

# MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

JANUARY 2023

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# MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

## January 2023



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.



## CHAD, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

- Tensions between the two countries have been heightened since October 2022, when Central African Republic (CAR)-based rebels clashed with Chadian troops in southern Chad.
- In November 2022, an aerial bombardment by a plane suspected to have originated in Chad struck a location in Bossangoa (CAR).
- Heightened tensions and mutual accusations of harbouring rebels raise the risks of cross-border activity this month.

### Situation

The risks posed by armed cross-border activity between Chad and CAR are raised this month due to heightened tensions between the two countries. A series of cross-border incidents and accusations by both countries of harbouring the other's rebels have contributed to increased hostilities. Unsubstantiated claims of a Chadian invasion force being prepared have also circulated on social media, raising the risks of invasion-related unrest in CAR's capital Bangui. Such misinformation can be anti-French in nature, posing risks to deployed French workforce, who might be caught in demonstrations.

Tensions between the two countries began to increase in May 2021, when CAR soldiers, accompanied by Russian mercenaries, entered Chadian territory in pursuit of suspected rebels. CAR forces clashed with Chadian troops, killing one soldier in combat and executing five others after taking them prisoner.

The subsequent period has seen a progressive deterioration, characterised by cross-border incidents. In October 2022,

CAR-based Chadian rebels entered Chad in Logone Oriental province and clashed with the armed forces. The rebels were allegedly trained and armed in Bossangoa by CAR military and Russian mercenaries. In November, an arms depot in Bossangoa was struck by bombs dropped from an unidentified aircraft said to have come from the north, in the direction of Chad. Reports indicate the attack was likely staged by Central African Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) rebels based in southern Chad, using improvised equipment. There have also been reports of Chadian rebel groups along the Sudan border, which neighbours both countries to the east.

The CPC is an alliance of major rebel groups from CAR, headed by former CAR president Francois Bozize (in office 2003-13). Bozize currently lives in the Chadian capital Ndjamen. Chad's claim of impartiality towards the situation in CAR has also been called into question due to the marriage of Chad's president, Mahamat Idriss Deby, to the daughter of a close ally of Nouredine Adam, the leader of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic. The group is part of the CPC coalition.



The tensions form part of the ongoing rivalry between France and Russia. France is a long-time ally of the Chadian government, while Russia has fostered closer ties with CAR through its Wagner group mercenaries. As seen already, CAR's relations with Russia raise the chances of fabricated news stories inflaming sensibilities against Chad and France.

## Implications

An interstate conflict between Chad and CAR is unlikely. For now, it would not be in the interest of the Chadian government to pursue military action against CAR armed forces or against rebel groups based in CAR. Following the violent repression of protests on 20 October 2022 and reports of an alleged foiled coup attempt on 11 December 2022, further destabilising influences and deployments of loyal troops outside of Ndjamenā would entail significant strategic risk.

Likewise, it is unlikely that CAR or allegedly allied Chadian rebels based in CAR would invade Chad. Chad's deployment of elite presidential guard units to border areas indicates that it considers such a scenario a credible possibility and expects the move to serve as a deterrent. Deby may also request that Bozize leave Ndjamenā, in an effort to avoid conflict with CAR and de-escalate tensions.

An invasion of CAR by CPC rebels would endanger deployed personnel in northern border areas of CAR. Subsequent counter-offensives by government and mercenary forces would seriously destabilise northern areas, posing risks to civilians and sparking a major movement of refugees south.

Further unsubstantiated news stories could cause protests and panic at short notice. In Bangui, reports of the alleged French backing of Chadian forces or of an imminent invasion would trigger protests against French interests, most likely targeting the French embassy, but possibly also other high-profile French organisations.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Bozize moves his residence from Chad	Such a move, if brought on by Ndjamenā's insistence, would de-escalate tensions between the two sides.
Talks between Chad and CAR prove fruitless. Rhetoric between the two becomes increasingly hostile	Given Chad's fraught domestic situation, a negotiated end to hostilities is the more likely outcome. However, personal relationships and historical grievances may engender renewed conflict.
CPC rebels stage an invasion of CAR from Chad and Sudan	This would greatly destabilise northern CAR. Government forces and their mercenary allies have been successful in recent months and maintain the upper hand strategically. A full-scale invasion is unlikely while the government possesses the advantage.
Chadian rebels based in CAR break through Chadian defences and move on Ndjamenā	Reports in November suggested that Chadian rebels in CAR were participating in an offensive to retake parts of CAR held by CPC rebels. Should the government and the Chadian rebels drive the CPC from CAR, incursions into Chad could occur, but a full-scale invasion remains unlikely.



## Recommendations

Workforce deployed to southern Chad should monitor developments for signs of heightened tensions or renewed hostilities. Further incursions by CAR-based rebels could pose incidental risks to deployed workforce. People in or near HIGH-risk border zones – those within 18 miles (30km) of the border – should have evacuation plans in place and be ready to move at short notice. As

### How we can help

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

information about rebel incursions is not likely to be reported in news media, the use of local contacts and robust local information-sharing networks is essential. Any evacuation may need to be done on a precautionary basis.

Potential for negotiations between Chad and CAR should be monitored this month. A heightening of rhetoric and direct accusations of aiding one another's rebel groups are likely to presage an increase in violent cross-border incidents. Equally, a negotiated end to hostilities, possibly including the relocation of the Bozize family away from Ndjama, could signal a decrease in violent incidents.



## ESWATINI

- Instability linked to pro-democracy demands and anti-monarchy sentiment has increased in recent months.
- Violent pro-democracy protests and associated targeted attacks will likely persist this month and pose incidental risks to workforce.
- There remain several triggers that could prompt a sudden deterioration of the security environment, warranting a close monitoring of developments.

### Situation

Since June 2021, protests and strikes calling for democratic reforms and the release of pro-democracy figures have taken place in Eswatini. Attacks targeting the monarchy, the security forces and government figures and interests have also occurred. The protests have been organised by various activist, political, industrial and student groups, while most attacks have been attributed to relatively newly formed armed anti-monarchy groups. These actors have accused the monarchy and government institutions of human rights abuses, corruption and neglect of their duties, among other grievances. Demonstrators are calling for a transition towards multi-party democracy and demanding justice for civilians and pro-democracy protesters who were arrested.

The number of pro-democracy protests has remained relatively stable since the initial peak in mid-2021. However, the level of violence during protests has been high. According to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, at least 60% of pro-democracy

demonstrations during this period have involved violence from protesters and the security forces. On 13 December 2022, the police opened fire on a group of people in Hluti (Shiselweni region) thought to be part of a public transport operators' strike. The work stoppage had been called to demand the release of pro-democracy parliamentarians who were arrested in 2021 at the start of the protests. On 3 October 2022, the police fired tear gas and made arrests after a group of pro-democracy demonstrators pelted stones at the University of Eswatini in Kwaluseni (Manzini region) and threatened security guards.

In addition to the high level of violence at protests, since September 2022 there has been a notable increase in the frequency of attacks linked to the pro-democracy movement. Although the rate of attacks had been increasing in the early months of 2021, they declined between June and September. The decline came after the anti-monarchy Swaziland International Solidarity Forces (SISF) group threatened to kill 200 police officers by 6 September. This may have been linked to increased security measures in the country during that period, as well as climatic factors during wintry months.

While the SISF has remained the main anti-monarchy group conducting attacks, other groups, such as the Sikhali Senkhululeko yemaSwati (SSS), have become increasingly active. In recent



months, there have been several reports of kidnappings and targeted killings of police officers and army personnel, arson attacks on the barracks, offices and private residences of the security forces and government-linked officials, and theft of weapons – including assault rifles – from the security forces. In November 2021, the SSS stated that it was attacking and killing police officers and aimed to eventually target King Mswati III. Most attacks have targeted junior police force members and have led to a few reports of defections.

## Implications

Despite growing challenges to the status quo, the monarchy remains unlikely to adequately address democratic demands and implement reforms. Pro-democracy groups continue to be decied by the authorities, and little progress has been made towards dialogue. Additionally, regional interventions, including from the Southern African Development Community, will continue to produce limited and slow results. Therefore, pro-democracy demonstrations and attacks will likely persist over the coming months.

The frequency of pro-democracy protests is expected to remain moderate. The threat of violence by the security forces continues to act as a deterrent against protest activity as well as criticism of the monarchy. There continues to be regular allegations of politically motivated and arbitrary arrests of people critical of the monarchy, as well as reports of abuses by the security forces. Nonetheless, where protests do occur, they will continue to carry a high risk of localised violence. People in the vicinity will face the risk of unrest, harassment and arbitrary detention by the authorities. Peaceful solidarity protests are also liable to be held in border areas in neighbouring South Africa during protests in Eswatini.

Despite the moderate anticipated frequency of protests, there is still a credible risk of isolated incidents sparking a sudden escalation in protests. Prior to June 2021, occasional pro-democracy demonstrations were held. However, the suspicious death of a student, allegedly caused by the security forces, and a government decree banning protests and the delivery of petitions to the authorities prompted

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Sudden, unannounced prolonged closure of key roads in major urban centers, including the capital Mbabane	This would likely occur ahead of security operations and would prompt local tensions and increase the risks of unrest and clashes with the security forces.
Sudden, unannounced disruption to internet and telecommunications networks	This would likely be part of security operations and prompt local tensions and related demonstrations.
Reports of arrests, disappearances or killings of influential pro-democracy figures or government critics	An increase in such reports would very likely trigger planned or sporadic protests in urban centres. The security forces would likely forcibly disperse such protests.
Rumours of a plot or an actual attempt to target senior monarchy or government figures	This would prompt a period of heightened instability. An increased security force presence, movement restrictions and telecommunications outages would likely be implemented.





the latest wave of protests. The demonstrations initially led to flight suspensions, widespread road traffic and telecommunications disruption, movement restrictions, and food, cash and fuel shortages. Developments such as an increased crackdown on well-known pro-democracy figures, unpopular government decrees, the sudden imposition of telecommunications outages including the banning of social media platforms, or a public act of defiance – including self-immolation – by a civilian could also serve as triggers for increased protests.

The frequency and scale of anti-monarchy attacks is likely to continue to increase. Although elevated security measures persist, evidence of notable support for these groups creates a permissible operating environment for them. The theft of weapons while simultaneously targeting security force members will also increase their capabilities to stage more regular and impactful attacks. Based on their recent attacks, armed anti-monarchy groups are assessed to have at least moderate capabilities, and some members likely have some level of formal security training and experience. It is noted that the anti-monarchy groups are unlikely to expand their targeting patterns beyond the monarchy, the security forces and government figures and interests. However, people associated with linked individuals or meeting in sensitive locations may be targeted. Additionally, people in the vicinity of attacks will face incidental risks of being exposed to violence.

Although armed anti-monarchy groups are expected to ramp up their activities, the security forces – particularly the military – remain broadly capable of maintaining security. Additionally, these groups are unlikely to currently have the capability to target senior members of the monarchy, including the king. However, even an attempted attack risks spiralling the country into a period of heightened instability and insecurity. Additionally, the ongoing attacks on the police may lower their morale and contribute to more defections, particularly as some police officers may identify with some of the pro-democracy grievances. Furthermore, in recent months, police officers have staged demonstrations demanding pay increases, and failure by the authorities to meet these demands amid the attacks could further lower the former's morale. Without an adequate response to the targeted attacks, anti-monarchy groups will slowly chip away at the security forces' capability.

While pro-democracy unrest and violence persist, the authorities are likely to redirect resources to addressing these threats. This may create gaps in day-to-day civil policing. Criminal organisations and related actors will be able to take advantage of this, increasing crime risks. Crime risks are already elevated due the rising cost of living and high unemployment, among other socio-economic issues.

## Recommendations

Closely monitor developments and identify organisation-specific triggers indicating a worsening of the security environment. Ensure security protocols and business continuity plans, including emergency communications plans, are up to date, reflective of the environment and rapidly implementable. Your understanding of the security risks should be specific to your organisation,





industry, site and team locations, and profiles and itineraries of workforce. Ensure in-country workforce are informed with accurate, timely updates and clear guidance on actions to take during a security incident. Ensure workforce are prepared to have supplies for at least 48 hours at short notice during stand-fast situations. These should include access to backup communications, reliable transportation, secure accommodation, food, water, fuel, cash and medical supplies.

In-country workforce should establish an information-sharing network with local partners and avoid all protests as a precaution. Workforce should also be advised to exercise caution when sharing information on social media and discussing local developments to avoid drawing suspicion from the authorities or causing offense due to sensitivity of these issues. In the event of protracted, widespread violent protests, businesses in protest locations will likely be subject to vandalism and looting. Consider relocating essential assets and personnel away from protest flashpoints. This may include establishing work-from-home protocols.

### How we can help

- **Presence in-region:** Our providers are based in South Africa and can deploy once activated.
- **Services offered:** Our providers can support services from meet-and-greet, ground transportation, security trainings to evacuations.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** No.

Foreign business travellers are unlikely to be directly targeted during anti-monarchy attacks. However, workforce should be briefed on related risks and advised to maintain a low profile, only sharing itineraries with local partners on a need-to-know basis. Consider having business meetings and events at low-profile places as a precaution. Workforce partnering with monarchy-linked businesses should engage a security provider to enhance security arrangements at their workplaces and accommodation. Exercise heightened vigilance and report any suspicious activity or packages to the authorities.



## NIGERIA

- The authorities in December 2021 introduced new designs for high-value denominations of the naira currency and confirmed a **31 January** deadline to exchange existing notes.
- While the measure was proposed to tackle inflation and improve security, it could trigger unrest as people may struggle to meet the deadline, particularly in rural areas.
- The currency redesign is also likely to influence kidnap risks, with assailants likely to start requesting ransoms in foreign currency.

### Situation

Following prior approval by the government, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in October 2022 announced plans to redesign high-value denominations of the naira currency. On 15 December 2022, they began circulating newly redesigned 200-, 500- and 1000-naira notes. The deadline to return and exchange existing notes has been set for 31 January, after which they will cease to be legal tender. The currency redesign was mainly proposed to tackle inflation and counterfeiting and to reduce the amount of cash currently being held outside the banking system.

The CBN hopes that the currency redesign will reduce inflation, which has reached a 17-year high and is currently at 21%. However, early indications demonstrate that the move could negatively impact the economy in the short term. The short transition period to exchange existing notes has prompted many people to temporarily swap naira for US dollars, with the intention of exchanging them back after the January deadline. This has led to a further depreciation of the local currency against the dollar. Additionally, the measure is expected to have a significant effect on those living in rural areas, who depend on cash and are located far from banking services where they can exchange their banknotes.

The measure is also expected to have implications for security. Importantly, it will disrupt the activities of militant and bandit groups who will have to choose either to return their illicit cash to banks or to see it become obsolete, thereby restricting their funding. However, local reports suggest that groups have already started to adapt, with the extremist Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) allegedly now collecting taxes in Central African Franc (CFA) rather than naira in areas under their control. The CFA is the currency used in neighbouring countries in the Lake Chad basin, where the group primarily operates.

The government has also introduced a cash withdrawal limit, in part to deter criminal groups and kidnappings. Kidnaps for ransom are a major concern in the country, with most ransoms paid in cash. The new plan would theoretically reduce the amount of cash available for people to pay ransoms, thereby eliminating one of the key incentives for kidnappers. However, there are concerns that kidnappers will instead begin to request ransom payments in foreign currency to bypass the restriction.



The redesign is long overdue, as two decades have passed since the last major reissue of the country's banknotes. However, the timing of the announcement and the short transition period have raised political tensions as the country prepares for the **February-March elections**. The measure could have implications for vote buying, curbing the ability of political actors to hoard cash and use it to influence votes. Nonetheless, opposition parties recently launched allegations that the ruling All Progressives Congress have been preparing to engage in digital vote-buying instead. The topic is expected to become further politicised ahead of the polls.

## Implications

The move is expected to result in short-term disruption and an expected shortage of US dollars as people seek to temporarily exchange their naira banknotes before the January cut-off date. It is also liable to cause long queues and associated disruption around banking establishments and ATMs in the coming weeks.

With Nigerians already facing high inflation and rising food and fuel costs, any further economic pressures could trigger protests and unrest. Given that the economy is largely cash-based, the timeline for the transition could negatively impact people who may find it difficult to exchange their currency on time. The effect will be most significant in smaller urban centres and rural areas, where cash exchanges are more common, heightening the risk of unrest in these areas. Any significant unrest could prompt the authorities to extend the January deadline.

The short-term cash shortages which will emerge from the policy could have a positive effect on security in some areas, primarily through cutting off funding for groups involved in criminal activities. However, such actors quickly adapt to government policies and local restrictions. There are doubts as to whether the plan will effectively constrain the activities of bandit groups operating across the north-west. While bandits carry out kidnappings for ransom, they do not always demand cash. Bandit groups also target and extort local communities for other purposes, such as to get cattle or supplies such as fuel and motorbikes.

Elsewhere in the country, groups that engage in kidnappings may also start to request cash

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Increased targeting of foreign nationals by kidnappers	This could occur in some areas as kidnappers adapt to the policy and request ransoms in foreign currency. Foreign nationals should adopt stringent precautions to mitigate the risk of violent crime, including kidnapping.
Disruption caused by queues at banking establishments and short-term cash shortages	This is likely given the short timeframe as people rush to exchange their currency.
Protests and associated unrest	Such incidents are more likely to occur in smaller urban centres and rural areas, where most transactions remain cash-based and the impact will be most significantly felt.



payments in foreign currency, particularly in US dollars. This could lead to an increased targeting of foreign nationals, based on the belief that they will more easily be able to meet such ransom requirements.

## Recommendations

Managers should monitor developments linked to the currency redesign this month, to include reports of associated disruption and any potential cash shortages. They should also monitor how the plan affects the activities of criminal groups in the country, particularly with regards to kidnaps for ransom.

In-country workforce should anticipate long queues around banks and ATMs in the coming weeks. Foreign nationals should liaise with local contacts for information on potential protests over the measure and avoid such gatherings as a precaution. The security forces are liable to use heavy-handed tactics to quell any related unrest.

### How we can help

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

Workforce should be aware of the credible risk of violent crime, including kidnapping, and take stringent precautions. The risk of exposure to crime remains highest when undertaking road travel. All movements should be confined to daylight hours and with security support, including escorts from the Mobile Force Police where necessary. Remain discreet regarding your nationality and travel plans, vary routine movements and remain alert for signs of being watched or observed. This includes static surveillance of worksites, offices and other vulnerable points, such as vehicle parking areas.



## AFRICA: ON WATCH

**Congo (DRC):** Monitor developments linked to the March 23 (M23) rebel movement in North Kivu province. The group has withdrawn from the strategic town of Kibumba, located approximately 12 miles (20km) north of the provincial capital Goma. However, several towns remain under M23's control, and it remains unclear whether it will agree to cede other areas captured in recent months.

**Ethiopia:** Instability will persist. Despite the relative lull in fighting between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in Tigray region, various factors could spoil the current truce. Insecurity from rebel violence in Amhara and Oromia regions will also persist and continue to fuel communal violence and unrest. Monitor developments and ensure escalation plans remain updated.

**Regional:** The ongoing wet season in parts of east and southern Africa will continue to contribute to flooding risks. Additionally, this month, southern African countries near the south-west Indian ocean will be approaching a high-risk period for the formation of tropical cyclones, adding to flooding-related risks. Monitor weather-related advisories and follow directives issued by officials.





## BRAZIL

- Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva will be sworn in as president on 1 January after narrowly defeating President Jair Bolsonaro.
- A heightened security presence can be expected in the capital Brasilia, and at government and military infrastructure in major urban centres.
- Pro-Bolsonaro protests have taken place, some causing significant disruption. Further disruptive and potentially unruly anti-Lula protests are likely.

### Situation

Nationwide protests by supporters of President Jair Bolsonaro have been recurring since he lost the presidential run-off to Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva (also in office 2003-10) on 30 October 2022. Lula's 51% to 49% victory is the narrowest margin in Brazilian history. Bolsonaro's supporters in the southern states of Santa Catarina and Parana almost immediately blockaded highways following the announcement of the results. Over the following days, the blockades extended to at least 20 states, causing significant travel disruption.

Bolsonaro waited until 1 November 2022 – almost 48 hours during which protests were ongoing – to announce that his administration would comply with the results and tacitly called on his supporters to stop protesting. However, roadblocks persisted for several weeks, and participants had varied demands with little organisation. While they were reportedly erected by truckers, they did not have the support of truckers' unions or other organisations, and many of the participants were disgruntled Bolsonaro supporters.

The Federal Highway Police were eventually able to clear the roadblocks, though they persisted until mid-November. Since then, protests have become more focused, targeting military installations in cities as well as the army headquarters in Brasilia. The size of demonstrations can vary – from dozens in smaller cities, hundreds in larger ones, to thousands in Brasilia – but most are calling for the military to intervene and prevent Lula from taking office.

While most such demonstrations have been disruptive, some have occasionally turned violent, particularly in Brasilia. Demonstrators have clashed with the security forces on several occasions, prompting the closure of Esplanada dos Ministerios and other sensitive locations in the city. On 12 December 2022, protesters tried to occupy the Federal Police headquarters and set fire to five buses in the vicinity. This prompted the police to use tear gas and close nearby roads.

### Implications

Polarisation has undoubtedly remained high as both leaders boast a strong base of supporters and ardent detractors, leading to high levels of unfavorability. This has driven steadfast Bolsonaro supporters to persistently protest, calling for measures as extreme as a military coup. They view



Lula – who was previously convicted on corruption charges and served time in prison before the convictions were annulled – as corrupt and unfit for office.

Given a faction of Bolsonaro supporters' resolute opposition to Lula and willingness to act, demonstrations can be expected surrounding Lula's inauguration on 1 January in Brasilia. Protests are likely in the capital leading up to and during the event, despite a heightened security presence. Demonstrations are also likely outside military facilities in Brasilia and major cities such as Sao Paulo (Sao Paulo state) and Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro state).

Following the inauguration, however, protests will shift focus from calls for military intervention to demonstrations targeting Lula and/or his ministers. In mid-December 2022, protesters targeted the hotel Lula was staying at during his electoral certification ceremony. Visits by Lula to different cities on government business are likely to prompt demonstrations at the destinations, which could be held in central squares or venues on his itinerary.

Overall, we do not anticipate anti-Lula protests to lead to a significant deterioration in the security environment in Brazil. Rather, these are likely to remain localised in major urban centres, particularly those that Lula is visiting. Nevertheless, the persistence of Bolsonaro supporters, any controversial cabinet appointments and Lula's budget initiatives are likely to prompt further protests. These could turn disruptive or violent at times, posing incidental risks to bystanders.

## Recommendations

Travel to Brazil can continue as normal. Managers supporting in-country workforce should monitor developments surrounding Lula's inauguration and protests by Bolsonaro supporters. Should events transpire peacefully, and demonstrations dissipate, a return to greater stability of the security environment can be expected.

If, however, well-attended and disruptive protests continue, managers should determine the exposure of workforce and operations at likely protest locations. These include main squares, government buildings, military installations and possibly event venues, particularly in Brasilia and other major urban centres.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Small-scale demonstrations continue with isolated instances of disruption	Protests are expected to continue but are unlikely to spread beyond defined impact areas.
A surge in protests fuelled by Lula's actions in office or Bolsonaro's statements	Although less likely, this would involve increased demonstrations across urban centres, which have a potential to turn disruptive at high impact flashpoints, such as central areas of urban centres.
Reports of politically motivated violence fuelled by persistent demonstrations and polarisation	If there is a surge in protests, it will likely translate into further polarisation. This could prompt isolated incidents of political violence. While this scenario is less likely, it would require effective communication by organisations to ensure tensions do not affect the workplace and workforce.





## How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of logistics and security providers nationwide.
- **Services offered:** Ground transportation, meet-and-greet, security site assessments, evacuation and other assistance.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request. Shorter in major urban centres.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Managers should monitor the impact of protests on the organisation or workforce. They should provide practical advice to local workforce of the risks posed by demonstrations and measures to take if they turn unruly. They should also re-iterate guidance – likely issued during the polarised electoral period – that is politically neutral, inclusive and forward-looking. This is to acknowledge the small but latent risk of politically motivated violence. During the electoral period, at least four deaths were caused by violence linked to the presidential election, mostly by friends and/or acquaintances of the victims.

International assignees and foreign travellers should consult local contacts to stay abreast of any spontaneous political rallies or unrest, and plan journeys avoiding such events. Monitor developments via local media, local contacts and International SOS alerts.



## ECUADOR

- Violence is escalating between criminal groups and between criminal groups and the security forces in the Guayaquil metropolitan area (Guayas province).
- Attacks, which often consist of shoot-outs and bombings, have increasingly taken place in the vicinity of civilian infrastructure, posing significant incidental risk to bystanders.
- The escalation of violence is likely to continue this month, despite the government's efforts to respond.

### Situation

An increase in gang-related violence in recent months, particularly in Guayas' coastal areas and in Guayaquil, has led to a notable deterioration in the security environment. According to data from the National Police, homicides in the Guayaquil metropolitan area – which includes Duran, Guayaquil and Samborondon – have risen from 547 in 2021 to 1,225 in 2022, a 124% increase. The metropolitan area accounted for one-third of all homicides in the country in 2022 despite representing less than one-fifth of Ecuador's population. At least 140 bombings were reported in Ecuador in 2022 and half of those occurred in Guayaquil.

The surge in violence is linked to the presence of criminal groups such as Los Lagartos, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones, which are vying to control the distribution and export of drugs, primarily cocaine. Guayaquil is home to Ecuador's largest port, which handles 85% of Ecuador's non-oil exports. The facility is also a focal point for drug storage and shipments to Central America and the US, leading criminal groups to set up bases in the city and battle for territory near the port.

While crime rates in Guayaquil have been rising over recent years, developments in recent months have marked a sharp deterioration in the security environment. Criminal groups have conducted attacks, most often consisting of car bombings and shootings, against the security forces in retaliation for prisoners' transfers. A bombing in August 2022 in southern Guayaquil killed five people and injured 17 others. The incident demonstrates how even a targeted attack can pose notable risks to bystanders. In an apparent show of force in November 2022, criminals conducted a series of shootings and bombings, killing five police officers.

The unprecedented level of violence prompted President Guillermo Lasso's government to introduce multiple security measures aiming at combating the growing violence. These included six consecutive declarations of states of emergency (SoEs) in Esmeraldas, Guayas and Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas provinces and associated perimeter controls, special operations, proactive investigations and nightly curfews. Joint police and military task forces have been formed and additional police officers recruited. Thousands of security operations have been conducted under the initiative, resulting in the arrest of hundreds of suspects. The authorities have also announced measures aimed at guaranteeing security and better management of the prison system.



The rising insecurity comes alongside a period of social instability. In June 2022, a nationwide protest organised by labour unions and by CONAIE, the largest indigenous organisation in the country, was called over the rising cost of basic goods and fuel, insecurity and unemployment. The action led to 17 days of widespread unrest that killed six people and paralysed the capital Quito, Guayaquil and other major urban centres for several weeks. The prolonged unrest quickly prompted the government to declare SoEs in six provinces and Lasso faced a vote to remove him from office. An agreement was ultimately found between the government and CONAIE, effectively ending the protest. However, other civic and indigenous organisations continue to hold occasional strikes and demonstrations, which carry an underlying risk of nationwide unrest and political instability. The most recent example was seen on 16 December 2022, when agricultural sector workers erected burning barricades along major roads in parts of Guayaquil.

## Implications

Gang-related violence is likely to increase in the short-to-medium term in Guayaquil due to battles and retaliatory attacks between criminal groups. The authorities are likely to increase anti-gang operations to curb insecurity. However, as the government has not yet proven capable of implementing an effective strategy to contain the violence, their efforts are unlikely to herald a sustained improvement in the short term. Simultaneous popular dissatisfaction over various social and economic grievances will divide the government's attention and divert police resources away from anti-crime initiatives.

An increase in armed confrontations between the security forces and criminal groups can be expected in the short-to-medium term. The conflict could have a greater impact on civilians if it expands from the southern part of Guayaquil and its outlying areas further into the city centre and business districts. Attacks in recent weeks have targeted civilian infrastructure, including bus terminals, health centres and upscale neighbourhoods, in an apparent effort to pressure the security forces to retreat.

Furthermore, prisoner transfer operations, especially those of high-profile prisoners, are likely to trigger further retaliatory violence in Guayaquil and other cities with penitentiary facilities, such as Cuenca (Azuay province) and Latacunga (Cotopaxi province).

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
A large deployment of security force personnel into central areas of Guayaquil	The authorities may opt for large security deployments in the central areas to contain the expansion of gang violence.
Further prisoner transfer operations are carried out	Violent attacks in Guayaquil have coincided with the movement of prisoners. Further such operations are likely to trigger renewed retaliatory attacks by criminal groups.
An expansion of the conflict between gangs and the security forces into upscale districts of Guayaquil	In recent weeks, criminal groups have engaged in confrontations with the security forces in upscale neighbourhoods, such as Alborada, and targeted various civilian infrastructure. Further attacks targeting key locations are possible.



## Recommendations

Guayaquil is likely to see continued spikes in violent crime. Managers should closely monitor the relevant indicators of a deterioration in the security environment and review contingency plans, factoring in the possibility of further civil unrest that disrupts travel and business operations. The levels of exposure to crime-related threats should also be reviewed for workforce in areas that are most affected by spikes in violence. Those operating in and around ports and coastal areas,

### How we can help

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

including Guayaquil and other HIGH-risk areas, should review their security posture, including protocols for workforce, logistics and hours of operations. The latter is particularly relevant as shootouts and bombings have mostly occurred after dark. Managers should ensure access to a robust and resilient local assistance network for ground movement and other operations, considering journey management and security support.

Those in affected areas should be attentive to developments in the prison system as violence has been coinciding with the movement of prisoners.



## EL SALVADOR

- A state of exception (SoE) can be expected to remain a feature of the security environment in the medium term.
- Large-scale, increasingly militarised security operations and associated disruption can be expected in urban centres.
- President Nayib Bukele's approach to the fight against crime is resonating at a subregional scale, with the government of neighbouring Honduras following suit.

### Situation

The enforcement of a state of exception (SoE) and other hard-line policies against gangs in El Salvador have had far-reaching implications in the country and beyond. Defined broadly, the SoE has implied the suspension of the constitutional rights to assembly, movement, self-defence and privacy of telecommunications. These have been accompanied by a revamp of the state's security apparatus. The hardening of security policies is bound to shape the country's security environment through the year. Further developments are also liable to impact the Central American subregion, as the adoption of similar policies in Honduras has shown.

Heavy-handed policies against crime are not new to El Salvador nor the other two countries of Central America's 'Northern Triangle', Guatemala and Honduras. They have received widespread support among the population, particularly in El Salvador, the historical epicentre of gang activity in Central America. Upon assuming office in 2019, President Nayib Bukele announced a Territorial Control Plan that initially appeared to be a new iteration of strategies already tested by previous governments. However, the security policies have since taken an unprecedented scope.

In March 2022, Bukele's government first declared the current iteration of the SoE following a surge in gang-related violence that left 92 people dead. In tandem with the SoE, thousands of police and military elements were deployed across the country to support security operations. Per the authorities, the SoE has led to the arrest of more than 60,000 alleged gang members as of this month. The murder count, which in the recent past was among the highest in the world, has also fallen dramatically.

Bukele's strategy recently entered a new phase implying a more prominent role for the military. On 2 October 2022, 2,000 army troops 'enclosed' the small municipality of Comasagua (La Libertad department) to disarticulate a local MS-13 cell, following a murder in the area. More than 50 alleged gang members were arrested. The arrests in Comasagua, which boasts around 12,000 inhabitants, set the precedent for more ambitious operations. On 3 December 2022, a joint police and military task force of 10,000 personnel enclosed Soyapango, a suburb of the capital San Salvador with almost 300,000 inhabitants. The security operation, which is expected to remain in place throughout this month, has resulted in the detention of at least 400 suspected gang members. Per Bukele's own declarations, further large-scale operations in major urban centres are being planned.



Bukele’s approach has drawn criticism from human rights collectives. They denounce detentions carried out by the security forces as often arbitrary, impacting innocent people with no proven affiliation to gangs. Per reports, the police are instructed to arrest a varying number of people to fill daily quotas. The political opposition has also accused Bukele of utilising the SoE to concentrate power ahead of the 2024 presidential election. Nonetheless, Bukele’s policies enjoy widespread support among the population. The president’s overall approval ratings remain very high, at 88%, which is likely to embolden him to pursue more stringent measures.

### Implications

Due to expire on **18 January**, the SoE is not only almost certain to be renewed a tenth time, but also very likely to remain a standing feature of the security environment this year. Large-scale security operations such as the enclosure of Soyapango are likely to be replicated in other heavily populated sectors of San Salvador’s metropolitan area.

Violent crime has gone down drastically. These improvements, however, are built on shaky grounds, as the structural causes of violent crime – high levels of poverty and an extremely unequal access to opportunities for social mobility – remain largely unaddressed. While homicide and other violent crime has reportedly decreased, extortion remains a source of concern across the country. Extortion rings are largely run from inside the prison system, which has become increasingly crowded under Bukele’s tough-on-crime policies. Imprisonment reportedly stands at least three times above facilities’ official capacity. Mass incarcerations – which may not be sustainable in the medium-to-long term – run the risk of expanding gangs’ recruiting pools.

The SoE raises serious concerns regarding due process, human rights and political freedoms. Nevertheless, the policies retain widespread appeal among sectors of a population long victimised by

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Poor economic performance	The SoE enjoys widespread support and is unlikely to be contested by much of the population in the short term. However, economic upheaval can affect the ruling government’s legitimacy. This could translate into a loss of the popular support needed for the security policy to be sustainable.
Reports of widespread social unrest	The SoE by itself has not yet caused social unrest beyond protests that have been easily managed by the security forces. However, dissatisfaction with the economy could cause the SoE to shift gears towards containing related unrest. An increase in demonstrations is likely to draw a very heavy-handed response, resulting in a tenser political atmosphere.
The imposition of curfews in urban centres and more stringent restrictions to mobility	In the event of heightened social unrest, the government is likely to double down on hard-line measures. These can involve strict curfews and severe restrictions to mobility. Penalties for non-compliance could be severe. Arbitrary detentions could pose an increased threat to in-country workforce.



violent gangs. At least in the short term, the potential for widespread social unrest demanding an end to the SoE and associated measures remains negligible. Although the SoE is unlikely to be widely questioned by itself, discontent with Bukele's economic policies – which continue to be an Achilles' heel for his government, as widespread rejection of Bitcoin as legal tender showed – can impact the security environment. In turn, this can potentially prompt a change of gears of the SoE towards containing related unrest.

Bukele's approach has resonated throughout the Central American subregion. On 5 December 2022, President Xiomara Castro of Honduras announced a National State of Emergency entailing more localised SoEs in the capital Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula (Cortes department), and other urban centres. President Alejandro Giamattei's government has resorted to localised SoEs in Guatemala to curb undocumented immigration and may be compelled to deploy such measures to suppress gang activity at some point.

## Recommendations

The SoE has brought some positive developments to the security environment, though it is unclear if they will be sustained. There remains a latent risk of flare-ups in criminal violence and social unrest. Should the situation escalate, managers should consider having workforce work remotely on days when demonstrations are planned, particularly if workforce live, work or commute near protest venues or where the security forces are operating. There is potential for violence to quickly escalate. The measures in place with the SoE may trigger the security forces to intervene forcibly, posing significant risk to anyone in the vicinity. Additional guidance or training for workforce is recommended, particularly those based in San Salvador.

Managers supporting in-country workforce should anticipate more large-scale security operations in urban centres, especially in San Salvador's metropolitan area. They should liaise with local contacts to remain apprised of developments, including short-notice deployments of the security forces that may impact operations in-country.

### How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of security and transportation providers.
- **Services offered:** Ground transportation, meet-and-greet, security site assessments, personal security awareness trainings, evacuation and other assistance.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Workforce should comply with official directives and protocols under the SoE. They should review the routes they take for daily activities and plan journeys avoiding areas impacted by ongoing security operations to reduce the risk of exposure to associated clashes. If undertaking essential journeys through such areas, verify the status of routes with local contacts and other resources prior to setting out. Do not attempt to drive through an ongoing security operation. Instead, turn around and find an alternative route to your destination. Should the security forces start to gather, vacate the area and find a secure location where you can wait for the situation to stabilise.





## US

- Recent violence targeting LGBTQ+ events and associated locations highlight ongoing security concerns associated with anti-LGBTQ+ groups and individuals.
- The focus of prominent far-right and conspiratorial groups and individuals will likely continue to shift toward LGBTQ+ groups.
- Small-scale armed protests are likely at LGBTQ+ events and associated facilities. These have the potential for localised confrontations.

### Situation

Further protests and localised acts of violence targeting LGBTQ+ communities and associated locations are likely this month, continuing a recent trend. Groups driven by far-right-affiliated or conspiratorial media and associated with armed militia-style groups, including the Proud Boys, have sought to disrupt LGBTQ+-oriented events. Counter-protesters have frequently confronted these groups, sometimes while armed.

LGBTQ+ issues, especially those regarding the transgender community, have increasingly attracted the attention of militia groups and people with extremist views. Issues surrounding drag shows, medical care for transgender children and transgender children's participation in scholastic sports are particularly controversial. Prominent political and cultural figures have commented on these issues with various goals. The heightened media spotlight, which has included inflammatory rhetoric and national discourse around such issues have increased the likelihood that aggrieved individuals will engage in acts of violence targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

In November 2022, a shooter opened fire in the Club Q nightclub, a LGBTQ+-associated venue in Colorado Springs (Colorado state). The assailant killed five people and injured 19 others before being subdued by patrons. In December 2022, assailants attacked two electrical substations in Moore county (North Carolina state), leaving 38,000 people without power for several days. No motive has been established, but the shooting coincided with a scheduled drag event in the county. Investigations into the incident are ongoing. Such incidents are in keeping with the findings of a Department of Homeland Security bulletin detailing expected terrorist threats in the US until May. The bulletin named the LGBTQ+ community as a likely target for political violence.

According to data published in November 2022 by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, around 200 anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations were reported in the US in 2022, more than three times the number reported in 2021. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation reported 141 instances of protests or threats targeting drag events in 2022. Many of these demonstrations have included the Proud Boys, who have increasingly focused on protesting against or disrupting LGBTQ+ events, a trend expected to continue this month. Incidents in the second half of 2022 were



primarily reported in socially conservative states, including Tennessee and Texas; ideologically split ‘battleground’ states, including North Carolina and Ohio; and in states that have previously seen notable violent demonstrations between far-right and far-left groups, including California and Oregon.

## Implications

Attacks against and protests outside LGBTQ+-associated facilities are likely to continue in January. The publicity associated with many LGBTQ+ facilities and events contribute to the risk of violence, as the location and schedules of associated events are easily accessible by would-be assailants. Groups and individuals holding anti-LGBTQ+ views frequently operate independently. Nevertheless, individuals sharing similar extremist beliefs are often part of shared online ecosystems where adherents discuss tactics, push readers toward further radicalisation, praise previous attackers and suggest potential targets.

In the wake of a high-profile attack, there is a risk that individuals within these groups and associated extremist ideologies may seek to replicate attacks with the goal of causing more casualties. Researchers from Arizona State University concluded that a single mass shooting inspires 0.3 more shootings. In other words, for every three mass shootings, a fourth was inspired by one of them. The study also suggests that the risk is most acute in the two weeks following a major incident.

The trend of Proud Boys and other ideologically adjacent groups disrupting LGBTQ+ events is likely to continue. The focus on previous hot-button issues, including COVID-19-related restrictions

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Extensive focus and reporting on LGBTQ+ issues, communities or events, by influential far-right figures	A heavy focus on specific events or concerns will increase the likelihood of demonstrations by far-right groups and accompanying counter-protests. Reporting by extremist figures on issues and protests is inter-connected - groups will respond to heavy reporting and these figures will report on increased protests.
A group announces plans to attend protests ahead of a LGBTQ+ event or near locations associated with the LGBTQ+ community	Demonstrations, especially those met with significant counter-protests, will likely lead to increased tensions. These risks are heightened if groups or individuals involved have historically been engaged in armed protests. Isolated clashes are possible between rival groups and with the security forces, who may respond with rubber bullets or tear gas.
An increased presence of armed anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrators and armed counter-protesters	The presence of armed demonstrators and counter-protesters greatly increases the risk of violence. The police is more likely to intervene and separate demonstrators to reduce the risk of direct clashes.
An escalation of tactics used by anti-LGBTQ+ groups to disrupt events or affect areas outside of LGBTQ+-associated establishments	Groups and individuals holding anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs may seek to copy tactics they deem effective. The success of these attacks will be highly dependent on the circumstances and capabilities of the threat actor. The security forces will also attempt to respond to previous incidents to reduce the risk of similar disruption.



and access to abortion, has decreased in recent months. LGBTQ+-related demonstrations and events will likely be affected by counter-protesters, some of whom may be armed. The presence of counter-protesters and armed groups significantly increase the risk to those in the vicinity. The police are liable to intervene in the event of clashes and may use rubber bullets or tear gas to disperse crowds.

While no similar incidents have been reported since the December 2022 attack in North Carolina, there is a risk of further attacks on infrastructure with the apparent motive of impacting LGBTQ+ events. Extremists may target infrastructure in communities hosting widely publicised LGBTQ+ events, which could impact anyone in the vicinity.

## Recommendations

Attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community can vary widely across the US. This dynamic, combined with the highly emotive nature of such issues, can increase the complexity of communicating related risks to workforce. Be sure that all communications are crafted with the appropriate cultural sensitivities.

Security managers should communicate the risks stemming from anti-LGBTQ+ threats and the potential for associated protests and, in some instances, violence against workforce. Ensure that workforce are aware of appropriate risk mitigation measures and how to respond to a security incident or threat. Managers should ensure that personal security awareness training is

offered to workforce, particularly those at greater risk of being targeted in an attack.

Managers should ensure that they have adequate security and business-continuity plans in place. This is of particular importance for those with facilities and workforce in the vicinity of establishments associated with the LGBTQ+ community or ahead of major local LGBTQ+ events. These plans should be well-understood by the appropriate stakeholders, be up to date and fully implementable.

Those with interests associated with the LGBTQ+ community should continuously monitor for changes to the risk environment and specific threats. These would necessitate a reassessment of security postures and policies.

### How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of logistics and security providers and an Assistance Centre in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania state).
- **Services offered:** A robust offering of security services including physical security support, secure transport, consulting and 24/7 access to advice and analysis from our local experts.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours depending on the location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.



## AMERICAS: ON WATCH

**Argentina:** Protests linked to the conviction of Vice-President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner on corruption charges could cause disruption in urban centres. A large, multi-sector march in support of Fernandez, initially scheduled for 20 December 2022, was postponed to **March**. Nevertheless, rallies by individual unions and other groups against the ruling can be expected.

**Haiti:** Recent killings of government officials have underscored the impunity under which gangs operate. While the security environment continues to deteriorate, the Canadian government has spearheaded multilateral efforts to arrange a foreign military intervention. Reports suggest the deployment of troops on the ground could finally materialise sometime this month.

**Honduras:** The government is mimicking certain aspects of El Salvador's hard-line approach to the fight against gangs. Constitutional rights have been suspended in parts of the capital Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula (Cortes department) and other major urban centres. Military personnel have been dispatched to reinforce security operations across the country, and there is potential for further short-notice deployments.

**Jamaica:** Reflecting a regional trend, the government recently renewed a state of emergency first declared in November 2022. The measure is being implemented in various parishes to curb a surge in gang-related violence.

**Peru:** Much of the country has been gripped by disruptive protests since the impeachment of former president Pedro Castillo (in office 2021-22) on 7 December 2022. The impact was particularly acute in Apurimac, Arequipa, Ayacucho and Cusco departments, though the situation has improved somewhat. Monitor our International SOS alerts and other channels for detailed analysis of the impact on the security environment.





## BANGLADESH

- There has been an increase in demonstrations led by the main opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP).
- The frequency of protests and the risk of unrest will increase around by-elections scheduled for **1 February**, and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's court hearings.
- Most demonstrations will be centred around the capital Dhaka and major urban centres, but political unrest in semi-urban and rural areas remain possible.

### Situation

Political tensions have been on the rise recently. The main opposition BNP undertook a series of rallies in recent months to put pressure on the ruling Awami League (AL). The BNP and several other parties are expected to sustain this momentum this month and hold protests against the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The BNP culminated its series of rallies on 10 December with a ten-point demand which included the dissolution of parliament and the setting up of a neutral caretaker government. Clashes were reported during the rallies, in which several people were injured.

Further, Ganatantra Mancha, an alliance of seven political parties and several opposition parties has announced support for the BNP demonstrations. They have also announced a 14-point demand to align with the BNP and will observe the same protest schedule as the BNP.

The points listed by both the BNP and Ganatantra Mancha are similar, indicating a potentially broader political alignment opposing the AL.

Separately, the authorities arrested Shafiqur Rahman, leader of the country's third-largest party, Jamaat-e-Islami, in Dhaka. Party activists held a demonstration on 13 December 2022 in Rajshahi (Rajshahi division) over the arrest, which turned unruly and led to several activists and security personnel being injured. Further protests demanding Rahman's release can be expected in the coming weeks. Protests were also held in Dhaka during which activists blocked roads, causing significant disruption.

The AL leaders have called for protests to counter the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami party. Further, election-related rallies by the 14-party alliance, which includes the AL, are also possible in the coming weeks. While these will primarily affect urban centres, including Dhaka, violent protests by student wings associated with the two parties in other areas cannot be ruled out.

In addition to political rallies, BNP protests and activities are likely to increase around its chairperson's court hearing dates. Party members have previously held protests demanding the withdrawal of cases against Zia. A hearing for a defamation case against Zia is scheduled for



**3 January** in a Dhaka court. Further hearings will take place on **17 and 23 January**. In total, Zia is facing more than 11 cases. Heightened security can be expected around the court premises where the hearings will take place.

Parliament's winter session will begin on **5 January**. Heightened security in the vicinity of the parliament building can be expected during the session.

Furthermore, five BNP lawmakers submitted their resignation from the parliament in December 2022 and by-elections for the vacant seats will take place on **1 February** in the five relevant constituencies in Brahmanbaria (Chittagong division), Bogra, Chapainawabganj (both Rajshahi) and Thakurgaon (Rangpur division). Heightened security and disruption is likely ahead of the vote as election-related unrest, including violence, is frequently observed. Related violence can include vandalism, arson and the use of weapons including blades and, more rarely, live ammunition and crude bombs, especially in semi-urban and rural areas.

## Implications

An increased police presence can be expected in Dhaka where all the court hearings related to Zia will be held. Protests by BNP activists to demand the withdrawal of cases against her can be expected in Dhaka and other urban centres. There remains a credible risk of unrest in the vicinity of any such demonstrations and the authorities are liable to use forcible dispersal measures, including batons, water cannon and tear gas.

Well-attended political rallies by the BNP, AL and other parties will continue and increase in frequency in the coming weeks. Anticipate heightened security measures in the vicinity of any planned gathering. This may include the erection of checkpoints, the deployment of additional police officers and increased surveillance. There is also a latent risk of clashes between supporters of the AL and BNP during such rallies. The risk of unrest will significantly increase if activists of rival political groups hold rallies in close proximity. Protest flashpoints in the capital include the National Press Club, Central Shaheed Minar, Shahbagh Square, Raju Memorial Sculpture and the Secretariat building.

Protests by the student wings of both AL and BNP are also expected to increase in the coming days, to disrupt the rival party's rallies. Clashes between the rival groups, as well as between the police and protesters, are a common occurrence during such gatherings.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Protests continue at their current level	Such demonstrations are expected to pass off peacefully, though associated localised disruption can be expected.
Rallies ahead of by-elections	Election-related violence remains possible in the lead-up to the polls. These rallies will result in significant disruption, particularly in urban areas. The police will forcibly disperse any unauthorised gatherings.
Protests become increasingly unruly in major urban centres, including Dhaka	The authorities will likely disperse protesters forcibly. Such measures can include the use of batons, tear gas, water cannon and live ammunition. The imposition of prohibitory orders could affect local travel.





Additionally, opposition political parties may hold protests in the vicinity of divisional headquarters and other major urban centres. Potential venues include government buildings, party offices, key intersections and public monuments. Such gatherings will be well attended, causing localised disruption. Any attempts to disperse demonstrations, and resultant unrest, will pose incidental risks to bystanders.

Meanwhile, protests by Jamaat-e-Islami activists demanding Rahman's release are also likely to increase. Clashes are possible between participants and the police. Disruptive or unruly rallies will prompt the police to use forcible dispersal measures such as batons, water cannon or tear gas.

Police presence will be heightened near the parliament building for the winter session and to prevent any protests in the vicinity. Any attempt to march to the building will prompt the police to use forcible dispersal measures. Any such gatherings and associated security measures will also cause localised disruption.

Further, an increased police presence will be in place in constituencies where by-elections are expected to be held as a pre-emptive measure. Associated security measures will also cause disruption along routes leading to and from such constituencies.

Opposition parties are likely to organise campaigns and demonstrations against the government to sway voters in their favour by highlighting perceived lapses of confidence in the ruling establishment over the recent shortages and price hikes, especially those related to essential commodities. Any such demonstration may prompt the authorities to install checkpoints, impose traffic restrictions and issue prohibitory orders in the vicinity of the events to prevent any unruly incidents. Any such activity will pose incidental risks to bystanders and commuters are likely to face traffic disruption.

Challenges to mobility and logistics are likely during large gatherings related to any protest or elections. Transport unions linked to the major parties may call for strikes to disrupt transport services during opposition rallies. Additionally, several private operators are liable to call off services due to the risk of vandalism during protests, especially if there is a risk of unrest.

## Recommendations

Managers should liaise with local contacts and monitor our alerts for information on any planned protests. Workforce should avoid all demonstrations as a precaution 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. Communication plans and





### 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:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

lines of escalation should be clear and tested. Managers should also monitor International SOS alerts and disseminate information on planned rallies in a timely manner.

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.



## MYANMAR

- Clashes between the military government forces and the People's Defence Forces (PDF) and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) are expected to continue in the coming weeks.
- Large gatherings are possible on Independence Day (**4 January**), and weeks leading up to second anniversary of the military takeover (**1 February**).
- Opposition forces will likely attack military-controlled infrastructure in urban centres. However, they lack the capability to inflict major damage or take over control of vital transit facilities.

### Situation

Myanmar will observe its 75th Independence Day on 4 January. The military government will also complete two years in power since its takeover on 1 February 2021. Both events are expected to draw demonstrations and increased political activity across the country, including in major urban centres. This is due to the sensitivity around the military government's rule and opposition from many parts of the country.

Clashes between the military government forces, and PDF groups and EAOs continues in various parts of the country. In December 2022, the military forces suffered casualties in Kachin and Mon states, and Magway, Mandalay and Sagaing regions. Additionally, several military personnel were killed in Chin and Shan states, and Bago and Tanintharyi regions. The National Unity Government (NUG) and EAOs have established additional northern, central and southern military commands, which already have infantry battalions on the ground. More organised and well-trained opposition forces can therefore be expected to emerge in the coming weeks, resulting in more frequent and protracted clashes with the military forces. The opposition forces have launched attacks using explosives in urban areas, inflicting damage on military-controlled infrastructure and personnel, apart from the on-ground fighting in rural areas.

Recent explosions have occurred in Hlaingthaya and Hlaing townships (both Yangon region), and Paukkaung township (Bago). The military usually responds to such attacks using infantry forces and sophisticated weaponry such as airstrikes. Rural areas are exposed to persistent conflict due to the clashes.

Further, the military government allegedly sustains strong diplomatic ties with foreign governments and continues to receive arms support. It has also reportedly improved relations with sections of the Buddhist clergy inside Myanmar. The clergy can have a substantial influence over opinion-building among the religious and more conservative sections of society.

### Implications

The military leadership will ensure robust engagement with foreign partners to maintain its capabilities. Given that the NUG has not received any diplomatic recognition, the military will



continue to be the primary governing force. In the short term, it will try to contain any potential disturbances around key dates when large gatherings can be expected. The security forces are liable to forcibly disperse demonstrations, possibly leading to violence. Heightened political activity will be particularly significant in January, given that elections are proposed for **August**. The mass release of political prisoners, as on National Day, or the proposal of ceasefire talks with certain ethnic groups are possible around the upcoming key dates to garner support and international legitimacy for the elections.

The fighting is expected to continue. Opposition forces will likely stage further attacks on military-controlled infrastructure in urban centres. However, the likelihood of the opposition forces gaining control over key infrastructure, such as ports of departure and security installations, remains low due to their limited capabilities compared with the military. The opposition forces also lack political unity and consensus at this stage to formidably challenge the military government.

## Recommendations

The security environment in Myanmar remains vulnerable, and credible risk is expected to persist for organisations and workforce, including foreign nationals. While explosions occur almost daily, particularly in conflict zones and less frequently in urban centres, their impact may not be visible unless international assignees and business travellers are at the site or in the vicinity.

The areas that international assignees may frequent can experience disruption of essential services. However, their interaction with the security forces would likely remain minimal.

Local nationals are more exposed to interactions with the security forces. As such, the risk from incidental exposure during attacks on security checkpoints and personnel remain high.

Movement should be carried out with heightened situational awareness and robust journey management plans, accounting for the potential for violence. Check-in/journey monitoring protocols must be established for long journeys, regardless of the locations (inter- and intra-city), factoring in any locally enforced curfews. Always have an idea of alternative routes to avoid being stuck.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
The military imposes curfews and restrictions on movement. There are occasional power cuts and temporary unavailability of supplies	Such restrictions or outages would be temporary and the situation would normalise in a short period. The availability of essential services and supplies are unlikely to be disrupted.
Sustained curfews, reports of frequent clashes and a crackdown by government forces	Likely around upcoming key dates. Services and travel can be impacted for a longer duration during periods of unrest.
Protracted clashes and frequent attacks on infrastructure and civilian crowds	An unsafe environment with the possibility of highly restrained availability of services.
Takeover of transit facilities by the opposition forces. International intervention of a military nature	Unlikely in the coming months, but it would result in significant disruption. Borders would likely close temporarily during such a situation and in-country workforce would be required to stand fast.



### 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:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

Be aware of night-time curfews that are known to be imposed in urban areas occasionally due to security incidents. Consider the potential for short-notice suspension of communications or movement restrictions. Maintain a list of emergency contacts, both electronically and on paper. In case you do not have access to alternative means of communication, check your organisation's incident management protocol. Organisations should have pre-determined safe haven/non-communication procedures based on movement patterns and business locations.



## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

- An escalation of violence in the Highlands region since October 2022 is likely to persist this year.
- Tribal conflict has been increasing due to internal mass migration to urban centres, limited police capabilities and socio-economic pressures.
- Further violence is liable to cause significant logistical disruption and airport shutdowns. Travel to affected provinces may need to be deferred.

### Situation

Tribal violence has been at an escalated level in the Highlands region – comprising Eastern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Jiwaka, Simbu, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands provinces – since October 2022 and such violence is likely to continue this year. A limited police presence continues to inhibit initiatives to curb violence and implement long-term solutions. Clashes often break out over land and property disputes, theft, robbery and generational disputes. Tribes are often armed with homemade guns, spears, machetes and bows and arrows and conflicts regularly result in multiple deaths.

Spontaneous and sustained tribal violence continues to afflict the Highlands. On 5 December 2022, 18 people were killed in a tribal conflict in Hides (Hela). In December, clashes also broke out between Mogie Andaklamb and Jika Andaklamb groups in Mount Hagen (Western Highlands), allegedly in response to the murder of a tribal leader's son. The previous month,

tribal clashes near Kagamuga International Airport (HGU, Western Highlands) spilled out into the runway. In September, one person was killed, and several others were kidnapped during an attack in Enga. Such violence is intense, quickly triggered and leads to sustained grievances and retaliatory attacks.

Continued violence has also prompted calls for the implementation of a state of emergency, anti-crime initiatives, a heightened police presence and church engagement projects. Such measures could provide temporary respite, but embedded cultural practices and deficient security force capabilities would impede progress. The rising cost of staple goods and lack of employment opportunities further increase the prospect of clashes over scarce resources.

### Implications

The escalation in tribal violence throughout the Highlands is likely to continue in the coming months. A lack of police personnel, limited public trust in the police and police ineffectiveness all limit the authorities' ability to curb such violence. The sporadic and tit-for-tat nature of tribal conflicts create a cycle in which violence can break out rapidly before gradually de-escalating.

High levels of migration to urban centres and high levels of poverty are likely to lead to increasing levels of tribal violence. As data from Human Rights Watch, the World Bank and local sources suggest, the increasing population is not being matched by the required level of economic



development. As a result, people are internally migrating to urban centres in search of economic opportunity. These domestic migrants often reside in temporary inter-tribal ‘settlements’ due to housing shortages. Violence then arises over land and property disputes, theft, robbery and generational disputes within settlement areas. The increasing size of settlements is likely to drive conflicts between rival clans.

Tribal violence can also have a significant impact on logistics. The killing of a tribal leader’s son in Mount Hagen in December saw attempts at retribution from fellow tribesmen the following morning, which affected road and motorway movements. Tribes will often erect roadblocks to prevent opposing tribes from retreating, which can pose significant risks and travel disruption to workforce in the area. Conflict can also impede airport operations, as seen during the closure of Kagamuga International Airport in November. Further attacks in urban centres and along the Highlands Highway are liable to disrupt movement.

Tribal clashes can deepen existing tensions and have an impact on economic and educational prosperity, prolonging economic woes and tribal conflicts. In November, schools, businesses, properties and vehicles were set alight during a tribal conflict in Yatemali village (Hela). Further attacks may cause significant disruption to hospitals, schools or businesses regarded as implicit in any tribal conflict.

### Recommendations

Travel to the Highlands can proceed with extreme caution and robust precautions, including the support of a security escort. Intense bouts of violence and tribal conflict may occur with little-to-no warning and escalate rapidly, rendering

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
A sustained period of tribal violence resulting in multiple fatalities	Further sporadic clashes between groups remain likely. Notable drivers for tribal clashes include disputes over territorial boundaries, resources and personal feuds, as well as isolated incidents of rape and theft. Clashes between tribal groups are often unpredictable and intense, resulting in multiple casualties. During periods of extended tribal violence, groups will often target hospitals and schools to weaken recovery efforts.
Police response involving use of force	The security forces frequently use live ammunition and other forcible measures to deal with tribal violence. However, such security force responses are unlikely to halt large-scale tribal clashes. A heavy-handed police response instead has the potential to trigger random and opportunistic incidents of violence and vandalism, such as looting.
Sustained clashes in central areas or urban centres or causing disruption to motorways or airports within the Highlands	An increasing population size, lack of economic opportunities, an increase in evictions and low availability of housing has the potential to lead to further clashes related to tribal land disputes. While clashes over land are often limited to the disputed territory, sustained clashes are likely to expand to central areas of urban centres and have the potential to block major routes or airport access.



travel to, from and within the country difficult or impossible. At the first signs of unrest or tribal clashes, workforce should immediately vacate the affected area and head to a secure location until the situation has stabilised. Workforce should minimise movement during periods of heightened tribal tensions. Due to the nature of recent attacks, workforce should minimise time spent in the vicinity of likely targets, including police stations and targeted businesses. Domestic evacuations via road or air may be required in the event of a significant deterioration in the security environment.

Maintain access to multiple means of communication – including local and international SIM cards, landlines and satellite phones – due to the potential for sporadic disruption to domestic networks. International assignees and business travellers should also prepare a grab bag containing essential items (including their passport and relevant visas) in case of a security escalation.

Due to the risk of roadblocks, workforce should liaise with their local contacts and security provider to ensure routes are clear before setting out. Do not attempt to cross or drive through roadblocks, as this may provoke a hostile response. Instead, turn around and seek an alternative route to your destination. Ensure you have contingency plans in case journeys are interrupted, especially for flights, movements to airports or along the Highlands Highway. In the event of a road traffic accident or altercation, avoiding stopping due to the risk of retaliatory attacks or targeted attacks by the affected tribes.

### How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of security providers.
- **Services offered:** Ground transport services and evacuations via air or road.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Available within major urban centres, including the capital Port Moresby, Lae (Morobe province) and Mount Hagen.

Managers should closely monitor developments and indicators for potential changes in the security environment. They should also ensure that a rapidly implementable escalation plan is in place as preparation for critical security scenarios. Safe havens and secure routes, methods of transport and ports of departure should be identified in advance. Escalation triggers to monitor for include land or property disputes, accusations of theft and robbery, killings of tribal members and generational disputes.





## ASIA-PACIFIC: ON WATCH

**Fiji:** Following negotiations, a coalition government has been formed with the People's Alliance (PA), National Federation Party and the Social Democratic Liberal Party. PA leader Sitiveni Rabuka is due to replace incumbent prime minister Frank Bainimarama. There have been reports of targeted attacks against Indo-Fijians. Heightened tensions and political scandals are likely to persist this month.

**Indonesia:** The newly passed criminal code will likely trigger protests across the country in the coming weeks due to controversial provisions concerning individual and press freedom. It may also have implications for foreign nationals as it is perceived as harmful for tourism. Nationwide protests were held in 2019 against the same bill, preventing it from being passed in parliament.

**Regional:** Anticipate disruption amid the Lunar New Year holiday period. Heightened transport demands may result in traffic congestion and overcrowding at transport hubs. Increased footfall at tourist sites will raise petty and opportunistic crime risks. The authorities would likely impose COVID-19 restrictions at short notice amid pandemic-related developments. Government offices, banks and businesses will likely close during this period.





## CENTRAL ASIA

- Significant energy shortages will cause increased logistical disruption across **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan** and **Uzbekistan** in the coming weeks.
- Shortages and associated disruption will drive demonstrations. While these will likely remain localised, the potential for more widespread protests cannot be discounted.

### Situation

Seasonal energy shortages have led to large-scale blackouts across Central Asia in recent months. While energy shortages and power cuts have long been a feature of the winter season in the region, the problem is particularly acute this year.

Aging energy infrastructure, chronic underinvestment and reported mismanagement have created a difficult energy landscape across Central Asia. The situation has also been exacerbated by corruption and sudden increases in demand due to a cryptocurrency mining boom. A prolonged cold spell, paired with global energy supply difficulties, has meant unscheduled power cuts began earlier than usual and are lasting for longer, also affecting heating supplies. The issue is consistent across four of the five Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan seems more inured due to its own energy production. However, the extent of the issue in the country is difficult to assess due to an extremely tightly controlled security and information environment.

In December 2022, Uzbekistan halted gas exports to China due to its domestic energy shortages. In the same month, Kazakhstan said it would also gradually reduce its exports to China to meet domestic consumption requirements. The planned conversion of major Kazakh electricity generating plants from coal to gas powered is exacerbating concerns that domestic demand will increase and thus become untenable in the coming months.

In late November 2022, as temperatures dropped to -30 degrees Celsius (-22 Fahrenheit) in the Kazakh city of Ekibastuz, the private energy facility that supplies the city broke down. The city was left without heating supply for several days. While the central government has sought to blame local mismanagement for the issues, there is increasing public anger around the issue of energy shortages.

Notably, a large cryptocurrency mine is also located near Ekibastuz. Kazakhstan is the second-biggest cryptocurrency mining country in the world, having experienced a significant influx of crypto miners in the aftermath of a ban on the activity in China in late 2021. The growth of crypto mining, a notoriously energy-intensive endeavour, has had a substantial contribution to increasing domestic energy demand in Kazakhstan.



While the country is a significant energy producer, it is struggling to meet its domestic energy needs, particularly its gas demands. Long-term price caps, a legacy from Soviet Union-era structures, has meant gas in Kazakhstan is sold at a loss. This affects the ability for reinvestment in infrastructure and provides an incentive to export fuel to obtain higher prices.

The government has promised reform in this area, entailing the removal of dangerous caps. However, this has proved politically dangerous. Large-scale unrest in January 2022 began with protests against the removal of price caps on liquid petroleum gas. Consequently, the government postponed planned gas reforms. In a bid to reassure domestic consumers of adequate supply and curtail potential further unrest, it also announced a planned reduction in gas exports for 2023.

The climate crisis and associated changing weather patterns are exacerbating the situation. Kyrgyzstan generates 40% of its energy from the Toktogul reservoir, but summer heatwaves over the last three years have substantially reduced the level of the dam. The heatwaves have also led to increased energy demands in summer, which in turn affects energy supply in following months.

### Implications

Acute energy shortages will cause increased logistical disruption across the region in the coming months. Sporadic, unplanned interruptions to power, heating and water supplies may occur. While the issue is worse in rural areas and smaller urban centres, larger cities, including the Uzbek capital Tashkent and Kazakh commercial capital Almaty, may also be affected.

The issue will also drive anti-government demonstrations. These will likely remain localised due to the tightly controlled security environment. However, public discontent is growing at the seeming failure of the central authorities to comprehensively address this recurring and worsening issue. As such, more large-scale unrest cannot be ruled out.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan need to increase domestic energy production, boost energy imports, or some combination of the two to prevent further logistical disruption and associated

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
Large disruptive protests, the closure of further power stations due to a lack of fuel, capacity or revenue	Such closures would place additional pressure on energy supply, thus increasing the potential for related public anger and associated protests.
The inability of the government to procure energy imports to supplement domestic production	In the event domestic supply continues to fall short of demand, regional governments will come under mounting public pressure to secure additional import streams. Failure to do so will lead to increased public discontent and associated protests.
Large-scale protests over energy-related issues occur in main urban centres	While large-scale protests remain unlikely, they cannot be ruled out. While sudden spontaneous flare-ups of unrest may occur across the region, the security forces have demonstrated capabilities to contain widespread unrest.



security issues. Amid difficult economic conditions, global fuel shortages and a complex geopolitical environment, increasing energy imports is less straightforward than it would seem. Other regional suppliers are likely to give preference to supplying European markets, where they can obtain higher prices.

In November 2022, Russia suggested an agreement with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan aimed at facilitating increased gas sales. However, leaders in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan gave a lukewarm reception to the idea, wary of the potential for 'political conditions in exchange for gas'. Russia's framing the idea as a union or alliance is understood to have contributed to resistance to the proposal. While it would be economically beneficial to both states to increase their imports from Russia, concerns around the latter's political intentions have shored up resistance to the plan. The implications of western sanctions on Russian energy have also led to hesitance from both governments.

### 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 assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** 24-72 depending on location and availability of resources at the time of the request.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes.

### Recommendations

Managers should ensure escalation plans are regularly updated, realistic and rapidly implementable. Ensure in-country workforce have access to adequate fuel supplies and, depending on location, assess if a private backup generator is required to mitigate the impact of electricity outages. Workforce in the region should anticipate sporadic disruption to essential services, including electricity, heating, water and internet services over the coming weeks. Maintain access to reliable primary and alternative communication devices and ensure they are always kept fully charged.



## GERMANY

- On 7 December 2022, 25 people were arrested on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. The alleged plotters subscribe to conspiracy theories regarding its legitimacy.
- The incident demonstrates the credible threat posed by fringe political groupings and far-right ideologies, which are on the rise.
- Managers should ensure workforce are briefed on how to respond in the event of shooting or stabbing attacks, as well as unruly protests.

### Situation

The German Federal Prosecutor's Office arrested 25 people on 7 December, including former army officers and police officials, on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. The prosecutor's office has said that 22 of those arrested are suspected of supporting, or being a part of, a terrorist organisation.

The prosecuted individuals are reportedly affiliated with the Reichsbürger movement. Its members invoke the historical German Reich and subscribe to conspiracy theories and a self-defined natural law. They reject the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany and its legal system. They deny the legitimacy of its democratically elected representatives, or even define themselves in their entirety as being outside the legal system. The Reichsbürger scene is not a new phenomenon in Germany, and domestic intelligence services have been monitoring the movement since 2016.

The group of people who have been linked to the plot range in their backgrounds and political affiliation. The apparent leader, Heinrich XIII 'Prince' Reuss, is an aristocrat. Others include people from the anti-democratic and right-wing extreme

fringes. Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, a Berlin judge and former member of the Bundestag of the far-right party Alternative for Germany, and members of the Querdenken ('Lateral Thinking') movement were part of the group. The latter was formed during the COVID-19-pandemic to oppose the government's public health policies. Former and current members of the security forces and members of the Special Forces Command were also involved.

The group was apparently inspired by those who stormed the Capitol Hill in the US in January 2021. Members had planned to break into the Bundestag (German parliament) and handcuff members of parliament and government officials. They had hoped that this would spark unrest across the country, resulting in a coup and an overthrow of the government.

Right-wing extremist terrorist acts with links to conspiracy theories have come under increasing scrutiny in Germany in recent years. In February 2020, a right-wing extremist in Hanau (Hesse state) killed nine members of migrant families, his mother and eventually himself. In October 2019, on the Jewish holiday of Yom-Kippur, a man in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt state) killed a pedestrian



and a person in a restaurant after attempting to enter a synagogue in the vicinity. Both assailants had produced manifests containing crude conspiracy theories. In June 2020, a neo-Nazi killed the district president of Kassel (Hesse), Walter Luebcke. He stated that Kassel's politics were supporting the 'Great Replacement', a political battle term used to attribute immigration by non-whites and Muslims to an alleged conspiracy aimed at replacing white-majority populations.

While the Reichsburger ideology focuses on the fundamental rejection of the Federal Republic of Germany, not all members have right-wing extremist tendencies. However, the movement's conspiracy-related argumentation favours a connectivity to right-wing extremists, such as antisemitic explanatory patterns.

Over the last two years, developments such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine have driven radicalisation in Germany. COVID-19-related protests brought together the state-sceptical scenes of the Reichsburger, right-wing extremists, adherents of the QAnon movement and vaccine sceptics, among others.

## Implications

The incident demonstrates the credible threat posed by radical elements within fringe political groupings and far-right ideologies, which are on the rise. During the security operation on 7 December, significant quantities of weapons and ammunition were seized. This, in combination with the military training and experience of several members of the group, demonstrates its capability to carry out violent attacks. The government has announced its intention to tighten gun laws in response.

Sympathisers of conspiracy theories, fringe political groupings and far-right ideologies pose a credible security threat. Right-wing extremists are known to stage xenophobic attacks that mainly target refugee centres or migrants. While these incidents are unlikely to directly affect business travellers, demonstrations organised by right-wing extremists can result in localised clashes between protesters and the police. Such unrest would pose incidental risk to bystanders.

Online disinformation, networking and radicalisation can translate into action, including violence. This could take the form

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
The assassination or attempted assassination of a politician, journalist or person of interest	This could motivate other Reichsburger conspiracy theorists or right-wing extremists to perpetrate acts of violence, including further attacks
Increased rhetoric from the Reichsburger scene, the Querdenken movement or right-wing extremists to developments related to polarising topics, such as the energy crisis	Instrumentalising polarising news by these groups has the potential to further radicalise them and contribute to their growth. This could lead to demonstrations or low-level attacks on political interests.
Protests by sympathisers and members of right-wing ideologies	While most demonstrations pass off peacefully, localised scuffles involving rival demonstrators or the police are possible.



of street protests, or attacks against the authorities. A police officer was injured in an exchange of gunfire during a related security operation in 2016, along with several other people. Further related incidents would pose incidental risks to bystanders. The alleged plot serves as a confirmation for members of the parliament about increasing security measures of political institutions. In August 2020, they already raised concerns after protesters, including sympathisers of conspiracy theories, fringe political groupings and far-right ideologies, stormed the steps of the parliament building. Such acts of violence against politicians and political institutions are on the rise, and could extend to threats to journalists, civil society groups and non-governmental organisations.

## Recommendations

Managers should closely monitor developments related to the Reichsbürger scene, right-wing extremists and the Querdenken movement. News related to the pandemic, the crisis caused by the conflict in Ukraine and other polarising topics could lead to a further radicalisation. Managers and in-country workforce should ensure access to verified sources of information, including International SOS alerts.

### How we can help

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

Workforce should avoid demonstrations organised by the Querdenken, Reichsbürger or right-wing extremist groups as a precaution. While most protests have passed off peacefully, there is a risk of scuffles involving rival demonstrators and the police. However, any such unrest would likely be swiftly contained and remain localised.

In-country workforce should also anticipate a heightened security presence near political institutions. This follows a request by politicians to increase security measures after the attempted coup and previous related incidents.





## EUROPE AND CIS: ON WATCH



**Armenia/Azerbaijan:** Azerbaijan will continue to accuse Armenia of using the Lachin Corridor route to illegally transport arms and gold to and from the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. This will lead to further road blockades by Azerbaijani activists and associated protests in urban centres in Armenia. Azerbaijan is demanding customs checks be established but will need international support to yield results.

**Czech Republic:** Presidential election will be held on **13 - 14 January**. If no candidate obtains more than half of the votes, a second round will be held on **27 - 28 January** between the top two candidates. Danuse Nerudova, Petr Pavel and Andrej Babis – who is currently being investigated for fraud – are leading in opinion polls.

**Kosovo:** Local elections in northern Kosovo, originally scheduled for December 2022, have been postponed due to growing ethnic tensions. President Vjosa Osmani announced that they would take place in **April**. Elections became necessary after Serbian mayors and municipal representatives in four municipalities resigned their posts to protest against a vehicle license plate ordinance issued by the Kosovar government.



## IRAN

- While anti-government protests will persist, unrest in its current state will not pose a threat to the regime.
- The government will continue to employ heavy-handed measures against protesters despite international pressure.
- Both the unrest and sanctions by international actors will continue to undermine the country's economic situation and drive regional tensions.

### Situation

Ongoing nationwide demonstrations started in mid-September. The protests were triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman, while in the custody of the morality police on 16 September 2022. She was arrested for allegedly failing to adhere to the country's Islamic dress code. As unrest persisted, the protest movement, which was initially sparked by outrage over the incident, grew to encompass broader anti-government sentiments. These include dissatisfaction with the country's leadership and the infringement on women's rights and personal freedoms, with protesters demanding regime change.

Despite domestic opposition and international pressure in the form of sanctions, the government has pursued a hard-line approach aimed at curbing protest activity. Both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi have vowed to pursue a tougher crackdown and publicly opposed any concession to protesters. Notably, this also excludes any easing of the legal requirement for women to wear hijab (head

coverings) in public. On 8 and 12 December 2022, the authorities executed the first two people for their involvement in the protests, with at least ten others facing a death sentence.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Basij – an IRGC branch consisting of paramilitary volunteer militia – have been actively involved in suppressing the protests. Additional reinforcements have been deployed across the country, including in Kurdish-populated north-west provinces and Sistan-e Balochistan province, dominated by the Sunni Muslim ethnic-Balochi minority. International reports indicate that at least 480 people have been killed so far by the security forces, and more than 18,200 have reportedly been detained. Amid allegations by the government of foreign interference in domestic unrest, the latter include a growing number of foreign or dual nationals.

The regime's response to protests has spurred divisions among the country's political and religious elite. Reports emerged in the recent weeks of several reformist politicians questioning government policies towards curbing the unrest, urging concessions be made. Nevertheless, the overt criticism of the government within the political establishment is still a rare occurrence. Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid, residing in Sistan-e Balochistan, remains one of the few key religious figures denouncing the regime. A majority of high-ranking Shia clerics side with the government.

The government's crackdown has led to a decrease in the tempo and scale of demonstrations but has failed to stop the unrest altogether. The resilience of the protest movement stems at least partially from the network of volunteer groups formed throughout the course of demonstrations to support the unrest. On 4 December 2022, youth groups across the country that have been playing a prominent role in co-ordinating protests formed an umbrella organisation, the Neighbourhood Youth Alliance of Iran.

### Implications

Anti-government protests will persist in the coming weeks as the authorities have demonstrated little intent to negotiate or offer concessions to demonstrators. Further executions of protesters will sustain public outrage and associated unrest. However, such activity is unlikely to yield a regime change. The government has the support of the security forces, including IRGC, Basij militia and the police. Furthermore, even those within the political establishment critical of the government's policies, including prominent reformist and former president Mohammad Khatami (in office 1997-2005), oppose regime change and advocate for reforms instead.

The frequency and scale of demonstrations will continue to fluctuate on a daily basis. A decrease in daily protest activity was observed throughout December 2022 amid an increasingly tough crackdown. Nevertheless, the neighbourhood youth groups and other informal organisations have demonstrated their ability to co-ordinate protests in multiple urban centres on planned days. This was evidenced by an increase in commemorative gatherings across the country in mid-November 2022, marking the three-year anniversary of the 2019 Iranian protests, as well as on Student Day (7 December 2022). Funerals and commemoration ceremonies for protesters will remain flashpoints of unrest.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
An increase in low-level attacks against the security forces	An increase in attacks on IRGC, Basij or police personnel, including stabbings or shootings, would reflect escalating hostile tactics by protesters in response to the government's crackdown. They would likely be followed by a surge in security operations.
Arrests or assassinations of prominent Sunni clerics	Arrests and assassinations of prominent Sunni clerics would heighten the risk of violent widespread unrest in Sistan-e Balochistan province.
Co-ordinated, high-casualty attacks on the security forces or government interests	Co-ordinated strikes against security or government interests and personnel, including bombs or suicide attacks, would mark a shift in the tactics deployed by the anti-government movement and signify a deterioration of the security environment.
An increase in militant attacks	A surge in militant attacks by extremist groups such as the Islamic State would point towards increasing instability and dwindling capabilities of the security forces to maintain order across the country.



Low-level attacks on the security forces and police personnel will persist. Protesters have targeted police vehicles and stations in the past. There have also been isolated reports of security force personnel being stabbed or shot dead. Casualties among them are likely to result in further arrests and persecutions of suspected perpetrators.

The capital Tehran and Kurdish-populated north-west will remain hotspots of unrest. In Sistan-e Balochistan, anti-government protests typically take place after Friday prayers. Arrests or assassinations of Sunni clerics based in the province would see an escalation of violent unrest.

Despite reports of internal divisions and international pressure, the government is unlikely to ease its response to protests. Both the Supreme Leader and Raisi have publicly called for a tougher crackdown on demonstrators. Their position is further supported by hardliners that have dominated the administration since Raisi's victory over reformist former president Hassan Rouhani (in office 2013-21) in the June 2021 presidential election.

The deepening economic crisis linked to the protests will increase pressure both on the government and on the country's stability. The Iranian rial has lost almost 18% of its value due to the sanctions imposed upon the country by the international community in response to the crackdown. Economic grievances remain a key driver of unrest in Iran. In the first half of 2022, subsidy cuts on key food staples triggered countrywide demonstrations. Even if the government is successful in stifling unrest linked to Amini's death, a further deterioration of the economic situation will sustain the risk of associated demonstrations and strikes in the coming months.

Anti-government unrest will also indirectly sustain regional tensions. The crackdown on the protesters has considerably strained relations between the international community and Iran. The latter has on multiple occasions alleged foreign interference in demonstrations. Additionally, the government has arrested foreign and dual nationals for their alleged participation in protests. Several countries that have introduced additional sanctions against Iran are parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, commonly known as the 'Iran nuclear deal'). Tensions and mistrust that have developed in the context of recent developments will further complicate the JCPOA negotiations. Delays in curbing the nuclear programme will sustain regional tensions, while delays in sanctions relief continue to undermine the country's economic situation.

## Recommendations

Managers should carefully evaluate whether to deploy assignees to the country. They should take into account their individual risk profile, limited consular support, as well as challenges associated with providing logistical, medical and security assistance due to international sanctions.

Ensure that travel to Iran is undertaken in compliance with any applicable regulatory restrictions. If in doubt, consider obtaining your own independent legal advice before undertaking any travel to Iran. Maintain updated and rapidly implementable escalation plans in case of a sudden deterioration in the security environment.



# MONTHLY SECURITY FORECAST

## Middle East and North Africa



In-country workforce should monitor local developments, including calls for protests on specific dates. Exercise vigilance around potential flashpoints of unrest and targets for attacks, including government and military interests, diplomatic missions, religious sites, popular tourist locations, transport hubs and crowded public areas.

Foreign nationals and business travellers should avoid all gatherings due to the credible risk of unrest, harassment and/or detention by the security forces. Be aware that foreign nationals caught in the vicinity of unauthorised protests are likely to arouse the suspicions of the security forces and may increase your exposure to questioning or detention. If you find yourself in the vicinity of gatherings, leave the area immediately and return to a secure location, such as your accommodation, until the situation stabilises.

If detained by the authorities, we advise workforce to insist on liaising with their diplomatic mission prior to answering any questions or making any statements. The authorities may be unwilling to provide the necessary contact details. As such, it is best to memorise the contact details or carry them on your person.

### How we can help

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

Carry identification at all times and anticipate spot-checks by the security forces. Maintain access to reliable communication tools and ensure that critical electronic devices, such as mobile phones and laptops, are always fully charged.



## SUDAN

- Political tensions will persist despite the signing of a new framework agreement in December 2022.
- Protests against the new deal will continue, driven by public mistrust of the military.
- Public opposition to the deal will either delay the signing of the final agreement or lead to its collapse.

### Situation

The military government and civilian Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) coalition signed a framework agreement on 5 December 2022 to end a prolonged political deadlock and enter a two-year transitional period that would culminate in democratic elections. The new deal seeks to establish a civilian-led transitional authority. It also stipulates the creation of a unified army with its formal role limited to a security and defence council headed by a prime minister.

The agreement has been described by the FFC as part one of a two-part process, as it does not provide a framework to address key issues that have been driving anti-military unrest. These include the reform of the security forces and military, justice for crimes committed since the 2019 coup, a dismantling of the remnants of former president Omar

al-Bashir's (in office 1989-2019) regime and the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA).

The framework for tackling these issues is expected to be developed under a second or 'final' agreement. The deadline for this is yet to be announced. The ambiguity around these key issues, including accountability for the repression of protesters and a reform of the military, led several civilian stakeholders to reject the deal. Demonstrations against the new transitional framework agreement have been staged across urban centres since it was signed.

Disagreements have also emerged around a potential revision of the JPA. The FFC stated that the expected changes within the government's structure, specifically the role of the military, are likely to require a revision of the JPA in line with the new Transitional Constitution. However, a spokesperson for the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) – an alliance of rebel movements that signed the JPA – warned against any revisions to the agreement. The Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan Liberation Movement-Minnawi – both members of the SRF – reportedly boycotted the 5 December deal over potential amendments to the JPA.

The agreement has the support of some international stakeholders. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK and the US have welcomed the deal and are seeking to co-ordinate economic support for Sudan, which has been cut off from international aid since the October 2021 military coup. On 13 December 2022, Sudan signed a preliminary agreement with a UAE consortium for a \$6b investment into the development of the Abu Amama port, to be located north of Port Sudan (Red Sea state).



### Implications

Although the signing of the framework agreement between the military and the FFC marks a positive development, political tensions will persist this year. These will be driven by negotiations over contentious issues, including security reforms, transitional justice, the revision of the JPA and the dismantling of the remnants of Bashir’s regime. The rejection of the new framework deal by resistance committees and some opposition parties will continue to fuel unrest this month. Public discontent will be sustained by mistrust of the military and scepticism of political stakeholders’ ability to address public grievances.

The final agreement currently being negotiated by the military and civilian groups could help ease these tensions, if it provides a framework for dealing with the issues. There are, however, challenges linked to negotiations that will undermine the credibility of the deal in the public eye. For many civilian groups, including the resistance committees, an agreement that would allow those responsible for the October 2021 coup to remain in power would deny justice to victims of the military and the security forces. Therefore, any deal that would allow army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, to retain their military roles within the new government structure would be met with public resistance.

Other contentious issues include reports of the military seeking to retain control over any reforms of its own structure and to obtain guarantees of impunity for military and security force personnel. A potential revision of the JPA has also led several signatory rebel groups to reject the new agreement.

A lack of transparency around negotiations and the absence of a deadline for the final agreement will drive uncertainty around the deal and its impact on stability in Sudan. Demonstrations against the military and the new framework agreement will persist in the absence of guarantees of transitional justice and structural reforms to the security sector. The security forces will continue to use heavy-handed measures against protesters, including tear gas and live ammunition. Disruption to domestic communications networks, including mobile and internet services, is likely during demonstrations.

Main indicators of deterioration	Assessment
A breakdown of the new agreement	Widespread opposition to the new agreement could lead to its collapse. This would prolong unrest and limit access to international aid.
An escalation in violent unrest	Hightened tensions will sustain the risk of an escalation in unrest. This would be accompanied by a tougher and more widespread crackdown on protests, with the security forces using live ammunition. This would likely result in a high number of casualties.
Reduced availability of international commercial flights via Khartoum International Airport (KRT)	An escalation in violent unrest could prompt the authorities to restrict access to the airport or cause international airlines to temporarily reduce or cancel flights.





The challenges of negotiating with the military and broader civilian opposition to the deal will either delay the signing of the final agreement or lead to its collapse. This second agreement is critical for civilian stakeholders to start the formation of the new transitional government and to get access to much-needed international aid. Sudan is experiencing an acute economic crisis accompanied by fuel shortages and increased prices of essential goods. The absence of a functional government and lack of financial aid will continue to constrain the ability of the authorities to address the economic crisis. This will further undermine stability and fuel anti-military sentiments and associated unrest.

## Recommendations

Essential travel to Sudan can proceed with stringent precautions, including strong journey management procedures, local support networks and access to the latest threat intelligence. Maintain flexible itineraries due to the potential for a sudden deterioration in the security environment. Be prepared to postpone or cut journeys short with little notice.

In-country workforce should liaise with their trusted local contacts to remain apprised of the latest developments, including the timings and locations of organised protests. Foreign nationals should avoid all demonstrations and stand fast on days when large protests are planned due to the credible risk of unrest.

Overland movement should be conducted with the support of a local contact or a reputable provider, particularly during periods of unrest. Reconfirm the status of routes and feasibility of journeys prior to setting out. Maintain access to multiple means of communication – including local

and international SIM cards, landlines and satellite phones – due to the potential for disruption to domestic networks. Be aware of the legal requirements surrounding the import and use of satellite phones.

Ensure that escalation and business continuity plans are regularly updated, realistic and rapidly implementable. These should be adapted to a wide range of scenarios, including the most-likely and worst-case scenarios. Reconfirm that essential workforce have the capability to stand fast at an adequate and assessed secure location with provisions in place for at least one week (i.e., food, water, essential medication and fuel). Workforce should ensure their passports and visas are up to date and on hand in the event of an evacuation.

### How we can help

- **Presence in-country:** An accredited network of security providers.
- **Services offered:** From ground transport services to assisting with evacuations.
- **Activation time:** 24-48 hours. The activation time will be shorter for requests in the capital Khartoum.
- **Secure accommodation:** Yes



## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: ON WATCH

**Lebanon:** Delays to the presidential election will sustain political tensions and associated public discontent. Since the end of the last presidential term in October 2022, parliament has made several unsuccessful attempts to elect a new president and form a government. The political stalemate, ongoing economic crisis and disruption to delivery of essential services will drive unrest.

**Regional:** A further slump in oil prices will put additional economic pressure on major energy exporters in the region, including the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In **Libya** and **Iraq**, the decrease in revenues from energy exports will contribute to a deterioration in living standards and exacerbate security risks, including crime and anti-government unrest.

**Turkey:** The sentencing of the Istanbul mayor will heighten tensions and drive the risk of unrest in the province. Government critics and members of opposition parties are coming under increasing scrutiny as the June general election approaches.





## 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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