

The weekly briefing | 2 June 2014

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Africa

Protesters in Central African Republic demand interim government's resignation

On 30 May, peacekeeping forces in the Central African Republic (CAR) fired upon protesters in the capital, Bangui, as thousands gathered to demand the interim government's resignation and the withdrawal of Burundian peacekeepers from the country. A Burundian contingent of the African Union peacekeeping mission (MISCA) responded to alleged gunfire from armed demonstrators outside its base near the UN headquarters in Bangui, where the bulk of the protests took place. The confrontation resulted in two fatalities and several protesters were injured. It followed a violent clash between protestors and MISCA forces on 29 May, which resulted in several civilians being injured. The authorities have set up checkpoints throughout the capital in response to the growing civil unrest.

The violence in CAR began on 10 December 2012 following the alleged violation of peace agreements by the François Bozizé government and a coup d'état by predominantly Muslim Séléka forces, led by Michel Djotodia. Prolonged violent confrontation between Séléka and armed Christian anti-Balaka groups has since caused thousands of casualties and the displacement of over a million civilians. Relief organisations have warned that continued violent unrest is causing significant issues in the delivery of humanitarian aid.



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With the resignation of Djotodia in January 2014, CAR's newly incumbent interim president, Catherine Samba Panza, is experiencing increasing political pressure following the violent outcome of the protests on 30 May. Despite attempts to establish measures aimed at facilitating a national reconciliation dialogue, violence is highly likely to continue throughout CAR in the coming months. Furthermore, as crucial border supply routes between Cameroon and Chad have been blocked due to the frequent clashes, African Union forces are also experiencing renewed pressure from the international community to respond effectively and control the unstable situation in CAR. With a growing resentment towards MISCA forces becoming increasingly salient, violence is likely to intensify should the interim government fail to capitulate to demands for their resignation.

Other developments

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has declared 'total war' against the terrorist group Boko Haram. On 29 May, Jonathan authorised security forces to use any means necessary to ensure success against terrorism, blaming the Boko Haram insurgency on extremist foreign elements. Jonathan's statement parallels a similar commitment by Idriss Déby, president of neighbouring Chad, at a West African summit in Paris in mid-May. Northeast Nigeria, under a state of emergency since May 2013, continues to be plagued by violence. The Nigerian military announced on 27 May that it had located the schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram on 14 April, but would not use force to free them due to the high risks associated with a rescue operation.

The leader of Malawi's Democratic Progressive Party, Peter Mutharika, has been declared the winner of the disputed presidential election. Incumbent President Joyce Banda is reported to have accepted the result, despite declaring earlier this week that the vote was invalid. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) has declared that the elections were held in a 'free, fair and credible' manner despite reports of irregularities. Anomalies were discovered in dozens of the votes from more than 4,000 polling stations. The main opposition, the Malawi Congress Party, had sought a court ruling for a recount of the votes, but the victorious Democratic Progressive Party resisted the proposal of a month-long extension to allow a recount to take place.

Libya's High National Elections Commission (HNEC) has announced that parliamentary elections will be held on 25 June, following the acceptance of the proposed date by the General National Congress (GNC). The GNC, elected in July 2012 in Libya's first free elections, has faced challenges to its legitimacy after unilaterally prolonging its mandate until December. General Khalifa Haftar, leader of the militia group the Libyan National Army, attacked the parliament in Tripoli on 15 May. Haftar has demanded a power transfer, pledging a campaign against hardline militia groups across the country. Foreign states have urged their citizens to leave Libya amid the growing instability.

On the radar

- **China is to send a peacekeeping force of 850 soldiers to South Sudan** to reinforce the UN mission there.
- **The Oujokoral Karim movement plan to stage an opposition protest in Dakar, capital of Senegal,** on 15 June.
- **Presidential elections to be held in Mauritania,** on 21 June.

Americas

Incumbent president pushed into tight runoff vote in Colombia's presidential election

The results of the 25 May Colombian presidential election represent a blow for current President Juan Manuel Santos. In contrast to the initial forecasts taken from most opinion polls, Óscar Iván Zuluaga, the handpicked candidate of former President Álvaro Uribe, took the lead in the first round of the country's elections, securing 29% of the vote, against 26% for Santos. The election campaign revolved around the future of the ongoing peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Over the past 19 months, Santos's administration has been negotiating in Cuba's capital, Havana, on a peace settlement with the guerrilla group. However, owing to the sluggish pace of the talks, many voters are sceptical about whether a final settlement will eventually be reached, and have criticised the government for attempting to exploit the FARC issue to its electoral advantage. The election race was marred by allegations of corruption and general political apathy, and turnout was only 40%. The second round of the election is to take place on 15 June.

Following publication of the first-round results, Santos said that he took the vote as a message that his government has failed to present the benefits of the negotiated peace deal. The issue of the peace talks appears to have overshadowed the election campaign despite the repeated suggestion from opinion polls that socioeconomic concerns far outstripped the FARC issue in the eyes of the Colombian electorate. The FARC threat has historically been used to co-opt social movements that press for social justice, as notably demonstrated by the adoption of a hardline stance by the government during the small-farmer protests in 2013. By separating social issues from the peace settlement, Santos has failed to gain the support of the Colombian people, given that a large share of the population have been left out by the country's recent economic boom.

In the current context, the support of smaller parties has become of paramount importance for the two candidates, as three other parties have gathered almost 40% of the vote between them. Firstly, the right-wing Conservative Party of Marta Lucia Ramirez came second with 15.5%, and on 28 May Zuluaga formed an alliance with Ramirez. In exchange, Uribe's candidate has agreed to soften his stance towards FARC by maintaining the ongoing peace talks if strict conditions (such as a unilateral ceasefire) are met. Secondly, the left-wing Alternative Democratic Pole of Clara Lopez came third with 15.2%. It has not yet declared its support for any candidate, but its supporters are likely to favour Santos. Thirdly, the Green Party of Enrique Peñalosa came fourth with 8.3%. Green Party supporters remain ambivalent in their preference towards either of the two candidates. As a result, in spite of receiving the lowest number of votes, the support of the Green Party might prove determinant in the run-off election.

Other developments

Security forces have responded severely to a strike by the indigenous population in Brazil's capital, Brasilia. On 27 May, an indigenous group of about a thousand people staged a protest next to Brasilia's stadium. It was harshly suppressed by the 700 police officers that secured the arena. Many social movements have taken advantage of the increased media coverage around the forthcoming World Cup to voice their grievances. Brazil's indigenous population criticises the government for the alleged unfair appropriation of their land by agricultural conglomerates. The 2014 World Cup in Brazil is to start on 12 June and end on 13 July. A protest march is planned in Rio de Janeiro on 13 June.

Last week, the Argentine judiciary summoned Vice-President Amado Boudou to testify in the Ciccone corruption case. He is suspected of abuse of power while serving as Economic Minister. The hearing is to take place on 15 July. Over recent years, Boudou's popularity has fallen sharply because of alleged corruption scandals; however, as a close ally to President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, he has managed to remain in key positions within the administration.

The intervention of Venezuelan security forces tasked with dislodging students from an occupied university in San Cristóbal resulted in violent clashes on 28 May. It was in the city of San Cristóbal that the conflict between the opposition and the government first turned violent last February. Since then, the administration of Nicolás Maduro has constantly accused the opposition of attempting to facilitate a *coup d'état*. Over the past week, the government has launched a legal suit against specific members of the opposition on the grounds of their alleged involvement in a coup plot against the regime. Protests are likely to intensify in Venezuela's main cities amid the ongoing political crisis.

On the radar

- **Fifth BRICS summit to take place in Fortaleza, Brazil, on 15 July.**
- **19 June marks the 29-year anniversary of the killing of four US Marines security personnel assigned to the US embassy and nine Salvadorean civilians** when members of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front fired upon a restaurant in San Salvador.

Asia and Pacific

The 'threat' of China and role of Japan highlighted at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue

This year's Shangri-La Dialogue, also known as the Asia Security Summit, was held in Singapore from 30 May to 1 June. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered the keynote address at the talks. In his presentation, he pushed for an increased role for Japan in establishing regional stability. US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel stated that Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea is a significant destabilising force in the region. Hagel claimed that China ignores international norms and rules and frequently uses intimidation and threats of force to assert territorial claims. He further indicated that the United States supported an increased role for Japan in the region.

Just prior to the opening of the summit, the chair of China's National People's Congress's Foreign Affairs Committee, Fu Ying, stated that Abe was propagating the idea that China posed a major threat to Japan. She reiterated that this 'myth' was being used as a pretext for the expansion of Japan's military. Recently, Abe has moved to redefine a section of Japan's constitution that restricts engagement in military operations overseas. In his keynote address, Abe noted that Japan wished to proactively 'contribute to peace' in the region. At the same time, Hagel's statements are likely motivated by the recent tensions that have permeated China's interactions with Vietnam, Japan and the Philippines. In late April, US President Barack Obama strengthened America's security commitment to Japan and expanded its military agreements with the Philippines.

Obama's moves illustrated the US attitude towards China, urging leaders in Beijing to take a more responsible and less provocative role in Asian regional security. While the United States reinforces its relationship with Japan as a means to assert its influence in the region, China is pursuing a different vision of Asian security. Specifically, the Chinese leadership is focussing on the role of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) as the chief mechanism for multilateral security engagement. However, Japan is not a member of the CICA and, as Abe's recent actions have highlighted, it seeks to play a more active role in the region's security. Looking forward, China is unlikely to accept an Asian security order dominated by Japan, yet the scale of the strategic alliance between Japan and the United States makes it unlikely that the CICA will become the chief mechanism for stability. As China's military power grows, its international disputes are also likely rise in magnitude, as the recent deadly anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam suggest.

Other developments

North Korea is to investigate the disappearance of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean citizens. On 29 May in Stockholm, Sweden, negotiators from the two countries announced that in exchange for opening an investigation into the disappearance of several Japanese citizens during the Cold War, Tokyo would begin easing sanctions on North Korea. Japan currently maintains a set of sanctions on North Korea for its previous inaction on this issue. These include bans on travel to North Korea, the transfer of money between the two states, and the use of Japanese ports by North Korean ships. In 2002, North Korea admitted that it had kidnapped the missing Japanese citizens. At that time, five of the abducted Japanese nationals were returned alive. The whereabouts of several others remain unknown. In 2008, Japan had indicated that it would reopen the investigation, but did not actually do so.

On 27 May, anti-terrorism police in Xinjiang Province, China, claimed to have thwarted a planned terrorist attack when they raided two illegal bomb-making factories. Local media reported that 1.8 tonnes of explosive materials were confiscated and five suspects were taken into custody for allegedly planning to detonate explosives in a public area in Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang. An official government report claimed that the foiled plan was modelled on the market bombing in Xinjiang that left more than 30 dead on 22 May. That incident was the most recent in a string of attacks reportedly carried out by anti-government activists from Xinjiang. The raid of 27 May followed another major breakthrough on 25 May when police reportedly captured 200 suspects from more than 20 extremist organisations.

On 31 May, representatives from the US and Australian armies stated that they have suspended interaction with Thailand's military following the coup that began on 22 May. Coup leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha indicated that martial law was necessary to end political demonstrations and restore stability to the country. He estimated that elections and necessary reforms would likely take a year or more. The last time the Thai military instituted a coup was in 2006, to end the rule of then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the brother of recently ousted Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop announced the postponement of three planned military exercises. The United States had cancelled a joint military exercise on 25 May, and US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel condemned the coup as a retreat from democracy.

On the radar

- **The Pakistani government will this week commence their investigation of the police officers that failed to intervene at the public stoning of a woman in Lahore.**
- **China will formally try five individuals in Xinjiang** who are accused of orchestrating the October 2013 'terrorist attack' at Tiananmen Square.
- **The US Senate and House of Representatives will begin a debate on increasing financial sanctions on North Korea.**
- **The Opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party plan to stage a demonstration at Jinnah cricket stadium in Sialkot, Punjab province, on 7 June.**
- **Increased security measures should be expected in China's capital, Beijing, surrounding 4 June**, which marks the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

Europe

New Ukrainian president confirmed as rebel attacks in east of country intensify

On 29 May, Petro Poroshenko was confirmed as the new Ukrainian president after winning 54.7% of the vote. In one of his first addresses as president, Poroshenko vowed to tackle the 'bandits' in eastern Ukraine and to reopen dialogue with Russia over the escalating crisis. Poroshenko's first week as president was marked with escalating fighting between Ukrainian military forces and pro-Russian rebels. On 26 May, rebels seized four international monitors from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The monitors were captured at a checkpoint near Donetsk whilst on a routine mission. A second team of monitors was detained on 30 May in the town of Severodonetsk in eastern Ukraine. On 27 May, the Kiev government announced that the anti-terror operation against separatists would continue under the new presidency. Amid growing speculation that the army was planning an attack on Slovyansk, thousands of civilians fled the city on 30 May, while rebels fortified their control of the city's provincial government and 2,000 pro-Russian supporters gathered in the central square on 31 May.

Alexander Borodai, the separatist leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, claimed that at least 50 pro-Russian activists (including 33 Russian nationals) were killed during an operation by separatists to seize Donetsk airport on 26 May. Local media reported that the airport was attacked in order to prevent the new president from visiting the city, after the billionaire businessman announced that his first trip as president would be to eastern Ukraine. On 29 May, pro-Russian rebels shot down a military Mi-8 helicopter in Slovyansk, killing six National Guard soldiers and six members of the special forces of the interior. The Ukrainian military claimed that the rebels had used a Russian-made anti-missile system to attack the helicopter. These two latest attacks suggest that at least some of the separatist forces are trained and well-armed combatants rather than local militiamen. As such, US Secretary of State John Kerry has voiced Western concerns over the identities of the rebels, claiming that there was evidence of 'personnel from Chechnya trained in Russia' crossing in to Ukraine.

Kiev sought to repair the tense relationship with Moscow with the announcement on 30 May that Ukraine had paid part of its gas debt to Russia. Following talks in Berlin, reports suggested that Ukraine had paid the Russian energy company Gazprom \$786 million of the total \$3.5 billion debt. In early May, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that from 1 June Ukraine would have to pay for its gas in advance should the debt not be paid; however, Ukraine had refused to pay the Russian energy supplier in protest at Gazprom's decision to increase gas prices. Moscow recognised the election results last week and announced that the Kremlin would be engaging in dialogue with Poroshenko and his government. However, despite these more positive engagements between Kiev and Moscow, it is unlikely that a significant dialogue will occur unless the newly appointed Ukrainian government ceases anti-terror operations in eastern Ukraine, which represent a major obstacle in the search for a political solution to the crisis.

Other developments

Protesters rioted for four consecutive nights from 26 to 30 May in Barcelona, Spain, after the City Hall ordered the eviction of squatters from the Cans Viens warehouse in Sants district. The transport authority had abandoned the building in 1997 and the site had become a makeshift social centre for the last 17 years. As security forces attempted to clear the site, violence erupted with rioters throwing stones, barricading streets, smashing shop windows and setting fire to garbage containers and a television van. Police responded with high-pitched horns and fired foam bullets to disperse the crowds. They arrested 61 people during the four-day riot. City officials claimed the site was to be redeveloped into a park; however, after the four days of protests, City Hall announced that plans for the demolition had been halted and discussions about the future of the site would be opened. The violent protests highlight the fact that, despite the country's recent economic recovery, social tensions remain high and unemployment remains a widespread problem.

Russia sought to further integrate its ties with former Soviet republics last week. Russian President Vladimir Putin met the Kazakh and Belarusian presidents in Astana, Kazakhstan, where the presidents initiated the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union. The union is set to launch on 1 June 2015, and will give citizens of member states equal employment and education opportunities in the three countries. The presidents reported that the deal also included collaborative policies in the energy, technology, industry, agriculture and transport sectors. The Kazakh First Deputy Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev informed reporters that the introduction of a single currency had not been discussed. Putin has long hoped to form an economic bloc to counterbalance the political and economic powers of the European Union and the United States. Russia's intent to bolster ties with former Soviet republics has raised concerns in Western countries. In March 2014, the former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton accused Putin of seeking to revive the Soviet Union. Putin has denied these claims, but during the meeting on 29 May, the Russian president claimed that other former Soviet republics were eager to join the union, though only Armenia's potential membership was actually debated.

On 31 May, protesters marked the one-year anniversary of the anti-government demonstrations that have engulfed Turkey for the past year. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urged young Turks to ignore the calls to mark the anniversary of the Taksim Square protests. The Turkish police organised a heavy presence on the street, with 25,000 police officers and 50 anti-riot water cannons deployed in Istanbul, while authorities blocked access to Taksim Square. However, hundreds of demonstrators flooded the streets of Istanbul, as well as several other cities, including Ankara. Local media reported that police had used tear gas on protesters in Istanbul and had arrested dozens of protesters. The mass movement of protests was launched last year after a heavy-handed crackdown of a demonstration against plans to redevelop Gezi Park in Istanbul. An estimated 3.5 million of Turkey's population of 80 million have participated in nearly 5,000 protests across the country. Eleven people have been killed during the protests and more than 8,000 have been injured.

On the radar

- **A meeting of the EU's foreign affairs committee will debate the presidential elections in Ukraine and Egypt** on 4 June.
- **The G7 summit will be held in Brussels, Belgium,** on 4-5 June.
- **US President Barack Obama will visit Europe on 2-6 June,** and is due to meet the new Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in Poland on 4 June.
- **Elections will be held in Kosovo** on 8 June.
- **World leaders will gather in Normandy, France, to mark the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings** on 6 June.

Middle East

Taliban suicide bomber targets minibus used by Afghan military

A suicide bomber targeted a minibus used by the Afghan military on 26 May. The bomber drove up alongside the vehicle on a motorcycle before detonating the explosives, killing at least two people and injuring two others. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack in eastern Kabul. Elsewhere in the country, insurgents attacked a US consular vehicle carrying diplomats on 28 May. The convoy was travelling through Herat province when it was attacked with small arms fire and rocket propelled grenades. Two Americans were injured in the attack and the insurgents subsequently fled on a motorcycle.

The attacks came in the same week that President Barack Obama announced Washington's post-2014 operation in Afghanistan. Obama announced on 27 May that 9,800 US troops would remain in Afghanistan following the cessation of combat missions at the end of this year. That number would be gradually reduced to half at the end of 2015, with only a few hundred troops remaining by the end of 2016. By 2016, the last year of Obama's presidency, the remaining US military presence in Afghanistan will be tasked with guarding the US embassy, training the Afghan military and supporting counter-terrorism efforts. The final withdrawal of US troops in 2016 will bring an end to the United States' longest war, which began in October 2001. However, the announcement also reverses assertions given in 2010 that the United States would completely withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.

The United States' presence in Afghanistan after 2014 is dependent upon Afghanistan's next leader signing a bilateral security accord, which will likely be signed in August. Currently, it appears that the US war in Afghanistan will officially be over by 2017, a year after Obama leaves office. The continued presence of militant activity and persistence of the Taliban in Afghanistan is a concern in the run-up to the second round of voting in the presidential elections. This also coincides with the summer fighting season. Attacks are likely to increase in frequency in the coming weeks. Polling stations, military personnel and foreign nationals are likely targets for Taliban operations.

Other developments

Fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have attacked a Kurdish village in northern Syria, close to the Turkish border, killing 15 people. Among the dead were seven children. The attack took place on 29 May, close to the town of Ras al-Ain in the Al-Hasakah Governorate, populated by a Syrian Kurdish minority. Syrian Kurds have avoided the anti-Assad insurgency for fear that any autonomous aspirations will be ignored in the future. The ISIL has been engaged in conflict with Syrian Kurds and other rebel groups in the north of the country.

Former military chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi claimed a landslide victory as Egyptian's voted in the presidential election on 29 May. Early indications show that al-Sisi claimed 93.3% of votes cast, with his only rival gaining 3 per cent. However, the turnout of 46% was much less than the 80% that al-Sisi had called for in the weeks leading up to the election. The turnout was also lower than the 52% that had elected Islamist leader Mohammed Morsi, the man who al-Sisi removed from power last year. The low turnout will test the new president's mandate to tackle the economy and the Islamist insurgency in Sinai.

A suicide bomber blew himself up at a mosque in central Baghdad, Iraq, on 27 May. At least 19 people were killed at the entrance to a Shia mosque in Shorja district, and a further 26 people were injured. Roadside bombs in Baghdad's Sadr City and Dura districts also killed two people. Sectarian violence in Iraq has reached levels not seen since 2008. The Shia-led government has struggled to suppress the rise of ISIL and al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters in Anbar province.

On the radar

- **Syrian presidential election is scheduled to take place** on 3 June.
- **The second round of the Afghan presidential election is due to be held** on 14 June.
- **A Palestinian unity government will likely be announced** this week.
- **Official polling figures from Egypt's presidential election will be released** this week.
- **The next round of nuclear talks between the P5+1 and Iran are due to take place** in Vienna, Austria, on 16-20 June.

Polar Regions

Greenpeace activists board Norwegian and Russian drilling rigs bound for the Arctic

Greenpeace activists boarded the Transocean Spitsbergen drilling rig currently rented by Norwegian energy major Statoil in the Barents Sea on 27 May. The rig was in transit to a planned drilling site in the Hoop area of the Barents Sea, where Statoil plans to drill the world's northernmost oil well (at the latitude of 74 degrees). Later on the same day, a second group of Greenpeace activists scaled another rig in the Dutch port of IJmuiden. The second rig was set to leave the port and proceed towards a Gazprom operated drill site in the Pechora Sea, also in the Arctic. As well as climbing the rig, the Greenpeace activists chained the structure to the port's seawall in an attempt to delay the its departure. Dutch police detained the activists at IJmuiden five hours after their protest began, and the Norwegian coastguard removed their colleagues on the Spitsbergen rig on 29 May. The coastguard also towed the Greenpeace ship *Esperanza*, which had been used in the Barents Sea action, away from the drilling site in the Hoop area on 30 May. The Statoil rig finally began drilling 89 hours behind schedule, and the Gazprom rig is now bound for the Pechora Sea.

Both these actions were aimed at bringing global media attention to the expansion of drilling actions by energy majors, such as Statoil and Gazprom, in vulnerable Arctic waters. Activists on the rigs unfurled banners protesting Arctic drilling and highlighting the risks that potential spills pose to the region's delicate ecosystems. According to numerous experts from the private, public and non-governmental sectors, Greenpeace's concerns are well justified. Specifically, Greenpeace cites its own research and new research from the Norwegian Polar Institute to argue that an oil spill from the Hoop area site could reach a wildlife sanctuary on Bear Island 175 kilometres away in less than a week. Statoil have rejected Greenpeace's claims about the risk of an oil spill, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently called Gazprom 'head and shoulders above overseas partners' in ensuring ecological protection in the Arctic. Nevertheless, the balance of expert opinion is in Greenpeace's favour: there is a large body of independent and governmental research that concludes that the lack of infrastructure and Arctic expertise would make any attempt at cleaning an oil spill in the region extremely difficult.

Despite the cost of delays to the Spitsbergen project being estimated at \$1.26 million per day, the immediate impact of both these actions will most likely be negligible. Statoil and Gazprom's Arctic projects are set to go ahead, and given the comparatively peaceful resolutions of the actions, neither of the actions are likely to generate the kind of prolonged media attention that followed the detention of Greenpeace activists in the September 2013 Prirazlomnoye protest. However, the actions are likely to provide an incentive for increased securitisation of Arctic drilling sites. The Norwegian government announced the establishment of a temporary 'security zone' around the Spitsbergen. According to the Norwegian authorities, this made the towing away of the *Esperanza* a legally acceptable move, though Greenpeace have responded with a well-founded legal challenge based on international maritime law. As for the Russian government, on 22 April Putin signed legislation allowing oil and gas corporations to defend infrastructure with private security forces. Ultimately, though, the future of oil and gas drilling in the Arctic will depend primarily on economic factors. Thus the monumental Sino-Russian gas deal worth as much as \$400 billion signed last week guarantees Russia a huge market for gas over the next 30 years, and will provide a considerable incentive for continuing Arctic oil and gas development.

Other developments

Russian state-owned gas major Gazprom has signed a deal with privately-owned Novatek to purchase 3 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually from the latter's Yamal LNG project in the Russian Arctic. With Gazprom's order secured, Novatek have now found buyers for almost all of the 16.5 million tons of LNG that the project is planned to produce annually by its completion in 2018. As well as representing a huge investment in Russia's Arctic Yamal Peninsula, the project will have a considerable impact on the expansion of Arctic shipping, as Novatek plans to ship much of the LNG along the Northern Shipping Route.

The Norwegian Ministry of Defence will extend its suspension of military cooperation with Russia, according to a press release issued by Defence Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide on 28 May. In response to what the minister called Russia's continued interference in the crisis in Ukraine, all bilateral military activities will be suspended until the end of 2014. However, Norway will continue with mutual cooperation in coastguard, border guard and search and rescue operations. Oslo will also continue joint operations with Russia's Northern Fleet, a powerful navy unit based in the Kola Peninsula.

Finnish Chief of Defence Ari Puheloinen has sought to allay concerns over an incursion last week into Finnish airspace by two Russian aircraft. *YLE News* reported on 27 May that while the Finnish defence chief claims to be troubled by the incident, in which the planes twice violated Finnish airspace, its significance has been exaggerated by the media. While declining to make any certain conclusions until further investigation has been carried out, the defence chief noted that previous violations in the past have been accidental. The Finnish border guard then suspended its investigations into the violation, claiming that the most likely explanation for the intrusion was 'careless navigation'.

On the radar

- **Russia's Northern Fleet has announced plans for new expeditions to take place this summer** to the islands of Franz Josef Land, Severnaya Zemlya, the New Siberian Islands and Wrangel Island.
- **Exxon Mobil and Rosneft are to proceed with offshore exploration projects in the Russian territory of the Chukchi Sea** in the summer season as soon as sea ice clears.
- **Rain forecast for the beginning of the week in the Russian Arctic city of Naryan-Mar will bring threats of floods** as regional authorities declared a state of emergency last week as a result of flooding of the Pechura River.

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