



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 10 NOV - 17 NOV 2023



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Week 48: 10 November – 17 November 2023

Executive Summary

- In the **United States**, President Biden and President Xi have agreed to the resumption of military communication but issues regarding Taiwan and competition will **likely** hinder major improvement.
- In the **Gaza Strip**, Israel Defence Forces have secured western Gaza City and will **almost certainly** begin the next stage of the ground operation which will **likely** entail the securing of eastern Gaza City and the bombing of areas in the south of the enclave.
- In **Mali**, it is **highly likely** that the Wagner Group assisted government forces in seizing strategic northern city, likely attracting the attention of regional actors like **Niger** and **Burkina Faso**.
- In **Myanmar**, a second front has been established by rebel groups which will **highly likely** overstretch government forces and destabilise much of the country.



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

AMER

- 1 United States:** Government shutdown averted
- 2 United States:** Biden host Xi in San Francisco
- 3 Paraguay and Venezuela:** Diplomatic relations restored

EMEA

- 4 Western Europe:** Israel-Hamas conflict continues to spark civil unrest
- 5 Gaza Strip:** IDF secure western Gaza City and prepare for next phase
- 6 Mali:** Government forces seize rebel-held town with help of Wagner Group
- 7 Zimbabwe:** State of emergency declared in Harare in response to cholera outbreak

APAC

- 8 Myanmar:** Rebel groups open second front in anti-junta offensive
- 9 China and Japan:** Strategic talks but underlying tension unlikely to improve
- 10 Taiwan:** Opposition parties agree joint ticket for presidential election



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Government shutdown averted in rare show of bipartisanship.

On 16 November, President Joe Biden signed a stopgap spending bill to avert a government shutdown following the legislation being passed in the Senate (87-11) and House of Representatives (336-95). The bill passed with broad bipartisan support, with Democrats stating that they were happy the agreement stuck to spending levels that had been set in previous deals. A group of hardline Republicans however were less pleased with the compromise, stating that new House Speaker Mike Johnson can no longer count on their support for legislation.

Assessment: This latest deal ends the years third fiscal standoff in Congress, following Washington being on the brink of defaulting on its roughly USD 31 trillion debt during May and June 2023 and coming within days of a partial shutdown in October 2023, that ultimately led to the removal of then Speaker, Kevin McCarthy. Passing the bill with bipartisan support in modern American politics is rare, so Republican and Democrat leaders will likely be hopeful that Speaker Johnson can foster a better working relationship between both sides of the house. However, the deal is only a temporary reprieve, buying lawmakers just over two months before the next deadline on 19 January. Given the frequency of fiscal stand offs during 2023, the increasing polarisation in United States politics, and the beginning of an election year, it is highly likely that this bipartisanship will not be repeated, with a partial government shutdown in January a realistic possibility. Another worrying development for Speaker Johnson is that the bill passed the House with support from 209 Democrats but only 127 Republicans, with 95 voting against the legislation. Moreover, 19 House Republicans voted to block debate on the bill in an attempt to wind down the clock before the deadline, likely to try and win more concessions on hot-button social issues, but Speaker Johnson suspended House rules to circumvent this eventuality. This likely suggests that the goodwill Johnson had from across the party has already vanished, and it is also likely that the right of the Republican party will again be an issue for the Speaker.

United States:

President Biden hosts President Xi in San Francisco.

On 15 November, President Joe Biden hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco, marking the two world leaders' first meeting in over a year. Biden described the talks as "constructive and productive" after several contentious issues were discussed. One of the major takeaways from the talks was the resumption of direct military-to-military communications, which were originally suspended after then Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in 2022. The two leaders also discussed Taiwan, where Biden reconfirmed the United States' "One China" policy and stressed that any resolution must be via peaceful means. Conversely, Xi warned the United States to stop arming Taiwan, to which Biden indicated the United States will continue to do so as a deterrent to a potential Chinese invasion. Other talking points included Iran and Russia, with Biden attempting to persuade Xi to leverage China's political and economic influence over the two countries to de-escalate the situations in Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas, where Iran is suspected to be pulling the strings. On the economic front, Xi asked Biden to lift sanctions and change export controls that are hampering Chinese economic recovery post-covid and stalling China's development. One important development involved China agreeing to curb the production of fentanyl-related products that are directly responsible for thousands of American deaths each year, and indirectly responsible for a host of socio-economic problems.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the United States is already overstretched by the war in Ukraine and the ongoing situation in the Middle East, and Biden highly likely believes Chinese influence could help mitigate these issues. Moreover, it is likely that Biden cannot afford a deterioration of relations with China as an election year looms, with the opposition likely to use it as an example of the world destabilising under Biden's tenure. Republicans repeatedly portray Biden as old, weak, and incompetent and Biden's comment that Xi rules as a dictator will likely add credence to this argument. Xi likely saw the meeting with Biden as an opportunity to attract foreign investment back to China whilst he struggles to bolster the economy post-covid, with the country experiencing record deflation and youth unemployment. The removal or lessening of sanctions on China will certainly assist Xi on this front. However, it is unlikely that Biden will rescind sanctions if the primary reason for them is to deny China access to military technology that will allow it to compete with the US whilst tensions remain high.

The subject of Taiwan was almost certainly the most significant and contentious discussion point as it has the potential to trigger a wider conflict in the Asia Pacific. The resumption of military-to-military communications has likely been identified as a risk control measure that will help to prevent miscalculation and subsequent escalation, in a similar vein to how the United States and the Soviet Union maintained dialogue during the height of the Cold War. However, it is likely that China was left frustrated by the United States' continuation of strategic ambiguity regarding whether Washington would directly intervene on the side of Taiwan in response to a Chinese invasion. Whilst this policy is likely designed to serve as a deterrent that complicates Chinese military strategy, it could ultimately be the source of miscalculation should key decision makers in Beijing assess that the United States will not actually intervene militarily.

Paraguay and Venezuela:

Diplomatic relations restored in run-up to Venezuelan 2024 presidential election.

On 15 November the Paraguayan Foreign Ministry released a statement announcing that both Paraguay and Venezuela had agreed to restore diplomatic and consular relations. The decision came following a conversation between Paraguay's president, Santiago Peña, and Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro. Diplomatic relations between the two states were severed in January 2019 when Paraguay decided to recognise opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president. Paraguay announced it had made the decision to close its embassy and to withdraw diplomats "in defence of democracy." Further to the restoration of diplomatic relations, both parties have agreed to formally appoint ambassadors in the coming days, followed by the reopening of each country's respective embassy.

Assessment: The restoration of diplomatic ties between Paraguay and Venezuela was widely expected. In April, Paraguay elected Peña as the nation's new president and whilst from the same political party as his predecessor, Peña had announced before the elections that reestablishing relations with Venezuela was a key issue. Peña further noted that despite making the decision to reengage with Venezuela, it did not distract from the fact that he would continue to have a critical voice on possible human rights violations and the lack of political openness in the country. This news is also a major diplomatic win for Venezuela. Paraguay has been an outspoken critic of Maduro, as evidenced by its decision to recognise Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela, along with 60 other countries, during its presidential crisis. Guaidó's global popularity has since waned, and he was removed from interim president in January 2023. Whilst Maduro will almost certainly describe the restoration of ties with Paraguay as a major win, many states still refuse to recognise him as the head of state and Washington-led sanctions are still suffocating the economy. Venezuela is set to hold elections in the second half of 2024 and the country has invited international observers to help portray the elections as free and fair. Should the elections be deemed fair and open by international observers then there is a high likelihood that more countries will restore diplomatic relations with Venezuela and the United States may decide to alleviate further sanctions. This will almost certainly be instrumental in improving material

conditions in Venezuela, where almost eight million people have fled as a result of poverty and political instability.

AMER Forecast. In the United States, Thanksgiving will be celebrated on 23 November. This will see widespread parades and celebrations take place, whilst many millions will be travelling placing extra pressure on the nation's airlines and freeway systems. Previous years have seen the country's air travel system suffer major disruption at Thanksgiving, due to adverse weather and not being able to cope with the surge in traveller demand, and there is a realistic possibility that similar scenes are witnessed this year.

Argentina will host its presidential run-off vote on 19 November. This will see the centre-left Peronist, Sergio Massa, face libertarian outsider, Javier Milei. Polling remains extremely tight and either candidate could win. This election will almost certainly spark large protests, rallies, and possible demonstrations regardless of the outcome. Meanwhile, in Guatemala, prosecutors have announced their intention to strip President-elect Bernardo Arevalo, and several of his senior allies, of their criminal immunity. Federal agents also executed search warrants and sought to arrest more than 30 student members of Arevalo's SEED Movement Party. Such moves will likely further prolong the country's ongoing political volatility which initially erupted in the aftermath of the August presidential elections. In Honduras, protests against that have been described as an "unconstitutional power grab" are set to continue, after thousands took to the streets to partake in demonstrations called for by opposition parties. Demonstrators are angry that President Xiomara Castro has hand-picked allies to become public officials.

Across the region, as the conflict between Hamas and Israel continues in Gaza, there remains a high likelihood that Israeli embassies, their staff and other buildings which are related to Judaism, or the Israeli state will be targeted. Argentina, home to Latin America's largest Jewish community, has in recent weeks seen a sharp rise in the number of anti-Semitic crimes recorded. Elsewhere, the proposed Kenyan-led security force for Haiti continues to make slow, but steady progress, with lawmakers in Nairobi giving the proposal their backing. The deployment now needs to pass various legal frameworks before it can deploy to the gang plagued Caribbean nation.

In Brazil, expect the country's ongoing and unprecedented heatwave to continue, with around 3,000 settlements under a red alert. In Rio de Janeiro, temperatures broke 42 degrees Celsius, whilst in other parts of the country the air temperature reached over 52 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, as a result of the country's ongoing drought, Mexico City has imposed severe water restrictions, with no set end date. This comes as the water levels in the city's water network have dropped to 44 percent of their normal levels for this time of year. Officials are hoping to reduce water supplies across the city by 25 percent in a bid to conserve water. Restrictions are likely to last until at least May 2024 which is the typical start of the country's rainy season.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Western Europe:

Israel-Hamas conflict continues to spark civil unrest in major cities.

As the Israel-Hamas conflict continues, tensions about how to respond to the crisis continues to spark large protests in Western cities. On 11 November, at least 300,000 pro-Palestinian demonstrators marched through central London calling for a ceasefire. Concurrently, a far-right counter protest also took place in the city, with skirmishes between those attending this march and police reported throughout the day. Across London, both demonstrations contributed to at least 140 arrests, with seven people charged so far. On the same day, tens of thousands also took part in pro-Palestine protests in Brussels and Paris. In Paris the following day, led by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne and former presidents Francois Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, roughly 105,000 people marched through the city to condemn a surge in antisemitic acts in France during the conflict in the Middle East.

Assessment: There has been strong support and sympathy for Israel from Western governments since Hamas' initial attack, but the Israeli military's response has evidently angered huge segments of the population. The rise of antisemitic attacks in the region can undoubtedly be attributed to the conflict, a trend that will likely be sustained by Israel's ground offensive. The vast majority of these protests passed peacefully with only isolated incidents of violence. The far-right violence in London was highly likely aggravated after then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, called pro-Palestinian demonstrations "hate marches" led by "mobs" that should have been cancelled by the police. Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police almost confirmed this stating "the extreme violence from the right-wing protesters towards the police today was extraordinary and deeply concerning." It is therefore highly likely that the United Kingdom's government will refrain from using such rhetoric in the future to minimise the potential of similar scenes. The range of leaders who led the march against antisemitism in France did convey a united front and will likely be applauded across the Western world. However, the demonstration did have its own political issues, with the decision of the far-right National Rally to take part meaning some parties on the left chose not to. The ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip is highly likely impacting policy decisions across the West and how to navigate through the conflict will likely be a prominent issue for all leaders. President Emmanuel Macron's calls for a ceasefire is a deviation away from the United States and United Kingdom's lines of "humanitarian pauses." However, as the conflict continues and the humanitarian situation on the ground deteriorates, there is a realistic possibility that public dissent expressed in the form of protest will begin to reshape Western policy.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

IDF secure western Gaza City and prepare for "next phase" of ground operation.

During the last reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have entered the "next phase" of their ground offensive after securing the western party of Gaza City. During the initial phase, the IDF conducted a "targeted and precise" raid of the Al-Shifa hospital, which Israel claims was being used as a Hamas command centre and weapons cache. The raid on the hospital was condemned by the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as Jordan who described it as a violation of international law. However, whilst in the hospital the IDF presented evidence of captured enemy material including phones, laptops, small arms and ammunition hidden behind MRI machines, as well as a tunnel shaft leading into the hospital. IDF reports indicate that some of the expropriated material has intelligence pertaining to Hamas held hostages. In the south of the Gaza Strip, the IDF dropped leaflets on four communities east of Khan Younis asking civilians to evacuate. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has continued to deteriorate with reports of a cessation



in telecommunication services, hospitals shutting down due to a lack of fuel, and sewage is reportedly flowing in the streets of Rafah. The United Nations has warned that it can no longer bring aid into Gaza due to fuel shortages. There have been multiple attacks on IDF positions in the West Bank by Palestinian fighters involving incidents of both small-arms fire and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), many of which have been claimed by Hamas' military wing, the al Qassem Brigades. Rocket sirens have sounded in both southern and northern Israel, provoking retaliatory IDF strikes on Hezbollah launch sites in Lebanon.

Assessment: Now that the IDF has secured most of western Gaza City, it is highly likely that the next operational phase will be to move into the eastern parts of the city. It is likely that Hamas' immediate main objective is to use guerrilla tactics to slowly degrade the IDF and diminish the will of both the Israeli political establishment and public. It is unlikely that the IDF have fully destroyed Hamas' tunnel network, which the group will use to conduct ambushes on the IDF and attack the force in its rear areas. Hamas will likely attempt to delay the IDF's offensive for as long as possible in order to move fighters, weapons and Hamas commanders to other parts of Gaza. Any delay will also help Hamas generate support from its international partners whilst the IDF operate in major population centres. The IDF's presentation of captured enemy material and a tunnel shaft from the Al-Shifa hospital will almost certainly be dismissed as staged or disinformation by many commentators. If genuine, the discovery is consistent with Israel's claims that Hamas and other militant groups violate international laws and exploit sensitive humanitarian infrastructure to facilitate operational activity. Whilst this may help to justify the IDF's incursion into a hospital, it is likely that many commentators will still be outraged by the incident and will demand a higher standard from a nation state such as Israel. It is likely that the IDF will only release limited information from the seizure of electronic devices and documents from the hospital as it is likely that these will include sensitive information that will determine the next moves of the IDF. The IDF's dropping of leaflets over Khan Younis is almost certainly an indication that the IDF will soon bomb the area, likely in preparation of a ground offensive into the south once the IDF has consolidated their positions and sufficiently degraded Hamas in Gaza City. Any IDF offensive into southern Gaza will almost certainly compound the humanitarian situation unless Israel makes major concessions regarding the facilitation of aid and fuel into the Gaza Strip. Temperatures are also set to drop as winter begins adding another layer of concern. Current Hezbollah cross border attacks into northern Israel are unlikely to be indicative of a new front and are likely an attempt to fix IDF forces in northern Israel. However, there is a realistic possibility that Hezbollah are setting the conditions for a future campaign into northern Israel should it be ordered by Hezbollah command or Iran.

Mali:

Government forces seize rebel-held town with the help of the Wagner Group.

During the last reporting period, Mali's military leader, Colonel Assimi Goita, announced that government forces had managed to retake control of the northern town of Kidal, which has been held for over a decade by rebel Tuareg militants. Goita stated that fighting had occurred for several days and that the Malian forces had only encountered minimal resistance from Tuareg rebels. He continued to stress that the military's mission in northern Mali was far from over and that the primary objective is to ensure the territorial integrity of Mali. The alliance known as the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), which is mainly comprised of separatist Tuareg rebel groups, issued a statement that it had left Kidal for "strategic reasons". Of note, there are unconfirmed reports that indicate that Malian armed forces were aided by the Russian private military company (PMC), the Wagner group. Neighbouring Burkina Faso, which is also run by a junta since a military coup in 2022, and is plagued by an Islamist insurgency, welcomed Kidal's liberation.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the securing of Kidal will be seen as an important symbolic victory for Malian armed forces as the town has been a historic centre for separatist movements since Mali's independence from France in 1960. In addition, Kidal serves as a strategically

important location, which had likely enabled rebel groups to control the main transit routes in northern Mali. Its recapture will almost certainly help to facilitate future government operations in the north of the country. Mali had been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency from groups aligned to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda as well as separatist forces in the north of the country. After its coup in 2021, Mali requested that French forces, who were deployed to combat the Islamist insurgency, leave. Then in 2023, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which had been operating in Mali since 2013, permanently withdrew. This likely left Malian forces completely overstretched and unable to contend with both Islamist and rebel factions simultaneously, with both in turn exploiting the security vacuum to conduct more attacks, seize more terrain and further destabilise the country. There have been reports of the Wagner Group operating in Mali in some capacity since 2021. However, it is likely the groups presence has been significantly smaller in response to the war in Ukraine. Since Wagner's attempted mutiny in June 2023, it is highly likely that the group is seeking to operate elsewhere, and that the Kremlin wants to keep the group at arm's length. The Kremlin is unlikely to want to totally disband the group as it affords the Kremlin with a strategic military asset comprised of experienced soldiers that can operate in a deniable and flexible capacity. The PMC can also help to protect Russian assets and revenue streams abroad or help Russia achieve some of its geopolitical objectives, like propping up pro-Moscow regimes in a manner official government forces cannot achieve. For these reasons, it is highly likely that the Kremlin will endorse future Wagner operations in Africa, and it is almost certain that under-equipped and under-resourced governments like Mali will willingly pay for Wagner's assistance, largely in the form of concessions in extractive industries. In response to Mali's success against the Tuareg rebel groups, it is likely that other regional actors such as Niger and Burkina Faso will seek to enlist the help of Wagner, a move that in the long-term will help to increase Russian influence in the region at a time of increased anti-West sentiment and claims of neo-colonialism.

Zimbabwe:

State of emergency declared in Harare in response to cholera outbreak.

Zimbabwe has declared a state of emergency in the capital, Harare, in response to a cholera outbreak. The country has been dealing with a cholera outbreak for months, which has killed dozens of people and infected at least 7,000 people. The epicentre of the latest outbreak is in Harare's densely populated suburb of Kuwadzana City. However, city authorities have warned that the outbreak is spreading and there are fears that the situation will deteriorate to levels seen during the 2008 outbreak, which is estimated to have infected over 100,000 people and killed over 4,000. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) has issued a statement suggesting that local health authorities are struggling to contain the outbreak due to a critical lack in supplies and health workers.

Assessment: Whilst Zimbabwe does not have a cholera endemic, it suffers from cyclical episodes of the disease which the authorities often struggle to contain. There is a realistic possibility that the current outbreak could lead to a situation similar to the 2008 outbreak, potentially leading to thousands of deaths. Due to poverty and poor working conditions, thousands of Zimbabwean healthcare professionals leave the country each year in search of better opportunities, a trend that has led to a brain drain within the healthcare sector. This trend has almost certainly degraded Zimbabwe's ability to deal with the latest outbreak. The situation has doubtlessly been compounded by the country's complications in accessing clean water, a factor which has been made worse by inadequate sanitation and drought. Given that 2023 is an El Niño year, there is a widespread expectation that Zimbabwe will encounter increased instances of drought. This, in turn, is likely to diminish access to clean water, placing additional pressure on authorities already struggling to deal with the cholera outbreak. There is therefore also a heightened risk that this outbreak may escalate to or beyond 2008 levels and could potentially paralyse the healthcare sector. Moreover, similar cycles of cholera are observed in neighbouring Malawi, South Africa, and Mozambique, presenting a realistic possibility that the effect of El Niño could set the conditions for similar outbreaks in these countries.

EMEA Forecast. Liberia's presidential election run-off between President George Weah and opposition leader Joseph Boakai took place last week. With 25 percent of the votes counted, Weah has just over 49 percent and Boakai has a little over 50 percent. The extremely tight race underscores the delicate state of democracy in Liberia, with any result having the potential to provoke demonstrations. On 22 November, the Netherlands will hold a general election following the coalition government collapsing. The country will have a new prime minister regardless of the outcome as the incumbent, Mark Rutte, is stepping down. It is highly likely that the country will experience an extended period of political volatility as despite a minimal threshold to enter parliament, polling suggests as many as 17 parties could make up the 150 seats, meaning a coalition would have to be negotiated; a process which took nine months last time and lasted less than two years. The electoral commission in the Democratic Republic of Congo have stated that they are ready to provide a fair and credible election despite concerns over the security situation in the east of the country and the transparency of the process. Regardless of the outcome, it is highly likely the result will be contested, with violence also likely during the campaign, the election day, and for the period following. Guillaume Soro, the former prime minister of Ivory Coast who has been in exile since 2019, has stated that he will return to the country and plans to run in the 2025 presidential election. Soro is facing life imprisonment for undermining national security and his return will likely bring civil unrest, with his expected participation in the election bringing a realistic possibility of sustained violence. Looking further ahead, the military junta that seized power in Gabon has stated that they aim to hold elections in August 2025. The junta also said a new constitution would be presented at the end of October 2024 and a referendum on its adoption would be held around November-December of the same year. There is a realistic possibility it would seem that the coup ends in genuine transition to democracy, a rarity on the continent.

In Europe, there are several potential catalysts for civil unrest in the next reporting period. In Spain, protests over the amnesty deal for Catalan separatists, agreed by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in order to form a coalition government, are likely to continue, with violence a realistic possibility. These have been particularly regular in Madrid. Strikes on public transport in Germany and Italy will disrupt travellers across the two nations in the coming week, with alternative modes of transport highly recommended. Turkey's President Recep Erdogan's visit to Germany comes as Ankara and the West clash over the conflict in Gaza. His arrival and the discussions that are held may lead to public statements which further inspire demonstrations for both sides.

Following global trends, as a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict, it is likely that Israeli embassies and their staffers across the region will continue to be targeted. The United States are highly likely to conduct more strikes against Iran-linked groups in the Middle East. There will likely be a tangible correlation between the number of strikes that target American bases in the region, and the number of American retaliatory strikes. Elsewhere, Armenia have announced that they will not take part in next week's Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) being held in Belarus. This highlights Yerevan's growing divergence from Moscow following the latter's lack of support over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Seismic activity in southwestern Iceland has diminished in size and intensity, but the risk of a volcanic eruption remains significant, as evidenced by recent earthquakes and the underground spread of magma. The Icelandic Met Office warns of a "significant likelihood" of an eruption in the coming days, particularly on or near the Reykjanes peninsula close to Reykjavik. The office further cautions that the southwestern peninsula of Iceland could experience decades of volcanic instability. Elsewhere, the United States is to resume food assistance to Ethiopia after it was stopped in June 2023. This resumption comes after the World Food Program also resumed food assistance in the country last month in the wake of major reforms. The increase in food assistance will almost certainly improve food insecurity but could be challenged in the long-term as the prospect of war threatens the country.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

Myanmar:

Rebel groups open second front in anti-junta offensive.

During the reporting period, anti-junta rebel forces from Myanmar's Chin State have seized two military bases near the Indian border and have secured control of a border crossing in Mizoram, with some fighting also reported in the Rakhine state. Government forces are now facing a rebel offensive in Myanmar's northwest, as well as an offensive in the northeastern states of Shan and Kachin. The president of the junta, Myint Swe, has warned that the country may be split into various parts as a result of "Operation 1027," the name given to the collective rebel offensive. Myanmar's military rulers have ordered all government staff and those with military experience to prepare to serve in case of an emergency. The United Nations (UN) has warned of a developing humanitarian situation and has said that over 50,000 people have already been internally displaced by the two-front offensive. The UN statement also stated that many essential roads have been blocked and that phone and internet services have been majorly disrupted.

Assessment: Now that two fronts have been opened in Myanmar by rebel forces, it is almost certain that government forces will be over-stretched and are already likely suffering from poor morale, after the loss of hundreds of military outposts and the prospect of a deadly civil war. Moreover, the quantitative and qualitative advantages afforded to government forces in terms of heavy armour and air power will be hugely nullified by the rebel groups' use of jungle and mountainous terrain, likely forcing government forces to commit to securing major population centres. It is also likely that any indiscriminate attacks on rebel held areas will only bolster rebel recruitment and turn the multitude of ethnic minority groups in the country against the junta. In a similar manner to the rebel groups based near the Chinese border in Shan and Kachin states, it is highly likely that Chin state rebels are attempting to secure the border with India. Securing the border areas will likely afford the rebel groups with a number of tactical and strategic advantages. It could enable rebel groups to disrupt government supply lines with India and China and provide rebel groups with logistical support for the movement of weapons and fighters. It will also likely provide the groups with safe havens as the rebel groups are often of the same ethnicity as Indian and Chinese communities in the border regions, who likely sympathise with their cause. Furthermore, having international borders behind them will degrade the government forces' ability to operate in their rear areas or surround them. As two offensives occur simultaneously, it is almost certain that the country will become more destabilised and will lead to thousands more civilians being displaced, with the current UN estimate likely conservative and already out of date.

China and Japan:

Strategic talks held but underlying tension unlikely to improve.

During their first face-to-face talks in a year, China's President Xi Jinping and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida expressed their commitment to developing mutually beneficial relations, with a focus on shared economic interests amid diplomatic disputes. The two leaders discussed contentious issues, including China's ban on Japanese seafood and the detention of a Japanese businessman in China on suspicion of espionage. Kishida concluded that China and Japan shared a common responsibility to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world.

Assessment: As China struggles with a faltering economy, it is likely that the most important victory for China was the agreement to resume regular trade talks with Japan, the third largest economy in the world and second largest economy in the region. However, the cessation of a Japanese seafood import ban or the release of a Japanese business is unlikely to greatly improve

the countries' often strained relationship. Since the joint commitment agreement in 2008, Japan has made strides in improving relations with South Korea and has moved closer to Western nations. While these efforts are often framed as measures to address concerns related to North Korea, there is an implicit understanding that they also serve as a response to China's influence in the region. Japan has also moved to improve its security ties with Taiwan and its new aircraft carrier is likely to join the United Kingdom and United States in simulating the defence of Taiwan, a move that will undoubtedly rile China. Whilst the meeting has been sold as a major step towards rapprochement, it is likely that that underlying concerns regarding Taiwan, territorial disputes, economic rivalry, and Chinese power projection will limit how much the relationship improves.

Taiwan:

Opposition parties agree to run on a joint ticket in next year's presidential election.

In the lead up to an electoral commission deadline of 24 November, the last reporting period has witnessed three significant developments ahead of Taiwan's January 2024 presidential elections. On 14 November, Terry Gou, the billionaire founder of major Apple supplier Foxconn, qualified to run in the election. In a statement Gou thanked his supporters and vowed to achieve peace across the Taiwan Strait. The following day, Taiwan's two main opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), agreed to proceed with a joint presidential ticket. Then on 16 November it was widely reported that Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's envoy to the United States, had been selected as the running mate for the Democratic People's Party (DPP) presidential nominee, current vice president, Lai Ching-te.

Assessment: It now looks highly likely that there will be three candidates contesting next year's presidential election in Taiwan. Gou qualifying for the race is a positive for Lai and the DPP, but a negative for the proposed joint KMT-TPP ticket. Gou originally tried to win the KMT nomination but having failed to do so decided to run as an independent in August. To be eligible for the ballot, the Foxconn founder needed 300,000 signatures but already has at least three times that. In polling that included the nominees from DPP, KMT, and TPP, Lai and the DPP received roughly 40 percent of the vote. When Gou was added to the polls, Lai and the DPP stayed on almost exactly the same vote share, but Gou received roughly 10 percent of the vote. This makes it almost certain that he is winning votes off the KMT and TPP candidates, making a DPP and Lai victory more likely. It is therefore almost certain that if the KMT and TPP did not work together then the DPP would win.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, it is almost certain that China will be a dominant issue for the duration of the campaign. China has stepped up military and political pressure on the island, highly likely attempting to force Taipei into accepting its sovereignty claim. Beijing publicly detests Lai, viewing him as a separatist, and the expected announcement of Hsiao, a fluent English speaker with deep connections in Washington, as the proposed vice-president candidate, will highly likely exacerbate this divide. For their part, it is almost certain that Lai and the DPP know this and view the appointment as their commitment to a more independent Taiwan. Beijing's preferred candidate is almost certainly the candidate that emerges to front the KMT-TPP ticket, with both parties vowing to pursue dialogue with China, on an equal and dignified basis, and "restore peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait." Despite Gou's assertions that he would ensure the island did not become "the next Ukraine," blaming the DPP for taking Taiwan to the brink of war by antagonising China, Beijing almost certainly did not want Gou running given it is highly likely that he could split the opposition vote.

APAC Forecast. Whilst Bangladesh's general elections will not be held until January 2024, the country has already begun to see deadly protests and political violence. As the elections draw nearer incidences of such unrest are likely to become more violent and regular. In the Soloman Islands, the Pacific games will commence on 10 November, with over 5,000 athletes from 24 different nations arriving in the country alongside thousands of spectators. The games have been 80 percent funded by Beijing, which led to further concerns about the increasingly close

relationship between China and the Soloman Islands, which was highlighted by a security pact the states signed in July 2023.

North Korea has stated that the G7 group is a “remnant of the Cold War” which violates the sovereignty of other countries. This was Pyongyang’s response to a G7 statement which criticised North Korean actions. This rhetoric only further serves to illustrate that Pyongyang will not be changing its diplomatic course in the short-term. South Korea has revised a bilateral security agreement with the United States, aiming at deterring North Korea’s advancing nuclear and missile threats, which has seen rapid advancements in recent months. Chinese aggression in the region’s maritime domain continues to drive the behaviour of other states. The Philippines for the first time joined the Annulex exercises as an observer, with these annual exercises taking place with forces from the United States, Australia, and Japan. Recent weeks have seen Filipino vessels increasingly harassed by Chinese counterparts, and there is a realistic probability that come the next Annulex, Manilla will be a participant and not just an observer. Vietnam is now second to China in the number of islands it has built up through dredging in the region, with Hanoi having created 330 acres of new land in the Spratly Islands since December 2022. Hanoi’s actions only further highlighted the complexities of the various overlapping claims of sovereignty in this region. India’s Interior Ministry has declared that nine groups in its northeastern state of Manipur are unlawful. The declaration states that the groups were engaging in activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India. Manipur has suffered from violence and unrest for much of 2023 and this declaration will almost certainly not improve the situation. Efforts to arrest, detain or persecute members of the now outlawed groups are likely to inflame the crisis only further. In Tokyo, following the Israel-Hamas conflict, a man crashed a car into a barricade near the entrance of the Israeli embassy, indicating a heightened global threat towards locations affiliated with Judaism or Israel. Such incidents are likely to continue occurring globally, as evidenced by an arson attack on the only Synagogue in Yerevan, Armenia.

Storm Midhili has formed in the northwest Bay of Bengal on 17 November. In the coming days, this system is expected to bring heavy rains and strong winds to southern Bangladesh, with there being a realistic probability of flash flooding. In India, the scheme to try and induce artificial rain in a bid to clear Delhi’s ongoing smog will be commenced in the next reporting period. This comes after the city was once again declared the most polluted city in the world due to a combination of industrial emissions, smoke from crop burning, and vehicle fumes.

