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and contemporary global issues”*

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About CRP News & Background

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Chairmanship handover meeting in the Arctic Council emphasises climate change

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ On May 10th and 11th the US hosted the biannual Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, bringing together ministerial representatives from its eight member countries, the US, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. It was also joined by observer organisations and participants.

“At the Ministerial Meeting, representatives from the eight Arctic States will discuss issues of mutual interest and review the accomplishments of the US Arctic Council Chairmanship” the US state department said. The purpose of the meeting was also for the US to hand over the chairmanship to Finland, and to review the progress in sustainability development and nature conservation under the US chairmanship. The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum which seeks to address the issues and increase coordination between Arctic nations and their indigenous communities. It is the leading organisation of regional cooperation in the Arctic.

However, one of the biggest issues was the US’s position on climate change, as Trump earlier this year announced his intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, which obliges countries to reduce their carbon emissions. Annika Nilsson

from the Stockholm Environment Institute in Sweden confirmed it raises concerns, saying “the US is a big emitter of greenhouse gases; that needs to change”.

Due to climate change, the Arctic region is increasing in strategic interest, as resources and shipping points are being freed up as ice sheets withdraw. The Arctic Council is also engaged in sustainable development and nature conservation, with environmental protection at the heart of the organisation.

The meeting finished with the member countries signing the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation and the addition of seven new observers – the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, the National Geographic Society, the Oslo-Paris Commission, Switzerland, Oceana, the West Nordic Council, and the World Meteorological Organisation.

According to the final Fairbanks Declaration which was signed by all parties, Finland’s chairmanship is going to focus on education, connectivity, meteorological cooperation and environmental protection. Finnish foreign minister Timo Soini commented “climate change proceeds rapidly in the Arctic, and we need to continue the successful work of the Council”.



Iran's presidential election

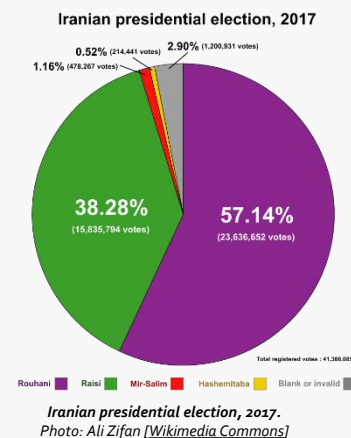
Mustafa Yenel ■

■ Presidential elections were held in Iran on 19 May 2017, the twelfth such election in the country. Candidates were incumbent president Hassan Rouhani and his rivals were the conservatives' top candidate Ebrahim Raisi, the Islamic Coalition Party's Mostafa Mir-Salim and Mostafa Hashemitaba who ran with no partisan support.

Hassan Rouhani has won a clear victory to a second term as Iran's president. With all of votes in Friday May 19 poll counted, Rouhani was re-elected with 57 percent, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmanifazli said on Saturday May 20. "Of some 41.2 million total votes cast, Rouhani got 23.5 ... and won the election," Rahmanifazli said in remarks carried live by state TV. However, his closest rival, Ebrahim Raisi, received 15.7 million votes.

The election was seen by many as a verdict on Rouhani's policy of opening up Iran to the world and set the things right on economy. One of Rouhani's promises four years ago was to reduce Iran's international isolation. During the campaign trail, Rouhani defined the vote as a choice between greater civil liberties and extremism and criticized the continued arrest of reformist leaders and activists. Also, the region that surrounds Iran is in turmoil. Its neighbours are increasingly hostile toward the country, and

are determined to limit its role in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Although there have been no glitches in implementing the nuclear deal, congress is still talking of scuttling it, and the Trump administration may be set on a path to greater confrontation with Iran. Iranians are worried about unemployment and inflation, pollution and water shortages. They worry about the future and that is why they decided to vote for him.



But certainly, next coming years will not be so easy for Rouhani and he will have to be faced to resistance from conservative rivals and the Revolutionary Guards. To keep his promises what he had made and also to keep the people on his side, Rouhani will have to take risks in future such as encouragement and rewards of the United States and its allies, economic and diplomatic engagement.



Minya bus shooting attack

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ On May 26, 2017, masked gunmen opened fire on a convoy carrying Copts from Maghagha in Egypt's Minya Governorate to the Monastery of Saint Samuel the Confessor, killing people and injuring others. Children are among at least 28 people massacred and dozens more injured after gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Coptic Christians.

Eyewitnesses report that the headman who returned from the Church of Sueyf and prayed to the monastery of Saint Samuel, was arrested by attackers wearing military uniforms numbering ten. According to the sources the attackers wore masks.

Minya is 250 kilometres from the capital city of Cairo and is located in the central part of the country. While claimed to be a minority within Egypt, the country's Christian population is the largest in absolute numbers in the Middle East and North Africa. The history of Christianity in Egypt dates to the Roman era. Alexandria was an early centre of Christianity. Egypt was a majority Christian country until 1453. Coptic Christians, who make up 10 per cent of the 92 million Egyptian population, have recently become the target of numerous attacks.

No group took immediate responsibility for the attack, although analysts suspected that ISIS was responsible. Amaq News Agency attributed it to group that belongs to "Islamic State". ISIS later released an official statement claiming credit.

Bombs exploded also last month in two Coptic churches in Tanta and Alexandria in Egypt. At

least 46 people have lost their lives in the bloody attacks committed by the terrorist organization ISIS. The first explosion took place during the Palmiyeen in St. George's Coptic Church in Tanta, about 100 kilometres from the capital city of Cairo. A few hours later, a bomb exploded in front of the St Mark Coptic Church in Alexandria. ISIS organised a bomb attack on a church in Cairo in December 2017 during the ritual. In the explosion, 25 people died.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi held an emergency meeting with security officials. Al-Azhar University imam Ahmad al-Tayyip, who was visiting Germany, said that the attack was carried out in order to bring the country into chaos.

After the attack, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi held an emergency meeting with top security officials. Security forces in Minya sent patrols and set up checkpoints on the roads in the area to find the attackers. On the night of the attack, President al-Sisi announced in a televised speech that the retaliatory attacks were carried out against terrorist training camps in neighbouring Libya. The state media, said war planes were responsible for six strikes against the areas surrounding the Derna port city, believed to have been the location of the trainings. A second military operation was launched the following day on May 27, 2017. On May 29, 2017, the Libyan National Army (LNA) spokesman confirmed that Egypt and the LNA cooperated after targeting 15 air strikes, targeting Derna and Jufra locations.



Never-ending conflicts in Central African Republic

Mustafa Yenel ■

■ The Central African Republic conflict is an ongoing civil war in the Central African Republic (CAR) involving the government, rebels from the Séléka coalition and the Anti-balaka militias. There is a peacekeeping force as well which was formed in October 22 by the regional economic community. The conflict began with the rebellion by the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) in North-Eastern CAR, led by Michel Djotodia when the Former President of the Central African Republic, François Bozizé, seized power in 2003. Tens of thousands of people were displaced during this conflict which continued until 2007. However, on 13 April 2007, a peace agreement between the government and the UFDR was signed in Birao but in the advancing years rebel groups alleged that Bozizé had not followed the terms of the 2007 agreement and that there continued to be political abuses such as torture and illegal executions. There were other peace agreements signed between the government and some other rebel groups such as Groupe d'action patriotique pour la libération de Centrafrique (GAPLC), the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the People's Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD), the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ), and the Front démocratique Centrafricain (FDC) but the conflict never ended. On 19 September 2012, Colonel Hassan Al Habib, was killed by the Central African Armed

Forces (FACA) on 19 September in Daya, a town north of Dekoa. On 13 November 2012, two civilians and a police officer traveling to Bangui were shot to death on the road between Sibut and Damara. On 10 December 2012, an armed group seized the towns of N'Délé, Sam Ouandja and Ouadda and at least five government troops were reportedly killed. On 26 December 2012, hundreds of protesters angered by the rebel advance surrounded the French embassy in Bangui, hurling stones, burning tires and tearing down the French flag. Two children were beheaded with a total of 16 children killed in Bangui during recent fighting and a total of 1,000 people were killed in December.

Ongoing conflicts are between Ex-Seleka militias and Antibalaka which largely started with a fight over a goldmine in November 2016. According to Red Cross reports, in Central African Republic's border town Bangassou, 115 bodies found after several days of militia attacks. Also, according to the United Nations refugee agency, approximately 2,750 refugees fled into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the conflict. Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, also said in his statement, "unverifiable figures" indicate up to a hundred people may have been killed in three days of clashes from May 7 2017 to May 9 2017 in the town of Alindao between anti-Balaka fighters and an ex-Seleka group.



Ongoing conflicts in Balochistan

Mustafa Yenal ■

■ Balochistan is the least developed province with rich natural resources such as natural gas, oil, coal, copper, sulphur, fluoride and gold in Pakistan. There has been an ongoing conflict in the region where Baloch nationalists stand against the Pakistani government and Iran. It is a guerrilla war waged by Baloch nationalists, who demands greater control of the province's natural resources and political autonomy. The first conflict began when Prince Abdul Karim revolted against his brother Ahmad Yar Khan's decision for Kalat's accession to Pakistan in 1948. Nauroz Khan was the leader of the second conflict. He and his followers started a guerrilla war against Pakistan, and were arrested, charged with treason, and imprisoned in Hyderabad. After the second conflict, a Baloch separatist movement gained momentum in the 1960s. Sher Muhammad Bijrani Marri and his followers were the actors of third conflict with guerilla war by creating their own insurgent bases, bombing railway tracks and ambushing convoys. This insurgency ended in 1969, with the Baloch separatists agreeing to a ceasefire. The fourth conflict, which was occurred between 1973–

1977, started when President Bhutto imposed martial law in those areas and led to armed insurgency.

However, the conflict is still in progress. There was a bombing attack to a convoy of the deputy chairman of the Pakistan Senate on May 12, 2017 and killing at least 25 people, officials said. At least 35 people were wounded in the blast near the town of Mastung. Militant group Lashkar-e-Jangvi Al Alami, which has jointly carried out attacks with Islamic State in the past, claimed responsibility for the bombing.

On May 13, 2017, two gunmen riding on motorbikes opened fire on a group of construction workers on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Gwadar. Ten labourers were killed. Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), separatist group that has been fighting for an independent homeland for the Baloch, claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistani authorities has reduced the violence via peace and developments in recent years. These developments include Chinese infrastructure project, the China-Pakistan economic corridor.

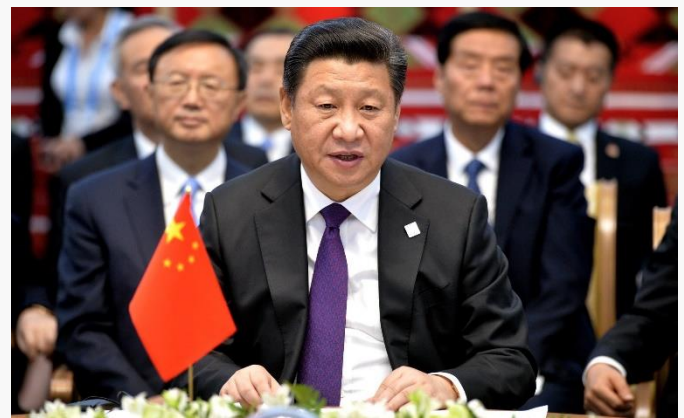


China's 21st century Silk Road Project

Mustafa Yenal ■

■ Belt and Road Initiative is a 21st century silk road project proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in order to boost trade and economic growth between China and the rest of the world. The main aim of this project is to push China take a larger role in global affairs, and the desire to coordinate manufacturing capacity with other countries. Building on the ancient trading routes of the Silk Road, the plan calls for massive investment in and development of trade routes in the region, particularly in infrastructure. By building a modern network of railways, roads, pipelines, and utility grids linking China with countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, China wants to make cross-border trade easier in the future. The Belt and Road initiative is geographically structured along 6 corridors, and the maritime silk road.

Delegates from more than 100 countries, including 28 heads of state, convened in a \$1bn complex north of Beijing for the two-day summit that began on Sunday May 14, 2017. Russian President Vladimir Putin was the pride of place, while the largest economies in Asia and the west sent lower-level representatives. "Spanning



President of China Xi Jinping. Photo: Kremlin.ru

thousands of miles and years, the ancient silk routes embody the spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit," Xi said in his opening speech. "We should foster a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation; and we should forge partnerships of dialogue with no confrontation and of friendship rather than alliance." China is planning to spend up to a trillion dollars on infrastructure projects and hoping to integrate more than 65 countries to its economy. Economists have likened the project to a modern day Marshall Plan which helped the United States as the world's superpower after the world war two, but it is

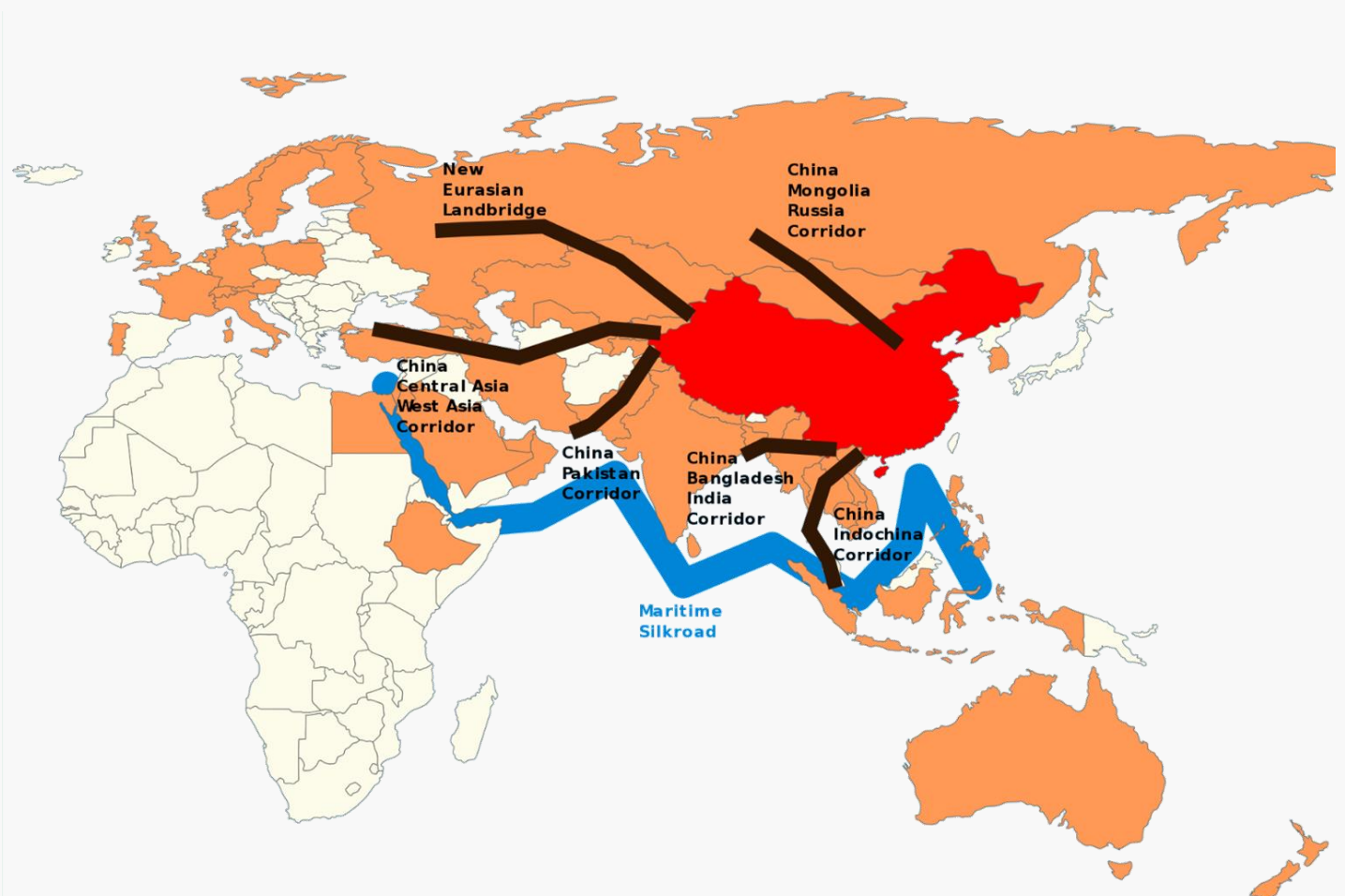


much bigger. China's aim is to carry out \$2.5 trillion in a decade with cheap, high-quality Chinese goods.

The One Belt One Road project is already being implemented in southwest China city, Chongqing. Containers are moved 24 hours a day onto trains that move Chinese goods to Central Asia, Russia and Europe. "The new trade routes will bring more business and big international companies here. It will open southern China and Chongqing to the world",

Spokeswoman for the Chongqing Logistics City, Gu Xin, said.

However, there are some challenges as well. First is, China's ruling regime is communism and many other western countries are democratic and opposition parties. This could lead difficulties on coordination and planning. The second is, this project contains different cultures and systems. Thus, in some countries it is hard to build and maintain projects due to different economy and law structures.



China in Red, the members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in orange. The 6 proposed corridors in black. Map: Wikimedia Commons



President Duterte declares martial law in the Marawi Crisis

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ Philippine government security forces and armed radical militia clashed on the 23rd of May when Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte initiated a military campaign to target radical leader Isnilon Hapilon in the city of Marawi. The city, situated in the south of the Philippines on the island Mindanao, is currently under siege and is taking a heavy toll from the continued Philippine air strikes as well as the destruction by the radical militia.

On May 23rd during a state visit to Russia, President Duterte declared a 60 day martial law in Mindanao, adding he would extend it if 60 days is not enough to quell the insurgency. He also cut his state visit to Russia short, opting to return to the Philippines. Earlier that day Philippine security forces clashed with heavily armed militants in attempting to capture terrorist target Isnilon Hapilon. Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana affirmed the militants belonged to the radical Islamist Maute group.

“The whole of Marawi City is blacked out,” Lorenzana said to the press in Moscow. “There is no light, and there are Maute snipers all around”. The insurgents had on the 23d of May besieged buildings and blacked out the city. Lorenzana further explained that the siege was caused when security forces raided a suspected terrorist hideout, which resulted in a gunfight during which the insurgents called for back-up

from their Maute allies. The conflict escalated as the armed militants besieged the city and set fire to buildings.

Marawi is the regional capital of the Lanao del Sur Province in Mindanao, and has for decades been the centre for a Muslim insurgency movement in the otherwise predominantly Christian country.

The militants and the Philippine military first clashed in 2013, before the group pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015 with the goal to establish a wilayat in Marawi. Isnilon Hapilon, the terrorist target the Philippine security forces attempted to capture on the 23d of May, is the leader of a second group called Abu Sayyaf. According to the Philippine government, both groups consist to a large extent of guerrillas and foreign fighters primarily coming from Indonesia, Malaya and Singapore.

Hapilon himself is on the FBI’s list of most wanted terrorists with a five million dollar bounty on his head and the most wanted man in the Philippines. The Philippine government had intelligence suggested he was in Marawi at the time, but not that he was backed up by “more or less 100 fighters”. The US state department attests Hapilon swore allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a video in 2014, and have linked his activities with Abu Sayyaf to kidnappings, bombings and attacks on Philippine



government forces, including the kidnapping of three American tourists in the Philippines. One of these was the Manila Bay ferry bombing in 20014, which killed around a 100 people.

While the Maute group and Abu Sayyaf have claimed allegiance to ISIS, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said that they rather "have been auditioning for recognition in ISIS", indicating they have not been acknowledged as a part of ISIS.

Even so, the Philippine government has expressed concerns over the fact that Mindanao, where Marawi is located, is becoming a gathering point for extremist activities, as the area is rich in resources bur poor, making it easier to recruit. Its geographical location has made it a safe haven for ISIS fighters returning from conflict in the Middle East.

Abu Sayyaf was created in 1991 on funding from the al-Qaida, and is an off-shoot from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The conflict has also taken a great toll on civilians. General Padilla recently confirmed the discovery of 16 dead bodies who ostensibly has been shot to death next to a sign reading "traitors". About 30,000 of the city's inhabitants have taken refuge in evacuation centres while another 42.000 fled to relatives outside the city, while many are still unaccounted for.

The city itself has faced extensive destruction after the rebels burnt a cathedral, schools and hospitals and also from the Philippine aerial bombardments, which have caused several friendly fire deaths in the Philippine ground forces. The insurgents also burned numerous



A building in Marawi is set ablaze by airstrikes carried out by the Philippine Air Force.
Photo: Mark Jhomel [Wikimedia Commons]

houses to cause confusion, and raised an ISIS flag next to a hospital they had claimed.

At the time when President Duterte held his speech, 12 soldiers had been injured. Upon declaring martial law at the press conference, the President also joked his soldiers could rape three women without consequences, which caused international outrage. He has also been criticised for his campaign against drugs which has resulted in around 4,000 civilian deaths in the hands of the police.

The Philippine military is currently still engaged in Marawi. The struggle with militant fundamentalism of different ideologies has been long standing in the Southern Philippines, and although the Philippine military suffers from poor funding and lack of resources it is receiving support from the US. On May 31st, government representative Restituto Padilla said 90% of Marawi had been reclaimed. However, many civilians are still unaccounted for, some being held hostage, and the ongoing fighting casts doubt on whether the conflict will be over within the 60 day martial law period.



Venezuela introduces military “dictatorship”

Fruzsina Csonka ■

■ Currently Venezuela owns the biggest reserves of oil and also the highest increase of hyperinflation worldwide. The socioeconomic and political crisis – which is based on the dictatorship of President Nicolas Maduro – evolved to a crucial stage during January, 2017. Since then, the large-scale anti-government protests and depression led to the death of dozens of people and many thousand injured. All domestic attempt for change had been undermined.

The events of the last four months provided no solution for the increasing hunger, dramatic GDP decrease, the plunging oil prices and revenues, however the United Socialist Party led by Maduro just benefited from the growing domestic conflicts, developing their extremist policies. Regarding the local supplementing infrastructure, Venezuela’s power demand 60% based on hydro energy, which cannot provide efficient norms to the society anymore because of the lack of water, thus switching the nature of the issue to an immediate humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, the three-digit-inflation causing a massive cash stuck, which means, that even though the society may would be able to afford maintaining their everyday life, the country is out of the basic goods, food and medicine supply as well as water.

The first major protests started on 23rd January – demanding immediate elections –, escalated to be a Constitutional Crisis two months later. The deepening polarisation of the political sphere started more than two decades ago, resulting the complete demolition of rule of law for now, violation of the constitution and international law. The slow-moving demonstrations and fights all over the country shifted slowly to a new phase. As the aftermath of the pro-government Supreme Court’s act stripping away the opposition-led National Assembly of its powers, daily protestations escalated to be violent riots in the name of peace and justice, when on 1st May, Venezuelan police responded violently and security forces started to raid communities, mostly using tear gas, randomly aggrieving citizens. As Julio Borges, the legislative assembly president explained: “It is one thing to try and build a dictatorship and another to complete the circuit.”

Consequently, the domestic economic, political and humanitarian crisis already had an impact beyond Venezuela’s border, as based on the lack of action taken internally, more than a dozen countries warned the government, to organise immediate new elections. In contrast, Maduro’s methods intensified, as he announced drafting a



new constitution, representing his understanding of the country's development based on the idea: "Votes or bullets, what do the people want?" – he asked the crowd during his statement. Introducing the details of his plans – the process of drafting would be carried out by the "constituent assembly" involving more than 500 delegates, which members would be mostly selected from "communal groups" by the government and Maduro himself. The new plan of the President immediately leads to the postponement of the upcoming elections, which had been already scheduled for 2018, although the process of the renewal of the constitution would take at least two years, pushing the potential change, as the defeat of Maduro. "Maduro is looking for a way to avoid elections that should be held soon: governors and mayors this year and presidential elections in 2018, and to preserve his power without them" – said Louis Salamanca, Venezuelan political science professor. Based on the worsening situation, hunger and depression all around the country and the decreasing approval rating of the current president, Maduro chose to justify his plan regarding the new constitution by "a military constituency to deepen the Bolivarian military revolution within the very heart of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces" to "strengthen the union" between the civilians and the military, which led even more violent riots on the streets. In the beginning of May, opposition leaders and civilians teared down statues of the former president Hugo Chávez, whose policies have been reinforced

and enhanced by Maduro. Later on, Chávez's childhood home was put on fire in Barinas, as a symbol of the fight against the socialist government. Students started to use "Puputov" cocktails to fight back against tear gas used by police. All segments of society tried to represent themselves on the streets, as nuns, grandparents, opposition representatives, closing roads, marching to the local ombudsman buildings, building barricades. On the 20th May – on the 50th day of successive protests – millions of Venezuelans protested in Caracas on the so called "We are Millions" march, praying and fighting for immediate elections, with no success.



Protester facing the Venezuelan National Guard during a protest in May 2017.
Photo: Efecto Eco [Wikimedia Commons]

The growing number of dead, starvation and economic oppression was handled by the government in an unacceptable way. As it was mentioned earlier, Venezuela's lack of power demand cannot be fulfilled because of all the above-mentioned reasons, which led to bunk regulations, as moving the clocks forward with half an hour, closing schools for a day weekly, and principally asking citizens to shortcut their daily needs. "Cut the use of hair-dryers or only



use them half the time” – Maduro demanded women all around the country.

The foreign intervention seems like an extremely sensitive solution. When US intelligence officials warned the socialist government, describing the risk of disintegration and unprecedented crisis, the president immediately acted on the American “threat” in a TV broadcast – “Washington is activating measures at the request of Venezuela’s fascist right” and declared a 60-day state of emergency on 12th May in the name of “international and national threats against our fatherland”.



Venezuelan police. Photo: The Photographer [Wikimedia Commons]

Local NGOs are claiming that, huge number of civilians are imprisoned, while the Amnesty International published an analysis, called “Politically-Motivated Arbitrary Detentions in Venezuela”, highlighting the fact, that the Venezuelan regime has an agenda, intentionally

violating all human rights, forcing the society into a situation when their fear is more relevant than hunger. “The fact that those who think differently are the only people who are labelled as ‘terrorists’, who are prevented from demonstrating and against whom violence and illegitimate force is used, is proof of a strategy to silence the growing social discontent in Venezuela” – said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International.

The Maduro presidency embodies the cruelty and intolerance of the former Chávez regime on a higher level. The first United Nations Security Council consultation – organised by the United States – took place on May 17th, focusing on the depressing crisis, however did not draw up any plans regarding international involvement. Especially as 57 countries – including China and Russia – are supporting Maduro’s socialist ideology, policies and reject any type of interference. In the meantime, the demonstrations are expanding, civilians are starving and fighting all over the country. At this point, there seems to be no solution for the current events, the Venezuelan government does all what it has within reach to get rid of international condemnation, while it is also possible that resignation, despondency and hunger will overwhelm the society, forcing them to go home and obey for the extreme socialist government.

“Maduro is looking for a way to avoid elections that should be held soon”



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Suicide bombing at concert in Manchester Arena

■ On 22 May 2017, following a concert by American singer Ariana Grande, 22 year-old British Muslim of Libyan ancestry Salman Ramadan Abedi exploded himself with shrapnel pieces homemade bomb. 22 people, including children, were killed and 59 wounded. After the attack, a 23 year-old man in Chorlton, South Manchester was arrested by police in connection with the attack. Theresa May called the attack “sickening” and in her statement in Downing Street said “callous terrorist attack targeted defenceless young people”.

Switzerland votes to phase out nuclear power

■ On the 20th of May referendum the Swiss public voted to phase out nuclear energy in favour of renewable energy, despite warnings from the no-campaign that it would disfigure the landscape and raise household costs. Although there is no decommission plan for the nuclear reactors yet, a 58.2% majority voted yes to progressively replace nuclear energy with renewable energy. Switzerland’s five nuclear plants currently provide a third of the country’s energy needs. The Green Party has hailed it as a milestone victory, while opponents warned that the move towards renewable energy would

raise household costs. The government suggested the plan after the nuclear catastrophe in Japan following the tsunami hit 2011.



*Aerial view of the nuclear power plant in Leibstadt, Switzerland.
Photo: Hansueli Krapf [Wikimedia Commons]*

Result of presidential election in Turkey

■ President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, re-joined the Justice and Development Party (AKP) on May 2 after the referendum which was held on April 16 for an executive presidency. The referendum was ended with the victory of Recep Tayyip Erdogan with 51.4 percent of the vote. As the leader of the ruling party now, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is able to decide for the party’s future decisions. Current Prime Minister and party leader, Binali Yildirim’s status in the party will be changed to newly-created role of Vice Chairman, AKP deputy chairman Hayati Yazici said.



82 missing Chibok girls returned by Boko Haram



People gathered in New York City to demand the release of schoolgirls in 2014.
Photo: Michael Fleshman (Flickr)

■ The militant Islamist group Boko Haram has released 82 of the original 276 schoolgirls they kidnapped in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2014. The girls, who were handed over in exchange for Boko Haram members held by the government, are currently in custody of the Nigerian government. The Boko Haram is a militant group fighting an eight year insurgency war against the Nigerian government with the aim to establish a caliphate in north-eastern Nigeria. The Nigerian President Buhari released a statement expressing his gratitude towards NGOs, the Red Cross, the military and other governments and organisations who had assisted in returning the girls. However, although many families were reunited, 100 Chibok girls are still missing.

Supporters for Californian independence to rally again

■ Supporters for Californian independence, known as Calexit, rally to organise a second referendum to leave the United States in 2018 after a failed first attempt following Donald Trump's victory in the elections. Backers have said they do not feel that California's political values are represented in Washington. However, the current bid for independence would potentially make California an autonomous entity still within the US, and thus not necessarily result in a full exit from the country. In order for the referendum to make it to the 2018 ballot, Calexit supporters first need to gather 600,000 signatures in favour after the ballot measure has passed through the attorney general's office.



Flag of California.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

The Vatican and Myanmar establish diplomatic relations

■ The Vatican announced the full restoration of diplomatic relations with Myanmar when Pope Francis cordially met with recently elected State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on May 4th. In Myanmar a UN report with evidence of human rights violation against the Rohingya Muslim minority caused international criticism, but Suu Kyi has denied the existence of these persecutions, and declined to support a UN investigation into the issue. The peace process in Myanmar is still fragile, where the rebels want peace and modest reforms, while the military stalls the peace process and continues to exploit natural resources on the countryside as well as discriminate against minorities. The Pope pledged the Church's aid in non-violent peacebuilding but also minority rights, indicating that the Vatican intends to promote not only the rights of the 700,000 Christians, but also the Rohingya Muslim community in Myanmar.

Clash on Pakistani-Afghan border

■ The Afghan Border Police opened fire on soldiers accompanying a census team, a Pakistani military statement read on May 5. Zia

Durani, a spokesman for the police chief in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, blamed Pakistan for initiating the conflict and also stated that using the cover of data collection is a way to sneak into Afghanistan for Pakistan. On the Pakistani side, nine civilians were killed and more than 45 people wounded, on the Afghanistan side four security personnel were killed and 14 police and at least 23 civilians wounded.

North Korea cut off by third biggest trading partner

■ After India cut relations with North Korea, North Korea lost one of its major trading partners. The Indian government announced it is halting all trade except food and medicine as tension mounts on the Korean peninsula and the US administration urges more global action to isolate Pyongyang. This process, which began in April 2017, shows that North Korea has lost its third important trading partner after China and Saudi Arabia. The UN Security Council is working hard for more than ten years to impose tough economic sanctions and to suppress North Korea's nuclear weapons program. At the same time it is known that most of countries cut off their trade relationships with North Korea..



■ News in Brief

International relations

Disagreements on Brexit negotiations

■ The meeting between the British Prime Minister Theresa May and the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker at Downing Street has showed that compromise on Brexit will not be an easy task. Whilst Theresa May described the meeting as “constructive”, Jean-Claude Juncker on the other hand stated that he is now ten times more sceptical after leaving the Downing Street. Sides are dangerously divided on some major issues such as Britain’s divorce bill and the future rights of EU citizens. Theresa May rejects paying the sixty billion euros divorce bill and also suggests that EU citizens should be treated in relation to living and working in the UK as anyone else who is not a British citizen.

Attack on aid workers in Afghanistan

■ An international guesthouse run by a Swedish-based charity was attacked in Afghanistan’s capital city Kabul late on May 20, 2017. A German woman was shot to death, her Afghan guard reportedly beheaded and a Finnish woman is missing and has possibly been

kidnapped, the ministry said. The two women were aid workers employed by Operation Mercy, a relief and development NGO based in Örebro in Sweden. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Trump isolated during G7 talks

■ The two-day G7 Summit in Taormina, Italy, started on May 26, 2017. It is expected that the main items of the agenda will be the issues of climate change, free trade agreement, asylum and immigration issues to be made to the countries in Africa.

United States President Donald Trump, UK Prime Minister Theresa May, French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni will attend the G7 meeting this time.

During the summit the European Union will be represent by President of the Council of Europe Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Strong security precautions also draw attention in Taormina, on the island of Sicily.

Foreign policy and security issues will be addressed in the first two sessions of the talks.





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