



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 01 DEC – 08 DEC 2023



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Week 50: 01 December – 08 December 2023

Executive Summary

- **Guyana** will **almost certainly** stay on military alert following another week of aggressive rhetoric from **Venezuela** over Essequibo. However, it is **unlikely** that Venezuela invades the disputed territory at this time.
- The IDF have resumed operations in the **Gaza Strip** following the cessation of last week’s ceasefires. It is **highly likely** that the IDF’s advance southwards toward Khan Younis in the coming days will compound the humanitarian situation and inspire attacks across the region.
- It is **almost certain** that the Houthis will continue to target commercial vessels from within **Yemen**. This follows the targeting of three ships in the last reporting period who the **Houthis** likely all thought were Israeli linked.



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

AMER

- 1 United States:** Long-term, high-ranking Cuban spy arrested
- 2 Venezuela/Guyana:** Tensions over Essequibo remain heightened
- 3 Peru:** Attack on goldmine underscores that security risks remain

EMEA

- 4 Italy:** Rome withdraws from Belt and Roads Initiative
- 5 Greece/Turkey:** Relations continue to thaw between historic adversaries
- 6 Gaza:** IDF advance south as violence in West Bank flares
- 7 Sahel:** Burkina Faso and Niger leave the G5 alliance
- 8 Nigeria:** Military drone strike results in mass civilian casualties
- 9 Yemen:** Commercial shipping attacked off the coastline

APAC

- 10 Armenia/Azerbaijan:** Both nations to explore normalising relations
- 11 Philippines:** Islamic State claim terror attack on Catholic Mass



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Americas (AMER)

United States:

Long-term, high ranking Cuban spy arrested.

During this reporting period, the US Attorney General, Merrick Garland, announced that they were bringing charges for spying against Victor Manuel Rocha. Rocha has been accused of spying for Cuba since 1981, and during his US government career he served as the US ambassador to Bolivia, sat on the National Security Council, and served at the US Southern Command, the joint command centre for Latin America and the Caribbean. He was also posted to senior State Department roles in Argentina and Mexico. It is alleged that he was recruited by Cuba as early as the 1970s, years before he had even joined the US government. His ultimate arrest came after several meetings with an undercover FBI operative posing as a fellow Cuban spy. During these meetings, he regularly praised Cuba, discussed his successful espionage, and called the US the enemy.

Assessment: The arrest of Rocha on charges of spying and espionage exposes one of the longest-lasting and highest-ranking infiltrations of the US government by a foreign agent. Due to his positions in the State Department, his ambassadorship, and his seat on the National Security Council, it is almost certain that the information he had access to would have been highly classified and highly sought after by Havana. It will have included information about espionage programmes the US was running in Latin America and Cuba and he may have directly contributed to the arrests or deaths of US agents and operatives in the field. His arrest will be seen as a significant wake-up call to the US and allies that whilst their attention in recent years has been diverted to emerging threats from Beijing and Moscow, Havana remains a critical threat capable of penetrating the US intelligence community or government. Cuba has long used its proximity to the US and its prowess in espionage (it focuses on recruiting in US graduate schools based on ideology, as opposed to bribing or blackmailing older professionals) to cultivate a formidable espionage network in the US, and occasionally other Western States. Havana is also widely expected to have sold or shared intelligence to other hostile states such as China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. The US and allied states will now undoubtedly be taking stock of the potentially extensive damage done to their national security given Rocha's espionage career spanned four-decades.

Venezuela and Guyana:

Heightened tensions over disputed Essequibo persist following referendum.

Tensions surrounding the disputed territory of Essequibo have risen again during the last reporting period. On 1 December, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) prohibited Venezuela from taking any action that would alter the status quo in the area. However, on 3 December the government in Caracas pressed on with a nationwide referendum, with voters categorically rejecting the ICJ's decision and voting to claim Essequibo as Venezuelan. Following the results, President Nicolas Maduro said that he would immediately authorise oil exploration in the area and proposed a law to the government-controlled legislature to create the new state of Essequibo. The military build-up by Venezuela has also continued, although Maduro has assured Caribbean countries that he will not invade the region. Nevertheless, Guyana has stated it will remain vigilant, whilst the United States has reiterated its support for a peaceful resolution and held military exercises in Guyanese airspace. In addition, several high-ranking Brazilian diplomats have

reaffirmed Brasilia's commitment to peace and their belief that conflict is not on the horizon, while also reinforcing its northern border with armoured vehicles and troops.

Assessment: Essequibo has been governed by Guyana (formerly British Guiana) since 1899 and now accounts for over two thirds of the country's land mass. In recent years however, the Maduro government has intensified the Venezuelan claim over the area, almost certainly on account of vast reserves of hydrocarbons being found on both Essequibo's land and in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). It is unsurprising that the Venezuelan referendum results voted in favour of incorporating Essequibo given that there was no organised campaign against the referendum and analysts expected voters who opposed it to stay home. Even so, there is a high chance that the results were fixed. The electoral authority contradicted themselves on numbers, voting and results, and it is likely that the 95 percent that voted in favour is an extremely high number for an unpopular government. Domestic pressures have also likely contributed to Maduro's aggressive rhetoric and shaping around Essequibo. It is likely that Maduro held the vote as a show of strength but also to gauge his government's support ahead of a 2024 presidential election. There is also a realistic possibility that if he is facing defeat in the election, a conflict in the east of the country could provide him an excuse to delay the vote on security grounds. This would highly likely be condemned by the West and would almost certainly see United States withdraw the recent economic concessions it has made. Due to the inaccessible terrain of Essequibo, a successful Venezuelan invasion would highly likely need to utilise the main road connection between Venezuela and Guyana, which run throughs Brazilian territory. Given Brazil's steadfast opposition to the use of the road for military activity and its mobilisation of forces along the border, it is highly unlikely that Venezuela launches an invasion at this time. However, if domestic pressures continue to influence Maduro, there is a realistic possibility that he invades Essequibo. However, despite Venezuela's force overmatch, the challenging terrain, will likely lead to a protracted conflict marked by guerilla warfare.

Peru:

Attack on goldmine underscores security risks remain.

On 2 December workers in a mine run by Compania Minera Poderosa SA were ambushed by men with explosives. The attack left nine mine workers killed, whilst ten were injured and several hostages were taken. This attack brought the number of mine workers killed at Poderosa sites to 16 in the last two years and comes as Peru has seen a major uptick in the amount of violence around its mines, in particular its large-scale copper mines such as Southern Copper Corps' Los Chancas and MMG's Las Bambas. This violence has caused significant political and economic disruption in the country.

Assessment: This recent attack only serves to underscore the fact that across the Peruvian mining sector, issues of insecurity are rife. The country is one of the world's largest suppliers of copper and also a major global supplier of gold. However, as a result of the growth in insecurity around mine sites, the country has seen investment in major new mining projects drop by around 20 percent this year alone. It is widely alleged that earlier government initiatives to try and formalise the illicit mining sector are a major cause of some of the current insecurity. This initiative allowed informal mines to register for a REINFO permit, which gave it limited legal protection whilst it continued the process of legalisation. However, many illicit mines simply obtained REINFO permits and never completed the legalisation process, leaving their status uncertain and making them difficult to close down. In recent years, high commodities prices are also believed to have incentivised criminal gangs to become involved and now illegal mining alone is believed to be worth USD six billion a year, making it larger than drug trafficking in Peru. Security at mine sites is difficult and costly to provide, and whilst the incentives for illicit mining remain and commodity prices are relatively high, such attacks are almost certain to continue to take place.



AMER Forecast. Ahead of the 2024 presidential election, internal disputes among Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' allies have intensified before the first Republican nominating contests, with key figures leaving his main super political action committee (PAC). This has cemented Nikki Haley as the leading contender to challenge Donald Trump for the Republican nomination, however the former president remains the firm favourite. For the Democrats, President Joe Biden is set to launch an extensive fundraising campaign in the next reporting period. It is anticipated that Democrats will likely slightly outpace Republicans in fundraising however, given recent polling and the potential competition with Trump in a general election, Biden will require a substantial war chest to remain competitive. In domestic American politics, it is now unlikely that new budgets will be approved before the end of 2023 following Republicans blocking legislation in the Senate. The deal that aimed at delivering billions of dollars in additional security assistance for Ukraine and Israel reached an impasse when Republicans insisted on stricter measures to address immigration concerns at the United States-Mexico border. Elsewhere in North America, in the Great Montreal region, the inter-union common front group that represents over 400,000 public workers are set to go on strike from 8 to 14 December. The magnitude and length of these strikes are set to cause mass disruption to many of the area's public services, including transportation and education.

On 10 December, the contentious Javier Milei will be inaugurated as the President of Argentina after winning the mid-November election, with disruption anticipated in Buenos Aires. Milei has convened a special congressional session on 11 December, where he is expected to unveil extensive and controversial financial and social reforms, which will likely spark civil unrest in a country that still has many Peronist supporters. It also appears increasingly probable that Argentina will now approve a long-pending trade agreement between MERCOSUR and the European Union. This likelihood has grown following a statement from incoming Milei, expressing support for the agreement. Argentina was previously one of the key countries opposing the deal. The implementation of the deal will likely benefit both Brazil's and Argentina's stagnant agricultural sectors. With both nations being major cattle farmers, it is likely that environmental protests will follow prompted by the loss of the Amazon and production of methane. In Peru, former president Alberto Fujimori has been released from jail after a ruling by the country's constitutional court granted him a humanitarian pardon. This decision has sparked debate as it contradicted the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which had urged Peru to refrain from releasing Fujimori due to his conviction for human rights crimes, including ordering massacres and corruption during his presidency in the 1990s. There is a realistic possibility that his release will provoke civil unrest in the country.

The persistent issue of gun violence in the United States will almost certainly continue to be a risk across the nation following the high-profile incident at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where a gunman killed three people and left one person wounded before being he fatally shot by the police. In Haiti, peasant movements in rural areas have called for international solidarity and following armed gangs moving into the countryside. Incidents of kidnapping, murder, extortion, and other atrocities have spiked, and the threat to the country's food security has increased.

In the American states of Washington and Oregon, an atmospheric river resulted in widespread heavy rainfall during the last reporting period, which led to flooding, landslides and multiple road closures across the region. Further disruption is anticipated with more rainfall forecast. It is highly likely that atmospheric rivers are becoming more common and more severe as a result of global warming. In Panama, the Panama Canal authorities have continued to restrict the number of cargo vessels which can use the canal. Extreme drought has affected approximately half the vessels wanting to make the transit and some shipping companies are paying up to USD 4 million to jump the queue, rather than wait several days. Delays in deliveries and increased shipping costs are likely to result in shortages and price increases as much of the world prepares for the Christmas season.





Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Italy:

Italy signals its intent to leave the Belts and Roads Initiative.

Italy has officially announced its intent to withdraw from China's Belt and Roads Initiative after Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni suggested it would three months previous. If Rome had not formally withdrawn from Beijing's flagship economic project, then it would have been automatically renewed for another five years in early 2024. Italy's former ambassador to NATO, Stefano Stefanini, suggested that the original decision to join the project under the populist government of the Five Star Movement and Matteo Salvini's right-wing League had been a mistake and that the incumbent government had wholly underestimated the geopolitical significance of Italy's inclusion. He also opined that Italy's future inclusion in the initiative was untenable due to deteriorations in relations between Beijing and Washington.

Assessment: The Belt and Roads Initiative envisions the rebuilding of the old Silk Road to connect China with Europe through Asia. Despite the potential economic benefits the project could bring, critics see it as a way for Beijing to increase its geopolitical power and influence participating nations' governments. Whilst Italy was not the first Western nation to join the Belts and Roads Initiative, following Poland in 2015 and Greece and Portugal in 2018, Rome's decision to join in 2019 marked the first inclusion of a major European economy and the first member of the Group of Seven (G7). As the G7 is an intergovernmental political and economic group made up entirely of Western leaning nations and the EU, Italy's signing of a non-binding memorandum was almost certainly interpreted as a major strategic win for Beijing which could potentially herald the future inclusion of other Western nations. Furthermore, it was likely indicative of deepening divides within the West, particularly in Europe, on how to deal with the political, economic, and military accession of China, and dismayed many Western allies at the time. It is likely that under Meloni and during heightened tensions between the US and China, Italy is repivoting towards Washington, a move that is likely to gain more traction if Donald Trump wins the presidency. Moreover, there is a realistic possibility that other Western nations will either be deterred from signing up to the Belt and Roads Initiative or the few countries in the West that have signed memorandums will reconsider their positions. However, Italy's decision is unlikely to be without consequence, and will likely provoke anti-Italian sentiment in the world's second-largest consumer market and negatively impact Italy's luxury goods exports.

Greece and Turkey:

Relations continue to thaw between historic adversaries.

During the last reporting period Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan made a landmark visit to Greece where he held several meetings with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece, with several other politicians from both nations holding concurrent meetings. Aiming to usher in a new era of closer ties, the two nations agreed to establish a roadmap with a number of facets. These included pursuing good neighbourly relations, seeking military confidence-building measures to eliminate sources of tension, boosting trade volumes from USD five billion to USD ten billion and working on issues which have kept them apart. At the end of the visit, Erdogan announced he expected to receive Mitsotakis in Ankara soon and dropped in a line that he desires for the two nations to develop cooperation on nuclear energy.



Assessment: Greece and Turkey have been long-term adversaries, reaching the brink of war in the 1990s and have more recently argued over several issues including, but not exclusive to, energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, defence issues, migration, flights over the Aegean Sea, the acquisition of fighter jets, where their continental shelves start, and the ethnically partitioned island of Cyprus. However, Greece's extensive and swift support and aid in the wake of the devastating earthquakes in Turkey in February saw a marked improvement in relations and this bilateral summit was highly likely the warmest between the two nations in decades. This has likely been aided by both Erdogan and Mitsotakis earning comprehensive electoral victories in 2024, giving them a mandate to act with greater freedom and needing less aggressive rhetoric to win support. For Turkey, the nation has been seeking European Union accession for more than two decades and improving relations with Greece would highly likely move this closer. Ankara is also trying to draw back foreign investors from all corners to help aid the Turkish economy which has been stagnating. For Greece, following an economic crisis that lasted almost a decade and rocked the Euro currency zone, Athens will almost certainly be looking to regain its position as a pillar of eastern Mediterranean stability and better neighbourly relations will highly likely achieve this. While the process will highly likely take time and hit a number of hurdles, there is a realistic possibility that the next few years will usher in a new period of Greco-Turkish relations.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

IDF conduct offensive into southern Gaza as violence in the West Bank flares.

After the ending of the ceasefire on 1 December the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) immediately resumed their campaign of bombing against targets in the Gaza Strip and continued to secure parts of northern Gaza, and have also committed to a ground offensive in the south of the enclave, including clearance operations in Khan Younis. According to the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, over 17,000 Palestinians have now been killed by IDF operations. In addition, the Palestinian Red Cross has stated that almost 300 of its staff have now been killed whilst operating in Gaza. The high civilian death toll has prompted the US Secretary of State and the United Nations to urge Israel to take every necessary measure to protect civilians, with Secretary Blinken suggesting that there is a gap between the government's declared intentions and the reality on the ground. There have been daily clashes in the West Bank between the IDF and Palestinians coupled with an increase in settler related violence, with Israel even approving a new settlement in East Jerusalem. To deter further illegal settlements and to decrease the violence in the West Bank, the US has emplaced sanctions on Israeli settlers, a move that has gained some traction within Europe.

Assessment: With the IDF securing much of northern Gaza and conducting clearance operations in the south, it is almost certain that the vast majority of Gazans have now become internally displaced with almost nowhere left to shelter in the Gaza Strip. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated to such a degree that it is almost certainly why UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has invoked article 99 of its charter, a measure no one in his post has taken for decades. This will convene an emergency meeting of the security council where it is likely they will vote on how to enforce or influence a ceasefire. Whilst the humanitarian situation is one of the principle drivers for this move, it is also highly likely that the UN fears that the war in Gaza will trigger a series of escalations that could destabilise the entire region. Iranian-backed proxy forces such as the Houthis in Yemen and the Popular Mobilisation Forces or Shia militias in Iraq have conducted multiple attacks against US forces throughout the reporting period. The US has conducted retaliatory strikes against some militias in Iraq, however the Pentagon has likely been reserved in its response out of fears of starting a major escalation. Nevertheless, sustained IDF operations in the south of Gaza will place further strain on aid workers, NGOs, deny Gaza access to critical humanitarian aid and lead to thousands more casualties. These factors will invariably motivate militia groups hostile to both the West and Israel to resume their attacks,

heightening the risk of broader regional destabilisation and a renewed cycle of violence across multiple theatres in the region.

Nigeria:

Nigerian military accidentally conducts drone strike on civilians.

Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu has ordered an investigation after the Nigerian military accidentally killed an estimated 88 civilians, including women and children, after a drone attack in northern Kaduna. Brigadier General Onyema Nwachukwu, the spokesperson for the Army, stated that during aerial patrols, troops mistakenly assessed a group of individuals, inaccurately interpreting their behaviour as resembling that of bandits, leading to the drone strike. Lieutenant General Taoreed Lagbaja, the Nigerian army chief, personally visited Tundun Biri village and expressed apologies for the air strike. During his visit to a Kaduna hospital where the injured were being treated, he assured them that he would cover their medical expenses.

Assessment: Kaduna is a region of northern Nigeria, approximately 160km north of the capital, Abuja. Like much of northern Nigeria, it has been struggling with kidnappings and killings conducted by armed gangs and also an endemic Islamist insurgency. The security services have deployed drones and have conducted multiple aerial attacks in order to combat both bandits and Islamists. It is almost certain that the use of drones is enabling the military to cover far greater areas and strike targets without putting soldiers at risk. However, this latest incident of misidentification is part of a series of Nigerian military errors that have killed almost three thousand civilians from approximately 250 aerial attacks. Nigerian attacks on civilians demonstrate the problems associated with having advanced weaponry but without a sophisticated intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance (ISR) capability and the absence of a developed targeting cycle or targeting methodology. This problem has undoubtedly been further compounded by the lack of boots on the ground, and it is likely that the military personnel responsible for these operations are hundreds of kilometres away and have a very poor understanding of the human terrain. Moreover, it likely points to a lack of effective and adhered to rules of engagement. The scale and frequency of these accidental attacks are almost certainly turning civilians in northern Nigeria against the incumbent government and threaten to further destabilise an already volatile part of the country. As other African nations dealing with insurgencies or lawlessness acquire advanced weaponry from the West, Russia, or China, it is highly likely that similar issues will be observed across the continent, leading to thousands of civilian deaths and greater political instability.

The Sahel:

Burkina Faso and Niger leave the G5 alliance.

During this reporting period, the post-coup governments of both Niger and Burkina Faso have announced that they will be withdrawing from the G5. The G5 was created in 2014 as an anti-jihadi force for the Sahel region, however, it has seen limited success in the years since. Burkina Faso has also this reporting period banned the French newspaper Le Monde after it published an article the military junta perceived to be critical.

Assessment: The withdrawal of Niger and Burkina Faso from the G5 should not come as a surprise, as it follows the pattern of Mali which withdrew in the wake of its own military coup. Post-coup governments in the three states have long accused the G5 alliance of serving French interests as opposed to local interests. The withdrawal comes after French troops started leaving Niger, which until its coup, had remained France's main security partner in the region. As a result of the withdrawal of these nations from the G5, Chad and Mauritania will likely seek to dissolve

the alliance as with three of the five founding members having left, it will possess little capacity to achieve its original goals. The banning of Le Monde in Burkina Faso should also not come as a surprise, given the rising anti-French sentiment across the region. Burkina Faso and Mali have already banned Radio France International (RFI) and France24. In the wake of the pullout from the G5 and the continued evidence of anti-French sentiment in the region, it is highly likely that in the coming weeks, there will be news of further security arrangements being inked between Russia and Niger and Burkina Faso.

Yemen:

Commercial shipping attacked off the Yemeni coastline.

On 3 December, the Houthis launched ballistic missiles which targeted three commercial ships off the Yemeni coast. In tandem with this, the USS Carney, which was in the area also stated that they shot down at least three drones which were targeting them. The attack which lasted several hours began at around 9:00 local time. Two missiles were fired at the Bahamian-flagged Unity Explorer, and whilst the first didn't impact the ship, the second did. The USS Carney responded to Unity Explorer's distress calls and whilst doing so shot down two drones. The other two ships which were targeted were the Panamanian-flagged Number 9 and Sophie II, both sustained minor damage from the missile attacks. Whilst responding to their distress calls, the USS Carney shot down further drones. In the days after the attack, the US was asked by Saudi Arabia to show restraint in responding to the Houthis.

Assessment: This marks the latest escalation from the Houthis as part of their retaliation for the ongoing conflict with Israel. The Houthis claim that they are targeting ships linked to Israel. However, it has emerged that several ships they have targeted are no longer openly linked to Israeli entities. This raises the possibility that the Houthis are using outdated data or that Israeli companies have effectively obfuscated their connections. Consequently, it is likely that a larger number of ships could be at risk of attack from misattribution. The collapse of the fragile ceasefire in Gaza means that further seaborne attacks from the Houthis are highly likely. Riyadh's request that the US show restraint in responding to these attacks will almost certainly be predicated on the fact that Riyadh and the Houthis both continue to cautiously abide by a fragile ceasefire in Yemen and are still in the process of holding peace talks. Riyadh will be conscious that any US or Israeli retaliations for these Houthi attacks may well upset this ceasefire and lead to a resumption of hostilities. Renewed fighting would highly likely entail the Houthis conducting missile and drone attacks against both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The threat of attacks along the Yemeni coast has already led to several international shipping firms changing their routes away from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden towards the much longer route via the Cape of Good Hope. Such diversions will cause delays in shipping times and if they are in place for a prolonged period, will almost certainly lead to shipping companies incurring more expense which will almost certainly be reflected in consumer prices.

EMEA Forecast. The UK's Home Secretary arrived in Rwanda to sign a new treaty to allow the UK to deport asylum seekers to the African state. The new scheme looks as though it may be legal, however, it remains politically contentious in the UK and is almost certain to spark political volatility and possible civil unrest. Meanwhile, Germany has announced border controls will remain in place until 15 December as it seeks to stem the flow of people smuggling and human trafficking. Ground staff at at least 46 airports in Spain will be on strike between 5 and 10 December, as a result, disruption to both airline and airport operations is almost certain. In Russia, expect further raids on LGBTQ venues and news of further arrests and interrogations, after Russian courts ruled that the LGBTQ community, individuals, and any organisations associated with them are extremists.

Egypt will be holding its presidential election between 10 and 12 December, it is almost certain that the incumbent, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, will win. Under al-Sisi, Egypt has regressed into autocracy, and he has successfully quashed most opposition to his rule. He may well likely “win” with around 80 to 90 percent of the vote in the first round and this will undoubtedly spark questions around the legitimacy of the vote. If unrest does develop it will almost certainly be dealt with heavy-handedly by security forces. In Guinea-Bissau, the president has dissolved the parliament, which is controlled by the opposition, in the wake of last week’s coup attempt. Political volatility in the country will likely persist into the coming weeks. In Zimbabwe, unrest and political volatility are almost certain to continue as the country sees by-elections taking place in the capital, Harare.

In Poland, PiS were given a chance a to form a government under incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. However, as PiS don’t have a parliamentary majority they will almost certainly lose the forthcoming vote of confidence, clearing the way for the opposition to form a government. It is widely suspected PiS will use this short window to fill as many official posts and appointments as possible with loyalists, in a bid to make life more difficult for the incoming Tusk government. In Germany, following breakdowns in the governing coalition, it is increasingly unlikely that a 2024 budget will be passed leaving funding for climate projects, local authorities and major infrastructure projects increasingly in doubt. The trial of Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik will continue to cause political tensions and volatility in Bosnia. He stands accused of defying Bosnia’s international envoys, and it is likely that in 2024 Bosnia will see similar levels of unrest as Serbia has this year, with Russia likely playing a role in fomenting the unrest. The European Council are due to meet on 14 December, it is almost certain that Ukraine and EU aid for Kyiv will be a major talking point. In the French overseas department of Mayotte, expected continued political volatility and civil unrest as residents protest an ongoing water shortage driven by chronic under-investment and water mismanagement. Water will likely continue to be severely rationed for the foreseeable future with households seeing running water, just once every three days.

As the Israel-Hamas conflict continues, European nations are warning of a rise in the threat of terror attacks, especially as they continue to prepare for Christmas with markets, and late-night shopping events. Historically these events have been attacked by Islamists. Authorities are also warning more widely of an uptick in hate speech, polarisation and extremist content. Across the wider region, Advent and Christmas services for Christian populations, especially small and historical populations, such as the Copts in Egypt, are also targeted by terror attacks. In the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the East African Peacekeeping force will commence its withdrawal. Whilst Kinshasa has been irritated by the inability of the force to quell the region’s violence, its withdrawal will likely precipitate a security vacuum which will only be further exploited by extremist actors in the run-up to the country’s December elections. In Nigeria, 10 December will see ECOWAS members meeting, and it is almost certain West African security and the increase in coups will be major talking points. Across the Middle East, US bases and assets will continue to be targeted by rockets and missiles as a consequence of the war between Israel and Hamas. Perpetrators are almost certain to be Iranian-aligned movements such as Hezbollah, the Houthis or Iraqi popular mobilisation forces.





Asia Pacific (APAC)

Azerbaijan and Armenia:

Statement on the normalisation of relations is released.

Baku and Yerevan have announced in a joint statement that are both committed to working towards normalising their relations. The joint statement also stated that they would work towards a peace treaty which respected each other territorial integrity and sovereignty. As a confidence-building measure, Baku will be freeing 32 Armenian prisoners of war, whilst Yerevan will release at least two Azerbaijani prisoners.

Assessment: For nearly three decades Azerbaijan and Armenia have been locked in conflict over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. This region, which is territorially part of Azerbaijan was for many years controlled by ethnic-Armenian separatists who received backing and support from Armenia. Baku successfully retook control of the entire region after a lightning offensive earlier this year. Other parts of the normalisation process will see Armenia lift its objections to Baku holding next year's COP, and Baku will support Yerevan's candidacy for a regional climate group. This normalisation process is heavily supported by the US, EU and Russia, and whilst talks have stalled, these initial agreements are a sign that serious progress is being made. In Yerevan, this progress is likely being helped by Armenia's continued pivot away from Russia which began with the country's velvet revolution and has continued, after Russian inaction in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Meanwhile, Baku, since Russia's Ukraine invasion has won influence in the West due to its oil and gas industry, and it likely realises that normalising relations with Armenia will go a long way to cementing such new spheres of influence.

Philippines:

Manhunt underway after Islamic State claim attack on Catholic mass.

A huge manhunt is underway in the southern Philippines after an improvised explosive device (IED) killed four people and injured at least fifty others at a Catholic Mass at a university gymnasium in Marawi City. The attack follows a series of counterterrorism operations in the area and was almost immediately claimed by the Islamic State (IS) through the application Telegram. Local officials have indicated that they have identified at least two main suspects, one of which is linked to a local militant group. The attack has been condemned by the US, UK and several other major Western nations.

Assessment: Marawi City lies in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in the south of the Philippines. Whilst the country is predominantly Catholic, Marawi City is almost one hundred percent Muslim and was brought to international attention in 2017 after Islamic State linked militants besieged the city for over five months and attempted to turn it into a province of IS. The siege was brutally dealt with by the Philippine security services, resulting in the displacement of over one million people and over a thousand militants were killed. However, it is almost certain that despite the ending of the siege, Islamist militants in the primarily Muslim and impoverished south of the country enjoy considerable support and freedom of movement. The attack was highly likely a response to successful government counterterrorism operations against IS-linked groups such as the Maute group and Abu Sayef but was also likely in part motivated by the current conflict in the Middle East. The attack will almost certainly leave the authorities on high-alert and result in tighter security at airports and ports, with enhanced police and military patrols being conducted across the region and within the capital, Manila. However, if the primary



inspiration for the attack was the success of counterterrorism operations, then there is a realistic possibility that increased operations could trigger a series of terrorist attacks that threaten to destabilise the region.

APAC Forecast. The ratings agency, Moody's, has downgraded its outlook on China's government credit ratings to negative because of expected lower economic growth and concerns over the issues in the expansive Chinese property sector. It is now likely Chinese authorities will need to extend financial support to local governments and state-owned enterprises burdened with debt, posing widespread risks to China's fiscal, economic, and institutional robustness. The country is expected to face a challenging fiscal year ahead, with potential political and economic volatility likely. Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko is currently in China for meetings with President Xi Jinping. This visit is highly likely part of Beijing's efforts to engage with countries critical of the United States. The next anticipated developments include news about Chinese investments in Belarus. Elsewhere on the geopolitical front, President Xi will visit Vietnam in the next reporting period as competition between Washington and Beijing for influence continues in the region. In Japan, the ruling party is facing mounting scrutiny amid reports that lawmakers are going to be investigated in relation to fundraising. Prosecutors will pursue several dozen lawmakers from the Liberal Democratic Party, including current ministers, in a scandal that will almost certainly further dent Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's popularity, and increase political volatility and the chances of civil unrest.

In New Zealand, it is anticipated that protests against the new centre-right coalition government will continue in the coming weeks following widespread protests against what demonstrators perceive as racist policies towards the Māori population. The new centre-right coalition government plans to limit the use of Māori language, review affirmative action policies and reassess how the country's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840, is interpreted in modern legislation. There also remains a realistic possibility of protests in Pakistan following a court in Islamabad dismissing the petition of former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to move his trial date, making it highly unlikely Khan will be permitted to run in next year's elections.

Tensions are highly likely to remain high in the South China Sea as various nations continue to try and assert their claims over the region. The last reporting period saw China and the United States trade claims over the legality of the littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Gifford's course in the region. While incidents involving China and rival claimants will almost certainly continue, Sino-American incidents present the greatest risk of escalation through either miscalculation or deliberate actions. China will almost certainly continue to attempt to intimidate Taiwan, with 12 Chinese fighter jets and a suspected weather balloon crossing the Taiwan Strait's median line on 8 December. It was also reported in the last reporting period that senior Chinese leaders held a meeting to "coordinate" efforts to influence upcoming elections in Taiwan. It is highly likely that Beijing will ramp up political and military pressure on Taipei throughout the election campaign. Hostilities on the Korean Peninsula are also expected to remain significantly tense for the foreseeable future. South Korea last week successfully conducted the flight of a solid-fuel rocket carrying a satellite and North Korea has begun satellite-based reconnaissance operations after the country launched its first military spy satellite last month.

Papua New Guinea has officially signed a wide-ranging security deal with Australia, that also covers defence and biosecurity. The deal has been delayed due to obstruction from opposition parties in Papua New Guinea, but a consensus was found. This is a major win for the West in the battle for influence in the Pacific and more deals similar to this are likely being negotiated with other island nations. Thailand and conflict-torn Myanmar will create a task force to boost humanitarian assistance to displaced people. Thailand likely hopes the plan will lead to constructive engagement between military-ruled Myanmar, regional powers, and the international

community, however it is highly unlikely to have an impact on the conflict currently raging in Myanmar.

The Philippines has witnessed several significant, high magnitude earthquakes in the last reporting period, and more earthquakes and aftershocks are likely to continue. So far, the effects of the earthquakes have been minimal due to their locations. However, there is a realistic possibility that a powerful tremor occurs in a populous area and causes a significant death toll. In Indonesia, the eruption of the Marapi volcano will continue to cause disruption. Several, smaller eruptions keep occurring and there is a remote chance of another large eruption. In India, the aftermath of Cyclone Michaung is likely to be felt for weeks across the south of the country. There is a realistic possibility of health and civil unrest threats in the coming weeks, as the floodwaters slowly dissipate and authorities try and address the associated issues.

