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IPI Regional Insights

November 2012

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

Mali: Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a harmonized concept of operations (CONOPs) for the deployment of an African-led international force in Mali, at an extraordinary summit held on November 11th in Abuja, Nigeria. The United Nations Security Council requested the concept of operations as a prerequisite to agreeing to support an international military force, based on the Malian transitional authorities' request for forces to assist with recovering the occupied territories in northern Mali. Developed by military experts from ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), the European Union, the UN, and other partners, the CONOPs was endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council on November 13th and will shortly come before the Security Council. The plan includes an agreement from ECOWAS leaders to commit 3,300 troops for one year. The troops would come mostly from Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as other West African countries and some non-African states. Core countries from the Sahel-Sahara region—including Algeria, Mauritania, Chad, Libya, and Morocco—also attended the Abuja summit. Algeria, Egypt, and Mauritania continued to express reservations about a military intervention, raising concerns about its humanitarian consequences, the risk of terrorism spreading to Mali's neighboring countries, and further stalling an already severe development deficit in the region.

If authorized by the Security Council, preparing and deploying the military force could take six months to a year. While carrying the risk of further entrenching terrorist groups in northern Mali and cementing their cross-border criminal activities—namely, arms, drug, and human trafficking, the potential delay gives different parties, including ECOWAS mediator President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Algeria and the UN through its Office for West Africa, time to attempt mediation efforts. Contacts with Ansar Dine, one of the Islamist groups in northern Mali, and with the secular Tuareg rebellion National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), are underway.

South Africa: The upcoming African National Congress Conference in December will provide a major test of President Jacob Zuma's leadership. While Zuma will probably be re-elected as chairman of the ANC, and thus remain as president, he is likely to face sharp criticism for the government's handling of the Lonmin mine disaster this past August and the country's weak economic performance. Thirty-four miners were killed by the police and at least 78 people were injured at the platinum mine where 3,000 striking miners were protesting low pay and poor work conditions. Tensions also reflect the strong position of COSATU, the nation's major trade union, and the National Union of Mineworkers that brought pressure to bear on the government to prevent further such incidents and compel Lonmin to provide redress to the families of those killed. The tragedy occurred while the Zuma government continues to struggle with persistent poverty, inequality, and deficits in housing, health, and social services for the majority of the population eight years after the end of apartheid. The recent election of former foreign minister Nkosozana Zuma as the new chairperson of the African Union stands out as the government's major achievement this year. Its domestic resonance, however, is inevitably limited.

Sudan: President Omar al-Bashir promised to retaliate against Israel for an air raid on a weapons factory in Khartoum. On October 23rd, Sudan accused Israel of sending four warplanes that jammed Sudanese radars and hit the Yarmouk arms factory in Khartoum. Israel refused to confirm or deny any role in the attack. Sudanese promises of retaliation are probably relatively empty, since Sudan's ability to retaliate is questionable. Sudanese authorities, however, have publicly reconfirmed their support for Hamas and its "resistance." In addition, Iranian military officials were quickly on hand to inspect the damage to the arms factory, according to press reports.

Latin America

Haiti: While Hurricane Sandy dominated world news when it hit the northeast United States, much less attention was devoted to the storm's impact on Haiti, where it struck a few days earlier

on October 25th. The storm killed approximately 60 people and damaged or destroyed more than 27,000 homes. But more worrying than the direct and immediate impact are the consequences in terms of food insecurity and a likely increase in cholera cases, in a country that has not recovered from the 2010 earthquake and tropical storm Isaac in August 2012. The United Nations estimates that up to 1.8 million people are at risk of malnutrition due to the combined effects of drought, tropical storm Isaac in the north, and Hurricane Sandy in the south on crops and food prices. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is considering an emergency revision of its funding appeal to accommodate increased needs. Haiti remains a country with chronically weak institutions and overstressed, limited resources—and one that already witnessed widespread food riots in 2008.

Middle East

Syria: Representatives of the Syrian opposition met in Doha in early November under intense diplomatic pressure to restructure and form new broad-based, united opposition leadership. Moaz al-Khatib, a former cleric and a trained geologist, was elected as president of what is now called the Syrian Coalition for the Opposition and Revolutionary Forces. In press reports, the Syrian opposition claims the politically difficult restructuring will bring them more money and, notably, arms.

Spillover from the Syrian crisis continues. Turkish authorities, preferring to have broad political cover for strengthening border defenses, are seeking a NATO deployment of Patriot missiles. In a new development, the crisis has now hit the occupied Golan Heights. After a number of stray mortar shells landed in the Golan in the past week, Israeli tanks struck a Syrian artillery launcher on November 14th.

This development reinforces the view that the Syrian government is aiming to regionalize the conflict, to divert attention from itself and from calls for Bashar al-Assad to step down. Fragmentation is increasing in Syria. Kurdish areas in the northeast are beyond the control of the government and the opposition. Dara'a in the south is under the opposition's control and Deir az-Zour in the east has only nominal government presence. The opposition recently seized an oil field in Deir az-Zour, a possible indication of a strategic shift in the conflict.

Egypt: Though the current Constituent Assembly is in the final stages of drafting and voting on specific articles of the new constitution, controversies threaten to bring the whole process to a

halt. On November 7th, Constituent Assembly Secretary General Amr Darrag (from the Freedom and Justice Party) announced that the final draft of the new constitution would be issued on November 20th, nearly three weeks earlier than the initial December 12th deadline. Many members of the assembly became uneasy with the sudden haste. The earlier date may have been chosen, in light of the Supreme Constitutional Court's announcement to issue a ruling on the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly on December 2nd. While the situation remains fluid, liberal representatives (including representatives of the Coptic Church) withdrew officially from the Assembly, unless their demands are met, over the November 17th-18th weekend.

Palestinians: The Palestinians took a first step toward raising their status at the United Nations from an observer to a nonmember observer state. On Thursday, November 8th, they circulated a draft resolution to the 193 UN member states asking for their support in the General Assembly. In light of the initiative, Israel is threatening to cut off tax revenues flowing to the Palestinian authorities and the US is threatening to cut off aid to the Palestinians. Attuned to the delicacy of the situation, Palestinians waited until after the US presidential elections before making this move.

Extensive violence broke out in Gaza and southern Israel starting November 6th. The conflict has reverberated regionally: Egypt recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv for 'consultations' on November 15, sent its Prime Minister to Gaza on November 16 in a show of solidarity, and is now engaging in an international effort to broker a ceasefire alongside other diplomatic efforts, particularly due to the looming specter of a full ground operation by Israeli Defense Forces.

Bahrain: On Tuesday, November 6th, the Bahraini government arrested four suspects in connection with a bombing that killed two people in the capital Manama. Bahrain accused Hezbollah of being behind the attacks. On November 7th the Bahraini government also revoked the citizenship of 31 people for damaging state security.

Kuwait: The opposition held a large protest against changes in the electoral system on Sunday, November 11th, also marking the 50th anniversary of the constitution. While large demonstrations had been banned, the protest proceeded without incident. Opposition members argue that the legal changes which create a system of one voter—one vote limits voters' choice and skews the election in favor of candidates aligned with the ruling family. The emir refused to rescind the new electoral law and said that the opposition should file a complaint with the constitutional court rather than protest.

Qatar and the UAE: Qatar is in the process of updating its limited and aging fleet of fighter jets. While the existing Qatari fleet of Mirages might imply a possible preference for a purchase from France, the extensive US assets deployed at Al-Udeid Air Base, which is perceived as a welcoming platform, put US war planes in the running. It is a buyer's market: given the current international financial situation, there is heavy competition among potential European and American suppliers. The UAE is also approaching a purchase decision on more fighter aircraft, as demonstrated by the November 5th visit to the UAE of UK Prime Minister Cameron to

discuss regional issues and highlight British fighter capabilities.

Saudi Arabia: On November 5th, fifty-three year old Prince Mohammed bin Naif was appointed minister of interior, replacing his uncle Prince Ahmed Abdulazziz. There is also speculation that Saudi King Abdullah will appoint Prince Ahmed as a second deputy prime minister.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission announced that the 2014 presidential elections will take place on April 5th. The decision puts to rest the rumors that Karzai would seek to delay the elections in an effort to extend his mandate during the crucial year when NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is scheduled to withdraw. Holding the election in early spring raises logistics concerns given Afghanistan's notoriously long, snowy winters and likely subsequent flash flooding, potentially blocking access for election workers and voters alike. The announcement, however, puts pressure on the Afghan government and its international partners to take the necessary steps related to voter registration and organization of the election. (See below on Taliban prisoners' release.)

Pakistan: The Supreme Court closed the case of contempt against the prime minister on November 14th, following the Attorney General's confirmation that a letter has gone to the Swiss authorities requesting the re-opening of the fraud investigation against President Asif Ali Zardari. The Pakistani political class appeared glad to see this political football passed to Switzerland given other pressures on the government, with rising violence in Karachi and the continuing fallout from the Taliban attack in the Swat Valley on Malala Yousafzai, a 14-year old girl and peace and education activist. Pakistan is pressing the NATO ISAF forces to go after Mullah Fazlullah, the alleged mastermind of the Yousafzai attack who is reportedly hiding out in a remote border region of Afghanistan. In parallel to this controversy, Pakistan agreed to release Taliban detainees at the conclusion of a November 12-15 visit to Islamabad of members of the Afghan High Peace Council. This release is seen as confidence building measure towards an Afghan-led reconciliation process.

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