

The weekly briefing | 17 March 2014

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Africa

Former Libyan prime minister flees country after being ousted over tanker dispute

Former Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan fled the country on 11 March after being ousted by the parliament in a no-confidence vote. The upheaval was caused by a North Korean-flagged oil tanker, the Morning Glory, loading crude oil from the rebel-held port of Es Sider before setting sail, despite attempts by the Libyan navy to stop it. Earlier during the week, some of Libya's most powerful rebel groups, who demand regional autonomy from Tripoli and have significantly undermined the central government's authority in the wake of the 2011 revolution, began exporting oil in defiance of the government ban.

Zeidan's ousting follows previous unsuccessful attempts by different Libyan factions to remove him from power, including a brief abduction by an armed group last October. Zeidan had previously spent several years in exile in Germany, and is believed to have returned there after a refuelling stop in Malta late on 11 March. He has defied a ban from travelling abroad, which was imposed due to his suspected involvement in the embezzlement of public funds. He claimed in an interview with French broadcaster France 24 on 13 March that the no-confidence vote against him had been falsified. The ousting of the prime minister will strengthen the motivation of the country's Islamist organisations that are conducting an insurgency against the transitional government, in conjunction with local militia groups.



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North Korea has denied any involvement with the vessel, and as the North Korean flag is frequently used to hide the true ownership of cargo vessels, it remains unclear where the tanker loaded with crude oil was headed. Late on 16 March, US Navy SEALs boarded and took control of the Morning Glory in international waters south of Cyprus. Meanwhile, the Libyan defence minister, Abdullah al-Thani, was named as Zeidan's interim successor for a period of two weeks, during which time the national assembly will have to agree on a permanent replacement. The latest turmoil adds to Western fears that the OPEC member state might break apart into rebel-held territories, with three major ports already under rebel control, causing a notable impact on the Libyan economy and national reconstruction process. On 14 March, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution extending its mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and sanctions regime for another year.

Other developments

Two leaders of Sudan's main rebel alliance, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), have been sentenced to death in absentia in a move likely to further increase tensions. Malik Agar, the former governor of Blue Nile State, and politician Yasir Arman, who stood against Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in the 2010 elections, were sentenced to death on 13 March along with 15 others on charges of terrorism and for staging a war against the state. The sentence follows the collapse of talks led by the African Union to break the deadlock between the SPLM-N and the Sudanese government.

UN and Congolese forces attacked Rwandan Hutu rebels near the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DR Congo) eastern border. Troops from the UN mission MONUSCO were deployed in the North Kivu province to back a Congolese offensive against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which consists of both former Rwandan soldiers and Hutu militiamen that fled to the DR Congo after taking part in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The Congolese government announced it would not stop its offensives until the FDLR, which human rights organisations accuse of murder and rape of civilians, is ready to begin a disarmament process.

Three people were killed during fresh clashes in Ghardaia city, Algeria. The deaths on 15 March occurred during renewed violence in the Hadj Messaoud area of Ghardaia, northern-central Algeria, between the Chaambi and Mozabite communities. The deaths are believed to have been triggered by a minor incident between the two ethnic-Arab and ethnic-Berber groups during the re-eruption of violence on 11 March, highlighting both the prevalence of ethnic tensions and an incapacity to control the violence, despite the deployment of additional security forces to Ghardaia city.

On the radar

- **East African countries are preparing to deploy troops to South Sudan** as government forces step up their battle against rebels operating around the strategic town of Malakal.
- **The UN emergency relief coordinator's report from Somalia is due to be published** on 21 March.
- **The South African political movement Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is to step up its campaign for the upcoming national elections**, with controversial proposals to expropriate white farmers' land and nationalise banks and mines.
- **Further anti-government protests are expected in Khartoum, Sudan**, to denounce the use of batons and tear gas used by police to dispel protesters on 15 March.

Americas

Contested result in El Salvador's second-round presidential election

On the evening of 9 March, Salvador Sánchez Ceren of the ruling left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) won the second round of El Salvador's presidential election. His victory was based on the narrowest margin, with a 0.22 points advantage over his opponent, Norman Quijano of the right-wing National Republican Alliance (Arena). This difference represents just 6,364 votes, in an election with about three million ballots cast. Quijano rejected the initial results when they were published because of ill-defined fraud charges. This led the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to suspend the official proclamation of a winner until it has verified the votes. However, despite Arena's demands, the TSE has until now refused to proceed to a vote by vote recount. Such a procedure is warranted by the El Salvador constitution only under extreme circumstances, which have not been met. Thus, on 11 March, Arena called for the election to be annulled, putting an end to the TSE verification process. Protest marches have also been organised by Arena supporters in the capital, San Salvador.

Ceren was the driving force behind the struggle between the FMLN guerrilla group and the totalitarian conservative regime during El Salvador's civil war (1979-92). Following his imposing 10-point lead over his rival in the first round of the presidential elections on 2 February, it was expected that he would win by an even larger margin on 9 March. However, Quijano skilfully managed to increase his support base in the period between the two rounds. A major factor that influenced the change in electoral preferences was the ongoing Venezuelan debacle, which severely undermined the FMLN revolutionary rhetoric. Moreover, Quijano benefited from the unexpected support of voters supporting first-round candidate Tony Saca, in spite of his tacit support for Ceren.

The unexpected re-emergence of Quijano marks the return of Arena to the forefront of the El Salvador political scene. The Arena party, which held power from 1989 to 2009, has been plagued by internal divisions since it expelled former president Antonio Saca from its ranks in 2009. The narrowness of the results is likely to further fuel tensions between El Salvador's major parties, Arena and the FMLN. Yet, the country is badly in need of a policy consensus, notably to solve its chronic problems with violence and rampant poverty. El Salvador has been subjected to violent gang activity since the deportation from the United States of many gang members in the mid-1990s. It is also significantly affected by widespread underdevelopment, with 40% of its population living in conditions of poverty. In spite of Quijano's accusation of the TSE's implicit backing for the FMLN, the United Nations delegation in El Salvador has given the tribunal its support. The next president should take office on 1 June for the period 2014-19.

Other developments

Former Columbian President Alvaro Uribe's position has been strengthened after congressional elections. In the elections, Uribe's right-wing Democratic Centre (CD) gained 19 seats in the senate and 12 in the deputy chamber, making the party the principle opposition force to President Juan Manuel Santos's Social Party of National Unity, though Santos maintains a majority in both chambers. Santos was the head of Uribe's Ministry of Defence from 2006 to 2009, during which time he embraced the president's offensive stance against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). However, following his election in 2010, he has adopted a more consensual approach to the FARC issue, resulting in a split between the former colleagues.

The 12 foreign ministers of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) met in Santiago, Chile, on 12 March to discuss the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. The meeting was called by Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and received much support in its organisation from Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff. However, it failed to deliver a sustainable mechanism for the resolution of Venezuela's crisis. Notably, the meeting received a major blow after Maduro announced that he would not attend the summit in Santiago. UNASUR is to send a delegation to Venezuela in the coming weeks.

Last week, a civil militia in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, surrendered its weapons to national authorities as part of a criminal investigation. For over a year, civilians have been organising vigilante groups to defend their villages from the powerful drug cartels that operate in the area. At the beginning of the year, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto ordered the militarisation of the region and incorporated the civil militias into a coalition against the drug traffickers. However, some militias have become involved in criminal activities, subsequently jeopardising Peña Nieto's security strategy.

On the radar

- **Washington to issue sanctions against Venezuela** over the ongoing student protests crisis in the country.
- **Unionised miners to stage nationwide strikes across Peru** on 17 March.
- **Paraguayan transport unions set to stage a nationwide strike over wage issues** on 26 March.

Asia and Pacific

Japan's Diet likely to relax the country's arms export ban

On 13 March, the ruling block in Japan's Diet indicated that it is likely to approve recently proposed adjustments to the country's weapons export ban. The majority coalition, consisting of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its partner, New Komeito, expressed approval of the proposal it received from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government. The changes are intended to establish 'three principles on transferring defence equipment' that will replace existing regulations. Under the new regulations, Japan would be able to export weapons and defence equipment to neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the regulations would still prohibit the export of weapons to states currently engaged in violent conflict.

Japan's existing regulations were adopted in 1967 and prohibited the sale of defence equipment to communist countries, countries engaged in international conflict, and states against which the United Nations has established arms embargoes. These regulations were expanded in 1976, a move which essentially banned all exports of weapons from Japan. The new regulations will require that export permits will be issued only once a set of criteria have been met. Specifically, arms sales must be demonstrated to contribute to Japanese national security, international peace and cooperation. At present, the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is responsible for exports of defence equipment; however, under the new policy, in urgent or emergency situations, the national security council would have jurisdiction over weapons exports.

Japan argues that the changes will not only allow more active participation in international peacekeeping operations and support Japanese national security interests, but also bolster domestic industrial production. Relaxation of the export policies would allow weapons exports to Japan's neighbours for the purpose of protecting important sea lanes. Nevertheless, many of the countries to which Japan may export weapons are engaged in territorial disputes with China over a number of small islands in the South China Sea. Additionally, China has recently sought to use its expanding naval power to play a more active role in maritime security. Thus, China is likely to oppose the amendments to the Japanese policy.

Other developments

North Korea fired 25 short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan on 16 March. The missiles, believed to be FROG surface to surface missiles, were fired in three stages during Sunday evening. Ten were launched shortly before 18:20, eight more were fired at around 20:00 and a final seven at approximately 21:30, and were reported to have travelled 43 miles before finally landing in the sea. The recent launches come just over two weeks after North Korea fired a number of scud missiles into the sea in what appeared to be a statement against South Korea and the United States' joint annual military training operations.

Maoist insurgents in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh killed 15 police officers on 11 March. Police forces in the Sukma district of Chhattisgarh were ambushed by nearly 200 members of the Naxal rebel movement in an attack lasting over two hours. The rebels had planted landmines in the Tongapal jungle where a team of nearly 50 police officers were on duty, which delayed the deployment of police reinforcements. It is not known if the attackers sustained any injuries. The Naxal insurgency dates back to the 1960s, and has reportedly been responsible for over 12,000 deaths in the past two decades. The insurgents have historically targeted both civilian and state officials in their attacks. Violence is prevalent in the north and southeastern regions of India, and the insurgency is regarded as a major internal security threat by the Indian government.

Last week saw a significant reduction in the anti-government protests that have raged in Bangkok, Thailand, since late 2013. Although the main protest movement is now confined to a public park in the capital, the economic damage from the protests remains diffuse. Strong controversy surrounds a government rice subsidy scheme that is blamed for damaging the purchasing power of farmers, for which Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra is presently facing negligence charges. The protests have led to a massive reduction in tourism, a key industry in Thailand, and damaged flows of private investment both from abroad and domestically. While most Asian Central Banks have been increasing domestic interest rates – a reaction to the US Central Bank's policy announcements earlier this year – Thailand's central bank has lowered interest rates to a new three-year low. The move is an attempt to boost consumer spending and reduce the costs of borrowing in Thailand.

On the radar

- **Japan's massive new nuclear material factory is nearing completion in Rokkasho, north of Tokyo,** and has led to international criticism of Japan's low-grade nuclear security system
- **Further protests expected by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party** over alleged election fraud.
- **Increased security and further unrest is expected in Larkana, Pakistan,** following the recent rioting over the alleged desecration of the Koran by a Hindu youth.
- **Students to protest in Kathmandu, Nepal,** on 18 and 19 March, over the increase in fuel prices.

Europe

Crimean parliament declares independence from Ukraine as voters in referendum choose to join

Russia As the Ukrainian parliament approved a motion to dissolve the Crimean assembly, talks took place in London on 14 March between Russia and the United States in an attempt to resolve the crisis in Crimea. The Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, claimed that no common cause had been found, while the US secretary of state, John Kerry, reported that the Russians had rejected proposals that would respect Ukrainian integrity while soothing Moscow's concerns. Lavrov maintained that Russia would respect the will of the Crimean people as expressed through the results of the referendum on the 16 March. He also denied that Russia planned to invade southeast Ukraine, but reiterated Moscow's claim that Russia has the right to protect ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine if the unrest continues.

Earlier in the week, the G7 issued a statement condemning the annexation of Crimea as a violation of the United Nations Charter. The G7 has stated that the Crimean referendum has no legal basis, and has called for Russia to withdraw the troops that it has already deployed to the region. G7 countries have also warned Russia that they are suspending any preparation for the planned G8 meeting in Sochi this summer until Russia changes course or is willing to come to a meaningful compromise. On the 15 March, the UN Security Council voted on a US-backed resolution condemning the Crimean referendum. The resolution was vetoed by the Russian representative, and abstained from by China, while all the other members voted in favour of the motion. On 19 March, the US government will put forward a bill that will authorise Obama to impose economic penalties on Russian and Ukrainian individuals involved in the takeover of the Crimean peninsula, and would approve a \$1 billion loan to the Ukrainian government.

The final results from the 16 March referendum in Crimea showed 96.8% of voters in favour of joining Russia. The result of the referendum was largely seen as pre-determined, given that 58% of Crimea's 2.3 million inhabitants are ethnic Russians and there was no status quo option on the ballot paper. On 17 March, the Crimean parliament declared independence from Ukraine and applied to become part of the Russian Federation. The process of separation from the Ukraine will be a long and arduous procedure, not least due to the reliance of Crimea on Ukrainian food, gas, electricity and water supplies, all of which will have to be renegotiated by the newly formed Ukrainian government and the to be appointed (presumably Russian) local government. –However, as Crimea is dependent on Ukraine, Ukraine is dependent on Russia: Ukraine imports almost all its energy in the form of Russian gas, and any sanctions brought against the newly formed Russian principality would undoubtedly be followed by severe penalties imposed by Moscow. If Ukraine refuses to come to a settlement with Crimea post separation, it could provide Russia with the motivation it needs to impose crippling sanctions on Ukraine or, if it feels there is a threat to the Crimea or Russian speaking natives, invade eastern Ukraine in order to secure its own interests.

Other developments

Turkish riot police have responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse

protesters. On 11 March, protesters took to the streets across 30 cities in Turkey after hearing the news of the death of Berkin Elvan, a 15-year-old boy who had been struck by a tear gas canister while out purchasing bread during the Gezi Park protests in June 2013. The teenager, who had been in a coma for 269 days, became a symbol for the anti-government protesters against heavy-hand tactics used by the security forces to curb demonstrations against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government.

On 12 March, 50,000 gathered to attend Elvan's funeral in Istanbul and nationwide protests continued. The Gezi Park protests originally broke out on 30 May 2013 following the announcement of plans to redevelop the park in Istanbul and soon spread nationwide as demonstrations against the government. Erdogan's government has faced a series of protests in recent months over allegations of corruption in the government and recent bills curbing freedoms on the internet and the tightening of the authorities' control over the judiciary. This is a highly sensitive time in Turkish politics with local elections to be held on 30 March.

Slovakia held the first round of presidential elections on 15 March. There is concern that if current Prime Minister Robert Fico wins the election, his party, the Social Democrats, would hold a monopoly over power, as it would control both the parliament and the government. Fico has held two terms as prime minister and has won support for the government's anti-austerity measures and fiscal discipline. In Saturday's first round, Fico polled 28.2%, with his closest rival, Andrej Kiska, a millionaire philanthropist, on 24%. A second round of the vote will be held on 29 March. Should Fico win the presidency, his government will face a reshuffle but will still control 83 out of 150 seats in the parliament until the next parliamentary elections in 2016.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko informed the Belarusian Security Council on 12 March that Russia had been asked to reinforce the joint formation of troops and deploy another 15 air force planes in Belarus. This is seen as a response to increasing tensions between Russia and the West and NATO's decision to build up its military presence near the Belarusian border. On 10 March, NATO announced the deployment of reconnaissance planes in Poland and Romania to monitor the crisis in Ukraine and that 15 airplanes would be redeployed from Italy to the Baltic States.

On the radar

- **The European Parliament's International Trade Committee will vote on whether to end or greatly reduce customs duties on EU imports from Ukraine.**
- **A 48-hour strike opposing austerity measures is planned for 19-20 March across Greece.**
- **Turkish local elections to be held** on 30 March.
- **European Union Foreign Affairs Council meeting is scheduled for 17 March.**
- **EU-US summit to be held in Brussels** on 26 March.

Middle East

Tit-for-tat cross-border fire between Palestinian fighters in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli military has reached levels that have not been seen since November 2012

Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip on 11 March killed three Palestinians associated with the group Islamic Jihad. Militants had fired cross-border rockets into Israel following the deaths of three Palestinian's involved in confrontations with Israeli security forces on 10 March. The death of three of its members prompted Islamic Jihad to fire up to 90 further rockets into Israel on 12 March. The Israeli military responded by bombing 29 militant targets. Tit-for-tat fire between Israel and militants in the Gaza Strip continued into 13 March.

The violence has reached levels not seen in the Gaza Strip since the eight-day war in November 2012. Israel defended its actions and stated that they shall continue to attack those that seek to attack them, and that 'if there is no quiet in the south [of Israel] then it will be noisy in Gaza'. Washington has condemned the rocket fire and insisted that Israel has a right to defend itself from terrorist attacks. The United Nations has called for restraint on all sides. However in the Middle East, Israel's military response has reignited anti-Israeli sentiment. Palestinian authorities have accused Israel of increasing the likelihood of violence spiralling out of control. The al-Quds Brigades, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have all claimed that they will respond to the Israeli 'aggression'.

Israel removed its soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, but maintains a naval and air blockade and restricts the movement of people and goods across the border into the territory. Israeli officials have closed the Kerem Shalom crossing in response to the rocket fire, further restricting the passage of goods. Israel has been accused of acting aggressively in Palestinian territories. A report published last month indicated that more Palestinians were killed in 2013 than in the two previous years combined, and Amnesty International has accused the Israeli military of using excessive violence in the West Bank over the past three years. Incidents of cross-border rocket fire into Israel are expected to continue and an escalation of violence in the coming weeks remains likely.

Other developments

Gunmen in the Egyptian capital of Cairo attacked a bus carrying military personnel. The bus was travelling through the Amiriya neighbourhood on 13 March when masked gunmen on a motorcycle opened fire. One officer was killed and three others were wounded in the attack. The Egyptian military blamed the attack on the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, though the Brotherhood released a statement condemning the attack and accused the government of attempting to incriminate the political organisation in order to drive them deeper underground. Attacks on security personnel and infrastructure have become commonplace in Egypt since the ousting of Brotherhood leader and former president Mohammed Morsi in July 2013. Militant activity in the country, particularly on the Sinai Peninsula, remains a major security threat.

Shi'ite Houthi fighters attacked an army base close to the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on 13 March. Two soldiers were killed and four others were injured, four Houthi fighters were also injured in the attack. Sectarian fighting between Houthi and Sunni tribesmen has escalated since October 2013, and 40 people were killed in sectarian clashes over three days earlier this month. The plan to transform Yemen into six federally administered regions has been rejected by Houthis in the north, who believe that the country is being divided between rich and poor. Violence in Yemen is a concern for Gulf States and the United States because of its strategic position alongside the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden shipping lanes.

The United Nations Human Rights Council published a report on the use of drone strikes and the unexpected deaths of civilians. The report was presented in Geneva on 12 March by UN special rapporteur Ben Emmerson. Concerns have been raised over the increase in use of drone attacks in Afghanistan and Yemen in 2013, though a reduction in drone strikes in Pakistan was witnessed during the same period. The majority of strikes are carried out by the United States, and the report recommends that countries have an obligation to carry out inquiries into drone attacks that involve the deaths of civilians.

On the radar

- **21 March marks the Iranian New Year and the start of the latest round of talks with the P5+1** aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions.
- **Protests are expected to continue in Egypt** in support of former president Mohammed Morsi, and against the possibility of Egypt's military chief, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, announcing his candidacy for presidency
- **The director of the Department for Security Affairs and Disarmament in Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Ulyanov, believes that Syria's chemical weapons should be removed and destroyed outside the country by 13 April.**
- **19 March marks the anniversary of the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003.**

Polar Regions

Norway calls on Nordic neighbours to join NATO

The Norwegian defence minister, Ine Eriksen Søreide, stated that both Finland and Sweden were welcome to join NATO as full members during a roundtable discussion between Nordic defence ministers broadcast on the Finnish television network YLE on 12 March. The invitation was explicitly linked to Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty in Crimea, with the defence ministers of Finland, Sweden and Norway, in addition to Estonian defence ministry undersecretary Sven Sakkov, unanimously accusing Russia of seeking territorial ambitions at the expense of its neighbours. Sakkov connected the current crisis in Ukraine to Russia's involvement in Georgia in 2008, and the Swedish defence minister, Karin Enström, criticised Russia for basing its foreign policy exclusively on 'geopolitics'.

The crisis in Crimea did not spark the debate in Sweden and Finland as to whether to join NATO (Norway and Estonia are already members) but rather rekindled a discussion that Nordic defence ministers have been conducting for many years. NATO membership would afford Sweden and Finland protection under Article 5 of the organisation's charter, which specifies that an attack on one alliance member is an attack on all. Given Russia's increasingly belligerent stance in the Baltic, with numerous bombing simulations flown last year over Finland and Sweden, such a guarantee would be a welcome security asset for the vulnerable Nordic states. On the other hand, full membership could provoke the very aggression from Russia that it is supposed to deter: in 2013 Russian defence chief Nikolai Makarov threatened that such a move could have 'serious political and trade consequences' for Russia's Nordic neighbours.

Russia's gambit in Crimea has made the prospect of NATO membership for Sweden and Finland more attractive, yet has simultaneously demonstrated that the Russian government is ready to take decisive and even risky action to maintain, or even reverse, the current balance of power with its neighbours. Indeed, such a programme has essentially been the guiding principle of Russia's foreign and security policy since Vladimir Putin first became president in 2000. Furthermore, the programme serves a domestic purpose: there is a deep popular perception in Russia that NATO expansion eastwards in the 1990s and early 2000s represented a complete humiliation for the country, and Putin's perceived reassertion of Russian military might is one of his few genuinely effective legitimisation devices. Russia would therefore have both the capability and motive for following through with Makarov's threats should Sweden and Finland decide to join NATO.

Other developments

The European Union parliament has passed a resolution that calls for increased protection in the high Arctic from development activities. The resolution, passed on 12 March, is not binding, and the legal procedure it sets out for establishing protected zones would have to be coordinated with the five Arctic coastal states, a process made even more difficult by the fact that the coastal states' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) are still awaiting legal definition. The resolution is thus unlikely to have a practical legal effect, but is more probably intended as a political statement. The EU is seeking to become more involved in Arctic affairs, a move supported by EU Arctic states Sweden and Finland, and last year attempted unsuccessfully to obtain permanent observer status within the Arctic Council (it is currently allowed to observe, but not on a permanent basis).

The UN Commission for Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS) has officially recognised the Sea of Okhotsk enclave as part of the Russia's continental shelf. The commission's ruling, delivered on 14 March, will grant Russia exclusive economic rights to an area of 52,000 square kilometres in the centre of the Okhotsk Sea, located between Japan and Russia, and recently described by the government as a 'real Ali Baba's cave', containing considerable potential oil and gas reserves as well as rich fishing stocks.

The largest Arctic paratrooper training exercise in Russian military history was executed successfully on 14 March. The exercise, involving 350 paratroopers and 36 planes, took place on the recently reopened military base on the New Siberian Islands archipelago in the Laptev Sea on Russia's northeast coast. As well as providing training and expertise for further military operations, Russian military commanders claim that the exercise has helped prepare Russia for undertaking search and rescue missions in its far north, a capability that will be essential if the Northern Shipping Route is to become more commercially viable.

On the Radar

- **Canada will host the next Arctic Council meeting in Yellowknife on 25-27 March.** The meeting is the first time the Arctic states will assemble since the outbreak of the crisis in Crimea, which is widely expected to cause tensions during the meeting.
- **An Arctic Dialogue conference bringing together politicians, academics and business leaders will be held 18-20 March in Bodø, Norway,** with the theme of 'The Arctic in a global perspective – resources'.

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