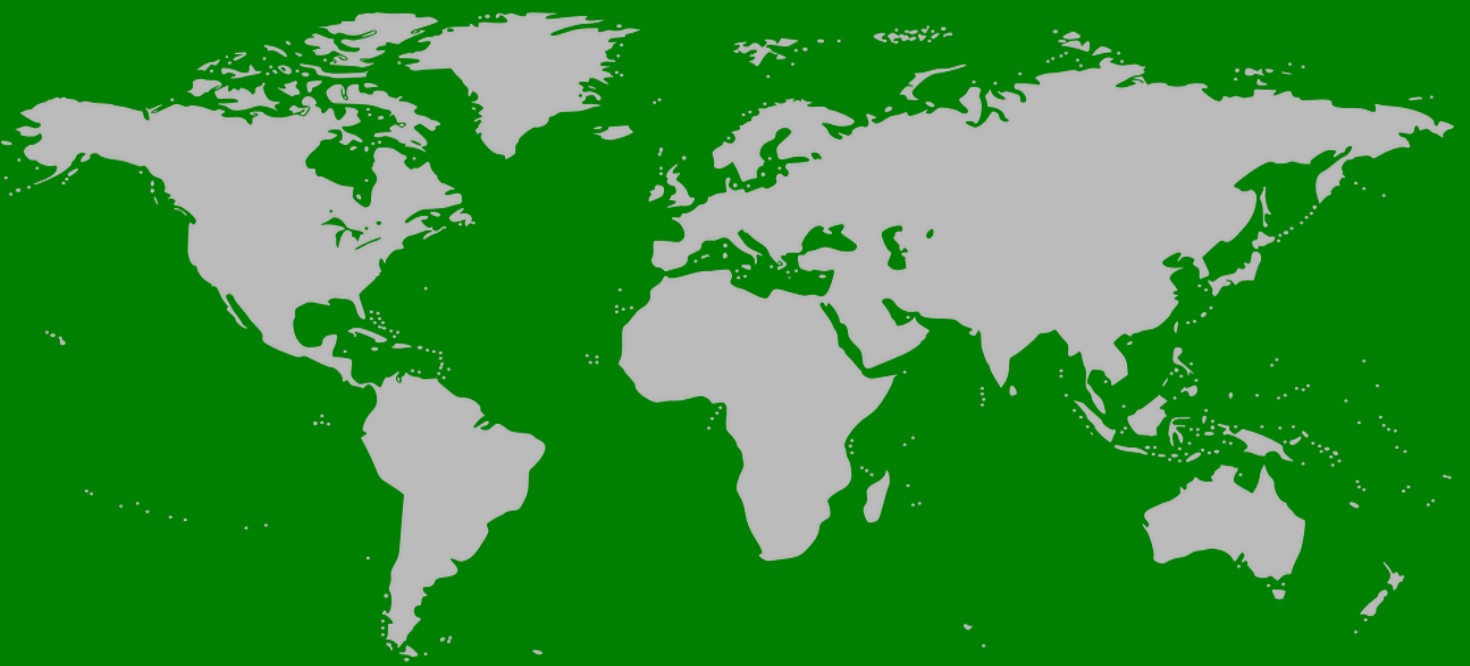


*“Discovering international relations  
and contemporary global issues”*

Cultural Relations Policy  
**News & Background**



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## About CRP News & Background

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## Changing patterns in Europe's migrant crisis

Katalin Reinitz ■

■ The huge flow of migrants from North-Africa and the Middle-East has been striking Europe since 2015. Although the number of people fleeing to the continent culminated in the summer months of 2015 the problem still concerns the European Union and each state individually as well. Since the issue emerged numerous measures have been taken in order to tackle the problem: the European Union has made a deal with Turkey in order to stop migrants before the European borders, it has obliged the member states to proportionately distribute the incoming refugees and several individual states have deployed physical obstacles on their borders. Although the international media attention decreased on the problem new circumstances are evolving. Namely two of the mostly concerned states, Italy and Libya have changed their approaches to the issue and non-governmental organisations have also had to adjust their stance.

As for Italy, the Mediterranean country has pledged to halt migration from North-Africa and for that reason it supports the rescue efforts and hostile approach towards NGOs of the Libyan government. Indeed, the Italian government would deploy two ships to Libya for their request in order to halt the illegal migration and human smuggling to the country. Moreover the Italian Parliament also decided in

July to impose restrictions on NGOs for the same purpose, though not all organisations agreed on this new “code of conduct”. The shift in the country's policy is possibly due to the outcome of local elections that resulted in a high number of anti-immigrant local leaders. Although the number of refugees arriving in Italy decreased in July, their number increased in Spain in the same period, as they are keen on finding new, easier and cheaper ways to reach Europe. At the same time Libya is also taking a harsh approach to the migration issue. The African country has extended its search-and-rescue zone into international waters and uses warning shots against humanitarian vessel in the area. The Libyan coast guards are also taking back migrants intercepted back to their home countries.

In this sensitive situation NGOs are also struggling to fulfil their obligations. Some of such organisations, for instance the Doctors without Borders or Save the Children have suspended their search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean region owing to security concerns. Those who still continue to operate, such as the Spanish Proactiva Open Arms are facing tough circumstances. The European Union's latest step to tackle the issue in February 2017 was an outlined plan to enhance the continent's ability to send people back to their homelands.



## African and European leaders agree action plan on migration crisis

Sandra Kaziukonyte ■

■ The president of France Emmanuel Macron gathered European and African leaders in Paris on 28th of August, 2017 for a summit heavily focused on migration and how to stem the numbers of people attempting to enter the EU illegally. The one-day summit aimed to harmonise the divergent positions between France, Italy, Spain, Germany and African countries and also, demonstrated unity and common purpose.

The EU has struggled to agree on a coherent solution to the influx of people fleeing war, poverty and political upheaval in the Middle East and Africa, and the crisis is further testing the cooperation between the member states. The French President, who hosted the summit, stressed that the migration crisis was a “problem that concerns us all” and needs to be approached with “solidarity, humanity and efficiency”. It is worth mentioning that the United Kingdom, despite leading the military engagement that led to the fall of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 and the subsequent power vacuum, was not among the attendees of the summit, a possible sign of Britain’s gradual marginalisation before Brexit.

Seven African and European leaders have met in Paris to try to build a new relationship aiming at cutting migration into Europe from northern Africa in return for aid. The leaders from France, Germany, Italy and Spain agreed to help Chad and Nigeria with border control to stem the flow of migrants through Libya and across the Mediterranean. The pledge was made with plans involving tackling people smugglers, improving stability in Libya and increasing aid to the transit countries.

In a joint statement, the four European leaders acknowledged the need to initiate a process in Chad and Niger that would lead to the resettlement of “particularly vulnerable migrants” in Europe. They announced the plan to carry out “protection missions” in the African nations in cooperation with the UN’s refugee and migration agencies. The process would allow refugees and migrants to immigrate legally to Europe, if they are on an eligibility list provided by the UN refugee agency and registered with the authorities in Niger and Chad. The idea is to set up the “hot spots” in, for example, Libya, to process refugee claims and prevent them making the treacherous journey across the



Mediterranean Sea. However, the chronic instability in Libya will be a major obstacle to asylum processing “hot-spots” operating there. In addition, the French President also stressed the need for an extra €60mln from the European Union to help African countries to deal with asylum seekers who have returned from Europe and to prevent further migration flows.

German chancellor Angela Merkel emphasised the need to clearly define which asylum seekers have legitimate humanitarian needs and who are fleeing poverty. She also stressed the urgent need to rethink European asylum system, which requires migrants to seek refugee status in the first country they reach. Such a requirement has put a huge burden on Greece and Italy, where people in rickety boats have arrived in recent years before travelling on to the other European countries.

The African leaders at the summit emphasised the fighting poverty as a central part of any strategy, arguing that human smugglers must be given legal ways of making money. Due to poverty, people decide to head to Europe and into human trafficking via dangerous routes. Therefore, it is necessary to find alternatives for the smugglers to leave criminal activities, such as commerce or farming. The president of Chad, Idriss Deby Itno, stressed that “poverty and lack of education” were the main drivers of migration to Europe.

Many African refugees and migrants entering the EU under radar come through the land-locked desert countries of Nigeria and Chad before crossing into Libya, where they eventually sail to Italy or Spain. Most of the migrants are West Africans, with Nigeria, Guinea and Ivory Coast being the top countries of origin. In most cases, they are treated as economic migrants, rather than refugees fleeing fighting or persecution. More than 120,000 migrants arrived in Europe by sea from January to August, compared to 261,000 in the same period last year, according to the UN’s International Organisation for Migration. More than 2,000 have died on this route this year, turning the Mediterranean Sea into the “cemetery”. Most of the new arrivals this year were in Italy. Italy has long urged its EU partners to help ease the burden of housing the migrants, as its reception centres are overcrowded. However, the number of migrants landing on Italy’s shores was half the figure it was last year, due to the aggressive Italian approach to halting migration across the Mediterranean from North Africa and tightened cooperation with Libyan security forces. On the other hand, the International Organisation for Migration estimated that the number of people reaching Spain from Africa is starting to increase, exceeding 8,300 by the beginning of August. Such figure is higher than the total number of migrants reaching Spain during the whole period of 2016.



## Russia's International Army Games showcase military might

Sandra Kaziukonyte ■

■ The third International Army Games were hosted in Russia from the 29th of July to the 12th of August in city of Tyumen to prove which nation has the most military might. The annual military competition has been launched by Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in 2015. More than 4,000 soldiers and personnel from 28 mostly non-NATO countries have participated in the event this year, including China, Kazakhstan, Iran, Egypt, Venezuela, Morocco, Angola and Zimbabwe. Even though, Russia has stated that invitations have been sent to 78 countries, including NATO members, however, Greece was the only NATO country taking part in military competition.

The International Army Games feature a range of army disciplines, including the Tank Biathlon, which is widely regarded as the main event and has taken place in Alabino military training centre. It involves tank crews driving an armoured vehicle through a range of obstacles while shooting at targets at the same time. The biathlon tests the speed and shooting accuracy of the crew. Visiting countries have been given a choice to bring their own tanks – as China did – or use the ones provided by Russia. But the games do not test only traditional military skills. Other disciplines include not only air

manoeuvres, off-road track racing, but also a cooking competition for army chefs and creative dance performances. In total, more than 2,500 medals have been handed out. The Russian team took the first place at the ceremony, preserving 100% record of victory since the beginning of the games in 2015. Kazakhstan and China took second and third places accordingly, with Iran and Venezuela being also in the top 10. In addition, the International military competition is not only military drill or combat training operation, but also a spectacular event of entertainment. Two weeks long event has festival-like atmosphere with various gymnastics performances and traditional Russian music being played, military memorabilia being sold and wartime ration-style food prepared. The vast variety of competitions attract thousands of spectators and are also broadcasted live. The televised competition is not only form of entertainment for the internal audience, but also a showcase of the military capabilities for the major international actors. While this annual event raises patriotism among Russians, it also serves as a reminder for Russia's neighbours, most importantly – North Korea with which Russia shares a 17 – kilometre border in the far-east.



## Qatar crisis in the shade of recent restoration of diplomatic ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia

Tamar Buachidze ■



Qatar. Map: CIA [Wikimedia Commons]

■ Qatar crisis, escalating on June 5, 2017, marked aggravation of diplomatic and trade ties with Qatar. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt accused Doha of supporting “terrorism”, but Qatar denied the accusations. As one of the results of the crisis, the Salwa border crossing between Saudi Arabia and Qatar had been shut, but diplomatic ties between Qatar and Saudi Arabia as well as Qatar and Iran took place one after another and as a matter of fact, these two facts are interconnected.

Starting with the recent development of Qatar’s diplomatic relations with Iran, two state’s full diplomatic ties have been restored at the end of August 2017, in defiance of four other Arab nations who have demanded it curb ties with the Islamic Republic. The emirate recalled its ambassador in 2016 when Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran were attacked after Saudi Arabia





executed a leading Shia Muslim cleric. But Qatar now wants to strengthen bilateral relations “in all fields”. Iran has helped Qatar cope with the trade and travel restrictions imposed by its powerful neighbours since June. After the accusations made in June, Qatar did not specify when its ambassador would return to Tehran, but the announcement came after Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani spoke to his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif by telephone. According to a statement, the two men “discussed bilateral relations and means of boosting and developing them as well as a number of issues of common concern”. It is important to indicate that there was no mention of Qatar’s dispute with its neighbours, during which Iran has allowed Qatar Airways, the national carrier, to use its airspace and sent fresh food supplies by plane and ship to help the emirate’s 2.7 million people meet their basic needs. There was no immediate reaction from Saudi Arabia and its allies.

Qatar’s decision to restore diplomatic relations with Iran came a week after Saudi Arabia’s King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman held surprise meetings with a Qatari royal whose branch of the family was ousted in a palace coup in 1972. Riyadh credited Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al Thani, who has no role in Qatar’s government, with brokering a deal that would allow Qatari pilgrims to attend the Hajj pilgrimage. The statement made underlined that Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud



*King Salman bin Abdulaziz.*  
Photo: Secretary of Defense [Wikimedia Commons]

had invited Qatari pilgrims to perform this year’s Hajj pilgrimage at his expense. King Salman also ordered that private jets belonging to Saudi airlines be sent to Doha airport “to bring all Qatari pilgrims on his expenses”. Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani welcomed the decision but insisted that Hajj should not be politicised and that the move should also include a full lifting of the political and economic blockade imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and three other countries.

However, tension is still there and these steps that have been shared with public is highly criticised questioning their real intension and aim. Until the political and economic blockade is imposed, no major conflict resolution is expected.



## Presidential re-elections in Kenya after violent protests and oppositional petition

Lisa Maria Kuke ■

■ On 11 August 2017, Kenya's presidential election has caused major uprisings and violent protests across the country and especially in its capital, Nairobi. The protestors are mainly identified to be supporters of the opposition's candidate Raila Odinga, who was defeated in the elections by the counter-candidate Uhuru Kenyatta. Odinga's supporters claimed the election to be rigged and manipulated in favour of Kenyatta, who won with a 54 % majority. Within the violent outbursts, 11 people have officially died, however, unofficial numbers by human rights organisations stating more than 28 people dead.

Next to the protestor's violence, the police reacted with armed force to the demonstrations and street's barricades in Nairobi. The city centre has been mostly avoided by locals over the weekend, with many shops and markets staying closed. While Odinga's supporters demanded re-elections, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, urged Odinga to calm his supporters down to end the violence.

Although Odinga did not release any statement shortly after the elections, he later filed a petition to the Kenyan Supreme Court to revoke the election's results and Kenyatta's presidency. Odinga has already claimed elections to be rigged twice since 2007, having lost the elections in 2007 and 2013. This time, the court approved his claims to conduct re-elections and declared Kenyatta's victory invalid. It hereby reasoned that the electoral procedures have not been properly supervised and executed by the election commission. The decision did not contain any confirmation of an actual manipulation of the elections by Kenyatta or his party. Kenyatta accepted the court's ruling, expressing his disappointment but at the same time declaring it "the nature of democracy". The new elections will be held on 26 October when Odinga and Kenyatta will compete against each other once again. The court's decision surprised many throughout the continent, and has been perceived as an important step to rebuild the trust in the local democratic institutions.



## Indian and Chinese troops clash in disputed Himalayan border region

Sandra Kaziukonyte ■

■ Tension has been high in mountain region of Ladakh for months and in August Indian and Chinese troops clashed briefly on a disputed area of land in the Himalayas.

The 2017 China-India border standoff or Doklam standoff refers to the military border standoff between Indian armed forces and the People's Liberation Army of China over the construction of a road in Doklam. It is considered one of the worst border disputes between the nuclear-armed rivals in more than 30 years. The standoff began when Chinese troops started to move construction vehicles and road-building equipment for the extension of an existing road southward in Doklam already in June, 2017. The road gives China access to the so-called "Chicken's Neck", that is, a thin strip of land, connecting India's central mass to its remote north-eastern regions. India reacted to China's actions with introducing around 270 of its troops with weapons and two bulldozers in the area in order to stop the Chinese from constructing the road. In turn, China accused India not only of trespassing on Chinese soil, but also, illegally remaining on Chinese territory and progressing with military build-up. Even though, China demanded an "immediate withdrawal of the troops" from the region, India denied any

military build-up and emphasised the belief in "peace and tranquillity in the India-China border being a prerequisite for smooth development of the bilateral relations".



*Doklam.*  
Map: Nilesch shukla [Wikimedia Commons]

Doklam is an area disputed between China and Bhutan located near their tri-junction with India. India does not claim Doklam, but supports Bhutan's claim over it and is a close ally of Bhutan in this conflict. China's claim on Doklam is based on the 1890 Convention of Calcutta between China and Britain, however, Bhutan was not a party to this Convention. In 1949, Bhutan signed the treaty with India, allowing India to guide Bhutan's diplomatic and defence affairs. In 2007, this treaty was superseded by a new Friendship Treaty that replaced the provision which made it mandatory for Bhutan to take



India's guidance on foreign policy and provided broader sovereignty.

From 1958, Chinese maps started to show large parts of Bhutan's territory as being part of China. Some local conflicts arose in the 1960s and in the 1970s negotiations took place between China and Bhutan with India sometimes playing a supporting role. However, the efforts to reach a consensus on the status of the Doklam area have failed. In the early 2000s, China built a road over the disputed area and reached 68 meters distance to the Indian border. Here, a turn-around was constructed which facilitated vehicles to turn back. This road has been in existence since 2005. It is the southward extension of this road that has provoked the 2017 standoff.

India has charged China of changing the status quo in violation of a 2012 understanding between the two governments over the tri-junction boundary points and causing the security concerns. China, in turn, has emphasised the history of the Doklam's area asserting that the territory where construction was taken place is under the jurisdiction of China. China accused India of using Bhutan as a "pretext" to interfere into the boundary talks between China and Bhutan and violating the territorial sovereignty of China, as well as, challenging the sovereignty and independence of Bhutan.

In addition, during this months-long standoff, several Indian and Chinese soldiers were alleged to have been injured after the confrontation in August. The clashes took place after Indian soldiers intercepted a Chinese patrol that veered into Indian-held territory, because of losing its way due to the bad weather. However, it is alleged that a group of Chinese soldiers have actually attempted to infiltrate across the border into the Indian-held territory. It is important to mention that China's military has held five live fire drills close to the disputed area and more exercises had been conducted recently, though the exact location was not specified.

Bhutanese government and media maintained a studious silence after issuing a press statement at the end of June, where it was stated that the road on which Chinese constructions were taking place was "Bhutanese territory". It also stated that Bhutan does not want China and India to go to war and it is avoiding doing anything that can heat up an already heated situation.

At the end of August, 2017 India and China announced that they had agreed to pull their troops back from the standoff in Doklam. Even though, China has stated that it "is not giving up its historical claims and expects India to respect its historical borders", it is reported that the withdrawal of both countries' troops is completed by now.



## ASEAN overcomes communique impasse, urges non-militarisation in South China Sea

Tamar Buachidze ■

■ The South China Sea has been the most divisive issue for the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for so many years, with China's influence over its activities. Some countries are wary about the possible repercussions of defying Beijing by taking a stronger stand. China's claims of sovereignty over the sea – and the sea's alleged 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas – have antagonized competing ASEAN member states: Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. As early as the 1970s, countries began to claim as their own islands, such as the Spratly islands, in the South China Sea, which may possess rich natural resources and fishing areas. China keeps maintaining that under international law, foreign militaries are not able to conduct intelligence gathering activities, such as reconnaissance flights, in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to the United States, countries should have freedom of navigation through EEZs in the sea and are not necessarily required to notify claimants of military activities.

It is important to mention, that China's claims threaten sea lines of communication, which are important maritime passages that facilitate trade and the movement of naval forces. In response to its assertive presence in the disputed territory in order to improve maritime security capacity



South China Sea.

Map: Nzeemin [Wikimedia Commons]



and deter Chinese aggression, Japan sold military ships and equipment to the Philippines and Vietnam. Moreover, China has warned its Southeast Asian neighbours against drilling for oil and gas in the contested region, which has disrupted other nations' oil exploration and seismic survey activities. During the years there have been ongoing talks, discussions and agreements regarding South China Sea, but the situation continues to be complex. It is essential to underline an agreement between China and ASEAN made in May 2017, for a code of conduct aimed at preventing clashes in the South China Sea, but it was not legally binding that would put an end to the territorial dispute. China keeps claiming most of the sea, through which around \$5 trillion in maritime trade passes every year, while the other countries have competing claims.

If we move onto the latest development of the dispute, Southeast Asian foreign ministers ended an impasse on August 6, 2017 over how to address disputes with China in the South China Sea and issued a communique that called for militarization to be avoided. Moreover, ASEAN noted concern about island-building meanwhile China is being sensitive to even a veiled reference by ASEAN to its seven reclaimed reefs, three of which have runways, missile batteries, radars and the capability to accommodate fighter jets. The communique takes a stronger position than an earlier, unpublished draft, which was a watered-down version of one issued last year in Laos. The agreed text "emphasized the importance of non-

militarisation and self-restraint". It argued that after extensive discussions, concerns were voiced by some members about land reclamation "and activities in the area which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tension and may undermine peace, security and stability". ASEAN's deadlock over the statement highlights China's growing influence on the grouping at a time of uncertainty over the new U.S. administration's security priorities putting under a doubt whether it will try to keep China's maritime activities in check. According to several ASEAN diplomats, Vietnam was the one among the members who pushed for a communique that retained the more contentious elements, which has competing claims with China over the Paracel and Spratly archipelago and has had several spats with Beijing over energy concessions. However, another stand has been taken by another diplomat claiming that there was no real disagreement on the contents of the communique and the initial draft was seen by some members as weak.

As we see, the dispute dating back in 1970s, is very slowly progressing and coming to agreements, which are not very durable. On August 6, the foreign ministers of ASEAN and China also adopted a negotiating framework for a code of conduct in the South China Sea, a move they hailed as progress while critics see it as a tactic to buy China time to consolidate its maritime power. Expectedly, another wave of negotiations will be necessary to be discussed and agreed on depending how long a code of conduct will be respected.



## Removal of Confederate monuments and memorials

Sandra Kaziukonyte ■

■ More than 150 years after the Civil War ended, the Confederacy is memorialised with statues and monuments across the United States. There is a nationwide on-going debate about the status of these monuments and memorials. The most recent efforts to dedicate and rededicate Confederate monuments come amid decades-long efforts to remove them.

In 1994, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led an effort to ban Confederate flags from South Carolina. In 2000, 50,000 people turned out to protest the state house flag. Most recently, following the Charleston church shooting in 2015, where nine Afro-Americans were killed, several municipalities in the US removed the statues and memorials dedicated to the Confederate States of America. The murders in Charleston initiated a renewed effort to remove the memorials across the country, including a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee which was dedicated in 1924 in Charlottesville. In August 2017, the rally “Unite the Right” was organised, where white nationalists marched to protest the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue. Unfortunately, the violent clashes between demonstrators erupted and a counter-protester was killed.

According to the study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2016, there are 1,503 Confederate place names and other symbols in public spaces across the nation. While some of the newer monuments are simple stones or plaques commemorating Confederate soldiers, others are large sculptures glorifying the major Confederate leaders. Before the Civil War, the Confederate had supported the continuation and expansion of slavery. Historically, the vast majority of these monuments in question were built during the Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights movement with the intention to intimidate African Americans. Therefore, debate over the future of this memorabilia is highly politicised and dividing both the citizens and politicians.

On one side of this debate, it is argued that Confederate monuments glorify white supremacy and are racist symbols of America’s dark legacy of slavery. However, the other perspective emphasises the cultural heritage and historical value of these statues. Many local government officials consider whether to keep Confederate memorials in their cities and towns or remove by relocating them.



## US sanctions against Russia

Sandra Kaziukonyte ■

■ In the beginning of August, 2017, the president of the United States signed into law the legislation that introduces new sanctions on Russia and also restricts the president's own ability to reverse or ease the introduced sanctions. Even though, Donald Trump voiced his discontent with these measures, the president had little choice, but to sign the bill after an overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress. The bill was passed in the Senate by 98 votes to two and in the House of Representatives by 419 to three, thus, even if Donald Trump vetoed the bill, it would have been easily overturned. The most important objection from the president emphasised the part of the bill that limits his ability to relax the sanctions on Russia without approval from Congress. It is the most controversial section of the bill, because it prohibits the president from lifting the sanctions on Russia or even easing their impact without first reporting to Congress. Donald Trump even stated that such a provision is "clearly unconstitutional", because it "encroaches on the authority of the executive branch to negotiate" and will "make it harder for the US to strike good deals for American people".

The new legislation comes amid increasing tension between the US and Russia, because of the alleged Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election, as well as its human rights violations, annexation of Crimea, military operations in eastern Ukraine and aggression in Syria. The new sanctions hit not only energy and defence sectors of Russia, but also include expanded measures against Iran and North Korea. The bill lists 12 types of sanctions that can be imposed and obliges the president to use at least five of them in many cases. The measures can include freezing assets, such as property, revoking US visas and banning exports from the US to the sanctioned countries.

Russia reacted strongly to the bill with statement from Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev calling this bill and its provisions "a fully-fledged trade war declared against Russia". Russia retaliated for the new sanctions and the countermeasures included the order to the US to reduce its diplomatic staff in Russia by 60% and seizing two of the US diplomatic properties.





## ■ News in Brief

### Domestic affairs affecting international relations

#### Barcelona attack: multiple deaths reported after van hits Las Ramblas crowds

■ A terror attack took place in the heart of Barcelona after a van drove into a crowd of pedestrians in the Las Ramblas Area, on August 17, 2017. Spanish authorities have confirmed that at least 13 people have died and 100 have been injured. A van mowed down tourists and residents followed by a car driven into pedestrians in the popular seaside resort of Cambrils. For days, suspected Ramblas attacker Younes Abouyaaqoub was on the run before police shot him dead. Extremist group ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack, which has also been linked to an earlier house explosion in the city of Alcanar, 120 miles south of Barcelona.

#### The Berlin mosque breaking Islamic taboos

■ The Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is located in a rented room on the third floor of the Protestant St. John's Church building in the capital of Germany. The Berlin's newest mosque is part of a growing movement known as inclusive Islam with a mission to spread a liberal form of Islam. This mosque is open to all Muslims (Sunni or Shia, Alawite or Sufi), as well as, gay, lesbians

and transgender people are also gladly welcome. In addition, women and men pray together side by side and women are allowed to lead the prayers. The Berlin mosque is the first permanent liberal mosque with a fixed place that is open to anyone.

#### Israel moves to close Al Jazeera, ban its journalists

■ Israel plans to revoke media credentials of Doha-based network, Al Jazeera journalists and close its office in Jerusalem according to the country's communication minister's announcement. Ayoub Kara made the announcement on August 7, 2017 during a press conference in Jerusalem, where Al Jazeera was barred from attending. Kara underlined, that the channel is being used by groups to "incite" violence: "We have based our decision on the move by Sunni Arab states to close the Al Jazeera offices and prohibiting their work," In a statement, the Doha-based media network denounced the measures from a country saying claims to be "the only democracy in the Middle East." Al Jazeera stressed that it will closely watch the developments that may result from the Israeli decision and will take the necessary legal measures towards it.



### **Suicide attack on NATO convoy in Afghanistan**

■ Tal Afar is a city known for becoming the last IS stronghold in northern Iraq in July 2017, after the government declared victory in the city of Mosul, 55km to the east. Tal Afar, which had a predominantly ethnic Turkmen population of 200,000 before it fell to IS in June 2014, sits on a major road between Mosul and the Syrian border that was once a key supply route for the jihadist group. Iraqi warplanes have been bombarding the jihadist group Islamic State's positions in Tal Afar, in preparation for a ground assault on the town. Popular Mobilisation spokesman Ahmed al-Assadi told AFP news agency on August 16, 2017 that its commanders had met their army and police counterparts to "decide on the plan to free Tal Afar". Beside Tal Afar, IS controls territory around Hawija, 170km to the south-east; and from Ana to Al-Qaim in the Euphrates river valley, 220km to the south increasing chances of conflict's further escalation.

### **History made for women in Jordan – Government abolishes 1960s Rape Law**

■ After Human's Rights and Women's Rights activists fought for years to revoke Article 308 from the country's penal code for rape crimes, the Jordanian parliament abolished the law on 1 August 2017. The law enabled rapists to avoid a punishment for their crime by marrying their victims. After the Senate and King Abdullah II approve the legislative change, the abolishment of the article will become legally recognised.

Salma Nims from the Jordanian National Commission for Women, as well as other activists, announced further endeavors to improve the situation of women's rights in Jordan.

### **UN High Commissioner for Refugees calls for enhanced international support for Sudan**

■ Filippo Grandi, the United Nations refugee chief made a visit to Sudan in mid-August where, according to him, international solidarity and resources are highly needed. Sudan hosts a vast majority of refugees fleeing the ongoing conflict in the neighbouring South Sudan. Indeed 416,000 South Sudanese refugees has arrived in Sudan since 2013, about 40% of them in 2017. Grandi reiterated the need for urgent donor support in the country along with strengthened efforts to address the root causes in South Sudan. The High Commissioner met South Sudanese refugees, their hosts and the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashi. The visit reinforced the need for support and solidarity from the international community towards Sudan which host refugees also from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen and Chad.

### **Anti-China protesters jailed in Hong-Kong**

■ Three members of the anti-government umbrella movement in Hong Kong have been jailed for six to eight months for their roles in the anti-government protests. The movement was sparked by an "illegal assembly" in September 2014 for which the three individuals have



already been convicted though avoided imprisonment. However, the present events induced the reconsideration of that decision. The Chinese government condemned the protests and considered them to be self-righteous and dangerous, hence sentenced the three men to jail. The imprisonment of anti-government protestors is not unprecedented in China: in 2014 13 umbrella activists were jailed, an act considered to be politically motivated prosecution by the Human Rights Watch. Representatives of the umbrella movement wish to continue their activity in order to implement the demands of the pro-democracy young generation.

#### **Japan calls for denuclearised world on 72nd anniversary of Hiroshima**

■ On the 6th of August, 2017 Japan has marked the 72nd anniversary of the world's first atomic bombing in Hiroshima. It is the only country to have ever come under nuclear attack. Representatives from 80 nations gathered to attend the annual event at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. In a ceremonial speech Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for global cooperation to end nuclear weapons. Japan already abides by a policy of not possessing, producing or allowing nuclear weapons on its

territory. However, there is a continued presence of some 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world.

#### **Crisis flares in Guatemala over corruption and organised crime**

■ Upon the president's declaration of the United Nations-backed anti-corruption chief investigating him and his party persona non-grata, Guatemala has fallen into deep political crisis. Jimmy Morales, a former comedian who was elected president two years ago after the previous government was toppled by corruption charges, announced the expulsion of the respected Colombian prosecutor via a video posted on his Twitter account on August 27, 2017. He also announced that he was firing the foreign minister for failing to carry out the expulsion, replacing him with an ally who is under investigation for illegal adoptions. Announcement followed the court's decision to strip Morales of his political immunity in order to proceed with charges linked to illegal campaign funds allegedly received by his political party the National Convergence Front (FCN) during the 2015 election. Thousands took to the streets of the capital, Guatemala City, as a result of growing fears that Morales is poised to declare a state of siege, escalating crisis and series of protests over corruption and organised crime.



## ■ News in Brief

### Bilateral relations

#### In the wake of Brexit: UK seeks to stabilise its Japanese trade relations

■ On 30 August, the British Prime Minister Theresa May went on a three-day visit to Japan, meeting the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to discuss future trade relations after the Brexit in May 2019. May seeks to negotiate an EU-like trade deal with Japan, maintaining the Japanese business and banking ties in Great Britain. However, Abe already announced before the visit that the EU relations will remain a priority for Japan, and that the UK will have to offer reassurances to negotiate new trade relations.

#### Rouhani warns US against ending the 2015 nuclear deal

■ The Iranian president Hassan Rouhani threatened to terminate the US-Iranian nuclear deal from 2015 if the United States continued to impose sanctions on Iran. Rouhani criticised the current Trump administration for being an “unreliable partner” in terms of international relations, thereby also referring to the US withdrawal of the Paris agreement. The US imposed new sanctions on Iran earlier for the further development of its missile programmes and testing.

#### Number of diplomats hit by sonic attacks in Cuba increase

■ More than 10 US and 5 Canadian diplomats and family members are reported to have been attacked by unidentified sonic weapons in Havana between November 2016 and June 2017. From immediate physical symptoms including headaches to long-term health damage such as hear-loss diplomats have suffered different injuries from different types of weapons. FBI agents, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Cuban authorities are working together to investigate the incidents, though two Cuban diplomats were expelled from the US in May behind the scenes. The interference of a third-country has also emerged as no such devices were found in the diplomats’ residences. Although the incident is highly sensitive Raul Castro reiterated Cuba’s engagement in the improvement of bilateral relations with the US.



Havana, Cuba – National Capitol building





*U.S. Navy aircraft carrier navigates to the Port of Guam.  
Photo: DoD Inspector General [Flickr]*

### False emergency alerts on Guam

■ On 15 August, two radio stations on Guam aired emergency alerts concerning an “unspecified threat”, thereby implying a potential military attack on the Island. The alerts caused some concerns among civilians considering the latest threats from North Korea to attack the Island’s waters. The radio stations and the national homeland security office quickly revoked the alerts and reported a “human error” as the cause of the false warnings.

### Australian deputy Prime Minister Joyce potentially expelled from Parliament

■ Australia’s deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party, Barnaby Joyce, is being accused of holding a dual citizenship as a New Zealander next to being an Australian. According to the Australian constitution, Joyce may be therefore ineligible for his parliament’s seat due to his second nationality. It is currently suspected that the Australian and New Zealand Labour party cooperated with each other to initiate this revelation, and to consequently jeopardise the stability of the Australian government.



*Barnaby Joyce.  
Photo: Apple and Pear Australia Ltd [Wikimedia Commons]*



## ■ News in Brief

### International relations

#### Brexit negotiations: UK's trade and custom proposals dismissed by EU

■ The United Kingdom delivered a new proposal for managing its custom and trade relations with EU and non-EU countries after the Brexit in 2019. The paper includes a postponement of new custom arrangements after Brexit, thus the UK would be able to continue their inter-EU trade relations without barriers and frictions for a limited time. The European Parliament already dismissed the proposal as issues of citizen's rights and finances must be dealt with first, before the negotiations about custom and trade relations can be continued.

#### NATO battlegroups in Baltic nations and Poland are fully operational

■ On 28th of August, 2017 NATO's multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland became fully operational. The Canadian-led battlegroup based in Latvia became the fourth to complete NATO's Certification Exercise. The four battlegroups deployed to the Baltic nations and Poland consist of about 4,500 troops in total and are of a defensive nature. The enhanced NATO's military presence in the eastern part of the Alliance is in response to a changed security environment after Russia's unilateral annexation of Crimea and its military build-up in the Baltic region.

#### Increase of US troops in Afghanistan

■ In a speech on 21 August 2017, US president Donald Trump introduced an updated military strategy for Afghanistan, announcing to deploy more US-American troops in the country. Furthermore, Trump also called NATO allies, such as the United Kingdom, to act accordingly and provide an increased military presence in the region. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reacted supportive and reassured the significance of this measure to prevent a revitalisation of terrorist movements in Afghanistan.

#### EU hails inauguration of international uranium bank in Kazakhstan

■ Kazakhstan inaugurated a Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) Bank on 29th of August, owned and controlled by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The uranium fuel bank will be a physical reserve of up to 90 metric tonnes of LEU. The members of IAEA will be able to purchase the nuclear fuel from this facility, in the event of an unexpected, non-commercial disruption to their supplies. The European Union, one of the project's biggest donors (€24.5 million), welcomed it as a "success for international cooperation" on nuclear non-proliferation. Kazakhstan has the world's second largest reserves of uranium after Australia and has been the biggest uranium producing country since 2009.





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