



# Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 08 MAR – 15 MAR



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Week 10: 08 March – 15 March

## Executive Summary

- Multiple dengue fever-related states of emergency in **Brazil** will **almost certainly** overstretch the healthcare system and **likely** reveal an expansion of the disease's range due to climate change.
- Unprecedented cyber-attacks on **French** departments point towards **Russian** involvement and will **almost certainly** concern authorities with the Paris Olympics looming.
- Al-Shabaab's attack on a government-linked hotel in Mogadishu will **likely** force the **Somali** government into expanding operations against the al-Qaeda-linked group and incite further attacks.
- In **India**, Prime Minister Modi's new citizenship law, which only applies to non-Muslims, is **almost certain** to provoke further sectarian violence and discrimination.

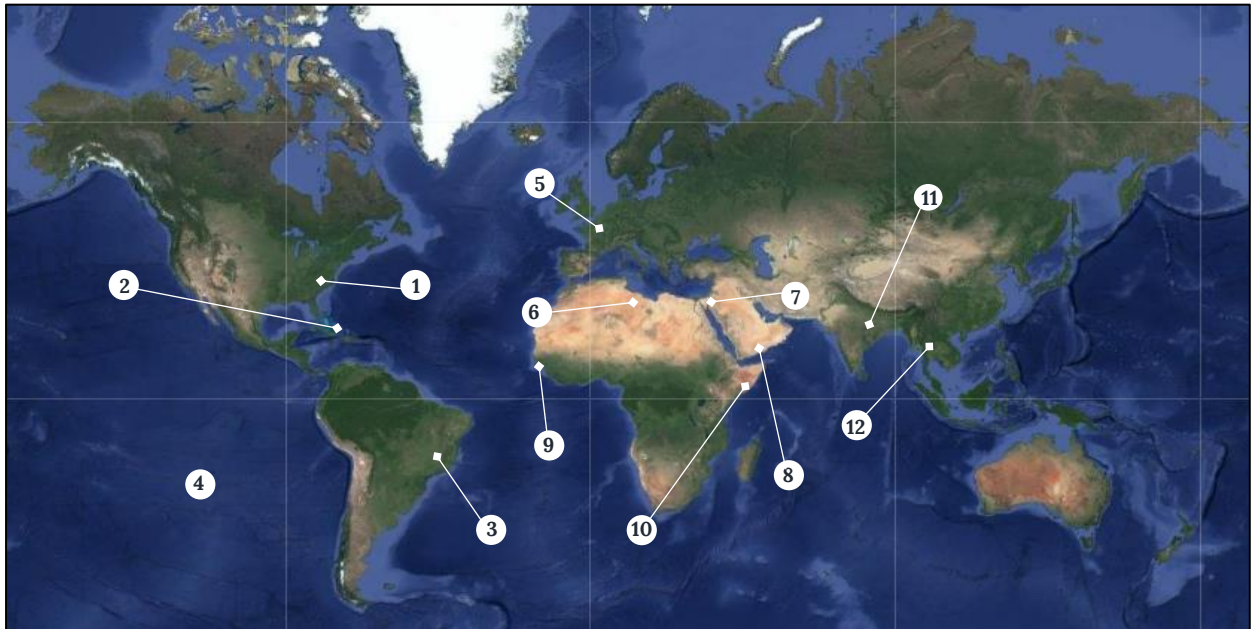


Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

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## Americas (AMER)

### USA:

#### House of Representatives passes bill potentially banning TikTok.

On 13 March, US representatives voted to approve legislation that would ban TikTok in the United States if its parent company, ByteDance, refuses to sell it within six months. The bill will now move to the Senate, and President Joe Biden has stated that he will immediately sign it were it to reach his desk. TikTok and ByteDance, which is headquartered in Beijing, have repeatedly denied accusations of constituting a national security threat, and of being controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

**Assessment:** The bill has bipartisan support and will likely reach the President's desk. While former President Donald Trump had called, unsuccessfully, for TikTok to be banned in 2020, the popularity of the new proposal certainly underscores how the US has finalised its commitment to a foreign policy that is openly hostile to Beijing and driven by the principle of containment. TikTok is banned in China, where a substitute app – Douyin – features a series of additional limitations, restricting users' screen time and utilising an algorithm which boosts videos promoting patriotic and government-friendly discourses. US bipartisan opposition to TikTok is likely driven both by worries about the app's data management practices and about its potential to shift domestic political discourses against US national interests. Despite his past calls to ban the platform, Trump opposes the bill because it may benefit Meta – a platform which he accuses of spreading narratives hostile to him and his political positions, and which has banned his social media accounts – and constitute a precedent to ban other social media platforms – likely hinting at apps aligned with his political views, such as Truth Social. However, it is very unlikely that the bill will be used for domestic, partisan reasons in the short term. Rather, it is almost certain that a possible ban on TikTok will further accelerate the global trend towards the “regionalisation” of online spaces. Likely, a US TikTok ban will provoke a reaction by Brussels. The EU has heavily invested in exporting its own online regulations, under the umbrella of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), beyond its borders, and has recently also made efforts to restrict TikTok's reach in its digital space. The EU may therefore take advantage of Washington's break with TikTok to further adjust its own position, possibly reaching a more moderate compromise with Beijing. Finally, Trump's assessment that a TikTok ban will aid Meta is likely correct. In recent years, Meta has launched initiatives to combat its main competitors: the message board app Threads as a direct response to X/Twitter, and the Instagram feature “Reels” as one to TikTok. If TikTok is banned, this will likely result in a greater centralisation of user traffic onto a more restricted number of social media sites. Finally, the ban may create future risks for information providers situated outside of the US, or for those looking to enter the US market in the future, likely creating further incentives for in-platform moderation and management.

### Haiti:

#### Prime Minister Ariel Henry resigns as country's descent into chaos accelerates.

The situation in Haiti continues to worsen. On 11 March, Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who is still stranded in Puerto Rico as gangs and rioters have shut down the Port-au-Prince airport, announced his resignation. Simultaneously, foreign diplomats have left the country, as Kenya declared further delays in the deployment of its much-needed UN-backed police force. The humanitarian situation in the country is now catastrophic, with widespread violence mostly affecting the civilian population, especially women, children, and the elderly.

**Assessment:** The humanitarian catastrophe in Haiti is likely to continue, as no viable political alternative can currently fill the void left by the collapsing state apparatus. The leading gang

network, known as “G9” and led by Jimmy “Barbecue” Chérizier, is reported as being involved in constant clashes with other militias and criminal groups, and, despite its claims to have created a politically stable coalition of armed groups, is very likely to continue negatively affecting the country’s ongoing societal collapse. Predictions of increased migrant outflows have materialised over the last reporting period, with massive increases of pressure at the Haiti-Dominican Republic border, which has also seen massive repatriation efforts on the part of Dominican forces. The number of internally displaced Haitians is now 350,000, and this is likely to further increase in the immediate future. The risk of regional stabilisation remains high, as well as that of violence erupting at the Haiti-Dominican Republic border. Without the deployment of a sizeable international force, it is extremely likely that humanitarian conditions within Haiti will remain catastrophic, with extremely severe risks to individuals and physical assets. Transport and business in Haiti remain very unlikely to return to a normal or viable level, and broader operations within the island of Hispaniola are likely to be affected.

## Brazil:

### Brazil facing dengue fever epidemic.

Brazil is struggling to contain a dengue fever epidemic that has broken out in at least six states in addition to the Federal District and has resulted in a state of emergency being issued in 17 cities. The epidemic is the worst national health crisis since COVID-19 and has led to concerns that Brazil’s public healthcare system, known as SUS, will collapse. SUS has resorted to building field hospitals due to a lack of hospital beds and has rolled out out Japan’s Qdenga two-dose vaccine to those deemed most at risk. Neighbouring Peru and Argentina are also dealing with major outbreaks, with Paraguay registering almost 100,000 countries in the first two months of 2024.

**Assessment:** Dengue fever is a viral infection transmitted by the Aedes mosquito species, primarily the Aedes aegypti. It is prevalent in tropical and subtropical regions around the world and thrives in stagnant water. Brazil is acutely at risk from the disease, with widespread inequality, poverty, disorganised urban planning, poor sanitation, and an over-stretched public healthcare system all compounding the situation. Brazil has already registered one million cases of the disease and is estimated to register over four million by the year’s end. Whilst the fatality rate of the disease is typically under one percent, given the extent of cases the disease will likely kill thousands, especially as there is a current vaccine shortage. In severe cases of dengue known as dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) or dengue shock syndrome (DSS), the fatality rate can be as high as 20 percent if left untreated- a major concern for the millions of Brazilians who live in poor rural communities or in the country’s impoverished informal urban settlements known as favelas, where sanitation is inadequate and where pools of stagnant water are commonplace. The extent of South America’s dengue epidemic has been exacerbated by the El Niño effect, which brings warmer temperatures and more rain, creating more breeding sites and increasing the range of the Aedes aegypti mosquito. However, the general range of the mosquito is also likely increasing as a result of climate change, which could ultimately spread the disease into more temperate climes. In 2023 there were record levels of dengue fever in southern Europe and the disease has become more prevalent in the southern United States. The quality of sanitation, advanced healthcare, use of ventilation systems, screened windows and harsher winters will invariably help to attenuate the spread in the temperate and developing world. However, it is almost certain that climate change will result in an extended mosquito season in much of the developing world where it is already endemic, with under-developed healthcare systems likely to struggle with a forecasted surge in cases.

## Argentina:

### As inflation slows down, Milei’s authoritarianism speeds up.

Buenos Aires’ monthly inflation rate slowed to 13.2 per cent in February, down from 20.6 per cent in January, as the country continues to deal with increased costs of living and prices, and with

the world's highest overall inflation rate (rising to 276 per cent on 12 March). President Javier Milei, a self-described "anarcho-capitalist", has implemented extreme austerity and increasingly draconian measures to combat the country's long-standing economic instability and a myriad of other issues such as crime. On 12 March, Milei responded to the governor of Santa Fe province and deployed federal security forces to the city of Rosaria, to take on gangs. Milei decreed that the city had been overrun by "narco-terrorists" and blamed the situation on "socialists".

**Assessment:** Milei's economic reforms have sparked massive waves of protests across the country, which are very unlikely to subside in the short term despite growth in inflation slightly slowing down last month. Buenos Aires has increasingly responded to protests with violent crackdowns, a trend that is only likely to worsen as the reforms continue to not deliver tangible results. The government's recent adoption of a tougher, more militarised stance on crime is likely intended both as a measure to increase support at home and as a public diplomacy gesture abroad. The release of pictures showing arrested gang members kneeling in rows while being guarded by heavily armed special force operatives, which have multiplied in number over the past weeks, are almost certainly a nod to similarly draconian measures taken by El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele. Bukele's methods have been met with both condemnation and praise, as they have effectively managed to significantly decrease the country's violent crime rates. By following Bukele's example of increased police militarisation, Milei may however also seek to stifle internal dissent, creating possibilities for further police crackdowns. Milei has also slashed the public sector bureaucracy, which could lead to greater centralisation of power in Argentina. While it is unlikely that Argentina will spiral into authoritarianism in the short term, the Milei government may have a negative impact on Argentina's risk levels. A more militarised police force, deployed against protesters, may also pose risks for humanitarian activists and journalists active in the country, as well as pose both indirect and direct threats to travellers in the country. Protests, and police intervention, may block roadways and impede business operations. Finally, it is important to note that late February saw Argentina's poverty levels skyrocket to 57.4 per cent. This factor, alongside worsening social conditions, will almost certainly translate to significant increases in the risk of petty and violent crime targeting individuals and physical assets, as well as political violence.

## AMER Summary and Forecast:

### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

A US Supreme Court stay on a controversial immigration-enforcement law in **Texas** will end 18 March if no further action is taken. Critics warn that if the court allows the law to take effect, states will have "broad leeway" to act against foreign nationals, which could come to the detriment of international relations. On 9 March, a US court found former **Honduran** president Juan Orlando Hernandez guilty of colluding with drug cartels to facilitate cocaine smuggling operations into the US. US prosecutors accuse Hernandez of turning the country into a "narco-state" during his tenure as president between 2014 and 2022. Hernandez was a long-standing US ally during his presidency, receiving more than USD 50 million in aid to combat the narcotics trade. Sentencing, scheduled to take place in June, is very likely to return a severe sentence, as Hernandez potentially faces life imprisonment. President Maduro has been selected by the ruling United Socialist Party as its candidate for **Venezuela's** presidential elections in July where he will contest a third term. Maduro is almost certain to win given that nearly all other challengers are barred, exiled or in prison. Further democratic backsliding in the run-up could trigger the imposition of sanctions on Venezuela or lead to civil unrest, as demonstrated by the 2019 political crisis. In **Argentina**, expect further policy uncertainty in the next reporting period for Milei despite the drop in inflation. This comes after the country's senate rejected his proposed mega-decree of reforms, a significant policy setback for him, and his second major setback after his earlier "omnibus" law was rejected.

### Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

Authorities in **El Salvador** have extended the state of emergency for the 24<sup>th</sup> time in a bid to further reduce gang activity. By 27 March, the state of emergency would have been active for two years. Whilst these draconian measures have led to a drastic reduction in homicide rates and associated gang crime, they have also been lambasted for their overreach and have prompted fears that President Bukele is consolidating power as a constitutional dictator, particularly after his contentious re-election in February. However, his methods have proven popular in Latin American countries plagued by gangs. Similar methods have been employed by Honduras, Ecuador and even Argentina, with citizens of Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia and Guatemala even taking to the streets demanding their governments follow suit.

#### **Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.**

Tornadoes have hit several areas of the **US** states of **Ohio** and **Indiana** resulting in at least three fatalities and injuring dozens more. Rescue efforts are likely to last days and thousands remain without power. Water levels in much of **Mexico** continue to be way below normal levels, prompting fears that Mexico Coty could run out of water in a matter of months. The crisis has forced authorities into seeking to extract more water from the subsoil. However, almost 60 percent of the wells in Mexico are assessed to contain contaminants, including heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury and lead. Should the authorities pursue this course of action it is likely that a health crisis will materialise.





## Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

### France:

#### French departments hit by unprecedented cyber-attacks.

On 11 March, France's prime minister's office announced that multiple government departments had been hit by cyber-attacks of an "unprecedented intensity". The French government has stated that it activated a crisis cell to deal with the attacks and to deploy countermeasures. A distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack was used to disrupt government network infrastructure and was claimed by the hacktivist group, Anonymous Sudan, via their official Telegram channel. Government departments affected included the French Interministerial Directorate of Digital Affairs (DINUM), Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, National Geographic Institute, Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, and Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion.

**Assessment:** The French government has issued a statement suggesting that there is no current indication that the attacks can be attributed to the Russian state, or entities aligned with Russia. Anonymous Sudan has been known to target countries and organisations for their "anti-Muslim activity". It has recently targeted several African countries for their hosting of the leader of the Rapid Support Forces of Sudan who are currently fighting against Sudanese government forces. However, there is evidence to suggest that the group is affiliated with other pro-Russian hacktivist groups. Some analysts even suggest that the hacktivist group is a proxy of the Russian state or even directly funded by the Kremlin. The group's origins, modus operandi and levels of financial backing indicate that the group is likely state-sponsored. Moreover, the group originated in 2023, halfway through the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and originally posted on Telegram predominantly in Russian and English, only later adopting Arabic. Whilst the group has attacked entities that fit their narrative of being "anti-Muslim", it has also attacked a myriad of countries and organisations that could be perceived as anti-Russia. In 2018, the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) exposed Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) for pretending to be a cyber group related to the Islamic State (IS), known as the "Cyber Caliphate". GCHQ's investigation suggests that this technique, which affords Russia a high degree of plausible deniability, is straight from the Russian intelligence playbook. A Russian-backed cyber group would have likely attacked France for its continued support for Kyiv and President Macron's recent comments regarding putting NATO boots on the ground in Ukraine. With France scheduled to host the Olympics in July, there is a realistic possibility that such an attack was strategic messaging from the Kremlin. The Paris Olympics is set to be the most digital to date and a test bed for the application of artificial intelligence. To mitigate against future attacks, the French government has stated that they are taking appropriate measures to counter these cyber threats and safeguard their systems ahead of the event.

### Libya:

#### Libyan leaders agree on deal to form new government.

On 10 March, president of the Presidential Council (PC), Mohamed Menfi, head of the High State Council (HSC), Mohamed Takala, and speaker of the House of Representatives (HoR), Aguila Saleh declared that they had agreed to form a unified government to supervise new elections. The agreement, which is sponsored by the Arab League and was followed by a call for assistance to the UN and international community, creates an opening for a deal between the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the HoR, supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA) of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. In 2021, elections in Libya failed to materialise, despite UN support.

**Assessment:** The ongoing conflict in Libya has dragged on for more than a decade, creating one of the MENA regions' worst ongoing crises and failing to fill the void left in the aftermath of the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Libya has been a battlefield for competing international powers, as well as one of the epicentres of the migration crisis sweeping the Mediterranean. In February, the GNU achieved what is likely a significant success after striking a deal with armed militia groups, with the latter agreeing to abandon the country's capital, Tripoli, by the end of Ramadan. This development is significant, as it will likely substantially diminish the risk of violence and civil unrest in the urban centre, of which militia groups have historically been the main cause. Albeit approaches for an agreement between Tripoli and Tobruk – the HoR's capital in the country's east – have been previously made (including the "6+6" committee plan from the summer of 2023, whose progress was halted following a wave of clashes in Tripoli), the announcement could signal an important shift. It may, alongside GNU's domestic success, likely be a sign of Tripoli perceiving itself to be in a more stable position from which to carry negotiations with the breakaway HoR. Furthermore, the deal also likely signals the GNU's increasing relevance as an international partner for key players in Europe and the Mediterranean. During the reporting period, the UK announced having struck a GBP one million deal with the GNU to stop migrant flows into Europe. The government also continues to be Frontex's (the EU's Border and Coast Guard Agency) main partner to manage migrant outflows from Libya. Armed militias continue to have considerable influence in Tripoli, and their retreat from the capital is yet to materialise per the agreement, the February deal is likely to represent a significant step forward in granting the government at least some of the breathing room it needs to conduct negotiations with Tobruk from a point of relative stability. While elections are unlikely to be held in the immediate future – as the legislative and electoral disagreements that have already soured previous talks between the two administrations continue to persist – there is a realistic possibility that the next months will see considerable progress. The National Reconciliation Conference, to be held in April in Sirte after multiple rounds of preparatory talks, will likely represent a fundamental opportunity for Tripoli and Tobruk to signal their credibility in pursuing the electoral deal.

### Israel and the Gaza Strip:

#### First aid ship arrives in Gaza, as Hamas opens Ramadan with peace offer.

On 15 March, the first ship carrying aid from the Larnaca port of Cyprus to Gaza approached the Palestinian shore. The vessel, which is administered by the NGO Open Arms, carries about 200 tonnes of material donated by the humanitarian group World Central Kitchen (WCK). Also on Friday, Hamas representatives presented a detailed ceasefire proposal, including plans for hostage exchanges with Israel. Israel Defence Forces (IDF) continue to conduct clearance operations in several sectors of Khan Younis and are shaping the conditions for a subsequent offensive in Rafah by conducting strikes on the city. The Israeli government has continued to state its intent to conduct clearance operations in Rafah, where it assesses at least four Hamas battalions are currently based as well as Hamas senior leadership. Iran has advised its proxy forces to avoid a wider conflict, however, Hezbollah has told Tehran that it is willing and ready to fight independently in any war with Israel. Cross-border attacks between the IDF and Hezbollah have escalated, and on 12 March Hezbollah responded to IDF strikes deep into Lebanese territory with a barrage of rockets targeting IDF bases in the Golan Heights. Uncorroborated reports suggest that Israel's Iron Dome may have failed to intercept many of Hezbollah's rockets throughout the reporting period.

**Assessment:** The aid delivered by the Open Arms vessel sends an important signal of the international community's heightened interest in and concern for the humanitarian conditions within the Gaza Strip. However, the delays experienced by the ship throughout its preparations and journey, and the lack of a clear timeline for the establishment of the humanitarian pier described by US President Joe Biden, likely indicate that maritime aid shipments to Gaza cannot yet offer a reliable flow of humanitarian material and will continue to be complemented by potentially dangerous airdrops and often blocked land routes. Hamas' recent announcement is also likely motivated, at least in part, by the ongoing humanitarian crisis. If an Israeli offensive on



Gaza were to be launched during Ramadan, it would likely result in a heightened risk for the Palestinian civilians concentrated in the south of the Gaza Strip, and it may incite popular dissent against Hamas itself. However, it is more likely that Hamas' sudden call for peace, after ceasefire talks stalled last week, is directed by operational considerations. On 13 March, the IDF presented a plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians from Rafah in preparation for the offensive, which would redirect civilians to "humanitarian islands" under IDF control. If Israel manages to establish functioning humanitarian corridors out of Rafah, Hamas will lose the chance to continue to use the civilian population as a shield which has likely deterred the IDF from conducting more intense strikes. Moreover, possible attempts by Hamas to prevent an exodus of Palestinian civilians from Rafah may be weaponised by Israeli public diplomacy, as well as create popular dissent within the city itself. In such a case, an IDF offensive would still remain likely, almost certainly inflicting extremely severe costs on Rafah's population. Iran's call for restraint to its proxy forces is almost certainly a signal that Tehran cannot afford a wider conflict and could also be strategic messaging to the US suggesting that it will not seek to escalate if Israel provokes a war with Hezbollah. There is also a high chance that Tehran's influence over its proxies has been over-estimated, especially when the IDF is likely seeking to provoke Hezbollah by expanding its operations on the group's home territory. If reports concerning the efficacy of Israel's Iron Dome are veritable, this could tempt Hezbollah to conduct more frequent and intense rocket attacks into northern Israel and even launch some of its longer-range missile capability deeper into Israeli territory.

## Yemen:

### Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader dead.

On 10 March, the leader of AQAP, Khalid Al Batarfi, was announced dead. Al Batarfi had led the group since 2020, when his predecessor was killed in a US drone strike, and has been replaced with Saad Muhammed Atef Al Awlaki, a member of AQAP's Shura council. While no official statements from AQAP have clarified the cause of Al Batarfi's death, some reports claim that he died of a non-specified illness.

**Assessment:** AQAP is one of the most dangerous al-Qaeda branches still in operation, and the UN puts its numbers at between 3,000-4,000. Over the last two decades, the group has authored a series of terrorist attacks in Western states, including the 2009 attempted Christmas Day bombing, and the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks. Currently, the group is primarily active in Yemen, where it has taken advantage of the ongoing conflict to boost recruitment efforts and operations. It has the strategic goal of destabilising the Houthi government while simultaneously fighting back against Saudi and UAE operations and political encroachment. At the same time, it is likely that AQAP is seeking opportunities to gather more public support, in order to return to the levels of power and influence it had in the second half of the 2010s. Traditionally recording a stable presence in the southeast of the country, AQAP was ousted from its northernmost strongholds – in the Al Qayfa region, in a series of offensives launched by the Houthis in late 2020, recording further losses in 2021. Since then, attacks by AQAP have generally declined, with the group having been significantly weakened. Despite repeatedly threatening American, Israeli and Saudi-UAE interests in the region, reports indicate that Batarfi may have played a role in restraining the number of AQAP operations against international forces, likely seeking to avoid retaliatory strikes that could help the Houthis, a position supported by al-Qaeda's Afghan branch, as well as against the Houthis themselves. Al Awlaki, on the contrary, is described as much more bellicose and risk-prone, and willing to carry out attacks against the parties involved in the Yemeni conflict. Reports show that AQAP has benefitted from the wave of anti-Western and anti-Israeli sentiment that followed Hamas' October 7 attacks. There is a realistic possibility that the change in leadership could lead to a renewed period of AQAP activity. Moreover, with international pressure mounting on the Houthis due to the current crisis in the Red Sea, it is possible that AQAP will carry out attacks to strain the precarious truce between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, with the aim of opening more opportunities for political manoeuvre. The change in leadership may also increase the likelihood of attacks on foreign soil, especially against Western countries, targeting airlines or public gathering places in large urban centres.

## Senegal:

### **Election campaigns commence ahead of the postponed presidential election on 24 March.**

Senegal is scheduled to hold its presidential elections on 24 March. The vote was originally scheduled for 25 February, but it was delayed by President Macky Sall, who is ineligible for re-election due to term limits. This has led to several weeks of violent protests and considerably shortened the electoral campaigns of the 19 approved candidates. It is anticipated that this will be the most highly contested election since Senegal gained independence more than six decades ago.

**Assessment:** The postponement of the election marks the most recent development in a month-long period of turmoil, which has triggered violent protests and raised opposition fears of a potential institutional coup. On 13 March, an amnesty law was ratified to alleviate opposition tensions. The legislation text would create a system to provide amnesty for protesters and opposition figures accused of offences linked to anti-government demonstrations over the past three years. However, it is also expected to absolve security forces of accountability for their occasional use of violence against protesters. The front-runners for the election will likely be former Prime Minister Amadou Ba as the ruling party's choice and Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a lesser-known candidate who gained popularity as the chief of the dissolved Patriots of Senegal (PASTEF) party. Faye's was released from prison on 14 March, where he had been held on charges of defamation and contempt of court. Following the end of his incarceration, thousands of supporters occupied the streets of Dakar in celebration. It is almost certain that only the wealthier candidates will benefit from the shortened election campaign, and unrest is to be anticipated leading up to and following the announcement of the results. This also marks the first time an election has taken place during Ramadan, meaning election campaigns have had to be adjusted to align with the serenity and sense of unity the holy month brings.

## Somalia:

### **Al-Shabaab attack Mogadishu hotel used by government officials.**

On 14 March, the al-Qaeda-linked violent extremist organisation (VEO) al-Shabaab (AS) attacked the SYL Hotel in Mogadishu. Reports indicate that militants used a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) to blast through the hotel's perimeter wall before attacking with small-arms fire. The attack, which was claimed by AS on its Telegram channel, continued into the morning of 15 March until security forces had killed all AS militants at the hotel. The SYL Hotel is reportedly frequently used by government officials for meetings and is located just 650 metres from Villa Somalia, the country's presidential palace. At the time of writing, no official death toll has been released, although reports indicate that four Somali MPs were wounded as a result of the attack.

**Assessment:** Government officials or locations are historically a main target for AS. In June 2023, AS militants attacked government officials at the Pearl Restaurant on Lido Beach in Mogadishu, another location that was commonly frequented by government officials. This attack lasted for over six hours and resulted in the death of six civilians and the injury of 10 others. In November 2022, AS targeted the Villa Ryas Hotel, located close to the presidential palace, and had previously attacked the SYL hotel in both 2016 and 2019. AS have become one of al-Qaeda's most powerful affiliates and are assessed to control up to 30 percent of Somali territory. A government offensive against the militant group was initiated in 2011 which was backed up by African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces, which includes troops from various African countries. The offensive has also been supported by various other external countries and organisations, including the US which has conducted drone strikes on the group, financial support and training from the EU and UK, and training and support from several Gulf States like the UAE and Qatar. The offensive has successfully dislodged AS from the capital and other major cities, but the group still commands much power and influence in the country's rural areas. The VEO has

likely been able to exploit the Somali government's limited state capacity and inability to ensure security to launch indiscriminate attacks against government forces, foreign peacekeepers and civilians. Moreover, in an impoverished country beset by humanitarian crises, AS' objectives of destroying the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), forcing a withdrawal of foreign influence and establishing a "Greater Somalia" consisting of all ethnic Somalis across East Africa under strict Islamic rules likely appeal to large elements of Somali society. AS attacks in the capital are designed to undermine the authority of the government and in retaliation to the government's intensified military offensive against the organisation. In response to the attack, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud will almost certainly pledge to commit more resources to fighting AS and will target the VEO's strongholds in central and southern Somalia. There is a realistic possibility this is one of the objectives of the attacks in the capital. By attacking Mogadishu, AS could be goading the government into deploying troops into AS-controlled territory, where they stand a better chance of degrading government forces. Any expansion of government operations is highly likely to incite more AS attacks on the capital, with government-linked hotels, offices and businesses the likely targets.

## EMEA Summary and Forecast:

### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

In **Germany**, this reporting period has strikes by Deutsche Bahn (DB). Freight drivers were on strike for 24 hours from 18:00 on 11 March, whilst passenger drivers followed suit from 2 am on 12 March for 24 hours., and both strikes caused nationwide disruption. The dispute between DB and its employees has become increasingly protracted, with the main demand being a reduction of the working week from 38 hours to 35. Further strikes are almost certain to continue to occur, leading to new incidents of widespread travel disruption. It should be noted, however, that private operators such as Flix trains will remain unaffected by these strikes. In **Spain**, the news that the lower house of parliament, the Congress of Deputies, approved on 14 March a bill granting amnesty to Catalans involved in a 2017 independence referendum will be seen as positive for Prime Minister Sanchez who relied on Catalan parties to form a government. An earlier iteration of the bill failed to pass the lower house. It still has to pass in the Senate, where the conservative People's Party (PP) holds a majority of seats. PP has vowed to delay the passage of the measure, stating it tantamount to buying votes from separatists. However, now it has passed the lower house, Congress can override a Senate veto with an absolute majority vote, so it is likely that the bill will pass. Amnesty for separatists has previously sparked large protests in Madrid, Seville, Valencia and even Barcelona. The passing of the bill is highly likely to instigate further demonstrations which could lead to widespread disruption. **Portuguese** elections on 10 March led to the center-right Democratic Alliance (AD) securing 79 seats out of 230. However, the far-right Chega party achieved huge gains, polling at 20 per cent after only being founded in 2019. The success has positioned Chega as a key player in any potential right-wing governing coalition. AD are reluctant to enter negotiations but could get pulled further to the right. This trend may also foreshadow a right-wing victory in the upcoming European elections in June. Consequently, there is a heightened likelihood of civil unrest in major urban areas across Portugal as a new government is formed. **Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein**, which together make up the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) have signed an agreement in New Delhi with **India** committing to USD 100 billion in investments and the creation of 1 million new direct jobs in India over the next 15 years. As part of the agreement, India has agreed to reduce import tariffs from the EFTA states. This agreement is expected to be a political advantage for Modi, providing an opportunity for Indian exporters to access European and global markets gradually. It is likely to lead to more integrated and resilient supply chains and reduce India's dependence on Beijing, which is a continuing trend. Additionally, India is also in discussions regarding similar trade agreements with the UK and the EU. **Russia** is scheduled to hold its presidential elections this weekend, the first since the beginning of Moscow's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Vladimir Putin's victory is almost guaranteed, and the vote is largely a political show through which the Kremlin seeks to bolster domestic support. Early voting has already begun in many areas of eastern Ukraine occupied by Russian forces. The vote's outcome is likely to be met with international condemnation, and some statements of support by Russia's allies. The possibility of limited social unrest remains, but these are likely to be met with disproportionate government repression. Polls show that **South Africa's** African National Congress (ANC) party, which has ruled the country

since the end of Apartheid, is likely to lose its parliamentary majority at the elections in May. A February survey of voter opinion conducted by Johannesburg-based think tank The Brenthurst Foundation and the SABI Strategy Group estimated that voter support for the ANC is at 39 percent, down from 41 percent in October and 44% in November 2022. The results are unsurprising, as South Africa continues to struggle with blackouts, rampant crime and civil unrest, widespread corruption, and decaying infrastructure. ANC's share of votes is likely to further suffer from the participation of the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party, which was recently formed by former president Jacob Zuma. The **EU** has announced it will seek to open membership negotiations with **Bosnia**, despite the country's lingering ethnic issues. Whilst this is a positive announcement, there is no guarantee that member states will endorse it as separatist Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, who is pro-Russia, continues to undermine the presidency and other political functions in Bosnia. Two weeks after the killing of opposition leader Yaya Dillo, **Chad's** interior ministry has ordered the dissolution of Dillo's party, the Socialist Party without Borders (PSF). This move likely represents a turning point in the complete nullification of the country's already heavily precarious democratic political system. The ruling administration is one of the last pro-French bastions in the Sahel region. The development is likely to result in moderate international condemnation, and there is a high likelihood of an increase in street protests, especially in urban centres, possibly affecting travel and business.

### Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

On 10 March, **Turkey** detained 33 people suspected of planning attacks on behalf of the Islamic State (ISIL) ahead of the country's local elections, which will take place later this month. Due to its proximity to regions where ISIL is active, and its military involvement in Syria in Iraq, Turkey continues to be one of the main targets of Islamist terrorist groups, as well as other militant formations opposed to Ankara. The government will likely continue to conduct counterterrorism operations in the next few weeks, although a risk of terror attacks remains, especially in Istanbul, Ankara, and the country's other urban centres. On 12 March, **Somali** pirates seized a Bangladeshi cargo ship 600 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia. Since December, pirate attacks in the Indian Ocean have increased, likely a reflection of opportunistic planning in the context of the situation in the Red Sea, where Houthi forces have launched repeated attacks against both civilian and military vessels. With international attention and naval forces having left the Gulf of Aden for the Red Sea, the likelihood of further hijackings and attacks will remain higher than normal in the coming weeks. **Congolese** leader Felix Tshisekedi and **Rwanda's** Paul Kagame have agreed to meet to discuss the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Kigali stands accused of inflaming and prolonging the conflict in the eastern DRC. Such a meeting may lead to a decrease in hostilities if an agreement is reached. Concrete barriers are being built along a stretch of the **South Africa-Mozambique** border to prevent people from crossing over to steal and smuggle vehicles. South African authorities have budgeted close to USD 2.7 million to build the wall. Cross-border crime is a significant issue in the area. According to reports, 15 companies of troops protect South Africa's borders, particularly the "high-risk borders" with Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho.

### Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Tropical Storm Filipo has impacted huge parts of central and southern **Mozambique**, specifically around the Inhambane region, with strong winds, heavy rain, and heightened water levels expected to lead to widespread disruption. Calls for international assistance have grown as at least 14,000 people are assessed to be displaced. During the last reporting period, Johannesburg, the largest city in **South Africa**, has experienced a severe heatwave, which has been likely exacerbated by ongoing water shortages within the city. The risk of social unrest, and particularly of possibly violent protests targeting government-owned assets and buildings, is likely to increase, and there is a realistic possibility of increases in street crime.



## Asia Pacific (APAC)

### India:

#### India enacts controversial citizenship laws in leadup to election.

India will begin enacting a controversial citizenship law on Monday 18 March. The law, strongly supported by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was originally passed in 2019, and allows for refugees from India's neighbouring countries to obtain Indian citizenship provided they are not Muslim. Modi is the head of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party, which promotes the nationalist and ethno-religious Hindutva ideology. Between April and May, India is scheduled to hold its first general election in five years, and the law's enactment comes at a critical time in the electoral campaign.

**Assessment:** The law's enactment must be contextualised within the electoral campaign, but also the broader political actions and international outlook of the BJP. In recent months, local BJP officials and Hindutva activists have exacerbated their attacks on Muslims, also carrying out various government-sanctioned demolitions of mosques. A month ago, Modi inaugurated a new Hindu temple on a site previously occupied by a historic mosque, demolished by nationalist activists in 1992, in a key moment for the rise of Hindutva in the country. Other than to appeal to domestic supporters and anti-Muslim sentiments at home before the vote, which is almost certainly its primary purpose, the announcement is likely meant to send a signal to regional partners that share similar political ideologies. In Nepal, for instance, the Hindu supremacist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has received the BJP's support in its efforts to re-establish a Hindu state in the country and has increased its own persecution of Muslim citizens. The BJP also likely seeks to spread its ideas – and confirm its leadership of the global Hindutva front – in other countries that have substantial Hindu minorities, which it likely sees as important political assets. At the same time, the government is also likely seeking to gather support among other regional minorities. In Pakistan, for instance, Christians have been subjected to severe levels of persecution, often in the form of mob justice following false accusations of blasphemy. It is extremely likely that the beginning of next week will see a spike in politico-religious violence and a substantial increase in the risk of terrorism across India. Moreover, recent cases of Hindutva-led anti-Muslim demonstrations and clashes in third countries, likely show that increases in violence in India have the potential to heighten similar risks abroad.

### Thailand:

#### Thai electoral commission dissolves reformist party.

On 12 March, Thailand's electoral commission said it had agreed to disband the reformist Move Forward Party (MFP). MFP won the most seats in last year's general election and promised to reform the country's lèse-majesté laws, which carry heavy penalties for critics of the country's ruling monarchy.

**Assessment:** In January, MFP's proposals had already been struck down by the country's Constitutional Court, which accused them of constituting a "threat" to the country's political system. MFP is the successor to the Future Forward Party, which was likewise dissolved by the electoral commission in 2020. The monarchy holds considerable sway over the country's domestic policy and conservative establishment, and it is not uncommon for critics to receive prison sentences of 50 years. The ruling, which is likely to be met with widespread international condemnation, indicates that hopes of internal reform are not likely to materialise in the medium term. The commission and court's statements, moreover, may create a precedent, increasing the risks faced by civil society actors, especially journalists, and by international humanitarian workers, active in the country.

## APAC Summary and Forecast:

### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

**Vietnam** has announced it will permit the establishment of independent trade unions by the end of 2024. This comes as Hanoi came under concerted pressure from the European Union and Canada as a result of the promises made on workers protection when it signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), an 11-member trade pact, and the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, a deal that entered into force in 2020. Currently, all unions not affiliated with the ruling communist party are banned. This change will likely strengthen Vietnam's attractiveness under the twin trends of "nearshoring" and "friend shoring" which are increasingly seeing manufacturing leave China and relocate to states with friendlier relations to the United States and the wider West. Critics caution however that Hanoi has already adopted a strategy to restrict such new unions from "getting a foothold" in society, and this was outlined in a directive agreed upon by the Communist Party's Politburo last year. Expect continued policy and legal paralysis in **Japan** after a high court in Sapporo ruled on 14 March that denying marriage to same-sex couples was unconstitutional. However, the court doesn't have the power to overturn the country's current marriage law. As such, despite this and other lower court rulings across the country coming to similar conclusions, Japan will remain the only G7 nation that does not provide legal protection for same-sex unions. Subsequently, Government offices may continue to deny marriage status to same-sex couples unless the existing law is explicitly revised to include LGBTQ+ couples, something which the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) remains opposed to.

### Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

**India** has begun deporting Myanmar refugees who fled following the 2021 Coup. Thousands of civilians and hundreds of troops from Myanmar have fled to Indian states following the 2021 coup and subsequent civil unrest. Most refugees are in Manipur, an Indian state where sporadic violence has killed nearly 200 people since ethnic clashes broke out in May last year. New Delhi has not signed the 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention, which spells out refugees' rights and states' responsibilities to protect them, nor does it have laws protecting refugees. Refugees will likely face persecution when returning to Myanmar. An alleged botched terrorist attack in Peshawar, **Pakistan** saw two suspects killed. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, where the incident occurred, is at the border with Afghanistan and has seen increased terrorist activity over the past year, with most attacks being carried out by ISIL and the Pakistani Taliban (PTT). The attack overlaps with Ali Asif Zardari's recent victory of a second term as President. Terrorism risks in Pakistan will likely remain high, especially during public holidays and political events. Relatedly, the ongoing tensions regarding the banning of former Prime Minister Imran Khan will continue to increase all risks related to Pakistan's political environment. In **Myanmar**, ethnic militia groups continue to seize territory from government forces and a renewed Kachin offensive threatens to overstretch the junta's military resources. The junta government's plan to conscript thousands has sparked concerns over a mass exodus from the Southeast Asian nation which will invariably strain relations with its neighbours.

### Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Severe heatwave warnings were issued for several parts of southern **Australia**. There is now an elevated risk of bushfires. Temperatures reached around 40.C. In February, tens of thousands of people had to evacuate amid an intense heatwave and massive bushfire in Victoria, which faced its worst conditions in four years. This current heatwave could prompt similar action, these weather patterns are prompted by El Nino, and as such are likely to persist over the coming months. Flooding and landslides have significantly affected the **Indonesian** island of Sumatra, killing more than 260 people and leading to the displacement of over 77,000. Last month, another flood struck the region of Central Java, displacing more than 11,000. The floods come at the end of Indonesia's monsoon season, usually lasting from November to March, and have likely been exacerbated by climate change. Current environmental conditions will likely significantly strain

government resources and may impact travel and business operations in the affected areas. Indonesia's climate-related risks are likely to continue increasing in severity in the long term.

