

WORSENING

AFGHANISTAN: Taliban advances prompt Barack Obama to delay the withdrawal of US troops

After the capture of the capital of Kunduz by Taliban rebels, Afghan troops supported by international forces retook the city after days of battle. The instability has prompted the US government to finally announce a delay in the withdrawal of US troops until the end of 2017. The battle for Kunduz killed 500 people, 400 of them Taliban. US forces bombed a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital during the battle, killing 22 workers and patients and injuring 37 others. MSF described it as a war crime and called for an independent investigation, though days later, US tanks entered the hospital premises and destroyed evidence. MSF announced that it was withdrawing from the area, leaving Kunduz province without a hospital. In Faryab, the Taliban took two districts. During the operation, they killed 22 police officers and captured the police chief and some more officers in the district of Ghormach. The district was taken back by Afghan forces at the end of the month. The fighting is pushing the number of internally displaced people in Afghanistan towards one million. In the centre of Uruzgan, 38 police officers and 65 Taliban were killed in clashes. Similar skirmishes also took place in southern Helmand province, where 22 border police and 65 Taliban lost their lives. In Samangan, the (unofficial) Taliban governor surrendered to the police with his militia and joined the peace process. The United States believes that only a peace process can end the current situation. On their official website, the Taliban also expressed their willingness to resume the peace process that was suspended in late September. Both the Afghan government and the Taliban are in favour of resuming the process, but prefer to leave Pakistan out of it this time. The Afghan government considers its neighbour responsible for the rise in violence and keeps asking it to stop supporting the Taliban. Vice President Rashid Dostum asked his old ally Russia for help regarding the ground gained by Islamic State in Afghanistan. Moscow has not ruled out bombing the group's positions. A magnitude-7.5 earthquake struck the northern part of the country, complicating the situation even further. (The New York Times, 01, 03, 20/10/15; Pajhwok Afghan News, 04, 05, 08/10/15; Radio Free Europe, 07/10/15; Voanews, 14/10/15; ToloNews, 10, 15, 20/10/15; The Guardian, 17/10/15)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE: Over 50 Palestinians and 10 Israelis are killed amidst escalating violence

Starting on 1 October, a string of acts of violence caused the deaths of 60 people (55 Palestinians and 11 Israelis), including children, and wounded many others amidst escalating tension that has encouraged speculation about the outbreak of a third Intifada. Most of the Israeli victims were stabbed by Palestinians, whereas the Palestinian casualties were mainly felled by Israeli gunfire. The many incidents included the murder of a settler couple, deliberate hit-and-run incidents against Israelis and attacks on buses, knife attacks and many shootings of Palestinian youth during search operations, at checkpoints and during protests in the West Bank. An Eritrean youth also died after being assaulted by a group of people that mistook him for a Palestinian assailant, while an Israeli citizen was shot dead by an Israeli soldier who also thought he was an Arab attacker. Various Palestinian sources have accused Israel of killing suspects without evidence. However, Israel has argued that it is acting in self-defence. Until late October, Amnesty International has documented at least four cases in which Palestinians were executed by Israeli forces when they posed no imminent threat and the US expressed concern about reports suggesting the excessive use of force by Israel. The violence initially broke out in Jerusalem, but then spread to the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The situation prompted emergency meetings among the Israeli cabinet, which authorised the security forces to close off parts of Jerusalem, including Palestinian districts in the eastern part of the city, announced that the attackers' homes would be confiscated and demolished and ordered the deployment of additional soldiers in various cities to support

the police forces. Although the Palestinians seemed to carry out the attacks independently, Israel accused the Palestinian authorities of inciting violence. The Palestinian authorities blamed the incidents on the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories and the growing discontent of the youth. The recent escalation began in mid-September due to tensions around the al-Haram al-Sharif complex (the third holiest site in Islam), which the Israelis call the Temple Mount and is located in the Old City of Jerusalem. According to a longstanding “status quo” agreement, Jews may visit but not pray in the area. Palestinian groups accused Israel of trying to alter this agreement, allowing a growing number of Jews to access the area and imposing restrictions on access to Palestinians. In late October, following efforts by US Secretary of State John Kerry, an agreement was announced between Israel and Jordan –the custodian of the complex– to install permanent surveillance cameras in the area. At the end of the month, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has rejected calls from Hamas to launch a new Intifada, stressed that the situation in the Palestinian territories was at its worst point since 1948 and repeated his request for the UN to provide international protection to the Palestinian population. (The Guardian, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28/10/15; AP, 02/10/15; BBC, 05, 15, 22/10/15; The New York Times, 13/10/15; Foreign Policy 14/10/15)

SOUTH SUDAN: The peace agreement unravels due to unilateral decisions by Kiir’s government

On 2 October, President Salva Kiir announced a unilateral decree fragmenting the current 10 states that make up the country into 28 federal states. Riek Machar, the leader of the rebel opposition group SPLM/A-IO, said that the move was a serious violation of the peace agreement signed in August and threatens its continuity. The group known as the Troika (the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway), as well as the regional organisation IGAD, also condemned Kiir’s announcement, expressing concern and warning the government that its plans directly contradict the peace agreement and that any fundamental change must take place within the Transitional Government of National Unity, which has yet to form. The IGAD has asked the government to repeal the decree. The political opposition and local experts also questioned its legitimacy. In another unexpected move, the ruling party announced the dissolution of all SPLM leadership structures, except the office of the presidency held by Kiir, which will propose new candidates. A similar incident set off the crisis in December 2013, which led to the fracturing of the party and the start of the civil war. Machar also strongly questioned the move, describing it as fresh provocation and a threat to the peace process. In other developments, during the month both the government and the SPLM/A-IO rebels broke the ceasefire agreed to on various occasions. The IGAD reported that the ceasefire has already been violated 50 times since the first cessation of hostilities agreement was signed in February 2014. Furthermore, the AU published a report accusing the government and rebel forces of committing murder, torture, mutilation, rape and forced cannibalism during the civil war, identifying the people responsible for the crimes. However, the regional organisation’s commission of inquiry added that evidence had not been found that genocide had been committed in the country. On a positive note, significant progress was made in the peace process. Uganda has begun to withdraw its troops (UPDF) from the country. Although it will not comply with the deadline for the withdrawal planned for 10 October in the peace agreement, it is estimated that it will finish during the first week in November. The IGAD appointed the former president of Botswana, Festus Gontebanye Mogae, to preside over the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission for the peace agreement. It also named Ugandan Lieutenant General Ivan Koreta to head the Ceasefire Transitional Arrangement Monitoring Mechanism (CSAMM). Meanwhile, the signatories to the peace agreement resumed negotiations to finalise the agreed measures of the section on security. The meeting took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 21 to 26 October, through the mediation of the IGAD-Plus team. Finally, on 9 October, the UN Security Council approved extending the mandate of the mission in the country (UNMISS) by two additional months, until 15 December 2015.

(Radio Tamazuj, 01, 10, 23/10/15; Sudan Tribune, 02-19/10/15; Reuters, 06, 08/10/2015; UN, 09/10/15)

SYRIA: Russia and Iran become more openly involved in support of Assad in the conflict, while the United States increases the supply of arms to opposition forces

The internationalisation of the war in Syria became more evident following Russia's direct involvement in bombings in the country and the more open presence of Iranian forces in combat. Moscow began air strikes in Syria on 30 September, with the stated objective of targeting the positions of ISIS and "other terrorist groups". However, the United States and other countries of the anti-ISIS coalition and the Syrian opposition have accused Russia of attacking the positions of rebel groups, some of them supported by the West, in areas with little or no ISIS presence. Russia has also been accused of harming civilians in its attacks, which have included the use of missiles launched from the Caspian Sea. Russia's intervention put Turkey on alert, which has condemned incidents involving violations of its airspace, and prompted NATO to warn that it is ready to defend its allies. It also led to contact between the United States and Russia to prevent incidents, since combat missions conducted by both countries were occurring in the same airspace for the first time since the Second World War. After the air offensive in Syria began, Damascus launched an operation to try to regain areas in the western part of the country held by the opposition. During the month, hostilities reportedly intensified in areas such as Homs, Hama and Latakia, forcing more people to flee their homes. In this context, Iranian support for Bashar Assad's regime became more explicit with forces on the ground. In mid-October, a senior officer in the Republican Guard, Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani, was reportedly killed in the area around Aleppo and the number of Iranian casualties in the conflict rose (between 60 or 70 in 2015 alone, compared to 140 since the war began in 2011). According to US estimates, between 2,000 and 4,000 Iranian troops are fighting in Syria. Washington decided to suspend the programme to train moderate rebels in Syria after its resounding failure. After the Russian air offensive began, the US decided to increase the supply of weapons to opposition groups. In the middle of the month, 45 tonnes of weapon stockpiles were reportedly delivered, mainly in al-Hasakah governorate, consisting of light weaponry, grenades and ammunition. In this context, near the end of the month the Russian-Syrian alliance staged a trip by Bashar Assad to Moscow, the first time he had travelled abroad since 2011. Shortly thereafter, contacts were reportedly revived between international and regional powers in an attempt to reach a political solution to the crisis, with the United States ending its refusal to allow Iran to participate in a new development. Thus, representatives of the United States, Russia, Iran, the EU, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were expected to meet in Vienna at the end of the month to address the crisis. (Foreign Policy, 01, 21, 23/10/15; BBC, 07, 13, 15, 22/10/15; Reuters, 10/10/15; The Washington Post, 09/10/15; The Guardian, 09, 27, 28/10/15; El País, 28/10/15)

TURKEY (SOUTHEAST): Over 100 people are killed in an attack on a pro-peace rally largely attended by Kurds in Ankara, while the PKK declares a ceasefire

In an attack described as the most serious in the history of Turkey, around 100 people were killed and hundreds were injured in a double explosion on 10 October before the start of a rally in Ankara to demand peace talks and an end to the conflict. Organised by various unions and NGOs with the support of the pro-Kurdish party HDP, the rally was attended by a notable number of Kurdish movement sympathisers and politicians. The Turkish government and president described the attack as a collective act of terror, blaming ISIS, the PKK, the Kurdish forces of Syria and the Syrian regime, while opposition parties and analysts held ISIS responsible (the HDP blamed the government, for colluding with ISIS) and accused the government of security failure despite having information about pro-ISIS cells in Turkey. Thus, despite the information blackout imposed by the authorities, reports emerged about family ties between one of the suspected authors of the attack and the perpetrator of the attack on a Kurdish cultural centre in Suruç in July that killed 33 and

injured over 100, as well as links to the suspected author of an attack on June against an HDP election rally that killed four. The attack caused great distress amidst acute deterioration of the political, social and security atmosphere and growing authoritarianism in recent months. Despite the enormous impact of the attack on the Kurdish movement, on the same day the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire, as previously planned, saying it was in response to calls for the same and aimed at facilitating the elections on 1 November, as well as a show of will for democratisation, peace and stability in Turkey. The government rejected the PKK's ceasefire and continued its military and police campaign against the Kurdish movement, relaunched in late July, including air strikes on Turkey and northern Iraq. In October, there were new special operations in cities in the east and south of the country, with curfews and serious effects on the civilian population, like in various districts of Diyarbakir and in Nusaybin (Mardin). Clashes occurred between security forces and the PKK, claiming dozens of lives, though the death tolls varied by source. One of the most serious incidents involved bombings by the Turkish Army in areas around the southeastern town of Lice that killed 14 members of the PKK on 10 October, according to the security forces. Furthermore, 14 agents were wounded in a guerrilla attack against a military outpost in Van earlier this month. Moreover, large-scale arrests of members of the Kurdish movement continued. (Hürriyet, Today's Zaman, Firat, AFP, 01-26/10/15)

ALERT

CAR: Violence and insecurity persists in the capital while a new electoral calendar is discussed

Insecurity and incidents persisted in the capital, Bangui, after the escalation of violence in late September that killed 61 people and wounded over 300 others, according to sources, before international forces and the French mission could restore calm. Sporadic incidents continued throughout October and a visit by a delegation of representatives of a faction of the former Séléka coalition sparked a new outbreak of violence. An armed group attacked the UPC delegation on 26 October, killing four of its members. Three other people were killed in the reprisals. Based in Bambari, the UPC delegation had come to Bangui to participate in a meeting with the transitional authorities and representatives of other political movements, the military and civil society. The attack triggered acts of violence in various districts and especially in the Muslim-majority neighbourhood PK5. Furthermore, following the death of two Muslim youths on 28 October, Muslim militias reacted against the inhabitants of the districts of Fatima and Nzangoyen, where their corpses had been found. Hundreds of people sought refuge in the Church of Notre Dame of Fatima, which the militiamen tried to attack, although the death toll remains unknown. The special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, condemned the incidents and the recent attacks against MINUSCA forces and aid workers in September, stressing that the international presence is in the country to support the peace process and calling on all armed groups to adhere to the cessation of hostilities agreement reached in Brazzaville in July 2014 and the Bangui agreement of May 2015. The special representative said that this attack coincided with the current dialogue aimed at achieving agreement among the president, the different political and military movements and the international community to establish a new electoral calendar. The tentative schedule under discussion proposes setting the date of the constitutional referendum for 13 December, the first round of the presidential election for 27 December and the second round for 7 February. France and Chad have called for the election to be held before the end of 2015 and the end of the transition. (Jeune Afrique, 16, 27 and 29/10/15; UN, 28/10/15)

CHINA (TIBET): The first round of elections for the Tibetan Parliament and government is held among the Tibetan community in exile

The first round of the elections for the Tibetan Parliament and government in exile was held, in which only Tibetans residing outside the China could vote, estimated at around 130,000

people. This is the second time that elections have been held since 2011, when the Dalai Lama resigned as head of the government to focus on spiritual responsibilities. The results of the elections are expected to be made public in December and the second round will be held on 20 March. For these elections, incumbent Prime Minister Lobsang Sangay, who was running to remain in office, recalled that negotiations with the government had been deadlocked since 2010. One candidate questioned and criticised the so-called “Middle Way” proposed by the Dalai Lama decades ago, which consists of renouncing the independence of Tibet and concentrating efforts on achieving genuine autonomy in aspects essential to the survival of Tibetan identity. These elections are being held simultaneously to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Tibet Autonomous Region and amidst growing concern about the health of the Dalai Lama. In this regard, in early October he had to cancel a planned trip to the United States based on medical advice, although he later stated publicly that he was in good health. Meanwhile, in late October Radio Free Asia echoed local sources indicating that the Chinese police had demolished 300 homes and shops near a lake in Qinghai province on the grounds that they were polluting the region and threatening the tourist potential of the area. A few weeks ago, also according to local sources, a woman set herself on fire after the police tore down several homes in the town where she resided. (Radio Free Asia, 21/10/15; ABC News, 18/10/15; South China Morning Post, 03/10/15)

DRC (east): The UN Group of Experts determines that the plundering of natural resources persists alongside the trafficking of weapons to armed groups in the country

According to a report published on 22 October by the UN Group of Experts on the DRC, military operations against armed groups in the eastern part of the country, especially against the FDLR and ADF, have had limited success and have not dismantled the groups. The armed groups still pose a threat to peace and stability in the area. Moreover, natural resources are still being trafficked illegally and the armed groups and some FARDC officers still benefit from their exploitation and the taxes imposed on them. Labels designed to locate minerals, conceived to ensure traceability, are still sold on the black market in Rwanda, which could result in minerals from conflict areas in the eastern DRC entering the international market. The Group of Experts received information that the smuggling of tin, tantalum and tungsten coming from the eastern DRC continued across the Rwandan border, confirming conclusions it had made in previous reports in recent years. Despite the various measures taken to improve the marking and registration of weapons and inventory management in the country, the Group of Experts stressed that they are not exhaustive and allow the transfer of weapons and munitions to armed groups to continue. The report also stated that many armed groups active in the eastern part of the country are still recruiting and using children. (UN Security Council, S/2015/797 of 16/10/15)

GUINEA: The opposition does not recognise the results of the presidential election, alleging massive fraud

After an election campaign marked by accusations between the different parties and pre-electoral violence that claimed over 10 people’s lives, on 11 October Guinea held its second democratic presidential election since independence in 1958. Six million Guineans went to the polls for the first round to elect the new head of state from among eight candidates, including incumbent President Alpha Condé. In an atmosphere of tension, with the national borders closed and traffic restrictions that only permitted government vehicles to circulate, the election took place without notable incidents. The African Union and the European Union sent observation missions to ensure transparency and proper procedures throughout the day, supported by the deployment of 19,000 members of the security forces. The AU and the UN congratulated the Guinean people for the peaceful conditions of the elections and asked the parties to respect the results and keep the peace. Bakary Fofana, the chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), revealed the results on

17 October, which confirmed Alpha Condé's victory by an absolute majority (winning 57.85% of the votes, with his direct rival, Cellou Dalein Diallo, gaining 31.44%). The final turnout was 68% of the electorate. The opposition did not recognise the results, alleging fraud and demanding repeat elections. Diallo, the leader of the main opposition party, called on the citizenry to demonstrate peacefully against the fraud. Frank Engels, who heads the EU observation mission, said that the election was free, transparent and valid and that the irregularities found and the difficulties in organising it did not invalidate the results. (Daily Trust, 05, 12/10/15; Deutsche Welle, 07, 09, 12, 17/10/15; Al-Jazeera, 10-11, 17/10/15; African Union, 12/10/15; UN, 12/10/15; SAnews 13/10/15; Europa Press 18/10/15)

INDIA-PAKISTAN: Mutual accusations continue between both countries as clashes persist along the Line of Control

India and Pakistan traded constant accusations at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session in early October. In his speech, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif proposed four points for resuming dialogue with India: respecting the ceasefire, not resorting to force, demilitarising Kashmir and withdrawing troops from the Line of Control (LoC). However, India replied that it only required one point: Pakistan must stop supporting the insurgency. In a meeting with the foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation held outside the UNGA, Pakistani Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz declared that India is supporting different insurgent groups in Pakistan and is repressing the Kashmiri people. During Sharif's speech, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Vikras Swarup tweeted continuous messages saying that it was not necessary to demilitarise Kashmir, but to "deteriorise" Pakistan, and that Pakistan was not a victim of terrorism, but of its own policies. In a further attempt to internationalise the conflict, Sharif asked the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan to monitor activity along the LoC, which India rejected. At the same meeting, Sharif gave UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon a file with what Pakistan considers irrefutable proof of India's support for insurgents in three places: Balochistan, Karachi and the FATA. The clashes on the LoC did not pause during the month, with around one dozen insurgents and security force members killed. In Bandipore, a police sub-inspector known for his success in fighting against terrorism lost his life in an attack. (The Express Tribune; Reuters; Dawn, 01-04/10/15; NDTV, 08/10/15)

MYANMAR: The government signs a ceasefire agreement with eight armed groups, but violence persists

The government of Myanmar reached a ceasefire agreement with eight armed groups (KNU, KNLA-PC, DKBA, Pa-O NLO, CNF, ALP, ABSDF and RCS/SSA) out of the 21 total insurgent groups in the country. In addition to the signatories, seven other groups were part of the negotiating process with the government. Groups that did not sign the agreement include the UWSA, SSA and KIA, which control large territories and possess many weapons. The agreement was signed during a ceremony attended by representatives of China, the United States and the United Nations, but without the leader or any other member of the main opposition party, the NLD. The president of Myanmar said that the signing of the agreement represents the start of the path to peace. The signing took place after a process fraught with difficulties, including complaints of alleged pressure from China on various groups to dissuade them from subscribing to the agreement. All the signatory groups were removed from the list of banned associations in the country after signing. Many warned of the fragility of the agreement, basically for failing to include all the armed organisations. In fact, clashes were reported throughout the month of October between the Burmese Armed Forces and several armed opposition groups that did not sign the ceasefire agreement, forcibly displacing people. The Burmese Army fought with the KIA in Hpakan and with the SSA-N in Mong Hsu and other areas nearby that forced around 3,000 people to flee. Some of the armed groups that signed the agreement voiced concern about this fighting, saying that it jeopardised the political dialogue planned after the ceasefire. (The Irrawaddy, 06-21/10/15; The Guardian, 15/10/15)

PAKISTAN: Implementation of the National Action Plan continues

One of the 20 points of the National Action Plan (NAP) is to act against hate speech (supporting terrorism, sectarianism or political violence). The Pakistani security forces have arrested 9,354 preachers thought to promote hatred. Of them, 1,345 are forbidden to give speeches during the holiest days (8, 9 and 10) of the current month of *Muharram*. However, there have been several attacks against *imambargahs* (as Shia mosques are known in South Asia) and the Shia community during the celebration of Ashura. In Bolan (Balochistan), a suicide attack on another mosque killed 10 people, six of them children. A procession was attacked in Jacobabad (Sind), causing the deaths of 22 people (10 children) and wounding over 40. In Quetta, an explosion on a bus killed 11 people. Another point included in the NAP involves lifting the moratorium on the death penalty. The interior minister announced that there are 6,016 prisoners sentenced to death in Pakistani prisons. Since January 2015, around 240 prisoners have been executed. After attending the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met with US President Barack Obama at the end of the month. His four-day trip to Washington was preceded by rumours of a proposed nuclear deal based on an article by David Ignatius published in *The Washington Post*. The Pakistani authorities have denied any type of negotiation to reach a deal similar to the one that the United States signed with India in 2005. An attack on the office of MP Sardar Amjad Farooq Khan Khosa in Dera Ghazi Khan killed seven people and wounded 13. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by TTP splinter group *Jamaat-ul Ahrar*. A powerful earthquake with an epicentre in northern Afghanistan also affected Pakistan, killing over 200 people and causing heavy damage. (*The Washington Post*, 07/10/15; *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, 19/10/15; *Dawn*, 22/10/15; *The Express Tribune*, *Dawn* 23/10/15; *The Guardian*, 26/10/15)

PHILIPPINES (MINDANAO-MILF): The international community urges the government and the MILF to surmount the difficulties affecting the peace process in recent months

At least 21 ambassadors and diplomats representing their respective countries (primarily from Europe, Asia and the United States) signed a joint statement urging the parties to surmount the difficulties affecting the peace process in recent months and prevent a resumption of the violence that has plagued Mindanao for five decades. A few days before, the main leaders of the MILF and the MNLF had signed a joint statement rejecting the approval of a watered-down version of the Basic Law on the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BLBAR), previously known as the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), and urging Congress to pass a law that was in line with the one originally agreed between the MILF and the government and that included fundamental aspects of the peace agreement signed in 2014. In late September, the head of the Presidential Office for the Peace Process, Teresita Quintos Deles, declared that the government was fully committed to adopting the BLBAR, a law that should incorporate the content of the 2014 peace agreement to its internal legal system and is considered the cornerstone of the peace process. The law, which is pending approval by the Senate and the House of Representatives, has been subject to various delays and amendments since legislative deliberations over it began in September 2014. Quintos Deles acknowledged the problems that had occurred during the congressional proceedings, such as the haste to pass the law before the legislature ends, but she also said that they had never come so far in a peace process before and that to abandon the current one would be to start over from zero. She also recognised the effort that the MILF is making to remain supportive of the peace process and urged it to keep trusting the current government and president. (*Philstar*, 13/10/15; *Jakarta Post*, 15/10/13; *News Fulton Country*, 23/10/13)

SOMALIA: Violence and insecurity persist in the country and al-Shabaab groups get closer to Islamic State

The security minister of the autonomous region of Puntland, Abdi Hirsi Ali (Qarjab), told Voice of America that the dwindling resources to fund al-Shabaab's war effort and the drop in the income of its ally, al-Qaeda, is pushing the armed Islamist movement closer to the armed group Islamic State (ISIS). Recently one of al-Shabaab's main ideologues, the radical cleric Abdulkadir Mumin, defected to ISIS, whose leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is seeking to expand his influence in Somalia. Mumin and other intellectual leaders of al-Shabaab in northern Somalia like Ga'amey, Kutubo and Bashir Shire have discussed offering their allegiance to ISIS. After one week of secret talks in Galgala, Mumin made contact with representatives of al-Shabaab in the south of the country to notify them of the results. However, various factions sympathetic to al-Qaeda opposed the northeastern branch of al-Shabaab's proposal to join ISIS and at least 30 combatants were gaoled for approaching it. In this regard, it is feared that the al-Shabaab branch in northern Somalia could be thinking about an imminent merger with ISIS, which would split al-Shabaab into two factions. In the town of Jilib, south of the port city of Kismayo, in the southern part of the country, the situation has been tense since July when the deputy commander of al-Shabaab, Mahad Karate, pressed the group's leader, Abu Ubaidah, to accept an agreement to pledge allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In March, al-Baghdadi invited Abu Ubaidah to join ISIS, and although in July, according to Garowe Online, it seemed that Abu Ubaidah could break off relations with al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, it appears that he did not do so. Meanwhile, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea blasted the government of Puntland for failing to pursue al-Shabaab and for not ending the sale of illegal fishing licenses to foreign clients. The Monitoring Group also announced that it found no evidence that Eritrea was supporting al-Shabaab. Finally, the UN Security Council extended the weapons embargo in Somalia and Eritrea until November 2016 and the mandate of the Monitoring Group until December 2016. Among other issues, the Monitoring Group remarked that although the federal government has carried out important reforms, the culture of corruption remains pervasive in the federal administration and the influence of the Damul Jadid faction, to which the president belongs, is decisive. (UN, 23/10/15; Garowe Online, 15, 22, 24, 27/10/15)

UKRAINE: Agreement to postpone the elections in eastern areas under rebel control

Rebel leaders in the eastern areas of Ukraine announced the postponement of the elections scheduled to be held unilaterally on 18 October and on 1 November in Donetsk and Luhansk, respectively. The announcement came after a deal was made during a meeting in Paris on 2 October between the leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France and Russia (the Normandy format) that the elections may be held in the east in early 2016 through a future electoral law especially for that purpose, and different than electoral legislation for the rest of the country, based on which local elections were held in the rest of Ukraine on 25 October. In addition to this new electoral law, the commitments include the completion of an amnesty law and a new constitutional status for the areas currently under rebel control. Details on these issues must be subject to new negotiations. Some analysts pointed to pressure on Ukraine at the meeting, while others indicated that there was pressure on Russia not to hold the elections unilaterally. Furthermore, the situation of relative calm on the ground continued in October, in line with the de-escalation in September after the ceasefire entered into force on 1 September. The de-escalation in Ukraine coincides with Russia's launch of its campaign in Syria. Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian rebels withdrew tanks and artillery of at least 100-millimetre calibre after the agreement reached in late September. Some isolated incidents occurred. Despite the reduction in violence, tensions between Ukraine and Russia remained and direct flights were cancelled between both countries. (The New York Times, El País, RFE/RL, 01-26/10/15)

PROGRESS

BURKINA FASO: The transitional government tries to return to normal and announces the elections delayed by the coup

Following the restoration of the transitional government after the failed coup d'état on 16 September by the presidential guard (RSP), led by General Gilbert Diendéré, the Burkinabe Armed Forces have achieved the surrender and disarmament of the elite military unit, dissolved by presidential decree. Diendéré, who initially took refuge in the Vatican Embassy, former Foreign Minister Djibril Bassolé and 21 other people were indicted for “acting against state security”. The coup leader faces 10 other charges, including crimes against humanity, which could lead to the death penalty according to the director of military justice, Colonel Sita Sangaré. Michel Kafando's government has denounced the involvement of foreign forces and jihadists in the coup, arresting the deputy chair of the Malian Tuareg group National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNL), Mahamadu Djeri Maiga, for his alleged relation to the events. The government has reported that the events following the coup d'état left a toll of 14 people killed and 251 wounded. Meanwhile, the country is trying to return to normal and has announced that the presidential and legislative elections that should be held on 11 October, postponed by the coup, will finally be held on 29 November. The EU has said that it will send a mission of 80 electoral observers led by the socialist MEP of Congolese origin Cecile Kyenge to oversee the conduct of the elections. In other developments, local media outlets reported the partial results of the autopsy and ballistics tests conducted on the remains of former President Thomas Sankara and the 12 officials assassinated alongside him, pending DNA testing. The autopsy shows that the ex-president's body suffered multiple gunshot wounds. For the Sankara family, the results demonstrate that he was shot dead with ammunition identified as belonging exclusively to the Burkinabe Army. (Deutsche Welle, 30/09/15; IRIN, 01/10/15; Europa Press, 02, 06, 14, 15/10/15; Al-Jazeera, 16/10/15; Africa Times, 17, 19/10/15)

CÔTE D'IVOIRE: The country holds its presidential election in an atmosphere of peace and transparency

The country's presidential election was held on 25 October, making it the first presidential election since the crisis broke out following the election in 2010 that led to the deaths of 3,000 people. The team of international ECOWAS observers reported that the elections took place in an atmosphere of peace and transparency, with no notable incidents occurring. In a country with a population of nearly 23 million, 6.3 million people registered to vote in the election, with the final turnout equivalent to 54.63% of the electorate. The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) announced the final count, which handed victory to sitting President Alassane Ouattara. Since he was re-elected for a second term by an absolute majority, receiving 83.66% of the votes (2,118,229), a runoff round did not have to be held. In other news, the International Criminal Court reported that the trial of former President Laurent Gbagbo and former Minister of Culture Charles Blé Goudé on charges of crimes against humanity, which was supposed to start on 10 November, has been delayed until 28 January 2016. (Deutsche Welle, 26-28/10/15; Reuters, 27, 29/10/15; Al-Jazeera, 28/10/15; Jeune Afrique, 28/10/15; Europa Press, 28/10/15)

THAILAND (SOUTH): The government announces its intention to begin formal talks with MARA Patani in mid-November

The secretary of the government negotiating team, General Nakrob Boonbuathong, announced Bangkok's decision to hold the first round of official talks with the umbrella organisation MARA Patani (which united six insurgent groups active in southern Thailand) in mid-November, although he also indicated that several informal meetings would have to take place between both parties beforehand in order to do so. Nakrob Boonbuathong downplayed the statement issued on 12 October by a faction of the BRN (the main group

operating in southern Thailand, to which three of the seven members of the MARA Patani negotiating team belong, including its chair, Awang Jabat) that criticised the government and was sceptical of the current negotiations. Among other things, the statement demanded recognition of the Patani nation (and therefore its right to self-determination) and the attendance of international mediators and observers at the peace talks. The government had rejected both conditions on previous occasions, although this time there was no official reaction from Bangkok and even a member of the government negotiating team said that everything is currently on the negotiating table. The statement demonstrates the BRN's desire to reach an end to the conflict through dialogue, but it also said that the peace process cannot become a form of government subterfuge to curb the progress of the Patani people. The statement also asserted that the main cause of the current conflict in southern Thailand is the colonisation of one nation by another. The government openly acknowledged that there are conflicting positions regarding the peace process within the BRN, but also said that it is maintaining fluid contact with the group and that the peace talks will follow their intended course. (The Straits Times, 13/10/15; Benar News, 12/10/15)

TUNISIA: The National Dialogue Quartet wins the Nobel peace Prize for its role in the transition process

The 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the National Dialogue Quartet of Tunisia for its role in the transition process in the North African country. Formed in 2013, the Quartet (composed of the Tunisian General Labour Union, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers) played a key role amidst the escalating tension between Islamist and secular groups that threatened to disrupt the transition process begun after the overthrow of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. The Quartet acted as a mediator amidst the polarisation in Tunisia, which had emerged after the assassination of two senior secular political opposition leaders. Its intervention enabled the transfer of power from the government dominated by the Islamists of Ennahda to a technocratic administration, facilitating approval of a new Constitution in early 2014 and later holding legislative and presidential elections. The Nobel Committee said that the award aims to recognise the courage of the Tunisian people who, despite the many challenges, have chosen the path of consensus and dialogue, thereby serving as a benchmark for other countries in the region. The award was also considered recognition of Tunisian civil society's contribution to peace. After the award was announced, various analysts stressed that the country still faces numerous problems, including political, economic and especially security challenges, as was made clear after the attacks in the capital in March of this year and at the resort in Sousse in June. (Foreign Policy, 09/10/15; Diario/Radio Universidad de Chile, 11/10/15; Le Monde, 09, 10, 13/10/15)

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