

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS – Week Ahead 15-21 Nov

by Tom Lake

All timings subject to change.

Monday 15 November:

- **United States-China:** US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping to hold a virtual meeting on Monday at 1945ET/0845CST on Tuesday. The leaders have so far held two phone conversations since Biden's inauguration in January, but this meeting will be the most wide-ranging in subject matter to date. Issues around trade and climate change are likely to feature heavily. Biden expected to push back on Beijing's actions in Xinjiang province, Hong Kong, and around Taiwan, but little progress expected in any of these areas. Xi likely to criticise US military activities in the Pacific and the creation of the AUKUS alliance, which China views as a direct threat to its interests in the Indo-Pacific.
- **United States:** At 1500ET, President Biden will sign into law the USD1trn Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, the first of two major social spending bills the White House is looking to pass in the coming weeks. Focus then turns to Congress. The Congressional Budget Office is set to deliver its scores on the multi-trillion dollar Build Back Better bill, which Democratic leaders want to see passed as soon as possible. The House of Representatives set take up consideration of the bill this week (no set date for this yet) and looking to have it passed by Friday. Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer set to meet with Senate parliamentarian in order to determine how the BBB bill could be passed via reconciliation.
- **European Union-Switzerland:** Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič meets with Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis as both sides seek to restart talks on an institutional agreement between the two. The Swiss walked out on talks that had been going on for seven years in May, citing EU demands on state aid and freedom of movement that Bern said were unacceptable. The EU wants to replace the hundreds of bilateral deals in place at present with a broader overarching deal with Switzerland.
- **United Kingdom:** The government could face a difficult end to the parliamentary day, with the Committee on Standards (motion) – relating into the report into the actions of now-resigned Conservative MP Owen Paterson – due to be debated. The Paterson report has seen a major scandal erupt over alleged sleaze and corruption within parliament, primarily directed at PM Boris Johnson's Conservative party. Opinion polling shows a sharp drop-in support for Johnson's party just as the scandal has erupted, and further debate on the issue in the Commons could keep it on the front pages for longer.
- **Turkey-Iran:** Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visits Tehran for talks with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. The meeting comes as Iran faces increasing pressure from the West to re-engage in talks in Vienna on the Iranian nuclear deal.

Turkey and Iran. Turkey-Iran relations have historically proved rocky, but both sides are expected to sign a long-term cooperation agreement following today's meetings.

- **Cuba:** There is the potential for Cuba to see mass protests against repressive government actions and in favour of the democratisation of the island. The communist government has banned any protest taking place, but with COVID-19 restrictions lifted as of today and children returning to school, the regime could see large numbers take to the streets. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has warned the government not to crush the protesters.

Tuesday 16 November:

- **European Union:** Foreign Affairs Council meets in its defence format, with EU defence ministers joined by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. While agenda is focused on European Defence Agency and EU training missions, the rising tensions to the EU's east is likely to dominate discussions. Reports of mass troop build-ups on the Russian-Ukrainian border has resulted in speculation that Russia could be planning an invasion of Ukraine, taking advantage of the diverted EU focus on the migrant crisis escalating on the Polish-Belarusian border.
- **United States:** No set date yet, but the Senate is set to bring up the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA is required to pass through Congress every year in order to maintain funding for the military. It usually passes with a wide bipartisan margin, but given the gridlock in Congress over other issues, and the huge number of amendments usually attached to the bill it could take several weeks to make it to President Biden's desk.

Wednesday 17 November:

- **United Kingdom:** Prime Minister Boris Johnson faces his biannual evidence session in front of the House of Commons Liaison Committee at 1500GMT (1000ET, 1600CET). Johnson set to face questions from committee chairs (who when sitting together form the Liaison Committee) on the Paterson scandal, the UK's COVID-19 situation, the now-concluded COP26 conference, and the AUKUS alliance.
- **United States:** Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman hosts her counterparts from South Korea and Japan, Choi Jong-kun and Mori Takeo, for tripartite talks in Washington. Comes as tensions in east Asia over potential Chinese intentions towards Taiwan remain high.
- **Russia:** Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov holds talks with his Moldovan counterpart Nicu Popescu. Relations between Moscow and Chisinau have proved strained in recent months as the new pro-EU government in Moldova seeks to pivot away from reliance on Russia while still maintaining gas supplies. The two men are expected to sign a five-year gas supply deal. Many in the EU are increasingly concerned that Moldova could come under undue pressure from Moscow to pivot away from the EU and back towards Russia.

Thursday 18 November:

- **North America:** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador visit the White House for a summit with US President Joe Biden. First meeting of the USMCA national leaders in five years. Comes amidst

a major increase in migrant flows through and from Mexico to the US' southern border. Mexico seeking greater US financial support to deal with the issue. Leaders also set to discuss COVID-19 situation on the continent and ongoing issues with North American trade.

- **United Kingdom:** Cabinet Office minister Lord Frost set to answer questions in the House of Lords relating to his ongoing negotiations with the EU over the Northern Ireland protocol. Due to start at around 1130GMT.

Friday 19 November:

- **NATO:** NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg delivers a speech in Berlin titled, "NATO 2030: The transatlantic community in the era of strategic competition". The role of NATO continues to come under scrutiny following the creation of the AUKUS alliance between the US, UK and Australia, and French-led calls in the EU for the bloc to follow a path of 'strategic autonomy', with more separation from the US on foreign policy and security issues.
- **EU-UK:** European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič due to meet with UK Cabinet Office minister Lord Frost in Brussels to discuss the Northern Ireland protocol within the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. Both sides agreed to 'intensify' talks after some progress was made in negotiations in London last week. This week's agenda set to focus on the issue of medicines and customs checks. There remains the prospect that the UK could invoke Art.16 of the protocol to disapply its rules, risking a major escalation in EU-UK tensions.

Sunday 21 November:

- **Chile:** First round of the presidential election. Incumbent Sebastian Pinera is not entitled to run again due to term limits. Opinion polls show that two of the most extreme candidates, right-winger Jose Antonio Kast and leftist Gabriel Boric, are favourites to make the second-round run off in December. First election to take place since mass protests and rioting in 2019-20 that prompted the formation of a constitutional convention to write a new founding document for Chile.

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