



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 12 JAN – 19 JAN



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Week 2: 12 January – 19 January

Executive Summary

- Donald Trump's commanding victory in the Iowa caucus confirms his positions as the frontrunner for the Republican nomination and makes it **highly likely** that he will face President Joe Biden in this year's upcoming **US** election.
- While **Iran's** strikes on targets in **Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan** raise tensions and increase the risk of an escalation in the Middle East, the strikes were **highly likely** carried out for internal security reasons and a direct conflict remains **unlikely**.
- Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the **Red Sea** are **almost certain** to continue despite US-UK military action.
- Lai Ching-te's victory in **Taiwan's** presidential election **likely** signals a shift in the electorate's position on the status of the island and has **almost certainly** angered **China**.



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

AMER

- 1 United States:** Trump secures big victory in Iowa caucus
- 2 Colombia:** Government extends ceasefire with FARC-EMC
- 3 Ecuador:** Top prosecutor shot dead amid continued insecurity

EMEA

- 4 Israel:** Two state solution rejected as IDF meet resistance in the south
- 5 Kuwait:** New government appointed following Emir's ascension
- 6 Iran:** IRGC conduct strikes on Iraq, Syria and Pakistan based targets
- 7 Red Sea:** Houthi attacks on shipping continue despite US/UK airstrikes

APAC

- 8 Singapore:** Minister of Transport charged with corruption
- 9 Taiwan:** Lai Ching-te elected president frustrating China
- 10 Korean Peninsula:** North no longer to pursue unification with the South



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Donald Trump secures comprehensive victory in Republican presidential nomination contest.

The last reporting period saw the first 2024 Republican presidential nomination contest take place in Iowa, with former president Donald Trump securing a comprehensive victory, receiving over half the votes with roughly 51 percent. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis finished a distant second with 21 percent and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley followed close behind on 19 percent. Trump's dominance was highlighted by the fact he won 98 out of 99 counties in Iowa, bar Johnson County, which Haley won by one vote. These three are now the only remaining candidates in the race after both entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson both pulled out following poor showings in the Iowa caucus.

Assessment: Despite the dozens of criminal charges Trump faces, the outcome of Iowa's Republican caucus has resoundingly reaffirmed Trump's status as favourite to secure his party's nomination for president ahead of this year's election. If Trump's Iowa success is extrapolated across the remaining states, it appears he is almost certain to win the nomination given that he won a majority among men and women, and among those who consider themselves very conservative, somewhat conservative and independent. The only factor preventing this is likely to be Trump's legal issues. It is highly likely for this reason that Trump has aimed to create an air of inevitability around his campaign, hoping to fast-track the normally months-long Republican selection process with a series of convincing early primary wins to force out his rivals. Such a feat would also expose him to less public criticism from members of his own party. Moreover, a Republican-nominated Trump is much harder to convict without being accused of political motivations. However, Trump is unlikely to deal a knock-out blow at the next Republican nominating contest on 23 January in New Hampshire. The state is decisively less conservative, with a more diverse electorate, with fewer evangelical Christians and a larger proportion of independents. This provides Haley the greatest opportunity to capitalise and she is almost certain to be Trump's closest challenger. Despite coming a distant third in Iowa, she swept up most of the voters who identified as moderates. While Trump still leads the state's polls, Haley has significantly closed the gap in recent weeks. It is likely that Haley is seeking to slow Trump's momentum and dent the narrative that him winning the party's nomination is inevitable. For DeSantis, the race is likely almost over. The Florida Governor threw all his funding into Iowa, in a state that is more favourable to his base, and he still failed to deliver a breakthrough performance. There is a realistic possibility that DeSantis is a distant third candidate by the time Super Tuesday arrives in early March, with the race for the Republican nomination being contested between only Trump and Haley.

Colombia:

Government extends ceasefire with FARC-EMC in bid to reduce rural violence.

The last reporting period saw Colombia's government extend a ceasefire with the FARC-EMC rebel group as negotiations continue towards President Gustavo Petro's goal for "Total Peace." The ceasefire has been extended by three months and will now last until 15 July. A stipulation of the latest agreement requires that FARC-EMC refrain from attacking civilians in areas under their control.

Assessment: The government's original ceasefire with FARC-EMC began in October 2023, and is one of several ceasefires with rebel and criminal groups negotiated by Petro's administration as he pursues his plan for total peace. The first ceasefires were announced on 1 January 2023 and while there has been a decrease in clashes between security forces and rebel groups during

this time, inter rebel-group violence in rural areas has increased as they compete for territory. Attacks on the general population have also remained just as frequent. It is likely that some of the rebel groups have used the cessation of hostilities with the military as an opportunity to regroup and recruit, as well as extort local businesses and kidnap civilians for hefty ransom payments. It is almost certainly this factor that has led Petro and his government to insert the clause in the latest agreement with FARC-EMC that the rebel group cannot attack local communities. It is likely that the government had to make concessions to achieve this commitment, several of which likely entail heavy investment in rural communities. It is highly likely that the government will look to implement similar agreements into all future ceasefires. It is almost certain that during Petro's administration numerous other ceasefires with various other groups will be reached, as internal security highly likely remains his number one domestic issue.

Ecuador:

Top prosecutor shot dead amid continued insecurity.

On 18 January, the public prosecutor who had been tasked with leading the investigation into the assault on a television studio, which was broadcast live on air, was shot in the city of Guayaquil. The prosecutor, Cesar Suarez, was killed in broad daylight after the vehicle he was travelling in was ambushed on its way to a court hearing. According to police, the killing had the hallmarks of a targeted assassination with Suarez having been shot multiple times. Less than 24 hours later, it was announced that two men had been arrested for the shooting and evidence recovered included a rifle, two pistols, a firearm charger and two cars. Alongside this assassination, Ecuador has also seen at least 43 prisoners escape from a jail in the city of Esmeraldas as 2,000 members of the security forces conducted search operations inside the complex. Meanwhile, it has been announced that all prison staff who were seized as hostages during the country's recent prison riots have been released and that soldiers had entered the Guayaquil prison complex as part of a new intervention to "control" the penitentiary centre.

Assessment: Saurez was almost certainly killed due to his high-profile role in fighting Ecuador's organised criminal gangs as a public prosecutor. He had already managed to interview 13 of the gunmen who were captured in the wake of the attack on the TV station, and his assassination may be linked to this case. However, it is equally likely that he was killed due to his work on other high-profile cases involving drug trafficking, political corruption, and leniency in the justice system for drug lords. The escape of more than 40 prisoners from a northern prison during ongoing search operations further underscores the inadequacies of the prison system. It is almost certain that enhanced police and security operations across the country will continue as the government seeks to stem the extent of the violence. The incumbent President Noboa was elected in 2023 on pledges to restore the country's security. However, so far Ecuador's security situation has only continued to deteriorate. There is a realistic possibility that if current security policies continue to fail, then the government may increasingly emulate President Nayib Bukele in El Salvador who has introduced a raft of extreme measures to curb gang violence. Whilst this approach has seen large-scale arrests, military crackdowns, and the erosion of freedoms, it has successfully suppressed violence and organised criminal gangs. As a result of these policies, El Salvador's homicide rate has fallen from the highest to among the lowest in Latin America, and if similar policies result in a similar trend in Ecuador, it would highly likely result in Noboa being re-elected in the country's 2025 general elections.

AMER Forecast. US Democratic and Republican leaders introduced and passed a short-term spending bill to avert a government shutdown, keeping federal agencies operational until March. The agreement aims to provide more time for crafting comprehensive spending legislation amid ongoing disagreements between the Democratic-led Senate and the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, with potential challenges from a faction of far-right Republicans. Nikki Haley has dropped out of a Republican debate and refuses to take part unless Trump also debates. This move comes just days before the New Hampshire primary on 23 January, which will likely be a more accurate reflection on the current dynamics of the Republican nomination

than Iowa's. Protests led by Guy Philippe's supporters in Haiti demand Prime Minister Ariel Henry's resignation, causing widespread disruptions. Philippe, a former rebel leader, recently repatriated after a US prison term, emphasises a desire to transform Haiti rather than overthrow the government. Concerns rise due to Philippe's history of leading a 2004-armed rebellion and orchestrating attacks against the police. Anti-corruption advocate Bernardo Arevalo was sworn in as Guatemala's president after a tumultuous inauguration delayed by congressional opponents. He faces multiple challenges from established parties. Previous opposition moves to counter Arevalo's ascendancy have sparked widespread protests and any further manoeuvres could trigger civil unrest. In Nicaragua, the government has released Bishop Rolando Álvarez and 18 other clergy after over a year in prison on charges related to an alleged plot to overthrow President Daniel Ortega's government. Ortega's administration has seized church property, imprisoned clergy, and closed Vatican charities in the past year, following accusations of a church plot in 2018. The released have been flown to the Vatican for negotiations and future releases appear possible. Argentina's largest union plans a national strike on 24 January, influenced by President Milei's policies. Widespread disruption is almost certain and potential violent clashes are a realistic possibility, and uncertainty surrounds the enforcement of a controversial anti-picketing law passed in December.

In Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince, gangs have launched a four-day attack on the Solino neighbourhood, trapping residents with flaming barricades and gunfire. Calls for help have been largely unanswered due to a lack of police presence, and reports suggest about two dozen deaths since the weekend. The identity of the attackers remains unclear, and the assault almost certainly raises concerns about gangs gaining control and increasing their grip on the country. Haiti's national police deployed officers to Solino to address the situation, and nearby communities erected barricades to prevent further gang infiltration. The country, overwhelmed by gang violence, awaits the deployment of a foreign armed force approved by the UN security council to help restore some order and stability.

In the US, over 70 million people are under cold weather alerts as freezing temperatures, sleet and snow hit several states with winter storms set to land on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Temperatures as low as -45C have been felt in parts of the country and roads are expected to be blocked as areas deal with up to ten inches of snowfall and thousands of flights are likely to be cancelled or delayed. Guatemala's Santiaguito volcano is currently registering between one and four weak to moderate explosions an hour. Whilst the risk of an eruptions currently assessed as low, fine ash particles are expected to fall on adjacent villages and could force an evacuation. In El Carmen del Atrato, Choco, Colombia, a landslide caused by heavy rains has resulted in at least 36 deaths, with dozens more injured and many missing. The casualty toll is expected to rise as search and rescue operations continue to search for survivors. Heavy rains and severe flooding have caused widespread disruption in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul. Multiple roads have been blocked by flooding in the major city of Porto Alegre where entire neighbourhoods have been inundated by floodwaters.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

Netanyahu rejects two-state solution as IDF encounter resistance in southern Gaza.

During the reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have continued to conduct clearance operations throughout much of the Gaza Strip. In northern Gaza, operations have been focused on the areas of Atara and Beit Lahia as the 36th Division withdrew from the north. This now leaves four brigades in Gaza, with the 162nd, 99th, and 98th left in northern, central, and southern Gaza, respectively. In central Gaza, the IDF have isolated the city of Maghazi and have reportedly destroyed Hama's main weapons manufacturing facility in the central governorate. In southern Gaza, the IDF have increased their bombing of Khan Younis and are encountering heavy resistance from combined Palestinian forces who are ambushing IDF armoured units and using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to disrupt IDF clearance operations. However, the Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said that Hamas' "Khan Younis Brigade is gradually disintegrating as a fighting force." The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry claims that the death toll is nearing 25,000. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades established a military council within Hamas to plan attacks globally. In the West Bank, the IDF are conducting daily raids, with efforts largely focused on Tulkarm and Nablus with an IDF drone strike in Nablus on 17 January causing at least eight Palestinian casualties.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state after the Gaza offensive, asserting Israeli control west of the Jordan River and reiterated that the IDF will not cease their operations until they achieve a "complete victory" over Hamas. The US emphasised the continued pursuit of a two-state solution, while Mexico and Chile referred Israeli actions to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for potential war crimes investigation. Within Israel, a terror attack near Tel Aviv in Raanana involving car ramming and stabbing resulted in a 79-year-old Israeli woman's death and multiple injuries, leading to the arrest of two Palestinians from the West Bank city of Hebron. Hezbollah have continued to conduct cross border attacks on IDF positions but have refrained from escalating. However, Hezbollah have refused to withdraw their forces further north away from the Israeli border, despite US efforts to persuade them to do so. Hezbollah have announced that they are open to US diplomacy and want to avoid "total war" with Israel but extolled the work of Iran and Iranian-backed groups throughout the region.

Assessment: The withdrawal of the 36th division is almost certainly indicative of the IDF's transition to the third phase of military operations which will be characterised by a reduction in IDF presence and move to more tactical operations. However, it is likely that this transition will be slower in the south of the Gaza Strip where IDF clearance operations are being met with stiff resistance from a multitude of Palestinian militias. Senior Hamas leadership has likely withdrawn to parts of the south and will remain high value targets for the IDF who will conduct extensive operations until they kill or capture the group's leaders. The IDF's bombing of the south is likely shaping operations prior to a major ground offensive aimed at clearing Hamas militants, with clearance operations being one of the primary factors that is hindering Palestinian militants' ability to conduct indirect fire attacks into Israel. As IDF forces withdraw forces in the north, it is likely Hamas and other Palestinian militias will exploit this and re-infiltrate into areas cleared by the IDF. Reports suggest that the IDF underestimated the extent of the tunnel network within Gaza, which Hamas will continue to use to ambush IDF and conduct attacks in their rear areas. IDF operations in the south are almost certainly putting incredible strain on the medical and humanitarian resources still left functioning in Gaza. The Nasser hospital in Khan Younis is Gaza's largest and already operating at over three times its intended capacity with both Hamas and aid organisations

warning of a deteriorating humanitarian situation and an outbreak of Hepatitis A. With IDF operations in the south focused on clearing major population centres like Khan Younis and Rafah, there is a realistic possibility that the facilitation of aid into Gaza will be disrupted which will further compound the humanitarian situation. There is also a probable chance that militants will attempt to move and draw in the IDF into sensitive areas likely the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone or evacuation zones. IDF operations in these areas will almost certainly be met with international condemnation and put pressure on Tel Aviv to accelerate the transition into the third and final phase of operations, with a cessation of all major combat operations.

Hamas' establishment of a military council could represent a change in strategy for Hamas as it seeks to extend the conflict beyond Gaza, a strategy that could further help influence Western powers to end the conflict due to the threat of escalation. IDF raids into the West Bank and Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestinian state will invariably lead to more protest movements across the world and likely be denounced even by Tel Aviv's closest allies, such as the US. Netanyahu's speech also likely signals a protracted IDF presence in the Gaza Strip, where Israel will highly likely attempt to replace Hamas with a civilian government similar to the Palestinian Authority, whilst the IDF attempt to contain the militant threat from Gaza.

Red Sea:

Houthi attacks on shipping continue despite US and UK airstrikes.

Throughout this week, despite a series of strikes by the US and the UK on Houthi positions in Yemen, the group has continued to target maritime traffic passing along the Yemeni coastline. At least four vessels, three commercial and one with the US Navy, have come under attack since 12 January. These attacks have continued despite the US carrying out five waves of air strikes against known Houthi locations in Yemen, as Washington seeks to degrade the group's capability to target international shipping. In conjunction with airstrikes on the Houthis, on 17 January the Biden administration redesignated the Houthis as global terrorists. This will automatically lead to the imposition of financial sanctions on the group; however, officials stated the listing would be revoked if they ceased their attacks. As a result of the rising risks in the Red Sea, providers of protection and indemnity insurance (P&I), and underwriters are increasingly adding clauses to their policies which mean that US, British or Israeli-linked vessels will not be covered against war risks if they choose to transit the Red Sea. This comes after the Red Sea War Risk premium has risen to 1 percent of a vessel and its cargo's value as of January 2024 from 0.07 percent in October 2023, whilst coverage has also been cut from a standard seven-day period to just 24 hours.

Assessment: The initial airstrikes from the US and the UK were likely intended to send a message of deterrence to the Houthis which almost certainly failed. After several further airstrikes, the Houthis continuation of attacks on merchant shipping indicates that their attack capabilities have yet to be sufficiently degraded. Furthermore, it is almost certain that Iran is continuing to facilitate lethal aid and arms components into Yemen, as evidenced by the recent interdiction of a dhow laden with missile components near the coast of Somalia. Houthi leadership will likely welcome the strikes as it plays into their narrative that they are at war with the West and deflects from a dire humanitarian situation within the parts of Yemen they control. The re-designation of the group as global terrorists will not kick in for thirty days and is likely designed to give the Houthis time to react. Washington will hope that the automatic financial sanctions this incurs means that the Houthis will see their funding and access to weapons severely curtailed. The news that P&I insurers and underwriters are now excluding US, UK and Israeli ships from war risk premiums if they decide to transit the Red Sea will likely force more companies to re-route around Africa and could lead to increased headline inflation as the consumer absorbs the costs incurred to shipping companies. In China, policymakers are almost certain to be worried about how further supply chain and shipping disruption will have negative impacts for its slowing economy. Sustained disruption could force Beijing to enter the equation, however this will likely manifest itself in the form of diplomatic overtures.

Iran:

IRGC conduct long-range strikes against targets in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan.

During the reporting period, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) have conducted multiple ballistic missile and drone strikes against targets in its near abroad. On 15 January, the IRGC launched ballistic missiles against the alleged headquarters of Israel's Mossad agency in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region and against targets linked to the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. The missile fired into Iraq landed in a residential area of Erbil, in close proximity to the US Consulate, and killed one of Iraq's wealthiest businessmen. Iraqi Prime Minister Masrour Barzani condemned the attack on Erbil as a "crime against the Kurdish people". Iraq also recalled its ambassador from Tehran, condemning the strikes as a "blatant violation" of Iraqi sovereignty. On 16 January, the IRGC conducted separate attacks on targets within the Koh-e-Sabz area of Pakistan's Baluchistan region which killed two children. The IRGC claimed it launched precision missile and drone strikes on targets within Pakistan linked to the Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl, known in Iran as Jaish al-Dhulm. Pakistan described the attacks as an unprovoked violation of its airspace, and initially warned Iran of serious consequences, before on 18 January launching strikes, against what it described as separatist militants, in Iran.

Assessment: Ever since Israel's offensive into the Gaza Strip there have been major concerns of a regional destabilisation and even conflict caused by a series of miscalculations or escalations. Iran has almost certainly tried to influence the decisions of the West and other major regional actors through the use of its proxy groups like Hezbollah, the Houthis and the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMFs) in Iraq and Syria. The use of non-state actors has enabled Tehran a degree of plausible deniability whereby it has escaped being directly attributed to the attacks it has organised or encouraged. The IRGC firing drones and ballistic missiles into neighbouring countries marks a serious divergence from this tactic as the IRGC falls under the direct authority of the Supreme Leader of Iran and has the potential to ignite regional tensions and provoke state responses. However, the attack in Iraq was conducted in the autonomous region of Kurdistan, and whilst condemned officially by the Iraqi government, is unlikely to warrant a reprisal from Iraq, especially as both countries struggle with Kurdish militants and because Tehran wields significant influence in the country. The attack in Syria against IS-linked militants was almost certainly in response to the bombing in Kerman, Iran during a commemorative ceremony marking the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the former leader of the IRGC's Quds Force. Syria is in no position to escalate with Iran and would have likely endorsed an attack against IS on its territory. The IRGC's decision to strike targets in Pakistan, a major regional and nuclear power, is the most likely source of escalation, especially as Pakistan is due to host elections in February and the attack has likely undermined the incumbent government. Whilst Pakistan and Iran have recently improved relations and conducted bilateral military exercises, it is likely that the attack will lead to increased tensions and reverse any recent progress. Anti-Iranian groups have sought sanctuary in Pakistan and anti-Pakistan militant groups that have established themselves within Iran's neighbouring Sistan and Baluchistan province. Iran's attack provided justification for Pakistan to conduct similar attacks on Iranian soil against groups deemed hostile to Pakistan such as the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), which will almost certainly come in the form of precision strikes. Iran will highly likely condemn any retaliation but is likely to manage escalation against a nuclear power, and it is highly likely Tehran factored in retaliatory strikes. It is unlikely that these exchanges will lead to a major escalation if contained to each country's respective Baluch region, limited to precision strikes and targeted against militant groups that are hostile to both regimes. However, there is also a realistic possibility that both Tehran and Islamabad will welcome the threat of conflict. The Iranian regime has faced unprecedented challenges on the domestic front, largely characterised by nationwide protests, with any destabilisation presenting an opportunity to shore up support and exert control within its own borders. In the mainly Sunni Pakistan, the incumbent government is likely to rally its base and its strong retaliation against the Shia power of Iran is likely to secure it votes in the upcoming election.

Kuwait:

Newly ascended Emir hopes to bring greater stability after appointment of new government.

On 17 January, Kuwait formed a new government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Sabah al-Saleh al-Sabah. The new government is the first under new Emir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah who came to power in December after his predecessor died. The reshuffle by Sheikh Mohammed was significant as he appointed new ministers for oil, finance and foreign affairs, and changed all but three ministers, with the prime minister also stating that the new government would carry out reforms to comply with the Emir's guidance.

Assessment: Kuwait is one of the world's largest oil exporters and boasts one of the greatest sovereign wealth funds, with assets estimated at over USD 700 billion. As such, any sign of a change of course in policy is closely monitored globally. The country has been hindered in recent years with frequent turnovers of the cabinet that have prevented long-term reform or stability. Indeed, this is the country's sixth cabinet in 18 months. This is almost certainly a result of Kuwait's legislature, which is made up of elected lawmakers, wielding more influence than similar bodies in other Gulf monarchies, disagreeing with the government who are selected by the ruling family. Emir Mishal's appointment of Sheikh Mohamed as prime minister, and the subsequent government appointments highly likely represents an attempt to prevent future impasses. He has removed senior members of the ruling Al-Sabah family, who held the defence and interior posts, from government and called on a greater focus on economic development whilst fighting corruption and nepotism. There is a realistic possibility that the new government of Kuwait, under Emir Mishal's direction, ushers in a new period of stability for the Middle Eastern country. It is highly likely that Kuwait's foreign policies, including support for Gulf Arab unity, Western alliances, and good ties to Riyadh, will remain in place given early indications.

Comoros:

Curfew introduced in response to civil unrest spurred by accusations of election fraud.

Starting on 18 January, an indefinite overnight curfew is being enforced in Comoros following violent protests which have killed at least one and injured several others, triggered by President Azali Assoumani's re-election for a fourth five-year term. The electoral body declared Assoumani the winner with 62.97 percent of the vote in the 14 January election. Protests erupted in the capital, Moroni, forcing the army into deploying tear gas to disperse demonstrators. When announcing the curfew, the interior ministry declared that the implementation of the curfew was due to the unrest attributed to the supporters of losing candidates. Assoumani's opponents, several of whom were arrested, alleged that the election was fraudulent, citing the tactics of ballot stuffing and premature voting closures.

Assessment: Assoumani securing almost 63 percent of the vote would ordinarily be considered a landslide. However, reports suggest that only 16 percent of the electorate voted, indicating a general rejection of democracy on the island nation. Comoros has experienced around 20 coups since gaining independence in 1975, with political instability largely rooted in ethnic and regional divisions. Until the recent election, there was a constitutional requirement for the presidency to rotate among Comoros' three main islands, Grand Comore, Anjouan and Moheli. However, constitutional reforms removed this obligation in 2018, allowing Assoumani to retain the presidency. His re-election has almost certainly been the main catalyst for the latest civil unrest, which has only been exacerbated by allegations of election fraud. Assoumani, who first won the presidency in 1999 after staging a coup of his own, is from the main island of Grand Comore, and also won the presidency in 2002, 2016 and 2019. Assoumani had previously refused to devolve power to the other islands which has invariably contributed to his unpopularity. Comoros also suffers from high unemployment rates and poverty, especially on the lesser two islands, forcing many to migrate to the main island of Grand Comore, the largest, most populous and politically and economically most significant. This has contributed to an ethnically and politically divided

landscape on Grand Comore and especially in the capital Moroni, whereas in previous generations the discontent would have been largely isolated to the smaller islands. The extent of the civil unrest will have almost certainly evoked memories of previous coups and compelled the authorities to introduce a curfew and suspend the internet in order to quell civil unrest before it threatens to destabilise the country or escalate.

EMEA Forecast. Pressure on governments across the region have risen the last reporting period and are almost certain to continue. In Germany, the farmers protest climaxed in the last week, but with the government seeming unwilling to meet their demands regarding concession, it is highly likely that further protests will occur in the near future. On a separate issue, protests against the far-right Alternative for Germany party are gaining momentum in the wake of a report that two senior party members joined a meeting to discuss plans for the mass deportation of citizens of foreign origin. In the UK, a recent poll has suggested that the ruling Conservative party are on course for a devastating loss in the next general election, which has to be held before January 2025. This would mark a dynamic shift in UK politics, with government policy highly likely to change. In Serbia, thousands of opposition supporters have returned to the streets, resuming protests against President Aleksandar Vucic, over issues of fraud and electoral manipulation. Vucic dismisses the claims as "fabricated," but there is a realistic possibility that protests, which turned violent in December, could escalate once again. Sino-Swiss relations look highly likely to improve in the coming years following a meeting between Swiss President Viola Amerd and Chinese Premier Li Quian. Switzerland is China's third largest trading partner, and Beijing will almost certainly be exploring all options to invigorate its stagnating economy.

In Africa, Felix Tshisekedi is set to be sworn in for his second term as President of the Democratic Republic of Congo on 20 January. It is highly likely that protests and disruption will take place across the country after opposition leaders called for demonstrations over the veracity of the election. The final list of candidates for the Senegalese general election in February must be submitted on 20 January. Main opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, continues to be barred from running with his party's alternative, Bassirou Diomaye Faye also in prison. It is highly likely to be a tense, and possibly violent, election period. Elsewhere, the prospect of a sharp currency devaluation is moving higher and closer in Egypt, risking further economic instability and possible social unrest and Russia and Niger have agreed to enhance military cooperation. The latter of these is almost certainly a precursor for the deployment of Russia's Wagner Group, or other Russian private military companies, ahead of ECOWAS holding a summit with Niger's junta on 25 January.

NATO exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 will commence during the next reporting period and is expected to involve at least 90,000 troops and run until May. The exercise will include the deployment of North American troops to the European theatre and will highly likely be met with inflammatory Russian rhetoric and demonstrations of strength by the Kremlin. Strategic messaging in the form of Russian nuclear forces readiness exercises is a realistic possibility. Turkey's interior minister has reported the arrest of over 30 suspected Islamic State (IS) members in a three-day operation across 11 provinces. The arrests point to the fact IS still maintains a considerable presence within Turkey and has likely used it as a safe haven. The exploitation and analysis of seized material is likely to provide further intelligence that may result in further counter-IS operations within both Turkey and the wider region. Somalia has refused entry to a plane carrying Ethiopian officials bound for the self-declared republic of Somaliland, escalating the diplomatic tensions between the two nations. The move is almost certainly in response to Ethiopia's proposed port deal with Somaliland, the sustained pursuit of which will invariably lead to heightened tensions on the Horn of Africa. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, about 2000 UN troops will withdraw as part of the ending of the MONUSCO mission. The 25-year mission marked by mixed success, was often seen unfavourably in the Kivu province. There are almost certainly concerns regarding the potential exploitation of the void left by the mission's withdrawal, with militant groups making substantial gains in recent months. Attacks in December 2023 and January 2024 in Mozambique's volatile Cabo Delgado province have led to the

displacement of at least 1,800 people and further attacks are likely as the armed forces struggle to contain the violence.

In Iceland, another volcanic eruption north of Grindavik, has seen lava flows impacting the outskirts of the town. While the eruption posed no threat to life itself due to prior evacuations, it is the second eruption in Iceland in a month, with further and potentially worse eruptions possible in immediate future. Severe winter weather across northern and western Europe will also likely cause residual disruption into the next reporting period. In a major health success, the WHO has declared Cape Verde as malaria free. It becomes the third Malaria free country in Africa after Mauritius and Algeria. Whilst it is a major achievement, and public health milestone, the WHO stated Cape Verde needed to continue to invest in anti-malaria projects, as mosquitos become increasingly resistant to the pesticides used to keep them at bay.





Asia Pacific (APAC)

Korean Peninsula:

Pyongyang no longer pursues reconciliation with Seoul as tensions continue to increase.

During the reporting period, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared that his country will no longer pursue reconciliation with Seoul and indicated that the entire North Korean constitution will be rewritten. The new constitution will specify that Pyongyang's intent in the case of a war with the South, is to "occupy, subjugate and reclaim" South Korea as part of the North's territory. North Korea also disbanded the key government agencies that had been tasked with managing relations with South Korea. Kim Jong-un accused South Korea and the United States of escalating tensions in the region, pointing to their increased joint military exercises, deployment of strategic US military assets on the Korean Peninsula, and trilateral security collaboration with Japan. According to Kim, these actions are transforming the Korean Peninsula into an area increasingly at risk of war. The UN decried Kim's move, stating that diplomatic engagement remains the only possibility for a sustained peace on the Korean Peninsula and called for a complete denuclearisation of the area. North Korea also tested a nuclear-capable underwater drone which state media said was in response to South Korean trilateral military exercises with Japan and the US.

Assessment: It is almost certain that North Korea's decision to no longer pursue peaceful reunification with the South has been inspired by the heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula, caused primarily by North Korea's weapons development and frequent demonstrations of strength, best characterised by its periodic launches of ballistic missiles, the most recent of which was on 15 January. North Korea is also developing more sophisticated weapons, with the latest demonstration including hypersonic technologies, which will be harder to detect and intercept. However, Washington's manoeuvres to counter both North Korea and China in the region have also contributed significantly to the tensions, especially as Japan has been increasingly pulled into a growing Asia-Pacific alliance which will invariably concern both Russia and China. On 17 January, the US, South Korea and Japan conducted trilateral naval drills which have been described as the largest combined exercises to date and were aimed at countering North Korea's nuclear, missile and underwater threats. As the US, South Korea and Japan alliance continues to mature, it is almost certain that North Korea will be pushed further into the spheres of Russia and China, who will cautiously accept North Korea as an ally to counterbalance the regional dynamics and deter US activity. Indeed, it is almost certain that North Korean has intensified is aggressive rhetoric after being emboldened by its improving relationship with Russia. Fears have already arisen over North Korea's acquisition of advanced weaponry from Russia in exchange for North Korean arms to be used in Ukraine. With Pyongyang moving further towards Moscow and Beijing, there is a realistic possibility that it will achieve even greater access to advanced technology and arms and break out of its current isolation in a united front against the US. Such a feat will likely improve the credibility of North Korea's escalatory nuclear doctrine, a strategy Kim is likely pursuing as it could ultimately enable North Korea to gain some concessions.

Taiwan:

Lai Ching-te elected President as Nauru switches diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

This reporting period saw Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) win the country's presidential election. This means that the DPP has retained control of the presidency for a historic third successive term. However, whilst the DPP has retained the presidency, they have lost their majority in the country's legislature, the Yuan. Due to a strong showing from the

Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which was only founded in 2019, neither the DPP nor its major political rival, the Kuomintang (KMT) have a majority. This is the first time since 2004 that no party has had a majority in the Yuan. In the wake of these elections, the island nation of Nauru in the Pacific Ocean stated that they would be switching their diplomatic recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing, leaving just 12 countries which formally recognise Taiwan.

Assessment: A third consecutive win for the DPP in presidential elections highlights that recent Chinese aggression and rhetoric around the unification of Taiwan has led increasingly more Taiwanese voters to be sceptical of the KMT who have historically promoted unity with China. Moreover, Beijing's destruction of Hong Kong's democracy and civic society under "one country two systems," has also furthered this case. The DPP contrastingly has historically portrayed itself as pro-independence and a supporter of Taiwanese sovereignty. These trends have likely been bolstered by the fact that an increasingly large number of voters identify as Taiwanese as opposed to Chinese. The loss of a majority in the Yuan for the DPP, and the rise of the TPP, however, highlights that domestically many Taiwanese are disillusioned with both the DPP and KMT for their lack of progress on long-standing domestic issues. Such issues include a chronic housing shortage, low wages, ageing demographics, and looming energy shortages. The TPP is likely to play a kingmaker role in the Yuan, and whilst it is more aligned with the KMT politically, it may seek to try and balance between both parties depending on the policy or legislation put forward. The switching of Nauru's diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing will have been negotiated before the election, and it is almost certain that Beijing will have offered financial or developmental incentives to the island for the diplomatic switch. The timing, however, will have been chosen to highlight Beijing's displeasure with the DPP victory. China is almost certain to continue trying to pick off Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies as a result of the DPP victory and will likely continue its aggressive rhetoric and military exercises. Indeed, as China's domestic economy struggles, Beijing may increasingly use nationalism and the status of Taiwan to try and shore up support. Meanwhile, under the DPP expect a continuation of a Taiwanese foreign policy which aims to strengthen and build alliances and partnerships with other liberal democracies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, the UK, the US and the EU.

Singapore

Minister of Transport charged with corruption.

On 18 January, it was announced that Singapore's Minister for Transport, Subramaniam Iswaran, has been charged with engaging in corruption. Iswaran faces 27 charges including graft, obstruction of justice and obtaining "valuable things" from a prominent real estate tycoon. If found guilty, he faces a fine of at least USD 74,000 and seven years in jail. The country's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) alleges that between 2015 and 2022 Iswaran received more than USD 285,000 in payments and assorted kickbacks.

Assessment: Singapore prides itself on the fact that it is one of the world's least corrupt countries. Indeed government ministers are often paid more than USD 1 million a year to help reduce any possible financial motives for engaging in corrupt practices. As such, it is exceedingly rare for an incumbent minister to be charged with such offences, with the last case of corruption at the ministerial level reputedly being in 1986. These corruption allegations come at a critical time for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Whilst they have governed Singapore continuously since independence, there have been a string of scandals in recent months which have dented their reputation. These include the resignation of senior government officials due to an "inappropriate relationship", and allegations of government officials receiving discounted rents in luxury housing. Furthermore, the 2025 election will see a transition of power in the PAP away from the incumbent Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, aged 71, to Lawrence Wong, aged 51, who is currently Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Alongside this, at the previous general election in 2020, the PAP incurred its worst-ever electoral performance. This prior electoral performance, combined with the recent scandals means that several senior members of PAP fear

the transition period and subsequent election may not be as smooth or as easy as they would hope. Despite this, the PAP are almost certain to win in 2025.

APAC Forecast. In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the country's largest Hindu temple, Ram Mandir, to great fanfare in the flashpoint holy city of Ayodhya on 22 January. The temple's opening holds major significance for Modi and his Hindu nationalist supporters, especially as they seek a third term in power in April's general elections. Muslim residents in Ayodhya, however, are fearful of potential escalations in already tense Hindu-Muslim relations, given the temple's contentious history. Elsewhere on the subcontinent, Nepal will hold National Assembly elections on 25 January. These will see a third of the available seats contested. While the balance of power could potentially shift, centre-left groups currently dominate the political scene, and indications suggest they are likely to maintain their hold on power. As Indonesia prepares to hold presidential elections, candidate Prabowo Subianto continues to hold a substantial lead, however, he has been experiencing a stagnation in popularity in recent weeks. Despite holding a 20-point lead in polls, it appears likely that the election will go to a runoff which could herald a period of political instability in the country. Finally, the Philippines has announced that it will seek to develop islands in the South China Sea, asserting them as part of its territory, with plans to enhance habitability for troops. The move will almost certainly amplify existing tensions with China, who will likely respond with aggressive rhetoric and more dangerous manoeuvres in the disputed South China Sea.

Insecurity continues to plague Afghanistan, with a suicide bomber targeting the governor's compound in Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz province, on 14 January. The attacker detonated the bomb after being shot by security guards, resulting in no deaths but leaving three individuals wounded. The attack is strongly suspected to be the work of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which has escalated its attacks in recent months, likely in an attempt to challenge the ruling Taliban. In Myanmar, rebels and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) continue to make gains in their fight against the country's military junta. In Rakhine state, the Arakan Army has declared it has taken control of the port town of Paletwa. This is another setback for government forces. It comes as part of a wider resumption of fighting just days after a Chinese-brokered ceasefire, with rebels accusing government forces of breaching the terms of the agreement. Fighting is almost certain to continue as ethnic rebels seek an opportunity to achieve more autonomy. The Maldives has asked India to withdraw its troops by 15 March, escalating tensions as President Muizzu seeks to reduce India's influence, favouring closer ties with China. The move comes amid a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the Maldives, with the latter owing China approximately USD 1.4 billion. The move is likely a signal of increased tensions between the two Asia superpowers and will likely draw Beijing deeper into the Indian Ocean.

Northern India has been badly impacted by dense fog and cold weather. This has disrupted flights and rail services, and it is predicted that that conditions will only worsen in the coming days and cause further disruptions. Such incidents are becoming more frequent in Asian cities, prompting calls for a new category of weather monitoring for the region. In China, the Xinjiang region saw extensive rescue and evacuation efforts after avalanches trapped over 1000 tourists at a ski resort. The region has seen extremely heavy snowfall and avalanches which have impacted over 200 miles of roads. Due to the geography of the area reopening the roads has been difficult and travel and transport in the affected areas are likely to remain difficult into the next reporting period. Due to heavy rain following the recent earthquake, and the fact that the region has now seen more than 100 aftershock quakes, Japan's Honshu Island has issued a series of landslide warnings. The island's Noto peninsula remains the most badly impacted region of the island. Finally, authorities in Indonesia have evacuated Mount Marapi for the second time in two months after it spewed ash 1300m into the sky. At least 100 people were evacuated on 12 January after the threat level was raised from level 2 to 3, the second highest. No one has been injured, however, a minor eruption on 4 December killed 24 and injured several more. The volcano is infamous for its sudden eruptions and its unpredictability could lead to an extended evacuation

zone. Indonesia's Lewotobi volcano has also sent an ash plume 1.5 kilometres into the air after 6500 people were evacuated from the island of Flores.

