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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: As expected, in a December 5th meeting the UN Secretary-General recommended an international military intervention to the Security Council as a last resort to assist the Malian armed forces to recover the occupied territories in the north. The Secretary-General strongly preferred national dialogue and endorsed military intervention only "to deal with the most hard-line extremist and criminal elements in the north." On the critical issue of funding, however, the report stipulated that funding come from voluntary and not assessed contributions. The Malian transitional authorities (under stress—see below), ECOWAS, and the African Union were disappointed by the lack of outright support for a military mission.

Instability in the interim government in Bamako is impeding regional and international efforts to reunite the divided country. On December 10th, the interim Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra was arrested by members of the army and forced to resign. The swift appointment of the new interim Prime Minister Diango Cissoko, the country's former ombudsman, will facilitate the pursuit of talks initiated by the ECOWAS mediator Blaise Compaoré with the Tuareg rebels of MNLA and the Islamist Ansar Dine. However, the conditions of the previous prime minister's departure, as well as the presence of the armed forces in the new government, are worrying and likely to slow down the hoped-for orderly return to an elected government. The interwoven security, political, economic, and social challenges facing Mali, the involvement of state and nonstate actors, and the interplay of regional states advancing their disparate interests all call for a multi-pronged response. At this time, however, the Secretary-General's report, recognizing the challenges, the need for careful planning and the political situation in Bamako, cautiously sees a future for a multidimensional UN mission. Thus, for the foreseeable future there will be ongoing political dialogue with those willing to talk, continued planning for an international military intervention, and political space for both progress toward a resolution and a worsening of the situation. The latter may well include the entrenchment of the regional franchise of Al Qaeda—Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb—in a new safe haven in northern Mali.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): On December 9th negotiations finally started in Kampala between the M23 rebel group and the government of the DRC. President Joseph Kabila had long resisted negotiating directly with the rebel group created in March 2012. The fall of Goma on November 20th to the M23 rebels in spite of the presence of UN peacekeepers was a game changer. It precipitated a declaration by the leaders of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) at the November 24th Kampala summit calling on the M23 to withdraw from Goma, but also on "the DRC government to listen, evaluate and resolve the legitimate grievances of M23." The African Union endorsed the declaration on November 25th.

While the negotiations started badly with mutual recriminations, the talks continue in Kampala. There are a number of unresolved issues at stake, including questions relating to military ranks, salaries of M23 officers previously integrated into

the Congolese army (FARDC), and political integration from the previous agreement between M23's earlier incarnation CNDP and Kinshasa on March 23, 2009. The M23 has in recent weeks tried to appeal to a broader Congolese base by seeking to discuss last year's contested national elections and issues related to the constitution (the implementation of decentralization measures), but without much success. The Congolese political opposition actually refused to take part in the Kampala negotiations as they were only offered observer status. It also criticized the secrecy of the agreement on March 23, 2009, which was never approved by parliament. Experts fear that this new round of negotiations will again not address the root causes of the cyclical conflict—regional competition for control of land and natural resources in eastern DRC, a weak government that lacks legitimacy, and poor governance (including the need for decentralization and real defense-sector reform). Concerns are that the talks will instead produce another temporary fix.

Middle East

Egypt: In the first day of voting in a two-part election on December 15th, 30 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote on a new constitution. Unofficial results indicate that 57 percent of those who cast a ballot voted in favor of the new document. Voters in the remaining districts will cast their ballots on December 22nd, when a similar showing and result is expected. The low level of turnout and small margin of support reflects the current political mood in Egypt. President Morsi's November 21st decree and subsequent actions, which effectively accelerated the finalization of the draft constitution and forced a quick popular vote on it, continue to draw supporters and protestors to the streets of Cairo. Demonstrations by both sides reached a climax on December 4th and 5th, when clashes outside of the presidential palace in Cairo left five dead and more than 600 injured. President Morsi's slow and limited reaction to the violence and minimal response to the opposition's concerns have been compared to Mubarak's attitude and actions during the January 2011 uprising. Of note, the new constitution ensures the military retains its powerful position in the government. Overall, the actions and events of the last few weeks have weakened the position of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The political crisis has also slowed down steps to jump-start Egypt's ailing economy. The government delayed a request for the \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, when on December 9th it first announced and then cancelled a tax hike within a ten hour period, probably for fear of inciting further demonstrations. It seems likely that the IMF loan is on hold until after the referendum or perhaps even after the subsequent parliamentary election, due in two months time. The IMF—as well as the international community at large—has been caught off guard by Morsi's mixed signals.

Libya: The reshaping of Libya's political landscape is slowly progressing. On December 11th Minister of Interior Ashur Shwail, whose appointment was delayed until an appeals court cleared him of the Integrity Commission's finding that he had been closely associated with the Qaddafi government, took his oath in front the Libyan General National Congress (GNC). His appointment comes at a critical time for Libyan national security: his first priority will be to round up weapons and galvanize a deeply shaken security apparatus. The new minister will also need to address the security vacuum that has allowed rogue elements to thrive in several parts of the country. Recent press reports speculate that al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is hoping to forge links with Libya's Ansar al-Sharia and other Islamist groups in Libya.

At the end of November, members of Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) met with oil corporations in Istanbul to secure \$50 billion dollars worth of oil contracts. Oil production has returned to pre-revolution levels (1.6 million barrels per day); yet, in the current market, interest in Libyan "sweet" high-quality crude oil is less strong this year, given a ready supply of the sweet crude resulting from US shale oil production and a shrinking market for the sweet variety in Europe.

Tunisia: Tensions between the ruling Ennahda party and the half-million-strong General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) reached a climax in the past few weeks. After a violent episode on November 27th between police and disenchanted youths in the southwestern town of Siliana, strikes broke out in various regions, including Sidi Bouzid—the epicenter of the Tunisian uprising in late 2012. While a nationwide general strike was originally called by the UGTT for December 13th, it was averted on December 12th when a deal was reached with the government (the terms of which remain undisclosed). The strike would have been the third of its kind since the union was established in the 1940s and days shy of the second anniversary of the uprising. The episode sheds light on the troubled Tunisian economy and a growing disillusionment with

the lack of economic opportunities, while revealing the shifting role of the UGTT from protector of workers' rights to a potent political opposition force capable of challenging the government.

Syria: As rebels in Syria continue to score more offensives against the regime, the government has retaliated with more force, most recently by launching Scud missiles from Damascus into northern Syria on December 12th, according to press reports. On December 17th the long-time Syrian Vice President told the press that neither side can win the fight militarily. On the diplomatic front, the United States and other states formally recognized the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people at a December 12th Friends of Syria meeting in Marrakech.

Lebanon: Spillover from Syria reached a climax on December 10th when several days of clashes between Sunni Muslims and Alawites left 19 people dead in the northern city of Tripoli. The second-largest city in Lebanon is a historic site of sectarian conflict and home to a large population of Sunnis who have been actively engaged alongside the Sunni-led opposition in Syria. The incident came days after Syrian warplanes launched a heavy attack on Damascus, where rebel forces tried to make advances on Bashar al-Assad's center of power.

Jordan: At a recent visit to the University of Jordan, King Abdullah II urged youth to participate in the upcoming January 23rd elections and to take a leading role in the country's reform process, a move that reinforces his reaching out to the largest and potentially most vocal segment of the population. Press speculation however seems to suggest that, due to civil unrest over the past four weeks, King Abdullah is considering postponing the elections—or at least making amendments to the already controversial electoral law—if the political climate becomes increasingly unstable. His biggest challenge is the Islamic Action Front—Jordan's "Muslim Brotherhood" and most important opposition group—who made it clear as early as July that they would boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections. According to press reports, King Abdullah has recently been in talks with various nationalist and leftist groups from the opposition with the hope of nurturing new alliances to neutralize the influential position of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Kuwait: Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah swore in a new 16-member cabinet on December 12th. Ten ministers from the last cabinet are re-assuming their roles in government, including Prime Minister Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. There are two women (one more than the previous government) in the cabinet. Press reports indicate that the opposition is unhappy with the result. The opposition also plans to protest the newly elected National Assembly (parliament) in court. A group of lawyers has called on the Constitutional Court to declare the election illegal and dissolve the parliament on the premise that the electoral constituency law issued by the emir in October was unconstitutional.

Palestinians: After an estimated 45 years of exile from Palestinian territories, Hamas political chief Khaled Meshaal visited the Gaza Strip and spoke of a new era of Palestinian independence. The speech took place at a rally celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Hamas and was a tour de force of political theater marked by tough rhetoric and radical political gestures. The day was also characterized by a unique display of Hamas-Fatah solidarity, as flags from both camps were visible among the crowds while Meshaal referred to Palestinian unity in his speech. There has been much press speculation around the issue of a potential Hamas-Fatah reconciliation with various commentators suggesting that the prime objective of Meshaal's visit was to secure a mandate for the rapprochement from the seemingly less-interested Hamas leadership in Gaza. The visit also was another indication of increasing cooperation between Hamas and the Morsi government in Egypt. Meshaal entered Gaza through Egypt's Rafah border crossing (a logistical impossibility under the Mubarak regime).

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan: Following a recent visit by US Secretary of Defense Panetta, President Karzai told the press that he will travel to Washington early in 2013 to discuss the possibility of US forces remaining in Afghanistan after the 2014 NATO International Security Assistance Forces drawdown. A major stumbling block in any continuing US military presence involves the terms of a status of forces agreement. Karzai told the press that while he respects the US insistence that its troops have immunity from Afghan law, he will discuss the issue and others that impinge on Afghan sovereignty during the upcoming visit. Among other developments, the Foundation for Strategic Research, a French think tank, is hosting an

intra-Afghan meeting on the future of Afghanistan this month, where Karzai government, Taliban, Hizb-i-Islami, and other Afghans will be present.

Pakistan: Interior Minister Rehman Malik visited India from December 14–16th where he signed a bilateral visa agreement, which will ease visa formalities for citizens of both countries. It is a significant development, occurring just over four years after the terrorist attack in Mumbai, whose origins have been traced to Pakistan. Of note, Interior Minister Malik’s visit comes approximately one month after the execution of one perpetrator in the Mumbai attack, who survived the attack and had been convicted in India for his role in it. When asked, Malik told the press that Pakistan would arrest Saeed Hafeez, considered the mastermind of the Mumbai attacks and living openly in Pakistan, if India or any other party presented evidence that would hold up in court. Hafeez has been released after previous arrests owing to lack of evidence.

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