Military operations in Eastern Ukraine

Afghanistan’s presidential race teeters on the brink

Political games: Kenya’s short-sighted approach to insecurity
World News in Brief

**Nicaragua**
On 19 and 20 July, two buses carrying political supporters of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front party returning from a political rally were attacked by armed guerrillas. The attack resulted in five deaths and 28 injuries. The perpetrators were a small group of politically-motivated militants. While these attacks represent an increase in the risk of political violence, the impact will be limited by the militant groups’ poor operational capabilities.

**France**
On 20 July, pro-Palestinian protestors attacked Jewish businesses in the Sarcelles district of Paris, breaking the windows of numerous businesses and looting shops. Protesters also damaged cars and threw projectiles at police. These were the most violent attacks among a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in European cities in response to the conflict in Gaza. At one such protest in Berlin, protesters threw rocks at police, leading to the arrest of several demonstrators.

**Ukraine**
On 17 July, Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, an international passenger flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, crashed near the town of Hrabove in eastern Ukraine. The plane is believed to have been shot down by a.surface-to-air-missile mistakenly fired by pro-Russian separatists using equipment widely believed to have been supplied by Russia. The incident drew widespread international condemnation and has resulted in renewed scrutiny of Russia’s alleged role in promoting unrest in the east of Ukraine.

**Malaysia**
On 24 July, the Malaysian government and six Tuareg groups signed a ceasefire agreement as part of ongoing peace talks in Algiers. The talks came after multiple attacks which included infiltrating between Tuareg rebel groups in the desert area between Gao and Kidal which killed over 30 people. Most of the victims of this attack belonged to the MNLA, the main Tuareg separatist group. Although the peace talks are under way, there is an increased risk of attacks in the northern territories on convoys of government forces by splinter factions of separatist rebels aiming to hinder the peace process.

**Tanzania**
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**Libya**
Tripoli is embroiled in a major battle between Misratan and Islamist forces against those from Zintan and their allied brigades. What began as an assault against Tripoli International Airport by rogue Misratan elements has evolved into a far more serious conflict that has drawn in various other militia forces, as well as some towns. The airport and its surrounding area has become a battleground with local residents having fled their homes. Approximately 47 people are thought to have been killed in the violence.

**Palestine**
The Afghan election has been marred by allegations of fraud and corruption. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai was pronounced the winner in preliminary results but this was rejected by his opponent Abdullah Abdullah, who threatened to set up a breakaway government. A US-brokered audit of all 8 million votes cast was disrupted by walkouts on both sides. The process restarted on 24 July, but further disruptions are likely. If the final result is not accepted by the losing candidate, there is a high likelihood that ethnic divisions in the country will be ignited.

**Indonesia**
Joko Widodo, or Jokowi, was declared the winner of Indonesia’s presidential election on 22 July. The announcement followed a two week impasse in which both Jokowi and his rival, Prabowo Subianto, claimed victory. Jokowi won by a 0.5% margin, but Prabowo will dispute the result in the Constitutional Court. Heightened security and restraint urged by both sides ensured that the election passed peacefully. Prabowo is discouraging his supporters from protesting but, in the likely event that his legal challenge is unsuccessful, there will be a heightened risk of unrest.

**Philippines**
The new army chief, Gregorio Pio Catapang, has warned Philippine soldiers to remain “professional and non-partisan” following rumours of a possible coup. President Aquino’s government has been destabilised by a Supreme Court ruling on 1 July that its stimulus fund, the Disbursement Acceleration Programme (DAP), was illegal. Aquino faces impeachment orders by political opponents in relation to the DAP as well as the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signed with the US. The EDCA will allow US troops to deploy to a maximum of five Philippine military facilities.

**Kenya**
On 11 July, unknown assailants killed Mohamed Shahid Butt, a prominent Kenyan businessman who was facing charges for funding the radicalisation of Muslim youth in Mombasa, coastal Kenya. In the past two years, human rights activists have accused the Kenyan government of killing three Muslim clerics who have been publicly linked to extremism. The Kenyan government is yet to be linked to Butt’s death, but his death, coupled with the increased marginalisation of Muslims in Mombasa, will likely lead to violent confrontations between Muslim youths and local security forces.

**Iraq**
The security situation remains extremely fragile, with fighting in recent weeks largely focused on the city of Tikrit. Despite using airstrikes, government security forces have so far failed to recapture the city from militants affiliated with the Islamic State (IS). Recent terrorist incidents include a militant attack on a prison convoy which killed 60 people on 24 July. The day before, IS carried out a suicide bombing in Baghdad which killed over 30 people.

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Military operations in Eastern Ukraine

The downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 prompted an international outcry and has brought Ukraine back to the forefront of the international political agenda. Government forces have made significant advances against pro-Russian rebels in recent weeks. Yet the rising human cost of the conflict threatens to render Kyiv’s gains worthless, writes Ted Cowell. In many respects, the past month has been a successful one for Ukrainian government forces. After wrestling back control of Donetsk airport, a key strategic asset in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine, government forces went on to take back the rebel stronghold of Sloviansk in early July. These military gains have accompanied promising political developments in Kyiv. Though viewed as a setback by some commentators in the West, the resignation last week of Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk – after two parties quit his governing coalition – is likely to provide a boost to the authorities’ offensive in the east. His departure will likely allow for fresh parliamentary elections which will give President Poroshenko’s Solidarity party a chance to turn the popular support it enjoys across central and western Ukraine into parliamentary seats. A faction-ridden parliament in Kyiv has hindered the authorities from taking swift decisions regarding military operations in the east. A new look parliament should put the authorities in a position to react to events more decisively.

These advances should not, however, detract from the considerable task that lies ahead of the Ukrainian government. The fate of MH17 – which, it is becoming increasingly clear, was mistakenly shot down by rebels using weaponry supplied by Russia – demonstrates the scale of the challenge faced by Kyiv. It is now widely accepted almost everywhere outside of Russia itself that the rebels are in receipt of considerable manpower, financial and material support from Ukraine’s neighbour – the Ukrainian government forces have had little success in asserting control over areas of eastern Ukraine that border with Russia, and have only control of around half of the 30 crossings that dot the borders of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The more government troops advance eastwards, the further they stretch their supply lines and the shorter the rebels’ become.

Apart from the military operation, arguably the more difficult task confronting the government in Kyiv will be how it regains legitimacy and support in the east once the rebels are defeated.

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The region’s predominately Russian speaking population is already susceptible to the anti-Kyiv propaganda promulgated by Russian state media channels. Kyiv has not helped its cause by resorting to emotive language in referring to its armed opponents in the east and their supporters as ‘terrorists’. Likewise, Kyiv’s failure to disarm and control those far right groups who played a role in the events of Maidan back in March, such as the Right Sector, has rankled many in the east. The fact that some of these groups may even have been incorporated into the Ukrainian armed forces lays the government open to being labelled aggressive and nationalist. Perhaps most significantly, government forces’ use of non-lethal artillery in cities such as Luhansk – where independent observers from the OSCE have recorded hundreds of civilian deaths – makes the challenge of capturing the population’s ‘hearts and minds’ harder still.

As Ukrainian government forces prepare to encircle Luhansk and Donetsk, Kyiv would do well to focus on stemming the growing sense of anger some Ukrainians feel toward central government. A new phase of combat is looming in the east which will involve more fighting in densely populated urban areas, the inevitable corollary of which will be greater numbers of civilian casualties. How successfully the government limits these casualties will be key to Ukraine’s future unity and political stability. Failure to do so will almost certainly lead to a pyrrhic victory, one in which a legacy of estrangement in the east will create demands for autonomy or federal status in the region, which Kyiv will find difficult to deny.

The first round of Afghanistan’s presidential elections saw a high voter turnout and relatively low levels of violence. The second round, however, was marred by claims of corruption and vote-rigging. A US-brokered agreement, involving the ascension of Hamid Karzai, avoided the establishment of a breakaway government but has been undermined by walkouts on both sides. As international forces look to downsize their presence in the country, Afghanistan can little afford further political uncertainty. Getting the election process right and nominating a president broadly accepted as legitimate will be crucial to the country’s stability, with implications for the wider region and beyond.

The two competing presidential candidates are Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. In the first round, Abdullah and Ghani received 45% and 32% of the vote respectively and, in the second round, 44% and 56%. However, suspicions were raised when the voter turnout increased between the two rounds from 6.6 million to a record 7.9 million. In the second round, Abdullah withdrew from a presidential runoff against Hamid Karzai over allegations of electoral fraud. Abdullh and Ghani have together attempted to reject the result and establish a parallel government.

The candidates come from contrasting backgrounds. Abdullah, Afghan Foreign Affairs Minister from 2001 to 2005, is a medical doctor and former Mujahideen and anti-Taliban fighter. Ghani, by contrast, left Afghanistan in 1977, studying at Columbia University before working as an academic and World Bank economist. He later served as Afghan Finance Minister from 2002 to 2004. His policy-making background may equip Ghani better for diversifying Afghanistan’s economy and reducing its dependence on the drug trade and foreign aid. Both men have said they would like to see a role for the international forces in Afghanistan, with Ghani proposing a possible role for NATO forces to sign a strategic security agreement, providing for 10,000 NATO troops to remain in Afghanistan after 2014.

The candidates’ ethnic alliances have a significant bearing on Afghanistan’s future security. Abdullah is affiliated with the Pashtun ethnic minority, winning an absolute majority at the first round in the country’s ethnically mixed north. Ghani is associated with the Hazara community, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan from which the Taliban derive. There are concerns that, if Abdullah loses, he and his supporters will feel disenfranchised from the political process and reject the result. A loss for Ghani, however, could alienate aspects of the Pakistan state and weaken government influence in the south and east where the Taliban are strongest. Both candidates are allied with powerful Afghan warlords and militias at their disposal. With the drawdown of international forces by the end of 2014, heightened ethnic and regional factionalism would come at precisely the wrong time for Afghanistan.

As international forces withdraw from Afghanistan, regional relationships will become more prominent. In recent years, Pakistan has been accused of harbouring Afghan militants and undermining Afghan security; conversely, the rise of domestic terrorism in Pakistan has prompted Islamabad to levy similar criticisms, accusing Kabul of allowing Pakistani fighters to base themselves on the Afghan side of the disputed border and sponsoring militancy in Pakistan’s tribal regions. Governance of the porous Afghan-Pakistan border is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future, offering a potential safe haven to international terrorist groups and allowing for a destabilising traffic of refugees between the two countries.

On 24 July, the election audit was restarted and, whilst further disruptions seem likely, the indications are that a new president will be appointed by the autumn. Still, the challenges facing Afghanistan are great and, for the next president, balancing ethnic and political interests will be key to a unified and governable Afghanistan.
Political games: Kenya’s short-sighted approach to insecurity

Kenya faces terrorist attacks and persistent ethnic tensions in parts of the country. Yet it remains politically stable, and recent nationwide rallies – often flashpoints for ethnic violence – passed peacefully. Nevertheless, the country’s security is undermined by its political leadership, which remains focused on domestic politics, writes Sharon Cheramboss.

Monday 7 July marked the 24th anniversary of the first Saba Saba rally in 1990, a milestone in Kenyan political history that helped bring an end to the oppressive regime of President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi. This year’s rally – much like many before – was an important bellwether for the state of Kenyan politics at a time of increasing insecurity. President Uhuru Kenyatta’s grip on the security situation, which is badly affected by increased terrorism, is possibly at its lowest since his election, which was seized on by opposition groups at the recent rallies.

Kenyatta’s most prominent security problem remains transnational terrorism by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (Shabaab), an Islamist militant group based in Somalia. The first half of 2014 saw the highest number of attacks in Kenya by Shabaab and associated militant groups since it first began targeting Kenya – after Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) joined the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2011. According to our estimates, the frequency of attacks has doubled for this period compared to 2012 and 2013. There has also been a steady increase in the impact of attacks following Shabaab’s attack on the Westgate shopping centre in 2013. The group’s strategy has shifted towards large-scale terrorist attacks against civilian targets in Nairobi, Mombasa and other Kenyan cities and towns.

In 2012, the UN Monitoring Group on Eritrea and Somalia designated MYC as Shabaab’s recruiting, fundraising and training arm in Kenya. However, recent intelligence reports indicate that MYC is a separate entity from Shabaab, which sometimes claims responsibility for Shabaab-conducted attacks in Kenya in order to elevate its status. Regardless of its organisational structure, it is evident that Shabaab’s influence in Kenya has become more established. The ongoing crack-down on Kenyan Somalis and Muslims by the government (such as the arbitrary arrests of Somalis and the killing of Muslim clerics) will likely foster further Islamic radicalisation in Kenya and result in further attacks by both Shabaab and local militant groups.

Insecurity caused by terrorism has begun to affect Kenya’s economic prospects. In late June this year, the World Bank revised down its growth projections for Kenya to reflect increased insecurity. Tourism, which contributes 12 percent of Kenya’s GDP, has been severely affected by the recent insecurity, as several key markets, such as the UK and US, have issued travel warnings against travel to certain parts of Kenya. In light of the June and July attacks, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office extended its travel warnings against all but essential travel to Lamu and Tana River counties in coastal Kenya. In late July, the US suspended its Peace Corps operations in Kenya and evacuated over 50 volunteers.

Recent domestic political developments in the run-up to the Saba Saba rallies raise further concerns around Kenyatta’s approach to security and the blurring of lines between domestic politics and transnational security threats. Prior to Saba Saba, Raila Odinga, the leader of the Coalition for Democratic Reforms (CORD), organised an aggressive political campaign following his return from a three-month hiatus in the US. Part of his agenda included ‘national dialogue’ with Kenyatta to address rising poverty, tribalism and the allocation of natural resources. Failing to receive an audience with Kenyatta, Odinga announced plans to hold a mass Saba Saba rally, as well as a series of nationwide anti-government rallies, which were attended by CORD supporters mainly from the Luo and Luhyia ethnic communities.

According to his critics, Odinga’s popularity and his anti-government agenda have distracted Kenyatta and shifted his focus back to domestic ethnic politics. On 17 June, with less than a month before the Saba Saba rallies, Kenyatta blamed two attacks in Lamu County, which killed at least 60 people in ethnic Kikuyu settlements in Mpeketoni and Moyale, on the opposition. He made his comments in spite of credible sources, including Shabaab itself, confirming Shabaab’s involvement in the attacks.

In addition, Ole Lenku claimed that the opposition had conducted the attacks with the help of the militant wing of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a predominantly Muslim political group seeking the secession of Mombasa from Kenya. Kenyatta’s and Ole Lenku’s decision to use the attacks in Lamu County for domestic political purposes has raised concerns about relations between the Kikuyu and the Luo following several years of improving ethnic relations. This has further marginalised the Muslim community in coastal Kenya.

Over the past six years, ethnic violence has been increasingly confined to a minority of remote, rural counties such as Wajir in the North East, oil-producing Turkana in the North West, Tana River in the South East and, most recently, Lamu in the South East. The ethnic and tribal tensions in affected counties result from local disputes over food and natural resources and have been worsened by disagreements over the control of natural resources between newly inaugurated county governments. Oil and gas and infrastructure projects, most notably the Lamu Port and South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, have also exacerbated existing tribal and ethnic tensions in some cases.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) Implication of Kenyatta, an ethnic Kikuyu, and his Vice President, William Ruto, an ethnic Kalenjin, in the 2007 post-election violence, acted as a unifying factor and played a significant role in their victory in the 2013 general elections. Their alliance reduced ethnic tensions between their respective communities.

However, the outcomes of the ongoing ICC trials threaten to aggravate the relationship between these groups and result in ethnic violence, particularly in the scenario that Ruto is found guilty and the charges against Kenyatta are dropped.

CORD have raised important political and security issues which need to be addressed by President Kenyatta. Most notably, the government’s failure to develop a coherent counter-terrorism strategy that can stem the increase in terrorist attacks.

Kenyatta has so far given international observers and many Kenyans little confidence, and progress in Kenya is likely to occur in spite of rather than due to his policies. However, despite the recent stoking of ethnic tensions by Kenyatta and Odinga, the Saba Saba rallies were largely peaceful. This is indicative in part of maturing relations between ethnic groups across Kenya. At the same time, CORD have raised important political and security issues which need to be addressed by President Kenyatta. Most notably, the government’s failure to develop a coherent counter-terrorism strategy that can stem the increase in terrorist attacks – and the knock-on effects on the country’s economy. As an accountant attending one of the Saba Saba rallies said: “It’s going to be a hard five years [under Kenyatta].”
About

Led by its Business Intelligence & Investigations division, Salamanca Group leverages its holistic risk management expertise to provide XL Group with a range of information resources and advice to inform their business operations.

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