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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

Liberia: On August 20th President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf suspended 46 officials in her government, including her son, for not declaring their financial assets to Liberia's Anti-Corruption Commission. Widely hailed by the public, the move received some criticism as coming late—two years into her second term as president—and for its soft implementation, allowing the officials to have continued access and use of public property during the suspensions. The dramatic presidential move draws attention to the deep need for transparency and accountability in Liberia's public finances and commercial transactions in its natural resources (diamond, timber, palm oil, and rubber sectors). Real progress, however, may depend on politically much more difficult prosecutions.

Mali: One month after returning from medical treatment in France and appointing a more inclusive government of national unity as demanded by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mali's Interim President Dioncounda Traoré officially requested ECOWAS military assistance on September 4th. The request covered only logistics, training, equipment, and aerial support to help Mali recover its occupied territory in the north and fight terrorism. It did

not include a request for troops, reflecting the Malian army's reticence to accept the deployment of the approximately 3,300 regional troops who have been on standby for several months. It also leaves out the proposed first phase of the ECOWAS mission, a process to secure transitional institutions and stabilize the southern part of the country—a disagreement ECOWAS' Commissioner for Political Affairs Salamatou Hussaini Suleiman said she is confident can be overcome. Even with these limitations, Mali's formal request allows the regional bloc to return to the United Nations Security Council and solicit a new authorization for its stabilization mission.

Somalia: In Somalia the newly formed federal Parliament elected on September 10 a community organizer and relative newcomer to politics, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, as President. The first elected president in forty years raises hopes for a fresh start, but he will need extremely strong political skills to lead amid Somalia's wily and entrenched warlords. An assassination attempt against the newly elected president on September 12th is an indication of the significant challenges ahead.

Latin America

Colombia: In a brief statement on August 27th President Juan Manuel Santos acknowledged that his government had agreed to restart peace talks with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in a bid to end the hemisphere's longest running armed conflict. It will be the first talks between the two parties since 2002. Norway and Cuba will host the talks, and Chile and Venezuela will serve as observers. Negotiations are planned to begin in mid-October in Oslo and later move to Havana. The agenda for the talks addresses six issues in sequential order: rural development, political participation, the end of armed conflict, drug trafficking, victims of violence, and implementation and verification. The FARC, confirming its participation in the talks via an online video, maintained its populist image by including a rap song endorsing dialogue. Talks have been tried in the past and failed, resulting in skeptics being the loudest voices in initial analyses. Yet the two sides appear motivated for a serious effort at ending the conflict. The Colombian military is stronger than it was ten years ago, and the FARC is weaker. President Santos, formerly the defense minister who led a tough, successful military campaign against the rebels, insists there will be no bilateral ceasefire and is backed by a recently established legal framework for peace talks with the guerrillas. While the FARC continues to attack Colombia's infrastructure, the guerilla leadership that defiantly led the group during the last round of peace talks has mostly been killed or captured. Perhaps a new generation of FARC leadership sees an opportunity to achieve its social justice, economic equity, and political participation objectives, given that neighbors such as Venezuela (which had previously offered sanctuary) are supporting the talks and the military fight seems unwinnable in light of the unwavering, better armed Colombian military.

Mexico: On August 31st the Federal Election Tribunal threw out the legal challenge to Enrique Peña Nieto's victory in the presidential race. This clears the way for Nieto to take office on December 1st. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the losing opposition candidate of the left, has stepped down as the head of his party and is fostering a citizen's movement of democratic regeneration and civil disobedience in reaction to the election results and court decision. López Obrador appears to be headed toward forming a new political party, perhaps seeing an opportunity to connect with the youth mobilized against long-standing political powers in Mexico.

Middle East

Egypt: Egypt's stock market was up 57% for the year as of September 11th, although market watchers expect volatility in the ongoing political transition. As the transition in Egypt has scared away tourists and investors and foreign reserves have plummeted, the government has turned to Gulf Arab benefactors, the International Monetary Fund (negotiating a \$4.8 billion loan) and the United States (\$1 billion in debt relief negotiations). Saudi Arabia, where President Morsi made his first trip abroad, had a delegation in Cairo the week of September 10th discussing a \$1.5 billion aid package. Investments and the investment climate were on the agenda as well that week with a large joint government-business delegation in Cairo from the United States and similar investment meetings between the Egyptian and Saudi governments. An anti-Islam film produced in the United States and released as an online trailer generated violent protests outside the American Embassy in Cairo. Egypt's response to the protests, in which President Morsi has to walk a fine line of outrage over the film while ensuring the protection of American diplomats and diplomatic facilities, appears to be emerging as the second major test of post-revolution bilateral Egypt-US relations since the controversy over American democracy-promoting non-profits last spring.

Iraq: Sectarianism continues to bedevil the political climate in Iraq, as demonstrated by the death sentence issued in absentia against Iraq's Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi. Tensions in the country are being inflamed by regional developments, including competition for influence by the pivotal states in the region.

Jordan: Managing domestic political reform and juggling the pressures from the Syrian conflict are taxing the Jordanian authorities. While street protests over domestic politics had leveled off during the summer of 2012, new protests forced the government to freeze a proposed fuel price hike in early September. As occurring elsewhere in the region, on Friday September 14th, protests

in Amman were directed at the US Embassy over the privately produced anti-Islam film. Amman is also juggling the challenges of a large influx of Syrian refugees and the political implications of serving as host to the former Syrian prime minister and other senior Syrian officers who have defected. There are some reports that Jordan's regional neighbors would like to see Jordan take a firmer position in support of the Syrian opposition.

Libya: US Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens was killed in Benghazi on September 11th, apparently in an attack that followed riots over the same anti-Islam film that has generated widespread protests in the Muslim world. Ambassador Stevens is the first American Ambassador killed overseas in 33 years. It is a painful reminder of characteristics of the Libyan transition: the lack of security, ongoing militia activity, and an undercurrent of religious extremism.

Palestinians: Efforts to reduce the deficit with financial austerity are landing Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in trouble on the streets of the West Bank, with demonstrations against the Palestinian Authority in various cities in protest over general economic hardship and rising taxes. Fayyad, a World Bank economist, is held in high esteem in Western capitals, but his popularity has recently been waning on the Palestinian street, due mostly to the prolonged stasis of the peace process. The Palestinian Authority has since announced that it will cancel the tax increase.

Syria: Fighting continues to focus on the northern city of Aleppo, though intense shelling of parts of the capital has also been reported, and reports documenting the brutality of both sides continue despite warnings from the United Nations' leadership. While political negotiations seem an unlikely possibility, joint UN and Arab League envoy Brahimi held talks in Syria from September 13-16th.

Yemen: A leader (reportedly second in command) of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Saeed al-Shihri, was killed along with six others apparently by a US drone missile attack in Yemen on September 10th. There was an assassination attempt against the defense minister on September 11th. President Abed Rabbu Mansour Hadi has since replaced national security and military intelligence chiefs, as well as the director of the office of the Presidency. These changes are seen as moves by the new president to assert his authority and diminish the influence of former President Saleh, who, while forced out of government last year, received immunity and is living in Yemen.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: The Parliament confirmed President Karzai's three nominations to key positions in the security cabinet on September 15th. Outgoing Minister of the Interior Mohammedi (Tajik) becomes minister of defense and seems to have avoided a parliamentary challenge by bringing ethnic balance, despite being forced out of the Interior post by a no-confidence vote in August. Deputy Minister of Interior Patang takes the ministerial slot, being one of two Pashtuns in the new security cabinet. Asadullah Khan, another Pashtun, got the job of chief of the National Directorate of Intelligence. He overcame rumors of human rights abuses and corruption in his past. Of note, Karzai is keeping outgoing Defense Minister Wardak as a senior advisor; Wardak lost the defense slot in a parliamentary vote of no confidence, but has been at Karzai's side since December 2004. The Parliament rejected Karzai's nomination to the slot of Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, so the Parliament showed its independence but did so over a position which has had much less importance than the other three slots under Karzai.

India-Pakistan: India's Minister of External Affairs S.M. Krishna traveled to Islamabad on September 7-8th for wide-ranging bilateral talks. The visit followed a week after President Zardari and Prime Minister Singh met on the margins of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Tehran August 30-31. While claims of Pakistani complicity in the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack cast a shadow in recent years over a long history of difficult bilateral relations, Minister Krishna and his Pakistani counterpart Minister of Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar both claimed a focus on the future at their joint press conference on September 8th. The talks produced a new visa agreement. Given the variants of domestic political gridlock in both countries (an unproductive "monsoon" session of the Indian Parliament and the ongoing judicial pursuit of the President on old corruption charges in Pakistan), making slow progress in neighborly relations is a "deliverable" of sorts to their respective peoples.

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