

The weekly briefing | 1 September 2014

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Africa

Escalation in conflict highlights rising cross-border threat from Nigerian militants

In recent weeks, the Nigerian Islamist militant group Boko Haram augmented its offensive from northeast Nigeria into the far north of Cameroon, forcing the Cameroonian government to further increase its deployment of soldiers to the area. On 25 August, militants carried out a house-to-house raid of the twin towns of Gamboru and Ngala, seizing control of the military base and police station and ultimately the whole town. The offensive forced thousands of residents and Nigerian military personnel to flee across the border into Cameroon. The militants then set up operations and occupied dwellings abandoned by the towns' inhabitants.

On 25-26 August, as Boko Haram advanced into the north of Cameroon near Fotokol in pursuit of the fleeing residents and Nigerian military personnel, Cameroonian security forces engaged the militants, killing 27. On 27 August, Boko Haram suffered heavy casualties as Cameroon's military increased its operational capacity, deploying tanks to Fotokol and shelling the militants' camp in Gamboru-Ngala from across the border. Although a significant number of Boko Haram fighters were killed, intelligence suggests that the militants still remain in control of the town. Boko Haram now appears to control at least three districts in Nigeria's Borno State and a minimum of one in both Yobe and Adamawa states.



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International pressure and the palpable advance of Boko Haram into the north of the country has led the Cameroonian government to adopt a more forceful approach by deploying the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) elite army units to the north to support the military and the Gendarmerie Nationale already stationed in that part of the country. However, it is widely alleged that the latter two entities are corrupt and have been ineffectual in halting the advancing militants. It is unlikely that the Cameroonian government's limited military intervention will have a tangible impact upon the situation in northeast Nigeria, further than containing Boko Haram's advance into Cameroon along the A3 highway. Should the militant group continue to attempt to cross into Cameroon, it is highly likely it will be met with significant force, particularly around Fotokol, with a corresponding bolstering of Cameroonian forces at key locations in the Extreme North Region, such as Limani.

Other developments

Militants have attacked a high security prison within the national intelligence headquarters in the Bondhere district of the Somali capital, Mogadishu. On 31 August, suicide bombers detonated a vehicle loaded with explosives at the entrance of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) headquarters, which houses Godka Jilicow prison, before shooting their way into the building. Rebels exchanged gunfire with Somali National Army soldiers in an attempt to free jailed militants from the prison facility, though they failed to reach the cells in which the suspected militants were being held. Three soldiers and a civilian were killed in the battle along with seven rebels. Islamist extremist group al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the assault.

The prime minister of Lesotho, Thomas Thabane, has fled from his official residence after receiving intelligence that he was the target of an assassination attempt amid an apparent military coup on 30 August. The leader of The All Basotho Convention (ABC), who, along with his family, fled to neighbouring South Africa, has accused the military of ousting him. The army denied the accusation; however, the military surrounded the prime minister's residence, disarmed police units and took control of a number of government buildings in the capital, Maseru, at approximately 04:00 (local time) on Saturday. Thabane has indicated that he will return to Lethoso. Deputy Prime Minister Mothetjoa Metsing, leader of the coalition party Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), is now running the government, though sports minister and leader of the Basotho National Party (BNP) Thesele Maseribane has accused Metsing of being involved in the coup. Radio stations within the country have stopped broadcasting.

At least 55 protesters were wounded during two days of clashes with security forces in N'zerekore, Guinea. Residents of the country's second largest city staged riots on 28 and 29 August after Guinean Red Cross medical workers were instructed to spray a chemical sanitizer at a local market area as a preventative measure against the spread of Ebola virus disease (EVD). Market traders claim they were not given prior notice of the intention to sanitise the market, and rumours spread that the medical workers had in fact intended to transmit Ebola to the locals by way of the disinfectant spray. The medical workers were attacked, and protesters erected barricades around the city. A group of protesters, some armed, descended upon N'zerekore's hospital, and the police and military used tear gas to disperse the crowds. A 24-hour curfew was subsequently enforced within the city on 29 August. Although order was restored to the city at the weekend, further violence is possible as tensions remain high over the government's alleged handling of the spread of Ebola. Government efforts are further hampered by the view among some Guineans that the Ebola threat is a scam, while others suggest that the virus has been imported.

On the radar

- **Protests possible in Mali on Independence Day** on 22 September.
- **Increased risk of terrorist attack by al-Shabaab surrounding the anniversary of the Westgate Mall attack**, 21-24 September.
- **Peaceful protests have been authorised in Lethoso over the coming days.** Such protests are likely to turn violent if security personnel attempt to disperse demonstrators.
- **Nigeria celebrates Independence Day on 1 October**, which may present potential targets for Boko Haram militants.

Americas

Marina Silva's 'third way' gains momentum ahead of Brazil's presidential election

Brazilian presidential candidate Marina Silva has widened her lead over President Dilma Rousseff according to the latest poll ahead of the country's election in October. Silva took the helm of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) less than two weeks ago, after the party's original candidate, Eduardo Campos, died in a plane crash earlier this month. Since then, she has received a remarkable surge in support, while Rousseff's reputation has been tarnished by the publication of weak economic figures. The most recent poll forecasts a tie between Rousseff and Silva in the first round of voting, with a victory for Silva in an eventual second round. Silva, who served as environment minister between 2003 and 2008, contested the 2010 election on the Green Party ticket, and earned nearly 20% of the vote. In 2013, she launched her own party, the Sustainability Network, which merged with Campos' PSB less than a year ago.

The rise of Silva's 'third way' represents a fundamental shift in the country's political spectrum, which is currently dominated by the ruling left-wing Workers' Party (PT) and the centre-right Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB) party. Many have turned to Silva as a protest vote in the aftermath of the summer 2010 riots, in which millions of Brazilians took to the streets to demonstrate against government corruption, poor public services and overspending on the World Cup and the Olympics. Silva is seen as more business friendly than Rousseff, except in the area of agribusiness where she pushes for more regulations to better protect the environment. On 29 August, Silva presented her electoral programme centred on the theme of 'direct democracy'. Among its major proposals, the manifesto argues for a more autonomous central bank, free public transport for students, and an increase in the share of public funds dedicated to health.

In spite of Silva's outstanding recent performance, it remains uncertain if she will be able to maintain her position as the frontrunner in the upcoming presidential election. Her party, the PSB, remains small in relation to the ruling PT and opposition PSDB in terms of both the size of its electoral support base and its financial capacity. In addition, many question the coherence of the merger between the Sustainability Network and the PSB, which diverge widely on their political and economic views. But regardless of her long-term performance, Silva's candidacy will certainly weaken the support base of the PSDB candidate, Aécio Neves.

Other developments

A general strike on 28 August blocked most of Argentina's transport network. The strike called by the country's major unions was particularly widespread in the capital, Buenos Aires, and impacted maritime, air and road traffic. The Argentine government of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has until now refused to yield to the demands of the opposition unions. This is the third general strike faced by Fernández since she took office in 2007, and is the second so far this year.

The Venezuelan opposition, Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), staged a march on 28 August to protest against the implementation of a new biometric identification system. In a struggle to curb the development of black markets for the purchase of basic goods, the administration of President Nicolás Maduro revealed plans to instate a biometric identification system in the country's major grocery stores. But the opposition, highly fragmented, has lost much of its capacity to mobilise people, and has until now failed to provide a coherent alternative.

El Salvador's most prominent gangs agreed to resume a truce with the police and the military on 29 August. The agreement orders gang members to halt their attacks on police and military officers as a token of goodwill. In 2012, the government brokered a landmark ceasefire with the various criminal organisations; but last year, levels of violence started to increase, and it is suspected that the ceasefire has been secretly flouted. Spokesmen for the gangs, among which are the MS-13 and its rival, 8th Street Gang, asked the government to facilitate negotiations in order to further the truce. So far, President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, who took office in June, has not yet revealed any new security measures.

On the radar

- **'Peace Week' to take place from 7 to 14 September in Colombia** as part of the ongoing negotiations between the government and the FARC.
- **Anti-government protests are likely to continue in Venezuela.**
- **Increased risk of unrest on the anniversary of the 1973 Chilean coup led by Augusto Pinochet** on 11 September.
- **Further protests are possible in St Louis, United States, over the shooting of a resident by police.** Protests are now expected to be peaceful.
- **Nationwide 24-hour teachers' strike to go ahead on 2 September in Uruguay** over demands for increased wages.

Asia and Pacific

Calls for Pakistani prime minister to resign as violent clashes continue and army consolidates its position

At least eight people have been killed and around 300 injured over the weekend in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, during ongoing clashes between security forces and supporters of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) political parties. Thousands of protesters breached security barriers outside the national assembly building and descended upon the private residence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in D-Chowk in the capital's high-security Red Zone, demanding his resignation over allegations of electoral fraud and corruption. Protests have also occurred in Gujranwala, Lahore, Faisalabad, Sukkur, Multan and Sialkot in Punjab province and Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh province, though these are on a smaller scale than the unrest in Islamabad.

Army chief General Raheel Sharif has requested 24 hours to establish a solution to the current turmoil; however, protesters continue to launch stones and brandish batons at police who are attempting to suppress the crowds with rubber bullets and tear gas (though they have since been ordered not to fire in a bid to avert further injury to protestors). Sharif has called for further negotiations with the supporters loyal to Imran Khan, leader of the PTI, and Dr Tahirul Qadri, leader of the PAT. However, it is unlikely that the opposition leaders will back down unless the prime minister resigns, and they have subsequently called for their followers to continue to assemble at Sharif's residence. Protesters also stormed the PTV network broadcasting building, temporarily forcing operations to cease; however, broadcast services have since recommenced.

Since the beginning of the recent unrest, it has been widely speculated that the military has been covertly assisting the protest groups, and many believe that the army intends to use the political crisis to reassert its dominance over the civilian government. Their stance as the final mediator during the current unrest will add strength to such conjecture. Tensions between the military and government have been mounting in recent months, notably since the prime minister blocked attempts by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, whom faces charges of treason, to leave Pakistan. Authorities continue to restrict access to the capital's Red Zone, and it is likely that the government will shut down mobile phone services to prevent protesters from communicating and gathering further momentum. However, other opposition groups have threatened to join the protests if the police continue to employ force against protesters, which would likely result in further violence.

Other developments

On 28 August, a court in Thailand dismissed the murder charges brought against former prime minister and current leader of the Democrat Party, Abhisit Vejjajiva. Abhisit was facing the charges for his involvement in a crackdown on demonstrators who were part of the red shirts anti-government movement over the course of 10 weeks during 2010. The crackdown by security forces resulted in the deaths of more than 90 people, most of which were civilians. Abhisit was originally charged during the previous caretaker government, which was ousted in the May 2014 military coup.

The Japanese defence ministry has requested its largest budget in post-war Japanese history amid tensions with China over disputed territory in the East China Sea. The ministry has requested 5.05 trillion yen, equivalent to \$48.7 billion, for the year – an increase of 3.5% on last year. Should the request be approved, it will mark the third consecutive year that the Japanese defence budget has been increased following a decade of cuts.

Approximately 500 Nepalese migrant workers went on strike on 26 August in Johor state, Malaysia, over poor working conditions. The strike rapidly escalated into a riot and turned violent after negotiations with management failed and protesters began to set fire to an electronics factory and physically attacked its officers. Approximately 125 Malaysian riot police were deployed to the site and responded with water cannons and tear gas, subsequently arresting 44 of the workers.

On the radar

- **Taxi drivers in Kolkata, India, threaten to stage an indefinite strike** from 3 September.
- **Increased security measures are to be expected at Ninoy Aquino International Airport in the Philippines** after a car bomb was discovered in a car park.
- **Pro-democracy group Occupy Central with Love and Peace threaten to launch a series of protests in Hong Kong** over the next month.

Europe

West warns Russia of heightened economic sanctions following incursion of Russian armed forces into eastern Ukraine

Tensions between the West and Russia further escalated last week. Following the capture of Russian armed forces personnel operating in eastern Ukraine by the Ukrainian armed forces, Western leaders have accused Russia of a dangerous breach of international law, and have warned of a notably increase in the severity of the economic sanctions imposed upon Russia by the European Union. On 29 August, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen publicly asserted that Russia was continuing to supply arms and resources to pro-Russian rebels and that Russian military operations have been conducted inside Ukrainian territory. In response, Russia has continued to ardently deny arming the separatists or that Russian forces are supporting rebels in eastern Ukraine. Russia instead accuses the Ukrainian government of acts of aggressions and the deliberate targeting of civilians.

The presence of Russian troops in Ukrainian territory is an undoubted breach of international law, and represents a contravention of the non-binding Helsinki Accords, which recognise the inviolability of frontiers and the territorial integrity of states. Last week, NATO reported that Russia had supplied tanks, armoured vehicles, rocket launchers and artillery to the rebels in eastern Ukraine. The British government has also asserted that 100 Russian tanks and over 1,000 Russian troops have crossed into Ukraine to date. While it is almost certain that the up-scaling of Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine will result in the imposition of tougher sanctioning from the European Union, critics, such as Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, have argued that the current sanctions imposed on Russia have so far failed to halt the escalation of the crisis. Pro-Russian separatists are now gaining ground in the confrontation with the Ukrainian armed forces, and the opening of a new front around Novoazok to the south has been widely attributed to Russian intervention in the conflict.

Last week, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk announced that Ukraine would seek the protection of NATO membership following the open involvement of the Russian military inside its sovereign territory, and called for increased military assistance in dealing with rebel forces. However, the Ukrainian membership of NATO, giving Ukraine the full protection of a mutual defence pact amongst NATO members, would be a significant escalation in political tensions between Russia and the West, and is highly unlikely at present. Whilst Ukraine is currently unlikely to receive significant military assistance from NATO, Western countries will continue to impose increasing economic costs on Russia for its actions. Furthermore, through a bolstering of troop presence in Baltic member states it is clear that NATO intends to demonstrate to Russia that such violations of territory will not be tolerated within NATO member states.

Other developments

On 29 August, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre raised the terror threat level in the United Kingdom from substantial to severe – the UK's second highest threat level. Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the government would introduce new laws to restrict British citizens from travelling to Syria and Iraq and to confiscate the passports of Britons seeking to travel to the Middle East to fight with the Islamic State. Home Secretary Theresa May defended the decision to raise the threat level as a response to developments in Iraq and Syria and the significant number of British citizens fighting in these conflicts.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls reshuffled his cabinet on 26 August, dismissing ministers who openly criticised President François Hollande for his economic policies. Having publicly rallied against the austere nature of government policies, economic Minister Arnaud Montebourg was removed and replaced by Emmanuel Macron, while the education minister, Benoit Hamon, and the culture minister, Aurelie Filipetti, were also removed from office due to their support for Montebourg. Hollande is attempting to pull France out of stagnation and steer the country towards growth; however, some of his policies have been too right-wing for some socialist supporters and party members, including his plan to cut €50 billion in state spending by 2017.

On 28 August, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was sworn in as Turkish president during a ceremony in the capital, Ankara, after winning the presidential election on 10 August with 52% of the vote. The former prime minister has extended his time in power to over a decade and Erdoğan has made clear that he seeks to exercise executive power in his new position. Previous presidents have performed a largely ceremonial role, and critics warn that Erdoğan may seek to amend the constitution to the advantage of the presidential position.

On the radar

- **Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs will discuss recent developments in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Gaza and Ukraine** on 2 September.
- **EU's agriculture and international trade committees will discuss EU-Russia trade in light of the Russian import ban on EU food** on 3-4 September.
- **The EU high representative for foreign affairs will address the annual conference of EU heads of delegations** in Brussels, Belgium, on 1 September.
- **NATO summit will be held in Newport, Wales,** on 4-5 September.

Middle East

Al-Nusra Front holds Fijian peacekeepers hostage in Syrian side of Golan Heights

The al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front have captured 44 Fijian peacekeepers during fighting between rebels and forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad over control of the border crossing between the Syrian- and Israeli-controlled parts of the Golan Heights. Insurgents also surrounded two UN encampments occupied by Filipino peacekeepers, who fought back in self-defence and eventually managed to escape. The peacekeepers are members of the UN Disengagement Observer Forces (UNDOF), a body that has been operating in the Golan Heights to uphold a negotiated ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces since 1974. The whereabouts of the Fijian peacekeepers is currently unknown; however, they are currently believed to be in good health, and have sustained no casualties.

In a statement released on social media, an al-Nusra spokesperson announced the capture of peacekeepers was for the lack of UN involvement in the Syrian crisis and the perceived support of the United Nations and the international community for al-Assad's regime. The latest incident in the Golan Heights has seen the withdrawal of the Philippines, Austria, Japan and Croatia from the UNDOF operation amid concerns of the rapidly deteriorating security situation. Various rebel groups and militias have been engaged in a conflict within the region that has advanced towards the Quneitra crossing, marking the division of Syrian- and Israeli-controlled territories.

Whilst it is not expected that the al-Nusra Front or other militias along the border will attempt to launch offensives against Israel, the Israeli Defence Force are observing developments with caution and have raised their domestic threat level. The latest clashes serve to highlight the continued difficulties with the Syrian conflict and its regional spill-over. Moreover, the international stature of the hostages would indicate that the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra front is attempting to distinguish themselves, and their agendas, from the Islamic State (ISIS). Separately, on 30 August, the al-Nusra Front released four Lebanese soldiers and one police officer held captive by the group.

Other developments

A long-term Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire began on 26 August. The truce has been brokered by Egypt to last a minimum of seven weeks, bringing a close to 50 days of conflict that has claimed the lives of at least 2,200 people. Under the deal, Israel will allow relief aid and development supplies into Gaza in an attempt to relieve humanitarian pressures. In return, Hamas will cease its rocket fire and cross-border attacks on Israel. However, peace remains fragile, and a number of salient issues are yet to be addressed: Hamas is yet to demilitarise, a key demand of Israel, and Israel is yet to lift the siege on Gaza by allowing access to airways and seaports, an issue of contention for Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. Negotiations are expected to continue in Cairo, Egypt, in the following weeks; however, until such issues are addressed and acceptable compromises are met, the prospects of securing any sustained peace will remain poor.

On 31 August, the Iraqi Army has reclaimed the town of Amerli in northern Iraq following a two-month siege by the Islamic State (ISIS). The operation began the previous day as a collaborative effort between the Iraqi Army, Shia militias and Kurdish Peshmerga forces. The offensive was supported by limited US airstrikes, followed by airdrops of humanitarian aid. Shia Turkmen in the town have been denied access to food and water by ISIS fighters. The success of Amerli is the first of the current counter-offensives to take place within Sunni strongholds. The United States continues to support Iraqi Kurdish fighters by air in their battle against ISIS; however, as ground battles enter residential zones the United States' it is unclear whether this support will continue. Nonetheless, the international community remains committed to the support of Kurdish fighters, and Australia announced the delivery of arms and munitions to the group on 31 August.

Tens of thousands of Yemen's Shia and Houthi supporters took to the streets of the capital, Sanaa, on 29 August to protest against the Sunni government, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Mohammed Basindawa. Separately, two leaders of the government's Popular Congress Party were assassinated in the country's southern Lahij province. Although no group has claimed responsibility for the killings, the strategic port and mountainous areas of Lahij are al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula strongholds. In an unprecedented move, the UN Security Council has called on rebel groups to disperse and lay-down their arms, threatening international sanctions (authorised in February) on those obstructing the country's political transition. Houthi rebels played a central role in deposing the country's former dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in 2012 after a year of mass demonstrations and violence. Clashes are likely to continue in the impoverished state as the country's leadership struggles to contain northern Houthi factions, southern separatists and al-Qaeda militants operating within their borders.

On the radar

- **Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to visit Brussels** to meet with chief negotiators for the next round of Tehran's nuclear talks on 1 September.
- **Bahrain's Prince Al Khalifa and United Arab Emirates President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan expected to attend the NATO Summit** in Newport, Wales, from 4-5 September.
- **Afghan election audit has been extended to 10 September,** a further eight days beyond the original 2 September deadline.
- **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi to visit the UN General Assembly** in New York for the first time on 25 September.

Polar regions

Canadian foreign minister visits Norway and Denmark to promote Arctic cooperation

Canada's foreign minister, John Baird, has visited Norway and Denmark in a bid to promote Arctic cooperation. This came as Baird visited Norway, Denmark and Austria during 22-27 August in order to advance a number of Canada's foreign policy priorities, including strengthening international security, promoting Arctic cooperation and building opportunities for trade and investment with Europe. In a press release prior to his visit, Baird expressed the importance of the Arctic to both Canadian identity and future prosperity, and stated that Canada aims to work closely with European Arctic states, such as Norway and Denmark, to nurture peaceful multilateral relations and protect Canada's northern interests.

The visit is significant, given the notable political animosity between Canada and Russia due to overlapping geographical Arctic claims, and the recent Canadian distain towards Russian foreign policy in Ukraine. With Russian President Vladimir Putin recently asserting Russia's intention to strengthen its position in the Arctic with a renewed focus upon polar development initiatives, Baird's calls to promote and defend Canadian interests in the region play strongly to the growing dichotomy between Russia and the West. As antagonistic rhetoric between Russia and Canada becomes increasingly prevalent, concerns over a standoff over the Arctic are becoming increasingly legitimate.

Given the Arctic region's increasing importance due to its significant natural resource reserves (the Arctic Circle contains 15% of the world's oil, and 30% of its gas reserves), strategic diplomatic missions such as Baird's will become ever more important as indicators of alliance building in order to bolster preparedness for future disputes in the region. Furthermore, given China's expressed interest in the region's shorter Pacific-Atlantic trade routes and Beijing's growing diplomatic influence in the region, the issue of Arctic alliance building is becoming an increasingly global issue. Following a joint statement between Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in May declaring a partnership between Russia and China in relation to the Arctic, Chinese vessels now regularly navigate the Northern Sea Route. The formation of such strategic alliances is illustrative of the growing division between Russia and the Western powers of the Arctic Council.

Other developments

Japan is vying to return to the Southern Ocean to recommence its whaling activities, despite the interdiction of Japan's research whaling program by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in March.

Japan's fisheries minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, has stated that the country will be submitting plans for a new research project, to take place during the 2015-16 hunting season, to the International Whaling Commission in September. Japanese whaling is condemned by the Australian government, who originally brought the case to the ICJ in March. Furthermore, proactive NGOs, such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and Greenpeace, have regularly participated in hostile engagements against the Japanese whaling fleet in the Southern Ocean, leaving numerous vessels damaged many miles from aid.

Finnish environment minister Ville Niinistö has stated concerns over plans to involve Russian state nuclear company Rosatom in the planned construction of a nuclear power plant in Pyhäjoki, south of Oulu in northern Finland. Niinistö has asserted that Finland should be aiming to reduce its dependence on Russian energy, in line with efforts from the rest of the European Union. Referencing the Russian regulation of natural gas deliveries to Ukraine, Niinistö maintains that Finland should follow the Czech Republic example and decline Rosatom involvement. Niinistö's comments come as Britain also re-evaluates its nuclear cooperation agreement with Rosatom.

The ice-monitoring probe CryoSat-2 launched by the European Space Agency has produced data regarding the rate of ice volume loss in both Antarctica and Greenland that has stunned researchers. Ice sheets in Western Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula are said to be rapidly losing volume, with similar concerns in Greenland (affecting the Jakobshavn glacier in particular). Cryosat scientists have judged this data as evidence of climate change and the growing impact of human emissions. The surprising speed at which the ice is receding is highly likely to generate growth in the exploration of previously untapped natural resources, and greatly increase transit operations along previously challenging maritime trade routes.

On the radar

- **Sulphur dioxide pollution from Kola GMK's nickel smelting facilities in Nikel and Monchegorsk, Russia, is significantly increasing.**
- **The first Arctic Economic Council meeting is to take place in Iqaluit, Canada, from 2 September,** and will include Scandinavian, Russian and Alaskan business representatives.

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