



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 01 MAR – 08 MAR



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Week 9: 01 March – 08 March

Executive Summary

- Current gang warfare and state breakdown in **Haiti** will **almost certainly** produce adverse spillover effects, **likely** leading to increased levels of external displacement and trafficking of illegal material.
- Sabotage of Tesla factory in **Germany** is **likely** to impact economic activity and local investment, there is a **realistic possibility** of further actions targeting other multinational companies.
- Counter-terrorism operations in **Russia's** Caucasus are **likely** indicative of a resurgent Islamist threat and highly **likely** linked to a US Embassy security alert for **Moscow**.
- The first recorded vessel sinking and fatalities from separate Houthi attacks will **almost certainly** deter shipping companies from the **Red Sea** and disrupt global supply chains.



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

AMER

- 1 US:** Super Tuesday sees Trump, Biden win setting up 2024 finals
- 2 Haiti:** Country descends into gang-led chaos as PM stranded
- 3 Peru:** PM Otarola resigns after corruption scandal breaks

EMEA

- 4 Germany:** Eco-activists shut down Tesla gigafactory
- 5 Russia:** Islamic State militants killed in Ingushetia
- 6 Israel and Gaza:** Netanyahu threatens Rafah offensive as ceasefire stalls
- 7 Red Sea:** Rubymar sinks, and Houthi attacks lead to first fatalities
- 8 Sudan:** Iran requests to build naval base on the Red Sea
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APAC

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- 12 Australia:** ASEAN summit calls for restraint in South China Sea



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Super Tuesday results crown a week of victories for Trump.

On 5 March, Super Tuesday, the most crucial date in every American presidential primary season, resulted in a resounding victory for former President Donald Trump. Trump won 15 out of the 16 states where primary elections were held, only losing the Democrat-leaning Vermont to his opponent Nikki Haley. Haley, who also recently won the Republican primary race in Washington DC, announced the end of her electoral campaign on the morning following the vote. The Super Tuesday triumph came only one day after Trump achieved another crucial success. On 4 March, the US Supreme Court ruled that the former President could not be barred from the election ballot in Colorado, removing one important obstacle on his path to return to the White House. Biden also saw a predictable victory, only losing the US territory of American Samoa by a handful of votes.

Assessment: The Super Tuesday results essentially guarantee that Trump will be the Republican candidate for the 2024 November elections, making a repeat of 2020's vote very likely. Trump's victory is, however, only likely to testify to the former president's popularity among his existing voter base, and not to the general electorate's sentiments. Losses among educated suburban voters, as well as young and college-educated Republicans likely signal a growing disaffection towards some of the former president's policies and antics. Over the past months, Trump's campaign has put forward particularly inflammatory proposals – for instance calling to stop granting US citizenship to children of undocumented parents, and promising presidential pardons to many of the 6 January rioters – which are unlikely to win votes among moderate Republicans. While Trump's "America First" camp is guaranteed to dominate Republican party politics until November, Haley's refusal to endorse Trump after ending her campaign is likely a demonstration of growing resentment by minority "establishment" currents within the party. Trump's commitment to extreme rhetoric could pose growing risks leading to the November general elections and embolden domestic "patriot" terrorist and extremist groups to act. While a repeat of 6 January is extremely unlikely, local cases of harassment and violence directed at public officials are likely to increase in the following months. Possible adverse legal developments involving Trump – who currently faces four trials and dozens of felony charges – would most likely lead to rapid increases in the threat of domestic terrorism and vandalism, particularly targeting government buildings, healthcare facilities, schools, universities, and law enforcement facilities, as well as specific officials perceived as opposing the former president. Biden's victory is also unlikely to be enough to eliminate the current president's election worries. Biden is likely to face further attacks from left-leaning Democrats on divisive issues such as Washington's continued support for Israel's war in Gaza, as well as worries concerning his age and capacity to maintain his role for a full second term. However, the reported plans for replacing Biden with an alternative Democrat nominee, such as California Governor Gavin Newsom or former first lady Michelle Obama, remain extremely unlikely to materialise. In the coming months, Biden will likely try to reassure his voter base by sticking to moderate electoral rhetoric, focusing on economic and labour issues, as well as attacking Trump's statements and record in office. Vice-President Kamala Harris' recent calls for a ceasefire in Gaza also likely signal the administration's awareness of the importance of left-leaning Democrats and independents. The ongoing controversy regarding US support for Israel has already resulted in some cases of harassment directed at Democrat politicians, and such acts are likely to continue if the situation in Gaza worsens, or if the administration continues to be seen as inactive. Acts of civil disobedience, for instance, disruptions to public transport, or the blocking of motorways, may become more likely in the coming months. However, the risk of organised groups carrying out acts of domestic terrorism, or severe acts of violence, remains moderate.

Haiti:

Haitian gangs lay siege to Port au Prince airport as prime minister stranded in Puerto Rico.

After a massive jailbreak of almost four thousand prisoners on 3 March, Haiti has descended into chaos. Powerful criminal gangs, which often outgun law enforcement agencies and the Haitian military, have attacked the Port au Prince airport, paralysing the capital and essentially dissolving any meaningful government authority in the country's capital, leading to the displacement of thousands of Haitians. Gang leaders have called for Prime Minister Ariel Henry to resign, threatening "civil war". In the meantime, the prime minister is attempting to return to the country after a diplomatic trip to Kenya, aimed at hastening the deployment of a UN-backed police force in Haiti. Reports, which Washington denies, say that the US asked the prime minister to resign to prevent further chaos and violence.

Assessment: The current situation in Haiti is likely to significantly increase the country's already severe levels of violence in the short-to-medium term. Even if the prime minister resigns, and a US-backed plan is in place to ensure some type of democratic transition to a new administration, the almost complete inability of the state to function and restrain the gangs makes it extremely unlikely that order will be restored without significant third-party intervention. UN-sanctioned intervention is extremely likely to offer the clearest, and possibly only, path forward towards the re-establishment of domestic order in Haiti. Haitian gangs have demonstrated their capacity to sustain a direct and open conflict with the state, while also engaging in violent competition with each other. Gangs are unlikely to meaningfully contribute to any type of orderly or viable transition of power. Haiti's ongoing collapse will likely have adverse effects on the region, possibly leading to the further displacement of thousands of Haitians towards neighbouring countries, as well as the possible intensification of migrant flows towards the American mainland and the United States-Mexico border. As Haiti's gangs are heavily involved in drug and weapons trafficking routes towards the United States and neighbouring countries, the collapse of the Haitian administration could likely contribute to generating increased flows of illegal material out of the country, including unregistered firearms, further bolstering American criminal networks.

Peru:

Prime Minister Alberto Otarola resigns from office amid corruption scandal.

On 5 March, Peru's Prime Minister, Alberto Otarola, resigned from office amid an ongoing corruption scandal. Otarola is accused of using his position to help a woman gain lucrative government contracts. The woman was given two contracts for work in the defence ministry in 2023 which earned her a total of 53,000 Sol (USD 14,000). The Prime Minister resigned following a television broadcast that aired recordings of Otarola expressing his love for the woman and asking her to send him her CV. The woman has also claimed that she had a brief affair with Otarola. The recordings date back to 2021 before Otarola was appointed cabinet minister. Due to Peruvian law, the other 18 members of the cabinet must also resign.

Assessment: This incident demonstrates recurring political instability in Peru. Changes in office are a regular occurrence and President Boluarte has ordered several cabinet reshuffles since taking office in September 2022, most recently in January 2024 where she swapped out four ministers. Since Boluarte took office, violent demonstrations calling for her resignation have been common. The protests that broke out immediately following her appointment led to an aggressive crackdown from security forces that killed almost 50 people. Many anti-government protesters will see Otarola's resignation and the cabinet reshuffle as an opportunity to increase pressure on Boluarte, meaning that anti-government demonstrations across Peru are highly likely, particularly in Lima. Opposition parties will almost certainly see this as an opportunity to call for new elections. Peru is already suffering economically, with the economy dipping into recession in 2023, further adding pressure to Boluarte's position. It was announced on 5 March that Boluarte would change her cabinet as part of a relaunch of the government's general policy, indicating that she is

attempting to be proactive ahead of expected pressure amid Otarola's resignation and the ongoing economic troubles.

AMER Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

On 8 March, former **US** President Donald Trump is set to welcome **Hungarian** Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida. Both figures, known for their critical stance on NATO and allegations of undermining the alliance, are characterised by their populist authoritarian right-wing ideologies. It is likely that, with the November elections on the horizon, Trump will continue building international partnerships with key European populist leaders, a position that will certainly worry Brussels in case of a repeat of the former President's surprise 2016 victory. The Electoral Tribunal of **Panama** has disqualified former President Ricardo Martinelli's candidacy for the 5 May presidential election after he received a 10-year prison sentence for money laundering last year. Martinelli has denied any wrongdoing and claims that he is a victim of political persecution. Before the annulment, most polls put Martinelli as the clear favourite to win May's election.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

In **Colombia**, more than 2,000 people were forced to shelter following ongoing clashes between paramilitary groups in the Nariño region. The fighting involves the National Liberation Army (ELN) and unidentified rival groups – most likely Revolutionary Alliance of Colombia (FARC) offshoots. The ELN has been involved in peace talks with the government since 2022, agreeing to release hostages on various occasions. However, negotiations stalled two weeks ago, with both sides accusing the other of violating the terms of the truce. Recently, the ELN announced having reached an agreement with FARC in Nariño, however, the existence of various rival paramilitary organisations makes a continuation of the violence likely.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

In the **United States**, Boeing is set to start contract negotiations with Seattle-area unions. The announcement comes at a time of continued crisis for the company. Possible strike action could further cripple production lines and lead to further volatility in the airline industry amid workforce shortages. The Smokehouse Creek Fire, now the largest in **Texas** history, has scorched more than a million acres of territory and displaced thousands of people across **Texas, Kansas** and **Oklahoma**. The American Red Cross reports that efforts to contain the fire are making gradual progress, and that predicted rain may help firefighting operations. However, the fire is predicted to likely grow significantly before being completely extinguished. Cases of dengue fever have drastically risen in **Brazil**. In the first two months of 2024, over one million cases of the mosquito-borne disease were recorded, and dengue fever is now reported in 85 per cent of Brazil's municipalities. The Sao Paulo government declared a state of emergency on 6 March, estimating a rate of 300 cases for every 100,000 residents. Factors such as climate change and rapid urban growth are fuelling the surge, which has resulted in an estimated 214 deaths this year.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Germany:

Left-wing extremists sabotage Tesla gigafactory.

On 5 March, the Tesla “gigafactory” in Gruenheide, on the outskirts of Berlin, was forced to shut down operations after one of the electricity pylons supplying energy to it was sabotaged. The eco-extremist group “Vulkangruppe”, which had already attacked another Tesla facility in 2021, claimed responsibility for the sabotage action, aimed at achieving “the biggest possible blackout” of the factory. Tesla estimates that it suffered damages amounting to hundreds of millions of Euros, while residents in neighbouring villages were also left without power due to the damaged power lines. Tesla’s “gigafactory”, the largest in Europe, opened in 2022. Earlier this year, it made front-page news in Germany when Gruenheide residents voted against its planned expansion in a local referendum, citing environmental concerns. The attack on the factory is the latest and most severe in a wave of “ecotage” actions increasingly directed against Tesla and other electric vehicle manufacturers in Europe and North America.

Assessment: Acts of sabotage such as this can be extremely disruptive for manufacturing operations and supply chains and likely have a compounding effect alongside other global risks, such as the current Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. “Ecotage” is a growing phenomenon which is very likely to continue due to growing concerns about climate change, environmental degradation and labour exploitation in developing countries. Extremist groups are likely to continue planning attacks on targets that are particularly symbolic, visible or are owned by brands and figures of global notoriety. This will invariably attract media attention to their cause and likely inspire other groups or individuals to conduct similar actions. The Tesla attack was very likely planned as a response to the referendum held in Gruenheide, which brought international media attention to the plant, as well as aimed at capitalising on the notoriety of Tesla owner Elon Musk. While the action against the Tesla facility was carried out by an established activist group, “lone wolf” attacks, committed by individual activists that are not part of any hierarchical organisation, are also likely to continue, albeit possibly restricted to urban centres and less severe acts of sabotage or vandalism. Ecotage actions are low-cost and do not demand logistical complexity, that target material assets and not individuals. These characteristics will very likely continue to make prevention on the part of local police forces particularly difficult. Moreover, it is incredibly challenging to protect potential targets from attack, as is identifying attribution, especially when police resources are likely focused elsewhere. Likewise, their potentially high media impact will likely impose larger risks on multinational brands that have global recognition and negatively affect stock prices, with Tesla stocks immediately dropping in response to the disruption.

Russia:

Six killed in counter-terrorism operation in Ingushetia.

On 2 March, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) forces eliminated six alleged militants in a counter-terrorism operation in the North Caucasus Republic of Ingushetia. The overnight operation began at 19:30 at a residential complex in the city of Karabulak. According to the Russian National Anti-Terrorism Committee (NAK), the suspected terrorists were eliminated after a shootout broke out with the security forces who were attempting to make arrests. Russian sources have alleged that the militants were members of the Islamic State’s (IS) Caucasus Province who had been “planning crimes in the realm of terrorism”. Several of the neutralised militants had allegedly been on the Russian federal wanted list. Videos and eyewitness reports from the scene noted gunfire and the use of hand grenades during the security operation. During the shooting and in the immediate aftermath of the operation, local security forces reportedly had

been conducting mandatory document checks, limiting communications, and setting up roadblocks around Karabulak. The identities of the neutralised militants have yet to be published. On 7 March, the US Embassy in Russia issued a security alert indicating that extremists have imminent plans to target large gatherings in Moscow.

Assessment: This recent operation highlights the continuing Russian counter-terrorism efforts in Ingushetia and across the wider North Caucasus region. The overwhelming majority of the Ingush population is Muslim and clan links are an integral part of society. Ingushetia, along with neighbouring Caucasus republics, has historically resisted Russian rule often resulting in armed conflicts with the Russian state and local militant groups that remained loyal to Moscow. While there has been no recent significant terrorist event in the region, extremist groups in the Caucasus almost certainly harbour the intent and capability to conduct attacks both in the Caucasus and deeper into Russia, with the recent US security alert likely alluding to the Islamic extremist threat. In April 2023 three police officers were killed and eight were injured in a similar counter-terrorism operation in the nearby Ingushetian city of Nazaran. It is believed that the operation on 2 March was linked to the incident in April 2023. These recent spates of shooting and counter-terrorism operations have been the most significant upsurge in violence in Ingushetia since the early 2010s which saw hundreds of members of the Russian security services killed along with a considerable number of civilians. Whilst recent leadership in Ingushetia has remained loyal to Moscow the same feelings of loyalty are not felt amongst many within the local population. The influence of Islamic extremism in Ingushetia is part of a broader trend within the North Caucasus region, where groups affiliated with organisations like IS, or Al-Qaeda have sought to establish a presence and further their agendas. Following the collapse of the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), militants who had joined from the North Caucasus region will have likely returned to their homeland and harbour the intent to plan and carry out localised attacks to undermine Moscow's authority. The Russian state is almost certainly aware of the growing threats in the region and will likely take a multifaceted approach to the situation including bolstering security measures, addressing underlying socio-economic grievances and maintaining close ties with selected Ingush leaders. Russia adopted this approach in neighbouring Chechnya following the conclusion of the Chechen Wars. Security and the economy have improved in Chechnya, albeit at the cost of civil liberties and human rights. A major Islamist terrorist attack in Russia remains likely and there is a high probability that violent extremist organisations (VEO) will seek to capitalise on the Russian military's diminished presence in mainland Russia after being deployed to Ukraine. Any attack will almost certainly undermine the Kremlin's authority and cause severe problems for Russia's leadership which has likely become even more unpopular with local populations given the mass deployment of North Caucasus fighters to Ukraine, with many also volunteering to fight with Ukraine. Furthermore, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kyiv has recognised Ingushetia's right to self-determination, a move that has likely evoked nationalistic sentiment and calls for independence within the principally Islamic republic.

Israel and the Gaza Strip:

Netanyahu threatens Rafah offensive as ceasefire talks stall.

With the beginning of Ramadan approaching, hopes of achieving significant progress in the ongoing Israel-Hamas ceasefire talks have stalled, after the Hamas delegation left Cairo with no significant breakthrough. Talks are nevertheless set to resume next week. On 7 March, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that Israel remains determined to carry out its long-awaited offensive into Rafah and southern Gaza, despite repeated warnings from the UN and the international community, and a leaked US cable predicting "catastrophic" humanitarian consequences if the planned operation is conducted. Also on 7 March, US President Joe Biden announced, during his State of the Union address, a plan to establish a pier off the Gazan coast for the facilitation of humanitarian aid. No details have yet surfaced concerning a timeline or the location of the port.

Analysis: An IDF offensive in Rafah would exacerbate the already immensely severe hardships faced by displaced Palestinians currently sheltering in the south of the Gaza Strip, which are currently estimated at over 1.5 million. Netanyahu's continued hawkish statements and threats are likely to continue representing a significant roadblock for ceasefire negotiations, and to cause widespread international condemnation, further isolating Tel Aviv diplomatically. The threats are also likely a response to the withdrawal of the Hamas delegation from Cairo, although there is a realistic possibility that, with Israel not having yet achieved its strategic objective of disintegrating Hamas' military capabilities, offensive operations may be carried out to impose unbearable pressure on the militant group. However, there is a possibility that, with international condemnations almost certainly continuing to multiply, the actual launch of an IDF offensive into Rafah might bring a significant reaction from Washington. US calls to establish a humanitarian pier likely represent a further sign of a break in Washington's established policy of unconditional support for Israel, following earlier calls by Vice-President Kamala Harris for an immediate ceasefire. Were it to materialise, the pier would enable the entry of aid into Gaza even if the Rafah crossing is shut in response to an IDF offensive. Likely using the Cypriot port of Larnaca as its main transport hub, the pier would allow humanitarian aid to bypass Israeli controls after being checked in Cyprus by international supervisors. This would almost certainly accelerate aid into Gaza, as Israeli inspections have been the main contributing factor to delays. The pier may be established in proximity to the Al Mawasi humanitarian zone, which, despite a significant lack of resources and infrastructure, now functions as one of the crucial humanitarian hotspots for displaced persons in the Gaza Strip. Throughout the progress of the invasion of Gaza, Israel has progressively reduced the area of Gaza's coastline declared "safe" for humanitarian aid and sheltering of displaced Palestinians. The establishment of a US-run pier may therefore serve as a constraint on future Israeli encroachments on Al Mawasi, likely offering a more stable platform from which to conduct humanitarian operations.

The Red Sea:

Houthi attacks result in first vessel sinking and first recorded fatalities.

On 2 March, the UK-linked cargo vessel, the Rubymar, finally sank in the Red Sea after being attacked by Houthi anti-ship missiles on 18 February. The vessel sunk whilst being towed to Saudi Arabia, succumbing to inclement weather and with much of the vessel already below the waterline from the initial attack. Damage from the Rubymar has resulted in an oil slick over 30km in length and the vessel was also laden with over 21,000 tonnes of toxic fertiliser, prompting major environmental concerns in an ecologically rich area where thousands of people depend on fishing as their source of income. In a separate incident on 6 March, a Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) hit the merchant vessel, M/V Confidence, a Barbados-flagged, Liberian-owned bulk carrier. The attack resulted in the deaths of at least three crew members, and several were injured, forcing the remaining crew members to abandon the ship, and be evacuated by the Indian Navy.

Assessment: The Rubymar marks the first time a Houthi attack has resulted in the sinking of a vessel and the attack on the M/V Confidence is the first recorded incident of fatalities. Houthi leadership continues to state that it will sustain its attacks until Israeli forces withdraw from the Gaza Strip, a condition which looks unlikely to transpire given the resolve of Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Furthermore, it is almost certain that the Houthis have stockpiled enough weapons to maintain their attacks for months to come after years of Iran facilitating lethal aid into Yemen, with Iranian dhows laden with weapons still being interdicted by coalition forces in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea. Despite stating that they would only attack vessels linked to Israel or the UK and the US in retaliation for their joint strikes on Yemen, the Houthi attacks on vessels have evolved to become far more indiscriminate, with vessels being attacked with few to no obvious links to the aforementioned countries. The attacks have already led to the cessation of Red Sea transits from many major shipping companies, with more likely to follow as a result of the first sinking, first recorded fatalities and indiscriminate nature of the attacks. There is also a high likelihood that the Houthis will continue to expand their target deck of vessels in response to the deployment of a European Union naval task force. Whilst the EU task force will provide more

protection, it has already shot down Houthi drones and missiles which will likely lead to the militant group targeting major European shipping companies such as MSC, Hapag-Lloyd and the CMA CGM Group, a scenario that is likely to contribute to even more rerouting, supply chain disruption, higher shipping premiums and increased consumer costs. Houthi attacks have to date galvanised its base within Yemen. However, the sinking of the Rubymar and any potential sinking of a vessel in Yemeni waters could prove problematic for the militant group. Economic conditions in Yemen are dire and hundreds of thousands rely on subsistence fishing. Oil and toxic fertilisers could destroy the livelihoods of many in a country where millions are already facing critical food insecurity and dependent on international aid, with Houthi actions continuing to disrupt the delivery of aid to Yemen. There is also a growing prospect of Houthi attacks leading to a resumption of hostilities with the Saudi-led Arab coalition, given the economic disruption it is causing. Attributing a vessel to one specific country is a rare occurrence. Whilst the Rubymar's owner was linked to an address in the UK, it flew the flag of Belize and was registered in the Marshall Islands. However, of most significance its voyage was organised by a Lebanese company and chartered by a Saudi commodities company, suggesting that the attack would have been more detrimental to regional actors, not the UK.

Sudan:

Iran attempts to secure strategic naval base on the Red Sea.

According to an undisclosed Sudanese government official, Iran has asked Sudan for permission to establish a permanent naval base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The report suggests that Iran offered a helicopter carrier in exchange for the port. Sudan allegedly refused the deal, citing fears of antagonising the US. Iran, whose Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), has recently conducted port calls in Port Sudan to sustain operations in the Red Sea, refutes that any such deal has been proposed.

Assessment: Iran has almost certainly refused to acknowledge that such a deal was being discussed, as if exposed it would highly likely force Washington to apply all diplomatic leverage on Khartoum to permanently shut the deal down. If IRIN achieved a permanent presence in the Red Sea, it would enable Iran to disrupt one of the world's busiest shipping routes by potentially blocking two major chokepoints, the Suez Canal and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, during a time of war or heightened tensions. A base at Port Sudan would also enable Iran to sustain more maritime operations in the Red Sea, where it is almost certainly monitoring maritime traffic through the Suez Canal and from Israel. Iranian intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations are then likely providing targeting information for Houthi operations off the coast of Yemen. An Iranian naval base less than 300km from Saudi Arabia, Iran's most significant regional rival, would almost certainly have major geopolitical implications and could lead to an accelerated arms race in the region. Despite claims that the deal has collapsed, there is a realistic possibility that it could still go ahead. Iran was an ally of Sudan when it was under the dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir and used Sudan to smuggle weapons into Gaza. Bashir was deposed in a 2019 coup and the new military leadership distanced themselves from Iran in favour of improved relations with the US, who gradually relieved sanctions on Sudan and removed the country from the state sponsors of terrorism list in 2021. However, rapprochement with the US has been jeopardised by the recent Sudanese Civil War, resulting in the US imposing sanctions on elements within the Sudanese government and military, as well as multiple Sudanese companies. Whilst these sanctions have been designed to end the civil war and bring the Sudanese government to the negotiation table, they could also backfire and influence Sudan to turn towards Tehran and other states hostile to the US, such as Russia, which has an unresolved port agreement with Sudan. Moreover, Iranian weaponry has proven effective in both the hands of the Houthis and in the war in Ukraine. Should the Sudanese Civil War continue, Khartoum could grant Iran a port in exchange for arms, with Tehran already providing uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) to the Sudanese military.

Nigeria:

Boko Haram kidnaps dozens in northeast Nigeria.

On 6 March, reports emerged that an estimated 100-300 were kidnapped by jihadist militants in the Gamboru Ngala refugee camp, situated close to the border with Chad and Cameroon. The camp housed many victims of terrorist attacks; mostly internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had been relocated following previous Boko Haram actions. The attackers were reported as also having destroyed infrastructure meant to house the internally displaced refugees. In response to the attack, the government has deployed a task force. Sources identified the group responsible for the attack as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a Boko Haram offshoot.

Assessment: The attacks' late reporting and the equally delayed government response were worsened by the almost complete lack of telecommunication infrastructure in Nigeria's northeastern border region, which has also been deliberately damaged by terrorist groups in the area. While Borno's state government claims that Boko Haram's presence in the area has been massively reduced, with 95 per cent of fighters having been killed or surrendered, the attack likely shows how tenuous government control is in Nigeria's rural northeast. Kidnapping attacks are not uncommon in Nigeria, but the magnitude of this operation parallels a similar incident in 2014, where 270 schoolgirls were kidnapped from a dormitory in Chibok, Borno. The operation can therefore be likely considered a show of force on the part of ISWAP, and a response to late-2023 government counterterrorism operations that had successfully liberated dozens of victims of kidnapping. Conditions and risks faced by women and children in north-east Nigeria are likely to remain extremely severe, especially at the border with Cameroon and Chad where terrorist groups' movements are difficult to track, and government responses are slowed down by the lack of infrastructure. Testimonies by victims who managed to escape show how ISWAP forces operate by freely crossing into neighbouring Chad, therefore making risks of terrorist actions not contained to Nigeria itself. The Chad Lake basin area likely functions as a sanctuary for Islamist groups in the region, who take advantage of its vast terrain to conduct smuggling operations and to conduct training and recruiting efforts with a low risk of interception and disruption. Islamist groups may also feel emboldened to act after a series of regional coups has led to the withdrawal of Western forces in the Sahel, who were previously the most effective force in anti-jihadist operations. Finally, it is likely that Borno state's poor track record in the treatment of IDPs – Governor Babagana Zulum recently accused them of ingratitude and of being "mischief makers" following widespread protests due to cases of famine in various camps – may have further contributed to the lack of safety experienced by IDPs in the area. Although very unlikely to be part of a coordinated effort or even to have been carried out by Boko Haram, the similarly massive kidnapping operation in Kuriga, on 7 March, can be seen as symptomatic of a broader perception among militant groups of the Nigerian government's weakness.

EMEA Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

France has become the first country in the world to explicitly include the right to abortion in its constitution after a change was approved by an overwhelming 780-72 vote in Versailles. Polls suggest that the reform is extremely popular, with 85 per cent of the population agreeing with it. Anti-abortion groups have decried the ruling, as has the Vatican. There is a realistic possibility that the constitutional reform will ignite protests from the country's far-right, or by the Catholic community. **Germany's** Verdi union has called for additional Lufthansa strikes amid an ongoing dispute. The strikes are scheduled for 8 and 9 March, with unionised members set to cease work from 4 a.m. on 8 March until 7:10 a.m. on 9 March. These strikes are likely to result in major delays and cancellations, as recent strikes have grounded nearly every Lufthansa flight and impacted over 100,000 passengers. On 2 March, a meeting took place between the **Slovak** foreign minister and their **Russian** counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in Turkey. The talks stand out as one of the few interactions of this nature by an EU member since the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This meeting is likely indicative of the ruling SMER party's Russophilia, with Slovakia showing

signs it will follow the disruptive path of Orban's **Hungary**, very likely igniting further fragmentation and debates surrounding the bloc's foreign policy. **Moldova** issued a warning against Russian meddling as it prepares to hold a referendum on EU membership and a presidential election later this year. The warning comes after the country's intelligence service stated that Pro-Russia Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor was a central figure for Russian hybrid attacks in the country. Also comes off the back of Transnistria's appeals to the Kremlin for protection. Moldova's current President who is running for election staunchly pro-EU/Western, as are many of the voters, but the Pro-Russian electorate has a commanding vote share. **France** and **Moldova** announced that they will sign a defence agreement. The agreement builds on a previous deal reached in September and is likely a signal to Moscow and to the Transnistrian separatists, as well as a direct response to recent statements by Medvedev, who argued for an expansion of Russia's borders to include the region. **Iran's** parliamentary elections, the first since the 2022 protests, were dominated by the country's ruling hardline conservative coalition. The elections saw historically low turnout rates, as many moderates and dissenters were barred from running, and amid calls to boycott. A notable development is that the elections saw the victory of extremely conservative outsiders, running outside of the "establishment" electoral lists. While Iran is unlikely to alter its foreign policy in the short term, the new extremist parliamentarians will likely play a role in nominating the successor to 84-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. On 6 March, the **Egyptian** government reacted to the risk of a foreign currency shortage by massively increasing interest rates and devaluing the Egyptian pound, leading the currency to lose 60 per cent of its value against the USD. The measure allowed Cairo to strike a deal with the IMF to more than double the three billion USD bailout it had secured in 2022 to a total of eight billion USD. The measures taken by Cairo are also meant to attract foreign direct investment. Regardless of their success, they will likely lead to a worsening of citizens' economic conditions in the short term. Political instability is likely to continue in **Kuwait**, as parliamentary elections are now set to take place on 4 April after the Parliament was dissolved on 24 February. For years, Kuwait has faced internal disputes, including one concerning the reform of its welfare state, which has hindered the kingdom from raising debt. This has depleted its funds, despite its significant oil reserves, making it difficult to cover the substantial costs of public sector wages. However, political instability is unlikely to translate into major civil unrest in the country given the country's draconian rules and preventative measures. **Senegalese** President Macky Sall announced that the country's next presidential elections will be held on 24 March. The Constitutional Council had previously ruled that the vote has to be conducted before 2 April. The next weeks are likely to see clashes at voting booths and protest rallies, especially in Dakar. **Liberia's** lower house backed the creation of a war crimes court. The latest resolution was proposed by newly inaugurated President Joseph Boakai and approved by 42 of 72 lawmakers. It will now pass to the Senate for a second vote at an unknown date. The two conflicts Liberia suffered between 1989 and 2003 saw widespread atrocities including massacres, rape, and the use of child soldiers. The development may cause instability although the renewal of armed conflict is unlikely. **Chad's** transitional leader Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno has announced his candidacy for the country's presidential elections set for 6 May. His announcement comes just days after his main political rival, and cousin, Yaya Dillo, was killed after troops attacked his party's offices. With the country under military rule and the opposition largely silenced, it is highly likely that Deby will win the election and dissenting voices will continue to experience repression and violence.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

On 5 March, **Hungary's** President Tamas Sulyok signed the bill that ratified Sweden's entry into NATO, following the Hungarian parliament's speaker's signature. The ratification ends a drawn-out period of diplomatic opposition to Sweden's accession to the alliance. Clashes broke out in **Corsica, France** between police and separatist protesters. The clashes came on the second anniversary of the killing in prison of independentist activist Yvan Colonna. According to local sources, the demonstrations saw the support of the main Corsican independentist movements, including the Partitu di a Nazione Corsa (PNC). Law enforcement and the protesters traded projectiles, including some Molotov cocktails. The security situation in southern **Nigeria** has likely deteriorated after troops from the Nigerian Army and Navy engaged suspected members of the

proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in a gun battle at their camps in Ejemekuru, Imo State, resulting in the killing of five armed men. The operation also led to the recovery of weapons, including rifles and ammunition, as well as the rescue of 15 kidnap victims in Tsohuwar Tasha, Zamfara State, where the troops overpowered the kidnappers, compelling them to flee into the forest. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, 15 people were killed in bomb blasts in Nyanzale as M23 militants seized control of the town housing thousands of displaced people. The operation represents a continuation of M23's attacks. The town is located 130 kilometres north of the strategically and politically important provincial capital of Goma, and the militants will likely capitalise on the attack to bolster their attempts to take the urban centre.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Kenya's leading doctors' union called for nationwide strikes from 11-17 March. The statement follows a continuation of recent unrest over working conditions across Kenyan hospitals. Prior protests saw the hospitalisation of a union secretary-general on 29 February after being shot in the head with a tear gas canister. It is likely other unions will join causing widespread disruption to medical services in the country.



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Asia Pacific (APAC)

China:

Annual meeting of the National People's Congress.

The annual session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) took place during this reporting period. The NPC sees around 3,000 deputies elected from across the Chinese provinces convene to hear the review of the last twelve months and outline the goals of the government for the next twelve months. The NPC can also pass laws, approve any personnel changes, and agree to delegate other matters of governance to smaller standing committees which meet more frequently. Several key announcements were made to the NPC by the country's Premier, Li Qiang. This included the country's 2024 economic growth target, which has been set at five per cent, a tougher rhetorical stance from Beijing vis-à-vis Taiwan coupled with a rise in defence spending of 7.2 per cent. There was also an announcement regarding the reform of the country's internal Hukou registration system.

Assessment: The NPC is widely seen as being a theatrical, rather than substantive, political event, and most of its decisions are developed in meetings between senior party and government officials long before its start. Despite this, the NPC's announcements and rhetoric can be used to inform what the senior leadership of China is thinking and how this may affect Beijing's relationships with the world. The news of the five per cent growth target, one of the country's lowest in recent years, likely signals that the government sees no easy way to deal with its multi-faceted economic crisis, whilst it also continues to delay any major economic decision until the Third Plenum later in 2024. The lack of any major announcements is also likely to mean that consumer and investor confidence in the Chinese economy remains subdued. The announced increase in defence spending, coupled with the hawkish language aimed at Taiwan, indicates that Beijing intends to further toughen its stance on Taipei. Given the recent electoral success of Taiwan's pro-independence Democratic Party in achieving a third presidential term, this Beijing's stance should come as little surprise. Perhaps the biggest change announced was the proposed Hukou reform. The Hukou system determines where residents can access credit, government jobs, education, subsidised housing, welfare and other social services. Around 400 million Chinese do not live where they are registered, meaning they are unable to access such services. Hukou registration is also inherited, which means that provincial inequalities (often urban-rural) often entail a generational dimension. Indeed, 70 per cent of Chinese children possess an inherited Hukou registration, not valid for where they live, or are not registered at all. Those who are fortunate to possess urban Hukous have often protested registration changes as they fear sharing their relative wealth and abundance of social services with more people. Whether the proposed reforms are accepted will likely be seen as a key test of whether the party's current mantra of "common prosperity" is genuine. Given the system currently restricts the mobility of the workforce, significant reform may also help to revitalise the country's ailing economy, although it will likely be met with significant resistance.

Maldives:

Maldives signs defence deal with China.

On 5 March, the Maldives signed a deal to receive military assistance from China. This deal was finalised days after Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu ordered India to remove its troops from the island nation by 10 May. The deal with China aims to increase relations between the two nations, however, the specifics have not been publicly reported at the time of writing.

Assessment: Historically, the Maldives have had substantive relations with both India and China. However, the Maldives has traditionally had deeper ties with the former after it was the first nation

to establish diplomatic relations with them in 1965. However, recent developments almost certainly confirm the new government is trying to attain closer ties with Beijing. This shift follows Muizzu's election in September 2023. Muizzu ran as a pro-China candidate who told the Chinese Communist Party in 2022 that if his party returned to office, they would expand the strong ties and pledged to end the country's "India First" policy. Given the Maldives' strategic location in the Indian Ocean and proximity to major global sea lanes, it is highly likely that China is actively seeking to obtain a naval base in the Maldives. There has been no concrete evidence of a Chinese military build-up on the island. However, there is a realistic possibility that this is an undisclosed component of the defence deal. In addition, the recent port calls of Chinese research ships which almost certainly conduct oceanographic surveys for military and civilian purposes, are likely an indication of this intent. Currently, China only has one foreign naval base, in Djibouti. A naval base on the Maldives will enable China to sustain more maritime operations in the Indian Ocean and along the east coast of Africa where it has substantial economic interests. Moreover, an increased military presence in this region will put Beijing in a better position to challenge its two main rival powers, the US and India. India has likely assessed that China will seek to establish a presence in the island nation and has likely attempted to counter this by recently building a naval base on the Indian island of Minicoy, approximately 125 kilometres north of the Maldives. Despite the strategic pivot towards Beijing, the Maldives is dependent on India for approximately a quarter of its trade, tourism, and numerous commodities. Therefore, Malé will likely need to navigate carefully to balance its relationships with both the emerging superpowers.

Australia:

Melbourne Hosts ASEAN meeting.

This reporting period has seen the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) hold a three-day summit in Melbourne, Australia. The summit was held in Melbourne to mark the fiftieth anniversary of ties between Australia and ASEAN, and Australia was keen to use its hosting to bolster its ties and commitment to the bloc. As such, during the summit, the launch of the USD 1.3 billion Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility was announced. This will provide loans, guarantees, equity, and insurance for projects that will boost Australian trade and investment in Southeast Asia. Whilst the summit aimed to focus predominantly on regional economic cooperation and renewable energy, these issues were overshadowed by the region's ongoing disputes in the South China Sea, concern over the situation in Gaza, and the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Consequently, a declaration covering all these issues was produced at the end of the summit. On the South China Sea, the Melbourne Declaration calls for a "peaceful resolution of the South China Sea disputes through legal and diplomatic processes without resorting to the threat or use of force". Meanwhile, in Gaza, ASEAN restated its desire to see an immediate and durable humanitarian ceasefire and in Myanmar, the bloc affirmed its support for the ASEAN five-point consensus first formulated in Jakarta in 2021 and called once more for a period of "effective humanitarian assistance and inclusive national dialogue".

Assessment: ASEAN's summit in Melbourne was designed to help mark the fact that fifty years ago, Australia became the bloc's first official dialogue partner, and it was also designed to build upon the progress and cooperation between the two in recent years. As such, the declaration from Australian Prime Minister Albanese that the ASEAN was "key" to Australia's future will be seen as positive as will the fact that the summit took place in Melbourne. Further positives are the announcement of the new fund, which will be seen as a successful and concrete illustration of the ties between Australia and ASEAN. These ties have often seen a gulf between rhetoric and reality emerge, which both sides will feel has been partially bridged this week. The challenge in the future will be to continue narrowing this differential and for ASEAN and Australia to also begin exploring how ties with other regional allies and partners can also be strengthened. Within the context of the Melbourne declaration, Australia and some of ASEAN's maritime states pushed for it to mention China by name when discussing the tensions in the South China Sea. It is likely that this did not occur as many ASEAN nations, even those with competing claims to China are unwilling to jeopardise their economic relations with China. Similar compromises can be seen in

the declarations on the situations in Gaza and Myanmar, with the often-diverging positions between states meaning that weaker language was used as states aimed to find common ground.

APAC Summary and Forecast.

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

In **South Korea**, a People Power Party (PPP) candidate attempted to self-immolate on 2 March after being excluded from the PPP's nomination lists, a gesture that will be seen as further evidence of the widespread polarisation and political tensions in the country. News that the government plans to begin suspending medical licenses will also further generate unrest and possibly lead to further disruption to medical services across the country. Both issues are likely to further play into creating political tensions and volatility in the run-up to the country's elections on 10 April. In **India**, Modi is holding his first visit to Kashmir since he revoked its autonomous status in 2019. He is scheduled to visit the region's capital, Srinagar. It is almost certain that this visit is being planned as an electoral show of force in the run-up to India's general elections. Since the removal of the region's autonomy in 2019, the Modi government has progressively removed or curtailed civil rights and autonomies in the region, and the past months have seen increased Hindu mob attacks against Muslim religious sites and communities. These baseline trends are almost certainly set to continue, and his visit is almost certain to inflame local tensions and may further embolden Hindutva nationalists. In neighbouring **Pakistan**, after three weeks of political wrangling, Shehbaz Sharif has been elected prime minister for a second term. He was elected with 201 votes. His election has already caused protests and unrest from those who continue to back the jailed former prime minister, Imran Khan. Sharif faces a monumental task trying to bridge the country's deadly political divide, shoring up its ailing economy, and resolving its deep-seated insecurity issues. It is almost certain that many of the policies he needs to pursue to resolve these will in the short term generate further civil unrest and political instability.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

South Korean and **US** militaries kicked off their spring drills on 4 March. Freedom Shield will involve twice the number of troops from both sides compared with last year in 48 rounds of combined field training, including air assault and air strikes. The drills come as North Korea continues to develop its nuclear capabilities with missile and other weapons tests. Pyongyang will likely launch a missile to demonstrate not only its capabilities but also its displeasure at the drills. **Hong Kong** is fast-tracking the approval of a new national security law, meant to bring its legal code closer to that of the People's Republic of China. The law's text contains draconian measures and punishments targeted at punishing acts of sedition, treason, and espionage. The law is unlikely to meet strong popular opposition, as Beijing has decimated Hong Kong's grassroots opposition movement after the brutal crackdown on the 2020 wave of protests. The law is expected to further freeze civil society and dissent in the city and will likely only further generate fears amongst the city's international business community that it is increasingly becoming a "hostile" location for businesses. The government of the **Philippines** has accused China's coast guard of conducting dangerous manoeuvres near Second Thomas Shoal, leading to a collision between two vessels. The incident is likely to exacerbate tensions in the area, as both China and the Philippines seek bolter their respective sovereignty claims in the region. Finally, in **Myanmar**, Kachin rebels reportedly bombed an airport in Bhamo on 7 March and attacked more than 10 army outposts near Myitkyina as part of efforts to resolve heavy fighting in Laiza and increase the pressure on the military government. The Myanmar military retaliated with artillery attacks and aerial bombing. It has been claimed that three people have died because of the heavy fighting. It is almost certain that heavy fighting will continue across the coming weeks in Kachin State, as the anti-military groups continue to press towards the state capital, Myitkyina, and more broadly are now within 350 kilometers of the country's second city, Mandalay.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Pakistan and **Afghanistan** have both been impacted by adverse weather this reporting period which has left over 70 dead across the two states. The heavy rain and landslides have blocked

highways in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, whilst in Afghanistan, snowfall has led to at least 14,000 livestock deaths. In both countries, a lack of high-quality infrastructure and their respective economic crises will have exacerbated the initial crises as the respective governments have little in the way of crisis or disaster management and mitigation at their disposal. In both states, expect continued tertiary impacts for a while such as transportation disruption, displaced persons, and food inflation in Afghanistan as the death of livestock impacts the local food supply. There is also a realistic probability that the displacement of people and the reduction of their livelihoods lead to an increase in criminality. In **Hong Kong**, expect humidity levels of 100 per cent to continue to persist across the coming days. As springtime approaches in the city, humidity levels often rapidly increase as the city is affected by humid maritime airflows from off the Chinese coast. It is expected that these high humidity levels will begin dropping towards the end of the next reporting period as the winds shift and bring cooler less humid air. The high levels of humidity have a high likelihood of worsening allergies and making transmissible diseases even more infectious as necessary droplets could form easily and be sustained for longer in the moist warmer air.

