

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS – Week Ahead Aug 24-30

by Tom Lake

All timings subject to change. The Political Risk Week Ahead may be truncated over the coming weeks as the measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19 sees political summits, meetings, and elections cancelled or postponed. All relevant and timely political events and public holidays will still be included.

Monday 24 August:

- **United States:** Republican National Convention gets underway, but unlike the DNC held last week there will be some events held at a physical convention centre in Charlotte, NC. President Trump is scheduled to make an appearance at each day of the RNC, with Monday's events culminating in the roll-call vote that will formally re-nominate Trump and Pence as the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Speakers on Monday include Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), House Minority Whip Steve Scalise (R-LA), former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, President Trump's eldest son Donald Jr., and Mark and Patricia McCloskey, lawyers from St. Louis, MO., who made headlines in June for brandishing guns at Black Lives Matter protestors that the couple said were threatening them and their property.
- **China:** Premier Li Keqiang to attend the third Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) meeting via videolink with Prime Minister of Laos Thongloun Sisoulith, Vietnamese PM Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Thai PM Prayut Chan-o-cha, Cambodian PM Hun Sen, and Burmese President U Win Myint. The leaders will discuss international cooperation on issues such as water resources, public health and connectivity according to Li's spokesperson Zhao Lijian.
- **United States:** Postmaster General Louis DeJoy appears in front of the House Oversight Committee to testify on planned changes to the US Postal Service. The planned changes have sparked intense criticism from Democrats, who have argued the cost-cutting measures are intended to impede mail-in voting in the November presidential election. Hearing starts at 1000ET (1500BST, 1600CET).
- **United Kingdom:** Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab announces he will visit with Israeli and Palestinian leaders 'this week'. Follows on from the peace deal reached between Israel and the UAE that has seen Israel halt its planned annexation of areas of the occupied West Bank. Raab will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, and alternate PM Benny Gantz, as well as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and PM Mohammed Shtayyeh.
- **Germany-Ukraine:** German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas visits the Ukrainian capital Kiev on Ukraine's Independence Day. Discussions set to focus on the situation in eastern Ukraine and the role of the Minsk Protocol and Normandy format talks, involving the leaderships of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.

Tuesday 25 August:

- **United States:** RNC continues, with speeches from First Lady Melania Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (speaking from Israel), Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, and two of President Trump's children, Eric and Tiffany.
- **European Union:** European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee to hold an extraordinary meeting from 1100-1300CET (0500-0700ET, 1000-1200BST) to discuss the ongoing anti-government protests in Belarus.
- **Europe:** Meeting of Europe's Germanophone finance ministers, with Germany's Olaf Scholz, Switzerland's Ueli Maurer, Luxembourg's Pierre Gramegna, Austria's Gernot Bleumel and Adrian Hasler of Liechtenstein meeting in Vienna, Austria.
- **Japan:** Trial of former Justice Minister Katsuyuki Kawai and his wife Anri begins in Tokyo. The Kawai's are accused of vote-buying in the run up to Anri Kawai's successful bid for a seat in the upper house of the Japanese Diet in 2019.

Wednesday 26 August:

- **United States:** RNC enters its third day. Speakers include Vice President Mike Pence, Second Lady Karen Pence, Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA), President of the National Association of Police Organizations Michael McHale, and Lara Trump, an adviser to the Trump presidential campaign and wife of Eric Trump. Kellyanne Conway is scheduled to speak, but it is unclear whether she will following the announcement of her resignation as White House adviser on August 23.
- **European Union:** Informal meeting of EU member state defence ministers. Meeting to prepare for the formal meeting in Brussels scheduled for November, but also to discuss ongoing defence and security issues facing the EU, and to try to develop next steps in the EU's nascent Common Security and Defence Policy.
- **European Union:** EU's chief negotiator with the UK Michel Barnier to speak at a French business conference at 1630CET (1530BST, 1030ET).

Thursday 27 August:

- **United States:** RNC concludes with speeches from HUD Secretary Ben Carson, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR), House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), former Mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani, and President Trump's daughter Ivanka. President Trump will close the RNC by delivering his acceptance speech from the South Lawn of the White House.
- **European Union:** Parties representing the German presidency of the European Council meet with European Commissioner for Budget Johannes Hahn and the negotiating team from the European Parliament to start negotiations over the EUR1.82trn multiannual financial framework (long-term budget) and the associated COVID-19 recovery package. Further talks to take place in September. European Parliament can only accept or reject the package, not make amendments, although its power to veto the budget could be used to force the Commission and member states to make changes to the MFF.

- **European Union:** Biannual 'Gymnich' meeting of EU member state foreign ministers takes place at Schloss Gymnich in Erfstadt, Germany. Extending over two days, the meeting is an opportunity for foreign ministers to seek to develop EU policy on major foreign policy issues. Topics such as the ongoing Belarusian protest movement, souring relations between EU member states (notably Greece) and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, the EU's response to the Beirut explosion and collapse of the Lebanese government, and the newly announced ceasefire in Libya are all likely to come up.

Friday 28 August:

- **Europe:** Meeting of political advisors to leaders of the 'Normandy Four' nations (Russia, France, Ukraine, Germany) to take place in order to make preparations for a meeting of N4 foreign ministers and national leaders to take place at a later date. The N4 leaders are involved in seeking a resolution to the ongoing territorial sovereignty issues in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine and the Crimea. The last N4 leaders meeting took place in December 2019.
- **US-South Korea:** Joint annual military exercises between US and South Korea conclude after starting on August 18.
- **United States:** President Trump to hold a campaign rally in Manchester, NH., following the conclusion of the RNC on August 27. The Trump campaign has been criticised by Democrats for holding rallies that they say have contributed to spikes in COVID-19 cases.

Saturday 29 August:

- **US-Japan:** US Defense Secretary Mark Esper to meet with his Japanese counterpart Taro Kono in Guam, marking the first foreign visit for Kono since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. China's actions in the South and East China Seas likely to be a major point of discussion between the two, as well as North Korea's recent missile tests.

Rolling Risks

- **Global:** The spread of the 2019-nCoV, commonly known as 'Coronavirus' or COVID-19 is the main story gaining political attention around the world at present. Starting in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the disease has reached 213 countries or territories, with 23,454,467 confirmed cases causing 809,333 fatalities according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at John Hopkins University. Travel bans and movement lockdowns have been in place in most countries, with some unwinding these measures as the peak of the virus passes while other reimpose restrictions. The pace of the unwinding of these measures differs significantly country-to-country depending on how effective each has been in suppressing the spread of the virus, with some notable centres of outbreak such as the US, Brazil, and India.
- **Global Protest/Political Violence:** Widespread civil unrest broke out in the United States in the first week of June following the death of African-American George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis, MN in late May. More than 75 cities saw protests against police brutality, with curfews brought in in 40 cities after widespread rioting

and looting. Protest movements spread to a number of other Western nations, including the UK and France. The protests and civil unrest have widened into a more general movement seeking to change what protesters say is a racist and unequal society in many Western states. This has spurred a reassessment of monuments in many Western cities, with opponents saying they glorify racist individuals, while defenders argue a nation's history should not be erased due to an individual's views or actions at another point in time. In Hong Kong, there is an increased risk of mass protests and an escalation in street violence in the wake of Beijing's imposition of a new national security law, which opponents say violates the 'one country, two systems' political environment enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

- **India-China:** Tensions between the world's two most populous nations reached their highest level in decades on June 15 when a skirmish in the disputed Galwan Valley, a remote Himalayan area along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), left 20 Indian and an unconfirmed number of Chinese troops dead. No guns are permitted by either side along the LAC, meaning the skirmish involved brutal hand-to-hand combat. Both sides have blamed the other for the escalation, the first deaths along the border in over 40 years. The LAC between the two sides is not officially demarcated, making the establishment of control difficult. Both sides have sought to de-escalate the situation in recent weeks, but there remains the prospect of more frequent skirmishes in the region with neither side willing to back down.
- **Trade War:** The spread of COVID-19 has seen a number of governments around the world issue strong criticism of the Chinese government for its perceived inaction in effectively containing the initial outbreak of the virus. This in turn could see trade relations worsen substantially if any tariffs or sanctions are imposed on China as a punishment. The state of relations between China and many western economies has deteriorated further following Beijing's decision to implement a new national security law on Hong Kong. Critics have argued the new law threatens Hong Kong's 'one country, two systems' political environment.