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Tensions between Spain and the UK over Gibraltar in Brexit negotiations

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ The future of Gibraltar's sovereignty is increasingly pressuring relations between Spain and the United Kingdom, as the UK prepares to negotiate its withdrawal from the European Union. The row intensified when the European Council published a draft negotiation guideline for Brexit, which stated that decisions on Gibraltar's new trade relations with the EU required Spanish consent. This would effectively give Spain veto power over Gibraltar's future, which caused outrage in the UK.

Former Tory leader Lord Howard alluded to the Falklands War when he said the UK would go to war to defend Gibraltar. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon made comments in a similar fashion, saying "Gibraltar will be protected all the way". However, UK Prime Minister Theresa May assured the press that her approach would definitely be "jaw-jaw" and not "war-war", asserting that there will be no war between Spain and the UK.

Spain ceded Gibraltar to the UK in 1713, and has since sought to bring the outpost back under Spanish rule, seeking bilateral sovereignty with the UK.

Gibraltar is strategically important to the UK due to its location at the opening of the Mediterranean Sea, which affords the UK control over the sea route into the Mediterranean. Gibraltar is also home to military bases and an airstrip. The problem is

that Gibraltar overwhelmingly voted remain in the Brexit referendum, and Spain declared they would block Gibraltar from integrating into the EU.

Gibraltar itself is feeling the pressure as Chief Minister Fabian Picardo commented Gibraltar will not be a bargaining chip in Brexit negotiations. He said the EU was allowing Spain to behave "like a bully", making Gibraltar a victim of a Brexit despite their remain vote, while making an appeal to the European Council to erase Spanish veto power from the draft guidelines.

Meanwhile the Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis commented that his government was "surprised at the tone coming out of Britain", saying they seemed to be losing their cool.

The UK was further angered by three separate illegal incursions by ships from the Spanish navy into Gibraltar's waters, the first on the 4th of April. In addition, the UK was also angered when Spain eased its opposition to Scotland joining the EU, something that goes against British interests. Supporting Scottish independence has previously been a sensitive issue in Spain because of the Catalan independence movement.

This is likely to only be the first of many obstacles as Brexit proceeds, especially with the larger issue of Scotland's independence movement reawakening.



European Union is for united Ireland after Brexit?

Mustafa Yenel ■

■ There has been recent development regarding European Union such as granting a full EU membership for United Ireland in the event of unification of Ireland. European leaders are expected to discuss at the first Brexit Summit on 29th of April 2017 that, if the Ireland unifies, this will automatically provide EU membership to them.

The unification idea is being supported with the example of 'GDR Clause', integration of the former East Germany into the European Community after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even though most of the population in Northern Ireland is not supporting this unification idea, thoughts of the separations with Brexit in the UK cause fears. Enda Kenny, the Taoiseach, has stated that "it is important for the North Ireland to have 'ease of access' to re-join the EU if reunification were to occur". United Ireland issue came back to the fore with the Brexit of the UK but people prefer to stay calm in the moment, as it is seen in Northern Ireland a recent poll shows that 62% of the population would vote for the territory to remain in the UK, while only 22% vote for United Ireland. Also, the voters are unsure for reunification in the moment.

Former Northern Ireland Secretary and Conservative Member of Parliament Owen Paterson's statement over Irish unity and EU is: "The UK voted democratically to leave the EU last year and it would be quite inappropriate for the EU to meddle with the integrity of the UK during negotiations and very unwise, given the current position in Northern Ireland".

EU / British Austerity or Irish Prosperity



With all the negotiations for Brexit, EU became more exhausted due to the agreements with UK on leaving the EU. Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel's opinion about British politicians was "they are living under the illusion that the UK would retain most of its EU privileges once it leaves the bloc". The EU also want the UK must stick to former British Prime Minister David Cameron's promise to pay into the EU budget until 2020. However, the EU thinks, British Prime Minister Theresa May's team has not engaged with consequences of Brexit exactly.



France honours police officer killed in Champs-Elysees attack

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ A French police officer was killed and another left fighting for his life after an apparent terrorist shooting on the famous Champs Elysées avenue just days before the first round of the presidential election. In a statement made by the French police, “one of the two attackers was killed in a fight”.

“The attack is linked to terrorism,” French President Hollande said. The attack was undertaken by ISIS. After the attack, French President Hollande invited the cabinet to an extraordinary meeting. Marine Le Pen and François Fillon, candidates for the presidential elections, announced they were cancelling their program on Friday, the last campaign day.

US President Donald Trump condemned the attack on Paris’s Champs Elysees at a joint press conference after his meeting with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, saying, “I would like to express my condolences to France and its people, which is a terrible thing. We must be strong and cautious”.



Elected President Emmanuel Macron. Photo: Ecole polytechnique Université Paris [Wikimedia Commons]

Three days after the attack, 43 million voters went to the polls in the country with a population of 66 million, choosing the president and then the deputies. The presidential elections were held between 23 April and 7 May, and on June 11 and 18, approximately 43 million electoral votes were used for parliamentary general elections.



Turkey's Erdogan declared his victory

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ Turkish citizens went to the polls on 27 April to vote on a new constitution that significantly increased the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Voters were asked to decide whether to shift Turkey from a parliamentary to presidential republic. A “Yes” vote would institutionalise a de facto one-man rule with Turkey’s powerful yet divisive premier at the helm. Whereas, a “No” vote would reject the chance for Turkey to become a presidential republic and block Erdogan's attempt to wield greater powers.

Turkey’s mainly Kurdish southeast and its three main cities, including the capital Ankara and the largest city Istanbul, looked set to vote “No” after a bitter and divisive campaign. Erdogan said 25 million people had supported the proposal, which will replace Turkey’s parliamentary system with an all-powerful presidency and abolish the office of prime minister, giving the “Yes” camp 51.5 percent of the votes. “For the first time in the history of the Republic, we are changing our ruling system through civil politics,” Erdogan said, referring to the military coups which marred Turkish politics for decades. “That is why it is very significant.”

Turkey’s lira firmed to 3.65 to the dollar in Asian trade following the referendum, from 3.72 in a day. Relations hit a low during the referendum campaign when EU countries, including Germany and the Netherlands, barred Turkish ministers from holding rallies in support of the changes. Erdogan called the moves “Nazi acts” and said Turkey could reconsider ties with the European Union after many years of seeking EU membership.

Under the changes, most of which will only come into effect after the next elections due in 2019, the president will appoint the cabinet and an undefined number of vice-presidents, and be able to select and remove senior civil servants without parliamentary approval.



Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: Kremlin.ru [Wikimedia Commons]



Suspected chemical gas attack in Syrian town

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ Mounting evidence is suggesting that the toxic chemical sarin was used in the attack on a rebel held town in northern Syria on the 4th of April 2017, while world leaders express outrage as the death toll continues to climb.

More than 70 people are dead in exposure to a chemical gas which was reportedly dropped from airplanes on the Syrian town Khan Sheikhoun according to eyewitnesses, igniting comparisons of the 2013 chemical attack on Ghouta.

Another 120 are severely injured and being treated in hospitals, some of whom have been transferred to Turkey in critical condition as the death toll climbs. A Human Rights Watch report would later pin the casualty rate at 92 dead civilians. Despite Assad's denial of the event, doctors on the site said the victims' symptoms were consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals.

The attack, which took place in the early hours of the morning, caused international outrage and was condemned by multiple world leaders. UK Prime Minister Theresa May called the attack unacceptable, and called for the Organisation of Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to investigate

the suspected use of sarin. She also said "I'm very clear that there can be no future for Assad in a stable Syria which is representative of all the Syrian people". "We cannot allow this suffering to continue".



Simulated chemical warfare exercise. Photo: Master Sgt. Ken Hammond [Wikimedia Commons]

US State Secretary Rex Tillerson similarly commented that Assad "operates with brutal, unabashed barbarism", denouncing the Syrian President's use of chemical warfare and calling for the Assad regime's allies Russia and Iran to use their influence to stop chemical attacks from happening again. US President Donald Trump also made a statement calling the attack "heinous", while also blaming the attacks on his predecessor President Obama for not sufficiently



preventing further usage of chemical warfare after Ghouta in 2013.

In fact, Syria was meant to have destroyed all its chemical weapons stock under UN supervision in 2014, when it handed over a full inventory of its chemical weapons arsenal. The use, production and storage of sarin is illegal under the United Nations Chemical Weapons Convention. However, there have been suspicions that not all sarin stocks had been destroyed.



A RPU-14 multiple rocket launcher, of a type that may have launched M-14 munitions found by UN inspectors. Photo: Vlad [Wikimedia Commons]

Syrian foreign Minister Walid Moallem has categorically denied any involvement by the Syrian government in the attack on Khan Sheikhoun, a claim which was backed up by Russia. Russia has stated no Syrian airplanes were in the Idlib area where the town is located at the time. Moallem stated the Syrian Air Force bombed a rebel weapons stock which contained the gas. The UN emergency meeting on the 6th of April produced a draft resolution demanding Assad to turn over flight movement data in

order to investigate this statement, however Russia has stated it will use its position in the Security Council to veto such a resolution.

However, a UK expert attests that sarin is destroyed when blown up, meaning that an airstrike against rebel chemical weapons stocks could not have caused the event in Khan Sheikhoun. On the ground there is mounting evidence of the use of sarin.

Doctors say the victim's symptoms correspond to those of a nerve toxin – pinpointed pupils, pallor, sweating, most victims dying of asphyxiation. After finding the chemical which sarin degrades into in urine and blood tests of the 30 or so patients it had received, the Turkish Health Ministry was able to confirm the victims had been exposed to a chemical agent, most likely sarin.

Video and photographic evidence as well as eyewitness accounts also show that the victims show no sign of physical trauma, which indicates they were exposed to a gas. Sarin is a nerve agent which paralyses the lung muscles and causing suffocation within minutes if the dose is lethal.

An independent French investigation found chemical compounds which are signature of Assad's sarin manufacture process in the environmental samples from the scene. By comparing it to samples from previous attack scenes, investigators were able to conclude that the toxin used in Khan Sheikhoun underwent the same manufacturing process as the chemical previously employed by Assad primarily in Ghouta, but also in several other airstrikes.



These findings were later confirmed by Turkish and British forensics as well as investigators from the Organisation of Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

“The process of fabrication of the samples taken is typical of the method developed in Syrian laboratories,” French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault stated. “This method is the signature of the regime and it is what enables us to establish the responsibility of the attack. We know because we kept samples from previous attacks that we were able to use for comparison.”

The French analysis went further and found indications that the chemical had been delivered aerially, which excludes the possibility that the act was committed by rebels, who do not have an air force. In terms of responsibility, this mounting evidence adds to the widespread consensus that Assad’s regime very likely did order the chemical weapons attack on the town. There has been no further response from Syria following these findings, while Kremlin representative Dimitri Peskov affirmed Russia’s position was unchanged, saying that only an impartial international investigation could yield decisive evidence.

Although Assad’s regime has been successfully driving the rebel forces back, the Civil War has taken a heavy toll on his military, and he has repeatedly been targeting non-combatants in starving and bombing civilians in rebel held areas to demoralise the rebel forces. If the Assad regime is responsible for it, the Khan Sheikhoun attack is certainly a stepping up of brutality, but the Syrian leader may have felt confident enough to do it as the West is balancing away from Syria. In March this year US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley declared the US’s diplomatic policy on Syria no longer was to depose Assad.



“Syrian foreign Minister Walid Moallem has categorically denied any involvement by the Syrian government in the attack on Khan Sheikhoun”



UN Security Council backing new Western Sahara talks

Tamar Buachidze ■

■ Western Sahara, situated on the northwest coast of Africa, has been the subject of a long-running territorial dispute between Morocco and its indigenous Sahrawi people, Polisario front. Morocco claimed Western Sahara after colonial Spain left, but Polisario fought a guerrilla war for independence for the Sahrawi people there until the UN-backed ceasefire. UN talks have long failed to broker an agreement on how to decide on self-determination. It is essential to take into account Morocco's point of carrying out an autonomy plan under Moroccan sovereignty while Polisario seeks for a UN-backed referendum including on the question of independence.

In April 2017, the United Nations Security Council unanimously backed attempts to restart talks between the two sides over the conflict, and extended its peacekeeping mission there for another year. The resolution came after the UN mission confirmed the Polisario had withdrawn troops from the Guerguerat area of the territory, a vast swath of desert bordering the Atlantic Ocean that has been contested since 1975. They had faced off in Guerguerat since 2016 with Morocco, which pulled its forces back earlier this year. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called to enter new negotiations that would include proposals from both sides. "This action should improve the prospects of creating an

environment that will facilitate early implementation of Mr Guterres's determination to relaunch the negotiating process," the UN spokesman said in a statement noting Morocco's early pullback and confirming Polisario's withdrawal.

The UN resolution on April 28th extended the UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINURSO, until April 30, 2018 and called on the parties to resume a fifth round of talks. Against a backdrop of decades of past political failures and mistrust, the resolution noted Morocco's 2007 autonomy proposal and welcomed Rabat's "serious" efforts to progress. It also emphasised Polisario's 2007 proposal, which calls for a referendum between independence, integration with Morocco and self-governance. Past attempts to broker a deal have been fallen apart over details mostly on referendum terms, including who should be allowed to vote.

Overall estimation of the talks could be considered positive according to the heads of state comments such as Morocco's foreign ministry. The ministry stated that the kingdom was satisfied with the resolution, and hoped for a "real process" toward a solution, which it said should be the autonomy initiative. Morocco also called for neighbouring Mauritania as well as Algeria, which backs Polisario and maintains tense relations with Rabat, to be involved in negotiations.



US to review Iran nuclear deal

Tamar Buachidze ■

■ The Iran nuclear deal representing a preliminary framework agreement was reached in 2015 between the Islamic Republic of Iran and a group of world powers: the P5+1 (the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, and China – plus Germany) and the European Union. Negotiations for a framework deal over the nuclear program of Iran took place between the foreign ministers of the countries at a series of meetings held from 26 March to 2 April 2015 in Lausanne, Switzerland. The framework deal was embodied in a document published by the EU's European External Action Service titled Joint Statement by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif Switzerland and in a document published by the US Department of State titled Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program.



Negotiations about Iran's nuclear programme.
Photo: US Department of State [Wikimedia Commons]



The Trump administration announced on April 18th, 2017 that it was launching an inter-agency review of whether the lifting of sanctions against Iran was in the United States' national security interests, while acknowledging that Tehran was complying with a deal to rein in its nuclear program. In a letter to US House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that there were concerns about Iran's role as a state sponsor of terrorism. Under the deal, the State Department must notify Congress every 90 days on Iran's compliance under the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It is the first such



notification under US President Donald Trump. “The US Department of State certified to US House Speaker Paul Ryan today that Iran is compliant through April 18 with its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” Tillerson said in a statement. During his presidential campaign, Trump called the agreement “the worst deal ever negotiated,” raising questions over whether he would rip up the agreement once he took office. It is essential to mention that Iran denies ever having considered developing atomic weapons although nuclear experts have warned that any US violation of the nuclear deal would allow Iran also to pull back from its commitments to curb nuclear development.



Arak IR-40 Heavy Water Reactor, Iran. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Anti-Trump banner in Ardabil, Iran. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

US's possible pull out of the deal explicitly does not represent an easy task. If Trump decides to withdraw from the deal unilaterally, the accord gives him a path forward. It begins with the United States alleging that Iran is not complying with the terms of the deal, and ends with the country using its veto power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to kill any continued sanctions relief. But that course of action could have serious ramifications for the United States if other nations believe Washington is trying to scuttle the deal absent cheating on Iran's part. The Trump administration risks provoking its European partners, China and Russia by threatening to pull out of the deal based on Iranian actions that were never on the agenda during nearly two years of nuclear negotiations that produced the accord.

“nuclear experts have warned that any US violation of the nuclear deal would allow Iran also to pull back from its commitments to curb nuclear development”



Russian navy visit the Philippines as Duterte strengthens relations with US foes

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ The Russian navy paid a four day visit to the Manila port in the Philippines on the 20th of April as a part of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's foreign policy initiative to strengthen ties with US traditional enemies, Russia and China.

Traditionally the Philippines have closely cooperated with their former colonial power, the US, but despite the fact that the Philippine army is receiving resources and equipment from the US army, Duterte has been known to resent US influence on the Philippines and in the region. Upon meeting President Putin Duterte referred to "US hypocrisy", and has instructed his Defence Minister to investigate the possibility of gaining military equipment such as drones and other arms from the Russian army.

This new move is a step forward in Duterte's envisioned "independent foreign policy", which seeks to strengthen Philippine ties with Russia and China and step away from dependence on the US. Varyag's Captain Alexei Ulyanenko said "this courtesy call is very important to us. So we had the Pacific Fleet", describing the visit's importance to the Russian Pacific Navy. The

Varyag, one of three Slava class warships, was accompanied by the tanker Pechenga.

The visit included goodwill activities, a cultural show and a tour on the Russian ship for civilians. Captain Leo Ramon Milano added that Philippine sailors were also given insights on modern sailing.

As Duterte is also attempting to warm up relations with China, such a rebalancing of relations with the Philippines may be bad news for the US. The US has previously worked hard to preserve its influence in the region, but as China continues to assert its growing influence in the South China Sea, there may be a higher risk of disputes. Only on the 21st of April the Philippines sent a military deployment to the Pag-asa Island in the South China Sea to mark their ownership of the island, which has been claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.

However, because of the army's dependence on US support and the strong historical ties, it remains to be seen if Duterte will affect such a significant turnover from traditional Philippine foreign policy.



Tensions rise between US and North Korea China, South Korea and Japan are in the middle of this spat

Mustafa Yenel ■

■ Donald Trump's diplomatic strategy for denuclearisation of North Korea is to leave the country alone in the era but Pyongyang does not seem to stop their actions on live-fire exercises. United States President Donald Trump welcomed all hundred members of the Senate on April 26, 2017 to brief on developments in North Korea.

The US decided to tighten sanctions on North Korea and by doing that aims pressuring the country to end nuclear and missile programmes. "We remain open to negotiations towards that goal, however we remain prepared to defend ourselves and our allies" said by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats at given joint statement. The US has already tighten sanctions on North Korea such as blanket ban on trade and a blacklist of anyone who deals with North Korea. One of the strategic plans of the US to stop North Korea is to pressure China to lean more heavily North Korea to cancel its nuclear weapons programme. Another pressure method is to put North Korea on the state

department's list of the countries that sponsor terrorism. In addition to these, exports to North Korea was frozen and investments are banned as well. Rex Tillerson will have a meeting with UN Security Council for further strict sanctions such as an oil embargo and punishment for Chinese companies that do this business.

However, the North Korea keeps ignoring the US actions. North Korea Foreign Ministry Spokesman said in the statement "There is a saying that those who are fond of playing with fire are destined to perish in the flames. The same can be said of the US."

Alongside these diplomatic solutions, the US and the allies are prepared to be ready with military back up as well. The US President Donald Trump has ordered high-powered US military vessels and aircraft carrier to the region in a show of force to stop North Korea from exercising another missile tests. South Korea started installing US missile defence system against North Korean missiles and the US Pacific forces commander, Admiral Harry Harris made a statement on Congress that the system would be



operational within days and any North Korean missile fired at US forces would be destroyed. “If it flies, it will die”, Harry Harris said. China set the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence system, or shortly THAAD system in South Korea.

The ongoing tension between the North Korea and the US effects primarily North Korea’s neighbours and preparation for the worst scenario of ending this spat has started. Whilst Japan held their first evacuation drill in case of emergency situation, Americans in South Korea practised evacuating the country in case of an attack as well. South Korea capital Seoul practises evacuation drill and also has its own guidance on what to do in case of an attack. Since it has a strategic position and border with North Korea, China has tried to stay in the middle on this spat and proposed alternative solutions to end up this situation but neither North Korea nor US was interested.

China’s highest priority on this issue is to avoid large-scale conflict on Korean Peninsula. China has a lot to consider in case of war situation such as the cost of war in terms of life, also the possible refugee crisis in terms of a North Korean loss and the military forces settled on China-North Korea border.

However, Former US Defence Secretary William James Perry’s statement for live CNN channel from Hoover Institution in Stanford, California regarding China was “China has never played a significant role in bringing North Korea to negotiate in the table in the past. I think this time they probably apparent to do so”. William

Perry also mentioned that this time US should not only look to China to solve this problem, but also being partner with China and putting together a very powerful negotiating package. Even if strategic mistakes happen in this crisis, many experts do not believe that war is the first coming event. On the other hand, some analysts do have a fear that the situation is already at point of no return and any minor mistake could lead to war. Bruce Bennet, a Senior Defence Analyst at the RAND Corporation said “The real question now is somebody going to make a stupid mistake, because some kind of minor escalation could get out of hand”.

North Korea’s live-fire exercises at their 85th anniversary of army rise tensions

North Korea marked the 85th anniversary of Korean’s People Army with the largest fire demonstration on 25 April, 2017 and it rises tension among US and its allies. North Korean state channel reported that the leader of North Korea Kim Jong-Un was satisfied with the military show of force. Immediately after, US President Donald Trump held a meeting with all members of the Senate to discuss the military demonstration of North Korea and how to respond it. However, there are 28,500 US troops located in South Korea as well and this is the largest military presence US maintained since the 1950–1953 Korean War.



Venezuela threatening to leave OAS

Tamar Buachidze ■

■ Crisis in Venezuela leading to the possible exit from OAS (Organisation of American States) dates from 2013, after Hugo Chavez died and Nicolas Maduro became a president. Venezuela is split into Chavistas and those who cannot wait to see an end to the 18 years in power of his United Socialist Party (PSUV). Chavistas praise the two men for using Venezuela's oil riches to markedly reduce inequality and for lifting many Venezuelans out of poverty. But the opposition says that since the PSUV came to power in 1999, the socialist party has eroded Venezuela's democratic institutions and mismanaged its economy.

In June 2016, Secretary General of the OAS Luis Almagro requested the convening of an urgent session of the Permanent Council of member in accordance with Article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to address the situation in Venezuela. Almagro cited part of Article 20, which states, "...the Secretary General may request the immediate convocation of the Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of the situation and to take such decisions as it deems appropriate." According to

Almagro, this process should address the "alteration of the Constitutional order" and how this gravely affects "the democratic order" of Venezuela, based on the complaints submitted to the secretary general by the National Assembly of Venezuela, as well as considerations of fact and law. However, Almagro failed to specify the qualifying event that triggers the Article, namely, an "unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in a member state", a provision intended primarily to cover coups d'état. It is arguable, and no doubt will be argued that the situation in Venezuela does not amount to an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order, since efforts are underway in the country by the opposition parties to work within the provisions of the constitution.

Recent anti-government protests in Venezuela to leave 'interventionist' OAS group is one of the major protests taking place during the crisis. It is essential to overview the reasons for recent protests before moving onto the specific ones for leaving OAS group. What protesters seek to



achieve is Maduro to step down, accusing him of eroding democracy. Maduro, meanwhile, has ordered the Venezuelan armed forces onto the streets to maintain order. The political turmoil follows the backdrop of a worsening economic crisis. Despite having the largest proven oil reserves in the world, Venezuela is fast running out of cash, and its people have struggled for years with food and medical shortages, coupled with skyrocketing prices. The opposition believes that Maduro has created a dictatorship. The government has repeatedly blocked any attempts to oust Maduro from power by a referendum vote. It has also delayed local and state elections. Moreover, while there is no simple solution to the country's woes and crisis, the opposition argues it can fix the failing economy. Moreover, the country only has \$10.5 billion in foreign reserves left, according to recent Central Bank of Venezuela data. For the rest of the year, Venezuela owes roughly \$7.2 billion in outstanding debt payments. Massive government overspending, a crashing currency, mismanagement of the infrastructure and corruption are all factors that have caused high inflation in Venezuela.

Moving onto the protests for withdrawal from OAS group, Venezuela accuses the US-based grouping of meddling in its internal affairs. The government made the announcement after the OAS voted to hold a meeting of foreign ministers



*Nicolas Maduro speaking to the Supreme Tribunal of Justice.
Photo: Government of Venezuela [Wikimedia Commons]*

to discuss the spiralling crisis in Venezuela. Neighbours have expressed concern at mounting unrest in the country. Violent protests against the government continued in the capital Caracas at the end of April 2017. One protester died, hit by a tear gas canister during clashes with police, and nearly 30 people have been killed since the wave of protests began in March. Venezuela's foreign minister Delcy Rodriguez announced that "Venezuela will not participate in any activities that promote interventionism".

Ongoing crisis explicitly has been taking place for years switching between minor and major aspects of outbreaks and demonstrations. What is expected next could be the opposition's demand to hold fresh elections as soon as possible. President Maduro has agreed but the date has not been set yet.

“Venezuela accuses the US-based grouping of meddling in its internal affairs”



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Stockholm attack:

“Homemade bomb” found in lorry killing four

■ A man from the central Asian republic of Uzbekistan was arrested on suspicion of terrorism offenses after the Stockholm truck attack on April 7th, 2017. The attack killed four people and injured about 15 more. Eight of the injured are still being treated in hospital, Eliasson said. Four of the injured, all adults, have serious injuries, Stockholm County Council said earlier. One child suffered minor injuries. Suspicions about the arrested man have strengthened during the course of the investigation, Dan Eliasson, chief of the Swedish Police told a press briefing. Police are investigating a "technical device", that could be a classic bomb or some sort of flammable device, found in the vehicle used in the attack, he said.

Protesters attack on lawmakers after storming Macedonia’s parliament

■ Macedonian party leader who was left beaten and bloodied after hundreds of protesters stormed the country's parliament has claimed the assault was attempted murder. The Balkan country is battling a severe political crisis, and tensions flared into violence on April 27th night when around 300 demonstrators burst into

parliament in an assault that left over a 100 injured. “What happened last night was a premeditated murder attempt,” said Zoran Zaev, leader of the Social Democrats. The EU, the UN and NATO appealed for calm but in a statement Russia put the blame on the West, saying the crisis was due “to the gross outside interference in Macedonia's internal affairs”.

International Monetary Fund spring meetings did not end up as Greece expected

■ International Monetary Fund spring meetings was held in Washington DC between April 21-23, 2017 this year and Greece was not on the schedule this time. Greece was expecting a breakthrough regarding the bailout negotiations but it was disappointing that Greek officials left the meetings empty-handed. IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde mentioned in her speech that the discussions, which were held during the meetings, were “constructive”. Primarily Germany and other countries including Netherlands and Finland, want the IMF to participate on Greece debt solution issues. Poul Thomsen, the director of the IMF’s European Department said “There’s some major movements here that need to be understood. The issue is not the targets but the credibility of targets being maintained over the medium term while the economy is growing”.



Egypt declares state of emergency after church bombings

■ Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi made an announcement of a three-month state of emergency imposition after two bomb blasts killed dozens of worshippers in Coptic Christian churches. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) armed group claimed responsibility for the suicide bombings in the Nile Delta cities of Alexandria and Tanta on April 9th, 2017, in which more than 40 people were killed. The President focused on the series of measures to be taken as the response to the occasion. Under Egypt's constitution, the state of emergency must be presented to the House of Representatives for approval within a seven-day period. The emergency law expands police powers of arrest, surveillance and seizures and can limit freedom of movement.

Washington protest against Donald Trump's policy on climate change

■ A sea of protesters gathered in front of the White House on April 29th, 2017 to voice displeasure with President Donald Trump's stance on the environment and demand of rethinking plans to reverse the climate change policies backed by his predecessor. The People's Climate March, the culmination of a string of Earth Week protests that began with last Saturday's March for Science, coincides with Trump's 100th day in office, the end of the traditional "honeymoon" period for a new president. During those first 100 days, the

Environmental Protection Agency has moved swiftly to roll back Obama-era regulations on fossil fuels while also facing significant planned budget cuts. Many of the protesters carried signs with slogans such as "The seas are rising and so are we" and "Don't be a fossil fool". As the procession passed the Trump International Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, marchers booed and chanted "shame".

Strikes against Temer's austerity reforms paralyse Brazilian cities



Protest against Temer.
Photo: Pedro Ribeiro Simões [Flickr]

■ Nationwide strikes in all 26 Brazilian states have paralysed public transport in major cities, while schools and businesses remained closed after President Temer imposed further austerity measures. The protests turned violent when the union led demonstrators clashed with police forces attempting to free up roads using tear gas. Having weakened labour laws and raised the retirement age, President Temer argued these austerity measures are necessary to bring the country out of its two year recession. The protestors also questioned the legitimacy of Temer's government, of which a third is under investigation for political corruption. This may be the biggest strike yet in Brazilian history.



Fear grips Liberians as mystery disease claims 9 lives



Ebola virus.

■ A mysterious disease has killed nine people in Liberia, leading the health authorities to issue guidelines to citizens on what to do as they investigate the illness. The authorities are conducting tests into blood samples and other specimens of the deceased as part of efforts to confirm whether or not the tests are related to the deadly Ebola virus. Some symptoms of the disease according to reports include: abdominal pains, vomiting and headaches. It was a while ago when Liberia was recently declared free of Ebola by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the last of four West African countries at the epicentre of the world's worst outbreak of the disease, but this time abovementioned unknown disease is killing number of people.

Ethiopia rejects UN investigation into deadly protests

■ Ethiopia is rejecting United Nations and European Union calls to investigate months of anti-government protests that killed hundreds of people in 2015 and 2016. It was the worst unrest in 25 years and the government responded by imposing a state of emergency that is still in place today. The UN has renewed calls to the Ethiopian government to let human rights officials conduct independent investigations into allegations of abuses by security forces against protesters in the country. It is essential to mention that demonstrations broke out in Ethiopia's Oromia region in November 2015 and later spread to the Amhara region in the country's northwest, growing into what has been considered the biggest anti-government unrest in Ethiopia's recent history.



Tens of thousands of protesters call for a regime change in Ethiopia in 2016.
Photo: Harar24 [Flickr]



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Macron and Merkel clashes about Greece's debt deal

■ Greek finance minister Varoufakis said that Emanuel Macron's finding of a solution to the Greek financial crisis was hampered by Angela Merkel. Varoufakis wrote that he received a text from Macron offering to broker deal to win debt-relief for Greece in return for structural reforms. In a response Macron said: "I don't want my generation to be responsible for Greece exiting Europe" and was offering to broker a meeting between the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and President Francois Hollande, but this attempt was blocked by Germany. German finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble suggested that Greece should take a "holiday" from membership of the Euro.

Anti-India protest led by female Kashmiri students

■ A 17-year-old was reportedly shot dead by security forces on April 15 in Indian-administered Kashmir while at least 50 college students were wounded by police officers who fired pellets and tear gas. Indian police, assisted by paramilitary troops, created a checkpoint outside the college to arrest the boys who they said were involved in stone-throwing incidents. Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters but the clashes intensified when pellets were

fired, leaving many students injured, including Zeeshan Ahmed, who was injured in the head. More than 15 students were admitted to the district hospital in Pulwama on the same day. Most of them suffered pellet injuries to their eyes. Zeeshan was later transferred to a hospital in Srinagar for specialised treatment, a senior doctor at Pulwama hospital told a local newspaper. Mass protests then broke out as a result, with students from other colleges and day-long protests and clashes on April 17 left more than 50 students injured.

Results of Putin-Abe summit meeting

■ Moscow summit meeting of President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe which took place on 27th April was the seventeenth meeting between them since 2012. It was a clear demonstration of a steady progress accumulating in bilateral relations. Both leaders reaffirmed that the peace treaty was necessary, and agreed to conclude it within their own leadership and tenure. Also they came to conclusion that 'joint economic activities' in the northern territories were the only path: fish farming, ecotourism, remote medical care and others. Moreover, step by step approach was endorsed by both leaders and they agreed to see each other regularly at the July G20 meeting at Hamburg, Germany, and at the Vladivostok Eastern Economic Forum in September.



■ News in Brief

International relations

Pan-European list proposal from Italy for 73 British MEP seats with Brexit

■ The idea of pan-European list for British seats in the European Parliament had “sympathy” from Gianni Pittella, the leader of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats Group, supported by Emmanuel Macron as well. This proposal is being suggested with the thought of integration and creation of Europe. However, other members are not sure and have some doubts regarding this proposal and British MEPs still have the right to keep their seats in the parliament until the Brexit occurred.

French court declines to extradite former Kosovan prime minister to Serbia

■ The French court has declined to extradite former guerrilla insurgency leader Ramush Haradinaj to Serbia, citing a failure on Belgrade’s part to follow procedural requirements as the reason. The former Kosovan Prime Minister was arrested upon his arrival in France on the fourth of January due to an Interpol warrant issued by Serbia. Although Haradinaj was acquitted of war crimes by a UN Tribunal in Hague in 2005 and 2007, Belgrade accused him of killings, torture

and abductions as a rebel commander in the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic denounces the decision as “shameful”, while Serbo-Kosovan relations are further strained as Kosovo calls for Serbia to stop its persecution of individuals linked to the war.

Kurdish-Arab forces making gains against ISIL in Tabqa

■ The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have advanced against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) near the armed group’s stronghold in Raqqa in northern Syria, according to a monitor. The assault on Tabqa began in late March when SDF forces and their US-led coalition allies were airlifted behind ISIL lines. Tabqa was home to around 240,000 residents before 2011, and more than 80,000 people have fled to the city from other parts of the country. The SDF, an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters, now controls at least 40 percent of the town of Tabqa, and more than half of the Old City. Rami Abdel Rahman, SOHR director, said fighting was continuing in the town on April 30th, Sunday morning. The SDF entered Tabqa on Monday as part of their offensive against Raqqa, ISIL’s de-facto Syrian capital.



Mexico's ex-governor attested in Italy to face charges in the US

■ A former state governor of Mexico's ruling party faces charges in Mexico and the United States will be prosecuted by US authorities first. Tomas Yarrington, a former governor of Tamaulipas state for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was accused in 2013 by a federal grand jury in Texas of taking millions of dollars in bribes from the Gulf Cartel and other drug traffickers. He was arrested in Italy in early April. As US Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Mexican Attorney General Raúl Cervantes Andrade said in a joint statement, the plan to extradite Yarrington to the United States depended on agreement by Italian authorities. Yarrington could also be executed on trafficking charges in Mexico. The following steps will be discussed as a result of the cooperation between two sides.

UN, AU commit to strategically review peace operations

■ The United Nations and the African Union have jointly committed to review the way peace operations are conducted to challenge the new forms of warfare. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced the plan at a joint press conference on April 20 with the African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat after signing a new partnership agreement at the UN Headquarters in New York. "We are witnessing, in Africa, as around the world, changes in the security situation that force us to have a strategic review of the way peace operations take place. We no longer have only the traditional peacekeeping operations," Guterres said. The two leaders earlier discussed situations in Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, and Somalia, as well as the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group. The framework is expected to align the Agenda 2063 of the African Union for sustainable development and the United Nation's Agenda 2030.





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