

# The weekly briefing | 10 March 2014

Political and security risk updates

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## Africa

### **International Criminal Court finds former Congolese warlord guilty of war crimes in historical conviction**

In a judgment passed on 7 March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) found former Congolese militia leader Germain Katanga guilty of war crimes. Katanga was found guilty of being an accessory to crimes including murder and pillage in an attack on the village of Bogoro in the diamond-rich northeast of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) in 2003, killing around 200 civilians. However, the court in The Hague found Katanga not guilty of using child soldiers and acquitted him of rape charges.

The decision marks only the second conviction in the ICC's 11-year history. The case, which lasted five years, was also the first to include charges of sexual violence. The trial was plagued with contradicting testimonies making it difficult to establish Katanga's role in the Patriotic Resistance Force, an armed group active in DR Congo in the early 2000s. Judge Bruno Cotte stated that it was Katanga's assistance in providing the attackers with arms that directly facilitated the bloodshed in the Bogoro attack. Katanga, who served as an army general under President Joseph Kabila, was tasked with combatting civil unrest. He was arrested by government authorities in 2005 and subsequently transferred to The Hague, where he first went on trial in 2010.



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Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui, another prominent militia leader who stood trial with Katanga before the cases were split, was acquitted in court last year due to lack of evidence. This acquittal prompted the ICC to alter the nature of charges brought against Katanga, arguing that Katanga had facilitated the crimes, rather than being central to their enactment as originally charged. One of the three ICC judges criticised this alteration as conspicuously limiting of Katanga's ability to defend against the charges. Katanga, who was once known as 'Simba' (lion), will be sentenced later at a separate hearing.

### **Other developments**

**On 6 March, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, informed the Security Council that thousands of Muslims are fleeing the Central African Republic (CAR) as a result of worsening sectarian violence.** UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and CAR Minister of Foreign Affairs Toussaint Kongo-Doudou both urged the Security Council to deploy an international peacekeeping mission to the country. Guterres warned that the fighting between the Muslim Séléka militia and Christian self-defence groups, which has escalated since its onset in December 2013, had now effectively turned into a cleansing of the western CAR's Muslim population. France is expected to propose a resolution in order to create an international peacekeeping force in the coming weeks.

**President Moncef Marzouki's office announced that the government had lifted the state of emergency in Tunisia on 5 March.** The state of emergency, in force since the 2011 uprising, had kept the country under tight security measures in the face of popular protesting and sporadic attacks by rebel groups. The authority of the army and police to intervene in protests has resulted in the arrest or death of dozens of protestors over recent months. Tourism, a major sector of the Tunisian economy, was notably impacted in the wake of the uprisings, with the number of visitors falling by more than a million. In November 2013, Marzouki announced an extension of the state of emergency until the end of June 2014, but the recent return to relative calm has resulted in removal of the emergency status four months early.

**Saadi Gaddafi, third son of former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, was extradited from Niger to Libya on 6 March.** The Libyan government has announced that he is now being held at a prison in the capital, Tripoli. When the previous Libyan regime was toppled in the 2011 revolution, Saadi Gaddafi had been granted entry to Niger on humanitarian grounds. The West African state's government had previously refused to extradite him, despite Interpol having issued a notice for extradition.

### **On the radar**

- **Anti-terror operations in the Sahel are likely to intensify** as the African Union launches a cooperative initiative with regional countries to improve stability.
- **Diplomatic tensions are likely to continue to rise between South Africa and Rwanda** following tit-for-tat expulsions.
- **The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is warning of growing post-election unrest in Ghana** between the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP).
- **The UN Security Council is to consult on its support mission and sanction imposition in Libya (UNSMIL).**
- **Platinum prices are likely to continue rising after the collapse of talks intended to end the South African miner standoff.**

## Americas

### **Venezuela's turmoil exposes domestic and regional political rifts**

On 5 March, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro blasted the Washington-based Organisation of American States (OAS) for attempting to address the country's ongoing political crisis. Since 12 February, violent bands have swarmed the streets of Venezuela's major cities, resulting in 300 injuries and approximately 20 deaths. Students angry about the country's rampant crime, shortage of basic goods, and rising inflation, initially staged the protests, but the unrest rapidly degenerated into violence between radical opponents and supporters of Maduro's government. The rise of violence, coupled with alleged breaches of human rights by the Venezuelan intelligence services, has generated widespread attention from the international community. However, Maduro is suspicious to the intervention of outsiders, arguing that it is part of an 'international fascist conspiracy'. On 5 March, Venezuela broke off relations with Panama over its call for the OAS to convene to discuss the crisis. The following day, Maduro called for an emergency meeting within the framework of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

These recent developments took place around the anniversary of the death of Venezuela's charismatic leader Hugo Chavez on 5 March 2013. Since Chavez's death, a double form of polarisation has occurred. First, a domestic division has been exacerbated, with a radicalised opposition and a more hardline government. This explains in part the dramatic escalation of violence since the outset of the protests and the inability of the traditional opposition parties to call for an armistice. As such, the figurehead of the opposition, Leopoldo López, has been held in custody since 18 February. Secondly, the radicalisation of Maduro's regime has exposed the regional political rift between left wing and more conservative governments. While the traditional leftist governments of the region, such as in Argentina and Brazil, have openly supported Maduro in the ongoing crisis, more liberal states, such as Colombia, have condemned the government response to the protests.

In contrast to the OAS, the UNASUR is an exclusively South American grouping that embraces the views of the region's left-wing governments. The Brazilian foreign ministry has urged UNASUR members to accept Venezuela's demand for an emergency meeting. The approval of the 12 UNASUR members is required before the organisation of such a consultation. However, even within the South American grouping, some disagree on Maduro's handling of the situation and have so far refused to take part in the meeting. As such, the holding of the international summit remains very much in question. But if organisation does proceed, such a meeting could serve as a lever to settle for an armistice between Venezuela's different political factions. Furthermore, it would demonstrate a renewed sense of regional cohesion. It is unlikely that a peaceful solution to Venezuela's political crisis will emerge without the involvement of a third-party international actor. In the meantime, further violence is to be expected amid an increasing divide within Venezuela's political class.

### **Other developments**

**Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has ordered military intervention in one of the country's principle port cities.** On 6 March, Santos announced the imminent intervention by special forces to counter the operations of criminal gangs and drug traffickers in Buenaventura. Buenaventura is Colombia's principle port on its Pacific coast. It was host to year-long violent strife involving two rival gangs competing for control of the drug trafficking route.

**On 5 March, left-wing candidate Johnny Araya announced his withdrawal from the Costa Rican presidential election.** Araya is from the same party as the outgoing President Laura Chinchilla, the National Liberation Front. He secured 30% of the votes in the first round, compared to 31% for his centre-right opponent, Luis Guillermo Solis. Araya has justified his decision based on the financial costs of his campaign and his lack of public support. However, it is believed that his withdrawal was motivated by the desire to avoid a historic defeat for his party. In accordance with the Costa Rican constitution, a second-round election will still take place on 6 April.

**Military police have clashed with Indigenous groups in central Chile.** On 5 March, at least seven military police officers were injured in a confrontation with Indigenous Mapuche in the region of Araucania. Security forces intervened after 30 hooded individuals from the Mapuche community took over a private farm that they claimed was built on land that was theirs by ancestral rights. The incident came days after a Mapuche leader was sentenced to 18 years in jail for arson and the subsequent deaths of the targeted property owners. Conflicts between indigenous communities, private landowners and extractive corporations have been particularly salient in recent years, especially in southern Chile, which is home to nearly one million Mapuche.

#### **On the radar**

- **Student opposition protests to be staged in Venezuela's main cities.**
- **Protests against the costs of staging the FIFA World Cup 2014 in Brazil are planned in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo** on 12 and 13 March respectively.
- **Miners affiliated to the CONAMI union have planned strikes across Peru** on 17 March.

## **Asia and Pacific**

### **China's National People's Congress begins its annual meeting with early indications of political priorities**

On 5 March, the Chinese legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), opened its annual meeting. The meeting is scheduled to last for 10 days, and delegations from across China will discuss a wide range of issues that the country faces. At the opening session, Li Keqiang, the Chinese premier, set out several key targets for China in the coming year. The NPC has set an economic growth target of 7.5% (the same as 2013) and target inflation at 3.5%. In addition to these economic goals, the government has announced that it will increase military and defence spending by 12.2%, bringing the total budgeted spending to approximately US\$131.6 billion. Li also mentioned that a number of painful adjustments and reforms were necessary if China is to achieve these goals.

Although the NOC is largely considered to be a rubberstamping mechanism for the Communist Party, these announcements serve as important signals for the future of Chinese policy. At the Central Committee's Third Plenum meeting in November 2013, robust economic reforms were announced. Such reforms included restructuring state-owned enterprises, increased oversight in China's credit markets, and improved urban-rural integration aimed at building a more consumption-oriented economy. These reforms are, however, likely to reduce growth rates in the short term. Therefore, the announcement that China will attempt to maintain its full 7.5% growth rate target indicates that reforms are likely to take a backseat to promoting rapid growth.

Looking forward, it is unlikely that any major policy shifts will come out of this meeting of the NPC. Nevertheless, these early announcements *do* provide a barometer for attitudes inside the government. Major issues in the Chinese economy do exist, for example the widespread growth of informal credit markets, but the indication by the government that painful reforms are necessary provides some hope that the Chinese government is willing to confront such deeply entrenched issues. On the other hand, an expansion of military spending reflects a growing level of seriousness at protecting China's territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, as well as bolstering domestic security. As the meetings progress, a clearer picture of the path of reforms and security intentions is likely to emerge.

## **Other developments**

**South Korean opposition groups reach an agreement to merge. A final agreement regarding the steps for the merger was reached** less than a week after South Korea's Democratic Party and a group of politicians led by businessman and independent politician Ahn Cheol-soo announced their intention to combine political forces against the ruling conservative Saenuri Party. Prior to the merger, Ahn had been planning to formalise his support into a third party, the New Political Visionary Party. Although the Democratic Party enjoys much greater support in parliament, the party has been widely criticised by its own members and constituents. Ahn's group is likely to gain from the political and financial resources that the Democratic Party offers. Elections are set to take place on 7 June, and this political merger has not only changed the political landscape in South Korea but also strengthens opposition unity against the incumbent majority Saenuri Party of President Park Geun-hye.

**Recent assassination points to continued violence surrounding Indonesia's upcoming elections.** The Aceh National Party member, known as Faisal, a legislative candidate, was shot in his car by unknown gunmen in South Aceh, and found in the early hours of 3 March with gunshot wounds to his back, chest and stomach. Such political violence is not uncommon in Indonesia. Recently, a candidate from the Democratic National Party was also targeted with a Molotov cocktail, while the head of the Aceh National Party was beaten to death by men from the rival Aceh Party. Political associated violence has been largely confined to Aceh in northwestern Indonesia, though police have received reports of voter intimidation in other areas of the country. Legislative elections are due to be held on 9 April. Although officials do not expect such incidents to interfere with upcoming elections, sporadic violence is likely to be witnessed in Aceh as the elections draw nearer.

**Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) joint military exercises are to take place in the Straits of Malacca.** On 5 March, ASEAN announced that its member states' defence forces had agreed to conduct joint military exercises. The exercises will take place next year, and are the first maritime security operation conducted of this kind. Past exercises have focused on the delivery of humanitarian aid and disaster relief. ASEAN's cooperation typically deals with economic, political and border issues; however, representatives at this year's ASEAN Defence Forces Informal Meeting acknowledged shifting security concerns. Currently, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines and Malaysia are engaged in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea region. The announcement of military exercises indicates an increasing focus on security in the Straits of Malacca, one of the world's most vital shipping lanes for energy and other commodities, as well as an elevated concern over China's naval expansion and aggressiveness in defending its territorial claims in the region.

## On the radar

- **Thailand's opposition protesters will continue to scale back their presence in Bangkok as election re-runs are successfully carried out in five provinces.** Roughly half of senate seats are due for election at the end of March.
- **India's Ministry of Home Affairs announced on 4 March that a new state, Telangana, currently part of Andhra Pradesh, is to formally come into existence on 2 June 2014.**
- **Malaysian opposition politician Anwar Ibrahim will appeal the 7 March ruling that sentenced him to five years in prison on sodomy charges.** The charges are widely seen as a means to suppress opposition support and scupper his plans to run for a state post later this month.

## Europe

### Ukraine political crisis escalates as Crimean parliament votes to join Russia

The political crisis in Ukraine further escalated last week. Russia now holds de-facto control of the semi-autonomous state of Crimea. Western leaders rebuked Putin's denial of an unlawful Russian troop presence on the peninsula. The West continues to ask Russia to use diplomacy to resolve the crisis as the United States issued the first sanctions and visa restrictions against Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Crimean parliament voted unanimously on 6 March to join Russia, and brought forward a referendum on the issue to 16 March. The Ukrainian government, EU members and the United States have objected to the vote and argued that it is not legitimate. Kiev has agreed to hold talks with Moscow, on the condition that Russia withdraw its troops from Crimea and cease supporting the new Crimean authorities. However, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, declined to meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Andriy Deshchychysia, at a meeting arranged by US Secretary of State John Kerry on 5 March. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) sent 35 unarmed observers to Ukraine last week, but the observers have been refused entry by pro-Russia forces that fired warning shots as the party made its third attempt to cross into Crimea on 8 March.

On 3 March, Vladimir Putin held his first public appearance since the news of Russian troop presence on the semi-autonomous peninsula. Putin said that the Kiev government had acted illegitimately over the eastern, southeastern and Crimean regions; however, the Russian president insisted that a Russian use of force would be a last resort. Putin added that Russia could not ignore calls to protect Russians in eastern Ukraine, and that Russia was acting in full compliance of international law. Putin denied the presence of any Russian troops outside their mandated Black Sea fleet bases, an assertion ridiculed by the West. According to Ukrainian border guards, 30,000 Russian soldiers are now believed to be in Crimea, compared to the 11,000 based at the Black Sea fleet base before the crisis. Under a 2010 Russia-Ukraine agreement, Russia can have a maximum of 25,000 troops in Crimea. On 4 March, Russian forces fired the first shots as a warning to unarmed Ukrainian soldiers who were marching towards the seized airbase at Belbek in Sevastopol. On 8 March, Russian news agencies reported that Moscow was considering halting inspections by the United States in Russia in line the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty and the 2011 Vienna agreement between Russia and NATO in retaliation for Washington's decision to halt military cooperation with Moscow.

Ukraine faces further pressure after Gazprom, the Russian gas company, announced that the company was considering cutting supplies to Ukraine after the government failed to pay its bill for January. Putin has previously said that Russia would be prepared to financially assist Ukraine, but due to late payments, Russia has been unable to do so. If Ukraine fails to pay for its February gas supplies, it will owe Russia \$2 billion. However, on 7 March the US House of Representatives approved a bill, yet to be voted upon by the Senate, to allow the United States to loan Ukraine \$1 billion to help lessen the blow of the Russian proposal to lift the subsidies on the cost of energy. The United States has also offered to send technical experts to advise the Ukrainian ministry of central banking and finance, and will train observers for the elections on 25 May. On 8 March, the French and US presidents released a statement warning Russia of new sanctions should Russian leaders fail to withdraw their forces from the peninsula and allow international observers into the Crimea.

### **Other developments**

**The Macedonian parliament was dissolved on 5 March by unanimous vote of all 117 present MPs.** On 6 March, parliamentary speaker Trajko Veljanovski revealed the decision to hold early elections on 27 April. The elections had originally been scheduled for 2015. The new date coincides with the second round of the presidential vote – the first vote being held on 13 April. The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) party, a junior member of the coalition government, pushed for early elections after DUI failed to agree on a joint presidential candidate with the leading party in the coalition, the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE. The largest opposition party, the social-democrats SDSM, has accused the coalition of falsifying this crisis as an excuse for calling early elections. Recent polls indicate that the next government is likely to be another coalition between the VMRO-DPMNE and DUI parties.

**On 4 March, the Romanian parliament approved Prime Minister Victor Ponta's new cabinet, after a split in the former ruling Social Liberal Union (USL) government the preceding week.** The Liberals left the coalition it had formed with Ponta's Social Democrat Party (PSD) and the Conservatives after a series of rows over Romania's commitment to the IMF's €4 billion aid deal. However, Ponta was able to sign an agreement on 3 March with the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) to join the coalition. The vote of confidence has given Ponta the mandate to push through IMF-backed reforms, which the government hopes will speed up the country's growth. However, President Traian Basescu has questioned the legitimacy of Romania's new government, questioning the prime minister's constitutional right to form a new government, and has threatened to take the Ponta to court.

**On 7 March, Northern Ireland authorities announced that three incidents of dangerous post had been reported.** An army bomb disposal squad was sent to a Royal Mail sorting office on 6 March in Londonderry and another postal office in Lisburn on 7 March. According to local media, one of the parcels had been addressed to Maghaberry Prison in Lisburn. First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness issued a joint statement on 7 March condemning the news that a primary school in Tobermore had received a bullet in the mail. Postal bombs have been rife in Northern Ireland in the last few months, with bomb devices being sent to Secretary of State Theresa Villiers, the devolved justice minister, David Ford, and the public prosecution offices in Londonderry. The use of such devices has been a tactic of republican and loyalist terrorist groups since the 1970s.

## On the radar

- **The foreign affairs committee of the European parliament will discuss an €11 billion EU aid package to Ukraine** on 11 March.
- **The European Parliament will debate on 11 March and vote on 12 March on the NSA inquiry.**
- **Urgent session of the EU Council for Foreign Affairs on the crisis in Ukraine is to be held** on 10 March.
- **EU-US summit will be held in Brussels** on 26 March.

## Middle East

### **Bomb blast in Bahrain kills three police officers**

A remotely-detonated device killed three police officers when it exploded as hundreds of mourners marched in procession to mark the death of a Shia man in police custody. Police were attempting to disperse a crowd of opposition protestors that had separated from the main procession in the village of Daih, west of the capital, Manama. Two other devices were detonated and a fourth was dismantled causing no further injuries. One of the police officers killed in the blast was from the United Arab Emirates, operating in a Gulf Cooperation Council force.

The Bahraini authorities announced that 25 people had been arrested in connection with the bombing. They also listed several noted opposition groups as terrorist organisations: the February 14 coalition, al-Ashtar Brigades and Resistance Brigades. The February 14 group has been active in Bahrain since civil unrest began in 2011, helping to organise protest demonstrations, while the al-Ashtar Brigades had previously claimed responsibility for committing attacks in Bahrain. Opposition groups have condemned the bombing and reiterated the requirement for protestors to carry out peaceful demonstrations in order to push for reforms.

Tensions in Bahrain have been simmering since protest movements began in 2011 during the wider Arab Spring. The Shia majority have accused the Sunni-led government of discrimination and have urged the government to push forward with reforms against the current ruling family. A further round of reconciliation talks between opposition groups and the government are expected, though there is little sign that these will be successful. Protests are expected to continue and further security support from Saudi Arabia remains a possibility.

### **Other developments**

**Saudi Arabia has taken steps to crackdown on perceived threats to the kingdom.** On 7 March, the kingdom formally designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group. The Muslim Brotherhood has been forced underground in Egypt since their removal from government, despite being democratically elected to power. Riyadh is concerned that the Brotherhood has been gathering momentum within the kingdom and that their doctrine challenges the Saudi dynastic rule. Tensions amongst the Gulf dynasties are high after Qatar refused to denounce the Brotherhood. Riyadh has also designated the Nusra Front and the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as terrorist organisations, among fears that Saudi citizens are fighting in conflicts abroad.



**On 6 March, it was announced that Egypt's cabinet had approved laws to facilitate a presidential election after the military-backed interim government resigned unexpectedly last month.** A date has yet to be announced, but it is expected that the election will be held in the spring. Field Marshall Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is expected to forward his candidacy following the official announcement of the electoral plans. The hugely popular army chief removed former President Mohamed Morsi from power in July 2013, and is expected to claim victory in the polls.

**A NATO airstrike killed five Afghan soldiers in Afghanistan on 6 March.** The airstrike took place in the eastern province of Logar, seriously wounding at least eight other soldiers and several civilians. A NATO spokesman confirmed the incident and believed that Afghan security forces were mistaken for insurgents. The use of both Afghan and coalition-led airstrikes in Afghanistan has become a source of tension between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the United States. A bilateral security agreement that would allow for a US military presence in the country after 2014 has yet to be signed.

### On the radar

- **Pakistan may launch a full-scale military operation against Taliban insurgents in the tribal areas close to Afghanistan during March** if the Taliban fails to uphold a recently agreed ceasefire.
- **Syria will miss the 15 March deadline in the programme to destroy its chemical weapons production facilities** in a deal agreed with the United States and Russia.
- **Protests are expected to continue in Egypt this week against the newly appointed interim government** and against the Gulf States that have supported the military-backed government.
- **Heightened security expected following a suicide attack at a northern security checkpoint in Hilla, Iraq, on 9 March** that killed at least 35 people and injured over 100.
- **Planned protests expected on 12, 15 and 21 March in Algiers, Algeria,** against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid to seek a fourth term in office.

## Polar Regions

### United States and Canada cancel joint Arctic military training exercises with Russia

US and Canadian officials have stated that military cooperation with Russia is to be temporarily suspended as part of a package of diplomatic sanctions aimed at punishing Moscow for what the North American states describe as an illegal occupation and invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. The announcement came at separate press conferences delivered on 2 March and 4 March respectively. A number of military training exercises to be held in Arctic territory later in the year will be cancelled under the suspension, including the naval training exercise Northern Eagle, held in the Barents Sea between the United States, Russia and Norway, and NORAD's air force exercise Vigilant Eagle held in the Northern Pacific between the United States, Canada and Russia. The Canadian authorities also expelled nine Russian soldiers located on Canadian territory on 6 March.

The harsh climatic conditions and sparse populations of the Arctic region mean that national governments are often forced to rely on military forces to provide key infrastructure, particularly for search and rescue operations. In contrast to the seemingly fraught relationships between the North American states and Russia in other areas, cooperation between Arctic states in the sphere of military training exercises has in recent years been remarkably effective. The Arctic Council has also made considerable progress in this area, particularly with the passage of its first legally binding agreement between the eight member states, the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement. Increasing levels of cooperation not only help guarantee the safety of natives and visitors to the Arctic, they also help set an important international precedent and maintain the region as one free of conflict and mutual suspicion.

The recent announcements from Washington and Ottawa threaten to derail this progress. US and Canadian actions thereby undermine the integrity of their commitments to the Arctic and the Arctic Council. They also potentially place lives at risk; economic activity and tourism is increasing human presence in the Arctic, with one official in northeast Canada last week reporting that the number of search and rescue operations conducted in his territory is increasing by on average 10-15% every year. While the United States and Canada have the right to apply sanctions against Russia, their choice to put Arctic cooperation at risk in the pursuit of other aims is a worrying precedent in a region where economic, environmental and security risks are so clearly transnational in nature.

### **Other developments**

**Two previously abandoned military bases in Russia's Kola Peninsula are to be reopened,** according to the minister of property relations in Murmansk, Oblast Oleg Mazurov. Mazurov, speaking to ITAR-TASS on 4 March, said that the bases were in the southwest of the Murmansk region, close to the border with Finland. Preparations are underway to ready housing blocks and infrastructure for the arrival of 3,000 soldiers and officers of the Northern Fleet.

**Finland's Green League is threatening to boycott the government over the construction of a controversial new nuclear power plant in the Pyhäjoki region of Central Finland.** In the original plan approved in 2011 the Finnish government granted the German energy company E.ON the licence to build the plant, but subsequent changes to the project have seen E.ON replaced by Russia's state-owned nuclear firm Rosatom. Despite changes to the project, a number of NGOs and local citizens are concerned that Rosatom lacks the environmental credentials to pursue the project, and are demanding the organisation of a new tender. Finland is heavily reliant on Russian gas, and local business leaders claim the project is essential for Finland to gain cheaper energy and greater energy security.

**French scientists revived a 30,000-year-old virus found in the Arctic permafrost in Eastern Siberia.**

Although the particular virus in question is not a human pathogen, the research suggests that the discovery is a worrying precedent, as other potentially harmful viruses may be waiting to be released from the Arctic's rapidly thawing permafrost.

## On the radar

- **The Annual Arctic Business Forum will be held in Rovaniemi, Finland, on 11-13 March.** Business leaders from a wide range of different industries will meet to discuss new business opportunities in the Arctic.
- **A conference on the theme of 'Sustainable Arctic Shipping and Marine Operations' will be held in London, United Kingdom, on 11 March.** Delegates will discuss in particular the state of readiness of maritime and search and rescue infrastructure along the Northwest Passage and Northern Sea Route.

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