

On the Horizon

JUNE – NOVEMBER 2024



INTERNATIONAL
**CRISIS
GROUP**

COLOMBIA

BURUNDI

PAKISTAN

MOZAMBIQUE



LATEST TRENDS

More than 2,000 Burundian troops are fighting RED-Tabara rebels and the M23 insurgency in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), fuelling tensions with Rwanda, which reportedly backs the groups. Amid reports of soldiers deserting and refusing deployment, Burundian authorities accused RED-Tabara of orchestrating violent attacks in Bujumbura and continued their crackdown on dissenters.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 Deployments in the eastern DRC will likely drive up tensions with Rwanda and at home

The government will likely continue to send troops to the DRC's North and South Kivu provinces, to fight M23 and RED-Tabara rebels respectively, as Gitega aligns more closely with Kinshasa and distances itself further from Kigali.

Unrest and frustration within the army over poor service conditions in the eastern DRC might increase, possibly adding to ethnic frictions along Hutu-Tutsi lines.

The Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth wing, will likely keep getting paramilitary-style training prior to potential deployment to the DRC.

RED-Tabara rebels could organise more attacks on Burundian soil, possibly with Rwandan and diaspora support.

TO WATCH Hostile rhetoric from Rwandan and Burundian political leaders; more troop deployments to the eastern DRC possibly including Imbonerakure members; discontent in army with poor service conditions; more Burundian soldiers being captured by M23 rebels.

Potential Consequences

Heightened tensions with Rwanda could pull President Evariste Ndayishimiye's government further into wider regional confrontation, pitting Gitega and Kinshasa, on one side, against Kigali on the other. As all sides are using unaccountable proxy groups alongside their armies, which are known for indiscipline, people in the eastern DRC could witness more abuses including killings, sexual violence, forced evictions and livestock theft. Burundian insurgent groups could carry out further attacks on Burundian soil, killing or injuring civilians.

Dissatisfaction within the security forces might increase strains among the Burundian elite and open cracks within the political and security apparatus, including but not limited to widening ethnic divides along Hutu-Tutsi lines, fuelling political instability and violence.

2 Political space is likely to close further ahead of the 2025 legislative elections

The government will likely step up its crackdown on supporters of Agathon Rwasa, former leader of opposition National Congress for Freedom (CNL), before the vote.

Police, intelligence services and Imbonerakure will likely further restrict space for dissent.

Civil society, the opposition and others who protest these steps might be forced into exile or to retreat from public platforms amid deteriorating socio-economic conditions.

TO WATCH Fate of supporters of former CNL leader Rwasa; divisive rhetoric on social media in advance of **2025** polls; increased insecurity, including attacks on the opposition; possibility of protests sparked by the rising cost of living, a stream of corruption allegations and collapsing public services, including electricity.

Potential Consequences

The ruling party, already under strain due to Great Lakes politics and poor socio-economic prospects, could show fissures and will likely further restrict democratic space in the lead-up to the **2025** legislative elections, which could pave the way for future political instability.

Increased violence – including against the opposition – could worsen insecurity countrywide, particularly in the Cibitoke province.



Flashpoint

Published June 2024 – 3rd edition

On the Horizon sounds the alarm about conflicts and crises that may emerge over the next three to six months. It identifies key actors and dates to watch in support of global conflict prevention efforts.



INTERNATIONAL
**CRISIS
GROUP**

LATEST TRENDS

President Petro's "total peace" initiative looks increasingly shaky. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident faction known as EMC splintered, with some sub-factions leaving talks with the government while others stayed at the table, plunging the negotiations into uncertainty. Meanwhile, Bogotá's discussions with the National Liberation Army (ELN) about a six-point peace agenda remain deadlocked and vulnerable to collapse.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 The EMC's break-up could fuel more violence along the Pacific coast

EMC splinters that walked away from talks will likely stage more attacks on police, military and civil institutions, including by using car bombs and other asymmetric means.

Military operations against EMC fronts now outside the talks will likely intensify.

Fighting among rival FARC dissident groups, including EMC sub-factions as well as the Segunda Marquetalia, could worsen. Tensions are high in Guaviare, Nariño, Valle de Cauca, Huila, Putumayo and Caquetá departments and could spread into Tolima and Quindío as well.

Government negotiations with the EMC sub-factions that chose to continue talks look set to continue but are increasingly precarious.

TO WATCH Growing instability in the Pacific coast and southern Amazon regions, which are home to the EMC's richest and most belligerent blocs; slow, easily reversed progress at talks with remaining factions.

Potential Consequences

Stepped-up hostilities between EMC sub-factions and the military, and among rival sub-factions, risk growing instability and harm to civilians caught in the crossfire.

Factions outside the talks are hitting military and civilian targets more often and tightening their social control of rural communities. They could mount high-profile attacks that cause numerous civilian casualties.

2 Negotiations with the ELN are vulnerable to collapse

The ELN's central command will likely keep participating in peace talks; but it will be wary of attack by other armed groups, likely affecting its approach to talks.

Some local ELN branches may consider separating from the central command in hopes of holding their own discussions with authorities (as in the case of the local Front Comuneros del Sur in Nariño, which left in May).

The government hopes to encounter a stronger ELN consensus platform for peace negotiations, now that the insurgency has completed its internal VI National Conference (to which the government was not invited).

TO WATCH Progress of the Nariño dialogue between authorities and local armed groups including the Comuneros del Sur; ELN's targeting of civilians.

Potential Consequences

Despite pledging to stop attacking civilians, the ELN has signalled its intention to restart kidnapping for ransom. It will also likely remain linked to other abuses, including armed strikes, social control, restrictions on mobility and extortion.

Fragmentation of armed groups could accelerate throughout Colombia, including within the EMC and ELN. The fracturing adds to a confused situation for civilians, who must often pay protection money to several actors and are at risk of harm if they run afoul of any group's attempt to impose social control in their community.

3 Gaitanista Army of Colombia (EGC) expansion threatens broader peace efforts

The armed criminal group EGC (previously Self-Defence Gaitanista Forces of Colombia), which remains outside the scope of talks, will likely keep positioning fighters for further expansion into ELN and EMC territory.

To rein in the EGC, security forces will likely work harder to capture its leaders, seize drug shipments and attack its tactical positions

TO WATCH EGC expansion into drug smuggling corridors along the Pacific coast; gold mining areas in Bolívar, Antioquia and Cesar; and possibly Catatumbo in Norte de Santander, home to the most coca crops, coal mines, palm oil production in the country and migrant crossings on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

Potential Consequences

Expansion into these areas would allow the EGC to dominate the corridor running from the Venezuelan border across the Atlantic coast and down to the Pacific coast, an enormous strategic prize. If it succeeds, it could influence ELN and EMC calculations about whether to make disarmament agreements with the government.

Incursions into these areas will likely fuel displacement and/or restrict the movement of thousands of civilians.



Flashpoint

Published June 2024 – 3rd edition

On the Horizon sounds the alarm about conflicts and crises that may emerge over the next three to six months. It identifies key actors and dates to watch in support of global conflict prevention efforts.



LATEST TRENDS

The jihadist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province seems to be rebounding amid faltering security operations and the draw-down of some international troops. On 10 May, militants staged a large-scale assault on the strategic town of Macomia. Meanwhile, preparations for the general elections slated for October face obstacles.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 A return to a full-blown Islamic State insurgency in Cabo Delgado is possible

There is a significant risk that Islamic State in Mozambique will take advantage of the shrinking international mission and the weakness of Mozambican forces to rebuild its ranks and step up its attacks in frequency and scale. After Macomia, militants could target the towns of Meluco, Ancuabe and Metuge. They could also raid prisons in or around the provincial capital Pemba to free detained comrades.

The mandate of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission expires on **15 July**, but South Africa, whose 1,495 soldiers make up two thirds of its personnel, and Tanzania are expected to keep some troops in Cabo Delgado until at least **December** to support Maputo's counter-insurgency efforts.

Rwanda will deploy an additional 2,000 troops to Cabo Delgado, bringing the total number of Rwandan soldiers in Mozambique to 4,500.

TO WATCH What shape the post-SADC security arrangements between Maputo and its partners in Pretoria and Dodoma will take; whether the newly deployed Rwandan contingent will take over from SADC troops or focus on different areas or objectives.

Potential Consequences

If the uptick in Islamic State attacks becomes an all-out offensive, it will likely lead to hundreds of deaths, spark a major displacement crisis and put tens of thousands at risk of food insecurity, particularly if NGOs already short on aid supplies stop operations because of security concerns.

A fresh insurgent offensive will also likely affect the operations of businesses, including the French hydrocarbon giant TotalEnergies, which is hoping to resume work in the Afungi peninsula near Palma, three years after its gas project there was halted due to insecurity.

2 The forthcoming presidential and legislative elections will likely be chaotic

Elections are planned for **9 October**, but the electoral commission appears unprepared and short of funds, while questions about the electoral calendar remain unresolved.

Should militants intensify attacks in Cabo Delgado in the coming weeks, they could impede voter registration and delivery of voter cards.

The ruling FRELIMO party is expected to do whatever it considers necessary to secure victory, including intimidating opposition voters or using other tactics associated with overt election theft.

Opposition leaders could call for protests and an electoral boycott ahead of the polls if they suspect foul play; anti-government marches could trigger a violent response from security forces.

TO WATCH Possible election delay; potential threats or violence against election officials, observers or opposition supporters; protests by opposition RENAMO party.

Potential Consequences

If elections lack credibility, a post-election crisis could unfold, increasing prospects of nationwide instability.

If FRELIMO is widely seen to have stolen the election, its agreements with RENAMO's armed wing could be in jeopardy. Violent protests or clashes could occur in RENAMO strongholds after the elections, including Nampula province in the north and the central provinces of Sofala and Inhambane.



Flashpoint

Published June 2024 – 3rd edition

On the Horizon sounds the alarm about conflicts and crises that may emerge over the next three to six months. It identifies key actors and dates to watch in support of global conflict prevention efforts.



INTERNATIONAL
**CRISIS
GROUP**

LATEST TRENDS

February's disputed elections have heightened tensions between the government and military, on one side, the opposition, on the other. Deadly militant attacks are surging in the provinces bordering Afghanistan, fuelling disputes between Islamabad and Kabul.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 A climate of extreme political polarisation could spur unrest

The authorities will likely continue to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avoid sovereign debt default; should such a deal be reached, food and energy prices could soar, exacerbating hardship and fuelling unrest.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan's opposition movement could exploit such turmoil to call anti-government protests that might turn violent, which in turn could obstruct parliament's functioning and destabilise the economy further.

The ruling coalition could unravel in the face of such public anger.

TO WATCH Government's ability to secure longer-term deal with the IMF; opposition's street mobilisation; military crackdown on protests.

Potential Consequences

Political upheaval will further sap the government's legitimacy, fuel widespread discontent and heighten risks of violence in a country already reeling from insurgent attacks. That could further damage civil-military relations and undermine the functioning of, and faith in, Pakistan's elected institutions.

2 Insurgencies could intensify in the provinces bordering Afghanistan

The Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP) and Baloch separatists will likely continue their attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces; TTP could further expand operations into Punjab province.

The Islamic State's local franchise could launch mass-casualty attacks on Shia Muslims, targeting cities with large Shia populations.

TO WATCH Major militant attacks killing numerous civilians, notably in Balochistan's capital Quetta and Sindh's capital Karachi; major military/police casualties fuelling renewed counter-insurgency operations.

Potential Consequences

Surging militant attacks could challenge the state's writ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, take a devastating human toll and place Islamabad on a collision course with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, whom Islamabad accuses of supporting the TTP.

3 Tensions with Kabul could escalate into armed conflict

A major militant attack attributed to Afghanistan-based militants could spark Pakistani retaliation, potentially in the form of cross-border airstrikes. Islamabad could forcibly deport an additional 700,000 Afghan nationals, or else resort to economic pressure, closing cross-border trade routes.

In reprisal, the Taliban authorities might target a post along the disputed border.

TO WATCH Major militant attacks in Pakistan; harsh rhetoric; Pakistan's deportation of Afghan refugees; prospect of Islamabad-Kabul dialogue; TTP attacks on Chinese nationals and their impact on Islamabad-Beijing relations.

Potential Consequences

A blocking of cross-border trade routes could lead to violent clashes between security forces and local communities and further strain relations with Kabul. Pakistan's forced repatriation policy risks precipitating a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan, which is ill prepared to deal with a massive influx.

Should there be major Pakistani military casualties, confrontation could escalate along and across the border.



Flashpoint

Published June 2024 – 3rd edition

On the Horizon sounds the alarm about conflicts and crises that may emerge over the next three to six months. It identifies key actors and dates to watch in support of global conflict prevention efforts.

