



Global Intelligence Summary

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Week 49: 29 November - 06 December

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Barnier government's collapse will **highly likely** worsen **France's** political and economic situation in the short term and will **likely** drive unrest in large urban centres.
- The HTS-led offensive **highly likely** presents an existential threat to the regime, and has **almost certainly** triggered a resurgence of hostilities amongst other factions across **Syria**.
- The detention of foreign executives in **Mali** is **almost certainly** part of a broader effort to exact money from Western mining companies operating in the country.
- President Yoon Suk Yeol **highly likely** to be impeached after temporarily imposing martial law in **South Korea**.

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Americas (AMER)

Mexico:

Sinaloa Cartel infighting leads to 500 dead.

Recent reporting indicates that since the US detention of the Sinaloa Cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada in July 2024, the factionalism of the cartel and subsequent infighting has resulted in over 500 deaths, with hundreds remaining missing. Mexican business leaders have also stated that the violence has led to over USD 1 billion in losses. On 29 November, Mexico's Ministry of Defense (SEDENA) began reinforcing its presence in the state by sending dozens of additional special forces personnel to counter the escalating violence between the "Los Chapitos" and "La Mayiza" factions of the Sinaloa Cartel. In a separate operation, Mexican authorities announced the seizure of over a tonne of fentanyl on 3 December. The seizure was the country's largest synthetic opioid seizure, equivalent to 20 million individual doses.

Assessment: Despite the increased deployment of Mexican forces to Sinaloa, the cartel violence is showing no signs of abating. Moreover, there are indications that Sinaloa is increasingly becoming a staging ground for a proxy war between other cartels seeking to exploit the factionalism of the Sinaloa Cartel. In November, two prominent Tijuana Cartel bosses pledged allegiance to the La Mayiza faction. This has been followed by recent reports that the Beltrán Leyva Organisation (BLO), an original part of the Sinaloa Cartel, has now offered its support to the Los Chapitos faction. Both the BLO and the Tijuana Cartel are likely attempting to establish control over the Sinaloa Cartel and the state's lucrative smuggling routes and narcotic production facilities. Both groups will likely commit many resources to the current conflict, resulting in an escalation of violence despite the increase in Mexican forces deployed to the region. Furthermore, the involvement of these groups could lead to the migration of violence outside of Sinaloa and other areas like Baja California. Engaging in the ongoing cartel conflict will be costly, and cartels will likely escalate narcotics trafficking to the US to fund their operations.

The record seizure of fentanyl is likely a direct consequence of President-elect Trump's threat to implement 25 per cent tariffs on Mexican goods unless it cracked down on the flow of both migrants and drugs, with only 130 kilograms seized from January to June nationwide. However, increased seizures combined with an enhanced security posture in Sinaloa will likely result in an escalation of violence and an expansion of retaliatory attacks by the cartels.

Colombia:

Head of Colombian armed forces warns armed groups have exploited peace negotiations.

Colombia's Military Forces Commander, Admiral Francisco Cubides, has warned that several armed groups in Colombia have exploited the country's ambitious plans to establish total peace to expand their military and economic influence. Cubides stated that groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident group, the Segunda Marquetalia, and the organised crime gang the Clan del Golfo have used ceasefire negotiations to exert greater control over drug trafficking and illegal mining activity. They have suggested that groups which once espoused leftist ideologies have now morphed into violent organised crime groups.

Assessment: President Gustavo Petro's government has attempted to establish "total peace" within Colombia since 2022, after six decades of fighting which has killed almost half a million people. However, his policy of pursuing bilateral agreements with a range of groups has increasingly led to the splintering of armed groups and criminal enterprises. These smaller groups have often fought

each other, resulting in higher rates of violence in rural areas or have formed new alliances, enabling them to exercise more control over illegal enterprises whilst also putting them in a stronger position to counter government forces. Record seizures of almost 600 tonnes of cocaine in 2024 are almost certainly indicative of the government's strategy backfiring. It also likely suggests that criminal organisations are using the guise of compliance to successfully entrench themselves in economically important regions. The continuation of Petro's plans risks inadvertently strengthening armed groups, allowing them to expand their influence and making it increasingly more difficult for Colombia's military to dislodge them from their areas of operations.

AMER Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest:

UN begins investigation into Venezuelan election.

The United Nations Human Rights Council launched an investigation into allegations that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro manipulated the results of the July presidential election. The investigation has been prompted by a petition from Latin American jurists who claim that the presidential election was marred by widespread electoral fraud which included the refusal to release voting records and that there is evidence to suggest that the opposition candidate, Edmundo González, won by a large margin. The Maduro administration is unlikely to comply with the demands of the investigation and there is a realistic possibility that the regime will increase its suppression of dissent in response. On 5 December, Maria Corina Machado, one of the main opposition leaders, stated that Venezuelan officials are likely to storm the Argentinian embassy in Caracas, where six political refugees are sheltering, in the coming days. If this were to happen, it would almost certainly precipitate a diplomatic crisis with Buenos Aires.

Paraguay expels Chinese diplomat.

On 5 December, Paraguay expelled a senior Chinese diplomat after he allegedly attempted to influence the country's relationship with Taiwan. The diplomat, Xu Wei, had arrived in the country for a UNESCO meeting and reportedly urged lawmakers to reconsider Paraguay's diplomatic ties with Taiwan, suggesting such a change would result in economic growth. Paraguay is the only South American nation that maintains formal relations with Taiwan and will likely attract increase pressure from Beijing to sever them.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror:

Children now make up 50 per cent of gang members in Haiti and Kenyans resign.

The United Nations has reported that children now make up around 50 per cent of armed gang members in Haiti, with recruitment increasing by 70 per cent in the past year. These children are forced into roles including informants, cooks, and sex slaves, and are also forced into perpetrating violence against rival gangs or the security services. The increased recruitment of children will almost certainly complicate the disruption of gang operations, adding a complex ethical component to the operations. In addition, Kenyan police deployed to Haiti as part of a UN mission have begun to submit resignation letters because of pay delays and poor conditions. Further resignations are almost certain to follow, with reports that the Kenyan force is suffering from ammunition shortages and is increasingly being attacked by the gangs.

Further attacks after at least 15 killed in prison riot in Ecuador.

On 4 December, at least 11 people were injured in a grenade attack at a prison in Guayaquil, in southern Ecuador. In mid-November, clashes broke out in the same prison. At least 15 people were killed and 14 injured before authorities could halt the violence. The El Litoral facility, where the recent riot took place, is partly under the control of gangs, whose members can easily access firearms inside the facility. According to local sources, at least eight separate gangs are present in the 12 blocks of the prison; in some cases, multiple gangs share one cell block, leading to greater tensions. It is highly likely that the riot and recent grenade attack were linked to the murder of Braulio Obando, the leader of the organised criminal group "Mafia-18", one day prior to the riot, which seemingly broke a precarious truce between armed gangs in the area. As previous cases have highlighted, outbreaks of violence in El Litoral often spread out to the suburbs of Guayaquil. It is likely that further targeted killings will occur in the coming weeks.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous:

Magnitude 7.0 earthquake recorded off the coast of California.

The tremor occurred at 18:44 (local time) on 5 December, approximately 80 kilometres from Rio Dell, northwest of Sacramento. Authorities in California and neighbouring Oregon issued a tsunami warning that was subsequently lifted. No serious damages were reported on land. However, there is a realistic possibility of aftershocks following the tremor.

Cuba suffers another major power outage.

On 3 December, a nationwide blackout was recorded in Cuba after a major failure at the Antonio Guiteras power plant in Matanzas. The blackout left millions of Cubans without electricity, resulting in the closure of schools and non-essential businesses. The government has begun restoring power, partially using generator systems. While power was partially restored on 5 December, planned outages are likely to resume. This incident is just the latest blackout in a series of power outages caused by hurricanes, fuel shortages and an outdated grid, with previous outages resulting in major protests against the government.

Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

France:

Barnier government falls.

Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned on 5 December after his government was toppled in a no-confidence vote on the day prior. The vote was sponsored by the left-wing coalition, the New Popular Front (NFP), and was supported by the right-wing National Rally (RN). The latter's support for the no-confidence motion, which followed months of tensions concerning the 2025 budget, broke the precarious equilibrium that had allowed the centrist bloc to support Barnier for three months. Constitutionally, National Assembly elections cannot be held until the summer of 2025, meaning that the parliament will continue to be divided into three incompatible blocs. President Macron has so far stated that Barnier will remain at the head of a caretaker government. On 5 December, Macron publicly stated in a televised speech that he rules out resigning before the end of his term in 2027, despite Barnier's fall.

Assessment: The collapse of Barnier's government is largely RN's doing. With the 2025 budget now likely out of discussion, the 2024 budget will likely be renewed automatically as per the constitution. This will almost certainly upset Brussels due to the worsening deficit that will result, although this is far from Paris' main concern. With Barnier's ousting, President Emmanuel Macron has a shrinking number of options. The first, and seemingly likeliest considering the speech on 5 December, is to push ahead with reinstating Barnier (or another figure from the centre or centre-right) to head a caretaker government with virtually no power until the following National Assembly elections. This matches Macron's own repeated pledges to remain President until the end of his term in 2027. With the 2024 budget again in place, a new caretaker government could perhaps hope to restore the informal "truce" with RN until 2025. However, there is no guarantee that RN would acquiesce to this. The verdict for RN leader Marine Le Pen's trial, which threatens to bar her from running for office, is expected on 31 March 2025 and the party, therefore, has an incentive to maximise gains before it is at risk of being "decapitated" (it is notable that even if the trial went to the appeal stage, a guilty verdict would still bar Le Pen from running provisionally).

The second option is to resign. This option would result in snap presidential elections which would almost certainly result in a second-round contest between Le Pen and Jean Luc Mélenchon, the leader of France Unbowed (LFI), a populist left party that leads NFP (or, as some analysts have noted, potentially another NFP leader with a less "polarising" brand than Mélenchon). While providing for a fresh political start, the new president would still have to deal with the tripartite parliament, creating a highly unstable political environment. A last scenario, which does not involve Macron's choice, is the beginning of another impeachment procedure against the president. While NFP continues to call for Macron's impeachment, their motion (if it were to be supported by RN) would fall short of the required two-thirds of the National Assembly (364 votes against the needed 385). With the centrist parties supporting Macron having little to gain by defecting, it is unlikely that they would tilt the balance in favour of the opposition forces.

A third, and potentially increasingly likely, option, is to attempt to bolster the centrist bloc by looking to the Socialists (PS). On the morning of 6 December, Olivier Faure, PS's leader, stated on French radio that he was open, at least in principle, to discuss a "short-term" agreement with the conservatives and Macron to avoid the country's political apparatus breaking down. Obviously, like the other forces of the NFP, the PS wants to avoid being seen as supporting Barnier-style spending cuts, and striking an agreement with them will therefore need to entail significant compromise from Macron's side. Nevertheless, PS' support has been an unspoken possibility for a while. The party has been languishing on the left despite winning almost as many seats as LFI in July, and continues to be

worried about losing votes to both LFI and the Greens. Moreover, there realistically is no way for PS to field a candidate to challenge Mélenchon as the left's representative in 2027, but the party also opposes LFI's populism and personalism, which has involved repeated attacks on NFP allies like PS. By striking a deal with Macron, PS could gamble that it will reinforce its position as a "responsible" centre-left force. In doing so, it would likely collapse the NFP.

The growing instability of the French political system is highly likely to result in growing civil unrest in France. If Macron refuses to resign, it is highly likely that NFP leaders will call for street protests that, considering recent instances, have a high likelihood to become violent in cities like Paris, Marseille and Lyon. However, even if Macron resigns, an NFP-RN presidential race is also likely to result in growing unrest, as highlighted by the increase in protests after the first round of the 2022 presidential elections.

Georgia:

Anti-government protests further intensify with increasing clashes.

Pro-European opposition protesters have continued a wave of civil unrest across Georgia. These protests have escalated in both scale and intensity following the Georgian Dream government's decision to suspend EU accession talks on 28 November. The largest demonstrations have taken place in Tbilisi in the vicinity of the Parliament of Georgia on Rustaveli Avenue, with daily clashes between riot police and protesters. Smaller protests have also reportedly taken place in Rustavi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Telavi, Khashuri, Poti and Gori. Security forces have deployed water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets against protesters. Over 300 protesters have been detained, with reports that detainees are being beaten while in custody. While there have been dozens of hospitalisations, no deaths linked to the unrest have so far been reported. There are additionally strong indications of a government crackdown against the political opposition, with an office raid and detainment of Nika Gvaramia, the leader of the Ahali party, on 4 December.

Assessment: The protests are highly likely now both larger and more intense than the March 2023 and April-June 2024 "anti-foreign agents" bill protests. Demonstrators have attempted to set up protest camps and barricades on Rustaveli Avenue in central Tbilisi, reminiscent of the 2013-2014 Ukrainian pro-Europe 'Euromaidan' protests that led to the overthrow of the pro-Russia Yanukovich-led government. While Georgian riot police have generally successfully dispersed protesters overnight through the use of significant force, on each day the following morning, protesters have regathered outside Georgia's parliament. The civil unrest is highly likely to continue into the following weeks. While the disruptions and violent clashes are currently localised to specific protest hotspots, there is a realistic possibility that the unrest could further escalate.

Triggers for further escalation include the now-scheduled 14 December Presidential election and its aftermath, which will be the first conducted using an indirect vote system through a 300-member College of Electors and will highly likely give a result in favour of the Georgian Dream nominated candidate Mikheil Kavalashvili. The pro-Europe incumbent and leading voice of the protest movement, President Salome Zourabichvili, has vowed to remain in her post until new parliamentary elections are held. This will likely generate a key point of political conflict. Another trigger for an escalation in unrest could be the killing of protesters by security forces. In the Ukrainian Euromaidan movement, the increased use of lethal force (including live ammunition) by security forces against protesters led to a dramatic intensification of the protest movement. There is a realistic possibility that Georgian protesters could become more resilient at holding off dispersal by riot police, and/or escalate protest tactics to the occupation of government buildings, which could in turn increase the deployment of lethal force by security forces.

Syria:

HTS-led offensive captures Hama and rapidly reaches Homs in lightning advance.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the leader of the Syrian Islamist rebel group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), declared on 4 December that the HTS-led offensive had captured Hama. This followed the surprise lightning offensive launched by HTS on 27 November that quickly captured Aleppo. The regime's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) had initially provided resistance and halted the advance for the first time in the countryside north of Hama, exploiting the elevated terrain just north of Hama on the mountain of Jabal Zayn al-Abidin. However, the HTS offensive rapidly outmanoeuvred the SAA and bypassed the mountain, with their entry into Hama leading to the urgent withdrawal of SAA forces. The HTS-led offensive then continued southwards towards Homs. As of the time of writing on 6 December, rebel forces are reportedly already in the outskirts of Homs.

Additionally, the Turkish-backed rebel group Syrian National Army (SNA) and the Kurdish-led and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have engaged in heavy fighting in northwestern Syria, with the SNA seizing the town of Tal Rifaat from the SDF. The SDF had earlier withdrawn from Aleppo following negotiations with HTS. In central and eastern Syria, the SDF has advanced into regime territory in operations that are stated to halt the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), with ISIS making an announcement declaring control over significant portions of Syria's central desert region. The US also conducted airstrikes on ISIS targets in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria.

Assessment: The lightning advance of the HTS-led offensive against the regime has dramatically reignited the Syrian Civil War and has triggered a resurgence of hostilities among various factions within the country. A pattern is currently emerging of the SAA quickly withdrawing and ceding significant ground to the rebels. On the one hand, this could mean that SAA battlefield losses have been low relative to the substantial gains the rebels have made, which could indicate that the SAA has maintained enough combat effectiveness to conduct counteroffensives at a later stage. On the other hand, however, the fragility of the SAA may have been exposed by the surprise offensive, with the Assad regime having relied considerably on Iranian proxy forces and Russian support previously to resist and reverse advances made by Syrian rebels.

If the rebel offensive captures Homs, which may occur imminently unless the SAA stands its ground, the coastal Tartus and Latakia Governorates which provide the regime access to the Mediterranean Sea may be quickly cut off from routes to Damascus. These regions hold prominent strategic value to Russia. Russia operates the Khmeimim Air Base in Latakia and a naval facility in Tartus, the Kremlin's only foreign naval base. Russia has withdrawn multiple naval vessels from Tartus, highly likely fearing the threat posed by HTS one-way attack uncrewed aerial vehicles (OWA-UAVs) and the imminent threat by ground offensives. While heavily degraded by the war with Israel, unverified sources indicate that Lebanese Hezbollah has reportedly started to send hundreds of fighters to Syria, and Hezbollah's new leader Naim Qassem has pledged to stand by the regime.

The reignition of the civil war has almost certainly set the conditions for increased ISIS activity, with the SDF advancing into regime territory to halt claimed ISIS expansion. While ostensibly neutral with the regime, the SDF are highly likely filling the vacuum left by regime forces that are redeploying. However, the SDF are highly likely struggling to contain parallel offensive actions by the Turkish-backed SNA, and there is a realistic possibility that the conventional Turkish military could further increase aerial operations against targets in both Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Israel, Gaza and Lebanon:

Israeli forces continue operations in north Gaza while Hezbollah begins recruitment drive.

Units of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have continued their focused operations in northern Gaza, aimed at destroying the last remaining groups of Palestinian militants. On 3-4 December, IDF units carried out further clearing operations in Beit Lahia. On 5 December, Amnesty International released an investigation concluding that Israel “is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza”. Also on 5 December, Hamas officials announced they had met with Fatah representatives in Cairo to agree on a post-war “committee” to administer the Gaza Strip.

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have continued to develop in southern Lebanon where, despite occasional strikes and reports of Hezbollah operations south of the Litani River, the ceasefire continues to hold. According to LAF officials, up to 5,000 troops will be deployed in the area as part of the ceasefire agreement. Israeli and international observers have noted that Hezbollah has begun reorganising immediately after the ceasefire, including by carrying out recruitment drives among its supporter base.

Assessment: Israel is likely to continue raids across the Gaza Strip to degrade Hamas and prevent the group from re-forming units capable of organised resistance. The finding of an additional hostage’s body, reported on 4 December, months after six other hostages had been found killed in a tunnel in Khan Yunis, highlights Hamas’ continuing policy of killing hostages if they expect that they will be freed by IDF forces. Protracted IDF operations in Gaza are likely to continue driving significant international and domestic pressure on the Netanyahu administration to agree to a ceasefire deal with what remains of Hamas. Hamas’ apparent willingness to allow Fatah to re-enter Gaza almost certainly highlights the significant losses suffered by the group, which have impeded its ability to carry out administrative functions inside Gaza and have thus created opportunities for alternative local groups to operate outside of Hamas’ control.

Hezbollah is almost certain to continue recruitment and rearmament efforts in the medium term. While the loss of much of its leadership creates a short-term vulnerability, Hezbollah’s ability to replace leaders showcases a significant resilience that, alongside a reduction in combat following the ceasefire, will likely ensure the organisation’s recovery. However, developments in Syria will likely impact Hezbollah’s ability to replenish its rocket and missile arsenals. With the Assad regime under pressure from HTS and other rebel groups, Tehran’s supply route to Hezbollah via Syria may be redirected to help Damascus. Moreover, Damascus’ retreats could result in fewer border crossings becoming available for Iranian weapons shipments to Lebanon, which in turn would make Israeli airstrikes at the Syria-Lebanon more likely to result in significant personnel and material losses.

Mali:

Junta government detains more Western mining employees.

On 26 November, Mali’s junta government arrested four senior employees of the Canadian mining company Barrick Gold. Those arrested are employed at Barrick Gold’s Loulo-Goukoto mining complex in western Mali, close to the Senegalese border. Barrick Gold has rejected the charges, which remained unspecified, but has released a statement indicating that they are working with the Malian government to secure the release of those detained.

Assessment: The recent detention of Barrick Gold’s employees is almost certainly part of a broader effort to exact greater revenue from Western mining companies operating within Mali. Barrick Gold employees were briefly detained in September 2024; in December, the CEO of Australian company Resolute Mining and two of its employees were arrested. Resolute Mining’s employees were only released after the company agreed to a settlement involving an upfront payment of USD 80 million

and a commitment to an additional USD 80 million. The detentions follow a government audit of Mali's mining sector in 2023 and the adoption of a new mining code, which has been enforced retroactively. The new code increases state and local interests in new projects from 20 per cent to 35 per cent, allowing the government an initial 10 per cent stake, the option to purchase an additional 20 per cent within two years of production, and allocating 5 per cent to local communities.

Dwindling government revenues, sanctions, high poverty levels and endemic separatist and jihadist violence has likely forced the junta to adopt such an aggressive policy towards the mining companies, with foreign companies now facing increased risks, including detentions of personnel and additional financial liabilities if they fail to comply. Whilst this action is likely to undermine Mali's international reputation and deter foreign investment, it provides a short-term financial boost to the military government. Moreover, the junta has likely been emboldened by Russian support, calculating that the Kremlin will step in to fill any void left by departing Western investors. Russian support will likely entail more favourable resource agreements, military aid, and security guarantees for an increasingly threatened junta government. Should this policy prove successful, there is a realistic possibility that it is emulated by the junta governments in Burkina Faso and Niger or that it migrates to other sectors outside of gold mining.

Mozambique:

Seven-day "4x4" wave of unrest begins.

Since a controversial election on 9 October which declared the incumbent Frelimo party as victor, Mozambique has experienced significant unrest. After several three-day waves, opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane has called for a "4x4" (four by four) phase of protests planned to last seven days, from 4-11 December. During this phase, Mondlane has called for a total shutdown from 08:00 to 15:30 during each day of this phase. This shutdown is to involve protesters parking vehicles on major roads and congregating in key neighbourhoods and avenues of major cities. From 21:00 to 22:00, people are to make as much noise as possible with vuvuzelas. So far, the first days of this phase have seen significant unrest and clashes between protesters and security forces. Protesters have blocked roads and "tolls" are reportedly being collected at roadblocks outside of the Maputo International Airport. At least 13 people have been killed and 34 shot in the latest stage of protests, with Nampula being a notable hotspot for the volume of injuries and accounting for at least seven deaths.

Assessment: Repressive measures by security forces will almost certainly continue. On 3 December, the government promised to use "all means at its disposal" to prevent demonstrations. Security forces have utilised tear gas and live ammunition during each phase of unrest. In response, protesters have targeted police and Frelimo assets, burning down several police stations and vehicles. On 4 December, local media reports that protesters invaded the Frelimo headquarters in Muecate, Nampula discovering hundreds of voter cards, which they scattered on the street. Whether or not this report is accurate, this publicised event is highly likely to lead to more Frelimo headquarters being targeted by protesters, who will be incentivised to hunt for more evidence of election rigging.

A political resolution is unlikely to appear soon. While Mondlane expressed support for a second "virtual meeting" with President Nyusi, the government and Mondlane remain at an impasse regarding the agenda, with Mondlane refusing to meet unless his agenda is granted. Mondlane has warned that he will keep urging for demonstrations through Christmas unless "the truth about the elections" is disclosed. His goal is reportedly to compel the government to engage in dialogue. To achieve this, Mondlane believes the protests "need to carry on for longer, maybe two to three months, at the same pace".

Significant economic damage has resulted from business disruptions and the repeated temporary closure of the Lebombo border crossing, Mozambique's busiest border crossing with South Africa. President Filipe Nyusi has emphasised that payment to public employees may be jeopardised due to demonstrations and that private companies and supplies may also be impacted. In the most recent wave, Mondlane has called on protesters to target airports for the first time and to halt flight activity to and from Mozambique. While flights have, so far, been largely unaffected, Mondlane's aim appears to be to disrupt business operations in the country. This is likely to both increase internal pressure on the government, which will face mounting anger the longer unrest continues, and increase external pressure as surrounding countries' economies continue to be negatively impacted by the disruption.

EMEA Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest:

Pre-Christmas travel strikes expected across Europe.

Strikes across Europe are causing significant travel disruptions in the run-up to Christmas. In Italy, a nationwide strike will impact trains, trams, and airports on 13 December, with further disruptions on 15 December. In France, rail and port strikes begin on 11 December, which is expected to last until Christmas, while easyJet workers in the country will continue their strike until 16 December. In Spain, a nationwide bus strike that started in November is ongoing, with the strike particularly affecting Murcia and Andalusia. Finnair is also cancelling 300 flights on 9 and 13 December due to a strike by pilots. Additional impromptu transport strikes across the continent are likely in the run-up before the holidays.

Centre-right dominates Irish General Election.

In the 2024 Irish General Election, Fianna Fáil emerged as the largest party, with its leader, Micheál Martin, claiming a significant win after the counting process. The focus will now shift to coalition negotiations, with Fianna Fáil expected to form a government alongside its centre-right ally Fine Gael. Sinn Féin, despite its strong performance, remains unlikely to join the coalition due to opposition from the two main centre-right parties, which have ruled out collaboration with the left-wing party. However, smaller parties like the Social Democrats and Labour are expected to play a crucial role in the formation of the new government in the weeks to come.

Italian parliament approves migration reform.

The new legislation expands the list of "safe countries", possibly affecting asylum claims of migrants arriving via the central Mediterranean route. Moreover, it shifts the responsibility for the rejection of migrants to the courts of appeals, grants authorities the ability to inspect migrants' personal devices, and seals information regarding border control agreements with third countries. The law is the government's reaction after the de facto stalling of its plan to relocate migrants whose asylum claims need to be processed to Albania. Civil society actors and NGOs have attacked the law, claiming that it infringes upon migrants' rights. There is a realistic possibility of localised protests following the law's passing in cities including Rome, Florence, and Bologna.

Romanian parliamentary election see populists gain, liberals lose.

The vote, held on 1 December, resulted in the Social Democrats (PSD) finishing first with 22 per cent of the total votes, despite losing six points compared to their 2020 showing. Their coalition ally, the National Liberal Party (PNL) collapsed to 14.3 per cent (11 points less than in 2020). Far-right and anti-establishment forces made important gains. The Union of Romanians (AUR), which last week threw its weight behind anti-EU presidential candidate Georgescu, won 18 per cent of the vote and

more than doubled its 2020 share. The far-right SOS Romania improved upon poll predictions and secured 7 per cent of the total votes. AUR-splinter, the anti-establishment and far-right Party of Young People (POT) won 6.4 per cent of the vote. The election results make a new PSD-PNL alliance likely, possibly with a much weaker PNL and the participation of smaller centrist and regionalist formations.

The upcoming second round of the presidential elections will almost certainly be decisive to chart Romania's political future and may have repercussions for the entire EU bloc. If Georgescu wins, which current polls say is likely, he will cohabit with a less stable centrist, EU-friendly coalition, which may create opportunities for greater populist gains. Moreover, Georgescu's ongoing conflict with the Romanian state security council, which has accused him of being "boosted" by a Kremlin-promoted covert information operations effort, may materialise in severe civil unrest following the second round of voting.

Niger junta seizes French-run uranium mine.

The French group Orano announced on 5 December that Nigerien authorities took control of its uranium mining unit. Orano spokespeople had highlighted a worsening operational environment, with repeated cases of "interference" dating back months. The seizure likely follows the cases discussed above in Mali and continues to underscore the juntas' willingness to sever its economic and political ties to Western states. Niger is one of the world's leading uranium producers and the loss of access to its reserves is an important setback for Paris, which has had its influence in the Sahel hugely reduced in recent years. Even if Niger's junta is not directly responding to Moscow's pressures, the move is likely to be well-received by its Russian partners.

Ghanaians set to elect new president on 7 December.

Ghana's presidential election will be held on 7 December alongside parliamentary elections for 275 constituencies. Polling indicates that the main opposition leader, John Dramani Mahama, is set to win the presidential election, placing him ahead of the main rival, incumbent Vice President Muhamudu Bawumia but with 11 other candidates running. The election is set to be dominated by concerns over the economy, jobs, education, and the state of the country's infrastructure, with both candidates presenting plans to boost the economy. The polling results are close and there is a high likelihood that a presidential run-off vote will be required to determine the winner. However, no party has ever secured more than two consecutive terms, a pattern that favours the opposition.

Namibia set to elect first female president.

On 3 December, Namibia's electoral commission announced that Vice President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of the incumbent SWAPO party was set to become the nation's first female president. Nandi-Ndaitwah won with 57 per cent of the vote and her SWAPO party retained its parliamentary majority. However, the election was marred by technical errors and delays, with several opposition parties refusing to recognise the results and promising to begin a legal appeal.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror:

Swedes charged for preparing to conduct terror attacks for the Islamic State.

On 2 December, Swedish counter-terrorism operations led to the detention of four male Swedish citizens allegedly planning to conduct terrorist attacks for the Islamic State (IS). Three of the suspects were charged with planning violent acts and for aiming to instil fear or destabilise Swedish society. The group has ties to an Islamic group in Tyresö, links to organised crime in Sweden, and were attempting to recruit underage individuals for attacks. The group reportedly had connections to the

Islamic State Somalia Province (ISSP), a branch of IS that has grown in importance in recent years after the relative demise of IS in the Middle East and an increase in IS activity in Africa. ISSP's leader was recently made head of the General Directorate of Provinces and is partially responsible for the group's external operations. Somalia likely serves as a key link between IS senior leadership in the Middle East and its affiliates in Africa, with ISSP potentially increasingly targeting the Somali diaspora in the West for recruitment purposes.

UN warn of critical conditions in Sudanese refugee camp after RSF attacks.

The United Nations and the NGO Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have warned that conditions within the Zamzam refugee camp near El Fasher in Sudan's North Darfur state have reached critical levels. The warning follows the reported shelling of the camp on 1 and 2 December by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group. The shelling has killed several people and has severely disrupted the provision of healthcare within the camp, which houses over half a million displaced persons. The camp has been under siege for months, which resulted in the declaration of famine conditions in August.

At least 56 people killed in football-related violence in Guinea.

A stampede and clashes resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries in Nzérékoré, the country's second-largest city, during a football match at the municipal stadium. The violence reportedly broke out following a controversial refereeing decision. According to local media, the death toll and the number of injuries have paralysed local healthcare facilities, creating widespread delays and disruptions. There is a realistic possibility that the incident will result in localised civil unrest, as some civil society actors have blamed the government for failing to put in place adequate security measures and for allegedly underreporting the actual casualty numbers. Moreover, as the match was being held "in honour" of junta leader Mamady Doumbouya, the violence is likely to be linked to the junta's rule, making unrest likelier.

Ceasefire does little to deter conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Since 3 December, clashes between the Kigali-backed M23 Movement and the Congolese army have escalated in the northern regions of M23 operations, particularly in the Lubero region. This comes amidst the revived Luanda process, which is an Angola-brokered ceasefire agreed on 30 July 2024 between the Congolese and Rwandan governments, the latter of which has been accused of providing support to the M23 militia. The DRC's eastern North Kivu province has been wracked by instability for decades. Since 2021, the ethnically Tutsi M23 militia, backed by Kigali, has seized large areas of land and has threatened to take its capital, Goma. Their stated objectives are to protect the interests of the Tutsi and Kinyarwanda-speaking minorities in the region, which are threatened by Hutu militias including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). In their efforts against DRC forces, the M23 Movement has perpetrated various human rights violations including executions, sexual assault, and the utilisation of child soldiers. Ceasefire prospects are complicated by the fact that the M23 rebels, while backed by Kigali, are not directly under their control. As such, while Kigali provides operational support to the group, it is unclear how much a ceasefire between the two governments can bind the rebel group to its terms. Despite the ceasefire's significance in representing progress between Kinshasa and Kigali, the M23 Movement's ongoing operations represent its limitations in stabilising the humanitarian situation in North Kivu.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous:

Storm Darragh to batter United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom's Meteorological Office has issued multiple red, amber and yellow warnings in anticipation of Storm Darragh which is set to cause significant disruption from 6 December. The storm is set to bring 140 kph winds to the UK, prompting the rare issuing of red warnings which are typically associated with life-threatening weather. Large waves, power cuts, falling trees, travel disruptions, and mobile or internet disruptions are highly likely.

UNRWA pauses aid deliveries through Kerem Shalom crossing.

The announcement was made on 1 December and follows increasing cases of looting and violence towards humanitarian workers. The depletion of Hamas' manpower has emboldened other groups to seize aid entering Gaza from the main open crossing. As such, there is a greater risk of violence between groups resulting in injuries for workers and civilians. The pausing of UNRWA aid deliveries is highly likely to contribute to already severe delays in the delivery of vital aid to southern Gaza.

At least 7 dead as standoff between police and miners continues in South Africa.

More than 1,000 people are assessed as trapped in a disused gold mine in Stilfontein in South Africa's North West province. They are engaged in a weeks-long standoff with South African police. The illegal gold miners, many of which come from neighbouring countries have mostly continued refusing to resurface (approximately 25 have done so over the reporting period). On the other hand, police forces cannot realistically enter the mine shafts due to considerable safety hazards. Despite courts' calls to allow emergency workers to enter the mines, the situation continues to be extremely precarious, with a high likelihood of further casualties in the coming weeks.

Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Pakistan increases counter-terrorism operations in response to wave of militant attacks.

The Pakistani military's media wing, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), has stated that it has initiated intelligence-based operations against terrorist entities in parts of the country's restless Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The operations have resulted in the deaths of dozens of militant fighters and several Pakistani military personnel, with most operations targeting militant senior leadership. The operations have been launched amid a wave of extremist and separatist attacks in Pakistan, with over 850 attacks already recorded in 2024, surpassing the 645 attacks recorded in 2023.

Assessment: In November, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the government had approved a "comprehensive military operation" against militant groups after a wave of deadly attacks by the extremist group Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the separatist group Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). However, a lack of funds, inadequate local support, significant internal unrest and the overstretching of the security forces has likely denied the government the ability to launch large-scale offensives. In addition, the militant groups are often afforded local support and have increased their capabilities in recent years. Consequently, the military's actions will likely be constrained to small-scale and targeted operations against key figures within the militant groups. Moreover, without sufficient access to advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) technology such as drones and communication equipment, the effectiveness of such operations will likely be constrained. However, the operations, which have likely been partially initiated by Chinese pressure after attacks on Beijing's interests, have almost certainly sent a strategic message to the militant groups who will likely escalate their attacks in response. Such a reprisal strategy will likely worsen Pakistan's already volatile security situation and likely translate into more militant attacks in areas outside of their control. This will likely include increased militant attacks in major population centres like Karachi, which was attacked by the BLA in October.

South Korea:

President Yoon Suk Yeol faces impeachment after temporarily imposing martial law.

On 3 December, President Yoon imposed martial law for the first time since South Korea became a democracy, its last use being in 1979 during a coup. In justification, Yoon claimed that it was needed to defend the country from internal pro-North Korea forces and that the National Assembly was "attempting to paralyse" the government. Martial law enables rule by military authorities and involves the suspension of civil rights including freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. Yoon also ordered striking doctors to return to work. Upon declaring martial law, the military, alongside the police, deployed to the National Assembly building while thousands of members of the public turned out to protest.

According to South Korea's constitution, martial law should only be used in "wartime, war-like situations or other comparable national emergency states". The constitution also grants the National Assembly to lift martial law with a majority vote. As such, South Korea's parliament gathered in the National Assembly and unanimously voted against its imposition 190-0. Yoon's own party, People Power Party, joined the opposition in voting against it. Shortly after the vote, Yoon lifted martial law, six hours after it was imposed. On 4 December, impeachment proceedings against Yoon were initiated and, in the aftermath, Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun took responsibility and offered his resignation.

Assessment: Yoon's decision to impose martial law comes amidst what is essentially a political deadlock. Since the opposition won a landslide in the April 2024 general election, Yoon has been a "lame duck" president, unable to pass any bills while vetoing bills passed by the opposition. A doctors' strike in opposition to his bill to increase the number of medical school enrolment numbers, alongside several corruption scandals, has only increased pressure on his administration.

The imposition of martial law is viewed as an extreme measure to be taken at times of national emergency and opposition members view Yoon's actions as not meeting the constitutional requirement. Yoon is now facing impeachment, with a vote taking place later this week, which requires support from two-thirds of the National Assembly. Consisting of 300 seats, 192 of which are held by opposition members, at least eight members of Yoon's party will need to join the opposition in voting for his impeachment. While members from Yoon's party initially rallied behind him, on 6 December the party chief expressed support for suspending Yoon's constitutional powers, suggesting impeachment is highly likely. If approved by the National Assembly, the impeachment trial would be conducted by the Constitutional Court, where six out of nine justices must vote in favour of impeachment to formally remove Yoon from office.

Yoon is currently also being investigated for the crime of "insurrection", something that carries the death penalty in South Korea. While proceedings are unlikely to go this far, partially because it is difficult to prove, it is unclear how far lawmakers will go; however, previous crimes conducted by former presidents have carried long jail sentences. In the most likely scenario, whereby Yoon is impeached, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo would take over presidential duties. If this happens, a snap election will almost certainly be called. If Yoon survives the impeachment process and refuses to resign, an outcome that is highly unlikely, protests will almost certainly continue and will add pressure to an already deeply unpopular leader.

APAC Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest:

Protests in India and Bangladesh over arrest of Hindu Hare Krishna priest.

The arrest of Hindu Hare Krishna priest Chinmoy Krishna Das in Chattogram, Bangladesh has sparked significant unrest, leading to protests both within Bangladesh and in neighbouring India. On 2 December, protestors in Agartala, India attempted to breach the Bangladesh mission, causing damage to the building. In Bangladesh, the authorities have frozen the bank accounts of 17 individuals linked to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in response to the unrest. The unrest is almost certainly linked to the increased persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh following the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has sought sanctuary in India, with New Delhi's refusal to hand her over further provoking sectarian tensions.

Indian farmers set to march on New Delhi by 6 December.

On 2 December, approximately 5000 farmers from the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh began marching towards New Delhi to protest and demand better compensation and lower costs for farming. The protestors are set to arrive in the capital by 6 December. Additional farmer protests are set to take place within the provinces of Kerala, Uttarakhand, and Tamil Nadu where they will march towards their respective legislative assemblies on 6 December. The protests are unlikely to be as large or disruptive as the farmer protests in February which resulted in major roadblocks, detentions and the use of force; however, transport disruptions and localised clashes with the police are likely.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror:

Sectarian violence in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province kills over 130.

Armed clashes between Sunni and Shia Muslim tribes in Kurram, a district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, have resulted in over 130 deaths as a result of retaliatory attacks following the ambush of a Shia convoy on 21 November. A temporary ceasefire has failed to last, and road closures have led to food and medical shortages. With the clashes gaining a lot of traction on Pakistani media, there is a realistic possibility that the Shia minority will be targeted in attacks in other parts of the country.

Major Myanmar rebel group signals intent to engage in peace talks.

One of the largest rebel groups in the Myanmar civil war and member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) has expressed a willingness to engage in peace talks with the junta government and has declared a unilateral ceasefire. The MNDAA has made significant gains in Shan State, including the capturing of the major border town of Lashio. The MNDAA's decision has likely been influenced by Beijing, who is increasing its involvement in the conflict after much of China's border regions have been destabilised. The Chinese closing of borders and restriction of supplies has likely forced the MNDAA into accepting a course towards peace or face the risk of being isolated and ill-prepared to continue its war with the regime.

China and Philippines accuse each other of escalating in South China Sea.

China and the Philippines have traded accusations after each party accused the other of conducting dangerous manoeuvres in the disputed South China Sea. Manila claims that Chinese Coast Guard vessels used water cannons and dangerous manoeuvres to deter Filipino vessels from patrolling near the Scarborough Shoal. Conversely, Beijing claims the Filipino vessels initiated the confrontation and has ordered Manila to stop its infringements into Chinese waters and cease its propaganda. The incident follows a diplomatic dispute in November after China outlined territorial waters around Scarborough Shoal and submitted new nautical charts to the United Nations to assert its claim.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous:

Multiple killed by severe flooding in southern Thailand and Malaysia.

As of 6 December, the death toll has risen to over 30 in Thailand's southern provinces as a result of severe flooding which is estimated to have affected over 600,000 people. Thailand's Ministry of Public Health has stated that 33,000 people have been forced to evacuate their homes in the five most affected provinces, Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Phatthalung. Floodwaters have continued to rise and further rain is forecast, which will almost certainly continue to cause major disruptions to essential services like healthcare and transportation. Neighbouring northern Malaysia has also been affected, with tens of thousands displaced and at least six fatalities. Health authorities in Malaysia are also on high alert in preparation for a surge in waterborne diseases following the flooding.

UN talks on global plastic treaty falter in South Korea.

The treaty would have imposed new global regulations on plastic waste management, as well as introduced caps on plastic production. This latter point provoked the opposition of oil-producing nations, including the Gulf States and Russia. The treaty would have likely been the most important environmental treaty since the Paris one. Instead, its failure follows similarly disappointing outcomes at the COP29 and COP16 summits. There is a realistic possibility of environmentalist activists in

Western states staging protests with the aim of causing traffic disruptions in cities like London, Paris, or Berlin in the aftermath of the summit.



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