



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 09 FEB – 16 FEB



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Week 6: 09 February – 16 February

Executive Summary

- The proposed **Israeli** offensive into Rafah has met universal condemnation and will **almost certainly** lead to violations of international law and compound an already dire humanitarian situation.
- In **Pakistan**, attempts made by the PMLN and PPP to form a fragile coalition to block Imran Khan's PTI will **almost certainly** lead to protests and further political instability.
- Farmer protests in **India** before the general election will **almost certainly** cause widespread disruption and **likely** lead to violent confrontations with the security services.
- In **Indonesia**, the victory of a candidate with links to the Suharto dictatorship is **highly likely** to trigger civil unrest.



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

AMER

- 1 United States:** One killed and dozens injured in Super Bowl parade
- 2 United States:** House impeaches Homeland Security Secretary
- 3 Venezuela:** Government expels UN office from country

EMEA

- 4 France:** Huge Russian disinformation network uncovered
- 5 Armenia and Azerbaijan:** Armenian troops killed
- 6 Israel and Gaza:** Proposed Rafah offensive met by universal condemnation
- 7 Senegal:** Violent protests in wake of election postponement
- 8 Ethiopia:** AU summit amid accusations of human rights abuses
- 9 DRC:** Major protests in capital as rebel group closes in on strategic city

APAC

- 10 Pakistan:** Attempt to formalise coalition to block Khan's PTI
- 11 India:** Farmer protests disrupt capital and result in violence
- 12 Indonesia:** Candidate with links to previous dictatorship set to win



Americas (AMER)

United States:

One killed and 21 injured during shooting at Kansas City parade.

On 14 February, one person was killed and a further 21 were injured during a shooting that occurred during the Kansas City Chiefs Superbowl celebration parade in central Kansas City, Missouri. Of the injured persons, three are in critical condition and five are in serious condition. Gunshots were reported by local authorities in the vicinity of Union Station, followed by reports of multiple casualties. Three suspects were arrested shortly following the initial reports of shots fired. An estimated one million people were in downtown Kansas City for the celebrations.

Assessment: The reasons behind the shooting are yet to be confirmed but terrorism has been dismissed by the authorities as a motive. Initial observations are that the shooting was triggered by a dispute among several parties, with two of the shooters identified as being juveniles. The shooting is likely to lead Missouri to review its gun laws. In 2017, Missouri became a constitutional carry state, meaning individuals do not require a permit to conceal carry or open carry a firearm. It is highly likely the Democrats will call for new gun-control measures in response to the shooting, whilst most Republicans will argue against the implementation of gun laws, claiming the right to possess firearms is enshrined in the US Constitution. Gun laws will be a key factor in the US Presidential elections later this year, and it is all but certain mass shootings such as this will be brought up during debates and campaign speeches. Despite Missouri being a majority Republican state, the scale and nature of the shooting are likely to provoke protests, as was the case in Tennessee following a mass shooting in Nashville in March 2023.

United States:

House of Representatives passes impeachment vote against Homeland Security Secretary.

On 14 February, the US House of Representatives narrowly passed an impeachment vote on the current Homeland Security Secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas. The Republican Party-majority chamber saw the impeachment pass by a sole vote, at 214 to 213. The monumental passing of the vote marks the first time a US cabinet member faces an impeachment since 1876. Calls for Mayorkas dismissal have been attributed to an extensive influx of migrants through the US-Mexico border. Since 2021 over six million immigrants are thought to have entered the United States illegally. The successful vote results in an impeachment trial for the US Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority to remove Mayorkas from office.

Assessment: The attempted impeachment of Mayorkas is likely an attempt by the Republican Party to highlight the Biden administration's poor handling of immigration in the lead-up to the November elections. Migration serves as a key focus for Trump's re-election campaign and is a contentious issue for a majority of America's population. A CBS poll conducted in January affirmed that 45 percent of those interviewed viewed the current situation at the Mexican border as a crisis. This is supported by the split of the votes being divided by party allegiance. Of the 213 votes against the impeachment, 210 were Democrat representatives. Subsequently, it is highly unlikely the two-thirds majority required for Mayorkas' removal from office will be met within the Democrat-led Senate. Despite this, the actions by the Republican-led House are likely to prove significant as a symbolic attempt to undermine Biden's presidency. A drive to remove Mayorkas from office is guaranteed to draw more media attention to the growing number of migrants at the Mexican border since Biden's inauguration. This move by the Republican Party, for which Biden has declared a political stunt, may prove successful in shifting voter opinions against the current administration ahead of the November elections. The success of the vote is also likely to garner

confidence for the Republicans in employing impeachment as a future tool for political gain, rather than its original intended purpose for removing criminal and ineffective politicians.

Venezuela:

Venezuela expels UN in run-up to 2024 presidential election.

On 15 February, the Foreign Affairs Minister for Venezuela, Yvan Gil, announced that the United Nation's Office on human rights was to halt all operations within Venezuela and give 72 hours for its staff to depart the country. Gil asserted that the office had been promoting the opposition within Venezuela and that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' local technical advisory office had been exploited by the international community to propagate discourse against Venezuela. This decision comes shortly after the UN agency expressed deep concern over the detention of prominent rights activist Rocio San Miguel, calling for her immediate release. Gil also criticised the UN rights office for adopting an inappropriate role and aligning with "coup plotters and terrorists" conspiring against the country.

Assessment: The UN human rights office has only been operational in Venezuela since 2019 but has established a precedent of highlighting human rights abuses within the country committed under the Maduro regime. Venezuela is scheduled to hold presidential elections within 2024, with uncorroborated reports suggesting they could be held in September. The Maduro regime has already barred the leading candidate, Maria Corina Machado, from participating in the elections for alleged political crimes. In the build up to the elections, it is almost certain that the government will detain, silence, and potentially assassinate political rivals, evidenced by the recent detention of Rocio San Miguel. The expulsion of the UN Office on human rights is almost certainly a manoeuvre to reduce international oversight of the electoral process and shield the regime from exposure of its abuses. The UN expulsion will likely be followed by the suspension of other international aid agencies, humanitarian organisations, and rights groups. This will undoubtedly maximise the chances of Maduro winning the election and be interpreted as a further step away from democracy and towards authoritarianism. Under Maduro, Venezuela has experienced isolation, economic decline, rampant crime, corruption, and political repression- all compounded by the government's over reliance on oil and plummeting global oil prices. His suppression of democracy will likely reverse the Biden administration's gradual sanctions relief on Venezuela and push Caracas further into the orbits of Russia, China, and Iran, with Venezuela's ultimate aspiration likely to be its inclusion within the BRICS community.

AMER Summary and Forecast. In Mexico, the former mayor of Mexico City, Claudia Sheinbaum, will make her presidential run official on 18 February. Sheinbaum has been a long-term ally of incumbent President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who under the Mexican constitution cannot run for another term. Many Mexicans fear a Sheinbaum presidency will continue Obrador's democratic backsliding and ineffective policies on the cartel violence, with protests planned across many of Mexico's major towns and cities. On 22 February, judges will convene in Colombia to elect the country's new attorney general. The vote will take place after several failed attempts and accusations of a judicial blockade orchestrated by the Petro government. The impasse and controversy of certain candidates has already led to protests on the streets of Bogota, with the result of the vote likely to fuel further demonstrations. The expulsion of Senator Katty Gonzalez from Paraguay's senate, one of the few opposition figures in national politics, has triggered protests in Asuncion and raised concerns about the state of democracy in the country. Critics argue that her expulsion, orchestrated by the right-wing Colorado Party, which holds a majority in Congress and the presidency, aims to stifle opposition voices. On 14 February, Argentina's statistics agency published annual inflation of 254 percent, although January's inflation rate had slightly decreased from December. With inflation so high, President Milei will highly likely continue his drastic measures to curb inflation by stripping back the state and government subsidies, moves that are likely to fuel further civil unrest, especially as the economy is projected to get worse before it improves.

ExxonMobil has confirmed plans to drill two new offshore wells off the coast of Guyana. The decision is likely to increase tensions between Guyana and neighbouring Venezuela, which claims the Essequibo region which amounts to two-thirds of Guyana. Caracas has already deployed military assets to the border, forcing Brazil to bolster its own border defences. The National Liberation Army (ELN) of Colombia, a left-wing guerilla group announced an indefinite armed strike for several municipalities of the Chocó department beginning on 10 February. The announcement of the strike came following a fallout with the Clan del Golfo cartel who also operate in the same area. However, the strike only lasted until 00:00 on 14 February following a series of dialogues between both parties and the Colombian military. Peace negotiations with the ELN remain ongoing despite numerous setbacks including the recent armed strike. Peace in Colombia remains fragile and there is a potential for the resumption of hostilities.

Over the previous reporting period, several northeastern United States and Canadian cities experienced one of the worst snowstorms over the past two years. Thousands of flights were either cancelled or delayed in New York and Boston with schools also suspended in several districts. Severe weather patterns in this region are likely to continue and disrupt essential services and transport networks. In Peru, hundreds of districts are under threat of landslides after intense rainfall has affected much of the south of the country. Heavy rainfall has already prompted a state of emergency and expected landslides will likely lead to multiple road closures. On 14 February, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) recorded a 5.8-magnitude earthquake located 73 kilometres west-southwest of Vallenar, Chile at a depth of 28 kilometres. While no significant damage was recorded in nearby regions there remains a possibility that subsequent aftershocks could occur.





Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

France and the European Union:

France uncovers Russian disinformation network operating within EU.

French military and cybersecurity experts have uncovered a vast Russian disinformation network operating in Europe. On 12 February, the French foreign disinformation watchdog, Viginum, stated that it had identified preparations for a widespread disinformation campaign that will target audiences in France, Germany, Poland, and several other European countries. The network consisted of 193 websites which Viginum has codenamed “Portal Kombat”. The sites, many of which were created after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, do not generate disinformation but are used to spread deceptive and false information in favour of Russia. The French authorities assess that their main purpose is to undermine European support for Ukraine and the network is being run by one single Russian organisation.

Assessment: Russia has a long history of using disinformation and deception to achieve various political, military, and ideological objectives. Disinformation campaigns were used extensively by the KGB and other Russian intelligence agencies like its modern Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU). Russia likely employs these strategies as a cheap and effective way to control the narrative to influence, destabilise and undermine target countries. It is also a tactic which is often difficult to detect, often deniable and is highly unlikely to warrant a severe response from Russia’s adversaries despite its effectiveness. The discovery of this network will almost certainly concern many in Europe with EU elections set for June 2024. Russia is almost certainly attempting to exploit societal divisions in Europe and foster the growth of populist movements sympathetic to Moscow’s interests. Movements such as Marine Le Pen’s National Rally in France, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in Germany, and supporters of the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland have all been accused of harbouring sympathies for Russia and raised their concerns over sustaining aid to Ukraine. Russia has likely targeted supporters receptive to its narrative to bolster populist movements and potentially influence their success in European Union elections to help diminish support for Ukraine on the continent. Whilst it will be hard to gauge the network’s success, Russia will almost certainly continue to employ this tactic and it is only likely to develop with the increased incorporation of artificial intelligence.

Armenia and Azerbaijan:

Armenian-Azeri peace negotiations in jeopardy after border clashes.

On 13 February, four Armenian soldiers were killed following armed clashes with the Azeri military near the village of Nerkin Hand in the southern Armenian province of Syunik. The deaths marked the largest fatality figure since the cessation of hostilities following the Azeri recapture of the disputed Nagorno Karabakh region in September 2023. Fatal clashes are a common occurrence along the heavily militarised border but have calmed in recent months with ongoing peace talks attempting to end the more than 30 years of intermittent conflict between the two states. Armenia’s Foreign Ministry noted the incident and announced that Azerbaijan had conducted the attack in an attempt to jeopardise the ongoing peace process. Azeri officials later replied dismissing the claims and said in a statement that its attack on the Armenian position had been in retaliation to an apparent Armenian attack on 12 February that resulted in the wounding of one Azeri soldier. International actors including both the governments of Iran and Russia have called for calm in the region and restraint to be shown from both sides. The United States State Department also issued concerns for a renewal of potential violence in the region.

Assessment: Peace talks between both sides have been stagnating in recent months with both sides disagreeing on a number of issues including border demarcation, control over ethnic enclaves and sporadic ongoing clashes between both militaries. Azerbaijan has continually expressed a desire to have a customs-free transport corridor through the Armenian province of Syunik that would allow Baku access to its exclave of Nakhichevan. Armenia has been steadfast in denying this request citing a need for complete control of its territory. Given the current state of both militaries, it is not improbable that in the near future, Azerbaijan could launch a lightning attack like seen in the recapturing of Nagorno Karabakh to forcibly establish its corridor to Nakhchivan. International actors, notably neighbouring Iran have realised this possibility and have warned Azerbaijan against such actions. Russia in the past had the deciding say in conflicts in the region and maintains a small peace force in the disputed Lachin corridor. However, given Russia's current occupation with its war in Ukraine and no longer allying stance to Armenia it's unlikely that Moscow would intervene should Azerbaijan launch an armed campaign to connect Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan proper. On 7 February Azerbaijani president Aliyev was re-elected to the position he has held since 2003 with a majority 92 percent voter share. This success undoubtedly was influenced by the Azeri military reclaiming Nagorno Karabakh in September 2023 as well as limiting opposition parties from campaigning in the election. Other international actors including the United States, European Union and United Nations have called for a continual de-escalation of the conflict and sustained peacebuilding in the region. However, given the lack of international presence in the region, except for Russia, Iran and Turkey, there is unlikely to be any intervention should Azerbaijan pursue its territorial ambitions by armed means.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

Netanyahu threatens Rafah offensive despite universal condemnation.

During the reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) conducted division-level clearance operations in Gaza City after Palestinian militants successfully re-infiltrated areas assessed as cleared. In the south of the Gaza Strip, the IDF have continued clearance operations in Khan Yunis where they continue to be stalled by heavy Palestinian resistance. Despite widespread condemnation and an urgent appeal from South Africa to the International Court of Justice, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has reiterated his stance that the IDF will commit to a ground offensive in Rafah, where almost 1.5 million Palestinians are currently seeking shelter. Major Israeli allies such as the US, France and the UK have all voiced their concerns, citing fears of a humanitarian catastrophe. In the West Bank, Hamas has called for three days of demonstrations against the Israeli government and for similar protests to happen abroad. On 14 February, the IDF launched its largest combined strikes on multiple Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon since the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict, killing at least one senior Hezbollah commander.

Assessment: The proposed Israeli offensive into Rafah has been universally condemned, even by Israel's strongest allies, and has reportedly strained relations with the Biden administration with fears that it will lead to war crimes and violations of international war. The IDF has stated that it has allowed civilians to evacuate the area. However, much of Gaza lies in ruin and it is unlikely that many people can evacuate the area through the current humanitarian corridors. It is almost certain that elements of Hamas' senior leadership have withdrawn to Rafah, who remain a priority target for IDF operations. Netanyahu, who maintains that Israel must achieve a "complete victory" over Hamas, has stated that the offensive must be concluded before the beginning of Ramadan on 10 March. The offensive has likely been delayed due to international pressure and attempts to evacuate the civilian population. However, there is also a realistic possibility that Israel is using the threat of an offensive to persuade Hamas into ceasefire and hostage release negotiations. Unconfirmed reports indicate that elements from Mossad and Shin Bet are in Cairo to hold talks with Egyptian officials and a Qatari delegation speaking on behalf of Hamas. The proposed Rafah offensive will almost certainly lead to a huge loss of civilian life and likely be detrimental to Hamas' cause and potentially could turn elements of the Palestinian population against the group. If Hamas does not yield to Israeli demands and the offensive takes place, it is likely that aid to southern Gaza will be suspended. This will invariably compound an already

severe humanitarian situation, and thousands of Gazans will likely attempt to flee into neighbouring Egypt. In response, Egypt has begun constructing a walled enclosure in the Sinai Desert to contain the refugees. Satellite imagery of the construction indicates that there is currently no provision for water, sanitation or other infrastructure, suggesting there may be little reprieve for any Palestinian refugee that heads south.

Senegal:

Election postponement triggers deadly protests.

Widespread civil unrest has engulfed Senegal leading to violent confrontations between protestors and the security services across the country and internet shutdowns. The security services have established roadblocks across the country and have used tear gas and rubber bullets to quell the unrest. At least three people have been killed by the violence, prompting condemnation from the UN who has urged the Senegalese government to respect the right to peaceful protest and uphold the country's long-held tradition of democracy. Hundreds of people have also been arrested, including journalists and members of the opposition.

Assessment: Senegal was set to hold presidential elections on 25 February; however, these were delayed by President Macky Sall, citing issues over candidate eligibility. The election delay was then passed by Senegal's parliament which resulted in violent confrontations in parliament and the arrest of several opposition members. Senegal's decision to delay the election has prompted fears of democratic backsliding, in one of the few countries in West Africa that has been praised for its democratic tradition. The election postponement has also coincided with a targeted campaign against Sall's political rivals. Major candidates like Ousmane Sonko, who commands much of the youth vote, have been accused of spurious charges widely believed to be politically motivated. It is highly likely that many of the protestors are young supporters of Sonko and have been organising protests through social media, which has prompted the government into cutting off the internet. President Sall's decision has provoked fears that Senegal is undergoing a constitutional coup that could further destabilise the region which has been marked by a series of violent and non-violent coups in recent years. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the US, France and several other external actors have all urged Senegal to hold elections and reverse its current course. In the short-term, the delay is almost certain to sustain civil unrest and cause widespread disruption in the country. However, in the long-term, the political uncertainty and erosion of democracy could destabilise the country and make it less attractive for foreign investment. Senegalese industries that have experienced growth in recent years, such as energy, agriculture, and tourism, may suffer setbacks if investors perceive Senegal as too politically unstable or risky to invest in. Furthermore, Senegal's success in containing terrorism could be jeopardised, with security forces overstretched and extremists identifying conditions to exploit. However, on 15 February, Senegal's top court voided President Sall's decision to postpone the elections, a move that could quash the civil unrest if the current government complies with the ruling.

Ethiopia:

African Union summit in Addis Ababa amid human right abuses in Amhara conflict.

From 15 February, dignitaries of the African Union (AU) convened in Addis Ababa for the 37th Ordinary Session Summit. In the opening statements to the summit, leading AU officials underscored recent coups, electoral violence, and extremist groups as the greatest threats to democracy across the continent. The convening of the AU came two days after reports from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which indicated that Ethiopia's National Defence Force (ENDF) massacred over 45 civilians in Amhara State. The killings were reportedly concentrated within Merawi, a city situated around 30 kilometres south-west of Bahir Dar, Amhara's state capital.

Assessment: The civilians massacred by the ENDF were allegedly supporters of the Fano Militia, an ethno-nationalist paramilitary group seeking to expand and defend Amhara's territory. The Fano have engaged in a series of clashes against the ENDF, resulting in a state of emergency being declared across Amhara since August 2023. The widespread use of drones by the ENDF in the ongoing conflict in Amhara has also drawn past criticisms from the EHRC. On 13 August 2023, an ENDF drone strike in Finote Selam resulted in 26 dead and a further 55 injured. Despite multiple reports of ENDF rights abuses, Ethiopia's actions were not mentioned as a threat to regional stability at the AU summit. The lack of condemnation for the human rights abuses of Ethiopia's security forces is likely a strategic consideration from the AU. Ethiopia's status as the symbolic home to Pan-Africanism, serving as an original founder and host to the AU, has generally resulted in little to no scrutiny towards its human rights abuses. The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region from 2020 to 2022 was even initially praised by AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, as preserving regional stability. This lack of scrutiny has likely emboldened government forces, especially as it is contained to an area with little international oversight. Moreover, Ethiopia was one of the few African countries to never be fully colonised by European powers and former colonial powers wield little influence in the country, in stark contrast to several other countries on the continent. In addition, as a landlocked country Ethiopia's conflicts have no effect on major trade routes such as the Red Sea, and Ethiopia's rebel activity is contained almost entirely within its borders, two significant factors as to why they draw such little international attention.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):

Anti-Western protests erupt in Kinshasa over inaction against M23 violence.

On 10 February anti-Western protests erupted in Kinshasa against the inaction of domestic and international governments against the March 23 (M23) rebel group. Protesters surrounded multiple Western embassies and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) building in the capital, Kinshasa. Protesters also blocked the entrances to the embassies with burning tyres and burned US flags and the flags of Belgium, the DRC's former colonial power. The protesters expressed frustration with their government's failure to act against Rwanda, which has been accused of supporting the M23 rebel group, an allegation Rwanda denies.

Assessment: The M23 armed group emerged in 2012 as a splinter group of the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), a rebel faction that clashed with the DRC government between 2006 and 2009. They argue that Congolese Tutsis and other ethnic communities face discrimination in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu, where M23 primarily operate near the Rwandan border. It is highly likely that the rebel group has developed ties with members of the Tutsi community within Rwanda, and Rwanda has likely exploited this for its own benefit. The eastern regions of the DRC are abundant in mineral wealth and Rwanda is likely using the group to enable it access to exploit these resources. M23 has likely benefitted from the DRC's weak governance, corruption, limited security forces and porous border with Rwanda to destabilise the region and increase its own influence. There are now growing fears the group will march on Goma, a strategic city of two million on the Rwandan border. The group has attacked neighbouring settlements, blocked the major roads into Goma and cut the civilian population from the farms that feed it, promoting major humanitarian concerns. To exacerbate the situation, thousands have fled the M23 group and sought shelter in Goma, where hospitals have been overstretched. M23 have stated that they are only on the defensive and have no intent on seizing Goma, a move that will almost certainly provoke international condemnation and could result in the deployment of a multi-national task force to combat the group, as was the case in 2012. However, should Goma fall to M23, it is highly likely that the protests in Kinshasa will grow, and pressure will mount on Western countries and organisations to exercise its influence over Rwanda to rein in the rebel group.

EMEA Summary and Forecast. Rail travel between France and Belgium will be disrupted on 17-18 February due to a French controllers' strike, with several Eurostar trains cancelled. With train

connections suspended, there is a realistic possibility that road travel between the two countries will be congested. Farmer protests continue to disrupt much of the European Union, with ongoing protests in France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and several other EU countries. Greek farmers have resumed their protests despite some government concessions and have planned a major rally in Athens during the next reporting period which is expected to bring widespread disruption to the capital. On 17 February, the Russian presidential election campaign period will begin. There have been recent demonstrations by Russian women demanding that Putin brings Russian men home from Ukraine. However, Russia has increased its suppression of public assembly and freedom of speech since the war in Ukraine and widespread protests are unlikely. Also on 17 February, it was announced that long-term Putin critic Alexei Navalny had died in prison. His previous poisoning, imprisonment, death in custody and the timing of his death coinciding with the Russian presidential election will invariably lead to accusations of foul play and could spark protests, both inside Russia and abroad outside of Russian embassies and consulates. Russia has announced that it will suspend all payments to the Arctic Council, citing a lack of “real work”. Cooperation between Russia and Western Arctic states has been almost completely non-existent after Russia invaded Ukraine. In the long term, Russia will likely seek to unilaterally develop and militarise the Arctic region outside of the Arctic Council, an area abundant in natural resources and becoming of increasing importance due to retreating ice cover. Turkish President Erdoğan met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi in Cairo marking the first meeting of both state leaders in over ten years. The main topics of the bilateral meeting included the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the future directions of Turkish-Egyptian relations. The ongoing conflict in Libya, where both Turkey and Egypt have supported different sides was not part of the talks. This meeting undoubtedly signals an attempt at further improving relations between both states. In the Sahel, the military-led governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have announced that their withdrawal from the West African trade bloc is “irrevocable” as they seek to form a new Alliance of Sahel States. Such a move will likely threaten regional stability, undermine ECOWAS and in the long term will likely be exploited by foreign powers like Russia and China. South Africa has experienced some of its worst power cuts for months during the reporting period. The country’s controversial policy of load shedding has been a constant trigger of civil unrest and prolonged periods of darkness have been associated with spikes in crime. State-owned power company, Eskom, has said it needed to implement stage 6 outages, removing 6,000 megawatts off the grid. After years of promising to improve the situation, this latest major disruption has the potential to spark protests across much of the country.

Enhanced security procedures will be visible in Munich as it hosts its annual security conference. US Vice President Kamala Harris will attempt to allay the fears of her European counterparts regarding the sustainment of military aid to Ukraine. She will also try and reassure NATO allies after Donald Trump opined that Russia should attack members who don’t fully pay their bills. European attendees will likely demand that the US resolves its issues within Congress to enable the resumption of aid and will encourage other European states to increase aid to compensate for the loss of US aid. The EU is set to launch its Red Sea naval mission on 19 February. Whilst the mission is being posited as entirely defensive and will not contribute to US and UK strikes on the Houthi Movement, it will likely increase the chances of escalation should an EU vessel sustain damage from the Iranian-backed militant group. However, additional defence is likely to encourage shipping companies to transit through the area again, which in turn is likely to reduce concerns over shipping delays, supply chain disruption and headline inflation caused by the rerouting of vessels around Africa. The Russian private military company, the Wagner Group has reportedly established control over its first gold mine in Mali. The group will likely seek to expand its control over the country’s resources and increase Russian influence in the country. Russia is almost certainly capitalising on the retrograde of Western forces from the region and is using mineral extraction to circumvent sanctions imposed on it. One of the likely preconditions for Russian access to mineral wealth is for the Wagner Group to help prop up the military government by ensuring security in the country. As the Wagner Group establishes its presence in the country it will likely engage extremist elements at the behest of the government with little respect for international law. On 10 February, a militant from al-Shabab who had defected to the Somali

National Army began shooting at service personnel and trainers at a UAE-run base in Mogadishu. The attack killed four Emirati trainers and a Bahraini officer. Al-Shabab claimed the attack was in support of Palestine and accused the UAE of being the right arm of the Zionists. The Somali Federal government has been increasing the scale of its operations against al-Shabab and it will likely retaliate with force after the deaths of military personnel belonging to the UAE which has funded much of the government's operations.

Heavy rains have caused severe flooding in much of southwestern Turkey, with the city of Antalya hit the worst. Flooding has forced the closure of schools, grounded flights and damaged roads and bridges. The extent of the flooding is expected to disrupt services and transport for days to come. Abnormally high rainfall has resulted in rare flooding in both Oman and the UAE. Flash flooding in Oman's mountainous region resulted in over one hundred people needing to be evacuated, and at least four people were reportedly killed. In addition, several stages of the Tour of Oman cycling race had to be cut due to landslide risks. Comoros has recorded its third death from cholera after declaring an epidemic at the beginning of February. Aid agencies have so far facilitated the delivery of cholera vaccines to eight priority countries in the region- Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe but not to Comoros. According to the authorities, the disease arrived in the island nation from Tanzania and has led to at least 48 cases in February. The regional rise in cholera cases and inability to contain the disease within borders is almost certain to spark major fears given the 14 February announcement by the UN that the emergency global stockpile of cholera vaccines is empty with all available doses for this month already allocated to countries battling major outbreaks. One estimate from UNICEF suggests that the rest of this year will see a predicted shortfall of at least 50 million doses between demand and supply.





Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Coalition needed to form government and block Imran Khan's PTI:

Following days of counting, the results of the Pakistani general election on 8 February have been published by the Electoral Commission. The 336 members of the National Assembly consist of 266 general seats elected by first-past-the-post voting in single-member constituencies, with 60 seats reserved for women elected by proportional representation based on the number of general seats won by each party. Ten seats of the assembly are also reserved for non-Muslim members. Independents linked to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party led by former and currently jailed Prime Minister Imran Khan won the most seats with a total of 116 out of a possible 272. The Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN) came second in the results with a total of 64 seats followed by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) with a total of 43 seats. No party has won a majority of seats and as such coalition of parties is needed to secure a majority and form a government. The election results came following weeks of unrest across Pakistan including attacks on candidates, the bombing of election offices and clashes between party supporters. Along with violence, there have been reports of electoral fraud and rigging in some constituencies as well as elected officials changing party allegiance following the publishing of the national results.

Assessment: The outcome of this election has marked a significant political upheaval, catching most analysts, both domestic and international, by surprise. It underscores Imran Khan's significant political support in Pakistan, despite his party's failure to secure an outright majority. Following his removal from the office of prime minister in 2022 through a vote of no confidence, Khan has faced sustained defamation campaigns orchestrated by the Pakistani military and its aligned political factions. In Pakistan's current political landscape, the formation of a government requires a coalition of parties. The election results suggest that this coalition will likely include the Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and representatives from four other smaller parties. Shehbaz Sharif is poised to commence a second term as Prime Minister, a role he held until the dissolution of parliament in August 2023. However, despite the formation of a coalition, significant political and ideological disparities among the involved parties raise concerns about its ability to govern. Moreover, Imran Khan's continued imprisonment is expected to fuel dissent among his considerable support base, potentially undermining the newly formed coalition. The military's denial of involvement in Pakistan's political affairs is largely dismissible given its history of direct intervention, having toppled civilian governments on three occasions. Additionally, no prime minister has completed a full five-year term since Pakistan's independence in 1947. On the domestic front, Pakistan grapples with an ongoing economic crisis characterised by high inflation rates, hovering around 30 percent, and stagnating economic growth of approximately two percent. Localised violence between support groups is expected to continue and poses a risk of escalating into nationwide civil unrest if left unchecked. International actors have also voiced their concerns about the results of the recent elections, citing electoral rigging and related violence. The new coalition will likely go ahead despite the numerous challenges it now faces. This will be seen as the only viable strategy to diminish PTI's power and will likely be a move endorsed by the Pakistani military.

India:

Mass farmers protests call for guaranteed crop prices.

Mass farmers protests have been calling for guaranteed crop prices on the outskirts of New Delhi in the past week. Thousands participated in the demonstrations, which were being led by over 250 different farmer unions, including the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, representing

over 150 unions, and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), supported by more than 100 unions. The protests have attracted farmers from hundreds of kilometres away who have brought their tractors and trailers to cause maximum disruption. The protests have prompted the security services into erecting barricades, placing nails and deploying heavy machinery around the Indian capital and its approaches. The security services have also used tear gas and water cannons to disrupt the protests and have prohibited large gatherings in New Delhi until 12 March.

Assessment: Crop prices have often been a major catalyst for Indian farmer demonstrations and have almost certainly evoked the memories of 2020-21 when farmers protested against three proposed laws that relaxed regulations concerning the sale, pricing, and storage of farm produce. The 2020-21 protests endured for over a year and forced the government into repealing all three of the agricultural reforms. However, some of the issues from 2020-21 have been left unresolved and are some of the primary motivations for the current protests. Given the relative success of the previous farmer's protest, it is highly likely that farmers have been emboldened and sense an opportunity to force the government into capitulation, suggesting the protests may be sustained for weeks to months if the government initially refuses to concede. However, India is set to hold general elections in April and with almost half of India's workforce being employed in the agricultural sector in some capacity, it is highly likely that the Modi government will want to quash the protests as soon as possible. Modi's options are to quickly submit to the demands of the farmers and potentially look weak before the election, or to use aggressive tactics and risk losing some of the electorate within the agricultural sector. The government's initial response suggests that it will pursue the latter option, a move that is unlikely to deter the farmers and will almost certainly provoke violent confrontations. The government has already used tear gas and rubber bullets, erected barricades, suspended the internet, introduced curfews and placed the police on high alert in much of the country. Consequently, it is looking likely that New Delhi is on course to repeat the events of 2020-21, where the city was affected by widespread transport disruption, increased levels of pollution, and reports indicate that as many as 750 people were killed by the authorities' use of heavy-handed tactics or by environmental factors.

Indonesia:

Defence Minister with links to Suharto dictatorship set to win presidency.

On 14 February, general elections were held in Indonesia to elect a new president, vice-president, members of Indonesia's Senate and House of Representatives and local representatives throughout the country. Incumbent President Joko Widodo was ineligible to run for a third term due to limitations established in the Indonesian Constitution. The three major frontrunners for the presidency were the current Defence Minister, Prabowo Subianto and two former provincial governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Over 200 million Indonesians were eligible to vote and with over 800,000 polling stations spread over 17,000 islands the official vote count is expected to take several more days, even weeks. However, early indications suggest that Prabowo Subianto is the clear front runner and may have won over 50 percent of the vote which will circumvent the need for a second round. Subianto has picked current President Widodo's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his vice-president.

Assessment: The likely victory of Prabowo Subianto has sparked fears over corruption and a return to authoritarianism in Indonesia. Allegations of corruption and nepotism have been primarily driven by Subianto's choice of President Widodo's son as vice-president. However, it is Subianto's connections to the 1967-98 Suharto dictatorship that has almost certainly perturbed most Indonesians. Under Suharto, Subianto was a Lieutenant General and commander within the Kopassus special forces until he was dishonourably discharged in 1998 after it had been uncovered that Kopassus soldiers had kidnapped, tortured and killed political opponents of Suharto. Whilst Subianto never faced trial, many of his troops were tried and convicted. He has also been implicated in rights abuses in Papua and Timor Leste, where uprisings were brutally suppressed. Many fear that past crimes will go unanswered under Subianto and that there will be an increase in human rights abuses under his leadership. Of note, Subianto stood out as the sole

presidential candidate who did not participate in a press freedom event and failed to provide a response to a questionnaire from Human Rights Watch regarding critical rights issues affecting Indonesians. Additionally, Subianto's connections to the incumbent president have likely fostered concerns that President Widodo will be running the country from the sidelines with Subianto as a puppet. Such a scenario will likely see little policy change in Indonesia and raise questions over the legitimacy of the country's democracy, factors that are likely to provoke civil unrest with demonstrations already underway to protest Subianto's past human rights abuses.

APAC Summary and Forecast. India and the UAE have signed an agreement on a trade corridor that aims to ultimately connect India with Europe via the Middle East. The corridor has been endorsed by the West and will ultimately help to undermine China's rival Belt and Road Initiative. South Korea has re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba after originally severing them in 1960 in response to Havana developing ties with North Korea. The move is expected to deal a political and psychological blow to Pyongyang, whose diplomatic standing relies on an ever-shrinking group of Cold War allies. In Thailand, the decision to release former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on the grounds of serious illness has resulted in protests outside the Thai Ministry of Justice. Given the accusations of corruption and the power Shinawatra's family has wielded in Thailand, protests are likely to grow, especially if it is perceived that he will re-enter the political arena in any capacity.

In a further demonstration of increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea has tested new surface-to-sea missiles off its eastern port at Wonsan. Kim Jong Un has also ordered his military to strengthen its readiness in disputed waters north of the South Korean border island of Yeonpyeong. Tensions have also soared in the South China Sea where a miscalculation could quickly escalate and threaten global supply chains. The Philippines has accused China of conducting dangerous manoeuvres near the disputed Scarborough Shoal after Chinese Coast Guard vessels had shadowed Filipino ones over 40 times. The Philippines has deployed a warship to its western waters to safeguard its maritime interests and to protect its fishing fleet from Chinese aggression. In Myanmar, the military junta has introduced conscription for all men aged 18 to 35 and all women aged 18 to 27, highlighting the desperation of the regime as it struggles to contain a multi-axis offensive from a disparate alliance of ethnic rebels. The government military has suffered a series of embarrassing defeats in recent months, and rebel forces have likely seized the initiative. Thousands have been killed or arrested for dissent and it is likely the conscription law will generate further animosity towards the junta.

Cambodia has confirmed its first confirmed cases of monkeypox in the country. Several people have been diagnosed within the capital, Phnom Penh, prompting the government to appeal to its citizens to take care of their personal and family health. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), as of 25 January, the disease has now spread to 117 countries and killed 176, although actual numbers are likely to be much higher. Extreme weather has affected much of Australia. Parts of Western Australia have endured heatwaves with temperatures regularly above 40 degrees Celsius, prompting fears over wildfires. In Eastern Australia, storms have battered much of the coast with 150 kmph winds knocking out power to almost 200,000 homes. Wildfires have raged near New Zealand's Christchurch, leading to road closures, home evacuations and a local state of emergency. Climate change has likely brought increased temperatures and decreased moisture, potentially exacerbated by the El Nino phenomenon characterised by intensified winds which threaten to spread the fires.