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# Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 06 OCT - 13 OCT 2023



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Week 43: 06 October – 13 October 2023

## Executive Summary

- In the **United States**, the Republican party have failed to nominate a Speaker for the House of Representatives, likely increasing the chances of a government shutdown or legislative paralysis.
- A damaged pipeline and telecommunications cable between **Finland** and **Estonia** was likely the result of deliberate sabotage and will likely escalate tensions in the Baltic.
- It is highly likely that **Israel** will conduct a ground offensive into the **Gaza Strip** in response to Hamas' attack which will almost certainly lead to heavy casualties on both sides, the displacement of hundreds of thousands, a humanitarian crisis and much international condemnation.
- Thousands have been killed by earthquakes in western **Afghanistan** and it is unlikely adequate international aid will be able to reach the remote communities affected in an increasingly isolated country.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period (06 October 2023 – 13 October 2023)

### AMER

- 1 US:** Republican party fail to nominate a Speaker for the House of Representatives
- 2 Guatemala:** Protests turn violent amid power transfer obstruction
- 3 Ecuador:** All suspects in the assassination of the presidential candidate are killed in prison.

### EMEA

- 4 Finland and Estonia:** Potential gas pipeline and cable sabotage
- 5 Turkey:** Erdogan refuses to recognise the LGBT community at AK party rally
- 6 Israel and the Gaza Strip:** Israel declares war on Hamas after cross-border attack
- 7 Libya:** Rival factions clash in Benghazi

### APAC

- 8 Afghanistan:** Earthquakes and aftershocks devastate western Afghanistan
- 9 Myanmar:** Government forces strike IDP camp
- 10 Australia:** Journalist detained in China returns home



## Americas (AMER)

### The United States:

#### Republican party fails to elect a speaker for the House of Representatives.

The last reporting period has seen the Republican party fail to elect a Speaker of the House of Representatives. Steve Scalise was voted majority leader of the House by fellow Republicans on 11 October but withdrew his candidacy to be Speaker on 12 October after it became clear he would fall short of the 217 votes needed to be elected on the House floor, with as many as 20 fellow Republicans, most of them Jim Jordan supporters, saying they would not vote for him.

**Assessment:** It is almost certain that the failure to elect a Speaker of the House of Representatives within the Republican party has left a void in the leadership of one of the most crucial legislative bodies in the United States and could force the branch into a state of legislative paralysis. With no effective leadership, the House will likely struggle to pass essential bills, approve White House requests, or address budget concerns or international crises. It also increases the risk of a governmental shutdown, an occurrence that will have huge economic and political ramifications. It also has implications for international relations, potentially affecting the United States' capacity to provide aid and support during international conflicts, a situation the West will want to avoid given the war in Ukraine and the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It is almost certain that state actor's hostile to the United States, such as Russia and China that have autocratic governments, will point to this as a critical vulnerability and weakness in the American system. In order to secure a new speaker, the Republicans must come to some form of compromise as they only hold a slim majority of 221-212 in the House, yet the right-wing faction that ousted Kevin McCarthy is likely proving intransigent. There is a realistic possibility that bi-partisan cooperation could help to elect a speaker. However, with a presidential election campaign looming, it is more likely that the Democrats will look to undermine the Republican party as much as possible before the candidates take to the road.

### Guatemala:

#### Political volatility continues to increase in the aftermath of the Presidential election.

Political volatility in Guatemala has worsened during this reporting period as the incumbent government continues to obstruct the transfer of power to President-elect Bernardo Arevalo. On 9 October, some demonstrations in support of Arevalo turned violent. Protesters in Guatemala City threw stones and looted buildings. Across the country, demonstrators continued to block major highways, causing fuel and food shortages and widespread travel disruptions. On 1-October, riot police attempted to remove some of the nationwide blockades but were outnumbered and subsequently abandoned their efforts. In response, the government declared that all involved in the protests would be arrested and charged with economic vandalism. They also suggested that 'foreign funding and support' were behind the protests.

**Assessment:** Both the rhetoric from government officials and the actions of the protestors represents significant escalations in the country's ongoing political instability. This instability arises from the incumbent government's attempts to block the transition of power to President-elect Arevalo. These actions include disqualifying his party, clashes between the police and the election authority, and breaches and tampering with confidential election materials, including votes. Given the escalating rhetoric and actions from both sides, and considering that the transition of power is scheduled for early 2024, the country is on the brink of further political instability. It is highly likely that this could lead to deadly clashes, as seen in other countries in the region, such as Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, and Bolivia.



## Ecuador:

### All suspects in the assassination of the presidential candidate are killed in prison.

On 7 October, it was reported that the six Colombians who had been killed in the Litoral Penitentiary in Guayaquil, and the one who was killed in a prison in Quito, were all suspects in the August assassination of the anti-corruption presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio. This news comes as the country's second-round runoff vote for the Presidential election is scheduled to take place on 15 October.

**Assessment:** The country's presidential campaign has been marked by numerous incidents of violence, which have included the assassinations of both political candidates and journalists. The Litoral Penitentiary is infamous for being one of the country's most violent prisons and at the last count, it was housing over 3000 more inmates than it was designed for. Nationally, the country has seen a surge of violence since 2021, and this has been mirrored in its prisons. It is also widely known that in many of the country's prisons, the government has less control than the country's powerful criminal gangs. The news that all the suspects behind the killing of Villavicencio have been killed in prison will almost certainly fuel suspicions that they have been killed before their cases could come to trial and they could reveal evidence linking officials and politicians to the drug gangs in the country.

The killings are unlikely to have an impact on the 15 October vote. In the aftermath of the assassination, all candidates pledged to focus on halting the deterioration in the country's security situation and the spreading of organised crime. However, the new president will have less than 12 months before the next scheduled presidential election and as such they are unlikely to make any major headway in these matters. Furthermore, given many of the root causes of the security crisis are located outside of its borders, unless Quito is able to work with regional partners any progress will be temporary.

**AMER Forecast.** It is almost certain that protests will erupt across much of the region in response to the war between Israel and Palestine. Demonstrations have already transpired across North and South America, from Canada to Argentina, and will almost certainly increase in scale, frequency, and intensity should Israeli forces conduct to a ground offensive. The Haitian government has refused to copy the Dominican Republic by reopening its land border, furthering a diplomatic crisis over a canal construction on Haitian soil. Such a move will likely lead to more economic isolation of one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and deny Haitians the safest route to leave a country plagued by gang violence. In the United States, Robert Kennedy Jr. has declared his candidacy as an independent for the 2024 presidential election. Kennedy had already secured USD 17 million in funding prior to his announcement and is expected to gather a substantial amount more, positioning him as a credible participant in the election. In a closely contested race, the potential impact of drawing votes away from either Biden or Trump could be significant. Ecuador's impending presidential run-off on 15 October presents a showdown between Left and Right candidates, in a country marred by political violence and assassinations. The election result will have a profound impact on the nation's direction, as the Left advocates for social justice and welfare, while the Right seeks tax reductions and a stricter response to crime, akin to that in El Salvador. At present, the centre-right candidate appears to be the frontrunner. Guatemala will remain plagued by protests demanding the resignation of the Attorney General for his campaign against the President-elect, Bernardo Arévalo. On 20 October, Guatemalans will celebrate Revolution Day, and it is highly likely that crowds will evolve into civil unrest given the political turmoil in the country, with multiple roadblocks throughout Guatemala City almost guaranteed. Starting on 20 October, Santiago, Chile, will host the Pan American Games. The terror threat is considered low, but there is a moderate risk of political protests using the event as a platform, and transportation disruptions are highly likely.

On 8 October, Colombia's government and the largest group of FARC rebels, the Estado Mayor Central (EMC), began a peace process with the suspension of offensive actions, aiming to end

nearly six decades of internal conflict. The ceasefire will be officially decreed on 16 October, and it is likely to bring about a decrease in insurgent violence across the country. With over seven million Jews in the United States and hundreds of thousands more spread throughout the Americas, there is a heightened chance of a terror attack targeting these communities in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict, with many school closures already reported across the region.

Hurricane Lidia weakened after hitting western Mexico as a Category 4 hurricane but continues to cause heavy rainfall. It is expected to bring two to four inches of additional rain to Mexico, with some areas potentially receiving up to 12 inches. There is a moderate chance of flash floods and mudslides, especially in Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima. In central Argentina, firefighters will likely continue to battle wildfires around the country's second city of Cordoba. The major fires that were right on the edge of the city have now largely been extinguished, however with more dry and windy conditions forecasted, the conditions have been set for the spread of wildfires. Much of the Brazilian Amazon has also contended with wildfires amidst a period of record drought. More fires are expected, and it is almost certain that the air quality will decrease over the region, particularly affecting the major Amazonian city of Manaus.





## Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

### Finland and Estonia:

#### **Baltic pipeline and telecommunication cable damaged under suspicious circumstances.**

On 8 October, a subsea gas pipeline and a telecommunications cable connecting Finland and Estonia under the Baltic Sea were damaged. The damage was so severe that Finnish authorities stated that it could not have happened by accident and that it was likely a “deliberate ... external act”. The Finnish prime minister, Petteri Orpo, held a press conference where he explained that it was almost impossible for such damage to have been caused by normal use of the pipeline or by pressure fluctuations. Local media even cited unnamed government sources as saying that Russian sabotage was suspected. Seismologists at Norsar, Norway’s national data centre for the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT), confirmed that they had registered a “probable explosion” on 8 October and ruled out the idea that such damage could have been caused by normal seismic activity. There is currently an investigation into the cause of the damage, which is being assisted by regional and global partners including NATO and the EU.

**Assessment:** It is highly likely that the damage was deliberately caused by an external actor as there are no indications of major seismic activity in the area. Moreover, whilst vessels, like fishing boats, have often damaged undersea critical national infrastructure (CNI) before with anchor snags, the extent of the damage and the fact that both the cable and pipeline were damaged simultaneously suggests that this is highly unlikely. Of interest, the potential attack of Finland’s and Estonia’s subsurface CNI comes approximately one year after the damage inflicted on Russia’s Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea and only several months after Finland’s accession to NATO in April 2023. It has also occurred after both Estonia and Finland stopped importing Russian gas as part of the sanctions regime put on Russian energy resulting from the war in Ukraine. Russia maintains a sophisticated underwater sabotage capability through a number of vessels and submarines as part of its Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research (GUGI) which are likely complemented by multiple civilian flagged vessels that answer directly to the Russian military. It is almost certain that Russia has extensive knowledge of underwater CNI, particularly in the Baltic Sea, where it has likely conducted multiple underwater reconnaissance missions. There have been multiple reports of a Russian survey vessel repeatedly operating in the area prior to the alleged sabotage. While an attack on Finland or Estonia’s CNI could in theory evoke NATO’s Article 5, it is unlikely to do so as there are no human fatalities, and it will be incredibly challenging to prove that Russia was responsible. It is highly likely that any investigation will rely heavily on historical tracking data that is promulgated by a vessel’s automatic identification system (AIS). However, it is likely that any vessel involved was either not transmitting on AIS or spoofing its location, and unless a suspected vessel was heavily monitored by military or Coast Guard assets, it is likely that there will be limited data to interrogate. There are limited concerns regarding Finland’s energy security due to its other means of provision, however, prices have increased slightly. Nevertheless, there will be significant apprehension about the possibility of Russia or other entities replicating this sub-threshold type of attack, which has the potential to disrupt energy and telecommunications services and pose significant challenges in terms of attribution.

### Turkey:

#### **Turkish president refuses to recognise the LGBT community and condemns “perverse” trends.**

On 7 October, Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan, speaking at a Justice and Development (AK) Party congress in Ankara, declared that he does not “recognise LGBT” and pledged to combat what he referred to as “perverse” trends aimed at undermining the institution of the family in Turkey. During his speech, Erdogan stated that neither his party nor AK’s Nationalist Movement



Party (MHP) allies recognise the LGBTQ community. Erdogan continued to emphasise Turkey's commitment to upholding the family institution by stating "we do not recognise LGBT. Whoever recognises LGBT can go and march with them. We are members of a structure that holds the institution of family solid, that strongly embraces the family institution." This statement follows Erdogan's recent discomfort with the use of "LGBT colours" at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where he expressed his concerns about the colours used to promote the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Assessment:** In recent months, Erdogan's government has adopted a more stringent stance regarding LGBTQ+ freedoms, particularly as the May presidential and parliamentary elections approached, likely in a move to rally his base. Although homosexuality is not illegal in Turkey, there is pervasive hostility towards it, and the crackdown on Pride parades by the police has intensified during Erdogan's tenure. It is highly likely that Erdogan's anti-LGBTQ+ remarks have been echoed by many others in Turkey and have almost certainly generated an atmosphere of fear for LGBTQ+ individuals residing in or visiting Turkey, with reports of people being arrested merely for appearing "gay." Additionally, there have been cases where gay foster parents had their child taken away following government intervention. The most significant public demonstration of this trend was in September 2022, when thousands of Turks took to the streets in the traditionally more liberal city of Istanbul, demanding that the government prohibit "LGBTQ+ propaganda." This march was the largest demonstration of its kind in Turkey and is likely reflective of a growing sentiment within Turkey. According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Europe division (ILGA-Europe), Turkey is one of the most homophobic countries in Europe, scoring only four percent in its ranking for the country's legal and policy practices concerning LGBTQ+ individuals. Many of Turkey's laws and legislation do not cater for the community. For example, the equality article in Turkey's constitution does not include sexual orientation and there is no provision for same-sex marriage. It is highly unlikely that Erdogan's government will introduce measures to improve life for LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey despite international pressure, such as expanding existing laws to include them or introducing hate crime laws. Further to this, as anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is proving popular it is almost certain such rhetoric will continue, and in time it may lead to violent incidents being directed at members of the LGBTQ+ community.

### Israel and the Gaza Strip:

#### Israel declares war on Hamas after militant group conduct cross border attack.

On 7 October, the militant organisation Hamas launched an attack on Israel consisting of multiple incursions into southern Israel across the Israel-Gaza border and launched multiple waves of rocket attacks across targets in southern and central Israel. It is estimated that thousands of Hamas militants entered Israel and attacked civilians in multiple settlements in close proximity to Gaza. Israel claims that over 1,300 Israelis were killed by the militants or by the associated rocket salvos. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) were deployed across much of southern Israel and were reportedly engaging elements of Hamas in up to 22 locations and have reported that over 1,000 Hamas militants were killed within Israel. However, withdrawing Hamas fighters are estimated to have abducted over 150 people, many of whom are anticipated to be foreign nationals. Israel has responded by declaring war on Hamas and began a campaign of aerial strikes against Hamas-linked targets across the Gaza Strip. To date, it is estimated that the IDF has dropped over 6,000 bombs on Gaza, resulting in the internal displacement of over 400,000 Gazans. Israel has also besieged Gaza, cutting the enclave off from food, water, medicine and electricity, and has stated that it will not allow for the resumption of these supplies unless Hamas releases its hostages. Hamas has responded by sustaining its rocket attacks on southern Israel and has stated that it will execute hostages if Israel continues its bombardment of civilian homes. Israel has set up an emergency unity government consisting of the incumbent government and members of the opposition. It is widely expected that the new war cabinet will sanction an IDF ground offensive into Gaza, with the IDF stating on 12 October that 1.1 million Palestinians living in northern Gaza have less than 24 hours to evacuate to southern Gaza, a move the United Nations has asked

Israel to rescind. The IDF has mobilised over 300,000 reservists and has also deployed forces to the north of the country, fearing an attack from the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group which has a well-armed force in both Lebanon and Syria. Many Western governments such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France have condemned Hamas' attack and have publicly declared their support for Israel. The United States has warned other militant groups and external actors, like Iran, to not get involved in the conflict and has deployed its USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to the eastern Mediterranean. Egypt has discussed plans with the United States and others to provide humanitarian aid through its border with the Gaza Strip but has rejected establishing humanitarian corridors for refugees fleeing the enclave into its own territory.

**Assessment:** Hamas' attack on Israel is likely the most major security breach in Israel since 1973 and will almost certainly be deemed as a huge intelligence failure. It is likely that Hamas had been planning the attack for months but had limited the plans to senior leadership and avoided electronic communication to circumvent Israeli intelligence collection. However, the timing of the attack is not surprising as Israel has likely been in a weakened position as a result of its internal judicial overhaul crisis which has led to mass demonstrations, strikes and even IDF reservists refusing to turn up to duty. Moreover, the West Bank has experienced historic levels of violence and clashes between militant groups and the IDF, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians. There have also been multiple other potential antagonisms such as the Israeli right-wing governments promotion of further Jewish settlement in the West Bank and ultra-nationalist Israelis storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex.

Hamas' decision to launch multiple air, sea and land incursions into Israeli territory was likely a tactic used to maximise the breadth and extent of militant penetration into Israel. With multiple engagement areas achieved, it is almost certain that Hamas was able to disperse IDF forces across southern Israel and increase IDF response times, who were likely already struggling to mobilise effectively during the Sukkot holidays. This likely afforded Hamas more time and space to conduct their attack and enabled them to achieve such a high death toll and abduct hostages. Hamas have also likely bolstered their rocket stockpiles by importing components into Gaza to be made into rockets and by increasing their own domestic production. This likely allowed Hamas to fire rocket salvos large enough to overwhelm Israel's Iron Dome air defence system.

The foundation of Israel's deterrent has long been based on using disproportionate force as an answer to provocation. In response to such an effective and brutal attack by Hamas, it is almost certain that Israel's reply will be severe and invariably lead to much international condemnation and spark protest movements across the world. The forming of a war cabinet, the mobilisation of 300,000 IDF reservists, the current besiegement of Gaza and the evacuation order are likely key indicators and warnings that the Israeli government will permit an IDF ground offensive into Gaza. Urban warfare is associated with very high casualties and in order to minimise IDF losses it is likely that the IDF will advance gradually and rely on air power and artillery to engage militants from a distance. This will almost certainly lead to the mass destruction of infrastructure in Gaza and result in many militant and civilian deaths. There is a high likelihood that Hamas will execute some of its hostages in a bid to dissuade Israel from entering Gaza, despite the value that hostages hold for future negotiations. An IDF ground offensive into Gaza could also be the trigger for Hezbollah and other armed groups along the border of Israel to mount an offensive. Such a move could stretch the IDF and limit the resources they can allocate to Gaza. A Hezbollah attack might trigger American intervention, potentially prompting Iran to instruct its proxy groups throughout the Middle East to target American bases, escalating the risk of a broader conflict.

Given Israel's expected offensive on Gaza, it is likely that international actors will push for a humanitarian corridor to be opened into Egypt. However, Egypt has often refused the entry of Gazans into its territory, even during times of conflict. Cairo's decision to open a humanitarian corridor will likely be grounded in a fear of refugees entering Egypt, and Egypt will not want to be dragged into the conflict, preserving its role as a mediator. Instead, Egypt will likely try and use



its border to facilitate the entry of aid into Gaza, leaving millions of Gazans stranded in the face of an impending Israeli offensive.

## Libya:

### Rival factions clash in Benghazi leading to a communications black out.

This last reporting period has seen clashes in Benghazi between the Libyan National Army (LNA), who are led by Khalifa Haftar, and an armed group affiliated with Mahdi al-Barghathi, an actor who once fought alongside Haftar. The battles broke out when Barghathi returned to the city after years of exile. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) reported that the battles had directly led to telecommunications being cut in the city, but local authorities claimed that an accidental cut in fibreoptic cables was to blame.

**Assessment:** Khalifa Haftar and Mahdi al-Barghathi once fought alongside each other in Libya's civil war, but this changed when Barghathi decided to support a government in Tripoli that Haftar did not recognise. Barghathi had been in exile from Benghazi since, with clashes between forces loyal to him and the LNA occurring sporadically. The Awaqir tribe, influential in Libya's east, had been working to effect a reconciliation between Haftar and Barghathi, but this was not forthcoming and is now highly unlikely to happen. Leaders within Awaqir sharing their frustrations that Barghathi entered Benghazi without their knowledge increases the probability that a deal will not be reached as they were the main mediator in negotiations. Whilst telecommunications remain down, the true extent of the clashes will remain unknown, but it is almost certain fatalities have occurred. At the same time, it remains unlikely that these clashes will spiral into anything more than skirmishes, given similar, recent examples in the country. The most likely scenario will be a temporary ceasefire that suspends the violence for the time being. It is likely that the clashes have had an impact on civilian life, and almost certainly worsened conditions for a city already struggling following recent flooding. It is likely that the humanitarian situation in the country further deteriorates, bringing with it a deteriorating security situation.

**EMEA Forecast.** It is almost certain that protests will erupt across the region in response to the Israel-Hamas war. In major cities with substantial Jewish and Muslim diasporas such as London and Paris, there is a high chance that protests will turn violent and it is almost certain that there will be localised incidents with the police clashing with demonstrators. The potential of an amnesty for Catalan separatists is causing issues in Spain, with large-scale demonstrations displaying Catalan and Spanish flags. This complex issue is expected to lead to increased protests, unrest, and political volatility in Catalonia until a new government is formed. The IMF and World Bank held their annual meetings in Marrakech, Morocco from 9-15 October. It was the first time they had held meetings in Africa for over fifty years and focused on addressing Africa's financial needs and climate resilience in the face of criticism that the institutions have sidelined the neediest nations. It is looking likely that the international economic organisations will pledge to give Africa additional seats on their executive boards, with discussions likely centring around how to promote economic growth and stability in Africa. Twenty-four candidates, including incumbent President Felix Tshisekedi, have submitted their candidacies for the December election in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A crowded field of old rivals, first-time contenders, and previously sidelined presidential hopefuls is challenging Tshisekedi, which could potentially split the opposition vote, increasing his chances of securing a second term. It is highly likely that there will be concerns regarding electoral fraud and political unrest or instability in a country already struggling with numerous armed groups and a rebellion in the eastern provinces.

Madagascar's highest court has postponed the presidential election by a week to November 16 to allow authorities to prepare after two opposition candidates were injured during protests. Andry Rajoelina, seeking re-election for a second term as president, had resigned last month to run for re-election, which led to a legal dispute regarding his citizenship. Protests and clashes are anticipated in the lead-up to the election. Multiple labour unions in France are planning strikes and demonstrations nationwide from 12 October to demand improved salaries, gender equality,

and other social measures. Air traffic controllers will strike from 12 October to 14 October, leading to significant flight disruptions. Other sectors, including travel, education, public administration, and healthcare, will also observe industrial action on 13 October. Protests and rallies are expected in urban areas across the country, with the largest almost certainly to materialise in Paris. There is a high likelihood the strikes will affect the Rugby World Cup. Protest activity is likely across Poland in the run-up to the divisive parliamentary elections and simultaneous referenda on 15 October regarding privatisation, the retirement age, the border with Belarus and migration issues. The results of both will almost certainly have serious implications for both the future of Poland and the EU.

The risk of a terror attack has almost certainly increased in much of the region in response to the Israel-Hamas war, particularly in Europe where there are substantial Jewish communities, with multiple Jewish schools closing across Europe. The French military have officially begun to withdraw from Niger following the military junta's request to leave the country. The United States has also cut its aid to Niger and officially declared the military rulers conducted a coup. Like much of the Sahel, a Western retrograde will likely be exploited by armed groups who will likely intensify their operations. The humanitarian crisis in the country is also expected to worsen, with the junta already being forced to cut much public spending. Nigeria has witnessed a number of attacks throughout the reporting period in the northern regions. This is likely becoming a pivotal challenge for the Tinubu administration. More attacks are highly likely and will cause Nigeria to rethink any potential military action in neighbouring Niger.

A significant weather shift is poised to impact Europe, with the continent transitioning from a historic heatwave to an impending Arctic cold blast. A deep low forming in the north will usher in the cold air, causing a sharp temperature drop in western and central Europe over the weekend and into early next week. Fresh snowfall is expected in Scandinavia, along with wintry showers in northern UK and possibly northern Denmark, likely causing much road disruption. Parts of East Africa are likely to endure a sustained heat wave with temperatures expected in the mid-40s and severe drought likely in much of the region.





## Asia Pacific (APAC)

### Afghanistan:

#### Series of earthquakes and aftershocks devastates western Afghanistan.

On 7 October, the Herat province in western Afghanistan was hit by a 6.2 magnitude earthquake which resulted in over 2,400 deaths according to the Taliban administration. There have also been multiple aftershocks, with at least 20 registering a magnitude over 4.0 and one on 11 October, also in Herat measuring a magnitude of 6.3 on the Richter scale. Local reporting indicates that many survivors are still too traumatised to return to their homes and are awaiting international aid as more aftershocks are anticipated. Entire villages have been reduced to rubble with current estimates indicating that over 1300 homes have been destroyed and it is assessed that many people are still trapped underneath. According to UNICEF, over 90 percent of those killed by the earthquake or currently in hospital were women or children.

**Assessment:** While Afghanistan is undoubtedly in dire need of food, water, medical supplies and other forms of international assistance in response to the series of earthquakes that have devastated much of Herat province, it is highly likely that the aid effort will be hindered by several factors. Firstly, the affected areas are remote, making access difficult for international aid organisations- a factor that is likely compounded by the fact the quake struck in western Afghanistan, close to the sensitive border with Iran. Additionally, there has been a significant reduction in the presence of Western organisations in Afghanistan due to concerns over the treatment of women and the Taliban's control of the country, likely limiting the resources and expertise available for relief efforts. It is likely that international aid organisations, including the Red Crescent, are currently directing their attention towards the Gaza strip in response to Israel's bombardment and siege, which may divert resources and focus away from the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan.

It is also highly likely that there is limited heavy equipment like diggers and excavators available in western Afghanistan, a factor that will invariably prolong the time it takes to reach and extricate any potential survivors. The high casualty rate, which is likely to increase, can be attributed to the poor quality of homes and infrastructure in the region, making them susceptible to seismic activity. It is almost certain that infrastructure has suffered as a result of decades of war in Afghanistan and the lack of proper construction has left many people trapped beneath the debris.

### Myanmar:

#### Deadly strikes on camp for internally displaced by Tatmadaw

On the night of 9 October at around 23:30 local time, the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military, launched a series of attacks utilising heavy artillery on Mung Lai Hkyet, a camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in the country's Kachin state. According to the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), which controls the region the camp was located in, at least 29 people were killed including children. The camp covered a large area and rescuers have said the death toll is likely to rise as people are still missing.

**Assessment:** Myanmar is the location of the world's longest-running civil war. This was primarily between the central government and a number of the country's ethnic minorities, such as the Kachin. This conflict was composed of regional conflicts, which whilst deadly, frequently remained localised. However, the widescale opposition to the 2021 military coup and the Tatmadaw's deadly reaction to anti-government protests has meant many of these localised conflicts fused, not only with each other but also with anti-government opposition in Burmese-

dominated areas. The KIA has long been one of the country's most powerful armed actors. Since the expansion of the country's civil war in the aftermath of the coup, the KIA has been giving weapons and training to many of the new anti-government groups which have formed across the country to resist military rule. It has also been a prominent supporter of forging unity with the other ethnic armed groups (EACs) in Myanmar and of the exiled National Unity Government. As of April 2023, it is estimated that the government have now lost control of more than 50 per cent of the country. The Tatmadaw have long been accused of human rights abuses, and are known to target schools and hospitals, so targeting an IDP camp should come as no surprise. The conflict's duration and the widespread opposition to the junta make it highly likely that the conflict will persist for years and will almost certainly involve the further targeting of civilians.

## Australia:

### Diplomatic relations with China in the spotlight as detained journalist returns home.

On 11 October, following three years in detention on national security charges, journalist Cheng Lei returned home to Australia after being released by China. Cheng, who had been working as a reporter for China's state-run station China Global Television Network (CGTN), had been accused of sharing state secrets with another country. No information was ever given regarding her charges, Australian diplomats were refused entry to her trial, and she never publicly commented on the case. Commenting on developments, China's ambassador to Australia emphasised the importance of sustaining the current stability and progress in their relations, also stating that China views Australia as a friend, and there is no reason for Canberra to perceive Beijing as a threat.

**Assessment:** The agreement to return Cheng will highly likely be seen as a diplomatic breakthrough for Canberra and demonstrates the thawing relations between China and Australia in recent months. Cheng was arrested in 2020 as tensions soured between the two nations; Australia called for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, whilst China responded by placing large restrictions on Australian exports. Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, came to power in 2022 with an objective of improving relations with China, the nation's biggest trade partner, and has announced intentions to visit Beijing in the coming months. Securing Cheng's release was highly likely a prerequisite for Albanese to undertake such a visit and her release will now likely lead to the trip taking place. Moreover, Beijing agreeing to this suggests that China wants the trip to not only occur, and be a success. Success will highly likely be measured in the form of increased trade as China, facing economic problems and higher commodity prices, looks to mend relations with a major supplier of iron ore, coal, gas, and wheat. However, differences between the two nations remain and Australia is highly unlikely to shift on policies relating to national security and limiting China's military build-up in the Pacific region. Therefore, whilst bi-lateral relations are likely to continually improve in the lead-up to Albanese's state visit, where it is likely that an economic agreement will be announced, due to regional geo-political differences, this is highly likely as far as the relationship will develop in the coming years.

**APAC Forecast.** It is almost certain that protests will erupt across much of the region in response to the war between Israel and Palestine. Demonstrations have already occurred across the region, and will almost certainly increase in scale, frequency, and intensity should Israeli forces conduct a ground offensive. Elections and referendums in New Zealand and Australia will take place over the weekend. Most notably the election in New Zealand is likely to usher in a new government, with the centre-right National party favourites win. In Australia, it looks increasingly likely that the country will reject a proposal to constitutionally recognise the country's Indigenous people. On 20 October, the Japanese parliament is expected to meet for an extraordinary session in an to attempt pass the new economic budget. It is likely this takes place and as such it is increasingly unlikely that the rumoured snap election is called.

In South Korea, the United States' nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan is due to dock at the port of Busan. There is a realistic possibility that this elicits a response from North Korea,

which would most likely be in the form of ballistic missile launches. Afghanistan has been rocked by major earthquakes and aftershocks, and there is a realistic possibility that more tremors will hit the region.

This next reporting period is likely to see Super Typhoon Bolaven move across the Western Pacific Ocean. It has already tracked past Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands and within 12 hours went from a category 1 to a category 5. It has already become the second-strongest storm the planet has seen this year. Whilst its current trajectory has it heading away from the countries of Asia, it may still lead to unsettled weather. Finally, the Regional Meteorological Centre in Calcutta has stated that this weekend is likely to see the “withdrawal” of the South-West monsoon from the Bay of Bengal. This is around one week earlier than last year, but withdrawal can take place anytime between early to mid-October with the latest withdrawals happening around 20 October. As a result of the withdrawal, the temperature is forecast to continue its upwards trajectory with temperatures likely to exceed 35 degrees Celsius.

