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IPI Regional Insights

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The International Peace Institute's (IPI) Regional Insights covers select regional and thematic developments based on information from a variety of sources. It draws on the research of IPI experts and is provided exclusively to major donors and members. Each monthly issue covers challenges and opportunities related to international peace, security, and development.

Africa

Central African Republic: After presenting a six-point plan to address the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR), United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed the deployment of a 12,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission to take over from the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) in September. These proposals recognize that despite MISCA's deployment in December 2013, supported by the French operation Sangaris, insecurity persists in CAR, alongside risks of a severe humanitarian crisis, cleansing of the Muslim populations, and a de facto partition of the country. The African Union has acknowledged the need for a larger and more sustainable UN mission to facilitate long-term stabilization efforts. At the same time, the AU has called on the Security Council to draw lessons from the recent transition from an African-led mission to a UN mission in Mali, and to ensure national actors maintain ownership of the peace efforts in CAR and regional actors are supported and remain involved. As the UN-AU partnership in peace operations is yet to be fully harmonized, the transition from MISCA to a UN operation provides another opportunity for the UN Security Council to reassess its relationship with an increasingly assertive regional organization.

South Sudan: As fighting resumed in South Sudan after a brief respite in early February, humanitarian agencies warned that the approach of the rainy season is a major concern for the 706,000 people displaced and the 75,000 that continue to seek refuge in the UN Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS) base camps. With the first major rainstorms of the season causing flooding and destroying hundreds of tents, the International Organization for Migration and other UN partners are working to develop ways to mitigate the risks of flooding and associated health and safety concerns. Meanwhile, peace talks between the government and the rebels were set to resume on March 20th in Addis Ababa, but have been delayed given differences over who is to participate. Simultaneously, an African Union commission of inquiry has been appointed to investigate human rights violations and other abuses committed during the armed conflict that broke out in mid-December 2013. The five-member commission will be headed by former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo and will make recommendations on the best way to ensure accountability, reconciliation, and healing among all South Sudanese communities. Relations between UNMISS and the government of South Sudan have been strained given the fighting and pressures on the mission. Thus the peace talks and AU commission of inquiry are important steps for re-establishing a sense of shared purpose and responsibility among the key local and international partners struggling to support the continent's youngest nation.

Latin America

Colombia: As peace talks are ongoing between the government and the leftist FARC guerrilla group, Colombia held congressional elections on March 9th. The elections could have a profound impact on the talks, as the implementation of any peace accord will require legislative action. The talks' chief critic, former president Álvaro Uribe, won 19 Senate seats for his newly minted political party, the Centro Democrático, making it the second largest bloc in the legislature. President Juan Manuel Santos's Partido de la U remains the single largest party in congress, with 21 seats in the Senate, and his coalition retains a majority in both houses. But Santos's popularity is low heading into the May presidential election, and Uribe has proved determined to oppose him at every step. While Santos is likely to win re-election due to a weak opposing field and push for a final peace accord by the end of the year, Uribe's new position as a senator, combined with the strong showing of his new party, could undermine confidence that the government will be able to negotiate and implement a lasting peace.

Venezuela: Against the background of high inflation and extreme citizen insecurity, Venezuela has been experiencing a wave of polarizing protests since early February. At least 28 people have died in the ensuing unrest with many more injured. The protests began as a student movement, but protesters were quickly joined by members of the upper and middle classes who have long opposed the Chavista movement currently led by President Nicolás Maduro. The president

maintains significant support among the country's poor and the military establishment, but by all accounts he lacks the charisma and political acumen of his predecessor and mentor, Hugo Chávez. The government responded swiftly to the protests with a hard hand, arresting hundreds, including opposition leader Leopoldo López. Maduro has since called for a series of "peace conferences" in the presidential palace, but they have been largely shunned. Henrique Capriles, the opposition governor who narrowly lost the presidential race to Maduro, has proposed his own points for dialogue, but the president insists that talks must begin without preconditions. On March 17th it was reported that Capriles had accepted an invitation to begin talks with the government, but negotiations were ongoing over how they would be structured.

Middle East

Algeria: Intercommunal violence has once again flared up in the southern town of Ghardaia, killing three Chaambas and prompting a visit by new Prime Minister Yousfi and Interior Minister Belaiz. Ghardaia is located on the edge of the Sahara and is home to two communities, the Chaamba of Arab origin and the Mozabites of Berber origin. Reasons for the outbreak in violence remain unclear, with some citing limited resources and economic opportunity, and others blaming the rise of criminal gang networks linked to theft and drug dealing. Four hundred miles north in Algiers, police continued to deploy and arrest protestors in the lead up to April's presidential election. Of particular concern for authorities is the Barakat (Enough) movement, which was formed solely in opposition to Bouteflika's fourth term. Though small in number, local analysts are watching this youth-driven group carefully, as it provides an alternative to the traditional political parties in Algeria.

Egypt: Egyptian army chief Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has ordered the reshuffle of military officers in some of the country's volatile areas—an indicator of both the growing security risks facing Egypt and a change in personalities aimed at paving the way for the imminent announcement of an al-Sisi presidential bid (Egypt is expected to have an elected leader by June 2014.) Among the changes were commanders in charge of the unstable northern Sinai region (where a war against extremists has been in full swing since July 2013) and parts of the Nile Delta (where terrorist acts have been on the rise). Indeed, on the weekend of March 15th and 16th, six military conscripts were killed by unknown gunmen near a military checkpoint in the governorate of Qalyubia, which led the government to pledge "decisive" action and order heightened security measures to counter this vicious wave of terrorism which has killed more than 200 soldiers and policemen since Morsi's overthrow. Such attacks on the army and security forces would be dealt with by military courts as enshrined by the newly approved constitution.

During an appeal trial on March 10th, three of Egypt's most prominent jailed activists (Ahmed Maher, Ahmed Douma, and Mohamed Adel) were believed to have been physically assaulted just before entering the courtroom. The three April 6th Movement members were sentenced to three years in prison in December 2013. The verdict on their appeal is expected on April 7th. Human rights activists have condemned the conditions of the jailed activists and journalists in Egypt during this interim period.

Jordan: A diplomatic row between Jordan and Israel erupted over the killing of 38-year-old Raed Zeiter, a Palestinian-Jordanian judge, by Israeli troops at a border crossing on March 10th. While the motivation behind the shooting remains unclear, Jordanian Prime Minister Nsur has held Israel "completely responsible" for Zeiter's death and demanded an apology. The episode led to a number of protests in Amman, notably at the Israeli embassy, where around 1,000 people gathered on March 14th raising fears of a domestic politicization of the episode.

The strain between the countries was reinforced when the visit of the far-right Israeli Minister of Housing Uri Ariel to the Al Aqsa mosque on March 16th was followed by clashes between Palestinian youth and Israeli police, which led the Jordanian government to condemn what it called "Israeli escalation" around the Al Aqsa mosque compound. Jordan serves as the custodian of Muslim sites in Jerusalem in accordance with the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty—a special responsibility that the government wants to keep despite the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations (much to the dismay of Palestinian negotiators). The violence in Jerusalem comes at a particularly tense moment, following recent Jordanian disgruntlement over a discussion among Israeli lawmakers to allow Jewish prayer at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Libya: On March 11th, Prime Minister Zeidan was relieved of his duties by the General National Congress (GNC) after he was unable to prevent a 37,000-ton tanker, the Morning Glory, commandeered by Libyan rebels from leaving the eastern port of Es-Sider. Soon after, de facto President Nouri Abu Sahmein called on army units and pro-government brigades from Tobruk, Benghazi, Sabha, Sirte, Misrata, and Tripoli to reclaim the blocked eastern oil export terminals held by Cyrenaica separatists (federalist movement) and set a two-week deadline for the "rebels" to clear the ports. On March 17th, the Morning Glory was intercepted by American Navy Seals, de-escalating this particular showdown and dealing a blow to Ibrahim Jathran, leader of the eastern Libyan militia that blockaded the ports and ally of the so-called federalist movement. However, as almost daily bombings and assassinations in Benghazi continue to undermine national authority, many fear a wider insurrection in the east with a potential spillover and declaration of autonomy in the south that could result in civil war. Adding to this overriding sense of insecurity are concerns about how defensively Libya's neighbors may react, should a strengthened Islamist coalition led by the Justice and Construction Party push the GNC towards a Muslim Brotherhood-friendly government, given Algeria's and Egypt's struggles to contain their own Islamist movements. At the March 6th Rome Conference on International support to Libya, participants, including Egypt and Algeria, reiterated the urgent priority for Libya to secure its

borders.

Yemen: Fighting in the north of Yemen has worsened, as Houthi fighters continue to clash with government forces in their push towards Sana'a, sparking fears of an outbreak of sectarian violence in the capital. All ceasefires in the north seem to have broken down, and while allegiances remain fluid, sides can be drawn around the Shi'ite Houthis and their fellow northern tribesman, and the Sunni Ahmar family and their tribal and Salafi fighter affiliates. Further exacerbating this situation is the steady influx of foreign fighters (many from Syria and often in the name of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), a growing circulation of weapons due to the government's inability to control smuggling, particularly along Yemen's coasts, and accusations of Iranian support to the Houthis in the form of arms.

In the south, Yemen's army and southern separatists were able to agree to a truce and prisoner exchange on March 13th, only for a pro-secession activist to be killed by security forces the following day. Despite a recent UN Security Council resolution targeting political spoilers and an Arab League humanitarian response action plan (announced March 17th), the situation in Yemen remains fragile.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: On April 5th Afghans go to the polls in a historic election. One Afghan civil society activist called it the "country's last hope." The election will most likely require a run-off with no clear leadership emerging for a few months. The leading candidates are Abdullah Abdullah, former Northern Alliance member who came in second in the presidential race in 2009; Zalmay Rasoul, a former senior member of the Karzai foreign policy team; and Ashraf Ghani, former finance minister and a 2009 candidate who has partnered with Rashid Dostum, a controversial former warlord as one of his ticket's vice president contenders. Other candidates with long histories in Afghan politics worth watching include Islamist Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf and Gul Agha Sherzai, most recently governor of Nangarhar province. Voting tallies are likely to indicate the future stature and ability of each candidate to influence governance going forward. The Taliban has called for a campaign of violence to disrupt the election and leading candidates worry about potential fraud.

Pakistan: Talks between the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban) are going forward under a mutually agreed ceasefire for the month of March, while attacks from splinter, non-supporting Taliban factions continue. Attacks on March

14th in the provincial capitals of Peshawar and Quetta, which killed 19 people, were one recent example. The US drone strikes appear to be on hold as the Pakistani government pursues this negotiation track. There is a lot of skepticism regarding the negotiations and much talk of planning for a major Pakistani military campaign against the militants in North Waziristan, if the talks fail.

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