



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 23 FEB – 01 MAR



Global Intelligence Summary

Week 8: 23 February – 01 March

Executive Summary

- **Denmark's** decision to close its inquiry into Nord Stream is **likely** indicative of the complexities of undersea investigations and will **likely** influence future undersea sabotage.
- **Israel** Defence Force (IDF) strikes in central **Lebanon** are **almost certainly** designed to degrade Hezbollah's capability and could be designed to goad Hezbollah into an almost inevitable war.
- A general strike in **Guinea** will **likely** disrupt bauxite production and if sustained will **likely** increase costs for industries dependent on aluminium.
- There is a **realistic possibility** that militant operations in southern **Burkina Faso** are indicative of an attempt to expand operations which could ultimately affect neighbouring **Togo** and **Benin**.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

AMER

- 1 US:** Texas records second-largest wildfire in US history.
- 2 Mexico:** Catholic church brokers truce between cartels
- 3 Brazil:** Over one hundred thousand gather to show support for Bolsonaro

EMEA

- 4 Baltic Sea:** Denmark closes Nord Stream investigation
- 5 Israel and the OPTs:** Dozens killed near aid convey and strikes in central Lebanon
- 6 Guinea:** Junta announces new Prime Minister amid a general strike
- 7 Burkina Faso:** Dual Terror attacks on a Church and Mosque
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- 10 Tuvalu:** New government affirms Taiwan relationship



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Texas records second-largest wildfire in state history.

A cluster of wildfires has burnt more than 1.1 million acres across the Texas Panhandle and has become the second-largest wildfire in US history. The largest fire has been named the Smoke House Creek Fire and is located north of Amarillo. The fires are being fuelled by strong winds, dry grass, and unseasonably warm temperatures. The fire prompted evacuation orders in many small towns, and a neighbourhood in Amarillo, and has led to power cuts to thousands of homes and businesses, as well as an emergency declaration in 60 counties by Republican state Governor Greg Abbott. The wildfire also prompted the shutdown of the Pantex nuclear facility near Amarillo. As of 1 March, two people have been killed by the fire.

Assessment: Rain is forecasted in the state's northern panhandle in the coming days that could aid extinguishing efforts, and the heavy deployment of firefighters is likely to continue across the panhandle until the fire is completely controlled. The Texas A&M Forest Service is also monitoring several other wildfires in the region such as the Windy Deuce Fire that has burnt more than 90,000 acres. The fires are all but certain to seriously hurt the state's economy due to agricultural losses. In 2022, the Eastland Complex wildfire, that burnt 433,000 acres, in Texas resulted in an estimated USD 23.1 million in agricultural losses due to livestock deaths, lost grazing values, and fence repair costs. The Smoke House Creek Fire has burnt more than double that and at the time of writing is estimated at being only three percent contained, indicating that the estimated cost of this fire will likely be substantially higher. The high economic loss will likely lead to this being a key topic of debate in the upcoming presidential election campaigns. Historically Democrats and Republicans have disagreed over the root cause of the increase in the rate of wildfires with the Democrats claiming that climate change is fuelling larger and less predictable fires. Conversely, Republicans believe the federal approach to fire prevention has crowded forests with dense, overgrown trees that serve to fuel the fires. With the peak wildfire season in the Texas Panhandle usually occurring in March and April, the state will likely be afflicted with more wildfires that could potentially overstretch firefighting efforts.

Mexico:

Catholic Church brokers a truce between rival cartels.

During the reporting period, the Catholic Church has helped to broker a truce between two rival cartels in the southern Mexico state of Guerrero. The truce was brokered by local clergymen with the support of bishops in the wider diocese and is between the Familia Michoacana cartel and the Tlacos gang. The ongoing regional turf war between these two cartels has been particularly violent and has shut down all non-essential movement in two of the state's cities.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the implicit understanding behind this truce is that the two cartels will simply divide up the territories which they control and subsequently charge extortion fees and traffic drugs, with a major reduction in gang-related violence. However, it should be noted that such truces are highly conditional on cartel leaders and members abiding by them and managing to establish trust with rival factions. This is invariably a fraught process; disagreements occur frequently and can often bring an immediate end to cartel truces. The fact that the truce was brokered by the Church, will likely be seen as further evidence by many Mexicans that the incumbent government's "hugs not bullets" policy is not working. Many will likely perceive that the government has effectively abdicated their responsibility to provide safe conditions and security across the country, instead leaving the responsibility to average citizens, local groups, and the Church to establish peace deals with the country's powerful and violent cartels. The

Mexican general election is scheduled for June 2024 and current polls indicate that despite a poor record on gang violence, the current Morena government is set to win. There have been no indications that the party and next likely president, Claudia Sheinbaum, will reverse the current policies, suggesting that gang violence in Mexico is unlikely to subside in the immediate future.

Brazil:

Over one hundred thousand gather to show support for former President Bolsonaro.

On 25 February, tens of thousands of supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro, gathered in Sao Paulo to demonstrate against the allegations and investigations surrounding his role in an alleged coup attempt in January 2023. If he is found guilty of the charges and allegations, then he could face imprisonment. In the wake of his election loss in January 2023, his supporters stormed and attempted to seize government buildings in Brasilia, in a manner reminiscent of the events in the United States when supporters of Donald Trump attacked the US Capitol building. It was estimated that at the demonstration there were at least 185,000 people. Bolsonaro addressed the protestors and claimed that as there were no tanks involved in the events of January 2023 it could not have been an attempted coup. Instead, he insisted that the Brazilian authorities were trying to “eliminate” him and cited the other charges he is facing such as the falsification of COVID-19 documents, and the misuse and misappropriation of government gifts from other nations, as evidence.

Assessment: At the time of writing, Bolsonaro is already barred from running for office until 2030 due to his convictions for abuse of power. Despite this, he remains active in Brazilian politics and is still the main political opponent of incumbent President Lula da Silva. This year, Sao Paulo, the nation's economic capital, will hold mayoral elections. Given the significant polarisation between supporters of Lula and Bolsonaro, this election is likely to be viewed as a showdown between the two factions and will provide an indication of voter sentiment at the halfway point in Lula's current presidential term. There is also a realistic possibility that Bolsonaro could be attempting to influence the court's decision by organising such a large demonstration, especially as any future decision made against him is likely to instigate further civil unrest across Brazil.

AMER Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

In the United States, Trump won the Republican primary in South Carolina, comfortably beating Nikki Haley in her home state. He has decisively won all the primary contests so far and as such is almost certain to be nominated as the party's presidential candidate. Despite this, Haley has vowed to continue campaigning until at least 5 March, and this is to give the still sizeable anti-trump minority within the Republican party a chance to continue to register their views. However, with Super Tuesday set for 4 March, it is highly likely that Haley's campaign will come to an abrupt end, with 15 states set to cast their ballots in presidential primaries and most indications suggesting a clear Trump victory. Mitch McConnell, the Minority Leader of the United States Senate has announced he will step down at the end of the year. He is the longest-serving party leader in Senate history, however, has publicly frozen several times recently and is now 82. There is likely to be competition for his replacement and given the continued dominance of Donald Trump within the party, it is highly likely that the next person to fill this position will be someone from the “MAGA” faction of the party. McConnell's stepping aside due to old age will also likely be used to undermine Biden's renomination, with the incumbent president regularly demonstrating age-related complications.

Major price increases are set to take place in Cuba on 1 March after the government announced that it will remove subsidies as part of an austerity programme to combat its economic crisis. Petrol is set to become five times more expensive and electricity prices will rise by 25 percent. The immediate and severe increases in prices are likely to fuel civil unrest in the country and long-

term could contribute to higher levels of crime. In December, Colombia's Lower House advanced President Petro's controversial health reforms, aiming to replace private insurers with a government service. The civilian opposition, along with Álvaro Uribe's Centro Democrático party, has scheduled a demonstration for 8 March. The protest could lead to widespread disruption if the opposition galvanises enough support.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

In Ecuador, President Noboa has announced an extension of the country's ongoing state of emergency until 7 April. This extension is designed to continue to allow the state to address its ongoing gang violence. The state of emergency has led to over 9,000 arrests since January. Critics have alleged that the extensions further allow the government to undermine several basic rights and freedoms. It is almost certain that under the extension, large waves of arrests will continue to be made. However, the simple emulation of El Salvador's state of emergency will likely not depress the country's high violence in the coming weeks. This is due to their involvement in the lucrative cocaine trade. Ecuador's criminal gangs are wealthier and better armed than their El Salvadoran counterparts, and any government moves to curb gang activity could lead to an escalation of violence.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

In Peru, the government has declared a health emergency in response to soaring cases of Dengue Fever. Already 32 have died and more than 31,000 have been infected. At least 20 of the country's 25 regions are impacted. Under the health emergency, medical staff and supplies can be shifted and reallocated more efficiently and quickly. The wave of cases has been driven by a heatwave which was then followed by heavy rain creating the "perfect breeding conditions" for mosquitoes. The government has also stated that climate change has meant that Peru's old measures of dealing with outbreaks are increasingly outdated and ineffective. It is almost certain that cases will continue to rise over the coming weeks and months, whilst the weather will remain favourable to the spread of the disease as the country is in the middle of the El Niño phenomenon which provides warmer and wetter weather.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Baltic Sea:

Denmark closes investigation into Nord Stream.

On 26 February, Denmark announced that it was following in the steps of Sweden and closing its investigation into the Nord Stream pipeline blasts. Denmark had opened an investigation after a series of explosions were recorded in the Baltic Sea in September 2022, which ruptured the multi-billion-dollar Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines that transported gas from Russia to Germany. The explosions pointed towards an act of deliberate sabotage and released vast amounts of methane into the air. The explosions occurred several months after Russia invaded Ukraine and triggered mutual accusations of blame between the West and Moscow. The Kremlin asserts that both Denmark and Sweden have dropped their investigations as there was likely evidence which suggested the sabotage had been conducted by their close allies. German authorities are continuing their investigation of the incident.

Assessment: The closed investigations into Nord Stream are likely indicative of the complexities of operating and investigating in the underwater environment or at sea. When vessels are not propagating on their automatic identification systems (AIS) or being actively monitored by military or coastguard assets, there are few ways to track them or identify their historic activity. Moreover, the monitoring of sub-surface activity is even more challenging with only military assets capable of detecting and responding to threats at these depths and distances. The failure to identify and prosecute any culprit will likely influence state and non-state actors to conduct future undersea sabotage against adversary critical national infrastructure (CNI). Undersea sabotage is not a new phenomenon and has primarily been aimed towards gas and oil infrastructure. However, as the world becomes more dependent on the Internet, there are growing fears that undersea telecommunication cables will be targeted. Recent reports indicate that undersea Internet cables between Djibouti and Saudi Arabia have been damaged, which will invariably take months to repair and likely cost millions. The difficulty in proving attribution has already led to accusations that it was the Houthis, Iran, Israel and even Russia. It is estimated that 97 percent of the world's Internet traffic passes through undersea cables and over USD 10 trillion in daily transactions. Damage to these cables could cause widespread economic disruption and even affect sensitive communication. State actors like Russia and China are likely mapping submarine cables and investing in capabilities to conduct underwater sabotage. Both countries have fleets capable of deploying autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), and deep-submergence vehicles (DSVs), equipped with advanced SONAR systems to explore the seabed and identify cable locations. However, as this equipment becomes cheaper and more widespread, it is likely that non-state actors, especially when backed by major countries, will be able to achieve undersea sabotage, as potentially evidenced by the Houthis.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

IDF strikes in central Lebanon raise the prospect of all-out war with Hezbollah.

During the reporting period, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have continued to conduct division-level clearance operations in the northern Gaza Strip and additional clearance operations in Khan Younis where they continue to meet heavier-than-expected resistance. On 28 February, the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry claimed that 104 people died in northern Gaza after IDF forces fired on them near a humanitarian aid convoy. The IDF contend that civilians were killed as a result of the crowding near the convoy and only fired on individuals who directly threatened IDF troops. The United States has warned Israel that a "total breakdown of law and order" is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the strip. On 29 February, Several Palestinian factions, including Fatah, met in Moscow to discuss the formation of a new Palestinian government. The IDF and Hezbollah continue to exchange fire across the Israel-Lebanon border. However, IDF jets have now conducted strikes away from the border region and have targeted areas of the Hezbollah stronghold in Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley, approximately 100km away from the Israeli border.

Assessment: The humanitarian convoy incident is almost certainly indicative of the desperation in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the north which has been cut off from adequate supplies of humanitarian aid for weeks. The incident will likely put further pressure on the Netanyahu administration to decrease the intensity of operations in the Gaza Strip and transition to more targeted operations against Hamas. The IDF has yet to commit to a ground offensive in Rafah and continues to set Ramadan as the deadline for any operations. Any offensive in Rafah, where an estimated 1.5 million people are seeking shelter, will almost certainly provoke widespread condemnation and there is a realistic possibility that this is a strategic bluff from Israel designed to place pressure on Hamas to release remaining Israeli hostages or cede to Israeli terms. The meeting of Palestinian factions in Moscow is likely an attempt to establish a united Palestinian front for negotiations with Israel. However, this process will likely be frustrated by long-standing factionalism and rivalries, as evidenced by the recent resignation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. IDF strikes in the Bekaa Valley are almost certainly an indication of Israel wanting to degrade Hezbollah's military capability before it can be deployed against Israel. The Bekaa Valley strikes are Israel's most significant strikes against Hezbollah since its strikes in Beirut in January. These strikes have prompted concerns that a war between Israel and Hezbollah is becoming almost inevitable, and it is likely that Israel is actively trying to goad Hezbollah into a war. Iran has enabled Hezbollah to build up a rocket inventory in southern Lebanon that is estimated at 150,000 rockets, with longer range systems capable of targeting the entirety of Israel. War with Hezbollah will provide Israel the opportunity to degrade this military capability and would degrade Iran's deterrence strategy.

Guinea:

Junta announces new prime minister amid general strike.

On 26 February, workers across Guinea commenced a general strike which saw streets empty, banks and businesses close and led to disruption to the country's important extractive sector. The strike has been organised by the Guinean Trade Union Movement and includes the public, private, and informal sectors of the national economy, it is indefinite, and as such will last until the organisers feel their demands have been met. These demands include the release of political prisoners, a lowering of food prices, and the lifting of media censorship. Less than 24 hours later, the country's junta announced that they had appointed the one-time opposition leader and respected economist, Mamadou Oury Bah, to the post of prime minister and had granted him the powers to form a new government.

Assessment: The country's general strike has already had some international ramifications as it has resulted in a spike in the international price of bauxite, almost certainly a consequence of Guinea being the world's second-largest producer of the mineral. It is almost certain the price will rise further as the strike persists, and the world begins to consume stored inventories of bauxite. As bauxite is primarily used for the production of aluminium, there is a realistic possibility that a sustained strike could have a significant impact on multiple industries that use the metal, with aluminium being widely used in packaging, food products, the car industry and innumerable other industries. How the junta responds to the strike will be seen as a key test. Under the junta, censorship has become commonplace and the right to protest curtailed, and the longer and more damaging this strike becomes, the higher the likelihood that it results in a violent crackdown against those involved. However, there currently appears to be little crackdown. There is a realistic possibility that this is because even government officials have gone on the record stating they support this strike. The nomination of Bah to the post of prime minister was almost certainly designed to quell the strike. Bah commands much respect across Guinea for his time as an opposition activist and his role as an economist could help restore faith in the handling of the country's economy, with many Guineans struggling with inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. However, by agreeing to become the new prime minister and therefore agreeing to work with the junta, Bah may have alienated some of his supporters and provided an additional stimulus for political instability in the country.

Burkina Faso:

Dual Terror attacks on a church and mosque.

On 25 February, two major attacks took place on separate places of worship in Burkina Faso. In Natiaboani, in the country's eastern region, a mosque was invaded during morning prayers by "machine gun-wielding insurgents on motorcycles" and they left "dozens" dead. Meanwhile, in the north-east of the country, Islamist militants entered a Catholic church during mass and killed at least 15 worshippers. Whilst no groups have stepped forward to claim either attack, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) is alleged to have entered Natiaboani and seized an army barracks on the same day as the mosque attack.

Comment: The country, which lies in the wider Sahel region of Africa, has been battling extremists since 2011, and this has slowly evolved into a multi-faceted security crisis involving bandits, militants, and jihadist insurgencies. The lack of security triggered two coups between 2021 and 2022, as soldiers and citizens became increasingly discontent and the country's deteriorating situation. During this period, attacks on Christians in the country have been common and have often been claimed by Islamist militants, and such a group is highly likely behind this most recent church attack. Given that Essakane village is situated in the "three borders" zone in the northeast of the country, near the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger it is also possible that the attack was carried out by a group based in Mali or Niger, with both countries also being run by junta governments and struggling to contain Islamist militancy. It is however far more unusual for mosques to be attacked in the country, and whilst no one has claimed responsibility there is a realistic probability it was JNIM. Reports indicate that JNIM had recently entered Natiaboani and seized the army barracks. If the mosque was known to be frequented by Burkinabe military personnel or civilian defence forces loyal to the junta government, it would likely have been perceived as a legitimate target by the Islamist group that has ties to Al Qaeda. JNIM has long sought to establish an Islamic State in the Sahel and has conducted a myriad of attacks against civilians to undermine the junta and previous civilian governments, which it almost certainly views as heretical, un-Islamic and inconsistent with strict Sharia law. The attack in Natiaboani could also be part of JNIM's wider strategy of spreading into the neighbouring countries yet to be destabilised by Islamist violence. The town is less than 100km away from the borders of Benin and Togo and lies on a major supply route. By driving out the army, there is a realistic possibility that JNIM could be seeking to expand its influence in the south of Burkina Faso and ultimately expand its operations into the stable and more Western-leaning Benin and Togo where it already has a minor foothold. To contain the violence, the post-coup government of Burkina Faso has been deepening ties with Russia and could look to Russia's rebranded Wagner Group, the Africa Corps, to ensure security in exchange for mineral extraction contracts favourable to Moscow.

Burundi:

Nine fatalities following armed rebel attack in western Burundi.

On 25 February, gunmen from the Red Tabara rebel group killed nine and injured others in an attack in the Ginhanga area of Bubanza in western Burundi. The rebel group confirmed via the social media platform, X, that it had conducted the attack on two Burundian military positions at around 21:30 local time and seized several weapons and ammunition in the process. The Burundian government condemned the attack and then accused Rwanda, whom it alleges has been training and providing arms and ammunition to the Red Tabara group. This is the second recent incident of note from the Red Tabara group following the attack on the village of Vugizo in December 2023 that resulted in the deaths of 20 people. The Red Tabara group was formed in 2015 in the wake of the Burundian political crisis and is opposed to the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy.

Assessment: As per the United Nations and several independent reports, it is highly likely that Rwanda is backing the Red Tabara group in Burundi. Relations between Burundi and Rwanda are almost certain to continue to deteriorate further following the recent accusations and the decision

in Bujumbura to close its border with Rwanda. Rwanda has become increasingly present in the global spotlight for accusations that it is funding both the Red Tabara group in Burundi and also the March 23 Movement (M23) that is causing widespread instability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Accusations suggest that Kigali is supporting the rebel groups as a means to destabilise both countries and to afford Rwanda greater access to mineral extraction. Whilst Rwanda is on cooperative terms with many Western states, there have been increasing calls for Western governments to sanction Rwanda over its alleged funding and training of various militant groups. However, the West will likely be reticent to sanction a developing African country still recovering from genocide. Moreover, the sanctioning of African nations has often persuaded them to pivot to strategic competitors such as Russia and China. Regional instability is likely a major concern for Burundi, where there are almost certainly fears the instability will not be contained within the DRC's borders. To mitigate against this, Burundi has covertly deployed its troops into the DRC to stop the advances of M23 and has even detained its troops who have refused to deploy. In addition, it is estimated that 85 percent of Burundi belong to the Hutu group and approximately 14 percent are Tutsi, the two ethnicities involved in the Rwandan genocide. Consequently, there are likely fears in Burundi that ethnic divisions could be provoked within its borders should there be a continued deterioration in regional stability.

EMEA Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

In France, protests broke out at the Paris Agricultural Fair upon President Macron's arrival. Macron later met with protesters and promised to establish "floor prices" for each product to ensure income stability. An emergency plan was announced on 26 February to provide financial relief to struggling farms. However, it is likely the plan will not go far enough, and more demonstrations are anticipated in the future. Lufthansa ground staff are set to strike again for three days starting from 06:00 am 6 March. This strike is expected to cause widespread disruption to German aviation. Travellers will likely seek alternative means of transportation such as Deutsche Bahn (DB) and Autobahns, leading to potentially heavier traffic than usual. Parliamentary elections were held on 25 February in Belarus and only candidates from four registered political parties, each of which is pro-government, were allowed to stand. Civil unrest is unlikely due to several draconian measures introduced after the 2020 protests. However, Belarussian dissidents based in Poland have declared that they are preparing to conduct a coup against President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime but are waiting for Putin's defeat in Ukraine. As of 1 March, citizens of North Macedonia may experience a new price shock as the measure protecting prices for certain basic food products is scheduled to end. An increase in food prices could potentially lead to civil unrest. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has announced its intention to lift travel, economic, and commercial sanctions on Niger. While officials claim it is to assist with a growing humanitarian crisis, it has likely been seen as an attempt to discourage Niger from leaving the bloc. Niger's planned exit could result in a complicated disentanglement from the bloc's trade and service flows, valued at nearly USD 150 billion annually. The removal of sanctions will also likely be seen in part as a recognition of the junta government and will do little to deter other coups in the region. Senegal's President Macky Sall has decided to step down, introduce an amnesty bill and propose that postponed elections now take place in June. Sall's decision to stay in power had been condemned by opposition groups in the country and these decisions are likely to reduce the civil unrest which has caused widespread disruption in the country. Nigeria's union workers have initiated a nationwide general strike in response to inflation and escalating economic challenges. The policies implemented by President Tinubu, which have led to the devaluation of the naira, are a key factor contributing to the current situation. While these policies may be economically sound in the long term, they have intensified the existing economic difficulties faced by Nigerians. On 28 February Ghana's parliament approved a strict anti-LGBTQ+ law that severely restricts the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and those advocating for the community. The law imposes a five-year imprisonment term for anyone found promoting, sponsoring, or supporting LGBTQ+ activities. There is a realistic possibility that the law could spark demonstrations in the country, both against and in support of the development.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan remain high after two Azerbaijani soldiers breached the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and infiltrated the Tegh village in the Syunik region. Shots were fired at the village from the Azerbaijani side, resulting in one of the soldiers being killed by Armenian forces. Peace talks have resumed in Berlin, however, if Baku's demand for unfettered access to its exclave of Nakhchivan is not met, continued border skirmishes are highly likely. Fears of another coup were sparked after gunshots were heard in Chad's capital of N'Djamena on 28 February. However, reports indicate that Yaya Dillo, the leader of the opposition was killed by government troops at his Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF) headquarters. The assassination comes just months before the country's election in May and suggests that the military government has no plans to transition back to democracy. In Mozambique, officials report that more than 70,000 people have now been displaced from the Cabo Delgado region due to an increase in Islamic State-linked militant attacks since late December. While attacks have primarily been restricted to Cabo Delgado, there are concerns they could spread to other areas such as Maputo and Tanzania, prompting humanitarian concerns and fears over regional stability.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Zambia has declared a national disaster due to a devastating drought, which has affected over one million households and has likely been exacerbated by the combined effect of the El Nino weather phenomenon and climate change. President Hakainde Hichilema has warned of the devastating affect the drought has had on agriculture, suggesting that almost half of the nation's planted area has been destroyed. In addition, there are major power supply concerns, particularly in hydroelectric power. Zambia will likely be forced to import electricity, ration resources, and realign its budget to address the crisis, and the drought has prompted fears concerning food insecurity, at a time when the country also struggles with a cholera outbreak.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

Myanmar:

Mass conscription by the Junta prompts fears of mass migration.

In the last reporting period, the Thai Foreign Ministry announced over 7,000 Myanmar nationals had applied for visas to emigrate to Thailand and queues of up to 2,000 people were formed outside the Thai Embassy in Yangon. The mass applications have been attributed to the recent implementation of mass conscription laws by the Military Council on 10 February. The laws, which are set to see 60,000 forcefully conscripted annually, are a result of recent successive losses by the Junta military, concentrated in Rakhine and Mon state. At least 5,000 are expected to be conscripted by mid-April following the Thingyan New Celebration, to alleviate the strains on the 100,000 currently serving soldiers of the Military Council. The announcement of conscription followed a series of successive defeats to the ongoing Operation 1027 offensive by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA).

Assessment: The ongoing emigration of Myanmar's youth population is expected to persist in the coming weeks, posing a significant challenge to the Military Council's authority and could ultimately degrade the Junta's ability to bolster its armed forces. The recent consecutive defeats against the Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA) have likely stemmed from poor military planning and decisions, but primarily from a general reluctance to fight, a sentiment that is almost certainly mirrored among the wider population. The breakdown of Chinese-mediated ceasefire negotiations earlier this year dealt a blow to the Junta's military campaign and denied it the ability to regroup. A failure to conscript the youth, many of which are also moving within Myanmar itself, will likely cause government forces to become overburdened, exhausted, and depleted. However, the most damaging effect of the youth emigration will likely be regarding Myanmar's relations with its neighbours. It is estimated that over 1,000 migrants will flee to Thailand daily. This will likely strain Thai border security but could also have negative effects for the Thai economy, which could ultimately lead to the persecution of migrants. Moreover, Myanmar's economy is heavily dependent on trade with Thailand and mass migration could force Bangkok to close its border and suspend trade with its western neighbour. Such a scenario will almost certainly lead to a further deterioration in the humanitarian situation, especially as Thailand represents one of the country's main trading partners and is hugely reliant on Thai foreign investment.

Tuvalu:

The new government re-affirms ties with Taiwan.

In the run-up to the country's general election, it was hinted that the nation could shift its diplomatic recognition to Beijing, a prospect which then seemed more credible as the country's pro-Taiwan leader, Kausea Natano, was ousted. However, on 26 February, the new government, led by Feleti Teo announced in a document titled "Statement of Priorities" that Tuvalu is committed to a long-term and lasting special relationship with the Republic of China (Taiwan), and that the relation is firm, rock solid and everlasting. Alongside this, reaffirmation of ties with Taiwan, the statement of priorities also mentioned reopening dialogue with Australia over a wide-ranging security pact which was signed last year.

Comment: Tuvalu is just one of twelve states left in the world which fully recognise and have diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The fact that several Pacific islands have recently switched recognition to Beijing combined with the hints in the run-up to the general election helped to fuel speculation that Tuvalu may follow. Whilst economically, China offers far more, it is likely that Tuvalu, which has been a full democracy since gaining independence from Britain in the 1970s

sees the value in remaining allied with Taiwan, another island state which respects the values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. Most recently, neighbouring Nauru switched recognition to Beijing less than 48 hours after Taiwan's presidential elections in January 2024, and this was partially driven by offers of economic assistance and financial aid which Taiwan simply could not, match. The resumption of dialogue with Australia concerning a security pact is likely further evidence that Tuvalu will remain allied to Taiwan and will continue to drift towards a growing Indo-Pacific alliance designed to counter Chinese influence in the region.

APAC Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

Iranians have begun to vote in the first elections since the 2022 anti-government protests. The parliamentary elections will select members of the country's 290-seat legislature, but opposition parties have called for a boycott and voter turnout is expected to be very low. Low voter turnout will likely be an indication of widespread dissatisfaction with the regime, which will almost certainly maintain the most power. In Pakistan, political instability is expected to persist following the elections and amid ongoing issues involving former Prime Minister Imran Khan. There is a high probability of protests similar to those in Karachi during this reporting period. If protestors attempt to defy the current Section 144 notice, which prohibits public gatherings for at least 30 days in Karachi, authorities are likely to respond with strong force. Sri Lanka has issued a warning to over 280,000 Russians on tourist visas, most of whom arrived after Russia's "partial mobilisation," that they must leave within two weeks. This follows a national backlash against illegal Russian-run businesses, some of which have adopted a "whites only" policy. Initially welcomed for their potential economic boost, the government now faces the challenge of enforcing these departures while balancing the much-needed income these Russians generate for the country's struggling economy.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

On February 29, Indian External Affairs Ministry spokespersons announced plans to replace military personnel with civilians in the Maldives, responding to President Randhir Jaiswal's call to remove the Indian military presence by May 10. The withdrawal is likely to ease tensions between the Pro-Chinese Jaiswal administration and India, following a series of confrontations fuelled by India's historical dominance over the region. Between 4 and 14 March, South Korea and the US will conduct annual drills to prepare for a potential nuclear attack from North Korea. These exercises often lead to increased activity from North Korea and could lead to more missile test launches. The drills are expected to trigger strong rhetoric from Pyongyang, suggesting that Seoul and Washington are deliberately escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. China has continued to exert its control over its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Floating barriers or "booms" have been observed over the entrance of the Scarborough Shoal, an area where vessels from the Philippines and China routinely clash. If the booms prove successful in blocking or deterring Filipino vessels, China will likely emulate this tactic across the South China Sea where it has multiple disputed claims. In the last reporting period, Hong Kong's controversial Article 23 national security law passed a consultation period and is set to be approved by city legislators in the coming weeks. The passing of the law is likely to create further tensions with the United Kingdom, as the vague definitions of sedition and foreign interference threaten the freedoms guaranteed to citizens by the Sino-British Joint Declaration following Hong Kong's independence in 1997.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

A province-wide alert has been issued in Sindh, Pakistan after unseasonably heavy rain has affected much of the province. In Karachi, many offices have been shut and the city's poor drainage system could result in flooding, with more rain forecasted for 1-2 March. South Korea's government is threatening legal action and revocation of medical licenses against thousands of striking junior doctors if they don't return to work. The doctors are protesting plans to admit more medical students, citing concerns about diluted care, which has led to widespread disruptions in

hospitals and the cancellation of surgeries. On 23 February, 15 people were killed and dozens injured by a fire that ripped through an apartment block in Nanjing, China. This fire follows a series of high-profile residential fires in China and will likely put pressure on local authorities to improve building safety measures. China frequently experiences deadly fires due to lax enforcement of safety standards. In the coming weeks, Nanjing city, where the fire occurred, is likely to announce arrests of officials and property developers blamed for the fire but will unlikely address the underlying issues. In Mongolia, severe winter weather has triggered multiple weather alerts, resulting in the deaths of almost three million animals. This loss poses significant challenges for the country's nomadic herders, who rely on these animals for their livelihoods. Mongolia has a history of extreme weather, but the government attributes this recent bout to the exacerbating effects of climate change. Continued impacts of this nature could pose a severe threat to Mongolia's traditional nomadic way of life.

