

Summary

- The resumption of peace talks between the Philippine government and the communist New People's Army (NPA) reduces the risk of fighting and extortion.
- Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif survived potential removal by the Supreme Court, but challenges remain ahead of elections in 2018.
- An increase in mass casualty attacks in Pakistan is likely as militant groups attempt to reorganise following disruptive military operations.
- A liberal candidate, such as Moon Jae-in, is likely to win South Korea's presidential election.
- Strikes and protests could increase in Papua New Guinea, in advance of June's general election.

Detailed Analysis

Philippines



(Picture by: Gregorio B. Dantes Jr/Pacific Press via ZUMA Wire/PA Images)

The resumption of peace talks between the Philippine government and the communist New People's Army (NPA) reduces the risk of fighting and extortion. President Rodrigo Duterte's peace adviser, Jesus Dureza, said on 12 March that both sides will resume talks in the first week of April to discuss a

bilateral ceasefire. The announcement comes a month after Duterte announced an "all-out war" against the NPA following the breakdown of their five-month unilateral ceasefires. The unilateral ceasefires had led to a significant reduction in exchanges of fire between government forces and the NPA. There was also a reduction in the NPA's small-arms, improvised explosive device (IED), and arson attacks on plantations and mines, indicating the guerrillas' leadership's tight control over the group's operations. A joint statement issued by government and communist negotiators on 11 March indicates that the resumption of talks is likely to lead to a bilateral ceasefire, in which both sides will have a monitoring mechanism. A bilateral ceasefire is likely to lead to a significant reduction in attacks, particularly in regions where the NPA is most active such as Northern Mindanao, Caraga, and Davao.



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Pakistan

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif survived the potential removal by the Supreme Court, but challenges remain ahead of elections in 2018. On 20 April, the Supreme Court announced that there was not enough evidence to dismiss Sharif over corruption allegations originating from the Panama Papers leak in April 2016. Instead, the court ordered the formation of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to further probe the allegations over the next two months. Although Sharif continues as prime minister, he can ostensibly still be removed by the judiciary following the JIT investigation. This adds to uncertainty for the ruling Pakistan Muslim League –Nawaz (PML-N) ahead of general elections in March 2018. The opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) – which led the campaign for Sharif's removal – will probably seek to capitalise on the details of the judgement and the fact that two of the five judges supported Sharif's disqualification to gain support in the politically-vital province of Punjab. Moreover, power outages have increased in Pakistan since the beginning of summer, casting doubts over whether the government will be able to follow through with its key election pledge to fully resolve Pakistan's energy crisis by 2018.

An increase in mass casualty attacks in Pakistan is likely as militant groups attempt to reorganise following disruptive military operations. In a video released following the 13 February suicide IED attack in Lahore, a spokesperson for Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JA), a faction of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), warned that the incident marked the beginning of "Operation Ghazi". The new campaign, according to JA, will focus on carrying out larger attacks throughout the country. Notably, the spokesperson also urged militant groups to co-operate in carrying out operations together. This is indicative of wider attempts by TTP factions to reorganise following the Pakistani military's 2014 operation in Federally Administered Tribal Areas. These events point to an increased likelihood of attacks at greater frequency over the next three-to-six months. However, the militant targeting pattern is likely to remain largely the same. IHS Markit still expects security forces, religious minorities (Shias, Christians, and Hindus), the judiciary, civil society activists, and Sufis to be most at risk of primarily suicide IED attacks.

South Korea

A liberal candidate, such as Moon Jae-in, is likely to win South Korea's presidential election. After the Constitutional Court approved then President Park Geun-hye's impeachment on 10 March, the presidential election scheduled for December was moved and by law must be held within 60 days of the ruling, i.e., 9 May. Then, on 17 April, prosecutors decided to indict the former president for corruption, saying that Park had probably accepted bribes to facilitate the merger of two Samsung group firms, among other alleged crimes. The fact that she is likely to be under investigation or on trial during the election means a liberal candidate will probably fare far better than either of the conservative party's candidates. Although the different camps' policy platforms do not differ greatly and the new administration is likely to remain largely pro-business, there is a risk of corporate tax increases and greater scrutiny of acquisitions, mergers, and joint-ventures.

Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea strikes and protests affecting mining and gas facilities, as well as urban areas, will be increasingly frequent ahead of the general election in June. The election is likely to be preceded by heightened contestation on issues such as healthcare and the allocation of mining royalties. Renewed protests by local landowners in Hela Province are likely, principally affecting the gas processing facility. However, the government will proactively intervene to protect property, including by engaging in mediation with local leaders and by enhancing police protection of commercial facilities. Civil opposition to the government in urban areas such as Lae and Port Moresby, led by the public service, unions, and the medical profession, is likely to prompt strikes affecting ground and air transport, as well as access to medical facilities. However, strikes are likely to be poorly organised and only likely to last several days.