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About CRP News & Background

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The evolution of the Crimean crisis

Although the month of March ended with the announcement of withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from Crimea, ordered by Ukrainian standing President Olexander Turchynov, the extension of individual sanctions by the European Union and the United States, and an announcement from German Chancellor Angela Merkel stating that Russian President Vladimir Putin has agreed to a “partial pullback” of Russian troops from the Ukrainian border, the events in Crimea during the month of April did not pan out the way the West had hoped.

The first of April marked the suspension by NATO foreign ministers of all civilian and military cooperation with Russia at a meeting in Brussels. However, shortly after, on 6 April 2014, it was announced by the Ukrainian defence ministry that there was a fatal shooting incident in the village of Novofedorivka, at a military dormitory building at the Novofedorivka Air Base in Crimea, which was, at that time, occupied by Ukrainian military personnel and their families who were awaiting relocation to mainland Ukraine from Crimea.

Though Putin had earlier agreed to the partial withdrawal of Russian troops from



*The main counterparts in the Crimean crisis.
Map: Wikimedia Commons*

eastern Ukraine, in April, NATO released satellite images that indicate the presence of Russian troops massed on the Russian-Ukrainian border in recent weeks. Russia denies these allegations, however, and has stated that the images released by NATO are in fact images from August 2013.

On the same day, 10 April 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin warns that the gas supply to Ukraine may be cut if Kiev does not pay off its debts to Russia, estimated to be about \$3.5 billion USD, and suggests that this could likely affect gas deliveries to Europe as well. While the situation in



Crimea in April of this year has not improved, it is difficult to predict whether this trend will continue. The Russian gas supply situation has led to Russia seeking a deal with China, a deal that many speculate is more beneficial to China than the Russian Federation.

As the situation that began in Crimea has now spread across other parts of eastern Ukraine, it currently seems that there is no end in sight. However, American author and journalist Thomas L. Friedman has an

interesting perspective on the events that have taken place between Russia and Ukraine in 2014 and Russia's current position. Taking into account that the situation in Crimea has weakened the Russian economy, prompted Europe to seek gas supply outside of Russia, has revived NATO, and has allowed for China to get a bargain gas deal, Friedman suggests that "the country Putin threatens most today is Russia."

“As the situation that began in Crimea has now spread across other parts of eastern Ukraine, it currently seems that there is no end in sight”



Anti-war protest in Odessa in March 2014. Photo: Yuriy Kvach



Violence intensifies during Syrian elections

In the Syrian civil war which began as peaceful protests against Assad's rule more than 150,000 people, including many civilians, had been killed, which undermined government forces against rebels trying to end the four-decade rule of the Assad family. The political revolt against al-Assad's regime started in Daraa province in 2011. Over the past year, more foreign fighters have joined to assist both sides of the civil war. Millions have fled the country. As more reports of bloodshed and chaos emerged from Syria, the government released an announcement which says presidential elections will hold on June 3, preparing the ground for Bashar al-Assad to defy widespread opposition and prolong his grip on power, days after he said the civil war was turning in his favor. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Jihad al-Laham said the constitutional court will start accepting presidential nominations soon. But it's unclear whether the elections will yield any major change in Syria, which has been wracked by violence over the past three years. But the new elections may not necessarily mean regime change. After President Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father in 2000, he won a second term

unopposed in 2007. Western and Gulf Arab countries that back Assad's opponents have called plans for an election a "parody of democracy" and said it would wreck efforts to negotiate a peace settlement. Monzer Akbik, of the Western-backed National Coalition opposition group, told Reuters the election was a sign Assad was unwilling to seek a political solution to the conflict. The European Union reiterated its stance against holding an election that time. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: "Such elections are incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Geneva communique," referring to a June 2012 agreement on seeking a political transition in Syria. US State Department



Bashar al-Assad graffiti in the "Abode of Chaos" museum of contemporary art.
Photo: Thierry Ehrmann



spokeswoman Jen Psaki said: “The Syrian regime under the Assads has never held a credible, free and fair election and has taken legal and administrative steps to ensure that this vote will not be fair”. Although Assad has not said explicitly he will run for office again, preparations for his candidacy have already begun in state-controlled parts of the capital. When the election was announced on state television, parliamentary Speaker Mohamed Jihad al-Laham said requests for

involve barrels stuffed with nails and other objects to maximize damage. By midday on the election day, at least nine people had been killed across the country, the opposition Local Coordination Committees of Syria said. On the same day, 11 government and loyalist fighters were killed near Talbisah, an Alawite town north of the central city of Homs. Alawites are followers of an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam. Assad is Alawite and the bulk of his opponents are Sunni Muslims, who form the majority of

“The Syrian regime under the Assads has never held a credible, free and fair election and has taken legal and administrative steps to ensure that this vote will not be fair”

nomination would be accepted until May 1. Syrians outside the country could vote at Syrian embassies on May 28. Parliament set residency rules for presidential candidates in March, a move that could have barred many of Assad's foes who live in exile. Assad said later that the conflict had reached a “turning point” because of military gains against the rebels.

As a reaction for the government announcement about the election date, opposition activists reported more “barrel bombs” rained down on neighborhoods across Syria. These highly destructive improvised explosives were dropped by helicopters. Western countries have condemned this type of act as a war crime. These kinds of explosives are usually

Syria's population. Few days later, dozens of people were killed in air strikes in the northern city of Aleppo, including 14 people in the Baeedeen neighborhood killed by the previously mentioned “barrel bombs”. Gun battles, shelling and air strikes continued daily and the weekly death toll from the conflict regularly exceeded 1,000. The Observatory put the day's death toll at 273. The US State Department said it had indications a toxic chemical, probably chlorine, was used in the Syrian town of Kfar Zeita that month. Later Syrian opposition activists reported that helicopters dropped chlorine gas on Kfar Zeita on April 11 and 12. After this the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, locked in a three-year conflict with rebels seeking to topple him, agreed to



destroy his chemical weapons after hundreds of people were killed in a sarin gas attack last year in the outskirts of Damascus. The UN gave a deadline for the total destruction of Syria's chemical weapons by June 30, but the government had vowed to complete the removal of its 1,300 tons of chemical substances on April 27, after missing several deadlines. Then Syria missed a self-imposed deadline to get rid of all its chemical weapons by April 27, as the United Nations announced that more than 92 percent of the arsenal had been shipped out of the country or destroyed. Sigrid Kaag, head of the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of

Chemical Weapons, told reporters in Damascus that the UN hoped Syria could meet the June deadline. The chemicals were transported to the Mediterranean port of Latakia and loaded onto Norwegian and Danish ships for transport from Syria to the Italian port Gioia Tauro, where they were transferred to a ship equipped to destroy the agents and turn them into low-toxicity effluent. Kaag urged the government to destroy the remaining chemical material "in shortest possible time frame". "If this is achieved ... then Syria has indeed successfully acquitted itself of a major obligation that is a focus of much international attention."



*A view of Syria under government crackdown.
Photo: Elizabeth Arrott*



Seven states in new round of talks about atomic dispute

Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia and the United States met in Vienna to resolve the atomic dispute what emerged with the ability of Iran to produce fissile material for a nuclear bomb.

This recent meeting on the 13th of May will be the third one in the series of discussions about the threat of a new war in the Middle East. Catherine Ashton said that the discussions require intensive work, and “we will now move to the next phase ... in which we will aim to bridge the gaps in all the key areas and work on the concrete elements of a possible comprehensive agreement”. The supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei encouraged the meetings about the nuclear talks but denied that Iran would slow the progress down because of these meetings, and would never let anything to be “forced upon them”.

The American warning about the so-called “breakout” of Iran worries the West, though Iran sticks to its opinion that the programme is “entirely peaceful” – the activity is for electricity generation, medical and agricultural research. The aim of the other six states is to slow the process down which is against the pledge of Khamenei.



Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khāmenei, Superme Leader of Iran. Photo: Sajed.ir

According to the US, in two months' time Iran could produce fuel for the bomb – the slowdown would repress it to a year.

The six powers want Iran “to cut back the number of centrifuges” with which it refines uranium, “the overall amount of enriched uranium it produces”, and its research in the field of technologies. Iran wants the “crippling economic sanctions imposed by the West and the United Nations lifted”. Back in November, an agreement was made “curbing some Iranian enrichment activities in exchange for some easing of sanctions”. The “general discussions” are complete. A diplomat said that among the



issues there are “how the UN nuclear inspectors would verify whether Iran was meeting its end of any deal, suspected past atomic bomb research by Tehran, and how to deal with UN Security Council resolutions on Iran adopted since 2006”. Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Abbas Araqchi said regarding the general discussions that “the reactor of Arak will remain as the heavy-water reactor ... but there are technical ways to decrease concerns over its activities”. Also, the uranium enrichment will not be suspended



P5+1 Talks With Iran in Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: US Department of State

though its level can be a matter of discussion. The West fears that Iran will not use the refined uranium to fuel the nuclear power plants to create electricity but to make material for a nuclear bomb. The reactor in Arak also can yield plutonium, another material for weapons.

Catherine Ashton, EU foreign policy chief who coordinates the meetings on behalf of the powers said that a good agreement, a progress is the most important at the moment. However, negotiators are worried

that any deals would be criticised by conservatives from all sides. It was possible that due to the choice of Iran for its new UN ambassador, Hamid Abutalebi, the talks could be delayed. The new ambassador has links to the 1979–81 hostage crisis when radical Iranian students held the staff of the American embassy for 444 days. Another problematic matter is that France24 was told that it is still the middle of the crisis, and there are “conflicting signals” about the talks: Ashton says they are substantive, Iranians say there is a majority consensus, Americans say there are insurmountable differences – every side wants a deal best for themselves, and since the contrast is well known between the countries, the problems are hard to solve. Israel has threatened to attack Iran if the diplomatic efforts fail. Iran says that the “assumed atomic arsenal” of Israel is what threatens peace and stability. Also background tensions over Russia and Ukraine, and the visa-denial for the UN envoy of Iran to New York complicate matters but fortunately have not harmed the nuclear talks. Good sign is that all participants are committed to finish the discussions soon, and not to extend the talks. “The consequences of failure are very significant.” The finalising is planned for the 20th of July, so a draft of the agreement should be ready at the end of May, or early June. So far, the meetings had been about declaring the positions of the countries, and not about narrowing differences. Next round of discussions will take place some time in May.



Israeli-Palestinian peace process breakdown



Palestinian-Israeli flag. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

On 29 July 2013 the US government and its state secretary John Kerry launched a renewed initiative to restore peace in the Middle East, and mainly, to stabilise the status of Israel and Palestine. The negotiations had been going on for several months as the final solution was due to be reached on 29 April 2014. But the talks simply collapsed by this deadline with John Kerry putting the main blame on Israel. Later the State Department corrected this statement, claiming that neither of the sides were helpful in the negotiation process. Even though, John Kerry pointed at events that were the Israeli side's fault. First of all, it refused to release 26 Arab Israeli prisoners as previously compromised and then it announced the establishment

of 700 new units. As a reaction, Palestine started to sign international treaties that would legally allow it to step up against Israeli occupation.

Because of the international pressure, Israel tried to save the peace process in the middle of April. It offered a deal to Palestine: Israel will release the 26 prisoners if Palestine gives up its plans for signing international contracts and joining international conventions. Palestine later agreed to not using its non-member observer UN status for making such deals. Eventually, the prisoners were not released, because according to the Israeli position it would not help the peace process. As many journalists claim, it happened because the United States did not release one of its prisoners, Jonathan Pollard. Pollard was jailed for life after as a US Naval Intelligence analyst, passed strategic secrets to Israel. Since then, his captivity has been a decisive point of Israeli-US relations, as all the US presidents refused to let him out of prison.

As a consequence, Palestine kept on signing new conventions. Because of this, the Israeli government imposed sanctions against them, freezing tax resources and



limiting bank accounts. This can mean 80 million euros loss monthly for the Palestinian Authority, which is about one third of its budget. According to the PA, this is a simple act of theft and can cause further damages as Israel is planning to suspend the oil activity in the Gaza strip.

The final outcome is still uncertain which can destabilise the whole region. The USA still intends to step up for Israel on the international stage, but it seems that their relations also needs some restoration after the broken mutual trust. There may be no need for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in the future, but for Israeli-Palestinian-US ones.



Secretary Kerry addresses reporters during Tel Aviv News Conference.
Photo: US Department of State

“There may be no need for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in the future, but for Israeli-Palestinian-US ones”

Israel cooperating with Arab countries?

According to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Israel is holding secret talks with several “moderate” Arab countries. Their aim is to establish diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries that do not recognise the Jewish state, protecting themselves from Iran’s threat. The cooperation has been on the agenda for many decades as only Egypt and Jordan signed a peace deal with Israel. As a reaction, Saudi Arabia immediately denied the talks; Kuwait has not commented the Israeli statement yet.



Violence after the ban of the Muslim Brotherhood

Since the removal of Mohamed Morsi and the ban of the Muslim Brotherhood, the number of militant attacks on soldiers and policemen has been growing in Egypt. Around 500 people were killed since last July when Morsi was overthrown and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi replaced him in the presidency, creating a military led country. The government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group, which became a target of arrests since the ban. The most recent attack targeting governmental officers was carried out on April 2, when three bombs went off near Cairo University. The university has been a combat zone between police and students supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. The first two bombs went off after each other causing the death of one policeman. The third bomb went off two hours later causing no casualties. Five people were also injured in the attack. The policeman was identified as Tariq al-Mirjawi, head of Giza's investigation department. A group called Ajnad Misr or Soldiers of Egypt said it carried out the attack. The group issued a statement in which they said that the group is targeting policemen who were involved in killing the anti-government protesters. The attack was also a response to the growing

number of female protesters detained. Meanwhile the country is facing other violent clashes. On April 6, two people were killed when the two big tribes, the Nubian and the Arab Beni Helal, began a fight in the tourist city of Aswan. Since the two tribes are fighting, 25 people have been killed altogether, out of which 17 people belonged to the Beni Helal tribe. Before the police could stop the fight, shops and houses were burnt down. The army said that the Muslim Brotherhood may have been involved in the fight. The Brotherhood denied any involvement. The government recently has begun a legal fight against members of the Brotherhood. An Egyptian court sentenced Mohammed Badie, the Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood, and 682 supporters to death on April 28. In another case, 37 people were sentenced to death and other 492 people received death penalty. The UN and the US expressed concerns about the high number of death penalties given. The Muslim Brotherhood said that it will continue fighting for a democratic Egypt and the freedom of the people. An Islamist alliance group also called for a demonstration, expressing its support of the group.



Séléka and anti-balaka clashes in CAR

The Central African Republic has been facing violence since December 2012, when rebels charged François Bozizé with infringing points of peace agreements signed in 2007 and 2011. In March 2013, the Muslim rebel group, the Séléka, took over the leadership, after which Bozizé fled the country and Michel Djotodia became the new president. However, the Séléka was forced to resign from the leadership after 10 months, because the group failed to stop the pervading violence. Since then, clashes became more and more frequent between the Séléka rebels and the mostly Christian affiliated “anti-balaka” militia. The violent clashes displaced around one million people and killed thousands.

The most recent fight occurred in the town of Dekoa on April 8. At least 30 people were killed and 10 people were wounded by stray bullets. Most of the victims were civilians. The “anti-balaka” group attacked the Séléka rebels on Tuesday morning and the two warring sides were fighting for more than four hours.

In December 2013, with the help of the United Nations, the African Union has begun the so-called MISCA mission aiming to restore peace in CAR. Around 850 troops



Anti-Balaka militia. Photo: VOA French

took part in the mission, including troops from Chad. In the beginning of April, however, Chad decided to withdraw its troops from CAR as soldiers have been accused of siding with the Séléka rebels. Soldiers allegedly were involved in controversial affairs. The Chadian foreign ministry said that the troops became victims of a malignant campaign. The withdrawal of the Chadian militia aggravates the situation not taking part in the peacekeeping mission anymore. The UN Secretary Council is to send around 12,000 peacekeepers in September, who will be backed by 800 troops sent by the EU. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said



that the violence has turned into religious cleansing. Lynching and sexual violence spread all over the country, each committed due to religious affiliation.

Meanwhile, France and the US proposed a UN sanction targeting former President Bozizé and two other persons: an “anti-balaka” militia leader and one of the leaders of the Séléka. The three men are accused of undermining peace by financing militiamen. Bozizé is charged with supporting the militia aiming to destabilize the situation in the country and bring him

back to the presidency. He also presumably encouraged an “anti-balaka” attack on Bangui, which increased violence afterwards.

Sanctions were to have come into force on April 22 but Russia and China objected it. An anonym member of the UN Security Council said that the two countries might change their opinions in the future. If the members do not come to an agreement, the sanction will remain in question for an uncertain period of time.



Seleca rebellion March 2013. Map: Evan Centanni

EU-Africa summit in Brussels

The 4th EU-Africa summit will be held in Brussels starting on April 2. The key issues discussed will be illegal migration from Africa to Europe, China's increasing influence in the area and trade relations. Before the summit, a CAR crisis meeting will also take place. Leaders from the EU and Africa will discuss about sending EU troops to CAR in order to restore peace in the country.



Presidential elections in Algeria



Elections in Algeria. Photo: Magherebia

Presidential elections were held in Algeria on 17 April 2014. On the eve of the elections, protests broke out in the capital, Algiers, in response to the incumbent president's re-election bid. This news came despite his ailing health and his 3 previous consecutive terms serving as Algeria's president, having served in this position since 1999.

Many boycotts and protests have accompanied the 2014 elections due to incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika seeking yet another term. Among the protesters complaints were demands for political reform in Algeria and a new political order. A large part of the controversy surrounding Bouteflika's re-election campaign stems from not only his ailing health, due to the fact that he suffered a minor stroke in 2013, but also because of his history as President. Before the end of Bouteflika's second presidential

term, he discarded the constitutional rules that would limit him to just two terms as president. Many Algerians see Bouteflika as unfit to run the country due to his health, which has kept him essentially absent from his own presidential campaign, and also because he has enabled widespread corruption in Algeria during his past 3 terms as president.

While controversy and protests are the more popular story coming out of Algeria, it is important to understand that there are also many Algerians who stand by Bouteflika. When remembering the past, such as the "black decade" of the 1990s in which the country was engulfed in civil war, there are many people who will support Bouteflika who has helped since that time to bring a sense of security to Algeria.

Many also fear that Algeria will follow in the footsteps of its neighbours, such as Tunisia and Egypt. The fear of an "Arab Spring" in Algeria, which has had very little success elsewhere, is something that many Algerians do not want and fear will be the result if protests against Bouteflika continue. Perhaps the power of security and the fear of unrest in Algeria are the most influential factors in this presidential campaign. Despite widespread discontent with Bouteflika's re-election bid, opinion polls early on have indicated that the incumbent president is likely to win the election.



Nigeria: Boko Haram attacks

Between 2002 and 2013 more than 10,000 people died and around 250,000 people were forced to leave their homes due to attacks carried out by Boko Haram. The terrorist organization was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, a Muslim sect leader. It is mainly based in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger. Boko Haram stands against Western education and aims to establish a pure Islamic country ruled by the sharia. Since the organization is active, it attacks schools, government buildings and churches. This year only, 1,500 people were killed.

The most recent attacks took place mostly in the north-eastern part of the country. Between April 9–10, gunmen killed 135 civilians. The first target was a training school for teachers in Dikwa. Five people were killed in the school and women were abducted. The school library was also burnt down while the attackers fled the scene. Some reports say that students were also killed but authorities in Borno deny the allegations. Two days later 60 people were killed in an attack when members of the terrorist organization burnt down houses, shops and other buildings. Until now only the north-eastern part of the country was



Parents of some of the victims of the 2014 Chibok kidnapping mourn their losses.
Photo: VOA

attacked. But on April 14, a bomb went off in the capital, Abuja. The bomb blasted at a bus station killing 70 people. This may mean that attacks will extend to the capital city as well. On the same day the country was shocked by the news of more than 100 schoolgirls being abducted from Chibok. The exact number of the victims is contentious. According to the official reports 129 girls were kidnapped, but the locals and parents say that the number amounts to more than 200. During the attack houses were set to fire and two members of the security forces died. The girls are between the ages 15–18. The military later announced that it saved almost all the girls, but the statement was later retracted. Only 20 girls were brought back. A week after the kidnapping officials



said that 85 girls are still missing. According to parents, however, the number of missing girls is 234. The girls are supposedly being sold as wives abroad. Reports say they are sold for \$12 each. President Goodluck Jonathan is being criticized for not being able to restore peace in the country.

Meanwhile, the military is also facing criticism because of its failure to bring back the abducted girls. An organization named Women for Peace and Justice called for demonstrations in Abuja. The protesters demanded the government to spare more resources for the saving of the girls.



*First Lady Michelle Obama holding a sign with the hashtag "#bringbackourgirls" in support of the 2014 Chibok kidnapping.
Photo: Michelle Obama's official Twitter account*

Nigeria: growing economy

According to new figures of the IMF, Nigeria is overtaking South Africa on the list of the strongest economies in Africa. Nigeria is now the 26th largest economy in the world. The country's GDP was almost doubled since last year. Industries like information technology and film production is strongly contributing to the increasing income of the country. But considering the size of both countries, South Africa's GDP is three times higher than Nigeria's.



Presidential elections in Afghanistan

The recent presidential elections in Afghanistan were held on 5 April 2014 with a second round held on 14 June 2014. Opinion polls indicated early on that, of the 8 candidates running for office, the front-runners in the race were Abdullah Abdullah (National Coalition of Afghanistan) and Ashraf Ghani (Independent).

closed in many provinces around the country. As the first round of voting came nearer, security increased drastically in response to credible threats made by the Taliban. This election has prompted the largest military operation in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and has amplified political instability in the country.

“it will be the first time in the history of the country that power may be democratically transferred”

This election will be of historical significance as it will be the first time in the history of the country that power may be democratically transferred. Despite this hopeful transition, there have been many issues surrounding the campaigns in this election and additionally there have been widespread accusations of fraud from both parties.

There has been much unrest since the first round of voting in April and the election results have been contested, as there are continued accusations of vote rigging and massive fraud. There may be some truth to these accusations, although it is unclear if just one side is at fault. There have been reports that Afghan police were preventing voters from reaching voting stations around the Kandahar province. Additionally, BBC correspondents confirmed reports that polling centres were running out of ballots several hours before the polls officially

As of April 15, BBC had confirmed at least 16 confirmed deaths and 9 injuries related to the presidential elections (affecting Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan staff, Afghan military, and insurgents).

A clear winner in these elections is necessary for Afghanistan to meet the requirements for a final security agreement with the United States. However, it seems that the two front-runners in these elections will stop for nothing short of victory. If this election does not produce a single, democratically elected president, it is likely that the security of the country will be at stake. Without a security agreement with the US, it will not be possible to move forward and address more pressing national issues such as corruption, drug trade, and possible negotiations with insurgents, most importantly, the Taliban.



Caspian Sea talks

The members of the Caspian Five held a conference discussing the status of the Caspian Sea region. The five members are Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The countries managed to make progress during the talks.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the five littoral states are responsible for the security in the area but they are open to cooperate with countries that are outside of the region. The only condition is that a third party would have to follow the principles and rules determined by the five countries. Lavrov also said that the countries could reach an agreement on the differentiation of marine territories.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif did not agree with Lavrov. He said that allowing any non-regional country into the area would be a wrong decision. In order to maintain peace and stability, non-littoral military should be excluded from the Caspian Sea.

Foreign ministers of the five countries will meet in Moscow to discuss the Caspian summit. The summit will be held in Astrakhan, Russia. The parties will discuss the program, the agenda and will draft the final documents. The agenda will include discussions about security, nature conservation, and aquatic biological researches.



Map of the Caspian Sea, oil and gas pipelines. Map: Texas University



South Korea test firing missile

South Korea test fired a ballistic missile with a range of 500 km. The test was a response to a mid-range missile fired by North Korea and a preparation to a possible attack from the country. The mid-range missile fell into the water and its maximum range is 1,300 km, which would be enough to hit much of Japan. South Korea is trying to extend the ballistic missile's range from 500 km to 800 km in order to be able to strike any site in North Korea. South Korea undertook a voluntary ban on developing missiles with a range of more than 300 km when the country made an agreement with the US. But the two countries made a new deal in 2012 and the limit was extended to 800 km.

North Korea also carried out a live fire drill close to the maritime border, which was drawn by the UN, but North Korea never accepted it. No shells fell in South Korean waters. This was the second time in the month that North Korea fired artillery into

the sea. The last time North Korea fired 500 rounds of artillery in a week. As a response, South Korea fired 300 rounds into northern waters.

Recently, North Korea sealed a tunnel at its site for nuclear tests. South Korea's defence ministry warned that the country might prepare to carry out its fourth nuclear test. North Korea conducted its previous tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013. According to an unidentified official, North Korea has placed a detonator and fissile material into the sealed tunnel. According to a UN Security Council resolution passed in 2006, North Korea is banned from carrying out any nuclear or missile tests.

The sealing of the tunnel occurred before President Barack Obama's two-day visit to Seoul, which has been objected by North Korea. The North Korean government said that Obama's visit may aggravate the situation bringing the possibility of a nuclear war onto the Korean Peninsula.

South Korea: FTA with Australia

South Korea signed a free trade agreement with Australia. The agreement is to urge exports of Korean goods, while facilitating imports of natural resources from Australia at a lower price. The agreement was made after five years of negotiations. Besides building a stronger economic cooperation, the two countries will cooperate in security and defence as well. South Korea also recently signed a similar agreement with Canada.



US-China relations

The US and China managed to reach a consensus on military cooperation. Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan and US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel agreed that the two countries should develop a stronger cooperative relationship. The sides discussed a future development of a new model of military-to-military relations in order to create stable bilateral military ties between the two countries. According to Chang, both sides are willing to strengthen practical cooperation and to have more communication. Chang also said that they will establish standards of behaviours in the field of sea and air safety. More discussion will be held about anti-terrorism as well. The parties also agreed to organize an Asia Pacific security dialogue where they can exchange views on current issues. After the Rim of the Pacific Exercise – the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise – the two countries will carry out joint medical rescue operations.

Apart from the agreement on stronger cooperation, US also levelled criticism on China. The country created an air defence over the territories in the East China Sea, including islands that are claimed both by China and Japan. Hagel said that China



U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel stands with Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan during an honors ceremony in Beijing. Photo: Defense.gov

does not have the right to establish an air defence zone over the disputed areas with no consultation. He also said that America does not take side in the dispute, but it will defend Japan and the Philippines and other territories that are in territorial conflict with China. Chang responded that China does not want to initiate any trouble in Japan. According to Chang, a diplomatic solution would be the most ideal but China will utilize its military if it is necessary. China also accused the Philippines of illegally occupying China's islands in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, Obama announced that the Diaoyu Islands – Senkaku in Japanese – would be covered by the US-Japan security



treaty, which angered China. The islands are situated in the East China Sea and claimed by both China and Japan. The territorial dispute almost reached its peak in January, when Japan alleged that a Chinese frigate locked its radar on a Japanese destroyer. Obama said that as the Diaoyu Islands are administered by Japan, they fall under the auspices of the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security that was signed in 1960. Obama told Xi Jinping that the territorial dispute should be solved through diplomacy and not violence.



The disputed Senkaku islands. Map: CIA

US: supporting Japan or China?

Obama visited Tokyo to participate in a discussion about diplomatic relations between Japan and the US. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Obama addressed the importance of Japan-US security ties. While the US hopes to maintain cooperation with Japan, the country also wants to have a constructive relationship with China. This raises a question: how would the US react in case China initiated a military action in order to take the Senkaku Islands? According to the security trade with Japan, the US has to back Japan. However, doing so would mean putting an end to peaceful US-China relations.

Philippines: defence deal with US

Philippine Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin signed a 10-year agreement with the US. The so-called Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement will allow American soldiers to have greater access to military bases in the Philippines. The deal is expected to help the Armed Forces of the Philippines in developing and modernizing maritime security. Moreover, the two country hopes to strengthen military cooperation with the agreement. Security against terrorism and natural disasters will also be improved. The US, however, does not establish permanent military presence in the country.



Conflicts in Venezuela

Venezuela is facing violent protests since February. Demonstrators are criticizing the government thanks to the growing inflation, shortages of goods, and high crime rate. Inflation reached a peak of 57%, large amount of goods are smuggled to Colombia where they can be sold for a much higher price. At the moment, Venezuela has the second highest murder rate in the world after Honduras.

The protests started in February after the opposition began a campaign to remove President Nicolás Maduro from presidency. Maduro was elected after the death of Hugo Chávez. Since February, violence caused the death of 39 people. Eight victims were members of the police or the security forces, while four of them were opposition activist killed by the police. Protesters are setting buildings on fire, including universities, governmental buildings and bus stations. Around 2200 people were arrested. The Amnesty International says that both sides have allegedly committed human rights abuse. Maduro accused the US of acting in the background and using the street protests to try to oust him. According to Maduro, the US government attempts to seize the



Peaceful protesters demonstrating in Caracas in February 2014. Photo: Bravo Pueblo

Venezuelan oil. The country is estimated to have the world's largest oil reserves. Maduro also said that the opposition wants to create a situation similar to the one in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the opposition is accusing the government of misconduct. The US denies any involvement and says that Maduro uses the coup as an excuse to break down the opposition. Washington also said the conflict is an internal problem of Venezuela and it does not affect the bilateral relationship between the US and



Venezuela. As a consequence of this, Washington did not accept Caracas' proposal to redeploy Venezuelan ambassador.

Maduro agreed to have a meeting with the opposition, who was not willing to participate in government led talks until now. Maduro even invited the Vatican's Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to mediate

in the talks between the opposition and his government. Maduro had great expectations for the peace talks, but the sides could not reach any agreement. The talks lasted for more than six hours but no solution was found to put an end f the nine-week long conflict. The only concession that has been reached is an arrangement of another meeting.



Maduro advertising. Photo: Wilfredor [Wikimedia Commons]

Boosting bilateral relations between China and Venezuela

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Venezuela on April 21. The minister was welcomed by Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elías Jaua. Yi was expected to meet Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in order to discuss possibilities of a stronger cooperative relationship between the two countries. Yi's visit preceded President Xi Jinping's second official tour to Latin America.



Mexico: improving international cooperations

France and Mexico made a cooperation deal that includes 42 agreements concerning security trade, healthcare, science, technology and energy. The deal also includes a training program that would be provided to the police force of Mexico. The agreement was signed after a meeting between President Francois Hollande and President Peña Nieto. Hollande said that France also wants to reinforce clearing trade relations with Mexico. Members of the Franco-Mexican Strategic Council will be responsible for proposing ideas for new investments. France can also provide support for Mexico in the nuclear field and in the fight against climate change. Hollande said that the two countries have a lot in common as they have a history of revolutions.

Meanwhile, the High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was held in Mexico City between April 15–16. More than 1,500 development leaders met in Mexico City in order to work out a plan for effective cooperation and global progress. Leaders include ministers, heads of governments, leaders from different organizations, and parliamentarians. UN



Peña Nieto, President of Mexico. Photo: World Economic Forum

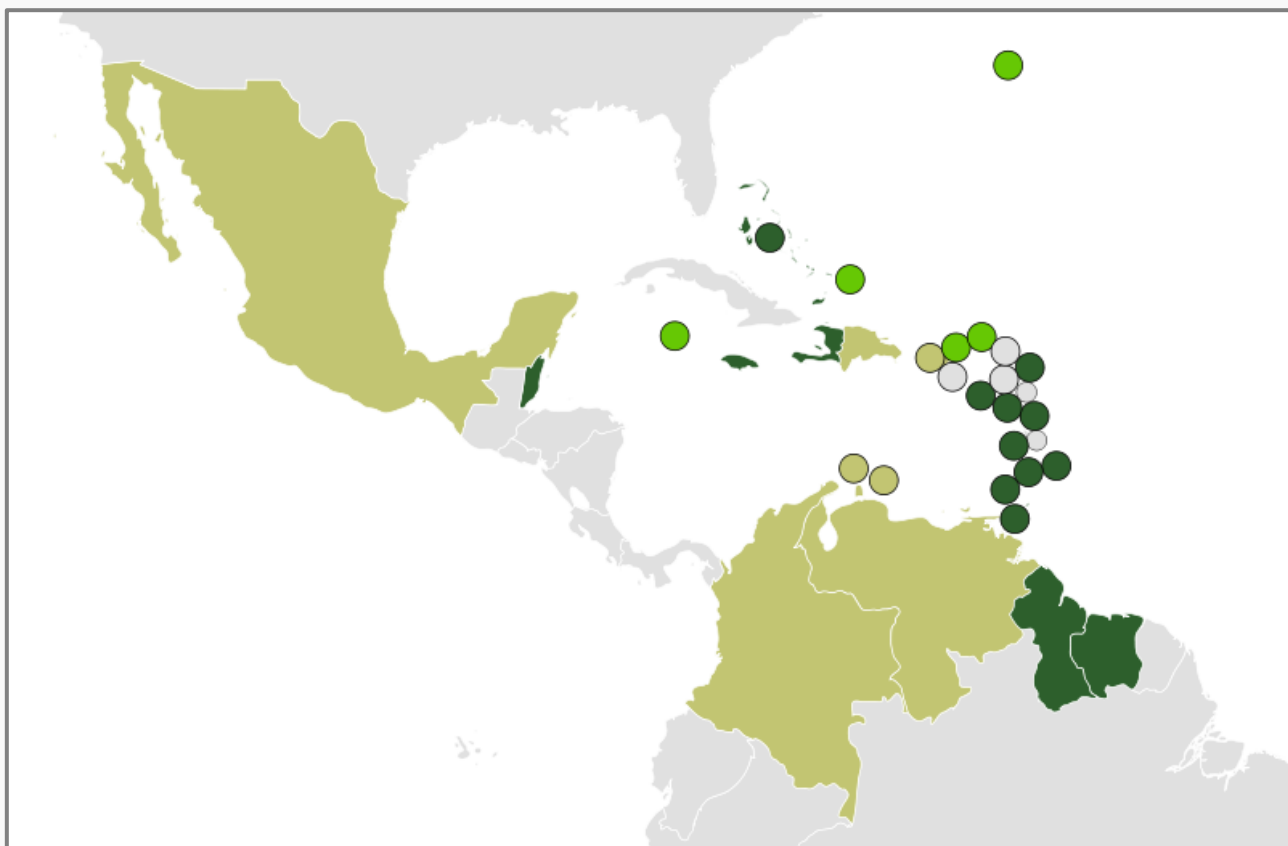
Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was also present. He said that a stronger cooperations is needed in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Ban Ki-moon said that countries of the Global South are improving. At the same time, the cooperating countries should do more against corruption. Peña Nieto said that Mexico wants to show greater global



responsibility. The country will try to meet its international obligations. This includes the fight against inequality and corruption in the country. Nieto also said that Mexico is ready for a stronger international cooperation. The country also plans a faster technological and scientific exchange with other countries.

More than a week after the meeting, another summit was held in Mexico. On April 29, leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) gathered in Mérida for the third summit. Mexico became the first country to establish a Joint Commission with CARICOM in 1974. Since then, Mexico and the Caribbean Community signed several cooperation agreements in the areas including

transportation, agriculture, or climatology. On the summit, Nieto announced that Mexico will support the Caribbean area with \$14 million in order to support the region in its fight against disasters and to strengthen ties with the 14 member countries. He made an official promise that Mexico will provide benefits for the Caribbean community. Nieto also announced the launch of the so called Technical and Scientific Cooperation Program that will provide training for Spanish language teachers and support different researches in the field of public policy. Mexico also signed an agreement with the Inter-American Agricultural Cooperation Institute. The agreement is supposed to help the region's agricultural development.



Map of CARICOM states. Map: Wikimedia commons



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Plans of an independent Basque state

■ The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) announced its plans for establishing an independent Basque state. Previously, the leading member of PNV, Juan José Ibarretxe, proposed the idea claiming that Spain is not a unified country anymore. The new state would include the Navarre area and the French Basque regions. The PNV does not want to follow the way of the nationalist Catalans. Instead, the party attempts to establish an independent state through negotiations and agreements. PNV members also insist a reform to the Spanish Constitution.

Elections in Lebanon

■ The Lebanese President Michel Seilman's term will end on May 25. However, Parliament has failed to elect the new president on its voting session on April 23. None of the candidates managed to receive the two-thirds majority. With this failure, the country has entered the two-month constitutional deadline to elect a new leader. The next session is to be held on April 30.

Drone attacks targeting al-Qaeda leaders

■ In a joint operation with the US, Yemen had launched drones that presumably killed members of the al-Qaeda. The strikes were allegedly targeting the highest leaders of the organization. Three men have been identified as midlevel leaders. The identity of the other victims and the death toll is still unknown. It is also a question whether there were any civilians among the victims, which causes increasing frustration in the country. The US also attacked a camp where al-Qaeda fighters were trained. The organization has been accused of plotting against Americans as well as attacking oil and gas ports in Yemen. According to Yemeni officials the government may try to indicate that the government is on the way to destroy the Al-Qaeda in the region.

Failed ceasefire with the Taliban

■ On March 1, the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced that it will extend its ceasefire with the Pakistani government. The decision was made after the government released 19 non-combatants, which has been the request of the Taliban since the two parties initiated the peace talks. However, the Taliban soon made a new announcement that the ceasefire will not be extended. Taliban leaders said that the reason for the decision is that the government did not respond to the announcement as seriously as they had expected.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Morocco needs more money to fight illegal immigration

■ The Moroccan government appealed to Spain and the European Union for more financial support in order to fight against illegal immigration. In the last year, more than 1,600 people successfully crossed the Spanish border in the area of Ceuta and Melilla. The two Spanish cities are situated in North Africa and targets of mass immigration from Morocco. The country keeps itself to the 1992 cooperative agreement, accepting back illegal immigrants who are deported back from Spain. The country says it needs more financial support to reduce the number of illegal immigrants crossing the border.

Higgins' visit to Great Britain

■ Irish President Michael D. Higgins arrived to London to begin his visit to Great Britain. Higgins' trip has a historical importance since he is the first Irish state leader to visit the country. The four-day visit includes an address to Parliament and a banquet in London. Higgins will also meet members of the Irish community living in Britain. Both parties emphasized the two countries' peaceful relations. Previously, the Queen became the first British monarch to pay a visit to the Republic of Ireland.

Erdogan: public condolences to descendants of the victims from the Armenian genocide

■ Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan conveyed condolences to families of victims of the Armenian genocide. More than one million people were killed in the mass murder of 1915. The genocide had its 99th anniversary on 24 April. Erdoğan became the first Turkish leader who publicly offered condolences to the Armenian people.

Angola and Zambia cooperation for children and the elderly

■ Delegations from Angola and Zambia met in order to discuss cooperative programs for the protection of children and the elderly. The meeting was a part of the Zambian minister of Community Development, Mother and Child Health, Emerine Kabanshi's five-day visit to Angola. Key topics of the meeting included community development and the education and training of vulnerable individuals.



■ News in Brief

International relations

South Sudan: continuing violence and warning from the US

■ At least 58 people died and more than hundred were wounded in an attack on a UN base in the town of Bor. The UN provided shelter for thousands of people who were displaced due to the ongoing fights in the country. Around 350 men attacked the base. UN peacekeepers immediately responded and killed ten attackers. Previously, President Barack Obama warned both the government and the rebel forces that if they cannot restore peace they will have to face sanctions. These sanctions may include bans on travelling to the US and financial penalties for those who are threatening peace.

Anti-gay movements in Africa

■ The Anti-Homosexuality Law that was recently enacted in Uganda has brought international criticism for President Museveni. Countries like Sweden, Norway and the US decided to cut all aid to Uganda as a reaction to the new law. However, Finland's minister for International Development, Pekka Haavisto said that cutting aid is not helpful, since President Museveni plays an important role in regional cooperation. Therefore, Finland decided to continue transferring resources to Ugandan civilians. Meanwhile, Ethiopia will most likely face anti-gay demonstrations. The Addis Ababa Youth forum plans to hold a demonstration in April. The government is also considering enacting a law that would include more severe punishments for homosexual acts.

Cuba may resume talks with Paris Club

■ A new meeting may be held between Cuba and members of the Paris Club. The group consists of 19 creditor nations who provide financial services to countries in need. The last meeting was in 2000 when Cuba could not meet the requirements in order to get support from the group. Now Cuba called for a new negotiation, which may mean that the country is ready to follow the rules. A deal with the Paris Club creditors would mean a significant reduction in the country's debt.





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