

The weekly briefing | 14 July 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

Nigerian president appoints close allies to cabinet amid growing political pressure

On 9 July, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan appointed four allies to ministerial positions left vacant after a cabinet reshuffle last year. The appointment of the new ministers represents an attempt to shore up support in the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria, where Jonathan's ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) is facing the strongest opposition. Among the new appointees are Ibrahim Shekarau, a former governor of Kano state, a political stronghold for the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC), and Abdul Bulama from Yobe state, which remains in a state of emergency as the government continues to fight the Boko Haram insurgency.

Jonathan also faces growing public and international criticism of his administration's failure to defeat Boko Haram, particularly following the kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls by the insurgent group in April 2014. Recent Boko Haram attacks, and their targeting of women and young girls, are a growing concern for the government, and are increasing international attention on Jonathan's unsuccessful approach to mitigating the activities of the insurgent organisation.



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Jonathan has also been hit by several defections from senior government figures. The latest ministerial appointments highlight the president's efforts to generate popular support against domestic political opponents. In particular, the APC, created in 2013 as a fusion of four regional parties, has become a nationwide challenge for Jonathan's PDP, which is likely to face tough election in 2015.

Other developments

Thousands rallied against Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in Nairobi on 7 July. The demonstrators criticised his failure to deliver on security, the rising cost of living and widespread corruption. The opposition group Coalition for Reforms of Democracy (CORD) had asked the government to convene national talks on these issues by 7 July, while the government maintains that discussion should take place in parliament. Public discontent is especially high over al-Shabaab attacks in response to Kenya's troop deployment in Somalia. In the most recent attack on the coastline earlier this week, gunmen killed 22 people, with authorities struggling to identify the culprits.

Somali troops retook the presidential palace in Mogadishu on 8 July, after several hours of fighting with al-Shabaab rebels who had forced their way in. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was not in the palace during the attack, which started when a car bomb exploded outside the presidential compound, before armed militants entered the palace. The compound houses several government offices and has been frequently targeted by al-Shabaab and other groups linked to al-Qaeda. The most recent attack is the first time al-Shabaab militants have been able to engage in prolonged fighting inside the structure. Although the African Union mission (AMISOM) released a statement that the situation had been stabilised and security measures further stepped up, al-Shabaab's increasingly frequent employment of guerrilla tactics and the widespread infiltration of security forces continue to pose risks.

Reconciliatory negotiations continue to falter in South Sudan as the fledgling country marked its third anniversary on 9 July. Despite repeated calls from the international community and fresh sanctions by the European Union, President Salva Kiir and his rival, former Vice President Riek Machar, have not returned to the negotiating table yet. The instability that has marked the country since last December's failed coup is causing increasing tensions between the Nuer and Dinka, with more than 400,000 South Sudanese having already fled to Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. More than one million remain internally displaced. With a cholera outbreak in nine of the 10 states, aid agencies now warn of thousands of lives at risk amid the already grave humanitarian crisis.

On the radar

- **The UN Security Council will consult on the UN mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on 16 July** as France warns of the political isolation of the country's interim president.
- **The UN Security Council will consult on the latest developments in Libya on 17 July**, as the United Nations plans to temporarily reduce its staff in the support mission for Libya (UNSMIL)
- **Tunisia's Ennahda party to choose a consensual candidate for the country's presidency.**
- **Further demonstrations should be expected in Brega in the Al Wahat district of Libya** amid the ongoing shutdown by protesting state oil guards.
- **The Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania, among other least developed countries, are seeking a bigger presence at negotiations on the post-2015 UN development agenda**, which continues next week.

Americas

Venezuelan president adopts more pragmatic stance in face of internal criticism

At the end of June, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro pledged that a series of reforms would be undertaken from 1 to 15 July in order to tackle the country's severe economic issues. The announcement took place following Maduro's dismissal of Jorge Giordani, the then minister of planning and the architect of the Bolivarian economic model. In a published letter, Giordani then criticised Maduro for his lack of leadership and blamed him for much of the country's current economic problems. Venezuela faces profound macroeconomic imbalances, with an annual inflation rate of 60.9% and chronic shortages of basic goods. The criticisms raised by Giordani received the backing of a number of prominent members of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), many of which, such as Héctor Navarro, were later dismissed from their positions for publicly voicing their views. Maduro also publicly defended his vice-president for economic affairs, Rafael Ramírez, confirming he would be staying in the economic cabinet.

Giordani's letter was the first open criticism of the Maduro regime by a founding father of the Bolivarian revolution. His criticisms reflect the broader rift between the radical and more moderate fractions of the PSUV party. In that regard, Ramírez represents a shift towards a more orthodox stance. Ramírez, who is the president of the state-owned *Petróleos de Venezuela* and minister of petroleum and mining, is seen as a pragmatic technocrat. In addition, he benefits from the support of the president of the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), Nelson Merentes. Ramírez has vowed to combat the country's rampant inflation problem by means of monetary and fiscal reforms. Such reforms entail an adjustment of the current exchange rate and the adoption of a string of austerity measures.

Maduro's recent reaction to the rising criticism among the radical faction of the PSUV party has made him more subservient to the interests of the moderates, epitomised by Ramírez. This ideological shift is likely to be clarified in the course of the upcoming third national congress of the PSUV, which is to take place from 26 to 29 July. The meeting is being hailed by party leaders as an opportunity to re-orientate and strengthen the largest political force behind the country's Bolivarian revolution. However, much of the success of Ramírez's pragmatic reforms will depend on the consent of the military sector headed by Diosdado Cabello, the president of the National Assembly.

Other developments

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his Argentine counterpart, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, in Buenos Aires on 12 July. The meeting took place after Putin's visit to Cuba as part of his Latin American tour ahead of the sixth BRICS summit. Putin and Kirchner reached a number of bilateral agreements, including an arrangement on nuclear cooperation. Putin also expressed his gratitude to Kirchner for her support of the Russian claim over the Crimea region. Moreover, a Russian committee is expected to travel to the Vaca Muerta oil field, which is believed to constitute the second largest unconventional gas reserve in the world.

A grenade attack left eight injured in the capital of Guatemala, Guatemala City, on 12 July. The explosive device was thrown at the premises of a fizzy drinks company in a violence-plagued neighbourhood on the outskirts of the capital. A local gang carried out the attack according to police sources. Over recent months, the Mara 18 and Mara Salvatrucha gangs have been battling for control of the area and have been targeting local businesses that refuse to pay protection money.

On 10 July, the Dominican Republic and Haiti agreed to resume Immigration talks. Over the past year, the issue of the legalisation of thousands of Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic has plagued the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Although the Dominican Republic has launched a process of regularisation on 2 June, many Haitians were left out due to the imposed identification requirements. In a press conference following the talks, Haitian Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe stated that the government would provide the documentation at a discounted price for its poorest citizens. In a parallel announcement, the Dominican Minister of the Presidency Gustavo Montalvo requested that the Haitian government end the current ban on imported Dominican products.

On the radar

- **Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires, on 18 July.**
- **El Barzón activist group plan to protest in Mexico's capital, Mexico city, on 23 July, against the government's energy reforms.**
- **Sixth BRICS summit to take place in Fortaleza, Brazil, on 15 July.**
- **Teachers affiliated to the UDOCBA union plan to rally in the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires, on 15 July over pay related issues. The rally will precede a strike that will commence on 16 July.**
- **20 July marks Independence Day in Colombia.**
- **Travellers flying to the United States should expect increased security measures to continue following the government's warning of a credible terrorist threat to aviation.**

Asia and Pacific

Indonesia awaits official results of presidential election while both candidates anticipate victory

Indonesia's presidential election was held on 9 July. Two candidates contested the election: Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Hatta Rajasa, from the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) ran against Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla, of the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P). Different media sources throughout the country reported different candidates as the victor in last week's polls. Subianto is reported to have held a rally where he thanked voters for their support and the mandate to govern. One difficulty is that although Indonesia has made efforts to develop an e-voting system, polling stations across more than 6,000 islands require several weeks to tally votes. Additionally, opposing political forces exert considerable influence on various media outlets throughout Indonesia. It is expected that the official count will be released by the government on 22 July.

Last week's presidential election follows legislative elections that were held on 9 April. These legislative elections saw a significant increase in seats held by both the Gerindra party and the PDI-P. The PDI-P won 109 seats, the Golongan Karya party won 91 seats and Gerindra won 73 seats, while several other minority parties split the remaining seats. According to Indonesian electoral laws, a party must win at least 25% of the popular vote in legislative elections in order to nominate a presidential candidate. In last month's legislative polls, no party gained the required percentage and thus a coalition was formed. The coalition agreement was challenged in the constitutional court, but it was decided that no changes would be made to the procedure for the 2014 elections.

Gerindra's candidate, Subianto, is the wealthy son of a prominent former minister from the Suharto administration and was married to Suharto's daughter. He is also a former general, and was removed from the armed forces in 1998 for his role in quashing pro-democracy demonstrations. He has run for the presidency three times, and represents a more heavy-handed regime. Indeed, he has been criticised as a potential threat to democracy in Indonesia. Conversely, the PDI-P candidate, Widodo, hails from a far more modest background, and represents a more democratic and populist agenda. Widodo's critics have raised concerns that a strong leader who emphasises stability is needed in a country as diverse and as geographically sprawling as Indonesia. On the other hand, many believe that Widodo represents a reformist tradition that has roused Indonesians to participate in public affairs. Given the stark political differences between the candidates, and sporadic concerns of vote manipulation and fraud throughout Indonesia, concerns are mounting that violence may ensue once the official results are known. Indeed, as the country prepares for its third democratic transition of power, the election results are certain to have wide-reaching implications for the implementation this latest transition in Indonesia.

Other developments

Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera met with US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel on 11 July in Washington DC to discuss the recent reinterpretation of Japan's military mandate. The two officials reportedly agreed that in light of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's move to expand the scope and international role of its defence forces, Japan should formulate bilateral defence cooperation guidelines. At the meeting, the United States showed strong support for the effective lifting of Japan's ban on collective self-defence. Despite the 1 July decision to reinterpret Japan's pacifist military mandate, a series of laws, which currently restrain the use of military force, must be amended in order to authorise engagement in collective self-defence operations. These revisions will form a new set of legal constraints on Japan's military, and are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

China announced on 11 July that security forces had detained 32 suspected terrorists in Xinjiang. The individuals have been sentenced for allegedly spreading extremist information on the internet and by mobile phone, creating terrorist organisations and constructing explosive devices. The sentences primarily range from four to 15 years in length, though two individuals were given life sentences. These arrests are a part of a year-long campaign against domestic terrorism. The campaign is in response to a string of violent attacks in public areas and transportation facilities that began in October 2013. Since the campaign was launched, more than 400 people, mostly in Xinjiang, have been arrested for suspected terrorist activities.

On 9 July, North Korea launched two short-range rockets into the ocean. The launch of the two scud-type missiles, which landed in the waters off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula, is the fourth set of firings in the past two weeks. The actions followed an official state visit by Chinese President XI Jinping to South Korea. China has traditionally been an important ally for North Korea, though recent events have indicated a shift in this historical alliance. In addition, North Korea appealed to South Korea for a suspension of military actions and verbal provocation, an appeal which South Korea dismissed.

On the radar

- **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend his first multilateral meeting as prime minister on 14-16 July** at the sixth summit of the heads of state or government of BRICS.
- **ASEAN countries are expected to sign a free trade agreement with India** next month.
- **The Singapore Armed Forces and the Republic of Singapore Air Force will be engaging in military drills** from 14 July to 18 July.
- **South Korean members of parliament are expected to continue debating a controversial anti-corruption bill this month.**
- **The United States and South Korea are to engage in joint naval exercises** from 16 July to 21 July.

Europe

Germany chancellor expels CIA station chief in Berlin as further US spying activities uncovered

On 10 July, the German government ordered the expulsion of the CIA station chief in Berlin. This follows the discovery of a suspected US spy in the German defence ministry just days after the arrest of a worker for the German foreign intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), who is accused of being a CIA informant. The BND official is believed to have been involved in a German parliamentary investigation into the activities of foreign intelligence agencies, including the NSA, and is thought to have handed over more than 200 documents, including information about the parliamentary committee investigating the United States' tapping of Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone and US surveillance of German citizens.

On 10 July, Merkel labelled spying on allies as a 'waste of energy', and her coalition partners have called for Washington to remove any US embassy staff involved and to cease spying operations in Germany. German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier discussed the spying allegations with US Secretary of State John Kerry at the weekend in Vienna, on the sidelines of a meeting focused on Iran and its nuclear programme. The German government says its decision to expel the top CIA official in Berlin was a fitting reaction to the breach of trust. This latest disclosure of spying by the United States upon Germany has placed the close relations between the two countries in jeopardy. The latest developments build on Germany's increasing frustration at the failure of the United States to provide assurances that it will cease to spy on German citizens. It will exert significant pressure on the Obama administration following verbal guarantees from Barrack Obama to Merkel during a visit in May that Germany was not under constant surveillance by the United States. The CIA declined to comment on the recent developments, but US officials did acknowledge that the CIA had been involved in recruiting the detained official as an informant over two years ago.

It has become evident that US espionage is damaging its relationships with allies. Last week, the White House described the partnership between the United States and Germany as one built on respect; however, the recent revelations will make it hard for Berlin to take Washington's word for granted. The United States relationship with Germany is particularly tense as, despite requests to be included, Germany is not part of a non-spying pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Canada – the Five Eyes intelligence alliance. The United States needs to repair relations with Germany in order to garner crucial support for a range of issues, including implementing tougher sanctions against Russia over the crisis in Ukraine. The United States is also in danger of alienating other European allies, following Merkel's proposed establishment of a European communications network in order to avoid emails and other data automatically passing through the United States.

Other developments

NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen has warned that Russia is playing a 'double game' in Ukraine. During a press conference in Washington on 8 July, Rasmussen cautioned that Putin's recent moderate statements represented tactics intended to fend off another round of economic sanctions by the West, and that Russia has continued to mass its troops along its border with Ukraine, while allowing equipment and arms to be smuggled by separatists into eastern Ukraine. The secretary general added that it was highly likely that Russia had also supplied weapons to pro-Russian activists in Ukraine. Rasmussen believes that there is no doubt that the Kremlin is heavily engaged in destabilising eastern Ukraine and weakening the new government in Kiev. Rasmussen also called for the NATO alliance to reshape in the face of a rise in Russian military spending and a fall in NATO members' military expenditures.

On 7 July, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, visited Bulgaria for talks regarding the resumption of construction of the South Stream gas pipeline. The pipeline is designed to transport Russian natural gas via the Black Sea to the European Union, thus reducing Russia's dependence on Ukrainian gas transit. Lavrov emphasised the importance of the construction remaining on schedule, but also conceded that dialogue should remain open between countries participating in the construction and the European Commission. In June, Bulgaria halted the project after the European Union's executive arm requested the suspension of construction following concerns that Bulgaria had broken the EU's public procurement laws by favouring local and Russian bidders. Russia claimed that these concerns were retaliations for the conflict in Ukraine, as Gennady Timchenko, the chairman of Stroyatansgaz, which is involved in pipeline construction, has been sanctioned by the United States over Russia's role in the crisis in Ukraine. South Stream is scheduled to start operations in 2015 and is expected to deliver 63 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year.

On 11 July, pro-Russian separatists fired missiles at military forces in the Zelenopole border post near Lugansk, killing 23 and injuring another 93 soldiers. On 10 July, Russia closed three major border crossings near Donetsk due to fighting between the rebels and Ukrainian forces. On 8 July, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko appointed Vasyl Grytsak as the new chief of military operations in eastern Ukraine. This is a signal that Kiev is intent on pressing ahead with the military operation. Also on 8 July, the Ukrainian defence minister, Valery Heletey, stated that a new ceasefire would not be on the cards until the rebels had laid down their arms.

On the radar

- **The election of the European Commission President will be held in Strasbourg, France, on 15 July.**
- **Catherine Ashton, the high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, will lead nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna, Austria, from 14 July.**
- **The annual Relief of Londonderry parade will be held on 9 August in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, commemorating the end of a 105-day siege of the city in 1689.**
- **Four European commissioners will be appointed on 15 July** by a plenary session of the European Parliament.
- **Interior ministers of France and Germany will begin a two-day visit to Serbia** on 14 July.

Middle East

Palestinian death toll rises as Israel continues military offensive against the Gaza Strip

An Israeli military offensive against the Gaza Strip began on 8 July following growing tensions between the two sides in the aftermath of the murders of three Israeli teenagers and the torture and murder of a Palestinian teenager. To date, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) has targeted 750 sites within Gaza believed to be housing members of Hamas, which Israel blames for the murder of the Israeli teenagers. The latest airstrikes have increased the Palestinian death toll to at least 172 (77% of which are civilians according to a UN estimate), with upwards of 1,100, people wounded, including women and children. UNRWA is reportedly sheltering 17,000 Palestinians who have fled the bombardment. In response, Hamas and other militant groups have continued to fire rockets across the border into Israeli territory, though no Israeli deaths have been reported as a result. Despite the successful interception of many of the rockets by Israel's Iron Dome aerial defence system, the scale of the latest foray of rocket launches by Hamas indicates a development of the organisation's strike capacity.

The UN Security Council met on 10 July to discuss these latest developments, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon urging restraint from both parties, and appealing for a ceasefire agreement to be arranged. Further concern was expressed over the number of civilian casualties and the limited capacity of health services within Palestine to deal with the crisis. Separately, five cross-border rockets targeted Israel's northern border with Lebanon on 11 July, a day after UN peacekeepers were deployed to the area amid rising tensions in Gaza. Israeli troops retaliated with artillery fire toward the source in southern Lebanon. It is unclear who is responsible for this attack; however, south Lebanon remains a stronghold for the Shia militant group Hezbollah, and is also home to numerous al-Qaeda linked Sunni rebels. As such, this recent attack prompts concerns that other radical factions within the region may also now target Israeli territory.

Israeli special forces are known to have carried out at least one brief incursion into Gaza, and the IDF continues to hint at a broader ground offensive, calling up some 40,000 reservists. The Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Ron Prosor, told the UN Security Council in Thursday's meeting that Hamas represents an indiscriminate threat and would not be tolerated by the government. With little indication that Hamas will surrender its arms, rocket fire into Israel can be expected to continue over the coming days and weeks. A wide range of voices continue to call on Israel to exercise restraint and do more to reduce the disproportionately high number of civilian casualties their actions are causing in Gaza.

Other developments

Houthi rebels captured the city of 'Amran, northwest Yemen, on 8 July. The capture follows weeks of fighting between the Zaidi Shia group and conservative Sunni tribes in the region. 'Amran, 70 kilometres north of the capital, Sanaa, had previously been a stronghold of the Bani al-Ahmar tribe. The death toll from the latest offensive is believed to have reached 200, with a further 15,000 people displaced from the region – raising the country's internal displacement figure to 35,000 according to a state refugee agency. Houthi fighters within 'Amran are believed to have gained the support of local tribes within the governorate, many of whom remain angered at the central government and northern tribal confederation.

The Iraqi parliament has failed to reach consensus on the country's political future, resulting in the postponement of the session on 8 July. A breakdown in negotiations followed the failure of the three political blocs to nominate positions of speaker, prime minister and president with clear political mandates. Parliament was originally postponed until 12 August; however, the arrangement was revised following international pressure. The Kurdish regional government and its president, Massoud Barzani, have responded by stating that ministers will continue to boycott meetings until Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki steps down.

Cross-border mortars struck Arar in the northern province of Saudi Arabia on 7 July. Three explosives landed outside apartment buildings in the latest offensive directed towards Saudi Arabia following cross-border raids in the country's southern town of al-Sharuah on 4 July that resulted in 10 fatalities. The latest attack is likely to increase concerns that the world's largest oil exporter is struggling to contain the militant threat on their northern and southern borders. Yemeni groups affiliated with al-Qaeda have long expressed their intent to depose the ruling al-Saud royal family, and to establish a caliphate in Mecca. The Kingdom continues to step-up security along its borders and to monitor developments in relation to Shia militants in northern Yemen and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant fighters in Iraq.

On the radar

- **Increased risk of militant activity possible around Afghanistan's Independence Day** on 19 August.
- **Rallies are anticipated in areas of Iraq with a Shiite majority on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Ali** on 20 July.
- **Spanish parliamentary delegation to visit Tehran, Iran, on 16 July,** to hold talks on bilateral relations.
- **Audit of ballots in Afghanistan's disputed presidential election is expected to begin** following the visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry to the country in an attempt to resolve the current deadlock.
- **21 August marks the 19-year anniversary of the Hamas-claimed bomb attack on a bus in Jerusalem** that killed six people and injured over 100 more.

Polar regions

Threefold increase in Russian strategic bomber flights over Arctic Ocean

The head of Russia's Eastern Military District's press service, Colonel Aleksandr Gordeev, has announced that the number of TU-95 strategic-bomber flights over the Arctic Ocean has increased threefold over the last year. According to Gordeev, the TU-95s, based out of the Amur Region in Russia's far east, will help Russia guarantee its interests in the Arctic, adding that all flights are carried out in strict observance with international norms for the regulation of air space and without any incursions into the sovereign territory of other states. Neighbouring Sweden reported that Swedish fighter jets were scrambled to meet potential Russian threats from training exercises in the Baltic, and claimed that they are scrambling approximately 50% more often than two years ago.

The announcements from Russian and Swedish officials confirm trends previously observed by security analysts and journalists in Russia and its neighbouring states. Russian military projection into the Arctic has proceeded at a considerable pace over the last couple of years. Once mothballed Soviet-era military bases in the Arctic and near the Baltic and Barents seas have been reopened. Russia has been reequipping its Northern Fleet and army divisions based in the Far North, as well as retraining army divisions for Arctic conflict, including a successful airdrop of paratroopers over the North Pole. Sweden and Finland have long been documenting the increased Russian air presence in the Baltic, and Canadian defence minister Rob Nicholson spoke recently in parliament about the 'need for vigilance' in the face of an increase in Russian military activity in the Arctic.

Russian military officials insist that the increased activity is necessary to project Russian sovereignty into the Arctic and to defend economic interests, such as the Prirazlomnaya Gazprom oil rig in the Pechora Sea, from possible terrorist attack, such as was allegedly committed by a Greenpeace protest targeting the rig in September 2013. This was almost certainly the main reason behind the military build-up over the last two years, though the fanfare that often accompanied it suggested that Moscow was also trying to resonate with a domestic audience. However, the dramatic increase in recent months is likely to serve yet another motive: many Canadian and US military officials have interpreted the increase in strategic bomber flights near their countries borders as 'strategic messaging' from Moscow, with Russia attempting to punish Canada and the United States for their critical stance on the crisis in Ukraine. This crisis has acted as a catalyst to the already long-observed tendency of Moscow to use military rhetoric as a means of sending messages to both internal and external audiences. With the crisis likely to continue into the immediate future, and with Russia more and more convinced of the need to protect its economic interests in the Arctic, an end to Russia's military build-up in the Arctic should not be expected any time soon. While this trend is unlikely to evolve into a rapid arms race with neighbouring Arctic states, there is evidence that the region is gradually militarising: for example, Sweden is planning an increase of almost \$1 billion to its annual defence budget, and Canada is discussing the purchase of a new fleet of F-15s (Eagle) from the United States.

Other developments

Activists from the Sea Shepard Conservation Society have descended on the Faroe Islands to denounce the annual whale killing tradition commonly known as 'the grind'. Over 500 activists are protesting on land and sea and intend to do so up to the dates of the annual event in October. The grind involves the killing of 1,000 pilot whales, a tradition that has been criticised for many years. Police on the island have been prepared for such protests and are confident that they are able to negate any clashes, while Danish intelligence services have been monitoring the situation.

Canada's National Energy Board (NEB) has agreed to review contingency plans from Imperial Oil and Chevron Canada before they file formal applications to drill in the Beaufort Sea. Both energy companies have requested that the NEB reviews their contingency plans in the event of a ruptured oil well before submitting their formal applications and heavily investing in the project in the Arctic waters. The NEB reviewed its rules in the Arctic drilling regulatory process following the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

The Chinese icebreaker Xuelong (Snow Dragon) has set off from Shanghai on its sixth Arctic expedition. The icebreaker departed on 11 July, and will travel through the Bering Strait, Chukchi Sea, Canada Basin and the Bering Sea. Its primary task is to focus on the Arctic's shifting condition and its impact on China's climate and environment.

On the radar

- **Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) will hold its four-yearly general assembly in Inuvik, Canada,** between 21-24 July to debate arctic issues and developments.
- **International Conference and Exhibition on Performance of Ships and Structures in Ice will be held in Banff, Canada,** on 28-31 July, and will address a number of topics, including naval architecture, icebreaking ships, marine operations safety, risk and environmental protection.
- **A meeting of high-level representatives of the Arctic states will take place 5-7 August** in Naryan-Mar, Russia.
- **Arctic Council Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group will hold a board meeting in Nunavut, Canada,** on 25-29 August.
- **Following its May 2014 meeting, the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission will hold its next meeting in Nome and Kotzebue, Alaska, United States,** on 26-27 August.

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