



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 02 FEB – 09 FEB



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Week 5: 02 February – 09 February

Executive Summary

- In **El Salvador**, President Bukele's landslide re-election is **highly likely** a public endorsement of draconian measures introduced to curb gang violence and will likely be emulated by neighbouring countries struggling to contain endemic crime.
- A second mass stabbing attack in **Paris** will **almost certainly** perturb the **French** authorities with the city set to host the Olympics from July.
- The **Senegalese** President's decision to postpone presidential elections and fears over further democratic backsliding will **highly likely** trigger further civil unrest in the country.
- In **Pakistan**, general elections marred by violence and accusations of vote rigging and state interference will **likely** result in incidents of civil unrest.



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

AMER

- 1 Haiti:** Mass protests call for Prime Minister's resignation
- 2 El Salvador:** Controversial president re-elected on anti-gang mandate.
- 3 Chile:** Wildfires ravage central region

EMEA

- 4 France and Belgium:** Major 3D-printed firearm network dismantled
- 5 France:** Stabbing attack outside major Parisian transport hub
- 6 Turkey:** Terror attack in Istanbul by Marxist revolutionary group
- 7 Israel/Gaza:** Ceasefire rejected as IDF draw up plans for Rafah offensive
- 8 Senegal:** Election postponement triggers civil unrest and fear of coup

APAC

- 9 Pakistan:** Elections marred by violence and claims of election rigging
- 10 India:** Violent clashes after demolition of Muslim sites
- 11 Myanmar:** Civil war forces India and Bangladesh to increase border security



Americas (AMER)

Haiti:

Mass protests call for resignation of prime minister as country grapples with violence.

Protests calling for the resignation of Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry have paralysed the country for several days after they erupted on 5 February. Thousands of protestors have amassed in the nation's capital, Port-au-Prince as well as several other towns and cities, with many recorded incidents of violence between protestors and the security services. On 7 February, five armed environmental protection agents from Haiti's National Agency for Protected Areas (BSAP) were shot by police after refusing to drop their weapons after firing in the direction of the country's police. Protestors have stated that they will not stop until Henry steps down. Henry has addressed the nation, calling for calm and has promised that he will hold elections as soon as the country's security issues are ameliorated. Haiti's only neighbour, the Dominican Republic, has stated that it is reinforcing its border in response to the violence.

Assessment: Haiti has been plagued with endemic gang violence since the assassination of its President, Jovenel Moise, in 2021 and has experienced multiple episodes of political instability. The country remains without a president and an agreement in 2022 stipulated that Henry was supposed to hold elections and cede power to a democratically elected replacement by 7 February 2024. His failure to do this has likely been the primary catalyst for this current civil unrest. However, the endemic gang violence and lack of democracy have been long-term drivers of tension. The country has not held any form of elections since 2016 and it is estimated that gangs control over 80 percent of the nation's capital and are gradually expanding their territory in other parts of the country. To compound the situation, violent clashes have also been ongoing since January between Haiti's police and BSAP agents. There are accusations that the environment protection agency has become too powerful and a de facto paramilitary force with links to former coup leader, Guy Philippe, who has called for a revolution against Hery's government. With the government facing protestors, gangs and BSAP there is almost no chance for effective governance. Henry's promise to hold elections will likely do little to quell the civil unrest as it is predicated on an improvement in the security situation. Many Haitians likely hold him responsible for the nation's insecurity and suspect he is using it as an excuse to remain in power. The plan to improve security in Haiti by deploying a UN task force led by Kenya remains unresolved, with a recent court ruling in Kenya suggesting it was unconstitutional. Without international assistance, it remains highly unlikely that Haiti will be able to combat gang violence.

El Salvador:

Controversial president wins landslide re-election on anti-gang mandate.

On 4 February El Salvador held general elections to elect the president, vice-president and all 60 deputies in the country's Legislative Assembly. Further elections are set for early March, where the country will elect all mayors and municipal councils. Incumbent President Nayib Bukele announced an early victory after a counting of 70 percent of the votes had determined that he had already won. Final polls indicated that Bukele and his Nuevas Ideas (New Ideas) party secured over 85 percent of the vote, marking a record landslide for the country. The results have provided President Bukele with unprecedented control of the assembly, where he had already used his majority during his last term to transform the country's institutions and reshape the courts with judges favourable to his party. Whilst Bukele's supporters have taken to the streets in celebration, several lawyers, journalists, and opposition politicians have condemned Bukele's re-election as authoritarian and in violation of the constitution.

Assessment: The unbridled success of Bukele’s campaign is almost certainly linked to his crackdown on gang related crime. In 2023 alone, El Salvador witnessed a 70 percent reduction in homicides and under Bukele has gone from one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America, to one of the safest. Some estimates suggest that the current murder rate is as low as 2.4 per every 100,000 people, making it the lowest in the Americas apart from Canada. Moreover, the gang’s freedom to conduct other criminal activity has been severely restricted, with widespread reports of small business owners no longer having to pay crippling sums in extortion rackets. The successful crackdown on gang crime has also likely been one of the primary drivers for the country’s economic growth, with year-on-year GDP growth under Bukele. However, the huge reduction in crime and associated benefits has likely come at a cost to political and civic freedoms in the country. Bukele declared a state of emergency in El Salvador in 2022 to specifically target gang crime and has reissued several states of emergencies since. These have included the mass deployment of security services; the imposition of curfews and restrictions on movement; enhanced police powers, including expanded powers to conduct searches, seizures and arrests; and the suspension of a range of civil liberties and constitutional rights such as the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. These measures have resulted in the reported arrests of over 75,163 alleged gang members as of January 2024 and over 150 deaths in custody as of May 2023. However, it is highly likely that the endemic gang crime was so severe that most ordinary El Salvadorians accepted these as necessary measures. However, it has provoked widespread concerns from internal and external commentators that the country is descending into a one-party state defined by authoritarianism, with even Bukele referring to himself as the “world’s coolest dictator.” Nevertheless, Bukele’s draconian measures have worked to combat gang crime and his landslide victory is almost certainly a public endorsement of his success. Consequently, it is likely that other countries in the region that suffer from similar issues, such as Guatemala and Nicaragua, will emulate El Salvador’s heavy-handed tactics and huge reductions in crime could be a future development in these countries.

Chile:

State of emergency as wildfires ravage central Chile.

President Gabriel Boric has announced a state of emergency in response to wildfires in central Chile, that have led to more than 120 fatalities in the Valparaiso region. Despite ongoing concerns regarding forest fires in recent months, the situation escalated on 2 February, driven by dry conditions and heatwaves reaching 40 degrees Celsius, intensified by the El Niño phenomenon. The National Disaster Prevention and Response Service (SENAPRED) estimates that approximately 129,000 acres have been lost to wildfires this season, with about 30,000 acres destroyed in Viña del Mar, a popular tourist destination. Additionally, Chilean authorities report at least 1,100 houses have been destroyed and hundreds of people have been reported as missing. To facilitate emergency response efforts, a curfew has been enforced in Viña del Mar, Limache, Quilpué, and Villa Alemana. Military personnel have joined the 1,400 firefighters already on the ground to address the nation’s worst disaster since the 2010 earthquake. The cause of the fires and whether they were intentionally ignited is still under investigation by the authorities.

Assessment: Whilst wildfires are a common occurrence in Chile, the fires this season have proven to be more lethal than previous incidents. In comparison to the 2017 fires, which claimed the lives of at least 11 people and were widely acknowledged as the worst in the country’s history, the current fires in Valparaiso have caused far greater destruction and loss of life. It is highly likely that the number of fatalities and persons missing will prompt public backlash and an investigation into the rescue efforts conducted by authorities. The climate pattern known as the El Niño phenomenon, which typically occurs every four years, contributes to forest fires by creating dry and humid conditions. The weather phenomenon, which is to some extent predictable, likely underscores a potential lack of readiness on the part of Chilean authorities, which will likely intensify public outrage. Current reporting from SENAPRED indicating that there are over 160 active wildfires nationwide, suggesting it is almost certain that further destruction and loss of life will occur.

AMER Summary and Forecast. The US Senate has blocked a bi-partisan bill that would have allocated funds to securing the US-Mexico border and freed aid for both Israel and Ukraine. Republicans voted against the bill, citing insufficient measures for border security, spurring condemnation from the Democrats who have accused the Republicans of prioritising Donald Trump's political interests over national interests. The decision has also been lambasted by US allies, with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk suggesting former Republican President Ronald Reagan would be turning in his grave due to the US' lack of commitment against Russian aggression. Colombia's Supreme Court has failed to elect a new attorney general, prompting protests outside the court's headquarters in Bogotá. President Gustavo Petro accused incumbent Francisco Barbosa of orchestrating a "constitutional rupture" and urged popular mobilisations, alleging a takeover of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Protests however have largely been isolated to outside the court and are unlikely to cause widespread disruptions. On 6 February, former Chilean President, Sebastian Pinera, was killed in a helicopter crash at Lake Ranco in Los Rios. Three days of national mourning were announced following the incident. Funeral ceremonies are expected to cause traffic disruptions in major urban areas on 9 February. However, the likelihood of any civil unrest resulting from the funeral remains highly unlikely. Argentina's governing party, La Libertad Avanza, has proposed a bill in parliament to repeal access to abortion and make the procedure punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Feminist groups have expressed their fear that a possible far-right government would result in a setback in the achievements of "Green Tide", an abortion-rights movement fighting to expand abortion access across Latin America. If the bill passes, protests are almost certain to occur throughout the country.

In Colombia, President Petro's government has negotiated a 180 extension to a ceasefire agreement with National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group. This will likely be seen as huge win for Petro's attempts to achieve total peace and will likely lead to a reduction in kidnappings for ransom, one of the ELN's major sources of income. In response to sustained threats made by Venezuela to annex Guyana's Essequibo region, Brazil has continued to reinforce its northern border despite claims that the situation has been resolved diplomatically.

In California, five people have died as a result of an atmospheric river, resulting in extensive flooding, mudslides, and power outages. The intense rainfall has prompted the governor to announce a state of emergency in eight counties, with evacuation orders being issued for areas in the south of the state, including Los Angeles. Authorities caution that travel disruptions are likely in the coming days as crews work to clear roads affected by mudslides. Notable areas experiencing disruption include Beverley Hills, Compton, and Grapevine. Residents are urged to maintain vigilance in anticipation of potential additional landslides and flooding in the coming days. Wildfires in South America have not been contained to Chile and a major wildfire is currently raging in Argentina's Los Alerces National Park in the province of Chubut, where high winds and a heatwave are threatening to spread the fire across the province.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

France and Belgium:

3D-printed firearms network dismantled across France.

On 5 February, the public prosecutor of Marseille announced the dismantling of a criminal network that was responsible for the production and trafficking of 3D-printed firearms. The network was operating in both France and Belgium and was selling its products on the dark web, with transactions being made in cryptocurrency. The investigation, which was being spearheaded by the cyber police, had been ongoing for over a year and has resulted in the arrest of 14 individuals involved, many of whom also have links to the drugs trade. Nationwide raids across France by the French gendarmerie also led to the seizure of eight 3D printers, seven 3D-printed firearms and dozens of conventional firearms.

Assessment: The confiscation of 3D-printed firearms marks an operational first for the French authorities but is not the first incidence of this within Europe. In 2022, a Spanish man was arrested for manufacturing 3D-printed firearms and in 2022, a Dutch man was arrested after attempting to sell a semi-automatic firearm to undercover police officers. However, this investigation marks the first instance of a criminal network being dismantled and is almost certainly indicative of a developing global trend. The low traceability and accessibility of 3D-printed firearms makes them easy to obtain in countries with strict gun laws and is likely to be a growing source of revenue for criminal enterprises. Moreover, they can be produced without the need of having to smuggle firearms or components over international borders. With the group primarily operating in southern France but also being established in Belgium, it is likely they were part of a transregional criminal network and likely have managed to sell firearms across other parts of Europe. While terrorist groups and criminal gangs likely view 3D-printed firearms as less reliable than conventional firearms which they can easily obtain on the black market, it is highly likely that 3D-printed firearms are becoming more sophisticated, more in demand and their proliferation will invariably increase the risk of terrorism and violent crime in the long-term.

France:

Three injured in knife attack at major Paris rail station.

On Saturday 3 February, three individuals sustained injuries in a knife attack at the Gare de Lyon railway station in Paris. The suspect, Sagou Kassogue, was apprehended, with authorities stating he displayed signs of mental disorders. Kassogue used a knife and hammer to attack his victims and ignited a backpack inside the station. Kassogue is reportedly a Malian national but held an Italian residence permit.

Assessment: Whilst the motive behind the attack is yet to be confirmed, Kassogue had recently uploaded videos online expressing his anger at French colonialism of his native Mali and the recent French military operations within the country, trends that could radicalise more of France's substantial West African diaspora. Whilst the French authorities are dismissing this as a terrorist incident, Kassogue's videos had signalled his intent to specifically target French people. In one TikTok video from early December 23, he stated "R.I.P in three months, may Allah welcome me to his paradise", suggesting the attack had been planned for a while, suggesting a failure of the French authorities to identify this threat, although to have identified this would have demanded mass online surveillance inconsistent with European privacy laws. There is also a high chance he had been further radicalised by events in the Middle East. This attack follows a December attack whereby a man targeted strangers near the Eiffel Tower, resulting in one death and two injuries by an assailant who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). These attacks could inspire

other lone wolf attacks which are notoriously difficult to anticipate or prevent, a prospect that will likely perturb the French authorities with Paris set to host the Olympics from July. To mitigate the risk, there will almost certainly be a huge increase in security for the event, with disruption likely to occur as a result. These attacks will likely be exploited by France's far right to criticise both France's and the EU's immigration laws, with the suspect easily entering France after obtaining an Italian resident permit.

Turkey:

One killed and five injured following terror attack outside Istanbul courthouse.

On Tuesday 6 February, one individual was killed, and five others sustained injuries, of which three were police officers, during a shooting incident outside Turkey's largest courthouse in the Caglayan area of Istanbul. The two suspected assailants were killed at the scene and authorities are categorising the attack as a terrorist act. Although no group has claimed responsibility, the authorities have accused the leftist militant organisation Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C). The attack took place on the year anniversary of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that killed over 50,000 people. 34 people have been detained by the Turkish authorities in response to the attack.

Assessment: The DHKP-C, also known simply as Dev Sol, is a revolutionary leftist militant organisation based primarily in Turkey which has been designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the US, UK, Japan and the EU. The group espouses Marxist ideology and some of its main objectives are to eliminate the influence of the West in Turkey and remove Turkey from NATO. Previous attacks have included shootings, suicide bombings and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Recent incidents involving the DHKP-C include an attack on the US Consulate General in Istanbul in August 2015, resulting in no recorded casualties. In March 2015, two DHKP-C members kidnapped and killed a prosecutor at an Istanbul courthouse. It is almost certain that additional security forces will be deployed throughout Istanbul and other Turkish cities, as this marks the second major terrorist incident in the country in the past fortnight. The prior attack, unrelated, was claimed by the Islamic State (IS), against whom Turkish authorities are currently conducting widespread operations. Whilst the DHKP-C is not an Islamist organisation, it is likely exploiting the current increase in extremism to conduct its own attacks whilst the security services are overstretched.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

Hamas ceasefire plan rejected as IDF prepare for Rafah offensive.

During the reporting period, Palestinian militia groups have continued to reinfiltate areas of northern Gaza previously assessed as cleared by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). In the south of the enclave, the IDF continue to meet heavy resistance from Hamas and other allied Palestinian militia groups in the vicinity of Khan Younis. On 7 February, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, stated that the IDF will prepare to operate in Rafah. US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, conducted his fifth tour of the Middle East since the 7 October attacks where he discussed negotiations aimed at reaching a ceasefire that would release the remaining Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip and allow more aid to reach Palestinians. Blinken was warned by the IDF that it will expand operations in the south, with Blinken raising concerns over the concentration of civilians in the area and questioned what measures the IDF will enact to mitigate civilian casualties. A Hamas counterproposal detailed a three-phase plan aimed at ending the conflict over a period of four and a half months. The plan entailed the release of all hostages held by Hamas in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including senior fighters, and a cessation of hostilities. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the Hamas plan, vowing to continue Israel's military assault on Gaza until the IDF achieved "absolute victory."

Assessment: The re-infiltration of parts of northern and central Gaza has almost certainly enabled Palestinian militias to ambush IDF forces and resume rocket attacks on southern Israel, with several attacks conducted over the period. It is unlikely that the IDF will cease operations in Gaza until they assess that this threat has been sufficiently degraded and can be entirely dealt with by the Iron Dome. The continuation of fighting in the north will likely delay the IDF's transition to a third and final stage and could lead to the redeployment of IDF resources to the north. It is now assessed that the Israel-Hamas war has displaced over 50 percent of the Gaza Strip's two million residents to Rafah, prompting major humanitarian concerns. Israel has been engaged in talks with Egypt over clearance operations in Rafah, with Egypt citing fears that IDF operations here will displace many Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula. However, sources indicate that Israel has promised Egypt it will allow Palestinians to evacuate north during any offensive on Rafah. An IDF assault on Rafah will almost certainly displace thousands of Palestinians into areas devastated by the war or into the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone where conditions are dire. The UN has warned that an IDF offensive on Rafah could lead to war crimes due to the high concentration of civilians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which was recently defunded for its alleged ties to Hamas, was warned that it has not been able to deliver aid to the north of Gaza for over two weeks. UNRWA's penetration by Hamas has also led to Israeli protests blocking the facilitation of aid into Gaza. Should the IDF commit to a ground offensive in Rafah, it is highly likely that the main conduit for aid into southern Gaza will be shut off entirely. Despite Hamas' proposal being rejected by Israel, it has likely raised hopes of continued dialogue and future negotiations of a ceasefire. Hamas are now in a much weaker position and Israeli refusals to meet their demands will likely force Hamas to re-enter negotiations with conditions more favourable to Israel.

Senegal:

Election postponement triggers civil unrest and international scrutiny.

On 3 February Senegal's incumbent President, Macky Sall, announced an indefinite postponement of the country's presidential elections which were originally scheduled for 25 February. During a televised address to the nation, President Sall justified the move on the grounds that unspecified "electoral issues" could lead to disputes. An opposition coalition has threatened to challenge the decision in court which has sparked fears over a protracted legal dispute and associated civil unrest in the country. On 5 February, Senegal's National Assembly passed legislation to postpone the country's presidential election to 15 December. The controversial decision resulted in opposition lawmakers being forcibly ejected from the National Assembly by riot police and at least three lawmakers have been arrested. The decision has triggered widespread public criticism and has led to sometimes violent demonstrations which have been broken up by tear gas.

Assessment: Senegal has long been held up as an example of a strong democracy in West Africa and the surprise election postponement has been met with condemnation from a range of external actors. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has urged that Senegal "restore the electoral calendar" as the move has almost certainly provoked concerns over an institutional coup in a region that has experienced multiple violent and non-violent coups in recent years. Tensions in Senegal were already high after a decision in January which excluded some presidential candidates from the ballot, such as Ousmane Sonko who has become the outright favourite amongst the country's youth and was sentenced for "corrupting the youth" in a manoeuvre designed to curb his influence. The combined effect of these moves, as well as the curtailment of press freedoms and political crackdowns, suggests a period of democratic backsliding in Senegal, which will almost certainly trigger further civil unrest that has set a precedent for deadly violence in recent years. To counter civil unrest, the authorities have restricted mobile internet and pulled private TV channels off air. However, given the attack on the country's democracy and fears over an institutional coup, it is highly likely that these measures will be ineffective in preventing further demonstrations.

EMEA Summary and Forecast. Finland's presidential election heads to a second round on 11 February after the inconclusive first round. Alexander Stubb leads with 28 percent of the votes, followed closely by Pekka Haavisto with 25.8 percent. The outcome will impact Finland's foreign policy, especially its stance on Russia and Ukraine, given the president's role in these matters, and with Finland newly in NATO, the election holds greater international significance. Farmers have continued to protest across multiple European countries. During the reporting period, Spanish farmers joined their fellow protestors in Germany, France, Italy and Belgium, with protests causing widespread disruption to transport. The protests have forced the EU into dropping plans to halve pesticide use across the bloc. However, this is only one of several grievances the agricultural sector has with the EU and a single policy change may not fully extinguish the protests, and a major protest in Madrid is set for late in February. Protests in Germany were triggered by speculation about a potential far-right policy of so-called 're-migration', which would force asylum seekers out of the country. Hundreds of thousands of protestors have taken to the streets of several of Germany's major cities to demonstrate against the Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD) party after senior party members were alleged to have supported the policy. Calls have grown to ban the party, but such a policy could backfire given the party's surge in popularity in recent years. In Berlin, where protests are estimated to be as large as 150,000 people, further protests are likely after AfD members were invited to the Berlinale film festival which is scheduled for 15-21 February. President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan is forecasted to win a snap election with a landslide majority. The election follows Azerbaijan's capturing of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region from ethnic Armenian separatists. There are major concerns regarding relations stemming from Azeri access to its western exclave, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, through Armenian territory. Armenia's traditional guarantor of security has been Russia, though tensions have increased after Russia failed to intervene in Nagorno-Karabakh and Moscow has been militarily and diplomatically weakened after its war in Ukraine. It is likely that Aliyev will exploit this to pressure Armenia into major concessions with the threat of future conflict between the Caucasus nations. Turkish President Erdogan and Egyptian President el-Sissi will meet in Cairo on 14 February, their first encounter since Morsi's removal in 2013. Despite past tensions, trade between the countries reached nearly USD 10 billion in 2022. Erdogan's visit signals a potential thaw, with Turkey agreeing to supply Egypt with drones for regional conflicts.

The Munich Security Conference will start on 16 February and will serve as a major global diplomatic summit likely to attract 100 ministers and 50 world leaders. Of note, Russian and Iranian officials have been excluded as well as Germany's AfD party. The summit will likely prioritise the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and it is expected that the conference's leadership will advocate for a firm stance on Israel regarding the adherence on international law. A heightened security presence within Munich is expected. Minor travel disruption is likely, and the conference could be met with localised demonstrations. The European Union is set to deploy a naval mission to the Red Sea to defend merchant shipping from attacks from the Iranian-backed Houthi Movement. Whilst this will increase the available protection to commercial shipping, the EU's involvement could see a wider range of ships targeted by the Houthis and serve as another avenue for escalation. The World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that is receiving reports of people dying of starvation in Sudan, where the civil war has displaced an estimated 9 million people. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs have made a joint appeal for billions in aid, claiming that half of Sudan's population requires support and protection. In addition, all three of the country's major internet providers are experiencing a blackout, which has been blamed on the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group who are likely to using the blackout to their advantage. With major powers concentrating on the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, it is likely that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate as neither side can agree upon a ceasefire. Further violent clashes have occurred in the disputed oil rich region of Aybei on the Sudan-South Sudan border between rival factions of the Dinka ethnic group. Armed rebels from South Sudan's Warrap state are likely exploiting a lack of governance caused by the civil war in neighbouring Sudan and will likely continue their raids until a ceasefire in Sudan enables government forces to ensure security in

the south. In further signs of how the war in Sudan is having a transregional effect, the hacker group known as Anonymous Sudan have conducted cyber-attacks against countries that have hosted the RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo or Hemedti or legitimised the RSF in anyway. Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda have all been targeted for hosting the RSF leader and future attacks on countries that host him are almost certain. On 6 February, multiple blasts at Mogadishu's Bakara market killed at least 10 people and injured many others. The cause of the explosions is yet to be determined but the prime suspect is almost certainly the al-Qaeda affiliated group al-Shabab. The Somali security services have been increasing their counter al-Shabab operations in central Somalia and the attack is likely linked to the government's attempt to degrade the terrorist group. With government operations likely to increase in the aftermath of the attack, further terror attacks are to be expected. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), fighters from the M23 rebel group have surrounded the strategic city of Sake, a crucial step before reaching Goma, the regional capital of North Kivu province. Thousands have fled the area as the Congolese Army and UN peacekeepers struggle to contain the rebel group. The DRC, alongside Western powers and a UN expert, have asserted that Rwanda supports the Tutsi-led rebel group. Despite Rwanda's denial of any involvement, these accusations have precipitated a diplomatic crisis within the region.

Iceland's Sylingarfell volcano near Grindavik has erupted causing a massive lava flow which has engulfed a nearby road. This is the third volcanic eruption in the area in recent months, likely stoking fears of a repeat of the 2010 eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull which caused air travel disruption across Western Europe. The eruption has prompted the evacuation of the Blue Lagoon spa, a popular tourist attraction in Iceland but despite the eruption occurring near Keflavik, Iceland's main airport, there were no disruptions reported. Suspected cholera cases in Zimbabwe have now surpassed 22,000 with 434 suspected deaths since the outbreak was first identified in October. Neighbouring Zambia is rapidly approaching 15,000 cases of the disease and has recently received EUR 1 million in support from the EU to combat the outbreak. With the rainy season happening in both countries, it is highly likely that rates of cholera are currently resurging.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Pakistan elections marred by delays and wave of violence in restless provinces.

On 8 February, general elections were held in Pakistan to elect a national government and members of the 16th National Assembly. Pakistan's political landscape is predominantly shaped by three major parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The voting occurred amid a crackdown on former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party, PTI and after a series of charges have been brought against Mr. Khan by various parties, individuals, and state institutions. The charges allege his involvement in corruption, terrorism, contempt of courts, rioting and even blasphemy. Imran Khan, who is entangled in over 150 legal cases, has been convicted of corruption and disclosing state secrets, leading to a 14-year prison sentence. Consequently, his party candidates were forced to run as independents. Critics of Khan's targeting have pointed out procedural irregularities and have suggested that this campaign is being orchestrated by the military to permanently remove Khan after the former prime minister challenged the Pakistan army's unbridled control of national security concerns. At the time of writing, indications are that supporters of Imran Khan have taken a marginal lead. However, the final vote count is set to be delayed due to a number of issues, one of which was a major suspension of mobile phone and internet services. International observers, including the United Nations and Human Rights Watch, also voiced their concern over incidents of pre-election rigging. These actions include the confiscation of nomination papers, arbitrary arrests of candidates and supporters, and systematic rejection of nominations. During the elections at least nine people were killed, and dozens injured after a wave of bomb and shooting attacks targeted polling stations in the restless Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

Assessment: Pakistan had already been severely politically destabilised by a targeted campaign against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his PTI party. It was widely anticipated that militant groups were going to further exploit this to target polling stations and the security services in order to undermine the government and disrupt the democratic process. Pakistan continues to face a consistent rise in armed attacks since 2022 when the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government. In addition, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has continued to emerge as a threat and there has been an increase in activity from Baluchi separatist groups such as the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), and Baloch Republican Army (BRA). This violence has disproportionately affected Pakistan's restless Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces and forced the country into temporarily closing its borders with Iran and Pakistan, as well as deploying troops to polling stations. Despite the attacks, many Pakistanis will likely see the security operations as a success as the violence was contained to these regions and was likely anticipated to be much worse. Conversely, the military's decision to deploy troops to polling stations and suspected involvement in the suspension of mobile and internet services will be a major source of contention. The suspension of services was likely the largest in Pakistan's history and could not have been achieved by a non-state actor. This points towards state involvement, likely conducted or sponsored by the military in order to complicate the work of independent election observers and cause irregularities in the voting process, ultimately to degrade the chances of PTI's success, with the deployment of troops likely being perceived as a move to influence the electorate. Current indications are that there will be no clear winner. This will almost certainly be an additional driver of political instability in a country struggling to recover from an economic crisis, militant violence and a deeply polarised political environment. Whilst Imran Khan still commands a sizeable base, the allegations against him have likely turned many Pakistanis vehemently against him, further adding to the country's polarisation. Whatever the result, the strained political environment compounded by allegations of election rigging will likely lead to incidents of civil unrest across the country.



India:

Violent clashes erupt after demolition of sensitive Muslim sites.

On 9 February, violent clashes erupted in the town of Haldwani, Uttarakhand in northern India. The violence occurred after authorities demolished a mosque and its adjoining madrasa in an anti-encroachment drive issued by a court order. However, the court order was challenged, and locals have argued that the demolition occurred before the matter was legally resolved. After the demolition, local Muslims took to the streets in protest and started to throw projectiles at the police and set fire to nearby vehicles. The police initially retaliated by firing tear gas but as the violence started to escalate imposed a curfew and issued "shoot at sight" orders. Internet services were also suspended in a measure to contain the violence. To date, at least four people have been killed and over 200 injured.

Assessment: India's anti-encroachment drives consist of the removal of illegal structures and settlements on public land. Despite ubiquitous slum housing and informal buildings being built all over India, these anti-encroachment drives have disproportionately affected India's Muslim minority and have often targeted symbols of Islam, such as mosques and madrasahs. The scale and frequency of these evictions has led to condemnation from the rights group Amnesty International, who have described the trend as a hate campaign levelled against the Muslim community. Eviction notices have often been issued in response to inter-communal violence and it is likely that they are being used as a form of collective punishment. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government there have been widespread concerns over deepening polarisation in India. It is highly likely that local authorities have been emboldened into conducting anti-encroachment drives without full legal authority. These incidents are likely proving popular with much of Modi's increasingly radicalised Hindu nationalist base. With general elections scheduled to take place from April, these forced, and often illegal evictions will likely increase in number and almost certainly steer India further down the course of sectarian violence.

Myanmar:

Civil war continues to strain tensions with neighbouring Bangladesh and India.

On 6 February, Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Myanmar's foreign minister, U Aung Mye Thaw, to raise a formal protest against tensions near the countries shared border. The protest was in response to the deaths of two Bangladeshi citizens the day prior, following cross-border mortar fire in the settlement of Tumburu. During the incident, Bangladeshi media sources reported just over 250 soldiers of the junta's border security force fled into Bangladesh following offensives by the Arakan Army. Soon after the Bangladeshi protest, the Indian government announced its intention to implement a 1643-kilometre-long fence along its border with Myanmar, effectively ending the current status of free movement within 16 kilometres either side of the border.

Assessment: The actions taken by the Indian and Bangladeshi governments underscore the significance of the junta's continuous losses against rebel ethnic alliances. In the last reporting period, the Arakan Army, an ethnic paramilitary group affiliated with the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA), seized control of Rakhine's Minbya township. While the capture of Minbya was insignificant in isolation, it has likely undermined the junta's efforts to reconsolidate its forces during ceasefire negotiations. The junta's failure to regroup effectively has likely led to the retreat of soldiers from Rakhine into neighbouring Bangladesh. The substantial losses suffered by the junta in Rakhine have undoubtedly influenced the recent actions of India and Bangladesh. The compromised security along the borders of both countries can be attributed to the junta's inability to contain the ongoing offensive by the TBA. With the Arakan Army making successive gains, any further incidents similar to the mortar strikes on 5 February are likely to provoke further responses

from Myanmar's neighbours and place further pressure on the junta government to negotiate with the rebel groups.

APAC Summary and Forecast. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has accepted the resignation of Kazakhstan's government, with First Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar temporarily assuming the role of Prime Minister. The move follows public dissatisfaction during former Prime Minister Alikhan Smailov's tenure, marked by various challenges including municipal heating issues, forest fires, mine explosions, and an earthquake. However civil unrest is unlikely in the country where it is brutally repressed. In India, unionised farmers, led by groups like the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), will continue nationwide strikes into mid-February, demanding agricultural policy changes. Planned actions have included a tractor rally towards Parliament House in New Delhi, with potential clashes expected at entry points. A nationwide general strike on 16 Feb will likely cause disruptions, with authorities likely to intervene if gatherings become disruptive. The Move Forward Party (MFP), which emerged victorious in Thailand's last general election, faces potential dissolution following a Constitutional Court ruling against its pledge to amend the royal defamation law. The court deemed advocating changes to the law unconstitutional, sparking petitions for the party's dissolution and life bans for lawmakers. If dissolved, it would mirror the fate of the Future Forward Party (FFP), stirring concerns about political unrest. In Malaysia, security operations are likely to be enhanced in the northern state of Perak as authorities are still struggling to track down up to 75 Rohingya refugees after riots broke out at a detention centre. Indonesia's presidential election on 14 February sees three main candidates vying for office, including Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, who aims to continue current President Joko Widodo's policies. The election's focus lies on concerns like employment, welfare, and the country's democratic stability, with the winning candidate needing over 50 percent of the votes to avoid a runoff in June.

North Korea has continued to inflame tensions on the Korean Peninsula by ending all economic cooperation with the South. Pyongyang has also continued its demonstrations of strength by firing cruise missiles and leader Kim Jong Un has called for a naval buildup, likely prompting concerns that the North Korea navy will evolve from a brown water navy into more of an expeditionary threat. Taiwan has complained of almost daily incursions into its air defence identification zone (ADIZ) and territorial waters throughout the reporting period. It is likely that Beijing is testing response times and sending strategic messages to Taipei after the recent Taiwanese elections resulted in an unfavourable result for China.

With the Lunar New Year due to start on 10 February, officials estimate that travel in and out of mainland China is projected to surpass pre-pandemic levels and the number of trips is expected to triple from last year in the lead-up to the Chinese New Year. As many as 9 billion individual trips are forecasted in the 40-day "chunyun" period when millions return to their hometowns to celebrate the new year with family, with self-driving accounting for 80 percent of trips. Major disruption is expected, especially as many roads have been affected by snow and ice. Further disruptions are likely in countries throughout the region with large Chinese diasporas such as Thailand and Malaysia. Ongoing volcanic activity at Mount Lewotobi Laki-laki in East Flores Regency, Indonesia, has prompted major concerns over an eruption, with increased seismic activity recorded since December 23. Airports may close temporarily, and ground travel disruptions are possible due to ashfall. Heavy snow in Tokyo has disrupted transportation and caused hundreds of flight cancellations and train service limitation. Disruption is expected to clear however, with temperatures set to rise and no indications of further snow. Tropical Storm Nat is currently located south of Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia, and is expected to strengthen slightly as it moves eastward towards the southwestern Tuamotu archipelago. Meteo France French Polynesia has issued pre-cyclone and cyclone alerts for various islands in the region, with heavy rainfall potentially leading to flooding and hazardous conditions. The inclement weather is likely to cause disruptions to transportation and local businesses, with risks of flash flooding, landslides, and health hazards such as waterborne diseases a likely occurrence.