

*"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"*

# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# February 2015





## 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.

As an initiative of ICRP, the content of this magazine is written and edited by student authors. The project, as part of the Institute's Internship Programme provides the opportunity to strengthen professional skills.



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ICRP Geopolitika Kft

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 – Hungary

**ISSN 2063-8205**

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## Preserved Magna Carta originals together for 800th anniversary



*King John of England signing Magna Carta on June 15, 1215, at Runnymede.  
Picture: Britannica.com*

**For the first time in history** the four remaining original copies of the famous English Magna Carta are reunited in occasion of the 800th birthday of the

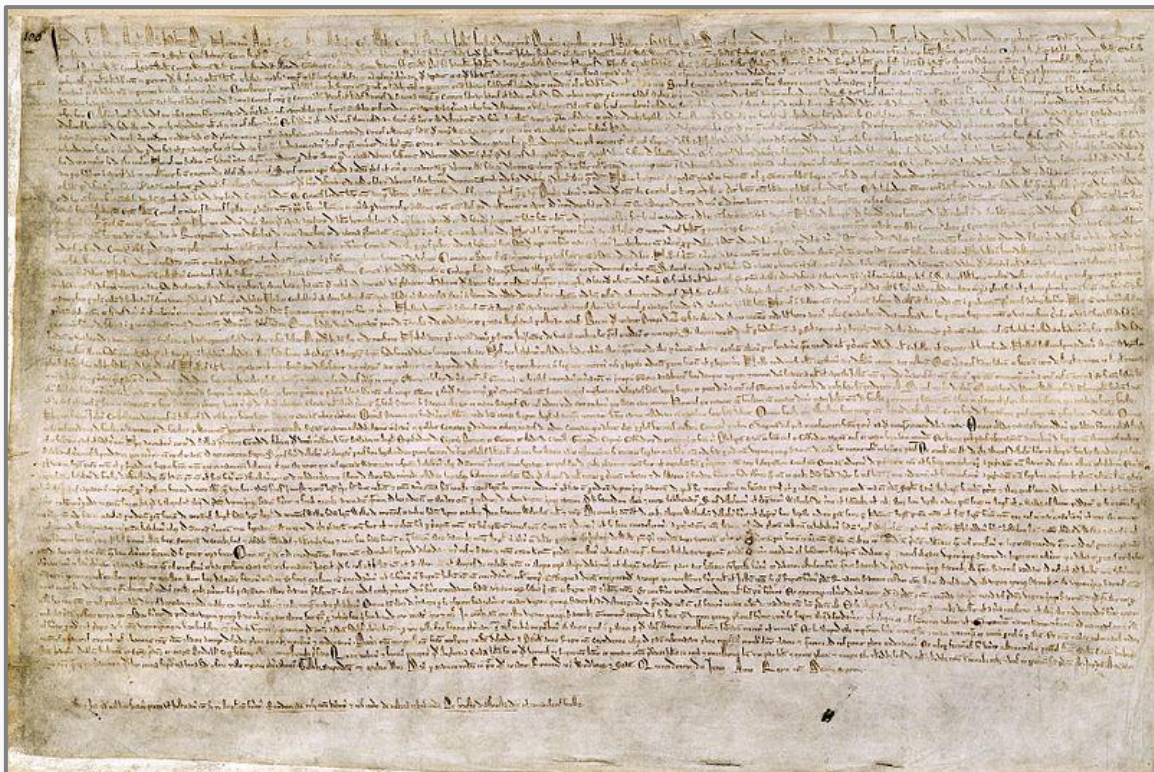
manuscript. This influential historical document formed the basis of legal rights in the world. Chairman of the Magna Carta 800th Committee sir Robert Worcester even defined Magna Carta as “England’s greatest export”. The manifest established a new relationship between the king and his subjects. The document is unique as it first recorded how the absolute power of the king will be limited to taxation, feudal rights and justice. Furthermore it promised the protection of church rights, protection for the barons from illegal imprisonment and access to rapid justice. It established the king was subject to the law and Magna Carta has been used as a defence against unfair rulers. The charter was agreed by King John of England at Runnymede, near Winston. When Magna Carta was created in June 1215, England had endured 16 years of John’s kingship, a leadership largely based on extortion, blackmail and violence. The King started a war against France, which he lost. English barons – in want of decreasing the power of the king – forced him to agree to their demands. Magna Carta is Latin for “the Great Charter” and still has a huge symbolic value for justice and liberty around the





world. It is considered to be the first step towards the creation of modern democracy. The Magna Carta also had an effect across the borders of England as it influenced the content of the American Bill of Rights of 1791. It created an enormous impact on many other constitutional documents in the world as well. In the 20th century Magna Carta was the source of inspiration for the content of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1950. For a long time the importance of this manuscript has been underplayed as Britain did not make much effort to celebrate previous anniversaries. Nowadays the Magna Carta is still considered an important constitutional document in England, despite the fact most of the clauses of the Charter are eliminated or replaced by a more recent

legislation. Only three of the 63 original clauses remain part of English law. One part defends the liberties and rights of the English Church, another established the liberties of London and other towns, however the third clause is the most famous one. It offers all free men the right to justice and a fair trial. Nevertheless only a small proportion of the population in medieval England were considered as "free men". Since 2009 the manuscript is officially UNESCO world heritage. The four original copies of Magna Carta are displayed in the British Library in London, however only 1,215 people had the opportunity to see one of the most famous documents in England. To celebrate this anniversary, a series of events will take place in England, including exhibitions, conferences and debates.



Copy of Magna Carta. Photo: British Library's Online Gallery



## Breakthrough ceasefire deal in Minsk

**After aborted talks** between Ukrainian and rebel leaders, now it seems they will agree and carry out a ceasefire in the war-torn country. The ceasefire agreement contains elements that have been present in previous talks as well, such as a demilitarised zone. Its goal was to revive a deal signed in Minsk, Belarus in September 2014, but it is challenging to reach such goals since the rebels have seized more territories since then. Albeit German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed her uncertainty about the success of this project, it is hoped to stop the crisis from further escalation. The agreement was born on talks longer than 16 hours and is described by French President Francois Hollande as “one of the last chances” to end the conflict – diplomatically at least. According to certain analysts, should a

diplomatic solution fail and should the United States provide weapons to Ukraine (a step which Merkel extremely strongly disagrees with, saying she could not “imagine any situation in which improved equipment for the Ukrainian army leads to President Putin being so impressed that he believes he will lose militarily”), the reaction from Russia is likely to be even more hostile than before.

The agreement should come into effect on 18 January 2015 and the withdrawal would occur during the following two weeks, said Russian President Vladimir Putin. He still denies the direct involvement of Russia despite what is now considered overwhelming evidence, such as very advanced military weapons that “can only come from Russia” according to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

### Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov shot dead

Former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov has been shot dead in Moscow by an unidentified attacker. The assault happened not much after he appealed for a march against the war in Ukraine. President Putin spoke out against the murder. His death was paid tribute in various countries in the world; as he has been described as a “bridge” between Ukraine and Russia, many see his death as a step back from achieving peace.



## Copenhagen synagogue shooting

**On 14 and 15 February 2015**, the capital of Denmark has seen three shootings after one another. The assault resulted in the death two victims and the suspected perpetrator. The Nordic country is now on high alert, and claims that the attack was heavily politicised since the first shooting occurred when a debate was scheduled to discuss Charlie Hebdo with Lars Vilks – a controversial cartoonist who has received death threats before due to his drawings on Prophet Muhammad – and one of the victims, a security guard, was of Jewish origin.

The first event took place at the cultural centre named Krudttønden where one civilian, a film director, was shot; hours later, after midnight, the Great Synagogue of Copenhagen was attacked where a man attending to a bat mitzvah was shot in the head and later died from his injuries. That morning at the Nørrebro station when the police hoped to stop a man, he began firing at them again, causing the police to eventually shot him to death. He was identified as Omar Abdel Hamid el-Hussein and is suspected to be behind both of the earlier attacks. First it was not clear that the two shootings were linked, but due to

his – now known – identity, it is certain. His motivations are unknown, it is yet to be seen whether he had support from a global radical Islamist organisation.

Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt spoke out against the act and affirmed that the Jewish community is “not alone” in Denmark: “when the Jewish community is attacked, the whole of Denmark is attacked”. At the same time she called for reconciliation as she emphasised that the fight is not between Muslims and non-Muslims as well.



*Flowers in front of the synagogue after the shootings. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*



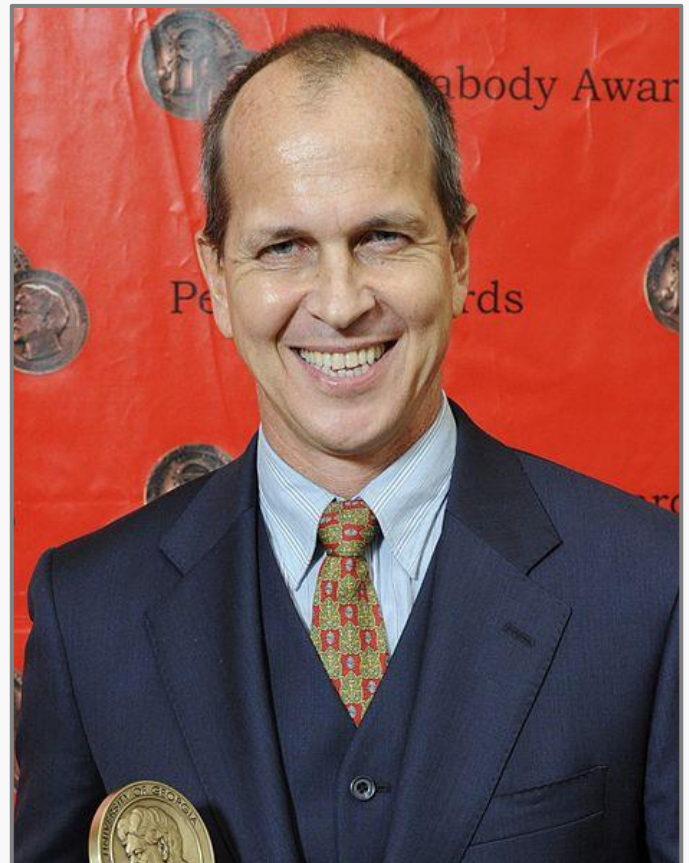


## Human Rights in Egypt

### **Peter Geste was released after 400 days in prison**

**Since the removal** of the elected president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 thousands have been imprisoned. In December 2013 Peter Geste an ex-BBC correspondent of Australian nationality was put under arrest along with his two colleagues Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed in Egypt. The charges were among others spreading false news and helping the banned Muslim Brotherhood. The three men refused their accusation and they claimed that they were only reporting the news.

Following a long procedure and 400 days in jail Peter Geste was finally freed and extradited on February 1. The Egyptian Interior Ministry confirmed the court's decision by a statement. The statement contains that it had been "decided to extradite Australian journalist Peter Geste... to his country today, 1 February (2015)... after the cabinet's approval, in enforcement of the Presidential Decree no. 140 for the year 2014 regarding the rulings on extraditing defendants and deporting the convicts". The possibility of the release of Geste was mentioned earlier in



*Peter Geste in 2012 with his Peabody Award.  
Photo: Peabody Awards*

November 2014 in light of the decree on repatriating foreign prisoners previously signed by President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. According to presidential sources there is a





chance that Fahmy will also be released after his Egyptian nationality being revoked as he has dual Canadian and Egyptian nationality. The third man Mohamed only holds Egyptian nationality therefore his release is doubtful. When in June 2013 the other two reporters were sentenced to seven years Mohamed was given ten years of prison. On 12 February 2015 the court decided that Mohamed and Fahmy could be free during their retrial.

The Doha based Al-Jazeera satellite television network welcomes the release of Peter Greste. The Al-Jazeera insists on the freeing of Fahmy and Mohamed as well. Although the relationship between Qatar and Egypt had been improving lately, this case resulted in the relations being strained between the two states.

**Alaa Abd el-Fattah  
prominent pro-democracy activist  
was sentenced to five years in prison**

**On February 23** an Egyptian court gave five years in jail to Alaa Abd el-Fattah on charges of violating a law that is aimed to diminish demonstrations. He had already been imprisoned for taking part in a protest for judicial independence in 2006. Following this event he became a symbolic person. The delivery of the recent judgement resulted in outrage in the courtroom. Supporters of Alaa Abd el-Fattah who were present in the courtroom started chanting: "Down with the military rule!" On the same day the trial of Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed was adjourned by the court until March 8.



*Alaa Abd El-Fattah. Photo: Alaa Abd El-Fattah*

“Supporters of Alaa Abd el-Fattah who were present in the courtroom started chanting:  
Down with the military rule!”



## Kidnappings and more videos from ISIS

**Days after ISIS** (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) threatened to kill Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh if Jordan does not release a female Iraqi jihadist, a macabre video was released once again. The movie showed the pilot, trapped in a cage and burnt alive. A sequence was added where al-Kasasbeh was walking at gunpoint amongst wreckage, most likely caused by airstrike attacks against ISIS. The flight lieutenant was held as a prisoner by ISIS when his plane came down near Raqqa, Syria during a mission against ISIS in December 2014. Since the US-led coalition started with airstrikes al-Kasasbeh is the first and so far only foreign military pilot to be captured. ISIS demanded to free Sajida al-Rishawi, she was sentenced to death after committing a suicide bomb attack in Amman in 2005, that killed 57 people. Jordan – participating in the US-led coalition against ISIS – has made many efforts to secure the Jordanian pilot release. The Jordanian government stated it was prepared to release the female jihadist in exchange for the unharmed al-Kasasbeh. King Abdullah of Jordan describes al-Kasasbeh as a hero and stated “Jordan must stand united in the face of

hardship”. Army spokesman Mamdouh al-Ameri added: “our punishment and revenge will be as huge as the loss of the Jordanians.” A tense situation was created when hundreds of demonstrators met in the streets in Amman after the news had been revealed, claiming revenge against the jihadists killers. ISIS showed the world its manipulation in information warfare in attempting to create problems for the authorities of Jordan and to weaken the Arab-Western coalition. As a reaction Jordan executed hours after the release of the video two prisoners, including Sajida al-Rishawi. The pilot was murdered after his father begged for compassion. Secretary



King Abdullah of Jordan. Photo: Chatham House



of State John Kerry stated therefore ISIS's only goal is "to murder and destroy". Jordanian media believe the pilot was killed on January 3, so weeks earlier before the video appeared.

Furthermore ISIS claimed an American hostage died by an attack by Jordanian airstrike in Syria. Kayla Mueller, age 26, graduated from Northern Arizona University. She is an aid worker who came to the Turkish and Syrian border in 2012 to work with refugees. The woman was kidnapped while working in Aleppo in Syria. The terroristic group revealed some pictures of a ruined building where she would have

Officials in Jordan insist they will keep up the pressure.

On February 15 another terrifying video appeared showing the beheadings of 21 Egyptian Christians. The movie shows images of a group in orange overalls marching along a beach. Every man was accompanied by a masked militant. These men had been captured by ISIS in Sirte, eastern Libya, who is now under control of Islamist troops. The video made it clear the men were killed because of their faith. ISIS did not distribute the video, Libyan jihadists who are loyal to ISIS posted the tape online. Since the fall of its then-leader Col

“Since the murder of pilot al-Kasasbeh Jordan has increased its participation in the bombing of ISIS. Officials in Jordan insist they will keep up the pressure”

died, however there are no images of the aid worker herself. Moreover there is no evidence to confirm the ISIS report according to officials. Her parents are hopeful she is still alive. Mueller would be the fourth American to die while being held by ISIS, if her death is officially confirmed. Aid worker Peter Kassig and journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff were beheaded by the group. An official of the Jordan government believes the ISIS report is "criminal propaganda" and is highly skeptical about it. Since the murder of pilot al-Kasasbeh Jordan has increased its participation in the bombing of ISIS.

Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 many other militia groups have battled to gain control for there is no strong central government anymore. In Egypt there have been demonstrations calling on the government to take more action to release the captives of ISIS. Despite the unrest in Libya, many Egyptians are crossing the border to Libya to seek a job. President of Egypt Sisi banned all travel from Egypt to Libya by Egyptian citizens and stated Egypt would respond to the deaths of the 21 men. A seven-day mourning period was held and Sisi had a talk about the murders with the top military commanders of Egypt. The



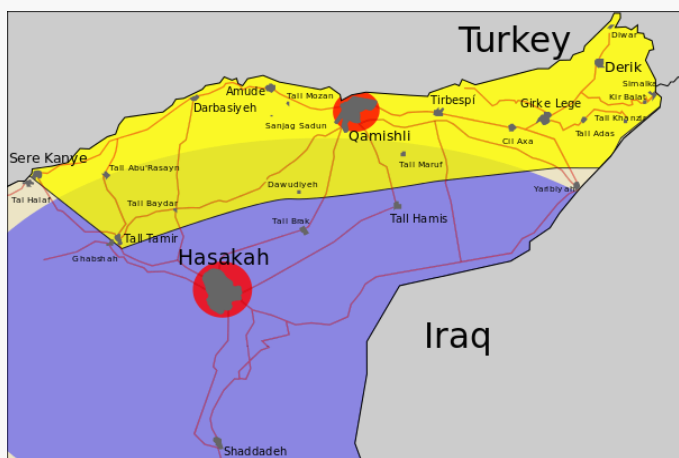
country – which is the most populous Arab state – focused more on the complex rebellion within its own borders and had not directly taken part in the US-led air strikes against ISIS. Western officials fear Islamist militants are taking advantage of the turmoil to enforce their presence. A few of these militant groups are loyal to radical ISIS and claimed responsibility for some attacks over recent weeks. Egypt decided to upgrade its military hardware in order to tempt the fear the crisis in neighbouring Libya could go across the border. Egypt ordered 24 fighter jets, a naval frigate and military equip men, according to French president Nicolas Sarkozy.

On February 24, at least 150 people from Assyrian Christian villages have been kidnapped by Islamic State in north-eastern Syria, according to Christian Syrian activists. At least 150 people are missing, including women and elderly. When the militants attacked rural villages of western Hasaka approximately 90 people were abducted. These villages are inhabited by the ancient Christian minority. This city is mainly in hands of the Kurds. However ISIS did not confirm the kidnappings. More than 200,000 people



US air force against IS in 2014. Photo: Staff Sergeant Chelsea Browning

have been killed in this conflict – which last nearly for four years – and many Assyrian Christians have emigrated. Christians do not longer form the majority in Syria's Jazeera area – which include Hasaka – since the arrival of Kurds and Arab nomadic tribes at the end of the 19th century. Two days later, ISIS released a 5 minute lasting video of an Iraqi museum in Mosul that is destroyed by militants with sledges and power tools. Priceless artifacts and large statues were smashed into pieces as they claim the relics are idols that must be removed. Their final goal is to eliminate what they view as heresy. It is not the first time the terrorist group destroyed a number of shrines and Muslim holy sites. They also would have sold ancient artifacts on the black market to finance their war. In the past Islamic State militants destroyed approximately 2000 books, leaving only Islamic texts in the Central Library of Mosul. Days later, they repeated the same act at the University of Mosul's library. "Our prophet ordered us to remove all these statues as his followers did when they conquered nations", an ISIS militant in the video adds.



Location of Hasaka. Map: Wikimedia Commons





### **Libya ends contribution in UN – brokered dialogue**

On February 23 the chamber of representatives of Libya decided to not participate any longer in the United Nations - brokered talks on the future of the North African state in war. The decision came after the terrorist attack a few days earlier in al-Qoba which wounded or killed many people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the suicide car bombings, killing 40 people. According to the – anonymous – statement from a Libyan parliamentarian the decision to stop the dialogue was a consequence of fears that the international community would pressure to take in Islamists in a future unity government. The United States appealed once again to all Libyan stakeholders to participate in the dialogue and stated that “those who choose not to participate are excluding themselves from discussions which are critical to combating terrorism as well as to the overall peace, security and the stability and security of Libya”. The international world is challenged to find a political solution to the political and military crisis of this nation.

“Libya decided to not participate any longer in the United Nations”

### **“Jihadi John” watched by British Intelligent Services in 2009**

Mohammed Emwazi – known by his nickname “Jihadi John” and from his appearance in the terrifying ISIS execution videos as a masked speaker – was being watched by the British Intelligent Services in 2009. Emwazi seemed to have a normal life, when he moved to London from his birthplace Kuwait at the age of six. He graduated in computer sciences in 2009 at the University of Westminster. British Intelligent Services noticed him when he headed to Tanzania accompanied by two friends for a “celebratory safari”. Questions remain how and when the ISIS militant was radicalized. The foreign hostages Emwazi guarded, gave him the name “Jihadi John”. In order to not disturb continuing operations Britain officially refuses to confirm he is “Jihadi John”. Jihadi John appeared however in court documents from 2011 as a participant in a network of extremists who smuggled funds, equipment and recruits from the United Kingdom to Somalia for “terrorism-related activity”. Emwazi later moved to Kuwait, however he returned to London at least twice. He blamed the British government for not allowing him to return to Kuwait. In 2013, he helped to guard Western hostages in Syria, one year later he made his appearance in the beheading videos of ISIS hostages.



## Increasing unrest in Yemen



Yemeni soldiers in 2011. Photo: Ibrahim Qasim

**As Shi'ite rebels seized power** in Yemen, several foreign embassies have closed their embassies in its capital Sanaa and the personnel were relocated. While the US Embassy claimed to destroy all weapons, some of the vehicles were apparently “left behind” as were taken over by the Houthi rebels. Following the closure of the embassies, British citizens were urged to leave due to “increased risk” while French citizens were asked to leave the country “as soon as possible”. Meanwhile, the US government confirmed that the closure of the US Embassy should not affect the counter-terrorism operations in the region against al-Qaeda Yemen branch as

defined as the most dangerous branch. In the course of increasing unrest, the parliament of Yemen has been dissolved by fighters led by Iran-linked Abdel-Malek al-Houthi while the president resigned in January this year. The leader of the Houthi already warned against foreign intervention and promised them to be “harmless” in case of any interference. With the help of the UN though, Houthi rebels have come to a preliminary agreement with the independent Justice and Building Party to ensure that Yemen “does not collapse” due to escalating violence. According to the preliminary agreement, the Nationals Congress will get a second chamber – a new parliament where the Houthis (who are from the north) will be given half of the seats while the other half will be given to the country’s representatives from the south. The House of Representatives will remain as it is while the fighters are called to withdraw from the governmental institutions they have seized. The escape of the president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi from his house arrest to the south of the country, however, might alter already agreed upon conditions. From Aden, the previous capital in the south,



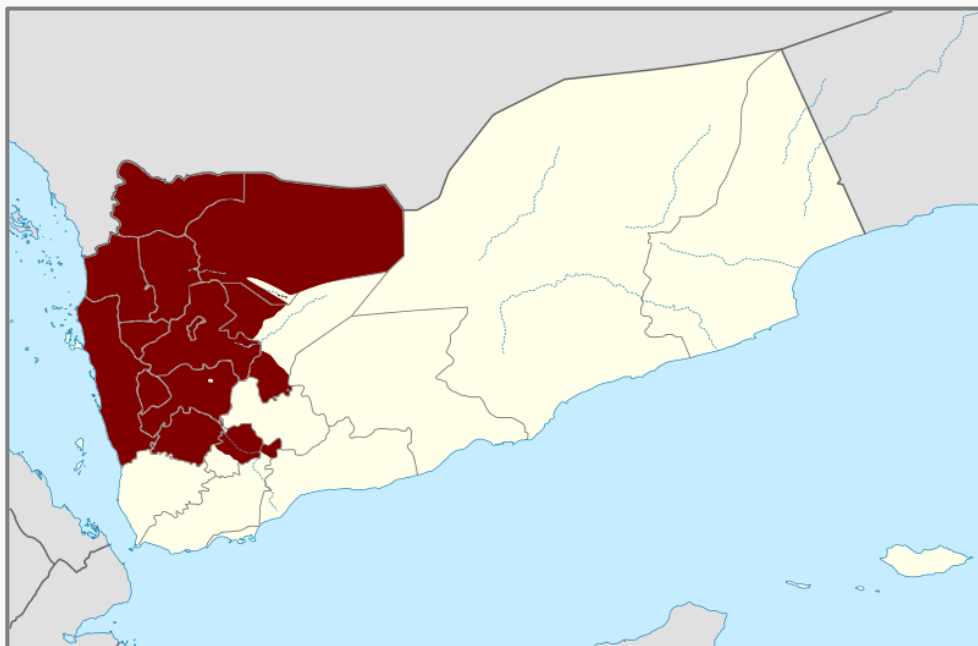
Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi withdrew his resignation. From there, he claimed to resume his duties while named the actions of Houthis as “null and illegitimate”. The president also called on government to ‘head to Aden to convene’. The prime minister of Yemen, although still under house arrest, followed the president’s claim and withdrew his resignation. The south of the country indeed might be a temporary safe exile for Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi as the Houthis, while coming from the north, were met with resistance when attempted further progress into the south, particularly from the Yemen’s branch of al-Qaeda. Too



Logo of the Houthis. Photo: Abdullah Sarhan

would be appropriate to remind that Hadi replaced the previous president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012 after akin uprising.

“Hadi withdrew his resignation. From there, he claimed to resume his duties while named the actions of Houthis as null and illegitimate”



Houthi controlled areas in Yemen by 30 January 2015. Map: Wikimedia Commons



## Boko Haram militants attack Chad for first time

**Presidential rally in Gombe** in the North-East of Nigeria continued with a suicide attack “minutes after” the current president Jonathan left his campaign; 18 people died. Identified by police as co-ordinated attacks, explosions hit another three oil-rich towns: Port Harcourt, Isiokpo, and Degema. Boko Haram have not taken responsibility for the blast although female suicide bombers recently became used by anti-democracy militants. Angry youth of the town blamed president’s People’s Democratic Party and the president himself for the visit claiming it was the reason of the attack. As a result, the president and his opponent Buhari cancelled their campaign rallies in the Borno state in the north-east of Nigeria. Will Ross, the BBC News reporter, emphasized that the timing of the attack in



Released Boko Haram hostages in November 2014. Photo: VOA



Autodefence forces against Boko Haram. Photo: VOA

Gombre “will have shocked the security forces” and the violence is apparently escalating as it gets closer to elections. The African Union also supported the plan of the deployment of a 7,500-strong regional force to fight the militants.

While military aircrafts from Chad continue their attacks on Boko Haram positions in Nigerian town of Gamboru, the militants managed to enter the town of Fotokol located on the side of the border in Cameroon when the central mosque was burned and worshippers together with the imam were killed. Cameroon is not the only country where the insurgency of Boko Haram is spreading to. Boko Haram intensified their attacks against Nigeria’s neighbours in response to their military support. Two other neighbouring states –





Chad and Niger are also subjects to cross-border attacks where the latter fought off an attack on a Bosso village. The first attack on Chad was in the village Ngouboua which fighters reached after they crossed the Lake Chad on motorboats but were pushed back by Chadian troops although they managed to kill the chief of the village and burn few houses. The attack followed the release of the video where the leader of Boko Haram declared “war” on Chad after coalition was formed. As a

result of a continuing insurgency in the North-East, the electoral commission proposed to postpone presidential and legislative elections to March 28 so that millions of displaced residents would have an opportunity to vote. Such a decision was met with opposition by another president candidate Muhammadu Buhari, whose loss in presidential elections in 2011 brought thousands of his supporters to streets and 800 were reported to be killed in those riots.

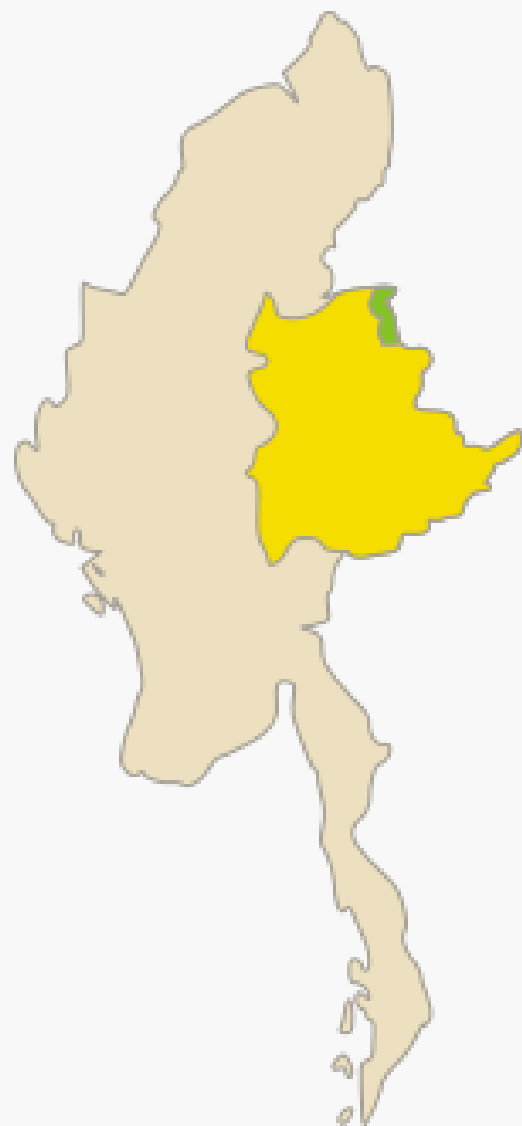


Areas controlled by Boko Haram by 11 February 2015. Map: Wikimedia Commons



## Kokang rebel offensive attacks Myanmar army

**Despite six years of negotiation** and relative calm an intense battle restarted on 9 February between Kokang rebels of a minority ethnic group and the government of Myanmar (Burma) in the northern part. The fights with Kokang rebels commenced in Laukkai near the border with China, only a couple of days ahead of the country's Union Day celebration. A coalition of armed groups, including rebels of Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) attacked several Myanmar military positions, in an attempt to regain the Kokang self-administered zone they have lost in 2009. Already 47 government soldiers died in the battle and numerous are wounded. In the first four days of the battle 73 government troops have been wounded in the clashes, however there was no information about victims among the rebels or the civilians. Spokeswoman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Hua Chunying announced China is hopeful involved parties in Northern Myanmar will generate peace talks and prevent the clashes from escalating and affecting border stability. Thousands of refugees have fled to China to escape the violence. The paper 'Global New Light of Myanmar' announced on its



*Location of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone (green) within Shan State (yellow).  
Map: Wikimedia Commons*





Myanmar Army Armour Division flag. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

front page the imposition of a state of emergency and martial law in the Kokang region. The notice was signed by the president Thein Sein. The president granted large privileges to the military army in order to fight the ethnic Chinese rebels and stated he will “not lose an inch of the country’s territory to Kokang renegades”. Since 1989 a ceasefire was established between the military government and most of the ethnic groups. In 2008 however the government junta proposed the ethnic armies have to be converted into border

guards which the ethnic armies opposed. In August 2009, a conflict known as the “Kokang incident” broke out in Shan State in northern Myanmar. Government junta troops fought several weeks against ethnic minorities, including the Han Chinese and Wa. The first day of the conflict, thousands of Burmese residents fled to Yunnan in neighbouring China. Losing soldiers and territory by the Myanmar military during these offensives the Kokang forces regrouped. The rebels refused to sign a nationwide peace agreement the government has pursued with armed ethnic groups. The revival of MNDA raised questions about the supply of weapons and tactical support to launch a major offensive. Analysts mooted the idea Beijing provides artillery to the Chinese rebels along its border as a way to react against the power of Myanmar, due to its objective to foster new Western relationships. Chinese state-linked media strongly denied every notion that claims Peking is helping Chinese ethnic rebels. They stated China is in most need of a peaceful border stability.

“Analysts mooted the idea Beijing provides artillery to the Chinese rebels along its border as a way to react against the power of Myanmar due to its objective to foster new Western relationships”



## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic affairs affecting international relations

### **Slovakia and the failed referendum**

■ This month in Slovakia a referendum were held. There were three questions: the first one was asking if the term “marriage” is to be referred only to bounds between man and woman; the second was seeking to ban adoption for same-sex couples; and the third was seeking to allow parents to opt out their children from the classes dealing with topics as sex education and euthanasia. The “yes” were overwhelming among the voters, but only around one million people, namely the 21% of the voters went to vote. This meant the failing of the referendum, whose quorum necessary for its validity was 51% of the voters. The initiators of the referendum think this was a success anyway. Everybody agrees on the fact that this will open a debate around the question. What seems evident is that for the majority of the population, the same-sex couples are not a threat.

### **Austria passes controversial reforms to 1912 Islam Law**

■ A controversial reform has been introduced to Austria's century-long “1912 Law” on Islam which granted it the status of the official religion of Austria. The new bill bans foreign funding for mosques and imams and aims the tackling of Islamist radicalism. While the new reform claims to give Islam a chance to “develop with in line with common European values” through obligatory university courses for imams and, more importantly, stop “political influence and control from abroad”, half a million of Muslims of Austria accused the government in unequal treatment as Christians and Jewish faiths are still supported from abroad.

### **Fiji removes the Union Jack from its flag**

■ Fiji's Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama announced the change of the state's national flag. The current flag contains the Union Jack, symbol of the United Kingdom, heritage of its colonial past. In order to welcome the 45 years of independence from the UK, in October the state will unveil the design of the new flag. There are four members of the Commonwealth that still have the Union Jack in their national flag: Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tuvalu. Also New Zealand has recently announced the will to hold a referendum in 2016, in order to assess the necessity to remove the Union Jack from its flag.





## ■ News in Brief

# Bilateral relations

### **Lithuania signs non-binding deal for US LNG**

■ The United States liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporters now focus on the Baltic states and Poland, and Lithuania appears to be a partner in this. Its importer company Litgas has signed a non-binding agreement to purchase LNG from the first export terminal of the US, announced on 18 February 2015. Lithuania also partners with Norway in LNG matters and similar non-binding agreements with half the world's LNG suppliers.

### **Xi Jinping accepted the invitation of Barack Obama**

■ On February 11 the Chinese Xinhua News Agency reported that in September Xi Jinping, China's leader will pay his first official visit in the United States. Xi has already been to the US in June 2013 but that was for an informal summit. Last November President Barack Obama visited China for the annual summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and now Xi accepted the invitation of Obama. The United States Deputy Secretary of State made a statement during his visit in Beijing stating that the aim of the US is to deepen its practical cooperation with China, to manage their differences and to deliver tangible results for the people in both countries and others in the world.



*US State Secretary John Kerry and Chinese President Xi Jinping in China in 2014.  
Photo: US Department of State*



### **Indonesia recalled its ambassador from Brazil**

■ Indonesia recalled its ambassador from Brazil, as soon as he was hindered to participate at the execution of a Brazilian for drug trafficking. This was an utter consequence to the execution of a Brazilian and a Dutch, among six other people, for drug crimes in Indonesia. Indeed, Indonesia has one of the strictest laws on drug smuggling of the world. These executions led to the withdrawal of the Brazilian and Dutch ambassador from the Asian country. This month it is also due the execution of two Australian citizens for drug crimes. Notwithstanding the protests of the EU, Australia, Brazil and Amnesty International, Indonesia does not want to step back from the question.

### **Pro-democracy protesters back in Hong Kong**

■ The streets of the financial and shopping districts in Hong Kong became filled with pro-democracy protesters again in February. As reported by police, between 8,000 and 13,000 people showed up for a peaceful march although were met with anti-democracy protesters. After introducing the screening of candidates for the next chief executive in 2017, Beijing refuse to withdraw the reform despite protests and pro-democracy lawmakers who have pledged to veto the plan.

“Between 8,000 and 13,000 people showed up for a peaceful march”

### **North Korea denounced American human rights conference**

■ On February 17 a conference in Washington DC was held about the extensive human rights abuses in North Korea. The meeting titled “North Korean human rights: the road ahead” was hosted by the nonprofit Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) and several international experts and speakers participated. North Korea immediately asked to cancel the meeting and accused America for ignoring the proposal to attend the conference in order to defend itself. However the organizers claimed the conference was open to the public, the State Department announced it was a privately organized event. Ever since a United Nations commission of inquiry declared huge abuses of human rights in North Korea, the country has a defensive attitude.

### **Chinese satellite station in Argentina**

■ Argentina and China have agreed on building a satellite tracking station in Patagonia region. President Christina Fernandez has said the installation is the fundament of the Chinese project to reach the moon by 2020. As predicted, the station will cost \$300 million and get ready to operate in 2016.



## ■ News in Brief

### International relations

#### **Thai hostages released by Somali pirates**

■ The Somali pirates made million dollars from seizing ships. Nevertheless, due to patrols of international navies, they have significantly reduced their attacks since 2012. A few days ago, six Thai hostages were freed by the pirates. This was the longest kidnapping in the Somali pirate history. The victims were taken in 2010. The original crew was of twenty-four members, twelve were taken, and six already died from illness in captivity.

#### **Iran talks in Geneva**

■ A US delegation led by Wendy Sherman will arrive to Geneva for a meeting with Iranian officials. The parties will discuss Tehran's nuclear program. EU Special Advisor Cathy Ashton will lead the consultation. Even though the Western countries suspect the development of a nuclear bomb in Tehran, Iran opposes the allegations and refuses having any nuclear weapons ambitions.

#### **Unclear explosion in Gaza, allegedly aiming Egyptian convoy**

■ No one got injured in the shooting and explosion along Egypt-Gaza border. According to Egyptian security sources, their troops fired warning shots following a bomb explosion on Gaza territory. Supposedly the Hamas was behind the detonation that targeted the army convoy. Palestinian forces have contacted Egypt to investigate the incident.

“Supposedly the Hamas was behind the detonation that targeted the army convoy”



### North Korea is trying to evade sanctions by renaming its vessels

■ The United Nations has been imposing sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear weapons programme. In 2014 a North Korean ship was turned out to carry weapons from Cuba to North Korea for this reason the sanctions were extended to the Ocean Maritime Management. In order to be deleted from the blacklist database the OMM is reported to rename its ships and also to transfer its vessels ownership to shell companies. Although in accordance with the UN sanctions North Korea is not allowed to transfer weapons other than small arms in July 2013 hidden Cuban military cargo was found on a North Korean Vessel. According to the U.N. North Korea sanctions committee the OMM “played a key role in arranging the shipment of the concealed cargo of arms”.



*North Koreans taking at a rest in a Chinese boatyard. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

### Incompatibility in the head of UN

■ William Schabas announced his resignation after numerous Israeli criticisms. The Canadian academic is the head of a three-member group of the United Nations Human Rights Council that examine alleged war crimes during Israel's military offensive in Gaza. The problem is, Schabas formerly wrote a legal opinion for the Palestine Liberation Organization what makes him incompatible for the task. The Human Rights Council's executive will provide legal advice about his position.







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