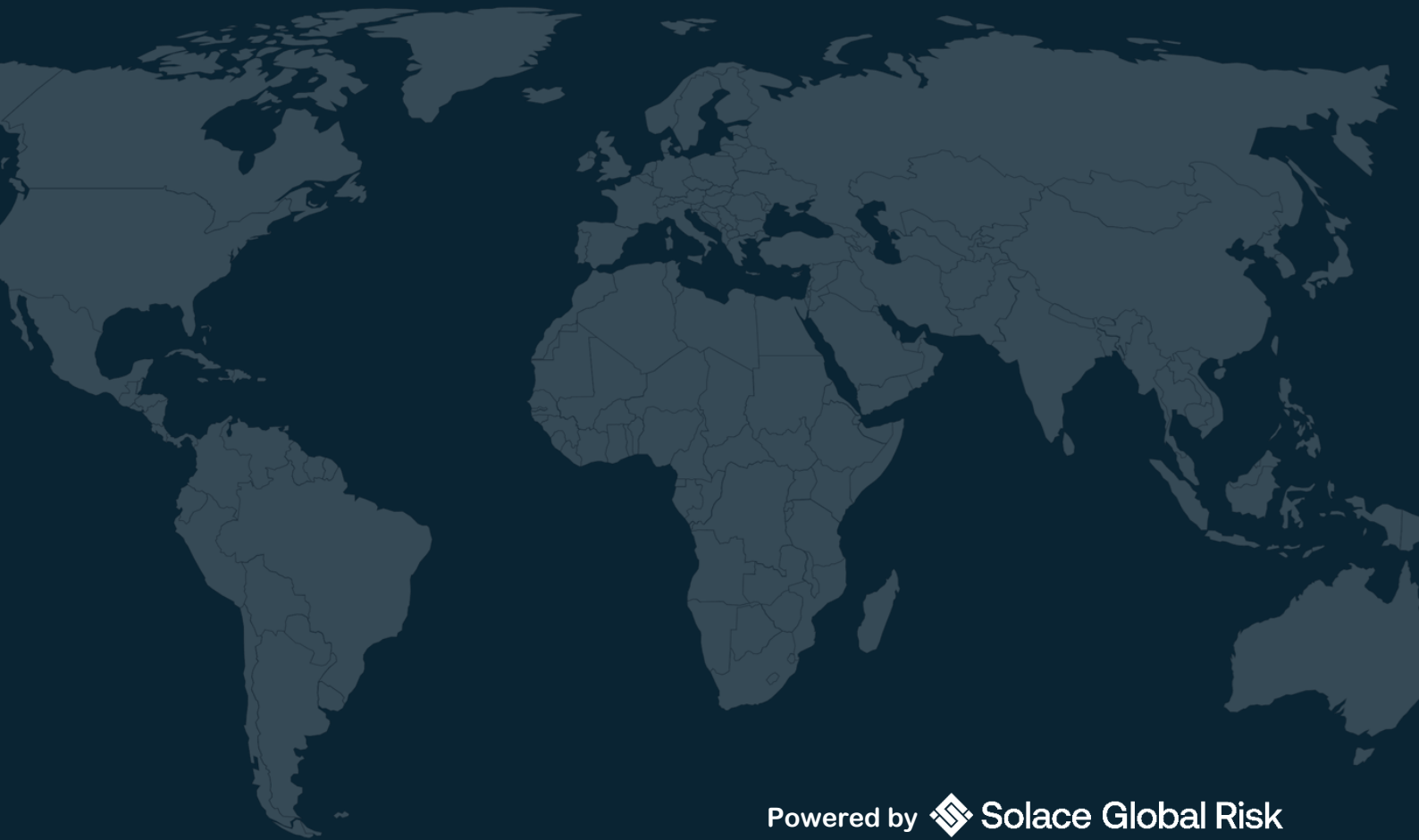




# Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 03 NOV - 10 NOV 2023



# Global Intelligence Summary

Week 47: 03 November – 10 November 2023

## Executive Summary

- In **Spain**, political instability and civil unrest look **likely** in response to Prime Minister Sanchez's move to grant immunity to Catalan separatists in exchange for coalition support.
- In **Israel**, the IDF's encirclement of Gaza City will **almost certainly** trap thousands of civilians in the area and lead to multiple civilian deaths.
- In **Sudan**, the army and Rapid Support Forces look **unlikely** to agree upon a ceasefire, increasing the chances of human rights abuses and potential genocide in the troubled Darfur region.
- In **Myanmar**, an offensive initiated by an alliance of rebel groups looks **highly likely** to destabilise the country and lead to the displacement of thousands.

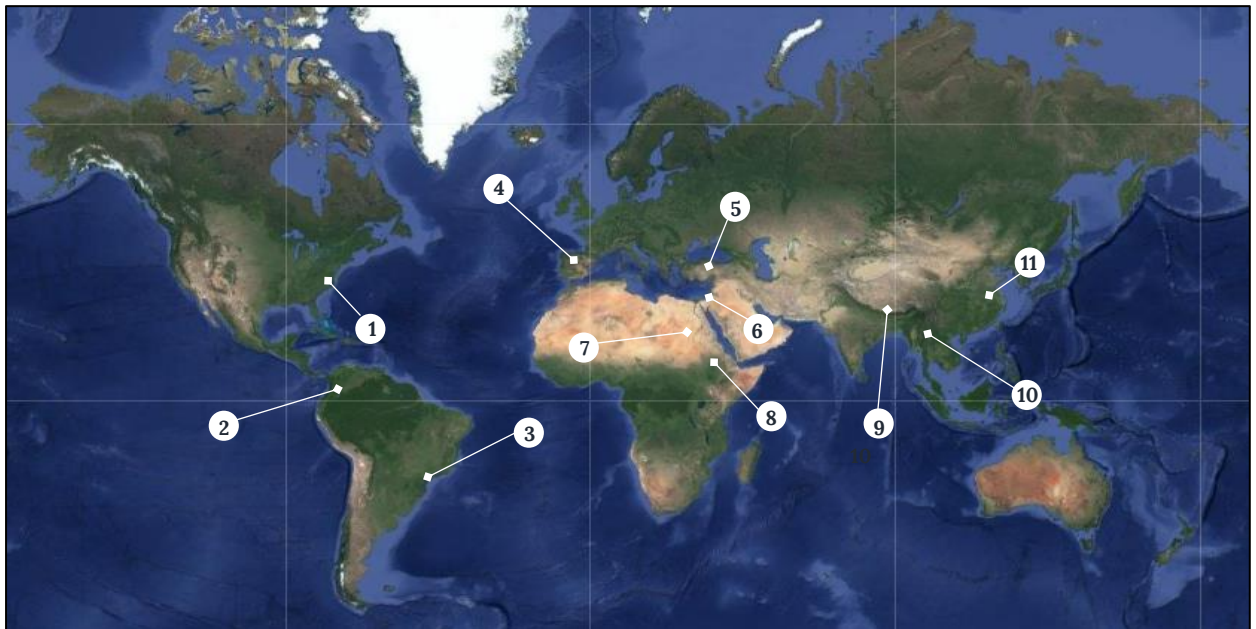


Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

### AMER

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- 2 Colombia:** ELN and Clan del Golfo clash in Alto Baduó
- 3 Brazil:** Hezbollah attack on Brazilian Jews foiled by Mossad

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- 6 Israel and the Gaza Strip:** IDF encircle Gaza City as thousands flee
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- 10 Myanmar:** Government forced back in rebel offensive
- 11 China:** Australian PM visits Beijing in rapprochement attempt



## Americas (AMER)

### United States:

#### **Promising electoral sign for Democrats as potential government shutdown looms.**

A year out from the 2024 presidential election, Democrats secured important victories in elections across the country during the last reporting period. In Virginia the party won control of both legislative chambers; in Kentucky Democratic Governor Andy Beshear won a second four-year term; and in Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment guaranteeing abortion rights. Elsewhere, freshly elected Speaker Mike Johnson continues to strategise on how to introduce a stopgap spending measure to prevent the government from shutting down on 17 November. The reporting period did not see Republicans, who control the House of Representatives, coalesce around one plan, but Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer indicated that staff from party leaders on both sides of the House and Senate were actively co-operating on how best to avert a shutdown.

**Assessment:** The election wins for the Democrats will likely help alleviate concerns some party leaders and officials had about Biden's unpopularity with voters. In Virginia and Kentucky, the Republicans had formidable candidates in places that are seen as bellwether states; Kentucky voted for Donald Trump by 25 percentage points in 2020 and in Virginia Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin, a once-rumoured candidate for the Republican 2024 presidential nomination, actively campaigned for victory, pouring millions of dollars from his own political action committee into the race. In Ohio, the legislating of abortion rights extends an unbeaten streak for abortion access advocates since the Supreme Court's decision in 2022 to overturn its 1972 Roe v. Wade decision. It is highly likely that this is an early signal that reproductive rights remain a potent issue for Democrats ahead of the 2024 presidential race. The 7 November results will likely provide Biden and the Democrats not only an idea of how to win next year's election, but also that recent disappointing polling is not necessarily a cause to panic. The latest threat of a government shutdown comes after hardline Republicans removed Kevin McCarthy as Speaker in October 2023. Biden and McCarthy had agreed a USD 1.59 trillion discretionary spending budget, but the same hardline Republicans are looking for an additional USD 120 billion in cuts. The ongoing negotiations are highly likely to test relatively inexperienced Speaker Johnson's effectiveness as the top Republican in Congress amid the party's infighting. Both Democrats and Republicans are, publicly at least, less concerned about a government shutdown occurring on 17 November as they were ahead of October's deadline, and therefore with bipartisan talks already ongoing, it is unlikely that that such an eventuality will be reached.

### Colombia:

#### **ELN and Clan del Golfo clashes in Alto Baduó suggest "total peace" not currently achievable.**

This last reporting period has seen the guerilla insurgency, National Liberation Army (ELN), conduct a 72-hour armed strike in Chocó, Alto Baduó, with the group accusing criminal organisation Clan del Golfo of encroaching on their territory resulting in clashes. The operation began in the early hours of 7 November and finished just before midnight on 9 November. At the peak of hostilities, tens of thousands of people were displaced or sheltering-in-place, and additional state security forces have since deployed to the region.

**Assessment:** While the immediate impact of these events is almost certain to have been disastrous for the town of Chocó, the direct consequences of the clashes will highly likely remain isolated. The more significant ramifications of the ELN military operation are likely to be on Colombia's nationwide security situation, as the attack comes at a critical time for President Gustavo Petro's plan for "total peace." The recent progress made by the government with armed

groups in Colombia had been positive, but the recent high-profile kidnapping of a famous Colombian footballer's father by the ELN has sparked widespread condemnation and likely created uncertainties whether engaging in peace negotiations with armed groups is appropriate. The ELN in turn accuses the government of violating the bilateral ceasefire it is currently adhering to, and another group, General Central Staff (EMC), also announced on 5 November that they had suspended the dialogue it was holding with Petro's government. Petro came to office in 2022 promising to bring peace to Colombia, a nation that has been plagued by an internal conflict over the last six decades that has claimed the lives of at least 450,000 people. Since the start of the year, Petro, his government, and numerous guerilla insurgencies, paramilitary forces, and criminal organisations have announced peace talks and ceasefires, that have ultimately not lasted. Indeed, whilst it is highly likely that the plan for "total peace" remains top of Petro's domestic agenda, given the lack of a coherent peace deal and the inability to build on deals already struck, it is now highly unlikely unilateral peace will be realised in Petro's first term.

## Brazil:

### Hezbollah attack on Jews in Brazil foiled by Mossad.

During the reporting period it was announced by the Israeli prime minister's office that Israel's national intelligence agency, Mossad, had worked in conjunction with Brazilian federal police to foil an attack on Jewish and Israeli targets within Brazil. The attack was purportedly going to be conducted by the Iranian-backed group, Hezbollah, which has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation in much of the West and by several Arab countries. Israel claims that the cell planning the attack was directly supported and financed by Iran. Local Brazilian police stated that the cell was trying to recruit Brazilian citizens to carry out the attacks and that they have executed eleven search and seizure raids in Sao Paulo, Brasilia and in the state of Minas Gerais. Two suspects have been arrested by the Brazilian authorities in Sao Paulo, one of whom recently arrived at Sao Paulo International Airport after flying from Beirut, Lebanon, where Hezbollah are primarily based. Mossad's announcement has aggravated the Brazilian justice minister who exclaimed that no foreign force orders around the Brazilian Federal Police. Brazilian and Israeli relations have been strained recently as Brazilian President Lula da Silva has condemned Israel's retaliation and ineffectiveness at securing the release of 30 Brazilian nationals trapped in Gaza.

**Assessment:** Brazil houses the second largest Jewish population in South America with approximately 100,000 Jews living in the country, providing Hezbollah with thousands of potential targets, such as synagogues and schools. In addition, it is estimated that there are approximately five to seven million Brazilians of Lebanese descent. While the overwhelming majority of these belong to the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church, there are hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Brazilians who subscribe to Shia Islam, some of whom will potentially be sympathetic to Hezbollah's cause and are likely aggrieved by Israel's attacks on Gaza. Security services in the region have been tracking Hezbollah operations in the tri-border region of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay for an extended period, exploiting the ungoverned space where authorities have traditionally failed to combat terrorist and criminal groups. Their main activities likely include drug trafficking, counterfeiting, and contraband smuggling to fund Hezbollah operations elsewhere.

It is likely that Hezbollah is not in a position to open up a northern front with Israel, with public support for a war low due to Lebanon's economic and political issues. In addition, the United States has warned it will strike Hezbollah targets in Lebanon should they escalate the situation and has moved substantial naval power into the Eastern Mediterranean to deter Hezbollah attacks. With Iran's most powerful proxy group impeded by these factors, there is a realistic possibility that Tehran is seeking to use Hezbollah to conduct external operations against the international Jewish community to influence Israel's decisions. In such a scenario, Iranian involvement would likely be suspected, however Hezbollah affords Tehran with a high degree of plausible deniability making Iranian attribution almost impossible to prove. Whilst the Brazilian attack was foiled, it will doubtlessly send a strong message to both Israel and the international

community, and it is almost certainly a tactic that could be employed elsewhere on the globe with a substantial Jewish diaspora.

**AMER Forecast.** Chinese Premier Xi Jinping will arrive in San Francisco on 11 November for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit where he and President Joe Biden will meet on the sidelines for a face-to-face meeting. It is likely that both leaders will seek to stabilise ties between the two nations, with it realistically possible the discussions could represent a reset in the two powerful countries' relationship. With the high-profile nature of the event, heightened security and several road closures should be expected across San Francisco preceding and during the event. Domestically for the United States, the last reporting period saw the one-year countdown to the 2024 Presidential election begin. The race to be the Republican nominee will likely continue to see Donald Trump remain as firm favourite after the third Republican candidate debate took place in his absence; polling suggests that none of the other candidates put in a performance to dramatically change the forecasts. Political volatility should be expected during the election campaign, especially as the recent civil case against Trump has found him guilty of fraud with a large fine anticipated.

In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau condemned recent violence as unacceptable after shots were fired at two Jewish schools in Montreal and clashes between students were reported at a university in the same city. Given the heightened tensions regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the humanitarian situation in Gaza, discriminatory attacks on both Jewish and Muslim populations should be expected across the continent. Elsewhere, provincial elections will also take place in Canada's Northwest Territories on 14 November.

The El Nino phenomenon continues to bring heavy rains to South America, leaving many rural regions isolated as flooding and landslides block road networks. In southern Paraguay hundreds have been displaced and in Honduras at least four people have been killed and dozens have been evacuated. The heavy rain and subsequent flooding are likely to continue into the next reporting period and should be expected across the continent whilst El Nino lasts.





## Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

### Spain:

#### **Sanchez and PSOE strike deal with Catalanian parties making second term highly likely.**

The last reporting period has seen several developments in Spain's political theatre as incumbent prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, tries to finalise a deal ahead of his investiture vote later this month. Several nights saw thousands of people gathering outside the Socialist Party (PSOE) headquarters in Madrid to protest against the proposed amnesty law for Catalan politicians, a measure put forth by Prime Minister Sanchez to secure backing from Catalonia parties. On each occasion, dozens were injured as demonstrations turned violent and protesters clashed with police, who in turn used rubber bullets and smoke canisters to disperse the crowds. As the civil unrest was ongoing, the General Council of the Judiciary, released a statement that said the possible amnesty for Catalanian separatists, in return for their support for a new Socialist-led government, served only the interests of Sanchez and not the country. Nevertheless, on 9 November the PSOE announced that they had secured the backing of the Catalan separatist party, Together for Catalonia (Junts), on the proviso of the amnesty for those prosecuted over Catalonia's attempt to secede from Spain was included in the deal. The PSOE commented that while the party still had "profound disagreements" with Junts, it had put them aside in the interests of forming a "stable government", and the agreement included support for a full four-year term. Protests and demonstrations that followed this were larger and more violent than seen earlier in the reporting period. The following day the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) also pledged their support to Sanchez's coalition government.

**Assessment:** Spain has been working to form a government since a July election produced no outright winner. However, following the announcement that Sanchez and the PSOE had secured the backing of Junts and PNV, it is now highly likely that the incumbent prime minister has earned himself a second term in office. Sanchez has already struck deals with Sumar and Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), and the Junts were seen as the most complicated coalition partner to get on board. Sanchez, in theory, now has enough votes to pass his investiture vote scheduled for next week. Regardless of the outcome of the political process however, Sanchez's agreement to pursue an amnesty law for Catalanian separatists in exchange for the backing of the ERC and Junts is almost certainly going to remain controversial. While the criticism from the conservative-stacked General Council of the Judiciary is not unexpected, Sanchez himself has previously openly declared that such an amnesty law would be unconstitutional. The growing size and violence of the protests prior to the deal being announced already highlighted the extent of the tensions. Now that as many as 1400 activists and politicians are expected to be exculpated, it is almost certain that tensions within most of Spain will spike. This will likely translate into large-scale protests will take place prior to the investiture vote, and it remains realistically possible that these events will turn violent. These protests are likely to grow further in size if opposition parties, including the centre right People's Party (PP) and far-right Vox party, openly call for such demonstrations. Whilst Sanchez's controversial coalition promises to bring political stability to Spain, it is likely that this thin majority will rarely fully agree on policy and Spain will be beset with political instability beyond the outcome of the investiture vote.

### Turkey:

#### **Organised protests against air base used by US prior to Blinken's arrival in Turkey.**

On 5 November in Adana, hundreds of activists at a pro-Palestinian rally attempted to storm the Incirlik air base which houses United States troops. The Turkish police were deployed to prevent demonstrators from breaching the bases' fences and used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. The protest, organised by the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, aimed to



protest Israeli attacks on Gaza, American support for Israel and called for the ending of a United States presence at the base. IHH president, Bulent Yildirim, called for restraint among the demonstrators but reaffirmed the significant Turkish support for the Palestinian cause. This rally took place just before the United States' Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, visit to Ankara for talks on Gaza, amid increasing criticism from Turkey towards the West over its support for Israel.

**Assessment:** It is highly likely that the protest outside the Incirlik air base was well organised in advance and designed to coincide with Secretary Blinken's visit in order to generate as much international publicity as possible. The IHH is a Turkish Conservative Muslim organisation that operates in over 120 countries and has been very active in Gaza, building schools and renovating the port. Reports indicate the IHH organised convoys of buses to bring protestors to Adana from other ports of Turkey. Given the effort involved in travelling hundreds of miles to stage a protest it is likely that the protestors were therefore more hardline than similar protests. Whilst Turkey officially supports the two-state solution, and has normalised relations since 1949, it is almost certain that many Turks are against Turkey's official position and are against Turkey providing the United States with military facilities that have been used in several war against Muslim nations, such as the Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan. The United States maintains dozens of bases throughout the Middle East in countries like Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Whilst protests are unlikely to occur outside American bases in countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, due to incredibly harsh laws regarding demonstrations, there is a realistic possibility that they may occur in Jordan, Iraq and Bahrain.

### Israel and the Gaza Strip:

#### IDF encircle Gaza City as thousands of Palestinians attempt to flee south.

During the last reporting period the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have conducted a full encirclement of Gaza City with armoured units and have ordered civilians to evacuate to the south, prompting thousands of Gazans to flee. The IDF has also maintained its air strikes on Gaza leading to multiple reports of damage to civilian infrastructure including several hospitals. The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry now claims that over 10,000 civilians have now been killed by the IDF, resulting in much international condemnation and the United Nations calling for an inquiry into the IDF's use of high-impact explosive weapons that can lead to indiscriminate killings. United States Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, has conducted a tour of the Middle East where he was met by protestors and many key politicians, such as Turkey's President Erdogan, refused to meet him. When in Israel, Blinken attempted to persuade Israel into introducing a humanitarian temporary ceasefire, a plan that was rejected by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. However, Israel did agree to "tactical" four-hour pauses for the facilitation of humanitarian aid. Netanyahu has stated that Israel has no plans to occupy or govern Gaza once the military operation has been completed but has suggested that a credible force will be needed to enter the Palestinian enclave to prevent the future emergence of militant threats. Saudi Arabia will host an Arab and Muslim nation summit during the next reporting period to discuss the Gaza conflict, which will include a delegation from Iran and will reportedly discuss how to reach a ceasefire.

**Assessment:** Israel's declared objective from the start of hostilities was to destroy Hamas as a military threat once and for all. However, there is no clear route to this objective, and it is highly likely that the IDF's sustained bombing of Gaza and current ground offensive is inspiring more Palestinians to join the ranks of Hamas. The IDF's encirclement of Gaza City is likely part of a first phase that will see the IDF attempt to contain Hamas elements within Gaza City, whilst it deploys armour and dismounted troops to find and destroy Hamas. However, it is unlikely that an encirclement will effectively contain Hamas due to their extensive tunnel network and ability to blend in with the civilian population. The encirclement will almost certainly trap thousands of civilians in northern Gaza and will lead to many more civilian casualties, provoking many anti-Israel and pro-Palestine demonstrations across the world. This first phase is likely to take weeks, maybe months, and there is a realistic possibility that the IDF will then seek to conduct similar action in southern Gaza, where elements of Hamas, especially key commanders, have likely

withdrawn to. Israel is almost certainly rejecting calls for a ceasefire as it fears it will enable Hamas the time and space to regroup. The sanctioning of four-hour tactical windows will afford Hamas some time to regroup and is likely the maximum amount of time Israel will allow, only doing so as a result of Western, particularly American, pressure. While the United States may laud the tactical window, it will likely do little to improve the humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Blinken's trip will largely be seen as a failure that exposed the limits of Washington's influence over Israel and a deterioration of United States relations with key regional allies such as Turkey. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas is continuing to provoke broader repercussions, including attacks on United States military bases in the region, gunfire directed at a Jewish school in Montreal, Canada, the shooting down of a United States MQ9 Reaper drone by the Houthis, and incidents of violence in the West Bank. Whilst the threat of a wider war does not look imminent, the Pentagon has stated that there have been 46 attacks within the last three weeks on United States and coalition personnel in the region. These have likely not reached the threshold for retaliation however there is a probable chance that a successful attack from an Iranian-backed proxy group could trigger a kinetic United States response which could be a driver for escalation. General Secretary of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group, Hasan Nasrallah, is due to speak on 11 November during Martyr's Day. Nasrallah's previous speech was relatively restrained in nature however, any change in direction will likely inspire many within the region's Shia community to act due to the respect and influence afforded to him. Whilst Netanyahu has stated that Israel has no plans to govern or occupy Gaza in the long-term, his allusion to a force responsible for securing Gaza will likely entail indefinite border security and be seen as an occupation by many. Within Gaza itself, it is likely that Israel intends on handing power over to the Palestinian Authority (PA), who currently administrate the West Bank – a move that will likely be endorsed by Washington.

## Sudan:

### **Warring factions fail to agree on ceasefire as genocide looms in Darfur.**

Throughout the reporting period, Saudi Arabia has hosted peace talks in Jeddah between the two rival Sudanese factions, the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The two warring factions have failed to agree on a ceasefire but have agreed to improve access to humanitarian aid. Fighting is ongoing throughout the country and the RSF are close to controlling all the Darfur province after managing to seize another major military base in the region. The RSF and groups affiliated to it have been accused of a host of crimes such as extrajudicial killings, looting, the rape and enslavement of women and girls, and the destruction of homes. Local monitors have stated that the RSF has increased the rate of mass killings since West Darfur fell entirely to them on 4 November.

**Assessment:** Fighting in Sudan erupted in April 2023 between the forces of Sudanese army chief and current Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and his former deputy commander and leader of the RSF, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. During peace talks at the start of the war, both parties agreed to the Jeddah Declaration, a commitment to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure and to allow access for critically needed humanitarian aid. However, it is likely that both parties have rarely abided by the Jeddah Declaration and violated several early truces too. Over 10,000 people have now been killed in the war according to conservative estimates. However, the true death toll is almost certain to be much higher with much of the fighting occurring in areas like Darfur where media access is severely limited.

The relatively isolated region of Darfur, which is approximately the same size of France, witnessed genocide in the early 2000s with estimates for the death toll ranging from 80,000 to 400,000, demonstrating the complexity of assessing the severity of the conflict in an area with such limited access. The largely Arab RSF were complicit in the last genocide which primarily targeted Sudan's ethnically black tribes within Darfur. The RSF are on the cusp of seizing the entirety of the province again after taking south, west and central Darfur, with thousands of internally displaced persons seeking refuge in northern Darfur. There are likely growing concerns that the RSF will



commit war crimes once fully in control of the region as the paramilitary group is unable to control many of its own forces. It is also highly likely that the RSF does not have the experience or capacity to effectively govern the territory it has seized, which will likely lead to more lawlessness and compound the humanitarian situation. Hundreds of thousands have already fled to neighbouring Chad, South Sudan and Libya, likely overwhelming these countries and increasing the chances of a further migrant crisis.

## Ethiopia:

### Renewed clashes in Amhara region.

The last reporting period has seen new armed clashes in the town of Lalibela in Ethiopia's Amhara region. The Ethiopian military began by firing heavy weaponry at least 11 times towards a mountain overlooking the town. The military's intended target was the Fano militia, a once ally of the Ethiopian military that had fought alongside federal troops in a two-year civil war in the neighbouring Tigray region that ended in November 2022. The town of Lalibela is also an important tourist and religious site within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, hosting the Rock-Hewn Churches, a current UNESCO World Heritage Site. Concerns have been raised by locals that should heavy weapon clashes continue in the town; the twelfth century churches may be irreversibly damaged.

**Assessment:** Relations between the Fano and Ethiopian military have soured following Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's announcement in April 2023 that regional security forces, such as the Fano, were to be integrated into the Ethiopian federal forces. Amhara has often been regarded as the sole stable regional partner for the federal government, but instability has been steadily growing across the region, and this has almost certainly stemmed from Ahmed's decision. This current situation in Amhara is Ethiopia's biggest security threat since the Tigray War. The Fano militia, along with other regional militias in Amhara, have been reluctant to incorporate into the Ethiopian federal forces. General mistrust, abuses of power and a fear of attack from neighbouring regions have left militia groups reluctant to disband and to integrate. Abiy has publicly stated that the reason for the integration of regional militias is to not undermine the individual regions security, but instead to make Ethiopia stronger and more assertive on the regional and global stage. Abiy, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, seems determined to leave a legacy, with it realistically possible that this is the reason Ethiopia is afoot with rumours of a possible new war for his administration – which would be a fourth in five years. Abiy has expressed continued desire to obtain access to a seaport and that it was an 'existential issue' for the landlocked state of around 125 million people. Ethiopia lost access to the sea following Eritrean independence in 1993. For some Abiy's desire to regain sea access for Ethiopia may be a vague hint at a potential war with a neighbouring state and the recent acquisition of a substantial order of Chinese made weapons supports that theory. However, this rhetoric for Ethiopian expansion from Abiy is likely to cause distraction from internal problems and to garner some support among the large, fractionalised population. The Ethiopian economy continues to falter and if the situation continues to worsen, an International Monetary Fund bailout will likely be required. Ultimately, while an Ethiopian war with a neighbouring state unlikely at this time, an escalation in the current situation in Amhara cannot be ruled out.

**EMEA Forecast.** President Andrzej Duda has given the incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, the initial opportunity to establish a new government in Poland after the nationalist Law and Justice party won the most seats in the recent elections. It is unlikely however that he will be able to form a coalition, with it likely that the Civic Platform party (PO) and Donald Tusk will be offered the next chance. It is likely that PO will garner enough support from other parties to form a government, marking a significant change in the direction of Polish politics. Portugal is highly likely to enter a period of political volatility after socialist Prime Minister, Antonio Costa, resigned amidst allegations of corruption. The country is set to hold snap elections in March, but it is likely the opposition will demand for earlier elections whilst the socialists are in the spotlight. In Liberia, citizens are set to vote in a runoff election on 14 November, choosing between

President George Weah and former Vice President Joseph Boakai. The first round was fiercely contested, and the upcoming runoff underscores the delicate state of democracy in Liberia, with expectations of another close contest leaving any result with potential to provoke demonstrations. The presidential election on 16 November in Madagascar is again at risk of being delayed after the President of the National Assembly called for its suspension. This follows opposition presidential candidate Jean Jacques Ratsietison being arrested during a protest in the capital, opposition claims the vote will be fraudulent, and weeks of protests that have seen dozens injured. Sustained protests are almost certain and if the elections are suspended again, and they are likely to increase in size and intensity. Looking further ahead, Ghana's ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) has nominated Vice President Mahamadu Bawumia as its presidential candidate. Bawumia, responsible for overseeing Ghana's economy, faces this role at a critical juncture with the country seeking USD 3 billion in aid from the International Monetary Fund.

The Saudi Fund for Development is set to finalise agreements totalling 2 billion Riyals (USD 533 million) with African countries during the Saudi-Arab-African Economic Conference. Additionally, preliminary agreements have been inked with nations such as Nigeria, Senegal, Chad, and Ethiopia, focusing on cooperation in the energy sector. This likely reflects a growing Saudi influence in the region as they attempt to diversify from oil, a trend expected to persist in the foreseeable future.

At the Arab League Emergency Summit addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and Gaza's humanitarian crisis on 11 November in Riyadh, a heightened security presence is expected. Increased measures, including checkpoints and potential airspace closures, will likely be implemented around the summit venue and major routes to King Khalid International Airport. On the same day, General Secretary of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, is set to speak for "Martyr's Day." His previous speech was more restrained than many anticipated. However, now the IDF are within Gaza there is a realistic possibility that Hezbollah will become more bellicose in its rhetoric and attempt to inspire attacks against Israelis and Jews around the world. As the United States continues to support and provide lethal aid to Israel, it is highly likely there will be more attempted attacks against American personnel in the region, particularly in Iraq. Iranian rhetoric or Nasrallah's speech could further inspire attacks.

In the wake of Storm Ciarán, Storm Domingos has caused severe damage to many parts of Western Europe and is expected to bring heavy rains for days to come. Flood alerts have been issued across much of France leading to multiple school closures. Severe flooding is also ongoing across eastern Africa. In Somalia, the situation is described as the worst in decades, and has resulted in 29 casualties and displaced over 300,000 people. Climate change, exemplified by contrasting weather phenomena such as El Niño and the Indian Ocean Dipole, continues to pose challenges across Africa. In Iceland, thousands of minor earthquakes have sparked concerns of a potential volcanic eruption and prompted the closure of the famous Blue Lagoon. While there is no immediate need for evacuation, local authorities are vigilant, prepared for potential volcanic activity, and are closely monitoring the situation.



## Asia Pacific (APAC)

### Nepal:

#### Earthquake kills hundreds in Nepal's remote northwest.

On 3 November, a magnitude 5.6 earthquake struck the municipality of Jumla in northwestern Nepal, causing the deaths of at least 150 people. The earthquake occurred at 23:47 local time and was preceded by three powerful aftershocks within an hour, triggering widespread panic and distress in Jumla and nearby regions. Reports indicate that dozens opted to spend the night outdoors due to the fear of further tremors and owing to the substantial number of homes that had been destroyed. One of the severely affected regions was Athaviskot, which saw the destruction of hundreds of homes. In response to the event, Nepal's Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, arrived in Jumla, issuing directives for the immediate commencement of rescue and relief efforts, following concerns of civilians still being trapped underneath the rubble.

**Assessment:** The recent devastation in Nepal underscores how poor structural integrity can contribute to the extensive damage of homes and vital infrastructure, which was almost certainly the factor responsible for the relatively high death toll on this occasion in Nepal. As rescue efforts continue, the provision of food, water, and medical supplies will be hindered by several factors. Firstly, the remote and mountainous terrain will result in difficulty accessing the affected areas. While several rescue helicopters and small military aircraft have landed in short mountain strips, most of the rescue and relief efforts are being carried out by foot. These operations have been impeded by landslides resulting from the earthquake, which have blocked major roads, many of which were already in a state of disrepair. It is also likely that there is a scarcity of specialist rescue equipment, such as excavators and listening devices, which will further hinder the search for missing persons. In mountainous regions, the typical winter temperature hovers at approximately 12 degrees Celsius during the day, frequently plunging below freezing at night. As a result, search operations become time-sensitive, and it is likely that rescue operations will be further impeded by snowfall and frozen terrain in the affected areas. Whilst the Nepalese government have indicated that they will attempt to improve infrastructure to make it more resilient to earthquakes, it is highly likely that the country doesn't have the funds to achieve this objective and that important business and tourist areas like Kathmandu will be prioritised.

### Myanmar:

#### Rebel group alliances in the north seize terrain as offensive gains pace.

Throughout the reporting period, an offensive launched by an alliance of rebel groups in Myanmar has seized dozens of settlements in the northern Shan State and forced the Myanmar military to surrender over 100 military outposts in the north of the country. The offensive, which began on 27 October, was led by the Brotherhood Alliance which includes three ethnic armed groups, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), The Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army. This original alliance has now been augmented by several anti-coup groups. Myanmar's military government, led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has alleged that an offensive in the country's northeast by an alliance of armed ethnic minority groups was partially funded by profits from the region's drug trade. The MNDAA, however, denied these allegations, stating that they have implemented anti-drug measures and focused on alternative crop farming in the Kokang region.

**Assessment:** Myanmar's military staged a coup in February 2021, leading to widespread public resistance and international condemnation. Many individuals, including armed groups, organised People's Defence Forces to challenge and seek the overthrow of the military's rule. Shan State is

home to several marginalised ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultures and identities, with many of the ethnic groups seeking more autonomy or complete independence from central government for seven decades; it is considered the longest ongoing civil war in the world. Instability has been further created by Shan State's location near the borders of China, Thailand and Laos. These border areas, particularly the "Golden Triangle" of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, have been vulnerable to cross-border trade, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities which armed groups have almost certainly profited from and have used to fund their anti-government operations. The Golden Triangle has been a major production area for the opium poppy for decades and governments have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to suppress the industry. It is also highly likely that rebel groups have seen their profits soar after the Taliban has achieved a purported 95 per cent reduction in opium cultivation in Afghanistan.

The pace of the offensive suggests that rebel groups are well funded and well organised unlike the demoralised and under resourced Myanmar military. There is a realistic possibility that the success of the offensive will destabilise the country further and inspire other groups to take up arms against the junta. The military has attempted to disrupt the offensive with air strikes. However, it is unlikely that the Myanmar army has sufficient troops on the ground to effectively repel the offensive, forcing it to mobilise all reservists. Moreover, rebel groups will likely exploit the mountainous and jungle terrain to facilitate their operations and draw the military into costly guerilla warfare. The Myanmar military is also currently fighting resistance movements in other areas of the country, such as Kachin State, and is likely unable or unwilling to effectively fight on multiple fronts. The instability on the border with China has forced Beijing to call for a ceasefire however, given the current success of the offensive and the apparent weakness of government forces, it is unlikely that a pause in fighting will be achieved in the near future, likely leading to many more fatalities and the displacement of thousands.

#### China:

#### China and Australia to restart annual trade meetings as tensions ease.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Chinese President Xi Jinping convened in Beijing on Monday with the intent of mending trade relations, among other interests. In a historic visit, marking the first time an Australian leader had visited Beijing since 2016, Xi conveyed China's willingness to collaborate with Australia, prioritising mutual interests and emphasising trade as the central element of their bilateral ties. China and Australia had cultivated a strong trade relationship over the years, with Beijing emerging as Canberra's primary commercial partner through purchases of Australian food and natural resources. This relationship strained in 2020 when Australia called for an international inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering China to block various Australian imports.

**Assessment:** Albanese initiated efforts to restore relations after assuming the role of prime minister in May 2022, resulting in China reducing trade barriers. It is highly likely that Xi and Albanese are aligned in their belief that a strong trade relationship would be advantageous for both nations, but numerous impediments continue to challenge their partnership. Australia officially rejected Beijing's South China Sea claims in 2020, which serves as an important passageway for trade with Japan and South Korea. Additionally, China opposes Australia's involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), which involves Australia, the US, India, and Japan, and is aimed at preserving a free Indo-Pacific while countering China's expanding influence, as well as AUKUS, the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. China highly likely perceives the QSD and AUKUS as a threat to its interests and a component of Washington's efforts to surround the nation with strategic and military allies to contain China's political, economic and military growth. Despite these discrepancies, it is likely that Albanese recognises the economic benefit of stable relations with Beijing, with China importing almost one-third of all Australian exports, a trend likely to increase as China's middle class continues to expand.

**APAC Forecast.** In China, Vice Premier He Lifeng has been designated to lead the office of the Central Financial Commission (CFC), overseeing the new regulatory body responsible for managing the extensive financial sector. The creation of the CFC and the appointment of He, a senior official, emphasises the Communist Party's intention to directly control the economy as the country plunges into deflation. Tensions involving China and Taiwan are also almost certain to remain heightened for the foreseeable. The United States has approved a USD 80 million grant for Taiwan to acquire military equipment, with the use of a grant, as opposed to a standard loan, potentially signalling increased American assistance. This will likely provoke an aggressive response from Beijing, and therefore events such as a Chinese naval formation led by the aircraft carrier Shandong transiting the Taiwan Strait, like occurred in the last reporting period, should be expected to increase in frequency. Beijing is also likely to face continued competition for influence in the Pacific region from Western nations, with Australia signing a security agreement with Tuvalu, also offering Tuvaluans displaced by climate change permanent residency.

Elsewhere, the United States and South Korea continue to discuss an extended deterrence strategy to counter threats from North Korea, with escalating United States activity in the region highly likely provoking North Korea, potentially fostering closer ties between Pyongyang and Moscow. Malaysia's Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, has affirmed the country's commitment to maintaining ties with Hamas despite Western condemnation. In addressing parliament, he urged Malaysians to unanimously support the Palestinian cause, which will likely trigger a rise in Pro-Palestinian marches. Meanwhile, the Thai government is currently negotiating with Iran in an attempt to secure the release of dozens of Thais held captive by Hamas. It will also likely continue its evacuation of Thai agricultural workers located in Israel after already evacuating over 7000. It is highly likely that violent protests continue in Bangladesh as garment workers demand a larger wage increase with an impact on major fashion brands a realistic possibility and in Pakistan, authorities will continue to locate, detain and deport thousands of undocumented who it blames for a spike in terror attacks. The subsequent humanitarian crisis will likely be exacerbated as thousands of Afghans are sent back to the Taliban run country, raising the risk of both radicalisation and oppression.

To address severe air pollution, New Delhi will enforce vehicle restrictions from 13-20 November. Despite mitigation efforts, the air quality remains dangerous, raising the risk to those with chronic respiratory or cardiovascular diseases. New Delhi is also seeking to implement "artificial rain" in a further bid to combat air pollution. These drastic measures demonstrate the severity of air pollution in much of India, which typically deteriorates during winter when cold air traps pollutants from sources including vehicles, industries, construction dust, and agricultural waste burning. Contrastingly, Australia recorded the driest and hottest October in more than 20 years due to an El Nino weather pattern which has seen hot, dry conditions hit crop yields. Several areas are contending with bushfires, drought and the Great Barrier Reef has experienced some of its worst coral bleaching with rising sea temperatures, which will highly likely continue.