



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 27 OCT - 3 NOV 2023



Global Intelligence Summary

Week 46: 27 October – 3 November 2023

Executive Summary

- In **Panama**, civil unrest is **almost certain** to continue after the government revoked a controversial mining agreement from its moratorium on future mining.
- In **Russia's** Dagestan, rioters stormed the Makhachkala Uytash Airport in search of Israelis and Jews. This **likely** points to growing instability in the North Caucasus and is **likely** a scene that will be emulated elsewhere in the world amidst rising antisemitism linked to the Israel-Hamas war.
- In **Pakistan**, the authorities seek to deport almost two million Afghans back to Taliban-run **Afghanistan**, a move that will **almost certainly** provoke a humanitarian crisis and receive condemnation.
- It is **almost certain** that riots will persist in **Bangladesh** in response to a government crackdown on the opposition with elections scheduled for January.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

AMER

- 1 Panama:** Protests continue over controversial mining deal
- 2 Venezuela:** Supreme Court suspends results of opposition primary
- 3 Latin America:** Countries begin to question their relations with Israel

EMEA

- 4 United Kingdom:** Global AI Summit takes place at Bletchley Park
- 5 Russia:** Rioters storm Dagestan airport in search of Jews
- 6 Israel and the Gaza Strip:** IDF encircle Gaza as humanitarian situation deteriorates

APAC

- 7 Pakistan:** Authorities begin expulsion of undocumented Afghans
- 8 India:** Bomb kills three at Jehovah's Witness event
- 9 Bangladesh:** Violent protests in Dhaka amid opposition crackdown
- 10 China:** Xiangshan Forum sees China and Russia target the west.



Americas (AMER)

Panama:

Government backtracks on copper mining deal in the face of extensive protests in the capital.

In the last reporting period, Panama's National Assembly looked to backtrack on the controversial mining deal with Canadian mining company First Quantum, as environmental protests entered their second week. Continuous protests across Panama City regularly saw the deployment of tear gas by police and around 870 arrests were made. On 2 November, Panamanian legislators convened for a third time in a week to vote on a bill that would introduce an indefinite moratorium on all new mining activities in the country. However, one article was removed which involved the controversial mining contract with First Quantum, and their mining activities at Minera Panama. The vote passed and was welcomed by many lawmakers who feared that a revocation of the First Quantum contract would result in multi-million-dollar legal bills.

Assessment: The exclusion of the controversial Minera Panama project from the moratorium on future mining activities is highly likely to lead to continued protests across Panama. These demonstrations have been driven by concerns that the open copper-mining pit could contaminate nearby water sources during a period of drought in Panama, linked to the El Nino weather system causing elevated temperatures in the country. Moreover, the protests against the mining activity may threaten the country's long-term investor-friendly image. In July and August 2022, Panama faced the largest number of protests it had seen in decades as a result of socioeconomic grievances in the face of a cost-of-living crisis. A banning on all future mining activity will likely harm the economy, however, over 80 percent of Panama's economy is within the service sector so the detriment will likely be manageable. Despite this, the government will doubtlessly lament the loss in revenue, a loss that has been further compounded by El Nino's effects. The drought has directly impacted the Panama Canal, with the Panama Canal Authority (PCA) reducing daily crossings to a limit of 25 by 3 November and planning to decrease it to 18 by February 2024 to conserve water levels. This will almost certainly threaten the annual USD 4.6 billion revenue the canal provides. To future-proof the Panama Canal revenue, it is likely that the government will continue to invest in infrastructure to avoid similar reductions in revenue. However, this could be controversial and provoke further environmental condemnation, a scenario Nicaragua will likely exploit as it plans on building a mega canal to rival Panama's.

Venezuela:

The Supreme Justice Tribunal suspends the results of the opposition's primary.

On 30 October, Venezuela's Supreme Justice Tribunal suspended the results of an opposition presidential primary that took place this month. The ruling came as organisers of the primary were attending a meeting and cooperating with the attorney-general who in the last reporting period had announced a criminal probe into how the vote was conducted. The decision is a temporary suspension, and the tribunal will make a final decision in the coming weeks.

Assessment: Maria Corina Machado, a long-standing opposition leader won the primary with more than 93 percent of the vote, after an electoral deal was struck between the government and opposition that allowed each side to choose its candidate. That deal saw Washington provide some sanctions relief to Venezuela's energy sector, including allowing Caracas to export additional amounts of crude oil, that accounts for 90 percent of all Venezuelan exports, for the next six months. Therefore, this development highly likely will anger the United States, and seriously risks the continued relaxation of sanctions and almost certainly throws further proposed sanctions relief into doubt. Indeed, the original deal with the United States laid out that



Washington would reinstate sanctions if the government of President Nicolas Maduro did not free political prisoners and lift bans on opposition candidates, of which Machado is one. With these looking like unlikely eventualities, it is now highly likely that Venezuela will not engage in a peaceful, free, and fair election that did seem possible only a couple of weeks ago, and as a result, the economic implications of sanctions will highly likely continue to cripple the national economy and could trigger social unrest.

Latin America:

Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia move to isolate Israel as Gaza offensive continues.

Chile and Colombia have recalled their ambassadors to Israel for consultations due to the Israeli Defence Force's (IDF) bombardment of the Gaza Strip. These decisions come following Bolivia's announcement that they have severed diplomatic ties entirely with Israel, making it the first country to do so since the 7 October attack by Hamas. Leftist leaders in Latin American countries have been critical of Israel's response to the Hamas attack, leading to deteriorating bilateral ties, accusations that Israel is violating international humanitarian law and even allegations of "neo-Nazi" tactics. Israel has responded by demanding that the Latin American countries condemn the Hamas terrorist organisation culpable for the slaughter and abduction of Israeli babies, children, women and the elderly. It also stressed that it expected democratic countries to support the right for a sovereign state to defend itself.

Assessment: It is likely that the decisions made by Latin American countries are in part motivated by the relatively large Palestinian diaspora in the region. It is estimated that there are millions of Latin Americans of Palestinian origin living within the region. The Palestinian diaspora in Chile is estimated at over 500,000, whilst the diaspora in Bolivia and Colombia is estimated at 15,000 and 12,000 respectively. Conversely, with the exceptions of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the Jewish population in Latin America is relatively low. As the Israeli offensive into Gaza continues to intensify, it is highly likely that those countries that retain some form of diplomatic relations with Israel will experience civil unrest outside Israeli embassies or consulates and outside government buildings. It is also highly likely that incidents of antisemitism will increase throughout the region. Several other countries throughout the region have sizeable Palestinian diasporas such as Guatemala (200,000) and Honduras (250,000) or have leftist governments as demonstrated by Brazil and Mexico. It is likely that several of these countries will also reconsider the nature of their relations with Israel and potentially recall ambassadors or sever relations entirely, leading to a growing isolation of Israel on the international stage. However, Israel's relations with several Latin American countries have evolved and deepened in the last two decades, in fields including commerce, smart agriculture, education and in regards to access to technology. These benefits have likely been very profitable for a number of Latin American countries who may be forced to disregard public pressure in favour of the economy, a move which could strain relations on the domestic front and lead to greater civil unrest.

AMER Forecast. In Mexico City, authorities are preparing for the Day of the Dead celebrations. It is anticipated that the city will see more than 17,000 police officers and 38 mobile medical units in attendance whilst multiple major roads will be closed across the city. The festivities will almost certainly result in major disruption.

In the United States, 7 November will see several local and state elections take place. This includes two gubernatorial races (Kentucky and Mississippi), four state legislatures, and several referendums. Whilst abortion access is not directly on the ballot in all races, it remains a key voter concern. In Mississippi, there is a realistic possibility that the Democrats may win the governor's mansion for the first time since 1999. On 8 November, the country will then see a Republican Debate, and the tone and contents of this will almost certainly be shaped by the results of the elections the preceding day. In Argentina, political campaigning continues as the country approaches its Presidential runoff vote on 17 November, which sees a radical candidate in Javier

Milei take on the Peronists. As a result of the curtailment of passages through the Panama Canal, supply issues are likely to begin appearing in the run-up to the busy Christmas period. Already, the wait times to transit through the canal have risen to around three days. Restrictions on the canal have also already pushed the price of global shipping rates higher as it has decreased the available number of vessels.

In Mexico, efforts are ongoing to try and locate many of the missing in the wake of Hurricane Otis making landfall in Acapulco; it is estimated that at least 47 people remain missing. The National Hurricane Centre of the United States assesses that there are two areas of low pressure (one in the Atlantic and one in the Pacific) which have a 10 percent chance of turning into a tropical cyclone in the next 48 hours. Regardless of their developments, as they move over land in Central America and the southern United States, they are expected to produce thunderstorms, and heavy rains increasing the chances of flash flooding, along with mudslides in areas of higher terrain.



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T +1 (345) 949-0004
F +1 (345) 945-6591

info@security.ky
www.security.ky

Cayman Technology Centre
115 Printer Way

PO Box 10055, Grand Cayman
KY1-1001, Cayman Islands



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

United Kingdom:

Global Artificial Intelligence summit takes place at Bletchley Park.

The world's first global artificial intelligence (AI) summit was convened at the United Kingdom's Bletchley Park for two days during the last reporting period. This summit saw global leaders from the United Kingdom, European Union (EU), China, and the United States, amongst others, meet with officials from tech and AI companies. They discussed how best to reach an international agreement on how to address the safe and responsible development of the rapidly advancing technology. During the summit, 28 governments and the EU signed up to the Bletchley Declaration, which is a shared understanding of the opportunities and risks posed by frontier AI and the need for governments to work together to meet the most significant challenges that AI developments pose to humanity.

Assessment: The summit was convened by United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as he seeks to establish the United Kingdom as a global leader in AI and the associated regulation. The summit will highly likely be seen as a success given the signing of the Bletchley Declaration, and also that senior American and Chinese officials shared a stage and engaged with each other constructively. However, in terms of bolstering the United Kingdom's global lead and reach in AI, the summit will be seen with mixed results. This is because whilst the summit has kickstarted a global movement to try and put in place a legal and regulatory framework to develop AI safely and responsibly, it has also highlighted how limited the United Kingdom's ability to set global rules is. Especially if it seeks to do so unilaterally, separate from the great global powers and trade blocs with the expectation they will simply sign on. This is most notably evidenced by the recent executive order by President Joe Biden on AI regulation and the establishment of the United States' own AI safety institute. Such moves, in particular by Washington, which remains a global leader in AI innovation, demonstrate that whilst London may have started the conversation, it remains the United States that will most likely dominate the field. Furthermore, Biden's executive order, which includes rules on privacy, security, discrimination and disinformation, is the most globally comprehensive piece of AI regulation and thus its global ramifications will be far greater than those of the Bletchley Declaration.

Russia:

Mob breaches airport security and hunts Jews in Russia's Dagestan.

On 29 October, an anti-Israeli mob managed to breach the security measures at Dagestan's Makhachkala Uytash Airport in southern Russia. Rioters broke into the airport terminal and stormed the runway after rumours circulated that Jews and Israelis were onboard a Red Wings Airlines flight that had landed from Tel Aviv. The Kremlin was forced to hold an emergency meeting in response to the riots although Russian state media dismissed the riots as simply a gathering of people opposed to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At least 60 people have been arrested following the event, which has received strong criticism from the West. The event forced the Israeli Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to release a joint statement saying that they expected Russian law enforcement to protect all Israelis and Jews, and the United States' State Department denounced the event as a modern-day pogrom. President Putin indicated that the event was instigated by Ukraine and Western intelligence agencies without citing any evidence.

Assessment: It is likely that the events in Dagestan are indicative of a declining security situation in Russia as a result of the war in Ukraine, which has led to the mass deployment of Russian personnel and resources to Ukraine or Russian border provinces. Additionally, there is a realistic



possibility that the security services in the Muslim-majority Dagestan, which is overwhelmingly pro-Palestine, enabled the riot which was doubtlessly inspired by Israel's offensive into the Gaza Strip and calls for a global intifada. The riots were almost certainly fuelled by social media, which Putin has suggested was the result of Western interference. This accusation is likely an attempt by Putin to deflect blame as he has always presented Russia as a bastion of interethnic and interreligious harmony, a notion that would have been seriously challenged by such events. Dagestan has experienced periods of secessionist unrest during the 20th and 21st centuries, which were often brutally repressed by Moscow. Dissent has also been building in the North Caucasus as a result of the partial mobilisation for the war in Ukraine, with further civil unrest inspired by growing socio-economic challenges. There is a realistic possibility that scenes of instability could motivate potential secessionists across Russia's historically troublesome Muslim-majority region whilst Russian forces are over-stretched in Ukraine. To the backdrop of a global surge in antisemitism, there are likely growing concerns that similar scenes will unfold elsewhere in the world, with Israel's recent ground offensive into Gaza a definitive catalyst for further attacks against Jews.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

IDF encircle Gaza city as humanitarian crisis deteriorates in Gaza Strip.

During the reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have sustained their strikes on the Gaza Strip, leading the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry to announce that there have now been over 9,000 people killed since Israel's retaliation. The United Nations has stated that several schools that had been turned into shelters have been damaged by IDF strikes as well as refugee camps within Gaza. After launching a ground offensive into the Gaza Strip, the IDF claims it has now totally encircled Gaza City and is attacking known Hamas positions on the ground, resulting in multiple IDF casualties. Hamas has continued to attack southern Israel with rocket barrages and fighting in the north of the country between the IDF and Hezbollah has continued near the border with Lebanon, leading to the evacuation of multiple border settlements. The United States Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, landed in Israel on 3 November to hold talks with Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. It is expected that Blinken will reaffirm the United States' support to Israel but will demand that Israel does all it can to limit civilian casualties. After weeks of deliberation, the Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip has opened to allow for the evacuation of foreign nationals from the Gaza Strip as well as limited numbers of injured Palestinians. There have been several incidents of fighting in the West Bank between the IDF and Palestinians as the IDF has deployed huge resources to the area and imposed new restrictions on the people living there, such as blocking roads into Palestinian towns and villages. There have also been increased reports of Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank. On the 3 November, Hezbollah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, broadcasted a speech from Beirut, Lebanon. Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah had no prior knowledge of the Hamas attacks on Israel but suggested that Israel had encouraged them. He continued to warn Israel that a pre-emptive strike on Hezbollah would be a huge mistake and that Arab nations were asking Hezbollah to not get involved on a daily basis. He finished by indicating that Hezbollah's next moves will be determined by two factors, firstly how the situation evolves in Gaza and secondly, how Israel acts towards Lebanon.

Assessment: It is likely that the IDF has calculated that enough of Hamas' defensive positions, tunnels and fortifications have been destroyed to warrant a ground offensive into the Gaza Strip. It is also highly likely that international condemnation aimed at Israel's perceived indiscriminate bombing of Gaza has forced Israel to deploy ground forces to enable improved targeting of Hamas militants and help to avoid collateral damage. Due to the IDF's quantitative and qualitative overmatch, it is almost certain that Hamas will use guerilla style tactics and utilise their vast tunnel network to degrade the IDF, which will in turn make the identification and destruction of tunnels a primary objective of the IDF. It is almost certain that the humanitarian situation within the Gaza Strip has reached critical levels with millions in dire need of water, food, fuel and other vital supplies. The international community will invariably demand a ceasefire to allow for the

facilitation of aid into Gaza and the evacuation of more foreign nationals and the injured through the Rafah crossing. However, it is unlikely Israel will acquiesce to this request as it will assess any pause will give Hamas and other militants the opportunity to regroup. It is almost certain that Israel fears a rebellion in the West Bank and has deployed the IDF to deter this from happening. It is likely that Israeli settlers are exploiting the current situation and the lack of normal limitations imposed on them by the authorities to attack Palestinians and appropriate more land in violation of international law, a move that will undoubtedly provoke further condemnation of Israel.

It is highly likely that Blinken's visit to Israel will provoke much international condemnation and trigger civil unrest outside United States embassies throughout the globe. The United States will likely support Israel, militarily and financially, whilst the IDF devastate Gaza and it is unlikely Blinken's calls to minimise civilian casualties will do much to offset this. Such sentiment will only continue to grow as the United States is scheduled to pass a military aid package in the House of Representatives, worth a reported USD 14.5 billion. Several European states such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany have maintained their positions on supporting Israel, leading to huge protests and spikes in antisemitic incidents, which are likely to continue until a ceasefire is brokered.

There are still grave concerns that the Israel-Hamas conflict will not be contained and evolve into a wider Middle East war. Hezbollah's attacks on the IDF have been largely contained to the border regions, however they possess the capabilities to strike deep into Israel and are deemed a much more competent force than Hamas. Nasrallah's comments will likely serve as a warning to Israel to not escalate the situation in Gaza or conduct any military action against Hezbollah beyond border skirmishes. The vague and tempered nature of his speech suggest that a full-fledged Hezbollah operation is unlikely in the immediate future unless Israel strikes first. It is also likely that Hezbollah will delay any intended offensive action until the IDF have been degraded and fixed in Gaza. However, unlike previous wars, the United States has significantly augmented its military power in the region and increased its rhetoric, which for now is likely to be enough to deter a wider conflict.

EMEA Forecast. There is now a realistic possibility that Pedro Sanchez will win a second term as Spain's prime minister after reaching a deal with Catalan separatist party Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC). Sanchez already has the support of Unite (Sumar) but still needs the backing of Together for Catalonia (Junts) to earn his investiture, with negotiations highly likely to be fraught. The visit of Ursula von der Leyen, the EU executive's president, to Serbia and Kosovo and her determination that both countries must normalise relations if they want to join the EU presents a possible route to a de-escalation of tensions that have been heightened in recent months. On the back of this, Serbian president, Aleksandar Vucic, dissolved parliament and called an early election for 17 December. It is likely that Vucic will win this election comfortably and therefore will use the election to cement his authority as he works out how best to proceed. In Montenegro, the appointment of a majority pro-European Union (EU) government makes it likely the country will continue to pursue EU ascension. Elections in Moldova on 5 November will bring disruption, but more importantly, determine the nation's future as the country is polarised between leaning towards the EU and Russia. Germany will likely continue to be plagued by far-right incidents, contextualised by a recently elected politician being arrested for allegedly displaying Nazi symbols and being a member of a fraternity accused of using the phrase "Sieg Heil." In a likely attempt to deter voters from leaning right, the German government has begun a crackdown on illegal immigrants and has drastically increased its searches of cars coming from neighbouring Poland.

In Africa, the United States has ended the participation of Gabon, Niger, Uganda and the Central African Republic in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade program, which is almost certainly a response to their various domestic situations. It is however unlikely that their withdrawal will have any effect on the governments in place, and instead likely impact their



respective populations comparatively more, potentially leading to further social unrest. Meanwhile, Kenya has announced that it will end visa requirements for all African visitors by the end of the year. Visa-free travel within the continent has been a goal of the African Union (AU) for the past decade and this almost certain to be the first example of an African state employing this sort of legislation.

In response to the Hamas-Israel conflict, Jordan has cut diplomatic ties with Israel, the first country to do so in response to recent events outside of South America. There is a realistic possibility that other nations follow this pattern in the near future. Highlighting the intricacies of Middle East diplomacy however, Jordan has also requested that the United States deploys Patriot air defence systems in the country to bolster its border defence at a time of heightened regional tensions. This is almost certainly a reflection of the fear in the region over escalating tensions and expect a significant increase in militarisation of borders in the coming weeks.

In Jeddah, representatives from the Sudanese military and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have resumed peace talks. A major breakthrough is unlikely at this time, but the resumption of talks will highly likely be seen as a positive universally. In Mali, the seizing of a United Nations (UN) base in Kidal by Tuareg rebels will highly likely precipitate a showdown in the strategic city where Mali's army is hoping to wrest back control. Is also indicative of the chaos and deteriorating security situation that will follow the UN withdrawal. In Nigeria, the insurgency in the north of the country is growing and highly likely to become a major issue for the government. At least 40 people were killed in Nigeria's Yobe state in the last reporting period, the first major attack on the north-eastern state in 18 months.

The effects of Storm Ciaran will almost certainly continue to cause disruption in the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, with severe damage reported in all three countries. Despite the worst of the weather passing, the clean-up operation will continue to affect public transport for several days. Elsewhere, the Klyuchevskaya Sopka volcano, Eurasia's tallest active volcano located in eastern Russia near the Kamchatka Peninsula, has erupted sending a large cloud over the region. Local disruption has already been reported but there is a realistic possibility that aviation in the region is affected depending on the direction the cloud moves.





Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Pakistan begins to deport undocumented Afghans.

In early October, Pakistan's Interior Ministry announced that it would forcibly deport up to two million undocumented Afghan residents from Pakistan if they did not depart the country by 1 November. Pakistan's government had claimed that the Afghan diaspora within the country was responsible for the majority of suicide bombings in Pakistan, particularly in the western provinces. Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti exclaimed that those who failed to leave voluntarily would face deportation and that this will be enforced by all law enforcement agencies from the provincial to federal level. Entry requirements for Afghans would also change from 1 November, with all Afghans entering Pakistan requiring valid passports and visas. Since the deadline has transpired, it is estimated that around 200,000 Afghans have voluntarily left Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan's law enforcement agencies have taken drastic measures to find, arrest and deport Afghans. These measures have included going door to door to identify and detain Afghans, using bulldozers to destroy Afghan homes or shelters, and hoarding Afghans into buses and trucks to be taken to the border.

Assessment: It is highly likely that the growing intolerance towards Afghan refugees aligns with a rise in violence associated with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an insurgent group linked to the hardline Sunni Taliban group that regained control of Afghanistan two years ago. The TTP's primary goal is to overthrow Pakistan's democratic government and enforce its strict interpretation of Sharia law. Subsequently, their attacks are aimed at destabilising the country and challenging the incumbent government. Furthermore, Pakistan contends with an ongoing threat from the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is predominantly based in Afghanistan, but has conducted attacks in Pakistan. Despite the measures taken by Pakistan to secure its mountainous border region and curb the infiltration of extremists from Afghanistan, it is highly probable that the border still functions as a significant channel for militants, contraband, and weaponry. It is almost certain that the Pakistani authorities fear that militants could exploit the Afghan diaspora to recruit potential militants from a largely impoverished and stigmatised population that is likely highly susceptible to radicalisation. Moreover, a sizeable Afghan diaspora could afford militants from Afghanistan an opportunity to hide within the population. There is also a realistic possibility that Pakistan fears that ISKP will seek to conduct more activity within Pakistan after the Taliban has degraded the group within Afghanistan. On 3 November, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in the Pakistani town of Dera Ismail Khan. Whilst this attack may be totally unrelated to the deportation of Afghans, there is a realistic possibility that the efforts to do so are overstressing police resources and providing militants an opportunity to attack.

It is almost certain that Afghanistan lacks the resources and expertise to deal with an influx of refugees. It is estimated that almost 30 million Afghans, or two-thirds of the population require urgent humanitarian assistance to survive; a crisis that has undoubtedly been compounded by a series of earthquakes that devastated western Afghanistan. Newly arriving Afghans will likely be devoid of food, shelter, clean water and medicine, which will be in limited supply in Afghanistan. There is a strong probability that numerous Afghan refugees who sought sanctuary in Pakistan did so to escape the Taliban, primarily because of their past affiliations with the former Afghan government or foreign entities. As a result, it is highly likely that many of these repatriated refugees will face persecution or even execution at the hands of the Taliban. Pakistan has



received some international condemnation for its expulsion of Afghans; however, it is likely that it will blame the West for not taking in enough Afghans after a twenty-year war that shaped the conditions for their original departure.

India:

Bomb at Jehovah's Witness event kills three in Kerala and stirs racial tensions.

On 29 October, three people were killed and at least 50 people were injured as a series of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) targeted a Jehovah's Witnesses meeting in Kochi, in the southern state of Kerala. More than 2,000 people were attending the three-day event and a man was detained on the same day after he posted a video on social media claiming responsibility. In the days following, police in Kerala opened an investigation into India's deputy minister of information technology, Rajeev Chandrashekhar, for allegedly stirring religious hatred on social media related to the bombings. Chandrashekhar accused Kerala's ruling Communist party of appeasing radical organisations and Kerala's chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, responded by stating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationalist party was trying to destabilise the state, home to millions of Hindus, Muslims and Christians.

Assessment: The man arrested claims to be a registered member of Jehovah's Witness who had become angry with the religious groups anti-national teachings. Given the nature of the incident and the accompanying statement of responsibility, it is highly likely that this attack was an isolated incident. Nevertheless, expect tightened security in major cities such as Delhi and Mumbai in the wake of the blasts, particularly around high-profile international events such as the ongoing Cricket World Cup. However, the comments from politicians following the blasts are more likely to lead to a deterioration in the security situation. Chandrashekhar's comments followed the former head of Hamas, Khaled Mashal, virtually addressing a rally organised by a local Muslim group in Kerala calling for solidarity with Gaza. Kerala, which is home to millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, and is the most religiously diverse state in India, has managed to maintain peace between the groups, but potential catalysts for violence do increase the risk of ethnic tensions, and subsequent violence, emerging. Given the rhetoric of Modi and the ruling Indian New Force Party (BNP), the upcoming 2024 elections, and the current violence in Manipur, it is highly likely tensions along ethnic or religious lines will be heightened for the foreseeable within India, with isolated cases of violence a realistic possibility.

Bangladesh:

Violent protests in Dhaka amid opposition crackdowns.

On 28 October, tens of thousands of people took part in an anti-government protest organised in Dhaka calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The protesters are demanding that Hasina steps down and hands power to a neutral caretaker to oversee the Bangladesh general elections in January 2024. The protests escalated and violent clashes broke out between security forces and the demonstrators, leading to one police officer and one protester being killed, as well as at least 100 more people being injured. Security forces deployed tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons against the demonstrators. Following the clashes, Mirza Alamgir, secretary-general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh's main opposition party, and dozens of BNP members were arrested. The police said Alamgir was arrested relating to the violence that broke out during the protests.

Assessment: The arrest of Alamgir highlights the crackdown on Bangladesh's opposition in the buildup to the January elections, with the BNP's leader, Khaleda Zia, already under de facto house arrest. The BNP has vowed to boycott the elections if Hasina does not step down to ensure a free and fair election. The BNP has claimed that around 2,300 of its activists have already been arrested since 28 October and it is highly likely the government are orchestrating this tactic to intimidate the opposition ahead of the elections. It is almost certain that protests will continue to



take place in the coming weeks, particularly in Dhaka, in the build up to the elections, which will invariably result in further arrests of the opposition. It is likely that many of these protests will turn violent and security forces will almost certainly deploy crowd control methods, such as tear gas and water cannons, in response. It is also likely that protesters will attempt blockades on highways, railways, and waterways, including the new railway link between India and Bangladesh in an attempt to undermine the Hasina administration. This would almost certainly impact the Bangladeshi economy, and given Dhaka has already had to accept economic assistance from the International Monetary Fund this year and it is likely that a faltering economy has been a further driver of civil unrest.

China.

Xiangshan Forum see's China and Russia target the West.

During the last reporting period, Beijing hosted the tenth Xiangshan Forum, China's biggest show of military diplomacy. The number and stature of foreign participants, including 22 defence ministers and 14 military chiefs, was at the highest level since 2006, with a delegation from the United States also in attendance. Key speeches were made by Zhang Youxia, vice chairman, behind President Xi Jinping, of China's Central Military Commission, and Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. Zhang offered veiled criticisms of Western nations, accusing some countries of trying to undermine the Chinese government, but did also stress the need for improving military ties with the United States. Shoigu was more forthright claiming that the West intended to inflict strategic defeat on Russia and expand the conflict in Ukraine to the Asia-Pacific region. Shoigu also commended Russia-China relations as "exemplary."

Assessment: The Xiangshan Forum has almost certainly taken on more importance for President Xi Jinping in recent years as defence and security issues have developed globally. China highly likely aimed to use the forum to promote Xi's public vision for a safer world, whilst drawing developing countries, particularly in the Global South, closer to Beijing. However, the forum took place at an awkward time for China as it is without a defence minister. On 24 October, Beijing officially sacked defence minister Li Shangfu; Li has been absent from public view for two months and is reportedly being investigated for corruption. Chinese military leaders deemed more senior than the defence minister filled in for Li, again re-emphasising the importance Beijing now places on the forum and defence and security. The participation of the United States comes at a time of a slight thawing in relations between Washington and Beijing, which is highly likely down to President Joe Biden and Xi's scheduled summit next month. The militaries of the two superpowers have very little high-level military-to-military communications, and no publicly known interaction has taken place since March 2023. It is likely that the lack of regular communication is a concern to both Beijing and Washington, especially given the risks of a miscalculation in the South China Sea or near Taiwan, and there is a realistic possibility that the issue is broached between Biden and Xi next month. China did reaffirm their claims over Taiwan at the forum, including the potential use of military force to reunify, and therefore the issue may be expedited. Shoigu's comments regarding the West and the "exemplary" Sino-Russian relationship are highly likely an attempt to maintain Beijing's support for Moscow amid their continued isolation on the international stage as it is almost certain that Russia is relying more on China, than vice versa, at this time.

APAC Forecast. In Taiwan, it has been announced that two major opposition parties, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT), will work together in the country's forthcoming parliamentary elections in January 2024. This comes as the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) continues to hold a clear majority in most polls. The DPP is a major Taiwanese nationalist party, whilst the KMT is historically Chinese Nationalist and anti-independence. The TPP, was formed as a centrist alternative to both of these parties. As such, whilst there is talk that the TPP and the KMT may seek to run a joint Presidential ticket, until policy positions around unification or independence are sorted, such an announcement is unlikely.



President Macron of France arrived in Kazakhstan this week, as part of his trip to Central Asia. The region was long regarded as within the Russian sphere of influence, however, Moscow's influence in the region has significantly declined following the war in Ukraine and it is likely that the West will try and build influence. It is rumoured that North Korea is poised to close dozens of embassies, including in Spain, Hong Kong, and multiple countries in Africa, with it estimated up to 25 percent could close. Pyongyang has long used its embassies to try and generate overseas revenue to support the regime. Such closures are likely indicative that these embassies are now costing more to run than they make, likely a consequence of the increasing pressure of international sanctions. Expect a further economic decline in North Korea, and there is a realistic probability that this could lead to Pyongyang coming back to the negotiating table as it seeks financial relief. Whilst North Korea seeks to close embassies, it is also in the final stages of seeking a third time to try and launch a spy satellite. After two failed attempts, observers expect this launch to be a success, and as such it will likely lead to regional powers such as Japan and South Korea reacting in the coming days.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin will meet with their Indian counterparts later this month in New Delhi to discuss "concerns and developments in the Indo-Pacific". These talks are almost certainly going to focus on tensions between the United States, India and China in the Indo-Pacific region. Meanwhile, on 4 November, the Australian prime minister, Anthony Albanese, will travel to China to meet with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang following a recent breakthrough in trade relations. His visit will be the first visit in seven years to the country of a current prime minister and will be seen as a breakthrough in relations for Canberra, as it continues to move closer to the United States and the United Kingdom in terms of security issues.

Indonesia has announced that in the run-up to its elections, counter-terrorist units have arrested 59 suspected militants. Of those arrested, 19 belonged to the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) network, which has ties to al Qaeda, while 40 suspects were from Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) which has pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS). Whilst the country's terror threat has been mitigated in recent years due to successful counter-terror operations the scale of these arrests shows how there remains a domestic terror threat within the country. Tensions between Beijing and Manilla will continue to remain high over the issues of sovereignty in the South China Sea. Beijing will almost certainly persist in its aggressive tactics, despite its claims of sovereignty having no legal basis according to a court ruling in 2016.

In India, government authorities have warned that air pollution levels could worsen over the next few days despite efforts to reduce them. The dip in air quality in the region during the winter months is often accompanied by a spike in respiratory illnesses, spurring school and factory closings. Meanwhile, in China, authorities have also issued warnings for fog and haze in the north of the country. This is due to an unusual combination of high temperatures and cold atmospheric conditions. Visibility is likely to drop to less than 50 metres in some parts. Much like in India, Chinese air pollution tends to spike in the winter and as such this will likely be an issue over the coming months. Finally, in Australia, multiple destructive wildfires continue to burn, and they are expected to shift to northern Queensland as the southern region of the state is expected to receive much-needed rain. At least one of the fires is believed to have been started deliberately.

