



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 19 JAN – 26 JAN



Global Intelligence Summary

Week 2: 19 January – 26 January

Executive Summary

- President Milei's sweeping reforms in **Argentina** have provoked the largest strikes in recent history which will **almost certainly** lead to widespread disruption with a **realistic possibility** of violence.
- Protesting **French** farmers cause widespread disruption and will **highly likely** descend on the capital with the Paris Olympics looming.
- In **Yemen**, the **US** and **UK** have continued their strikes in response to Houthi attacks on merchant shipping, and **China's** pressure on **Iran** is **likely** to lead to attempts to rein in the rebel group.
- In **China**, the effect of environmental disasters will **highly likely** strain relations between the government and local populations over concerns of a lack of safety measures.



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

AMER

- 1 USA:** De Santis pulls out and Trump wins New Hampshire
- 2 Haiti:** Gangs attack community as UN mission deemed illegal
- 3 Argentina:** General strike across Argentina against Milei reforms

EMEA

- 4 France:** Farming protests continue and begin to threaten the capital
- 5 Syria:** Israel blamed for missile strike on Damascus
- 6 Iraq:** US attacked, and talks begin on ending US military presence
- 7 Israel:** IDF clear south as ICJ demands measures to prevent genocide
- 8 Red Sea/Yemen:** US and UK continue strikes as China exerts pressure on Iran

APAC

- 9 Thailand:** Courts to reinstate ex-prime ministerial candidate
- 10 China:** A major earthquake and landslide devastate remote provinces
- 11 Tuvalu:** Election could put ties with Australia and China in the balance



Americas (AMER)

United States:

De Santis pulls out of presidential race and Trump wins New Hampshire.

This reporting period has seen Trump win the endorsement of fellow Republican challenger, Ron De Santis after he dropped out of the presidential race two days before the New Hampshire primary. De Santis decided to end his presidential campaign as he failed to emerge as a credible challenger. In Iowa, whilst he came second, he still trailed 30 percentage points behind Trump. In his endorsement of Trump, he stated that Nikki Haley, the remaining contender to Trump was the candidate of “democrats and globalists”. Trump then won in New Hampshire, solidifying his hold on the Republican nomination. Trump won 54.6 percent of the vote to Haley’s 43.2 percent.

Assessment: In 2023, De Santis was strongly considered to be a leading contender to beat Trump in the Republican primaries. However, despite donations totalling more than USD 100 million to his campaign, and a legislative legacy in Florida which appealed to Trump supporters, he repeatedly failed to connect with voters. Whilst he promised to win in Iowa, he ultimately trailed Trump by 30 points. De Santis’ exit is unlikely to radically reshape the Republican race, and most of his supporters are almost certain to transfer their support to Trump. The results in New Hampshire will be seen as a major setback for Haley’s campaign, as she had invested heavily into the state in the hopes of winning it and bolstering her flagging race. Despite her loss, she has vowed to continue onto the next primary in South Carolina. Haley served as governor of this state between 2011 and 2016, and she likely hopes this may help her to narrow the margin between her and Trump. However, it remains unlikely she will win here with current polling indicating a major Trump win. How large her defeat becomes will almost certainly inform whether she drops out after this next primary or continues in the race as a Republican alternative to Trump. In response to her vow to continue, Trump has called her an imposter and stated that under his government, anyone who donated to Haley would face the consequences. Despite his win in New Hampshire, the results also highlighted how poorly Trump performed outside of his base of support. Areas of the state with high earners, those with college education, political independents, or a mix of all of these voted heavily for Haley. If Trump desires to win in November, he will have to work out how to extract more votes from outside of his base, which is a task he appears unable to do so far.

Argentina:

Mass mobilisation of workers across Argentina to protest Milei reforms.

On 24 January, tens of thousands of workers took to the streets of Argentina in order to strike and protest the budget-cutting policies of new far-right President Javier Milei. The mobilisation is being led by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the country’s largest union with an estimated seven million members. Whilst the main demonstrations are occurring outside Congress in Buenos Aires, further protests have been scheduled in dozens of other cities across the country like Córdoba, Rosario, San Miguel de Tucumán, Mendoza, Mar del Plata, Bahía Blanca, and many others. Basic essential services are not expected to be disrupted by the strike; however, the majority of the economy and daily life is expected to be paralysed by the industrial action.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the primary catalyst for the strikes are the sweeping reforms introduced by Milei, just ten days into his presidency. These reforms, which are aimed at drastically cutting public expenditure and decreasing the size of the state, include the reduction of worker protections, major deregulation of multiple sectors of the economy, the elimination of rent price ceilings and the ending of price controls on several consumer goods, at a time when the country is struggling with record inflation. Milei also decided to devalue the Argentinian Peso

by approximately 50 percent, a move that has highly likely affected many ordinary Argentinians by increasing inflation and causing wage erosion and could lead to other adverse effects such as the increasing of interest rates and decreasing the real value of peoples' savings. Whilst the CGT has been instrumental in organising the strike, it is expected that their workers will be joined by Argentina's next two largest unions, the Argentine Workers' Central Union, and the Argentine Workers' Central Union (Autonomous) as well as several other smaller unions. Joint action by these unions is likely to lead to some of the largest demonstrations witnessed in Argentina during its recent history. Milei has also sought to introduce a raft of measures to reform the penal code which include draconian policies to limit public protest. Moreover, the Minister of Security, Patricia Bullrich, has adopted repressive policies, introducing the "Public Order Protocol" that authorises security forces to intervene against roadblocks or disruptions to transportation. Amidst widespread protests involving millions of people in Argentina, coupled with the government's attempts to curtail such demonstrations and the country's history of violent protests, there is a significant likelihood that these protests may escalate into episodes of violence.

Haiti:

Gangs continue to exert their control as Kenya deems UN deployment illegal.

During this reporting period, gangs in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince have raided the community of Solino which is home to numerous police officers and continue to lay siege to the neighbourhood. Reports indicate that additional police have either failed or refused to come to the rescue of the neighbourhood's residents and that gangs have begun torching homes. Nearby communities have erected fortifications and barricades consisting of rocks, trucks, tires and banana trees to contain the expansion of gang violence. In a separate incident in the capital, six nuns were kidnapped by Haitian gangs, prompting the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince and the Haitian Conference of the Religious to demand that the government take decisive action against escalating gang violence. They also condemned the government's previous efforts to curtail the violence which they described as a "reign of terror". Pope Francis demanded the release of the nuns who were subsequently released on 25 January. On 26 Friday, a Kenyan court ruled against the Kenyan government's plan to deploy police to Haiti to lead a UN-backed multinational mission aimed at restoring peace and security in the gang-plagued Caribbean nation.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the gang attack on the Solino neighbourhood is an attempt to expand their control of the city, with recent estimates suggesting that they now control up to 80 percent of Port-au-Prince. The successful capture of Solino will likely grant the gangs access to some of the few remaining neighbourhoods that have so far managed to avoid being overtaken by the gangs. Whilst international oversight in Haiti is heavily restricted and many crimes likely go unreported, a report by the United Nations released on 23 January indicated that there had been nearly 5000 homicides in Haiti in 2023, a figure that represents more than double the amount killed in 2022. The gangs' control has also caused major disruption to the Haitian economy, depleted public resources and resulted in one of the deadliest cholera epidemics on the planet. Many of the neighbourhoods free from the gangs were previously controlled by them in the 1990s and early 2000s until UN-led missions managed to restore some degree of order in the country. The UN approved the deployment of an international policing mission for Haiti in October 2023 which is likely the only measure that can curtail the gangs' influence and bring back some stability to the country. However, the mission was to be led by Kenya but was delayed over disputes in Kenya surrounding its legality. The verdict of the Kenyan court on 26 Friday will almost certainly be seen as a major setback for Haiti and it is likely that there is significant opposition within Kenya to deploy its own forces to Haiti and away from its own problems. The gangs will almost certainly exploit the delay of a UN mission to seize more territory and consolidate more power before attempts are made to dislodge them.

AMER Forecast. In America, the Federal Aviation Authority has declared that the 737 Max 9 can start flying again, however, it has banned further production of the airliner by Boeing until further

notice. In the short term, this will undoubtedly relieve pressure on US domestic airlines such as Alaska and United who are major users of the aircraft. The grounding had led to widespread US domestic route disruption. In the long term, the production halt is likely to lead to continued pressure on airlines as it will impact delivery timelines and likely lead to price pressure on tickets as seat numbers will not be rising as quickly as airlines had planned. Venezuelan authorities have arrested 32 civilians and soldiers, accusing them of participating in a US-backed conspiracy to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro. Attorney General Tarek William Saab stated that all suspects have confessed, revealing information about the alleged plans, and they have been accused of treason and convicted for their crimes. The crackdown is likely to further strain relations between Caracas and Washington.

The Argentinian electricity providers Edenor and Edesur have formally requested the Argentine government to increase monthly tariffs in 2024, seeking over 1 billion Argentine pesos (USD 1.2 million) to sustain public services. If the government accepts the request, the increased prices will likely provoke further protest in a country already reacting to President Milei's contentious reforms. Meanwhile, Mexican authorities are urging for a swift investigation into the increasing presence of US military-grade weapons seized from Mexican drug cartels, including machine guns and rocket launchers. The influx of such weapons has empowered cartels, surpassing law enforcement capabilities and leading to more lethal violence. With such an overmatch, further cartel violence is almost certain to occur in the coming weeks.

Colombia's government has declared a state of emergency due to escalating wildfires, seeking international assistance. Over 31 major fires are burning, with several approaching Bogota, and only nine are presently contained. Conditions are anticipated to deteriorate in the coming days and consequently, there is a likelihood of urban areas facing evacuations.





Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

France:

French farmers continue nationwide protests and threaten action in Paris

During this reporting period, a second consecutive week of protests occurred among farmers and agricultural groups throughout France. These demonstrations were prompted by grievances regarding the agricultural sector, including concerns about the unfair pricing of their products, as well as the imposition of excessive taxes and regulations pertaining to environmental protection. Farmers congregated along various highways across the nation, obstructing toll points and intersections by depositing produce and manure. Particularly concentrated roadblocks were observed in the more traditional agricultural regions situated in the southern and western parts of France, notably around the vicinity of Toulouse. These roadblocks have resulted in significant disruption and discontent among the general populace, with tragic consequences exemplified by the fatalities of two protesting farmers who were struck by a passing vehicle in Pamiers. Despite these events, public sentiment remains divided, with several workers' unions expressing solidarity with the farmers and participating in protests at multiple locations. Efforts to address the issue have involved discussions between the French government and agricultural representatives. However, to date, no resolution has been reached. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal is anticipated to deliver public statements on Friday with the aim of ameliorating the ongoing agricultural crisis.

Assessment: Farming policy has always been a sensitive issue in France and domestically, this marks the first substantial challenge for the new Prime Minister, Gabriel Attal. As the European Union's foremost agricultural producer, France boasts a myriad of independent producers of wine, meat, and dairy. So far, the protests have been confined outside Paris, predominantly occurring within the traditional agricultural zones of the country. However, numerous union leaders have issued threats to mobilise protests in the French capital, a prospect that, if realised, would precipitate widespread disruption, especially to the transportation sector. In the upcoming month, Paris is slated to host the Paris International Agricultural Show, one of the globe's premier agricultural exhibitions, which could serve as a focal point for continued protests. Nationally, these demonstrations likely underscore deeper issues. President Emmanuel Macron is apprehensive about the burgeoning support for far-right ideologies among farmers in anticipation of the European Parliament elections in June. Farming discontent has not been confined solely to France during this reporting period, with analogous protests also surfacing in Germany, Poland, and Romania, thereby accentuating these concerns on a pan-European scale. In the short term, the French government will likely appease the farming unions with a number of incentives and reforms to curtail immediate civil unrest. This is as this year will see France hosting the Olympic Games and going to the polls in European elections. Consequently, Paris will seek to do all it can ability to stop widespread civil discontent.

Syria:

Israel blamed for missile strike on Damascus.

This reporting period saw a missile strike on a house in Damascus on 20 January. According to Iran, this strike was carried out by Israel and left at least five senior members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) dead. Local Syrian media identified two of those killed as being General Sadegh Omidzadeh, an intelligence officer of the IRGC's Quds Force in Syria, and his deputy, who goes by the nom de guerre Hajj Gholam. The building which was targeted was regularly used by the IRGC and Iranian advisors supporting Syria's President Assad. The strike was carried out in the city's Mazzeh neighbourhood, which is a high-security zone that is home to the headquarters of the United Nations in Syria and several international embassies.

Assessment: Israel has frequently launched air strikes at Syria since the start of that country's civil war. These were long seen as part of Israel's attempt to counter or disrupt the growth of Iranian influence in Damascus. However, the attacks have increased significantly since the outbreak of the war in Gaza. Only last month, the senior IRGC officer Brigadier General Razi Mousavi was killed in an alleged Israeli airstrike in Damascus. The tempo of strikes has almost certainly increased as Israel seeks to prevent Iran from supplying arms to its Lebanese-based proxy Hezbollah, which has stepped up attacks on northern Israel and has considerable freedom of movement within Syria. These cross-border attacks have forced Israel to evacuate its border zone and have become so persistent that Israel has warned it can no longer tolerate Hezbollah's presence on its border, raising the prospect of a second front being opened by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). This latest strike on Damascus was likely Israeli retaliation as it came only days after Iran claimed that it struck what it claimed was an intelligence outpost belonging to Mossad in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraq:

Al-Asad air base attacked, and the US opens talks on ending its military presence.

This reporting period saw the US used Al-Asad airbase in Iraq targeted by Iranian-backed militias on 20 January. The base was targeted with ballistic missiles and rockets and led to several US personnel being injured. A statement from the US Central Command stated that personnel were undergoing evaluation for "traumatic brain injuries". Alongside the US personnel, at least one Iraqi was also injured. Just days later, on 24 January, it was reported that the US had sent a letter to the Iraqi government stating it was willing to initiate talks on how to end the US-led international military coalition in the country and work towards replacing it with standardised bilateral relations.

Assessment: The attack against Al-Asad airbase was perpetrated by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a group which emerged in late 2023. They have frequently attacked US forces across both Iraq and Syria. This attack, however, marks a sharp escalation compared to prior attacks. This is because this is the first time such an attack has been conducted using ballistic missiles, whereas historically these attacks have been carried out using lower-sophistication weaponry such as drones and non-precision rockets. More widely, this attack almost certainly forms part of the wider regional repercussions stemming from the ongoing war in Gaza, and the longer this continues, the likelier it becomes these provoke a broader conflict. Around 2,500 troops have been in Iraq since 2014 to help their Iraqi counterparts with counter-Islamic State (IS) operations and security. The news that the US has agreed to open talks with Iraq about ending its military presence, is likely tied to US concerns that unless tensions in the region are lowered then this regional war could break out. The announcement also means that Washington has dropped its long-standing pre-condition that for talks to commence, Iran-backed Iraqi militant groups must stop attacking US assets. Whilst this announcement is highly symbolic, the talks will almost certainly take many months, perhaps even longer than a year, with any outcome or conclusion highly uncertain. US troops in Iraq provide the country's politicians a necessary counterweight to the pro-Iranian militias in the country, and in doing so allow for a form of political stability in the country. The news of such talks will almost certainly help to appease the pro-Iranian elements in Iraq and may be enough to reduce tensions in the country in the short-term. There is a realistic possibility that the talks will end with an agreement on only a small reduction, as the US and its local supporters will fear a full reduction could bolster Iranian influence in the region and lead to a re-emergence of IS as a major threat. Moreover, the Iraqi federal government will be mindful that any policy it pursues regarding the withdrawal of US forces could suggest that it is cowering to Iranian influence. Whilst the talks may start soon, any agreements are unlikely to be made until after the US presidential election.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

IDF continue attempts to clear southern Gaza as ICJ rules Israel must change tactics.

Throughout the reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have continued to conduct clearance operations in several parts of northern, central and southern Gaza Strip. On 23 January, a Hamas military unit conducted an attack on a complex that resulted in the deaths of 21 Israeli soldiers. This attack marks the largest IDF fatality toll in a single attack since hostilities began. In southern Gaza the IDF clearance operations uncovered the largest underground weapons production facility to date. Israeli forces have continued their advances through Khan Younis but at a slower rate than in previous weeks. Palestinian militias are continuing to execute a deliberate defence in the area with a heightened presence in western Khan Younis. Clashes continued within the West Bank between the IDF and Palestinian militants with a particular concentration in the areas of Jenin and Tubas. On 25 January an IDF vehicle convoy was targeted with an improvised explosive device in the Muqayla are of Jenin. Cross-border attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel and vice versa continued during the reporting period. A shelter-in-place order was issued for the Israeli border kibbutz community of Hanita following IDF reports of an infiltration of militants from the Lebanese border. The shelter-in-place order was lifted shortly after following confirmation of no infiltration. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns along with Israeli counterparts will meet with Qatari and Egyptian officials for talks on a second potential hostage deal. The exact figure of remaining Israeli hostages within the Gaza Strip is unclear but a number of sources has placed the figure at over one hundred. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has rejected Israel's request to dismiss South Africa's genocide lawsuit but has issued warnings to Israel that it must use "all measures within its power" to prevent genocide in Gaza. Following the announcement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered members of his cabinet to refrain from responding to the International Court of Justice's provisional ruling.

Assessment: In parts of northern and central Gaza, Palestinian fighters are likely re-infiltrating areas assessed as cleared by the IDF and will likely fix IDF units with guerilla tactics and concentrate their efforts on disrupting IDF supply lines whilst the IDF attempts to secure Khan Younis. Uncorroborated reports indicate the attack on the IDF which killed 21 soldiers was the result of a rocket-propelled grenade attack which caused the detonation of IDF explosives used to blow up buildings. The scale and nature of this attack is likely to provoke further criticism of the IDF's tactics by drawing attention to the deliberate demolition of buildings. Palestinian fighters have likely withdrawn to the south and have been able to mount a more effective defence of Khan Younis which has slowed down the rate of advance of the IDF. IDF advances in the south of Gaza have closed in on the remaining healthcare facilities in Khan Younis and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society has reported that IDF operations are threatening their operations. With much of Gaza now cleared by the IDF and fighting ongoing in the south, it is almost certain that Palestinians have few places left to seek shelter other than the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone and areas further south such as Rafah. However, uncorroborated reports suggest that IDF tanks and troops have moved into the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone. If true, this marks the first time the IDF have entered the area and would suggest that there are no areas within Gaza safe to shelter. In the West Bank, there is a realistic possibility that Palestinian militias are increasing their attacks in the area in order to fix IDF resources in an attempt to provide relief to Hamas and other militias in Gaza. Whilst external actors attempt to mediate and secure the release of the remaining Israeli hostages, it is unlikely that Hamas will release all of the hostages as this would force them to lose all of their remaining leverage over Israel. The ICJ ruling will almost certainly increase calls for a ceasefire and will likely put more pressure on the US to limit its support for Israel. The ruling will also highly likely serve as a catalyst for further demonstrations throughout the West and much of the Middle East.

Yemen and the Red Sea:

US and UK continue strikes as China asks Tehran to rein in the Houthis.

During the reporting period, the Houthi Movement has resumed its attacks on international shipping and 24 January fired three anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward the US-flagged, owned, and operated container ship MV Maersk Detroit,

whilst it was transiting the Gulf of Aden, forcing the vessel and its US naval escorts to turnaround. Uncorroborated reports and a Houthi statement claim that they had successfully engaged a US naval escort, a claim Washington categorically refutes. The US and UK have resumed strikes on Houthi military launch sites and imposed sanctions on key Houthi officials alleged to be involved in or directing supporting attacks on Houthi vessels. Shipping companies have continued to redirect vessels, resulting in delays and additional mileage. The US has also reached out to China, asking it to communicate directly with Iran in a bid to persuade Tehran to rein in Houthi attacks. Iranian sources have reported that Chinese officials have contacted their Iranian counterparts, asking them to prevent further Houthi attacks or risk harming business relations with Beijing. However, the Houthi leader, Abdel-Malek al-Houthi, has explicitly stated that their operations will continue until Palestinians in Gaza receive food and medicine.

Assessment: The Houthi attacks on commercial shipping which began in November 2023 have raised the cost of shipping and insurance by disrupting one of the world's busiest sea lanes. The move was highly likely endorsed by Tehran in a bid to persuade key Western decision makers, with many countries in the West struggling to contain inflation which the rerouting of commercial vessels will highly likely increase. However, the US and UK strikes have indicated that elements within the West are refusing to cower to the Houthis, a move further substantiated by the recently imposed sanctions and the US decision to redesignate the Houthis as "Specially Designated Global Terrorists". Washington's steps have likely increased Tehran's fears of a regional escalation and have increased the chances of a resumption of hostilities between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, with many of the Gulf countries also suffering economically from the Houthi's actions. Similarly to Hezbollah, the Houthis have almost certainly been funded, armed, and trained by Iran. Whilst their initial actions were potentially directed by Tehran, the threat of escalation could lead to a severe degradation of Iranian capabilities and proxy forces in a strategic location. One of Tehran's likely original objectives was to develop the Houthis as an insurance policy in case Iran was attacked. As such, Tehran will likely be perturbed by the prospect of Houthi forces being severely weakened. China's original policy was likely to remain quiet and attempt to undermine the US-led efforts to restore regional stability from the sidelines. Whilst China has likely lost some face by agreeing to Washington's request, the disruption to commercial shipping is likely proving extremely detrimental to Beijing's economic interests as a major exporter to Europe, especially as the Chinese economy continues to report decreasing growth rates. As China is heavily sanctioned Iran's largest trading partner by a considerable distance, it is likely that Iran will acquiesce to Beijing's demands. However, it remains to be seen how much control Tehran wields over the Houthis. The Houthis have likely exploited the regional instability and threat of escalation to boost their profile and detract from the dire economic and humanitarian conditions within the parts of Yemen under their control. In the wake of the original US and UK strikes, millions of Yemenis took to the streets of Sana'a, likely suggesting that the Houthi's aggressive actions have done little but bolster their support on the domestic front.

EMEA Forecast. On 1 February, EU leaders are due to meet in Brussels for a budget summit. Hungary's veto blocked EUR 50 billion for Ukraine from the EU budget in November 2023, with Budapest arguing funding for Ukraine should be sourced externally. However, much of Hungary's EU funding remains frozen and this could be used to change Hungary's decision and enable the bloc to provide Ukraine with vital military aid. Finland is set to hold its first presidential election since joining NATO on 28 January. Incumbent President Niinistö is unable to run, and polls indicate that no candidate will secure a majority, almost certainly leading to a head-to-head runoff. The elected president will represent Finland at NATO meetings and play a key role in foreign policy. Germany's Deutsche Bahn (DB) is on strike from the 24 to 29 January, marking its longest strike on record. Widespread disruption is expected nationwide, and the lack of rail services will highly likely lead to an unprecedented demand for flights and buses, causing a huge spike in price and a decrease in availability. Furthermore, roads will likely see heightened congestion as many may well use private vehicles to travel. Poland's new Donald Tusk-led government is seeking to propose legislation aimed at easing the country's near-total abortion ban. Although the bills may pass through parliament, there is a likelihood of a veto from President Duda of the PiS party, who

has been resistant. There is also a realistic possibility of protest from the Catholic right of the country, who remain incredibly conservative. The leader of the Chad junta has visited Moscow and praised ties with Russia, expressing expectations of Moscow's assistance in stabilising the country. This visit is anticipated to lead to increased military cooperation between the two nations and could herald the deployment of Russia's Wagner Group to the African nation. The Turkish parliament has voted to approve Sweden's accession to NATO leaving just Hungary to give the green light after 20 months of delay. Hungary's forecasted approval will end a period of wrangling within NATO and will likely be met with Russian demonstrations of strength in the High North complemented with aggressive rhetoric. In a move to decrease the chances of a regional escalation, Iran's President Raisi has visited Turkey to meet with President Erdogan, aiming to address the Gaza conflict and resolve bilateral differences. While Erdogan has expressed support for Hamas, Turkey maintains significant trade ties with Israel. Additionally, Turkey and Iran find themselves on opposing sides in conflicts such as those in Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh. Liberia's new President, Joseph Boakai, aged 79, was sworn in after winning the November election making him the oldest president in the country's history. He is widely viewed as honest and not suspected of corruption. Optimism surrounds his tenure with expectations that Boakai will improve the material conditions in Liberia, ensure a stable supply of electricity and water and improve other infrastructure. Senegal's election authorities have barred opposition candidates Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade from the upcoming presidential elections. The move raises fears of potential violence during the election as violent protests erupted across the country after Sonko was convicted of corruption in June 2023.

NATO Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 has begun with US naval assets setting sail from the Atlantic seaboard. The exercise is set to demonstrate the US ability to deploy forces to Europe and will consist of over 90,000 exercising troops. Russia will almost certainly respond with demonstrations of strength but will be severely hindered due to the number of forces it has deployed to Ukraine. The Russian Baltic Fleet is set to conduct a coastal defence exercise in response and Russia's nuclear submarine forces could posture in the High North. A fire at Novatek's Baltic Sea fuel export terminal, reportedly caused by a Ukrainian drone attack, has resulted in the suspension of operations. The terminal, situated in the Gulf of Finland, plays a crucial role in shipping oil and gas products to international markets. The incident is expected to prompt a forceful response from Russia, given the potential ramifications for its economy and military operations. Egypt's President al-Sisi has warned against any threats to Somalia and expressed opposition to Ethiopia's consideration of recognising Somaliland's independence for access to a strategic port. The dispute likely adds to existing tensions between the two countries over the use of the Nile River and Ethiopia's dam construction on the Blue Nile which could be the source of a future conflict. Sudan is now being recognised as the largest internal displacement crisis in the world with an estimated 9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) or 13 percent of all the world's IDPs. The humanitarian situation is degrading in both Sudan and within IDP camps in neighbouring countries as conflict between the Sudanese government and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) wages across multiple fronts within Sudan. Inter-ethnic and religious violence continued during the reporting period in Nigeria's Plateau State. A state located on the border of Nigeria's majority Muslim north and Christian majority south saw spates of violence that resulted in dozens of deaths as well as curfews being issued. This recent outbreak of violence follows on from the hundreds killed over the Christmas 2023 period and clearly highlights the continuing deterioration in the local security environment and inter-communal relations. The military junta in Mali has officially terminated the 2015 peace deal with Tuareg rebels, a crucial agreement aimed at maintaining stability in a region plagued by unrest. The deal, already weakened by the 2020 coup, is now fully dissolved, raising concerns of an escalation in violence in northern Mali.

Cameroon has initiated a significant vaccination campaign for children against malaria, aiming to immunise around 250,000 individuals. This makes Cameroon the first country globally to implement such a vaccine. Malaria, a major cause of fatalities, particularly in Africa where 95 percent of the world's deaths occur, claims hundreds of thousands of lives annually.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

China:

China grapples with major earthquake and Yunnan landslide.

At around 02:09 local time on 23 January, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck near the Chinese-Kyrgyzstan border. The significant tremors that followed were felt across central Asia, with shaking reported as far as Islamabad and New Delhi. As a result of the quake, at least three fatalities have been documented, and a further 12,000 people displaced as aftershocks numbering in their hundreds continue to impact the region. The news of the quake came only a day after a significant landslide impacted Liangsui in China's Yunnan Province. The landslide, induced by heavy rainfall in the area, caused prominent damage to settlement, leaving at least 31 dead, and around 50 trapped.

Assessment: The recent environmental disasters are likely to strain relations between local populations and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China's rapid economic growth in recent decades has led to the hasty execution of major construction projects at the expense of safety. Buildings in China are seldom equipped with measures to minimise earthquake damage, especially in the underdeveloped western provinces. This vulnerability was made apparent in the aftermath of the 18 December 2023 earthquake in Qinghai Province, which destroyed 14,000 homes, causing around 150 fatalities. While the Chinese state has acted rapidly to provide temporary shelters for the 12,000 recently displaced, sub-zero average nightfall temperatures of around – 20 degrees Centigrade increases the likelihood of further casualties and will almost certainly put local authorities under significant strain. The extent of the devastation, which would have been mitigated with improved structures, is likely to amplify discontent with the region's majority Uyghur population, who already face significant discrimination and persecution by the Han Chinese, which has included widespread human rights abuses, mass detention, re-education camps, mass surveillance and impositions on the practice of Islam.

Thailand:

Thailand's courts reinstate ex-prime ministerial candidate, Pita Limjaroenrat.

On 24 January, Thailand's Constitutional Court reinstated ex-prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat to Thailand's House of Representatives. Limjaroenrat was initially suspended from serving as a member of parliament (MP) last July, after allegedly possessing shares of defunct media company ITV. As leader of the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP), Pita gained the most votes out of any party in the 2023 general election, however, he was unable to form a coalition government due to the role of pro-military and monarchy representatives in the Thai Senate.

Assessment: The decision to reinstate Limjaroenrat is highly likely to see resistance from Thailand's military elite and allies of the monarchy. The MFP pledges to reform Thailand's lese-majeste laws, which under Section 112 of the criminal code can result in prison sentences from three to fifteen years if criticisms are raised against the monarchy. The archaic laws are widely regarded as among the harshest of their kind in the world and have drawn widespread condemnation from international human rights groups. The attempts to reform lese-majeste by the MFP are likely to be used against them, as the military and conservatives seek to limit their ability to ascend to power, bolstered by the fact that millions of Thais are staunch monarchists. In the next reporting period, the Constitutional Court is scheduled to consider a petition that views these reforms as an attempt to overthrow Thailand's constitutional monarchy, a move that could lead to minor protests on the streets of Thailand's major cities from pro-monarchists. Much of the

opposition to the MFP likely stems from their aim to limit the influence of the military in Thai politics. A majority of the senate's representatives were appointed by members of the military junta following the 2014 coup. The considerable and suppressing influence the military continues to hold in turn may see a resurgence of youth protests that impacted the country between 2020-21. It is likely that any further actions to limit the influence of Limjaoenrat or the MFP will instigate civil unrest across Thailand from the party's youthful supporters.

Tuvalu:

Election could herald further geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific.

On 26 January, the Pacific Island of Tuvalu held an election to elect all 16 members to the country's parliament. The country does not have political parties, and as such, all candidates must run as independents. In the wake of the election, all victors enter negotiations and seek to develop factions based on shared policy and political alignments. The largest faction then will form a government and elect the prime minister. Consequently, this means that even if the incumbent prime minister, Kausea Natano retains his seat, he may not retain his position. Indeed, there are at least two others who have declared they intend to seek the position of prime minister. They are the leader of the current opposition faction, Enele Sopoaga, who lost his prime ministership to Mr Natano in 2019, and the current minister of finance, Seve Paeniu.

Assessment: Tuvalu is one of the smallest nations in the world with less than 12,000 inhabitants. As such it is rare that the country registers in international politics. However, this election is taking place at a sensitive time in the wider Pacific region. As it stands, Tuvalu remains one of the 12 nations which have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The nearby island of Nauru switched its diplomatic representation from Taiwan to Beijing less than 48 hours after Taiwan's elections earlier in January 2024. Whilst Natano has maintained strong ties with Taiwan since 2019, the Tuvaluan ambassador to Australia has warned that the country could switch allegiance to Beijing in the wake of the election. This is because whilst Natano and Sopoaga have stated they favour the maintenance of strong ties with Taiwan, Mr Paeniu has stated he would seek to place Tuvalu's ties with both China and Taiwan under review, with such a phrase often a precursor to a nation switching allegiance to Beijing. The election is also likely to impact the island's ties with Australia. This is because of a new treaty between Tuvalu and Australia which was agreed in November 2023. The treaty commits Australia to assist Tuvalu in response to major natural disasters, health pandemics and military aggression. However, it also gives Canberra veto power over any security or defence-related agreement Tuvalu wishes to make. From Canberra's point of view, this veto would likely mean that Tuvalu would continue to sit within the emerging liberal-democratic bloc of countries. However, from the Tuvaluan point of view, this is a major loss of sovereignty. Mr Paeniu has committed to keeping the treaty, which he helped to negotiate, but wishes for some amendments, whilst Mr Sopoaga has stated he would not ratify it. Mr Natano has not re-iterated his position on the treaty, but he would likely seek to keep it in some form as it was negotiated under his premiership. Due to the mechanisms in the Tuvaluan election, there is a realistic probability that the country will see a new government and prime minister emerge. If the new prime minister is Mr Paeniu, then it is highly likely that the island will switch its allegiance to China, furthering dwindling the number of official Taiwanese allies and cementing Beijing's emerging influence in the Pacific islands. It is almost certain that any new government will seek to review the Australian treaty, with the potential for governments not led by Mr Sopoaga to keep the treaty. Other governments may see what concessions or amendments they may be able to achieve in further negotiations with Australia. However, a government which seeks to maintain this treaty will be mindful that it presents a balance in Tuvalu and the wider region to the increasing influence of Beijing.

APAC Forecast.

Political/Economic/Unrest

French President Emmanuel Macron is on a visit to India, which aims to enhance trade relations between the two countries. India has recently acquired French arms, and the two nations collaborate on space technology. France is likely seeking to strengthen these ties further and is looking to conclude a deal that would enable India to purchase six French nuclear reactors. Meanwhile, it is being reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin is planning to visit Pyongyang, marking his first visit to North Korea since 2000. This development follows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's visit to Moscow in 2022, highlighting the growing cooperation between the two nations which will almost certainly entail greater military cooperation and the exchange of arms and technology. To revive its struggling economy, Beijing has introduced new economic policies, including a 0.5 percent reduction in the reserve ratio, freeing up USD 140 billion for lending, lowering interbank interest rates, and easing restrictions on property purchases. While targeted at the troubled property sector, these measures may have limited impact as they fail to address the fundamental issues contributing to the downturn in the Chinese property market and the broader economy. Meanwhile, China and Uzbekistan have elevated their diplomatic relations to an "all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership". This news will likely be a prelude to announcements of Chinese investments in Uzbekistan, in particular around the strategic China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway which would allow for a route to Europe bypassing Russia. Other possible investment areas include renewable energy projects such as solar, wind and hydropower.

In other political developments for the region, Laos will assume the rotating presidency of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It takes over the position from Indonesia, which has struggled to make headway on regional challenges such as the conflict in Myanmar and tensions in the South China Sea, primarily driven by China. Given Laos' high level of financial and economic dependency on China, there are low expectations that any progress on these issues will be made under the Laos presidency. On 26 January, Australians will celebrate Australia Day which has become increasingly contentious and viewed by many Aboriginal Australians as "Invasion Day". This year's Australia Day is likely to be especially charged after the country's legislature rejected an Indigenous advisory body. Despite extreme weather forecasts, protests are highly likely to occur across the country.

Government forces in Myanmar continue to cede ground to rebel alliances after a series of defeats and reports of major defections. Recent estimates suggest that the junta has now lost up to 50 percent of its territory, with Chinese attempts to broker peace proving incredibly limited. Rebel forces will highly likely maintain their current operational tempo after seizing the initiative, with further territorial gains expected which will only further place further pressure on the military junta. In an attempt to try and reduce tensions, Iran's Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, is set to visit Islamabad, Pakistan on 29 January. This visit follows recent strikes both nations have conducted inside the other's respective Baluchistan regions raising fears of a wider conflict breaking out. The fact both sides conducted limited precision strikes, combined with the news of this visit will likely decrease tensions. In Pakistan, large-scale civil unrest is likely to continue turning violent as the country's general elections which were deferred from November are set to take place in early February. Major cities such as Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad will likely see large-scale protests. Those organised by supporters of Imran Khan, who is barred from contesting the election will likely face crackdowns from security forces. Such crackdowns have historically turned violent.

There has been continued activity at Indonesia's Mount Merapi. The region has seen spreading gas clouds and lava flows on its slopes, prompting the evacuation of thousands. In 2010, an eruption killed 347 and displaced 20,000 and with approximately 250,000 living within 10 kilometres of the volcano, a significant eruption is likely to cause many casualties. Further gas

clouds are likely to impact both domestic and international flights on the island of Java which is home to some 145 million people and at least six major airports. Meanwhile in Australia, whilst Cyclone Kirrily was downgraded to a category-two system it still caused widespread damage in Queensland. Thousands will likely remain without power into the next reporting period, whilst flood warnings will persist and clean-up and repair efforts may further cause localised disruption to travel and transportation.

