

*"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"*

# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# October 2015





## About CRP News & Background

Cultural Relations Policy News & Background is a part of ICRP Monthly Review Series and an initiative of Institute for Cultural Relations Policy Budapest. Launched in 2012, its mission is to provide information and analysis on key international political events. Each issue covers up-to-date events and analysis of current concerns of international relations on a monthly basis.

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



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45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 – Hungary

**ISSN 2063-8205**

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## Migration crisis continues

**After big amount** of the influx of people, many countries in Europe decided to construct border fences. On 16 October, Hungary declared its southern border with Croatia closed to migrants.

A month ago, Viktor Orban, who is the right-wing government of Hungary's fiercely anti-immigration prime minister, closed down the migrant route across its border with Serbia. Hungary closed the door on hundreds of thousands refugees and streaming across the Balkan Peninsula. They were directed into Croatia from where they entered Hungary.

In recent weeks at a rate of 5,000 to 8,000 migrants per day en route to the most preferred destinations Austria and Germany. And both Croatia and Slovenia declared they would not limit the influx as long as Austria and Germany kept their doors open.

After Hungary closed the border with Croatia, migrants streaming across the Balkans reached Slovenia, diverted overnight by the closure of Hungary's border with Croatia in the latest demonstration of Europe's disjointed response to the flow of people reaching its borders. . Along with closure of the border,

Croatia started to redirect migrants to the west, towards Slovenia, where hundreds had arrived already and more were on their way. Slovenia declared they would be registered before they leave to Austria and Germany. Also Slovenia suspended rail traffic with Croatia on account of the fact that "complete control" over the influx.

After all these events, Austria has declared they are planning to construct a fence along the main border with Slovenia, which used by migrants for entering the country. "The move would not shut the border, but would allow better control of arrivals," Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann said.

Meanwhile, At least 35 people drowned trying to cross the sea between Turkey and Greece. A Greek coastguard spokeswoman said "We do not have a picture of how many people may be missing yet."

On 30 October, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said he was ashamed to be a member of a European Union that he said was avoiding responsibilities over the migrant crisis and crying hypocritical tears for children who have drowned trying to reach its shores.



## Terror hits Ankara's streets

**After the curfew in Silvan** (Diyarbakir), which has a mainly Kurdish population, at least 17 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have been killed in Turkish military assault on 2 October.

According to local Dogan News Agency, the operation was launched at 5 AM local time by the Istanbul police department together with the teams from the anti-terrorism branch.

Ankara started a curfew in several areas of the city and helicopters and armoured vehicles have reportedly been deployed in at least three of the city's neighbourhoods. Also, according to social media reports, there was intensive gunfire and heavy artillery sounds and a building caught fire following hits from Turkish Army artillery.

On 10 October, at Ankara's main train station 102 people were killed and more than 200 people were injured at a peace rally by two suicide bombings of a local cell of the Islamic State group, which took orders from extremists in Syria.

It had acquired "strong evidence" that the IS cell, which based in Gaziantep, near the Syrian border, was also responsible for four previous attacks in Turkey since May that have mainly targeted supporters of a pro-Kurdish party, the Ankara Chief Prosecutor's

office said. Investigators had established a "regular flow of money" from IS in Syria to the cell, they added.

After this event, Turkey launched air strikes on PKK camps after harassment fires of PKK in Hakkari, Yüksekova. Turkish warplanes struck Kurdistan Workers Party militant targets in northern Iraq and south-eastern Turkey on 10 and 11 October, pressing their military campaign a day after the rebel group ordered its fighters to halt attacks on Turkish soil. According to security sources 30-35 PKK guerrillas were killed in northern Iraq raids.

One senior security official told Reuters that "The PKK ceasefire means nothing for us. The operations will continue without a break."

The PKK umbrella group announced its fighters on Saturday to stop militant activities unless they face attack, in response to calls for them to avoid acts which could prevent a "fair and just election" being held on 1 November.

Another important operation was on 26 October, the government claimed it struck a major impact to an IS cell in a raid in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir, in which seven militants reportedly were killed. Two police officers also died in the clash.



## Syria is still in trouble: An overview of the October incidents

**In its fifth year** of the Syrian civil war, more than 250,000 people were dead and the half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million was displaced.

On 30 September, Russia started conducting airstrikes in Syria, commented the aim as helping the government defeat the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. However, many of the strikes have targeted Syrian rebels in the area where the extremist group is not present and have hit civilians. Also two Lebanese sources told to news agencies that hundreds of Iranian troops have arrived in Syria for joining government forces and their Lebanese Hezbollah allies in a major ground offensive backed by Russian air strikes.

One of the sources familiar with political and military developments in the conflict said that "The (Russian) air strikes will in the near future be accompanied by ground advances by the Syrian army and its allies." According to UN humanitarian officials, more than 120,000 people have been uprooted in Syria in October because of battle. Between 5–22 October the many people fled their homes in the Aleppo, Hama and Idlib governorates. Most remain

in the three governorates but some have fled to camps near the Turkish border. Most people in Aleppo moved toward villages and towns in the countryside west of the city" – U N spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The report of UN largely matches up with similar report by the Norwegian Refugee Council. According the report of Norwegian Refugee Council 100,000 Syrians have been displaced in the last three weeks by the recent fluctuation in the fighting following the start of an airstrike campaign by the Russian military.

Also, the council mentioned that this new mass migration is pressuring already overpopulated and overstretched camps in the country.



Children in a refugee camp. Photo: Number 10 [Flickr]



Mostly, the new wave of displacement is from the county of Aleppo, where Syrian government and allied troops, encouraged by Russian airstrikes, started a ground offensive on 16 October. Also, the militant Islamic State group has captured new territories in Aleppo, thrusting out rival rebels and fighting with government troops. Other people were displaced by the airstrikes and fighting in Hama and Homs.

### **USA and Russia negotiations**

After airstrikes of Russia, senior diplomats announced that Russia and the USA will have military negotiation on Syria conflicts. Although Russia and the United States take a basic dispute on Syria, the parties decided to enter into negotiations for avoiding strike each other in the air operations on Syria.

On the evening of 30 September, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met and agreed on being in communication behalf decreasing risks for both sides.



*Shaping Syria's Future: Ahmet Davutoglu. Photo: World Economic Forum [Flickr]*

### **Russia violated Turkish airspace**

The United States and NATO condemned Russia for violating Turkish airspace on 3 October. After the violation Ankara threatened to respond.

This event followed by an emergency meeting in Brussels of ambassadors from the NATO's 28 member states to respond to what Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg called "unacceptable violations of Turkish airspace" after a Russian jet crossed its frontier with Syria, which held by NATO.

A day after, a Russian warplane again violated Turkish airspace and a Turkish foreign ministry official said, inculcation Ankara to invite Moscow's ambassador.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in a statement he had been told by Russia that the violation was a "mistake" that would not happen again.

He said that "Turkey's rules of engagement apply to all planes, be they Syrian, Russian or from elsewhere ... Necessary steps would be taken against whoever violates Turkey's borders, even if it's a bird."

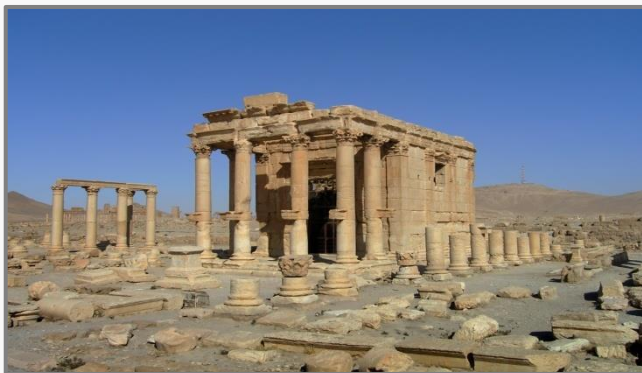
“necessary steps would be taken against whoever violates Turkey’s borders, even if it’s a bird”



## Destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS

**Islamic State militants** have killed three captives in Syria's ancient city of Palmyra by tying them to columns and blowing them up, activists say.

IS has destroyed two 2000-year-old temples, an arch and funerary towers at Palmyra, one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world. The identities of those reportedly killed on 25 October, have yet to be given. But they are thought to be the first to have been killed in that way since the jihadist group seized the ruins in May.



Palmyra. Photo: Juan Llanos [Flickr]

When ISIS occupied the UNESCO-designated World Heritage site city of Palmyra in Syria in May 2015, the international community wondered what fate awaited these majestic ruins. After seizing Palmyra in Syria in May, Islamic State jihadists have been consistently destroying the remains of the ancient city which are

included on the UNESCO World Heritage list demolishing some of its most prized sites.

In August, UNESCO Director-General denounced the destruction of the ancient Roman temple of Baal Shamin as a war crime and called it "immense loss for the Syrian people and for humanity.

In just ten days, between the last week of August and the first week of September, the smaller temple of Baal Shamin, the Grand temple of Bel and three funerary towers from the necropolis were blown up in what has become the hallmark signature of ISIS's destruction of cultural heritage sites. Now, ISIS has destroyed yet another iconic landmark of Palmyra.

Why is ISIS destroying Palmyra's major heritage landmarks? The answer lies beyond the simplistic narrative of an extremist Islamist group with an iconoclastic approach to cultural heritage generally portrayed in the media.

ISIS commits cultural heritage atrocities to shock the world, allowing ISIS to demonstrate its ability to act with impunity and illustrating the impotence of the international community to prevent them.

ISIS's destruction of the site of Palmyra should be seen through the wider lens of events taking place in Syria today and the need for ISIS to respond to them.





## Knife attacks and what comes after: Israeli-Palestinian relations

**Israeli security forces** shot dead two Palestinians aged 12 and 15 in protests along Gaza's border fence on 10 October, Palestinian medics said, and Israeli police said they killed three Palestinian assailants in Jerusalem.

Eleven days of bloodshed in which four Israelis and twenty-one Palestinians, many of whom were carried out knife attacks, have been killed in Jerusalem, the Israeli occupied West Bank, Gaza and Israeli cities have raised concerns that a new Palestinian uprising may be brewing.

The same day of the shootings, two Palestinians were shot dead by police after stabbing at least four Israelis in separate attacks near Jerusalem's Old City, Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

In a bid to stop further escalation, US Secretary of State John Kerry spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 9 October, Netanyahu's office said and with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on 10 October, according to the official Palestinian news agency WAFA.

Netanyahu and Abbas have called for calm and Palestinian police continued to

coordinate with Israeli security forces to try to restore order, but there are few signs of the violence dying down. Netanyahu has said repeatedly that he will not allow any changes to the status quo under which Jews are allowed to visit the al-Aqsa mosque but non-Muslim prayer is banned, but his a guarantee have done little to quell alarm among Muslim across the region.

In 2000, a visit to the al-Aqsa compound by Ariel Sharon, then Israel's opposition leader and later prime minister, engaged Palestinians and helped to trigger on uprising that continued for five years and left about 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis dead.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, lands that Israel captured in 1967 Six-Day War, for a future state. The US has brokered peace talks broke down in April 2014.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Jerusalem on 20 October, in an attempt to deescalate tensions that have produced a spate of killings and retaliations between Israelis and Palestinians, demonstrating a diplomatic balancing act with no easy end



in sight. The secretary-general said, "...Israelis and Palestinians stand on the brink of another catastrophic period of violence. We need to keep the situation from escalating into a religious conflict with potential regional implications. We must create conditions for meaningful negotiations that will end the occupation and realize the aspirations of both people. The highest profile arrest so far in this recent spate of violence is Hassan Yousef, a leader

of Hamas. The Israel Defence Forces arrested Yousef on 20 October. Since the start of October, 45 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. About 1,850 others have been wounded by live ammunition, rubber bullets and beatings, it said. The spiral of violence appears to be deepening the hostility and mistrust between the sides.



Israeli West Bank barrier . Photo: Montecruz Photo [Flickr]



## UK and Saudi Arabia ties under tension

**The relations** between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia seem to be shacking, after David Cameron announced that the European island would withdraw from a deal worth of 5.9 million pounds with the Middle East country. The British Prime Minister has been criticised by the head of the Labour Party and by the Lord Chancellor and justice secretary about negotiates with countries that still use beheadings, stoning, crucifixions and lashing under a strict interpretation of the Islamic laws.



*Saudi flags at Buckingham Palace. Photo: Tijl Vercaemer [Flickr]*

Diplomatic relations between the two countries have not been stable, since Saudi authorities arrested a 74-year-old British man in August 2014, for possession of alcohol forbidden in the Middle East. Karl Andree was condemned to one year in

prison and 360 lashes. Though his prison sentence has ended, Andree continued detained, awaiting for his corporal punishment. David Cameron stated that the cancelation of the deal, related with training Saudi Arabia prison staff, had nothing to do with Andree's case, but it reflected the government's decision to prioritise domestic issues.

Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz, from Saudi Arabia, immediately respond to the British Government, stating he would "not be lecturer by anyone" and that "always had to deal with a lack of understanding and misconception". However, in the same way his people respected "the local traditions, customs, laws and religion of Britain, we expect Britain to grant us this same respect."

According to "The Telegraph", David Cameron tried to ease the diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, by sending a message to the King Salman bin Abdul Aziz bin Saud and suggested that the British Prime Minister could visit the Middle East country by the end of 2015.

During 2014, Saudi Arabia was the biggest importer of British-made weapons, and is the main commercial partner of the United Kingdom in the Middle East.



## Insurgency in Yemen

**One month after** returning from exile, Yemeni government was attacked by the Islamic State, making more complex the dynamics of the civil war in the country. The government was in its temporary facilities, in Aden's al-Qasr hotel, when two bomb cars exploded. The jihadist group also attacked the Gulf Arab coalition, supporter of the government forces in the port city of Aden, and a Houthi-run rebels' mosque, in the capital Saana. The four coordinated attacks killed 22 people and it was the first offensive act of the Islamic State in the civil war against the government.

Associated with the Sunni Islamic sector, the Islamic State values are hostile towards United States backed Yemeni government and its Arab coalition allies, as well towards the Shi'ite Muslim Houthis. However, so far, the extremist group had refrained from attacking the government and Saudi-led coalition forces. Vice President and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, who survived the explosions, condemned the jihadist actions. "Today's attack does not affect anybody. On the contrary, it binds us together even more. We had come here to work and we know that there are security gaps. But this now prompts us to do more in the

framework of reinforcing security in a bigger way by the general security services and armed forces."

Yemen is in a state of civil war since the beginning of 2015, when Yemen's security forces split into two main groups: the supporters of the current government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, which also counts with the military support of an Arab coalition constituted by five Gulf Arab States, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan; and the Houthi forces, loyal to the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has remained politically influential. Both parties have been accused by the International Amnesty of committing war crimes. Only in October 2015, several airstrikes led by the Saudi coalition, in an attempt of restoring regions taken by the Houthis, including the capital of Yemen, killed hundreds of civilians. Even a hospital in the north of the country of the Medicines San Frontiers was bombed.

The conflict became more complex when a Yemen affiliate of the Islamic State emerged in the end of 2014, with the goal of destroys al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, to whom both Houthis and government forces opposed.



## Hospital bombing in Afghanistan

**On 3 October** a US airstrike hit Kunduz in northeast Afghanistan after it was requested by the Afghan government forces. The airstrike hit a hospital in the city and killed 22 patients and staff members of Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

The Afghan government initially justified the airstrikes, saying their forces had information indicating that “armed terrorists” were in the hospital. “These statements imply that Afghan and US forces working together decided to raze to ground a fully functioning hospital ... with more than 180 staff and patients inside ... because they claim that members of the Taliban were present”, Doctors Without Borders wrote in the statement.

Initial official reports also indicated that the NATO coalition forces were receiving fire from the building when the decision to fire was made.



*Doctors without Borders 024. Photo: Richard Roche [Flickr]*

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said President Obama apologised to Doctors Without Borders two days later during a phone call with the organisation's president Joanne Liu, expressing his condolences for the US bombing of the hospital in Afghanistan.



*Providing support to the Red Cross in Afghanistan. Photo: DFID-UK [Flickr]*

Obama promised a transparent and thorough investigation of the facts “and if necessary will implement changes to make sure tragedies like this one are less likely in the future”.

Also, Obama spoke by phone with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to express condolences for the “loss of life” and “commend the bravery of the Afghan national forces.”

From past to present, this is not the first time US airstrike has killed large numbers of civilians in Afghanistan. In 2009, 74 civilians were killed when two tanker trucks were bombed and a fireball was ignited.



## Disputes over the South China Sea

**Tensions between** the two largest world economies are escalating, as the United States test China's patience in the South China Sea. President Obama's defence secretary confirmed in the end of October 2015, that a warship had sailed within 12 miles of the Chinese island of Spratly. Beijing authorities immediately reply to the incident, with its Foreign Minister Wang Yi warning the Americans they should "act more prudently to avoid provocation".

The United States have not recognised China's sovereignty over the South China Sea islands, a region also dispute by The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.



*USS Mustin Patrols the South China Sea. Photo: U.S. Pacific Command [Flickr]*

In the beginning of October, when Washington was considering to sail warships within the 12 nautical miles of the artificial islands constructed and claimed by Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated: "We will never allow any country to violate China's territorial waters and airspace in the Spratly islands, in the name of protecting freedom of navigation and overflight. We urge the related parties not to take any provocative actions, and genuinely take a responsible stance on regional peace and stability."

The international law recognises the distance of 12 miles as the limit of the maritime territory of the states. However, that limit does not apply to islands build in top of previously submerged reefs. In this sense, the United States claimed they did not violate the international law. On the other hand, China saw it as Washington challenging Beijing authority. Since 2012 United States patrols did not sail in the area, when the islands had not yet been constructed. In May 2015, Chinese navy sent eight warnings to United States P8-A Poseidon surveillance aircraft for flying to close to the islands, though beyond



the 12 miles radar. In September 2015 in order to avoid the possibility of aerial clash, during his visit to Washington, President Xi Jinping finalised an agreement with President Obama about the matter, where Beijing affirmed the islands have mainly civilian purposes. Nonetheless, the tensions between the two countries have not eased.

Washington is preoccupied that the construction of the islands has military objectives and worries that it is in China's plans to build new islands in the much disputed area. In October, Beijing completed the construction of two lighthouses in Huayang Reef and Chigua Reef in the Spratly islands, stating its purpose to help with maritime search and rescue, disaster relief, environmental protection and navigational security.

The European Union has already affirmed its support to the United States, even though it might compromise the economic relations of the community with Beijing. In a statement, a spokesman for Foreign Affairs of European Union said "As we have commented on the allegations, the European Union is committed to a maritime order based on the principles of international law, in particular as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."

Though inhabited, the Spratly islands are an important economic and strategic area, as they may have reserves of natural resources around them. Besides, it is a major shipping route and a productive area for world fishing. In this way, they have been a stage of political dispute among the countries in the South China Sea.

“Foreign Minister Wang Yi has warned the US that they should act more prudently to avoid provocation”



*USS Mustin Patrols the South China Sea. Photo: U.S. Pacific Command [Flickr]*



## FIFA corruption scandal continues

**Joseph Blatter**, Michel Platini and Jérôme Valcke were provisionally suspended by Ethics Committee of FIFA, following the corruption scandal that hit the football world in 2015. Blatter, President of FIFA, was suspended for 90 days, with the possibility of extending. Platini, President of UEFA and Valcke, FIFA's Secretary General had the same punishment. In addition, FIFA's Vice President, and candidate to succeed Blatter in the leadership of the organism, Chung Mong-joon was banned for six years and sanctioned to pay a fine of 100,000 Swiss francs (around 91,000 euros).

In a statement presented by the Commission, during the established period, "the above-mentioned persons are prohibited from engaging any activities related to football, both nationally and internationally". In September 2015, the Swiss Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal process to question Blatter under the suspicion of mismanagement, misappropriation of funds and abuse of trust. Besides, the Swiss authorities affirmed they would also investigate if Blatter breached his fiduciary duties towards the football organism, by signing a contract for the transfer of television rights for the 2010

and 2014 World Cups for amounts below the market price with CONCACAF.

Platini was firstly listen in the quality of testimony, but ended up involved in the process for receiving from Blatter an illegal payment that negatively affected FIFA, worth of two million Swiss francs (around 1.8 million euros).

The President of UEFA was one of the candidates for the elections for the presidency of FIFA, in February 2016, and was considered the favourite to victory. However, his suspension may affect his candidacy.

As for Mong-joon and Valcke, the first one was found guilty of violating five articles of the ethic code of FIFA, for assigning the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar respectively; and the second had already been suspended for alleged misconduct, related with a deal to sell inflated tickets for the World Cup 2014.

Blatter and Platini immediately stated they will appeal of the sentence.

Since May 2015, FIFA has been involved in a corruption scandal, in a lawsuit filed by the United States justice that led to accusation against 14 leaders and former leaders of the football organisation.





## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic affairs affecting international relations

### **“Last dictator in Europe” elected for fifth term**

■ Alexander Lukashenko was re-elected as the Belarussian President for the fifth time, with more than 80% of the votes. In the last elections, in 2010, the victory of “Europe’s last dictatorship”, as described by former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, led to public protests and to the imprisonment of several opposition leaders. However, Lukashenko’s attitude towards the economic crisis, his criticism against Russia’s annexation of Crimea, his hosting of peace talks in Ukraine and the pardoning of the opposition leaders, last summer, have helped to improve the public support. Lukashenko was first elected as President in 1994 and since then has been the head of the country.

### **New liberal government means big changes for Canada**

■ With a host of policies that differ dramatically from his predecessor, Justin Trudeau’s victory over the most conservative leader in Canada’s history will reverberate beyond the country’s borders. The first major shift came on 20 September, when Trudeau announced he had spoken with US President Barack Obama and told him he will remove Canada’s six fighter jets from the US-led bombing campaign against the Islamic State terrorist group in Iraq and Syria. There will be a “new way for Canada to be on the world stage”, agreed Liberal lawmaker Marc Graneau, who won re-election. The White House said Obama called to congratulate Trudeau on the other day and said in a statement the two leaders “committed to strengthening the countries” joins efforts to promote trade, combat terrorism and mitigate climate change”. During the campaign, Trudeau re-energised the Liberal Party, which suffered its worst electoral defeat four years ago, winning 34 seats and finishing third behind the traditionally weaker New Democrat Party.

### **Egypt votes in long-delayed parliamentary elections**

■ People have been voting in Egypt in the first round of long-delayed elections to choose a new parliament on 18 October. The authorities say the poll is the final step in a transition to democracy. Voting continued on the next day in this first round of the elections, with a second round due in November. Results are not expected to be known until early December. The government declared a half-day holiday the same day for state workers, apparently hoping to encourage more voting. Analysts say turnout is expected to be low, with many Egyptians disillusioned with the democratic process. Apathy is particularly high among young people with many angry at the government and its policies.



### **Libya crisis: doubts over UN unity government proposal**

■ At least nine people were killed and dozens more injured in Libya's second city Benghazi when mortar shells hit a protest against a United Nations proposal for a unity government to end a political crisis on 23 October. Libya is caught in a conflict that pits the internationally recognised government and its armed backers against an opponent government established by an armed alliance that took over the capital last year, four years after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. Along with General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army forces fighting an alliance of Islamist fighters and former anti-Gaddafi rebels, Benghazi has become in advance in Libya's multi-sided war. To end this chaos, The United Nations has serviced a proposal for a national unity government between the two main political factions but enterprises to reach a deal have stopped as both sides face resistance from within their ranks.

### **Iran's parliament backs nuclear deal**

■ Iranian state media said that the country's parliament has confirmed a deal on its nuclear programme agreed with six powers. According to the official IRNA news agency, the deal was passed with 161 votes favourable, 59 against and 13 abstentions. But, the parliament persisted that international inspectors would have only limited access to military sites. The deal between Iran and the P5+1 was reached after 20 months of negotiations. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani was criticised by conservative MPs for proposing they were intentionally trying to delay the deal. According to correspondents, the domestic debates on the agreement resulted in angry conflicts within the parliament of Iran.

### **Report: mass graves, rape and cannibalism in South Sudan**

■ According to a long-awaited report, in South Sudan mass graves and evidence of horrific crimes, containing forced cannibalism, were founded by African Union investigators. President Salva Kiir's faction in the conflict is also suspected of recruiting an irregular tribal force before the outbreak of war in December 2013. Besides, the report, published on 27 October, argues that former Vice President Riek Machar attempted a military coup in December 2013. The report said that government troops were the responsible of organised killings of members of the ethnic Nuer in Juba. When violence burst out, Machar, a Nuer, became a rebel leader. He and Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, recently signed a peace agreement.

### **Boko Haram strikes again**

■ Five bomb children with age between 9 and 15 years old were responsible for several blasts in the city of Maiduguri, in the north-eastern of Nigeria. The attacks occurred in a mosque and in the house of the vigilant leader, killing fifteen people and injuring 35 others. Maiduguri is known as the first base of Boko Haram, where the extremist Islamic group started its expansion six years ago. Two weeks before, similar attacks killed around 100 people. Boko Haram has intensified its offensive actions since the election of President Muhammadu Buhari, in May 2015, who swore to defeat the jihadist group.



### **China to end one-child policy and allow two**

■ China had a controversial policy, which was introduced in 1979, to slow the population growth rate. It is estimated to have prevented approximately 400 million births. Under the one-child policy there was a variety of sanctions for couples who violated the principles. In progress of time, China faced the problems of rising social costs and falling numbers of labour force. Moreover, population in China is getting older. Eventually, China has decided to end its one-child policy and given allowance to couples to have two children.



*Clap Clap. Photo: James Kim [Flickr]*



*Primary school children Fengdu. Photo: Anne Roberts [Flickr]*

### **Nepalese parliament elects first female president**

■ A communist politician, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, who has long campaigned for women's rights, has become Nepal's first female president. She is the second person to hold the mainly ceremonial role. President Bhandari was defence minister from 2009 to 2011. She has promised to champion minority and women's rights in Nepal. She has been a leading political figure since her husband, Madan Bhandari, who was then leader of the party, was killed in a mysterious car crash in 1993.

### **Secular publisher hacked to death in latest Bangladesh attacks**

■ A publisher of secular books has been hacked to death in the Bangladeshi capital, reported by local police. Also, two other writers and a publisher were stabbed and shot at a publishing house, in an attack in Dkaha. After at least four atheist bloggers were murdered in the country this year, horror of Islamist violence have been expanding in Bangladesh. While Islamic State has alleged responsibility for three other attacks, the attacks have been connected by police to domestic Islamist extremists. Faisal Abedin Deepan's body was founded in his office. Also, earlier in the day, publisher Ahmed Rahim Tutul and other two writers were attacked in the office of the Shudhdhoswar publishing house and seriously wounded. Both Depan and Tutal had published books of Bangladeshi-American writer and blogger Avijit Roy, who was one of the four secular bloggers killed in Bangladesh this year.



## ■ News in Brief

### Bilateral relations

#### **Bahrain ambassador to Iran leaves the country**

■ Bahrain withdrew its ambassador to Iran and established a deadline of 72 hours for the Iranian ambassador in the first leave the kingdom. The diplomatic incident happened after the Bahraini authorities found 1.5 ton of explosives and bomb-making materials in a warehouse, in a residential area in Nuwaidrat, ten kilometres from the capital Manama. The high grade explosives were to be use in terrorist attacks by suspects, later arrested, connected with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah.

#### **Russia is building a military base on disputed islands seized from Japan during World War II**

■ Russia plans to build a military base on the Kuril Islands, a group of Pacific islands it seized from Japan at the end of the World War II, Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu said on 22 October, according to the Interfax news agency. Defence Minister Shoygu said that “We are not keeping this a secret – we have practically created a base on the Novosibirsk Islands, the Island of Kotelny. This is a big military base, there was no such in the Soviet period.” The dispute between Russia and Japan over these islands has remained unresolved since World War Two. The conflict has kept the two nations from signing a formal peace treaty. The Soviet Union seized the islands in 1945, shortly before Japan's surrender in World War Two.

#### **South Korean president says she's open to talks with Japanese leader**

■ On 15 October, South Korea's president Park Geun-hye said that she was willing to meet one-on-one next month with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo of Japan. Ties between South Korea and Japan, its former coloniser, have been strained for years, largely over issues rooted in their painful history. The United States is avid for them to improve the relationship while their arch enemy China's developing assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear arms program in the region. The date for the meeting between presidents of South Korea and Japan has not been announced, but Park said that it would be held in Seoul in early November.



## ■ News in Brief

# International relations

### **South Ossetian leader proposes referendum on joining Russia**

■ Leonid Tibilov, the separatist leader of South Ossetia has proposed holding a referendum on whether the Georgian breakaway region should join Russia. Tibilov and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an “alliance and integration treaty” in Moscow on 18 March. The pact was remonstrated by both the European Union and United States. Moscow has signed a similar deal with another Georgian breakaway region, Abkhazia, in December 2014.

### **Ex-soviet states to jointly defend borders in crisis**

■ The leaders of ex-Soviet states, led by Russian President Vladimir Putin, responded to growing instability in Afghanistan on 16 October, by agreeing to create a joint task force to defend their bloc’s external borders if a crisis arises. The move could mean that Russian troops, as part of collective forces, will be deployed to Afghanistan’s borders as the US-led coalition gradually withdraws from the country, leaving behind a power vacuum. The Kremlin says Russia wants to stop the spread of Islamist militancy, but Western governments also see it as Russia trying to re-assert itself as a global power. The leaders of ex-Soviet grouping the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) met at Burabai resort near the Kazakh capital, Astana. They agreed on the creation of what is described in a summit document as a “grouping of border(forces) and other institutions from CIS member states designed to resolve crisis situations on the external borders.” Russian border troops were responsible for security on the Tajik-Afghan border until 2005, when an agreement with the Tajik government lapsed and they pulled out.

### **Europe-US data transfer deal used by many firms ruled invalid**

■ The Court of Justice of the European Union shut down a transatlantic system that allowed firms to easily transfer personal data from European Union to United States. Created by the European Commission fifteen years ago, the Safe Harbour system was considered by the court as not properly protective of European Union citizens’ personal data. At the same time, the institution criticised the fact the European citizens do not have legal measures to recourse against misuse of personal data. The deal allowed American and European companies to transfer data, like payroll, human resource information and lucrative data used for online advertisement. IBM, Google or Ericsson are a few examples of the 4,000 firms that used the system.



### **South Africa plans to leave International Criminal Court**

■ South Africa plans to leave the International Criminal Court (ICC), a deputy minister said on 11 October, as the government faces criticism for ignoring a court order to arrest Sudan's president earlier this year. The Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, who has been accused of genocide and war crimes, visited South Africa in June and was allowed to leave despite a court order to detain him. Last week the government asked the ICC for more time to explain why it allowed this. But, this weekend the ruling party resolved to leave the court. The parliament will not debate ICC membership. The African National Congress (ANC) commands a comfortable majority in the legislature, with more than 60 percent of the vote.

### **Nauru to process all asylum seekers in offshore detention centre**

■ News that Nauru will move to process all residuary asylum seekers was welcomed by the government of Australia. In pursuant of a statement issued by the Nauru government, refugees will be among those helping to resettle the remaining 600 asylum seekers in the Nauru immigration detention centre. The government of Nauru has promised to process all asylum seekers in its offshore detention centre still awaiting a result on their application for refugee status "within the next week." The decision comes just days before a legal challenge investigating the Australian Government's role in the centre's operation.

### **Trans-Pacific Partnership is reached but faces scrutiny in Congress**

■ United States and eleven other Pacific nations, including Japan, Australia and Canada, reached a commercial accord, seen by President Obama as a legacy-making achievement. The Trans-Pacific Partnership closes the commerce relations between two fifth of world economy under a set of common rules. The accord may represent a pillar against China's influence in global commerce. However, Obama's achievement has now to pass through the Congress with Republican majority, which may be an obstacle to the partnership approval.

### **Ukraine and Japan elected for UN Security Council**

■ On 12 October, Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay were elected to serve the United Nations Security Council for a period of two years. The five countries, representing five different world regions, were elected without opposition. Though their powers are lower than the five permanent members, the new temporary members can use their influence to prioritise their own foreign policies or to "attack" their rivals. It is the case of Japan's relation with China, regarding the Human Rights violations by Beijing's ally North Korea, or Ukraine with Russia, concerning the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.



### **Number of people living in extreme poverty decreases to 702 million**

■ The World Bank announced that, for the first time in human history, the number of people living in extreme poverty is likely to fall below the 10 % of the world population in 2015. This represents a fall of 3.2 %, in relation to 2012. The president of the World Bank Jim Yong Kim stressed “these projections shows that we are the first generation in humanity that can end extreme poverty”. The strong economic growth rates in emerging markets, like India, and the investments in education, health and social safety nets are seen as the main cause for the decrease. Extreme poverty is defined as living on or below 1.90 dollars per day.

### **Nobel peace prize 2015 awarded to Tunisian national Dialogue quartet**

■ On 9 October, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, contrary to expectations, skipping figures such as Pope Francis and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and handed the award to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet. The quartet obtained reward for its role during the country’s transition to democracy in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011. “The quartet was formed in the summer of 2013 when the democratisation process was in danger of collapsing as a result of political assassinations and widespread social unrest. It established an alternative, peaceful political process at a time when the country was on the brink of civil war. It was thus instrumental in enabling Tunisia, in the space of a few years, to establish a constitutional system of government guaranteeing fundamental rights for the entire population, irrespective of gender, political conviction or religious belief.” the Nobel Committee said.



*The Busker, Child Portrait, Mexico City. Photo: Geraint Rowland [Flickr]*



*Tunisia national dialogue focuses on consensus. Photo: Magharebia [Flickr]*





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