

MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

DECEMBER 2022

HEADLINES THIS MONTH

Africa

- 3 **Ethiopia:** Cessation of hostilities agreement struck in Tigray state
- 7 **Mali:** Pressures on government increase, anti-government protests likely
- 11 **On Watch** – Eswatini, Ghana, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa

Americas

- 12 **Mexico:** Escalation of violent crime in Guanajuato state to persist
- 15 **Peru:** Corruption allegations against president to sustain political unrest
- 18 **On Watch** – Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago

Asia-Pacific

- 19 **Bangladesh:** Nationwide political, socio-economic rallies to increase in frequency
- 22 **Fiji:** General elections to take place after delays
- 25 **Regional:** Holiday season to see increase in disruption, security measures
- 28 **On Watch** – India, Nepal, Vietnam

Europe and CIS

- 29 **Armenia, Azerbaijan:** Cross-border clashes to continue despite international mediation attempts
- 32 **Europe:** Cost-of-living crisis to drive unrest, transport strikes over winter season
- 36 **On Watch** – Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, UK

Middle East and North Africa

- 37 **Regional:** Turkish air raids to continue in Syria, northern Iraq following Istanbul bombing
- 40 **Tunisia:** Election likely to pass off peacefully; economic issues could trigger protests
- 43 **On Watch** – Iran, Iraq, Sudan



MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

December 2022



The *Monthly Security Forecast* gives managers insight into our assessment of significant events and any likely changes to the risk outlook in the coming month, globally.

It covers key indicators or drivers of deterioration being tracked by our regionally based security specialists and our recommendations on how you can prepare, factoring in any planning constraints we have identified.

Our *Monthly Security Forecast*, like our *Insight Reports*, is part of our broader Premium Workforce Resilience offer. It complements our weekly *Regional Security Forecasts*, available to all subscribers.

Legend	
Indicator & definition	Action required
Low likelihood of substantive change in reporting period (30 days unless specified).	None.
Some likelihood of change; no substantive deterioration.	Requires vigilance.
Significant likelihood of substantive change.	Increased readiness to adapt risk management plans.
Critical change imminent.	Action required to update or implement plans.
Unpredictable high-impact, low-likelihood event.	Be prepared to respond at short notice to account for workforce and/or amend plans.

If you have any questions about the recommendations or assessments in this forecast, please call your nearest Assistance Centre.



ETHIOPIA

- On 2 November, the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) reached a permanent cessation of hostilities agreement (CoHA) to end the two-year conflict.
- Despite this positive step towards enduring peace, there are several challenges that risk undermining the CoHA and prompting a return to hostilities.
- Additionally, across Ethiopia several other security concerns remain that will continue to complicate the security environment.

Situation

The CoHA was agreed after the African Union (AU) led peace talks between the federal government and the TPLF in Pretoria (South Africa) from 25 October. The talks were held following a resurgence in September of intense clashes in northern Ethiopia between the two sides. During the clashes, the federal forces – who were supported by the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) and special and irregular forces from Amhara and Afar states – gained significant advantage over the TPLF. Additionally, the talks came amid sustained international pressure for peace talks and co-ordinated diplomacy involving international actors, including the AU and US, and a worsening humanitarian and economic situation in Ethiopia.

The CoHA came into effect on 3 November and stipulates several provisions, including:

- An immediate and permanent stoppage of fighting and the cessation of overt and covert acts of violence, subversion, or collusion with hostile forces, including ensuring that there are no further provocations or incursions by other forces.
- The full disarmament of the TPLF **by 2 December**, the implementation of a demobilisation and reintegration programme for its fighters and the restoration of the federal military's presence in Tigray.
- The expedited provision of humanitarian aid and the restoration of essential services in Tigray, as well as the facilitated return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).
- The cessation of all defamation campaigns and hostile rhetoric. The restoration of political dialogue between the TPLF and the federal government.
- For the dispute around the administrative status of western Tigray to be resolved according to the Constitution.

Broadly, the agreement has been well received, including by the UN. Within Ethiopia, people have expressed relief at the cessation of fighting, and many appear cautiously optimistic about the durability of the agreement. Within Tigray, the planned resumption of aid and services has been



especially lauded. However, certain provisions of the agreement have been challenged by groups supportive of Amhara and Tigrayan interests, and there are continued questions surrounding Eritrea's position regarding the CoHA. These issues risk challenging the implementation of the agreement.

Implications

Despite apparent broad commitment to the CoHA, there remain several challenges that could undermine its implementation and potentially prompt a resumption of fighting in Tigray.

One such is the disarmament of the TPLF, which some Tigrayan groups are likely to continue to challenge. The CoHA was met with surprise and has been criticised as capitulation by some public Tigrayan figures and the Tigrayan diaspora. Despite these views, the TPLF's central leadership continues to signal its intention to disarm. However, the TPLF has more recently stated the disarmament is contingent on the withdrawal of hostile forces from Tigray. Additionally, in recent weeks there have been unconfirmed local reports of some TPLF fighters planning to stow some weapons and encouraging civilians to remain armed. Such actions risk undermining any trust-building between the TPLF and the federal government, which will be important towards ensuring a lasting CoHA. Additionally, if groups of fighters opposed to the CoHA remain armed, they may re-launch a smaller-scale insurgency against the federal forces or any remnants of Eritrean or Amhara forces in Tigray over the coming months.

Additionally, the TPLF will struggle to meet the disarmament deadline. Indeed, the military leadership on both sides have acknowledged that the deadline is unrealistic. Open channels of communication and reported ongoing constructive engagement between the TPLF and the government's senior military commanders around the disarmament will limit tensions should the disarmament process be prolonged beyond the deadline. However, there have been allegations from the TPLF of ongoing killings and shelling in various locations in Tigray by Amhara and Eritrean forces, and allegations of continued troop mobilisations by their forces despite the CoHA. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential for abuses by federal forces against ethnic-Tigrayans once they re-deploy in Tigray. Continued threats of violence could jeopardise the TPLF's commitment to disarmament if there

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
The TPLF or the federal government publicly accuses the other of contravening the CoHA	This would signify fissures in the relationship between the two sides, raising the probability of further contraventions to the agreement.
The TPLF begins to waiver from disarming	This would potentially signify the group's continued willingness to resume fighting.
The EDF refuses to withdraw from Tigray	This would significantly increase the likelihood of hostilities quickly resuming in Tigray.
The TPLF or Amhara authorities reject the approach or decision to address the territorial dispute	Although both sides appear committed to averting hostilities, related disagreements risk escalating tensions and increasing the likelihood of confrontations by armed groups on either side.



are insufficient guarantees from the federal forces to protect Tigrayan communities and ensure the withdrawal of all other hostile forces.

The withdrawal of Afar, Amhara and Eritrean forces from Tigray will be challenging to implement. In particular, Eritrea, which was not involved in the peace talks, has not yet made any public pronouncements on its position regarding the CoHA. It remains unclear if the EDF, which retains a presence in Tigray, intends to withdraw. It is likely that the EDF will be reluctant to withdraw given its longstanding enmity with the TPLF, repeated previous statements of its desire for a decisive military victory over the TPLF, and without guarantees that its own security interests will be met. Eritrea views the TPLF as a security threat and would likely require assurances from the Ethiopian government of protection from the group, including its full disarmament. The sequencing of these contingencies will be important to upholding the CoHA. Additionally, should the EDF withdraw, it could do so into previously contested territory, sustaining related tensions with the TPLF and driving the risk of related clashes.

Additionally, although the authorities in Amhara have expressed support for the CoHA, there will likely continue to be a diversity of views from Amhara regarding some provisions. Further, the dispute over the status of western Tigray will remain contentious as both sides remain steadfast in their claims over it. The Fano youth militia group denounced the CoHA as marginalising Amhara interests for aiming to resolve the territorial dispute according to the Constitution. The Constitution recognises the contested territory as part of Tigray, which suggests that Amhara authorities – which have controlled the area since the outbreak of the conflict – will likely lose control of the area. The area is fertile, has historical significance to both states and is strategically important to Tigray as it offers a corridor to Sudan for the otherwise enclosed state. Some local commentators have suggested that the Amhara authorities may push for a referendum on the status of the area, which would provoke tensions with the TPLF. Additionally, the TPLF's seeking to locate returning IDPs and refugees in these areas would ignite tensions with Amhara.

The provision of humanitarian aid in Tigray also risks stoking negative sentiments in Afar and Amhara if communities in these states affected by the conflict perceive that they are receiving insufficient aid by comparison. Throughout the conflict, there have been periodic reports of communities in Afar and Amhara feeling side-lined by the focus on the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray, and demanding aid for their communities. Such sentiments risk prompting tensions between communities in border areas and related violence and criminality. Conversely, if insufficient aid is released in Tigray and/or the restoration of services delayed, this would erode the confidence in the CoHA.

While the federal government and the TPFL work to implement the CoHA and improve the security environment in northern Ethiopia, high levels of insecurity will persist in other parts of the country. In western and southern Oromia state, regular clashes between the federal and regional forces with the rebel Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) will persist. An increased number of federal forces personnel are anticipated to deploy to Oromia to fight the group, intensifying clashes. In Amhara, continued allegations of government efforts to disarm Fano will retain related tensions and the risk



of occasional sporadic armed clashes between the federal forces and Fano. Sporadic intermittent communal violence over land and other resources will persist across the country, particularly in areas impacted by the ongoing drought. These issues, alongside continued allegations of government suppression and any negative reactions to the CoHA, will sustain pockets of anti-government sentiment, driving the potential for occasional well-attended protests in urban centres.

Recommendations

We continue to advise that essential travel to Ethiopia may be possible depending on the nature of travel and subject to an individual risk assessment of the current security and medical situations, including entry restrictions and the potential for sudden changes. Continue to defer all travel to Tigray, as well as to Amhara and areas of Afar bordering Tigray amid sustained potential for a resumption of hostilities. Travel to Addis Ababa, including transits, can continue with standard security measures.

Managers should monitor developments related to the CoHA. A breakdown of the CoHA would prompt renewed hostilities. Identify organisation-specific escalation triggers indicating a threat to the federal government or TPLF's commitment to the CoHA. Likely

flashpoints for renewed clashes will likely be confined to Tigray.

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of providers that may require approval from the Ethiopian government to activate.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Ensure workforce continue to employ security protocols and that escalation plans remain up to date and applicable for a variety of scenarios. In-country workforce should continue to have access to accurate, timely updates and clear guidance on actions to take during a security situation. Be mindful of which sources are accessed for updates on developments due to the potential for biased reporting and misinformation. Workforce in HIGH-risk areas should also have the ability to stand fast for a period of up to one week in secure accommodation with access to essential supplies, including food, water, cash, medicine and fuel.



MALI

- Recent criticism of the national transition council (CNT) from several key former allies is indicative of pressure on the government and increases the likelihood of anti-government protests this month.
- Divisions within the CNT regarding the appointment of an acting prime minister, and a recent alleged assassination attempt, indicate an erosion of political stability.
- Further withdrawals of international forces from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) will increase the threat posed by militancy.

Situation

Several recent developments have put pressure on the Malian government and cast doubts as to its long-term stability. These include divisions within influential factions close to the CNT junta, pressure from Islamist factions, and international pressures. Those with operations in Mali should monitor developments in the coming months due to the risks posed by unrest, instability and insurgent groups.

One development burdening transitional President Colonel Assimi Goita is the deterioration in the health of Prime Minister Choguel Maiga. Goita is under pressure to appoint a permanent new prime minister. Choguel Maiga, leader of the Mouvement du 5 juin-Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP), has been incapacitated since August by an unspecified cardiac event. Due to this, he has been replaced by an interim prime minister, Lieutenant Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga, who continues to also serve as the minister of territorial planning and decentralisation. Choguel's M5-RFP faction was instrumental in bringing down the government of former president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK, in office 2013-20) and organised protests that put immense pressure on the IBK government in 2019 and 2020. Choguel's ill health has caused a split within his faction

between those who believe he should resign and those who believe he should stay on. His resignation or permanent replacement by Goita could be interpreted as a betrayal and be met with angry protests in the capital Bamako.

Another government ally which has turned against Goita recently is Yerewolo Debut sur les Remparts. The group has previously led calls for the expulsion of France's military and influence from Mali and for closer ties with Russia. The group's leader, Adama Ben Diarra, also known as 'Ben le Cerveau' (Ben the brain), is a member of the CNT and is an ally of Choguel. On 6 November, the group made a statement that was critical of the government. It alleged that the CNT had raised its budget only to serve itself and its suggestion that a mandatory helmet law to be introduced in **January 2023** was introduced solely to commercially benefit CNT members. The group followed with their first anti-government protest on 12 November. All the group's previous protests had been anti-France and pro-government. If this discontentment with the ruling CNT junta remains, then further anti-government protests are likely.



Another key figure in the M5-RFP movement was imam Mahmoud Dicko. His sermons led to protests which were violently repressed by the IBK government. Following the coups of 2020 and 2021 he was largely silent, until in May he broke his silence to accuse the junta of arrogance. In October, the media reported that Dicko had been meeting representatives of the 'Parties and political groups for a successful transition' opposition coalition. This was followed up in November with a news article authored by Dicko which decried a lack of morals and religion in the nation, implying that Islam should have a greater role in politics. Dicko's formally throwing his sizeable political weight behind the opposition coalition would constitute a major blow to the government. Subsequent sermons and protests could result in large crowds, which could be forcibly dispersed by the authorities.

Concessions made to Islamists in the north of the country could also increase pressure on the government. On 11 November, Houka Houka Ag Alhoussemi, an Islamic judge affiliated with jihadists in the Timbuktu region, posed conditions to the government for the reopening of regional schools. These conditions include strict religious rules at odds with Mali's secular nature. Rather than reject the demands, Alhoussemi was received by the local government authorities. The reception represents a possible shift in policy in the north of the country. In response to the development, 37 civil society organisations on 16 November issued a press release to express their condemnation of it. Further concessions to Islamists may anger secularists in the south and could further divide the government and generate protests.

Internal divisions within the government may also have surfaced during an alleged recent assassination attempt. On 11 November, French media reported that Goita's aide-de-camp was injured in an assassination attempt on 2 November. According to the report, the victim, Captain Souleymane Traore, was shot at the presidential palace in Koulouba neighbourhood, Bamako. He was saved by his bulletproof vest. The government has denied the claims. If true, the attempt could be indicative of internal divisions within the military. Only high-ranking members have access to the presidential palace.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Choguel resigns or is permanently replaced as prime minister	Knowing that it could divide key allies, Goita is unlikely to replace him. However, Choguel may choose to resign owing to health reasons.
Unrest or repression at an anti-government demonstration	Unlikely in the short term, but should anti-government protests gather momentum and threaten the government, repression of them would become likely.
A key member of the government is assassinated	Divisions within the CNT junta could result in a power struggle. If November's reports of an attempted assassination are true, then there could be reprisal attacks in the coming months.
The UN cancels or does not renew the mandate of MINUSMA	MINUSMA's mandate expires on 30 June 2023 . It is unlikely to be cancelled prior to this date. A cancellation could destabilise central and northern areas.



The withdrawal of British and Ivorian forces from MINUSMA is further contributing to the government's isolation internationally. The UK will withdraw around 250 troops, while Cote d'Ivoire will withdraw their 857 troops. The withdrawals follow earlier withdrawals by Germany, Egypt and Sweden, and come amid further allegations of atrocities carried out in Mopti region by government forces supported by Wagner group mercenaries.

Implications

The M5-RFP, Yerewolo Debout sur les Remparts and Mahmoud Dicko all possess the power to mobilise major anti-government protests. These major protests could in turn jeopardise the present transitional government. Anti-government protests could also lead to violent repression of any opposition by the government, posing risks to bystanders. Such protests would likely be communicated in advance and take place on weekend mornings in central areas of Bamako. Triggers for such protests could include Choguel's resignation, Diarra's ejection from the CNT or Dicko's formally joining the political opposition.

That the government is denying a high-profile assassination attempt in Bamako should also be taken as a sign of strife in the government. However, it is not possible to fully verify the facts. Military infighting could pose risks to deployed workforce. Such an event would likely be signified by sustained gunfire at either the Kati military camp or the presidential palace.

Concessions to Islamists in the north could diminish the jihadist threat and provide for a basis on which peace talks could take place. In the south though, making peace with Islamists in the north could seem like a capitulation and could lead to discontent with secular Malians. This in turn could lead to future protests. Such protests would likely be staged by civil society organisations in Bamako and would be unlikely to be disruptive, unless accompanied by parallel Islamist organisation protests.

The withdrawal of further international peacekeeping forces from Mali will curtail the capability of counterterrorism operations in central and northern areas. British and Ivorian troops constituted little more than 1,000 of a total strength of 18,000. Nonetheless, it places an additional burden on Malian forces and frees the hand of jihadist groups operating in the region, raising the risks posed by terrorism. Their withdrawal, and Mali's further co-operation with Russia, will pose difficult questions at the UN Security Council. A review of MINUSMA is due no later than **13 January 2023** and the force's mandate expires on 30 June 2023. A debate was held during the last UN Security Council meeting in June 2021 on MINUSMA about human rights abuses and the mission's future looks far from secure. Mali's hostile attitude towards the force and the international community's rejection of Mali's apparent partnership with Russia could imperil the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate.



Recommendations

In Bamako, people should be prepared for the possibility of sustained anti-government protests or a sudden change in government. Preparations should comprise having information sharing networks in place, having somewhere safe where workforce can shelter in place at short notice in the event of a breakdown in law and order, and having a sufficient stockpile of essential supplies to be able to stand fast in the event of sustained unrest.

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Those with operations in central and northern regions should monitor developments relating to a possible entente with Islamist factions. Should the Malian government engage in peace talks and agree terms with Islamists, managers may need to reassess whether workforce can remain in these areas. Managers should also monitor developments regarding the future of the MINUSMA peacekeeping mission. Should the mission not be renewed, the force's withdrawal could spark renewed fighting in northern regions, posing a critical danger to deployed workforce.



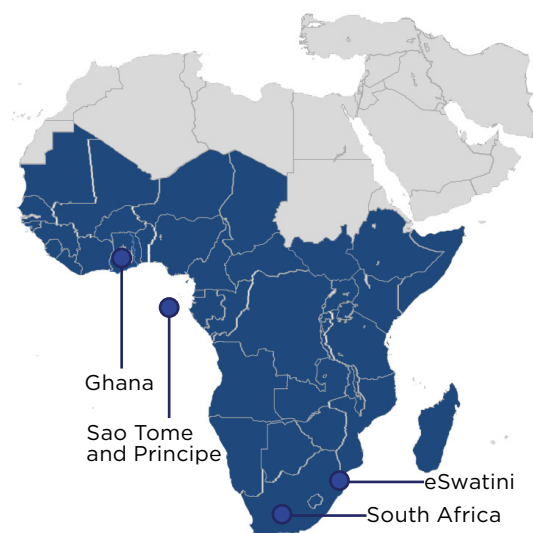
AFRICA: ON WATCH

eSwatini: Anti-monarchy sentiment will remain elevated due to demands for democratic reforms and the state's unwillingness to implement them. This will continue to drive unrest and violence against the monarchy and the security forces' interests and personnel. Political stability will increasingly be threatened as the frequency of such events rises.

Ghana: The authorities are likely to agree on a debt relief package with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to alleviate a protracted economic crisis. However, the terms of the IMF deal and ongoing high inflation will trigger further protests and associated unrest this month.

Sao Tome and Principe: A coup attempt was reported on 25 November. Several suspects have been arrested, including a former military officer involved in another coup attempt in 2009. Tensions will remain high in the coming weeks as the authorities continue to investigate the incident.

South Africa: This month, the ruling African National Congress party will hold a conference to elect senior members of the party, including its leader. Fracturing within the party has, in recent months, fuelled protests and allegations of political sabotage. There is a risk of such incidents increasing ahead of and around the conference. The outcomes may also be contentious.





MEXICO

- The escalation of violence in Guanajuato state that started in November is likely to maintain some of its momentum this month.
- Mass shootings at bars in working-class sectors of Guanajuato's Industrial Belt will continue to be a feature of violent crime in the short term.
- Queretaro state is unlikely to experience major spillovers of violence from Guanajuato in the short term, but continued monitoring is crucial.

Situation

The state of Guanajuato continues to be the site of a turf war between the Santa Rosa de Lima (CSRL) and Jalisco New Generation (CJNG) cartels. We expect this trending violence to keep some of its momentum well into December and likely **2023**.

Most of Guanajuato's confirmed murders, and a growing number of disappearance cases, are concentrated in the state's 'Industrial Belt'. The south-eastern quadrant of the state – including Celaya and the surrounding municipalities of Apaseo el Alto, Apaseo el Grande, Cortazar, and Villagrán – remains the most critical hot spot. This area is traversed by a dense network of fuel pipelines which are tapped by criminal groups seeking to resell the fuel illegally. Besides a complex pipeline network, Guanajuato also houses other key energy infrastructure, including an oil refinery in Salamanca. Additionally, lucrative local drug markets and extortion rackets continue to be a source of strife between rival criminal factions. The high levels of violence have not been replicated in the capital Guanajuato city and San Miguel de Allende, which are major tourist hubs. Outlying areas of these municipalities remain crime-ridden, nonetheless.

While Guanajuato has ranked as one of Mexico's most-violent states for years, recent developments may be opening a new chapter in the turf war between the CJNG and CSRL. On 8 November, Juan Rodolfo 'El Rudy' Yepez – brother of former CSRL leader Jose Antonio 'El Marro' Yepez – was arrested in far-flung Tecate (Baja California state). Armed clashes, burning roadblocks – or so-called 'narcoblockades' – and arson attacks on private businesses were reported in Celaya and neighbouring municipalities in the days that followed. On 10 November, at least nine people were executed at a bar in Apaseo el Grande by CSRL henchmen in an apparent show of force. Traffic along the key Federal Highway 45 was disrupted on multiple occasions by criminals hijacking and setting light to vehicles on the road.

Figure 1: The 'Industrial Belt' of Guanajuato and adjacent cities of interest





The killing of CJNG operative Emmanuel Zermeno on 15 November by the security forces in neighbouring Queretaro state further inflamed the conflict. To shield the territory from any spillover violence, Queretaro state police have maintained a heightened presence in areas bordering Guanajuato. This includes roads leading to its troubled neighbour, especially near the toll on Federal Highway 45.

On 18 November, Secretary of the Interior Adan Augusto Lopez pledged the federal government would deploy 1,000 army troops, including the Special Forces, to contain the violence. Meanwhile, violent incidents, including mass shootings, continue to be reported at an alarming rate.

Implications

Violence has particularly harshly affected Guanajuato's working-class areas, according to Mexican security analyst Eduardo Guerrero. Mass shootings have overwhelmingly taken place at bars and other venues in such areas. These attacks almost always target members of rival crime groups gathering at certain venues. However, they often become indiscriminate on the spot, threatening bystanders in the vicinity with no stakes in organised crime. While the turf war has mostly affected underprivileged areas, violence can occur in more upscale and residential areas. This is especially true amid ongoing escalations related to the arrest or killing of cartel leaders, which can cause widespread disruption in Celaya, Irapuato and other urban centres.

Another challenge is disruption to travel, by criminal escalations in the form of 'narcoblockades'. The authorities are usually quick to clear these roadblocks. However, they not only cause travel disruption, but can also pose serious risk to bystanders as armed criminals hijack vehicles to then burn. Associated shootings can also pose an incidental risk to travellers.

The escalation that started in November is likely to carry on into December, as criminal factions continue to try to settle their scores.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Simultaneous criminal roadblocks on key motorways	The security forces are usually well-placed to clear criminal roadblocks in short order. However, a co-ordinated effort to disrupt the motorway network could pose greater challenges to supply chains and workforce mobility.
Further arrests or killings of cartel figures	The arrest or killing of organised crime figures is a trigger for short, though often, intense bursts of retaliatory violence. The aggressiveness of the response from cartels can vary depending on the neutralised individual's rank within the hierarchy. Containment measures by the authorities at all three levels of government are usually disruptive in the short term in specific locations.
A spillover of cartel violence into Queretaro	For years, Queretaro has been largely spared from the violence afflicting Guanajuato. Reports of armed clashes in Queretaro would signify a major escalation, and probably a turning point in known dynamics of regional cartel violence.



The killing or detention of key cartel figures – even when these occur in far-flung states – by the security forces is bound to feed into this escalation.

It is worth noting that, despite its geographical proximity, Queretaro has thus far been largely spared from the violence in Guanajuato. This is often attributed to the state's security forces closely monitoring the border. However, the existence of pacts between cartels – or between these crime groups and the local authorities – to keep Queretaro a conflict-free zone cannot be completely discarded. In any case, surges of violence in Guanajuato are unlikely to impact Queretaro beyond the traffic disruption caused by armed clashes and narcoblockades on Federal Highway 45. Relatively minor spillovers, mostly in the form of police pursuits into Queretaro, are likely to occur on occasion.

It is nevertheless necessary to continue monitoring the situation in Queretaro, as armed clashes there would signal a turning point in the regional violence dynamics.

Recommendations

Guanajuato is likely to face continued spikes in violent crime, especially in south-eastern urban areas. Managers should ensure that their security protocols are adequate. Business continuity plans should be pursued where possible, empowering workforce to work from home or from a site unlikely to be impacted by criminal unrest. Managers should consider seeking out information-sharing relationships with industry partners to enhance the situational awareness for their in-country workforce. They should also stay apprised of security operations and the detention or killing of local cartel figures, as these can be a trigger of escalation. Should local sources suggest

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** A robust network of logistics and security providers as well as workforce.
- **Services offered:** Ground transportation, meet-and-greet, security site assessments, personal security awareness trainings, evacuations and other assistance.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

confrontations between criminal groups and the security forces are escalating, consider relocating workforce to secure accommodation elsewhere, where feasible.

Workforce should review routes travelled during commutes to work and in other daily activities. Due to the persistent threat of criminal roadblocks and shoot-outs along motorways, enhanced precautions should be taken when undertaking ground travel between urban centres. If undertaking essential journeys through such areas, they should verify the status of routes with local contacts and resources prior to setting out. They should not attempt to drive through an ongoing roadblock, whether enforced by legitimate security forces or armed criminals.



PERU

- President Pedro Castillo faces renewed ouster efforts, including an 11 October indictment over corruption allegations and a 10 November accusation of treason.
- Recent protests for and against Castillo in the capital Lima and previous impeachment attempts have seen unrest.
- Related developments this month are liable to prompt unrest and operational disruption, particularly in Lima.

Situation

The allegations of corruption and treason against Castillo are just the latest in a series of controversies that have threatened to remove the embattled president since he took office in July 2021. The indictment, by the attorney general, follows a series of corruption investigations. A congressional committee alleges Castillo headed a scheme as president to auction government posts and public contracts. The congress has also reformulated a treason accusation based on statements Castillo made over possibly ceding sea access to neighbouring landlocked Bolivia. If passed, the motion would allow the congress to suspend Castillo from the presidency for five years.

Castillo has forcefully denied the allegations, calling the congress' move an attempted coup d'état. Following the indictment in October, he called upon the Organisation of American States (OAS) to activate the 'Inter-American Democratic Charter', which aims to strengthen and uphold democratic institutions in member countries. In response, the OAS on 20 November sent a delegation to 'analyse the situation' in Peru.

There has been an increase in related demonstrations in recent weeks, both in support of and against Castillo. Some have resulted in violence. A well-attended march in the centre of Lima on 5 November calling for Castillo's removal escalated when the police used tear gas to disperse demonstrators. During a rally in Lima in support of Castillo and calling for the closure of the congress on 10 November, scuffles were reported between demonstrators and the police. Rival demonstrations in support of and against Castillo were also reported on 20 November around the arrival of the OAS delegation. The use of tear gas by the security forces was also reported on the day.

Peruvian presidents have been vulnerable in recent years to congressional manoeuvres to oust them. Castillo himself has already survived two impeachment attempts, the latest in April this year. Former president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (in office 2016-18) resigned ahead of the passage of an impeachment motion in 2018. Former president Martin Vizcarra (in office 2018-20) was impeached and removed from office in November 2020. These impeachment efforts have consistently resulted in bouts of public unrest, including roadblocks and clashes between protesters and the police.



Implications

The OAS delegation's visit could potentially serve as a stopgap to prevent Peru from entering yet another political crisis. However, the delegation is unlikely to reach a conclusion that would alter the direction of legal and congressional initiatives related to Castillo's removal. Developments in both cases are likely during December, driving protests and potential breakdowns in political stability.

The potential for a deterioration in the security environment is also linked to Castillo's reaction to such developments, and possible deployments of the security forces in the event of unrest. In recent months, he has taken a more combative tone, arguing that his political opponents seek to overturn the 'will of the people' by attempting to remove or suspend him. On the day following the attorney general's indictment, armed soldiers reportedly surrounded the Government Palace in Lima, in what was seen as a message from the Castillo government. The country's ombudsman has also denounced heavy-handed tactics by the security forces against demonstrators, particularly in demonstrations against Castillo.

Regardless of how the measures against Castillo develop, demonstrations with potential for unrest are likely. In the event the legal case or the congressional motion against Castillo fails or peters out, protests are likely to be carried out by anti-Castillo groups. These are likely to be well attended in Lima, due to Castillo's low favourability levels in the capital. However, they are less likely to escalate under this scenario.

Should the efforts to remove Castillo progress, a surge in frequency of protests can be expected. These are likely to initially remain focused around the city centre of Lima, particularly Plaza San Martin, the congress building and the Government Palace. However, there is a credible risk that they could escalate, particularly if opposing protest campaigns for and against Castillo intensify. Such a situation could lead to heightened tensions and

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Continued disruptive demonstrations ahead of congressional hearings	Protests are likely to continue – both for and against Castillo – as the legal case and congressional motion against him continue. Workforce should avoid demonstrations as a precaution and monitor developments for signs of escalation.
The resolution of the legal case and congressional motion against Castillo; he remains in office	We would expect a temporary burst of protest activity against Castillo, likely met with forcible measures from the security forces such as tear gas. They are unlikely to develop into a protracted and violent protest campaign.
A disruptive and violent protest campaign develops due to controversial developments in cases against Castillo	This scenario is likely in the event of controversial or abrupt developments in the proceedings against Castillo. This could include the removal or suspension of Castillo from office, or the dropping of charges under questionable circumstances. This could develop into a protracted protest campaign from either or both sides with potential for violence, particularly if the government declared a state of emergency or curfew and deployed the security forces to quell demonstrations.



recurring clashes between rival demonstrators. Protesters may also adopt tactics such as putting up blockades along key thoroughfares or routes to the Jorge Chavez International Airport (LIM).

Should the situation escalate and/or Castillo sees his government threatened, he could declare a state of emergency and/or deploy the military to quell protests. Such action would pose considerable disruption and direct risks to operations and travel. While Lima is likely to remain the focal point, related demonstrations are also possible in provincial cities such as Arequipa (Arequipa region), Cusco (Cusco region), Chiclayo (Lambayeque region) and Trujillo (La Libertad region).

Recommendations

Travel to and operations in Peru can continue, though managers and workforce should closely monitor developments for indicators of a potential deterioration in the security environment over the coming month. Managers should also ensure the timely dissemination of security information to workforce and be prepared to adjust itineraries and/or protocols in the event of an escalation.

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** A robust vetted network of security providers.
- **Coverage:** Nationwide.
- **Services offered:** Updates and advice on various travel and security risks. Secure ground transport, meet-and-greet and evacuations, with appropriate notice.
- **Activation time:** Generally shorter in major cities such as Lima but may vary according to provider availability and on-the-ground conditions. Preferred lead time for security or ground transport tasks is 24-48 hours.
- **Secure accommodation:** Available in most major cities; hotels vetted by International SOS in Lima and Cusco.

Workforce should avoid demonstrations – particularly during heightened political tensions – and leave an area at the first sign of unrest in their vicinity.

Managers should also review business continuity plans and maintain flexibility in the event of an escalation to safeguard workforce and operations. They should be prepared to allow workforce to work from home when feasible and/or take additional security precautions over road movements. These could include adjusting schedules to minimise evening movement, as protests are likelier to escalate into violence after dark, particularly if a curfew is implemented. Managers should closely monitor International SOS security alerts and liaise with trusted local contacts to remain abreast of developments and protests in their locations of interest.



AMERICAS: ON WATCH

Ecuador: A state of emergency remains in effect in Esmeraldas, Guayas and Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas provinces **until at least 16 December** due to an increase in violence. A heightened security presence can be expected with the potential for clashes, particularly in outlying areas of Guayaquil (Guayas). Pending negotiations between the government and indigenous organisations are liable to prompt protests.

Haiti: Gangs continue to exert control over large swathes of the capital Port-au-Prince and other urban centres. A recent attack on US embassy vehicles by the 400 Mawozo gang further highlights the threat these groups pose to workforce. Canada is leading debated plans for a foreign military intervention to re-establish order to the western half of Hispaniola island.

Mexico: Border areas of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas states have seen recent escalations of violence that are likely to persist in the short term. This mostly relates to a protracted turf wars between the Gulf (CDG) and the Northeast (CDN) cartels that has prompted new episodes of forced displacement in towns of Tamaulipas bordering the US.

Trinidad & Tobago: Trinidad and Tobago is expected to end the year with an unprecedented murder tally. Much of this can be attributed to ongoing turf wars between gangs over drug markets. Violence has been increasingly spilling over into upscale and residential districts, posing an increased risk to uninvolved bystanders.





BANGLADESH

- A recent increase in demonstrations has mainly been led by political parties and triggered by increased fuel prices, as well as power cuts and goods shortages.
- We expect protests to become even more frequent this month.
- Demonstrations will mainly focus on the capital Dhaka. Key dates during the month are likely to result in further disruption.

Situation

The ruling Awami League (AL) and the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will hold a series of nationwide demonstrations throughout December. These will primarily affect Dhaka and other urban centres.

The BNP has announced weekly divisional rallies **until 10 December** over fuel price rises. A protest campaign led by the party began in Chittagong (Chittagong division) on 12 October. Related rallies have been held in Barisal, Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rangpur and Sylhet divisions. Scuffles between participants and the security forces were reported on several occasions.

Additional demonstrations are planned in Rajshahi division on **3 December**, with the campaign culminating in Dhaka on 10 December. Further gatherings are expected to be announced during the latter event. Separately, the AL is

planning to hold rallies across Dhaka on 10 December, including in Savar, one of the city's key entrance points. These events are intended as a show of strength in response to the BNP campaign.

Opposition parties such as the BNP, Left Democratic Alliance and the newly formed Ganatantra Mancha have targeted the AL over fuel price rises and nationwide power outages. This is part of their ongoing campaign ahead of the **December 2023** general election. Meanwhile, the AL will hold its triennial national council on **24 December** in a bid to kickstart its election campaign.

In addition to political rallies, key dates in December are likely to result in disruption, particularly in Dhaka. The Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the AL, will hold its 30th national conference on **8-9 December**. Thereafter, Victory Day (Bijoy Dibosh), marking the end of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, will be celebrated on **16 December**. Demonstrations and rallies are likely to be held around National Assembly (parliament) sessions during the month.

Implications

A heightened security force presence can be expected in Dhaka and other urban centres for all political gatherings. The risk of unrest will significantly increase if activists of rival political groups hold rallies in close proximity. In such cases, the police are likely to refuse permission for such



events to proceed and may also pre-emptively impose prohibitory orders in such locations. Disruptive or unruly rallies will prompt the police to use tough measures, including baton charges, water cannon and tear gas, to disperse crowds.

There will be an increase in the frequency of demonstrations in Dhaka in the coming weeks. This includes socio-economic protests by civil society groups, as well as rallies by political parties. The latter are often organised in response to parliamentary developments. The National Press Club, the vicinity of Central Shaheed Minar, Shahbagh Square, the Raju Memorial Sculpture and the Bangladesh Secretariat building remain the main venues for demonstrations in the capital.

An increased police presence will be in place around the parliament building in Dhaka to prevent protesters from marching there. Any attempt to do so will prompt their forcible dispersal. Such gatherings and associated security measures will also cause disruption on nearby routes such as Sangsad Avenue, Lake Road and Mirpur Road.

Elsewhere, demonstrations by opposition political parties and other groups may focus on divisional headquarters and other major urban centres to maximise visibility. Potential venues include government buildings, party offices, key intersections and public monuments. Such gatherings will be well attended, causing disruption on nearby routes. Any attempts to break up demonstrations, and resultant unrest, will pose incidental risks to bystanders. Disruption associated with heightened security measures around key dates such as Victory Day will exacerbate traffic congestion in urban centres, especially Dhaka.

Recommendations

Managers should liaise with local contacts and monitor our alerts for information on any planned protests. Workforce should avoid all demonstrations and reconfirm the status of routes if travelling through an affected area. It is also advisable to avoid prominent landmarks and key government buildings on days when protests are planned.

Managers should review their business continuity plans and consider allowing their workforce to work from home, if feasible, on days when major protests are planned. They should also monitor International SOS alerts and disseminate information on planned rallies in a timely manner.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Protests continue at their current level	Such demonstrations will pass off largely peacefully, though associated localised disruption can be expected.
An increase in the frequency and size of demonstrations	This will result in significant disruption, particularly if held in central areas. The police will forcibly disperse any unauthorised gatherings. However, any associated violence would be quickly contained.
Protests become increasingly unruly in major urban centres, including Dhaka	The authorities are likely to impose restrictive measures, including a ban on gatherings. Any attempt to hold protests will prompt a strong police response. This would pose incidental risk to bystanders and disrupt travel locally.



MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

Asia-Pacific



How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of logistics and security providers.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Workforce should anticipate an increased police presence around demonstrations and ensure that they are carrying relevant identification documents to ease passage through any checkpoints. They should also know what to do in case of any escalation and comply with all official directives and company protocols. Communication plans and lines of escalation should be clear and tested.



FIJI

- The general election is scheduled for **14 December** after months of delays in setting an official date. All 55 members of parliament will be elected.
- Localised protests and associated unrest may occur in the lead-up to the vote and after the results are announced.
- A heightened security force presence at key locations, movement restrictions and communications blocks should be anticipated nearer to election day.

Situation

All 55 parliamentary seats will be appointed following the general election. Campaigning and nominations for various candidates started as early as 1 November. Nine parties filed their candidate nominations on 14 November.

The major parties contesting the election are the incumbent FijiFirst, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), National Federation Party (NFP) and the People's Alliance (PA).

Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama initially came to power following the 2006 coup. His FijiFirst party won control of parliament in the 2014 election and retained control by a slim margin in 2018, holding 27 of the current 51 seats in parliament. The 2022 election will add four more seats, making a total of 55 members of parliament.

Implications

The period immediately after the election is likely to be characterised by uncertainty as no party is favoured to win a clear majority. Parties will likely negotiate the formation of

a majority coalition. Precedent suggests that a military coup could take place if there is a sustained delay in government formation. Additionally, the constitution grants rights to the military to intervene if the wellbeing of Fiji or its nationals is endangered.

Even if prominent parties fail to gain a majority, it is unlikely that minor parties will form a government. Parties are required to win at least 5% of the vote to get a seat in parliament. Almost 700,000 voters are registered for the upcoming election. The Elections Office reported a turnout of 71.9% of the 637,000 registered voters in the 2018 election, when FijiFirst stayed in power.

The PA and NFP plan to run as a coalition. Former prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka's (in office 1992-99) departure from SODELPA and his subsequent formation of the PA, makes it likely that votes will be split between these parties. SODELPA's leadership has thus far shown an unwillingness to form a coalition on ideological grounds but has stated it will reevaluate should no party gain a majority. FijiFirst's decreasing popularity, fractures in the opposition parties and smaller parties' inability to meet the vote threshold mean a hung parliament is possible.



An increase in rallies is likely during the campaign period. There are notable legal considerations when organising assemblies – some may require a police permit at least seven days in advance. The police can also shut down any gatherings on the grounds of public safety and morality. Should protests occur, they are liable to be forcibly dispersed. The police are aligned with the current leading parties and may potentially deny permits to or shut down assemblies by rivals.

Tensions between parties and their supporters are likely to rise leading up to the election date. Opposition parties have accused the government of intimidating and harassing candidates following minor charges levied against NFP leader Biman Prasad on 26 October. Further charges of corruption or slander against opposition candidates are likely. Heightened security can be expected across the country, especially near polling stations, sensitive government buildings and party offices.

Recommendations

Companies should review their communication plans and ensure that time-critical security information can be disseminated to in-country workforce, no matter where they are in the country. Managers should closely monitor the situation using reliable sources.

Workforce should be fully briefed on the latest developments and associated risks. Local national workforce should exercise heightened caution if voting, due to the risk of disruption at polling stations.

Political groups may commandeer minibuses and other forms of transport to move their supporters. Managers should ensure they have identified alternative transport options. If your workforce is travelling, book accommodation in the vicinity of the location they are visiting, where feasible. Route selection should also avoid rally venues. Managers should advise people to avoid all political gatherings to

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
The arrest or prosecution of opposition members	The judiciary would be liable to charge opposition members pre- and post-election. Arrests, imprisonment or forced withdrawal from the election could lead to significant protests in opposition strongholds.
An increase in unauthorised protests	The authorities can use forcible measures to prevent protests. Sustained demonstrations would be likely only if the security force's powers are restricted.
The election results in a hung parliament or calls for new election	This could result in a significant delay for government formation. The potential for social unrest or demonstrations would increase over time. Party strongholds would be liable to stage demonstrations.
Allegations are made of electoral fraud following the announcement of results or the refusal of all parties to accept the results	Widespread demonstrations could occur nationwide or in the losing party's strongholds. There would be a heightened risk of unrest. This could warrant the use of constitutional military intervention. Workforce should be prepared to stand-fast.



How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of medical and security providers.
- **Services offered:** Situational updates as well as assessment and advice on security risks. We also work with providers on services from transportation to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes, in the capital Suva and Nadi (Ba province).

minimise disruption to their plans. Refrain from engaging in public discussions on sensitive topics, including politics. Avoiding the perception of being linked to any political party significantly reduces exposure to violence.

Management should review business continuity plans, such as for if protests, election-related unrest or military intervention compromises workforce access to, or exit from, corporate facilities, including offices and residences. Plans should include the introduction of alternative work practices and stand-fast periods. As a precaution, managers should also compile and maintain an updated record of in-country workforce's locations and contact details and, where relevant, their dependants. Workforce should have enough essential supplies to stand-fast for at least 72 hours.



REGIONAL

- Anticipate increased levels of petty crime, road traffic accidents and travel disruption in the upcoming holiday season.
- Bookings for accommodation and transport should be made in advance.
- Heightened security at transport hubs, shopping malls, tourist areas, religious sites and other crowded places is expected.

Situation

Amid continually de-escalating COVID-19-related restrictions, an increasing number of people are undertaking both business and leisure travel. Increased security and travel disruption during the Christmas and New Year holiday period is expected **until at least 2 January** in several countries.

Risks associated with petty and opportunistic crime are usually more pronounced when shopping in crowded areas and during holiday-associated festivities. Foreign nationals are likely to be targeted due to perceived wealth. Reports also indicate an increase in cybercrime across countries in the Asia-Pacific region during this period. This includes the targeting of ATM cards, both online and offline, as well as a spike in phishing attacks, especially in countries such as **Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines**.

The risk of terrorism is heightened as crowded hubs and markets at a sensitive time make for high-profile targets and more impactful attacks. Security is likely to be enhanced at marketplaces and other key locations such as important landmarks, religious places and festive events, to mitigate risks from crime, terrorism and road accidents.

Additionally, the demand for accommodation and transport usually peaks, resulting in booking challenges as well as associated travel disruption. This is more pronounced prior to or on key dates like Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Traffic jams are anticipated on major thoroughfares.

The Philippine National Police and other authorities anticipate heavy traveller volume as well as the usual increase in petty and opportunistic crime, especially in major urban centres like Metro Manila. This is due to the traditional influx of overseas Filipinos returning home as well as domestic travellers going to their home provinces or popular tourist destinations. They will deploy heavily in key locations nationwide like transport hubs and malls alongside other security forces. This is despite a decrease in the number of recorded crimes by 2.6% this year compared with 2021.

Due to well-attended religious observances, like the 'Simbang Gabi' (also known as the 'Misa de Gallo') which runs from **16 to 24 December**, the security forces will also be deployed around churches. Increased police patrols can be expected, with additional forces being deployed to secure events like the '*Pahalipay sa Paska*' event in Davao City (Davao region), which involves the president giving gifts to local nationals. Such well-attended events can be chaotic and should be avoided, if possible, as a general precaution.



In some countries, like Indonesia, the Philippines and **Thailand**, extant credible militant activity is expected to prompt the authorities to enhance counter-terrorism measures, especially at transport hubs, commercial areas and religious sites. The authorities in other countries, including **Bangladesh**, **India** and Malaysia, will likewise take precautions against small-scale attacks on 'soft' targets. This is due to precedent for terrorist threats and attacks over the Christmas and New Year holidays.

The holiday period is also hugely significant in the predominantly Christian Pacific Island nations. In **Papua New Guinea**, the festive period exacerbates the potential for clashes and opportunistic crime, such as carjackings and pickpocketing. Celebratory events in urban centres, like the capital Port Moresby and Lae (Morobe province), are hot spots for such incidents. In **Australia**, the rate of crime, especially housebreaking and pickpocketing, increased by 40% in December 2021 in Sydney (New South Wales state) compared with the average for the rest of the year. Additionally, travellers in Papua New Guinea should liaise with local contacts regarding locations of celebratory events and well-attended congregations due to the high risk of opportunistic crime and the potential for clashes to occur. In 2019, the popular celebratory location Jack Pidik Park (Port Moresby) was closed following frequent reports of crime and unrest.

Road traffic accidents tend to become more frequent during the holiday period due to high vehicular volume as well as the increased likelihood of drunk driving and speeding. Based on a World Health Organization report, Thailand has the highest number of casualties from road traffic accidents in Asia, ranking ninth worldwide; 78% of the accidents are caused by speeding, especially in the capital Bangkok. During the long holiday period of New Year 2021-22, around 2,220 road traffic accidents occurred, causing 263 deaths and 2,198 injuries.

Implications

Business travellers and foreign nationals must plan accordingly to stay on schedule amid traffic congestion and enhanced security at transport hubs like airports. They will also face challenges with hotel and transport bookings due to high demand.

Heightened security presence can be expected during the holiday period across key public and festive locations, and transport hubs. Across countries, the authorities are likely to routinely issue terror alerts ahead of key dates; such warnings should be taken seriously until they are disproved. They also periodically arrest suspected militants and disrupt terror plots.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Stampedes at a festive gathering	Excessive jostling due to large crowds remains a risk; there have been incidents of fatal stampedes. Be alert to such signs and aware of exit gates/routes.
An increase in petty or opportunistic crime	Maintain heightened situational awareness. Avoid ostentatious displays of wealth.
Fatal road traffic accidents	Avoid self-driving, wherever possible.
A terrorist attack targeting a festive gathering or crowded hub	Terrorist attacks are difficult to predict. Precautions can be exercised to mitigate the risk of exposure to such incidents.



Recommendations

Prior to travel, business travellers and foreign nationals should anticipate heavy demand for accommodation, flights, car hire and taxis, and book ahead of time to minimise inconvenience. Reconfirm existing bookings because demand for domestic and international travel options will increase. Additionally, holiday-specific COVID-19-related guidelines may be announced. Government offices, banks and other businesses may also be closed, resulting in business

disruption. Plan journeys accounting for the potential for delays and maintain flexible itineraries. Download the International SOS Assistance App for ease of access to relevant information.

A heightened security presence in crowded areas is expected, so follow all official directives. There is a risk of militant attacks against perceived soft targets during festivities, which is elevated in certain locations. Business travellers and foreign nationals are encouraged to adopt an appropriate level of vigilance. Minimise time spent at potential criminal and terrorist targets, like malls, religious buildings and entertainment venues popular with Westerners.

Take precautions against petty and opportunistic crime and maintain a low profile. Large numbers of people will gather in public spaces and carry more money while buying goods for celebrations, heightening the risk of petty crime. Movement should be done on well-lit and well-travelled routes.

Business travellers and foreign nationals should familiarise themselves with the nature of observance and cultural sensitivities as these may differ from country to country.

How we can help

- **Presence in-region:** We maintain a presence through security, health, and logistics experts at our Assistance Centres within the region, which operates an accredited network of providers thereat. We have two fully resourced Regional Security Centres based in **Singapore** and Sydney (**Australia**).
- **Services offered:** Situation updates, as well as comprehensive itinerary- and profile-specific risk assessments and advice on security risks throughout the region.
- **Secure Accommodation:** We provide information and assessments, available upon request.
- **Secure transport:** We engage security providers offering a range of services, such as secure transport and executive protection in key urban centres.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours, depending on the location and resource availability at the time of request.
- **Emergency response:** In the event of a marked degradation in the security environment, International SOS can support on a best-effort basis. Our capabilities will be shaped by the operational environment at the time of request.



ASIA-PACIFIC: ON WATCH

India: The parliament's winter session will take place on **7-29 December** in the capital New Delhi. These sessions are flashpoints for opposition parties and other groups to highlight grievances and demands to the government. Expect an increased police presence around the parliament building and major demonstrations to be held elsewhere in the city.

Nepal: Provincial and federal election results are due to be announced **on 8 December**. Instability associated with a 'hung parliament' is likely in the coming weeks as no single party is likely to secure the required majority to form a government. Protests and clashes between rival factions amid shifting alliances are liable to cause localised disruption, posing incidental risk to bystanders.

Vietnam: Anticipate protests and related disruption amid fuel shortages in urban centres like Ho Chi Minh City and the capital Hanoi. The shortages are being linked to the regulation of oil prices and hoarding by distributors. While the authorities have put in place measures to ease the shortages, the situation is unlikely to stabilise in the coming weeks.





ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN

- Two years after a ceasefire ended large-scale hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a more lasting peace settlement remains elusive.
- The EU, Russia and the US are pursuing separate mediation efforts, leading to a flurry of direct talks with little progress.
- Russia, with peacekeeping troops on the ground, will remain the primary mediator. However, facilitation attempts by the EU and the US will continue in the coming weeks.

Situation

Two years after a ceasefire ended large-scale hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, there is no sign of a more lasting peace agreement. Despite Azerbaijani statements that such a deal should be signed by the end of **2023**, and several concurrent mediation efforts, little progress has been made on key contentious issues. In recent months, there has been increasing competition from international actors, such as the EU, the US and Russia, to lead negotiations between the two countries. However, long-running tensions and the consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan have taken on an outsize importance on the global geopolitical stage.

Russia emerged as the primary mediator between the parties at the end of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in late 2020. It negotiated the ceasefire that halted hostilities and deployed almost 2,000 peacekeeping troops on the ground. Since the beginning of 2022, however, the US and EU have taken on more prominent mediation roles. Both US secretary of state Anthony Blinken and the European Council's president Charles Michel have hosted several rounds of talks between the two governments. The conflict in Ukraine

has fuelled perceptions in the Caucasus region that Russia's primary focus lies elsewhere. This would open opportunities for the EU and US to potentially gain influence in Russia's traditional realm of authority.

Russia's credibility as mediator has been weakened somewhat for Armenia following an outbreak of clashes in September. Unlike earlier skirmishes, these were not centred around Nagorno-Karabakh but involved a military operation by Azerbaijan in Armenian territory. From Armenia's perspective, the presence of Russian peacekeepers has failed to prevent outbreaks of clashes over the last six months. These have resulted in significant casualties and territorial losses. However, Russia would likely argue its personnel on the ground better facilitated an end to periodic hostilities.

Russian officials have criticised diplomatic efforts by the EU and the US in the south Caucasus. Their intervention has been characterised as a cynical effort to 'squeeze Russia out', rather than provide a 'balanced' solution. Regardless of the intent, the high level of international interest presents for Armenia and Azerbaijan an opportunity to advance their respective agendas. Nonetheless, both parties will ultimately need to choose one avenue of negotiations to agree on a peace deal.



Implications

The approach of the EU and the US to mediation presents a very different interpretation and solution from Russia's approach. This was laid out in the 2020 ceasefire agreement and in subsequent public statements by Russian president Vladimir Putin. As such, the question of who becomes the main arbitrator also determines the direction further talks and a potential peace agreement will take.

Peace deals proposed by the US and the EU require Armenia to recognise Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. The region is internationally recognised as such but has a majority ethnic Armenian population. It is culturally important to many in Armenia and official recognition of it as part of Azerbaijan is politically sensitive. In contrast, Russia's version of a peace deal reportedly calls for the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh to remain unresolved, recognising it as a special case. This is a more attractive option for Armenia. While it is less appealing to Azerbaijan, it could feasibly accept an ambiguous status if its other demands are met.

There are, however, some aspects of Russia's peace plan that may not satisfy Armenia. A contentious point is the interpretation of a clause in the 2020 ceasefire that Armenia would guarantee the security of transport links between Azerbaijan and its exclave, Nakhchivan. Azerbaijan envisages this as a corridor along the Armenian-Iran border, likely secured by Russian troops. On the other hand, Armenia is concerned about the potential interruption of cross border trade with Iran this could cause, as well as the expansion of Russian troops' responsibility.

Azerbaijan's priorities include securing Nagorno-Karabakh and other claimed territories as undisputed Azerbaijani territory. Guaranteeing more transport and communication links between

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Further cross-border clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani troops occur	While sporadic outbreaks of clashes are likely in the coming weeks, these do not indicate a broader deterioration in the security environment.
Azerbaijani troops take additional territory in Nagorno-Karabakh	Azerbaijani troops may launch military operations to take strategic locations or settlements mandated in the ceasefire agreement. While such action would increase the potential for a military escalation, the presence of peacekeepers and Azerbaijan's military superiority means a large-scale direct conflict remains unlikely.
Confrontations between Russian peacekeepers and troops are reported in Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding regions	All sides will seek to avoid direct confrontations with Russian peacekeepers to avoid unnecessary escalations.
Azerbaijani troops launch military operations in Armenian territory	Azerbaijan may launch further operations within Armenian territory. Baku will characterise any such incidents as being provoked by Armenia, but they will also serve as a reminder of Azerbaijan's military superiority as negotiations continue.



Azerbaijan and areas formerly held by Armenia, and opening additional trade and transport routes between Nakhchivan and mainland Azerbaijan, are also among its key demands. Armenia's government remains concerned about how a formal recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory would be received with its electorate. However, it seems to be resigned to the fact that such a move may be inevitable. The country has switched emphasis in recent months to securing the rights of Armenians living in Azerbaijani territory. As Azerbaijan pushes for a transport corridor with Nakhchivan, preventing an interruption of its cross-border trade with Iran is also a priority for Armenia.

The two countries will likely evaluate all options in the coming months as various mediation efforts offer different solutions. This presents a credible risk of a doubling or tripling of efforts that would ultimately reach no resolution. In September, Russia, shortly followed by the US, hosted peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Neither meeting made discernible progress.

The EU and the US may be taking a more active mediating role in the future. However, the presence of Russia's troops on the ground makes it the primary negotiator and ultimate arbitrator. Despite the conflict in Ukraine, this makes it more likely that Moscow will remain the primary negotiator and ultimate arbitrator. Its efforts may be supported by simultaneous negotiations from the EU, though given current geopolitical realities there is no prospect of Russia and the EU co-operating. While the specifics of the plans offered may differ, all international players have the same ultimate regional priority – avoiding another outbreak of direct hostilities. As such, continued international engagement will help sustain a broader peace process. However, periodic outbreaks of localised hostilities along the shared border and in Nagorno-Karabakh should still be expected as international efforts will not serve as enough of a deterrent to prevent such incidents.

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** Fully resourced Assistance Centres in Moscow (Russia) and Dubai (United Arab Emirates).
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to evacuation assistance.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Recommendations

All travel to Nagorno-Karabakh, its administrative boundaries and Armenia-Azerbaijan border areas should be avoided. Workforce should exercise caution when posting online and discussing any domestic political issues or the conflict in Ukraine. Managers should ensure that escalation plans are updated and rapidly implementable due to the current heightened tensions and persistent skirmishes.



EUROPE

- High energy and food prices will drive unrest across Europe during the winter season (**December to February 2023**).
- High rates of inflation and stagnant wage growth will continue to fuel strikes and public discontent in the near term.
- Transport will be disrupted by strikes this month.

Situation

The current cost-of-living crisis across Europe has sparked a wave of strikes and associated protests. Although there will be a dip in protests around the Christmas and New Year holidays, strikes and protests will increase across the rest of December.

Energy prices have risen an average of 42% across the eurozone compared with November 2021. According to the latest estimates by the European Commission, inflation rates were above 10% in more than half of eurozone countries in October. In **Hungary**, inflation is at 21%, while **Estonia**, **Latvia** and **Lithuania** are all around 22%. While governments have attempted to cap gas prices and offer relief packages to their populations, inflation rates remain high. Economists have warned of a continent-wide recession, which is likely to fuel further discontent. In the **UK**, the Bank of England has predicted a two-year recession.

In Hungary, teachers have been striking to demand higher wages. In early 2022, Prime Minister Viktor Orban made it almost impossible for public education works to engage in industrial action, such as protests, citing COVID-19 concerns. There have been various reports of teachers being fired for participating in industrial actions. This has sparked further unrest, including associated protests in the capital Budapest that attracted more than 80,000 participants.

The transport industry remains one of the main sectors impacted by strikes. In the UK, members of the RMT rail union have carried out several days of strikes. On 26 November, the train drivers' union held a walkout, disrupting rail services across the country. Such strikes will likely continue as salary negotiations remain unresolved. Civil servants in the UK, including Border Force and Home Office officials, have also threatened to strike from **mid-December**.

While the inflation rate in **France** currently stands at 7%, one of the lowest in Europe, discontent has also been reported there. The CGT national trade union organised strikes in October and November to demand wage increases. On 10 November, metro workers in the capital Paris went on strike and held protests, disrupting transport services across the city.

In the aviation sector, many workers have gone on strike in recent months. On 9 November, 40% of flights from Brussels Airport (BRU, **Belgium**) were cancelled due to a strike. On 18 November, aviation workers at London's Heathrow Airport (LHR, UK) carried out a 72-hour walkout. In France, unions have called for an Air France workers' strike from **22 December to 2 January 2023**,



impacting travel during the holiday period. In **Spain**, Ryanair cabin crew workers are planning multiple strikes **until 7 January 2023**. However, Ryanair has stated the strikes will not cause much disruption.

In **Greece**, members of the GSEE umbrella trade union took part in a nationwide strike on 9 November, the second such strike since September. Related well-attended protests in the capital Athens and Thessaloniki resulted in clashes between participants and the police.

Implications

The rate of inflation across Europe is likely to remain high during the winter months as energy consumption increases amid shortages. Food and energy costs are likely to remain high, too, placing economic pressures on both households and governments. This is likely to be compounded by household economic pressures associated with the Christmas holiday. An increase in the frequency and intensity of strikes and associated protests can be expected if there are further increases in inflation and related stressors, such as increases in interest rates. This is especially likely **after 1 January 2023**, following the conclusion of the holiday period.

High inflation is unlikely to trigger similar disruption in the Baltic countries. Despite high inflation, industrial action has been minimal compared with lower-inflation countries such as France. This may be partially explained by a decline in inflation rates, a fast recovery from COVID-19 and rising salaries.

Disruption is also likely to be low in countries that produce hydrocarbons, such as **Norway**, where a low inflation rate and minimal reliance on fossil fuels for electricity have insulated the country against social unrest.

In Hungary, further strikes are possible in December, especially if inflation rates continue to rise. The government has claimed it will increase teachers' salaries to 80% of the average graduate salary, provided it receives EU funding. However, if this does not happen, strikes and associated protests will persist.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Further increases to inflation rates	While the International Monetary Fund has estimated that inflation rates will stagnate in 2023 , further increases to inflation rates are likely in the short term. This will trigger further discontent and strikes, especially during the holiday period.
Increases to taxes and/or interest rates	The European Central Bank increased interest rates in November. Further increases to taxes and/or interest rates are likely as governments attempt to combat inflation. Consequently, there will be a decrease in household incomes, triggering strikes.
Negotiations between employers and unions fail	It is unlikely that employers will increase pay at the same rate as inflation. If employers do not meet the demands of unions, further strikes are likely.
Increased instances of clashes between protesters and security force personnel	The likelihood of clashes will increase as governments are unable to solve the crisis. However, widespread violence is unlikely.



Transport strikes will continue across Europe, as disputes fail to be resolved. In the UK, the RMT announced on 16 November that 92% of the union is in favour of further strikes. A London Underground ('tube') strike in November led to all tube services being cancelled for 24 hours. Such disruption is indicative of the situation across Europe, where overcrowded buses, road congestion and increased demand for taxis can be expected during similar strikes. Travel disruption during the holiday period will be exacerbated in the event of transport strikes.

Further aviation strikes will cause flight delays and cancellations. During such strikes, check-in and security check queues will likely be longer than normal. If the Air France workers' strike goes ahead, flights via France will be disrupted over the holiday period.

In the UK, a civil servants' strike, expected to take place for a month from mid-December, has been planned to cause maximum disruption of public services. This includes delays at passport and border checks, including during the holiday period.

Strike-related protests are most likely to take place in major urban centres. While protests are unlikely to have major security implications, clashes between security force personnel and demonstrators are possible, posing incidental risk to bystanders. Protests are also likely to disrupt traffic in city centres.

Recommendations

Managers should closely monitor developments related to strikes, related protests and any associated travel disruption.

In Hungary, monitor developments over wages for teachers. The EU has announced it will allocate billions of euros to Hungary. If the government still refuses to provide pay increases to teachers after receiving these funds, strikes and associated protests will likely increase.

During aviation strikes, contact the relevant airline or the airport directly for information on flight schedules. Monitor developments around the Air France workers' strike, as it may be called off. In the event of flight cancellations, your travel agent will be able to assist with alternative arrangements. Before booking any flights, check for related strikes.

During public transport strikes, expect an increased demand for alternative modes of transport and allow additional time to complete journeys. Managers should enact business resilience measures to minimise business disruption, including pre-booking taxi services, renewing passports or driving licenses ahead of when they are needed or hiring coaches for group travel. If able to do so, workforce should work from home during transport strikes to help minimise exposure to disruption.



MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

Europe and CIS



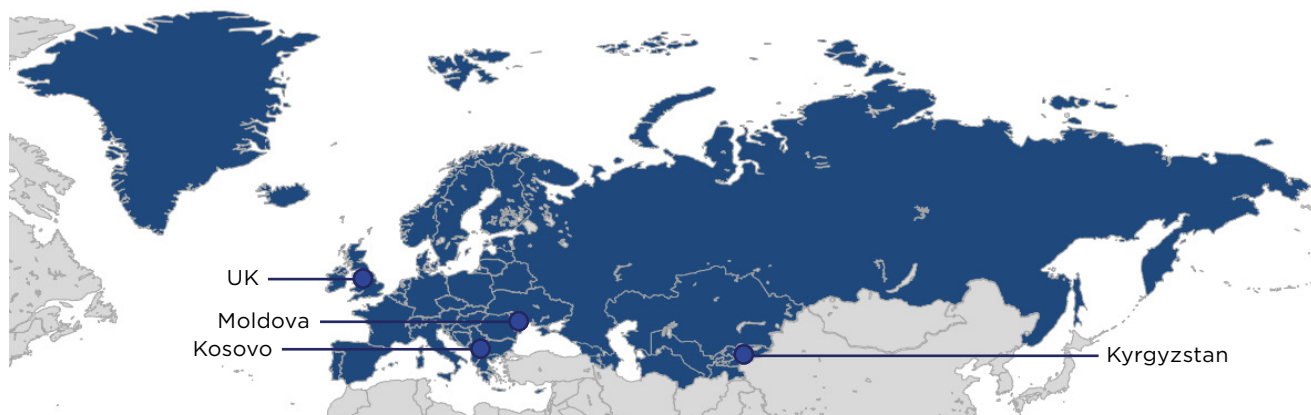
How we can help

- **Presence in-region:** An accredited network of logistics and security providers.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** Up to 24-48 hours to activate, depending on location and availability of resources at the time of request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes

During protests, workforce travelling near or around affected sites should reconfirm the status of routes before setting out and allow additional time for journeys. Exercise caution if in the vicinity of a protest and leave an area at the first sign of unrest, or if a crowd is forming.



EUROPE AND CIS: ON WATCH



Kosovo: People with registration plates issued in Serbia have been ordered to obtain Kosovo-registered plates. Those who refuse will face a fine, which has fuelled social unrest. The leaders of Kosovo and Serbia have failed to reach an agreement on the issue. Tensions will remain high this month and further protests can be expected.

Kyrgyzstan: Parliament ratified a fresh border agreement with Uzbekistan. The development prompted criticism from activists and border communities. The deal contains several land swaps, including of a water reservoir. Local opposition to the deal has raised the prospect of fresh border clashes in the coming weeks. However, such incidents are likely to remain localised.

Moldova: Anti-government protests in the capital Chisinau will continue. Protesters have vowed to gather **every Sunday** amid rising energy costs until early presidential and parliamentary elections are called. Protests are likely to be well attended and disrupt traffic in their vicinity.

UK: There have been several security incidents in Northern Ireland. On 16 November, a bomb exploded near a police vehicle in Strabane. On 20 November, a delivery driver was forced to drive a suspicious object at gunpoint to a police station in Londonderry. Further security incidents will prompt increased police checkpoints and patrols.



REGIONAL

- The 13 November bombing in Istanbul (Turkey) has increased the potential of a Turkish military ground incursion into Syria.
- Further Turkish air raids on Kurdish militant positions in northern Syria and Iraq are likely in the coming weeks.
- These will heighten the risk of retaliatory cross-border attacks into Turkey along the border with Syria.

Situation

Turkey on 20 November conducted a series of air raids targeting Kurdish militant bases in northern **Syria** and **Iraq's** Kurdistan Region (KR). This followed a fatal bombing in Istanbul a week earlier that Turkey blamed on the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The incident prompted Turkey to launch an air operation into neighbouring Syria and Iraq, dubbed 'Operation Claw-Sword', by enacting the right of self-defence under article 51 of the UN charter.

The strikes targeted military bases, warehouses and other infrastructure linked to PKK and its offshoot, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which subsequently threatened retaliation. The Turkish border town, Karkamis, was hit by several rockets on 21 November, resulting in two casualties. No group claimed responsibility for the incident.

The Istanbul bombing reignited the discussion over Turkey launching a new incursion into northern Syria, while potentially expanding its operations in Iraqi KR. In Syria, Turkey conducted three military ground incursions in 2016, 2018 and 2019. These were aimed at degrading the capabilities of PKK and affiliated Kurdish groups to launch attacks in Turkey and to prevent the formation of a Kurdish-dominated autonomous region along the Turkish border.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been leading the discussion over renewed military operations in Syria since May to create a 19-mile (30km)-deep buffer zone within the border area. The initiative failed to gain momentum due to lack of support from the US and Russia, whose forces are present on the ground in northern Syria.

In Iraq, Turkey has launched a series of military operations since 2019 targeting PKK positions in northern areas of KR bordering Turkey as well as in the Qandil mountains, where PKK headquarters are based. As part of these operations, Turkey maintains a series of military bases and posts across northern KR for surveillance purposes. It also conducts regular drone and missile strikes, which over the years have succeeded in limiting PKK operations in the area and improving Turkish border security. Turkey's latest operation, dubbed 'Operation Claw-Lock', was launched in April 2022 and is ongoing.



Implications

The recent Istanbul bombing has increased the potential for Turkey to launch another military ground incursion into Syria. The incident has put concerns over Turkey's national security and the threat posed by PKK and affiliated Kurdish groups back on the political agenda. These developments come ahead of Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in **June 2023**. With his popularity sinking, Erdogan is likely to make national security a cornerstone of his campaign to divert the public's attention away from the country's deepening economic crisis. Although the PKK denied responsibility for the attack, Erdogan will use the incident as a pretext to justify another cross-border operation.

Meanwhile, both Russia and the US will mount diplomatic pressure on Erdogan to deter another land incursion. A new offensive would threaten to destabilise the situation in northern Syria and undermine the allied Syrian government and Russia's positions in the region. It would also prove disadvantageous to the US, which relies on YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces to fight elements of the extremist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group operating in the country. International pressure has worked in the past to discourage Turkey from launching new incursions into Syria.

As part of its broader strategy to address Kurdish militant activity along its borders, Turkey may also expand its operations in northern Iraq. The country currently maintains a series of military bases and posts across northern KR. Any decision to broaden its activity and presence in the region could entail increased drone and missile strikes on PKK positions.

KR authorities will seek to put diplomatic pressure on Turkey to scale down its operations in the region by appealing to the international community. Nevertheless, such operations will persist as neither KR nor Iraqi federal authorities have the military capabilities or diplomatic leverage to prevent foreign attacks on their soil.

More air raids on Kurdish militant positions in northern Syria and Iraq are likely in the coming weeks, as Turkey maintains the intent to further degrade their capabilities. In Syria, such attacks are likely to be concentrated in Aleppo, Hassakh and Raqqah governorates. In Iraq, they are likely to focus on northern parts of Duhok and Erbil governorates

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Renewed air raids into northern Syria and Iraq	These would increase the risk of civilian casualties and cross-border attacks into Turkey but remain limited in range and scope.
Another militant attack in a major urban centre in Turkey	Such an incident in a major city like Istanbul or the capital Ankara attributed to PKK would significantly heighten the risk of military incursion into Syria and an expansion of Turkish operations in northern Iraq.
A Turkish military ground incursion into Syria	This would trigger a resumption of fighting in northern Syria, thereby destabilising the area and heightening tensions domestically in Turkey, which hosts a sizable Syrian refugee community.



as well as the Qandil mountains. The increase in airstrikes will drive the risk of miscalculations resulting in civilian casualties in both countries. It will also heighten the risk of retaliatory cross-border attacks into Turkey, particularly along the border with Syria. These attacks will continue to target government and security sites along the border but will remain limited in scope and range due to the limited capabilities of Kurdish militant groups to conduct such operations into Turkish territory.

Recommendations

In Iraq, defer non-essential travel to HIGH-risk areas within 15 miles (24km) of the Turkish and Iranian borders, where there are risks of cross-border fire and incursions. Travel to these areas requires journey-management measures and the support of a professional security provider. Travel to the rest of KR can proceed with standard security precautions. If journeying outside the main urban centres of Erbil and Suleimaniyah (both KR), business travellers should receive an itinerary-specific pre-trip threat assessment, as security support may be required.

In Turkey, defer non-essential travel to areas within ten miles (16km) of the Syrian border for the foreseeable future due to the risks associated with proximity to an active conflict zone and the potential for spillover violence. Defer all travel to areas within five miles (8km) of the Syrian border in Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Mardin and Sanliurfa provinces (all Turkey). Travel to border areas with Syria requires robust logistical support, including transport and accommodation sourced through local contacts or a security provider. Such accommodation should have enough provisions in place to last at least 96 hours (including food, water, essential medication and fuel).

Travel to non-border areas of Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Mardin and Sanliurfa can continue with standard security precautions. Do not self-drive and pre-arrange transport with a trusted local

How we can help

- **Presence in-region:** International SOS has a fully staffed 24/7 Assistance Centre in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

driver with appropriate language capabilities. Liaise with local contacts for logistical and operational arrangements, and for information on potentially disruptive security measures.

In Syria, defer all travel to areas outside the capital Damascus due to the prevailing civil conflict.



TUNISIA

- Economic issues, such as goods shortages and austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), could trigger protests.
- Elections to the newly created Assembly of People's Representatives will be held on **17 December**. We expect voting to pass off peacefully.
- Widespread unrest leading to a breakdown in law and order is unlikely. This is due to high levels of political apathy and repression of dissent.

Situation

Although President Kais Saied's policies have attracted criticism, the predominant driver of popular disgruntlement is economic pressures. Chief among these are shortages. Fuel, cooking oil, bread and other household staples have been scarce in recent months. Although the government has often blamed shortages on speculators, the nation's finances remain poor. Saied's administration in October negotiated a \$1.9bn IMF loan. However, the deal is contingent on internal IMF discussions in December and agreement with the UGTT labour union over the enactment of requisite government reforms.

This uncertainty creates the potential for a breakdown in relations between the UGTT and the government over the terms of the loan. Also of note is the government's anticipated reform of its subsidy system in **2023**. Under this measure, subsidies on key products will be removed for all but the poorest in society. This remains a key potential driver of unrest.

Nevertheless, several factors are currently deterring street protests and a sustained civil disobedience campaign. These include a preoccupation with managing day-to-day economic challenges, as well as voter ambivalence, concessions by Saied and increased government repression, which has diminished vocal opposition.

Saied's administration has imprisoned members of parliament for so-called 'speech offences' and placed other critical voices under house arrest. Stringent laws have been enacted against 'false information' and journalists have been imprisoned on terrorism-related charges. The incarcerations have generated protests from the SNJT journalists' union. However, wider repression means that the situation will need to deteriorate further before people are willing to risk imprisonment by speaking out.

High levels of political apathy are also a major factor in reducing the risk of unrest. This was indicated by the low voter turnout for the July constitutional referendum. We anticipate that turnout for the parliamentary polls will once again be poor.

Saied has made political concessions to Islamists and modernists, aiming to placate each camp enough to stave off protests. The president's crackdown on the Islamist Ennahda party reassures secularists, while his emphasis on family values ensures traditionalists are not alienated.



Preliminary results of the vote are due on **20 December**, with official results announced on **19 January 2023**. The election will be the first since Saied seized power on 25 July 2021 and follows a constitutional referendum held exactly one year later.

The Assembly of People's Representatives replaces the previous parliament. It will lack any executive power and any ability to check the president's power, while there is no provision for any opposition to the government. Although political parties are technically allowed to field electoral candidates, they must be elected individually rather than via the previous electoral list system. As with the July referendum, the established major political parties have announced a boycott of the polls.

Nevertheless, we expect a peaceful electoral cycle. Voter apathy, the new institution's apparent toothlessness and the predominance of economic concerns will all reduce the risk of unrest.

The polls will be held in line with a new electoral law published on 15 September. This was created by presidential decree and has drawn criticism from opponents. Among them is the National Salvation Front (NSF) coalition, which is boycotting the vote and has labelled Saied's presidency a dictatorship. However, protests by the NSF and other opposition groups have so far been small scale and not disruptive in nature.

Opposition to the electoral law and Saied has also come from within the latter's own July 25 Movement. The movement's chairman, Abderrazek Khallouli, has consistently called for the polls to be pushed back to **March 2023** to facilitate amendments to the electoral law. There is also the potential for opposition from the police. Tensions between the government and police unions have mounted following the jailing of eight police officers in September. They were convicted of harming public security by staging a sit-in protest.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
A breakdown in negotiations between the UGTT and the government over austerity measures associated with IMF loan terms	Negotiations are likely to be protracted and last into 2023. The IMF had initially said that any deal being granted would be contingent on the acceptance of its terms by the UGTT. A complete breakdown of negotiations is thus unlikely, but a worsening of relations is probable.
Protests over economic issues degenerate into regular rioting and unrest in urban centres	Goods shortages have characterised 2022, but no major rioting has occurred thus far. A major deterioration in the situation would be necessary to trigger widespread riots. A key juncture will be the promised government review of the subsidy system, slated for 2023.
The UGTT calls a general strike	This could come as a result of a government insistence on harsh austerity measures, especially those which harm the living conditions of government workers.
Members of Saied's 25 July Movement, the police or military seize power	Unlikely. There are no obvious contenders in Saied's own faction largely due to its nascent status. A move from within the security forces would be unprecedented and the police and military have hitherto sought to distance themselves from overt involvement in politics.



Implications

Economic issues and the stance of the influential UGTT union remain the most important factors in determining the likelihood of widespread protests and the functionality of infrastructure.

Protests linked to the economic situation are likely in the coming months. The biggest trigger to monitor in this regard is any deterioration in relations between the UGTT and the government. A general strike called by the union has the potential to mobilise large numbers in urban centres. Such action could be triggered by the government enforcing public sector job cuts, wage reductions and/or an end to government subsidies.

Short-notice, smaller-scale demonstrations are also likely during ongoing goods and fuel shortages. The latter will continue to have a constraining effect on mobility in the coming months. Likewise, strikes organised by groups such as taxi drivers, port workers and train operators are liable to hinder transport logistics.

We expect only minor protests during the electoral cycle. These are most likely to be organised by organisations such as the NSF and take place before and during the vote. However, the NSF and other opposition bodies are not likely to organise any enforcement of their boycott. Demonstrations by women's groups, unions and other civil society institutions are also probable in the coming month but should not be disruptive.

The period immediately after the election could see opposition groups cite Saied's increasingly autocratic nature as part of a wider rallying cry over economic issues. This will be more likely if those elected to the new parliament are perceived to be pro-government sycophants.

A much less likely scenario is the overthrow of Saied's government from within. This could be triggered by continued challenges to police authority or by leadership challenges emanating from within the 25 July Movement.

Recommendations

Normal business travel can continue throughout this month, including on 17 December. However, long-term challenges persist, and businesses should be well prepared for shortages,

How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
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- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

major and sustained unrest, and the possibility of short-notice and unruly demonstrations.

Managers should monitor the situation closely for signs of deterioration. Special attention should be given to any changes to government policy in response to the proposed IMF loan. Cuts to government expenditure could lead to the withdrawal of the UGTT from negotiations. Such a move could herald the start of a prolonged period of unrest and even a possible change in the country's leadership.



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: ON WATCH

Iran: Protests will persist in the coming weeks, driven by public outrage over the crackdown on demonstrations and grievances linked to women's rights. Funerals and commemoration ceremonies for those killed during gatherings will remain flashpoints for unrest. The authorities will maintain a strict stance against unrest and escalate their crackdown on protesters.

Iraq: Cross-border strikes into Kurdistan Region (KR) conducted by Iran and Turkey will persist, as both countries maintain their intent to dismantle Kurdish groups in KR's border areas. The increase in cross-border strikes will further complicate the local security environment as well as heighten risk of miscalculations and related civilian casualties.

Sudan: Despite a preliminary agreement being reached between military and civilian stakeholders in mid-November, tensions will persist as both sides negotiate the framework of the new civilian-led transitional government. Issues regarding to the role of the military during the transitional period as well as reforms of the security and military sector will remain highly contentious and drive unrest.





ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS AND UNPARALLELED SERVICES

International SOS and its network of partners combine the world's leading security and medical risk specialists. With an access to over 3,200 security specialists led by our 200 dedicated security experts based in our Assistance Centres and offices around the world, we provide a comprehensive suite of integrated security risk services for the global workforce and managers tasked with keeping people safe, secure and healthy. We deliver timely, actionable security intelligence, analysis, advice and on-the-ground assistance.

INTERNATIONAL SOS SECURITY PRESENCE



10 Security Intelligence & Assistance Centres



22 Centres of Local Security Expertise



1 Aviation Security Centre

For follow-up questions about the assessments or recommendations in this Report, please call your nearest Assistance Centre.

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