

# The weekly briefing | 18 November 2013

Political and security risk updates

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**Africa:** State of emergency declared in Libyan capital as dozens killed in clash with militia.

**Americas:** Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro cracks down on private businesses in supposed economic war.

**Asia and Pacific:** Gambia severs diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

**Europe:** Polish far-right groups turn violent during national independence day march.

**Middle East:** Confidence in the Geneva talks between the P5+1 and Iran appears to be fading.

**Polar regions:** US Navy submarine presence in the Arctic jeopardised by budget cuts.

## Africa

### State of emergency declared in Libyan capital as dozens killed in clash with militia

A 48-hour state of emergency was declared in the Libyan capital on 16 November following clashes in which several dozens were killed and hundreds injured. In one of the worst outbreaks of fighting since the overthrow of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi, members of a militia from Misrata opened fire on around 500 protesters who had gathered outside the group's headquarters demanding their withdrawal on 15 November. Fighting intensified throughout the night, with Libyan security forces trying to seal off streets around the incident in the Gharghur district. On 16 November, further clashes occurred between rival gunmen at checkpoints in Tajoura, east of Tripoli, set up to prevent more militia fighters from entering the city.

The protests against the militia's presence in Tripoli were backed by imams at Friday prayers as well as by the mufti, the country's highest religious authority. Since the previous week, with the Misrata militia entering the capital, street fighting has reached the most serious levels since the revolution. Struggling to contain the situation, the Libyan government has demanded the withdrawal of all militias from Tripoli to ensure a minimum of normal economic activity. Following the latest clashes, most businesses remained closed. Stark divisions in Libyan society and the military's weakness in attempts to control the local power centres that have remained since the uprising have meant that militias have been able to hold key points for months, blocking oil exports, Libya's main source of income.



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Failure to evict militia fighters from Tripoli would further weaken the position of the Libyan authorities under Prime Minister Ali Zeidan. Together with the precarious economic situation, this seriously threatens hopes for the country's transformation. Moreover, there is increasing concern about a spread of instability to neighbouring countries due to the seemingly unrestrained armed groups and overflow of weapons. Earlier this week, France announced it was considering increasing aid and counterterrorism training to Libya to prevent a spill over of militancy across the borders.

### **Other developments**

**The UN Security Council has rejected a resolution proposed by African states, led by Rwanda, to suspend the trial of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta** and his deputy president, William Ruto, at the International Criminal Court for one year. Eight members abstained from the vote on 15 November, ensuring the resolution fell below the number needed to pass. Kenyatta and Ruto are accused of crimes against humanity following the 2007 elections, when violent repression killed more than one thousand people. Meanwhile, a poll released on 14 November found that a majority of Kenyans were in favour of Kenyatta standing trial in The Hague. The trial will commence in February 2014.

**Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a French priest in northern Cameroon, close to the Nigerian border.** Georges Vandenbeusch was seized on 13 November, only days after the US government designated Boko Haram, as well as splinter group Ansaru, as terrorist organisations. Both groups have been blamed for increasingly violent attacks across Nigeria, with Boko Haram carrying out raids in villages in the Borno region in the early hours of 15 November. France issued a warning for citizens in Cameroon, amid concerns that Vandenbeusch has been taken across the border to Nigeria.

### **On the radar**

- **Ethiopia will repatriate nationals from Saudi Arabia** following clashes with security forces and allegations of torture.
- **The semi-autonomous Somali region of Puntland is waiting for international aid** after cyclone kills hundreds.
- **Guinean opposition parties have called for protests** after the country's Supreme Court rejected complaints against election results.
- **The campaign for parliamentary elections in Mauritania, boycotted by opposition parties, enters final week** before first round of elections.
- **Morocco hopes to attract foreign investors at Rabat summit** from 19 November.

## **Americas**

### **Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro cracks down on private businesses in supposed economic war**

In a public speech on 15 November, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro revealed the imprisonment of over 100 businessmen since last weekend. Mentioned for the first time a month ago, in his 'economic war' Maduro blames the private sector for the country's economic ills. He argues that the price of basic goods has been artificially inflated by those taking advantage of the difference between the official and black market values of the dollar compared to the Venezuelan bolivar. Year-on-year inflation is at 54% in Venezuela, with a 20% shortage of basic goods, according to figures from the Central Bank of Venezuela.

Maduro's economic war pledges to set legal limits on businesses' profit margins. Last weekend, authorities enforced a 50-60% discount on appliances in stores of the capital, Caracas. The enforced measures led to instances of riots and looting in some shops. Authorities have threatened that regular inspections will take place and arrests will be made of shop owners that do not comply with the government's price controls.

Price controls are expected to be expanded to all consumer goods. Goods in high demand, such as shoes, clothing and car parts, will be privileged targets. Beyond the technical implications of the economic war, the president's stance demonstrates the victory of radicals over moderate within Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). As such, the radicalisation of the Bolivarian socialist model with its associated distorted economic policies is likely to prevail in the near future.

### **Other developments**

**The Colombian government have uncovered a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) plot to assassinate former president Alvaro Uribe.** The revelation came about a week after a landmark agreement was reached between FARC and the Colombian government. Uribe was president from 2002 to 2010 and took a hardline approach to the FARC issue. He is the principal opponent of the current peace talks.

**On 16 November, an armed civilian militia group seized Tancitaro city hall in the State of Michoacan, Mexico.** The event occurred after a confrontation with the Knights Templar (Caballeros Templarios) cartel left three dead and two others injured. The region has been infested by the operations of drug trafficking cartels in recent months.

**Brazil's Supreme Court has ordered the arrest of 12 people convicted in the country's biggest corruption trial to date.** Referred as the Mensalao trial, the case involves politicians, businessmen and bankers accused of diverting public funds to buy political support during Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government between 2002 and 2005.

### **On the radar**

- **Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos to declare himself over his probable candidature** for the May 2014 presidential election.
- **Workers affiliated to the CTA union plan to hold nationwide protests across Argentina** on 20 November.
- **Localised unrest likely ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections in Honduras** on 24 November.
- **Further disruptive protests are possible across Chile** as an indefinite strike by municipal workers continues.
- **Planned anti-government demonstrations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti,** on 18 November.

## Asia and Pacific

### **Gambia severs diplomatic ties with Taiwan**

In a move that Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh's says is of 'national strategic interest', Gambia has severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan. No elaboration has been given of what these strategic interests are but Jammeh has expressed his desire to remain friendly with the Taiwanese people. Taiwan's official response was one of shock and regret.

It is likely Jammeh's move is designed to be a positive signal to China. Beijing has denied the existence of an independent Taiwan since the Chinese Nationalist Party (or Kuomintang) retreated to the island of Taiwan following defeat against the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Beijing has been investing heavily in Africa. The level of investment is substantial; the export of raw materials from Africa to China is indispensable and China's growing influence is significant.

China can exert significant amounts of soft-power and non-military influence in Africa. Taipei may find itself increasingly isolated as states continue to court China. Gambia was one of a few African countries to officially recognise Taiwan; only Swaziland, Burkina Faso and Sao Tome and Principe remain. However, officials in Sao Tome and Principe have recently confirmed that China plans to conduct a trade mission to promote infrastructure projects. This comes 16 years after Beijing broke off relations with the potential oil and gas producer in the Gulf of Guinea due to their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

### **Other developments**

**The UN International Court of Justice ruled on 11 November that most of the disputed lands surrounding the Preah Vihear temple on the border with Thailand should belong to Cambodia.** Both governments have welcomed the verdict and Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra called on Thais to accept the verdict. However, one Thai nationalist group, the Thai Patriotic Network, has said it would reject any judgement from the court. Cross-border fighting has been especially volatile since 2008 but many hope the independent ruling by the United Nations court will bring the dispute to an end.

**After months of turmoil, officials announced that Abdulla Yameen has won the presidential election run-off vote in the Maldives.** His opponent, Mohamed Nasheed, had won 47% in the first round earlier this month – just short of the 50% plurality – in an election process mired in controversy. Nasheed, however, has not yet publicly accepted defeat. The Maldives has faced months of political and legal wrangling that had begun to leave foreign diplomats especially concerned.

**Thailand's controversial political amnesty bill has been rejected by Thailand's senate.** The bill could have led to the return of the exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the pardoning of those who ordered police to open fire upon Thaksin's supporters in 2010. In an exceptional show of national solidarity, every member of the upper legislature voted against the bill's passage. Their decision was undoubtedly influenced by the tens of thousands of protestors who took to the streets of Bangkok and other major cities in a week long protest. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister and leading proponent of the bill, has promised to respect the senate's decision.

## On the radar

- **David Cameron, the British prime minister, continues to pressurise the Sri Lankan government to investigate human rights abuses** during the end of the country's civil war in 2009.
- **A national election will take place in Nepal on 19 November.** An opposition alliance continues to obstruct election-related activities and seek to prolong political instability.
- **As the Philippines recover from typhoon Haiyan, President Aquino's handling of the disaster continues to be scrutinised** and corruption within the country's authorities continues to be highlighted by the media.
- **Hong Kong has threatened to impose economic sanctions on the Philippines** if substantial progress is not made to provide compensation for their incompetent handling of the 2010 Manila hostage crisis.
- **Heightened security measures are expected in Bachu, China, following a fatal clash between the police and suspected ethnic Uighurs attackers** on 16 November.

## Europe

### Polish far-right groups turn violent during national independence day march

On 11 November, a march in the capital commemorating Poland's national independence day turned violent for the third year in a row. Groups of masked youths set cars on fire and threw firecrackers at police, who used rubber bullets and tear gas to control the situation. The rally is organised by far-right and nationalist movements and it commemorates Poland regaining its independence at the end of the First World War in 1918.

The damage carried out by the rioters included the destruction of a rainbow-coloured arch symbolising diversity and tolerance. The Polish president was also forced to apologise after youths attempted to attack the Russian embassy, throwing firecrackers and scaling the building's fence before being stopped by police.

The violence at the march underscored ongoing political divisions in Polish society and the growing popularity of radical right-wing groups in recent years. Right-wing factions have won support in the aftermath of the economic recession and their claim of defending 'Polishness' in light of an increase in recent years in immigration, secularism and European integration. Polish non-governmental watchdogs have recorded an increase in racially-motivated violent incidents in the past year.

### Other developments

**On 16 November, thousands of Bulgarians rallied for and against the Socialist-led government.** At a rally in the capital Sofia, Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski vowed to stay in power and push for reforms to raise incomes and help the disadvantaged. In the second largest city Plovdiv, the main opposition GERB party staged a protest, demanding that the government resign and call a new election due to their incompetence and allegations of graft. The Socialists have held office since May, when the GERB government was forced to resign following mass protests over high utility bills and corruption. The current mass protests underline growing political divisions in the EU's poorest country.

**Silvio Berlusconi announced that his party, People of Freedom (PDL), had been rebranded to its original name, Forza Italia.** Berlusconi also indicated that he may no longer support Prime Minister Enrico Letta. The announcement came a day after a split in the centre-right movement, following a split from PDL of a group led by the interior minister and Berlusconi's former right-hand man, Angelino Alfano. Alfano's group, which includes 30 senators and 27 lower house deputies, have pledged to remain in Letta's coalition, which survived a confidence vote last month. Berlusconi himself faces expulsion from the Italian parliament, following his conviction of tax fraud in August.

**The Greek group Militant People's Revolutionary Forces claimed responsibility for the dawn drive-by shootings of two supporters of the far-right Golden Dawn party.** The previously unknown group announced that the shootings were a retaliation against the stabbing of anti-fascism rapper Pavlos Fissas, who was killed by an alleged member of Golden Dawn. Police have not confirmed the authenticity of this latest claim; however, there is increasing fear in the country of an escalation in political violence.

#### **On the radar**

- **Anti-austerity demonstration planned for 23 November in Bilbao, Spain.**
- **EU envoys will travel to Ukraine this week hoping to reach an agreement** on the imprisonment of the opposition leader, Yulia Tymoshenko.
- **The UN's Warsaw Climate Change Conference continues this week.**
- **Student unions have called for a nationwide strike across Spain on 20 November** to denounce proposed education reforms.
- **Localised disruption expected during planned protests in Lisbon, Portugal,** by transport workers on 19 and 20 November.

## **Middle East**

### **Confidence in the Geneva talks between the P5+1 and Iran appears to be fading**

The talks in Geneva between the P5+1 (United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France, plus Germany) and Iran occurred at a senior diplomatic level that has not been seen over the previous decade. However, progress in negotiations froze after France's foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, disagreed with the manner in which a draft agreement had been compiled between Iran and the United States, with little input from other group members. Due to this disagreement, the P5+1 were only able to produce a draft agreement as the talks came to an end, leaving the Iranians with little time to respond properly.

The revised proposal, backed by France, suggested that Iran stop work on a heavy-water nuclear reactor in Arak (capable of producing plutonium) and there would be no guarantee that Iran will have the right to enrich uranium. This revised proposal went beyond what Iran was willing to accept. However, Iran has agreed to increase transparency in its nuclear programme and inspectors will be allowed to enter nuclear sites in Arak and Gchine as cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continues. According to the IAEA, Iran's previously rapid increase in nuclear capability had slowed since August 2013. Despite this, Iranian officials continue to reiterate the country's right to enrich its own uranium and continue to develop its nuclear programme, instead of importing nuclear fuel.

It appears that the momentum has been lost during the most recent rounds of talks in Geneva and opposition and scepticism of Iran's nuclear programme remains. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has deplored any negotiations with Iran over their nuclear programme and cautioned the international community against lifting economic sanctions. Moreover, the United States Congress is due to proceed with plans to increase economic sanctions on Iran, which threatens to derail continued dialogue between Iran and the P5+1. Supporters of the crippling economic sanctions believe they have forced Iran to the negotiating table and any further squeeze would give Washington and its allies a greater leverage when negotiations resume. President Hassan Rouhani is also facing domestic opposition as he attempts to strengthen civil liberties.

### **Other developments**

**Attacks on Shia Iraqis coincide with the Shi'ite festival of Ashura.** Ashura is the most important event in the Shi'ite religious calendar and commemorates the death of Imam al-Hussein, who died over 1,000 years ago and signifies the split between Shia and Sunni Muslims. On 13 November, 10 people were killed as truck laden with explosives detonated at a security checkpoint close to Tikrit. The blast claimed the lives of two policemen and eight civilians. In a further attack, Shi'ite pilgrims were targeted in Baquba, north of Baghdad, leaving a reported 17 dead. More incidents of violence were reported as the holy festival came to an end on 14 November. A suicide bomber killed 35 people and wounded another 75 as pilgrims gathered to mark the end of the festival in the city of al-Sadiya. Iraqi sectarian violence has increased since Sunni fighters took up arms in neighbouring Syria.

**On November 11, the Syrian National Coalition, the internationally recognised opposition in Syria, announced that they had agreed to take part in the Geneva peace talks.** The Geneva II talks follow on from efforts in October to bring the fighting in Syria to a diplomatic end, backed by Russia and the United States. However, difference between Moscow and Washington emerged about the role that opposition groups would play. The Syrian opposition had also refused to attend talks if there were any chance that President Bashar al-Assad would remain in power. The coalition has since announced an interim government charged with governing opposition held territories and conditions for attending discussions in Geneva. However, the Syrian National Coalition still does not have widespread support within Syria. Infighting and a failure to recognise other opposition groups may prevent any successes in Geneva from being reflected on the ground. Meanwhile, Syrian security forces and pro-Assad fighters have reclaimed neighbourhoods in Damascus as part of a new offensive to secure Assad's control in the capital.

**Renewed ties between Russia and Egypt signify a shift in Egyptian foreign policy.** On 14 November, General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's army chief and defence minister, met with Russian officials in Cairo to discuss renewed cooperation between the two countries. The meeting came some 30 years after Egypt and the old Soviet Union were close allies. Despite no agreement being reached, renewed dialogue and cooperation comes after Washington announced its intention to suspend military aid to Egypt. This outreach to Moscow by Cairo represents discontent with Washington's withdrawal of military aid. However, Egypt remains a key strategic alliance for the United States and military aid has only been suspended. It is likely that military aid will resume when the interim government announces election plans for next year.

## On the radar

- **Negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme in Geneva are set to resume** on 20 November.
- **An estimated 2,500 tribal leaders in Afghanistan have been invited to a grand assembly** on 21 November.
- **US Secretary of State John Kerry will visit Israel on 22 November** to discuss Iranian nuclear talks and peace with the Palestinians with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- **The National Alliance to Support Legitimacy (NASL) have organised nationwide demonstrations across Egypt** on 19 November calling for the reinstatement of Mohamed Morsi.

## Polar regions

### US Navy submarine presence in the Arctic jeopardised by budget cuts

Rear Admiral Kenneth Perry of the US Navy expressed doubts in an interview with Associated Press on 13 November that Arctic training exercises for the submarine fleet would go ahead as originally planned in the spring of 2014. The intensity of US submarine operations in the Arctic has tapered off since the Cold War, but US submarines continue to maintain a presence there and transit the area when travelling between the Atlantic and the Pacific, Perry said. Arctic submarine exercises, known as the Ice Exercises, take place every three years. The last Ice Exercise was conducted in March 2011. Perry said that an attack submarine in Groton is being prepared for participation in an Ice Exercise planned for spring 2014, but also expressed uncertainty as to whether the exercise will take place due to budget pressures. Automatic budget cuts that started taking effect this year are slated to remove of total of \$480 billion from US defence programmes through to 2021.

In a different geostrategic environment Perry's revelations would most likely be unremarkable. However, Russia's politicians, generals and journalists have been conducting a highly visible and at times feverish military and ideological campaign to assert its supposed sovereignty in the Arctic over the last few months. This has included the reopening of military bases, the launching and design of new military and logistical ships, the severe response to a Greenpeace anti-drilling protest and a vitriolic campaign in the national press to denounce perceived opposition to Russia's claims in the area. Indications that the United States lacks the political will to meet this campaign with an adequate response are thus likely to become a cause of concern for hawks in the US military establishment.

There is a narrative currently popular amongst many political commentators that the Arctic will be an area of increasing competition as retreating ice caps open up the region to the extraction of its potentially massive oil and gas deposits and allow the exploitation of its promised Northern Shipping Route. However, the cost of oil and gas extraction in such extreme climates is still punitively high and the supposed economic benefits of the Northern Shipping Route remain in doubt. Thus while Russia races to spend huge resources on a project of doubtful economic benefit, US apparent unwillingness to enter into an Arctic arms race may reflect sound judgement rather than inherent weakness.



## Other developments

**Sweden's indigenous Arctic Sámi community are appealing to the UN to stop the government's plans to develop mining on Sámi territory.** The appeal to the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination was sent as a reaction to the Swedish government exploitation concessions to the company Nickelmountain AB, which plans to open a nickel mine in Rönnbäck in Tärnafjällen, in the indigenous reindeer herding district. The Sámi community claim that the construction of the mine will destroy pasture areas and migration routes essential for reindeer herding. The case is likely to be closely watched by the many other indigenous communities that live in Arctic states whose way of life is under threat from the plans to develop Arctic resources.

**A project in which Rosneft will allow Petrovietnam to explore for hydrocarbons in the Pechora Sea in the Arctic off northwest Russia was included amongst a raft of deals signed during a visit to Vietnam by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 12 November.** The announcement not only introduces an unexpected new player into the development of Arctic resources but has also shocked energy analysts as an unprecedented move by Rosneft to allow access to its jealously guarded Arctic resources to a foreign firm. The move indicates the possibility that Rosneft and Gazprom might invite the participation of other foreign firms to the development of Arctic oil and gas fields. Given the comparatively low technology base that Russia's state energy giants work from, such participation will be essential if Russia genuinely intends to exploit Arctic resources on any significant scale.

**The Arctic 30 activists arrested in Russia over a protest against Arctic oil drilling were moved from the northern city of Murmansk on 11 November on their way to pre-trial detention centres in St. Petersburg.** The likely reason behind the transfer is to curb international criticism of Russia for the conditions in which the activists have been held in Murmansk, allegedly confined for 23 hours a day in bleak and ice-cold cells. While Greenpeace expressed hopes that the move would give the activists, who hail from 18 different countries, better contact with their consular lawyers, the parents of detained British activists told journalists at a press conference after meetings with British Prime Minister David Cameron that they doubted it would bring the release of the detainees any closer.

## On the radar

- **Russia's Investigative Committee will apply for a three-month extension to the detention of the Arctic 30 this week.**
- **A spokeswoman for the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea suggested that a final decision on the Arctic Sunrise case against Russia could be delivered on 21 November,** though she added that this was only a conditional date.
- **Finnish Cabin Crew Union (SLSY) and Finnish Aviation Union (IAU) strikes have been avoided** after reaching an agreement, though a support strike is likely on 19 November.

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

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