

„Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues“

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

January 2013





About CRP News & Background

Cultural Relations Policy News & Background is a part of ICRP Monthly Review Series and an initiative of Institute for Cultural Relations Policy Budapest. Launched in 2012, its mission is to provide information and analysis on key international political events. Each issue covers up-to-date events and analysis of current concerns of international relations on a monthly basis.

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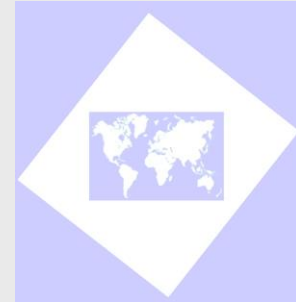
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Central African Republic conflict continues

Less than two weeks after securing a peace agreement in the Central African Republic, anti-government rebels broke the ceasefire on 23 January 2013 allotting blame to the government, alleging that they reneged on the terms of the power-sharing agreement. The government has pointed fingers at the rebels themselves, saying that they violated the peace deal by vandalizing and breaking into government buildings. In an attempt to bring an end to the latest insurgency in the Central African Republic which had already escalated to the brink of a civil war by January, government and rebel fighters on January 11 in Libreville, Gabon, agreed to a one-week ceasefire. The agreement which was mediated by the Economic Community of Central African States, held promise of maturing into a full-fledged peace plan as long as its terms were upheld and rebel demands were met including release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of soldiers from South Africa and Angola. In line with the ceasefire agreement, President Francois Bozizé signed a decree on January 13 that dismissed Prime Minister Faustin-Archange Touadéra from power. On January 17 opposition figure Nicolas Tiangaye was formally appointed the new Prime Minister of the Central African Republic. Under the Libreville Accord, President Bozizé will have no authority to dismiss any future



François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic. Photo: UNDP/hdptcar

government Premier and also provided for a one-year transition period prior to the country's parliamentary elections. Neither Bozize nor Tiangaye will be able to run in the 2016 election.

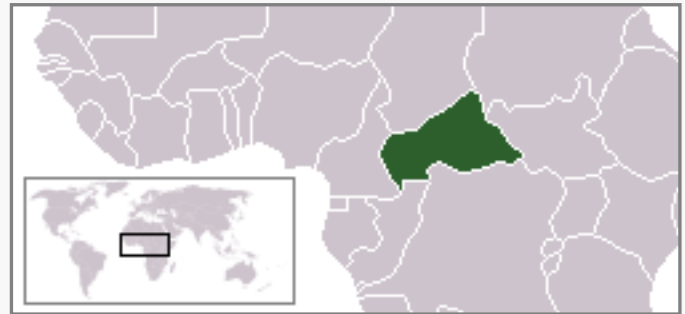
Following news of the rejuvenated fighting, newly appointed PM, Nicolas Tiangaye expressed his remorse over the failed peace deal saying, "I regret these abuses made by some Seleka rebels and, by the way, Seleka itself acknowledged the situation and proposed sanctions for these rebels..." The Seleka, an alliance of several rebel groups, was initially adamant that there would be no ceasefire unless President Bozizé immediately stepped down, however the coalition rescinded their demand under the January peace agreement. President Bozizé will retain his post until the 2016 Presidential election,

however a new coalition government was to be formed and an opposition leader appointed Prime Minister before January 18, 2013. The rebel group threatened to break the ceasefire and request intervention from other parties if President Bozizé did not honor the accord. "He's quite cunning, Bozizé," said rebel spokesperson Colonel Njadder-Bedaya voicing the group's distrust of President Bozizé's good will. The January 11th agreement did not require the Seleka coalition to retreat from the cities they occupied. Nonetheless, Colonel Njadder-Bedaya stated that the coalition has no intention of leaving until their demands are met.



School girls in the Central African Republic. Photo: Pierre Holtz[Flickr/hdptcar]

President Bozizé was faced with numerous rebellions since he usurped power in the 2003 Central African Republic coup. However he told reporters that the pact between the ruling party and the rebel groups signed in the Gabonese capital was done in hope of resolving the December 10, 2013 uprising and to bring about peace at last to the impoverished, conflict-plagued nation, saying "...it's a victory for peace because from now on Central Africans in conflict zones will be finally freed from their suffering".



The Seleka insurrection in the notoriously unstable Central African Republic is the latest in a series of rebellions since gaining independence from France in 1960. The rebel alliance claimed that their motive for the December insurgency was fueled by President Bozizé's failure to honor peace treaties from 2007 and 2008 and that political abuses are still prevalent, such as "torture and illegal executions". "We are not rebels by conviction," said one of the rebel leaders, General Mahamat Moussa Dhaffane, "we agree that things should change...we will also change. The country needs peace and economic development. I want to leave a peaceful and prosperous country for our children." Over the one-month time frame, rebels seized control of one-third of the country, sweeping several cities from north to south but stopped short of the capital city, Bangui. Hundreds of multinational African peacekeeping soldiers from Chad, Cameroon, Angola and the Republic of Congo amassed the capital in a unified effort to prevent the insurgents from advancing on Bangui.

During a speech in the capital in late December, President Bozizé appealed to the global community for assistance. High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton expressed the European Union's concern over the crisis and strongly urged those involved to "take all necessary

measures to end, without delay, all exactions against populations in Bangui neighborhoods that undermine chances of a peaceful dialogue." According to reports, the U.S responded by making provisions for the evacuation of "several hundred" American citizens, including US Ambassador Laurence D. Wohlers and his diplomatic staff. French President Francois Hollande also rejected the plea on the grounds that French military would only be used to protect French citizens in the Central African Republic and not to safeguard President Bozizé's administration. Two days into 2013, the French contingent was totaled at 600 troops with an additional 150 paratroopers being deployed, stressing that their forces were present solely to "protect French and European nationals" and not to combat the insurgents. Then-chairman of the African Union Yayi Boni, pleaded for open dialogue between government and rebels, "I beg my rebellious brothers, I ask them to cease hostilities, to make peace with President Bozizé and the Central African people ... If you stop fighting, you are helping to consolidate peace in Africa.

African people do not deserve all this suffering. The African continent needs peace and not war."



Girl in front of destroyed homes in Ngaoundaye, Central African Republic.
Photo: Pierre Holtz [Flickr/hdptcar]

Escalating tensions in Mali

In January 2013, Mali has experienced a mounting crisis arising from the belligerent Islamist militants' seizure of the north of the country in April 2012. The crisis began with the return of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) from fighting in Libya on Muammar Gaddafi's side. The MNLA is a Tuareg-led separatist movement whose aim was to break away from Mali and form an independent state. They allied with several Islamist groups, including Ansar Dine, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mujao), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Signed-in-Blood Battalion and the Islamic Movement for Azawad (IMA). The rebels have taken control over the key towns of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu in northern Mali and imposed Islamic sharia law there.



Touareg independence fighters. Photo: Magharebia

Tensions escalated when the Islamists took over Konna, a government town in the country's centre with the intention to enter further south. It caused great fears among regional states and international communities as this al-Qaeda-linked military coalition had already possessed two-thirds of Mali (roughly the size of France) and dreaded that the territory would become a haven for terrorist groups.



Pro-government Militia members training in Sevare, Mali. Photo: Anne Look [VOA]

On 10 January, the Malian troops started a counter-offensive to retake control over Konna, a strategic central city separating the north and the south. On the same day, Mali's government declared state of emergency and appealed to France for urgent military aid.

On the following day, 11 January, in response to Mali's cry for help, French President François Hollande announced France's support and sent French soldiers to

join Mali's fight against Islamist "terrorist elements". He said that this joint operation will last "as long as necessary" to protect the citizens of Mali and also the French nationals living in the country. The French prompt decision to intervene came on behalf of the whole international community, according to French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius.

Regarding international reactions, the United States of America, Britain and the African Union expressed support for the French move, but UN officials claimed that no UN-mandated intervention is to be expected before September due to formal procedures. As the fights continued and the crisis deepened in Mali, the West African leaders hosted a summit on 19 January in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The aim of the summit was to call for greater international involvement in order to terminate this intolerable and serious

situation. As a result, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which Mali is a member state, promised 5,800 troops, Chad 2,000 troops and Nigeria 900-1,200 soldiers to resolve the conflict once and for all.



“AL-QAEDA-LINKED MILITARY COALITION HAD ALREADY POSSESSED TWO-THIRDS OF MALI”

Conflict between Burmese Army and rebels in Kachin

On January 19th 2013, the Burmese Army officially ended the operation in the province of Kachin. The area generally had posed threat to the country by growing number of militants who are particularly linked to Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). Kachin conflict is known as Kachin war that is generally called as Burmese Civil war since 1941. The main reason of the conflict among the Armed forces and the militant group is for autonomy of ethnic group in Kachin that is located in Northeast of Burma. There had been many casualties and displacement of the people since the beginning of the conflict, the KIO is the only rebel group that is not agreeing for the ceasefire and is carrying different operations against the armed forces from time to time. The Burmese Army stated that most of the area is under the control of the state and there are only few incidents that do not pose significant threat to the state. The recent ceasefire is a result by the Parliament's decision to end the fight against different rebel groups in the area.

China raising concerns over the border with Burma

China is increasing security by moving military personnel on the borders with Burma in mid of January 2013. This move by China resulted after Kachin conflicts and its possible spillover effect in the bordering areas between two countries. China had always been putting close eye on this conflict that caused huge inflow of displaced people from the conflict to China. According to one report of Human Rights, China had forcefully sent back many people directly or indirectly affected by the this conflict on the boarding areas among the two countries. In addition to that China has strong business and trade ties with Burma, it has repeatedly called on the country to ensure stability along the vast and remote border. At the same time, this move by China at the domestic level of Burma raises another concern for renewing the economic or political ties with China.

New ASEAN chief to focus on South China Sea security

On January 9, 2013, the newly appointed ASEAN leader Le Luong Minh, who is soft-spoken diplomat from Vietnam raised the concern and put focus on South China Sea security. This move by the ASEAN chief has been welcomed by different key members of the ASEAN countries. Minh stated "In the face of complicated developments on the South China Sea, ASEAN should speed up efforts towards an early start of negotiations with China with a view to achieving an early conclusion of a code of conduct on the South China Sea." He also stressed that the maritime dispute remains priority, the most important item on his agenda will be to continue to work on establishing a formal community of wide-ranging political, economic and social ties across ASEAN member states by the end of 2015. The initiative includes introducing the ASEAN Economic Community, a regional bloc that will reduce trade and investment barriers in an area home to almost 10% of the world's population and an economy of about \$2 trillion.

The territorial disputes in the South China Sea involves both land (island) and maritime disputes among seven sovereign states within the region, namely the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan and Indonesia. These islands are rich in terms of

natural resources and countries involve in the disputes claim their rights over different islands in South China Sea. The main reason behind the disputes and the interests of different nations include acquiring fishing areas, the potential exploitation of crude oil and the natural gas under the waters of various parts of the South China Sea and mostly importantly the strategic control of important shipping lanes in the region. In addition to that, several members have welcomed the United States defense pivot to Asia to counter China's moves in the area. Others with close ties to China, prominently Cambodia a member state of ASEAN bordering with Vietnam, have prevented the organization from reaching a required consensus on taking a stronger unified stance to restrict China, which prefers to deal with its rivals one-on-one.



*Secretary-General of ASEAN Le Luong Minh.
Photo: ASEAN*

Diplomatic Tensions Rise Again over the Falkland Islands

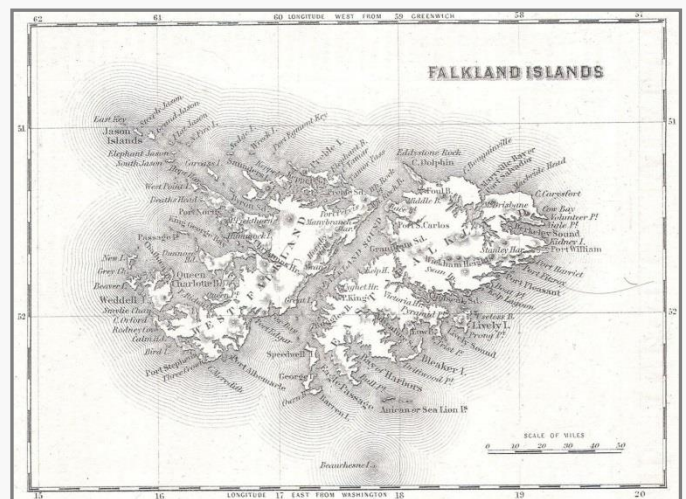
On 3 January 2013, UK Prime Minister David Cameron firmly rejected Argentina's latest territorial claim to the Falklands. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner openly criticized Britain for treating the islands as its "colony" and claiming Argentina's right to it.

The Falkland Islands is a British overseas territory with a population of 2,800 of mainly British descent. It has been a strongly disputed territory between Britain and Argentina for many years and the question of its sovereignty creates tensions ever since the British has set foot there. Argentina maintains that the Malvinas, as they call it, belong to them, because they inherited it from Spain in the 1800s. However, British administration on the islands dates back to 1765 and Britain established control over the islands in 1833. With the exception of the Falklands War in 1982, Britain was the sole power who exercised authority there.

President Fernández also based her argument on the islands' location: the Falklands lies 14,000 km from the capital of the United Kingdom, while only 1,898 km from Buenos Aires. But whenever Ms Fernández raises her demand she receives the same answer that the fate of the Falklands is not open to negotiation.

The future of the Falkland Islands is now in the hands of its inhabitants. A referendum on the islands' political status is scheduled in early March. Britain is willing to defend the principle of self-determination of the islanders at any cost. It is the islanders, neither Britain nor Argentina, who will decide whether they wish to stay with the United Kingdom or not. Although, in Argentina's view, the islanders are occupiers rather than residents, therefore they cannot regard the referendum as fully legitimate.

So the question is, will Argentina respect the result of a democratic process and resign itself to it? It remains to be seen.



Map of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) from 1855. Map: Geographicus

In Amenas hostage crisis

On 16 January 2013 more than 800 people were taken hostage by al-Qaeda-linked terrorists on a gas facility called Tigantourine near In Amenas, Algeria (see map). The attack itself was committed by 32 Islamist terrorists known variously as both *Katibat al-Mulathameen* ('The Masked Brigade') and *al-Muwaqqi'ūn bi-d-Dimā'* ('Those who Sign with Blood') who killed a number of people right away on the spot. Among the hostages, there were different kinds of nationalities like British, French, American, Norwegian, Japanese and Irish. Right after the incident the Algerian special military forces invaded the place of the hostage crisis in order to free the hostages and make an end of the situation. The offensive lasted for four entire days and ended with the death of 29 of the hostage-takers and with the capture of three of perpetrators. According to an official report made on the situation, one third of them were Algerian while the rest consisted of eight nationalities, including eleven Tunisians, two Canadians, and Egyptian, Malian, Nigerian, and Mauritanian terrorists. As a consequence of the crisis with regard of the hostages, a total of 685 Algerian workers and 107 foreigners were managed to be freed during the intervention but on the other hand, more than 39 foreign workers were killed along with an Algerian security guard.

As for the reason why the terrorists chose a gas facility in Algeria as the sport for the attack, it was a response for Algeria for why it opened its airspace to French warplanes which served as a channel of the offensive against Mali.



*Map showing the location of In Amenas and Tigantourine in Algeria.
Map: Wikimedia Commons*

The importance of the chosen place is also indicated by the fact that the gas field is operated by the Algerian state oil company, Sonatrach jointly with British Petrol and produces 10% of Algeria's gas production. As for the motivations of the action, the purpose of the militants was to force the French army to suspend operations against Islamists in northern Mali, in return of the hostages.

War in Northwest of Pakistan

The armed conflict among the fundamentalists and armed forces of Pakistan began in 2004 when Pakistan became the forefront ally in the war against terrorism. Pakistan started for the search of militants of different fundamentalist groups such as al-Qaeda and Taliban mostly in the Northeast region. It is the battle among the armed forces of Pakistan and the militants who were considered as religious fundamentalists. The joint border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is almost 900 kilometers long. The militant groups that are present in the Northwest are mostly fundamentalist and anti-western. Fundamentalists in the area believed that Pakistani armed forces are pro-USA and that is the reason they have started war against those who are supporting USA's policies in the region. Others believed that the fundamentalists have roots in Afghanistan and after the war in Afghanistan they became more active in cross-border activities and started fighting to protect their interests in the border areas of both countries. The militant groups which are having clashes with armed forces of Pakistan are Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Islam and many organized crime groups. This battle since the beginning costs lot in terms of lives and other domestic instabilities in the political

landscape of Pakistan. In other words, the groups are still active and carrying out different attacks on security personnel, schools in the area, targeting different minority groups, luxury hotels and different places where hundreds of civilians lost their lives. Pakistan with its military power got success in different areas where there had been big threat but there are some areas where the threat is still present.

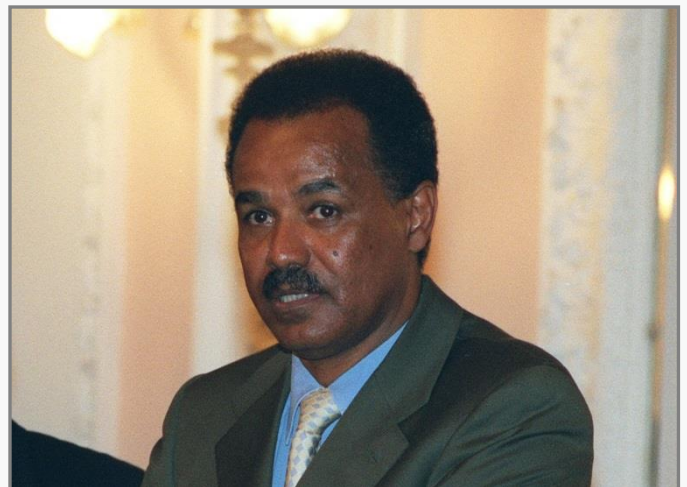
Bombings in Pakistan

Pakistan had been facing huge insurgency in different parts of the country. In 10th January 2013 there have been bombings in the southeast city of Quetta. Those attacks were car and suicide bombings in nature, which resulted killing of more than 130 and injuring several people in the city of Quetta. There have been two major reasons known after the attacks and two different groups claimed the responsibilities. One of them was Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed to be responsible of car bombing and this type of attack linked to religious ethnicity. Other group reported to be the Baluch Separatist Army, which has been fighting against the armed forces of Pakistan for the separation of Baluchistan. These types of attacks in the southeast region of Pakistan are frequent in different time periods by the armed groups.

Dissident soldiers seize the Ministry of Information in Asmara, Eritrea

On 21st of January, 2013 dissident soldiers occupied the Ministry of Information and forced the state media to make an announcement about the release of political prisoners in Asmara, Eritrea. According to regional diplomatic sources, two tanks encompassed the building of the state media with approximately a dozen of soldiers and on the basis of the statement of an anonymous witness, the rebelling soldiers literally forced the director of the state media to announce a clear demand with the aim of releasing the Eritrean political prisoners. However, as a consequence of the strict barriers made by the Eritrean government against foreign media access, it has to be declared that most of the statements are hard to truly verify. After the announcements were made, also both the state TV and radio had gone off air for a couple of hours. As a consequence of the incident, the commander of about 100 dissidents finally agreed to give himself up and all the employees of the Ministry of Information were released. As for the mutineers, according to Kidane those who took part in the action were not senior personnel, but young people who found the current situation of the country revolting. A website called Awate stated that Saleh Osman –

who became a great figure of the bloody and ruthless border war with Ethiopia in 1998-2000, after proving strong resistance against the abandonment of the key southern port of Assab and protecting it – was the commander of the rebelling soldiers. On one hand the uprising was a consequence of the deteriorating relation between the soldiers and the government over the economic hardships. On the other hand, it was also a way of calling up the attention for the need for more democracy. This emerging distress derives from the fact that according to UN sources, in 2012 5,000–10,000 political prisoners were being closed behind bars in the country where they were delivered to torture and unlawful summary executions.



President Issaias Afeworki has ruled the Horn of Africa nation with an iron grip since 1993

UN calls Israel's settlements illegal

Israeli settlements drive Palestinians out from the occupied territories according to a United Nations report which says Palestinians properties are permanently destroyed.

In spite of the report Israel does not cooperate with the UN. Even the Israeli foreign ministry refused the report and said it was counterproductive and impeded the peace process in the Middle East.

Israel still resists of the UN pressure and continues one-sided policy. In addition the Israeli foreign ministry thinks the only way to solve the issue is negotiation between Israel and Palestine without preconditions. Although some UN authors demand Israel to stop buying new settlements the prime minister of the Jewish state Benjamin Netanyahu is very determined to continue settlement activities. A source from Botswana said: "The magnitude of violations relating to Israel's policies of dispossessions, evictions, demolitions and displacements from land shows the widespread nature of these breaches of human rights,"

There are approximately half million Israeli settlers in more than 200 separate settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Most of them were built without official permission. In addition the settler

population is growing faster than the average of Israel. It can increase tension between Palestine and the Jewish state. Lot of Palestinian people must leave their lands because of the Israeli settlers. Even the United Nations and the European Union condemns the action of Jerusalem, Benjamin Netanyahu supports the enlargement of settlements. About 300,000 settlers live in East Jerusalem. The population of Israeli immigrants grows about 15,000 each year. The number of Jewish population has almost doubled in the past twelve years. Thanks to Israeli immigration the UN should think two-state plan over because some Jewish politicians hopes that the population of settlers can be around 1 million within few years, says Yaakoz Katz. On the other hand Israeli settlements drive Palestinian farmers away and attack their properties.

The settlements break the Fourth Geneva Convention which says it is prohibited to transfer inhabitants of occupying power into occupied territory. Besides the Convention, it is prohibited under international humanitarian law and international criminal law too. Instead of two-state idea the UN should prevent Jewish settlers from building new settlements in Palestinian territories.

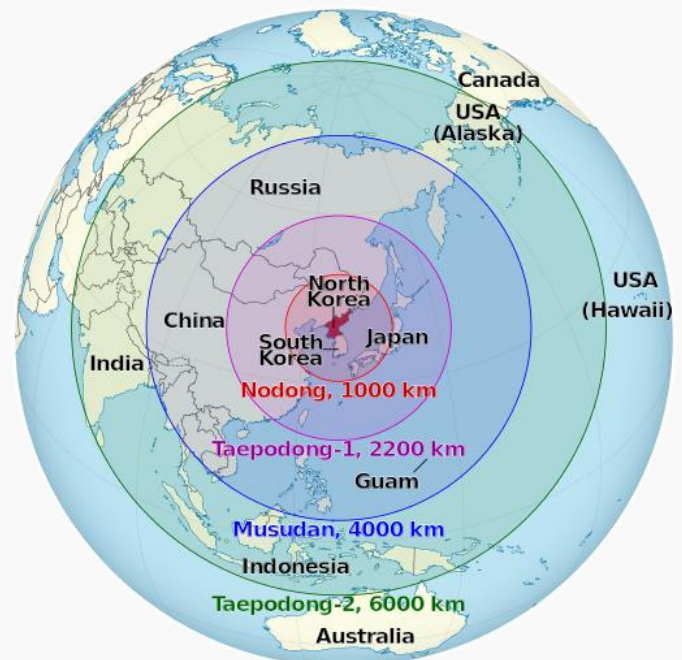
Growing tensions between the Koreas

Kim Jong-un, communist leader of North Korea has made a speech in television which was without precedent, because his father, former leader Kim Jong-il did not do so. The text of the speech was published in three of the main newspapers the communist country. This new speech did not reduce the tension between North and South because Kim Jong-un wanted to continue testing of long-range rockets. In spite of the tests he promises radical changes and to raise living standards.

North Korea has launched two rockets so far. The communist country will go on and coincide the third rocket test with Kim Jong-il's birthday on February 16.

It is not the first time when North Korea threatens South Korea and the United States. Pyongyang left the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. North Korea has also made preparations for a new war.

During the test South Korea will be ready to give a strong response for a possible provocation from the North. The United States as a main ally of the South wants new sanctions against the regime. In the other hand Pyongyang could not make successful rocket launches in 2006 and 2009. The latest test was in December which was an answer for international



Estimated maximum range of some North Korean missiles

criticism. North Korea commented its own action as peaceful. During the test of Pyongyang, Seoul strengthened its army to be able to give an effective response for a possible provocation which has been happened many times so far. For instance a source from Pyongyang threatened South Korea with military measures: "If the South Korean puppet regime of traitors directly participates in the so-called UN 'sanctions', strong physical counter-measures would be taken."

In addition the United States condemned the nuclear test of North Korea and called it "needlessly provocative". Response of

Pyongyang is the strongest ever now. Even though China is the main ally of North Korea it is not likely support Kim Jong-un completely. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei announced: "We feel regret that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea went ahead with the launch amid widespread concerns by the international community."

Besides the long-range rockets the number of the Northern refugees has changed a lot. More than 1,500 North Koreans arrived in the South in 2012, however their number was 2706 one year earlier. Pyongyang keeps in touch with Chinese authorities to find and punish refugees from the North

because most of them go to the South across China.



Inscription stone marking the border of China and North Korea in Jilin. Photo: Prince Roy [Flickr]

“THE UNITED STATES AS A MAIN ALLY OF SOUTH KOREA WANTS NEW SANCTIONS”

■ News in Brief

Diplomacy and international relations

Cameron calls for renegotiation of EU membership

■ British Prime Minister David Cameron confirmed plans to renegotiate the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union and to hold an in-out referendum after the next election in 2015. PM has indicated that he would campaign with all his "heart and soul" for the UK to remain in the EU but only in case he succeeded in renegotiating its membership terms. Cameron has mentioned the EU's concentration of power, undemocratic nature and bureaucracy as factors causing frustrations in many British people. No doubt the UK Independence Party's growing support was also an important motivation in making Cameron speak out on the EU-issue. Although the PM has emphasized that no matter what happens the EU will remain the UK's biggest market and geographical neighbourhood, he should think very carefully this decision because as he said: leaving the European Union "would be a one-way ticket, not a return".

European economic crisis – is the worst behind us?

■ In New Year's speeches European leaders expressed optimism about the pace of financial reforms in Euro zone countries and declared that the worst of the economic crisis has now passed. However, analysts have doubts about the success and think the crisis is not over, further problems are ahead. "A couple of things have happened that have taken away the immediate big breakup risk of the euro but the underlying problems and the huge debt in Europe are not yet solved" – stated Juergen Michels, senior economist at Citibank in London. Spain and Greece are still facing an economic situation of extreme difficulty, not to mention the deepening social crisis, so European leaders' now must confront questions like how to stimulate growth and bring down unemployment in the continent.

Kosovo's first 'ambassador' to Serbia

■ Kosovo's Foreign Minister, Enver Hoxhaj has proposed Lulzim Peci as Kosovo's first diplomat to represent the country in Serbia. The two states do not have diplomatic relations since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 which is not recognised by Serbia. However, the two sides have agreed to appoint liaison officers during the third round of EU-mediated talks between Kosovo's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci and his Serbian counterpart, Ivica Dacic. Peci's main task will be to improve communication and to back the EU-process to normalize relations between the parties. Belgrade is expected to name its envoy within days, however the government insists neither representative will have diplomatic status. They will only work out of the EU offices in Pristina and Belgrade.

■ News in Brief

United States resumes relations with Somalia

■ On 16th January 2013, it was officially confirmed by a US senior diplomat that the United States will recognise officially the government of Somalia. The diplomat also maintained that it was for the first time that US is opening the formal diplomatic relations since the heavy armed conflict between US Army and militants in Mogadishu in 1993. The Assistant Secretary further said that the new Somali government has made significant progress in stabilizing the country and defeating al-Shabab Islamic militants groups which were fighting against foreign forces in the early 1990's. In addition to that, Somali forces have pushed out of major towns with the help of the African Union forces. It has been almost six months that the newly elected Parliament formed the government and started resuming ties with different countries.

Malala Yousufzai released from Hospital to home in UK

■ On 3rd January 2013, Malala Yousufzai was released from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham to continue her rehabilitation at her family's temporary home in the West Midlands, United Kingdom. Yousufzai, a blogger and an activist who had been shot in head in the northeast province of Pakistan in the early October of 2012. She was shifted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham few days after the attack, where she with the help of the government of Pakistan and the UK was treated in a hospital in the UK. Team of the doctors who were operating her was satisfied for her fast recovery and advised her to the rehabilitation at home. She became the symbol for girls' education not even Pakistan but throughout the world as international media quoted. There were sharp reactions after the attack throughout Pakistan as well as international. Due to that she had been awarded and also nominated different national and international awards and scholarships in the fight for girls education in Pakistan.

The Philippines takes territorial issues with China to international court

■ On January 9, 2013, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario raised the concerns over maritime territorial disputes with China by announcing his government is taking the case to an International Tribunal. There have been disagreements on different islands over Chinese South Sea, where both countries are claiming their rights, but China with strong control over South China Sea and claiming their territory and having conflicts with different nations in the region. As Rosario said that the Philippines has used all its political and diplomatic channels for peaceful negotiations over the maritime disputes and China is not serious to bring solution to territorial issues with the Philippines. As a result the Philippines decided to challenge China's claim, which includes water off the West coast of the Philippines, at an international arbitration tribunal, citing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Other countries like Vietnam and Malaysia also having the disputes with China over the South China Sea. Analysts say China is trying to solidify its claims of "indisputable sovereignty" over most of the South China Sea by conducting regular maritime patrols in the area.

■ News in Brief

Conflicts and disputes

New violence in Belfast: more than a flag protest?

■ Petrol bombs were thrown at police, water cannons and plastic bullets were used and almost 30 police officers were injured as new violent protests in Belfast entered their second day. Nearly 1000 people gathered at the Belfast City Hall to demonstrate against the City Council's decision to limit the number of days to 18 when the Union flag is flown from City Hall. Among pro-British loyalists, the decision is seen as part of the step-by-step erosion of the British presence, a stripping of what many of them call their identity. However, according to Eamon Gilmore, Ireland's Tanaiste (deputy prime minister), this violence is being orchestrated by known criminals, intent on creating chaos. 'This has nothing to do with real issues around flags and identity in a shared society, which are the subject of intensive political discussions at present.'

Turkish prime minister urges joint effort on Kurdish peace initiative

■ Turkish PM, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urges his main opposition to join the government's new initiative aiming to solve Turkey's Kurdish problem. Erdoğan addressed his statement to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP). The discussion between the two parties over the issue has been revived after the government officially launched fresh efforts and sent Hakan Fidan, Chief of the National Intelligence Organization, to meet Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkey has tried to carry out negotiations with the PKK twice before. Each time, talks were abandoned due to violent attacks committed by groups inside the PKK who were not interested in peace.

Leading Islamist rebels killed in Chechnya

■ Thirteen Islamist rebels were killed in a shootout in Chechnya's volatile mountain province including two of the most wanted leading insurgents. The two commanders, brothers Khusein and Muslim Gakayev were considered the region "most wanted" people and have been accused of carrying out several high-profile armed attacks. One of their operations in 2010 killed six people in the Chechen parliament. Russian counterinsurgency forces consider the current action – which is still going on – a significant military victory.

■ News in Brief

Parliamentary elections in Jordan

■ On 23 January Jordan held its first parliamentary elections since the onset of the “Arab Spring”. With an electoral turnout of 56.6% the Lower House will consist of an absolute majority of conservative candidates which means power relations in the parliament will provide King Abdallah II a solid support base. Although international election observers have not found indications of electoral deceit or vote-buying, the Jordanian opposition – which boycotted the polls – claims the contrary and alleges fraud.



Abdullah II of Jordan

Soldiers killed at Pakistani-Indian line of control



*Pangong Tso is a lake at an altitude of about 4500m in Kashmir region.
Photo: dipak123 [Wikimedia Commons]*

independence in 1947 and firing is still common along the internationally recognized LoC despite the ceasefire agreed in 2003.

■ Two Pakistani and two Indian soldiers were killed in a gunfight at the line dividing the disputed Kashmir region in early January. While India accuses Pakistan of sending military troops across the LoC, Pakistani army spokesman considers India's allegations “propaganda” and refuses all accusations. India regards the entire region as an integral part of its territory however Pakistan demands implementation of a 1948 UN Security Council resolution for a referendum to define the wishes of the Kashmiri people. The two countries have fought three wars since their

independence in 1947 and firing is still common along the internationally recognized LoC despite the ceasefire agreed in 2003.

■ News in Brief

Americas

Venezuelan leader's health condition worsens

■ President Hugo Chávez has severe respiratory infection and is suffering breathing problems after his fourth operation for cancer. Venezuelan leader's recovery is currently being observed by Cuban medical staff so it is certain that he cannot attend his swearing-ceremony scheduled to hold in January. Officials suggest to postpone his inauguration however opposition says the 58-year-old socialist leader is not fit enough to govern. Possible new elections could bring victory of Nicolas Maduro, the ruling Socialist Party's candidate.

Venezuelan-Colombian top diplomats meet for strengthening ties

■ Elias Jaua, Venezuela's newly appointed foreign minister met his Colombian counterpart, Maria Angela Holguin to deepen relations between the two countries and to help peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) leftist rebel group. Due to his delicate health condition President Hugo Chávez was not able to attend the meeting, however his foreign minister assured the international community that Venezuela will continue supporting the Colombian government's requests to achieve the goal of peace. Years ago Colombian officials accused Chávez's government of providing refuge to some members of the FARC and helped it with arms. Venezuela has strongly denied these accusations.

Changing in the presidency of CELAC

■ At a group summit in Santiago Cuban President Raul Castro assumed the rotating presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) from Chile. Castro stated that Cuba will play its role with "total adherence to international law and to the United Nations Charter, rejecting interference, aggression, the threat and the use of force". The gathering focused on forging greater regional integration, approved a resolution supporting Argentina's demand to discuss sovereignty of the British-held Falkland Islands and emphasized the necessity of putting an end to the US economic embargo against Cuba. Set up in Caracas in 2011, the organisation integrates all nations from across the Americas except Canada and the United States.

■ News in Brief

Africa

Pledges for national unity talks in DRC

■ Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo announced his intentions to start national unity talks which he considers essential of the country's survival amid a conflict involving several rebel groups in the east. "The war in which we're involved needs to be an opportunity for us to further unite despite the diversity of our tribes, of our religious beliefs and of our political views" Kabila said during his New Year speech. The political scene's main opposition party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) assured its support to back Kabila's initiative. However Congolese rebel group, March 23 Movement threatened to walk away from peace negotiations unless the government signs an official ceasefire.

Women's rights in Morocco – changing laws

■ Moroccan government has announced its plans to change the country's penal code to outlaw a traditional practice which allows rapists of minors to avoid jail by marrying them. The method was also encouraged by judges to spare family shame. The new bill was presented nearly a year after a 16-year-old girl's suicide who had been forced to marry her alleged rapist. Women's rights activists welcome the initiative however consider it as only the first step on a long way to reform the system.

David Cameron makes surprise visit to Libya

■ British PM made a one-day surprise visit to the Libyan capital, Tripoli as part of his African trip. After Cameron had been greeted by the public in Martyrs' Square he also met the country's recently appointed Prime Minister, Ali Zidan and President Mohamed Magarief. Although Foreign Office has warned of threats to the British embassy in Tripoli and advised Britons to leave Benghazi, Cameron has engaged in supporting the Libyan government to take necessary steps to improve the country's security and to develop a functioning democracy after decades of dictatorship.



■ News in Brief

Asia & Middle East

US-Japanese discussions on defence guidelines

■ The United States and Japan have started the revision of defence cooperation guidelines including the fields of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The review has started with a working-level meeting in Tokyo between American and Japanese officials and will likely take a year or more to complete. Strategy has been unchanged since 1997 however the current circumstances in the security environment of Far East – China's territorial demands and North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes – require new approaches. Japanese PM has proposed allowing his country to exercise the right of collective self-defence that would significantly change the future of the two state's defence cooperation.

Chinese call for dialogue over disputed islands

■ Chinese President Xi Jinping declared to a Japanese envoy that he was committed to develop bilateral ties and holding a summit meeting in order to improve the two country's relations. In the meantime China took the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands to the United Nations. Although Japan rejects the UN involvement, launching an international legal process could help starting dialogue and reducing tensions.

Malaysian prime minister in Gaza

■ Malaysian PM, Muhammad Najib Abdul Razak visited the Gaza Strip during his first trip to the Hamas-controlled area. He has become the first non-Arab leader to visit Gaza as an official guest of Hamas. The Prime Minister, who was accompanied by his Foreign Minister Anifah Aman and other Malaysian officials, urged different Palestinian factions to unite and he praised their endurance of Israeli oppression. He said his visit was intended to show solidarity and support for the struggle of the Palestinian people" however it has provoked storms of controversy in Kuala Lumpur, in the Palestinian territories and in Israel as well.

United States – complete pull-out from Afghanistan?

■ According to White House officials, President Obama does not rule out a complete withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan after 2014, despite initial suggestions of General John Allen top military commander, to keep a number of troops in the country. Obama and his Afghanistan counterpart Hamid Karzai met at the White House and announced that they have agreed to speed up plans for moving Afghan forces into the security lead, while US troops will shift into a support role. "Starting this spring, our troops will have a different mission: training, advising and assisting Afghan forces" – said Obama however he has not made a decision on the matter of residual troop number. As Ben Rhodes, the President's deputy national security adviser said: "We are not guided by the goal of a certain number of US troops in the country. We are guided by the objectives that the President set – disrupt, dismantle, defeat al-Qaeda."



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