

# The weekly briefing | 24 March 2014

Political and security risk updates

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## Africa

### **Attack on Tripoli International Airport following government's announcement of mobilisation of security forces to step up fight against terrorism**

Explosions hit a runway at Libya's international airport in the capital, Tripoli, early on 21 March, causing flights to be suspended until the morning of 22 March. The cause of the explosions was reported variously as rockets, shells or a time bomb. The attack came the day after the Libyan government had announced that it was mobilising its security forces after stating publicly for the first time that 'terrorist groups' were behind a series of attacks directed against state forces and foreigners in the country.

The latest attack highlights the increasingly sensitive situation in Libya following former Prime Minister Ali Zeidan's escape from the country. The transitional authorities appear unable to control several armed groups acting in different areas throughout the country, which have not laid down their weapons since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011. Rebel forces' control of Libya's natural resources, especially petroleum, is exerting significant pressure upon both the Libyan government and the country's economy. The government has so far remained wary of seeking open confrontation with the armed groups, however, in their 20 March statement, the authorities stressed that the country finds itself in a confrontation with terrorist groups. A group of former opposition fighters from the city of Zintan, to the southwest of Tripoli, has controlled the airport since the revolution. Rebels are also holding Saif al-Islam, the former dictator's son, in Zintan.



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The Libyan government has called upon the international community to support their fight against armed groups in the country. The emphasis on terrorist elements within these armed groups can be interpreted as a plea for assistance from Western countries in particular, who have been monitoring the worsening power vacuum following the Libyan revolution with concern, particularly since the 2012 attack on US diplomats in Benghazi. On 17 March, a US Navy SEALs team raided a North Korea-flagged tanker carrying Libyan crude oil from the rebel-controlled port of Es Sider, in a bid to thwart a militia plan to sell it abroad.

### **Other developments**

**The defence minister of the Central African Republic (CAR) has called on all residents of the capital, Bangui, to hand over any weapons or be considered as military targets in a bid to facilitate a disarmament process.** In a state radio address on 18 March, the defence minister, Theophile Timangoa, called for disarmament and demobilisation. Despite the assistance offered by French forces in order to disarm these militias, sectarian violence between the country's Christian and Muslim communities has continued to escalate since the outbreak of violence in December 2013. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said on 20 March that violence between Christians and Muslims in CAR had reached a 'terrifying level', including instances of cannibalism and the decapitation of children. The European Union is preparing to deploy a mission to CAR by the end of April.

**The second round of South Sudan peace talks has been delayed after the country's government rejected the idea of a group of formerly high-ranking political leaders participating as a third party.** Following several months of fighting, a ceasefire agreement has been agreed but has been repeatedly violated since January. This has caused international mediators to increasingly lose patience with the opposing parties. On 20 March, South Sudanese troops seized the strategic oil-rich town of Malakal after more than a month of occupation by forces loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar.

**Negotiators have achieved limited progress in ending a strike that has brought South Africa's platinum mining industry to a halt for more than six weeks.** Anglo American Platinum announced on 20 March that it had reached a deal with workers at its plants, represented by the National Union of Metalworkers. However, a separate wage strike, coordinated by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) that involves tens of thousands of workers, is well into its second month. This is affecting several large mining firms and turning into one of the costliest strikes in South African history. Negotiations have failed primarily because the current aims of the opposing sides in terms of workers' remuneration are too far apart for compromise to be achieved at present.

### **On the radar:**

- **UN officials have warned that trucks that were transporting thousands of tonnes of urgent aid are being held up by South Sudan's warring factions.**
- **Tensions are expected to elevate in Burundi** following the issuing of life sentences for leading opposition members of the Movement for Solidarity and Development.
- **The UN panel of experts' report on Cote d'Ivoire is due on 25 March**, and the mandate for the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is due to expire at the end of the month.
- **The Barakat (Enough!) activist group plan to protest in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, on 24 and 27 March.**

## Americas

### **Removal of Bogota's mayor threatens Colombia's peace process**

On 19 March, Gustavo Petro, the left-wing mayor of Colombia's capital, Bogota, was officially removed from office after months of battling in the courts. He was first charged in December 2013 by the country's conservative Inspector-General, Alejandro Ordóñez, over a 2012 rubbish-collection crisis. Ordóñez ordered Petro's departure from office and imposed a 15-year ban from holding public office. Since then, Petro has received wide public support in his struggle to reverse the judgement, but to little avail. However, on 18 March the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a binding regional court, ruled in favour of Petro. The following day, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos rejected the ruling, going against the IACHR charter, and chose centre-right Rafael Pardo as interim mayor. After the announcement, Bogota's entire city government announced its resignation. Petro is the second mayor of Bogota to be removed from office in the past four years; in 2011 Samuel Moreno was sacked after revelations of corruption.

The ousting of Petro, a former member of the M19 guerrilla group, in what appears to be a political manoeuvre, has negatively impacted on the current peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The chief FARC negotiator, Ivan Marquez, has expressed his indignation over Petro's removal, which he argues will adversely affect previously negotiated agreements. In November 2013, the peace talks achieved a landmark agreement over the issue of FARC's political participation. The deal, which guarantees the guerrilla group's political participation, is the second of five points to be discussed during negotiations. But the recent manoeuvres in Bogota have exposed the rigidity and underlying clout of Colombia's political mechanisms. The function of the Inspector-General – to mediate the correct function of government institutions and agencies – is enshrined in the country's constitution. This position has been widely criticised by the opposition as tending to further concentrate power in the hands of the right-wing majority because the Inspector-General is elected by members of the senate.

In a public statement, Petro declared that he will sue Santos for ignoring the IACHR ruling. Furthermore, he insisted in that he would remain politically active so as to launch a nationwide campaign to promote the rewriting of the 1991 constitution. Notably, this would entail a reform of the Inspector-General office. In response to the confirmed impeachment of Petro, the IACHR is to hold a hearing on the case on 24 March. The session is to touch on the broader issue of the possible over-reach of administrative power of the Colombian authorities. In the meantime, Pardo, also minister of labour in Santos's administration, is to remain in office until new elections are held in June. His appointment to the second most powerful elected office is likely to give a boost to Santos's hold on power ahead of the presidential election scheduled for 25 May.

### **Other developments**

**Colombian farmers have demonstrated over unfulfilled promises by the government.** On 17 March, 30,000 Colombian farmers took to the streets of Bogota to urge the government to address the dire conditions facing the countryside. The organisers attempted to revive the 2013 mass protest movement, which shut down most of the country's motorways and railway networks last autumn. The liberalisation of the economy under the Santos administration has further marginalised the traditional agrarian sector, which comprises most of Colombia's rural population.

**A viral video on the internet has highlighted police violence in Brazil's favelas.** A video captured by a bystander of a woman struck by gunfire during a shoot-out between police and suspected criminals has brought the case to national attention. On 18 March, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff offered her condolences to the victim's family. Brazil has traditionally adopted a hardline approach to dealing with the illicit drug trade in its favelas. But such operations have been increasingly criticised by the public in the run-up to World Cup, which is to take place in June. Last week, Special Police Operations Battalions (BOPE) were deployed in Rio de Janeiro's favelas after a policeman was killed and two injured.

**On 22 March, a protest staged by the opposition in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, turned violent.** The protest was organised in support of the liberation of opposition leader Leopoldo López, who was imprisoned in late February for inciting the opposition to take to the streets. Since February, the country has been engulfed in a political turmoil between radical opponents and supporters of the government. Thirty four people have so far been killed in the unrest.

#### **On the radar:**

- **The United States is to issue sanctions against Venezuela** through the Organisation of American States (OAS) over the ongoing student protests crisis in the country.
- **Paraguayan transport unions are set to stage a nationwide strike over wage issues** on 26 March.
- **Protests against the forthcoming FIFA World Cup are expected in several cities in Brazil** on 27-29 March.

## **Asia and Pacific**

### **Three separate bomb and grenade attacks in Thailand believed to be politically motivated**

At least four people were injured during three separate bomb and grenade attacks in the northern province of Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 21 March. The first attack, at 20:35 on Friday evening, targeted a PTT petrol station in tambon Nong Hoi and resulted in injuries to a customer and three members of staff. The focus of the second attack, which came at 21:35, was the offices of Boon Rawd Brewery Company in tambon Yang Nerng in the Sarapee district, where two grenades were thrown into the office building. One of the grenades failed to explode, and although no injuries were reported, part of the building and two vehicles parked inside were damaged. Reports suggest that the owners of the brewery company have ties with anti-government protesters, which could indicate politically-related motivation. The third bomb was hidden underneath the wheel of a car in the car park of Andaman Seafood Restaurant in tambon Pa Dad, and exploded at 22:15, causing no injuries but damaging vehicles.

It is believed that all three targets have links to agencies and officials who are currently dealing with cases against government politicians. The attacks came hours after the constitutional court nullified the 2 February general election, which angered pro-government supporters and adds further weight to the attacks being politically motivated. Police are currently investigating whether the attacks are in some way related to the current political conflict within the country.

Twenty two people have so far been killed and over 700 injured during protest-related violence since 30 November 2013. Attacks have included grenades and small homemade explosive devices and shootings. Increased security is expected to continue despite the government's lifting of the state of emergency on 19 March.

### **Other developments**

**South Korea's defence ministry stated that North Korea had fired 30 short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan on 22 March and a further 16 early on 23 March.** The recent launching of the FROG rockets, which travelled approximately 37 miles before landing in the sea, mark the fifth time that North Korea has fired into the sea in protest against the ongoing annual joint military exercises between the United States and South Korean military, which commenced on 24 February and are expected to continue until 18 April. The United States and South Korea have called the launches acts of provocation and have called for North Korea to refrain from firing any further missiles.

**At least two people were killed and seven others injured when a bomb exploded at the Shah Agha shrine in the Khakrez district of Kandahar province, Afghanistan, on 21 March.** The bomb was concealed within a fruit basket and exploded at around 10:00 on Friday morning as gatherers had congregated at the shrine to celebrate Nowruz, the Persian New Year. The deputy governor and deputy mayor of Kandahar province were reported to be among the injured. No group has yet claimed responsibility.

**Indonesia's Densus 88 counterterrorism unit last week arrested three suspected militants after intercepting a package containing explosives.** The package was sent by the suspects from Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city and the capital of the province of East Java, with the intended destination of Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi. The three arrests were made in Makassar, Bengkulu and Lampung.

### **On the radar:**

- **Further protests are expected in Bangladesh in addition to a shutdown strike on 24 March** over suggested irregularities in the recent upazila elections.
- **Increased security is expected to continue in Bandipora, India,** despite the lifting of a curfew on 19 March.
- **Ongoing demonstrations by students and civil society activists are to continue at the parliament building in the Zhongzheng district of Taipei, Taiwan.**
- **Increased risk of terror attacks in the Philippines surrounding the anniversary of the founding of New People's Army on 29 March.**

## Europe

### **Ukraine signs EU partnership agreement, while Putin signs annexation of Crimea**

Following the referendum on 16 March, Crimean officials signed an agreement with Russia on 18 March for the annexation of the peninsula into the Russian Federation. Russian President Vladimir Putin defended Russia's actions in a patriotic speech claiming that the Crimean referendum abided international law and the UN charter, and also defended the annexation of Crimea as the protection of ethnic Russians who were abused by the Ukrainian government. The European Union and the United States reacted by announcing further sanctions against Russia, including sanctions on a further 12 prominent Russians, senior figures in the Russian administration and close allies to Putin. In reaction, Putin stated that attempts by the West to intimidate Russia with sanctions would be viewed as acts of aggression, and Moscow later retaliated by imposing its own sanctions on senior US politicians. However, sanctions by the West had little effect as Russia continued to take over military bases in Crimea, and on 21 March, following the approval of both houses of the Russian parliament, Putin officially signed into law the annexation of Crimea. It is the first time the Kremlin has expanded Russia's borders since the Cold War. On the same day, Ukraine's acting prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, signed an association agreement with the European Union.

The Crimean parliament has announced plans to nationalise all Ukrainian state property on the peninsula. The parliament has also decided to introduce the Russian rouble alongside the Ukrainian hryvnia as the autonomous region's official currencies, and will set up a new central bank with an expected \$30 million in support from Russia. Although Putin has continued to deny that Russia has plans to invade mainland Ukraine, the Russian president has also insisted that Russia has the power to 'use all means' to protect ethnic Russians, while Russian MPs have spoken of the need to protect Russian speakers from radicals throughout Ukraine. On 17 March, the Russian foreign ministry called upon Ukraine's parliament to make plans to draft a new constitution. Russia wants Ukraine to become a federal country with autonomous states, handing more power to the regions. The ministry also urged Ukraine to adopt a neutral political and military status. Both of these acts would prevent Ukraine from joining the European Union or NATO. Meanwhile, Russia's prime minister, Dmitri Medvedev, announced that Russia would be seeking \$11 billion owed by Ukraine for cheap gas, as any agreement signed between the two countries had been 'subject to denunciation'.

On 20 March, the UN Security Council held its eighth meeting in three weeks – an indication of the determination by Western powers to highlight Russia's diplomatic isolation over the situation of Crimea. At the meeting, tensions rose after comments by Samantha Powers, the US ambassador to the United Nations, describing the annexation as 'theft', which angered her Russian counterpart, Vitaly Churkin. The West also became increasingly concerned as Russia took over more military bases across the Black Sea peninsula. Although Ukrainian soldiers peacefully surrendered to the take-over of the military base in the Crimean capital, Simferopol, on 18 March Russian troops detained the new Ukrainian navy commander, Sergiy Gayduk, and Ukrainian troops refused to surrender the airbase at Belbek on 22 March. The Kiev government has authorised Ukrainian troops to fire weapons in self-defence.

On 19 March, the Ukrainian government announced that it would appeal to the United Nations for the recognition of Crimea as a demilitarised zone and a withdrawal by both Russian and Ukrainian forces. On 20 March, Angela Merkel said that Europe would step up political and economic sanctions and would launch 'phase-3 measures' if Russia went ahead with its plan to annex Crimea. The G8 will effectively cease to exist should the current political impasse continue to escalate. Russia currently holds the G8 presidency and a G8 meeting is due to be held in June in Sochi. The British foreign office announced that the United Kingdom was suspending military cooperation with Russia, including the cancellation of a planned UK, French, US and Russian naval exercise, and is suspending a proposed visit by a Royal Navy ship to St Petersburg. Meanwhile, monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe will begin their mission after Russia negated its previous objections, though it is unclear if they will be allowed into Crimea. On 20 March, the United Nations announced the deployment of 34 human rights monitors after reports of security concerns for ethnic minorities in Crimea.

### **Other developments**

**On 21 March, the Bulgarian defence ministry announced that 12 countries were participating in a two-week drill, codenamed Saber Guardian.** Approximately 700 officers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States carried out computer-assisted exercises at one of the United States' four military bases in Bulgaria. According to the ministry, the objectives of the drill are to expand and improve the countries' interoperability with NATO, the command of multinational formations in performing humanitarian missions, and the expansion of regional strategic partnership in the security field. In 2014, Bulgaria will host more than 40 international joint training exercises.

**The European Union denounced the move by the Turkish government on 21 March to block access to Twitter.** Users had published voice recordings and documents that supposedly showed evidence of corruption within Tayyip Erdogan's government on the social media site. Local media reported that Twitter informed users of court orders for the site's closure. President Abdullah Gul used Twitter to denounce the ban and the government's attempt to control social media. Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said that blocking the site was only temporary; however, on 20 March, Erdogan had promised to 'wipe out' Twitter following the smear campaign that his opponents had led on the site. Erdogan's office claimed that the government decided to block Twitter after the site failed to remove a link following an order by Turkish courts.

**On 18 March, the main website for Islamist militants in the North Caucasus, Kavkaz Centre, reported that the leader of the terrorist umbrella group Caucasus Emirate, Doka Umarov, had died and that a new leader had already been appointed.** Umarov was considered to be Russia's most wanted man and has been the subject of an international warrant issued by the UN Security Council and Interpol since 2000. Kavkaz Centre offered no explanation for the death of the leader, instead uploading a video announcing the group's new emir, Ali Abu Muhammad al-Dagestani. Abu Muhammad has been the group's qadi, or senior judge, since October 2010. It is currently unclear how the death of Umarov and the appointment of Abu Muhammad will impact on the operations of the Caucasus Emirate. Russian authorities have yet to officially confirm Umarov's death.



## On the radar

- **G7 leaders will meet on 25 March in Brussels.**
- **EU-US summit on 26 March in Brussels**
- **European Defence Agency conference in Brussels** on 27 March.
- **The outcome of the 20-21 March EU summit will be debated at an extraordinary Conference of Presidents**, open to all MEPs, with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy on 26 March.
- **European Commissioner Štefan Füle will visit Kiev this week** to work with the Ukrainian authorities on the implementation of the association agreement.

## Middle East

### **Lebanon risks being dragged further into Syria's civil war as Syrian military continues its offensive along Lebanese border**

The Syrian border town of Yabroud, a long-term rebel stronghold and key supply route into neighbouring Lebanon, fell to government troops on 17 March as the Syrian government announced that it was also in control of the town of Qalamoun. Thousands of Sunni fighters and refugees subsequently fled across the border into Lebanon's Bakaa Valley. Syrian forces fighting alongside Hezbollah fighters also seized the village of Ras al-Ain, southwest of Yabroud, on 19 March. The village was believed to have been under the control of the al-Qaeda affiliated Nursa Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

The influx of Sunni fighters fleeing Syria into Lebanon threatens to destabilise the Bakaa Valley and other frontier areas along eastern Lebanon's border with Syria. Sectarian tensions in Lebanon, and throughout the region, have increased as communities and groups have backed either President Bashar al-Assad, a member of the Shi'ite Alawite sect, or the predominantly Sunni fighters who oppose him. The Lebanese Shia town of al-Labwa was subjected to rocket attacks in response to Hezbollah's involvement in forcing Sunni rebel fighters to flee across the border. Many rebels fled to the Sunni town of Arsal and the Lebanese army was deployed to reopen a road linking the two towns that was blockaded by residents of al-Labwa. A Sunni protestor was shot dead on 18 March as demonstrations took place in Beirut, the Bakaa Valley, and Sidon in protest to the road closure affecting Arsal. Further fighting broke out in the northern city of Tripoli, resulting in the deaths of 22 people.

Sectarian violence in Lebanon between Sunni and Shia has become increasingly common over the last 12 months and the increasing numbers of fighters fleeing Syria will only intensify the situation. The sectarian nature of the spill-over from the civil war in Syria, now entering its third year, is further exacerbated in Lebanon due to the support al-Assad's forces receive from Lebanon-based Hezbollah. It is highly likely that violence between sectarian linked towns and neighbourhoods will increase as Syrian troops continue their offensive in regions along the border. Civil war in Lebanon is thus a possibility.



## Other developments

**Two army officers and six militants were killed in the Egyptian province of Qalyubia, north of Cairo, on 19 March.** The shootout took place during a government raid on a makeshift bomb factory and safe house. The hideout was used by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, a self-declared Jihadist group that has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in Cairo and across the Sinai Peninsula, in addition to claiming to have killed over 200 security personnel. Attacks on police and military checkpoints have increased since the military deposed Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013.

**Israeli jets bombed several military locations in the Syrian government-held areas of the Golan Heights on 19 March.** A roadside bomb wounded four Israeli soldiers as they investigated suspicious activity in the border region and the airstrike operations were carried out because those that activated the device operated in the Syrian territory. The targets included a Syrian military headquarters, a training facility and artillery batteries, killing one soldier and wounding seven others. Israel blames Damascus; however, anti-Assad militants and Hezbollah also have a presence on the Golan. Israel has occupied the territory since 1967 and, although similar incidents have occurred in the past, the injury to the four soldiers marks the worst incident since the war in Syria began in 2011. Israel risks being drawn into future military operations in Syria's civil war with the success of Hezbollah's involvement in recent months.

**Four Taliban fighters launched an attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, on 20 March.** The attack on one of Kabul's most prestigious hotels left nine people dead, including four foreign nationals, and an Afghan journalist and three members of his family. The attack occurred as people were celebrating Nawroz, the Persian New Year, and foreign attendees were in Afghanistan to observe the upcoming elections. The four Taliban fighters were able to breach security posing as guests, which highlights the capability of militants to overcome heavily secured targets.

## On the radar

- **30 March marks Land Day, an annual of commemoration used by Palestinians to mark the expropriation of land to Israel in 1976.** Demonstrations will likely take place in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The risk of violence is high.
- **Pro-Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations will continue in Cairo,** the capital of Egypt, until 29 March as part of an 11 day campaign launched by a coalition of anti-coup groups.
- **The Afghanistan presidential election will be held on 5 April.** An increase in violence leading up to the vote is highly likely, with the Taliban threatening to kill anyone who takes part in what it calls a Western-backed sham.
- **15 April marks the anniversary of the rioting in Ahwas, Iran, in 2005,** which resulted in the deaths of approximately 100 people as security forces cracked down on protesters,
- **The indefinite strike by Israeli foreign ministry employees is to continue** as they demand increased wages and better working conditions.

## Polar regions

### **Russia holds large-scale military exercises along border with Finland**

More than 40 crews of Su-34, Su-27, Su-24M and MiG-31 began a large-scale military exercise in the northwest Russian border province of Karelia on 19 March. According to the source at the Russian Ministry of Defence, the exercises, in which crews from across the western reaches of the Russian Federation are taking part, will continue until the end of March. The source states the purpose of the exercise is to practice fighting of enemy aircraft and ground facilities. Meanwhile, a number of complimentary exercises were held further to the north on the Kola Peninsula and in Murmansk region, on 17 and 18 March respectively. The former envisaged a land invasion of the Arctic territory, and the latter an incursion into Russian airspace of eight hostile aircraft.

The exercises are taking place against the worrying backdrop of deteriorating relations between Russia and its Nordic neighbours. The Russian annexation of Crimea has rekindled a long-running debate in the Swedish and Finnish defence ministries over the potential benefits of NATO membership. Both sides are faced with the paradox that Russian aggression makes NATO membership for Sweden and Finland both more desirable and increasingly risky. US and Norwegian NATO officials have indicated that the offer of membership is open should either of the Nordic states decide in favour of it; Russian officials have repeatedly warned of potential economic and political retaliation should the offer be accepted.

The recent Russian military exercises will only exacerbate this paradox. Nevertheless, NATO accession for Sweden and Finland is closer now than it has been in any point in recent history. For Sweden, this trend is less surprising for a number of reasons. First, despite official neutrality, Sweden has a long history of cooperation with NATO. Second, Sweden is far less economically dependent on Russia than its neighbour to the east, and consequently has less to fear from Russian threats. Third, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt is the most active supporter of the Eastern Partnership Programme, which envisages closer economic and political ties between the EU and a number of Eastern European states, including Ukraine, which is by far the most important in terms of the success of the programme. On numerous occasions since November 2013, and particularly in response to Viktor Yanukovich's surprise decision to withdraw from the Eastern Partnership Programme, Bildt has proved one of the most aggressive and powerful of Russian foreign policy critics. On the other hand, Finland's move towards NATO, given their very close economic ties with Russia, is a much riskier move. Nevertheless, in a 16 March interview with the Finnish press, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen became the most significant Finnish politician to date to openly state that 'NATO is an option'.

### **Other developments**

**Exercise Cold Response, which includes 16,000 troops from 16 different NATO countries, has moved into its final phase.** The exercise, which has been on-going in Northern Norway for the last two weeks, is one of the largest 'joint combined' exercises in Europe, with units from all military branches. Ivar Moen, press spokesperson at the Joint Command Headquarters specially created for the exercise, spoke to Arctic-news portal Barents Observer about the logistics of the exercise, but while reporting that the invited Russian guests had taken part as planned, declined to comment on whether the situation in Crimea had had any influence on their participation.

**Local citizens in the Swedish town of Luleå held a demonstration on 17 March against the construction of the proposed Fennovoima nuclear power plant in Pyhäjoki, Finland.** The proposed power plant lies 96 miles from the Swedish coast. Local opponents are focusing on the leading role of the Russian state-owned company Rosatom in the venture. At the event, Esa Härmälä, director-general of the energy department at the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, denied that Finland is outsourcing its energy needs to Russia. Meanwhile, Nici Bergroth, an engineering manager at Fennovoima, stressed that the project is majority Finnish-owned.

**Lukoil will invest €1.4 billion in the Russian arctic region of Nenets Autonomous Okrug, according to the company president Vagit Alekperov.** Lukoil intends to increase oil production in the province by 30% over the next two years, with much of the oil to be shipped out through the Barents Sea, resulting in a corresponding increase in Arctic shipping. Alekperov has called the scale of the investment 'unprecedented', and pledged to deliver the first €500 million by the end of 2014.

#### 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.
- **Norwegian minister Tine Sundtoft's trip to meet Russian counterparts that was originally planned for this week has been cancelled** as a reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea.

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