

CIRAT WATCH

15 March 2024

Executive Summary: American involvement in Gaza is likely to increase as the US sends resources to construct a port facility for humanitarian aid. China's economy is getting back on track, but suppression of journalism is still an issue after an explosion in Heibei province. Vladimir Putin continues nuclear threats against the West amid Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil refineries. The US Department of Transportation requested a budget of \$109.3 billion for projects including improvements to the aviation industry, while a former Boeing employee was found dead after testifying against the company.

Discussion:

Middle East/Africa:

Israel/Gaza: The U.S. is sending General Frank S Besson to build a temporary floating harbor to help get aid to Gaza by sea. The U.S. plans to have 1,000 U.S. troops in action in the operation to build the pier. But the pentagon stated there would be no boots on the ground. The U.S. has partnered with the private firm Fogbow run by former military and intelligence officials to accomplish this operation. A shipment containing 200 tons of feed supplies for the citizens of Gaza was late in leaving Cyprus. The ship left port on 12 March. The UN has stated the famine in Gaza is almost inevitable and that there are children starving to death.

Nigeria: March has seen a wave of mass kidnappings in Nigeria. Armed men on motorbikes kidnapped 280 students aged 8-15 on 7 March. Fifteen students and four women were kidnapped from a school in Gada, Sokoto on 9 March. The kidnappers demanded 1 billion Naira (\$600,000) ransom, stating the children will be killed if their demands are not met. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was quoted saying "not a dime" will be paid.

Somalia: Al-Shabab attacked the Syl hotel in Mogadishu, killing three soldiers and injuring 27 people including three government officials. Somali security forces conducted an operation to end the 12-hour siege of the hotel and eliminate the terrorists.

Asia:

China: The economic indexes in China have returned to normal, as official reports state that their economy is getting back on track. With this though, the CCP are eliminating any sense of weakness as they got rid of the press conference after their annual parliamentary meeting this year. Chinese authorities have been brutally obstructing journalists from legitimate interviews and broadcasting. Journalists have been blocked presumably for reporting from the scene of an explosion at a chicken shop in Hebei province. Broadcasts were being interrupted, which provoked more of a desire for information by the public on such a deadly event.

South Korea: Korean doctors are still on strike over legislation in South Korea over new doctor intake and reduced wages. The government gave them an ultimatum, but they never returned to

the hospitals. In their place, the Government of South Korea is mobilizing public health doctors and military surgeons to occupy several vacant hospitals to fill the gap. They will be there for four weeks as planned although it could be longer.

Japan: Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara will hold talks with peers from fellow Pacific Island nations over security support. Future discussions between Japan, island nations in the South Pacific, and Western allies could lead to the largest Japanese security move in the Pacific since WWII. These actions were provoked by China's extensive time and money investments in the Pacific in exchange for "dropping diplomatic recognition of Taiwan."

Pakistan: Asif Ali Zardari was elected president of Pakistan. Zardari received 411 votes from national and provincial lawmakers compared to his competitor Mehmood Khan Achakzai's 181 votes. Zardari's victory is attributed to his alliance with "Pakistan's other political dynasty, the Sharifs, and his key role in talks to form a coalition government after the disputed national parliamentary election on February 8th." Zardari previously served as president of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013.

North Korea: Kim Jong Un drove and tested out a new tank model. This is the third time Kim was reported to have observed military exercises since the start of North Korea's rivals - South Korean and U.S. drills. This is presumed to be a rehearsal for invasion. "Kim has praised the country's latest tank as "the world's most powerful". Kim and North Korean troops are completing preparations for war.

Europe:

Russia: President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Russia was ready for nuclear war if it came to it. This comes only a week before his election where we will most likely see an extent in his Russian rule. This is the second occasion in less than two weeks in which Putin has used nuclear rhetoric. Putin also stated in his interview Wednesday that U.S. troops on the ground in either Russia or Ukraine would be seen as an intervention. I would expect to see an increase in military surveillance in the Ukraine and Russian region with such an increase in nuclear war rhetoric's.

Ukraine: Ukrainian air defense shot down 15 out of 25 Russian drones over the Black Sea port of Odesa. An infrastructure facility was claimed to be hit in the attack. Oleh Kiper, the Odesa regional governor stated, "Another massive nighttime drone attack by the Russians in the Odesa region." Drone attacks in the Odesa region will continue.

On March 13th Ukraine struck Russian oil refineries. This caused a fire at Rosneft's biggest refinery in one of the most serious attacks against Russia's energy sector in recent months. Oil prices in Russia rose 2%, partly due to concerns about supply distribution. President Putin claimed these attacks to be an attempt to disrupt the country's presidential election this week.

Italy: On March 12th Italian lawmakers approved the country's participation in a European Union naval mission to protect cargo ships in the Red Sea from attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen threatening maritime traffic. Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told lawmakers before the vote that the mission, launched last month, is strictly defensive, but that Italian ships would have the

power to defend themselves. The mission is tasked with “self-defense, that is the neutralization of direct attacks on merchant ships under escort and repelling any attempts to seize the vessels. That includes responding with military force in the case of an attack. The Senate later approved the mission with a vote of 153-0.

Migrants that had set off from Zawiya on the Libyan coast did not get far after there was engine failure as the dinghy broke down. Sixty of the migrants died while twenty-five survived this horrific incident. Of the twenty-five, two were in critical condition and were flown to Sicily by helicopter for further treatment. Survivors claim that the victims included women and at least one child. Mediterranean crossings are known to be a very dangerous journey. It’s claimed to be over three thousand deaths and disappearances during the year 2023. The highest since 2017. Safer routes for crossing will most likely be in question with more forms of safety in the Mediterranean if this number won’t improve.

France: French President Emmanuel Macron, who once sought to negotiate with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has emerged as one of the West’s most outspoken Russia hawks, forcing Europe into a potentially decisive moment over Ukraine as U.S. backing for Kyiv is blocked in Congress. Breaking ranks with other Western leaders recently, Macron refused to rule out Western boots on the ground in Ukraine, a move that jolted North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, even those close to Ukrainian borders who have long advocated a tougher approach to Moscow. Last week, he told French lawmakers that Europe shouldn’t set red lines to its support for Ukraine against Russia. Breaking ranks with other Western leaders recently, Macron refused to rule out Western boots on the ground in Ukraine, a move that jolted North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, even those close to Ukrainian borders who have long advocated a tougher approach to Moscow. The French legislature is also set this week to debate a proposed 10-year defense and security pact between France and Ukraine that Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky unveiled last month.

Hungary: The European Parliament is planning to sue the European Commission over its decision to release European Union funding for Hungary. The decision was confirmed following a closed-door meeting on Thursday between the parliament's president, Roberta Metsola, and the leaders of the parliament's seven political groups. The lawsuit was recommended on Monday by the parliament's legal affairs committee. The case concerns the decision by the commission on December 13 to unfreeze €10.2 billion earmarked for Hungary that had been held back due to rule of law concerns. Around €21 billion of European Union money remains withheld from Hungary.

Americas:

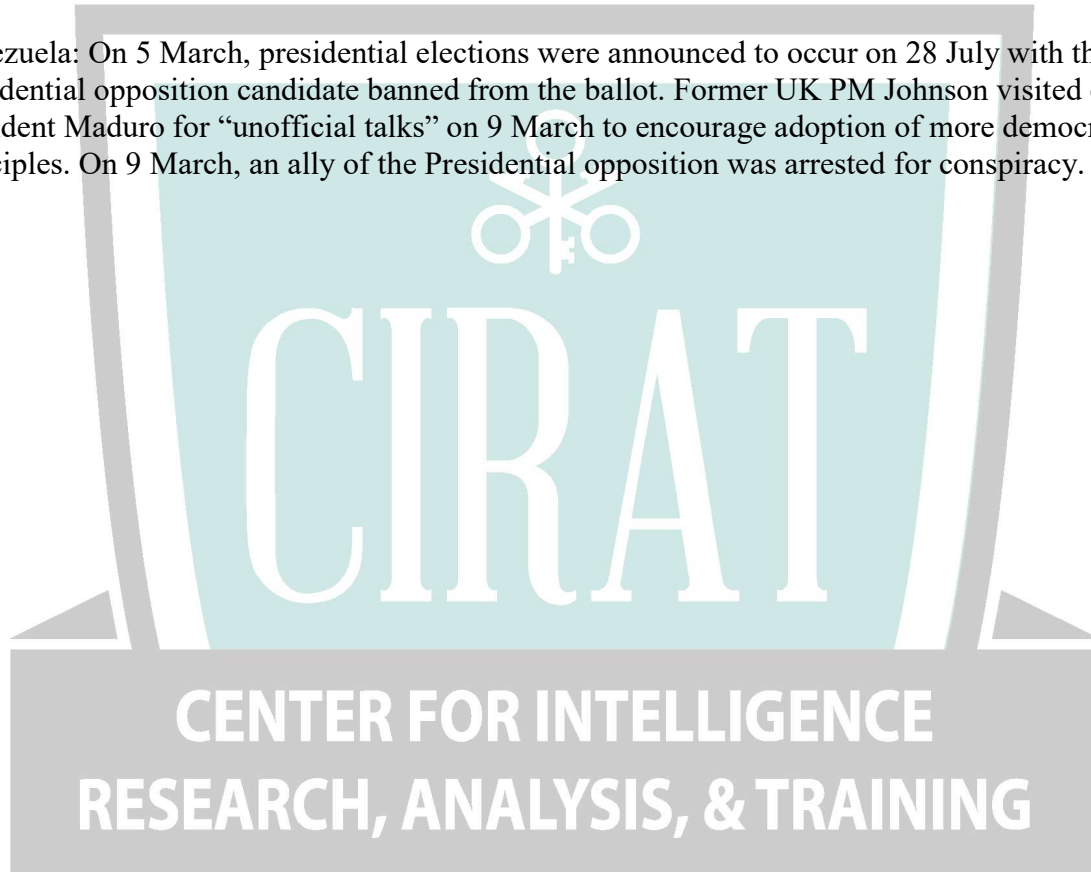
United States: The 2025 DoT budget requests \$109.3 billion for 2025; investments include: safety and efficiency for aviation, crackdown on a corporate jet funding loophole, improving and updating transportation infrastructure, increasing rail safety and efficiency, and funding public transit.

A former Boeing employee was found dead only a few days after testifying in a whistleblower lawsuit regarding the company’s production standards. Reports say he died of “self-inflicted wounds”. On a trip to Charleston dedicated to this case, he was found dead in his truck in the

hotel parking lot. He gave information regarding substandard oxygen masks and faulty parts being used to speed up production and repairs. Boeing rejected all his claims in the lawsuit.

Haiti: Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry agrees to resign late 11 March 2024 during a meeting in Kingston, Jamaica. He stated that Haiti needs peace and prosperity after announcing that his government will leave as soon as a transitional council is enacted. US Secretary of State was at the meeting and pledged another \$100 million for the Kenyan-led police team and an additional \$50 million in humanitarian aid.

Venezuela: On 5 March, presidential elections were announced to occur on 28 July with the main presidential opposition candidate banned from the ballot. Former UK PM Johnson visited current President Maduro for “unofficial talks” on 9 March to encourage adoption of more democratic principles. On 9 March, an ally of the Presidential opposition was arrested for conspiracy.



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