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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

Mali: Twenty-eight candidates, including four former prime ministers and one woman, are running to succeed interim President Dioncounda Traoré in Mali's elections on July 28th, which will most likely go to a run-off on August 11th. The elections will formalize Mali's return to democratic order about 18 months after the coup and rebel takeover of the north; they are also an essential anchor to France's military exit strategy and an important requirement for the United States and others to resume investment and aid.

However, against a backdrop of continuing intercommunal tension and violence and the absence of government administration in former conflict zones, there are concerns that the elections risk upending the divided nation's fragile peace, particularly given instability in the rebel stronghold of Kidal and the other northern cities of Menaka, Gao, and Timbuktu. In addition, the results of rushed and ill-prepared elections risk being highly contested, and this could escalate into post-election violence, especially with the anticipated low turnout in the height of the rainy season and during Ramadan, and the challenges associated with the organization of the vote for about 500,000 internally displaced Malians.

Moreover, the new United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization in Mali (MINUSMA) has not had sufficient time to establish itself and secure the most fragile regions. MINUSMA officially took over from the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) on July 1st and will provide security for the elections. While Mali's timely return to constitutional order should remain a priority to pave the way for inclusive political dialogue and to foster reconciliation in the divided country, scheduling elections at the end of July is a high-risk tactical move that may serve to satisfy international partners only in the short term.

Zimbabwe: On July 31, the 33-year rule of President Mugabe will be challenged with little hope of change by, among others, a coalition of Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), Mavambo Kusile Dawn (MKD) led by Simba Makoni (Mugabe's former finance minister), and Zanu-Ndonga. The constitutional court ruling that set the date has left no time for reforms adopted earlier this year to be implemented before polling day. Patchy voter registration, campaign financing corruption, and a lack of free media have led many to declare the elections unfair. In addition, the prospect of election related violence and human rights abuses remains significant. The timetable for the elections includes a six-week period between the first round and the run-off; in 2008 more than 200 people were killed during this period after the first round of polling, 10,000 were injured, and 28,000 were forced to flee their homes before Mr. Tsvangirai conceded.

So far, many of the top army and police chiefs have openly backed the ruling ZANU-PF, raising fears of security force intervention in the event that Mr. Tsvangirai's coalition wins. A peaceful election would bring much-needed investment back to Zimbabwe, but a repeat of the 2008 violence would reverse the tentative economic growth experienced since

2009. Lack of reform and reports of plans to rig the forthcoming election mean President Mugabe is expected to remain in office. Mr. Tsvangirai has admitted he starts his campaign with a “heavy heart,” a sentiment shared by many observers.

Middle East

Egypt: The ousting of President Morsi on July 3rd reflects both continuity and change. It revealed the military establishment’s ability to remain a stalwart in Egyptian political life, having removed a democratically elected president in order to “impose the will of the street,” while it also signaled a rebooted political arena free from a dominant Muslim Brotherhood influence. The decision was far from unanimous and has polarized the Egyptian street to an unparalleled degree, producing flashpoints of violence—most notably, a confrontation between pro-Morsi supporters and the military that resulted in more than 50 fatalities. This incident resulted in the withdrawal of the Salafi Nour party (the largest Islamist group to back the removal of Morsi) from political negotiations. Without their support, the new executive led by interim president Adly Mansour (former head of the Supreme Constitutional Court) now lacks Islamist players. Indeed, the new cabinet sworn in on July 9th does not comprise a single Islamist.

Nonetheless, the executive continues to move forward with the transition timeline: a seven-month process that entails amending the constitution and a parliamentary election in early 2014. While the political action has centered in Cairo, there have been reverberations in the Sinai peninsula where, according to press reports, the Egyptian military in coordination with Israel is undertaking a large-scale military operation against Islamist insurgents.

Morsi’s removal has been met with mixed reviews around the world. The US has avoided labeling the overthrow a “coup,” a term that would put its aid package to Egypt in jeopardy. Others—notably Iran, Turkey, and Tunisia—lambasted the turnover as illegitimate: a subtle indicator of global existential angst among Islamists. The event also provoked a strategic realignment in the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait pledging \$12 billion in loans to support Egypt’s transition, a role primarily occupied by Qatar during the Morsi years.

Tunisia: Secular opponents of Tunisia’s Islamist-led government are hoping to emulate their counterparts in Egypt. A “Tamarod” (rebellion) was launched in Tunis on July 4th, with participants claiming that 180,000 signatures have been gathered for a petition that calls for the dissolution of the Islamist-dominated National Assembly. In contrast, several hundred people protested the overthrow of Egypt’s President Morsi in central Tunis on July 13th. Waving Tunisian and Egyptian flags, the protesters criticized the military’s involvement in Egyptian politics, indicating a similarly polarized Tunisian populace. The likelihood that the Tamarod campaign will succeed in Tunisia is slim. The Tunisian military is less able to influence the political balance of power, and the leading Ennahda party has made more attempts to build consensus between Islamist and secular groups over the past two years, despite the current impasse regarding the draft constitution.

Bahrain: A Tamarod campaign has also been announced in Manama. The Bahraini variant issued its first communiqué online on July 3rd (the day Morsi was ousted in Egypt), calling for a large demonstration on August 14th, a date that marks the departure of British forces from Bahrain in 1971. In response, the interior ministry issued a warning on July 13th against “illegal demonstrations and activities that endanger security.”

Qatar: With a new emir in power and the potential loss of a close ally in Egypt, Qatar responded to events in Egypt with caution, “praising the Egyptian army’s role in safeguarding Egypt’s national security” and adding that it “respected the will of the Egyptian people.” In contrast to this statement, the Doha-based Sunni Muslim cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi issued a fatwa (religious decree) on July 6th imploring Egyptians to support overthrown Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in accordance with sharia law, which “imposes on all believers allegiance to the elected president, to carry out his orders and conform to his directives.” The contrast is interesting given the relatively uniform stance taken by these two parties during President Morsi’s year in power.

Syria: What started as a two-sided conflict between the Syrian regime and a diverse opposition in Syria has spiraled into a much more complex conflict in which certain parties, notably the radical Al-Nusra Front, have now emerged as separate entities, fighting both regime and more mainstream rebel groups. This was epitomized in clashes between Kurdish and Al-

Nusra fighters on July 17th, which left twenty-nine people dead near the town of Ras al-Ain. This was among countless others violent episodes that took place in the past few weeks in Syria, despite a UN call for a ceasefire on the eve of Ramadan.

The international community is still scrambling for a political solution to the conflict, with the Geneva II talks remaining ever-elusive. However, one positive breakthrough took place on July 10th when the United Nations accepted the Syrian government's invitation for a visit by two senior UN officials for talks on the alleged use of chemical weapons in the conflict.

Israel/Palestine: Pressing the case with both parties during an extended visit in the region, US Secretary of State Kerry announced July 19th that a basis had been established for the resumption of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators. The talks are expected to restart in Washington in the next week to ten days. While no details were announced, press reports indicated that there will be a release of some long-serving Palestinian prisoners as a confidence-building measure before the talks begin. There is little optimism surrounding the talks, given the issues that divide the parties, the domestic political divisions among both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and the long history of stalled negotiations.

Iran: On July 17th, Iran announced that it would resume talks with world powers on its controversial nuclear program once president-elect Hassan Rowhani assumes office and forms a new negotiating team. The announcement comes following mounting pressure from Washington as well as renewed threats from Israel regarding the use of force against Iran. It also came a day after the UN Security Council was unable to decide whether Iran's missile tests last year were a violation of UN sanctions imposed on Tehran, an impasse created by Russian and Chinese opposition, and an indication that the Iranian question remains a salient thorn in American-Russian relations.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: In the three-day period between July 13th and 15th, Afghanistan's parliament passed two laws that provide the framework for the provincial and presidential elections set for April 5, 2014. The first law outlines electoral procedures; the second outlines the election management bodies. Politicking regarding the election is also underway among former ministers and governors who served under Karzai, although it is too early to identify any frontrunners. The passage of these laws was much awaited by Afghan's international partners and introduces some positive momentum on the heels of the recent debacle surrounding efforts to engage the Karzai government and the Taliban in peace talks. When the Taliban raised its flag and added a name plate on the house its representatives are using in Doha, the Karzai government was outraged, blamed the US for the Taliban's acting like a government, and changed its mind about holding talks with the group.

Pakistan: Pakistan's new prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, met Chinese President Li on July 4th in Beijing. It was Sharif's first trip abroad, and Pakistan's economic, energy, and infrastructure needs were the primary topics under discussion. The choice of location for this first foreign trip by the newly elected prime minister was no surprise, since he was paying a call on Pakistan's most long-standing regional ally. The new government is also reaching out to neighboring Afghanistan: Prime Minister Sharif's special adviser on national security visited Kabul July 21st.

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