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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

Democratic Republic of the Congo: The M23 rebel group in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) surrendered on November 6th, following a military defeat against the Congolese armed forces and UN troops that forced M23 leaders and most of its fighters (estimated at around 1,500) into neighboring Uganda. This military victory created momentum for a political deal. However, the peace deal that the government of the DRC and the M23 were widely expected to sign on November 18th fell apart at the last moment when the two failed to agree on whether they were signing an "agreement" or a "declaration." Part of the reason is that Kinshasa believes its military victory over the M23 has changed the terms of the settlement. But beyond the title of the deal itself, two major issues will have to be ironed out over the next few weeks: the conditions for a possible integration of some M23 fighters into the Congolese armed forces, and whether and who among the M23 leaders would get amnesty as part of such a deal. Adding to the complexity of finalizing the Kampala negotiations, the M23 announced on November 13th a split into two factions, with a new branch referring to themselves as "realists" led by M23 political leader Serge Kambasu Ngeve indicating that it was ready to sign a "declaration." The military head of M23 Sultani Makenga, who is on the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee list, did not offer an immediate public reaction.

Middle East

Egypt: Following a visit by a Russian delegation to Cairo November 14th, there is talk of a potential foreign policy realignment for Egypt. After meetings with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy attempted to downplay speculation of a major shift by deeming Moscow too important to "be a substitute for anyone" while merely emphasizing this recent meeting as part of a more "pluralistic" foreign policy approach for Egypt. Given that this was the highest level visit in years (and also included the Russian defense minister promulgating rumors of an arms deal) it is nonetheless clear that a message was being sent to Washington, which, just last month, froze a portion of its annual \$1.3 billion aid to Egypt. And yet history advises caution: during the bleakest period of US-Egyptian relations, which pushed Nasser into the sphere of the Russians, US-Egyptian intelligence communities retained tight cooperation. A recent (and rare) interview by Intelligence Service Director General Mohamed Farid el-Tohamy reveals a similar dynamic. The spy chief is quoted as saying that "no change" has affected the relationship between the Egyptian intelligence service and the CIA, reaffirming that "cooperation between friendly services is in a completely different channel than the political channel."

Libya: While the mechanism for Libya's Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting the new constitution is finally in motion—with sixty seats divided equally between Libya's three constituent regions—there is little optimism regarding its chances of success given the inability of the government and the elected authorities to restore order and security. Indeed, it is armed militia groups who are calling the shots in Libyan politics, albeit using the façade of the state apparatus to force

their agendas (as demonstrated by the recent kidnapping of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan). Ironically, more extreme elements (particularly Ansar al-Sharia) have argued for a stricter application of Islamic law as a solution to boost security in the increasingly lawless country. A leaked document from the Ministry of Justice revealed the establishment of a "committee charged with revising current legislation and to propose amendments that would not contradict the fundamental rules and regulations of Islamic law." As such, factions continue to gain more political clout, and the existing leadership finds itself in a desperate situation: calls for militias to disarm, especially in the cities, have gone unanswered and 43 people were killed in Tripoli on November 15th when militia members opened fire on protestors.

Syria: While the world focuses on planning a potential Geneva II peace conference and on progress in disarming Syria's chemical arsenal, dynamics in the complicated world of political Islam continue to change. A November 8th announcement by al-Qaida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri called for the abolition of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) while stressing that the Al-Nusra Front is the official Al Qaeda operative in the Syrian war. The former body, it is assumed, would return to its original function as the al-Qaida wing in Iraq known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), were it to heed the demand of al-Zawahiri. Meanwhile, on November 13th, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed to continue fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime for as long as needed. While the opposing parties are largely described in sectarian terms, it is the Gulf States—Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and presumably others—who are funding the players and fueling the fight in the increasingly complex proxy war being fought in Syria.

Iran: Talks with Iran over the weekend of November 10th and 11th ended inconclusively, quickly moving skeptics and spoilers to take advantage of the pessimism. Indeed, one of the US administration's greatest hurdles will be to successfully convince conservative members of the US Congress to give diplomacy time and space. There is already a loud chorus of voices among both Democrats and Republicans expressing concern that any interim deal is a sweetheart deal for the Iranians and the possibility of further congressional action to impose tougher sanctions on Iran remains. Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to ring the "war" alarm bells should the US be responsible for a "bad deal" with Iran. With negotiations having resumed on November 20th, the debate in the US and Israel is likely to become more intense as to whether a limited agreement on Iran's nuclear program makes sense at this time.

Qatar: Following an eight day visit to Qatar in early November, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of Migrants François Crepeau proposed a list of fifteen recommendations, including legislative reforms to protect workers, proper enforcement and implementation of existing legislation, and the abolishment of the "kafala" system (which ties workers to a single employer and prevents them from changing jobs without permission from their employer). With 94% of its population comprising migrant workers (mostly South Asian and African), Qatar has recently faced criticism over its labor rights abuses amid hasty preparations for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, not least in a report published by Amnesty International on November 18th. Meanwhile, recent labor riots by Ethiopian workers in Saudi Arabia highlighted that this is a problem permeating the Gulf as a whole. Indeed, Human Rights Watch recently appealed to Gulf countries to abide by International Labour Organization standards, thus placing the region in the spotlight for the human rights abuses.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: A *loya jirga* (meeting of elders and elected officials) will be held on November 21st to decide on the proposed bilateral security agreement with the United States, which would allow US troops to stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014. A central issue for discussion is the US insistence on immunity from Afghan law for its troops. Preparations for the meeting were marred on November 16th when a suicide bomb near the *loya Jirga* compound killed at least 10 people, injured dozens, and damaged vehicles and nearby buildings. While President Karzai has stated that the *loya jirga* is open to all, including the Taliban, the latter are not expected to show up, given their opposition to any continued presence by US forces. Karzai has turned to this traditional Afghan mechanism in part because of the political cover that the elders' support would provide for his government to approve the deal.

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