

The weekly briefing | 20 October 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa: Ebola continues to destabilise a number of West African countries.

Americas: Bolivia's incumbent president, Evo Morales, wins landslide victory.

Asia and Pacific: Little progress made in dialogue between North and South Korea.

Europe: Ukraine, Russia and EU agree to gas talks but fail to reach agreement on the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

Middle East: Attentions turn to Lebanon in balancing regional sectarian threat.

Polar regions: Russia set to expand Arctic territory by 1,165 square kilometres.

Africa

Ebola continues to destabilise a number of West African countries

Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) has spread rapidly across a number of West African countries since the outbreak began in March 2014. At this stage, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are the worst impacted countries, with a total of 9,191 people confirmed or suspected of having contracted EVD and 4,546 confirmed deaths in these countries according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The infection rate is expected to increase to approximately 10,000 people per week by December. There have also been a small number of cases in Nigeria (20), Senegal (1), Spain (1) and the United States (3). Senegal and Nigeria have now been declared Ebola free by the WHO. Policymakers do not expect an immediate increase in infections in Western countries due to their well-maintained public healthcare systems and healthcare infrastructures. However, numerous Western governments have increased their controls at access points.

Ebola is not only a public health issue but is also a significant threat to the economy and national security of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. All three countries are reporting an increased risk of food shortages, reduced household income, and higher unemployment. It is estimated that all three countries will face a decline in GDP varying between 2.5% and 3.4%. Furthermore, reforms to the security sector and judiciaries appear to have stalled in those countries due the shift in national priorities. The international community's efforts to re-establish peace within these states have also been put at risk as attention shifts from disrupting transnational crime and restricting the spread weapons to combating Ebola.



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Numerous other African states are at risk of being affected by Ebola within weeks or months. In addition to the number of people infected, this will impact on the GDPs and national security of the effected states. Considering the increasing levels of support that international community is lending to the efforts to contain the Ebola crisis, it is likely that the outbreak will begin to be contained more effectively towards the early months of 2015. However, due to the fact that many states need weeks to mobilise the pledged support, it is highly likely that the situation will worsen before it improves. While food stocks will last in the short term, declines in household income and shortages of work may create tensions within the affected states once the international community withdraws their support following the containment of the crisis. It will be crucial that the international community support affected states beyond ensuring the safety of Western states and until such time as the economic and social repercussions of the outbreak have also been properly addressed.

Other developments

The ceasefire between Nigerian government and Boko Haram has been undermined by fresh attacks in Borno and Adamawa states. The agreement was signed by Boko Haram's chief security officer, Danladi Ahmadu, and the principal private secretary to the president, Ambassador Hassan Tukur, on 17 October. However, rebel attacks are reported to have occurred less than 24 hours after the agreement was signed.. Twenty rebels reportedly attacked Maikadiri and Michia, burning down houses and shooting randomly into houses and cars according to military sources. It is uncertain whether Boko Haram will uphold other parts of the agreement, including the release of 200 school girls that were abducted from Chibok in April and who are supposed to be released by 21 October 2014.

On 17 October, Egyptian security forces arrested Walid Attalah, the leader of the military wing of Sinai-based Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis. A rocket factory supplying the group was also discovered and destroyed in a separate raid. It is not clear whether the two incidents are directly related. Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis is responsible for a number of assassinations, including that of a high-level police general, Mohammed Saeed, as well as for the death of hundreds of Egyptian soldiers. More recently, the group has also beheaded numerous individuals suspected of spying for Israel's national intelligence agency, Mossad.

Tensions are rising in Sudan over the killing of UN peacekeepers and government forces as fighting has continued in Darfur. Rebels from a faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement claim to have killed 21 government soldiers in an attack on the night of 16 October. Sudan's security forces retaliated with air strikes on Burgo and Karko in the East Jebel Marra region on 17 October. According to reports, up to 12 bombs were dropped by the Sudanese Air Force. In an unrelated incident, gunmen killed three UN peacekeepers and stole their patrol vehicle. It is unclear whether or how the gunmen are related to the rebels.

On the radar

- **Tunisian parliamentary election to be held on 26 October**, with the presidential election scheduled for 23 November.
- **Various opposition parties to protest outside the US Embassy and MONUSCO headquarters in Kinshasa, the capital of Democratic Republic of Congo**, on 20 October.
- **20 October marks the anniversary of the killing of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.** Celebratory rallies and protests orchestrated by Gaddafi's supporters are both likely.

Americas

Bolivia's incumbent president, Evo Morales, wins landslide victory

On 12 October, Evo Morales won a third presidential term with over 60% of the vote in Bolivia's presidential election. His two main competitors, businessman Samuel Doria Medina and former conservative president Jorge Quiroga, gathered less than 30% of the vote between them. Key to Morales' landslide victory has been the overwhelming support of indigenous groups, as Aymara and Quechua populations account for approximately half of Andean rural areas. After Morales' victory, some opposition leaders criticised the electoral process, and claimed the increased number of eligible Bolivian voters and the alleged loyalty of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to the president was fraudulent. Bolivian presidents are technically limited to two consecutive terms, but following the promulgation of a new constitution in 2009, Morales successfully persuaded pliant courts to ignore his first term.

Morales is an outlier of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), a left-wing political grouping launched by former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez to counter US influence in the region and which notably includes Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela.. In contrast to the other socialist leaders of the bloc, Morales has maintained a high degree of popularity while ensuring high economic growth and running a fiscal surplus every year since 2005. Most impressively, Bolivia's ratio of international reserves to GDP reached a record high of more than 50% in 2009. In addition, the country has made great strides in combating poverty. According to the latest UNESCO statistics, Bolivia's illiteracy rate has dropped from about 14% in 2006 to less than 4% in 2014. Such improvements have been made possible thanks to a careful mix of protectionist and more liberal policies. When he first took office, Morales partly nationalised the hydrocarbons industry in order to bankroll his redistributionist agenda. But to retain investors' confidence, the indigenous leader also agreed to liberalise certain sectors, and recently restored normal ties with the IMF.

In spite of the success of the Bolivian model over the past decade, many see the symptoms of a looming crisis in the recent deceleration of the economy. Most of Bolivia's exports are unrefined goods, such as soya oil, hydrocarbons and precious metals. Thus, it is suspected that the fall in commodity prices will increasingly pose a serious threat to the country's economic model, which would negatively impact on Morales' redistributionist agenda. In addition, the mediocre economic performance of neighbouring countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, is likely to further deteriorate Bolivia's balance of trade. Nevertheless, Bolivia has also heavily invested in infrastructure and value-added industries, while the rise of a middle class has boosted domestic consumption. Indeed, the main risk to the Bolivian model does not seem to arise from the economy but rather from its over-reliance on the figure of Morales.

Other developments

Venezuela secured a temporary seat at the UN Security Council in the first round of voting on 16 October. The South American country earned 181 votes in support of its candidacy at the UN General Assembly – 52 over the 129 votes needed to clinch the seat. Soon after, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro claimed the result as a sign that the broader international community holds the country in high esteem. Venezuela lost its last bid in 2006, as it was strongly opposed by the United States. But this year, the Obama administration did not mount a diplomatic campaign against the country's bid.

Protestors responding to the slow progress made in the investigation of the disappearance of 48 students set fire to the Government Palace in the Mexican city of Chilpancingo on 13 October. The demonstrators pressed the government to take further action to locate the remaining 43 students that went missing last month, and called for the resignation of Governor Ángel Aguirre, who is believed to be involved in the affair. The protestors threatened more aggressive actions if the authorities failed to speed up the search for the missing students. They accuse the police of finding the missing students and then giving them up to *Guerreros Unidos*, a local drug cartel. The reported discovery of 28 charred bodies on 6 October near the city of Iguala caused outrage, but the bodies have not yet been identified. In response to the protests, on 14 October the government announced the death of the *Guerreros Unidos* leader, Benjamin Mondragón, during a shootout with security forces.

Fears over a Venezuelan default are threatening the rule of President Nicolás Maduro. The South American country is allegedly at the brink of default due to a sharp fall in oil prices. Oil accounts for about 95% of Venezuelan export revenues. Two weeks ago, Venezuela demanded an emergency meeting of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) to try to stop the fall in energy prices amid the country's struggle to meet its debt obligations. So far, Opec has not responded to Venezuela's demands, and is due to meet on 27 November. To compensate for its lack of foreign currencies, Venezuela increasingly relies on barter trade deals with China. In July, Venezuela borrowed an additional \$4 billion from China in return for an additional 100,000 barrels per day of oil on top of the 500,000 barrels a day Venezuela already exports to China, nearly half of which is payment for the more than \$40 billion they have already borrowed. A default would severely restrict Venezuela's access to foreign capital, which would lead to dramatic shortages of basic goods in the domestic market.

On the radar

- **Brazil presidential election runoff scheduled for 26 October.**
- **Uruguay's general election scheduled for 26 October.**
- **Further anti-government protests planned for 26 October in Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti,** calling for the resignation of President Michel Martelly.

Asia and Pacific

Little progress made in dialogue between North and South Korea

Military leaders from North Korea and South Korea convened in the village of Panmunjom on 15 October. However, according to a statement made by the South Korean government after the meeting, negotiations fell short of substantial progress. The meeting ran from 10:00 to 15:10 local time. Local reports stated that representatives from the North Korean military argued that the South Korean navy should respect its West Sea guard line', control anti-Pyongyang and anti-Communist media reports, and stop activists sending balloons filled with anti-North Korea materials across the border. In turn, South Korean officials emphasised that they could not control the activities of private citizens and the media in a democratic society.

Earlier this month, the militaries of the two sides exchanged fire when a group of South Korean activists used balloons to float currency, radios, information regarding the nature of the North Korean regime, and various other restricted items across the border. The North Korean military attempted to shoot down the balloons. South Korean media reported that some of the shots reached a civilian area, obliging the South to return fire. The other key area of contention discussed at this meeting was the disputed Northern Limit Line (NLL). The NLL is the disputed de facto maritime demarcation line between the two countries that was established after the Korean War in 1953. North Korea disputes the location of this line on the grounds that it was established by the UN command that was largely under the leadership of the United States.

Such high-level meetings between North and South Korea are relatively rare. On 4 October, several top-level North Korean officials made a surprise visit to South Korea on the occasion of the closing of the Incheon Asian Games. At that time, the two sides agreed to resume high-level talks. After the 15 October meeting, the South Korean government extended an invitation for further high-level talks at the North Korean town of Tongilgak on 30 October. The increased efforts at cross-border communication reflect positively on bilateral relations between the two countries; however, they are marred by ongoing and sporadic conflicts in the border region. Henceforth, it is likely that any progress at bilateral meetings will be very slow and that sporadic conflicts and displays of military strength by the North will continue.

Other developments

At least six people were killed on 14 October during a violent clash in Fuyou village in Yunnan Province, China. The confrontation occurred over the building of a new logistics hub in the village. Four people were reportedly burned to death and two beaten to death with steel pipes. More than 18 others were seriously injured. According to local media, a group of several hundred uniformed men drove in trucks and began assaulting a group of demonstrating villagers. The identity of these individuals is unclear: they were reported as construction workers in local media, but accounts of the events on social media suggested that they had equipment featuring police insignia. The project was originally approved in 2011, and has been the source of several clashes, due to disagreements concerning worker compensation. According to local sources in the provincial capital, Kunming, several hundred villagers participated in the demonstrations last week. Land developers have also reportedly been seizing farmland in order to progress the project. While land demonstrations in China are common, the level of violence in this incidence was exceptional.

Malaysian authorities have arrested 14 suspected Islamic State militants. The arrests took place in Selangor state and were a part of a three-day anti-terrorism operation. The arrested individuals were all Malaysian citizens between ages of 14 to 48. According to Malaysian authorities, several of the suspects were reportedly involved in the recruiting, financing and transportation of Malaysians joining the Islamic State terrorist group. Several others were reportedly planning to join Islamic State in Syria. Since April, Malaysian authorities have arrested more than 35 people suspected of aiding Islamic State or seeking to join the organisation. In August, Malaysian counterterrorism authorities reportedly stopped an attack on a foreign-owned brewery in Selangor. The individuals involved in that case had allegedly pledged allegiance to Islamic State and were building explosives. Despite ongoing anti-terrorism efforts, more than 30 Malaysians have allegedly joined Islamic State.

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has said that elections scheduled for late-2015 may be delayed. As Prayuth set out for Milan, Italy, to participate in the Asia-Europe Meeting, he stated that elections would not be able to proceed unless the country was able to adhere to a reform roadmap. The plans for reforms that Prayuth has propagated since coming to power via a military coup earlier this year include the establishment of a new constitution and changes in 11 key policy areas. These changes are designed to end the influence of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the brother of former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Thaksin Shinawatra came to power on a set of populist policies that were designed to earn the votes of the country's poor. At the time of the military coup, Australia, the European Union and the United States urged the country's leadership to make a rapid return to democracy, and downgraded diplomatic relations with Thailand. Thus, if Prayuth ultimately delays elections, his administration is likely to face intensified international criticism.

On the radar

- **India is expected to pay \$500 million to Iran this week** to allow the country to recover frozen oil revenues held overseas.
- **Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) party to rally in Abbottabad**, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, northeastern Pakistan, on 23 October.
- **The Chinese Communist Party will hold its 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee** in Beijing this week.
- **Japan and the United States. are expected to continue negotiations regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership** at an upcoming summit in Sydney, Australia, on 25 October.
- **The head of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific will visit South Korea** on 24 October.

Europe

Ukraine, Russia and EU agree to gas talks but fail to reach agreement on the crisis in eastern Ukraine

On 17 October, the Russian and Ukrainian presidents held talks with the European Union in Milan, Italy, on the sidelines of the Asia-Europe Meeting. British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President François Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi also participated in the talks. During the 'positive but difficult talks', Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko did not reach a breakthrough on the crisis in Ukraine, but the Ukrainian president reported that the leaders agreed that all the clauses of the Minsk memorandum should be implemented and that elections should be allowed to take place in Donetsk and Luhansk. During the meeting, the leaders also outlined a deal to solve the gas dispute. In a bid to ease tensions before the summit, Putin ordered the removal 17,600 soldiers presently stationed near the Ukrainian border to return to their original bases on 11 October. However, NATO reported that there was no evidence of a pullback of Russian troops.

On 19 September, Kiev, Moscow and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine agreed at the Minsk summit to create a 30 kilometre security zone, to cease offensive operations, to ban flights by combat aircraft over the security zone, to allow OSCE monitors to observe the region, and to withdraw any foreign troops. However, the Minsk memorandum was never fully implemented, and fighting in eastern Ukraine continues despite the ceasefire of 5 September. This new endorsement of the Minsk agreement indicates that both sides seek a peaceful resolution within the near future; however, it is unclear whether either Russia or Ukraine will follow through with the implementation of the security zone or if Russia will withdraw its troops, which the Kremlin currently denies are present in eastern Ukraine.

Another round of the multilateral talks on the gas dispute has been scheduled for 21 October in Brussels, Belgium. On 15 June 2014, the Russian gas company Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Ukraine, after Kiev failed to pay its \$4.5 billion debt. The gas talks have become a critical issue for Ukraine as the winter months set in, and it is highly likely that Russia will attempt to use the gas crisis as leverage in talks regarding sovereignty issues in eastern Ukraine. European Union countries import approximately 16% of gas supplies from Russia, and nearly half this volume is received through the Ukrainian gas pipelines. European energy commissioner Guenther Oettinger reported that the high level of gas reserves would be sufficient to prevent a gas shortage for European Union members; however, disruptions of gas in Ukraine are highly likely due to the country's shortage of gas reserves.

Other developments

On 17 October, the Polish public prosecutor general, Andrzej Seremet, announced that a Polish army officer and a lawyer had been arrested on suspicion of espionage. Authorities revealed that they had carried out an extensive investigation into the individuals before the arrests. The identities of the individuals were not released by the prosecutor general's office; however, a member of the parliamentary intelligence committee, Marek Biernacki, reported that two detained individuals were accused of spying for Russia. According to Biernacki, both suspects are believed to have been working for the GRU, the Russian foreign military intelligence directorate. The military officer was working for the Polish ministry of defence, while the lawyer is of dual Russian-Polish nationality. Polish Deputy Prime Minister Janusz Piechocinski warned that Russian diplomats could be expelled from Poland for collaborating with the two suspects if the spying case is confirmed.

On 16 October, the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group collapsed after the exit of Latvian MEP Iveta Grigule. Grigule applied to the European Parliament President Martin Schulz to withdraw her membership of the EFDD group in order to become an independent MEP. The EFDD housed many of the Eurosceptic MEPs, including the United Kingdom's UKIP MEPs and the Italian Five Star Movement's MEPs. The EFDD accused Schultz of persuading Grigule to withdraw from the group in order to engineer the EFDD's downfall. A European Parliament group requires a representation of parties from at least seven member countries. Without 'group' qualification, the EFDD will now suffer from loss of funds and fewer opportunities for speaking time during important sessions in the parliament.

On 17 October, the Swedish armed forces announced that a military operation was being carried out near islands surrounding the capital, Stockholm. Commander Jonas Wikstrom reported that ships, helicopters and several ground units comprising of approximately 200 soldiers were taking part. Authorities launched the operation following a tip-off of the occurrence of what is being described as 'foreign underwater activity' in the Baltic Sea from a credible source. In the last few months, Sweden has logged frequent manoeuvres by the Russian air force in the Baltic Sea, and in September, two Russian SU24 fighter-bombers entered Swedish airspace. This latest incident is speculated to involve a Russian submarine or mini-submarine.

On the radar

- **President of the European Council Henry Van Rompuy will chair the European Council meeting on 23-24 October,** with the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and President of the European Commission Martin Schulz to attend.
- **On 21-22 October, the European Parliament will debate and vote on whether to extend duty-free access to the EU market for Ukraine's exports until the end of 2015** so as to support Ukraine's struggling economy.
- **A final vote on European commissioner candidates will be taken** on 22 October.
- **Trilateral gas meeting between the EU, Russia and Ukraine will be held in Brussels, Belgium,** on 21 October.

Middle East

Attentions turn to Lebanon in balancing regional sectarian threat

Lebanon has found itself embroiled in spill-over crises from the Islamic state and the al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra Front in recent months. A fourth Lebanese soldier, Abdul-Monem Mahmoud Khaled, previously stationed along the country's eastern border with Syria, announced his defection to the Islamic State on 14 October. Separately, a 19 year-old soldier was killed and dozens more injured in a coordinated attack on a military convoy on 17 October. The latter instigated a number of security raids on refugee camps in Bireh and Khirbet, northern Lebanon, and the detention of at least 50 Syrians believed to be linked to the Sunni terrorist groups.

The latest attacks follow several months of sectarian tensions within Lebanon between rival Sunni and Shi'ite factions. Hezbollah has been pro-active within the country and neighbouring Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, fighting daily in the eastern Bekka valley, the site of a number of refugee camps. Problematically, while the defected soldiers are unlikely to pose any strategic threat to the state, it does much to highlight tensions within the national army in regard to Hezbollah's involvement and corresponding ideological disparities. The country has been without political leadership since May, and the current security situation has meant that the possibility of a national election remains unlikely in the short term.

Moreover, as the state continues to house large numbers of Syrian refugees, demographic stability and the policing of the country's remote border areas remain central challenges. Indeed, the UN's refugee agency has placed the number of Syrian refugees in Bekka alone to be over some 400,000 individuals. A lack of political leadership in Beirut, and conflicting reports of border-area violence, hold the potential for Lebanon to collapse into civil and sectarian war. As such, international funding concentrating on both military and humanitarian support ought to be expected in the coming weeks.

Other developments

Street protests are continuing in Saudi Arabia following the death sentence handed down to Shi'ite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Beginning 15 October, a number of Saudi's minority Shi'ite population took to the streets in the country's east following the sentencing of al-Nimr for disobeying the ruling al-Saud monarchy. While the protests have been peaceful, the number of Shi'ite's publicly challenging the regime is significant. Iraq's Grand Ayatollah, Sayed Muhammed Taqi al-Modaressi, Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and Lebanon's Hezbollah have each criticised the court's decision in sentencing al-Nimr and the state's treatment of its Shi'ite communities. Protests are set to continue in the coming days.

At least 12 people were killed in Yemen's Radda district on 14 October when Houthi rebels exchanged fire with fighters from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) Ansar al-Shariah. Ten people were killed in clashes in al-Bayda province, and a further eight in the town of Ibb on 17 October. Violence has continued following AQAP's admission of guilt for a suicide bomb that killed 47 Houthis in the country's capital, Sana'a, the previous week. Both Houthi rebels and AQAP are competing for political and territorial control, and with no substantial mediating dialogue currently in place, violence will likely continue.

A roadside bomb killed seven soldiers in Egypt's northern Sinai Peninsula on 19 October. The blast reportedly ripped through an armoured vehicle heading toward suspected militant positions, killing seven and injuring six. Sinai has been Egypt's most restive region since the overthrow and imprisonment of former president Mohammed Morsi in 2013. Islamist militants and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood continue to use Sinai as an operational base to launch attacks against the state and its security forces. Sporadic violence and further targeting of security forces within the peninsula is now almost inevitable.

On the radar

- **Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi is to visit Iran on 20 October** for talks on Baghdad's struggle against the Islamic State.
- **Representatives of the Iranian government are to continue nuclear talks with the P5+1/EU3+3** in Vienna, Austria, on 22-23 October.
- **The Palestinian Authority is expected to submit a draft resolution to the UN Security Council to end Israeli occupation of its territories**, despite international pressure not to.
- **4 November marks the anniversary of the beginning of the hostage crisis at the US embassy in Tehran, Iran, in 1979**, which lasted for 444 days.

Polar regions

Russia set to expand Arctic territory by 1,165 square kilometres

After the completion of a recent cartographic survey conducted by Russian oceanographic vessels, Russia is set to expand its economic territory in the Laptev Sea by 1,165 square kilometres. The expansion comes after Russian pilots spotted a previously undiscovered island in the region in 2013. While covering a land space of only 125 by 370 metres, the island will greatly increase Russia's surrounding economic territory. The event is reminiscent of a Russian discovery in 2001 that legally granted Russia territorial sovereignty over the Sea of Okhotsk, measuring 50,000 square kilometres.

The news is significant given the Arctic's wealth in natural resources and increasing strategic significance in terms of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLoCs) and fisheries. While the resource composition of the acquired territory is not yet clear, Russia's 2001 discovery has illustrated the critical nature of these expansions, given that the Sea of Okhotsk contains 1.1 billion tonnes of oil and 2 trillion cubic metres of gas reserves.

The recent discovery forms part of an overall Russian strategic re-prioritisation regarding the Arctic. Moscow has been installing new military bases in the Arctic, as well as increasing its military aerial presence in the region, often leading to the scrambling of Norwegian, British, US and Canadian fighter jets in response. Intending to reopen all former Soviet infrastructure in the region by 2015, Moscow has maintained that it will have established a working military command structure in the Arctic by 2017.

Other developments

The US department of defence has released a climate change adaptation roadmap, recognising that climate change poses a serious and urgent national security risk. One of threats posed by climate change has been identified as the increasing traffic around the previously frozen Arctic Sea Lanes of Communication. The Pentagon claims that the increased traffic requires an increased US capacity in monitoring and disaster preparedness in the region.

A significant amount of oil has been found within the Norwegian sector of the Barents Sea. An estimated 85 to 310 million barrels of oil (or some 14 to 50 million standard cubic metres) have been discovered by Lundin Petroleum. The discovery is significant given the disappointing test-drilling season in the surrounding areas. The discovery has already come under fire from various environmental NGOs, who point out that drilling in the pristine Arctic seas is irresponsible and of potential great consequence to the regional biodiversity.

The Russian nuclear-powered submarine Yekaterinburg has re-entered service after being severely damaged in a fire in December 2011. Having undergone mooring trials for the previous four months, the submarine is to be given the green light to return to active service, and will re-establish itself within the Northern Fleet by December of this year. The fire that damaged the Yekaterinburg started while it was in a floating dock at the naval yard Roslyakovo, north of Murmansk.

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