase in assistance, with critical needs totalling almost \$1 billion.

On 17 September, Muhamed Ibrahim, assistant chief of township division of the East district of Mandera, Kenya, died from injuries he received when attackers fired shots and threw hand grenades as he arrived back at his residence in the evening. No entity has yet claimed responsibility. Governor Ali Roba speculated that the attack could not be blamed on clan fighting, as the assistant chief did not come from either of the clans that have been fighting in Mandera. It is thought that the attackers are likely members of the al-Shabaab Islamist extremist group, which has targeted officials in similar attacks in Mandera.

On the radar

- **The UNC, UDPS and MPCR opposition parties plan to rally on 27 September in Kinshasa,** the capital of Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- **On 26 September, a framework report is due on peace, security and cooperation in the Democratic Republic of Congo,** together with a report on the stabilisation mission in the country (MONUSCO).
- **Tensions are rising between Botswana's government and Chinese businesses over large building projects** as the election campaign heats up.
- **A new food crisis is looming in Somalia for 130,000 people displaced by the continuing fighting** between government forces, supported by African Union forces, and al-Shabaab militants.

Americas

'Vulture funds' increase pressure on Argentina amid unresolved sovereign debt case

The Argentine pesos reached an alarming low point on 17 September, as it plunged against the US dollar in the country's informal exchange market, pushed by rate speculation. The dramatic depreciation of the national currency in the black market was triggered by renewed concerns over the solvency of the Argentine state amid the unresolved legal dispute between the government and Elliott Management Corporation, a hedge fund that specialises in speculation on distressed debt. The so-called 'vulture funds' have pursued the Argentine government in US courts for over a decade to claim for full repayment on purchased defaulted debt in 2001. In a ruling earlier this year, the funds succeeded in blocking interest payments on Argentine bonds abroad until they receive full compensation for their share of the purchased debt, pushing the country into a technical default. However, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has staunchly refused to compromise with the 'vultures', and so the funds use other means to pressure the government into complying with the ruling. To that end, Elliott Management Corporation has notably contracted Albright Stonebridge Group, a consulting group led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former National Security Advisor Samuel Berger and former Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, to negotiate with the government.

The increased pressure applied by the hedge funds on the Argentine state has radicalised the government's discourse. This was recently highlighted in the threats issued by Argentine's foreign minister, Héctor Timerman, against the current US interim ambassador to Argentina, Kevin Sullivan, after the US diplomat warned over the negative potential consequences of not respecting the latest legal ruling. Over the past year, Fernández's political party, the Front for Victory (FPV), has increasingly turned the Argentine legal dispute with the 'vulture funds' into a political struggle to bolster its support base. As a result, Fernández's approval rating has surged in recent months in spite of the country's poor economic performance and the problem of rampant inflation. Furthermore, the radicalisation of the government's populist rhetoric has strengthened the country's atypical presidential system, which is underscored by the influence exerted by Fernández and her family. As such, for the very first time, on 13 September, Fernández's son, Maximo Kirchner, gave a public speech in the capital, Buenos Aires, before 40,000 supporters of La Cámpora – a radical political youth organisation affiliated with the FPV.

The ongoing legal dispute constitutes a lucrative political platform for Fernández. The increasing pressure exerted by the hedge funds has therefore resulted in the government adopting a more radical posture instead of a more conciliatory one. Following the Argentine congress approval of a new Foreign Debt Payment Bill on 18 September, a new law will enter into force that would technically allow the government to pay its foreign-currency denominated bonds locally or in France. However, it is unlikely that such law would comply with the US ruling, and seems to serve a more political purpose.

Other developments

On 17 September, a march organised by Ecuador's largest union, the United Front of Workers, ended with clashes between protesters and police in the streets of the capital, Quito. The march mobilised indigenous peoples, students and pensioners in protests against several labour policies promoted by President Rafael Correa's government. The protests represent one of the greatest public demonstrations under the Correa government in years. On 19 September, further clashes were reported, and some union leaders threatened to organise a nationwide strike.

Aquiles Gómez Martínez, one of the brothers of Servando Gómez, leader of the Knights Templar's drug cartel, was found dead on 19 September at his private residence in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán state, Mexico. Martínez was found dead with a gunshot wound to the mouth in a suspected suicide, though authorities have commenced an investigation. The Knights Templar's is a Mexican drug cartel that has taken hold in the Michoacán region over the past decade. However, since 2012, local civil militias have fought back against the cartel, and succeeded in occupying its stronghold, Apatzingán. In 2014, the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto agreed to legalise most civil militias as 'rural guards'. In spite of several setbacks, the Knights Templar continues to control several villages in the region, and their leader Gómez remains at large.

Dozens of people were arrested during the eviction of people from an occupied building in Brazil's economic centre, São Paulo, on 16 September. The eviction from an old hotel hosting over 200 families turned violent as police officers clashed with the evicted inhabitants in the centre of the city. The police have been accused of using excessive force, but the criticism has so far been rejected by the head of the operation. The lack of affordable housing in São Paulo has become a severe problem in recent years, with groups claiming the occupation of abandoned buildings is in response to the housing crisis.

On the radar

- **Uruguay's general election is scheduled for 26 October.**
- **Venezuelan government has extended the night closure of its border with Colombia** for an additional three months.
- **Peru's regional and municipal elections are on 5 October.**
- **Customs staff in Argentina are to strike between 24 and 28 September.** Operations at border crossing and airports to be affected.

Asia and Pacific

China and India sign multiple trade and investment agreements despite ongoing border conflict

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Ahmedabad, India, on 17 September, beginning his three-day visit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the meetings in Delhi and Ahmedabad, the two leaders signed at least 12 agreements on bilateral investment and trade. One of the deals included \$20 billion Chinese investment in Indian infrastructure projects over the next five years, which will largely address India's outdated railway system. In addition, China also agreed to help India establish industrial parks in Gujarat and Maharashtra. The two leaders also discussed joint space exploration and civil nuclear cooperation. Earlier this month, Japan also expressed interest in accelerating nuclear cooperation with India. China and India join the United States, France, and Russia in pursuit of investment in India's nuclear energy sector. Earlier this month, India finalised a deal with Australia to purchase increased quantities of uranium fuel.

Whilst Xi and Modi were engaged in negotiations, tensions remained high in the northeastern region of India-controlled Kashmir. From October to November 1962, India and China fought a brief border war in the region. Although the Chinese won control over the Aksai Chin, the region remains contested. Indian media have recently been reporting on alleged incursions into Indian-claimed territory. On 10 September, Indian soldiers and members of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police reported that at least 200 Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers and at least 12 heavy-duty vehicles and construction equipment entered Indian territory. They reportedly were constructing a temporary road, about two kilometres in length. Indian troops reportedly confronted the Chinese soldiers, but the incident did not lead to violence. Indian troops reportedly later destroyed the Chinese-built road.

In addition to the elevated tensions on the disputed India-China border, the Indian president, Pranab Mukherjee, signed several deals in Hanoi, Vietnam, with Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang. The deals included defence procurement, air transportation and, most notably, oil and gas exploration. The two parties signed a letter of intent for a joint venture between state oil companies ONGC Videsh and Petro Vietnam to begin exploration and development of two oil blocks off Vietnam's coast. Chinese officials have stated that they do not recognise the deal, as it takes place in what China considers its territorial waters. Despite recent developments, it is very unlikely that such conflict will disrupt economic relations between China and India. The two leaders acknowledged the need to resolve border disputes and further deepen economic relations. Relations with India are an important part of China's international strategy in the Asia-Pacific, and such disagreements regarding the line of control in the disputed territory are unlikely to derail major investment deals.

Other developments

The US Senate armed services committee released a report on 17 September accusing Chinese hackers of penetrating the US Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) server network on at least 20 occasions. TRANSCOM is the unified command that manages the global transportation of US military equipment and personnel. Among the more serious hacking incidents, one reportedly resulted in the loss of sensitive military documents, flight plans and the login information of numerous employees and contractors. All of the attacks are believed to have been affiliated with the Chinese military. The majority of the attacks targeted systems operated by contracted government employees, likely with less sophisticated defence systems against digital attacks. In May 2014, the US justice department indicted five People's Liberation Army employees on charges of hacking into computers operated by several large US companies. Despite the report's findings, such attacks at the present level of severity are unlikely to significantly alter US-China relations.

Australian police arrested 15 suspected terrorists in Sydney on 18 September. Australian authorities reported that more than 800 officers participated in over 20 raids, which led to the arrests of several individuals allegedly affiliated with the Islamic State (IS). According to Australian intelligence, the suspects had been planning to carry out acts of terrorism in Australia, including the abduction and beheading of members of the public. At least one of the 15 arrested has already been charged with terrorism offences. Authorities also conducted searches in Brisbane. Earlier in September 2014, two individuals were arrested in Brisbane and accused of allegedly recruiting and providing financial backing to terrorist groups operating in Syria. Additionally, Australia has recently, for the first time since 2003, elevated its terror alert level to high. Australia has agreed to send military forces to join a growing international coalition to counter the Islamic State. On 22 September, the Islamic State released a video in which their spokesman Muhammad al-Adnani urged IS followers to kill civilians in the West, including Australia.

Malaysian authorities have tightened security measures after four Chinese Uighurs were arrested in Indonesia on 18 September. The individuals arrested are suspected of maintaining links to the Islamic State and the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement. The individuals reportedly travelled through Malaysia using fraudulent Turkish passports purchased in Thailand. A specialised division of the Indonesian police arrested seven individuals on suspected terrorist activities in Poso, Indonesia. A local source indicated that the suspects were likely planning to join a terrorist organisation in Sulawesi. This region is reportedly home to a number of radical groups with links to the Islamic State. It is believed that approximately 100 Indonesians and between 50 and 100 Chinese individuals are in Syria and Iraq fighting for IS.

On the radar

- **Thailand's finance ministry is expected to unveil a new farm subsidy scheme** next month.
- **Members of Japan's ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party, are expected to engage in bilateral talks with members of the Chinese government** as early as October.
- **Pakistan is expected to name the new head of its intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI),** this week.
- **Japanese and US trade officials will meet this week** to discuss the Trans-Pacific Partnership and expanding bilateral trade.

Europe

Ukraine signs association deal with European Union and grants limited self-governance to separatist regions

On 16 September, the Ukrainian and European parliaments ratified the EU association deal – a political and economic agreement between Ukraine and EU member states. However, following pressure from Russia, Ukraine and the European Union agreed to delay applying free-trade rules. The Ukrainian parliament also approved a law that grants special status to separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, including Lugansk and Donetsk. Under the new law, the separatist regions will have limited self-rule for a three-year period. Ukrainian deputies also passed a second law that offers amnesty to rebels who have fought against Ukrainian forces in recent months. Separately, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko visited the United States, and called for additional military assistance from the West during a joint session of the US Congress.

The association agreement recently signed with the EU was the same deal that the former Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, pulled out from signing in November 2013 – the act that set off Ukraine's current crisis. However, last week, the EU and Ukraine agreed to postpone the key part of the association agreement – the lowering of trade barriers between Ukraine and EU member states – until early 2016. The decision was made following threats by the Kremlin that Russia would block Ukrainian imports if the free-trade rules were applied. Russia is concerned because by signing the free-trade rules Ukraine would be pulled out of the Eurasian Economic Union – an economic union, between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia, built to rival the European Union.

Kiev is seeking to appease the rebels in order to ensure that the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine continues to hold. Although the ceasefire has held since 5 September, both sides have violated the peace plan, and on 15 September, four civilians were killed during clashes between government forces and rebels. However, calls from Poroshenko to US Congressmen that Ukraine needs military assistance, rather than the non-lethal equipment that President Barack Obama has so far committed to, indicate that Kiev may be anticipating a potential end to the ceasefire. There is also additional concern in the West that Russia may be looking to further intervene in the country, after President Vladimir Putin allegedly threatened Poroshenko that Russia could send troops to Kiev in two days. However, it is unlikely that the comments have any substance, as Putin is also rumoured to have mentioned invasion of Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw and Bucharest – all capitals of NATO-member countries.

Other developments

On 17 September, the Swedish Social Democrats called for centre-right parties to join together to prevent the far-right Sweden Democrats from forcing a new election. The Social Democrats fell short of winning a majority in the recent elections, winning 43.7% of the vote. The far-right and anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats won 13% of the vote – a sufficient amount to block the passing of the government's budget. The leader of Sweden Democrats, Jimmie Akesson, reported that the party was considering supporting an alternative budget to the one proposed by the government. All Swedish parliamentary parties have ruled out working with the Sweden Democrats. However, traditionally all parliamentary parties submit a budget to parliament, and so far the outgoing four-party Alliance, which had been in power for the last eight years, has insisted that it will be submitting its own budget.

Russia's investigative committee placed the billionaire Vladimir Yevtushenkov under house arrest on 16 September following the committee's announcement that Yevtushenkov was under investigation for money-laundering. Yevtushenkov is the majority shareholder and chairman of the AFK Sistema conglomerate, which owns Russia's largest mobile operator, MTS, and a controlling stake in oil company Bashneft. On 17 September, following the announcement of Yevtushenkov's arrest, shares in Sistema fell by 17%. Yevtushenkov was released from house arrest after three days. The committee reports directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and it is possible that Yevtushenko is being targeted, as the state-owned oil company Rosneft is seeking to gain control of Bashneft. Another possibility is that Yevtushenkov is being made an example of as a warning to other oligarchs unhappy with Putin because of the economic impact of Western sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement in eastern Ukraine.

On 17 September, Kosovan authorities arrested 15 individuals during an operation targeting members of the Islamic State. Local media reported that several imams had been detained, including the head of the Grand Mosque in Pristina. Authorities carried out the operations in Pristina, Prizren and the flashpoint town Mitrovica. Authorities reported that the arrests had been made following threats, and declined to publish the names of those arrested citing national security.

On the radar

- **US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker will visit Ukraine this week** to discuss reforms to stabilise Ukraine's economy and attract investment.
- **Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski will visit the United Nations in New York** next week.
- **Air France pilots affiliated to the SPAF and SNPL unions to extend their strike** until 26 September.

Middle East

UN-brokered peace deal announced between Yemen's rival Shi'ite Houthis and Sunni-led government

A UN-brokered peace deal between Yemen's Houthis and the Sunni-led government was announced on 20 September. The truce has been agreed following the escalation of violence within the country in recent weeks – the worst seen since authoritarian ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh was deposed in 2012. Houthi rebels, based in the country's north, have advanced their control of strategic towns leading to the capital, Sanaa, where protests have raged for the past several months. Clashes between Houthi and Yemeni armed forces have increased, resulting in the deaths of hundreds. The UN-brokered agreement has been reached following the rejection of a number of governmental overtures proposed by President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi in the hope of restoring stability to the heavily-troubled state.

Politically, the challenge remains to balance the demands of the Houthi while maintaining the country's democratic transition. The terms of the agreement are set to include formal representation of Houthi within the government's structure, potentially destabilising the south. Southern Yemen has embarked upon a sustained campaign of separatism against the state since its integration under Saleh in 1994, and harbours many members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, following the reinstatement of fuel subsidies earlier in the month, it remains unclear how long the impoverished country will be able to financially accommodate the demands of the Houthi and their domestic sympathisers.

Due to the economic picture within the country, the state remains heavily dependent on overseas investment and foreign aid; however, the security situation is likely to bring about a reduction in foreign involvement. Furthermore, the United Nations, while actively supporting Hadi's transition, is unlikely to increase any financial support to the government while opposition rebel groups remain armed. Conversely, the disarmament of the Houthis is unlikely to take place without the government first implementing tangible developments in awarding both political and economic concessions. As such, the agreement remains fragile, and violence is likely to continue.

Other developments

A road-side bomb killed six security officials in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula on 16 September. Whilst no group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, Sinai has been a hotbed for Islamic militant groups supportive of the imprisoned former president Mohammed Morsi. The al-Qaeda affiliated Ansar Beit al-Maqdis has claimed responsibility for similar attacks against state officials within the province in reprisal for crackdowns on Morsi supporters. Over 1,400 people have been left dead following the targeting of groups in the restive region in the last year. Al-Maqdis militants have been identified among some of the dead fighting alongside the Islamic States in conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Afghanistan's presidential candidates signed a power-sharing deal on 20 September, ending months of political dead-lock. Ashraf Ghani will be named the country's president in a ceremony due to take place this week. Rival candidate Abdullah Abdullah will either become or will nominate a chief executive officer with powers similar to those of prime minister, as well as appointing senior positions on terms of 'parity' with Ghani. Significantly, however, the results of the electoral commission's ballot re-count are yet to be announced, and the exact extent of Ghani's support base remains unknown. While the United States has heralded the power-sharing deal a success for the country, within Afghanistan the latest appointment is likely to witness greater disillusionment at the country's democratic capacity.

The Islamic State released 49 Turkish hostages in Iraq on 20 September, including of a number of diplomatic workers and their families. The hostages had been held captive by IS militants within northern Iraq over the past three months. The terms of their release have not been announced; however, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has stated that no ransom had been paid and the hostages were released thanks to a state-led intelligence operation. Turkey has been reluctant in recent months to join the international coalitions against IS – a position widely speculated to be reflective of the large number of Turkish hostages held by the group. However, with the latest hostage release, pressure is likely to mount on Turkey to become a base from which to launch counter-offensives against the Islamic State.

On the radar

- **Iranian nuclear talks to continue in New York**, with a proposed deadline for complete agreement on 24 November.
- **Second round of ceasefire talks expected to take place between Israel and Fatah and Hamas** in Cairo on 24 September.
- **September Revolution Day in Yemen on 26 September presents an increased risk of terrorism and protest activity.**
- **National Iraqi Day to be celebrated on 3 October presents increased risk of terrorist activity.**

Polar regions

Russian fighter jets and bombers enter US air defence identification zone off Alaska

Six Russian military planes were identified and intercepted by two Alaska-based F-22 US fighter jets on 17 September after entering the US Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) just west of Alaska. The Russian planes included two fighter jets, two long-range bombers and two refuelling planes. The following day, two Russian long-range bombers were intercepted by Canadian fighter jets after entering the Canadian ADIZ. The aerial interceptions were confirmed by the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) and US Northern Command (NORTHCOM).

The events illustrate a common occurrence in the region, with NORAD spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Michael Jazdyk stating that over 50 similar interceptions have occurred over the past five years. Whilst common, the actions are being taken seriously by NORAD and NORTHCOM, especially in light of the fact that all Vigilant Eagle training exercises between Russia and NORAD were cancelled earlier this month because of Russian actions in Ukraine. Undoubtedly Russian provocations such as these will garner an increased amount of attention from military and political officials in the West, as well as the general public, due to the current tensions between the two parties.

With political hostilities still running high, future actions such as these could easily result in accidents and miscalculations, or even confrontation between Russia and NORAD. Without the adequate de-escalation of hostilities between the West and Russia, military exercises should be considered as incredibly high risk due to the volatile potential of armed aerial interception.

Other developments

The Finnish government has approved plans for a new Russian-designed nuclear power plant.

Provided the final approval from parliament is secured, Pyhäjoki power plant is to be built south of Oulu in northern Finland after the Finnish coalition government approved its plans. The power plant has caused major controversy due to concerns over the safety of nuclear power and political hostilities with Russia, exasperated by Finland's proximity to Russia. The decision comes only weeks after the Finnish environment minister, Ville Niinistö, declared that further energy cooperation with Russia would be a 'step back' given the importance of reducing energy dependence on Russia.

Countries have agreed to increased scrutiny over Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean.

A resolution proposed by New Zealand at an International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting on 18 September was passed 35 votes to 20. The resolution maintains that, in accordance with findings declared earlier in the year by the International Court of Justice, 'special permits' for scientific research must be able to justify the necessity of killing whales as part of the research. Japanese whaling in the Antarctic remains a controversial matter, with Japanese intentions to resume whaling in the 2015-16 season amplifying the tensions.

The vice-president of Russian state-owned oil company Rosneft claims that the company is capable of continuing with its Arctic drilling ambitions without ExxonMobil. During the International Investment Forum 2014 held in Sochi, Russia, over the weekend, Rosneft's state secretary-vice president, Larisa Kalanda, maintained that Rosneft plans to continue working alone on its Kara Sea drilling project, originally embarked upon with ExxonMobil as a partner. As ExxonMobil has been forced to cease operations with Rosneft in the Arctic due to sanctions by the US government, Rosneft's future on the project had been unclear.

On the radar

- **The Arctic Council's emergency prevention, preparedness and response (EPPR) conference to take place in Arkhangelsk, Russia, between 23 and 25 September.**

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