

*"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"*

# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# April 2015





## About CRP News & Background

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## The Armenian Genocide divides Turkey and the Pope

**2015 marks the 100th year** since the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The recurrence has meant commemorations all over the world to remember the death of more than 1.5 million people. Among them there were also Pope Francis and officials of the European Union that passed a non-binding resolution to commemorate the genocide. Turkey strongly reacted to the declarations, defining them, through the words of its Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, as the attempt of an “evil front” to use history to insult and blackmail Turkey. The statement was followed by the recall of the Turkish ambassador from the Vatican.

The Armenian Genocide took place in two different moments. The first moment was from 1894 to 1897. In this period, Sultan Abdul Hamid II punished a population in revolt carrying out violent repressions. The second moment was from 1915 to 1923. In this second period, the group of the Young Turks, in order to fulfil their nationalist targets, scientifically planned the elimination of the Armenian population from the country. Notwithstanding Turkey's position on the issue, such planning has been demonstrated: the scholar of Jewish



*Armenian genocide centennial logo.  
Picture: Wikimedia Commons*

origin Yehuda Bauer, in his book “The Place of the Holocaust in the Contemporary History”, defined the Armenian genocide case as the closest to the Jewish Holocaust; the Polish professor Raphael Lemkin claimed he had thought about the case of the Armenians in 1944 when he coined the term “genocide”. Recently, in 2005, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) confirmed that the Ottoman Empire implemented a systematic genocide against the Armenian population. At the end of the nineteenth

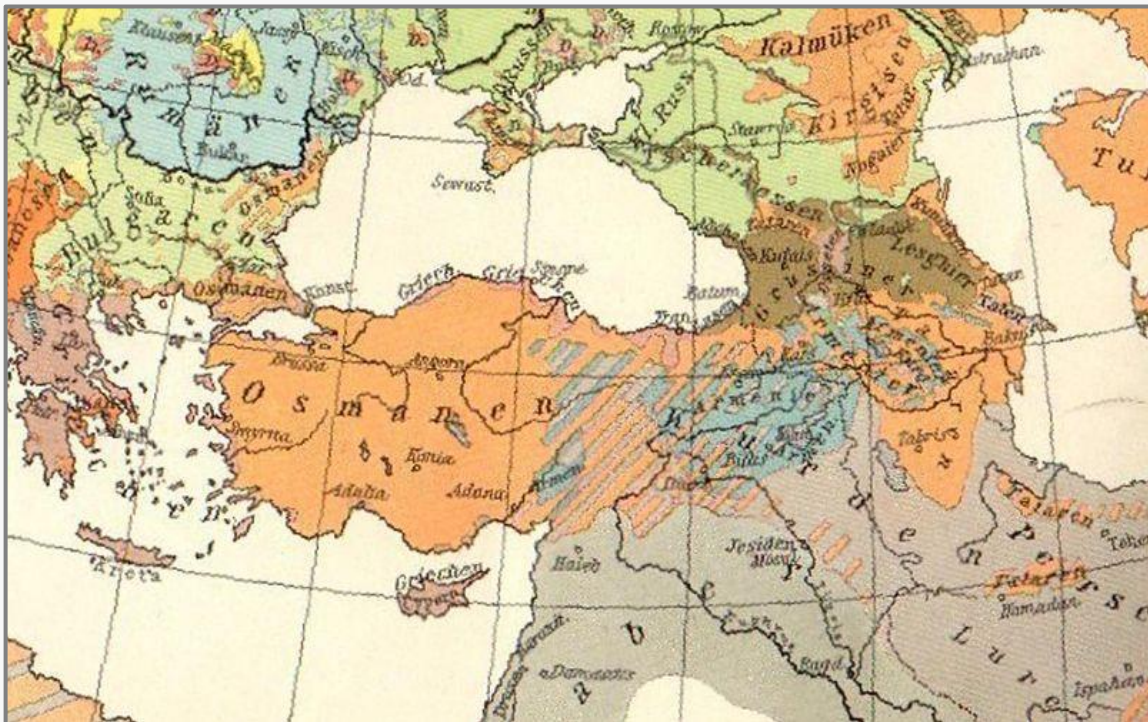


century the Armenians were one of the many ethnic groups that lived in the Ottoman Empire. They were about two millions, especially in the Anatolian region. Nonetheless, they were highly discriminated for their religion, and a pressing nationalism was growing all around the country. Around 1890, the Armenian population rose in all parts of Anatolia because Turkey did not comply with the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 that would have guaranteed more rights to the minority. The protesters called for reforms, the end of their discrimination, the right to vote and a constitutional government. The response of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II was tough: the Ottomans sent the army in the region and pushed the Muslim population against Armenians, defined as "enemies of Islam". The Ottomans committed serious crimes. The worst took place in the city of Urfa, where

about 3,000 Armenians died burned alive inside the cathedral where they had taken refuge. The reign of terror lasted until 1897, when Abdul Hamid claimed to have finally solved the Armenian issue.

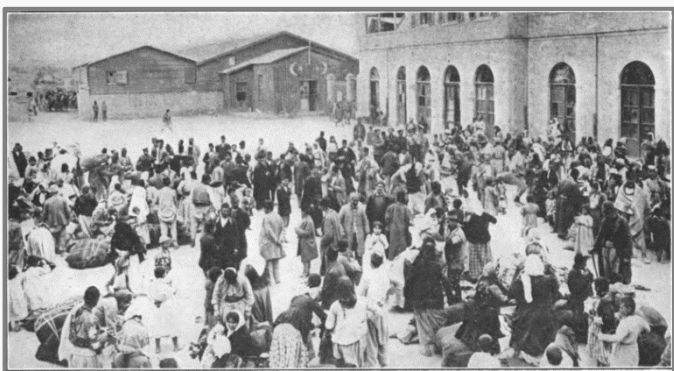
Few years later, in 1909, the Young Turks came to power, deposing the Sultan Abdul Hamid in favour of his brother, Mehmet V. One of the main goals of the Young Turks, a strongly fanatic nationalist group, was to pursue the idea of an area, from Anatolia to Central Asia, inhabited exclusively by the Turkish ethnicity.

Approaching World War I, the Turkish government was afraid of the possibility of the Armenian alliance with the Christian Russia. For this reason, the Young Turks, led by the "Three Pashas" (Mehmed Talat, Ismail Enver and Ahmed Djemal), decided to organize the systematic elimination of the Armenian people. The perfect



Ethnic map from 1914, Armenians marked with blue. Map: Wikimedia Commons





Armenians waiting for deportation. Photo: Aurora Mardiganian: Ravished Armenia

opportunity to kick off their extermination plan was provided by the outbreak of the war, which would have prevented the foreign countries to intervene in the Turkish internal affairs.

During the night between 23 and 24 April 1915, in the city of Constantinople (now

people. Only in a few reached the destination, while the majority died during the gruelling journey. The testimonies of this massacre were proved by the photographs of the German Armin T. Wegner, who during the war served in Anatolia.

The debate over the Armenian genocide involves the discussions over the genocide denials. Within the European Union, the Holocaust denial is considered a crime in the legal systems of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Lithuania. Conversely, other countries such as France, Spain and Portugal punish the denial of any genocide. On the contrary, in Turkey, to

“Deportations became real death marches that involved about 1,200,000 people”

Istanbul) there was a sudden roundup of the Armenian intellectuals. In one day, almost 300 people belonging to the ruling class disappeared. These people were deported to Anatolia, and those who survived the trip were massacred at their arrival. After eliminating the leaders, the Turkish government ordered the disarmament of the Armenian soldiers enrolled for the war (about 350,000). They were arrested and massacred. Finally, the plan of the Young Turks targeted the rest of the Armenian population of Anatolia. They were deported to Mesopotamia with the excuse of the evacuation of the war zone. These deportations became real death marches that involved about 1,200,000

talk about the Armenian genocide could mean the application of the Article 301 of the Criminal Code, which punishes the offenses towards the Turkish state.

After 100 years, Turkey is not ready to admit



Armenians being deported during the massacre. Photo: Narek [Flickr]





Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: World Economic Forum

its past mistakes. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that Turkey could not accept that its history included genocide and focused on

Turkey's present-day treatment of Armenians. "There are 100,000 Armenians who are either Turkish citizens or not citizens in my country. Have they been submitted to any different treatment?" – he said. "They benefit from all kinds of opportunities. We could deport them, but we don't. They are guests in our country.

"Whatever decision they take it will go in one ear and go out the other" – he said. "It is not possible for the Turkish Republic to accept such a sin, such a crime."

Hence, the positions of the EU and Turkey do not seem reconcilable. The issue over the Armenian genocide remains as one of the points that hinders Turkey's accession in the European Union.



Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan. Photo: Rita Willaert



## Four years of civil war in Syria



Free Syrian Army soldier with machine gun in Aleppo in 2012. Photo: VOA

**The Syrian government conducted** several air strikes on the Islamic State group's positions in Damascus. 32 persons have been killed in these operations on 22 April. Some counter strikes were made with the same method being used by ISIS. In these attacks, 7 people have died in a village. Jisr al-Shughur, the last major town which remained under the government control in Idlib province has been taken over by Islamist rebels (including al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra front) on 25 April after two days of fighting. Before their withdrawal, the government forces have executed 23 prisoners. According to several sources, the bodies of about 60 loyalists have been laid in the streets. One day later, the government launched warplanes to strike the city; dozens of airstrikes has resulted to

the death of 27 people and more than a hundred deaths for the control of a city. But that is only an episode of a more complicated conflict.

This country of 23 million of inhabitants, where 90% of the population is Muslim (largely Sunni – 78% and a minority, 12% is composed of several Shiite branches) and 10% Christian, has been torn by civil war for 4 years. The Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000, belongs to a Shiite minority branch, the Alawite. Nevertheless, he belongs to the Baath Party that is a socialist party and favours for the uniting of Arabian countries, and fights for secularism.

In the course of time, the Syrian regime has corrupted, and then showed its undemocratic and despotic face to the opposition its own citizens. For this reason, it is inspired by the Arabian Spring in Tunisia and Egypt.

Therefore, after several aborted attempts, a peaceful manifestation is finally made on 15 March 2011 when tens of thousands people gathered in Aleppo and other cities of Syria (Hassakah, Deraa, Deir Ezzor, Hama and Damascus). Several teenagers have been arrested and tortured after painting





some tags against Bashar al-Assad in the toilets of their school (it took 7 months to release the last one, his torturers waiting for his last bruises to vanish).

To repress these contestations, the government made the choice of weapons and 4 demonstrators were killed on 18 March in Deraa. That was only the beginning of the rebellion. By the end of March, we could already count 30 deaths. Since then, the country has been gripped in a civil war.

### Who are the opponents of the regime?

On 29 July 2011, a bunch of deserters (which raised the number of 100,000 in one year) from the regular Syrian army, created the Free Syrian Army. They were the first group of opponent that rose against the regime, to protect unarmed demonstrators and to take part in the regime's fall. Their demands were the following: the creation of a democratic system, ensuring human rights, and no more useless deaths: any group that attacked civilians was considered as an enemy. They also support the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (created in 2012), a Syrian organization recognized as the only representing of Syrian government by about 100 countries – European countries and United States notably.

But their support is only ideological as they never provided any weapons. Against them stands the regular Syrian army from Bashar al-Assad's government, but also other pro-government organizations, called the loyalists. These groups, mostly Shiites



Free Syrian Army soldier with machine gun in Aleppo in 2012. Photo: VOA

and Alawite, remain faithful to the president al-Assad, this last one sharing the same religion. The regular army is supported by Russia and China for economic, military and geostrategic reasons. As the government needed help, it slowly integrated Hezbollah, Libyan militia, to its offensive.

Adding to this group, other rebels came into the game, seeing an opportunity to take power. In a hope to weaken their economic opponents, Iran, the Saudi Arabia supports these groups. However, as the conflict grew on, they have started to finance more extremist groups affiliated to al-Qaeda, and ISIS.

Since 2011, several conflicts opposed these different actors for the control of cities and regions. Aleppo, Kobane, Damascus, Deera: several fronts, several groups, and several claims. With the support of Iran, Russia, and the Libyan Hezbollah, the Syrian government succeeded to maintain a "Syrian regime territory" in the northwest of the country from Damascus to Latakia.

The oldest conflict opposes the regular army, helped by the loyalists to some rebels, principally Islamists and supported by the United States and Saudi Arabia. The principal fight between those two groups is



focused on Deera, Aleppo and Damascus, the capital. Those rebels (supported by the USA) are also fighting against al-Nusra (affiliated to al-Qaeda) in the north of the country, and ISIS, especially around Aleppo, Idlib and Hama.

ISIS (or DAESH), located in the North (its attachment point is Raka) is the most active group in Syria, fighting on several fronts, as is said previously, against the rebels. They are also fighting in the north to try to get back the control of Kobane after losing it in February 2015. They are planning to create, in the end, a caliphate in Iraq and Syria and to initiate the Islamic law, the Sharia, and to impose their domination on this region; thus, they need to rule this place. Their opponents here are the Turkish army, and the international coalition.

In Raka, ISIS is also fighting against the regular Syrian army in Homs' region. This last one indeed tries to gain back the favours of the international coalition, which made ISIS her one big fight lately. Another one of ISIS conflicts is situated in Deir Ezor, against al-Nusra, a jihadist movement affiliated to al-Qaeda. In the same area, ISIS also fought against the eastern tributes, now refugees in Turkey and which promised to get revenge; several conflicts sometimes happen.

Nevertheless, even though they are enemies here, they are fighting side by side against the Hezbollah at the Libyan boundary. The results of this amount of "mini wars" are simply depressing: more than 220,000 deaths, 4 million of refugees and more than half million of wounded people since 2011. Therefore, the situation is more complicated than it seems to be at

first sight. The original conflict, opposing rebels to the government forces is influenced by other groups, and the territory is torn between several areas of conflicts, each group trying to control an area of the country. Moreover, other countries such as the United States and Arabic countries are also trying to influence these conflicts in their favour, providing money, weapons or fighters. Their involvement comes to aggravate and intensify a situation already venomous.

This conflict, which lasted 4 years is, for sure, not yet over, and will have for a long time an impact on this region and the world because of the economic-political troubles and the human disaster it involves.



*Bashar Al-Assad during a visit to Brasil. Photo: Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom*



## ISIS operations in Libya

**The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria** is an organization that consists of the extremist Islamist terrorists. It is established in Iraq with the support of the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda on 13 October 2006. The terrorist group is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The ISIS has declared itself as the real Iraqi State. Firstly, related to al-Qaeda, it started to pull away from the organisation after the death of their leader Osama bin Laden on 2 May 2011. The ISIS was finally separated from al-Qaeda on 9 April 2013. It was trying to take over the group al-Nusra, related to al-Qaeda at the same time. Since then they became enemies.

The purpose of the ISIS is to re-establish the caliphate of Abbasids. Indeed, it tries to be well known and to attract as much as supporters as possible, sowing terror and fear among the world. Therefore, they practice the jihad and adopted an anti-



*Bashar Al-Assad during a visit to Brasil. Photo: Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom*

American behaviour which explains their uncommon methods, like abduction of most of the time European or American citizens, and their decapitation that they video and post on the internet. At the present, they are now in Libya and Iraq. In these two countries, ISIS multiplied its attacks, trying to remain active to weaken

“It tries to be well known and to attract as much as supporters as possible, sowing terror and fear among the world”



its opponents and reform the “caliphate”. Therefore, since the 2011 revolution and the death of Muammar Gaddafi who led the country since 1969, Libya is torn by several Islamist organizations trying to take over the country, and the transitory government is facing troubles to designate the new democratic government.

ISIS's last actions are targeting embassies in Tripoli, the capital, as in the case of the Egyptian and Algerian embassies earlier this year. Indeed, on 12 and 13 April 2015, they had the Korean and Moroccan embassies respectively attacked, the first one by a shotgun, causing the death of two guards and the second one by a bomb, causing nobody's hurt this time. The purpose of the attackers was probably to make difficult the relations between the country and the rest of the world and, therefore, weaken Libya's foreign relations.

Others actions that has been registered were in Ramadi in Iraq, where the ISIS was fighting to take over the Anjar province against Iraqi armed forces and the American coalition. With the withdrawal of

the Iraqi army, the ISIS is now controlling the city. Scared of this threat inhabitants fled from the region: 150,000 before the victory of ISIS and 40,000 since then.

This humanitarian crisis could not be solved by

humanitarian support only. Most of them are ready to take any risk, as the last sinking catastrophe in April 2015, killing 800 migrants proved it. Nevertheless, even though people are fleeing to stay alive, they do not want to flee to find a safe place, they want peace back in their home.

Another problem is the recruitment of soldiers and supporters. The ISIS indeed organised a very active recruitment on the internet in the European countries, most of the time targeting the young people. Approximately 12,000 Europeans of Middle Eastern ancestry have joined the ISIS since 2011. This is not only a conflict in the countries where the ISIS is present but also a global conflict by its international approach, its members than, its victims, abduction, murders and terrorist attacks.



Fighters belonging to the Islamic State group in Anbar, Iraq. Photo: Examiner.com



## Historical deal reached in Iranian nuclear program

**On 2 April, six major powers and Iran** – also known as P5+1 – have put a significant step towards an agreement on Iran's nuclear program. The United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia plus Germany and Iran joined a meeting in Swiss Lausanne to establish a negotiation. In particular, America was having its concerns regarding the agreement, for one of the most major threats for the

diplomat of EU read out a statement, focusing on the main topics, including a reduction in the amount of operating centrifuges in Iran by two-thirds. In other words, the Iranian stock of enriched uranium will be reduced from 10,000 kg to 300 kg, less than would be required to make a bomb. Furthermore, changes to its nuclear facilities, inspections from the International Atomic Energy Agency of

“Tehran will extremely decrease its nuclear capability in exchange for ending the international sanctions”

country is the nuclear program of Iran. The diplomats were supposed to reach a deal by March 31, which was their self-imposed deadline. Two days after the expiry of the deadline the negotiators presented the agreement on the future shape of Iran's nuclear program as a major achievement. Principally capital city Tehran will extremely decrease its nuclear capability in exchange for ending the international sanctions. Federica Mogherini, the top

Iran's nuclear facilities and a promise to lift sanctions if these steps are verified are other highlights in the agreement. However, the sanctions can be brought back if Iran does not meet its obligations. Also, it should be taken in account this is only an unwritten understanding, not a formal agreement. It only lays the foundation for tough negotiations on the details. By June 30 a comprehensive nuclear agreement with more details



should be reached between the world players and Iran.

The outline of the framework is being welcomed around much of the globe. According to American president Barack Obama the agreement is a result of months of hard and principled diplomacy, he calls the agreement 'a historical pact', which if fully respected will prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. He added the deal would be closely watched: if Iran would not keep its promises, the world would know it. "The deal is not based on trust, but on unprecedented verification". Russia beholds this agreement as recognition of "Iran's unconditional right to a peaceful nuclear program". German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated: "we are closer than ever to an agreement that makes it impossible for Iran to possess nuclear weapons. That is a great credit to

all negotiating partners". After the deal was announced in Lausanne, a spontaneous celebration erupted in the streets of Iranian capital Teheran. Ten thousand people showed up in the street and chanted their gratitude towards the Iranian leaders.

However, some criticism regarding the agreement can also be noticed. In particular Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu strongly opposes the reached deal. Netanyahu is convinced Iran is trying to create a nuclear bomb – a concern that has been shared by much of the world. In a telephone conversation with Obama Netanyahu claims a nuclear – armed Iran would threaten the survival of Israel, regarding the calls of Iranian leaders for the destruction of the Jewish state and Iran's support for hostile militant groups across the region. Obama reassured the prime minister the pact does not change the



*P5+1 and Iran negotiations on 30 March 2015. Photo: United States Department of State*



concerns regarding Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and threats towards Israel. The objective of Netanyahu is to dismantle and disassemble the nuclear infrastructure of Iran, rather than limiting its usage or repurposing Iran's facilities. Such stipulations were however not part of the framework agreement. Netanyahu is calling the emerging deal a historic mistake and states the survival of Israel is non-negotiable. "Israel will not accept an agreement which allows a country that vows to annihilate us to develop nuclear weapons". Netanyahu's cabinet minister Yuval Steinitz added the country would examine how to cancel, or at least attempt to close some of the open branches in the framework pact.

In the past, Israel stated it would consider taking unilateral action in order to prevent Iran developing a nuclear weapon. In other words, this would mean the country could present air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities. The chance Israel will really take solely action appears to be very small, however, Netanyahu is not the only party who reveals criticism. The Republican



John Kerry and Benjamin Netanyahu meeting on 9 April 2015. Photo: US Department of State



Anti-aircraft guns guarding Natanz Nuclear Facility. Photo: Hamed Saber

led Congress has also expressed negative comments regarding the deal. Netanyahu may feel he can put pressure on the American administration to push harder, sharing the same opinions as the Congress. According to US House speaker John Boehner the deal represented a disturbing departure from Obama's original objectives; the Congress should review the deal before sanctions on Iran were lifted. The Congress, in other words, remains sceptical and threatens to enforce new sanctions on Iran. US Secretary of State John Kerry did not believe the Congress would block the pact, saying that act would be very irresponsible. Furthermore, Obama warned the Congress not to stop the deal, for the United States would be blamed for the failure of diplomacy. "International unity will then collapse", he stated.

Western ministers pointed out this agreement is only the start of further negotiations, the race is not over yet. In the next three months many significant issues and technical details have to be discussed. "If Iran will act uncooperative, then there



will be no agreement”, Obama said. As French minister Laurent Fabius told the media: “it is a positive step, but at the same time there are still questions and details that need to be resolved”. One of the main issues of struggle will be the pace at which the sanctions are suspended or cancelled against Iran. The arrangements regarding this issue were much more imprecise than

to assure the international community Iran could not produce nuclear weapons and to accommodate the country’s assertion of its right – as a signer of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – to enrich nuclear fuel for civilian purposes. Negotiations even took more significance for the United States and Iran, which both have a long history and strained relations.



*European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif address reporters after the talks.  
Photo: United States Department of State*

the arrangements of uranium enrichment and conversion of reactors. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Iran started negotiating in 2006. Since then the dialogue have had a tortured history for the push and pull over Iran’s nuclear program formed tons of proposals. The challenge was ambiguous:

Both parties have not talked to each other in nearly four decade, until two years ago. Kerry said it was a very intensive process, for the stakes are very high and moreover for the long history of not communicating with each other. However, a framework is now created. On June 30 we will see how the process continues.





## Houthis: from a clans' war to a humanitarian disaster



Emblem of the Houthis. Picture: Takahara Osaka

**“A Pakistani and a Saudi killed by shootings coming from Yemen”** – this is one of the most common titles that can be read lately in newspapers or on social media. This crime is the last one committed by the Houthis, a group of Yemeni rebels, on 11 May 2015.

Yemen is a country which is politically weak and is torn by local wars. Some different groups of rebels and “political opponents” are fighting for their voices to be heard.

These are the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), also known as the Houthi rebels.

The Houthi movement was created in 1992 by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi under the name of Young Believers. At first, it was a theological and non-violent organisation. In the course of time it gathered between 15,000 and 20,000 young people during summer camps by 1995. As its cultural and religious education slowly turned to a politically engaged movement with more demands, Hussein gave up its position as a Member of Parliament in order to focus onto his organisation.

The members of the group later on changed the group's name from Young Believers to “Ansar Allah” then, and began to radicalise and strengthen its political convictions since 2001. They adopted anti-American and anti-Israel speech not only onto the political basis as a discourse on an anti-Semitic one but also onto the religious basis: “God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, and Victory to Islam” are just some of their slogans.

In 2003, as these slogans started to spread





Yemeni soldiers from the 1st Armoured Division. Photo: Ibrahem Qasim

with the Iraq war, the Yemeni government arrested and executed a lot of supporters of the Houthis in Sanaa due to the fear of a

2014. Houthis took back their weapons to take over Sanaa where the capital of the country is located. After several months of conflicts, the number of casualties has risen. According to the United Nations, 1,244 people were killed in early May, 5,044 got wounded and 12,000 people fled the country since March 2015. Finally, Houthis accepted the requirement of the United Nations and signed a treaty of peace with the current government in Yemen.

They broke this agreement by walking on Aden where president Hadi had once established his government. Facing the insurrection, in early May, president Hadi fled away and was found as a refugee in

“According to the United Nations, 1,244 people were killed in early May, 5,044 got wounded and 12,000 people fled the country since March 2015”

future rebellion. Then in June 2004, the War of Sadat between the Yemeni government of president Saleh and Houthi rebel group began. In September the same year, Hussein who is the leader of the Houthis died, and his brother took the lead of the organisation. Houthis asked for recognition and no more marginalisation. More than 10,000 people died and more than 200,000 people were displaced because of this war that ended with a ceasefire in 2010.

However, the ceasefire did not last much longer: it was broken on 21 September

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The president was not the only one who withdrew; Jamal Benomar who is the United Nations Peace Envoy announced his resignation after losing the support of Arabian countries, which accused him of lack of discernment and for trusting the Houthis too much.

In the meantime, the United Nations decided to launch a military operation, to try stopping the progression of the Houthis by blocking the weapons shipment from the Iranian government, even though this last one and the rebels keep on denying

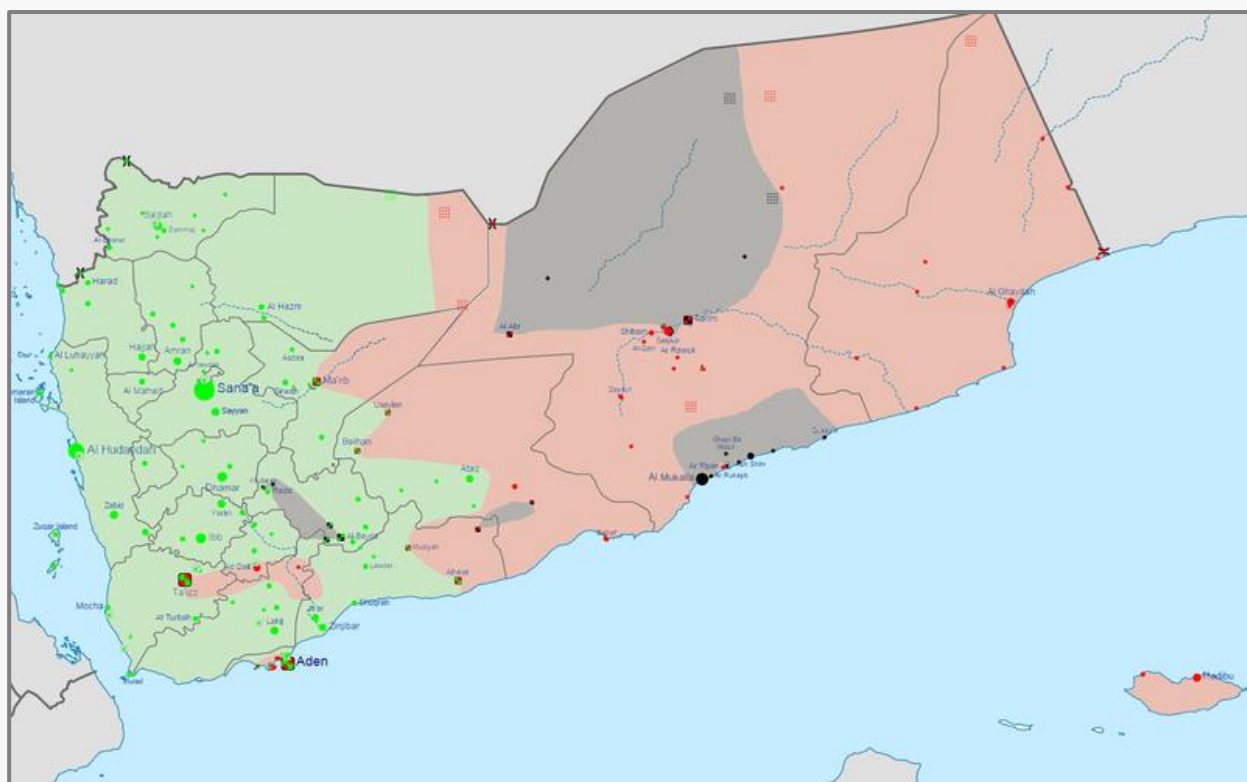


any alliance between them. This resolution was accepted in order to stop the increasing violence in the region.

Indeed, more and more violent actions are made in both sides to try to take over the country, and to give damage to their opponents. These conflicts were intensified in the region of Aden where the Houthis and president Saleh's loyalists are fighting.

About 750 citizens have been wounded in the airstrikes attacks and 150,000 people have been chased away from their homes. Since the beginning of this civil war in 2014, more than 1,000 civilians have been killed and 700,000 were forced to flee.

Meanwhile, Yemeni government refused the last peace proposal from Iran, doubting it as a mere political tactic and that Iran is



*Houthi presence by January 2015 marked with green. Map: Wikimedia Commons*

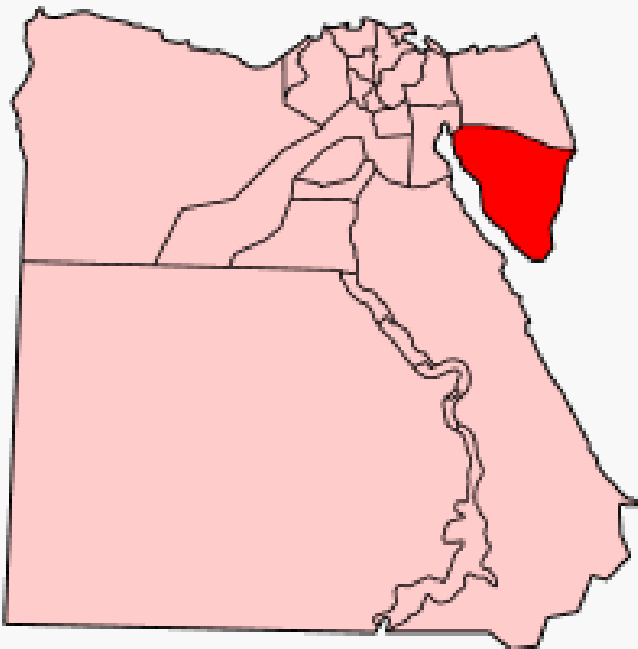
The Houthis does not hesitate to launch airstrikes against the civilian population who lives in hotels and other residential buildings. The last violent actions were the Saudi Arabian airstrikes onto rebels' premises in Sanaa. Sadly, this action caused collateral damage, including several explosions and the death of 15 persons and tens of wounded people.

too much implicated to claim herself as a peace ambassador.

Yemen is a country of 26 million of inhabitants. It became one of the poorest Arabic states, as the aftermaths of the war are always catastrophic; it has caused thousands of deaths, wounded people, and refugees, and the shortage of water. In short, nothing good comes out of it.



## Violence in the Sinai Peninsula



*The Sinai Peninsula. Map: Wikimedia Commons*

**The ongoing conflict** in the Sinai Peninsula has produced a new portion of casualties from both sides of the conflict as well as the civilians.

The Sinai Peninsula has historically served as a smuggling route for weapons and supplies. The 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty only made the limited governmental control over it institutional, which made it an ideal place for the operation of militant groups, which exploit the harsh terrain, overall poverty and lack of trust for the

government within the local population. On 2 April, Islamists attacked two army checkpoints near Sheikh Zuwaid, killing 13 Egyptian soldiers and two civilians and injuring eighteen other soldiers and a police officer. Egyptian officials claimed that at least 15 terrorists, which were using car bombs and gun power to lead their attack, were killed. Hundreds of soldiers were killed in such attacks, as they tend to target the army rather than civilians.

The following day, Egypt launched several attacks accompanied by airstrikes on the terrorist hideouts to the south from the city, killing at least 100 militants, who have pledged allegiance to the ISIL terrorist group, and call themselves the Sinai Province, or the Lions of Sinai.

Not long after that, on 8 April, 11 civilians were killed in a series of mortar and missile attacks on the same city and a village nearby. On the same day, a military vehicle detonated killing two police officers outside of the capital of the province, el-Arish.

The attacks on the military continued on 12 April, when 6 soldiers were killed in a bomb attack on their armored vehicle near Sheikh Zuweid. This was followed by a video of beheading an Egyptian soldier, which



was posted on social network. On the same day, 5 policemen and 1 civilian were killed in the city of al-Arish, where a bomb truck exploded outside of a police station.

April ended with another outburst of violence, which was led by several Bedouin tribes against the Islamists. The largest Bedouin tribe in Sinai, the Tarabin, announced its full support for the Egyptian military in order to expel ISIL-alleged terrorists from Egypt. 200 armed tribesmen are ready to cooperate with the army, and an attack has already been launched against hotbeds Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in southern Rafah of North Sinai. This

happened after the terrorists shot dead a member of another Bedouin tribe and beheaded a Tarabin child. The Sawarska and other smaller tribes have joined the cause, while one of the Tarabin leaders urged all of the Bedouin tribes in Sinai to join the fight.

Sinai is a very difficult region to perform large-scale anti-terrorist operations, and the militants seem to be feeling quite confident in their action. Still, the sudden support of the Bedouins, which are local to the region, might become a factor that would help the governmental forces to fight the ISIL successfully.

“Militants seem to be feeling quite confident in their action”



*An Egyptian soldier in Tahrir Square, during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*



## Al-Shabaab increases attacks in Somalia

**An Islamist organization al-Shabaab**, which is allied to al-Qaeda, launched several attacks and terrorist acts in Somalia in April in response to the ongoing offensive against it by the governmental military and the African Union peacekeepers.

“Al-Shabaab is not interested in the future of Somalia; it is only interested in pushing its own extremist agenda for its own perverted purposes,” said President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. In a response to Kenyan help in fighting the rebels, al-Shabaab launched an attack on Kenya’s Garissa University College, killing at least 148 people, mostly students. Kenya retaliated with a series of airstrikes against two terrorist camps in the Gedo region, completely destroying them. Although, al-Shabaab claims that their camps were untouched, and the bombs fell on farmland. In Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, a car with explosives ran into the Bonoodo restaurant and exploded. The restaurant is located near the city’s Central Hotel, which has already been attacked once in February.

No official statements were made by the government officials regarding this disaster, but Abdirizak Omar, Somalia’s interior minister, wrote on his official Twitter

account about seven al-Shabaab fighters that were shot by the government forces nearby.

The terrorists also managed to plant a bomb in a UN van, which killed at least six people in the northern region of Puntland. Four UN staff who were helping Somali children, were killed in that attack.

Earlier in April, al-Shabaab bombed and assaulted the building of Somalian Higher Education Ministry and the Petroleum and Minerals Ministry in Mogadishu, killing at least 18 people, and wounding 15. The rebels exploded a car bomb outside of the ministry walls, and proceeded with storming the building and opening fire. They managed to take control over two floors of the building but then were pushed out by the governmental and African Union troops. Eight civilians, seven attackers, two Somali security force members and one African Union soldier were killed during the incident, according to the Somali officials. Somalia’s government has placed bounties on the heads of 11 al-Shabaab leaders, which include 250,000 US dollars for the terrorist chief Ahmed Omar Abu Ubyed and 100,000 to 150,000 dollars for the other 10 leaders.



## Boko Haram recaptures key town in northeast Nigeria

**Several serious developments** have happened in Nigeria in the war against the Boko Haram terrorist organization.

On 23 April around 2,000 terrorists engaged Nigerian soldiers in Kirenowa town, and proceeded to Marte, a border town along the shores of Lake Chad. Boko Haram

town of Damasak, north-eastern Nigeria. As the joined forces of Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria flush the militants out of previously occupied areas, similar sites become quite common.

“Dead bodies were found in houses, streets and many more in the Damasak River

“Dead bodies were found in houses, streets and many more in the Damasak River which has dried up”

forces armed with tanks and bombs made the soldiers flee from their positions and recaptured Marte for the third time.

The town has been a key battleground during the last six years of insurgency, which has killed approximately 13,000 people and left around 1.5 million homeless. Marte was captured by the Nigerian military in a recent offensive against the terrorists, which have fought back and also retook a key position in the Sambisa forest.

Hundreds of victims of Boko Haram insurgency have been found dead in the

r which has dried up,” said a local resident, Kaumi Kusur.

The government does not give a precise number of bodies found in Damasak, but one of the locals that helped to bury the corpses puts the death toll at more than 400 people, women and children included. Another large Boko Haram attack occurred on 25 April, when the terrorists stormed the island of Karamga on Lake Chad in motorized canoes. The Nigerian troops were caught off guard and suffered heavy losses. According to different sources, 48-80 soldiers were killed and 30-36 were missing.





Parents of the Chibok kidnapping victims.  
Photo: VOA

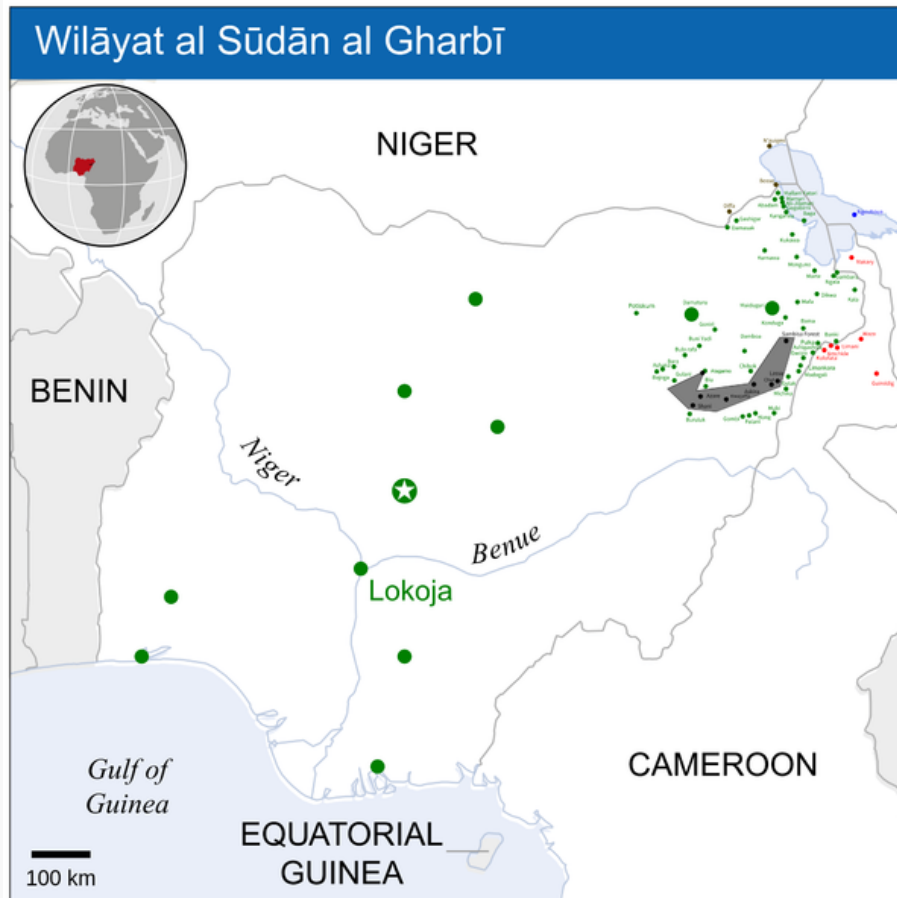
After their victory, the militants turned their guns onto the civilians.

Some positive developments have taken place in the Sambisa Forest, which is being cleared of the Boko Haram forces by a

series of military operations. Nigerian army has rescued 200 girls and 93 women from one of the terrorist camps, and 100 girls and 60 women from another one.

Although the psychological state of these hostages is still unstable, and it is still unclear whether they are the wives of the terrorists or if they are related to the mass abduction of girls in the city of Chibok, in April of 2014, they are kept in safety, and are starting to enjoy the newly gained freedom.

Boko Haram has abducted around 2,000 girls and women since last year, according to the Amnesty International, and such mass rescues increase the hope for seeing them alive in future.



Boko Haram's positions by 15 April 2015.  
Map: Wikimedia Commons





## US casualties in Afghanistan

**The White House has acknowledged** on 23 April that two American hostages were killed in Afghanistan during a drone attack against al-Qaeda in January. The White House also believes that two American terrorist leaders, including al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn, were taken down in the same region during a series of counter-terrorist operations.

Both hostages, American Dr. Warren Weinstein and Italian national Giovanni Lo

Porto served as aid workers in Pakistan before they were abducted by the terrorist organization in years 2011 and 2012, respectively. President Barack Obama expressed his condolences to the families of the victims, and as the Commander in Chief took the full responsibility for what happened. "It is a cruel and bitter truth that in the fog of war generally and our fight against terrorists specifically, mistakes, sometimes deadly mistakes, can occur," he



*US soldiers in Afghanistan in 2010. Photo: US Army*



said. "But one of the things that sets America apart from many other nations, one of the things that makes us exceptional is our willingness to confront squarely our imperfections and to learn from our mistakes.'

The attack was held in January, in a small mountain area on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Prior surveillance did not show any presence of civilians or hostages in the area, which made a full scale drone attack possible. President Obama promised a thorough independent review of the case to indicate any lessons that can be learned from it.

The White House announcement came after several alarming developments in the war in Afghanistan. 10 people were killed, and 65 were injured on 9 May in Mazar-e-Sharif during a seven-hours-long gunfight. Gunmen in military uniforms were storming the office of an Afghan attorney general.



*US 10th Mountain Division soldiers in Afghanistan. Photo: SSG Kyle Davis*

Five security officers, including a police chief, were killed and 26 government officials were hurt in the attack, which was carried out by the Taliban.

Along with a recent killing of a US soldier by an Afghan conscript, these events signal that the situation in the region is far from being regulated, and may produce further outbursts of violence in future.

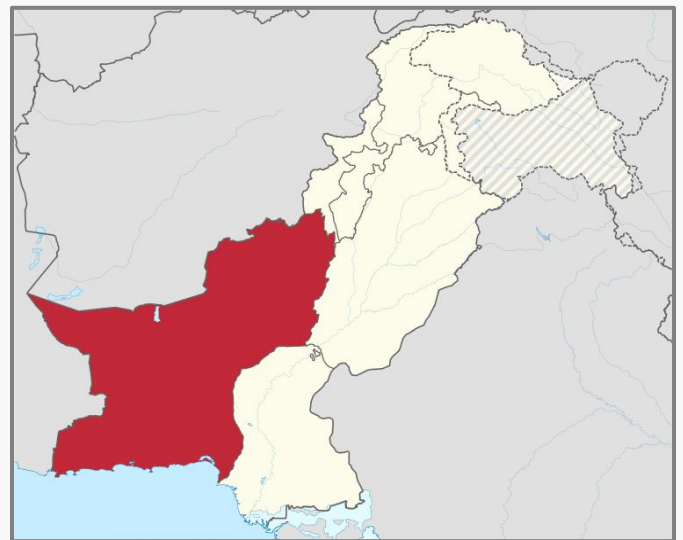


*Senator Obama visits American troops in Afghanistan in 2007. Photo: Staff Sgt. Adora Medina*



## Labourers and human rights activist killed in Balochistan

**Several recent developments** can once again be noticed in the ongoing Balochistan civil war conflict since 2004. Baloch nationalists and the governments of Pakistan and Iran are fighting in the Balochistan region of South-West Asia, which includes regions of south-western Pakistan, south-eastern Iran and southern Afghanistan. The nationalists of Baloch want greater autonomy and increased royalties from natural resources. Moreover, in some cases they demand fully independence. Although Balochistan is a resource-rich area – in particular natural gas, oil and mineral resources – the region is still one of Pakistan's poorest and least developed. Baloch separatists claim the government of Pakistan is systematically suppressing development in the Balochistan region to keep the Balochs weak, while the government stated international business interest have been very low due to the ongoing unrest. According to the government progress has been made in introducing a package of economic and political reforms in 2009, however Baloch nationalist groups argue the benefits of these reforms have not been yet shown in the area. On April 10, gunmen



*Location of Balochistan in Pakistan. Map: Wikimedia Commons*

killed 20 labourers after overpowering eight security guards in their camp in Gokh Don area of Balochistan, near the south-western town of Turbat. The workers were accused of working on an army-backed dam construction site. After recognizing their identity they were murdered. Apparently paramilitary troops were guarding the labourers but fled when confronted by a large number of gunmen. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Front claimed responsibility for the attack. The target was the Pakistani army and those working for its construction projects in the province. At least three labourers were wounded. The



paramilitary Frontier Corps troops were searching in the nearby mountains for the attackers. Balochistan Home Minister Sarfaraz Bugti said they will be brought to justice. Furthermore, on April 25 one of Pakistan's most outspoken human rights activists Sabeen Mahmud was shot dead. She was on her way from an event "Unsilencing Balochistan" she hosted in Karachi when her car came under fire from unknown gunmen. The topic of the hosted discussion was the disappearing people in Balochistan, a term used to describe persons who have been abducted in Balochistan, with their bodies usually found years later. The Voice of Baloch Missing Persons organization stated more than 2825 people have "gone missing" in this way since 2005. Mostly Baloch rights activists

and students have disappeared and they claim these acts have been carried out by the Pakistani government and its powerful ISI intelligence agency, a charge the agency denies. In 2011 a report on illegal disappearances in Balochistan was published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, ISI and Frontier Corps were identified as the offenders, the security services reject the accusations and state they are battling a brutal fight against rebels in the province.

According to Raza Rumi, a rights activist who is currently living in the USA and escaped an assassination attempt in 2014 "Mahmud was neither a political partisan nor a power seeker but Pakistan's state and non-state actors are averse to any form of dissent. This is why she had to be killed".



*A Pakistani Baloch man. Photo: Khalid Mahmood*





*The flag of Balochistan. Picture: Wikimedia Commons*

Mahmud was having doubts about the event, because the moderator had cancelled. “Whenever voices are raised against rights abuses in Balochistan, the government tries to suppress them. Suppressing voices does not solve the issue, indeed it only makes the voices become louder”, according to Nasrullah Baloch, the chairman of the Voice of Missing Baloch rights organization. Moreover, the unrest continues for the next day a bomb was

dropped, killing three people and injuring 20 others. The bomb was dropped in Sibi 130 kilometres southeast of the provincial capital Quetta in Balochistan. According to a police officer the bomb was planted in a motorbike. The police is investigating the possible targets but did not find any specific target yet. Nobody has claimed responsibility yet but Baloch separatists demanding greater autonomy have been waging an insurgency for years.



*Baloch children in Quetta. Photo: Sherbaz Jamal dini*

“Whenever voices are raised against rights abuses in Balochistan, the government tries to suppress them. Suppressing voices does not solve the issue, indeed it only makes the voices become louder”



## Leaders Bali Nine executed, Australia removes ambassador to Indonesia

In 2005, nine Australian men were arrested smuggling 8.3 kg of heroin in plastic bags strapped to their bodies from Indonesia to Australia. Leaders of this “Bali Nine” group Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran were executed by a firing squad on April 29 after spending a decade at prison island Nusa Kambangan and after numerous rejected legal clemencies. These were the

criticized in the world, most Indonesians would not make any adjustments in the current law that allows the execution of murderers and drug traffickers. Moreover, many civilians are calling for an extension of this law, allowing also death sentences for corruption convictions. In 2005 a judge of the Denpasar District Court stated the court expected criticism from the outer

“Most Indonesians would not make any adjustments in the current law that allows the execution of murderers and drug traffickers”

first ever death sentences imposed by the Denpasar District Court. The seven other members Si Yi Chen, Michael Czugaj, Renae Lawrence, Tan Duc Thanh Nguyen, Matthew Norman, Scott Rush and Martin Stephens were sentenced to life imprisonment.

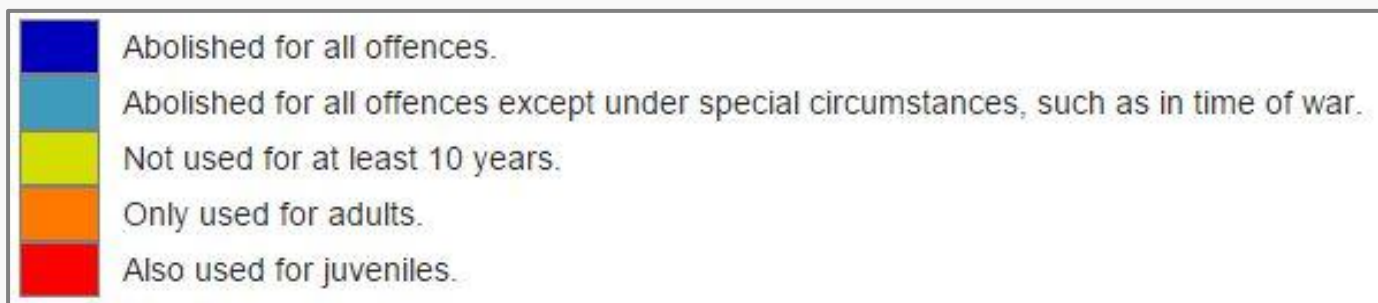
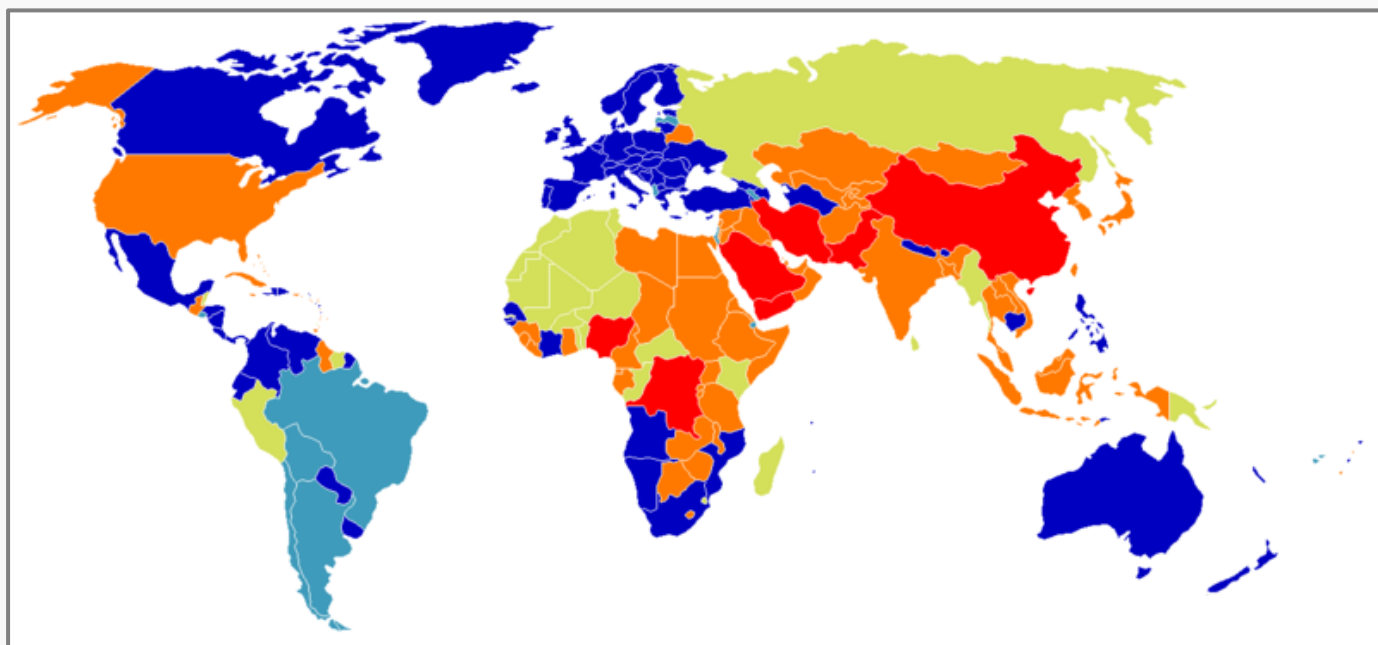
Indonesian law regarding drug smuggling is one of the strictest in the world. While Indonesia's death penalty has been widely

world, however Indonesian courts will only obey the laws applied in Indonesia. He claims the judges will not be affected by public opinion or the media. In the past, six other men were also convicted and executed for drug offences, including four Nigerians, an Indonesian and Brazilian man. Furthermore, president of Indonesia Joko Widodo said he will not approve any clemencies for drug offences. Australia



demanded Indonesia to delay the execution and their top politicians have been active to avoid the death penalty for the two young Australians. After the execution Amnesty International strongly condemned these events and stated it was a human rights violation. Furthermore, the sentence caused a startling diplomatic response: in protest Australia withdraws its ambassador from Indonesia. Prime minister of Australia Tony Abbott revealed the executions were “cruel and unnecessary”, in particular because the two men had been fully rehabilitated during their detention in prison. After a meeting in Paris

between French president Francois Hollande and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Hollande stated both countries “share the same attachment to human rights and condemn the death penalty in all places and all circumstances”. Abbott furthermore underlines the relationship between Australia and Indonesia is from great importance however it has suffered as a result of the execution. Moreover, ministerial contacts between the two countries have been suspended for a while once it became apparent that the executions were likely, and they will remain suspended for a period.



*Death penalty around the world. Picture: Wikimedia Commons*



## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic affairs affecting international relations

### **Five Kurdish militants were killed clash with the Turkish forces**

■ The Turkish forces killed five Kurdish militants in Agri province, near the Indian border, when insurgents from the Kurdish Workers Party attacked the soldiers. Four soldiers injured in the clash. According to the government the PKK was aiming at the destabilization of the country before a parliamentary election in June. The PKK did not comment on the incident. There has been a ceasefire between the PKK and the government for two years, but clashes became relatively frequent this year before the election.

### **Two car bomb attacks left at least eleven people dead in Iraq**

■ A car filled with explosives was detonated in a commercial area in Mahmoudiyah, a town in Iraq about 30km from Baghdad. The car was parked in front of a bakery when the bombs exploded. The blast killed seven people and another thirteen were injured. Hours later another vehicle was detonated near a Hospital in the western part of Baghdad. The second attack wounded ten people and left another four people dead. Just one day before the car bomb attacks 15 civilians were killed by numerous attacks around Baghdad. The Islamic State group and other Sunni extremists execute attacks on a daily basis, but for these two explosions no responsibility has been claimed yet.

### **An assault by al-Shabaab militants on a Kenyan university left 147 people dead**

■ On 2 April, five armed militants rushed into Garissa University in north-eastern Kenya. The attackers, after killing two security guards, opened fire on the students. According to witnesses Christians were the main targets. Eventually four of the militants were surrounded in the dormitory when they detonated their suicide vests. The fifth attacker was arrested. 500 students managed to escape, 79 of them were injured and another 147 people, mostly students died at the attack. 500 out of 815 students were accounted for by the end of the evacuation. After the attack an overnight curfew was ordered for Garissa and three other counties.





### 126 soldiers have been killed in the fights in Myanmar

■ There were altogether 253 clashes between the Myanmar government troops and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army. The government reported that since the outset of the fighting on 9 February as many as 126 soldiers were killed and another 359 were wounded. As a result of the latest offensive the government managed to take control over key strategic locations such as Laukkai, the capital of Kokang region. In the meantime a draft nationwide ceasefire agreement was signed preliminary on March 31. On the other hand, according to the ethnic armed groups' Nationwide ceasefire Coordination team peace cannot be achieved with the MNDA left out from the agreement.

### Hillary Clinton tries again

■ In the United States, the former State Secretary Hillary Clinton is expected to launch on Sunday, in Iowa, her presidential campaign. There will not be any great speeches. In fact, she has decided for a milder approach through her Twitter account. This is a more farsighted strategy considering the fact that she had already run and lost for the designation of the Democratic candidate in 2008, third after the current President Barack Obama and the former Senator John Edwards. Nonetheless, now she is leading with a percentage point in Iowa over the Republicans Rand Paul, Ted Cruz and her direct challenger on the Democratic side, the Former Virginia Senator Jim Webb.



*Hillary Clinton at an early campaign event. Photo: Hillary for Iowa*



## ■ News in Brief

### Bilateral relations

#### **Four Taliban militants were killed in a drone strike**

■ In North Waziristan, the mountainous border region of Pakistan two missiles hit a house in which suspected Taliban fighters were resided on 12 April. The attack was carried out as part of the offensive that began last June forcing the Taliban militants to withdraw from larger towns and cities. Four militants died in the attack. This was the seventh drone strike this year in Pakistan. According to a spokesman for al Qaeda two of its leaders had already been killed in these attacks. Pakistan considers these drone strikes as violations of its sovereignty; on the other hand there is a common suspicion that the military tacitly approved at least a few of the attacks.

“Hearing about the death, hundreds of furious people joined the protests in Narbal where several police officers, soldiers and protesters were injured”

#### **Teenage boy killed during anti-India protest**

■ In the disputed area of the Himalayan region of Kashmir clashes between India and Pakistan are still continuing. In the western village of Narbal, a teenager was shot during an anti-India protest of separatists, disputing the dominance of India in Kashmir. It remained unclear how he died, as a police officer claimed the boy was shot by the government army, while several other voices stated he was being held by authorities before being shot. The police opened a case for murder rapidly and started investigating the death. However, according to locals and right groups the goal of this inspection was mainly calming the public anger. Hearing about the death, hundreds of furious people joined the protests in Narbal where several police officers, soldiers and protesters were injured. At the funeral thousands of people attended, shouting pro-Pakistan slogans.



### China protest emergency landing American fighter jets

■ On 2 April, two American F18 – jet fighters landed at an Taiwanese air base, angering China, for Beijing considers this area as her own property. According to American authorities the pilots were forced to make an emergency landing in southern Tainan, due to a mechanical failure during a routine flight. In one of the solemn statements China launched with the VS the country “requires the US to abide by the 'One-China Policy' and the three joint communiques between China and the US and to prudently deal with the relevant issue”. This statement refers to the arrangement between US and China that recognizes Beijing as the only government of China. According to some speculation this event could have been a reaction of the US to an unprecedented People's Liberation Army Air Force exercise over the western Pacific Ocean east of Taiwan. However, it is clear this incident reminds China of the strong, unofficial military relationship between US and Taiwan.



*Cuban president Raúl Castro and US president Barack Obama meet in Panama. Photo: Whitehouse.gov*

### Barack Obama and Raul Castro meet at the side-lines of the Summit of the Americas in Panama

■ “This is obviously an historic meeting” – these are the words of President Obama about his meeting with Cuba’s President Raul Castro in Panama on 11 April 2015. This is indeed the first time since 1956 that such a meeting between an American and a Cuban president happens. In 17 December 2014, the United States and Cuba launched a process of normalisation of the relations between the two countries. And even though they did not agree on every topic, the parties will try to maintain good relations. The re-opening of both of the embassies is on the program of the next meeting scheduled on 21 May 2015.



## ■ News in Brief

### International relations

#### **American congress can vote and reject fast-track Trans-Pacific Partnership**

■ In order to establish a comprehensive trade agreement between United States of America and 11 Pacific nations, the Congress of Republicans and Democrats have developed a pact regarding the “fast-track legislation” on 16 April. This agreement allows President Barack Obama to negotiate trade agreements subject to an up-or-down vote from Congress. This deal implies the Congress to vote, endorse or reject the trade agreements; however they are not allowed to make adjustments. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) proposes a trade agreement involving the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Canada, Mexico and seven other Pacific-rim nations. Nevertheless, this deal is no guarantee trade legislation will pass Congress, for many democrats – especially those who identify closely with organized labor – still dispute the pact. They claim these fast-tracked trade deals causes unemployment and deteriorated public services.

#### **Three members of the UN mission were abducted in DR Congo**

■ On 23 April, three members of the United Nation’s Peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo went missing in Kibumba about 30 kilometres from the provincial capital Goma. Later, their vehicle was found by the Congolese army. “The motor was turning and the car was empty”, reported a Congolese army officer. There is no information about the current whereabouts of the three missing MONUSCO members. At the time of the incident the UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous was negotiating to resolve difficulties between the UN mission and the government in Kinshasa.

“There is no information about the current whereabouts of the three missing MONUSCO members”



### **Rape of children in the Central African Republic by French soldiers**

■ A scandal hit the French Army when Charges came from six children, aged from 9 to 13, who accused 14 French soldiers to abuse their dominant position and the hunger of children to trade oral sex against cookies. Several investigations – first in France and then in the Central African Republic – have been opened to try to understand and clarify the case, since the investigation – which was supposed to remain untold – from the United Nations was released in April 2015. Sanctions will be taken by French government but also by the Central African Republic, which does not want the crime to remain unpunished.

### **Putin allows transfer S300 missile systems to Iran**

■ The Russian president declared the ban of the delivery of S-300 missile air defense systems to Iran as no longer valid. Former president Dmitry Medvedev announced the prohibition in 2010, however today Russia states the embargo was voluntary and no longer essential for the nuclear talks regarding Iran in Switzerland made progress. According to foreign minister Sergey Lavrov Iran is in need of an up-to-date air defense system due to the increased tensions in neighboring areas and the military activity in Yemen recently. Israel has criticized the decision of Russia to lift the ban. However, Lavrov underlines the defensive nature of the S-300 missile system for it is not constructed for attacks and will cause no harm regarding the security of any state in the region, including Israel.

### **China is building a runway on the Spratly Islands in the disputed South China Sea**

■ Satellite images were disclosed showing the construction of an airstrip on the Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands. Several Asian countries have overlapping claims in the South China Sea region. The other claimants are worried by the land reclamation work of China, stating that the artificial islands could be used for military purposes. They are asserting that late China could use its military presence in the region to enforce its claims. China argues that its actions are legal and his work serves no military purposes other than providing defence.

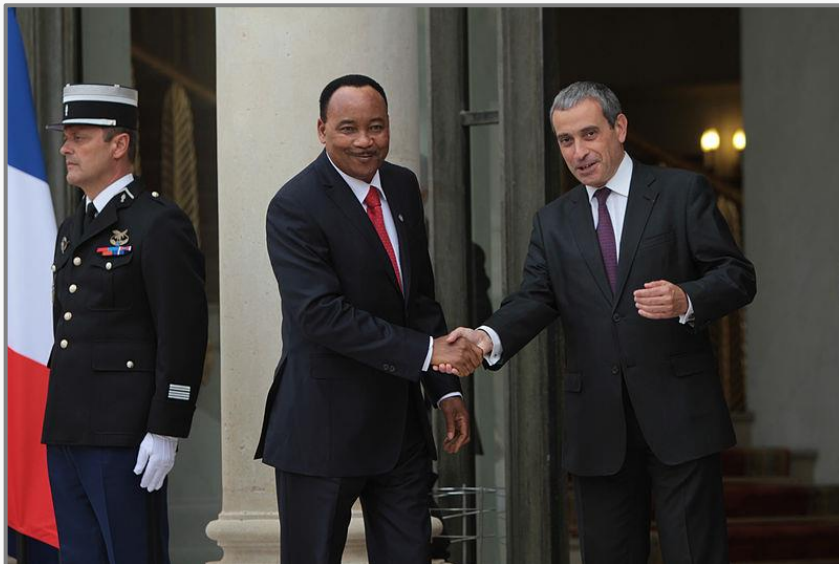
### **The Mediterranean becomes a cemetery for over 650 migrants**

■ A boat with around 700 migrants capsized in the night between 18 and 19 April, around midnight, 200 kilometres south of Lampedusa. An Italian vessel was sent out to help them, but only 28 survivors were picked up, while 24 corpses were to be brought to Malta. According to estimates, more than 650 people died drowned in the shipwreck. There was a call between the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and the Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat. They agreed in demanding a EU summit to deal with the problem. The desperate situation of Libya will bring more and more refugees in Europe, and the EU cannot remain inactive in front of what have been, according to the Maltese Premier, “the worst tragedy in the Mediterranean in recent years”.



### Death condemnations of foreigners in Indonesia shook the public

■ Despite mercy request coming from all over the world, eight people have been condemned to death and executed during the night of 28 and 29 April in Jakarta. Among them were one Indonesian, one Brazilian, two Australian and four Nigerians. Only one Philippine woman and one French man have seen their execution reported. Their execution was justified in the name of “a war against the horrible crimes linked to the drug which threaten [Indonesia]”. These executions were denounced by several international organizations including Amnesty International and have weakened the relations between the home countries of the condemned people and Indonesia. Indeed Brazil already called back its ambassador after a first execution of one of its national 3 months ago.



*Laurent Stefanini at a conference about Libya in 2011. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

### Denying of the French ambassador due to homosexuality

■ Designated as French ambassador of the Vatican in January 2015 by the France's President François Hollande, Laurent Stefanini has not got the chance to assume any of his responsibilities yet. Indeed, since his nomination, the Pope and his delegation remained silent, not according, not rejecting him. And this silence is definitely not caused by the lack of his qualifications: he is the Former counselor for Religious Affairs at the Foreign Ministry and was the first counselor at the Embassy of the Vatican from 2001 to 2005; the man obviously possessed the required qualities. The problem seems to be his sexual orientation; in a 15 minutes interview in mid-April 2015, the pope told to Laurent Stefanini that the “wedding for everybody” law, his assumed homosexuality and the insistence of French government were the real troubles. Even though François Hollande tries to remain straight firm in his decision and said that if the pope did not accepted Laurent Stefanini, the French ambassador's office would remain empty, the government seems to be looking for somebody new to take the spot.





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