

*"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"*

# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# March 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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## Intensifying ISIS operations in the Middle East

**March has seen the progress** of massacres of the IS militants in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia where numerous attacks were made. In the north of Iraq, IS militants destroyed 2000-year old ruins in Hatra, following the destruction of Assyrian city of Nimrud and museum artifacts in Mosul 'justifying their actions by the belief that false idols have to be smashed. All destructed cities were extremely valuable for the history of civilization as Hatra flourished as a major trading-post on the Silk Road and contained numerous temples and sculptures dedicated to gods like Apollo and Poseidon. UNESCO Head Irina Bykova immediately commented that such a destruction is a "strategy of cultural cleansing" and "war crime" that has "no political or religious justification". At the same time, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities blamed international community for failing to help Iraq protect its ancient monuments.

Meanwhile, multiple bombing in Iraqi Baghdad killed 19 people while the government continues a large-scale operation to recapture the city of Tikrit. Iraqi forces together with the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards have already



*The ruins of Hatra in 2006.  
Photo: Staff Sgt. JoAnn Makinano*

retaken districts around the city of Tikrit, the hometown of the deposed Saddam Hussein. Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani has personally overseen the defense of Baghdad and helped to organize pro-Iranian Shia militia. Tikrit fell to IS militants in June 2014 with the help of anti-government Sunni allies. The retake of the city is crucial for Iraqi government as it controls the strategic highway linking the south of the country with the north. Tikrit is also important as lies on the road to Mosul, second biggest city in Iraq, which was also seized by the IS but planned to be retaken. While the country continues being split between Sunnis, the supporters of Saddam and Shia majority, constituting the



government of the country, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi offered to excuse misled Sunnis who “lay down arms” instead of fighting the IS, the supporters of an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam.

During the celebration of a Kurdish New Year Nowruz, 45 were killed in attacks on Syrian Kurds in the north-eastern city of Hasakeh. While the IS claimed no responsibility, their relation to it was already identified due to IS militants attacks on towns located nearby along Syria’s border with Iraq and Turkey. 82 members of Syrian forces were killed during attacks on government positions in central provinces of Homs and Hama. IS has also published a

In the Libyan town of Sirte, ISIS kidnapped about 20 medical workers during an attack. The city lies between Tripoli and Benghazi. Most of the kidnapped were from the Philippines, as well as Ukraine, India, and Serbia. The officials suppose the personnel was taken to be used for own injured militants as medical personnel were trying to leave the city due to worsening security situation. On March 18 the attack in Tunis killed 23 people at a museum. While ISIS claimed responsibility, authorities and analysts said no clear links exist between the IS and the gunman. Arrested suspects said to be supporters of the al-Qaeda’s North-African branch. The situation within

## “Concerns are raised over the extremism spreading in North Africa”

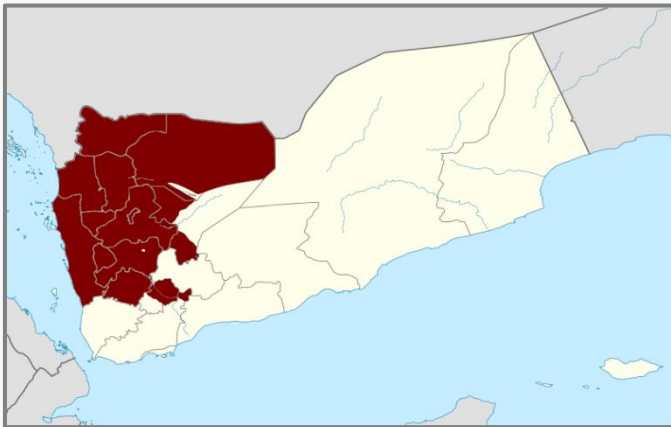
video showing the beheading of 3 Kurdish peshmerga fighters in the North of Iraq. The peshmerga have emerged as a key partner and allies of the US campaign which have driven the extremist group to the north of the country with the help of airstrikes.

At the same time, the extremist group claimed to fight with “those who ventured into an alliance with crusaders” rather than with Kurdish people. More than 1,000 peshmerga have been killed in combat with Islamic State militants since they captured a third of Iraq last summer. Meanwhile, few hundred Kurds have joined the IS against peshmerga and use chlorine as a chemical weapon.

the country remains quite dangerous. Concerns are raised over the extremism spreading in North Africa as neighboring Libya already pledged the allegiance to IS. Analysts cautioned that small groups could be taking inspiration from the militant group. Tunisian authorities estimated that 3,000 young people left the country to fight with radical groups in the Middle East, 500 have returned and may decide to carry attacks on their own. What is certain – the attack spread fear that is damaging for Tunisian economy struggling to recover since 2011 after the Arab Spring. The attack will damage Tunisia’s tourism industry and tourist operators already suspended visits to the country.



## Interventions in the sectarian war in Yemen



Houthi controlled areas of Yemen. Map: Wikimedia Commons

**The last American troops** have been evacuated from the Al-Anad airbase in Yemen following the closure of the embassy. As Houthi rebels took over the capital, hundreds of al-Qaeda members escaped prisons raising the security questions within the country. The cooperation of Yemeni government with the US and cooperative drone strikes have been hampered by raising power of Houthis and al-Qaeda militants. However, al-Qaeda and Houthis are not the only dangers within the country – the presence of ISIS was marked in March by their first large-scale attack in the capital of Yemen – Sanaa. Bombing of two mosques took the lives of at least 137 Shia worshippers and Houthis and 357 were injured. The online

statement of the new Sanaa branch of IS claimed to “cut off the arm of the Safavid (Iranian) plan in Yemen”. It is the first attack of the IS in the region where al-Qaeda is known as the most prominent jihadist group. While both ISIS and al-Qaeda are Sunni groups advocating extreme versions of Islam, analysts believe two would not cooperate 'anytime soon'. In fact, al-Qaeda claimed the declaration of an Islamic caliphate as illegitimate. The fight for the control of the country is mainly happening between the deposed president Hadi and the Houthis, a minority group stronghold in the north. While the two combating sides use airstrikes against each other, Hadi appeared on AdanTV for the first time since the escape of the house arrest. He urged Yemeni troops to refuse orders from Houthis and tied the actions of the latter to Iran. The top member of Houthi Political Council, on the other hand, blamed Hadi on Yemen's crises and chaos as he refused to transfer power. The supreme leader al-Houthi spoke live on al-Masirah TV: “If any army tries to invade our country, we will prove that Yemen will be a grave for those who invade us”. Iran denounced the military intervention



claiming any it will only complicate the situation. Meanwhile, Houthis progressed further to the south and seized the third largest city of Taiz and its airport. The captured city is located only 140 km from the base of Hadi – Aden.

The involvement of Saudi Arabia indeed revealed later this month as the country began airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen claiming that “Sunni Kingdom will do anything necessary” to restore a deposed government. The airstrikes hit Sanaa and its military base al-Duleimi. Logistical and intelligence support was provided by the US government while other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan claimed the demands to intervene. Saudi-led coalition troops bombed Houthi targets to gain control over Yemen's airspace amid ground fighting in Aden between the Houthi rebels and forces loyal to Hadi. Egyptian and Saudi warships have been deployed to Bab al-Mandab strait, a key trade and oil route separating the Arabian Peninsula from east Africa.

Later in March, the deposed president of Yemen Hadi abandoned the country as the Houthis started advancing toward his positions in Aden and struck his troops and thus, took over the air power as well as ballistic missiles. Hadi's departure demonstrates the disintegration of American counterterrorism efforts and a possible war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The departure of the US troops and the escape of Hadi indicate the disintegration of a military coalition against al-Qaeda, the base of which has been



*Saudi Arabian Air Force's Panavia Tornado IDS. Photo: Mike Freer*

Yemen. At the same time, although the Houthi rebels control much of the territory of the country, they cannot project enough of power and the existing chaos within the country, the American officials notice, may give al-Qaeda the “breathing space”.

As the conflict escalates and civilians start leaving the city, there is a warning of a humanitarian disaster. Mass evacuations of nationals were already initiated by Pakistan, China, and Russia as an airstrike hit a refugee camp Mazraq in north Yemen in an attack which initially targeted nearby Houthi fighters.

The position of Pakistan remains uncertain. While the government of the country is refusing to participate in a sectarian war because of the fact that so many sects live in Pakistan itself, it has been loaned with 1.5 billion from Saudi Arabia to meet debt-service obligations and undertake large energy and infrastructure projects and, thus, asked to show commitment to the coalition. Meanwhile, first report of naval forces taking part in the conflict appeared as Saudi-led war planes hit the airport in Aden; warships are believed to be Egyptian.



## Terrorist group al-Shabaab attacks Somali hotel

**The terrorist organization al-Shabaab** claims responsibility for an attack on a luxury hotel in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. At least nine persons were killed in the heavy battle between al-Shabaab militants and security forces on March 27, in order to recapture the facility of the Maka Al-Mukarramah hotel. According to one of the survivors of the assault the militants

until daybreak before trying to drive off the militants. Who was being targeted by the militants and how many civilians were inside the hotel remained unclear.

In the past, jihadist terrorist group al-Shabaab – who claims to have close ties with al-Qaeda – launched many attacks in Somalia, remaining a threat in the East African region. Since the surrender of

“Somalia is making an effort to solve many years of political instability and civil strife, however al-Shabaab is trying to break this attempt ”

were killing anyone they could find inside the hotel, which is a popular spot for Somali government officials and foreigners. At first, a suicide bomber blew up his explosives-laden car at the gate of the hotel, followed by gunmen who quickly make their way into the hotel. The infiltration lasted for hours and the terrorists hid for several hours in the hotel's dark rooms and alleys. There was sporadic gunfire, although the security forces made the decision to wait

dictator Siad Barre in 1991, the country is in lack of a stable government. Somalia is making an effort to solve many years of political instability and civil strife, however al-Shabaab is trying to break this attempt by regularly carrying out suicide bombings, drive-by shootings and other attacks. They often target government troops, lawmakers and foreigners, namely in the capital city where the government is seated. Between 2007 and 2011 al-Shabaab captured much







*Al-Shabaab fighters in Somalia.  
Photo: Al-Kataib Foundation*

of Mogadishu, but the African Union forces accomplished to regain control of Somalia's capital and other major cities. The extremist group is also active in neighboring countries, including Kenya. In 2013 an attack by al-Shabaab in the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi took the

lives of at least 67 people. Al-Shabaab planned violent attacks on Kenya and Uganda as the two countries have contributed troops to the African Union force supporting the government in Somalia.

Weeks before the attack in the hotel, an U.S. drone strike in Somalia is believed to have killed a senior member of the al-Shabaab extremist group who allegedly helped plan the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi. Adan Garar and two others are suspected to have been killed after their car was targeted near the town of Bardhere. According to a senior Kenyan official Garar is also suspected of planning failed attacks on Kenya's coast and in the Ugandan capital, Kampala last year.



*2013 Westgate shopping mall incident in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo: Anne Knight*



## Once again Pakistan faces terrorism

**Pakistan is a South Asian country** of more than 180 million people. It was a British colony and part of the Commonwealth. In fact, Pakistan, as Bangladesh, was part of India until 1947. When it obtained the independence, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the President of the Muslim League, became the nation's first Governor-General and the Speaker of the Parliament. Nonetheless, the first democratic elections took place only in 1970.

A major concern of the country, and one of the main reasons for the secession from India, is religion. Indeed, Pakistan is the second most populous Muslim-majority country. The 97 per cent of the population is Muslim. The majority is represented by the Sunni Muslims, but the country has the biggest Shia Muslim community of the world after Iran.

Recently, various Islamist militant groups have gathered under the umbrella organization of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, the Taliban Movement of Pakistan). The TTP is not directly affiliated to the Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Omar. Nonetheless, the organization is based in the northwestern Federally Administered Tribal Areas, near the Afghan border.



Flag used by Tehrik-i-Taliban. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

The TTP was born in 2002, but it became active only in 2007. The group became famous to the whole world in 2010, when they attempted a failed car bombing in Times Square, in New York.

Since then, the TTP has constantly been active, especially within Pakistan borders. Few days ago, in Lahore's Youhanabad area, a Roman Catholic Church and a Christ Church were hit in suicide attacks. The blasts took place on Sunday, when the churches were full of people. Fourteen persons died, and several were seriously harmed. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Jamaat-ur-Ahrar claimed the responsibility for the attacks. The situation after the bombings was so tense that angry people burned



alive a person they believed was involved in the bombings, and almost lynched another one. Youhanabad is the country's biggest Christian locality. Moreover, this is one of the wealthiest province and the homeland of the current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. A similar attack to a church took place in 2013, in Peshawar, killing more than eighty people.

Surely, the objective of the TTP was double: to kill the unfaithful Christians; and to defy the government. In fact, in the statement in which the group declared its responsibility was added "We promise that until an Islamic system is put into place in Pakistan such attacks will continue. If Pakistan's rulers

think they can stop us, they should try to do so." Indeed, in the last few days, in the North-West of the country, at the border with Afghanistan, there were battles between the army and members of the terrorist group. Fighting jets were deployed in the Tirah valley in the Khyber region, West of Peshawar. The Pakistani troops killed eighty militants. Conversely, a mine targeted twelve soldiers, killing six of them. In the last weeks there were strong indications of the fact that the leader of the TTP, Maulana Fazlullah was in the area under strike. His fate is still unknown, but there are constant speculations on the social media.



*Fata, the main territory of activity of the group Tehrik-i-Taliban. Map: GAO/USAid*



## Terrorist attacks in Mali

**Five people were killed** in Bamako, Mali's capital city in a suspected terror attack. Amongst the victims there is a French national, a Belgian and two Malians. Although it has not been clarified what happened exactly, sources saw a gunman walking in a restaurant, popular with foreigners. According to the UN peacekeeping mission to Mali, two international experts were among the

necessary. A day after the murders of five people another attack took place in the northern Malian town of Kidal. The three victims, including a UN peacekeeper were killed in a complex offensive. According to Radhia Achouri, UN spokesperson at least 30 mortars were launched towards a UN base outside the desert town. Civilians were killed in the attack as well. Mali's desert north suffers from ethnic

“At least 30 mortars were launched towards a UN base outside the desert town. Civilians were killed in the attack as well”

wounded. A policeman in the scene told the Agence France-Presse that one of the victims was a police officer. Witnesses saw the attackers escaping in two black vehicles, but most of them were refusing to testify in fear of vengeance.

French President Francois Hollande offered help in the area to tighten security. The French embassy warned French nationals in the city to stay alert and ask for help if

rivalries, instability and Islamist menace. Al-Qaeda linked Jihadists kept the area overrun, until French-led military intervention in 2013. The attack followed a peace deal agreement proposal by United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon, what the Malian government signed in hope of maintaining peace in the area. However, Tuareg-led rebels need more time before signing any agreement.



## Nigerian allies unify against Boko Haram

**The Nigerian terrorist organization** Boko Haram is believed to have carried out four suicide bomb attacks in the city of Maiduguri in Nigeria on 7 March. The assaults lasted for four hours and contained several crowded public places such as a fish market and bus station. At least 54 were killed and 143 wounded. Boko Haram did not claim responsibility for these events, although they were similar to previous attacks from the Islamic extremist group. Maiduguri is the place where the group was created and since they were driven away from their base in 2013 during a military state of emergency their target is



*Location of Maiduguri. Map: Wikimedia Commons*



*Eland 90 armoured car of the Chadian Army. Photo: Idriss Fall*

Maiduguri. Moreover, the terrorist group has increased suicide bombings and attacks in villages recently, because military forces from Chad and Nigeria have defeated the insurgents from several towns along Nigeria's border with Cameroon.

In order to establish a strong offensive against Boko Haram and to prevent the spread of similar terroristic activities, the African Union has created a regional force up to 10,000 men, that will be based in Chad's capital N'Djamena. However, this force will only focus on securing the Nigerian side of Lake Chad and will not push further into Nigeria. Since 2009 Boko Haram has been fighting an insurgency to create an Islamic state in northern Nigeria and in recent months the violence has increasingly spilled over into neighbouring



states. In north-eastern Nigeria, forces from Niger and Chad have launched a ground and air offensive against the terrorist group. The speech of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was the cause of this campaign. In his online pledge he called on Muslims everywhere to swear loyalty to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Nigerian officials interpreted this message as a reaction of the military pressure from Nigeria and its allies. They stated the

pledge of allegiance to ISIS was a sign of weakness.

Furthermore, the Nigerian military and troops from neighbouring states have recently claimed some success in their campaign against Boko Haram. However, Boko Haram militants have continued to launch deadly attacks. Nigeria is in need to improve security in the north and therefore postponed national elections by six weeks until 28 March.



*Northern Cameroon border, where Boko Haram operates.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

“The Nigerian military and troops from neighbouring states have recently claimed some success in their campaign against Boko Haram”



## Killings in Nigeria during tense elections

**Amid ongoing presidential elections** in Nigeria, where two opponents – President Jonathan Goodluck and a former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari fight for presidency and for the favor of an ethnically, regionally, and religiously divided electorate, a gunman killed at least 15 people in northeast of the country. It is the first elections in Nigeria when an opposition candidate is claimed to have a serious chance of winning but whose win may trigger violence within the country, which already started to escalate. While two candidates agreed on a peace accord and signed an act, the post-election is seen as a danger due to poisonous rhetoric from both sides and continuing shootings. Moreover, Buhari already lost once to Jonathan in 2011 and back then it triggered riots in the Muslim north when 800 people dies while 65,000 lost their homes. Buhari's top argument is his claim that he never stole during his 1983–1985 rule while his reputation of a military leader play well with government's failure to fight Boko Haram. However, ethnic and regional sentiments remain the most important – Buhari is popular in the north, Jonathan – in the south and east. The voting itself has seen numerous



*Muhammadu Buhari speaking at Chatham House.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

problems. Before voting started, two bombs exploded at polling stations and the website of the electoral commission was shut by hackers. Problems with biometric card-readers were also reported while fingerprint-recognizing machines worked with delays.

At the same time, the Islamist group Boko Haram, who are promoting the revival of Islamic caliphate in religiously mixed Nigeria and reject democracy, launched several attacks on voters in the northeast of the country. While collaborating Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger reclaimed much of the territory the Islamists took over earlier this year, they fail to control all attacks on civilians.



## United States imposes sanctions on Venezuela

**On 9 March the United States** declare Venezuela as a national threat. The USA immediately rendered sanctions against the South American country. According to the White House the Grounds for the sanctions is that “Venezuelan officials past and present who violate the human rights of Venezuelan citizens and engage in acts of public corruption will not be welcome here, and we now have the tools to block their assets and their use of US financial systems” stated Josh Earnest spokesman. In answer to the sanctions Venezuela called home its charge d’affaires in Washington in order to consult.

The sanctions include the blocking of interests and property in the United States of certain Venezuelan individuals and denying their entry to the US Furthermore American citizens and permanent residents are not allowed to do business with the sanctioned individuals. The sanctions were reportedly not directed against the local residents of Venezuela, but the corrupt elite of the government. Alongside with the sanctions Washington also requested the release of all political prisoners held in Venezuela, having “dozens of students” among them. In the past few years the



*Barack Obama at Las Vegas Presidential Forum.  
Photo: Center for American Progress Action Fund*

relationship between the United States and Venezuela did not lack frictions. Since 2008 there existed no full diplomatic representation of the two countries. In 2008 Hugo Chavez socialist leader expelled Patrick Duddy the Ambassador of the U.S. In reply to this Bernando Alvarez Venezuelan envoy was expelled from the United States. Venezuela now took the role of Cuba as being the primary adversary of the US in Latin America. Notwithstanding the hindrances in the diplomatic relations the commercial ties between the two countries remained stable. Venezuela is still the fourth-largest crude exporter to the US and it has the United States as its biggest trading partner.





## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic affairs affecting international relations

### Russian troops in full alert

■ According to the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, since the middle of March 38,000 troops, 41 warships, 15 submarines and 110 aircrafts are exercising near the Western border in order to face eventual dangers. Russia is concerned by the increasing exercises of the NATO troops near their border. The exercises began a day after the disclosure of the documentary about the annexation of Crimea in the Russian Federation. Notwithstanding the Minsk agreements and the ceasefire, the tensions between the parts have constantly increased.



*Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at the Gozhsky test ground.  
Photo: Kremlin.ru*

### Bombings in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula

■ On 10 March a suicide bomber approached a police base in a water tanker, filled with explosives. As the police fired on the vehicle it detonated the dynamite. The explosion killed a civilian and wounded 30 policemen and another two civilians. An army captain was killed and two soldiers wounded in the second attack. Soldiers followed militants in El-Arish when a roadside bomb blew up. Numerous attacks on security forces happened recently in Sinai since 2013, when the army removed Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.



### **Syrian government helicopter crashes in rebel-held area**

■ The helicopter, that is property of the Syrian government, went down in Jabal al-Zawiya, the north-west of Syria. This area is held by opposition fighters, including those from the al-Nusra Front. Four crew members were captured, a fifth was murdered. There were at least six crew members on board, however the fate of the sixth member remained unclear. Due to technical failure, the plane was forced to make an emergency landing near the northern town of Maarat al-Numan. Online videos and pictures appeared to show a damaged large helicopter in a rocky field. Numerous accusations have been made to the Syrian government for dropping barrel bombs from helicopters on hundreds of locations, violating an UN Security Council resolution.

### **Several attacks in Baghdad, 16 people die**

■ A number of civilian areas in Baghdad were the victim of attacks from insurgents. These assaults took place on numerous public places, including a commercial street and market, making a total amount of at least 16 deaths and 46 wounded. In order to recapture key areas around Tikrit – the former hometown of Saddam Hussein – government forces, Iranian-backed Shiite militias and Sunni volunteers are fighting each other in an attempt to gain control of these areas, as they were taken by Islamic State in June. Militants also seized four oil fields, the smuggled oil ascertains the finance of their operations and it prevents the government military to retake the land.

“Government forces, Iranian-backed  
Shiite militias and Sunni volunteers  
are fighting each other”

### **Nine people were injured in a knife attack at a train station in China**

■ On 6 March two men at a Chinese train station carried out a knife attack on people standing around. The attack left nine people injured and a police officer was wounded on his thumb the circumstances of which have not been cleared up. One of the assailants was shot by the police officers the other one got arrested. Their motive is still not clarified. Several photos and videos were unclosed on social media showing the attacker with a cleaver and the security officers approaching. Unfortunately this was not the first incident at the Guangzhou train station where another knife attack took place last year in May, six people were injured then.



## ■ News in Brief

### Bilateral relations

#### **Five million dollars were offered by the United States for a missing ex-FBI agent in Iran**

■ In 2007 a former FBI agent Robert Levinson went missing in Iran during a visit to the island of Kish. He turns 67 on 10 March and according to his family he has serious health issues such as diabetes and hypertension. Despite he retired from the FBI seventeen years ago according to press release in 2013 he had been offered money by the CIA to gather information about the contested nuclear program while being in Iran, although this allegation is denied by Washington. In 2012 the United States offered one million dollars reward for his return. This year, on 9 March the reward was increased to five million dollars for any useful information about the present location of Levinson. The United States asked the government of Iran to cooperate in the investigation but Iran is negating knowing anything about his disappearance.

“According to press release in 2013 he had been offered money by the CIA to gather information about the contested nuclear program while being in Iran”

#### **Germany will not attend Moscow WWII Victory Day Parade**

■ The German Chancellor Angela Merkel has recently announced, that like many other Western leaders, she will not attend Moscow WWII Victory Parade. Russia celebrates the victory over the Nazi forces during the Second World War on 9 May, one day after the Western forces. Normally, the allies attend this celebration every year. Nonetheless, due to the increasing tensions for Ukraine's situation, this year few Western leaders will be present. Anyway, Moscow declared that the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will attend the ceremony.



### **Moldova: two Russian journalists banned for five years**

■ Moldova has recently banned for five years two Russian journalists from entering the country. The two were Dmitry Kiselev, head of the state-owned Rossiya Segodnya, and Andrei Kondrashov, author of the documentary “Crimea: The road home”. The journalists were trying to document the imminent elections in Gagauzia, one of the regions less supportive towards the European Union aspirations. It is not the first time that the Moldovan government pushes away Russians from its territory. The same happened last month with a TV crew and three lawmakers. Indeed, the President Nicolae Timofti aspires the integration of its country in the EU, and dreads the Russian presence to be harmful for the achievement of this objective.



*Moldovan President Timofti welcomes U.S. State Secretary John Kerry.  
Photo: U.S. Department of State*



*Map of Moldova with EU flag.  
Map: Wikimedia Commons*

### **Heightened security concerns in Saudi Arabia**

■ US Consulate Generals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia received a warning message from the embassy. In response, US officials suspended operations at the embassy and consulates in Saudi Arabia for a few days. According to the statement, telephone lines at the facilities will be down for two days. They warn US citizens to travel cautiously throughout the country. There is no information of a specific security concern. However allegedly there was a car bomb threat.

### **Myanmar guilty for bombing Chinese territory?**

■ On March 13 a bomb dropped in the border city of Lincang in Yunnan Province took the life of four Chinese civilians, nine other persons were injured. According to China, Myanmar was responsible for this event, however Myanmar claimed no involvement in this incident. After analysing GPS data and radar information the Myanmar military came to the conclusion their warplanes did not carry out the strike. China warned that it would take action if more stray-fire incidents occurred and insisted of an intensive investigation. According to an air force spokesman China sent numerous warplanes to chase away the Myanmar planes approaching the Chinese border.



## ■ News in Brief

### International relations

#### **EU is running out patience with Greece**

■ The Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras requested a meeting with the main European Union institutions, in order to receive short-term funds to solve the current liquidity problems of its country. Since 2010, Greece received from the EU and the International Monetary Fund bailouts for a total of 240 billions euros. Nonetheless, its economy has shrunk by 25 percent, partly due to the austerity measures imposed by its lenders. Syriza's party of Alexis Tsipras was elected to refuse the austerity measures, but until now has accepted the help of its creditors without progressing in the reforms requested. The EU has accepted a four month extension of its bailout program, but now is running out patience.

#### **El-Sisi says Arab League “agrees in principle” to form a voluntary joint military force**

■ Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi announced at the closing session of the Arab League Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh that member states have agreed in principle to form a joint military force to deal with security threats. Membership in the force would be voluntary, according to the summit's final declaration. El-Sisi added that a “high-level” team will be created and led by Arab army generals to study means of forming this force. He also pledged to continue “working, communicating and coordinating” with Arab states on various common interests in the region.

“He [El-Sisi] also pledged to continue working, communicating and coordinating with Arab states on various common interests in the region”





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